

**LOW-INCOME AND HOMELESS INUIT IN**  
**MONTREAL**

**DOCUMENT PREPARED BY DONAT**  
**SAVOIE AND SYLVIE CORNEZ, ADVISORS**  
**TO MAKIVIK CORPORATION**

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## **PREAMBLE**

Makivik Corporation was created in 1978 pursuant to the signing in 1975 of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement by the Inuit of Nunavik (the James Bay Cree), the governments of Québec and Canada. Makivik is a non-profit organization that represents the 11,000 Inuit of northern Quebec scattered in 14 communities along the Hudson Bay, the Hudson Strait and the Ungava Bay.

This brief report on Low-Income and Homeless Inuit in Montreal has been prepared based on Information gathered during the implementation of Makivik strategy and action plan on Inuit homelessness in Montreal between 2011 and 2013, and the results of a major research project sponsored by Makivik Corporation and conducted in 2012 by Professor Nobuhiro Kishigami.

Professor Kishigami interviewed 75 Low-Income and Homeless Inuit in Montreal with a questionnaire of 70 questions. The results of this research provide a very accurate and reliable representation of the conditions of Low-Income and Homeless Inuit in Montreal.

Makivik Corporation developed its current strategy and action plan on Inuit homelessness to pursue two objectives:

1. Ensure the access to adequate medical care and social services for Inuit who are in difficulty or homeless
2. Work on the prevention of homelessness, of crime and support rehabilitation

The implementation of Makivik strategy was done by establishing partnerships with organizations that have knowledge, experience in their field and are sensitive to Inuit values, culture and language. This approach has the benefit to see immediate tangible results.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### **A) INUIT POPULATION IN CANADA**

Nunavut:	27,070	45.5%
Nunavik:	10,750	18.2%
Western Arctic:	3,310	5.6%
Nunatsiavut/Labrador:	2,325	3.9%
Outside Nunangat:	15,990	26.9%
<b><u>TOTAL:</u></b>	<b><u>59,445</u></b>	<b><u>100%</u></b>

The majority of Inuit who have left their community have moved to Canadian cities like Edmonton, Yellowknife, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Happy-Valley-Goose Bay in Labrador and in St. John's Nfld. Once in the south, some Inuit move from city to city.

### **B) INUIT IN MONTREAL**

- ***Approximately 10% of Inuit from Nunavik now live in Montreal in estimate of around 1000-1200 individuals.***
- Inuit who live in Montreal: 70% are from Nunavik, 20% from Nunavut, 5% from Nunatsiavut/Labrador and 5% were born in Montreal or adopted by non-Inuit families.
- Inuit from Nunavik that live in Montreal come mainly from Kuujuaq, Quartaq, Kangirsuk, Puvirnituk, Kangiqsualujuaq.
- Inuit from Nunavut mainly come from Cape Dorset and Iqaluit.

- 45% of Nunavik Inuit in Montreal do work, and several work for Nunavik Inuit organizations (Makivik Corporation, Kativik School Board, Air Inuit, Avataq Cultural Institute, Module Nord Québec of the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services, etc.). They mainly live in residential areas of suburban Montreal or in surrounding cities.
- 55% of Nunavik Inuit in Montreal are low-income or homeless and live in or close to downtown Montreal.

## MIGRATION TO MONTREAL

### **A) MIGRATION OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO MONTREAL**

In the 1960s, number of First Nations and Métis migrating to urban areas began to rise, while increase of Inuit migrants began in the 1980s.

This rapid Inuit population influx in Montreal was accompanied by a sharp increase in number of Inuit facing economic and social problems, and the justice system. There is presently a steady increase in both number and percentage of homeless Inuit.

Aboriginals (Inuit, First Nations, Métis) form 0.3% of Montreal population.

Aboriginals are overrepresented amongst homeless people in Montreal. ***Although Inuit form 10% of population of Aboriginals in Montreal, they represent 45% of homeless Aboriginals.***

- 47% of low-income and homeless Inuit who were interviewed by Professor Kishigami have lived in Montreal for at least 10 years
- 23% for 20 years
- 15% for one to 5 years
- 15% less than 6 months

The majority of Inuit who come to Montreal stay for a relatively long period of time, but Inuit women stay in Montreal longer than men.

