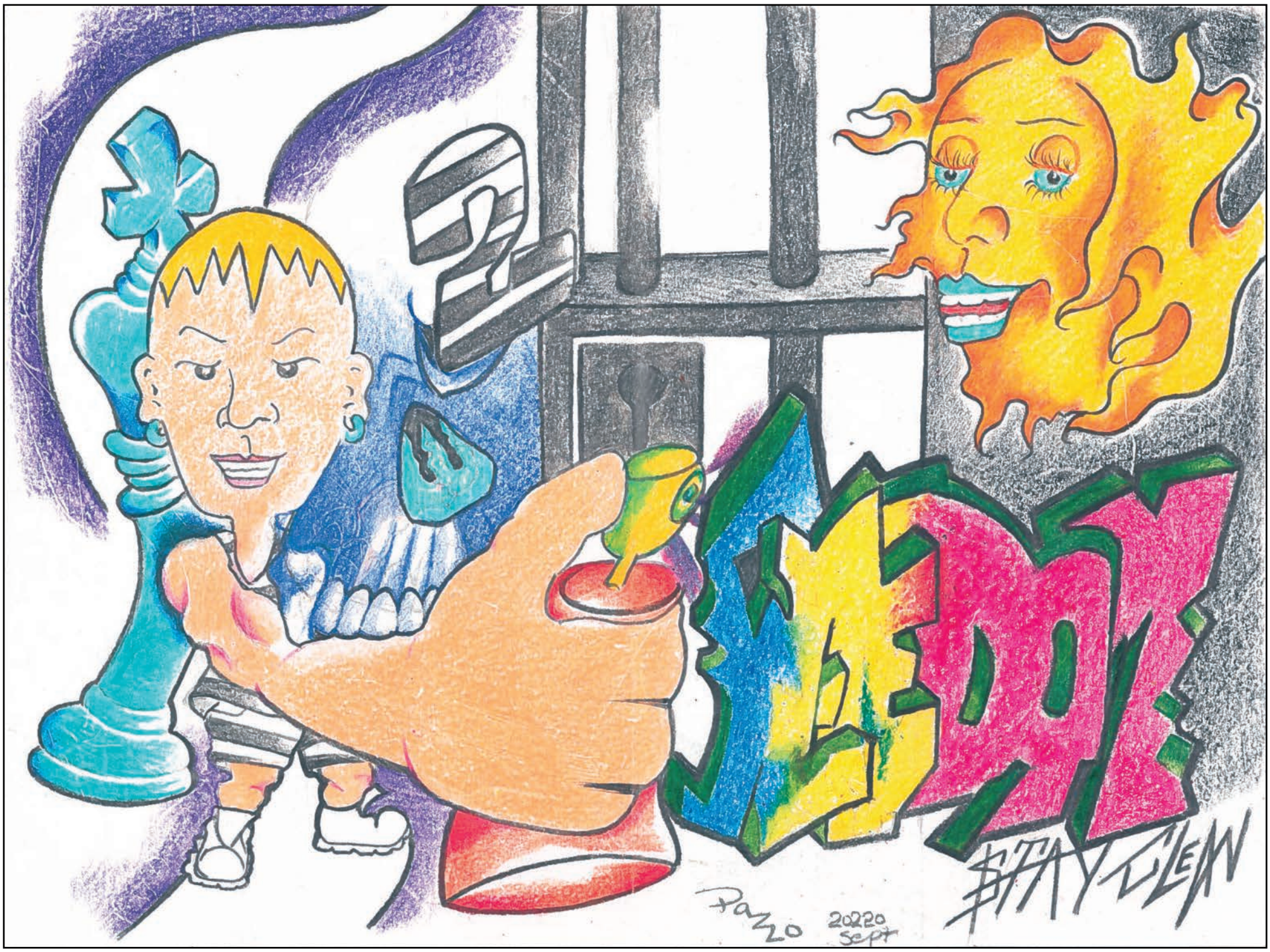
CELL COUNT

YOUR PRISON HEALTH RESOURCE SINCE 1995 | FREE - FOR PRISONERS, EX-PRISONERS & THEIR FAMILIES | STAYING HEALTH, DECEMBER 2022 - #99



During these Difficult Times

I have been "Stripped of Everything in Life" and m
y freedom. Accused of doing "Everything Right in Life", for being "REHABILITATED" having "Emotions". Never doing anything wrong, never acting on my "Emotions", being "Persecuted" and being accused of being "Crazy", falsely labeled and "Punished" beyond all measure.

However, not a crime nor a charge in 21 years since 2002. I had been at minimum security prison for 17 years, since 2005. I have lived in the community for the last 12 years, 6 years on my very first day parole, 6 years on my very first full parole as a productive, "Law Abiding Member of the Community", not even a speeding ticket, no one ever called the police on me ever, never even got into a fight, not even an incident.

Suspended, "Illegally Detained and Imprisoned", not just once, but 3 times now over the last 12 Years, for no wrongdoing what so-ever, I've only experienced "Systemic Discrimination Based on Disability", only caused by "Defamation of Character" by case management only, forced to take anti-psychotic medication against my will for no reason for 26 years. Six psychiatrists saying that there is nothing wrong with me paid and contracted by CSC. All of these doctors "Vindicated" me of all CSC's allegations and "Removed all Medications" twice. However, I'm currently sitting here in this high-medium security institution for no reason or wrong doing, locking me down trying to "Nail me to the Cross" for another 2 life sentences, begging someone to fix this "Horrible" wrong or move me forward. Such, "Disrespect for Human Life", they are trying to keep me in prison my whole entire life; I have done time from 1988 to 2008, 20 Years on a Life 10 sentence.

When is enough, enough? How many more life sentences would you like to "Nail me to the Cross" According to "Correctional Service of Canada" their "Commissioners Directives". "Mission Statements" and their "Correctional Programs ". I have done everything that they told me, that I had to do, to get to live in the community as a productive, "Law-Biding member of Society". In addition, I have done no wrong since I was released for the first time in 2008, and if it were not for this "Systemic Discrimination", I would have lived in the community now for the last 24 years, not just the last 12 years.

It took me "44 Years of my Life" to get to sit at my own kitchen table for the first time ever in my life, doing it the right way and please excuse me for

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Letter from the Editor

To our Cell Count readers,

Thank you for picking up the 99th issue of Cell Count, the 'Staying Healthy' edition. I am excited to feature some new contributors to our team, which consists of incarcerated writers and artists from across Turtle Island. In this issue, you will read about someone who is caught up in the system because of lack of adequate and appropriate supports for prisoners who live with mental health issues, a demand from legal advocates regarding HIV nondisclosure convictions, information regarding HIV and HepC in prisons, which there is a higher prevalence of than on the outside due to institutional restrictions, one person's struggles with using substances, a prisoner's perspective on toxic masculinity, and other awesome submissions.

The next issue's theme will focus on what your dreams are the for the future, it could be about yourself, your family, loved ones, systemic changes you'd love to see, and anything else this topic inspires in you. It will also be the 100th issue of Cell Count! To mark this issue, we also welcome submissions about what Cell Count means to you, what you would like to see in the future, and anything else you can think of!

We also know the holiday season is here, and on behalf of the entire Cell Count and PASAN team, we want to wish you peace, justice, freedom (in whatever form that may look like for you) and healing. We know this can be a particularly lonely time for many of you, and we want you to know that you are not alone, and that we are thinking of you. You will find a beautful holiday art piece in the art section, we hope this brings you a little bit of joy.

November 20th - Trans Day of Remembrance

For this Transgender Day of Remembrance, PASAN would like to call attention to the human rights abuses experienced by gender diverse prisoners in Canada, which is a contributor to trans death. The following is a CTV article containing detailed accounts of some of these abuses, and the ways gender diverse prisoners are discriminated against by carceral systems.

Documents show a pattern of human rights abuses against gender diverse prisoners

By Denio Lourenco Dece, CTV News, May 16, 2022

TORONTO - For gender diverse people in the Canadian prison system, the act of keeping a low profile can be the difference between life and death, but for those who are visibly queer or transgender, the situation is much more volatile, and they have become targets for violence and abuse.

Despite a recent societal shift in attitudes towards LGBTQ2+ people, documents obtained by CTV News show a pattern of human rights abuses against gender diverse prisoners at the hands of prison staff.

To capture the full picture of what's happening inside these institutions, CTV News has reviewed hundreds of court documents and spoke with several people in the Canadian prison system who are transgender, non-binary and two-spirit. Their accounts contain distressing details of sexual violence and physical attacks that are being revealed for the first time.

Cont'd on pg 5

December 1st - World AIDS Day

For World AIDS Day 2022, PASAN joined fellow AIDS service organizations across Toronto for the annual Laying of the Black Rose Ceremony and Interagency March. Afterwards, community members gathered at YMCA to kick off Indigenous AIDS Awareness Week with a feast. And to close the day, PASAN attended a community fair in Kensington Market with music and food to share stories and spread awareness about HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C, and overdose prevention.

December 6th - Violence against women and girls day

This December 6th, PASAN would like to bring attention to the large number of women who are criminalized for protecting themselves in instances of intimate partner violence and other forms of gender-based violence. Here is an excerpt from a Policy-

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If a woman uses force to protect herself or others – especially if a weapon is involved – she will commonly face the full, often disproportionate, weight of the law.

She is likely to be quickly criminalized and then imprisoned. Due to differences in the average size and strength of men and women, if a woman engages in hand-to-hand combat with a male attacker she is likely to end up severely injured or dead. Women who respond to physical threats by picking up a frying pan, knife, or even an attacker's gun are likely to be charged and considered more deserving of blame than the attacker. They are also then subject to a mandatory minimum prison penalty for using a 'weapon' in their reactive use of force.

The vast majority of women charged for using reactive – usually defensive – force, don't pursue a legal defense and are likely to plead guilty.

Sometimes it is because the only witnesses to the attack or abuse are their children, and they do not want to subject their children to the trauma or shame of publicly testifying. Sometimes it is because they are persuaded to plead guilty in order to avoid a possible trial and mandatory minimum sentence. Many Crown prosecutors offer set sentences in exchange for guilty pleas when they learn of women's histories of abuse.

True justice would be withdrawal of charges when prosecutors realize women responded in a reasonable (though unenviable) way to unreasonable, violent threats toward them or those for whom they care.

Why do rising incarceration rates matter to women?

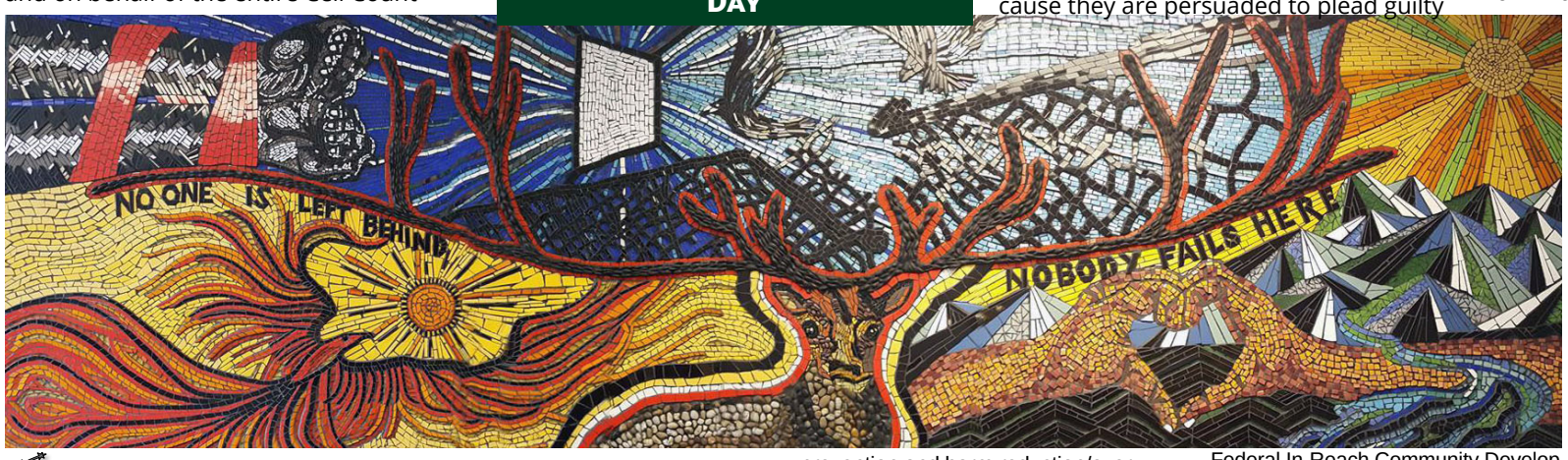
The fastest-growing prison population in Canada is racialized women, particularly Indigenous women. More than one in three women in federal custody are Indigenous. The number of South Asian women and African, Caribbean and Black Canadian women in custody is also increasing.

There are many linkages between the increased marginalization, victimization, criminalization, and institutionalization of women. Studies involving self-reporting by individuals indicate that virtually no one reaches the age of majority without doing something for which they could be criminalized. Who is labelled a criminal (or "criminalized") and imprisoned is usually determined by the relative privilege or lack thereof of those involved and the circumstances of the act – who does what, to whom, in what context – rather than the actual risk to public safety or likelihood of harm.

It is no coincidence that 91 percent of Indigenous women and 87 percent of all women in federal prisons in Canada have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse. Most also live with disabling mental health issues.

Calling all creators!

The Federal Team is looking for submissions for our Grief and Loss pamphlet - we are looking for art, short poetry, or personal experiences with grief and loss inside. Let us know if you would like your submissions to be anonymous, or include your name. If you have any questions, call or write to us (see contact info below).



PASAN

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

Support Services

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selling, case management, pre-release planning, and referrals for those in custody living with HIV and/or HCV

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equate medical care and support while incarcerated

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number at 1-866-224-9978. If you can't get through to us from our toll-free number, we also accept collect calls from prisoners across Canada at 416-920-9567, but we prefer people use our toll-free number

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development, resources and training for community groups across Ontario.

Outreach and Education

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tion workshops inside many of the provincial and federal adult institutions in Ontario

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which contains article, poetry and art produced by current and ex-prisoners

Author: [illegible], 2019

prevention and harm reduction/over - dose prevention trainings for agencies working with prison populations

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reach and support and act as a referral "hub" for HIV/HCV positive prisoners who are transferred from one region to another, to ensure continuity of support

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where ex-prisoners assist those who are currently incarcerated, about to be released, or already released to get medical and health needs met.

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Key messages about HIV non-disclosure from the Canadian Coalition to Reform HIV Criminalization

A consultation is taking place by the CCRHC, Informed by years of community advocacy and extensive community consultations, the CCRHC recommends that organizations and individuals emphasize several key points when responding to the government's consultation:

1. Canada's approach to criminalizing HIV non-disclosure is unscientific; contributes to HIV stigma; undermines public health efforts to stop the spread of HIV; disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous, and gay communities; and imposes significant harms on people living with HIV. Many of those who have faced charges or been found guilty experience barriers to housing and employment, social exclusion, and increased risks of violence and abuse. HIV criminalization does not address the gender inequalities and violence that can put women at risk of HIV, but has been used to threaten or victimize women living with HIV.
2. Sexual assault charges should never be used to prosecute allegations of non-disclosure, exposure, or transmission of HIV (or other sexually transmitted or bloodborne infections). Using the law of sexual assault to deal with non-disclosure in the context of consensual sex is harmful to people living with HIV (including the many harms that flow from mandatory designation as a sex offender). Trying to adapt the law of sexual assault to such situations also raises concerns about damaging important principles in the law of sexual assault more generally.
3. If the criminal law is used, it should only be used as a measure of last resort, in rare cases where there was actual and intentional transmission of HIV. Changes to the law should clearly state that people are not criminals for engaging in activities that, according to the best scientific evidence, do not pose a significant risk of transmission (e.g. sex with a condom, sex with a low or suppressed viral load, oral sex), or when extenuating circumstances were present (e.g. a person did not disclose because they feared violence). The law should be clear that any conviction requires proof that a person purposely and actually transmitted HIV.
4. As with HIV, the criminal law should be strictly limited with respect to other sexually transmitted and bloodborne infections (STBBIs) and never apply in absence of actual and intentional transmission. While HIV has been singled out for prosecution, current criminal law applies to some other sexually transmitted infections as well. The solution to the stigmatizing, discriminatory treatment of people living with HIV in Canada is not to expand criminalization further to people with other STBBIs. Rather than exacerbate the harms already seen with overly broad criminalization of HIV, the solution is to properly limit the scope of the criminal law.
5. Avoid the creation of a new HIV- or STBBI-specific offence. Instead, amend the Criminal Code so that existing offences cannot be used to prosecute non-disclosure, exposure or transmission in absence of actual and intentional transmission. An HIV- or STBBI-specific offence would further stigmatize and discriminate against people living with HIV and STBBIs.
6. End the deportation of non-citizens following conviction. This policy and this practice are racist in their effect. A criminal conviction based on HIV/STBBI non-disclosure must not affect immigration status.
7. Review past convictions so that people living with HIV previously criminalized under these harmful and stigmatizing laws no longer must live with the label of being a criminal (and a sex offender in the case of most convictions to date).

Staying Healthy Behind the Walls: Hepatitis C and HIV in Prison

10 things to know about Hep C and HIV if you are in prison

The rates of hepatitis C (Hep C) and HIV are higher in prison than in the community.

You can do many things to protect yourself and others from Hep C and HIV while in prison.

Hep C is an infection that attacks your liver. HIV is an infection that makes it difficult for your body to fight infections.

Hep C or HIV can be passed when sharing equipment to inject or inhale drugs.

Hep C or HIV can be passed when getting a tattoo with equipment that hasn't been sterilized.

HIV can also be passed through sex. Sex is low risk for passing Hep C but the risk increases with condomless anal sex where blood, HIV and other STIs are present.

Getting tested for Hep C and HIV is the only way to know for sure if you have Hep C or HIV. You can get tested by making an appointment at healthcare with the nurse.

Hep C treatments can cure Hep C. There is no cure for HIV but there are treatments that can help a person stay healthy for a long time.

You can do many things to take care of your health if you have Hep C or HIV.

If you need support or have questions about Hep C or HIV, you can talk to a Peer Education and Counselling (PEC) worker or call PASAN (1-866-224-9978) or CATIE (1-800-263-1638).

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C (also known as Hep C, or HCV) is a virus that attacks the liver. If untreated over many years it can lead to liver damage, liver cancer and liver failure.

What is HIV?

HIV is a virus that makes it difficult for your body to fight infections. This means that you can get sick more easily and more often.

Why do Hep C and HIV matter if you are in prison?

The rates of Hep C and HIV are higher in prison than outside prison. Hep C is much more common in prison than HIV. That is why it is important to know how to protect yourself and others from these infections.

How do you get Hep C or HIV?

Hep C is passed from one person to another through blood. It may also be passed in semen and anal fluid.

HIV can be passed from one person to another through:

- blood
- cum (semen/sperm) or pre-cum
- vaginal fluid or anal fluid
- breast milk

For Hep C or HIV to be passed on, the blood or other body fluid that is infected has to get into the blood stream or body of another person.

Hep C is a strong virus that may be able to survive on a surface for up to six weeks. HIV can only survive on a surface for a few minutes. Both HIV and Hep C can survive inside a syringe for several weeks.

How Hep C and HIV pass from person to person

Hep C and HIV can pass from one person to another when:

- people share equipment for injection drugs (works)
- people share crack pipes

somebody gets a tattoo or piercing and the artist does not use new equipment, sterilize the tools or re-uses ink

- HIV is in cum, pre-cum, vaginal fluid and

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anal fluid. This means that HIV can pass from one person to another during unprotected sex. Condoms are one kind of protection. Also, people with HIV who take treatment and keep the virus suppressed do not pass HIV through sex. It is not very likely to get Hep C from sex, but the risk increases when blood, HIV or other STIs are present.

Hep C is different from HIV because Hep C can pass from one person to another when people share razors, toothbrushes or nail clippers. This is a less common way of passing Hep C.

Hep C and HIV can pass from a pregnant person to an unborn baby. This is also called perinatal transmission.

It is not clear if bleeding during fighting or using punching bags with blood on them can pass Hep C or HIV, or if re-using someone else's menstrual pad can pass Hep C or HIV. If it is possible, the chance of passing HIV or Hep C with any of these activities is likely very small.

Learn how to protect yourself and others from Hep C and HIV while in prison

In prison you don't have authorized access to new drug use equipment or to properly sterilized tattooing or piercing equipment. Still, there are many things you can do to protect yourself and others.

Most activities in prison do not put anyone at risk of getting Hep C or HIV

You CANNOT get Hep C or HIV from:

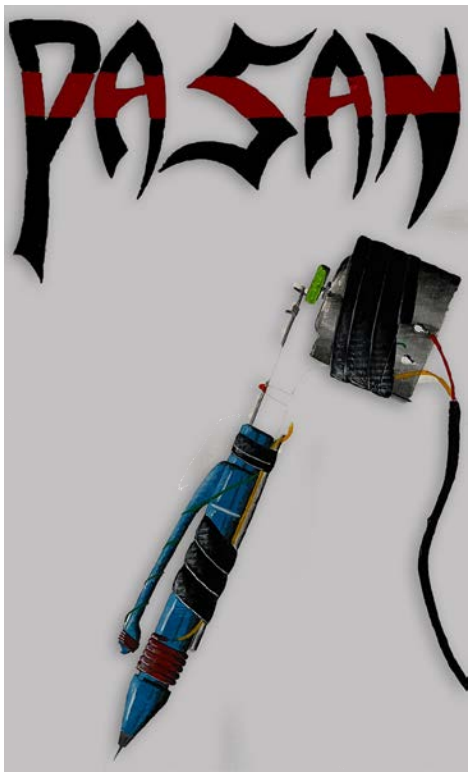
- sharing a cell or range
- using the same showers or toilets
- kissing or hugging
- shaking hands
- using the same forks, spoons, knives, cups or plates
- sharing cigarettes or joints
- coughing or sneezing
- sharing towels, soap or shampoo
- playing sports or cards

Can using bleach stop Hep C and HIV?

Using bleach to clean needles before sharing or re-using them is not an effective way to prevent passing Hep C or HIV. Using all new injection drug use equipment is the best way to not pass Hep C or HIV. If you can't get new injection drug use equipment, try to use some of the strategies from the section "Protect yourself and others while using drugs".

Protect yourself and others while using drugs

- If you can get new injection drug use equipment, use a new needle and syringe every time you inject, or keep your own needle for re-use.
- Use new cookers, water and swabs every time you inject, or keep your own supplies for re-use.



- If you don't have new injection drug use equipment, consider switching to drugs you can swallow, eat, smoke or snort, if you have this option.
- If you are inhaling drugs, use your own pipe and try not to share it.

If you are snorting drugs, use your own straw or rolled up piece of paper and try not to share it.

- People with HIV who take treatment and can keep their viral load undetectable (that is, too low to be measured by blood tests) have a much lower chance of passing on HIV when sharing drug use equipment. HIV treatment doesn't lower the chance of passing on or getting Hep C or other infections if they are present.

Protect yourself and others while fucking

- Use condoms every time you have vaginal or anal sex.
- Use water or silicone-based lubricant (avoid oil-based lubes because they can make condoms break).
- Avoid sharing sex toys, but if you do, cover them with a new condom and wash the toys with warm, soapy water after each use.
- Oral sex (blow jobs or going down on someone) is less likely to pass HIV than vaginal or anal sex.
- Even though the chance of passing HIV through oral sex is low you can choose to use condoms or dental dams when you have oral sex.
- If you or the person you are having sex with has HIV and the HIV viral load is undetectable (which means that HIV treatment keeps it so low that it cannot be measured), there is no chance of passing HIV during sex. For this strategy to work, a person needs to have two undetectable viral load tests in a row. It can take three to six months for a person to have an undetectable viral load after starting treatment.

Protect yourself and others while getting a tattoo or piercing

When getting a tattoo or piercing, prepare and bring your own equipment if you can. That way you can be sure that everything is new, including:

- the needle
- the ink
- the ink pot
- the rag
- If you don't have your own equipment, ask the tattoo artist to prepare the tattoo machine, ink and work area in front of you so you know it is new.

If you are getting multiple sessions on the same tattoo or think you will get another tattoo or piercing, save your equipment for the next time.

Protect your personal items

Try to avoid sharing razors, toothbrushes and nail clippers. There may be blood on them that is too small to see but could pass Hep C.

Protect yourself and your baby while pregnant and after the birth

If you have Hep C, the chance of passing it to your baby during pregnancy or delivery is low. It is OK to breastfeed your baby but if your nipples are cracked and bleeding, it is important to stop until they heal.

If you have HIV, it is possible to have an HIV-negative baby. You need to get proper HIV care and treatment during pregnancy and birth. It is also important not to breast feed your baby because HIV can be passed through breastfeeding.

If you have Hep C or HIV and are pregnant, tell your healthcare team about your status so they can give you the right care.

Get tested for Hep C or HIV

It is important to get tested for Hep C and HIV because the rates of these infections are higher in prison than outside.

The only way to find out if you have Hep C or HIV is to get tested. You can't tell if someone has HIV or Hep C by looking at them. Many people do not feel any symptoms after they get Hep C or HIV.

Some people may not want to get tested for Hep C or HIV because they are afraid to know the results or they don't want to be discriminated against. If you are close to getting out of prison, you may want to wait to get tested in the community as there are more options for care. The benefits of knowing your status are that you have the option of getting treated earlier and you can help to protect others from Hep C or HIV.

If you have any questions before or after you get tested, you can contact PASAN at 1-866-224-9978 or CATIE at 1-800-263-1638.

Hep C testing: It takes two different blood tests to find out if you have Hep C. A person who tests positive for both tests has Hep C.

HIV testing: The HIV test is a blood test. If you test positive that means you have HIV.

