

We would love to hear from you!

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the Sou' Wester

A grassroots newsletter on criminal justice & prisoner reintegration

Fall 2024 Edition

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

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Prisoners Justice Day, 2024

On August 10th, 2024, the annual vigil for Prisoners Justice Day was held in Parc Vinet, near the Lionel Groulx metro. Although there had been torrential rain the day before, the weather was wonderful, sunny with a light refreshing breeze.

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Marie's Place

Marie's Place is a special place. Communitas has been having their day or renewal/ corn roast/ reflections/ community building/ picnic there for years. Some say it is the riverfront property that makes the picnic special; some like the food - the corn is always fresh; some like the community; some rave on the river views; some even like the fishing. However, the reality is that all those things are great, but it is Marie that makes it special.

The thing with doing something for a long time is that people get older. Marie is no exception to that rule. "If a hockey game goes for 3 periods I am now into overtime" Marie once declared. No one had the heart to explain that hockey games go for 60 minutes, and Marie, well, she is into the 2nd period of overtime. But she is alert, feisty, and ready to get things done.

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Celebrating 25 Years of Community Healing.

One wise Communitas member explained one evening words to the effect that, "guys don't change while inside, they heal." Wise words from a lifetime of observation and working with guys from the penitentiary to help them survive and heal.

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Marie's Place

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This year, Communitas celebrated part of its 25th Anniversary with the "Picnic at Marie's". The weather cooperated, the people showed up (over 50), and Gord did a fantastic job of setting up and keeping things flowing (with a little help from his friends) - a marvelous time was had by all. Even saw some reflection and community building going on.

Thanks Marie, see you next year!

Lino



Communitas Art Fair

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Save the Date: Date: Tuesday, October 22nd, 2024

As part of the ongoing celebration for Communitas' 25th Anniversary, we are preparing our first Art Fair. Why an Art Fair? It will help us remember our past; hope for a better future; by balancing the sorrow for those that have gone with an appreciation for those that remain, and those that will join us in our community tomorrow.

It is also our belief that art can help heal the sorrows of past mistakes, lead to self

understanding, and allow us to grow, as individuals and as a community.

The Art Fair will be an Open Door event. So, the location: is Fulford Hall., located at 1444 Union Avenue, 2nd Floor, Montreal, QC H3B 3Y5

- **Date: Tuesday, October 22nd, 2024**
- **Preview between 2:30 to 4:30 PM,**
- **Showing and auctions 5:30 to 9:30 PM.**

The event includes a viewing of art works and selected crafts, a silent auction, a called auction, door prizes and surprises. Refreshments (non-alcoholic) will be served.

For 25 years, Communitas has had the pleasure of working with and learning from those who have been imprisoned. We are excited to share with you a fun and en-

lightening evening. This event will be open to the public but only for adults 18+ only. A limited number of tickets is available, for a suggested donation of \$10 per ticket. Be sure to reserve yours as soon as possible.

We are looking for contributors, volunteers, door prizes, and sponsors Your donations, via our Web page, www.CommunitasMontreal.org, or via cheque are most welcome. Please mention #CommunitasArt. Thank you for your support!

For more information or to offer your assistance, please email us at: artshow@communitasmontreal.org

Lino on behalf of the Art Fair Committee



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

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



The Therapeutic Use of Art

Photo courtesy of pexels.com, artist: Okuda San Miguel

Many of us enjoyed drawing or colouring and using them as a form of self-expression when we were children, but as we got bigger and life became more complex, art as an activity only remained part of life for a few of us. Maybe we weren't encouraged to do it at home, maybe it wasn't seen as a valuable piece of education at school, or maybe we didn't have access to what we needed to nurture our artistic side. Whatever the case may be, there are many reasons for nourishing the artist in us and picking up that paintbrush if it's something we haven't been doing.

Art is not only a potentially personally satisfying endeavour, but it can be used as a therapeutic tool in many settings. In fact, art therapy, which specifically involves a therapist and therapeutic relationship, is frequently used with people of all ages and abilities, and in many different settings such as schools, healthcare institutions and prisons. It is even an effective tool to heal persons who have experienced difficulty in life or trauma. The main reason that art therapy can be so effective is that it allows the person to use their creativity to convey feelings that are hard to express in any way they so choose with the materials or mediums they use. Creating art outside of therapy can achieve this same purpose.

