Case Study: Montréal, Sherbrooke, and Gatineau

A HUMAN RIGHTS ANALYSIS OF ENCAMPMENTS IN CANADA

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The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Canadian Human Rights Commission or the Federal Housing Advocate.

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Table of Contents

List of collaborators 3

SUMMARY **5**

INTRODUCTION **6**

Notre-Dame Street Encampment—Montréal 7
Resistance: A Home for Everyone *9*
Dismantling Postponed *10*
Mobilizing Against the Teardown *11*
Operation Sheltered With Care *13*
The Teardown, a Watershed Moment *14*
Social Isolation, a Consequence of the Teardown *15*
After the Teardown, the Mobilization Continues *16*
Steinberg Woods Camp—Montréal 18
Politicians Seize on the Issue of Encampments *18*
Steinberg Woods Dismantling *19*
Denunciation of crackdowns *20*
Reflection of a Crisis and a Lack of Suitable Facilities *21*
Berri Encampment—Montréal 22
Encampment in the Cabot Square Area—Montréal 23
Montréal North Encampment—Montréal 23
Mount Royal Encampment—Montréal 24
Notre-Dame/Iberville Encampment—Montréal 24

REALITIES OF ENCAMPMENTS OUTSIDE THE CITY **25**

City of Gatineau 25
City of Sherbrooke 27
Dismantling the Encampment *28*
After the Dismantling of the Encampment *29*

CONCLUSION **30**

RECOMMENDATIONS **30**

Right to Housing and Suitable Facilities 30
Tolerance and Respect for Rights are Necessary 32
Support Rather than Crackdowns 34
Collaboration and respect for rights 35

RÉFÉRENCES **37**

Le Devoir 37
Journal de Montréal 37
Journal 24 heures 38
Journal Métro 39
Références Sherbrooke 41
Références Gatineau 42
Autres références 42

Summary

Encampments with one or more makeshift shelters have always existed in Quebec. However, in the last two years, these have become more visible and therefore more worrisome. Faced with this increase in the number of people using public space as a place to live, this document presents the evolution of the situation of encampments between March 1, 2020, and the beginning of January 2022, based on a review of media in Quebec.

The purpose of this document is to understand the evolution of the situation of the encampments, to identify the lived reality and the needs of the people who occupy these camps, as well as the response by the community and the municipal and provincial governments in Quebec. More specifically, it addresses the situation of the camps in Montréal as well as those on Joffre Bridge in Sherbrooke and on Ruisseau de la Brasserie in Gatineau. However, we are aware that other regions in Quebec may also have encampments. These cities were the most represented in the media.

It should be noted that this document was produced as part of a cross-Canada knowledge-sharing research project that was funded by the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate in order to improve public understanding of the reality of those living in encampments. This document was inspired by the actions taken by the “Nobody Left Behind” Collective which brings together a large number of organizations (n=18) working closely with people experiencing homelessness and extreme poverty, and their sectoral groups in Montréal. It was important to recognize their support for people who have no other option than a tent, camp, or informal makeshift shelter for refuge. In addition, it has been read and contributed to by individuals and organizations working in the homelessness sector.

Introduction

Encampments with one or more makeshift shelters have always existed in Quebec. However, in the last two years, these have become more visible and therefore more worrisome. Faced with this increase in the number of people using public space as a place to live, this document presents the evolution of the situation of encampments between March 1, 2020, and the beginning of January 2022, based on a review of media in Quebec. More specifically, this document addresses the situation of the camps in Montréal as well as those on Joffre Bridge in Sherbrooke and on Ruisseau de la Brasserie in Gatineau. However, we are aware that other regions in Quebec may also have encampments. These cities were the most represented in the media.

We consulted the main French-language newspapers in Quebec, such as Le Devoir, La Presse, Journal de Montréal, Journal Métro, 24 heures, and other media (such as press releases from the Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal [RAPSIM], the Table des organismes montréalais de lutte contre le VIH/Sida [TOMS], the "Nobody Left Behind" Collective, etc.). The English translation of the French search keywords used are: "encampment," "makeshift shelter," "dismantling," "homelessness." Where search engines allowed, we associated two keywords, such as "encampment and homelessness" and "dismantling and makeshift shelter."

The analysis was carried out on a monthly basis in order to understand the evolution of the situation in the encampments and to identify the lived realities and needs of the people who live in these camps, as well as the response by the community and the municipal and provincial governments. We analyzed 18 articles from the newspaper Le Devoir, 27 from La Presse, 28 from the Journal de Montréal, 32 from 24 heures, and 40 from Journal Métro for a total of 145 articles on the situation of encampments in Montréal, 17 articles on the situation in Sherbrooke, and 6 articles on the reality of the encampments in Gatineau.

This document was produced as part of a cross-Canada knowledge-sharing research project funded by the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate to improve the public understanding of the reality of those living in the encampments. It was inspired by the actions taken by the "Nobody Left Behind" Collective, which brings together a large number of organizations (n=18) that work closely with people experiencing homelessness and extreme poverty, and their sectoral groups. It was important to recognize their support for people who have no other option for shelter than a tent, camp or on the street. In addition, it has been read and contributed to by individuals and organizations working in the homelessness sector.

Image from La Presse: Notre-Dame Street Encampment, Montréal

Notre-Dame Street Encampment—Montréal

The pandemic has made the situation of people experiencing homelessness in Montréal more challenging. As of April 2020, the various community, municipal and public authorities have been mobilizing to adapt the emergency response to homelessness. Everyone was on high alert. The City of Montréal decided to open emergency shelters to accommodate the growing number of people who found themselves living on the street due to a combination of a loss of housing and a reduction in the number of shelter spaces. The efforts of the city of Montréal were not enough to ensure that people could find a place in an emergency shelter if they wanted to.

RAPSIM and TOMS expressed concern that the available services did not meet current homelessness needs and were quick to ask police to be more lenient with people sleeping on the street. These groups of organizations even called for a complete halt to teardowns during the pandemic (Corriveau, 2020, April 9). Faced with this lack of facilities, organizations mobilized to distribute tents to shelter those who found themselves living outside. The City of Montréal opposed this initiative, expressing concern about any actions that are not related to public health (Corriveau, 2020, April 9).

RAPSIM and TOMS have continued their efforts to support those who find themselves sleeping outside. In a meeting with the City of Montréal on April 22, 2020, they asked that the City take a position in support of tolerance for outdoor tents and called for designated sites where people experiencing homelessness could set up safely. Despite the urgency to act to protect one of the most vulnerable populations worst affected by the crisis, the City of Montréal reiterated that regulations do not allow tents in their jurisdiction and that police officers can only tolerate them until sunrise, after which people experiencing homelessness must leave (Corriveau, 2020, April 9; Lepage, 2020, June 5).

However, effective May 1, 2020, Public Health issued an advisory stating that the provision of temporary outdoor shelters is complementary with other strategies developed by the City, the health network and community agencies. To this end, it proposed steps to follow to reduce safety and cohabitation issues in outdoor shelters (Regional Public Health Branch, 2020). The integrated university centre for health and social services (CIUSS) for the central-south region echoed this position and issued a notice stating that makeshift shelters (tents) are a safe and preferable alternative to emergency shelter facilities or any other type of accommodation for certain individuals who are experiencing homelessness. The CIUSSS also recommended the establishment of temporary outdoor shelter sites (Goudreault, 2020, June 4; Lepage, 2020, June 5). Despite these opinions in favour of tolerating tents during the pandemic, the City of Montréal maintained its position and announced that tents on the territory would be dismantled on June 1, 2020. RAPSIM, TOMS and the Montréal Indigenous Community NETWORK (NETWORK) opposed this decision, responding in a public letter where they emphasized the importance of camps in the pandemic context, saying that they make physical distancing easier and allow for a form of preventive isolation in case of need (RAPSIM and TOMS, 2020).

