

CELL COUNT

YOUR PRISON HEALTH RESOURCE SINCE 1995

FREE - FOR PRISONERS, EX-PRISONERS & THEIR FAMILIES

VOICE & VISIBILITY - JUNE 2026 - #112

THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT GROUPS ON IDENTITY

By Cody Herrell

My name is Cody and I have a global sentence of a smidge over 10 years and at the time of writing this, have served 4 years and spent another year on parole. There are so many things I could talk about with regards to my time in prison, or even just this system in general, as a gay man. So, forgive me if I do not stick to one specific topic through what you are about to read.

Originally when I came to prison, like many both gay and straight, male or female, we are to believe some very scary experiences lay ahead of us. I am fortunate to not know of almost any of the horrors I have heard of or witnessed in the media (television and books) or from the accounts of others. This is likely due to the institution that I am at, but perhaps I should also give myself some credit based on my personality and any other traits that have helped me navigate this time in my life. Regardless, those fears are still very real upon arrival and until they are disproven, or enough time passes that these worries fade away, any type of imprisonment is a very stressful adjustment.

I have said this many times by this point in my incarcerations, but coming to jail was like jumping into a time machine and travelling back to a time where bigotry in all of its forms was much more accepted and visually on display. If you trend towards more open-minded viewpoints, then this drastic change from the "real world" is quite jarring, as I am sure many readers who are particularly interested in this issue of Cell Count can relate to. Since being here, I have founded a 2SLGBTQIA+/Allies group that has been running for approximately 5 years now and these days meets twice a week, with an attendance of 2-30 people at any given meeting. I continue to be surprised at the presence of queer people and our allies where I am and I am very thankful that this group offers some semblance of a safer space for people who need it. In the early stages we did reach out to a few other penitentiaries to try and connect with other queer groups, but unfortunately we only ever heard back from one group on the East Coast that we sadly fell out of contact with after I left on parole. At that point I had to accept that I needed to let the queer group that I had built in prison go on without my presence and needed to focus on the next steps in my life. Once my parole was revoked and I returned back to my mother pen, the group I had left behind had changed drastically and my heart hurt upon hearing many of the negative things that had happened during my year away. Despite these feelings, I had to remind myself that I have always said that this group will be here in whatever capacity as long as it is needed, and if it were to fall apart then that means that it is not needed. Fortunately, with help from several others, the group has returned not only to its former glory but has actually surpassed all that I described it to be earlier in this article. To be honest, when I left on parole the group mostly consisted of Allies and had [con't on pg.10]



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SPECIAL
ISSUE

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PRIDE
MONTH
SPECIAL



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Cell Count Readers,

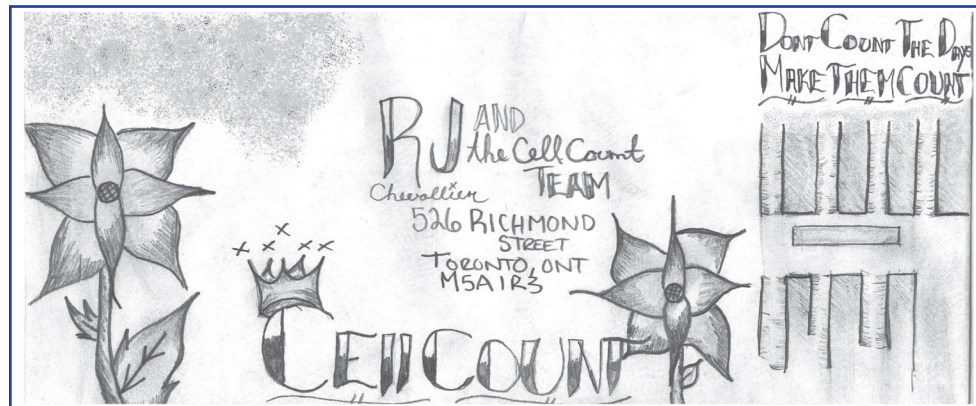
Summer is here, and June is a big month - it is widely recognized as National Indigenous History Month and also as PRIDE Month (the celebration of 2SLGBTQ+ identities and histories). I was asked many times over, by many people both inside and outside, whether Cell Count would be doing a Pride issue. With PJD coming up in August, and with witnessing the growing scope of politically-fueled hate against so many 2SLGBTQ+ people just trying to get by, it felt important to make some extra space for these stories to be shared. I told everyone that I would prioritize submissions on this topic for this issue and see what happens. You'll find this issue is a little more text-heavy than usual. This is because the response and the submissions for this dedicated theme was overwhelming. Thank you, as always, for trusting these pages with sharing your stories, your insights, your struggles, and your strengths. I was really struck by the overwhelming sense of camaraderie and support and love, that despite all the hardships and pain shared, is still woven within these narratives and outwardly shared so generously. There is acknowledgement of differences, of disagreements and of dislikes even, and yet there still seems to be a commitment to respecting and showing up for each other.

I would like to be deeply honest with all of you: I felt a little bubble of nervousness in me about publishing this special issue and how some readers might react to it. But then that also felt like all the more reason to publish it too. Those of you who have been and are currently inside, you know all-too-well what it feels like to have the powers-that-be work to dehumanize you, silence you, and ultimately, want to make you disappear. The same powers and people that want to turn back the clock on 2SLGBTQ+ rights (including access to healthcare, resources and supports, self autonomy, dignity, and freedom) are the same ones that want to build more prisons, have stricter bail conditions and only leaving prison "in a box." They count on us fighting amongst ourselves, and they make it easy, even helping to provoke it. It's easy to forget that taking care of each other doesn't always mean agreeing and getting along with each other, but it means respecting each other and working together.

Someone once told me that there are as many genders and as many sexualities in this world as there are stars in the sky, we just don't have the language or even the understanding for it all. Often, the more we understand something, the less weird-ed out we are by it. But we don't always have to understand it 100% to support it. There is a lot I will never fully comprehend about galaxies or black holes, but I still think they're cool as hell! And I hope we can all find a little bit of stardust in the pages of this issue.

In solidarity and in trouble,

RJ Chevalier, Cell Count Editor



Upcoming Cell Count Issues: What You Need to Know

Issue #113: Cell Count's annual Prisoners' Justice Day Issue. Deadline for submissions was June 26, 2026.

- If you have any last minute submissions (especially related to obituaries, tributes, specific PJD information or events, call to speak with RJ at PASAN before July 14th

Issue #114: Special Issue in partnership with Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre on Hepatitis-C (stigma, harm reduction, education, etc.)

- **Deadline for submissions: September 01, 2026.** What does harm reduction for Hep-C look like inside? What is testing and/or treatment like for Hep-C inside? What would you like to see happen differently? What needs to change? Callout for artwork related to Hep-C and Stigma.

Send artwork, poetry, stories, articles, fiction, etc. We want to see it all!

Even though we can't print it all, we love to receive it. We also keep submissions on file for a while for potential use in future issues.



ABOUT PASAN

PASAN is a community-based harm reduction/HIV/HCV organization that provides support, education and advocacy to prisoners and ex-prisoners. PASAN formed in 1991 as a grassroots response to the HIV crisis in the Canadian prison system. We strive to provide community development, education and support to prisoners and ex-prisoners in Ontario on HIV, Hepatitis C (HCV), overdose prevention and other harm reduction issues. Today, PASAN is the only community-based organization in Canada exclusively providing HIV and HCV prevention, education and support services to prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families.

SUPPORT SERVICES

- Individual support, informal counselling, case management, pre-release planning, and referrals for those in custody living with HIV and/or HCV
- Individual support, case management, referrals, and follow up care for those released and in community

- We assist our clients in accessing adequate medical care and support both while incarcerated and when in community

OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

- Conducts HIV/HCV and harm reduction workshops inside many of the provincial and federal adult institutions in Ontario
- Produces a newsletter, Cell Count, which contains articles, poetry and art produced by current and ex-prisoners
- Facilitates Prison 101, HIV/HCV prevention and harm reduction/overdose prevention trainings for agencies working with prison populations
- Assist agencies to start prison in-reach and support and act as a referral "hub" for HIV/HCV positive prisoners who are transferred from one region to another, to ensure continuity of support
- Peer harm reduction outreach workers who go out into the surrounding community to hand out supplies, water, resources and overdose prevention kits. They also assist in the event of finding people who may be experiencing an overdose.

THE PASAN TEAM

LEADERSHIP TEAM

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Anton McCloskey Prison In-Reach and Cell Count Manager **x236**
TBD Harm Reduction & Community Programs Manager

PRISONER IN-REACH & SUPPORT STAFF

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Eveline Allen Toronto South & East Detention Centres In-Reach **x238**

Omar Ramcharran Federal In-Reach **x239**

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RJ Chevalier Cell Count Editor **x234**

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ISSUE #112

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Special thanks to Mickey L for all his dedicated liaison work and congrats to him and his next chapter on the outside!

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Thank you to all of you who helped mail out over a thousand copies of this issue!



THERE'S NO CELL COUNT WITHOUT PASAN ... SO WHO AND WHAT ARE PASAN?

PASAN has three main areas of services and support. **In-Reach Support:** We have 2 federal workers that work with people inside across Canada and 3 provincial workers that work with people inside around Ontario, and 1 Cell Count editor. **Linkage to Care & Community Support:** We have 3 community workers that work with people after they have been released and are living in community in the Toronto area. **Harm Reduction & Community Care:** We have a small team of part-time harm reduction workers and 2 full-time staff who help to coordinate all of the harm reduction work like community needle clean-up, making and distributing safer-use kits, training community organizations on harm reductions, and more. All of our staff that make up all of these teams are also the same people who answer the phones, answer your questions, and connect you to supports whenever you call us. We are a small team, but we are mighty (well, we try to be)! Our phones sometimes get really busy, or our staff is away from the phones doing other important work. If you call us and don't get through, keep trying other times and days!

PRIORITY POPULATION SPOTLIGHT

by PASAN Staff

Why is it important to talk about and highlight 2SLGBTQ+ persons when talking about health and harm reduction? The risk and transmission of HIV, Hepatitis C (HepC), and other sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs) disproportionately affect certain groups that are known as "priority populations." These priority populations include people in prison or recently released from prison, people who inject and/or snort drugs, Indigenous people, and many people under the 2SLGBTQ+ umbrella. Each priority population faces unique sets of barriers to accessing and enjoying their right to health and healthcare. When someone belongs to more than one of these priority populations, both their risk and the barriers that they face go up and get more complicated. The inequities and barriers faced by people in any of these populations are structural and systemic in nature – meaning they are built into the rules, the laws, the policies, etc. – like homophobia and transphobia, rather than being caused by individual behaviour. Although, things like homophobia and transphobia also play a role in person-to-person oppression and violence too, but these hateful and discriminatory beliefs and opinions are often built from a long time of misinformation and disinformation about 2SLGBTQ+ people (similar to how some people have pretty harsh beliefs and opinions about people in prison, but really they just need to learn more, think critically and pull the veil up from over their eyes).

So again, why is it important to talk about and highlight 2SLGBTQ+ persons when talking about health and harm reduction (both inside and outside of prisons)?

- Cisgender and trans, gay, bisexual men and men who have sex with men (MSM) are at greater risk for certain sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs). Barriers to effective care include health issues related to HIV infection or its treatment, as well as stigma and discrimination.

MSM are also at increased risk of gonorrhea, syphilis, hepatitis A and B, among other STBBIs.

- Cisgender lesbian, bisexual women and women who have sex with women are at increased risk of breast, ovarian, and endometrial cancers. There is a tendency to believe that sex between women is less risky because of the assumption that it does not involve penetration, but this assumption about sex between women is very outdated.
- Trans and gender non-conforming people also face additional obstacles to accessing quality sexual health care, including experiences of outright discrimination and healthcare providers refusing to treat trans patients, as well as healthcare providers lacking the relevant knowledge and skills to treat trans healthcare. Trans and gender nonconforming individuals face various sexual health risks, including higher risks for HIV and other STBBIs, and unintended pregnancies.
- 2SLGBTQ youth are more likely to engage in high-risk substance use and sexual behaviors leading to an increased incidence of STBBIs. Trans and gender nonconforming youth are also at higher risk for assault and sexual abuse.
- Intimate partner violence is as prevalent in 2SLGBTQ relationships as in heterosexual and cisgender relationships and has been associated with a number of high-risk sexual behaviors.

Over time, we have seen a lot of progress in 2SLGBTQ+ rights in Canada, but members of the 2SLGBTQ+

Misinformation is false, inaccurate, or misleading information that is spread unintentionally and without the intent to deceive. People who share misinformation usually believe the information is true and pass it along by mistake, through misunderstandings, or due to a lack of knowing and verified facts.

Disinformation is false or inaccurate information that is deliberately created, presented, and spread to deceive the public and/or manipulate others. It is an intentional effort meant to trigger emotional reactions, cause damage, or gain influence and power

community continue to experience worse health outcomes than their heterosexual and cisgender peers. Harmful outcomes have been linked to factors such as high rates of stress due to systematic harassment, social stigma and discrimination, and a lack of 2SLGBTQ+ specific information and competent health care. Factors that support good mental health for 2SLGBTQ+ people, such as access

to spaces and both romantic and non-romantic relationships that affirm their sexual orientation and gender identity, lower rates of suicide and risk-taking behaviours.

So what does this all mean and why should we all care? It means that healthcare and healthcare professionals need to educate themselves and do a much better job. But this also means that all of us can do that too. Not as doctors or nurses, obviously, but as community members, peers, cellies, neighbours, friends, family, whatever. We can encourage each other to use harm reduction and safer practices – when using drugs and when engaging in sexual activities, of course. But also when just interacting and connecting with each other, by seeing each other as people and by standing up for each other. We all know how difficult it can be for any and all of you to access the healthcare you need inside. Imagine then adding even more layers and more barriers on top of those that already exist. Simply put: when we make things better, more accepting, and more accessible for those who are hit the hardest, we make things better, more accepting, and more accessible for everyone.

PREVENT HIV WITH PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS

via CATIE Factsheet
[edited by PASAN Staff]

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is an HIV prevention method that can be used by people who are HIV negative and at ongoing risk for HIV through sex, sharing injection drug use equipment, or both.

It is a highly effective way to prevent HIV transmission when used consistently and correctly. It involves using antiretroviral medications, which are the same drugs used to treat people with HIV. Taking PrEP requires a prescription from a healthcare provider and attending regular medical appointments for monitoring and support.

You might consider using PrEP if you:

- sometimes have vaginal or anal sex without using a condom and don't know the HIV status of one or more of their sex partners
- have a sex partner who is HIV positive and not on successful treatment
- inject drugs and sometimes share needles or other equipment
- have ever tested positive for an STI or hepatitis C
- have ever used post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)

PrEP requires a prescription from a healthcare provider such as a doctor or a nurse practitioner.

It is a highly effective way to prevent HIV transmission when used consistently and correctly. It involves using antiretroviral medications, which are the same drugs used to treat people with HIV. Taking PrEP requires a prescription from a healthcare provider and attending regular medical appointments for monitoring and support. PrEP is available in pill form (also called oral PrEP) or as a long-acting injection.

There are four types of PrEP approved by Health Canada, including

two different pill formulations and two long-acting injectable options.

Taking PrEP orally can be done by taking one pill every day OR it can be taken "on-demand" (also known as PrEP 2-1-1) which is taken only on days before and after having sex. The PrEP 2-1-1 name refers to its dosing schedule: 2 pills taken some time between 2 hours and 24 hours *before* having sex, then taking 1 pill 24 hours *after* having sex, and then taking 1 more pill 24 hours after that.

If you expect to have sex again and it has been less than 1 week since you took the PrEP 2-1-1 dose, you only need to take 1 pill 2-24 hours before sex (so, rather than 2-1-1, your dosing will be 1-1-1). If it has been more than one week, then you start with the full 2-1-1 dosing routine again.

