



**Annual Report
2008-2009**



Translation and photograph : Nancy Kirkpatrick

**Lynda Gagnon
Micheline Cyr**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Our mission.....	3
3. The people you meet.....	3
The participants.....	3
Our Board of directors.....	3
The volunteers.....	4
The staff.....	4
On the job training (Stages).....	4
Our community.....	4
The government contributions.....	5
4. Collaboration and public awareness.....	5
5. Statistical profile.....	6
Duration and frequency.....	6
Age.....	6
Cultural origins.....	7
Education.....	7
Children.....	7
Income.....	8
Destinations.....	8
Problems facing the homeless.....	8
Violence.....	9
Mental health.....	9
Substance abuse.....	9
Multiple difficulties.....	9
Physical health.....	10
6. Our day to day work.....	10
Individual follow up.....	10
Group activities.....	10
Painting workshops.....	10
ParCelles.....	10
Accompaniment.....	10
Professional contacts.....	11
Support, after a stay.....	11
7. Conclusion.....	11

It is with pleasure that we present the Auberge Madeleine's annual report for the year 2008-2009. This report certainly sheds light on our capacity as a community organisation to meet the changing needs of homeless women and women in difficulty in Montreal. We have as individuals and collectively with the support of the larger community been able to tap into the creative energy that is essential in order to bring about change. This is achieved also by our approach to intervention that is firmly centered on women's strengths, acquired through a life time of experiences both good and bad.

Since 1984, the Auberge Madeleine has offered shelter welcome and support to homeless women and women, 18 and over, living through any form of personal crisis. Residents stay anywhere from a few days to a few months, enabling them to come to terms with certain difficulties and follow through on whatever strategy will best suit their needs.

The Auberge Madeleine is made up of many people who chose to pursue a common goal: that of bettering the quality of life of an ever growing population of homeless women. These people whether they are members of our board of directors, workers, volunteers, students, donators or participants have managed to pull together their resources, competencies and generosity in order that the Auberge Madeleine continue it's mission.

The participants

This year, a total of 233 women resided at the Auberge, for some more than one stay was called for. A total therefore of 295 stays in all were recorded.

These women may have shared the need for assistance but were as varied in age, origin and background as is possible to imagine. Living together during a period of great stress and insecurity is not always a simple task. Our approach permits an open communication that in turn enables old fears and prejudice to be put aside. What is left in fact is room and opportunity for new perspectives to emerge. This hub of exchange and activity is fertile ground for sharing and mutual support.

During this same period of time, 387 women, all ex-residents took advantage of the opportunity to keep in contact through our after-stay follow up service. This kind of support can take many forms and is adaptable to specific and individual needs. Long term support offers the very best key to maintaining stability and inclusion within our society.

What we support in fact is each woman's real desire to better her living conditions no matter the obstacles that she will certainly face. By respecting each person's rhythm of change, we have traced many a winding road in good times and bad toward a better life experience.

Our Board of directors

The board met 8 times during this past year. Members work steadily to ensure that more and more people become aware of the realities of homelessness as well as of the work of the Auberge Madeleine. They have wholeheartedly supported our activities and initiatives throughout the year by participating actively in comities as well as specific tasks generating support for the Auberge Madeleine staff and residents. They have offered up their skills and resources stemming from a wealth of experience in the University, private, public and para-public sectors.

Members of the board 2008-2009 were: Rev. Dr. Patricia G. Kirkpatrick (president), Diane Buteau (vice-president), Robert Goyer (treasurer), Patricia Middleton (secretary), Quitterie Roques de Borda (secretary of correspondence), Nancy Kirkpatrick (personnel member), Sophie Courville (resident member), Micheline Cyr (director, ex-officio member), Nicole Leduc, Ana-Maria Seifert, Daniel Chonchol, Bernadette Nagy and France Paradis.

The volunteers

Twenty-five volunteers participated in the work of the Auberge this year by donating their time and expertise for a total of 330 hours.

Their accomplishments, to mention just a few include: translation and clerical support, help with the send-off of the newsletter to our donators 3 times a year, animating activities, helping out in the kitchen. The residents benefit from their presence and the staff remains grateful for all their support.

We would like to mention the fact that there is quite a high level of fidelity that runs through our list of volunteers, some having spent the last 24 years participating in the life of the Auberge. Thanks and welcome to all!

The staff

Let me take this opportunity to thank the workers of Auberge Madeleine for their commitment to our common goal. We are fortunate to have such a diverse group of women capable of rising to numerous challenges.

Between the 1st of April 2008 and the 31st of March 2009, 30 women worked side by side at the Auberge Madeleine for a grand total of 34 222 hours.

The makeup of the Auberge Madeleine full time staff;

1 director, 1 administrative assistant, 10 '*intervenantes*' or direct workers, 1 cook and 1 head of maintenance.

