

## Communiqué

### **Planting more seeds towards reconciliation Is a medicinal garden viable for the Indigenous community in Montreal?**

For the past ten years, members of the Montreal Indigenous community have recognized the need for the creation of an indigenous health centre in the municipality. From a working committee in the midst of the Montreal Indigenous Community NETWORK to an incorporated entity, they have put their efforts in building relations to develop a fully-fledged holistic health centre in Montreal. Fresh from the success of the first navigator pilot-project sponsored by the City of Montreal, they look forward to continuing the development. Based on the principles and practices of cultural safety and decolonising approach, the future centre would be community-based and led.

While the board of directors of the Indigenous Health Centre of Tiohtià:ke petitioned the City of Montreal to take part in the process by allocating a proper building for the project to flourish, new questions keep sprouting. With an indigenous population of more than 30,000 and Montreal being the fourth biggest indigenous urban centre in Canada, why does it remain the only major city in the country without an indigenous health centre? Although small programs exist to support the Indigenous communities in Montreal, none specialize in social services, mental health or the principles of cultural healing for this population. Creating the Indigenous Health Centre of Tiohtià:ke would thus meet the needs of the community while planting more seeds towards reconciliation.

Earlier this year, the board has been invited to put in an option in a Montreal downtown location which has green space and an educational vocation. Although this opportunity is very encouraging, it highlights the need (and lack of) for knowledge transfer and education from a decolonising approach. As to not let themselves be limited by what cannot be done – according to jurisdictional or other barriers – the board has met with Éco-Quartier Peter McGill and has developed and maintained a fruitful collaboration.

In fact, on June 27, nine people met to start a medicinal garden while getting Knowledge, building relations and exchanging teachings. Together they prepared the soil and planted heirloom seeds of the Three Sisters – which consist of squash, corn and beans. They also planted a patch of sweetgrass, donated by an Abenakis friend from Odanak! As they will return to water and care for this new medicinal garden, they will add a few plants of sacred sage. While cultivating this project, all the workers agreed, “true reconciliation is an ongoing process that starts by building good relations”.

Still, the City of Montreal has not yet reconciled the planting of sacred tobacco on the territory. In the efforts to remedy this situation, the group intends to initiate discussions and present a request to the City so that together, they can look into the by-laws pertaining to this particular plant. Learning about the practice and use of sacred tobacco can then help the City understand the many traditional uses –for spiritual and ceremonial practices – other than the individual consumption.

It is the hope that as this project grows, bridges of reconciliation will be negotiated in an understanding and spiritual usage of the planting and harvesting of the medicine plants for the well-being of the community.

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