When to get tested for Hep C and HIV

It is a good idea to get tested for Hep C and HIV if you have ever had unprotected sex, shared drug use equipment or gotten a tattoo or piercing outside of a professional shop (such as in prison).

If you think you might have been exposed to Hep C or HIV recently, you can get tested right away. In these cases, you should also get another test three months later to know for sure whether or not you have been infected. This is because it can take some time for your body to produce the reaction that confirms the infection.

What if you find out you have Hep C or HIV?

If you've been diagnosed with Hep C or HIV, you may feel fear, anger, sadness and other emotions. It is very normal to feel this way. Getting support can help. If you feel comfortable, talk to a family member or friend about what you're going through. A lot of prisoners who have Hep C or used to have Hep C are open to sharing their experiences and supporting other prisoners with Hep C. You can also call PASAN or another community agency.

It's important to know that you can live well with Hep C and HIV. There is Hep C and HIV treatment available inside and outside of federal prisons. Treatment has a high chance of curing Hep C, and HIV treatment can't cure you but it can help you stay healthy for a long time.

Being HIV positive in prison can be hard Health information should be confidential, but in prison keeping your health information confidential can be more difficult than on the outside. Some people may think they have a right to know if their cellmate or someone on their range is HIV positive. Some people don't understand how HIV is transmitted and may not want to share a cell or range with someone who is HIV positive, even though you can't get HIV from sharing a cell or a range. Prisoners with HIV are sometimes discriminated against verbally, emotionally and/or physically. Also, there can be more barriers to health care in prison than in the community.

In spite of these challenges, you do have rights, whether you have HIV or Hep C.

These are your rights in prison related to your health care:

- You have the right to have your health information kept confidential even in prison.
- People do not have the right to know your HIV or Hep C status, even if they think they do.
- You have the right to not be discriminated against because of your HIV or Hep C status.
- You have the right to health care in prison, even though getting the health care you need doesn't always happen.

If you are living with Hep C or HIV in prison and you need support to advocate for your rights, you can call PASAN and they will support you or try to connect you with a community organization that supports prisoners in your area.

Living with Hep C and HIV: Staying Healthy

If you test positive for HIV or Hep C in prison, there are a lot of things you can do for yourself to stay healthy:

Learn about the treatment options for Hep C and HIV. There are treatments that can cure Hep C and HIV treatments that can keep you healthy for a long time.

It may be difficult to maintain a healthy diet in prison, but do the best you can. If you are having trouble eating enough calories, see if you can access nutritional supplement drinks like Ensure. If people ask why you are getting Ensure and you don't want to tell them you have Hep C or HIV you could say it's for another health issue like diabetes.

If you have Hep C, drink coffee. Many studies show that a few cups of coffee a day may reduce the risk of developing liver damage or liver cancer. If you like to put sugar in your coffee try not to use too much because that can be bad for your health.

Drink water. Try to get at least 7 hours of sleep. Exercise regularly – this can help to increase your appetite and manage stress. Get regular health check-ups.

Try to reduce your stress by talking to someone you trust or doing exercise or meditation. Even taking deep breaths may help you feel more calm.

Get the hepatitis A and B vaccines if you haven't gotten them already. Getting another infection can make your liver worse. Drinking alcohol is hard on the liver, so try to cut down or stop.

If you have HIV and are experiencing numbness, tingling, burning and pain in your toes, feet, lower legs, hands or arms this could be a health problem called neuropathy.

Here are a few things you can do:

- talk to someone in health care; they can help you figure out what is causing it limit the amount of walking you do
- avoid wearing tight-fitting shoes and socks
- avoid standing for long periods
- If you are taking Tylenol or Advil:
  - Some people take acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) to manage pain. It is important to be careful about how much you are taking because taking too much acetaminophen or ibuprofen can cause liver injury and even liver failure. Talk to your doctor about how much acetaminophen or ibuprofen is safe for you. Also, it can be risky to your health to combine alcohol and acetaminophen.
- It's a good idea to tell a practitioner you trust if you are taking any medications purchased from the canteen.

Hep C and HIV Treatment

Good treatments are available for both HIV and Hep C.

Hep C treatment has changed a lot. New treatments have high cure rates, few side effects and short treatment lengths. Hep C can be cured!

For people living with HIV, medical experts recommend starting treatment as soon as possible after being diagnosed with HIV, because people are often healthier when they do this. There are many HIV treatments that are easy to take and have few side effects.

If you want to know more about treatment, speak to the nurse or the institutional doctor or you can request to see a specialist.

You can also speak to other prisoners who know about Hep C or HIV or you can reach out for support by calling PASAN at 1-866-224-9978 or CATIE at 1-800-263-1638. Both organizations are able to accept calls from federal institutions.

Remember that you are not alone! PASAN is a great resource for support and information about your diagnosis and treatment options or if you just need to talk about what you're going through.

Illustration by Peter Collins

Canada's Justice System Is Anti-Indigenous: Reversing the Trend in Indigenous Incarceration

By Editorial Board, The McGill Daily, September 19, 2022

Perhaps the most glaring evidence of the persistence of colonialism and white supremacy in so-called Canada is the disproportionately high number of Indigenous peoples in Canadian prisons. In 1995, when Indigenous peoples represented only three per cent of Canada's total population, they made up 18 per cent of Canada's incarcerated population – a number which has only increased since. Last year, Indigenous people represented just four per cent of the country's population but made up 37 per cent of the population in its prisons. The Correctional Investigator of Canada, Ivan Zinger, said in a release, "[t]he Indigenization of Canada's prison population is nothing short of a national travesty."

Indigenous women, transgender, Two-Spirit people, and youth are among those most targeted by the justice system. Indigenous women make up half of the women serving sentences in federal prisons. In Saskatchewan, Indigenous women make up 98 per cent of the women in custody. In the years 2014 and 2015, Indigenous young people comprised a third of federal admissions to custody while making up just seven per cent of the general population.

Overrepresentation of Indigenous people in Canada's prisons originates from a justice system rooted in colonialism and white supremacy. Yet the Canadian government's "restorative justice" initiatives for Indigenous people in conflict with the law do not adequately acknowledge the underlying causes of the high incarceration rate. Instead, the pursuit of "restoration" with regards to Indigenous convicts is centred on rehabilitation after their sentencing. Without policies that acknowledge and attempt to repair the material conditions that drive high Indigenous incarceration rates, the Canadian government will fail to reverse the "Indigenization" of its prison populations. Systemic racism has kept Indigenous peoples in poverty and restricted their access to education, health care, and employment, and the disproportionate number of Indigenous people in the Canadian criminal justice system is a direct result of these conditions. Policing further perpetuates this cycle of incarceration as Indigenous people are often targeted by racial profiling. Once they're in interaction with the court system, Indigenous victims are less likely to be afforded alternative sentencing options and more likely to have their requests for assistance ignored.

The Supreme Court of Canada's landmark decision in R. v. Gladue (1999) – a case surrounding the sentencing of a young Indigenous woman who pleaded guilty to homicide – advised lower courts to make sentencing decisions considering the background of Indigenous offenders based on section 718.2 (e) of the Criminal Code. The Supreme Court stated that the disproportionate number of Indigenous people in the justice system reflects "what may fairly be termed a crisis in the Canadian criminal justice system." The Gladue decision also resulted in "Gladue rights" for all persons who self-identify as Indigenous. These rights allow for offenders who identify as Indigenous to prepare a "Gladue report," which may outline certain circumstances or ways they have been marginalized so that these may be considered in sentencing decisions.

Despite this supposed advancement, the Indigenous population in prisons has been growing by about 44 per cent since April 2010, while the non-Indigenous incarcerated population has decreased by 13.7 per cent during that same period. In practice, Gladue reports may further entrench anti-Indigenous racism in the justice system. According to the First Peoples Law, one "sinister result of Gladue Reports" is their use by Corrections Canada "as evidence of an Indigenous offender's likelihood to reoffend" and "as a basis to thus deny the offender early release," often forcing Indigenous offenders to serve longer sentences than non-Indigenous offenders with similar convictions.

Furthermore, Indigenous people are more frequently denied bail, which means they will be held in remand if they are an adult or pre-trial detention if they are a minor. They are also 33 per cent less likely to be acquitted than white people and 14 per cent more likely to plead or be found guilty; once convicted, Indigenous offenders are 30 per cent more likely to be imprisoned. Additionally, convicted Indigenous individuals are disproportionately sent to maximum security correctional facilities and are more likely to be placed in solitary confinement. As seen with Gladue, changes in the methods of sentencing have not provided an effective solution to the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the justice system, and can instead increase the harm of the carceral system. It is therefore crucial to work towards a non-carceral model of community safety as an alternative.

In R v. Ipeelee (2012), Canada's Supreme Court conceded that "Canadian courts have failed to take into account the unique circumstances of Aboriginal offenders that bear on the sentencing process." The Court also declared that lower courts should consider this in sentencing Indigenous offenders. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) called on all levels of government to "provide realistic alternatives to imprisonment for Aboriginal offenders" – such as the Indigenous Justice Program, which funds Indigenous-led community-based justice programs that use "restorative and traditional justice processes" rooted in traditional Indigenous cultures – and respond to the underlying causes of offending." Although such programs are by themselves inadequate in addressing the high incarceration rates of Indigenous people, community-based programs are an important first step to take as an alternative to carceral systems of justice while simultaneously addressing the material conditions of Indigenous communities.

It is essential to recognize the systemic racism and material conditions that have allowed for the number of Indigenous people in prisons to increase drastically. The Canadian government must work to end the socio-economic marginalization of Indigenous peoples, starting with the Calls to Action of the TRC that outline improvements to education, health care, employment opportunities, and child welfare in Indigenous communities. These recommendations provide a path to begin to alleviate the "social and political inequalities, intergenerational trauma, and economic barriers" caused by colonialism that leave Indigenous people at higher risk of involvement with the legal system. Support Indigenous-led initiatives focusing on offering support to communities and educating Indigenous youth on the criminal justice system such as First Nations Justice Strategy and Level's Indigenous Youth Outreach Program. Call on the Canadian government to take legislative action that will ensure fairness and equality for Indigenous peoples in the justice system. Support abolitionist movements that promote non-carceral models of justice, such as the Saskatchewan-Manitoba-Alberta Abolition Coalition, Defund the SPVM, and Solidarity Across Borders. Get involved with local organizations that support Montreal's Indigenous community, like the First Peoples Justice Center of Montreal, the Native Friendship Center of Montreal, and Resilience Montreal.

Nova Scotia joins B.C. in refusing to hold immigration detainees in provincial jails

By Nicholas Keung, Immigration Reporter, Toronto Star, September 21, 2022

A campaign to end detention of migrants in provincial jails is gaining momentum after a second province decided to stop holding immigration detainees for the federal government in its facilities.

Nova Scotia is joining British Columbia and has given Ottawa 12 months' notice to cancel its immigration detention agreement with the Canada Border Services Agency.

On Tuesday, the Nova Scotia Department of Justice confirmed that the province will no longer hold individuals who are detained solely for violating the immigration law when the contract ends on Aug. 8, 2023. Officials are working on a plan to wind down the practice.

"Across the Atlantic provinces and throughout the country, migrants and refugee claimants too frequently face abusive, open-ended immigration detention — especially traumatic for those fleeing war or persecution in search of a safe haven," said Julie Chamagne, executive director of the Halifax Refugee Clinic.

"Nova Scotia's decision is an important step forward for human rights. We call on the federal government to enact robust legislative and regulatory changes to stop rights violations in this system across the country."

Last year, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International launched the joint campaign to lobby provinces and territories to end the practice of holding immigration detainees alongside dangerous criminals in jails.

A campaign is currently underway in Ontario, which holds more than half of all immigration detainees in Canada.

In 2019-20, before the pandemic, more than 8,800 migrants were detained in Canada — 19 per cent in a provincial facility. In 2020-21, the number dropped to 1,605, with 40 per cent held in a provincial jail, as public health concerns amid the pandemic prompted the release of detainees who posed little risk to the public.

B.C. had the second most immigration detainees of all provinces: 1,470 in 2019 and 310 in 2020. Nova Scotia only held 14 inmates for the border agency in each of those two years.

"One is too many," said Chamagne. "There is no legal limit on immigration detention. So you don't know how long you're going to be held. And that really is contrary to our values as Canadians.

"I really hope it will have a domino effect."

Across the country, more than 70 correctional facilities are used to hold federal immigration detainees who are deemed a flight risk or a safety threat to the public or to themselves.

"As a result of Nova Scotia's decision, immigration detainees will soon be spared the corrosive, human rights-impairing conditions of the province's jails, where solitary confinement, mass lockdowns and other forms of routine institutional violence have only intensified since the start of the pandemic," said Sheila Wildeman, co-chair of East Coast Prison Justice Society and a Dalhousie University law professor.

"We call on the federal government to use the resources devoted to maintaining this brutal practice to instead invest in sustainable immigration settlement supports in the community."

The local campaign, initiated in April, mobilized a letter-writing campaign to Premier Tim Houston's Conservative government.

Border officials have invested in new and upgraded immigration holding centres, including new facilities in B.C. in 2020 and in Montreal this year, to reduce reliance on provincial jails.

