

Annual Report 2014-2015

Projet P.A.L.



Conditions for people with mental health challenges, especially those living in poverty, became more difficult this year; so we worked harder! All we heard about was an austerity budget, reorganization and abolishment of long standing support networks and cuts to essential services. At the same time, we saw Projet P.A.L. members scrambling to find affordable housing and access to health services. Members struggled more than ever to make ends meet as energy costs increased and rent and food costs soared. We saw members scraping and saving to purchase bus tickets so they could go to a food bank or see their doctor. As the health care system was being reorganized members were shuffled from one institution to another, unsure of what the future would bring.

In difficult times such as these, members knew where to turn to: they came to Projet P.A.L. They participated in workshops of Art Therapy, Theater and Yoga. They prepared community meals, attended leadership workshops and did public speaking engagements for Centraide and for Projet P.A.L.. They attended demonstrations and engaged in activities to promote mental health awareness. They came to talk and were listened to with compassion and empathy. At Projet P.A.L., compassion and empathy are the motivators for change. 2014 was a difficult year. Many challenges came our way and we just worked harder!

The Board of Directors of Projet P.A.L. is made up of a majority of participant members, that is to say, people with mental health challenges. Despite their own difficulties and daily challenges, these individuals selflessly offered their time and energy to the organization. They were steadfast and often faced with tough decisions for which they showed leadership and professionalism.

There were new additions to the team, newcomers who brought with them a fresh vision and energy. They joined the senior members of the team and together, worked with unwavering passion and dedication. On the eve of our 40th Anniversary, Projet P.A.L. remains a leader and innovator in alternative practices in mental health. This year we stood up to our reputation as we faced difficult times with determination and courage, and included people with mental health problems in all our discussions, our decisions and our actions. We gave them the opportunity to speak out in a climate that attempts to silence the vulnerable. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank the team, our community partners and especially the members of this proud organization, all of whom advocated and lobbied to improve the lives of people with mental health problems. We faced these difficult times together and we didn't just survive, we flourished!

Board of Directors

“In the four years I was on the B.O.D. at P.A.L., I considered this not only an ideal opportunity to give back to an organization that supported me when I needed it, but also the chance to grow in leaps and bounds. It gave me an opportunity to be in an environment where I could see how I functioned as a person (in an as close to a work-like environment as possible) by improving my life skills and having the chance to learn new skills I never had.”
-Jennifer Gujdan

The Board of Directors convened 11 times in 2014-2015. The Board members received a training and orientation session at the beginning of their new mandate. They were active on finance committees, Selection committees, as well as various Member Assemblies. They participated in the Outreach initiatives in institutions and sister community groups, and met new challenges in public speaking. Board members were present in the P.A.L. drop-in for social gatherings and to support the members at large. The fact that the Board of Directors is composed in majority by Projet P.A.L. members is in itself a challenge to the stigma that still exists about mental health.

Mission Statement

« People living with mental health challenges suffer from discrimination and isolation.

Projet P.A.L., a bilingual community organization, founded in 1975, responds to these issues by offering diverse services using an alternative approach of empowerment and mutual aid (...).”

The Drop-in Center

The drop-in center was teeming with activity this year. There were 218 persons with valid membership cards. New team members descended upon the drop-in with vitality and energy. They, along with the participant members who are involved in all the planning and decisions-making, hosted a flurry of activities. Some of these included a boat cruise in Ste-Agathe, a visit to the Canadian Museum of History in Ottawa, Brome Fair, an apple picking at a beautiful orchard and the ever popular sugar shack. There were community events such as a corn roast, Christmas celebrations, weekly dinners, monthly dances, Bowling and movie nights. Three members took on new challenges and showed leadership through their animation of workshops in Music appreciation, Art and Inspiration, and Language for Fun. Courses in Yoga, art therapy and tam tam, as well as the most popular Animal Therapy Workshop, continued with success. Music provided solace and fun for all. The choir sang at Projet P.A.L. events as well as at external community events. Music jams gave the team and members the chance to play together and for a few hours forget about life's difficulties.

