



*A new initiative to empower women
as they transition from shelter
to autonomous living*

Lotus Project

As part of Logifem's ongoing commitment to improving the lives of women in its care, our Executive Director recently put forward a challenging question: How can Logifem better understand the needs of women leaving our emergency and transitional housing, to support them during this period of transition?

Like a plant uprooted from familiar soil, a woman transitioning from a shelter to autonomous living may experience a shock. Without proper support, a plant can wither. But given the right conditions, the plant will take root and produce a beautiful blossom, much like a lotus. It is in this context that the Lotus Project emerged.

The Lotus Project is a community-based research project funded by the Catherine Donnelly Foundation and led jointly by Logifem and McGill University. Launched in January 2021, the objective was to co-create post-shelter support programs to meet the needs of women who go on to long-term housing after living in a shelter.

Lotus Project Advisory Committee

One of the first actions of the Lotus Project was the formation of a **Community Advisory Committee** to lead the project. This committee is composed of the following key stakeholders:

Diversity, expertise, and experience

- Four Montreal organizations that work directly with women experiencing homelessness.
- Three researchers, and
- Three women who have experienced the transition from shelter to autonomous living.

Meet two Committee members and former residents of Logifem. Their input is invaluable to the project.



Former residents share their experience



As a new arrival to Canada, and a single mother of three, **Theresa** was committed to building a better future for her family. She believed education was key, so she enrolled at HEC. Her days were filled with classes, her evenings with homework and housework, all the while caring for her children. It was exhausting, but she was determined to graduate. And she did. But life didn't get easier. Even with her degree, as an immigrant she had difficulty finding a permanent, well-paying job.

She took multiple jobs to make ends meet, but the pace took a toll. Eventually, she could no longer afford rent on her two-bedroom apartment and was left with nowhere else to go.

Theresa came to Logifem feeling drained and fragile. "It was a very difficult period, even with the support of the intervention workers, because there are many things to put in place before relocating". She needed to find a job, a new home, and daycare.

As an immigrant, Theresa did not understand how all the different services functioned in Quebec. "There was a big gap between how things worked and what I knew."

Lotus Project Actions

One of the recommendations that emerged from the Lotus Project research was the creation of a relocation guide, a booklet that will include community resources and information to help women manage their new home. The interactive guide will encourage residents to add notes to document the journey, making it easier for their intervention worker to follow up and provide relevant support.

For Theresa, the obstacles ahead felt overwhelming. However, through her tenacity, she discovered resources in the community that helped her achieve her goals and she recommended that they be included in Logifem's relocation guide. They include:

- Job search support
- Respite for single parents
- Childcare options
- Accessing subsidized housing



Former residents share their knowledge



Michele arrived at Logifem in a vulnerable state; no surprise, considering what she had endured. She was a victim of rape, and following this traumatic event, had made her way to the hospital to proceed with a forensic kit. Five days later she woke up to find herself tied to her bed with an IV in her arm. She had no recollection of the previous days. She was placed under public guardianship, and spent the rest of her stay in the psychiatric unit where she remained hospitalized for 417 days. When she was released, her psychiatrist and social worker referred her to Logifem.

Michele described the beginning of her stay at Logifem: “I stayed in my room, because I was crushed”. But as she began to heal from her trauma, she was able to start the slow process of rebuilding her self-confidence. She respected her guardianship terms, took her medication, and managed her budget. A year later, she was selected to move into one of Logifem’s transitional apartments. Life was turning around despite her being under the public guardianship. In the back of her mind, however, she knew that eventually she would have to leave Logifem and find her own apartment. She was anxious about the transition to autonomous living and the possibility of ending up back in hospital.

Lotus Project Actions

Michele grew up in foster care and group homes, and has been independent since the age of 17.

She considers herself resourceful and resilient, and is familiar with a range of community resources.

“As a member of the Advisory Committee, we share our views and take a position on the feasibility of ideas.”

She approved of the creation of a relocation guide and was forthcoming with resources familiar to her, which included:

- Tax clinics
- Flipp, an electronic flyer that advertises weekly specials
- Food assistance
- Debt management and budgeting
- Legal services



New Case Manager position

We are delighted to welcome H el ene Bertocchi to the Logifem family! She will be coordinating our post-shelter services and implementing some of the actions identified in the research project.

“I completed a bachelor’s and a master’s degree in psychology in France. Supporting women with their journeys, highlighting and reinforcing their strengths to overcome obstacles during their transitions are missions dear to my heart.”



Lotus Project Actions

Part of H el ene’s role will be to develop a Needs Assessment Kit comprised of tools to identify the risk factors and priority needs of women and families leaving Logifem. This is another recommendation that emerged from the research.

Theresa works for the federal government in accounting and loves her job. She lives in a co-op with her three children where she has built friendships with the neighbors.

Michele lives in a subsidized apartment, has regained her autonomy, and is no longer under public guardianship. She is currently enrolled in the Centre for Parallel Learning (CAP) program and enjoys the benefits of art therapy.

The Lotus Project is helping us realize our vision to see women and children equipped and empowered to leave the cycle of homelessness, to thrive, and to blossom.



thanks

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