

Quaker Concern

An interview with our newest staff member, Karen Ridd

By Matthew Legge



Karen Ridd

Matt: Welcome to CFSC, Karen! What's surprised you about your work here so far?

Karen: Thanks! I'm delighted to have joined CFSC! One great surprise actually happened during my interview for this position. I'd come prepared to suggest a name change away from talking about "criminal justice" work towards something that doesn't stigmatize people who are currently incarcerated. But when I arrived at the job interview I found out that the change had already happened. Now CFSC is talking about its work in this area as "transformative justice" work. Much better!

Matt: You have some longstanding connections to Quakerism, don't you? Tell us about them.

Karen: I'm an Attender at Winnipeg Monthly Meeting, and have been on the fringes of Quakerism since I wrote a university paper on George Fox 40 years ago.

That's a long time now! In my orientation package to CFSC (okay—that's another surprise—what a mountain of information! Y'all are thorough!) I've been doing a lot of study and reflection about Quakerism and I'm delighted by how much really resonates in my spirit. I've also had some great Quaker mentors over the years: Alaine Hawkins was a dear Friend and coordinator with Peace Brigades International (PBI) when I worked with PBI in Central America. George

Lahey's mentoring has made me the teacher that I am. Mark Burch set me up to teach his Voluntary Simplicity course at the University of Winnipeg. And WMM is filled with role models! Moreover, when I came back from Central America in 1989, I had the opportunity to travel across Canada doing peace education work, and met so many amazing Quakers during that time. I'm enjoying reconnecting!

Matt: You already have a great job teaching Peace and Conflict Transformation Studies at Canadian Mennonite University. What drew you to take on the CFSC job as well?

Karen: Penal abolition has been close to my heart for many years, really catalyzed by visiting people in prisons when I worked with PBI in El Salvador. As you can imagine, those were truly horrific institutions, and the experience sealed my belief that no one should be caged. When I returned to Canada, I tried to keep up the work: I volunteered with Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) and Prison Book Clubs, did some prison visitation, helped start Circles of Support and Accountability in Winnipeg, taught with Walls to Bridges, and worked in restorative justice. In one memorable week I was involved in an AVP workshop and then a few days later taught a conflict resolution training to correctional officers at the same prison.

That experience made it so obvious to me that our

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The *UN Declaration* has shaped my life for 25 years

By Jennifer Preston



Jennifer Preston and Paul Joffe at the UN in Geneva.

CFSC staff have a book club. Recently we finished reading and discussing *Realizing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Triumph, Hope, and Action*. I co-edited this book with CFSC associate, and long-time legal counsel with the Cree Nation Government/Grand Council of the Crees, Paul Joffe, and then staff at the First Nations Summit, Jackie Hartley. We started work on the volume in 2008 and it was published in 2010.

As the book club was concluding our discussions, one of the staff asked what it was like for me to go back to the book all these years later. Therein lies a tale.

As long-time avid readers of *Quaker Concern* are aware, I spent much of the past 25 years working on the *Declaration* in one way or another. The book project came out of a symposium hosted by the BC Indigenous leadership and held a few months after the *Declaration* was adopted by the UN General Assembly (GA) in 2007. At the Symposium I presented on the role Quakers had played in the development and adoption of this human rights instrument.

When I look back over the journey, am I discouraged? Hopeful? Yes. It has never been an easy road, and the challenges are too many to document here. The successes are also too many to list! Indigenous leaders and advocates first went to the United Nations to have the international arena address the dispossession and discrimination that Indigenous peoples continue to face around the globe. CFSC represented Friends worldwide in this work and we faithfully supported our Indigenous partners with the priorities they laid out. We continue this work in many ways.

Where did we go?

So many places! The *Declaration* was globally celebrated

when it was one of the first instruments adopted by the newly created UN Human Rights Council in June 2006, and later at the GA. Again there were celebrations in New York with the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in 2014. Celebrations are fine. But implementation is another story.

Implementation can be so many things: implementation on the ground in Indigenous communities; political implementation—such as legislation; legal implementation such as Court decisions. Implementation is about decolonizing. Implementation is about addressing systemic discrimination. Implementation is about ensuring respect for human rights.

“Human rights are not for cherry picking.”

