

We would love to hear from you!

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# the Sou' Wester

A grassroots newsletter on criminal justice & prisoner reintegration

Summer 2023 Edition

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

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# Volunteer visits to Cowansville Correctional Institution

Finally, after a two-year absence due to Covid, volunteer visits to the prison have resumed. Of course, there are a lot of new faces among both the inmates and volunteers. It was wonderful to reconnect although during the physical absence from the prison an active letter writing campaign filled the void and allowed everyone to stay in touch.

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## The Communitas Members' Appreciation Brunch, 2023

On Saturday, June 10th, Communitas hosted an event for its members. It was organized by a small Sub-Committee of Jeri, Lino and Olivia, who invited us all to a brunch. It was a joyful reunion, a celebration of Communitas and of its membership.

Our hosts took pains to ensure the ambience. Not only did they offer us a delicious and copious buffet, they also brought us

live music. Two professional musicians, who, I am told, are friends of Olivia, offered their services for a small honorarium. Likewise, another friend of Olivia, a florist, supplied bouquets of flowers to decorate the tables. These bouquets became the prizes of a raffle that was offered towards the end of the gathering.

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## Letter to the Editor

This letter accompanies a selection of some poems I have written over the last year or so since transferring from Provincial to Federal.

It was Tim Smart, our English-speaking Protestant Chaplain, Book Club leader, Literacy Committee organizer, and all-around mentor and counsellor, who introduced me to your publication - the spring 2023 edition.

*Continued on page 4*

## Volunteer visits to Cowansville Correctional Institution

*Continued from page 1*

The biggest change was Ugo who now has the job of looking after the chapel. Besides his normal duties, Ugo goes above and beyond, setting up the chairs in an absolutely perfect circle, evenly spaced, and placing a Bible and hymn book on each seat. The loaded coffee machine is ready and set to go as well.

The evenings begin much as before with coffee, with actual milk now, and a short social time before Rev Tim calls the meeting to order. Tim always has a question to start things off, sometimes serious and other times not so much and each person gives their name and answer. My favourite question was 'if you could be a kitchen appliance what would it be?' Then a few hymns are sung, chosen at random by anyone who has a particular favourite, although Amazing Grace was picked so often in the past that Tim practically banned it. There is a brief session of gentle yoga stretching led Joan, or by Ali who fills in admirably in her absence. But the music, an integral part of any Anglican service, really serves to get everyone involved and is a great way to move on to the Bible study, once the coffee cups have been refilled, of course. Tim decides on the Biblical passage and individuals take turns reading a verse or two followed by a discussion which sometimes can be quite animated and occasionally can go completely off topic until Tim brings us back to reality. The important thing is that all feel free to express their opinions in a non-judgemental environment. The evening ends with everyone holding hands and each person saying a short prayer or just simply saying "Amen".

### The Sound of Music

Over the years we have been blessed occasionally to have a guitar player to accompany the hymns or just play something to open or close the evening. On one of the first visits after Covid, Hans, an older gentleman, strolled into the chapel with a keyboard under his arm and offered to play one or two numbers. Now Ugo revealed his talents as roadie, unlocking the electronics cabinet and setting up the keyboard and microphone. Hans is still learning to play but his efforts are always appreciated, and we've tried to get sheet music and instructional books for him to practice playing.

## The important thing is that all feel free to express their opinions in a non-judgemental environment.

A few weeks later, Ray showed up and offered to play a song that he had written, and it was obvious that he was a seasoned singer and guitarist. Not having his own guitar in prison, he could only use the one in the chapel which limited his time to rehearse but he was marvelous all the same. Soon Hans and Ray became a duet and under Ray's guidance Hans accompanied Ray admirably. Of course, maestro Ugo was always there to hook things up. Word must have spread because one night Danny walked in and said he had come to sing a song. Ugo set up the mike, Danny plunked himself down, and acapella, belted out A Whiter Shade of Pale, with a voice like Robert Plant and as good as any version I've heard since the Procol Harum original. He left after a burst of applause but returned the following week to sing another song and stay a bit longer into Bible study. He told me of the cover band he sang with and when I looked it up, I realized we had a seasoned pro in our midst.

The following week the first guy to show up was Norman carrying a guitar case and saying he came to play with Danny. Now Ugo the roadie was put to work plugging in the

keyboard and guitar. From the first few guitar licks it was apparent that Norman could play with The Who or any other rock band. He told me he's played all kinds of music from churches to clubs. He could literally make the guitar talk. They did a Tom Petty number and were incredible. As we were leaving, I asked them if they could play a certain song. They lit up and said sure they would work on it.

Two weeks later in the chapel, along with Ray and Hans, they belted out Stairway to Heaven. He started by saying that "someone", looking directly at me, had requested it. Tim followed his gaze and all I could say was, "Well it does have 'Heaven' in it!" I couldn't believe that four guys who never played together and had almost no practice time could perform so well.

