

## CHAPLAINCY DISRUPTION AT COWANVILLE A SERIOUS RISK TO REINTEGRATION EFFORTS

### Turmoil surrounding English-speaking chaplaincy position at Cowansville Institution demonstrates heightened vulnerability of supports for federal prisoners

An hour's drive South-East of Montreal, Cowansville Institution is a medium-security institution with an official capacity of 599—a quarter of whom claim English as their preferred, if not only, language. Until recently, the sizable institution has been serviced by just two chaplains, only one of whom could provide their services in English, and did so with the support of a modest four paid hours per week.

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## Vegetable Garden Project Off to a Roaring Start



The growing season is off to a running start this year in Communitas' brand new vegetable garden, which got its start as a successful proposal funded through our Participatory Budgeting project—a process where our own members proposed ideas and voted on those that would be funded.

It all started last Fall with a search for land and an application for a Community Garden plot in our Saint-Henri neighbourhood. After much waiting and many calls to the city government, the news came in: there would be at least a two-year wait for one to be available! Not willing to forgo the coming years waiting, we pursued the idea of using the outdoor space adjacent to the office on the wood deck. After meeting with our landlord, it was agreed that planters could be set. The result is now 11 boxes prepared with proper drainage and organic soil ready to nurture our seedlings.

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We would love to hear from you!



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*The Sou'Wester name is a reference to Montreal's Southwest, where Communitas began its work in 1999 and is still based today.*

## Chaplaincy disruption at Cowansville a Serious risk to Reintegration Efforts

*Continued from page 1*

On March 31, 2018, the position, held by Reverend Canon Tim Smart, was eliminated following notice from Bridges International, the Florida-based parent of Bridges of Canada—the organization who became responsible for coordinating Canada's federal chaplaincy services in 2016.

Prison chaplains are a crucial social resource for those inside, and this development has been seen by many as a significant loss for the English-speaking population at Cowansville, and a serious blow to reintegration efforts in the Montreal area. On the important and multifaceted role that prison chaplains play, long-time prison chaplain and Communitas founder Peter Huish has expressed that chaplains are not only—nor even primarily—concerned with religious matters. “Chaplains are now seen more as resources for the caring, human accompaniment of inmates according to their personal needs, with sensitivity to any faith concerns when appropriate. They understand that encouraging and enabling prosocial and helpful relationships is at the heart of their

vocation,” he said. “They also enable the involvement of diverse volunteers from the community within prisons and assist inmates who are returning to the community by connecting them with family and community resources that can assist their social reintegration process.”

The decision to eliminate the position came in the context of broader changes during which chaplaincy services have been cut back. In 2014, Correctional Service Canada moved to a new “single service provider” model for chaplaincy services. Late last year, the CBC reported on the perceived insufficiency of chaplaincy and a corresponding increase in complaints to both the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Office of the Correctional Investigator (“Inmate complaints on the rise over access to religious services,” December 23, 2017). Presently, there is also a legal challenge before the Federal Court in relation to the previous chaplaincy provider, alleging denial of religious freedom.

Given that the Cowansville development directly impacts Communitas' mission, its leadership group addressed a letter to the Assistant Warden of Interventions at Cowansville, expressing its dismay and copying several key figures, including the

Minister of Public Safety, Ralph Goodale, the Commissioner of Correctional Service Canada, Anne Kelly, the Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, and several others.

Since then, Rev. Smart managed to work on a volunteer basis with reduced activities while awaiting further developments. Widespread protest from a variety of sectors provided hope that the decision would be reconsidered. On this, Rev. Smart indicated that it was “only by the concerted effort of many dedicated volunteers and community organizations like Communitas that we were able to raise enough concern within CSC that a response became necessary.” In fact, it seems like our voices were heard: as of June 18th, Rev. Smart will officially be returning to Cowansville. Though the hours are few, at least some recognition has been given to the importance of his work and of the community connections made possible through his position. The apparent vulnerability of chaplaincy, however, continues to worry some supporters.

*-Jeff*

**See the letter we wrote on page 3**

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## Vegetable Garden Project Off to a Roaring Start

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Earlier this season we ordered seeds from a local supplier known for their organically certified products. Some seeds began growing in a starter tray next to the window in the office: Montreal Tasty red tomatoes, Galina yellow cherry tomato, and three varieties of peppers: Lipstick (red), Tequila Sunrise (orange) and Chocolate (purple). Others got their start outside in early May: Lebanese cucumbers, kale, De Cicco Broccoli, dark green summer squash, Detroit dark red beets, salad mix lettuce, Scarlet Nantes carrots, Witches Fingers carrots, and Black Beauty eggplant all planted outside in the boxes. All are growing well and show great promise.