A spokesperson for the border agency has said officials will continue to work with provincial partners to maintain community safety and the integrity of the immigration program and to ensure immigration detainees are treated in a dignified and humane way.

Documents show a pattern of human rights abuses against gender diverse prisoners

cont'd from pg 2

PRISONS ABUSING A LEGAL LOOPHOLE

When Erica Wilson was sentenced to 16 years in prison for drug trafficking in 2016, it did not come as much of a shock to her. Wilson had previously served time in Canada and California where she was incarcerated for drug-related crimes. She wasn't new to the business of selling drugs or serving time, but her experience this time around was dramatically different from her previous stints in jail.

For Wilson, things started changing in 2018 when she was incarcerated at Kent Institution in British Columbia. After decades of suppressing the idea that she might be transgender, Wilson says she decided to begin living her life as the woman she's always been deep down inside.

The changes were small, but significant. At 49 years old, Wilson was still exploring her gender identity and started to change her physical appearance to look more androgynous. She began by growing out her hair and shaping her eyebrows to appear more feminine. Eventually, with the help of an endocrinologist, Wilson started a course of hormone therapy and felt confident enough to request women's clothing from the prison.

Wilson's requests for women's clothing, personal items and access to health care professionals were all provided, after repeated requests. But when her lawyers asked to have her transferred to a women's institution, her request was denied. For Wilson's lawyers, this came as a surprise because in 2017, Correctional Service Canada (CSC) adopted an interim policy that outlines how federal prisons should manage offenders with gender identity or expression considerations.

Part of the policy states that "CSC has a duty to accommodate based on gender identity or expression, regardless of the person's anatomy (i.e. sex) or the gender marker on identification documents."

The policy however, includes a caveat; it goes on to say that requests related to gender identity or expression will be accommodated unless there are "overriding health or safety concerns which cannot be resolved."

Advocates have called for the caveat to be eliminated and say that it is an obscure decision-making process that allows CSC and prison staff to approve or deny requests at their leisure without taking into consideration an offender's human rights.

"CSC has a legal obligation to accommodate transgender people," Wilson's lawyer Alexandra Paquette told CTV News in a phone interview from her office in Montreal, Quebec.

Paquette, who has represented five other transgender clients in the Canadian prison system doesn't dismiss the potential for health or safety issues, but she

is skeptical of the frequency in which CSC uses this exception to the policy.

"With all the transgender clients I've represented, CSC has used that special exception," Paquette explains.

In a statement to CTV News, Marie Pier Lécuyer, a spokesperson for Correctional Service Canada said, "We take this issue extremely seriously. We are committed to ensuring that our institutions are safe and secure as we work to rehabilitate offenders and uphold public safety."

CSC says they cannot speak to specific cases due to their obligations under the Privacy Act, however, a spokesperson explained that each transfer request is assessed on a case-by-case basis.

"If an offender was previously denied and re-applies for a transfer at a later date, we always re-assess each request to take into account any circumstances that may have changed," the spokesperson added.

CTV News has obtained a copy of Erica Wilson's transfer request. According to the assessment, Wilson's risk factors include: "negative peers, gang affiliations, entrenched criminal values and poor problem solving and decision-making skills."

It goes on to say that if Wilson were to be transferred to a woman's institution, "there would be cause for concern for the psychological safety of the current population at EIFW [Edmonton Institution for Women]. Wilson expresses as a man and has no foreseeable plans to alter his [sic] appearance in order to express as a woman once at EIFW. While it is not necessary for an individual to express as their gender, her masculine appearance and deportment pose an imminent risk to the psychological safety of a segment of the population from EIFW."

The assessment, which was completed in March 2021, also raised concerns about Wilson's inappropriateness with female staff at the prison and states that she has "manipulative behaviours."

Wilson has made it known that she began taking hormones in 2018 and has consulted with a psychologist and endocrinologist regarding her physical transition. She wears women's clothing and prefers to wear her hair pushed back, sitting just a few inches below her shoulders. Regardless of these changes, Wilson and her lawyers maintain that it is within her right to be transferred to a women's institution and stress that any delay would continue to put her at-risk.

Throughout the six years that Wilson has been incarcerated she says correctional officers have openly called her a "t****y" or "f****t" in front of a cohort of 60 other inmates and that these negative interactions with prison staff have raised tensions and motivated other inmates to make disparaging remarks towards her.

Documents show that Wilson was slashed in the face by another inmate with a homemade weapon at Kent Institution in November 2018 and also detailed another instance where she was attacked and suffered a black-eye in October 2020.

Wilson explains that she has tried speaking with her lawyers to rectify these situations, but will often refrain from making any formal complaints due to a fear of retaliation from correctional officers and other prisoners.

"I'd rather be locked in a cell for 24 hours a day to deal with my journey on my own without any abuse or verbal attacks," Wilson told CTV News in a phone interview from Saskatchewan Penitentiary. "It's already scary enough going through this on my own. I should be able to be myself, but I'm afraid and that's terrible."

According to CSC, currently less than 1 per cent of offenders in federal custody identify as having what the service deems "gender considerations." Despite this small population size, others have similar stories of abuse and mistreatment at the hands of prison staff, which some prisoners' rights advocates say is rooted in a toxic prison culture.

A TOXIC CULTURE AMONG PRISON STAFF

Towards the end of May 2021, Erin Gear received a troubling phone call that sent her into a state of panic late one afternoon.

"They broke my arm," a voice cried out. "The guards broke my arm."

At the other end of the phone was Gear's partner, Nick Dinardo, who at the time was incarcerated at Port-Cartier Institution in Quebec.

Through gritted teeth, Dinardo explained that they had had a mental health crisis the night before, and in the midst of it all they were violently slammed to the ground by correctional officers.

As they were pinned against the cold prison floor, Dinardo says the guards proceeded to hit them repeatedly before twisting and fracturing a fragment of their elbow.

"I just felt myself getting hit in the head and stuff and I got my arm pulled up my back like they're gonna handcuff me and it was getting bent in all these different ways until eventually they stopped, lifted me up and put me in my cell," Dinardo told CTV News in a phone interview from Millhaven Institution for men in Bath, Ont., where they are currently incarcerated.

"My whole arm was black – like blackish-purple – from the injury," they lamented. "After eight days a nurse finally looked at my arm, and she's like 'yeah, you definitely need to go for X-rays.'"

In a statement to CTV News, CSC disputed this claim stating: "Mx. Dinardo was seen and evaluated by professional health services immediately after an incident in May 2021, and provided ongoing care. The privacy of a patient prevents us from being able to disclose any medical information."

In the weeks that followed, Dinardo, a 29-year-old two-spirit person from Piapot First Nation in Saskatchewan, decided to file what would become their second complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission over the abuse and mistreatment they say they have experienced throughout their incarceration.

According to the complaint, Dinardo began serving their third federal prison sentence in November 2018. They have a history of childhood trauma, including sexual abuse and as a result of these experiences they have developed post-traumatic stress disorder, in addition to other mental health issues.

Dinardo first came into federal custody at the young age of 18, after spending six years in juvenile detention. Throughout this time they say the abuse they've experienced has only persisted.

"I have seen and experienced a lot of violence, including being assaulted many times by other prisoners," Dinardo wrote in the complaint. "Guards have used force against me a lot. CSC has not meaningfully helped me with or for the most part even acknowledged the trauma of these experiences."

They went on to explain that CSC "fails to address my mental health needs and responds to my emotional distress with violence and isolation, which then exacerbates my suffering [...] the distress I feel as a result is compounded by the additional violence, harassment, indignity and lack of safety I have experienced more recently as a result of my gender identity and my placement in institutions designated for men."

"As a result of policies that do not adequately protect the safety and dignity of gender diverse prisoners and a culture of abuse and antagonism by staff, I am profoundly unsafe," they added.

Dinardo's complaints are currently being reviewed by the Canadian Human Rights Commission and a decision is expected later this year.

In a statement provided to CTV News, CSC admits the officers misjudged the situation and that Dinardo posed no particular threat.

An internal investigation later found that prison guards used excessive force that was not proportional to the situation, including unauthorized strikes and kicks, which breached several laws and policies.

Despite these findings – which include video footage of the altercation – crown prosecutors have declined to pursue charges against the officers involved. But advocates agree that the experiences Dinardo describes are systemic issues that are deep-rooted.

"One of the things that we hear about the most when we go into the prisons, is issues around the way that staff treat the prisoners," Emilie Coyle, executive director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, told CTV News. "There just seems to be a really toxic culture."

Coyle's organization works to identify issues affecting women, girls and gender diverse people in the justice system and lobbies for legislative changes. She notes that tensions within these institutions can reach a point where the relationship between prisoners and correctional officers becomes eroded and that it can lead to violent treatment.

"Just like in the general population, transphobia exists, and if you couple that with a power imbalance in the prison, it can be really, really detrimental to a person's well-being both mentally and physically," she explains. "We're dealing with a binary prison system that hasn't caught up to gender considerations."

As CSC points out, offenders have a number of avenues to report inappropriate behaviour and file grievances whether they are a victim or a witness, but advocates say that individual remedies rarely lead to systemic changes that benefit more than one person at a time.

SWEEPING IT UNDER THE RUG

To this day, when Moka Dawkins hears people shouting, her mind races back to the years she spent at the Toronto South Detention Centre (TSDC) where fighting, yelling and mistreatment were a part of daily life.

Burned into her memory is one afternoon in May 2018 when a verbal exchange commenced between inmates and prison staff. According to court documents, correctional officers began trading insults with prisoners before turning their attention to Dawkins, a transgender woman who was serving an eight-year sentence for manslaughter.

She says midway through the confrontation prison staff started pointing at her and laughing saying "look at that thing" among other slurs and verbal taunts.

Days later Dawkins filed a grievance with the prison, but by that point she said the situation had become too much to handle, and she no longer felt safe.

With the help of her lawyers she was able to file a complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal where she detailed multiple allegations of discrimination based on her sense of gender and the way she chose to express it while she was incarcerated at the TSDC.

In response, the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Ontario says they investigated the incident and as a result "two correctional officers were disciplined." While the nature of their punishment was not specified, documents show that the officers were required to review the ministry's policies for managing gender diverse people and complete an e-learning module about transgender perspectives.

Months later in Oct. 2018, the Deputy Superintendent of Operations at TSDC, Joyliz Nassanga-Sessanga offered Dawkins an apology and assured her that she would not be treated like that again by prison staff.

CTV News has made multiple attempts to reach Nassanga-Sessanga, but calls have not been returned.

For Dawkins, her mistreatment by correctional officers was just the tip of the iceberg. Throughout her four years of incarceration she endured more than a dozen physical attacks in two different Toronto men's jails, leaving her with cuts, bruises and a scar under her bottom lip.

She says these incidents illustrate how the justice system fails to protect transgender prisoners from violence and discrimination.

"The harassment was an everyday thing from both guards and other inmates," Dawkins told CTV News in a phone interview. "I always had to watch my back and look over my shoulder. I got into a few incidents where other inmates would just run up and fight me spontaneously with no issue, no prior argument, nothing."

"It was a violent and traumatizing experience," she added.

FORMER TRC CHAIR CRITICIZES LIBERAL BILL TO END SOME MANDATORY MINIMUM SENTENCES

By Brett Forester, CBC News, Oct. 20th, 2022

The Trudeau government's proposed legislation aimed in part at reducing the mass imprisonment of Indigenous people in Canada misses the mark, Murray Sinclair said Thursday.

The former Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) chair and retired senator told the Senate legal committee studying Bill C-5 that it "does not go nearly far enough" as a strategy to reduce the overincarceration of Indigenous and Black offenders.

The bill, if passed, would eliminate about one third of the country's mandatory minimum penalties, provisions in the criminal code imposing compulsory prison time for those convicted of certain offences, Sinclair explained.

"The government has provided no data to justify a piecemeal approach to the repeal of mandatory minimum sentences," he said, "nor have they explained why they have rejected TRC Call to Action 32."

The TRC's 2015 final report urged federal and provincial governments to commit to eliminating the overrepresentation of Indigenous offenders behind bars over the following decade in Call to Action 30.

In Call to Action 32, the TRC urged the federal government to amend the criminal code so judges, after weighing all the evidence, can depart from mandatory minimums by imposing discretionary sentences.

By not putting this statutory power in judges' hands, Sinclair said the Liberal bill fails to implement that particular call to action.

"I urge the government to reconsider and fully implement Call to Action 32," Sinclair said. "We need to move away from a simplistic, punitive, one-size-fits all response, and we need to trust and allow our judges to do the job they have been appointed to do."

The Harper government introduced many mandatory minimum sentences into Canadian law as part of a tough-on-crime agenda. Some, such as mandatory minimum gun crime penalties, have been deemed unconstitutional by the country's highest court.

When introducing C-5, Justice Minister David Lametti touted it as a set of reforms that would immediately address overincarceration.

Advocates for their repeal, such as Independent Sen. Kim Pate, have argued these laws excessively punish Indigenous people, and women in particular.

Indigenous women make up 50 per cent of the female federal prison population, according to Correctional Investigator Ivan Zinger, Canada's prison ombud.