One brand name is Truvada (generic versions are also available) and contains the drugs tenofovir disoproxil fumarate (also called TDF) and emtricitabine (also called FTC). This pill formulation can be taken daily or on-demand. The other brand name is Descovy and contains the drugs tenofovir alafenamide (also called TAF) and FTC. This pill formulation can be taken daily. Daily PrEP is recommended as an option for anyone who may be at risk for HIV through sex or from sharing injection drug use equipment. On-demand PrEP is recommended as an option to prevent getting HIV through sex

for cisgender men — including gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men and heterosexual men — and for transgender women.

Taking PrEP using the long-acting injectable can be done every 2 months or every 6 months and can only be administered by a healthcare professional.

One injectable is under the brand name Apretude and contains the drug cabotegravir (also called CAB) and is administered every 2 months. Injections are given in the gluteal muscle (in the butt muscle). To begin this medication, you have to start with 2 injections that are administered 1 month apart OR take CAB in pill form for 28 days, then receive regular injections once every 2 months. Apretude is recommended as an option for anyone who may be at risk for HIV through sex or who may be at risk through sharing injection drug use equipment.

The other injectable is under the brand name YEYTUO and contains the drug enacapavir (also called LEN) and is administered every 6 months. 2 injections are given under the skin, usually in the abdomen. To begin this medication, for your first dose you will also take 2 pills on the day of the first injections and 2 pills again the next day. YEYTUO is recommended for people at risk for HIV through sex, but research is currently underway to evaluate its use for people who inject drugs. [con't on pg.4]

NEW TRELLIS PRISON WORKER IN KINGSTON, ON!

The Prison Support Program at Trellis (Kingston, ON and surrounding area) is dedicated to supporting individuals who are currently incarcerated, preparing for release, or transitioning back into the community. The program focuses on reducing barriers and creating opportunities for individuals to achieve healthier and more stable outcomes. It does this through advocacy, education, case management, and community partnerships. We work to strengthen your continuity of care before, during, and after release. This includes helping you prepare for release, navigate healthcare and social service systems, connect with community resources, access harm reduction services, and develop realistic plans for long-term stability and independence.

The program works primarily with individuals living with HIV and those at higher risk of HIV. We believe that prison health is public health, and our program seeks to ensure that individuals have access to the information, support, and resources they need to make informed decisions about their health and well-being. A central focus of the program is empowering individuals to actively participate in their own journey. The people we serve are encouraged to identify their goals, recognize their abilities, and access opportunities that support personal growth and community connection. We work closely with our clients to make sure that the support is tailored to each person's unique circumstances and goals.

Many of you know and remember Diane Smith, who was the long-time prison worker at Trellis. Diane has retired and focuses now on her health and wellbeing. Before she retired, she helped to train Diego Salazar, who is now leading the program. Diego is a healthcare and community support professional whose work has been shaped by years of experience supporting diverse populations through advocacy, client-centered care, and service navigation. He has extensive experience working with people from a wide range of cultures, communities, and life circumstances. With his background in community healthcare and his lived experience as an immigrant, he takes a deeply human approach to his work that stresses the importance of dignity, respect, and continuity of care for individuals who are often underserved and overlooked. Diego believes that meaningful change happens when people are provided with opportunities, support, and someone who is willing to walk alongside them during difficult transitions.

At its core, the Prison Support Program is about more than connecting people to services. It is about building trust, fostering hope, and helping individuals recognize their strengths as they work toward healthier, safer, and more fulfilling lives.

Individuals who are currently incarcerated, preparing for release, recently released, or seeking support and information are encouraged to connect with the program. You can reach out to Diego Mon-Thurs from 8am-4:30pm at 613-328-8542 (cannot accept collect calls) or through Trellis's main number at 613-545-3698 (accepts collect calls), and those with access to email can email him at diego.salazar@trellishiv.ca



[con’t from pg.3] PrEP interferes with the pathways that HIV uses to cause a permanent infection. For HIV to cause infection the virus must enter the body, infect certain immune cells, make copies of itself (replicate) within these immune cells, then spread throughout the body. When PrEP is taken consistently and correctly, antiretroviral medication gets into the bloodstream and genital and rectal tissues. The medication works to prevent HIV from replicating within the body’s immune cells, which helps to prevent a permanent infection.

PrEP does not prevent HIV immediately after a person starts taking it. People who are taking daily PrEP or long-acting injectable PrEP should wait seven days from when they take their first pill or get their first injection before relying on it to prevent HIV. It is part of a comprehensive HIV prevention strategy that should involve regular medical appointments and should include access to other supports and services such as free condoms and safer injecting supplies and referrals to other services (e.g., mental health services, opioid substitution therapy).

The first step is to make sure you’re HIV negative before you start PrEP. Drug resistance can develop if someone is HIV positive when they start taking PrEP or becomes HIV positive while on PrEP. If this happens, the drugs in PrEP may not work to treat the person’s HIV, which can limit the person’s options for HIV treatment. To avoid resistance, it is important to confirm that a person is HIV negative before they start PrEP and to make sure that they continue to have regular HIV testing while using it. If a person tests positive for HIV while on PrEP,

they should stop taking PrEP right away to reduce the risk of developing resistance.

It is important to also get tested for other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and hepatitis A, B and C and you may need some additional tests depending on the type of PrEP that you want to take. It is also very important to attend regular medical appointments once a person has started PrEP, typically once after the first month on PrEP and then every three to four months thereafter. These visits are necessary so that the person can be tested for HIV and other STIs, and be monitored for drug side effects and ongoing adherence.

The drugs used in PrEP are generally well tolerated, but as with any medication, they are still capable of causing side effects. Side effects reported for oral PrEP were mostly mild and temporary and included nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, headache and dizziness. Truvada (or the TDF/FTC combo) has been associated with more concerning toxicities in a small number of people, such as small decreases in kidney, bone and, rarely, liver health. But luckily, these changes were reversible after stopping PrEP.

A person can stop using PrEP entirely or switch to another option, but it’s important that they speak to a healthcare provider about how to do so safely. The safest way to stop, restart or switch depends on the kind of PrEP the person is taking, so they should talk to a healthcare provider for guidance.

PrEP is not the same thing as **post-exposure** prophylaxis (PEP). PrEP is taken regularly *before and after* potential exposures to HIV, but PEP is only taken *for 28 days after* a single potential exposure.

A future issue of Cell Count will include information on PEP. You can also call organizations like PASAN, Trellis, PARN, Thrive, and others for more information on PrEP, PEP, or any other STBBIs, testing, treatments, and more.

A GENDER AS OLD AS TIME

By Allie the Hopefully Ally · June, 2026

There is often a misconception that occurs in relation to gender identity and gender expression. “Gender identity” is how a person sees themselves and “gender expression” is what a person does to communicate their gender to others — clothing, hairstyle, mannerisms, way of speaking, roles we take in interactions with others, and so on. In other words, gender expression is the outward appearance of a person, whereas gender identity is in our brains, someone cannot see someone’s gender identity.

In Western culture, being transgender is identifying with a gender that is different than the gender that the doctors assigned you at birth.

Nonbinary is an umbrella term for gender identities that are not in the gender binary of woman/man (binary means “only two parts”). Being gender nonconforming means a person does not conform to societal expectations of a particular gender or any gender.

“Language is not perfect when it comes to understanding and explaining the individual experience of gender, the umbrella terms we use to describe gender can resonate differently with different people,” says Andra Castle, the Assistant Director for the Center for Women and Gender Equity in Iowa. “I think the important part is that a person can be transgender, gender nonconforming, nonbinary, neither or all, and it is really up to the individual to determine what terms best describes their individual experience with gender, if any of them.”

While these concepts can feel very new or even strange for many of us here in the Western world, according to PBS, gender identity and gender expression are very evident in different cultures around the world and have been for a very, very long time.

“On nearly every continent and for all of recorded history, thriving cultures have recognized, revered and integrated more than two genders,” PBS said. “Terms such as ‘transgender’ and ‘gay’ are strictly new constructs that assume three things: that there are only two sexes (male/female) which leaves out all of the biological variations known as intersex, as little as two sexualities (gay/straight), and only two genders (man/woman).”

Castle says it is important to look at how different Indigenous peoples and cultures around the world use a different social structure for gender, and that a binary gender system consisting of only two genders (that of a man and a woman), is not universal. Before the impacts of colonization, many different cultures throughout the world recognized and respected the existence of both gender conforming and gender nonconforming identities, ultimately creating a space for multiple genders to exist in their cultures.

For example - **“Two-Spirited” People of North America:** many Indigenous nations recognized people who embodied

A FEW COMMON TERMS & DEFINITIONS

- Ally**
A person who actively educates themselves, and supports and advocates for marginalized people and communities. Allies listen to and are guided by, communities and individuals affected by oppression.
- Asexual**
A sexual orientation where a person experiences little or no sexual attraction. Asexuality is a spectrum, and asexual people may still experience romantic attraction even if they don’t experience sexual attraction.
- Bisexual / Pansexual**
A person who is emotionally, physically, spiritually and/or sexually attracted more than one gender, though not necessarily always at the same time.
- Cisgender**
A term for a person whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.
- Cisnormativity**
The assumption that being cisgender is the default or normal standard for human experience, which marginalizes people who are trans, non-binary or otherwise gender diverse.
- Deadnaming**
The act of referring to a trans or non-binary person by the name they used before transitioning. A “dead name” is often the name assigned to a person at birth or their former legal name.
- Intersex**
A term used to describe a person born with variations in sex characteristics (such as reproductive systems, chromosomes or hormones) that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies. Intersex refers to bodily diversity, not gender identity.
- Non-binary**
An umbrella term for gender identities that exist outside of the man/woman binary. A non-binary person may experience their gender as a blend of both, somewhere in between, entirely different, or as having no gender at all. Other related terms include genderqueer, agender, bigender and genderfluid. People who are non-binary may or may not identify as trans.
- Passing**
A complex and often contentious term referring to when a trans, non-binary or gender non-conforming person is perceived as cisgender.
- Transgender (Trans)**
Umbrella terms for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. This includes, but is not limited to, trans men, trans women and non-binary people.

CHROMOSOMES

?? ... XX , XXX , XXY , XYY , XY ... ??

* There are several known variations in sex chromosomes

HORMONE LEVELS

Estrogen Testosterone Progesterone

* Hormone levels vary over time for everyone

SEX / BIOLOGY

YOUR BITS AT BIRTH

Vagina ... Differently Defined or Shaped ... Penis

GENDER

GENDER ASSIGNMENT

Female Intersex Male

* Doctors assign this at birth based solely on genitalia

GENDER IDENTITY

Woman/Girl Man/Boy Non-Binary, Gender Non-Conforming, Gender Fluid, Etc.

Cis Trans Cis Trans

* These identities also fall under the “TRANS” umbrella

GENDER EXPRESSION

Feminine Masculine

Neutral, Undefined, A Mix of Things, Etc.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

SEXUAL AND/OR ROMANTIC IDENTITY

Straight / Heterosexual

Gay / Lesbian

Bisexual / Pansexual

Queer

Asexual / Graysexual

Whatever else, however else a person identifies, who cares!

PHYSICALLY AND/OR SEXUALLY ATTRACTED TO ...

Men (Cis and/or Trans)

Women (Cis and/or Trans)

Non-Binary People

All of the above / All genders

Only some of the above

No attraction to anyone usually or always

ROMANTICALLY ATTRACTED TO ...

Men (Cis and/or Trans)

Women (Cis and/or Trans)

Non-Binary People

All of the above / All genders

Only some of the above

No attraction to anyone usually or always



both masculine and feminine spirit and social roles. “Two-spirited” is an English-language term used by some Indigenous people to describe a cultural, spiritual and gender identity specific to Indigenous contexts, although each nation has its own specific language, traditions, and identities. In many communities, Two-Spirit people were healers and medicine people, spiritual leaders, matchmakers, artists and craftspeople, keepers of ceremonial knowledge, and mediators between social groups.

The Mudoko Dako people of Northern Uganda: were recognized by the Lango as a distinct third gender. Born male, living and accepted as women within their communities, they dressed in women’s clothing, took on traditional domestic responsibilities such as cooking and cleaning, and before British colonial rule, they could marry men freely and were often adopted by their husbands’ co-wives, fully integrating into family life.

The Mahu of Hawaii: the Kanaka Maoli in Hawaii recognized the Mahu, who could be of any biological sex but expressed a gender role between masculine and feminine. “The Mahu could be biological males or females inhabiting a gender role somewhere between, or encompassing both, the masculine and feminine,” PBS said. “Their social role is sacred as educators and promulgators [publishers, proclaimers, lawmakers, etc.] of ancient traditions and rituals. The arrival of Europeans and the colonization of Hawaii nearly eliminated the native culture and today Mahu face discrimination in a culture dominated by white European ideology about gender.”

The Bugis people of South Sulawesi: traditional Bugis culture recognizes 5 genders – Oroane are men, Makkunrai are women, Calalai are people assigned female at birth who take on social roles traditionally associated with men, Calabai are people assigned male at birth who take on social roles traditionally associated with women, and Bissu are a distinct category of people regarded as embodying both masculine and feminine elements. The Bugis’ system demonstrates that gender diversity can be embedded with a society’s religion, social structure, and worldview – not merely as an exception, but as an integral part of cultural life.

The Xanith of Oman: are considered an intermediate gender in the Islamic nation. They are biological males that do not practice emasculation, but do assume the dress, mannerisms and some social roles of women. However, those who are Xanith have masculine names and

are referred to in the masculine grammatical gender form. Under Islamic law they have all the rights of a man and are welcomed to worship in the mosque with men.

The Chukchi people of Siberia: nomadic, shamanic people who embrace a third gender. Generally, the shamans who are a part of this tribe are biologically male with some adoption of female roles and appearance, who married men but were not subject to the social limitations placed on women. Those who were Chukchi could accompany men on the hunt as well as take care of family.

The Hijras of Indian Subcontinent: are a recognized third gender community in South Asia with a documented history spanning over 4,000 years. Hijras are mentioned in sacred texts, and are documented as playing important roles and holding very respectable positions, such as acting as advisors in royal courts. Their status became heavily criminalized after being colonized by British rule.

The Muxe of Mexico: are Zapotec people who view themselves as neither man nor woman, but instead a distinct “third gender”. Muxes are part of ancient culture and are well-known in the town of Juchitán de Zaragoza in southern Oaxaca State. Historically, Muxes have been celebrated for their skills in embroidery, hairstyling, cooking, and crafting.

The Bakla of the Philippines: Bakla is a Tagalog term that encompasses an array of sexual and gender identities. The Bakla even developed their own language to use with each other, called Swardspreak. It is a mixture of Filipino, English and Spanish and is spoken with a “hyper-feminized inflection.” While the Bakla have existed as a recognized third gender for centuries, more conservative influences in recent decades have marginalized them.

These are just some examples of cultures that recognize more than two genders and more than one (or two, or three) ways of being. While other societies and cultures have revered and honoured transgender and nonbinary individuals and ways of thinking (not defining them by who they love but for who they are and how they contribute, and not as political or sexual statements but as a way of life that is woven into family and community and healing), North America has not. Because we have adopted a “one (or two) size fits all” idea of gender, our daily lives are shaped by it in almost every way. With gendered language, names, behaviour, clothing, expectations, punishments, systems, or even just what water bowl we’re allowed to pee in. These things shape the experiences for both transgender and

cisgendered people and can often be harmful for all genders, because gender is **not** a “one size fits all” experience. When we forget about our histories, when we try to pretend that we can fit people into identity boxes, or when we decide to hate or laugh at what we don’t understand, it can get very dangerous – especially when it means people are denied access to bathrooms, healthcare, housing, food, and are threatened with or experience physical violence for not conforming to what we think gender should be or look like.