The deck provides a venue for gathering this summer and the Friday Table Talk lunches are a great chance to observe the progress in the garden. No doubt many will be keeping their

eyes on the garden and doing what is needed to keep the weeds and animals at bay. In fact, the work of tending to the garden is one of the reasons it was started, seen as a relaxing activity that would contribute to our gardeners' well-being. As one of our steady gardeners put it, “I love gardening...The zen, the meditation. It relaxes me.” Studies have also shown that gardening can produce positive mental health outcomes.

After the work is done, Communitas is looking forward to a meaningful harvest late Summer or early Fall to provide tasty organically grown produce for us to enjoy and to provide to those in need within the Montreal community. Happy farming!

*-Ron*





April 13, 2018

**Re: Elimination of English-Speaking Chaplaincy at Cowansville Institution**

Dear Mme Béland,

We write having learned, with considerable distress, that the Chaplaincy position for English-speaking prisoners in Cowansville Institution, and the volunteer programs which depend on it, have been discontinued as of 1 April 2018. This decision adversely impacts not only our work, but by extension has serious implications for the Canadian public, and we urge you to take steps to reverse it.

By way of introduction, Communitas is a community-based non-profit organization which works to facilitate the successful social reintegration of English-speaking prisoners and ex-prisoners in the Montréal area. We have been conducting this work with proven success since 1999 and currently receive support from Public Safety Canada out of recognition that our services improve lives, significantly reduce recidivism, and offer considerable savings in terms of the financial costs associated with corrections and victimization.

The work done by chaplaincy in Cowansville, like that occurring in other Canadian institutions, is invaluable. It not only provides broad and varying types of support and guidance inside the institution, but also creates vital links with the community that are essential to ensuring inmates' success once they are released, and are otherwise not available. The position about which we write plays a unique and irreplaceable role in providing referrals to and establishing relationships with essential services and community organizations such as ours, as well as facilitating volunteer activities within the institution that cultivate positive relationships whose impacts continue long after release.

Importantly, the chaplain plays this role within a context where the challenge of accessing those in need is arguably unparalleled. This is especially the case given that we work specifically with Anglophone inmates who represent a linguistic minority in Quebec institutions—albeit a significant one at 25% of the Cowansville population—and are therefore further isolated. The loss of Cowansville's only English-speaking chaplain is thus a significant blow to the well-being of these inmates, the work of our organization, and the safety of the community to which they will return. Accordingly, we feel that the decision to eliminate the chaplaincy position is not only a serious blow to our own organization's mission, but by extension that of the Correctional Service of Canada as well, which includes an aim of "contribut[ing] to public safety by actively encouraging and assisting offenders to become law-abiding citizens".

This decision is especially difficult to understand in light of the fact that the position's significant impact came at the cost of only four (4) paid hours a week. Moreover, it is particularly concerning that it has been made and communicated by a third party based in Orlando, Florida, which is evidently out of touch with the realities of Quebec's correctional environment.

For nearly two decades we have seen firsthand the crucial role that chaplains play to facilitate successful, crime-free lives following release, and must state clearly that this decision will significantly impact the reintegration efforts within the province. Once these institutional capacities are lost, our frontline experience suggests that they would be very difficult to recover. Given the enormous benefit to the community and to the individuals implicated by this invaluable service provided by the Chaplains at Cowansville, we urge you to take whatever steps you can to reverse this decision.

We look forward to hearing from you regarding the steps you have taken, and thank you for having the Canadian public in mind in doing so. Yours sincerely,

**Jeffrey Kennedy**, Coordinator  
**Peter Huish**, Chairman, Board of Directors



## Artist in Our Midst: An Interview with Patrick

The Sou'Wester met Patrick in a downtown café before Open Door, Communitas' Tuesday night event.

**Sou'Wester:** Hi Patrick, what are you drawing?

**Patrick:** It's a book for a cartoon.

**S:** You mean a cartoon for a book?

**P:** Yes. My English is horrible. Maybe it's a special trademark for me. My interlocutor should try to survive. Kind of like an awake nightmare.

**S:** You often bring lots of bags to Open Door. What's in your bags?

**P:** Like this (points to his art). And a sweater. Pencil coloured. And 2 cell phones, one for business, one for personal. And a tape gun to repair the Communitas box in the kitchen at Open Door tonight. And these coffee grounds from my morning coffee, I give them to Bill for his vegetables. One bag is my office. 25 lbs on my right arm, 25-35 on my back and a load on my left arm too.

**S:** How many rings are you wearing?

**P:** Eleven on my right arm, just one on the left arm. This one is amber. I like amber. It's not my birth stone but it's my preferred stone. Before this life I did have many lives with a lot of bucks. This is a souvenir of this time. I was a salesperson for Le Devoir, the best seller, half of the department's sales were mine. My wallet was full of bucks.

