



Pan-Canadian Community Development Learning Network Profile of Effective Practice

Santropol Roulant: Building an Intergenerational Community



Context

The Santropol Roulant was the initiative of two young men, Chris Godsall and Keith Fitzpatrick. The two worked at the Café Santropol, on the corner of Duluth and Saint-Urban streets. In 1995, they decided to found the Santropol Roulant.

Back then, the unemployment rate among young people was high and the baby boomer generation was leaving little room on the job market for recent graduates. Moreover Chris and Keith were anglophone, at the time of the second referendum in 1995. All these conditions put them at a disadvantage in their job searches.

This Profile of Effective Practice is one of fifteen stories examining how innovative, community-based initiatives are using comprehensive approaches to improve social and economic conditions on a local level.

The profiles were created as part of a 2.5-year project of the Canadian CED Network looking at the links between social inclusion and community economic development.

For other profiles, more information on the project and additional resources on social inclusion and the CED, see the notes at the end of this document.

Other people in their situation would have simply left Quebec to find work in another region of Canada or even in the United States. But the bond that Chris and Keith had developed with their community was strong. According to Chris Godsall:

[...] Life in Montreal is rarely governed by logic. To live in Montreal is to experience a constant subtle passion. To leave Montreal is to experience the pain of loss – the kind reserved for lost love. I believe Montreal - with its coursing contradictions and intense beauty - is one of the only fully formed places in North America. I've been spoiled and have traveled to Paris, Jerusalem, New York, Saigon,

The Territory

Geographic Coverage: The centre of the island of Montreal

Geographic Location: The corner of Duluth and Saint-Urbain streets in Montreal

Population: The organization operates with young volunteers who assist the elderly or people who are living with a loss of mobility. The goal is to break the social isolation and to promote the development of an inclusive intergenerational community.

Economic Characteristics: Conservative estimates indicate that between 8 and 10 % of Canadians suffer or are at risk of suffering from hunger.¹

Social Characteristics: In 2000, an estimated 3.8 million Canadians will be age 65 and older. This constitutes 13 % of the population.

Athens, Bangkok, London, San Francisco... The corner of Duluth and St. Urbain is the most interesting place I've even been.¹

In 1994, after having refused a job in Toronto, Chris gave himself 12 months to find or create a job in Montreal. An entrepreneur by nature, his interest was perked when he heard about the some youth funds for the development of community projects. He then had the idea of involving Café Santropol in the project and transposing the organizational dynamic of the cafe onto a community organization for young people. After a series of brainstorming sessions and an exploration of various community food security initiatives, Chris developed the idea of a meals-on-wheels program where deliveries would be done by young people. Once the idea was launched, Keith came on board and they worked together to bring the project to life.

To familiarize themselves with the principles and activities of meals-on-wheels, the two examined the existing meals-on-wheels programs in Montreal. They were very surprised to learn that the great majority of persons who delivered the meals were relatively old, i.e. between 50 and 75 years. They also noted that meals-on-wheels does much more than just deliver meals: it allows the participants (clients) – largely people who live alone – to be with someone else for a moment and to thus break their daily isolation.

History

Santropol Roulant delivered its first meals in 1995. During its setup phase, the organization benefited from a variety of subsidies from Emploi Québec and from Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC). They also greatly benefited from the expertise and generosity of the owners of Café Santropol, who helped them write a business plan, establish contacts in the food sector and allowed them to use the Café's kitchen for a certain time.

Since Santropol's founding, the Montreal community and other partners have welcomed it with much enthusiasm. Seeing young people get involved with the aging population or those living with a loss of autonomy is appreciated by all. Partnerships and collaborations then developed naturally. To chart their course, Chris and Keith established direct links with the Montreal meals-on-wheels network and with the Local Community Service Centres (CLSC) of the areas Santropol served.

Santropol Roulant is ideally located close to educational institutions. Links between the organization and nearby universities formed rapidly, in particular with McGill, the alma mater of Chris and Keith. The two entrepreneurs succeeded in involving young people who want to know more about their community, mostly students who come from outside of Montreal who are in the city for their studies.

In 1996, the project *Generation Outreach (GO)*, financed by the McConnell Family Foundation and HRDC, allowed Santropol to extend its reach to four post-secondary educational institutions: McGill, Concordia, the University du Québec à Montréal and the Cégep du Vieux-Montreal. The GO project incites students from the participating institutions to get involved in their community. Santropol Roulant delivers the meals to the institutions, from where the students carry out the distribution to clients.