We don’t know what we don’t know, and that’s okay. We’re often scared of or really uncomfortable by the things we don’t understand, and that can be okay too. It just means there are more things to learn about, because what we’re really afraid of isn’t the person, or the gender, or the sexuality. We’re afraid of society’s judgment and response, we’re afraid of what we think we know. So if we just stop assuming and learn more about it and change what we know, society could look a lot different – and I imagine that a society with that much respect and care could also look like a society that doesn’t lock people away for breaking rules that it made up in the first place.

FOI DOCUMENTS REVEAL ONTARIO’S ‘UNPRECEDENTED’ JAIL EXPANSION PLANS

By Liam Casey · The Canadian Press · April 14, 2026

Ontario is planning a massive expansion of jails over the next decades, The Canadian Press has learned. The province’s jails have been significantly over capacity for years, with the situation worsening. Ontario plans to add nearly 6,000 jail beds by 2050, documents obtained by University of Ottawa researchers through freedom-of-information laws show. The plan is broken down into three phases, with the first phase underway, says the transition binder prepared last year for Solicitor General Michael Kerzner.

Ontario’s jails “are experiencing significant capacity challenges (i.e., there are approximately 2,000 more inmates than beds — the equivalent of five large jails),” the documents say. The ministry said the capacity problems are “complex,” but several factors are contributing to the rise, including a backlog in the court system to deal with those on remand in jail awaiting trial, inmates remaining in custody longer, bail reform and population growth.

The first phase of the province’s plan includes 1,170 new beds by

2032 at a cost of \$4 billion, though the document notes only \$2.9 billion has been approved. Those efforts include the \$1.2-billion project currently underway to build the new Thunder Bay Correctional Complex that will replace an aging jail, plus new, expanded or refurbished jails in Brockville, Kemptville and Napanee, and modular builds in Niagara, Milton and Sudbury, the documents show. “Phase 1 projects will provide incremental relief in our overcrowded facilities,” the documents say. “However, the need is growing over the next 10 years, and another 3,500-4,500 beds are still required.”

Phase 2 will deliver an estimated 1,500 beds at six sites between 2033 and 2041 “through a combination of expansions and new institutions,” documents say. Phase 3 will see another “2,000-3,000” jail beds built between 2040 and 2050.

Province has ‘an aggressive plan’: solicitor general

The Ministry of the Solicitor General prepared the binder for Kerzner, who was re-elected in the snap election Premier Doug Ford called in February 2025, more than a year early. Kerzner has since returned to the role of solicitor general, who is responsible for law enforcement and provincial correctional facilities across Ontario. “We’re going to build as many beds as we need to protect Ontario,” Kerzner said Monday. “We’ve got an aggressive plan.” He hinted the province will be expanding the modular jail builds that will accommodate 300 more beds and is looking to reopen the jails in Brantford and Walkerton. The documents note that jail capacity as of February 2025 is 8,508 beds, which means the province is planning to increase capacity by 66 per cent.

Documents reveal ‘unprecedented increase’: researcher

Mackenzie Plumb, a PhD candidate in the criminology department at the University of Ottawa, obtained Kerzner’s March 2025 transition binder through a recent freedom-of-information request. She works under Justin Piché, a criminology professor at the University of Ottawa, who researches provincial jails and federal prisons. They shared the documents with The Canadian Press. “When I saw the numbers, my jaw hit the floor,” Piché said in an interview. “This is an unprecedented increase in jail capacity.” The plan will be “extremely expensive,” Piché warned. He said the proposed plan would cost at least \$7 billion in today’s money to build some 6,000 new beds. He based his estimates on the cheapest build the provinces are currently doing, which are 50-bed modular jails at a cost of \$1.2 million

per bed. The cost increases significantly for non-modular jails, like the new Thunder Bay jail, said Piché. That jail will double inmate capacity of the current institution and bring 345 beds with a cost of \$1.2 billion. It costs about \$1.5 billion per year to operate the jails, Piché said, which would jump to more than \$2 billion per year in today’s dollars when all those new beds become reality.

“As a researcher who studies prison construction and alternatives to incarceration, this is the wrong direction to be heading in,” said Piché, who is also a member of the Coalition Against Proposed Prisons. “Imprisonment is the most costly and ineffective way to enhance community well-being and safety.”

Kerzner said he has been transparent with the public about the province’s plans, though neither he nor Ford have laid out their long-term vision for jails. The province already “ambushed” the residents of Kemptville, a small town outside Ottawa, with news of the proposed jail back in 2020, said Victor Lachance, a local resident who founded the Coalition Against Proposed Prisons. The documents show the province is not being transparent about its jail expansion plans, he said.

“As more communities are damaged by the Ford government’s jail boom, our Coalition Against Proposed Prisons will support residents in towns and cities across Ontario as they fight to stop prison expansion and push the province to spend more on things that actually make us safer,” Lachance said.

Overcrowded jails have been a concern for years

The province has been dealing with overcrowded jails for years now. In September 2023, there was an average of 8,889 people in provincial jails, well over the 7,848-person capacity, data obtained by The Canadian Press shows. Overall, jails were operating at 113 per cent capacity at that time.

At the time, 81 per cent of those inmates were awaiting trial and presumptively innocent. The provincial institutions hold people who are accused of a crime but not on bail, as well as those serving sentences of two years less a day. Inmates with longer sentences are housed in the federal prison system. In response to the 2023 story about jail capacity, Ford pledged to build more jails.

Criminal lawyers and correctional officers have said the jam-packed jails have deleterious effects on both inmates and jail guards. The union representing correctional officers has said inmates are triple bunking in several institutions, [con’t on pg.6]

Prisoner Support Lines

ENABLING JUSTICE

call collect from any jail/prison in Ontario

- access resources
- get support
- receive printed materials
- report prison conditions

Hamilton.....	905-631-4084
Kenora/North.....	807-548-4312
Kingston.....	613-881-0050
London/West.....	519-690-0836
Milton/GTA.....	416-775-7983
Niagara.....	905-227-5066
Ottawa/East.....	613-768-9951
Penetanguishene.....	705-797-7002
Sudbury.....	705-522 7136
Warkworth.....	705-270-8073

*Beaver Creek = Penetanguishene

*GVI = Hamilton

*Bath/Millhaven/Joyceville = Kingston

RECOVERY BY MAIL

WISRCanada offers free Twelve Step-based recovery to inmates who are troubled by compulsive or risky sexual behaviour through our “Writing to Inmates Seeking Recovery” program. We start by providing recovery literature to inmates. Next we connect individual inmates with a volunteer letter writer who has worked the Twelve Steps themselves and are experienced sponsors.

Supporters, friends, and family members can contact us at WISRCanada@gmail.com or visit our our website at saatoronto.org/prison-outreach

Inmates can write to us at:

WISRCanada
PO Box 75096
20 Bloor St E
Toronto ON M4W 3T3

[con't from pg.5] while guards are dealing with increased assaults and struggling with their mental health. The Criminal Lawyers Association has said accused individuals are taking longer to get to a bail hearing, contributing to the rise in jail populations.

Global News published newly released data on Monday that shows Ontario's jails are operating at 130 per cent capacity, a marked jump from 2023. The Sudbury Jail, the news outlet noted, stood at 165.7 per cent capacity as of October 2025.

BAIL REFORM: LIBERAL GOV'T PUBLIC SAFETY STRATEGY

By Peter Zimonjic · CBC News · June 16, 2026

The Liberal government's long-promised reforms to Canada's bail and sentencing regime are now law. Bill C-14, the Bail and Sentencing Reform Act, received royal assent on Monday. The new law amends the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and the National Defence Act to tighten the bail and sentencing framework across all three.

"We've taken a major step forward but we also know that there's more to do," Justice Minister Sean Fraser said.

The minister said the bill was crafted in consultation with police forces and his counterparts in the provinces and territories. He thanked them for their contributions which he said would help restore confidence in the justice system.

Fraser said the new law is central to the federal government's public safety strategy and was specifically crafted to keep the country and its people safer by addressing their concerns.

The law is "designed to target some of the most frequent causes of concern we hear in our engagement with communities across Canada," Fraser said, "whether that's auto theft or home invasion, whether it's extortion, whether it's trafficking or whether it is assault or sexual assault."

In a post on social media, Prime Minister Mark Carney said the new legislation makes "more than 80 changes to the Criminal Code to

tighten bail and sentencing laws." Carney said the changes will "keep violent and repeat offenders off your streets," and "keep you and your community safe."

The changes to the Youth Criminal Justice Act, for example, give police the power to publicly identify a young person in cases where there is a threat to public safety.

Reverse onus bail
The legislation changes bail significantly by creating a new "reverse onus provision" that makes detention, not bail, the default. It means someone seeking bail must prove they should not remain behind bars while they await trial, instead of prosecutors having to prove denying bail is justified.

That provision will automatically impact anyone charged with: Violent auto theft; Extortion involving violence; Breaking and entering a private home; Some human-trafficking offences; Auto theft for a criminal organization; Committing a third violent crime; Choking, suffocating or strangling someone.

The legislation also puts a reverse bail onus on anyone charged with a violent offence involving a weapon who has been convicted of a similar offence within the last 10 years.

It expands the circumstances under which bail can be withdrawn as well.

Sentencing for civilian and military courts

The Bail and Sentencing Reform Act gives courts the power to impose consecutive sentences for repeat offenders in cases involving violence, vehicle theft, breaking and entering and offences committed on behalf of organized crime.

It restricts the circumstances under which a court can impose a conditional sentence — where certain sentences can be served in the community — for someone convicted of sexual assault or other sex crimes involving a minor.

Under the new legislation courts will also be able to impose steeper penalties for contempt in both civilian and military courts.

And the legislation gives the both military and civilian courts the power to hand out harsher penalties to people who repeatedly:

- Assault first responders and transit workers.
- Commit acts of retail theft and other theft.
- Have been convicted of mischief to property offences.

The new law also gives courts the power to ban someone accused of extortion or any offence involving a firearm from being in possession of a firearm or "other weapon."

Fraser said the federal government is providing the provinces with funding so they can track the impact of the changes contained in the Bail and Sentencing Reform Act, in order to inform government on how the law can be tweaked or improved in the future.

Conservative MP Frank Caputo said the act does not go far enough, describing its measures as a "small step" when Canada's bail system needs "wholesale reform."

"Yes, C-14 did something. It may have taken a small step. We don't want to take a small step. We want to solve the problem," he said Tuesday.

Tim Tierney, president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, welcomed the change, saying it marks "a meaningful step toward safer streets and fewer repeat violent offences."

He said in a statement that — with effective implementation and sustained investment to address the root causes of crime — the act will "help build safer, more resilient communities across the country."

INCARCERATION RATES FOR WOMEN HAVE DOUBLED IN THE LAST 2 DECADES. WHY IS THAT?

By Maia Tustonic · CBC News · May 21, 2026

An Edmonton men's prison is being transformed into a women's prison, reflecting a squeeze for space as the number of federally incarcerated women in Canada has nearly doubled in the last two decades.

Federal Public Safety Minister Gary Anandasangaree confirmed the transition of Grierson Institution, a minimum-security prison, in a May 8 response to a written question from Alberta MP Dane Lloyd. The switch aims to make space for the rising number of women in custody, as there is an expected shortfall of more than 300 beds for federally incarcerated women in the next five years, the reply said.

The increase in women's incarceration is linked to economic insecurity and tougher attitudes toward bail, experts say, raising concerns about overcrowding in women's institutions.

Factors include cost of living, mental health

Women make up only about six per cent of federally incarcerated people in Canada. But the number of women inmates has nearly doubled in the last two decades, from 445 in 2004-05 to 886 in 2025-26, according to the Correctional Service of Canada. The rise is linked to the rising cost of living and a lack of access to housing, employment and mental health support, according to

Write ON!

Supporting prisoners through correspondence



INCARCERATED IN CANADA? NEED INFORMATION?

WRITE ON! is an all-volunteer group whose goal is to help and support prisoners in Canada, through correspondence.

WE CAN:

Research general information you need, such as:

- general legal information
- info on prison rules and policies
- info on resources, programs and services
- and possibly other kinds of information you need.

WE CANNOT:

- Give any kind of professional advice, legal or otherwise
- be a pen-pal service (though we could refer you to one)
- Send anything that could be viewed as sexually explicit
- Send store bought items such as notebooks, crafts, etc.

CONTACT US:

Write ON!
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110 Cumberland Street
Toronto, On M5R 3V5



Jerry Flores, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Toronto Mississauga. "I'm not surprised that women's rates of incarceration are increasing, because the precarity of all of our existence has increased as well," said Flores, who is an expert on gender and crime. Women who end up being incarcerated have often experienced abuse, which can push them toward shoplifting, substance abuse or sex work leading to criminal offences, Flores said. Without investment in social supports, the number of women imprisoned will likely continue to increase. Criminal defence lawyer Megan Schwartzentruber said she has seen the increase of incarcerated women in her own practice with Toronto-based law firm Cooper, Sandler, Shime & Schwartzentruber LLP. "When I started practising 16 years ago, it was rare to have female clients, let alone clients who were incarcerated," Schwartzentruber said. She said pushes for tougher bail conditions in 2015 and since the COVID-19 pandemic have led to more accused individuals — including women — being remanded in custody or denied bail.

Indigenous and racialized women are disproportionately affected, Schwartzentruber said. In 2022-23, about half of incarcerated women were Indigenous, despite making up only about five per cent of Canada's female population. "I think the women that are being incarcerated is a symptom of the larger problem, which is just the overuse of incarceration in Canada, especially at the remand stage," Schwartzentruber said.

Overcrowded women's prisons
The growing number of incarcerated women means prisons are "bursting at the seams," said Fallon Aubée, 66, a former inmate and now a prison abolition advocate in British Columbia. She believes the expected 300-bed shortfall is a fraction of the space actually needed to accommodate incarcerated women in the coming years. She likened prisons to "modern-day residential schools" and mental health wards, where overcrowding leads to a "stifling" environment of mounting tension and anger. Aubée, who is a two-spirit woman, spent 6½ years in a women's institution, where she said the increasing violence was "staggering" compared to the 15½ years she spent in men's prisons. Overcrowding also means there isn't enough programming space, so inmates can't access resources to help set themselves up for life after prison, she said. The government should focus on harm-reduction approaches and allow more people to serve time outside of prisons when possible, Aubée said. "The sentencing guidelines don't mean you have to incarcerate everybody just because they step into a courtroom," she said. "There's alternatives to prisons that do work." According to the public safety minister's reply

earlier this month, women's prisons "are currently operating at or above their designed capacity" and steps are being taken to maximize existing space. Planning is underway for transitioning Grierson Institution, but the Correctional Service of Canada was unable to provide information about the cost or timeline, the reply said. The men held in Grierson "will be relocated to other institutions."

In a statement to CBC News, the Correctional Service of Canada said it works to optimize bed space in prisons while supporting rehabilitation. Additionally, the service said it uses healing lodges and "structured community accommodation" to safely release inmates and "reduce institutional pressures." To address the growing number of women inmates, Flores said he foresees more men's institutions being turned into women's prisons, despite the fact that the former are also overcrowded.

The government may also consider the costly and time-consuming "knee-jerk reaction" of building more prisons, Flores said, though he suggested more social services and mental health supports would be a better investment. "I think it's more humane and more economically prudent and savvy to try to stop some of these issues before they get started."

WHO KNEW NATURE WAS SO INCLUSIVE?

CBC News (June 5, 2025) · Copied & Submitted from Inside · June 2026

Victoria BC wildlife conservationist Connel Bradwell wanted to know more about queer behaviour in the animal kingdom. The result of that curiosity is the new [2025] documentary film, *Animal Pride: Nature's Coming Out Story*.

"As a gay wildlife conservationist, I've always been deeply connected to nature, but I never really encountered any information about queerness in the natural world. I've studied wildlife for years, yet it wasn't until I saw same-sex behaviour in orcas that I realized how little I knew," Bradwell told Postmedia via email.

