



The Bridge

Winter 2011

JohnHoward
SOCIETY OF THE LOWER MAINLAND OF B.C.

www.jhslmbc.ca

One Day, One Person

Here I am, behind the gray brick walls where metal doors are slamming, anxious people shouting and where I smell the food that is just about to be served. Up in the catwalk, as I interview this guy, I can see a shadow of a gun that is pointed upwards. The guards come in and interrupt us. We have five minutes to get out of this institution, as the visit hours are over.

I leave behind a slight thought of hope: that one day, Mike will be as free as the bird that is singing at his cell's window every morning.

Back at the house, I am getting briefed on a shift that has just been finished by one of my colleagues. We do not even finish talking, and the door slams open. But no knock? One of the guys wants to get into the freezer. I grab the wireless phone with me and as soon as I touch it, it magically rings. On my way to the freezer I am already talking to a parole officer on the phone, and I can hear the bell from the outside door. I finish all my conversations in less than 5 seconds and open the front door. Correctional Service of Canada is at the door with a new resident: Mike.

I invite him inside as he has numerous boxes and he is moving in. He seems excited to know one person in the house: ME. Every other guy is giving him the

looks, and I can feel the tension between their masculine identities. I finally finish showing Mike around the house and I explain to him the rules he has to abide by, when he suddenly asks me: "May I go to the washroom?" I understand why he asked me that. He has been inside the prison for a long time. This is what we refer to as "institutionalization". Every movement an inmate makes is monitored. All their activities inside the institution are structured and limited. I tell Mike that he is now in the community, he is not inside a jail, and he can perhaps go to the washroom without asking for permission. He smiles and does not say a word; this is his thank you. It is 00:00 hours and I pass on my duties to my coworker.

Andrei



"Tough on Crime": The Omnibus Crime Bill

JHSLM Executive Director Tim Veresh has been with the organization for more than ten years and has worked in every part of it. He is particularly able to understand the impact of changing legislation on the people who we assist and support.

The "Omnibus Crime Bill," Bill C-10, was tabled by the federal government on September 20th, 2011. Officially it is known as an Act to enact the Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act and to amend the State Immunity Act, the Criminal Code, the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and other Acts.

This bill contains nine separate pieces of proposed legislation. If passed, it will create a number of new mandatory minimum sentences for a wide variety of offences, increase the use of denunciation and longer sentences for young offenders, make it easier for the Minister of Public Safety to deny Canadians incarcerated in other countries transfers back to Canada to complete their sentences, and would delay or deny pardons outright for hundreds of thousands of Canadians with a criminal record.

If this "Tough on Crime" Act passes, one has to consider what the actual consequences will be. At the present time provincial and territorial prisons are experiencing significant overcrowding. In B.C., 75% of provincially incarcerated inmates are on remand awaiting trial. With more financial resources being allocated to prisons, one has to ask whether financial investments are also being made to health care, education, employment, services to victims, and to building healthier communities? The total cost associated with these provisions has not been clarified by federal government, though it is anticipated that 75% of the expense shall be borne by provincial and territorial governments.

As I read through Bill C-10 I was concerned with how those who are vulnerable may be netted into prison due to mandatory minimum sentences that remove

judicial discretion. For example, how will this legislation impact Aboriginal people, who are already significantly overrepresented in Canada's criminal justice system? How do mandatory minimums impact provisions such as the Gladue Principle—a 1999 decision of the Supreme Court of Canada that allows a court to offer reasonable alternatives to incarceration, in particular for Aboriginal offenders? How will persons with developmental disabilities, mental health issues and/or brain injuries fare when their personal ailments are not permitted consideration in their sentencing?

Fiscal restraint within the provincial ministries has resulted in the closure of group homes and the limitation of support services to only what is essential for personal health and safety needs. The mandate of probation has moved from rehabilitation and support to supervision and risk management. All of this means that often the criminogenic factors relating to the offenders' incarceration are not addressed upon release.