In 2003, HRDC stopped its funding, obliging Santropol Roulant to decrease the number of participating educational institutions from four to three. Funding from the McGill and Concordia Public Interest Research Groups allowed those universities to stay on board for longer, but today McGill is the only university with ties to Santropol Roulant.

Like all organizations, Santropol Roulant has experienced challenging periods that have forced it to make some adjustments. For example, its territory grew, the participation of volunteers fluctuated, the requirements and priorities of financial providers changed and the staff experienced periods of exhaustion. Despite everything, Santropol Roulant succeeded in maintaining its services thanks to a network of loyal partners.

Between 1998 and 1999, Santropol Roulant had three executive directors. In 1999, the new executive director implemented adjustments in human resources management which then led to a new stability for the organization. That newly gained stability and approach allowed the organization to consolidate its know-how and to develop activities that complement the meals-on-wheels program.

In 2001, in its sixth year of existence, the members of Santropol Roulant decided to review and strengthen the mission of the organization. To do so, they applied a process of strategic planning with the assistance of the Centre for Community Organizations (COCO)².

As part of this process, Santropol Roulant matured and developed organizational reflexes to ensure its survival. For example, it decreased its dependence on governmental subsidies by diversifying its services and its sources of revenue so that now a significant portion of the financing comes from donations from former volunteers or collaborators. In fact, the organization can count on a network of more than 1,000 partners. Those partners – individuals or organizations who are involved of one way or another in the development of the organization – are regularly informed about the activities of Santropol Roulant.

Santropol Roulant

Year Incorporated – 1995

Activities and Services – Delivery of meals and cooking, intergenerational project, rooftop gardening, bike workshop

Data and Results – A network of over 1,000 persons to support it at any point in time; 100 volunteers per week; 120 participants/ clients per week; 10 to 20 volunteers per day for the delivery of meals; 80 to 90 meal deliveries per day

Awards – Prix Armand-Marquiset, Les petits frères des Pauvres, 2002; Prix Père-Marcel-de-la-Sablonnière, La Fédération de l'âge du Québec, 2002; Prix Claude Masson for young volunteers for Nadira Ramharry, a volunteer of long standing; "One of Canada's Best-Run Charities", Globe and Mail, 2000; Launch of the 25 cent coin "Wisdom", Royal Canadian Mint Millenium Coin Series, 2000; Prix Téléglobe for community service, 1998; Peter F. Drucker Award for innovation in the non-profit sector (silver), 1997

Future Projects – Santropol Roulant is presently pursuing various development strategies, in particular a strategy that will promote intergenerational exchanges.

Activities

Santropol Roulant has many activities that were initiated by its employees and volunteers. Its main activity is the meals-on-wheels program. Other activities are all linked to this program in one way or another. In this section, the main activities of Santropol Roulant are presented: the meals-on-wheels, the intergenerational community, the Rooftop gardens and the bike workshop.

i. Meals-on-Wheels – The Kitchen and Meal Delivery

The meals-on-wheels program relies on many volunteers who are recruited either by word of mouth or through the GO program. The GO project encourages students from McGill to get involved in their community.



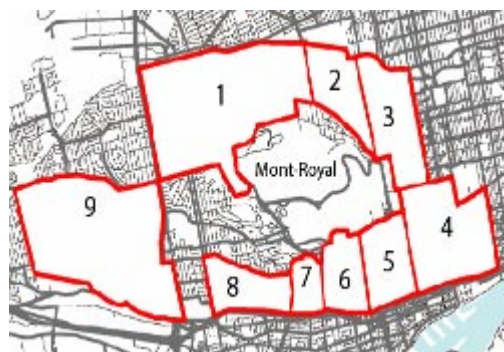
It is also interesting to note that the delivered meals are not free: participants (who receive the meals) must pay a small sum of \$3.50 per meal. The service is offered 5 days a week, 52 weeks a year.

The young meals-on-wheels volunteers work either in the kitchen or deliver the meals. Those who work in the kitchen prepare the meals, pack them and clean up. The kitchen team offers 30 different menu choices that take account of allergies, food preferences and other needs (diabetes, food intolerances, etc.) of their clientele. The kitchen team is also responsible for making chai tea for Café Santropol (the sale of the beverage provides the organization with some revenue).

