

CSQ

MAGAZINE

LABOUR SHORTAGE

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\$18 for a decent living

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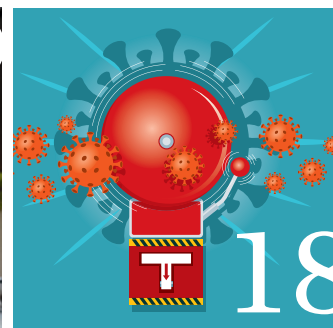
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THE FUTURE WE WANT

For men, talking about issues related to the status of women and women's rights can be tricky. But it can be done, as long as we don't lose sight of the most important thing: know how to listen, and to acknowledge what is being said.

I am an elementary school teacher. I have always taught, then also worked as a union activist, in predominantly female workplace settings. As a union leader, I am also fully aware that I am representing a strong majority of women, who make up close to 80% of the membership of the CSQ. Working in education, higher education, early childhood education, health, culture and community settings, women are the core of our union organization's DNA.

Unifying, proactive and inclusive, this year's theme for the International Day of Women's Rights, *The Future Is Feminist*, speaks to me. The future at issue is also mine.

Do I want to be part of a feminist future? Absolutely!

Because it is entirely consistent with the values that the union movement champions and that I support. Advocating for a more just, more equitable, more progressive, more supportive, greener society also means planning on taking part in building a feminist future.

And of course, these values and this vision of the world that we live by and that we defend are not restricted to our workplaces and union organizations. We give them consideration in all the areas of our lives: at home, at work and at school, as parents, workers and citizens, as well as in our interpersonal relations. They are simply a part of us.

WOMEN MORE IMPACTED

How can we ignore the extent to which the past two years have unfairly impacted women? We know that the pandemic and the

consequences of the public health crisis brought about job losses and as a result, loss of income, more sharply felt by women. As well, overexposure to the risk of contamination, overwork, growing difficulties with work-family balance, particularly in a context of telework. To say nothing of domestic violence and a dramatic rise in femicide. In short, women have been severely impacted by the crisis.

In Québec, three-quarters of government employees are women and about one third of women hold jobs in the public services. The pandemic has also highlighted the cracks in our networks and revealed the extent to which they have been weakened.

FEMINIST SOCIETAL CHOICES

I really hope that the future of Québec is feminist. I want to be part of a society that makes the societal and economic choice to invest in those areas of employment that are predominantly female (education, health, early childhood).

At the time of writing, the government has announced further easing of restrictions, indicating that the public health crisis is drawing to a close. Soon, economic recovery will once again take its place in the daily vocabulary, like a mantra, as Québec prepares to table its budget. However, the recovery must not happen solely through the investment of public funds in traditionally male economic sectors, not this time!

A VICIOUS CIRCLE: OVERWORK CREATES MORE OVERWORK

The workforce shortage obviously will be an essential issue over the coming months. In our schools, our centres, our hospitals, our colleges, our universities and our childcare centres, everywhere, staff shortages affect our workplaces. The government is counting on initiatives to attract and recruit employees in our networks, but sooner, rather than later, it will have to examine what it should do to retain the employees currently working in these settings. It's time to "take care of the people who take care of people," so to speak.

As union organizations, the members are sending us a clear message: we have to tackle overwork, hardship and working conditions. It is our responsibility to make their voices heard.

ENDING VIOLENCE COMES DOWN TO COLLECTIVE ACTION

In the specific context of violence against women, we also have a role to play to ensure that our workplaces are the allies of victims.

Bill 59, which amends the *Act respecting occupational health and safety*, provides new levers by imposing on employers the obligation to include domestic violence in their prevention plans. The workplace is often the only safe place providing these women with a degree of freedom. Heightening awareness, being attentive, welcoming, taking action and giving support: there are practices to be widely deployed and implemented. Society as a whole must be involved in eliminating problems of violence.

That is why I am calling on us all to come together and make the future the sum of our collective struggles, solidarity and equity. A feminist future.

Éric Gingras | CSQ PRESIDENT

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LABOUR SHORTAGE

SEEKING SOLUTIONS

Far from easing the labour shortage, the pandemic seems to have exacerbated a shortfall of employees in certain sectors such as health and education. How can this be explained and what are the solutions? An overview.

Anne-Marie Tremblay | COLLABORATION



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By the end of 2021, Québec had 238,050 vacant positions for 265,300 unemployed people. A historic high. “While the labour market sustained a huge shock in April 2020, it already seems to have recovered all its losses. Two years later, the indicators are green,” explains the deputy director of the Institut du Québec, Emna Braham. At 4.6% in December 2021, the unemployment rate prior to the emergence of the Omicron wave was even lower than it was before the start of the pandemic, according to the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

As a result, positions are increasingly difficult to fill. The labour scarcity observed prior to the crisis will not be solved for some

time, notes the analyst. “All the evidence suggests that it will persist mainly because of population aging. We witnessed this dynamic prior to the pandemic and it continues.” Consequently, it will not be until 2030 before a balance is restored between the number of persons retiring and those who are entering the labour market, she adds. In the meantime, the gap widens every year.