Members prepared and served nutritious meals for each other and for their extended community. They organized tournaments, participated in Social Club events, as well as contributed to the daily maintenance of the center. Members also came to talk to the animators in difficult times and were welcomed and comforted. Their preoccupations were discussed at Vie Associative meetings, and Members Assemblies and referred to the Board for approval. Every day we saw members help each other out. Be it through listening to a friend in a difficult moment or accompanying each other to appointments, members were there for each other. The Drop-in provided the framework.

“Serving the meals at P.A.L., gives me a sense of meaning of being wanted. It takes me out of my solitude. I feel that when I joined P.A.L. we would be there for each other even in the darkest hour.”

-Giovanni Iuliani,
Community member

Community Housing

“Sous le Toit de P.A.L. gave me a safe place to live. My mood has improved and I became more autonomous. It gave me stability and took away the anxiety of not having a place to live.”

-Michael

Projet P.A.L. continued its fight for low cost housing for its members. In participating at the Table de Logement Social de Verdun and as a member of FRAPRU, FOHM, amongst others, we assured that our long standing commitment to advocate for decent and affordable housing was always on the agenda. The need for support services in housing for this population is essential. We lobbied and will continue to do so to convince those in power that when all citizens are well housed and supported, social problems and re-hospitalizations diminish, and productivity and civic contributions increase.

Sous le Toit de P.A.L. (SLTP)

Two Projet P.A.L. workers provided community support services to the 28 residents at Sous le Toit de P.A.L. Respecting an alternative approach, each and every resident was implicated in the functioning of this project. Board administrators, locataires-surveillants and maintenance crews are all positions filled by the residents. The Projet P.A.L. workers provided services in budgeting, personal and domestic hygiene, active listening, referrals, conflict resolution and crisis intervention. The workers animated community kitchen activities and supported the residents in their organization of the ever popular weekly *café-rencontres*. Projet P.A.L. also provided a 24 hour on call emergency service. The Annual report of Sous le Toit de P.A.L. gives further detail on the success of this project; it was evident more than ever this past year. New residents saw a dramatic increase in their autonomy and well being, while longer term residents saw a stability that confounds general mental health statistics. For us at P.A.L. it is a simple fact, affordable and decent housing with community support services yield brilliant results.



“Sous le Toit de P.A.L. has given me the opportunity to live in a stress free environment to discover my true potential.”

-Julian Middling

Logi-P.A.L.

“At Logi-P.A.L. we live together in harmony. It is a peaceful place to live. Living in Logi-P.A.L. has enabled me to further my education, financially and gives me a lifestyle of autonomy. I have two to three healthy meals per day. It is a very quiet neighbourhood and I sleep well at night”.
-Laurent Dupuis



Logi-P.A.L. is a six unit low cost housing project founded in 1986 by Projet P.A.L. These residents needed only occasional follow up due to the stability that they have achieved from receiving community support services for many years. The workers provided administrative support for the organization and ensured that residents remained active in the general functioning and all decision-making. Projet P.A.L. provided a 24 hour on call service. The Logi P.A.L. Annual Report gives further detail of the positive benefits of this low cost housing project.

Carrefour Autonomie P.A.L. (CAP)

This year, CAP housed 14 residents. Each resident was supported in reaching the objectives they defined upon entering the program. CAP residents are in transition after a difficult period in their lives and the workers are present on a daily basis to support them. They offered assistance in budgeting, hygiene, cooking, and personal development. Residents participated in group discussions with each other and the workers, or for example, a CLSC nurse who gave a nutrition workshop on psychiatric medication, weight gain and its management. Residents' meetings were held on a weekly basis which helped to develop peer support and deal with issues of house maintenance or interpersonal conflict. The individual follow-ups are punctual and provided a clear framework for community reintegration. The workers were available five days a week and Projet P.A.L. provided a 24 hour on call emergency service.