**S:** What do you do in your spare time?

**P:** I pass part of my time to make my drawings. I like to take big walks, long, long walks. Maybe take the metro at St-Helene's, take the bridge to the metro, take a walk to the point of the island, pass under the trees, find the surfers (the interviewer can't write fast enough while Patrick describes the entire route) and you arrive at the back of the boats of sauna etc. That's in Old Montreal. Then go to café on St-Laurent where people play chess. That's 3 hours and a half, very rapid walk.

**S:** You play chess at the café?

**P:** I had a choice to continue to practice my talent at drawings or learn chess. I chose to practice my drawings.

**S:** Do you have family in Montreal?

**P:** My father is in Pointe-aux-Trembles. And I have one brother, one sister. I am the Benjamin - the baby. That's a French expression. My father was born in France, my mother is French Belgian, and they met in Manitoba. My father was in the Canadian army for 55 years.

**S:** So you moved around a lot when you were a kid?

**P:** We did stay in Quebec. The promotion and money were not important to my father. Important was education in French. So he gave up promotion and money so we would have an education in French.

**S:** You had an exhibition earlier this year at Atomic Café—anything else in the works?

**P:** I also have a project of a series of 12 or 15 cartoons for books for French or Belgian editors. So, I want to pass a maximum of my time to create the stories, personages, actions etc. I also want to make a new kind of cookies with production packaging but I need a place to realize it. I have 2 or 3 places that I need to contact soon.

**S:** Is there anything else you would like our readers to know?

**P:** I did observe about myself sometimes. Between awake and sleep, you don't know if you're in reality. I did find a lot of new inventions there. It's fascinating. ...And I like very strong peppers. (He takes a swig out of a bottle of hot sauce called XXXtra Hot Sauce.) I'm not stupid. I ate first. It helps my digestion.

**Want your art or photography featured in the Sou'Wester?**

Send us a copy of your artwork & any title or author name that you want included. We'll do our best to fit it in one of our upcoming newsletters!



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## Finding Work after Prison: An Important Step but a Big Challenge

Finding work after release from prison is often a pressing need and a significant challenge. There are many benefits to having a job, and for ex-prisoners released on parole there can be an explicit requirement to find a job quickly. Despite all the advantages that employment brings to the ex-prisoner, their family, and the broader community, finding and holding a job isn't always easy for those who have just gotten out of prison.

The good news first: There are many benefits to having a job. One of those benefits is obviously the paycheck that supports the ex-prisoner and their family, but the benefits don't stop at the bank. Being employed builds skills and experience that can help ex-prisoners get future jobs, as can the strengthened social networks that come with jobs. Work also helps break the isolation that ex-prisoners face, gives an increased sense of self-worth, combats boredom, and as J, a Communitas member now back in the community said, work provides "freedom – you're out of the house, you're not under the thumbs of the POs." Parole officers are also likely to be more comfortable when the people under their supervision are employed, as this provides more stability and is viewed as a productive use of time.

The broader community also gets benefits when ex-prisoners have jobs, from an economic point of view because ex-prisoners

are new consumers and taxpayers in their communities, and from a public safety perspective because former prisoners with employment are three times less likely to return to custody. The community also benefits from former prisoners' many gifts and capabilities through the services that they would provide. Everyone wins when ex-prisoners can find fulfilling and rewarding work.

Despite all the benefits of working, there are a lot of challenges facing ex-prisoners looking for a job. "The biggest problem is the gap" said J. Time inside is time in which social networks on the outside that help you find work are getting frayed, and in which the skills that you had before are getting weaker or outdated. "The hot water valve isn't in the same place that it was 25 years ago," in the words of K, another Communitas member now in the community. Perhaps equally important, time inside is time during which you have no work history to show employers looking for reliable people with experience.

Another big challenge for ex-prisoners looking for work is the prospect of a background check and anti-prisoner bias in hiring. It can be hard to get hired if all someone knows

about you is that you spent time inside, so it's always easier to get a job when they don't do a check. When they do a check, J advises that it's better to tell them before the check what

they're going to find. Then there are jobs which ex-prisoners can't have due to inability to get security clearance, prohibitory laws, or parole conditions barring them from doing specific kinds of work. Furthermore, many ex-prisoners don't have the education needed for many jobs, and due to limited education and training inside are unable to find work after release.

