

## Case Studies on Adult Learning

# Seniors' Parliament

### Contact Person

Marthe Vaillancourt, AQDR

1620, avenue de la Salle, suite 10  
Montréal, Québec H1V 2J8

Tel.: (418) 548-6870

E-mail: [martheav@videotron.ca](mailto:martheav@videotron.ca)

## ADULT LEARNING

Knowledge Centre

July 2009

The official website of the Seniors' Parliament<sup>1</sup> is found under the *Mission éducative* heading on the website of the National Assembly of Quebec<sup>2</sup>. Instituted immediately after the Year of the Senior in 2000, this parliament, which is much like the National Assembly, promotes the mobilization of seniors as part of a pleasant, innovative and constructive project.

The website states that the Seniors' Parliament was established through the cooperation of the:

- 1- National Assembly;
- 2- Amicale des anciens parlementaires du Québec;
- 3- Association québécoise de défense des droits des personnes retraitées et préretraitées (AQDR)<sup>3</sup>.

## **1- Program description**

### **1-1- Organization and general structure**

The National Assembly of Quebec has a working group that cooperates with its speaker to promote an educational mission among various community groups, including four youth parliaments for schoolchildren, students, youths and university students, and the Seniors' Parliament.

The Seniors' Parliament is also part of the AQDR's repertoire of activities. This association includes members from 45 regions of Quebec overseen by 11 members democratically elected for a two-year mandate at an annual general meeting.

These directors in turn choose the members of the executive council, including one chair, two vice-chairs, a treasurer and a secretary. Each regional chapter accredited by the national AQDR has a similar structure for its members, such as the AQDR de Montréal Nord, which has 701 members in 2009<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> La mission éducative de l'Assemblée nationale. Online: <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/FRA/education/parlementsages/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> National Assembly of Quebec. Online: <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> AQDR. Association québécoise de défense des droits des personnes retraitées et préretraitées. Online: <http://www.aqdr.org/>

<sup>4</sup> AQDR. Association québécoise de défense des droits des personnes retraitées et préretraitées. Online: [http://www.aqdr.org/site/montrealnord/dejeuner/dej\\_04\\_fev\\_09.pdf](http://www.aqdr.org/site/montrealnord/dejeuner/dej_04_fev_09.pdf)

The AQDR defines its official mission as the collective defense of the rights of retirees and preretirees, with a fundamental approach based on sociopolitical activities. According to its view of aging, the AQDR's positions are in line with the issues surrounding people aged 55 and older, namely pension plans, income, housing, safety, violence, ageism, social exclusion, health, home support and care, medication and transportation. In short, anything that may affect seniors on a daily basis.

### **1-2-Mission of the Seniors' Parliament**

The board of directors<sup>5</sup> states that the goal of the Seniors' Parliament is to:

1. Get seniors interested in how the National Assembly works;
2. Enable seniors to develop bills, follow their progress, take part in parliamentary committees and in debates in the House like real members;
3. Introduce bills to be voted on by actual members and ministers in order to develop their interest in seniors;
4. Develop seniors' skills and knowledge;
5. Get to know the reality of parliamentary work.

### **1 -3- Operation**

#### **1-3-1- Target population**

The Seniors' Parliament is made up of retired women and men from every region of Quebec who are appointed by the members of their regional AQDR chapters to draw attention to and set out their concerns and those of senior citizens.

The members of the Amicale des anciens parlementaires du Quebec introduce them to the steps in the legislative process, the role of the member and the work of the National Assembly.

---

<sup>5</sup> Marthe Vaillancourt (2009), vice-chair of the board of directors of the national AQDR. Le parlement des sages. Email communication, March 24, 2009

The board of directors indicates that the participants in the Seniors' Parliament are AQDR members or members of groups invited by the AQDR, and all of the seniors are interested in following the parliamentary sessions broadcast by the media.

Management also states that this truly unique project gets 115 participants involved in the democratic process of three parties designated as interventionist, autonomist or green, respectively. Each senior member must abide by the characteristics of his or her party during his or her own addresses. Seniors may participate for a second consecutive year, and the outgoing members of the Seniors' Parliament are replaced from among its members. The seniors are required to attend caucus meetings, draw up their addresses, discuss matters in parliamentary committees and often surprise the elected members with their analysis and convictions. The 115 participants in the Seniors' Parliament and AQDR members also inform their respective groups of what they have learned and of each group's achievements.

