

FAMILIES AND CORRECTIONS JOURNAL

A SPECIAL MENTAL HEALTH EDITION

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The mission of the Canadian
Families and Corrections Network
is:

"Building stronger and safer
communities by assisting families
affected by criminal behavior,
incarceration and community
reintegration."

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'The Mental Health Effects of Crime on the Family' Research

By Louise Leonardi, Executive Director, CFCN
and Dr. Stacey Hannem, Associate Professor, Wilfrid Laurier University

What IS Mental Health?

Mental Health – it's a topic that's on a lot of people's minds right now and one that affects us all. But what IS it, really? The World Health Organization defines Mental Health as **"a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community"**.

There has been research on the effects of incarceration on inmates but what about the families on the outside? What about the emotions, stress and mental wellbeing of those who have to deal with the effects of the justice system and incarceration of a family member? How does this translate to public safety? Canadian Families and Corrections Network (CFCN) wanted to find out. And thankfully, so did Public Safety Canada who funded the research we undertook in September 2014.

Why do we need this research?

Families of offenders are often considered the 'lost society', an unspoken reality. Family members left behind are victims of the 'consequences' of crime and are the ones who have to deal with feelings of loneliness, shame, anger and grief; stress of the loss of family income and feelings of great responsibility. Parents may experience an extreme sadness that their loved one is not there to watch and participate as the children grow up and feel a great loneliness without their partner. Families are often ostracized and isolated in their community and children of offenders are ignored, teased and often bullied at school because they have a parent in jail which may affect their self-esteem, scholastic marks and interpersonal skills. We need to capture this information so that we can see how this affects Canadian families and what programming, policies and help we can offer.

The research is timely in that Corrections Canada is currently focusing on Mental Health issues. Health Canada states **"Mental health is a crucial dimension of overall health and an essential resource for living. It influences how we feel, perceive, think, communicate and understand. Without good mental health, people can be unable to fulfill their full potential or play an active part in everyday life. Mental health issues can address many areas, from enhancing our emotional well-being, treating and preventing severe mental illness to the prevention of suicide."**

The Canadian Psychiatric Association (CPA) claimed recently that **"The numbers are compelling. We must do more for those suffering from mental illness. The CPA sees a natural leadership role for the federal government, both in addressing the mental health of the populations for which it is directly responsible, and in fostering collaboration with and among the provinces and territories."**

And the Partners for Mental Health announced the results of their latest poll on mental health and youth suicide in Canada in early February, 2014 and found that **88% of Canadians believe the government needs to be doing more to provide for the mental health needs of our young people** to prevent tragedies like suicide and **76% of Canadians agree the lack of support for mental health services is one of the most pressing issues facing youth today**.

The 'Mental Health Effects of Crime on the Family' Research Project offers a better understanding of the impact of crime on families; puts forward a focus on the criminogenic factors around Mental Health; and creates a family resource for this important issue.

What did we do?

Canadian Families and Corrections Network joined in research partnership with Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU, Brantford Campus), and in particular, Dr. Stacey Hannem, Associate Professor in their Criminology Department, to evaluate the effects of crime and incarceration on the family unit.

We wanted to look at some valuable questions such as:

- What mental health issues are experienced by family members when a loved one is involved in crime?
- What is the mental wellbeing at the time of their family member's incarceration and entry into the criminal justice system?
- How do adults and children on the outside cope?
- What resources are used (family doctors, counselling and support groups)?
- Is there under-served access to mental health for families of offenders?
- Are there any long term effects?
- Does the offending family member on the inside show any understanding or accountability for this issue?
- And, importantly, did these mental health issues lead to other problems for the outside family members such as drugs and alcohol? Is it a risk factor for their criminality and our public safety?

CFCN ran a self-administered online survey to capture quantitative and qualitative data on our website. Then we offered families the option of participating further in a telephone interview to discuss more in-depth questions for feedback on coping mechanisms, treatment and results. We surveyed families all across Canada inclusive of different race, social and cultural groups; family equity; gender; urban and rural residents, etc. to determine their mental impact as a family member turns to crime, evaluating their mental health status at the time of their family member's incarceration as well as through current, ongoing issues to determine if it is leading to crime or criminogenic factors such as drug and alcohol abuse. We also completed a literature review of current research in this area.

What did we produce?

From this ground-breaking research CFCN and WLU have created awareness across the country of the current work in this area and generated a lot of interest in how families on the outside deal with crime. A project summary with findings of the research outlining challenges, best practices and criminogenic factor analysis for family members who have someone involved in the criminal justice system is provided in this Special Edition of our Canadian and Families Journal and a full '*Mental Health Effects of Crime on the Family*' Research Report has been produced and is available on CFCN's website at www.cfcn-rcafd.org. Further, we are preparing to promote and present this research wherever possible to our partners, researchers and at CFCN speaking engagements.

We have also produced a '*Coping over Time*' resource to offer family members affected by crime ideas, suggestions and advice from other family members around mental health issues. This valuable resource is also available on our website at www.cfcn-rcafd.org.

