

FALL 2021 NEWSLETTER

DANS LA RUE

OUR NEW VAN IS FINALLY HERE!

The first vehicle in Montreal to be 100% powered by renewable natural gas.

The illustrated report you'll find on pages 2 and 3 will give you a better idea of what it's like to spend an evening on the new Van and appreciate its impact on homeless youth.

The new **Dans la rue** Van has a smaller carbon footprint and runs entirely on renewable natural gas (RNG). RNG is produced by converting food waste into energy through a process known as biomethanation. Powered by the ALDO Group, Énergir and the Marcelle and Jean Coutu Foundation, the Van will help fight climate change by generating fewer greenhouse gas emissions.

The help of our partners at Énergir was invaluable throughout the procurement process. The modifications to the Van interior and sustainable focus would not have been possible without their expertise.

The support of the ALDO Group and the Marcelle and Jean Coutu Foundation was also indispensable in bringing this project to fruition. In 2019, **Dans la rue** was proud to be the recipient of the proceeds of the ALDO Group's *Purpose Ride*, which raised \$104,570 to partially fund the purchase of the new Van. In addition, we are very fortunate to be

able to count on the incredible volunteer efforts of the Group's employees.

Moreover, the Marcelle and Jean Coutu Foundation stepped up their support for **Dans la rue** in 2019, with a multiyear partnership to help fund the new Van's operations. This will help ensure homeless youth have access to basic necessities.

The Van plays an important role for youth of all ages who are socially isolated, vulnerable and struggling.



PROGRAMS AND SERVICES TO HELP PROVIDE A WAY OUT OF HOMELESSNESS

Although the pandemic is an ongoing concern, our counsellors now have all the tools they need to deal with the ramifications of the public health crisis.

The new Van has been winding its way through the streets of Montreal since July, and the Bunker and Day Centre continue to meet homeless youth's essential needs.

Over and above these core activities, we have resumed most of our other services, including psychosocial support, legal and administrative aid, our school and employability programs, the art room, referrals and accompaniment, housing and family services. By strengthening

our ties with youth, facilitating their contact with outside resources and providing spaces where they can learn and grow, we are empowering them to find a way off the street and toward a more self-sufficient, rewarding future.

Thank you to our employees who have pulled out all the stops to come up with concrete solutions adapted to the realities of homeless youth through **Dans la rue's** many programs and services.





A NIGHT ON THE NEW VAN

A HEARTWARMING HUMAN EXPERIENCE

BY ELIZA MOSES

When the new Van hit the road in early July, the Development and Communications team at Dans la rue was curious to see how its return to the streets of Montreal would turn out. So I contacted Alexandre Des Groseillers, the coordinator in charge of the Van's operations and volunteers, and asked him if I could spend an evening on the Van. His response to my request was an enthusiastic yes. So on Wednesday, August 4, I hopped onboard to meet the Van's volunteers and the people they serve, and see first-hand how the service works. I've prepared this article for you about this very heartwarming human experience.

ENCOUNTERS WITH THE PEOPLE SERVED BY THE VAN

There are about 20 people already lined up on the sidewalk at our first stop. The volunteers get straight to work at the service window at the back of the Van. They form a sort of bucket brigade, with one volunteer taking orders at the window and the two others on either side, preparing hot dogs and drinks on the new and improved counters.

I get off at every stop with our photographer and explain what we are doing to those gathered. I answer questions and talk to them, making sure to respect their privacy, and take down a few testimonials, with their informed consent.

As soon as we mention we are with Dans la rue, their faces soften and smiles beam. We see that most of

them are people living on the edge in housing projects, neighbourhood shelters or the street.

One woman comes over with her dog. She takes the time to sit down on her walker as she eats her hot dog. She tells me she lives alone, pointing to a rundown building close by. The Van is her "social time." Without Dans la rue, she would spend her entire day by herself. Everyone agrees: the Van is like a family, with lots of the same faces showing up over and over again.

I hear something similar from Olivier, who comes up to me to say he'd be glad to tell me about his experience. He's one of our "alumni."

