



TOWNSHIPERS

MAGAZINE



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Place
Jeunes
Eastern
Townships



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COVER IMAGE: Suzanne Lepage, Pond hockey in Compton.

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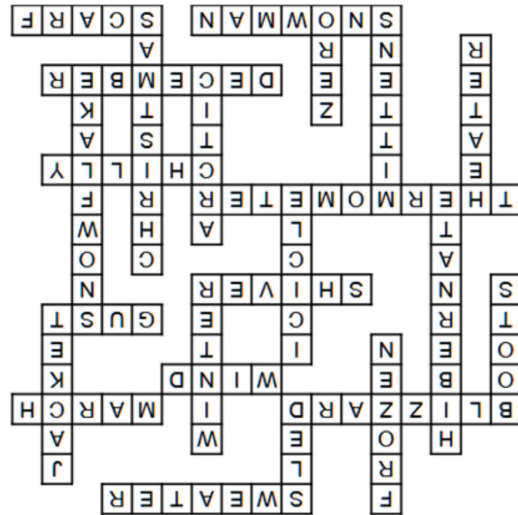
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Spoiler alert!

Welcome to our Townshippers' Magazine

In this winter edition, you will read about voices from the past, the present, and the future.



Last summer, as I looked through some past editions of Townshippers and Crossroads magazines, and read testimonials that my colleague, Allyson Sirois, had collected during her stint as a summer student in 2024, a common theme appeared: languages, history and finding your place in an Eastern Townships that is very English in some areas and very French in others.

I began to think about my upbringing. My father wanted us to identify as French and speak and write la langue de Molière perfectly, so he insisted that we attend French elementary and high school, even English CEGEP was not up for discussion either, now that I think about it! My mom, from Vancouver, managed to speak a broken French, but was certainly always more comfortable in English. At home, we just switched back and forth between the two. This is when it dawned on me that I wanted this edition to be “Voices of the Townships.” Was I the only one? Did others feel torn between French and English? What were their stories? Where did they fit in?

As I investigated more, spoke to people, heard their stories and received their articles, I was pleasantly surprised to read that many people sort of bounce between two languages, or make do with where they fit, depending on where they are and who they are with.. and it just seems to work for them. Happy reading! Suzanne

Message from our President



“Voices of the Townships” is a fitting theme for this edition of Townshippers' Magazine. Our region has long been recognized as a model of cooperation and collaboration, regardless of language, background, or origin. This history of working side by side is one of our greatest strengths, and it guides how we face new challenges together.

In recent months, the proposal for a Quebec Constitution, Bill 1, has become a focal point of concern for many across Quebec, including Townshippers. This legislation not only affects the English-speaking community; it has implications for anyone who cares about transparent government, the ability to question decisions, and the freedom to make their voices heard.

When mechanisms for challenge and accountability are weakened, it is not just one group that loses ground, but the democratic fabric that binds all communities.

Townshippers' Association's brief on Bill 1 reflects these concerns and underscores what is at stake: the right to participate fully in public life, advocate for oneself, and speak up when decisions do not reflect the realities of citizens. These are not abstract principles. They influence access to services, the protection of minority rights, and the confidence people have that their voices matter. For a region that is recognized as having been built on collaboration and mutual respect, the idea of limiting dialogue and recourse runs counter to who we are.

At the same time, this is also a moment of remarkable growth and renewal for Townshippers' Association. The organization is experiencing an unprecedented period of development. This momentum is no accident. It is the result of a deeply committed Board of Directors who generously give their time, expertise, and energy to guide our mission. It is driven by our Executive Director, Denis Kotsoros, whose leadership has helped expand our reach, strengthen our partnerships, and amplify the voices of English-speaking Townshippers' within the broader conversation.

It is the incredible Townshippers' team who works every day to support individuals, families, and organizations across the Eastern Townships, turning vision into concrete programs and services. Volunteers, partners, and supporters add their own voices to these efforts, ensuring that the Association remains rooted in community and responsive to local needs. To each of you, a sincere "Thanks." Your dedication makes it possible for Townshippers' Association not only to speak, but to be heard.

Together, we reaffirm a simple but powerful message: the voices of the Townships will continue to express concern, celebrate, build bridges, and shape a future where cooperation, collaboration, and respect remain at the heart of our community.

Sincerely, Don Warnholtz

Message from our Executive Director



As I reflect on the operational strides we have made over the last quarter, I am filled with a quiet sense of pride in our collective progress. Townshippers' Association is evolving, not for the sake of growth itself, but to ensure we remain a steadfast resource for the English-speaking community across the Eastern Townships.

Our primary goal has been to bridge the gap between available services and the people who need them. To this end, we have significantly expanded our physical presence to better approach our communities. With new offices now established in Magog, Stanstead, Cowansville, and on Queen Street in Lennoxville, we are more accessible than ever. These spaces are not just administrative hubs; they are open doors to conversation and support.

Program-wise, we are moving quickly to address current realities. Recognizing the challenges faced by our younger generation, we have expanded our Youth Mental Health initiatives with a sharpened focus on supporting students within our high schools. Furthermore, looking ahead to February, we are eager to launch our new Employability Services. This initiative will be instrumental in helping community members confidently navigate the changing job market.

Our work is most effective when it is collaborative. Our outreach programs in Waterloo, Haut-Saint-François, Coaticook, and Lennoxville are thriving. Rather than imposing top-down solutions, we are successfully supporting local organizations to address their communities' specific needs.

Underlining all these initiatives is our greatest asset: our people. Our staff has grown to include over 20 young professionals who are deeply committed to fulfilling our goals. They are representative of our local communities and of the Eastern Townships as a whole. Without the energy and dedication of these professionals, we would not be the organization that we are today, one that represents a resilient and vibrant community. It is a privilege to build the infrastructure that supports it.

Sincerely, Denis Kotsoros

Townshippers' Staff

Townshippers' teams often collaborate to accomplish our goals. This year, our Association welcomed a new team to our ranks: Workforce Employment and Economic Development!



WORKFORCE EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

GERALDINE LEMONDE, SENIOR PROJECT COORDINATOR; **GABRIELLE POIRIER**, CAREER COUNSELOR; **KERWINS SAINT-JEAN**, PROJECT COORDINATOR; **ABBEY DRISCOLL**, PLACE AUX JEUNES EASTERN TOWNSHIPS AGENT; **JENNIFER HUMBLET**, PROGRAM MANAGER.
ABSENT FROM THE PHOTO: **TANYA RHODES**, CAREER COUNSELOR.