Indigenous men and women combined comprise 32 per cent of the penitentiary population, Zinger said in a release last year, calling the numbers "unconscionable."

SENTENCES

Before the hearing, Pate told CBC News passing C-5 unamended would risk failing to achieve the bill's desired effect.

“This risk is that we will continue to see the exponential increase in the numbers of Indigenous people in prison as well as those of African descent, and most especially we will continue to see the trajectory of the incarceration rate of Indigenous women skyrocketing," she said.

The bill passed in the House of Commons but not without opposition from Conservatives.

Ontario Tory MP Michael Barrett slammed the proposed reforms during last year's House debates as a "criminal-first agenda" and "soft-on-crime approach" that will keep violent offenders out of prison.

Pate argues the evidence backs her and Sinclair's position.

"That kind of political rhetoric is all aimed at inflaming public opinion, not looking at the evidence and determining what we actually need to address," she said.

"All of the evidence shows that in fact tailoring sentences, ensuring that accountability exists, but tailoring sentences to meet the circumstances is far more effective."

Senators also heard from other legal and policing experts following Sinclair.

Sarah Nieman, legal counsel with the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), threw her support behind the proposed amendment.

"Many of the Indigenous women coming out of federal prisons today are not coming out whole, healed or restored," Nieman testified.

"The criminal justice system is failing them and we ask you to do your part in remedying that harm."

Mussell, Fayter and Piché: Stop preventing people in Ontario jails from voting in local elections

An Opinion piece By Linda Mussell, Rachel Fayter, Justin Piché, The Ottawa Citizen

There seems to be no plan in Ottawa to facilitate voting for imprisoned people in the upcoming municipal election. As a result, many Indigenous people, Black people, disabled people, and people living in poverty — who are imprisoned at high rates — will experience voting disenfranchisement this October.

In recent days, Premier Doug Ford has said he plans to introduce legislation giving more authority to the mayors of Toronto and Ottawa in an effort to accelerate municipal decision-making in Ontario’s two largest cities. The premier has also suggested that these powers could eventually be extended to other municipalities.

While the possibility of such a move — which would disempower municipal councillors and erode local voices — has received considerable attention, the disenfranchisement of thousands of imprisoned people who are prohibited by law or in practice from voting in municipal elections in the province has largely been ignored.

With municipal elections set for Oct. 24, action is needed to repeal section 17(3)1 of the Municipal Elections Act to ensure more residents of Ontario get their say on housing, public health, social and emergency services, transit, and other matters that impact them, their loved ones and communities. Under this section, “A person who is serving a sentence of imprisonment in a penal or correctional institution” is prohibited from voting. That said, people in pre-trial detention who are awaiting their day in court — roughly three-quarters of imprisoned people in Ontario — also appear to be prohibited from municipal election voting even though they are technically eligible to vote.

When we contacted City of Ottawa officials to find out how they were facilitating voting for people held in pre-trial detention in institutions such as the Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre, they referred us to the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs. When we contacted the ministry, it referred us back to the city. The lack of an answer to our question tells us there is no plan to facilitate voting for imprisoned people in Ontario’s upcoming municipal elections. As a result, thousands of people — including Indigenous peoples, Black people, disabled people, and people living in poverty who are imprisoned at high rates — will experience voting disenfranchisement this October.

This municipal voting prohibition for sentenced prisoners, and other barriers to voting for imprisoned people in the province, exist despite a 2002 decision from the Supreme Court of Canada, which ruled that people who are imprisoned have the right to vote in federal and provincial elections under section 3 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. There is no good reason for the current municipal election voting ban in Ontario, and other provinces and territories in Canada — with few exceptions such as Nova Scotia — permit people who are imprisoned to vote.

Rachel Fayter, former prisoner, advocate and doctoral candidate, explains, “there are already so many barriers for criminalized and imprisoned people to engage with and be a part of the community, with many of us being denied basic human rights. Even when prisoners are legally entitled to vote, this process is not often facilitated by carceral institutions. During my four years of incarceration in both provincial and federal institutions in Ontario, I was able to vote in a federal election but was denied my democratic rights in a provincial election due to lack of information and lockdowns in prison. I was unable to vote in a municipal election.

“The overwhelming majority of prisoners in Canada eventually return to the community, and we are more likely to succeed if we are welcomed as full participants rather than shunned by society.”

While there is plenty of evidence demonstrating that inclusion along the lines discussed above enhances community safety and well-being, there is no such evidence that voting disenfranchisement contributes to our collective safety and well-being. In Ontario, “rehabilitation” and “reintegration” of criminalized people as full members of society is a core pillar of the vision to “transform corrections” — an empty promise with disfranchisement. The choice is clear: amend the Municipal Elections Act to allow imprisoned people in the province to vote in the upcoming municipal elections.

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More people may join ongoing hunger strike at Sask. women's jail, advocate says | CBC News

By Theresa Kliem, Nov. 5th, 2022

A woman at a jail in Prince Albert, Sask., is continuing her eight-week hunger strike to protest the treatment of incarcerated people there, according to an advocate for inmates.

Faith Eagle is one of three women at Pine Grove Correctional Centre refusing to eat, and more inmates in Canadian institutions might follow, according to Sherri Maier, who advocates for people in custody and founded the support group Beyond Prison Walls Canada.

Maier said she has heard about other people at facilities across the country who plan to join the hunger strike this weekend, including at Regina Correctional Centre and at the Atlantic Institution in Renous, N.B.

"It sounds like we might be able to have some prisoners out in Ontario jails ... hopefully joining in, too," she said. "And then there's people in the community."

Maier plans to be one of them, while another woman incarcerated at the Edmonton Institution For Women wants to start a ceremonial fast this weekend, the advocate said.

Maier previously said she was contacted by Eagle, who is in custody at the women's jail while she waits for a trial date, with concerns about alleged racism from some guards at Pine Grove, a lack of timely access to medical attention and the quality of their drinking water.

Monday will mark Week 8 of Eagle's strike, Maier said.
"She feels there's a lot of prejudice and discrimination there against the Indigenous women," said Maier.

"Medical care has always been a problem in prisons, whether it's ... federal, provincial. This has always been a problem, especially mental health."

Province aware of Pine Grove hunger strike

Maier said she's also been told there is a woman with tuberculosis on Eagle's unit who is allegedly not in quarantine.

A spokesperson with the province's Ministry of Justice said they could not comment on the personal health matters of inmates.

However, the spokesperson confirmed in an email on Thursday that three inmates are participating in a "tray refusal" at the provincial jail.

The striking women are accepting liquids, including juice and nutritional drinks, and receive "continued medical supervision," including doctor checkups, according to the email.

The spokesperson said the ministry is monitoring the situation to ensure health and safety of the participating inmates."

The Saskatoon Tribal Council confirmed that its director of justice, Crystal LaPlante, went to Pine Grove Correctional Centre earlier this week.

Eagle appreciated the opportunity to speak with an Indigenous woman about her concerns, said Mark Arcand, the council's tribal chief.

"Faith has some expectations and some outcomes that we think are reasonable, and some might not be achievable," he said.

"We understand it is a jail, there are rules and regulations," said Arcand.

"If we have to change the system, what does that look like, and what are those systems that need to be changed so there's good outcomes and results?"

In October, the province and the tribal council announced a new pilot program which will provide the council with funding for a project to reintegrate formerly incarcerated women into the community.

On Thursday, Arcand said the tribal council will go back to Pine Grove for a followup visit.

'Built on systemic racism'

Sydney Wouters has also been monitoring the situation at Pine Grove as part of her role as a prison in-reach service worker and acting co-executive director for the Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan — a non-profit organization that supports women who have been incarcerated.

Wouters said her organization last spoke with Eagle two weeks ago at the jail in Prince Albert.

"The concerns that I have been hearing are revolving primarily around their treatment by staff, especially the racism that Indigenous women are facing in Pine Grove," said Wouters.

"This is something that has been going on for a long time.... Our justice system is built on systemic racism. There's an overrepresentation of Indigenous people within the justice system."

According to a new report from Ivan Zinger, the country's top prison watchdog, Canada has made scant progress in addressing the overrepresentation of Black and Indigenous people in prisons, with some facing even worse conditions than they did a decade ago.

Wouters said she has also been speaking with administrators at the facility and asked that they make complaint forms readily available, rather than requiring inmates to ask staff for them.

She was told the director of programs and the cultural advisor would sit down with Eagle to talk about her concerns on Thursday, but Wouters said Friday morning she hadn't heard anything more about the meeting.

"They know that there's issues ... specifically with treatment of the women," said Wouters.

Drinking water tested

The quality of drinking water was another concern for the inmates participating in the hunger strike.

Eagle said last month the water smelled and tasted so bad she was boiling it, Maier said on Thursday.

According to the provincial Ministry of SaskBuilds and Procurement, which manages and maintains provincial government buildings, the water at Pine Grove was tested and sent to a Saskatchewan Research Council lab for analysis on Oct. 5.

A total of 30 tests were done, and officials on-site did not detect any unusual odour or taste in the water, the ministry said in an email to CBC on Friday.

Tests in the inmate areas "met the government of Canada's standards for drinking water quality," the spokesperson said, while a test in a staff area "where the water is rarely used was slightly above the acceptable level for copper."

That line has since been flushed, according to the ministry.

Lack of cultural programming

Both Maier and Wouters also say the women in the facility are also hoping for more access to cultural programming and support.

"How are we supposed to help them make the changes in their lives so that they don't end up back in prison following their release without offering them proper programming?" said Wouters.

"That's what we're seeing in the community as well, is lack of programming so that people don't have to be in jail."

Maier said during a recent "mass move" in the jail, Eagle was placed into a high security unit.

A mass move involves inmates being moved away from their current unit, and potentially locked down, to defuse escalating movements, the advocate said.

"[Eagle] did say they're locked up 14 hours a day [in the high security unit] and it's 100 per cent Indigenous."

When asked about the "mass move" and whether it involved women on hunger strike, the government spokesperson said they could not talk specifics about planned lockdowns, citing

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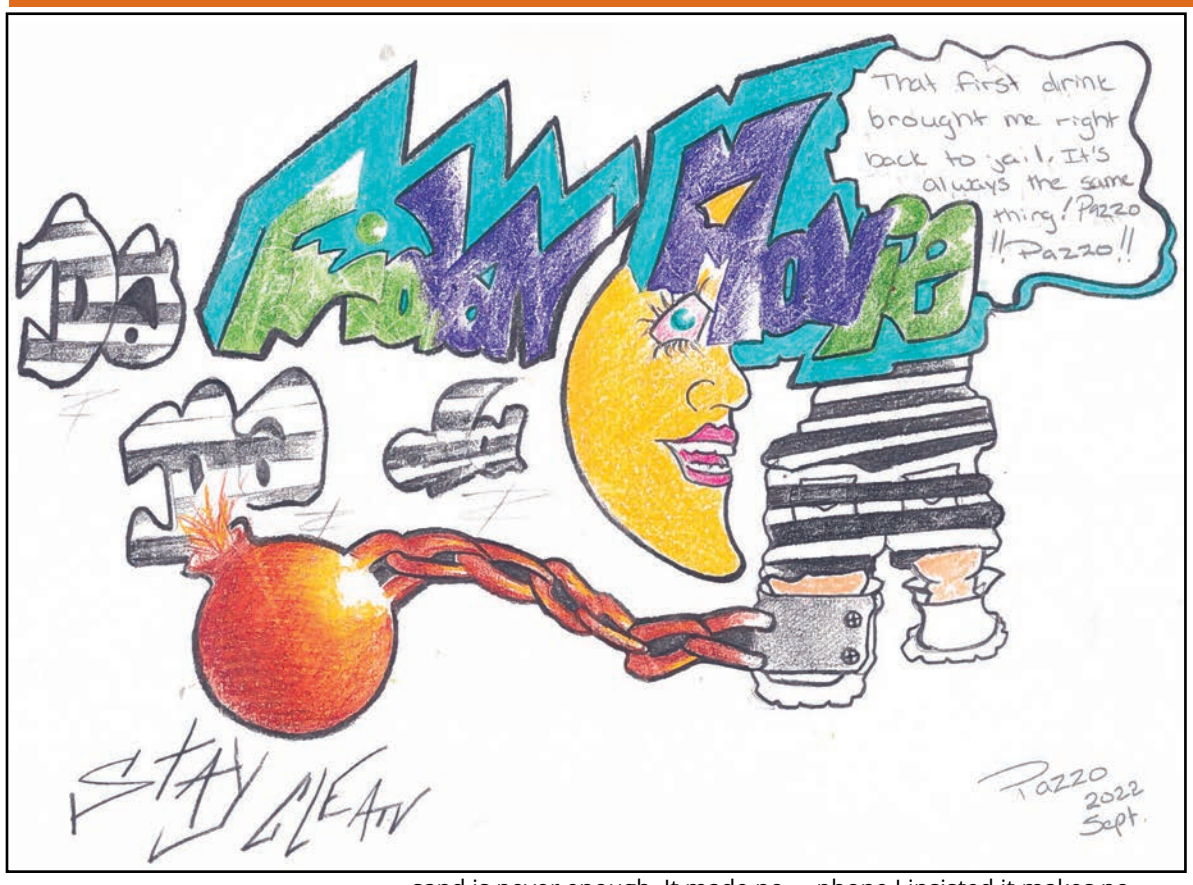

My Tiny Story

By Pazzo

I honestly have had enough of using mood altering substances. While being incarcerated, all them times you would think I learned something. Be foolish, stubborn and intimidated for one reason or other I never was able to put my foot down on my addiction and move forward.

