

COVID-19 Emergency Fund Report

Show your local love



Centraide
of Greater Montreal

HELP MAKE
POVERTY AND SOCIAL
EXCLUSION
#Unignorable

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Introduction

On March 13, 2020, the Québec government declared a health emergency. By March 16, the majority of Centraide of Greater Montreal (CGM) employees were teleworking. On March 19, the first invitation of generosity was sent to “Centraide’s best friends.” As of March 23, a partial lockdown was announced by the Québec government, leading to the first “shutdown” of non-essential services. On March 25, CGM officially launched its COVID-19 Emergency Fund, putting exceptional measures in place to help the isolated and vulnerable populations of Greater Montreal that were hardest hit by the pandemic.

Generous donors quickly answered the call, and more than \$8 million was raised. This rapid response made it possible for CGM to distribute donations within the first few days of the pandemic and continue its ongoing support. The social development team was able to process agency requests within 72 hours and to disburse funds just three working days after the launch of the Emergency Fund.

To respond to requests efficiently, CGM developed a simple online form to survey agencies on their needs and ask them to project how they would use funds over a four-week period. At that time, no one knew how long the crisis would last.

The guidelines defined within the Emergency Fund framework targeted two priorities:

- **Support** actions focused on meeting **basic needs** such as food assistance and emergency accommodations
- **Strengthen** listening, help and referral services for **vulnerable and isolated people** (seniors, people with mental health issues, homeless people, caregivers, etc.)

The requests were numerous and greatly exceeded the amount of available funds. It quickly became apparent that the COVID-19 Emergency Fund would need to be extended. To meet the ongoing demand, a phase II plan was announced to agencies in Greater Montreal. This was made possible thanks to the increased support of donors and contributions from the City of Montreal and its boroughs (\$1,190,000 investment), as well as the cities of Laval (\$400,000), Longueuil (\$200,000), Boucherville (\$25,000), and Town of Mount Royal (\$15,000). In addition, Centraide of Greater Montreal was allocated \$683,000 to meet the needs of vulnerable senior citizens as part of the federal government's New Horizons for Seniors project. This grant was integrated into the COVID-19 Emergency Fund and redistributed to agencies that specialize in providing assistance to vulnerable seniors.

The primary purpose of this report is to paint a portrait of investments, illustrate the use of funds, record the preliminary impacts, and document key learnings. The data used in this report is drawn in part from the first survey forms completed by agencies, and from a second accountability form that agencies filled out at the end of the eight-week COVID-19 Emergency Fund period. (response rate of 94%)

Thank you to all of our donors for contributing so quickly and generously!

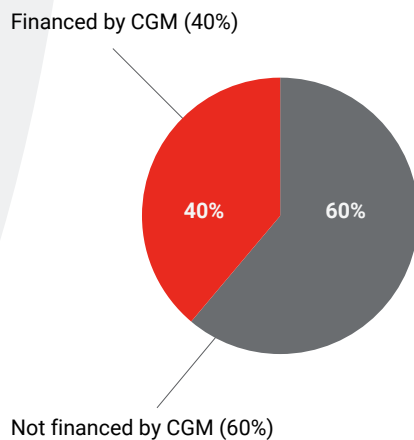
Portrait of Investments

Between March 27 and May 19, 2020, Centraide of Greater Montreal received 910 requests for financial support from 654 agencies, for a total of \$17.34 million. Of the \$8.4 million raised by the COVID-19 Emergency Fund, just over \$7 million was allocated to the 616 accepted requests. No administrative costs were deducted from the funds collected. Notably, only 40% of the agencies supported were part of the CGM network, which means almost 400 agencies outside of CGM's regular network were supported by this fund.

