



The “Coup de main”

Need Help with a haunting? We do that too...

By Marie-Christine Gauthier from the Lowertown Community Resource Centre

(First published in *The Lowertown Echo*)

YOU MIGHT THINK that working at reception at the Lowertown Community Resource Centre is just answering calls, responding to emails and managing appointments, but I could write a novel about working at reception. The thing about it is that every day is different.

Technically, the days all start off the same: unlock the doors at our offices at 40 Cobourg, unlock the grill around the reception desk, set up the laptops for public use, check phone messages and make a list of which staff are on site. Then, the day takes on a life of its own...

Being a receptionist at a community resource centre actually involves wearing many hats: technical trouble-shooter, problem solver, compassionate listener, stand-up comedian, traffic controller, resource navigator, translator, and advocate. You get to help people in concrete ways. Sometimes, it's the small things, like looking up a number or address, printing off forms, or directing people to a resource. But often, it's something bigger like translating a government letter into words that people actually understand or listening to someone who really needs to talk because they

are lonely or having a really bad day (or week). There are the stories that break your heart: people who are hungry and can't access enough food for themselves or their children, the ones who can't access stable housing or whose housing is inadequate or have problems like bedbugs or rats, the parents who can't find resources for their disabled children.

There are also the enquiries that are quirky: the person who asks for help with a haunting in their building; the client who wants to set up a meeting with Stephen Harper, the Pope (not the current one, the one before him),

Being a receptionist is a bit like being a bartender...

and Barack Obama (when he was President); the caller who asks for the cinema showtimes for *Fifty Shades of Grey*. You quickly develop the art of listening with intent and a straight face, no matter what people tell you. You also learn to listen for the more subtle meaning behind the initial request. It is often difficult for people to ask for the help they need—it can take time to get to the real issue. When they do, it is important to respond with respect, tact, discretion, and compassion. I love working at reception because I really enjoy being around people. Over the years, I have developed relationships of trust with many residents. I know them from our kids attending the same schools, from running into them at the Lowertown pool or the Rideau library or the grocery store or at community meetings because I live in the area. But mostly, I get to know them from



Marie-Christine Gauthier at her post at the LCRC reception desk

chatting with them while they wait to meet with one of our social workers or community organizers. Being a receptionist is a bit like being a bartender, people tell you things. They tell me about their families, their work, their studies, and other things that go in in their lives. We talk about healthcare issues and resources for that child who is having problems at school. We trade folk remedies for minor ailments and cooking tips.

Working as a receptionist at the Lowertown Community Resource Centre challenges my skills and my creativity on a daily basis. It gives me a sense that I am giving back to the community and making a difference. I consider myself privileged to do meaningful work, in my community, with people that I respect, for an organisation whose mission and values I believe in.

To know more about who we are and what we do, please visit : www.crcbv.ca

THANK YOU to the Ottawa Literacy Committee and to the TD Financial Group for awarding us the Suzanne Pinel Award and for the kind donation for books for our Early Years and after-school Youth programs.

A huge THANKS to all our Winterfest volunteers who lent a hand and made the event all the more successful!

THANK YOU to CISCO employees for their generous donation to our food bank!

DONATIONS NEEDED

HELP US support residents from our neighbourhood. If you have any of the following, please drop off at the Community House (145 Beausoleil):

- Gently used winter boots and running shoes (for women, men and children), dresses, coats and men's sweaters
- Canned tuna, ham, chicken ; ragout and creamed canned soups
- Peanut butter, powdered milk, tea and coffee, flour, cereals and oats
- Diapers (size 4 & 6, diapers for adults, and toiletries)



THE ISSUE



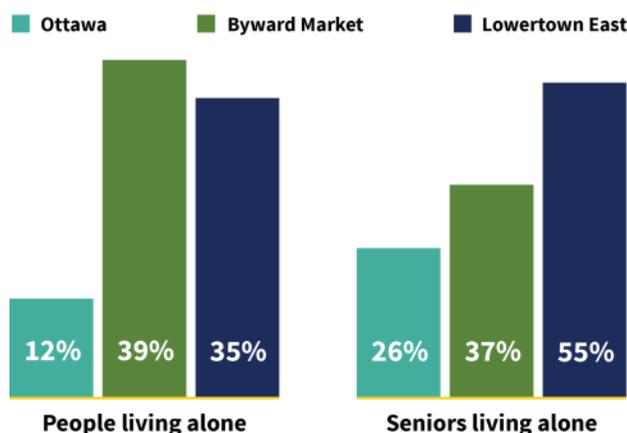
Social Isolation

LOWERTOWN IS the most densely populated neighbourhood in Ottawa and over 50% of its 14,000 residents live in high-rise apartment buildings. With that in mind, you would think that Lowertown folk would be in search of peace, quiet and alone time. But just as it is quite possible to be all alone in the wilderness and not feel isolated, one can live in proximity to hundreds or thousands of others and feel like you have no one to talk to.

When we take into consideration other facts, we realize that social isolation and, more importantly, **feelings** of social isolation (loneliness), are issues of going concern in our community. In Lowertown, approximately 58% of households consist of one person in contrast with the Ottawa average of 28%. Over 45% of Lowertown seniors live alone; the Ottawa average is 26%. The fact that Lowertown has a much higher proportion of people living on low-income means there are many residents for whom it is a struggle to afford many of the activities that help break isolation. Throw in language and cultural barriers for recently-arrived immigrants or refugees and mobility issues and it is easy to see how someone might feel alone.

The link between social isolation and negative impacts on health and quality of life is clear, as is the fact that low-income people and seniors are among the most vulnerable to social isolation. At the same time, **“being more socially connected has a positive influence on physical and mental health and well-being.”** As one psychology professor notes: “Humans are hardwired to interact with others, especially during times of stress. When we go through a trying ordeal alone, a lack of emotional support and friendship can increase our anxiety and hinder our coping ability.”

Social Isolation in Lowertown



THE RESPONSE

AT THE LCRC, we work hard to create warm and welcoming environments open to all. While attending one of our play groups for young children and their parents, being greeted by a smiling face at reception, being served a free breakfast or lunch at the community house on Beausoleil Drive, taking part in a community event in Jules-Morin park, or talking with one of our counselors, residents are listened to and respected. Our sites and programs are a place for residents to connect to each other and to their neighbourhood.

“ [The Centre is] like home... [I] do not know how I would manage without your help. I have always been helped never turned away. I am so grateful. ” - a Lowertown resident



WinterFest 2018

96 % of clients feel respected

88% feel more connected to their community
as a result of their participation in LCRC activities

LCRC Highlights

- **New Multicultural Playgroups:** Starting on March 14, (for 10 weeks) we will be offering **Arabic and Somali Playgroups** every Wednesday in the Early Years room at 40 Cobourg.
- **Awesome Arts Festival!:** On Friday, May 25th, children, youth and seniors from Lowertown will share the songs, video, poetry and dance resulting from the MASC Awesome Arts program. Show is at 6pm at the Patro.
- **Coffee Time:** Tenants of 160 Charlotte Street are invited for a social coffee time, from 10am to 11:30am on the first Tuesday of every month.
- **Souपालicious!:** Every Monday from 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm at the Community House come enjoy soup and bread.

All our programs are FREE!

THANK YOU to the ByWard Market BIA for making the LCRC the recipient of the proceeds of their fabulous Stew Cook-off!