ADMINISTRATION & ACCOUNTING

FADÉLA HAMOU, SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR; **DENIS KOTSOROS**, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & PRIVACY OFFICER; **PHUONG NGUYEN**, HUMAN RESOURCES AND PAYROLL MANAGER; **COREY CUTTING**, IT COORDINATOR (CONTRACTOR).



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ALLYSON SIROIS, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR;
NATHANIEL LAMONT, PROGRAM MANAGER; **SIMONE GOLOVEN**,
PROGRAM COORDINATOR.



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JAYME MARROTTE.
ABSENT FROM THE PHOTO: **MURRAY MCDONALD**, **ENZO EVANGELISTI**, **PETER STARR**, **CHERYL GOSSELIN**.

Who are you? We asked a few staff and board members.

Cheryl Gosselin, Board member since 2005, past Vice-President 2020-2024
Born and raised in Sherbrooke



I've lived in the Townships my entire life; I was born here. I consider myself bilingual and bicultural [...] My father is French Canadian, English was my mother tongue because my mom is English. It was always a mixture of the two. When I was ready for school, my father wanted me to attend a French school, so I went to St. Antoine for kindergarten and grade one. I knew more French than English at that time and apparently had trouble talking to my mother because I didn't know enough English. After that, I attended Lennoxville Elementary in English, so I kind of lost some of my French. I still spoke it and culturally, I was closer to my father's family because my mother's family had moved away. So yes, I guess you could say that I consider myself more Québécois than Canadian.

Michelle Lepitre, Director of Communications
Born in Sherbrooke and raised in the Cookshire area

I am an English speaker from the Eastern Townships, born and raised here. I was born in Sherbrooke and lived most of my life in the Haut-Saint-Francois, which is a little MRC down the road, around Cookshire, East Angus area. Both of my parents are native English speakers, but on my father's side, there is a French connection. My great-grandfather was a francophone who married an English American and the English took over, I guess. So that's why I have a French name, but within our family circles, we've never spoken French, always English.



Denis Kotsoros, Executive Director
Born and raised in Montréal; moved to Ste-Étienne-de-Bolton in 2022



When I tell someone in Saint-Etienne that I work for Townshippers' Association, they don't shy away but instead want to sit down and talk. [...] The Townships teach us, and we can teach the rest of the province and country, that a harmonious relationship based on mutual respect and neighbourliness is possible. Coming from Montréal, I'm enriched by this new experience.

(Interviewer: Do you identify as an English speaker or a French speaker?) Neither. I don't define myself by language because then I would have to include Greek, and that just gets complicated. There are times when I am in the office, sitting here, having a conversation in English, then switching to French, and then my mother calls me, and I'm speaking in Greek. I go home with a headache. I am equally a Canadian and a Quebecer. I am of Greek heritage. I am proud of what I've done in my life. I've competed for Canada. I've represented

Canada, Quebec, and the Greek culture here in Quebec. I don't define myself as a French speaker or an English speaker; I define myself as a person who wants to make a change in the community.

Simone Goloven, ERCC Program Coordinator
Born in the U.S., raised in France, a Townshipper since 2013

I left the U.S. for France when I was eight and didn't speak a word of French, but learned through total immersion (school, TV, friends, etc.). My grandfather even made my sister and I write French *dictées* every morning to practice our spelling and grammar. Years later, I moved to Quebec for university and realized it was the perfect mix of both my languages and cultures. Over time, my accent became a blend of everywhere I've lived. In France, people often don't believe I'm French because my accent doesn't fit in a box, but in Quebec, they say I sound French. It really used to bother me, but now I'm proud of my 'Simone' accent. Language has shaped who I am, and I'm most comfortable in English but feel most myself when I can speak *franglais*. It's a mix of all the places I've called home, and that makes it uniquely mine.



Melanie Thompson, Vice-President
Born and raised in Cookshire, a proud bilingual Townshipper



I am a proud Townshipper. I was born and raised in the Townships, and I have chosen to stay here to raise my family. I am bilingual. I am privileged to say that that I am a well-balanced Townshipper with a mix and match of French and English cultures. I am proud to say it today, but growing up this was a little more complex for me.

At home, we spoke French most of the time. My dad is a Québécois français, and my mother, American (she is now Canadian and American). I attended English elementary school and French high school. Younger, I had the feeling that I had to pick, I was either French or English. My English friends called me a French Frog and my French friends said I was une *tête carrée*. It was only later in life that I realized that I did not have to choose because I AM BOTH! I am fortunate to be an active member of both the French and English communities.

In my opinion, this is what defines me as a Townshipper.

In the Townships, the French and the English coexist and that's why we call ourselves Townshippers. I have the pleasure of embracing the best traditions. And I now tell my children how lucky they are to be Townshippers and that they are French and English; they do not have to choose just one.

Allyson Sirois, Community Development Coordinator
Born and raised in Rimouski, a Townshipper since 2019

I arrived in Lennoxville as a Francophone who didn't speak English very well. Fresh out of Université de Sherbrooke and honestly, terrified of making mistakes. But people welcomed me so openly that I never felt judged for 'messing up' in English. And when I switched to French, everyone made an effort to follow my lead.

Experiences like the recent Open Forum community event in Lennoxville reminded me how special this region is... a place where bilingual conversations flow naturally and people connect without allowing language to be a barrier.

Today, I don't really see myself as Franco or Anglo, I'm proudly Frenglish. That's why I love working at Townshippers'. I get to talk to my coworkers in a mix of French and English, sometimes in the same sentence, and it just works. Living here taught me that it's not about speaking perfectly; it's about being understood, listening, and creating connections that go beyond languages.



From Brussels, Belgium to Townshippers!

By Lara Beaupère, Outreach & Events Coordinator
Born & raised in Brussels, Belgium. Newly arrived in Sherbrooke

I was born in Brussels, Belgium, and lived there all my life. My family—as Belgian as can be—are all native French speakers, some even speak Dutch at times, other times, English. Growing up, I learned Dutch and English in school, but I always had more affinity for English; maybe it was its international aspect, the idea that it could allow me to travel and communicate with more people. I'm glad I stuck with it.



Coming from a trilingual country (French, Dutch and German!), it was easy for me to understand the duality present in Quebec, the different visions, the shared history and the cultural schism. This is also what drove my family and I to the Townships: to be part of a multicultural environment, discover the shared heritage, and raise my child with this background.

Of course, the landscape of the area was a no-brainer. I had already visited Quebec six times in the past and fell in love with the nature, the colours, the open spaces. After three decades in Brussels, I needed a change, more space, a place to grow and to embrace a new culture.



I can only hope that my child, born in Belgium but raised here, will understand the opportunity he has to embrace several cultures, to create his own version of what it means to him, and then share it with the world.