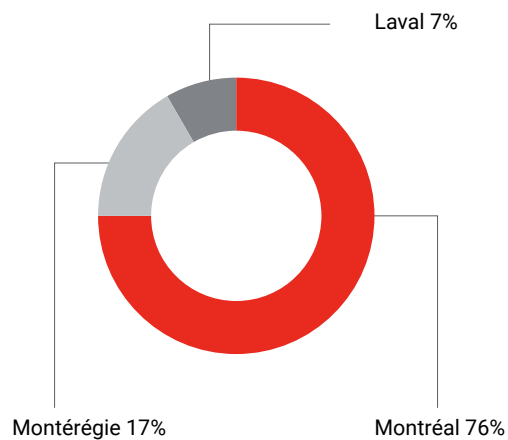
Number of accepted requests

910 REQUESTS	\$17.34 M REQUESTED	654 AGENCIES	\$7.09 M DISTRIBUTED	442 AGENCIES SUPPORTED	2.27 M PEOPLE SERVED
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Percentage of agencies financed by CGM



Percentage by region



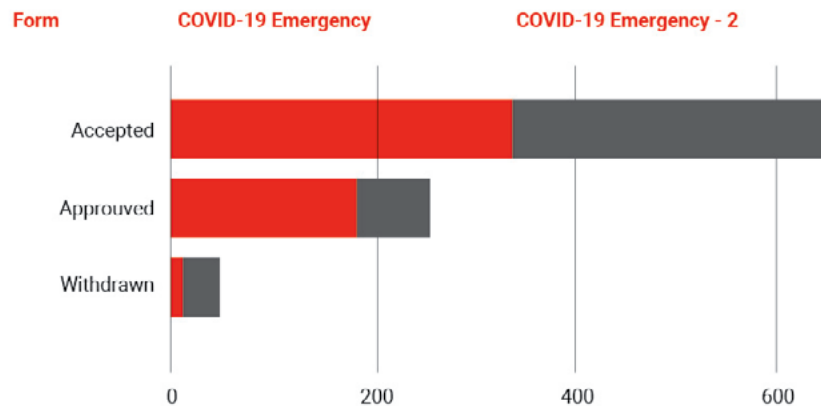
SECTION 01

Of the 910 requests received, 616 were accepted (68%). Request that were not accepted were refused because:

- They came from outside the CGM territory
- The proposed activities did not meet funding guidelines

It should also be noted that 20% of approved requests were accepted with a decrease in the requested budget. Additionally, some agencies withdrew their applications after filing, either because they had received funding from another financial partner or were forced to suspend operations (due to lack of staff, insufficient space to meet distancing requirements, etc.).

Number of requests by status



Investments by region

Unsurprisingly, the majority of funds were distributed in Montreal, where community agencies and the most vulnerable populations are the most concentrated. Subsequently, close to 80% of funds were allocated to agencies on the island of Montreal, while 16% went to Montérégie and 6% to Laval.

However, the percentage of accepted requests is higher for Laval and Montérégie, at 72% and 66% respectively, compared with 37% for Montreal. For Greater Montreal as a whole, 41% of the amounts requested were granted.