The selection of new residents is done by the residents themselves as were all decisions pertaining to house rules and policies. This past year residents were particularly active at Projet P.A.L., in the Therapeutic Measures program and in preparing meals. They were also socially active with residents in the upstairs Shared Lodging Program.

“My stay allowed me to better understand my abilities and inabilities caused by my illness and the numerous side effects of my medication. The presence of Beatrice and Steve was of immeasurable help and it came without judgment. I was able to form relationships with other residents and this helped me to continue. I want to thank all the workers of Projet P.A.L. for your dedication and involvement.”

-Nicole Gauthier

Shared Lodging Program

The Shared Lodging Program has been home to 12 residents who lived in a shared apartment setting. The program places emphasis on achieving long term goals for community integration. Residents received follow up as needed and participated in monthly sharing meetings which is a peer support group designed to enable the residents to help each other to define and follow through on long term objectives. This was a stellar year for resident's participation. The community garden in the back yard was abundant, the upkeep and the harvest shared by all. The residents helped in the preparation of Projet P.A.L. community lunches on a regular basis. The *café-rencontres* held with both Shared Lodging and CAP residents were vibrant and well attended. Two Shared Lodging residents animated monthly workshops at the P.A.L. Drop-In center. Most remarkably, there was a noted increase in mutual aid and support, discussions and casual get-togethers. The unfortunate reality of isolation and personal difficulty that is experienced by so many people with mental health problems was clearly replaced by friendship and community activism.

"I have lived in the Shared Lodging program at CAP for a little over a year. After receiving appropriate health care, I rediscovered my autonomy and my love of life. I had the desire to take on new challenges, to participate in back to work programs as well as offer a workshop at P.A.L., and to follow through on my objectives. The sharing and exchange with my roommate helped me to enrich my daily life by doing fulfilling activities."

-Chantal Bouffard

Collective Community Action

Considering that this was a difficult year for individuals living in poverty and social exclusion, it was an action-packed one for collective community action. This program aims to address members' needs collectively and to develop and promote their civic participation. It also aims to educate the population at large to the harsh realities of social exclusion and poverty experienced by people with mental health challenges. Most importantly, it aims to bring about concrete change to public policies and practices in order to improve members' quality of life.



The Anti Poverty Committee

"I have been participating in the Anti Poverty group since September. It has enabled me to broaden my understanding of the effects of poverty in our society. This participation not only helped me to have a better understanding but also to bring forward my ideas my questions and my arguments".
-Véronique Carli

The Anti-Poverty Committee continued to lobby for affordable transit fares in collaboration with the Mouvement Collectif Pour un Transport Public Abordable (MCTPA). The follow up committee of this initiative held 15 meetings and published 3 newsletters to inform the public of recent developments. Members and the staff attended a demonstration at City Hall in December and participated at two MCTPA General Assemblies, as well as a dynamic flash mob at metro Charlevoix. A working committee was assembled with MCTPA and the STM to study the feasibility of reduced transit fares for people with low income. Meetings were convened with the president of the STM. The dilemma of affordable transit fares continued to be an impassioned one in 2014-2015. It will remain so!

The Citizens Action Group

The objective of this group is to enable members to strengthen community ties and to promote their involvement in external and internal actions. It encouraged members to identify and use their strengths so as to develop their civic spirit. Six meetings were held this year to explore these themes. Notably members were active in the preparation for International Mental Health Day. On this day they welcomed members of a community partner, CACV, to P.A.L. to prepare for a demonstration to mark The International Day Against Poverty, held each year on October 17th. This poignant event, which took place outside the Verdun City Hall, saw Projet P.A.L. and CACV members along with numerous other community groups and citizens, create a wall of cardboard boxes decorated with slogans and testimonies that depicted the barriers and hurdles that poverty forces them to face daily. Municipal, provincial and federal representatives as well members of the press were in attendance.