Santropol Roulant then delivers the meals to secondary schools and to participating cégeps (colleges) as part of the GO project. Those locations serve as distribution points from where the volunteer couriers pick up the meals and begin their delivery. The couriers start their shift at around 3 pm and carry out the deliveries by foot, bike or car.

Santropol delivers to nine different boroughs in Montreal, with downtown being the main service territory. Among these boroughs are Westmount and Outremont, the two richest districts in Montreal. In that context, it is worth noting that, when selecting its clientele, Santropol Roulant considers a combination of factors that are not restricted to financial status.

The Santropol Roulant takes care not to overload the schedules of the couriers so that they can spend some quality time with the participants. This is important as the couriers of the Santropol Roulant are sometimes the only people with whom the participants are in contact during the week. It is a gesture that may seem negligible, but which the participants appreciate enormously.



For us seniors we have the opportunity to talk about our lives and be reminded of our value as contributing members of our community. There is something very fulfilling for someone of my age to be equal with someone young instead of being 'old grandma.'³ S. Raphaels, 86 years, member

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Côte des neiges | 6. McGill Ouest |
| 2. Outremont | 7. Downtown |
| 3. Plateau | 8. Westmount |
| 4. Centre-sud | 9. Notre-Dame de Grâce |
| 5. McGill | |

The young volunteers can also draw valuable lessons from that experience:

The simple experience of delivering meals to seniors can change the way young people see the world. This is one of the founding ideas behind Santropol Roulant.⁴

Around that activity, which is the centerpiece of the Santropol Roulant, other complementary activities have taken root.

Since the very beginning in 1995, we have complemented the essential service [meals-on-wheels] with numerous socializing activities that allow our clients, largely senior citizens living with a loss of autonomy, to continue to be a part of our community at large.⁵

ii. The Intergenerational Community – Intergenerational Project

As mentioned before, the goal of Santropol Roulant is to promote the development of an intergenerational community. For that purpose, the organization regularly organizes intergenerational activities within the framework of the meals-on-wheels program. The nature of the activities is diverse. For traditional holidays such as Christmas, Saint Valentines and Halloween, the Santropol Roulant organizes get-togethers between volunteers and participants (clients). Some of these events try to gather all participants and volunteers while others are held on a smaller scale, such as dinners for 6 to 10 persons. In this way, volunteers or participants who are less at ease in large groups also have the occasion to socialize. The goal of these activities is:

to bring our community together in new and more meaningful ways and to break down the barriers and stereotypes between generations. In this way, we hope to create a sustainable intergenerational community in and around Santropol Roulant and to develop strong connections between people of all ages and backgrounds.⁶

iii. Rooftop Gardening

The Rooftop Gardening activity was initiated by a Santropol Roulant volunteer who wanted to strengthen the “green and sustainable” aspect of the organization, i.e. the use of recycled paper, organic cleaning products as well as meals made with organic foods.

The Rooftop Gardens project is carried out in partnership with Alternatives, a Montréal-based international solidarity organization. This innovative partnership allows urban agriculture experiences to be shared between an international community network and a local community organization working on food security issues.



The project has two aspects: first of all, it informs Montreal citizens about urban agriculture so that the community as a whole can become greener. Secondly, the food grown in the demonstration gardens is harvested for the Santropol Roulant meals-on-wheels program.

iv. Bike Workshop

The bike workshop is a regular project each summer. It evolved out of Santropol Roulant's need to maintain its fleet of bikes (used by volunteers for meal delivery) in good condition, but also out of a concern to protect volunteers by preventing accidents during deliveries.

Maintenance of the bikes is the principal recurring activity of the bike workshop. However, every year diverse complementary activities take life around the workshop, depending on the aptitudes and the energy of the workshop coordinator. The bike workshop coordinator is hired for his or her personality and not strictly for technical knowledge. He or she is also regularly invited to participate in other Santropol Roulant activities.

The workshop coordinator has significant leeway as to the way in which services are offered and what complementary activities are organized. In past years, the bike workshop took on relatively diverse orientations. Santropol Roulant was able to experiment with a project that took the form of a bike repair cooperative and a more educational project on ecological transportation.

Participatory and Comprehensive Analysis

The Santropol Roulant intervenes on the two economic and social issues of food security and social isolation of persons living with a loss of autonomy, mainly the elderly. To accomplish its mission, the organization emphasizes two key elements: complementary activities (as mentioned above) and an “organic approach”.