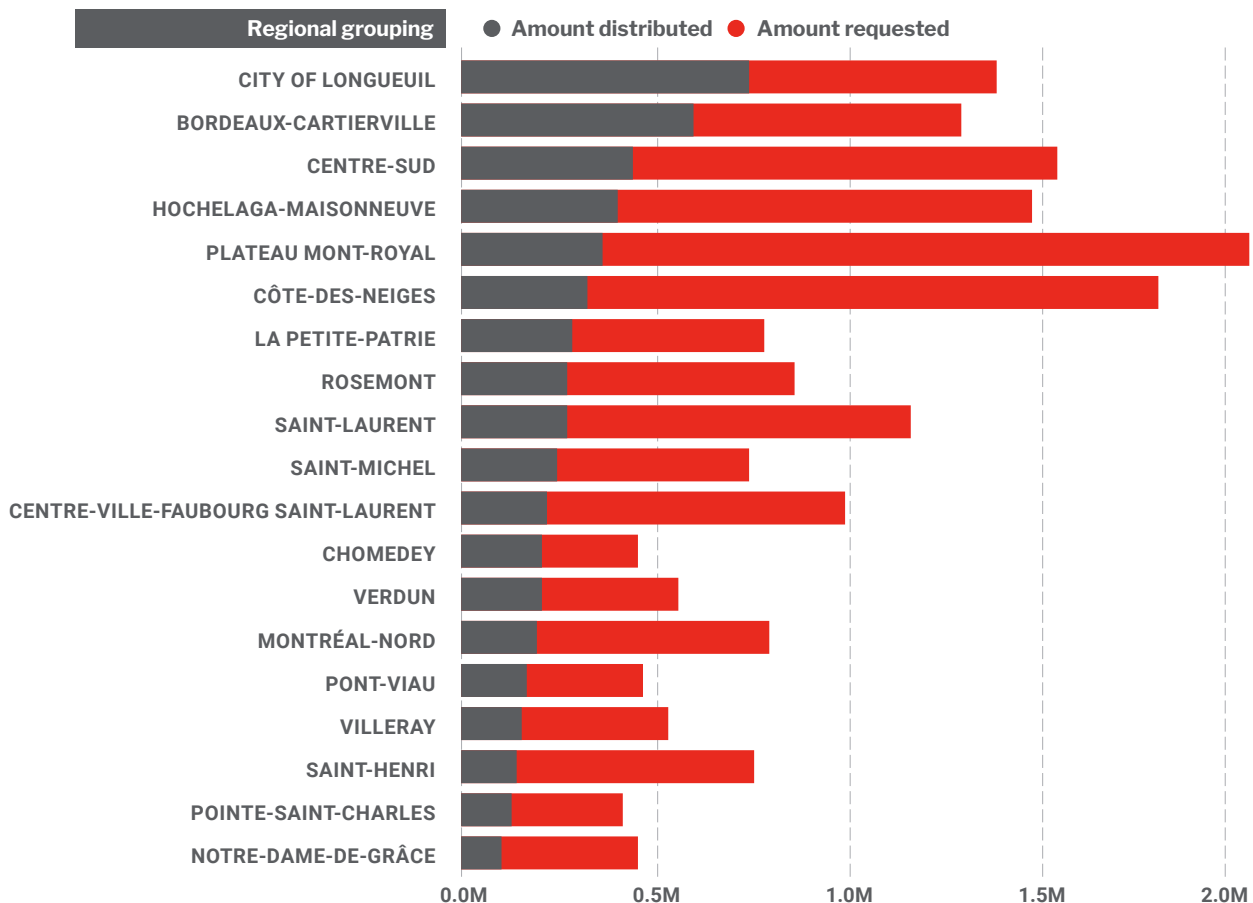
SECTION 01

Investments by neighbourhood, city network, and regional county municipality

The number of requests and amounts requested vary by territory. Some neighbourhoods organized quickly and were among the first to apply. Others found it more difficult to apply but had just as much need for assistance. The Emergency Allocations Group (EAG) took this variation into account and made every effort to ensure neighbourhoods were supported equitably. On average, neighbourhoods received 40% of what they requested. The graph below illustrates the primary investments granted by the COVID-19 Emergency Fund by neighbourhood, city network, and regional county municipality. For full details, see Appendix A.

It should be noted that some projects changed between the time of their submission and acceptance. This is the case for La Tablée des Chefs (City of Longueuil), which was granted a larger sum than was initially requested, given the nature and scope of the project.

Amount received and amount requested by region / regional grouping



TESTIMONIAL

“

Initially, our goal was to produce 800,000 meals over a two-month period. Given the pressing needs and unknown duration of the situation, we doubled our goal to 1.6 million meals over a four-month period. We expect to not only reach our goal but to exceed it and reach the two-million meals mark. After just 10 weeks, we've already served 1,400,000 meals. Headquartered in Longueuil, La Tablee des Chefs was granted \$200,000 for this regional project.

