

the Sou'wester

Spring 2019

PRISON LEGAL SERVICES IN CANADA : A PERSONAL LOOK BACK

No one would argue that our prison population's legal needs are fully met, but few will deny that the presence of lawyers in the service of those needs is a familiar sight inside the walls.

This has not always been the case. In 1985, when I joined Nicole Daignault and Renée Millette as a full-time prison law practitioner, we were but three in the province. And a few years later, as I accompanied activist Claire Culhane to Saskatchewan's super max to take statements from 16 prisoners complaining of torture, CSC's Prairie Region found the idea of convicts receiving legal assistance so unusual that it obliged me to procure precursory letters from the prisoners... *Continued on page 2*



Communitas Restorative Justice Focus Group



There is a renewed movement at Communitas to embrace restorative justice more completely. Following an Open Door Presentation in mid-February on the November 2018 National Restorative Justice Symposium held in Saskatoon, Communitas members expressed a desire to look into what more Communitas could do on the matter of restorative justice.

The Communitas link to restorative justice is firmly embedded in the organization's Mission Statement that affirms in part that "Communitas is a non-profit, essentially volunteer-driven, English-speaking organization, working in accordance with the principles of restorative justice for a safe community, through the accompaniment and reintegration of those who have served time in a penitentiary."

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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
 /communitasmontreal

PRISON LEGAL SERVICES IN CANADA - A PERSONAL LOOK BACK

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... in question confirming they did, indeed, wish to meet us; after which the visit department grudgingly assigned us an appointment schedule which we learned upon our arrival from Montreal included useless timeslots which did not fall within the institution's visiting hours. Today, happily, legal representation is less contentious, although its occurrence in Saskatchewan remains a rarity, given the work is not supported by that province's legal aid regime.

But enough bouncing back and forth; let's return to the beginning. The Canadian penitentiary's earliest antecedents are found in eighteenth century England, whose county jails and archaic dungeons were part of a corrections environment which also featured transportation of criminals, frequent hangings, work houses, and debtors' prisons. Magistrates took a hands-off approach to penal institutions, many of which were under the de facto management of criminal organizations. Legislative rules for correctional keepers were a blessing whose time had not yet come, and as we know, without mandatory rules and duties one can seek no remedies. This correctional free-for-all was not to last.

The death in 1740 of Charles VI, Holy Roman Emperor and head of the House of Habsburg, plunged most of Europe into the War of the Austrian Succession. The social and financial cost for England led to a dramatic increase in crime and put enormous demands on its penal institutions. The need of reorganization, now irresistible, and the urgings of prison reformer John Howard and other people of conscience precipitated a new approach to corrections, one which sought to reform the soul rather than chastise the body. There were now to be rules which were defensible and systematic, commanding respect and imposing order and discipline: such was the thinking behind the Penitentiary Act of 1779. Further pressure came with the trade depression and crime wave following the loss of the American colonies. Reform of the habits

and morals of the vagrant poor was sought through construction of new prisons built on variations of a solitary confinement and silence model in England (Gloucester) and America (Cherry Hill), and these influenced nineteenth century prison construction in Canada.

We shall not track the proliferation of penitentiaries as they spread throughout the Canadian landscape, being more interested in the emergence of national rules defining the rights and obligations of the penitentiary population, and, by extension, fostering a need and role for lawyers who could defend those rights. And rules there were, set out in



Serving hard time in Halifax

Canada's Penitentiary Acts of 1834, 1851, 1868, and 1875, the last of which placed leadership in the hands of an Inspector of Penitentiaries, whose Annual Report in 1879 already incorporates the notion that even prisoners have rights under the law, that the law exists not only to chasten the offender but to protect him, and that it is right for the watcher to be watched:

"It is of paramount necessity that prisoners should realize the fact that the rules are carried out fairly and justly, in order that strict and stern discipline be maintained without exciting constant resistance. They must feel, too, that the officers are simply administering the law, and that in any case of abuse of power on the part of an officer, he will be held to a strict accountability. (...) The vilest criminal, who is sentenced only to confinement and hard labour, has as good a right to require that society should not expose

his health, sanity or life to danger, as the most virtuous member of the community."