Part time positions focused on: intervention, after stay support, group animation, task accompaniment for the residents.

Regular staff meetings, (5.5 hours per month) were essential in maintaining continuity and communication. Ongoing training was provided monthly by a psychologist working in conjunction with 'Médecins du Monde'. The attention given to providing this kind of steady support for the staff is a key factor in maintaining both motivation and commitment in the long run.

On the job training (stages)

Two of our staff members provided supervision this year to 3 students studying in the department of social work at UQAM as well as at the CEGEP du Vieux Montréal. The students' experience at the Auberge was certainly enriching and they appreciated the level of commitment with which their supervisors provided support.

Our community

We thank all those who have been loyal donators, providing the means with which the Auberge Madeleine can fulfill its mission.

This absolutely imperative support stems from 25 foundations, 28 corporations, 17 associations, 31 churches, 10 religious communities and close to 450 individuals who have expressed their solidarity by donating funds or materials directly to the Auberge.

Specific foundations such as Bell Mobility and the Gazette Fund focused their giving power on certain services and donations provided directly to the women residing at the Auberge over this past year.

Government contributions

We receive assistance from the Provincial government via the '*Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Montreal*' (PSOC) as well as the Federal government via the '*Initiative de partenariat de lutte à l'itinérance*' (IPLI)

4	Collaboration and public awareness
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We at the Auberge Madeleine work alongside and in conjunction with many other organizations, ensuring that services provided for women in difficulty remain pertinent and viable.

We are members of :

- Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal inc. (RAPSIM)
- Fédération des ressources d'hébergement pour femmes violentées et en difficulté du Québec
- Réseau alternatif et communautaire des organismes en santé mentale du Montréal métropolitain (RACOR en santé mentale)
- Regroupement intersectoriel des organismes communautaires de Montréal (RIOCM)
- Table des groupes de femmes de Montréal
- Réseau d'action des femmes en santé et services sociaux de Montréal
- Association canadienne pour la santé mentale de Montréal
- Micheline Cyr is currently a member of Montreal's liaison comity on itinerancy that unites those working at the city of Montreal, the *Agence de la santé et des services sociaux*, the RAPSIM as well as others.
In this capacity, our director participated in the comity outlining the framework for the future creation of a center specialized in short term detox in Montreal.
- The Auberge Madeleine is partnered with the *Fonds dédié à l'habitation* as well as the FOHM (*Fédération des OSBL d'habitation de Montréal*) in certain projects focusing on low income housing with ongoing support and community outreach.

Communication and networking

The Auberge Madeleine as an organization is represented and active within a whole network of organizations. The staff members are themselves, individually working with an extensive range of community and public organizations on a daily basis; offering assistance and making pertinent outside referrals.

Members of our staff as well as our director are called on to present information at conferences or give training in Universities and other community resources as well as general information sessions for the larger public.

We also publish our own newsletter three times a year.

Each year, the Auberge Madeleine comes to the aid of women who for any numbers of reasons are in need of shelter and support. 233 women stayed with us this year and another 327 women received support provided after stays with us.

Violence, poverty and isolation remain the three most crushing obstacles in the lives of the women we meet. With these major factors in their lives, we stand alongside women who are in dire need to feel welcomed, supported and above all treated with respect and dignity. The Auberge does not simply represent shelter, but also an environment that fosters relationship.

Our capacity: 19 places.

Our percentage of occupation this year: 95%

We had to do renovations in the Auberge which lead to limiting the numbers of beds available during the 25 days of renovation (for the security of the women and the type of renovation). During this time, 283 requests were denied and the women were referred to other shelters.

When the renovations were done, we returned at full capacity, and a total of 2 697 requests were denied for lack of space.

How do people reach us?

60% of requests came from women who had previously stayed at the Auberge.

18% came directly from other short term shelters.

And still others can come from referrals made by the CLSC, other community resources, help lines, crisis centers, hospitals, detention centers etc.

Frequency and duration

Lasting change and the bettering of living conditions do not happen overnight. Women who are faced with sometimes crippling hardships are going to need more than one stay in the space of a year.

21% of our residents were offered stays more than once this year. This proportion is quite stable throughout the past years.

In all 295 stays were counted compared to 301 last year.

The mandate of the Auberge is to provide short term shelter, respecting this mandate explains the resulting 63% of residents leaving within the first 30 days. More time is provided when needed to complete specific plans of intervention as was seen in 37% of the stays offered this past year.

Stays within the Auberge last anywhere from a few days to a few months depending on the situation.

The number of women residing temporarily at the Auberge each year varies with the duration of each woman's stay.

The average duration of stays this year was of 22 days, compared to 23 days in the previous year.

Age

The very large majority are situated between the ages of 41 to 50 years old. The average being 44 years of age that closely resembles the four past years of service to the community.

