

MISSION
OLD BREWERY

Les Sentinelles

Final report by the Old Brewery Mission on its pilot project
devoted to homeless Canadian veterans



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A few bits of data

Little is known about the phenomenon of homelessness among military veterans in Canada, even less so in Quebec. Studies and programs aimed at this vulnerable and highly marginalized group are few and far between, and tangible measures for coping with this problem have been slow in coming. It is worth distinguishing between ex-service members and war veterans. Being regarded as an ex-service member requires, at a minimum, completion of basic military training, whereas a war veteran is someone who has been deployed abroad on a military mission. People in both categories may be considered veterans, the term used most frequently in this report.

Nationwide, it was only in 2014 that the Department of Veterans Affairs finally admitted that homelessness constituted a problem among veterans countrywide. The department recognized the need to provide a shelter allowance or to build new affordable housing specifically for homeless veterans. However, no concrete policy has been instituted up to now, and the federal budget presented in February 2018 actually indicated a reduction in funds for veterans as of 2019. In Quebec, veterans are not mentioned in the *Plan d'action interministériel du Québec contre l'itinérance 2015–2020* (interdepartmental action plan against homelessness) nor in the City of Montreal's plan. And the only major Canadian study on homeless veterans did not focus on any city in Quebec, turning its attention instead to Toronto, London, Calgary and Victoria.

Across Canada, the proportion of homeless shelter users who reported serving in the Canadian Armed Forces varies between 2.2% and 2.7%, according to available data. Recent analyses estimate that about 3,000 veterans make use of these shelters on a regular basis. Some experts say these figures may be far lower than the actual numbers because they are extrapolated only from data provided by 60 homeless shelters in Canada, thus excluding from the outset anyone not frequenting these places.

Moreover, some experts believe this number is rising steadily due to episodes of post-traumatic stress disorder and long delays in processing retirement and disability files. In November 2017, Veterans Affairs Canada reported that about 29,000 veterans' files were still pending, awaiting responses to disability claims. We note, in addition, that current government policy requires veterans to prove that their physical or mental health problems result directly from their military service. This can be a long and arduous process.

There are no precise data or estimates on the number of homeless veterans in Quebec. We know, through the Quebec Veterans Foundation, that there are:

- 122,000 veterans in the province;
- about 1,500 additional veterans discharged each year;
- 25% who encounter difficulties in their transition to civilian life.

While they account for between 2.2% and 2.7% of shelter users nationwide, the proportion of veterans who are homeless may be substantially higher in big cities. According to Montreal's "I Count" survey in 2015, 6% of homeless people are veterans, amounting to 185 people out of the 3,000 surveyed. The proportion is similar in Toronto, where they account for 7% of homeless people. Several organizations have criticized the "I Count" data, which they regard as substantial underestimates. In any event, veterans clearly are overrepresented in the homeless population, more so in the big cities.

The Old Brewery Mission, like other shelters, compiles data on its service users. Users are asked various socio-demographic questions, including one on their status as an ex-service member or war veteran. Since 2014, for our shelter's men's pavilion alone, 144 persons responded to this question in the affirmative. For various methodological reasons, however, it is impossible for us to determine the proportion that this figure represents for our organization. That said, these men are 52.8 years of age on average, and nearly 80% of them are French-speaking. Moreover, 38.5% of them stayed at the Old Brewery Mission for over three months, and 10% stayed for more than a year.

The issues

A number of specialists say veterans' needs stand out, and resources are inadequate. In addition to the experience of homelessness, their cases are often far more complex, given the particular problems related to their military service: physical injuries leading to disability, post-traumatic stress disorder or various addictions stemming from their time in the armed forces. According to Susan L. Ray and Cheryl Forchuk (2011),¹ the main causes of homelessness among war veterans are alcoholism, substance abuse and mental health issues. This is hardly a surprise if we look at the homeless population as a whole. The same study also notes: "The transition from military to civilian life was also a large factor in the veterans' homelessness. Many spoke about the difficulty

¹ Homelessness Partnering Strategy, "The Experience of Homelessness among Canadian Forces and Allied Forces Veterans," Lawson Health Research Institute, 2011.

in adjusting to an unstructured civilian life and the lack of supports they received in moving from military to civilian life.”

A 2013 study shows that:

- Participation in combat and peacekeeping missions is associated with mental disorders among veterans.
- About one service member in two suffers from mental health problems or alcohol dependency.
- Regular members of the Forces have higher rates of depression and generalized anxiety disorder than the Canadian population as a whole.
- From 2002 to 2013, the rate of depression among Regular Force members did not change, whereas rates of post-traumatic stress disorders and panic disorder did show an increase (due to presence in Iraq or Afghanistan, for example).
- Rates of post-traumatic stress disorder and panic disorder are higher among Regular Force members who had been deployed to support the mission in Afghanistan than among those who had not.
- The risk of suicide among male veterans is 40% higher than among the Canadian population as a whole. Among female veterans, it is 80% higher.

According to the Quebec Veterans Foundation, an average of eight years elapses between the end of military service and the first episode of homelessness. The cross-Canada study on homelessness among veterans found that this gap averages 18 years, while other research points to an average of 10 years before they end up on the street. Whatever the case, it must be recognized that homelessness among veterans follows an extended period of destabilization, and we need to be prepared for it. For example, more than 40,000 Canadian Forces troops were deployed in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014 alone. It follows logically that we are barely starting to see the detrimental effects of this deployment on these veterans. We can expect to see a wave of veterans in a state of vulnerability over the coming years, at least until 2022 and probably for many years thereafter due to the Afghanistan deployment alone. In addition, a number of studies have shown that the various disorders arising from military service – post-traumatic stress disorder, for example – begin several years after leaving the army. In short, even if the Canadian troop deployment is decreasing, the opposite is true of veterans’ needs.

