

Local charities weather COVID storm

RUBY PRATKA
RUBY@QCTONLINE.COM

The COVID-19 crisis has brought out the generous side of Canadians, particularly Quebecers, according to a recent report by Canada Helps, an online charitable giving platform. However, local nonprofits are worried about how their operations will continue as the pandemic drags on.

“Despite the heartbreaking news that we’ve been receiving every day due to COVID-19, [there is] some good news,” noted the authors of *The Giving Report 2020* in a cover letter. “In the last few weeks, there has been more than a 50 per cent rise in monthly gifts for Canadians

during this time of need. Quebec residents have been especially generous this year – over 19 per cent of families have donated, which makes Quebec the second-highest donating province in the country.”

Dozens of local nonprofit organizations, including the Citadel Foundation, the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity Foundation and the Société pour la Protection des Animaux (SPA), process donations through Canada Helps. According to the report, nonprofits that support the needs of vulnerable people and animals have benefited most from the rise in donations.

“In Quebec and in the rest

of Canada, a lot of gifts go to support vulnerable people, whether that’s through food banks, homeless shelters or senior-care organizations,” said Jacob O’Connor, director of charity engagement at Canada Helps. “When tragedy happens, Canadians and Quebecers give. We saw that during the [Fort McMurray] wildfires and during Hurricane Dorian [in September 2019]. We have been hit with a national crisis and Canadians are responding.”

However, O’Connor is concerned that the economic fallout from the COVID-19 crisis, which has put millions of Canadians at least temporarily out of work and brought “non-essential” industries to

a standstill, will lead to a drop in donations over the medium to long term. He notes that many nonprofits rely on galas, festivals or other annual events to raise money, and these events have now been cancelled or postponed. “In times of recession, people rely on charities more, but during the last recession we saw a big decline in donations,” O’Connor said. “In 2008 there was an overall decline of \$1.5 billion.”

Those are worrisome numbers for Félix Tremblay, executive director of the SPA de la Capitale-Nationale. “About one-third of our financing comes from philanthropy,” he says. “We have seen growth in donations in

recent years but this year is clearly going to be an outlier. Not only will donors have less money, but more people will put their animals up for adoption. We’ve already had cases of people who have lost their jobs and had to give up their pets, and that’s truly a last resort.”

Collaboration Santé Internationale is a Limoilou-based nonprofit which sends used, refurbished medical equipment to low-income countries. Some equipment, like bed frames, gloves and masks, has been requisitioned by the Quebec government for use in local hospitals, explained executive director Pierrette Defoy Dolbec. Shipping operations are on hold because

many of the countries that normally receive equipment are on lockdown and those who need the equipment can’t legally pick it up in port.

“Donations are down, and maintaining our finances will be very difficult,” Dolbec added. “We also normally operate with a lot of volunteers, and that has had to stop because many of our volunteers are elderly.

“We’re all a bit worried here, just like everywhere else ... but we have no choice,” she said. “We’ve been around for 51 years, so we’re just waiting and hoping that everything will fall back into place once this is over.”