

We would love to hear from you!

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the Sou' Wester

A grassroots newsletter on criminal justice & prisoner reintegration

Winter 2025 Edition

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

A Message from Sophie

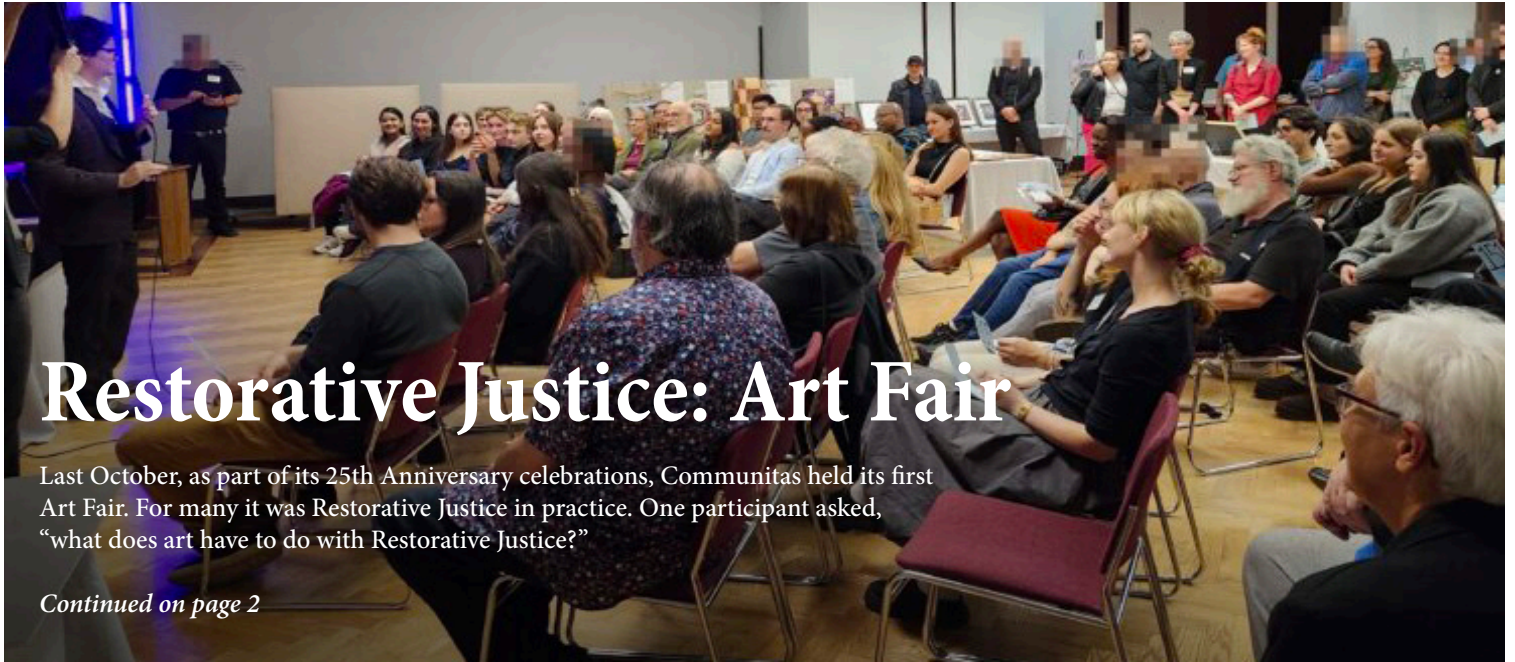
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Restorative Justice: Art Fair

Last October, as part of its 25th Anniversary celebrations, Communitas held its first Art Fair. For many it was Restorative Justice in practice. One participant asked, "what does art have to do with Restorative Justice?"

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The Communitas Christmas Party

December 17th ,2024

This year's Christmas party was described by more than one of the attendees as "awesome". The pervading mood from the get-go was joyful and uplifting; we celebrated being together. We welcomed seventy one guests, more than ever before. It was a motley crew that comprised volunteers, people from half-way houses, parolees who came from their own homes and five gentlemen who came from "inside". We

were thrilled to see them, and grateful to Marlon, our volunteer driver who brought them to us.

With her usual grace and elegance, Jeri acted as Maitre d'. The programme began with a Grace by Rosalie, a volunteer, beautiful and simple, for us all. When Jeri asked for announcements, Mike stood up to announce that he had just been paroled and there was a frisson of joy in the room.

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Embrace the Journey: Transforming New Year's Resolutions

Bill and Bob often debate ideas online or on the phone early in the morning while savouring a morning cup of coffee. The talk, one morning as the new year slipped into being, was about meaningful new year's resolutions.

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Restorative Justice: Art Fair

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The short answer is 'lots.' A slightly longer answer is that art can be therapeutic. This is true for offenders and for the victims of the offences. One of our guest speakers, Pauline, in a poignantly brief message, explained how art can be therapeutic.

