

LE PORTE-VOIX

At the heart of relational health



♥ FOR MEANING AND FOR HOPE

After a year of pandemic during which any mention of COVID traumatizes us, I won't talk to you about homelessness, or curfews, or violence. Neither will I talk about feminicide or climate change, migration and genocide.

Rather, I will talk to you about health that offers hope. Global health, which is physical, mental and also relational, and which the whole planet needs so very much.

I will talk to you about this relational health, which helps us better understand violence, trauma and post-traumatic stress. Because, once again, the advancement of science and knowledge is enabling us, as humans with complex brains and a consciousness we are very proud of, to push back the frontiers of fear and ignorance, to live in harmony and security with ourselves and others, and with our environment. To find hope once again.

Because neither the loathsomeness of guilt or shame need be the destiny of a trauma survivor. Because good and evil, stripped of all moral character, whether physical, mental, relational or spiritual, are about well-being and healing, for the good, and about suffering and injury, for evil.

Yes, there is also the evil that manifests itself in violence, homelessness, racism, sexism, colonialism, fundamentalism, wars... But this evil conceals the wounded and suffering, men and women who are human beings and who need help, solidarity and consideration in order to heal and flourish.

♥ FRIDAY, MARCH 5, 2021

I've been asked to write about what motivates me, about my commitment to La rue des Femmes. So I'm sharing my day today with you.

It's 7:30 a.m. I accompany K to the birth of her daughter. K has settled in at Jacqueline House, where she has slowly re-created a secure, loving and understanding family, and where she can — finally! — dare to find the hope to heal the relational wounds that have condemned her to a life of survival. I am there to reassure her, to be her voice, to defend her right to exist, to be her safety net... so that she can surrender to the vulnerability that the situation requires. I am there so that she is not alone... that solitude she knows so well.

At 10.13 p.m., I have the great honour of seeing K take her daughter in her arms, of witnessing K for the first time radiant, overwhelmed by motherly love. Then, quite naturally because she trusts me, she places her daughter in my arms. A moment of purity, humility and great respect.

It was a day filled with emotions, excitement and contradictions: love and fear, happiness and despair, wonder and reality. Today, little Aaliyah and her mother met in the cycle of deep relational wounds and suffering. This essential and vital encounter of love, which will mark the eternity of both, will be fleeting... 48 hours to fill their cells with their memories of each other.

It's 12:05 a.m., I'm back home, inhabited by the fragility and beauty of life, by the power of suffering. Self-surrender and love... the price of survival to give life to her daughter.



Photo : Kathleen Girard / Studio Kat Kennedy

And who have a heart, the core of relational health.

Because a healthy relational world is a caring and inclusive world that neither disqualifies nor overqualifies anyone. Because a healthy relational world paves the way for resilience and hope, for happiness for all, with equality; for the happiness of living together, the foundation of our humanity.

So, in a world that is full of mandatory and all-too-often painful passages, in order to grow up healthy and equal, this time we might say, as did French neuropsychiatrist Boris Cyrulnik in an interview with Céline Galipeau on Radio-Canada in March: "Ça valait la peine de souffrir!" (the suffering was worth it!). For meaning and for hope...

**Léonie Couture, C.M., C.Q.
Founding President**

Will K and Aaliyah ever meet again... who knows! But our job is to make sure that if that day comes, K will have healed her relational wounds, and will have built a foundation for serene and nurturing relationships. For the past 15 years, my role at La rue des Femmes has been to provide the care and healing that allows women experiencing homelessness to regain the life that was stolen from them.

K wanted to share with you this precious moment of profound happiness and peace; and it was with all the pride and love of a new mother that she said to me: "Show them my daughter, she is so beautiful, I want everyone to see her!". Meet Aaliyah!



**Ann-Gaël Whiteman
Coordinator, Jacqueline House**

♥ LRDF DURING THE PANDEMIC

2020 statistics

- **1,000** women helped
- **511** women sheltered
- **65,597** meals served
- **1,200** times per month, a woman received a service at the door
- **150** women who received telephone follow-ups (no longer having access to the day centres)
- **136** women who received therapeutic relational health care and services by telephone, online or in individual meetings



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Thanks to our printer



♥ WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY

I am surrounded by women. I have an amazing mother, five sisters, two daughters and two daughters-in-law. In May 2018, when I became Executive Director of the Caisse du Complexe Desjardins, I learned that we had been partners with La rue des Femmes for 15 years. I was drawn to the cause and totally taken with Léonie.

