

# ANNUAL REPORT 2013

## LE MILIEU

Coopérative de Solidarité Créative



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## VISION

A welcoming environment that inspires empowered diverse communities through dialogue, creativity and sharing resources.

## MISSION

Le Milieu is a solidarity cooperative that offers a dynamic space open to all. We aim to cultivate personal and collective growth, active inclusive participation within the community, and sustainable living principles through art, food and dialogue.

## VALUES

Le Milieu believes that ...

1. "**Abundance** is a communal act, the joint creation of an incredibly complex ecology in which each part functions on behalf of the whole and, in return, is sustained by the whole. **Community not only creates abundance – community is abundance.** If we could learn that equation from the world of nature, the human world might be transformed." - Paul Rogat Loeb
2. **Art and food as tools** that, through making and sharing, keep individuals and communities healthy
3. **Sustainable** living principles hold individuals accountable to each other and the planet
4. **Dialogue** and creative expression bridge differences and create connections
5. Considering all voices, **collective decision making** and working together within the community encourages inclusivity.
6. **Accessible, open, and diverse spaces** foster respect and understanding.
7. A **generous spirit** and **open heart** cultivate **love and gratitude** within individuals and communities.

# COOP LE MILIEU ANNUAL REPORT 2013

2013 was an eventful and transformational year for Coop Le Milieu. The cooperative created new partnerships and collaborations in the realm of the arts, food appreciation and security, urban agriculture and dialogue; it hosted a record number of workshops and open studio sessions in its cafe-studio space; it renewed and improved its catering and cafe menus; and it expanded its participation as a social enterprise in the Exchange Economy.



## Coop members and volunteers

The coop's board decided that the orientation, needs, and capacities of Le Milieu as a social enterprise would be better promoted through a non-profit lens; Le Milieu opted to change its fiscal status to non-profit on April 16, 2013. Le Milieu was pleased to continue experiencing valuable contributions from its founding members, while also welcoming new members into its growing community. This created a magical blend of ideas and innovations, which have served to expand the services of the organization and to improve the atmosphere and functionality of the cafe-studio. The perfect *mélange* of skills and energy was reached, which resulted in a successfully run open studio and workshops, hosting large participatory community events, including three community art exhibitions and a week-long arts and food festival called "Eat your heART out" which was highlighted by the official launch of the coop's catering service, shadow puppetry, an art exhibition and several workshops and talks), two seasonal neighborhood celebratory gatherings celebrations, and a giant puppet parade.



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The cooperative also implemented a new goods and services pricing system in the cafe-studio that offered members, volunteers, and workshop facilitators advantageous prices on materials and food sold in the coop, as a way to honour their valuable contributions and encourage their continued participation, growth, and patronage. Coop Le Milieu reaped a successful harvest of new and dedicated volunteers through a fall recruitment potluck. By the end of 2013, the coop had 38 members - of which 27 voluntarily contributed their time, energy and ideas to help develop the coop in a variety of unique ways. Dedicated to its mission of supporting individual and community empowerment, Le Milieu continued to adopt exchange economy practices such as bartering, swapping, and skillshare workshops, as well as a 'cafe en attente' initiative that offers patrons a new and easy way to give back to their community by paying for an additional coffee for a future customer to enjoy.



## Staff

Acknowledging the need for processes that support the particular talents and needs of those who were committed to the organization, Le Milieu began a deep process of evaluating the way staff roles were determined and assigned, taking great care to match roles, tasks, personalities and interests with individuals who had the motivation, energy, and time to carry them out with enthusiasm and joy. While Le Milieu's promising future was rewarded by a Jeunes Volontaires grant for hiring three part-time employees (each working 20 hours/week, from January to June 2013) and Subventions Salariale grants through Emploi-Québec for two full-time employees (each working 40 hours/week, from July to December 2013), the organization continued working hard towards a sustainable balance between paid staff and volunteer contributions, all the while finding innovative ways to create paid jobs for its members.

## Board

For the 2013 year, the board was composed of:

Afra Tucker – President

Rachel Chainey – Vice-President

Olga Perju – Secretary

Kat Ying – Treasurer

Janet Lumb and Pascale André – Observers

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The governance structure of the organization was reconfigured at the December General Meeting to accommodate a larger Community Board (12 people) with meetings every other month, and whose members were empowered to appoint a smaller Executive Board (5 people), mandated to meet twice a month and make the majority of the everyday decisions mandated by the community Board and, ultimately, the cooperative members. The purpose of this new structure was to engage more voices in the decision-making process through a process whereby Board members are vetted and voted in, while preserving the efficiency and flexibility required for effective decision-making.

Another important initiative that was introduced at the end of 2013 was that both Boards began working on and articulating a mission and vision statement that aimed to communicate how Coop Le Milieu manifests its presence as a social enterprise, as well as where the organization sees itself in the forthcoming decade. This process of discernment continued to unfold and will be presented publicly in 2014.

## **Using the cafe-studio space**

The categories of open studio and business hour workshops, outside business hours community events, outside business hours workshops, events, and other rentals now allow the organization to decide what is fair and advantageous in accordance with its own mandate and operations while remaining open to an assortment of opportunities and people who bring in new energy and creativity. In 2013 Le Milieu made enormous headway determining generous but firm principles by which to organize and coordinate use of its studio space to benefit studio participants and the cooperative organization alike.

