

The English Communities Committee

September 2008

As you have probably noticed, I sign this column as the president of the English Communities Committee of the CSSS des Sommets. But you may not know what that committee is and does.

Set up in September 2005 as part of a project funded by the federal government under its minority languages programme, the committee has continued and grown since that funding ran out. Its purpose is to act as a two-way communications channel between the management of the CSSS des Sommets and the English-speaking population that it serves.

To begin, the abbreviation CSSS stands for *Centre de Santé et de Services Sociaux* which translates as “health and social services centre.” This is the designation for the administrative structure that oversees the delivery of all the public health and social services in the area, which, for the CSSS des Sommets is roughly equivalent to the region defined by the MRC des Laurentides but also includes some communities outside that zone. There are many pockets of English-speaking people throughout the region, some of them in large concentrations, such as Arundel, and others scattered widely.

The CSSS des Sommets is committed to providing its services to the population in English where required. In order to develop these services, they have to know the make-up of the communities they serve. This is where our committee comes in. We have representatives from various localities and from different interest groups as well as a member of the Board of Directors, plus the directors of the communications and quality of services departments. We meet in Ste. Agathe on average eight times per year, on a weekday morning for about two hours. We discuss and report on issues such as the implementation of the new telephone system, which allowed for a full menu of English choices and messages, forms and documents that have been made available in English to physicians so that patients asking for them can understand clearly the tests being requisitioned as well as what preparations are required for them, and many other projects that we feel will help us all in times of need. One of these is the website at www.csss-sommets.com, where clicking on the “English” button at the top left of the welcome page leads you to the site’s English version. While it is still a work in progress, increasing amounts of the information available on the French site are being translated.

Our members also occasionally attend conferences and meetings with related groups from across the province, under the auspices of the CHSSN (the Community Health and Social Services Network), an umbrella group that advocates for the rights and needs of the English-speaking population of Quebec where it relates to health and social services.

We also have members who sit on other committees and bring forward the issues that concern us in such places as the *Fondation médicale des Laurentides et des Pays-d’en-Haut*, the fundraising arm of the CSSS des Sommets, and on the *Table de concertation des personnes âgées et du Soutien à domicile de la MRC des Laurentides* (the Seniors’ and Homecare Services Roundtable) where such groups are reminded that, in order to adequately reach our communities, a consciousness of language and cultural differences must be acknowledged and addressed.

If you would like to join our dynamic working group and are interested in providing feedback between your own community and the CSSS des Sommets, please let me know. We would love to have you.

Sheila Eskenazi, President, English Communities Committee of the CSSS des Sommets