Working for Townshippers' Association was the logical path to follow. In the past, I worked for charities, so it was important for me to continue down this path in my "new" life. Being part of an organization that assists others, helps a minority, will be my new challenge, and I'm eager to use my experience of growing up in a multilingual environment!

Quebecers have a reputation for being welcoming and warm people... Obviously, Townshippers go even further. I've never felt more welcome than I do here.

On the fence

By Suzanne Lepage, Community Information Agent
Born and raised in Montréal; moved to Compton in 2007

Whether I am labeled French or English depends on who I am with and what setting I am in... sometimes, I consider myself (or am considered by others) to be English and other times, I am French. I was born and raised in Montréal. My father was from a small French-speaking town in Saskatchewan and my mother, from Vancouver. My brothers and I were raised in both languages; we only ever spoke English to my mom and French to my father. Since my dad wanted us to learn French grammar, we all went to French school until university.

My mother tongue is English but depending on the context and group of people I am with, I am either the token English (aka: *tête carrée*) or the token French (aka: the Frog). Some say I have an English accent when I speak French, but I am proud of my heritage, and I love to take people by surprise by switching between the two languages when they least expect it!

When I became a parent, I vowed to give my kids the gift of bilingualism, because let's face it, it's one of the few free things I could give them. When my oldest started to speak, French came out of her mouth, so I just followed her cue and from then on, spoke mostly in French. Much to my mom's dismay at the time, her grandkids had trouble understanding when *Mamie in Montréal* spoke to them in English; on the flip side, *Papie à Montréal* was thrilled!

As my kids reached grade six, they each participated in an intensive English program where from September to December, they were taught only in English; from then on, it clicked. Today, my girls are perfectly bilingual, and my boys, well although they do not speak English unless it is required, they understand perfectly and are more than capable of communicating in English.



Recently, I was in line at the grocery store with one of my daughters and the woman ahead of us turned and said: "I cannot believe how effortlessly you both switch between English and French." I smiled, laughed, and to be honest, had not even realized that we were doing this... I felt so happy inside. I thought of my parents... they would be thrilled to know that my kids would be able to understand *Papie and Mamie*.

Living In-Between

By Jennifer Bauer, Projects Coordinator at Mental Health Estrie

Sometimes I tell people I am a first-generation Canadian, born to European parents. No, I do not speak German or Italian, though the question inevitably comes. At other times, I share that French is my first language, the one that has shaped most of my childhood. There are also moments when I lean into my bilingualism. Most of my studies were in English, and I now work for an organization serving the English-speaking community. With family and friends, I speak Frenglish, and that's where I feel the most at home; mixing and matching words, yet everyone still understands one another.

Each version is true. Each one captures a part of me. But none of them tells the whole story. I've come to realize that I tend to share the parts of me that will most easily build a bridge with others. I am not trying to create waves or discomfort; I am searching for connection and belonging, which is easier said than done.

I am proud of who I am, where I am from, and the languages I speak; however, I have never quite felt like I fit in. Living in Quebec my entire life, I know I don't belong to either the French or English-speaking communities; I reside somewhere in between. It's a strange kind of isolation when you find yourself sitting outside looking in because you show up differently based on your history, upbringing, language, values, beliefs, and experiences.



This sense of not quite fitting in has also meant standing at the edges, never fully grasping what certain individuals and communities have endured over generations, despite having lived alongside them for decades. I have not experienced their hardships nor shared their sense of togetherness. Yet it's exactly this middle position that has kept me curious and open-minded. It's made me willing to connect with and learn from anyone, no matter who they are, where they come from, what language they speak, or how they choose to be in the world.

I may never fully belong to a single language or community, and I am learning to accept that. Above all, I am grateful to my parents for choosing the Eastern Townships as their home and for giving me the gift of two languages. My in-between, I hope, will become something more solid and grounded for my children as they learn where and how they belong in this world.



Mental
Health
Estrie

A non-profit, community organization committed to helping English-speaking families of Estrie and surrounding area to manage the impact of mental illness.

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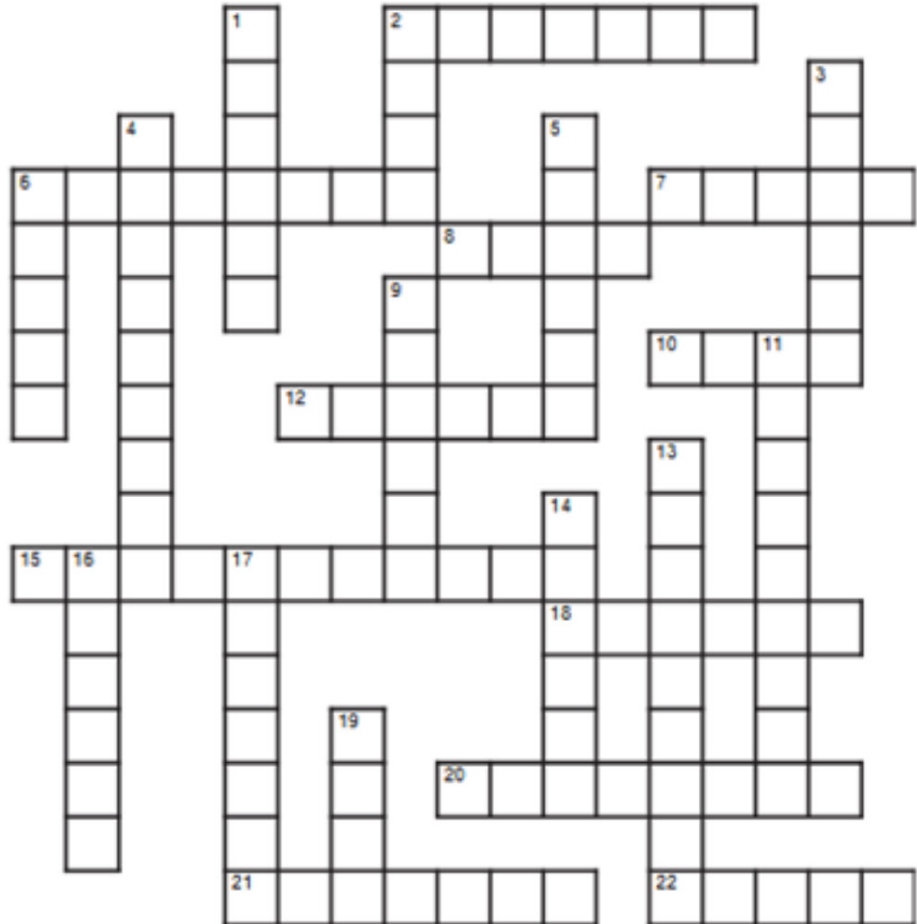
Winter Crossword

Across

2. Knitted top.
6. Snowstorm with winds.
7. Month that winter ends in.
8. When the air moves.
10. A sudden blast of wind.
12. Shake from the cold.
15. Tells you how cold it is outside.
18. Rather cold.
20. Month that winter starts in.
21. He might have a carrot for a nose.
22. Keeps you neck warm.

