

COMMUNITAS LAUNCHES SCHOLARSHIP TO SUPPORT CHILDREN OF PRISONERS

One of the beauties of the participatory budgeting process is its potential for empowerment, enabling the members of a collectivity to decide together how they wish to see money belonging to the group utilized.

It is a profoundly democratic exercise which serves to foster equity and strengthen community ties. And it was through an exercise such as this that the members of Communitas chose to create a scholarship aimed at students with one or more currently or previously incarcerated parent.

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2018 Communitas Christmas party biggest ever



The Open Door Christmas party this year was bigger than ever, including for the first time, two vans of Open Door regulars from Federal Training Centre, plus one from Ste-Anne-des-Plaines Institution. All in all roughly 70 participants were present although enough food was brought in to feed at least 100.

The Bishop graciously accommodated us at Fulford Hall despite the Primate's visit, and a constant buzz of conversation was heard throughout the beautifully decorated room as people chatted and laughed among themselves, at their tables or milling around the soft-drinks stand, whilst in the background Christmas music played softly. A peek into the kitchen would reveal furious activity as Gordon orchestrated the heating and distribution of food to his many willing helpers.

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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.

 @communitas_MTL
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Communitas launches scholarship to support students

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Our community has a deep and concrete appreciation of the depth and breadth of incarceration's pernicious impact on the life of a family, from the absence of a loved one, to financial hardship for the household, to the destructive stigma which affects not only the offenders, but also those around them. How often have we been witness to the damage that incarceration of a parent can do to the

children's educational plans. Out of this experience has come our determination to provide some measure of financial assistance for the higher education of deserving candidates whose parent or parents have been or currently are incarcerated.

We were gratified to find that this is a concern and a goal shared by the Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC), and the Montreal Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, who are convinced, as are we, that no one is disposable; and that by making education more accessible we not

only enhance the lives of the recipients, but attack one of the important roots of criminal activity. With their collaboration, we therefore are pleased to announce a scholarship in the amount of \$1,300 to be awarded to a deserving individual in the coming year, \$800 for the following year, and a final \$800 for the year after that. A Communitas Scholarship Committee is already in place and operating, so stay tuned for further updates!

-Monika

Christmas party a great success

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Offerings of food this year were extremely eclectic, with Jewish, Ukrainian, Sri Lankan, Italian, Greek, Haitian, and Jamaican dishes among those on offer. It all disappeared! Add to that the numerous offerings of desserts and you can get an idea of the feast that everyone enjoyed.

Of course, no Open Door Christmas party would be complete without a visit from Santa

and his Elf, and true to form Santa arrived to dispense gifts to all the good boys and girls that night. Nary-a-one was omitted.

This year too we added Christmas Carols to the mix, with song sheets distributed, and favourite carols being demanded from the various tables. Jeri as usual was an excellent compere joining the singing on the mike and choosing the shouted out carols to be sung.

Adding to the night's delights was Bill with a reading of the Christmas Story from St. Luke's gospel, and Matthew with a rendition of the

poem 'T'was the night before Christmas'. We also paid a tiny tribute to the late Hugh MacCormack, Communitas Volunteer Extraordinaire.

A jolly time was had by all with many expressions of thanks and appreciation being showered on Communitas and the Open Door crew for the warm welcome and the wonderful evening.

We look forward to doing it again in 2019.

-Michele

Some carvings by Sean

Shown here are but a few fine examples of the work of Sean Ryan, a MicMac carver who was, for some time, in the Federal Training Centre, which allowed many of the Montreal volunteers to have had the chance to see, first hand, the results of his artistic carving. Several younger detainees benefitted from his influence and teaching during that time. The themes he portrays are usually figures from native legends, such as the bear, the eagle, the thunderbird, or the turtle. All of these may be portrayed on a large wall plaque or on the lid of the many boxes he makes, using combinations of fine colored and textured woods, often presented as gifts to friends. Anyone who has had the (maybe unfortunate!) chance to enter the prison on Vancouver Island will have passed through the entrance whose walls are carved by Sean.



Communitas is fundraising!

As a non-profit charity, Communitas depends on financial support for its operations from the Government, Montreal Community Chaplaincy and generous donors.

Nevertheless, this current year 2018/19 has seen us operating at a deficit – needing to raise some \$24,000 in order to balance our budget.

Hence the overt effort to raise funds from the public, for a –it must be acknowledged – not particularly popular cause for most people – that of supporting the reintegration of ex-prisoners in the community.

To date we can proudly say that more than half the amount (\$16,175) has been received from various individuals, with one specific (anonymous) donor matching donations received up to 31 December 2018 in honour of Hugh MacCormack - long-time supporter of Communitas – who died last year.

