

L'Arche Saint John Celebrates Four Years

It's been four years since Saint John's and New Brunswick's first and only L'Arche home, "McKim House", opened on the city's West Side. Honouring the memory of George and Charlotte McKim whose dedication since the early nineties played a key role in making it a reality, it is a place of welcome and hospitality and a home for four adults with developmental disabilities.

Founded by Jean Vanier, the son of one of Canada's Governor Generals, the international organization (active in thirty countries) has acquired a reputation for true inclusion. He states "real peace implies something deeper than polite acceptance of those who are different. It means meeting those who are different, appreciating them and their culture, and creating bonds of friendship with them." In nearly 200 small homes and day settings across Canada, from Vancouver Island to Cape Breton, caregivers and volunteers from diverse cultures and backgrounds share deeply committed relationships with people with developmental disabilities. Each community has a wide circle of friends who participate in its life in various ways. The size and lifestyle of L'Arche communities vary, but all are characterized by the same spirit of welcome and the valuing of relationships where each person, with or without a developmental disability, is enriched and often transformed.

Volunteer board members like Mary Collier Fleet, Stephen Horgan, Dixi Marmen, James MacGillivray, Barry Roderick, Janet Leger, Wilma Slaney, Owen Boyle, and new member Heather Maughan contribute their time and expertise. Sister Charlotte Vickers chairs the board of directors and is inviting the community to join in a celebration of their progress on Monday June 29 from 2-3:30pm at 623 Lancaster Avenue. The lower level will be open for admiring guests who may remember its multi-level pre-renovation look. They will see the transformation to wheelchair accessible accommodation, meeting and storage space, including a multi purpose room with improved lighting, a single level floor, a meeting room, a prayer corner, and washroom facilities.

L'Arche Saint John receives about half of its operational funding from the Province of NB, but board members point out finding other sources of support is critical. The Diocese of Saint John, the Sisters of Charity, start-up funding from L'Arche Canada, an anonymous donor, and many other donations including several grants from the Greater Saint John Community Foundation have been helping along the way. Fundraising takes a great deal of the group's time and energy, whether it be a concert, bridge or dinner. They are grateful for companies like Xerox and Dowd Roofing whose employees have been generous with volunteer time and materials.

Currently L'Arche Saint John has four "core members" who are permanent residents. Many still have fond memories of John Pike, who passed away this year. They are hoping to create a memorial event in his memory which involves one of his favorite activities, bowling. Patrick, a core member, has many musical talents, which he shares at a variety of community events. He is proud of his comfortable room and the donated piano, which he loves to play. He, Krista, Stephane and Debbie are very comfortable in the home-like atmosphere and often are out for a variety of activities and work. Mary Collier Fleet says "it's a great model....amazing. It creates a home, not just a care facility...and a rich life."

Jocelyn Worster, the new Executive Director, who recently arrived from L'Arche, Antigonish, NS, leads the group with help from three staff members, Marilyn Moore, Gray Gillies and Ran (Trevor) Wei. Marilyn Moore is very appreciative of the ongoing support of the Sisters of Charity. She says staff look on their role as a "calling" and make L'Arche their own personal home. Volunteer help is valued and provided by some almost daily but more is needed and welcome: for building relationships, offering

transportation, supporting events and activities. Living in L'Arche as an assistant is also a possibility. Being a Sponsor or fund-raiser on behalf of L'Arche Saint John, New Dawn Community Inc. is another way to get involved.

L'Arche Saint John, New Dawn Community Inc.

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Photo:

L'Arche is a place of welcome and hospitality and a home for four adults with developmental disabilities. Assistant Gray Gillies and Board Members Mary Collier Fleet, Vice-Chair, and Wilma Slaney (l.-r. standing) along with core member Patrick McGrath and Marilyn Moore, House Leader, will be celebrating newly completed renovations, Monday, June 29, at an Open House on Lancaster Avenue.

Community Profile is a weekly column highlighting community causes and work done by non-profit organizations in the Greater Saint John area. It is contributed by Jane Barry, Executive Director of The Greater Saint John Community Foundation. Contact the Foundation at 506-672-8880. To view other Community profiles, visit www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca