



NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA MAGAZINE

INJUSTICE



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THE GREAT SPIRIT OF THE FEMALE SIDE OF LIFE OF ALL THINGS

KCI-NIWESQ

ISSUE 23

Correctional investigator:
Over-incarceration of Indigenous
people is "unconscionable"

A Canadian Senator calls for the
exoneration of 12 unjustly treated
convicted Indigenous women

(IN)JUSTICE



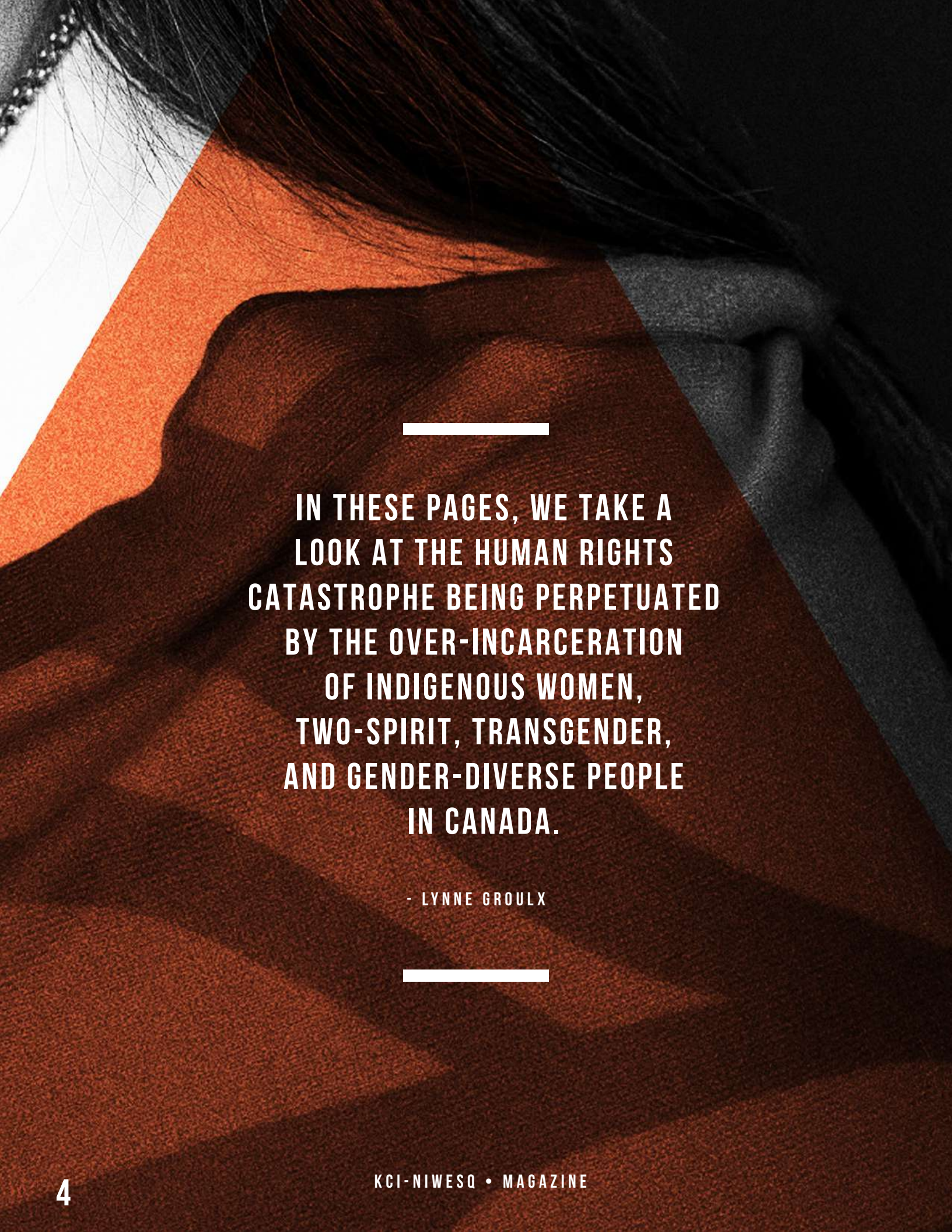
THE OVER-INCARCERATION OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN, TWO-SPIRIT, TRANSGENDER AND GENDER-DIVERSE PEOPLE HAS BEEN CALLED ONE OF THE GREATEST HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS CURRENTLY BEING PERPETUATED BY THE CANADIAN STATE. IT HAS RESULTED IN HALF OF ALL FEDERALLY INCARCERATED WOMEN SELF-IDENTIFYING AS FIRST NATIONS, INUIT, OR MÉTIS. IN THIS ISSUE, WE LOOK AT THE HARMS CREATED BY THIS SITUATION THAT THE CORRECTIONAL INVESTIGATOR CALLS “UNCONSCIONABLE,” AND CONSIDER ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH CRIME.



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Special photo credit: The Senate of Canada and
the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies



**IN THESE PAGES, WE TAKE A
LOOK AT THE HUMAN RIGHTS
CATASTROPHE BEING PERPETUATED
BY THE OVER-INCARCERATION
OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN,
TWO-SPIRIT, TRANSGENDER,
AND GENDER-DIVERSE PEOPLE
IN CANADA.**

- LYNNE GROULX



BIENVENUE À LA VINGT-TROISIÈME ÉDITION DE KCI-NIWESQ, LE MAGAZINE DE L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA (AFAC).

This is not a new problem. Ivan Zinger, the Correctional Investigator of Canada, and his predecessor have been calling attention to the increasing Indigenization of federal penitentiaries for more than a decade.

In this issue, we talk to Dr. Zinger about his findings and what can be done to stop this insidious trend. He says it is critical for the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) to turn some of its budget over to Indigenous communities and groups to allow them to manage the corrections of their own convicted people.

You will also hear from Senator Kim Pate, who is calling for the review of the cases of 12 convicted Indigenous women who have been treated unjustly by the legal and corrections systems. She argues that the women should be exonerated. Two of the women for whom Senator Pate is lobbying are the Quewezance sisters who spent 30 years in jail for a murder they say they did not commit.

Senator Pate was also among the many Canadian Senators who visited Canadian penitentiaries over the past seven years. They recorded what they say are numerous incidents of human rights breaches on the part of the CSC. You will see the photos they took in the pages that follow.

We talk to Martha Paynter, a researcher who looks at the intersection of reproductive health and the justice system. Ms. Paynter says the over-

incarceration of Indigenous women is a violation of their reproductive rights and that this must be ended by allowing convicted mothers to serve their time with their children in their communities.

You will learn about the increased burden placed on prisoners in Northern Canada. When convicted of serious crimes, they are usually sent South, far away from their families and their communities, to complete their sentences.

And, you will hear from experts in restorative justice who are helping Indigenous people who have run afoul of the law, and their victims, to move on in ways that do not entail incarceration, but instead create opportunities for a better future for all involved.

So, thank you once again for opening the pages that follow. Thank you for reading the twenty-third edition of Kci-Niwesq. Please drop us a line and let us know what you think at reception@nwac.ca.

Miigwetch.