We are therefore still seeking to raise another \$7,825 in order to break even this year and to be able to respect our responsibilities and accomplish the goals we outlined in our 2018-2019 budget:

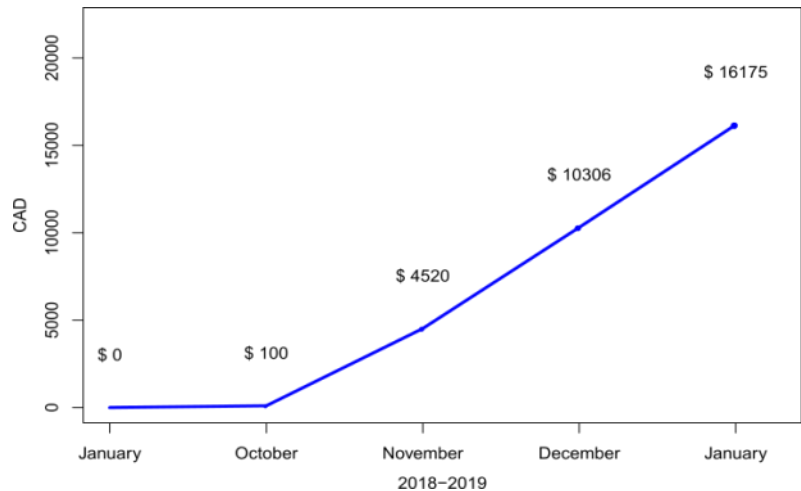
- Staff costs
- Rent/supplies/equipment
- Open Door

- Table Talk
- Circles of Support and Accountability
- Movie nights
- Board Games afternoons
- Volunteer recruitment and training
- Peer support
- Prison visits
- Prisoner escorts/drivers
- Prison chapel events
- Restorative Justice events
- Outreach materials - Sou'Wester/ pamphlets/handouts/posters etc.)

- Participatory budgeting activities identified by our members
- Etc.

Our newly redesigned website (www.communitasmontreal.org) now has a Canada Helps donation button that allows the public to support our work easily and transparently. You will note that monthly and quarterly donations are possible using the Canada Helps option. Cheques and cash are also welcome alternatives.

We invite all our readers to think about how you could support the work of Communitas and help us reach our goal.



A poem by Alan

By the warmth of His Presence
In my heart I am blessed
Wishing for eternal Peace
Stop the shooting
Stop the wars
My health is slipping
Courage and serenity are all I have
If you believe we are from God
And reason without doubt
We are all one
Don't ever forget we are all unique
And important to one another
Faith making all things possible
Love makes all things beautiful
May these two gifts fall upon you
We all have what it takes
To create what we imagine
By the warmth of His Presence
- Alan

A doodle by Michele



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 into one of our newsletters!

At the heart of it all: An Interview with Alan

The Sou'Wester caught up with Alan to learn a little more about one of our favourite people.

Sou'Wester: Your name is spelled A-l-a-n, is that right?

Alan: Of course, that's the only way to spell Alan.

SW: Yes, that's the best way, the way my little brother spells his name. He says Al is the best name in the world to have.

Alan: *(chuckle)*

SW: Tell us about your childhood.

Alan: I was born in Montreal, in Rosemont, around Beaubien and DeLorimier. I liked football and played in elementary school but we had no football in our high school and my dad wouldn't pay for me to play in the West Island, so that was the end of that.

SW: I know you have a brother, do you have a sister?

Alan: I have two brothers, I'm the oldest. But I wasn't a good role model because in order to fit in with the other kids, I got in with a rough clique and I did some pretty bad things. I've come a long way since then. I always wanted a sister. I would have been very protective of her and would have spoiled her.

SW: What's your best memory of childhood?

Alan: When I was five years old, my gran took me to Expo. All the countries had pavilions and what I remember most is all the colours.

SW: Have you ever been married?

Alan: I was married three times. Once I was married two and a half years to a Russian woman. As soon as she got her papers, she split! *(big laugh)* She was gone! Man, that was hard to take.

SW: Have you travelled?

Alan: I lived three months in Toronto and I hated it. Everyone was snobbish. Once I asked a bus driver, "Where's the metro?" and he said, "It's not a metro, it's a subway. Learn!" And one summer I spent with my aunt

in New Brunswick. Same thing. Nobody liked me because I was from Quebec. I didn't even speak French at the time! Now I speak French.

SW: Too bad. Those people discouraged you from travelling.

Alan: But I love Quebec. I like fishing and my favourite place is Chambly. I lived there for two years and went fishing every day. I would bake my fish every day with onions and tomatoes. There are largemouth and smallmouth bass, rainbow trout and brown trout, carp, and catfish. The Basin is attached

SW: Do you see your brother often?

Alan: I visit him every weekend. He's married and has 2 dogs, 4 cats and 3 or 4 birds. He's got Noah's Ark! I help him clean his house and, if he needs it, help him at the warehouse where he works. At night we watch DVDs. He's got a couple of hundred DVDs.

SW: What else do you like doing?

Alan: I write poetry. I started in Grade 5. We had a competition and compiled them in a book which we sold. That was my first time getting published.

(At this point Gordon walks in, says a few rough words to Alan and leaves)

SW: How do you put up with that?

Alan: Gordie? He's special. He says strange things to me. He's my best friend.

SW: Are your parents still living?

