

## New volunteers carefully matched with residents

By SUSAN PURCELL

**T**HE PATH to volunteering at L'Abri in recent years has taken some turns. For a long time, most of our volunteers were recruited from Montreal's English-language faith communities. Now, congregations are ageing and some churches are even closing.

About a year ago, L'Abri decided to restructure its approach to recruiting new volunteers. A decision was made to create a "task-oriented" — and often time-limited — option which would pair new volunteers with one resident. We would continue to recruit long-term volunteers to apartment teams as before.

Coordinator **Lori Goodhand** took leadership for the job of recruitment, concentrating largely on universities — combing websites such as Concordia's and visiting resource fairs held on campuses.

**Volunteers paired with residents with similar interests**

Lori has also been in touch with a church frequented by new arrivals. Our two placement students

and the two other coordinators have been working with Lori to interview interested candidates, and to help integrate them. So far they have integrated seven new volunteers, most opting to be paired with a resident, while one chose longer-term involvement with an apartment team.



NEW VOLUNTEER BRUCE, LEFT, AND L'ABRI RESIDENT GULAM SHARE A COMMON HISTORY.

In their interviews with task-oriented candidates, Lori and her team explain our approach and expectations, and seek to determine their interests and abilities. Then, with the interests of a particular resident in mind, they draw up an action plan. These volunteers meet regularly with their designated resident and, if they wish, can attend activities involving the apartment's volunteer team and all three residents.

One happy pairing came about when **George William Ssimbwa Bisirikirwa** — known as Bruce — came in for an interview. When staff considered his age and the fact that he hailed from Uganda, they immediately felt he might get along with **Gulam Sohrab**, one of our residents from the same country. Gulam works long hours doing maintenance work, and enjoys spending his free time with Bruce.

If you'd like to volunteer with us, please get in touch!

[labrivolunteer@gmail.com](mailto:labrivolunteer@gmail.com)

## Annual general meeting 2023

'Abri staff, residents and volunteers met at the Unitarian Church on March 21, 2024, for their Annual General Meeting. President **Pepita Capriolo** welcomed members of the community to our first in-person Annual General Meeting in four years.

### Highlights included...

- In January, members of the executive committee held the first of three meetings in 2023, to focus on volunteer attrition, rising rental costs and the strained healthcare system;
- This led to a Special Community Meeting held in May, where residents and volunteers were asked their views on these issues; and
- Their responses contributed to immediate action to upgrade apartments, and revive outreach to recruit new volunteers.

**2023 financial report** showed a healthy balance.

**Special thanks** for their generous support were extended to:

- Echo Foundation;
- Hylcan Foundation;
- George Hogg Family Foundation;
- Adair Family Foundation;
- Colin J Adair Charitable Foundation; and
- Tony & Betty Infilise Family Foundation.

**Health benefits** were implemented for staff after many years' effort.

### Future plans included...

- Holding an information session for prospective volunteers in the spring;
- Widening our knowledge of development for non-profits;
- Continued negotiation with property owners to limit rising rental costs;
- Easing residents' stress when obtaining healthcare with frontline support from coordinators; and
- Strategic work with community partners and at the board level.

## 2023 Annual Report



Call us for your copy  
+1 514 932-2199  
Or email us for a digital copy  
info@labrienville.org

*Pictured from left, front row, Dale MacDonald, Pepita Capriolo (President), Cecily Lawson and Richard Dufour. At rear, Sam Beitel, Susan Purcell, Luke Gruber, Maxene Rodrigues, Jane Bourke, Sandra Baines, Afric Eustace and Gulam Sohrab. Missing from the photo are Charles Pearo and Sharyn Scott.*

## Board of Directors 2024-25

There are two changes to the Board of Directors since last year: **Richard Dufour** has joined the executive; and **Campbell Stuart** has left the board and joined the Advisory Council.

### EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Pepita Capriolo  
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Marc Laporta, MD  
Marjorie Sharp, BCL, LL.M.  
Warren Steiner, MD  
Campbell Stuart, BCL, LL.B.



PHOTO: STAR GALE

# Jerome ~ A welcome Sunday visitor



project. But no other L'Abri resident has kept at it for as many years as **Jerome Kierans**, now in his sixties and a 25-year-plus veteran of these visits.

Usually driven by a volunteer, but occasionally on his own in a cab, Jerome travels with a photo display and pamphlets, and sometimes a bag of hasty notes designed by residents. With help or solo, he sets up in the church basement before attending the service. Congregants are invited to meet him at coffee hour.

