

Quaker Concern

The art of government relations: a tapestry of stories, Quaker voices, and advocacy

By Sandra Wiens



Sandra Wiens on her first day on Parliament Hill. Photo: Mike Hogeterp.

In 2023 Canadian Friends Service Committee hired me for a newly created job based in Ottawa: Government Relations Representative. Components of the work I'm doing have been done by program staff and volunteers at CFSC before me. But my role as a full-time staff person in Ottawa makes this a bigger priority for CFSC than it's ever been.

So what is it that I'm doing? I'm weaving a tapestry of relationships. Many are relationships that I have inherited. I'm taking those existing threads and passing them through the loom to build up the pattern. And I'm adding new threads too. This is an evolving effort that requires variation and change to be beautiful. I like this metaphor because it serves a dual purpose: it symbolises a process that needs many hands to create a complete picture, and it tells a story, which is at the core of what I'm trying to do.

Storytelling builds trust and is part of Quakers' unique voice when it comes to engaging with decision makers. Even though CFSC's office is in Toronto, the Quaker voice has succeeded in Ottawa before. For example, Jennifer Preston has had a huge impact in recent years through building relationships. Alongside partners, she has shared facts and stories in Ottawa to get decision makers to understand Indigenous peoples' human rights and reconciliation.

This culminated in the passage of the *United Nations*

Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, which received royal assent in 2021. Achieving this Act took persistent voices, including CFSC's, telling a story of hope and justice, for decades. Our quiet but insistent voice impressed those who heard it. And that led to lasting connections, adding to the tapestry, giving me a place to start my work.

There are many who've seen the impacts of the Indigenous human rights work we've done. They recognize CFSC as a trusted presence. They know us as good faith actors whose voice is balanced and truthful—seeking justice and peace as a way forward. I am trying to achieve this same level of recognition for CFSC in the criminal justice and peace areas we work in as well.

“I'm weaving a tapestry of relationships.”

When it comes to criminal justice, it's clear that the status quo does not work. I'm finding allies who recognize the ineffectiveness of a legal system that continues to ignore the human costs of incarceration. As CFSC's end goal is contributing to a transformed justice system that is healing rather than causing further harm, I'm using current legislative priorities to demonstrate better ways to achieve this. In my work I'm tracking important developments in the House of Commons and the Senate.

I'm taking a particular focus on the *Federal Framework*

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Lastest joint statements

The Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples issued a statement on the 16th anniversary of the adoption of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*:

<https://QuakerService.ca/UNDeclaration16>

We repeated our call for Hassan Diab not to be extradited from Canada for a second time:

<https://QuakerService.ca/HassanDiab>

CFSC joined multiple letters and statements on Gaza including calling on Canada to support South Africa's Genocide Convention case against Israel at the International Court of Justice:

<https://QuakerService.ca/IsraeliCJLetter>

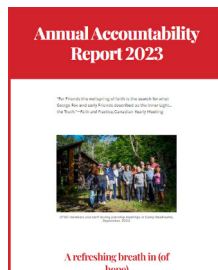
The incredible power of listening

A recent study found that only 5% of people said they felt "heard" after a conversation. In this blog post for Psychology Today Matt Legge shares stories and research about the benefits of listening.

<https://QuakerService.ca/Listening>

Matt also joined the Kerulos Center for Nonviolence for an hour long conversation that covered a wide range of topics from how social networks shape our emotions and decisions to how contemplative practices can be useful to activists:

<https://QuakerService.ca/LivingOne>



2023 annual report

Each year CFSC shares an annual accountability report. It gives you a quick sense of the many accomplishments that your donations helped to realize this. The 2023 report offers brief highlights from work in support of Indigenous peoples' human rights, peace, and criminal justice initiatives, and includes an opening letter from our Clerk (Chair of the Board of Directors) Vince Zelazny:

<https://Report.QuakerService.ca>

New short videos, including five alternatives to prison

We continue to release great video content like a video narrated by CFSC's Nancy Russell that briefly looks at five effective alternatives to prison.