However, in spite of the dire need for shelters and the instability experienced by people experiencing homelessness, the City of Montréal decided to reduce the number of accessible shelter beds and outdoor food sites in early June 2020 (Nadeau, 2020, June 1). The organizations were concerned that this would make people experiencing homelessness more vulnerable and threaten their health and safety at a time when the health crisis was in full swing (Lepage, 2020, June 5).

Faced with this lack of facilities, many people experiencing homelessness, including those who found themselves on the street as a consequence of the pandemic (loss of income, “renoviction,” etc.), no longer knew where to turn to meet their needs. Gradually, they settled in the park along Notre-Dame Street, which is a heavily travelled thoroughfare in the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve neighbourhood (Lauzon, 2020, July 29). Every day more and more people joined the camp. Given the size of the encampment, there was no question of the City of Montréal dismantling it. Instead, it opted for collaboration with community organizations to ensure the safety of the site (Lauzon, 2020, July 29).

According to the Montréal Police’s (SPVM) communication officer, Louis-André Bertrand, this camp could be tolerated because there were no complaints from residents for perceived mischief or wrongdoing, and cohabitation was possible (Lauzon, 2020, July 29). What’s more, a wave of solidarity emerged, and several public visits by organizations and citizens took place. Without fail, people from the neighbourhood mobilized to bring

donations of all kinds to support the people living in the camp. Some of them even offered up their outdoor electrical outlets to be used to help people in the camp (Messier, 2020, August 14).

Given the size of the camp and the numerous teardowns that took place across the city of Montréal, on July 22, 2020, the "Nobody Left Behind" collective (ONLPD: *On ne laisse personne derrière*) was born out of a collective will to support people who had no other option for shelter than a tent, an encampment, or the street. This is a grouping of a large number of organizations (n=18) that work closely with people experiencing homelessness and extreme poverty, as well as their sectoral groups. However, while the encampment gained a certain degree of tolerance from the City of Montréal and people experiencing homelessness organized themselves, the opposition party Ensemble Montréal became concerned about the situation. This party denounced the mismanagement by Mayor Plante's administration of the issue of homelessness (Poirier, 2020, August 5), calling for a moratorium on the early closure of temporary shelter facilities (Machillot, 2020, August 6). However, in response to these allegations, the party in power, Projet Montréal, stated that there is no direct link between the City of Montréal's transition plan (the closing of temporary shelter facilities) and the camp on Notre-Dame Street East. According to the Projet Montréal party, the people living in the camp are those who want to live outdoors (Machillot, 2020, August 6). The City of Montréal has stated that there are sufficient shelter spaces to accommodate people experiencing homelessness and that, in preparation for a second wave of the pandemic, they would be encouraged to move to emergency shelters before August 31, 2020 (Goudreault, 2020, August 21). According to the mayor of the city of Montréal, Valérie Plante, police force would not be used to dismantle the camp and everyone has the right to a roof (Goudreault, 2020, August 19).

Resistance: A Home for Everyone

Despite the call to leave the camp, people refused to leave and objected to being relocated to emergency shelters. For many of them, emergency shelters were not an option (Poirier, 2020, August 20) because they lead to dependency on services, which runs counter to social integration, thus plunging them into a vicious cycle (Goudreault, 2021, April 28). Others stated that in the emergency shelters, they face strict regulations and feel like cattle (Messier, 2020), denigrated, judged, and infantilized (Ferah, 2020, September 4).

> We really didn't feel comfortable in the temporary emergency shelters [being] treated like dogs (for example waiting outside the door until THEY wanted to open it).

> [...] Getting kicked out at 6 a.m. It doesn't make sense. (Special Collaboration, 2020, August 24)[1]

What they want is a place, a home, without curfew and without a schedule, which they find in the encampment (Ferah, 2020, September 4). For them, the encampment allows them to develop a sense of belonging, solidarity, security, and community that they cannot find elsewhere. They feel comfortable and organize to survive. Therefore, the people living in the camp had no intention of leaving until the City of Montréal proposed a reasonable and fair solution for everyone (Lepage, 2020, August 25).

> Here, we are a community. If someone is not doing well, the others are there for them. The City wants to break that, they want to isolate us. I am much better off here, with other people, than I was alone, rejected, in my corner. (Ruel-Manseau, 2020, August 31)

For the people living in the camp, to see them dismantled without being asked their opinion and being forced to leave without real solutions and concrete help is unacceptable. They don't want false hope, being told they will have a home someday (Special Collaboration, 2020, Aug. 24; Gobert, 2020, Aug. 24).

In the face of this resistance, the mayor of the city of Montréal has made it clear that encampments are not a safe and sustainable option for consideration (Lepage, 2020, August 25; Ruel-Manseau, 2020, August 31). She reiterated that the City is not taking a coercive approach but is determined to see the encampment removed (Iskander, 2020, August 27). Nevertheless, the community sector reminded her that temporary facilities continue to create exclusion by turning away people with substance use problems and called for low-threshold facilities that offer unconditional admission (Goudreault, 2020, August 21). These community organizations are calling for expanded options. In this regard, Leilani Farha, the UN Special Rapporteur on Housing, criticized the City for setting up temporary emergency shelters that do not meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness, when it should have consulted with those people first (Ouellette-Vezina, 2020, September 2).

Dismantling Postponed

On August 30, 2020, one day before the deadline for dismantling, the City of Montréal announced that the encampment would not be dismantled because the mayor wanted

[1] This quotation, like all other quoted material in this document, is translated from the French.

to help people move to shelters, without specifying how she would convince them (Broch, 2020c, August 31). However, “despite the City of Montréal’s desire to clear the site by the end of the day, the majority of its residents say they want to stay” (Broch, 2020b, August 31). Community groups called on the City of Montréal to permanently abandon the dismantling of the encampment (The Canadian Press, 2020, August 28). In a press release, the Association Québécoise pour la promotion de la santé des personnes utilisatrices de drogues (association for health promotion among people who use drugs, AQPSUD), RAPSIM, NETWORK and TOMS spoke out against these repressive practices. In their view, in the midst of a housing crisis where the pandemic is still pervasive and the overdose crisis is worsening, encampments must be tolerated because they represent a safe space that grants people some stability and reduces their movements, as recommended by public health guidelines (Coordo-TOMS, 2020, August 28).

The Montréal police, the SPVM, stated that, “When homeless or vulnerable people settle temporarily in public places, they are not systematically evicted. If the police officers of the SPVM proceed with an eviction, it will be within the framework of a concerted approach carried out in collaboration with community partners” (Corriveau, 2020, October 19). For their part, community organizations point to issues related to dismantling, including the health and safety of campers.

As TOMS coordinator Marjolaine Pruvost explains*:* “Dismantling means moving people away, isolating people. We are in the context of a pandemic and a housing crisis. We are seeing a resurgence of overdoses. Dismantling structures is putting people’s health at risk” (Goudreault, 2020, October 6). David Chapman, director of the organization Résilience, added that when people are evicted from the place they are living, it is difficult to follow up with them and ensure that they are receiving basic services to meet their needs (Corriveau, 2020, October 19). However, Pierre Lessard Blais, mayor of the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve neighbourhood, stated that, following a fire in a tent at the camp, a line had been crossed around public safety (Broch, 2020, August 27). According to the deputy director of Care Montréal, Daniel Guillet, these events are only isolated cases and should not be used as a reason to dismantle shelters (Broch, 2020, August 27).

