

NEIGHBOURHOOD CHANGE

and the Role of **Centraide/United Way**
of Greater Montreal in Saint-Michel

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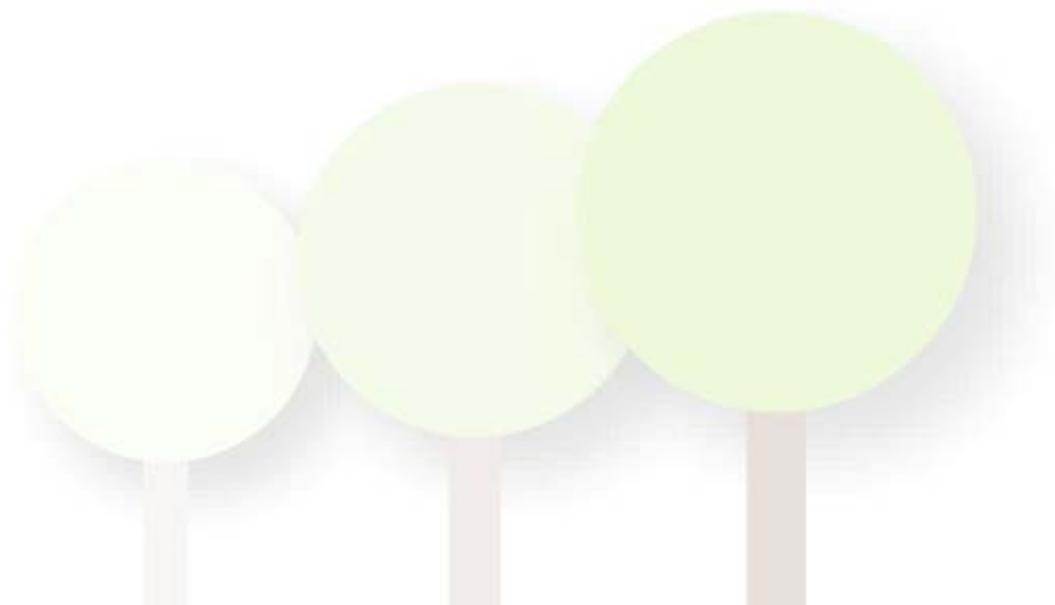
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Acronyms

ANC	Action for Neighbourhood Change
ARUC	L'Alliance de recherche universités-communautés
ARUC-ES	L'Alliance de recherche universités-communautés en économie sociale
BAEQ	Bureau d'aménagement de l'Est du Québec
CCI	Comprehensive Community Initiatives
CDC	Community development corporation
CDEC	Corporation de développement économique et communautaire
CENTRAIDE	Centraide/United Way of Greater Montreal
CLSC	Centre local de services communautaires
CMTQ	Coalition montréalaise des tables de quartier
COM	Conseil des oeuvres de Montréal
CSDM	Commission scolaire de Montréal
HRSDC	Human Resources and Social Development Canada
IFDEC	Institut de formation en développement économique communautaire
INRS	Institut national de la recherche scientifique
La Fédération	Fédération des oeuvres de charité canadiennes-françaises
Le Chantier	Le Chantier de revitalisation urbaine et social
LICO	Low Income Cut-Off
OPDQ	Office de planification et de développement du Québec
PEP	Pointe-Saint-Charles
PIP	Peer Input Process
RESO	Regroupement pour la Reliance économique et sociale dans le Sud-Ouest de Montréal
TOHU	The branding for La Cité des Arts du Cirque, a creation of the Cirque du Soleil
VSMS	Vivre Saint-Michel en Santé

Executive Summary

The focus of this paper is on the unique transformative role that Centraide/United Way of Greater Montreal (Centraide) has played with particular reference to the experience in the neighbourhood of Saint-Michel, which is located in the northeastern part of Montreal. The paper's purpose is to create a better understanding of the vital role that an intermediary organization such as Centraide can play in supporting community action, as well as the implications of that involvement for the organization itself and for citizens in a neighbourhood.

Understanding the context of development in Quebec and Montreal is essential to comprehending the nature of the change process currently underway at the community level in Saint-Michel. The history of community organizing dates back to the 1960s and the era of "l'animation sociale" when, in response to the worldwide recession, citizen participation became a survival strategy for certain urban districts and a number of rural communities in Quebec.

Throughout the 1970 and 1980s, citizen groups and networks proliferated in Quebec, especially Montreal, with the early support of organizations such as Centraide's predecessor "La Fédération," and the YMCA. Subsequently, a range of diverse citizen-driven organizations and community-run social services were supported by the Governments of Quebec and Canada, as well as the City of Montreal. It is not possible to cover the extensive history of this period here, however as an example, 12 community development corporations were established in Montreal by the mid-1980s as community-controlled institutions.

During the 1990's, many new social development and poverty reduction initiatives emerged in Montreal and in Quebec. In 1990, a report by the City of Montreal noted the persistent and alarming concentration of poverty in many districts of the city including Saint-Michel. The effects of widespread deindustrialization were apparent and, in spite of numerous employment and training initiatives undertaken by all levels of government, the number of unemployed remained relatively unchanged.¹ There was a growing recognition that new approaches were needed, and that decentralized approaches and initiatives at the grassroots level tailored to specific community needs were important.

The City also saw the need to provide leadership and to help build community capacity. As part of the effort, the City joined the international Healthy Communities movement in 1990. In parallel, the concept of the social economy emerged with the establishment in 1996 of the Task Force on the Social Economy. It was followed in 1997 with the creation of a partnership by the City of Montreal, Centraide of Greater Montreal and the Department of Community Health to support local social development.

Since the 1970s, Centraide in Montreal has had a history of being involved with social development and community-based organizations, which focused on the need for social change through citizen-led initiatives. In the early 1990s, with poverty increasing in spite of its efforts, Centraide began a transformation towards a more strategic approach to building communities. It stressed collaborative, multi-sector partnerships, investing in promising strategies, the creation of networks, growing community leadership and evaluating the results throughout the process.

¹ Ville de Montréal, *Partenaires dans le développement économique des quartiers*, 1990, pages 11-13.

Centraide focused on strategic choices and, as a result, Saint-Michel became one of its priority neighbourhoods. Vivre Saint-Michel en Santé (VSMS), a community-led organization created in 1991 with a history of local engagement to improve the quality of life of the district, was its chosen vehicle. Based upon the results of the work of VSMS, Centraide supported it in an initiative to focus on poverty reduction and social inclusion. From those origins, Le Chantier de revitalization urbaine et sociale of the district of Saint-Michel was created approximately a decade later.

It should be noted that the Saint-Michel district had been in decline since the 1960's. It had a high population density, a low level of owner-occupied dwellings, many single parent families, low levels of education, high drop-out rates, high child mortality, unemployment higher than the Montreal average and significantly lower average incomes. In the mid-1990s, it became a priority poverty area selected by Centraide, the City of Montreal and Public Health partnership.

Starting in 2000, VSMS realized that despite its efforts in a number of selected areas: mental health, youth, family, seniors, food and overall strategic planning, poverty persisted. Saint-Michel remained one of the poorest districts in Montreal. It became apparent that other strategies would be required to break the cycle. Poverty reduction and social inclusion became the *raison d'être* for the establishment of Le Chantier, an offshoot initiative of VSMS. Where VSMS focused broadly on quality of life issues and worked largely with government agencies and existing service providers, Le Chantier was established as a way of mobilizing people to embark on a long-term, integrated strategy aimed at broadening the participation of local citizens and sectors. Le Chantier also focused on extending the project's reach into new sectors such as housing and to involve newcomers and the business community.

The decision by VSMS in 2004 to become involved with Vibrant Communities, a national initiative co-sponsored by Tamarack, was part of its broader place-based comprehensive community development strategy concentrating on poverty reduction. Le Chantier was and remains VSMS's new instrument, its new tool to develop the Saint-Michel community.

An essential thrust of VSMS with its Le Chantier strategy was and is to connect Saint-Michel with outside experience and supports. Centraide realized the value of such relationships early on and acted instinctively on the opportunity presented by Vibrant Communities to bring in additional knowledge of comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs) and poverty reduction that would complement the considerable expertise already available from the Quebec experience. It encouraged VSMS to apply to become one of six designated Vibrant Communities Trail Builder communities.

In June 2006, Le Chantier reported the following participation:

- Twenty-two government partners (two federal, one provincial, seven regional and eleven municipal).
- One school commission advisor, four schools, two CSDM networks and one Housing Society.
- Twelve business partners.
- Four foundations.
- Seventeen not-for-profit organizations.
- Five low-income organizations.
- An increasing number of citizen participants were linked specifically to the seven public participation projects.

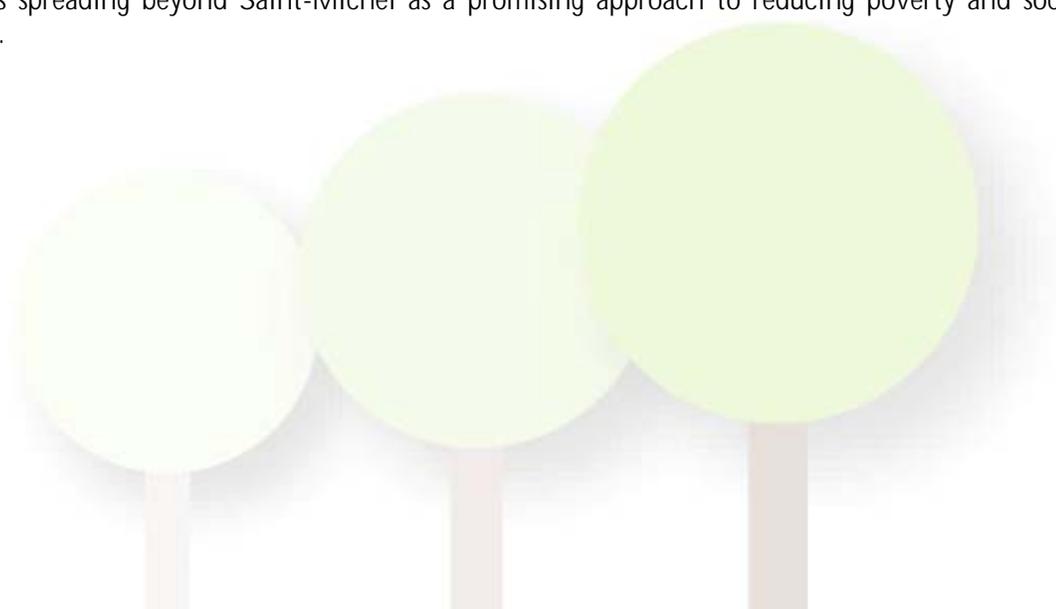
There are also other partnerships at the level of Greater Montreal. This includes one with the Committee of Major Partners (grands partenaires), a unique relationship with Centraide and, for specific tasks, linkages with partners such as l'ARUC for research and evaluation. Other significant partners are the Cirque du Soleil for community mobilization, cultural animation and support, and with several governmental agencies, such as Public Health and the municipal Income Security and Social Development Department.