Our live auctioneer, Will, explained the relationship-building in another way – through some of the stories that the artists and their friends shared on some of the art that was being live-auctioned. Will's auctioneer genetics came through as he did a fantastic job of explaining, sharing, and getting people to bid just a little bit more. Over \$6500 much needed dollars were raised.

In fact, our President Michele, was so busy processing payments (thank you) that she could not give us an exact count of how many we were - but it was well over a hundred of us that passed through. And many

bought. Over 40 works of art were sold. Many tastes, many styles, and many smiles. Focus on the smiles.

Restorative Justice is about healing and creating relationships. On that basis the evening was a resounding success.

One of the artistic contributors had this to say:

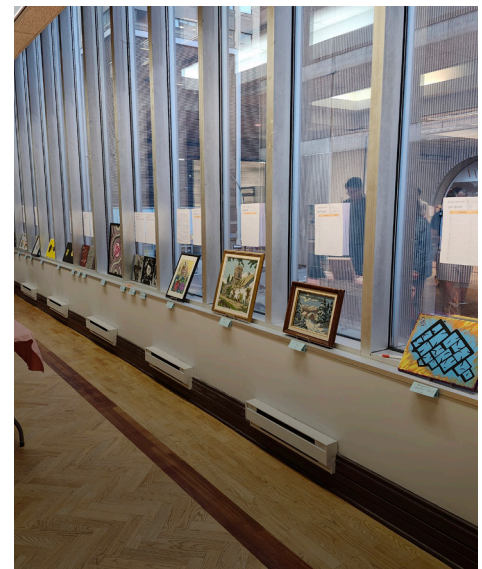
It is hard to say at any one time what I am thinking or planning to do with a piece. For it involved deep meditation. I often just trace the lines that the canvas on paper is showing me. It is as if the picture already exists in a different time or place, and I am retrieving it for the purpose of viewing for my person. Please also turn the painting to view different angles. If it (the painting) is truly for you, it should tell a story. So, I guess to answer your question, I am simply thinking of what, or listening to the canvas and what it wants to represent. ~ EKG

As several of the formerly incarcerated explained, it was nice to have an event that was forward looking, and full of sharing and smiles. Not about old mistakes and hurts, but rather about future hopes and sharing.

A great team effort was required to make the event a success. The generosity of sponsors, the volunteers, and, of course, the artists must be acknowledged. However, the most important people of all were you, the participants. The people that attended, the people that bought, the people that laughed, and hopefully the very same people that will spread the word for the next time.

Thanks to one and all.

Lino



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

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



Art Show Feedback

Respondents highly praised the art show and generally considered it a success. They particularly liked the called auction, the presentation of Communitas to the public, the artwork from inside the prisons, and the atmosphere of the night.

Respondents differed in their suggestions for improvements, though none contradicted one another. There was a call for a larger planning committee and more clarity overall. People wanted the artwork to be more clearly labelled, silent auction win-

ners more clearly announced, and roles for volunteers to be more clearly established.

Overall, the art show was well-liked, regarded as a success, considered a desirable annual event, and inspired actionable improvements for future Art Shows!

Praise:

People really liked the art show experience and believed it was a successful endeavour. They found that the energy and concept were great. We did an excellent job presenting ourselves and making the event official through catering, fancy dress,

and transforming the space into an art gallery. In particular, people liked Will's auctioneering, especially his dedication to the role. People also mentioned that having art from inside the prisons was an outstanding achievement.

83% of respondents said there should be another art show.

16% of respondents said that there maybe should be another art show.

No respondents suggested there should not be another art show.

An art show guest's perspective

My husband and I attended the Communitas art auction and, as professional artists ourselves, we were impressed with the artwork being offered and with the way the event was organized. It was so much fun, as well as being easy to navigate as bidders and potential buyers. Although many of the people knew each other, lots of us did not, but that was no barrier to everyone

mixing, talking together and having a good time as we surveyed the artwork, made our choices and bids, and then waited impatiently for the auction to begin.

The young auctioneer was fantastic! He engaged the crowd immediately, was very well-prepared, and had a lot of amusing and interesting things to say about the various works and the artists who had donated them. To my surprise, everyone got into the bidding and the prices were respectful and, in some cases, significantly high, as the participants vied with each other to contribute to the good cause we had come

to support. I was glad to hear the speeches by Communitas volunteers and artists and learn more about the organization as well.

The linocut print that we purchased that evening is hanging in our house where we see and enjoy it every day. We're very glad we attended the auction and hope it will continue as a fundraiser for Communitas.

Beth



A reflection on the Art Show – A Learner's Perspective

I began my journey with *Communitas* during the pandemic, as a volunteer. It was *Communitas*, specifically the ex-prisoners and prisoners, who inspired me to go back to school. Watching these men showing up, watching out for each other, and building more peaceful lives and communities one day at a time was something that drove me to want to acquire the skills so that I could dedicate my life to contributing to this. I went back to school and found my way into an internship with *Communitas* so that I could spend more time dedicating my efforts here. The Art Fair and Auction project was conceptualized in the spring during my previous year's internship, and I continued through the summer to help with the planning as a volunteer. I secured a second internship for this year with *Communitas* and continued to work on the project with a dedicated, small team.

