



August 10th, 2021

Public Statement: Prisoners' Justice Day 2021

Today is Prisoners' Justice Day - a day observed by incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, their loved ones, and those who stand in solidarity with them. Today, and every day, we at CAEFS remember and honour all those who have died while incarcerated and recommit ourselves to working towards a world without prisons.

Prisoner Justice Day (PJD) marks the anniversary of the death of Eddie Nalon, who died while incarcerated in the segregation unit of the Millhaven Maximum Security Prison in Bath, Ontario in 1974. A year later, on August 10th, 1975, the first Prisoners' Justice Day took place at Millhaven in commemoration of Eddie Nalon. The year after that, on the same day, thousands of prisoners across Canada went on a one-day hunger strike, and PJD committees in Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia organized community events to draw attention to prisoner's concerns. Prisoners continue to engage in a day-long fast and labour strikes on August 10th to call attention to the lethal effects of the prison system and to honour those who have died. Non-incarcerated community members have held, and continue to hold, vigils in support.

Canada's first – and for decades, only – federal prison designated for women was completed in 1934. The Prison for Women (P4W) was characterized in the Arbour Report, and by many who were incarcerated there, as “cruel, inhumane, and degrading.” Emilie Coyle (Executive Director of CAEFS) is honoured to be attending the healing circle hosted by the P4W memorial collective, on the former grounds of P4W today. The P4W collective continues to work to build a memorial garden on the grounds of P4W and uses this yearly event to “plant the seeds of transformative justice and move closer to planting a memorial garden”.

“The inhumane conditions experience by federally sentenced women did not end when P4W closed. People who are currently serving their sentences in federal prisons designated for women continue to experience conditions that undermine their humanity. There remains an overreliance on punishment and an undervaluing of care. We must stand with currently and formerly incarcerated people in remembering those who have died because of this lack of care, and demand change. The kind of change required to end these injustices asks us to imagine a world where accountability is not rooted in punishment, but in collective responsibility, community care, and the dignity of all people.” – Emilie Coyle, Executive Director, CAEFS

CAEFS staff members, Johanne Wendy Bariteau and Sheri Pranteau, will be speaking at Prisoner Justice Day in Montreal about their experience of incarceration and fight for change as part of the vigil in Montreal.

“There is so much that happens inside that people don't know. Prison is a life draining place: people wither, and many people do not make it out. People in prison all have histories of trauma, especially those of us who are Indigenous. We need healing, and there is no healing in prison. Everyone deserves a second chance, and we can't forget about people inside. We need to stand together to create change.” - Sheri Pranteau, Advocacy Liason, CAEFS



The events being held in Kingston and Montreal are two of the many being held from coast-to-coast today, organized by Prisoner Justice Day committees comprised of community organizations (including many Elizabeth Fry Societies), activists, families, and people with lived experience. You can find a resource listing all these vigils on our website – we hope you will join us in person or online in supporting these community-led events and honouring those who have died while incarcerated.

For comment, please contact:

Emilie Coyle, Executive Director of CAEFS

[Ecoyle@caefs.ca](mailto:ecoyle@caefs.ca)