Thank you to those courageous family members for their participation!

Family members who are stigmatized and shamed by their loved one's crime are often reluctant to speak out. Through direct conversations, emails, phone calls, social media and an incentive to encourage participation, 140 people took the anonymous online survey on our website. Further, 63 of them (45% of survey respondents) agreed to a follow-up interview with 44 (31% of survey respondents, 70% of potential interviewees) interviews conducted.

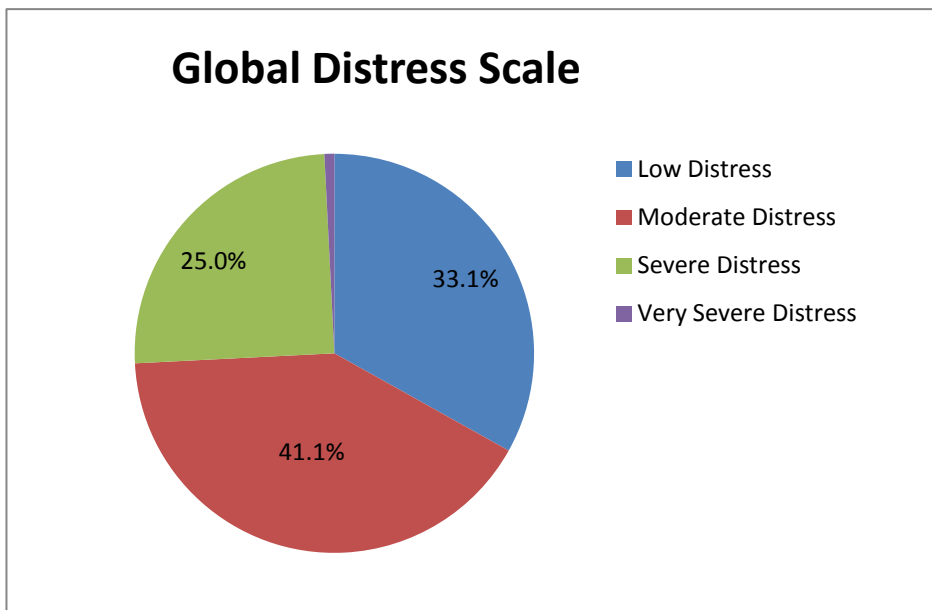
What did we learn from the Literature Review?

- **There is no Canadian literature specifically on the subject of mental health concerns faced by families of offenders.**
- Most of the existing research focuses on the social, material and emotional difficulties faced by families of offenders in the US and the UK.
- The claim has been made that the incarceration of the individual **punishes** the family, and that society has an obligation to ensure, as much as practically possible, that the pains of punishment do not extend to the families of the offenders.
- The children of prisoners exhibit a range of symptoms related to attachment disruption, post-traumatic stress, depression, antisocial behaviour, and poor self-esteem. Children who are exposed to abuse and violence in their household prior to the parent's incarceration, predictably, are found to suffer greater mental health effects.
- Prisoner's wives identify serious needs in the areas which contribute to stress, namely: information, financial/material, social, family relationships and help in raising children. Prisoners' wives symptoms of grief and stress have a similarity to the wives of prisoner of war and servicemen missing in action.
- Research focuses on the experiences of prison visiting as an important coping mechanism but also potentially difficult and traumatic for families. The quality of the prison visitation experience has also been identified as a key factor in the level of distress experienced by children; negative prison visitation experiences and visitation policies which are not "family friendly", such as non-contact visits, restrictions on movement and touching, and an environment which is generally perceived by the child as hostile or scary can have a negative impact on that child's relationship with the incarcerated parent and increase levels of distress related to the incarceration.

Survey Demographics

- Respondents covered a wide range of ages: 2.2% 16-20 years of age, 9.4% 21-29 years, 26.8% 30-39 years, 10.1% 40-49 years, 33.3% 50-59 years, and 18.1% 60+ years.
- In terms of the length of familial involvement with the justice system: 13.1% had been involved with the justice system for less than one year, 14.6% for 1-2 years, 20.4% for 3-5 years, 25.5% for 6-10 years, and 26.3% had been involved with the justice system for more than 10 years.
- Family relationships showed that the incarcerated person was their husband/ex-husband (37.2%) or son / stepson (35.8%). Other family relationships reported included brother, father, nephew, daughter, uncle, boyfriend, mother, grandson, wife/ex-wife, aunt, niece, various "in-laws" and "other".
- Almost 60% of respondents indicated that their family member was still incarcerated (sentenced or awaiting trial); a further 20% were on parole or had completed a sentence of incarceration. 7.4% of family members were currently serving or had completed a community sentence, and 3% were awaiting trial in the community. 1 individual had been acquitted of the charges and 8.9% reported 'other' status.

