

We would love to hear from you!

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the Sou' Wester

A grassroots newsletter on criminal justice & prisoner reintegration

Spring 2023 Edition

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

An evening at Open Door

page 3

Mostly Legal Dollars and Scents

page 6

In the News

page 11

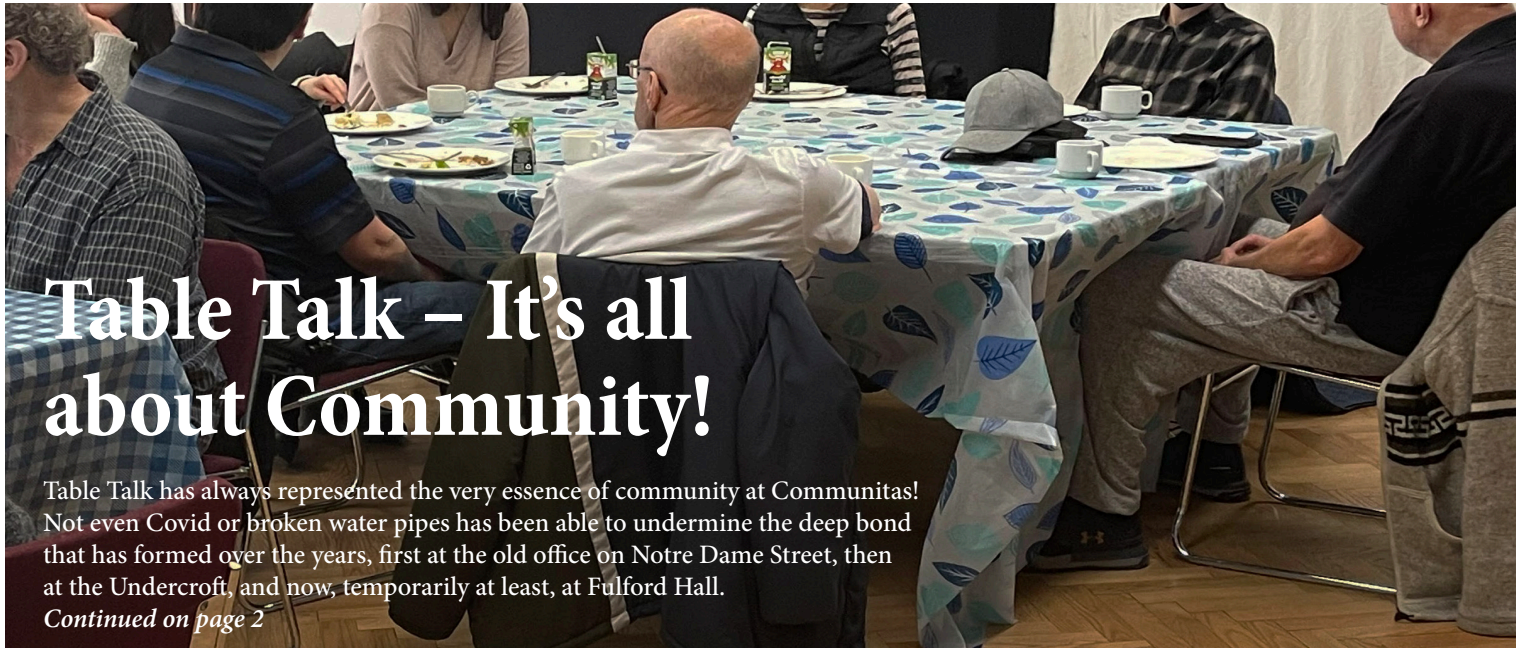


Table Talk – It's all about Community!

Table Talk has always represented the very essence of community at Communitas! Not even Covid or broken water pipes has been able to undermine the deep bond that has formed over the years, first at the old office on Notre Dame Street, then at the Undercroft, and now, temporarily at least, at Fulford Hall.

Continued on page 2



Hello to all Communitas members and to the Sou'Wester readership!

My name is Olivia, and I started a placement with Communitas in the fall as part of my Bachelor of Social Work at Dalhousie University. My program is in Nova Scotia,

but as a distance student, I am able to work from my home base of Montreal. I will be with Communitas till the end of July.

Continued on page 3



My Woodstock

People are always impressed when you tell them that you attended Woodstock. Since only half a million attended the festival, back in 1969, you're considered to be part of the elite if you were there. To get the most "bang for my buck", as the saying goes, I impart the information casually, as though highlighting a moment in time. "Oh, yes, I've visited Chicago. After the summer that I went to Woodstock."

Continued on page 9

Table Talk – It's all about Community!

Continued from page 1

Some of the faces change, the menu evolves, but the ambiance continues, vibrant and engaging. There is a sense of teamwork as members set up the tables, prepare and present the food, and then return the room to its former condition. Birthdays are celebrated. Discussions at each table may be profound and moving, or simply reflect the weather outside. Table Talk has also welcomed international students from McGill to come in and share a meal from time to time.