Anything more than once in jail is too much and did my addiction listen? No! I woke up hungover, confused, angry and too weak to get high or draw. Every time I get myself behind these walls I go scared straight. No I won't this time I'm not using again. I don't care, even if hell freezes over. Not once in the early stage of my addiction was I serious about not using again, just for today, or One is too many and one thousand is never enough. It made no sense.

Today at the perfect age of 54 turning 100 some days complaining about aches and pains. Other days feeling like an athlete. I'm all-in, hands down, I quit. Yes, I'm happy to say this is the hardest earned 2 months coming up. I truly believe that I have earned these months towards my sobriety! And more to come.

I hear the "Rocky" movie anthem playing in the background. Friends and family screaming, my two cousins holding my sister.

Pazzo! Pazzo!

You said that before, I laughed so hard while on the phone. A laugh so powerful that it opened my thinking channels. This laugh wasn't a forceful, disrespectful laugh. It was, "The Man, God"!

So while we still spoke on the phone I insisted it makes no sense for a grown man to diss himself/or lie to God that I don't want his help to not use again. So I asked my cousin to believe me and stop asking/telling me if I really meant what I said.

With all my heart I apologize to all the people in and out of my life that I've hurt, lied to, and didn't try hard enough all these years.

I ask for my higher power to help me stay clean and sober just for another day.

All I got is another day, if not that I ask for another minute to give me enough time to think and move forward without issues and hostility. All I got is today and all I want is that minute to push forward so I can have the same, if not a better day tomorrow. Let me live one day at a time.

CONT'D FROM PG 7

security reasons.

Maier said she last talked with Eagle earlier this week, and was told she has been able to see an elder since she came to the new unit.

"Nobody ever wakes up and says, 'Hey, I want to go to jail today,'" said Maier. "They are still human."

Most of the people she works with "know that they need to be there," said Maier.

"They call it a legal obligation. They just want to serve their time with dignity."

Procurement, which manages and maintains provincial government buildings, the water at Pine Grove was tested and sent to a Saskatchewan Research Council lab for analysis on Oct. 5.

A total of 30 tests were done, and officials on-site did not detect any unusual odour or taste in the water, the ministry said in an email to CBC on Friday.

Tests in the inmate areas "met the government of Canada's standards for drinking water quality," the spokesperson said, while a test in a staff area "where the water is rarely used was slightly above the acceptable level for copper."

That line has since been flushed, according to the ministry.

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Screwed Up: Penitentiary Poetry

Screwed Up: Penitentiary Poetry (released Dec. 23, 2021, on Amazon.com) is a brand-new book written exclusively by men currently serving life sentences in Canada and is the first in a new series. This book has given its authors and artists an opportunity to let their talents, feelings, and art be showcased. Readers found the concept of the book unique and intriguing and provided a lot of positive feedback.

This collection is our outlet to voice our emotions, while living in a space where voicing our emotions may not be so welcome. This book is also a platform to share our work with the hope that people may notice, read, connect, and enjoy it.

Love, please forgive me
I've let you down in the past,
For I was young and foolish,
Now, I need something that will last.
-Excerpt from One More Chance, by W.T.W., published in Screwed Up: Penitentiary Poetry

Be A Part of Screwed Up: Penitentiary Poetry 2
Poetry Submissions Wanted

Submissions* for the second book in the Screwed Up series are now being accepted.

We are primarily looking for poetry submissions, written exclusively by federal inmates, complimented with art and stories about each author.

Submissions must be addressed to:
JUST RELEASED PUBLISHING INC.
PO BOX 60005
LONDON RPO POTTERSBURG, ON.
N5W 0B7

Screwed Up: Penitentiary Poetry 2 is being expanded beyond just poetry, to include drawings, and non-fictional stories by the authors of the poetry. According to the positive feedback from the first book, readers are interested in convicts' insight; their emotional, physical, and psychological journey through the prison system; how they've changed from someone committing a serious crime into the person they are now; etc... This expanded format allows each author to connect with the reader and have a stronger voice, while creating a better reading experience.

Submissions should include:
• Your name/ pen name you'd like published
• Year and location the work was done
• Any additional relevant details about the poetry, art, and stories
• Your name and return address

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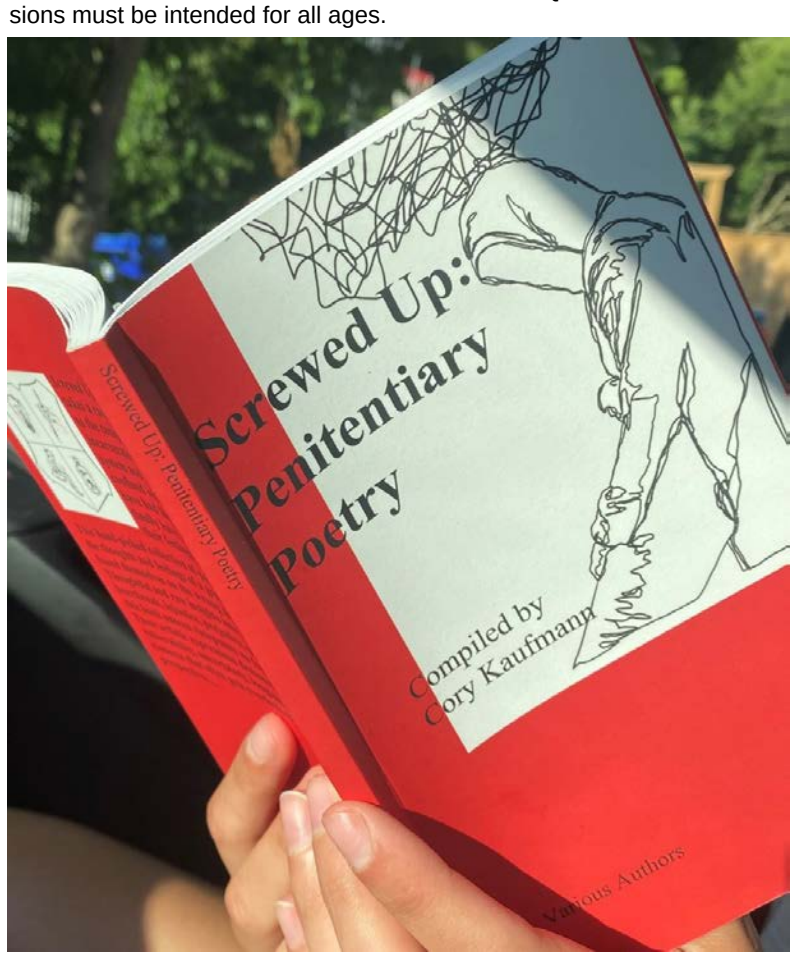

Hollow Man

By Mark Zammit

I have never felt so hollow. I feel like a shell of a man, like my skull is an empty maraca. A guitar with no strings, a broken instrument basically, a hollow man. My body feels like an empty vessel, a ship that is supposed to carry precious cargo but is pulling into docks, empty below, hollow! I have never felt this hollow, so hollow in my life. Between depression, anxiety, my night terrors, my epilepsy seizures that are causing me even more mobility issues, my already existing mobility issues, my PTSD, auditory and visual hallucinations and the blood infection (Buergers Disease) that's going to cause the amputation of my right arm, my blackouts and now my new post-surgery mini-seizures or body tremors that happen 10 to 17 times a day, oh yes dear readers, I am for sure one lonely ass "Hollow Man".

What is hollow? For me, hollow means a shell, like a shell of a man. I feel that I am and have nothing. I have no self-worth, self-pride and nor do I care about actual life or living. The people I am in love with are out of my reach in different ways, regardless, all three don't know how I feel anyhow.

I am so tired of opening my eyes in the morning and living this life of what feels like soulless boredom, misery and shame because 3 pedophiles that got away with using me as a sex doll by the time I was 14 years old. From 10 to 14, when most kids were celebrating birthdays and Christmas' with families and Santa, I was hiding shit, blood, and cum on my hands (my abuse was not familial). To this day I can still smell their sweat, cologne, and breath.

So to all the lookie loos, loss prevention officers, police officers or just Richie Rich snobs that see me in their store or on the subway or on their street looking for cans or thrown out clothing etc., etc. Before you judge me, call the police or threaten to, threaten me with a bat, accuse me of shoplifting, etc., etc... Just know I may be hungry or cold or on my way somewhere. I am a good person. I've done charity events for Sick Kids Hospital and Children's Aids in the past and currently I "AM" an advocate for LGBTQ2S+ rights, prison reform, homeless reform, against racism... I've spoke at Osgoode Hall, on Montreal radio, wrote articles for PASAN and Ottawa University, Guelph University, and I've been interviewed by the Toronto Star twice.

If you were to see me dirty, strung out and digging through your garbage on your expensive street, that is my mental health got the best of me and the demons from my past (Scout Leader, his drug dealer, Catholic Priest) that raped me for 4 years has come back to haunt me. So please don't judge me and push me further to my noose.

The moral of this article is: you don't know what a person is dealing with or what happened to them to get them to where they are. Don't judge someone by their clothes or where they live or their mental state. Offer help or refer them to someone that can, because words hurt forever and if one of those people decide to take their own life, your words may have been the words that tightened the noose around their neck, and that's not your choice to do so.

My life was robbed from me at 10 years old, I did not deserve that. Please help me put it back together.

A True Brother

By A Lifer

Some say a brother is two guys with the same parents, or two men of faith who call each other brother, or maybe blood brother, or biker brother, or army brothers. A brother is someone who is there for you through thick and thin, someone who has your back no matter what. They are hard to come by. However, I do have one of those brothers, I can count on him no matter what and we go back a lot of years. We did lose touch for a bit but somehow we found each other again and we are closer than ever now. We work out and train together and push each other, play music in a two person band, and do a lot of walking and talking. We are always there for each other, we are true brothers, and when times get tough we can always depend on each other. I may not always tell him how much I thank God he is there whenever I need him and I hope he knows I'm there for him too, right to the end. Thank you for everything and always being there for me, brother, you know who you are.

Life In Camp

Well, almost 29 years later I finally got to camp, what a treat this is. No yelling, no loud music, cook all your own food, a real bed too, not sleeping on a steel plate. And the freedom. Wow, you cannot believe it. There are some weird rules but hell, I can live with them. The staff are all mostly good, they don't bug you at all, everything is on the honour system. Every now and then we will get a medium or max staff member and they forget they are in a camp so that can sometimes cause a problem but it does get straightened out and other staff will put them in their place. There are a lot of different kinds of inmates here, they will drop a dime on you in a heartbeat. And there are a lot of guys that shouldn't be here because they have not put in the time or fixed their behaviour. And ordering things here, it's crazy, you would think things would be easier, not harder. You only get mail twice a week, what kind of BS is that? Workplace bosses need to realize that if they have "lifers" working for them, they need to be given first choice at jobs. A lifer would respect all tools and equipment more than a short timer because they're there for the long haul – they will take care of everything so it lasts. Short timers don't give a shit, they're very rough on things and if you tell them to be careful, they just laugh and say it's not their shit so who cares. I sometimes ask if the bosses notice these little things or not, I feel I have a good boss and I hope he sees these little things. There are things that go on here and I just shake my head at them because I never thought I would be in jail. In addition, you need to be careful of every word you say because someone might file a complaint against you because they misunderstood what you said. But other than that, camp cupcake is a great place to do time.

Congrats to our longtime Cell Count contributor Zakaria, who was recently granted parole after 17 years inside! Here
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A Gun, A Horse, and a Gold Coin

By Zakaria Amara

According to a friend of mine who has spent 30 years inside, in the old days, legislation mandated that every convict is entitled to a gun, a horse, and a gold coin upon release. At some point in the 1900s, this practice was abandoned but the legislation itself was never abrogated from the law books; which is why in the 1990s a convict who was aware of this ancient practice demanded a gun, a horse, and a gold coin upon his release. His jailers laughed at him so he took them to court and won. However, due to having a weapons ban he couldn't keep a gun, and due to lack of horse accommodations at his half-way house he couldn't keep the horse. All he got in the end was a gold coin and a secure place in the Convicts' Hall of Fame.

The End.

Canadian Tortured Prisoner

By Inmate X (Prisoner since 1991)

I am a native inmate who has been forced to do over 30 years in prison even though the number for parole eligibility was less than half of that number…

But; prisoners who are given a life sentence with a parole eligibility date (number) are supposed to be released on that date, NOT held in captivity for another 20, 30 or 40 years!; just because their P.O. might have a personal hate on for them.

C.S.C. – will tell you that "these inmates" are dangerous… and have assaulted, stabbed, or murdered other inmates and that's why we've held them so long!

