

CELL COUNT



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FREE - FOR PRISONERS, EX-PRISONERS & THEIR FAMILIES

THE 2020 PJD ISSUE - #91

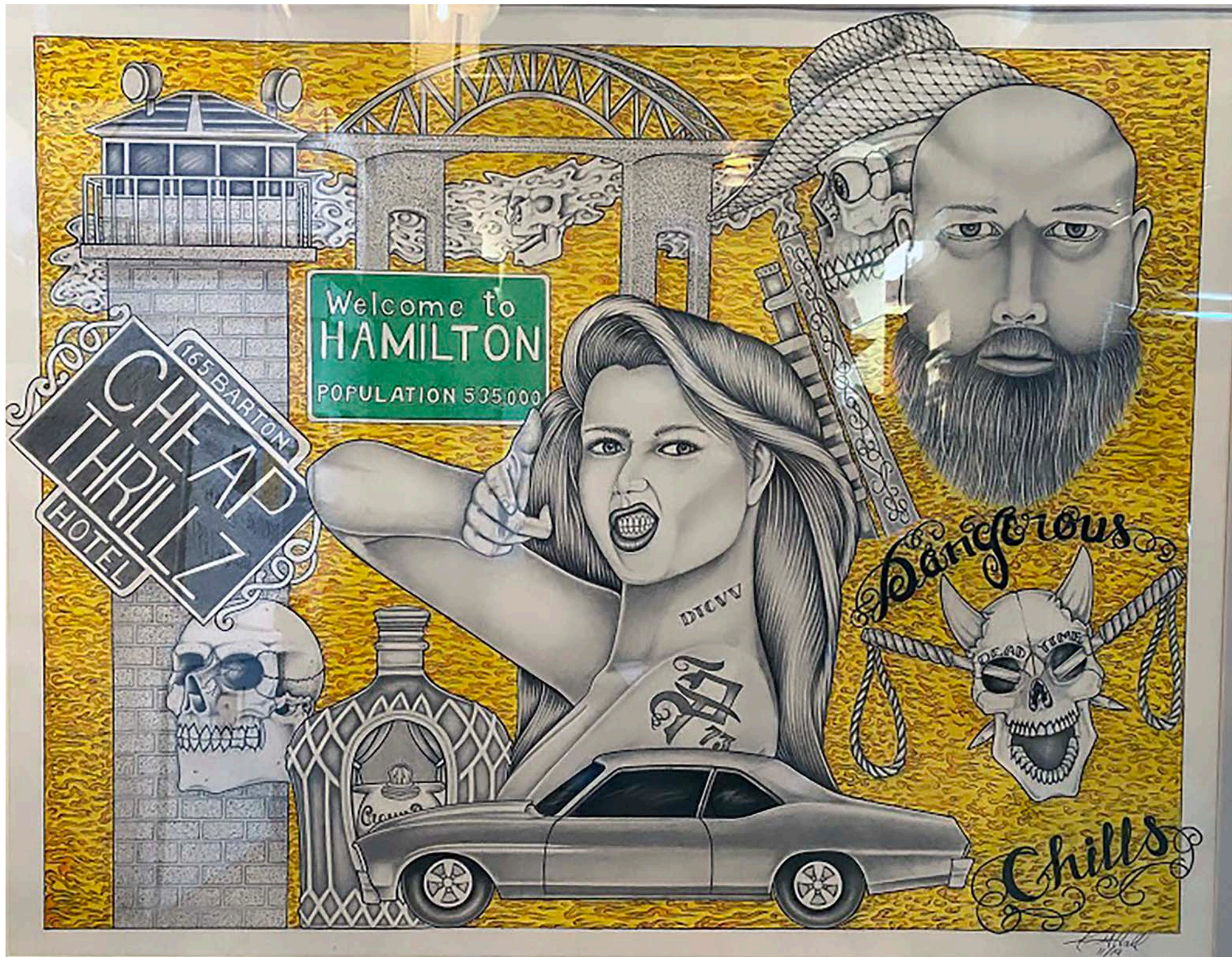


Illustration by Jeremy Hall - apologies for the reflections, the art work was photographed behind a glass frame.

Silent and voiceless

By Mark Zammit

No reason to panic, this is not an epidemic nor is this a pandemic, we will have it contained soon, this is a hoax (D. Trump... duh), and my personal favorite, "there is no threat to 'public' safety or the 'general' public/ population." My question faithful readers is this: what about the over 20,000 inmates locked away

in provincial and federal institutions, jails and prisons across Canada?

When the general media reports on COVID-19, they speak on cities, towns, countries, retirement homes, communities and even cruise ships. Cases confirmed, cases projected, the threat to, the threat of, contain to, quarantined there... and soon.

There is one class of citizen or person(s) that have not once been mentioned or thought of, not a single report written on or spoken of, and those people my dedicated readers, are us! Inmates and convicts behind the wall or fence. Are our lives so meaningless that we are not worthy of warning, a heads up, precautionary measures or even a thought or mention? Repeated-

ly, day in and day out, a Princess Cruise line ship has been mentioned dozens of times, but not a single media outlet has once mentioned the safety or the health of inmates. All across Canada we're doing time in the revolving door cash grab that is Canada's judicial and jailing system.

Thousands of men and women enter Canada's jails and

prisons on a daily, if not hourly basis (people from all walks of life, genders and races). We are the Canadian so-called "justice system", With no quarantine or health protocol whatsoever. Do our lives mean nothing, do our families lives mean nothing? Or, are our jails and prisons simply incapable, I'm prepared, uneducated and unfit to deal with an epidemic or a pandemic of any

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Myth 1
I have just been diagnosed. . . I am going to die!
This is the biggest myth of all. In fact, people are living with HIV longer today than ever before. HIV medicine has advanced and the new medications allow those infected with HIV to live normal, healthy and productive lives. But the medications need to be taken properly and on time.

Myth 2
I can't get HIV from my boyfriend or girlfriend or prison buddy because I know this person loves me and I trust him or her.
While it's true that people who love each other wouldn't intentionally give each other HIV, it's also true that one partner in a relationship can be HIV-positive and not know it. A person can have HIV for years and not show any symptoms. Even if you are in love, the only way for you to know for sure is if you're both tested.

Myth 3
HIV can be spread through tears, sweat, mosquitoes and other insects.
This is not true. You can only catch HIV through infected blood, semen, vaginal fluids and breast milk. The most common ways for HIV to be transmitted are through unprotected sexual contact, sharing needles for drug use or piercing, or sharing tattoo equipment with an HIV-positive person.

Myth 4
HIV can be spread through casual contact.
HIV is not spread through casual contact, so it is impossible to get it from sharing a glass, fork, cigarette, or towel, by shaking hands, kissing or hugging, being on the same living unit, double bunking, sharing public washrooms, or using the same gym equipment or pay phones.

Myth 5
HIV only affects gay men and drug users.
This is not true. More and more straight people and seniors are becoming infected with HIV. In fact, HIV can infect people of any age, gender or sexual orientation. People who have sex with many people are at the highest risk. Unfortunately, sometimes people don't tell the truth about their sexual past. To protect yourself, practice safe sex and get tested.

Myth 6
HIV testing can't be trusted.
HIV test results are correct 99% of the time. Plus, all positive test results are followed up with a second test just to make sure.

Myth 7
There's a cure for HIV.
No. HIV medication helps people with their illness, but does not cure it. If you take your medication every day, it lowers the amount of HIV in your body. But there will always be some HIV in you. You can still give HIV to someone else so you should always practice safe sex, safe drug use and safe tattooing methods.

Myth 8
We both have HIV... we don't need a condom.
Not true. You can pass on or get other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) that make people with HIV even sicker.

Myth 9
HIV is the same as AIDS.
No, this couldn't be further from the truth. HIV is the virus you catch in the first place—AIDS is when you get other sicknesses caused by untreated HIV. Knowing the difference between the two is very important.

Resource created by Positive Living BC's Prison Outreach Program

Ask a Hep C Prison Worker

An advice column about Hep C in prisons
My name is Lindsay Jennings, and I am the Provincial HepC Coordinator at PASAN. I wanted to send a long overdue introduction of myself, as I have been at PASAN for 4 years now. I transitioned to PASAN from John Howard Society, where I was a peer support worker. My position as a HepC worker is very personal to me, as my father passed away due to alcoholism and a cirrhotic liver, from having Hep C. Also, I am a person who has experience with being incarcerated, so, when I had the opportunity to work for PASAN, I knew that I was in the right place; being able to support folks while they are incarcerated and educating folks about the myths of HepC, and hopefully, helping prevent the spread of HepC within our carceral system. Call me if you have questions regarding how HepC can and cannot be transmitted within a jail setting such as: tattoo and piercing, sharing drug tools, etc: 1-866-224-9978x231. Don't worry, you cannot get Hep C from sharing a cell, toilet, basketballs, or phone with someone who has openly disclosed their HepC status. Folks who are in our federal system: CSC should be treating anyone who has confirmed chronic HepC. However, within Ontario's provincial system, it gets a bit trickier! There are accessibility and eligibility obstacles to overcome, which I can help you navigate, regarding being treated for Hep C during your incarceration. I invite folks to get in touch with me if you have questions, concerns, or would like help in navigating how to get tested, and how to access treatment! Last but not least, I want to send a shout out of respect to folks inside during this pandemic. I have been moved by the resilience from folks on the inside during this turning point in time, and I stand in solidarity with you!

COVID-19 in prisons: What needs to be done in Ontario

July 27, 2020

By Claudia Medina, Eveline Allen, Chris McNab and Nicole Alexander

As of early June, 360 cases of COVID-19 were reported in federal prisons. The Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General has just recently started publishing updates on the total number of cases in provincial institutions.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) was not provided or mandated to be worn by staff until late April in provincial institutions, which contributed to infections among staff and prisoners in the early days of the pandemic. The risk of an outbreak is very high in correctional facilities as it is very difficult to follow infection control best practices, as prisoners share phones, showers, cells and common areas with non-removable tables, which are less than two metres apart. Prisoners were not provided with PPE, hand sanitizer or supplies to clean surfaces.

PASAN quickly took action during this stressful time by forwarding prisoner phone calls to outreach staff working from home, so we could provide information on how to minimize the risk of infection in provincial institutions in Ontario. We offered strategies to reduce the risk of transmission, such as putting a sock over the phone receiver, not using the gym, avoiding close contact whenever possible, and covering their faces with t-shirts or other fabrics. We sent information sheets to prisoners in hopes that they would assist them in staying safe and protecting themselves.

How COVID-19 affects prisoners' health and well-being

Mental health was and still is a major concern for people who are incarcerated during this difficult time. Many of our cli-

ents living with HIV or Hepatitis C reported that this pandemic has negatively affected both their mental and physical health.

Because prisons suspended programming and enforced lockdowns, many prisoners are missing their routines. Steady routines allow prisoners to cope with the hardships of being imprisoned. This sudden change is threatening the mental health of people who are incarcerated, causing many to feel bored or emotionally distressed. We also heard about an increase in the number of fights and overdoses in Ontario prisons.

PASAN has developed worksheets to further engage prisoners in meaningful self-reflection, with the hope that they will allow them to better cope with the unrest caused by the COVID-19 crisis. We have also shifted programming to a remote model, where self-assessments, informational worksheets and phone calls to our Canada-wide toll-free number have replaced in-person workshops.

Once released, what next?

During the pandemic, many incarcerated clients have been trying to prepare for their release back into the community, some of whom (such as people with underlying conditions) were granted early release. People who are incarcerated with less than three months to serve could apply for a temporary access program and have community supervision. From March 16 through May 26, there was a 31% decrease in the number of provincial prisoners. While decarceration was welcome news during the time of COVID-19, prison staff were overwhelmed with pre-release planning and prisoners found it stressful and chaotic to navigate their return back into community.

