

This climate led to the establishment in 1975 of the first support centre for rape victims in Montreal. In quick succession, six centres opened across the province. These centres were established by women who had decided to find ways of meeting their own needs and to demand social and legal changes. Today, some fifteen sexual assault support and crisis centres (perhaps known by different names, but all serving the same purpose) are in operation in Quebec.

Our daily experiences and approach to the problem

Support centres are established when a group of women from a particular region or city decide to "deal with" intolerable situations in which women are subjected to violence. A support centre is a non-profit organization made up of an independent group of women. Services are provided by paid workers, activists and supporters of women's causes.

Our objective is to help the many women who have been sexually assaulted. To achieve this aim, we have instituted direct support services such as:

- an emergency telephone hotline: 24 hours per day, 7 days per week;
- follow-up: personal meetings to help victims deal with the aftermath of the assault;
- information and help with the various procedures (hospital, police, court, etc...)
- groups meetings to give women an opportunity to share their experiences with others and discuss the progress they have made.

We supply far more than mere information or support. Our services must provide a specific reference framework if we are to achieve our objectives. They must help women to understand, once the crisis has eased, that sexual assaults are not isolated acts to which they may have more or less contributed, but rather a manifestation of our cultural behaviours. Failure to take this fact into account means failure to understand the very nature of sexual assaults.