

## **FALL MEETING OF THE QUEBEC COUNCIL OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S CLUBS**

**Pavillon Agathe Lacerte, Université Laval**

1100, avenue de la Médecine Local 1184

Université Laval, Québec (Québec)

**Saturday October 19 2013 from 9 h to 15 h30**

***Higher education for women in Québec: what progress has been made ?***

### **WELCOME**

Godelieve de Koninck, Copresident, Association des femmes diplômées des universités – Ville de Québec

Judith Sanschagrin, Copresident, Association des femmes diplômées des universités – Ville de Québec and regional director (francophone clubs)

Liette Michaud, President of the Quebec Council of University Women's Clubs and VP-Québec, Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) Board of Directors

### **GUESTS**

Susan Murphy, CFUW President. Susan announced that the national office was encouraging all clubs to get involved in a National Initiative to Counter Violence Against Women and mentioned that CFUW membership is open to all women.

Brenda Shanahan, Regional director for anglophone clubs, Quebec Council.

Dominique Racanelli, Treasurer, Quebec Council and President of the University Women's Club of Montreal, Inc.

Patricia Couture, President, Montreal South Shore University Women's Club

Mary Jane Amey, President, Sherbrooke & District University Women's Club

Gilda Martinello, President, Montreal Lakeshore University Women's Club (absent)

### **SPEAKERS**

**Widia Larivière**

- **Youth Coordinator, Femmes autochtones du Québec Native Women (FAQNW)**

**Pierre Duchesne**

- **Minister of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology**

**Sylvie Poudrier**

- **Consultant for Aboriginal Affairs, Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones du Québec- *Higher education for Aboriginal Women : facts, challenges and possible solutions.***

### **SUMMARY**

**Widia Larivière**

**Youth Coordinator, Femmes autochtones du Québec Native Women (FAQNW)**

- Member of the Association of Aboriginal Students at Laval University while studying for her B.A.
- Approximately 1 million Aboriginals in Canada and about 100,000 in Québec with 50% of the population under the age of 25, so we must focus on youth.
- 11 Aboriginal nations in Québec with a variety of living conditions and who belong to different linguistic families.
- The Indian Act at the end of the 19th century made them into second class citizens.
- Residential schools where many suffered different types of abuse ensured the disappearance of culture and languages.
- Intergenerational problems created by this are still felt today.
- Before judging Aboriginal Nations, one must take into account the social and historical context in which they have evolved.
- Education takes place in a climate of judicial quarrels as schools must teach the provincial curriculum but financing is provided by the federal government.
- There is a gap of about 3000\$ per child per year between the amounts granted by the federal government and those granted by the Ministry of Education, Recreation and Sports of Québec to Québec school boards.
- Schools are in a terrible state.
- Language survival varies from one nation to the other. Despite an oral tradition, several dictionaries exist.
- Aboriginal languages are taught first in schools, then, French and English.
- There is a high dropout rate: three times higher for Aboriginals.
- Aboriginals in Quebec are not as well educated as others in Canada.
- Values that are fostered: to be responsible; to receive an education that reflects our culture; to respect the Elders and the important role that they play in the community.
- Obstacles: geographic distances, isolation, poverty, lack of financial support during studies as the support varies from one community to the other and so do the criteria; racism and discrimination, lack of motivation of self-confidence; balancing work/family/studies: there are twice as many single parent Aboriginal women than in the general population. Reasons for quitting studies include pregnancy and child care.

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS/BEST PRACTICES -**

1. An Aboriginal college that provides significant cultural grounding for Aboriginal students : Kiuna College at Odanak, near the town of Sorel, offers a program in Social Sciences with courses in Aboriginal history and literature. There is an agreement between the Cegep in Trois-Rivières and the Attikameks pour coordination and support.
2. Academic support as offered by the Université du Québec in Abitibi-Témiscamingue which offers a mentoring program for specific fields of study. Widia Larivière wondered why Laval University and UQAM didn't offer such services when Concordia University and McGill University run a Support Centre for Aboriginal students with dedicated, full-time personnel.