The key instrument used to evaluate current mental wellness was the ALERT Mental Wellness Assessment scale - a 15 item scale measuring symptoms (anxiety and depression), functioning, and well-being/efficacy (reverse-scored). The responses to each item were scored from 0 to 3 and a total score derived by summing the values for each individual item response. The total scores range from 0-45 and map on to a categorization of low, moderate, severe and very severe distress. The chart below demonstrates the breakdown of the global distress scores by category and percentage of completed surveys.



Scoring

- 0-11 low (or no) distress
- 12-24 moderate distress
- 25-38 severe distress
- 39+ very severe distress

Mean of non-clinical community

- 7.33 (SD 6.44)

Mean of CFCN families

- 16.78 (SD 10.88)

Mean of clinical community

- 19.92 (SD 9.51)

*SD = Standard Deviation

And this means?

This population of individuals, affected by crime and incarceration in their family, clearly **experiences significantly more distress, on average, than we would expect from a random sample of community members and scores much closer to the expected mean for a clinical sample (those seeking psychological counseling for mental distress).** Research participants told us:

Well, I mean, it's very, very, difficult. Just because someone does something wrong, you don't stop loving them. You can't make yourself stop loving a person, no matter what they do, whether it's good or whether it's bad. So, as their journey escalates, you're taken along on their journey too. And no matter how bad it is or how good it is, you are part of it. So it affects every facet of your life. It affects you in every way. [FMH22]

Shock that your son could do something horrible, something socially unacceptable and so it's sort of nothing you ever prepare for. You prepare for things in life for your children but you know when your son was little he never said, when I grow up I want to be a criminal... So you don't prepare for this, it's just such a shock when it happens and it shocked the whole family and before you can even, you know like when you know something's coming, you prepare for the impact but this you can't prepare for the impact, it just hits you. [FMH25]

Mental Health Over Time: We asked participants to respond to mental health questions prior to their involvement in the criminal justice system, at the time of the offence and currently, at the time of the survey. The majority of respondents did not report prior chronic mental health concerns or a mental health diagnosis at the time of their loved one's involvement in the criminal justice system, but these measures did increase over time.

Professional Help: Peer Support offers valuable assistance in terms of professional help. 54.6% sought help from a family physician at some point (64.6% of these were satisfied with their physician's response), 57.1% went to a counselor (with 66.7% of these being satisfied with the assistance), and 46.7% had sought out a peer support group (with 81.5% of these being satisfied). (CFCN outlines all known Support Groups across Canada on our website.)

Participants said:

They were absolutely the lifesavers for me because I met other women who were from 'normal families, good families' who were going through the exact same thing as I was. And they were all at different stages, some were like me, their son was just entering the process, some their sons were currently in prison, and some had sons who were on parole. [...] So the first few meetings I went to, hearing all the horror stories of what had happened to some of their sons, I mean it was extremely hard to hear because there are some terrible stories. However, the...I don't know what the word is...the elation that I felt that I had somebody that I could talk to about this, and not continually have to hide it...and people who were empathetic and listened to my story. And also the people who could give me information about what to do next, and what resources I had to ... I mean that was, I have to say, was an absolute lifesaver. [FMH14]

Family: Relationships with family members were negatively affected by crime, with 45.6% indicating that family relationships were "somewhat" affected and 28.1% indicating that relationships were very affected. 36.5% of family members affected by crime felt their family was very supportive of their situation, 47.8% reported that their family was "somewhat" supportive, and 15.7% felt their family was "not at all" supportive.

The impact...it's been devastating. It's consumed our whole family, our hearts, our family unit. You feel helpless because your family member's actions are out of your control. Yes, it's been very hard on the family unit but we've all stuck together. [FMH17]

Friends: 32.1% reported that friends were very supportive, 56.3% were "somewhat" supportive, 11.6% reported that their friends were "not at all" supportive. (Findings may suggest that family and friends are more likely to be supportive if they see value in the relationship or feel that the offender is remorseful.) 51.4% of our families indicated that their relationships with co-workers and employers were "not at all" affected with qualitative data suggesting that this can be explained by the fact that many individuals did not disclose their situation to this group.

I have got quite used to talking about it over the years now. The first year or two was harder, right, because I was so like, "How do I say this?" or "What can I...?" or, "How I explain this?" I would just say, "He's in jail, and he made the wrong choice", and I wouldn't get into it. Some people would ask, "Can I ask for what?", or something. But this is another thing that I found quite interesting, is that when I start opening up to people that way, it was amazing how many people would tell me something personal about somebody in their life or someone that they knew that, you know, so I thought, "Okay, there are other people dealing with this too." [FMH25]

What about the family member involved in crime?

78.9% of respondents reported having “a lot” of contact with their family member who was involved in criminal activity, 10.5% reported some contact, and 10.5% reported no contact at all. 33.8% of family members travel 200-499kms (one way) to visit their inside loved one.

63.5% of participants felt that their relationship with this family member was very positive, 26.1% said somewhat positive, and 10.4% felt that it was not at all a positive relationship.

