



# CANADIAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

ENVISIONING A WORLD WHERE PEACE AND JUSTICE PREVAIL

November, 2015

Dear Friend,

Amelia (I'll use this name to protect her privacy), 35, gave birth to a baby girl. Just two days later, her infant child was taken to a foster home. **"It was the saddest day of my life,"** Amelia told reporters. Amelia was incarcerated in the Alouette Correctional Centre for Women in Maple Ridge, BC. She was serving time for a drug-related offense. A mother-baby program, which would have let Amelia nurse and care for her baby, had just been cancelled by the BC government. She even tried to serve time in a federal prison where a program existed, so that she could be with her daughter, but was rejected.

Amelia and another former inmate sued on behalf of all provincially incarcerated women in BC and their children. They argued that the closing of the program violated a mother's right to bond with, nurture, and breastfeed her baby, as well as the baby's right to a mother's care. The lack of a mother-baby program caused extreme stress and violated constitutionally protected rights.

We know, and research demonstrates, that **bonding and care in the first few months are critical as a baby's young brain develops.** For Amelia and her daughter, and other mothers, a traumatic or extended separation can impact the health and development of the child and have profound negative impacts on the adult they become. The extent of the lifelong damage is starting to become clear as more evidence builds.

It has been proven that mothers who participate in mother-baby programs are less likely to return to prison. Unlike incarcerated fathers, mothers tend to be primary caregivers for their children and other family members. When a mother is sentenced, often for **crimes related to economic survival**, the disruption of family life plays a role in children having increased behavioural problems. Mother-baby programs make a huge difference!

CFSC brought the policy work of Quakers at the international level to the attention of the lawyers representing Amelia. This policy work has focused on **an area typically ignored by governments - the rights and needs of children when their parents are incarcerated.**

In 2013, the Supreme Court of BC ruled that the cancellation of the mother-baby program was unconstitutional because **it did not consider the best interests of the children** or the constitutional rights of their mothers - it separated infants from their mothers during a critically formative period.

Our concern for the wellbeing of mothers and children in prisons led CFSC to join an international research group seeking to define proper treatment for incarcerated women who are pregnant or have children. In September, CFSC was pleased to endorse the newly developed Guidelines that finally set a standard, one that children and mothers like Amelia absolutely deserve.

This is just one way **your support has made a concrete difference this year**, but to give you even this small glimpse hasn't left me with much more space.

I haven't had the chance to write about the many other ways your donation creates positive change, from promoting peacebuilding to supporting the rights of Indigenous peoples and a process of reconciliation. We have written a **full Annual Report** and **I hope you will have a look -** <http://report.quakerservice.ca> (feel free to request a paper copy from our office if you'd like one!)

There are common threads that are true of all the work that donors like you help to realize. It all arises from the same values, from the same sense of hope, regardless of the obstacles, and with the same responsiveness to where our efforts are most needed.

We build true partnerships. **We bring people together in deep dialogue**, we listen to different perspectives and needs, and we search for a shared way forward. Often, when the conditions are just right, **this approach leads to major positive shifts in our world**.

I trust you understand this, because you have a vision of a world where peace and justice prevail. Peace is not an end destination but the way we work together. **Please make a donation today to help this work continue. Thank you for your trust and vision.**

In Friendship,



Lana Robinson

Clerk, Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)

**P.S. There is an urgent need for new monthly donors.** This type of giving is easy to setup online or directly from your bank account. Why not let us know how we can help you become a monthly donor?