

GIVING BACK

## Restoring the lines of communication for francophone seniors

PAUL WALDIE

The Globe and Mail

**The Donor:** Sylvie Lavoie

**The Gift:** Creating the H el ene Tremblay Lavoie Foundation

**The Reason:** To help provide long-term care for francophones in Toronto

About five years ago, Sylvie Lavoie noticed a sudden change in her elderly mother, H el ene Tremblay Lavoie. Once a constant chatterbox, Ms. Lavoie's mother had gone quiet, communicating less and less with family and friends as dementia set in. "I just thought it was just, sort of, as you get old that's what you do," Ms. Lavoie said from her home in Toronto.



**Sylvie Lavoie, whose mother once lived at Bendale Acres, would like to see more French-language services available to Francophone residents of long-term-care facilities in Toronto.** PETER POWER/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

After a few medical tests, Ms. Lavoie discovered that her mother had reverted back to French, her mother tongue, and lost the ability to speak English. It was a stunning revelation given that, while her mother was originally from Quebec, she had lived in Toronto for more than 30 years. As the dementia worsened, Ms. Lavoie tried to find a long-term-care facility in Toronto that could care for her mother in French. There was nothing available and she ended up in a home in Welland, Ont. that offered some French-language care.

She moved her mother later to Bendale Acres in the Scarborough area of Toronto, which has 37 beds for francophone residents and a limited French-speaking staff. She died there in 2010.

The struggle to find care for her mother in French led Ms. Lavoie to launch a charity to address the issue. She notes that about 100,000 francophones live in Toronto but they have no dedicated long-term-care facility. "The hope is that Bendale Acres would at least be partially designated francophone," she said.

The charity, called the H el ene Tremblay Lavoie Foundation, has held some high-profile events and has been meeting with representatives from all levels of government.

"The No. 1 objective is to sensitize the [francophone] population to start asking," Ms. Lavoie said.

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