Besides its potential as a fun and relaxing activity, some benefits of creating art include regulation of the nervous system,

reduced anxiety, improved self-control and regulation, improved neurological functioning and self-acceptance. Art can also help us process emotions and develop positive coping skills. Some researchers argue that art can even help with behaviours like addiction and eating disorders, while others have found that engaging in the creation of art can reduce levels of cortisol, a stress hormone that aggravates or causes mental and physical health issues when its levels are too high in the body over time. Additionally, since art is a multi-sensory activity, its benefits may heighten for the artist, since the use of multiple senses leads to improvements in processing information and therefore improved outcomes. Some experience benefits like increased ability for concentration and staying in the present moment. For many, art can have additional important benefits, such as the potential to allow access and engage in culturally meaningful self-expression. Many cultures use art as an important form of expression and identity, and so engaging in one's culture through art can give us a way to keep culture alive within us even when we are away from home. In fact, the list of benefits derived from art therapy or simply creating art goes on and on.

Whether you're an experienced artist or someone who thinks they "aren't any good" at it, art is for and can be enjoyed by everyone. You can literally use anything

to create art, making it accessible to anyone... The only limit is your imagination. Maybe you're someone who would like a new hobby or maybe you're looking for a new way to express yourself while you're on your self-care journey. Whatever your situation, there are plenty of good reasons to include artistic expression in your life.

Sources:

1. <https://www.canadianarttherapy.org/what-is-art-therapy>
2. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/01/11/795010044/feeling-artsy-heres-how-making-art-helps-your-brain>

By Leigh (they/them)

Prisoners Justice Day, 2024

Continued from page 1

The event began with the MC introducing a local indigenous elder, who generously shared with us some of his own trajectory. While incarcerated, he had discovered his indigenous culture and roots.

The next speaker shared a brief history of PJD, remarking how this year marked the 50th anniversary of the death of Eddie Nalan. In response to the death of Eddie on August 10th, 1974, his fellow inmates held a non-violent hunger strike and work stoppage. This was an attempt to bring about changes in the life of those incarcerated at Kingston Penitentiary. The first vigil was held the following year, and it evolved into what we recognize as PJD in 1976.

This year, the 50th anniversary, 10 people were scheduled to speak, sharing their reflections and hopes for PJD with an audience of about 80. Some of the speakers were former inmates, while others represented community groups. Everyone shared memories and experiences surrounding PJD. Then the names of individuals who died in prison in the past year were read aloud and there was a moment of silence. Subsequently, when the microphone was made available to anyone who chose to speak, a few people were moved to share their personal experiences. One young man sang a traditional Cree prayer to the Creator. His gracious performance was awe inspiring and came from his heart. He said that he had not planned to sing. If he had, he would have brought his drum.

For anyone not familiar with Prisoners Justice Day, here's my own Cliff's Notes version:

On August 10th, fifty years ago, conditions in Canadian penitentiaries were so terrible that a man named Eddie Nalan chose to end his life.

I say chose but I believe that Eddie saw no choice. He had to end his life or continue to suffer the horrors of psychological, physical and emotional torture, commonly equated with prison life. Those of you who have been inside, or those with family or friends who have been inside, know what I'm referring to. A person is not driven to take his or her life if they are living a happy, joyous life in a wonderful place. To die alone on

the floor of a concrete cell is a horrible cruel waste of life.

The First Vigil

On August 10th, 1975, the anniversary of Eddie's death, the inmates of Millhaven held a one-day peaceful protest, involving a mass work stoppage and a hunger strike. They prepared a list of demands, the same as were read at this year's vigil:

- 1) *The right to meaningful work with fair wages*
- 2) *The right to useful education and training*
- 3) *The right to proper medical attention*
- 4) *The right to freedom of speech and religion*
- 5) *The right to free and adequate legal services*
- 6) *The right to independent review of all prison decision making and conditions*
- 7) *The right to vote*
- 8) *The right to form a union*
- 9) *The right to adequate work and fire safety standards*
- 10) *The right to open visits and correspondence*
- 11) *The right to natural justice and due process.*

For daring to stand up to the system and to make these demands, the organizers of the protest were still being held in the "hole" (solitary confinement), a year later. But attempts to suppress the movement for change backfired. The prison authorities rounded up and segregated those believed to be the key organizers and transferred them across the country, away from their family, friends and community support. And these organizers brought with them their message, that through peaceful non-violent protest, we can affect change. The message spread with them across the country.

This message continues to spread as evinced by the vigil held 50 years later. Prisoners Justice Day has spread to many countries and is even recognized by Amnesty International. Some people ask, "Is it still necessary? Haven't conditions improved?" Yes, it is still necessary and yes, conditions have improved, but not enough. Nowadays, the Powers-that-Be claim that there is no segregation, that the "hole" no longer exists. But in reality, it's still there, with a different name. Whether you call it the "hole", segregation, or happy- fun- time, it is still a tool

used by the authorities, a toy in their little box of horrors that they like to play with. I spent 32 years in prison, and I know.