Lino, Rosalie, Michele, Becky, and Marlyn have all stepped up to the plate (!) with a variety of delicious meals since the move to Fulford Hall, while others bring in desserts, chips, and juice. When our CD player broke down, Peter offered up his phone and speakers to provide the musical ambiance, and Alana came through with a replacement CD player the following week.

The mechanical mysteries of Fulford Hall's hoary professional dishwasher were unravelled by an undaunted Patrick, who has since shared The Knowledge with his apprentice, Alana—and even that chore-related event



was celebrated as a family. Faithful member Carl was presented with a birthday cake on his special day, and when Bill returned on his birthday after a prolonged absence following surgery and recovery, a congratulatory birthday cake awaited him. Peter's birthday was marked by a community-signed card expressing fond wishes and greetings.

After every meal, the clean-up is spontaneous and efficient. Fulford Hall is left sparkling clean. Everyone helps out. Everyone cares. Yes! Table Talk is the very essence of the community that Communitas embodies.

By Bill

Communitas Space Flooded

Communitas has unfortunately been affected by the flooding of the Undercroft at Christ Church Cathedral over the Christmas holidays. You may remember that -25C night in Montreal in December – well, that was the night that the pipe upstairs broke and unleashed a deluge.

Communitas was spared the full damage as the office itself was untouched – however, we lost the common space where Table Talk is held each Friday, as well as the kitchen where all our cookware is kept.

As luck would have it, the one certain night that Open Door is held in the Undercroft (Shrove Tuesday when the Bishop uses Fulford Hall for the Pancake Supper) coincided with the Undercroft being unavailable!

As it was, Open Door returned to full Zoom that night for the first time since in-person Open Door restarted after Covid lockdowns. It was quite fun to see everyone up close on the screens again – however, those who don't have access to Zoom were not able to participate in



Open Door that night, and we did have three persons show up in-person – not having received the in-person cancellation message.

For Table Talk, we at Communitas immediately pivoted and made arrangements for it to be held at Fulford Hall instead of at its regular space in the Undercroft. The Cathedral was extremely accommodating in allowing us access to the Hall and the kitchen -including access to plates, cups, glasses, cutlery etc.

With the willing hands of those attending, we

rearranged the seating, and it all went swimmingly. We are currently booked for Table Talk in that new space until at least the end of June. We will hopefully know by then what the prognosis is for repairs to the Undercroft, which is quite badly damaged – needing walls and flooring to be ripped out and dehumidification to take place.

In any event, we will survive to live another day – one way or another.

Michele

Presenting Olivia!

Continued from page 1

While my social work program is preparing me to work in many domains, I have been interested in prisoner justice and reintegration work for the past decade. Some of my experience includes being a collective member of the Prisoner Correspondence Project, a pen pal project for incarcerated people across North America and doing reintegration peer support through that same project.

What drew me to Communitas, in particular, was CoSA, as there are so few organizations that offer this program in Canada. It has been amazing to learn more about this restorative justice approach and how it works in practice. This work connects deeply to my values and interests. Much of my social work practice is informed by the belief that connection, community, and social support are essential in the process of healing and transformation.

In my time here, I hope to make connections with people at Open Door and Table Talk, participate in organizational planning and activities, and learn more about how best to support the organization's membership and

volunteers. I will also be visiting halfway houses to help spread the word to staff and parole officers about Communitas so that more people can attend its activities.

Some fun facts about me are that I have a sweet dog, Daphne, who is a 2-year-old blue heeler and my faithful companion, and that I am also trained as a pastry chef and used to run a pie business.

It's been a pleasure meeting people at Communitas, and I look forward to getting to know you all more!



An Evening at Open Door: Lo-TEK

"How Indigenous Architecture Can Change the Way We Live on Earth" was the title of Michele's presentation at a recent Open Door. It was appropriate, as Saturday, April 22, 2023, was this year's Earth Day.

Michele shared with us her insights gleaned

from a book she had read by Julia Watson, who is an architect, landscape designer, and professor at both Harvard and Columbia Universities. For her new book, Ms. Watson travelled across 18 countries for six years to visit various communities and document their ways of life.

It all starts with an attempt for us to rethink the meaning of "low-tech." Watson's Lo-TEK, plays with "Tech" to become "TEK" which means: Traditional Ecological Knowledge. The lesson is that there is much that we can learn from traditional methods of doing things. The presentation made a compelling case for this stance.

As Michele reiterated, "We're beginning to understand a great irony of climate change: that the people most affected by it often did the least to cause it."

The presentation allowed us to visit some of the places that Watson wrote about, namely:

- The Chagga in Tanzania, whose forest agriculture systems support Mount Kilimanjaro's rich biodiversity;
- The Kayapó in the Amazon Basin, who use fire to cultivate their crops, replenish the soil, and protect their land from deforestation;
- In Iran, Persians have developed qanats,

or underground aqueducts, which serve as natural foils to our energy-intensive pumps and wells;

- And the fascinating Khasi people of Meghalaya, India—known as the wettest place on earth—who have trained and cultivated rubber fig trees to grow bridges over rivers.

