

RELATIONS BETWEEN POLICE AND HOMELESS ARE IMPROVING

MONTREAL, Wednesday February 21, 2018 – The newly appointed police chief, **Martin Prud'homme**, and a score of police officers and SPVM employees took turns serving supper yesterday afternoon to more than **400 homeless people** at the Old Brewery Mission's St-Laurent Campus cafeteria (906 St-Laurent Blvd.). The event was part of an enhanced partnership between the two organizations, which began a year ago, to promote a better understanding among police regarding issues surrounding homelessness.

Since February 2017, the SPVM has been drawing on the expertise of the Mission to better educate its officers and adapt its responses to the realities of homelessness. So far, **240 new recruits to the SPVM** took part in complimentary training sessions provided by the Mission.

Topics covered in these sessions include:

- Overview of homelessness in Montreal, including available services and resources
- Understanding the issues surrounding homelessness, particularly mental health
- Ways to diffuse crisis situations involving someone who is homeless or mentally ill

Throughout the year, officers also took part in awareness initiatives and volunteer activities, like serving meals. In 2017, **51 uniformed police officers** volunteered their time to help serve meals to hundreds of homeless people at the Mission. Progress was monitored jointly through biannual meetings between leaders of the two organizations.

Matthew Pearce, President and CEO of the Old Brewery Mission, says these initiatives help create bridges between police and homeless people by offering them opportunities to interact in positive, non-conflictual contexts. "Changing law enforcement's perception of homeless people won't happen overnight, but we're seeing signs of improvement," he says. "Trust is being built as more and more officers feel comfortable stopping by our café and various service points to get to know the people who rely on our services; it's a step in the right direction and we will continue our efforts in 2018," Pearce continues.

Police chief **Martin Prud'homme** says only good things can come out of partnerships with community organizations like the Mission. "The Mission is a place where Montreal's most vulnerable people can get the help they need to turn their lives around," says Prud'homme. "It's important for the SPVM to build a rapport with homeless men and women, so we can

direct people to these critical resources that can help them overcome the issues that lead them to the street," he says.

Moving forward, the Mission will build upon its enhanced partnership with the SPVM to continue raising awareness of the issues surrounding homelessness through special workshops, hands-on activities and learning initiatives.

About the Old Brewery Mission

Founded in 1889, the Old Brewery Mission is the largest resource for homeless men in Quebec and for homeless women in Canada. The Mission offers an array of programs and services, among them emergency, housing, urban health and psychosocial support programs, and helps more than 4,000 homeless men and women rebuild their lives each year.

Website: www.oldbrewerymission.ca

Twitter: @missionOBM