

An introduction to St-James Drop-In Centre

Alain Spitzer, Director

In October of 1985, the St-James drop-in centre opened its doors for the first time. From those early days, the center has evolved and consequently increased its services. In its humble beginnings, the center catered to 30 or so members, and served primarily as a place where one could get a hot meal, and a bit of shelter from the cold.

Today it serves as a day shelter for more than 200 members, serving food throughout the day, running a clothing exchange, showers, an art studio, and more importantly serving as a place where men and women marginalized by society can obtain help from our social workers in a safe and peaceful place. Along the way the center went through numerous changes, all of which allowed it to achieve a greater influence on the lives of its members.

As for me, the St-James drop-in center will always remain the story of exceptional

people. Whether it is the user-members of the center, or the incredible team that works here, what I have noticed is how much is achieved everyday with so little. I think that this is what makes St-James drop-in such a special place.

Everyday I see the dedication of all involved with St-James drop-in center (employees, volunteers, stage students), and how they help to better the lives of so many different people that have been cast aside by mainstream society. You can only be inspired by what this center has achieved over the last 21 years.

What has made St-James drop-in so special is the spirit that has been infused in it by the different people who have passed through its doors over the years. In a society where most people look out for themselves, in a society that rips away the self-belief of those most vulnerable, the St-James drop-in centre is the foundation upon which new aspirations are created; it has given so much self-belief to so many people who had lost it along the way.

I think the legacy that St-James drop-in center will leave behind is that it has made the Montreal city center a better place for so many people that had been given up on. I am happy to be able to be

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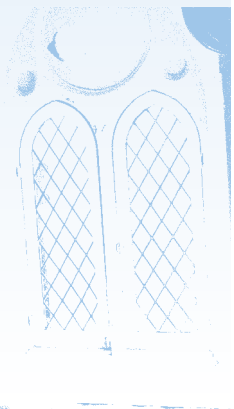
The team at St-James drop-in center: Alain Spitzer, Virginie Buteau, Nathalie Sheppard, Erica Legman, Stan Kupferschmidt, Wanda Gabriel & Anne-Marie Beaulieu

STAFF, VOLUNTEERS, AND STAGE STUDENTS

2006 was in my mind a very special year for the centre in regards to what we were able to create from a TEAM building point of view. The departure of many long time staff members appeared to signal a new era for the St-James Drop-In Centre. After working effortlessly for the drop-in for many years, Mirabelle Ricard, and Johnny Blainey left for new challenges, which allowed for a swift turnover in staff with the arrivals of Alain Spitzer (Director), Stanislav Kupferschmidt (Intervention worker), Nathalie Sheppard (Intervention worker), and Lisa Bendxen (accountant). Despite the dramatic personnel changes, the team gelled pretty quickly, and is in my opinion one of the very best I have ever seen. Great co-workers, but good friends as well. I have rarely been in contact with such GOOD people. I hope from the bottom of my heart that we can all stick together for a few years and achieve great things together for the St-James Drop-In Centre.

In the same line of thought, I can not give enough credit to our volunteers. As usual Bernard Racicot was an annual mainstay in the art room, and was all over the place helping us out with our publicity, driving us around to various art exhibits, and participating in the daily life of the art studio. The art room received further assistance from volunteers David Cohen, and Jean Boynton, who in their own way made the art studio a very special place. I would also like to send out a big thank you to Maggie Kupferschmidt, our volunteer nurse who had a huge impact on the well being of our members throughout the winter months. She has recently left to work in Africa, but we are looking forward to her return in the next year. Finally how could I forget Helen and Gilda who worked tirelessly in the kitchen preparing the meals that sustained all the members throughout the year.

A final thank you to all our stage students from McGill, Concordia, Université de Montreal, Dawson, Vanier, Cegep du Vieux-Montreal, and Ecole des métiers des faubourgs. Thanks again guys, you made St-James Drop-In centre a better place.



a part of that, and I would like to thank all those who have helped us along the way.

