

All smiles, advancing in a narrow corridor, Marie-Lou meets the many men living at Maison du Père, who greet her warmly. It's a busy, very busy day, but she answers each one, and each one by name. It is not only her red hair that illuminates this place, but also her loquacity, her vivacity and her manifest desire to communicate an unconditional acceptance to these people who find Maison du Père on their life path. This is the impression Marie-Lou left us, as we ourselves walked through the corridor of her impressions to better understand the difference she brings to our participants.

Marie-Lou is the organization's leisure activities intervention technician. This means that, on her shoulders, rests the responsibility of organizing and animating a multitude of activities: social ones, to break the isolation and encourage socialization, cultural ones, to nourish the mind, and physical ones, to keep in shape, while taking into account the special needs of the often older men at Maison du Père. The result: users can choose between, for example, meditation, yoga, visual arts, gardening, cooking, pétanque, chair dancing, visits to the museum or discussion sessions ... and even fishing fly crafting!

Speaking of flies, Marie-Lou caught the bug of her job as a teenager, working as a summer camp leader with children with disabilities. After high school, she considers going into social work, because of her desire to help others. "For me, leisure activities was not like a job, it was like a passion. I didn't know I could change lives with it, my whole life", she says. She then discovers the technical diploma of interven-

tion in leisure activities, a little-known discipline, but quite well cut out for her ambitions. She then obtains jobs with disabled and elderly people. After 12 years, she decides to change environments and joined the Maison du Père team.

"I don't regret my choice at all!", she assures us. Especially considering that the job came to her at a very opportune time. "If I had this job when I left school, I wouldn't have had the same background. I think today I can really bring something to them, and I know my job." When she arrived, "what was important for me was not to schedule too many activities from the beginning, and getting to know them", to facilitate exchanges, but also to understand the activities that could catch their interest.

For example, upon their arrival, a resident confides in Marie-Lou his dream of seeing an exhibit on the work of Salvador Dali, near the residence, at the Old Port of Montreal. Immediately said, immediately done: Marie-Lou organizes the visit for a small group of residents. "The exhibit was in three sections: we entered Hell, after that Purgatory, and after that Heaven", she says. In Hell were pictured all sins. The sight of the sins depicted in the first section then rekindles memories of a resident's bad decisions, who has to sit down to fully experience his emotions and cry... "You see then how therapeutic that can be."

This is what the Maison du Père activities make possible. More than entertainment, activities can be another way of accessing the feelings of participants, and allow for unblocking problems buried in the subconscious. It is also a way of



encouraging the adoption of healthier behaviors. "There is a resident, for example, who a few times said to me: 'Thanks to the fact that there are activities, while I'm with you, I'm not going to use substances.' Now, that is really rewarding."

In addition to cultural activities, other activities help maintain the physical health of the older residents, while other more social activities allow participants to get to know each other. Ultimately, the men's regaining control over their physical and mental health through activities may motivate recovery in other spheres of life. In short, Marie-Lou's work is a complement to the biopsychosocial interventions of the caseworkers.

If participants are successful in motivating themselves, activating themselves and opening themselves up, it is thanks to their personal strengths, first of all. But, we are convinced that Marie-Lou's philosophy of intervention has something to do with it also. "I'm not going to judge you if you did something wrong in your past", she says. "I have a great role. I am here to make sure their future is beautiful. "