Did you know there are already successful alternatives to prison? In this eye-opening video, we delve into innovative solutions that are transforming the landscape of criminal justice and offering a path towards safer communities and genuine rehabilitation. The video explains:

1. Community-based sentences
2. Restorative justice
3. Education, employment, and training
4. Addiction and mental health services and
5. Healing Lodges.

Since the last edition of *Quaker Concern* we've also put out a one minute short for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and more interviews from our Indigenous Voices on Reconciliation series. Watch, comment, and subscribe for more on YouTube:

<https://QuakerService.ca/YouTube>

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 worked for a world where peace and justice prevail.

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Read current and past issues online at QuakerConcern.ca. Contact us to switch to a digital subscription.

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Cultural revitalization in action: CFSC's Reconciliation Fund

By Rachel Yordy



A screening of *s-yéwyáw: Awaken* became all the more powerful as the film team honoured a shishalh elder who is in the film and passed away the week before the Vancouver screening. Photo submitted by Alfonso Salinas.

As you may know, CFSC's Reconciliation Fund supports the grassroots, community-based efforts of Indigenous peoples in Canada working on cultural and language revitalization projects. Modest grants of up to \$2,500 are typically awarded to individuals or groups that have not found funding elsewhere, and contribute towards the costs of cultural ceremonies, Elder or knowledge holder honoraria, travel, printing, etc. In many cases this is a critical infusion of funds that enables protocols to be honoured, an Elder to participate and share knowledge, or a new resource to be developed to support the continuity of Indigenous languages and lifeways. It truly makes a difference!

2023 was a significant year for CFSC's Reconciliation Fund as awareness of, and interest in, the Fund increased across Turtle Island. It's a joy to share updates now about all of the cultural revitalization efforts that the Reconciliation Fund has helped to realize.

Let me start by expressing our gratitude: first for the time and wise counsel of our Grant Advisory Committee this year—*mussi cho, ?ulnumsh chalap, miigwetch*. Second, to all those who donated since the establishment of the Fund—it is deeply appreciated. And third, for the opportunity to discern the fit of reconciliation grants with many worthy projects and Indigenous applicants—wow, we've learned so much collaborating with you and are inspired by your work.

This year CFSC provided funding to three projects: an opening ceremony for the Living with the Land Society; a Medicine Wheel Teaching Project with the Bonnechere Algonquin Cultural Centre; and travel funding for Indigenous filmmakers to attend the Vancouver premier of their documentary *s-yéwyáw:*

Awaken. As we have corresponded with applicants and their references, we have learned how the grants made a difference to each project, and we've seen the beauty of projects in action. We'd like to share some of these stories with you.

Let's go to British Columbia (BC), to Sqw'wax'w/ Lee Creek in Secwepemc territory, a community across the lake from the Quaker Western Half-Yearly Meeting's spring gathering spot in Sorrento.

This past summer, Elder Minnie Kenoras and the Living with the Land Society planned to host an opening ceremony to raise a totem pole, and formally open the tipi and healing centre in their community. Unfortunately, wildfires led to postponement of the opening until summer 2024. Thankfully, the lands associated with their site were protected. Despite this setback, Elder Minnie Kenoras reports that the tipi and healing centre is abuzz with activity. The tipi has been raised, the sweat lodge is being used regularly, and the totem pole has been painted in anticipation of the opening ceremony.

In a phone call with CFSC, Minnie shared her deep gratitude for our support and excitement to celebrate the opening this year. As she explained, living at the centre is like living in a different world: one that is loving and kind, where people come together to pray and heal. Indeed, it is a beautiful site right on Lake Shuswap.

Over the last five years, I've felt a fiery tipping point in my body, living in BC... I am awake to temperatures rising, droughts increasing, and the world burning, and it breaks my heart. But I remain hopeful that as the world awakens to Indigenous fire keeping practices,

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Reconciliation Fund continued

industry shifts away from unsustainable forestry, we adjust our lifestyle expectations, and caring humans plant trees and protect our old growth forests globally, we can still have a healing effect on the planet.

