

My name is Anda Panciuk, and I have lived on Nuns' Island since 1999. I am the mother of 2 children (grades 2 and 4) who attend l'École Primaire Île des Soeurs. I am an active volunteer at the school and in the community, and my husband is the coach for our son's hockey team which is located in Verdun.

I have chosen to speak to the commission tonight about my personal experience as a member of the community who benefits from living within close proximity to a school and whose children commute to school daily by foot.

My family lives on a residential street backing onto the forest (Domaine St-Paul). We purchased our home knowing that our children would be within walking distance to the present school on Nuns' Island. By road, our home meets the required distance for our children to have access to the school bus in order to commute to school every day, however as we very quickly realized, it is much faster to walk to school than to take the bus or car. Not only that, but it is more relaxing, more environmentally friendly, less dangerous and more pleasant for our children to walk than to use a vehicle to get to school. As a parent, I love the fact that my kids can benefit from the short walk to school to see, hear, feel and smell the nature we have on Nuns' Island, rather than sitting immobile in yet another vehicle, being chauffeured somewhere that is extremely close by and further contributing to the traffic on Nuns' Island.

We chose to send our kids, like many other parents on Nuns' Island, to the local school within our community. Private school is an available option for many parents on the island as we live in a generally well-off part of Verdun, but for my family, the idea of sitting my two very active kids in the car or on a bus for a minimum of 1½ hours per day was not something I wanted. As it is now, my children get approximately 11 hours of sleep per night, often waking up as late as 7:30 am. Most mornings, they depart for school at 7:45 or 7:50, leaving us plenty of time to make it to school in time for the bell at 8am. In a time and society where sleep, energy levels and physical activity are sorely lacking within the general population, having my kids attend the community school and walking the short distance on their own is a way of keeping them active and healthy. Active children who get sufficient amounts of sleep and fresh air are healthier and better prepared for the education they receive at school. It does not take a study to realize this; this is simple common sense, and it is what I see every day with my own children who both excel at school and who have not once missed a day because they were sick.

Nuns' Island is a safe little community where our children are secure in their morning walk to school. Some have claimed that there will be a danger linked to the children walking to the new school at Parc

de la fontaine. My family actively gets around Nuns' Island on a daily basis, and in fact, many days my car does not move from its position in my driveway, as I work from home. I can say that from our experience as cyclists and pedestrians, there is little danger for anyone walking anywhere at any time of day on Nuns' Island. My 9 year-old son has been walking, skateboarding or biking to school without incident for the past 4 years. 4 times a day, he crosses roads (often alone) and uses sidewalks and not once in 4 years of doing so, has he encountered a safety issue with a motorist or any member of the community. In fact, commuters on their way to work have been nothing but courteous to him and other children I see walking to school.

As a parent, I feel great resentment of having to explain to my children why I am defending the idea of a new school and why there are some members of the community who clearly do not want a school built within the proximity of their homes. I find it astonishing and frankly, quite embarrassing for our community that this debate is even happening. Our young children should not be loaded up on buses and sent into snarling traffic jams to start their day, nor should they be banished to the perimeters of the island where they would still be forced to take the bus, as some would have it. Instead, they should be allowed to walk the few minutes it takes to get to school, a school in the very heart of our community, where we can SEE and HEAR them learn and play.

My family lives, works, goes to school and plays on Nuns' Island. We take advantage of every resource imaginable here, from leasing office space, to using the daycares, from attending summer camps here, to grocery shopping, and from using the tennis courts and swimming pools. Our children are involved in sports teams on the island and we try to frequent as many businesses on Île des Soeurs as possible. We try to keep our activities central to our community, thus reducing traffic and our carbon footprint, keeping our cars, our family and our money on the island as much as possible, and contributing to our Nuns' Island society as active and responsible citizens. Many have spoken about sustainable development or 'developpement durable', but this is what I call *sustainable living*.

Please note the photo collage that I have put together which shows members of my family over the years on our daily walk to school. In some photos, you will notice the children are not wearing backpacks, these are of our walk to school after they have come home for lunch. Walking with my children to school is by far the best part of my day and I know that it is a highlight of their day as well. You can see the smiles and joy on their faces. When we walk to school, our children learn respect for the environment, they learn that daily physical activity is important and as a bonus, we are able to spend precious and

valuable time together. These are not things our children experience when they are sitting in a school bus.



We also proudly participate in every single one of the Marchons vers l'école, whatever the season and whatever the temperature:



This is the last Marchons vers l'école that we participated in on June 21<sup>st</sup> of this year. I was happy to volunteer my services as the official photographer to document this very popular event in our community.



To conclude, I would like to say that our children are not bothersome and they certainly are not an eyesore in the minds of the majority of residents on Nuns' Island. Children add life and vibrancy and energy to our diverse and growing community. They should not be forced to be bused to school or to leave Nuns' Island to receive the basic right of an elementary education. The borough, municipal and provincial levels of government, in addition to the Commission Scolaire have all recognized the importance and benefits of building a school in the Parc de la fontaine. If our new school is built within walking distance for its students, and built on non-contaminated soil as well as being safely planned and

structured, as is the case with the Parc de la fontaine site, I am convinced that all Nuns' Island parents, myself included, will be satisfied knowing that we are the doing the best we can for our children.

We are an extremely wealthy and well-educated community here on Île des Soeurs. We can and should be able to do better for our children.

Thank you.