

We would love to hear from you!

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the Sou' Wester

A grassroots newsletter on criminal justice & prisoner reintegration

Fall/Winter
2022 Edition

The Sou'Wester name is a reference
to Montreal's Southwest, where
Communitas began its work in 1999

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Bob's photographic journey

From the little black Kodak box camera, I had as a young boy to 35mm cameras, the darkroom, making a living as a portrait photographer, the commercial photography studio, fine art photography, digital impressions, publications in books, magazines, exhibitions and where I'm at today, experimenting with a barely new and controversial movement, making images with Artificial Intelligence -- AI.+

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Open Door Christmas

"Great party!" people said as they were leaving. One person even thought it was one of the best Open Door Christmas parties ever. We knew that because of COVID, the numbers would be somewhat smaller than in other years, and we set out eight beautifully decorated tables throughout Fulford Hall. This year 45 guests came to enjoy the first Open Door Christmas party in three years.

We started by applauding Talent, who escorted the men from B-16 (600), and then Peter Huish said a lovely grace, reminding us of how fortunate we are to come together in this loving community. As always, the buffet tables were overflowing with dishes from around the world: two long tables of main course dishes and one long table of yummy desserts.

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Federal government ended CoSA funding

CoSA was funded by the Government of Canada for 15 years, starting in 2000. Its annual budget has never exceeded \$2 million, compared to the \$5 billion the Canadian government spends yearly on jails and prisons. Moreover, the public and private costs of a single serious sexual assault have been estimated by Public Safety Canada as being several hundred thousand dollars.

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Bob's photographic journey

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It takes faith to make art, and sometimes it's not pragmatic. Pablo Picasso said, "I paint objects as I think them, not as I see them." With Artificial Intelligence today, it is possible to make images using words -- prompts. I concur with Richard Dawkins when he writes, "If you push novelty of language and metaphor far enough, you can end up with a whole new way of seeing." This is a new digital experience. I have yet to find my niche. But the journey is amazing. I learn from other artists. I find myself in the domain of Piet Mondrian as he reasons, "To approach the spiritual in art, one will make as little use as possible of reality, because reality is opposed to the spiritual." "...the evidence of things not seen."

In summary, I try everything until I arrive, and even then, I'm not there.

<https://robert-knight.pixels.com/>



Open Door Christmas

Continued from page 1

After supper Steve read chapter 7 of the Gospel of Luke, the announcement to the shepherds of the birth of the Christ child, and Rob did a fine job reading the almost epic poem, *The Night Before Christmas*. Suddenly, there was a flash of red and a burst of ho-ho-hos and who was it but the old man from the North Pole, Santa Claus himself. He said that we were all on his Nice list and gave us all a little something from his workshop. Santa even got a kiss from one appreciative guy.

Communitas thanks everyone who honoured Open Door by their presence, for their contribution to the potluck, and a special thank you to those who prepared the building all afternoon, attending to every detail: Carl, Patrick, Michele, Rosalie, Francoise, Nicole and Steve F.

Jeri



Christmas humour

Why does Santa have three gardens?
So he can 'hohoho'.

What do you call a kid who doesn't believe in Santa?
A rebel without a Claus.

What do you call a Santa living at the South Pole?
A lost Claus.

What does Santa spend his money on?
Jingle bills.

What goes 'Oh, oh, oh'?
Santa walking backwards.

Why do Dasher and Dancer love coffee?
Because they're Santa's star bucks!

What do Christmas trees get when they go numb?
Pines and needles.

What do Christmas trees wear at the pool?
Trunks.

What do you call a Christmas tree that only appears in action movies?
Spruce Willis.

What do you get when you cross a Christmas tree with an iPad?
A pineapple.

News From the Inside

At Ste. Anne des Plaines Institution, in collaboration with the Corporation Jean-Paul Morin and with help from other individuals, chaplain Laurent and a group called Rainbow (Arc-en-Ciel) have been focusing on ways of learning Restorative Justice methods. This initiative also receives support from Desiré, a chaplain at the medium security wing, who chairs two or three meetings a week in the minimum.

Francophone prisoners at Ste. Anne have been regular attendees at Entrée Libre for the last several months, and now the Anglophones also are enjoying monthly visits to Open Door, where they have quickly become familiar with its traditions and are active participants in our discussions and activities.

