



CONGRÉGATION DE  
NOTRE-DAME

Éducation libératrice  
Liberating Education  
真の自由への教育  
Educación liberadora

# LA PETITE MAISON DES ENFANTS SOLEIL, CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT – CHILDREN – WOMEN SINCE 1991 – IN SOUTH- CENTRAL MONTREAL

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## WHAT LED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF LA PETITE MAISON DES ENFANTS SOLEIL?

Certain serious problems that society creates for mothers and children are unacceptable; it raises questions and disturbs. What we discover is humanly and socially intolerable: it is an urgent call for liberating education.

The impoverishment of children is linked to the impoverishment of women, their exclusion and the social scorn of which they are victims. We carry the mission of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame in our hearts, a project born of Marguerite Bourgeoys, a woman who was both an educator and an innovator who remained attentive to God and to the signs of her time: She cared for children whose lives were threatened and accompanied women and mothers.

## THE CHILDREN WE WELCOME AT PETITE MAISON DES ENFANTS SOLEIL

- There is a snowstorm outside, it is 10 p.m. and an eight-year-old child is looking through the window of a bar searching for his mother; he is paralyzed with fear. He knows that his mother will get her social assistance cheque stolen.
- Kids wander in the alleyways, hidden in the corners, skipping school.
- Children break windows and remove things displayed there in order to get food.
- Little girls are in a dangerous park with their mother who is a prostitute; we look for them late in the evening.
- In class, two children from the same family are crying, breaking their pencils and ripping their notebooks; they have just been abandoned by their mother and the teacher is unaware of what is going on.
- A small family lives in a van, hidden; their mother is frightened.
- Some mothers work on the street in conditions of pure violence.

This is what our itinerant team saw with their own eyes during many walks around the neighbourhood a year before the opening. Our contacts with the police, shopkeepers, schools and social workers taught us that these children are violent, aggressive and destructive.

## A PLACE OF HOSPITALITY AND ACCOMPANIMENT NEEDED TO BE OPENED IMMEDIATELY

For them, we opened La Petite Maison des Enfants Soleil. A place, a "home" where we welcome them, listen to them and form an attachment with those who come, a place where they may develop a sense of belonging. We met with mothers, as equals, in their small apartments and provided a stable team of teachers.

We go to school with some children who can no longer function in class, are violent and often in crisis, to help to re-establish a sense of trust, develop their interests and support their teachers. After school, the children go to La Petite Maison des Enfants Soleil, to "be kids," develop self-esteem, discover their strengths and their talents. For them, we create customized activities; they experience success, they become someone for someone. We have rapidly developed a network of solidarity in the neighbourhood: the surrounding schools that the children and professional teams attend; the social workers; the shopkeepers; police and the network of donors who support the mission of the nascent organization.

Our sources for liberating accompaniment are the Jesus of the Gospel, in the midst of the excluded, Marguerite Bourgeoys and her extravagant and tenacious faith in her God and in all people, her presence among the people of her time, and her recognition of the importance of everyone, rich and poor.

After 22 years, we sometimes meet more than 80% of these young people; they have jobs, some are pursuing an education, either at the university level or in work-oriented courses. They have stable partners and children; some have been on the organization's board of directors. The cycle of the street and its dependencies is broken.

La Petite Maison des Enfants Soleil is for liberating education, it is...

- a small road leading to a new freedom for marginalized women and children outside of the precinct;
- an alternative path to maximize our services in partnership with professional services in the field;
- a committed financial network of social solidarity in support of an urgent cause.