HEALTHCARE AT THE FOREFRONT

Aging not only has an impact on the active population, but also on the demand for services, particularly in healthcare. Thus, with more than 37,000 positions to be filled in 2021, according to the

Institut de la statistique du Québec, the health and social services sector is among the areas most affected by the labour shortage, notes Emna Braham. The number of vacant positions exploded between 2019 and 2021, with an increase of 117%, according to Statistics Canada.

“The labour shortage can also be explained by difficult working conditions, which is even more true during the pandemic,” explains Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay, a professor specializing in human resource management at Université TÉLUQ. For example, more than 4,000 nurses left the public network since the start of the public health crisis in 2020, or 43% more than in 2019, based on data compiled by *La Presse*. Moreover, the total number of jobs in the field of health and social services slightly dropped between 2019 and 2021, whereas demand sharply increased, observes Emna Braham.

TEACHERS UNDER PRESSURE

In the field of education, the number of vacant positions also increased, although less markedly, states Emna Braham. The number of vacancies reached 5,135 in 2021, according to Statistics Canada. However, she points out that the figure does not tell the whole story. “In some sectors, such as teaching, employers cannot allow a position to remain unfilled. They have to find other solutions and this need is not reflected in the numbers.”

Thus, it is hard to measure the real scale of the shortage when schools make wide use of substitute teachers to meet their needs. Indeed, while the number of legally qualified teachers remained rather stable between 2013 and 2018, those who were not qualified grew from 15,000 to 30,000, explains Geneviève Sirois, professor in school administration at Université TÉLUQ, who is currently conducting research on the shortage in the field of education as well as solutions.

The pandemic has not spared the field of education either, making teachers' workloads heavier and expediting retirement for many, according to Geneviève Sirois. “The problem is that neither the Ministère nor the school service centres are able to provide accurate figures to account for the labour shortage, workforce needs in the coming years, or retirements. But it is something we are hearing a lot about. Many people have decided to retire sooner because of the current conditions.”

In addition, the shortage is amplified by COVID-19-related absences, making working conditions more difficult, she notes. “Currently, in many school service centres, a four-day workweek or a half-day sabbatical can no longer be requested. There are practically no more centres that offer this. Even having access to one day of training becomes difficult when there is no one to replace you.” Like nurses, some are even forced to work in a substitute capacity.

ENTICEMENT OPERATION

Québec estimates that there is currently a shortfall of 4,300 nurses in the healthcare network. For its part, the Ministère de l'Éducation hopes to hire 8,000 people (teachers, special education specialists and childcare educators) in the network over the next five years. To this end, the government launched a variety of measures including an action plan called *Opération main-d'œuvre* with a total budget of \$3.9 billion.

The goal is to attract, train and requalify 170,000 employees in a number of targeted sectors, including 60,000 the fields of health and social services, education and educational childcare services. Among the solutions advocated by the state are international recruitment, accelerated or online training and making use of retired employees. In addition, there is a grant program for students enrolled in targeted college and university programs in education, childcare and healthcare.



Emna Braham

Photo Institut du Québec



Geneviève Sirois

Photo Université TÉLUQ



Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay

In Geneviève Sirois's opinion, the solution will come from the development of targeted training programs to qualify all teachers who are not currently qualified. "We already have 30,000 people in the networks who are only asking to be provided with the tools and the means that will foster their occupational integration," she says. She also recommends enhancing the status of the profession, which requires an improvement of working conditions.

CALL ON SENIOR WORKERS

Moreover, it's in the interest of employers to encourage older employees to work, as Québec lags behind in this area, says Diane Gabrielle-Tremblay. In fact, in Québec, only 36% of persons aged 60 to 69 years are working. The percentage climbs to 43% in Ontario and 63% in Iceland, according to the data from a study published by HEC Montréal's Centre for Productivity and Prosperity in 2019.

For this to happen, the specialist believes that schedules must be redefined. "Many retired persons would remain employed if they were offered a work schedule better suited to their needs. Currently, however, there is not much flexibility or acknowledgment of their needs." This could be a complex endeavour in certain settings, such as in hospitals. "But as it stands, it is complicated to manage schedules spread over 24 hours a day, 7 days a week," she adds. In some settings, a number of tools, particularly IT tools, are being tested to customize work schedules based on staffing.

IMPROVE WORKING CONDITIONS

While we must take action on recruitment, it is also important to focus on retaining employees, believes Geneviève Sirois.

