

A Community Making a Difference

THE CENTRE DE SANTÉ DES AÎNÉS SUD-OUEST VERDUN IMPLEMENTS AN INITIATIVE TO HELP SENIORS REMAIN IN THEIR HOME

Within municipalities, an increasing number of non-profit organizations (NPOs) are taking charge and developing strategies to meet the needs of seniors living in their area.

In Verdun, the team of the Centre de Santé des Aînés Sud-Ouest Verdun (CSASOV) firmly believes in working together to help manage some of the chronic illnesses seniors suffer from and ensure a good quality of life. Since more and more seniors want to remain at home as much as possible, the Centre has decided to roll up its sleeves to provide them a safe living environment that is adapted to their needs.

“In addition to their growing numbers, seniors are living longer and value staying at home and in their community as they age, if possible. While some move into private retirement homes or HLMs (low-rental housing), almost 90 per cent live in their homes within the community,” says Dr. Roger Cadieux, founder of the Centre de Santé des Aînés Sud-Ouest Verdun.

In general, the Centre’s objective is to support people’s health, that is, the Centre aims to ensure that they are able to carry out their daily activities in their usual living environment in spite of a disability or illness. Recently, the CSASOV has implemented an initiative that aims to help seniors stay in their homes as long as possible.

“If seniors can see, hear and move independently, they can live in their home. However, progressive loss of independence because of chronic illness or the effects of some diseases result in seniors facing a certain number of difficulties living in healthy living environments that are adapted to their needs. It is with this in mind that we have begun thinking about visiting seniors and evaluating their homes to see if there aren’t small things we can do to assist them,” explains Cadieux.



Street scape shows clearly accessibility challenges

Some socio-demographic facts about the boroughs of Verdun and Le Sud-Ouest

In the borough of Verdun, 41 per cent of seniors aged 65 and over live alone, and in the borough of Le Sud-Ouest, the proportion increases to 45 per cent.

Forty-two per cent of seniors suffer from at least one chronic illness. The most common are arthritis or osteoarthritis (42.3 per cent), hypertension (33.7 per cent) and diabetes (20.7 per cent).

Eighty per cent of seniors have at least one health issue:

- 80.3 per cent have vision problems
- 41.8 per cent have mobility problems
- 21.8 per cent have hearing problems

Source: Rapport d'activités 2015 du Centre de Santé des Aînés Sud-Ouest Verdun

Helping seniors age in place

“We are trying to prevent problems,” he adds. “When the environment is badly deteriorated and caregivers are absolutely exhausted, there is almost nothing you can do. We focus more on the person than on the disease, and in this way we are complementing the health care system. Our approach is to develop a supportive relationship through which seniors can remain at home,” states Cadieux.

We must remember that the Centre de Santé des Aînés is a non-profit organization whose mandate is to prevent illness and maintain seniors’ independent lifestyle within the boroughs of Verdun and Le Sud-Ouest. It is not a medical clinic, but it is an organization whose initiatives seek to prevent the negative impacts of disease and complications.

In addition to helping seniors preserve their functional health, the CSASOV gives them advice about the minor adaptations that will make their homes safer and better suited to their needs and various limitations.

“We want seniors to live in their homes as long as possible. There are various factors at play that make this feasible. Sometimes, a few simple adjustments or help with housework can make all the difference in them staying in their own homes longer,” explains Daniel Mercier, a CSASOV volunteer and retired employee of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).

Many home adaptations can be made to facilitate seniors’ daily activities, whether it’s taking a bath or shower, using the toilet, preparing meals or doing the laundry. For example, railings in staircases or handle bars in the bathroom can be installed, or electrical plugs can be made more accessible to make chores easier.

The Centre’s team also does prevention by informing seniors about which activities they should perform carefully or those they should no longer perform at all, depending on their condition. “Using a stepladder to change a light bulb when you’re 90 years old is a pretty dangerous thing to do,” warns Cadieux.