Looking back on a busy year

The last 12 months have seen the St-James drop-in centre organize and participate in many different activities, which were all put together for the benefit of our members.

Beginning last winter, Greg Rickhaus and Carole Sinclair (stage students from McGill social work) organized various outings for our members at the movie theatres, bowling, and a hockey game. All of these went extremely well, and a big thank you goes out to all the participants as well as to Carole and Greg.

With the arrival of spring, we all set out to the countryside to spend a beautiful day at the sugar shack in association with the FOHM. As usual, this event was highly anticipated by all, and went extremely well. We followed this by two multi-day retreats away from the city. The first of these was a three day camping trip to Oka. Ten of our members headed off with Stan and Nathalie for a lakeside getaway of fun on the beach. Days later, in association with DIANOVA, twelve of our members went away on an urban breakaway program in the region of Mont Tremblant under the supervision of Carole and the tireless Stan. The trip lasted 6 days, and each day was structured so as to offer both workshops and activities to the participants (i.e: kayaking, horse back riding, canoeing, etc). It was a great experience, and with a bit of luck we will be returning next summer.

With the end of summer fast approaching, we organized two more outings for the centre: a day at La Ronde amusement park, and an end of season pick-nick at parc Jeanne-Mance. It was a nice way to head off on our annual holidays during the month of august. With our return to work in September, and the cold fast approaching, we headed off to Mont St-Hilaire for a day of apple picking along with various other community organizations. Our annual thanksgiving meal followed, and a big thank you goes out to Candice Valintine for her kind donation of turkeys, that made the whole event possible.

All in all, the centre had a really good year. The activities organized by the centre linked with the tireless efforts of all the staff, volunteers, and INSO workers, allowed for a year which ended with the centre and its members being in a better position than it was at the same time last year. And if that isn't a reason to celebrate the upcoming year, I don't know what is.



The members at the sugar shack ↗ and at the poetry workshop ↘



Apple picking , une belle journée

The Poetry workshop.

A brief word on the poetry workshop that Greg Rickhaus initiated during last winter. Initially designed to provide our members with an extra activity, it developed into much more. In fact by the end of the summer, a poetry book was in the works, and along with the assistance of many different volunteers it became a reality at the beginning of September. Greg collected the poems, Marika Nelson created the lay-out, and Colin MacIntyre provided the photos for a truly amazing book that includes dozens of poems by fourteen different poets. It is a beautiful book, and a fabulous endeavour that culminated with a book launch at the Shaika Cafe in NDG. The cafe was packed as the poets read their poems to a large crowd of friends, family, and various other people interested in witnessing the beginning of something very special. It even landed us with an article in the Montréal Gazette, and various offers by different bookstores around Montréal to carry our book. 500 copies printed, and nearly 200 sold within 2 months of the launch has created a real positive vibe within the centre. It clearly demonstrates what the St-James Drop-In Centre is all about. So much achieved with so little is the legacy I think this place will leave behind years from now. More importantly I think that it can serve as a model of what social services should be, rather than what it can be.

St-James Drop-In centre really is a place where self-belief is rediscovered everyday.

NOTE: 14 sightings of something lifelike is available at Indigo-Chapters bookstores, as well as at The Word bookstore & 10 000 Villages West Island. You may also order a copy at our e-mail: info@stjamescentre.ca.



Exposition à la maison de la culture
Côte-des-Neiges au mois de janvier 2006

UN UNIVERS TOUT EN COULEUR



*Anne-Marie Beaulieu
Coordonnatrice de l'atelier d'art*

Il y a longtemps que je rêvais de travailler dans un environnement où l'expression artistique primait.

Partageant ce souhait à tout vent, j'ai été bénie en août 2005 lorsque l'ancienne directrice de St-James, Mirabelle Ricard, m'offrit de travailler à l'atelier du centre. J'ai donc fait mon entrée en septembre de la même année dans le monde des sans-abri et des laissés-pour-compte encore méconnus pour moi. Les défis m'attendaient et j'étais prête à les relever.