"We don't have the exact figures, but some of the data suggests that up to 50% of people holding degrees in teaching leave the profession after five years."

Measures such as mentoring or implementing a professional integration program could help to reduce the number of hasty departures." Likewise, the filling of positions needs to be reviewed, she says, adding that 48% of teachers do not have permanent status.

We also need to rethink work organization, says Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay. The researcher, who has studied the attraction and retention of nursing staff, thinks that problems with balancing work and family life and a lack of autonomy, along with lean management,¹ are among the main reasons these professionals leave the profession.

Indeed, hospitals have focused on Japanese work methods, in which everything is timed, which nurses criticize, she explains. "But an important aspect of lean management has been forgotten. It involves bringing employees together to seek solutions. It is this aspect that explains why the Japanese have been such successful innovators."

In the same vein, why not draw inspiration from the Swedish approach, which encourages collaboration, teamwork, skills building and versatility to improve the allocation of work? "In other provinces, there are teacher assistants who take care of other duties, such as supervision. This allows teachers time for lesson planning or marking," points out Geneviève Sirois.

In short, there is no one solution for tackling the labour shortage. Instead, we need to implement a series of actions that will enable us to attract talent but also to retain it by focusing on autonomy and recognition, according to Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay. This is a discussion to be held with all employees.

¹ *Lean management* is a management and work organization method that aims to improve the performance of a business and the quality and profitability of its production. The CSQ strongly criticizes this type of management, particularly in health and social services and in education.



Photo iStock

\$18 FOR A DECENT LIVING

With an eighteen-dollar minimum hourly wage, hundreds of thousands of workers could escape poverty. What is the government waiting for?

Félix Cauchy-Charest | CSQ ADVISOR

The government's minimum wage increase to \$14.25 as of May 1, 2022, falls far short of expectations, according to the Coalition Minimum 18\$ which brings together key labour organizations like the CSQ as well as several organizations advocating for the rights of non-unionized workers. To learn more, CSQ Magazine met with CSQ Research Advisor Pierre-Antoine Harvey.

CSQ MAGAZINE: HOW WAS IT DETERMINED THAT AN \$18 MINIMUM WAGE WAS NECESSARY TO ESCAPE POVERTY?

Pierre-Antoine Harvey: The campaign led by the Coalition Minimum 18\$ and discussions about the minimum wage are based on one principle: a single person that works full-time [35 hours per week] at the minimum wage should be able to lift themselves out of poverty. They should be able to cover a little bit more than their basic needs, which is why we are calling for \$18 in 2022.

HOW MANY PEOPLE IN QUÉBEC WORK AT THE MINIMUM WAGE?

Close to 300,000 people work at the minimum wage [currently \$13.50, \$14.25 as of May 1, 2022] across Québec. However, our demand impacts a lot more people—the hourly wage of some

500,000 other workers lies somewhere between the minimum wage and \$18. Increasing the minimum wage to \$18 would automatically impact a great number of workers.

WOULD AN INCREASE OF THE MINIMUM WAGE TO \$18 DRIVE UP CONSUMER PRICES?

Studies have shown that an increase of the minimum wage does bring price increases but not significantly. The impact on inflation of a 30% salary hike would be from 1 to 2% for the overall economy. As this would not be a proportional increase, the impact of the salary increase would not be removed by inflation.

WHY IMPOSE A MINIMUM WAGE INSTEAD OF SIMPLY LETTING THE JOB MARKET SORT ITSELF OUT?

