



Communitas

ANNUAL REPORT
2017 - 2018





Reflections from our Chair

Peter Huish

We have relished the experience of new life in this just-completed year at Communitas. What has served us in the past has been preserved and newly energized, and there has been much innovation thanks to the leadership and initiative of Jeff Kennedy and Michael Pedruski. This report provides some detail on this rejuvenation of our signature activities and shows the excitement that is carrying us forward in new ways.

We are grateful that we are funded once again at a level that brings both viability and possibilities for development thanks to our participation in the CoSA National Capacity Project, coordinated by CoSA Canada, of which we are a founding member. While there remain financial challenges moving forward, our CoSA work is no longer on life support as it was in recent years and the process of renewal and growing of Circles is nourishing our sense of mission and effectiveness.

As important as funding is for our viability and new life, relationships are at the heart of our life and identity. Many have rallied to the support of our new leaders, alongside whom I have been fortunate to work. Our dedicated board of directors has adroitly climbed a steep learning curve with patience and wisdom in bringing good judgment to our governance. Our Steering Committee has resumed its caring and careful enabling of much of our operations, including increased attention to Communications and Restorative Justice focuses. Perhaps most gratifying is the innovation of consultation of our members and the enthusiasm and appetite for meaningful participation, including through our new participatory budgeting process. All of this is carried by those who give of themselves voluntarily and to whom we are deeply grateful. Moreover, we have continued to benefit from the generous support of Christ Church Cathedral and the Diocese of Montreal who provide excellent space for our weekly Open Door meetings, as well as from generous donations by our dedicated supporters in the community.

I see pleasure and satisfaction in others at these developments, notably in those attending Open Door, Table Talk, and Movie Night—each in greater numbers, which is deeply satisfying to me, and I am grateful for all of it and for those who choose to be members of our community.



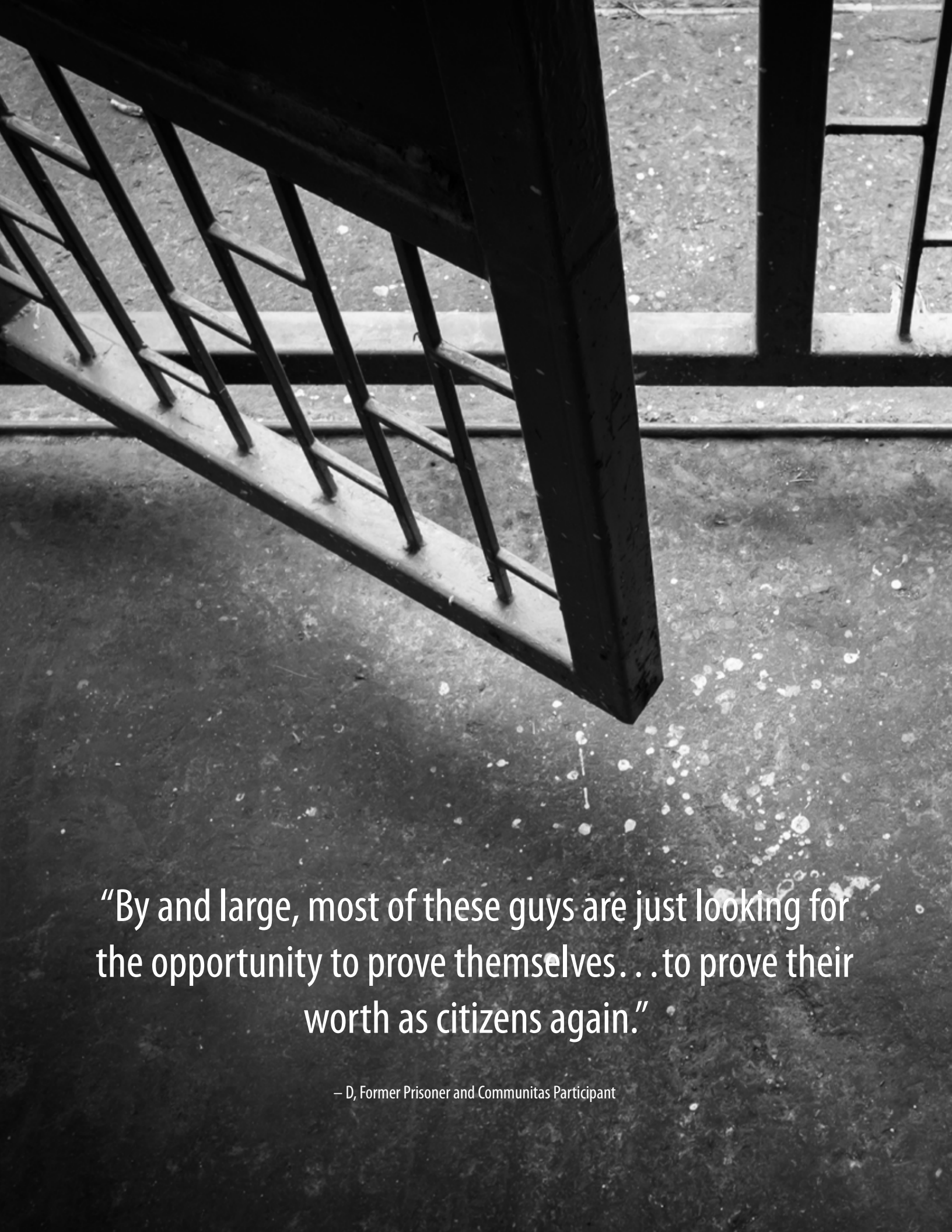
Peter Huish
Chair of the Board and Founder

