



# **Renaissance Montréal: A Case Study**

*by*

**William Ninacs, with the collaboration of  
Francine Gareau**

**September 2003**



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1600 Scott Street, Suite 620  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada  
K1Y 4N7  
Phone: (613) 729-3340  
Fax: (613) 729-3896  
E-mail: [caledon@caledoninst.org](mailto:caledon@caledoninst.org)  
Website: [www.caledoninst.org](http://www.caledoninst.org)

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## ***Introduction***

In Québec, community economic development initiatives often focus on an approach involving economic reintegration<sup>1</sup> in order to attain their objectives:

More precisely, economic reintegration is a practice that proposes a voluntary return to employment on the part of people who have been excluded. Economic reintegration does not hold the abolition of poverty to be its primary goal, but rather to combat the social exclusion to which too many individuals living in advanced industrialized societies fall victim. It is not in any way an admission of defeat before the fact that more and more individuals risk being affected by poverty but it is rather a particular effort made to give a chance to individuals to get control of their lives, and to escape from or avoid poverty. Economic reintegration aims among other things to allow excluded persons to regain some measure of dignity and exercise their citizenship.<sup>2</sup>

Depending on the case, activities involving economic reintegration usually respond to the pressures of supply and demand in the labour market.<sup>3</sup> Concretely, this means either the creation of new paid work spaces and the maintenance of existing jobs (supply) or the development of qualifications permitting access to paid work (demand) by means of personal development as well as the development of overall employability.

As an organization, Renaissance Montréal operates mainly on the level of demand since its original vocation is as a training business. However, its remarkable growth in recent years has led to the addition of a business section able to create permanent employment. It does not correspond to an activity of economic reintegration with respect to the supply of jobs since generally speaking socially excluded persons do not have access to them. Seen through a local development lens, these jobs are not in any way to be thought of as negligible. When considered with Renaissance's growing annual budget, it is obvious that the economic impact generated by Renaissance in those neighbourhoods where it is active is considerable. In addition, its sphere of activity – the field of the '3Rs': reduce, reuse, recycle – means that it plays a role as an actor in terms of sustainable development. The least that can be said is that Renaissance Montréal certainly has the wind in its sails... in its recycled sails at that!

As is the case for any company or organization, the success of Renaissance Montréal is not related to any one factor. Consequently, what is now emerging from its background is the idea that partnership – or in its particular case, partnerships, plural – may prove to be one of the keys to successful economic reintegration.

## ***Renaissance Montréal: A Community Enterprise***

### ***Background***

The story of Renaissance Montréal starts with another organization working on the frontlines of poverty, *Moisson Montréal*, the largest food bank in Canada. Created in 1984, *Moisson Montréal* collects more than 27 million pounds of food each year – 60 to 80 tonnes per day! – and supplies more than 200 community organizations in Montréal, Laval and the Montérégie region, which then redistribute the food to persons in need.

In 1988, the Board of *Moisson Montréal* began looking for ways to break the cycle of dependence and go further than just helping out with food. They wanted to find a long-term solution to the problem of poverty that would allow users of food aid organizations to return to the workplace and thus obtain greater autonomy. After searching for some time, contacts were established with Goodwill Industries in the United States and Ontario, since *Moisson Montréal* understood the collection of donations – the sector in which Goodwill was operating very well. Ideally, *Moisson Montréal* would have liked to set up an employment training centre at that time, one that was adapted to food aid organizations and based on the collection and sale of used consumer goods. Unfortunately, the project had to be put on hold for awhile because *Moisson Montréal* had to concentrate on its own consolidation at that time.

Yet the project did not completely disappear. Finally, in 1994, Renaissance Montréal came into being in the North-Central district of Montréal, thanks to a financial partnership among the provincial government (\$154,000), the federal government (\$80,000) and some private foundations (\$100,000). Renaissance also benefited from the expertise and support of *Moisson Montréal* and Goodwill Industries International. The following year, its first workplace – a store for the sorting and sale of used goods – opened its doors under the name *Fripe-Prix Renaissance*. Today, less than ten years later, Renaissance Montréal operates six *Fripe-Prix* stores across the island of Montréal, as well as a sorting centre which opened its doors in October 2000 and which is housed in the same premises as its ‘parent,’ *Moisson Montréal*.

