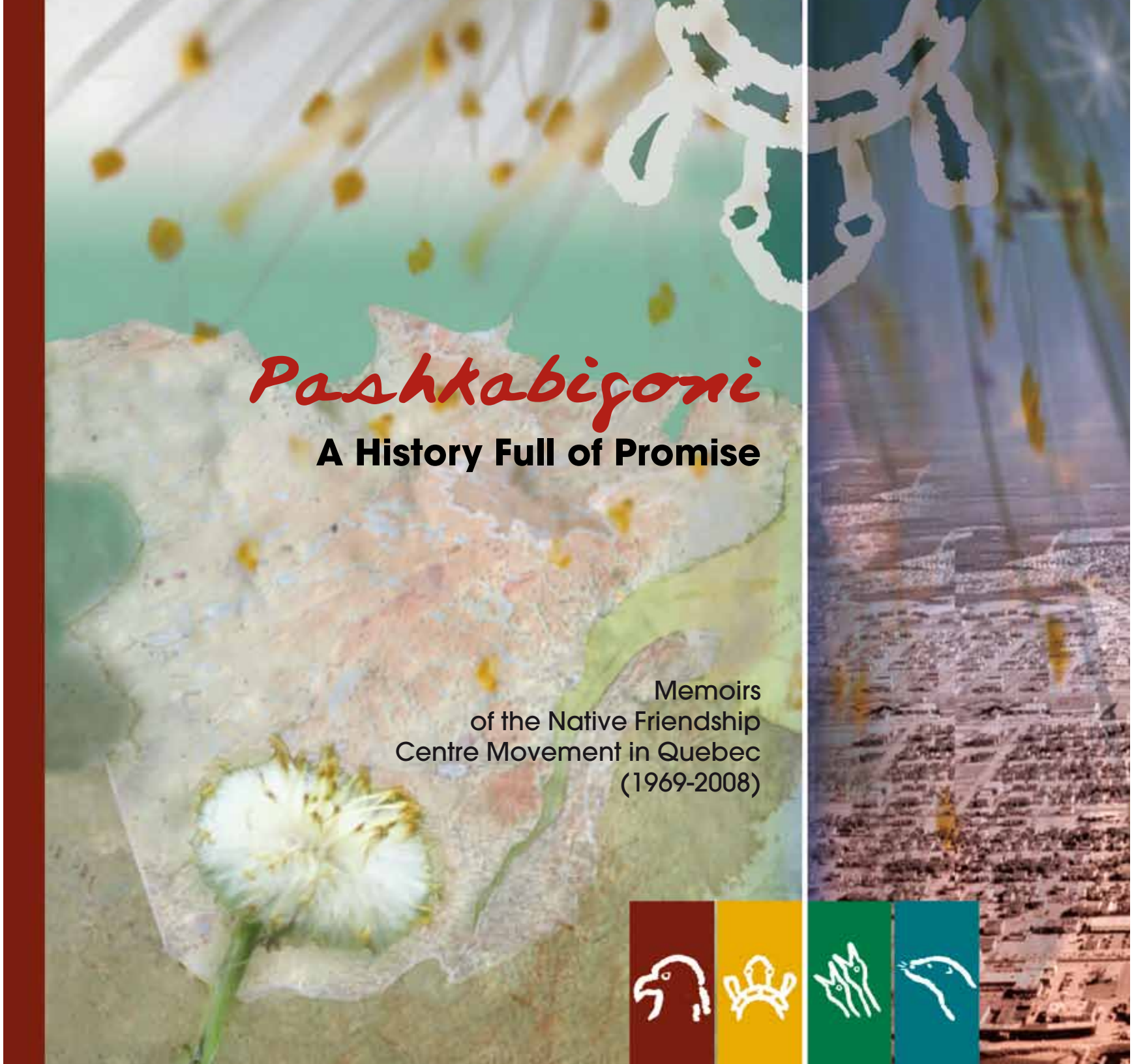
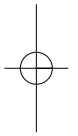


Pashkabigoni

A History Full of Promise

Memoirs
of the Native Friendship
Centre Movement in Quebec
(1969-2008)



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These memoirs are dedicated to the memory of the pioneers in Quebec's Native Friendship Centre Movement who are no longer with us. We honour, among others, the following for their devotion and involvement:

Joseph Shecapio-Blacksmith,

Cécile Bordeleau,

Annie Bastien Cleary,

Linda Akwright,

Margaret Moore,

Johanne Pinette,

Ginette Flamand

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Two roots entwined in my heart,

One the city, the other the land,

Which haunts my spirit always,

Like a memory, a call from the earth.

Denyse Chartrand,
Mes racines (unpublished poem)

"We are not from the past, but from the past we take our momentum and direction, our vocation and path. We are Indians, we are the arrow in flight, its arch in the sky taking us from what we have been to what we are, pointing the way to what we will become. We are governed only by that of our own choosing. The powers of yesterday and the winds of today strive to block our way, but we are the ones who will decide our destiny."

Sub-Commander Marcos, The Long March of the Zapatistas, 2001

The first Native Friendship Centre in Quebec was created in 1969 at Chibougamau. Over the 39 years since then, the Aboriginal people in Quebec's urban setting have made so many achievements that the time has come to speak about them. Here follow the memoirs describing the moments that have highlighted this remarkable and important journey.

These memoirs are the narration of the efforts and successes of urban Aboriginal people, the story of a long march which has led not just to a present-day Quebec with eight highly active Native Friendship Centres, but also an authentic movement that is supporting them and providing them with a forum where their voices can be heard.

With the difficult struggle to obtain recognition of the rights of First Nations members as its backdrop, this is an extraordinary accomplishment. We must bear witness to this story, but not just to take stock of and celebrate the progress made. We want also to reflect on the challenges waiting over the horizon. The story we will tell here is a call to go even further!

THE EAGLE

symbolizes the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec

The eagle brings vision, strength and inspiration. He characterizes objectivity and clarity of thought, which allow us to reflect on what needs to be done and from there, to set priorities and make decisions. The eagle climbs high in the sky and sees the entire landscape below. The eagle also symbolizes the communication that is so vital between the RCAAQ and its member Native Friendship Centres, which form our Movement and are the reason for the RCAAQ's existence as their provincial association.

Introduction:

Looking back to see how far we've come

Everyone has at some time or another heard of the First Nations in Canada and Quebec. And everyone knows how, through the blow of forced assimilation, efforts were made to forget and marginalize them, in short, to make them into invisible peoples. But there are perhaps few who know that during the past several decades, this same invisibility has been threatening a new fringe of the Aboriginal population – the Aboriginal people who live in the urban context.

Yet urban Aboriginals make up nearly half of the entire Aboriginal population in Canada and more than one-third of that in Quebec. By living in the cities or having recently left the protection of their community for an urban life and thus losing a good portion of the rights they enjoyed as members of their communities, they are leading a precarious existence. We are witnessing a true Diaspora – an Aboriginal Diaspora! In the Algonquin language, this phenomenon may be called "Pashkabigoni," a word which means the scattering of pollen released by flowers. It aptly reflects the reality of the dispersal of Aboriginal people who find it necessary to migrate to the cities. But with this migration, the longstanding discrimination and inequalities that characterized their life in the communities have been transplanted into new forms in the heart of the non-Aboriginal urban world. It is a world where they find themselves isolated and helpless, without means to make their voices heard, to be recognized, to realize their desire to live as fully Aboriginal people!

In Quebec, this reality is seen especially in the urban centres of Montreal, Quebec City, Val-d'Or, Chibougamau, Sept-Îles, La Tuque, Joliette and Senneterre, but also in Gatineau, Roberval, Baie-Comeau and Maniwaki.

It is within this context that we grasp the importance of the efforts made by the Aboriginal pioneers who, over the years, have created the eight Native Friendship Centres in Quebec and who, in surmounting a wall of misunderstanding and difficulties, have formed their own provincial association, the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec (RCCAQ).

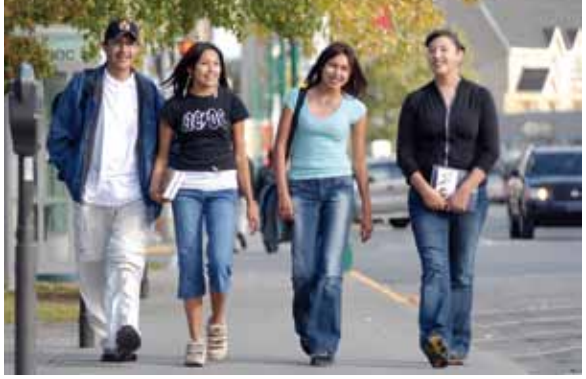
How has this story unfolded, this journey taken by so many people who, all in their own way, had the same objective at heart, that of giving a voice to urban Aboriginals and supporting them in their daily lives?

These memoirs set out to commemorate their efforts by describing what they encountered on the path towards achieving their goal, so that we may have better understanding today of the dreams, hopes and claims of urban Aboriginal people in Quebec, and of the history leading to their collective organization.

But these memoirs are more than a written record. We want them, through the accompanying photographs and illustrations, to be a work of beauty as a witness to culture, indeed, as the direct expression of this cultural identity in which urban Aboriginal people take so much pride.

What better way to look back at the long path travelled so far and to look ahead to what must be done in the future than by letting the Aboriginal people in Quebec tell their story in their own voices?

We hope you enjoy your reading!



Urban Aboriginal people in Quebec

New realities!

Aboriginal people in the urban setting are the expression of new realities confronting the members of the First Nations in Quebec.

Just like the Aboriginal people in the communities, they have been dispossessed of the fundamental rights that should be theirs as First Nations members and are more often than not reduced to the status of second-class citizens, buffeted by discrimination and, according to statistical studies, subject to living conditions far below the average enjoyed by other Canadians. In the eyes of the non-Aboriginal governments, their situation does not really count for anything – they do not exist and are in danger of being transformed from Aboriginal Peoples into invisible peoples!

The reality is that in moving to the cities, urban Aboriginals must confront new challenges adding to the ones they had to confront while living in the communities.

By leaving their communities, they have lost a portion of the rights, protections and services they enjoyed there, but at the same time they must try to live in an urban world which is not their own, one which is openly hostile to them and ignores them completely. By coming to live in the cities, they can no longer turn to the collective Aboriginal services available in the communities, nor do they have a representation structure devoted specifically to making their hopes and claims known in terms of what they experience daily in the urban setting.

Reduced to living on the "fringes of the fringe," they have so much trouble finding their place and getting their voices heard. Indeed, all the difficulties of being Aboriginal seem to be rolled up into their urban existence!

Furthermore, the latest population statistics for Quebec (2005) show that they account for no less than 37% of all Aboriginal people in the province, compared to 48% of all Aboriginals in Canada, according to statistics from 2001. Between one-quarter and one-third of the Aboriginal people in Quebec, or close to 25,400 out of a total population of 68,738, live in an urban setting. [1]

Even more revealing is the increase in the number of urban Aboriginals. In just two decades, their population has doubled and even tripled in some of Quebec's urban centres. This phenomenon is clearly the result of a sustained migration to the larger urban centres, but it is also due to the fact that a significant number of urban Aboriginals have been able to recover their status thanks to Bill C-31 and have accordingly chosen to affirm their identity as being both urban and Aboriginal.

The living conditions of urban Aboriginals

The strong growth in the urban Aboriginal population is marked by an important and unique characteristic: this population is made up of a large percentage of young people under the age of 29 (69%) and a high percentage of women (56%), many of whom are heads of households. Furthermore, the economic, social and cultural conditions of urban Aboriginals fall well below the level of those enjoyed by non-Aboriginals and are just slightly above the level for Aboriginal people who are living in the communities.

In turning to the Human Development Index of the UN, we find that Canada is ranked 8th among 174 countries, whereas the Aboriginal people in Canada are ranked 48th (just ahead of Mexico) and urban Aboriginal people taken by themselves are ranked 37th.[2] These statistics fully bring out the extent of the gap between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals and allow us to better grasp the differences between urban Aboriginals and Aboriginals living in their communities.

More specifically, in terms of education, we find that 50% of First Nations members in Canada aged 25-64 and living in the communities have not

completed high school, compared to 30% of urban Aboriginal people and 15% of Canadians overall.

On a similar note, statistics from 2006 indicate that just 4% of Aboriginal people living on-reserve have a university degree, compared to 9% of Aboriginal people living away from their community (an increase over the 7% reported in 2001) and a much higher 23% of all Canadians.[3]

When we consider the employment situation in Quebec, we find that the unemployment rate of Aboriginal people aged 15 and older is much higher than it is among non-Aboriginals. In 2001, 14% of Aboriginal people living away from their communities were unemployed, compared to 8% of non-Aboriginals. In general, Aboriginal men are more likely to be unemployed than Aboriginal women are. The unemployment rate is also much higher among 15-24 year-old Aboriginals living off-reserve.

The key indices for evaluating quality of life show that in 2001, one of every ten Aboriginal people living off-reserve in Quebec reported not having suitable drinking water and 21% reported there were periods during the year when their water was contaminated.

We also see that 16% of Aboriginal people living away from their communities are in overcrowded housing, compared to 5% of non-Aboriginal people. In 2001, close to 17% of off-reserve Aboriginal households had severe needs in terms of housing.[4]

But further to the statistical story, we must consider another dimension of the reality experienced by urban Aboriginal people. Their biggest difficulties stem as much from the fact that they are in a wholly new situation as from the obvious socio-economic inequalities they must face. How are they to affirm their Aboriginal identity and claim the rights to which they are entitled, within an urban environment that is not their own and immersed in non-Aboriginal values? And how are they to do so when they no longer have direct access to support from their home communities, either in terms of services or representation?

