EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
ADMINISTRATIVE INVESTIGATION REPORT

Cité-des-Prairies Rehabilitation Centre for Youths Experiencing Difficulties

English translation of the public French-language report dated December 17, 2024. This is an unofficial translation, not an official Government of Québec publication. Numbering and redactions are retained. Text covered by black redaction bars in the original is not translated or reconstructed.

INTRODUCTION

The Cité-des-Prairies Rehabilitation Centre for Youths Experiencing Difficulties (Cité-des-Prairies) is a residential facility providing rehabilitation services for adolescent boys placed under the Youth Protection Act as well as the Youth Criminal Justice Act. Most of the young people are housed there following an order of the Youth Division of the Court of Québec.

Facility Information

Number of young people housed: 158. Number of residential units: 14.

Profile of the Young People

The young people housed at this centre are between 12 and 21 years old. They have serious behavioural problems ranging from substance use and repeated running away to pronounced aggression. Cité-des-Prairies also houses young people who have committed offences, often repeatedly, ranging from theft to homicide. These young people have experienced many years of personal and family difficulties.

Background — Administrative Investigation

In August 2024, the Director of Youth Protection accepted a report that led CIUSSS Centre-Sud and the Director of Youth Protection to initiate an external administrative investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct between staff and young people at Cité-des-Prairies. In September 2024, the Integrated University Health and Social Services Centre of South-Central Montréal (CCSMTL) appointed two external consultants to conduct a thorough and entirely impartial administrative investigation, make recommendations, and submit a final report at the end of their mandate.

Our Commitment

We have become fully aware of all the issues raised during the investigation and the serious shortcomings identified at Cité-des-Prairies. The Directorate of Youth Protection and CIUSSS Centre-Sud acknowledge the seriousness of the issues raised and have taken concrete measures as the investigation progressed. In accordance with the Youth Protection Act (YPA), the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA), and its mission and values, CCSMTL is committed to providing quality rehabilitation services and implementing all necessary measures to strengthen the integrity and safety of the young people living at the Cité-des-Prairies Rehabilitation Centre, as well as a healthy and safe working environment for all employees.

Conclusion

CIUSSS Centre-Sud is aware of the challenges raised by the consultants and takes their recommendations seriously. Concrete actions are already underway to ensure that the necessary changes and improvements are made.

Note: The remainder of this document presents the consultants' findings and recommendations in their entirety.

LIST OF SIGNS, ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAART — Adaptation, Improvement, Aggression, Regression, Training (training program)

ACTE — Prevention of pimping activity — clinical activity on trafficking and sexual exploitation

AEC — Attestation of College Studies

AEESQ — Québec Association of Specialized Educators

AGP RT — Personnel management officer, labour relations

AGP — Personnel management officer

ARC — Attachment, Regulation, Competencies (training)

CDP — Cité-des-Prairies

CIUSSS — Integrated University Health and Social Services Centre

CJ — Youth centre

CMS — Multiservice centre

CP — Local adviser

CPNSSS — Management Negotiating Committee for Health and Social Services Centres

DA — Assistant director

DJ — Director of the Youth Program / Youth Director

DPJ-DP — Director of Youth Protection — Provincial Director

DRH — Director of Human Resources

ETC — Full-time equivalent

JC — Young offenders

LNT — Act respecting labour standards

LPJ — Youth Protection Act

LSJPA — Youth Criminal Justice Act

MOI — Independent workforce / staffing agency

OPQ — Québec Office of Professions

PIJ — Youth Integration Project (computer system)

PPCP — Criminal and Penal Prosecutor

PROPS — Signs of respect and admiration for someone — fist bump

RH — Human resources

RPD — Pre-sentence report

RT — Labour relations

SAC — Clinical activities specialist

SNITCH — Informer / tattletale

SPVM — Montréal Police Service

TCR — Regular full-time

TPO — Occasional full-time

VOI JC — Young Offender Orientation and Integration Component (training)

WAX PEN — Electronic cigarette containing highly concentrated THC liquid — illegal product

1. CONSULTANTS' REPORT

As part of this investigation, more than 52 witnesses were interviewed in structured interviews lasting one to three hours per person. We received six written statements and conducted unannounced visits to all secure and open custody units at Cité-des-Prairies, including the La Relance unit. More than 80 documentary exhibits were reviewed. We made 10 reports concerning young people and identified 27 employees to our clients for whom follow-up should be undertaken.