Even after finding work it's often difficult for ex-prisoners to keep their job. For starters, it can be hard to fit in after a long time inside where the culture is different than on the outside. In addition, "a lot of guys have problems," said K; ex-prisoners often have more severe physical health, mental health, and substance abuse problems than people without a history of imprisonment. Another big challenge with keeping a job is that it has to be sufficiently rewarding to foster a sense of commitment. "It's easy to find a job that doesn't pay well, but it's hard to find a job that pays decently" said L, another Communitas member now in the community. Good pay for good work not only tends to lead to longer employment, it also increases public safety as higher wages have been found to correlate with decreases in crime. Another challenge in keeping work is meeting the needs for supervision: "That's the biggest problem with guys holding jobs" said J. Curfew and supervisory meetings can interfere with an ex-prisoner's work schedule and cause them to lose their job, and parole officers sometimes make spot inspections that can negatively disrupt the workplace or out the ex-prisoner as someone with a history of incarceration, though as J noted "Some parole officers aren't all that bad, they'll meet you in the parking lot at lunch time."

Given that employment is such an important part of reintegration it makes sense to ask how getting and keeping jobs could be made easier. Two obvious solutions would be more employment relevant training offered on the inside and more assistance for ex-prisoners looking for work on the outside, as well as ongoing support for ex-prisoners currently working and their workplaces. Such approaches supporting ex-inmates in their return to the community build public safety, support individuals during a difficult transition and truly reintegrate the community.

*-Michael*



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## Time for Correctional Law Reform

Whatever shortcomings may fairly be cited in the governance and administration of this country, and despite the challenges posed by our somewhat novel constitutional organization, it must also be admitted that Canada is widely admired throughout the world as a relatively free and well-ordered modern society, blessed with strong and stable legal and regulatory institutions. This would not be the case were it not for the adoption of laws and regulations reflecting the evolving needs of our population and society, and were it not, as well, for the never-ending tweaking of these instruments as needs change.

In recent decades, in exercising its supervision of the federal legislative and regulatory framework, the Department of Justice enjoyed the collaborative support of a specialized, independent body of legal experts, who in turn enjoyed access to a broad spectrum of specialists knowledgeable about the various topics which captured the attention of these restless jurists. The Law Reform Commission of Canada, created in 1970 under Liberal Justice Minister John Turner, was mandated to carry on a continuing review of the laws of Canada for the purpose of discerning and recommending ways in which these should be improved, modernized, replaced, or dispensed with. The LRC proceeded by choosing areas of inquiry and producing reports which examined the existing practices and rules, identified deficiencies, and made concrete recommendations for reform. The investigations of the LRC were wide-ranging:

one moment the spotlight would be on divorce (which is presently scheduled for a new overhaul); and the next, on abortion. Readers of the *Sou'Wester* will want to take special note of the extensive efforts invested in the burgeoning field of administrative law so intimately tied to corrections and conditional release issues, and in the Criminal Code and the Canada Evidence Act, which resulted in, for example, a seminal report on dispositions and sentencing in 1976, meant to reflect the Commission's guiding insight that the coercive powers of the criminal law and its agents must always be used in such a way as not to do further damage to the social fabric. This work ground to a halt, however, in 1993, when the Law Reform Commission was disbanded by the Mulroney Conservative government on the eve of an election, ostensibly to reduce wasteful spending of Canadian tax dollars.

Happily, in 1996 the Liberal government resuscitated the Commission. Operating this time under the more neutral appellation, The Law Commission of Canada, it pursued its labours until the Harper Conservative government aborted its funding in 2006, at which point it vanished from the theatre of legislative reform, still with no indication in 2018 that it will ever be revived.

Predating and, later, parallel to the sustained regular operation of this dedicated tool of revision and reform, any number of isolated studies have been undertaken by the agents and agencies of government. Some of them were precipitated by particular developments or events, some driven by blatantly political

ends, while others were simply part of the inherent ongoing business of Parliament to improve and update the spirit and machinery of Canada's laws. No small part of that activity has addressed questions of particular concern to the world of corrections and conditional release.

A landmark event is the report of the Fauteux Committee, released in 1956, which reoriented the concept of parole. No longer to be conceived as a direct reward for compliant and industrious behaviour during incarceration, early release was reimagined as a program to assist offenders in making the transition from custody to participation in free society. It was in fulfillment of the Fauteux vision that Parliament moved in 1959 to adopt the Parole Act and create Canada's first National Parole Board.

Six years later, an Order-in-Council mandated a Committee on Corrections, chaired by Mr. Justice Roger Ouimet, to inquire into the broad field of corrections, in its widest sense, from the initial investigation of an offence through to the discharge of a prisoner. The resulting report defended the now-familiar notions that sentences of imprisonment should be resorted to only where clearly required for the immediate protection of society, and that in the long-term, the protection of society is best achieved through rehabilitation.

