

Quaker Concern

Through the bars: making connections

By Nancy Russell



Have you ever had a pen pal? Was it a good experience? Did you learn about where they lived, their customs and culture, or perhaps their life circumstances, including the joys and the sorrows?

When I was in grade 7, our teacher decided that assigning pen pals to the class would be a great learning opportunity. He was right. I was assigned to a boy my own age who lived in Japan. His name was Takashi and his written English was very good. I learned about what it was like to live in Kyoto, the school system there, Takashi's family and deep sense of obligation to them, and his likes and dislikes. As a result I think I developed a more realistic understanding of life in Japan. And I like to believe that Takashi benefited from my letters about life in Canada.

At CFSC we often receive mail from those in Canada's prisons and jails. Upon reflection, correspondence with incarcerated persons has some features that are similar to the pen pal experience described above. Letter writing with those in prison helps us provide information to one another that would be difficult to find out in other ways. Through writing to one another, a positive relationship develops. More about this later. First, I'd like to share some history.

Prison letter writing is not new. Historian Elizabeth Foyster describes prison writing in England beginning

in the 1680s. She says letters that peoples wrote from prisons "provided new insights into the experience of punishment... Many writers used letters to obtain practical support while in prison, but they also found writing was a means to reflect upon what they held to be most important."¹

In 1988, Jan Arriens, a British Quaker, founded an organization called Lifelines. This was in response to a BBC documentary that he saw about an execution that took place in Mississippi. The documentary showed interviews with incarcerated persons from the same prison. Jan was moved by their compassionate and intelligent perspectives and wrote letters to thank them. The letters he received back prompted him to begin Lifelines—a letter writing service that continues today. Its 1,400+ volunteers support and befriend persons serving time on death row throughout the United States.

“People in prison are isolated.”

The Prisoner Correspondence Project began in 2007 in Montreal by taking on surplus letters from another organization and agreeing to find them pen pals. The focus of this project is writing to the LGBTQ+ imprisoned population. Since 2007, as word travels inside prisons, the project continues to grow. This is an all-volunteer group. An collective of six to ten people outside of prison answers letters, sends resources, and

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New statements and letters

Since the last edition of *Quaker Concern* CFSC has released the following statements and open letters:

- In response to the immanent threats of forced eviction of the residents of Masafer Yatta <https://QuakerService.ca/MasaferYatta>
- On the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* <https://QuakerService.ca/UNDeclaration15>
- Calling on NATO to count and cut military carbon emissions <https://QuakerService.ca/NATOEmissions>
- Expressing deep concern over the possibility of Hassan Diab once again being extradited to France: <https://QuakerService.ca/HassanDiab>
- Joining the renewed global call for a moratorium on the use of synthetic biology “gene drives”: <https://QuakerService.ca/GeneDrives>
- Renewing our calls for Canada to speak out to protect Palestinian children from cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment by the Israeli military: <https://QuakerService.ca/CanadaStandUp>
- A joint statement from Quaker agencies about the situation in Ukraine and the Quaker peace testimony: <https://QuakerService.ca/UkrainePDF>

Recent criminal justice research

CFSC has created short visual summaries of recent reports explaining what’s wrong with mother-child units in Canada’s prisons (<https://QuakerService.ca/MotherChildUnits>) and estimating that there are 405,373 children with a parent in custody in Canada. A new 35 minute documentary—*Bonds That Hurt Bonds That Heal*—shows the life-long impacts when a parent is incarcerated. The film can be streamed for free on our website: <https://QuakerService.ca/BondsThatHurtBondsThatHeal>

Invest in communities, not war

Canada has announced plans to buy 88 new Lockheed Martin F-35 stealth fighters for \$19 billion (with a lifecycle cost of \$77 billion). This plane is designed for first strike attacks and can carry a nuclear bomb. A new Parliamentary e-petition calls for Canada to cancel this deal. Sign the petition: <https://QuakerService.ca/NoFighterJetsPetition> Find out more from the No Fighter Jets campaign, endorsed by CFSC: <https://NoFighterJets.ca>

Short videos explore Indigenous rights and sustainability

What does sustainability mean to you? Advice for living our responsibilities is a new series of inspiring videos produced by Katsi’tsakwas Ellen Gabriel for the Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples (of which CFSC is an active member). The brief videos feature Indigenous experts answering questions and telling stories to explain their understandings of sustainability. Learn more:

<https://QuakerService.ca/SustainabilityVideos>

Common values, hidden truth posts for Psychology Today

In his ongoing blog for *Psychology Today* Matt Legge shares exciting and practical research on common human values: <https://QuakerService.ca/OneEasyChangeInPerspective> and considers the impacts of the surprisingly common idea that “my side knows a hidden truth”:

<https://QuakerService.ca/HiddenTruth>

Annual Accountability Report

Our *Annual Accountability Report* came out in December. It highlights the great many things that CFSC was able to accomplish in 2022 thanks to our donors, volunteers, and staff. Have a look:

<https://Report.QuakerService.ca>

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.