Over thanksgiving weekend, I was deeply grateful to see a beloved Sorrento Centre still standing in spite of wildfires in the area, and to look out across the lake to Sqwłax and feel a new sense of connection to First Nations friends sharing cultural wisdom in these lands.

Next, I want to take you to the site of the new Bonnechere Algonquin First Nation (BAFN) Community Cultural Centre in Renfrew Ontario. There, Chief Richard Zohr is arranging for an Elder to share teachings about the medicine wheel with Indigenous and non-Indigenous children through partnerships with local schools. Construction has delayed the opening until this summer, but activities will be commencing as rooms are completed.

The BAFN is excited to launch educational sessions once the Elders feel the space is ready, with funding for knowledge holders' travel and time from the Reconciliation Fund.

“This is a critical infusion of funds that enables protocols to be honoured, an Elder to participate and share knowledge, or a new resource to be developed to support the continuity of Indigenous languages and lifeways.”

As acts of cultural revitalization and celebration, these sessions are important in creating sacred space, strengthening the knowledge of Algonquin lifeways across the local community, and instilling pride in the next generation of Algonquin children in their First Nations heritage. We look forward to celebrating the Cultural Centre's opening with the Bonnechere Algonquin First Nation and Renfrew community!

Finally, I want to introduce you to dear Indigenous friends in the shishalw swiya, where I have lived on the Sunshine Coast of BC over the past six years. There, Elders have passed along teachings to revitalize Canoe family culture to a young Nation member. A residential school survivor has shared his life's journey with his daughter. And a Sixties Scoop survivor living in the

community has found her way back to her people. The film s-yéwyáw: Awaken (<https://s-yewyaw.ca>) documents these stories.

The film premiered in Sechelt in September 2023, and has since been showcased at film festivals in Toronto and Vancouver. As the cast required resources to host an opening ceremony and question-and-answer session at the Vancouver premier, the Reconciliation Fund made this a reality.

It was a heavy but powerful event. One of the shishalh elders in the film had passed away in the week before the screening. The screening became an even more meaningful tribute to her life and teachings, and an important space of shared grief for the film team. I raise my hands up to the filmmakers for completing this tender work.

As we move towards the end of our fiscal year and contemplate the health of our Reconciliation Fund, CFSC would be grateful for your help in two ways. First, we invite those who are moved to donate to the Fund through our website or by cheque to help it grow. Without your contributions we may not be able to say yes to as many applications in the year ahead.

Second, we would appreciate your help spreading the word about the Fund. Relationships with Indigenous individuals and communities are key to applications finding us. There is in-depth information about the fund at <https://QuakerService.ca/ReconciliationFund> including a detailed application that can be shared with ease. CFSC's amazing staff person Jeremy Vander Hoek is also available to answer questions throughout the application process. He's reachable at Jeremy@QuakerService.ca.

Thank you for sharing the journey. These projects truly ripple out across the country and enable Indigenous peoples to positively impact their communities and Turtle Island! We look forward to another meaningful year of reconciliation granting in 2024!



Rachel Yordy is a member of CFSC's Indigenous Rights Program Committee. A settler seeking right relation, she has worked for First Nations governments in BC over the last decade in education and community development.

Bill Curry and I became Quakers effortlessly. We just got sucked into the Canadian community, attracted by its actions assisting US draft resisters, army deserters, and others objecting to the Vietnam war. In 1968 we attended a peace retreat led largely by Murray Thomson.

Murray was enthusiastic about a new project. He was thrilled about the name of it. We were drawn to this vision: Project Ploughshares—a name from the book of Isaiah, Chapter 2, Verse 4: “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

With this promise as their motto, Murray Thomson, a Quaker, and Ernie Regehr, a Mennonite, founded Project Ploughshares in 1976. Canadian Friends were not only founding members, but have made a financial contribution and had a representative serving on Project Ploughshares ever since.

