
Final report on the project

“Street work against homelessness and violence among women”

COALITION SHERBROOKE
POUR LE TRAVAIL DE RUE 

April 2019

Street work

Street work is carried out through a daily presence in the living environment of homeless persons and by building a relationship of trust with them to guide them towards wellness.

Fontaine, A., Wagner, G., *La négociation du sens et des usages des pratiques en travail de rue auprès des jeunes : rapport de recherche*, 2017

The Coalition sherbrookoise pour le travail de rue

Created in 1988 out of a desire in the community to reach out to people who fall through the cracks in the existing health and social services system, the Coalition sherbrookoise pour le travail de rue's mission is to go out and meet people who have broken ties, to varying extents, with their loved ones and community.

This outreach work is done on their own turf, in open spaces (street, parks, schools, businesses, etc.), on foot, as well as through the Macadam J bus, our mobile intervention unit.

www.travailderuesherbrooke.org

Table of contents

The issue	4
Specific objectives of the project and means to achieve them.....	5
Comparison of initial objectives and results	7
Quarter 1: January to March 2018	10
Quarter 2: April to June 2018	10
Quarter 3: July to September 2018	11
Quarter 4: October to December 2018.....	11
Recommendations	12
Conclusion	13



Funded by the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy Innovative Solutions to Homelessness

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect of the
Government of Canada

The issue

The Table itinérance de Sherbrooke has noticed an increase in the proportion of women using the network of resources for the homeless in recent years. For the year 2010–2011, statistics show an average of 24% of women using shelter resources, 39% using housing resources, and 29% using community support resources¹.

Quebec’s national policy to fight homelessness (Politique nationale de lutte à l’itinérance) confirms what we are observing in the field regarding the phenomenon of homelessness among women:

In addition to certain factors they share with men, homeless women have often experienced a long history of violence, including sexual, psychological, physical, spousal, or family abuse. Studies conducted in recent years in Quebec and across Canada show that a significant number of these women have experienced violence (73% to 81%). [...] Women are not as visible as men on the street. They develop several strategies to avoid ending up there. These survival strategies, such as prostitution or shoplifting, make them less visible, but pose risks to their health, safety, and dignity and pull them deeper into homelessness. It is known that many of them avoid the street going from one shelter to the next, or resorting to couch-surfing at a friend’s or an acquaintance’s home. This hidden homelessness obfuscates the extent of the rising rate of homelessness among women. These findings must be weighed in to understand the issue of homelessness among women and define actions to tackle this problem².

The violence experienced by homeless women explains why many of them are particularly wary of people and of the various social, community, or institutional stakeholders. Establishing a relationship of trust requires time and effort, but it lays the groundwork required to truly support women and guide them towards improving their living conditions in a tangible manner and stabilizing their situation regarding violence and homelessness.

¹ Table itinérance de Sherbrooke, *Cadre de référence sur l’itinérance à Sherbrooke*, 2011, p. 28.

² Government of Quebec, *Politique nationale de lutte à l’itinérance: Ensemble, pour éviter la rue et en sortir*, 2014, pp. 13-14.

Specific objectives of the project and means to achieve them

The purpose of the project “Street work against homelessness and violence among women” was to introduce and consolidate street work interventions to prevent and alleviate homelessness among Sherbrooke’s women and girls. This goal directly corresponds with the second key sector within the framework of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) 2014–2019: Improving the self-sufficiency of individuals and families experiencing homelessness or facing an imminent risk of becoming homeless, through personalized services (support services)³. To achieve this objective, the project aimed more specifically to:

Ensure a sustained presence in targeted sectors to reach out to women;

Develop interpersonal relationships based on respect and trust;

Offer free activities to break down isolation, and to develop a sense of belonging, social skills, and self-esteem in homeless women;

Work in conjunction with local partners on the issue of homelessness among women and foster the development of accessible services that are adapted to their specific realities.

To meet these objectives and to comply with the province's policy to fight homelessness (Politique nationale de lutte à l’itinérance)⁴, it was agreed that for the first two or three months, a female street worker should focus on observation and integration efforts in the targeted environments, by identifying the various risk factors and spaces where she would be more likely to come into contact with homeless women who are victims of violence. By making herself available 35 hours a week, based on a flexible and adapted schedule—day, evening, and night—she was able to identify spaces

³ Governments of Canada and Quebec, *Canada-Quebec Agreement Regarding the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) 2014–2019*, 2015, p. 11.