To make matters worse for those recently released, halfway houses – which facilitate the transition of federal prisoners back into the community – stopped

accepting new residents, to minimize the spread of the virus. Most organizations that would provide support before and during their release were temporarily closed or not providing remote services at the time.

The lack of housing options for ex-prisoners was yet another hurdle. Many ex-prisoners were facing the reality of homelessness and an interruption to income. Prisoners that were released expressed that living in this state of chaos put them at risk for re-incarceration, as they had nowhere to stay or had no income to live on.

The quality of life for prisoners who were released to halfway houses before this state of emergency was also challenging. Halfway houses expected that residents would live under lockdown with only two hours a week for their "essential" needs, an experience similar to incarceration that further triggered and affected ex-prisoners' mental health.

The role that community plays

PASAN has responded to the pandemic by maintaining communication with prisoners, allowing us to continue to link them to beneficial community resources. We were able to connect HIV-positive prisoners with lawyers at the HIV/AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario (HALCO) through conference calling. We continue to provide pre-release support to prisoners and refer them post-release to AIDS service organizations, shelters and other community services. We keep in contact with clients in the community through weekly wellness checks and deliveries of food and harm reduction supplies.

As early as March, people who were incarcerated expressed concern about the delay in providing PPE for prison staff and the high risk of transmission that this delay posed for them. Staff were leaving the institution and returning back into

the prisons without any PPE or practicing physical distancing. PASAN advocated for prisoners by writing to the Solicitor General of Ontario and pushing for the health of prisoners to be considered during the COVID-19 crisis.

PASAN staff also worked with the Toronto Prisoners' Rights Project to create and administer a fund for newly released prisoners. The funds provide people with financial assistance to meet their basic needs such as clothing, travel and food.

Preparing for the second wave

We are now focusing on the anticipated second wave of COVID-19 and how to continue providing prisoners with the support they need. Infections continue to occur inside prisons despite the lack of media attention towards the state of institutions across Canada and how COVID-19 affects the lives of prisoners.

There is still much work that needs to be done and we need to continue efforts to advocate and support people inside Canadian prisons and jails during this pandemic. Working collaboratively to dismantle barriers and risks to prisoners has never been more pressing.

PASAN continues to deliver services remotely to prisoners and ex-prisoners and we will always keep our lines of communication open in solidarity with prisoners.

Eveline Allen (regional prison in-reach coordinator), Chris McNab, Nicole Alexander (federal in-reach community development coordinators) and Claudia Medina (program manager) all work for the Prisoners' HIV/AIDS Support Action Network (PASAN). PASAN formed in 1991 as a grassroots response to HIV in the Canadian prison system. Today, PASAN is the only community-based organization in Canada exclusively providing HIV and hepatitis C prevention, education and support services to prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families.

COVID-19 TAKING A TOLL IN PRISONS, WITH HIGH INFECTION RATES, CBC NEWS ANALYSIS SHOWS

Valérie Ouellet, Joseph Loiero · CBC News · Posted: Jul 17, 2020
Robert Langevin was scared he might die behind bars.

"I am an urgent case and I am a vulnerable human being. I have rights. This isn't human," he pleaded in writing with Quebec's provincial ombudsman in March from his cell at Bordeaux jail, known officially as the Montreal Detention Centre, where he was awaiting trial.

The 72-year-old from Valleyfield, Que., had heart problems, and he needed daily medical care and an oxygen mask. "I don't want to die here," he wrote. That was on March 27. A few weeks later, the jail where he was being held was hit by one of the biggest COVID-19 outbreaks in the country. Ninety-six inmates and 39 employees tested positive for the virus — among them, Langevin.

"I couldn't care for my brother. It's like he was abandoned," his sister Pierrette Langevin said in an interview with CBC News. A preliminary analysis by CBC News suggests that, despite prevention measures such as releasing thousands of low-risk offenders, infection rates are still five times higher in provincial jails and up to nine times higher in federal facilities than in the general population.

Overall, 600 inmates and 229 employees have tested positive for COVID-19 and three people have died in federal or provincial correctional institutions for which data was available, CBC's analysis found.

Confined to cells 24 hours a day Pierrette Langevin said her older brother was an optimistic man with a big heart who loved throwing dinners and block parties at his home, collected clothing for charity drives and would call the city any time a lamp went out at the neighbourhood playground.

He'd served time for a string of break and enters in his youth but had been keeping to himself and working odd jobs, including as a mechanic, an electrician, a bar manager and a butcher, before being arrested in December on drug-trafficking charges.

The family started worrying after Langevin stopped calling home in early May. They had no idea some inmates at Bordeaux jail were being confined to their cells for 24 hours a day — with no access to phones, laundry or showers — after a first case of COVID-19 was found.

On May 19, they received a call late at night from Montreal's Sacré-Cœur Hospital. On the line was the jail's chaplain, who told them Langevin likely wouldn't make it through the night. He died in the following hours, too sick to say goodbye to his family.

"It's a shock. How come I couldn't talk to him?" his sister said. "Why didn't the jail tell us he was so sick?"

Higher risk for outbreaks

While the federal and Quebec governments regularly publish detailed figures on testing and confirmed COVID-19 cases in jails and prisons, the rest of the provinces and territories do not. In May and June, CBC News asked every correctional department in the country for its statistics on testing, confirmed cases and number of inmates. They all replied except Nunavut. Several provinces had zero cases to report.

Thirty-nine out of 137 provincial and federal institutions for which data was available, or one in four, reported at least one inmate or employee who tested positive for COVID-19.

"Even before COVID-19, we knew that prison environments were at high risk for outbreaks," said Alexandra Blair, a researcher at the University of Toronto's Dalla Lana School of Public Health who's been tracking cases of the virus in federal jails for an upcoming study.

Blair said that much like residents of long-term care homes, inmates are more at risk in part because they live in close quarters with many common areas and interact daily with several employees for their basic needs, such as meals, access to the yard and showers.

"We have a lot of people crowded in small spaces, sometimes in buildings that are older that don't have great ventilation," she said.

"These are also places where everybody eats next to each other. They are perfect environments when you're thinking about something that can be passed on through a cough or droplets."

CBC's figures also show how pervasively the virus can spread behind bars in a given institution: The majority of confirmed cases — more than 80 per cent — are concentrated in two provincial and three federal facilities in Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia, including Montreal's Bordeaux jail.

Along with Bordeaux, one of Canada's hardest-hit provincial jails is the Ontario Correctional Institute in Brampton, where 91 inmates and 25 employees tested positive for the virus.

The most-impacted federal penitentiaries are the Federal Training Centre in Laval, Que., and B.C.'s Mission medium-security institution — where the data suggests as many as a third of inmates were infected.

More data and testing figures needed, says expert

The numbers obtained by CBC are not a complete picture. Several provinces, including B.C. and Ontario, said they couldn't break down their testing figures by jail or by day. Many didn't know how many employees had been tested. Others didn't specify if testing figures included multiple swabs of the same person.

"Having all that information will be essential for us now but also going forward with COVID-19," Blair said. "The outbreaks that we see now are likely not the last."

Available figures suggest 45 per cent of provincial inmates have been tested while 11 per cent of all federal prisoners have been swabbed, compared with nine per cent of the general population.

Infection rates were calculated using a snapshot of the total number of inmates per facility on one day between May and July, as provided by each correctional department. With the exception of B.C., CBC was not provided with weekly counts of newly admitted and released inmates. It is unclear whether the inmate population changed dramatically on a daily basis during the period we examined.

'You have to be fearful,' says Ottawa prisoner
CBC News spoke with current or recently released inmates in several facilities across the country, including a man who was held at Bordeaux with Robert Langevin.

"Things like masks and gloves, that all started at least three weeks too late," said Claude Laberge, who was staying in Block C. He said at least 10 people were infected in that area. Laberge, who now lives with his partner's elderly relatives, said he got tested immediately after his release in early May and learned then that he'd contracted the virus behind bars.

"We would see guards, no gloves, sharing food or giving medication [to inmates] with no masks ... and we would scream at them to distance or be careful," he said. "It was causing a lot of sparks and tension inside."

None of the current or former inmates were surprised to learn they are more at risk behind bars.

For those still incarcerated, they said they don't have masks or gloves and are given little access to water or soap to wash their hands. Few physical distancing measures have been put in place, they said.

"My anxiety is always through the roof," said Deepan Budlakoti. He's being held at the Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre, which has no reported cases of the virus.

"You have to be fearful because at any given point, this jail could fall on lockdown."

According to CBC's research, at least 3,000 inmates across the country have been placed in isolation since the beginning of the pandemic in March to prevent or contain a COVID outbreak — including in facilities without any cases.

In a statement to CBC, Ontario's Ministry of the Solicitor General said measures to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus in its facilities include "medical isolation of impacted inmates as appropriate," but it stressed that "there is no blanket lockdown in our institutions in response to COVID-19."

Correctional Service Canada explained in an email that all new prisoners, as well as symptomatic individuals or close contacts of symptomatic individuals, are placed in medical isolation "as

a precautionary measure ... to protect inmates that do not have the virus and those who may be more vulnerable."

In June, the Correctional Investigator of Canada issued a report criticizing the practice of isolating inmates, stating, "My office is looking for an overall lifting of restrictions on conditions of confinement.... Rights need to be respected and restored," it said. "It's a form of torture," said a guard in B.C.'s Mission jail, where 120 inmates and 12 employees were infected — and another inmate died. CBC agreed to conceal his identity because he fears losing his job for speaking with the media.

Correctional officers were explicitly told not to wear masks in the early days of the pandemic, as management feared it would scare inmates, the guard said.

"They're not going to be intimidated because we wear a mask. In fact, the inmates wanted us to be wearing masks."

Blair, the U of T researcher, said prisons and jails have a "toolbox of interventions" they can use to slow or stop the spread of infections, including ramped-up hygiene, universal testing and protective equipment for inmates and guards.

But if those tools aren't used effectively and facilities rely only on long-term isolation, she said, "that is not ... humane or just."

The B.C. guard also said that despite management knowing an inmate tested positive for COVID-19, he was allowed to continue coming in contact with staff and other inmates for several hours afterward. This lack of precaution may have caused the outbreak at Mission, he said.

"I just look at it like they were just playing Russian roulette with everyone's lives."

Pierrette Langevin said she feels her brother lost that lottery — and that little was done to prevent his death.

"I forget about the inmate. I see the man, my brother, someone in pain who needed help."

Both Quebec's Ministry of Public Security and the provincial coroner have launched investigations into allegations of negligence surrounding Langevin's death.

At this time, he remains the first death related to COVID-19 in a provincial jail in Canada.

REMEMBER THE CHATTER ABOUT RELEASING INMATES EARLY TO EASE SPREAD OF COVID-19? IT DIDN'T HAPPEN

By Douglas Quan, Welland Tribune, Vancouver Bureau, Wed., Aug. 5, 2020

Even though Public Safety Minister Bill Blair asked prison and parole officials this spring to consider releasing low-risk inmates early due to the threat posed by COVID-19, there was no increase in the number of prisoners released during the first three months of the pandemic compared to a year earlier. In fact, there were slightly fewer inmates released, according to new information obtained by the Star.

The federal inmate population nationwide did fall by about 600 — from 13,958 on March 1 to 13,357 on May 24, show records from the Correctional Service of Canada.