"That moment was a wake-up call, I'd been so focused on the more familiar aspects of nature that I missed a whole world of diversity right in front of me."

Bradwell discovered that for more than a century, researchers had been documenting same-sex relationships in animals, but due to societal or cultural pressure, their findings were often "hidden, removed, or dismissed."

"What really struck me though, was how this secrecy has impacted both the science itself and conservation efforts," said Bradwell. "Understanding the full range of animal behaviour, including queerness, is essential to

[con't on pg.7]



HELPING YOU TO SUPPORT YOUR INCARCERATED LOVED ONES ACROSS CANADA

ABOUT US

TT team members are real people that have experienced the real struggles of the Canadian Correctional System

Our goal is to introduce the friends and family members of incarcerated individuals, to as much need-to-know information as we can.

WHY CHOOSE US?

Not only will we gather items, we will build and ship a Pen Pack to your loved ones that are doing hard time anywhere in Canada.

OUR SERVICES

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Tough Times Don't Last, Tough People Do!



[con't from pg.6] protecting these species and the environments they rely on."

"Luckily, today there are amazing scientists who are doing this work, often against the odds, and bringing these stories forward. They're trail-blazing a path for more inclusive, honest science that better reflects the natural world."

Here are five facts about queer animal behaviour from CBC's *Animal Pride: Nature's Coming Out Story's* wildlife conservationist, Connel Bradwell:

1) Female albatrosses raise chicks together

On Islands like Oahu, female Laysan albatross pairs form long-term bonds, some lasting decades. They mate with males to produce fertilized eggs, then return to their female partners to co-parent and raise the chicks together. Similar long-term, same-sex pairings have also been observed here in British Columbia, including among Canada geese and gulls, that nest and raise young together.

2) Queer behaviour is found in over 1500 species

Scientists have documented same-sex sexual behaviour in more than 1500 animal species, from insects and birds to dolphins and primates. It is not an anomaly; it is a natural, widespread part of the animal world.

3) Banana slugs and others challenge the gender binary

Banana slugs, found in B.C.'s forests, are hermaphrodites - possessing both male and female sex organs. They often exchange sperm mutually and sometimes self-fertilize. Slugs aren't alone; many fish change sex mid-life, and fungi have thousands of genders, showing that nature often thrives in fluidity, not rigid roles.

4) Homosocial behaviour strengthens bonds

Many animal species engage in same-sex social bonding, known as homosocial behaviour. These co-operative partnerships often involve sexual behaviour and play a key role in trust and group cohesion. We filmed bighorn sheep displaying this behaviour in Radium Hot Springs, showing how queerness shapes complex animal societies.

5) There's still more to learn

Same-sex behaviour has been hidden and ignored for a long time, but it is finally being studied and understood. Many species, including penguins and orcas, require specific social structures to survive, structures that include same-sex behaviour. Understanding this diversity is crucial for better conservation. Thankfully, more scientists are now embracing and exploring this work.

PRISON LIBRARIANS SAVED!

Digital newsletter communication from Book Clubs for Inmates · June 11, 2026

Today the Commissioner of Correctional Service Canada (CSC) announced an official rejection of the proposed budget cut that would eliminate federal librarian positions. This means, thanks to your support and advocacy, librarians in federal penitentiaries across Canada can continue their invaluable work.

We are grateful to Commissioner Talal Dakalbab for his swift review and sound rejection of such a harmful cut. We are also encouraged and inspired by his thoughtful message, in which he confirms that "access to reading materials, information, and

learning supports plays an important role in offender rehabilitation, including literacy development, education, and personal growth. This will continue."

We are thrilled by this news and want to extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who raised their voice and took action in support of prison librarians. At a time when access to books, literacy, and learning within our institutions is more important than ever, your advocacy sent a powerful message: prison libraries matter, and the work done by prison librarians is not only necessary, but life-changing.

We were fortunate to be supported by a remarkable community of writers who set aside their own work to write compelling and heartfelt articles about this misguided decision. Their voices helped galvanize public attention, sparked important conversations, and inspired so many Canadians to take interest and action.

While there is still work ahead, the response to this campaign has demonstrated the strength of a community united around a simple belief: that access to books, knowledge, and professional library services should remain an integral part of Canada's correctional system.

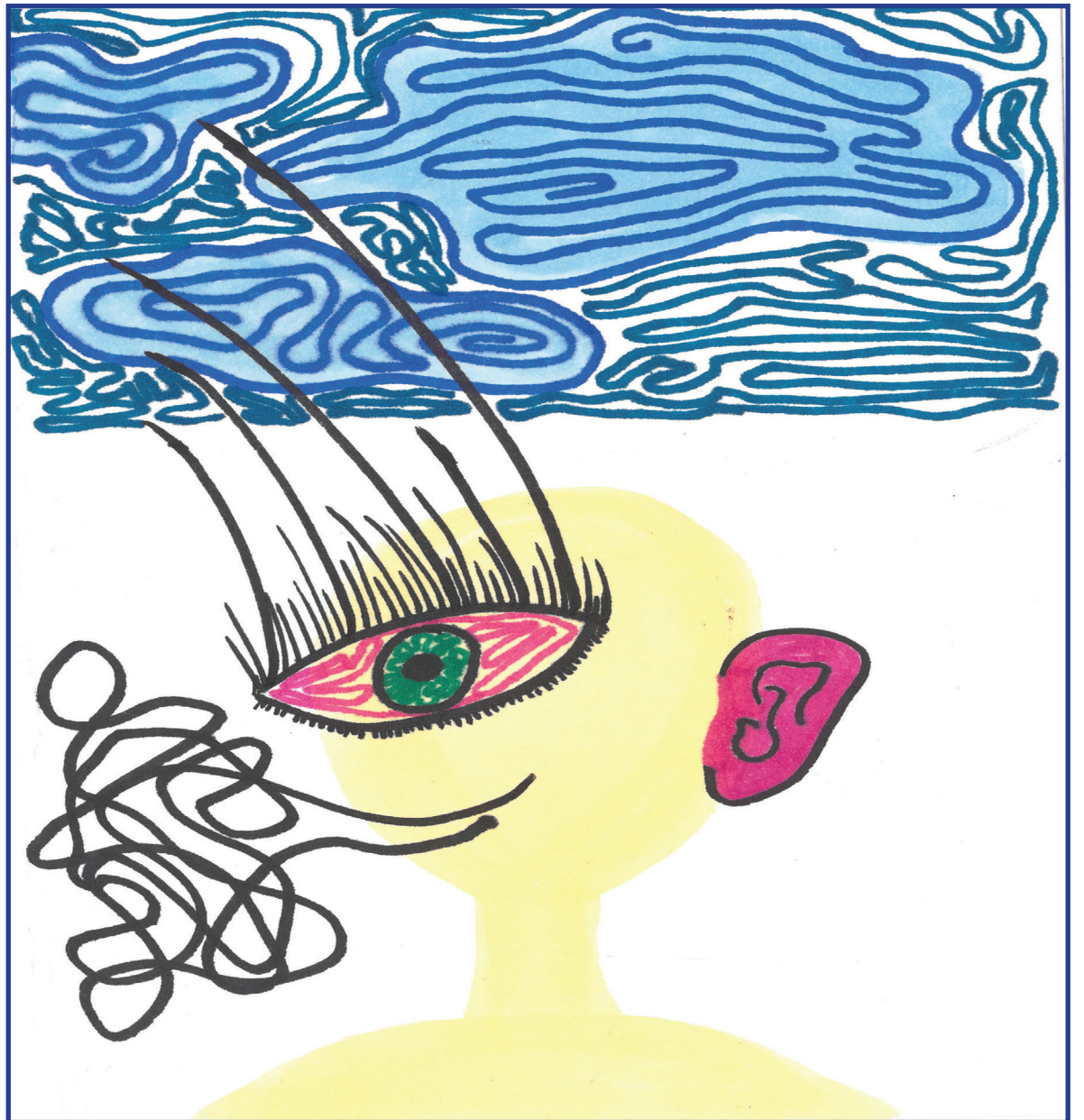
Thank you for your friendship, your advocacy, and your commitment to this important cause. We are profoundly grateful for your support and we look forward to keeping this momentum up as we continue working to improve prison libraries, ensuring every incarcerated individual has access to the literature they need to imagine a different future. Let's not stop here. Let's build for a better future.

With sincere appreciation,

Tom Best

Executive Director

Book Clubs for Inmates



INNOVATORS INSIDE = ENTREPRENEUR OUTSIDE

We talk to so many of you on the inside who have amazing ideas for different businesses, non-profit and charitable initiatives, and more. *Comeback Catalyst* is a free 6-week entrepreneurial program for anyone who has been incarcerated and has a business idea they are passionate about pursuing. Co-founders and Cell Count supporters *Emily O'Brien* (ex-prisoner) and *Lucy Cullen* have connected us to some of the program's graduates for this new series, where they'll share their experiences with the program, starting their business on the outside, and pass on any advice for future Comeback Catalysts and (ex-)prisoner entrepreneurs.

What's your name? Jessica Compton

How long have you been out for? 30 years

What is your business? Author & Speaker

Did you come up with your business idea while you were in prison or after?

After, yet I have always been a writer that dreams, with a journal and pen in hand. Journaling was my main focus, sometimes poetry appeared but it was more of an attempt. On the outside, my therapist was an encouragement and overall it just felt good to get out my feelings and thoughts.

What inspired it?

Everywhere I went people were always asking, "*are you ever going to write a book?*", and I kept saying *one day*. The book was inspired when my mom passed, I had some time off work and had some time to myself, and in the flow of life I saw a post from Comeback Catalyst to learn more about starting your own business. I filled out the application. It was the best accountability, education and encouragement I had in a long time especially while grieving.

My book is a photography memoir that shares my childhood trauma with being abducted, abandonment, abuse, addictions, grief & loss, suicide ideation, homelessness, incarceration on many occasions, and then moving the book into a light of success – my career as a Child and Youth Worker, Educational Assistant, and Supervisor at the After Care.

What has felt the most challenging for you?

I have a learning disability, and with having the diagnosis of ADHD, for me distraction and technology has always been a fear, and the biggest thing is *am I going to comprehend things right away?* And if I don't, I have to read things over and over until the light in my brain goes on.

What has felt the most rewarding for you, what do you love about it the most?

Most rewarding is that I pushed through most of my fears which I listed in the above, and that as a self publisher, I have sold almost 150 books in less than 5 months. On the flip side, my launch was a huge hit of community coming together with music, speakers, door prizes, and the success even prior to the launch was my pre orders to cover the cost of my printing. I'm not the greatest at math, but when you have an idea you have to learn all the ins and outs of everything.

If you had to start over again, is there anything you would maybe do differently?

Probably hire an editor. My book had 6 simple mistakes, and now that I'm about jump into my second round of bulk printing, the mistakes are fixed, but for me I was super frustrated because I read it 20 times. Like I say, one day at a time.

Knowing what things look like inside, do you have any advice for people who are dreaming about their future on the outside?

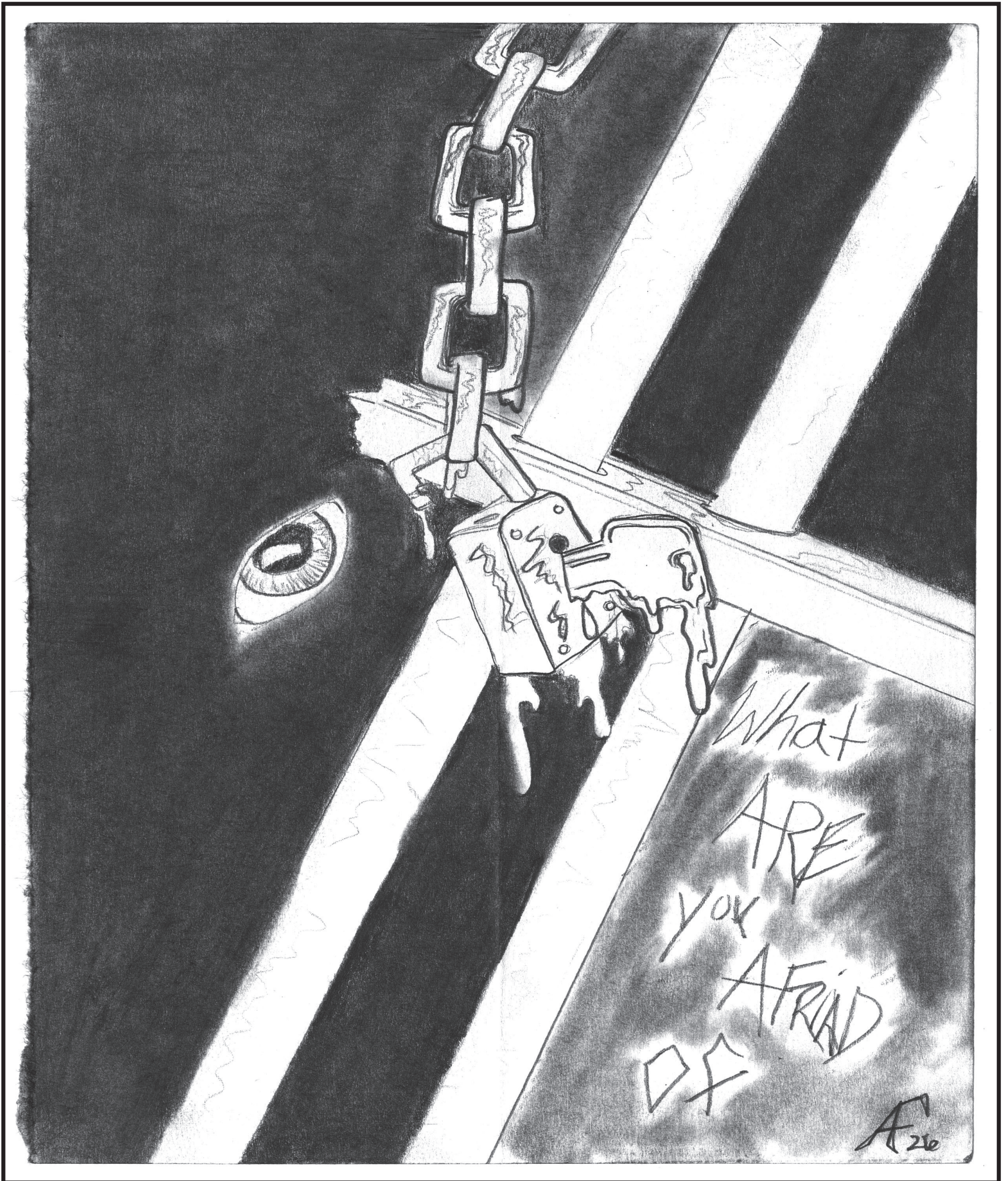
As a person with a list of lived experiences such as childhood trauma, addiction, homelessness, incarceration, suicide ideation, mental illness such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD, I always like to say - if I can do it, anyone can do it. Just remember to take one day at a time.