The studio hosted 1372 open studio hours, 207 skillshare and dialogue workshops organized by community members, and 19 special events (exhibitions, shows, launches and celebrations) that gathered and connected various members of its community/ies, achieving the goal of the organization to welcome a greater diversity of participation and ideas through combining different materialities, practices, and interests. As a result of the increase in traffic, activity, and interest, Le Milieu has started the process of inquiry and research on the viability of relocating to a bigger nearby space to welcome even more participants in the years to come.



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In 2013, the studio-café's opening hours were Wednesdays to Saturdays, from 1:00 to 8:00pm, and were generally run by one paid staff coordinating, and one volunteer assistant. Overall, the coop welcomed 3540 visiting participants throughout the year.

## **An overview of the clientele of 2013:**

### **Gender:**

65% identifying as women                      35% identifying as men

### **Age:**

0-18 years old: 5%                      19-35 years old: 45%                      36-50 years old: 15%  
51-65 years old: 30%                      65 years old and +: 5%

### **Language primarily spoken:**

French: 50%                      English 40%                      Other: 10%

### **Neighbourhood of residence:**

Centre-Sud, Plateau, Hochelaga-Maisonneuve: 55%  
Other Montreal neighborhoods: 35%                      Out of town visitors: 10%

## **Kitchen**

In 2013, the Coop's Eco-Conscious Kitchen worked hard on developing and refining its menu, which offered a great variety of wholesome and creative vegetarian and vegan hot meals, hors d'oeuvres and dessert options. Local and organic ingredients were favoured, and meals were served almost entirely in reusable or compostable containers that were delivered by bike in the warmer months, to a constantly expanding catering clientele.

One paid employee managed the coordination and ran the catering service, with help from one to two volunteers (depending on the workload of each order). In total, 130 orders of 3480 catered meals, to 28 different groups and organizations were served, including local colleges, universities, private events and neighborhood community organizations.



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## Community and clientele

Le Milieu continued to work with its original catering and café-studio clientele, while broadening its reach as a result of new partnerships that emerged primarily from word of mouth marketing. In the realm of arts and community-building, some of its most successful collaborations in 2013 included: Concordia University's University of the Streets Cafe, Green Chinatown, Éco-Quartier St-Jacques, Sentier Urbain, La Ruche d'Art, Rue Publique, 100 en 1 jour Montréal, Paysage Solidaire, and Jardins sans Frontières. Its notoriety and visibility also grew exponentially through its virtual presence, primarily on Facebook.

The cooperative also engaged in a fair bit of reflection about its community/ies over the course of the 2013-year. Learning equally from its successes and failures, the organization welcomed feedback from all of its interactions and put time and effort into evaluating attitudes and policies pertaining to client-staff-community relations. Inquiry, self-assessment, and trial and error have all played a role in helping Le Milieu embrace opportunities to understand how individuals and groups can be better supported by the cooperative itself.



## Media coverage:

Coop Le Milieu was featured in *Le Journal de Montréal* (April 1<sup>st</sup> 2013), in a promotional video for *100 in 1 Day Montréal* (September 2013), *The Gazette* (November 26, 2013), on *CBC Radio One* (December 11, 2013), as well as frequently on the "Radical Montreal" blog.

Le Milieu was also invited to present as an "inspiring, pioneering organization" at *Le Forum des Artisans du Changement* in Québec City on November 10, 2013.



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## **Budget**

Le Milieu operated with a total revenue of \$82 243, of which \$43 676 (53%) was self-generated by the Coop through:

Catering: \$27 652

and Studio and Café sales: \$16 024

The remainder \$38 567 (47%) was accumulated in the form of grants:

\$8000 from Jeunes Volontaires (Emploi-Québec)

\$14 067 in Subvention Salariales (Emploi-Québec)

\$13 500 for equipment from Le Fonds de Développement en Économie Sociale

\$3000 from Caisse Desjardins D'Économie Solidaire for an emerging girls' urban agriculture project.

Le Milieu's expenses for 2013 totaled to \$77 547, including:

Rent, business tax and utilities: \$11 287

Human Resources: \$36 783

Durable equipment purchases: \$10 000

Regular operating expenses for studio, café and kitchen: \$16 477

The Coop ended the year 2013 with a net profit of \$4 695, to be entirely reinvested in the development of the cooperative in 2014.

## **Moving forward**

For 2014, one of Coop Le Milieu's most significant plans is to take the next steps towards achieving its goal of relocating to a larger space, on less residential street of the Centre-Sud neighbourhood, which will include an on-site professional kitchen and the development of a Fab Lab in the space.

Additionally, Le Milieu plans to:

- Continue improving its collective management and environmental sustainability practices,
- Develop the up-cycling store and the boutique wall,
- Kick-off the first cohort of "Girls Can Grow", an urban gardening camp for girls aged 8-16,
- Organize more food-related events, such as food security talks and cooking workshops
- Hire interns from a variety of colleges and universities,
- Develop a paid catering chef position,
- Hold more exchange economy activities such as repair cafes, "gratifierias", facilitate service swaps between citizens, and open a tool library,
- Collaborate more intentionally with other community art spaces in Montreal through sharing resources, skills and organizing joint events
- Find innovative ways to generate more autonomous revenue and secure recurring grants
- Expand the coop's network by presenting at conferences, speaking to media and connecting and representing our local community.