Caution

The external consultants do not claim to know everything about the environment they visit compared with those who work there day after day, sometimes for many years. The consultants do not claim to possess the truth. Their role is to bring an outside perspective to different situations based on their past experience and what they observe in various settings. When reading this report, it is important to consider that the situations raised have generally evolved over time, most often positively. Consequently, some matters presented in the report may no longer reflect present-day reality.

Note

For ease of reading, the term "educator" is used to refer to all educational staff. However, readers should be aware that the educational workforce is predominantly female.

Caution

Media coverage refers to possible infiltration by street gangs within Cité-des-Prairies or to the possibility that the educators concerned were acting under threat. In the investigation we conducted, apart from the fact that several young people at Cité-des-Prairies belong to street gangs, we found no evidence suggesting infiltration. Similarly, we found no facts that would allow us to conclude that the educators involved in the cases we reviewed were acting under any kind of threat.

FINDINGS — PSYCHOSOCIAL AND REHABILITATION AREAS

Training and Support

1. Staff have not received ongoing training since 2020.
2. Staff support is insufficient.
3. There are too few residential-setting coaches, and the coaching period is too short.
4. Recruitment and retention of clinical activities specialists (SACs) is problematic.
5. Consultant services are underused.
6. Educational staff in custody settings consist mainly of young, inexperienced women.
7. Expertise is being lost as experienced educators leave their positions.
8. Service and unit managers do not receive enough support in learning their roles, particularly when they begin.

9. Having unit managers cover for one another creates an excessive workload when a colleague is absent (increasing responsibility from two to four units).

10. Staff replacements occur daily, and coordination with the recall list does not meet needs.

11. Support for staff practice is inconsistent, comes from different sectors and is not coordinated: coaches, clinical activities specialists, clinical assistants, consultants, unit managers, etc. These many people with different job titles are expected to train and support staff.

Practices

12. Unprofessional and inappropriate practices occur in units and are tolerated.

13. Practices are not standardized across units.

14. Reprehensible behaviour is not sufficiently controlled and prohibited.

15. Disciplinary measures are underused (see Human Resources section).

16. Human resources staff supporting disciplinary measures in youth services do not respond quickly enough.

Workplace Climate

17. Employees have lost confidence in management.

18. Several employees have expressed a desire to leave their jobs.

19. An atmosphere of mistrust and fear has produced a code of silence among employees.

20. A feeling of unfairness exists.

21. Some employees have experienced reprisals after making disclosures.

22. Security is deficient in several respects.

23. Problems repeatedly raised and reported to management remain unresolved.

24. [REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

25. There are no clear operating rules in the units.

Security

26. Many prohibited items enter Cité-des-Prairies. [REMAINDER REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

27. [REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

28. Drugs. [REMAINDER REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

29. [REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

30. [REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

31. [REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

32. The La Relance unit has no break room for intervention officers. Confidential information is shared among officers and may be overheard by young people present.

33. [REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

Decision-Making Process

34. Reports are not made as required under the Youth Protection Act.

35. The functional authority of the Director of Youth Protection–Provincial Director does not allow her to fully carry out her mandate.

36. The Director of Youth Protection–Provincial Director is not informed, or is informed late, of situations for which she is accountable.

37. The Director of Youth Protection–Provincial Director does not participate in defining the competency profiles of people to whom she delegates certain responsibilities.

38. Problematic situations involving employees are not referred to the Youth Program Director and the Director of Youth Protection–Provincial Director.

39. Certain strategic functions are not sufficiently supervised (Protocol 5).

40. Expectations for reciprocal communication are not documented and shared between the two directorates.

41. Because of the lack of a shared vision from assistant management, staff have lost sight of their mission and its values.