⁴ “We must build and maintain a relationship of trust with homeless and extremely vulnerable individuals. This requires that we ensure the stability of ad hoc and short-term intervention teams who focus on managing individuals and crises, while adopting a caring approach of support and assistance. Emergency interventions must be designed differently and integrated into a preventive approach.” Government of Quebec, *Ensemble, pour éviter la rue et en sortir, Politique nationale de lutte à l’itinérance*, 2014, p. 32.

of social exclusion linked to the issue, progressively have marginalized individuals living in these spaces get used to her, and slowly earn their trust

In conjunction with the observation and integration efforts, sustained intervention efforts were carried out throughout the project. These efforts were geared towards the following activities:

Creating and developing relationships of trust;

Responding to emergencies and crisis situations as well as psychosocial needs encountered;

Being welcoming, a good listener, and fostering a dialogue, both on foot and aboard the Macadam J bus (mobile intervention unit);

Offering continued support and assistance to homeless women who have experienced violence;

Fostering access to resources and services for women through referral as well as sustained and personalized support efforts.

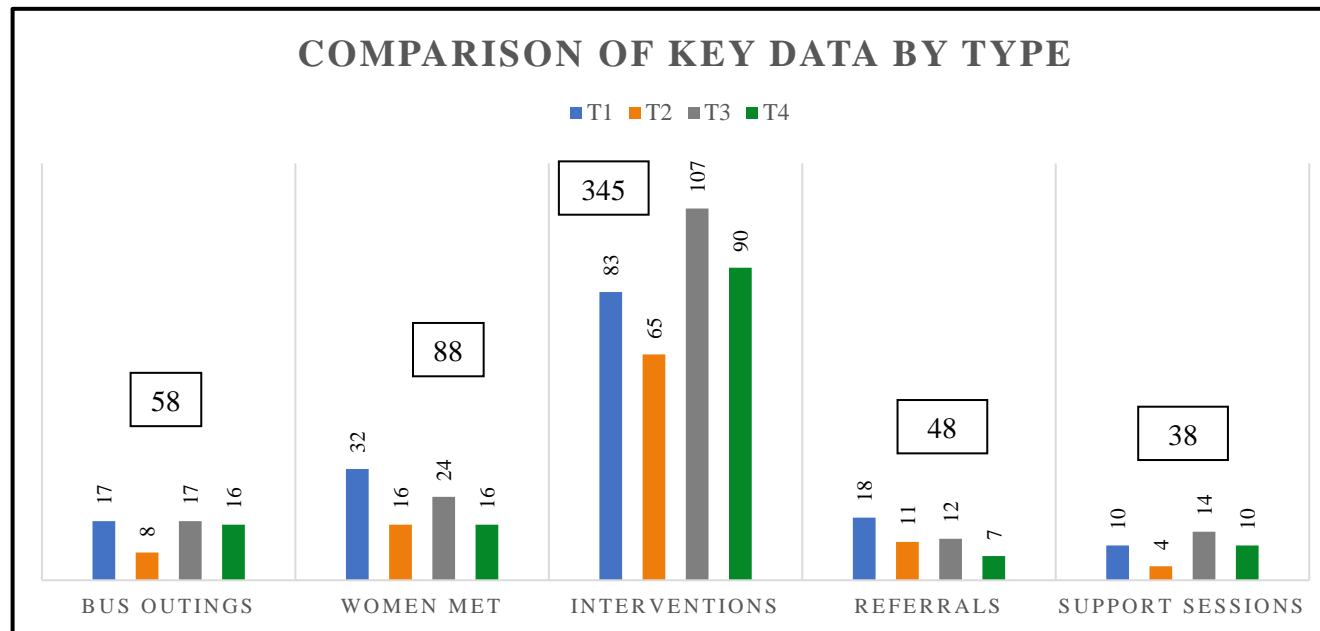
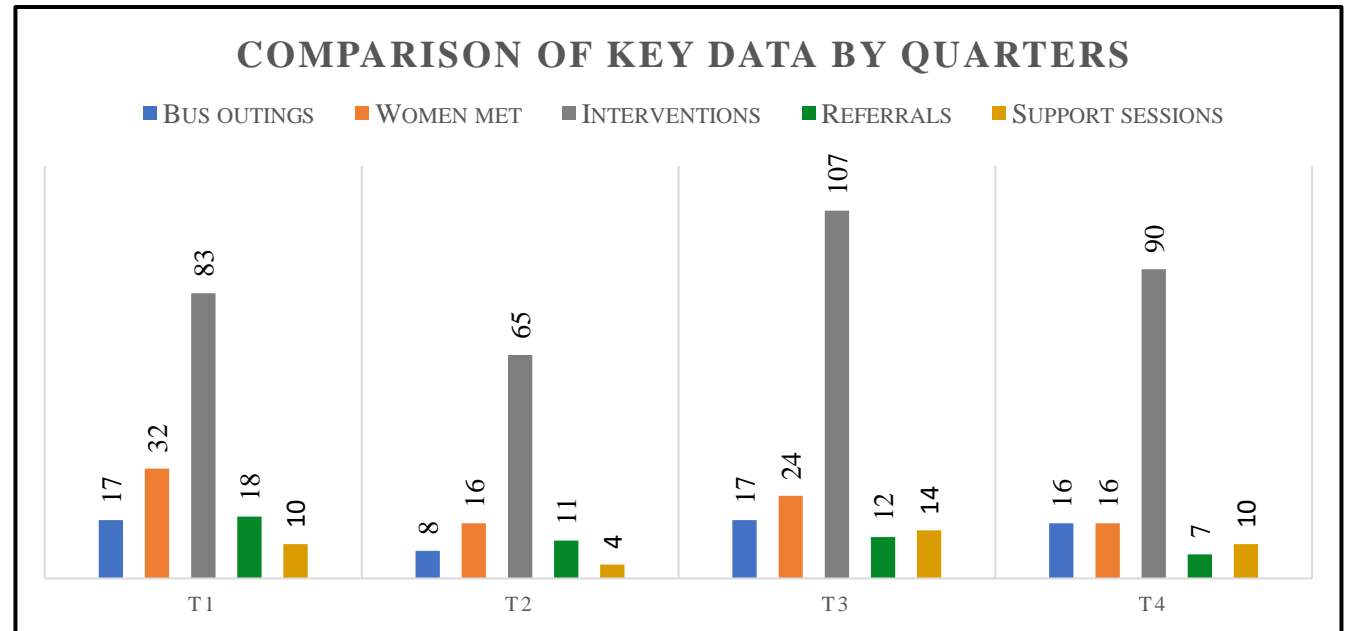
Various free activities were also offered to give women the opportunity to break out of isolation, socialize, rebuild their self-confidence, develop social skills, and eventually develop a sense of belonging to a group with a perspective of social reinsertion.