Donations are received with gratitude. The generous support of individual donors makes all of the work described here possible. CFSC issues tax receipts for donations over \$10.

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What does theory of change have to do with justice and peace?

By Sarah Forrest and Matt Legge



CFSC members and staff gather at Camp NeeKauNis for meetings that include theory of change discussions. September, 2022.

You may have heard the term “theory of change” (ToC) used in recent years. There are many perspectives on how to use a ToC, including as: a way to track progress toward goals, an instrument to guide funding, and a communication tool. Since ToC is talked about and implemented in different ways, you might be tempted to dismiss it as technical jargon or a too-rigid management tool. It’s actually more useful to peace and social justice work than you might think. Let’s look at why that is, and how CFSC is using ToC to learn and be purposeful in our service work.

ToC helps you see connections

Perhaps the biggest benefit to using a ToC is that it aids us in thinking about how different issues are connected and how they affect each other. In social change groups like CFSC, creating a ToC permits us to understand the reason for our work through articulating the problems we seek to address. What changes do we want to see in the world? Who will experience those changes? What assumptions and beliefs are we resting on that explain the actions we’re taking?

“In using a theory of change we must remain nimble and responsive.”

As you can see, developing a ToC is a reflective practice. It involves diving deeply into our motives and reasoning for doing the work we do and examining the environment, relationships, and power structures that we operate with and in. Put simply: it allows us to communicate and agree on what we’re doing, why we’re doing it, and what outcomes we expect to cause with our work. A ToC enables us to agree on what we consider success.

Through defining what we’re hoping for, we can then

identify the activities that will lead us there. ToC helps us see whether work is contributing towards achieving this impact we envision, or if there is another way that we should consider instead. A ToC can be introduced to social change work at any time to help validate what’s currently being done, determine if resources are having the intended impact, and highlight specific areas that may need course correction.

ToC needs to be flexible

Setting up a ToC is like making a roadmap that outlines the steps we plan to take to reach our goal. There’s one important difference though. When you’re driving somewhere, the route is usually pretty well defined. Traffic might cause you to change course, but it’s unlikely that new roads will suddenly be built while you’re en route!

With social change work, things are far messier. The world is complex and many factors influence each other. A change in government, new laws, or emerging issues like the invasion of Ukraine can alter plans quite suddenly.

So in using ToC we must remain nimble and responsive. This is where continual discernment to listen together for the guidance of the Spirit is so important to CFSC’s use of ToC. We’re always learning and adapting, testing what seems to be working well and what hasn’t gone as expected. We frequently adjust, revising our theories about what actions are most needed and why.

What does this look like?

A ToC shows cause-effect relationships that we expect. It can be stated in the simple format “if [blank] then [blank] because [blank].” For example, “**If** CFSC sends Quaker Concern to our supporters **then** some will take

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Theory of change continued

new peace and justice actions **because** they have an increased awareness about opportunities for action.” Building up a series of these statements lays out the assumptions and logic behind our work. This makes it easier to work together harmoniously, and to spot and correct issues with how we’re working.

A ToC isn’t just a product, it’s also a process

As a process, creating a ToC is participatory. It’s developed in collaboration and conversation, especially with representation from the people that the work seeks to benefit. Together, participants agree on long-term goals, establish what success would look like (being as specific as possible), and decide how to act to bring about that success. They also identify risks. They do all this while sharing and challenging each other’s assumptions and evidence about how and why proposed activities will work (or not).

“This can be a form of finding Truth together.”

As a product, a ToC serves as a measurable description of our social change initiative. It forms the basis for future planning, on-going decision-making, and learning. It’s a valuable tool for documentation, evaluating and reporting on the larger implications of our work, and holding ourselves accountable. Documenting what happens when we do our work helps us see whether we’re moving closer to the world we seek. This requires using a critical eye. What outcomes have resulted from our actions? How effective are our partnerships? What can we do better?

This may all sound foreign or overly demanding, but the truth is, you’re already using a theory of change any time you act for justice or peace. You just might not have thought about it or looked into if it’s an accurate theory.