”

LA TABLÉE DES CHEFS

Use of Funds

Agencies in the community sector have shown creativity, resourcefulness, and ingenuity to reorganize their service offerings during the COVID-19 pandemic. No agency supported by CGM was spared. More than half had to adapt their services, nearly 25% reduced services, more than 40% cancelled services or operations, and some agencies even introduced new services. Several of the services that were cancelled or postponed were income-generating activities.

Impact of COVID-19 on operations and service offerings

442 agencies responded, with multiple responses permitted	
Adaptation or modification of services	27%
Cancellation of activities	24%
Remote service	24%
Augmentation of services	12%
Interruption of services	5%
New services	5%
Reduction of services	3%

“

All of our self-financing activities (consignment shop, warehouse, room rental, community dinners) have been suspended. All of our volunteers (aged 70 and up) are in confinement. The centre is no longer accessible to volunteers and beneficiaries, only staff remain. We provide emergency food services, distribute food, prepare and deliver small meals, do small grocery runs for the elderly... not to mention friendly visits and psychological support for the elderly and their caregivers.

”

CENTRE D'ENTRAIDE BÉNÉVOLE DE SAINT-AMABLE

SECTION 02

Adapted or supplementary service offerings for the crisis context

Within a few hours of launching the COVID-19 Emergency Fund, CGM observed that the vast majority of requests aimed to provide food support to vulnerable populations whose situations had become worse because of the crisis. Many initiatives were implemented to ensure that basic needs were covered. Several agencies reorganized their operations to ensure they could prepare meals, and many started to distribute baskets and meals on a massive scale. Delivery services were coordinated to reach people with limited mobility.

Normally, CGM does not support the distribution of gift cards. However, this option became essential during the pandemic. For example, for people who do not have access to government services due to a precarious legal status (undocumented immigrants, sex workers, etc.), grocery and pharmacy gift cards were the best short-term option available.

Another major adaptation centered on providing virtual services to replace interventions that would normally be offered in person.



Many agencies had to adopt digital services on the fly to maintain relationships with the people they serve.

SECTION 02

Within the COVID-19 Emergency Fund framework, CGM was able to support approximately 10 agencies with strengthening computer skills. An allocation of \$75,000 was invested to identify the needs of professionals and agencies in implementing solutions. Agencies were able to benefit from discounts on equipment, as well as personalized services to help improve IT practices. An evaluation of the impact of this support within agencies will enable CGM to identify the various achievements, organizational challenges, and learnings.

The majority of agencies also had to familiarize personnel with other available emergency services so that they could make referrals. Food support was quite often accompanied by psychosocial services, either through a friendly phone call or doorstep conversations.

Finally, it should be noted that services adapted for the homeless population received a great deal of attention. Compliance with sanitary requirements required the rearrangement of premises and schedules, as well as the addition of meals, sanitary equipment, and other services.

Breakdown of expenses

Regarding the breakdown of expenses, many agencies invested in human resources. In addition to other factors, this can be explained by the lack of volunteers available to provide emergency services, resulting in an increase in staff work hours and new hires (cooks, delivery people, intervenors, etc.). Unsurprisingly, the second-highest expense is food assistance, followed by those for supplies and equipment (sanitary products, computer equipment).

Breakdown of expenses by category	
Other expenses	\$253,765.17
Cleaning or maintenance	\$127,921.37
Accommodation	\$34,924.36
Travel	\$258,712.57
Hygiene products or sanitary equipment	\$266,311.70
Supplies and equipment	\$1,064,008.68
Food assistance	\$2,319,108.52
Human resources	\$3,127,977.10

TESTIMONIAL

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Despite COVID-19, we have maintained our accommodation services (capacity: 26 women). However, we have extended the length of stay of our residents. We also continued to facilitate new admissions. The only activities we reduced are those that serve former residents (home visits and other activities).