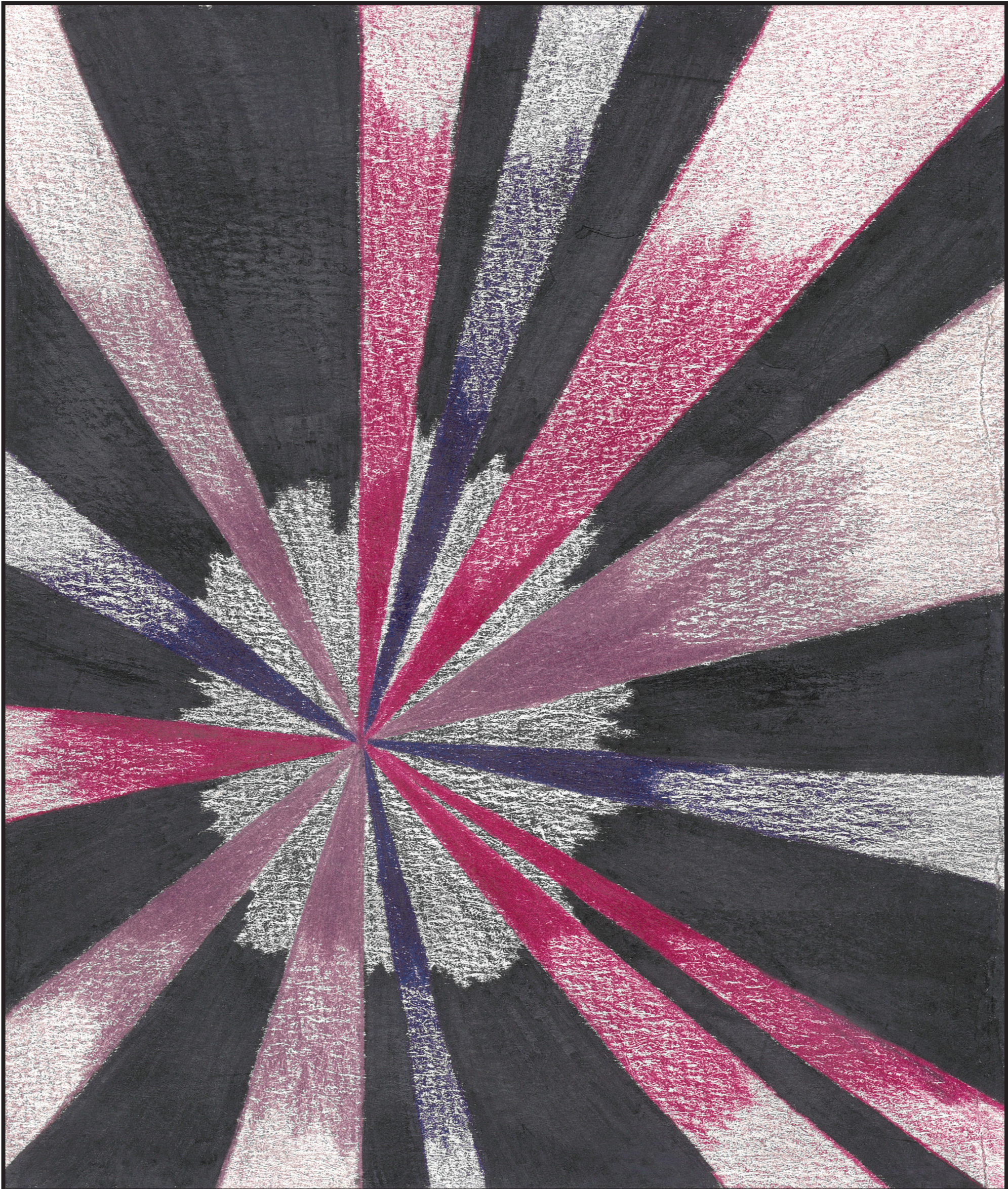
What did taking one day at a time look like for you?

Waking up in the morning and counting my blessings, waking up with deep breathes, waking up knowing my resources if need be, and waking up with selfcare remedies - which includes brushing teeth, shower and enter out into the world with protecting my peace, setting boundaries and doing what's best for you, and trying to stay in the moment. Trying to be nice to others that might not be doing so well, and making sure that we take time to comprehend our day, be around positive influences, having a decent meal to the best of our abilities, and taking walks to clear the mind, close up the days with meditation and some journal entry even if it's for 5 min.

Is there anything else you want to share or want people to know?

Create a list of resources and supports. Put those contacts on your phone list and in your phone once you're out, stay connected with community. Lastly ... protect your peace.





10 WRITINGS ON THE WALL

ISSUE #112: VOICE & VISIBILITY



[con't from cover page] only a sprinkle of queers. These days, it has done a complete flip! With more queer people here in my prison with me than I had experienced before. I have come to see and hear more of what others similar to me have had to go through during their time and continue to appreciate my own journey while doing my best to uplift and support others.

I must apologize, as I believe everything I just wrote was only the preamble to what I actually wanted to discuss in the space that I am hopefully provided in this newsletter, which is identity. In prison, on most days I have felt that I am only one thing and nothing more. No interests, no goals, no hobbies, and no traits other than being gay. I have for almost my entire time here been referred to as "Gay Cody", be that in part because when I first got here there were about 10 other Codys and that was my best identifier. It was still frustrating for me to accept, as nobody in the real world would ever refer to as such – at least not to my face, I know I have had gal pals talk about me to their partners and call me their "gay friend Cody", but only to put their partners out of a threatened state about another man – and I would likely react a bit poorly while I educated others about my frustration. As I am absolutely sure, every single openly queer person in jail experiences the same boring jokes every single day, said from one of the many uninformed, misinformed, and uneducated persons in relation to our sexualities or sexual preferences, to anyone bending over in our vicinities, to any food or object vaguely penile in shape, and I suppose in women's prisons ... jokes about vaginas? Forgive me again, as I do not actually know if that last one is true. I have almost never found any of them funny, especially ones about butts as I have been pretty obvious, not just in general but also every time a joke like this is made, that I AM the butt and that all butts around me are safe from my gayness. Naturally, people rarely learn and will always continue to make the jokes. I would like to think that there are many other interesting things about me to poke fun at or comment on, but as I believe many a queer knows, a vast majority of what we hear out of the mouths of our prison peers only refers to something about our queerness. This can

be quite suffocating for some and very damaging to their sense of self, especially if you are trans or are a younger person who is still learning and discovering who they are. I am not sure when it happened, and I will say that this is not always the case, but I have essentially gotten to a point where I do not really let these comments and jokes affect me anymore. I say this because there are people who live alongside me now who have not yet acquired the skill and I am doing my best to try and guide them through these situations. Really, you have about 3 options: react poorly and feed into it (worst option), ignore them (average option), lean in so far that it is ridiculous (the most fun option – but it has varying results that could be risky if you do not understand your audience before doing). Maybe I am just much more confident than I believe myself to be, but I tend to go with the latter option 9 times out of 10 and it seems to work well for me. Honestly though, all 3 options have their practical applications and you may just have to experiment and be ready to pivot between them in order to come through unscathed. One element I did not consider until this very moment was that having a queer group in my institution might be what has allowed me to overcome much of the negativity associated with being queer in this environment and helped me to remind myself of my identity outside of my queerness.

Though we are a group of many, from nearly unlimited walks of life and experiences, here within these fences we are a kind of family. We love, fight, joke, tease, support, stress out, read, and shade the hell out of each other, but even in the moments of negativity, there is a bond we have that is special and unique that cannot be understood in the same way by our hetero and cis counterparts [editor note: hetero = straight and cis = not two-spirited, trans, or non-binary]. If you are struggling where you are, consider the potential of transferring to an institution with a queer support group like ours, if that is within reason for you or maybe you could be that first driving force to create a queer support group where you are! Personally, I am likely looking at being here until my statutory release which is some time in 2030, so if you are in need of support and have nowhere else to

look for it, feel free to write Bowden Institution's LGBTQ Group and I will do my best to make sure you are connected with someone who understand you, even just a little. Regardless, remember that you are more than your queerness and that the people who you choose to have in your life value you for who YOU are, and that includes every part of you and is not due to a singular facet of your existence.

Thanks for putting up with my grab bag of ramblings and making it this far. - Cody Herrell

Bowden Institution's mailing address is: HWY #2 - P.O. BOX #6000, Innisfail, Alberta, T4G 1V1

[Editor's Note: Cody shared that he'd also really love to connect with and trade resources with other 2SLGBTQ+ groups at other institutions across Canada. Get in touch with him using the address above.]

BUDGET CUTS TO EDUCATION ARE ALARMING

By Adrian Campbell

I have recently heard that CSC is cutting funding in many different areas and one of them is a huge slash to the education budget. This is incredibly alarming behaviour from CSC. How do they expect an inmate to learn to do better and make a positive change in their lives if they remove the abilities for them to do this.

Desired 2 Learn (D2L) is a great way for inmates to use their time during their incarceration. It teaches them, on computers, different lessons that they can choose from in learning new skills. This is something that inmates are voluntarily doing to improve themselves. By taking this away from them, CSC is essentially saying we do not care if you want to improve yourself; we would rather put more money into building more prisons so we can punish you instead.

CSC moved away from the punishment model of incarceration decades ago in favour of rehabilitation. Why then are they seemingly making changes now to move back to the punishment of prisoners?

CSC is also looking to cut funding for CORCAN welding apprenticeships that help inmates gain skills they can use upon their release, which would allow them to financially look after

themselves and give them positive goals to work towards. It has been proven that an offender is less likely to reoffend if they have educational upgrades and stable employment. Why then is CSC so ambitious to save money by cutting funding for this?

In the long run, these cuts will cost CSC more money, not less. If people are more likely to reoffend as a result of the lack of rehabilitative opportunities given to them, then CSC will have to build more prisons, hire more correctional officers, and pay more to feed and warehouse an increased amount of inmates. Where is the common sense in that kind of budget planning? I'm at a loss of words to understand the logic involved with these decisions.

BEING A TRANS WOMAN IN A MALE PRISON PART ONE: DATING INSIDE

By Stephanie Cannon

It is hard enough being a transgender woman inside a male institution, but it is even harder to be in a relationship as a transgender woman inside. Trans female inmates get into relationships with cis male inmates for a variety of reasons. Some get into them so that they feel safe and secure from violence from other inmates. Some get into relationships due to loneliness and want to be with someone who they have some commonality with.

There are those too, who like me, were completely caught off guard and just were in the right place in the right time. Lastly, some get into relationships for a sexual purpose. Regardless of the reason, it happens. Relationships inside happen and most inmates will not be forthcoming about it. This is not so much about dishonesty, but protecting themselves and their relationship from unwarranted harassment and discrimination, while also protecting the sacredness of their relationship while inside. Often both people in the relationship come under intense scrutiny from their parole officers, COs, and institutional management.

Jealousy plays a big role too. "If he can live his girlfriend, then why can't I have my girlfriend live with me?" is a line we hear a lot from other inmates when couples inside ask to live together. Hey! I get it. Seeing

couples connecting, being happy, and in love, inherently you want the same thing. "Sorry, we do not condone relationships." Is another thing I have heard when asking management or correctional managers to cell with our partners, often we are given this sentence with no explanation other than just a flat no.

"We don't condone relationships" is what a parent says when they don't want their child to do something. If you have kids, you know that that doesn't work. Just because they don't "condone" relationships inside, it does not mean that it doesn't happen. The idea that being in a relationship is a negative and should be punished, if we are honest, is something that perpetuates this unhealthy idea of what trans people and more specifically what trans women deserve. This can create an internal narrative that trans women historically are not deserving of love, affection, and connection.

We are human beings – regardless if we're trans or not, regardless if we're in prison or not – with emotions and histories. And all humans seek connection. Corrections, or those working in institutions, often forget the human side of those who are incarcerated, and by extension the community. At the end of the day, regardless of why we are here or how long we have to serve, we are humans, no ifs, ands or buts.

CSC should create more opportunities for human interaction which leads to more success for rehabilitation and community integration. While being less focused on vilification of relationships and those in them. They should create an environment that is built on being supportive of rehabilitation, meaning relationships too, as long as they are healthy and do not harm anyone. After all, one of the pillars to rehabilitation and success in the community is feeling like we have a connection to people and community.

Relationships don't just happen with trans women and cis male inmates. They happen for men who identify as gay, and cis women who identify as gay, and those who identify as trans men and cis women. It is very common that relationships happen in all institutions across Canada. This is not something new. Hormones flare and we all have needs, whether it is romantically or sexually.

Institutions that have support for LGBTQ+ inmates are often the ones the most against relationships from happening. And will do everything in their power to target, create drama, and use falsified information to separate the couple. Rather than creating drama, CSC should be focused on creating education, supports, and safe spaces that would help them succeed. As the outside community has seen, the gay rights movement, when the LGBTQ+ community were vilified by government and people in authority, it created hatred towards us and caused the community to fight back. This happens in institutions as well. Fortunately, the resilience that gay and trans people have create an uneasy way to erase us from existence. **[con't on pg.11]**

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[con't from pg.10] We are strong, resilient people who have been known to fight and stand up until we have created safe spaces and acceptance that we deserve. This era-sure leads to othering us or certain groups within the community and creates environments where we use unsafe sexual practices.

When inmates who are cis male date transgender women they are called names, made fun of, or are victims of derogatory comments. This does not create spaces where they feel safe to be open in their relationship. People and other inmates often assume that if you date a trans woman that you are gay, that somehow your sexual orientation equals/ is the same as your gender identity. I have heard many times couples being asked, "So your boyfriend is gay, you know, because you used to be a guy?" It is a question that is asked constantly, and it gets annoying. Therefore, I usually respond with the same answer, "No. I identify as a woman and my boyfriend is straight. He does not date men, so therefore he is not gay." It is annoying that I have to continuously respond to that question when in reality it is none of their business.

Some people don't care about the opinions of other inmates, however, some do. This causes inmates to not want to be open, which creates further problems within themselves, as well as when it comes to their case management team (CMT). If their CMT finds out that they were not honest about their relationship, it's used against them in many ways and can affect their cascading to a lower security, or their ability to get parole or special releases.

Historically trans women are told we are not enough. Not woman enough, not attractive enough, not skinny enough, and that the only way for us to be loved, is under the cover of darkness and away from society. This idea is enforced even in prison by management not providing gender affirming services, opportunities, or access in ways that others who don't identify are able to have. An example of this is marriage. When you've been in a relationship for many years inside the most natural step to take is to propose and then get married. We are not afforded that same right. Inmates who don't identify as trans and who date people in the community are allowed to marry, but we are not, as I've just said. There are those couples who don't have any connection to loved ones or family in the community and their partner is all they have. To say that you can't get married and to be able to experience life milestones is denying basic rights and freedoms that we all should have and deserve.

If I did not say it already, I will say it now. Relationships in prison are hard. There is no right way to date while inside. Normal things that happen in the community, when they happen inside are seen as negative and are used against you or your partner to, again, try to separate you or to the most extreme, to ship you out of the institution. Which creates it's own issues within yourself and your partner.

It was very early on in my relationship where I realized that CSC did not see my relationship as valid. It is hurtful and saddening. I, like every trans person, want the same

connection and feeling of love and acceptance as anyone else. I want to reach the same milestones as any other cis-hetero relationships: to be engaged, to get married, and live the rest of my life with my husband. Thus, when I realized it was going to be an uphill battle to ensure I had the same rights as others, I was discouraged. Then after years of being in, I realized that they want to dehumanize you and that comes through in the lack of validity of myself and of my relationship. They want you to conform. Naturally, I fight against the forced need to conform to where society is, I have always been one to carve my own way, do my own thing and fight for my rights to be respected, and I expect nothing less of myself. This is what has caused me to channel my elders and do as they did, stand up and fight for what's right, in the hopes that if even one person reads this, they can relate to or even know where I'm coming from.

As couples inside, all we want to be is left alone, to be with our partner and live simple lives until we are finished our sentences. We want to be out of sight and out of mind. Which is something you would think CSC would want too.

Additionally, these issues that we face in prison are happening more often as the years go by. CSC is completely separating (meaning transferring) couples, when we are fighting for our basic rights to be respected. We are told to follow protocols when we have issues instead of resorting to violence and aggression. In prison, that's the famous institutional grievance system, a system that is without judgement and completely works in our favour. I'm kidding. It definitely does not work in our favour and more often it works against us. It is a system that isn't supposed to be biased or favour one side or the other when it comes to complaints of discrimination. Unfortunately it is. If you file a discrimination against staff and it's denied, you end up being the victim of targeting from staff members. In the rare chance your grievance is upheld, you're given words that mean nothing. They can't tell you the punishment that staff is going to receive, only that they don't tolerate that behaviour and that they strive to create inclusive environments. When in reality, those are just words and the environment of equality, inclusion and is free of discrimination is just a pipe dream.

