

Housing in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce:

A portrait of the issues, resources and services affecting the community



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Portrait and survey compiled as a project of the NDG Housing Table:

CDH
CSSS Cavendish
Maison Transitionnelle 03
NDG Community
Council

Prevention NDG
R.O.M.E.L
Teninform
HLM Tenantsø
Association

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Executive Summary:

Introduction:

In June 2012, survey interviews on housing were conducted with residents and organizations serving the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG) community of Montreal. The purpose of the interviews was to develop a portrait of the housing issues to further inform the action plan of the NDG Housing Table and the NDG Community Council (NDGCC).

Primary trends:

Throughout the interviews with residents and community organizations trends appeared for specific populations that are in need of more specialized support. These specific populations are also more vulnerable (those with low income, refugees, seniors, youth and people living with mental illness) to mounting cutbacks to services and programs. Both sections *1.0 Access to housing* and *2.0 Access to housing services* discuss the concerns facing different populations in their ability to access services and adequate housing. Often, individuals experience multiple intersecting issues (such as, gender, income, age, race, sexual orientation and residence status) that create further vulnerabilities and affect their ability to access service. As organizations our capacity to meet these demands in the current funding climate is becoming more difficult. Despite this as a community with strong working relationships we can come together to meet these challenges and learn from each other's successes. The organizations in NDG have developed exemplary models and programs that are tailored to meet specialized needs and demands and can help to inform future projects.

Conclusion:

This report has provided a significant opportunity to begin to plan future steps for research and action. Throughout the interviews recommendations were developed to specifically address the needs of organizations and residents to enhance the capability for capacity building, mobilization and development. It is our intention to develop a means that promotes the involvement of residents and organizations while keeping in consideration meeting needs and organizational demands. We hope to provide an opportunity, for example at the NDGCC roundtable, for organizations to learn about the report findings and specific actions they can be involved in as follow-up (a calendar of training, meetings and community clinics/ workshops).

One of the main areas for future research is the need for more in-depth population specific into issues and available services. In the process of writing this report multiple groups were discussed that based on the interviews were in need of more specific needs and resources. While, there does appear to be some services available the difficulty of reaching them, their ability to support the language, cultural needs and the wellbeing of users needs to be further investigated.

Introduction

In June 2012, survey interviews on housing were conducted with residents and organizations serving the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG) community of Montreal. The purpose of the interviews was to develop a portrait of the housing issues to further inform the action plan of the NDG Housing Table and the NDG Community Council (NDGCC). This portrait is further intended to formalize and expand on the concerns that had been raised in previous community discussions at the NDG Round Table, the NDG Housing Table and directly with residents seeking housing information at the NDGCC.

It is clear to the organizations and residents that accessible, affordable and adequate housing is a need shared by various populations in NDG. According to the Wellesley Institute (2010) 1.5 million households in Canada are involuntarily paying more than 30% of income on housing costs. In NDG this is becoming a significant concern to economically constrained individuals and families who are paying larger percentages of their income to housing often reaching upper wards of 60%-80% (for those living on social assistance) (NDG Food Depot, 2012; Rivers Edge Community Kitchen, 2012). Housing affordability for many is further thwarted by the extensive wait times for units at the Office municipal d'habitation de Montréal (OMHM). According to the OMHM (2012) over 22,000 people are on the waitlist with only 2,000 spaces becoming available each year. The challenges of making ends meet were reiterated by the River's Edge Community Kitchen, the NDG Food Depot and Batshaw (2012) that their clients' reliance on food programs and their overall ability to balance their needs are becoming increasingly problematic. At times it has been causing significant distress and there have been increased reports of acute crisis arising from both sudden homelessness and the mental health effects of inadequate, unsanitary housing (Tracom, 2012). Youth, people using substances, LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) often in combination with mental health issues have been noted to have an increased difficulty of accessing emergency housing (Tracom, 2012; Head and Hands, 2012).

The cost is not the sole challenge as often tenants face difficulties in negotiating rent increases, repairs and landlord responsibilities. In multiple discussions both with residents and organizations, wait times at the Régie du logement, accessing services, tenant rights information and ensuring that repairs were done correctly surfaced as reoccurring issues.

While many challenges were noted, so were the successes. It is clear from the survey interviews that despite the difficulty of responding to increased need, extensive work is being done by the community to support its residents. Partnerships, expertise, and focused programming are contributing to a dynamic portrait with substantial opportunities for future work.