Unfortunately, some Inuit die in the streets of Montreal or have been the victim of traffic accidents. Measures have been put in place to ensure the body of the deceased person is sent back to his or her community for proper burial.

### **B) REASONS FOR INUIT TO MIGRATE TO MONTREAL - PULL FACTORS**

- To accompany (or live with) a family member, partner, sick person, a friend
- Employment
- To receive medical services
- Opportunities for education

### **C) REASONS FOR INUIT TO MIGRATE TO MONTREAL - PUSH FACTORS**

- Lack of housing: 68% of Nunavik Inuit live in overcrowded houses.
- There is a steady increase of blind or hidden homelessness in Nunavik communities; they are often called drifters or couch surfers.
- Family problems: drugs and alcohol abuse, divorce, suicide
- Physical abuse, sexual abuse
- High cost of living
- Lack of employment
- Relocation of Inuit to federal and provincial detention centres
- Lack of food (6 Inuit out of 10 do not have enough to eat)
- The main reasons for Inuit women to migrate to Montreal are directly related to physical abuse, sexual abuse, personal problems, and lack of housing.
- The main reasons for Inuit men to migrate are relocation to detention centres, personal problems, social issues, lack of housing.
- There is a high probability that Inuit men leaving detention centres become homeless.
- Victims with personal problems or have been abused sexually and physically are also likely to become homeless.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF LOW-INCOME OR HOMELESS INUIT IN MONTREAL

### A) SEX AND AGE

- Average age of low-income or homeless Inuit who were interviewed is 39 years old.
- The number of women is greater than that of men in Montreal.
- There is a larger population of men who are homeless compared to the number of women.

### B) PLACE OF RESIDENCE

- Low-income Inuit have normally a place of residence either with a boyfriend, spouse or a family member.
- Low-income Inuit tend to live in eastern Montreal, St-Henri, Verdun, and Lachine.
- Some Inuit live alone.
- Almost all Inuit men live alone.
- Inuit women tend to live with someone.

### C) FINANCIAL SITUATION

- 18% of Inuit men interviewed and 15% of Inuit women have an income of approximately \$1000/month.
- **55% of Inuit interviewed have an income – average of \$650/month.**
- **27% of Inuit have no income at all.**
- 43% of Inuit men have an income of less than \$500/month.
- 27% of Inuit women have an income of less than \$500/month.

### D) LANGUAGE

- 85% of Inuit speak Inuktituut every day.
- 5% of Inuit speak English every day.
- 10% do not speak Inuktituut as several Inuit were born in Montreal or were adopted by non-Inuit families, and some probably are from Nunatsiavut or Nunavut.

## **E) SELF-ESTEEM**

Of all Inuit interviewed 35% indicate they have a largely negative impression of urban Inuit, 23% a mixed impression, 15% have mostly a positive impression and 32% have no comment or fixed impression.

## **F) OTHER ASPECTS OF LOW-INCOME AND HOMELESS MONTREAL INUIT**

- 52% of low-income and homeless Inuit wish to stay in Montreal.
- 54% of Inuit women wish to stay in Montreal compared to 39% for men.
- 42% of Inuit claim they want to go back home if housing was available.

## **IMPROVE ACCESS TO MEDICAL AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

### **A) ACCESS TO FOOD**

- Several Inuit use a variety of charity and welfare agencies to secure their meals:
- CHEZ DORIS daytime centre: women only
- Native Friendship Centre of Montreal: day centre
- Open Door Shelter: day centre
- St. Michael's Mission: day centre
- Projets Autochtones du Québec (PAQ): night shelter
- Country food (mainly seal meat) is now available in these 5 centres/shelters.
- Amongst the Inuit interviewed, 43% did not know the above organizations existed.
- 57% knew about these organizations but are under the impression they are not eligible to receive benefits from these organizations.

## **B) ACCESS TO CLOTHING**

- 35% purchase their own clothing.
- 25% of Inuit (majority of women) get their clothing from CHEZ DORIS daytime centre.
- 50% receive clothing from shelters and social agencies.

## **C) ACCESS TO MEDICAL SERVICES FOR INUIT**

The major health problems amongst Montreal Inuit are: HIV/AIDS, mental disorders, accidents, cancer, drug and alcohol related sicknesses, etc.

The establishment of poles of services in partnership with *Société de développement social de Ville-Marie* and St. Michael's Mission close to several Montreal Metro stations, has ensured direct access of doctors for Inuit.