CFSC, with our partners in the Coalition of the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples (DeclarationCoalition.com), worked tirelessly to have Canada change positions and endorse the *Declaration*—first begrudgingly in 2010, and more enthusiastically in 2016. We then set to work to achieve federal legislation to implement the *Declaration*—first with a private members bill (C-262) and then a government bill (C-15). A key purpose of that legislation is to “affirm the *Declaration* as a universal international human rights instrument with application in Canadian law.” Next came Canada’s *National Action Plan*, released in 2022.

In the midst of these major milestones, never forget that CFSC went to the Supreme Court of Canada in 2014 in the *Tsilhqot’in Nation* case to argue that the *Declaration* must be used when examining cases of land rights. In 2015 we supported the Truth and

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UN Declaration *has shaped my life* continued

Reconciliation Commission and its 94 *Calls to Action* and 10 *Principles of Reconciliation*, the first being that the *Declaration* is the framework for reconciliation. In 2020, provincial legislation to implement the *Declaration* was adopted in BC. Paul and I travelled extensively to talk with Indigenous Nations and settlers about the *Declaration*, where it came from, what it means, and how to use it.

All of this work to see the *Declaration* respected and implemented was deeply challenging, always with governments and corporate interests pushing back on Indigenous peoples' human rights.

Where are we now in 2024?

Ahhhh, I thought you'd ask. Well, some days it feels we have a step forward and then one back. Yes, we have absolutely moved forward in both law and policy in Canada and this forward movement continues to grow. There is no question, however, that much work remains. So much must be done to ensure that the journey of reconciliation has real meaning in Canada. Sometimes we see that governments, institutions, and the corporate sector appear to be embracing the *Declaration*, while quietly trying to avoid the harder elements. But human rights are not for cherry picking.

“When I look back over the journey am I discouraged? Hopeful? Yes.”

I am extremely encouraged by two recent Supreme Court of Canada decisions that have relied on the *Declaration* in the rulings. I'll cite one, a reference decision concerning child and family services (*Attorney General Quebec v Attorney General Canada*). The Court states that, “...the Government of Canada ‘must, in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples, take all measures necessary to ensure that the laws of Canada are consistent with the *Declaration*.”

CFSC is a partner in a research project with others from the Coalition to work at the community level to see what comes next, what are the grassroots needs for Indigenous peoples (see our article on this research project: <https://QuakerService.ca/TowardImplementation>). Indigenous Nations, organizations, and communities are using the *Declaration* widely in many ways to advance their rights and their realization of self-determination.

What's next?

CFSC will continue to work in solidarity with Indigenous partners, supporting their priorities. Currently, this includes implementing the *National Action Plan*. Internationally, we continue to both promote advances and also hold Canada to account, most recently at Canada's appearance before the UN Universal Periodic Review. Our work also includes the ongoing efforts to create and share resources on the *Declaration*.

So, what was it like to go back to the book I edited from 2008-2010? It was a pleasure to re-read and discuss with my colleagues. Much of the book is still relevant and not out of date. I wish I could say it is only relevant as a look at a point we've moved far beyond. I am frustrated where the violations and discrimination continue unchanged. I am also hopeful we have created change and will continue to do so.



Jennifer Preston serves as CFSC's General Secretary and is a member of Hamilton Monthly Meeting. For a very long time she has coordinated the Indigenous rights program at CFSC. Realizing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Triumph, Hope, and Action is available online or through the CFSC office.

Indigenous peoples are working hard at the grassroots to **revitalize their cultures and communities**. But this work takes resources.

CFSC's **Reconciliation Fund** provides grants directly to Indigenous cultural, language, and other revitalization projects.



Please give now at QuakerService.ca/Donate (select “Reconciliation Fund”) or by mailing in the enclosed card with a note that your gift is for the Reconciliation Fund. Thank you!

Could a guaranteed liveable basic income help reduce incarceration? by Karen Ridd

You probably believe in a Guaranteed Basic Income, too!" the voice on the other end of the phone said mockingly.

Guaranteed Basic Income? Actually, I'd never heard of that before—but it immediately struck me as a good idea. I was a new mother at the time, calling my provincial Premier to raise concerns about the reduction of funding to services in my inner-city neighbourhood. I knew the Premier's staffer and I were going to disagree. I didn't expect that she would (albeit unintentionally) teach me something important. Guaranteed Liveable Basic Income (GLBI). "Yes," I said, "I do believe in that."