These are some of the peoples who were embracing regenerative agriculture and nature-based solutions long before they became buzzwords. We have much to study and learn from them. Checking out Julia Watson's new book, Lo-TEK: Design by Radical Indigenism for a primer on this topic seems like a good place to start.

Watson says, "Indigeneity is reframed as an evolutionary extension of life in symbiosis with nature."

The above is but a feeble summary of Michele's fascinating presentation. The linked article might provide some more insights.

https://www.vogue.com/article/julia-watson-lo-tek-indigenous-design-architecture-climate-change?fbclid=IwAR0AcJftDYhI9NFxliDueEJ6-mVDBGQ2mLPEBRJ_8fO9uP0oLNmr5Vbhbwo

Lino

Lonely and Lost



*Lonely and lost
A whisper in the wind
What is keeping me here
Too many wars
Will we all survive?*

*Watching the news
Sinking down
Hard to breathe
Drowning
Hunting by smell
Heart pounding
Head aching
Meeting the reaper*

*Watch me now
The pain
No longer there
Floating above the world
Meeting my Maker
No more pain.*

By Alan

My Woodstock

Continued from page 1

“Woodstock,” says my collocutor. “Wow! I never met anyone who was actually there.” “Only for one night,” I reply, “and that was quite enough.”

I chose to go to Woodstock as the lesser of two evils. It was an escape, albeit a very brief one, from the summer camp in upstate New York, to which I had committed myself for the summer of 1969. That year, I was twenty-three years old, courageous and foolhardy, eager to leave my native land, Scotland, and to “set off to look for America.” Without money, or a green card that would allow me to work in the U.S., I signed up for a program of Cultural Exchange, advertised in a Glasgow newspaper.

Never having been in the U.S. before, I imagined that summer camp was like the one in the movie, *Marjorie Morningstar*, named after the protagonist in the popular novel of the same name. I didn't have a smidgeon of Marjorie's beauty – she was played by Nathalie Wood – but I did want to follow her trajectory and to find romance in the arms of the drama coach, or the tennis coach, or any other coach who came my way. So I outfitted myself like Marjorie, clean and neat, with a wardrobe of poplin dresses and bobby socks and white sneakers, and I got on the plane.

One Thursday afternoon, after a two-day stay with my aunt in New York, clad in a white tennis dress, I found my way by bus to the camp in the Pocono Mountains. Before I had time to inspect the premises, I was escorted to a field where my fellow counselors were staying in tents, the children not having arrived yet. I was told that the counselors were communing with nature, and, I suppose, with one another, before the camp officially began.

This was my introduction to Cultural Exchange: dozens of stoned teenagers, all dressed in motley rags, knee deep in mud. I knew immediately that I was an outsider and that there would be no cultural exchange and, as the summer proceeded, my expectations were borne out. Five or six years older than my fellow counselors, and “straight” in their eyes, I was regarded as an alien, there only to dampen their pleasure. They grouped me with the one other older counselor, a crew-

cut fellow who had been in the military and who was generally suspected of being a spy for the FBI. He and I became confidants, if not friends.

The camp was run by a prestigious social work school in New York. From the Director to the lowliest minion, the chain of command was carefully defined. Youngsters, mainly from wealthy middle class families of New York, knew deep inside, despite the fresh air narrative, that their parents wanted to be rid of them for the summer. Their hefty fees subsidized the second much smaller group, kids from impoverished families, mostly Afro-American. The counselors who took charge of the children, were older and more bratty versions of the main group of campers. They were teenagers themselves, there to have a good time and with little interest in their charges.

The two groups of campers had little in common, except that both of them dreaded Visitors' Day, when, as expected, their parents didn't show up.

Along with a co-counselor, Rina, I was assigned to a “bunk” of eight ten-year old girls from the wealthier group. Overwhelmed by the open hostility of these children, I found it difficult to make a connection with them. Rina who was nineteen years old, naïve and full of good intentions, tried from the get-go to play the loving mother to our charges. She was no method actress. In fact, she was so phony that all of us, the girls and I, were totally turned off by her gooey remonstrances. One day, after about a week, the girls rebelled. It was, I believe, a spontaneous rebellion provoked by some sugary remark by my co-counselor, as mild as “Let's put our candy away till after supper.” The pot of simmering rage which the girls had contained all week, burst. They started gently, by throwing pillows at Rina. Then, as though waking up to their feelings, they hit her and pounded her with their fists. By now, all inhibitions gone, they trashed the bunk and everything that was in it. I stood there mesmerized, immune from the attack, making useless sounds and gestures to get them to stop. I knew that it was not the unfortunate Rina at whom they raged, but at the mothers who had abandoned them. Rina was their target because she asked the girls to pretend that everything in their world was alright. I had never participated in that charade.

The girls only calmed down when a male counselor from an adjacent bunk came in response to the noise.