When CSC feels that they will lose on a higher level grievances, such as those to do with cell accommodation, they will often resort to transferring the person to another institution. When they do your partner will not be allowed to know where you went, what institution you're at, or why you went, often citing "confidentially." Again, this can create mental health issues, having to wait days and even months to get a letter from your partner telling you where they are.

If you are open about your relationship, be prepared that CSC will deny cell accommodation. This happens for a variety of reasons, but can often be worked around if you don't open up about your relationship.

They will use the fact that inmates gets jealous, drama that being in a relationship can cause, completely that CSC created, or the fact that other inmates don't want to have to

deal with it. This could all be solved with having a dedicated range, house, or unit to LGBTQ inmates, where you could put couples and others who identify LGBT on the same range which would create safer spaces for everyone, in a space they can feel accepted for who they are. Historically, prison is not an accepting place, so having something like this would help tremendously to ease the stress that we face. Moreover, it would take the unnecessary stress off CSC's back, where they are often scrounging about where to house transgendered and other gender diverse people. Those who are in relationships then have a spot where they can be, if not in the same cell, on the same range. Problem solved.

CSC can do things to help transgender inmates in relationships feel human and to have our relationships validated. Things like being able to marry, with or without honeymoon PFVs, is something that they can start with. Next, they can work on policy that would create CSC to be a more inclusive space for relationships and for all 2SLGBTQ+. They can create programs within the institution that are focused on creating healthy relationships, that focus on communication, boundaries. And they can create environments that allow inmates to safely open up about their relationship to their CMT without worrying about being targeted, vilified, or potentially shipped.

All it takes is for us to work together, with those of us who have lived experiences to help make CSC a more welcoming and inclusive place, and that actually sends people into the community rehabilitated and sets them up for success. It is time to move corrections Canada forward in time, from the 60s into the 21st century. This would be the first step in doing that.

All those who are in relationships want, to know that they matter to someone and that they are loved. They are looking to have someone care for them and not judge them for who they are, how they were born, what brought them to prison, or who they date. At the end of the day, we're looking for the same thing, connection and to be loved. The end.

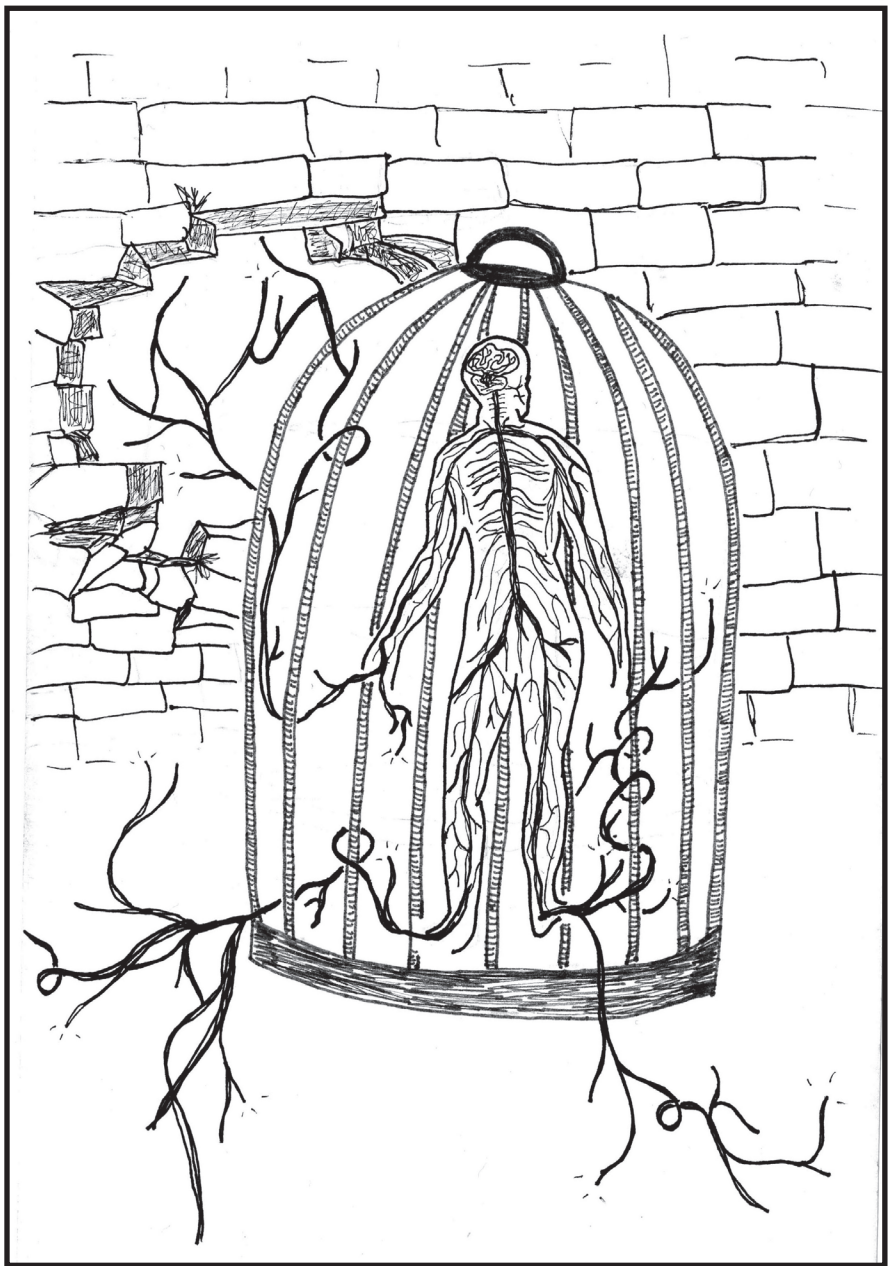
[Watch for Part Two: A Day in the Life]

BI BI JAILBIRDIE

By J.

I am a bisexual male, middle aged, who finds himself able to have intellectual, emotional, and physical relationships with people of male and female gender identity.

I was not the "stereotypical" or "confused" youth. I realized early on that I was attracted to boys and girls both and embraced that as who I am, at a time (mid 1980s) when it was neither popular nor acceptable to be with a same gender partner. As such, I never truly fit anywhere. Until



LEARNING THAT PEOPLE ARE LISTENING

By Bransyn Lyon

This is my first time in the federal system and I think as a 22 year old that there is much I can learn from others who are in prison alongside me. However, I feel my experience in prison and as part of the LGBTQ community has been quite difficult. I have always known that I "swung" both ways, but it was not until most recently that I was comfortable coming out to my family, specifically to my mom. It was not until I became the co-chairman of the LGBTQ Group at my institution and my mom asked me "are you part of the allies ... or are you ...?" and I know what she was asking. For some reason I dreaded this question for so long, but I knew at some point it was going to come up, and I honestly could not have thought of a better time to talk about it. I told her I was bisexual and that I have known for many years ... so did she. She explained to me that her and stepdad have had many conversations about the topic of my sexuality, however they never had confirmation from me. My mom and stepdad want to provide me with the best support possible while in custody and when I am released, and knowing who I am will allow them to help me be part of communities (LGBTQ) I may not have felt comfortable being a part of before. I think this was a huge milestone and I know I can be myself and not feel like I am hiding **[con't on pg.12]**



MONOLOGUE WITH MOKA: FROM THE INSIDE OUT

To my sisters, my fellow femmes, and my siblings still navigating the walls—I see you.

I know the weight of the air in there. I know what it feels like to have your identity treated like a debate and your health treated like an inconvenience. When I was where you are, I was fighting a war on two fronts: one against a system built on colonial narratives that tried to tell me who I was, and one for the basic right to exist as my authentic self.

The Fight for the Self

Being trans inside means you are often your own doctor, your own lawyer, and your own advocate. I remember the exhaustion of having to build connections with officers and program workers just to get resources. I had to educate the healthcare system on Hormone Health—teaching them how to monitor my blood work and understand my treatment.

It is a heavy burden to be the educator when you are the one in need of care. But that fight was where I reclaimed my power. I refused to let systemic refusal or negativity define my worth.

Finding the Ground Beneath Your Feet

People often ask how I kept my mind right. For me, grounding was a mix of the old and the new. I grew up in the Christian faith, and I returned to the Bible as my anchor. In those moments of deepest refusal, prayer was the tool that kept me strong.

I also had to get honest with myself. I looked around at the stories of the people I was with, and I realized how much we lose when we stop listening to those who love us. I thought about my parents and the education they had pushed for—an education I had walked away from. I realized that while the system was holding me, I was the only one who could hold my future.

The Ascent: Education as Liberation

I decided then that I wanted a different life. I started with my GED through Amadeusz. That was the spark. Once I was released, I worked, I stayed focused, and I went back to school. I graduated in 2023 with a Community and Justice Services diploma.

But I didn't stop there. Today, I am at the University of Toronto, fast-tracking a double major in African Studies and Equity & Solidarity, with a minor in Caribbean Studies. What was supposed to take four years, I am finishing in three. I am currently applying for my Master's degree.

From the Streets to the Stars

Before this journey, I was uneducated. I was a sex worker. I was living on the streets and navigating homelessness. I know the feeling of having nothing but your own will. Now, I have my own apartment, my own peace, and a future I built with my own hands.

Here is the truth: No matter what life throws at you, and no matter how many barriers the system puts in your way, it is up to you to make the change. You have to be the one to bring that betterment to your life, because no one else is going to do it for you. You are the architect of your own freedom.

A Note to the "Allies"

To the community and the allies reading this: we need more than your "support." We need you to accept the specific vulnerabilities trans people face in our livelihoods. We need you to dismantle the transphobia that creates these barriers in the first place. Don't just watch us survive—help clear the path so we can thrive. Keep an eye out for my upcoming book, where I dive deeper into this journey of reclamation and resilience.

To my sisters inside: stay fierce, stay grounded, and never stop fighting for the version of yourself you haven't met yet.

Sincerely,
Moka Dawkins



[con't from pg.11] who I am.

When I was first arrested and placed in the remand, eventually people began to assume and it became pretty clear that I was bisexual. However, I began to be treated differently. I was consistently harassed by inmates and guards, being called a fag and other derogatory terms that just broke me. Many inmates felt the need to touch me inappropriately, slapping my butt and other areas, or grabbing me and sexualizing everything I said or did. The excuse of "because you're gay it's okay" became the norm, and unfortunately no matter what I said, they did not care. I struggled throughout my time in remand, and I began to regret telling people and being who I am; I could not be me. I found it easier to pretend I was straight than being myself and bisexual. However, I did meet one of my best friends, who I call my Jail Dad. He was my biggest support, and to this day still is. I do not believe I would have survived remand without him. He took care of me as if I was his own biological son. To this day, I believe he was a blessing in disguise to me and my family, and I could not have asked for someone better to be part of my life and help me through this time. It was because of him I survived remand, literally and metaphorically. I have so much appreciation for him and through all the terrible times, I knew I could count on him for a laugh or a smile. If he is reading this, I hope he realizes it and knows how much

he means to me. He is an amazing friend and I hope one day we will be able to have a laugh or two outside of these walls.

It was not until I came to penitentiary where I was introduced to the queer community and Bowden's LGBTQ Group where I met the chairman who is now one of my closest and best friends. Our group chair is someone I can always rely on and can always go to when I need a laugh, advice, or just to cry. I think since I have been here, he has seen me cry and breakdown more than anyone else. He is someone I look up to so much. His confidence and love for others reminds me of who I am; I know I can be myself and not afraid of who I am. Being part of the LGBTQ community at Bowden has down me that there are many people out there who care. I feel like I matter, it has given me a purpose. This group that I now co-chair is not only for LGBTQ, but allies as well. I have had the pleasure to talk with so many inmates who just need someone to talk to and not feel judged, and I feel that is so important, especially while incarcerated. It is hard to be able to talk to people in prisons as you worry about people judging you or if they are going to spread what you say, or if it is a staff – if they are going to note or report it. I am so happy to have so many people who feel like they can talk to me and know that there is someone who is there to listen.

To those who are or might be

struggling with anything, know that it will be okay. There are people who care and who are willing to listen. You might have to reach out, but they are there. It is easier said than done, trust me I know, but once you take that first step you will find so many people who will be there for you. Also, there will always be people who judge and say bad things about you but know it doesn't matter. Their opinions are just another opinion. Do not let it control you. Do not let it affect who you are. Do not let crappy people change you! Know that you are amazing!

A TRANS WOMAN'S EXISTENCE IN CSC

By A.

Ah, to be a trans woman forced to live in a men's institution in the middle of Alberta, such a traumatic tale I don't know where to begin.

You can call me A. This is my miserable experience as a 25-year-old, pre-op trans woman in CSC custody. Almost a year ago I was sentenced for my crimes, and to say this has been the hardest year of my life is an understatement.

I've lived my life as a woman for 6 years, been on hormone therapy for 5 and a half. I'm lucky and grateful in my transition to have achieved more feminization than I ever imagined. I live day to day with passing privilege. I very much enjoy not having to worry about people realizing, outing me as a trans woman and the prejudice and violence that can

come with that. This is something incredibly hard for me in a men's institution. Due to my pre-op status, I was not allowed to try and go to a women's institution. My correctional team refused to make the effort, as I know some pre-op women have the opportunity, and I was not awarded that privilege. To me it is so dehumanizing, no woman should have their womanhood defined by what's between their legs. It's pure transphobia to treat pre-op trans women this way, especially for someone like myself who will never get bottom surgery. I love who I am. For policy to decide that I'm not woman enough is blatant discrimination at its finest. I no longer have that safety net I had in the community, where my passing privilege lets me live an easy life amongst cis women and trans women alike. In here everyone knows I'm trans and it's hard feeling so isolated. There are a couple other trans women in my institution, I struggle to relate to them in any way due to them being two to three times my age and never having lived in the community as women. I try my best to connect with them, but our trans experiences are so different it's hard to feel like I'm not alone most days.

When I first arrived here, I was not ready and was scared what this experience would be for me. Within the first day I had half the institution trying to get close to me for the wrong reasons, and the other half constantly harassing me. I'm a very flirty and social person, which turned out to be at my detriment, as it seemed everyone either wanted to be with me or to hurt me whether it was physically or emotionally. I navigated my first month as best as I could; so many inmates were trying to manipulate me, so I kept pushing all the creeps away, isolating myself.

I was grateful to find out our institution has a LGBTQ+ group and started to attend, which made things a little easier because I had a queer outlet. I still struggled in the group due to being the only trans woman that attended at the start. I finally understood what some trans people by "not fitting in with the LGBTQ+ community." Something I never really experienced in my hometown, as most of my friends are trans or non-binary. Still, with all of this, I am so happy to meet the people I have and to have a support network in this group. We meet twice a week, one of our sessions is dedicated to sharing our experiences and struggles that we've had between sessions. The group has been so receptive and caring towards the struggles and trauma I've experienced here. Even if they don't truly understand my experience, they try to. And that makes me happier.

During my time in custody, I deal with harassment every day from the inmate population, as well as staff. Constant jokes are made about my breasts, my body, my clothes, my make-up. It's a never-ending cycle, but I don't let it stop me from being myself and expressing myself in a way to combat my gender dysphoria. I will not ever let the inmates or staff change who I am! Even though it makes my time harder. As institutional policies are so many years behind in relation to transgender or non-binary individuals in custody, I feel it is my obligation to try and

advocate to create change for better treatment for my people.

I've suffered through three sexual assaults and three physical assaults in my year in custody so far. CSC has done nothing but victim blame me for how I dress, act, and stand up for myself. I'm constantly being told by staff and my correctional management team that I'm "enabling people's crime process" due to my actions or appearance. I have been absolutely clear with staff that I have abstained from sexual intimacy with the inmate population, yet I'm constantly treated as if I'm the problem even though I'm consistently victimized by the current system in CSC. These are only a fraction of my struggles as a trans woman in CSC custody.