Ray was the only musician to show up a couple of weeks later and at the appropriate time. Tim asked him to do a song that he had prepared. Before beginning he said it was a classic rock song that he had adapted with some verses from Tim's favourite Amazing Grace. He then sang a beautiful version of House of the Rising Sun with the adapted lyrics. The only thing missing was the organ, especially at the end. Although Hans couldn't be there that night, Ray agreed that they would perform it together another time. The adapted lyrics are printed at the end of this article.

The boys were at it again the following week with Danny crooning Bon Jovi's Bed of Roses, with one exception. Ugo went to the back of the chapel, emptied a plastic garbage pail which he played like a drum for percussion. There is nothing Maestro Ugo cannot do and so the Cowansville Five house band was formed.

We are blessed with an abundance of great musicians and we do not know for how long. All we can do is enjoy the good feelings that music generates but for now, with apologies to Julie Andrews, "The walls are alive with the sound of music..."

*by Robert "Bob" Morell -aka- "Cookie Bob"*



For the latest news and activities at Communitas, between editions of the Sou'Wester, visit our Facebook page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/communitasmontreal/>

Join the conversation and like us.

## The Communitas Members' Appreciation Brunch, 2023

*Continued from page 1*

As always at Communitas, the heart of the gathering was the people. Forty-six of us showed up, and we were warmly received. Jeri even read aloud a poem she had written, acknowledging each of the participants who said they would be attending. We chatted and laughed, got to see old friends again and to make new ones. The warmth and friendship that we expect to find at Communitas distinguished this gathering. At Communitas, we are all pilgrims on life's journey, all equal, all volunteers.

Thanks to Communitas - especially, Jeri, Lino and Olivia for creating this lovely event. I hope that everyone enjoyed it as much as I did.

*Marlyn*



## Poem for Member Appreciation June 10, 2023

*Peter had an idea in 1999*

*Twenty-four years later it's going just fine*

*He brought along Michele, now the president of the board*

*And Claire and Marie joined the ward*

*Steve was a lawyer who now draws cartoons*

*Lino makes us five-star lunches at noon*

*Marlyn writes stories that flow with a zing*

*And Françoise always says, "What can I bring?"*

*Jeri chairs Open Door, Sabrina works in the pen,*

*Caroline went to Mexico and started us again*

*Olivia's the one who organized this brunch*

*While Bill arranges every Friday lunch.*

*Bertrand gives us this great room for free*

*And Patrick and Carl work at every party*

*David was a chaplain, escorting inmates by bus*

*And he and Susan have both quilted for us*

*Marlon and Serena drive in guys from the pens*

*Margaret arranged the escorts, again and again*

*Sammy's attended for a decade or more*

*Bob has presented and chaired Open Door*

*Anouk crunched numbers for the CoSA project*

*And Natasha serves with her knowledge of tech*

*Leigh and Kadene are both movers and shakers*

*Rosalie is one of the Table Talk bakers*

*Nic designed our book, Ron produced a film*

*Diana came to us through law school McGill*

*Frederick's checking us out for the first time today*

*Jhon and Immacula lead Bible Study*

*Steve speaks about us to Concordia class*

*Jim and Olivia have come back from the past*

*Barry once sat on the board of directors*

*Now Donald has stepped up as the newest inspector*

*Isabelle gives lifts because she has a car*

*While Garth takes public transit from so very far*

*Stephania taught us Social Emotional Learning*

*Samantha is new but keeps on returning*

*It's a pleasant surprise to see Glen at Table Talk*

*We'll see more of Greg since he's joined the block*

*Norman's a snowbird but attends when he can*

*And when William attends he is definitely our man.*

*Jean-Michel and Mireille answer our calls for pledges*

*Making sure that Communitas stays away from the ledges.*

*Evelyn and Johane are behind everything we do,*

*Whether a simple soup lunch or Belgian beef stew.*

*Look all around: What a great group we are!*

*Somewhat eclectic, sometimes bizarre*

*Thanks to you all, for your presence today*

*Let's move to the raffle with no further delay.*

Written and recited by Jeri

## Letter to the Editor

*Continued from page 1*

I am grateful that he did, and thankful to you for caring to be involved with people who are and have been inside. I remember when I first stumbled upon the Prison Radio Show on CKUT, McGill's Radio station, and how I suddenly didn't feel so alone and abandoned - that there were people on the outside who actually cared about us and we weren't just discarded and forgotten. Your publication gives me the same verve and affirmation. I ended up reading it with a pink highlighter.

