

Quaker Concern

Elevate the Voices of Those with Lived Experience

By Nancy Russell



When I close my eyes and think about lived experience, I can still hear the words of children and youth I've met over the years:

- “They asked me questions in front of my parents. I couldn't say anything with them in the room.”
- “It took me a year to say something to the teacher. I stood in line at her desk almost every day. She never noticed me. One day I said, ‘look’ and showed her my arm.”
- “When the social worker came to my school, I was embarrassed. Everybody saw.”
- “The cops called me a ‘YO.’ Young offender? I was 10. I was a kid.”
- “When the Children’s Aid Society came to my house, the police came too. I thought I was going to jail.”

In Ontario, it was comments like these from advisory groups of children and youth that helped to inform inquest recommendations for enhanced training of teachers, social workers, and police officers.

“Elevate the voices of those with lived experience.” So, it says in CFSC’s criminal justice plan. Right now, it includes goals related to improving the lives of children with incarcerated parents and working toward changes in laws to ensure better family-based sentencing options as alternatives to imprisonment.

Since my arrival at CFSC in 2020, I’ve met several children, youth, and families impacted by parental incarceration. Their shared stories include feelings of isolation, shame, and stigma. Children and their families often face disapproval and attitudes of moral judgement from friends and other family members. Absence of support pervades. Placement of children away from home and family happens frequently. Lack of access to the incarcerated parent whether by phone, video, or in-person visit, is common. Visits are cancelled, especially true since the onset of the pandemic. There is often increased financial burden for the family related to a decrease in household income, associated costs for prison phone calls and food, and long distance travel expenses for prison visits.

“Absence of support pervades.”

Listening to the opinions of children and youth who have or are “living the system” is important, because they’re part of the story about that policy, sector, or service. Policies and laws must not rely only on the viewpoints of groups holding established authority. CFSC considers that the inclusion of the voices of children and youth are essential for fundamental system change. We understand that the most well-intentioned people (like ourselves) without direct personal experience, can put great effort into creating change that may not be meaningful for those who are actually dealing with the system.

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Canadians call on NATO to reduce nuclear risks

Canada, as a member of NATO, relies on threats to use nuclear weapons. In April we joined a wide range of signatories in calling on Canada to energize negotiations by all governments toward nuclear disarmament. Find out more at:

<https://QuakerService.ca/NATONuclearRisks>

Discerning social concerns

Several Quaker Meetings have said to us in effect: “We’re exhausted. We try to address so many problems in the world that in the end we’re spread too thin. How does CFSC navigate this challenge? How can we decide what causes to take up?”

In response to these questions and requests for help, we’ve written a pamphlet. It explores what discernment is, what a leading is, and how to use Quaker decision-making processes to select what peace and social justice work to take on. To download it in PDF visit:

<https://QuakerService.ca/PeaceAndSocialConcerns>

Invest in communities to reduce reoffending

Canada has tabled a new *Federal Framework to Reduce Recidivism*. We welcome the *Framework’s* focus around the social determinants of health: housing, education, employment, health, and positive support networks. The National Associations Active in Criminal Justice (NAACJ), of which CFSC is an active member, released a discussion paper with recommendations (<https://QuakerService.ca/ReducingRecidivism>), and continues to meet with government about the new *Framework*.

Implementation of the UN Declaration in Canada

We helped put on a side event during the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Geneva. At the event four expert panelists discussed the law that Canada passed last year, the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*. The Act began a process of implementing the Indigenous human rights expressed within the *UN Declaration*. Find out how these experts think Canada is doing with this implementation and what still needs to happen:

<https://QuakerService.ca/EMRIPEvent>

Psychology Today post explores the power of emotions in conflicts

“Emotions are absolutely fundamental to our actions and beliefs, but they aren’t so easy to control. You might think you know how you or someone else ‘should’ feel. But that could just block you from connecting with yourself or that person,” writes CFSC’s Matt Legge for *Psychology Today*. Have a look at the post for some evidence-based ideas about the roles that emotions play in conflicts:

<https://QuakerService.ca/EmotionsAreFundamental>

UN asks Canada about children of incarcerated parents

We met with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and took the opportunity to highlight the situation of children when their parents come into contact with the criminal justice system. Questions that we drew to the attention of the UN were later asked during a review of Canada: How many children with incarcerated parents are living in Canada? How does Canada ensure the rights of these children? We later followed up with Canada with further questions about data collection, alternative family-based sentencing, access to family contact and visits, a federal Children’s Commissioner, and current supports available for children and families of incarcerated persons.