Since the death of Eddie, prison bosses have become more subtle and sophisticated and have moved from physical to more psychological forms of abuse. But the fact is that in this supposedly more humane system, inmates are still driven to end their lives, their only exit from an environment in which they feel alone, unwanted, unloved and unworthy.

Until conditions improve to the point where not a single inmate sees his only option to end his daily suffering as death, we must continue what the guys at Millhaven began. The guys inside can't do it alone. It will take people like us, ordinary people on the outside, to help affect the changes that are needed. Of those original eleven demands presented 50 years ago, only one has been realized. The right to vote was won through intervention by the Supreme Court of Canada. It will take all of us working together to create real, meaningful change.

Thank you for taking the time to read this article. Let's continue to work together until there's no more need for PJD.

Freeman

PRISONERS' JUSTICE DAY VIGIL
VEILLÉ POUR LA JOURNÉE DE LA JUSTICE POUR LES DÉTENU-E-S

FIGHT FOR AN END TO ALL FORMS OF PRISON
LUTTER POUR LA FIN DE TOUTES LES FORMES DE PRISON

AUGUST 10 LE 10 AOÛT
PARC VINET METRO LIONEL-GROULX 2-5 PM 14-17H

Join us in Parc Vinet for a vigil featuring speakers, tables with relevant literature, and all your local prisoner justice collectives.
Rejoignez-nous pour une veillée avec des orateurs, des tables avec de la documentation pertinente, et tous vos collectifs locaux pour la justice des prisonniers.



Movember supports scaling up of Dad HERO program in Canadian prisons

Movember is funding a parenting program in Canadian prisons that is helping dads to stay connected to their children, supporting their mental health, and improving their chances of reintegrating into society and their family lives after they leave prison.

The Dad HERO (Helping Everyone Realize Opportunities) project, which is delivered by the Canadian Families and Corrections Network (CFCN), has been offered in 19 prisons across Canada from Kent Institution in British Columbia to Springhill Institute in Nova Scotia.

To date, 530 men from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds have taken part in Dad HERO since it was launched in 2017.

CFCN has estimated that more than half of the men in Canadian prisons are fathers and at least 450,000 Canadian children have a parent who is incarcerated.

“Being in prison is horribly isolating,” says Louise Leonardi, executive director of Canadian Families and Corrections Network.

“It’s violent, it’s crowded. We have men who say they are scared to stay in their cell because they know it’s not good for their mental health, but

they are scared to leave their cell because they’re afraid they’ll be stabbed. This kind of isolation and conditions are not at all conducive to positive mental health.”

Research shows that strong family relationships not only help people cope better with being in prison, it can help when it comes to reintegrating into society and lowers their chances of going back into prison. It also decreases the risk that their children will follow their parent’s footsteps into crime.

The Dad HERO program, which was created by CFCN in partnership with the Correctional Service of Canada, starts with an 8-week parenting course to help incarcerated dads deepen their understanding of childrearing and make the most of their connection to their children, despite being physically separated from them.

From there, the men move into a Dad Group in the prison that meets regularly to keep them connected through their shared experience as fathers. The project also offers a Dad Group when they leave prison to continue to help them focus on parenting and supports their reintegration into family life.

Louise says: “The men in our program are given the opportunity to be together, to learn about how to be a good dad. Some of these people have never had that opportunity.

“With Dad HERO, we bring them into an environment where they are not just a number. They are a name now, a dad, and that identity is incredibly powerful. The fact that they are focused on something that they care so much about – their children and their family – is incredible to them.

“We give them opportunity, tips, and tools for how to connect with their family and their

friends on the outside. We give them a safe and welcoming environment on the inside to connect with each other to bond over something positive - their children and to have a moment to laugh and just be a normal person.”

Movember Canada Country Director, Todd Minerson says: “At Movember, we believe emphatically in the idea that healthier men result in healthier families, which means a healthier world. We also know that we mean all men, even those who are currently incarcerated. That is why we love the work of Dad HERO, helping incarcerated Canadian men who are fathers get set up for the best chance of success upon their release. It’s good for them, great for their kids, and improves the health outcomes for everyone.”

With over 95% of incarcerated people eventually returning to the community, the impact of this mental health programming not only within the prisons, but also the family connections built during this time is critical.

“We’re pleased that Movember support of Dad HERO is resulting in fathers across Canada reporting that they have developed new social connections and strengthened the relationship with their families,” shared Ivy Lim-Carter, Director of Social Innovation, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention.