### ***The ‘business’ aspect***

Renaissance Montréal collects used consumer goods from the general public, companies and diverse organizations: clothing, furniture, books, toys, sports articles and small electronic goods. It collects some six million pounds of used goods each year – the equivalent of 400,000 green garbage bags!

Renaissance Montréal uses different collection strategies and has a number of partners. For instance, twice-yearly collections are organized in conjunction with an awareness campaign centred

on environmental protection in collaboration with the *Société de transport de Montréal* and the *Régie intermunicipale de gestion des déchets* (Inter-Municipal Waste Management Board) on the island of Montréal. The general public as well as businesses are also solicited by phone and goods are collected from people's homes on fixed days according to the residential sector in which the donor lives. In addition, 100 donation boxes are installed outside certain public places, frequently outside Métro-Richelieu grocery stores. Collaboration with the Montréal School Board allows schools willing to participate to hold an annual activity in order to collect clothing. In 2001-02, 120 schools took part during the collection period and 24 tonnes of used clothing were rounded up. Finally, Renaissance has agreements with certain thrift shops and with organizations that hold bazaars in order to collect any surplus clothing. In short, one might wonder how Renaissance could manage to supply itself without its many partnerships.

In the beginning, goods collected were sorted in the stores. However, with increased volume and the assistance of a \$300,000 grant from the Québec Environment Ministry to help with donation depots and a sorting centre, all goods are now sent to the sorting centre in the Saint-Laurent district. This procedure allows better management of merchandise and means that more realistic inventories can be maintained. Today, the centre employs 24 people in permanent jobs and has a daily processing capacity of 21,000 pounds (thanks, among other things, to the installation of 400 feet of automated conveyor belts).

In fact, permanent jobs such as these are characteristic of a community enterprise rather than a training business. Training businesses are normally involved in the creation of 'transitory employment,'<sup>4</sup> where individuals in difficulty are able to have an authentic work experience accompanied by a personal and professional training program *on a temporary basis*. By contrast, a community enterprise usually positions itself to create permanent jobs.

A supply and transportation team coordinates collection strategies, whether they be systematic or one-off collections (special collections, bazaars, certain clothing banks), and plans all transportation, sorting and handling of goods. Once sorted, goods are shipped to one of the six *Fripe-Prix* stores and put up for sale to the general public at modest prices. Store personnel look after shelf stocking, product rotation and sales. In order to vary the products for sale, partnerships have been reached with other training businesses and collection agencies so that items such as rebuilt bicycles and recycled paint can be made available to Renaissance's customers.

For some time now, Renaissance Montréal has had an active export business going (a bit less than 10 percent of its current income). Approximately 30 percent of products that cannot be sold locally are used in this way. Huge bales of clothing and accessories are made up weighing more than 400 kilograms each! Renaissance has identified certain local buyers involved in the export of used consumer goods, in particular for winter clothing, and has had contacts with Eastern European and some North African countries. It also has organized trade missions to different West African countries, which has enabled it to conclude purchasing contracts for products, identify new partner-

ships and extend its knowledge of the market. “The export of used consumer goods is done as far as possible with partners who have social objectives and who are likely to encourage economic growth in less privileged populations.”<sup>5</sup> In fact, the Renaissance model might be set up by partners in some African or South American countries in the not too distant future, enabling certain entrepreneurial activities to be started in these countries. For textiles that cannot be reused, the organization is working to find new markets, as well as new partnerships, with a view to defibering or using some other process.

On the level of human resources, Renaissance Montréal has a team of 102 permanent employees specialized in some 40 different fields. Staff is split up into six main departments: 1) secretariat and advertising, 2) training, 3) human resources, 4) sales, 5) finance and 6) supply and transportation. With the exception of the first department, all are headed by managers under the supervision of the Executive Director. Renaissance offers training and professional development sessions to its employees in their respective fields.

