

COVID-19: HOMELESS YOUTH NEED YOUR SUPPORT MORE THAN EVER

Thanks to the legacy Pops left us, homeless and at-risk youth have a safe place where they take a break from life on the streets and find assistance, guidance, care and compassion. More than **1,000 youth** use our services over **40,000 times** every year.

The challenge before us right now is unprecedented. At Dans la rue, we will continue to do our utmost to reach out to young people in need.

Homeless youth are more vulnerable than ever. But your support will help them look to tomorrow with hope.

Every donation makes a world of difference to us – and to them: danslarue.org/en/donations/

Be sure to follow us on social media for updates.

A WEEKEND GETAWAY FOR DANS LA RUE FAMILIES

Young parents in vulnerable situations don't often have the chance to get away from it all and take part in outdoor, art and sports activities with their children. But Dans la rue's Family Services has changed that by organizing trips to the country several times a year.

During their stay, participants can enjoy a welcome break from their everyday routine. This helps them connect with their children in a different environment and interact with other parents.

These getaways are part of a broader approach designed to help young parents who use **Dans la rue's** Family Services take better care of themselves so they can take better care of their children.

The family services counsellors who are involved in the experience can

observe behaviours related to nutrition, sleep and attachment in this unique context – and encourage parents to talk about these and other concerns once their children are tucked in for a good night's sleep.

This represents an extraordinary opportunity for young parents like Arianne*, who shared the following with us: ***"My goal in going to the cabin with everyone was to get out of my bubble and to relax and unwind. I had never been outside the city before or gone swimming in a lake. My daughter***

really liked playing outside and meeting other children and babies. We had such a great time. I don't think I've ever laughed so much in my entire life!" ■

**not her real name*

Due to the most recent social distancing measures to prevent spreading COVID-19, outings have been suspended until further notice. But it is only a matter of time before young parents and their family can plan their next trip together!

DANS LA RUE

450-533 Ontario East,
Montreal, QC
Tel.: (514) 526-5222
danslarue.org

For regular updates on Dans la rue's activities, join our 21,000 followers on



facebook.com/danslarue.org



instagram.com/_danslarue



twitter.com/_danslarue



youtube.com/Danslaruemontreal

INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIA*, A GRATEFUL USER OF DANS LA RUE'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Since her teen years, Olivia has been in therapy to cope with anxiety and various traumatic experiences. After having benefited from our services a few years ago, she came back to Dans la rue's Day Centre. Today, she's sitting down with us to share her story.



How did you find out about the services and psychologists at Dans la rue?

"I heard about **Dans la rue** through friends who told me there were free meals there. Two years ago, I was in the middle of trying to sober up. I went to Chez Pops because I was in pretty bad shape. I wasn't sure I could go on much longer. I talked to one of the day centre counsellors and she said I should go see the on-site psychologist. She even came with me the first time. After eight therapy sessions, the psychologist suggested EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing) psychotherapy. I've been doing that for two years now."

How did seeing a psychologist at Dans la rue help?

"When I started, it wasn't the kind of technique I would've naturally gravitated toward. It took some time to get used to it.

But once I started to see the results, it was incredible.

EMDR focuses on trauma. It's really impressive the difference it can make in managing panic attacks, stress and mood swings. I've learned to recognize what I'm capable of doing, which I was never able to acknowledge before. I've learned how to love myself, how to be confident in my abilities and to give myself the time I need.

Two years ago, I wouldn't have been able to tell you one good thing about myself. But now that's changed."

What did you like about the psychologist at Dans la rue?

"I've had several psychologists over the years, but this is the first time I've stuck it out.

The psychologist at **Dans la rue** has more of a hands-on approach. He knows what street life is like and adapts things to suit my needs. When my animal was sick, for

example, we talked a lot about that. He understands how important an animal is when you're living on the street. The relationship you develop is different than with a regular pet."

How are you doing these days?

"My drinking problem is now behind me. I have a stable job and a car. I enrolled in a horticultural studies program a few years ago with financial aid from **Dans la rue**. They paid for my tuition, my coveralls and my books and even provided food vouchers the entire time I was working toward my diploma." ■

*not her real name

SUPPORT FROM OUR PSYCHOLOGISTS FOR TRANS YOUTH

Close to 29.5% of homeless youth (aged 13 to 24) identify as LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex or asexual) according to a Canada-wide study conducted in 2016 by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. Yet they are overrepresented among the homeless population. Transgender and questioning youth represent about 13% of the individuals met in 2019 by Axel Glaize and Diane Aubin, psychologists at Dans la rue.