Movember has been involved with Dad HERO since 2016, through the Social Innovators Challenge, a grant funding program set up to test innovative ideas about what engages men to build strong social connections, particularly those who are at risk of becoming socially isolated.

Courtesy of the Canadian Families and Corrections Network (CFCN)



Waiting for the Sun

The aurora in high in the Sky
ice and snow beneath my feet
walking as if in a fright
can't wait till the grass is green
I know I will never make it home
Are they still searching for me

I killed to run
and my wife is no where to being see
I miss my children
no sticks for a fire
in the far distance there is the sound of dog's
stomping through the night
waiting for the sun.

Alan

Death by a Thousand Cuts

Everyone serving time knows that as often as rights and privileges are lost through some focused, reviewable, wrong-headed decision by the correctional authorities, they are also delayed, worn down, and extinguished through the daily failure, refusal, or inability to act where action is needed. This is not a Hollywood saga of corrupt prison wardens and brutal guards; it is a tale of finite resources, endemic sloth, and operational needs.

In our Winter 2021 column we met a case testing the assertion that s.7 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is violated when the system fails to deal urgently with suspended parolees who, because of time served, will instantly be freed if only the bureaucrats will get around to shuffling some papers and pushing their pencils. (Pardon the overstatement: there is the small matter of CSC's preparation of a file and recommendation, the Board's case review and revocation vote, and the sentence administrator's calculation and entry in OMS of the new Statutory Release date.) In January, 2021 Ontario's Supreme Court concluded the two agencies were opting not to assign this special cohort priority placement in the waiting list for post-suspension reviews (as our readers would expect a fair and competent bureaucracy to do) simply because there was no black-letter law forcing their hand.

In Justice Muszynski's view, scuttling the haphazard prolongation of offenders' detention justified the administrative burden his ruling would foreseeably inflict on those charged with its implementation. (Mostly Legal quipped at the time that "how the Board will accomplish this feat is for it to discover.") He ruled that

to comply with the Charter, the governing regulation must henceforth be interpreted to mean the Board is obliged to render its decision on or before the day on which suspended offenders will have completed two thirds of the unexpired portion of the sentence. The government's election not to appeal signaled that his decision was to be accepted and applied nationally, allowing many an offender to see home on 'Stat Release' as early as the law intended. Kudos to prison lawyer extraordinaire Paul Quick, Director of Queen's University's Prison Law Clinic.

The story does not always end so well, and for that, even before bureaucratic inertia and ineptitude, there is the issue

Locking the population in their cells effectively simplifies prison management, but for prisoners, deprived entirely or partially of showers, phone calls, programs, outdoor exercise, and other activities, the practice in its cruelty and impact on their mental health resembles extended solitary confinement.

of finite resources. The Correctional and Conditional Release Act may well proclaim that CSC is responsible for (...) "(b) the provision of programs that contribute to the rehabilitation of offenders and to their successful reintegration into the community; (and) (c) the preparation of inmates for release;" but these objectives are DOA without funding allocated by the Treasury Board and directed to the requisite programs and professionals and experts. Communitas itself has seen cherished and long-awaited outings abruptly cancelled for want of an officer authorized to sign a piece of paper.

Where the text defining the system's obligation is neither a statute nor a regula-

tion (i.e. a statement of the law), but a mere policy instrument, usually in the form of a Commissioner's Directive, the challenges of obtaining court-ordered compliance are multiplied. Whatever the source of the right or privilege in question, it is unwise to count on the official delays for treating grievances, transfer applications, escorted or unescorted pass requests; for parole file preparation; and for provision of programming. Response times for Access to Information and Privacy applications are especially meaningless, with many requested documents surfacing years late. In all these situations, the system shelters behind the explanation of limited resources.

Lockdowns born of staffing shortages reflect a total collapse of a prison administration's duty to respect the legal and policy framework of their carceral institution. They are an overt, frank admission that rights and privileges have been cast aside without legal process, but predictably, we do not find the administration in an apologetic frame of mind—instead we are told, "it can't be helped, we are doing

everything we can with what we've been given, no one can blame us." Locking the population in their cells effectively simplifies prison management, but for prisoners, deprived entirely or partially of showers, phone calls, programs, outdoor exercise, and other activities, the practice in its cruelty and impact on their mental health resembles extended solitary confinement.

The Ontario provincial system has distinguished itself by pushing this management tool too far for too long. 2017 saw two class actions filed seeking damages for abusive reliance on staffing lockdowns from 2009 to 2017. The CBC reports that 2016 was the peak year,

with an astonishing 636 full facility lockdowns due to staffing shortages; and in 2021, seemingly encouraged rather than deterred by the 2017 court filing, Ontario allowed an even more astonishing 783 full lockdowns. The actions have been brought on behalf of both detained migrants and the provincial prison population, of which 81 per cent are remand prisoners awaiting trial. Counsel for the plaintiffs are hoping to have the cases heard in 2025.