Quaker Concern

Quaker Concern is the newsletter of Canadian Friends Service Committee, the peace and social justice agency of Quakers in Canada. Since 1931, CFSC has been a small team but has achieved a great deal.

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Canadian Friends Service Committee

60 Lowther Ave, Toronto, ON M5R 1C7

☎ (416) 920-5213

✉ Info@QuakerService.ca

📍 QuakerService.ca

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Expanded Visions of Sustainability at Expert Symposium

By Jeremy Vander Hoek



Expert Symposium on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Sustainable Development, April, 2022. Photo: Katsi'tsakwas Ellen Gabriel.

In the first few weeks at my new job at CFSC I got a text from Indigenous Rights Program Coordinator Jennifer Preston: “So! What do you think about coming to Vancouver?” With excitement I told her, “Of course, I’d love to.” A few weeks later I set off from my home office in Ontario to a multi-day event. I would be attending the Expert Symposium on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Sustainable Development: Indigenous Peoples’ Human Rights and Ecological Knowledge.

The Symposium was just one component of a long-term project CFSC began in March 2021, with funds from the federal government’s Sustainable Development Goals Funding Program. Leading up to it, experts gathered online numerous times to discuss sustainability in the context of implementing the *UN Declaration*. These meetings led them to produce resources that grounded the in-person dialogue. The resources include two factsheets on the relationship between sustainability and Indigenous peoples’ human rights, and a series of videos exploring Indigenous visions of sustainability.

“The focus was on how Indigenous peoples’ human rights are essential to the pursuit of sustainability.”

The symposium was hosted by the Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples, University of British Columbia (UBC), and Canadian Friends Service Committee. Experts gathered to discuss the relationship between the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The focus was on how Indigenous peoples’ human rights are essential to the pursuit of sustainability.

Let me share some background information on the symposium, how the sessions went, and why it was important.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The symposium drew connections between Indigenous peoples’ human rights implementation and the 2030 Agenda, including the SDGs. But what are they? The SDGs cemented their importance in 2015 when UN member states unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This set out a path for the global community’s future, and developed the SDGs as the steps on that path. Have you ever made a New Year’s resolution? The SDGs are sort of like that: the global community’s decades-long resolutions.

There are 17 goals in total, including the elimination of hunger, action on climate change, achieving gender equality, and more. As you can tell, these goals are ambitious. They imagine a world where everyone’s needs are met and where communities work well to care for each other. In many ways they align with CFSC’s vision of a world in which dignity, justice, peace, human rights, and harmonious relationships with creation are fostered and upheld.

Yet the SDGs are far from perfect. Often, they fail to consider the perspectives of Indigenous peoples. Take goal 8 for example: economic growth and decent work for all. What counts as decent work? That depends on who you ask. Indigenous peoples’ understanding of decent work may vary widely from the norms of colonial societies. This symposium provided an important opportunity to discuss these discrepancies.

Our Time Together

The symposium took place over two days in April at

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Expanded Visions of Sustainability continued

UBC's Vancouver campus on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam people. Upon arriving, I was struck by the beauty that surrounds UBC. I marvelled at snow peaked mountains towering over the city and the deep blue glimpses of the Pacific Ocean.

On our first day together, Musqueam Elder Larry Grant welcomed us to this territory. Dalee Sambo Dorough, Inuit advocate and Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, gave the keynote address. Her presentation focused on the need for a new global trajectory. In her introduction, she spoke of the generations of Indigenous peoples who have preserved and used sustainable practices. "Indigenous peoples have always practiced sustainable development. We would not be here. Hands down, bar none, we would not be here if we did not practice sustainable concepts. We originated them and we still practice them." Her conclusion emphasized the need to implement the *UN Declaration*. Doing so will allow Indigenous peoples' sustainable practices to freely flourish to the benefit of all of us. "The world community needs us," she asserted.

"Sustainability ought to encompass our culture, spirituality, physical wellbeing, environment, and more."

The second day of the symposium featured a series of panels and extended dialogue between the presenters and other experts in attendance. CFSC's Jennifer Preston was our in-person host and as she mentioned in the day's introduction, each conversation advanced the discourse!

I spent much of the symposium assisting advocate and activist Katsi'tsakwas Ellen Gabriel in filming interviews. I saw up close the way Ellen connected with participants in honest conversation. With those she knew well and those she had just met, Ellen was able to cultivate a comfortable space for everyone to share.