This all points to a vital need for more projects aimed directly at currently or potentially homeless veterans in the coming years. Returning to civilian life can be hard for many veterans. Success or

failure in the transition from military to civilian life has an impact on many factors that can make the difference between a veteran having or not having a place to live. Veterans questioned as part of the *Canadian Model for Housing* study find that housing stability removes a major source of stress, enabling them to focus on general well-being. Moreover, this same study found that long-time occupancy of a dwelling or home is linked directly to significant gains in many areas of life, including scores on the quality of life scale, overall sense of well-being, physical and mental health, mood, social and family relationships (people close to a veteran may have trouble grasping attitudes or behaviours, especially following an episode of post-traumatic stress disorder), economic status and decreased use of emergency or legal services.

Finally, it should be noted that significant improvements occur mainly starting in the second year of housing stability, showing the importance of being able to occupy a dwelling over a long period (La Presse Canadienne, 2017).



LES SENTINELLES: A PILOT PROJECT BY THE OLD BREWERY MISSION

Over the last few years, the Old Brewery Mission has shown keen interest in a particular group among the homeless clientele: Canadian Armed Forces veterans. Our observations and our research on this group have led us to note that, in addition to dealing with the problems experienced by a large portion of the homeless population (drug or alcohol consumption and mental health), veterans also face various difficulties arising from their military backgrounds. The transition to civilian life, episodes of post-traumatic stress disorder, injuries and physical limitations, accessibility and the process of obtaining benefits present major obstacles to these men and women. The Old Mission Brewery, with its constant urge to adapt to the problems facing its clientele and in the absence of specialized services for homeless veterans in Montreal, established “Les Sentinelles,” a new project to welcome and assist currently or potentially homeless veterans, a reality that requires an appropriate response.

Various military and paramilitary organizations are working to assist veterans on the road from military to civilian life. With their range of philosophical approaches, these initiatives all present facets of a response. Les Sentinelles, along with the Quebec Veterans Foundation, has taken the first steps in a collaborative approach between these varied pathways to work together and avoid duplication of services.

The Sentinelles pilot project is the first in Quebec and in Canada to commit itself to homeless veterans. Some veterans may find their military background to be an additional stigma leading to the street. This requires finding the right referrals to combine these two realities.

In collaboration with the participants themselves and with numerous partners, the program has aimed to provide psychosocial guidance and monitoring of variable intensity so as to get nine Canadian veterans into housing and to maintain the housing stability needed to end the cycle of homelessness. In addition, Les Sentinelles aims to get a better grasp of the needs and experiences specific to this group of people.

SETTING UP THE PROJECT

Project description

Goals:

- To provide support and variable-intensity psychosocial monitoring to nine homeless or highly precarious veterans.
- To support housing integration and promote housing stability.
- To get a better grasp of the needs and experiences specific to homeless veterans.

Criteria for inclusion:

- Canadian citizen – female or male
- Canadian ex-service member or war veteran
- Currently homeless or in a precarious state
- Sufficient self-reliance for housing integration

What the project provides:

- Housing searches and support in integration
- Variable-intensity psychosocial monitoring, based on participants' needs
- Referrals and guidance to necessary services
- Financial assistance for rent
- Full furnishings
- Initial grocery shopping

The Sentinelles program applies measures and services to promote the economic and social self-reliance of veterans in difficulty, to break the chronic nature of homelessness and to encourage social reintegration. The model applied in the project is variable-intensity monitoring, provided through home-based psychosocial meetings. This approach is aimed at providing housing stability to veterans, who benefit from guidance and referrals to the appropriate resources. One of the housing stability measures involves the provision of financial assistance in rent payment, allocated each month for one year. For some participants, this assistance was extended up to the end of the project (March 2019).

The Old Brewery Mission social housing operation is positioned as a major community resource in affordable housing transition services and solutions. This housing stability and guidance approach has proven its worth, enabling us to get many chronically homeless individuals off the street. The many partnerships that have been established – in health care, food security, furnishings, community services and in other areas – help us ensure that the needs of individuals are met, boosting the chances of success in housing integration and stabilization. Through the Sentinelles program, we have sought to reach a marginalized group of people (veterans) within an already marginalized population (homeless people). This has provided for more extensive development of our services, tools and network of partnerships specific to former military personnel and thereby support individuals who, after committing themselves to their country, have experienced difficulties in their return to civilian life.



Building the team

The Old Brewery Mission turned to internal human resources to fulfil this project, establishing a competent and motivated team. The program is supervised by the Director of Social Housing, Urban Health and Research as well as the coordinator of this same department, recruited as a housing search officer. For the psychosocial monitoring of the veterans in the program, a case manager was hired on a full-time basis. In addition, a psychosocial worker also worked on the project at the Old Brewery Mission's Webster Pavilion, where our participants stayed during the process of military background validation and of housing search and integration. In addition, a research analyst was hired to examine the program and to study veterans in difficulty.

The commitment of members to the homelessness cause and the interest shown in the problems involved in the transition from military to civilian life played a big role in the success achieved in aligning services.