There were a lot of discussions, decisions, re-evaluations of those decisions, negotiating roadblocks and disagreements, troubleshooting of problems as they came up, and so on. There were a lot of small details that needed high levels of discernment to be able to get the big picture to work. This was a very complex task that required a lot of support from others, and a lot of coordination. As one member put it, it was often a lot like trying to "herd cats." This is to say, the work was difficult, but we took it one step at a time, and we got it done. It was definitely worth it.

There were many times when I felt very uncertain about how this would all turn out. I had to remind myself often that I've seen this community do truly amazing things when we come together, and that I had faith that the things I worried about or had no control over would be handled well by the community – that it would all turn out just fine. Working on a project like this, I think, is less about what you know how to do, and more about

what you're willing to learn and the amount of faith you have in your colleagues. As someone who likes to have absolute control over my projects, relinquishing control over decisions and processes and outcomes was incredibly tough. Since the completion of the Art Show, I'm glad for the things I learned while working on this project, especially for this lesson on letting go of control.

I was absolutely delighted to see how people interacted with this project. There were so many offers of help and art donations from all angles. I heard some of the men talking about how they were grateful for the Art Show as an opportunity to give back to our community. Others were excited to be able to have their art be a part of the auction. Some were ambivalent about whether it was a good idea to put their art on display and whether anyone would be interested – some of those people themselves took a leap of faith and offered some of their works. Some were using their social network to spread the word and gain more support. There was a lot of buzz and excitement surrounding the event that grew as the date approached... and a lot of pressure! The encouragement I received from seeing everyone's reactions to the upcoming event kept me motivated, and the need for it to be impactful kept me from throwing in the towel when I found things difficult. The members of *Communitas* deserve every bit of effort that went into this, and then some.

It felt a bit surreal on the day of the event, the Art Show felt like an abstract concept, far off in the future, until the moment I walked into Fullford Hall on October 22nd. The day earlier, I had handed my colleagues a binder with everything I thought they needed to put everything together without me. I had classes that day and had no choice but to totally let go of that need for control.

When I walked in, I was greeted by some of

the men who had been helping out and were obviously happy with how things were going. The auction room was absolutely beautiful, I was so over the moon with what everyone had accomplished... it totally surpassed my hopes for what it would look like.

The artworks were displayed beautifully, and I was so happy to see everyone having a good time. Those artworks whose artists were worried about them being wanted were all bid on. We had the joy of hearing music from an artist inside the prison (a delightful last-minute surprise). We had artworks from volunteers and the men, and were lucky enough to be able to display some works from the prisoners inside (this is very tricky to get done and we were sorry we couldn't include more). We were very sorry to learn that some of the men from inside the prisons that we were expecting to come weren't able to. We hope that the joy from this event reach those men who couldn't join us despite the distance. We did hear that some of the men inside who did get their works displayed were happy when they sold. I was so pleased to hear that this had been encouraging to some inside who even started to make some more art and music since hearing about their works being sold and the art show. I heard lots of positive comments after the show about how people enjoyed it and how it touched people.

I think that for some this was a lovely moment in time and an example of what can be accomplished when we work as a community. This is true for me, but this was also the result of years and years of hard work that I have put into myself and into learning. I suppose the lesson in all of this is that if you have a dream to accomplish something, keep trying, and one day, you might just find yourself doing just that.

Leigh

The Communitas Christmas Party

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After the introductions, the meal was served. It was a sumptuous pot-luck feast with dishes for carnivores, vegetarians and vegans, and a table of gorgeous mouth-watering deserts. In the kitchen, Gordon coordinated the food presentation to perfection. We ate and we were very satisfied.

After dinner, as is the custom at Communitas Christmas parties, came a short bible reading from the gospel of Luke about the Nativity. The reader was Doc who was spending his first Christmas in more than twenty years out of captivity. This was followed by a recitation of "Twas the Night before Christmas." This year's version was much improved with the introduction of mime. The Reverend Tim Smart read the text, accompanied by Colin who splendidly leapt and capered and cavorted and contorted his face to reflect all of the matter of the poem. We laughed a lot and noted that the "night before Christmas" had never seemed so short. The recitation was



followed by a fully attired Santa, with his Elf, who distributed little gifts to each of us.

One of the delights of a Communitas Christmas party is meeting up with people you haven't seen for a long time, people with whom you once had a warm connection. Even if you've forgotten their names, your heart registers pleasure at seeing them again. The fact is that once you get attached to

Communitas, you're going to stay attached. And you'll always be welcome when you come back.

Some members consider the Christmas party to be the most important event on the Communitas calendar. It's certainly on the short list. Let us enjoy it for many years to come.

Marlyn

Open Door's First Ever In-person New Year's Eve Party!