Next day there were meetings, in the upper levels of the chain of command, to discuss what had happened, to impose penalties and to elicit a few apologies. There were no significant changes in our daily routine. After the event, which was doubtless cathartic for them, the girls formed closer, nurturing bonds. Nobody could explain what had happened. Only I had a theory, but I kept it to myself.

The cuisine at the Camp was unpalatable, even by the lowest standards and most of us restricted ourselves to peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. The bathrooms were dirty and smelled bad.

One perk offered to campers was a visit to the Woodstock Music Festival in August, and this prospect nurtured them throughout the long month of July. The youngsters had been exposed, for many summers on end, to all that the Camp had to offer and they claimed indifference to the whole gamut of activities, from ceramics and arts- and -crafts to water sports. But to attend a music festival, that was something. Then, as the big day approached, the campers' hopes were crudely dashed. The Governor of the State of New York declared the area a danger zone because of rampant hepatitis. As a result, the administration of the Camp would not allow the campers to attend. Those who had left for Woodstock were conveyed back to the Camp without delay. The disappointment of the young people was palpable. They expressed it by flinging their Woodstock provisions all over the terrain. Even a week later, you could find peanut-jelly sandwiches wrapped in wax paper, on trees and shrubs.

But counselors, if they had the weekend off, could, of their own volition, go to Woodstock. The camp even provided a bus to take us there. Many, including me, opted to go. My only ally, the FBI spy, wasn't interested and I embarked on the bus alone with the hippy counselors.

The entry road to the Woodstock site was blocked by cars and other parked vehicles and we had a long walk to the site when we got off the bus. I remember walking behind two skinny counselors from the camp, a tall fellow and his short girlfriend. The young man strolled along languidly swinging his arms, while his girlfriend struggled under the weight of the tent and other baggage that they'd brought along.

This division of labor didn't surprise me. I'd been down that road before and had had oc-

casion to observe the vast chasm between what hippies professed and what they did. Anarchy would be absolutely fine if people were not, on the whole, greedy and self-serving. Hippies are just like the rest of us. Two years earlier I had visited Amsterdam where a drop-out cousin was staying. Attracted by the access to marijuana, hippies congregated in Amsterdam in the tens of thousands, lodging like flies on a fruitcake, in every available space, including the houseboats and any other minimal accommodation around the Dam Square. The area that contained them was a giant market, for these straggly people who claimed to disdain materialism, were totally absorbed in buying and selling anything from a toothbrush to a minibus.

As a lifelong adherent to “clean and neat”, I was not a good candidate for Woodstock. Only in hindsight, did I come to realize that what transpired at the music festival was close to miraculous. Woodstock transcended the music and the mud and the profit motive of its organizers. For more than three days, close to half a million people co-existed peacefully in extremely cramped quarters with minimal food, shelter, sanitation and health services. And there was no expression of aggression, no stabbing or other fighting that the medical team had to address. These were half a million people of all sorts, mostly young. We should all be proud of what went down at Woodstock. Human beings have never, on record, conducted themselves so harmoniously.

I wasn’t, however, thinking like a sociologist back then. I was there as another pleasure seeker, but one who had strayed into the wrong garden of earthly delights.

My group arrived on Saturday evening. It was already dark as we unfurled our sleeping bags on plastic sheets, in the little spaces we carved out among the throng. Only in the morning, when we awoke, did we view the amazing spectacle of wall-to-wall people as far as the eye could see. This was a sight that I’ll never forget.

But there was no time to linger. I had an immediate task. I had to find a clean toilet. I would have no truck with the stinking port-

able toilets that dotted the landscape and for which people were lining up in dozens. Nor would I pee in the lake, though this was a widespread practice. As has been documented in films about Woodstock, that lake served a myriad of human needs. I wouldn’t touch it with my toe, let alone empty my bladder into it.

So I walked and walked, and the landscape of drugged, ecstatic people remained the same. Somehow, on my way, I met Ray, a student from Columbia University, who became my escort and my protector. He was a bright young man, ready to share his stash of good quality marijuana. But more than that, he had a job connected to the stage and through it, access to the clean bathrooms used by the performers. This made him irresistible. He snuck me in and I was eternally grateful.

In my quest, I had lost track of time. As well I had no way of finding my fellow travellers, and I needed to find them in order to return to the Camp. Ray suggested that we go to the medical tent where they had a loud speaker and could announce my predicament. Following the sound, we found our way there and I asked for help to locate my companions. But I was informed that only the names of people who were ill and in need of medical attention were announced. Trying to think of another plan, Ray and I sat on chairs that surrounded the medical tent, watching people terribly distressed because they were on “bad” acid trips. Those people received hands-on help, often from volunteers, drug users themselves who worked smoothly in tandem with enlightened medical personnel. Traditional therapy, in the form of sedatives, was eschewed in favor of supportive counseling to those on a bad trip, and in almost all cases it worked.

In desperation one becomes resourceful. I created a new narrative. I informed the MC at the medical tent that I was diabetic and that I had become separated from my friends. These people were holding my supply of insulin and if I didn’t get it soon, I would go into a diabetic coma.