### *Training businesses*

For Renaissance Montréal, any entrepreneurial steps must serve its social mission. It considers itself, above all, to be “a nonprofit organization founded in 1994 whose mission is the professional and social reintegration of people having difficulties joining the labour market and the promotion of a commitment by each individual to protect the environment.”<sup>6</sup> But it is the way Renaissance Montréal goes about attaining this objective of social and professional reintegration that qualifies it as a training business.

Training businesses are genuine enterprises, since they market the goods and services they produce, are faced with competition and need to remain financially viable. However, they must find ways of balancing the constraints inherent in any real business with “their basic mission of training people who are temporarily unable to cope with the reality of the labour market.”<sup>7</sup> They therefore struggle to find ingenious ways of supplying these people with technical, personal and social skills that will allow them to become able to hold a job and thereby create new social bonds for themselves.

In Québec, training businesses have been developed since the beginning of the 1980s in a variety of sectors such as food and food service, retail and wholesale concerns, culture, tourism, manufacturing (e.g., wood, metal, computing, bicycles, clothing) and various types of services (e.g., home help, printing, general mechanic, recycling). Their clientele vary with each organization’s mission, but they are always made up of people without employment who are, generally speaking, in difficulty – e.g., youth and adults with no fixed address, newly-arrived immigrants, single-parent mothers, young dropouts or offenders.



*Le Collectif des entreprises d'insertion du Québec* (Québec Training Business Collective) brings together training businesses throughout the province. Apart from representing and promoting the interests of its members, it offers services such as facilitation, training, accompaniment and counselling for the range of issues related to training businesses. As is the case with several of its members, the story of the Collective has been built on some remarkable partnerships. The Collective qualifies one of these as a sort of 'love story' – between an impressive number of collaborators coming from diverse backgrounds. For example, links woven in the early 1990s between the first Québec initiatives of this kind and training businesses in France meant that Québec was able to benefit from the French experience and, in particular cases, to avoid a good number of mistakes.

There was also the extraordinary partnership that started towards the middle of the 1990s between representatives of the nascent Collective and delegates from the Québec government. The interdepartmental task force on training businesses was made up of representatives of a dozen ministries and public organizations: Québec Correctional Services Department; the Secretariat of the Ministry of Finance; the Industrial Policy Department of the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Science and Technology; the Continuing Education Department of the Ministry of Education; the Planning and Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Health and Social Services; the Employment Integration Department of the Ministry of Income Security; the Secretariat for Regional Development; the Office of the Minister for Employment and Solidarity; the Québec Society for Labour Force Development; and the Secretariat for Canadian International Affairs. Imagine the challenge required getting a consensus! And what's more, on questions of financing! For example, the struggle by members of the Collective for the maintenance of a salary for participants rather than non-taxable benefits was a memorable one.

In March 1998, after several years of consultations and negotiations, the Québec Minister for Employment and Social Solidarity adopted the *Cadre de reconnaissance et de financement des entreprises d'insertion* (the Framework of Recognition and Financing for Training Businesses). In addition to setting out the precise steps leading to accreditation for a training business and the interim financing modalities for activities involving reintegration originating from the Fund to Combat Poverty, the Framework incorporates the seven criteria decided upon by members of the Collective in order for an organization to qualify as a training business:

- 1) a mission oriented towards social and professional reintegration of persons in situations of exclusion
- 2) the offer of a genuine work experience to persons in major difficulty, giving priority to those who have had a number of repeated failures and for whom existing resources are not adapted
- 3) a not-for-profit status, but at the same time an authentic enterprise capable of offering a genuine work experience that is significant to participants
- 4) a status for participants as 'paid workers' for a determined period, according to the labour standards in force in the particular sector of activity

- 5) a personalized accompaniment throughout the period of training and even afterwards
- 6) a global approach, centred on the needs of individuals and incorporating as much the personal and social aspects as the professional
- 7) the creation of partnerships with other players in the milieu.