The general aging of the Quebec population is clearly reflected in the ages of the women we see at the Auberge. The proportion goes from 34% of residents over 41 years of age in 98-99 to 65% this past year.

Cultural origins

Quebecers, Haitians, Europeans, south Americans, Africans, Americans, and First nation's women find themselves together for a time at the Auberge Madeleine. This diversity constitutes a very rich and sometimes complex living and working environment.

Language and immigration status

The majority; 82% of residents used French as their primary language of communication.

16 % English

1 % communicated neither in French nor English. Many on our staff are multilingual. For the rest of us a mixture of charades and sign language was used.

Of the 233 women who came to the Auberge this past year, 188 (81%) were born in Quebec.

6% were born in other Canadian provinces.

13% were born in other countries, often presenting difficulties stemming from issues of immigration and status. This is one of the factors that can vary the time required to effect change in someone's situation.

Education

As a general rule, the women we have met at the Auberge Madeleine have been severely undereducated, reflecting sometimes a full lifetime of precarious and unstable living conditions.

45% of residents did not complete their secondary education.

4% did not complete their primary education.

Not untouched by violence, poverty and isolation though are those 19% having completed college\CEGEP and 9% university.

Children

The reality is that although we speak of the women residing at the Auberge this past year as individuals, 56% of them were mothers.

For a great many of our residents therefore, the experience of motherhood has been seriously compromised. Many dream of either maintaining or rebuilding close ties but are confronted as their general living conditions, mental health issues or issues of dependency do not facilitate such relationships.

Some mothers (55%) who have children under the age of 18 negotiate their relationships with their children by going through the Youth protection agency. We support all their efforts to foster better relationships with their children as well as those working for their children.

For those mothers having suffered conjugal violence and whose children have bared witness to this means of control and oppression, the effects can be devastating for years after the initial placement and separation from their moms.

For these mothers, we offer a safe space to vent frustrations and feelings of guilt. We'll talk about the real consequences on the young when they are exposed to violence: learning disabilities, isolation, running away from home, depression...

Income

This is one of the hardest factors to tackle when looking at the realities facing homeless women. In the present social context, these women are hardest hit by the rarity of permanent employment, the specialization of the work force, lack of education, poor self-esteem issues as generally only the securely employed are lifted up to the category of accepted and valued citizens.

Basic intervention at the Auberge deals with procuring at least the revenue to which each citizen has the right. For more of our residents (72%) this means social assistance. For others a back to work or job training program can be offered.

By the same token, the search for low income housing will go hand in hand with any longer term perspective of intervention.

Destinations

The majority of women residing at the Auberge are in search of a permanent affordable solution to lodging. The reality is that they will be faced with lack of housing to fit their budget: between 565\$ and 800\$ monthly income.

23% of women headed for longer term solutions (apartments, low income housing and long term supervised shelters)

17% chose to stay with family or return to spouses regardless of the difficulties that may present to them. Sometimes with a little more energy with which to negotiate better and safer relationships.

40% chose to head towards other short term shelters, detox programs, hospital, to other cities in hopes of finding new opportunities for change.

The remaining 20% are destinations '*unknown*', often women staying with us for a short time and returning to the streets, to abusive relationships.

Each stay however can represent a step, bringing about change in small increments; remember we are offering more than shelter.

Problems facing the homeless

On an individual level, the women we meet ask for help after having suffered many losses over time. (apartments, employment, social and family ties)

In a societal perspective, they are homeless due to many factors working against them such as: high cost of available housing and no one to co-sign or offer references, shortage of low income housing..

In reality, they may need to leave their apartments because they are unfit to live in, because of the arrogance with which they are harassed by concierge or owner, because they are late in paying the rent, because of roommates that have left, spouses that are deceased or simply gone, because of substance abuse reeking havoc on their lives, because of complaints from neighbors hearing the shouts of their violent spouse.

Marginalized by low income, and having broken ties with family or friends, mental health issues, shame of not living up to the expectation of others. This history of loss leaves a legacy of acute stress, depression, mental health problems, substance abuse and general health problems.

Violence

81% of residents this year were dealing with past and or present situations of violence.

This represents everything from issues of incest, rape, or any other form of physical and psychological violence.

We offer information, *consciousness raising* for those that feel that they are alone and are in need of tapping into their own sense of personal empowerment. The enemy here is shame, guilt...emotions that will effectively diminish anyone's capacity to move forward.

Mental Health

77% of residents this year suffered from mental health issues...showing a significant rise from the past years.

Of the aforementioned, 81% were diagnosed with schizophrenia, OCD or depression.

The other 19% presented without diagnosis severe breaks with reality, often in a constant state of fear. We strove to provide within a gentle approach both guidance and accompaniment to consult health professionals. Trust above all is essential in these circumstances, as previously stated, we do not offer only shelter.

Substance abuse

69% of the residents had a substance abuse problems.