“TALKING THE TALK”

GAME OF RECOGNITION POLITICS AT PLAY IN CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM

Ivan Zinger, the Correctional Investigator of Canada, says it's unconscionable that one-third of all federal prisoners—and one in every two incarcerated women—self-identify as Indigenous, at a time when Indigenous people account for just 5% of the Canadian population.

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) has learned to “talk the talk” about reconciliation, but its unyielding need for power, authority, and control is filling federal prisons with Indigenous faces at an ever-expanding rate.

That's the assessment of Ivan Zinger, the Correctional Investigator of Canada who serves as prisoners' ombudsman. His report *Ten Years Since Spirit Matters* is a scorching indictment of the correctional agency's unwillingness to end the increasing Indigeneity of federal penal institutions.

“Unconscionable,” is how Dr. Zinger describes the fact that one-third of all federal prisoners—and one in every two incarcerated women—self-identify as Indigenous, at a time when Indigenous Peoples account for just 5% of the Canadian population.



“It's a question of inequity and social justice in Canadian society, and compliance with our human rights obligations,” he said in a recent interview with Kci-Niwesq.

In his report, which was tabled in Parliament at the beginning of November, Dr. Zinger makes the case for “bold and innovative reforms” to Canada's approach to Indigenous corrections. He calls upon the Government of Canada “to loosen the levers and instruments of colonial control that keep Indigenous Peoples marginalized, over-criminalized, and over-incarcerated.”

He says the disproportionate numbers of incarcerated Indigenous people will be reduced only when First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities are given the resources to manage the correctional response for their own convicted people.



Pictured: Ivan Zinger
Photo credit: Office of the Correctional Investigator

"We've made it quite clear that that Corrections has got to do things differently, that they need deep reforms," says Dr. Zinger. And the reforms must include a shift of a significant portion of the agency's overall budget of \$3.2 billion to Indigenous management.

Section 81 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act allows the transfer of Indigenous prisoners into healing lodges run by Indigenous communities or groups. Section 84 allows them to be placed under community supervision.

"Our evaluation is showing that those healing lodges run by Indigenous communities yield much better correctional outcomes," says Dr. Zinger.

Yet, over the past 10 years, there has been just one new healing lodge built by the federal CSC. The number of spaces in the community has increased by just 53 beds. And the occupancy of those beds is just 51%—possibly because of the narrow criteria that qualify prisoners to be eligible for admission.

"That's why we said that Corrections has got to change the way it does business," says Dr. Zinger. "It's got to stop controlling resources, and it's got to be able to find initiatives that will yield better results."

It is the same message he and his office have been delivering for decades. The latest report is a follow-up to a similar assessment released in 2013.

The obvious injustice has prompted the federal government to direct substantial amounts of money to the CSC with the aim of providing the kinds of interventions that will keep Indigenous people out of jail.

But despite those investments, the CSC's discretionary spending on Indigenous initiatives amount to just 3% of its total budget ... and the Indigenous prison population keeps growing. It increased by 41% over the past decade, while the in-custody numbers of white people has fallen.

There is "a need for a significant change in direction at the Correctional Service of Canada," says Dr. Zinger. The agency must "let go control of resources and stop some of the initiatives that basically dictate their model of an Indigenous approach to corrections, which unfortunately has not yielded any benefits. In fact, it's been quite a failure."

None of the outcomes for Indigenous Peoples that the CSC has the power to address have been on a positive trajectory, says Dr. Zinger.

In 2015, Call to Action Number 30 of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission demanded that federal, provincial, and territorial governments commit to "eliminating the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in custody over the next decade."

"We're two years away from that deadline and over-representation keeps growing," says Dr. Zinger. "The model they have isn't yielding any measurable improvement and they keep doing the same thing, and doing more of the same thing."

In May 2022, Dr. Zinger sent shock waves reverberating across Canada when he announced that, for the first time in history, Indigenous women made up half the female population in the country's federal prisons. He calls that a "terrible milestone" that "cannot be qualified as anything but a human rights violation."

In addition to the disproportionate numbers, the outcomes for Indigenous women who are federally incarcerated "are absolutely terrible," says Dr. Zinger. Indigenous people are entering federal prison at an increasingly younger age. And, they stay there longer than non-Indigenous prisoners because they are more likely to serve larger portions of their sentences.

They are also more likely to serve their time in maximum security.

"The latest data I have is that 73.5% of women placed in maximum security are of Indigenous descent. That's an extraordinary thing," says Dr. Zinger. "And of course, maximum security is where there's the fewest level of services to address their needs or psychological distress or mental health services. It's very difficult for those women to cascade down to lower security, so they're more likely also to chronically self-harm and are more likely to attempt suicide, compared to non-Indigenous women."

They are also more likely to be involuntarily transferred to another prison, which creates problems because they are then far away from their family and community supports.

It is important to note that the majority of incarcerated Indigenous women have children, and many of those children are very young, says Dr. Zinger. "That creates significant psychological distress."

But the CSC has a limited ability to provide trauma-informed services. "So those women have baggage that requires support, and they're just not getting it," says Dr. Zinger. "The first line of responders are correctional officers, and they just crank up the security, crank up the restrictions. And that usually aggravates the situation."

The CSC says it remains committed to meaningful action to address the over-incarceration of Indigenous Peoples. In response to questions from Kci-Niwesq, it listed steps it has taken, and is taking, to reduce the disparities, including hiring a Deputy Commissioner for Indigenous Corrections in May of this year and reducing

the barriers that prevent inmates from being transferred to community-run healing lodges.

"We agree that investments need to be made directly in the community for local organizations to provide supports for offenders," said a spokesman for the agency. "But these investments do not need to be zero-sum. We can have both a correctional system that leads to safer communities through the safe rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders, and meaningful investments in the community led by local organizations."

But the numbers show that, whatever its intention, the model of incarceration currently being followed by the CSC is not working for Indigenous Peoples.

If Canada could reverse the trend of over-incarceration of Indigenous Peoples and bring the rates down to the equivalent of their overall representation in the Canadian population, "we would have incarceration rates that would be as good as Scandinavian countries and we would be at the top of the world," says Dr. Zinger. But so far, there is no indication that the federal CSC is interested in making the changes required for that to happen.

"There is a sense that the CSC has been playing a game of recognition politics, where it has learned to talk the talk of reconciliation to increase its resource base, quell the concerns of detractors and advocates, and stall for yet more time," Dr. Zinger says in the most recent report. "This has been of no service to Indigenous people behind bars."



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IT'S A QUESTION
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IN CANADIAN
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- IVAN ZINGER

Pictured: Ivan Zinger
Photo credit: Office of the Correctional Investigator

12 INDIGENOUS WOMEN, 12 STORIES OF INJUSTICE

SENATOR KIM PATE IS CALLING FOR A REVIEW OF THE CRIMINAL CASES OF 12 INDIGENOUS WOMEN WHO LANGUISHED FOR YEARS BEHIND BARS FOR CRIMES IN WHICH THEY WERE BIT PLAYERS, OR WHOSE EXPERIENCES INSIDE THE CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM SENT THEM DOWN EVER DEEPENING HOLES OF INJUSTICE. SHE SAYS THE WOMEN SHOULD BE EXONERATED.