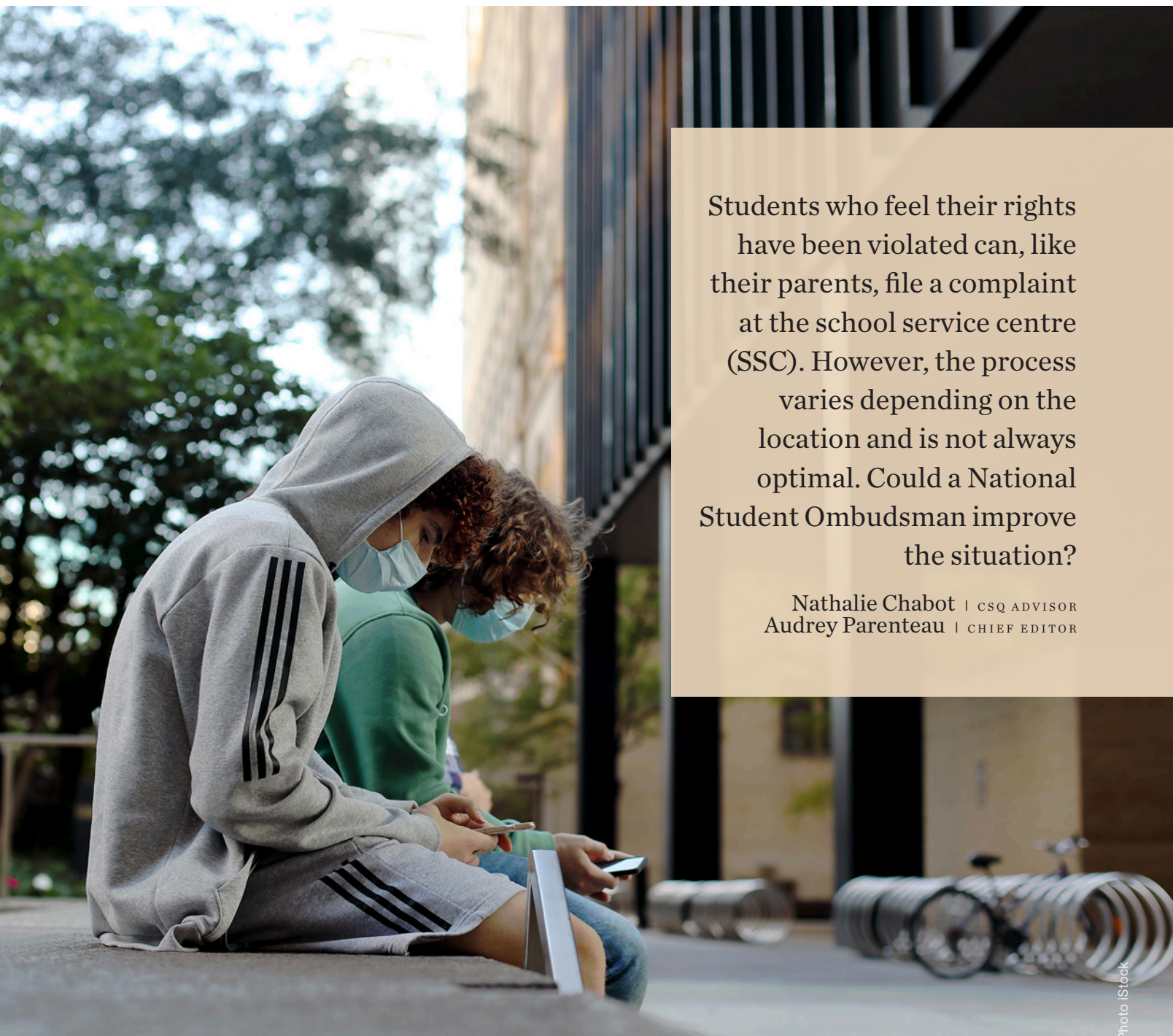
There is a great need for workers right now, particularly in sectors with lower wages; this might lead, quite organically, to higher salaries. Right now, workers have some leverage in the job market, something they don't normally have when it comes time to negotiate their salary. However, historically, their ability to negotiate is limited, even non-existent. That is why the government should step up and ensure a minimum for everyone.

ON A FINAL NOTE, WHY IS THE CSQ'S INVOLVEMENT WITHIN THE \$18 MINIMUM COALITION SO IMPORTANT?

The Coalition Minimum 18\$ combines the forces of organizations representing workers or people living in poverty. The Centrale is taking an active part in this solidarity effort that goes far beyond fighting for our members. This will result in better working conditions for all workers across our society. Solidarity among organizations really can make a world of difference.

STUDENT OMBUDSMAN

A REFORM THAT COULD GO FURTHER



Students who feel their rights have been violated can, like their parents, file a complaint at the school service centre (SSC). However, the process varies depending on the location and is not always optimal. Could a National Student Ombudsman improve the situation?

Nathalie Chabot | CSQ ADVISOR
Audrey Parenteau | CHIEF EDITOR

When he was in Elementary 4, Samuel spent over a month sitting in front of the office of the school principal. Isolated from his classmates because of his behavioural problems, he was not allowed to return to class or to play outside in the schoolyard during recreation periods.

During the entire time, Samuel received no lessons and didn't see any friends. Even though his mother, Marie-Claude,¹ made repeated requests to the school administration to find a solution and to allow her son to return to his class, nothing was done. The school principal admitted that the school lacked resources to provide support to both Samuel and his teacher in order to foster the young boy's smooth return to the classroom.

After reaching out to the school administration, Marie-Claude could have filed a complaint. Faced with the complexity of the procedure, the timeline for a settlement that she anticipated would be very long and the fear that the process would not be neutral, she gave up.

UPCOMING REFORM

All school service centres, all school boards and all private schools have a procedure allowing students and parents to lodge complaints. Education Minister Jean-François Roberge recently tabled Bill 9, which aims to speed up and standardize the complaint processing procedure, and enhance the independence of these procedures in each institution.