In reality, urban Aboriginal people experience living conditions similar to those seen in any Diaspora in the history of the world. They share the same lot as all other peoples who have been exiled by the chance of history from their homes. Like them, the Aboriginal Peoples of the Americas were dispersed and isolated, and forced into a material and cultural world unlike their own. They then gave birth to new generations of Aboriginal people who came to live in the cities and who, in many cases, built lives for themselves in that new environment.

Indeed, due to the stagnant economic and social situation in the reserves, many Aboriginal people leave in the hope of improving their lives. Some have no choice but to go to the cities to continue their academic or professional training or to access health services. Some go on a temporary basis, but others have been living in an urban setting for more than a generation, meaning that the city is now truly their living environment.

Having been required, for a multitude of different reasons, to leave their own territories (which are already narrowly confined to the reserves), urban Aboriginal people find themselves in an environment unlike what they have traditionally known. They are isolated and consequently undergo strong pressure to become assimilated. How, in such a context, can they maintain their language, their culture, their very identity? And what does being 'Aboriginal' really mean to urban Aboriginal people? Such are the questions to which their new conditions for existence continually demand an answer.

Do they count for anything at all?

These questions are all the more pressing because off-community Aboriginal people do not really count for anything, not for the federal government, which claims to have legal and financial obligations only towards Aboriginal people who live in their communities, not for the provincial governments which, even though they have powers in terms of health, education and territorial management, fear being forced to take on additional costs for matters outside their jurisdiction, and not even for the Aboriginal governments, which have difficulty understanding this new reality which does not fit into the framework provided by the existence of the reserve or community.

This all means that urban Aboriginals, who are without truly recognized services or clearly identified representation, find themselves torn in two and even more directions, all the while never being certain that they will be able to take the place in society they rightly deserve.

But that is the interesting point; far from disappearing or melting into the anonymous landscape of the cities, far from being acculturated or assimilated, urban Aboriginals have found opportunities to cultivate original and promising ways of affirming their identity.

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THE TURTLE

is the foundation of everything.

Just like the turtle who bears the earth on his back, the Native Friendship Centres are the ones that carry our Movement forward.

A history full of promise

The work of pioneers

It is within this completely new and difficult context that we must try to grasp the extent of the pioneering efforts made by the Native Friendship Centres. Over the years, they have built up a genuine network of mutual support for a new generation of Aboriginal people who form these new urban Aboriginal communities. In Canada, there are 117 Native Friendship Centres; eight NFCs have been established in Quebec, with one in each of the following urban centres: Montreal, Quebec City, La Tuque, Val-d'Or, Senneterre, Chibougamau, Joliette and Sept-Îles.

The history of the Native Friendship Centres is more recent in Quebec than elsewhere in Canada. It was born in the late 1960s, in the wake of important socio-economic transformations that led to the expansion of the non-Aboriginal urban world into the territories of the Aboriginal communities (as was the case with Chibougamau). The result was a steadily increasing flow of Aboriginal people from their communities towards the urban centres.

It was to face this new reality, in short, to make an effort to bridge the immense gap between the world of the Aboriginal communities and the urban world, between the First Nations' territories and the urban reality, that the Native Friendship Centres sprouted, one after the other, like mushrooms!

Even though they were created at different dates and often on the basis of specific needs, they always emerged at a time when it was vital to address the urgent concerns and expectations of Aboriginal people thrust up against the urban reality. More generally, they always sought to be welcoming places, which could replace the "Indian bars" or inhospitable hotel lobbies by creating new spaces for services and exchanges from a true Aboriginal perspective right in the heart of the city.

The NFCs began providing services from reception to referrals, support, training, integration, cultural promotion, and more. The approach may have been somewhat the same in all Centres, but as Louis Bordeleau has expressed so clearly, success would have remained beyond reach had it not been for the patience and dedication of those who possessed the courage to launch themselves into such an undertaking.

Indeed, the history of each Native Friendship Centre in Quebec is one of dedication, courage and tenacity, of gradual advances and temporary setbacks mingled with uncertain victories. It is a history which looks back at the immense path already travelled but also points ahead to what remains to be accomplished, a history in which each step forward is a spark of hope.

CICC:

Cree Indian Centre of Chibougamau

In the 1950s, a mining boom shook the mid-northern region of Quebec, and the city of Chibougamau sprang up almost overnight in the heart of Cree territory. Several Cree families who were displaced by these new mining developments resettled at Lac aux Dorés. The road linking Chibougamau to Mistissini had just been completed.

Cree members started going to Chibougamau for their shopping needs and for medical care. English was their second language, whereas Chibougamau was almost entirely French-speaking. The Cree had almost no relations with the provincial government; they came under the jurisdiction of the Canadian government. They would wait long hours for their transportation, sitting outside the Hudson's Bay store, which was a symbol of the exploitation of First Nations through the fur trade. Cree people were unable to find a place to live, due not just to the scarcity of housing available for rent but also to the omnipresence of racism.

In 1969, the Chief of the Cree at Lac aux Dorés and other concerned people in the region came together to create an incorporated organization with a board of directors; thus was born the first Native Friendship Centre in Quebec – the Cree Indian Centre of Chibougamau (CICC). The Centre's first board of directors was made up of Smally Petawabano (Mistissini Chief), Joe Coom

and Alphonse Tropper (both counsellors at Mistissini), Jimmy Mianscum (Chief of the Lac Doré Cree), Peter Gull (a Cree miner from Chapais), Hugo Miller (an Anglican minister), Jean Carrière (a hotel owner), Laurent Levasseur (director of social services) and Edna Neeposh (a social worker).

In December 1970, Anne-Marie Awashish, who was living in Mistissini, took on the job to get the project underway. A dedicated and natural leader, Anne-Marie made sure she finished the job she started. Office space in the basement of the Chibougamau bookstore was rented. The first grant, provided by the Secretary of State for Canada, came to $6,000. It went primarily towards providing housing for miners from Mistissini; this activity was run by volunteers. The Cree were glad to have a warm place where they could meet and enjoy a good cup of tea together. The space rented by the CICC also provided accommodations for two miners from Mistissini, who had nowhere to stay after their shifts. With a very small budget, the CICC offered services (e.g., housing services, translation, referrals, and so on) made necessary by the transition to life as part of modern Quebec society. The Cree wanted to take vehicle operator training and courses in mineral extraction so that they could work in the mining industry; the CICC thus organized and implemented courses in these areas.

In 1972, a grant was received from the Secretary of State under the Migrating Native People's Program; it served to hire three employees and gave the leaders of the CICC some time to catch their breath.

In 1974-1975, the dream became a reality. The Anglican Church donated property at 95 Jaculet Street and the Secretary of State provided a capital fund for constructing a building adapted to the real needs of the Cree population in the region. This development allowed the Centre's leaders to respond to other emerging needs in such areas as education and intercultural relations. A small arts and crafts boutique was opened. The new building had every desired amenity, in strong contrast to the cold streets of Chibougamau and the unhealthy atmosphere of the "Indian bar" where five years early, Cree members would have to spend hours before they could go home.

It was during this period when Anne-Marie Awashish, after noting that the CICC was solidly implemented and well underway, turned her attention towards helping with the development of Native Friendship Centres in other parts of Quebec, including La Tuque, Val-d'Or, Montreal and Senneterre. She also participated in the creation of the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec; through her actions, she was an exemplary model of mutual support, generosity and solidarity. Anne-Marie remembers the dedication of others who made possible the creation of the NFCs. They include Margot Chiachi and Henri Baribeau of La Tuque; Annie Moore, Michèle Rouleau and Georges Bordeleau of Senneterre; Gloria Nault, Jeanne and Dean McDonald of Val-d'Or; and Margaret Horn and Eddie Gardner of Montreal.

In 1981, the CICC expanded its building by adding a second storey, through another capital fund from the Secretary of State. Yves Jégou, a social development officer with the Secretary of State, played an important role in this phase of the Centre's development.

The second-floor addition provided new offices and meeting rooms. The main floor was used for accommodations, the kitchen, the dining room, and the arts and crafts shop, while the basement contained space for the youths and the Cree School Board.

Services for Cree patients were an important priority for the CICC, which had to keep its doors open seven days a week. By the early 1980s, it was serving some 30 meals each day.

The first major art exhibition presenting First Nations works was held in 1980 at City Hall. The elected municipal officials were interested in improving relations with the first inhabitants of the territory, and art was seen as an important means of fostering stronger mutual understanding.

More and more Cree families were searching for housing in the city, but most were unable to find any. The CICC was asked to come up with a solution and it tackled the problem head on. AS the owner of a building worth a significant amount, the CICC was able to get a mortgage, which allowed the purchase of an apartment block with four units.

A new leader, Judy Parceaud, was soon to take the helm at the CICC. Judy had been assisting students in her work for the Cree School Board. For more than a decade, she would devote body and soul to the development of the CICC and the provincial association (RCAAQ).

The first "Indian Day" was held in the summer of 1982. It was a wonderful presentation of several Cree traditions, which helped to build intercultural relations with the non-Aboriginal community, through activities

combining fun and learning. The Cree were making their presence felt more and more in Chibougamau at the time, and the benefits brought by the James Bay Agreement played an important role in the local economy.

The CICC began a study on the history of the Cree in the Chibougamau region, by way of student projects. For this study, it received invaluable support from the social worker at the time, Jacques Frenette. Jacque supervised the writing of the book presenting the results of this work. The book, entitled *The History of the Chibougamau Cree*: An *Amerindian Band Reveals its Identity*, was published in 1985.

Meanwhile, the CICC was continuing to develop. A playground for the children was built, and a permanent outdoor exhibition of historical photographs was installed; it highlighted the work done to support Cree students. The CICC also sought to reduce the dropout rate and to improve relations between Cree students and the non-Aboriginal population. In 1987, in order to ensure better services for patients, a building was acquired where they would have more peace and quiet. The Centre also began activities in prevention of drug and alcohol abuse, which was becoming a serious problem in Chibougamau, Mistissini and Waswinipi.

The years 1989 and 1990 saw the implementation of a project for building awareness of Cree culture. This project presented the full scope of Cree culture through conferences, films on community television, and exhibitions displaying art work, craftwork and photographs. Another new development occurred when the school board agreed to include Aboriginal values as part of the curriculum.

In collaboration with the CLSC (local community health centre), the CICC supervised a health employee, whose job was to visit the Cree encampments in the Chibougamau region to vaccinate people, provide them with up-to-date health information and carry out prevention work.

In May 1991, a major event transformed the face and dynamics of the Chibougamau region– the first shovelful of earth was dug to build the new Cree community of Oujé-Bougoumou, which became the new home of hundreds of Cree people living in Chibougamau, Chapais and family hunting camps. A year later, on May 22, 1992, the residents took possession of their homes.

The impacts on the CICC were important. Employees left to take the many new jobs available in the new community, which offered much better salaries and conditions. The CICC also saw a drop in the demand for its services. It went through recruitment difficulties because qualified Cree people were now working in Oujé-Bougoumou. The faithful employees had to work doubly hard. Worry and discouragement set in; the moral of the troops dropped. The CICC was going through a crisis that put its future in doubt, but the flame never went out. The employees rolled up their sleeves and worked doggedly on. Meetings were held to learn about people's expectations, and the Centre turned to the elders of the community for assistance and advice.

The direction that the CICC decided to take was to emphasize cultural exchanges with the non-Aboriginal people of Chibougamau and to strengthen the quality of services for the community's Aboriginal population,

in keeping with the Centre's mission. Among these new efforts was a golf tournament organized for fundraising purposes.

Indian Day is today far the most important and the most popular annual event, with cultural and social activities bring together the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the Chibougamau region. Demonstrations of various traditional practices and games are put on to entertain the spectators, and a sampling of wild game is on the menu for the day. In 2006, this always well-attended event celebrated its 25th anniversary.

NFCVD:

Native Friendship Centre of Val-d'Or

The Native Friendship Centre of Val-d'Or opened its doors on November 22, 1974, with instrumental support from three imposing figures in the Algonquin community– Richard Kistabish, Jean Papatie and Fred Kistabish. Val-d'Or was going through a period of heightened economic activity benefiting Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike. With the economy thriving, the Cree were getting ready to sign the James Bay Agreement with the provincial and federal governments, and the Algonquins had moved their tribal council to the heart of downtown Val-d'Or. The Aboriginal people were knocking at the door of the city.

A building at 576-3rd Avenue was purchased with funding through the Migrating Native People's Program of the Secretary of State for Canada. Despite the limited space, an office and seven housing units were installed. The intentions were good but poorly provided for in terms of human and financial resources. Still, the NFCVD team overcame numerous obstacles to meeting its primary mission, that of improving the quality of lives of urban Aboriginals. Gloria Nault of Timiskaming was named the first executive director of the NFCVD.