Methodology

In total, interviews were conducted with 24 organizations (*see appendix A*) these interviews were based on a survey (*see appendix B*) developed by the NDGCC and the NDG Housing Table. Interviews with organizations were conducted by phone, in person and by written response. 15 casual one-on-one interviews were conducted (*see appendix C*) with community residents at the River's Edge Community Kitchen and the NDG Food Depot during drop in times. Information and discussion also occurred one-on-one with those seeking service from the NDGCC Resource Centre. The record of information assistance provided by the NDGCC over the last year informed some of the specific examples of housing issues experienced by residents.

Part 1: Access to affordable, adequate housing

1.1 Introduction

Throughout the survey, discussion arose over specific challenges to accessing affordable and adequate housing. While the following sections may not speak to all the needs and intersecting issues, it is an attempt to reflect on the concerns facing the NDG community. Many organizations work to address the needs of individuals and families on a temporary (emergency/crisis), transitional (providing more needed support and services) and long-term (housing that meets the needs for a more significant time frame) basis.

1.2 Mental Health

One of the primary issues discussed with organizations and from the direct experience of NDGCC Resource Centre is the housing challenges facing people living with mental illness and those experiencing a period of challenges to their mental health. Mental health is an overarching non-demographically specific concern, although there are people with more specific vulnerabilities.

Temporary Housing:

Crisis intervention services have noted an increase in the number of males experiencing sudden homelessness (Tracom, 2012). In some circumstances these incidents have been linked to illness, mental health concerns and changes in employment status. Other incidents have been connected with an acute period of distress related to mental health at times related to the suitability of their dwelling.

While there are shelters for emergency housing they are generally not accessible to those using substances and the emergency nature of the facility provides only short-term solution to a long-term need. Organizations expressed concern over changes in criteria for the Booth Centre shelter facility of the Salvation Army. It had been brought to their attention that the centre is no longer accepting men living with schizophrenia and their capacity to serve the general population is limited because more of their spaces are being reserved for male seniors (Tracom, 2012).

Transitional Housing:

Forward House is at the forefront of transitional housing focused on mental health in the NDG area. Forward House is providing staged housing and integration programs for those adhering to a treatment plan. Their clientele is primarily referred from those receiving treatment from a medical facility. Aside from Forward House there are other programs near by in the south west region serving those receiving treatment at the Douglas Hospital (CSSL, 2012).

Based on conversations with individuals at the NDG Food Depot many previously homeless males are seeking transitional housing in rooming houses. The cost of rooming houses seemed to range around \$400-500 a month in NDG which, for many would constitute the majority of a social assistance income. From these conversations it was clear that although they were grateful for finding a place to live they expressed interest but difficulty in having their own apartments. They discussed the challenge of accessing resources, affordability and the OMHM wait times. For some individuals they mentioned the hope for finding a place once they are eligible as seniors.

Long term housing:

As previously mentioned, finding housing in the long term can be especially difficult for those living with mental illness. The L'Abri en Ville shared housing model is an exceptional example of supportive and integrative housing in a community environment. However, it may not be suitable for all those seeking long-term housing as adherence to treatment and housing rules must be followed.

1.3 Youth (ages 16- 25)

Temporary Housing:

Multiple organizations (L'Abri en Ville, 2012; Tracom, 2012; Head and Hands, 2012; Mrs. Sabria Hussein, 2012 and Batshaw, 2012) stated concern over the lack of youth focused shelters. Currently, there are no shelters in NDG/ CDN/ Montreal West boroughs' and especially limited service for Anglophone youth in the city. For youth facing mental health challenges availability of services directly capable of addressing their specific needs are in demand and based on these conversations currently do not seem to be fully addressed.

Transitional Housing:

Due to the specific needs of youth, sometimes facing dual-diagnosis, adjusting to treatment adherence or experimentation makes it difficult for placement (L'Abri en Ville, 2012). Existing organizations serving individuals with mental health issues often are not specialized in addressing the needs of youth and having an organization in the West-end of Montreal would be beneficial (Tracom, 2012).

Long-term Housing:

It was discussed in interviews that most young people in NDG are sharing

apartments to save on cost. Shared accommodations are not always suitable especially, for young families. Young people, especially full time students may have added challenge due to ineligibility to access social assistance and social housing.

1.4 LGBT

Temporary Housing:

It is very difficult for organizations to properly refer individuals that are LGBTQ to shelter and crisis housing (Head and Hands, 2012; NDG Food Depot, 2012). Often, without a specific mandate by the shelter to serve the LGBT community it can be an especially difficult to ensure an individual's safety and wellbeing. Organizations interviewed spoke to difficulties of properly accommodating individuals that are transitioning because, of specific mandates to serve women and/or because of shared accommodations based on sex (Tracom, 2012; Maison Transition, 2012).