”

AUBERGE MADELEINE

SECTION 02

Number of interventions

The data that follows is not exhaustive, because the circumstances of the crisis made it difficult for agencies to accurately record all interventions. The priority was to ensure that people had food to eat, a roof over their heads, and that physical and psychological risks were minimized as much as possible. While the data is limited as a result, it nevertheless provides an idea of the work carried out by community agencies in just a matter of weeks.

According to information provided by agencies, the COVID-19 Emergency Fund resulted in:

- **37,503** families reached
- **277,464** people provided with emergency support
- **826,462** meals offered
- **205,178** deliveries or distribution of food items (baskets or meals)
- **213,302** friendly phone calls or support meetings (virtual or physical)
- **8,723** donations of supplies and equipment (computers, hygiene products, gift cards, etc.)



These numbers do not take all activities into account, as illustrated by this heartwarming photo montage created by Fami-jeunes, one of the agencies supported by CGM.

TESTIMONIAL

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We thought we would be able to offer our distribution service to more organizations, but they had to close their doors due to lack of funding, lack of volunteers, or other reasons caused by the pandemic.

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LE GARDE-MANGER POUR TOUS

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No one could have predicted this! We had to get very creative when listening to people, providing support, and assisting them as usual. Thanks to Centraide's support, we were able to purchase tech equipment to allow staff to telework and stay in touch with families who were struggling. We also bought a Zoom license, which enabled more people to connect with the activities we were offering and allowed us to remain part of the social fabric and maintain the link that families lost due to the closure of schools, recreation centres, etc. Without you, we would have only increased our deficit (existing losses + new purchases). But more importantly, we would have lost contact with families in need, helpless in the face of this crisis, and lacking resources. Thank you!

”

LA MAISON À PETITS PAS

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Having no prior experience dealing with a pandemic, we tested and readjusted as we went. We were unable to assess the requests that came in and had no idea how long the crisis would last. But by following government guidelines, we found ways to adapt to the ever-changing reality. My team and I (reduced from 12 to 8 members) have been able to adapt each day by fighting our fears and anxieties in the face of this dangerous virus. Sanitary measures also required a lot of adjustment, both in the kitchen and in the centre.

”

CENTRE D'ACTION BÉNÉVOLE D'IBERVILLE ET DE LA RÉGION

SECTION 02

Populations served

It's never ideal to label people or put them in a box, whether they are seniors, homeless people, immigrants, or single parents. People are rarely defined by just one category, and more often have multiple characteristics. However, we asked agencies to identify, wherever possible, the primary clientele targeted by their interventions. The objective was to ensure we offered services to all vulnerable populations, including those that are most difficult to reach. Note that agencies can serve more than one target population

Populations served	
Racialized people or people of immigrant background	10%
Homeless people	6%
People with disabilities	6%
People with mental health issues	11%
Senior citizens	14%
People with low incomes	1%
Recent immigrants	9%
Youth	8%
Men experiencing difficulty	6%
Women who are victims (or at risk) of violence	6%
Expecting mothers and families with newborns	8%
Low-income families/single parents	14%
Indigenous peoples	1%

While on the subject of populations served, it should be noted that 78% of agencies confirmed that they connected with people they do not typically reach under normal circumstances, both in terms of volume and profile. Here are some examples:

- The profile is no different, but the number of new beneficiaries is much larger. Among them are several who recently lost their jobs. In terms of profile, in almost all cases these are people who are no longer able to make ends meet.
- Families with members who lost their jobs.
- People whose family income is just above the poverty line, students, and the recently unemployed.
- Two different profiles: People reached were isolated seniors who could not go shopping or leave their homes. The delivery of hot and frozen meals assured

SECTION 02

their food security. We also had requests from new people or families experiencing financial difficulty due to job loss, as well as some sick and confined people. Some situations have already been resolved, while the circumstances for others remain very precarious.

- Homeless people who did not regularly come to our centre began showing up after the COVID-19 outbreak because many other agencies had reduced their services. These people switched to our centre in order to access shelter during the day, to eat, to shower, and to rest.

