

Killing the Silence

I would like to use this first page of the newsletter to illustrate what I find the most endearing about the St-James Drop-In Centre. As I've mentioned before, what really 'lights me up' about St-James are the very beautiful acts of kindness that I witness on a daily basis.

The reality of life at St-James is that much of what we do is achieved under difficult circumstances. The suffering one encounters in this line of work can really drag a person down. Recently while I was going through a period of self-doubt, the beauty of St-James was brought back to me by certain events that followed the death of a long time member of the centre, René Brunelle.

I first met René during my early days at St-James, back in the winter of 2005. What struck me as unusual right away was his age - René was 65. The harshness of the streets makes being homeless at that age more than unusual - it is almost impossible.

I learned that René had only become homeless a year or so before our encounter. He had worked all his life, but due to the difficulties he had with managing his pension, he had been evicted from his latest apartment. Perhaps if he'd had a few loving friends or relatives to help him along, he may

have navigated through those choppy waters. But as most of those who knew René can testify, his flash-in-the-pan mood swings could make him a difficult person to accompany and support - which in

Page 2

My arrival at the St-James Drop-In Centre :

(Catherine Lacasse)

I have been working as an intervention worker at the St-James Drop-In Centre for nearly six months, and during this time I have gotten to experience first hand what a unique and 'colourful' place the centre is. My beginnings here started just as they have for most workers before me in that I have allowed the members to quietly come to me when they needed to, and over time I have learned a great deal about the difficult situations that they live through on a daily basis, and the fascinating people that they are in their own right.



Catherine Lacasse

Their backgrounds vary greatly; some are artists, others are musicians, while many others are cooks, military veterans, and the list goes on (...). In all their differences, they do however share an innate ability at understanding human emotion, and the intelligence that guides it throughout.

What I most appreciate about St-James, is the opportunity to build relationships with the members on a daily basis, and to maintain them on a long term period. This allows us to spend a greater amount of time building a relationship based on trust and

respect, and hence to establish tight bonds that will facilitate our ability to help them.

Page 4



Alain and René at the Drop-In

many ways explains why he lived in such solitude and isolation.

During the two years that I knew René, he managed to get his life back together to a certain degree. He moved into a new apartment that we helped him find, acquired some furniture that was collecting dust in my garage, and started volunteering at the Salvation Army Store on Notre-Dame Street. Over time, I got to learn a lot about the unusual life that he had led, and to appreciate the person that he was. Some days he could be impossible to deal with, but most days he was great to hang out with.

In the fall of 2007, just as he had walked into our lives, he disappeared without a word. A few days after we had last seen him, animated and full of his usual character, he was found dead in his apartment by the outreach worker of the centre. His death came as a great shock to all of us, but considering the hard life that he had lived, I guess that it was always going to happen sooner rather than later.

Following his death, the police were unsuccessful in getting in touch with any of René's living relatives. So after four months, he was buried in a mass grave by the local authorities. I was really struck by such an insignificant disposal of a person's remains. In the days that followed, I spoke with different staff members who had known him, and we decided to organize a fundraising operation to raise money for an appropriate memorial service. We were able to raise more than \$900, and then had a spot dedicated to him in the Cote-des-Neiges cemetery. The service is due to take place in the next two weeks, and it will be great to see everyone there.

Invisible to most people, René Brunelle will always remain an important part of the history here at the St-James Drop-In Centre, and an instrument of many lessons in respect, love, compassion, and in 'killing the silence'. When I am struck with those inevitable moments of self-doubt, I'm consoled by the truly beautiful and inspirational place our centre can be – a place where we can learn the lessons of life and humanity on a daily basis.

Spring at St James

Ron Melanson

Can you imagine what it's like to be homeless during the winter we have just lived through? The snowy season was pretty intense, even for those of us who had all the comforts of a warm, dry and secure place to hang our hats.

I can't imagine what it would be like to be cold and wet with no place to go; or what my mood would really be like if I had to sleep on the cafeteria floor of an overcrowded mission.