The Health Service Van of *Médecins du Monde* (Doctors of the World) will visit on a regular basis various shelters including Projets Autochtones du Québec (PAQ) who runs the only night shelter in Montreal for Aboriginals, 50% of its visitors are Inuit. The van also circulates in Montreal to provide medical services to those who literally live in the streets.

The results of Professor Kishigami's study tend to show that low-income and homeless Inuit have now better access to medical services on a permanent basis. Certainly with the establishment of partnerships by Makivik the extent of the access to services has improved.

## **D) ACCESS TO COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA**

Montreal Inuit maintain their social relationships with Inuit living outside of Montreal by communicating through media or visiting them directly.

Telephone is the most common means used to communicate with those living outside Montreal or in Nunavik, followed by Facebook and Internet.

- 77% of Inuit who communicate are mainly low-income Inuit
- 23% Inuit do not communicate at all: these are mainly men.
- 25% of Inuit communicate once a week

- 20% twice a week
- 15% on a daily basis

## **E) ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT**

Many Inuit in Montreal find it difficult to get a steady employment. The main reasons are low level education and language barrier.

There is also open racism and discrimination towards Inuit.

# **PREVENT HOMELESSNESS**

## **A) RELATIONS WITH THE JUSTICE SYSTEM**

One out of 4 Inuit men (25%) has been in a detention centre. Some were driven out of their community and had drug and alcohol problems.

One out of 20 Inuit women has been in a detention centre.

There are presently approximately 85 Nunavik Inuit in federal detention centres for sentences of more than 2 years. They are mainly in Laval detention centre.

Approximately 185 Nunavik Inuit are in provincial detention centres for sentences of less than 2 years. They are dispersed all over the province.

20% of homeless Inuit interviewed have been in a detention centre.

3% of low-income Inuit interviewed have been in a detention centre.

We can assume that Inuit released from detention centres are likely to become homeless.

## **FINES**

- 48% of Inuit who have been interviewed have unpaid fines (62% are men and 35% are women).
- 62% of *homeless* Inuit have outstanding fines.

- 32% of *low-income* Inuit have outstanding fines.

Major reasons for fines:

- Fighting in public places
- Drinking
- Drug use
- Disturbing the peace (yelling)

Unfortunately, some Inuit live a criminal life in Montreal and are members of street gangs, thus enticing other Inuit to commit crimes such as use of drugs or prostitution.

## **B) SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN MONTREAL**

- 75% of Inuit do have family or relatives in Montreal.
- 25% of Inuit interviewed have no family or relatives in Montreal.
- Montreal Inuit tend to act alone or in pairs.
- Inuit seem to lead their lives separate from each other.
- However, some Inuit live in close proximity.

Some others who want to meet relatives or friends go to the night shelter Projets Autochtones du Québec (PAQ) and at the Native Friendship Centre of Montreal or at Cabot Square (Atwater Park).

Regarding visits to their home community:

- 50% of Inuit have never gone back, because of travel costs.
- 25% of Inuit go back every 3 years.
- 8% once a year
- Many do go back for funerals.

## **C) NEEDS EXPRESSED BY LOW-INCOME AND HOMELESS INUIT**

Amongst the Inuit who were interviewed, here are the priorities they have identified in order of priority:

- A place to stay
- Jobs

- Country Food
- Education/training
- Access to airline tickets to go back to their community
- Cultural activities
- Health and Medical services

## DEVELOPMENT OF SERVICES

### **A) FIRST LEVEL OF SERVICES**

In order to alleviate these problems encountered by low-income and homeless Inuit in Montreal, continuous work has to take place to consolidate the first level of services related to access to food, clothing and medical services, replacement of ID, a place to stay, and also to ensure that the Inuit that have no income at all get access to government's social welfare programs, and finally they should be adequately informed about social organizations and shelters that can help them, mainly through Makivik's partners in Montreal.

**Chez Doris:** this day centre provides to low income and homeless women access to basic services such as food, clothing, showers and beds during the day. They also provide access to communication and media. 15% of the clientele are Inuit and it is a known point of service amongst the Inuit women. An outreach Inuit case worker provides additional help to Inuit women that are on the streets and can't access services. 2<sup>nd</sup> level of services is provided by Chez Doris via the Cheque Administration program which helps women budget their income and maintain a residence.