Alan: No, but I correspond with my Aunt Norma in Ontario. She's 86. She moved out of Quebec with the English exodus in 1976. I talk to her about twice a month and mailed her Christmas card

yesterday, early because of the Canada Post slowdown. Maybe I'll go visit her and Uncle Keith this summer.

SW: What do you read?

Alan: I like science fiction with sorcerers and dragons. My favourite author is Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, the bible of Tolkien. I don't like Harry Potter, I've seen the movies but it's juvenile. I also like vampire stories, like Buffy the Vampire Slayer.

SW: What do you look forward to in the future?

Alan: In April 2019 I'll be end of mandate. Completely finished. I'll have no radius and my brother and I want to go to Park Safari. Maybe I'll take the girls fishing, visit my Aunt Norma, go to La Ronde...



to the Richelieu River which goes to Vermont and we get all kinds of fish coming up from the States. The Government regulates the ten lakes around Montreal. You only need one license for zones 7, 8 and 6 but you need a special permit to catch salmon.

SW: How do you spend your free time now?

Alan: I like quilting. I started nine years ago in Martineau, just to get out of the place. David Shantz took care of everything. Quilting is so peaceful, so zen, you know, you're on the machine or drawing designs. I designed a quilt called "Blowing in the Wind" because it reminded me of the Bob Dylan song. We auctioned it for \$450 which went to the Mennonites. Now I'm doing one called "Eagle First Nation" which I'll give to a guy that my brother knows in Kahnawake.



Accessing healthcare in the community

“You don’t need much, as long as you’ve got your health,” as the old saying goes. There are few things in this world that have a greater impact on quality of life than your health, be it physical or mental, which is no doubt why healthcare makes up such a huge proportion of government expenditures. The healthcare of federal prisoners is the responsibility of CSC, but after release how is healthcare provided in the community, and how can it be accessed?

The healthcare system in Quebec is organized into administrative regions called either a CIUSSS or a CISSS. The CIUSSS or CISSS is responsible for coordinating and managing the services provided to their community. Those services can include institutions such as:

Hospitals, which provide diagnostic, general, specialized, and emergency services for physical and mental health with teams often including doctors, nurses, social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists and counsellors;

CLSCs, or community health centers, which provide a variety of preventative, curative, and rehabilitation services in the community, including mental health and support for quitting smoking;

CHSLDs, or residential long-term care facilities, which provide services for adults with functional difficulties including housing,

psychosocial services, nursing care, medical support, and rehabilitation;

Medical clinics, which can offer same or next day doctors’ appointments and lab services;

Community pharmacies, which in addition to filling prescriptions may have on-site nurses at specific times to provide services such as vaccinations;

Rehab centers, providing specialized care for people with physical disabilities;

Crisis centers, which provide 24/7 consultation, evaluation, accommodation, and referral services to those experiencing a psychosocial or psychiatric crisis; and

Community resources, for example, safe-injection sites or support for victims of sexual or elder abuse.

Given so many different kinds of services, how can you tell what kind of service is right for your health needs? There are a number of governmental services that exist to help you find the service you need.

For starters, during an emergency the number to call is 911, which connects you with an operator who will determine what emergency service meets the needs of the situation, be it police, fire department, or an ambulance.

For non-urgent situations where you need help navigating the health system two great resources exist – the website of your regional CIUSSS or CISSS, and the Info-Santé hotline.

The website of your regional CIUSSS or CISSS will list the location of your local CLSC, help you register for a family doctor, or make an appointment with a doctor online. Of course, not everyone has access to the internet, and websites can be difficult to navigate, which is why the Info-Santé hotline is indispensable. This free helpline, which can be reached by dialing 811, is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and by calling it you’re put in touch with a nurse who can answer health questions you have, tell you what kind of service you need to access, and direct you to it. Info-Santé can also connect you with a social worker, should that be the resource you need.

Of course, barriers exist to accessing health services in any community. Two significant barriers for accessing healthcare anywhere are the language of healthcare and the costs of healthcare, so it’s worth touching on those. The government pays for essential healthcare for Quebecers through RAMQ, which covers many forms of healthcare but not others. In general, essential medical services are covered, in addition to some dental care for young children and those needing financial assistance, and some optical care for children and those needing financial assistance, but it’s always worth clarifying before receiving services what is covered and what isn’t. It’s also important to know that some healthcare service providers operate outside of the RAMQ system, and you’ll need to pay yourself for all of their services, so make sure you’re clear about whether a healthcare provider works in the system or outside of it before accepting services. In terms of accessing healthcare in the language of your preference, anglophones have the right to receive healthcare in English in Quebec, though not all institutions can provide a given service in English. Allophones may have the right to an interpreter in one of 55 languages, depending on their situation.

Hopefully this helps you understand how to access healthcare in Quebec, but nobody likes feeling sick, so maybe this is a good time to mention that other well-known phrase, “An apple a day...”