Our work

Meeting returning citizens at the door.

Every day, at the gates of Quebec's prisons and at the doors of its halfway houses, men and women step into a community from which they were once totally removed. Despite their newfound physical freedom, they often remain excluded—living in the community, but stigmatized and isolated. Indeed, some speak of feeling like their crimes are written on their foreheads. All of this intensifies the difficulties of starting life anew after being incarcerated: finding housing, gaining employment, addressing mental health or substance abuse issues, adapting to changing times, establishing relationships, and repairing the harm caused through both crime and punishment. More than taking a personal toll on people looking for a second chance, the uphill battle that returning citizens face only increases the risk of further crime and deprives the community of the contributions that these people might make.

For nearly two decades, Communitas has worked on the ground to facilitate the successful reintegration of those returning from prison. We do this by bringing (ex-)prisoners together with everyday community members on equal footing in a variety of contexts, whether in larger groups or in more intimate settings, to offer support, mentorship, empowerment, companionship, and belonging. In our experience, and as research on our work bears out, those put in the right conditions are much less likely to re-offend, are positive forces in their communities, and altogether provide a more hopeful and inspiring picture of what life after prison can be—for all of us.



“By and large, most of these guys are just looking for the opportunity to prove themselves...to prove their worth as citizens again.”

— D, Former Prisoner and Communitas Participant



PLACE ST-HENRI

"The weekly topics of discussion at Open Door are always interesting, but the most wonderful part is the people who have introduced me to so many perspectives I've never considered before."

– V, Volunteer

Open Door

All are welcome.

In its simplest form, Open Door is a weekly meeting at which prisoners, former prisoners, and volunteers share time with each other. Usually anchored by a presentation from a community member or a visiting organization, each Open Door provides a space for participants to learn about something new, reflect on important events in their lives, and chat casually over refreshments. Despite this simple approach, Open Door packs a big punch by providing a reliable space where all are welcome and where relationships can be built that ease the return to community.

It's no surprise then that Open Door, now in its 17th year, has a dedicated audience. During 2017-2018, Open Door attendance was nearly 1400. This has meant 382 hours of involvement for 37 different men on escorted absences from local penitentiaries, 988 hours of involvement for 55 different ex-prisoners living the community, and 1392 hours of involvement for 100 different community volunteers. Together we learned about tenants' rights, developments in restorative justice, parole, the history of hip hop, the importance of community, and dozens of other topics introduced by a diverse group of presenters that featured 22 invited speakers from the community and 29 speakers drawn from Open Door's own attendees.

1387

TOTAL ATTENDANCE

988

HOURS

OF INVOLVEMENT
FOR GUYS IN
THE COMUNITY

382

HOURS

OF ESCORTED
ABSENCE FROM THE
PENITENTIARY

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA)

No one is disposable. No more victims.