The majority of respondents felt that their family member understood the effects of his/her crime on their well-being, with 40.9% of respondents indicating that their family member understood “a lot”, 43.5% said “somewhat”. Findings suggest that families affected by crime are more likely to maintain contact and to have a positive relationship if the offender expresses an understanding of the impact that he/she has had on his/her family members’ lives.

Crime and problems in coping mechanisms

Coping Strategies: When we asked family members what they were doing to manage their feelings about their family member’s crime and involvement in the criminal justice system they told us honestly.

- **Positive mechanisms** include exercise (46.9%), peer support (40.6%), journaling / writing (39.8%), religious practice / prayer (39.1%), and meditation (31.3%)
- **Not so positive mechanisms** include use of prescription medication (36.7%), smoking (23.4%) and alcohol (17.2%), eating disordered behaviour (18.9%), prescription misuse (9.4%), and self-harm (7.1%)
- **Illegal mechanisms** include 6.3% used street drugs, and 4.7% had broken the law to provide for their families

Survey comments include, “**Honestly, although bad for my health, smoking has been the coping mechanism I use to deal with the stress of the entire situation and by-products of it,**” and, “**The most helpful at the time was cutting but clearly it wasn’t healthy but it was the only thing that worked**”.

Other factors: 13.4% had struggled with drug or alcohol abuse, 7.1% had attempted suicide, 62.2% reported increased anger or irritability and 63% of respondents reported financial difficulty (with 82% of wives/partners reporting financial problems).

There is no question that it is devastating to have a loved one involved in crime and family members are trying all kinds of coping mechanisms, even some that are illegal! Is our justice system creating more crime?

Worry and Stigma

Family members also disclosed a range of negative emotional and social outcomes related to crime in the family. 57% disclosed that they worry “a lot” for the safety of their incarcerated family member while s/he is incarcerated. Interviewees frequently discussed that their family members had been victims of violence, mistreatment, and perceived abuse while incarcerated.

40.4% of those surveyed reported feeling very stigmatized in their community and 38.6% felt “somewhat” stigmatized. Many indicated some degree of isolation from the community, with 35% feeling “somewhat” isolated and 28% feeling very isolated. 44.2% reported feeling somewhat ashamed and 31% were very ashamed.

From the 85 qualitative data questions in the survey and in our follow-up interviews consisting of eight open-ended questions family members were asked probing questions to expand on their areas of concern, coping strategies and survey responses. Certain themes appeared as follows:

- **Impact of Crime on Families:** Families report that crime has serious implications rippling out from the family members closest to the criminally involved person, to extended family, friends and community. The immediate trauma is not necessarily mitigated by time. Respondents disclosed that they currently attribute feeling 'sad or blue', having difficulty sleeping, reduced ability to work, anxiety, depression and physical illness to the stress of their involvement with crime. Many are still struggling with the loss of their family member, reconciling their understanding of the person they thought they knew, and are still in therapy and experiencing health issues.
- **Impact of the Justice System on Families' Mental Health:** The distribution of the scores on the Global Distress Scale administered in the survey replicated what would be expected in a clinical population seeking psychological counseling for mental distress, confirming that families affected by incarceration are more frequently in distress than those in the general population. Our data also shows that the initial trauma of crime in the family may be subsequently compounded by lack of information, lack of accessible support & assistance, financial stress, stigma, worry, and a general sense of injustice in a system that does not consider their needs.
- **Lack of Information:** Families feel they are not provided enough information about the criminal justice process, their role(s) and rights in the process, and what to expect. They spoke about gaps in policy intended to protect the privacy of individuals often resulting in unintended frustration, worry and inability to access assistance in contacting their inside loved one and commented on lack of uniformity around visiting processes across Canada.
- **Lack of Accessible Support:** Support for family members is not uniformly available, nor necessarily easy to find. Families want to know about peer support groups and services available in their communities. Programs lose funding and services for children are particularly difficult to locate.

My kids were made targets at school, they were bullied, they were stigmatized, basically they were 'persona non grata' in the community, no one wanted anything to do with them. They felt alone, they felt isolated. No one seemed to want to help them. They were pretty bad off. [FMH34]

I have no way to explain to them, "You know, you're not alone and what you're feeling is normal. And this is part of this." I say it, but there's no one else, there's no support I can take them to, and they can say to them, "Yes, there's other children that are going through this. You're not the only children who've lost their parent due to incarceration" [FMH15]

- **Need for Understanding:** Participants in this research repeatedly emphasized the importance of feeling understood and the value of obtaining support from individuals or professionals who comprehended the ways that crime negatively affects family members. Many wanted those that had the value of lived experiences and therefore turned to peer support groups.
- **Financial Effects:** Finances are one of the leading causes of stress for families with 63% reporting difficulty or increased strain in this area. Wives, partners, and parents carry the largest burden.
- **Sense of Injustice:** Family members feel that deprivation of liberty alone should comprise the punishment for crime and felt that there was inadequate food and medical treatment, and unfair treatment by correctional staff to their inside loved one and themselves as visitors.
- **Barriers to Seeking Help:** Each of the factors listed above has implications for help seeking, for example if families do not feel understood by professionals or are struggling financially they may discontinue the service, if they mistrust the justice system they may not ask for help, etc.