The Ouimet Committee was followed by a Task Force on the Release of Inmates under the leadership of Mr. Justice Hugessen in 1972. The Hugessen Report was notable for its attack on the imposition of fixed-term sentences, and for its support for the adoption of legislated maximum terms. Much of the Hugessen Report's thrust was snubbed by the subsequent report of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs in 1974, but the latter did concur at least on the importance of restricting sentences of imprisonment to those cases where the judge was convinced it was necessary for the protection of the public.

As noted earlier, the Law Reform Commission weighed in on sentencing issues in 1976. It considered that mechanisms such as mediation, arbitration, or diversion programmes should be used in preference to the criminal justice system wherever possible to deal with criminal acts. It developed guidelines for what it viewed as fair and constructive sentencing which it wished to see incorporated directly into the Criminal Code.

1981 was a watershed year, for it was then that the government initiated a mammoth and far-reaching project: the comprehensive review of all federal law concerning crime and the criminal justice system, with undeniable ramifications for corrections and conditional release. The Criminal Law Review precipitated fifty discrete subsidiary studies, including its acclaimed Sentencing Project. At the same time, John Carson's Advisory Committee toured penitentiaries and parole offices across the country in 1984, meeting as well with various and sundry other actors in the criminal justice field (including the author of this text!) and furnished the Solicitor General with a report on the management of correctional institutions.

In June of 1986, one of the fifty studies, the Correctional Law Review, self-described as a major and important study in its own right, published a wide-ranging series of working papers treating numerous aspects of correctional and parole practice. In the following years it also conducted further consultations with interested groups and individuals, and published additional reports destined to influence the coming changes.

In 1988, building on the findings of all of the preceding reform-minded activity, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Justice and Solicitor General, under MP David Daubney, conducted an inquiry into sentencing, conditional release and related aspects of the correctional system, and brought forward ninety-seven recommendations.

Throughout those years various government bills addressed the need for reform of specific aspects of the correctional legislative regime, but no attempt had been made to overhaul the existing law wholesale. This finally took place on November 21, 1992, when in one climactic move both the Penitentiary Act and the Parole Act were swept away, repealed and replaced by the unified comprehensive scheme we know today as the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, whose provisions create, empower, and direct both agencies, as well as the Office of the Correctional Investigator. Despite significant adjustments over the years to the terms of that statute, and the regulations promulgated thereto, for better or worse, those same core ideas and institutions enshrined in the 1992

legislation still govern correctional and parole practice today.

In the preceding brief survey we have witnessed some moments of dramatic change. Is it possible that today we are entering on another such moment?

There are a number of signs that there currently exists a widespread appetite for reform. In the United States, repressive policies and practices have brought prison systems in many jurisdictions to the point of collapse. At the federal level, the U.S. government has embraced a sentence reduction program, while many conservative state administrations are scurrying to reduce

***There are a number of signs that there currently exists a widespread appetite for reform. In the United States, repressive policies and practices have brought prison systems in many jurisdictions to the point of collapse.***

crushing correctional budgets. And consider events in liberal California, where repression had resulted in such overcrowding that some prisons operated at 300 percent capacity, leading the United States Supreme Court to order a population reduction on constitutional grounds. In 2011 the state responded with an act of mass forgiveness, releasing tens of thousands of inmates and diverting many accused away from incarceration.

In the United Kingdom, on May 26, 2018, the Guardian reported that Justice Secretary David Gauke has decided his prison population is far too high, prison sentences under 12 months do not rehabilitate and should be used only as a last resort, alternatives should be employed for less serious offences, and that for people with mental health problems, prison could be absolutely the worst place.

Evidently, Ontario as well has heard the siren call of reform. On October 3, 2017, CBC News reported that former federal Correctional Investigator Howard Sapers, having been commissioned to examine Ontario's provincial prisons, has released a report recommending sweeping changes to correctional policies and practices in the province, and the adoption of the Ontario Corrections Act to replace existing legislation, which hasn't been updated in more than three decades. Marie-France Lalonde, minister responsible for Ontario's jails, stated that the new legislation would

encompass a "rights-based approach" to corrections that is missing from the current regime, and that "our vision for Ontario's corrections is one of transformation."