Following the signature of the Canada-Québec Labour Market Development Implementation Agreement, by means of which the Québec government assumed full responsibility for the active employment measures funded from the Employment Insurance Account, the Québec Government created *Emploi-Québec* at the beginning of 1998. *Emploi-Québec* was also given the mandate of supporting the training businesses. This organization then established its own accreditation process (including a two-year probation period) and opted for the formula of a three-year service contract built around objectives with negotiated, measurable results in both quantitative and qualitative terms to meet the funding requirements of training businesses. In the contracts, consideration was given to the enterprise's mission, the characteristics of the participants and the socioeconomic situation of the region concerned.

Once accredited, a training business becomes a supplier of reintegration services for *Emploi-Québec* and, in exchange for services rendered, receives amounts allowing it to cover: 1) the costs associated to the salary status of participants as well as social benefits; 2) costs related to the remuneration of personnel who look after reintegration as well as social benefits; 3) operating expenses related to the reintegration services; 4) the cost of any basic training; and 5) the cost overrun engendered by the participants' lack of productivity. It follows that any expenses related to the enterprise's commercial activities must be borne by its own revenues. This includes salaries and related expenses of staff not involved in the reintegration process, raw materials, fixed assets and various equipment, and the diverse costs related to marketing and administration.

To date, 37 training businesses can be found in nine regions of Québec, 26 of which are accredited by *Emploi-Québec*, including, of course, Renaissance Montréal. Together, they train more than 2,500 people annually in some 66 different fields, employ 572 persons in permanent positions and generate nearly \$20 million annually within the Québec economy through the sale of their products and services.<sup>8</sup> In 2002, the *Fripe-Prix Renaissance* stores increased commercial revenues by 18.6 percent compared to the previous fiscal year, attaining \$3 million in sales. The organization's capacity for self-financing exceeded the 60 percent mark in 2001-02, "something not seen before in the short history of training businesses,"<sup>9</sup> according to Pierre Legault, Renaissance's Chief Executive Officer.

### *The 'training' aspect*

Renaissance Montréal offers persons who are experiencing difficulty entering the labour market an opportunity to acquire professional skills by means of training positions in one of the

following fields: retail sales, computing, shipping and transportation, telemarketing, janitorial or office work. The positions are temporary, lasting 26 weeks, but are full-time, meaning 35 hours per week. Each person hired participates in the training curriculum and is paid the legal minimum wage. He or she must meet the same performance standards as in the private sector.

### *The participants*

Positions are advertised in each of the six stores and contacts are established with Local Employment Centres (CLE), the *Carrefours Jeunesse Emploi* (CJE: youth employment centres) and several other organizations likely to have access to a clientele in need of these services. Recruitment and selection of participants is planned, organized and coordinated by the human resources department at Renaissance. Prospective participants must be unemployed, between ages 18 and 65, and eligible for income support programs according to CLE criteria. Renaissance has adopted a selection code for participants stipulating, among other things, that a candidate who is obviously employable, motivated and dynamic has no need of reintegration services and consequently will not find a place at Renaissance. The same is true for persons who are not likely to successfully follow a training curriculum due to severe personal difficulties (e.g., uncontrolled drug abuse problem or absence of motivation). The Québec Training Business Collective, of which Renaissance is a member, currently is holding discussions with a major foundation to obtain funding for a longer training path, possibly of two years, for people who have more serious problems with regard to developing their own employability.

The majority of those accepted as participants present one of the following profiles. They have no professional training or high school diploma; have been excluded from the labour market for more than two years; are young and want to acquire some work experience; or are immigrants who may have a high level of education but lack North American experience. There are also people who have mental health problems, a physical incapacity or other difficulties related to integration as well as individuals with low literacy levels. Problems of drug abuse and mental health must have been under control for at least two years and ex-prisoners must have been out of prison for at least one year.

Candidates who meet these requirements can participate in an information session during which they learn more about Renaissance's mission, eligibility criteria, the training process and the support they will receive during and after the training curriculum. After this meeting, candidates are invited to two interviews: the first with a social worker and the second with the supervisor of the appropriate employment sector. In both cases, the purpose is to verify the person's degree of motivation and seriousness and to confirm both interest and capacity for the available position.