“Circles” continue to be at the core of Communitas’ work, matching those returning from prison with a steady, dedicated group of everyday community volunteers who offer regular support in a myriad of ways. The vast majority of Circle participants—‘core members’ as we call them—are those with a history of sexual offending and deemed high-risk and high-needs. However, the well-documented success that Circles have had in reducing re-offending—by more than 70% according to several studies—is a testament to the fact that, given the right support, these individuals are not only able to safely return to the community, but enhance that community as well.

2017-2018 saw Communitas expand its Circle activities under the first year of the CoSA National Capacity Project—a five-year initiative supported by Public Safety Canada that will grow impact, help build sustainability, and contribute to research on the effectiveness of community-based responses to crime. In facilitating Circles for 10 participants, Communitas organized over 200 circle meetings in which these groups tackled the difficulties of reintegration head on. This would not have been possible but for the extraordinary commitment not just from Core Members, but from volunteers who gave more than 800 hours of face-to-face time in addition to travel and coordination.

10
CIRCLES

200 +
CIRCLE MEETINGS

800 + VOLUNTEER
HOURS



"My circle's always there for me, like if sometimes I'm feeling down or feeling angry or I'm feeling nervous or confused, I can call my circle anytime and they're always there for me."

— J, CoSA Participant



“Table Talk is a warm and welcoming get-together
for Communitas members and friends to share
and enjoy a tasty lunch.”

-C, Table Talk Regular

Table Talk

Sharing a meal, and so much more.

As in years past, Communitas has continued to hold a free lunch each Friday through 2017-2018 at its office under the banner of Table Talk. A hot meal with little structure other than the conversations that emerge in our shared space, the initiative has been a valued part of the weekly calendar for those needing companionship, needing to stretch a dollar, or wanting to keep up on the latest within our community. Over the years, Table Talk's start time has moved earlier and earlier as attendees gather early outside our doors, eager to get the conversation started, and this year was no different. At the same time, attendance—driven particularly by former prisoners living in the community—soared this past year over the course of 50 lunches, more than doubling in number to regularly include 15 or more attendees.

50 SHARED MEALS

Movie Night

Lights, Camera, Action!

Loneliness and boredom are challenges for everyone, and can be heightened for those still reintegrating. We launched our movie night initiative in 2010 to help combat these challenges, and have continued through 2017-2018. Movie Night is a monthly meeting at which popcorn and friendship are in ample supply, and it has become a highlight of the month for most of its participants, volunteers and "the guys" alike. This year saw us shift movie night to our office for a cozier setting, and we have seen increased attendance ever since.

12 MOVIE NIGHTS

Prison Inreach

Bringing the community inside.