During the early chapters of the Canadian prison story, offenders had their champions, the most notable perhaps being Agnes Macphail, who in 1922 became the first woman to be elected to the House of Commons. They did not plead their cause before the courts, but through commissions and reports designed to rouse the public and move the government. With the Second World War, there was an explosion of regulatory bodies in Canada, as elsewhere, the better to coordinate the nation's energies and resources during the existential crisis. As they

proved their worth managing the business of increasingly complex industrial societies, administrative agencies and tribunals expanded their ambit, by the same token driving the evolution of those common law principles and remedies which soon would become weapons in the prison litigator's arsenal.

During the volatile 1960s the civil rights movement brought this struggle into focus, as American activists and lawyers were drawn to the defense of incarcerated clients

against the unfettered power and willful behaviour of their captors, one of the most farsighted and effective of these activists being Martin Sostre, an inmate himself. 1972 saw the creation of the ACLU's National Prison Project, currently led by attorney Susan H. Herman.

Developments in Canada followed not far behind. The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies was created in 1962, and Montreal's Ligue des droits de l'Homme began wading into prison issues the following year. Individual litigators were spurred on by the creation of the Federal Court of Canada in 1971, although pioneers like Professor Ron Price soon learned its judicial outlook was anything but friendly. In 1972, Professor Michael Jackson, with University of British Columbia law students and provincial legal aid funding, created Canada's first prisoners' rights clinic, beginning at Matsqui federal penitentiary and then branching out; while



Kingston Penitentiary: Canada's most famous prison closed its doors

activists founded L'Office des droits des détenu(e)s in Montreal. In 1974, Queen's University Correctional Law Project (today, Queen's Prison Law Clinic) was established under the leadership of Professor Price, then Allan Manson, then Fergus (Chip) O'Connor, and others. Partial federal Justice Department funding in 1974 allowed John Conroy to create a clinic at Abbotsford which later evolved into B.C. Prison Legal Services, today directed by Jennifer Metcalfe. (Like Prof. Jackson and Chip O'Connor, the stalwart Mr. Conroy remains one of the key actors in our movement forty-five years on.) Federal money also allowed the creation of a prison law clinic at Sackville, New Brunswick. Regrettably, in 1978 that funding dried up and the clinic blew away.

In 1975, in *McCann v. The Queen*, the Federal Court's watershed judgment on the arbitrary use of solitary confinement in B.C.'s maximum security penitentiary gave a hint of the potential of strategic, tenacious litigation for the protection and expansion of prisoners' rights. That same year, the redoubtable activist Claire Culhane, founder of the Prisoners' Rights Group, set up shop in B.C.; Prison Justice Day began its inexorable march from Millhaven to all the penitentiaries in the land; and a prison law clinic was grafted on to

the Legal Aid office in Laval, Quebec. After six months Laval's federal grant had expired, and so had the clinic. Between 1980 and 1983 there were efforts by the law schools of McGill and UQAM, and Montreal Legal Aid, but they failed to produce another clinic.

Then the stars aligned in February, 1985, as academics and practitioners from across the country assembled in Toronto for Canada's first national prison law conference, moderated by Fergus O'Connor. Before they dispersed, the Canadian Prison Law Association had been born, a landmark event: thenceforth, prison advocacy in Canada would function with a greatly enhanced level of coordination and mutual cooperation. The CPLA operated during its formative years out of B.C. Prison Legal Services' office under the tireless leadership of Sasha Pawliuk, to whom we all owe a debt. Prison lawyers in all corners of the country would send their caselaw to Vancouver, and Sasha would see to its distribution nation-wide. An electronic list-serve facilitated daily information updates, national strategy sessions, and requests for assistance, fostering a collegial identity which was further strengthened by a series of national law conferences organized from 1985 to 2005 by Sasha and Steve Fineberg. The group has appeared before parliamentary

and senate committees, intervened in test cases, and lobbied corrections officials and elected representatives. In 2010, the Ontario Prison Lawyers merged with the CPLA, folding its membership into ours. Our current president is Mark Knox of Nova Scotia, supported by board members in Ontario and B.C.