*The training curriculum*

Participants begin the reintegration track with a four-week period of familiarization. A multidisciplinary team known as the 'reintegration team' follows participants during this period, evaluating their level of employability and developing a personalized training plan. Participants benefit from this period by becoming familiar with their individualized reintegration curriculum and attending a number of different workshops based around personal and social training – e.g., career orientation, self-knowledge, communication, conflict management, stress management and understanding the job market and employers.

The next 14 weeks are devoted more to theoretical and practical training in the chosen sector of activity. It is during this period that participants really begin to work within the business, supervised by the department's managerial staff. But the personal and social training continues as well with the focus on career orientation.

A final period of eight weeks is spent on employment consolidation and integration. Participants continue to acquire technical skills through their work as well as personal and social skills through ongoing training. At this point, for one day each week, and backed up by job orientation counsellors, candidates begin to actively seek work. Specific training sessions are offered, demonstrating various dynamic methods for seeking employment and producing a résumé. Towards the fifth month of the process, there is the possibility of trial employment in a company with which Renaissance has reached an agreement.

Once the six-month point has been reached, participants receive a certificate and letters of recommendation to employers. A thorough post-training follow-up, over a period lasting up to two years, is offered to those who complete the process. During this period, support, advice and assistance continue to be provided at regular intervals (one week, eight weeks, six months, one year and two years after the end of the process). Follow-up and support are also carried out with employers by measuring their degree of satisfaction and suggesting corrective measures if necessary.

In short, Renaissance Montréal, following the example of other Québec training businesses, offers a program that is part of an overall approach to combating poverty. The program takes into consideration the overall needs of participants, as much social as personal and professional. The results speak for themselves: a placement rate of 80 percent and, since 1994, more than 850 persons who have reintegrated into the workplace or returned to school.

*The training team*

The human resources behind the training curriculum at Renaissance Montréal are all grouped together within the reintegration team: social workers, job counsellors, career counsellors, the liaison

officer who works with employers, workplace trainer-educators and support staff. Although the liaison officer works to increase the awareness of potential employers about the mission of Renaissance, some employers now communicate directly with Renaissance without even having been solicited.

### ***Renaissance Montréal: An actor in community development***

Renaissance Montréal considers itself as an agent of revitalization within the community; in fact, the activities of its six stores have a quite significant social and economic impact. For example, the organization helped create permanent jobs in different lower-income areas of Montréal while increasing the buying power of low-income earners who are now able to obtain consumer goods at modest prices. These stores also constitute environments for social and professional reintegration for several dozen underprivileged individuals each year.

Renaissance Montréal also contributes to reinforcing the region's social fabric in a number of ways. For example, it has a seat on one of *Centraide du Grand Montréal's* ad hoc committees as well as on the executive committee of the *Chantier de l'économie sociale* (Social Economy Working Group). In another area, Renaissance has created links with a large number of actors on the local scene: with community groups (reference and follow-up of clientele, donations from thrift shops or bazaars); with local businesses (internships and hiring of graduates, collaboration on collection drives, donations of material, participation on the board); and with institutions (collaboration with schools, collaboration with the city on collection drives and applicant referrals from the CLEs).

Some of these partnerships help promote an increase in social capital – a bank of mutual obligations that arises between people and organizations in the same milieu and which is produced when people work together for the common good. Thus, bringing together people from different sectors on the board of Renaissance – 11 members elected at the Annual General Meeting coming mostly from the business sector, but also from the education realm, the media and the public sector, as well as the Executive Director – may have no market value for them, but this type of partnership does increase the quality of life of some of the weakest members in their community.

Renaissance Montréal also plays a role of some importance in the area of sustainable development, if only by virtue of the fact that it stops some four million pounds of used goods from being carted to the dump each year. However, its contribution goes further than that. For example, in April 2002 Renaissance launched an educational kit that aimed at encouraging schoolchildren and adults to reflect on the issue of textile recycling. Through various activities, the children were invited to discover the life cycle of used clothes and asked to be more open to other possibilities in which each individual act would count for something and would have repercussions on the environment. This tool, with its capacity for heightening awareness, allowed young people to demystify

(through games, reading and interaction in class) the useful steps in the life of clothing, from its origin to the point of recycling.