What Justin said about the line between the people who volunteer and the people who are volunteered to being removed was poignant. That same attitude is evident in our Monday night Chapel groups led by Tim Smart. I feel a total unity of humanity within our group, with the volunteers being as excited and committed to being there, or sometimes more so, as the insiders

Leigh mentions a Quaker meeting. I was involved with a Quaker church in Manhattan and Vancouver. I even wrote a song lyric mentioning it in a song I wrote about New York called "Ray's Pizza":

I think I'll go to the Quaker Church and worship the silence -

It's the best sermon I've ever heard

This pertains to their process of gathering, not with a preacher or priest or some such figurehead, but to sit in silence and wait upon the Spirit, and then if so, prompted to speak a message for the group's benefit. This could be a uniquely amazing spiritual experience. I also bartered involving music lessons, though I was the teacher who bartered with students who could not necessarily afford to compensate me monetarily. I like how she said the more you trade, the less you need. Being inside allows me to explore some of these apparent paradoxes, which work more on a spiritual level and beyond our mental tendencies and patterns.

And in the In the News report, it states 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. The 'state of destitution' statement rings true. Especially when combined with the ruling given by the judge mentioned in Mr. Fineberg's article: ... 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. For some reason, that statement just hits me like a concrete slab in the gut - just takes the wind out of me.

Overall my favourite quote must come from Steve Fineberg: "... and the new level of deprivation had simply been absorbed as the reigning definition of penitentiary life." That one need to be meditated and expounded upon!

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

*Ray M.*

---

## Our Separation

The sun rose and set on you  
And in a way  
It still does,  
It's just that then  
I would say  
It's what is,  
And now  
I can only say  
It's what was;  
Time, the only unit of measure  
That counts  
(forgive the pun),  
And our connection  
Is ticking away,  
Slipping away,  
Like the grains of sand  
In an hourglass,

The stockpile which once was our connection

Lessens with every grain falling through the funnel

Only to settle upon the mass, the heap, the mound, the pile, the load which is

Our separation.

And in last night's dream

I lift you up

And carry you once again

Along some back-road highway,

Feeling the thinness of you,

Your bones, the lightness,

As I try to explain

The unexplainable,

Our separation

And

Where did the sun go...?

*Submitted by Ray M.*

## No, more Shrubs.

No, more shrubs.

The brown, yellow, and dry flowers  
that built our towers

Yet, confined by the Power.

Please, don't sabotage the performance  
Here, tortured by the fury of inspiration

The Spite, abuse, hate, misunderstanding of the past  
together we can clear this rust.

No, more shrubs

The brown, yellow, and dry flowers  
that built our towers

Yet, confined by the power.

The fragments that obscure our Spirit  
The envy, malice and hypocrisy.  
it is unspoken tragic,  
blind to the truth, shone with vice.

No, more shrubs

The brown, yellow and dry flowers  
that built our towers.

Yet, confined by The Power.

S.R. Othman 22

*Submitted by Ray M.*

# Waiting for the Heat

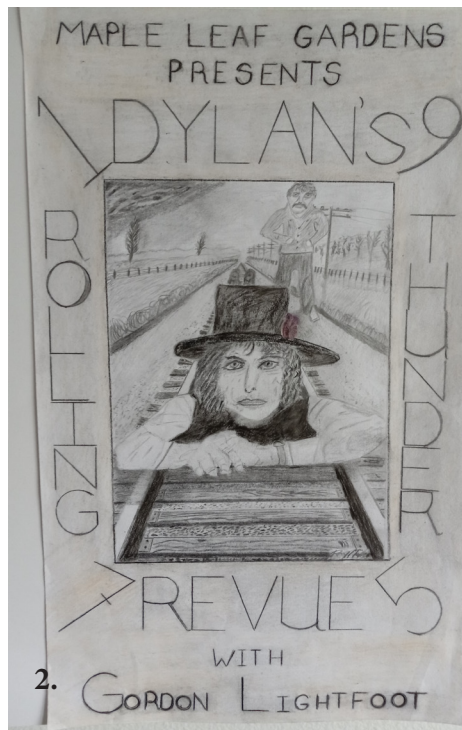
Anger and grief  
Waiting for the heat  
There is no relief  
Praying to my saviour  
A one-two punch  
I must drop the ball  
Being committed  
My future is all about falling  
Time is taking its toll  
Afraid to lose my soul  
The wolf fixes its eyes  
The bear ends all in finality  
Can't breathe  
Must pay the bills  
Living on the hill  
Waiting for anyone  
While time waits for no one.

*Alan*

# These Eyes You See

In these eyes are Light.  
Light which reflects.  
Reflects the Life lived.  
In these eyes is the likeness of a  
mirror.  
Of humanity,  
to which all may look and equally  
say;  
"I understand".  
In these eyes are  
memories of past truths, lies and  
loves.  
In these eyes you see...  
you see within all you are  
all you can be,  
in these eyes you see.

