IN THE HANDS OF CITIZENS: A VIDEO REPORT

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The Comité des Citoyens de Saint-Jacques, a dynamic citizens' organization of downtown Montreal's multi-ethnic community, was founded in March 1984. The Committee's goals are to fight poverty and to help the community organize and mobilize around issues that affect them. The Committee was formed to create a forum where residents could express their concerns and share their ideas. The Committee is composed of volunteers who are committed to working towards positive change in their community.

Challenges and Changes

The Committee faced numerous challenges in its early days, including lack of funding, equipment, and time. However, the Committee was determined to make a difference and decided to use video as a tool for communication and mobilization. The Committee's first video project was a half-hour program to raise awareness about the Committee's activities and aims.

In the following weeks, the Committee discovered that when the equipment was left in the offices, no one used it. Instead, the Committee decided to interview people coming out of welfare and job offices, and to use the equipment to make a series of five public meetings in various areas of the city. These meetings were meant to stimulate debate on their collective problems, to gain new and active members, and subsequently to decide on the Committee's future actions.

The Committee's success in creating a video program was based on the willingness of the Committee's members to use the equipment and to communicate their concerns and ideas. One of the Committee's members, Dorothy Henaut, explained:

"When we watch the tapes, we don't just learn to know ourselves better; we also come to understand others. It's a good pretext for talking to them."