Recruiting participants

We did the rounds of Montreal-area institutions and community organizations to promote the project and advance the recruitment of participants. Altogether, more than 30 places were visited. The project was explained to both management and response teams, and we put up posters to make Les Sentinelles known to users. We need to recognize, however, that the efforts that went into external recruitment did not really pay off: of the nine participants in the project, eight came from within the Old Brewery Mission, and only one individual was referred to us by another organization. Consulting our internal database, we picked out individuals who had identified themselves as Canadian veterans. Identification and recruitment therefore took place on Old Brewery Mission premises and by word of mouth. The case manager, together with the housing search officer, spent many hours doing street work in places frequented by homeless people in Montreal to track down veterans in difficulty.

Once individuals were found, we had to make sure they had actually served in the Canadian Armed Forces. This step proved to be quite arduous in a number of respects (this aspect will be spelled out in the section on the project's challenges and difficulties). Some individuals in difficulty were enticed by the service offering and claimed, falsely, to be veterans so that they could take advantage of the program's benefits. We had an ethical requirement to confirm military backgrounds before starting the process of bringing individuals into the program. We therefore developed a partnership with a case manager at Veterans Affairs Canada. Although she became heavily involved and showing willingness and determination, confirmation times could run from a few days to a day weeks, and in some instances we never obtained answers. These delays

deterred some individuals, who felt invalidated and unrecognized by the military; we lost track of several veterans in this way.

For candidates who were chronically homeless or unable to find housing during the waiting time for military background validation and housing integration, 10 beds dedicated to Les Sentinelles were opened at the Old Brewery Mission's Webster Pavilion. The psychosocial worker was thus able to stabilize these individuals and to meet their primary needs during the process. A total of 72 nights' lodging was offered, in addition to basic services (meals, showers, clothing, etc.).

During the project's two years, we met a total of 62 individuals who identified themselves as veterans. Of these people:

- Nine individuals were officially accepted in the project. We therefore met our goal of nine participants.
- Three other Canadian veterans benefited from the Sentinelles, program through other housing services in the Old Brewery Mission community that are not subsidized by Innovation Canada.
- We were able to confirm the military backgrounds of 36 other Canadian veterans. Seven of them were already part of other Old Brewery Mission social housing programs, four were not interested in the program, two showed too little self-reliance for housing integration, four were continually in an advanced state of intoxication and were referred to an addiction program, one did not wish to live in the Montreal area, two had too much income to qualify for our programs, and three were referred to Opération chez toi, a new Old Brewery Mission program also devoted to veterans for stabilization (this aspect will be explained more fully on page 25).
- We lost track of 13 individuals during the military background verification period. In every instance, these people were referred to appropriate resources, whether at the community or military level (Veterans Affairs Canada or VETS Canada, for example).
- We were unable to validate the military backgrounds of 14 individuals.

Tracking veterans in difficulty

Status of persons	Number of persons	Specifics
Veterans admitted to the Sentinelles project	9	Goal fulfilled
Veterans admitted to other social housing projects	3	Second part of Les Sentinelles (Office municipal d'habitation de Montréal)
Veterans with confirmed military backgrounds who were not part of the project	36	<u>Of these 36 veterans:</u> 7: other programs 4: not interested 2: loss of autonomy 4: major addiction problems 1: not interested in living in Montreal 2: too much income 3: referred to Opération chez toit 13: left prior to validation
Persons whose military backgrounds could not be confirmed	14	Not findable in the Veterans Affairs Canada or VETS Canada systems (3 of them prompted serious doubts as to whether they were veterans)

We guided the nine veterans through the various steps leading to acquisition of a dwelling. They agreed to take part in psychosocial follow-up meetings, analysis and prioritization of their needs, budget analysis, housing searches and visits, presence at various appointments, etc. Their active involvement in these steps and obligations was evidence of their urge to escape homelessness permanently. In some cases, we got the various treatment teams to work together and support individuals in a housing stabilization approach. All other veterans whose backgrounds were confirmed but who did not join the project were referred to necessary resources.

The project continues to conduct screening efforts among the homeless clientele to offer support services and referrals with the various organizations serving veterans. The Old Brewery Mission is able to provide support and services through other programs in the social housing department and the Opération chez toit project. We received three referrals from Veterans Affairs Canada and VETS Canada for veterans in difficulty. They joined the services of the Old Brewery Mission's Saint-Laurent Campus (Opération chez toit) for psychological stabilization before moving on and potentially joining the Sentinelles program. These referrals from military circles reflect the project's credibility and recognition.

The search for housing

The search for housing has obviously been a vital issue in the project's success. We have put substantial resources and effort into seeking not just housing but also real estate partners. The project has been explained to dozens of organizations and building owners. We have spent many

hours contacting established partners, seeking new allies, browsing websites (such as Kijiji) and going along the streets of Montreal seeking “for rent” signs. Private owners have been more hesitant to collaborate with us; systematic work has gone into raising their awareness and informing them of the realities experienced by veterans who are homeless or in a precarious state. But we have been confronted with various prejudices and unsettling remarks. Establishing contacts and visiting dwellings has enabled us to identify landlords who are open to our type of clientele and to find potential dwellings for our clients, in different areas of Montreal. This partnership search remains a current and ever-changing matter of interest.

The Sentinelles project favours a social mix rather than ghettoization. We want individuals to be integrated and to identify with the community, which is why we disapprove of an approach that consists of putting individuals together in the same building. By providing a choice of dwellings in different Montreal boroughs, the project has enabled participants to apply their full capacity for action and to become active players in the housing stabilization process. Participatory and non-imposed housing integration allows for convergence between an individual’s requirements and the project’s needs. To develop and establish a financial support bank for housing, links have been created between community players and building owners with a view to maximizing the potential for partnership and collaboration. Of the nine participants, five were housed in private dwellings and four in non-profit housing with a social mandate (Habitations Sherbrooke Forest, SHAPEM). They chose dwellings ranging from 1½ to 3½ rooms, in five different Montreal neighbourhoods, based on income and needs. As mentioned earlier, steps taken with the municipal housing authority have enabled us to acquire three additional dwellings for veterans. We are continuing to build on this collaboration to grow and sustain the program.