-Michael



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SOLITARY CONFINEMENT IN CANADA: A SCORESHEET

In one form or another, solitary confinement, also known as segregation, has been a feature of the disciplinary and management regime of Canada's federal prison system since 1834. The CCRA currently allows imposition of a maximum of 30 days segregation— with or without visits— as punishment for a serious disciplinary offence. The Act also authorizes indeterminate periods of administrative segregation for a prisoner's own protection; or if his presence would interfere with an investigation which could lead to a criminal or serious disciplinary charge; or where, based on his actions, continued association would jeopardize the security of the penitentiary or a person. By far the greater number of segregated prisoners are held on an administrative rather than punitive basis, and thus without the safeguard of a statutory limit. Alone in a cell 23 hours a day, some are held for months, some for years. According to the British Columbia Civil Liberties Union, one in four Canadian prisoners has experienced solitary confinement. Indeed, so dependent has our penal system been on this practice, few prison managers can imagine a prison functioning without its segregation cells.

One Canadian who has no difficulty imagining a prison system without solitary is Kim Pate, longtime indefatigable champion of female offenders and advocate for all prisoners' rights, and now a member of the Order of Canada and of the Canadian Senate. In an opinion piece in the *Globe and Mail*, Senator Pate denounces segregation as "an inherently dangerous and inhumane practice"

constituting cruel and unusual treatment or punishment, in violation of s.12 of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Moreover, Pate points out, it is not even necessary; "there are examples in Canada where, when segregation was not an option, entire institutions have operated for extended periods without segregation units."

She is not alone in holding this view: assaults on the efficacy and morality of solitary confinement have multiplied in recent years and are coming from all sides. Professor Lynn McDonald, respected activist and former Member of Parliament, also unburdened herself in the *Globe and Mail*, casting the provincial and federal use of solitary as the last remnant of an archaic array of barbaric correctional practices including hanging, flogging, the paddle, and bread-and-water diets. She is especially disturbed that suicidal and mentally ill prisoners are not spared the anguish of segregation, despite their fragility. In the B.C. Supreme Court, renowned legal expert Professor Michael Jackson has testified that solitary confinement is "the most individually destructive, psychologically crippling and socially alienating experience that could conceivably exist within the borders of the country." Again in the *Globe*, Queen's Law Professor Lisa Kerr bluntly avers that the horror stories now surfacing "have stirred a new public understanding of solitary confinement as a form of torture." And these doleful assessments are no more damning than the official reproofs repeatedly issued by the correctional system's own watchdog agencies.

Increasingly, the attacks are nourished by the results of medical research. The prestigious journal, *Scientific American*, published an article by Dana Smith on November 9, 2018, titled, *Neuroscientists Make a Case against Solitary Confinement*. Having canvassed the medical literature, Smith confirms that "this type of social isolation and sensory deprivation can have traumatic effects on the brain, many of which may be irreversible." She reports that neuroscience research played a role in a successful class action lawsuit brought against solitary confinement in California. Parallels are found in the Canadian experience: for example, a suit brought by the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association relied crucially on the disturbing testimony of Doctors Grassian and Haney about solitary's responsibility for organic brain damage. Small wonder that the B.C. Health Professions Review Board ruled in August, 2018, that the B.C. College of Physicians and Surgeons (therefore, doctors treating prisoners) must adopt practices satisfying the ethical duties of medical professionals as defined by the United Nations' *Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners* related to solitary confinement. (These 'Mandela Rules' prohibit solitary confinement for more than 15 continuous days, or for any time at all for prisoners with mental disabilities, as this would constitute torture or cruel treatment, which doctors are forbidden to participate in actively or passively.)

Change appears finally to be on the way. As Senator Pate pointed out to the *Sou'wester*, "The move away from isolation and segregation is an international phenomenon and in some ways Canada is quite late to the party, so to speak." Beginning in 2015, both sown by and sowing the country's growing disenchantment with solitary confinement, legal challenges have sprouted like rebellious weeds in the correctional greenhouse. The first to bear fruit was the Canadian Civil Liberties Association's application to the Ontario Superior Court for a declaration that the sections of the CCRA permitting indeterminate prolonged administrative segregation are unconstitutional and therefore invalid. In the result, the judgment of December 18, 2017 did recognize the serious damage segregation can cause to prisoners' health, and held the impugned statutory provisions violate s.7 of the Charter whenever segregation exceeds the fifth working day review, as that review is

procedurally flawed. The Court accepted the Attorney General's request that the declaration of invalidity be suspended for 12 months to allow the continued use of administrative segregation while Parliament went about legislating a new constitutionally compliant scheme. On January 17, 2018, the CCLA filed an appeal, considering that the judgment was distinguished more by what it withheld than what it granted: the Court had declined to find indefinite segregation necessarily constitutes cruel and unusual treatment or punishment, even with respect to mentally ill prisoners; and, international norms notwithstanding, declined to identify a number of days which would exceed constitutional muster once an acceptable review procedure will have been adopted. The appeal is pending.

