

## **Visits to Lisette-Dupras Readaptation centre (October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2004)**

On the eve of the Montreal Conference on Intellectual Disability, and as part of the program for the invited participants to the conference, international visitors had the occasion to meet representatives of the Quebec public health system, as well as parents, from the Lisette-Dupras Readaptation centre. These meetings were held on October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2004, prior to a reception put on by the Mayor of Montreal, M. Gerald Tremblay, at City Hall.

The visits were originally organized as an exchange on the rights of intellectually disabled people. However, these encounters went far beyond the question of rights. They gave the international participants exposure to our system and information on what is happening throughout Canada and the United States, and, more importantly, provided an important background to the discussions that were to follow on Wednesday and Thursday. In addition, they seemed to set a tone of collegiality, openness, and exchange that permeated the atmosphere during the entire conference without having to go through a period of introductions and of overcoming cultural prejudices and misconceptions. In our case, the participants soon realized that they were among colleagues and with partners in the struggle for rights for disabled people throughout the world.

Representatives of the Adult Services – *zone Lachine* met with Mrs Carlota Hammeken Pérez of Mexico. Mrs Hammeken is president of VOZ Pro Salud Mental, which she founded in 2001. The main objective of this non-profit lay organization is to provide support for persons suffering from mental illness or persons with an intellectual disability, by offering information as well as rehabilitation and social integration services. Mrs Nancy Roy and Ghislaine Goulet coordinated the visit of the day activity centre.

Representatives of the Adult services - *zone Centre* met with a participant from Argentina, Mrs Andréa Aznar. Mrs Aznar is a clinical psychologist, who teaches special education at the University of San Martín (UNSAM) and is the director of a day centre which provides recreational occupational therapy services (*Instituto*

*Recreativo Terapeutico Especial, IRTE*) as well as the co-director, along with her close collaborator Diego Gonzalez Castañón, of the *ITINERIS* project, a project supporting the advancement of the rights of persons with an intellectual disability, through training workshops for parents, friends and professionals of the field. A visit of the *Atelier Uni* was organized with Mrs. Johanne Cournoyer and Lise Meilleur.

A Brazilian representative for International Inclusion and for Inclusion Interamericana, Mrs. Vampré Xavier is the mother of Ricardo, who has an intellectual disability, and has headed the international relations department of the National Federation of Parents and Friends of Intellectually Disabled Persons (FENAPAES) for almost 40 years. She had expressed the wish of meeting, while in Montreal, with a parent of a child with an intellectual disability. Such a meeting was thus arranged with Mr Robert Bousquet, father of Mylène, and vice-president of the board of directors of the Lisette-Dupras readaptation centre.

Our Director of Professional Services, Dr. Katherine Moxness, and her Counselor, Mrs. Suzanne Kennedy, had the opportunity to exchange views with Mrs. Valerie Bradley, the Incoming President of the American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR) on the organization of services and the promotion of quality within the service system.

The Direction General and other Head Office staff were not left out. Dr. Jacques Carriere of the DSP met with an homologue from Brazil, Dr. Francisco B. Assumpsao, Director of the Department of Mental Health & Children's Services of the City of Sao Paulo. John Aung-Thwin and his Counselor and secretary-general, Guy-Michel Des Lauriers, met with Mrs. Andrea Zondek, Executive Director of FONADIS , an organization mandated to improve the living conditions of over 800,000 intellectually disabled people living in Chili.

Lastly, Mr. Norman Badger, a member of the board of directors of the Lisette-Dupras readaptation centre met with Mrs Hilda Miñón De Aubert of Argentina. Mrs De Aubert is currently president of FENDIM, an organization whose goal is to promote and defend the fundamental rights of persons with an intellectual disability and their families, to provide legal support to persons with an intellectual disability, to monitor

the quality of services they receive, to collaborate in the drafting of laws on intellectual disability and to carry out prevention and awareness campaigns so these laws will be respected. In 2003, Mrs. Miñón de Aubert was recognized as one of the top 100 Argentinian leaders.

These wide-ranging and intense exchanges throughout the organization clearly set the upbeat and collegial tone of the Conference to follow. The organizing committee of the conference owes a debt of gratitude to all these people who helped make the Conference itself such a success.