E.K.G.



- 1. Art by Ali
- 2. Art by Ray
- 3. Art by S.R. O.

What is this tumult disturbing our summer reverie? The news media's coverage of Paul Bernardo's transfer to a medium security prison has remained at the boil since early June, stoked by the relentless investigations of journalists and the seething indignation of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition. In evident disarray, Public Security Minister Mendicino and his Liberal Government have pinned their hopes on a hastily ordered review of their Correctional Service's actions. Will the resulting report, made public July 20, lower the temperature? Will a cabinet minister's head appear atop a pike above the Peace Tower? Must Commissioner of Corrections Kelly fall on her sword before the public shifts its attention to some new affront?

Canadian courts will encounter few sexual sadists with a history of atrocities this lengthy and repulsive. In some of these acts Bernardo was partnered by Karla Homolka, who received a greatly reduced sentence before her full involvement was known, in return for her cooperation in Bernardo's prosecution.

In 1995, he was found guilty of two counts of first degree murder, kidnapping, forcible confinement, and aggravated sexual assault, and one count of committing indignity to a human body; many others counts were stayed. He received two life sentences, with full parole eligibility at twenty-five years, and further was designated a dangerous offender. He was later to admit to many other horrific acts.

Bernardo was placed in the maximum security federal institution at Kingston designed to detain and protect vulnerable prisoners like informers and sexual offenders. In 2013, he was moved to Ontario's maximum security Millhaven penitentiary. Two years later he reached day parole eligibility, and in 2018, eligibility for full parole.

Subject to constant reviews, in November 2022, Bernardo's case finally earned the management team's support for transfer

to a lower security institution offering a specialized treatment program for sex offenders. Millhaven's warden gave approval to the medium security classification and transfer on March 27, 2023. On May 29, after almost thirty years in maximum security, Paul Bernardo arrived at Quebec's medium security La Macaza Institution. And all hell broke loose.

The Correctional Service notified the victims the day of the transfer, and the media quickly became aware. The transfer immediately was loudly condemned by the victims' long-time lawyer, and Opposition Leader Pierre Poilievre. The latter showcased his party's fitness to take control of

## **What is this tumult disturbing our summer reverie? The news media's coverage of Paul Bernardo's transfer to a medium security prison has remained at the boil since early June, stoked by the relentless investigations of journalists and the seething indignation of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition.**

Canada's prisons by sharing his insights into modern penology: "Conservatives will ensure Paul Bernardo rots in maximum-security prisons" and will restrict all designated dangerous offenders and those convicted of more than one murder to maximum security for life—in one blow scotching the core correctional programs of temporary absences, conditional release, and 'cascading' to lower security when and if the time is right. Ontario Premier Doug Ford, not to be left behind, offered the federal Minister his own wise counsel: "This scumbag Bernardo should rot in hell," adding, "When we sentence someone to life sentences, that means a life sentence in jail, maximum security, 23 hours a day. Matter of fact, I'd go one step further: that one hour he's out should be in general population." (One cannot help but think of the equally feckless Stockwell Day, who, while an Alberta Conservative cabinet minister, publicly encouraged

general population prisoners to administer rough justice to serial rapist/murderer Clifford Olson.)

In the aftermath of The Transfer, reporters intoxicated by their good fortune were galvanized by questions of who knew what when and why not, while incensed politicians clamour for the resignation of the Minister, who has been running from pillar to post defending his failure to make a decision it was not his to make. The carping has crystallized into four related accusations: information about such files should flow in a more reliable and timely manner inside the system and between Correctional Service and the Minister; information about the location and movements of high-profile prisoners should be available to the public, especially to victims; both the Minister and the Corrections Commissioner have scandalously failed to intervene; and the governing legislation and policy should not allow offenders with Bernardo's profile in settings lower than maximum security.

Rarely has so much excited attention been lavished on questions of so little use, predicated as they are on a faulty assumption that with timely notification, the Commissioner and Minister could and would have usurped the work of a legally mandated transfer board. Ignored is the legal framework surrounding the transfer process, which assigns the final decision to a particular Correctional Service office (normally the warden), thereby excluding interference even by those tasked with oversight of the system. The principle is enshrined in the Supreme Court's ruling in *Roncarelli v. Duplessis* (1959), the infamous case in which Quebec's Liquor Commission cancelled the license of a restaurant belonging to a Jehovah's Witness on orders from parochial premier Maurice Duplessis. The Court found the cancellation was unlawful, as the governing legislation assigned an exclusive decision-making role to the Liquor Commission, leaving no authority in

the hands of the Premier, despite his high office.