One of my favourite questions Ellen asked each participant was what sustainability meant to them. Although the answers ranged in content, most were underscored by two major themes: that their people had been practicing sustainability for generations, and that they understood sustainability wholistically. I used to think of sustainability in relation to development or energy, but these answers expanded my view.

Sustainability ought to encompass our culture, spirituality, physical wellbeing, environment, and more.

Charting the Path

As our two days together concluded, Craig Benjamin was tasked with drafting a discussion paper outlining the major insights from the symposium. (That paper is available on the Coalition's website. I encourage you to read it for a deeper analysis than I will provide here.) As Craig notes, some states view the SDGs as aspirational goals, but experts at the symposium helped dispel this notion. They clarified that sustainability is a human right. This means that human rights must inform how we pursue sustainable development. The SDGs aren't simply a list of things governments hope to achieve. They're goals that must be worked towards consistent with human rights principles. So maybe my New Year's resolution comparison wasn't sufficient. The insights at the symposium helped me think of the SDGs more as promises.

Experts also emphasized that human rights must include the rights of Indigenous peoples. These rights are outlined clearly in the *UN Declaration*. They include rights to self-determination, to practice and revitalize Indigenous cultural traditions, to clean water, and many more. As Craig puts it, the *Declaration* is an important part of the blueprint that must guide the pursuit of sustainability.

Unfortunately, this blueprint has yet to be realized. Although some progress is being made, governments still oppress Indigenous peoples in violation of the *Declaration*. However, experts at the symposium imagined a world where that oppression ceases, where Indigenous rights are respected, and where Indigenous peoples can freely practice their vision of sustainability throughout the world. This vision gives me hope.



Jeremy Vander Hoek is CFSC's Assistant for Indigenous Rights and Events.

1. Dalee Sambo Dorough, "Indigenous Peoples, Sustainable Development, and the Need for a New Trajectory," April 6, 2022, <https://www.DeclarationCoalition.com/expert-symposium>

The resources discussed in this article (factsheets, videos, and paper on the symposium) can be found at:

<https://DeclarationCoalition.com>

The Next Generation is Anxious for Change. They Need Help Getting It

By Kerry Grier



Youth from Grassy Narrows First Nation stand in front of Queen's Park in Toronto calling for justice for mercury poisoning of their waters, July, 2022.

Young Canadians are worried about the state of the world. A perfect storm of a pandemic, climate change, and a steady stream of images of conflict are contributing to this.

With regard to the environment, concern that their parents and grandparents are passing them a world on fire is leading many youth to feel angry, frustrated, and depressed. This isn't all bad. Psychotherapist Caroline Hickman calls such eco-anxiety a "healthy response to the situation we are facing because it shows awareness of the crisis." Compassion for the planet also fuels some young people to take inspiring action. A poster child for youth in action, Greta Thunberg, summed up her thoughts on the COP26 climate change meeting by saying, "26 COPS, they have had decades of blah, blah, blah and where has that got us?"² There's a strong desire to move beyond talk and achieve real results. With the right skills and supports, this desire can be directed toward peaceful and constructive campaigns to win real change.

"Peace is a requirement for young people to flourish."

Issues around peace and conflict are of great concern too. Canadian youth are connected to global communities and have classmates from all over the world, some of whom have been affected by armed conflict. The war in Ukraine dominates the airwaves. We see fresh-faced young men and women being sent into battles where they will either lose their lives, their limbs, or the person they were when they went in.

According to the International Crisis Group, the world has a lot more violence to be concerned about. War rages on in Ethiopia and Yemen. Myanmar is a tinder-

box of political instability. Afghanistan faces a dire humanitarian crisis. US-China relations are tense. And much more.

These destructive conflicts require youth to be fed into the grizzly war machine. How can we help young people to step away from government-sponsored violence, and from extremist ideologies? Who should youth turn to for guidance when so many in previous generations contribute to the mess they're faced with?

Peace is a requirement for young people to flourish. But they need skills and support to know how to contribute to justice and peace. Too often, those creative skills of active nonviolence aren't taught. They aren't discussed in mainstream Canadian culture, whether in popular media like music or TV, or in schools. Destructive conflicts in communities and families are modeled instead. They're insidious and suffocate youth. So let's start there. At home.

