



Supporting neighbourhoods to better build caring communities



Improving living conditions for the most vulnerable members of a community, and creating the necessary conditions to do so, requires joint action on the part of many social actors, from ordinary citizens to institutions and corporations.

Centraide of Greater Montreal is dedicated to bringing people together to build caring communities. It is a crossroads where citizens from all walks of life converge around the common values of promoting individual empowerment and social solidarity, and work hand in hand to make Greater Montreal into a place where the less fortunate will have the means to live in dignity.

Building community capacity

Improving living conditions for the most vulnerable members of a community, and creating the necessary conditions to do so, requires joint action on the part of many social actors, from ordinary citizens to institutions and corporations. By providing increased funding to the social agencies it supports, Centraide of Greater Montreal enables them to consolidate their activities and develop new initiatives to meet community needs. But Centraide goes even further by investing in joint initiatives aimed at empowering communities, engaging residents, and building the capacity of residents to find creative local solutions themselves.

Centraide began supporting community round tables in various Montreal neighbourhoods in the early 1990s, at first on its own, and later in partnership with the City of Montreal the Montreal Public Health Department. These

round tables bring together numerous local citizens, decision makers and social actors, including representatives of neighbourhood police stations, health services and community agencies; municipal, provincial and federal elected representatives and officials; City of Montreal community workers; and local merchants and business people. These people combine their efforts to address issues relating to health, urban planning, transportation, the environment, neighbourhood safety, school dropout, early childhood development and community life; to combat poverty and social exclusion; and to improve the quality of life for local citizens.

Over the years, Greater Montreal's network of community round tables has grown and developed considerably. Today, Centraide supports 30 round tables in as many neighbourhoods and boroughs in Montreal.

Opening up new horizons in Saint-Michel, a Montreal neighbourhood hard-hit by poverty

In 2002, Centraide was approached by *Vibrant Communities*, a pan-Canadian initiative that wanted to involve Montreal in its community-driven effort to combat poverty and social exclusion.

Based on the knowledge and experience it had acquired by promoting and supporting

community round tables for over 15 years, Centraide contacted *Vivre Saint-Michel en santé*, the local action committee responsible for Saint-Michel's urban revitalization project, and proposed that it become a *Vibrant Communities* partner.

The Saint-Michel neighbourhood, located in the centre-north area of the Island of Montreal, is occupied by the Miron and Francon quarries, which take up 42% of its surface area, and is cut in two by the Metropolitan Autoroute.

The neighbourhood's population is comprised largely of families, many of which are headed by a single-parent (about 40%) and economically disadvantaged (40% of the population lives under the low-income threshold).^{*} As well, many residents are members of a cultural community, making Saint-Michel the third most multiethnic neighbourhood in Montreal.

The level of schooling among residents aged 15 and over is very low, with 32% not having completed grade 9.^{*} The school dropout rate is a concern as well, with 33% of young people between age 15 and 24 no longer attending school.^{*}

Centraide : better building caring communities by going beyond financial assistance

In raising awareness and mobilizing social actors around this initiative, Centraide emphasizes the complexity of the challenges to be met in a community like Saint-Michel, and the importance of providing long-term support to initiatives of this nature.

The *Saint-Michel urban and social revitalization project* provides Centraide of Greater Montreal with an opportunity to boost its role as a “community builder” by experimenting with forms of support that go beyond financial assistance.

In addition to acquiring valuable knowledge and expertise from its participation in this pilot project, Centraide is using it as a lever with a view to inspiring other Greater Montreal communities to mobilize and launch similar initiatives.

Centraide of Greater Montreal supports the Saint-Michel initiative in a variety of ways, by:

- Financing actions initiated by the Saint-Michel community round table;
- Bringing together major local and regional partners, such as the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, the Cirque du Soleil, the City of Montreal,

the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation, Centraide’s major donors and the Public Health Department, in order to cement ties with the Saint-Michel community;

- Offering strategic advice to the initiative’s promoters and the project manager;

- Informing the community of all the work being done in this neighbourhood;

- Using all the regional, provincial and national forums available to raise awareness of and promote the initiative;

- Working with researchers to better measure the impact of the initiative’s activities;

- Assigning human resources to help the people responsible for the initiative organize special events and follow up on files relating to the *Saint-Michel urban and social revitalization project*;

- Building bridges between donors and actions undertaken in Saint-Michel.

In raising awareness and mobilizing social actors around this initiative, Centraide emphasizes the complexity of the challenges to be met in a community like Saint-Michel, and the importance of providing long-term support to initiatives of this nature. In supporting the initiative, Centraide respects the decisions taken by the neighbourhood, and gives pride of place to the *Vivre Saint-Michel en santé* local action committee.



** Demographic and economic data come mainly from the socioeconomic profiles of the City of Montreal and its 27 boroughs in the 2001 Canada Census, and from documents produced by various government departments and agencies, paragonovernmental organizations, the CLSCs or Centraide.*