Nous avons déployé beaucoup d'énergie afin d'organiser un local pouvant répondre aux besoins artistiques des membres. Depuis, nous y travaillons à notre aise et surtout, nous sommes fiers d'exposer les oeuvres aux murs montrant ainsi les talents de tous et chacun. Ces oeuvres sont à la fois poétiques, énergiques, colorées et spontanées et ce n'est que quelques qualificatifs pour décrire cette merveilleuse mosaïque. À quelques pas de la salle principale du centre, nous voulons créer un endroit propice à la création et nous sommes toujours agréablement surpris de voir et de découvrir l'esprit et le cœur de ces artistes marginaux.

C'est alors que l'idée d'un atelier-galerie prit naissance. En novembre 2005, nous avons amplement d'oeuvres pour une première exposition, nous avons donc pendu la crémaillère en accueillant le grand public. L'accueil fut très chaleureux. Cette expérience m'encouragea à poursuivre mes recherches pour des lieux de diffusion.

Les réponses furent-elles aussi positives. Nous avons donc parcouru la métropole et ses environs plus d'une dizaine de fois dans l'année pour exposer les plus et les moins récentes créations de ces artistes qui ont l'habitude de travailler dans l'ombre de notre cité.

Notre but est d'encourager les artistes-membres par l'estime de soi et quoi de mieux que d'avoir cette possibilité d'exposer. Pour eux, c'est une occasion inespérée d'être encouragé par la vente de leurs oeuvres et la chance de croiser des amateurs d'art naïf. Les ventes sont des gestes d'encouragement puisque 50% de celles-ci sont remises à l'artiste, l'autre part sert à l'achat de matériel d'art ou tout autre besoin essentiel pour le centre.

Je suis reconnaissante envers les artistes-membres pour le succès que connaît le volet d'expression artistique du centre de jour St-James. Je suis enchantée de leur accomplissement et du partage de leur vision artistique. J'ai appris cette année à respecter ces hommes et ces femmes, à suivre leur rythme et écouter ce grand dénuement affectif, économique et culturel.



Anne-Marie Beaulieu

There's a whiff of irony in the air.

By Rob Bull, Chairman

When the Saint James Drop-In Center celebrated its 21st anniversary in October 2006 with the publication of its first book and plans for its imminent formal separate status, it was closer in many ways to Saint James United Church than it had been in years.

Over the decades, the Center was generally left on its own on a day-to-day basis. For some at the church, the Center was merely a tenant. And for many years, virtually the only people at Saint James who got to know the people at the Drop-In were some board members and the Saint-James staff.

That's a pity because some pretty remarkable things were going on upstairs.

The Center came up with an innovative response to homelessness. It's called "finding people homes." The Drop-In helped create Chambreclerc, an independent agency that bought and fixed up neighborhood buildings and found housing for dozens of people. In time, the Center moved well beyond the provision of food and day-time shelter to become a full-service agency with an amazing art program that brought us back out into the city. We attracted some bright and dedicated students on internships and the cooperation of a network of colleagues and agencies throughout Montreal. Volunteers joined us from a variety of faith communities and backgrounds and other religious groups became donors.

Meanwhile both the church and the agencies funding the Center concluded that it was time for the Drop-In to develop its own separate corporate status.

The process is nearly complete and the links between the Center and the church are stronger than ever. Our current remarkable team under the gifted leadership of Alain Spitzer is a major factor. With cheerful compassion and courtesy, their devotion goes far beyond their job descriptions in looking after the people in their care and this attitude seems to be rubbing off on others all over the building.

Things are changing at Saint James as well.

Now, the Drop-In is known as an official mission partner of Saint James. People from the church have helped prepare meals, do the books, work on the website, lead memorial services, bought paintings, donated socks, money and underwear and assisted behind the scenes. And some Drop-In folks are taking part in the life of the church.