The concept of a Native Friendship Centre was new, and the expectations of users, workers and organizations grew to the point that the NFCVD wasn't sure which way to turn. It had to meet a non-stop flow of urgent social, cultural and educational needs, stir the soup for lunch every day and translate forms for people who spoke only Cree. Facing such a scope of needs, the leaders of the NFCVD had no choice but to search for a new location. They found a building at 1011-6th Street in a residential area, with more adequate space to serve the growing Aboriginal population. This first relocation of the Centre took place in 1979. The NFVCD, now in its fifth year of existence, had gained confidence and began new projects as bold as they were innovative. Fred Kistabish took over its direction for a number of years, after which he was succeeded by Dominique Rankin. During this time, a strong effort was made in the fight against substance abuse. For example, therapeutic outings to the forest were held as pilot projects.

It was also an era of cultural projects, which included the holding of an Aboriginal film festival; the writing of a book, *Madessiwin*, on the topic of Algonquin medicinal remedies; a meeting held by the elders on Askigwash Island; and the promotion of First Nations arts and craftwork. Housing was a daily activity; the NFCVD provided meals and overnight stays at modest prices that attracted everyone. The housing service was very popular among the Cree from the North, who used it when they came to Val-d'Or for hospital appointments. Mary Brazeau, who has been the cook since the very beginning, says that her best memories are those of speaking and sharing a laugh with elders she had never met before.

In 1981, the NFCVD held its first softball tournament. The tournament, which ran for ten years, was a major gathering for close to 2,000 Aboriginal people,

who would spend several days in Val-d'Or for the games. The local authorities and merchants appreciated this new and unexpected source of income, but they took a dim view of seeing so many people in one place for the tournament.

The years 1985-86 were marked by several firsts, including the Centre's first newsletter and its first Bingo licence. Bingo was a lucrative activity which allowed the NFCVD to raise a significant amount of money for its future projects.

We also remember these years as having revealed serious administrative shortcomings within the organization. The Secretary of State, as the Centre's main funding sponsor, was considering funding cuts; the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec (RCAAQ) thus proposed that it manage the NFCVD until the financial situation was restored and the Centre's administration regained its footing. A committee made up of Micheline Chartrand, Johnny Jolly and Louis Bordeleau) was created; it held meetings for a year until the light at the end of the tunnel appeared.

Diane Décoste was hired as director. She led the NFCVD towards healthy management and expanded the self-funding activities, which gave the Centre some breathing space. Parts of the building were renovated to improve the quality of the housing and food services and to increase the income from these services. The NFCVD established a partnership with Cree patient services to provide quality housing services to Cree patients during their stay in Val-d'Or.

In 1987, the number of Aboriginal people in Val-d'Or grew considerably, leading to a housing shortage. The NFCVD coordinated the Wawaté project, which involved developing new housing units for 18 families on

Louise Lemay Street. During this period, Health Canada proposed to the NFCVD that the latter coordinate and manage the health liaison service for Aboriginal people living away from their communities. The takeover of this service allowed the hiring of Aboriginal people who knew the patients and the problems they experienced with the health system and its institutions. A few years later, Health Canada also turned over the coordination and administration of patient transportation services to the NFCVD.

By the late 1980s, the migration of Aboriginal people to urban areas, as seen 20 years earlier in the big cities of the Canadian West, had become a reality as well in Val-d'Or and elsewhere in Québec. In collaboration with the University of Québec in Abitibi-Témiscaminque, two surveys were conducted to establish a profile of the urban Aboriginal population. The NFCVD was becoming more mature and had the wind in its sails! This steady pace in its growth was due to the perseverance and dedicated work of individuals who believed in what they were doing and were convinced that they could improve the situation. We remember here the contributions of Christine Sioui, Denise Gosselin, Gerry Boudrias, Mary Brazeau, Louise Gosselin, Mary Ann Wapachee and Edna King.

In 1990, the NFCVD presented the second edition of the Aboriginal film and video festival, in collaboration with *Terres en vues*. It also launched *Kamamajicek*, a photo exhibition about the Anishnabe, which would be run again 15 years later, in 2005. The year 1992 saw the first golf tournament, which was organized as a funding activity, followed in 1994 by the first Nitahigan benefit dinner, a cultural event that would be repeated twice more.

All this time, the organization was expanding and the office space at 1011-6th street had become too small. Under the direction of Édith Cloutier, who has been at the helm of the NFCVD since June 1989, a plan was developed for funding and constructing a new building. In 1993, the Société d'habitation du Québec and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation announced important financial participation in the form of a loan through the off-reserve Aboriginal housing program. Various fundraising activities were held to complete the funding and to carry out this ambitious project.

The new building was erected in 1995 at 1272-7th Street. As a major step in the evolution of the NFCVD, it provided a wonderful work atmosphere and gave new energy and impetus to the staff. With 12,000 square feet of space, the building has three stories and a basement. The housing service has 16 rooms and food services can accommodate 28 people at a time. This significantly increased the capacity for self-funding.

In 1996, the NFCVD opened an urban training centre to give training in new technologies. The program ran for seven years and helped hundreds of Aboriginal people in the region acquire new skills. At the same time, the First Nations Head Start program was launched; its goal was to provide early stimulation to children aged 0 to 5 through learning adapted to their culture. An arts and crafts shop was installed in the reception area; it presents a superb range of wonderful art and craftwork of Inuit, Cree, Algonquin and Atikamekw origin.

During this time, the City of Val-d'Or and its social agencies recognized and supported the efforts of the NFCVD by giving it several awards, including the Municipal Award of Merit in 1997. The NFCVD was now an essential

stakeholder in the social fabric of the city. In 1998, it collaborated in a partnership program with the Val-d'Or Chamber of Commerce to establish long-lasting relations and exchanges between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in the city.

In 1999, the Urban Multi-Purpose Aboriginal Youth Centre program was created to promote the involvement and participation of Aboriginal youths. In the same year, the Aasumiih Akawi Minicin exhibition was launched. It presented the recent history of the Anishnabe and Eeyou nations in the Val-d'Or region. A second component of this exhibition was added the following year; entitled "Anishnabe Aki," it had an educational objective, which was to allow people to understand the historic and contemporary issues related to the territorial claims of the Algonquin people.

The NFCVD welcomed the new millennium with the implementation of psychosocial intervention services, under Human Resources Development Canada's program for assisting homeless people. As part of a personal and professional skills development project, Aboriginal youths created a giant mural representing peace on the exterior of the building and made banners representing the Aboriginal nations in Quebec.

The NFCVD also began its campaign for the signing of *Declarations of Friendship between Peoples* as part of International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, held on March 21, and the Gabriel-Commanda March against Racism. Two conferences, each attracting more than 200 participants, were organized. The first of these conferences, which took place in 2001, dealt with crime prevention; the second one, entitled "Anishnabe Aki: Our Territory Yesterday and Today," focused on the different aspects of territorial claims.

Such fast development at the NFCVD required adjustments. The Centre's services were restructured into three main development sectors – social, community and economic. A short time later, the Centre established health promotion services through the Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative.

Another major expansion involved the construction of the Gabriel-Commanda Pavilion, which was inaugurated in 2003. It became home to the *Abinodjic-Migwam* Early Childhood Centre (ECC), which has 60 places for children. In addition, the NFCVD collaborated closely in the implementation of a college-level program in early childhood education with the Cégep de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Emploi-Québec and the First Nations Human Resources Development Commission of Quebec.

This expansion also ensured adequate space for activities in the pre-school program, as well as space for social development employees, a community hall and eight more rooms for the housing service. More than 25 jobs were created thanks to the opening of the early childhood centre; the NFCVD now has more than 60 employees to serve its population.

To support and encourage Aboriginal students, the NFCVD introduced the Mëmëgwashi Gala and began publishing the Dream Catcher agenda. Also in 2002, it developed a new assistance service for intergenerational victims of the Aboriginal residential schools. The Mohiganech Club (little wolves club) built its den in 2003; it provides homework assistance services to its members, aged 6 to 12, and serves as a social club for them.

The NFCVD has been honoured on numerous occasions for its achievements in culture (Jeanne Lalancette-Bigué Award and Mishtapew Gala of Excellence), the struggle against racism (Anne-Greenup Award),

and support for vulnerable people (honourable mention given at the Awards for Excellence of the Health and Social Services System). In June 2006, Edith Cloutier was made a Chevalier of the Ordre national du Québec for her invaluable contributions to the development of her community.

With great distinction, the NFCVD is accomplishing its mission to improve the quality of life of the Aboriginal population in Val-d'Or and the surrounding area. It is recognized as one of the most active and visible Native Friendship Centres in Canada. This is recognition well merited by the Centre's steadfast work, exemplary dedication and genuine commitment to the importance of its mission.

CAALT:

Centre d'amitié autochtone de La Tuque

The Centre d'amitié autochtone de La Tuque (CAALT) was inaugurated on July 1, 1975. This was at a time when the Atikamekw people in the Mauricie region were regularly visiting La Tuque to meet their needs, with healthcare needs as the most important ones.

Before the implementation of the CAALT, the Aboriginal people in the region had no meeting place or network for mutual help. People, mainly of Atikamekw origin, went to La Tuque to meet various needs, the most common one being to obtain health care. The neighbouring Innu from Mashteuiatsh also went to La Tuque for the same reasons. They would all meet at the train station and share the latest news on a park bench.

Henri Baribeau played a leading role in the work to implement the CAALT. The founding members held meetings with representatives from Weymontachie, Manawan and Opitciwan to identify the needs of the urban Aboriginal community and to determine the possible solutions for meeting those needs. They knew of the existence of the Cree Indian Centre of Chibougamau and of the funding available from the Secretary of State for Canada. At the time, people had thought of opening a museum, but

they decided that creating a Native Friendship Centre would be more appropriate for meeting the needs. It was necessary to find a shelter for people to replace the cold park benches and inhospitable hotel lobbies as quickly as possible.

In 1973, a needs study was conducted. Students were hired to interview Atikamekw people who came to La Tuque for services. The majority of the respondents indicated that they needed somewhere to stay and a meeting place. Assistance for patients was one of the several urgent needs that were identified. It was known that Secretary of State funding was available, but it was not easy to find a building for "Indians" at the time. This obstacle was overcome with the help of a "white" friend, who bought a house and rented it to the implementation committee. Racism was omnipresent in La Tuque at the time.

The founding members wanted to acquire an unused school to serve as the Centre, but the City of La Tuque, as the owner of the school, refused their proposal and suggested that they instead construct a building, while noting that Indian Affairs and Northern Canada had plenty of money for Aboriginal students.

The first grant awarded to the CAALT came from the Secretary of State for Canada under the Migrating Native People's Program. The grant came to $37,000 and was used for operations. The first director was Arthur Quoquochi, who had played for the Boston Bruins in the National Hockey League. The Centre's first location was at 750 Réal Street. At the beginning, it had just two employees, namely a director and a secretary-receptionist.

Demand for arts and crafts was similar in the CAALT to that in the other NFCs; in 1976, the Centre inaugurated its cultural week, which gives the local population the opportunity to discover the talents of artists from Opitciwan, Weymontachie and Manawan.

The Centre's housing services welcomed patients from the Atikamekw communities and a new resource was needed to assist these people. A health liaison officer was hired to serve as a resource person for all the health workers in La Tuque and the Atikamekw communities. This person, whose duties included accompaniment and interpretation services, also coordinated transportation between various service points and the train station, the bus terminal and the airport.

1979 saw a strong effort to preserve an Aboriginal burial ground located at the confluence of the Croche River and the St-Maurice River. With the support of the Atikamekw-Montagnais Council and the Department of Cultural Affairs, an archaeological dig was started. It revealed four graves, human bones, arrowheads and various ancient tools. A request was made to the Quebec government to have the area designated as a historic site. Meanwhile, a forestry company and the Department of Energy and Resources had developed a project for building a bridge right beside the site. The site's protectors made repeated requests to get an injunction halting the project. However, the government did not give the site historic status, but instead proposed moving all the remains and artefacts to another location. The bridge was eventually built and the site

was dug up. This occurred during a period which was perhaps tilted in favour of economic development, but at the expense of respect for the first inhabitants and their heritage.

In 1981, a grant from the Secretary of State allowed the construction of a new building on St. Paul Street. The clients, leaders and employees now had a space adapted to their needs. During this same period, a 45-minute documentary entitled *Les Autochtones présents en Mauricie* was produced in Super-8.

To preserve traditions, fifteen participants took courses in 1983 on how to tan animal hides and make moccasins, gloves and mittens.

In 1984, research involving elders was conducted under a community development program. The research gathered information about legends, arts and craftwork, and traditional recipes. Two years later, a high-quality brochure giving the results of this research was produced, with the invaluable contribution of elders Anna Chilton and Marguerite Connely.

The mid-1980s brought a significant increase in the Aboriginal population in La Tuque. In response, the CAALT conducted a needs assessment regarding the housing needs of new arrivals. The results of the study led to a project to construct new modestly priced housing for this population. This project, run by the CAALT and other organizations, also encouraged employment, because the future residents of the housing were able to help with the construction.

The Aboriginal patient liaison and transportation program expanded and the CAALT began using the building on St. Paul Street solely for this program. Patients needed calm and peaceful surroundings to regain their strength and the Centre had the right place for them. To do so, it had to relocate for a short time. It then acquired the building at 544 St. Antoine Street. At the time, the second floor was for high school students and the main floor and basement were for activities.

A few years later, the CAALT acquired another building, located in Shawinigan. It provided housing for Atikamekw students and patients who had to go to Shawinigan. Being in a strange town away from their traditional territory, they appreciated this initiative very much.