Mobilizing Against the Teardown

The ONLPD collective has continued to work hard to advocate for the rights of those living in encampments and has continued its donation campaign to buy more camping kits despite the threat of dismantling. They repeat that the camps are not a substitute for other types of housing, but that this is the solution that many people have turned to and that their choice must be respected and their autonomy protected. According to the collective, there should be no police repression, and adequate support needs to be

offered to the people in the encampment, such as waste collection, food aid, sanitary facilities, support from community organizations, etc. (ONLPD, 2020, August 31).

In support of the people living at the Notre-Dame street encampment, a citizen's petition was drafted to allow them to keep their place of accommodation. Within just a short period of time, it collected thousands of signatures (Iskander, 2020, August 25). Other residents of the neighbourhood believe they must have the right to stay.

> These people don't bother anyone and on the contrary, [it's] beautiful to see them helping each other in a small community and seeing that they are doing well. Let them live there. (Iskander, 2020, August 25)

Meanwhile, other residents and organizations mobilized via Facebook using the page "A Home for Everyone" and showed up with signs on August 31, 2020, to oppose the teardown of the encampment ordered by the City of Montréal (Broch, 2020a, August 31).

As of September 1, 2020, the Notre-Dame street encampment had not yet been dismantled. The mayor was banking on the opening of three new temporary emergency shelters and she was willing to tolerate the presence of campers on the site until they were directed to the appropriate facilities. The Quebec ministry of transportation said they were tolerating the people on their property, pending an order from the City to evict them. On September 3, only three beds were occupied by people from the camp (Ouellette-Vezina, 2020, September 2).

At the city council meeting of October 18, 2020, the Mayor of Montréal stated that emergency measures had been put in place since the spring and that the plan for winter measures would arrive shortly (Corriveau, 2020, October 19). The winter measures were expected to include 400 additional beds, warm rest stations, and shuttle services. The mayor announced, "Nobody will be left behind" (Plante, 2020, October 30), echoing the slogan of the ONLPD collective. For his part, Serge Lareault, commissioner for the homeless, acknowledged that the pandemic and the lack of social housing have exacerbated the phenomenon of homelessness in Montréal, increasing the demand for emergency shelters (AFP, 2020, November 22). One of the measures put in place to address this need is the acquisition of the Hotel Dupuis, to house people experiencing homelessness: "It's still a hotel, it's comfortable, so that's what we're working on" (AFP, 2020, November 22). Nevertheless, community organizations continued to say that this is not enough, that facilities are already full and have to turn people away, and that more marginalized populations will have difficulty fitting in or getting a bed. According to Laury Bacro, community organizer at RAPSIM (Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et

itinérantes de Montréal), the encampments provide stability for the people who live there (Corriveau, 2020, October 19).

That said, in order to support the 300 campers occupying 217 tents at the Notre-Dame street encampment, on October 23, the ONLPD collective published an open letter outlining its demands and the issues and the benefits of the camps for people experiencing homelessness (Bacro, 2020, October 23). Despite the demands of the ONLPD collective, on October 29, 2020, the Mayor of the City of Montréal reported that she was prepared to intervene quickly, without using force, to avoid dangerous situations, for the well-being of campers as temperatures began to drop (Ouellette-Vézina, 2020, October 29).

Operation Sheltered With Care

On November 24, 2020, an operation dubbed "Mise à l'abri solidaire," or sheltered with care, was launched to try to convince campers, from encampments all across the city, to leave voluntarily, by offering to store their belongings for them (Iskander, 2020, November 24). Dismantling the encampment is not yet on the table. The idea, according to Mayor Valérie Plante, is to reach a consensus but also for no one to stay on the site during the winter. However, she remained vague about what the specific date will be (Corriveau, 2020, November 25). In any case she specified that there will never be any question of using a bulldozer approach, or force, to remove the people living in the camp (Ferah, 2020, October 26).

It was also announced that the Société de transport de Montréal (STM) had donated a "Solidaribus" to facilitate the success of the operation (Corriveau, 2020, November 25). However, among community organizations, opinions are divided. On the one hand, some, like Michel Monette, director of the organization Care Montréal, emphasize the efforts made for the winter measures:

> This is the best winter facilities plan we've had in the last 10 years…. We went to visit the Notre-Dame street encampment and I had never seen it empty like that, almost deserted. I think the new shelter options will help to offset it. (Machillot, 2020, Nov. 5)

Others, like Julien Montreuil, deputy director of the organization L'Anonyme, point out that these facilities are not for everyone:

> For sure, not all campers will want to go to the emergency shelters this winter, because the schedule and regulation constraints are just too restrictive for them. We're here to refer them to options, but we also respect those who prefer the "freedom" of being outside, and we want to continue to look for structural solutions

> to homelessness, to address the problem in the long term. (Machillot, 2020, November 5)

Many people in the encampment did not seem to fear the cold and still refused to go to shelters, which they consider too strict and unsafe in the midst of a pandemic (AFP, 2020, November 22). They continued demanding access to housing, or simply their right to camp out. Indeed, thanks to the mutual aid between campers and the generosity of citizens, they had settled in well for the coming winter (Messier, 2020, November 26). However, they feared that their camp would be dismantled, as Jacques Brochu, a camper at the Notre-Dame encampment, pointed out: “They’re tearing it down strip by strip. I’m afraid they’ll bring down the number of campers and, when there’s no supervision, they’ll throw all our stuff away” (Corriveau, 2020, November 25).

The Teardown, a Watershed Moment

As the cold weather began to make itself felt, the campers of the Notre-Dame encampment were getting progressively better equipped to face it, using different means to heat or insulate their tents. Then on December 5, candles set fire to a tent. The flames reached two stories in height and required the intervention of firefighters. Three such incidents have occurred in recent weeks (Trussart, 2020, December 5). This fire and the security issues end up serving as justification for the eviction of the campers. The fact that the tents were on private land (of the Ministère des Transports du Québec—MTQ) is also named as the main reason for the dismantling (Gildener, 2020, December 6). Police officers from the SPVM, representatives from the MTQ, and firefighters were on site on December 6 to ask the campers to leave, and the eviction notice was issued by the Montréal fire department (Lauzon and Ducas, 2020, December 7).

On December 7, the teardown took place. In the morning, Ste-Catherine Street was blocked between Davidson and Moreau by the SPVM. There were about 100 police officers, including four on horseback, as well as the riot squad and a helicopter that set up a security perimeter around the camp to proceed with the dismantling (Messier and Lalancette, 2020, December 7). This intervention cost more than $232,475, according to information provided in a Freedom of Information request to the SPVM (2021). According to the head of mobilization of BAILS, the neighbourhood housing committee, Marine Armengaud: “Mobilizing 250 police officers on horseback, on bicycles, in cars, with riot gear and even a helicopter, was completely out of proportion. They even threatened the campers with arrest, forcing them to leave. This is unacceptable” (Ouellette-Vézina, 2020, December 8).

They were allowed to bring two bags with them, and the rest of their belongings would be numbered and stored. However, campers report that it wasn't that simple:

> I crossed the cordon and they finally agreed to let me collect my belongings. A dozen policemen were surrounding me, watching me without helping. One of them kept telling me to hurry up. I had fifteen minutes, he kept telling me. I was forced to walk away not knowing what number they were going to give my stuff so I could find it again later when they stored it. (Messier and Lalancette, 2020, December 7)

Michel Monette, director of Care Montréal, also states that "the protocol that had been presented to him was not followed." According to him, community workers and street workers did not have access to the camp, despite what was planned (Paré, 2020, December 7). The Montréal fire service (Service de sécurité incendie de Montréal, SIM) spokesperson Louise Desrosiers, "admits that community responders did not have access to the site, but were present outside the perimeter to meet homeless people being escorted by police" (Paré, 2020, December 7). According to Sylvie Boivin, Executive Director of L'Anonyme:

> Only one Anonyme worker was able to remain on the site and it was because he arrived before the police perimeter was set up. He was on his own, single-handedly helping the homeless pack their belongings and supporting them through the crisis they were experiencing. (Paré, 2020, December 8)

According to Messier and Lalancette (2020), about 50 protesters were present to support the campers (December 7). Several of them were pepper-sprayed by the police. According to Linda Boutin, a public relations officer with the City of Montréal's Citizen Experience and Communications Department, everything went smoothly, and respect was shown for the campers (Paré, 2020, December 8). However, this is not the perception of community organizations and campers, who were upset at losing their "home" and were shocked at the violence of the operation.

