



Canadian Friends Service Committee

E-Newsletter



Canadians in prisons need access to the internet to take online courses, get informed about support programs

“Canadian prison officials have said an inmate’s successful reintegration into the community requires at least some education beyond the high school level. But taking university or college courses inside Canadian prisons has become extremely difficult – and in some cases impossible.” [notes the Toronto Star](#) (.docx) in an investigative piece that came out in March.

The Star explains that the problem is “the federal government does not allow prisoners access to the internet, while paper correspondence courses have been almost entirely

eliminated.”

Education isn't the only issue. [WriteOn!](#) a volunteer-run organization that CFSC has supported financially and [done events with](#), notes having received, “hundreds of letters from incarcerated people across Canada who request all kinds of information, including general legal information, educational resources and information about supports and programs that can benefit them in preparation for their release.”

WriteOn! has started [a petition you can sign](#). It calls on Canada to let incarcerated people have access to the Internet. This would help “to improve their access to educational resources, including being able to take college/university courses, access career information, work on personal goals, and reduce isolation.”



People aren't stuck in a fixed box.



The surprising truth is that people change all the time

I've had the chance to talk to thousands of people about conflicts, and not one has ever said to me, “I'm the primary driver of the problem. Why am I so difficult?” Instead, they invariably ask how to change other people's beliefs or bad behaviour. And a lot of the time, they feel like they already know the answer: That other person will *never* change. They're unreachable. They're awful. They're the problem.

What's fascinating is that all sides can find ways to think this.

Picture this common scene: You meet up with a friend for coffee and soon they're explaining to you in detail why their co-worker is so impossible to work with. In that moment have you ever wondered what that co-worker is telling *their* friends?

When you see the other side as "the problem," that can preserve destructive conflict patterns. The conflict feels fated to continue, you imagine, because people don't change.

Except they do. All the time...

[Keep reading](#) this latest *Psychology Today* blog post by CFSC's Matt Legge.



We're thrilled to welcome Mel Burns, our new Peace Program Coordinator!

Mel Burns resides in New Brunswick on the traditional lands of the Wolastoqiyik, where the Wolastoq River and the Bay of Fundy meet. She has a background in Social Work and is currently at the Thesis stage of her Masters degree with a focus on Religion, Peace, and Justice. Mel has spent years working with refugees and newcomers to Canada, managing a wide variety of case management and programming. Prior to that, Mel worked in New Zealand for an Indigenous organization providing support to youth beneficiaries and young parents.

Mel is passionate about peace education and depolarizing by building a culture of compassionate communication. She has experience facilitating workshops on a variety of topics related to both social work and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Mel believes that all life is created equal and that each human we encounter has the ability to teach us a unique and valuable truth, if only we take the time to pause and pay attention. "Attention is the rarest, and purest, form of generosity."—Simone Weil.

Mel is the co-parent of a rambunctious toddler, an avid walker of an equally rambunctious dog, a proud member of the queer community, a regular tree-hugger, a donut connoisseur, and a lover of continuous learning.

Learn more about [CFSC's peace work](#). Get on the wait list for [free peace skills workshops](#) facilitated by Mel.



WHAT IS PENAL ABOLITION?

Penal abolition seeks to eliminate the punitive mindset which pervades society and justice systems by transforming harmful approaches to ones that are healing. The term "penal" originates from the Latin and Greek words for punishment, and to "punish" is to cause suffering. It is the suffering inherent in the justice system that Quakers wish to abolish – for victims, perpetrators, institutional staff, families and communities.

Quaker work towards penal abolition has been shaped by diverse experiences and an evolved understanding of the root causes of injustice. Early efforts by Quakers focused on reforming prisons to make them more humane and to substitute prisons for capital punishment. However, evidence showed that the social objectives of imprisonment – deterrence and rehabilitation – were not being met through punishment.

Quaker activist Ruth Morris noted that reform within prisons often simply "ended up serving the very system that was so destructive." Now Quakers work with others in creating alternatives to incarceration, such as restorative justice, transformative processes, diversion and trauma-informed systems.

The global increase in incarceration despite the rise of more effective alternative approaches, then led to questions around punitive approaches. "Punitive approaches are guided by coercion, misuse of power, and fear, fostering additional trauma. The predominant focus on punishing offenders commits the great majority of the system's energy and resources to legal processing, prisons and incarceration. Justice for survivors and communities become unlikely." (Canadian Yearly Meeting, 2010)

HOW ARE QUAKERS INVOLVED?

Quaker and former prison governor, Tim Newell, comments that the early persecution and imprisonment of Quakers, including George Fox, brought home to the developing Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) "the reality of being locked up." The worldwide community of Friends has worked on concerns related to justice for over 350 years. This has included founding organizations such as the Elizabeth Fry Society and the Alternatives to Violence Project, promoting restorative justice processes, and participating in the establishment of norms and standards at the United Nations.

In Canada, Quakers have held longstanding concerns with prisons. They called for prison abolition in 1981 at their Canadian Yearly Meeting (Minute 93) and for those harmed to become the centre of restorative and transformative approaches at their Canadian Yearly Meeting in 2010 (Minute 79). Quakers in Canada are also involved with the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP), prison visitation, restorative justice, rehabilitation and coalitions working toward penal reform.

"The prison system is both a cause and a result of violence and social injustice. Throughout history, the majority of prisoners have been powerless and oppressed. We are increasingly clear that the imprisonment of human beings, like their enslavement, is inherently immoral, and is as destructive to the cagers as to the caged."

Part of Minute 93 by the Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in 1981

Image: Mrs. Fry talking to the Prisoners in Newgate, in the year 1816 by Jerry Barrett. © Trustees of the British Museum

Featured resource: *From Harm to Healing*

At just four pages long this resource distills the decades of research and discernment that have gone into CFSC's position that the current "criminal justice system" needs to be totally transformed for the benefit of everyone impacted by crime. Print copies of this handout are available for free. [Contact our office](mailto:info@quakerservice.ca) to request yours or read the handout online: <https://QuakerService.ca/HarmToHealing>

This is just one of hundreds of great [resources available on our website](#).