The Atikamekw Nation Council (ANC) was created around this time; it gave the Atikamekw communities a tribal council which would gradually take charge of its own programs and services. The ANC established its business and service offices in La Tuque. Several experienced employees from the CAALT went to work for the ANC. They did so for various reasons, including the opportunity to make a higher salary. The ANC and the CAALT cooperated in health matters, including the patient transportation and housing service, until the ANC could take full charge of it.

Here, we wish to single out Rosanne Petiquay for her exceptional contributions to the CAALT; she worked for the Centre for more than 20 years as accountant, programs manager, and executive director. Through her dedication and ardour, the organization overcame numerous obstacles. She also gave generously of her time as president of the CAALT Board of Directors.

The First Nations Head Start (FNHS) program came to La Tuque in 1995, under the aegis of the CAALT. After a few years of operations, it became *Le Premier Pas early childhood* learning centre. In 2000, it confirmed its autonomy by appointing a new board of directors and began its own long march towards bringing about a better future for Aboriginal children.

An Urban Aboriginal Training Centre (UATC) was implemented in 1996 to teach computers to all Aboriginal people and to any other person or organization. The courses were taught by professionals; this was expensive and operating costs well exceeded the income brought in by registrations. The training centre closed a few years later with a large operating deficit.

The CAALT later ceased operations at its housing facilities in Shawinigan (1998) and La Tuque (2000). Several employees were laid off or reassigned to other programs, while others returned to their own communities.

During this period, the CAALT nurtured the idea of an ambitious project for an Aboriginal cultural interpretation centre. A building on the shore of Lac St-Louis was purchased in October 1997 for that purpose.

Several exciting projects were held at this new site. Under one such project, which was sponsored by *Youth Service Canada*, ten Aboriginal youths learned about their culture; they also created miniature models depicting the traditional villages of each First Nation in Quebec. Most of the participants then found jobs or returned to school.

The building on Lac St-Louis also housed a beautiful exhibit room, a day centre, which provided meals, and space for office rental and conferences. To this day, the CAALT organizes various training and prevention activities at this site.

The new millennium brought some bumpy times for the CAALT. Confronted by an important deficit and seeing obstacles in its path, the Board of Directors asked the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec (RCAAQ) for support in the spring of 2000. The RCAAQ judged the situation to be serious enough to consider the CAALT a Centre in difficulty, as specified by the Aboriginal Friendship Centre Program (AFCP). It would take several years of hard work and numerous sacrifices to set the ship on an even keel again. A recovery plan was developed to guide the leaders of the CAALT to calmer waters.

The CAALT found itself back on course thanks to the leadership of the Board of Directors, which obtained help from an outside consulting firm for its restructuring. The Centre revised its programming and turned its focus to offering a wide range of activities to all age groups of its clientele. The CAALT has been led since 2003 by Christine Jean, an Innu from Mashteuiatsh who holds close to her heart the well-being of the Aboriginal population in La Tuque and is steadfastly guiding the Centre safely to shore, never hesitating to offer her friendship and support.

No history of the CAALT would be complete without including the wonderful story of Mélanie Napartuk, a young Inuit from Puvirnituq who moved to La Tuque and has been involved in the youth component of the CAALT since her teen years.

The CAALT team, which is always ready to go the extra mile, is making every effort to ensure the best possible services for the 350 Aboriginal families in the Centre's registry. We see a promising future thanks to the strong involvement of youths who are bringing new energy that is opening the way to constructive and creative projects, with the continuing invaluable participation of the elders in our community.

NFCM:

Native Friendship Centre of Montreal

The origin of the NFCM dates back to 1974, when Aboriginal students were looking for a place to call their own in the big city, a place where they could meet and combine their efforts to improve their situation. These students came from just about everywhere and thus from several different nations. At the time, talk of the Native Friendship Centre concept was on everyone's lips. Office space was found at 2009 Bishop Street for the start-up of operations. The Centre obtained its letters patent and was incorporated in 1975.

When Eddie Gardner took over the direction of the CAAM, immense challenges were awaiting. The Aboriginal people in Montreal in 1975 were looking for a paradise in the city, but the search proved fruitless for most of them. The rich and easy life they saw was not accessible to them and the many obstacles in the way made it seem too impracticable to reach.

But one step at a time was the order of the day for the NFCM. In 1977, it obtained capital funding from the Native People's Migrating Program to acquire a somewhat more spacious building at 3730 Côte-des-Neiges, thus allowing the Centre to better serve the Aboriginal population.

Like any new organization, the NFCM had to establish priorities, obtain the right tools and build partnerships. In this role, it took part in the creation of the RCAAQ with the other existing Centres (CICC, NFCVD and CAALT).

In the early 1980s, the NFCM saw that Aboriginal people caught up in the justice system had immense legal needs; they had virtually no support for dealing with the apparatus of the law. The NFCM created a new organization to assist them, namely Native Para-Judicial Services. This new organization was given the mandate to provide liaison between individuals and the justice system. The Native para-judicial counsellors had made their entry into the legal world of Quebec.

First Nations members are barely noticed in the huge cosmopolitan city of Montreal. Most people see them as just another group of immigrants. In 1982, to overcome this general indifference, and in a symbolic gesture of cultural affirmation, the NFCM presented its first cultural festival; the sound of Aboriginal drumming echoed throughout the least receptive neighbourhoods of the city!

The NFCM continued to broaden its horizons. With Margaret Horn as director, it implemented new programs and services for people seeking assistance. Resources were diversified, new funding sponsors were sought; still, the Centre often felt powerless before the complexity of the requests being made of it. The NFCM needed support itself if it was to help others. But running the community kitchen, visiting hospital patients and assisting impoverished street people comforted body and soul, at least for the moment.

The NFCM developed in step with the social evolution of its community and was eager to take on the challenge of organizing and holding the annual general meeting of the NAFC in 1986. This event was the scene of a memorable address made by then-Quebec premier René Lévesque to the hundreds of delegates from the Native Friendship Centres in Canada. His address contained the solemn declaration announcing his government's official recognition of the 11 Aboriginal nations in Quebec.

A year later, in 1987, the NFCM collaborated with other organizations to create the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal, which provided housing to Aboriginal women going through all types of problems. A large proportion of the women who went to the shelter were Inuit. They came from the North, had no shelter or point of reference, and were looking for a place where they could feel safe.

During this time, Ida LaBillois became the executive director of the NFCM. Ida had grown with the Centre and knew how to get things done. She was hard-working and dedicated, with an abiding concern for social justice. Ida instilled positive work values among her peers and guided them towards taking on new challenges.

The NFCM was called on during the Oka Crisis to help provide the basic necessities of life to innocent people caught behind the barricades. In this role, it organized fundraising activities and recruited volunteers to transport food. The social and political impacts of the crisis also had to be addressed and managed. Bitterness and suspicion were omnipresent. Efforts were made to pick up the pieces but the wounds took time to heal.

In 1990, showing its pioneer spirit once again, the NFCM organized the first conference in Quebec on HIV/AIDS. Well aware of the great risk this new scourge presented for the Aboriginal population, the organizers brought together professionals for the conference, which was held in Quebec City. The goal was to break down taboos and make as many people as possible aware of the urgency of the situation. The conference was a strong success and broke ground allowing several similar conferences to be held.

In 1993, to overcome the various gaps and barriers in the labour market affecting urban Aboriginal people, an employment referral service was implemented at the NFCM. New avenues for job creation were explored and a databank specially designed for this service was created. With few resources but enormous desire, small miracles were achieved.

For a number of years, the NFCM simply did not have enough space to serve its population. The building on Côte-des-Neiges had become too small to meet the needs and a new location had to be found as quickly as possible. In 1995, the NFCM acquired its current building, located at 2001 St-Laurent Boulevard. This was an important event in the history of the NFCM. It was a time for celebration because all of our hopes now seemed within reach of being made a reality. But the building was in the heart of downtown Montreal, an area feverish with activity and all sorts of urban creatures!

With the new building, the Centre's funding was more uncertain. A large mortgage was cutting into the cash flow necessary for holding activities. Fundraising activities were necessary. New obstacles were looming ahead.

Our youths began using the basement of the NFCM in 1999 for their activities, thanks to funding from the UMYAC program. An Aboriginal youth council was created. The youths wanted more freedom as part of the NFCM. They obtained the leeway they desired through the UMAYC program, which required their full participation. A coordinator and facilitators were hired and the youths were kept busy daily with a full program of activities in such areas as culture, sports, employment and training, education and the arts. Our youths saw a limitless horizon thanks to these activities and the future belonged to them.

In 2002, a research project entitled *Homelessness among the First Nations, Inuit and Métis* was conducted in Montreal. Following this project, the NFCM obtained funding from Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) for a pilot project on urban Aboriginal homelessness. A van was acquired to patrol the streets of Montreal as part of the pilot project, which was named Ka'wahse and provided emergency support, food, clothing and shelter to homeless Aboriginal people. This project lifted the veil on the sordid living conditions of homeless Aboriginal people who had not reached the promised land. At the NFCM, they were given hot meals and were referred to health, education and housing centres. Given the scope of the task, collaborative relations were built in 2004 with service agencies such as *Médecins du monde*, which ensured nursing care during the weekend patrols. They gave indispensable support and provided the expertise necessary for combating a scourge which was spreading despite concerted efforts and acts of courage bordering on heroism.

During this time, the financial situation of the NFCM worsened. The Centre struggled to deliver its activities reports and financial statements, and was crushed by debt. It had to be categorized as a centre in difficulty and as such, negotiated the terms of a recovery plan with the RCAAQ.

In 2006, the NFCM embarked on an education mission to promote diabetes and tuberculosis prevention among its members. As part of this mission, it built links with recognized health organizations in order to better meet the many needs of the urban Aboriginal population.

To ensure its own healthy management, the NFCM set up a development program, which included a blueprint for the board of directors and staff. This plan defined the medium-term and long-term duties of the leadership towards the urban Aboriginal community and the areas that management must focus on in order to meet the economic, socio-cultural and spiritual needs of Aboriginal people.

NFCS:

Native Friendship Centre of Senneterre

The Native Friendship Centre of Senneterre (NFCS) opened in the fall of 1978 at 571-12th Avenue. It was created to assist a nomadic population of Cree, Algonquin and Atikamekw members, for whom housing was the priority need. Senneterre is located at the junction of Highway 113 and the railway line, so a good number of Aboriginal people would go there for provisions and all kinds of services.

Before 1978, the meeting place was the home of Annie Moore, a dedicated woman of peace; she welcomed anyone who knocked at her door. Assisted by a social worker named Michel Raîche, Annie created a provisional committee along with Charlotte Wapachee, Marlene Dixon and Georges Bordeleau. The necessary legal documents were completed and sent to the appropriate government departments. In the summer of 1978, a cheque in the amount of $15,000 was received from Quebec's Department of Social Services for starting up the new centre.

Senneterre had always been a region that showed hostility towards the First Nations. In earlier times, First Nations members would have to leave the town before sundown or they would be put in prison. Indifference and mistrust were passed down from generation to generation. Implementing the NFCS was difficult, but the determination of its founders made all the difference.

With Michèle Rouleau as director, the NFCS worked first on developing housing and food services for Aboriginal people in transit in Senneterre. It then created a demographic databank to facilitate the urban integration of the growing Aboriginal population, which presented numerous urgent needs.

The NFCS was located in an old wood-heated building on 12th Avenue across from the municipal arena. On winter mornings, it was common to see the workers wearing their coats and gloves indoors. The leaders of the NFCS really had no choice but to accept this building; in fact, it was the only place they were able to rent. Everywhere else was off-limits because of racism.

But the building was in a residential zone and the NFCS received an eviction notice in 1979 from the municipality of Senneterre. According to the eviction notice, there were bylaws prohibiting the Centre from offering institutional services in this zone. The troops mobilized and a call for support was made to the regional and provincial Aboriginal associations. Our leaders also took part in the meetings of the municipal council and an awareness campaign for keeping the Centre open got underway. These efforts were not in vain because in the coming years, the city came to tolerate our presence despite the protests by certain city councillors and other leading figures who wanted to see the NFCS close its doors.

In 1980, Michèle Rouleau left the Abitibi region and Louis Bordeleau took over as director. The NFCS got to work on consolidating services, training staff and obtaining new funding sources. Salaries were so low that one might reasonably conclude that the positions were volunteer ones. During this time, staff members included a director, a secretary-receptionist, a referral officer, a cook and a night watchman.

In 1981, the NFCS had to hold fundraising activities to cover its costs; one such event was a canoe-a-thon, which took place right across from city hall in Senneterre. As a symbolic gesture, the mayor of Senneterre and the president of the NFCS went in the same canoe. Through such activities, links with the elected municipal officials were strengthened.

In 1982, under a project for cultural preservation, the Centre published a brochure giving the historical highlights of the First Nations in the Senneterre region. This publication also included information on the history of names in the region, along with testimonies from elders and stories and legends.

In 1983, our researchers went to the upper basin of the Mégiscane River and took photos of ancient burial grounds and the remains of trading posts of the Hudson Bay Company. They found metal pieces, including a harpoon tip from the 1870s.

As part of a community interaction program, two facilitators organized discussion workshops on various topics with the objective of harmonizing relations between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in Senneterre.

In 1985, through a capital program for the Native Friendship Centres, the NFCS moved to a beautiful downtown building that was more suitable for its needs. After 50 years of brief visits to an inhospitable environment, the First Nations in the Senneterre region now had a place they could call their own. They could hardly believe this had happened and there was euphoria throughout our community. With more spacious and better-adapted facilities, the Centre implemented cultural and educational programs as well as research activities. Elders were interviewed and their testimonies were carefully conserved in the Centre's archives.