In Saint-Michel, Centraide has intentionally set out to demonstrate and test a new way of working with communities and to explore a new role for itself as an organization committed to reducing poverty and social exclusion. Its diverse activities in support of community-building extend to partnering, community-based research and evaluation, network development, accompaniment, convening, acting as a technical and strategic advisor, and support to community leadership.

The implications of this changing role for Centraide are significant. It has moved away from being primarily a fundraising and redistribution organization, to become an advocate for and partner in community building. Its mission has remained the reduction of poverty and social exclusion, but its approach to bringing about measurable change has been transformed. Centraide's messaging and practices have changed and its campaign, which reflects this new community focus, has become increasingly successful.

By acting strategically, Centraide has embarked on a course to consolidate its poverty reduction knowledge, assess its learning, reach out to other places, build on the experience of others, construct partnerships, collaborate in new ways and, above all, to support community building to reduce poverty. It has sought to transform itself into an organization that brings value-added beyond the distribution of campaign funds. It already possessed extensive intellectual capital and direct experience, which needed to be made available to support community building and the reduction of social exclusion to those actively seeking to tackle poverty. Centraide has changed its strategy in order to use its practical experience and its development knowledge to help communities in distress.

Centraide continues to work through the implications of its change from being a granting organization and a dynamic fundraising machine to a strategically-focused learning organization. Shifting to become primarily of service to communities and secondly, a resource to donors and its member organizations is a fundamental change not without its difficulties. The transformation within Centraide has proceeded step by step and is still underway. To this day, the community building strategy is spreading beyond Saint-Michel as a promising approach to reducing poverty and social exclusion.



Background

The Action for Neighbourhood Change Initiative

Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC) is a pan-Canadian initiative that brings together four national partners in five communities supported by five government sponsors – all committed to collaborative action for community revitalization and change. Launched in May 2005 with a federal government commitment of \$4 million, the project is a two-year pilot initiative that aims to build community capacity for change, as well as inter-organizational and inter-departmental learning and horizontal collaboration.

Nationally, the partners are the United Way/Centraide Canada, Tamarack, the Caledon Institute and the National Film Board. In the selected community neighbourhoods, the five local partner organizations are the United Ways in Halifax, Thunder Bay, Toronto, Regina and Surrey. Supporting government entities include the National Secretariat on Homelessness, the Office for Learning Technologies, the National Literacy Secretariat, with all three linked to Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC), Canada's Drug Strategy (Health Canada) and the National Crime Prevention Strategy (Public Safety & Emergency Preparedness Canada).

ANC is a learning partnership that is meant to mobilize locally-driven, multi-stakeholder efforts to improve quality of life and to promote neighbourhood revitalization. Its origins emerge from the growing realization within governments, the private and the not-for-profit sectors, as well as local stakeholders that, in spite of numerous efforts to tackle community underdevelopment and marginalization, poverty is increasingly concentrated in particular neighbourhoods. Left to themselves, the affected communities are often unable to break out of the cycle of poverty.

Recent community development experience, supported by research and analysis into the situation of these neighbourhoods, has revealed a wealth of local assets and energies. If brought together strategically and supported by internal and external resources, the potential for local solutions to local problems has been shown to be great. ANC seeks to build on this collective experience, along with the commitment of local stakeholders in five neighbourhoods, to learn how individuals, governments, business and the not-for-profit sectors can work together to maximize the potential for successful sustainable neighbourhood revitalization.

The various partners and players in ANC have taken on complementary, coordinated, but distinct roles consistent with their areas of expertise. United Way/Centraide Canada is the national coordinator for the initiative and is focused on its overall administration and finance, communications, evaluation and partnership facilitation. The Caledon Institute, with its strong focus on community capacity-building and poverty, is leading a policy dialogue, which will increase the understanding and collaboration between governments and communities. Its primary goal is to improve the way governments and communities learn from experiences in order to create better policies to support community revitalization.

The National Film Board is training youth to improve communications between the various players, as well as to capture the lessons learned.

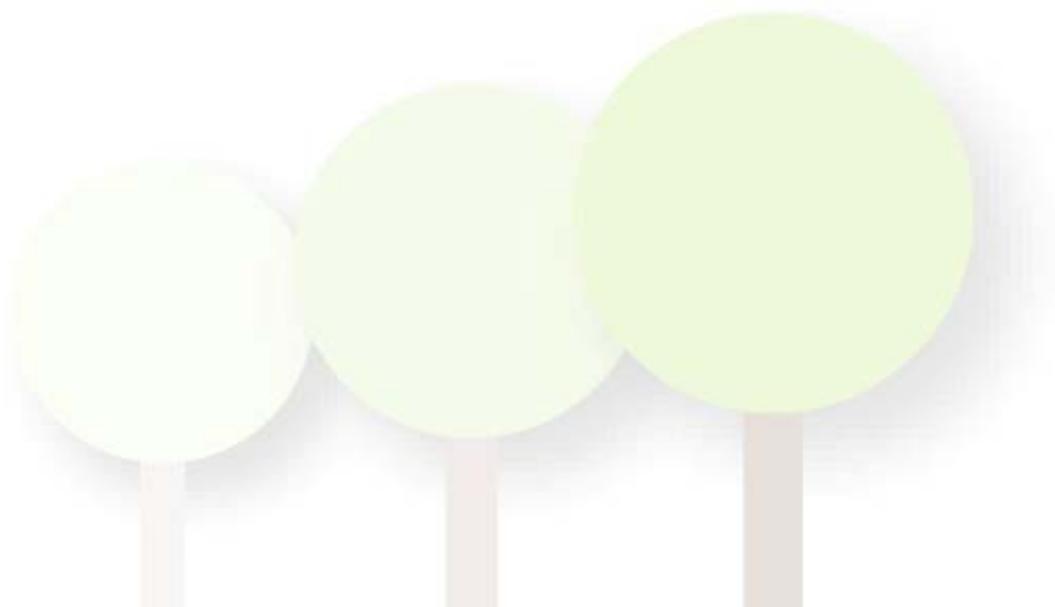
Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement (Tamarack) brings to ANC its experience in community engagement through the provision of coaching and other support to assist communities to

take charge of their own issues. Its role as one of the ANC partners is specifically to develop and coordinate the implementation of the action research framework and learning process.

The Purpose of the Paper

Central to the knowledge generation focus of the ANC initiative is the importance of capturing the value-added brought to a neighbourhood revitalization process by supportive internal and external partners. In this case, the focus is on the unique transformative role that Centraide/United Way of Greater Montreal (Centraide) has played with particular reference to the experience in the neighbourhood of Saint-Michel, which is located in the northeastern part of Montreal.

The purpose of this paper is to better understand the unique and vital role that an intermediary organization, such as Centraide, can play in supporting community action, as well as the implications of that involvement in a neighbourhood. Equally important in terms of learning is to explore the commitment to Saint-Michel by Centraide and to understand the reasons for that unique investment, as well as its impact on the support organization itself.



The Context

Community Action in Quebec

Understanding the context of development in Quebec is essential to comprehending the nature of the change process currently underway at the community level, as well as the key roles played by various stakeholders. It has been argued that community involvement in Quebec dates way back to the early 1900s when Alphonse Desjardins began his cooperative credit union movement known as *Caisses populaires Desjardins*. A key role in the mobilization of communities was also played by organizations close to the Catholic Church such as *la Jeunesse étudiante chrétien* (young Christian students) and the *Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne* (young Christian workers). Later, in the 1960s, the Quiet Revolution promoted a policy of economic nationalism, which saw the provincial government create crown corporations in strategic sectors of the economy to complement the largest concentration of cooperatives in Canada.

In the 1960s, the attention shifted to regional development characterized by the activities of the Bureau d'aménagement de l'Est du Québec (BAEQ) created in 1963 as a result of efforts to revitalize the Gaspé area of the province. BAEQ's stated goal was to produce a plan of action for that region based upon the participation of the population.² In the late 1960s and early 1970s, "l'animation sociale" led to a proliferation of citizens groups, especially in the urban areas of Montreal.

In the urban areas, full employment shifted, due to a worldwide recession, into increased unemployment in both rural and urban communities. A citizen's movement grew up to oppose government-imposed solutions to revive certain rural communities and to close many others. The result was that by 1983, the Quebec Government, through its agency l'Office de planification et de développement du Québec (OPDQ), undertook to support the creation of a community development corporation to create local employment in the Bois Francs region. Its mandate included encouraging the involvement of the community in socio-economic development and the creation of community enterprises.³ This was the precursor of other community-based development corporations and organizations that followed. Gradually, a shift from externally designed (government) solutions to a more participatory, community-driven development approach took place.

Community Change in Montreal

The first community organizing took place in the St. Henri district of the city in 1963 and was funded by la Fédération des oeuvres de charité canadiennes-françaises and led by the Conseil des oeuvres de Montréal (COM).⁴ Its initial focus was on improving recreation and education services for area residents, but it soon began to train community leaders to advocate for themselves. Subsequently, COM demanded to be involved in other decisions concerning the neighbourhood and, in 1965, an epic battle began over the issue of urban renewal. The City never recognized the legitimacy of COM, but its activism continued and inspired other neighbourhoods such as Pointe-Saint-Charles.

² BAEQ, Plan de développement, in *L'approche du développement économique communautaire et sa situation au Québec*, Groupe Econov Développement/New Economy Development Group, 1993, page 27.

³ *Ibid*, page 29.

⁴ *Community Organizing* by Brian Wharf and Michael Clegue, Oxford University Press, 1997, a section on the History of Community Development in Quebec by Jean-Panet Raymond & Robert Mayer, page 32.