As for the federal system, in a previous issue of the Sou'wester we noted that the Liberal government elected in October, 2015 seems bent on distancing itself from the repressive, ideologically driven criminal justice agenda of the Harper years. This is evident in the Prime Minister's Mandate Letters to Public Security Minister Goodale and Justice Minister Wilson-Raybould ordering a review of all criminal justice measures adopted in the preceding ten years. We reported on at least one step by Mr. Goodale to implement that direction: a

public consultation on the pardon system, with the promise of reform action to follow. Subsequently, following another public consultation, the Minister decided to restore the celebrated prison farms liquidated by Mr. Harper. And beginning December of 2017,

the reforming impulse took a giant leap forward with an unprecedented invitation to the public at large to play a role in the revamping of our criminal justice system, publicized online and in town halls under the astonishing heading, Justice transformation: How would you change our justice system to better serve Canadians? Of course, when the time comes to formulate and adopt laws designed to modify the contours of correctional and parole practice, it is the organs of government that will exercise that mandate, but the current opportunity for the man or woman in the street to submit their opinions and insights, possibly exerting some influence, remains a hugely refreshing innovation and another indication that this government's interest in reform goes beyond the legalization of marijuana. Could profound changes to the criminal justice system be on the horizon? As we say in Québec, dossier à suivre.

-Steve

# Loneliness: The Human Condition

**Hannah Arendt, in her book *The Human Condition*, wrote that modern life gives people freedom; but that same freedom also bestows loneliness.**

The “fearsome word-and-thought-defying banality of evil” was the main preoccupation of this German philosopher and activist. How humdrum and normal were the Nazis that made her flee her home country, Arendt told her world-wide audience. They weren’t monsters – they were “mediocre,” civil servants who typed out reports and went to lunch and took their kids to school like their neighbours.

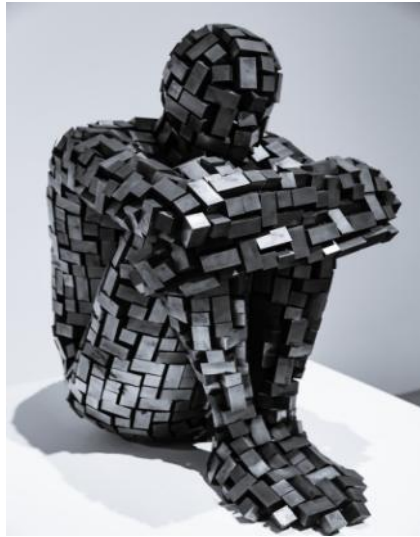
They tossed aside their own morals to send some of their neighbours off in cattle cars to the gas chambers. Arendt said they felt part of a movement far larger than themselves. No one held a gun to their heads, even if the consequences of not doing their job was abundantly clear for them and their families.

‘Power and violence are opposites,’ Arendt wrote. “Where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where the power is in jeopardy.” In minimum security, the coercive power of the gun is less necessary. Everyone here has theoretically worked on themselves; there are inmates at the end of long sentences as well as those serving short sentences.

## Mixed Nuts

White collar embezzlers mix with mob hit men on a patch of land without barbed wire or machine guns. It’s a place where, for the first time in a long time, I can find my own space without being bullied or harassed quite as much as at other higher levels of security.

Yet we are thrown together into a melting pot of races, social levels and personality types I might not ever have met in my long-ago civilian existence. Which opens the mind, makes you more sensitive to how others live and see the world.



At my trial, when asked how the people I hung out with in Ottawa knew I had gone mad, two who testified cited the fact that at any gathering, I was disinterested in white English speaking Canadians. Instead I would make a beeline for anyone foreign – black, French-speaking, anyone – and ask them questions about their culture.

In the high-security circles I was living in, this was considered dangerous. At the time, in the 90s, anyone born in a nation not considered a close ally of Canada’s, could not work in the civil service. Bureaucrats in certain departments were told they could lose their jobs just for speaking to someone from a non-allied nation. Decent people looked out for their families; not the type you would ever pick out of a police lineup.

## No Hummus Please

“Don’t lunch with Libyans” was the adage. My home and world were filled with folks from the best schools who would talk in hushed tones when left alone on a corner sofa. My bizarre interest in the exotic and the foreign was seen as concrete proof of mental instability, an omen of how I would soon go off the rails.

A prison is an incubator of extreme views. And many here are men you absolutely would pick out of a police lineup. Ottawa reporters used to describe Prime Minister Jean Chretien as looking like “the guy who drove the getaway car.” Those actuals guys are here.

But being brought together with a welter of people from cultures other than your own destroys your fear. My job often involves helping these folks learn English and French.

In rooms with men who tell me of harrowing trips across choppy Asian seas on a raft, fleeing war and searching for prosperity and peace, it is hard to be scared of immigrants.

When your life breaks down and nothing makes sense, when bombs dropping on your home village interrupt your kindergarten class, it is tough to adjust to a 9 to 5 existence. Jail is the perfect cure for prejudice and pre-judgement – and for the behaviours that result from losing your moral compass.

