



Seniors and Families at the Heart of Argenteuil

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Valuing the Opinion of Elders!

In 1990, the United Nations' General Assembly declared October 1st the *International Day of Older Persons*. This year's theme – "Valuing the Opinion of Elders!" – works hand in hand with the ongoing *Municipalité Amie des Aînés* approach in the nine municipalities, which holds the ideas and needs of the elderly close to heart.

Valuing the opinion of senior citizens is firstly to become aware of our own prejudices surrounding the generations that came before us, and to oppose the traditional frame of reference exposed in the media, such as the cult of eternal youth which focuses on performance, speed, and consumption.

Unfortunately, in our contemporary occidental societies, we are too often confronted with the myth that elderly citizens have little to nothing to offer to society. Yet, their contribution is undeniable. Among many other examples, we can cite data from 2006 that suggests that, in Quebec, over 360 000 seniors spent 2.5 million hours a week collectively in order to help a person close to them. Additionally, 22% of the 60-69 age group were found caring for persons of limited autonomy, and nearly a third of seniors over 70 provided significant financial support to their grandchildren¹. Those statistics do not include the many hours of volunteer work spent in various activity sectors.

We should draw from several first nations' cultures in which seniors are recognized and even revered for their knowledge and experience, as well as their wisdom born off of their long struggle, and for the essential part they play in their community?

It is time for us to reiterate that regardless of our age or physical condition, we learn and think all through our life. Therefore, we need to encourage the creation of collective spaces in which people of different generations can positively influence one another. As it is so aptly stated in the Chinese saying: "it is not wealth that is lacking in the world, but rather sharing."

¹ Ipsos-Décarie. Survey of people aged 55 and older, commissioned by the Chamber of Notaries of Quebec and the Council of Elders. Research report, November 2006, p.28.

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