Social Isolation, a Consequence of the Teardown

The dismantling of the encampment contributed to the dispersal of people experiencing homelessness, distancing them from the services and organizations they rely on or pushing them into isolation, whereas for many, living in the camp was a way to protect themselves while also living in community, on their own terms. "We felt less lost in the camp. It had become our world almost," according to a former occupant of the Notre-Dame Street encampment (Paré, 2020, December 7). Organizations such as L'Anonyme also denounce the fact that the same evening, the emergency shelters were full and some former camp residents had to spend the night outside (Paré, 2020, December 7). According to Sylvie Boivin, Executive Director of L'Anonyme:

> It was a community that had decided to unite, to work together, and to stand together. It's been dismantled, but tomorrow there will still be tents. There are people who will die, possibly because of a fire or because of the cold, but there will be no one to see them. And that in our view is very unfortunate. (Paré, 2020, December 8)

After the Teardown, the Mobilization Continues

Following the teardown, several community organizations, such as the BAILS Committee, Dopamine, l'Anonyme, the Table des organismes communautaires montréalais de lutte contre le sida (the Montréal roundtable of organizations fighting against AIDS, TOMS), Chez Stella and the Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal (RAPSIM) gathered on the periphery of the dismantled Notre-Dame Street encampment. They demanded not only more social housing but also the recognition of the right to occupy public space for people experiencing homelessness (Paré, 2020, December 8). Tolerance for encampments was warranted, given the situation at emergency shelters, the housing crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the city government rejected the idea of tolerating the encampments, citing public health and safety issues (Goudreault, 2020, December 12). Mayor Plante blamed the lack of action of the provincial and federal governments on social housing, claiming that the municipal government has no power over the housing crisis (Corriveau, 2020, December 8).

On December 10, Caroline Leblanc and Sue-Ann MacDonald issued a public statement against evictions from makeshift shelters and encampments, addressed to the government of Quebec and the City of Montréal. They gathered more than 1400 signatures from citizens, community and public service members, academics, and researchers (La Presse, 2020, December 10). The statement called for respecting the choice of homeless residents to occupy public space, treating their property with dignity, and implementing a moratorium on evictions of housed people during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as of unhoused people living in makeshift shelters and encampments. In response to the lack of action and political will, these two authors mobilized different stakeholders across Canada to share their experiences of encampments and to pool their knowledge on the political, community, and individual responses to this reality.

On December 14, the BAILS Committee, TOMS, CACTUS Montréal and Chez Stella issued a press release to address issues around dismantling (Mary, 2020, December 14). United in their condemnation of the police operation, they believe that the City chose intimidation rather than support and that this has isolated the campers from their network of support, dispossessing them of the community which had allowed them to live with a minimum of dignity. They also denounced the fact that the City did not allow

campers to keep their personal belongings, which could have consequences for their living conditions.

Many people experiencing homelessness believe that solutions could have been put in place to ensure their safety and the cleanliness of the site. The ONLPD collective made recommendations and was willing to work with the fire department, among other authorities, to find solutions to the safety issues caused by the risky heating systems used at the encampment. One year later, many campers have not been able to retrieve their belongings from storage with the City of Montréal despite their efforts. Many of them miss the community they had created for themselves, which provided a solution to loneliness as well as providing security and access to good food (Cyr, 2021a, December 7). According to Guylain Levasseur, a person who lived in the encampment, its dismantling did not solve anything; on the contrary, it increased the risks to which people are exposed on the street (Cyr, 2021a, December 7).

Caroline Leblanc, a doctoral student in the community health field, says that it is time to stop dismantling encampments and instead start offering the people who live there supports that meet their needs, rather than opting for strict supervision. She also reminds us that emergency shelters are not an option for everyone and that many people experiencing homelessness are looking for community, which they find at the camps (Cyr, 2021b, December 7). Michel Monette, director of the Care Montréal emergency shelter, still believes that the dismantling of the Notre-Dame street camp was a mistake, and that it could have just been moved (Cyr, 2021b, December 7).

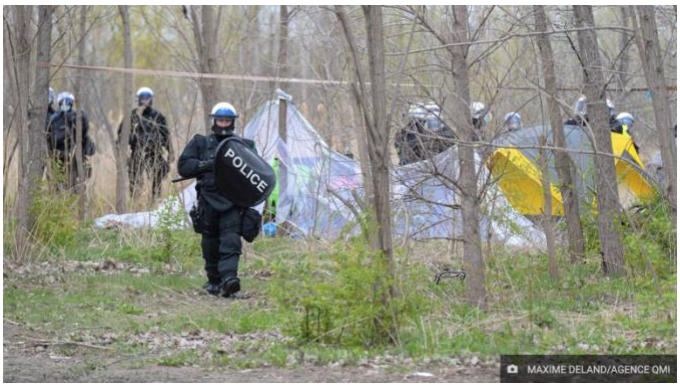

Image from Agence QMI: Steinberg Woods, Montréal

Steinberg Woods Camp—Montréal

Since the brutal dismantling of the Notre-Dame camp, which was the most visible within the area of Montréal, several makeshift shelters appeared, hidden in the urban landscape (Messier, January 19, 2021). However, in mid-April 2021, another encampment was set up in Steinberg Woods in eastern Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, far from view (Gildener and Paré, 2021, April 27).

One camp occupant, Guylain Levasseur, said that at a certain point, people experiencing homelessness "must be visible in order to fight homelessness" (Gildener and Paré, 2021, April 27). Knowing that the issue of safety is always one of the reasons cited for dismantling and in an effort to avoid repeating certain experiences from the Notre-Dame camp, the people who live at the Steinberg Woods camp organized to ensure the safety of all. They stated that they put out fire extinguishers for each tent to prevent fires but indicate that they need water cans, medical kits and naloxone as well as toilets (Gildener and Paré, 2021, April 27).

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to housing, Leilani Farha, recalls that the level of security of the people living in encampments is threatened when they do not have their needs met. In this case, she says:

> Cities would be well advised to provide the makeshift camps with basic services to ensure their safety, such as access to clean water and sanitation facilities, as well as generators to prevent the use of candles or flammable gases by campers. You have to give them what they need to survive. (Goudreault, 2021a, May 3)

Politicians Seize on the Issue of Encampments

In the midst of the municipal elections, decision-makers used the issue of encampments to score political points. On the one hand, outgoing mayor Denis Coderre visited the Steinberg Woods encampment under the gaze of a dozen journalists (Girard, 2021, April 28). He remained convinced that the City should not wait for other levels of government to act, and that Mayor Valérie Plante has the power to implement sustainable solutions (Lacerte Gauthier, 2021, April 27). In his view, the solution is rooming houses. People experiencing homelessness in the camps are looking for hope, and that means permanent solutions (Goudreault, 2021, April 28). "What people want is to not lose what they have. They want to have stability and the ability to have the tools they need to have a better quality of life," added Mr. Coderre (Lacerte Gauthier, 2021, April 27).

