

Seniors' Forum

October 2009

On Thursday October 15, more than 60 people from across the MRC des Laurentides gathered in the basement of the church in St. Jovite to work towards a three-year action plan geared to the senior population. This meeting was a follow-up to one held in May that provided the organizing committee with the list of concerns and possible solutions that were on the minds of the participants, who represented all the players in the health and social services network: professionals, volunteer associations, municipalities and individuals committed to the betterment of the lives of their fellow citizens.

Under the umbrella of the Seniors and Homecare Roundtable of the MRC des Laurentides (known as SAD for *Soutien à domicile*), the CSSS des Sommets and FADOQ, the federation of Golden Age Clubs, the organizing committee took the results of the May consultation and prepared a very complete working document containing a summary of all the ideas expressed in the brainstorming workshops in May. These were broken down into several categories: public awareness, promotion and communication; accessibility and services; volunteering; and caregivers.

The working documents for each of the above categories contained a list of objectives and a separate list of the suggested means to accomplish those objectives. The people attending the October meeting were asked to write down the two categories that interested them the most and the group was then divided into separate workshops. Each participant attended two workshops reflecting their first and second choices of category. Members of the organizing committee ably led the participants through the exercise of establishing the top three priorities in each category. Everyone was encouraged to express an opinion and to ask questions. Through this type of discussion, trends became evident and certain issues were clearly on the minds of most of the participants. At the end of the morning, the responses from the two groups that had looked at each subject were combined and tabulated.

After a light lunch, the results of the morning's consultations were read out. The priorities were established in each category. Under communications, first is the necessity of knowing the needs of the community, then spreading the word on what is available in terms of services and finally reaching out to people who are isolated and do not request help. It was clearly underlined throughout the process that everything must be done to provide a high level of all services in English as well as French. For accessibility and services, the priorities are to inventory services currently available and make them accessible through all the municipalities, to develop more housing solutions for seniors and to offer more services to people in their homes. The priorities in the volunteer sector are to raise awareness and promote volunteer services in the population at large, to improve the recruitment and training of volunteers and to prepare a new generation to take on the mantle. And finally, for caregivers the highest priorities are to increase the services and assistance available to family caregivers, to develop respite care to give them a break, and to have the status of caregivers recognized in order to relieve some of the burdens carried by family members, both financial and physical.

The final step in the day's proceedings was the creation of working groups to draw up action plans to meet these objectives over the next three years and to ensure continuity down the road. These groups will report back early in the new year and then implementation will begin by bringing together all the partners whose help is required to meet these objectives. I'll have more news for you then.

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