Our experience indicates that 70% of offenders had unstable work histories when their offence occurred, 70% had not completed high school, 60% had not completed grade 10, 60% had no trade or skill knowledge, 90% had behavioural problems in elementary school, and—as reported by Statistics Canada—15% of men and 29% of women had previously been hospitalized for a psychiatric reasons.

Crime reporting in Canadian and international media has skewed the reality of crime for many Canadians. The result is a perception of, and fear of, increasing crime while the actual rate of violent crime has been on the decline. This over-saturation of crime reporting has left the general public with the belief that all offenders are violent, sadistic psychopaths waiting to prey upon innocent victims like you in your very home. The reality is that the majority of crime happens to individuals already involved in anti-social or criminal lifestyles. This is not to suggest that innocent people do not also become victims of crime but rather that such instances are a relatively small percentage of all criminal offences.

Ultimately, what matters most is how we as individuals feel about living in Canada. Criminal justice is one part of how we define ourselves. My Canada is one that takes an active role in the prevention of victimization by eliminating foreseeable and preventable criminological factors: appropriate social supports for people with behavioural challenges, educational programming and assistance to complete schooling, access to employment through skill and knowledge development, health care, early intervention programs, treatment programs, trauma prevention, and the reduction of social stigma.

Greg Rogers, executive director of the John Howard Society of Toronto, has stated that “believing that incarceration will make our communities safer is like believing building more cemeteries will cure cancer.” There is no doubt there is a need for prisons but prison must be considered as a last resort.

Anthony Doob from the University of Toronto adds that “decades of research has demonstrated that harsher sentences for youths or adults do not reduce re-offending. Nor would harsher sentences deter others. These are not ideological statements; they are based on evidence from numerous studies. The results are quite consistent: one cannot punish away crime.”

Some people do need to go to prison for the protection of the public. Judges must make decisions that

are proportional to the seriousness of the offence; for some serious offenders this means prison. Research suggests, however, that being sent to prison—especially for the first time—increases the likelihood of re-offending, compared to being held accountable in the community.

Irvin Waller, champion of victims’ rights and University of Ottawa professor, wants crime policy to be shifted away from a reactionary stance to a wiser balance between smart enforcement, risk-focused prevention, and rehabilitation. His book, entitled *Less Law, More Order: The Truth About Reducing Crime*, provides several examples of practices that reduce crime through investment in preventative services. You can find out more about his research at www.irvinwaller.org.

We teach our clients to consider all of the factors associated with making a decision; only after thinking about the impact it may have on others should one act. Once made, you must take responsibility for your actions. This is advice everyone should heed.

Legislation that limits our rights and freedoms, and a large omnibus bill intended to reform our criminal justice system without carefully considering the impact of such changes is as senseless as the many criminal offences that are committed in Canada.

Executive Director Tim Veresh





Our annual JHSLM Sports Day went from wholesome team games to a water fight. Here, our Director of Community Services, Jen, gets chased by JHSLM client Justin (left), while Tyler holds outreach worker Sebastian so he can get soaked (below). Note Sebastian's concern.



Sports Day and Waterfight



JHSLM Client Larry: Performer and Artist

Theatre Terrific (www.theatreterrific.ca) “supports artists of all abilities in the rigorous creation of provocative theatre.” Each participant is given an honorarium for their work.

One of residents at Vancouver Apartments with an artistic soul, **Larry**, was involved with a couple of their productions with over the past year: *The Bread Project*, an “adaptation of the ancient tale of beautiful Persephone, seized and stolen away by the god of the underworld, causing her mother, Demeter, to vengefully stop all growth of grain,” was performed in Crab Tree park (see photo) in the summer, while *A Truck Full of*

Chickens—a story about poultry from clucking to eating—was part of the annual Vancouver International Fringe Festival. Larry played Bill the Chicken, got to dress up accordingly, and spiked his hair up with gel. Larry said he really liked “meeting new people and old friends from other productions.” Singing and dancing was all part of the mix.