Open Door is also receiving prisoners from the Federal Training Centre (B-16), which has experienced a settling-in period as old pre-Covid routines are re-established. Communitas is again able to welcome visitors to the chapel, including several first-timers being introduced to life behind bars. Some cases of Covid continue to arise, causing temporary quarantine regulations to be applied to the groups concerned, but the rest of the establishment continues normally. The illness caused by Covid does not seem to be severe at this time.

Right now, in December, end-of-year occasions are being organized, but on a reduced scale, since Covid rules still apply for visitors (no choirs invited, etc.). Ste. Anne will be having a Christmas Mass on Dec. 21st, at 3.00 p.m. but only those with a visitor's card can be admitted.

Margaret



49th Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator

On November 1, 2022, the 49th Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator was tabled in Parliament. The report covers three national investigations, including updates on the experiences and outcomes of Black and Indigenous persons in federal custody, as well as a review of restrictive confinement conditions and practices since the elimination of solitary confinement in 2019. In his news conference, the Correctional Investigator, Dr. Ivan Zinger, zeroed in on the situation facing Black prisoners in Canada:

“Today, I am releasing an update of the Office’s 2013 ground-breaking investigation looking into the experiences of Black prisoners under federal custody. I am very disappointed to report that the same systemic concerns and barriers identified nearly a decade ago, including discrimination, stereotyping, racial bias and labeling of Black prisoners, remain as pervasive and persistent as before. In fact, the situation for Black people behind bars in Canada today is as bad, and, in some respects, worse than it was in 2013.”

The Correctional Investigator’s report shows Black prisoners experience disproportionately poorer outcomes on key measures of sentence administration. Specifically, the investigation found that Black prisoners are over-represented at maximum security institutions. As a group, Black individuals tend to serve more of their sentence behind bars at higher security levels before they cascade down. Black persons are more likely to be involved in a use of force incident regardless of risk or security level, age, sentence length, or gender. Black prisoners are over-represented in involuntary transfers. They are subject to more frequent and longer placements in Structured Intervention Units. They incur more institutional charges and are more often designated as a security threat group affiliate. Despite overall lower rates of reoffending and lower returns to custody, Black persons are more likely to be assessed as higher risk, as having low motivation and low reintegration potential.

The Correctional Investigator stressed that these findings are not new, have been documented before, and, as such, should have been addressed by the Correctional Service. He pointed out that in 2016, the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent referred to and endorsed the Office’s earlier findings, as did the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights in 2019 and again in 2021. In other words, the Service has had ample time and opportunity to address disproportionately poorer outcomes for Black people under federal sentence.

The investigation found numerous examples where Black prisoners are treated unequally or unfairly compared to the rest of the incarcerated population, such as inmate pay levels, access to personal care items, meaningful prison employment, and early release opportunities. Black individuals interviewed for this investigation consistently reported the

The investigation found numerous examples where Black prisoners are treated unequally or unfairly compared to the rest of the incarcerated population, such as inmate pay levels, access to personal care items, meaningful prison employment, and early release opportunities.

use of derogatory or racist slurs/language by CSC staff, as well as being ignored or disregarded in ways that increase feelings of marginalization, exclusion and isolation.

Of significant concern, Black prisoners frequently reported being labelled or treated like gang members by CSC staff, even if they did not have an official or active security threat group affiliation. They indicated that staff referred to them as gang members based on a variety of factors including the neighbourhood where they grew up, the people they associate with on their range, groups of Black individuals congregating together, the clothes they wear, or the way they interact with others. The tendency to view behaviours, language, interactions or background through a “gang lens” is especially detrimental as it makes it difficult to cascade to lower levels of security, obtain gainful employment, or garner support from the assigned

case management team. Furthermore, once a gang affiliation is applied to an individual, it is nearly impossible to have it removed, as there are few disaffiliation options or resources offered by CSC.

“Unfortunately, racial discrimination and bias continue to follow Black individuals into federal custody,” stated Dr. Zinger. “The needs of Black people are unique and grounded in a historical context and experience of racism and discrimination in Canadian society. At the most basic level, the correctional system should not serve to further perpetuate disadvantage. I call on the Correctional Service to address the unique lived experiences of Black persons in federal custody and to work in close partnership with Black community groups, stakeholders and experts in developing and implementing much-needed changes for Black prisoners.”

Dr. Zinger’s report also includes the first of a two-part follow-up investigation of a Special Report that was tabled in Parliament in 2013 titled, *Spirit Matters: Aboriginal People and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act*. Part I of this investigation notes that overrepresentation of Indigenous people in federal corrections has accelerated and disparities in outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons have widened. Indigenous individuals are increasingly entering the system at a younger age, spending considerably longer time behind bars, and returning to federal corrections at unprecedented rates compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts.