But the decline is attributed not to a rise in inmate releases but to "releases from federal custody continuing to outnumber admissions," according to the records. In other words, the drop appears to have been driven more by court shutdowns and fewer offenders being sentenced.

The records lend support to the findings of federal prison watchdog Ivan Zinger, who released a highly critical report in June that said there was "simply no advanced, coherent, concerted effort or plan in place to thin the federal prison population in order to slow the transmission of COVID-19 in federal corrections."

Zinger went on to say the federal response had been "slow, contradictory, confused and deficient." During the height of the pandemic, 360 federal inmates became infected with COVID-19 and two died. The outbreaks were confined to five CSC facilities — Mission Institution in British Columbia; Grand Valley Institution for Women in Ontario; and Joliette Institution, Port-Cartier Institution and the Federal Training Centre in Quebec.

The outbreaks prompted calls from prisoner advocates at the time to decrease the prison population, citing concerns that physical distancing was difficult due to inmates' close living quarters.

Mary Campbell, a retired Public Safety Canada director general in the corrections and criminal justice branch, told the Star in May that prisons were known "breeding grounds" for disease.

"Get them out now," she said. As the Star has reported, one of the challenges of releasing more offenders into the community is determining where to house them.

Halfway houses are often the first stop for someone on day parole but they continue to face lengthy wait times. Still, earlier in the spring, reporters learned that Blair had asked the heads of the CSC and the Parole Board of Canada to consider early releases for certain, non-violent offenders.

Then in a press briefing in late April, Blair told reporters "hundreds" of inmates had been deemed eligible and had received approvals for release.

His office later clarified that those releases were for inmates who were already scheduled to leave prison through parole or whose sentences were ending, according to the CBC.

Records released to the Star in response to an access-to-information request show there doesn't appear to have been any significant change in the number of inmate releases during the peak COVID-19 outbreak period compared to the previous year.

According to the records, from March 1 through May 24, there were 1,627 inmates released (including 585 on day parole,

33 on full parole and 954 on statutory release). Roughly the same number — 1,652 — were released during the same period in 2019 (including 579 on day parole, 30 on full parole and 993 on statutory release). In an email Tuesday, Blair's office said the parole board is an arms-length agency of the government and "considers all relevant and available information" when making its decisions. During the pandemic, the parole board has "streamlined a number of its policies and processes" in response to a 14 per cent increase in parole review submissions. "Actions taken by the (parole board) as well as fewer transfers to federal institutions have led to an overall population reduction within these institutions." From March 2020 to present, the federal inmate population has declined by more than 1,000 inmates, the statement said. Government officials were unable to quantify how many releases were specifically due to the pandemic, saying that a number of considerations go into releasing someone. However, a CSC spokeswoman did say the downward trend in the inmate population was "expected to continue over the coming months." She noted that while the average number of releases each month from March through May was 600, which is what it was before the pandemic, the number of releases in June and July went up to 652 and 621. As the Star previously reported, the medium-security portion of B.C.'s Mission Institution — which saw one of the worst COVID-19 outbreaks in a federal prison — descended into "absolute chaos." Frontline workers tussled with management over access to protective equipment, while inmates screamed and banged on their metal doors during a period of lockdown. In his June report, Zinger, the prison watchdog, described "pent-up frustration" among inmates due to prisons using "indefinite lockdowns" and "extended periods of cellular isolation" in response to the pandemic. A proposed class-action lawsuit filed against the federal government in April alleges prison officials at Mission Institution failed to protect inmates and deprived them of their liberty by holding them in conditions "akin to solitary confinement." The government has not yet responded to the lawsuit. There are currently no active COVID-19 cases in any federal institutions.

PRISONS SHOULD CONSIDER SAFE RELEASE AS A PANDEMIC HEALTH MEASURE: ADVOCATE

Roshini Nair · CBC News · Posted: Jul 21, 2020
As prisons begin to allow visits for the first time after lockdowns due to the coronavirus pandemic, one advocate says the provincial and federal prison systems should be looking at the safe release of prisoners as a public health measure.

Prisons have been at the centre of a number of coronavirus outbreaks since the start of the pandemic, including one of the country's largest in B.C.'s Mission Correctional Facility where there were 120 COVID-19 cases and one death. A CBC investigation found coronavirus infection rates are five times higher in provincial jails and up to nine times higher in federal facilities than in the general population. Meenakshi Manoe, a member of the Vancouver Prison Justice Day Committee, says the conditions at prisons — like the limited ability for people to physically distance and very little access to personal protective equipment — put prisoners at a higher risk for the virus. In addition, the response to trying to contain the virus — arbitrary lockdowns, stopping outside visits — have created an atmosphere of tension, fear and stress for many. "That's had a tremendous impact on prisoners' mental health and well-being," Manoe said to host Gloria Macarenko on CBC's On The Coast. Although visits are resuming in prisons — with rules like 48 hour advance bookings, mandatory temperature checks, and the donning of masks — Manoe said this is a good time to consider the safe release of prisoners, especially if a second wave of coronavirus cases comes to pass. She says this is not just in the interest of the health of individual prisoners, but as a remedy to a larger, broader problems of mass incarceration. For example, a report released in January 2020 by the Office of the Correctional Investigator found the over-representation of Indigenous people in federal custody reached a new historic high. At five per cent of the general population, Indigenous people make up 30 per cent of the federal prison population. "We know that in prisons, both provincial and federal, there's a disproportionate incarceration of Indigenous people as well as people living with mental health issues, people with disabilities, and people who have chronic health conditions, not just about COVID, but things like hepatitis C, HIV," she said. "We're looking at a population very impacted by the social determinants of health and we know that incarceration across the board is just bad for your health." Some correctional facilities in the country have already seen drops in prison population coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic. Ontario released more than 2,000 inmates at the start of the pandemic in mid-March. In B.C., B.C. Corrections says its in-custody count declined from approximately 2,200 in mid-March to 1,500 in mid-May and has remained stable since that time. In a statement to CBC, Correctional Services Canada and B.C. Corrections both said public safety is a paramount concern when releasing prisoners.

"On average, 600 offenders are released a month. This occurs through parole, statutory release or expiration of sentence. It is important to note that a number of considerations go into release decision-making, with public safety being the paramount consideration," read the statement from Correctional Services Canada. Manoe says both institutions need to do more. "This broader moment [is...] a real opportunity to rethink prisons and incarceration," she said. "Let's start to look at ways that people can be in the community, held accountable for harms that they have done, but let's shift away from mass incarceration, predominantly of racialized people."

ALBERTA JAILS BREACHING PANDEMIC PROTOCOLS, LAWYERS WARN PROVINCE

Andrea Huncar · CBC News · Posted: Jul 17, 2020
A group of Alberta lawyers says ongoing violations of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at Alberta jails is putting inmates and staff at high risk. The Alberta Prison Justice Society (APJS), an organization of lawyers who promote the rights of prisoners, say members consistently receive complaints that staff are not wearing masks or maintaining physical distancing. Inmates say they don't have access to masks or sufficient cleaning supplies and they're forced into close proximity with other inmates, the APJS says. Those concerns are contained in a letter sent to Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Deena Hinshaw and Minister of Justice Doug Schweitzer on Wednesday.

"As the Chief Medical Officer of Health in Alberta and the Justice Minister for Alberta, you both are responsible for ensuring that people within our jails are safe," wrote Amanda Hart-Dowhun, APJS president. "When this pandemic infects the jails, there will be catastrophic consequences including serious illness and death for inmates and for the wider community. You must intervene immediately before this occurs." The letter calls for the province to conduct random audits to determine compliance, and publicly release the results. This week an inmate at the Edmonton Remand Centre (ERC) tested positive for COVID-19. Between March 16 and July 15, Alberta Health Services confirmed eight cases of COVID-19 inmate infections within provincial correctional centres. The letter cites a June court decision that also raised concerns about COVID-19 protocol at the remand centre. Initially, D.H., as he's identified in the ruling, was denied bail by the provincial court. He's charged with sexual interference in a case involving a 13-year-old complainant. His previous criminal record includes aggravated

sexual assault. But an Alberta's Court of Queen's Bench justice agreed to review his bail after concluding that the COVID-19 pandemic and a revised release plan amounted to a change in circumstances. Justice Donna Shelley said lung disease and HIV put D.H. at great risk should he contract COVID-19. "While the [Alberta Health Services] and ERC may have developed a guide aimed at minimizing the risks of infection at ERC, the evidence is clear that its implementation has not been complete or prompt, that Mr. H.'s observations and concerns were well founded, and that he has little ability to control the enforcement of measures which might minimize the particular risks to him," wrote Shelley. "There has been little testing and there is no random testing regime in place in relation to the hundreds or thousands of people who are either confined there or enter and leave it each day." Shelley said between May 19 and May 31, 183 tests were conducted following revised testing for new inmates who must first provide consent. Hart-Dowhun said it's difficult for prisoners to be able to make the choices to protect themselves with reduced access to showers and handwashing and unavoidable physical closeness. "My fear is that people will die in there," Hart-Dowhun said in an interview Thursday. "And that will be what it takes for enough people to care to do something and by then families have lost their loved ones." "This system works" AHS and Alberta Justice and Solicitor General said robust prevention protocols are in place and they are in line with the approach being adopted across Canada. Inmates are assessed upon admission, transfer and at least once a day, AHS said in an email. AHS added that new inmates are quarantined in a group, and anyone who shows symptoms or tests positive is isolated. The health authority said staff wear appropriate personal protective equipment when assessing patients and self-isolate when showing symptoms. Other steps to prevent transmission include decreased group programs, enhanced cleaning procedures and physical distancing measures, AHS said. "Dr. Deena Hinshaw has repeatedly stated this system works," said Dan Laville, spokesperson for the solicitor general. "The very small number of infected inmates also reflects the system is working, with many precautions and preventative actions put in place to protect the health of everyone in facilities."

CANADA'S PRISON OMBUDSMAN CALLS COVID ISOLATION 'EXTREMELY CONCERNING'

Colin Perkel, The Canadian Press, Published Friday, April 24, 2020
TORONTO -- Measures to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pan-

demic in the country's prisons violate their human rights even if authorities are acting in the context of a public health emergency, Canada's prison ombudsman said on Friday. In a lengthy assessment, Ivan Zinger said strict isolation of inmates has put them in difficult circumstances, although he did not address specific incidents of unrest said to be related to the pandemic. "The stark choice for many infected inmates comes down to taking a shower, or making a call to a lawyer, my office or a family member," said Zinger, the correctional investigator. "Fundamental human rights and dignity...must be respected." Data from Correctional Service Canada show at least 196 inmates in five of the country's 43 prisons -- in Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia -- have tested positive for the coronavirus, with 65 of them at B.C.'s Mission Institution. About 80 guards have similarly been infected. There has been one death. Zinger called it "deeply concerning" that prison authorities had flagged about 400 inmates as under some form of medical isolation, meaning being locked in a cell for all but 20 minutes a day. Some may be isolated for other illnesses or non-COVID reasons. The ombudsman noted prisons had locked down inmates, shut gyms, libraries and other communal spaces, and suspended programs and communal meals. Even more restrictive measures were in place in those facilities with outbreaks, he said. "Daily access to the yard and fresh-air exercise have been extremely curtailed, offered only every second day, half hour twice per week or sometimes simply suspended outright." Zinger did report an "overall spike" in incidents at several facilities involving non-compliant inmate behaviour, protests, threats against staff, assaults on inmates and other disturbances. On Thursday, an inmate at Donnacona Institution in Quebec told The Canadian Press that guards this week had quelled a peaceful protest over the lockdown with tear gas and rubber bullets. He said one inmate needed hospital care. Prison rights group the John Howard society similarly reported hearing of guards resorting to percussion grenades to quell unrest at Collins Bay penitentiary in Ontario. Correctional Service Canada confirmed the two incidents on Friday. It said one inmate was injured at Collins Bay on April 15 when staff used "distraction devices" to get inmates back into their cells. The service also confirmed an inmate needed outside treatment after the Donnacona unrest. "CSC reviews the circumstances of any incident in which force is used and takes the appropriate measures in order to prevent or improve our use of force practices," a spokeswoman said. Investigators have been unable to visit prisons because of the

pandemic, but Zinger said his office was functional and had taken about 150 COVID-related complaints since mid-March. "At a time when prisons are closed to the wider public, my office is committed more than ever to shine a light on Canada's prisons," he said. He recommended mandatory testing and masks for inmates and staff. He also recommended better communications between wardens and the media. Only 743 inmates -- around five per cent -- have been tested. This report by The Canadian Press was first published on April 24, 2020.