T.M. was first criminalized as a teenager when police apprehended her sheltering in a school. She had fled there, with nowhere else to go, to escape sexual abuse from her father. T.M. ended up convicted of breaking and entering. Her responses to her treatment in prison resulted in multiple additional charges and a decade of isolation in segregation. Once in the mental health system, she was diagnosed with isolation-induced schizophrenia.

T.M. is one of 12 Indigenous women whose stories are recounted in a 2022 report by Senator Kim Pate—women who have languished for years behind bars for crimes in which they were bit players, or whose experiences inside the correctional system sent them down ever deepening holes of injustice.

They are women whom Senator Pate, a human rights lawyer, knows personally through the more than two decades she spent as Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies. The Senator compiled the report, called *Injustices and Miscarriages of Justice Experienced by 12 Indigenous Women*, in the hope that the cases will be reviewed and the women exonerated.

“When you see each of these cases individually, you can see the injustices,” Senator Pate said in a recent interview. “But when you see all 12 of them together, you can’t ignore the injustices. Every single one of them had histories of abuse. All of them were either themselves in residential school or are next-generation survivors. All of them were responding to circumstances where the context of the violence they were experiencing and responding to and the whole story about what happened was not put before the court for all kinds of reasons.”

They are women like S.D. who was initially jailed as an accomplice to an abusive partner’s drug dealing and was subsequently convicted of second-degree murder after confessing to the death of a prison friend whom staff and other prisoners acknowledged had taken her own life.

There’s Y.J. who was convicted of first-degree murder in the death of a man who was abusing children in her community, including her own son. Although she played a limited role in killing the man, she received a harsher sentence than others who were involved, including her own husband, because the police and Crown argued that, as the mother of an abused child and as the survivor of abuse herself, she had the strongest motive.

Or C.D. who received a mandatory life sentence at the age of 19 for killing a woman who had procured her and other Indigenous women for a man who assaulted his victims while taking photos and video footage. S.D. spent nearly three decades in jail and was released shortly before she died of cancer in April 2022.

Senator Pate says she knows of many more Indigenous women, beyond the 12 profiled in the report, who have experienced similar injustices. Some reached out to her after the document was published to ask if their cases could also be suggested for review.

But, even getting the justice system to take another look at the original 12 has been difficult.

“We’ve had a few groups of lawyers express interest in working on some of the individual cases,” says Senator Pate. “Unfortunately, most times, they come back saying that they don’t have the resources so they think it’ll be too difficult unless there’s a group review. While I understand and agree, it is frustrating and challenging.”

The report was prompted by a request from Harry LaForme, a member of Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation who was the first Indigenous judge to be appointed to an appellate court in Canada, and Juanita Westmoreland-Traoré who was the first Black judge appointed in Quebec and the first Black dean of a Canadian law school. They were appointed by then federal justice minister David Lametti to explore the creation of an independent commission to consider wrongful-conviction applications.

"WHEN YOU SEE EACH OF THESE CASES INDIVIDUALLY, YOU CAN SEE THE INJUSTICES. BUT WHEN YOU SEE ALL 12 OF THEM TOGETHER, YOU CAN'T IGNORE THE INJUSTICES."

- SENATOR KIM PATE

The two judges asked Senator Pate to find cases of women who had faced discrimination in the legal system that led to wrongful convictions. Senator Pate says she replied that some of the most egregious situations were those of Indigenous women. So that is how she focused her report.

These are "women who have experienced violence, many of them for most of their lives," she says. "These are women for whom their responses to the violence, or their attempts to navigate their lives as a result of trauma and poverty and the intersections of discrimination, led them to be in circumstances where they ended up convicted of serious offences and the reasons were rarely, if ever, really considered."

In many cases, she says, the women were defended by lawyers who were not skilled in deconstructing the impact of the repeated violence experienced by their clients over the course of their lifetimes. In multiple cases outlined, the women had been physically abused to the point of hospitalization.

Some of them told their lawyers that their crimes were committed while they were "fighting" with a man. It would be easy for a white male defence lawyer to envision that as meaning the fight was mutual, the way men fight in a bar, says Senator Pate. That does not take account of the long-time violence or contextualize the abuse the women experienced.

"When I do training sessions with law or other students, I often say: 'If we treated any other offence the way we treat misogynist violence, and particularly when it intersects with race, and most especially for Indigenous women, then people would be up in arms,' says Senator Pate. "The reality is we immediately question the victim. We minimize the impact of violence against women and children. We have now degendered it and call it intimate partner violence, as though there's a mutuality that we know doesn't exist."

When the Senator initially asked the women, who were either in prison or out on parole, if they would be willing to talk about their circumstances, with a view to potential exoneration, all but two refused. They worried that their life circumstances and their stories and words would be used against them.

"And, quite frankly, I couldn't tell them that they were wrong. None of them had been treated fairly before, during, or after charges, convictions, and sentencing. Most were classified as high risk by discriminatory classification systems and had spent time in prison well past their original parole or warrant expiry dates. Those who had been paroled had too often experienced being hauled back into prison for relatively minor situations that really didn't involve them posing a risk to public safety," says Senator Pate. The Honourable Harry LaForme and Honourable Juanita Westmoreland-Traoré agreed to a confidential meeting where they could talk to the women in private and the women could use pseudonyms, and the women agreed—this is why they are identified by their initials in her report.

When the women and Senator Pate presented the cases to LaForme and Westmoreland-Traoré, they agreed that they clearly identified a number of injustices. They recommended that the cases should be documented and put forward for review.

Senator Pate has provided the report to the Minister of Justice and the Law Commission of Canada. She is also hoping that the soon-to-be-created Miscarriages of Justice Commission will take a look—there is a bill before Parliament calling for its formation following on the work of LaForme and Westmoreland-Traoré.

David Milgard, who spent 23 years in jail for murder before being exonerated by DNA evidence, pushed for the cases to be reviewed before he died in May 2022.

Senator Pate has also sent her report to experts and lawyers, including those working for the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC). She says all have agreed that a review should be pursued.

NWAC issued a statement saying it supports the calls from senators to exonerate the 12 Indigenous women. It also says the federal government must do more to address deep-rooted inequalities and fulfill its commitments to eliminate discrimination in the criminal justice system.

"I would love to see as much publicity as we can get around this, without the women having to expose themselves to more disappointment. I hope they receive commitment to move forward with a review of their cases," Senator Pate says of her report. "The challenge is that the women have thus far experienced no justice from our legal system and are therefore understandably afraid to go public until such time as they know what that will mean."



Pictured: Kim Pate
Photo credit: Senate of Canada

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THE CHALLENGE IS THAT THE WOMEN HAVE THUS FAR EXPERIENCED NO JUSTICE FROM OUR LEGAL SYSTEM AND ARE THEREFORE UNDERSTANDABLY AFRAID TO GO PUBLIC.”

- SENATOR KIM PATE



FINALLY HOME FREE

ODELIA AND NERISSA QUEWEZANCE ARE FREE AFTER SPENDING 30 YEARS IN PRISON OR ON PAROLE FOR A KILLING THAT THEIR YOUNGER COUSIN ADMITS HE COMMITTED. A JUDGE HAS GRANTED THEM A CONDITIONAL RELEASE, PENDING A MINISTERIAL REVIEW OF THEIR CONVICTION ON SECOND-DEGREE MURDER CHARGES.



