

# How I came to be a Refugee Settlement Worker at Friends House

by Eusebio Garcia

n November 1984 my brother Luis Enrique and I fled the civil war in El Salvador and headed for Texas where another one of my brothers, Abelino, had been living and working for some years as a non-status person. All three of us were arrested, put in detention, and separated. I was only nineteen at the time, spoke little English, and felt very nervous about what might happen to me. Fortunately the other detainees, as well as the lawyer who visited me, were reassuring, telling me everything would be okay. Their presence helped me through a very anxious time. After three months my bond amount (a cash deposit, like bail) was decreased and Abelino was able to pay it. Although my brothers and I were freed from detention, we were still without status and our future was uncertain.

Another brother, José Augustin, had been living in Canada for two years and filled me in on what was happening at Friends House in Toronto. Every Thursday, refugees from Central America would gather there to talk about the war, and to plan actions such as demonstrations in front of the U.S. consulate, protesting American aid to repressive Central American governments.

Friends House was THE place for Central American refugees to assemble and organize in the 1980s. Nancy Pocock, Fred Franklin, and Isabelle Showler were some of the incredible Quakers who attended these Thursday meetings. While Spanish was the easiest language for most attendees, there was always someone there to translate into English for



Eusabio Garcia in his office at Friends House (Toronto). In 2013 the office received visits from 305 people from 39 countries.

Friends. José told Nancy about our predicament in Texas, and she got the ball rolling on our resettlement in Canada.

We arrived in Toronto on December 13, 1985, and were taken from the airport to Hotel Isabella, downtown. What I remember most from this time was how COLD it was! I didn't want to leave the hotel until José, who had gotten accustomed to Canadian weather, really pushed me to go out and get some fresh air. After two weeks in Canada I went to a Thursday meeting at Friends House and got involved with the Central American refugee community. I took English classes at George Brown College and later studied social work there. The course combined in-class learning with work experience, and in my first year I took a work placement at Friends House to help newcomers to Canada find jobs. I soon discovered what a rewarding experience this was.

Although the jobs were usually entrylevel positions, the newcomers were happy to gain Canadian experience, and I felt great being able to help. In my second year at George Brown, I took a placement in Family Benefits (now known as the Ontario Disability Support Program), where I encountered many mental health issues among my clients. Although I had worked with people facing hardships before, this was on a different scale, and the experience wore me down. When a full-time position as Refugee Settlement Worker came up at Friends House in October 1990, I eagerly applied and got the job. I started working with Nancy Pocock, an amazing woman who tirelessly advocated for refugees. Nancy was the founder of Toronto Monthly Meeting's "Quaker Committee for Refugees ". I have been doing this work ever since.

## **KEEPING UP WITH FRIENDS**

## CFSC to offer camp on nonviolence

From August 24 to 30, 2015 we will gather at Camp NeeKauNis to share skills and build community, discovering and strengthening our roots in nonviolence. The idea for the camp came from Young Friends, however it is open to anyone young or old over the age of 16 (non-Quakers welcome!). Be inspired, challenged, and enriched at Camp NeeKauNis! CFSC will make some travel funds available to Young Friends who need them. Find out more at: http://www.quakerservice.ca/camp

QUAKER CONCERN

Quaker Concern is the newsletter of Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers). Published three-times a year, it features articles on CFSC projects and concerns of Friends. CFSC's Annual Report and Appeal is sent to all donors in late autumn.

Canadian Friends Service Committee, founded in 1931, exists to unify and expand the concerns of Friends in Canada. Our work is carried out by three program committees (Quaker Indigenous Rights Committee, Quakers Fostering Justice, Quaker Peace and Sustainable Communities Committee).

**Donations** are received with gratitude. We rely on the support of individuals to carry out our work. CFSC issues tax receipts for donations over \$10.