Furnishings

We established partnerships with two furniture companies. In both cases, we opened corporate accounts to benefit from attractive discounts. The first company offered good prices, but we soon noticed that the furniture was of lesser quality. We therefore decided to change suppliers for the other veterans in the project. We set our choice on Brault et Martineau. The cost of the items is higher, but so is the quality. We thus obtained a good quality/price ratio, quick delivery and excellent after-sales service. We were also accommodated in various aspects, in particular in time slots for delivery. The participants and the Sentinelles team are very pleased with the service and the merchandise.

We selected items to give participants a range of choices while keeping to the allotted budget. The notion of choice in furnishings let participants contribute to creating a home that fits their

image, based on their respective needs and tastes. This notion becomes a major advantage in housing stabilization for individuals, creating a sense of belonging in their surroundings.

Partnerships

The project's success relies among other things on the diversity and number of partners involved with Les Sentinelles. To support housing stabilization among participants and to meet their needs, we set up collaborations in several areas: health care (hospitals, CLSCs, clinics, addiction rehabilitation centre, etc.), legal services (community-based advocacy groups, legal clinic, etc.), military matters (Quebec Veterans Foundation, Veterans Affairs Canada, Veterans Emergency Transition Services [VETS Canada]), real estate (Habitations Sherbrooke Forest, SHAPEM, AB4G, private owners), furnishings, community organizations (job reintegration, food assistance, etc.) and academic circles (collaboration with McGill University in research on homeless veterans who benefited from the program).

Collaboration was also established with providers of services to Canadian war veterans and veterans. Meetings with Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC), Veteran Emergency Transition Services (VETS Canada), Operational Stress Injury Social Support (OSISS) Quebec, the Quebec Provincial Command of the Royal Canadian Legion and the Quebec Veterans Foundation helped us establish the parameters of collaborative agreements and gain a better grasp of the services offered to ex-service members and war veterans. On the ground, VETS Canada, with the primary goal of offering peer support, contributed to the project's success. Already well established in Canada's English-speaking provinces, VETS Canada is seeking to institute its services on a more sustained basis for French-speaking Quebec veterans. In addition to peer support, VETS Canada has the ability to provide shelter, financial assistance (rent, debts, bills, transportation), food assistance, clothing, furniture, household items and construction tools (to help maintain or return to a job). They also helped us by financing moves by several of our participants. We made several referrals and service requests, and the quick response time greatly impressed us. We also worked on producing a document for authorizing disclosure of information on participants. In this regard, we sought to have the work of the Old Brewery Mission team and of the VETS Canada volunteer team arranged more efficiently and with better coordination. VETS Canada has broadly met our expectations and is proving to be a significant partner in the housing stabilization of Sentinelles participants.

The Quebec Veterans Foundation (QVF) is another valued collaborator. We took part in several coordination meetings with members of their team. Promoting Les Sentinelles in several ways, the QVF pledged to help spread word of the program. Lieutenant-General Yvan Blondin (retired) took part in the news conference marking the program's official launch (November 10, 2017), following which Les Sentinelles was mentioned 80 times in the media, and was also involved in

other appearances and media testimonials. The QVF also gave us the opportunity to take part in its first *Grand rassemblement* (September 29, 2018), organized for veterans and their families, friends and colleagues. The event was held at the Aviation CMP hangar at Saint-Hubert airport, with more than 30 organizations and businesses setting up booths to inform veterans and the people around them of services they can benefit from. The coordinator of Les Sentinelles took the opportunity to talk about the program with about 40 people, most of them veterans. Many were surprised by the scope or even by the existence of the problem and said they felt touched by the Old Brewery Mission's commitment to the cause of homeless veterans. Some even offered to serve as volunteers. This first *Grand rassemblement* was an excellent way to raise awareness among a target group and to provide visibility to the project.

Through the QVF, we met Captain Glenn Hoa, a Canadian Armed Forces reservist and a dentist by profession. Dr. Hoa launched a project called "Pro Bono 52 Challenge" that aims to provide dental service to veterans in difficulty. Having heard of the Sentinelles project, he wishes to offer his services to participants in the program, on a priority basis. In addition to providing basic care (examination, cleaning, extraction), there is the possibility of a more in-depth examination of each individual's needs. A partnership between Dr. Hoa and the QVF could enable us to provide more extensive dental care to veterans if necessary. This initiative by Dr. Hoa is highly appreciated by the five veterans who have had the good fortune to benefit from it. We shall therefore continue to develop this collaboration.



PROGRESS AMONG PARTICIPANTS

Psychosocial monitoring

We were able to maintain housing stabilization for eight of the nine Les Sentinelles participants as well as ensuring individual follow-up and guidance. The participants are individuals who had been chronically homeless. By providing a choice of dwellings in various Montreal boroughs, the project enables participants to apply their full capacity for action and to become active players in the housing stabilization process. The initial phase of the Sentinelles project helped them take steps toward social reintegration and housing stabilization with psychosocial support.

