

Addressing Hunger

April 2008

Hunger is a real issue, even here in our relatively affluent society. Too many families, including children and the elderly, are unable to provide three nutritious meals daily to their members. Food banks, which started out in the early 1980s as a temporary measure to deal with the economic conditions at the time (remember 24% interest rates?) have become a permanent feature on the Canadian landscape.

In the Laurentians, the poverty rate is high and the number of single-parent families, usually headed by women, and the proportion of our population that is elderly are both above the provincial average. With younger family members having moved on to the larger regional centres, many of our older residents live in relative isolation.

People throughout the region are faced with food insecurity and descend into a spiral of increasing difficulty through poverty, poor physical and mental health, and subsequent loss of contact with the social support network provided by family, and by public and private institutions.

Many programmes exist to address the issue. There are groups that fund school breakfasts, which provide our vulnerable children with a healthy and nutritious start to their day. The Moisson Laurentides is a central food bank which collects tons of food every year and distributes it through local counters run by volunteer committees in most of the towns in the region. There are community kitchens, where groups of people get together once or twice a month to pool their resources and their talents and prepare a series of meals in large quantities that are then divided up among the participants, providing each with a variety of dishes that they can take home and serve to their families. Some communities have organized monthly meals to provide a social setting along with the food served. There are also Meals-on-Wheels services providing a weekly hot meal to elderly people in their own homes at a very modest price. There is a complementary service for those who live too far away from the major centres to receive hot meals, providing good quality frozen meals, also at a very reasonable price.

All these services take a great deal of money and volunteer time. At the same time as demand is rising, resources are declining. The CSSS des Sommets has joined with other partners to support the umbrella group *Objectif Partage* (Goal: Sharing) which, in addition to its work coordinating emergency food relief and support for the community kitchen projects in the area, also helps organize local groups providing emergency medications and transportation. In the face of a funding crisis, community organizers and the director of communications and community relations from the CSSS joined with Claude Cousineau, the local MNA, the member groups under the umbrella, and other community activists, to deal with the immediate issues of money to keep operations going. But in both the near and long terms, the needs remain strong. If you are able to share a bit of your own good fortune, contact Martine Pinsonneault, the president of *Objectif Partage*, at 819-425-5407. Or if you are in need of any of the services described above, she will direct you to the best place to receive the help you need.

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