PRISON WITH CANADA'S WORST COVID-19 OUTBREAK HOUSES INUIT INMATES

Selena Ross, CTV News Montreal Digital Reporter, Published Sunday, May 31, 2020

MONTREAL -- Inuit men living in a specialized prison unit in Quebec have been at the centre of Canada's worst prison COVID-19 outbreak.

Men with psychiatric problems are also housed in the same jail, according to a former inmate. Government statistics have shown since April that a federal prison in Laval, just north of Montreal, has been contending with a very serious outbreak, with 162 confirmed cases so far and one person dead. But it was never made clear that the facility, the Federal Training Centre, is home to two groups of especially susceptible inmates—susceptible not only in terms of their health, but in how hard it can be, for logistical reasons, to help them secure parole. That imbalance has been a problem for a long time, says Benson Cowan, the CEO of Nunavut Legal Aid, speaking of Inuit prisoners. But it's especially alarming now, he says.

"I think we were under a significant obligation to ensure that Indigenous people were being released at the same rate as non-Indigenous people, but [corrections institutions] long failed that obligation," says Cowan. "In the face of the more significant threat to health that the pandemic has posed, I think the failure [of] Corrections and for the Parole Board to come up with a COVID-specific strategy is disappointing, to say the least, and shocking."

The Federal Training Centre, often called the FTC, consists of two buildings essentially across the road from each other in the suburb of Laval.

One building is minimum security and the other is a mix of medium and minimum security. Between them, they have capacity for 764 inmates.

Only one of the buildings—the mixed-security one—has been swept by COVID-19 infections. That's the building that happens to have the two special units, says a former inmate who spent years in both buildings.

A group of inmates with serious psychiatric problems were originally moved to the Laval prison

several years ago when some of Canada's forensic hospitals were downsized, he said.

"They're just not able to function well in the system," said the former inmate, who was recently released from the FTC after spending more than a decade there. He didn't want his name published since he's still on parole.

"Basically, they would be victims in other institutions."

That special wing has a dedicated support worker, he said. Its inmates are able to "maintain themselves" in terms of basic physical needs, but have a lot of other impairments and "learning difficulties," he said.

"They don't need hands-on minute-to-minute care—they just need intense supervision."

WORST OUTBREAK IN ANY CANADIAN PRISON

There's little information publicly available about the prison. The former inmate said it has five wings—four consisting of cell-blocks, and a fifth with condo-like cells where inmates can cook their own meals, as he described it. There are around 400 or 450 prisoners in total, he said, and two hospital beds.

One of the four wings has the psychiatrically impaired inmates, and two others are reserved for Inuit men, he said.

Correctional Services Canada hasn't yet responded to a request for confirmation that the facility houses the psychiatrically impaired inmates. It did, however, confirm in an earlier statement that the building houses a unit for Inuit men, grouping them together in order to provide special services such as Inuktitut translators, access to Inuit elders and traditional northern food.

"They...have access to cultural activities including soap carving, Inuit games and country food meals," said Patricia Jean, a spokesperson for Correctional Service of Canada, in an emailed statement.

The prison aims to keep all Inuit inmates, whether medium- or minimum-security, housed in one place so they can all take part in the programs, she said.

"This allows them to speak their language...share traditional meals and feel less isolated," she said.

The inmates can also have "visits from partners in Nunavik," she said, which suggests that the majority of the Inuit inmates are from Nunavik, the Inuit territory in Quebec's north, rather than from Nunavut or other northern jurisdictions.

All Canadian federal prisons are taking extra precautions during the pandemic, Jean said, including enhanced cleaning protocols and "medical isolation" of especially vulnerable prisoners. Corrections has also suspended inmates' visits, work releases, transfers and all temporary absences except for those for medical reasons.

But the Federal Training Centre's mixed-level building has had the worst outbreak of any prison in

Canada, federal or provincial. Out of 342 inmates tested so far—somewhere around 80 per cent of the entire prison—more than 40 per cent have tested positive.

The 162 positive cases put the FTC well above the numbers of other hard-hit Canadian prisons. The Mission prison in B.C. had 120 positive cases, while the Bordeaux provincial prison had close to 100 cases, according to some reports, though Quebec authorities recently put the number at 60.

At the Laval prison, 146 of the 162 infected people are now considered recovered, with five tests pending.

Correctional Services hasn't released the identity of the prisoner who died of COVID there on May 3, the second in the country—the first was a man who died at the Mission prison. Correctional Services Canada says that while they're announcing COVID-19 deaths, they can't release the deceased prisoners' names for privacy reasons.

INUIT 'SERVE THEIR SENTENCE LONGER'

The Parole Board of Canada has faced calls through the pandemic to grant more inmates early release. The board has said it's rearranging its priority list so that inmates facing health risks can have their cases heard sooner—but it isn't skipping steps in the normal process.

Since March 1, the board has granted just five "parole by exception" cases, according to its public statistics. Forty-four are pending a decision. The board said in a statement that that is an increase from its usual rate—last year it granted four "parole by exception" cases in the whole year.

That level of urgency is not nearly enough, especially when it comes to Inuit prisoners, says Cowan, who is based in Rankin Inlet and has headed Nunavut's legal aid services since January 2019.

Inuit generally face harsher prison sentences than non-Inuit, and they also have more trouble getting parole, even at the best of times, he said.

"Not only [are Inuit] subject to criminal proceedings at a higher rate than their percentage of the population, but they're also more likely to be convicted," says Cowan.

"If convicted they're more likely to go to jail. If they go to jail they're sentenced to longer periods of time, and when they're sentenced, they serve their sentence longer."

Even when other prisoners are up for parole and can relatively easily put together a plan for release—a job, a new address, and all the other components the Parole Board requires—Inuit prisoners have a tough time figuring out the same logistics, especially given the severe housing crisis in Canada's north, Cowan said.

"You need to have a residence, you need to have supports, and an Inuit man or woman detained in a federal institution in the

south is simply unable to meet the criteria of the Parole Board," he said, at least not with significant outside help.

The fact that none of Canada's criminal justice agencies appear to have alerted northern groups that a COVID outbreak was sweeping through a prison with so many Inuit inmates is a missed opportunity, he said.

"We would have advocated on behalf of any [Nunavut Inuit] who were in a federal institution" during the pandemic, says Cowan, if his legal group had known of them.

The Parole Board bears responsibility, too, he said—it should have made a clear plan "months ago" for how to prioritize release for vulnerable people.

At this point, it would be nearly impossible for an Inuit inmate to secure release and then, according to the northern territories' strict protocols, to quarantine in the south for 14 days before boarding a flight north, he said. He pointed out that Inuit tend to have more underlying health issues than southern Canadians, partly because of the lack of health services in the north, he said.

The national Inuit organization Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami told CTV they hadn't been aware of the outbreak and couldn't comment. Quebec's governing Inuit body, the Makivik Corporation, also didn't comment.

LOCKDOWNS ESPECIALLY HARD ON PSYCHIATRIC PATIENTS Prisoners with serious psychiatric problems have their own set of high barriers to securing parole, and their own health vulnerabilities.

It's also important to keep in mind, says Senator Kim Pate, how much people with mental health problems can suffer when put in any kind of isolation, whether solitary confinement or simply a COVID-related lockdown.

Correctional Services Canada first announced a lockdown at the Federal Training Centre on April 15.

"The reality is that individuals with mental illness should not be in prisons," Pate told CTV. "And at times like this, not only do we know they're likely not faring well in isolation, but they're also likely to see an exacerbation of their symptoms."

Canada's Senate tried to add amendments to a prison reform bill—Bill C-83—last year that would have made it easier for prison inmates to live in a community-based setting, Pate said. "Those were rejected by the government, and now [the pandemic] is a perfect example of when it would have been far preferable for these individuals to be in community-based settings rather than segregated units in prisons," she said.

Canada has an office dedicated to overseeing prisons, the Office of the Correctional Investigator. That office told CTV that only the Correctional Investigator himself, Ivan Zinger, was authorized to speak to media but that he was

"not available in [the] foreseeable future." They didn't respond when asked why.

COVID-19 OUTBREAK THAT INFECTED 120 INMATES AT MISSION INSTITUTION DECLARED OVER

Ian Holliday, Reporter, CT-VNewsVancouver.ca, Published Thursday, May 28, 2020
VANCOUVER -- One of British Columbia's worst COVID-19 outbreaks is now over, health officials said Thursday.

The coronavirus outbreak at Mission Institution medium security federal prison began with just two positive tests on April 4, but soon ballooned to 132 total cases, including 120 inmates - roughly 40 per cent of the entire inmate population.

One inmate died from the virus, and the outbreak quickly became one of the worst in B.C. and one of the worst in Canada's federal correctional system.

Activists demanded an inquest into the inmate's death, and unions said the prison was slow to implement physical distancing measures and other precautions to contain the spread of the virus.

In late April, provincial health officer Dr. Bonnie Henry said the outbreak had left health officials "playing catch-up."

"It's a very difficult environment to effectively isolate people who are ill from others," Henry said at the time.

Eventually, every inmate at the facility was tested for the virus, with the last new case detected on May 1.

Now, after two full two-week virus incubation periods without any new positive tests, the outbreak is officially considered over.

Announcing the end of the outbreak Thursday, Henry commended teams from Fraser Health and the B.C. Centre for Disease Control for their efforts working with federal officials on their response to the situation. "It took an incredible effort," the provincial health officer said.

"The protocols that were developed have really been now expanded and put in place in federal correctional institutions across the country. I think that's a real testament to the amount of effort and expertise that we have in the province to support this type of outbreak response."

PRISONER SUING OTTAWA OVER SAFETY OF INMATES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Liam Casey, The Canadian Press, Published Tuesday, May 12, 2020
Physical distancing measures in correctional institutions during COVID-19 have been "grossly inadequate" putting the health and safety of prisoners at risk, alleges a lawsuit against the federal government.

