

LE PORTE-VOIX

At the heart of relational health



♥ FOR HAPPINESS TOO...

The creation of La rue des Femmes and the development of its relational intervention approach were inspired by the concept of relational health. This led to its relational health teaching program, designed for La rue des Femmes’ workers and participants, but also for the various people involved in dealing with homelessness and conjugal violence who request it.

I have been accompanying women experiencing homelessness in their recovery for almost 30 years, and my work continues. Although relational health is defined as “the vital capacity to feel safe and secure, and to connect with oneself and others,” this is not a static description; it evolves with the experience we gain. It is also clear to me today that happiness is an integral component of good relational health.

This has led me to reformulate the definition of relational health as “a state of profound well-being that enables the vital capacity to feel safe, secure, connected and happy with oneself and others.”

Relational health is the foundation of total health, along with mental and physical health.

The loss of our relational health impacts our mental and physical health.

Relational health is damaged by violence and trauma, and these directly affect our capacities to feel safe, secure and connected, which are its heart and its source.



Photo : Kathleen Girard / Studio Kat Kennedy

If these injuries are left untreated, this can lead to “hell on earth,”* a state of post-traumatic stress and homelessness. So, without these relational wounds being acknowledged and without the necessary care, the person risks losing everything and, ultimately, ending up on the streets, with increasingly less capacity for connection, safety, security and happiness. This is what we mean by the “state of homelessness.”

The ability to connect is essential and vital for the human being, whose rational brain cannot develop without the relational bath in which it is immersed from birth... for happiness!

Léonie Couture, C.M., C.Q.
President, Founder and Executive Director, La rue des Femmes

* “Trauma can be hell on earth, but when transformed, it is a divine gift.” – Peter Levine, American psychotherapist, specialist in trauma therapy.

♥ MARIE, LA RUE DES FEMMES’ LITTLE RAY OF SUNSHINE!



After studying graphic design at university, Marie, who is particularly attracted to “ecodesign” and 3D artwork, started her own company revitalizing objects and clothing. A stain on a pair of pants? A few brush strokes and you have a unique piece! An item found abandoned on the street? Marie sees it as a potential work of art!

“After a few years of having my own thrift store where I sold my creations, I wanted to put some colour in the world! I was tired of making art for art’s sake; I wanted to pay it forward. For me, art should be for everyone!”

A woman who has always had a keen interest in psychology and philosophy, she saw a publication by La rue des Femmes on a popular social network. Intrigued, she inquired about the organization and... wanted to work there!

“I was inspired by La rue des Femmes’ mission,” says Marie. “I decided to write to tell them that I wanted to work with women experiencing homelessness. I explained my plan to them: to bring art to these women who have nothing left. Art in all its forms! To help them see the most mundane of objects, like a rock or a can, as a possible work of art.” She adds enthusiastically: “I believe that changing their perception of the objects they see just lying around can lead them to change their perception of themselves.”

Her proposal, and especially her energy and infectious good humour, appealed to the Clinical Director.

And for a year now, Marie has been the leader of creative activities, Theatre trips, art gallery visits, dancercize, choir and art creation... Marie is an all-round talent who likes to push the participants’ limits. “They all have talents!,” she insists. “You just have to help them to realize it, regain their self-confidence and recognize their strengths. They are so proud when they see that others like what they have done! It’s magical!”

The participants greatly appreciate Marie’s ability to listen, her authenticity and her thousand-and-one ideas. “I feel comfortable with them. We have fun together,” says Marie, singing as she returns to the day centre.



♥ **TREASURER... AND MUCH MORE!**

In the spring of 2018, the Association des Femmes en Finance du Québec (AFFQ) posted an advertisement that caught Gerarda Capece’s eye: La rue des Femmes needed a treasurer to sit on its Board of Directors.

Ms. Capece, who was eager to get involved in a cause, made inquiries and soon met with the Board Chair at the time, Lorraine Pilon, to discuss the non-profit organization’s mission and vision.

“My first reaction was ‘Wow!’ And when she told me about relational health, I fell off my chair!,” Ms. Capece says. “Even though my work experience is primarily in the health field, I had never heard of relational health. It was new to me. It resonated with me because it’s so true.” Since then, she has visited Olga House... in fact, she has done more than visit because, except for the pandemic years, Gerarda has participated in the Brunch des Reines, organized by the Board of La rue des Femmes every year since she joined. “This year I was the dishwasher!

The brunch is an opportunity for us, the Board members, to meet the La rue des Femmes participants. We are the ones who do everything at the brunch: preparing and serving the food... and even washing the dishes! Seeing these women who have lost everything and talking to them puts things in perspective,” she tells us.

She adds: “As Treasurer, I analyze the financial statements and attend Board meetings to report the results to the other directors.

And, since I really care about the cause, I act as a kind of spokesperson for La rue des Femmes among my friends, colleagues and family. I talk about my involvement and people are interested; they ask me questions about the organization and women experiencing homelessness. I think it’s impossible not to be touched by this cause!”

It is thanks to people who volunteer their time, like Gerarda, that La rue des Femmes can continue, day after day, to welcome and care for our society’s most broken women.

Thank you, Gerarda, for your unwavering support over the years!

Gerarda Capece, CPA, Director of Financial and Information Resources at Résidence Berthiaume-Du Tremblay, Treasurer of the Board of Directors of La rue des Femmes



♥ **A CLINIC FOR WOMEN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS**

One of the pillars of the La rue des Femmes Relational Health Institute, funded by the *More Than a Roof... Healing Homelessness* major fundraising campaign, the Jaclyn “Jackie” Fisher Outreach Clinic is an essential component of the overall healing process for women living in a state of homelessness. Its team consists of a medical care and follow-up counsellor and a relational health counsellor specializing in mental health and psychotraumatology, as well as a clinical nurse specializing in homelessness and a social worker who are part of the CIUSSS Centre-Sud-de-l’Île-de-Montréal outreach team.

Located inside Jacqueline House—a small house full of love and pain, but most of all deeply wounded and scarred women—the clinic enables women in a state of homelessness to be guided through their medical care in a completely safe and respectful manner.

Official opening

The Clinic’s official inauguration took place on March 30.

“We are proud to have contributed to the creation of this clinic, which responds to a pressing need: providing basic physical and mental health care to women experiencing homelessness,” said an emotional Rina Fisher, Jackie Fisher’s mother and Chair of the Jaclyn Fisher Foundation.

Rachel Fisher, Jackie’s sister, added: “This is certainly a cause Jackie would have embraced.” When she unveiled the plaque in memory of Jackie Fisher, Léonie Couture said: “This plaque will be installed near the clinic door to remind us of Jackie’s positive and inspiring actions.”

She concluded by adding that Jaclyn “Jackie” Fisher was “a role model for everyone.”



Left to right: Rachel Fisher, Léonie Couture, Rina Fisher, Larry Fisher et Catherine Op de Beeck.

DID YOU KNOW...

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