Fresh from international work, Murray and Ernie had, in different places and ways, both become incensed by expanding global militarism and the growing value of the arms trade. They envisioned Project Ploughshares as a peace research institute. It found a natural home at Conrad Grebel University College, a Mennonite College, on the campus of the University of Waterloo.

A year after its founding, Project Ploughshares became a project of the Canadian Council of Churches. This means that it is a Christian faith-based organization.

I was privileged to become a member of Project Ploughshares’ management board, as a representative of Canadian Friends Service Committee, in 2020. I am now beginning my second term of three years.

Project Ploughshares publishes the *Ploughshares Monitor* quarterly. In its pages, it highlights four well-developed program areas:

1. Nuclear weapons,
2. The arms trade,
3. Emerging technology (AI), and
4. Space security.

Recently, in response to input from members, another was added, focussed on the intersection of climate, peace, and security.

In a world awash with nuclear weapons and both intra-state and interstate wars, the effect of war on the environment is undeniable. On the one hand, there are national leaders meeting and cooperating on lowering the carbon footprints of their countries. On the other hand some of the same countries are producing military arms, exchanging them, profiting from them, and posturing themselves in combat with one another. It is clearly time to take the secrecy out of the carbon cost of militarism and war.

War destroys the environment directly. One need only view the devastation in Gaza to recognize the extent to which natural and built environments suffer from incendiary weapons. War also destroys the environment indirectly by the manufacture of these weapons. It destroys the environment in a third way, by diverting money and many of our brightest and best researchers and scientists to playing “war games” with technology. Leadership requires two things: First, redefining security as not dependent on each nation’s military might but instead mutual interdependence (no nation can be secure in isolation if our planet is not liveable for anyone). And second, a plan for widespread public and media education about the need and urgency of action.

“We were drawn to this vision: Project Ploughshares.”

It is possible to change direction. When enough people become convinced that it is necessary to do so, our human capacity for change can be quickly mobilized. The Manhattan Project to develop and deploy the first nuclear bombs did exactly that. Driven by the concern that Germany was developing an atomic weapon, it took a mere two years to convince leaders of Britain, Canada, and the USA that the allied forces should be first. After that agreement, within three years, starting from practically zero, the project amassed approximately 150,000 people as workers, engaged most of the world’s foremost scientists, built four small cities and huge manufacturing sites, and did the job! The budget was practically unlimited because the project was seen as necessary for the allies’ survival. I have no doubt that if we could be similarly concerned about the environment, we could make the changes necessary to protect it.

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Project Ploughshares continued

Project Ploughshares is one of the kinds of change agents we need. It conducts extensive and much-needed research in the areas of emerging technology and space security. It takes pride in its accurate analysis of the arms trade and supports the *Arms Trade Treaty*. And it's not a shallow research institute without opinion. Witness, for example, the winter issue of the *Monitor*, where it challenges the sale of Canadian military goods to Israel in a report called *Fanning the Flames* (<https://bit.ly/FanningTheFlamesReport>).

I'm delighted that Executive Director Cesar Jaramillo is now taking steps to focus on the intersection between militarism and environment. It is time to put numbers to the carbon footprint of the military, which isn't tracked or reported properly as CFSC and many others note (<https://QuakerService.ca/MilitaryEmissions>). Even the transport and sale of arms extracts a carbon cost. It is not Canada's national security that is at stake when we ship arms to countries like Saudi Arabia.

Furthermore, we can no longer think of wars as being limited to the immediately affected entities. Depleted uranium from the first US invasion of Iraq was spread by the winds across Asia and found in the Punjab. Environmental pollution spreads around the globe.

In the panoply of peace and environmental organizations, Project Ploughshares occupies a unique position as a nationally regarded voice of reason. Its staff are quoted in national media because they have a particular depth of knowledge available only to those whose mandate is research.

Project Ploughshares remains faithful to its purpose: "to work with churches, nongovernmental organizations, and governments, in Canada and abroad, to advance policies and actions that prevent war and armed violence and build peace."