Le mur est constitué de tous les obstacles qui maintiennent les gens dans la pauvreté.
(Photo TC Media - Hugo Lorini)

Projet P.A.L. est un organisme dont le mandat consiste à aider les personnes qui vivent avec des problèmes de santé mentale, tandis que le CACV est engagé dans la défense des locataires.

Photos from Messenger de Verdun, October 23rd, 2014

Weekly information sessions and workshops were offered by the community action worker and her colleague in Individual Aid and Accompaniment. These meetings focused on sensitizing and informing members on issues and policies that impact their lives. The workers were poised to answer questions, provide references and to once again, mobilize and encourage members to remain active and engaged. Some of the issues discussed were *Participating in the Provincial Elections*, *The Austerity Budget, How it Affects You!* and *Access to Public Services*.

All the internal mobilization and education enabled members to be active and vocal outside of the organization. Together, members and the team attended demonstrations in October and in March to denounce the nefarious impact of the imposed Austerity measures budget. Members also voted that P.A.L. support a community strike on November 17th in collaboration with the coalition “*Je soutiens ma communauté, je soutiens le communautaire*”. All the team members attended this demonstration.



To address another more intimate challenge faced by our members, the Aid and Accompaniment intervenant worked on the development of a Hearing Voices Support Group. Development of this workshop is ongoing and this phenomenon which is highly stigmatized and rarely spoken of is currently being promoted through outreach with other community groups, and through information sessions amongst P.A.L. members.

Individual Aid and Accompaniment

The Individual Aid and Accompaniment worker assisted in the collective action at Projet P.A.L. but was also available to assist members when they were in need of individual support. The primary reasons for consultation had to do with problems of personal financing including, accumulated debt, Hydro bill payment plans, and overall budgeting. Other matters included problems with Welfare, accessing health services, filing medical complaints, and settling conflicts with landlords or caregivers. Accompaniment to Legal Aid and to court as well as demystifying the legal system, was in demand. This worker was present at members' most difficult moments to empower the person to face their challenge and accompany them through to its resolve.

“Being a part of the group gave me strength and gave the group the strength to fight for and defend the most vulnerable”.

-Denis Savoie

“The Aid and Accompaniment worker made me feel calm and not let go of the challenge ahead. I felt more comfortable to express myself with her present.”

-Bobby McGuire

Therapeutic Measures

The Therapeutic Measures Program offered 14 members the opportunity to work within the organization and receive remuneration for their participation. As always, this was an extremely popular program and the benefits to members' self esteem and autonomy was astounding. Members benefitted from the program as Social Club Animators, drop in Assistants, Cleaning Supervisors and Workshop Animators. Monthly debriefings were offered to all the participants as well as individual support and follow-up. This was where P.A.L. leaders were made and where an alternative approach in mental health, which emphasizes strengths over diagnosis and illness, was center stage.

"Since being in the Therapeutic Measures Program, I seem to have leadership qualities, I discovered confidence and strength I couldn't find before".

-Heather Craft

Community Visibility

Projet P.A.L. was active in the community on all fronts, advocating tirelessly for its members and for all people living with mental health problems. We collaborated with TLSV, CDSV, TOCSM, RACOR, RIOCM, RRASMQ and TROVEP; the regroupments that gather community partners together to bring about positive change. These community links kept the organization abreast of the many changes that came our way, especially from the Quebec Government's *Plan d'Action en santé Mentale*, and from an austerity budget that has affected health care and access to services. Projet P.A.L. was an active player in lobbying for 350 low cost housing units in Verdun. This project has been approved by various levels of government and successful negotiations took place with the *Direction de l'habitation de Montréal*. After deliberation and with much regret, the Board of Directors decided not to reserve units specifically for P.A.L. due to the precariousness of funding for community housing support services. P.A.L. will however, remain an active participant in assuring that people with mental health problems are prioritized in the project and in all its negotiations.