1.5 Women and Families

Temporary Housing:

Sheltered housing for conjugal violence and emergency situations has been very helpful for women and families in crisis. For women of all ages one of the main concerns is starting over with little income and savings (Maison Shalom, 2012). For some individuals cultural barriers may make accessing sheltered housing difficult. A private shelter has been helping to address the needs of a multi-ethnic primarily Muslim clientele (Hussein, 2012).

Transitional Housing:

From within the shelters connection is made with secondary stage shelters which, can provide further counseling and intervention in a supportive environment. Groups such as O3 have been providing a key opportunity for transitional housing for young families while, engaging them in life skill programming. Suitability, space and transitioning to long-term housing are significant challenges to those providing transitional housing (O3, 2012).

Long term Housing:

The difficulty to all groups interviewed was the challenge of accessing spaces in the OMHM due to the long wait times. For many women and families accessing affordable and adequate housing is an immediate need. For those who enter into a transitional program it can actually prolong the period to get into an OMHM because, it is assumed that their stay will be the maximum allowed although, it is not appropriate to all residents (O3, 2012).

1.6 Immigrants and refugees

Long term housing:

Affordable, adequate housing is considered a means of integration for newcomers to

Canada and Montreal. Despite this significant barriers of discrimination, affordability and language make it very challenging to access suitable housing. Organizations such as R.O.M.E.L have been working to address these issues and assist people by providing a housing bank of good landlords and by helping to mitigate the process. Organizations and residents have expressed confusion and frustration in regards to the wait times and accessing information at the OMHM.

1.7 Housing for people living with disabilities

Long term housing:

Availability of adapted affordable housing especially for families is very necessary. At the NDGCC we have worked with multiple instances of people living with episodic or degenerative conditions in which, the housing is not conducive or worsening their conditions. For these individuals they expressed feelings of distress over the wait times and significant concern over the added impact affordability was having on their health.

1.8 Seniors

Short-term housing:

SAVA and other shelters have discussed providing assistance to seniors in emergencies experiencing conjugal violence and abuse. One of the most difficult aspects discussed by SAVA is reaching those that are experiencing abuse. According to SAVA, despite the recognized need for assistance in this region fewer seniors are seeking shelter and emergency housing than other areas of Montreal.

Long term housing:

In numerous conversations affordability and location to services surfaced as being primary concerns for seniors looking for housing. The stress and cost of finding another apartment or residential facility often outweighs a senior's desire to locate a more suitable residence. There is a large demand for semi-assisted facilities with specialized services.

1.9 Conclusion:

The main concern in relation to housing is the availability of affordable, adequate and accessible housing in the NDG area. The wait times at the OMHM and confusion around the process are areas of great concern for numerous residents looking for a long-term affordable housing option. One of the most practical services that have been helpful is organizations that are providing direct assistance to finding available units (R.O.M.E.L and Face à Face).

In addition, youth, people living with addictions and mental health issues are in direct need of emergency shelter options and transitional supportive housing. Organizations providing shelter and focused programming are integral to addressing some of the more specific concerns facing certain populations. The lack

of availability is a major obstacle for organizations helping connect people to secondary, supportive and long term housing options. Despite the lack of availability their work is integral for assisting individuals and families in connecting to needed housing.

The need for short-term, transitional and long term housing is all connected. Affordability and/or periods of acute life changes often force people to seek emergency short-term housing. The availability and suitability for long-term housing often, effect the decision to seek transitional housing (Forward House, 2012; Maison Shalom, 2012). If units are not available, many are forced to remain in short term or transitional housing and in some cases become homeless (Tracom, 2012).

Part 2: Access to information and tenant rights support

2.1 Introduction

Access to information is the availability of resources and knowledge that can assist with tenant rights, referral to appropriate services and supporting people seeking affordable housing. The availability of information is central to enhancing the capacity of organizations and individuals.

Supporting and advocating for tenant rights is a significant aspect of information access especially for an area of predominantly renters. According to CDEC (2009) 67.1 % of NDG residents are living in rented dwellings, 34.6% of the buildings are in need of minor repairs and 12.1% are in need of major repairs. Organizations working on tenant rights address directly the multitude of complex issues related to this need for repairs, health, safety and sanitation. While there is not one issue in particular of concern, there has been concern over the capacity to detect invisible molds and bedbug exterminators not being properly licensed and using chemicals improperly (Teninform, 2012).

2.2 Mental health

For people with mental health issues addressing tenant rights concerns can often exacerbate existing conditions or elevate the feelings of distress. Challenges of communicating with landlords and janitors can often increase the feelings of crisis experienced by the tenant. There have been cases where individuals experienced harassment and pressure tactics to try to push the tenant out of the dwelling (Teninform, 2012; NDGCC, 2012; Tracom, 2012). Often these individuals have remained in the same dwelling for extended periods and have kept the rate of rent affordable.