These past months at St James have given me a different perspective on how to react to the things that are out of my control. I was humbled once I realized how much I complained about the long hard winter and that my friends here at the centre seldom complained even though it was much more difficult for them to get through this mental and physical ordeal.

Spring has finally come and renewed a deep sense of appreciation in me, not only for the warm sun and new growth all around, but also for the valuable lesson taught by those who view life in a way that allows their attitudes to not be affected by the harsh realities of their surroundings. I hope that some of this attitude rubs off on me.



Ron Melanson

Chairman's message for Drop-In

By Rob Bull

It is just about done. The St. James Drop-In Centre's own bylaws and regulations are nearly ready.

It has been quite a journey. Members, staff, volunteers and board members have all been part of the process we needed to go through on the way to becoming an independent non-profit that is no longer subject to the rules of the United Church.

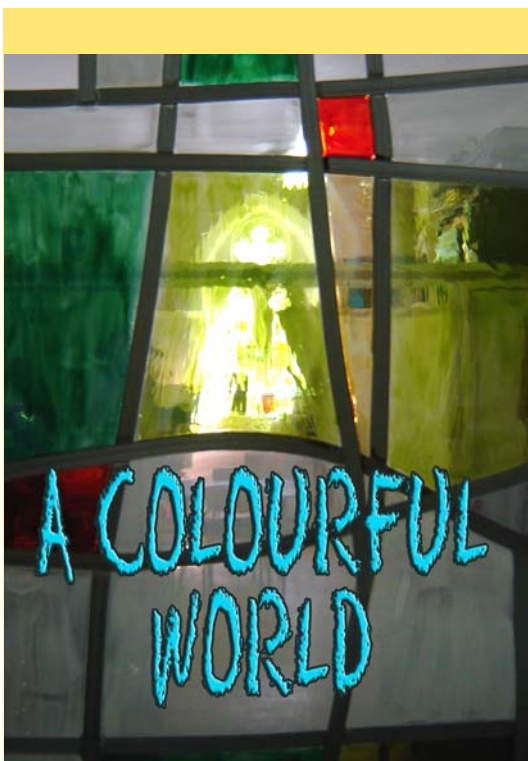
That's how we operated for 21 years after we were started as an outreach of St. James United Church which is still our landlord and our partner in many initiatives.

By the time the document has been vetted by our lawyer, re-examined by our board and approved at a general meeting, we will have our very own reference points.

It won't change how things are done at the Centre. Over the years, we have become more certain than ever about our core values of caring respect and empowerment in community.

But now, when someone wants to know what we stand for and how we plan to put it into practise, we have this statement which we created together.

And that's a very big deal. Congratulations everybody.



By Anne-Marie Beaulieu

First and foremost I would like to announce that the art studio has moved to an adjacent space on the 3rd floor of the Church. The room is identical in size, but thanks to a new layout it feels bigger and brighter, which makes it a far more ideal creative space. If you get the chance to drop by, it is definitely worth the detour.

This new space has hosted a fresh creative spirit inspired by a new group of artists, and with them comes new possibilities and new ideas.

Since January the centre has participated in seven different exhibits, and has sold many paintings. Besides the exhibits, it is always possible to drop by the centre and meet the artists during their creative periods. In relation to this I would like to thank Mr. Lalonde, who since our exhibit at the 'Centre St-Pierre' in February has been dropping by periodically and has purchased many paintings. Time with him is always time well spent.

For a second year running, the art program has hosted interns from the Art Education program at Concordia

University. With their assistance, we have explored new mediums, and have designed panels for the dormitory at the Old Brewery Mission.

In the coming months we have no exhibits penciled in, but we are organizing two outdoor painting events. The first of these is in cooperation with Felicity Taylor, for VOX and occurred in May on the front square of St-James United Church. The second will take place on Mount Royal Avenue on June 5th as part of the 'Nuit Blanche sur Tableau Noir' festival. Besides ourselves you will also be able to appreciate the work of my colleague Bernard Racicot who is participating on an individual basis.