The bill makes changes to the student protection mechanisms in both public and private establishments, by proposing to appoint a National Student Ombudsman (NSO) and regional student ombudsmen (RSO).

"Although we welcome the Bill, it does raise a number of areas that require improvement," said CSQ president Éric Gingras. Specifically, school network federations affiliated with the CSQ would like to see:

- **Greater independence**

To ensure greater impartiality, the National Student Ombudsman should be appointed by the National Assembly rather than by the government, as is currently proposed in the Bill. The appointment of regional student ombudsmen should be carried out by the government rather than by the Minister.

- **Competence**

Of utmost importance is the regional student ombudsmen's ability to properly understand the complaints being filed and to make a

thorough, fair analysis, which depends on their competence and their knowledge of the education network. This benefits both complainants and the individuals cited in complaints.

- **Dialogue as an initial solution**

Although mechanisms are needed to protect students and the services to which they are entitled, before resorting to them, "it is worth allowing room for dialogue and collaboration between students, parents and staff," said Éric Gingras.

"It is particularly important to be able to distinguish between dissatisfaction and a complaint," he added. "The dissatisfied individual must be able to reach out to the person concerned to inform them and try to find a solution, without this automatically being considered a complaint."

However, in its current version, the Bill is at risk of causing confusion in the workplaces because it does not allow for clearly distinguishing between an informal discussion over a dissatisfaction from a formal complaint.

- **A better definition of the concept of service**

The bill raises an important issue: students or their parents can lodge a complaint when they are dissatisfied with a service, but the concept of service is very broad. It is essential to clearly delineate what can or cannot be the subject of a complaint.

- **Preventing duplication of recourse**

Clearly defining the subject of complaints would also avoid duplication of recourse. An initial evaluation of complaints should be carried out to determine whether other recourse might be more appropriate or already underway. In such a case, the processing of the complaint should be suspended. However, the current legislation stipulates that the complaint would continue to be examined.

Lastly, staff members should also be able to reach out to the Student Ombudsman to inform them of unacceptable situations in which students' rights are not respected. "This could contribute to formulating recommendations that are collective in scope and that allow for suggesting improvements to benefit all students," concluded Éric Gingras.

1. Marie-Claude wished to remain anonymous.



Photo Sabrina Gagné

CEGEPS SEEKING PSYCHOLOGISTS

Andrée-Anne Provençal

CEGEP psychologists are hard to come by. Hard to recruit and hard to hold on to. This in itself is nothing new, but undoubtedly an escalating problem in a pandemic that continues to undermine student morale. Would an attraction and retention premium help turn things around?

Sylvie Lemieux
COLLABORATION

The college sector offers a rich and diverse practice says Andrée-Anne Provençal, psychologist at the CEGEP de Baie-Comeau for the past seven years. “We play an instrumental role in our students’ educational success. There is nothing as gratifying as helping a young adult feel better and stay in school,” adds Andrée-Anne Provençal.

While this endeavour is incredibly rewarding, there are many obstacles to overcome, obstacles—like the salary—that limit the profession’s appeal. “Staff turnover is high. Many psychologists leave the public sector and opt for a private practice where salaries are higher,” she explains.

A 2020 survey carried out by the Association des psychologues du Québec (APQ) and the Coalition des psychologues du réseau public québécois (CPRPQ) determined that there is a salary gap of at least 27.3% between public sector psychologists versus those in the private sector.

And what’s more, college psychologists aren’t even on equal footing with their colleagues in the public sector. In fact,

they are the only ones not entitled to the 9% attraction and retention premium for people working in elementary and high schools or in the health network.

“And the starting salary isn’t all that interesting either for doctoral graduates,” states the psychologist. According to the CPRPQ, the salary scale for a public sector psychologist ranged from \$26.43 to \$49.82 in 2020, well behind other professions with similar educational requirements.

MOVING THINGS FORWARD

The Fédération des professionnelles et professionnels des collèges (FPPC-CSQ) has long advocated for greater recognition of the work done by psychologists in the college network. This has resulted in the government putting in place an inter-round committee to see psychologists who are members of the Federation have access to this 9% premium.

Andrée-Anne Provençal, committed to doing her part and seeing things move

forward, is a member of this committee; one of their first goals is to take stock of the psychologist shortage in our CEGEPs. At the moment, there is insufficient information to take proper stock of the situation. She believes that the premium would be a very good start to help attract more psychologists.

BREAK IN SERVICES

Given how scarce resources are, psychology services differ from one college to the next. It is not uncommon for a person to hold two jobs at once.

When she started out at CEGEP de Baie-Comeau, Andrée-Anne Provençal divided her time between special-needs services—serving the needs of students with diagnosed limitations such as learning disabilities or a physical impairment—and her work as a psychologist.