**Global
NEWS**

ODELIA AND NERISSA QUEWEZANCE ARE FREE AFTER SPENDING 30 YEARS IN PRISON OR ON PAROLE FOR A KILLING THAT THEIR YOUNGER COUSIN ADMITS HE COMMITTED.

Odelia was 51 and Nerissa was 48 in March 2023 when a judge of the Court of King's Bench in Saskatchewan granted them a conditional release, pending a ministerial review of their conviction on second-degree murder charges in the death of 70-year-old farmer Anthony Joseph Dolff.

Their cases are among those profiled in a report by Senator Kim Pate called *Injustices and Miscarriages of Justice Experienced by 12 Indigenous Women*.

The Quewezance sisters, who are from Kee-seekoose First Nation in eastern Saskatchewan, are survivors of a residential school.

According to Senator Pate's report, Odelia struggled with substance use as a result of the abuse she suffered at the school. The sisters say Mr. Dolff who was a caretaker at the institution, made repeated sexual advances toward both of them and offered them money when they refused. He was known to provide young people with a place to party as well as alcohol in exchange for sex.

Their cousin confessed to stabbing Mr. Dolff. He was a 14-year-old minor at the time of the killing and served four years in jail for second-degree murder.

The Quewezance sisters admit they were present when Mr. Dolff died. They say they participated in attacking him, but they say they did not kill him.

Even though their cousin confessed, the police held the sisters at an RCMP detachment for several days of questioning after their arrest in 1993. This was in violation of a court order that they be moved to a jail. That questioning session was not recorded—also considered a breach of their rights.



Pictured: Odelia (left) and Nerissa Quewezance speak to reporters after their release from prison in March 2023
Photo credit: Canadian Press

Odelia was 21 when she was convicted by an all-white jury. Nerissa was 19. Neither sister is comfortable speaking to the media, says Senator Pate. They are concerned that anything they say publicly could be used against them. Both were released on parole for brief periods during the 30 years since their conviction, but they were returned to prison for minor breaches of their parole conditions.

When the sisters were finally freed last March, Odelia told reporters “I’m feeling overwhelmed. I’m relieved that we’re home free and I just want to thank the judge.”

Life outside of the institution where they spent most of three decades has been a difficult adjustment. Odelia is getting to know the 16-year-old daughters she had with her husband, Jay Koch, while she was out on parole.

“To be honest, (prison) screwed up my mind and my sister’s mind because I’m so used to being watched,” she told the CBC in August. “I’m always in my room. I feel safe in there ... it’s a lot to get used to.”

**“I’M RELIEVED THAT WE’RE HOME FREE AND
I JUST WANT TO THANK THE JUDGE.”**

- ODELIA QUEWEZANCE

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SENATORS GO TO JAIL

A TOUR LIKE NONE OTHER

Canadian Senators who toured correctional facilities between 2017 and 2021 say the Correctional Service of Canada is failing to comply with basic human-rights standards in its treatment of prisoners who cannot safely be managed within the general prison population.

Senators say the Correctional Service of Canada is failing to comply with basic human rights standards in its treatment of prisoners who cannot safely be managed within the general prison population.

Canadian Senators toured correctional facilities between 2017 and 2021—years that spanned the passage of Bill C-83. The legislation amended the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA) to create structured intervention units (SIUs), which are intended to end the use of segregation.

Unlike segregation, prisoners in SIUs are entitled to spend a minimum of four hours each day outside their cell and have the right to interact with others for at least two hours a day.

In addition to violations of the CCRA, the Senators found that correctional facilities are in breach of the Canadian Charter of Rights as well as international human rights treaties, including the United Nations' Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (known as the Nelson Mandela Rules).

The Senators say in their report entitled *Senators Go to Jail* that the CCRA requires significant reform to end the injustices. To this end, Senator Kim Pate has introduced Bill S-230 in an attempt to make some of those required changes.

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NO MEANINGFUL CHANGES WITHIN FEDERAL PRISONS HAVE BEEN MADE AFTER BILL C-83 WAS ENACTED.”

- CANADIAN SENATORS' FINDINGS





Photo credit: The Senate of Canada



AMONG THE FINDINGS DERIVED FROM THEIR VISITS, THE SENATORS STATE:

Prisoners in SIUs did not have access to daily mental health check-ins.

Prisoners across the country reported having difficulty accessing a lawyer within the first few hours of being placed in an SIU, as is their right.

Many prisoners said that, while they were in the SIU, they were not able to access the programs and services available outside segregation.

No meaningful changes within federal prisons have been made after Bill C-83 was enacted.

Conditions within prisons did not meet legislative requirements.

No prisoners at any institution had the ability to file requests or grievances without the possibility of reprisal from prison authorities.

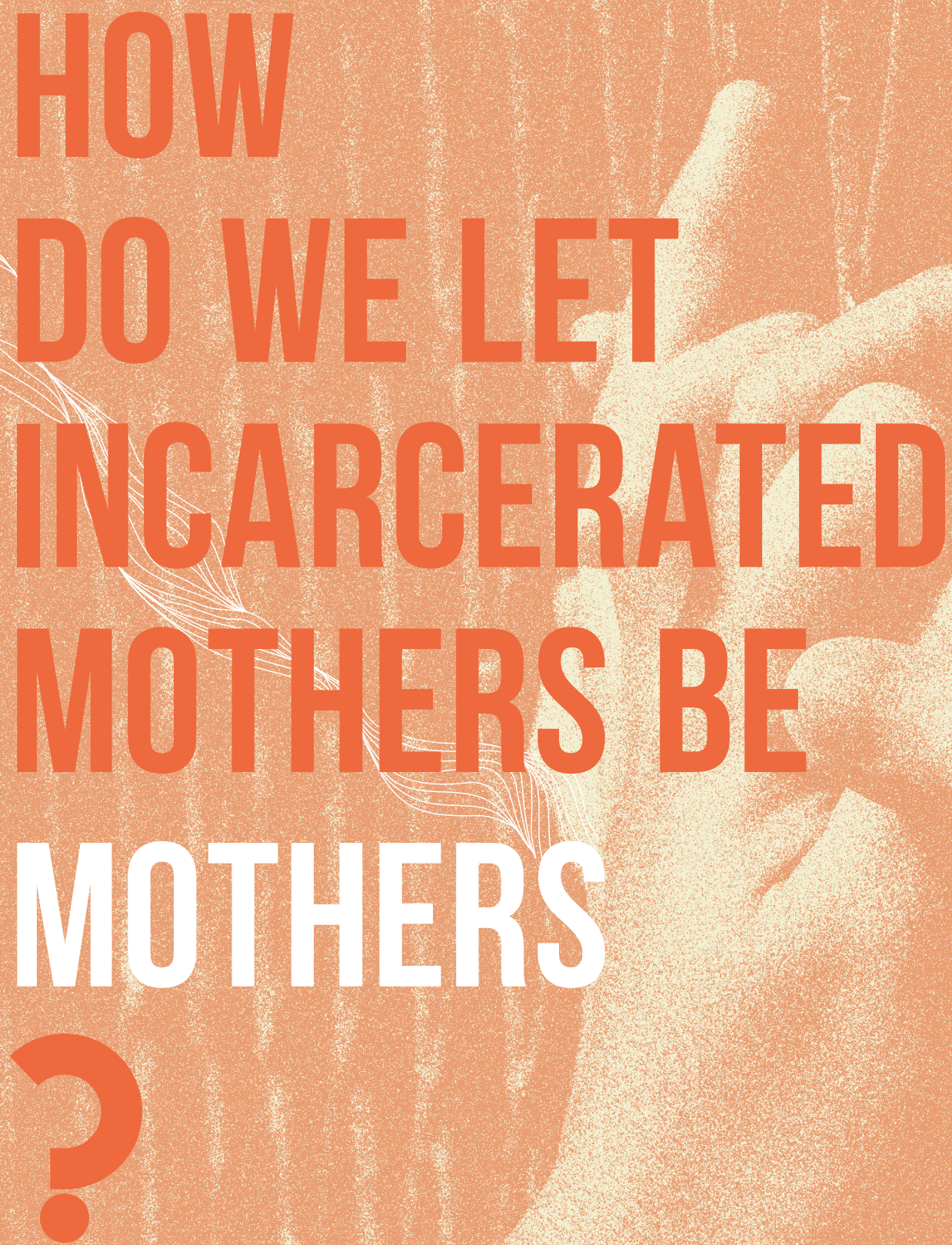
Prison libraries were not accessible to prisoners.