You can learn more about each of Project Ploughshares' areas of work by reading *The Ploughshares Monitor*, available at <https://Ploughshares.ca>



Dale Dewar is a long-time supporter and former member of Canadian Friends Service Committee who currently represents CFSC on Project Ploughshares.

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to Reduce Recidivism Act and the recently released implementation plan for the Act.

This approach also holds for CFSC's peace work. For a long time it's been clear that Canada is not living up to its potential to help build a more peaceful world. This has been made starkly evident by the current Israel and Hamas war and Canada's roles, such as continuing to arm Israel contrary to Canada's legal obligations under the *Arms Trade Treaty*. Israel/Palestine has become a focus for my work over the past three months. Coordinating meetings, tracking developments in real-time, and finding the best strategies to influence government or individual MP's positions has been paramount. Engaging directly with the Quaker community to contribute toward Canada's support for a ceasefire has also been rewarding.

Despite all the devastation and grief that is being felt due to the violence, I perceive a glimmer of hope. There is such a groundswell of support for a future for Palestine/Israel that perhaps did not exist before and could become a reality. From what I see and hear in meetings, a space for change can emerge. But it will take the ongoing momentum from everyone invested in just and sustainable peace. New actions will be needed in the coming weeks and months as the situation develops. CFSC will continue to share action tools on our website and social media because it will be so important to support a commitment to a peaceful future for Israel/Palestine.

The networks, partners, and allies that I have met since starting my role all add to the story that I'm trying to convey in my work in Ottawa. I'm reminded of that quiet but insistent voice that I'm seeking to amplify with all the new connections I'm making. Many people I talk with have not heard of Quakers before. But some remember the echoes of the work CFSC has done, and make space to meet with me and hear what Friends are up to. Those who know Quakers know us as continuing to work on issues for years or decades rather than jumping onto a cause only when it's popular. Our dedication over the long term is a strength that is needed, since the large scale problems CFSC seeks to address take lots of time and patience.

Being in Ottawa allows me to be persistent. It is with hope and optimism that I'm weaving the tapestry, creating new connections, and telling and adding to a story that will continue to evolve.

Sandra Wiens is CFSC's Government Relations Representative.

Every day brings new possibilities for peace. We are all connected. Our world has an urgent need to focus more on preventing violent conflict, particularly through emphasizing the importance of peace education.

Peace education is how I first became aware of CFSC. I joined CFSC's *Are We Done Fighting?* workshop series and met participants who shared stories and experiences and asked questions that were heavy on their hearts. I gained insights that I applied immediately in my personal and professional life. I also went from being a participant a few years ago to now serving as a CFSC staff person and co-facilitating the workshop series at the end of 2023 with Matt Legge. This workshop series continues to be one of the highlights of CFSC's peace programming. And it's free, to make it accessible to whoever needs it (<https://QuakerService.ca/Register>).

While I've facilitated many workshops, trainings, and other peace education activities, I found co-facilitating the *Are We Done Fighting?* workshops a source of learning and inspiration. Each session is different, and the participants have their own perspectives and priorities. This gives new language and new life to my understanding of the complexities of peacebuilding. There's always something to learn in this field!

One of CFSC's goals now is to bring the strategies and tips that are shared in the workshop series to a wider audience via shorter content available in different formats. This won't go as deep as interactive discussions in a workshop. But the content will reach people who aren't ready to take a workshop or read a full book. Stay tuned for this in the future!

This isn't the only focus of our peace work. Each day can be quite different. Often I'll receive a message to join a meeting or research a new issue that can lead to unexpected opportunities. When I need to understand the historical context, Toronto Friends House where CFSC's office is located, has a library full of Quaker peace perspectives for me to learn from.

One day of the week I look forward to is Wednesday. In the morning, CFSC staff study a book together. We're currently reading and discussing *Realizing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Triumph, Hope, and Action*. Each week we review a chapter. Having Jennifer Preston, who is a co-editor and co-author of

this essential publication, brings the book into a deeper dimension of practical importance for us.