I hope my strength through all this trauma can be an inspiration to others in my position. To my sisters struggling as I am, remember not to lose hope. Things will get better for us the more we stand up and stay true to ourselves. Through perseverance, we will one day be safer in this system and have the opportunity to be placed in female institutions without surgeries being required. There will always be prejudice and hateful people, but together we can grow stronger and show the system we are not going anywhere!

Trans Lives Matter! You are not alone lovelies!

TWO EARS, ONE MOUTH

By Bobby

"I have twice as many ears as I have mouths. Thus, I shall listen at least twice as much as I speak."

- David Suzuki

I was fortunate enough to hear Mr. Suzuki deliver this quote in person. The context of the delivery was him emphasizing that he deserves less than half of the credit for the advocacy work that he does, as he wouldn't have known which direction to even consider – from one day to the next – without gathering information from those whose lives and surrounding environments he wanted to improve.

This could not be more relevant to being an ally to the 2SLGBTQ+ community. And although I believe I kept this mind on the outside, I've had to realize it all over again on the inside.

My life comprised some unique challenges while I lived on the outside, but on the inside they have been amplified and magnified. Then I began attending the institution's 2SLGBTQ+ group, and I've realized two things. The first is that their challenges have been magnified and multiplied on the inside much more than mine. The second is that the more I've learned about their challenges, the more I've realized how little I've known all along.

Therefore, I've made the decision to listen and learn much, much more than I would ever even consider speaking, and I'm very grateful for how much I've learned. And although there are people in this group who continue to interject and talk over one another, I learn from them as well. Sometimes I learn from what they say as they interrupt, sometimes I realize that their heart is in the right place, and sometimes I learn from the sadness and

[con't on pg.13]



[con’t from pg.12] frustration being plainly displayed on the face of the person being interrupted.

I strive to do better – and to enhance – my approach to being an ally, as time and experiences pass. But for now, here is the principle I work to embrace: any time I am listening to a member of this community, I’m listening to someone who has mileage as a victim in pain. Perhaps they’re working towards healing, however being listened to is more helpful and therapeutic than me jumping in and accosting them with my irresistibly brilliant and insightful idea. Or perhaps they would indeed like my input, but not until they’ve reached a point in expressing themselves, which then invites that input. And as a bonus, the longer I spend listening before speaking, the better my input may end up being.

Regardless, my advice to anyone who has been given an opportunity to listen, is to view it as a gift. It is an instance of someone opening their heart and bestowing their sacred trust upon you. Treat the opportunity with as much reverence as you are able.

[Editor’s Response: *I had to look up the definition of the word reverence for myself, so for anyone else like me – reverence means “a deep feeling of profound respect, admiration, and awe.” I also want to thank Bobby for contributing this article as an ally and for sharing how you approach your allyship. It’s very similar, if not entirely the same, as how prisoner allyship is approached by many of us on the outside. We can never truly understand the experiences inside prison walls if we haven’t lived it ourselves. And also, we recognize that likely most, if not all, of what we’ve been taught to know or believe about prisoners and prisons is really just not true at all. So as allies, we listen. And we try to learn more. Really, that’s a big part of what Cell Count is too – listening, learning, trusting, and sharing. Bobby shared, “the longer I spend listening before speaking, the better my input may end up being.” The big dawgs/systems are doing too good a job of distracting us from really listening to one another, they’re happy to have us pointing fingers at each*

other for reasons we don’t even always understand. Imagine if we listened to others with as much trust and reverence as we would like to be listened to with? Inside, outside, and across the walls. What could we learn? How much better could our input be? And what can we do with that input?]

PRISON PARTNERS

By Philly Eh!

The struggle is real when you’re trying to maintain a partnership in Federal prison. Most pens are single-celled, as was my experience (I’ve been to a few max’s and only one med). In max-security, it’s more difficult to sneak into another’s cell, as the guards are more alert.

In Provincial jail it’s much easier to start and maintain a partnership, as you can have a cellmate. You still need to practice discretion as to when the guards are doing their checks.

Relationships in a correctional centre are very difficult to maintain, regardless. One is faced with ever changing circumstances. Such as: one partner moving unit ranges, transferring institutions, going to the SIU, etc.

However, going without a partner for some is easier than the daily struggle to maintain such relationships. What are porn magazines for, anyhow? Yeah, it’s so not the same, but at least the porn won’t break your heart, move away from you, or have to sneak into your house for a quickie.

For myself, I’d rather take the time and risk it in order to have a mental, emotional, spiritual connection with someone. Obviously, the physical connection matters too, but now that I’m older and more mature, it’s not my main goal. You know?

UNTITLED

By Emilia

Hi, my name is Emilia (not my real name). I am a transwoman. I find it hard to be myself in jail. I feel I need to hide my gender. Only jail staff and about a handful of inmates know my true identity. I feel I can’t be myself here. I identify as a lesbian. I’ve only been attracted to 2 men in my lifetime and it wasn’t sexual but more romantically. Apart from that, all my attractions or crushes were all female. I also identify as gray-asexual, meaning my attraction is rarely sexual or only on certain conditions. I tend to fall in love romantically much faster and much more often than sexually. What is hard being transgender is that people think I must be attracted to men. I also hear inappropriate comments from ignorant men, especially in jail. No one chooses their gender or who they are at-

tracted to. No one should judge any one for being different or not being the norm. It shouldn’t matter who we are attracted to, as long as we don’t harm or abuse people. This is what an ex-girlfriend said to me years ago. Many of my crushes growing up and in my young adulthood were women older than me. In my early 20s I was in a relationship with a woman nearly twice my age.

Being queer, you are way more likely to be abused, bullied, or die by suicide. To cope, we often reply on addiction. We are often rejected by our family and friends. Some of us end up homeless, in jail, or dead. Growing up I knew I was different, but didn’t have any words to describe it. Transgenders were rarely talked about. The only way it was portrayed was through Drag Queens, and I knew that wasn’t me. For years I was in denial and bottled it up. I turned to addiction to cope and ended up in jail. In 2017 I came to terms with my identity. This is when it made sense. This is when I found out, you can be a transwoman and a lesbian at the same time. I am not on estrogen yet [editor note: estrogen is a feminizing hormone that we all have, but that women have much more of], because it feels like my body is already producing it. I know it doesn’t make any sense. I also feel there is a cycle to it. Sometimes during the month I feel a mega-boost of estrogen. On another month it is not so much. I know it doesn’t make any sense. The other reason I am not using estrogen yet is that I am hoping to have more children in the future. Actually, if it was possible, I wouldn’t mind getting pregnant myself and experiencing the miracle of life growing inside myself. Maybe one day transwomen will be able to, but probably not in my lifetime. What I am disappointed in is not everything is covered in Canada when it comes to transitioning. Some of it you have to pay out of your own pocket. I am still learning on what is covered and what isn’t. I want one day to be a writer. I hope one day, it will come true. I am right now trying to survive jail. I just want to do my time without being harassed by ignorant bullies. Because I am small, I am an easy target. I don’t need more anxiety, because transgender isn’t easy as it is. I am dedicating this letter to every transgender person and queer person who lost their lives either by suicide or murder over the years, and to those who are suffering, wherever you are.

LETTER TO DOUG FORD

By Unknown

Mr. Doug Ford,
Regarding your ideas for Ontario Place, Billy Bishop Airport, the 401 Tunnel, etc., how would anyone operate these places, or any other business of any kind, if there are no schools to teach them the basis of reading, writing, math, etc., or the more specific parts for more specific jobs? This is how important education is, and why all governments should invest more in education, even for immigrants.

Thank you for your time.

- A Federal Inmate

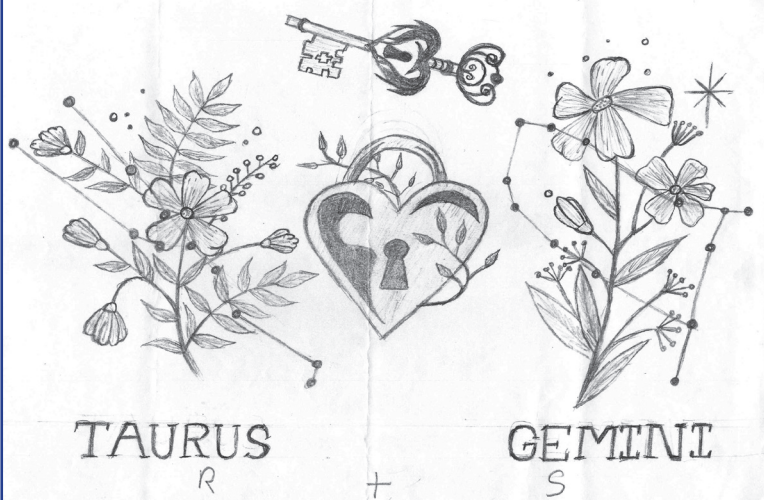
P.S. Immigrants add to Canada’s population, as well as help businesses run more efficiently.



DIVIDED BUT NOT DISSUADED

To start this off, some of you may know me and may have read part of what happened to me at OCDC in Cell Count issue #108. The point of this article is to tell everyone how me and my partner won against OCDC and the ministry by forcing them to follow their own policy. We get to be together in a relationship, where OCDC tried to stop us from being together, they wouldn’t even let us see each other. OCDC said it’s against protocol, but I didn’t back down. I had gone through page after page, called a number of legal services over it, worked day and night, didn’t sleep, was on a hunger strike and cell strike (refusing to come out of my cell at all). I did this because I saw how OCDC was wrong. Ministry policy says we can be in a relationship, just nothing sexual. I pointed this out, plus a number of other things from the Charter, and was able to find out that my partner and I can be cellmates, because both of us are covered by Bill C-16 and equality rights, on top of a number of others. But no surprise that OCDC is fighting us on this too. I’m not going to go into the full legal issues on this. OCDC wants to fight us on this because I’m a transwoman, born male becoming female; my partner is non-binary, born female and goes by none. They even went as far as transferring me to a different institution, after leaving me with a broken hand and broken ribs. I was transferred briefly to a women’s institution and then transferred again to a different institution and am being held on a men’s unit. My partner and I fight for each other, and they never stopped fighting on their side. I won’t say “she” or “her” for my partner because they don’t use those, they use “they” and “them”. I’m also not putting their name as that will be up to them on their part if they want to share. We are the first inmates to ever get to be in a relationship out in the open at OCDC, and most likely other jails too. A lot of staff say that what me and my partner have is true love. I do believe they’re right and so does my partner. OCDC pushes back, but we push back harder, and with the kind of person I am, I never back down. I have a reason to go to a new level of pushing back. When we are together, we are unstoppable. Love will always win in the end, we showed it can happen and we will be sure that it will happen again. I will not stop fighting to transfer out of the male unit and back to a women’s unit or institution. My partner and I will not stop fighting for each other. OCDC says all the time that I know ministry policy better than anyone. Which they’re right, I do. OCDC also says I always win. Which again, they’re right, I will. I will never fight unless I’m right and I make sure that I’m always right. I don’t know anything that my partner is going to say, I will find that out after both of us mail a copy of what we wrote to our lawyers for them to send to Cell Count.

- Raven Pandora-Phoenix



This won’t be long, words fail me a lot lately, so I hope you do read this in my eyes. To say it takes courage to be who you are doesn’t say all I would like it to. It doesn’t mention not only the fear, but the reason for that fear. A lot of people choose to hide from the world behind an acceptably sad mask, because they know if the mask comes off, that fight will be unforgiving in its will to crush ingenuity. So, saying it takes courage to be yourself isn’t all I want to be said. We have fought, my partner and I. We have fought through life. Some people are born to fight for better, but seldom is it for themselves that they fight. They fight their last day hoping to give something tomorrow. That’s why my partner and I fight. We fight for a tomorrow that doesn’t have the hatred. We fight for a tomorrow that leaves the pain in the past. It’s not a question of “if we don’t, then who will?” it’s “this is what we can do, so we will.” We’ve both been hurt because we couldn’t hide behind that mask like people wanted us to, so maybe if the pain in front of the mask was too much, we would hide behind it. But somehow, it doesn’t make us hide. We saw that others couldn’t hide behind the masks either, and seeing that there are other unmasked ones out there who are taking the pain, we chose to fight back, because tomorrow there will be more unmasked. My partner and I don’t fight for our tomorrows; we fight for theirs.

- S.

Canadian Inmates Cupid’s Corner



Looking for Love Beyond Bars?
Canadian Inmates Cupid’s Corner offers a safe and respectful way for incarcerated people in Canada to build genuine connections with those on the outside. We believe love, friendship, and hope can flourish—even across distance.

Want more info?

Canadian Inmates Cupid’s Corner
PO Box 21041
Chilliwack RPO Southgate
BC, V2P 8A9
E-mail: ttc.prison.wife@gmail.com

14 POETRY FROM INSIDE

ISSUE #112: VOICE & VISIBILITY



DRUG BALLAD

By José DeFrias

LUST AND VANITY

BOTH DISGUST

STOLEN TREASURES

BROKEN TRUST

TAKE A SMASH

I CALL THAT VAIN

TAKE A SMASH?

NOW THAT'S INSANE

GOT CAUGHT UP SMOKING DUST

GOT FUCKED UP, ATE SOME MUSH

HAVE A SEIZURE, BODY ERUPTS

OH MY GOD, WHAT THE FUCK!

DID SOME DOWN TO CALM ME DOWN

HIGH AS FUCK, ALL THROUGH THIS TOWN

GOT SOME PILLS, SMOKED SOME CRACK

MET THE CHICK, TOOK HER STASH

ENDED MY NIGHT BY THROWING UP

DIED THAT MORNING, GOT CAUGHT UP

BAD DREAM

By Kerry Russell

Lonely, cold, hard to breath.

I wake up in my cell, another bad dream.

Lying awake, alone with my thoughts.

Thinking, dwelling, on all that I've lost.

My freedom, my life, my daughter, my wife.

I could end all my pain with just one slice.

Should I? Would I? Could I? Please...

The answer is yes, I roll up my sleeve.

I take the razor, place it to my skin.

And say one last prayer before I begin.

Wet, warm, unsure, confused.

Oh my God, what did I do?

Everything's dark and fading away.

I don't want to go, please can I stay?

The answer is no, in bed dead I lay.

Lonely, cold, unable to breath.

Alone in my cell, it wasn't a dream.

CAPTURE

By Gordie Soyee Lemaigre

Four billion years after I'm dead, the sun will run out of fuel and blow up. In its wake it will leave a black hole, eventually the black hole will fade and die just like me. About 200 million years from now, Andromeda galaxy will merge with the Milkyway galaxy, and the newly formed galaxy will fade and die just like me.

It's been a great life I live so far, I got my education in the correction; although I live my life like I had everything sorted out, but I didn't. I played by my own rules, like I'm in the middle of the ocean flying back in an empty tank to a burning carrier. He still wouldn't pull a play on me.

I'm sitting in an isolation, nothing grows in here, only my loneliness.

I love to be where endless garden grows and where the green grass and green leaves grow.

I want to feel the heat of the sun. I want to feel the rain when it's raining.

I want to see the lightning flashing. I want to hear the thunder crashing.

I can't hide the joyous feeling of getting my release from this turmoil palace before I pass.

I defected from my past and I capture the new and better future.

Out here I can reunite with the pleasure of watching the billions of sparkling stars on a clean cloudless night.

When the dawn breaks, I'll fix myself one of my many satisfying meals.

At the end of a working day, I'll embrace the greatest gift known to man.

Getting good at something else other than doing time.

WHEN I THINK OF A VOLUNTEER

By Kayla Rose

When I think of a role model,

I think of a volunteer

When I think of a superstar,

I think of a volunteer

When I think of someone I admire,

I think of a volunteer

What do they all have in common?

They are all compassionate and caring

A little zany and daring

Volunteers are heartwarming and fun

They're definitely not on the run!