The last Sunday in October was All-Saints' Sunday as well as Outreach Sunday at Saint James and the Drop-In celebrated its 21st birthday at the service. Alain talked about the work we do. Bernard Racicot, a long-time volunteer, gave a Bible reading and poet Danny Cattelain read one of his works from the Drop-In's first book. In his sermon, Rev. Bonner said that everyone present, including those of us from the Drop-In, should be counted among the saints.

It makes you think.



Rob Bull

NO WHERE LEFT TO GO....

HOUSING OPTIONS LIMITED:

Stanislav Kupferschmidt

Safe and affordable housing continues to prove to be a growing challenge for a rising majority of our members. With big real estate invading the downtown core to begin the violent process of gentrification, the direct physical conversion of what was once affordable apartments, into upscale luxury condos has resulted in a major displacement of the cities poor into the outer areas of the city, where lower rents can still be found.

For those who cannot afford being in further proximity of the downtown core, due to reliance on social services predominantly located in this area, their options are limited with the choice of either paying as much as 75% of one's monthly income on rent, or living in the affordable but insecure and threatening environment of the few rooming houses left standing. Those who opt for the first less economically secure option meet further resistance from discriminatory landlords whom we are forced to continually pressure to treat our prospective tenants as they would any other human being, with discriminatory behaviour often being hidden through subtle technicalities and procedures. Those frustrated by this repeatedly time consuming and on occasion humiliating experience, are left with the rooming house alternative. In this affordable but commonly insecure and intimidating environment, individuals face being recurrently robbed, sharing their residence with cockroaches and other pests in buildings that are frequented by drug dealers, loan sharks, and other predators ready to take advantage of those struggling with disabilities or mental health issues.

We are happy to report that we have been able to find safe, secure and affordable housing for many of our members, however despite our continued efforts the growing trends remain a reality. If the process of discrimination and gentrification goes uninterrupted we will continue to see more homelessness and extreme poverty contrasted to extreme wealth in our downtown core.



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THANK YOU, THANK YOU! THANK YOU? THANK YOU; THANK YOU: THANK YOU.

A big thank you goes out to all of you out there that had a part in making St-James Drop-In centre what it truly is: A family. Below are some of those that have impacted on the life of the centre during the last 12 months: 10 000 Villages NDG & West Island, EJLB Foundation, Caroline Cronk, Catherine Sévigny, Candice Valintine, Christina Arizza, Kenneth Shea, Mazon Canada, Garde Manger pour tous, Gouvernement du Canada: Programme IPAC, Régie régionale de la santé et des services sociaux: Programme PSOC, Shaika Cafe, Maison de la culture de la Cote-des-Neiges, Co-op la Maison Verte, St-James United Church, Beaver Lodge N6, The Word bookstore, Indigo-Chapters bookstores, Marika Nelson, C.J. MacIntyre, Bernard Racicot et Direction Chrétienne, Nancy Keays et le CLSC des Faubourgs, Wendy Zubis, Isabelle Wright & the women of St-James / Hudson, Ann / Margaret / Scott / Pierre / Pablo / Arlen of St-James United Church, Pastor Sama et la congrégation Kimbanguiste, Paula Klein and the Montreal City Mission, Alain Bernard and the Dianova urban breakaway program, Manuel & Colette Klaesi, Maggie Kupferschmidt, Jean Boynton, David Cohen, John Lehnert, Mr & Mrs Ricard, Habitat for Humanity, North West clothing company, Jacques Bossé & Joe Donohue ARTS NDG.
Merci aux membres INSO (insertion sociale), Dawn Maxwell, Marc Robineau, Paul Hicks, France Cooper, Kenny Proute, Christopher Reid et Danny Cattelain pour leur assiduité et leur engagement ainsi qu'à Virginie Buteau, employé à temps partiel pour son dévouement et sa patience. Sans eux nous n'aurions pu cheminer autant.