While touring 11 federal penitentiaries, the Senators, who were members of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights and the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, took photographs. These are included in their report. Those pictures have been used, with the permission of Senator Pate, to illustrate this issue of our magazine.



CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES ARE IN BREACH OF THE CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AS WELL AS INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS TREATIES.”

- CANADIAN SENATORS' FINDINGS



HOW DO WE LET INCARCERATED MOTHERS BE MOTHERS ?

SHE'S INDIGENOUS AND HEAVILY PREGNANT

... AND SHACKLED. SHE STUMBLES AS SHE CLIMBS THE PRISON STAIRS.

The guards can help her to her feet. But they cannot calm her fears about what comes next.

What will happen to her baby after it is born? Will he stay with her in this austere and violent penitentiary? Or will someone on the outside step in to raise the child until she finally obtains her freedom?

For these reasons and others, the over-incarceration of Indigenous women in Canada is a violation of their reproductive rights, says Martha Paynter, Director of Nursing Research with the Contraception and Abortion Research Team at the University of British Columbia and an assistant professor in the Faculty of Nursing at the University of New Brunswick.

Dr. Paynter says it is time for Canada to find better alternatives for Indigenous women who have been convicted of crimes. She argues in favour of non-carceral supportive housing options that would allow convicted mothers to live with their children. Those options could include community- or group-run healing lodges, which are mandated under the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

"The reproductive justice movement is conceptualized as the right to not have children. But it is also the right to have children and to parent in safety," she said in a recent interview with Kci-Niwesq. "When you take that lens and look at the prison system, you can see all of these constant and deeply ingrained aspects of reproductive injustice. The most obvious is that when you are incarcerated, you are separated from your children. And, so often, because of who we incarcerate and the colonial, racist, misogynist, homophobic, classist

dimensions to the penal impetus, it is more likely to be vulnerable, marginalized, oppressed, women, and gender-diverse people."

Indigenous women now account for half of the women incarcerated in federal penitentiaries. They tend to be young and in their reproductive years. Many are single parents and the sole breadwinners for their families, which means their children are more likely to be taken into the child welfare system when they are sent to jail.

"Prison, like the residential schools, is a genocidal apparatus of the state," says Dr. Paynter. "Prison is the outcome of policing. And we know that policing (of Indigenous Peoples) in Canada emerged from enforcing the Indian Act and enforcing the reserve system. So, this is a contemporary manifestation of those early colonial projects."

Dr. Paynter, whose research focuses on the intersection of reproductive health and the justice system, is the author of *Reproductive (In)Justice in Canadian Federal Prisons for Women*, a 2021 study prepared for the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies. She gathered information for that report at a series of workshops with prisoners held in federal correctional institutions across Canada.

The workshops were open to prisoners of all races. But, Indigenous women account for half of all federal prisoners and, at some of the workshops, more than half of the participants self-identified as Indigenous.

"Most of the people who are in prison are Indigenous and, therefore, are in some way intergenerationally or directly impacted by the residential school regime and the Sixties Scoop,



“THE REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE MOVEMENT IS CONCEPTUALIZED AS THE RIGHT TO NOT HAVE CHILDREN. BUT IT IS ALSO THE RIGHT TO HAVE CHILDREN AND TO PARENT IN SAFETY.”

- MARTHA PAYNTER

and these routine, genocidal state acts,” says Dr. Paynter. “And the prison system continues that trend, but invisibilizes it, just like the residential school regime was invisibilized.”

The discussions at the workshops reinforced the incompatibility of reproductive justice with the overincarceration of Indigenous women in Canada, and the emotional trauma associated with separating incarcerated mothers from their children. They also confirmed at least four ways in which incarceration harms reproductive health: through sexual violence, denial of reproductive health services, denial of fertility, and separation from the family.

In terms of sexual violence, reproductive justice includes the right to bodily autonomy. Participants at the workshops recounted the shame and loss of self-worth they felt during and after invasive strip searches. “And prison is a very dangerous site of sexual violence,” says Dr. Paynter, citing the 2022 case of a former prison guard at the Truro Institution for Women who was sentenced to three years in jail for assaulting three of the women incarcerated there.

On reproductive health services, Dr. Paynter says basic needs like the availability of birth control to manage menstruation and pregnancy are simply not built into the prison apparatus.

As for fertility, there are documented cases of coerced sterilization. And just being in prison during prime reproductive years limits an incarcerated woman’s choice to have children. Indigenous women are incarcerated at younger ages and for longer periods, says Dr. Paynter, so they are disproportionately likely to spend more of their fertile time incarcerated.

“Tied with all of this is the incredible complexity of the health histories of this population and how that ties in with reproductive health,” she says. “For example, we know that more than 80% of the

women behind bars have experienced childhood abuse (plus there is a lot of) mental illness and substance-use disorder.”

Mental illness and substance abuse can increase a prisoner’s security classification and reduce their access to special programs, visitation, and other beneficial aspects of prison life.

For the participants in the workshops, the number-one concern was their separation from their children.

“When you are incarcerated, your children don’t have the right to be with you and you don’t have the right to be with them,” says Dr. Paynter. The incarcerated women live in constant fear about the harm their children may be experiencing.

The women “are beholden to the people who step up to care for their children in community,” says Dr. Paynter. The burden that is being placed on family or friends can create massive amounts of guilt.

“There’s so much loss of control. There’s constant fear,” she says. “The prisoners are constantly asking themselves: ‘What if my family member is too overburdened and decides not to do this for me? Then my child will go into the (foster care) system.’ Or ‘my mother is now 69 years old. How is she going to take care of my 18-month-old toddler?’ And on and on and on.”