## Refugees

These men from far-flung nations, who screwed up when given a chance to establish themselves in a new land and want to prove that they won’t do it again, laugh and cry and worry about their kids. Caught up in the maelstrom of greed and easy money, they end up behind bars. A luxurious hotel compared to jails in Laos or Bangladesh. But jail nonetheless. A shock that will turn you around, unless you are a sociopath.

Data from Britain’s Brexit referendum showed that regions with the fewest immigrants voted most heavily to leave Europe. Country folk who lived in green and hilly villages far away from immigrant communities, from Poles and Pakistanis populating the cities, were those most scared of the threat posed by newcomers. But these newcomers’ neighbours weren’t scared enough to want to build a wall. Fear of the unknown makes us chatter our teeth on a dark night.

## That is the human condition.

In the loneliness of easy modern living, we can step over the homeless person and avoid the neighbourhoods where people who don’t speak our language live. But if we do, we risk fear of the dark.

-Colin



## Annual Consultation and Annual General Meeting Bring Renewal for 2018-2019

The Spring is always an exciting time at Communitas. As warm weather brings new life outdoors, indoors it is also a time for our members to bring new life to our work. At the end of April, Communitas hosts its Annual Consultation at which we ask our members and participants to reflect on the preceding year and provide leadership with their views on the year ahead. At the end of May, we host our Annual General Meeting, at which we together make decisions that formally set up the year ahead. Fresh from these momentous occasions, Communitas is filled with enthusiasm for coming months.

At our Consultation, which took place April 24th during an Open Door session, we heard about the personal impacts that participation in our various activities has had on those present: the creation of positive relationships, the learning from—and about—others, the enjoyment, the sensitization to the effects of incarceration, the sense of making a difference in one's community, of belonging, of comfort, or acceptance, and of community. We heard further about needs that we might help meet in this next year, including those related to housing and employment, and the 'themes' that members might hope will characterize this next year, including "Re-visioning, Renewal, Rejuvenation", "Outreach", "Fundraising", and, as we build up to the Fall of 2019, "20 Years of Communitas!"

At our Annual General Meeting, which took place on May 30th, we dug into the statistics behind the growth of our various activities, the funding that made it all happen, and what we are projected to need for this next year. On the latter point, we recognized the need to take seriously our \$24,000 fundraising target and work diligently together toward that goal. In leading us on this and other challenges we face, we also elected a new slate of seven Directors to our Board. We are excited for the leadership that Peter, Diana, Michele, Bill, Roch, Steve and Jeri will bring in this next year. 2018-2019, here we come!

*-Jeff*



## Effects of Incarceration Extends to Families

The trauma of having a loved one incarcerated takes a devastating toll on the family. Not only does the impact of a family member going to jail result in lost family income, shattered relationships, and a reduced standard of living, it also often leads to isolation as the offender's family bears the brunt of rejection by the community. The family becomes an additional victim of crime through the social impact of someone going to prison. Partners of the those incarcerated often experience the same traumatic symptoms as partners of prisoners of war, while children suffer separation anxiety by losing a parent, social stigma, poorer academic performance, and have a greater chance of being incarcerated themselves.

While there aren't currently many resources for families of prisoners, some organizations

have sprung up to tackle this pressing need, both at the national and local levels.

At the national level the Canadian Families and Corrections Network (CFCN) links together and supports organizations across the country that can be of assistance to affected families. While located principally in Ontario near a number of federal institutions, it can refer all Canadian families to resources closer to home as well as offer advice and support. As part of this mission the CFCN runs a toll-free support line, and offers educational resources to help families while a loved one is on the inside as well as during the reintegration process, with a special focus on resources to help children deal with the incarceration of a family member.

In Quebec, the main resource is Relais famille which offers a wide variety of services including one on one sessions to discuss the family's situation and provide relevant information, support groups, accompaniment to court appearances or penitentiaries, a free lending library with games, books, and movies, skill workshops, and therapeutic activities such as meditation and art workshops. While Relais famille is primarily a francophone group, it does make itself available for anglophones as well.

A number of other organizations also provide support to families in a less targeted fashion. For example, while the société Elizabeth Fry du Québec is primarily focused on supporting

women caught in the criminal justice system, their programming includes support to families through the "Mommy reads to me" program, in which prisoners record themselves reading a book and the recording is presented to their children along with a copy of the book.

