

A Short History Of The English Communities Committee

June 2011

Founded in October 2005, the English Communities Committee of the CSSS des Sommets acts as a two-way communications bridge between the widely-dispersed English-speaking population of the MRC des Laurentides and the health and social services centre that serves its needs.

Our committee is made up of volunteers representing different communities, some geographical, some social and others of a more formal nature. We try to keep a balance that includes the major population centres, such as Arundel, Mont Tremblant and Ste. Agathe, and the different age groups, such as families with children, recently retired people, and those in their senior years. We have representatives from the Fondation médicale des Laurentides et des Pays d'en Haut, Laurentians CARE which acts as a clearing house of information and programs for caregivers and the people in their care, the Users' Committee, and, of course, the CSSS itself.

Over the years we have worked to establish the priorities for the provision of services in English through the hospital in Ste. Agathe, the CLSCs in Ste. Agathe, Mont Tremblant and Labelle, and the long-term care facilities in those three locations, all of which make up the CSSS des Sommets. These priorities have been developed around our meeting table through the input of our members, who rely on their interchanges with their individual communities as well as their own insights, which have grown through their involvement in the committee.

Among its achievements, the committee has helped identify service improvements subsequently undertaken by the administration of the CSSS in response to our recommendations. Our input to the CSSS has always been met with the greatest of respect and willingness to cooperate and accommodate, subject to the availability of resources, both human and budgetary. Since the provincial government essentially controls that, there is not much room to manoeuvre, but good will and openness has brought many successes.

Language training of the reception personnel began in 2005-2006 with the same federal funds that allowed a short-term contract worker to be hired to set up our committee. This money was funnelled through the provincial umbrella group for the provision of services to the English-speaking community, CHSSN, and coordinated with McGill University. This program allowed a number of the people who answer the phones, register patients and staff the appointment centre to follow a comprehensive English-language course designed to deal with their work situation.

Another major move was the introduction of the completely bilingual automatic telephone system, a huge undertaking involving a lot of technical underpinning before the long hours of recording all those messages could begin. While not yet at 100%, the few trips down dead-end menu paths are being identified and will be corrected in the near future.

Less visible, but equally important, was the sensitizing of the administration to not only language but also to cultural differences. This led to, among other things, the introduction of modified kosher meals being provided for those who require them in the hospital.

We have also participated actively in other committees and associations dealing with health and social service delivery to help sensitize them to the needs of our communities, which has led to the translation of many documents and the provision of information, training and other events created for the English-speaking population.

The most recent milestone was the passing of the resolution implementing the access plan, as described in my April column. This column, which I have written monthly since November 2006, has also grown out of the good relations between our committee, representing you, and the CSSS des Sommets, which is there to serve all of us,

no matter what our language, culture, race or creed. Sometimes I write about changes or services at the hospital, others times about services provided by other organizations outside the CSSS that serve the community. But it is always about things that help you live in English while fully participating in the greater community that surrounds us.

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