In response to this reaction of the candidate for mayor, press officer Geneviève Jutras for the party in power, Projet Montréal, said that there were no lessons to learn from him: "The former mayor never showed leadership on this issue, and his elected officials should protect rooming houses from 'renovictions'" (Goudreault, 2021, April 28).

However, Mayor Valérie Plante of the City of Montréal no longer wished to have encampments within the city for security reasons. She said that what people experiencing homelessness need is a permanent home, but that this takes a long time to put in place (Goudreault, 2021, April 23).

The mayor persisted in saying that despite the wishes of many, organized encampments are not the solution and that she prefers to bring the people living there to existing facilities (Gelper, 2021, May 6). According to Nathalie Goulet, in charge of homelessness for the executive committee, the City is firm on the issue of organized camps: they cannot be tolerated (Messier, 2021, May 4).

However, in an open letter, community organizations and researchers stated that:

> According to the authorities, there are enough emergency shelter spots left and these people need to be redirected to those facilities. However, if some of them prefer encampments to temporary emergency shelters, it is because they cannot or do not want to visit these places for legitimate reasons. (Broussouloux, Leblanc, MacDonald, Painchaud, Pruvost and Savage, 2021, May 6)

One of the camp's occupants, Guylain Levasseur, said the solution is simple and called for housing subsidies (Goudreault, 2021, April 23). While waiting for this to happen, he explained that he has no intention of leaving and that the camp is his home (Goudreault, 2021, April 28).

Steinberg Woods Dismantling

On May 1, 2021, the people living in the camp received an eviction notice from the Quebec ministry of transportation, citing "fire safety issues." This document had no signature or contact information (Transport Québec, 2021). On May 3, 2021, the riot squad, accompanied by 14 police cars, surrounded the area to prompt the people living in the camp to leave (Gaxet, 2021, May 3). An intervention, it should be recalled, that cost more than $99,113 according to information provided in an access to information request to the SPVM (2021).

Safety issues were cited, although the people living in the camp took the necessary measures to mitigate the risks. Ms. Geneviève Jutras, press secretary for Valérie Plante,

Mayor of Montréal, explained as follows: “We prioritize responding to sites that pose significant problems, such as disturbances to citizens, safety, sanitation, crime issues, or encampments that are growing in size with permanent equipment” (Goudreault, 2021a, May 3). In her view, if temporary encampments are not dismantled, they may become permanent (Goudreault, 2021b, May 3).

According to Minister of Transportation Chantal Rouleau, people were not entitled to occupy the grounds and despite the increase in rental costs, “There are shelters for everyone” (Gaxet, 2021, May 3). In her view, the encampments and subsequent dismantling are not related to the housing crisis, and there are ample facilities available (Carabin, 2021, May 3).

The community sector reacted to the dismantling of the Steinberg Woods by denouncing the number of police officers on site during the operation. According to Michel Monette, director of Care Montréal, “It was like using a bazooka to kill a fly” (Corriveau, 2021, May 4). In his view, community organizations should have been allowed to support the people living at the camp instead of moving residents elsewhere (Corriveau, 2021, May 4). Teardowns serve only to displace people experiencing homelessness, uprooting them from their home communities and distancing them from the stakeholders with whom they have connections, putting them at greater risk (Gaxet, 2021, July 13). According to James Hughes, CEO of the Old Brewery Mission, penalizing these people is not the answer, as what they need is options (Hughes, 2021, May 8). While according to Alexandre, a homeless person who was present at the camp, dismantling does not solve the problem, it only displaces it. He asked what the point was of “kicking us out of outdoors” (Paré, 2020, May 3).

Denunciation of crackdowns

More than 50 people gathered in front of Montréal City Hall to denounce the latest dismantling of the Steinberg Woods encampment (Cyr, 2021, May 10), including the people who lived there, who lament the loss of a great deal of equipment and personal belongings that were thrown into garbage trucks.

Many people believe that a repressive approach such as dismantling is not the solution. Alexandre Leduc, MNA for Hochelaga-Maisonneuve and the person responsible for Québec Solidaire’s fight against homelessness, says that it is no longer viable to continually chase away the people who live in encampments (Gaxet, 2021, July 13). Instead, he argues that the risks in the camps should be minimized and that psychosocial support should be provided while also facilitating access to housing (Paré, 2021, May 5).

Michel Monette, director of the Care Montréal emergency shelter, emphasizes that what is being dismantled are not just tents and trailers but human beings who have lives and rights (Lacerte-Gauthier, 2021, May 3).

According to Caroline Leblanc, a doctoral student in community health at the Université de Sherbrooke, intolerance towards encampments exposes the people who live there to "not in my backyard" syndrome, which continually reminds them that they are not welcome anywhere. She therefore advocates for tolerance of encampments, with supports tailored to the needs of the people who inhabit them, as they wish to maintain their autonomy (Cyr, 2021a, December 7).

Reflection of a Crisis and a Lack of Suitable Facilities

The multiplication of encampments throughout the City of Montréal is a reflection of a housing shortage and a confirmation that available shelter services are not sufficient or sufficiently diverse to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness (Hugues, 2021, May 8). As the CEO of the Old Brewery Mission points out, there is little variety in the supply of emergency shelter services and many barriers to accessing them. We need to think about why people decide to live in an encampment because for many, it becomes their only option for regaining a sense of autonomy, privacy, and community. It is thus important in this case to question if it is our collective choices that push them to take the decision to live in an encampment and thus to show their independence and their refusal to remain invisible (Hugues, 2021, May 8).

However, despite the fact that the mayor of the city of Montréal, Valérie Plante, has recognized that a bed in an emergency shelter is not enough and that the solution does not lie in moving people from one temporary place to another equally precarious place, she remains opposed to encampments (Hugues, 2021, May 8). The reporter pointed out that people will not find an encampment anytime soon given the mayor's comments that she hopes to move people experiencing homelessness into permanent housing (Cyr, 2021, May 7). However, while housing is one of the priorities for ending homelessness, it should be noted that François Legault's government has the "worst record" in history in terms of housing "with only 620 new social housing units built under this program in 2020, according to Québec solidaire's figures" (Gelper, 2021, May 6).

According to James Hughes of the Old Brewery Mission, "The increase in encampments is a tragic symbol of the lack of political will to provide a minimum standard of living for the most vulnerable citizens." He says that housing is a right and that governments must

recognize this and act. “An emergency response is not the only answer” (Hughes, 2021, May 8).

In the view of François Legault’s provincial government, it is absolutely necessary to avoid the establishment of new makeshift camps in Montréal. Aware that some people will not go to the emergency shelters, he wants to ensure that there will be optimal management of the makeshift structures to avoid the establishment of encampments (Carabin, 2021, April 15).

For its part, the federal government supports emergency benefits for residential tenants at risk of eviction. It sees this as a solution to reduce the number of people living on the street. However, Annamie Paul, then leader of the Green Party of Canada, said that emergency benefits would be unfair if they were not available to low-income people as well. In her view, we should declare not only a housing crisis but also a homelessness crisis. The camps are a symbol of a lack of services, and she adds that “these are residents, and their wishes must be taken into account. The problem is that there are not many alternatives” (Gelper, 2021, May 12).

Despite numerous recommendations in favour of outdoor shelter sites, the dismantling continues. One of the most often cited reasons is safety, but there are also issues of hygiene and cohabitation at the heart of these crackdowns. Fire hazards, dangerous locations (near water), acts of vandalism around the encampment, occasional non-compliance with physical distancing, and the return of people to public spaces after the gradual easing of quarantine restrictions are among the reasons for dismantling makeshift shelters (Lepage, 2020, June 5). However, there is no justification for the level of violence, brutality, and aggression experienced by people living on the street (Lepage, 2020, June 5).

According to Marjolaine Pruvost, the coordinator for TOMS: “Repressive measures, in this context, do not meet any public health objective” (Goudreault, 2020, June 4).