A Mother Child Program was introduced in the federal prison system in 2001 to allow eligible prisoners to raise their infants and toddlers inside the prison as long as they can afford the costs of feeding and caring for them.

But Dr. Paynter’s research has found that just 150 people have participated in this program in the last 20 years.

“Every single person, pretty much, in the federal prison system is a mother,” says Dr. Paynter. “But there is almost no participation in this program.

Why? Well, the number-one reason is that it subjects your child, and your mothering, to the punitive eye of the state.” It means the prisoner must obtain approval from the provincial or territorial child protection services, even though she is being incarcerated in a federal prison.

Women who have experienced the interference of child protection, and its violence, are reluctant to allow that kind of interference, says Dr. Paynter. And, she says, there is no evidence that the Mother Child Program actually works to keep families together.

“We have this knee-jerk idea, this assumption, that this is a good idea, but we don’t have any proof,” she says. “I think we really need to challenge this idea that bringing babies into prisons is ever a good idea when we could, instead, support women to live with their babies in the community,” as is sanctioned under sections 81 and 84 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

The Mother Child Program is also difficult to access; most of the successful applicants have been non-Indigenous. And, when the mothers are released, there is no similar option available in halfway houses. So, some of the women who were able to live with their children while they were incarcerated end up losing them once they are paroled.

“We need to always be cognizant of what are the alternatives,” says Dr. Paynter. One of the options that has proven to work, she says, is supporting mothers to live in community with their babies, she says. “So why are we not doing that?”



Pictured: Martha Paynter Photo credit: Timothy Richard of Halifax

“I THINK WE REALLY NEED TO CHALLENGE THIS IDEA THAT BRINGING BABIES INTO PRISONS IS EVER A GOOD IDEA WHEN WE COULD, INSTEAD, SUPPORT WOMEN TO LIVE WITH THEIR BABIES IN COMMUNITY.”

- MARTHA PAYNTER

WHEN YOU'RE JAILED FAR AWAY FROM HOME

The few women who are convicted of serious crime in Northern Canada are made to pay a double penalty.

In most cases, their sentences must be served in the South, far away from family, friends, and community—possibly at a federal correctional institution where no one speaks their language.

As Canada grapples with the over-incarceration of Indigenous women, there are other issues—including those specific to the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit living in northern territories or Labrador—that reinforce the arguments of critics who say it is time to rethink the way correctional services are delivered in this country.

Emilie Coyle, the Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS), says there are few cultural supports offered to Inuit women, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people in southern correctional institutions, including those incarcerated people who have been sent there from the North. But the CAEFS faces a dilemma in demanding more.

“We struggle with this balance because, the more services that you put into a prison, the more you solidify the role of a prison in our

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IF YOU'RE AN INDIGENOUS PERSON IN A COMMUNITY IN THE YUKON OR NORTHWEST TERRITORIES, YOU ARE TYPICALLY SENT TO B.C. OR EDMONTON, TO THE FEDERAL INSTITUTIONS THERE. YOU'RE DISCONNECTED FROM YOUR FAMILY, YOUR CULTURE.”

- BRIANNA BOURASSA

society,” Ms. Coyle said in a recent interview. “And our vision as an organization is that we are all working to shrink prisons out of existence through a variety of interventions. That’s going to be the only way that the solutions that we’re looking for—which are cultural supports—will happen in community in a way that is culturally appropriate.”

In 2019, Jody Blake, an Inuk woman living in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador, spent six weeks at the Correctional Centre for Women in Clarenville, Newfoundland and Labrador, about 1,400 kilometres from her home. It is the only detention centre for women in that province.

“I don’t know anybody in Newfoundland, and my kids can’t come and see me ... they don’t have money,” Ms. Blake said in an interview with

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"INDIGENOUS FOLKS, POOR FOLKS, TRANS FOLKS, ALL OF THE INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES THAT ARE ALREADY CRIMINALIZED, ARE THE PEOPLE WHO DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO BAIL FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS, INCLUDING THAT THEY DON'T HAVE A HOME OR A SURETY."

- EMILIE COYLE

the Canadian Press after her release. "There (were) other people there from Labrador when I was in there, and they were having hard times, too. Other people (were) getting visitors and people from Labrador never had anyone."

Similar situations occur all across the North when Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people are sentenced to spend time in jail.

"In my experiences, folks who receive a federal sentence who live in one of the territories are sent to a federal institution in the southern provinces," says Brianna Bourassa, CAEFS's lead advocate for the northern and pacific regional teams. "So, if you're an Indigenous person in a community in the Yukon or Northwest Territories, you are typically sent to B.C. or Edmonton, to the federal institutions there. You're disconnected from your family, your culture. Access to children is an ongoing issue. A major dislocation happens."

In the eastern part of the Arctic, women convicted of crimes are often sent to the Joliette Institution for Women in Quebec, which, says Ms. Coyle, struggles to find supports for any Indigenous prisoners, let alone those who are Inuit. And the language barrier poses real problems. "Not only do many Inuit women and gender-diverse folks not speak English," she says, "they also don't speak French, so they will be extremely isolated."

And, after they have adapted to life at a particular prison, the women are likely to be moved to another correctional facility, and then another. "They will

be moved around from institution to institution, often moving further and further away from their families over the course of their time served," says Ms. Bourassa.

Sometimes, when the CAEFS calls attention to certain cases of extreme hardship, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) will try to make accommodation for female prisoners who are being detained far from their home community, says Ms. Coyle. "They might be willing to look at how they can potentially assist with family support, or family reunification, or family visits, or something like that. But it's not a program. It's not something that people can rely on consistently."

Even telephoning home can be difficult for Northerners in southern penitentiaries. The few phones in federal prisons are not located in places where conversations can take place in privacy. And prisoners must pay for their calls, which is difficult for convicted people who are being paid a dollar an hour—if they can get a job in the prison. "When you don't have any money already, it's going to be very prohibitive for you to call home," says Ms. Coyle.

On top of that, Indigenous women are more likely to spend time in maximum security, where they have fewer opportunities for visitation, phone calls, and rehabilitative programs. Ms. Bourassa says the rating scale employed by the CSC to determine a prisoner's security level (minimum, medium, or maximum) was developed three decades ago for white men. "It doesn't make any special accommodations for intersectionality. It doesn't

acknowledge any Indigenous social history. It really positions Indigenous folks at a disadvantage," she says.

Such is the fate of Inuit women who are convicted of serious crime. But, even before conviction, there are inequities.

Most of the people housed in territorial jails are awaiting trial. This means they may ultimately be found not guilty. But those with fewer economic resources are more likely to wait behind bars until their trial has reached its conclusion. According to the Northern Market Basket Measure, 20.2% of the people living in the three territories were below the poverty line in 2021, compared to 7.4% of the people living in one of the 10 provinces.

"Indigenous folks, poor folks, trans folks, all of the intersectional identities that are already criminalized, are the people who don't have access to bail for a variety of reasons, including that they don't have a home or a surety," says Ms. Coyle.

For those reasons and many others, prisoners' advocates, including the CAEFS, say it's time for new options for convicted people, and especially for convicted Indigenous people, whose rate of incarceration is grossly disproportionate to their percentage of the general population of Canada.