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### **CFSC supports** *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*

Private member's Bill C-641 proposes to bring Canada's laws in harmony with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples - a consensus international human rights instrument. The federal government has expressed vigorous opposition to Bill C-641. CFSC recently joined with Indigenous partners to raise serious concerns with the reasons given by the Government of Canada for its objections. This detailed commentary includes excellent background information for those interested in knowing more about Indigenous rights in Canada: http://www.quakerservice.ca/c641

## Canada's involvement in Iraq and Syria and anti-terrorism efforts at home

In response to Canada's military involvement in Iraq and Syria, Canadian Yearly Meeting has joined with other members of the Canadian Council of Churches to issue a joint letter to government. The letter is a consensus view agreed to by churches representing 85% of Christians in Canada. It highlights a number of nonmilitary actions Canada should prioritize to support a just and lasting peace in the region. Read it at: http://bit.ly/1CuKBaO

Back in September, CFSC wrote a blog post expressing why we oppose a Canadian military intervention as a response to ISIS. This still describes our thinking:

http://www.quakerservice.ca/IraqSyria

In March we also wrote an open letter to express our concerns with Canada's Anti-Terrorism Act Bill C-51. Read it at: http://www.quakerservice.ca/c51

## Updated list of service opportunities

CFSC has updated a list of service opportunities for Young Friends and others seeking to have a direct experience of service work with a Quaker organization (or one with Quaker roots). The list of opportunities includes voluntary and paid positions, more and less structured programs, opportunities of shorter and longer lengths, and ones within Canada as well as many other parts of the world. Have a look and please share this list with Young Friends and others in your Meeting: http://www.quakerservice.ca/whatyou-can-do/service-opportunities/

## CFSC joins in call for clear, reliable, and effective price for carbon emissions

Did you know that CFSC is 100% fossil fuel industry free (as defined by 350.org) with our investments? And our ethical investments have consistently performed well too! We've joined 52 other religious investors with total assets under management of \$2 billion to call on Canada to set a clear, reliable and effective price for carbon emissions. This is one small but important component of a comprehensive strategy Canada must urgently adopt to help prevent catastrophic climate change. Read the letter at: http://www.quakerservice.ca/carbon

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# **Reconciliation:** The journey ahead

by Jennifer Preston and Rob Hughes

The formal work of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is drawing to a close. In Ottawa, May 31 – June 3 the TRC will host their closing events and the release of their report. CFSC will be there with our Indigenous partners. For the past five years the TRC has looked at the legacy of the Indian Residential School system. Friends across the country have engaged in this critical work.

As TRC Chief Commissioner Murray Sinclair has said, there are no easy fixes. It took generations for us to arrive at this place and it will take generations to fully arrive at a new reality. What might that look like? What is our role, as individuals and corporately as Friends, in this journey? Justice Sinclair has also said, "If you thought the truth was hard, reconciliation will be harder."

The road ahead will not be easy. But it is critical for us to dig deeply, to listen, to learn and to open ourselves to engage in healing. Black's Law Dictionary defines reconciliation as: "Restoration of harmony between persons or things that had been in conflict." How is harmony restored? As non-Indigenous Canadians, do we understand our roles in the conflict? While Friends in Canada did not run Residential Schools, we have benefitted from the legacy of colonization and dispossession of the First Peoples of this territory. We must engage with integrity (for more on what this means, see Sarah Chandler's 2001 Sunderland P. Gardner lecture The Never Broken Treaty at http://www.quakerservice.ca/ NeverBrokenTreaty).

Reconciliation includes restitution. This is particularly relevant when discussing land rights. It is also important when we think about culture, education, and language - all profoundly affected by extreme human rights violations inherent in the Indian Residential School system.

Reconciliation means a genuine commitment to change, to honestly engage in re-conceptualizing relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to create a



Our work at the international level towards the realization of Indigenous Peoples' human rights is one way in which Friends engage in reconciliation. We took this photo while at the United Nations in Geneva in March, 2015. Pictured (L to R): Ambassador Luis Chavez from Peru meets TRC Commissioner Chief Wilton Littlechild and National Chief Perry Bellegarde.

future of peace, justice and renewed hope.

Reconciliation is not a series of isolated events, but an ongoing process. One of the most inspirational images of the TRC's work was September 13, 2013, when 70,000 people from all walks of life marched together under pouring rain through the streets of Vancouver in the Walk for Reconciliation. The Walk was a powerful symbol: Aboriginal and nonaboriginal people walking side by side in a common journey. The Quaker Indigenous Rights Committee (QIRC) of CFSC is developing tools to assist Friends with this journey. We hope that as the TRC concludes their formal work, our journey will just be beginning.