“Year over year, Canadian prisons are being filled by Indigenous Peoples who are caught up in the proverbial revolving door, experiencing worse circumstances while inside, with few viable options for getting out and staying out,” stated Dr. Zinger. “I will have more to say on these issues once this investigation is complete, but for now it appears that at the highest levels, CSC does not seem to accept that it has any role or influence on reversing the perpetual crisis of Indigenous overrepresentation in Canadian jails and prisons. A corporate culture and a prison system that are resistant to change can only serve to keep Indigenous Peoples marginalized, criminalized, and over-incarcerated.”

The 2021-22 Annual Report makes 18 rec-

ommendations in total, including eight directed at improving the lives and outcomes of Black prisoners. Dr. Zinger renewed his Office's call for the appointment of a Deputy Commissioner for Indigenous Corrections and issued a recommendation for CSC to be included in the development and implementation of Justice Canada's Indigenous Justice Strategy. Other nationally significant recommendations include:

1. Prohibit any dry cell placement beyond 72 hours.
2. Update CSC's 2007 National Drug Strategy, which continues to promote a zero-tolerance approach to drugs behind bars.
3. Prioritize the current review of the security classification process, particularly as it applies to Indigenous women.
4. Rescind the discriminatory movement level system for maximum-security women.
5. Provide alternative accommodations for women housed in Secure Units and work toward their eventual closure.

6. Review the program requirements and eligibility criteria for the Mother-Child Program, with a view to increasing access to and participation in the program and removing barriers, particularly for Indigenous mothers.

7. Equip prisoner escort vehicles, including those currently in service, with seatbelt assemblies, handholds, and other safety and restraint features.

As the ombudsman for federally sentenced offenders, the Office of the Correctional Investigator serves Canadians and contributes to safe, lawful and humane corrections through independent oversight of the Correctional Service of Canada by providing accessible, impartial and timely investigation of individual and systemic concerns.

The 2021-22 Annual Report, along with a Backgrounder and summary of the report, are available at www.oci-bec.gc.ca.

Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) calls on correctional service of Canada to strengthen English-Language programs

By Mitra Thompson

Project manager, Access to Justice in English

QCGN's Access to Justice in English project has presented the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) with a list of recommendations on how to strengthen and complement their offer of English-language rehabilitative programming in Quebec-based facilities.

"Our research has found that despite the existence of official language obligations toward official language minority groups across Canada, there remain gaps in access to services and rehabilitative programs in English in Quebec that we believe CSC has the opportunity to address," said Sylvia Martin-Laforge, director general of the Quebec Community Groups Network.

The recommendations were presented to CSC's Deputy Regional Commissioner for the Quebec region, Alessandria Page. Copies have also been shared with Justice Canada, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, and the many community stakeholders who took the time to meet with the Access to Justice project over the past year to share their experiences and provide more understanding of the unique circumstances and challenges faced by English-speaking federal inmates in Quebec.

"We have offered to continue to work alongside the CSC to address these very issues and we are hopeful that they will respond positively," said Martin-Laforge. "We thank CSC's Director of Citizen Engagement, Katherine Cole, for her assistance with our inquiries in recent months."

View our recommendations (https://www.qcgnjustice.ca/upload/documents/qcgn-ajeq-csc-final-report-and-recommendations_296.pdf)

and the key findings from our research by visiting our Access to Justice in English webpage (<https://www.qcgnjustice.ca/>).



A gospel singer in our midst!

One Friday at Table Talk, it became known that a certain someone was fostering an incredible talent - regular attendee Philip revealed that he had been a member of the Montreal People's Gospel choir for some 22 years, and luckily for us, they had some concerts coming up! That night Alana and Rosalie got a sneak peek as the choir performed three songs, and then on Saturday, December 3rd, Rosalie and Becky travelled together to the beautiful setting of Victoria Hall in Westmount for a full two-hour concert.

Philip's incredible Baritone voice could be distinguished occasionally within the choir of 24 people, but the real show was when Philip took to the front of the stage as a soloist. Singing "Rise Up and Walk," we were mesmerized by the most incredible soulful voice that came out of this gentleman who usually remains somewhat reserved at Table Talk. I ran up to the front and took some photos, and even downloaded their album when I got home! I shall be keeping an eye out for any future concerts and can highly recommend supporting their events.