### ***Renaissance Montréal: A Goodwill enterprise***

Renaissance Montréal is also a member of the network of Goodwill Industries International. Founded in 1902 in Boston, Goodwill is a network of 207 community organizations around the world – in the United States, Canada and 22 other countries – that operate in the field of collecting and reselling donated clothing and household articles. These organizations have a common mission of helping people in difficulty overcome barriers that prevent them from finding employment. They offer social and professional training in one of 1,900 retail outlets operated by the network or by placing them in contractual positions in a variety of private companies or public institutions. At first glance, because of the services offered, these organizations often bear similarities to Québec training businesses and sometimes to adapted workplaces for persons with disabilities.

However, on the organizational level, the links between Goodwill Industries International and the members of its network are more like the rights accorded to a franchisee by a franchiser. Indeed, in the commercial arena, a franchise contract accords to a franchisee the right to operate under a company name or banner, using a brand and a type of commercial know-how within a specified territory reserved for that franchise. It also identifies the obligations of the franchisee to the franchiser. This is the case for Renaissance Montréal because, in the membership agreement signed with Goodwill Industries International, the use of the name ‘Goodwill’ has been granted and the entire province of Québec assigned as territory. In exchange, Renaissance Montréal is committed to paying an annual fee of several thousand dollars to Goodwill Industries International and has agreed not to alter its by-laws without approval from Goodwill. This agreement helps ensure that any changes conform to the aims, policies and values of the overall Goodwill network.

For Renaissance Montréal, permission to use Goodwill’s brand and logo is of lesser value than the access it receives to Goodwill’s experience on the commercial and organizational levels (e.g., organization of collections, advertising and personnel training) as well as that of intervention with persons excluded from the job market. Therefore, the link with Goodwill appears more as a business partnership – certain consulting services offered by Goodwill Industries International to its members must be paid for, others not – than the scrupulous reproduction of a pre-established model. A more in-depth examination would be required but, taking into account the specificities of the Québec model of training businesses, it is doubtful that Renaissance Montréal is, in any way, a copy of any Goodwill company, either American or Canadian.

## **Conclusion**

A senior manager in another training business described the desired effects of its actions as follows:

For young people, apart from impacts on the job market or going back to school when they were on welfare for the last two years, things like that, listen, you can talk as much as you like about qualitative aspects, you can talk about quality of life, about self-worth. The young people leaving here, they get a girlfriend, the first thing you know, they've got an apartment, they never had one before, they lived in boarding houses and half the time they would leave in the middle of the night because they had no money to pay the rent.<sup>10</sup>

The success of a training business cannot be measured just by its own survival or its financial returns, but rather by the economic and social integration of a part of its human resources. The way in which the mission of Renaissance Montréal has been set forth testifies to the fact that its 'business' aspect is subordinate to its social agenda. However, its economic survival is no less of a priority, because bankruptcy would lead to the closure of the entire enterprise and put an end to the reintegration component. In reality, in a training business, it isn't possible to choose between the 'business' aspect and the 'social intervention' aspect because, like two sides of a coin, they form one inseparable whole. This being said, putting emphasis on the social aspect is necessary so that economic considerations don't end up taking the upper hand, as is often the case when operating in a market economy.

On the other hand, approaching a training business primarily through its social aspect leads to the trap of reducing the 'business' operations to the simple management of a program. But the operations of an enterprise whose viability depends on its commercial transactions are very complex, since its management must oversee planning, organization and leadership, as well as managing the organization's human, material, financial and physical resources. It also must do this in a context of constantly evolving economic conditions. The training business must therefore not be confused with a simple employability development program, even though such development might be part of its objectives.

In fact, the mission of a training business is to fight against *social exclusion* even before poverty. It accomplishes this by preparing its participants for reintegration into existing jobs that fit their skill level. Such positions are often poorly paid and their working conditions may even be quite arduous. Nevertheless, jobs in sectors such as retail sales, shipping and transportation, telemarketing, janitorial and office work all have the merit of being fairly common and available in all regions. They therefore represent genuine opportunities for reintegration.