But what about an inmate who hasn't committed any of these offences? Well, that's when C.S.C. just makes up "problems" such as the inmate is a "problem inmate" who has argued with staff (because C.S.C. staff are never wrong) and, of course, would never just abuse an inmate… right? OR maybe the inmate hasn't finished his schooling… is that a good enough reason? Or maybe another hundred "piddelly-butt" reasons that will suffice, in lieu of any real reasons.

Let's talk about parole, shall we?…

Over my long and arduous sentence, I have applied for parole about four times and even though I've literally pulled off a small miracle and haven't so much as been in a fight with staff or inmates over my 30+ years… I still have been turned down for parole each time. Among the excuses given for not sending me home were: hasn't finished schooling, doesn't have enough support in the community – but at that time I was married (with kids) and have multiple brothers, a sister, and not to mention – cousins, aunts, uncles and my poor mother who cries so much that it affects me 200 miles away!

Then, at my latest parole hearing, the Parole Board told me they were turning me down because "you assume" too much! How does C.S.C. get away with that?! I have done my sentence and 20 years more… when does the abuse end?!…

Is there anyone in this country who can help me find my way home…?! I'm reaching out my hand… is there anybody out there?

How much these prisons make off of us

By L.D.

I'm a 40 year old Indigenous man, serving 3 years and 6 months for crimes I actually never done. I always take credit for my convictions all by way of guilty plea cause I was guilty. Now I'm innocent for the first time in my worthless life and here I sit rotting in Bath Penitentiary. Found guilty based solely on my criminal record. On March 3rd, 2020 I went to the Ottawa bucket and started my appeal process right away.

I was sent to Joyceville shortly after. At Joyceville I worked in the kitchen full time with a glowing job performance reference letter from the manager of the kitchen. 4 months later, I was told due to program availability I would not be going to minimum, but I would be going to medium where I could get my program and plan my release. But when I got here there was no program, no elder, no nothing… So I went to work but I stayed in the kitchen from September until the end of December. I got tired of staff messing with my attendance saying I missed days when later it was proven that I didn't miss time at work. So I gave my notice and went to work at CORCAN… I like working there but due to my appeal, I was denied a raise in pay, even though I'm due for two raises. But I'm exercising my right to appeal my charges, yet they use this to say I'm not taking responsibility for the charges, but why would I lie and take responsibility for things I didn't do? When I went for parole, I was denied. Why? Simple because I have an appeal in the works.

I was told I would have enough time to complete my program before my start date. The program is 8 months long and I only got 10 months left. I don't think it's fair at all for them to treat people this way. This prison does nothing to help us, they make us work for next to nothing, then they charge us for cable: $9.50/person/2x per month, and this jail has an easy 500 people in it (according to CSC, the capacity is 516), this adds up to $9500 a month! They make just under $10,000 a month on cable TV… Soon they will be taking $20 every two weeks for rent, that's about $20,000 per month on top of the cable fees, bringing the total to almost $30,000/month, and we only make $5.80 per day from working.

If you ask me, it's nothing more than a money racket geared to make the government richer. I'm not sure this letter will make it to you, but I will have my story heard and this is only part of the crazy things I have been put through. I have so much more to say about this place.

Pros/Cons

By Phoenix Poisson

No matter what it is there's always pros and cons to it. It's how you make it through that gives you a story to tell. Why you did it, an excuse. Where you did it, the background setting. Who you did it with, your friendships and/or enemies. Et cetera.

Take grocery shopping, for example.

Pros:
1) you get food.
2) you get friendly service.
3) you get A/C while working.

Cons:
1) you have to spend money.
2) you have to deal with annoying kids.
3) if you gotta go to the bathroom… good luck getting home in time!

Everything has this concept. How you choose between a situation with more pros or more cons is what proves your ability to get out and stay out of prison.

Even topics such as religion, school work, showering, sleeping, etc. deal with pros/cons.

Choose wisely!

Is This Justice

By Brian G. Kerr

When the police intentionally withhold certain pertinent information in order to obtain from an honorable Justice a warrant which otherwise would never be issued, I ask you, is this justice?

When a crown attorney includes a key witness's home address in the accused disclosure, particularly a witness who is testifying against the accused and is arguing that the accused is a dangerous offender to society, aka a dangerous offender designation. And the accused in no way utilizes this information in order to bring harm to the witness, contrary to the accusations in which were originally being alleged by the witness. Again I ask you, is this justice?

I have been raised in a Christian home and I learned how to play chess when I was perhaps 15 years old and I have always had a reasonable amount of street smarts. Howbeit, I have never been very good at poker. Moreover, I am by no means a lawyer, but I have brushed up on certain litigative knowledges. In addition, I can tell you, which I am sure you might agree, when one shows his cards or mutters his next move in advance, it is generally not a good result or effective strategy in which to hold your pieces.

If I were to bait a hook with the intent of catching a decent sized fish, yet no fish is responding to my allurement, how is it I can say that the fish is hungry?

Or that they are biting well?

Assuming for a minute I am a lawyer or a crown attorney, and I were attempting to provide and show cause that a particular opponent were a "dangerous offender". It probably would not be too wise for me to provide my key witness's home address of where he is currently residing in the accused's disclosure. I mean what would be the purpose of this? Even if it were an accident, there are various significant problems with this. One, that I would be considered irresponsible as I am (quote) "responsible" for the vetting of such material prior to release and two, that I'm either a very lousy lawyer or that I am an extremely cunning one! Suggesting I had an alternative motive. None the less, should the respondent not respond as I have anticipated, this would likely only leave the probability that I am a (quote) "very lousy lawyer!"

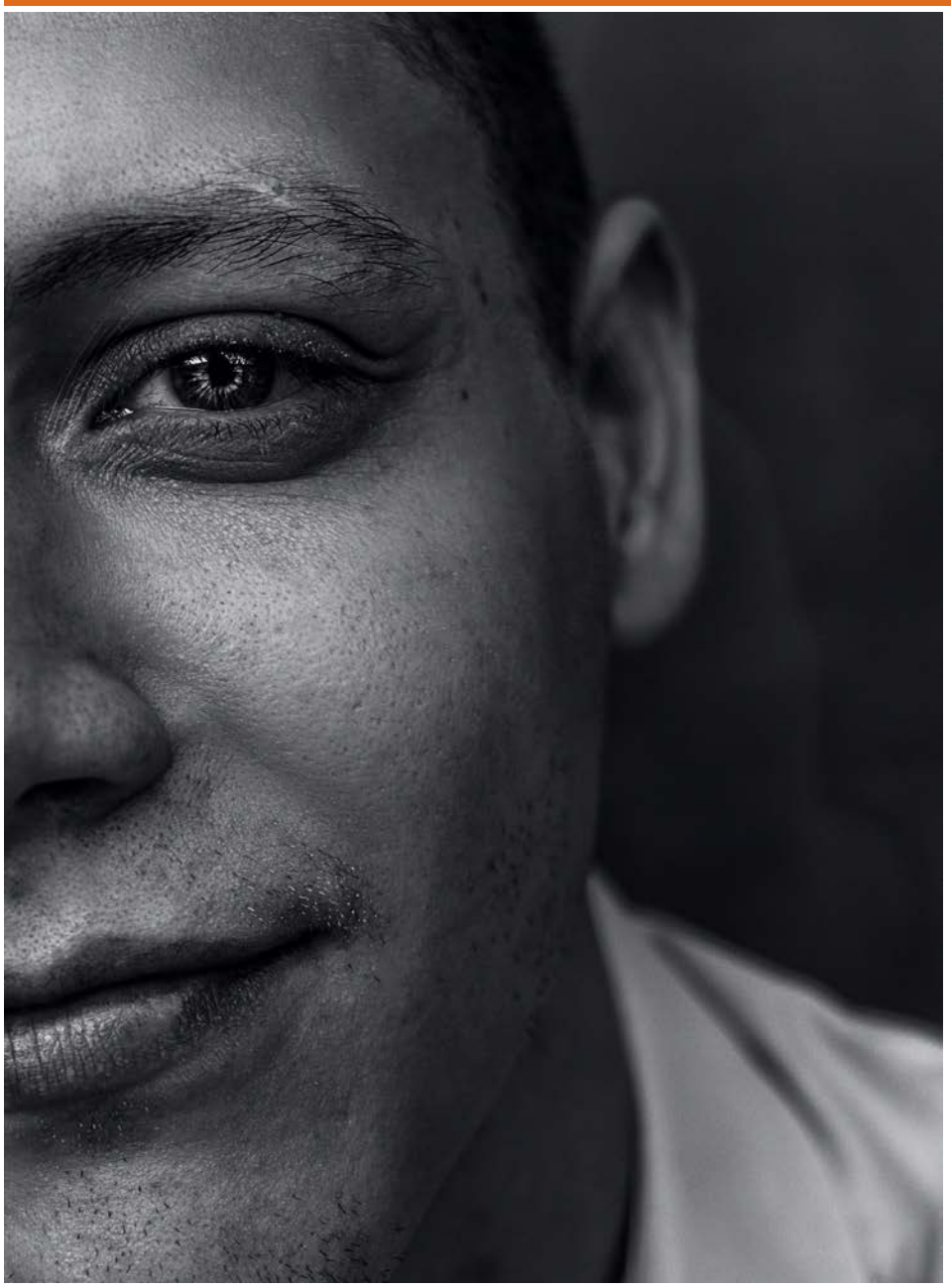
Sure, I could always try to attempt to suggest that this information was in fact reciprocated or somehow acted upon. However, again, if I am unsuccessful, this would only confirm that I am in fact a lousy, cunning and "corruptive" lawyer.

Moreover, I am sure this reputation would follow me the entire duration and remainder of my career.

You see, as a crown attorney, it would be my job to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that my opponent is in fact a dangerous offender. Nevertheless, if circumstances had it that my client – aka key witness who has alleged that the defendant counselled my client to commit murder and that a) no murder was in fact committed, and b), that the allegations in which my witness makes his allegations were in no way committed upon himself in the same manner or similar manner as to which he had alleged (despite ample opportunity on behalf of the accused to do so – via the haphazardly vetted material.) I would hence, essentially fail to uphold my obligation, and the benefit of the doubt would still be present. This is all without mentioning the simple fact that I did include such detrimental information – suggests that I don't, or in any way felt that the defendant/accused was much of a threat to begin with, let alone a "dangerous offender".

Am I an asshole for pointing it out? I suppose I am, but at least I have the courage to admit it! I did not hide behind my disappointment or sit behind the stench of an ill begotten demeanour. (I mean, assuming that the crown attorney is corrupt in his ways, I would not necessarily presume otherwise). However, as I said previously, if he were to in any way fail in his attempts, as I believe he did in his entirety, he would look awfully silly and such course of actions ought to be carefully reviewed and reconsidered, especially should a decision be rendered for an appeal, a possible dismissal or a retrial.

Perhaps, it would be better for both the crown attorney and the defendant's sake if one were not aware of such implications. Howbeit, we all have our own angles of which to contend. Question is, is the degree of corruption so prevalent that one may be willing to chance their ways, career, and reputation, despite knowing the truth and accuracy of their executions? Perhaps… but then again, only one's true colours and actions can speak to this direction. Perhaps this is a question, only the crown attorney himself can answer.



It Took Going To Prison To Recognize My Toxic Masculinity. Here's How I Finally Changed.

%\ &KULVWRSKHU %ODNZHOO ,Xa **ington Post, September 3rd, 2022 (this topic was suggested by our reader and contributor** .DULVVD 5DGFOL•H

"Looks like someone was trying to educate her. That's why the bitch has a black eye," I heard a fellow prisoner say.

"Right. Sometimes you gotta tell 'em twice," another replied.

The small group of prisoners around them erupted in laughter.

Comments like these, along with homophobic slurs, are quite common in prison and other environments full of men striving to perform their "masculinity," as if not talking abusively about the objectification of women, or anyone deemed "not masculine enough," would somehow make them seem weak and less than their "manly self" — a persona they've spent their lives creating.

It's a feeling I know quite well. I acted ignorantly and spewed similar comments in a fair share of my early years. Given where and how I grew up, this was seen as normal, or just "guys being guys." I say that not as an attempt to justify this horrendous behavior, but only to add context to how it's created and continues to grow.

Since before I can remember, I have lived in an environment completely consumed by toxic masculinity. I was raised in the Hilltop neighborhood of Tacoma, Washington — a place that thrived off high levels of violence. In the early 1990s, it was known as one of the roughest gang areas on the West Coast. Our community was ravaged by the crack epidemic, and violence ruled our lives.

Growing up there led me to suppress my humanity and live in a false reality, attempting to feel secure and avoid becoming a victim myself. I didn't always understand this but have come to know it is true. As a kid, I was taught that emotions were for women and "wussies," that things like crying, and other emotions deemed "soft," were things "real" men did not express or even have.

While trying to live up to this flawed version of masculinity, I caused serious harm to others, my community and myself. And when I was sent to prison with a 45-year sentence for taking another human life, I was exposed to an environment with levels of toxic masculinity far exceeding any that I had experienced before.