On December 31, about 18 people (a nice number for a small party) wore colourful paper hats, ate excellent leftovers from the Christmas party, and played fun word games. At 8PM, we broke out the bubbly (which bubbled all over the floor) and toasted the New Year with the people of Cape Verde, a country in the Atlantic Ocean 5,750 kilometers away. At 8:00 Montreal time, the clock was striking midnight on this island archipelago off the coast of Senegal. We split up into three teams and enjoyed guessing the following word riddles. Can you guess them? Hint: #1 is "Man overboard."

1. Man
board

2. Sitting
World

3. M O
E K

4. ME ME ME
AL AL AL day

5. LOOK KOOL Ux

6. _ O _
B.A.
M.D.
PhD

7. S T A N D
I

8. . that's

9. T
T
T
3T

10. BUSINES

11. A
K
Q
J
U

Answers:

1. Man overboard; 2. Sitting on top of the world; 3. Look on top of the world; 4. Three square meals a day; 5. Look both ways before you cross; 6. Three degrees below zero; 7. I understand; 8. That's beside the point; 9. Tea totaller; 10. Unfinished business; 11. The cards are stacked against you.



Season's Greetings

Fortified by the spirit of the festive season, Mostly Legal proposes we maintain our holiday high a few moments longer by turning our backs on the turbulent waters ahead. Admittedly, apprehensive populations around the globe are fearing what 2025 will bring, and certainly, that is the reality for Canada's prisoners and their allies. But are there no uplifting stories to pierce the descending curtain of dread?

On September 17, 1988, the *Globe and Mail* reported that "for three years, public calls for a 'tougher' prison system grew louder and more demanding. But a recent series of influential reports indicates that there is unexpectedly strong support for more sensitive and widespread reform." Failing to recognize Canadian attitudes were creeping toward less extreme reliance on repressive tools, then Solicitor General Kelleher (a Mulroney Conservative) had blithely introduced legislation to increase prison terms and restrictions on parole, only to be forced by public disapprobation to walk back the bill's most egregious features. Surprised by the Minister's inglorious rebuff, David Cole, prominent prison lawyer and later Ontario judge, confided to the *Globe*, "I think the whole iceberg is moving. We cannot be really sure which direction it is going in, but [it turns out] we are not as far to the right as I thought we would be."

Might 2025 be a similar moment? Is it possible that even while surface events threaten criminological calamity, the operating assumptions undergirding our institutions and animating its bureaucracy have reached firm higher ground able to withstand and outlive the cynical manoeuvres of transient political actors? To be sure, the political fortunes of the right seem to be flourishing, signaling a serious

possibility of imminent regime change in Ottawa; and undeniably, that party's apparatus make no secret of their eagerness to substitute a retrograde populist vision for whatever progressive policies our liberal-centrist government has introduced or maintained. South of the border, with the connivance of fellow travellers in politics and business, a vicious madman bereft of scruples who lies as he breathes has been invited by half the voting public to exercise dominion over the country and the globe. In other parts of the world, reactionary populist sympathies threaten to overwhelm institutional norms and topple governments. For a Canadian prisoner, or a prisoner's family, friends, and political allies, wherever one's gaze falls, repression seems to be the temper of the times.

And yet... not everywhere and not always.

In the United Kingdom, in a move welcomed by the Howard League for Penal Reform, a major sentencing review is searching for ways to reduce incarceration

Surely no less important was another action taken by President Biden in the waning days of 2024. During his first term Trump resumed executions after a 17 year hiatus and scrambled to execute 13 individuals just before leaving office.

through alternative measures, potentially leading to new judicial powers to direct that sentences be served in a form of house arrest, enforced by smart watch-like tracking devices (not everyone's cup of tea: abolitionist purists will react with equal doses of approval and suspicion—but that is a debate for another day). The Minister assures us the review is learning from the experience of other jurisdictions, including Texas (!), which has shrunk its prison population and closed some institutions. In a more immediate response to Britain's rampant overcrowding crisis, Christmas

came early for 1,700 non-violent offenders, summarily released on September 10, 2024, and for another tranche of 1,100 released on October 22.

Similarly in California, epic overcrowding in the state's penal institutions, in lockstep with pragmatic budgetary concerns, are finally acting to curb the traditional political appetite for penal solutions. The struggle to curtail the unfolding disaster of mass incarceration has been a long time in gaining secure footing, but having found it, the decarceration movement now says more about the future of California's correctional thought and practice than the populist impulse of the moment. A series of court battles eventually brought the overcrowding issue forward to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled in 2011 that nothing short of a court-mandated population limit could redress California's constitutional violations, and the California system was ordered to reduce its numbers by 40,000 prisoners within two years.

There followed a plethora of legislative initiatives to prevent or shorten sentences of imprisonment. Many offenders have been diverted away from incarceration, and waves of prisoners have been released. California's numbers came down, and ancient prisons were closed. Greater access to

programming was instituted. A legislated program aimed at the elderly now offers parole hearings to prisoners at least 50 years old who have completed 20 years of continuous incarceration, including those convicted of murder and violent sex offences. Even some offenders convicted of first degree murder of a peace officer will become eligible once they are 60 and have served 25 years of continuous incarceration, although in August 2024 the legislature refused another bill to entitle certain offenders sentenced to life without parole to petition the courts for resentencing,

strong support from the state's Democratic Party notwithstanding.