The ruse worked. The announcement was boomed over the terrain and my “friends”

from Camp came to find me. It was the same pair, the tall skinny fellow with the short girlfriend, behind whom I had walked when we first arrived. Now they were gracious and I felt grateful to them. They led me back to the rest of the group.

After that I remember only rain, torrential rain that persuaded us to leave. Jimi Hendrix had postponed his performance till the following morning and only a small portion of the participants, about 50,000, stayed till Monday to hear him. The rest of us, thoroughly drenched, got out the best we could. I remember getting into the back of an open-top truck with another young woman. The truck brought us to the highway and the State troopers waved us on when they saw us hitchhiking. That day hitch hiking was legal.

Somehow we got back to the Camp. There was no plush reception or hearty meal awaiting us but at least we each had a bunk and access to hot water. And despite our fears, nobody developed hepatitis.

Whenever I think of Woodstock, I try to understand how the “three days of love and peace” were so remarkably successful. Was it because of the drugs that made the participants mellow or the pervasive culture that encouraged people to be loving? Was it the gentle approach of volunteers, especially those from Hog Farm, who kept law and order? Was it the music? Whatever it was, the formula ought to be identified and duplicated. The people who attended Woodstock were no different from you and me, and they brought with them all the anger and prejudice and needs that cause conflict in much better circumstances. Yet everyone co-existed peacefully. This thought gives me hope for the human race.

So now I have Woodstock on my CV, not the CV I used to use when looking for a job, but the oral one I share with friends, old people my age. I’m proud, you see, that I was there. But when they ask me what I did at Woodstock, I tell them I looked for a clean toilet. And that’s the truth.

By Marlyn

References:

1. Abruzzi W. “A White Lake Happening.” New York State Department of Health, Sept. 1969: “Of 797 cases of “bad trips” that required care, only 72 were seen by a doctor and only 28 were treated with medication”
2. Jack Kelly, BA, EMT-8 “EMS at Woodstock” *Journal of Emergency Medical Services*, April 28th, 2010.

Dollars and Scents

In a carefully designed survey, federal prisoners were asked to name a provocative initiative which could be expected to aggravate, infuriate, and generally stir the pot. Respondents overwhelmingly warned against curtailing the amount and appeal of their meals, or lowering their already miserly pay. How broad was that survey, where and when was it done? It doesn't matter, my survey's 'fugazi,' I made it all up, but no one should doubt its truth. You know it, I know it—mess with the limited opportunities detained people enjoy and they are going to be embittered, and they are going to be restive. Which Mr. Harper's Minister had to have known when he introduced cutbacks in both of those areas shortly before the public gave his government the boot.

How disruptive and upsetting can a mere menu reform be? The Good Book teaches there's more to life than food (Matthew 4:4, Luke 12:23), but that high-minded notion may strain for traction in an environment so wanting of ordinary life's richness. When one's world consists of all-encompassing regulations and stifling routine, meals mercifully punctuating the suffocating weight of uneventful time inevitably acquire an outsized role well beyond the utilitarian satisfaction of nutritional requirements. If free citizens key on food for entertainment, distraction, community, comfort, and the sheer pleasure of eating, so do our imprisoned brothers and sisters, but all the more ardently.

Complaints against institutional food are inevitable, but it is fair to ask why the Correctional Investigator's annual Reports disclose a 63% jump in complaints about food, food services, and religious and medical diets for the year ending March 31, 2016, over the year ending March 31, 2014. What drove that surge in dissatisfaction?

In 2014, Public Security Minister Blaney introduced a new CSC National Food Menu designed to provide men's penitentiaries across the country with a four-week cycle menu based on Canada's Food Guide, and on the standards of the Food Safety

Code of Practice for Canada's Foodservice Industry. This entailed a more regimented plan for the feeding of offenders, involving more fruits and vegetables, leaner meats, diminished environmental fallout. Now, members of the public may or may not have an appetite for healthy eating: to them, Canada's Food Guide addresses a reasoned appeal. In dealing with prisoners, the government has opted for a more muscular approach, firmly imposing the Menu's responsible choices on its captive consumers.

Still, this is nutritious food, sourced, prepared, and delivered in sufficient quantity to sustain life—so what's not to like? Well, a penitentiary veteran has explained to me what's not to like: just like free Canadians, most federal prisoners would prefer a less zealous adherence to our Canada Food Guide. They resent this science-based

If free citizens key on food for entertainment, distraction, community, comfort, and the sheer pleasure of eating, so do our imprisoned brothers and sisters, but all the more ardently.

diet fit for astronauts on a mission, a no-nonsense regime which "takes the joy out of eating," to quote my source. Dry chunks of non-fat chicken breast may be good for the heart, but when your surroundings are dreary and immediate prospects dismal, periodic falls from nutritional grace can nourish the morale. Predictably, there was resistance.