Total abstinence being a long term goal in our perspective, we openly respect the element of choice and appropriate timing when dealing with substance abuse issues. Each step, each moment of realization is fostered and oriented towards using more secure practices of consumption, the reduction of negative impact before abstinence becomes a reality.

Multiple difficulties

63% of the residents faced multiple difficulties.

Not surprisingly, a large percentage of women residing at the Auberge this past year had multiple difficulties. Violence leading to anxiety and depression...Depression leading to self-medication... Substance abuse leading to mental health issues and psychosis...poverty leading to dependant relationships, gambling. Women living in precarious situations and making uninformed choices in desperation.

The equations can be modified and looked at in any direction and results will be the same. Serious problems are not created in a vacuum.

22% of residents had the added difficulty of having to deal with infractions under the law. Tickets are given out readily for 'being in the way' and disturbing foot traffic, for lying on park benches or leaning on concrete walls, for solicitation, fighting, and J walking to mention a few.

Intervention: a staff member is currently assigned to accompany those who need assistance getting all this sorted out at court, paying tickets or organizing community service so that these women may *pay their dept.* to society.

With the accumulation over time of all these difficulties, thoughts of suicide appear for some: in fact, 23% of women we met mentioned suicide as an option to bring an end to their suffering.

Physical health

It is not enough to say the words... «take care of yourself.»

The majority of our residents have temporary or permanent health problems. It is clear that their state of health has been affected by violence, substance abuse, stress, poor nutrition, lack of medical follow up, lack of appropriate clothing even may have a prominent effect on their general and long term health.

4% of the residents mentioned being HIV positive.

Last year, we started looking into the growing percentage of those with Hepatitis C, and another 9% were diagnosed with this condition.

Our goal is to open up communication and raise women's consciousness to the effects of unsafe sexual and substance use practices.

And finally 7% of our residents live with physical handicaps, suffering from hearing loss, blindness, paralysis etc.

Our first floor is adapted to receive women needing wheelchair access.

Individual meetings: a crucial component whether it means taking the time to welcome some into the Auberge or arranging follow-up meetings with her specific worker where she can list her objectives and where together they can find the strategies that will best meet her needs.

These meetings are particularly helpful in uncovering each woman's strengths within her life experience.

Group activities

Another part of our work resides in the power of living together. Our presence 24 hours a day...our sharing of mealtimes and dishes, and group activities is without a doubt part of the recipe that makes the Auberge Madeleine feel like home.

Formal activities are also held that are animated by volunteers, students in training and regular staff alike: introduction to the Internet, arts and crafts, discussion on myriad themes (positive affirmation, anger management, health and contraceptives, self-esteem, conjugal violence, etc...)

76 thematic activities were held this past year and 283 residents participated.

ParCelles: Our very own radio program at CHOQFM (UQAM radio) gave voice to the concerns and ideas of women who are homeless.

It was with a great deal of enthusiasm that the Auberge undertook this project of producing a weekly show led by one of our staff members and a team of previous and present residents. What a wonderful experience of personal empowerment! 24 programs were aired between September 2008 and March 2009.

Accompaniment: This project was invaluable on the 108 occasions it came into play this past year. To those most vulnerable and in need of personal assistance, this project enabled the successful completion of essential medical, psychiatric, economic intervention as well as providing advocacy for those who could not speak for themselves. 53 in-house activities focused on the search for apartments.

Painting workshops: This innovating project was fashioned this year to enable the residents to discover a new form of expression, to develop their creativity, to experience pride in their work and foster self-esteem. The workshops were sought after by the residents and many talents were revealed. An exposition in a café was organized at the end of the year and met with great success.

Professional contacts

Many of the women in need of our assistance are already working with other professionals: social workers, doctors, psychiatrists, welfare agents, etc.. From time to time we need to contact these people and we do so with the express authorization of their clients. By providing a little encouragement and punctual support, our residents can more easily open lines of communication and deal with various resources at their disposal.

Also we respond to all requests for information, general referrals and those geared towards health and professionals in the realm of social services.

Support after a stay

We offer ongoing follow up support to all of our ex-residents. We compiled 3 317 calls as well as 779 visits from those who wished to remain in contact and had certain needs to be addressed.

To be able to count on the support the Auberge Madeleine offers, 7 days a week and 24 hours a day is essential for a certain number of our residents. We provide the kind of support that maintains stability when things are more than difficult and, this in turn, can help avert situations of crisis.

The Auberge Madeleine represents a living environment of change and exchange. After even one stay with us, the Auberge Madeleine can remain a place of belonging and a safe space to turn to in times of need.

In conclusion, we hope that this guided tour into the workings of the Auberge Madeleine has given light to some of the pressing needs of women in difficulty and laid plain the importance of providing support in times of crisis and energy in times of change. The process serves to strengthen our community as a whole.