Pot-pourri For the Holidays

With the festive season barrelling toward us as the Sou'Wester makes its way to print, let us agree this is no time to publish dreary, dolorous, and dismal dirges. We have accordingly taken care to cast our net in balmier waters in order to bring our readers a measure of hope and cheer.

Access to handwritten information

And what could be cheerier than a Federal Court decision which blew up a government roadblock to prisoner-friendly advocacy? The John Howard Society of Canada vs Minister of Public Safety 2022 FC 1459, decided October 25, 2022, by Madam Justice McVeigh, is not a case the public is likely to have seen in recent news headlines, but prisoners and their lawyers should easily recognize the salutary role it is destined to play in the perennial struggle for prisoners' basic rights.

The judicial festivities have their origins in events at Bath Institution, a medium security pen huddled in Millhaven's sombre shadow in the Ontario region.

There, as elsewhere, Correctional Service Canada (CSC) had introduced public health measures in March and April of 2020 to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. These included the mandatory wearing of masks by prisoners and CSC personnel. Naturally, strict adherence to such precautions takes on a vital importance for detained persons trapped in a setting where they live with reduced access to health care and cleaning supplies; nor are they free to up and leave, or even fully distance themselves. Not everyone in the Bath population was impressed by the officers' dedication to safety procedures, and six prisoners expressed their dissatisfaction through the proper channels, filing twelve grievances complaining of officers' failure to wear their masks as required. It should be understood that as a result of CSC's unyielding restrictions on computer access inside the walls, griev-

ances like these are commonly handwritten, and this was the case with ten of the documents which concern us here.

Enter the John Howard Society of Canada (JHSC), an organization which for a great many years has provided unflagging assistance to this country's prisoners, and never more so, in this writer's opinion, than in the present era. An essential tool it has employed to great effect to establish the facts useful in its prisoner advocacy is the federal Access to Information Act (hereafter, the Act). Hoping to take the Bath prisoners' initiative a bold step further, the JHSC made application under the Act for access to anonymized prisoner grievances related to Bath's unmasked guards. CSC handed over the twelve grievances after rendering them anonymous through the reviews required by subsection 19(1) of the statute, which instructs the head of a government institution to "refuse to

Of course, our readers have often seen embryonic legislative activity wither and die in the womb-- indeed, Bill C-22, an earlier clone, died on the order paper in the previous Parliamentary session.

disclose any record requested (...) that contains personal information," a term given expansive meaning in the Act's definitional section.

And here's the nub of the dispute: in performing its redactional function, CSC's Privacy and Access Analyst took the view that handwriting styles are apt to reveal authorship, casting all handwritten grievances as personal information for the purpose of the Act, and therefore to be excised wholesale, leaving only CSC's typed grievance responses to be shared with the public. The JHSC contested this action to the Information Commissioner of Canada, who opted to support the CSC Analyst's stance. In effect, where handwritten material was concerned, in balancing the privacy of the individual (the grieving prisoners) with the public's right to know, these state actors concluded the conflict must be resolved in favour of pri-

vacy, an ironic outcome, as the 'public' in this equation was an agency attempting to advocate on behalf of the very party seen as requiring s.19's protection.

The JHSC's Federal Court request for judicial review of that posture was generously brought by Andrew West and Ashley Wilson of the Calgary branch of McCarthy Tétrault, and their pro bono litigation was not in vain. The Court acknowledged that privacy rights can and often do trump the public's information rights, but squarely disagreed that in the present context, the prisoners' handwriting styles could serve to identify them. Thus, ruled the Court, CSC had erred in universally treating inmate handwriting as personal information for the purpose of s.19 of the Act, rather than applying the same principles it employs for redaction of typeset grievances. The Court directed the return of the handwritten grievances

to a different analyst for a proper s.19 review, one which this time should suppress only such content as might truly jeopardize privacy rights. (Names, FPS numbers, and the like come to mind.)

Our readers will appreciate the broad application

of this ruling, the Federal Court having not only facilitated the JHSC's action on the health and safety issue which precipitated the litigation, but curtailed a significant curb on future initiatives of the JHSC or other groups and individuals acting in furtherance of prisoners' interests.

Welcome News about Mandatory Minimums

In an earlier installment this year, Mostly Legal focused on the malign potential of this country's manifold mandatory minimum prison sentences, a criminal justice policy instrument beloved of the Conservative Harper government. As we closed that discussion, we noted the Trudeau government's introduction of Bill C-5, which proposed the expansion of conditional sentences; and the entire or partial repeal of 20 of the existing 72 man-

datory minimum sentences, including six drug offences in the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, a tobacco offence, and all firearms offences in the Criminal Code.