The psychosocial follow-up meetings enabled participants and the case manager to work jointly in developing a response plan suited to each person. Exploration, evaluation and recognition of needs in all spheres of their lives help individuals gain a footing in the experience of housing stabilization. The intensity of the follow-ups differs from one participant to another, based on the needs and processes that require support. Some veterans need a weekly home visit, in addition to regular telephone calls, while others have more limited needs in terms of guidance and support. Whatever the case, all of the program's beneficiaries have shown their interest and motivation in playing an active role in psychosocial monitoring. Follow-ups and referrals are catalysts in the individual re-affiliation process. The frequency with which most participants are monitored declined during the two years of the project. Indeed, the case manager, who initially conducted her visits on a weekly basis, can now space her home follow-ups at two-month intervals for eight of the nine veterans in the program. Progress by these participants in achieving self-reliance shows us the tangible benefits of housing stabilization for individuals who had been chronically homeless.

Peer support is another significant factor in backing for individuals. Some of the veterans in the project have been getting together following project-related activities and have established links. Moreover, VETS volunteers, as veterans themselves, are able to raise certain topics and touch upon military aspects.

Referrals, guidance and alignment of services

The integration of participants in the Sentinelles project also requires active participation from them in aligning the necessary outside services (physical and mental health care, addiction, employability, dealings with Veterans Affairs Canada, food assistance, etc.). Services were aligned successfully in most cases. Six veterans were affiliated with Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) and

four with Veteran Emergency Transition Services (VETS). Eight of the nine participants now have access to specialized physical or mental health services. Many referrals and support services have been offered to the veterans in the project to facilitate their access to services related to their reintegration process and to their needs and rights, whether at the government or community level. Referrals and guidance of individuals in their various processes remain key factors in housing stabilization for the veterans in the program.

Achieving self-reliance

For leases during the first year, all participants benefited from a rent subsidy of \$300 a month. These subsidies were extended into the second year of the project for participants who still required this financial support. Indeed, we feared that some participants would be back on the street without monetary support. Despite the established budget measures, income remains inadequate to ensure the continuity of housing stabilization. We were able to obtain a subsidy extension for four of them. For three other veterans most at risk of returning to the street, we turned to the Office municipal d'habitation de Montréal (the municipal housing authority), which offered us three five-year rent subsidies at 25% of income to support them in their housing stabilization. The last participant, whom we supported throughout his dealings with Veterans Affairs Canada, now benefits from a monthly military pension that amply meets his needs. As mentioned earlier, housing stabilization for veterans takes time, which is why we seek to maintain rent subsidies as long as possible, when necessary. This additional time lets us work on achieving self-reliance for participants over a longer period. We have worked on lining things up to help maintain housing stabilization, through community organizations and other programs as well as the Quebec Veterans Foundation.

In addition to the financial aspects, the self-reliance of participants also results in a lower follow-up frequency or even full cessation of home visits. Here is a breakdown of where things stand in terms of the follow-up frequencies of the seven participants still active in the program:

Follow-up frequencies of the seven participants still active in the project

	Weekly	Biweekly	Phone contact only	Follow-up about to end
Number of participants	2	3	1	1

Employability

Of the three veterans who found work during the project, only one was able to keep his job over a period of nearly a year. Sadly, a heavy relapse in consumption led to loss of his job. Up to now,

none of the veterans in the program has a stable job. The two other participants, one employed as a cook and the other as a school janitor, both lost their jobs. Both of these veterans are prone to mood swings and serious difficulty with social relations. Courtesy and politeness remain issues with them; being highly impulsive, they get carried away easily and reject criticism. We supported them during these setbacks, without judgment. This enabled us to go back over the reasons for these firings, to help them step back from events and to validate with them what behaviours would have been good alternatives. We are helping them find tools to manage their consumption or their impulsiveness more effectively. We are supporting them in the search for other jobs while working on their social skills.

Another participant is on the road to employability, but he is 62 years old: age is a barrier to eligibility for the training programs offered by social assistance and is an obstacle to hiring. He remains motivated, however, and continues to fill out job applications and to distribute his résumé, a tool we worked on extensively with him. This participant also has some way to go in terms of social skills, a major obstacle to employability in his case.

The other veterans in the program face employment constraints, whether in terms of physical ability or mental health, and are therefore unable to undertake employment-related steps. In all instances, the individuals who were recruited show serious challenges and issues in terms of stabilization. The window of job opportunity remains very limited. This is why a return to employment is not necessarily a criterion of success for the project. We are, however, continuing our efforts with a view to pre-employability and job maintenance.



CHALLENGES AND DIFFICULTIES

Project length

The project's lack of continuity has been hard on participants, who obviously wish to maintain long-term housing stability. This has created considerable anxiety for some of them. Moreover, studies have shown that stable occupation of an apartment over time is fundamental to enhancing well-being and physical and mental health in general. For a highly marginalized clientele such as homeless veterans, the project's length is a major challenge to stabilization and to working on all spheres of life. As mentioned before, it is after two years that significant improvements in the quality of a person's life are observed.

The latent period following the announcement of funding for the program caused us significant delay. The project's starting date was set for March, but we had confirmation only in May. This meant we did not have the time to start with selection and recruitment of participants or with the search for housing. We had to work extra hard to get the project off the ground. We were in a race against the clock, minimizing our efficiency during a pivotal period.

Establishing contact

Establishing contact is often a challenge with veterans in difficulty. They may show mistrust and may have experienced trauma in the Canadian Armed Forces, making it harder to build a bond of trust than with the homeless clientele in general. They often feel ashamed of their situation and have difficulty requesting and accepting the assistance that may be offered to them.