In 1987, at the request of Health Canada, the NFCS took over the Aboriginal patient liaison and transportation service. In this role, we maintained communications with the health establishments and coordinated transportation of patients to hospitals outside of Senneterre.

In 1988, noting the difficulties Aboriginal students were having in adapting, the NFCS began an education liaison service. It hired Hélène Lavoie, who dedicatedly supported and assisted the youths in their studies and personal lives. At the same time, a joint table was created, bringing together social workers and education professionals to come up with long-term solutions to the problems Aboriginal students experienced in trying to fit into an education system that was foreign to them.

At the same time, forestry operations were going strong east of Senneterre, and one of the chosen access routes for these operations threatened to encroach on an Aboriginal burial ground along the Wetetnagami River, near Cemetery Lake. The NFCS convinced the Department of Natural Resources to make a detour to protect the site. When the loggers' operations brought them to the cemetery, they left a 132-foot strip of uncut forest around the burial ground.

In the summer of 1991, as part of the celebrations marking the Abitibi cycling race, we organized an event called Nottaway Migwam, which was held on the baseball field in the heart of the city. We erected an authentic Aboriginal encampment and for three days, the public came to taste First Nations specialties, enjoy traditional dance, participate in games, watch cultural films, and speak with Cree, Algonquin and Atikamekw people. One of the most wonderful memories of this event is of the dance by the youth of Opitciwan decked out in their beautiful traditional costume, accompanied by the strains of a violin. This activity was repeated in 1994 to mark the 75th anniversary of Senneterre, at the same site, and it enjoyed the same success as before.

During this period, the NFCS experimented with a new project called *Child to Child,* with children aged 9 to 12 as the target group. This program had already demonstrated its value in the United States. It was introduced in Canada by Health Canada, which set up pilot projects in Native Friendship Centres throughout the country. The NFCS was designated as the site in Quebec for the pilot project. The program worked to promote good health through approaches targeting the youths' active participation. In other words, youths became partners in

health promotion. Through their participation in interesting group activities, they established links with their peers, families and communities. The program allowed some 12 Aboriginal youths to strengthen their self-esteem, learn how to control their emotions better, and improve their sense of responsibility.

In 1996, the First Nations Head Start (FNHS) program was introduced at the NFCS, as a joint project with the Native Friendship Centre of Val-d'Or. Through the program, Aboriginal children under the age of five benefit from culturally-based learning to facilitate their future school and social lives.

The late 1990s were marked by the acquisition of the Shabogamak chalet at a magnificent site on the shores of Lac Parent 9 kilometres from Senneterre. This allowed the NFCS to start holding activities of all kinds in a natural setting without disturbing the neighbours: camping and fishing in the summer, snow-sliding and snowshoeing in the winter. The chalet gave the NFCS an opportunity to expand its recreational, cultural and community activities program. It also came to be used for training workshops, e.g., therapeutic stays, cultural demonstrations and social gatherings.

Students started coming to the chalet to learn about Aboriginal culture; we now had another way to build authentic relations with the younger generations. The schools appreciated very much these visits, which they qualified as being educational.

In 1999, the Urban Multi-Purpose Aboriginal Youth Centre (UMAYC) program was introduced. This new program, which was sponsored by Canadian Heritage, allowed youths to organize regular activities in their own space at the Centre and at the Shabogamak chalet. A coordinator was hired and a

youth council began holding monthly meetings to ensure the project ran smoothly and to make corrections where necessary.

For the past 20 summers now, a canoe trip has been held for 15 to 20 participants to encourage physical activity, renew links with the traditions of our elders and make our youth more aware of the need to protect our Mother Earth.

In 2001, the NFCS welcomed some 50 delegates of the Cree Nation Youth Council at the Shabogamak chalet for their annual meeting. Temporary shelters were set up for everyone. We even had a small 'dépanneur' on site. For three days, we tended to the needs of these terrific people who were overjoyed by the setting we provided them.

In 2003, the NFCS celebrated its 25th anniversary. Many people were honoured for their contributions. Annie Moore, the mother of the NFCS had passed away in 1998 and was honoured posthumously. The faithful employees with 20 years or more of service were recognized; they included Louis Bordeleau, Charlotte Wabanonik, Jacqueline Bordeleau, Robert Moore and Margaret Moore. A community supper was enjoyed by all who were there to mark the anniversary.

In 2005, the Centre began a literacy course for elders who wanted to be able to read the labels on the items they bought. This course was given with the collaboration of adult education services.

A carnival was initiated at the Shabogamak chalet, with a host of games and activities for people of all ages, such as a broomball tournament, ice

fishing, tug-of-war, snow-sliding and snowmobiling. The carnival, which helps to build stronger social relations in the community, is capped off by a party.

The NFCS facilitated and coordinated information sessions for former students of the residential schools to assist them in obtaining reparation with recognition and justice. These sessions were painful but necessary.

The NFCS is celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2008. Having reached the age of adulthood, it is surveying the horizon stretching out before it. Many of the original members are no longer among us and the challenges are not the same as the ones in 1978. The face of racism has changed and the passenger train no longer takes Aboriginal families back to an invisible life in the forest. But we see the worried look on the faces of the Anishnabe elders and the innocent smiles on the faces of the children and we are led inevitably to ask – where will the future take us?

CAAQ:

Centre d'amitié autochtone de Québec

The Centre d'amitié autochtone de Québec was created in 1979 thanks to the efforts of dedicated women from Village-Huron, led by Jocelyne Gros-Louis. Officially inaugurated on May 17, 1981, the CAAQ set out to support Aboriginal people who came to the Quebec City region and had difficulty finding services appropriate to their needs.

Like all the other Native Friendship Centres in Quebec, the CAAQ is a non-profit organization managed by a board of directors elected at the annual general meeting. Its mission is to provide Aboriginal people living in the Quebec City region or in transit there with a meeting place, and services and programs, as well as to promote social, sports and cultural activities for them.

In the early 1980s, the CAAQ was located at 147 Valcartier Boulevard in Loretteville. It offered short-term housing in host homes to assist Aboriginal patients, students and others looking for a place to stay, including those caught up in the justice system. The CAAQ organized visits to Aboriginal patients who wanted some company while in hospital and found

interpreters for people needing support with regard to health care or the justice system. We also provided information of all kinds to help Aboriginal people deal with the bureaucratic apparatus and we gradually built up a mutual support network for this population dispersed throughout the large area of Quebec City.

The CAAQ also began promoting Aboriginal culture and traditions, by offering courses in clothes making and by organizing art exhibitions.

In 1985, the Centre acquired the Domaine Dubuisson, a building in Loretteville, so that it could consolidate and make more accessible its housing service to patients referred to it by Health Canada, in particular those from the Naskapi community of Shefferville. This community had signed a services agreement the year before with the CAAQ by which our centre could provide support as well as interpretation and housing services to its members who came to Quebec City for medical care.

1987 was a year that brought big hopes and expectations with the confirmation of funding to build a new Native Friendship Centre at 23 St-Louis Street in Loretteville. The CAAQ moved to this new location in February 1988 and was now able to serve its clientele and other organizations with an infrastructure that could meet the many needs. The directors of the CAAQ prioritized the needs of its clientele on the basis of the most urgent ones and knocked on the doors of various federal and provincial government departments for support.

We also began sponsoring a community action program for children, entitled À l'*Unisson*. The goal of this program was to promote development of parental skills, help parents adapt to this role, and provide the support necessary for meeting the needs of Aboriginal families and their children aged 0 to 12 living away from their communities.

In 1995, the CAAQ bought and renovated a building at 1177 Chemin Ste-Foy in Quebec City to meet the growing housing needs. This new housing centre was inaugurated the following year and was named Auberge du Cap au Nord. To maximize services, it was decided to keep the building open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Domaine Dubuisson was also renovated and four subsidized housing units became available for low-income families.

Two years later, in 1997, the *Centre Kanikantet* was implemented as the Urban Multi-Purpose Aboriginal Youth Centre project of the CAAQ, with the purpose to provide a meeting place for Aboriginal youths aged 10 to 29 and to offer them services and programs adapted to their needs and culture. To fully identify the objectives and better serve this young population, three groups were formed according to age: 10-12, 13-17 and 18-29. A wide range of sports, social and cultural activities were put on the program, along with workshops on health promotion and social services, all to help the youths improve their chances of success in life. The project also encourages leadership among the youths and gives them opportunities to affirm themselves in positive ways, get involved and decide what is best for them. Emphasis is given to education and training as well, to give youths a boost in their efforts to join the labour market.

In 2001, the project *Minuenium* was established to promote diabetes prevention, with the focus on good nutrition and the benefits of physical activity, and with all ages as the target. Advice from a nutritionist was also made possible through this project. To achieve the objectives, the project turned to various means such as World Diabetes Day, collective kitchens, recipe books and an obesity prevention camp.

During this same period, the CAAQ implemented a homelessness prevention program entitled *Umeshkanam* (Urban Territory 03). Its goals were to eliminate the risks of homelessness among Aboriginal people, reduce substance abuse, combat violence against women and children, and help people break out of their isolation. Clients could now get some counselling, including needs evaluation and referrals to the appropriate resources for assistance. Community meals, prevention workshop, food assistance and a community garden are some of the means that encouraged people to take part in the program.

The year 2002 was marked by the creation of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. The project created by the CAAQ under the AHF was called *Rétablir l'équilibre quotidien*; its purpose was to heal the wounds suffered by victims of physical and sexual abuse in the residential schools, and by their descendents. Psychotherapeutic work, counselling and healing circles were the activities introduced to help participants regain their psycho-affective balance.

In 2003, the CAAQ purchased and renovated a day centre called the Café Roreke, to provide training in institutional cooking and catering services. The

Centre also provides food services and rooms for rental to organizations. In so doing, it has created jobs for Aboriginal people.

The early childhood centre, Auassiss-Petit-Enfant, was created in April 2005. It has 30 spaces available for children aged 0 to 59 months. It uses a program with a learning approach that fosters the overall, harmonious and optimal development of children at the physical, intellectual, emotional, social and moral levels. This new enterprise gave several new opportunities to the entire community through the jobs and work experience placements that it created. It also emphasizes diabetes prevention for young children; the healthy food prepared by the Café Roreke plays an important role here. The children also benefit from an environment adapted to their culture.

Activities for elders are an important part of our programming as well. We offer them a wide range of psychosocial and leisure services under the *New Horizons program*. The elders are enjoying these activities immensely; the program is also helping to break through people's isolation, to combat poverty and social exclusion, and to promote the creation of intergenerational links.

Since 2005, the Centre has been offering programs to promote the well-being of women, with support from Status of Women (Canada) and the Secrétariat de la condition féminine (Quebec). Efforts have been made to encourage Aboriginal women to take on decision-making positions within their community, local and regional authorities. Similarly, to improve their socio-economic situation, the Centre has worked hard to allow them equal access to jobs and social services. These measures have made it possible to draw up an accurate social profile of Aboriginal women living in the greater Quebec City area.

The CAAQ is continuing its work within the urban Aboriginal community of Quebec City and is sparing no effort to improve the community's quality of life with a clientele-based approach. The employees and board members carry the Centre's mission in their hearts, and their actions bear witness to their authentic commitment to Aboriginal people here in the capital city of Quebec.

CAAL:

Centre d'amitié autochtone de Lanaudière

In the spring of 2001, a new Native Friendship Centre was born, marking the creation of the first new Native Friendship Centre in 20 years. This new centre, located in the Lanaudière region, was called the Centre d'amitié autochtone de Lanaudière. It began operations a year later in a modest office located at 128 Précieux-Sang in Joliette. The clientele is made up mostly of Atikamekw members from Manawan now living in Joliette. Like all the other NFCs, the CAAL is a non-profit organization managed by a board of directors; its nine members are elected annually.

The CAAL took as its mission that of improving the quality of life of Aboriginal people in the region, by bringing them together through an association that would provide them with means for achieving that objective. The CAAL also promotes cultural understanding between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in the Lanaudière region and builds bridges to facilitate exchanges between the two communities.

As a new friendship centre, the CAAL does not qualify for core funding, which the other NFCs in Canada and Quebec receive. New centres do not automatically receive funding from the Aboriginal Friendship Centre Program of Canadian Heritage. This reality has caused serious problems. A great deal of time and energy must be devoted to searching for funding, even though our purpose is to help people through various services.

The CAAL gives particular attention to providing training and skill acquisition activities to its clientele. It offers punctual training according to the requests and the opportunities that arise.

Like elsewhere in the urban centres of Quebec and Canada, it is not easy for Aboriginal people to find housing in our region. The CAAL helps families and students who are looking for a roof over their heads.

The CAAL created its youth council in October 2003 and implemented the Urban Multi-Purpose Aboriginal Youth Centre program, which allows youths to hold activities that meet their cultural, recreational and social needs and interests.

To revive the Atikamekw culture among our youths, in the summer of 2005 we launched the *Miskatisowin* project, which involves a stay in the forest with traditional and educational activities. It helps participants to rediscover their origins and to learn about the wealth of their culture and history.

Even though the CAAL was not rolling in money, we obtained a van in 2003 so that we could provide better services. We were now able to offer lunch at noon and homework assistance to students, along with appropriate transportation. The participation of volunteers became essential for these activities, because the small team at the CAAL could not do everything at the same time.