Of course, our readers have often seen embryonic legislative activity wither and die in the womb-- indeed, Bill C-22, an earlier clone, died on the order paper in the previous Parliamentary session. This time, however, the government got it done. C-5, introduced in late 2021, passed third reading two weeks ago. On November 17, 2022, C-5 received royal assent.

Mandatory minimums aside, the Bill contains a key innovation related to the treatment of simple possession cases. In the wake of C-5's adoption, The Controlled Drugs and Substances Act now requires peace officers, before bringing a charge, to consider if it would be preferable "to take no further action, to warn the individual or, with the consent of the individual, to refer the individual to a program or to an agency or other service provider in the community that may assist the individual." That decision, to charge or to divert, must take into account this new declaration of principles:

- (a) problematic substance use should be addressed primarily as a health and social issue;
- (b) interventions should be founded on evidence-based best practices and should aim to protect the health, dignity and human rights of individuals who use drugs and to reduce harm to those individuals, their families and their communities;
- (c) criminal sanctions imposed in respect of the possession of drugs for personal use can increase the stigma associated with drug use and are not consistent with established public health evidence;
- (d) interventions should address the root causes of problematic substance use, including by encouraging measures such as education, treatment, aftercare, rehabilitation and social reintegration; and
- (e) judicial resources are more appropriately used in relation to offences that pose a risk to public safety.

Given these forward-looking changes, what's not to like?

Well, actually, several things. The Bill's mandatory minimum provisions are limited to certain offenses, whereas critics argue that a comprehensive repeal with one stroke of the pen of all of Canada's mandatory minimum prison sentences, including life imprisonment, is what was needed, and would have been the principled approach to the issue. It has further been argued that among those mandatory minimums left on the books are some of the offences which most sorely afflict Canada's minorities.

Be that as it may, the long-awaited legislative action on mandatory minimum sentences, echoing and codifying a growing body of constitutional rulings in judicial test cases, along with significant support for diversion measures, is good news of a high order, and certainly deserves its place in our seasonal mini-chronicle of hope and cheer.

Hopeful update on Jaskirat Singh Sidhu

In the previous Sou'Wester we dealt with the government's heartless campaign against Mr. Sidhu, described in those pages as "the hapless individual whom Canadians will forever associate with the Humboldt Broncos bus crash." When we left Mr. Sidhu, he was serving his eight-year sentence on day parole; a Canada Border

Services Agency officer had issued a recommendation to the Minister to deport; and lawyer Michael Greene had filed a request, supported by written arguments, in the Federal Court for judicial review of the Agency's report. If the Court comes to the decision that he has seized it with "an arguable case," Mr. Greene will be permitted to appear in an effort to convince it the officer's review was flawed and the file should be remitted to a different officer for a proper study.

We see from the Federal Court Registry that all relevant documents have been filed, and the case delivered on August 24 to a judge for a ruling on permission. For Sou'Wester readers wondering what has happened since, the answer is... nothing. In early December, Mr. Greene went on record to pronounce himself "cautiously optimistic.... Usually when it takes time, it means you've got an arguable case." Once the Court has issued a decision, it will be reported here. For now, we choose to be cheered by Mr. Greene's heartening message of hope, and wish only good news for Mr. Sidhu and all our readers during the festive season.

Steve Fineberg



Stories from Open Door: From the Inside Out



Rev. Tim Smart

Anglican Minister
Chaplain at Cowansville

20 Nov 2012 Celebrating Restorative Justice Week: film: Metamorphosis •
7 Feb 2012 Film on Angola Prison: Music from the Big House •
28 Jun 2011 10 Weeks 10 Years series. Focus on 2002: What is a mission?

I joined Open Door around its 10th anniversary. I remember a big old school bus as part of the theme. It was a place of welcome where everyone could get on the bus. I liked that theme. All welcome to jump on board and journey together.