In the 60s and 70s, Pointe-Saint-Charles was a bellwether declining community in Montreal. Similar to other urban areas hit with deindustrialization following World War II, it lost 16,000 jobs between 1967 and 1988,⁵ and its population dropped (by more than half) to 13,000 by 1986. Building on the experience of St. Henri, citizens in Pointe-Saint-Charles began to organize themselves in 1965. They created a number of community-led organizations, including a Maison de Quartier, a community health clinic, a community legal services organization and a popular education centre followed in the 1970s by a consumer's food cooperative and a cooperative housing organization. This form of community development led by the Conseil des Oeuvres de Montreal, spread to two other central districts of Montreal: namely Centre-sud and Hochelaga Maisonneuve.

In the same period, across Montreal and in Lower Town in Quebec City, old working class neighbourhoods were becoming activist and were challenging the status quo. By the early 1980s, many of these local organizations were meeting around many "tables de concertation," and a grassroots community movement emerged that spread to other areas. In Montreal, this movement took on the municipal proponents of urban renewal plans and advocated for the construction of affordable housing and housing cooperatives accessible to local residents.

Gradually, locally controlled capacity was developed and the animation movement became characterized by two distinct approaches, one integrative and consensual, and the other integrative and conflictual.⁶ Citizens committees in Quebec practiced both approaches – one that advocated community-run social services, which would be based on the principle of self-help, and the other on the need to make "animation" more political with the creation of pressure groups and alternative community-owned institutions, such as community development corporations (CDCs).

With the economic downturn in the early 1980s, the focus of community activism shifted inevitably from social to economic priorities. Many community groups moved towards proactive lobbying and the creation of partnerships to tackle both the social and economic development challenges by establishing local social services and businesses. The provincial government funding for locally-delivered services, such as home care for the elderly, grew rapidly in the 1970s, while advocacy groups worked with very limited resources. The number of advocacy groups continued to grow as evidenced by the number of women's, youth, disabled, senior's and other "regroupements."

Nevertheless, change was underway. For example, in March of 1984 the Provincial Minister of Labour and Income Security met with citizens of Pointe-Saint-Charles and agreed to fund a socio-economic study of the community conducted by its residents. Nine local organizations joined together and incorporated the Programme économique de Pointe Saint-Charles (PEP) to undertake the study. Its Board of Directors was comprised of eight representatives of community organizations, eight other residents, four members equally divided between local business and outside associates, as well as one representative of the staff. A year later, on the basis of this study, the Minister announced the first annual grant of \$150,000 for operations and \$100,000 for investment in local start-up businesses.⁷

⁵ Institut de formation en développement économique communautaire (IFDEC), *Le programme économique de Pointe Saint-Charles, 1983-1989* by Jean-Marc Gareau, page 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Community organizing, page 35.

⁷ *Ibid.*, page 7.

Within months of the formation of PEP, two other local community corporations were founded in Montreal east – La Corporation de développement économique et communautaire (CDEC) Centre-Sud and Le Programme d'action revitalization Hochelaga-Maisonneuve. Subsequently, 12 CDEC's were created within the City of Montreal. In 1989, as evidence of the progress and recognition of community-driven activity, PEP became RESO (Le Regroupement pour la Reliance économique et sociale dans le Sud-Ouest de Montréal), supported by the three levels of government for five years and expanded to cover all of southwestern Montreal.

The dye was now cast and, within the City of Montreal and elsewhere, community-driven social and economic development and the building of local citizen organizations was underway with private and government funding.

At about the same time, a report by the City of Montreal noted the persistent and alarming concentration of poverty in a number of enclaves such as Saint-Michel. The effects of widespread deindustrialization were apparent and, in spite of numerous employment and training initiatives undertaken by all levels of government, the number of unemployed remained relatively unchanged.⁸ The same report took the view that although the provincial and federal governments carried the primary responsibilities for education and training, their programs seemed to be unable to reach much of the target population. Significantly, it concluded in 1990 that, together, the City and local communities needed to get involved in these issues.

In a 1989 report by Institut national de la recherche scientifique (INRS)⁹, reference was also made to the relevance of local and community economic development as an approach that could deal with the intangible barriers faced by a marginalized population. It also noted that community organizations were an essential ingredient in this process.



Cela en a amené plusieurs à conclure que des nouvelles approches devraient être développées, en complément aux approches traditionnelles. Un consensus se dessine un peu partout quant au choix qui doit être privilégiés : des actions très décentralisées, des projets et des programmes issus du milieu, répondent aux besoins particuliers des différents groupes.¹⁰

The City report stressed the need for new approaches and identified the growing consensus about the importance of decentralized approaches and projects initiated by grassroots groups tailored to the specific needs of the different communities. The report stated the City's intention to recognize the community organizations involved in socio-economic development in order to open up the possibility for them to become partners in the search for and the application of concrete solutions to poverty and unemployment. But the City went further, indicating that it would seek to build up the capacity of local organizations, particularly the community groups, so that they could manage projects in concert with local authorities, the private sector and other stakeholders. The City also saw the need to provide leadership to bring together these groups across its entire territory.

⁸ Ville de Montréal, *Partenaires dans le développement économique des quartiers*, 1990, pages 11-13.

⁹ André Lemlin & Richard Morin, *INRS-Urbanization*, 1989, page 221.

¹⁰ Ville de Montréal, *op. cit.*, page 20. Freely translated as : This has brought many to conclude that new approaches or mechanisms should be developed to complement more traditional ones. Consensus building in different locations related to preferred options: very decentralized initiatives and community-based programs that meet the particular needs of different groups.

In 1989, Mercier-Est, the first district to become part of the Healthy Cities movement (Villes et Villages en santé) started a trend in Montreal that eventually amounted to a total of 10 districts becoming involved. The City of Montreal officially became part of the worldwide and Quebec Healthy Cities Networks in 1990 and, in the spirit of its partnership approach, others joined, including Centraide du Grand Montréal and the Department of Community Health.¹¹ By 1994, the City of Montreal had recognized the dynamism present at the community level and, with its partners, it decided to prioritize, support and extend the local community development work.¹²

The City adopted a policy of community and social development and supported a number of different local organizational models. In each district, a local roundtable (un table de concertation du quartier) was funded to work towards improving the quality of life. Eventually, 30 roundtables were created. Concurrently, within the province of Quebec, governments were beginning to recognize the concept of the social economy and the implicit value it placed upon local commitment and involvement in both the social and economic dimensions of the community. Its relevance to the reduction of poverty and social exclusion was especially promoted by community activists and the women's movement, with emphasis upon the social economy as a way of eliminating, not managing, both.¹³ The establishment of the Task Force on the Social Economy in 1996 and its subsequent evolution into Le Chantier de l'économie sociale, a not-for-profit corporation, were key milestones reflective of the context within which the work in Montreal was situated.

By 1997, the City and its partners, Centraide and the Department of Public Health agreed to create the Program for financial support to local social development.¹⁴ This program brought together the then 20 local roundtables. From 1998 to 2001, these partners funded profiles of each roundtable which were later synthesized into one report. During the same period, these roundtables grouped together under the emblem of the Montreal Coalition of District Roundtables¹⁵ in order to gain recognition and to develop a participatory evaluation process with the support of the Centre for Popular Training and funding from Centraide. During this time, the three partners increased their core funding to each of the local roundtables to \$40,000 annually. With this support, most of the roundtables were finally able to hire a full or part-time staff person to assure the continuity of their organizing and advocacy work.

Also during this period, the Public Health Department, in partnership with the local CLSCs in seven declining suburban communities in Montreal, undertook to support the development of multisectoral and multi-network local roundtables. Subsequently, in 2002, the amalgamated City of Montreal confirmed the value of this local social development work and extended it across all of its districts. The funding for each of the tables continued to increase until 2006, by which time the joint funding contributed by the three partners annually amounted to \$55,000 dollars per table, which included a significant investment by Centraide.

¹¹ Department of Community Health, subsequently renamed the Division of Public Health and Social Services, part of the Regional Health and Social Services Commission of Montreal-Centre.

¹² Orientations et Paramètres de Gestion et d'Évaluation, Initiative montréalaise de soutien au développement social local, page 7.

¹³ The Social Economy in Quebec, A Practitioners Perspective by Bill Ninacs, Victoriaville, Quebec, 1998, page 3.

¹⁴ Programme de soutien financier au développement social local.

¹⁵ Coalition montréalaise des tables de quartier (CMTQ).

In terms of the governance of this initiative, a joint management working committee was established, as well as a steering committee composed of the three major funding partners to advise on the redevelopment of the program of support for what became the Montreal Initiative to support local social development.¹⁶ The key challenge that they planned to address was to undertake the overall consolidation of the financing of the 30 local roundtables supported by the Initiative de soutien with a view to continue their involvement and identifying other funding partners in order to build local capacity in response to identified local priorities.

¹⁶ L'Initiative montréalaise de soutien au développement social local.

The History of Centraide of Greater Montreal

The logic of the present role played by Centraide of Greater Montreal (Centraide) can be traced back to 1966, when five charitable organizations came together to form the Federated Campaign of Greater Montreal. In 1975, it changed its name to Centraide Montreal and finally to Centraide of Greater Montreal in 1992 when its coverage was expanded to include the entire Island of Montreal, as well as Laval and part of the South Shore area. In addition to its name change came a change in its view of the world of philanthropy and voluntarism. Initially responding to pressure from the business community to merge the multiplicity of fundraising campaigns into one, Centraide created a federation of charitable federations mandated to raise money and redistribute it to its independent members. Subsequently, it merged the operations of all the member federations in order to better serve the public, especially the poor.

In coming together within the context of a rapidly changing Quebec, Centraide's members opted to move beyond their original fundraising and volunteerism focus to "build an organization with a philosophy based on social development and self-help."¹⁷ This change led Centraide to shift to a more strategic focus on allocations by sector of intervention, rather than by agency, effectively moving away from direct assistance to charitable organizations towards action to address broad social problems. By moving to link their action to social change, Centraide was influenced by the social animation and community development approaches being advocated by community activists within Quebec and particularly Montreal.

The 1960's emphasis on participation within the social development approach subsequently evolved in the 1980s into one that saw Centraide promoting "a comprehensive approach based upon prevention and self-reliance."¹⁸ There was an increasing awareness of the growing gap between the rich and the poor. A more inclusive approach to poverty alleviation led to the involvement of new players such as those from the labour and grassroots movements. New community-driven capacity was being built that included local and regional roundtables on a territorial and sectoral basis, networks, new multisectoral partnerships and social economy initiatives, as well as training institutes, small business loan funds and increasing numbers of local service providers. Much attention was being paid to linking social and economic initiatives and to engaging the private sector.