Meanwhile, at the U.S. federal level, we discover a heady development with profound implications for social reintegration poised to come into its own in the new year. In the 1990s a change to the critical Pell Grant program, which offers tuition aid to the nation's low-income students, rendered prisoners ineligible. Restoration of state and federal prisoners' participation in the funding program was initiated under Obama and completed during Trump's tenure (did he know it was happening?), yet monies would not actually start to flow in that direction until 2023-2024. Reforms simplifying the mechanism for prison applications will take hold in 2024-2025; and now New York State has ended its own 26-year ban on state tuition assistance for incarcerated people, showing the way for other state administrations.

How far-reaching is the arrival of financial assistance for prison college studies? A game changer: various institutions have claimed a rate of return in the range of two or three percent for their graduates, and the Bard Prison Initiative reports that within two months of release, 85% of its graduates are employed. Many of those college graduates go on to higher degrees outside.

More glad tidings come from the office of the president. On December 12, 2024, President Biden announced he is "commuting the sentences of close to 1,500 individuals who were placed on home confinement during the COVID-19 pandemic and who have successfully re-integrated into their families and communities." This is, as his Republican critics have noticed, a greater number than any of his recent predecessors has issued—and he may not be done yet: "In the coming weeks, the President will take additional steps to provide meaningful second chances and continue to review additional pardons and commutations." (One hopes additional acts of clemency

will finally include the aged, ailing, and unfairly convicted Leonard Peltier, whose rescue has been personally requested by the president of the National Congress of American Indians, and so many other informed observers.) Also announced were "39 pardons to individuals convicted of simple use and possession of marijuana, and to former LGBTQI+ service members convicted of private conduct because of their sexual orientation," making this the first time presidential pardons have restored the rights and reputations of convicted persons according to offence category, arguably a less personal but highly principled approach to which individuals should benefit.

Surely no less important was another action taken by President Biden in the waning days of 2024. During his first term Trump resumed executions after a 17 year hiatus and scrambled to execute 13 individuals just before leaving office. Mindful of Trump's current campaign promise to expand the federal death penalty and to 'clean out' death row within his first year, President Biden commuted the death sentences of 37 of the 40 prisoners on federal death row to life without parole (the three exceptions being authors of racist and terrorist mass murders). A week after Biden's announcement, on his last day in office, outgoing North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper commuted death to life without parole for 15 of the 136 persons on the state's death row. Previously, the state had commuted the death sentence of only 5 persons since 1976.

Back in the true north strong and free, we turn for a moment to the 1994 Commission of Inquiry into Certain Events at the Prison for Women in Kingston, conducted by future Supreme Court Justice Louise Arbour. What she witnessed there convinced her the Rule of Law was not respected by Correctional Service's regional and national management, yet "judges who impose sentences expect that their sentences will be administered in accordance with the law. (...) A sentence of

imprisonment is comprised not only of a fixed term, expressed by the judge, but also of all the stipulations contained in the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, or in the Criminal Code, or in any other statute or regulation governing imprisonment. (...) If that is departed from the integrity of the sentence is at stake, and may need to be restored."

The Arbour Report accordingly advanced this novel recommendation: "If illegalities, gross mismanagement or unfairness in the administration of a sentence renders the sentence harsher than that imposed by the court, a reduction of the period of imprisonment may be granted, such as to reflect the fact that the punishment administered was more punitive than the one intended."

Fast forward 28 years to this festive season. On December 10, 2024, Canada's Upper House gave final imprimatur to third reading of S-230, a bill sponsored by Senator Kim Pate. One of its several startling and highly consequential provisions, faithful to Madame Arbour's recommendation, would allow federal prisoners to ask their sentencing court to rule they have suffered the kind of behaviour Arbour called out, and to reduce their sentence accordingly.

Let us recognize immediately that with Parliament prorogued as of January 6, 2025, the Lower Chamber is unavailable to begin its treatment of a bill from the Senate before the next session begins on March 24; and that should a quick election return a conservative government, the prospects for Arbour's radical recommendation will be nil for the present. Why, then, proffer S-230 as an event consonant with our festive spirit? Consider, Dear Reader, that Arbour's remedy was an outlandish pipe dream in 1996; in 2025 it has the full backing of the Senate of Canada. Firm ground indeed for the future to build on.

Steve

Transforming New Year's Resolutions

Continued from page 1

After our thoughts were all recorded on paper (well, digitally speaking) as to how a new year's resolution in 2025 should be viewed, we decided to share the results of our morning coffee discussion. Pour yourself a coffee and enjoy!

“As we step into the new year, many of us are setting resolutions to guide our personal growth. But what if we approached these goals not just as tasks to complete, but as opportunities for transformation? This year let's focus on curiosity, exploration, and the process itself rather than simply fixating on the end result.

Instead of treating resolutions as rigid goals, consider them as pathways to personal growth. It's not just about reaching a destination; it's about discovering new aspects of yourself along the way. Every step, no matter how small, is an opportunity to learn and evolve.