Recommendations

1. Policies on prison visiting should respect the dignity and needs of everyone in Canadian institutions – staff, inmates and prisoners’ family members should all be subject to the same rules across the country and treated with courtesy and respect.
2. Prison visiting facilities and policies should be “family-friendly”, to the extent that this can be accomplished without unduly compromising the safety of inmates and staff.
3. Increase in services that support programming and knowledge resources for family members of those in the criminal justice system.
4. Establishment of peer support groups and resources for families affected by crime in each major centre in Canada.
5. Establishment of an online peer support group / discussion board for families affected by crime, operated and moderated by a non-profit organization with expertise in the effects of crime on families.
6. Affordable and effective support services for children affected by crime and incarceration should be made available across Canada, and easily accessible to parents.
7. Each arm of the criminal justice system (police, courts, corrections, parole) develops a standard resource to be provided to families of accused/convicted persons at first contact; the resource should describe the criminal justice process, what the family member might expect to happen, and provide contact information for an individual who can assist with inquiries [see recommendation #8]. This resource should also be readily available online and accessible by key search terms.
8. Each arm of the criminal justice system should employ a family liaison officer who is easily accessible to families and equipped to provide timely and accurate responses to family inquiries and referrals to local resources / supports.
9. Development of training modules for mental health professionals, counselors, social service providers, and individuals working in the criminal justice system that would raise awareness of the effects of crime and incarceration on families and provide best practices for effectively serving this population.
10. Take measures to reduce the financial burden of incarceration on families of offenders, including covering the costs of telephone calls, private family visits, and accommodations for families who travel to visit their loved ones.
11. Continued efforts to destigmatize families of offenders, including community awareness of the impact of crime on families and challenging myths and stereotypes about families affected by crime and incarceration.
12. Continued research concerning the intersections of crime and children and the effects of parental incarceration with respect to children visiting in prison, segregated visitation and video visitation.

Final Words

In Canada, a person who has committed a crime is placed in custody as punishment. The innocent children and family members still in the community have no part of that crime yet this research shows that family members are profoundly affected by their loved one’s involvement in crime and the justice system. They experience mental health distress that far exceeds average levels found in the general population and struggle, even years after the offence, to find the support and resources they need. Some families demonstrate outstanding personal strength choosing positive coping mechanisms while some are turning to illegal and harmful activities to manage. Families of those affected by crime should be viewed as key partners in the correctional journey. Every effort should be made to make their path easier, in our justice system, in our prisons, and in our communities.

And thank you!

This ground-breaking research has come from Public Safety Canada (with thanks to Cliff Yumansky and Dariusz Galczynski), Canadian Families and Corrections Network (researchers Louise Leonardi, Margaret Holland and Cindy Pelletier) and Wilfrid Laurier University (Dr. Stacey Hannem and student research assistant, Chelsey Kerr). Please accept our gratitude for your funding and support.

It is only with the courage and strength of the family members of those who have a loved one involved in crime who willingly gave their time and shared their stories that this research was possible. We offer a heartfelt thank you for your contributions and hope we have given a voice to your concerns and a belief that your strategies and advice will assist others in a similar situation.

Please see our website at www.cfcn-rcafd.org or email national@cfcn-rcafd.org for the full Final Report of this research; our 'Coping over Time' resource outlining the best practices, positive coping strategies, successful treatment options and ideas for assistance to families affected by crime; and further CFCN research.

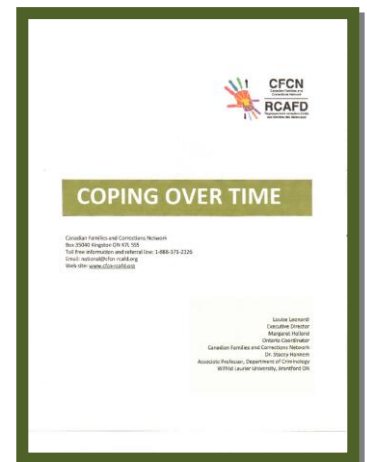
Recent CFCN Resources for Families, Caregivers and Community Organizations

All available on our website at www.cfcn-rcafd.org



CFCN's Research Report

"Forgotten Victims -
The Mental Health and Well-Being of Families
Affected by Crime and Incarceration in Canada"



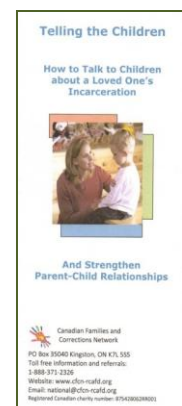
Coping Over Time

Ideas, suggestions and advice on how to
cope with having a person in your
family involved in crime



A Guide to Setting up a Family Support Group

Ideas, suggestions and answers on how
to setup a Peer Support Group for families with
a loved one involved in crime



Telling the Children

How to talk to children about
a loved one's incarceration

MOM OF AN INMATE WHO ALWAYS HAS A NAME

I cannot believe I'll have to pass for the first time in my life, this dismal place associated with so much misery, so much suffering... [Canadian jail]. It is far from a TV documentary viewing... this time, it is I who must cross the heavy doors of the detention center with the dismal name of "garbage [Canadian jail]", so nicknamed by the prisoners, given the dilapidated state of the buildings...