I would also like to take a few moments to mention that Danny. C, the art room assistant of INTERAGIR (work therapy program) has resigned after two years with us. During that period Danny assisted us in keeping the art studio efficient, and in greeting artists and non-artists alike. He recently decided that he wanted to spend additional time playing music on his saxophone, and therefore had to cut back on other activities. On behalf of all the staff and members, I would like to thank Danny for all his hard work.

On a sadder note, it is with much regret that I must announce the passing of a long time artist of the St-James Drop-In centre. Ms. Patricia Cooney, passed away in April following a long battle with cancer. She was the initiator of a partnership between the art studio and 'Le Musée en Partage' program of the Musée des Beaux- Arts de Montréal. Unfortunately she never had the chance to take part in the project because of her illness. In her memory the artists of the centre, and the art educator of the Museum: Hélène Gravel-Tremblay will design a collage tree, and dedicate it to her.

For the upcoming autumn period, the centre has a vast array of projects lined up, and they will be advertised as they come around on the centres website. If you would like to receive notifications for these events please send us an e-mail, and we will gladly add you to our mailing list.

info@stjamescentre.ca



My arrival at the St-James Drop-In Centre :

(suite from page 1)

Working at St-James allows all of us to experience a unique community in which we are an integral part of the daily life. We assist the members in their journeys to rid their lives of alcohol or drugs; to acquire suitable housing; to find appropriate employment; to cope with the death of a loved one; to deal with the news that they are suffering from an illness, (...) and to simply guide them through difficult periods of isolation.

Therefore we quickly become significant in their social lives, guiding them in good and bad times much like a family member.

We end up realizing that they have as much influence in our lives as we have in theirs. They make us think about our most basic values, and the importance of appreciating the present, rather than worrying about the past and the future.

To end, I would like to take a moment to thank all of the 'St-James family': staff, members, volunteers, and students, who together make St-James the very special place that it is today.

Words from the Inside

Daniel Proulx

At the St-James Drop-In Center we are in over our heads, but for all the right reasons! The centre helps us a great deal on a personal and cultural level. It is great to be here, and the group dynamic is fantastic. Personally, I have only good things to say about this unique community experience.

All in all spending time here is an A+ experience.

Thanks a million to Anne-Marie for all her hard work and dedication

Good summer to all!



OBITUARIES

We want to express our deep regrets over the deaths of three long time members:

Luc Robitaille (46) who passed away in February 2008, as well as

Patricia Cooney (61) &

James MacDougall (69) who both passed away in April of 2008.



Luc



Patricia



James



Top row: Erin Carney, Alexis Boyle, Ron Melanson. Middle row: Nathalie Sheppard, Marie-Eve Dionne & Catherine Lacasse. Bottom row: Anne-Marie Beaulieu, Bernard Racicot & Alain Spitzer.

Thank you

Les fondations EJLB, Jackman, Hylcan, Ballard, FK Morrow, Kaufmann, Hockey for the Homeless, Mazon Canada, Kenneth Shea, Le Garde manger pour tous ; Gouvernement du Canada : programme IPLI, Régie régionale de la Santé et des Services sociaux : Programme PSOC ; Dianova Canada, St-James United Church, F.O.H.M. Beaver Lodge N6, David Eggert, Danica Straith, Frankie martinez, Indigo / Librairies Chapters, Nancy Keays et le CLSC des Faubourgs, Direction Chrétienne, Paula Klein et le Montreal City Mission, la compagnie North West Clothing, Isabelle Leduc et Chambréclerc, Église St-Andrews and St-Paul, Irwin Brown, Shaika Café, Helen, Stan Kupferschmidt, Li Stock, François Hoang, Dawson College: Social Services, Concordia University : Art Education, Hotel Reine Elizabeth, Banque Toronto Dominion, Gerard & Laurel Spitzer, Cegep Du Vieux-Montreal, Vanier College: SCC.

centre de jour
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drop-in centre

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