Down

1. Turned into ice.
2. It goes downhill fast.
3. A short coat.
4. What bears do in the winter.
5. Opposite of summer.
6. Shoes for snowy days.
9. Frozen trickle of water.
11. Ice crystal.
13. December 25th.
14. Area around the North Pole.
16. Used to warm a room.
17. Winter hand warmers.
19. Temperature (in Celsius) at which water freezes.



Voices from the past: A trip that will stay with me forever

By Suzanne Lepage, Community Information Agent



Last summer, I visited Grosse Île and the Irish Memorial National Historic Site. A 45-minute drive from Québec, we hopped a ferry for a trip down memory lane. I had heard about this island—which was used as a quarantine station from 1832 to 1937—from my mom who talked about it and always wanted to go but alas, never got there. I felt like this trip was for her, to be able to tell her about it and show her pictures, even though she may not recall wanting to go.

Although my grandparents were from Scotland and immigrated to British Columbia in the 1920s, my mom always told us that we also had “some” Irish in us—and my red hair and freckles certainly brought out the Irish in me during St-Patrick’s Day celebrations!

Grosse Île is in the middle of the St. Lawrence River; it was Canada’s main immigration gateway and served as a quarantine station for the Port of Québec from 1832 to 1937. During this time, hundreds of thousands of immigrants were welcomed to this island. The thought of all these people—numerous Irish fleeing the potato famine—to Canada, amazed me, saddened me and made me want to know more.

As the boat approached the island, and I got a glimpse of some of the old buildings...houses, barns, churches... something spoke to me. I have often thought about how neat it would be to travel back in time and seeing the old buildings, the signs and the relics of the past, made me want to see this place as it once was; although the site of many a heartbreak and loss, it called to me.

Once on the island, we were split into groups. We opted to go on the English tour to truly dive into the experience. Little did we realize that in our tour group were members of the Siamsa Montréal School of Irish Music. We were in for a treat! They had brought along their instruments.



The sanitation building where the newly arrived first stopped to disinfect themselves and the few belongings they had with them, the hospital that cared for the sick, often too many to handle, to the Celtic cross and cemetery commemorating those who had come here seeking a better life, the churches, schools and homes for the workers and their families who lived on this island, nothing is left unearthed by the Parks Canada guides. Through their narrations, role playing and stats, they make this historical place come to life. You relive its history and grasp its impact on the lives of so many. Numerous arrived at this unknown island with the hope of a new lease on life, yet, sadly, for many this island became their last resting place.

We walked along the pathway leading to the cemetery where thousands of Irish are buried—and today, 47 crosses stand in memory of those who died on Grosse Ile in 1847, by and large the most tragic year, with more than 5000 burials. Listening to our guide recount what is known about the people who arrived in this place, a sense of sadness came over me. A memorial with names engraved in alphabetical order honour the Irish who are buried here; people who came to Canada in search of a better life, yet never made it off this island. When the musicians in our group started playing traditional Celtic songs, I was overwhelmed by the silence, the respect and the wonder of those like me, who came to visit out



of curiosity—or to fulfill a promise—but who will leave here filled with knowledge, memories and gratitude.

If you have yet to visit *Grosse Île and the Irish Memorial National Historic Site*, it is a must see! A day of wonder and history awaits.

Here are some numbers from the Parks Canada website:

Between 1829 and 1851, 696 129 immigrants arrived in Québec. Of these:

- 191 820 (27.5%) were from English ports
- 407 818 (58.5%) were from Irish ports
- 75 102 (10.8%) were from Scottish ports
- 21 389 (3.2%) were from elsewhere in the world

<https://parks.canada.ca/lhn-nhs/qc/grosseile/culture/histoire-history/statistiques-statistics>

Something new is taking shape at Townshippers'

A conversation about guidance, work, and community

Townshippers' is developing a new workforce and employability initiative designed to support English speakers across the Townships as they navigate work, training, and career transitions. Built as a long-term, community-rooted approach, the program focuses on guidance, connection, and practical support that reflects today's realities.

The initiative will be officially launched on February 11, 2026 with a public unveiling at the QG de l'entrepreneuriat in Sherbrooke.

Speaking with **Workforce Employment and Economic Development Manager, Jennifer Humblet**, we learned why this program was created, who it is designed to support, and what guidance can look like in practice.

What realities in the Townships shaped the creation of this new workforce and employability program?

"What we were seeing repeatedly was that many people in our region were facing more than just a job search, they were navigating layered challenges such as language barriers, gaps in digital or professional skills, financial stress, health realities, or a lack of clarity about where to start.

For the English-speaking community, accessing employment and training services can feel complicated, even discouraging. Some have had negative experiences with systems in the past, others are at major transition points, for example finishing school, changing careers, re-entering the workforce, or simply seeking stability.

Motivation and potential were there; it was guidance that was missing. A place where people could slow down, be heard, and receive support that reflects their reality. We needed an approach that went beyond short-term solutions. One that was long-term, rooted in the community, and focused on helping people build confidence, skills, and meaningful connections at their own pace."

About the Program Lead

Jennifer Humblet leads the development of Townshippers' new workforce and employability program, funded through the Government of Canada's Enabling Fund. With nearly 20 years of experience across community, educational, and corporate environments, Jennifer specializes in building human-centred systems that respond to real needs.

Known for her calm leadership style and strategic mindset, she brings together partners, ideas, and resources to create pathways that are both practical and deeply respectful of individual journeys. Jennifer believes that confidence, connection, and clarity are essential ingredients for meaningful participation in work and community life and she's passionate about helping people find their footing.

Jennifer creates inclusive environments where no one is overlooked, ensuring every individual can thrive. Her leadership turns aspirations into reality.

When you talk about guidance rather than quick fixes, what does that look like for someone reaching out to your team for the first time?

"It starts with listening. For many people, the hardest step is asking for help. When someone contacts us, we take the time to understand their situation, their goals, and the barriers they are facing, without judgment or pressure.

Our role is not to push people down a predefined path, but to walk alongside them as they figure out what makes sense for them. Progress looks different for everyone, and that's something we respect deeply."

You use the word "guidance" a lot. What does that look like in practice?

