

Thank you for the opportunity to express my opinions and concerns about “itinerance and social cohabitation.” I am writing this document from the perspective of a citizen who lives in Milton-Parc (for more than 30 years), where we have a 24-hour shelter (Open Door) and a large Inuit population who “reside” on the corner of Milton and Parc.

I would like to focus on two issues:

1. Cohabitation and the definition thereof.
2. The unique situation of both Inuit of Milton-Parc and local community.

Social Cohabitation:

- The very first question in your mandate section is “Que signifie pour vous la cohabitation sociale?”

I would like to know how the City of Montreal (VdeM) defines “cohabitation” and “social cohabitation.” The VdeM website mentions several times the concept of “cohabitation.” I have searched their website and have not found a definition. How can we apply ‘social cohabitation’ if we do not have a standard definition?

According to the Robert en ligne the definition of co-habitation is: “Fait de cohabiter.” Not a useful definition. The definition of habiter is “vivre ensemble.” Again, not very useful.

Using the English Oxford dictionary:

- the state of living together (and having a sexual relationship without being married)
- the state or fact of living or existing at the same time or in the same place: a harmonious cohabitation with other living creatures"

The VdM often talks of “cohabitation.” The prefix “co” is derived from latin meaning:

- together/jointly
- partner

Are we (the housed) supposed to only exist in the same time or place as the itinerants? Are we to simply ignore them, walk around them and let the itinerants do as they please? For me personally, the prefix ‘co’ implies bi-directional. If we are to have ‘harmonious’ cohabitation, then the itinerants need to also respect societal norms and laws. There are expectations of civil norms on both the itinerant population and the ‘housed.’

The VdeM needs to define “social cohabitation” and establish expectations. Until this occurs and all parties are aware of the expectations, then no progress can be made.

The Inuit of Milton-Parc

I would like to focus on the Inuit population who live on the streets of Milton-Parc. Why? From my observations, the Inuit are quite different from the other itinerants in that they live in a large together as a large “family” unlike the other itinerants who are more mostly solo (or in pairs). This is cultural for them. Consequently, the problems they cause for the community are often a reflection of the group and group mentality. Thus, the interventions and solutions will need to be distinct.

As background, the Inuit population of Milton-Parc (M-P) moved in when the Open Door (OD) relocated to the church Notre Dame de Salette on Parc Avenue. Prior to that, we did not have a significant itinerant or Inuit problem. Initially the Open Door was a day centre. They served a population that other shelters would not i.e. the inebriated and intoxicated. However, due Covid, the OD evolved into a 24-hour centre and remains so. Now when I pass by the OD in the evening, there is a long line of people waiting to gain shelter for the night. For the most part they are polite, quiet and respectful of the others in line. In the line are those with mental health issues and then there are those who have become victims of the currently economic issues. Rarely are there any Inuit in the line. They remain at the corner of Milton and Parc....lying on the side walk....drinking....inebriated....yelling...fighting amongst their own, blocking entries to small businesses and apartments...urinating and defecating on the sidewalk (despite the portable toilet placed by the city)...buying drugs....doing drugs...leaving needles in back allies where children (used) to play...having sexual relations (sometimes for money...prostitution)

One of the most surprising things I have learned over the years is that many of the Inuit choose to be there! Why do they choose to be there? How do I know this? I was an Emergency Physician at the Montreal General for over 30 years. We dealt regularly with this population, whether those living on the street (usually brought in because of intoxication or trauma due to fights, or being hit by a vehicle), or those transferred from Nunavik for a medical condition. I specifically remember one Inuit lady, in her 50s, transferred down from Nunavik, told me that rather than going home, she wanted to try living on the street, at Milton and Parc. This intersection is ‘famous’ even in the Grand Nord. Some of the reasons they choose to live on the street include having an established Inuit community, easy access to food, alcohol and drugs combined with a profitable intersection for begging. The street Inuit who were brought into us (almost always by

ambulance) were often to eager to leave and go back to the street before medical evaluation and/or treatment was complete.

What needs to be done to clean up the neighbourhood?

- Police need to pass by the Milton-Parc intersection on a regular basis, several times per day
- Police need to empty the alcohol containers
- Loitering needs to be banned
- Police need to force them off the sidewalks and to move on.
- Workers from PAQ1 and PAQ need to educate them that choosing to live on the street is not an option. This means enough resources must be provided including cultural re-integration services
- Giving money, food, clothes, furniture by the public to these street people must be discouraged/banned. Rather, they should be encouraged to donate to established organizations that provide services to the Inuit and/or other homeless people.

Social Cohabitation and the Inuit of Milton-Parc

In 2022 the Ombudsman of Montreal published a report about the Inuit of Milton-Parc, “Ne pas détourner le regard.” The situation has definitely not improved. If there is going to be a harmonious social cohabitation (whatever the definition), then this must be bi-directional and more respectful of the local community. If not, then cohabitation is simply not possible and a much stronger response is required on the part of VdeM and police.