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Christine Geoffrion walked into Volunteer and Information Quinte's headquarters in Century Place looking to volunteer her services.

She ended up with a full-time job.

Geoffrion, a francophone living in Trenton, is VIQ's new Manager of Information Services and her main responsibility will be implementing its new 211 network information service that should in place by early 2005.

She is not phased by the daunting task that lies ahead of her.

"The 211 service is pretty new. I think it's a great idea because it's sometimes hard to find the service you need and this system will help, especially new people moving into the area or just seniors because there will be a real person answering the phone, not a recording."

By dialing 211, an operator will be available to provide contact information on a wide variety of services. As part of the 211 network, VIQ will be handling calls during normal business hours while a call centre will receive calls after hours.

The 29-year-old Geoffrion, who joined VIQ in early December, has spent the past two months updating VIQ's data base of agencies listed in the Community Key directory. The data base will be a key ingredient for the 211 service.

"We'll print the new 2004 copies at the end of February and then I'll be able to devote more time on the 211 system," she said.

Geoffrion moved into the Quinte area last July from Montreal and she is still trying to adapt to a quieter lifestyle. Her biggest transition, though, has been speaking English every day in her duties with VIQ.

"I'm improving my English every day," she said proudly.

Geoffrion arrived well qualified for VIQ's information manager's position.

Born south of Montreal, she completed a two-year human sciences diploma program at a community college. She then successfully earned her communications certificate from the University of Montreal in 1994 (a one-year program).

Geoffrion decided to further her communications skills by registering for the

16-week program at a private institution, Promedia Radio and Television School, in Montreal.

She completed her post-secondary education by acquiring her degree in political science from the University of Quebec in Montreal in 1998.

Geoffrion worked part-time at a CAA call centre in Montreal during her university studies and then went full-time with a Montreal firm that distributes press releases and company announcements around the world.

In November 2001, she became the communications officer for the Volunteer Bureau in a Montreal suburb and remained in the post until going on maternity leave.

She came to this area last July after her husband, Eric, was posted to CFB Trenton's transportation unit. The couple has a 16-month-old daughter, Marie-Anie.

Geoffrion said she is getting used to the smaller community but misses living close to Montreal because that's where her family and friends remain.

She loves her job at VIQ.

"It's a small volunteer centre but we are really busy. It's a great way for me to learn this area and the community resources and to help other people."

Geoffrion acknowledges she has a "big project" to introduce the 211 information system for the community.

The 211 system was introduced in Atlanta a few years ago and the United Way of Canada decided to bring it north "to give all Canadians the same access to community resources."

The city of Toronto implemented it a year ago. A call centre operator answers residents' calls for community information and referrals, such as where people can find retirement homes for their parents, what off-hours medical clinics are open and what shelters are located for troubled teens.

"VIQ will be partnering with neighbouring counties to implement the system here hopefully in 2005. We would like to have it operating as soon as possible next year," she said. "There are a lot of details to work out and that will be part of my job."

Over the next several weeks, Geoffrion will be meeting with officials from neighbouring counties to discuss the proposed information network service and plan with still needs to be done.

Geoffrion said the VIQ's extensive data base of area agencies — available in print form in its annual Community Key resource publication — will serve as the basis for the new service.

She has already learned a lot about the community by updating the Community Key database and is thrilled to be working on the 211 service.

"When you leave your mark somewhere, that's great," said Geoffrion.

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