

Santropol Roulant

www.santropolroulant.org
Montreal, QC

WHO THEY ARE

Santropol Roulant is a Montreal-based, not-for-profit organization founded and run by young people in the community. They bring people together across generations and cultures through their innovative meals-on-wheels service, their intergenerational activities and their volunteer programs.

WHAT DO THEY DO?

Santropol Roulant's primary program is a meals-on-wheels service organized by young people committed to building a healthy community. They deliver much more than just meals – they break social isolation and bring together generations. Santropol's approach is that food is a vehicle for bringing people together across perceived barriers, whether language, culture or generation.

They have a bike shop that is open to all members of the cycling community. It's a place where people can go to fix their bicycle, learn or teach to repair a bicycle, and share their passion for a transportation means that is not only the most efficient existing to date, but might very well be the most fun as well.

Santropol is also involved in a Rooftop Gardening Project that promotes the utilization of roofs for food production and urban green space development. The project will develop and experiment with soil-less growing techniques that are ecological, economic and applicable to roofs, balconies, walls and other small urban spaces.

HOW DO THEY ENGAGE YOUTH?

“Young people came and went. They passed through the organization, experiencing it- and were changed by it. All the while it seemed to stay the same, a constant community structure thriving within a transient youth culture.” Allison Griffith, Director of Operations

Santropol has adopted a very unique way of engaging youth. They've made themselves into more than just your average volunteer initiative. The organization has now become a model of youth engagement, and a bustling community space that attracts young people from all walks of life to work, volunteer, and create positive change in the world. Young volunteers contribute to the mission in unique ways by bringing their ideas, energy, questions, and talents.

What's critical here is that Santropol has not just created an organization, but a unique culture within an organization that makes it very appealing to youth. Though they are working on the projects mentioned above, the Santropol space is a place where any idea can flourish into a project. Because of its informal, dynamic, human-oriented and candid atmosphere, it has managed to create a culture that is very conducive to the combining of ideas and easy flow of communication among youth. Young people can just walk in from outside and check out what Santropol has to offer.

TELL ME ABOUT THIS CULTURE

By organizational culture, Santropol is referring to the values, symbols, and motivations behind who

they are and how they work as an organization. Volunteers have often expressed an overwhelming feeling of belonging and connectedness that they've experienced while taking part in Santropol's activities. They describe Santropol Roulant as an organization that is highly inclusive in its approach and that inspires and empowers them to learn, grow, and contribute to their community in meaningful ways.

“Santropol is like one giant space with desks, couches, it's very casual, candid, it's messy, always changing, well located, things are shared, and the space is very informal. There is a high level of flexibility with regard to volunteer shifts, and a whole range of different things you can get involved in. Most of the things you can get involved in often don't require a high level of training or expertise, and someone will show you the ropes and you can probably pick it up quickly enough. “

Allison Griffith, Director of Operations

This is the kind of place where young people will feel comfortable spending time and working on something they enjoy. In a sense, it takes the messy and disorganized energy and enthusiasm of young people and creates a great outlet to channel it towards a positive action. Santropol Roulant has created an open, fluid community space where people want to spend time because it is accessible and without obvious hierarchies. This allows them to feel they have an important place to experiment, connect, and get involved.

“Rather than focusing on the need to attract young people to do a certain kind of “job”, we focus on the wider organizational context in which that activity will take place, as well as the degree to which it aligns with the unique talents and interests of volunteers. Contrary to conventional wisdom, we don't spend much energy on developing techniques to recruit, retain, motivate, and recognize young volunteers. Instead, we focus on creating a dynamic space where people of all ages can learn, develop meaningful relationships, and be active in shaping their communities.” - Allison Griffith, Director of Operations

Santropol does not provide a group of pre-set jobs to choose from. They believe that connecting the ideas and projects that volunteers bring through the door is crucial to assure their commitment and engagement.

Incredibly, this culture has practically eliminated the need for Santropol to promote itself. Many young people have had great experiences with them and have referred Santropol to their friends. This cycle continues and helps deal with turnover that almost all youth organizations deal with. That youth can just walk in and check the place out also helps them remain highly visible to their target.