On January 19, 2015, the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association and the John Howard Society filed their own application for a declaration of invalidity, and on January 17, 2018, the B.C. Supreme Court ruled that the relevant provisions of the CCRA offend s.7 of the Charter, not only for their inadequate decision-making procedure, but for the use of indefinite periods of solitary confinement. It also held that any use of segregation discriminates against mentally ill, disabled, and Aboriginal prisoners, in violation of s.15 of the Charter. The Court suspended its declaration of invalidity for 12 months. In March, 2018, the Attorney General filed an appeal, which has yet to be argued, and on January 7, 2019, requested an extension of the suspension of the invalidity declaration to afford Parliament more time. The Appeal

Court agreed to extend to June 17, 2019, but also attached conditions obliging CSC to adopt practices respecting the findings of the B.C. Supreme Court. On January 31, the CCLA and BCCLA petitioned the Ministers of Public Security and Justice to yield, but they responded that there is need for further clarity from the two Appeal Courts given the somewhat divergent judgments in Ontario and B.C.

Meanwhile, four class actions have been instituted. Gallone v. The Attorney General of Quebec seeks compensatory and punitive damages for provincial prisoners held longer than 22 hours since June 2014. Gallone v. The Attorney General of Canada seeks

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compensatory and punitive damages for all federal prisoners in Quebec with mental health problems who, after February 24, 2013, have been in administrative segregation, and all other prisoners who were segregated for periods of at least of 72 hours. In Ontario, Brazeau v. The Attorney General seeks damages for all federal inmates in Canada with mental illness who after November 1, 1992 have experienced inadequate medical care, over-segregation, and the arbitrary use of force. Also filed in Ontario, Reddock v. The Attorney General seeks damages for all federal prisoners not already covered by Gallone or Brazeau and who were segregated since November 1, 1992, for periods of at least 15 days. In all

three federal cases, negotiations between the adverse parties were attempted until December 2018, but did not avail, and the cases will be going to trial.

One remembers that on taking power, the Liberal Government made a commitment to review and reform the criminal justice system. Spurred on by escalating public and judicial pressure, in October, 2018 the government introduced its legislative answer to the evils of segregation and to the recommendations of the Ashley Smith jury. Bill C-83 claims to enhance health care and access to patient advocacy services, reduce body cavity searches, give greater weight to Indigenous offenders' needs, and eliminate both administrative and disciplinary segregation by substituting "structured intervention units," the last accompanied by an improved decision-making process. Prisoners' rights advocates have proved skeptical, and none more so than Senator Pate, who

informed the Sou'Wester that CSC already has established living units in every prison for women and in the men's maximum security establishments, and is increasingly employing lockdowns in medium and minimum security, all of it to segregate prisoners from each other and the prison population. For Pate, the claim that 'structured intervention units' eliminate segregation is "a cynical exercise that merely rebrands this cruel treatment" while removing many procedural safeguards. She informs us the government is looking for a speedy passage of Bill C-83, which is now at second reading.

-Steve



Dolphins and the transfer bus

On a transfer bus from Cowansville to Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, in the lower Laurentians just north of Laval.

It does not matter if it is day or night. I cannot tell.

In the rear, in a cage, manacled and handcuffed, all is darkness. I hear the rhythm of the truck suspension against the road; feel the truck speed up and slow down; and stare into the void. Thoughts come and go in the form of dreams.

This is what a sensory deprivation tank must feel like, I say to myself. They have those tanks everywhere. A fibreglass shell encasing body temperature saltwater. No light. No sound. You strip naked, get in, and without feeling your body, you descend into the depths of your mind. It is called “tanking”.

These tanks became popular years ago thanks to psychologist Dr. John Lilly’s seminal book, *Center of the Cyclone*. Lilly was obsessed with dolphins, which he saw as just as smart as we are. He worked in aquariums studying dolphin language. He believed that if you could figure out how dolphins thought, how their brains worked, then you could communicate with them. He saw the sensory deprivation tank as the best way to get a human inside a dolphin’s brain.

A zen master tanks

Buddhist Zenmaster Brad Warner of California does not agree. The worldwide leader of the ancient Dogen Shanga sect, this Ohio native visited McGill University’s tank some years ago. He didn’t think it would lead to some great moment – Zen Buddhists believe we are one with the universe, so “the state of mind divorced from body never exists in nature”. Besides, “I was certainly aware of my, um, frank and beans flopping around there like a kielbasa carelessly thrown into the Great Salt Lake”.

Warner fell asleep. He awoke to the sounds of what to him, as a punk rock bassist for the group Zero Defex, sounded like the soundtrack of the cult sci-fi film *Voyage to the Planet of Prehistoric Women*. When he got

out of the tank he felt dizzy. And he was thinking of prehistoric women dressed in seashell bikinis.

Lilly never did talk to dolphins in a tank. Dolphins have a lot on their minds: get food; find love; raise young; many of the same concerns we have. They are never alone with their thoughts. Nor am I in my sensory deprivation transfer bus cage. There is the bumping of the bus’ suspension; traffic noises outside; the radio played by the officers in the front of the bus. But it is true, as Warner writes in his book *Zen Wrapped in Karma Dipped in Chocolate*, that when you have only darkness to stare at, “your brain goes to work digging out whatever it can find to try and keep itself occupied – kind of like a lazy employee pretending to work because the boss is watching”.