*-Bill*

## Canadian Families and Corrections Network

**Web:** [www.cfcn-rcafd.org](http://www.cfcn-rcafd.org)

**Tel:** 1-888-371-2326

**Mail:** PO BOX 35040, Kingston, ON, K7L 5S

## Société Elizabeth Fry du Québec

**Web:** [www.elizabethfry.qc.ca](http://www.elizabethfry.qc.ca)

**Tel:** 1-844-489-2116.

**Mail:** 5105, Chemin de la Côte Saint-Antoine, Montréal, QC, H4A 1N8

## Relais famille

**Web:** [www.relaisfamille.org](http://www.relaisfamille.org)

**Tel:** 1-855-419-6632.

**Mail:** 660 Rue Villaray, Montréal, QC H2R 1J1



## The Experience of “Table Talk” at Communitas

For a great many people the title “Table Talk” will be something quite normal—in other words it will be perceived as nothing special and as a very basic part of our day-to-day life. Which means for many of us, sitting around a table, eating or drinking something and talking, and communicating with one another.

But “Table Talk” under the Communitas banner is something far more than the very basic needs of our normal life. It is a weekly occasion where ex-prisoners and volunteers come together every Friday during lunchtime, to not only enjoy the food and beverages which are provided by Communitas, but even

more importantly to enjoy each other’s company together.

It is an opportunity where people who have been out of touch with society and who quite often are very lonely, and still having difficulties in finding their own identity, or are searching for a place to feel safe, can come for a lunch, a talk and or discussion about their individual need for support.

Communitas has created an atmosphere where ex-prisoners can express themselves, without any fear or concern for consequences and or repercussions. Additionally, Communitas can also provide or arrange necessary support, for example: religious, legal, psychological, language and not to forget friendship.

We have to realize that these individuals who have been incarcerated, quite often have lost their relationship with friends and family and not to forget also their own place where they can feel safe in order to rebuild their lives.

Based on an experience of more than 20 years of supporting these persons, Communitas saw a great opportunity by means of Table Talk to create a relaxed and safe atmosphere over lunchtime, where all sorts of discussions can take place, with the objective of supporting ex-prisoners so that they will find their own identity and place in our society.

-Dirk





## Open Door Highlight: Emile Berliner Museum

Each Tuesday, Open Door attendees gather without knowing who they will hear present, nor on what topic. On June 26 attendees were in for a nice surprise: to learn of Montreal's distinguished position in the history of sound and music. We welcomed Anja, Associate Director of the Emile Berliner Museum in St. Henri.

Who is Emile Berliner and why was a museum named in his honour? Emile Berliner was born in Germany in 1851 and moved to the US where he transformed his apartment into an electrical laboratory. He first patented a microphone that Alexander Graham Bell used in his telephone, and then patented the

gramophone and the process of creating and duplicating flat disks (records!). Without knowing it, he had forever changed the world of music.

He moved to Canada, set up the Berliner Gramophone Company in 1900 and became a major employer in Quebec as the sound industry took off. Everyone wanted a gramophone, even the early versions with the tiresome crank to keep the record spinning. We learned that the dog that looked into the gramophone on the RCA Victor label was named Nipper, and the HMV label stood for "His Master's Voice." Anja brought us historical disks that we passed around, some of which were very heavy.

The Emile Berliner Musée des Ondes, which opened to the public in 1996, has lovely and significant historical collections related to sound and music, as well as Emile Berliner's archives, guided tours, exhibitions, research and cultural activities. After Anja's presentation, one excited Open Door attendee exclaimed, "I'm an electrician. I have to go there!"

Quebec can be proud of its citizens who have made significant contributions to the sound industry, including the great Alexander Graham Bell, the important but forgotten Reginald Fessenden, and the inventor, businessman and philanthropist Emile Berliner.

-Jeri

Garfield



# Please support Communitas!

Communitas is a non-profit, volunteer-driven organization which welcomes (ex-)offenders back to the community by supporting them in their social, spiritual, emotional and practical needs.

We rely heavily on support from individual donors like you. The stigma associated with work in this area brings unique financial and other challenges with it and so your contributions are essential in sustaining our important work.

I support Communitas and their programs and am enclosing a donation of:

\$25     \$50     \$100     Other \_\_\_\_\_

"Tax receipts will be issued for donations of \$50 or more. Please include the following information for that purpose:"

Full name Including middle initial: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**AFTER YEARS OF CONFINEMENT,  
RE-ENTERING SOCIETY CAN BE A  
CHALLENGING EXPERIENCE  
FOR PRISONERS.**



## **Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) at Communitas: Is it for you?**

Communitas is proud to have introduced Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) to Quebec in 2000 and have provided more than 50 circles since. COSA matches individuals with a history of sexual offending with a group of everyday community members who are committed to helping you navigate the challenges of life in the community and achieve a successful, crime-free life.

If you are interested in hearing more about the possibility of having your own circle, contact:

Jeff Kennedy 514-244-6147

[coordinator@communitasmontreal.org](mailto:coordinator@communitasmontreal.org)

We would love to hear from you!



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*The Sou'Wester name is a reference  
to Montreal's Southwest, where  
Communitas began its work in 1999  
and is still based today.*