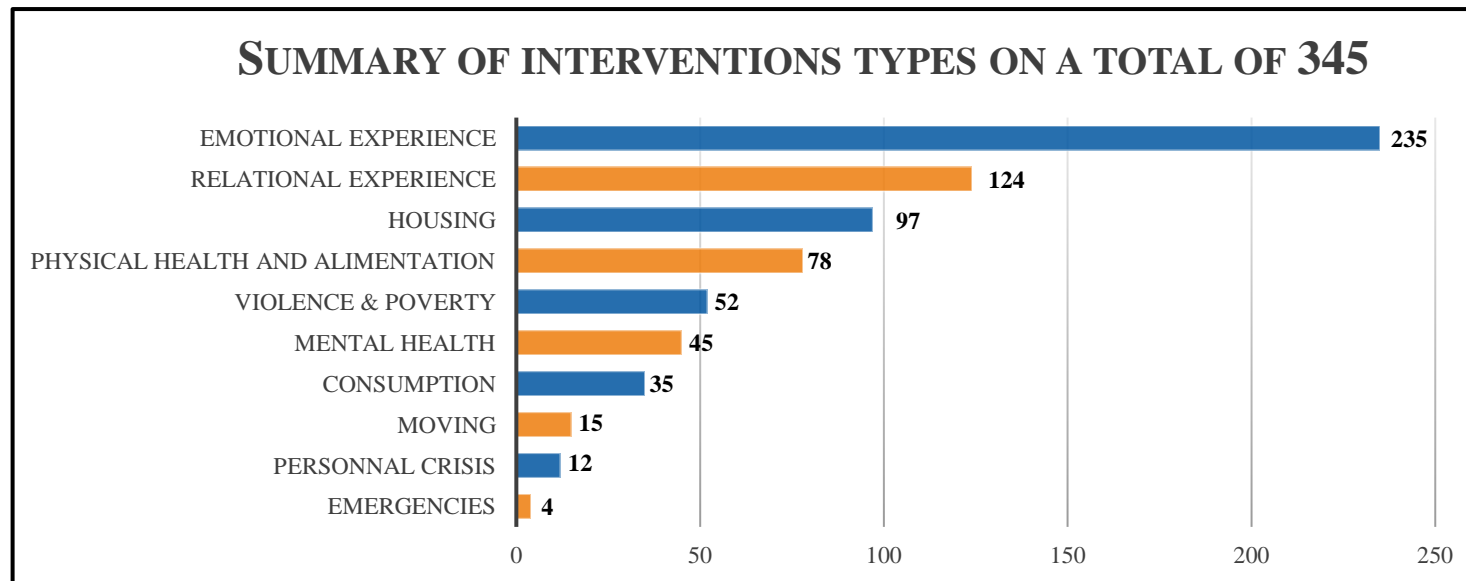
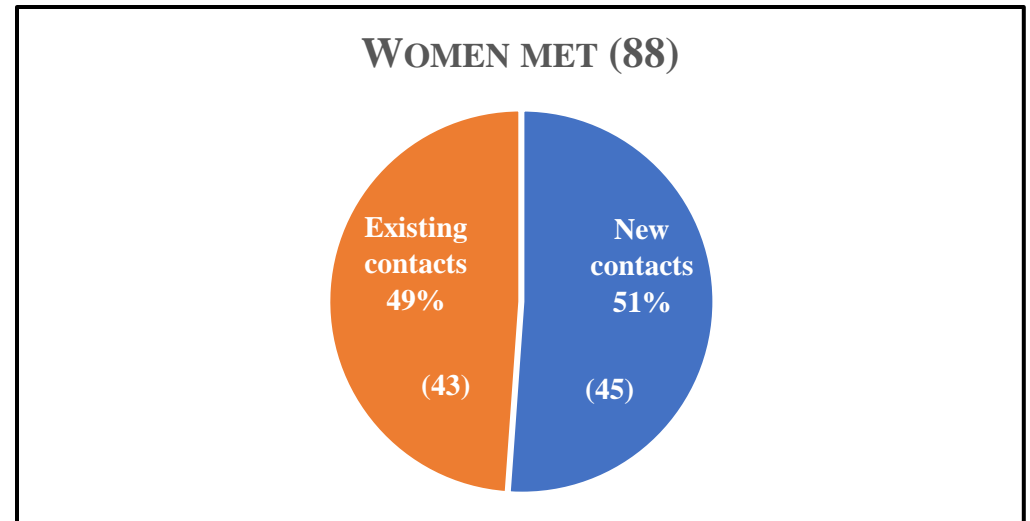
Through her relationships with the women, the street worker fostered access to resources and services for them through referral as well as sustained and personalized support efforts.

Finally, she compiled comprehensive intervention statistics to establish a quantitative profile of the women met and a qualitative analysis of the various interventions conducted with them (locations, types of intervention, topics addressed, referral and support sectors, etc.)

Comparison of initial objectives and results

Initial objectives	Results after one year
Reaching out to some 50 women victims of violence experiencing homelessness.	We met with 88 women, of whom more than half (45) were new contacts.
Organizing from 4 to 12 free activities to enable the women encountered to break out of isolation, develop a sense of belonging, and rebuild their self-esteem.	We organized 4 activities, which were all very successful for the participating women.
Developing the abilities (resilience factors) and personal and social skills required to meet their basic needs and take steps in terms of socialization, social ties, reintegration, and in certain cases, social and professional reintegration.	Through the interventions carried out, we believe that the women reached were able to develop the required skills and abilities to meet their basic needs, as each of these interventions was specifically tailored to respond to the issues they had identified.
Providing access to resources and services through referral and support efforts by the worker.	With 48 referrals made by the worker, as well as 38 support sessions, we conclude that the objective of providing access to resources and services was successfully met.