As a prison chaplain, I distribute the *Communitas* newsletter inside and encourage people going to halfway houses to attend Open Door. Some inmates have no idea where to go once they are to be released, to a town or city with which they are unfamiliar or in which they are

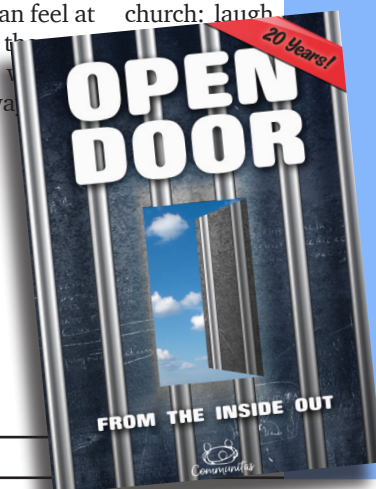
shunned. It is a tough road, and wonderful that there is an organization that is bilingual but where English speakers can feel at home. It is a joy to connect with them that I have not seen in a while – whether they are now in Minimum, a halfway house or even out on the street.

It is a joy to connect with the guys that I have not seen in a while – whether they are now in Minimum, a halfway house or even out on the street

There was a talk given by Justin Piché from University of Ottawa that drew my attention to the fact that criminology is being studied and critiqued at university level. I found it reassuring that there is an academic study and critique of the process, and

also that they were helping to publish a written testament by prisoners about prison life in the *Journal of Prisoners on Prison*.

I am an Anglican parish priest in the Eastern Townships, with many little communities to care for. Since 2009, I have been a part-time chaplain at Cowansville. Although CSC keeps cutting my hours, I still go in and do the work. I treat



Use the following link to order a copy of *Open Door: From the Inside Out*

<https://communitasmontreal.org/open-door-from-the-inside-out-a-book-celebrating-20-years/>

Federal government ended CoSA funding

Continued from page 1

The CoSA program has been proven to lower dramatically the recidivism rate for sexual offenders, which represents a significant financial saving for Canadians: the public and private costs of a single serious sexual assault have been estimated by Public Safety Canada to be several hundred thousand dollars.

Despite this, funding for CoSA was terminated by the Harper government in 2015. In 2017 the federal government again provided funding of about \$1.5 million per year to support 15 sites across the country, including Communitas in Montreal, enabling the creation of circles for approximately 300 people with sex offence convictions.

This funding expired in March 2022 and has not been renewed. As a result, four CoSA sites in Atlantic Canada and Quebec have been forced to go on hiatus and three sites in Saskatchewan have cut back programming. Sites in B.C., Alberta, Manitoba, Nova Scotia and Ontario are preparing for reduction or closure if sustainable funding is not secured in the next six months.

This leaves many high-risk sex offenders without support for their reintegration needs and at greater risk of reoffending.

Discussions about funding with federal officials, including Public Safety and Justice Canada, remain ongoing. CoSA Canada is committed to identifying funding opportunities as well at both the provincial and municipal levels.

C.S.R.Q.: The End of a Chapter

Unfortunately, the CSRQ (the non-profit organization that provided Circles of Support and Accountability in French) has shut down all its activities.

Due to the end of funding from Public Safety Canada, the Board had no other option than to take a pause and close for the time being. Should there eventually be a change in the funding available, the activities could be restarted.

We are deeply sorry that we had to take this drastic decision, but that was the only one that we could take. We hope that a new chapter will be written...

Roch Lemay

President of the Board

Cercles de soutien et de responsabilité



Table Talk 2.0: From Notre Dame to the Undercroft

When Table Talk went into forced hibernation due to the pandemic, many wondered what it would be like in new surroundings and if the vibrant ambience of the old office on Notre Dame St. could be achieved in the Undercroft.

The Notre Dame office on Fridays was always a warm hubbub of discussion during Table Talk. One long narrow wooden table, the centre of many different conversations, all at the same time; and as many as 15 to 20 people crowded around that table.

Gord always pulled through with delicious meals that were the highlight of the week for some attendees. And there was always Cookie Bob and his scrumptious peanut butter cookies to add to the mix. It was a festive social get-together that many sadly missed during Covid times.

As Covid wound down, it was a no-brain-

er—Table Talk 2.0 needed to happen, this time in the Undercroft, and the sooner, the better. It was launched at the beginning of this past summer and started off slowly, with 8 to 10 people attending. By the fall, the number had increased to 17 on one occasion. The menu was varied from roast pork to spaghetti, pizza to chicken, with plenty of salad and free offering desserts. The chefs alternated from Bill to Becky, Michele to Rosalie and Marlyn. The conversation was lively around those three to four tables that we set up.

Yes, the Ambiance was back... somewhat different, but just as exhilarating.

Table Talk warmly invites all members to partake on Fridays at 11-30 am in the Undercroft.