QIRC uses the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for our work. The UN Declaration can be seen as a blueprint for reconciliation, affirming and elaborating on Indigenous Peoples' inherent rights, which throughout history have not been respected.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon underlined in 2008, "The *Declaration* is a visionary step towards addressing the human rights of indigenous peoples. ... [I]t provides a momentous opportunity for States and indigenous peoples to strengthen their relationships, promote reconciliation and ensure that the past is not repeated."<sup>1</sup>

Reconciliation can be engaged with in various ways. QIRC works with Indigenous partners to promote reconciliation legally, politically, spiritually, and personally. During the final TRC days in Ottawa we are working with partners to present two educational panels. With other faithbased groups, we are planning a panel on the Doctrine of Discovery. We will share our experience of working with Friends across the country to develop a national statement repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery. With the Coalition on the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples we are organizing a panel titled The UNDeclaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Justice, Reconciliation and Hope. This panel will be part of the TRC plenary sessions and will include TRC **Commissioner Chief Wilton** 

<sup>1</sup> Secretary-General (Ban Ki-moon), "Protect, Promote, Endangered Languages, Secretary-General Urges in Message for International Day of World's Indigenous People", SG/SM/11715, HR/4957, OBV/711 (23 July 2008).

# Partnering to transform justice

### by Tasmin Rajotte and Sarah Chandler

• ociety may just assume that the current criminal justice system does what it is intended to do. It appears so, as there is a general reluctance to closely examine the system. This means that transforming it is a major challenge. As CFSC associate member Elaine Bishop noted in the 1970s, criminal justice processes do not exist in isolation, but are a part of society. Some of the most needed changes must come from outside the criminal justice system itself. Specifically, "the development of toleration and caring for others, and the redistribution of economic and social power, are basic societal changes which will alter the criminal justice process."1

CFSC's work toward a transformative justice system is supported by partnerships with a number of organizations. The following are examples that we hope provide a glimpse into the ways Friends engage in justice work. This work is often slow and difficult, but ultimately it can help to realize significant positive changes.

CFSC participates in the International Quaker Criminal Justice Liaison Group (IQCJLG), a network of Quaker agencies. Several members will be attending the 13<sup>th</sup> UN Crime Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in Doha, Qatar, in April. The theme of the congress is *Preventing Crime to Build Sustainable Development*. This congress will connect with Friends' concerns about the over-reliance on incarceration to deal with social problems such as drug use and mental illness.

Quaker representatives will attend the 24<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Crime Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in Vienna in May, which has a section on children. Here, the Commission will receive a 5 year report on the death penalty among other topics. At these meetings, Quakers will work on issues related to children of prisoners and prisoners sentenced to death, revisions to standard minimum rules on the treatment of prisoners, and the



promotion of safety and prevention of violence in prisons. These large forums provide the space for nongovernmental organizations to interact with each other, as well as the opportunity to meet with people from justice ministries, police, and prison services, so that quiet diplomacy work may be done.

The Quaker Centre for European Affairs (QCEA) has just published a report on pre-trial detentions, stating that 120,000 persons are currently detained without trial in the EU.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile in Canada, despite a declining crime rate, 54.5% of the 25,208 people behind bars in 2012/2013 were people in pre-trial custody, also called remand.<sup>3</sup> Not only does remand violate the presumption of innocence, it also impacts the children of those held, which is of particular concern to CFSC.

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) works on issues related to mass incarceration (participating in mediation with prisoners on hunger strikes), solitary confinement, policing and racism, setting up Circles of Support and Accountability for released sex offenders and others, and following the UN Convention Against Torture. Friends in both the US and UK have also raised concerns with the profit making prison model. Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW) in the UK will be focusing on the upcoming election in Britain by recirculating its discussion paper, *Why Prison? A Framework to Encourage Discussion about the Purposes, Effectiveness and Experience of Imprisonment as a Response to Criminal Actions* (see: http://www.quaker.org.uk/files/CCJS-Why-Prison-April-2013.pdf). CFSC is working on a similar educational resource for Monthly Meetings in Canada.