HUMAN RESOURCES — FINDINGS

Existing CIUSSS Process for Disciplinary and Administrative Files

1. The human resources structure concerning local advisers and labour relations does not have the support of all staff.

2. The process for disciplinary files does not allow prompt action and informed decisions. It does not adequately consider the responsibilities of the Director of Youth Protection–Provincial Director toward young people in her care or the message that should be conveyed to teams.

3. Final disciplinary or administrative decisions, from suspensions longer than five days up to dismissal, are made by labour relations without direct communication with the local adviser or consultation with, or consideration of, the manager and/or management.

4. Labour relations validates disciplinary letters involving more than five days of suspension up to dismissal, but does no more. Validation is carried out internally by labour relations using documents prepared by the local adviser.

5. The local adviser is the manager's first point of contact for disciplinary or administrative measures, although some advisers have little or no labour-relations knowledge.

6. Local advisers receive no coaching before gathering a statement of facts. Because they are excluded from labour-relations discussions, they cannot become familiar with concepts that would help them handle files.

7. Local advisers can ask labour-relations questions through a mailbox assigned to a personnel management officer in labour relations. The person answering may vary.

8. When serious files are discussed with labour relations (suspensions over five days through dismissal), the local adviser is not involved or consulted. The file is sent to labour relations for validation based on the context provided by the adviser, without the adviser present.

9. Disciplinary files involving young people, where their safety or development may be compromised, are not automatically brought to the attention of the Director of Youth Protection–Provincial Director or the Director of Human Resources.

10. Based on interviews with HR representatives, they address discipline with the employee but assume the youth directorate will handle matters relating to the young person.

11. Several files involving young offenders should have resulted in reports that were not made. Most were not brought to the attention of the Director of Youth Protection–Provincial Director, Youth Director or Human Resources Director.

12. The labour relations decision takes precedence and is communicated to the local adviser, who must communicate it to the manager and the relevant directorate.

13. The local advisers interviewed who were involved in youth files (three of 21 advisers) lacked the skills to challenge labour relations decisions.

14. Managers concerned are not heard or interviewed by labour relations. Managers are even told they cannot communicate with labour relations directly and must go through their local adviser.

15. The disciplinary/administrative file-handling and decision-making process is far too long, and identifying who is accountable for decisions is difficult, if not impossible.

16. Decisions are inconsistent and coordination is lacking.

17. There is excessive tolerance of behaviour that should not be tolerated. Escalation of sanctions for similar behaviour is too slow, and the message does not get through to employees.

18. Labour relations decisions prevail and are followed, although several deserve qualification or challenge in light of the Director of Youth Protection–Provincial Director's responsibilities toward young people, the message sent to teams and the institution's reputation.

19. In several files reviewed, the institution waits for an educator to resign even though it has sufficient grounds to dismiss her. These educators then work at another institution with a similar population.

20. In almost all files reviewed, decision-makers hesitate for too long before taking necessary measures that require prompt decisions. We hear that they fear measures will be challenged and the employee may prevail, creating costs for the employer. In this context, without being told so explicitly, we understand that it is preferable for an educator involved in an overly close relationship to resign, thereby avoiding challenges.

21. Statements of facts prepared by local advisers for the files examined in this investigation are incomplete and do not permit informed decisions.

22. Some statements of facts must be redone. The local advisers involved and interviewed do not appear to understand what information they need to gather to enable informed decisions later.

23. Because of insufficient knowledge and experience, coordinators, managers and local advisers generally have no arguments to challenge the position adopted by labour relations.

Staffing, Requirements and Deployment of Educators; Lack of Professional-Order Membership

24. Checking references when hiring educators is not standard practice; references are checked only when there are doubts about a candidate.

25. Hiring criteria for the title of educator, although approved by the CPNSSS and provided for in the job classification, are concerning. They allow increasingly young educators to be hired, sometimes with no qualifications suited to organizational expectations, much less to the young people at Cité-des-Prairies described in this report.

26. Because of staffing shortages and a ministry request to integrate agency staff, hiring criteria were changed to admit more people.

27. Given hiring criteria and this particularly vulnerable population, educator training and coaching are seriously inadequate to provide quality service at Cité-des-Prairies (see discussion elsewhere in this report).