"I used to use your services a lot. Especially the Day Centre, the Bunker



and the Van, when I was living in the street. But now, I have an apartment, and things are going well for me." The Van has remained a constant in his life since those days. "The Van has always been there for me, through thick and thin. That's why I keep coming back."



THE VAN'S VOLUNTEERS COMMITTED AND ENGAGING

As I arrive at the Day Centre, I am welcomed by a trio of volunteers – Nunzio, Renaud and Delphine are the ones on duty that evening. Dedicated individuals like them are key to delivering the Van service and listening to youth experiencing homelessness, providing them with support, and handing out food, drinks and basic necessities.

Everyone is in a great mood, saying how excited they are to be doing their first shift with the new vehicle. This iteration of the Van is a 34-foot-long bus, which is replacing our former 30-foot RV. Great care is taken in operating and manoeuvring the vehicle, as everyone is still getting used

to the new rig and how it handles on the narrow streets of downtown Montreal.

As we pull up to the first stop, at the corner of Morgan and Sainte-Catherine, the volunteers prepare me for the realities of homeless life. But Renaud assures me that, despite all the challenges they have gone through, the people we serve are always happy to see the Van arrive. "We are moved at each stop," says Delphine.

Between stops, the volunteers share some personal anecdotes, and I suspect they're trying to lighten the atmosphere to counteract the human suffering we would come face to face with along the way.



THE VAN AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE

It quickly becomes apparent just how busy it can get for the three-person crew handing out food. The people who have come to the Van naturally turn to me to ask for basic necessities, like toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap, shampoo, deodorant, toilet paper and the feminine hygiene products that are very much in demand among the young women.

Throughout the evening, we see many people, both younger and older, for whom this will be their only meal that day. They all have the same thing to share: how grateful they are to the volunteers and

services at Dans la rue. There is a mutual feeling of trust. Smiles shining through the darkness and uncertainty. The experience of the Van opens a window of hope on the support of a community and the essential work done by organizations like ours.

When I get back home, it hits me how lucky I am to have a roof over my head and a bed to sleep in, unlike so many of the people I've seen at the Van that night. The experience speaks volumes about the concrete difference Dans la rue is making in the lives of people who are living on the brink.

Report written by Eliza Moses, Senior Advisor, Communications, Dans la rue. Photos by Annie-Ève Dumontier.

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION FORUM

■ An initiative of Coalition Jeunes+.

In an effort to achieve its objectives in terms of preventing and reducing youth homelessness, **Coalition Jeunes+** hosts a forum to give young people a voice and inspire various stakeholders to work together to improve prevention outcomes.

The event will take place on November 18 and 19 in a hybrid format on Zoom, with youth gathered in person across the province, in collaboration with a number of community partners.

Coalition Jeunes+ is a Quebec-based coalition that was created in 2018 by **Dans la rue** and is led by community organizations, researchers, groups and youth.

The Coalition's goal is to bring together key stakeholders in order to effect positive and lasting change in the fight against youth homelessness, by upholding and promoting the rights of 12- to 30-year-olds throughout the province.



EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMS

■ Keeping youth on track as they work toward a better future.

Through our employability programs, we can offer homeless youth work experience that is adapted to their situation and includes a psychosocial component. Unfortunately, the pandemic brought these initiatives to a screeching halt until this summer.

One of the participants was enrolled in a part-time program at the new Day Centre garden. All summer long, he took care of watering the plants, removing the weeds and harvesting the bounty. Not only that, but the social horticulturalists at Sentier Urbain gave him the opportunity to take part in several activities and put in some hours in their own gardens.

FAMILY SERVICES

■ Resumption of home visits and water park trip.

In response to families' requests, home visits started back up again this summer, to the great delight of parents, children and Family Services counsellors. The nicer weather meant these visits could take place outside and often as part of a trip to the park.

We also organized a water park trip. All the families were on time and very excited to once again participate in group activities that had been suspended since the outset of the pandemic. They loved reconnecting with other families and seeing how much their children had grown!

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