

NEWSLETTER CHRISTMAS 2020

maison de l'amitié

Romina Casa-Cordero works as a receptionist at the Maison de l'amitié.

Two years ago, she left her native Chili with her husband. She reflects on this beautiful adventure.

Conversation with Mathieu Stassart.



From the Cordillera to the Plateau

Mathieu Stassart: How did you end up at Maison de l'amitié?

Romina Casas-Cordero: When I landed in Montreal, I did not speak a word of French. I quickly understood that learning it was essential to my integration. After some initial research, I discovered that Maison de l'amitié, situated very close to my home, offered French classes at an affordable rate. When I had my placement test, the teacher showed me a pen and asked me "c'est quoi" (what is this)? I replied "I don't understand" and he put me in level 1 (laughs).

At the same time, I began volunteering at the reception. A few months later, Maison de l'amitié offered me a salaried position as a receptionist.

MS: What made you decide to get involved here?

RCC: On my first visit, I was welcomed in Spanish. I was so happy to be understood. I wanted to give back what I had been given. I also became involved as a personal challenge. In Chili, I was a physiotherapist. Here, I have had to begin my career path from scratch and, additionally, in a multilingual setting.

MS: What is your perspective as you look back at your journey in Quebec?

RCC: Before emigrating here, I had never left Chili. I had always lived in the same neighbourhood, in Santiago. This experience of living abroad has made me stronger. After two years in Montreal, I feel that I have accomplished many things. This experience has made me more open minded. Before, I had a

very strict life plan. Now I am open to all opportunities. I think I can do many things! Here at Maison de l'amitié, we meet people from everywhere. Here I have several friends who do not come from South America, I work with colleagues who do not speak my native language. The Maison de l'amitié has given me many opportunities to grow professionally and personally.

MS: What are your plans for the future?

RCC: My husband and I have a threeyear work permit. It ends in November of this year. My husband is thinking of reorienting his career-toward cinematographic animation. That will certainly bring us to moving to English Canada or the United States.

MS: Do you have a message for newcomers to Montreal?

RCC: Dare to do something different and don't be afraid to make mistakes! We are all human. Mistakes are part of the journey. Get involved in society, volunteer, even for simple tasks, and don't lose your self-confidence. Remember that you were capable of much more complex things in your country of origin. Even if it takes a while, it doesn't matter. Trying is the beginning of the journey. When a door closes, many more will open.

EMBRACING COMMUNITY



Taking on the wave - inhouse

It's Thursday afternoon. March 12. The pandemic has been trickling into Montreal for 2 weeks now and gaining momentum. Our treasurer James Bugden emails with information on the virus and says we will need to close our program, especially the language classes. The next day, a decision is made to close the building to programs beginning the following Monday. Staff come in that week to meet and discuss immediate casualties regarding the closing of classes: can we salvage the rest of the session by switching to online classes? The following week, staff is forced to go home. The board decides to lay us all off and staff is asked to go on the CERB relief program. All staff decide to continue working as volunteers.

Within two weeks, we have online classes going for 25% of the students who decide to continue and reimbursements are sent to the others by mail. Skipping the May/June session, staff prepare for a full session online with a new online processing system for the July/August session. What a burst of creativity and resilience from our staff and super volunteers that have permitted us to actually surf the wave! This was only possible because of the CERB program. Since September staff are back on salary and we plan online classes to continue until the end of June 2021.

Because of CERB and staff continuing to volunteer until this past August, we will be able to avoid ending the year in the red.

Taking on the wave - outdoor programs

The street music festival Duluth en Arts had to be cancelled as well as our neighborhood party (Fête des voisins). The Farmers' market looked dead in the water but our coordinator, Vincent Lacombat, fought tooth and nail to get it accepted as an essential service and meet all the restrictions. It was on, then off, then on again. The markets finally got going in July while also running two new markets that the borough wanted us to start. We have to thank the borough officials and city councillor for their great cooperation. We managed to organise the distributions of the flowers in June for the city. The street fair however, that was usually organised during the flower distribution, had to be cancelled.

Taking on the wave - with our neighbors

The pandemic put pressure on our foodbank partners Racine Croisée and Partage & Solidarité to increase their services. Racine Croisée used our main floor community spaces to store food and organize two distributions weekly until August 31st since the space was unused by the language classes. Partage & Solidarité, who collect unsold foods from local grocery stores and distribute from our sharing shack, were given a space in our building from which to distribute food. The other group in distress was our neighborhood merchants. Since we are members of the local merchant association as well as member of the board, we took leadership as representative to the various government entities, informing members of the help available and organising meetings with elected representatives and city officials.

four stars



Victoria Robertson (English teacher)

Victoria first joined our team in July 2015. A gifted and versatile teacher, not only has she mastered online teaching, she is now spearheading efforts to add a fifth level to our English program.

Thank you so much, Victoria



Marc Sunderland (French teacher)

Marc first joined our team in January 2018. He consistently teaches two beginner classes per week and his students wish they could have him for three! He took up the challenge of teaching online while barely batting an eye.

Thank you so much, Marc!



Lucinda Barriga (Spanish teacher)

Lucinda started volunteering with us in January 2019. She has brought a lifetime of expertise in teaching Spanish to our classes. What an incredible gift! Lucinda has taken the online plunge, helping us to continue to fulfill our mission while we navigate this difficult period.

Thank you, Lucinda!



Emily Schnell (Reception)

Emily began volunteering at the reception in November 2019. She was one of the first to become involved again once we were able to physically include volunteers in the reception space. She embodies the warmth and welcome that are at the heart of our mission.

Thank you, Emily!

BOARD MEMBERS:

Chairperson: Carly Breger

Vice-chairperson: Dan Abman

Secretary: Verity Thomson,
James Bugden

Treasurer: Alain Spitzer

Administrators: Yeona Yang

Abraham Rash, Dionne Codrington,
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residents activities

This year, our orientation activity was a bit different! We took a daytrip to the north shore near Oka for apple picking, followed by a ferry ride across the river and a poutine dinner back on the Plateau. Between the seven of us, we collected 36 kg of apples. Due to the late arrival of our two volunteers from Germany, this experience was a bit late in the semester. Earlier in the semester, we had already convened an orientation meeting to discuss the rules and expectations of the residence.



Apple picking



Lukas showing how its done



Crossing the ferry to Hudson from Oka

Residents:
Astrid Foth, Germany
Amelie Schutte, Germany
Emily Schell, Saskatchewan, Canada
Amos Friesen, Saskatchewan, Canada
Micah Kroeker, Manitoba, Canada
Sheldon Soudin, Québec, Canada
David Bourgault, Québec, Canada

markets



Laurier Market Ouest



Laurier Market



Sherbrooke Market



Baldwin Market



Farmers market committee: (left to right) Cristina (assistant coordinator), Eliza (itizen), Vincent (coordinator), Valérie (farmer representative)