Validation of military background

Finding an effective partnership to check military backgrounds was a major challenge for Les Sentinelles. First, everyone involved in one way or another with the military assured us that veterans know their registration numbers by heart. However, we found just the opposite to be true: of the 48 veterans whose military backgrounds were validated, only two knew their registration numbers. It should not be forgotten that homelessness is often the result of a degree of disorganization among individuals, to which are added cognitive, mental health and consumption problems. We first attempted to establish a procedure with the Royal Canadian Legion. However, this slow and cumbersome bureaucratic process did not fit either with the project's timelines or with the targeted clientele. Since this step in the project's enrolment process was essential in determining an individual's eligibility, this obstacle was critical. But then,

at an event held by VETS Canada (Tour of Duty 2017) and attended by a team member, an encounter with Christine Martel, a case manager at Veterans Affairs Canada, produced a partial solution to this problem. With an ability to provide faster responses regarding the military identity of our participants, with a minimum of information, Ms. Martel proved to be a major ally for Les Sentinelles. Her knowledge of the homelessness problem in connection with the transition from military to civilian life and of the services available to ex-service members and war veterans was also very useful to us. However, this collaboration had its limits, since some of the verifications were long and sometimes impossible to validate. The older archives are not necessarily digitized. After a few months, at a meeting held to establish collaboration, we were invited by VETS Canada to turn to them for validations. This new contact proved highly worthwhile for the project since VETS, in most cases, was able to provide military background validations within 48 hours. This reduced waiting times enormously for potential participants. We also established closer collaboration with Veterans Affairs Canada over the last few months of the project. We therefore had access to two authorities to support us in this regard, and we developed a bilateral referral system with the two organizations: we refer the veterans we meet to their services, and they call upon us when they come across veterans in difficulty.

Mental health

Most participants in the program have to cope with serious physical or mental health issues, often in comorbidity. Some of them have been diagnosed and treated, but not all of them, leading to conjecture by participants and the team based on observations and discussions. We are dealing with individuals who show signs of operational stress injury, with which other mental health problems are often associated, requiring highly specialized psychiatric care. We have encountered instances of anxiety disorders, cognitive problems, post-traumatic stress episodes, Tourette's syndrome, depression, substance addiction, personality disorders and paranoid schizophrenia. One participant mentioned having been diagnosed, but he refused to disclose or discuss the subject.

The Sentinelles team, which does not include a specialist, psychologist or psychiatrist, requires a professional focal point in the at-home integration, stabilization and guidance of veterans. Moreover, alignment with health care monitoring teams has been long and arduous. In addition to long delays, we had to deal with refusals to provide diagnosis or treatment, since problems involving post-traumatic stress episodes among veterans were too specialized for the public health-care sector. After observing the seriousness of problems experienced by homeless veterans, we have been working closely with Veterans Affairs Canada to obtain support in the guidance and referral of these highly marginalized persons to the appropriate services. With each individual coming to us with a personal experience of military life and homelessness, this high

level of marginalization makes participants a seriously imperiled clientele. We are also hoping to receive training from the Quebec Veterans Foundation.

Other challenges

The Sentinelles team encountered additional obstacles during the two years of the project. Indeed, the project had to demonstrate that homelessness among veterans was a real and immediate problem. Several community organizations as well as some groups with military connections expressed doubts regarding the need for this type of project. Outside referrals to the program were very limited at the beginning. However, with 48 veterans in difficulty, with a confirmed background in the Canadian Armed Forces, the program showed the need for an increase in projects assisting this specific clientele.

Also, the complexity of military-related procedures, in particular with Veterans Affairs Canada, was a major obstacle for many of our participants. The amount of red tape, the quantity of documents to be filled out and the processes to be gone through deterred some veterans. We found that the difficulties related to homelessness were not fully taken into account. However, we supported the veterans in these procedures, and they managed to persevere and gain access to the services requested.



SUCCESES

Housing stabilization

Due to the efforts of the Sentinelles team and of the veterans themselves, eight of the nine housing integrations succeeded. Only one participant suddenly left his dwelling though we have kept in touch with him, assuring him that we remain there to help him. One participant, who will be mentioned later, left the project successfully. Here are some data on the participants:

- 8 veterans remain housed;
- 6 veterans remain actively involved in their psychosocial monitoring and their procedures;
- 6 Canadian veterans have been connected to the services of Veterans Affairs Canada;
- 4 Canadian veterans have been connected to the services of VETS Canada;
- 5 Canadian veterans now have access to various physical and mental health care professionals.

This is an indication of the trust that has been built with the program's participants and of the solidification of our partnerships with organizations devoted to veterans.

Participants' sense of belonging

We have built on the sense of belonging of the veterans in the program by offering group socio-recreational activities. In addition to lessening isolation, these activities have enabled participants to talk about their experiences and to create links, in a light and voluntary context.

On December 19, 2017, the Sentinelles team organized a community meal on a Christmas theme. The participation rate was very high, with eight of the nine veterans in the project showing up. At this meal, we could observe the esprit de corps that quickly took root around the table. These individuals, who all had military backgrounds, were able to talk about their personal experiences in the Canadian Armed Forces. They also spoke about their housing integration and their gratitude toward the project, which they identified with. With the sense of brotherhood and solidarity that developed during this meal, the veterans could see that they were not alone in facing hard times and experiencing long periods of homelessness. This helped them bridge the gap between their experience and reality, in addition to lessening the isolation encountered by most of the participants during the holiday period. Affinities developed on this occasion, leading to a form of

mutual assistance among the veterans, who otherwise may be overcome by solitude once they are housed. The participants, grateful for the meal and the event prepared in their honour, expressed interest in getting together again on similar occasions, showing clearly their sense of belonging toward the project and their fellow veterans.

