

Elizabeth Fry Society

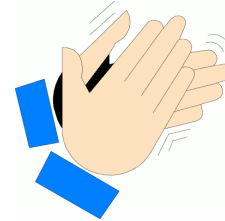
of Saint John, New Brunswick
Newsletter –August 2007

Did you know?

- ◆ That most women who are criminalized are considered low risk, posing virtually no threat to the communities in which they live and work. Only 1-2% of women released ever re-enter prison for new offenses. At the same time, these women have many needs.
- ◆ That for women, mental illness and poverty is often associated with increased risk of violence and abuse.
- ◆ That it is better to give a woman a hand up than a hand out.
- ◆ The majority of women prisoners suffer from a substance abuse disorder and in many cases, their substance use contributed to committing the crime that resulted in their incarceration.
- ◆ That the majority of women who come in conflict with the law are mothers, most of whom are the sole supporters of their families.
- ◆ That when mothers are sentenced to prison, their children are sentenced to separation.
- ◆ That the increasing number of Canadian women in prison is clearly linked to the increased cuts to expenditures for social services, health and education. We protect and support women who are criminalized in all situations, from their first arrival at a police station to maintaining contact with their children and re-entering their communities.
- ◆ New Brunswick has seen a 5% crime decrease since 2005.
- ◆ On any given day in Canada, 25 000 children have a mother involved in the criminal justice system.
- ◆ That women do not have a long-term residential treatment facility in N.B. However, N.B. men have had one for about forty years.

Applause and Support

A very special thank-you to all our individual donors. Without your support we could not continue to provide the assistance for the incarcerated women and their children. Thank you so much! We acknowledge support from The New Brunswick Department of Public Safety, Correctional Services Canada. A huge “merci” goes to Les Filles de Marie de L’Assomption for all the knitting they do for children of women prisoners. Volunteering with Elizabeth Fry is about people from all walks of life, who give their time, have a vision and a conviction to create a change within the Canadian Criminal Justice System and to build stronger community for all citizens.



Summer Students

This year, we had one summer student working in the office, in the provincial courts, and at the Saint John Regional Correctional Centre. Erin McLaughlin, a fourth year student at St. Thomas University, returned to us for a second summer. She is currently doing a bachelor of arts with a double major in Human Rights and Criminology. She has been assisting with one-on-one sessions, bingo, arts & crafts at the S.J.R.C.C, and with the court work program.

✍ Bingo/Arts & Crafts ✍

These activities are conducted at the S.J.R.C.C. one Monday per month. Both programs are very popular, as they provide women with social activities in an environment where they are able to interact

naturally with each other and volunteers from Elizabeth Fry. Both activities are looked forward to by all! Each participant takes part and enjoys a snack. Due to a sizeable increase in the number of incarcerated women, we have had to increase the number of prizes for bingo. In order to continue to do so, we do need more donations! Some things that we would like to have include: shampoo, conditioner, body wash, toothpaste, toothbrushes, socks, writing paper, hair brushes, hair gel, and deodorant. We are seeking donations from individuals and/or groups to assist us with this. The cost of a monthly Bingo is approximately \$50, and about the same for arts & crafts. A great way to help out these women would be to sponsor a bingo or arts & crafts evening. For further information, contact the office at 506-635-8851, or drop donations off at 68 Carleton Street, Saint John. A special thank you to groups and individuals who have donated this year!



Program sends Anti-Shoplifting message to students

Students in School Districts 6 and 8 may just think twice about shoplifting this summer thanks to the Elizabeth Fry Society of Saint John.

Wanda Cosman, a volunteer with the society, recently wrapped up an anti-shoplifting program designed to make students aware of the consequences of the crime-both for the accused and their victims. “It’s to make them really think, and to tell them that shoplifting is just not tolerated,” she explained.

Mrs. Cosman has visited 11 schools, and spoken to more than 745 students. Her presentation includes a video depicting what happens to school children who steal a few items from a store- from their arrest to their first appearance in court.

She also distributes a booklet to students entitled, “Shoplifting...The Crime of the Century.” This publication contains a shoplifting scenario, puzzles, and exercises with anti-shoplifting themes.

“Even if it just stops one child, makes them think, that’s my whole thing,” Mrs. Cosman says.

Since 2003, this program has been presented in 53 schools, and reached 2962 children, along with their teachers.

No doubt this program has far reaching effects on the business community in the Greater Saint John area, whom are receiving the long-term benefits from this program.

We are asking for corporate donations, of any size, to keep this program operational.

Court-work Program

Denise Durette has continued to attend court every day, along with Erin McLaughlin during the summer months, to work with the women who are facing criminal charges.

The court work program is highly beneficial for both the court work volunteer, and the women in conflict with the law. Volunteers have the chance to get to know and recognize the women, hear the legal perspectives of a woman’s case, and become more knowledgeable about the justice system.

All of these factors are extremely valuable when offering guidance and advice the women may want or need. There are numerous advantages from the women’s point of view as well. Going to court also allows them to get to know and recognize us. Simply having a volunteer present whom the women know, and who is there for them, proves to be a great source of emotional support and gives strength. Many women are afraid, not familiar with the criminal justice system, or might not have anyone to encourage or comfort them. It is through this program, that volunteers are able to give some guidance to the women about what they should expect and/or experience. Most of the time, just letting them know we’re here for them if they need us, makes them feel better. Most of these women do not have family support.