New bills are introduced every year. The member formations are replaced and the Seniors' Parliament assesses the participation of its members. The members of the National Assembly and of the group specializing in government training assess the participating members. The history and reports of each parliament are passed on at an AQDR General Meeting.

#### 1-3-2- Admission to the AQDR

Becoming an AQDR member means fighting ageism or discrimination based on age. The official website invites seniors to defend their rights and protect their privileges by stressing that "*the AQDR also involves using the older person's experience to serve society*".

Seniors should contact the nearest regional chapter to actively participate in improving the standard of living for Quebec seniors by becoming spokespeople for a clientele with multiple needs to be able to express themselves publicly. According to the AQDR, this

position in the field makes it possible to apply pressure on behalf of the community and to represent seniors before government authorities.

After paying the registration fees, the elected members must take part in every preparatory step for holding the Seniors' Parliament: election, drafting a bill, forming parliamentary groups, assigning roles, drafting addresses, and addresses in the House.

### 1-3-3- Seniors' Parliament process

The Seniors' Parliament website sets out several steps. From the official opening to assent to passed bills, the Parliament proceeds with swearing in the members and then the lieutenant-governor's opening address, the speeches of the premier and leader of the official opposition, followed by the introduction of bills and motions, the filing of petitions, and debates on the bills and petitions in the National Assembly chamber. There is a question period before the ministerial statements and consideration of the bills in parliamentary committee. Bills and their status may be consulted on the National Assembly website as they progress.

### **1-4- Funding**

Management states that the Seniors' Parliament operates on the contributions of the regional chapters, national AQDR and members of the National Assembly.

The Seniors' Parliament also receives support from the Fondation Jean-Charles-Bonenfant, whose mission is to financially support the National Assembly's educational activities. Every participant also receives a certificate signed by the Speaker of the National Assembly.

## **2- Statistics and achievements**

### **2-1- Partnership**

The Seniors' Parliament works in partnership with other seniors' groups from the association of former parliamentarians and youths from the Fondation Bonenfant, as well as National Assembly employees and the Assembly's training groups.

## **2-2- Achievements**

### **2-2-1-Leadership**

This initiative has a significant impact on and provides leadership for seniors who are now interested in the work of the National Assembly. The Seniors' Parliament sparks an interest at the community level because it shares its questions and concerns. The community is better able to follow debates in the National Assembly.

Socially, the Seniors' Parliament opens up interesting debates on the bills introduced in the National Assembly and creates a drive to take part in improving the standard of living of seniors outside the sphere of its members, or even among municipal elected representatives. Those taking part in the parliament work to strengthen ties with elected representatives at every level in order to develop their interest in seniors' issues. Management also stresses the contribution of the media, which always support the cause of seniors.

The Seniors' Parliament has logged many achievements since 2000, including the 2008 *Intergenerational Charter*<sup>6</sup>, which brought together four generations of participants aged 12 to 80 with a view to asserting the ambitions of the generations and the values that drive Quebec society<sup>7</sup>.

The official AQDR website sets out, starting on the first page, an overview of the issues on seniors' interests with each debate, bill introduction and story about the events. The many topics addressed deal with malnutrition among seniors in homes, fraud, health, scams and elder abuse. The website also indicates scheduled social events and socialization activities such as conferences, luncheon meetings, and regional or national meetings.

### **2-2-2- Training process**

---

<sup>6</sup>La Charte intergénérationnelle (2008). Online:  
[http://www.aqdr.org/general/general/charte\\_intergenerationnelle\\_2008.pdf](http://www.aqdr.org/general/general/charte_intergenerationnelle_2008.pdf)

7

The training takes place during the meetings of the various regional chapters. It is given in the form of conferences, discussion workshops and talks, but may also be held during the AQDR general meeting.

### 2-2-3- Challenges and future prospects

The challenges the Seniors' Parliament must face include overcoming seniors' defeatism, helping them to learn how to deliver an address without reading a text, to draft a bill and to be able to defend it. The Seniors' Parliament also has to ensure that members and participants actively take part in fighting passivity and ensuring the continuity of bills that are of interest to seniors. It also hopes to expand its network of partners and members. Management states that the AQDR wants to contact other seniors' groups for 2009, especially cultural communities, to improve participant training so that they can express themselves without a text and develop a realistic view of parliamentary work by staying in touch with elected representatives.