Bill

Poem

Reflection on Open Door

*The light comes ON
Reflecting off the four walls
Mixing friends with Strangers
Easing my mind
wanting to know them better
Pills are the only way to go
Laughter when you are around
one day at a time
There is no tomorrow
I think of your name
Nothing to hide
Am I going insane
Every Tuesday I get out
One day a week I feel alive
You I won't forget
Sometimes when I look in the mirror
I can't recognize myself.
Then the
Lights come on*

By Alan

Sou'Wester interview



The Sou'Wester interviews Dave

SW: What were you like as a child?

Dave: I am the eldest of three boys, and with my dad, and many cousins, we had a large extended family. And so, it was about being one of many. The family focus was on sports. We're a very sporty family. Winter was all about skiing, and I'm from out West, so we were in Whistler. During the summer, it was golf and tennis and sailing and every single imaginable English team sport... rugby, soccer, grass hockey and all the rest. We had a relatively happy childhood and, apparently, my parents told me that before I went to school, I was kind of turbulent. I think I was jealous of the fact that my two brothers required attention from my mother – that I had had all to myself for two years – but once I got into school, I apparently calmed down. I was a

good student, I enjoyed school, and I went to a couple of good schools, and enjoyed myself. I grew up in Vancouver.

SW: Which do you like better, there or Montreal?

Dave: It's very different. I enjoy Montreal as a city and an urban experience, and the history and the multicultural aspect. The city of Vancouver has the access to the outdoors, which I really like. You have this magnificent combination of ocean, mountains, and forests that I totally love. When I'm back, we go kayaking and mountain climbing and camping and all the good stuff.

SW: What do you do for fun?

Dave: Ah hah! I really like to eat. Events, going out for meals, preparing meals at home, I'm all into that. I am very social, and so, I like to do gatherings. In my younger life, I was a party guy. So, out I went to bars and clubs and danced and had fun. As I got older, that kind of calmed down, and now it's about spending time with family and doing sports. Here in Quebec, for a very long time, I had a dairy farm, and I lived in the Laurentians. For a long time, it was looking after the farm, looking after the cows, and working and looking after a family. I have two sons. Now, the joy of being in your 50s is that the kids are gone, and the cows are gone. Both sons have decided they don't want to take over the dairy farm. I have more time for my regular routine. I go to the gym; I'm a gym guy. I go to the gym a couple of times a week. I love swimming. My main enjoyment is hanging out with family and friends and eating!

SW: What's the secret to staying youthful?

Dave: Health is an important thing, looking after your body. I wish I could take credit for this, but I think I have good genes. The sports stuff was there from the beginning, so necessar-

ily you're looking after your body. I really think that it's a mindset and a heart. What I like to do is, I do like to play! Every kind of play turns my crank. I have two grandkids, three and one, and just spending the day playing [with them] and being silly is totally groovy. It's about being able to have fun and being silly. I very much enjoy being silly. I think that keeps you young at heart.

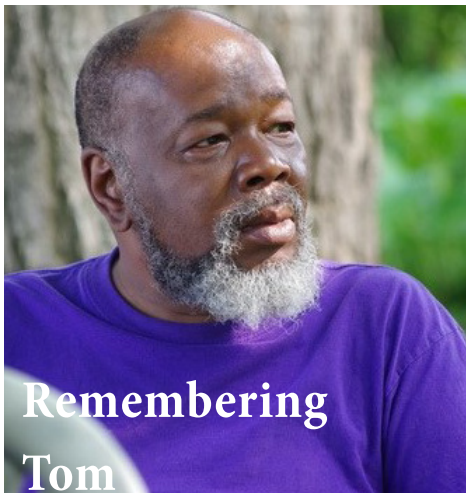
SW: What has been your favourite job?

Dave: Either I have been lucky enough or deprived, depending on how you look at it. I've only ever done one thing in my life, and it is rehabilitation. I worked in rehab centers with people who had been in car accidents or with head or spinal cord injuries, then I moved into psychiatric rehabilitation, which led me to work in social rehabilitation with people who have been in prison. So, I have worked for different employers, but I have basically always done the same thing. I never had these wonderful experiences of working in a bar or McDonald's or whatever, and I lucked in early on. In university, I had friends who went tree planting - but I went and worked with people with intellectual disabilities, and we went horseback riding and to Disney World in California... and this was my summer experience; just having fun!

SW: What are you grateful for?