**Projets Autochtones du Québec (PAQ):** the only Aboriginal night shelter for men and women provides beds, meals, cultural activities and is developing a new resource that will better answer the needs of its clientele. Approximately 50% of individuals that use PAQ are Inuit and rely on them for their survival. An Inuit case worker will provide additional help to PAQ which has seen an increase in the usage of their shelter. Transitional rooms and programs will enable PAQ to provide 2<sup>nd</sup> level of services.

**Open Door:** because of Makivik contribution, the day centre is now open 5 days a week and is an essential service in that area, Cabot Square, where displacement of homeless individuals is announced. Nearly 40% of individuals that seek shelter at Open Door are Inuit, and more than likely have slept outside. The centre is open to men and women in difficulty.

**Native Friendship Centre of Montreal (NFCM)** provides day programming to Aboriginals in difficulty. It has been identified by the recent study of Professor Kishigami NFCM as an important gathering place for Inuit in Montreal, providing food, services and access to communication and media. It has outreach workers including an Inuk, and because of Makivik investment it is now equipped with proper ventilation for their carving room used by 35 Inuit adults and youth. The Mikinak project reaches out to Inuit youth in difficulty and provides opportunities to develop their creative talents.

## **B) SECOND LEVEL OF SERVICES**

A second level of services for Inuit should be developed. These relate mainly to the organization of daytime and cultural activities, education and training, employment, economic opportunities, and strengthening social networking and healing, and provide alternatives to Inuit coming from detention centres in order to enhance crime prevention and support rehabilitation.

A number of partners have been identified to provide employability programs to Inuit in Montreal. Support in the development of English programs for Inuit in detention centres and information of Inuit services in Montreal should be developed. Recent initiatives in Montreal could be explored to see how the services can be applied to the Inuit in detention centres near Montreal.

Continuous work will also have to take place with the City of Montreal who will be developing a new homelessness policy, with the government of Quebec who announced on February 27, 2014 its new homelessness policy which includes a specific section on Inuit homelessness, and finally access to federal programs namely their Partnership Strategy to End Homelessness, in order to have access to funding.

Further collaboration will have to continue with the private, commercial and financial sectors and private foundations that have made donations to Makivik partners using Makivik financial support as leverage.

Closer relations will have to be developed with Qikiqtaani Inuit Association as several low-income and homeless Inuit in Montreal are from Nunavut mainly from Baffin Island. Contacts have been established with the Office of the President of QIA.

Closer collaboration will also have to take place between Makivik and the Government of Nunavut who is presently developing a homelessness strategy and conducting study on homelessness in Iqaluit (capital of Nunavut Territory), Cambridge Bay and Rankin Inlet. Exchange of information between Nunavik and Nunavut will greatly help in identifying projects, good practices and success stories that could be very useful to both the Nunavimmiut and the Nunavummiut in the implementation of their strategies and action plans.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

There is a steady increase of Inuit migrating to Montreal including more and more Inuit youth. There is now an established permanent Inuit community in Montreal.

Shortage of houses in Nunavik is one of the primary reasons why Inuit migrate to Canadian cities. A substantial percentage of Inuit would go back to their community if housing was available.

Low-income and Homeless Inuit suffer widespread poverty, drugs and alcohol addiction, homelessness, isolation, racism and discrimination and health problems.

Several Low-income and homeless Inuit have or have had problems with the justice system. Inuit released from detention centres are likely to become homeless.

Steady increase of homeless Inuit mainly amongst Inuit men. Once Inuit become homeless, it is extremely hard to escape from this condition.

Inuit in Montreal face racism and discrimination.

A place to stay, education/training and jobs are the 3 top priorities of the Inuit who were interviewed.

Organization of feasts and regular gatherings amongst Inuit has often been suggested in order to enhance social networking, which functions as a safety net, for mutual aid and the development of self-esteem.

The use of telephone, Facebook and Internet are very important tools to enhance regular and permanent communication amongst Inuit in Montreal and with their home community.

If the problems in Nunavik still remain, such as social and personal issues, housing shortage, abuses, lack of jobs, the flow of Inuit to southern Canadian cities will continue to increase.

*Possible scenarios:*

- Homelessness become routine
- Homelessness is no more a problem: adequate housing, income and support
- Homelessness worsens: as more Inuit come to Montreal, more of them encounter unemployment or homelessness