CFSC sees the importance of connecting with youth. We are striving to meet young people in safe spaces and equip them with peacebuilding skills. Breaking down assumptions and seeing the humanity in others are valuable skills for fostering peaceful families and communities. Steering youth towards trusted resources and organizations will help them make informed decisions.

Communication is key for everyone, regardless of age. As Friends with teenagers at home can attest, this can be the first stumbling block. There are many reasons that communication break down. One that comes up in trying to speak across generations is that younger people are frequently used to digital communication as their primary way to interact. That means they're

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Breathing Life into Treaty continued

often ill at ease or embarrassed to engage in face-to-face discussion. Another challenge for all parties is listening. When was the last time you sat down with a young person and listened to them instead of listening just enough to form your response?

CFSC believes there is opportunity in adversity. Many young people are looking for ways to be heard and to contribute to policy dialogue. They're looking to make positive impacts with minimal resources. They're actively seeking facilitators, workshops, and training opportunities. One peacebuilding organization working with youth found that they're more likely to remember peace skills learned through sport than in a standalone workshop. Successful interventions are often taught in tandem with the arts, sports, or media. They're learned by example from the family environment and personal relationships. CFSC is here to help with this.

“Breaking down assumptions and seeing the humanity in others are valuable skills.”

We're expanding activities around youth engagement, which we'll be rolling out both in Canada and internationally. We look forward to sharing future updates. Are you a youth who's interested in this work, or do you know youth groups that would be a good fit for collaboration with CFSC? Please get in touch with me. And how are your own peace skills? Have you attended one of CFSC's *Are We Done Fighting?* workshops yet?



Kerry Grier is CFSC's Peace Program Coordinator.

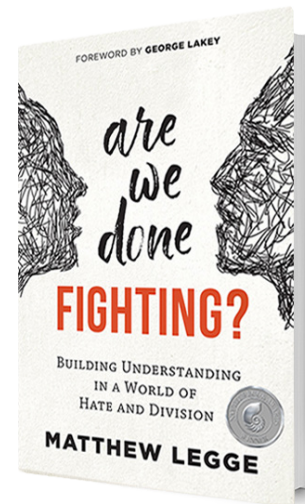
1. Kate Whiting, "What is 'Eco-Anxiety' and How Can We Ease Young People's Fears for the Planet?," *The Planetary Press*, October 14, 2021, <https://www.theplanetarypress.com/2021/10/what-is-eco-anxiety-and-how-can-we-ease-young-peoples-fears-for-the-planet>

2. Quoted in Daniel Kraemer, "Greta Thunberg: Who is the Climate Campaigner and What are Her Aims?," *BBC*, November 5, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-49918719>



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Matt@QuakerService.ca

“No, we are not done fighting, but we can fight in a better way. This book tells you how.”—Johan Galtung founder of Peace Studies as an academic discipline



Leading figures in peacebuilding and human rights promotion are calling CFSC's award-winning book *Are We Done Fighting?* "a joy," "exceptionally valuable and timely," "a much needed antidote against the risk of depression and despair," and "enabling, practical, and clear-minded."

You can join a virtual study group to do activities from the book. This free series of workshops has run 15 times with more than 200 people taking part.

Taking place over six consecutive weeks and drawing from the book, sessions will help you develop or improve practical skills for disagreements and conflicts. There's a particular focus on communication, belief, persuasion, power, and inner peace. But each group is different based on the experiences and stories participants bring. Whatever conflicts, peace, and justice issues group members want to discuss inform these interactive workshops.

The workshops run based on demand. Just add your name to the waitlist and you'll be notified once there are enough registrants and the next round of sessions can begin.

Get on the wait list:
<https://QuakerService.ca/Register>

More about the book:
<https://AreWeDoneFighting.com>

Lived Experience continued from pg 1

Children and youth have long told us about the sense of isolation and stigma that comes from growing up with an incarcerated parent. Last summer I met with Ebony Underwood, the founder of We Got Us Now, an American non-profit organization and movement created by and for children of incarcerated parents.

Ebony and members of the Canadian Coalition for Children with Incarcerated Parents met with a group of Canadian young people who had all grown up with a parent or caregiver living in prison during their years of childhood and adolescence. This was a unique opportunity to share stories.

Ebony talked about the genesis of her involvement in working for change within the criminal justice system. When she was a teenager, her father had already been in prison a long time. Ebony began dedicated research about prison sentences, pardons, and the possibilities for release. It was a long and complicated road that eventually led to her father's release from prison.