In 1985, the principle was revisited by the Federal Court of Appeal in *Morin*, concerning the placement of a high profile federal prisoner. In an obiter statement, Mr. Justice MacGuigan quoted Roncarelli to the effect that “in other words, there can be delegation down, but not up.” Instruction from above could not substitute for personal consideration and decision-making by the warden, which office was specifically identified and mandated by the legislation to take such a decision. Similarly, in *Marachelian* (July 11, 2000), the Federal Court quashed the warden’s decision to deny a lifer’s request for a minimum security classification and transfer, where that decision was made in deference to instructions from National Headquarters.

You see how this works: had Commissioner Kelly or Minister Mendicini become involved in the Bernardo transfer, as demanded by their critics, this would have exercised an unlawful influence on the legally-appointed decision-maker.

A second misunderstanding concerns the criteria which underpin the assignment of security levels. Canada’s correctional system is required by law to pursue the goals of rehabilitation and reintegration, and never to employ measures more intrusive and restrictive than are warranted. The law spells out the procedure to be followed and the list of factors to be considered in making transfer decisions. Prominent among these is a most serious criminological evaluation of the threat the offender might pose for the safety of the public, or the institution’s residents, staff, and visitors. In fact, the governing statute places risk, as discerned by the transfer authority, at the heart of every transfer

decision. What is not found in that list is the public’s impression of the risk, nor the Minister’s knee-jerk best guess, nor Mr. Poilievre’s politically-driven rhetorical flourishes. Equally extraneous is public outrage, understandable though it may be.

In the case of Donald Alexander Hay (July 9, 1985), a prisoner doing life for kidnapping and statutory rape earned transfer down to the Saskatchewan Farm Institution, where his conduct gave no reason to regret that decision. When the Service wanted to empty the building for conversion to administrative offices, Hay was returned to a higher security setting for “policy reasons.” In ordering that Hay’s minimum placement be restored, the Federal Court found that despite his “thoroughly repulsive offences,” the recent increase in his security level and placement was “the quintessence of unfairness and arbitrariness,” based as it was on considerations far from the correct statutory factors to be consulted in transfer decisions.

Similar in principle, and closer to the facts of the Bernardo affair, Mr. Allan MacDonald was a former fireman who had murdered an off-duty police officer in Ontario. He earned transfer from medium security to a minimum close to his family, but close as well to the victim’s town, provoking a community outcry. In sending the prisoner back to medium security, the warden crafted a decision he hoped would appear to rely on a relevant factor, by arguing proximity to the victim was causing psychological harm, and thus threatened public safety, one of the statutory criteria. The Federal Court rejected that sophistry, and dealt with public outrage as extrinsic to a lawful transfer study. (MacDonald, January 7, 2008)

The further concern has been raised that

placement in La Macaza betrays the sentencing court’s ruling that the full sentence be served in maximum security. In point of fact, the judge never specified a security level, but was content to opine that Bernardo should never be released from prison: “The behavioural restraints that you require is jail. You require it, in my view, for the rest of your natural life....” Whatever the details, all who are conversant with Canadian correctional law understand that the jurisdiction for placement, transfer, and release decisions falls outside the purview of the sentencing court. When judges express their opinion on these subjects, it remains just that—a personal opinion with no legal force.

The Review Committee’s Report, just released, after an intense inspection of every document, every action, every decision associated with Correctional Service’s management of the Bernardo file, has found that law and policy were scrupulously respected throughout. It nevertheless recommends, and the Minister has accordingly directed, that Correctional Service henceforth formally notify the Minister “Prior to transferring a high-profile offender to any reduced security level....” To what end? Yes, this will allow the government time to prepare for foreseeable blowback, but it also will invite unlawful political resistance to unpopular decisions before they are taken, or at least before they are executed. Transfer files are prepared and voted by experienced criminologists in an orderly, prescribed fashion, based on well-documented files. Unavoidably, at times, even they will make poor judgement calls—everybody does. Will we improve the results by submitting sensitive cases to the pressure of career politicians looking over their shoulder at their political opponents?

*By Steve*

**Dear Editor,**

I recently was given a copy of your spring magazine, well done.

I have missed this over the years – why? I have done all my time in Ontario until the past year where I

find myself now in my second Quebec pen, as I finish my sentence.

There are so many comments that I could have something to add, we do not have enough paper here so

I will keep my first letter short, as an introduction.

I would love to have the chance to write something for your magazine any time, please reach out to me.

Take care and thank you for all you do for us,

and all you print so the Canadian population can see, we

have an issue that needs to be addressed sooner than later well all, our correctional system.

Until soon,

Yours

*Kevin B, Cowansville*



## Summary Report of the Annual General Meeting

Communitas held its Annual General Meeting via Zoom on Wednesday, 24 May 2023. A total of 29 members attended ensuring that the quorum (12) was met.