Teardowns are not without consequences. They lead people to isolate themselves and fall out of touch with their case workers, which exposes them to imminent risks to their health and to their lives.

Berri Encampment—Montréal

Other smaller encampments, located throughout the city of Montréal, were also dismantled. Such was the case for the one that was erected at Îlot Voyageur in August 2020. It was tolerated for several months. Its campers were not bothering anyone, said

one of them, who had padded his tent well for the winter, he heats it using candles. The campers were also able to help and protect each other, he added: “That’s five lives I’ve saved in two weeks,’ said Jason Dominique, who has obtained naloxone to intervene when campers have opioid-related overdoses” (Goudreault, 2020, December 12).

Encampment in the Cabot Square Area—Montréal

On October 18, 2020, an encampment erected on a Ministère des Transports du Québec property, in the Cabot Square area of Montréal, was also dismantled by the SPVM. This dismantling was done at the request of the ministry, citing security issues, as well as following a citizen complaint (Corriveau, 2020, October 19). The campers, accompanied by workers from the organization Résilience, were able to relocate to another place following negotiations with the police (Corriveau, 2020, October 19).

Benoit Langevin, the Official Opposition Critic for Homelessness, says there are inconsistencies in the decisions made by the City regarding these encampments: “The City is dismantling the encampment at Cabot Square, it tolerated the encampment on Notre-Dame Street and now it is tolerating the one behind [the former] Îlot Voyageur. What is their process?” asked Mr. Langevin. “We can’t be playing ping-pong with human lives” (Pelletier, 2020, August 28).

Montréal North Encampment—Montréal

In Montréal North, about five campers et up in a snow deposit site after being displaced. The borough had planned to dismantle the encampment on October 22, 2020, after installing a chemical toilet, picnic tables, and a makeshift shelter for them (Faucher, 2020, October 1). Neighbourhood community organizations were in contact with the campers. The Montréal North Housing Committee highlighted the fact that homelessness is growing in the neighbourhood, making it more visible, in part because of rising housing prices (Faucher, 2020, October 22). At that time, there were only two campers left since the others had already left the area, at the request of the borough. The mayor of Montréal North, Christine Black, asked the Plante government for help in decentralizing homelessness services, most of which are located downtown, to avoid uprooting people from their home neighbourhoods (Faucher, 2020, October 22).

On September 1, 2021, another dismantling took place in the Montréal-North neighbourhood where people experiencing homelessness were confronted with a lack of facilities in the borough. The community network said that dismantling the makeshift shelters undermines the work that has already been done and weakens the relationships

that have been created with the people occupying the camps (Champagne, 2021, September 1). Montréal North Mayor Christine Black remains convinced that dismantling is the responsible thing to do because of the security risks.

Mount Royal Encampment—Montréal

On April 21, 2021, after a warming station in the Plateau Mont-Royal neighbourhood closed its doors on March 31, 2020, tents were set up in a parking lot near the Mont-Royal metro station. Due to noise, shouting and violence, coexistence became rather difficult among the occupants of the camp and this led to a reaction from local residents. Not wanting to call the police, they contacted the City. However, fearing for their safety and saying they had received no response from the City of Montréal, they mobilized and collected more than 120 signatures in order to demand better supervision of the camps (Gildener and Paré, 2021, April 27). One of the authors of the petition said:

> We're not against the fact that there are people there. It's the behaviour and lack of supervision that we're essentially concerned about. Right now, these people who are homeless have nothing. This is a parking lot. They have no services. They are left to their own devices. They have real needs that are not being met. (Gildener and Paré, 2021, April 27)

Notre-Dame/Iberville Encampment—Montréal

On July 21, 2021, an encampment that had been occupied by ten people on one of Transport Québec's properties was dismantled. Only five people were present at the time of the dismantling. Safety issues were cited: "The city states that on July 1, the Montréal fire service (SIM) responded to a fire that destroyed two tents." Social and psychological supports were offered, as well as storage for personal effects (Gaxet, 2021, July 13)

REALITIES OF ENCAMPMENTS OUTSIDE THE CITY

Image Radio-Canada: Ruisseau de la Brasserie encampment, Gatineau

City of Gatineau

To fully understand the reality of Gatineau, one must take into account that it is a city located near Ottawa, the capital of Canada, separated from it by a bridge, and that there is a lot of back-and-forth traffic of people experiencing homelessness on both sides of the river. Currently, there is a camp along Ruisseau de la Brasserie near the Gîte Ami as well as other smaller or more hidden camps. These are regularly dismantled by municipal employees, with the assistance of police and psychosocial support workers, who encourage campers to use the existing services. However, Michel Kasongo, director of the Hull soup kitchen, reminds us that many people are living with substance abuse or mental health issues, which makes access to existing shelter facilities more difficult. Annie Castonguay, Assistant Director of the Bureau régional d'action sida (regional bureau for action on AIDS, BRAS) explains that there is no room in the emergency shelters and that even warming centres are occupied by about ten people during the night (Radio-Canada, 2021, July 29). The independent candidate in the Hull-Wright district, René Coignaud, states that there is no doubt that there has been a "failure to offer decent living conditions" to people experiencing homelessness and that it is wrong to remove them from camps when there is no adequate place to move them to (Blais-Thompson, 2021, June 6). As for the people living in the camp, they are tired of the teardowns. In 2020, this is said to have happened about 15 times (St. Denis, 2021a, June 2). "I think it's a bit of a shame. It's a bit drastic. Lack of housing, that's the result," said one camp resident, referring to the dismantling operations (Radio-Canada, 2021, July 29).

We note that the encampment, which is located along the Ruisseau de la Brasserie near the Gîte Ami, had previously been a pilot project in 2015, and the Centre d'intervention et de prévention de l'Outaouais (Outaouais regional intervention and prevention centre) had given a positive assessment. However, it stressed that the number of people in the camp, 50 to 60, was far too many. He also specified that they were dealing with partygoers who gathered at the camp on weekends and did not share the same reality as those who used the site as a last resort (Bonenfant, 2015, October 30). The mayor of the city of Gatineau had stated in 2015 that he was not keen on the idea of continuing this experiment if it did not become a site for interventions that are part of a continuum of services (Bélanger, 2015, March 10). Despite the fact that the camp was meant to be a temporary solution, and despite the numerous teardowns and the reluctance towards its existence, it is still there after more than six years.

Faced with this reality, which has become almost permanent, since the beginning of the year 2021, the vocabulary is changing when talking about the camp along Ruisseau de la Brasserie near the Gîte Ami. Despite not being officially allowed, it is still tolerated. In this case, the idea is no longer to dismantle the encampment, but rather to do cleanups, where people experiencing homelessness will be able to re-establish themselves afterwards (St-Denis, 2021b, June 2). Police and blue-collar workers were present during the cleanup, as well as mechanical scoopers and trucks for collecting the garbage. Nevertheless, although evicting the people living in the camp is no longer on the table, the issues related to dismantling remain (St-Denis, 2021b, June 2). Indeed, although the people living in the camp are notified five days before the major cleanup (Blais-Thompson, 2021, June 6), they may be absent and thus see their personal belongings thrown in the garbage (St-Denis, 2021b, June 2).

That said, given the 18% increase in demand for shelters (Blais-Thompson, 2021, June 6), community organization requested the extension of facilities and the addition of emergency shelter spaces as well as the purchase of mini-living spaces (rooming houses) and a supervised camp project, which are possibilities in the future (St-Denis, 2021b, June 2). Indeed, the desire to create humanitarian camps in the Robert-Guertin arena parking lot is among the possible solutions to get people out of the woods, as their presence is becoming harmful to the environment (waterways and forest) (Blais-Thompson, 2021, June 6). In any case, in the meantime, as facilities struggle to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness, encampments continue to multiply in the city of Gatineau (St-Denis, 2021a, June 2).