Our good relations with the community of Manawan paid off when the CAAL received a gift of unused sports equipment from Manawan for our young people. Indeed, most of them did not even have proper running shoes for playing in the gyms of Joliette, Manawan was asked to make a financial contribution. It agreed to give a hand, knowing that physical activity was important for the children.

The CAAL maintains positive relations with its local and regional partners. It became a member of the RCAAQ in November 2002 and is also a member of the National Association of Friendship Centres. With support from the Native Friendship Centre network, the CAAL received a substantial increase in its income from the Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones for fiscal year 2007-2008. These new resources have given the CAAL much needed breathing room and allowed it to plan a move to another location, which is necessary to ensure the best possible services for the Aboriginal population in the region.

The wonderful adventure of the CAAL would not have been possible without the generous and exceptional volunteer support of Maurice Bonin, who has given body and soul to the Centre's development. In 2004, the Quebec government honoured him for his volunteer work in the category of non-profit organizations.

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NFCSI:

Native Friendship Centre of Sept-Îles

The Native Friendship Centre of Sept-Îles is the latest member of the family of NFCs in Quebec. It held its founding meeting on December 10, 2006 and inaugurated its new offices on December 12, 2007 at 170-700 Laure Boulevard in Sept-Îles. The NFCSI did not spring up without antecedents. In the late 1980s, an Innu group had rented an office to run a NFC, but the experiment lasted a short time only. Still, they did attend some meetings of the RCAAQ and were present at the 1990 annual meeting of the NAFC, held in Halifax. Another effort to create a NFC took place in the mid-1990s, but this too was in vain.

The mission being taken on by the NFCSI is of obvious importance; Sept-Îles is the natural crossroad for providing services to the communities in the North Shore and coastal regions of Nitassinan. The Chiefs of the Innu communities gave their recognition and support of the project for creating a NFC in Sept-Îles to promote the well-being of their people who lived permanently in Sept-Îles or went there for services.

The directors of the NFCSI called on the RCAAQ for its support in the early stages of the start-up process. The provincial association immediately began investing the time and resources needed to make sure that everything went smoothly. The main funding sources for the start-up were the Aboriginal Initiatives Fund of the Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones du Québec and transition measures under the Homelessness Partnership Initiative of Human Resources and Social Development Canada.

The NFCSI strives to improve the quality of life of Aboriginals living permanently in the urban setting of Sept-Îles, and of those who are in transit there. It also promotes Aboriginal culture and creates bridges between all peoples. As a place for reaffirming identity, it is building an alliance with all peoples in friendship, respect, transparency and mutual support.

To meet its objectives, this new NFC offers a variety of reception, referral and information services. It also provides cultural and thematic workshops according to requests and needs, and holds coffeehouses and community meals to build solid relations with its clientele and partners. The directors and employees at the NFCSI are working determinedly and dedicatedly towards being able to offer an oasis of peace to the Aboriginal people who live in or go to Sept-Îles.

Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec

RCAAQ:

Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec

The Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec (RCAAQ) was created in 1976, when the Native Friendship Centres in Chibougamau, Val-d'Or, La Tuque and Montreal decided to create an association to advance their cause. Anne-Marie Awashish, Henri Baribeau, Gloria Nault and Eddie Gardner were the first directors of the RCAAQ.

Like any new organization, the RCAAQ held a contest for the logo that would become its symbol. The winning entry was by Christine Sioui-Wawanoloat; it illustrated a sunrise ceremony with two figures sharing a peace pipe. This symbol was based on an authentic design made on birch bark.

Without any grants for support, the young organization used the Cree Indian Centre of Chibougamau as its headquarters. In the late 1970s, the provincial government agreed to fund the RCAAQ through a program for volunteer organizations in the Department of Social Services' network. The RCAAQ then set up its offices in the Native Friendship Centre of Montreal at 3730 Côte-des-Neiges.

The NFC Movement in Quebec underwent its first expansion in 1978 by welcoming a new member, the Native Friendship Centre of Senneterre. A year later, the Centre d'amitié autochtone de Québec also became a member.

The RCAAQ developed gradually and thanks to new human and financial resources, it moved to new offices on Cherrier Street in Montreal. After having spent its earliest years with just one employee, by the early 1980s we had four employees, including Jacques Jobin as coordinator.

1984 marked the 450th anniversary of Jacques Cartier's first voyage to Canada, and the RCAAQ organized a conference with "450 Years Later" as its theme. It was not a time for celebration but rather one for reflection and discussion. Where did things stand for us 450 years after the arrival of Europeans on our lands? The conference was held at the Manoir du Lac Delage near Quebec City and brought together 300 delegates from the Quebec First Nations, as well as representatives from the NFCs in Quebec and Canada. The event was a tremendous success and gave the RCAAQ and its member NFCs a unique opportunity to become better known.

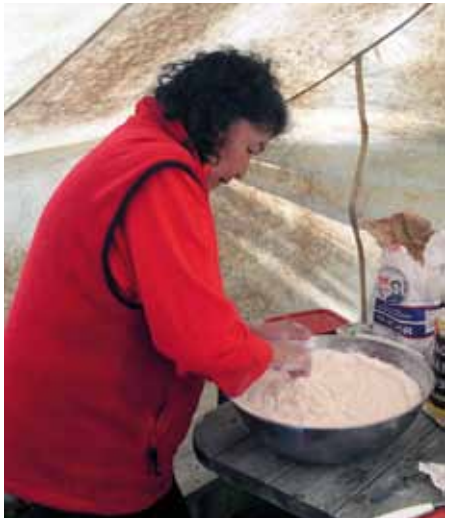
In 1985, at the request of the Family Policy Consultation Committee, the RCAAQ organized a forum on the Aboriginal family. Close to 60 people from all of Quebec's regions attended the forum, which was held at Cap-Rouge, just outside of Quebec City.

The RCAAQ team was gaining more experience and with that, maturity. We had more confidence in our actions and we looked towards the future with tremendous hope and optimism. We also began to receive calls and requests from groups wanting to implement Native Friendship Centres in their areas.

In 1985, the RCAAQ and the Native Friendship Centres took part in an extensive national research project on the abuse of drugs, alcohol and solvents, under the aegis of the National Association of Friendship Centres. A report was produced and its recommendations were widely publicised.

During this period, the NFCs benefited from significant additional funding provided by the federal government for the NFC program. In the course of a single year, all the NFCs in Canada were able to add a new employee to their core staff. The RCAAQ was often asked for its advice on how the new funding should be allocated, because there was not always enough funding to cover all needs and difficult decisions had to be made. This inevitably brought bumps that needed smoothing out.

In 1988, as part of a cultural exchange program, the NFCs welcomed people from France, who discovered a new culture and ways of doing things that were different from their own. The following year, the RCAAQ visited Blagnac in France to learn about their methods for intervening with at-risk clienteles. Diane Décoste, the RCAAQ's executive director at the time, coordinated the project.



1989 saw a new attempt to create a NFC for Sept-Îles. Serge Mckenzie carried the torch this time and attended several meetings with the RCAAQ to get the project off the ground. Unfortunately, there wasn't enough kindling and the fire did not catch. But a spark remained…

Meanwhile, the NFCs throughout Canada were conducting an unprecedented lobbying campaign to get more funding for the Aboriginal Friendship Centre Program. They sought the support of the media and Members of Parliament, who brought up the issue in the House of Commons. At the same time, the RCAAQ published a brochure to mark the 20 years of existence of the NFCs in Quebec.

1990 was the year of the Oka Crisis, which had numerous impacts on the Aboriginal world in Quebec. The RCAAQ gave all possible support to the NFCM in its efforts to get food and other provisions to the unfortunate people caught behind the barricades.

In 1991, the Secrétariat aux Affaires Autochtones organized a conference in Val d'Or on relations between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. Respected speakers took part, and earnest desires for enhanced relations were expressed on all sides.

This was also the time when *Pathways to Success*, a program of Human Resources Development Canada, got underway. Under the program, the federal government transferred funding for training to the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador (AFNQL), which redistributed the funding to the communities via the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Human Resources Development Commission (FNQHRDC). The RCAAQ, which was sitting as a member of

the AFNQL and FNQHRDC, made every effort to obtain a fair share of funding for urban Aboriginals under the training programs.

In 1992, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples travelled the country. The RCAAQ presented a brief to bring attention to the problems experienced by the urban Aboriginal population in Quebec. Raymond Picard was also appointed as our new executive director in 1992.

On March 10, 1993, the NFCs in Canada closed their doors for the day to protest the 20% cuts that had been announced for the Aboriginal Friendship Centre Program (AFCP) over a four-year period. The NFC Movement went through a sombre period in its history, after having been so heartened by the increased funding a few years before then. We got the word out regarding the injustice being done and contacted the media, but all for nought.

In the following autumn, the RCAAQ held strategic planning workshops to re-orient its priorities and to revive the flame that had been sputtering for some time. A work committee was also created to develop membership criteria for new NFCs in Quebec.

In 1994, the NAFC sponsored a national project for implementing a database system to evaluate the AFCP. It met with passive resistance from the members, who were mistrustful of the idea that their information would be used by other authorities.

The NAFC held its annual general meeting in Quebec City in the summer of 1994; the close to 300 delegates and observers were captivated by the charm and hospitality of Quebec's beautiful capital city.

In 1995, the RCAAQ became a member of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission, an entity coming under the aegis of the AFNLQ. We also participated in the launch in Montreal of the First Nations Head Start program. Under the guidance of the RCAAQ and Health Canada, the FNHS took root in our member NFCs in 1996.

Also in 1996, we held a meeting in Quebec City with ministerial officials responsible for Aboriginal issues, so that we could learn more about their roles and responsibilities. The Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones (SAA) coordinated the meeting, which produced beneficial exchanges and established better communications.

By 1997, the RCAAQ was demonstrating its strong leadership in economic development. It managed a major provincial project which was decentralized to the NFCs. Local community development officers were to be hired in each Friendship Centre and optimism quickly took hold. The same period saw the establishment of the Urban Aboriginal Training Centres (UATC) in most of the NFCs to give their populations training in new technologies. In order to bring these important projects to fruition, the

RCAAQ deployed efforts to satisfy the diverse and at times divergent expectations of its members. This era was marked by rigorous questioning of the development method that the RCAAQ and the Native Friendship Centres should focus on. A turbulent wind was blowing throughout our Movement.

To be fully ready for new challenges over the horizon, we held more strategic planning sessions in the fall of 1998. We began with a province-wide evaluation of the First Nations Head Start (FNHS) program. It was found to be working well, although one site had problems of a structural nature.

1999 marked the introduction of the Urban Multi-Purpose Aboriginal Youth Centre program (UMAYC). Canadian Heritage gave responsibility for this new program to the NAFC, which in turn assigned management of the program in Quebec to the RCAAQ. Substantial amounts were involved and the RCAAQ assessed projects from the NFCs as well as from other Aboriginal organizations in Quebec. A coordinator was hired to manage the program.

The RCAAQ celebrated its 25th anniversary at Chibougamau in October of 2001. The founding members of the RCAAQ were invited to join with the board members and delegates of the NFCs in commemorating this anniversary. They spoke about the beginnings of the Native Friendship Centre Movement in Quebec and the challenges they had faced in creating the NFCs. It was a wonderful time for sharing; all the participants got to know one another and to talk about things past and present.

2001 was also marked by the creation of the RCAAQ's Urban Aboriginal Youth Council in August at Senneterre. The six NFCs at this gathering (NFCVD, NFCS, CICC, CAALT, CAAQ and NFCM) had asked their youth delegates to set down the foundations of a structure for youth involvement at the RCAAQ. The gathering was a great opportunity for the youths of the NFCs to meet and get to know one another better, and to discuss the issues affecting them. Many of the Aboriginal youths involved in our Youth Council over the years have developed strong leadership skills and have since taken their place within our Movement and in other spheres of society.

The RCAAQ celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2001. In that same year, the Centre d'amitié autochtone de Québec accepted the invitation to rejoin the association. There were now six Native Friendship Centres; that number soon increased to seven when the Centre d'amitié autochtone de Lanaudière joined the RCAAQ at the latter's annual general meeting of 2002, held in Quebec City.

During this period, the RCAAQ underwent numerous changes and encountered obstacles blocking its growth. The work team had to fall back on its own resources and restrict its activities in order to focus its strengths more effectively.

In 2004, the RCAAQ held a strategic planning session with the Board of Directors, delegates from the NFCs, and the RCAAQ work team. As a group, we identified common values of respect, solidarity, engagement, integrity and

pride in the Movement, and articulated an overall vision for our activities. We thus ensured that our work would be directed towards common goals and objectives established with the well-being of the Movement in mind.

The RCAAQ focused its energies on consolidating the work team and on organizational restructuring. The result was new leadership and investment of efforts in developing the RCAAQ's network and influence. Under the direction today of Josée Goulet, an Innu from Uashat Mak Maliotenam, we have a dynamic and proactive team continuing our work as a provincial association.

The highlight of 2005 was the signing of a relationship agreement with the AFNQL on May 17; through this agreement, the two organizations formalized their relations and the RCAAQ became the privileged interlocutor of the AFNQL regarding the delivery of services for urban Aboriginals.

