

A Success Story

Services d'aide Bruno-Dandenault – Qualilogis Sherbrooke, Quebec

Qualilogis: housing for all

Imagine having to spend more than a third of what you earn to find an apartment. That is a sad reality for many disadvantaged people in the Estrie region. In 2002, Services d'aide Bruno-Dandenault decided to take action by setting up the Qualilogis project, which helps them find an affordable place to live.

Forty years ago, in 1964, Reverend Bruno Dandenault had no idea when he set up a support services organization for inmates that he would be laying the foundation for what has now become a network of organizations that help his fellow citizens in myriad ways. But that is exactly what happened: the former chaplain for the Sherbrooke prison, who died in 2000, was to set an example for dozens of volunteers in the Estrie region and lend his name to a foundation that continues to help not only offenders, but also all those who are having difficulty finding a place to live.

Helping people get off the street

Qualilogis is Services d'aide Bruno-Dandenault's latest project. Launched in 2002, it has received two contributions from the SCPI,* including \$192,000 in 2004.

Qualilogis met a need that no one had ever before addressed in the Estrie region. "There was nothing like it in the region," explains Philippe Allard, Co-ordinator for Qualilogis. "We offer people in search of a place to live the tools they need to find one and to move in. These services include accompanying them on their apartment hunts and giving advice on how to deal with a lease, keep their commitments and maintain good relations with the landlords. We even direct our clients to organizations and stores where they will find low-cost furniture." Qualilogis has two caseworkers who work in the field, using cell phones and often their cars.

Clients from all walks of life

Qualilogis was first established to help former inmates find a home and live normal lives after their release from prison, but it quickly expanded its client base to all residents in the Estrie region who are at risk of becoming homeless because of their precarious situation. In 2004 alone, the project helped over 110 people in difficult circumstances put a roof over their heads. More than 60% of Qualilogis' clients are men between 18 and 60 years of age or more. Its clients are referred by probation services in Sherbrooke, Correctional Service Canada, the local CLSC, women's shelters and many emergency shelters in the region. "We start by contacting the person and finding out what they need, then we determine with them whether or not they are ready to start working with us, because we do not do the work for them," explains Philippe Allard. "This is a very important distinction, because our services are geared to promoting independence and getting people to take responsibility for their actions."

Philippe gives the example of Thérèse, who moved from Asbestos to Sherbrooke when she separated from her husband. She was in very bad shape mentally and in financial difficulty. Thérèse was seen at the hospital, where she was being treated for mental illness. "We gave her some change so she could start making calls directly from the hospital to look for a place to live, and we went with her to see the apartments," explains Philippe. "The Foundation lent her the amount of the deposit required by her new landlord and we visited her once a week after she had moved in." Once her situation had become more stable, Thérèse, who had once owned a

restaurant that she ran with her husband, was gradually able to live an active life, applying her experience at the Chaudronnée, a soup kitchen in Sherbrooke.

From receiving to giving

Thérèse will not be the only one to have had an opportunity to roll up her sleeves and help people who, like her, have gone through hard times. Qualilogis is currently training officers who, like Philippe Allard, will be helping others find a place to live before the end of 2005. Thanks to the volunteers recruited from among clients who have received assistance from Qualilogis, even more people will get help and escape the cycle of wandering and homelessness. The new volunteer caseworkers will be able to show clients where they can find low-cost food and furniture and follow up on them once they have moved into their new digs.

When Qualilogis was first established, it expected to help some 60 to 80 people, but in its first year, it helped over 110 people find a place to live. This alone is proof that this organization is an essential service for many people who would otherwise have little recourse other than the street, instability and temporary solutions.

By Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

June 2005

*SCPI: Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative