

# Dialogue

BETTER COMMUNICATION FOR BETTER CARE

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Members of McGill University's TRHP Project team at the Golden Share conference. Left to right: Caroline Storr, Teri Baloukas, Nadine Mulindeh, Mireille Marcil, Natalina Clemente, Claude Béland, Yael Peled, Gail Hawley-McDonald, Sarah Shaughnessy, Jean Robert.

## A partnership in pursuit of "Better Communication for Better Care"

The McGill Training and Retention of Health Professionals (TRHP) Project seeks to contribute to Quebec's initiatives to ensure that English-speaking Quebecers have access to the full range of health and social services in their own language, through measures designed to build and maintain a sufficient complement of personnel capable of providing services in English. The Project is a partnership between McGill University; the ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur and its network; the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) and its institutions; and Quebec's English-speaking community, through the Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN) and its community networks in the regions. The project is stakeholder-driven and, as such, provides a framework for results-oriented action and measurable outcomes.

### Principal Investigator Daniel Weinstock:

## MCGILL'S TRHP PROJECT A GLOBAL LEADER IN RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE AND HEALTH

According to Professor Daniel Weinstock, the challenge of being able to serve patients in a language they will understand is not unique to Quebec or Canada. "There isn't a country in the world where the problem we are talking about here doesn't occur," he says.

Since becoming Principal Investigator for McGill's Training and Retention of Health Professionals (TRHP) Project, Professor Weinstock says he has discovered several pockets of researchers around the world

doing similar work on language and access to healthcare services.

An award-winning researcher and professor, Weinstock joined the McGill Faculty of Law in 2012 and took over as Principal Investigator of McGill's TRHP Project in 2013. His ultimate goal, he says, is for the project to propel Canada forward as a leader in this area of research.

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Professor Daniel Weinstock, Director of the McGill Institute for Health and Social Policy, and Principal Investigator of McGill's TRHP Project.

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He aims to create an international network in which researchers can share notes and best practices to ensure that research around the globe on language and health is not conducted in silos.

In the meantime, he says, the ongoing work of the TRHP Project in Quebec, which provides training tools for English-language service delivery and helps retain bilingual healthcare workers, is essential. He underlines the fact that many anglophone communities in Quebec are small and fragile. “The idea that the market would ensure that their needs will be taken care of is not plausible,” he says. “There needs to be

positive, deliberate action.”

In the end, Professor Weinstock says that government investment is the only way to ensure that members of these communities receive proper healthcare when they enter a clinic or hospital. “The ability to understand one another, to make sure patients are understood well by the healthcare professional, is one of the main determinants in a successful clinical encounter,” he says. ♦

## Phase 3 of the Language Training Program: Measuring the impact

Interactions between healthcare providers and patients can sometimes be stressful. Add a language barrier, and a whole new stress comes into play. That’s exactly what McGill’s Language Training Program aims to prevent.

“Our goal is for the provider and the patient to better understand each other,” says Mireille Marcil, Director of the TRHP Project. “Eliminating the language barrier reduces stress levels, puts both the patient and provider at ease, and, ultimately, results in a higher quality service.”

Since its inception in 2003, the Program has provided language training to over 11,000 health and social service professionals across the province. Initially, courses were funded by McGill’s TRHP Project but were delivered by CEGEPs, other universities, and private sector providers. The downside to this de-centralized delivery method was that it was difficult to measure the impact of the various language courses being offered.

“To truly measure the results of the Program, we need to know what language skills the participants acquired, if these skills were used in their professional functions, and if the language

training improved the delivery of services,” says Mireille Marcil. “We could not do that with the initial approach.”

Seeking a new approach, McGill’s School of Continuing Studies was charged with developing customized language training courses for three professional streams (healthcare workers, social services workers and frontline administrators), with eight levels for each stream. “We are talking about 24 courses in all,” explains Effie Dracopoulos, Associate Director of Language and Intercultural Communication in McGill’s School of Continuing Studies. “Because a minimum of seven students is required to provide an in-class course, we opted to develop on-line courses. In remote regions, there aren’t always enough participants to form a class.”

Since oral communication is key to the success of language training, McGill also set-up virtual classrooms. By winter 2016, virtual classrooms were being offered for all eight levels.

Annie Vienney heads-up the *dossier Langue anglaise pour l’accessibilité aux services de santé et aux services sociaux pour la population anglophone, au Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux de l’Abitibi-Témiscamingue*.

**“Some positions require a perfect knowledge of English and a very good proficiency in the language to serve our community, because we work with sensitive issues and often work with vulnerable people, both in the health and in the social service areas,”**

says Vienney. “The employees who participated in the English courses really appreciated the exchanges and interactions with instructors and other trainees. The language training program is, in my opinion, very relevant and very suited to the needs of staff in our network.”

Says one participant: “I am more confident and calm now when I receive a call in English.” Another added, “I can speak English more easily now. It has made me more proactive in my work.”