Have you ever written a letter to government? Have you ever signed a petition, gone to a protest, or voted? In each case you took those actions because you believed something would change as a result. You believed that if you went to the protest some decision maker might pay attention and change a policy or practice you were focused on. Or you believed that you would raise awareness and get community members to take note of the issue. Or you believed that nothing was likely to change but it was important to make a public witness nonetheless. Each of these is a theory of change.

The value of developing one ToC together with others you work with (which is what CFSC does) is that it forces you to think about your assumptions, discuss them out loud, and become clear together about what the work should entail and why. Done well, this can be a form of finding Truth together. It helps you think about your purpose and how you can be most effective with your limited time and energy.

Our world badly needs more effective peace and social justice change agents! So we need people having ToC discussions, being careful about why they’re acting in the ways they are, and learning from what they try.

This isn’t a one-time thing. The ToC process is ongoing, always involving research into what’s working well for other groups, and checking on the match between short-term activities and long-term goals in our work. This ongoing process reminds us not to lose sight of our vision as we get busy with day-to-day tasks. Ultimately, it brings the purpose of our service work to the forefront of everything we do.



Sarah Forrest is CFSC’s Peace Program Coordinator. **Matt Legge** is CFSC’s

Communications Coordinator. To learn more about how to discern peace and social concerns

read the pamphlet (PDF) at:

<https://QuakerService.ca/PeaceAndSocialConcerns>

Are you tired of all the stuff?
Ask your loved ones to support justice and peace instead of buying a present for your next birthday. Tell them to give to CFSC.



QuakerService.ca/BirthdayGift

Watch accomplished experts offer hope on the path to reconciliation

By Rob Hughes



Indigenous Voices On Reconciliation



Still from CFSC's video series *Indigenous Voices on Reconciliation*. Check back for the newest videos at <https://QuakerService.ca/IndigenousVoices>

This past November, I was excited to reconnect with Chief Robert Joseph—a hereditary chief of the Gwawenuk people—at an event for the release of his book, *Namwayut*. He has been Executive Director of the Indian Residential School Survivors Society and an honorary witness to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We first met in 2013 at a two-day workshop for Indigenous two-spirited and non-Indigenous LGBTQ+ people. Later that year I joined some 70,000 people in the Walk for Reconciliation that he led. I've also volunteered for his organization, Reconciliation Canada, during the Truth and Reconciliation Event in Vancouver in 2015. Whenever I get the chance to hear him speak or chat with him, I'm encouraged and challenged by his wisdom.

At the book event, he explained that in the Kwak'wala language, the word “namwayut” conveys the deep understanding that we are all one. One common humanity. One connected whole. Chief Joseph has always inspired and motivated me to engage in reconciliation as he did again with this explanation. He also said that reconciliation gave him a gift, and he wants to give his own gift back to the world.

“Reconciliation” is a tricky word. How do we respectfully engage? While the heavy lifting must be done by non-Indigenous Canadians, CFSC knows how challenging this can be. To help, consider checking out a new resource we've been working on.

Indigenous Voices on Reconciliation is a series of videos capturing conversations with some of our Indigenous partners. You'll hear from a variety of different Indigenous people, from youth to elders, with diverse backgrounds as academics, advocates for defending the environment and Indigenous peoples' human rights, singer/songwriters, cultural workers, and

those in leadership roles in their communities. Some are critical about the rhetoric around reconciliation, particularly from governments and others whose actions (or inaction) fails to match their words. Among the speakers in the video series are:

- Naomi Bob, Snaw'naw'as/Nanoose First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Peguis First Nation;
- Haana Edenshaw, Tsiits Git'anee clan of Haida Gwaii;
- Dr. Sheryl Lightfoot, Anishinaabe from the Lake Superior band of Ojibwe;
- Kirby Muldoe, Tsimshian and Gitksan Nations;
- Collin Orchyk, Treaty 1, Peguis First Nation;
- Katsi'tsakwas Ellen Gabriel, Mohawk from Kanehsatà:ke Nation;
- Kenneth Deer, Bear Clan of the Mohawk Nation of the Kahnawake territory;
- Mary Lou and Dan Smoke, Ojibway Nation, from Batchawana, on Lake Superior, and Seneca Nation from the Six Nations Grand River Territory, respectively; and
- Bill Namagoose, Waskaganish Cree First Nation.

Each of these speakers addresses what reconciliation means to them personally. By considering each perspective, we can begin to understand the complexity of reconciliation. These videos are an excellent reminder to resist easy answers.