Image: La Tribune: Campement du Pont Joffre, Sherbrooke

City of Sherbrooke

The situation in Sherbrooke has not been spared from the consequences of the pandemic. More and more people experiencing homelessness are looking to meet their needs, and encampments have multiplied in the city. Faced with a lack of funding and a lack of employees, the only emergency shelter in the city of Sherbrooke, the Partage St-François, which has a capacity of 27 people and turns away between 10 and 15 people a night (Radio-Canada, 2021, October 29), was forced to close its doors for three weekends in a short period of time, the first time this has happened in 40 years (Radio-Canada, 2021, November 4). The CIUSSS de l'Estrie-CHUS was no longer able to fund the emergency shelter because the Community Support Program (PSOC) grants did not allow it (Fauteux, 2021, November 4). The city of Sherbrooke has offered financial assistance of $35,000 for the following three years (Deshaies, 2021, December 7). However, improvements to this program by the government would greatly help, making working conditions competitive with the public network and helping to keep the employees in the community network (Fauteux, 2021, November 4)

Faced with the instability of what had become the only shelter facility due to closures and with the access constraints faced by those experiencing homelessness, many decided to move to the area below the Joffre Bridge, a short distance from the facility. There were around twenty people there depending on the night, according to the authorities (Léonard, 2021a, November 30). At the request of the Rock Guertin Foundation, police officers agreed to distribute food in the streets to people experiencing homelessness, and citizens mobilized to compensate for the closure of the emergency shelter, which also serves as a food aid site (Radio-Canada, 2021, November 7). According to one person

experiencing homelessness: “It’s heartwarming, but it’s a plaster on a sore that will continue to bleed.”

The people who lived in the Joffre Bridge encampment also mobilized to meet their needs. A list was updated daily to target needed donations and avoid surpluses. However, in response to the outpouring of generosity from the public, Sherbrooke Mayor Evelyn Beaudin asked the public to stop providing direct assistance to homeless people living at Joffre Bridge (Gaulin, 2021, December 6). Gabriel Pallotta, coordinator of the homelessness roundtable in Sherbrooke, explained that the high number of donations led people to stop accessing services, because they were able to meet their needs directly at the camp (Gaulin, 2021, December 6). However, Université de Montréal School of Social Work assistant professor Elisabeth Greissler believes that direct donations to the camp are not necessarily harmful. On the contrary, it can reduce the hardships people are going through. According to Myshell-Alexandre Carpentier, donations from the public make a big difference in the daily lives of the people living in the camp (Gaulin, 2021, December 6).

As the camp grew from week to week and winter arrived, Sherbrooke Mayor Evelyn Beaudin called for action because of the increased risk of hypothermia, fire, harm, and overdose (Leonard, 2021, November 30). She clarified that the dismantling was requested by community organizations on the ground (Leonard, 2021a, Nov. 30), although there was no consensus among them. In her view, it is inconceivable to let people live in such conditions, much less in winter (Leonard, 2021, November 30). To achieve this, a personalized approach was used, offering different options such as lodging at Partage St-François, with another organization or with a relative, as well as providing temporary storage if needed (Gaulin, 2021, December 4). However, the Sherbrooke Tenants’ Association deplored the fact that the encampment was being dismantled without any real alternatives being offered (Léonard, 2021a, November 30). The people experiencing homelessness were themselves sceptical of the City’s strategy. For them, returning to an emergency shelter is not an option (Dumas, 2021, November 30). According to Ronald Landry, a member of Hope Community Church, people experiencing homelessness need this place because they have nowhere else to go (Dumas, 2021, November 25).

Dismantling the Encampment

The crackdown approach was not considered in the dismantling of the camp. The authorities wanted to ensure the action was safe and humane (Leonard, 2021b, November 30). However, before the dismantling, there was a noticeable reduction in resources and support, and the stress level increased. City of Sherbrooke employees

usually came every day to collect the garbage and the people living in the camp cooperated with them, but as the dismantling approached, they were less frequently present. Then, these employees even came to seize the firewood of the people living in the camp, which reduced their ability to keep warm at night (Observation of the encampment, 2021).

During the dismantling, the intervention was calm, even if some people did not want to leave (Léonard and Plante, 2021, December 6). City employees carried out the removal and several social workers were present on site to ensure that the operation went smoothly (Léonard and Plante, 2021, December 6). However, according to Stéphanie Roy, coordinator of IRIS Estrie, the dismantling was done in a draconian way, and more time should have been allocated (Radio-Canada, 2021, December 10). She points out that "when you dismantle, sometimes you lose people. To think that we're going to be able to easily locate all these people… Oftentimes they'll go back to old camps or elsewhere. They will put themselves in much more dangerous situations" (Radio-Canada, 2021, December 10). However, the political attaché of Mayor Evelyne Beaudin of the City of Sherbrooke, clarified that no arrests had been planned in the event that people remained under the bridge after the evacuation (Proteau, 2021, December 6).

After the Dismantling of the Encampment

On the ground, this dismantling did not come with a plan B. Only a few people took the option of emergency accommodation, as most found a temporary place or returned to their former (much more distant) encampment. Some women found themselves in situations that put their safety at risk (observations of the encampment, 2021).

It must be emphasized that the people who lived in the camp were capable of organizing themselves, they had done so before, during and would continue to do so after the dismantling, according to the coordinator of the Sherbrooke homelessness roundtable, Gabriel Pallotta. He clarified that the issue of homelessness has always existed, but has just become more visible now (Leonard, 2021b, November 30). Indeed, safety issues are often used to conceal political issues, such as the visibility of homelessness (Bergeron, 2021, December 7). However, policymakers have not done enough research on the actual actions that can be taken to address encampments, and every time an encampment is dismantled, the problem is displaced.

Caroline Leblanc, a doctoral student in community health, reacted to the dismantling and said that it would have been possible to take preventive action to reduce the risk of fire (Radio-Canada, 2021, December 10). In her view, the encampments are the result of a violation of the right to housing, and the safety risks will be much greater if the

encampments are dismantled. For many, the encampments are a source of protection and mutual support (Leblanc, 2021, December 7). She also highlighted the need to decentralize the available shelter services in Sherbrooke, because if people are turned away from the shelter, they have no more options. In addition, she said that a tiered approach to services is needed because emergency shelters are not suitable for everyone (Radio-Canada, 2021, December 10). In the view of the Sherbrooke tenants' association, this dismantling was useless. The only foreseeable result was that several encampments were scattered throughout the city, and the only danger was a political one, a purely image-related danger. This organization has requested the creation of a warming centre (Proteau, 2021, December 6).

Conclusion

In all cities, people living in encampments organize themselves, and the strength of the group allows them to protect and support each other in times of need. In the camps, people manage to structure themselves and to settle down, which allows them to experience a certain level of stability. However, municipal and governmental responses prevent them from coming together to meet their needs. As soon as people experiencing homelessness become visible and the number of structures becomes disruptive and more difficult to dismantle, authorities react quickly to put an end to their mutual support. This approach undermines the emergency response for people who do not use shelters, and it becomes a major issue because it is difficult for them to find a place where they can be valued and exist in their own living context. People living in encampments live under the continual stress of being displaced, dismantled, and moved from a place that means something to them, reminding them that they are not welcome anywhere.

Recommendations

The recommendations below are based on those developed by the No One Left Behind Collective, in recognition of their actions and ability to mobilize knowledge to address the real needs of people sleeping in tents, encampments, and informal makeshift shelters. A cross-sectional analysis of these media articles also provided additional elements to these recommendations.

