

Area 87 Our Remote Communities in 2024

According to the 2021 census, there are roughly 150,000 Haitians and roughly 150,000 Latin Americans, the majority concentrated on the Island of Montreal. The vast majority of all Haitians and a large proportion of all Latin Americans in Canada live in the greater Montreal area.

At present, Area 87's membership is made up of some 7,000 Francophones, 2,000 Anglophones, and around 250 Hispanophones, in 387 groups. Haitians, an important community in the Greater Montreal area, are absent from our service structure. We do have a Russian group that meets once a week and is hosted by a Latin American group. We also have a Polish group that is inactive, but which the area continues to post on its meeting list. Natives North American in our area have two groups. We used to have a Farsi-language group (Iranians), which has disbanded and is in practice integrated into an English-language group. Italian members attend our English-speaking groups. And especially, we have a group that has been hosting telephone meetings in French since Monday, March 23, 2020 (COVID) for alcoholics who are unable to attend or have limited mobility. And a group that holds regular meetings for deaf people in Langue des Signes du Québec (LSQ) for more than 30 years.

The composition of the Greater Montreal population, — especially on the Island of Montreal with its 2.1 million inhabitants in 2023, is a real mosaic. It represents a great diversity of cultures, races, colors, beliefs and languages. There are no fewer than 120 cultural communities from all five continents. This reality is not necessarily reflected in our meeting rooms.

In Montreal and its suburbs, we pride ourselves on being inclusive. So how do we get our message across to alcoholics who can't be reached because of their “remoteness”? A remote community is not necessarily an isolated community from the North Pole. According to our guidelines, such a community is defined as one where it is difficult to get the message across because of language, culture or geography. It's a very broad definition and, if we want, an inclusive one. Whether you're housebound or living in an institution, or part of a special interest group, or are stigmatized because of your religious or cultural background, then, how do we ensure equal access for the people currently underserved by our local service structure?

We have a lot of work to do in identifying community resources and leaders within our area's ethnic and cultural communities (local media, places of worship, medical care providers, social clubs, schools, etc.).

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Recently, our local Public Information and Cooperation with the Professional Community committees have struggled to bring together members interested in our cultural and linguistic communities.

The forthcoming arrival of the Haitian Creole-language Big Book challenges us to reach out to this important community in the Greater Montreal area. Although over 56% of the population of the Montreal region is bilingual and 24% trilingual, the issue of discrimination on the basis of race, color, language or ethnic origin is real, even in 2024.

When I ride on the public transit in Montreal, I'm really in a world other than sitting comfortably in my home group's Monday meeting. The contrast is striking. How can we activate this small microcosm of AAs in the Greater Montreal area today? The challenge is daunting.

In my 31 years in A.A., the A.A. message hasn't changed. I've changed. The world has changed too. The city I've lived in for nearly 40 years has also changed a lot. I'm still the same man, but my inner self has been transformed thanks to the Twelve Steps program. My best friend is English-speaking, my sponsor is American. I have a close friendship and collaboration with a Latin American member, despite the fact that I speak virtually no Spanish. I have Greek, Italian and other friends.

All our Area meetings and assemblies offer simultaneous French/English translation provided by our volunteer members. All my written communications as a delegate are in three languages, since historically our Area is English, French and Spanish.

In 2024, we celebrate 80 years of A.A. in the Greater Montreal area. It was an Anglophone who introduced A.A. to us. In 2024, we also celebrate 50 years of AA's Spanish-speaking presence in Montreal and 75 years of history of the first French-speaking group in Montreal. Diversity has always been in our DNA. How can we make it flourish in 2024?

Right now, our membership seems to be stagnating. Please, let's stop justifying ourselves by blaming the pandemic. We could point to many reasons and certainly many of our shortcomings. Taking action is about turning to a higher power, clean house, and then turning to others knowing why you're doing it. Individually, that's fine. But collectively, are we ready today to undertake this exercise? What we want to pass on to others, are we ready to apply it to ourselves? Collectively?

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The challenges are great. I'm personally convinced that the answer lies in our shared experience, above all in sponsorship - good sponsorship, as Bill W put it. Solidarity, camaraderie, support, and above all a reassuring, ongoing presence. It doesn't cost much, but it takes a lot of time. In its early days, AA took a vow of corporate poverty. Individually, AA means a little money, but a lot of shared time and love.

In closing, let's keep this in mind:

"But the ex-problem drinker who has found this solution, who is properly armed with the facts about himself, can generally win the entire confidence of another alcoholic **in a few hours**. Until such an understanding is reached, little or nothing can be accomplished." (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 18)

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