For a classic account of the collision of rights and administrative convenience one need search no further than a 1997 judgment of the Ontario Court of Appeal. In *Sanchez vs Metropolitan Toronto West Detention Centre*, a prisoner who had been in remand for 15 months sought a declaration that the conditions of her maximum security placement offend sections 7 and 12 of the Charter. Among other laments, the untried Ms Sanchez was required to share a cell with a sentenced person, although she could not share her cellmate's opportunities, access to temporary absences being one example. The Superior Court's rejection of her claim was confirmed by the Court of Appeal, which wrote that there was no actionable violation of rights here, for whatever she suffered was excused by the "inevitable inconveniences of the operation and administration of a large detention centre," which functions the way it does "out of operational and practical necessity." Faced with that perspective, capable of short-circuiting any complaint, aggrieved prisoners can only put away their rights and wait for better days.

A quarter of a century later, Ontario's Superior Court and Court of Appeal have again accorded a sympathetic hearing to a system unable or unwilling to protect rights promised by law (*Inlakhana v. Canada (Attorney General)*, 2023 ONCA 836).

Ms Inlakhana was sentenced to over six years. According to the accelerated parole review (APR) program then in force,

she should have been eligible on October 21, 2012 for the quasi-automatic day parole offered non-violent first-time federal offenders at 1/6 of the sentence. This did not happen, as the CCRA was amended on March 28, 2011, and APR was abolished. Together with nine other female offenders at Grand Valley Institution, she brought a constitutional challenge before Ontario's Superior Court of Justice, which held on November 3, 2014, in accordance with the rulings of the B.C. Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Canada, that APR remained available to persons who had committed their offences before the repeal, meaning Ms Inlakhana should have been considered for the quasi-automatic release 26 months earlier. Following the court clarification, CSC prepared her file for the Parole Board, which, as expected, found she met the criteria for APR release. From her victory in court to her actual release, Ms Inlakhana suffered an additional 43 days of captivity.

Ms Inlakhana and her nine peers filed a lawsuit seeking damages for false and unlawful imprisonment, negligence, and psychological suffering and emotional distress, as well as compensation for lost income. The litigation which concerns us here set aside for separate trial the 26 months of detention flowing from the unconstitutional reading of the law, and treated only the additional 43 days, which included 14 business days plus weekends during which the process stagnated because essential documents went missing.

The Superior Court's decision refusing civil liability was confirmed by the Ontario Court of Appeal, which also condemned Ms Inlakhana to pay costs of \$10,000. One passage from the appeal court's reasons says it all:

The difficulty with this submission is that there was simply no evidence of the standard of care in circumstances such as these, where the process for early parole commenced only after the detainee

had passed the early parole date. While there was evidence to suggest that, in the normal course, the accelerated parole process commences 90 days in advance of the parole eligibility date, there was no evidence to support a different standard of care after a parole eligibility date has passed.

Did you catch the court's play? It was not even investigating if her release could have been effectuated faster. Rather, it held the law imposes no special duty to make heroic efforts, or even to act with a sense of urgency. On this view, after the system has missed a statutory delay, it is free to proceed at its customary glacial pace, coffee breaks intact (the court seems willing to tolerate the ordinary 90 days preparation time). The plaintiff / appellant's Board even received a CSC file with documents inexplicably missing, and the situation stayed like that for 14 working days plus weekends, while Ms Inlakhana, who should have been on day parole, did time—but hey, a detention centre is a big machine constrained by "operational and practical necessity," as the same court put it in 1997, and stuff happens. Sometimes liberty has to take a back seat. Nothing to see here, folks.

Of course there should be a different standard of care after a date has passed, a more exacting one. The system should not be rewarded for violating rights, but required to redress the breach with all the resources at its command. The appeal court's cavalier take on the situation of Ms Inlakhana and her peers is in marked contrast to our earlier example of a trial level decision insisting that suspended parolees to be met before their new statutory release date passes. Which judicial mind set dominates at present, and is likely to hold sway in the future? Don't ask me to say it...

Steve



Some of Jeri’s memories from 22 years with MSCM / Communitas

I started volunteering with prisoners through Concordia’s Building Bridges program. Spending time with the prisoners was so enlightening that when the program ended for the summer, I looked for something that ran all year long and I found Open Door in about 2003.