¹⁷ Ninacs, W. "Centraide of Greater Montreal: A Case Study." The Caledon Institute of Social Policy. September 2003. page 2.

¹⁸ Ibid., page 3.

The Transformation of Centraide

Nonetheless, it was the 1990s that set the stage for the further transformation of Centraide in Montreal. A growing awareness was emerging that, in spite of all the work done to date, all the funds raised, the volunteers involved and the local capacity being built, poverty was still increasing. In Greater Montreal in the years 1991 to 1996, the number of people living under the low income cut-off “rose from 22 percent to 27.3 percent – or 893,000 people.”¹⁹ New faces of poverty and distress were emerging, and a culture of poverty and hopelessness was being passed on in certain neighbourhoods. Concurrently, the State was divesting itself of its responsibilities in a number of social service areas.

Centraide realized that, given its emphasis upon a public campaign to raise funds within an increasingly competitive charitable giving environment, it needed to demonstrate that it was making a real difference in the community. Consequently, it moved from a traditional charitable approach, one in which it was funding organizations that were responding to the needs of vulnerable populations. Its approach of choice became one of social development, an intentional strategy aimed at building local individual and group capacity to improve the community's quality of life in a sustainable manner. Its focus would remain, nevertheless, on the poor and vulnerable members of the community.

An example of the transformation of Centraide Montreal's approach can be found in the experience accumulated for over a decade with its founding of 1, 2, 3 GO. This strategic initiative, now operating in eight communities, is focused on mobilizing a community around the well-being and development of very young children and support to their parents. It is an action-based approach responding to the situation of the very young in the community, and it is intended to empower community members to change the conditions. 1, 2, 3 GO was conceived of and funded initially by Centraide as a consortium of partners that also obtained funds from several foundations. Uniquely, it was and is also an action-research and continuous learning project that continues to reflect on its lessons learned on the ground and in terms of its reconceptualization. It intentionally links practice with theory.



Ce bilan est avant tout le produit de la réflexion de personnes qui ont suivi des initiatives 1,2,3 GO pas à pas et qui, en s'alimentant aux écrits théoriques et scientifiques sur le sujet, ont constamment cherché à en accroître la pertinence et la force de l'impact.²⁰

In 2000, to ground its transformation in the community, Centraide brought together an Advisory Committee on Social Issues (Le Chantier Aiseur) composed of 19 leading citizens who reached out to an additional 60 agency representatives. The Committee was tasked with identifying the major social issues in the community and their implications for the Centraide, a unique exercise undertaken from the perspective of a philanthropic organization. This exercise became the first step towards the implementation of Centraide's new strategic guidelines and towards strengthening its collaborative

¹⁹ Ibid., page 4.

²⁰ Freely translated as: This assessment is foremost the product of the analysis of individuals who have followed the 1, 2, 3 GO initiative step by step, and who, by relying upon scientific and theoretical writings on this topic, have constantly tried to increase the validity and the impact.

relationships within the Montreal community. The Committee made a number of recommendations that were put into action by Centraide.

A summary of the practical consequences of these recommendations had a greater emphasis upon making strategic choices with a view to “building caring communities,” “developing community action’s potential” and “promoting voluntary social involvement.”²¹ It meant encouraging collaboration among partners; supporting relations between the corporations, donors and the community-based sector; investing in the most promising strategies and developing networks, as well as training between agencies; promoting volunteer involvement at community agencies; growing community leadership, especially amongst the upcoming generation; stressing innovation; and, finally, creating more effective tools to evaluate the impact of community action.

The transformation of Centraide meant a focus on strategic choices, including the areas within Montreal that were the most impoverished, and underserved by the existing agency and government programs. In addition, it was interested in building on demonstrated community initiative where additional support could make a difference and, importantly, where collaboration with a number of partners was contemplated. The importance of the potential for innovation with partners who were committed to measuring impact was also to be front and center in terms of Centraide’s new strategic thinking.

Saint-Michel, in northeastern Montreal, was chosen by this partnership as one of seven priority neighbourhoods within which to model new strategies to obtain measurable results. The work of Vivre Saint-Michel en Santé (VSMS) placed Saint-Michel in a strong position to be chosen as a priority neighbourhood. With the subsequent arrival of Vibrant Communities, Centraide saw an opportunity to capitalize on a focused poverty reduction movement and, therefore, acted as the catalyst to connect the community with Tamarack to build local capacity and engagement to reduce poverty and social exclusion.

²¹ Building Caring Communities and Supporting their Ability to Act, Centraide of Greater Montreal, September, 2000, page 4.

The Situation in Saint-Michel

Until the turn of the last century, Saint-Michel was a small farming community of about 1,000 people. Postwar settlement of returning soldiers, a large influx of Italian immigrants, and growth of the City of Montreal generally and local industrial development, driven by the expansion of the Miron and Francon quarries, caused Saint-Michel's population to swell to 64,000 by 1964. The quarries are 20 storey-deep pits that occupy 42 percent of the community's land mass and divide it into three sectors which are geographically distinct. Saint-Michel is also bisected east to west by the Metropolitan Autoroute – a major arterial highway that was built in 1960.

Historically, immigrants have been drawn to Saint-Michel by the potential for jobs, less expensive land and the absence of zoning and planning regulations. Small workshops and factories have grown up alongside residential housing units, giving Saint-Michel a patchwork appearance.

Saint-Michel's relatively prosperous early years were followed in the 1970s and 1980s by economic decline and subsequent political marginalization. In 1968, the Miron quarry closed and was transformed into a massive garbage dump. Similarly, in 1984, the Francon quarry ceased operations and became a snow removal storage area. The local economy went into substantial decline, as did the community's self-image. In addition, Saint-Michel suffered from increasing political marginalization when it lost its status as a municipality in 1968 and became part of a ward of the City of Montreal.

Worsening economic conditions and the arrival of a number of different cultural groups led to the increasing ghettoization of Saint-Michel and other nearby neighbourhoods. Poverty levels rose and the transient nature of the population increased correspondingly. Saint-Michel became recognized as a place for those seeking low-cost rental housing and a reception area for new immigrants. Based upon the 2001 census, immigrants comprised some 42 percent of the population (compared with 29 percent in Montreal), of whom 43 percent were North African, 19 percent were Latin American and 17 percent were from Southeast Asia.

The Conditions for Change

Saint-Michel residents faced a range of housing and social challenges. Currently numbering 60,000 residents, their neighbourhood has the highest population density in the city, which is almost double that of Montreal as a whole. The area has an extremely low level of owner occupied lodgings (33 percent). Lone-parent families constitute 29 percent of the population.

In 2001, Saint-Michel's residents had the lowest level of education in Montreal – 30 percent had less than nine years of schooling, compared with 15 percent for the rest of the city. The school drop-out rate was 33 percent. Saint-Michel's child mortality rate is 8.5 per thousand compared with 5.6 in Montreal, although the life expectancy level is the same as the rest of the city (78.2 years of age). Unemployment was 12.6 percent in 2001, 3.0 percent higher than the city's overall rate, while the average annual income was \$18,841 – almost \$10,000 below the Montreal average. Census figures from 2001 also indicated that 25 percent of household earnings came from government transfer payments and 40 percent of residents lived below Statistics Canada's low income cut-off (LICO); 72 percent of those below the LICO were lone-parent families.²²

²² Section 5 is excerpted from: Makhoul, A., Brodhead, D., and E. Leviten-Reid. "Le Chantier in Saint-Michel: Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion" The Caledon Institute of Social Policy. March 2006. pages 2-3.

The Choice & Challenge of Saint-Michel

Change was underway in Saint-Michel well before Vibrant Communities came along. “Encouraged by the citizen action movement in the 1960s and 1970s, ad hoc groups in Saint-Michel began to form in the 1980s around social service and charitable initiatives. Environmental issues associated with the dumpsites in the two former quarries became rallying points for resident action in the 1980s.”²³ The community network formed during this time developed a significant momentum with the considerable impetus provided by the environmental challenges posed by the dumping of garbage into the old Miron quarry. It was a rallying point for the local people.

In 1989, the initiation in Quebec of the World Health Organization inspired the “Villes & Villages en Santé” movement which opened a path towards the development of multisectoral local strategies to improve the quality of life of the population. It is a place-based movement that sought to bring together a cross-section of local citizens and others to work together to produce a healthy community. A healthy community was defined as one where local human and physical resources and potentials were fully utilized through the active participation of the population. A report from l’Alliance de recherche universités-communautés (ARUC) credited the “Villes & Villages en Santé” movement with an innovative emphasis on a strategy of multisectoral cooperation and planned community dialogue.²⁴

The initial organizational impetus in Saint-Michel was inspired by this vision and it resulted in the creation in 1991 of Vivre Saint-Michel en Santé (VSMS). During its first forum, which brought together citizens and other speakers, a long list of recommendations was formulated, plus 11 working committees were formed focused on a vision of community-driven development based upon a multisectoral partnership committed to improving the quality of life of the population. VSMS worked primarily on improving access to services and, where needed, to obtaining services that were lacking in the Saint-Michel district given the area’s lack of infrastructure relative to other areas of the City of Montreal. Thus, Saint-Michel was one of a number of poverty areas chosen by Centraide, the City and the Public Health department for particular attention. This support was extended to strengthen the community organizations and the public institutions engaged in the work of VSMS.

The community dynamism in a number of districts, including Saint-Michel, convinced the City of Montreal to support and grow this locally-driven activity in 1994 as an intentional poverty reduction approach. The City adopted a municipal policy to tackle its marginalized urban areas with a community development approach and it funded organizational pilot projects in several districts. It went beyond the local level and partnered with other funders to support a roundtable (table de concertation) in each district to work on improving the quality of community life. Initially, 19 roundtables received annual municipal funding for this work and these groups eventually formed a citywide table – la Coalition montréalaise des tables de quartier (CMTQ), a network of organizations dedicated to local social development.

²³ Ibid., page 3.

²⁴ Fontan, Jean-Marc, et al. *Projet de recherche sur les quinze ans de la table de concertation: Vivre Saint-Michel en Santé, Phase 1: Profil de la communauté* par Sambou Ndiaye. ARUC-ES, novembre, 2004, page 34.