Feedback from nurses and social workers on the virtual aspect of the



“LOST IN TRANSLATION”

course has been extremely positive, too. "Simulations allowed us to interact with the instructor and classmates in a stress-free way," according to one participant. For another, the opportunity

to study at McGill was a real plus. "I was proud to say I was studying at McGill via the Internet! It was a very positive experience." ♦

*The John Abbott College Health Caravan and the Health and Social Services Community Leadership Bursary Program are two of 78 initiatives of McGill's TRHP Project Retention Program. The Retention Program aims to increase the participation in the provincial healthcare system of technicians and professionals who are able to respond to the needs of English-speaking clients, in their own language, and increase the range of services offered to Quebec's English-speaking communities.*

# ALL ABOARD!

## Travelling Health Caravan connects students from Montreal to English-speaking communities of the Laurentian region

For Ellen Wilson, being told by a Nursing student that she had suffered a heart attack in the past, unbeknownst to her, was quite a surprise. "I wasn't even going to go, but my husband was going," she said, referring to John Abbott College's Health Caravan, which passed through her hometown of Lachute in late March 2016.

Staffed by 3rd year students from John Abbott College's Nursing, Dental Hygiene, Pre-Hospital Emergency Care, and Youth and Adult Correctional Intervention programs, the Health Caravan is intended to provide students with an opportunity to get acquainted with some of the English-speaking communities outside of Montreal.

Lachute was one of several stops that the Health Caravan made this past spring to community centres and schools in the Laurentian region. With the help of 4 Korner's Family Resource Center – a local community group and TRHP Project partner – the Caravan visited eight locations, including Lachute,

Gore, Kanestake and Arundel. Under the supervision of professionals in their field, students answered health-related questions and flagged health issues, like irregular heartbeats and high blood pressure.

The experience was enlightening for those who attended, as well as for the students. Caravan interns took away more than real-world professional experience – they also got to visit communities they might one day choose to live in.

**"I learned a lot about the communities in the Laurentians, and I had no idea that there are people who have to travel very far to get access to basic healthcare in their preferred language,"**

said Marsella Cilbiyikoglu, a Dental



John Abbott College's Health Caravan in action.

Hygiene student who participated in the Caravan.

Joseph van de Sluys, a Nursing student, said he was also surprised to hear about the challenges facing anglophone populations in the Laurentians. Some patients explained to him that they travel all the way to Hawkesbury, Ontario, to get services in English.

**"In their own communities, they don't have the services that allow them to go more frequently and allow them to take care of themselves,"**

he said.

For Ellen Wilson, the patience and kindness of the students has stuck with her, and she would definitely attend the Health Caravan again. "We thoroughly enjoyed it, and we told all our friends that, if the Caravan ever comes again, they'd be crazy not to go," she said. ♦



## RECIPE FOR SUCCESS:

### encouraging bilingual graduates to work in Quebec's remote communities

For Caroline Cooper, an occupational therapist (OT) on Quebec's Lower North Shore, the decision to return home to work after her studies made sense. "My family is here. My roots are here," she says.

Generally, the choice to work on the Lower North Shore is one that only those with an attachment to the region are willing to make. The remote area is made up of 14 small communities spread out along roughly 400 kilometres of coastline bordering Labrador, and some communities can only reach one another by snowmobile.

"It's a rural lifestyle. There are no movie theatres or shopping malls. It's a unique person who wants to live that kind of lifestyle," says Kimberly Buffitt, Director of Programs at the Coasters Association, speaking about the challenges of attracting bilingual healthcare professionals to her region.

According to the World Health Organization, students from remote regions who receive professional health and social services training are more

likely to return to practice in those regions. With that in mind, McGill's Training and Retention of Health Professionals project created the Health and Social Services Community Leadership Bursary Program and awarded 145 bursaries, between 2011 and 2015, to students from selected Quebec regions, including the Lower North Shore. As part of the program, students must return to work in a public health or social service institution in one of the select regions for a minimum of one year.

Cooper, who received a bursary for the 2011-2012 school year as well as the 2012-2013 school year, said the program has the added benefit of providing a much-needed financial boost for students from remote regions who leave at a young age to pursue post-secondary studies. "It's a very costly undertaking," she says, underlining that students have to pay for their own travel, rent and living expenses.

Buffitt says the bursary program, which has been running since 2011, has been critical for her region.

**"It gives our students a real incentive to return home once they begin their careers."**

In the Gaspé region, Cathy Brown, Executive Director of the Committee for Anglophone Social Action (CASA) says they face similar retention challenges. "Like any other small town in Quebec, our youth aren't crazy about the idea of coming back to start their career."

Brown says the program is already seeing results, pointing to 2012-13 bursary recipient Alexandra MacWhirter, who recently settled in the region to work at a CISSS as a nurse.

"It has encouraged youth to start thinking differently about their future. It's definitely an incentive to come back," Brown adds. ♦



**Caroline Cooper was a bursary recipient during her studies in Occupational Therapy.**