The suit, filed by Sean Johnston, who is serving a life sentence for murder, and several human rights organizations, claims failure to protect the health of prisoners during the pandemic violates their charter rights. Johnston and the groups, which

include the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and the Canadian Prison Law Association, filed the application in federal court Tuesday against the country's attorney general. "Physical distancing measures in prison have been grossly inadequate," Johnston said in a statement. "Some of us remain double-bunked and cannot achieve physical distancing within our own cells, let alone throughout the institution." Without a vaccine or an approved treatment for COVID-19, physical distancing remains the greatest protection against contracting the novel coronavirus, the suit said. They also allege Correctional Service Canada cannot keep prisoners safe because it cannot ensure the proper physical distancing measures without reducing the prison population. "Unlike other correctional authorities around the world and across Canada, however, (Correctional Service Canada) has taken few if any steps to release prisoners from its institutions," the suit said. "Federal prisoners are disproportionately at risk both of contracting COVID-19 due to the nature of the penitentiary environment, and of suffering severe adverse outcomes including death, due to the prevalence among the federal inmate population of pre-existing vulnerabilities." The suit also alleges some prisons are using lockdowns, with prisoners confined to their own cells for indefinite periods, as a means to curb the spread of the disease. It is a practice that is tantamount to segregation, the suit alleges. Two prisoners have died of COVID-19 and 333 others have tested positive for the disease, while 202 inmates since recovering, according to Correctional Service Canada. The vast majority of those cases have come from outbreaks at two institutions in Quebec and one in British Columbia. "Unlike other correctional authorities around the world and across Canada... (Correctional Service Canada) has taken few if any steps to release prisoners from its institutions," the suit alleges. The lawsuit's allegations have not been proven in court. The office of Attorney General David Lametti declined comment and referred questions to the minister of public safety. The office of the minister of public safety and emergency preparedness said it has authorized both Correctional Service Canada and the Parole Board of Canada to use their power to release inmates "in keeping with their legal obligations and with all due consideration for public safety." "Since the beginning of March 2020, there have been fewer admissions to federal institutions and continued releases into the community, resulting in the overall federal custody population to decline by over 400 inmates, or more than the average size of a

minimum-security facility," the minister's office wrote. "This downward trend in the overall federal inmate population is expected to continue over the coming months." Correctional Service Canada said the health, safety and well-being of staff and inmates is critical. The service has suspended visits to inmates, temporary absences, work releases and inter-regional and international transfers of inmates in its effort to curb the spread of the disease, said spokeswoman Esther Mailhot. The institutions have enhanced cleaning, including disinfecting common areas and high-contact surfaces, she said. "We continue to educate staff and offenders around prevention and the spread of illness, including the importance of good hygiene practices, through training posters, fact sheets, and ongoing written and verbal communication," she said. The institutes are also "medically isolating inmates who show symptoms and are positive to COVID-19 to prevent the spread of infection." This report by The Canadian Press was first published May 12, 2020.

EIGHT STAFF, 60 INMATES TEST POSITIVE FOR COVID-19 AT BRAMPTON JAIL. INMATES TRANSFERRED TO TORONTO SOUTH DETENTION CENTRE

By Alyshah Hasham Courts Reporter, Jim Rankin Staff Reporter Exactly three weeks ago, a social worker assured a group of inmates at a Brampton jail that they were "in the safest place in the land." On Monday, the Ontario Correctional Institute (OCI) became the site of the worst outbreak so far at an Ontario provincial jail. Eight staff and 60 inmates — more than half the jail population of 109 — have tested positive for COVID-19 so far, according to the Ministry of the Solicitor-General. OCI has closed temporarily and all inmates have been transferred to the Toronto South Detention Centre, where they will be kept in a separate area and made to isolate for 14 days. All staff from OCI are being asked by Peel Public Health to self-isolate for the next 14 days. Both inmates and correctional officers say the outbreak could have been prevented if measures including strict social distancing had been enforced earlier. "Since the pandemic began, local OPSEU leaders at OCI have been demanding that ministry officials take meaningful steps to enforce social distancing. But up until April 16, most of those demands had been ignored and inmates were still allowed to attend programming, exercising, and were eating together in groups," said a press release from the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) on Monday evening. OPSEU President Warren "Smokey" Thomas said the Ministry of the Solicitor General is failing to keep both inmates

and correctional staff safe and criticized a "business as usual" approach that has resulted in a catastrophic outbreak. Correctional officers at the jail had also previously complained about limited access to personal protective equipment. On Monday morning, inmates told the Star they were provided face masks to wear for the first time. Temperature and pulse checks began only after three correctional officers from OCI tested positive for COVID-19 and Peel Public Health declared an outbreak on April 15. Inmates showing symptoms were "rush-tested," with some held in segregation units before being transferred to the Toronto South Detention Centre in Etobicoke. All 109 inmates at the jail were tested over the weekend. The jail is a treatment facility focused on providing treatment for substance abuse, sexual offending and mental health. All inmates there are serving sentences of less than two years. A spokesperson for the ministry said the mass inmate transfer from the jail was needed due to its dormitory style setting which inmates have said made social distancing impossible. Inmates also shared bathrooms and living space in a unit of about 20 to 25 men, which they were responsible for cleaning themselves. Inmates had continued to eat close together in a cafeteria until last Wednesday, and, until last Tuesday, were using recreational facilities together, according to inmates at the jail. The inmates are being transferred to Toronto South, because the jail, opened in 2014, has a modern healthcare unit with medical isolation units and appropriate resources, according to a ministry spokesperson. As a result of a number of factors, including more bails granted, fewer arrests and a few early releases, the population at the Toronto South has been operating below capacity. However, the jail — the second largest in Canada — has been regularly criticized by judges for "inhumane" conditions, understaffing and frequent lockdowns which have continued during the pandemic. On Monday, Chris Jackel, head of the correctional officers division of Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU), said there may not be enough staff to handle the influx of new inmates, even though the Toronto South jail population had decreased. "It's impossible to predict if there will be a staffing crisis," he said. "The workload obviously will increase, there are more inmates to care for, more cleaning that is required." He said he can't comment on any measures being taken to ensure adequate staffing levels at the Toronto South. He said he doesn't know yet if protocols will be in place to avoid cross-contamination if correctional officers are moving between the OCI inmates and others. He said that at the Toronto South correctional

officers are usually assigned to work in just one area of the jail. He said all staff working in units where the OCI inmates are will have full personal protective equipment. He is continuing to lobby for more personal protective equipment for officers all jails, and said a contentious waiver from the ministry is no longer required for staff who want to wear their own masks if PPE was not approved for use. In addition to a lack of social distancing measures, Jackel said OCI may have become a "breeding ground" for the virus in part because of its unique layout as a treatment facility. It has dormitories rather than cells, a cafeteria, recreational facilities and relatively free movement for the inmates, he said. Speaking to the Star on Monday morning, OCI inmate Mark Zammit thought back to three weeks ago when a social worker at the jail started touching various items in a room and said that the inmates were "in the safest place in the land." "I knew then we were in trouble," said Zammit, 49. He is serving a sentence for assault with a weapon and armed robbery and was accepted at OCI in January to receive treatment for his addiction to crack cocaine, anger management and his mental health. Zammit said there has been a lot of fear and anxiety among the inmates, who aren't sure what conditions at Toronto South will be like. They were told to call public health for their test results, he said, and he didn't know yet what his were. Peel Public Health said results are being provided through the jail health teams. "It's very stressful. It's very frustrating. Everyone is afraid," he said. The outbreak at OCI is the worst-case scenario advocates have been warning about for weeks, and they say more needs to be done to release non-violent, low-risk inmates from jails. The jail population has decreased by 30 per cent since the start of the pandemic. "This isn't surprising," said Daniel Brown, a Toronto defence lawyer and vice-president of the Criminal Lawyers' Association, of the OCI outbreak. "It was only a matter of time and it will spread like wildfire." Meanwhile, jail conditions across the province are harsher than normal, with reports of almost 24-hour lockdowns due to staff shortages, limited phone access, limited shower access and no visitors, he said. No new COVID-19 cases have been reported at any other provincial jails. The Toronto South has had three inmate cases. It is unclear how many are still active. One inmate case at Monteith Correctional Complex is no longer active. There are no confirmed cases at Milton's provincial Maplehurst Correctional Complex, though one inmate moved to a hospital tested positive there, said Peter Figliola, acting president of OPSEU Local 234. He also rep-

resents correctional officers at the neighbouring Vanier Centre for Women, where there are no cases. Between the two jails, there are about 1,300 staff, with around 1,100 of them guards. Looking at the proportion of the inmate population testing positive, the scale of the outbreak at OCI is similar to the largest outbreaks in federal prisons, where offenders sentenced to more than two year sentences are housed. According to figures posted Monday by Correctional Services Canada, which reflect federal tests as of Sunday, there were a total of 177 positive inmate cases, up six from the previous day. More than 300 tests had come back negative, with 33 pending results. One federal inmate at Mission Medium Institution died in hospital last week, becoming the first federal inmate to die from COVID-19. Mission, in the Fraser Valley, is the scene of the largest federal outbreak, accounting for 60 positive inmate cases out of 218 inmates tested. Public Safety Minister Bill Blair said late last week that the Mission inmate was in his 70s, had "some other health concerns" and — amid calls to depopulate jails and prisons — was not eligible to be released due to the "serious" matter for which he was serving a sentence. "It's a great concern to us," Blair said in a Zoom chat, referring to the death of an inmate. There are about 14,000 people serving sentences in federal institutions. Many are serving life sentences, said Blair, and are not eligible for release. "We'll continue to work really, really hard with people who work within the prison system and advocate for those inmates to make sure that we do everything we can to keep them safe." CSC confirmed late last week that correctional officers at Mission were no longer rotating between institutions, a change demanded by the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers. Fraser Health has set up a mobile hospital for infected inmates, requiring fewer correctional officers to be with them. Twenty-one Mission inmates have recovered from COVID-19. There are inmate case outbreaks at five other federal prisons, with 8 cases at Grand Valley Institution for Women in Kitchener; and in Quebec, 14 at Port-Cartier Institution; 44 at Federal Training Centre; and 51 at Joliette Institution. In its daily count Monday, the union for federal correctional officers listed its members' positive cases by institution, with two cases at Grand Valley; two at Drummond Institution in Quebec; six at the Federal Training Centre; nine in Mission; 13 at Port Cartier and 34 at Joliette. The total of positive federal prison guard cases is 65, which has remained about the same for the past several days.



Represent you

By Nolan Turcotte

My heart goes out to these young men locked up in the belly of the beast. I may be young myself, but anybody that knows me would tell you I'm an old soul. I'm polite, honest, trustworthy and courteous. I believe in chivalry, equality and generosity, and I always keep my word, therefore I consider myself the last of the old school.

I've been held hostage in this savage environment for nearly 14 years, and I'll never forget how I was supposed to become a grown-ass man overnight upon my admission to federal custody at the age of 18. I was a child, fresh out of juvie, thrown to the wolves and expected to survive. Well, I survived, but at an unfortunate cost. I destroyed my life as I paved the path of destruction by resorting to horrific acts of violence, which caused harm and trauma to my victims and their loved ones. My reputation is prolific for only being 29, but my first-hand experiences have shaped my perspective and given me insight. I am now using this knowledge to make changes to my life, but I consciously go out of my way to help these young men doing time, because guidance is what I needed when I was full of piss and vinegar. When I look at these young men my heart wishes them greatness. I won't just sit back in silence when it's my responsibility as an Indigenous man to help those around me.

This life, I involuntarily chose, has taught me to always observe my surroundings. Throughout the years I've noticed an overwhelming amount of vulnerability, which tends to be taken advantage of, rather than nurtured. This is prison, so what can I really expect from murderers, hustlers and rapists? Preying on a person's weakness is the method of operation for the general prisoner; especially, the ones who remain neck deep in the sub-culture. I understand this world in ways many are incapable of doing so, and my reflections are intended to save myself, and those willing to accept my love, support and knowledge.