I still do. And my work at CFSC will include efforts to make that idea a reality in Canada. Guaranteeing a basic income to everyone could reduce poverty, improve health and educational, and reduce incarceration.

The connection between poverty and over-incarceration is incontrovertible. For instance, according to research done by the John Howard Society, 22% of people were unhoused at the time of their incarceration.¹ As Senator Kim Pate once said, "Canadian prisons and jails are receptacles for people who have been failed by other systems."

Leah Gazan (in Parliament) and Kim Pate (in Senate) recently put forward bills in their respective chambers, calling on the Canadian government to open discussions with stakeholders about what a GLBI might entail, who would be eligible, and more. These are important conversations to have: and the good news is there's a precedent for them.

As an International Development Studies professor, I came across the visionary Mincome experiment that took place in Dauphin, Manitoba, in the 1970s.² A common concern about GLBI is that people might take advantage of the program and stop working. (I see that as a pessimistic and capitalist view of human nature: that we need to 'work' to have value, and that work is always a burden that people must be driven to do.)

What the Dauphin Mincome experiment showed was that people generally kept working, with the important exceptions of new mothers (who were able to stay home longer with their babies) and teenage boys (who stayed in school or returned to school). Additional

money that the GLBI provided was largely spent on what before had been 'extras' like going back to school, dental care, or children's activities.

This is not to say that a GLBI is perfect. Indeed there are potential problems that Friends—as people with a deep and longstanding concern for social justice—need to be aware of.

We need to ensure that any implementation of a GLBI doesn't become a slippery slope to the privatization of social services, or used as a way to misdirect attention from Indigenous sovereignty movements (a government could conceivably use their help of individuals instead of Nations as a way to evade the responsibility for reparations including land back).³ We would also need to make sure that a GLBI would not simply provide a subsidy for employers to keep people in bad low-paying jobs and undercut the struggle for social justice.

Moreover, a GLBI would need to be truly universal. Social benefits usually demand that people prove they're looking for work (while ignoring the important unpaid labour many are often already doing, like parenting, cleaning, cooking, caring for loved ones, studying, and being community members). A truly universal basic income would not include such demands.

CFSC believes that "universal" should also include people who are currently incarcerated. Inmates in Canadian Federal prisons are usually paid \$3.15 a day, a sum which hasn't changed since 1981. A big cause of recidivism inside (that is, infractions that are incurred by people who are incarcerated and that then lead to additional charges and longer periods of incarceration) is that there is simply no way to support family members or get enough supplies or good food with \$3.15 a day. Black markets and illegal industries proliferate behind prison walls.

CFSC encourages Quakers to engage with GLBI. It's an important issue. One thing you can do right now is visit the website <https://ubiworks.ca/guaranteed-livable-basic-income>. It has lots of additional information on a GLBI, and multiple ways to respond.

Another thing you can do if you're in Canada is to meet with or contact your Member of Parliament (MP). For

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Guaranteed livable basic income continued

the basics of how to visit with your MP see our handout <https://QuakerService.ca/VisitingMPs>. This is a good time to bring to your MP's attention that new GLBI legislation is in the first stages of the parliamentary process. It's important that MPs know GLBI is an issue their constituents care about. There will eventually be a vote, so educating MPs to vote in favour of this legislation is an important task you can help with! We look forward to engaging, alongside Quakers across the country, in exploring GBLI further.



Karen Ridd is CFSC's new Transformative Justice Program Coordinator. You can read her bio on page 8.

1. John Howard Society of Ontario, "The counter point," 2014, <https://bit.ly/CounterPointPDF>
2. Travis Tomchuk, "Manitoba's Mincome experiment," Canadian Museum for Human Rights, August 10, 2022, <https://HumanRights.ca/story/manitobas-mincome-experiment>
3. Jane Barter and David Driedger, "Universal basic income could leave some Canadians behind," Broadview, June 5, 2020, <https://broadview.org/universal-basic-income-neoliberalism>

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carceral systems are dehumanizing for everyone. So, I'm glad to get to do more direct work on these important issues. But I'll be continuing the teaching too (at a reduced load), so really, I'm getting the best of both worlds!

Matt: How's the transition going so far?