"Guidance means accompaniment, not correction. We're not here to tell people what they should do. We're here to help them explore what could be possible and connect them to the right resources at the right time, this may include career counselling, skills-building workshops or employer connections.

Employability challenges are rarely isolated, so our approach can't be either."

Who is this program designed to support?

“The program is designed to support English-speaking community members across the Eastern Townships. While we work with people of all ages, there is a particular focus on young people aged 17 to 35 who are often at key transition points: students completing school, young adults entering the workforce for the first time, or people who are reassessing their path after an early career experience. We also support parents returning to work, adults re-entering the workforce, and individuals who are looking to rebuild stability later in life.

Accessibility comes from flexibility. We don’t assume one timeline or one definition of success. We meet people where they are and adapt support to their reality.”

Partnerships play a central role in this work. Why is collaboration so essential?

“No single organization can meet all needs, and it wouldn’t make sense to try. Collaboration allows us to build on what already exists in the community and to connect people with organizations that have deep expertise and established trust.

We work closely with partners such as Phelps Helps, Pleins Rayons, Oboulo, Orientation Travail, ETSB, and many others. Each brings a unique perspective and set of strengths.”

“Belief in self, possibility, and community is the foundation for lasting change.”

- Jennifer Humblet

When you think about impact, what does success really look like for participants?

“Success is not always immediate or visible in traditional metrics. Sometimes success is someone gaining clarity about their next step, or a renewed confidence, new skills, or the courage to apply for an opportunity they once felt was out of reach.

Of course, employment outcomes matter, but they are part of a broader picture. We look at stability, engagement, and connection. We look at whether people feel supported and capable of navigating their own path forward.

Those moments of confidence and momentum are powerful, and they often lead to lasting change.”

As this initiative continues to take shape, what do you hope community members will feel when they hear more about it in the months ahead?

“I hope people feel reassured. I want them to know that support exists, and that they don’t have to have everything figured out before reaching out.

This work is grounded in patience, dignity, and trust. It’s about walking alongside people, not directing them from a distance. At the end of the day, we’re here to help. We’re here to *guide*.”

Want to benefit from some workforce and employability guidance? Write to hello@townshippers.org.

Small gestures, big impact: Building equitable care

By Emily Côté, Health and Social Services Program Manager

Language shapes health, safety, and well-being. In my role at Townshippers, I witness this every day. In the Eastern Townships, English speakers make up a small percentage of the population, yet the need to be understood remains crucial. When we talk about English speakers, we include those who prefer to communicate in English, even if their mother tongue is another language. According to the 2021 Census, 40 915 residents in Estrie speak English, representing 8.4% of the region, including an estimated 4 600 visible minority English speakers. Although their stories and circumstances differ, the need for equitable access to care is universal.

The 2025 Waterloo Needs Assessment brought these realities into sharper focus. In Waterloo, nearly 13% of residents speak English. Many described feeling lost in the health and social services system, unable to obtain information they could fully understand, or uncertain where to seek help. These are not minor inconveniences. They shape health outcomes, mental well-being, and a person's ability to participate fully in community life.

Seniors who participated in the assessment said they wanted English versions of services already available in French. Residents with lower incomes spoke candidly about financial barriers that complicated access. Many shared the same refrain: when English services are not available locally, they must travel to Knowlton or Cowansville. Nearly half of survey respondents travel weekly for care, recreation, or community activities; a burden that is costly and exhausting, especially for those with mobility challenges or caregiving responsibilities.

In focus groups, participants described long waits for family doctors, unclear communication, and moments when their requests for service in English went unanswered. Yet, these same people also pointed to clear



strengths in the community. Informal support networks remain a lifeline. Simple bilingual gestures in public spaces help people feel seen. Participants called for improved communication tools and more consistent outreach in trusted places such as the Legion, local schools, and community media.

As we begin to work with partners to act on the Waterloo recommendations, our commitment is to find practical, community-driven solutions. In the coming year, Townshippers' Association will launch a new needs assessment in Sutton and Abercorn. Each community has its own realities and priorities. Listening closely and responding meaningfully is how we move toward a system in which every resident feels safe, informed, and respected in their language.

Because systemic change takes time, we have also taken steps to facilitate navigating medical appointments. We have updated our Health Passport to help English speakers communicate key information to health professionals who may speak primarily French. This tool supports clearer, more confident conversations at times when clarity is essential. We began distributing the Health Passport at

Townshippers' Festival in Lennoxville last fall and have already shared more than 200 printed copies. We have copies at our office, and a digital version is available on our website under the Resources tab/Knowledge Base (townshippers.org/knowledge-base/). Would you like a copy? Write to ecote@townshippers.org.

Moving forward, Townshippers' Association will continue to amplify the voices of all English speakers throughout the Eastern Townships. By listening carefully, collaborating widely, and advocating consistently, we aim to strengthen the vitality of our communities and support the well-being of every resident who calls this region home.



It's not always easy, but if you ask sometimes it helps!

For our Voices of the Townshippers, we asked an English-speaking senior from each of our Senior Wellness Initiative (SWI) locations to tell us about their experiences living as a language minority in our region. Here is what they had to say:

Richmond: "I am a Canadian, a Quebecer, and a Townshipper all at the same time. I have lived in Quebec for seven decades. I realize that it is very important to be able to speak French while living in Quebec. French is a difficult language to learn. Some people have a gift for learning languages. I do not! Yet even in my senior years I continue to improve my French language skills every day. I think that I am a work in progress." - Mary

Waterloo: "I pay taxes; I should be able to get services in English. But they refuse to do it. I went to city hall, and they just said, "We are in Quebec." I'm frustrated!"
-Anonymous

Bury (Health Link): "In terms of the political situation, I'm not feeling safe. They keep pushing more barriers, and it leaves me feeling unwelcome. The English-speaking community is becoming more reserved. Sure, there are differences between us, but our differences shouldn't separate us." - Anonymous

Magog: "They are cutting our privileges and increasingly pushing French, even in spaces that are designed for English speakers. I'm just not happy." - Anonymous

Sherbrooke: "People are good enough to speak English, but if something is super important, then I request that they communicate in English. I'm feeling positive about my experience living in the Estrie region." - Marsha

Knowlton: "We love French; we have absolutely no problem with it. But they (the system) keep pushing us. Even though I am French on my mother's side, I still find that when I want to get services in English, they refuse to serve me in English."
- Anonymous

Our Senior Wellness Initiative program is offered in six locations across the Townships: Bury, Magog, Richmond, Waterloo, Sherbrooke and Knowlton.

