

Saint Columba House

Annual Report 2007



To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*. (People) are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection. (Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*)

A church and community gathering reflecting on “Empire” and its modern-day manifestations - students of library science teaching children how to discover the hidden treasures of a library - a meeting for Point St. Charles residents to discuss recent changes in the community - a tutoring session for a child struggling with reading... What do all these activities have in common?

Literacy!

Literacy is not only about reading and writing. It is the ability to decipher the world around us, to name the problems we face within it, and to organize ourselves to make changes. These days, we speak of computer literacy, economic literacy, health or media literacy and many

other ways of reading the world. As defined by UNESCO “Literacy involves a continuum of learning to achieve goals, to develop knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in the wider society.”

Literacy, in this broad sense, is essential to all our programs and outreach work at Saint Columba House. It is key to the work of promoting campaigns and actions in

the interests of the community. It is at the very heart of our educational programs with pre-schoolers and primary school children. Our advocacy work helps build literacy about the law, rights and responsibilities. Literacy is an important element of the Hand-in-Hand program helping

participants to navigate the world as people living with an intellectual handicap. Daily, those who come for lunch learn about nutrition and environmental practices to improve their health and that of the planet.

In the following pages you will read about these and many other activities at Saint Columba House that help people to rename their world, to reflect on the potential within and together, and

to work in community to bring about positive change. Literacy is also about building bridges of understanding between different communities, which this 82 year-old partnership between The United Church of Canada and the community of Point St. Charles continues to strive for as we grow together in faith and understanding.

Patricia Murphy, director



The Saint Columba House Children's Library and Learning Center is a wonderful place where children discover many hidden treasures!

2007 AT A GLANCE

2007 got off to a great start with the news of **St Gabriel School's** survival of a second round of consultations on its future. Saint Columba House fought alongside community parents to preserve this last English school in Point St. Charles. Saint Columba House continues to work in partnership with St. Gabriel School particularly in its efforts to develop excellence in literacy education.

Saint Columba House worked actively as part of the **Action Watchdog Community Coalition** to fight for people-centered development, particularly for disadvantaged groups. Currently at the core of several massive urban development projects, Point St. Charles struggles to have its voice heard at city consultations where important decisions will be made likely to have far-reaching consequences. Saint Columba House has also been active on the **Community Youth Coalition** and participated in several initiatives to promote school perseverance amongst youth.



In 2007, Saint Columba House undertook a greening initiative as part of the United Church **Green Church Project**, resulting in a composting system, conversion to eco-cleaning products, building improvements to reduce energy loss, enhanced recycling, and the introduction of environmental education to programs.

We worked with the group **Community Action for Food Security** to develop two **collective garden projects** including a container garden terrace, demonstrating balcony gardening techniques to the community.



Thanks to the great contribution of community volunteer Sharon Rankin and her team of volunteer librarians, we now have a **Children's Library and Learning Center**.

This lively room - filled with carefully selected children's books, comfy bean-bag chairs and cozy reading corners, supervised computer access, a magazine rack and book displays - helps children to discover the world of reading, to explore a library's vast resources and to get to know and learn from your local librarian. Many thanks to all the churches and organizations that contributed to this wonderful project.

Program Updates 2007

The Hand-in-Hand day program for intellectually challenged adults is now comfortably settled in a beautiful first floor space, ensuring increased security for many no longer able to manage stairs. Two new participants have joined the family, and we continue to benefit from the solid support of excellent volunteers who alongside Myrna offer a high quality diverse program to meet the physical, emotional and intellectual needs of participants. Our art class in collaboration with the YMHA continued, and Hand-in-Hand art is increasingly visible throughout the building. Gym, computer training, literacy activities and celebrations are other important components of the Hand-in-Hand program. We are deeply grateful to all who helped us with the renovation project.



Many thanks to all who helped create a lovely new space for the Hand-in-Hand program for intellectually challenged adults.

After a two year hiatus, the **Summer Day Camp Program** is back! Focussing on literacy, the camp seeks to make learning fun, physically active, interactive and achievable! Children explored many ways of learning and expressing new ideas, went on several great outings to places of interest, swam regularly and enjoyed visits from many fascinating guests including a 10 foot-long yellow python! The camp accommodated 50 children and functioned as a fully-bilingual camp. It also provided a great learning experience to 7 counselors-in-training and meaningful employment to a team of 8 counselors.

We are delighted to have been selected for the 2007 RBC After-School grants program. We are now able to hire enough staff to ensure one-on-one help to children struggling with reading and mathematics in our **After-School Program**. We were also able to start a tutoring program for high school students. We work closely with children, parents and schools to meet each child's learning needs. The After-School Program receives 50 children from nine inner-city English and French schools.