Chatting over coffee and cookies, Jerome makes friends with a variety of people. "I tell them how wonderful

L'Abri is, and how it's been so good for me. Sometimes they tell me they have a relative with mental illness. They imagine how good L' Abri would be for them."

In the early days, these visits were much more frequent. Volunteer-resident pairs would drive to churches in Westmount, NDG, Verdun, Lachine and Montreal West to describe how L'Abri is a safe and welcoming home for adults living with mental illness.

Over the last three decades, church attendance has dwindled. "We used to go to St George's, St Ignatius of Loyola, St Ansgar and other churches", Jerome notes. "Now it's

just Montreal West United, the Unitarian Church and St Andrew and St Paul."

But faith communities are still an important means of spreading the word,

and Jerome remains a valued L'Abri ambassador. He enjoys these visits as much as his listeners do, and we're grateful for his important work. | **SP**

SAM BEITEL

JEROME, ABOVE AT RIGHT, CHATS WITH VISITORS AT THE CHARITABLE PARTNERS EVENT IN JANUARY 2024, AT THE CHURCH OF ST ANDREW AND ST PAUL.

## A valued L'Abri ambassador

**E**VER SINCE L'Abri began back in 1991, volunteers and residents have visited faith communities around the city to talk about our

# Hubert Reeves nous racontait la magie de l'univers

Par MARIE-JOSÉE PICHÉ

**U**N JOUR QUE J'ÉTAIS SANS ABRI et que je passais mes grandes journées à la Grande Bibliothèque, il y avait un poste audio où **Hubert Reeves** donnait une conférence à la Sorbonne. Je l'ai écouté à deux reprises tellement cet astrophysicien et écologiste franco-qubécois de renommée mondiale rendait la vie extraordinaire.

Malheureusement, ce célèbre auteur s'est envolé vers les étoiles de son ciel le 13 octobre 2023 à l'âge de 91 ans, à Paris. Je suis si triste d'avoir perdu sa magie de conteur. Mais, ses immenses connaissances nous font, grâce à ses livres, encore voyager avec des mots simples dans les énigmes de l'univers et de notre avenir sur Terre.

Hubert Reeves est l'auteur d'une quarantaine d'ouvrages et récipiendaire d'une vingtaine de distinctions. Il a été président de l'organisme militant *Humanité et biodiversité* depuis 2001 jusqu'à sa mort.

Cet homme était un incondicional de l'exactitude. Impatient de ne pas avoir pu enseigner à son université à Montréal à l'aide des livres en anglais (qu'il considérait meilleurs dans son domaine que les livres en français), il a quitté le Québec pour s'établir en France, où il avait les coudées franches.

Dans ses bouquins en astrologiques, il explique comment nous en sommes venus à exister, et quel est le possible avenir de l'univers. Il écrit sur les univers parallèles, l'espace-temps, et les collisions météorites. Puis, en écologie, il traite de la déforestation, des déplacements de population, de l'économie, de la sensibilité des animaux sauvages, de la pollution lumineuse, du retour du loup et de la migration des oiseaux.

Voici en guise de réflexion une petite boutade de Reeves : « La biodiversité nous est indispensable, mais si elle pouvait parler, peut-être nous demanderait-elle à son tour à quoi nous lui servons. »





# Change is in our DNA

BY STAR GALE

*"To exist is to change,  
to change is to mature,  
to mature is to go on  
creating oneself endlessly."*

~ Henri Bergson,  
French philosopher

I HAVE OFTEN RETURNED to this quote over the last few months. I find comfort in reminding myself that L'Abri came into existence because caring people were courageous enough to change and improve the quality of life for people living with mental illness in their communities. I think of the many changes I have witnessed myself, as the organization grew and matured over the years, responding to the evolving needs of residents, volunteers and other like-minded communities who adopted our unique model.

Since last fall, we have implemented health and insurance benefits for L'Abri staff, and welcomed new residents, volunteers and donors.

In the coming months, we will be searching for – and considering what – opportunities we can create to stabilize housing for our thirty residents in an increasingly volatile rental market. I know this will likely bring about a new chapter of change, but change is, paradoxically, what L'Abri has always been.

We look forward to working with you along the way!

## Friends from the past welcomed at holiday festivities



We love the way holiday celebrations bring us together with old friends from our past! After years sheltering against COVID-19, it was wonderful to enter our festively-decorated office space, *at left*, in December to be greeted with familiar faces. Long-time volunteer **Jim Cullen**, *left*, upstairs with friends amidst the swirling snowflake lights.



