

Blazing a Trail for Active and Healthy Aging

September 2010

Last year my husband, Joseph Graham, was asked to join a working group made up of representatives of English communities across the province charged with addressing the issues facing seniors. Coordinated by Nina Kim of the Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN), the group held a series of telephone conference calls to outline a plan of action.

The report, entitled *Blazing a Trail for Active and Healthy Aging*, was presented publicly at a press conference held in Montreal on August 17, 2010. This 28-page glossy booklet is completely bilingual and is divided into 12 sections whose most important elements are sections 3 through 6: Demographic Portrait of English-speaking Seniors in Quebec, Analysis of Key Government Priorities, Major Challenges, and Priorities and Recommendations for English-speaking Seniors. These are supported by statistics and tables, references and a list of key federal and provincial government programs and priorities.

The Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN) prepared a baseline data report for 2008-2009 which shows that the Laurentians has the second-largest concentration on English-speaking seniors outside of the greater Montreal region, after the Outaouais, with a total of 5,688, about 10% greater than that of the Eastern Townships, although the Townships' English population is generally older than ours.

The major challenges we face include insufficient access to information in English, particularly about community resources available to seniors; a lack of services, including transportation services, or lack of awareness of the services that do exist in English; and inadequate living conditions for English-speaking seniors, including insufficient low-cost housing, inadequate home care support, a lack of day centres and respite care support, inadequate nutrition, and a greater sense of isolation due to the language barrier, for instance, there is a lack of English activities in seniors' residences.

Reflection on these challenges has produced a set of priorities and recommendations to enhance the lives and living conditions of seniors. The first priority is to improve access to information in English, especially concerning government documents and health care. Next is to increase the services available and to raise awareness of existing community resources for English-speaking seniors, through providing funding to community organizations to improve mobility. This includes encouraging a greater number of local social activities, an active lifestyle, a communications clearinghouse and coordination of available services volunteers. The third priority is to improve living conditions through the creation of a provincial network for English-speaking seniors to share activities and best practices, similar to such a grouping that exists for the French-speaking population outside Quebec, and to increase support programs for seniors and their families.

As upbeat and heartfelt as the report reads, there is little in it that would suggest who, or what money, is going to do all of these things.

If you would like to read the full report, you can download it from the site at www.qcgn.ca or contact Michelle Dupuis 514-868-9044 or michelle.dupuis@qcgn.ca.

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