In other CEGEPs, professionals might be able to rely on the support of another psychologist but on a part-time basis only. This situation is far from ideal and undermines the team. There are also other CEGEPs, farther from major centres, without any psychologists. “Student services are provided by other specialists, including social workers.”

The fact remains that only psychologists (and doctors) can undertake the assessment of a mental disorder and provide

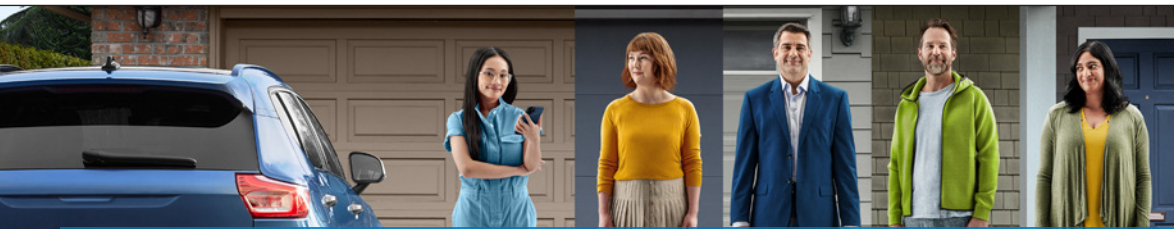
psychotherapy treatments, as they are reserved acts. Given that the waiting time to see a psychologist ranges from six to twenty-four months on average, many young adults do not have access to the services they need. This is especially true in the current pandemic, with needs increasing tenfold.

SKYROCKETING NEEDS

“We’ve never been confronted with so many requests for a consult than in the last fall semester,” says Andrée-Anne Provençal. “Eighty requests were submitted, instead of the fifty or so we usually have. And this is for a population of 600 students. We’ve had to set up a waiting list, a first for us, which is less than ideal.”

Depression, anxiety, personality disorders... Mental health issues have not only increased but are more significant. To support their psychologist, the CEGEP de Baie-Comeau recently decided to hire an additional resource. “We’ve received a number of applications from psychotherapists and social workers, but none from psychologists,” she added with regret. “So we will be hiring someone from another profession.”

Nonetheless, this help will be more than welcome even though certain responsibilities will remain the prerogative of Andrée-Anne Provençal.



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ADAPTED AND ESSENTIAL SERVICES



Taking a quick run to burn off stress before her big exam. Coaching someone who is teaching a student with autism spectrum disorder. Suggesting strategies to address anxiety. But for Stéphanie Deschambault and Catherine Goulet, their mission is above all about helping young adults with special needs succeed in college.

Anne-Marie Tremblay | COLLABORATION

Stéphanie Deschambault and Catherine Goulet

Photo Martin Blache.

These two special education technicians (SET) are part of the CEGEP de Sherbrooke adapted services team, where they help students with physical and learning disabilities or those with other medical conditions that might impact their studies.

The team's counsellors assess the situation of each young adult and suggest different methods to help them access the same opportunities for success as other students. For instance, some might need a quiet space to write exams, a computer with Antidote or help taking notes, or some might need to be accompanied by a sign language interpreter. In other cases, the counsellor might suggest some personalized guidance with a specialized educator.

And that is where the adapted services team's SETs—namely Catherine Goulet, Stéphanie Deschambault and two other colleagues—come in. They work with some 160 students. “About 70% of our interventions involve organizing their school life,” explains Catherine Goulet. “We talk about how things are going with their classes or their relationships with their teachers, we check if they've bought their school supplies or if they need some financial help with that. We make sure they've told their teachers about the measures they're entitled to through adapted services. We can also help them break down their homework and assignments.”

A BROADER INTERVENTION PLAN

Most of the students meeting regularly with an adapted services SET are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders. Intervention plans, developed in collaboration with the student, often go far beyond academic issues. “Simply mustering up the courage to ask their teacher a question can be very difficult for them,” adds Catherine Goulet. “We work very hard to help them get there.”

A SET can also be a bridge between students and the teaching staff. A person may have a hard time making eye contact and some teachers can find that upsetting, for instance. “Once we explain that their student can either look or listen to them, they respond differently.”

Starting college is a pivotal moment in students' lives. Many are standing on their own two feet for the very first time. Stéphanie Deschambault notes that “at the elementary and secondary level, students receive excellent support. And then, overnight, they need to learn how to be adults. Renewing their health insurance card, booking a dentist appointment, taking care of their taxes,

planning their schedule, managing their education... Our goal is to help them develop into self-reliant adults.”

PERSONALIZED GUIDANCE

Each student is provided personalized guidance and takes part in regular or occasional meetings with a SET. “Nothing is quite as complex as a human being. Everyone is different. Two people might have the same diagnosis, but how we help them may be different,” argues Catherine Goulet. And that means that a SET can help one student having a panic attack and help another book a quiet space for an exam.