Larry is now enrolled in a choir group within Theatre Terrific. They will be performing a Christmas concert in December. If you want to come out for an evening of good ol’ fashioned Christmas cheer, get in touch with us at Vancouver Apartments!

Avoiding Crises: Aging and Developmental Disabilities

A key part of JHSLM work includes assisting individuals with developmental disabilities (who may or may not have come into contact with the law) achieve greater independence. Jill, a JHSLM Outreach Worker since 2009, addresses some challenges ahead.

Like the rest of the baby boomers born between 1946 and 1964, adults with developmental disabilities (ADD), are living longer than previous generations (due to improved medical care) with increasingly complex needs. Individuals with Down's syndrome, for example, are even experiencing aging-related issues like dementia in their forties. And like many government agencies, those charged with the care of these individuals are practicing fiscal restraint.

Many of the outreach clients served by JHSLM are in this group. We are adapting quickly but also—unfortunately—reactively to their changes in interests, abilities, and requirements. We aim to improve their access to health care; find a balance between home, community, and institutional support; respond well to increasing and changing needs; and manage risk through thoughtful and inclusive planning. A holistic and interdependent approach is essential.

Education is also very important: of the individuals we serve, the families who value our work, other involved stakeholders, and the general public. And it is necessary to educate ourselves with the most updated—and sometimes entirely new—information on ADD care-giving resources and gerontology issues.

While the current level of service requires ongoing advocacy, the aging of our clients means more is needed to maximize the quality of life and health of our clients, measured in part by their level of personal independence. Positive outcomes should be reached in an inclusive way, offering empowerment and informed direction.

Unfortunately, the severity of need is often not recognized—or acted upon—by funders until there is a crisis, which leads to increased expense, reduced

choice, and a negative impact on our over-burdened health care system. Prevention and early intervention are key factors in the reduction of crisis.

Developmental disabilities carry particular risks and challenges, including inferior health care. Due to their disability, individuals may not know how to ask for medical care, be unable to articulate their medical needs, or not realize they need medical care, meaning that those without any support may slip through the cracks with their health needs ignored or not recognized. Risks are also associated with conditions associated with specific syndromes and difficulties related to living on fixed or low income.

Care for individuals with complex and specific needs can be effective and less expensive if individuals can remain at home or in the community. Care plans and services need to be flexible, integrative, person-centered, preventative and long-term, utilizing evidence-based methods in order to promote wellness and reduce risk. We need to improve coordination among a wider selection of services and ask some tough questions here at JHSLM: do we need to make changes to our current delivery system? Is there a niche we could be filling that others are not? How are we addressing the issues associated with an aging ADD population? The answers may have us changing how we work.

Jill



Michelle takes three JHSLM clients dog walking excursion in North Vancouver.

A Missing Woman: Olivia Williams



My name is Chris Joseph. I come from Central British Columbia, Lake Babine Nation. My sister Olivia Williams went missing from the Downtown Eastside in 1996.

Olivia came to Vancouver in the summer of 1995 from Smithers, and was pregnant and gave birth to a girl a few months later.

Olivia wasn't reported missing until one year after her disappearance, and in 1997 she was put on the Missing Woman's Task Force.

After that, investigators from Vancouver came up to Burns Lake to interview me and my father. They took DNA samples and asked about the last time we had seen Olivia. We told them Olivia had taken a Greyhound bus down to Vancouver, and that we hadn't seen or heard from her since she left.

After the police came up to Burns Lake, we never heard from them again.

I am upset with the way the RCMP handled my sister's case and all the cases of the women involved.

RCMP did not follow up on individual investigations of each missing woman and it took too long to connect the cases, and as the years went by more and more women, women like my sister Olivia, disappeared.

I also don't like the way that the women are discussed in the media by RCMP—no matter what the women were involved with, they did not deserve what happened to them.