For youth living in marginal conditions, obtaining psychological support and undergoing physical transformation can be very complicated, given the lack of access to trained professionals.

Both psychologists have therefore received specific training in working with transgender youth. As mental health care professionals, they assess their dysphoria, the feeling of disconnection between the sex assigned to them at birth and the gender identity they recognize as their own.

The psychologists welcome each youth and validate their gender expression. This helps in assessing their condition, identifying the dysphoria and referring them to the

appropriate medical care. Free and informed consent is a pivotal part of the process from beginning to end.

Part of the approach involves stabilizing other elements related to their mental health as well as additional factors that may be detrimental to individuals living in precarious conditions. Both psychologists work together and share their expertise with the medical teams and psychosocial counsellors to tailor the treatment and care plan to the needs of transgender youth. ■

MENTAL HEALTH: AT THE HEART OF WHAT WE DO

The mental health of our youth is a top priority in our outreach and front-line services and all of our programs. Essential services and resources are key to preventing existing problems from escalating or becoming chronic.

Access to care for homeless youth is essential, knowing that mental health problems are both a cause and a consequence of homelessness.

In the youth room, art room, music studio and other dialogue- and expression-friendly spaces we provide, all the conditions are in place to promote, support and develop mental wellness.

In addition, **Dans la rue's** day-to-day practices are consistent with the values espoused by ACCESS Open Minds, a national youth-oriented research project aimed at improving mental health services.

The counsellors and psychologists at **Dans la rue** are keenly attuned to these issues. They offer comprehensive mental health care services and guide youth in need to the appropriate resources based on their individual situation.

Our heartfelt thanks go out to the Echo Foundation, the Medavie Health Foundation and Hockey Helps the Homeless, three important partners over the years whose support has enabled us to improve our mental health initiatives. Together, our contributions are making a real difference in helping youth achieve wellness in mind and spirit. ■

"When one of the counsellors asks us if we need to see a psychologist, most of the time, we say no. The first meeting is usually hard. But a counsellor is there to walk us through the process, until we no longer need them and start seeing the psychologist on our own."

— Nicolas Leclair, a youth who has benefited from Dans la rue's services

JOBS: A WAY FOR YOUTH TO REGAIN SELF-CONFIDENCE

For at-risk and homeless youth, having a job can be vital in helping them meet their needs, achieve a sense of stability and develop their interests.

Some youth don't have any real work experience. For others, any experience they do have has been negative. To help them build confidence in themselves and their abilities, we offer pay-by-the-day opportunities in our kitchen, dog kennel or garden. Not only does it give them something constructive to do, but it is also a source of income and the first step toward a longer program.

An in-house, six months, 20 or 35-hour-a week program in the kitchen, music room or the depot is available to our youth, giving them a chance to prove themselves in a familiar environment with people who understand their situation.

The youth at **Dans la rue** face multiple challenges when it comes to getting and keeping gainful employment. Our programs let them develop their skills and expose them to a positive work environment. We can then help them

transition to external job programs or one of many training and integration programs with our partner businesses and organizations.

Our thanks go out to the Home Depot Foundation for their essential support for our employability programs. ■

"When I started at the kitchen, it gave me experience and fuelled a passion for cooking I didn't even know I had."

— Helen, a *Dans la rue* employability program alumna, who now works in the kitchen of a restaurant in Montreal

A NEW VAN FOR DANS LA RUE WILL SOON BE READY

In 1988, Father Emmett Johns bought a used Winnebago to reach out to at-risk youth in downtown Montreal, offering them food, a warm welcome and a sympathetic ear.

More than 30 years later, the Van is still one of our core services. The Van we are using now has been in operation for the past 15 years and has outlived its useful life.

Our partners and donors have pitched in to let us to acquire a new model, the sixth in the history of **Dans la rue**, that will be better equipped to meet the needs of the youth we serve.

The new natural gas-fuelled Van will be more environmentally friendly and will have much more space to store basic necessities and accommodate users more efficiently. It will also have an extra door at the back for added safety.

The new Van will make its first rounds on the streets of Montreal in the coming months. Volunteers have always been part of the history of the organization. It is thanks to them that the Van travels the city to meet the youth and their needs. And volunteers will continue their important service to youth with this new Van. ■