The movement has gone from strength to strength, as the ROC's landmark moment was replicated in Quebec, host to over one third of Canada's federal offenders, as well as its provincial prisoners. The Association des avocats et avocates en droit carcéral du Québec formed in May, 1992. Its president and vice-president for its first 21 years were Steve Fineberg and Jacinthe Lanctôt, and both positions now are in the capable hands of Sylvie Bordelais. Like its national counterpart, the AAADCQ depends on an electronic communication tool to connect and unite its members, allowing us to speak with one voice to the Quebec Bar, government officials, and the public. Clearly, prisoners' rights advocacy has come of age.

- Steve

COMMUNITAS RESTORATIVE JUSTICE FOCUS GROUP

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The Restorative Justice Focus group is looking at ways to embrace more fully the principles of restorative justice. The group, comprising 14 women and men from a cross-section of the Communitas community, has met four times to better understand the benefits of restorative justice and to map out activities that Communitas members can undertake to promote the use of restorative justice within our own community as well as in our wider community. The meeting consists of sharing documents on restorative justice and watching videos, followed by a lively discussion of the members' hopes and dreams for RJ.

The Federal Department of Justice describes restorative justice this way: "Restorative justice is commonly defined as an approach to justice that focuses on addressing the harm caused by crime while holding the offender responsible for their actions, by providing an opportunity for the parties directly affected by the crime – victims, offenders and communities – to identify and address their needs in the aftermath of a crime.



"Restorative justice is based on an understanding that crime is a violation of people and relationships. The principles of restorative justice are based on respect, compassion and inclusivity. Restorative justice encourages meaningful engagement and accountability and provides an opportunity for healing, reparation and reintegration."

As the focus group members are discovering, there is a growing awareness of the need for restorative practice in society. It is being used more and more in other areas than just criminal cases such as schools, workplaces

and in the community itself, wherever relationships become harmed.

The group is discovering that more must be done to engage the wider community to allow this awareness to grow. As such, early plans are to organize a couple of activities this November during restorative justice week aimed at the larger community that will enable a discussion surrounding the benefits of restorative justice.

For more information, contact Bill at either Open Door or Table Talk, or by sending an email to info@communitasmontreal.org.

SOME RECENT OPEN DOORS

April 2: Drawing Exercises: Today at the Open Door we went to Art School and we did three exercises to strengthen our eye-hand coordination. First, we did a "blind contour" drawing of a still life in the middle of the room (we only look at the object, not at the paper, and let the pencil go where it "feels" right rather than trying to making the drawing look good). Next, we drew the same still life with our non-dominant hand. Finally, each person received a few pieces of dry pasta and we concentrated on capturing the fine detail of such small objects. After each exercise we enjoyed walking around to view everyone's efforts and playing art connoisseurs. Let's do some more art at Open Door!



April 16: Computer Coding: Randy is a self-taught computer coder and he encouraged us to consider going directly for what we want without spending years in school. He is proof that confidence and determination can get a person into a dream job. At one point he ceded the computer to one of our participants, who has been studying coding on his own, and in one-minute he drew up a simple Open Door announcement for us. Applause for the two self-taught coders!



April 30: The Teenager inspiring Climate Change Awareness worldwide: Greta Thunberg is a 16 year old Swedish girl with Asperger's Syndrome – on the autistic spectrum. Yet, she single-handedly inspired more than one and a half million school children all around the world to walk out of their classes in March 2019 and to **Strike For The Climate!** We watched a speech given by her to the British Parliament educating its members about the peril of Climate Change, and had a lively conversation at Open Door on what we as individuals and as a community can do to save the world from Climate Change. In the words of Greta Thunberg: "Is the microphone really on? Can you hear me? Is my English OK? Because I am beginning to wonder...."

Report from the 2019 Communitas Consultation

Every year at Communitas we host our Consultation. This is an event that tries to gather as much of our membership as possible, as its main objectives are to generate a space where we can all reflect about the previous year and to provide constructive feedback for the coming one.

This year, we had our Consultation on April 23rd during an Open Door session, where we were joined by our diverse membership: members of the Board of Directors, guys in the community, volunteers, and also guys that came from the pen. It was an amazing and incredibly participative group!