Enter disgruntled consumer William A. Johnson, who filed grievances at Warkworth Institution over the abrupt disappearance of bacon, French fries, and fried and scrambled eggs. He also grieved the replacement of 2% milk, required for his cereal, by the powdered version, which he claims he and many others are unable to digest. These changes occurred in August, 2015, as the penitentiary was implementing the National Food Menu. When the matter arrived in the Federal Court (Johnson v. Canada (Attorney General), 2018 FC 582), CSC's statement, sounding like the brochure of a well-run zoo, assured the judge all was in order because "the NFM prescribes the food items and the portions

provided for each meal of the day of the week" and "was developed in conjunction with Regional Dietitians – as well as the recommendations contained in Canada's Good Guide – and provides for the consumption of 2600 kilocalories daily." Mr. Johnson, who drafted, filed, and pleaded his case without benefit of legal counsel, advanced various arguments, but to no avail: all were rejected by the Court, and the tyranny of nutritional rigour prevailed. The judge's feeling about Mr. Johnson's plight can be detected in his comment, "with respect to section 7, I agree with the Respondent that the Charter does not protect against trivial limitations of rights."

Certain foods and many essentials may be purchased on the side in the canteen and through the penitentiary 'store' by prisoners with sufficient funds in their canteen account, and some readers might ask why

this would not meet the needs of all the unhappy Johnsons. But what if the government which shrank the institution's meal options has also shrunk the population's paycheck?

The existing pay system was established in 1981, with the minimum wage of \$3.15 per day corresponding to the disposable income of a free single individual earning \$3.50 per hour. The basic wage has not been adjusted since, although the details of the pay scale have been tweaked at times. Factors such as punctuality, satisfaction of expectations, participation in the correctional plan, and general behaviour cause one to rise and fall on the pay scale ladder. Those who refuse to participate in programs receive the most minimal pay; those who are unable but willing to participate receive a little more. Higher rates are paid to those involved in work and study programs, but the highest rate still generates a very modest pay package.

And then there are the thousands of prisoners remunerated by CORCAN, CSC's special agency producing goods (eg. office furniture) and services for sale mainly to federal departments, but also to other organizations. CORCAN allows employees to acquire job skills and certifications and apprenticeships, and to pick up good inter-

personal skills and work habits. Individual and group performance bonuses lucrative by prison standards were available to CORCAN participants before October of 2013.

Inflation has been working against the stagnant base rate since the latter was set in 1981. A telling Correctional Investigator study reports that the canteen basket costing \$8.49 in 1981 cost \$61.59 in 2006. The impact of this dynamic on Mr. Johnson and his peers will be obvious. Little wonder that litigants have complained their income doesn't allow them access to a sufficient quantity of food, or to buy canteen items essential to their health care, personal hygiene, and psychological health; that their shrinking purchase power hurts access to family, and thwarts their attempt to set aside savings for their release.

The coup de grace was announced by Public Safety Minister Blaney on May 9, 2012, and implemented in October of 2013 through changes to the Commissioner's Directives, and the Corrections and Conditional Release Regulations. With the expressed goal of shifting more of the costs of detention onto offenders, the per diem prisoners receive was reduced to defray room and board costs and administrative costs of the penitentiaries' telephone system, while the incentive bonuses for CORCAN programs were eliminated. Taken together, these measures had the effect of reducing prisoners' inflation-depleted pay by yet another 30%.

This abrupt attack on their finances brought matters to a head. Many prisoners mobilized to oppose these punishing cutbacks, and Inmate Committees reached out to each other to coordinate collective resistance. Eventually, this energy was channelled into a determined legal challenge, which wended its way through the courts slowly and laboriously, as court cases will. By November, 2019, when the Federal Court of Appeal finally ruled in the government's favour, any organized resistance had long since dispersed, and the new level of deprivation had simply been absorbed as the reigning definition of penitentiary life. The decision of the appeal court was not widely noticed or remarked on; and today, although prisoners who served through those years have a clear

memory of the shock and anger which ran through the system, few can describe how the movement's life-force petered out in a spirited but fruitless legal debate.

The case, reported under the name *Guérin v. Canada* (Attorney General), 2018 FC 94, was brought to the Federal Court by nine prisoners willing to dig in as the standard bearers of the struggle. They contended that the measures under attack 1) are inconsistent with the provisions and spirit of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act; 2) breach the Charter sections 7 (liberty and security of the person) and 12 (cruel and unusual treatment or punishment); 3) violate international norms (Mandela Rules for the treatment of prisoners) and international labour Conventions; and 4) fail to abide by the employer-employee rules of the Canada Labour Code. The Federal Court's trial division rejected these arguments.

On appeal (2019 FCA 272), the final three arguments were re-examined, and defeated again. The Appeal Court reiterated the

long-standing jurisprudential rule that the norms found in international instruments do not govern here unless expressly imported into our law—which the Mandela Rules are not; that the Charter does not impose an obligation on the state to uphold life, liberty, and security of the person through economic measures, such as a minimum level of pay for prisoners; and that labour norms do not apply, as the appellants had failed to convince that remuneration for participation in CSC programs reflects an employer-employee relationship.