And let's not forget that the journey itself is where the real magic happens. Think of your resolutions as a pilgrimage—where the detours and challenges aren't obstacles, but chances to grow. Each unexpected turn has something valuable to teach you.

Curiosity should be your guide. Approach each goal with a sense of discovery. Ask yourself, “What will I learn today?” This mindset keeps things exciting and helps you stay engaged with the process. It also opens the door to new insights and experiences you might not have anticipated.

Discipline is important, of course, but it doesn't need to be rigid or oppressive. It's all about balance—finding a steady rhythm that works for you while also being flexible enough to adapt when life inevitably shifts. Consistent effort is key, but don't be afraid to adjust as you go.

You don't have to go it alone. Surrounding yourself with people who support, challenge, and inspire you can make all the difference. Their perspectives and encouragement will help you stay motivated and remind you of the bigger picture when things get tough.

And when challenges arise—and they will—see them as opportunities rather than setbacks. Every obstacle is a chance to learn, grow, and build resilience. These moments are often where the most valuable lessons happen.

Rather than chasing perfection, celebrate your progress. It's the small victories that add up over time and keep you moving forward. Acknowledge every step of growth, no matter how incremental it may seem.

Ultimately, think of your resolutions as invitations to explore and expand. Whether it's picking up a new skill, building a new habit, or diving into a creative project, these resolutions are more than just tasks—they're opportunities to immerse yourself in something new and exciting.

So, this year, approach your resolutions with a spirit of curiosity and adventure. The journey itself holds just as much value, if not more, than the destination. And remember, it's the exploration that makes the experience truly rewarding.”

Bill and Bob



Opioid Crisis and Addiction Treatment

As of February 2024, nearly one in four federal inmates in Canada—approximately 23%—are receiving opioid agonist treatment (OAT) to address opioid use disorder. This equates to 3,129 out of 13,619 inmates participating in programs that provide medications such as methadone and Suboxone (buprenorphine/naloxone).

OAT involves the administration of medications like methadone and Suboxone to manage withdrawal symptoms and reduce illicit opioid use. Correctional Service Canada (CSC) has expanded these programs in response to the growing opioid crisis, aim-

ing to provide comprehensive support for inmates struggling with addiction.

Despite these efforts, challenges remain in ensuring timely access to OAT upon incarceration and maintaining continuity of care post-release. Barriers such as stigma, resource limitations, and varying provincial policies can impede consistent treatment delivery. Additionally, differences in OAT prescribing practices across provinces and between correctional facilities and the general community highlight the need for standardized policies to ensure equitable access to treatment for all individuals with

opioid use disorder.

CSC has been proactive in expanding OAT programs to combat the opioid crisis within correctional facilities. In addition to methadone and Suboxone, CSC introduced Sublocade (injectable buprenorphine) to offer more flexible treatment options tailored to individual inmate needs. In 2019, CSC developed a comprehensive guidance document to standardize OAT delivery across all sites and regions, ensuring consistent and effective treatment aligned with national clinical practice guidelines.

The following data (in the link below) shows a point-in-time snapshot (September 2024) of the number of individuals, by institution, on OAT and the number of individuals on the wait list.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/correctional-service/programs/offenders/health-services/opioid-agonist-treatment/2024-09.html>

Many people are currently receiving treatment and very few are on the waiting list in Quebec Federal institutions.

Ron



Every Day Ends With A Why

And now I want you to hear my pain
In each and every one of these syllables I know that I'm the
one in prison, but
What you did to me was more than merely criminal You shut
me out of everything
Showing less compassion than you would show to any animal
Because regret can be forgiven
Even the dead can be made livin' But all the loss I have suf-
fered Is an infliction dubbed incurable Now there' s just God
and me
And neither of us are free
We 're both doing our sentence of eternity Yeah, God and me
Together in disbelief Shaking our heads over A mere discrep-
ancy God and me
Finding nothing in this funny
Unless one likes to laugh at the irony Yeah God and me
And the devil makes three Feeling each nail you avail Every
nail you impale Every nail you assail
As we howl and we wail Like some banshee or some Unholy
trinity
But really, there' s no one left here But me (unless you count
this poetry)
Alone in the searchlight, the cross-hairs, your blank stare, just
Fight, fight, fight, fight, fighting to breathe
They tell you that it' s those that give Who'll receive
And far be it for me to be the one To fail to believe
And I don' t acknowledge that we all have Been merely duped
and deceived
So I keep shaving my soul with a knife That I sharpened and
cleaved