The abundant literature on the organization as well as an interview with one of the staff members clearly showed that the organization has a unique approach that it can call its own. It could be called an “organic approach”, in reference to their evaluation tool, the “organic evaluation”. Moreover, Santropol Roulant is part of the research project *Labo Vivant* financed by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, which seeks to transfer the Santropol Roulant approach to other organizations.

The “organic approach” is characterized by four key elements: 1. A continual development process; 2. Sufficient flexibility to stimulate innovation; 3. Consideration of the Intervention Context; and 4. Rigour in the development of projects, which are oriented by the mission and the objectives of the organization.

Project Framework

Mission – Break down social and economic isolation between generations by using food as a vehicle for ideas and actions towards a healthy and vibrant community. Engage a range of people to play an active role in their community through initiatives that address food security, loss of autonomy and health.

Focus of Action – Intervene to support food security; reduce social exclusion; break down gaps between generations; involve young people in the community as volunteers

Conceptual Model – Organic evaluation

Supportive Policies – Youth policy; volunteer policy; policies on supporting the elderly; salary subsidies from Emploi Québec and Human Resources Development Canada

Success Factors – Start-up assistance from the Café Santropol; employment policy to promote the participation of young people; location of the organization; organic approach; existence of a support network in the case of a crisis.

i. A Continual Development Process

Santropol Roulant is not a finalized project or an organization that charts its course with long-term development plans. Rather, it is a project that is constantly in an evolution dictated by the energy of its current and former employees and volunteers. The diverse activities that have shaped the organization have happened because certain employees and volunteers – and even certain clients (by their critiques and observations) – have believed in the organization and in the importance of its contributions.

Gradually, Santropol Roulant developed activities different from existing ones. That improvement was made possible by the organization's efforts to inform itself about the satisfaction and the concerns of its employees, volunteers and clients. That process has moreover been formalized in a document entitled "organic evaluation":

The organic evaluation allows for the natural emergence of problems through conversation, questioning and reflection. A close connection to the problems results in energy, speed and appropriateness in addressing them. It also allows us to get to the root of a problem.⁷

The approach of Santropol Roulant promotes the development of a stimulating environment where exchange, reflection and questioning are valued. Every week, the organization takes the time to update its activities, improve the quality of its services and allow for the emergence of new ideas.

That process of continued development is promoted by the organizational culture, in particular in the flexibility given to staff and in the participatory approach toward volunteers and employees.

ii. Sufficient Flexibility to Promote Innovation

Santropol Roulant's approach also offers its employees and volunteers an exceptional flexibility that allows them to become developers of social projects. The Rooftop Garden project is a concrete example of a project that resulted from this approach. Rooftop Gardening developed from a series of discussions on the subject and was developed thanks to the technical knowledge of certain employees and partners and, above all, thanks to the energy of one employee and of partners such as Alternatives who believed in the project. The project

aims to promote the use of roofs for the production of food and the development of new green spaces in urban spaces with the goal of creating an environment favorable to the health and well-being of the community.⁸

Today, the project mobilizes many partners such as Alternatives, an organization that promotes the concept on an international level.

The approach of Santropol Roulant offers adequate flexibility because it does not place the emphasis on the means but rather on the objectives and the mission of the organization. Rather than imposing ways of doing things, the management encourages creativity and the involvement of its employees and volunteers. Santropol Roulant hires people not strictly on the basis of their qualifications, but rather for who the person is and the energy she or he can contribute to the organization.

iii. Consideration of the Intervention Context

This characteristic means taking consideration of the context within which Santropol's activities take place, notably with respect to the target clientele (the participants) and the non-specialized volunteers.

First of all, the clients are people who are somewhat isolated from the rest of society. Santropol Roulant certainly responds to the issue of food security, but it also responds to the issue of social inclusion. The volunteers who deliver the meals have a relatively flexible schedule which allows them to learn about the daily concerns of the clients. To ensure that quality of relationship, Santropol Roulant avoids overloading the schedules of the volunteers. Unfortunately, however, that also implies limiting the number of clients.

