

Carrefour d'Intercultures helps newcomers adjust at Christmas-time

CIL assists recent immigrants in adjusting to life in Quebec and Laval



Musicians perform during the Carrefour d'Intercultures de Laval's Christmas and New Year's celebration held on Dec. 20 at the St. Joseph Community Centre in Chomedey.



Performers get into the spirit of the season at the St. Joseph Community Centre in Chomedey last month.

M MARTIN C. BARRY

For families and individuals newly-arrived in Quebec from nations all over the globe, the unwelcoming weather of winter isn't the only problem they come to know. Christmas and New Year's can also be times of great loneliness and confusion – especially for those new to our culture.

A joyful time

Each year, the Carrefour d'Intercultures de Laval hosts more than 250 newcomers and government-assisted refugees, including many children, at the St. Joseph Community Center on rue Pie-X in Chomedey. The joyful event allows them to celebrate their first Christmas in Quebec with others in similar circumstances.

Laval-Les Îles NDP MP François Pilon, who was one of the elected officials who took part in the celebration on Dec. 20, said in an interview with the Laval News that he knows all too well what recent immigrants to Quebec go through upon first arriving.

According to Pilon, his wife, Sonia, who immigrated to Quebec from Venezuela more than two decades ago after growing up in Lebanon, had initial difficulties adjusting to the culture of Quebec before she finally settled in. "It's not easy, but it's easier when there is a resource like the Carrefour d'Intercultures that they can count on," said Pilon.

Loneliness overcome

"It was her first Christmas after she arrived in September," he added, recounting her experience. "By December she found herself alone with her husband at the time and a young son, but nobody else in Canada she could count on. It is a situation that is particularly lonely this time of year, but one that no one needs to endure when assistance is available."

The general director of the Carrefour d'Intercultures de Laval, Denis Arvanitakis, was on hand to offer best wishes to all, thank staff and volunteers for organizing the event, and welcome the invited dignitaries, including Pilon, Commission scolaire de Laval president Louise Lortie and CSDL commissioner for Vimont Reynald Hawkins.

Helping new arrivals

Founded in 1990, the CIL is a non-profit organisation whose mission consists in greeting, assisting in the settlement and accompanying newly arrived immigrants, including government-assisted refugees, as well as members of visible minorities and cultural communities, in their integration into Quebec society.

It also aims to sensitize Quebec society to cultural diversity. The CIL plays a pioneering role in the management of diversity, intercultural dialogue and reconciliation, while respecting differences and promoting the common values of Quebec.

PHOTO: Martin C. Barry-Newsfirst



Among the elected officials attending the Carrefour d'Intercultures de Laval's Christmas and New Year's event were, from the left, Commission scolaire de Laval commissioner for Vimont Reynald Hawkins, Laval-Les Îles NDP MP François Pilon and Sonia, his wife.

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