I don't limit myself to helping a specific age group, but I do my best to focus on the younger generations, as well as my own, because entering the penitentiary is like being reborn. The mind is like a ball of clay, it can be shaped in any way, depending

on the influence. If an individual decides to follow a negative influence they can easily find themselves rotting in his cell as long as I have; or even longer, like the old-timers I've met over the years. But, if an individual decides to follow the footsteps of a positive influence, and makes a concerted effort to walk righteously, they will be blessed with the endless possibilities in everything life has to offer. Personally, I believe there is something special hidden within every one of us and our current condition, precludes the majority of us to access our untapped potential. I'm sure there are many who are aware of their talents and intellect, but aren't embracing them, due to the lack of guidance and encouragement. That needs to change, which is why I'm reaching out to those who will accept my help, whether it's directly, indirectly, today, tomorrow, or someday down the road.

Now, I've been all over the country (Sask Pen, Edmonton Institution, the SHU, Kent Institution, Millhaven Institution and finally Warkworth Institution) and I've seen the same shit everywhere I go... Young men getting caught up in the bullshit. Why does this happen? Because the young men want to belong, so they seek acceptance. Unfortunately, they seek acceptance from negative peers, look up to them as if they're gods, and do whatever is expected of them in order to prove themselves "worthy."

Although, I do not condone this behaviour, I completely understand it, due to surviving the gang life myself. I was once impressionable like many of these young men who are currently overpopulating the prison system. At the age of 19 I earned my full patch and my seat on the council, but after experiencing betrayal, I came to the realization I'm the only one who truly has my back. In 2014, I proudly abandoned my affiliation and began taking baby steps towards change. I may have left the gang, but all I knew was politics and violence, so I continued to involve myself in the bullshit, depending on my circumstances. I had to teach myself to stop using violence as a first resort, and eventually my violent tendencies abated me. I transitioned from stabbing, to fighting, to arguing, to solving my problems peacefully through communication, whether it was with prisoners, or correctional officers. I became a

better man than I once was. I'm proud of who I am at this moment, because I've done a lot of growing over the years. I'm still a work in progress, but I believe we all are. Reflecting on my past, questioning my thinking and behaviour, learning about my culture and setting goals for myself is what helped me gain a clear understanding of who I was, who I am, who I desire to be and who I'll undoubtedly become.

I believe experience is both a curse and a blessing in disguise, because it's impossible to truly appreciate pleasure without pain, laughter without fear, and tranquility without the madness. The adversity we face forms who we become, and our misfortunes are opportunities to learn, grow and excel. I know it is very easy to give in to the negativity when it arises because emotions are powerful and difficult to control at times, but if you dedicate yourself to obtaining a balanced way of life, success will be the outcome.

Change begins with you, and I don't believe for one second that you're truly content with spending the rest of your precious life trapped in the system. Even if you're acting hard as fuck right this minute. One day it'll be too late and I don't want that for you, but never mind what I want. You need to consider what your loved ones want and what you and them both deserve. I made the mistake of always wanting to make my gang proud and I never took into account how my actions were impacting my loved ones. Now, I am 14 years in on a life 7 bit, overdosing on regret and wishing I could turn back the clock. If only, if only...

So, if you're young and lost, maybe even a little hopeless, take a look at who you associate yourself with and ask yourself if they have your best interest at heart. If they don't, there's nothing wrong with respectfully stepping back from what they represent. You need to put yourself first, and focus on your healing journey in order to make a better life for yourself. A true friend will understand where you're coming from and respect your decision; and if you end up catching flack for disassociating yourself, then that should only be more of a reason to cut ties.

When you find the courage to distance yourself from the bullshit I encourage you to embrace your talents, find your passion, attack your dreams, achieve your calling live, with purpose, and conquer life. I believe in you.

M. Zammit cont'd from cover
nature? Or does our government and gatekeepers just not care?

Do you know that on Friday, March 6, 2020, two cases of COVID-19 were suspected in the womens provincial jail in Milton, Ontario, yet I and dozens of others at my institution watched four news media outlets (CP24, CityNews, CFTO, Global) and not a mention in the smallest, remotest of size. As it turned out, it was a false alarm, the ladies were cleared and the institution thus far is COVID-19 free. But the question remains, why were inmates, families and so on and so forth not given the same courtesies as the rest of Canada? And I do have it on good authority that these words I am writing are true. This is not a fictitious circumstance and will more likely than not happen again. Why is it that our lives have such a little meaning that we are not worthy of warning or precautionary measures? All provincial jails across Canada are double or triple bunk or set up in a dorm atmosphere.

Provincial and federal corrections are not in the least, prepared for any type of form of outbreak, epidemic or God help us all, a pandemic. Most institutions can barely contain a flu virus year to year.

Health Canada and the Solicitor General claim to preach hygiene, sanitary measures, proper handwashing, sanitizer, cleanliness, precautionary hygiene measures, sanitizing wipes and so on and so forth due to the fact that jails are not much more than a lab technicians petri dish of random germs.

The institution that I currently reside in, is in fact, the best one that I have experienced when it comes to cleanliness,

health and hygiene product accessibility, cleaning supplies and routine – as well as proper sanitary functions. At this time, I most definitely feel blessed to be here. But with that being said, this is a rare occurrence and there are other institutions where inmates get zero access to hand sanitizer, sanitizing wipes, masks, proper germ killing soap or high-grade cleaning products such as toilet bowl cleaner or floor cleanser. The same mops and brooms that clean the bathroom areas are also used to do so in the day room's, cells, etc.

Once again I will mention, that my current institution stands above most where healthcare staff and access are concerned, but that too is beyond rare, I still sit here aghast to how much more professional and caring they are. Again, having said that, most jails and prisons are hard pressed and arrogant about an extra roll of toilet paper or paper towel let alone proper and compassionate healthcare or mental health care and support/treatment. Men and women all across our country can, will and have put in several requests for health care services and treatment and waiting months for a simple written reply let alone an actual appointment.

In closing and again on good reliable authority, I say that if those two COVID-19 suspicions proved to be positive, dozens or more would have fallen deathly ill and/or possibly even died. The jail in question was not even remotely prepared or compassionate to the situation. It seems to me that we as inmates are not worthy of respecting on unless in a negative matter or as it seems now, worthy of a health scare warning.

When will inmates lives matter?

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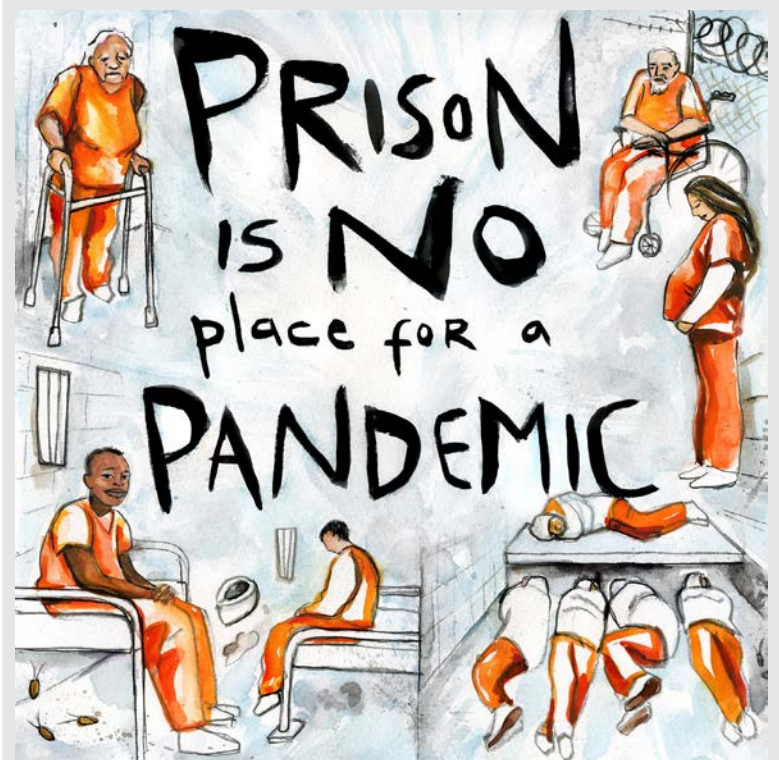


Illustration by @micahbazant



A sign posted outside Ottawa-Carlton Detention Centre. Image from Criminalization and Education Project

How is your prison dealing with COVID-19?

By Philippe Poisson

I am at a RTC institution in BC, and so far we have had few restrictions that have hampered our daily routine. The biggest challenge as yet is the fact that all visits and PFV's have been cancelled until further notice and are now being done via video. CSC has banned all non-essential staff from entering the premises of this institution, until further notice. Non-essential staff includes, but is not limited as it may change: Library staff, school teachers, Aboriginal Elders and ALO's, Programs staff, Chapel workers, some Gymnasium staff, Security and Intelligence Officers (SIO's), Institutional Parole Officers (IPO's), Therapists, Psychologists and Psychiatrists. The only CSC employed staff allowed in are maintenance workers, health care staff and guards.

As seen on various news outlets, social distancing is being incorporated within my institution. When guards see us giving one another props, they don't really care, but when the health care staff see us, they tell us not to do it. Health care staff also make us stand a minimum

distance of 2 arms-lengths away from one another when there is more than three of us standing around, such as in medication lineup, Suboxone lineup, Methadone lineup and even in food tray lineup.

My job title here is the Miscellaneous Cleaner. Under the job description of the Misc. Cleaner, I am to do odd jobs around my whole unit, on every range. But, as everything was being done by the other cleaners and the C-Range cleaner had left in January 2020, I was given that job, as well as my usual duties of cleaning the 8 other Interview and Health Care rooms throughout my unit, a daunting task if I were asked to clean them all in one day.

Now that the COVID-19 extra cleaning measures have been put into practice, I not only have to sweep, mop and wipe down all of C-Range every day, but I have to do the same thing to the 8 other Interview and Health Care rooms throughout my unit twice a week. Plus, I was given training in how to operate the newly acquired Electro-Static Machine and then told to use this machine in each of the 8 rooms twice a week while wearing a long-sleeved shirt, pants, shoes, breathing mask, protective

eyewear and disposable gloves. Using the Electro-Static Machine causes me to sweat profusely! But not as much as when I wipe down all the door handles, stair railings, tables, chairs, appliances, washers & dryers, phones, computers, exercise equipment and everywhere else that people touch on a daily basis.

As well, I have been given the job of taking care of an elderly inmate with Parkinson's disease by helping him clean his cell or help him shower or anything else that he requires of me. I am literally run ragged everyday and barely have any free time to myself. However, as long as people do not take advantage of me along the way, as CSC seems to be doing before they transfer me when the out-of-Province transfers start up again, then I do not mind helping people out! I love to clean and I equally love to help people out! Doing so gives me a warm and good feeling within my soul and heart. And in this time of need what with the COVID-19 Pandemic and all, I am even more giving than usual. I will ask the Creator to bless you all who read this and may you all stay healthy and safe from this very nasty virus!

In solidarity and strength, we are one with another!

government. Justin Trudeau stated at the start of all this, "The coronavirus will not become a pandemic". We saw it with SARS and again with H1N1; this too shall pass. Mr. Nelson, the poorest example that I have myself ever encountered as a social worker, stated in an open forum to all his clients "This is all media hype, no reason to overreact - I myself refuse to wear gloves or masks anywhere, grocery stores etc., I do not even own a bottle of hand sanitizer". He told us all repeatedly that "OCI is the safest building in all of Canada and we should feel honoured and grateful to be there". The sergeant on that same unit, Sergeant Adrian Dougan concurred with his statements as she's several times revoked our TV privileges so we could not watch the news updates. Three weeks or so later, 60 inmates and 8 staff tested positive for COVID-19 and the entire jail population was transferred to Toronto South Detention Center and Ontario Correctional Institute was shut down indefinitely.