Preliminary Impacts

The agencies supported within the framework of the COVID-19 Emergency Fund responded to dire needs and can attest to the added importance of their work under these exceptional circumstances, which saw already fragile populations become increasingly vulnerable. The impact of their efforts is extensive, but here we will focus on the effects that are most often mentioned by the agencies.

Food security

Unsurprisingly, food security is the most commonly mentioned impact. A number of families and isolated individuals were already struggling to secure food before the pandemic, and the situation worsened with the onset of COVID-19. Food banks were overwhelmed and several agencies began to prepare and distribute meals. In short, incredible efforts were undertaken to ensure that as many people as possible could secure healthy meals, despite the crisis. These interventions were rarely limited to food. Often, contact with the agency was also one of the few opportunities for social interaction.

Shelter

In addition to food security, the need for shelter and access to sanitary products rapidly increased. Agencies that offered emergency accommodations had to review their operating policies to ensure they complied with public health requirements while at the same time doing their utmost to support their clients.

SECTION 03

Breaking isolation

Many friendly telephone calls were made to ensure people had a sympathetic ear and psychosocial support when needed. It was also during these calls that agency personnel could refer people to the right services. The presence of community workers reduced stress and anxiety, and provided a sense of security for people facing heightened psychological distress due to the crisis.

Collaboration within the community ecosystem

The crisis also made it possible to create and strengthen ties between community agencies and the population. It also led to increased collaboration between community agencies, which in some cases combined their efforts or services. Several agencies mentioned greater collaboration and a heightened sense of belonging within their field as one of the positive side effects of the crisis.

Community sector outreach

Agencies also assert that they were discovered by new segments of the population during the crisis. Media coverage of their work on the front lines introduced several agencies to the general public, including people who had not used their services before. Being in the spotlight and having their work recognized within the community ecosystem inspired a sense of pride and appreciation among agency personnel, which provided a morale boost while they faced busy schedules and difficult work conditions.

SECTION 03

Technological shifts

It should be noted that several agencies were compelled to adopt technology due to the extraneous circumstances caused by the pandemic. Often, agencies were not equipped to work remotely. The COVID-19 Emergency Fund enabled them to acquire the necessary equipment to offer virtual services. Zoom meetings, whether held individually or as a group, are now a regular part of daily operations. However, issues persist because many of the agencies' clients do not have access to computers, smart devices, or the Internet. Even the use of a standard telephone is not accessible to everyone who needs support. This troubling situation was mentioned on several occasions.

Main impacts observed
Human rights
Strengthening of health measures
Online/remote services
Listening and referral services
Response to basic needs
Sense of security/reduction of anxiety and stress
Creation/strengthening of community ties
Breaking isolation
Psychosocial support
Food security

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Shelters are often a last resort for women facing domestic violence. In that sense, we provide a vital service for a population at high risk of homicide: The potential closure of our shelters due to COVID-19 would have literally risked the lives of countless women and children. The ability to offer women psychosocial support at our shelter, as well as at home thanks to video-conferencing platforms used by external services workers, has made it possible to maintain the essential connection between Inter-Val and the women we support. The telephone doesn't allow for the same level of intimacy as video-based applications.

”

INTER-VAL 1775

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With the help of emergency funds, homeless people were able to access supplies and sleeping bags, as many people did not want to leave their neighbourhoods to find shelter. It should be mentioned that there are no emergency accommodations in our area, and there were none that opened during the pandemic. Along with food and sleeping bags, we distributed sanitary products and personal protective equipment. And in addition to responding to their needs, we provided up-to-date information on COVID-19 and took the opportunity to share prevention directives. We were also able to offer support, listen, and refer people to other complementary services.