On November 22, 2018, we invited the program's participants to lunch at a restaurant followed by a movie at a theatre. Three of the seven participants still active in the program agreed to take part. To maximize the potential of this group meeting, we invited other Sentinelles veterans who were not part of the current subsidy (housing funded by the municipal housing authority). Participation by the two additional veterans was funded by the Quebec Veterans Foundation. There were thus five veterans taking part in the activity. The mood was cheerful, with all the participants happy to get out and meet other veterans and to share a pleasant moment with the team members in a less formal setting. The film (Bohemian Rhapsody) also pleased the participants, given that the musical group in the film was from their generation. Most of them shed tears at the end of the film, giving rise to touching conversation on the way back. They all expressed gratitude for the fine day they spent together.

Then, on December 20, 2018, the veterans were again invited by the team on a group outing. To mark the year-end holidays, we invited the Sentinelles participants to brunch at a restaurant. This time, four veterans from the program accepted the invitation. Once again, we extended the invitation to the Sentinelles veterans; only one joined the group. There were thus five veterans and two Sentinelles team members sharing a good meal and a good time together. Since the participants have low incomes, they rarely have the opportunity to eat at restaurants, which most regard as a luxury. Again, they were very grateful for our invitation.

The story of Mario

The Sentinelles team witnessed an initial positive exit from the project to a private dwelling. Mario, the veteran in question, was the first participant to leave the program, even before the end of his rent subsidy, and this represented a major success.

He arrived in Montreal, homeless for the first time and searching desperately for assistance. He found refuge at the Old Brewery Mission, where he was soon referred to the Sentinelles program. We guided him through the various stages of housing stabilization. Suffering from serious mental health disorders, he was directed to the right services, given that his treatment team was in a different region. We also supported him in Veterans Affairs Canada procedures.

However, he could no longer handle living in Montreal, due to his general state of health. He suffered from anxiety disorders, bipolarity, obsessive-compulsive disorder and episodes of post-traumatic stress (some caused by his years of service in the Canadian Armed Force). All these problems resulted in the stimuli found in the city greatly affecting his quality of life. In addition, since his entire family lived in Trois-Rivières, Montreal did not provide him with the sense of belonging, security and support that he felt back home, near his loved ones. Also, his medical team came from the Trois-Rivières area.

Mario took the initiative to find a private dwelling in Trois-Rivières and signed a lease starting last June. He chose a dwelling that he could afford, even without a subsidy (the Veterans Affairs Canada procedures eventually resulted in a military pension).

To support him in his project to return home, we called upon VETS Canada. They proved to be key partners in the success of this positive exit from the project, supporting and financing Mario in his move from Montreal to Trois-Rivières. With their support, Mario was able to bring with him all the furniture and other items provided to him by the program during his housing integration or acquired later. He is very pleased with everything the project brought him and to have been able to keep and move his goods thanks to VETS. He expressed gratitude for the support from Les Sentinelles. The project, along with his involvement and his active participation in the psychosocial monitoring, enabled him not only to get off the street permanently but also to return to his family, enabling him to flourish in a place where he feels he belongs.

This first exit from the project is therefore highly positive, and we are very proud of this success, which shows the need for a program devoted specifically to homeless veterans.

Opération chez toit

During implementation of the program and the initial recruitment phases, we were forced to turn away several veterans, for various reasons. Some of them would have benefited from a stabilization period (in mental health, for instance) to prepare themselves to live autonomously. This is why we sought and obtained funding from the Veteran and Family Well-Being Fund to create the new “Opération chez toit” program.

“Opération chez toit” (the name is a play on words in French combining “at home” and “roof”) falls within a continuum of services at the Saint-Laurent Campus (the Old Brewery Mission’s Webster Pavilion). Over the last few years, we noticed, during triage, that a number of individuals arriving on an urgent basis mentioned their service in the Canadian Armed Forces. This trend grew considerably with the establishment of Les Sentinelles. Aiming for housing stabilization with psychosocial support, this project does not meet everyone’s needs since it is directed only to veterans with the ability to be live in normal housing.

Accordingly, the “Opération chez toit” pilot project aims to set out a trajectory to minimize the impact of homelessness among veterans, particularly within the setting of a shelter (dormitories often filled to capacity and noisy). This involves developing leverage, with an exit open for a return to civilian society. The project’s aim is to stabilize veterans through psychosocial support, referrals and guidance to appropriate resources to optimize the chances of full reinstatement. The project will hire a case manager specializing in homelessness and aware of the realities of individuals with military backgrounds. We have been able to reserve a private furnished room at the Saint-Laurent Campus as well as two beds in a private dormitory (cubicles) to stabilize veterans who may be homeless and/or disorganized. The case manager will be mandated to guide individuals in recovering their ability to take control of their lives. A psychosocial file and a specialized response plan will be developed for each veteran, to meet their specific individual needs. In addition, the case manager will be sent to visit all the major shelters in Montreal and all the community organizations closely involved with the problem of homelessness to find, identify and support potential veterans as well as to inform these organizations and the people working in them to promote the project and provide referrals.