Karen: CFSC really has great staff and they and my Committee have been hugely helpful at getting me oriented; I'm grateful for that. Now if I could only get used to the time changes!

Matt: What initiatives are you currently working on?

Karen: I'll make sure to write about this in an upcoming Quaker Concern, so I won't say a lot here, but I'm excited by work that CFSC is getting involved in regarding the Federal Framework for Reduction of Recidivism (FFRR: <https://bit.ly/ReductionOfRecidivism>). The FFRR is a solid, multi-party initiative, but there is work to be done to guarantee that it is implemented as fully as possible. On a different front, as a Manitoban, I'm perhaps particularly interested in exploring ways that CFSC can

be supportive of the burgeoning Indigenous justice-making movements that are happening. Lastly, I'm glad that CFSC is starting to think about the possibilities of a Guaranteed Liveable Basic Income.

Matt: What are you reading these days?

Karen: I'm not sure if people are aware of this, but CFSC staff have a weekly book club. I missed out on the staff discussion of your book *Are We Done Fighting?*, so I'm busily trying to catch up. It really dovetails well with work that I've been exploring on what makes social change happen, so I'm enjoying it!

Matt: Haha, dear readers, I assure you that was a totally unsolicited plug. What do you do in your non-CFSC time?

Karen: Oooo... lots of things! I've got two young adult kids that I love spending time with. I'm the butler to two cats (sometimes four: the neighbour cats like to visit!), I used my bike as my primary mode of transportation all winter this year (may spring come to Winnipeg soon!). I volunteer for lots of theatre companies in Winnipeg. And whenever possible, I'm in a canoe!

Matt: If you could ask people reading this article to take action on something today, what would that be?
Karen: Can I give them two things? Watch the newest CFSC video, *Monica's Story*. Then help us get it to people who might not normally see things like this. Share it with extended family, neighbours, put a link to it at the bottom of your emails for a while: I'm sure Quakers will have creative ideas about how to help extend our reach on this! Secondly, check out the links in my article on the Guaranteed Liveable Basic Income and take one of the actions highlighted there! Thank you in advance, Friends, for your work on these issues!

Matt Legge is CFSC's Communications Coordinator.

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Canada's about-face on Gaza shows people power at work by Sandra Wiens

Canadian Friends have shown their concern and support for the people of Israel, Palestine, and particularly Gaza, strongly over the past six months, and it has been heartening to see. Since the October 7th, 2023, Hamas attack and taking of Israeli hostages, Israel has led an ongoing assault on Gaza. This has been truly devastating. It has deeply affected not only everyone in Gaza, but safety and security in the whole region.

Despite original unquestioning support of Israel, the Canadian government was forced to acknowledge the need for a ceasefire, humanitarian aid access, upholding its commitment to international law, and an arms embargo with Israel.

That change in position only happened thanks to the persistence of Canadians in advocacy, letter writing, meeting with MPs, and protesting across the country. All actions that I know Friends participated in. CFSC's two letter writing campaigns saw hundreds of letters sent and many visits to MPs.

While heavily watered down with last-minute amendments, a motion was passed on March 18th—an expression of the will of Parliament and, by extension, that of Canadians. It was important to Canada, to the international community, and, hopefully, for Palestine/Israel. Other countries are referencing the motion, providing a precedent for more countries to follow.

There is still much left to do in holding Canada accountable, but we now know that the voice of Canadians does play an important part in generating major change—as the chronology of events below demonstrates—from complete support of Israel to an arms embargo with Israel.

Chronology

—**Oct 7, 2023:** Hamas attack on Israel claiming the lives of 1,139 Israelis. Over 250 hostages are taken. Within hours Gaza is sealed off by Israel. Access to water, electricity, and fuel are all cut off.

—**Oct 8, 2023:** Israel declares war on Hamas and begins an aerial bombardment of Gaza.

—**Oct 27, 2023:** Israel starts ground invasion of Gaza, tells Palestinians to move south. Canada continues to affirm Israel's right to self defense.

—**Dec 12, 2023:** UN General Assembly adopts a resolution demanding an immediate humanitarian

ceasefire in Gaza and reiterating its insistence that all parties comply with international law, hostages be released immediately, and humanitarian access be ensured. Canada votes in favour (previously did not vote in favour of a ceasefire).