CFSC works with national justice networks too. One, the Church Council on Justice and Corrections (CCJC), has a mandate to support initiatives that promote restorative justice principles. As part of this work, CCJC recently released a *National Report and Evaluation of Circles of Support and Accountability in Canada*. For *National Victims of* 

content/uploads/2014/07/2014-07-23-Bythe-numbers1.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Elaine Bishop. 1976. Criminal Justice. Canadian Quaker Pamphlets.justice agreements.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> QCEA. 2014. http://www.qcea.org/ wp-content/uploads/2014/11/pretrialdetention-report-FINAL-20141120.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Canadian Civil Liberties Association. 2014. By the Numbers: Crime, Bail and Pre-trail Detention in Canada

http://ccla.org/wordpress/wp-

*Crime Awareness Week*, April 19-25, CCJC will host a panel discussion highlighting how programs can help perpetrators of crime consider the impacts on victims and, in so doing, develop empathy. CFSC associate member Kate Johnson will be speaking about her experience delivering these "Victim Impact Programs" to prisoners.

CFSC is a board member of National Associations Active in Criminal Justice (NAACJ). NAACJ provides a forum for members to share information on policies related to criminal justice and to dialogue with the federal government. In February, NAACJ held a national workshop with Public Safety Canada on Community-based Alternatives to Custody across the continuum of Mental Health Services. NAACJ also met with the Correctional Investigator for Canada to learn about the status of various recent reports and the federal government's response to the many recommendations arising from the inquest into the suicide of Ashley Smith.

As part of our work on the effects of the justice system on children and youth, CFSC will be working with the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children in preparation for the next review of Canada on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and Canada's Constitution were written before the UNCRC was drafted. Neither address the needs of children. To rectify this inadequacy, Canada ratified the UNCRC in 1991. Canada's last report under the UN Universal Periodic Review (URP) raised a significant number of issues related to children, youth and the Canadian justice system. Together, CFSC and the Coalition will monitor progress on these matters.

At the local level, CFSC supports several projects that address the impacts of the justice system on children and youth. One such project is Spring House, which was created to meet the needs of families visiting the federal prison located in Springhill, Nova Scotia. There is no public transportation access to the prison, nor is there accommodation suitable for families. To assist with maintaining family relationships, Spring House provides transportation, safe and affordable accommodation, and emotional support for visiting families. Through partnerships, this is just one example of the kinds of societal changes we can all be involved in to alter criminal justice processes.

Tasmin Rajotte is the Coordinator of CFSC's Quakers Fostering Justice (QFJ) program committee and a member of Ottawa Monthly Meeting. Sarah Chandler is the Clerk of QFJ and a member of Vernon Monthly Meeting.

# **Quaker Committee for Refugees**



Nancy Pocock was both a talented jewellery designer and the founder of the Quaker Committee for Refugees in the early 1980s.

Toronto Friends provide space and support but keeping this important work afloat is a constant struggle. By selecting one of Nancy's beautiful pieces of sterling silver jewellery you can support the Quaker Committee for Refugees.

For prices and to order, please visit: http://www.torontoguakermeeting.org/refugee-committee.html



## **REFUGEE SETTLEMENT**

Continued from page 1

Refugees from all over the world come to see me at Friends House. If they don't speak English or Spanish, I have access to a huge list of translators. I help them complete forms as they apply for refugee status acceptance, renew permanent residence cards, enroll their kids in schools, and submit their tax information. I help them find shelter, healthcare, social assistance, and legal advice. I also offer follow-up support with family reunification questions. The slightest mistake may lead to long delays, or even to rejection. The stress involved in these processes intensified in 2013 with the New Refugee System which cut the time refugees have to prepare their cases from 28 days to 15 days. This change has put even more pressure on applicants and created an even greater need for swift and efficient support.