What of this history holds true today? During the pandemic, the reductions effecting the 30% cutbacks have been lifted temporarily, restoring pay to its pre-October 2013, level—but for how long? Meanwhile, inflation continues to eat away at prisoners' buying power and quality of life. And the National Food Plan maintains its dreary grip.

Steve Fineberg





Justin

3 Aug 2021 The Intersection between Theology and Psychology

I'm a psychology student interested in trauma. I find that the field has a lot to say about people who have experienced trauma and not much to say about people who cause it. I was interested in finding a way to get to know the whole picture. While looking at places where I could volunteer, I came across Communitas and saw the impact it had on reducing recidivism, really interesting.

I like that it's quite informal. Communitas is the only place I've volunteered that has removed the line between the people who volunteer and the people who are volunteered to. We don't walk in knowing who's been convicted and who hasn't. It might come up in conversation but it's not structured like that. This changed my understanding of reintegration. Maybe it's the way that my brain is wired, but I always thought that reintegration had to be very structured, like a therapist or a social worker who helps someone through a process in an organized way. Open Door taught me that all a person needs in order to cope is support, and that support can be informal.

People of the Lie by Scott Peck, which examines the age-old problem of human evil, also had a big impact on me

Then there are the presentations on new topics every week. I presented on two things that I'm passionate about, theology and psychology, and where I thought there was overlap. I asked the question, "Do you think people are born the way they are or become the way they are?" It's the nature versus nurture question, but it's also related to the theological question of free will. Most people thought it was a mix between the two, and I offered both perspectives.

During a presentation on Peru, the presenter mentioned ayahuasca, an element of native Peruvian culture. I've never tried it but I find

it interesting, so my ears kind of perked up a bit.

I like the book Crime and Punishment by Dostoevsky, which contains a lot of theological and psychological exploration. People of the Lie by Scott Peck, which examines the age-old problem of human evil, also had a big impact on me.

Stories from Open Door: From the Inside Out



Leigh

26 Jan 2021 Barter and Trade

I first heard of Communitas from someone at Quaker meeting, they thought I should see what it was about. I wanted to learn about what really helps, so I started to attend Open Door meetings. This was about a year ago, during the pandemic. I've only attended on Zoom. Open Door was not what I thought it would be like. I imagined it would be more formal. The only image I had of the process of integration was somewhat clinical, but we all just get together and have fun.

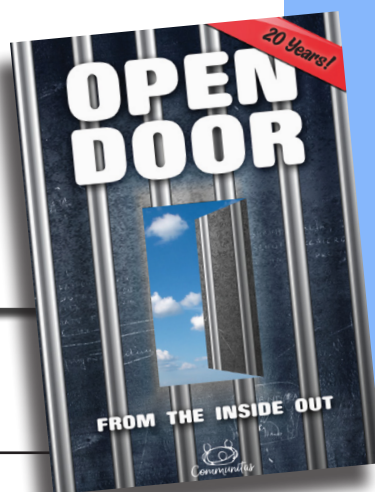
I really enjoyed meeting everyone at Open Door, I also enjoyed the presentations. I particularly liked Fraser's presentations, because he was so animated. He was really into it!

I made a presentation at Open Door on the subject of bartering. For three years

For three years I lived by barter, not earning or using money. By trading, I managed to get everything I needed.

I lived by barter, not earning or using money. By trading, I managed to get everything I needed. I found that the more you trade, the less you need. I got food in exchange for housework, and I even managed to barter for music lessons. When I was younger, I played the baritone saxophone. This time I learned to play the harmonica. I figured a harmonica was a much more affordable option this time around, plus it was easy to carry and play on the go.

This year, I'm finally easing myself into academic life after a fourteen year absence. I'm taking a couple of courses for now, psychology and indigenous courses, and I'm doing pretty well. I've also started working in a health food store. I look forward to returning to Open Door when my schedule is less demanding. I have to say, I really miss seeing everyone on Tuesday nights!



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/>



Office of the
Correctional
Investigator

Bureau de
l'enquêteur
correctionnel

The Honourable Marco Mendicino
Minister of Public Safety
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister,

I am writing in support of Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA), a non-profit community corrections program that assists people who have committed sexual offences to lead responsible and constructive lives in the community upon release. CoSA is a proven, volunteer led reintegration program that reduces the likelihood of sexual reoffending amongst a high-risk group.

It is my understanding that five-year national crime prevention funding for CoSA Canada is set to expire at the end of 2022, thereby possibly ending federal support for a network of 15 CoSA sites currently operating across Canada. Though the organization is actively engaged in seeking more permanent funding through implementation of the Federal Framework to Reduce Recidivism (FFRR), there are concerns that, even if successful, this potential new source of funding may come too late in ensuring CoSA remains viable in the short-term.