Pet Therapy

Another program Denise has been involved in, is visiting the S.J.R.C.C. once a week with her dog, Taffy. The Elizabeth Fry Society of Saint John adopted him from the Animal Rescue League, and have been taking Taffy out to the jail for the women to interact with the women for the past three years.

The women pat, brush and play with Taffy. He in turn gives them emotional support, in order to feel comfortable to discuss their situation. The dog therapy has been great for the women, and Taffy enjoys going too!



Christmas Gift Program

Once again, we had a successful gift program for mothers incarcerated in Saint John and in Madawaska over Christmas. We provided an outfit, mittens, hat, scarves, slippers, toys, and games for each child. All of the presents were wrapped by the moms, and then mailed throughout New Brunswick by E. Fry. Once again, we welcomed the help of a group of Sisters, all over eighty years of age, from a convent in northern New Brunswick. They knitted a great many beautiful items for the children. Also, a special thanks to The Salvation Army for gifts and toys. Every provincially sentenced woman received an E. Fry t-shirt and a gift bag with personal care items. Christmas cards were sent out to all the women. Our Christmas program requires a lot of participation and organization on the part of a few dedicated volunteers, and is dependant on the generosity of our donors.



What we do:

Elizabeth Fry Volunteers, daily, are volunteering in the following ways:

- Visiting SJRCC Monday & Wednesday evenings from 7-9 p.m., and Thursday mornings from 9-11 a.m.
- Monthly trips to Nova Institute for Women in Truro, Nova Scotia to visit the women
- Every six weeks to Nova Institute for Women in Truro, Nova Scotia to conduct the Mother/Child Read Aloud Program.
- Three trips to Madawaska Regional Correctional Centre to provide services.
- Daily presence in Provincial Court to assist women and their families.
- Writing letters to MLA's, MP's, and government officials.
- Making phone calls to families of women prisoners
- Staffing the office
- Attending committee meetings, workshops, board meetings and conferences.
- Assisting women living in the community
- Speaking/writing to judges, lawyers and social workers
- Conducting anti-shoplifting course in School Districts 6&8
- Conducting Mother/Child Read Aloud program at SJRCC
- Writing proposals for grants and funding
- Attending parole board hearings
- Corresponding with women prisoners
- Preparing for Mother/Child Read Aloud Program by purchasing, sorting, packing materials, and mailing books across Canada, the United States and Portugal.

- Preparing and conducting Arts & Crafts and Bingo at SJRCC
- Writing, typing, editing newsletter
- Writing and mailing appeal letters
- Transcribing minutes of regular meetings and mailing to members to keep them informed of our activities
- Recruiting volunteers
- Driving and accompanying women to appointments
- Public speaking
- Mother's Day Project at S.J.R.C.C. to celebrate Mother's Day and Elizabeth Fry week.
- Phone line available from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. daily, to assist women on the outside.
- Conducting an at-risk teen program for female youths aged 14-17.

Volunteering with Elizabeth Fry is endless, and we are always open to fresh, new ideas as to what could be done for women within our community. A lot of our work is concentrated within the community, and we do need volunteers to help with projects outside of the Saint John Regional Correctional Centre, and Nova Institution in Truro, Nova Scotia. If you would like to assist us in our work, or have ideas of how you would like to improve the conditions of marginalized or criminalized women, feel free to contact us. We do provide training for all of our volunteers. Also, we welcome inquiries and would be happy to provide information or speakers. **Volunteering is helping people, but also gaining an understanding about each other, and a sense of human compassion. You can have a positive affect on someone's life!**

Each Elizabeth Fry Society is autonomous, but is affiliated with the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Society's. All Elizabeth Fry Societies advocate on behalf of women and girls in conflict with the law. Societies exist in communities all across Canada. Each offering a variety of programs and services.

A round of applause for our volunteers:

Faith Bishram	Fr. Paul LeBlanc
Wanda Cosman	Glenna Munro
Berna Critchlow	Keith Munro
Deinse Durette	Marian Perkins
Joanne Genge	Jillian Ramsey
Carol Jellison	Marianna Stack

Thank you for all you do!

Mother/Child Read Aloud Program

This valuable program has been offered at the SJRCC for the past six years, and has expanded to include federally sentenced women at Nova Institution in Truro, Nova Scotia. Mothers have the opportunity to read to their children. The program enables the mothers (as well as grandmothers, aunts, sisters, etc) to choose new story books to read onto tapes. The tapes, books, batteries, and a one-time gift of a walkman are sent to the children's caregiver.

The program benefits are many-the mother feels close to her children as she reads the books she has chosen. The children, who, in many cases, feel as though they have been abandoned by the loss of their mother, can now hear their mother reading to them. What makes this program so special? After all, it is just a person reading to a child, but this isn't just a person or a child. In both cases, there has been a sudden disruption to both lives, and separation. What this program does is give the mother a chance to re-establish and maintain some contact and reinforce her love her child. Our aim is strengthening the bond between mother and child, while encouraging a life-long love of books by the children.