The “Opération chez toit” project will help identify needs more effectively and provide greater assistance to this group of people. It will serve as a benchmark and a catalyst in the social reinstatement of homeless veterans. It will help direct stabilized veterans to appropriate organizations and resources, whether in the areas of housing, physical and mental health, drug addiction, employability, etc. The goal is therefore to find and identify veterans and to provide them with surroundings that are better suited to their reality and their needs. It will also be, in some respects, an entryway to the Sentinelles program. As mentioned earlier, the Old Brewery Mission is seeking to broaden its service offering for veterans through “Opération chez toit,” complementing Les Sentinelles. Veterans Affairs Canada has designated this project as a recipient under the Veteran and Family Well-Being Fund. On October 11, 2018, the Honourable Seamus O'Regan, Minister of Veterans Affairs, and Member of Parliament Marc Miller were at the Old Brewery Mission to announce \$3 million in funding for 21 organizations across Canada, including ours. This national announcement gained broad media coverage, providing an opportunity to inform the Canadian public and to raise awareness of the problem of homeless veterans, in addition to explaining what is being done to assist them.

RESEARCH

Throughout the project, we have continued to gather information for research purposes. For the official research launch, we are moving ahead with a preliminary project through administrative procedures at McGill University.

This research is qualitative in nature, given the small sample of participants. The interviews consist of questions to enhance the veterans' involvement with the program and to determine their level of satisfaction with the support provided.

The problem of homeless veterans and the particularities of this clientele also merit further research, more particularly as regards the benefits and long-term effects associated with housing assistance programs intended for veterans.



IMPACTS ON THE LIVES OF CANADIANS (PROJECT OUTREACH)

Les Sentinelles is the first project in Canada targeted specifically to homeless or highly precarious people with military backgrounds. The project thus seeks to reach a marginalized group of people (ex-service members and war veterans) among an already marginalized population (the homeless). Ex-service members and war veterans are overrepresented in the homeless population (about 6% in Montréal). This is why a housing stability program with guidance, such as Les Sentinelles, is fundamental in fighting homelessness among ex-service members and Canadian war veterans. Once they are housed, the social reintegration process makes them full and active citizens.

Raising awareness of the realities experienced by homeless veterans was done systematically among dozens of community organizations, real estate organizations and residential building owners. The links created through the referral and guidance of participants have enabled the team to disseminate information on veterans' realities to various partners.

Participation in a symposium held by the Réseau québécois des OSBL d'habitation (RQOH)

The project coordinator had the opportunity to take part in a forum titled "Homelessness: diversity of trajectories and issues" during the biennial symposium of the RQOH, a network of non-profit housing organizations. A 30-minute presentation on the homeless veteran population and their particularities and specific needs helped raise awareness among more than 50 persons and organizations working for various homelessness and/or housing bodies in Quebec. The pilot project was laid out with its successes, its challenges and its preliminary conclusions. This presentation provided good visibility and helped draw attention to the particular difficulties experienced by homeless veterans. The audience consisted mostly of professionals working in the homelessness or social housing fields as well as building owners. We hope we achieved greater awareness and inspired people who can make a difference in support for veterans, who face specific obstacles linked to their military backgrounds.

Media coverage and awareness

Following the project's media launch at a new conference held on November 10, 2017, Les Sentinelles enjoyed great visibility (80 mentions in various media). This major national conference helped raise the Canadian public's awareness of the realities experienced by homeless veterans in addition to making the project known. The media that showed interest in the project include:

ICI Radio-Canada Montréal, ICI RDI, LaPresse.ca, La Presse +, Le Journal de Montréal, Montreal Gazette, CBC Radio One, CBC Montreal, Huffington Post Québec, CTV News and Global News.

Other communication opportunities have been made available to us. Between November 8 and December 29, 2018, Les Sentinelles was mentioned 34 times in various local and national media. More recently, an article by reporter Pierre-André Normandin, titled “De plus en plus de vétérans de l’armée se retrouvent à la rue” (A growing number of army veterans are on the street) appeared in La Presse on December 27, 2018. In this article, one of the program’s participants as well as the team were interviewed.

With this dissemination of information on the project and on the realities endured by Canadian veterans, the Old Brewery Mission got many calls and e-mail messages from citizens wishing to provide tangible assistance to this highly marginalized group of people. We have received various donations and even an offer of volunteer help from a veteran who is still active in the Canadian Armed Forces. The program, which is also turning out to be a demonstration project, shows the reality of the difficulties that Canadian veterans can experience and the need for further development of the resources devoted to this specific clientele. The project’s impact has contributed to greater public awareness nationwide. We are continuing our communication efforts with our partners, donors and financial backers to promote the project and to extend its impact in the community. The Old Brewery Mission, through its program devoted to veterans, has become a leader in the fight against homelessness among this group. Our expertise is achieving growing recognition both from our peers and our partners.

Les Sentinelles wishes to extend special thanks to the Old Brewery Mission, Matthew Pearce, Georges Ohana, Jacinthe Corbin, Kasandra Szalipszki, Hannah Brais, the Quebec Veterans Foundation, VETS Canada and Veterans Affairs Canada

HELPFUL LINKS

- Old Brewery Mission to announce new pilot project for homeless veterans

<https://www.missionoldbrewery.ca/en/news/old-brewery-mission-to-announce-new-pilot-project-for-homeless-veterans/>

<https://www.missionoldbrewery.ca/en/news/housing-homeless-veterans-in-montreal/>

(* Based on the news release sent to the media on November 10, 2017).

- How Mario is taking his life back

<http://www.oldbrewerymission.ca/fr/nouvelles/mario-reprend-contrôle-de-vie/>

**** Include a video-testimony from a former service member and beneficiary of Les Sentinelles.***

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The logo for Canada, featuring the word "Canada" in a serif font with a small maple leaf above the letter 'a'.