

Empowering People to Eat Well, Be Well, and Change the World



V a n e s s a R e i d

Food is an essential part of our daily lives. It is central to our health and well being, but we rarely know where it comes from, under what conditions it was produced or how far it had to travel to get to our kitchens and into our stomachs. In fact, most people are so far removed from food systems and cycles that their only contact with food is buying, preparing, or eating it—they have little contact with the people, places, and natural miracles from which that food originates.

Santropol Roulant is an award-winning community organization founded and run by young people. We use food as a vehicle to break social and economic isolation between the generations and to strengthen and nourish our local community. A social service with an environmental and social change ethos, Santropol Roulant aims to bring the most nutritious and ethically produced food to our community.

Since 1995, with the energy of thousands of volunteers, we have made over 310,000 meals and delivered them by bicycle, on foot and by car to seniors and people living with a loss of autonomy across Montreal. We are also innovating and experimenting with new ways of connecting people to food, to their environments and to each other.

Urban Solutions and Revolutions

Too many people in our cities eat poorly, and often alone. It is difficult to find, afford and purchase nutritious, tasty and culturally appropriate food, or to grow it in a way that is both good for the environment and for human consumption. These conditions mean that many of the individuals and communities with whom we work live in deep food insecurity.

An important contributor to food insecurity is isolation, loss of autonomy and the lack of a social network. Organizations like Santropol Roulant create fertile, much needed spaces for people of all walks of life to gather and commune, with food as the central vehicle to breaking isolation and nourishing community, in its largest sense.

Santropol Roulant's "specialty" has always been the variety and quality of delicious and nutritious meals made fresh everyday by volunteers and our staff (chicken cacciatore, orange chocolate cake, diabetic options, fresh fruit salads and edible flowers) for Montrealers living with a loss of autonomy. The majority of volunteers are between 14-35 years of age, so Santropol Roulant also fosters the unique interaction that takes place daily across the city of Montreal between volunteer deliverers and clients of different generations and cultures.

We realize that in order to address the root causes of food insecurity in our community, we need to look at the larger urban context; to build and deepen our spectrum of relationships around food. Our unconventional approach to traditional models of meals-on-wheels, intergenerational, volunteer and green projects is part of a broader movement of

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bringing people together in meaningful ways for the collective good. We believe that social services are an essential part of – and must take a leadership role in – a larger vision of social change that include the voices and aspirations of young and old.

The food cycle at Santropol Roulant, then, has evolved from daily food preparation in our kitchen and delivery by bike to planting, sprouting, growing, composting and harvesting our own food from our rooftop community garden. Our food cycle is deeply connected to the seasons, and the life cycles of people and place.

A portion of the 25,000 meals we make and deliver a year is now grown on our **Rooftop Garden**. A partnership with international development agency, Alternatives, this project connects local citizens to their food source while growing food for those who cannot make their own food. It also connects Montreal’s urban agriculture movement, and our simplified lightweight growing technology, to similar innovations evolving in developing countries such as Cuba, Morocco and Senegal.

Building new relationships of solidarity includes local farmers, and through our Going Organic campaign we are buying organic produce so that 20% of our meals-on-wheels are organically grown and nutrient-rich. In so doing, we are strengthening local food resources to meet local needs and making a strong statement on how citizens and community organizations can make a difference in urban sustainability.

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Our community-based food and urban agriculture projects also include Harvesting Histories, recording the oral histories and recipes of seniors and volunteers, while making and sharing food together.

Urban organizations like Santropol Roulant have the opportunity to enhance the holistic health of people of all generations and backgrounds, create new kinds of relationships between individuals and with the city and land. Providing healthy, organic, homegrown food to people in all stages of life and giving people a space to voice their stories, provides fertile soil in which the roots of change can thrive. Potential for individual and collective health is infinite. Eat well, be well!

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For more information about Stropol Roulant, see www.santropolroulant.org