"Generally speaking, I would say that we have to be innovative and also creative," says Ms. Coyle. "And we have to be curious. Because we have communities that have their own justice histories that don't look like corrections the way we see it. We need to find ways to learn about those justice histories, but also

to be creative and innovative in how we can implement them currently.”

Ms. Bourassa says the self-governing First Nations of the Yukon have already introduced some creative justice initiatives. For example, Carcross/Tagish First Nation in southern Yukon offers a peacemaking class, in which community members are taught how to resolve conflict at the lowest possible level and in a restorative way.

Ms. Coyle points out that Section 81 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act says sentences can be served in a community. “It doesn’t have to be in a facility. It can be anywhere. It can be a person’s home. It can be an apartment building. It can be a community centre, as long as the (Correctional Service) is satisfied that the safety and security aspect has been considered. But that hasn’t happened in the North.”

Adequate government investments would allow the implementation of those sorts of changes to the criminal justice system, reducing or even eliminating the need to send Northern convicted people to southern institutions. “But, I also think that we need to figure out not just restorative but transformative solutions,” says Ms. Coyle. “Our whole focus should always be to prevent harm from happening in the first place.”



Pictured: Emilie Coyle (top) Brianna Bourassa (bottom)

THE UPSIDE

OF HAVING A CORRECTIONAL CENTRE ON FIRST NATIONS LAND

While many Indigenous convicts are imprisoned far from their homes and families, some First Nations have cut deals to allow jails and penitentiaries to be built on reserve land.

One of them is the Osoyoos Indian Band in the South Okanagan Valley of British Columbia. The provincial government leased 20 acres of land on the reserve for the construction of the Okanagan Correctional Centre, which was opened in 2016.

"Singly, it's our biggest source of revenues and I'm pretty sure it's the biggest job creator, at 250 jobs," says Osoyoos Chief Clarence Louie. "Somebody puts up an institution, I don't care if it's a prison or a hotel, any city or town would want 250 union-paying jobs."

Some community members are employed as guards. Some work in administration. And some work in cultural programming.

Osoyoos is not alone among First Nations in allowing this type of development. The Okimaw Ohci Healing Centre in Maple Creek, Saskatchewan, for instance, has been housing incarcerated Indigenous women on Nekaneet First Nation since 1995. Its construction was guided by the vision of Elders, and the prisoners are taught Nekaneet practices, culture, and values. Although it is mostly a prison for men, women are also held there on a short-term basis.

In British Columbia, the province says Indigenous considerations guided the planning of the Okanagan Correctional Centre, which is subject to a 60-year, \$10.8-million land lease agreement with the First Nation.

"Nobody puts up their hand and says, 'we want a prison on our res,'" says Chief Louie. "But it turned out to be the biggest land lease we've ever done, and it paid off our entire industrial park infrastructure."





"IF A MEMBER OF THE OSOYOOS BAND IS GONNA WIND UP IN JAIL, IS IT BETTER TO BE IN JAIL HUNDREDS OF MILES AWAY?"

-CHIEF CLARENCE LOUIE

Some community members were opposed to allowing a penitentiary to be built on Osoyoos, says Chief Louie. But, he points out, there were also people who opposed the creation of the Nk'Mip Winery, which has helped to bring financial independence to the First Nation.

Back when the prison was being constructed, says Chief Louie, "young guys were teasing each other about who is going to be the first one to wind up in jail on this Indian reserve."

And some Osoyoos band members have, in fact, ended up doing time at the Okanagan Correctional Centre. "We've got some people in jail right now," says Chief Louis.

"If a member of the Osoyoos band is gonna wind up in jail, is it better to be in jail hundreds of miles away?" asks Chief Louie. Visits with prisoners are much easier when they are being held just a couple of kilometres away.

There are also cultural benefits. As Osoyoos is a horse culture, the First Nation insisted, as part of the lease agreement, that the institution incorporate a horse program. They are also salmon people, so there is a fish hatchery where prisoners raise tiny fish.

Over the years, even some of the detractors on the reserve have come to accept the institution's presence. "I know some of the ones that voted no," says Chief Louie. "And now, because their kid works there or one of their family members works there, they're not against it."

“

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- CHIEF CLARENCE LOUIE



All pictures: The Okanagan Correctional Centre exterior
Photo Credit: Government of British Columbia

THE GLADUE FACTOR

IT HAS BEEN NEARLY 30 YEARS SINCE JAMIE TANIS GLADUE'S CASE FORCED COURTS TO CHANGE THE WAY THEY TREAT INDIGENOUS PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN CHARGED WITH SERIOUS CRIMES.

Ms. Gladue, a Cree woman, was 19 years old in September 1995 when she killed her fiancée by stabbing him through the heart during a fight in Nanaimo, British Columbia. She was initially charged with second-degree murder but was allowed to plead guilty to manslaughter when the Crown agreed she had been provoked.

Both Ms. Gladue and her fiancée, who was also Indigenous, had been drinking heavily at the time of the crime. The stabbing took place at a party organized to celebrate her birthday. Her fiancée had insulted her, and she suspected him of having an affair with her older sister.

As it happened, the incident took place shortly after the federal government had changed the Criminal Code of Canada by adding Section 718.2(e), which requires courts to take into consideration "all available sanctions, other than imprisonment" for Indigenous people convicted of crimes. (The new law came into force in 1996.)

The changes were meant to divert Indigenous people from incarceration at a time when they accounted for 18% of prisoners in Canada.

In retrospect, the Criminal Code changes did not stop the Indigenization of Canada's prisons. Today, when Indigenous people make up 5% of the Canadian population, they account for more than 40% of the people incarcerated in provincial jails and a third of the inmates in federal penitentiaries.

Nevertheless, the Criminal Code changes did prompt some courts to search for alternatives to incarceration.

The judge who first sentenced Ms. Gladue agreed she should spend three years behind bars for manslaughter, but he did not take into account any factors related to her Indigenous background. The judge also said that the new provision of the Criminal Code did not apply to Indigenous people who committed crimes off-reserve.

The Supreme Court of Canada disagreed. It upheld Ms. Gladue's three-year sentence, but said the new section of the Criminal Code applied to all Indigenous people who commit crimes, whether their offences take place on or off a reserve. It also said judges have a statutory obligation to consider an Indigenous offender's circumstances, no matter the offence.

After the Supreme Court ruling, courts began requiring pre-sentence reports for all Indigenous people convicted of a crime to determine if there are ways to keep them from serving time in jail. These are known as Gladue reports.

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RESTORATIVE JUSTICE:

SETTING THEM ON A STRAIGHT PATH

Restorative justice is about diverting perpetrators away from courts and jails, and allowing communities to decide how their people who have committed crimes, and the victims of their actions, can best move forward.

Imagine a justice system that restores harmony between those who have done harm and those they have harmed.

Imagine a justice system focused on rehabilitation rather than punishment.

Imagine a justice system that does not saddle young people with criminal records, but instead provides an opportunity for growth, learning, and pride.

That is restorative justice. It is a relatively new response to the over-incarceration of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. But its foundations lie in the traditions of Indigenous societies around the world, including those in this country.