Just recently, we received a beautiful thank-you letter from the women at Nova, which we share with you.

“Thank you, it brings me joy to read aloud to the children I love. Thank you for tremendous efforts to bring to us women here at Nova Institution for Women, the Read Aloud Program. We

appreciate your commitment, love and care, and time which you offer so kindly to us and our families. Thank you.”



~Our legacy~

We strongly believe that the assistance extended to provincially sentenced women, serves to keep them from entering the federal system. More emphasis must be placed on having better support systems in the community so that less time will be spent being incarcerated. It is possible that many women could be spared from federal sentencing and the resulting separation from children and families, plus saving great financial costs to society, if more monies, programs, etc, were available to more marginalized and criminalized women in our community.

We face challenges on a daily basis, and meeting them, we continue to grow. Our volunteers are committed to the women we serve, and continue to be strong advocates on their behalf. We wish to express our thanks to all the women who have had, or are having, the “lived experience” of being incarcerated for allowing us to be a part of their world, and sharing their lives with us. We can only grow stronger because of their courage and honesty.



Cross Roads to Success

In February of 2007 we offered, for the first time, "Cross Roads to Success" a female teen intervention program. This program was designed by a member of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Cape Breton. We partnered with UNBSJ and two honour students volunteered to facilitate the ten sessions which included: journal writing;

recognizing strengths; assertiveness; women in society; problem solving; social justice; anger management; and stress management. The young ladies particularly liked the personality quiz games and snacks.

We ended our sessions with a pizza party which was extremely successful. The teens offered their opinions on what they liked and how we could improve the next session. They especially enjoyed meeting women who had lived experience in the provincial and federal correction centres. It was quite an eye opener for them. We hope to be able to offer this program again in the winter of 2008.

Growing Relationships

This past year, our volunteers have had the special privilege of reaching beyond working solely with the incarcerated woman. By building successful relationships of trust, several women have introduced us to their immediate families. Two of our volunteers, while attending meetings in another city, were invited to visit and have a meal with the family and the young woman, who was befriended while serving a federal sentence.

Volunteers have visited and supported the mother of a prisoner and have assisted her in several ways. Another family member of an incarcerated woman was ill in hospital and E. Fry volunteers visited her, and were able to give support to family members visiting from out of town.

At the invitation of several women at Nova Institution, members attended the Christmas family social in December, and were again invited to the summer barbeque in June. Many of the women do not have family support or families are located far away, and do not have the financial means to travel to Nova. At times like these, E. Fry becomes “family.” As one woman said when having her picture taken with E. Fry volunteers, “See, my family’s here too.”

Building a house, building a community

Congratulations to the inmates and staff at Nova Institution for a job well done! Nova women, along with staff and community, raised \$26,000 to build a house for children orphaned by AIDS in Uganda. After a presentation of dance and song by The Wa-too-too Children's Choir, the women incarcerated at Nova presented the choir with a cheque for \$26,048.38 as a part of their Nova House African fundraiser, which will be donated directly to the ministry to build a house in the Wa-too-too village. Over several months, many fundraising activities took place, such as a sponsored yard sale, consisting of articles made by the women at Nova, buy a brick campaign, a silent auction, coffee house, and a letter writing campaign. The Choir performed on April 24th, which was their only prison concert throughout their entire North American tour. This project helped build the institutional community, strengthen relationships with partners, and contributed in a meaningful way to the global community. Our society supported this campaign, by purchasing a brick. The residents of Nova Institution for Women, are encouraged to do meaningful work, and give back to society. It is part of the fundamental mandate that these women focus not only on themselves but on the bigger picture, and work to create a better society.



Looking to the future

This fall we look forward to developing a partnership with the University of New Brunswick, Saint John campus, departments of Criminology and Psychology, which will provide us with two students who will do a placement with us. We are hopeful that

2008 will see us having a community outreach worker.

♥ A Love From Afar ♥

Being apart from all my loved ones,
Is harder than I thought.
I try to be logical,
Telling myself that it may be forever.
That's not much comfort nor peace,
When I really need to touch them, kiss them,
and love them.
I sometimes close my eyes to a daydream,
And hold a picture in my mind.
Pretty and bright-as the yellow in a rainbow,
With nothing more than its natural glow.
I imagine all things, I would say and do
If I could have them visit me here.
No matter how beautiful the picture is,
It will never compare to the real thing...
To look into their eyes or whisper their
name,
As we sing a song or simply play a game.
We would pitch a tent, roast marshmallows
on an open fire,
Or do whatever it is that their little hearts
may desire.
Grab a backpack and fill it with snacks to
head out for a walk,
As soon as mommy uses her key to secure
the lock.
They'd pick up a ladybug along the way
Or toss a pebble for the dog to play.
Now they keep these words next to their
heart,
For if they truly believe, we will never be
apart.
Close your eyes and envision the biggest and
brightest star,
And know in your heart, mommy will
always love you
Even from afar.

-an inmate and friend of Elizabeth Fry
Society of Saint John, New Brunswick