Having groups that are linking individuals to mental health service has become extremely important. In multiple incidents that we have seen at the NDGCC the presenting problems are linked to issues needing more specialized interventions.

Some organizations have stated the challenge of reaching people living in HLMs and in other apartment dwellings to ensure that they are accessing needed resources. Outreach workers from the CLSC and Prevention NDG have been very successful in door-to-door campaigns to access individuals with deteriorating health and decreasing autonomy in apartments and HLMs. With decreasing autonomy the conditions of the apartment may begin to deteriorate increasing problems of health and safety.

2.3 Youth

With the end of funding to the Head and Hands street worker program it is difficult to gauge the level and diversity of need facing the NDG youth community. As young people may be living in precarious housing situations (not being on a lease, sleeping on peoples couches) without a fixed address they are often at risk of unsafe and inadequate housing.

Examples had been given of individuals living in precarious housing entering a state of crisis over sudden difficulties with landlords or others in the dwelling (Head and Hands, 2012). Access to young people especially those in group homes, with addictions and engaged in sex work are hard to reach without the availability of a street worker. With limited trust in traditional services these groups are especially vulnerable and may be lacking needed services.

2.4 LGBT

The majority of the discussion involved the challenge of providing information on shelter services safe and appropriate for individuals identifying as LGBT. Some organizations spoke to the challenge of appropriate placement for individuals that were transitioning.

A lot of the issues stated above for youth also would be pertaining to this population as well. For example, in discussion with Head and Hands issues related to living in precarious housing situations, accessing those with addictions, engaging in sex work and those not trusting of traditional services would also affect those that are LGBT.

2.5 Women and Families

As is the case for many people that are living in poverty the focus on immediate needs often make addressing problems in their housing environment a lower priority. Housing is not always adequate for the needs of the family. For example, in cases of over-crowding, seeking more adequate housing is important to decrease the stress of the family. For some individuals' culture, poverty and pride makes it difficult to seek help (Women on the Rise, 2012; Hussein, 2012). Developing a relationship of trust with community organizations such as Women on the Rise has proven to be an integral way to address these barriers.

2.6 Immigrants and refugees

According to city of Montreal districts (2009) statistics from 2001-6 show that

immigrants represent 29% of total NDG population. Organizations have discussed multiple barriers for immigrants and refugees to address concerns and access services. Language barriers make it extremely difficult for people to access services and communicate with landlords. R.O.M.E.L and Bienvenue à NDG have been striving to assist tenants in negotiating with landlords, increasing awareness of rights, discrimination and accessing appropriate services. Assisting refugees and undocumented individuals is especially difficult overall for organizations (Women on the Rise, 2012; R.O.M.E.L, 2012). Due to ineligibility there is a significant lack of services for refugees.

2.7 People living with disabilities

In discussion with individuals there is a need for assistance in connecting people to resources especially for finding adapted and the process of adapting apartments. The cost of moving is especially a concern for those with limited mobility. For those seeking funding for adaptations in an apartment there is an extensive process, which can take up to 5 years to complete (Tango, 2012).

2.8 Seniors

Rent increases have been a major concern for seniors that have come to the NDGCC. An annual increase of even a minimal amount can pose a significant stress for seniors living on a fixed income. Seniors in private residential facilities are also very vulnerable to large rent increases.

Organizations working with seniors such as the NDGCC (2012) spoke to the difficulty of capacity to work on individual advocacy cases. With limited budgets organizations struggle to provide client support, programming and advocacy. For many people who feel vulnerable there is significant resistance to taking an action against a landlord. SAVA and NDGCC spoke of receiving anonymous calls about abuse in residential facilities.

2.9 Conclusions

Addressing tenant rights was a challenge for multiple organizations based on fitting the need for service to organizational mandate. Organizations such as Teninform and Head and Hands spoke to the helpfulness of having lawyers available to provide advice. Experience, contacts and inside information were stated as being very useful in helping clients navigate the system. Numerous organizations and individuals spoke to the extensive wait times at the Régie du logement and to see a city inspector.

Community groups are especially helpful at connecting vulnerable populations to appropriate services. This is also the case for groups who have the capacity to continue follow up in the community. Community building has been proven to be very effective in improving the relations and safety of apartments (Prevention NDG, 2012).