Pictured: Elizabeth Johnson

It's about diverting perpetrators away from courts and jails, and allowing communities to decide how their people who have committed crimes, and the victims of their actions, can best move forward.

Restorative justice has been in place for two decades in many Indigenous communities across Canada. One of them is Miawpukek First Nation, at Conne River on the south coast of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mi'sel Joe, Chief of Miawpukek, realized 20 years ago that there had to be a better system of justice for his people—one that is controlled by the community.



Pictured: Nova Institution - SIU and Secure Unit Yard
Photo credit: The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies

"WE WANT TO LOOK AT THEM AS INDIVIDUALS. AND THEN WE ASK WHAT CAN WE DO TO SUPPORT THIS INDIVIDUAL TO MAKE SOME HEALTHIER CHANGES, SO THAT THEY'RE NOT CONTINUOUSLY GOING DOWN THIS PATH OF CAUSING HARM."

- ALANA ODAWA

Chief Joe was aware that Judge Robert Fowler was presiding at a courthouse across the bay from Miawpukek.

"I sent a message to his court worker and asked him if he would come to Conn River for a meeting, and he said 'no, I don't have the time,'" Chief Joe said in an interview during a recent visit to Ottawa. "And I told him, if we can get you over to Conn River and get you back to your court in 45 minutes, would you come over. And he said 'yes.' So, I sent a helicopter over. It landed right next to our band office and that's how I got to meet him."

The two discussed the need to implement a system of restorative justice in Miawpukek. And Judge Fowler agreed that it should happen.

The majority of crimes in Miawpukek are minor break and enters or petty vandalism of churches and the school. In the not-to-far-distant past, the 'restorative justice' for committing those types of offences would be meted out by one's parents, says Chief Joe. "If someone reports you to your parents, I mean, God almighty, I would rather go to jail."

But, as the First Nations came under the control of the colonizers and their lawyers and judges, he says, that system went by the wayside, and those who committed a minor crime in Miawpukek ended up in prison.

"I know people who were put in jail for taking a piece of plastic from somebody's cabin," he says. There was one man who spent 30 days behind bars for borrowing a canoe—which is part of the Mi'kmaq tradition. And Miawpukek

men were regularly being incarcerated for hunting moose without a licence. "The RCMP would come in and take the meat right out of the pan on the stove and take the man who got the moose off to jail."

In Miawpukek, when someone is acknowledged to have committed a crime and is referred to the restorative justice program, they take a seat at a table with the victim, Elders, supportive people for both parties, and witnesses. There is a smudge, and a feather is passed from person to person. A judge may oversee the process. Then the discussions begin.

"At the end of the day, we have to come up with a resolution for what has been done. The first thing would be an apology," says Chief Joe. "And then (the offender) may have to do community work for 30 days or 40 days. They may have to cut wood for an Elder, or they may have to paint a fence. It all depends on the time of year."

But there are no criminal charges. No one goes to jail. And justice takes place in full view of community members who may sit as observers, says Chief Joe, rather than in a courtroom several hours away where the proceeding is out of the eyes of the people of Miawpukek.

It is a similar process that takes place when minor crimes are committed in the First Nations that are part of the Nishnawbe-Aski Nations north of Thunder Bay, Ontario.

"Restorative justice is a unique way of seeking alternative justice within the community that benefits the victim, the offender, and their families, and

ultimately supports the community," says Elizabeth Johnson, a restorative justice worker with the Nishnawbe-Aski Legal Services Corporation (NALSC).

Lorilee Lessard, another NALSC restorative justice worker, says it is the Crown attorneys who determine whether a person charged with committing a crime would be a good candidate for the alternative form of sentencing. But recommendations can come from many sources, including arresting officers.

Restorative justice frees up court time, and is less costly than a criminal trial. But the real advantages flow to the offender, the victim, and their community.

When Ms. Lessard receives a referral from the Crown, she first calls the person who has broken the law (she calls this person a client) to talk about the crime. She asks them to explain what was going on at the time the offence was committed and how it has impacted their life. Then she contacts the victim to ask the same questions.

"Then I would facilitate a healing circle, which would include the offender, the victim, an Elder, supports for the offender, supports for the victim," says Ms. Lessard. "And in that circle, we would talk about how we can correct the harm."

That may include an apology letter and community service.

"We encourage culturally based community service, says Ms. Johnson. "So, spending time on the land, spending time with an Elder if they go hunting."

Connections to the Elders are so important for young people who have strayed afoul of the law, says Ms. Lessard.

“A week and a half ago, we had an excellent Elder in our circle who was reiterating to that offender the importance of choosing the good path, and connecting with your culture, and being more traditional in your way of thinking, and learning respect,” she says. “And I think that impact of Elders speaking, it really gets through to our clients that this is your chance to get on a good path.”

Alana Odawa, a restorative justice worker in the Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence unit of NALSC, says it is difficult for someone who has served time in a settler correctional institution to turn their life around once they are released.

“The programs for people who are being incarcerated are supposed to rehabilitate and help those individuals,” says Ms. Odawa. “But, when they come out, they’re still painted with the same brush because, even years later, society sees them as who they were before.”

No one wants to be labelled a criminal, says Ms. Lessard. “Everybody makes mistakes in life,” she says. Some of her clients have long backgrounds of “addiction, trauma, there’s so many things you have to look at. And when they come through the restorative justice program, there is that talk of treatment. There’s so many more options.”

There are no statistics available to prove that restorative justice works in the Nishnawbe Aski communities. But Ms. Johnson says that, in the years she has worked for NALSC, she has never had a client reoffend. Ms. Lessard says that has been her experience as well.



Pictured (top to bottom): Lorilee Lessard, Mi'sel Joe

"We want to look at them as individuals," says Ms. Odawa. "And then we ask what can we do to support this individual to make some healthier changes, so that they're not continuously going down this path of causing harm ... our ultimate goal is to be breaking that cycle."

Chief Joe tells the story of a young man in his community, who was repeatedly getting into trouble.

"He went before Judge Fowler" as part of the restorative justice program, says Chief Joe. "The young man was a pretty good artist, and Judge Fowler said you have to do a picture of an Aboriginal person. They can be sitting down, lying down, standing up, whatever—and it will be hung in a courthouse. And he did that. That was his sentence."

The young man did not offend again. The message, says Chief Joe, is that when someone has committed a crime and needs to be set on a straight path: "Give them something they can do that they can be proud of."

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- CHIEF MI'SEL JOE

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- ELIZABETH JOHNSON

Photo credit: The Senate of Canada

(IN)JUSTICE



KCI-NIWESQ

is the magazine of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC). Its objective is to highlight the work of the organization and to tell the stories of the Indigenous women of Canada.

NWAC, which was founded in 1974, is a national Indigenous organization representing First Nations (on and off reserve, with status and without), Métis, and Inuit women, girls, and gender-diverse people in Canada. Its goal is to enhance, promote, and foster the social, economic, cultural, and political well-being of Indigenous women within their respective communities and Canadian society.



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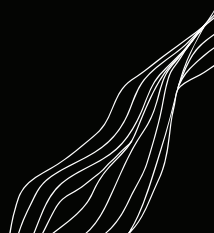
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