It is amazing what is stored in the attic of the mind. Music you once heard; old girlfriends; bad movies; childhood traumas; and lots of things you didn’t think were even in you. Just like a toilet overflowing. A lot of it is deep; a lot of it is just stuff.

In the end I am led out of the truck, at our destination. My chains are undone. A man asks me if I belong to any criminal gang. Nope. I am led to a holding cell, to stare some more.

Survival tips

For those of you left alone in a dark place – it could be a hospital room, or some closet an evil bully has locked you into – there’s an old prisoner’s trick, passed down through generations, for getting you through your day. Here are the steps:

1. Invent a 6-foot tall invisible squirrel friend.
2. Give him a name. Mine is “Ziggy”. You cannot have that name for your invisible squirrel friend. It is mine.
3. Be nice to your invisible squirrel friend.
4. Topics to avoid: cats (they chase away squirrels); pesticide; winter.
5. Dance with your invisible squirrel friend.
6. If, say, a hospital nurse or a prison guard asks you what are you doing, never say, “Go away, I am dancing with Ziggy my invisible squirrel friend”. (Though your invisible squirrel friend

would never be named Ziggy – see point #2).

Or, you can simply stare into the darkness and meditate, as I did. And as the Buddhists teach. But none of their sacred texts even mention dolphins or squirrels. Not even once.

-Colin

R.I.P. Suzanne Lawson

It is with deep sadness that Communitas marks the tragic passing of one of our former staff members and volunteers – Suzanne Lawson.

Suzanne was tragically killed in a road accident on 12 December 2018. She is remembered by her fellow staff and volunteers and the members of Communitas whom she served for more than seven years back in the day when we were named ‘Montreal Southwest Community Ministries – MSCM’.



As well as being an active member of our Steering Committee, Suzanne served as a member of Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA), and indeed is featured in our film ‘One of Us’, together with her beloved “Dog”.

She was generous with her time, and passionate about the cause of Restorative Justice. She was outspoken in defending herself and others and had the most infectious laugh.

We will miss you Suzanne.

National Restorative Justice Symposium, November 18-20, 2018 Saskatoon SK.

Inspiring Innovation: Restorative: Anytime, Anyplace, Anywhere

I had the great privilege of attending the 2018 National Restorative Justice Symposium that was held in Saskatoon in November at the beginning of Restorative Justice Week. I was there representing Communitas, as our organization is based on restorative principles aimed at the successful reintegration of those returning from prison back into society.

More than 300 people gathered for the annual symposium in a province where there is a sizeable Indigenous population. About half of the attendees were Indigenous and each day opened and closed with a Cree prayer and sacred drumming. The Indigenous footprint was unmistakable: The emcee was Indigenous, as well as two of the three keynote speakers.

The event kicked off Sunday evening with a reception marking the 60th anniversary of the John Howard Society in Saskatchewan. Retiring Provincial Court Judge Gerald M. Morin, a Cree who has just completed 17 years on the bench in what is called the "Cree Circuit" in northern Saskatchewan, gave the opening address that evening, beginning with what many restorative justice practitioners already firmly believe: that the criminal justice system as we know it must change.

"The courts have no option but to follow the laws made by legislators," he said. "That does not permit much flexibility when it comes to ensuring that sentencing better suits the harm caused by the offence." He added: "Too often the laws are created to appease the public and not to remedy a situation. However, it isn't just the law itself that is the

problem when it comes to sentencing, but the policies that bureaucrats enact to carry out the law. They don't always do it properly and the courts get stuck with this."

The first keynote speaker energized the gathering with her personal story of overcoming trauma and pursuing success as an Olympic athlete. Waneek Horn-Miller, a Mohawk from Kahnawake, was 8 years old when she watched on television fellow Mohawk Alwyn Morris win gold in canoeing at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. She set her resolve at that young age to take up swimming and someday participate in the Olympics herself. That resolve was tested when she was 14 and taken by her mother behind the Barricades during the 1990 Oka Crisis along with her 4-year-old sister. The night the 78-day Crisis ended, Waneek was stabbed by a soldier's bayonet, only a centimetre from her heart. It took authorities 22 hours to bring her to hospital where she was told by a doctor she was indeed lucky to be alive.

While others who had been behind the barricades later turned to alcohol and drugs to deal with the trauma, Waneek went back into training and won gold in Water Polo at the 1999 Pan Am Games before going on to the Sydney Olympics in 2000 where her team placed fifth.

Her message now to Indigenous youth is to be a warrior always, no matter what the obstacles may be..... be strong in the face of adversity. Being a warrior, she said, was about finding your strength. Being a "warrior" is perhaps one of the most misunderstood words there are, even in Mohawk circles.... Its true meaning is "Kanonohkatsheera - balance and peace". When one does that, she said: "one exercises the most powerful energy in the world."