In 2006, the RCAAQ devoted efforts to negotiations, representations and interventions with three government levels (First Nations, Quebec and Canada) and partners from civil society in preparation for the First Nations Socio-Economic Forum. The forum allowed the RCAAQ to achieve its objective of setting in motion actions and measures for improving the socio-economic conditions of the First Nations in concrete, effective and viable ways. At the forum, The RCAAQ signed a Declaration of Friendship with the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN) and partnership agreements with the Chantier de l'économie sociale and the Union des municipalités du Québec (UMQ).

During these years, the RCAAQ continued to consolidate and develop our network. It sponsored two needs assessments of the urban Aboriginal community, one in Montreal and the other in Sept-Îles. These studies demonstrated the increasing needs of urban Aboriginals in Quebec. Through

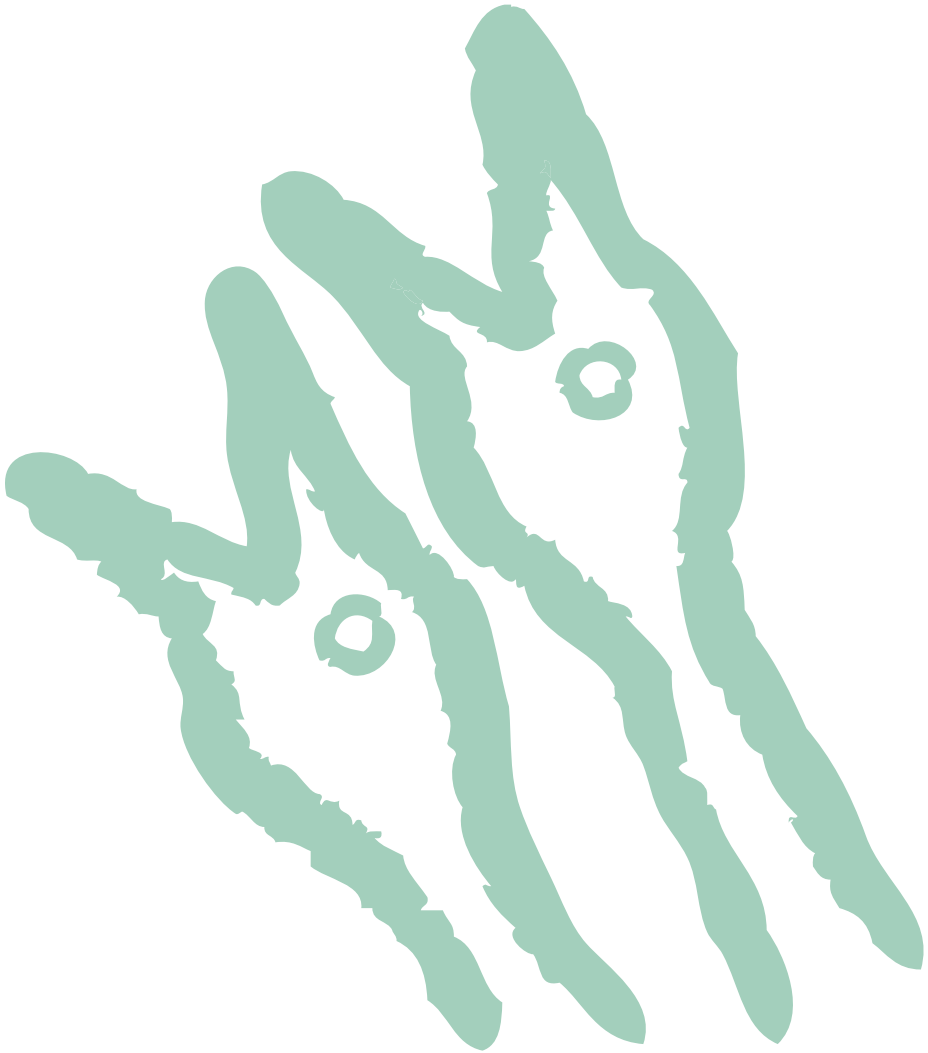
this work, the RCAAQ also supported the implementation of the Native Friendship Centre of Sept-Îles.

At its annual general meeting held in June 2007 at La Tuque, the RCAAQ welcomed the NFCSI as the newest member of the Native Friendship Centre Movement in Quebec and as the 118th NFC in Canada.

GEESE

always ready to fly off in search of new challenges.

The strong sense of teamwork and solidarity that geese represent are qualities embodied by the members of the RCAAQ Youth Council.



Decisive support from the Native Friendship Centres

Our history clearly shows that even though each NFC developed within its own specific context, they have all striven to meet, on a daily basis, urgent needs stemming from the emergence of Aboriginal communities in the urban setting.

In the heart of the urban world, they have become incubators for initiatives, the locus for expressing the needs and claims of a no-longer invisible proportion of the Aboriginal population.

We are now at the source of their originality; they have learned how to provide the needed specific and culturally-adapted services that the communities cannot provide. Within the non-Aboriginal urban setting, they are defending the dignity and cultural identity of Aboriginal people, whatever their Nation of origin. The NFCs understood that their work would have to be based firmly on an open-door policy which gives universal accessibility.

One-of-a-kind activities and services

Our unique situation gave us the opportunity to introduce several wholly original initiatives as an expression of the new urban Aboriginal realities. Here we recount just some of the more important initiatives: homework tutoring or assistance services allowing Aboriginal children to integrate more easily into the non-Aboriginal school system; support for literacy and transmission of Aboriginal culture and languages; creation of documentation centres or libraries as storehouses of our history and as means for promoting knowledge of Aboriginal culture to all; establishment of the UMAYC program to give youths the resources to improve their living conditions and develop their leadership skills; creation of women's circles to ensure access by women to cultural and psychosocial services adapted to their needs; organization of collective kitchens allowing people to acquire new skills and serving to fight poverty; and development of cultural campaigns or demonstrations to denounce racism and promote the richness of Aboriginal culture, respect of others, and self-esteem.

The eagle as a symbol of the RCAAQ's mission

All of these local efforts needed a collective voice, one that could be expressed while respecting differences. In 1976, in response to this need, along with the need to coordinate the actions of the NFCs and to give them greater coherence, strength and visibility, the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec was created.

The eagle symbolizes the kinds of action we want to carry out and represents the vision, strength and inspiration that the RCAAQ brings to its members. The eagle characterizes objectivity and clarity of thought, which allow us to reflect on what needs to be done and from there, to set priorities and make decisions. The eagle climbs high in the sky and sees the entire landscape below. We too must base our actions on an overall vision. We must be able to share this important knowledge effectively with one another; the eagle thus also represents the communication that is so vital between the RCAAQ and its member Native Friendship Centres, which form our Movement and are the reason for the RCAAQ's existence as their provincial association. But the eagle can do nothing important without the presence of the turtle, who carries the earth on his back and is the foundation of everything. The NFCs, symbolized by the turtle, are the ones that carry our Movement forward.

In other words, the RCAAQ seeks to be a structure for collective coordination and representation, an association at the provincial level that

can combine the energy and efforts of all the NFCs, ensure greater effectiveness in their work, and allow each one's experiences be put to good use by the others.

Our hope was to see this patient work being done at the local level grow little by little on the provincial front and give birth to a new movement, that of urban Aboriginal people who share a common history and values.With this goal in mind, the RCAAQ devoted its efforts to ensuring the implementation of common province-wide projects and programs at each NFC.

In the same vein, the RCAAQ supports its members in accomplishing their missions, by providing technical advice, support and resources. But it also plays a role in representation; it defends the interests of urban Aboriginals at the provincial level and encourages joint discussions and actions by the First Nations in Quebec and the various government authorities.

The RCAAQ's primary mission is to promote individuals' and communities' well-being through a community-based approach, and to provide spaces for collective and democratic representation by which urban Aboriginals can make known their hopes and claims and express themselves in respect of their differences, including those of language, nation and status.

In this sense, our objective is to improve the quality of life of Aboriginal people, promote culture and create mutual understanding among different

peoples. Through a holistic philosophy based on empowerment (i.e., regaining power over ourselves), we strive to develop an approach focusing on community and culture, incorporating also the social economy.

With 39 years of experience behind us, we have seen an evolution and an increasing complexity in the needs of urban Aboriginals, and consequently a transformation of and improvements in the work done by the NFCs and the RCAAQ. When we started out, our work essentially consisted in providing referrals and emergency food services, or simply lending an empathetic ear.

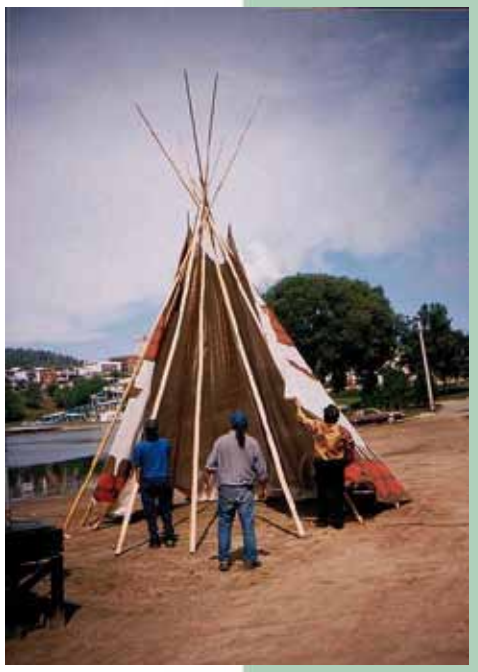
But the speed of migration and the extent of the problems encountered quickly showed us that good will and compassion were not enough to help an extremely vulnerable population. We had to gradually develop a specific approach which involved seeing ourselves as forming a collective movement with the same values and a common vision for development. We see this reflected today in the important holistic and community-based philosophy, which the RCAAQ holds to as its priority. This philosophy is our guide for promoting, in collective and cultural terms, the empowerment of each individual and for helping them to acquire the resources they need to build their lives. At the same time, we are also working to transform the social conditions which are the source of their difficulties.

Here, we find the otter to be the animal which symbolizes perfectly the qualities the RCAAQ hopes to develop among its members. The otter is energetic, active and cheerful. He is also the playful trickster who represents the First Nations' sense of humour. But he

also represents their equally legendary curiosity and desire to learn and discover, bringing to mind the importance we place on communicating and sharing through our creation of democratic spaces for discussion, particularly forums, when we must address new issues.

Practical gains

Seen as a whole, the RCAAQ offers services of all kinds to more than 18,700 First Nations members, Inuit and Métis in Quebec. It mobilizes over 100 volunteers and provides long-term jobs to more than 165 people. We reach 1,250 youths and provide a homework assistance service for the 6-12 year-olds in partnership with 27 Francophone schools. The RCAAQ conducts research and produces studies and briefs on such topics as racism and discrimination, sustainable development, the Youth Protection Act, etc. We are therefore not just at the forefront of efforts to promote the collective affirmation of urban Aboriginal people, but also of the Aboriginal desire to successfully tackle the challenges of today.



Many Aboriginal leaders got their grounding in the NFCs to prepare them for their future work; they include Ghislain Picard, Michèle Rouleau, Alexis Wawanoloath, Monique Sioui, Matthew Coon Come and Mélanie Napartuk. The NFCs have been exceptionally dynamic spaces allowing different people to cross paths and set a course for their actions in life.

But the RCAAQ did not content itself with the services it had established; it also overcame the shortcomings in collective representation by building, as a complement to its work, permanent links with the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador and the various commissions of the AFNQL. The RCAAQ, along with Quebec Native Women (QNW), is today a member of these AFNQL bodies, with the right to speak but not to vote. The RCAAQ is also considered as the privileged interlocutor at the Chiefs' Table with regard to all issues involving urban Aboriginals, as evidenced by a special agreement signed with the AFNQL in May 2005. By working closely with the commissions of the AFNQL, the RCAAQ is able to fully get across the specific nature of urban Aboriginal needs and to ensure better understanding of the value of its development strategies, including those of focusing on a community-based approach and the social economy.

At the First Nations Socio-Economic Forum of 2006, held in Mashteuiatsh, the RCAAQ was recognized as a full partner in its role as the representative of urban Aboriginals to the different levels of government. At the Forum, we negotiated 11 commitments with governments in various areas, including health, youth, the economy and education. We also established our first official agreements with various organizations from civil society, including the CSN, the Chantier de l'économie sociale du Québec, the Union des municipalités du Québec (UMQ) and Dialog, a research and knowledge network relating to Aboriginal Peoples.

We have gained wide recognition for our work, as seen in the distinctions and awards received by the Native Friendship Centres and their leaders and volunteers over recent years. Édith Cloutier was made a member of the Ordre National du Québec, the greatest distinction awarded by the Quebec government. In March 2006, the Cree Indian Centre of Chibougamau won the Grand prix du Tourisme québécois Nord-du-Québec, and in 2006, Doris Saint-Pierre received the Rita Fortin Prize in honour of his volunteer work at the Native Friendship Centre of Val-d'Or. Maurice Bonin of the Centre d'amitié autochtone de Lanaudière received the "Bénévole en action" award in 2004 as part of Hommage bénévolat-Québec, and Mélanie Napartuk was honoured at the Gala Éclair de Jeunesse 2007 for her work in the youth art and culture category. We mention here as well the honorary plaque awarded during Volunteer Week to the Aboriginal youths at the Centre Nikwemes for their dedicated involvement at the Centre d'amitié autochtone de La Tuque.

Support from the youths in our Movement

The RCAAQ has created an important place for Aboriginal youths by ensuring that they have their own representation structures.