In 1997, the funding partnership between the City, Centraide of Greater Montreal and the municipal Public Health Department grew into support for a program of support to social development that included 20 local roundtables, each corresponding to a defined sociological district of the City. VSMS, as one of the roundtables, was supported (in 1997) by this tripartite agreement. In 1997-98, these roundtables were invited to become important players in the preparation and organization of citywide local forums leading up to a regional-wide social development forum. This meeting brought together the Conseil régional de développement de l'Isle de Montréal, as well as the social services and health networks.

Underlining the importance placed upon this locally-driven activity by its supporters was the commitment by Centraide in 1999 of an annual grant from its social development program of \$40,000 to each local roundtable. This investment enabled most of the tables to hire permanent (sometimes part-time) staff, and insured the continuity of their organizing and mobilization work.

Between 1998 and 2001, the City, Centraide of Greater Montreal and the Public Health Department jointly financed the research on a profile of each table and by 2002, these studies were brought together in a synthesis document for the entire City of Montreal. The CMTQ, with support from the Centre de formation populaire and financed by Centraide, undertook a participatory evaluation of the organizing (activités de concertation) work carried out in each district. The results of this study were shared with the two other funding partners and they pointed out the importance of the local process of decision-making, as well as insuring continuity in the work of the local tables.

In Saint-Michel, VSMS had grown by the year 2000 into a community-driven initiative that targeted its efforts on a number of selected areas: mental health, youth, family, seniors, food (including the establishment of a public market) and overall strategic planning. Yet, Saint-Michel remains one of the poorest districts in Montreal. It became apparent that an additional strategy was required to break the cycle. Poverty reduction and social inclusion became the *raison d'être* for the establishment of Le Chantier de revitalization urbaine et sociale, an offshoot initiative of VSMS. Where VSMS focused broadly on quality of life issues (e.g., access to services) and its members worked largely with government agencies and existing service providers, Le Chantier has embarked on a long-term, integrated strategy. It is based upon an in-depth diagnosis of the situation of the district, as well as a long term vision defined and approved collectively by the local citizens and other stakeholders. Influenced by the work of Le Chantier, VSMS plans to enlarge its areas of involvement into new sectors such as employment, economic development, housing, culture, sports and recreation and urban renewal. It also aims to broaden the participation of local citizens by focusing on extending the project's reach to involve the newcomer and business communities.²⁵

After a decade of work, VSMS has mobilized resources, engaged more people in its work, improved access to services, modified its governance structure and launched approximately twenty new projects. Of equal importance is the new way of thinking that has emerged from its community organizing and service-oriented activity. Since the establishment of Le Chantier by VSMS, the partners of VSMS now "believe that poverty and social exclusion result from a lack of financial and personal assets (e.g. education, skills, language and cultural access). The sum of these deficits is greater than the parts: a lack of both financial and personal assets essentially denies individuals of their personal power to shape their own affairs."²⁶ As a result of this conviction, VSMS partners have begun work in new

²⁵ Makhoul et. al. "Le Chantier in Saint-Michel: Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion" The Caledon Institute of Social Policy. March 2006. page 3.

²⁶ Ibid., page 3.

areas of intervention using new approaches. VSMS initiatives have gone beyond the social domain into the economic, cultural and urban revitalization areas. Involvement with political and business groups has intensified in order that VSMS may influence change and reduce poverty and social exclusion. A new emphasis upon obtaining results and researching opportunities is emerging.

“The recent establishment of Le Chantier signals a widespread recognition that individuals and organizations acting alone cannot affect the degree and range of poverty reduction initiatives required to transform their lives or their communities.”²⁷ While the grassroots history of VSMS has helped to establish a poverty reduction process based on resident engagement and participation, it recognized the need for the implementation of new strategies. The efforts to launch Le Chantier initiative have focused on efforts to expand partnerships within the community, as well as collaboration with external government agencies and other players based outside the neighbourhood. Through its Le Chantier initiative, VSMS now creates a space where residents and other partners can articulate and mobilize a plan of action for community-driven neighbourhood social and urban revitalization, as well as the reduction of poverty and social exclusion in Saint-Michel.²⁸

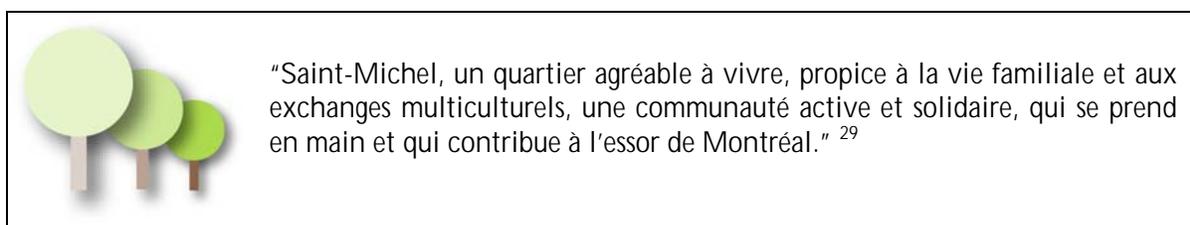
²⁷ Ibid., page 3.

²⁸ Ibid., page 4.

Elements of Le Chantier's Integrated Strategy

The decision by VSMS in 2004 to become involved with Vibrant Communities, a national initiative sponsored by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy and Tamarack, was part of a broader place-based comprehensive community development strategy concentrating on poverty reduction. Le Chantier is its new instrument and its new tool for community-driven development. It does not replace VSMS, but builds on its history, and extends its capacity to strategically reduce poverty. Le Chantier has also inherited years of community animation and mobilization, networking and partnership experience in Montreal and Quebec which was noted earlier – that context is vital to understanding the efforts currently underway to reduce poverty and social exclusion in Saint-Michel led by Le Chantier, but supported by a score of other players.

As a result of a district strategic planning workshop held in the autumn of 2004, a first in Quebec, Saint-Michel developed its own vision of local development which is as follows:



It was realized by VSMS through its Le Chantier initiative that in order to make an impact on poverty in Saint-Michel, a 10-year local development process would be necessary.

Building a Critical Mass – Action and Attitude

An attitude change was seen as fundamental to making progress towards Le Chantier's stated goals of transforming the district by building a new identity through the reduction of poverty and social exclusion. Le Chantier also sought to achieve greater integration of Saint-Michel residents into the social, economic and cultural life of the community and, likewise, into Greater Montreal. In spite of more than 15 years of local organizing and a growing number of local citizens who wanted things to change in Saint-Michel, the prevailing attitude was one characterized by pessimism, skepticism and even fear. The fear was caused by a perception of insecurity and local violence, accentuated by a lack of confidence in public officials of various levels of government on the part of some immigrants who had lived in authoritarian countries.

Rather than trying to obtain a few small successes or "early wins," a strategy often used elsewhere, Le Chantier determined that limited action with some successes would not impress the community – it would not signal a substantial change or provide enough hope. Local people had experienced ad hoc targeted initiatives and marginal progress over the years that had been judged as insufficient to change the community's circumstances. They did not generate sufficient optimism. Instead, the preferred strategy was to start with a bang by building a momentum, by rapidly involving more citizens and by moving ahead on a score of sectors. Citizen attention and subsequent involvement

²⁹ Presentation by Pierre Durocher to the Peer Input Process (PIP), December 9, 2004, notes page 6. Freely translated as: "Saint-Michel, a remarkable neighbourhood in which to live, supportive of family life and multicultural exchanges, is an active and supportive community that controls its own destiny and contributes to the revitalization/growth of Montreal."

could only be obtained through a broadly-based, multi-project, multisectoral approach. Along with their participation, increased adherence to the community and a change of attitude – both judged essential to community revitalization and a reduction in poverty and exclusion – would occur.

Under the direction of a Steering Committee of 18 partners, supported by a Committee of Major Partners (grandes partenaires), two strategies to fight poverty and social exclusion were identified, as well as four action priorities.

The two strategies are:

- to increase the collective local capacity to organize
- to organize in a coordinated, integrated manner to attack the entire range of serious deficiencies in the district.

The four action priorities are:

- to increase the disposable incomes for families and individuals
- to improve and diversify the stock of local housing
- to improve the access to and range of cultural, recreational and commercial services
- to improve local security.

The initial three-year workplan called for the initiation of 42 projects to address these. Later on, the June 2006 mid-year update and workplan provides the evidence of what creating a critical mass of activity looked like after 18 months. In the three cross-cutting strategic areas of activity: citizen participation; mobilization of partners based on a plan of action; and sharing the learning – the pace of activity becomes apparent.

Citizen Participation – Working with many partners, seven projects were started. Five of these were place-based in subdistricts of Saint-Michel and two were broad-based district-wide and specifically youth-oriented. The focus of these projects was the inclusion of adults and youth, as well as support for organizing groups of neighbours. Some 240 people were involved in special activities and monthly meetings led by a Citizens' Participation Partners Club.

Mobilization of Partners – Some 20 partners working from the three-year workplan initiated projects in each one of the three priority areas. Project organizers focused on the income file began three new projects, including one concerned with employment opportunity planning in conjunction with the development of the former Saint-Michel quarry site. This project involved the Mayor of Montreal and his office, the administration of the Arrondissement, local business people and VSMS, along with the site developer Smart Centres.

In the housing priority, two projects moved ahead. The first was the establishment of a local housing information office to help renters, owners and promoters improve the condition of the local housing stock while the second consisted of gathering local people together who were interested in the planning of 134 new cooperative housing units.

In the access to services priority, planning for two social integration projects commenced with local partners, including two local school administrations, the TOHU, and the Cirque du Soleil. Through a project entitled l'Ecole d'Arts Nomade, cultural activities and teaching were brought into two primary schools. The second access project brought together 15 business and other agency partners to work on creating a sense of community through the development of a commercial sector concept and plan by making more services available

locally. The small businesses on Jarry Street lacked sufficient draw and, apart from using local *depanneurs*, people tended to shop outside the community.

Sharing the Learning – Members of VSMS and Le Chantier participated in 15 learning and sharing events in the previous six months. These exchanges took place in the cities of Quebec, Toronto, Ottawa, and, naturally, Montreal. In addition, tele-learning sessions and conferences involved a growing number of people, culminating in the decision by Le Chantier to engage a staff person responsible for developing a learning plan in order to better share and learn within the district and as part of the Vibrant Communities Pan-Canadian Learning Community initiated by Tamarack.

