



BACKGROUND

GOOD SHEPHERD SISTERS OF QUÉBEC

Pioneers among those who have worked with girls and women excluded from society for transgressing the accepted norms of the period, the Good Shepherd Sisters of Québec engaged in charitable works that have endured for more than 150 years. Despite constant financial difficulties and social prejudice, this community cared for an otherwise neglected group. Their establishments adopted a consistent approach that was inspired by the latest 19th- and 20th-century methods for social rehabilitation. Guided by Christian charity, these pioneers of social work adapted their interventions to fill gaps in the public system, taking into account advances in the perinatal period and in re-education.

In the early 1850s, when the Good Shepherd Sisters of Québec community was founded, Québec City was facing many of the inherent problems of urbanization and industrialization. As it was a port town, it also faced issues such as prostitution, deviance, crime, and poverty. At this time in Canada and elsewhere, the attitude toward the marginalized and destitute was gradually changing, and poverty was increasingly considered to be the result of social conditions rather than an individual's weaknesses. It was in this context that a few compassionate laywomen joined Marie-Josephte Fitzbach in opening Asile Sainte-Madeleine, a home for "repentant" women. Madame Fitzbach and her fellow laywomen established the Good Shepherd Sisters of Québec. Officially made a community in 1856, they devoted themselves to protecting and reintegrating women who had been excluded from society for the reasons of delinquency or pregnancy outside of marriage.

Over the years, this mission evolved to include a complete set of programs and services focused on the greater welfare of marginalized women. The community established homes for repentant women, women's prisons, halfway houses, re-education and social services, shelters for girls, lodging for young working women, youth centres, homes for unwed mothers and their children, maternity hospitals, hospitals where nurses and midwives were trained, obstetrics clinics, nurseries and orphanages, adoption agencies, daycare centres, regular and specialized schools such as child wellness schools, art and trade schools, home economics schools, family institutes, normal schools, and classic colleges. While most of this work was carried out in Quebec, some initiatives were introduced in other parts of Canada and in the United States, Brazil, Haiti, and Africa. Throughout their history the Good Shepherd Sisters of Québec have constantly kept up with scientific advances and with developments in the philosophies related to social work in managing their institutions.