The meeting covered the following topics:

- 2022-2023 Overview
- Budget for 2023-2024
- Board of Directors

Main decisions included:

- Approval of the Financial Statement for 2022-2023
- Approval of the Budget for 2023-2024
- Election of the new Board of Directors

Communitas Activities reported on in the past year (May 2022-April 2023):

- Open Door
- Table Talk



- Communitas Christmas Party
- Communitas Summer Picnic
- In-reach activities
- Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA)
- The Gospel Zone
- The Sou'Wester
- 2022 Christmas Card Campaign
- Communitas Coordination Team (Peter; Jeri; Bill)

Communitas Financial Reports:

- Expenditure in 2022-2023: \$34,207
- Liability and Equity 31 March 2023: \$52,683
- Results Financial Appeal (Nov-Dec 2022) \$26,282
- Budget Approved for 2023-2024 \$46,918

- Fund raising target for 2023-2024 \$16,918

Board of Directors:

- One member of the BOD resigned: Roch (Treasurer)
- One new member was voted onto the BOD: Donald
- Six returning members to the BOD: Michele; Steve; Jeri; Pauline; Sabrina; Dave; Peter (Hon. Member)

The detailed Report of the Annual General Meeting can be found on the Communitas website at:

<https://communitasmontreal.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/AGM-2023-Presentation-23-May-2023.pdf>

*Michele*

## Communitas Welcomes a New Board Member!

Communitas held its Annual General Meeting on May 24th, 2023 via Zoom. The AGM saw the election of a new board member as well as the re-election of six current board members. All were unanimously acclaimed.

The returning board members are Michele (Chair and Treasurer), Steve (Vice-chair), Jeri (Secretary), Pauline, Sabrina and Dave. The newest board member is Donald, who has been active in Communitas for several years. Donald brings to the board a lifetime experi-

ence with CSC across many institutions and security levels. He has been a board member of the People's Potato at Concordia University for the past 3 years and holds a strong belief in the mission of Communitas and Open Door.

Peter Huish continues to serve on the board as an honorary member.

The board is assisted in its work by a Coordination Team comprised of Peter, Jeri and Bill.

Bill



*"A real friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out."*

*Walt Winchell*



## Consultation comments April 25, 2023

Communitas held a members consultation on April 25, 2023. One of the agenda items asked members what Impact their participation in Communitas has had on them. Here are a few of the responses:

1. Being able to speak my truth, being in an environment of non-judgment, and not excluded because of it. A sense of inclusion and caring.
2. People's hearts are in the same place even though opinions are different. Different denominations - there's no hierarchy. Everyone hears others' opinions, hearing others' truth. A place for reflection.
3. Importance of community, turning introverts into extroverts. Enriches lives, thinking of others, and desire to outreach out. Feeling like it's a family space, I belong.
4. A place to meet people of the same interests, participation in developing contacts towards humanity, uplifting.
5. Being a volunteer here changes your focus and makes you more in contact with humanity.
6. Communitas is the best-kept secret. This is what I'm looking for.

## More pictures from the Communitas brunch!



The Sou'Wester writing and art competition is now ended.

Winners will be announced in the next edition of the Sou'Wester this fall.



## Play Project

Dear Readers,

I am writing a play about the experience of being in prison, the effects of incarceration, and the influence of Communitas. I am eager at this stage to talk to people who have experience and opinions on these topics, especially people who are or have been in prison.

Of course, your identity will be kept confidential unless you'd prefer it to be known.

If you would like to talk to me, please email me at [marlyn041@gmail.com](mailto:marlyn041@gmail.com)

or leave a message at

**Communitas (514-244-6147).**

Thank you,

Marlyn

## Sou'Wester interview



### The Sou'Wester interviews Paul

**SW:** Where were you born?

**Paul:** I was born in Vancouver, B.C. I'm not a big fan... it's beautiful, but like, I was born there, but I spent my childhood in Romania, so... or parts of my childhood in Romania, before moving back to Vancouver. Although I don't remember much of it, I just associate it with being more... sad, or just like, more busy, you know what I mean? There was an organization that I volunteered with that helped with homelessness and homeless issues... One of our impact lines was that the downtown east side is the poorest postal code in North America... the disparity between the rich and the wealthy... it's so evident there. It's really bad.

**SW:** Do you speak Romanian?

**Paul:** I do, I speak it fluently. So, I didn't spend actually that much time in Romania, I was a child when I was there, and I actually haven't visited again since I was 17. But yeah, I spent some time in Romania. (I speak Romanian) especially with my family, I talk to my grandma every other day, for example. Or when I text with my parents, it's always in Romanian. There's a small community of Romanian students here in Montreal. So, I speak with them, but I've been told... I speak fluently so I don't really have to search for my words or anything, but I also recognize that I have a very American accent when I speak. It's kind of like the franco-phone people from Ottawa who speak French fluently but have that American accent. You know what I mean?