One of the things that we got to learn was how Communitas really has had an impact on the lives of our members: it has been an opportunity for all to broaden their minds and to learn from others, and for Communitas to connect with our members, to build relationships and community, to keep hope alive. Furthermore, we also learned about needs our members have and that we can consider in our coming year. These were related primarily to continuing our efforts to foster pro-social relationships and friendships throughout the membership. Finally, among the themes proposed that could be featured in 2019-2020 we had: "Helping the forgotten ones", "Inclusion and diversity", "A place of hope", and "The strength of unity".

- Monika

A summary of the 2018- 2019 AGM

Communitas held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) in the Undercroft of Christ Church Cathedral on Wednesday, 22 May 2019. The meeting was well attended with some 28 members and 1 observer present. Business addressed by the meeting included the presentation of the 2018-2019 Annual Report, with the Coordinator Monika, and Assistant Coordinator Michael outlining the activities that took place during the year including statistics for attendance at the Open Door, Table Talk, Movie Night, Board-Games Afternoon, In-reach activity at the Federal Training Centre (B-16) Correctional Facility, and Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA). A report on the 2019 Communitas Annual Consultation and its recommendations was also presented to the gathering.

The 2018-2019 Financial Report and the 2019-2020 Budget were approved by the AGM. The latter shows a fundraising target of some \$18,000 in order to attain our goals for this year. The Board of Directors was also voted on, with six of the previous seven Directors being reappointed. A new Director, Ms. Pauline Houle, was also elected to the Board, replacing Ms. Diana Sitoianu who stepped down after two years of valuable service. The full 2018-2019 Annual Report will be posted on our website.

- Michele

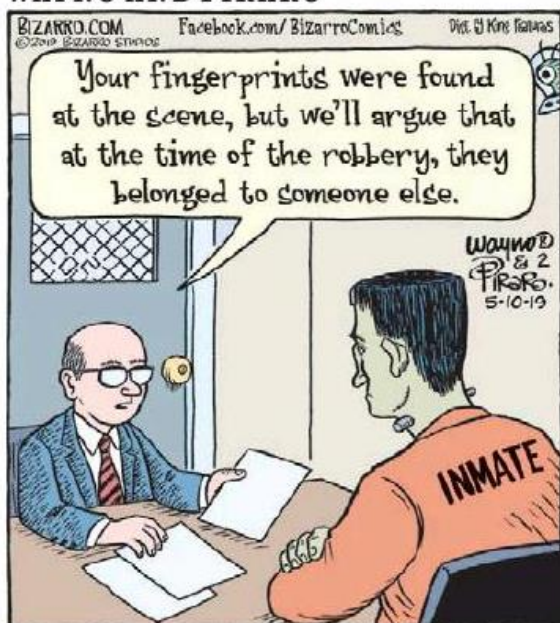


Members enjoyed snacks before the AGM began



The new board met for the first time at the conclusion of the AGM to chart a course forward!

WAYNO AND PIRARO





In the News

Where Prisoners Can Lock Their Cells, and Guards Are Told to Knock

From The New York Times
By Iliana Magra
March 31, 2019

LONDON — For two years, inmates at a prison in Wales have been allowed to lock their cells from the inside — for privacy. Guards have been expected to follow a “knock first” policy before entering. The detainees have had access to laptops, through which they can order meals.

And please, don’t call them “prisoners.”

The unusual accommodations, publicized by the British newspaper The Telegraph and other news outlets this past week, were put in place at Berwyn, the largest prison in England and Wales, which opened in February 2017. The policies are part of a government overhaul of prison practices in England and Wales intended to improve conditions and bolster rehabilitation.

Six new jails are planned in the United Kingdom, The Telegraph noted. And despite opposition from some prison workers, the government regards Berwyn as “a model for a modern prison,” according to a continuing study funded by the Economic and Social Research Council seeking “to unlock an age-old question of whether prisons can really rehabilitate offenders.”

But the approach has been a failure, an official from a trade union for prison workers said on Sunday.