My sister's case hasn't been heard yet. I am hoping for some answers and some closure.

Chris, a JHSLM client

When You Don't Know if What You Do Makes a Difference...

Being an Outreach Worker at The John Howard Society of the Lower Mainland requires a great deal of patience, compassion, and a real desire to help others. The commitment to helping the clients we serve keeps us going through the setbacks that we inevitably endure in this line of work. Some days are harder than others. On those more difficult days, I like to read the following letter to remind me of why I do what I do:

To: Melanie

Hello, I thought I would drop you a note to say thank you for your help. I know I started out being difficult, my stubborn "do it all myself" streak can be rather closed off. But I do truly thank you for your patience and assistance while I tried to get my feet on the ground. Your trust and efforts were not wasted or unappreciated. I understand I have burnt my bridges to again reside at Tims Manor and that is my loss. Given the appearance of circumstances I fully understand why but things are rarely that simple.

The service Tims Manor provided me and continues to do for others is important. Count your abilities and dedication as accounting for a large measure of that success it enjoys. Keep up the great work; you are doing exactly what you are meant to.

Cheers!

GB

This is why I do what I do! Sometimes, it can seem that clients don't appreciate what you do for them or when someone is unsuccessful on their release and returns to prison, it can be very trying on us. We sometimes question ourselves, wondering if we could have done more to help or whether the help we did provide was wasted. Then you receive a letter like this and you remember: I am doing "exactly what I was meant to"—help others.

Melanie



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Emotional Communication: A Workshop



JHSLM recently hosted a workshop on *Effective Communication* (see **photo at left**) for residents of our Miller Block affordable housing and clients with developmental disabilities. Many thanks to Gabriella, Miryam, and Rimppi from Rhodes Wellness College (<http://www.rhodescollege.ca/>) who facilitated the workshop.

We would like to acknowledge our **sad farewell** to departing staff **Suraj, Louise, Kailey**, and the incomparable **Ron**; while offering a **warm JHSLM welcome** for new staff, including the two **Michelles, Jesca, Katie, Alexandria, Ashley, Candice, Jessica, Kayla, Ruth, and Terrence**.

Getting Involved: A Thank You

Many people have good intentions; they want to help others who are less fortunate than themselves, fight illness, raise awareness, et cetera. Then there are the people who do not just *say*, they take action and *do*—this is the kind of person who gives their time by volunteering or doing a practicum with the John Howard Society of the Lower Mainland.

The volunteers and practicum students I have been working with over the past few months have shown so much drive, passion and desire to assist all of our clients in anything they may need. Some are working on important research projects. They bring great ideas, new perspective, and dedication to their projects and positions. We benefit from their generous spirit.

JHSLM, in return, contributes to their experience and knowledge. Through working with our clients, volun-

teers and practicum students learn how to harness the many resources available to the people we assist, both in the community and while incarcerated. We want to give them the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in assisting people in the future. Our volunteers and practicum students gain valuable insight from listening and observing staff in various situations, by asking specific and important questions, and receiving informed answers. It is our responsibility to share the knowledge and experience we have generated in our positions at JHSLM.

I would like to thank everyone who is involved in the Volunteer/Practicum program! Big thanks to the volunteers and practicum students for giving their time, and to all staff who participate as well. I am looking forward to working with everyone in the year to come!

Pam

Getting Involved: What You Can Do

Step 1.

Learn more about us: Check out our recently refurbished website at www.jhslmbc.ca.

Step 2.

Ask us questions. Contact us hear what we've been up to lately.

Step 3.

Consider volunteering, donating time, needed items, or money towards making your community safer, happier and healthier.



Who Works Here? Getting to Know Our Staff

A number of mostly newer staff were asked a few questions so we can all get to know them a bit better. Here's some of their responses.

What were you doing before working with JHSLM?

Ashley: I was a student.

Candice: Youth probation.

Heinrich: Caring for a private patient (schizophrenic) and taking a 1 year course in substance abuse counselling.