In 2001 at Senneterre, the Urban Aboriginal Youth Council of the RCAAQ was created, thanks to the leadership of Aboriginal youths who were actively involved in the Native Friendship Centre Movement. Their energy and enthusiasm are vividly conveyed by the symbol that today represents our Youth Council – an image of two geese ready to fly off in search of new challenges, always with a strong sense of teamwork and solidarity, qualities that the members of our Youth Council embody.

The RCAAQ Youth Council is made up of a representative from the local youth council at each NFC. These representatives are elected for one-year terms. As Council members, they are the spokespersons of urban Aboriginal youths. Together, they express the needs and concerns of these urban youths and defend their interests to various authorities, including the RCAAQ Board of Directors, the board of each Centre, the Aboriginal Youth Council

of the National Association of Friendship Centres, and the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Youth Council (FNQLYC).

The Urban Aboriginal Youth Council is providing a space for joint actions by the youths at each NFC and is thereby encouraging the development of positive leaders for tomorrow, promoting the social engagement of youths, and giving them opportunities for training and exchanges.

THE OTTER

is energetic, active and cheerful.

The otter is the playful trickster who represents the First Nations' sense of humour. But he also represents their equally legendary curiosity and desire to learn and discover, bringing to mind the importance we place on communicating and sharing through our creation of democratic spaces for discussion, particularly forums, when we must address new issues.

A look to the future

It would be far from true to think that our network of Native Friendship Centres was created without difficulties! Crises, roadblocks and detours, wholesale staff changes and periods when it seemed we were standing still – all these and more punctuated the years. It is thus appropriate to view the progress we have made in terms of what we have called here our "long march." How could things have been otherwise? We were virtually invisible, or if we were seen, we were not considered worthy of having a name which indicated we existed!

The urban Aboriginal people in Quebec thus faced an arduous task in making progress and carving out a place for themselves, where they could be heard and recognized. If they have made undeniable progress and gradually cut this colossal work down to size, they still have farther to go and many more obstacles to overcome.

This is because the issues forming the backdrop of their existence are of great importance. Indeed, the growing phenomenon of Aboriginal migration, which began to be felt in Quebec in the 1970s, presents problems never before encountered, not just for those who have left their reserves, but for all First Nations members.

We know intuitively that the future of the First Nations depends essentially on their ability to access their territories and resources, in short, to recover part

of what has been stripped away from them. This is a vital point. It explains why the AFNQL keeps constantly in the forefront the rightful claims that the First Nations must have access to these territorial resources which can give them the means for genuine self-government.

But while we wait for the non-Aboriginal governments to acknowledge the validity of these arguments and for agreements which will allow Aboriginal people to live in dignity by having access to their territories and resources, the concrete Aboriginal reality continues to evolve. More and more people are leaving their communities for the cities to join the small nucleus of Aboriginal people who have grown up in the urban setting. We are witnessing an inexorable Diaspora. Whether permanently or temporarily, an ever-increasing number of people are confronting a reality other than what they have known. Defending the rights of First Nations members thus also means defending the rights of urban Aboriginals.

New spaces for voicing our claims

Here, we must separate fact from fiction. It is not a matter of creating new and artificial categories for Aboriginal people whose future has nothing to do with that of the people living in the communities. Nor is it a matter of focusing on certain claims that may be more genuine than others.

We must instead focus on the elements that unite us than on those which divide, while acknowledging this expanding space for claims and standing shoulder to shoulder; we are involved in the same struggle for ensuring that all Aboriginal people can take the place which is rightfully theirs. But we know that our shared struggle for improving the living conditions of Aboriginal people in Quebec is clothed in various forms and requires adapted means of organization and representation. The context here includes the cities where new Aboriginal communities are taking root, and thus the Native Friendship Centres, which are seeking to meet the new needs that correspond to the new urban setting.

Living in the heart of the non-Aboriginal world, urban Aboriginals are the First Nations members in the front lines of the work in getting the specific claims of Aboriginal people heard. This is their environment, which requires them to adjust to the non-Aboriginal world and its values and way of life; nevertheless, they have forgotten nothing of their roots or territories.

Urban Aboriginals thus play a special role, complementary to the roles of others elsewhere, particularly in the communities. This simultaneously "complementary and autonomous" dimension of their actions is very important, because it is only by uniting gradually on all fronts that the First Nations members will acquire the means – in full respect of their differences – to bring to life the strengths they truly represent. But doing so is conditional upon forgetting neither our traditional territories – our "rear base" without which the First Nations could

vanish in the not so distant future – nor the urban space, which so vividly characterizes the contemporary existence of Aboriginal people.

Nothing is more revealing than to note the diversity of the services which the Native Friendship Centres seek, from a cultural perspective, to provide, e.g., literacy initiatives, psychosocial support, ongoing training, job search assistance, social economy initiatives, and so on. They tackle a full range of issues, including health, education, the economy and social services, and strive to meet the most basic and vital needs (food services, housing, training, etc.). For these reasons, they form by themselves, in the heart of the urban space, a micro-society, a true community growing in strength. They are the expression of Aboriginal people's desire to live in the urban setting, the affirmation of their pride in creating an urban space that is coming more and more to reflect the image of the people they wish to be.

And because the NFCs are called on to respond in cultural terms to these new needs, they have been required to grapple with the issue of culture. Their primary goal here is to bring the maximum benefits of cultural identity and pride to all Aboriginal people. They seek, through positive and active ways, to promote and make known Aboriginal culture, to bring it out from the shadows and actualize it, as a living and vital concern. With culture as our support, we can confront and thrive in today's urban reality as Aboriginal people!

The NFCs and the urban Aboriginals they represent are in daily contact with

non-Aboriginal people and a way of life far from the protections of our communities. In this role, they are privileged ambassadors to the non-Aboriginal world, as bridges joining Quebec society and Aboriginal society.

We can thus appreciate even more their strategic position and the vocation they have taken on so naturally as a permanent link between the non-Aboriginal world and the various Aboriginal nations, that of promoting mutual respect and equality among all peoples and nations.

The growing Aboriginal presence in the urban setting brings up the sensitive issue of cohabitation on the same territory by people of different cultures, with all the challenges that implies. And this situation affects everyone living in an urban centre, not just the Aboriginal population, but non-Aboriginal citizens and groups as well. It does indeed point to brand-new issues! For example, if an Aboriginal person is elected mayor, what must she do to transform her city and ensure that Aboriginal people are no longer invisible or subjected to discriminatory or racist policies? What steps can she take to permit Aboriginal people to participate as citizens, not just in their community's economic development, but also in its social and cultural development? We clearly foresee here all the joint work and exchanges that will need to be instituted at the ground level. And there we find the Native Friendship Centres, as the ardent promoters of this necessary collaboration.

Complementarity and autonomy

Located at the convergence of complex realities, the NFCs have been able to play their role only by considering their actions as autonomous and at the same complementary to those of the First Nations communities and their authorities.

This carefully built-up combination of autonomy and complementarity is the main principle that gives the NFCs their strength and originality, but it is the most difficult one to maintain and affirm. It is also very difficult to obtain recognition of this principle from the provincial and federal governments.

We know, in looking to the future, how crucial it will be for our network of Native Friendship Centres to obtain more permanent institutional recognition and thus be ensured regular and recurring funding that will allow them to plan their actions over the longer term.

It is also important that their status be clarified and that governments recognize their genuine powers of representation, as a basis for acting in full autonomy regarding the issues that affect them.

Even more, we see why they cannot remain satisfied with being just coordinating entities. It was vital for them to give content and spirit to their organizational structure as a movement. The RCAAQ is also a movement with a shared history and values, which serve to define its mission. These values, which the RCAAQ actively promotes in carrying out its mission, include a community-based, holistic and pluralistic approach, empowerment, the social economy and others, all values which have been rethought and reinterpreted in terms of issues encompassing the identity and culture of urban Aboriginal people.

We now understand why it is necessary for the RCAAQ and the NFCs to renew themselves and to develop management tools, training services and activities and services that will more and more adequately meet the needs of their populations. Our Movement must also show innovation and make use of all external support that can help it accomplish its mission.

The RCAAQ and its member centres, by way of their missions, participate fully in this affirmation of the Aboriginal identity and this desire for collective emancipation and empowerment, placing them in the forefront of the overall struggle of the First Nations in Quebec. We know that the ideals by which they are guided will not fail to bring about newer and stronger generations of Aboriginal leaders within our Movement!

Conclusion:

Sparks of hope

Invisible and reduced to living on the "fringes of the fringe" – this has been the reality behind the story of urban Aboriginal people that we sought to describe at the start of these memoirs and from there to shed light on the difficulties they have had to surmount. They are still often ignored by everyone around them, without a clear path pointing the way out of the impasse of poverty and discrimination and without a strong voice to claim recognition as full members of the First Nations from non-Aboriginal governments and populations.

But in setting down these memoirs, the reader may be left with an even more vivid impression that of the long march by urban Aboriginal people towards a better future, accompanied by sparks of hope throughout their journey.

From our vantage point today, we see that despite all the difficulties they have encountered along the way, they have at least been able to undertake the battle for collective dignity and recognition, and if that battle

has not been fully won, it has led to important victories; in short, it has cleared the way for even newer possibilities.

We must look back to see how far we have come, so that we may take heart from the progress made and learn from the setbacks. Above all, we must not fear the work of memory which reminds us of what might otherwise have been forgotten and buried away, considered valueless by those who seek to control history for their own gain. Resisting such forces means creating, inventing, and turning new challenges into opportunities for growth, but it also means a constant battle with memory.

The objective of these memoirs has been to portray that battle, to bring to life again the full panorama of the hidden history of urban Aboriginal people, the story of their claims, daily combats, victories and advances, of their collective organization which they strengthened over time and the founding of the eight Native Friendship Centres in Quebec, which have played such a vital role in their struggle.

We must keep in mind that this battle with memory covers a vast landscape. It is not limited to the events surrounding the history of urban Aboriginal people spanning the past several decades; its scope is the history of all the Aboriginal Peoples in North America.

We see then why it is so necessary to recover the history of these forgotten ones. It is only by getting to the source of things that we can shed light on what the official history leaves out – the decisive role played by the First Nations in Quebec and the crucial struggles they have been involved in, all their aspirations for a life of dignity which they have never relinquished and which have given them strength to exist to this day.

Urban Aboriginal people want no less. They share the same desire to make their hopes a reality. And to do so, they are finding ways to bring their culture fully alive today in their urban setting. It is a culture with which they so solidly identify, because they have chosen it actively and freely!

Remembering is also a way of bringing to life the memories of one's roots, the memory of earth and our territories, of our ancestors and traditions, the memory of the dreams of past generations and unfulfilled desires for recognition, the memory of resistance and struggle and of the unquenchable hope for change.

We are not nostalgic for a past which is no more. But we do view the past as a source of inspiration for affirming, here and now, the Aboriginal identity, for uniting our strengths wherever possible in order to transform the present.

Is this not the very purpose of these memoirs? To share in this battle with memory, this battle for the dignity of Aboriginal people, and to spread knowledge of it everywhere, as the Algonquin word 'Pashkabigoni' suggests! Such are the basic and concrete issues which the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec confronts on a daily basis in supporting the urban Aboriginal population.

Our hope is that the readers of this work will come away with a deeper understanding of what our struggle has meant!

Endnotes

1 Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (2005).

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4. Danielle Descent and Tshiuetin Vollant, *Implementation of a Native Friendship Centre in Sept-Îles: Urban Aboriginal Clientele Needs Assessment and Profile,* Sept-Îles, March 2007.
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Listes de sigles

AFCP:	Aboriginal Friendship Centre Program
AFNQL:	Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador
ANC:	Atikamekw Nation Council
CAAL:	Centre d'amitié autochtone de Lanaudière
CAALT:	Centre d'amitié autochtone de La Tuque
CAAQ:	Centre d'amitié autochtone de Québec
CICC:	Cree Indian Centre of Chibougamau
CLSC:	Health and Social Services Centre
FNQLHRD:	First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Human Resources Development
FNHS:	First Nations Head Start
FNQLYC:	First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Youth Council
HRSDC:	Human Resources and Social Development Canada
NAFC:	National Association of Friendship Centres
NFCM:	Native Friendship Centre of Montreal
NFCS:	Native Friendship Centre of Senneterre
NFCSI:	Native Friendship Centre of Sept-Îles
NFCVD:	Native Friendship Centre of Val-d'Or
QNW:	Quebec Native Women
RCAAQ:	Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec
SSC:	Secretary of State for Canada (forerunner of Canadian Heritage)
UATC:	Urban Aboriginal Training Centre
UMAYC:	Urban Multi-Purpose Aboriginal Youth Centres

Pashkabiçoni

A History Full of Promise

Memoirs of the Native Friendship
Centre Movement in Quebec
(1969-2008)

The history of the Native Friendship Centres in Quebec is one of dedication, courage and tenacity, of gradual advances and temporary setbacks mingled with uncertain victories. It is a history which looks back at the immense path already travelled but also points ahead to what remains to be accomplished, a history in which each step forward is a spark of hope.

Published on the occasion of the annual general meeting of the National Association of Friendship Centre, these memoirs bring to life the tremendous adventure of the Quebec Native Friendship Centres and bring out the many dimensions making up the struggle of Aboriginal people in Quebec's urban setting.

Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec

Réseau de l'action bénévole du Québec

Action Bénévole Québec

Secrétariat à l'action communautaire autonome et aux initiatives sociales
Québec