I also spend one day every week helping those incarcerated at the Immigration Holding Centre. I remember what a confusing time it was for me when I was detained in Texas, and how important it was for me to get encouragement and positive direction from someone who understood what was happening. Typically I explain to the detainees why they're there, and what they need to do to be released from detention. I also find shelter for those being released, and access to other services they may need.

Our committee holds two big events every year. For Labour Day weekend, I bring a group of immigrants and refugees (83 this year) up to Camp

## RECONCILIATION

#### Continued from page 3

Littlechild, TRC Honourary Witness Grand Chief Edward John and QIRC associate Paul Joffe. This will be webcast, and therefore available for those not in the Ottawa area. Visit the CFSC website on June 1 for the webcast link.

Friends may engage individually and as Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups in reconciliation work. Reconciliation Canada, a communitybased initiative formed in collaboration between Tides Canada Initiatives Society and the Indian Residential School Survivors Society, NeeKauNis for an experience of being in nature, canoeing, swimming, and playing soccer. They also participate in an art program and a musical evening at the camp. This not only gives newcomers a taste of Canada's beauty, but also strengthens bonds between different families so they can support each other.

I also organize a Christmas party for refugees at Friends House, a great celebration attended every year by over a hundred children and their parents. The party has been running for twenty-five years and is a wonderful way to make a difference for newcomers during the holiday season. It is a chance for kids to sing and play classic carols, meet "the man in red," share stories, eat great food and leave with a gift to be unwrapped on Christmas Eve.

I would like to note that Fred Franklin has been on the Ouaker Committee for Refugees for decades, and his commitment to social justice has been a huge inspiration for me. Fred helped form the detention committee of the Toronto Refugee Affairs Council (TRAC), an umbrella organization of community-based agencies that provides assistance to refugees and refugee claimants in the Greater Toronto Area. I was honoured to stand beside Fred in 2013 when Seneca College's School of Community Services presented us with an award for our long-standing service to immigrants and refugees.

Finding funding for our work is an

ongoing challenge. We are grateful to CFSC for their support, although our goal is to become financially independent. Part of our fundraising involves selling beautiful cards created by our committee member Sarah Hall and silver jewelry designed by the late Nancy Pocock, and produced by our committee member Judy Pocock. To learn more about these, contact Judy at judy.pocock@utoronto.ca.

Working for the Quaker Committee for Refugees has been a blessing for me. I work with a team of caring people, and I get to see the difference my work makes in people's lives. It is a great feeling when someone calls to tell me her status application has been successful. I feel grateful to live in Canada, and to give back to the community that welcomed me. My hope for the future is that more Quaker Committees for Refugees will be formed across Canada, to help refugees who come to cities other than Toronto.

The Quaker Committee for Refugees posts on their website http://www.torontoquakermeeting.org /refugee-committee.html an annual report which includes details of the numbers and nationalities of the people assisted. Meetings with an interest in supporting refugees in their own communities are encouraged to contact Eusabio at garcialapaz@gmail.com or 416-964-9669.

continues to encourage communities and organizations to sponsor events. KAIROS also organizes and promotes events across the country. We encourage you to visit their website for information about reconciliation events in your area.

CFSC recently circulated information about the *World Conference on Indigenous Peoples Outcome Document* and Canada's shameful behavior regarding it. Vancouver Meeting will discussion this on May 3 and other Meetings may also want to engage with this. Engaging with the implications of Indigenous Peoples' human rights is part of reconciliation.

As mentioned, QIRC/CFSC reconciliation resources will be available later this summer and used at Canadian Yearly Meeting in August. Watch our website and Facebook page for updates and details.

Jennifer Preston is the Coordinator for CFSC's Quaker Indigenous Rights Committee (QIRC) and member of Hamilton Monthly Meeting. Rob Hughes is the Clerk of QIRC and a member of Vancouver Monthly Meeting.

# Nonviolent direct action in Ottawa

by Eric Schiller

ow can we become more effective in speaking truth to power? That was the pressing question that confronted the Peace and Social Concerns committee of Ottawa Monthly Meeting. Using a small amount of money donated for nonviolence training, we enlisted the help of George Lakey of the Earth Quaker Action Team (EQAT; http://www.eqat.org/) from Philadelphia.