Some other topics covered include the importance and challenge of land acknowledgements, what it means for a non-Indigenous person to be an “ally,” and what Canada should be focused on.

I love the perspective each speaker brings to the conversation. I found the response to the question on how a non-Indigenous person can be a good ally

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Path to reconciliation continued

particularly helpful. As Mary-Lou Smoke says, “many people are sincere in their hearts and don’t know what to do.” Here are some suggestions covered by different speakers:

- Show up and listen;
- Learn about the history of colonialism and genocide, marginalization, residential schools, the reserve system, and the *Indian Act*;
- Learn about the people whose territory you occupy, who they are, their customs, and their laws;
- Acknowledge your privilege and power;
- Celebrate and mourn with Indigenous peoples, joining in gatherings, marches, and ceremonies when invited;
- Combat the racism Indigenous peoples face; and
- Reach out and form relationships.

Acknowledging your privilege and power can be done positively in a number of ways and should not be viewed as appeasing your feelings of guilt. The next time you’re considering an investment, donation, or how to vote, take the time to think about how it may impact Indigenous peoples. Combating racism can be as simple as saying something. If someone expresses negative views about Indigenous peoples, take the time to talk with them and show them one of these videos. This is also an effective use of your privilege and power.

Each video is brief, most only a couple of minutes. They can be watched all at once or as stand-alone clips, individually or shared with a group. They’re useful in a variety of contexts. For example, CFSC staff member Jeremy Vander Hoek and I included several of them in our presentation *Discerning and Engaging with Meaningful Land Acknowledgements* at a Canadian Yearly Meeting session in 2022 and later to Quaker meetings in Vancouver and Toronto. The clips helped us elaborate on and emphasize different points in the presentation.

I hope these videos will give insights and motivation to non-Indigenous Canadians to find openings for how they can engage in the hard but necessary work of reconciliation. After your first watch, consider where you might share them!

<https://QuakerService.ca/IndigenousVoices>



Rob Hughes, Vancouver Meeting, lives in the territory of the Qayqayt First Nation in New Westminster. He is clerk of CFSC’s Indigenous rights program committee.



Meredith Egan, former coordinator for CFSC’s criminal justice work, passed away in December. CFSC extends our condolences to her children Nat, Petra, Brigid, and Grace, as well as daughter-in-law Maggie, son-in-law Corey, and granddaughter Pippa.

Meredith lived by the belief that individuals have the power to foster healing. That faith guided so much of her work with CFSC, and later, as a novelist, and through Wild Goat Coaching, her executive coaching business.

Meredith was instrumental in bringing about the Canadian Yearly Meeting minute *Justice is Possible* in 2010 (<https://QuakerService.ca/JusticelsPossible>). Friends may also remember her approach to tactile justice education tools—magnet sets and stone rubbing materials.

Hundreds of incarcerated men, children living in group homes, school children, and persons living in pervasive violence were gifted a portion of her loving faith and hopefulness through anti-violence education circles that she facilitated across Canada.

As part of a joint project between CFSC and Toronto Monthly Meeting, I went with Monica and Jeffrey Walters-Field and Meredith to Portland, Jamaica, in 2008. We worked to establish a Peace Club for students at Happy Grove School, an historic Quaker school that had been beset by violence. A similar effort worked to plant seeds of peace in partnership with the North Point Douglas women’s centre in Winnipeg.

We give thanks for the grace of God as witnessed in the life of Meredith.

By **Vince Zelazny**, New Brunswick Meeting, Clerk of CFSC.

even composes a newsletter! They work collaboratively with an inside prison advisory group. They receive about 100 letters a week.

As the staff person for CFSC's criminal justice work, I'm the one who gets mail from prisons. I believe that the positive relationship that develops while I correspond with people on the inside is of mutual benefit.

This two-way flow of information provides a "reality check" for both correspondents. I find out what's really going on with things like family visits, phone calls, healthcare, programming, and so on. The person on the inside finds out about changes happening to prison policies, programs, legislation, updates on rights and rules, educational resources, and more.

People in prison are isolated. Frequently they don't get accurate information (sometimes any information) from prison staff. By writing to one another, we can each find out what's really happening.

These voices of lived experience add credibility to CFSC's advocacy work. During the height of the pandemic, the National Associations Active in Criminal Justice (CFSC is a member), arranged bi-weekly phone calls with Correctional Services Canada (CSC), presumably for CSC to keep us informed of how well they were managing their prisons. It was crucial during those calls to be able to challenge misinformation. For example, statements from CSC misrepresenting access to phone and video visits for families were contrasted with information received from those inside. As a result, some changes to the good were made.