Dave: That I was able to find a job early on that I grooved in and that I continue to have fun in after all these years. I am grateful for the friends and family that I have maintained over the years. I went back out West this summer, and I'm still friends with people I went to elementary school with! I get to hang out with people I've known my whole life, and I am very close with my cousins, who are my same age. I'm grateful for that kind of stability and that I am still open to new experiences.

by Leigh



Remembering
Tom

Tom Gero was a much loved member of Communitas. We learned recently that he passed away a short while ago after a short illness.

Tom had been a member of Communitas from back in the day when we were still called Montreal Southwest Community Ministries (MSCM). He was a faithful participant at both Open Door and Table Talk – when Table Talk was held at our offices at Notre Dame. Tom would arrive early for Open Door and make sure that the coffee was ready for when people started showing up. At Table Talk he had his special chair in the corner that everyone knew was 'Tom's chair'. There he would

sit, sometimes appearing to be asleep as the hubbub of Table Talk took place around him.

Although he was a very quiet person, Tom had many friends – and a sly sense of humour. His understated but warm personality drew people to him and even in the times when he was going through especially hard times, friends and even strangers would stop by to talk with him, bring him food or money and generally show him love. We even heard that someone placed a chair outside a Provigo he was known to frequent, so that he could be more comfortable.

His friends at Communitas will miss him greatly. Rest in Peace Tom.

Dear Editor

A Rewarding Encounter with McGill Students

Dear Communitas Montreal,

I hope you are having a great day. We are students from McGill's English Language and Culture program instructed by Kevin Stanley. In our CEGE 413 class, we have started a Community Organization Project in which each group researches a different community organization in Montreal to learn more about civil society and to improve our English language skills.

We are interested in your program because your mission is appropriate and meets the interest of the entire society. The purpose of the prison is not only to punish but also to help prisoners get rid of their misconduct by changing the environment. With your help, the prisoners can start to get evolved into normal society faster and benefit both themselves and other people.

In order to know and understand more about you and your efforts, we would like to have an appointment in English at your local. We would like to visit for about 30 minutes during the week of November 25th to December 2nd between the hours of 9:30 to 3:00. If that isn't possible, perhaps we could arrange an online interview on zoom.

We are eager to learn more about your organization and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Carlos and Zihuan

.....

Dear Members of Communitas Montreal,

Thank you for inviting us to your table talk activity on Friday, November 25th. The food was delightful, and all the people were charming and gratifying. We not only enjoyed the vivid atmosphere but also the communication with all the people who attended.

We highly appreciated your invitation to the activity; furthermore, the interview was very smooth and pleasurable. Not only our prepared questions were answered, but a more profound curiosity also emerged from

the interview. Based on the information you provided, we will be presenting this information to our class this week.

We think Communitas is truly making a difference for ex-prisoners in the community.

Sincerely,

Carlos and Zihuan

.....

The Sou' Wester is a fine publication in which it's an honor to find one's efforts printed, or even rejected. I read it with great interest from cover to cover.

Marlyn

.....

Dear Editor:

The Summer 2022 edition of the Sou'Wester was one of my favorites to date. I even agreed with most of Steve's article. However, I would like to point out a small, but to me significant error, on page 9. My presentation was not *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Capitalism*, it was the "*The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Corporations*." A meaningless point for many but a distinct difference for those that preach Business English.

Thanks, and keep up the fine work, including the Open Door Notes which I truly enjoy.

Thanks,
Lino.

Sou'Wester Competition!



The Sou'Wester is launching a competition inviting all who wish to submit a creative piece to be considered for publication in our newsletter. There will be a first, second and third prize awarded to the winners and runners up. All genre of entries is encouraged – short story; poems; art; cartoons; etc.

The Communitas Editorial Committee members will be the judges, and the competition will run until March 31, 2023.

First, Second and Third prize winners will have their entries published in the following editions of the Sou'Wester: Summer 2023; Fall 2023; Winter 2023; Spring 2023, as appropriate

Deadlines for the first competition will be announced.

Entries should be sent via e-mail to :

Communications@communitasmontreal.org

or by mail to:

**Communitas,
1444 Union Avenue,
Montreal Quebec,
H3A 2B8.**

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: _____

Make cheque payable to Communitas

Address: _____

Please mail to:

E-mail: _____

1444 Union Avenue

Montreal QC, H3A 2B8

You may donate through our online donation page by clicking [here](#), or by filling in the form above and mailing it to our office.



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:

cosa@communitasmontreal.org

www.communitasmontreal.org

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 [Facebook/CommunitasMontreal](https://www.facebook.com/CommunitasMontreal)