As the revitalization of the Drop-in was one of the annual objectives, an outreach program was created to publicize our services throughout the Island of Montreal. Projet P.A.L. workers along with members of the Board of Directors presented P.A.L. services and promoted an alternative approach in mental health to various community partners and institution. This initiative is a long term one but has already yielded results as we saw an increase in new members.

TLSV: Table sur le logement social de Verdun

CDSV: Concertation en développement social de Verdun

TOCSM: Table des organismes communautaires en santé mentale

RACOR: Réseau alternatif et communautaire en santé mentale de l'île de Montréal

RIOCM: Regroupement intersectoriel des organismes communautaires de Montréal

TROVEP: Table régionale des organismes volontaires en éducation populaire

RRASMQ: Regroupement des ressources alternatives en santé mentale du Québec



For Mental Health week 2015, Projet P.A.L. along with partners Projet suivi communautaire, CSSS Sud-Ouest-Verdun, and the Douglas Institute in Mental Health participated on the coordinating committee for the Salon de la Santé Mentale. Forty-five community groups were in attendance and P.A.L. promoted its services to over 600 people. One of the highlights of this day was the P.A.L. choir who gave a concert and presented testimonies about the impact of the choir on their mental health.

When the *Agence de de la Santé et des Services sociaux* consulted community groups about impending changes to the *Guichet d'accès* (the access mechanism) in mental health, Projet P.A.L. jumped at the opportunity. As always, members' autonomy was in the foreground. After years of lobbying, Projet P.A.L. finally negotiated that the CSSS will assure that people who are needing services in mental health may refer themselves directly to these services, rather than have to rely solely on the referral of a health professional. This was an important and unprecedented gain.

This year was no exception. Projet P.A.L. was out in the community, visible, constant and unwavering in its determination to address any and all issues that affect the lives of people with mental health challenges. Right alongside them were the very people that the organization serves. Together, we made this difficult year one of hope and promise for a better future.

"I am very happy to be on Projet P.A.L.'s outreach committee. I really enjoy being able to talk about Projet P.A.L. to the various community groups."

*-Robert Aelick,
participant
member and
President of the
Board of Directors.*

Priorities 2015-2016

P.A.L. will celebrate its **40th Anniversary** in November 2015. Plans are currently underway.

Particular effort will be placed on **community outreach** as a way to promote the alternative approach in mental health and to promote our services throughout Montreal.

We will place much effort in promoting access to affordable transit fares in collaboration with *MCTPA*.

We will support the Coalition *Je tiens à ma communauté, je soutiens le communautaire* for increased government funding for community groups.

Finally, we will continue the fight against austerity that compromises public services and social programs.

Thank you

Projet P.A.L. is grateful to all the community partners who collaborated with us to improve the quality of life for all those living with mental health challenges. In particular we wish to acknowledge the following individuals who have generously offered their support.

Centraide of Greater Montreal, *Alliance pour la solidarité sociale*, Manon Barnabé, équipe PSOC, Josée Blanchette, équipe PSOC, Echo Foundation, Daniel Harvey, Social Community agent Isabelle Dallaire SPVM, Dana Powell and the Verdun MNA and elected officials.



*It is with regret and heavy hearts that we said goodbye to long time member and resident of Sous le Toit, **Douglas Taylor**. Doug had been a member of P.A.L. since 1998. He was a member of the Board of Directors and was also a resident in the Shared Lodging program. Doug was a dreamer, full of ideals and theories. He was also a gentleman who offered a kind and gentle word to everyone. He is missed by all of us.*

*We say goodbye as well to **Aileen Mooney**. Aileen was a recent member at P.A.L., not known by many, but very dear to those who were fortunate to meet her. We offer our most sincere condolences to her family and friends.*

Board of Directors 2014-1015

Robert Aelick (*President*)

Jennifer Gujdan (*Secretary*)

Brigitte Lavertu (*Employees Representative and Treasurer*)

France Paré

Jean-Patrice Defoy (*left during the year*)

Cheryl Rozovsky (*left during the year*)

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