Into a soul-sized hole which
Is measured by the amount that I've grieved
I hope that you' re standing around watching in your costume
Of the recently bereaved
' Cause I' m not dead, but I' m dyin' Haven' t laid down, but I'
m lyin' My spirit' s sinkin', it ain' t flyin'
I' ve got about one more verse I' m plyin' Yeah this poetry
curse is me tryin'
It's me down on my knees and prayin' It' s me down on my
knees and beggin', Imploring, beseeching, I' m reaching,
Remember your teaching, Now I'm speechless
I've never felt less than zero I once was your hero
Now I'm just less than nothing Just a sidewalk you spit upon,
My concrete is cracking
It's crumbling - Those who walk beside me Keep stumbling
I'm a quarterback fumbling
I' m the center-strip rumbling
The blind date who keeps stumbling And sweating, and stink-
ing, oh what Were you thinking, a better man would At the
very least be drinking
But there's no whiskey in prison But there's no whiskey in
prison
Save what you can distill from the pain you are given The
pain, now well-conceived
The swan-song is over, I bet everyone's relieved That I'm
locked up, Okay, I'11 shut-up
But just remember as sure as September, It was you who left I
still am writing and waiting, cause baby I didn' t leave
You can believe, That I'11 never leave.

by Ray, 2004

The Sou'Wester interviews Jared

SW: Where were you born?

Jared: Toronto, Ontario.

SW: What were you like as a child?

Jared: I was slow, I had a voice block until I was four. Lots of people used to laugh at me, because I had pigmentations all over my body. I couldn't understand anybody else. They told my mom I wasn't going to even have a grade 6 education. They told my mom that I had brain damage, because (when I was born) I died six times in the hospital. They brought me back six times in the Toronto hospital, and the doctors told my grandfather and granny, that if I was born anywhere else, I wouldn't be here.

SW: You've gone a lot further than that, though.

Jared: Yeah, I have my high school, and I have my DEP in construction, I have my loader license, my excavator licence... my lift license, commercial industrial and residential drafting...

SW: So, I guess they were really wrong about you.

Jared: Yes, and now I'm going to go for my class 1 license, and I do nothing but read books. I've read maybe over a hundred and twenty-five books this year. I have books on... self-hypnosis, chemistry, mathematics, physics, new-age consciousness, biology. I've also read different bibles, the old bible, the new bible, catholic, protestant, Jehovah... I also like to look at different religions, to see what their concepts are compared to what I was taught from my granny and grandfather and what our concepts are. A lot of them are very similar in a lot of areas. There's actually a lot more out there... My people call this the dream world, we're not really here. We're actually in two places at the same time but we're only conscious of this one. If we can learn how... that's why we go on vision quests... in order to contact the other part of me that I'm not conscious of. We use 100% of our mind, not 10%, we're only conscious of 10%. The only thing that human beings have to do... is become con-

scious of more. That should be a new theory that we should work on.

SW: Becoming more self-aware.

Jared: Yup... In Native, in our culture, when we smudge, it's not to get rid of the bad energy, it's to equal them out. Because only then can you consciously have control of what's going on, the choices you're making. It's not the good or bad, we are both. Every person is capable of both. You have to balance it. It's like the Yin and Yang. Me, when I was doing bad things, I was thinking negatively. I was afraid when I was happy, because I didn't believe that I deserved to be happy. At the time, I wasn't aware of what I was choosing. I thought I would get something out of it. When you equal it out and actually look at the process of what's going on, then you can change it. I've worked a lot on myself. I closed my eyes and I pictured that wall of shame in front of me and I walked through it, I had my spirit walk through it, to find out what was on the other side, and I found that yes, there's going to be people who don't accept you, but there's also going to be a lot of people who do. So, go with that, go with that knowledge that there are going to be people who are going to love you and accept you for who you are today. That's what I look forward to.

Before, any time I went to prison, I was by myself, I didn't think that it was hurting me. I was hurting other people, for some reason, it didn't affect me as much as it does today. That was a big difference, when I said "yes, going to prison, going through everything, is actually hurting me." I always tell people you get what you think you deserve. It's hard to accept that part. I made myself believe I didn't care. That's why you hear a lot of prisoners say, "it's only time." Yes, I hated being there, and it was normal for me, but it didn't have to be. I'm just glad I had the time to sit down and figure out what's going on.

SW: Is there anything you've done that you're particularly proud of?

Jared: That I had three kids. That I actually did the schooling, because they always told me when I was younger, I couldn't get my truck driving. They told me I was too small; I wasn't smart enough. So that's what I want to do next, to prove that I can. Prove them wrong, that's what I'm going for. I can actually sit here and find out who I want to be.

SW: If you could tell your younger self something, what would it be?

Jared: Hang on. You don't have to hide no more. Just let everything be new. Just see what happens. Quit worrying about everything. You were never alone. There is a genius inside of everybody. You just have to show people how to listen to themselves. It's already inside of you, you just have to know where to look.

SW: You were telling me at lunch recently about how you made corn. Can you tell me a more about that?