To June 2007, the momentum has grown with 23 projects launched. More importantly, supports have been put in place to sustain these initiatives. Project staff has been hired to follow through on the work of each file, including income, housing, and access to recreation and cultural services, as well as on the citizen participation file. Oversight committees called Partners Clubs are in place for all but the security file. The plan for the remainder of 2006 is focused on consolidating the current projects and planning others. Of note is the intent to monitor the results of each of the projects currently operating against the overall workplan of Le Chantier. The goal for 2006-07 is to increase the momentum and have 30 of the planned projects underway with data kept on each one.

In order to fully understand this snapshot of the project's activity, it is important to remember that Le Chantier was barely 18 months old in June 2006. In its first year, the emphasis of its work was on planning to activate the VSMS poverty reduction and inclusion goals and, subsequently, to become an active part of the Vibrant Communities network. Creating a critical mass of activity was seen as vital, but only to the extent that a long-term plan was developed and followed. The long-term sustainability of the work of Le Chantier and its projects was and remains a concern, but at this juncture, capturing the imagination and involvement of the community is deemed to be essential.

Local people need to feel that a change is underway. VSMS and Le Chantier recognize residents' need to move from a perception of defeat and discontent to one of optimism and participation. The critical mass required to effect this vital attitude change is not yet clear, nor is the required capacity to sustain the high level of activity. At this point, ideas are being tested, capacity built, real projects put in place; results and performance are being tracked and an appropriate balance is being sought. Gradually, local people are becoming increasingly aware of and involved in that change and the beginnings of an attitude change can be perceived.

Linking-up – A Deliberate Strategy

An essential component of the VSMS and Le Chantier strategy is to connect Saint-Michel with outside experience and supports. Recent literature on comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs) and neighbourhood revitalization illustrates the importance of building linkages within the community, as well as with external partners. As the Caledon Institute wrote, "CCIs recognize the value of contributions from diverse backgrounds, networks and areas of expertise. Collaborative relationships create new value by bringing additional resources, insights and expertise to the table."³⁰ Centraide realized the value of such relationships early on and acted instinctively on the opportunity presented by Vibrant Communities to bring in additional knowledge of CCIs and poverty reduction to complement the considerable expertise already available from the Quebec experience. It

³⁰ Torjman, Sherri, and E. Leviten-Reid. "Comprehensive Community Initiatives." The Caledon Institute of Social Policy. March 2003, page 5.

encouraged VSMS to apply to become one of six designated Vibrant Communities Trail Builder communities in Canada in order to access and engage with a supportive external resource.

Within the community context, VSMS knew from its first decade of experience that a long-term development instrument was needed to take a holistic, comprehensive approach to community building. It established Le Chantier as a collaborative, as well as a multisectoral, community revitalization organization that would emphasize partnership development. From the beginning, Le Chantier's deliberate strategy was to involve an ever widening circle of participants in community planning and subsequent project implementation. The initial challenge was to move beyond the social services milieu inhabited by VSMS to encompass more local citizens, visible minorities and the business community.

A Steering Committee of 18 people was set up by VSMS to guide the start-up of Le Chantier and at its core was a group of active local citizens. Chaired by a local business person, the committee's members were drawn from not-for-profit service providers along with some community-minded individuals. VSMS reported to the community during several annual open community meetings, but it recognized that increased broad-based public participation was needed. Le Chantier was intended as an approach to growing the number of partnerships. As part of its governance strategy, each of its priority areas had its own Partners Club (Club des partenaires). Each Club brought together those interested in the particular area or major initiative. Each Club met at least three times a year to provide community oversight of the initiative(s) for Le Chantier, as well as to advise and support their implementation.

Progress has been made in this regard and, by June 2007, Le Chantier reported that six of the Partner Clubs were underway, one in each of the priority action areas with the exception of one. There was no Club planned for the security priority, however one is planned to begin in the autumn of 2007.

On average, there are 20 organizational partners in each of the Clubs coming from community organizations, public institutions or businesses. These Clubs shape the initiatives in the areas of increasing family and individual incomes (e.g. relating to employment, and access to government transfers), to affordable and quality housing; to the development of a commercial artery; to the development of sport and recreation infrastructure and to the recognition of culture and the development of citizen participation.

Funding for some of the project activities has come from federal, provincial, municipal, as well as foundations and, to a limited extent, from private sector sources. However, the support for Le Chantier's ongoing core organizing and planning activities, as well as its research, evaluation and learning comes mainly from Centraide, the City of Montreal and the Vibrant Communities Initiative funded by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, a major Canadian foundation.

In June 2006, Le Chantier reported on the following participation:

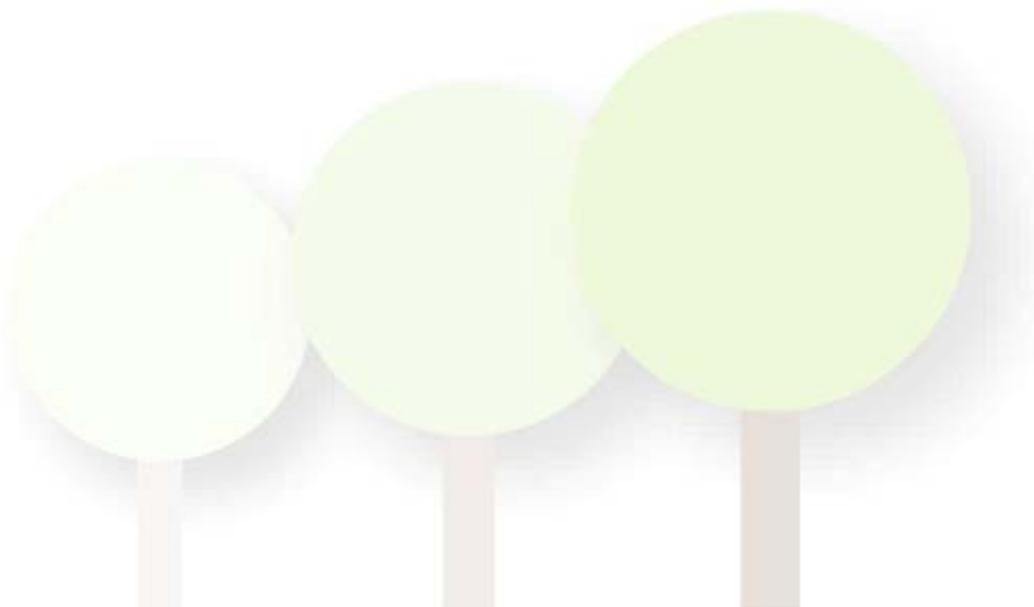
- Twenty-two government partners (two federal, one provincial, seven regional and eleven municipal).
- One school commission advisor, four schools, two CSDM networks and one Housing Society.
- Twelve businesses.
- Four foundations.
- Seventeen not-for-profit organizations.
- Five low-income organizations.

- An increasing number of citizen participants were linked specifically to the seven public participation projects.

There are additional partnership arrangements, such as the Committee of Major Partners (grands partenaires), at the level of Greater Montreal, the unique partnership with Centraide, and for specific tasks, linkages with partners such as l'ARUC for research and evaluation. Also the Cirque du Soleil for community mobilization, cultural animation and support, and relationships with several governmental agencies, such as Public Health and the municipal income security and social development department.

Networks in Action

VSMS, through its Le Chantier initiative, are also active members in a number of local, regional and national networks, such as the Pan-Canadian Learning Community, the Vibrant Communities collaboration and many local and regional roundtables.



Centraide's Role in Saint-Michel & its Value-added

In Saint-Michel, Centraide intentionally set out to demonstrate and test a new way of working with communities and to explore a new role for itself as an organization committed to reducing poverty and social exclusion, and improving the quality of community life for all citizens. To make the selection of a district, Centraide considered the situation of the tables de concertation supported by l'Initiative montrealaise, as well as the profile of their target area. Saint-Michel was chosen as a pilot community by Centraide because of its position as one of the least-served zones, the dynamism of its established citizen-driven organization and its on-going relationship with Centraide. Despite a decade of effort, its situation was seen to be deteriorating and the neighbourhood was open to and in need of outside assistance and advice if the community was to be revitalized and poverty to be reduced.

Partnering

In Saint-Michel, Centraide worked closely with VSMS to support the conceptualization and launch of Le Chantier and it partnered with other funders to underwrite the start-up stages.

Community-based Research and Evaluation

Centraide's newly adopted community development approach came with an important supportive role in community-focused research and evaluation. Recognizing the challenge presented by measuring a social development approach, it set out with other research partners to discover whether social impact can be measured by trying to better understand its conceptual underpinnings, what others are doing in the field and, also, what was possible for Centraide to do in this regard. The outcome of this effort was a multi-pronged strategy aimed at helping community organizations develop a culture of planning and evaluation, focused on equipping local communities with tools to assess impact. The strategy would also help Centraide measure the impact of its own strategies on the community organizations it was supporting.

In Saint-Michel, Centraide financed research of the VSMS experience in partnership with l'ARUC-ES that produced three recent studies.³¹ One study looked at the 15-year history of VSMS by profiling the community, one looked at the development of the structure of VSMS since its inception and the third focused on the participation of the ethno cultural communities in VSMS. The design and governance of Le Chantier has profited from this research. Centraide had been a key sponsor (and funder) of this work and these studies.

Network Development

As part of its new strategies, Centraide gave priority to creating networks to further its work with communities. It has been a member of the City of Montreal Advisory Committee, supporting evaluation and research in the five designated revitalization zones, it sits on a committee of the Social

³¹ Projet de recherche sur les quinze ans de la table de concertation: Vivre Saint-Michel en Santé, Phase 1: Profil de la communauté par Sambou Ndiaye, Jean-Marc Fontan, et al, ARUC-ES, novembre, 2004 and Phase 2. Monographie organisationnelle de VSMS and an exploratory study, La Participation des communautés ethnoculturelles à la table de concertation de Saint-Michel also with l'ARUC-ES.

Development Forum and participates on “La chaire Approches communautaires et inégalité de santé.” In all these fora, Saint-Michel is involved as a model of action, reflection and innovation.

Raising awareness and increasing multi-party collaboration was also a goal of the new strategies and, in Saint-Michel, this has taken the form of a Committee of Major Partners convened by Centraide. Composed of current or potential key government and non-government partners in the Saint-Michel project,³² its primary purpose in Saint-Michel is to share learning and to create awareness of the work and its implications. While facilitating the sharing of the Saint-Michel experience, the committee has also been able to build new funding arrangements, and facilitate greater collaboration amongst government and non-government agencies, as well as donor organizations.