“It’s a social experiment that has been a complete disaster,” the official, Mark Fairhurst, the chairman of the Professional Trades Union for Prison, Correctional and Secure Psychiatric Workers said in a phone interview.

“Berwyn has the highest assault rates on officers — they lost control because they were too soft; they listened to psychologists who don’t do our jobs,” he added.

Berwyn, about 170 miles northwest of London, has capacity for 2,106 male inmates.

The prison follows guidelines set out in a 2017 research project, “Well-Being in Prison Design,” that was funded by the Royal Institute of British Architects in conjunction with the Ministry of Justice.

As part of the measures, privacy locks were installed to allow inmates to lock their cells (though they can be overridden by guards); prison officers were required to knock on cell doors before entering; prisoners were provided with laptops that could gain access to an internal network; and different terms were used to refer to the men inside and to their cells.

“These physical measures are matched with the operational philosophy and terminology: Those in custody are referred to simply as ‘men’ and the cells are ‘rooms,’” according to the project’s guidelines.

“The guiding principle is that officers and staff are enablers of rehabilitation first and foremost,” the report added.

But the approach has not been effective, Mr. Fairhurst, the trade union chairman, said. He

also pushed back on the idea that staff members at Berwyn would knock on cell doors.

"They're prison officers, why would they knock?" he said. "They are still prisoners; there's still violence."

About 100 prison officers demonstrated outside Berwyn in September to protest "unprecedented violence" at the prison, after reports of widespread drug use and assaults against staff members, which allegedly included employees being pushed down the stairs and spat on, the BBC reported.

Mr. Fairhurst also stressed that inmates at Berwyn could not lock and unlock their cells at will. "They can lock their cell door when it's unlocked, so that other prisoners cannot go in and steal their belongings; they can't unlock their cells," he said.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Justice said in an email on Sunday that staff members at the

prison "can override the locks that prisoners use when they want privacy in their cells."

The spokesman for the Ministry of Justice said of the 2017 report, "While we welcome views on how the design of new prisons could reduce reoffending by improving prisoners' mental health and rehabilitation, this document is not a blueprint for future prisons."

In January, academics from the Universities of Bath and Leicester announced a three-year research project into whether prisons can rehabilitate offenders — and Berwyn is being studied, according to the project's official announcement.

"Some of these changes at Berwyn are relatively simple, but they might be having an important effect when it comes to making prisoners feel that they are treated with respect and decency," Yvonne Jewkes, a professor of criminology at the University of Bath who is one of two academics leading the research, said at the time.

A report published in July by an independent monitoring board for Berwyn, a body of volunteers who monitor prisoners' welfare, found that inmates there were "treated fairly and with decency," and said, "Berwyn will provide a practical illustration of what works well, what works less well and what can or should be discontinued." The report covered the period from March 2017 to February 2018.

The Ministry of Justice has said that as part of the wider overhaul of British prisons, the windows of new prisons in England and Wales will have toughened glass and air vents, because a government-funded study had warned that having bars was punitive. The measure was also intended to make it harder to smuggle contraband into prisons.

The ministry has also said in December that more inmates would be allowed phones in their cells to help maintain family ties in an effort to improve rehabilitation and cut reoffending rates.

An ode to Table Talk

It's Friday and I have a big appetite. Robert brings his ginger snap cookies, or will it be his famous peanut butter cookies. Maybe he'll surprise us with the best carrot cake I've ever tasted. And then, I'll never forget his moist orange cake. One bite and it was an explosion of flavor filling my palette.

Gordie's making chicken teriyaki. Everyone looks forward to Gordie's cooking. He has a passion for cooking and we have a passion for eating. Some of my best food memories happen at Table Talk. And some of my best recipes come from there too.

There's no agenda, but people say what's on their minds. Most conversations take place in little groups scattered around the table. It's here where I get good reading recommendations. Robert's got me reading Farley Mowat. Robert is on a mission to collect all his books. And today he's proud to build his collection to hand down to his recently born grandson. He was the last holdout to get a smart phone. Of course we know why — he can take pictures of his new grandson.

And problems. Come to Table Talk and you may just find the solution. There's a lot of wisdom here: life experiences and learning from mistakes. Shame has no place here.