Santropol Roulant furthermore places importance on the well-being of the volunteers and employees. Just as the clients are served, the employees and the young volunteers should also be served in the sense that they should feel that they are appreciated and that they evolve together. To that effect, the Santropol Roulant states that:

Our goal is to respond to the basic needs of a vulnerable population and to do so with dignity. It is also to inspire and equip young people to identify and address the issues they see around them with imagination and passion – to get involved, to participate and together to work towards the changes we want to see.⁹

In addition to light schedules for the volunteers, Santropol Roulant applies tools and a simple management style that facilitate the participation of all and leave room for innovation.

iv. Rigour in the Development of Projects Oriented by the Mission and the Objectives of the Organization

All the activities of the organization are related to its mission which is:

[to use] food as a vehicle to break social and economic isolation between generations and to strengthen and nourish our local community. We engage a diversity of people to take an active role in their communities through initiatives that address the health and food security needs of seniors and Montrealers living with a loss of autonomy.¹⁰

Despite the flexibility given to staff, the actions and activities always remain directly linked to the mission and the objectives of the organization. Before validating or implementing an activity, the members of the organization consider its relevance to Santropol's mission and objectives. The capacity of the organization of stay loyal to its first mission comes from the organic evaluation process. That process encourages staff members and volunteers to question themselves regularly, to reflect together and to share the concerns among each other and with their partners.

Outcomes and Evaluation

The organization succeeded in implementing a meals-on-wheels program that delivers meals to more than 120 persons living with in loss of autonomy per week. That service, as well as its complementary services, allow those persons to stay in contact with the outside world and to feel included in a society that operates on a different rhythm. The meals-on-wheels service also gives those persons the possibility to stay at home. It could even be suggested that the services

provided by Santropol Roulant enable the government to save money. With the choice to stay at home, the clients avoid having to be institutionalized and to thus be under the responsibility of the state. As a consequence, the government avoids considerable costs for infrastructure and services.

The organization also allows more than 100 young volunteers per week to interact with their community. Santropol Roulant offers those young people the opportunity to become aware of the problems of their neighbourhood, to acknowledge the necessity of getting involved, and to understand that they can be part of the solution. Santropol Roulant is in a way a school of life, where the gratitude of the clients allows the volunteers to realize the impact of their social involvement. Santropol Roulant is also a meeting place for young people who feel like contributing to society in an active and constructive way and a place where peers serve as counsellors, transmitting knowledge and perpetuating traditions.

Success Factors and Conclusions

In assessing the success of the Santropol Roulant project, five main factors that play a role or have worked in favour of the organization should be considered. Those success factors are not exhaustive and some of them are interrelated. They are: 1. the participation of the Café Santropol for the launch of the organization; 2. the presence of youth programs; 3. the location and the community ambiance; 4. the organic approach; and 5. the support network.

From its start, the Santropol Roulant could count on an experienced partner, the Café Santropol. The owners allowed Santropol Roulant to benefit from their expertise and their supply network. They also helped the two young entrepreneurs, Chris and Keith, in setting up their business plan. Moreover, a part of the approach valued by Santropol Roulant goes back to the organizational culture of the small cafe at the corner of Duluth and Saint-Urban. The relationship between the two organizations, although modified over the years, continues until today.

Santropol Roulant also benefited from private and government youth programs – assistance programs which are crucial in the start-up phase. The contributions of Emploi Québec and Human Resources Development Canada gave, for the early years, stability to the organization. Foundations such as the *McConnell Family Foundation* also offered valuable support in the start-up phase. Today, programs for volunteer support and for the elderly are greatly appreciated by the Foundation.

Among the factors which have contributed to Santropol Roulant's development of are no doubt its location and setting. Santropol Roulant certainly offers mobilizing activities and a strong social mission. However, as emphasized by Chris Godsall in his quote at the beginning of this text, the organization evolved in a special neighbourhood. The proximity of large green spaces provides a festive and welcoming ambiance. The proximity to the universities – two of which are anglophone with a great proportion of students coming from outside of the city – is also a favourable factor for Santropol Roulant. That ambiance that is unique to the district is reflected inside the walls of the organization - a stimulating place where it is agreeable to work and share ideas.

Another success factor is the organic approach, which offers volunteers and employees sufficient leeway to feel that they are part of the adventure. It is an approach which the founders valued and which, despite time and some deviations, has remained and endured. That mode of

Santropol Roulant

operation takes each individual into consideration and ensures that each finds their place within the larger Santropol Roulant community.

Last but not least, the long-term development of a network of more than 1,000 collaborators is a success factor. That network is composed of financial partners, former volunteers or employees, and of other people who have participated in their way to the Santropol Roulant community. The strength of that network figures as a gauge of success and is also a guarantee of its future.

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For more of information about Santropol Roulant, visit: <http://www.santropolroulant.org/>

Notes

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For more Profiles of Effective Practices and other resources on social inclusion, go to:

<http://www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/en/pages/learningnetwork.asp>

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