Quarter 1: January to March 2018

From January to March, the street worker was able to create new intervention links and build upon relationships with women already known by the organization who could benefit from the project. She was also able to launch intervention work with these women, particularly by responding to emergencies and psychosocial needs, as well as through support, referral, and guidance efforts.

Organized activity

On March 7, a women’s bowling activity was organized, and 7 women were able to participate.

First quarter in numbers

During the first quarter, 32 women were met, including 10 new contacts. The street worker carried out 83 interventions, most of which addressed emotional or relational history. Of these 83 interventions, 2 were emergencies. The street worker also made 18 referrals, including 10 pertaining to housing. Finally, 10 support sessions were completed, and 17 outings were held via the Macadam J bus.

Quarter 2: April to June 2018

Organized activity

On June 27, the women reached enjoyed an afternoon of relaxation and artistic expression in the woods.

Second quarter in numbers

As of the second quarter, a total of 48 women had been met, including 23 new contacts. The street worker carried out 148 interventions, most of which were structured around emotional or relational history. The street worker made 29 referrals, including 14 pertaining to housing. Finally, 14 support sessions were completed, and the Macadam J bus went on 25 outings.

Quarter 3: July to September 2018

Organized activity

On August 25, the street worker took part in a women’s afternoon in Montreal where various activities took place.

Third quarter in numbers

As of the third quarter, a total of 72 women had been met, of which almost half (35) were new contacts. The street worker carried out 255 interventions, most of which addressed emotional or relational history. The street worker made 41 referrals and completed 28 support sessions. The Macadam J bus also went on 42 outings.

Quarter 4: October to December 2018

Organized activity

A free second-hand clothing activity took place on October 10, which enabled several women to obtain good-quality clothes, while enjoying spending time together.

Fourth quarter in numbers

As of the last quarter, a total of 88 women had been met, including 45 new contacts. The street worker carried out 345 interventions, most of which addressed emotional or relational history. The street worker made 48 referrals and completed 38 support sessions. The Macadam J bus went on 58 outings.

Recommendations

After a full year of working for and with the women, we consider the following elements essential for the implementation of such a project:

- Identifying the main locations frequented by these women (shops, bars, restaurants, cafés, etc.);
- Progressively integrating these women’s environment, while respecting their pace of life;
- Preventing the use of multiple resources and fostering the presence of the same workers in these environments;
- Ensuring the presence of workers in informal contexts to build the foundation necessary to develop a healthy and willing relationship;
- Developing partnerships and collaborating closely with organizations in the institutional and community sector offering services to women experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless and/or victims of violence;
 - o For example: L’Escale, CALACS, IRIS Estrie, Arche de l’Estrie, the CIUSSS’s homelessness team, etc.
- Offering non-mixed safe spaces to enable women to break out of isolation, meet other women, and create a support network and a sense of belonging to the group;
- Organizing social, cultural, and sports activities, based on their interests and needs. This enables them to reclaim their body and history, develop their self-esteem, discover their passions, develop their sense of belonging, and take action.

Conclusion

The Coalition sherbrookoise pour le travail de rue is a community organization that has been operating in Sherbrooke for more than 30 years. The project “Street work against homelessness and violence among women” stood out and introduced innovations to standard practices through its willingness to integrate into the inconspicuous environment of women living on the street. As explained in the introduction, women develop many survival strategies to avoid ending up on the street. By keeping this in mind, by being patient, caring, and an attentive and understanding listener, by becoming a reference on which they can count, and by offering activities that suit them, the street worker assigned to the project secured her place in this tight-knit environment. One year later, we notice that the ties created over these four quarters—with the street worker but also among the women reached—live on, and we are confident to have paved the way to new relationships that will become meaningful to them, if they are not already.