

## CEGEP Social work technician: A gratifying, necessary job

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The April 2001 issue of *the Collegial Notebook* announced the creation of a new social work technician position at Collège Édouard-Montpetit, which Cécilia Hernandez filled. She had been hired on a temporary basis as part of a specific project. The college subsequently created a regular social work technician position, for which Ms. Hernandez was hired in August. The least we can say is that she adores her work. "I'm the luckiest person in the college!" she says, brimming with enthusiasm.

If Cécilia Hernandez loves her work so much, it's because she has succeeded in establishing a good relationship with students and above all, because she feels useful. Her work mainly consists of greeting students who come to see her in her office and referring them to the appropriate resources, depending on how serious or urgent the problems are. The most important cases are referred to the college psychologists or to external resources, but often, students really need to talk to someone. "We all need someone to listen to us. Students need to talk, and I'm there to listen to them. It's fundamental." Often students go to see her to make an appointment with a psychologist, but after talking with her, they no longer feel the need.

Stéphane Lamontagne, at Collège François-Xavier-Garneau and Sonia Hébert, at Cégep de Victoriaville perform work that is similar to what Cécilia Hernandez does, to the extent that they were hired to perform reception and referral tasks. But they prefer to be called "hallway workers" because they work like street workers. Seldom in their office, they are out and about, getting directly involved in student life "in the field." For example, Stéphane Lamontagne decided to get involved at the student café to get closer to the students, whereas Sonia Hébert eats with them at lunch time every day. The idea is to create a relationship of trust with the students, to be accessible, open and always available. "It's not easy for a new student to go knock on the door of a psychologist he doesn't know," says Stéphane Lamontagne. "My work mainly involves responding to students' needs and establishing a connection between them and the resources."

Not only do social work technicians provide specific assistance to students, they also lighten the load of psychologists who must deal with high demand. For example, Cécilia Hernandez's task is to manage the waiting list for psychologists in terms of seriousness and emergencies. Sonia Hébert and Stéphane Lamontagne manage to establish contact with students who could not be reached through the usual resources.

The three technicians who were interviewed also like their work because every day is different. Students go to see them to talk about problems with interpersonal relationships, love relationships, substance abuse, finances, sexual aggression or simply because they feel lost and need some direction at CEGEP. The three workers also carry out many prevention activities in collaboration with other agencies, namely in suicide, STD and mental health prevention. For instance, Stéphane Lamontagne is on a committee that offers students frozen meals at cost, while Cécilia Hernandez took part in setting up groups to support academic success for boys, to assist girls with anxiety problems and help students deal with interpersonal relationships.

In short, whether they're called "hallway workers", social workers or social work technicians, Cécilia Hernandez, Stéphane Lamontagne and Sonia Hébert are passionate people who like and respect students. The special connection that they have succeeded in establishing with them enables them to defuse crisis situations with potentially dramatic consequences, but above all, it ensures that students have someone who will listen.



STOCK/N. Bkoun

**Cécilia Hernandez adores her job as social work technician.**



**Sonia Hébert compares her job to that of a social worker out in the streets.**



Paul Chamberland

**Stéphane Lamontagne calls himself a hallway worker.**