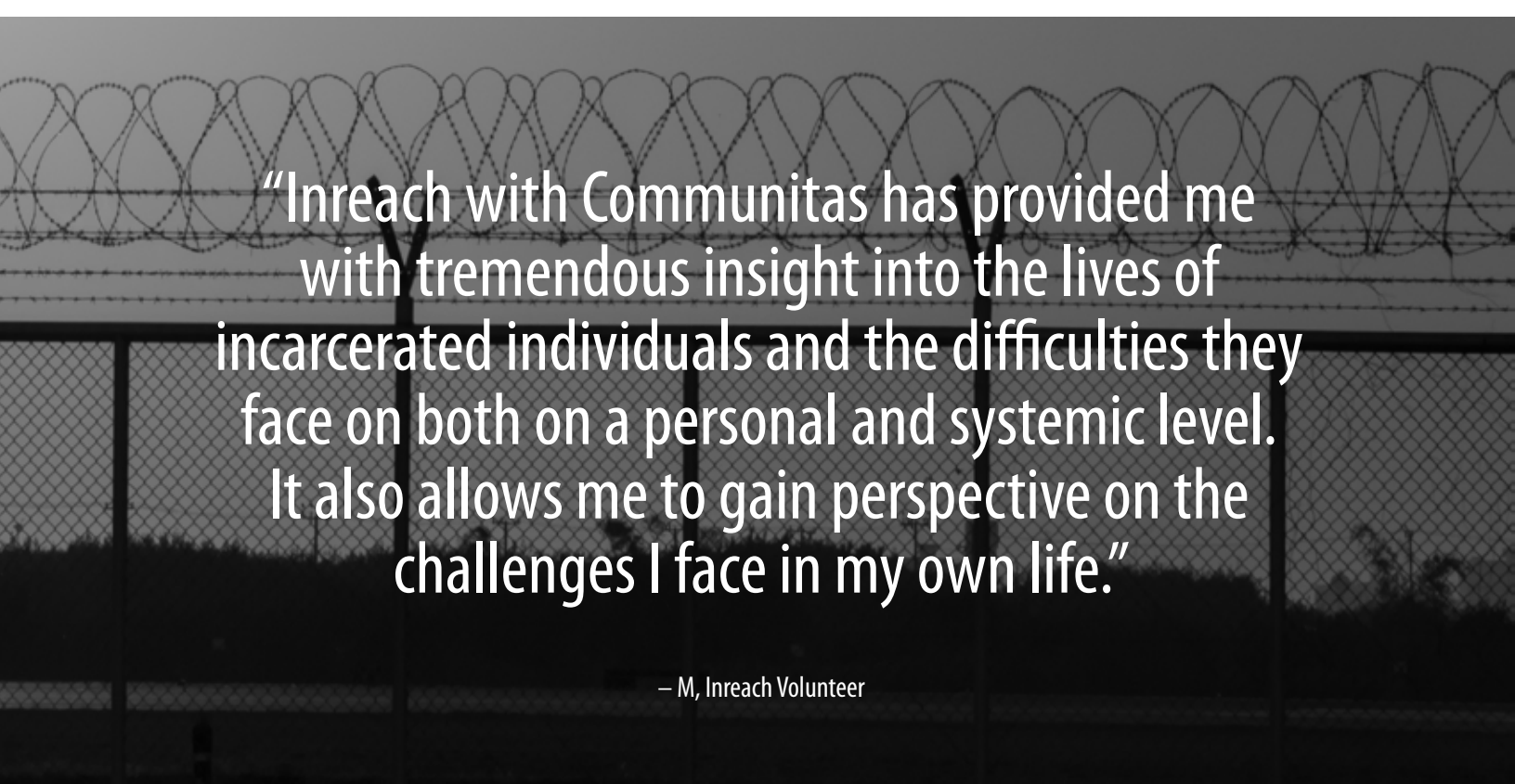
While most of Communitas' programming happens in the community, reintegration shouldn't start at the prison gates, nor should the boundaries of our community end there. With this in mind, Communitas volunteers have continued to head into the minimum-security penitentiary at Federal Training Centre in Laval twice monthly to share time with those inside. Throughout 2017-2018, a typical visit involved a group of 5-8 volunteers, drawn from a larger group of 14, who were fortunate to share each visit with 8-11 prisoners. Together, these activities built relationships that have enriched the lives of both volunteers and prisoners, and have played an important role in raising awareness about our activities among those approaching release.

24

INREACH VISITS TO FTC

14

**DEDICATED
VOLUNTEERS
DOING
INREACH**



"Inreach with Communitas has provided me with tremendous insight into the lives of incarcerated individuals and the difficulties they face on both on a personal and systemic level. It also allows me to gain perspective on the challenges I face in my own life."

– M, Inreach Volunteer



Grassroots leadership

Empowering our members to make us —and them— better.

Our members, whether inside or in the community, whether having criminal records or not, are our reason for existing and the engine that powers our work. Underpinning our approach is the idea that everyday citizens, working together, can make a difference in both individual lives and community safety, and that all of us gain something by doing so. We are therefore firm believers that our members are the experts and have a lot to contribute to organizational planning, outreach, and decision-making. Through members' meaningful participation, our organization is not only more effective, sustainable, and socially just, but we also help foster fulfilled, informed, and engaged citizens.

Throughout the year, the diversity of our membership has been represented on our Board of Directors, Steering Committee, and Sub-Committees, and our members have participated collectively in our annual Consultation and Annual General Meeting. The creative expression of our work to the broader community has also leaned heavily on our members' own gifts—photography, graphic design, writing, film-making and art. We also ventured into new territory by experimenting with Participatory Budgeting—a democratic process through which our membership brainstormed ideas for new initiatives or expenditures, developed proposals, and then voted on which ones would be funded. The process led to a number of great new initiatives which have either been instituted or are in development, including a garden project, new coffee sourcing that employs former prisoners, a scholarship for children of incarcerated parents, and a pilot project for additional re-entry support.