“The harmful impact of having a parent in prison doesn't end when you grow up.”

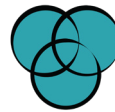
That work has transitioned to national advocacy and activism. Most recently, this includes the introduction by two politicians in the US of ambitious new legislation. It would create a presumption of release for petitioners who are 50 years of age or older and have been incarcerated for more than 10 years. Ebony describes *The Second Look Act* as providing “a second opportunity to not only the incarcerated individual, but [providing] a second opportunity for their children and families to restore, repair, and renew those broken bonds...”¹

Everyone present at the meeting with Ebony Underwood last summer agreed that the harmful impact of having a parent in prison doesn't end when you grow up; the trauma can be insidious and last a lifetime.

Think about times in your own life when you've been together with others who share similar experiences and stories. Did you feel strengthened by the collective experience and perspectives of the group?

Including and bringing together those with voices of lived experience has many advantages. I have seen it in action. My work with youth advisory groups has

only intensified my belief that when you bring together people with shared lived experience, they help one another, create restorative spaces, and find common ground that generates collective motivation for change. Later this summer, CFSC will initiate a nation-wide call out to youth and young adults with the lived experience of growing up with an incarcerated parent or caregiver. We hope to form an advisory group that will work together with us in our continued pursuit to educate and raise public awareness about children of incarcerated parents and to create a rights-based framework for sentencing, enhanced pre-sentence reports, and alternatives to prison.² We are excited about this new initiative and will be sure to keep you informed of our future progress!



Nancy Russell is CFSC's Criminal Justice Program Coordinator.

1. Ebony Underwood, “Corey Booker Introduces the Second Look Act,” *We Got Us Now*, 2022,

<https://WeGotUsNow.org/fair-sentencing>

2. Canadian Friends Service Committee, “Considering the Best Interests of the Child When Sentencing Parents in Canada: Sample Case Law Review,” 2018, <https://QuakerService.ca/CaseLawReview>

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life? Ask people to donate to justice and
peace in honour of your special day.
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Friends on the Move



At the end of April and beginning of May, multiple members of CFSC once again participated (virtually) in the two-week sessions of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The Coalition on the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples had a joint statement which was presented by Sheryl Lightfoot (you can read the statement at <https://QuakerService.ca/UNPFII2022>).

Indigenous Rights Program Coordinator **Jennifer Preston** was interviewed by an antiracism podcast about partnership with Indigenous peoples. Jenn explained what sometimes over-used words like “reconciliation” and “decolonization” mean, practically speaking. She outlined how everyday non-Indigenous people in Canada can get started on the work of reconciliation and relationship building. Listen to the audio at: <https://QuakerService.ca/PathForwardPodcast>

In May Jennifer gave a virtual presentation to the Salvation Army Church in Canada on how the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* has shaped CFSC’s work with Canadian Quakers.

In July Jennifer attended the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) in person at the UN in Geneva! After being away from the UN for almost three years, this was invigorating! CFSC participated in a joint statement (see <https://QuakerService.ca/EMRIP>), a side event, attended the Ambassador’s breakfast at the Canadian Mission, and with the Quaker UN Office (QUNO), hosted our annual EMRIP dinner at Quaker House. We also hosted a dinner meeting of the Global Indigenous Rights Research network. Meeting with the QUNO staff team was a pleasure.



Jennifer Preston and staff of QUNO Geneva.

Peace Program Coordinator **Kerry Grier** was in Sorrento, BC to take part in Western Half Yearly Meeting. She facilitated a session on peaceful communication and breaking down barriers between people.

Communications Coordinator **Matt Legge** was on the *To Save The World* podcast in what turned out to be a wide-ranging discussion. Later in the show Matt talked about CFSC’s book *Are We Done Fighting?* and some examples of platforms that promote constructive disagreements amidst the hate and radicalization taking place on much of social media: <https://QuakerService.ca/ToSaveTheWorldPodcast>

Matt also gave a presentation and answered questions for an online conflict transformation class organized by Mennonite Central Committee.

Saba Narvel has joined CFSC as a short-term practicum student. Saba is doing research and supporting development of educational resources and planning of events related to the children of incarcerated parents. Saba has previously been an Education Consultant and Trainer at the Centre for Disability Management, Inclusion, and Empowerment in Mumbai, India, and Assistant Professor at the Department of Special Education, SNDT Women’s University (also in Mumbai).