Locally, Centraide has supported VSMS in extending its reach and growing its networks beyond those citizens who were initially involved in VSMS. It assisted in the development of Le Chantier and promoted approaches to the business community, with local governments and with cultural communities. It also helped create networks at other levels and linked VSMS to them at the municipal and regional levels.

Nationally, Centraide Montreal is part of the United Way movement in Canada and it has been called on to contribute to conferences and discussions in the role of philanthropic organizations, the voluntary sector and other social development topics. In particular, its work in Saint-Michel is relevant to the national initiative currently underway to establish standards of performance for United Way organizations engaged in initiating or expanding their work as community impact organizations, such as those involved in the Action for Neighbourhood Change initiative. As noted earlier, Le Chantier is directly involved with Vibrant Communities and it has participated actively in its conferences, tele-learning sessions and reflection exercises. Centraide was responsible for seeing the possible synergy between the work planned in Saint-Michel by VSMS and the focus of Vibrant Communities, as well as for bringing the two together.

Accompaniment

Centraide has played a vital accompaniment role at various levels, both within the Saint-Michel community and externally. It introduced the national Vibrant Communities initiative to the organizers of VSMS and worked with Tamarack to create an understanding of where Vibrant Communities could fit into and support the ongoing activities in Saint-Michel. It provides a supportive role to facilitate the Vibrant Communities work of VSMS and Le Chantier in order to maximize the learning from the Saint-Michel experience with a view to sharing it elsewhere in Quebec and across Canada.

Within Montreal, Centraide lent its weight to support the community development work in Saint-Michel by introducing VSMS and Le Chantier to senior players in the City administration, as well as to key bureaucrats and to potentially supportive partners, such as government departments, foundations and other granting organizations. Lacking credibility at the outset of its community revitalization work, Le Chantier needed outside help and Centraide was able to open doors and reassure potential partners and funders. Centraide and its Committee of Major Partners have been able to provide strategic assistance and advice to VSMS and its Le Chantier initiative.

³² Invitees to the upcoming meeting include senior representatives from the Caisses populaires Desjardins Saint-Michel, Foundations including Chagnon, Bronfman and McConnell, and others including the Roasters, Provincial department of Employment & Social Solidarity, Regional and Municipal Affairs, and NGOs such as Quebec en Forme, VSMS, and City of Montreal officials, Public Health, the School Commission and the University of Quebec in Montreal, Centraide and Tamarack.

Convening

The accompaniment role was not the only unique assistance Centraide offered. Vital proactive leadership action in support of Le Chantier was also evident. Centraide excelled at convening key players and partners on a regular basis, a talent that had implications well beyond the Saint-Michel area. The Committee of Major Partners was a uniquely Centraide contribution. While the original intent of bringing together funders and other stakeholders was focused primarily on sharing the learning from the Saint-Michel project, Centraide had a broader goal. It realized the importance of growing the support for community-driven poverty reduction work by increasing the awareness of the reality and challenges posed by the community situation in Saint-Michel as a pilot site. Stress was placed on strategically involving members of the Committee of Major Partners in certain community events and celebrations and also annually meeting to report and reflect on the Saint-Michel experience. Meetings were kept short and focused with emphasis placed upon mutual learning and discussion. Funding issues were handled outside the Committee on a bilateral basis. It was anticipated that greater awareness would create a greater shared commitment to the goal of poverty reduction and would create the basis for partnerships to develop from other funding and support organizations in Montreal and elsewhere.

Centraide has played a convening role at a number of different levels and within a range of sectors. As its focus on community development increased, it supported and provided core funding in many cases to district roundtables (tables de concertation) that brought together various local players at the district and city-wide levels. Later on with the involvement of other partners, it contributed to finance a coalition of district organizations at the municipal level and municipal level tables de concertation which included the participation of citizens and organizations.

In the specific context of the Saint-Michel pilot project, it has supported the organization of workshops and seminars such as a day-long Montreal-wide gathering of community, agency, funding and government representatives at the Boscoville Centre in late 2005. Its purpose was to share the collective knowledge of the conference participants about community revitalization and poverty reduction. Speakers were invited from Vibrant Communities, 1, 2, 3 GO, Le Chantier, Centraide (Ottawa and Montreal) and others to share experiences, create awareness and leverage their collective knowledge.

In the case of Saint-Michel, it was an early opportunity to involve others in their pilot project and to promote some of its new concepts and innovations. Centraide was engaged in this instance in promoting innovation within communities and across sectors, with the reality of community development and poverty reduction as the focal point. As a result of this strategy, and with the involvement of non-traditional partners, the message of community building is beginning to invade other sectors, such as education and health, which are starting to consider their work within a larger conceptual framework.

Strategic and Technical Advisor

Perhaps the most important part of Centraide's work in Saint-Michel, especially with Le Chantier, has been its role as strategic and technical advisor. Centraide has worked closely with VSMS to advise on the design and implementation of community rebuilding approaches that take into account the uniqueness of the immediate community and the larger development context in Montreal and Quebec. With its years of community experience, Centraide, now more committed than ever to measurable poverty reduction rather than just mitigation, is demonstrating its interest in community-driven innovation and impact. Internally, it has reorganized its structure, established a Community Impact Unit and is increasing this team in numbers and capacity. Its purpose is to better serve as a strategic advisor and to provide technical assistance to poverty-stricken communities in Greater Montreal. It is also committed to bringing partners around the table to develop new tools and supports to build greater local capacity and to obtain positive results.

In Saint-Michel, the road to success – reduced poverty and social exclusion – is not clear and the strategies to move ahead must be crafted to reflect the local reality and challenges. As a marginalized community, it lacks sufficient internal resources and knowledge, not to mention confidence, and must call on the help of knowledgeable outsiders. Centraide understands the context of underdevelopment within which Le Chantier initiative is evolving. Importantly, it has a mission focused on reducing poverty, and it can and does bring focused human and financial resources to bear on the situation if the community is willing to lead.

Unlike many government programs that are short-lived and narrow in their scope, and whose team members change constantly, Centraide has an ongoing commitment. In the case of Saint-Michel, it has a designated priority area. Continuity of involvement, mandate, staff teams and approaches, as well as intellectual capital accumulation are the essential ingredients of a useful strategic and technical advisor. Centraide has all of these characteristics and assets and is currently putting them to use in Saint-Michel to significant effect within the context of its long-term strategic framework.

Support to Leadership

One of the significant weaknesses often present in marginalized communities is the lack of strong local organizational leadership. Frequently there is a lack of depth and confidence within the staff and Board leadership in the local agencies and community organizations. Yet, to be successful, community building must rely on locally-driven initiatives and organizational capacity. Engaging local citizens in their community must build on the motivation of local people to improve their community circumstances – on local leadership development, in short.

An immediate priority has been to support and increase the depth of local leadership in the Saint-Michel. Throughout the history of VSMS in Saint-Michel (and with others elsewhere in Montreal), Centraide has extended support to local leaders through one-on-one relationships, group sessions and, in some cases, with training to reduce their isolation and to strengthen their capacity. It is hard to measure the value of this input, but discussions within Saint-Michel attest to the importance of this role. Experience elsewhere with CCIs consistently records the importance of having sustained, knowledgeable external technical and strategic support available if significant change is to occur in marginalized communities. Centraide is growing its internal capacity and devoting new resources to building a strong team dedicated to community capacity building and support.

The challenge in communities similar to Saint-Michel is not only to identify and grow the local leadership potential, but to employ strategies that make this leadership sustainable. In this case, sustainability implies not just working with the status quo – the current local leaders, but it also means training to strengthen the leadership cadre. Community building is, by definition, an ongoing process and it cannot be maintained by a few local leaders remaining in place. The needs change and so must the leadership. Effective community leaders must be trained to practice a true community leadership which includes making room for the emergence of young leaders, recognizing when the existing leaders must move on. New leadership styles fitted to the requirements of a participatory and transparent leadership approach are seldom inherited, they most often require training.

Centraide is aware of the value of effective community leadership and is working on a number of approaches to respond to the challenge. To support the development of local leadership, Centraide with other partners has funded training opportunities and it is now testing a new leadership training package designed specifically for leadership capacity building in situations similar to those of Saint-Michel. Its own community building and support team is now a separate unit within Centraide. Its funding allocation to community building and poverty reduction is currently 10 percent of the funds raised by its annual campaign. Centraide has not permitted designation of funds by donors and this has meant that Centraide has significant flexibility to adjust to changing community situations.



The Implications for Centraide

To understand the organizational implications for Centraide of its new community building direction, the transformative process underway since 1990 must be recalled. Before 1990, Centraide had been primarily a way of collectively raising money and redistributing the funds to deserving United Way member charities. Its focus had been on the support of social services, but the campaign was in decline. Fewer funds were being raised although poverty was clearly increasing in many districts of Montreal. With the arrival of new management of Centraide in 1991, the downward trend was reversed. In 1993, Centraide began to work with district round tables which brought together local citizens, community groups and institutions to tackle poverty and exclusion. In 1994, Centraide developed the 1,2,3 GO initiative aimed at mobilizing local communities around the issue of the well-being of children

In 1997, Centraide adopted a new strategic direction and decided to focus on social development. Its mission remained the reduction of poverty and social exclusion, but its approach to bringing about significant and measurable change was transformed.

Centraide decided to act strategically. It embarked on a course to consolidate its knowledge of poverty reduction, to assess its learning, to reach out to other places, to build on the experience of others, to construct partnerships, to collaborate in new ways and above all to support community building to reduce poverty. In short, it sought to transform itself so that as an organization it would bring value-added beyond the distribution of campaign funds. It already possessed extensive intellectual capital and direct experience which needed to be made available to support community building and the reduction of social exclusion to those actively seeking to tackle poverty. It changed its strategy in order to use its practical experience and development knowledge to help communities in distress.

The implications of the change from being a granting organization and a dynamic money-raising machine to a strategically-focused learning organization are still being worked through by Centraide a decade later.