Back then Open Door was on the 6th floor of the YMCA on Stanley Street. We had only discussion topics, no guest speakers

and no AV equipment. The very first guest speaker who brought a slide show had done disaster relief during Hurricane Katerina in Louisiana. He said he had never in his life seen such disrespect for the poor as during those evacuations.

Six members of my family have attended Open Door. In order to do a special presentation for my dad, I researched the 1914 Shackleton Expedition to the South Pole. Everyone was inspired by that harrowing “man against nature” story.

In 2008 I took over responsibility for the Open Door program, and the personal growth it has given me has been immeasurable.

Again, in 2008, we cleared up a problem that had long been plaguing the organization and we were rewarded by a Renaissance of activity! It was like a glorious sunny morning after a dark stormy night.

In 2011, I called Peter all excited to tell him that our Member of Parliament, Tyrone Benskin, had agreed to be our keynote speaker at the Open Door 10th anniversary gala. Benskin gave an impressive after-dinner speech to a packed room.

After three years of working non-stop, the Steering Committee was invited by Peter and Michele to a week-long retreat to Jamaica in 2011. Although we arrived exhausted, we were so pampered that we all came back with renewed dedication to our roles in Communitas.

I’ve been on one Victim – Offender Encounter at FTC. Two lifers and a drug importer shared their stories, and I shared my story of once having been the victim of a violent crime. Some unforgettable testimonies were shared.

The Synod of the Diocese was being pressured by their insurance company to kick us out of Fulford Hall (the Open Door space) because we had criminal records. The Synod voted 44 – 1 to stand behind Communitas and told their insurance company to take a hike.

Creating the Open Door book during the pandemic was an excruciating experience. I had wanted that book for five years and everything that was needed showed up at the right time: an energetic team of interviewers, the money to print it, even a graphic designer. It hit the street on December 21, just in time for Christmas sales.



Long-time member works up an appetite for Communitas

Bob Morell, also known fondly to the Communitas community as “Cookie Bob”, has taken his culinary talents to the next level by publishing his first book: “Bob Appetit”

Bob describes Bob Appetit “as an 80-page collection of 52 of my favorite recipes – soups, cookies, cakes, and favorite meals.”

He goes on to say: “the recipes are easy to prepare and a wonderful addition to any kitchen. Inspired by my desire to provide men leaving prison with healthy, inexpensive meals, it is equally valuable to any amateur or more experienced cook.”

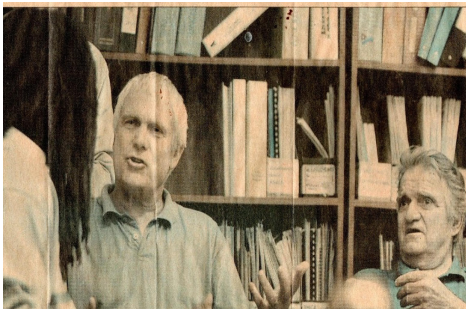
Communitas has greatly benefited from the project as Bob has indicated: “All profits from book, now in its third printing, will go to Communitas. a volunteer organization that supports men, both in prison and upon release, as they re-enter society. Communitas depends solely on donations to fund their prison chapel visits and programs such as Open Door, and Table Talk. I am proud to volunteer in such a worthwhile cause!”

Communitas is very pleased to announce that we have received a donation of \$1,100 from Bob and Camille Morell, Bob and Camille, both longtime members of Communitas, spontaneously decided that they would share the profits that they made from the sale of the book with Communitas, and already we have seen the fruits of this gift, with the promise of more to come as the book is going into a fourth printing.

Communitas chairperson, Michele Rattray - Huish wishes to thank the Morells “for their thoughtfulness and generosity in contributing to Communitas in this way, and we expect that our members who buy the book will doubly benefit from enjoying the recipes within.”

Copies of the book can be obtained either through Communitas or contacting Bob by email: cisaacsmorell@videotron.ca.

Bill



From the Communitas Archives

A Fresh Start for Ex-Convicts

Montreal Gazette, Tuesday May 25th, 2004
Harvey Shepherd

It's fine to learn 'life skills' in prison but they're of no use if you can't practice them once you get out, say a group of volunteers who are opening a drop-in centre that will offer friendly contacts and ad- vice.

"When you get out, you are labeled," said the 38-year-old prisoner at the Federal Training Centre in

Laval. "Whatever you do, in some people's minds you will always be a criminal." That's why this man, serving time in the minimum-security prison for drug-trafficking, thinks it's important to interact with 'nor-

mal' people on friendly terms, even while he's still in prison.

He was among 40 people — residents of federal prisons, volunteers from the community and a few chaplains — who recently travelled, some under escort, to a room at the downtown YMCA for a social and educational evening.