Former board president **Gael Eakin**, *at left*, and her husband **Charles Colby** joined us for the festivities. *Below*, from left, former coordinator **Cathy DeChambeau** catching up downstairs with advisory board member **Marjorie Sharp** and resident **Karen Bassett**.



SAM BEITEL



**Meow!** This furry creature sprang from the pen of our multi-talented resident, **Marie-Josée Piché**.



## *"There is no sincerer love than the love of food."*

This quote from George Bernard Shaw is definitely true when it comes to members of the L'Abri community!

### Volunteer appreciation dinner



SAM BEITEL

We especially love the meals prepared by our friend **Giovanni Monti**, *above, right*, for our Volunteer Appreciation Dinner, *at top*, held this year in March following our Annual General Meeting (See P. 2). Board president **Pepita Capriolo** (*inset*) poses with her plate before joining members of her apartment team for food, chat and tributes by residents to their volunteer teams. (Turn to P. 6 for our tribute to Campbell Stuart.)

### *Cabane à sucre*

There's something about time spent in the chill spring air of the Eastern Townships that definitely gets the taste buds tingling. This gang of residents, volunteers and coordinators, *below*, tucks into hot pea soup in late April at a *cabane à sucre*, before moving on to maple-drenched pancakes, bacon and dessert. Our in-house photographer **Sam Beitel**, *at bottom*, looks delighted to sample fresh-boiled maple taffy on a stick. Afterwards, everyone was ready for a good nap on the bus ride home!



COURTESY SAM BEITEL



# How Leah (and her cat) came back

By MICHELLE MILLS

MICHELLE MILLS



Strong work ethic,  
great people skills

**O**UR NEW part-time coordinator, **Leah Yrastorza-Daghman**, was born in Montreal, but grew up in California. Drawn to Quebec's affordable education, she returned here for school. She began by studying anthropology at Concordia University, but transferred to McGill to enter the School of Social Work.

Leah came to L'Abri en Ville as a field placement student in September 2021, with a strong interest in the field of mental health. She says she was "drawn by the model and community aspect — specifically, the long-term nature of the housing."

L'Abri was impressed by her strong work ethic and people skills. We were also delighted by her regular *Zoom* visits with Chester, her beloved cat! Upon completion of her field placement, Leah was kept on as a summer student under the Canada Summer Jobs program.

After she graduated, Leah was hired elsewhere in the mental health field, but L'Abri had not forgotten her. When coordinator **Vishaka Ratnayake** had to step down last September as coordinator, she suggested Leah as her replacement.

A great idea! Both staff and residents were happy to welcome Leah back to L'Abri.

"I enjoy being able to create strong relationships with the residents, to really get to know them", Leah says. "I also love working closely with the team and volunteers."

L'Abri has a way of keeping people around and for that, and Leah, we are grateful!

MICHELLE IS A COORDINATOR AT L'ABRI EN VILLE

## Campbell Stuart

### Invaluable to our board, loved by our residents

**A**T THE VOLUNTEER Appreciation Dinner after our Annual General Meeting, Past President **Sandra Baines**, *opposite*, made a touching tribute to **Campbell Stuart**, who is retiring after many years on our board. As a lawyer who served terms as both our president and vice president, Campbell provided us with invaluable advice that helped L'Abri deal with many bumps in the road.

**Collaborative,  
respectful,  
committed**

As Sandra said, his approach "was always collaborative, respectful and showed sound judgment", all the more impressive considering he was "often the only man at the table among some strong and opinionated women." One of Campbell's recent contributions was successfully negotiating a new insurance policy that resulted in significant savings for L'Abri.

In spite of his demanding law practice, Campbell also made time to be a committed apartment volunteer, accompanying the three Wellington men to regular Sunday movie nights at the Dollar Cinema, and organizing their move to the Jolicoeur apartment.

Because he was balancing his schedule as a practicing lawyer with volunteering at L'Abri, Campbell was sometimes late for meetings. Sandra teasingly recalled his many phone messages saying "I'm on my way."

"But like all good things," she concluded, "Campbell was worth waiting for." | **SP**



SAM BEITEL

# Strengthening our capacity to meet housing needs

By STAR GALE

Over the past year, the L'Abri Times has reported on how the challenges of a volatile rental market, our aging population and our strained healthcare systems have uniquely impacted our community members. We've also recognized that these issues are not isolated to our community, but problems many Canadians grapple with.



