

## Visits to West Montreal Readaptation centre (October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2004)

The eve of the Montreal Conference, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2004, WMRC welcomed a number of international visitors. As part of the program for the invited participants to the World Health Organization and the Pan-American Health Organization Conference on Intellectual Disability, they had the occasion to meet representatives of the Quebec public system, and more explicitly, in some cases, from our establishment, prior to a reception put on by the Mayor, M. 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 Metro Zone Client Services team met and toured with Dr. Julio Huaman Pineda of Peru, President of the *Honorio Delgado-Hideyo Noguchi Institute* for Mental Health. Dr. Huaman is also the representative of the Health Minister of Peru on the United Nations ad hoc committee mandated to write an international convention for the protection of and the promotion of the rights and dignity of disabled persons. He met with a number of chef de services and discussed the organization of services and toured, during the short time available, the Centre for Arts Therapy of Concordia University.

Representatives of the West Zone welcomed Dr. Diego Gonzalez Castanon of Argentina. Dr. Gonzalez is Director of Psychiatry at the *Instituto Recreativo Terapeutico Especial* (IRTE) and coordinates since 1995 the project called ITINERIS, a project promoting the advancement of the rights of intellectually disabled persons through training sessions for parents and practitioners alike. Joining them for a visit to a family-type resource and to a work station at the Centre Benjamin-Viger was Dr. Therese Agossou, counselor with the African Bureau of the World Health Organization.

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. Assumpcao, Director of the Department of Mental Health & Children's Services of the City of Sao Paulo. John Aung-Thwin and his Counselor, Jack Carlon, 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. And, the out-going Secretary General, Mr. Ron Creary, had the occasion to exchange with Mr. Edgar Molina Montalvo of Ecuador. Dr. Molina is Professor Emeritus in the Faculty of Political Science at the Central University of Ecuador, is the father of a young adult with Downs Syndrome, and is the President of FEPAPDEM, the national association of parents and friends of intellectually disabled people.

Lastly, Raul Ramirez of the DSP and originally from Chili himself, met and exchanged with Mr. Enrique Norambuena of Chili, a parent of a Downs Syndrome child, President of an inter-American forum on the rights of intellectually disabled people, and a Counselor to the Department of National Defense of Chili, mandated to elaborate a policy of non-discrimination within the criminal justice system in the country.

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.