Want to meet other English-speaking seniors? SWI offers weekly or monthly sessions, everything from financial workshops, chair yoga, intergenerational activities, arts and crafts, and much more. Interested? Contact Zia at za@townshippers.org or 819-566-5717.



Richmond: Summer picnic



Sherbrooke: Craft day



Waterloo: Chair yoga



Bury: Rock painting

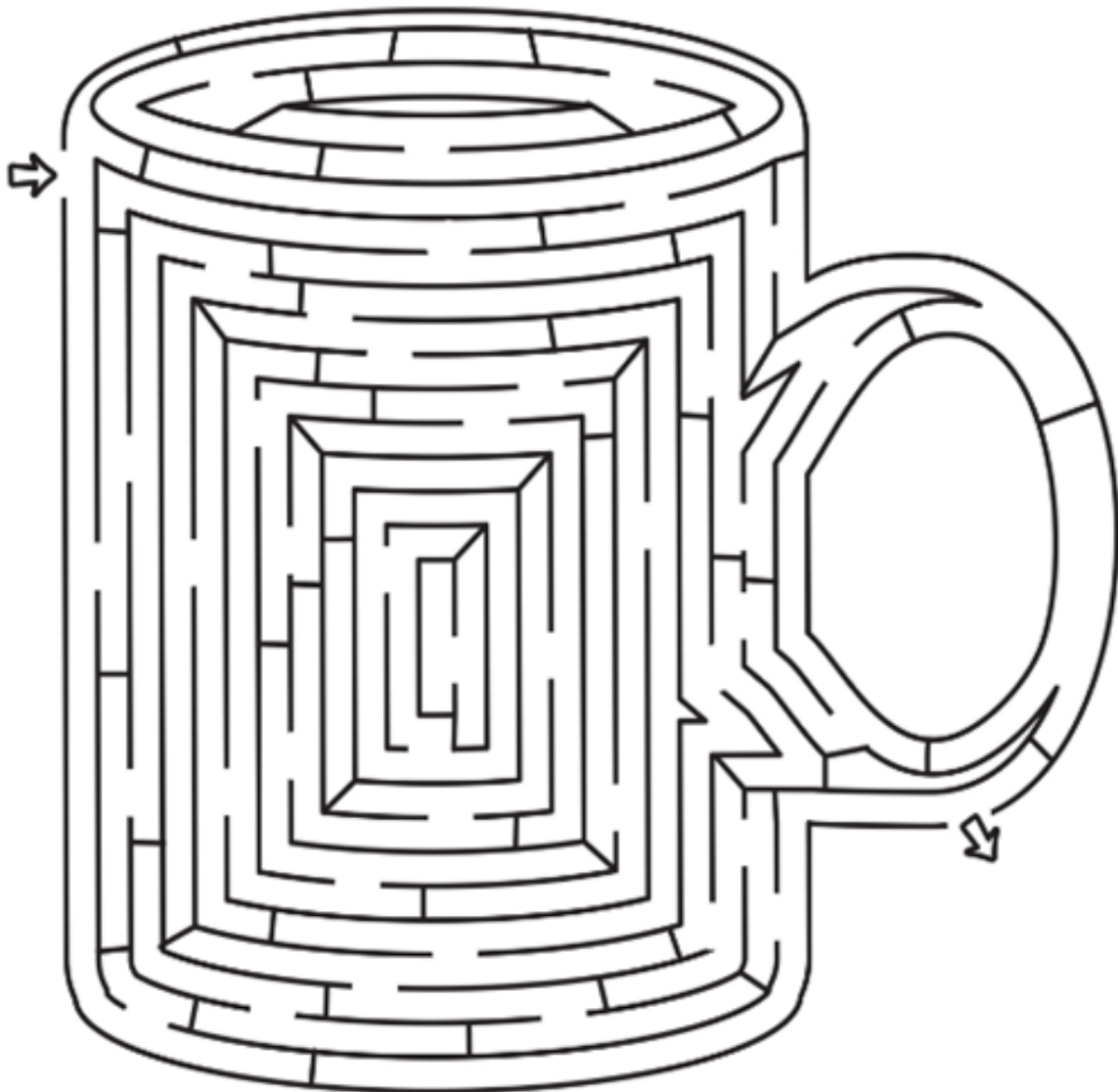


Magog: Collective kitchen

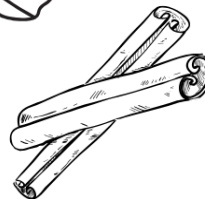


Knowlton: Chair yoga

Hot Chocolate Maze



Which items would you add to your hot chocolate?



About Townshippers: More than a radio show

By Nathaniel Lamont, ERCC Program Manager

For 15 years, *About Townshippers* has been on the air highlighting the dedicated, talented, and inspirational individuals and organizations that help make the Eastern Township a cherished home to English speakers. What's the secret to this radio show's success and longevity? How has *About Townshippers* retained its place in the hearts of Townshippers? I believe the answer to that question lies in its tradition of giving a voice to the needs and dreams of the community.

How do we ensure that people's voices come to life on the show? Since I began hosting this show about a year ago, I've realized the importance of balancing free-roaming conversation with structured questions. It can be easy to box in an interview with excessive structure. Instead, it's best to start with a few questions and see where they lead; this is why I prefer long-format interviews—between 30 to 60 minutes—to give us time to cover a diverse range of topics that you will not find on an organization's About Us page or in a person's CV. This also allows us to share heartfelt moments and highlight the beauty of our community, while still communicating the services and activities available to English speakers.

One voice that I was proud to share was that of Samantha Medellín Morin from the Avante Women's Centre. Samantha and I discussed the *12 days of Action to End Violence Against Women* campaign and highlighted the amazing array of services offered by Avante. This interview took on a whole new direction as she shared fond memories of the Bedford area that she visited as a child on a trip from her home in Mexico City. As an adult she moved to Bedford and she now hosts a group of immigrant women, many of whom are Hispanophones. She mentioned that just sitting down for a coffee can make a world of difference to these women. This group provides kindness and familiarity to people in a new land and Samantha is a perfect ambassador for the Townships.

Another Townshiper story that I was privileged to share was that of Sutton-Based artist Ewa Scheer. We discussed art in all its beauty and depth, and how it shaped her as a person. For Ewa, art started with the "everyday esthetics" introduced to her by her mother. Growing up in a small apartment in communist Poland, through care and attention to detail, her mother was able to infuse the mundane with meaning. During our conversation, Ewa shared her journey of studying philosophy, having her daughter, emigrating to Canada, and studying art and design in Toronto. Her story and thoughts about art and her relationship to the nature and landscape of the Eastern Townships touched me deeply. Her words emphasized the diversity of the lived experiences of people who call the Townships home.