“In our room, we have stress balls and tons of other sensory objects that students can borrow if and when they need them.

We even have a Nintendo Switch—the perfect tool to foster interactions between our young patrons!”

The SETs can also help those they support better understand their own diagnosis and themselves. They can also direct them to other resources, both in and outside of the CEGEP, if need be.

AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE

SETs have, among others, been extremely helpful throughout the pandemic, as in-person services were maintained. “We felt we were really providing an essential service,” recalls Stéphanie Deschambault. “Meetings were even more important for our students. In certain cases, we were the only person they'd see that entire week.” Special educators were able to help them weather the crisis, referring those who had lost their job to the CEGEP's foundation for instance.

Most users of the CEGEP de Sherbrooke's adapted services have handled the health situation very well. However, being isolated was harder for those who find social interactions particularly challenging, notes Catherine Goulet. Some needed help with their concentration during online classes or to get a better handle on the different virtual tools used by their teachers.

Simply said, the work of a SET is anything but routine, and really quite stimulating. “These young adults have their whole life ahead of them. It truly is inspiring to work with them, to help them believe in their abilities and make their own decisions,” says Stéphanie Deschambault. But, above all, she and her colleague Catherine Goulet are really making a difference in the lives of these kids. What a wonderful source of motivation!



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A TRULY UNIQUE POLICY

Québec's family policy provides its population with better conditions to start a family. 25 years on, has it achieved its goals?

Véronique Brouillette | CSQ ADVISOR

Thanks to Québec's family policy, workers can take advantage of the Parental Insurance Plan and the revenue it affords them during their maternity and parental leaves, as well as access reasonably priced early childhood educational services. And the same can be said for lower income families having access to a family allowance.

Inspired in part by the report of the working group on youth *Un Québec fou de ses enfants*, this policy made the well-being and development of preschoolers a key government priority by setting three objectives: make it easier to balance parental and professional responsibilities, provide greater equality of opportunity for children and support greater equity among families.

Ground-breaking at the time and unique across North America, Québec's family policy has often been cited as an example over the last 25 years.

How is this vision of early childhood and family in Québec faring nowadays? Over the past quarter century, the political context has changed. Successive governments have brought about reforms and new measures, diverting the original model over the years and opening the door to the development of daycare centres, whose numbers skyrocketed by 867% from 2009 to 2018. By comparison, early childhood centres (CPEs) and regulated and subsidized home childcare providers only grew by 9 and 4% respectively. Moreover, the staff of early childhood educational services is running out of steam, having long been underpaid and working in difficult conditions, which makes attracting new personnel and retaining existing staff challenging.

BETTER WORK-FAMILY BALANCE

The implementation of the family policy has had a positive impact on the balance between parental and professional responsibilities for all workers. While only 16% of children were in educational childcare services in 1998, that number rose to 80% in 2018. The development of the early childhood educational network supported women's access to the labour market. In fact, the rise in their employment rate has had a positive ripple effect on Québec's economy.

Despite this progress, 51,000 parents are still waiting for a space for their child in an early childhood educational service. Access to a reduced-rate space or a space for children whose parents have an atypical schedule is difficult. Staff shortages throughout the network as well as the pandemic are not helping the situation.

GREATER EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

Recognizing the importance of children's development by considering services as "educational" rather than only "childcare" is one of the greatest achievements of the family policy.

Several studies have shown that attending a quality educational service contributes to a child's educational success. It also has a protective effect for toddlers in vulnerable families.

AND WHAT ABOUT EQUITY AMONG FAMILIES?

This is the most elusive goal of the family policy, partly because of the unrestrained development of private daycare centres which in turn has led to a two-tier system with different rates. The government unilaterally put an end to the universality principle in

51 000

PARENTS

ARE CURRENTLY WAITING FOR A SPACE
FOR THEIR CHILD IN AN EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATIONAL SERVICE.

2015 by implementing revenue-based childcare rates. Although this measure was not in place for very long, it did create inequities among Québec families. Many parents still don't have access to a reduced-rate space.

What is more, unlike the education system where grants are given to schools based on the overall deprivation index, CPEs are not entitled to grants unless parents are on social assistance. Home childcare providers don't even have access to that grant. Children of parents working at the minimum wage are not taken into consideration when determining the grant. In addition, children of refugees do not have access to subsidized spaces.

GETTING BACK TO BASICS

The family policy had an undeniably positive impact on children, parents, women and our economy. However, over time, certain political decisions have had an impact, not always favourable, on its early objectives.

Today, instead of offering families a universal, high-quality and entirely state-subsidized model, the government has moved toward a hybrid model where the private sector is certainly present.