Jessica: I worked for the Westcoast Genesis Society, Genesis House and Maria Keary Cottage.

Kayla: Reception/Customer Service at Mountain West Studios, a school photography studio.

Michelle S.: Finishing up my degree in Criminology with the University of the Fraser Valley.

Ruth: I worked for a half way house in Edmonton.

Terry A: I was previously a co-op student with Vancouver Parole for 1 year and a supervisor at Playland.

If you did not grow up in Vancouver, where are you from and what is a something people usually say when you tell them you are from there and how do you really want to respond to them?

H: Being from Austria, inevitably the "Arnold Schwarzenegger" syndrome comes up (still!). I do a mean impersonation of his voice, although he is from the South of Austria and I'm from the East, thus there is a chasm in how our local dialect sounds. I have no problem with it, although it IS sometimes tiring.

K: I'm from Saskatoon. People usually ask me if I like football and know how to drive a combine. Yes to both!

How do you see working at JHSLM fitting in to your career plan?

A: I took the adult probation officer course at the Justice Institute after graduating and decided that I really wanted to get involved in community corrections.

C: Police Officer

K: I want to work my way up in the company. I would love to stay here as long as possible.

M: I have always wanted to work for federal corrections in some aspect in a role that deals directly with offenders but I did not want to be a correctional officer. Working with JHSLM allows me to do exactly that.

T: Although post-secondary offers amazing programs in the social sciences, a textbook or written exam is quite different from front line services. JHSLM allows for me to obtain and develop diverse experiences that will help me excel.

What is your favourite film?

A: *Gone Baby Gone*

C: *The Family Man*

H: *Angel Heart*. *Lawrence of Arabia* is a close second.

K: *A Clockwork Orange*, or *Dr. Strangelove (How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb)*

M: *Beauty & the Beast*

R: *The Outsiders*

T: *Fight Club*.

Can you describe a day you had that was close to perfect?

A: Zip lining for the first time and spending the day in Whistler.

H: The four days when each of my two sons and my two daughters were born.

K: I slept in, had lunch, and played Skyrim all day in my PJs with my fiancé.

T: The day that we knew my dad would survive his heart attack.

Canucks, Lions, Giants or Whitecaps?

A: Canucks.

C: Canucks.

H: Lions, though I am a soccer fan (the Whitecaps suck right now).

K: None! Boo Vancouver teams!

M: CANUCKS!!!!

R: Don't care, I don't like sports.

T: Canucks all the way.

If you could have one superpower, what would it be?

A: To turn any object into money

C: Go back in time.

H: Healing.

J: Ability to take away pain, trauma, homelessness, and addiction.

K: Flight!

M: Teleportation.

R: To heal the body.

T: It would have to be to fly.

Famous person (living or dead) you'd most like to go on a road trip with?

A: Robert Plant.

C: Chelsea Handler.

H: Joao Magalhaes/ Ferdinand Magellan (first to round the world in a ship) – I know, it's not really a "road" trip but close enough!

J: Marilyn Monroe.

K: Jack Kerouac.

M: Marilyn Monroe.

R: Pierre Trudeau.

T: Justin Bieber. Just kidding, probably Kurt Cobain.

Famous person (living or dead) you'd most like to have a serious discussion with?

A: John Lennon.

C: Oprah.

H: Richard Feynman (May 11, 1918 – February 15, 1988).

J: Mahatma Gandhi or Dalai Lama.

K: Oscar Wilde.

M: Romeo Dallaire.

R: Stephen Harper.

T: Stephen Colbert or Karl Marx.

What would you want your legacy to be in people's lives?

A: A loyal and honest person/friend.

C: That I was caring and selfless.

H: My legacy is already established through my four children.

J: "The legacy we leave is part of the ongoing foundations of life."

K: I just want to be of service!

M: Kind, generous, funny and loving.

R: That I had a positive effect on them.

T: That I was a positive influence in some way.