

Brief

***The State of the Profession
of the
Spiritual Care, Guidance and Community Animation Service
in the
Province of Québec***

Prepared by:

David-Roger Gagnon – Former Spiritual and Community Animator

Frank Lofeodo – Education Consultant for Guidance and Spiritual & Community Animation - Retired

30 June, 2016

Preamble

The 25% cuts to the Spiritual Care, Guidance and Community Animation Service, and the un-dedicating of Mesure 30070, known as Mesure 15120, had a significantly negative impact on the service to students. We would like to respectfully request that the government reconsider the 25% budget reductions imposed on the Spiritual Care, Guidance and Community Involvement Animation Service. (We refer to this work as Spiritual & Community Animation). Boards within the English Sector have always remained faithful to the Spiritual & Community Animation service as outlined in Bill 118 and see the 25% cut as inequitable. As an example of this commitment, English School Boards have invested significant amounts of money for the past 19 years in this service for aspects such as: Initial transitional work from Pastoral to Spiritual Care with Concordia University; for on-going Professional Development and training; and to staff teams of full-time Spiritual & Community Animators. Our boards have maintained the vision of Bill 118 since its inception in 2000.

Additionally, we would respectfully request a restoration of mesures monies that are specifically dedicated to the work of Spiritual Care, Guidance and Community Involvement Animation across Québec. Known formally as Mesure 30070, and currently Mesure 15120, the removal of the specific dedication of these funds has left the discretion of its use to the school boards. This has meant severe cuts across Québec to the Spiritual & Community Animation Service to students, which is mandated by the Education Act. We are very concerned about the impact of this un-dedication of the mesure is having on the profession and service as a whole across Québec. Spiritual & Community Animators are the only professional group who can serve students in this area because they are specifically trained to do so.

We are also concerned about what we perceive to be a misunderstanding of the nature of this profession and how it serves students in schools across Québec. We fear that there is some lack of clarity between religion in schools, which this work is not, and supporting the spiritual/moral element of students' lives and sense of community service, which is at the heart of this work.

Outlined below are reasons that we feel strongly justify a reconsideration of budget reductions and un-dedication of mesures imposed with respect to the English Sector School Boards as well as the preservation of Spiritual & Community Animation Services in both English and French schools.

Spiritual Care, Guidance and Community Animation Service: The Background

As outlined in the document *The Spiritual Care and Guidance and Community Involvement Service*, the Québec government published new orientations (Bill 118 in the 36th legislature) on the place of religion in schools in a document entitled *Québec's Public Schools: Responding to the Diversity of Moral and Religious Expectations* in the spring of 2000. Among other things, these orientations recommended that the pastoral animation service offered to Catholic students and the religious animation service offered to Protestant students be replaced with a spiritual care, guidance and community involvement service offered to all students.

These new orientations led to major changes in the Education Act:

- Students other than those enrolled in vocational training or adult education **are entitled** to student services in spiritual care and guidance and community involvement. (Art. 6)
- A school is an educational institution whose object is to provide to the persons entitled thereto, under section 1, the educational services provided for by this Act and prescribed by the basic school regulation established by the Government under section 447 and to contribute to the social and cultural development of the community. A school **shall**, in particular, facilitate the spiritual development of students so as to promote self-fulfilment. (Art. 36)
- Every school board shall ensure that **schools offer to all students**, services for spiritual care and guidance and community involvement. (Art. 226)

Spiritual & Community Animation: The Situation Today

Our School Boards has remained faithful to the letter of the law, and the spirit of the law, as stipulated in Bill 118. We have invested 19 years of significant financial resources, time and effort into the Spiritual & Community Animation Service and are proud of how our Services have remained true to our commitment and delivery of Bill 118.

The Spiritual & Community Animation Service is an essential service to students as it is the only volet that educates the heart, and helps our students become more intelligent in compassion, justice and the care of others. Many recent studies show that compassion education is a primary factor in raising the successful learning level in all other academic learning. We encourage our students to excel in justice and care for others so that they can equally excel in math, science, music or physical education. Additionally, programmes such as mentoring programmes, in place in many schools under the direction of Spiritual & Community Animators, build relationships between students and promote self-worth of those participating, as well as fostering respect for and development of their peers.

In our boards, the success of this service is rooted in the consistent presence of the Spiritual & Community Animator in the elementary and high schools they serve, building a relationship with the students with each passing year. The Spiritual & Community Animators are the only professional group that can address certain issues in the elementary level, and revisit these issues again with the students when they reach high school. Drug dependency and sensitization is just one issue among many that serve as examples.