As you are aware, the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) recently rendered a decision to declare certain *Criminal Code* provisions regarding the National Sex Offender Registry (NSOR) unconstitutional because of the absence of judicial discretion and the automatic nature of being placed on the Registry. The SCC has given Parliament twelve months to amend the legislation. In light of this decision, and from my vantage point, risk-based programs like CoSA offer a potentially more cost effective and evidence-based approach to preventing sexual reoffending and victimization than relying on the NSOR.

Consistent with the mandate letter you issued to the Commissioner, I am therefore appealing to you to urge your Department or the Correctional Service of Canada to provide CoSA with an immediate interim grant or contribution until a more permanent and sustainable funding vehicle is secured.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Ivan Zinger, J.D., Ph.D.
Correctional Investigator of Canada

cc Pam Damoff, Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Safety
Anne Kelly, Commissioner, Correctional Service of Canada

Update on Fundraising Efforts:

The fundraising team has met twice so far to coordinate and plan the research and further steps we see as essential for the support of Communitas's work. One of our first initiatives will be to seek assistance from a relevant professional able to help us structure and plan for long-term fundraising, although steps in this direction may be postponed if we find ourselves too close to this season's deadlines for funding applications.

Whether with or without a professional's help, we are proceeding to seek out funding which will allow Communitas to continue putting together needed resources for the men and carry out our activities. The ultimate goal is to secure the funds required to support our recently defunded and other programs, and even to expand programs and activities. Ideally, the funding raised would allow for the hiring of full-time employees to give full-time support to the important work of Communitas's volunteers.

In the News

From reports by Canadian Press, February 11, 2023

Committee hearings in Parliament in January pointed to deficiencies within Corrections Canada allowing systems failures to persist.

During one of those hearings, New Democrat MP Blake Desjarlais blasted Correctional Service Canada officials, stating: “The auditor general is yelling at the top of her lungs about the conditions that are often facing Indigenous and Black people in Canada and the systems continuously stay the same.”

Auditor General Karen Hogan, who also appeared at the committee, found in her May report that the Service “failed to identify and eliminate systemic barriers that persistently disadvantaged certain groups of offenders.”

The report continued, “The over-representation of Indigenous and Black offenders in custody has worsened with higher security classifications, the late delivery of correctional programs and the delayed access to release on parole.”

The latest annual report from the Office of the Correctional Investigator of Canada similarly found that Canada was failing its Black and Indigenous prison populations. Before the House Public Safety Committee, Ivan Zinger testified that such prisoners are subject to discrimination, biases, and racism.

He added that the broader inmate population is being left in a “state of destitution” with no way to get ahead. Inmates who work in prison haven’t had a pay raise since 1981, he said, when wages were set at \$6.90 a day. It’s hardly enough to pay for items such as toothpaste and soap, which are not provided for free.

Zinger said that the Correctional Service Canada is “very good at producing a lot of corporate documents” — but that the plan “doesn’t filter down to the penitentiary floor.”

CSC Commissioner Anne Kelly acknowledged there are systemic barriers and racism within the criminal justice system, stating, “While CSC cannot influence the decisions that bring offenders into our custody, it is our responsibility to improve outcomes for offenders by providing them opportunities for effective rehabilitation.”

The Auditor General’s report has found that Indigenous and Black men were placed in maximum security prisons at twice the rate of other offenders.

It also called into question the quality of the custody rating scale, a framework used to determine the level of security an inmate will be placed in. The scale has not been reviewed by experts since 2012, the report said, and an additional set of criteria used to determine where to place Black offenders had never been validated at all.

Moreover, Hogan informed the Committee’s M.P.s that officers didn’t always follow the provisions they were supposed to. “We found that corrections staff frequently overrode the scale security rating to place Indigenous offenders at higher security levels, with little consideration of culturally appropriate and restorative options.”

Commissioner Kelly responded that the rating scale is only one component in a comprehensive process to determine the security level of federally sentenced offenders. But she also said the federal agency has ramped up its efforts to ensure what it is doing is “reliable and valid.”

Those efforts, according to Kelly, include conducting “extensive” work on the way it classifies Black offenders, and partnering with the University of Regina to develop an “Indigenous and gender-informed security classification process.”

The Service is trying to improve conditions in other ways, too, Kelly and other officials said — such as creating more digital programming and setting up Indigenous intervention centres intended to help offenders access and finish programming.

The Correctional Service also says it is in the process of hiring a Deputy Commissioner for Indigenous Corrections and is developing strategies to help it better serve the needs of Black offenders.

At the committee hearing, Desjarlais pressed the officials on their knowledge of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and expressed disappointment when they could not name calls to action that apply to their work.

He suggested that the state of prisons should trouble all Canadians. “This is not an Indigenous and Black issue,” he said. “This is a Canadian justice issue. It’s an issue of our justice system, not the individuals (whom) they fail.”

https://www.thecanadianpressnews.ca/politics/federal-watchdogs-mps-slam-corrections-officials-on-treatment-of-prisoners/article_d5cee771-699c-5e17-a7fe-7e6c63902daf.html



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 June 30, 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.

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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