At this time, I know there are others, but I cannot and will not put their chance at recovery in jeopardy in the slight chance that OCI does re-open. So I speak for myself and on my experiences there. Myself? I suffer from PTSD, depression, anxiety, night terrors and anger issues due to years of childhood sexual trauma by three different male abusers. This in turn led to mass hard drug use, homelessness and an obscenely lengthy criminal record via my pro-criminal lifestyle.

Therefore, in situations like I just described, recovery and treatment candidates and client treatment should not entail belittlement, fear, threats and having to walk on eggshells every day. Unfortunately, that is the form of so-called treatment that OCI thrives on. Threats of transferred to a higher security, threats of loss of good time, misconducts or other institutional charges in the form of tickets or sanctions, I have seen it all behind the walls of 109 McLaughlin Rd. S.

No three names mentioned above come from three different walks of life, past and present (Trump, Trudeau, Nelson), yep they share one very disturbing commonality, they all have a "God Complex." A "God Complex" That can, Will and has hurt many others while they stay protected and safe in their bubbles.

As the media outlets and the men running our province and country drone on about "the economy, the recession to follow, gas prices, interest rates" and so on, people continue to die, bloodlines are getting extinguished at long-term care facilities and families are getting torn apart. But put quite bluntly, it's oh see I didn't drop the crystal ball and shatter it with 68 confirmed positive COVID-19 cases, the men and women at risk the most in our jails and prisons, would hardly have received a sympathetic mention, or a mention at all for that

matter. Not only the incarcerated have been completely ignored, it took the homeless community in Toronto to reach 30 positive cases, before anyone found them worthy to mention. Once again it is the mentally unhealthy and incarcerated as well as the homeless and poverty stricken that get ignored, forgotten about and left behind during a crisis. I beg of you all please do not twist my words. I have many elderly in my life of which I love fiercely and I'm devoted to like my folks and my Baba. I stress daily and worry constantly about them as both my folks are in their 70s and they take care of my Baba's dementia riddled 97-year-old body and brain, so I should worry some tears daily for them and will continue to do so. But there is still plenty of room for disgust and anger for a government I am now ashamed to say I voted for.

The behaviour and action, or lack there of from both our provincial and federal governments when it comes down to the health and safety, life and death matters of Canadas homeless, poverty stricken, addicted and incarcerated is downright disgraceful, disrespectful, heartless, hypocritical and hateful. As an inmate myself and turning 50 years old this year, I get a front row view of a sad and broken system. Add to that being a part of an advocate of the LGBTQ community, I may as well be a subject to death row during this COVID-19 pandemic, and the lack of truth, honesty, compassion and sincerity on behalf of Ontario correctional institute proves my point even further. I feel at this time, so very helpless and unnecessary, Not to mention belittled and abandoned by my own government.

The homeless, poverty stricken, addicted and incarcerated have zero voice in this pandemic. It took one jail to shut down and shelters to close before Mr. Trudeau or Mr. Ford even spoke about us, yet still no action. Truly! The short staffing, double and triple bunking, nightmarish healthcare and the overcrowdedness has been going on for decades, and it took a " worldwide health emergency and pandemic" Just to open a few eyes, ever so slightly.

I have lived in the GTHA's shelters and shelter system more of my life outside of prison than not, And we have for as long as my mind will allow me to remember, slept an arms length or less from one another. During the SARS outbreak I was triple-bunked at the Toronto W. Detention Center. Virus after virus, SARS, H1N1, The bird flu, HIV... violence, addiction, poverty, you name it... men and women in jails, prisons, institutions and shelters are always the last in line, the last in peoples hearts and the last in peoples thoughts. Not because we don't advocate for ourselves or have organizations that help, because our Canadian government "does not care". The rich continue to

Cont'd as M. Zammit on pg 9

Unheard voices

By Mark Zammit

As I said amongst what may or may not be the beginning of the end, the zombie apocalypse or biblical heresy, I may be bidding a farewell to those I have called friends or family, those whom I've labelled as enemies and to the many who have used me, lied to me or somehow have just found a way to take advantage of me. Regardless of your category, if it becomes necessary, I bet you all a goodbye toast from me to you in a less than grateful but far from ordinary life.

This life, this journey, this existence, has done nothing to offer me a sense of self-worth or pride other than grant me my two sons Jeremy and Keenan. It

has offered me little else to make me desire to continue and it sure as hell has not given me the urge to continue moving forward through this maze of broken journeys, shattered dreams and failed attempts.

The year 2020, thus far has taught me nothing other than the fact that I'm not afraid to die from COVID-19 or anything else for that matter. Death does not instill any form of fear into me in the least. Quite frankly, if my end were to in some form feel the need to rear its head, then all I would find necessary to say, would be a polite and cordial "thank you". In this time of brutal honesty, my only fear is the fear of grief and loss that threatens my sanity if I were to lose someone I love.

At 49 years old, my life equates as much to me, as a speck of sand that has gotten trapped in the tread of a snow tire with larger stones or gravel. The tires tread is utilized to capture such dirt and stone, almost like a catch basin so to speak, and I just so happen to have gotten caught up in a vessel of sorts, carrying me around in a world I do not belong.

In a program called "Rasa Yoga", I have learned that my own body is simply, only a vessel for my spirit and/or my soul, as a snow tire euphemism is a vessel for this life I am currently forced to partake in.

Donald Trump, so classlessly called COVID-19 the "Chinese virus", and claimed it is a hoax perpetrated by the Chinese



Illustration by Gerry Saulnier

Grief for a friend By Philippe Poisson

PJD means a lot to me! To me, it's a day to remember my friend who passed away in a provincial prison in British Columbia. His name was Jack F. Jack committed suicide in the Kamloops Regional Correctional Centre (KRCC). Jack hung himself in his cell. The question is: Why did Jack decide to take his own life? Although the answer may seem simple, it is quite the opposite in the eyes of corrections. You see, Jack had been hoarding his schizophrenia medication to sell to another inmate on his unit who got high off of them. But Jack wasn't dumb. He would sell every other days' worth of medication to the guy buying and on the off days, Jack would take his medication so as to stay semi-sane. But the guards caught on to the play and reported it to Healthcare, who confronted him about it and then proceeded to cut him off cold turkey.

Without his schizophrenic medication, Jack was in for a rough haul. After roughly one month, Jack became depressed and did not eat most of his meals. Then came the hallucinations, followed by the voices and noises. After putting up with this hell for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and asking Healthcare repeatedly for his medication back and making every promise he could think of in order to get his medication back, and still being unable to acquire them, Jack took his own life by way of suicide.

I cannot remember exactly when Jack took his own life due to a traumatic brain injury that took away most of my past memories, but I think it was around 2013. So that is the year I tell everyone when I discuss my reason for honouring Prisoners' Justice Day (PJD).

May you rest in peace my friend and brother! God bless; until next year...

In solidarity and strength, we are one with another!

M. Zammit cont'd from page 8

get rich as the rest of us stand voiceless and broken.

Regardless of innocence or guilt, it seems to not matter because once the orange pumpkin suit adorns to our bodies, our voices go mute and are no

longer heard or have any substantial meaning or purpose. For years upon years, decades upon decades, the basic human rights of provincial and federal inmates have been violated, abandoned, robbed and degraded. Since "FOREVER", The minute something is taken away from inmates, it is never to be returned or reinstated. From smoking, food quality and drives, as well as familial socials and gatherings just to name a select few. When it's been removed on a trial or temporary basis, it is gone for good, to now be used as a carrot to be dangled over a rabbits head. A broken child's toy held hostage with promises of repair but not a tool or parts in sight.

For weeks leading up to the COVID-19 outbreak at the Ontario correctional institute, staff and inmates alike argued, asked and begged for the same items from upper management. Masks, gloves, gowns and disinfectant wipes. PPE supplies in general. For two days on unit 2, we ran out of gloves to do our cleaning chores, yet the bathroom cleaners (I was one and the second one who has HIV poz) we're still made to do our bathroom cleansing chore, with no rubber gloves. One more time we were told how OC I was the safest place to be in all the land, and we were being ungrateful. If any of us stood our ground we were threatened with loss of good time or a transfer to higher security.

The world we are living in is already a scary and volatile place to exist. When the men and women in charge of our health, safety and protection are more full of lies in themselves then they are of the inmates or treatment candidates, the world becomes an even scarier place to live.

The poor anxiety riddled addicts with mental health problems will always be just that, with mental health problems will always be just that, "POOR". Without the poor, the rich would not be rich without pro-criminals, There would not be jails, prisons and institutions. And without addiction there would be no need for treatment facilities. Our government profits from every action, of every criminal or addict and mentally unstable person... and that will never change.

As long as we continue to differentiate poor and rich, upper, middle and lower middle to low class, and the mentally ill versus the capable, it will always be the poor or unstable that will suffer, be ignored and go unnoticed.

The world was not prepared for COVID-19 and until we unite as one and stop judging and work as a team, people will continue to get sick and the weak will continue to die.

COVID-19 is not a biased, bigoted or racist disease, it came for all of us. Gay, straight, poor, rich, old, young, addicted or not. Just like HIV/AIDS turned out to not be the disease of gay men, Covid does not discriminate either. #StandTogether

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NIGHTMARES AND DAYDREAMS

By Zakaria Amara

This is my first night in prison. Its past midnight, and I'm in solitary confinement. The lights are permanently on, and I'm sitting on my bed, (a thin beige cot on top of a grey slab of concrete), with my back against the wall.

I'm looking straight ahead, but my mind is elsewhere.

My life has just been shattered into a million pieces... now floating around the room like space debris.

Now begins the task of trying to piece them together.

Some pieces are lost forever... The only glue I have is truth... But I don't know that yet ...

This is the tenth time I've been strip-searched this week.

When you enter a place like this, dignity is something you leave at the front door.

This is my third year in solitary confinement. Its past midnight, summer is here, and there's been a blackout for the last two days. The ventilator has stopped breathing, and the air is heavy and rotten.

I wonder... if I'll make it out alive...

A man's face has just been cut open by two vicious razor swipes.

He's only 26 years old, but he's scarred for life...

So am I... And so is everyone else here... Welcome to Maximum-Security.

We're on lockdown. Again.

Living in a Maximum-Secu-

rity prison is like being inside the bowels of someone who is chronically constipated; Movement is rare.

His enemy is secure, for now, behind a solid steel door with a small plexiglass window. As he stealthily approaches it, he quickly squats and takes out two plastic bottles that contain what appears to be muddy water. Attached to the lids of each bottle are yellow plastic tubes that are designed to give whatever is launched out of them a 45° trajectory.

Still squatting, he places the bottles at the bottom of the door, and quietly slides their yellow cannons through the open crack.

The Trojan Tails are in! Grinning from ear to ear, he then quickly stands back up, and reveals himself to his enemy through the small window, as he stomps on both bottles, causing liquid shit to explode into the cell.

The victory is swift, total and undeniable.

Welcome to the Special Handling Unit.

I'm in our tiny laundry room, lying on a metal foot locker. Two Lifers across from me are bickering.

Water is dripping on my forehead from the ceiling. It could be piss-water from the toilets upstairs, but I'm not concerned.

The man across from me washes his bedding every day, (sometimes twice); a severe case of OCD with more than a dash of Paranoid Schizophrenia.

Yesterday, he told me that his bed smelt like shit.

Today, the laundry machine is

broken.

How will he survive?

It's 11:05 a.m.

I'm standing at the crack of my door, watching the guard delivering mail. My cell is all the way at the end. Will he make it here, or will he turn around just before he gets to my cell?

I pray for a letter... for proof that I exist.

He's definitely approaching my cell.

My heart skips a beat.

I run to my bed, and sit there facing the wall, pretending as if I'm oblivious to his existence.

He's in front of my door now, rummaging through papers and envelopes.