28. Educators do not belong to a professional order and therefore are not governed by the Professional Code.

29. Educators caught committing reprehensible acts against residents resign and go to work elsewhere with the same population.

30. Educators at the CIUSSS who had overly close relationships with young people, for whom the CIUSSS made substantiated reports, resigned; we have confirmation that some work in other organizations with similar populations.

31. We are told that, since December 1, with the establishment of Santé Québec, employee files will be centralized. Educators who would normally have been dismissed could still resign, but their disciplinary file would follow them to a subsequent employer. The disciplinary information must be included in the official employee file even if the employee resigns.

Probation

32. For educators on the recall list, the youth program management adviser oversees probation follow-up. The process in place is adequate and meets needs.

33. For educators holding positions within units, probation follow-up is entirely the responsibility of the unit manager.

34. Managers interviewed report that they sometimes have to confirm a problematic educator in their position because the end-of-probation deadline was missed.

Exit Interviews

35. The CIUSSS distributes a survey to departing employees to understand why they leave.

36. Participation in this survey over the last year was 17%.

37. The low participation rate does not provide an accurate picture on which to base adjustments or corrections.

38. Managers interviewed did not refer to the survey results when explaining the exodus from certain teams.

RECOMMENDATIONS — PSYCHOSOCIAL AND REHABILITATION AREAS

Training and Support

1. Establish an ongoing training program suited to the needs of young offenders, available and accessible to staff working with them.

2. Review existing training that no longer reflects leading practices and changing needs of young offenders (e.g., AAART).

3. Ensure the training program covers: (a) Youth Criminal Justice Act; (b) Youth Protection Act, especially reporting obligations and the multisectoral agreement; (c) offending profiles and how they evolve in relation to the educator's approach; (d) mental-health realities of residents; (e) co-transference, including erotic transference; (f) de-escalating violent behaviour; and (g) cross-cultural realities.

4. Provide mentoring for unit managers and external managers when they begin their roles or during periods of change requiring new skills.

5. Strengthen coaching: (a) have three residential-setting coaches; (b) extend coaching to 12 weeks to standardize support for internal and external staff and cover half the probation period.

6. Align the clinical activities specialist model with that of external clinical assistants to make these positions attractive.

7. Reorganize the clinical support structure by bringing these positions into a single team dedicated to clinical support and sharing a common mission. If appropriate, establish a community of practice responsible for consistency, complementarity and standardization of the approaches offered by coaches, clinical activities specialists and clinical assistants.

8. Make a team of consultants dedicated to Cité-des-Prairies available. Encourage their involvement in clinical processes concerning young people and staff. Recruit externally if needed.

9. Consider transferring experienced educators from other residential settings to provide rigorous support and role models for inexperienced new educators.

10. Formally replace unit managers during medium- and long-term absences.

11. Ensure that the operational local staffing officer (HR) continues to meet replacement needs effectively despite now handling all Cité-des-Prairies requests.

Practices

12. Revisit the code of ethics, dress code and security measures quarterly in each unit.

13. Include this initiative in directorate and unit action plans and document its implementation in team meeting minutes.

14. Display the code of ethics, dress code, service mission and values in units where staff can see them.

15. Involve researchers in program development and ensure programming conforms to the psychoeducational model.

16. When reprehensible behaviour occurs, systematically apply progressively escalating disciplinary measures.

17. Involve local advisers in managing employee files and inform directors (DJ-DPJ) when problematic situations raise questions or decisions are delayed.

Workplace Climate

18. The Youth Program Director and Director of Youth Protection–Provincial Director should promote existing protections against reprisals for disclosures of wrongdoing among teams.

19. Hold a staff mobilization activity, led by the Youth Program Director and Director of Youth Protection–Provincial Director, to redefine the vision, mission and values of the young offenders sector.

20. The two directors should visit teams to present the vision, mission, values and new arrangements in the young offenders sector, with implementation timelines, to prevent unacceptable situations from recurring and restore meaning to rehabilitation work.

21. Document in writing the reciprocal communication expectations agreed between the Youth Protection Directorate and the Youth Program Directorate.

22. Assess the functioning of young offender teams, internally and externally, every year (climate, safety, training, support, practices, expectations and concerns) and report to both directors.

