

THE SPRINGBOARD: REPAIR SHOP FOR SCHOOL DROPOUTS

This is all about a private school, started through the initiative of two Brothers of the Christian Schools of Quebec. This school comes to the help of young people who have prematurely abandoned their regular school course, especially the first cycle of the Secondary school, but who want to make it up, either so that they can continue with the regular course or to more easily get employment which requires the completion of the first cycle.¹

We also accept youths who, during the pursuit of their courses in school, find some difficulties particularly in French, English, mathematics or the sciences. The latter take courses either at night or during the summer vacation.

I — The history

1 — Upon returning from Africa, two brothers noted the amazing phenomenon of some 50,000 young school "droupouts" each year, that is, youths who leave school prematurely during the first cycle.

2 — After seeking advice and after getting the authorization from the Superiors, in October 1981, they began giving private courses at first to two students. By the end of the year, 23 young people between 16 and 25 years of age were taking advantage of these courses.

3 — During the second year, we were helped by other confreres, then by some religious Sisters and by a Marist Brother. Some young people got interested in our service and spontaneously offered their collaboration, free of charge.

4 — At the time we are writing up this report, 26 October 1985, around 200 boys and girls have taken lessons with us.

A first Observation

We are aware that we are working on behalf of young people who can not participate normally in the development of their potentialities in scholastic life as it exists today.

What also encourages us is the testimonies furnished by the students themselves. We should like to cite a few here:

a) "Seeing that my course begins at 9 a.m., I have to get up early. Before, I used to get up at noontime because I used to go to bed at two or three in the morning. Now I feel better disposed".

b) Many have indicated that they found *confidence in themselves* once again because of the attention given to each one as a person, which is the way at Springboard.

c) Certain ones say that they have found answers to questions on religion and on life in the world today, even though no courses are given on these subjects.

d) One of them writes: "In order to work, I must have a calm atmosphere, and here I have found the atmosphere I need".

e) "I have found a moral support which I have not found elsewhere. I feel myself freer and more at ease with myself".

f) "I have confidence in my abilities, and with this help, I can progress in my classes and thus have a good future".

g) "Since coming here, I have been getting along better with my family".

h) "I have learned to work; now I have a method for working".

i) "Here, they take the time to explain the difficulties which we find, the reasons for our mistakes". (a student from the GEGEP).

These testimonies speak for themselves

II — An idea of the results achieved

- a) Many of our former students have proceeded to the GEGEP and even to the University.
- b) Some have re-enrolled at the polyvalent, either in the general course or in the vocational course.
- c) Three have taken the Secondary VI intensive course, and now are in the market for a job.
- d) Some are now attending the Boudralut school in Quebec which receives them beginning with Sec.

III.

e) Others have returned to work better equipped than they were before. Already some of our former students come to visit us.

III — The weak points of our organization

a) The young people who come from unfavorable environments or from difficult family situations are still at the mercy of the same milieu.

b) Many "dropout" again, for the same causes produce the same effects. Further, the offer of a little work, even at a reduced salary, attracts a certain number of them.

c) Often the fathers do not fulfill their role towards the boys. It is too often the mother who has to take the initiatives. At the beginning of last year, we had in our course six boys, and only one of them had a father living at home.

d) Also, if the two parents work outside of the home, the child is often left to himself; he does not get up in the morning and his homework is neglected.

e) If, upon leaving the classes, these youths again find the same gang which had an evil influence of them before, nothing has changed and their work is haphazardly done at home and the young man or woman come to day dream here in school.

f) *It is not easy* to find experienced teachers who will accept the work willingly, to be patient towards the youth whom life has misled but who are trying to make a comeback. We mentioned that we are being assisted by three religious Sisters of St. Louis of France and by four young people who are more advanced but unemployed. This week, a Marist Brother begins to give courses here in French.

g) Sometimes, we have grouped students of the same level: five, six, and even eleven students in the same course. However, experience has taught us the fact that they are not on the same level and that they do not work at the same speed at all. It is therefore evident that we ought to take them individually, or at the most, we could take two at a time. The students feel that they are better understood and their output is at least doubled.

IV — Financial aid

A question which is frequently asked is "Who supports this gratuitous service?" It is neither the State, nor the local school system. The Brothers' community supports us but we should like to strongly underline the fact that our *former students* have supported our service. They have offered money for the sake of less fortunate students and, only recently, they have made a big financial investment and they have worked willingly to assure us an adequate location. Probably a rather rare enough phenomenon in the annals of Associations: our students have endowed the Service as a *small school*. They devoted a number of days of work, going out to round up a few more students helping us find some new teachers of good will.

Conclusion

The Springboard is a humble organization in face of all those who need our help; but, as many confreres have affirmed, this work seems to fully correspond to the wishes of Saint John Baptist De La Salle. It is a great consolation for a retired Brother to be able to continue on for a few more years in a work which demands all his strength and which keeps him in the orbit of De La Salle and of Christ, up to the age of 70 and beyond.

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¹ In Quebec, the secondary course is divided into two cycles the same as elsewhere, but these are found in different schools and in different places. The first cycle is given in schools called "Polyvalent"; the two other years are taken in schools names GEGEP (Collège d'études generales et professionnelles) Schools of General Studies and Vocational Studies.