The get-together was one of a weekly series organized by a group that has been working to promote

interaction between prisoners and the public since 1999. It will take another step in that direction when a drop-in centre, mainly for English-speaking former inmates of federal prisons and their families, officially opens a couple of blocks from the St. Henri Metro station. The public is invited to the open house.

The need for friendly contacts with non-prisoners remains after a prisoner is released, said Mike Curtis, who has been keenly interested in this plight of prisoners since a close friend fell afoul of the law.

"It's fine to learn life skills while you are in prison, but all too often you don't get a chance to practice them once you get out," said Curtis, a volunteer with the Montreal-Southwest Ministries

The drop-in centre at 4123 St. Antoine St.

West won't be operating fully until the Fall. But when it's running, it will house the first site of its kind operating mainly in English in Montreal, said Peter Huish, an Anglican prison chaplain and founder of Montreal Southwest Community Minis-

tries. (The name reflects financial and volunteer support from community and church organizations in southwest Montreal.)

The drop-in centre, to be known as Fresh Start, will offer friendly words and resources to former inmates and others who are lonely or feel the need for friendship or advice, Curtis said.

Montreal-Southwest Community Ministries already organizes visits by volunteers to prisons. It also sets up the social gatherings and support groups that bring together volunteers and recently released inmates.

"Marginalizing and isolating former criminals often leads to their committing new crimes," Huish said.



The Communitas Story

Communitas' grassroots origins trace back to 1999 when Peter Huish, a local prison chaplain, was struck by the absence of support for both soon-to-be-released prisoners and the communities to which they would be released. Those 'inside' were apprehensive and unprepared, particularly the Anglophone minority, for whom the dearth of programs and services was especially apparent. Outside the walls, consultation with community groups, victims and their families, and prisoners' families revealed frustration at the lack of resources directed at successful reintegration and the rebuilding of relationships damaged by crime.

Motivated by that need, and recognizing the important role faith groups were playing in the Sud-Ouest of Montreal where they worked, a group of everyday citizens stepped forward under the banner of Mon-

treil Southwest Community Ministries (MSCM) to assist with the reintegration of the Anglophone prison population. It soon became obvious that there was a real need to create more opportunity for the public to be regularly engaged in bridging the gap between prisons and the community.

Since then, we have expanded our activities to include a variety of initiatives and projects, both within the community and within the local Anglophone prison populations. With a view to better reflecting our inclusive spirit, since 2015 we have continued the work under our new name, Communitas.

With the change of name, also came a significant organizational change as we became incorporated as a Charitable Non-Governmental Organization, with a volunteer Board of Directors of 7 members elected every year during an Annual General Meeting. This official change has enabled us to seek funding — not only from individuals,

but also from the government and other organizations.

Some of our current programmes are listed below:

Open Door

Table Talk

Prison Chapel activities

Prison In-Reach

Circles of Support and Accountability

"The Sou'Wester", our quarterly Newsletter

Accompaniment of men recently released from prison

Communitas Summer Picnic

Communitas Christmas Party

As we continue to grow and evolve in our search for new ways to build safer, stronger communities, we invite you to help us write our next chapter!



The Sou'Wester interviews Margaret

SW: Where were you born?

Margaret: I was born in Wakefield, which is a city in Yorkshire, England.

SW: What were you like as a child?

Margaret: I was the eldest in the family. I was a very ordinary child. My father worked for the civil service and my mother didn't go out to work, she was at home. She believed that women should be at home, taking care of the children, doing the housework. Before I reached 5, my brother was born, so we were two children, and the war began. The Second World War. That began our new phase of life. There were air raids, we had to go into the air raid shelter for the night. It completely changed life, but as children, we didn't realize it was different, we just played, and played the "boom, boom, boom" that the bombs made.

SW: Because you grew up in it, you didn't realize how abnormal that was.

Margaret: That's right, exactly. We played things that kids all played, in fact, we had lots of fun. We had children that were coming from other cities in England that were closer to our cities, because we were

judged as being not as dangerous as London, for example, or Liverpool. Those were cities that were dangerous. I lived in a Yorkshire industrial town, it was used for creating bombs, but we managed to be "medium-danger" compared to other places. (I was) 10 when it ended. It was different, but in some ways, the trouble that we had, like having to use ration-books to buy food, or clothing, to be limited in our movements were actually worse when the war was declared over. There was not enough food, there was a shortage of everything you might need. I remember the first time I saw an orange. My mother told me to go to the grocery store, if you had children under 10 or something, you could have one orange for your family.

SW: I bet it was quite an orange.