COURTESY STAR GALE

THE PROGRAM'S ICE-BREAKER CHALLENGED US TO BUILD THE TALLEST STRUCTURE POSSIBLE WITH SUPPLIED MATERIALS. I WORKED ON THE EXERCISE WITH (FROM L.) GEORGE DEVLUGT, HABITAT FOR HUMANITY; PATRICK MCKENNA, SECOND STAGE HOUSING COORDINATOR, NAOMI SOCIETY; AND MARK KENNEDY, CEO/FOUNDER, EVERBLOOM HOMES.



cahdco



Centretown Citizens  
Ottawa Corporation



Our belief that solutions to these challenges — particularly housing precarity — will arise from collaborative community discourse led to my participation in a lively two-day event held in April, hosted by Centretown Affordable Housing Development Corporation (Cahdco) and the Centretown Citizens Ottawa Corporation (CCOC). Cahdco, an Ottawa-based non-profit real estate development corporation and sister organization to CCOC, offers a series of learning and networking opportunities which aim to increase affordable housing knowledge and organizational capacity for those hoping to meet housing needs in their communities.

**In March, I enrolled in Cahdco's Blueprints Program,** a two-month online course where, alongside participants from across Canada, I studied typologies of affordable housing and feasibility studies, to build the essential knowledge base needed to embark on an affordable housing development project.

The in-person module of the program was hosted at the Beaver Barracks redevelopment site in downtown Ottawa, with approximately 30 participants in attendance. It was brilliantly coordinated: a balanced mix of engaging team exercises, informative panel presentations, site visits to local affordable housing developments, and peer networking.

On the first day, the in-person module opened with an ice-breaker challenge, then moved on to a case study exercise where each participant pitched a theoretical affordable housing development, and voted on the most feasible pitches. We then organized into six teams to work together over the next two days to develop those ideas into fully-realized affordable housing project proposals.

The second day featured presentations from the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Community Housing Transformation Centre. Each presentation offered information about funding opportunities and support available for affordable housing developments, particularly those that meet the needs of their local communities and environmental sustainability goals. The event ended later that day with a tour of the housing on the CCOC's Beaver Barracks site, which boasts the largest residential geothermal system in Canada.

**I returned to Montreal with so much new information,** connections, peers, and optimism! As I write this, I am still a few weeks away from completing the program and already deeply inspired by the knowledge that we do not face the challenges of tomorrow alone.

STAR IS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF L'ABRI EN VILLE

## Gifts to L'Abri en Ville in recognition of loved ones

### Remembering

**Bob & Mary Bassett**  
Robert Bassett

Beverley  
Gregor-Pearse  
Armand Stanger

**Audrey Bean**  
Anonymous

Martha Bell  
Mary Martha Guy  
Susan Joiner  
& William Gilsdorf  
Maureen Lafrenière

**Peter Biller**  
David Stirling

**Raymonde Hachey**  
Maureen Lafrenière  
Josef Schmidt  
Beverlea Tallant

**Robin Hardman**  
Susan Purcell

**Gregory Lipscombe**  
Joanne Lipscombe

**Gerry Macdonald**  
Reda Macdonald

**Margaret**  
Anonymous

**Doris Mayer Robinson**  
Anonymous

**Maurice Prendergast**  
Andrée Prendergast

**Mary Quinlan**  
Nancy Grant

Audrey H Mcleod  
William Quinlan

**Pamela Sachs**  
Anthony Sachs

### Honouring

**Eleanor Beattie**  
Mary Brown  
Alison Clark  
Susan Joiner  
& William Gilsdorf  
Cecily Lawson  
Eileen Manion  
Eric Philips-Oxford

**Pepita Capriolo**  
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**Maxene Rodrigues**  
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**Donna Thomson**  
Carol Baines

### EDITOR

Susan Purcell

### EDITORIAL TEAM

Sam Beitel  
Star Gale  
Michelle Mills  
Jennifer Morrison

### DESIGN

JAM Design

### HELP & ADVICE

Sally Cooper  
Cecily Lawson

## L'Abri Times

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**L'Abri en Ville**  
2352 Duvernay Street  
Montreal QC H3J 2X1  
+1 514 932-2199  
info@labrienville.org  
labrienville.org

### We'd love to hear from you!

Please send your  
comments or  
suggestions to:  
suepurcell@videotron.ca

### If you're interested in volunteering:

Please get in touch  
with us at:  
info@labrienville.org



SAM BEITEL

## Measuring up

FOR THE FIRST TIME since before the pandemic, residents gathered at the office in late May to prepare a community kitchen meal. Here, **Karen Bassett** gets started measuring broth for the recipe. Check out our upcoming fall issue for more about this popular residents' activity.



*"I would like to support L'Abri."*

We thank you  
sincerely for your  
generosity.

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