The simplest of words in prison can incite severe violence — and even riots, in some cases. On multiple occasions, I have witnessed prisoners and guards get beaten until their eyes could not open, for nothing more than calling someone a "punk" or a "bitch."

These words are extremely demeaning in prison culture and a good indicator of just how toxic the environment is. "Punk" is used in reference to a person who is a victim of anal rape, associated with being the weakest in the prison. "Bitch" is used in reference to one being weak and letting others treat them in a disrespectful manner at any time.

Allowing either word to be used against you opens up a very dangerous door. Because one could become targeted for abuse if they are called "punk" or "bitch" without offering an immediate response, many prisoners use serious violence to react to these slurs. Most of the time, this is only done in fear and to protect oneself. The rules and norms of this environment force prisoners to live by a code that compromises all human morals and standards.

While in county jail in 2006, I found myself in solitary confinement because I had fought with another prisoner who refused to pay a gambling debt: a cookie. Extremely embarrassed, I felt I had no choice but to use violence. It wasn't about the cookie at all: We had made a bet, he refused to pay after losing, and countless others had witnessed his refusal. This meant I had to act — at least it felt like I had to — or everyone would try the same kind of thing against me, if not worse, in the future.

To this day, I use this scenario to remind myself about just how far toxic masculinity had pushed me. I was living by principles that I didn't agree with.

Breaking free of these ideas and actions that were deeply embedded in my mind from an early age and reinforced exponentially in prison was extremely challenging. You quickly become an outcast when you begin to question the established norms as a prisoner. Individuals see you as a coward or assume you think you're better than they are. You are targeted, deemed weak and opened up to high levels of judgment.

But eventually the bullies move on to the next target when the reaction they desire isn't received — just like they almost always do, no matter where you are. And once you're confidently living without toxic masculinity ruling your life, it's possible to support others in making that transformation in themselves. But this can be harder than climbing Mount Everest, in some cases.

"Breaking free of these ideas and actions that were deeply embedded in my mind from an early age and reinforced exponentially in prison was extremely challenging. You quickly become an outcast when you begin to question the established norms as a prisoner. Individuals see you as a coward or assume you think you're better than they are."

I honestly don't know the exact moment that I stood up to the toxic masculinity controlling my life, although I would guess it was around six years ago when I participated in a restorative justice program called Healing Education and Accountability for Liberation, facilitated by the organization Collective Justice. That was the first time I had even heard the phrase "toxic masculinity." But from the second I knew and understood the term, it was impossible to ignore the overwhelming role it had played in my life.

Every male I knew in my developmental years had taught me how to protect myself using principles of toxic masculinity. When I learned from my uncle to fight over things as minor as someone speaking disrespectfully to me, that was toxic masculinity. When others told me to fight if anyone challenged what I believed to be related to my "manhood," that was toxic masculinity. And when I was told that having a gay friend could "rub off on me" and "make me gay," that was toxic masculinity, too. But I had no idea, because I didn't know any other way.

Since I've begun to rethink my life, I've faced many moments of adversity. I live behind a razor wire fence at a prison full of characters, many of whom have yet to learn these same skills and therefore still remain loyal to a belief system that's destroyed our lives.

So when I refuse to participate in aggressive or toxic masculine behavior, I don't always seem to be the most popular guy. But I tell myself that it's not a contest of who's the most popular, and how people react to the way I deal with situations is not personal. Men are just scared to be vulnerable, especially in prison. I understand that, and I constantly remind myself that it took years for me to adapt the principles I now use to guide my life.

Many of my friends refer to me as a "square," twisting their fingers up in two mismatched L's to form the shape. But they always do it with a smile, and I take that as a positive sign for the work I've done. Nevertheless, there are also guys I was close to previously who now say nothing to me and simply walk by me in the hall as if we'd never known each other. They refuse to accept my new way of life and hate that I'll walk away from a fight or confrontation without using aggression.

Living by these beliefs is extremely difficult in prison, but I know that would be the case anywhere else. I still get mad and at times jump to the thought of using aggression as a way to handle issues, even trying to rationalize that certain individuals only understand violence as a means to resolve problems.

But I quickly remind myself that that is exactly the thinking that placed me in prison in the first place, causing severe harm to many others and myself along the way. To combat these thoughts, I've learned to take timeouts and give myself enough space to think about my behavior before I act.

Spending the energy to reshape the way I think and interact with others has changed my life in many ways. Now, I'm surrounded by people who encourage me to be a man who adds to the world, not one who continues to take away from it by abusing or harming others — physically, emotionally or mentally.

I'm proud to say that my refusal to use toxic masculinity to guide my life has become a beacon of sorts for others looking to change their own toxic behavior. This offers me a chance to help support men who want to live a better way but have no clue where to start.

Relationships with friends and family have begun to strengthen. Before, I was the tough cousin, brother or nephew to call when you wanted to solve an issue with violence; now I'm the one they ask for advice on relationships or solving a problem with healthy conflict resolution practices.

Most importantly, I was able to meet and marry the most amazing human I've ever met, Chelsea. She fell in love with my kind heart, empathy toward others and loving nature. She would have never loved the aggressive man I was before, who moved through the world as if everyone owed him something and who would simply take whatever he wanted if it wasn't given to him.

Today, I feel secure in who I am. I respect all humans, no matter who they are or how they identify. I don't let others control my actions or words. And now I know that those who won't like or respect me if I don't live by their toxic code are not the people I want in my life anyway.

Christopher Blackwell, 41, is serving a 45-year prison sentence in Washington state. He co-founded Look2Justice, an organization that provides civic education to system-impacted communities and actively strives to pass sentence and policy reform legislation. He is currently working toward publish- /4- ' ERRN RQ VRO LWDU\ His writing has appeared in The 1HZ <RUN 7LPHV 7KH :DV Post, The Boston Globe, Insider and many more outlets.

Sic Chick

Breaking the beaks of eagles

This is a teaching I received from
an elder where eagles in their later
stages of life go to a safe, quiet
S O D F H D Q G E U H D N W K U R X J K W K H H D J O H V W R V H H
all these years to see •
this is the place I slayed
and was slain by Angel.
The Hole
in which I ate my heart
insatiable
the result of dark years
pushing the perimeters
of depression
beyond the walls of iso.
Apartheid
is alive and well right here
in our fabled free NATO.
From genocide democracy
I ran "savage" breathing
locomotive smoke –
hemorrhaging exhaust.

This is the season of respite
(rare for distant runners)
Of gathering old and new
muses, and fusing the difference
calculating
weights and measures, hearts
to golden feathers.
This, a long time coming
is a long time dying.
And oh how I railed
against god & kings.
From the beginning
to the end – enduring
prison, second class citizens
spiritual warfare.
Colonialized wild
because I believed
in the doubt
of Moses & Ishmael.

I run through deserts
now, in search
of a delicate rain.
For self-preservation.
For lactose & honey.
To not fade.
To unjade the living.
To heal inter-generations.
And all I know
now is long-suffering.
The never-ending
perseverance for "someday" –
Frozen with the notion
that day may never come.
But that's ok
for caged eagles
and champions who lose
again and again
knowing sacrifice
is not deceit.

This poem is being re-printed with a correction to the title, which was mis-typed by the editor in the last issue.

K 22

Embodiment of Earth

The origins of unconsented

dejas root themselves

in the now.

A relentless season burnt

H P E R G L P H Q W R I (D U W K L Q

separation anxiety, rising

temperatures lit up

deciduous like sacred hearts

far-away stars;

Taken

their lights.

– Q D W P R V S K H U L F 5 R R G

of tears.

Of undocument-
ed

crime scenes dug under the cover

of Nightshade

the colour of the darkest habit.

The blackest cloth scarred-

catastrophic infrastructure broke-
down.

7 K H \ U H F R Q F L O H G W K H P V H O Y H V W R

A summer/ to remember/ to never
forget.

Flags hang at half-mast in tribute
W R

Bodies hanging in trees and clos
ets-

to escape their
memories.

7 R R O R V W F K L O G U H Q V X U Y L Y H G E \
6 X L F L G H

Survived by Sixties Scoop.

6 X U Y L Y H G E \ 0 L O O H Q Q L X P 6 F R R S

From Bubble-gum to Rum Raisin
Scoops

of reconciliation, sprinkled with

the statistics of each passing gener
ation-

exceeding the Scoop before; until

Kingdom Come. Forever and what-
ever,

all my relations and Amen. Until

all my descendants stop becoming

inter-sections that lead to nowhere.

Where reconciliation is unmasked

Res s u r r e c t ions.

Honouring broken treaties;

in time Healing

the prequel of the last scene is
complete;
and a thousand years hence-

We will look back NOW.

(Life) in and of Installments

There's a tremor in the atmo-
sphere.

A vibe-alto in the alto. A shadow

Trying like hell to disengage

Itself from a cobweb jail-cell.

There's an eddy in the continuum.

< R X N Q R Z (G G \ W K H / R V W 5 D Y H Q

Who sits atop Rusted

Rooster

God-forsaken weather vane;

O L N H D : K L U O Z L Q G L Q

-Jetstream-

5 R Z L Q J Z L W K W K H S U H G H F H V V R U

of Pathos.

There's a tremor in the voice

of an aged traveler

caught in singularity

wonders-

"what if"

Black-Hole
gravity
can get shot of

getting to be gone…

Zakaria Amara

50,000 years before existence

My fate
hangs around my neck

like a necklace.

My life

is an outline of a portrait

drawn by God

that I must paint with my deeds.

Free will and fate

are like twin horses that we ride
standing

not knowing which is which

until the race is over.

There can be no peace,

no rest,

and no stillness of the mind

without embracing destiny.

Wholehearted surrender…

Glimpsing into the secrets of the
universe,

"Maktoob," the Arabs said; it is
written.

Your life

and your death;
your sorrows

and your joys;

every grain of rice

and every golden coin

on its way to you

was marked with your name,

50,000 years before existence…

Forgotten Warrior

A Deeper Sense of Presence

No childhood, no youth – we had to walk through this existence, darkness & cold alone! – then when I hit adulthood, I again had to face the loneliness, emptiness & sadness alone – never had another love, don't know happiness, peace, or comfort – I do know HATRED, I do know ANGER, violence & DEATH. We been caged or controlled in some way my whole existence, either by C.A.S. or C.S.C. I'm tired of being subjected to the will of others.

Lost Soulmate

Nothing lasts forever, I want to love you as long as I can & keep you with me, I have to protect you from every danger & heal all your emotional wounds, if you're lost, I have to seek until I find you. It's a great responsibility & yes I am up to it!!

-67-

I wander this earth

Searching for somebody

I don't know

Yet everywhere I wander

There is no one

"Vision"

The vision of peace, which gave me hope against the darkness, against the loneliness, she was my light, the reason I survived!!

"Purpose"

Standing ready to carry the physical, emotional & psychological overload to a satisfying state of equilibrium!!

"Mine"

Fated to walk the path of tragedy & notoriety

Warrior Forever

Lindsay (10 Day Isolation COVID) 09/20/22

Nothing 2 read, no escape at all
Mentally or physically
Voicez screaming 4 your death.
Dead friendz forever lost soulz
Drunken dead friendz forever
lost
Pain more miserable than this
existence
A past catching up with a present
Stuck in a fucken loop, a nite-
mare
Over and over, repeat a livin hell
Alone in a cell with the ghosts of
an evil life
Nowhere 2 run, nowhere 2 hide,
at all
Face the past and reap what
you sow

The reason why

We were each otherz mo-
mentz
Easy conversation, an under-
standing
Deep connection, a shared
goal and
A mask on back seat of the
mother fucken
Car connection

Singled celled COVID 2022

The devilz here with me

Right here, right now.

Just him and I

Along with all the sinz I've ever

Done or thought

Rob Surridge

Untitled

Notions surrender exit isolation changing location happens now.
Vehicles in motion the backup pressing view under eyebrow.
Statements made goodbyes said another leaves going elsewhere.
To borrowed memory and reflections in the past day's retrieval with care.
Momentarily disengaged in a tiresome feeling evacuated like a blank stare.
Dragged on periods of sentiment let go of fears to win in kind rare.
Lesson is known dressed of color only one of many shades of orange.
So often to see its natural to be on otherwise slight cringe.
The idea of a dark hearts voice has vanished as demons get away deceit of binge.
In no claim for travel mentions tours lit up to ignite and singe.
No longer a slave of substance with passing in conquer ending to relive.
Exemption to weakness transfer in strength a powerful ability to give.
Cross country run first ahead of the trail leading front singly
Passive sobriety favours strong faith living clean consecutive habitually.
The race is a long nonstop finish line out of sight putting it polite.
Every move important factor improvement designed in advance steady every night.
Proudly in success treading on to triumph accomplishing victor no contest.
waking to devotion of being superior to yesterdays personal best.

Nunu

Untitled

Love is a gamble
Sex is a game
Guys do the fuckin
And girls get the blame
An hour of pleasure
Nine months of pain
3 days in the hospital
And a body to maim
The father's a druggie
The mother's a whore
See this wouldn't have happened
If the rubber hadn't torn!

BRIAN KERR