About Townshippers' Nathaniel Lamont and guest, Ewa Scheer.

Regardless of what our guests come to the show to discuss, we aim for authenticity and connection. Whether we are talking about education, healthcare, theatre or literature, what sets *About Townshippers* apart are the personal perspectives and experiences of the guests that we strive to highlight. I'd like to thank all the devoted individuals who share their work, life, and experiences. A big shoutout to the teams at CIDI 99.1 FM and CJMQ 88.9 FM without which this show would not be possible.

I'd also like to thank you, our listeners, across the Townships. If you're interested in discovering the show, join us on Tuesdays at 10 a.m. on CIDI 99.1 FM and CJMQ 88.9 FM, and Thursdays at 1 p.m. on CIDI and 4 p.m. on CJMQ.

If you are thinking about moving to the Townships or you have been living here for some time, Townshippers' Association can help you connect. Whether to find services, discover opportunities or learn about events, we seek to welcome, engage, educate, and connect. We look forward to meeting you! Write to Simone Goloven, sgoloven@townshippers.org or Nathaniel Lamont, nlamont@townshippers.org.

The ABCs of language learning in the Eastern Townships

By Simone Goloven, ERCC Program Coordinator

Learning a new language isn't about perfection. It's about building confidence, one small step at a time. You don't need a classroom to get started with French and for many people, that's actually the hardest place to begin. Some of the best learning happens in tiny, everyday moments: ordering a coffee, asking a question, listening to a podcast on your walk to work. Luckily, the Townships is full of simple, real-life ways to practise, even when official courses take time or aren't available. Here's an A to Z of ideas to help you explore and bring a bit more French into your routine.

A – Alloprof Parents

A lifesaver for families navigating homework in French school and a sneaky way to improve your own French at the same time.
alloprof.qc.ca

B – Bi-Lingo*

Townshippers' Association (hey, that's us!) connects English-speaking learners with francophone mentors for real, supportive, and confidence-boosting conversations.
townshippers.org/bilingo

C – Circonflexe Mentorship Program

A province-wide mentorship program that offers structured support for people wanting to strengthen their professional French.
circonflexementorship.ca

D – Digital Apps

Apps can't replace real conversations, but they help build vocabulary and keep the routine alive when you're busy. Just don't make the owl mad...
duolingo.com
lingodeer.com

E – Everyday French Exposure

Set your phone to French. Make your grocery list en français. Change one thing a day. Tiny habits add up.

F – Francolab (TV5Unis)

Short videos, activity sheets, and everyday Quebec French. Great for hearing French the way it's spoken.
tv5unis.ca/francolab

G – Grocery Stores & Markets

From reading labels to asking a quick question at the counter, grocery stores and markets are full of low-pressure chances to practise.

H – Health Passport

A handy booklet that is designed to help you communicate with French-speaking medical professionals. It includes a glossary of common medical terms and body parts, and space to note your personal information.
Email us to get your copy!
hello@townshippers.org

I – Initiate the Conversation

Start small. Order your coffee, say bonjour to a neighbour, ask one simple question. Confidence grows by trying, not by waiting to feel ready.

J – Jeux en français

Games and trivia nights turn practice into play. Pub Montagu is a great Sherbrooke spot for a fun evening with friends.
pubmontagu.com

K – Karaoke

Sing in French loudly, proudly and slightly off-key. Try a karaoke night at Bar Le Tucker in Mont Sutton.
montsutton.com/services/bar-le-tucker

L – Language Meetup Sherbrooke

Weekly meetups where you can practice with friendly learners and native speakers in relaxed settings.
facebook.com/languagemeetupsherbrooke

M – Mauril

A listening app from CBC/Radio-Canada designed to help you understand everyday Quebec French.
mauril.ca

N – News

Read one article a week from La Tribune for local news. Start with headlines, then build up from there.
latribune.ca

O – Office québécois de la langue française

Think of the OQLF as your French-language toolbox. Quick answers, practical guides and hundreds of thousands of Québec terms and definitions right at your fingertips
vitrinelinguistique.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca

P – Podcasts

No matter your preferred genre news, storytelling, true crime, culture or education there is a balado for you on Radio-Canada.
ici.radio-canada.ca/ohdio/balados

Q – Québec-ismes

« Attache ta tuque! » McGill's Vivre en français website offers short, clear linguistic capsules that explain common Quebec expressions and how they're actually used.
vivreenfrançais.mcgill.ca/capsules-linguistiques/expressions-quebecoises/

R – Radio Bingo (CJMQ)

It may sound unconventional, but CJMQ's Tuesday-night Bingo is secretly fantastic for learning French numbers. Tune in at 7 p.m. on Tuesday evenings to hear the numbers called in English first and then in French, all delivered by local legend Gord's iconic voice.
cjmqradiobingo.com

S – Social Media

Follow a few Quebec creators or organizations. Scrolling becomes listening and reading practice without extra effort.

T – Télé

Swap one of your usual shows for something in French on your favourite streaming platform. There's more out there than you think... reality TV, dramas, comedies, documentaries. *Love Is Blind: France, anyone?*

U – University Community Resources

Bishop's French Hub offers conversation groups and helpful tools for the community. The Université de Sherbrooke also hosts lectures, cultural events and public activities.
facebook.com/thefrenchhubbu
usherbrooke.ca/actualites/evenements

W – Workplace French

The OQLF's Vocabulaire des professions is a goldmine for learning real Quebec workplace terms and expressions you can use immediately.
vitrinelinguistique.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/ressources-linguistiques/outils-apprendre-francais

X – eXplore the Townships

Be a tourist in your own region. Try a French-language tour at the Musée des beaux-arts de Sherbrooke or explore local winter routes listed on Tourisme Cantons-de-l'Est.
cantonsdelest.com

Y – YouTube

Quick, fun French at your fingertips. Try Ma Prof de Français or Wandering French to get started!
youtube.com/@maprofdefrancais
youtube.com/@wanderingfrench

Z – Zones Francophones

Browse a farmers' market or chat with artisans at a local fair. For ideas, a quick scroll through Facebook Events can lead you to all kinds of local happenings.

Language learning doesn't happen in one big moment. It happens in dozens of tiny ones.

So whatever you try (big or small) the most important thing is simply that you **try**.

If you want to learn more about the Bi-Lingo linguistic mentorship program or have a great language learning resource to share, please reach out to:

Simone Goloven
ERCC Program Coordinator
sgoloven@townshippers.org

Dialogue McGill: better long-term access to English-speaking health and social services

By Suzanne Lepage, Community Information Agent

When it comes to your health, being understood—and understanding—is key! Townshippers’ programs such as Dialogue McGill are meant to help our English-speaking community have access to health and social services in English.