Here I am, heart beating, seeing closer through the windshield of my car, the image of a large building, like a giant sore on the surrounding greenery. Trees have at least a chance to look up and break free from the sight of barbed wire that overhangs the building...

First check, we must go and say the reason for our visit: "I have come to see my son"; the guard has not seen my trembling and the tears that are stopped by my eyelids, playing the same role as him: guardian of my tears. We must show two pieces of identification.

I walk alone like a robot to the place... walking into the unknown, to the suffering that awaits me there, lurking in a corridor, in a passage through mesh doors, a pain I suffered, I have to choose to be able to see my son...

Second stop, I nickname this room, the crying room. This is where we must all take a number and wait, wait and wait... here, not a single visit happens where you do not hear a muffled sob or hands clenching in despair on this tiny paper that leads us to the third irrevocable level. We are all connected by a transparent thread, since we all know that we are here for a loved one who has unfortunately broke the barrier of illegality and this cascade of events leads us into its groove and its virtual prison. We are the collateral victims and are considered the family of an inmate, so no smile, no empathy will be bestowed upon us... we are guilty by osmosis. We become numbers; we no longer have rights, only an obligation to follow the regulations. The workers, prostitutes, small gangs - BS, bikers, I feel lost in this motley crowd and I have to drag myself, make my way and all this against my true will, I became of them and we each become part of the same family. We are the tenuous thread which connects the inside to the outside. We are the lungs of the inmates. The magic happens and our intellectual and

MAMAN D'UN DÉTENU QUI PORTE TOUJOURS UN NOM

Je ne peux croire que je vais devoir franchir pour la première fois de ma vie, cet endroit lugubre associé à tant de malheurs, tant de souffrance... la prison de [Canada]. On est loin d'un visionnement de documentaire à la télé... cette fois ci, c'est moi qui doit franchir les lourdes portes de ce centre détention portant le nom lugubre de "poubelle de [Canada]" surnommée ainsi par les prisonniers, vu l'état vétuste des bâtiments...

Me voilà le cœur battant, voyant se rapprocher sur le pare brise de mon auto, l'image d'un vaste bâtiment, tel une plaie géante sur la verdure environnante. Les arbres ont au moins eux la chance de regarder vers le haut et de se libérer de la vue des barbelés qui surplombent l'édifice...

Premier contrôle, on doit s'assumer et prononcer la raison de notre visite: " je viens voir mon fils" le gardien n'a pas perçu, mon trémolo et mes larmes qui s'arrêtent grâce à mes paupières jouant le même rôle que lui: gardien de mes larmes. Il faut montrer deux pièces d'identité.

Je marche seul comme une autonome vers l'endroit... c'est marcher vers l'inconnu vers la souffrance qui m'attend là, tapi dans un couloir, dans un passage, dans des portes grillagées, une souffrance que je subis, que je dois obligatoirement choisir pour pouvoir voir mon fils...

Deuxième arrêt, je surnommerais cette salle, la salle des pleurs. C'est là où nous devons tous prendre un numéro et attendre, attendre et attendre... ici, il ne se passe pas une seule visite où l'on n'entend pas un sanglot étouffé ou l'on ne voit pas des mains se crispant avec désespoir sur ce minuscule papier qui nous entraîne irrémédiablement à la troisième étape. Nous sommes tous reliés par un fil transparents, puisque nous savons tous, que nous sommes ici pour un être cher qui a malheureusement franchi la barrière de l'illégalité et toute cette cascade d'événements, nous entraînent dans son sillon et dans sa prison virtuelle. Nous sommes les victimes collatérales et sommes considérés comme la famille d'un détenu ainsi nul sourire, nulle empathie ne nous sera témoigné... nous sommes coupable par osmose. Nous devenons des numéros, n'avons comme droit, que l'obligation de suivre les règlements. Les ouvriers, les prostituées, les gagne-petits, les BS, les motards, je me sens perdue dans cette

social differences vanish before the urgent need to stand together, facing guards who treat us with so little respect.

Third stop, we hear over the intercom our given number. Unfortunately this is not the joy of the winning number in any lottery...it is the fear of what follows, what awaits us. I go to another room a few steps away and then they give me my precious ticket and the attendants, rarely smiling, prepare us for the expedition through the prison. Checks: 'Am I dressed appropriately and am I on the visitors list.' I then receive the benefit of a card with my name placed in a plastic holder topped with a cord, and I have to wear this "mother of an inmate" gem around my neck. I give two pieces of ID; one will be kept so that the key that is given to me will indeed be returned. Armed with this key, I am given a locker to deposit bag, pencils, key, etc.