Influence/Leverage

Centralize began to bring together its knowledge and with other partners started to gather new information. For example, it helped design and then finance the development of community profiles in the areas of Montreal designated as high poverty areas. It helped create a university-community research partnership to do the work. It also helped organize and it participated in working sessions on poverty reduction approaches. It brought together diverse parties such as academics and donors to link resources and sectors. Going beyond simply gathering information, Centraide has continued to work on new ways of widely disseminating its learning within communities. Conferences and workshops, such as the one noted earlier held at the Boscoville Centre, have been organized to consider the research and the lessons learned, as well as to create new strategies. In addition, Centraide actively participates in a score of roundtables, networks and other information-sharing opportunities.

At another level, the use of public “celebrations” to involve and inform local people, as well as key partners, was innovative. An example is the annual summer community festival which was organized

by TOHU. It used the draw of the Cirque du Soleil and its affiliate TOHU to create a buzz.³³ These celebrations have participatory, as well as learning and awareness creation goals and they seek to influence as well as inform. The Major Partners gatherings organized by Centraide will frequently be planned to coincide with these public events as a way of providing them a peek on the community dynamism at work. Another opportunity to influence key players from outside the area is the effective use of well planned and non-invasive community tours and visits. In Saint-Michel, many tours have been organized for a wide range of participants such as municipal officials (as noted below), other major partners and donors, project coordinators and staff from Action for Neighbourhood Change and United Way, representatives from the Healthy Cities movement and many more.

Centraide has also leveraged its existing relationships with the political leadership of the city and province to advocate for and support policy and regulatory changes. In Saint-Michel, for instance, Centraide arranged for the Mayor of Montreal and other municipal leaders to tour the district and to brief them on the potential of the future quarry redevelopment to benefit local citizens. A year after this tour when the quarry site suddenly became the subject of a developer's interest without the involvement of local people, the Mayor agreed to slow down the quarry approval and design a process which made room for community input.

The long-term impact of this change is yet to be determined, but it is quite possible that in the future the City will be open to adopting a more comprehensive, participatory community development approach to future major site developments. Centraide had used its influence strategically to bring the partners together to discuss the development options and it has used its influence with the municipal administration to organize an orientation visit to Saint-Michel. Subsequently, it worked with city leaders and officials to rethink its approach to involving the community in a sensitive site development file. The intentional use of its capacity to strategically involve and influence key players from outside the community is an additional value-added that Centraide brings to the table. It leverages its credibility with others to create the space for community innovation, involvement and change.

Centraide is still learning about how to best use this contribution to community building and is developing tools to equip its staff, as well as other key players with new skills to maximize its potential to help local initiatives strategically.

Organizational Change

Within Centraide, changes were needed in order to deliver the new community building direction. A shift from a campaign focus to a community-oriented, poverty reduction strategy meant firstly the bringing together of the relevant knowledge within working teams and subsequently into a new community impact unit within Centraide. This unit was/is led by a dynamic Vice President working with a flexible mandate and significant senior management support. New staff skills were required to support capacity-building, to deliver technical assistance and to undertake community outreach as well as partnership and network development. A new relationship with donors and with its own agency membership was required to interpret the new direction and to build up a greater shared awareness of poverty and the ways to reduce it in Montreal. A collective understanding was needed across Centraide in order to improve the awareness of its community building focus and to maximize the impact of poverty reduction strategies. That process continues to move forward and the planning, management and implementation of the change is underway.

³³ TOHU is the branding for La Cité des Arts du Cirque, a creation of the Cirque du Soleil.

Unlike past government-sponsored programs and project initiatives which were often ad hoc and short-term, research indicated that poverty reduction projects needed the involvement of the community, as well as external resources as part of a long-term development strategy. Centraide needed to adjust its operating approach in order to respond to the need for continuity of involvement and investment (with others) in designated poor areas. A strategic approach to community building meant a shift to providing ongoing core funding to community initiatives such as the district roundtables. Centraide was already providing ongoing core funding to a large network of community organizations (some 300) across Greater Montreal.

Centraide, in the case of Saint-Michel (and other community roundtables), provides annual core funds for VSMS to finance its operations (one staff and basic administration costs). It brought donors and governments as partners to the table to create an awareness of the implications of community impact work. It stressed the need for core organizational funds for community groups without which continuity and a core administration, essential to long-term community-driven development was unlikely to be put in place. It invested in new players and partners and worked with new local stakeholders. In short, it began to innovate and focus.

Internal Operations

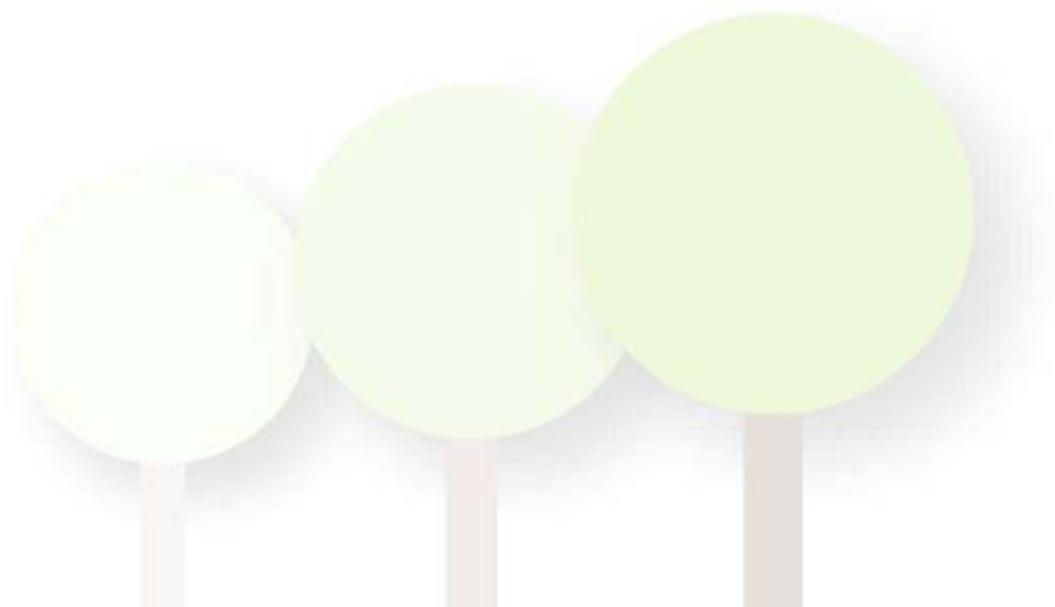
It is important not to underestimate the challenges faced by Centraide. Its shift to a community-building focus continues to have significant implications for its internal operations. For example, the place of volunteers within Centraide is changing. The involvement of volunteers in Centraide's operations has always been valued and over time their role in deciding on priorities and the allocation of grants to member organizations has taken on considerable importance. The Allocations Committees are in the main run by volunteers in a decision making role and this has become especially important given the need to prioritize in order to use campaign funds effectively.

Gradually, funding is being made more and more available on a territorial basis to support place-based community development. Volunteers on allocations committees will be faced by considerable change and a challenging of traditional funding processes and practices. Thus it has become important to create an increased awareness amongst these volunteers of the value of these new directions and to establish a process whereby their roles can evolve in a positive way.

Another change which needs to be highlighted concerns the messages used during the annual fund raising campaign of Centraide. Although the annual campaign has always been a time to inform the donors about the work being done by the community organizations to respond to the needs of the poor, the messaging more and more emphasizes the importance of mobilization at the district level to reduce poverty and social exclusion. The annual campaign is a particularly useful time to create a better understanding of the work which is going on in the communities, as well as the initiatives of the district roundtables. The example of the district of Saint-Michel has helped illustrate how a community can have a greater impact when the citizens, the institutions, the government and foundations work together towards the same objective.

However, the implications of the changes underway raise even more fundamental questions within Centraide that go beyond creating a new role for volunteers. It is possible that new dimensions of voluntarism are emerging which will need to be embraced within the organization. A key goal of community building is to build the capacity of the community to take on greater responsibility for defining and sustaining its development. This local leadership needs to be supported and, as its competency increases, it is conceivable that it will expect to take on a greater fundraising and allocations role itself.

What, then, is the role of the volunteers on the existing allocations committees? Can the existing allocations work take on a greater design, oversight, monitoring and knowledge generation role? Is this a new form of local voluntarism that will complement the current important work of volunteers within Centraide? These questions are only now emerging and they are on Centraide's radar screen. The organizational change process underway must clearly be considered on numerous levels – the status quo is already changing and innovations will need to be considered in the role of volunteers to name just one area within Centraide.



Conclusion

The community-building strategy of Centraide is a work-in-progress in Saint-Michel as a pilot site and elsewhere in its area of responsibility, which encompasses Greater Montreal. There is no roadmap, but there is past experience and the accumulating intellectual capital within Quebec. Elsewhere, the Canadian lessons learned about poverty reduction are being brought together by organizations such as Tamarack and Caledon Institute, as well as certain United Way organizations. Other Canadian partners, such as a number of foundations including Maytree, McConnell and Chagnon, are actively contributing to the analysis and innovation of the practice. A number of the community economic development and social economy projects have contributed valuable input to the learning about what works in place-based community development in Canada. The work on CCIs in the United States, spearheaded by not-for-profits like the Aspen Institute is instructive and helpful to the current initiatives in Canada.

Business as usual in the not-for-profit and voluntary sectors is not possible – a change of strategy is necessary. Reliance on governments to lead the way is unwise, however they seem to be able to follow others and to support short-term pilots. Certain governments in Montreal and Quebec have become partners in longer term, place-based poverty reduction efforts. Government's willingness to commit to successful approaches in a sustained manner is in doubt, and their capacity to replicate is demonstrably limited by their inclination to try to deliver directly on a project by project basis. Longer term interventions to reduce poverty and social exclusion have thus become the responsibility of community-driven initiatives in partnership with organizations such as Centraide, as well as others who are willing to commit on a long-term basis.

Characteristics essential to effective poverty reduction work include intensity of focus, coherence of strategy, intentional and deliberate action, a commitment to results and measurable community impact, as well as a transparent, collaborative approach. Partnership development, longer term interventions and an eye on sustainability of the initiatives with a community-driven core – all these elements are apparent in Centraide's community-building work. Lessons learned from the Saint-Michel experience have helped Centraide search for a new balance within its organization and are assisting it in sorting out its philanthropic and development roles that are "at the heart of the contradiction."³⁴ It does appear that the community-building strategy is spreading in Montreal beyond Centraide and Saint-Michel to other sectors. Therefore, its momentum is increasing and it is on its way to creating a critical mass of activity and the potential for systemic changes to reduce poverty and exclusion.

³⁴ Quote from an interview.