By helping English-speaking health and social science students financially during their studies and having them commit to living and working in our region for a year following the obtainment of their diploma, Dialogue McGill’s retention and recruitment program’s goal is to increase the number of bilingual health and social services professionals in our region. The goal is to improve long-term access to English-speaking health and social services within the Eastern Townships.

Two of our past Dialogue McGill bursary winners, both speech pathologists who work with our English-speaking community, had this to say about the importance of English services:

Rosemary: “Working and living in the Estrie region allows me to contribute to more bilingual, equitable and accessible services for the English population, and be part of the healthcare services. Seeing children’s language abilities progress is rewarding, whether it be a big or a small improvement!”

Chloé: “There are many key differences between the acquisition of French and English in children. For example, consider how the French R sound and the English R sound are produced with different tongue positions. Given my education at McGill, I am very aware of the significant differences between the two languages and feel like I have the training to provide adequate services to our anglophone clientele.”

Dialogue McGill Bursary

Are you—or someone you know—studying in health and social sciences, whether it be at a vocational school, a college or CEGEP, or university? You—or this student—may be eligible for a Dialogue McGill bursary.

Learn more about the Dialogue McGill program and the Community Network Bursary by visiting townshippers.org/dialogue-mcgill/.

ARE YOU STUDYING IN HEALTH OR SOCIAL SCIENCES?

You may be eligible for a Dialogue McGill bursary!

Dialogue McGill’s bursary program, managed by Townshippers’ in Estrie, provides financial support to students to improve access to health and social services in English in the Townships.

Learn more at townshippers.org/dialogue-mcgill/ or scan



Dialogue McGill



Health
Canada

Santé
Canada

Discovery Trips: Unearthing more than our region

By Abbey Driscoll, PAJ ET Agent

Townshippers' Place aux jeunes Eastern Townships (PAJ ET), a part of the Place aux jeunes en région provincial network, encourages the migration of young English-speaking professionals into the region. Through day trips or discovery trips, our PAJ Agent helps eligible 18- to 35-year-old participants discover and settle in the beautiful Eastern Townships.

Here is what two PAJ participants had to say about potentially living in the Eastern Townships as an English speaker:

PAJ Discovery Day participant from Montréal Moved to the Townships in 2024

“Before coming here, being anglophone just felt like a label. Living in the Townships, it’s become something richer. Participating in the Discovery Day opened my eyes to the history and resilience of the English-speaking minority here. Now I catch myself using small bits of French at the café or chatting with francophone coworkers without overthinking it. I’m still learning, but I feel proud to be part of this bilingual community; another Townshipper finding my place in the mix.”

PAJ Discovery Day participant from Montréal Not yet moved to our region

“My first impression of the Townships was how familiar they felt, even though I was technically stepping into a French-majority world. During the Discovery Day, I met other anglophones, some life-long residents and some newcomers like me who shared the same questions: “Will I fit in? Will my English be a barrier? But I also met Francophone Townshippers who grew up hearing English in their grandparents’ kitchen. They saw our presence, not as an inconvenience, but as part of the region’s identity. This mix gave me a sense of belonging that I didn’t expect so quickly.”



Who is ELIGIBLE for PAJ ET?

- You must be between 18-35
- English must be your first language (of Canada's two official languages)
- You must be open to moving to the Eastern Townships
- You must sign up here: <https://placeaux-jeunes.qc.ca/compte/inscription/candidat>

Interested in learning more about our Place aux jeunes Eastern Townships program?

Visit townshippers.org/paj/ or contact Abbey at paj@townshippers.org

CONVERSATION starters

Have you ever met one of your heroes? What did you say to them?

Would you rather have a live-in massage therapist, a live-in chef or a live-in cleaning lady?

What's the best compliment you've ever received?

Do you have a morning ritual?

What was the best part of your day, so far?

What's one thing you're deeply proud of — but would never put on your résumé?

Has a teacher ever changed your life? How so?

When was the last time you saw an animal in the wild?

If you could share a meal with one fictional character, who would it be?

If you were heading out on a road trip right this minute, what would you pack?

Would you like to write a book? (About what?)

Be a Townshipper in the know!

As a promoter of the interests of the English-speaking community in the Eastern Townships, Townshippers' Association takes pride in keeping you in the loop. Not only with our own activities and events for seniors, youth and family, job hunters, students, etc., but what our partner organizations are up to and community events happening across the Townships.

How can you stay informed? There are several ways to find out what is happening, both in print and online.

Townshippers' online

We use several social media platforms to promote events, share information and stay in touch with our community. Be sure to follow us on Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn. These platforms help us share partner information, advertise our events and activities, and celebrate key moments. Follow us @townshippers.



Local newspapers

Every month, Townshippers' publishes two columns in the local newspapers: About Townshippers in the Brome County News and Keeping in Touch in The Sherbrooke Record. These columns talk about our programs, our Association, our partners' initiatives, legal topics, etc. Most of the columns are written by us, and some are written by—or in collaboration with—a partner. Would you like us to write about something specific? Write to Suzanne at slepage@townshippers.org.



CIDI and CJMQ radio

Our weekly About Townshippers show highlights events, activities, and services that are important to English speakers in the Townships. This show airs on CIDI 99.1 FM on Tuesdays at 10 a.m. and Thursdays at 1 p.m., and on CJMQ 88.1 FM on Tuesdays at 10 a.m. and Thursdays at 4 p.m. Featuring informative (or entertaining) topics and dynamic guests, you are sure to hear about something that interests you, whether it is job hunting, partner campaigns, arts and culture, workshops, or health and social services.

Newsletter

As of January 2026, our electronic newsletter's distribution will be changing. Townshippers' Association members will receive our newsletter every month—at the beginning of the month. The goal is for us to be more proactive and tell you what is coming—so that you can participate or attend—as opposed to giving you a wrap up of past events!

For non-members (although members will also receive it!), the newsletter will become a quarterly occurrence that will summarize what happened over the past three months.

If you are a member and are not receiving our newsletter via email—or know someone who is not yet a member and wishes to become one—be sure to contact Lara at lbeaupere@townshippers.org.

Community Calendar

Spread the word! The Community Calendar on our website is becoming more popular, so be sure to add your community event to it! Looking for something to do in our region? Check out our online calendar for what's going on in terms of workshops, conferences, craft sales, and more! Visit townshippers.org/calendar/ to view—or promote—upcoming events!

Questions? Something you would like to bring to our attention? Send us an email: hello@townshippers.org.



[illegible]