Thus, Spiritual & Community Animation teaches our students to demonstrate compassion and engage in community service, developing their self-worth and strengthening their confidence and sense of worth as a person who can make a positive difference. We are raising the next generation of active citizens, which requires the formation of conscience, values, and an awareness in our students of the people and the environment around them. Based on the context of today's society with respect to acute individualism as the trend, the Spiritual & Community Animation Service is essential in moving the students from "I" to "US" and to a realization of the importance of the collective good. The service teaches students not only the 'how to' questions, but the 'why do' questions. Some students served by our schools present with a spiritual practice or philosophical tradition that is a tool in their toolkit of protective factors. The Spiritual & Community Animators are the only professional group trained to support the student in the development of this protective factor according to the practice with which the student is familiar.

Through implementation of the model that was introduced as a result of Bill 118, Spiritual & Community Animators implement the in-school work in many areas, including:

- Trauma and loss – helping students, their families and the school as a whole through times of crisis and facilitating the healthy living of the moment in a spirit of hope and respect.
- Bill 56 and Anti-Bullying Programmes (Red Cross ("*Beyond The Hurt*"), Ometz, & La Fondation Jasmin-Roy ("*Toolkit for Schools*") & Safe School Committees (Bill 56).
- Successful Transition programmes from preschool to Kindergarten; Grade 6 to High School, which include the creation of supportive materials and programming.
- Healthy Schools: Prevention & Promotion (Axe 1) in areas including: substance abuse, awareness and prevention (e.g. tobacco, alcohol, drugs, gambling), healthy lifestyle choices, relationships, healthy environment. (80% of Prevention & Promotion work is done by Spiritual & Community Animators)
- Promotion of *Hooked on School Programme/Persévérance scolaire* – including the development of peer-to-peer initiatives, such as Mentoring Programming in schools; orientation activities and other incentives and inspirational programmes to help students complete their educational toolbox.
- Spiritual development, is sometimes called Character or Virtues education. This type of learning helps students to make wise decisions and to *discern* right from wrong. We are engaged in helping students develop spiritual/ethical maturity and emotional literacy.
- Development of core values as the basis of critical thinking – teaching students to act and think ethically and compassionately.
- Advancement of understanding and acceptance among cultures, and facilitating dialogue between cultural groups, and helping people understand beyond surface differences.
- Values education with the lenses of Religious practices as teaching tools (i.e. Teaching about *Welcome* and *Inclusion* and referring to Diwali; Teaching about *Forgiveness* and *Starting Over* and referencing Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Lent).
- Instilling a sense of identity and belonging – encouraging students to become active members of their school, their local community and the global community.
- Responding to concerns of radicalisation through inter-spiritual dialogue, through the instilled sense of belonging, and a deeper understanding of and respect for spiritual diversity.
- Development of social conscience such as the importance of making a difference through community service, e.g. food banks, soup kitchens, seniors visits, community fundraising programmes for research, etc.

All of this work is carried out by Spiritual & Community Animators through a highly effective service-provision model with a proven track record that is respected throughout the Province of Québec. The Spiritual & Community Animation Service goes above and beyond, and is distinct from the work of the ERC programmes in its delivery, content, and community-based approach.

The programme fosters deeper understanding among cultures. The Spiritual & Community Animator is the specialist most appropriately trained to help build the dialogue that raises the understanding levels between the different groups. This is a reality throughout our very diverse school boards, where, from day to day and from school to school, this service has a significant impact.

Spiritual & Community Animation: Looking Towards the Future

We are committed to pursuing the delivery of a well-established and well-respected Spiritual & Community Animation programmes and our hope is that the CAQ Government amend Bill 40 to preserve The Spiritual Care, Guidance & Community Involvement Animation Service as presently structured in the Education Act. We are proud of our achievements since the inception of the Service in 2000, and of the important role that our Spiritual & Community Animators occupy in the development of and impact on the day-to-day lives of our students and their families. We believe in the value of the programme and its place in the complete education of our students: body, mind and spirit. This is “Education of the Heart”.

Given the importance of this matter to students and their families, we respectfully request that the Spiritual Care, Guidance & Community Involvement Animation Service be maintained as part of the Education Act.

Our Recommendations

- That the Ministry maintain The Spiritual Care, Guidance & Community Involvement Animation Service as presently structured in the Education Act.
- That the Ministry restore Mesure 30070 as a dedicated funding envelope specifically for Spiritual Care, Guidance & Community Involvement Animation
- That the Ministry restore the 25% funding that was cut from the budget specifically supporting Spiritual Care, Guidance & Community Involvement Animation
- That the Ministry recommit to insuring that school boards across Québec adhere to Bill 118 and the Education Act and restore the positions which are directly funded under Mesure 30070
- That the Ministry provide clear directives on how to implement Bill 118 and the funding provided by the mesures, in order to hold school boards accountable for how the service is shaped and how the mesures funds are spent, and to insure that the way the work is done is consistent with the vision of Bill 118