They are intelligent and sweet

- some even sing a good beat

Volunteers are honest and helpful

Guiding us when times are stressful

They are the ones who drive

So we can go to a church where we thrive

Volunteers dedicate their time,

The least I can do is rhyme...

When I think of a volunteer...

I want to say,

Thank you -

For all you do!

SCARS

By Aaron Fairfield

I knew this well o'twisted soul, your pain, the hate, my rage, the heat, some scars run too deep. Just under the surface - just, but deep enough to feel the beast enthrall in rage, want a battle, hate thrust forward with no turning back. Some we make cry, others will bleed.

My love is hard to bear. I ask not that you forgive or even understand, only that nothing is forgotten. Blame the monster and not the man. Pry the demons from the hands, dry the pain from both my eyes, to keep the flame burning bright inside.

BUTTERFLY

By Kayla Rose

Butterfly in the daylight sky

Showing your beauty as you fly away

Wings so delicate, yet they hold strong

Gliding along the winds of chaos and

peace

From flower to flower you flutter,

Collecting the ever-so-sweet nectar

Growing stronger with each passing

day

Helping the flowers find their magical ways

A science and an art;

The journey of a wondrous butterfly

BEWARE OF DOG

By Dogmeat

YOU CAN'T CHOOSE WHO YOU LOVE, BUT I REALLY WISH YOU COULD.

ALL THE PEOPLE I'VE EVER LOVED HAVE HURT ME.

EITHER THROUGH FOUL ACTIONS OR THE LACK OF RECIPROCATED FEELINGS.

AND ISN'T THAT HOW IT ALWAYS IS?

I'VE NEVER SEEN A HEALTHY PAIR OF LOVERS.

NEVER KNOWN TWO PEOPLE WHO COULD MAKE IT ALL WORK.

IF I SAW IT JUST ONCE, COULD I DO THE SAME?

MAYBE I'M JUST A LONELY PUPPY DOG WITH THE LOVESICK BLUES.

I'LL FALL IN LOVE WITH ANYONE WHO SCRATCHES MY HEAD,

AND FORGIVE BEING BEATEN OR NEGLECTED.

BUT DOGS CAN BITE TOO.

NOW I'M JUST A JUNKYARD MUTT.

THE VIRGIN LETTER

By James Alan Gemmill

My grandmother's name was Mary Virgin

My mother's name was Irene Virgin

My name was James Alan Virgin (parents not married)

Extrapolating from the above

Means I was a Virgin twice in my life

I come from a long line of Virgins

My grandmother's name was Mary Virgin

My parents bought an old church and converted it into a home

Where did it all go wrong?

Why am I in jail?

Such high hopes

God does not make mistakes

I am a 64-year-old proud Queer hoping to meet a decent man before I die, HIV-

I hope that this message made you smile

The world seems to be lacking in smiles

No Virgins were hurt by writing this true verse

DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

By Mike Ball

I got a footlocker in my cell, that I use as a filing cabinet.

My OCD keeps it organized, but hoarding a bad habit.

I got 4-year-old canteen receipts, don't know why I still have 'em.

What else do we have in here? You wascally lil wabbit...

A calendar from '22 when the Ukraine-Russian War started.

We all got COVID in max, then locked down and disregarded.

My lil sister got married, near my birth-day I marked it.

Put the teepee poles back up, resur-rected and retarped it.

Got some mail from my family, ya most of 'em still love me.

But it's too far to visit, been years since anyone hugged me.

Feeling forgotten and alone, man it really used to bug me.

The psych doctor tried to help, upped my prescriptions and numbed me.

A stack of max misconducts, I had to stop gettin in trouble.

So, I quit drinkin shine, cuz I was done seeing double.

It was time to fix up fam, I had to burst my own bubble.

I'm gonna make it to medium, get out from under this rubble.

Koskie-Minsky legal papers, I'm on several class actions.

Lockdowns and segregation are just some of the infractions.

We're criminals not animals, injustices require reactions.

Our rights were violated, hold the system accountable for its actions.

Artwork, music, and writing, collected over the years.

There's still creativity inside, can't stop turning these gears.

Find something to focus on, either face or forget your fears.

Get out of your head, or end up drown-ing in the tears.

A couple of red phonebooks, tryna put a face to a name.

I've seen so many free up, and they all say the same.

"I'll help you with a flight," or "We're gonna make it rain!"

But then they "need a minute," and that excuse is hellla lame.

Institutional paperwork, ya we all gotta have it.

Trafficking and murder, guess I got some bad habits.

Gunnin like Elmer, after that wascally lil wabbit.

My life inside this footlocker, that I use as a filing cabinet.

15 BULLETIN BOARD

ISSUE #112: VOICE & VISIBILITY





PASAN IN-REACH SCHEDULE

TEDC: Weekly on Fridays
TSDC: Weekly on Wednesdays
1-to-1 and Groups - Contact **Damjan** at ext. 231

MAPLEHURST & HWDC: Alternating Wednesdays
1-to-1 and Groups - Contact **Cherisa** at ext. 233

HEPATITIS C PROGRAM / WORKSHOPS
TSDC: 3rd Tuesday of the month
CNCC: 4th Tuesday & Wednesday of the month
Contact **Chance** at ext. 230

ONTARIO FEDERAL PENS
No regular schedule. Watch for our posters in your institution for different workshops and Cell Count newsrooms - Contact federal workers **Omar** (ext. 239) and **Yasmeen** (ext. 222)

CALL TO CONFIRM - SCHEDULES CAN SOMETIMES CHANGE

1-866-224-9978

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

PASAN's office, where we publish Cell Count, is on the historical territory of the Huron-Wendat, Petun, Seneca and, most recently, the Mississaugas of the New Credit Indigenous peoples. This territory is covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Haudenosaunee and the Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the lands and resources around the Great Lakes.

HIV+ CLIENT SERVICES

In order to be a client & access these services you need to have confirmed HIV+ status and be a prisoner or ex-prisoner (all times are in Eastern Standard time)

- Phone Hours: Mon – Fri from 9am-4pm
***We are a small staff and a busy office, if you call and don't get through to anyone, please keep trying!**
- Workshops and Programming: Scheduled usually on Mondays or Thursdays (give us a call or check out our website for a complete list of events we have scheduled)
- Release Funds - \$50 (twice a year max)
- TTC Tickets – 2 each for clients who attend workshops/programming
- Harm Reduction Materials (safe smoking use kits, safer needle use kits, condoms, etc.) available for everyone Mon - Fri from 10am-5pm

CALL TOLL-FREE! (FORGET COLLECT)

If you are in any Federal or Provincial Institution or Detention Centre call us using our toll-free # 1-866-224-9978

ABOUT CELL COUNT

PASAN publishes 'Cell Count', a minimum of 4 issues per year. We are based in Toronto on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation, the Haudenosaunee, the Huron-Wendat and home to many diverse Indigenous peoples. It is sent out for **FREE** to Clients & Prisoners in Canada. If you are on the outside or part of an organization, please consider a donation @ \$20 per year. We are proud to release our newest issue to you. We are also grateful for all the wonderful feedback we have been receiving from our readers, and encourage you to keep putting your two cents in. Our goal is to have most of our content written and produced by prisoners and ex-prisoners, so we highly encourage you to get in touch with us if you're interested in being

part of the Cell Count team.

Publisher: PASAN
526 Richmond St E, Toronto, ON M5A 1R3

Circulation: 900+ / Recirculation: ???

All original artwork, poems and writings are the sole/soul property of the artist and author.

Fair Dealing in the Canadian Copyright Act:

Sections 29, 29.1, 29.2: "Fair dealing for the purpose of research, private study, education, parody, satire, criticism, review, and news reporting does not infringe copyright."

!! NEXT CELL COUNT !! !! DEADLINE !!

**PJD 2026 ISSUE #113 for AUGUST '26:
DEADLINE TO SUBMIT = JUNE 26**

**ISSUE #114 SPECIAL HEP-C ISSUE:
DEADLINE TO SUBMIT = SEPT 01**

Submissions to Cell Count are also accepted on an ongoing basis. Submissions that don't make it into the next issue, will be prioritized for the next one. This goes for all future submissions. So don't hesitate to send in your submission whenever it's ready!

** SUBMIT TO CELL COUNT !! **

Calling all artists, writers (fiction, non-fiction), illustrators, cartoonists, poets, journalists (aspiring or otherwise), and other creative types: We want your submissions! We get lots of letters from our readers telling us how much they love seeing all your work and they're hungry for more. Send us your stuff and get published in Cell Count.

When you send us stuff, please include a completed submission form or a short letter that includes:

- Your name
- The name you want published
- Permission to publish your work
- If you want your stuff mailed back to you or sent to someone else
- If it's okay to edit your writing for grammar, spelling, or length, etc.
- If it's okay to make any minor changes to your art for publication

We recommend you keep a photocopy of your work if you can!

Writers: We get a lot of great work sent in that we are unable to use because of very limited space. Apologies. Please con-

sider the column width & keep articles/poems tight & to the point. Honestly, the first items to go in are the ones that fit nicely and leave space for others – quality and quantity!

Please note: If you do send something to us, you're welcome to give us a call so we know to look out for it in the mail. We suggest you call us a week or two after you send it to make sure we got it. This is why we recommend keeping a copy, just in case. If mailing is a concern, call us and we can talk about transcribing instead.

Women are the fastest-growing prisoner population in Canada, but often their experiences are marginalized in conversations about the prison system. We want to hear your take on prison, life, family, or anything else you're interested in writing about. We can guarantee confidentiality from PASAN staff, and can publish your pieces under a pseudonym if you want! Please submit your articles, poetry, art, or letters to the Cell Count editor at 526 Richmond St E, Toronto, ON M5A 1R3.

DID YOU MOVE? GET TRANSFERED? DID YOU STOP GETTING YOUR CELL COUNT?

We often get about 75-100 Cell Counts returned to us each mail-out (and sometimes more!). Please help us reduce our mailing expenses and help us get your issue to you by letting us know of any address change, ASAP! Thank you for taking care with this.

CELL COUNT AT COLLINS BAY INSTITUTION

We have been informed that all Cell Count subscriptions at Collins Bay Institution are given to the volunteer liaison to distribute. So please give them a visit and ask for your envelope by name!

CELL COUNT EVALUATIONS

Please take a few minutes to complete the evaluation form we've included with this issue and mail it back to us. We use these evaluations to make sure that Cell Count is useful to you and so our funders know we're on the right track. Call us if you would like to do your evaluation over the phone instead! **1-866-224-9978**

CELL COUNT PEER LIAISONS

Cell Count is looking for peer liaisons who are currently incarcerated to be a representative for Cell Count inside. You would be responsible for gathering subscribers, letting us know when subscribers have moved, encouraging people to submit their work, helping with evaluations, and answering

general questions. Call RJ if you're interested! 1-866-224-9978 x234

A NOTE ABOUT PEN PALS:

Here is a list of correspondence services for people inside (alternatives to pen pals, which is still, sadly, no longer a part of Cell Count):

• **Canadian Inmates Connect:** Currently, there is a \$35/year subscription. Your ad will be placed on a website, and people with internet access browse through to decide who to connect with. A point of caution: you are asked to say what you have been convicted for, and your full name will be published online. Melissa is the person to contact for more information. *Write or call her at:* Canadian Inmates Connect Inc. 3085 Kingston Rd, Suite 267, Toronto, Ontario, M1M 1P1 - (647) 344-3404

• **Black and Pink:** Specifically for queer and trans prisoners. They are based in the United States, it does not cost anything to be part of the list, and you don't have to tell them your conviction. *Here is how to reach them:* Black and Pink National Office, 614 Columbia Rd, Dorchester, MA 02125 - 617.519.4387

• **Penn2Paper:** A group of community volunteers who support prisoners in having platonic, safe, and meaningful pen pal connections.

*PACIFIC & PRAIRIE INSTITUTIONS write to them here: Penn2Paper, 104-1015 Columbia St. BOX 873, New Westminster, BC, V3M 6V3

*ONTARIO & ATLANTIC INSTITUTIONS write to them here: 2-140 King St. E. BOX 308, Hamilton, ON, L8N 1B2

• **Prison Fellowship Canada:** This is a faith-based, Christian organization that connects prisoners with volunteers of either the same gender, or where there is a 15-20 year age difference. The point is for you to have an outlet to express yourself to someone who will listen. If you are of the Christian faith, this may be a great option for you. *You can reach them for more info at:* Prison Fellowship Canada - National Office, 5945 Airport Road, Suite 144, Mississauga, ON L4V 1R9 - 905.673.5867

• **Prisoner Correspondence Project:** "a solidarity project for gay, lesbian, transsexual, transgender, gendervariant, two-spirit, intersex, bisexual and queer prisoners in Canada and the United States, linking them with people who are part of these same communities outside of prison" (quote from their website). *Write to them here:* QPIRG Concordia c/o Concordia University, 1455 de Maisonneuve Ouest, Montreal, QC H3G 1M8

If you have had success using a pen pal service and would like to share it with other Cell Count subscribers, please write to us or call. We can list it in a future issue.

ASPIRE 2 HEAL FROM HURT TO HOPE



Micro-scholarships, financial literacy resources, mental health support, and a strong community network



**YOUTH AGES
18-29**



**PARENT/GUARDIAN
INCARCERATED IN CANADA
(OR RELEASED WITHIN LAST 10YRS)**



**ENROLLED IN HEALTH
RELATED POST-SECONDARY
PROGRAM**



ISSUE #112: VOICE & VISIBILITY



BLACK INMATES & FRIENDS ASSEMBLY
Accepts collect calls
2518 Hamilton Avenue W, Toronto ON,
M6M 1T1 / 416-652-3131

CRIMINALIZATION AND PUNISHMENT EDUCATION PROJECT (CPEP)
University of Ottawa, Dept of Criminology, 120 University Private, room 14002, Ottawa ON K1N 6N5

DISABILITY NETWORK OF ONTARIO'S PRISON PROJECT
Accepts collect calls
Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion
423 King St East, Hamilton, ON L8N 1C5 *see page 3 for contact numbers

PRISONERS UNITED ORGANIZATION
No collect calls
PO Box 30009, Greenbank North PO, Ottawa ON, K2H 1A3 / 613-567-JAIL (5245)

● IT'S OKAY TO EDIT MY WRITING FOR: ☐ SPELLING ☐ GRAMMAR ☐ LENGTH
(NOTE: WE WILL NEVER EDIT THE MEANING OF YOUR WRITING! WE ONLY EDIT BECAUSE YOU ASK US TO, OR IF WE REALLY WANT TO PRINT YOUR PIECE BUT IT'S TOO LONG OR CONTAINS NAMES THAT CAN'T BE PRINTED)

● IT'S OKAY TO EDIT MY ART IF YOU NEED TO: ☐ YES ☐ NO
(EXAMPLE: SOMETIMES WE ADD BACKGROUNDS, MIGHT NEED TO REMOVE VISUALS OF WEAPONS OR NUDITY, ETC. WE TRY TO DO THIS AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE, WE PROMISE!)

● I GIVE PERMISSION TO USE MY ART FOR OTHER PASAN MATERIALS AND PROJECTS: ☐ YES, YOU CAN USE MY ART FOR ALL THE THINGS ☐ NO, ONLY USE MY ART IN CELL COUNT
(EXAMPLE: EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES & BOOKLETS, OUTREACH POSTERS, FUNDRAISING MATERIAL, SOCIAL MEDIA, ETC.)

● CLEARLY PRINT THE NAME YOU WANT TO HAVE PUBLISHED WITH YOUR WORK: _____
OR CHOOSE ONE OF THESE OPTIONS - ☐ ANONYMOUS ☐ UNKNOWN

● DO YOU WANT YOUR ORIGINAL ARTWORK OR WRITING RETURNED TO YOU? ☐ NO ☐ YES (TO INSTITUTION) ☐ YES (SEND IT HERE):