Immediately following this discussion, CFSC hosts Meeting for Worship online with Friends joining from across Canada. (Contact us if you'd like to join these weekly worship sessions.) On Zoom, we can sit in silence and contemplate about our world. Friends can also share ministry. These Meetings help foster inclusivity and a sense of community.

These two activities (book club and Meeting for Worship) have been particularly meaningful during an unprecedented time. While I was busy getting oriented to CFSC and my new role, everything suddenly shifted. On October 7 we were horrified by the loss of life in Israel due to the attacks by Hamas. As I write this article, a few months have passed, and still many hostages have not been released. Meanwhile, the conditions in Gaza have become even more dire.

At CFSC, we have been working behind-the-scenes in providing humanitarian support in partnership with American Friends Service Committee. Your donations have provided emergency relief to nearly 50,000 people in Gaza. Since December, an open kitchen has also been able to provide warm meals to displaced people. We encourage Friends to please consider donating to this crucial cause at <https://QuakerService.ca/Gaza>. We have also joined in multiple meetings, open letters, and letter writing campaigns to the government of Canada calling for a ceasefire and other actions toward just peace for all.

CFSC's programs and future initiatives in 2024 and beyond are even more needed in this moment of increasing violence and hatred. As Peace Program Coordinator, I am actively seeking new initiatives focusing on conflict transformation and violence prevention.

If you have any questions or ideas surrounding CFSC's peace initiatives, or are looking for some advice about peacebuilding, please reach out and contact me. I look forward to hearing from you. We can each contribute in cultivating peace and social cohesion. May peace be with you.



Yehuda Silverman is CFSC's Peace Program Coordinator.

Friends on the Move



OUR INDIGENOUS RIGHTS STAFF HAVE travelled a lot lately. **Jennifer Preston** went to Geneva in late September to support partners at the Human Rights Council's 54th session, where their resolution on human rights and Indigenous peoples was drafted.

In early November, **Jeremy Vander Hoek** went to Costa Rica to support the work of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at their seminar hosted at the University for Peace in San José. Experts from around the world came to discuss laws, policies, constitutions, and judicial decisions relating to states' attempts at implementing the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

December brought both Jennifer and Jeremy to the territory of the Sámi people, called Sápmi, in what's now known as northern Norway and Finland. This travel was part of their work in the Global Indigenous Rights Research Network, a group aimed at bringing together the resources and expertise of academia, civil society, and activists to push for implementation of the *Declaration*.

Their trip began with learning at both the Sami Parliament in Finland and the Sami Parliament in Norway. Parliamentarians and other staff shared how they've worked to implement the *Declaration* in their contexts. After that, they spent time supporting the Network team and Sámi partners at a two-day workshop at Sámi University. Participants at the workshop dialogued on effective implementation efforts and discussed how best to overcome common challenges.

MATTHEW LEGGE VISITED YARMOUTH Meeting on January 20th to talk about Israel/Palestine and broader issues of peace and social justice activism. Although snow was falling outside, the beautiful old Meeting House was toasty warm and the event was well attended, generating rich discussion.

Matt also presented online at a launch event for a peace journal he contributed to, to a university class at Furman College in South Carolina that studies CFSC's book *Are We Done Fighting?*, and in-person at a Toronto library.



NANCY RUSSELL IS RETIRING FROM CFSC after serving as our Criminal Justice Program Coordinator since 2020. We thank Nancy for her years of service and wish her a wonderful retirement! Nancy joined us after a long and successful career including at the Office of the Ontario Child Advocate and teaching at Humber College. Most recently Nancy has helped steward CFSC's work in support of the children of incarcerated parents and has helped us to plan for new penal abolition advocacy work in Ottawa. This planning meeting saw Nancy joined by staff member **Sandra Wiens** and CFSC members **Daisie Auty**, **John Samson Fellows**, **Jocelyne Tranquilla**, and associate **Kathy Bickmore** at Friends House in Toronto. (This was a special meeting in the winter after the full CFSC members and staff meeting held in the fall at Camp NeeKauNis.)