Security

23. [REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

24. [REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

25. [REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

26. [REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

27. [REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

28. [REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

29. [REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

30. [REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

31. [REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

32. [REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

33. [REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

34. Establish a break room for independent intervention officers at La Relance.

35. [REDACTED IN ORIGINAL]

Decision-Making Process

36. Remind all Youth Criminal Justice Act teams and units of section 39 of the Youth Protection Act concerning the obligation to report.

37. Transfer external youth delegate teams under the Youth Criminal Justice Act to the hierarchical authority of the Director of Youth Protection–Provincial Director, together with the function associated with Protocol 5.

38. Forward reports prepared by the on-call service to the Youth Program Director and Director of Youth Protection–Provincial Director.

39. Forward all employee files that could put young people’s safety or development at risk to both directors.

40. Involve the Director of Youth Protection–Provincial Director in developing competency profiles for persons to whom she delegates authorizations and in selecting senior managers and coordinators.

RECOMMENDATIONS — HUMAN RESOURCES

Existing CIUSSS Process for Disciplinary and Administrative Files

1. Human resources employees assigned to support managers in disciplinary matters (for this function only) should report to the same service manager.

2. Pair local advisers with labour-relations personnel management officers to support managers in disciplinary decisions.

3. Pairings should reflect individual competencies, given some employees' lack of expertise.

4. Managers should be able to contact their local adviser and/or labour-relations officer to take a position or get answers about disciplinary files.

5. Add labour-relations personnel management officers to meet the needs of an organization with more than 21,000 employees; seven such officers are far too few.

6. Managers must be involved at every stage and in every decision in the disciplinary process.

7. All parties are accountable for disciplinary decisions. A manager uncomfortable with an HR recommendation should escalate the matter to their directorate and possibly the CEO.

8. For every file involving a young person, the relevant directorate must be informed immediately, and whether a report is required must be discussed if no report has yet been made.

9. Disciplinary decisions must take account of the Director of Youth Protection–Provincial Director's responsibilities toward young people, the CIUSSS's reputation and the message intended for teams and the public.

10. Reserve the mailbox for questions unrelated to disciplinary files.

11. More complex files must be handled at a consultation meeting with labour-relations experts, the local adviser, labour-relations officer and manager involved all present.

12. Set a specific time each week for consultation meetings on complex files attended by everyone involved.

13. Provide training to local advisers and labour-relations officers that addresses the Director of Youth Protection–Provincial Director's responsibilities, including the multisectoral agreement and Youth Protection Act, and the message that must be conveyed to teams.

14. Provide coaching to local advisers and labour-relations officers so they can prepare statements of facts that enable informed decisions.

15. Provide training to managers on the Director of Youth Protection–Provincial Director's responsibilities, including the multisectoral agreement and Youth Protection Act, and the message to be conveyed to teams.

16. The manager must always be present when statements of facts are taken from an employee.

17. An employee identified as problematic by a CIUSSS manager should not be transferred to another CIUSSS position unless both managers meet to address recent situations and plan corrective action.

18. When disciplinary files concern employees who belong to a professional order, the local adviser, labour-relations officer and manager should discuss whether a complaint to that order is appropriate.

Staffing, Requirements and Deployment of Educators; Lack of Professional-Order Membership

19. A court-record check is insufficient when hiring educators; a vulnerable-sector background check must be conducted.

20. Assess ways to prevent educators found at fault from moving from one institution to another, to protect children.

21. Ensure educators assigned to young offenders have at least some experience in other youth units, whether class 1 or 2. Otherwise, tailored training and coaching must be provided before they cover shifts or take a position in these units.

22. Beyond the existing orientation day, class 1 or 2 educators must receive minimum training before reporting to a unit with young offenders (see related section of this report).

23. Provide longer-term coaching for educators assigned to young offender units (see related section of this report).

Probation

24. Establish a mechanism to remind managers of the end-of-probation date for educators in their units.

Exit Interviews

25. The CIUSSS should assign a resource to conduct exit interviews in departments with alarming turnover rates so that necessary corrections can be made.

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