A recent study carried out on Renaissance Montréal criticized these types of jobs since "some of these positions do not offer very much potential for training and qualifications... and others do not allow for very much variety in the range of tasks to be accomplished and can rapidly become

routine and repetitive.”<sup>11</sup> The study also faults Renaissance Montréal for contributing “no additional social qualifications.”

Although the criticism concerning the available positions is objectively fair, the admonishment of Renaissance is much less so, because it seems to ignore the fact that Renaissance must support a reintegration curriculum that allows participants to occupy jobs found within its own sector of activities. Other training businesses may offer positions that are more highly qualified professionally, but the fact is that Renaissance operates in a sector where jobs require lower qualifications. In addition, training businesses aim to increase the worth of work as such, and this remains true even for positions that require few skills. As Goodwill likes to point out: “We believe that all work has dignity, and work adds to the dignity of individuals and their families.” Finally, as the author of this case study already has noted elsewhere: “In qualitative terms, the objective is to allow an individual to act in an autonomous fashion on his or her own socioeconomic destiny – to find another job or return to further studies, alter harmful behaviour, modify his or her environment.”<sup>12</sup> In fact, a good percentage of participants prefer a return to school at the end of their curriculum while others use their new job, with the continuing support of the training business, as a springboard towards other more attractive horizons.

The same study disapproves of Renaissance Montréal’s management methods which “fail to promote the participation of training personnel in the enterprise,”<sup>13</sup> considering that its hierarchical structure may prove “potentially disqualifying for the participants.”<sup>14</sup> Here as well, it seems that the role of a training business has not been clearly understood. In fact, a training business must reproduce as faithfully as possible the conditions found in traditional businesses, and it must do this on both management and working conditions levels. As a result, democratic participation, even though desirable in theory, does not really have a place in the reintegration curriculum since it tends to lead to exaggerated expectations on the part of future employees.

Obviously, there is nothing stopping Renaissance from having a more participative structure for its permanent staff, as favoured both by modern management techniques and by the values of an alternative economy. On this point, Pierre Legault notes that Renaissance regularly organizes meetings with its permanent staff where the agenda is open and where issues of common interest are freely discussed with management. The organization is currently in the process of fully revising its training program, using a highly innovative model developed by the Renaissance’s permanent staff, but that is not the issue. As stated above regarding the second characteristic of a training business, genuine work experience must be offered to participants and, up until now, very few private companies have an organizational structure which incorporates staff participation in decision-making processes.

These criticisms of Renaissance have been reviewed here simply to show that training businesses have a particular role to play from a poverty reduction perspective. They are part of a continuum of services, because the path of economic and social reintegration includes a number of



multidimensional steps which requires the development of partnerships at each level. For many people, training businesses constitute the portal not just to the labour market but to all of society, on the margins of which they had been heading until they took the decision to embark upon a structured pathway of reintegration.

This case study has emphasized the importance of developing partnerships in order to succeed with the process of reintegration. Yet there is still one that has not been named, and it is perhaps the most important of all the partners. It concerns the one that develops among the peer group taking part in the process – i.e., the participants themselves. A dynamic of mutual support begins to appear: Each person understands the other's difficulties and can empathize; they can begin to share helpful tactics they have picked up along with their improved know-how; and they can laugh together. At the same time, a certain amount of pressure is also present, because the various production lines require a degree of performance from each of their links. Going back and forth between support and the pressure of genuine work forges social relationships which, one hopes, might one day be transformed into true bonds of solidarity with other peers and other members of society. It is particularly on this level that the concept of a renaissance makes so much sense.

**Endnotes**

- 1 The expression “insertion par l’économique” has also been translated as “integration-through-work” in other works by the author, notably: Ninacs, W. A., and M. Toye. (2002). “Overview of Integration-through-Work Practices in Canada.” *Économie et Solidarités*, vol. 33, no. 1, pages 74-92.
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