A warm welcome greets all who come to the Saint Columba House Lunch Program. A take-out service for elderly shut-ins is now available to those in need of this service.

The Saint Columba House **Lunch Program** is not only about feeding bodies. It creates community, offers hospitality, provides education on nutrition, models good ecological practices, lends a listening ear to learn more about unmet needs, provides a daily meal to a refugee in sanctuary, offers excellent opportunities for volunteerism AND offers a daily, nutritious, balanced hot meal for a dollar a day! There were many developments in the lunch room in 2007, including renovations and sprucing up, development of a take-out service for elderly shut-ins, and more menu diversity. Lunch-room staff and volunteers have also been key to many other innovative initiatives this year, including the Green Church Project, the community gardens, building renovations, community celebrations and many other great contributions.



The Alternate School offers a head-start program for 2-5 year-olds while supporting parents in their role as key educators.

The **Alternate School** offers a pre-school head-start program to children aged 2 to 5, embracing the rich cultural diversity children and their families bring to the program. In 2007, many activities sought to celebrate this gift and help each child learn more about their own culture and that of others. The Alternate School encourages parents to support their children in school by involving them in class through parent-child activities and weekly parent meetings - a model in which everybody learns!

Women of the World Unite! The **Saint Columba House Women's Discussion Group** is stretching across continents and over oceans to reach out to other women in struggle. Following an inspiring visit from the Montreal and Area Grandmothers Fellowship, the Women's Group learned of the plight of the South African GoGos, grandmothers raising their grandchildren orphaned by the AIDS epidemic. They have been busy knitting quilts and raising funds for the Stephen Lewis Foundation in support of these courageous women through such activities as bake sales or a voluntary contribution at our annual celebration of International Women's Day. This dynamic and lively group of women knows how to have fun while making a difference in the world!

Welfare Rights Committee & **Comité des sans emploi** are two citizen-based groups working in partnership with Saint Columba House that engage citizens in on-going reflection and action on issues facing the community and on opportunities to exercise its voice. Efforts in 2007 focussed on building the membership through a range of activities including café-rencontres, community suppers and public assemblies as well as musical evenings to reach out to different cultural groups in the community. Both groups contributed to Action-Watchdog's assessment of changes and emerging issues in Point St. Charles. They worked to mobilize citizens in the fight for the survival of the local post office and closely followed and consulted on developments on the CN Lands. These groups are supported mainly through Saint Columba House and other sources of local funding, and worked over the past year to advocate for funding from provincial sources for their anti-poverty work. We are hopeful of a positive response in 2008.

None of our work would be possible without the valuable contribution of **volunteers and students**, who devote 11,000 volunteer hours annually to Saint Columba House. Whether working in the kitchen, tutoring children, organizing the library, painting the building, serving on the board, helping with fundraising, participating in community campaigns, and many other initiatives, volunteers are the backbone of our programs and daily life at Saint Columba House. New volunteer opportunities are always available, so don't hesitate to call if you are interested.



We are deeply appreciative of building staff and volunteers, Kathy, Anita and John, who worked together to create a beautiful, peaceful space for the Spiritual Development Program.

Small but beautiful, the **Spiritual Development Group** recuperated a tiny storage space and converted it to a lovely oasis of peace and retreat for the use of all. Our Spiritual Development program now resides there, a small library of resources for worship and reflection is stored within, and we will soon be offering a Healing Pathway ministry from this location. Our Spiritual Development coordinator, Donna Leduc, brings to the program the enhanced gifts of leadership she has developed through her participation in the United Church Lay Leadership Development program. All are welcome to join us every Monday afternoon from 1:15 - 2:30.

Looking ahead to 2008

There is much we hope to accomplish in 2008 including: Continue to help citizens have a voice in the development of their community; Fight for the survival of community institutions such as the local post office and St. Gabriel School; Follow through on a building improvement plan with renovations to the downstairs bathrooms and Alternate School; Expand our take-out lunch service for elderly shut-ins; Pursue the goals of all our programs and consolidate new initiatives such as the collective gardens and the Green Church Project; Support Welfare Rights Committee and Comité des sans Emploi to obtain provincial funding from SACAIS; Enhance our Summer Day Camp program to include more youth from Point St. Charles in the counselor-in-training program and as counselors. Continue to diversify our funding base as we approach looming Mission and Service cuts in 2009.

Heartfelt Thanks Are Due to ... !

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