**SW:** What kind of child were you?

**Paul:** I don't know. I spent a lot of time outdoors as a child, which I am very grateful for. I used to spend a lot of time drawing, so, especially when I was like, I want to say 12, 13, my best friend at the time... he and I would... well we used to play this game where we would pretend to be lizards ... and go outside on adventures or whatever. We got really into drawing and actually what we would draw, we would draw comic books, in French, they were like bandes dessinées, like little lizards going on adventures and stuff, fighting the bad guys. I still have them, they're at my parent's house somewhere. It was so much fun... and, otherwise, I have an older brother and a younger sister, so I'm a middle child... like, neither of my siblings I have beef with, but... it's interesting because when (my sister) was born, I was told by my mom that I was actually like, extremely jealous of her. I don't remember this particularly... but I probably suffered from middle-child syndrome. I don't remember a lot of it, but my mom told me that, so I'm going to accept it as fact.

**SW:** I noticed sometimes you wear a pearl necklace, and some of the kids at school are wearing them. Can I ask what's that about?

**Paul:** I just think it's cute! It doesn't mean anything in particular, I just really like it. It's one of my favourite pieces, I think it can go with most things. In general sometimes I'm just feeling myself and I want to add a little flair to my outfits, and I put it on, you know? It doesn't hold any special meaning, in fact it was a very cheap find, it's not even real pearls. It was like a \$12 necklace I found at... one of those importation stores. I found it really cute, I tried it on, and I was like, "hey, I really like this," so I just started wearing it. I didn't think it would become a very like, statement piece, but I really like it so I'm glad you noticed it.

**SW:** I do like it, it's very cute.

**Paul:** I think it's definitely trending. It's kind of similar to how a lot of straight men are starting to paint their nails, for example, because they're realizing that gender, the way that you dress, doesn't really have any implications on your gender expression or sexuality. They're realizing that painting your nails can be cute, or wearing necklaces can be cute. I will say though, I have no beef against that, I will say that a lot of people who do do that... sometimes you see people like, painting their nails black, but they don't put any topcoat or whatever and it chips within a day, then it becomes ugly... You know what I mean? I think it's very very cute and I'm very glad that people are doing it, but it has to be done right. It's not that hard. You're taking

the time to express yourself anyway, you might as well do it properly. Right? Execute it well.

**SW:** You're going to be moving to Berlin, what are you going to be doing there?

**Paul:** I'm moving for a job actually, I'm graduating this year, it's crazy. I have a job lined up in software. It's kind of like a vessel that's bringing me overseas. Berlin has a lot of socialist influence... it gives me the impression that a lot of people there align with my morals. It's very important to meet people who have the same morals as you, to have friend groups in that. It's so much easier if you actively seek these people out, through volunteer circles, or reading circles or whatever. So, as soon as I signed my job offer, I started looking for mutual aid organizations in Berlin. What's interesting there is, as compared to Montreal, it's very well organized. I remember when I was looking for *Communitas*, I was looking for organizations who specifically deal with prison... and I had a hard time finding *Communitas*. What's different about Berlin, as soon as I googled mutual aid organizations, the first result was a reddit post where someone had compiled all the organizations... and you can sort them by languages that you speak or the times that they meet, and it's this massive repertoire.

**SW:** What will you miss about *Communitas*?

**Paul:** I'm going to miss all the side attractions, obviously the presentations are always so much fun... but every now and then when Lino and Michele - they have their little capitalism spats - or Steve and Becky... it's so much fun. Everyone at Open Door has so much personality. Every time I go, I learn something new. A lot of the stuff I've learned at the Open Door presentations... they really hit home. One of the best examples is when you presented last summer about abusive relationships, and you mentioned a specific detail that in an abused person... that your brain chemistry literally changes, and creates an actual physical addiction... that it can be explained with neuroscience...

**SW:** What are you grateful for?

**Paul:** You really hit deep there. There's a lot that I'm grateful for. The fact that I can afford some of my income on the side to do some of the things I like to do like climbing or art supplies. I can afford to have a roof over my head and food. When I'm at the apple store, when I see the new products, I'm like, "I don't need this in my life." I grew up around very grounded people, it's really helped shape my mindset and helped me have a lot of empathy.

*Interview by Leigh*

## Halfway Houses in Quebec are struggling

*an Open Letter by their directors as published March 16, 2023 in Le Devoir*

“In public safety, funding for detention is always much more important than funding for community monitoring and supervision of ex-detainees”

If an essential service such as the police or fire department were held at arm's length, the public reaction would be immediate. When it comes to public safety, we want things to work.

The same goes for halfway houses in Quebec, which supervise and accompany people who leave a detention facility. Their contribution to society may still be unknown, but it is essential.