Jared: It's because I grew up traditional. What I call three different worlds, there was the world on the reserve, which was a living hell. There was the White man's world, which was even worse. And then there was the world when I ran away with my grandparents, up in the bush. We hid about 75 kilometers in the bush, so I learned how to set snares in the summertime for rabbits, and we learned how to pick mushrooms. We had to look where the birds were pulling the mushrooms, the tops off, those were the ones you could eat. With the bits taken out of them. We had... what you can eat, the trees, the roots, boil them, our medicines. We used to have the corn. Everybody peels them, they want to put butter on them, salt and everything else. But I never grew up that way. When we wanted to eat corn, we would go pick up the corn, pull it off of the stems, and put them in the fire just like that. We put them in the coals and twist them and turn them, about five/ten minutes. It gets the flavour of all the wood, and everything pulled into it. Then you take it out of the fire and THEN you peel it, and then you eat it. You don't put anything on it, you don't have to. The taste and the flavour of the real corn... that's the same thing with beans and anything else. Like the wild onions that grow on the ground, you just pick them and eat them just like that. There's nothing taken away from it. When you don't cook it and it's just pure, it's better for your system. You have to have it natural. I know we dry out corn to make bread. It's the same thing for drying our fish, you don't cook them, you just let them hang there and smoke. For us, once you have your beaver or anything, you throw it in the snow and let it freeze and just cut slivers off of it and eat it just like that. You get the full flavour, and you're honouring the animal. That's what we use the tobacco for, it was our way to pray, it was our offering. We put down tobacco and we say a prayer, and we burn it, because human beings are visual. So, when you take the smoke inside of you, it becomes a part of you, your

wishes and dreams and hopes, and anything you want to ask your Creator, or God, and when you blow it out, you see it going into His world. He has no choice but to answer you. You know He heard you, He has to answer you. Visually, automatically, it registers in your mind, that ok, it's His now. That's one thing I was proud of. I hated being Indian as a kid, because of what we were going through, being put through, there is still a part of me that loves being Indian, what we call Anishinaabe. That's our word for us. That's what my granny told me to remember

to get through everything. She said, "always remember that you're Anishinaabe." That helped me a lot. No matter what I was going through.

SW: What are you grateful for?

Jared: I'm grateful that I had this time to learn about myself. That now I have time to show... who I became, compared to who I was. I'm opening myself up better and allowing myself to be vulnerable. I have a chance to change my life. Now I can look at the happy things. If I'm happy I can say I'm

happy, if I'm sad, I can say I'm sad. If I don't like something, or my PO said something, I can't do this, I can't do that, I can just say ok, that's the way it is for now but it won't always be that way. It's not only one way now. Now I can just sit back and say this is what it is for now, it doesn't have to be permanent. It was the best thing that changed. And I go from there.

Interview by Leigh (they/them)



A Message from Sophie, Your Volunteer Coordinator

I am writing to you at the commencement of the New Year. This period of reflection, a liminal space between the old year and the new, grants us an excellent opportunity to contemplate starting anew. Although I have

only been your volunteer coordinator for a short time, Communitas is at the forefront of my mind as I commemorate 2024.

In recent weeks, I have reflected on all the fun we have had while achieving incredible feats at Communitas. Communitas' inspiring Art Show and 25th Anniversary have been at the forefront of my mind. These celebrations recognized Communitas' rewarding impact on our community today and over the past quarter century. Equally significant to 2024 was Communitas' weekly and annual events. Every Open Door spiritual moment, lecture and Table Talk lunch has its own warming memory. So has our annual participation in Restorative Justice Week, our Christmas card drive, and our holiday potluck. None of these events would have been possible without our volunteers' enthusiastic work and the contributions of our attendees, chefs, coordinators, and presenters.

At the heart of these reflections lies the meaning behind the work we dedicate to this organization. Independent of the event, weekly or annually, routine or singular, small or large, Communitas has a resounding message to its members, our city, and

the world. We all have an inherent value, and we all deserve to be treated as equals.

Communitas' message resonates especially during Montreal's dark winter months and especially at the dawn of the New Year. During these short days and long nights, we are surrounded by traditions that dwell on the faith that there is light in darkness and hope independent of circumstance. Communitas' message joins this chorus, reminding us that we practice these ideas every week, year-round!

In the year ahead, I look forward to continuing this practice alongside my fellow volunteers and Communitas members. While I have just two seasons of experience at Communitas, many of you have dedicated lifetimes of work, effort, and intention to this organization. To every reader, new and old, I thank you for all that you have done to create this very special place within the heart of Montreal.

Thank you for all that you do to help Communitas be Communitas!

Your volunteer coordinator,

Sophie

Communitas Fundraising in 2024

Communitas held its first fund-raising Art Fair in 2024 and in addition to being a wonderful and exciting evening we also raised a total of some \$6,500 in donations to support our activities, with 85 individuals contributing through art and ticket purchases as well as donations to the cause.

As usual we also held our Annual Financial

Appeal between November -December and again were blessed with generous contributions from 34 donors totalling approximately \$24,600.

Together, this amount of \$31,100 has succeeded in surpassing our fund-raising target of \$30,000, which will enable us to confidently continue our activities secure in the knowledge that our basic expenses can be met this year.

Special mention should be made of our 17

monthly donors, whose consistent support allows us to plan ahead with confidence and whose generosity is appreciated more than can be imagined.

Communitas thanks all our many supporters, the ones who have supported us for years, and the new ones who came on-board this year and we look forward to many more years of fruitful collaboration.

Michele

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.

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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