—**Dec 29, 2023:** South Africa presents to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) a case for genocide in Gaza by Israel. There have been at least 21,507 deaths in Gaza (approx. 1% of Gaza's population).

—**Jan 26, 2024:** ICJ issues provisional ruling of a plausible case of genocide. ICJ acknowledges the urgency of the humanitarian situation and outlines measures for Israel to conduct military operations and guarantee the provision of basic services and humanitarian assistance to the population in Gaza.

—**Jan 26, 2024:** Funding to UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) by 16 countries (including Canada) suspended due to allegations of staff involvement in the Oct 7th attacks.

—**Feb 12, 2024:** Foreign Affairs (FAAE) Committee of the House of Commons unanimously passes motion requesting Global Affairs Canada (GAC) to provide documentation on the export permits for military goods and technology issued to Israel since 2006.

—**Feb 20, 2024:** UN Security Council ceasefire resolution fails 13 to 1 with the US vetoing.

—**Mar 8, 2024:** Canada restores funding to UNWRA based on reports from a UN investigation.

—**Mar 15, 2024:** UNICEF shares that 31%—or 1 in 3 children under 2 years of age—in the Northern Gaza Strip suffer from acute malnutrition (an escalation from 15.6% in January). Serious fears of famine in Gaza loom.

—**Mar 18, 2024:** Parliament passes historic motion on Gaza calling for, among other things, an arms embargo with Israel—the first G7 country to do so.

—**Mar 25, 2024:** UN Security Council ceasefire for Ramadan resolution passes with 14 votes in favour and for the first time the US abstaining from the vote (allowing it to pass).

—**Apr 10, 2024:** A new motion is presented at the FAAE Committee asking, again, for the export permits for military arms and technologies sent to Israel since 2020, as the FAAE has yet to receive the documents from GAC.



Sandra Wiens is CFSC's Government Relations Representative.

Friends on the Move



CFSC HAS BEEN HONOURED TO WORK consistently with international human rights lawyer, **Paul Joffe** (pictured on page 3), who has recently retired after 50 years at the bar. Paul's extraordinary commitment to the *UN Declaration* and Indigenous peoples' human rights is humbling. CFSC staff **Jennifer Preston** hosted a small retirement dinner for Paul in Montreal. Long-time CFSC partners joined to thank Paul for his incredible service! It has been our deep pleasure to partner with Paul and we wish him a happy retirement.

CFSC STAFFERS **SANDRA WIENS AND JEREMY Vander Hoek** headed to Washington to visit our sister Quaker service organizations Friends Committee on National Legislation and American Friends Service Committee. While still in Washington, Sandra and Jeremy attended a Global Indigenous Peoples' Peacebuilding Conference.

Jeremy went on to New York City where he was at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

together with CFSC's **Rachel Singleton Polster, Rachel Yordy**, and CFSC partner **Page Nandawab-Ikwe Chartrand**, Anishinaabekwe, who is based in N'Swakmok.

CFSC also supported a University of British Columbia expert seminar for the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in February. The hybrid seminar had Jeremy and Rachel Singleton Polster there in person and Jennifer online. We provided assistance to the office of the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations and the keynote was given by National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak.

CFSC WELCOMES NEW TRANSFORMATIVE Justice Program Coordinator **Karen Ridd**. Readers of *Quaker Concern* will remember from our last issue that **Nancy Russell** has retired. Karen has stepped into this program coordinator role now and brings a wealth of experience to CFSC.

Karen holds an MA in Peace and Justice and is a mediator, facilitator,

teacher, and public speaker with decades of experience in conflict resolution.

In the '80s Karen worked as a human rights volunteer in war zones in Central America with Peace Brigades International. Her work there was recognized with multiple awards. She has also received awards as a teacher of Conflict Resolution Studies and International Development Studies at Canadian Mennonite University. She's a sought after consultant on the effective use of participatory education in university classrooms.

Karen is a member of Walls to Bridges (teaching university courses inside prisons and jails), and has experience with Alternatives to Violence Program, Circles of Support and Accountability, and Prison Book Clubs. She's a member of Geshar/Bridge/Gasr (dialogue and action on Israel and Palestine), and Peac-ing it Together (connecting social activists with conflict resolution practitioners and resources).