

## CHOMEDEY RESIDENTS TO KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR CRIME

LAVAL POLICE LAUNCH PROJET CYCLOPE TO COUNTER PROSTITUTION, DRUGS

By Nancy Girgis • TLN

In an effort to counter the growing phenomenon of prostitution and drug dealing in Chomedey South, the Laval police have launched a program that has proven quite successful in Montreal and Gatineau.

The Cyclope Program aims at countering prostitution solicitation and harassment, which is quite bothersome to residents living in the area delimited by Curé-Labelle, Perron, 75th Avenue and 80th Avenue in Chomedey. Inspector Michel Paré says the police force became concerned with the growing prostitution and drug problem in the area. "Many citizens had signaled their discomfort towards the prostitution and drugs that has existed in the area for more than 10 years, but which has amplified over the past few years," he said. "We then looked at ways to resolve this growing problem."

Insp. Paré explained that the program is threefold. The environment deals with drug sales in the area while the prostitutes' aspect revolves around the solicitation for sex. "In the past we have made many arrests and raids to counter drug sales and have increased police presence to discourage prostitution," he said. The third aspect deals with the prostitution clients, also known as 'johns'. "No clients, no prostitution," Insp. Paré points out. To efficiently reduce sex solicitation in the area, residents will be asked to fill out an Observation Report whenever they notice possible prostitution in the area. Witnesses will be asked to report the description of the event, the vehicle involved and of the driver. This form is available on the City of Laval website or at the

neighbourhood police station. Each form will be treated confidentially and an investigation will be launched in each case.

With prostitution and drug sales having such a strong link in the area, the Laval police also implemented a crime hotline known as Info-Délit. This line, bearing the phone number (450) 662-5151, is open to citizens who wish to report criminal activity they may have witnessed in the area. It is important to remember that this hotline does not replace emergency services and that citizens can leave detailed messages, which will be followed-up by officers.

Police will also hold many activities in the area in an effort to meet residents and to promote this project through promotional t-shirts, bracelets and balloons. "We want to bring a feeling of belonging in the area and to maintain a quality of life for all citizens," Insp. Paré said, adding that targeted operations will continue.

### Too little, too late

Longtime Chomedey resident Diane Saint-Onge applauded the program but fears it comes at a point where the problem is beyond control. Her family has lived next door to crack houses for years, and her daughter, seven-year-old Marie-Jane accidentally pricked herself with a syringe she had found on the ground near her home last March, which highlighted the area's problems. Although several tests have confirmed that little Marie-Jane did not contract a disease during the incident, Saint-Onge no longer believes the area is safe. "For me, that incident was the last drop, so we

are moving to Vimont soon," she said. "However, this project could do some good for the area, maybe people will be less scared to send their kids to play outside, and being more vigilant might also solve other problems. I hope they keep this up in an effort to help people feel safe in their own home."

Julien Clusiau and Janick Bezaud are counsellors with L'Oasis, an organization that works with the homeless and sometimes with prostitutes. The pair voiced their shared opinions on this new project. "At first we feared (the Observation Report) would isolate them more," Clusiau said. "However we noticed that the initiatives are geared towards the client, so we'll see how useful it will be." Both added that this project might not prevent the migration of prostitution into other neighbourhoods, as has often been seen in Montreal. "If the client is scared, the prostitute will have fewer customers, thus either isolate herself or move to other parts of town, which isn't necessarily the best thing," Bezaud warned.



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*Left: Inspector Michel Paré says the police force became concerned with the growing prostitution and drug problem in the area. Right: Chomedey district's L'Abord-à-Plouffe city councillor Ginette Légault Bernier announces program*