Helping an senior with a task at home

Small actions but big impact

The CSASOV has partnered with stakeholders that provide services other than housing and that can help seniors remain independent and live in their homes. The Centre collaborates with various caregiver groups, pharmacies, medical clinics and community centres.

An important partner is without a doubt the Centre de formation du jardin du citoyen, an NPO founded a few years ago by Cadieux that gives seniors a hand with odd jobs and chores, such as shovelling snow from entrances or mowing the lawn.

“The Centre’s team can carry out tasks in the immediate environment, such as washing windows, strengthening doors, installing smoke detectors, shovelling snow, mowing the lawn, etc. At first, this may all seem ordinary, but if you are no longer capable of doing it, it’s hard to stay in your own home” explains Cadieux.

In 2015, CSASOV workers performed 2,496 tasks for seniors living in the Centre’s area, such as mowing lawns, providing a full lawn maintenance service and carrying out various jobs in their homes. A total of more than 4,000 tasks were counted for the year, demonstrating how important such small actions are to helping seniors live at home.



Activities that reach seniors

In addition to relying on the Centre de formation du jardin du citoyen as a key information provider, the CSASOV has other ingenious ways of reaching seniors. One of the most efficient is without a doubt the *Mercredis en musique à Verdun*, a series of 11 free summer concerts. Organized in collaboration with local partners, each of these cultural events is attended by between 300 and 600 seniors.

The concerts not only give seniors the opportunity to feel less isolated and enjoy themselves without having to spend money, but also allows the members of the CSASOV team to chat with them, especially about their housing needs.

“It’s a good way to reach seniors since they don’t often have a lot of spare cash to spend on entertainment. A lot of them spend 45 to 50 per cent of their income on rent. The concerts are free, so seniors can socialize and have fun at a lower cost, in addition to being the ideal way for us to check their housing conditions,” declares Daniel Mercier.

“We’ve been holding concerts for 10 years, but this year we have information booths on different topics, including one on housing. People can fill out a very short survey in which they can indicate their needs and what home adaptations would be necessary. They can also tell us if they would like more information or a home visit,” the Verdun retiree further explains.

The Centre de Santé des Aînés Sud-Ouest Verdun is also employing another innovative initiative to target seniors that might need the Centre’s assistance. The organization is building partnerships with representatives of places of worship to be notified about people who might need their help.

Assessment tools

As of a few weeks ago, the CSASOV has been gathering the information provided by seniors in the surveys to get a picture of their needs and what actions should be anticipated. The next step is to have homes evaluated by workers in the field.

The project, which Daniel Mercier has been asked to head because of his experience in the housing sector, aims to ensure that seniors’ living environment is adapted to their functional capabilities and offers suitable living conditions. Since there are many aspects to living well and safely in a home, the assessment’s objectives will be the following:

- Evaluate the risk level of the living environment regarding accidents, falls, fire, temperature, etc.
- Reach a minimum balance between the seniors’ functional capabilities and their living environment.
- Evaluate the living environment regarding the seniors’ functional health.
- Identify the problems that can be solved.
- Refer seniors who have needs to the specialists that can assist them (for example, plumbers, electricians, income tax preparation clinics, local businesses, etc.).

Daniel Mercier will also have at his disposal two assessment tools created by the Centre with support from CMHC: one for evaluating the senior’s housing conditions, which was based on CMHC’s *Maintaining Seniors’ Independence through Home Adaptations* self-assessment guide, and another for assessing the health of seniors.



The start of a free summer concert



Invaluable benefits

For a large number of seniors, living at home is the preferred option and is far more cost-effective than living in an institution. This is why prioritizing small inexpensive adaptations that allow them to live independently makes perfect sense.

Doctor Cadieux respects and promotes the wish seniors have of staying in their homes as long as possible.

“When feasible, seniors want to live in their home as long as possible. Moreover, considering today’s medical advances, many of them do not have health problems that are too overwhelming, allowing them to remain fairly functional. Not to mention that they can contribute to society in many ways, particularly by volunteering in all kinds of projects,” added the Centre de Santé des Aînés Sud-Ouest Verdun’s founder.



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