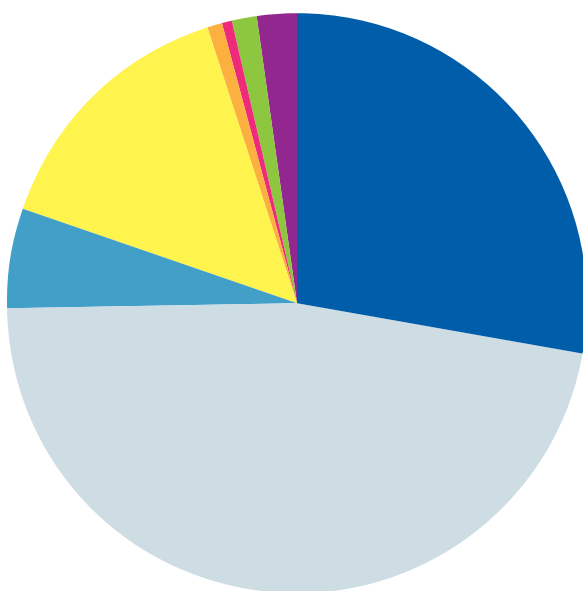
Finances

Doing a lot with a little.

In 2017-2018, Communitas' finances underwent notable changes, driven chiefly by the start of the CoSA National Capacity Project (CNCP). After years of operating without staff, the rejuvenation of our Circles work saw our expenses increase with the funding of two part-time staff positions, in addition to replacing outdated equipment and investing in new media to recruit participants and shine a light on the oft-neglected issue of prisoner reintegration. We maintained our wonderful home office in Saint-Henri, though the increase in the number of visitors for initiatives like Table Talk contributed to driving costs as well.

In revenue, the CNCP's re-introduction of funding from Public Safety Canada—which had been discontinued in 2014—provided an \$81,188.80 influx, which was by far Communitas' largest funding stream. For our second largest funding stream, we continued to be supported by Aumônerie Communautaire de Montréal with \$14,890.50, an amount nearly identical to the previous year. We also continued to benefit from the generous support of community donors, receiving \$6947.70—a 20% decrease from prior years.

In all, Communitas raised \$103,027.00 in revenue while using \$106,726.85 to conduct its work, creating a deficit of \$3,699.85 for 2017-2018.



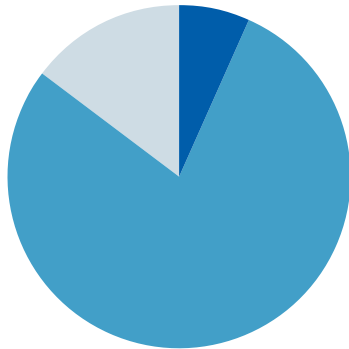
2017-2018 EXPENSES

- STAFFING & COORDINATION
- OFFICE COSTS
- PROFESSIONAL SERVICES
- FOOD & REFRESHMENTS
- MISCELLANEOUS
- INSURANCE
- VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT & TRAINING
- TRANSPORTATION

103,027
TOTAL REVENUE

106,726
**TOTAL
EXPENSES**

DEFICIT
3699



2017-2018 REVENUES

- PUBLIC SAFETY CANADA (CNC)
- AUMÔNERIE COMMUNAUTAIRE DE MONTRÉAL
- DONATIONS

AS OF MARCH 31, 2018:

ASSETS

37,654

LIABILITIES

2102

With 2017-2018 in the books, Communitas is looking forward to expanding our impact in the coming year—bringing our work to more of those who would benefit and improving on what we have found to be effective. This means more lives changed, and a safer, more integrated Montreal. To do this, however, we have identified a 2018-2019 fundraising target of \$24,000. If you or a group that you are part of would like to contribute, please visit our website at www.communitasmontreal.org or write to us at coordinator@communitasmontreal.org. Together, we know we can reach this goal and continue to make real and lasting change in our community.

2018-2019
FUNDRAISING TARGET  **\$24,000**



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