Most talks take place around the table. Sometimes private conversations take place inside the vault where it's safe. (OK, I couldn't resist that.) Speaking of which, Table Talk is a place where even the driest jokes find an audience. If I tell a boring joke to Steve, he always retorts with a better one. And Robert, Cookie Bob we call him, is always competing to see who can tell the worst joke. When a painful expression creeps over a joke-victim's face, we both know we've succeeded. All kidding aside though, people that come here leave having been fed, emotionally, socially, spiritually and with a full belly. We're like the Table Talk Musketeers, "One for all and all for one."

I wouldn't miss a Friday if I could help it. And when I'm away, I make a habit of a regular Friday phone call.

Mike's been away on a trip to Europe. It was interesting to overhear his eyewitness report on the state of Notre Dame Cathedral which was recently damaged by fire.

There's never a boring moment at Table Talk. It's my highlight of the week.

- Bob

Congratulations to Communitas volunteer Serena Lopes!

A big congratulations to long time Communitas volunteer Serena Lopes who was recently awarded the Prix Claude-Masson for young volunteers for the region of Montreal. Serena was awarded the prize in part due to her volunteer work with Communitas supporting prisoners and former prisoners on the inside and the outside. Serena's citation also notes the fantastic work she does by providing care for children while their parents appear at Youth Court. We're proud to have exemplary community-minded volunteers like Serena working with us as we build better lives by helping prisoners and former prisoners meet the challenges of reintegration!



Feeling overwhelmed, maybe a touch irritable, and incapable of getting to sleep even though you haven't been sleeping? You might be stressed.

Stress can have a wide variety of causes, from very big things like natural disasters, violent incidents, and major life changes, to smaller things like having to make simple decisions or living in a noisy and crowded neighbourhood. Given that it can have so many causes stress is a fact of life, but over long periods too much stress is bad for you and can cause all kinds of problems, such as poor digestion, anxiety, headaches, depression, sleep problems, weight gain, concentration issues, memory problems, cardiovascular disease, and reduced immune system function. Yikes! While stress can have some positive aspects, too much stress is clearly a bad thing, so it's worth having a plan for managing stress to keep yourself happy and healthy.

One approach to managing stress is to prevent it before it happens. There are a number of ways to nip stress in the bud before it even gets started:

Avoid stressors: Understand the difference between things you need to do and things you don't need to do. If you can avoid stressors this might be a good way to reduce your stress level, but there are some stressful things in life that we can't simply put off, so for these you'll need another approach.

Try to get perspective on the things that stress you: Is it really as big a problem as you think? Maybe the thing you're dreading is actually an opportunity for growth!

Don't let problems get worse: Ignoring problems that need to be addressed might make you feel better in the short term, but the problem might get worse and cause you more stress down the line.

Know your limits: Don't take on too many responsibilities, and prioritize how you spend your time so the most important things get dealt with first.

Make time for relaxing activities: Setting time aside for hobbies can help keep you balanced.

Get enough sleep and eat well: Get enough rest, enjoy a diet rich in healthy foods, and limit caffeine, alcohol, and cigarettes.

While it's great to reduce the amount of time that you're stressed, it's also a good idea to have some coping strategies on hand if you find yourself in a stressful situation. Here are some ideas for managing stress once it's started:

Exercise: Exercise has been shown to help reduce stress, and you don't have to run a marathon to get the benefits. Even things as simple as getting off the bus a few stops early and walking the rest of the way can help.

Reach out to friends and family: Having a sympathetic ear to share with is valuable when things aren't going well. If you don't have many friends and family nearby consider trying to make new friends at work, by volunteering, joining a club, or finding a workout buddy.

Spend time in nature: Nature is all around us, and you don't need to go to the woods to get its relaxing benefits. Instead watch the sun

rise, look at the stars, or focus on the sounds outside.

Find something funny about your situation and laugh!

Think about the things that are going well in life, and not just the stressful things.

Find a stress-escape-hatch that works for you: In a real bind it can be helpful to hit the pause button on stress by taking a deep breath, thinking of something you love, counting backwards from 10, or just walking away from the situation for a bit.