"These voices of lived experience add credibility to CFSC's advocacy work."

Another example came from my correspondence with someone in a federal institution in Atlantic Canada. They raised concerns about dental care and policies at CSC that restrict procedures like dental cleaning and regular checkups. They sent me hard copies of memos, prison policy, and more.

At this same time, the John Howard Society of Canada was preparing a report to the government about healthcare in prisons, and supporting the principle that people who are incarcerated should have access to the same healthcare as other Canadians. With the prison

resident's consent, I was able to share the concerns and documents about substandard dental care with the John Howard Society to be included in the report. Here is a short list about why we think corresponding with those in prison is important:

- It provides contact and connection with the outside, which may help to lessen a sense of isolation;
- For those inside, it provides information they would otherwise be unable to obtain;
- It helps those outside to know what's going on in prison and better understand needs and issues; and
- It gives a "reality check" that's especially helpful when communicating with Correctional Services Canada, institutions, and government.

CFSC has long provided community grants to encourage projects that engage in criminal justice issues and align with our values and ways of working. This year, one of our community grant recipients is WriteOn!—an all-volunteer organization whose goal, through correspondence, is to support those imprisoned in Canada.

In December CFSC held a virtual event about prison writing and WriteOn! and CFSC's work in this area. To view a recording of the event and learn more see: <https://QuakerService.ca/WriteOn>

If you're feeling inspired to start writing to people in jail or prison, here are three Canadian organizations that are almost always looking for volunteers:

WriteOn!

Website: <https://WriteOnPrisoners.wixsite.com/WriteOn>
Email: WriteOnPrisoners@gmail.com

Penn2Paper (Prison Pen Pal Service)

<https://Penn2Paper.ca>

Prisoner Correspondence Project (Pen Pal Service for LGBTQ+) <https://PrisonerCorrespondenceProject.com>



Nancy Russell is CFSC's Criminal Justice Program Coordinator.

1. Elizabeth Foyster, "Prisoners Writing Home," *Journal of Social History* 47(4), 2014.



We're pleased to welcome CFSC's new Peace Program Coordinator **Sarah Forrest!** Sarah joins CFSC having worked for over 13 years in program implementation, project coordination, partnership development, and volunteer coordination in the nonprofit sector. She has worked internationally in Malawi and Ghana. She is currently completing a Master of Arts in Human Security and Peacebuilding at Royal Roads University, which she attends virtually from Toronto.

Matt Legge joined Lake Erie Yearly Meeting for a presentation and interactive practice on communication skills. (The presentation was recorded: <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=6FOT-elpgEY>). He also gave presentations to Mennonite Central Committee staff, an informal study group with members as far away as the Netherlands, and two chapters of the Canadian Federation of University Women (including his first in-person presentation since 2019, delivered to a large audience in Aurora, ON). He continues to facilitate free interactive workshops. You can learn more and join the wait list for a future

session: <https://QuakerService.ca/Register>.

CFSC member **John Samson-Fellows** presented virtually as part of a course at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre in the UK. John led a close reading of Canadian Yearly Meeting's minute on prison abolition (see his article on this <https://QuakerConcern.ca/40th-Anniversary-of-Minute-on-Prison-Abolition>) and spoke about how it inspires CFSC's work. He used the example of our advocacy on behalf of children of incarcerated parents. He explained that work to reduce the harm caused when prisons disconnect parents from their families is a step on the path of prison abolition.

CFSC's **Jennifer Preston** has thoroughly enjoyed joining Head of Quaker Agencies meetings. These meetings bring CFSC together with Quaker organizations from the US, UK, and Europe as well as Friends World Committee for Consultation. There are amazing synergies amongst these Quaker agencies.

In September CFSC hosted a virtual meeting between members of the

Coalition for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples, government of Canada representatives, and Indigenous and government representation from Aotearoa/ New Zealand. The discussion was about the Aotearoa Action Plan for implementing the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and Canada's legislation.

In November Jennifer visited Geneva for a UN Human Rights Council (HRC) workshop on the Enhanced Participation of Indigenous peoples at the HRC. It was a pleasure to work with long-time partners with a focus on how States can recognize Indigenous peoples in the international arena without treating them as nongovernmental organizations.

New Year's Day had Jennifer flying west for a week on stunning Haida Gwaii. This was part of the research project that CFSC has done in partnership with many Coalition members, the University of British Columbia, and other academic institutions. We are talking with Indigenous communities about how they are using the *Declaration* and what tools might be useful to them.