I am almost there...A first gate to cross, we verify my identity...a few steps lead me to a gigantic staircase. I try to fill my lungs with the air of freedom to be able to give it to my son... I open the doors with a pounding heart and it is a long corridor with faded walls that I then see a sensor device and a huge gate, which will be operated by the guard as soon as she ends her phone conversation that never has anything to do with the job. Us, we must have lots of time to wait because, after all, we are in a prison... Let's just say that time is not measured in the same way inside and outside.

The gates open, another check at the counter, remove your card and you get it back 10 minutes before the end of the visit as you are preparing to leave the one you love... Another locked door, and finally the visiting room... And there, what a visiting room!!!

Two rows of cubicles, 20 on each side. We can be up to 40 visitors and as many inmates. A completely airtight glass separates the inmate from the visitor and a horrible mesh popup in the middle of the glass, holds a voice transmitter. Imagine the cacophony prevailing when everyone is trying to exchange tender words, speak of children or everyday moments... It is a remarkable effort to understand beyond words. Me, I try to draw in my soul, my son's smile, his shaggy hair, his eyes so brown and deep that I could get lost in forever in them. Each holds a piece of me, one that is not too affected and he, the one who exudes confidence... Neither my son nor I want to add more to

foule hétéroclite et je dois m'y glisser, faire ma place et tout ceci à mon corps défendant. Je suis devenue des leurs et nous devenons chacun partie de la même famille. Nous sommes le fil ténu qui relie le dedans au dehors. Nous sommes le poumon du détenu. La magie s'opère et nos différences intellectuelles et sociales s'évanouissent devant l'urgence de se tenir tous ensemble, face aux gardiens qui nous traitent avec si peu de respect.

Troisième arrêt, on entend à l'intercom notre numéro. Hélas ce n'est pas la joie du numéro gagnant d'une loterie quelconque... c'est la peur de ce qui suit, qui nous guette. Je me rends dans une autre pièce à quelques pas et enfin on me donne mon précieux billet et les préposés rarement souriant, me prépare pour l'expédition carcérale. Vérifications: suis-je habillée adéquatement et est-ce que je suis sur la liste des visiteurs. Je bénéficie alors, d'une carte portant mon nom mis dans une enveloppe en plastique surmontée d'une courroie, et je dois obligatoirement porter ce "bijou de mère de détenu" à mon cou. Je donne 2 pièces d'identité dont une sera gardée de telle sorte que la clé que l'on me donne sera belle et bien retournée. Munie de cette clé, direction casier, pour déposer sac, crayons, clés, etc.

Je suis presque arrivé... une première grille à franchir, on vérifie mon identité... quelques pas m'amènent à un escalier gigantesque. J'essaie de remplir mes poumons de l'air de la liberté pour pouvoir en insuffler à mon fils...j'ouvre la porte le cœur battant et c'est un long couloir aux murs défraîchis qui s'offrent à ma vision, puis un appareil de détecteur et une immense grille, qui sera actionnée par la gardienne dès qu'elle aura terminé sa conversation téléphonique qui n'a jamais rien avoir avec le travail. Nous, nous avons notre temps n'est-ce pas pour attendre puisque nous sommes dans une prison...disons que le temps ne se mesure pas de la même façon en dedans et en dehors.

La grille s'ouvre autre vérification au comptoir, on retire votre carte et on vous la remet 10 min avant la fin de la visite pour que l'on se prépare à laisser celui qu'on aime... Encore une porte verrouillée et enfin le parler...et là, quel parler!!!

Deux rangées de cubicles 20 de chaque côté. Nous pouvons nous retrouver jusqu'à plus de 40 visiteurs et d'autants de détenus. Une vitre complètement

this unwanted encounter. Everyone is trying to protect themselves and each other... This is not a first meeting that we can lower our guard ... everything is so unreal...

To not touch my son but to see him as a child in penance; to see him in an environment hostile to normal life, what a test for a mom. That he must "pay" for his mistakes, that his youth is irretrievably suspended and that his future is not so promising. The stigma of imprisonment is more striking than this little belly button that once connected him and me...us in a very special way.

They bring me my card to signal and begin our separation ... my heart starts to beat faster, but where is my guard, the one that will make the dam of tears?

It is "goodbye" looming, the hand that is placed on the glass to cover mine. No contact, only the eyes can fill this lack of touch... it is time, he will return to his cell and I to mine, because now, I live in my symbolic cell...

Learning to go on our way without our children, it's like mourning a loved one who is living in an inaccessible location...

Mom of an inmate who always has a name: David

Donation?