3. Including programs in Aboriginal history so the course can be interesting for everyone. It is difficult to achieve reconciliation when there is ignorance of the Aboriginals' role in establishing Canada.
4. The «Idle No More» movement, an initiative of Aboriginal women which offers awareness training, « Teach-Ins », spaces where there can be dialogue nation to nation. The advocacy on social media has revived the interest of the non-Aboriginal population for Aboriginal Peoples.
5. The hope that the evolution of francophone Quebeckers between 1968 and 2013 will also become the destiny of Aboriginal Peoples in Québec. Therefore, Aboriginals must have the means to get out from under and it's not only a question of money.

### **Pierre Duchesne**

- **Minister of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology**
  - His department organised a Summit on Higher Education; he is interested on the impact of students who are the first in their family to pursue higher education
  - He mentioned that we now have the first female Prime Minister in the history of Québec, Pauline Marois, whom he described as a wonderful example of leadership by a woman in the field of Québec politics and also in the Parti québécois, having faced various crises with tenacity and obstinacy
  - During the student crisis last year, there was anger and much criticism by the press of the government: things have calmed down.
  - Crises are useful as they lead to reforms.
  - Going back in Québec history: the establishment of Cegeps\* after the Parent Report were critical as only 25% of Francophones had schooling. (\*Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel known in English as General and Vocational College)
  - In 1960, only 16% of women attended university.
  - In the USA, the GI Bill for veterans had provided grants and a period of catching up: the first university graduate in a family had a positive influence on his family as well as on his community.
  - With the Parent Report, access to education became more democratic and now, women are the majority in all fields of study except engineering (and information technologies, said a participant.)
  - This progress occurred at the same time that Québec Francophones improved their standing in society and more women entered higher education. Presently, there are only more men than women at the doctoral level in Québec.
  - The first university graduates in many families came from disadvantaged families.
  - Graduation rates at the post-secondary level are higher in Québec than in Canada because of Cegeps.
  - The graduation rates at the Université du Québec in Rimouski, Trois-Rivières and in Abitibi-Témiscamingue where there is an Aboriginal pavillion include 70% of first generation students .

### **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

1. Financing post-secondary studies: Québec Aide financière aux études will include more bursaries than loans this year, which should reduce student debt. (A comment from the participants: credit cards are a bane. Young people need Financial Literacy courses when in high school to learn how to live within a budget.)
2. On October 16 2013 a National Policy on Research and Innovation will grant bursaries. These measures should create cultures of research, starting with retrofitting laboratories in high schools (25M\$).
3. Getting women to choose studies in fields that are trending. The Minister mentioned the “Hats off to you” program which gives bursaries to women who have chosen non-traditional trades for women. He mentioned the lack of workers in the aerospace industry.
4. The establishment of early childhood learning and childcare facilities, *Centres de petite enfance*, by the government has been studied in order to justify the expense and results have shown that women who return to work inject money into society.
5. To a question asking about the possibility of granting free tuition at the post-secondary level, the Minister responded that 500M\$ must be allocated to improve aging school infrastructures, that choices must be made.
6. To a question asking about improving access for Aboriginal women to post-secondary studies, the Minister alluded to agreements with the federal government.
7. To a question asking why universities in Québec are vying for students and establishing satellite campuses everywhere, the Minister mentioned the creation of a National Council of Universities to ensure better coordination (June 2014).

### **Madame Sylvie Poudrier**

- **Conseillère en affaires autochtones, Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones - *L'éducation supérieure pour les femmes autochtones : Constats, enjeux et pistes de solutions***
  - The Secretariat is part of the Executive Council of the government as the chiefs of the 11 First Nations recognized in Québec deal directly with the Prime Minister of Québec, through the Secretariat.
  - Aboriginal realities are not taken into account by provincial laws, rules and regulations.
  - Only modern treaties have been signed in Québec. In 2003, the Paix des Braves agreement was implemented. The James Bay Agreement was signed in 1975 by the Crees, Inuits and Naskapis, which provided them with a lot of income. (N.B. The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement was an Aboriginal land claim settlement, approved in 1975 by the Cree and Inuit of northern Quebec, and later

slightly modified in 1978 by the Northeastern Quebec Agreement, through which Quebec's Naskapi First Nations joined the treaty.)