Right to Housing and Suitable Facilities

Whereas the lack of housing that is suitable for people's needs amplifies the phenomenon of homelessness:

- We believe that it is necessary to invest in different forms of housing; namely social housing, social housing with community support, and rooming houses as well as in the AccèsLogis program in order to promote access to and retention of housing and to act in a structured manner with regard to the phenomenon of homelessness.

Whereas shelter facilities are inaccessible for some people experiencing homelessness (notably for people who use drugs, couples, trans and non-binary people, people with animals, people living with mental health or chronic health issues, etc.):

- We believe that it is necessary to promote the implementation of high-tolerance shelter facilities that minimize exclusion as much as possible, i.e., that adapt to the needs of people who wish to use the emergency shelter and that facilitate their access. This can be done for example by setting up wet services, i.e., offering an alcohol consumption program as well as consumption and overdose prevention sites within shelter facilities, by valuing and recognizing the presence of animals within the shelter or by developing 24/7 shelter facilities, without time constraints in order to reduce the instability of people experiencing homelessness, etc. Then, it is even more important that frontline workers be trained in this type of approach.

- We believe that when it is not possible to find a suitable shelter, we must support people experiencing homelessness to find an alternative that suits them so that they are not forced to live in a camp, if they do not wish to.

Whereas women and LGBTQ+ people experience a multiplicity of oppressions that are specific to them, and mixed emergency shelter facilities can create a sense of insecurity that prevents some individuals from accessing them (e.g., being exposed to their abuser, etc.):

- We believe that it is essential to develop appropriate shelter facilities for women and LGBTQ+ communities.

- We also believe that it is important to train the workers at shelter facilities with regard to the reality of the LGBTQ+ communities in order to reduce the possible assaults and traumas experienced when they use them.

- We believe that there is a need to adapt the infrastructure of existing shelter facilities (in addition to training, for example, having non-mixed areas or a floor reserved for women).

Whereas, particularly disturbing effects have been noted in youth homelessness during the pandemic:

- We believe it is essential to invest more in youth homelessness services to prevent chronic homelessness.

- We believe that we need to develop high-tolerance youth shelter facilities and reduce exclusionary measures in existing emergency shelters as much as possible so that we do not deprive youth of a stable and safe environment where they can receive support that is suitable to their situation.

- We believe that it is important to offer more psychosocial support, both in preventing homelessness and in accompanying young people experiencing homelessness, while adapting to their realities and needs. This support can take different forms, whether it is by facilitating access to wrap-around health care services, by supporting these young people in the legal system and around residential stability, or by being present in their daily lives in order to prevent situations of distress and ensure the necessary follow-up for their living and health conditions.

Considering the specific needs of people experiencing homelessness from Indigenous communities:

- We believe that it is necessary to listen to the needs and solutions put forward by Indigenous communities, so that they have the autonomy to develop culturally and socially appropriate services (including shelters). In this sense, institutions should work with Indigenous communities to develop facilities that respect the dignity of each person, facilitate accessibility and a sense of belonging for Indigenous people experiencing homelessness, and reinforce this aspect within existing facilities.

Tolerance and Respect for Rights are Necessary

Whereas the right to housing represents an indispensable right to a dignified and decent life and to exercise self-determination for all;

Whereas the housing crisis is growing, and people are finding themselves unable to afford housing;

Whereas some people may be unable to hold down a home for a variety of reasons:

- We believe that encampments are a necessary alternative in the context of housing, health, or other crises, and when people are unable to hold down a home.

Whereas shelter facilities generate exclusion and some people do not want to or cannot use them for various reasons: personal (e.g., to preserve their autonomy), organizational (e.g., cannot bring their pet with them) and structural (e.g., lack of space in the facilities);

- We believe that it is necessary to recognize the possibility of living in a makeshift shelter, if, for the person, it is a place that makes sense to them, and that most resembles a “home” and a dignified and autonomous life.

Whereas encampments allow the people who live there to develop a sense of belonging and to benefit from stability or support;

Whereas crackdowns on people living on the street are counterproductive, and dismantling encampments can impact their health by continually displacing them, isolating them from their community, denying them access to essential support, and depriving them of access to a makeshift shelter, thereby contributing to the deterioration of their living conditions and increasing the risk of death from cold, fire, and overdose:

- We believe that makeshift shelters must be allowed to be set up and respected in all municipalities affected by this phenomenon so that people can remain in their community, as close as possible to their place of belonging and to the people, resources and services that support them in their situation, and thus avoid a break in the link that could have an impact on their health and their lives.

- We believe it is important for municipal governments to take a clear position supporting tolerance for encampments and to ensure that they provide the facilities necessary for their proper functioning and the safety of the people living there.

Whereas life in a camp is often precarious and can involve risks:

- We believe that a harm reduction approach, rather than a punitive and repressive one, is essential to reduce the risks related to fires, cold, substance abuse and sanitary issues and thus act to prevent the deterioration of living and health conditions of people living in an encampment.

- We believe that it is essential to provide people living in encampments with access to water, toilets, heat during cold weather, and nearby lockers to store their personal belongings, as well as material for the prevention of substance-related risks, and to ensure the collection of waste for the most dignified and sanitary living conditions possible.

Support Rather than Crackdowns

Whereas public space sometimes serves as the last resort for many people and a place that makes the most sense to live for others:

- We believe that we must stop prosecuting and criminalizing people who live in encampments and recognize their right to occupy public space.

- We believe that there is a need for more training for authorities on the realities of people who live in the street and a better understanding of the issues they face when their makeshift shelters are dismantled.

Whereas people living in encampments are often invisible and ignored in the implementation of actions that concern them:

- We believe that people living in camps must be consulted and their voices must be truly considered so that they can be involved in prioritizing actions and initiatives to meet their needs and can participate in decisions that affect their lives.

- We believe that it is important to give decision-making power back to the people living in encampments and that we must collectively work to empower them.

Whereas the building of a meaningful bond and the development of a trusting relationship with stakeholders helps find appropriate solutions:

- We believe that it is essential to foster case work, if the people living in the camps so desire, in particular by providing adequate and sustained funding to organizations offering this form of intervention.

- We believe that community, institutional and other organizations working in the field of homelessness, as well as the various levels of government, must be attentive to the needs and interests of people living in encampments and that we

must work harder to give them the necessary tools to respond to the urgent and organizational needs they encounter.

- We believe that it is important to value the expertise of peers in intervention, i.e., those who have experienced or are experiencing this reality of homelessness, in order to develop and strengthen the links established with the people living in the camps.

Whereas one of the arguments cited for dismantling the camps is security-related issues:

- We believe in empowering camp residents and offering workshops on how to reduce the risk of fire, hypothermia, frostbite, and overdose, and providing them with safety equipment and information on their rights and responsibilities.

- We believe that their strengths should be highlighted and that they should be assisted, if they so wish, in the development of their capacities in order to promote their autonomy and thus improve their living and health conditions.

- We believe that it is essential to implement solutions and actions after consultation with camp residents in order to target their real needs and priorities.

- We believe we must stop thinking of the emergency response to homelessness seasonally and instead ensure continuity of services in order to reduce the instability of facilities and facilitate access to suitable services, thus promoting better living and health conditions for people living on the street (e.g., 24/7 respite care facilities).

Collaboration and respect for rights

Whereas people living in encampments are full citizens and deserve to be considered as such:

- We believe that people living in camps need to be treated with respect for their dignity, autonomy and self-determination.

- We also believe that in order to take into consideration the different faces of homelessness, we need to develop multiple, suitable, local responses in consultation with the people concerned, i.e., those experiencing homelessness. This must be done throughout Quebec in order to decentralize resources and thus

reduce the uprooting of people experiencing homelessness from their environment.

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