Margaret: It was a big orange, actually. It was great. It was completely new to us. It was a big adventure that we were going to taste this orange. Now when I look at kids in the market eating all these exotic fruits that we can get now, I wonder how we came so far, haha.

SW: What were you doing before you started at Communitas?

Margaret: I tended to be interested in what's going on everywhere, and I belonged to a group that did community building, which was following the methods of Scott Peck. Becoming a friend to everybody, dealing with everybody in positive ways. I became fascinated by someone who used to be a dentist, and he gave up being a dentist, which was an expensive thing to do, because dentists get well paid. He chose, he went into going into prisons and giving a second chance to prisoners to learn how to live in the world outside. He devoted the rest of his time to that, and I was just so fascinated that he would do that, that he would give up the good position that he had in his job. Along the way, it fell upon me to have the chance to organize a workshop of community building, here in Montreal, with mostly prisoners or ex-prisoners as the participants. All because I was so fascinated by this man, who had so much to offer, and so, I asked him if he would like to come and be one of the facilitators

of the workshop. He accepted to do that, and he said, "I'll also bring you one of my assistants." That was really something special. So, when the workshop actually happened, both of them were facilitating. The two of us who were supposed to be facilitating, we just left it to them!

SW: What drew you to Communitas?

Margaret: My husband was not an Englishman, he was an Irishman. He was living with our family in England, but it wasn't his place that he felt at home. We decided to chose to move to Montreal as a place where neither of us had grown up in to give us a chance to have a new beginning, which we did, we don't regret doing that at all. While we were there, we discovered quite a few different movements that we wouldn't have had a chance to learn about if we hadn't come to Montreal. Montreal had so many special new beginnings that we wouldn't have heard about. Because my husband was Irish, his first language as a child was Irish, which he had forgotten, which he regretted having forgotten it. The attitude in Ireland when he was young was still that children should be speaking in Irish, and he was losing it. He was an English Lit teacher, he moved further away from Irish in the end, because of his background in literature. I was a teacher of more... Younger children, I was a kindergarten teacher. I loved being a Kindergarten teacher. I loved being around kids who didn't know anything. No skills, no knowledge of how they should behave with each other, how they should share, everything was new for them at that age. To me it was just so special. To watch them growing into a person who has learned to be sociable, to take turns, things that we take for granted... it was a very special age of life for me to be with the children. I had a lot to learn from them. I also began to be interested in children with learning disabilities and started doing more courses at McGill to qualify for that... and that's what I ended up going on to, being a special ed. teacher.

SW: You've been at Communitas for a long time, right?

Margaret: Almost since the beginning. Over time... People who came to Com-

munitas with very little experience of daily living, because of having been in prison for a long time, not knowing what's the norm for behaviour... Seeing some of these people, seeing people there in the meetings that I knew when I was attending meetings before, they're now decision makers there, they're people who we depend upon. That amazes me. One of them was at one of the last meetings I had been at... And I see this same person helping people to understand things that he couldn't understand when I was last attending, which was quite remarkable.

SW: It's a very nourishing environment.

Margaret: Oh yeah. A lot of growth.

SW: Is there anything else you want to talk about?

Margaret: I think maybe my husband, he was very much admired by a lot of people, an awful lot of people. He was somebody who was always interested in the under-

dog and supporting and working for the underdog. That was his speciality. When his funeral came, the church was full of, not of people who live around here, but of prisoners, or ex prisoners. It made such an important crowd of people who were there to support him... It affected people who were just parishioners who lived in this district, to see the church full like this. They didn't know that they were prisoners, but they learned, they found out, that, prisoners could be good people, and they're not condemned by what they once did. Prisoners will often say, "I'm not what I did, that's what I did once, a long time ago, and I've been all this time learning." So many people outside don't realize that that's possible, that prisoners can learn anything.

Each edition of Open Door... the topics that are chosen, some of them I find interesting, some of them I find boring. Some of them are extremely difficult to

understand, but extremely informative. Nic, who is a cyclist, and who places the articles in the newsletter... He gave a very important lecture, you could say, of the present state of research in photography in space, and how it has advanced, and how much we can see, and how old it tells us the universe is... The different stars and everything... Everything is much, much older than all the world thought it was before. So, prisoners come, and they sit down and they learn about things like that, which most of the population here don't know anything about. I didn't know anything about it, and I've had plenty of opportunity to find facts, but certainly, they have been given the opportunity to learn what will be helpful to know.

Ok, I think that's probably enough.

By Leigh (they/them)



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 _____

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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.

CLICK HERE



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

coordinator@communitasmontreal.org

www.communitasmontreal.org

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