- The Secretariat is responsible for Status of Women issues for Aboriginals; there is violence, exploitation and sex trafficking. Many communities are not accessible by road. In Kitcisakik, a very isolated community, people live in shacks and some do not have running water, electricity or toilets. In one community, 95% of the men have been arrested for sexual abuse. In others, inhabitants are divided into clans and there is physical, drug and alcohol abuse as well. Generally, complaints made by women are dealt with four years later. Despite this, the word "violence" does not exist in the Aboriginal language.
- In one case, children were being bused to Val d'Or to go to school and live with host families during the week but their parents were not happy so the government put in trailers to be used as classrooms.
- Only 20% of Aboriginals have their High School Diploma (Secondary V).
- Band schools are usually elementary schools and secondary schools are rarer.
- Bands receive block funding for health and social services, water, infrastructures, and education, including teachers' salaries. For the past 20 years, the federal government has provided the same level of funding per pupil per year despite the higher birth rates, inflation and the costs associated with living up north. There is no money for libraries or educational specialists.
- Often, there are agreements with school boards to educate Aboriginal students. However, school boards ask the band councils to pay between \$6000 to \$9000 per student. Bands who send kids to Ontario pay \$12 000 per student. Chiefs decide who will finish their high school schooling because there isn't enough money.
- Aboriginal women who do not delay maternity have a harder time. Children are accepted and nobody talks about contraception. Between 1975 and 2005, Aboriginal women had to declare who was their child's father so 30% of the children were not recognized as Aboriginals and the federal government did not finance their education.
- Teachers in band schools are not unionized, except for the community of Pessamit so the Chief closed the school on Fridays to be able to get by.
- The federal government does not recognize the Québec educational system. There is no money for adult education or vocational education. The funding is based on the previous year's enrollment figures so, again, Chiefs decide who will go to school if there isn't enough funding for all eligible students.
- In 2002, the federal government produced 6000 reports on Aboriginals but there is no progress. The federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, Bernard Valcourt, has presented an Education Bill for Aboriginals this fall.
- The psychological effects of residential schools are still in play. Going to university meant losing one's Indian status so education was not encouraged. Aboriginal peoples are wary, suspicious of Whites. So there is little family support.
- In Inuit villages, teenagers will get pregnant in the hope that they will be given a house because, on average, 11 to 15 people are packed into a house, which contributes to the number of cases of physical violence and sexual abuse (boys and girls).

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

1. Support services in Cegeps and universities are of great help.
2. To counter students' lack of motivation in school, the teaching of French as a second language must be used because Aboriginal languages are taught exclusively up to grade 3. Also, teachers need to understand that Aboriginal languages are « pictorial » because this influences the children's thinking and learning styles.
3. Teaching sex education in elementary and secondary schools. Presently, Personal Development courses are no longer part of the Québec curriculum. In theory, all teachers are responsible for sex education but it isn't working.
4. Countering male chauvinism by implementing programs which teach gender equality in order to change the customs.
5. Offering post-secondary courses in the communities to keep Aboriginal students in their home environment. For example, McGill professors travel up north to give courses in teacher training and social work.
6. Respecting the knowledge of Elders concerning the territory when a development project is undertaken. For example, listening to Elders would have saved time, energy and money when building dams or mining.
7. Supporting local efforts to gain autonomy. For example, Inuit midwives developed courses and want them to be recognized with a diploma. In Nunavik, they did a study involving 2000 women and obtained positive results.
8. Denouncing abuse, and inequalities with respect to having access to quality education. For example, an Assistant Deputy Minister insisted that the Quebec Education Act ensures free education services to children up to age 16, and that Aboriginal children live in Québec therefore school boards should not charge band councils when they provide educational services.
9. Insisting on accountability for band council expenses.
10. Increasing funding for education so pedagogical resources, educational specialists, improved infrastructures, technology and quality teaching will be available.
11. Arranging meetings between Aboriginal women elected to office and female MNA's in the National Assembly to encourage dialogue and improve women's rights. (role undertaken by the Secretariat for Aboriginal Affairs).

