

Raising Community Awareness

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Over the years that the English Communities Committee has existed at the CSSS des Sommets, I have seen significant growth in the consciousness of the needs of the English-speaking communities of the Laurentians. We all benefit from the work of activists throughout the region who are standing up and making the communities visible to the institutions that serve them.

There is nothing confrontational in this activism. It is completely cooperative and is practiced and received with great goodwill on all sides. The spirit of openness to learning English and to providing service in the language of choice of the patient is very strong.

But, and this is a big but, this will only continue and grow if we continue to assert ourselves. We must keep the issue in the consciousness of everyone who provides services to the English-speaking communities, not only health and social services. It applies to providers of all other services and businesses of every sort. The point is not to demand to be served in English. That would not be very productive. The point is to unite and make our numbers known. Let the majority recognize that we are a strong and vibrant minority within their community, and, while many, if not most, of us speak French with a greater or lesser degree of fluency, we are and wish to remain English.

When population numbers are used in planning, the most often consulted are those compiled by Statistics Canada. These numbers, however, do not accurately reflect the real makeup of our communities. They include only full-time residents of the area and we all know how many of our neighbours are only in their homes part-time. As a result, services are planned for our communities based on the much lower number of full-time residents rather than the total English-speaking population that requires services in the region.

It is up to each one of us to make ourselves heard, not just about being English, but about any and all the issues that concern us. Only if we do so in all our interactions with public and private institutions will the full awareness of our needs and concerns be addressed. It is not only an issue of language spoken. Even the most bilingual among us, with our varied cultural backgrounds, have concerns that are not necessarily shared with the majority.

We know at our committee that, if we don't remain vigilant, our priorities sink into the piles on the desks of planners and managers. There is no ill-will intended. The willingness to help is there. It is only normal that the groups that make their needs known will have them addressed.

Think about this the next time you go into a store, a barbershop or the hospital, and speak with pride of your attachment to the English community, even if you do it in French.

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