I made the connection between my family's solidarity and the solidarity of the people who are part of La rue des Femmes. Another similarity with the guide, the family head, and Léonie, who believes that we should all have the same opportunity: to be well supported, protected, listened to and, above all, to be greatly loved in life. I am very inspired by this generous woman and admire her strength of character in helping homeless women obtain more than a roof over their heads.

Initially, I was involved in the Gala de la santé relationnelle to mark the 25th anniversary of La rue des Femmes. I used my connections to raise awareness of the organization and funds

for the benefit of women. In January 2020, I joined the Foundation's Board of Directors and I have witnessed the great engagement of these directors and the solid values of the people around us.

*The major fundraising campaign **More Than a Roof...Healing Homelessness** – which aims to treat more women experiencing homelessness more quickly and to establish La rue des Femmes as a relational health institute – is close to my heart and I know that we have all the resources to achieve it.* I believe in it and I know that with the strength of a team, we will be able to give dignity to all these women who deserve our solidarity.



Nathalie Tremblay

Executive Director, Caisse du Complexe Desjardins

Member of the La rue des Femmes Foundation Board of Directors

♥ THE THINGS THAT MOVE US FORWARD

When I started working at La rue des Femmes in the spring of 2019, I was a housekeeper. My day started early in the morning. While vacuuming, I would smile, sing, and share my good mood with the women.

During the first lockdown, I had to change my working hours. The surfaces in the premises had to be disinfected more frequently, and the maintenance workers now had to rotate their shifts over a longer period of time, so I started working in the evening. This new schedule changed my routine and brought me into contact with many more women, as well as closer to the support workers.

I was present at supper time when things can be hectic. I often had to consult with the support workers and warn them of unforeseen circumstances that required their adaptation. I saw their work up close. I was fascinated by their serenity and inner strength. Something inside me made me want to do what they

did, even if their work seemed demanding.

In fact, it didn't take long for me to realize that I wanted to be part of their team, that I too could help, care for our women by being attentive to their needs. I wanted to make a difference in the lives of our participants who have not had it easy and who at times remind me of my sisters, my mother, my grandmothers.



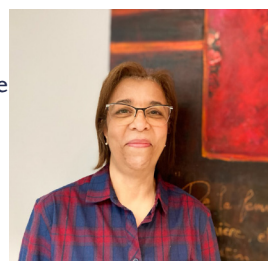
I've been a psychosocial worker for nine months now. Every day I learn to be a good listener, to be emotionally supportive and to love. I serve meals, often at the door, as COVID requires us to provide take-out, I make sure the women have clean clothes and enough blankets. I am confronted daily with situations that I would have thought were out of my control last year. I have grown. Thanks to our women, their trust, and the bond that connects us. I thank life for bringing me to where I am.

Marie-Danielle Coulombe

Psychosocial worker, at Olga House

♥ SPOTTED, AT THE DAHLIA CENTRE

In the six years that I have been at La rue des Femmes, I have worked in all three of its houses. It has enabled me to discover and understand all the miseries, physical or moral, that have pushed women into the cruel world of homelessness. I am currently at the Dahlia Centre – supervised studios to facilitate the return to a normal life. The event that made the biggest impact on me was this: **a woman came to me one afternoon to talk about her anguish regarding a job she had applied for. She was exhausted, as the process was long and demanding, yet her intense desire to succeed, her patience and perseverance were still evident.**



We were sitting in the office discussing this when the telephone rang and she answered. I saw the worried woman in front of me transform into a person filled with joy. Sighing, she unloaded a heavy burden that she had carried for a long time. Her facial expressions and her gestures emanated a positive message. She clutched the phone between her hands and her chest to finally tell me that she had been offered the job. She was savouring the caller's words as she absorbed the news. Her tears flowed freely, our eyes met in a compelling silence. I smiled at her and handed her a tissue without saying a word, giving her all the space she needed. I felt that, during this pause, she was journeying from illusion to reality, she was making room for the best that was yet to come for her final deliverance.

It was a brief moment, but very intense. It had allowed me to witness the success of an inspiring woman, who still had all her greatness and yet had not yet lived her life because, until then, she had suffered through it.

Leila Benaissa

Housing Manager, Dahlia Centre

♥ **Have you considered making a planned gift to La rue des Femmes?** Whether it's a gift of life insurance, a legacy gift, a gift of stock, or the creation of an endowment fund, planned giving is a way to perpetuate your generosity. To guide you in this process, **contact Mélissa Pilon, Fundraising agent, at mpilon@laruedesfemmes.org.**



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