These ideas might help prevent stress, or manage stress once it's found you, but if you think your stress might be out of hand consider speaking to a healthcare professional about your concerns. Hopefully you'll be smiling, laughing, and blissfully sleeping through the night in no time!

- Michael





Circles of Support and Accountability

What is a Circle of Support and Accountability?

A Circle is a restorative justice initiative where volunteers from the community accompany high-risk sex offenders in their daily journey of the re-integration process. Briefly, restorative justice aims to heal the community after a crime has occurred, focusing on addressing the needs of victims and of the community, and seeking accountability from the offender for the criminal behaviour. The goal of Circles of Support and Accountability, or CoSA, is to prevent re-offending. Each Circle is composed of a core member, who is the ex-prisoner, and a minimum of three volunteers from the community.

When a high-profile sexual offender is released from prison, the media have a field day, portraying the ex-prisoner as an evil monster who is unable to change. This type of reporting causes fear, anger, and panic within the community. Consequently, the general public does not want this individual in their midst, reflecting the “not in my back yard” attitude. In addition, the ex-prisoner’s family is not always accepting of a member who has committed a sexual crime and may want to have little or nothing to do with this loved one. Background checks may interfere with securing employment or a decent place to live. It is often difficult for a sex offender to develop a

relationship with another adult because of the type of the crime of a sexual nature. Many are court-ordered to follow a Long-term Supervision Order and, with this type of decree, have very strict conditions to follow.

Conversely, CoSA volunteers provide an experience of community for ex-prisoners, by helping to ease their transition from prison into society. They regard them as citizens with rights. They will accompany core members when they need assistance. While the volunteers do not accept their crime, they do not judge them. They are trained to be active listeners and to recognize signs of situations that can place the core member at risk of re-offending. CoSA regards as a serious matter the needs and concerns of the victims and community as well as those of the offender.

Communitas, formerly Montreal Southwest Community Ministries, was established in 1999 by Peter Huish and he also started Circles of Support and Accountability that same year. I began volunteering with CoSA in 2001 and continue to do so. I have to say that some Circles have been more challenging than others. Nevertheless, my experience with CoSA has truly been a fruitful one. What a beautiful testament to CoSA when a core member successfully re-integrates into the community. When a Circle ceases, I do miss our gatherings with the core member and fellow volunteers.

Thankfully, some core members do continue to remain in touch with the volunteers; I always enjoy meeting for a coffee. I can honestly say that it is a privilege to be a CoSA volunteer. Both the core members and fellow volunteers have taught me to be a better person.

In closing, we must keep in mind that all core members are human beings with positive qualities. While their personalities are different and they are individuals in their own right, one thing is common to them all: experiencing the daily challenge towards a successful social re-integration after their release. Empathy is a key element in CoSA volunteering. Therefore, if you are ready to walk a mile in the shoes of released sex offenders, then volunteering with CoSA may just be your calling!

- Laura



An interview with Gordon

The Sou'Wester sits down for a heart to heart with our helper-in-chief

SW: You've been in two Communitas videos?

G: Maybe three. Or maybe I sat twice for one video, I forget.

SW: You're our front man!

G: Well, I'm the most vocal. If I don't like something, I say it.

SW: We need more people like that in society. Where did you grow up?

G: I was born in Northern Ontario and we moved to Detroit when I was six months old. My dad was a computer engineer with Chrysler. It was a nice city while growing up but when the race riots started in 1969-70 it became intolerable being white, even though all of my friends were black. We moved back to Ontario when I was eleven, and the schools didn't have those big-ass metal detectors that the students had to pass through in Detroit.

SW: Were you a good student?

G: Oh yeah, I got straight A's until I got bored.

SW: Did you graduate from high school in Ontario?

G: Yeah, then I left home at age 16 and a half. I was part of the hippy movement. It was a better time then, travelling and working. I travelled to all 50 states, including Hawaii and Puerto Rico.

SW: Alaska?

G: Alaska, too. Then I got recruited into the US army and I got to travel the world: Germany, Lebanon, England, Paris, Japan, Korea, Australia...

SW: What were you doing as a soldier?