In the fall of 2014, a group of 12 members and attenders of Ottawa Meeting took part in a series of five weekly training sessions using extensive study program materials from George Lakey. Then in January, 2015, George led us in a weekend training

workshop in nonviolent direct action (NVDA) - both motivations and methods. To the surprise of some of us, this involved performing in a neighbourhood mall. The goal was to participate in Spirit-led public NVDA.

We learned some valuable lessons from this, including:

- Consider the history of nonviolent resistance. We spent time looking at many successful activities of the past.
- Plan new strategies and be creative in NVDA activities. We live in an evolving digital age.
- Effective NVDA requires a committed and cohesive group of volunteers. It takes time. We realized that we as a group needed to work on our own interpersonal issues as we got ourselves ready for the moment when our actions might have a significant effect. For some of us, this has meant learning to move outside of our comfort zones.

When we finished our training, we needed to choose a project and EQAT offered the following guidelines:



Jane Keeler is CSIS Chief Arnold Barnburner and Carl Stieren is Judge Otto Pilate as the Quaker Theatre Team rehearses *Three Traitors*, a play they put on before a rally to stop Bill C-51 in Ottawa on March 14.

- The project should be directed to people who are under immediate threat.
- The issue should be easily understandable.
- The target should be readily available.
- The goal should be achievable.
- We should join together with other groups.

We could add one more criterion: the activist support group should be in close consultation with the group that they are trying to assist. Luckily, there is no shortage of issues in Canada's capital city where we can coordinate with other groups! We first demonstrated this on March 14, when four members of what we decided to call the Quaker Theatre Team, with help from others, created and performed a five-minute play at a rally opposing the "Anti-Terrorism Act," Bill C-51.

"When we stepped up to put on our play on the sidewalk outside the Prime Minister's Office, we had to think fast," recalled Carl Stieren, who played Judge Otto Pilate. "We had to make space for a stage amid the crowd.

"Then I realized there was only one mic on a cable so I took on two roles: the wicked judge and the microphone carrier. It pained me to have had so little time for rehearsal, but as Jane Keeler later said, 'That's usually the way street theatre is.'

"What shocked me afterwards was my realization that if we had done this after Bill C-51 had gone through, all of us could have been sabotaged or arrested - we Quakers, the organizers and the 700 demonstrators. CSIS and the police would only have had to use the fact that there was not a formal permit for the rally, because the organizers tried to submit one just one day too late."

To see video of the street theatre by Quaker Theatre Team in Ottawa, visit: http://bit.ly/1GRkiTn. Since this performance the Team has performed twice more about Bill C-51.

*Eric Schiller is an associate member and recent past board member of CFSC.* 

## FRIENDS ON THE MOVE

Sarah Chandler (Vernon Meeting), clerk of CFSC's Quakers Fostering Justice program committee was in Washington, DC speaking on a panel at the 2015 Women and Justice Conference: Women, Prison and Gender-based Violence, sponsored by the Avon Global Centre for Women in Justice at the Cornell University Law School. Her topic was Children of incarcerated parents.

Indigenous Rights Program Coordinator *Jennifer Preston (Hamilton MM)* will be in Ottawa for *Free, Prior and Informed Consent* [FPIC]: A symposium on

human rights, Indigenous protocols and good practice. CFSC is coordinating with several partners to present the symposium, a public event at the University of Ottawa, on May 19 and 20 with a live webcast of the second day. This is an opportunity to discuss the status of FPIC in Canadian and international law and its relevance in crucial decisions facing Indigenous peoples today. Participants will learn more about FPIC, share experiences, and identify practical recommendations to advance this important human rights standard. Watch our website for more details!

We are pleased to welcome *Keira Mann* as our 2015 CFSC Program Assistant! (Formerly the CFSC Internship, the position has been revamped.) Keira is a student of international development and law at Dalhousie University and has a strong interest in human rights, peace and refugee issues. Many of our readers will have the chance to meet Keira at Canadian Yearly Meeting (CYM) in Prince Edward Island this summer, or at our nonviolence camp at NeeKauNis. You can contact her at keira@quakerservice.ca.

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