

Meeting with the Senate Committee on Official Languages

Thursday, 6 October, 2016

Société Francophone de Victoria (SFV)

At the service of the community

1. **Who are we?**

Founded in 1941, the SFV provides services, programs and activities for the Francophone and Francophile community of Greater Victoria. We are not-for-profit business headed by a board of directors with nine members. Management, assisted by two employees, organizes and provides programs and services.

Our mission is to [translation] “promote, represent and defend the French language and Francophone culture in the Greater Victoria region by bringing the community together and creating institutions that respond to the needs and interests of its members.”

The SFV is funded at 45% by Heritage Canada and at 55% by provincial grants and employment services revenue.

2. **Who do we serve?**

The Francophone community in Victoria is multicultural. According to Statistics Canada (2011), there are over 7,000 people with French as a mother tongue and more than 30,000 people who speak French, representing 10% of the population of Greater Victoria (approximately 350,000 people).

Both official languages equals Canadian heritage

Interest in French is very strong in our region. In Victoria, 20% of students are enrolled in French immersion. These families need a Francophone space where they can cultivate and use their French.

Vibrant multicultural Francophonie

For example, at Victor-Brodeur school, there are more than 20 different nationalities. Several of these families speak more than three languages (Africa, Mauritius, Europe, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and the Middle East).

3. **What do we provide?**

a) Programs and activities

Family:

- Mini-Francophones: (0 to 4 years, babies and mommy or daddy) meeting and discussion;
- Bees: games and activities for 4 to 6-year-olds;
- Scouts: 7 to 12-year-olds;

- Cinema;
- Fantastic Thursdays: monthly cocktail
- Celebrations for everyone: Halloween, Christmas, St. Jean Baptiste, Canada Day.

Seniors:

- Various activities to bring people together, inform them and have fun;
 - Bridge, films, meals, outings and lectures.
- b) Employment services
- c) Francophonie festival: annual overview of the Francophonie
- d) Occasional projects: linguistic duality (murals and notebook)

4. Challenges and solutions

In general, the transfer of responsibilities from the federal to the provincial government decreases access to services in French for the Francophone community of Greater Victoria.

a) At the service level

HEALTH

- Absence of beds in extended care for Francophones;
- Absence of health services in French;
- Little information in French (e.g., Cancer Clinic and Life Lab have information in eight languages, but not in French);
- Absence of prenatal and pediatric services in French.

Suggested solutions

- Extended care: following the example of what is happening with the veterans' hospital (Broadmead), the federal government could help reserve a few beds for Francophones. This proximity would allow patients and their families to support each other and receive better care; and
- Financial or other encouragement to provide health services in French.

CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY

- 19% of the 60,000 students are enrolled in French immersion. Around 30 young people complete their secondary studies at Victor-Brodeur school each year;
- Once their secondary studies are complete, all of these young people have nowhere to use their French. There are very few post-secondary French courses;
- There are not enough services for young children. Assimilation starts at birth. If the parents do not find a French daycare or preschool, the child ends up in an Anglophone environment.

Suggested solutions

- Boost funding for universities and colleges that provide and develop programs in French; and

- Federal grant programs that help to develop activities in French for these young people.

b) At the infrastructure level

It is difficult to establish a permanent location, a location that is known by the community as the Francophonie centre of Victoria, a meeting place with a proud Francophone identity.

Suggested solutions

The grants received from Heritage Canada help to pay rent but not a mortgage. The rental rates increase every year. Renters remain at the mercy of landlords and the rental market.

Therefore, it would be logical to allow organizations to own their own facilities. The same money allows for permanence.

For example, VanCity Credit Union is mandated to help not-for-profit organizations become building owners because it believes that it is the only way to ensure their growth and longevity, so why not provide a program that helps organizations define their needs and support the funding of such an acquisition. The simple fact of being able to use the funds received to pay a mortgage would make a large difference without costing anything more.

Thank you for taking the time to come meet with us. We believe in a CANADA where both official languages are strong and recognized within a multiculturalism that respects all cultures.

Thank you!