Although the political and economic context is ever evolving, the development of children and the equality of opportunities must be key government priorities to remain faithful to the spirit of the family policy.

COVID-19

ALARM BELLS STILL RINGING!

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Québec was not prepared to deal with a public health crisis of such scope, despite myriad warnings from scientists in recent years. And yet we will undoubtedly witness many more health crises! We urgently need to take our safety in hand.

Lise Goulet | CSQ ADVISOR

The many human dramas and all the inquest reports¹ sent a powerful message about Québec's multiple shortcomings in its ability to deal with a global public health crisis. The findings over recent months are appalling.

The Québec government threw in the towel years ago. Despite the warning signals, its public health spending per capita has

decreased since 2010. In 2019, Québec was spending threefold less per capita (\$150) than the Canadian average (\$384), an investment deficit of \$2 billion.²

To our astonishment, we witnessed many instances of bending the basic rules of risk management: failure to respect the precautionary principle, specifically with regard to ventilation and the wearing of N95 masks, deficient infection prevention and control measures, insufficient and inaccessible personal protection equipment, a lack of transparency and collaboration with all the stakeholders concerned, among other things.

Decision-making structures that are remote from practice in work settings, which led to excessively long response times and, in some cases, a failure to understand needs and directives, are also singled out. To say nothing of the public health director's lack of independence and transparency.

AT THE HEART OF PRIORITIES

In her final report on performance in the provision of care and services to seniors during the first wave of the pandemic,³ the

¹ Inquests carried out by coroners in the long-term care centres (CHSLDs), the Québec Ombudsperson and Québec's Health and Welfare Commissioner.

² INSTITUT CANADIEN D'INFORMATION SUR LA SANTÉ (2019).

³ COMMISSAIRE À LA SANTÉ ET AU BIEN-ÊTRE (2022). *Le devoir de faire autrement – PARTIE 1 : Renforcer le rôle stratégique de la santé publique*, 100 p.

Health and Welfare Commissioner, Joanne Castonguay, is emphatic: public health must be placed at the heart of the priorities of the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux.

The Commissioner formulated many recommendations, including the development of an integrated province-wide public health risk and infectious disease preparation strategy; the design of a crisis management plan in which the chain of command is well defined, meaning the clear definition of responsibilities, roles and functions of all the players; human, informational and financial resources that meet needs and achieve targeted results; and the development of a culture of transparency in terms of public health-related policies and decisions.

And yet transparency has been recognized as one of the guiding principles of risk management since 2003!

LOCAL INTERVENTION PLANS

Piecework management of a public health crisis of this scale in an emergency is no longer an option. Of course, the Commissioner proposes several tangible measures to improve Québec's intervention capacity: a continuous risk analysis monitoring mechanism, the creation of a crisis management committee within the Ministère, an emergency decision-making process, the development and application of province-wide standards to infection prevention and control in all settings under the responsibility of the Ministère. That's positive!

Yet our best protection will always be prevention. "We want the government to restore locally, for each of the institutions of our network, public health action plans that will be developed, implemented, assessed and regularly updated by the parties concerned, including the employees who thoroughly understand

"Local planning and timely action will be our best protection in future public health crises."

– Luc Beauregard, CSQ Secretary-Treasurer and political lead for health

the shortcomings, the needs and the challenges of their workplaces," said the President of the Fédération de la Santé du Québec (FSQ-CSQ), Isabelle Dumaine. This was already stipulated in section 14 of the *Public Health Act*, which was repealed by the Barrette reforms!

DEPOLITICIZE PUBLIC HEALTH

"Public health must be depoliticized asap," said Luc Beauregard, CSQ Secretary-Treasurer and political lead for health at the CSQ. "Some decisions put lives at stake, and must be based on scientific analysis and without strategic considerations. In tangible terms, the government must restore to healthcare employees and institutions the decisional levers and resources that will enable them to take timely action and ensure their safety. Local planning and timely action will be our best protection in future public health crises."

In his book *The COVID-19 Catastrophe: What's Gone Wrong and How to Stop It Happening Again*, Dr. Richard Horton, editor-in-chief of *The Lancet*, describes the global response to the pandemic as an unequalled global failure in terms of public policies.

His analysis shows six areas of failure that, taken together, resulted in a delayed, inadequate response to the pandemic:

1. The failure of technical guidance

2. The failure of the political process after scientific guidance was received

3. The blatant failure of political leadership: an inability to establish public confidence and to take decisive action

4. The catastrophic failure of preparation and of the supplies and personal protection equipment (PPE) acquisition process; catastrophic failure to establish necessary clinical and diagnostic capacities in support of surge capacity and catastrophic failure to protect healthcare employees

5. The failure of implementation

6. The failure of communication: too little, too late

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