G: Just moving from base to base, staying in shape and keeping my skills sharp. I was deployed twice, once in Lebanon as a peacekeeper and once in Granada as part of an invasion force.

SW: You got an honourable discharge?

G: Yeah.

SW: Since then you've been all across Canada.

G: Yeah, I arrived in Montreal in 2007. I would love to go back to Vancouver because of the mountains. Beautiful! You can swim in the morning and ski in the afternoon. And I would like to go back to Germany, and maybe Korea, or Russia.

SW: How do you spend your time now?

G: I walk a lot and volunteer and keep busy. If everybody did a bit of volunteering, the world would be a better place.

SW: You cook for us and keep the office so clean. Where did you learn those skills?

G: My grandmother taught me cooking and the army taught me to be organized.

SW: Do you have brothers and sisters?

G: I grew up with 3 brothers and 4 sisters. My identical twin died when we were eleven. We were playing train tag, where you jump from car to car on moving trains. He fell and that's when my family started to go downhill.

SW: I imagine it was hard for the whole family, especially you.

G: I was the oldest and didn't like that. If I wanted to go swimming, I was told, "Take your little sisters swimming with you!" *C'mon!* I had to babysit and I got blamed for what the littler kids did. On the other hand, I didn't have to wear hand-me-downs. I had good clothes. Later, another of my brothers died in Vietnam in 1975, he was part of the draft.

SW: I think you were an adventurous child.

G: Oh yeah! We'd leave the house at 7a.m. and not come back 'til 7p.m. We rode our bikes everywhere. As kids we went down into the sewers and explored until they came

looking for us. This summer I want to ditch my metro pass and get a bike again.

SW: If you could have any reality right now, where would you be?

G: In a cabin in the woods, with neighbours about a mile away. I'm not really a people person. I have a cat that has the same personality as me. *(Gordon has cat scratches all over his wrist.)*

SW: What personality is that?

G: Straightforward. Say what you mean and then forget it. Alan doesn't like going into the metro with me because I'll say what I think when something bugs me. Like a guy whose pants are hanging so low I can see his dirty underwear, I'll say, "Buddy, pull up your pants. I don't want to see that!"

SW: Like I said, more people need to say what's on their minds. What lessons have you learned in life?

G: Don't smoke in the closet. As a kid I burned down the house because we were doing that. And don't offer a doughnut to a police officer. You can get a ticket for that.

SW: What do you want to be remembered for?

G: Nothing. Just bury me. I do good stuff for people because it makes me feel good, not to be remembered. Like helping someone get a job or find furniture or making them feel included, don't talk about it, just do it. *(We take our dirty dishes to the sink.)* Just leave those dishes there, I'll do them after you leave. And I should take this recycling down, too. But right now I've got to go pay bills for someone.



The Day the Memories Left

By Bob Knight

Memories pass
 As ships in the night,
 Floating in and out
 With demons at the tiller,
 Having no past,
 No future
 And only the present
 For a compass.
 Ghosts abide in memories,
 And in silence,
 Hauling their cargoes
 Of times that were,
 And times that are no more.
 Memories get sucked
 Into the whirlpool of chaos
 That even time can't heal.
 We live with no tomorrow
 While sorrow
 Becomes the bane
 Of our existence
 With death guiding the ship
 That crosses to a place
 Where reprieve awaits
 And memories are forgotten.
 Yet even knowledge
 Has its purpose,
 That we may be humbled,
 Knowing more and more
 About less and less,
 Till we know practically everything,
 About nothing.

Poem by Allan

April 28, 2019

*They said I would never make it
 Born into chaos
 Always had bad dreams
 One too many uncles
 Mind is always in the gutter
 Big city
 Living in the fast lane
 My roots run deep
 Go back in time
 My father had no advice
 Everywhere I go
 Everywhere I know
 It is always a struggle
 Day by day
 Reaching out the other side
 Picking myself up
 Standing tall
 No more tears
 I can love once again
 Night and day
 I know wrong from right
 The Light is finally shining on me
 I have finally made it.*



Artwork by Doug

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 \$20 or more. Please include the following information for that purpose:"

Full name Including middle initial: _____

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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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