A Maori Indigenous university professor from New Zealand in his keynote address had a

warning to participants about the use of restorative justice. Juan Marcellus Tauri said there is a risk of restorative justice being turned into an industry by its proponents. "There is a danger it will be a continuation of colonialism, a postmodern form of imperialism." His point was that in those communities where restorative justice is being introduced as a solution to crime, the members of the community itself must be in charge of the process instead of outside authorities. The community needs to take ownership. To not give control to the communities would just be a new way to perpetuate existing colonialism. One Cree elder observed in the question and answer session afterwards that Aboriginals have now become a major industry for white people.

The final Keynote speaker was Dr. Kerry Clamp of the University of Nottingham in Great Britain. Her presentation was given as an academic. She said practitioners too often had little time for academic research findings because of the intense nature of their work, but that "it is really important for RJ practitioners to step back from the experience now and again and look at the theoretical framework. In that way, this will allow for new tools in the existing toolbox."

There was an underlying theme throughout the keynote speeches and workshops: when it comes to reforming the criminal justice system, it is not enough to simply remodel the prison building (an image put forward by Prof. Tauri) ... something new must be built in its place if victims are to be healed, offenders are to take responsibility, and communities are to be made stronger. Given this theme, the challenge for Communitas is to become more restorative in all that it does.

-Bill



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In the news

Prison watchdog calls for more healing lodges

Canada's federal-prison watchdog wants to include more healing lodges in Canada's correctional system.

The proposal is one of 21 recommendations made by Corrections investigator Ivan Zinger in his 120-page annual report. The investigator's office reviews and resolves complaints brought to his office by individual offenders.

Correctional Services Canada (CSC) has healing lodges for Indigenous women and men where Aboriginal values, traditions and beliefs are used to design the services and programs for offenders. The lodges for women are minimum- and medium-security facilities. For men, they are minimum-security. Non-Indigenous offenders can also live there if they choose to follow Aboriginal cultural practices. Healing lodges have been part of Canada's justice system since the mid-1990s. This year, 294 inmates are registered at them.

"I actually cringe every time I hear politicians talking about crime and punishment," Zinger said. "Egregious cases are being used by political parties as a wedge issue, and the end results are policies and laws that, in my view, go against ... good corrections and public safety."

Zinger's recommendations are in line with those of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report, which asked the federal government to build more Indigenous healing lodges.

The over-representation of Indigenous men and women in the federal prison system continues to rise. In 2018, 28 per cent of all people in custody were Indigenous, even though they represent 4.3 per cent of Canada's population. Indigenous women represent 40 per cent of all women in custody.

Zinger's report also describes a riot at the Saskatchewan Penitentiary in 2016, in which 85 per cent of the 131 inmates involved were Indigenous. During the riot, two inmates were seriously assaulted and one was murdered. All three victims were Indigenous.

Zinger said the first report on the riot concluded it was a random and spontaneous event. It did not consider what drove Indigenous inmates to riot.

As a result, Zinger concluded that the CSC should no longer investigate itself.

The healing way

The head of a women's healing lodge in Edmonton is defending both the safety and effectiveness of Canada's nine Indigenous healing lodges, in the wake of outrage over the relocation of convicted murderer Terri-Lynne McClintic to a healing lodge in Saskatchewan.

Buffalo Sage Wellness House opened in 2011, one of nine Indigenous healing lodges introduced in an attempt to address high rates of Indigenous incarceration.

"It's not a get-out-of-jail-free pass to come here," said Claire Carefoot, executive director of the Buffalo Sage Wellness House, a 28-bed urban facility that houses minimum-security inmates who have committed crimes ranging from murder to armed robbery.

Healing lodges aim to get at the roots of offender's learned behaviours, said Carefoot, which is often more difficult for women than punitive time sitting in a jail cell.

While research into the effectiveness of Indigenous healing lodges has shown mixed results, [a 2013 government backgrounder](#) claims that the recidivism rate for offenders who completed programs at three Aboriginal healing lodges was six per cent, below the national rate of 11 per cent.

Carefoot says Buffalo Sage only recently began tracking recidivism rates, but she's convinced they're on the right path.

"From my 29 years of experience in the correctional system, I believe that any one man or woman who truly gets involved in the Aboriginal cultural aspects of life does not reoffend. If they're truly involved."

Over 1 Million Florida Felons Win Right To Vote

In a key ballot initiative, Florida will restore voting rights to citizens convicted of certain felonies after they have served their sentences, including prison terms, parole and probationary periods, AP has projected.

Voting rights will not be restored to those convicted of murder or felony sexual offenses.

Approximately [1.5 million people are currently barred](#) from voting in the state because of a past felony conviction — a figure representing about 10 percent of Florida's adult population.

While more than [150,000 Floridians](#) had their voting rights restored during Democrat Charlie Crist's four years in office, Gov. Rick Scott's ascension to the office seven years ago put a halt to that. Since 2011, Scott has restored voting rights to just over [3,000 people](#).

The current system significantly affects African-Americans in the state: [More than 20 percent](#) of otherwise eligible African-American adults are unable to vote under this process.

In February, a [federal judge declared](#) Florida's current procedure for restoring voting rights to felons to be unconstitutional.