Yet these organizations are struggling to deliver their services. The cause: the shortage of labour, as in many other sectors. This is the case for the only halfway house in the Gaspé region, for example, which was forced to close at the end of March due to a lack of staff, despite all efforts to continue operating. This closure deprives the entire region of an important social safety net.

Uncompetitive and often difficult employment conditions, contractual requirements and operating costs pushed higher by inflation make it increasingly difficult to hire and retain qualified staff, as well as to maintain programs adapted and diversified for people on parole. What would happen if we had to close more halfway houses?

### *The situation in numbers*

This network suffers from the exodus of its professionals to the public sector, where there is a 29% wage gap for the same qualifications. This is the reason given by 89% of employees who leave their positions, according to a survey conducted last fall by the Association des services de réhabilitation sociale du Québec.

Over the past 24 months, the average turnover rate in halfway houses has been 54%. For more than half (56%), it is impos-

sible to offer essential clinical positions at a competitive salary with the current job market. As a result, the pressure is mounting on management staff, who too often have to work evening, night and weekend shifts.

In addition to an unprecedented staff shortage, we are seeing an increasing complexity in the needs of people leaving detention. The increase and severity of mental health, addiction and physical health issues, in addition to cognitive deficits related to the aging of the prison population, are often cumulative and require increasingly specialized intervention and expertise, which cannot be improvised.

### *An equally essential service*

The Quebec system is a forerunner, and it embodies a humanist vision by advocating social reintegration and rehabilitation rather than coercion. And it works! This is evidenced by the very low recidivism rate of halfway house residents (1.25%). And once they leave, these people contribute once again to the country's economy.

For 50 years, these agencies have been an official part of our justice system and act as a buffer between detention and the community. They are dedicated to the social rehabilitation of incarcerated persons by helping them to find employment, housing and a positive place in society.

But if we do not want the quality of clinical follow-up to weaken, funding must be commensurate with the real needs of the sector so that, collectively, we can continue to benefit from this essential service. In public safety, funding for detention is still much higher than funding for monitoring and supervision of ex-prisoners in the community. Yet more than 90 percent of those detained will eventually be released and become our neighbours again.

So, who do you want as a neighbor? A person who leaves prison without any support, or a person who will be supervised by a team of professionals to help them reintegrate into society?

David Henry is Executive Director of the Association des services de réhabilitation sociale du Québec. He co-authored this text with 22 directors of halfway houses in Quebec\* published in Le Devoir in March of this year. <https://www.ledevoir.com/opinion/libre-opinion/785481/libre-opinion-maisons-de-transition-un-reseau-aubord-de-l-effondrement>

### **\*Have also signed this text:**

Lorraine Michaud, Executive Director, CRC Arc-En-Soi, Rivière-Du-Loup and Maria Chantal Lessard, Executive Director, CRC ATNQ, Amos

Marie-Ève Théberge, Executive Director, Auberge Sous Mon Toit, Granby

Judith Deslauriers, Executive Director, Transition Centre-sud, Montréal

Steeve Thomassin, Executive Director, Montreal Transition House, Montreal

Carl Veilleux, Executive Director, Société Emmanuel-Grégoire, Montreal

Geneviève Latreille, Executive Director, Maison Joins-Toi, St-Hubert and Granby

Raymond Cotonnec, Executive Director, CRC Curé-Labelle, St-Jérôme

Patricia Arseneault, Executive Director, CHC Lafleur, Ste-Angele-de-Prémont

Claudine Bertrand, Executive Director, Via-Travail, Montreal

Diane Tremblay, Executive Director, CRC Le Pavillon, Quebec

Jean-François Cusson, Executive Director, CRC Carpe Diem, Laval

Stéphanie Tremblay, Executive Director, CRC Joliette, Joliette

Michèle Michaud, Executive Director, RE-HAB, Lévis and Vallée-Jonction

Richard Gagnon, Executive Director, Agence sociale spécialisé de l'Outaouais, Gatineau

Martin Bélanger, General Manager, Le répit du passant, Rimouski

Annie Morel, Executive Director, Crime Prevention Assistance Service, Sherbrooke

Luc Gagnon, General Manager, Maison Charlemagne Corporation, Montreal

André Bonneau, Executive Director, CRC Roberval, Roberval

Ruth Gagnon, Executive Director, Elizabeth Fry Society of Quebec, Montreal and Quebec City

Luc Bellemarre, Executive Director, CRC Maison Jeun'Aide, Montreal

Valérie Maltais, Executive Director, Canadian Mental Health Association, Saguenay Chapter, Chicoutimi

Translated from French with the help of DeepL <https://www.deepl.com>

# 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](mailto:cosa@communitasmontreal.org)

[www.communitasmontreal.org](http://www.communitasmontreal.org)

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