Please help us reduce the impact of crime on innocent children and families by making a donation toward resource printing, our toll-free help line or to send a free 'Jeffrey Goes to Jail' storybook to a child.

Change lives by helping a family member today - every donation helps!

You can:

1. Make your cheque or money order payable to Canadian Families and Corrections Network and mail donations to:
CFCN
PO Box 35040
Kingston ON K7L 5S5
(888) 371-2326
2. Go to our website at www.cfcn-rcafd.org and click the DONATE NOW button to pay by credit card or PayPal

Charity registration number: 875428062RR0001
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hermétique sépare le détenu du visiteur et un horrible grillage incrusté dans le milieu de la vitre, fait office de transmetteur vocal. Imaginez la cacophonie régnant lorsque tous essaient d'échanger des tendres mots, de parler des enfants ou du quotidien...remarquable effort de se comprendre au delà des mots. Moi, j' essaie de dessiner dans mon âme le. sourire de mon fils, ses cheveux hirsutes, ses yeux si bruns et profonds que je voudraient m'y perdre à jamais. Chacun se compose un personnage moi, celle qui n'est pas trop affectée et lui , celui qui respire la confiance...ni mon fils ni moi, ne voulons en ajouter davantage à cette rencontre indésirée. Chacun cherche à se protéger et à protéger l'autre..Ce n'est pas lors d'une première rencontre que l'on peut baisser nos protections...tout est si irréel...

Ne pas toucher mon fils, le voir là, comme un enfant en pénitence, le voir dans un milieu hostile à toute vie normale, qu'elle épreuve pour une maman. Savoir qu'il doit "payer" pour ses erreurs, que sa jeunesse est irrémédiablement suspendu et que son avenir n'est plus si prometteur. La stigmatisation de cet emprisonnement sera bien plus marquante que ce tout petit nombril qui nous a jadis relié lui et moi dans un moment privilégié.

On vient de me rapporter ma carte, signal d'entamer notre séparation...mon cœur se remet à battre la chamade , mais où se trouve ma sentinelle , celle qui fera la digue de mes larmes?

C'est "l'au revoir" qui se dessine, la main qui se pose sur la vitre pour recouvrir la mienne. Aucun contact, seul le regard peut combler cette absence du toucher ...c'est le départ, lui dans sa cellule et moi dans la mienne. Parce que dorénavant, je vivrai dans ma cellule symbolique ...

Apprendre à continuer son chemin sans notre enfant, c'est comme le deuil d'un être chéri qui est en vie dans un endroit inaccessible.

Maman d'un détenu qui porte toujours un nom: David



'Strengthening Families Affected by Incarceration' Event

By Louise Leonardi, Executive Director, CFCN

One of the ways CFCN is trying to help families is through our '*Strengthening Family*' Events. This is a chance to offer family resources in a non-stigmatizing way, create awareness in the community and reduce bullying in our schools – all toward helping the mental health, well-being and self-esteem of children and families touched by crime.

In January 2015, Canadian Families and Corrections Network and the West End Community Centre Public Library in Guelph, Ontario teamed up to host a '*Strengthening Families Affected by Incarceration Day*'. CFCN recently received funding from the Guelph Community Foundation for the '*Help the Forgotten Children*' project which distributed valued resources about familial incarceration throughout the city. Out of meetings on this project, we decided to go a step further and host an event for the innocent children in Guelph whose lives have been affected by family crime.



Families reading with Elmo in Big Bird nest

One of CFCN's partners is Sesame Street who recently launched its newest resiliency initiative '*Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration*'. This multimedia outreach initiative has reached great success throughout the United States to provide much-needed resources to support and comfort young children, throughout their parents' incarceration. Canadian Families and Corrections Network has received the ONLY endorsement from Sesame Street to distribute these toolkits throughout Canada and Guelph public libraries was the FIRST recipients of this valuable resource.

Further activities throughout the event included meeting Sesame Street friends, Big Bird's reading corner, Cookie Monster's table (featuring cookies of course!), Sesame Street's *Little Children Big Challenges Incarceration* DVD, colouring activities, learning about community resources for families affected by incarceration, etc.

Our intention was to offer some fun and support to families who deal with crime and in order to reduce the loneliness, shame, community isolation and school bullying for children, this event was open to ALL families who wished to attend.

Corrections, politicians, police and community leaders came together for this cause and many spoke passionately about the challenges families, and in particular children, face in our schools around isolation and the stigma associated with having a loved one in jail. Thank you!

If you would like to have a "*Strengthening Families*" event in your area, contact us at national@cfcn-rcafd.org.

Phil Allt (Guelph Councillor); Vikki Dupuis (West End Community Centre); Chief Brian Larkin (Waterloo); Honourable Liz Sandals (Minister of Education and MPP Guelph); Elmo; Honourable Yasir Naqvi (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services Ontario); Chief Jeff DeRuyter (Guelph); Kathryn McGarry (MPP Cambridge); Chris Willard (Guelph Community Foundation); Louise Leonardi (CFCN)