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RUE ACTION PRÉVENTION JEUNESSE

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“Our agency plays an important role with youth in Côte-des-Neiges. Through our services, we have kept a close link with young people and families. Thanks to our actions, young people felt understood, supported, and trusted. Your help has enabled us to support youth who were isolated because of the digital divide. Many youth and parents were worried about distance learning and its accessibility. The most remarkable benefit is that young people are now optimistic and feel confident during this time of uncertainty. These moments gave our team the opportunity to better understand the importance of our role in the community.”

”

MAISON DES JEUNES DE CÔTE-DES-NEIGES

Key Learnings

There is no precedent for the crisis we are currently experiencing. It has led to its share of challenges, complications, but also learning opportunities. Significant lessons have emerged from this crisis, both for the agencies supported by the COVID-19 Emergency Fund and for Centraide of Greater Montreal.

KEY LEARNINGS FOR AGENCIES

While agencies were not asked any specific questions about insights gained during the crisis, some shared learnings without prompting.

The amplification of social inequality

In their report, one agency cited a phrase found on social media that was used in response to the claim that we are all in the same boat: “We are not all in the same boat. We are facing the same storm.” It is clear that not everyone has had the same ability to weather the storm. The crisis has only exacerbated existing social inequalities, and community agencies have tried, as best they could, to limit the damage. But this observation should not be limited to community agencies; it applies to society at large. The social divide is very real, and the crisis has only highlighted and amplified it. It will take some time for the most vulnerable populations to recover from the crisis, and the community sector has proven to be essential in supporting marginalized populations.

SECTION 04

The added value of collaboration

In general, neighbourhoods with pre-existing partnerships were able to organize more quickly and efficiently. These partnerships enabled neighbourhoods to make more solid demands and weave a safety net around the most vulnerable, particularly with regard to food security. While also affected by the crisis, the neighbourhoods supported by Centraide's Collective Impact Project (CIP) had less difficulty staying the course and were able to quickly put emergency services in place.

The need to adopt digital solutions

Under normal circumstances, community agencies already juggle numerous priorities, busy schedules, and limited budgets. While considered necessary, the shift to digital was not a priority for a number of agencies. At the start of the lockdown, Centraide of Greater Montreal received requests for support from the personal email addresses of agency managers. Teleworking was not possible for everyone. In addition, the strength of the community rests on its ability to cultivate strong ties with the population. These bonds, which are often difficult to create, require time and effort. The sudden switch to virtual communications required some major adjustments to the way things are done.

Now that the vast majority of agencies have embraced this shift and modified their operations, they can offer remote services to their clients. However, the challenge remains for those who do not have access to the necessary technological means.

While this will be an interesting learning process for agencies over the coming months, it also widens the digital divide among the most disadvantaged.

KEY LEARNINGS FOR CENTRAIDE OF GREATER MONTREAL

Centraide of Greater Montreal has gained many insights during this crisis. First and foremost, CGM's role as a social investor and its expertise in the fight against exclusion has been affirmed in the current crisis. Numerous donors have trusted CGM and generously donated to the COVID-19 Emergency Fund.

CGM had to react and innovate quickly to produce simple and effective tools to receive and analyze requests, process disbursements, and perform administrative validations along the way.

SECTION 04

This process was certainly not perfect, but it made it possible to distribute the first disbursements within 72 hours of the launch of the fund. CGM was able to perform rapid analysis for small amounts allocated to short-term interventions (four weeks). While this procedure isn't viable for long-term investments, it's clear that this venture will allow CGM to review and simplify the process in the short term.

The crisis also enabled CGM to discover agencies outside its network that play an important role in supporting the most marginalized communities, especially in contexts where systemic racism is very present. Supporting these agencies on an ad hoc basis is one thing; integrating them into a longer-term strategy is another.

In conclusion, Centraide of Greater Montreal can affirm that the lessons learned during this crisis will guide its future investments so that, together, we can continue to show our local love in the fight against exclusion.

Show your local love



Centraide
of Greater Montreal

HELP MAKE
POVERTY AND SOCIAL
EXCLUSION
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