My hopes skyrocket.

They have now surpassed the moon!

He drops something on my hatch and leaves,

I perform a supernatural leap towards my door and spot a folded paper, not an envelope.

My rocket is now crashing back to earth.

I open the folded paper. Its just our bi-weekly account statement.

Try again tomorrow.

I'm out on parole, standing at a busy intersection.

There are flying cars now.

The once familiar traffic lights are nowhere to be seen.

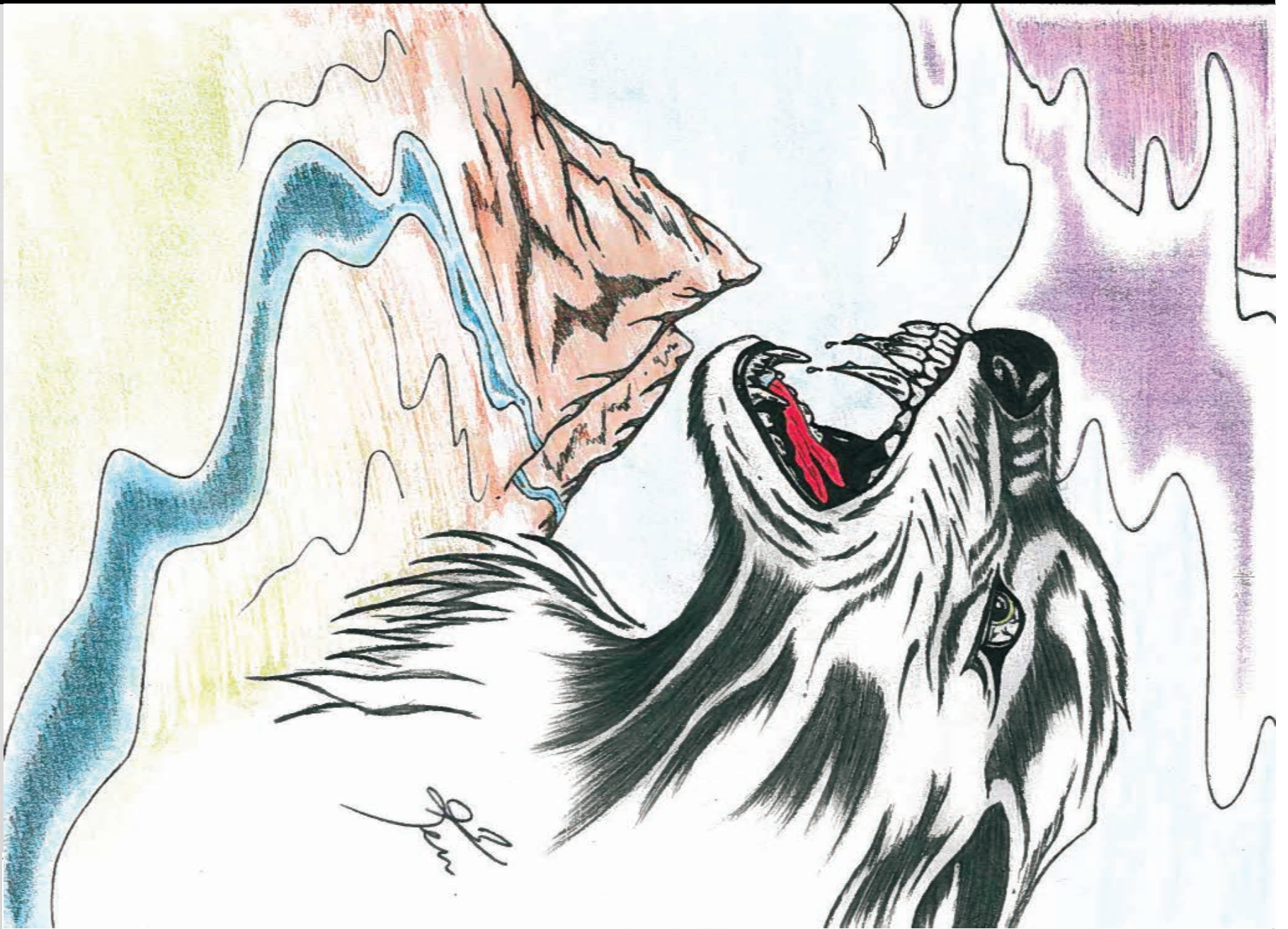
I'm terrified of violating my parole conditions by crossing at the wrong time, (I am serving a life sentence, after all).

Come to think of it,

I could just as easily get killed by a drunk, (flying car), driver.

Life, indeed... is full of possibilities.

Illustrations by Brian Kerr



Outreach & Support Schedule

Currently, we are not offering programming inside of prisons due to COVID-19. We are working with and waiting for word from the various Ontario federal and provincial institutions on when we will be returning inside to do our groups and 1 on 1s. This may change by the time the next issue comes out, so please contact us directly for the most up-to-date information on outreach and support inside at: **1-866-224-9978**

We have also reduced the number of staff in our office to allow for physical distancing as a safety precaution against COVID-19. Our staff office schedule is as follows (to reach a staff member, please dial **1-866-224-9978** followed by the extension):

Amina Mohamed ext 236
Women's Community Program Coordinator - Tuesdays and Thursdays
Arpa Azmila ext 235
Harm Reduction Manager - Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays
Chaman R Vashishtha ext 222
Finance & Office Manager -

Mondays and Wednesdays
Cherisa Shivcharran ext 233
Provincial Community Development Coordinator - Mondays and Thursdays
Chris McNab ext 237
Federal In-Reach Community Development Coordinator - Wednesdays and Fridays
Claudia Medina ext 227
Program Manager - Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays
Eveline Allen ext 238
Regional Prison In-Reach Coordinator - Mondays and Tuesdays
Janet Rowe ext 225
Executive Director - Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays
Lindsay Jennings ext 231

Provincial HepC Program Coordinator - Mondays and Tuesdays
Nicole Alexander ext 234
Federal In-Reach Community Development Coordinator - Wednesdays and Fridays
Sena Hussain ext 228
Communications & Resource Dev Coordinator - Tuesdays and Thursdays
Stephanie Moulton ext 223
Harm Reduction Outreach Coordinator - Thursdays and Fridays
Harm Reduction Outreach Workers 243
Also, you can reach us by mail at: PASAN, 526 Richmond St E, Toronto, ON

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 Eastern Standard time)

- Phone Hours: Mon – Fri from 9-5, except Tuesday mornings
- 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.
- ID Clinic – cancelled for now
- Release Funds - \$50 (twice a year max)
- TTC Tokens – 2 each for clients who attend workshops
- Harm Reduction Materials – Mon – Fri from 9-5, except Tuesday AM (Safer-Crack-Use-Kits, Safer-Needle-Use-Kits, Piercing Needles, Condoms, etc.) - for everyone.

Sometimes we and the phones are very busy so please keep trying!

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 91st 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.

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526 Richmond St E, Toronto, ON M5A 1R3
Circulation: 700+ - 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."

A NOTE ABOUT PEN PALS:

Here is a list of correspondence services for people inside (alternatives to pen pals, which is, 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

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." - From their website. Write to them here: QPIRG Concordia c/o Concordia University

1455 de Maisonneuve Ouest, Montreal, QC H3G 1M8

Inmate Ink: "Help us bring Hope to a prisoner one letter at a time. Offers memberships from \$20 - \$40. Your completed ad will be published on our website for anyone in the general public to view and contact you directly. For an application or more info, please contact Tasha Brown at: P.O. Box 53222 Marlborough CRO, Calgary AB. T2A 7L9 or www.InmateInk.ca"

If you have had success using a pen pal service (other than ours) 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.

MOVING?

We were getting about 75 Cell Counts sent back to us each mail-out labelled, 'Not Here'. Please help us reduce our mailing expenses by letting us know of any address change, ASAP! Thank you for taking care with this.

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 make sure you write a line in that gives us permission to publish your work. Also, let us know if you would like your work returned to you or sent on to someone else! Please also type your work or write clearly 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 consider 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! Also, let us know in writing if it's ok to edit your work for grammar, spelling and so we can fit it in.

Please note: If you do send something to us, please give us a call if you can so we can look out for it in the mail. Also, call us again at least a week after you send it to make sure we got it. If not, if you're sending in a piece of writing, we can transcribe it over the phone for you, so keep a copy of everything you send us!

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, 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.

WHEN SUBSCRIBING TO CELL COUNT

We have been notified by a few different institutions that if you'd like your subscription of Cell Count to make it into your hands, you have to register at the library to receive it first. Please do this before requesting a subscription from us just to make sure! Also, if you are interested in subscribing please contact: Cell Count, 526 Richmond St E, Toronto, ON, M5A 1R3 or call Sena at: 1-866-224-9978 ext 228

NEXT CELL COUNT DEADLINE

We are realizing that setting a deadline date is difficult because sometimes it takes a long time for Cell Count to get to our readers, and then people who would like to submit don't have enough time

to write/draw their submissions. We are going to try something new: We will create a new issue once we receive enough submissions to make one. So just write/draw your submission and send it in! If it doesn't make it in the next issue, it will be prioritized for the issue after.

CONTACT NUMBERS

If you are in any Federal/Provincial Institution or Detention Centre call us only with this #: Toll-free 1-866-224-9978

CSC'S NEW PRISON NEEDLE EXCHANGE PROGRAM (PNEP)

We want to hear from you! After refusing for more than 20 years, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) announced last year the introduction of its "prison needle exchange program" or PNEP in federal prisons. This is the result of an ongoing court case by the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, PASAN and others. The PNEP began in Summer 2018 at two prisons: Grand Valley Institution for Women in Kitchener, Ontario and Atlantic Institution in Renous, New Brunswick. Beginning in January 2019, CSC has said it will start phasing in PNEP across the federal prison system. The Legal Network and PASAN are continuing with our legal case to make sure all prisoners who need it can access the PNEP, and we want to hear from you. If you are in a prison with a PNEP, we are interested in learning about your observations and experiences of the PNEP: * Are people using the program? * Do you think the program works? * Are there any problems for those who wish to participate? If you are able to share your thoughts with us, please contact: PASAN (toll free: 1-866-224-9978) or Sandra Chu at the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network at 416-595-1666 ext. 232. Both PASAN and the Legal Network accept collect calls from prisoners.

HOW PASAN AND CELL COUNT ARE OPERATING DURING COVID-19

During the COVID-19 outbreak, PASAN is still open, but in a more limited capacity. Our staff are in the office two days/week, which is when we can read and reply to mail we receive from inside, and still available by phone Monday - Friday, 9am - 5pm. Currently, we are only allowing staff in our office to help limit the potential spread of the virus, but we are brainstorming ways to slowly start offering services to our clients in office again. We are also waiting for federal and provincial institutions to start allowing outside organizations back inside so we can start delivering groups and one-on-ones with you again.

Cell Count is still running and accepting submissions. We are currently low on submissions and need more sent from you inside to produce Cell Count. If you are interested in submitting but are experiencing issues trying to get your work to us, please give Sena a call at ext 228. Thank you for your patience during this difficult time!

ONTARIO PRISONER EMERGENCY SUPPORT FUND

PASAN staff are no longer completing phone applications for the fund. Families, loved ones or support workers can help you fill out the form at their website: www.tiny.cc/prisonerfund

If you've already applied and have follow up questions, ask the person who filled out the application on your behalf to email: prisonerfund@gmail.com. The money takes about a month to a month and a half to receive. Email transfers are the best way to receive money.

If you don't have anyone with internet access that can help, PASAN can mail an application to you, but we can't help if you have any follow up questions.