"In Florida, elected, partisan officials have extraordinary authority to grant or withhold the right to vote from hundreds of thousands of people without any constraints, guidelines, or standards," [the judge said](#). "Its members alone must be satisfied that these citizens deserve restoration. The question now is whether such a system passes constitutional muster. It does not."

The ballot initiative for [Amendment 4](#) to Florida's Constitution could majorly affect future elections in the swing state, which has been known for its very tight voting outcomes. Florida's most notable tight race was the presidential election in 2000, when George W. Bush narrowly won the presidency.

"This is an issue that transcends rural-urban-suburban divide. It transcends the partisan divide," Neil Volz of the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition [told NPR earlier this year](#). "And it really is something that impacts all communities and all walks of life."

Indeed, 64 percent of Floridians agreed to restore felons' voting rights, according to the Associated Press. The ballot initiative required a supermajority of 60 percent support to pass.

Board games afternoon a big success

To be competitive without being cutthroat, to relax and play as if you were once again a child, or to stimulate your mind by testing and trying your vocabulary – Board Game Afternoon is a flexible day for friends, food, and fun.

In 2017, the participatory budgeting committee of Communitas suggested the concept of getting together for board games. Following my request to complete hours at Communitas in order to fulfill competencies for my Youth and Adult Correctional Intervention diploma, this wish from the community was brought to life with myself as the facilitator, but could not exist or thrive without the help of supportive staff and each volunteer or individual who shows up, week after week.

As soon as this program was suggested to be part of my work for the fall semester, September could not come fast enough. I desired exactly this type of face-to-face contact with members of Communitas and of the community. I may have lacked the typical Canadian board-game-oriented family in my years of growing up, but Sundays at Communitas make up for anything I might have lost in an even more fulfilling way as it becomes no longer about me, but about you, about everyone else, and about all of us together. There is an optimistic excitement in me each time I hear someone walking up the stairs to the office, as I am always eager to see whose face peers in from the other side of the door.

From Trivial Pursuit to Pay Day, Uno to Risk, and Scrabble to Scategories, there is no lack of options to vote on every Sunday at 2:00. Not sure how to play? You'll learn, even if it's a Jamaican game called Kalooki that uses multiple decks of cards.

Sitting, sipping coffee, and snacking, we play the chosen game until 4:00. Our time



together may begin with games, but progresses with life updates, jokes and laughter, stories, anticipations for the future – and ends with warm goodbyes and “see you next time”.

I would like to thank those who support Communitas every Sunday in creating a judgment-free community space, those who have donated board games, and those who inquire cheerfully about its movement and growth. If ever you find yourself “board” on a Sunday, stop by the office where there is always a seat for anyone who wants it.

-Katherine

Three recent Open Doors

Music and Hearing – Kierla

Kierla brought her cajon (a drum box to sit on) and with her guitarist friend she led us through rhythms and repetitive exercises. Our bodies start to move to the beat of music but why do we not begin to dance to the beat of a strobe-light, for example? The answers are all in our brains, and the language of the brain is electricity. In fact, we don't move by reacting to sound or the beat, but by predicting it. A question was asked about which kind of music is best to work by for long hours at the computer. The answer: Baroque music. Music therapists know how to improve all sorts of conditions, for example, improving Parkinson's disease with Rhythm and Blues, or any music with a strong beat.

McGill Body Donor Program – Joseph Dubé

The body donor program had its roots hundreds of years ago: in grave-robbing. Since in the past, there were so few

opportunities for doctors and medical students to see inside the human body, they would pay handsomely to view a dissection of a corpse robbed from a newly dug-up grave. Today, sick people and their families donate their bodies to McGill so that anatomy students can dissect and learn. Over twelve months, the students become very attached to the person whose body they have dissected. At the end of every year, McGill has a party in which families of the donated bodies come to celebrate and learn how attached to the body of their loved one the students are, reading poems and tributes. It's the highlight of their semester.

RJW: A Crime in the Community

Open Door celebrated Restorative Justice Week by constructing a crime in the community: Albert is a young man from the community who wants to finish school and learn a trade, but he is forced into a gang and accidentally shoots and injures an innocent young man from the community. We divided ourselves up into four groups to role play the Offender, the Victim, the Community and the Restorative Justice Group. People really learned a lot about how Restorative Justice

works and how complex the issues surrounding a crime can be. Nothing is black and white, everything is shades of grey. With only 45 minutes of exploring the Restorative Justice process, we saw how days, weeks or months of this could truly bring dialogue, healing and growth to the community.

The final Open Door of the year: carolling and Christmas cards

We continued in the party spirit and sang Christmas carols tonight. We divided ourselves into small groups to each sing one day of the 12 Days of Christmas, and each verse was so full of muttering and laughter that when we all joined together for the verse of the 12th day, our desire for melody was thunderous! We could have drowned out the Vienna Boys Choir! We brought out the Christmas card supplies and Katherine said, “Oh good! I remember this activity from last year.” It was beautiful to sit together to focus, relax and be creative while listening to Christmas music. Several cards were exchanged between members and others were left for Communitas. A lovely end to an exciting year at Open Door!

-Jeri

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:

Monika Barbe 514-244-6147

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.*



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