3.0 Recommendations:

Throughout the interviews specific questions were asked to better understand the needs of organizations and residents in regards to training, mobilization, capacity building and development. It was clear in these conversations that many organizations had varying levels of capacity to engage in further activities. There were groups that felt that training would be best suited for their program volunteers (SAVA, 2012; NDG Food Depot, 2012; Rivers Edge, 2012). At the NDGCC it has been an important for us to examine how to best serve residents and provide opportunities for tenant mobilization and resource access. Many groups (NDG Food Depot, 2012; Women on the Rise, 2012; Head and Hands, 2012 and NDGSCC, 2012) spoke to the challenge for residents who are struggling to meet basic needs to be involved in mobilizing and to attend workshops. Often, the issues that they face are immediate and sometimes a response to a sudden crisis, which makes it difficult to wait for service. Some residents expressed a lack of knowledge of available services and programs.

3.1 Capacity building/ mobilization

Training:

- Maison Transitionelle 03, Coop Zoo and Coop Benny Farm expressed interest in organizational and skill building training. For example, training the trainers and cooperative management.
- There was also interest from SAVA, Rivers Edge, Head and Hands and the NDG Food Depot for training for volunteers to assist with crisis intervention, basic housing and tenant rights questions. These groups are not members of RCLAQ and their volunteers are not all bi-lingual.
- There is a need for training, program development and support for community groups seeing an increase in clients with mental illness. The first step is to be able to bring together a group including NDGCC, Prevention NDG, Lori Goodhand at CSSS, Tracom, NDG Food Depot and NDGSCC.
- Some residents have expressed interest in being involved in a tenant association. It is a useful means of engaging residents in issues, which may be the most effective if it was lead by residents and supported by organizations. Providing training for individuals interested in leadership of tenant mobilizing would be an important way of supporting a restarting of a tenant organization.

Clinics/ workshops:

- NDG Food Depot, Women on the Rise and Head and Hands expressed interest in clinics in different community settings on a regular basis to assist residents with filling out forms and/or focused on specific questions such as rent increases.
- Contact with housing table partners and interested organizations will be undertaken to ensure that there is no overlap of services.

Information sharing:

- A practical means to increase knowledge and community capacity is to provide opportunities for organizational information sharing.
- Often, information changes and residents and organizations in the same community are unaware of all the services being provided.
- For individuals and families: providing clinics/workshops on a regular basis and distributing services to organizations providing direct service could improve access to information.
- An updated resource list for housing in NDG is being developed and distributed with resource materials to organizations and groups in NDG.
- Utilize the NDG roundtable as a forum to present report findings and planned next steps.

3.2 Development

- Access to affordable housing is the forefront of issues related to housing.
- A more in-depth study of the existing services is needed to better understand access and quality.
- Utilizing the experience of organizations that have developed their own models and have direct experience with social housing models.
- The L'Abri en Ville model could be very useful in developing a transitional option for youth . The next step could be to bring together interested groups to discuss these possibilities.
- Support possible interest in starting a cooperative. It could be very helpful for interested groups to meet and make contact with established cooperatives such as, the Clifton Coop and those at Benny Farm to better understand the process

4.0 Conclusion:

Throughout the interviews with residents and community organizations trends appeared for specific populations that are in need of more specialized support. These specific populations are also more vulnerable (those with low income, refugees, seniors, youth and people living with mental illness) to mounting cutbacks to services and programs. Both sections *1.0 Access to housing* and *2.0 Access to housing services* discuss the concerns facing different populations in their ability to access services and adequate housing. Often, individuals experience multiple intersecting issues (such as, gender, income, age, race, sexual orientation and residence status) that create further vulnerabilities and affect their ability to access service. As organizations our capacity to meet these demands in the current funding climate is becoming more difficult. Despite this as a community with strong working relationships we can come together to meet these challenges and learn from each other's successes. The organizations in NDG have developed exemplary models and programs that are tailored to meet specialized needs and demands and can help to inform future projects.

As discussed in the previous section, *3.0 Recommendations*, this report has provided a significant opportunity to begin to plan future steps for research and action. Throughout the interviews recommendations were developed to specifically address the needs of organizations and residents to enhance the capability for capacity building, mobilization and development. It is our intention to develop a means that promotes the involvement of residents and organizations while keeping in consideration meeting needs and organizational demands. We hope to provide an opportunity, for example at the NDGCC roundtable, for organizations to learn about the report findings and specific actions they can be involved in as follow-up (a calendar of training, meetings and community clinics/ workshops).

One of the main areas for future research is the need for more in-depth population specific into issues and available services. In the process of writing this report multiple groups were discussed that based on the interviews were in need of more specific needs and resources. While, there does appear to be some services available the difficulty of reaching them, their ability to support the language, cultural needs and the wellbeing of users needs to be further investigated.

