

# FAMILIES AND CORRECTIONS JOURNAL

Our 25<sup>th</sup>  
Anniversary  
Edition!

## SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Canadian Families and Corrections Network |  
Regroupement canadien d'aide aux familles des détenu(e)s  
PO Box 35040 Kingston ON K7L 5S5  
[www.cfcn-rcafd.org](http://www.cfcn-rcafd.org)  
(888) 371-2326



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**The mission of Canadian Families  
and Corrections Network is:**

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

**CFCN’s Canadian registered  
charity#: 75428062RR0001**

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## Who Needs Connections?

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By Louise Leonardi, Executive Director, CFCN with assistance  
from researchers Melissa Fleming, Kingston ON and Jennelle Connolly, Stoney Creek ON

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As a human being, regardless of culture, religion, or status, we all have basic human needs. Feeling loved and having a sense of belonging rank high on this scale of needs along with health, equality, safety, etc. It is so absolutely vital to our wellbeing that people go to great lengths to find it. Those inside our institutions are no different and it's the reason why family and friends on the outside are so important.

People in jail have three ways to connect with those on the outside, namely, telephone calls, letters, and personal visits. In the federal system (for those serving two years plus a day) each prison has a 'Visiting and Correspondence' (V & C) department that handles outside contact.

### *Telephone Calls*

While phone calls are a very popular way to communicate, the price is high, as the calls are expensive. In the provincial jails in Canada, telephone contact is often through collect calls only (even if you live close to the jail). In the federal institutions, calls are usually through a card system that contains an approved list of phone numbers. Money must be put on the card by the person inside or through a donation by friends or family on the outside. If the family does not live near the institution, the long-distance charges can add up quickly.

A lot of family and friends go the 'snail mail' route which is effective. Letters can be sent from anywhere in Canada for a small price and often times other small items can be added such as photos or a magazine article. There may be differences across Canada so it is always best to check with the institution your person is in, to see if what you wish to send in your envelope is allowed. Cards that sing, items with fancier paper and glitter, stickers, etc. are usually not permitted.

### *Letters*

### *Visiting*

Visits are always the best but it can be emotionally difficult to have a 'closed' visit (behind glass) and not get to touch the inside person. The cost of a visit can be beyond what many can afford as prisons are not always close to cities and bus routes. And if your person is not in a prison close to you the cost of airplanes, hotels, taxis, meals, etc. may just not be possible. The federal prisons also have Private Family Visits, which many enjoy, but sometimes the wait is challenging as there are many who request these visits but only so many onsite family visiting units.

Regardless of how you make contact, connecting is very important to everyone in the family and to friends as well. Let's look at some of the benefits of visiting.

- Visiting provides an opportunity for families to simply be together
- Visiting gives family hope to the possibility of change
- The togetherness that occurs during visitation creates a sense of normalcy in the family
- Visiting can be the opportunity to begin to repair the harm caused by crime and to restore relationships

### *For the Outside Family*

- Visiting gives a person something to look forward to
- Visiting reminds those inside prison of the outside world and its benefits
- Visiting can provide an opportunity to relax, laugh, and have fun
- Visiting bridges the emotional distance between the inside person and their family
- Visiting can provide an opportunity to repair damaged relationships with family members
- Those in prison without family contact often feel neglected, alone, depressed, and angry
- Visiting can provide an opportunity to look to the future and set personal goals
- During visits, those inside can see themselves as human beings rather than criminals
- Visiting reduces violence in prison as those inside avoid situations that could jeopardize their visiting privileges
- Correctional Service Canada research indicates that ‘those who participate in Private Visits are less likely to threaten or commit a violent act while incarcerated’

### *For the Inside Person*

- Visiting can provide an opportunity for children to be heard and to let their incarcerated parent know how children are being effected
- Visiting offers teachable moments to dissuade children from following the path of their parent
- Any visits or mail received, from an incarcerated person’s child, in the three months prior to release, causes the child and incarcerated person to have a stronger attachment after release

### *For the Children*

- Those in prison who have had more frequent contact with their family are less likely to return to prison upon release
- The greater the number of visits, the lower the likelihood of recidivism
- Those in prison who have contact with their family are more likely to have successful parole outcomes
- Those who are visited in prison can more often be managed in the community than those who do not receive visits. Holding a person in the community, rather than an institution, comes with significant social cost savings.

### *For the Community*

Regardless of all the positive benefits, Correctional Service of Canada research from 2009 shows that only 46% of men receive visits and 54% of women do. What keeps us away? Broken relationships certainly account for some of this, but our families tell us it is also about the cost of visiting and the fear of the security in prison (guards, ion scanners, and drug dogs).

We all need social connections and there are benefits for everyone in sharing our lives together. But it is a personal decision whether or not to connect with a family member who is in prison. Consider the benefits to all involved in your life, the safety of community, and give careful thought to what you may want to do.



## **Dad HERO**



Did you know CFCN is currently working with the Movember Foundation on an incarcerated dad’s project called **Dad HERO** (Helping Everyone Realize Opportunities)?

We want to inspire dads to be a positive influence in their children’s lives, to be the hero their kids look up to by realizing the valuable gifts they have within themselves. We want to encourage positive social connections, teach parenting skills, and help men build their resiliency while they are in prison and upon reintegration!



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## Visitor Resource Centres (VRC's)

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By Marg Holland, CFCN's Ontario Coordinator

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Visitor Resource Centres use a restorative justice approach, offering family information, referrals, education, interim support, interventions, and the opportunity to discuss the difficulties that they may face in confidence. Research has shown that strong community contact and supportive family relationships play a key role in the reintegration of someone from prison and in the building of safe communities. Canadian Families and Corrections Network's Visitor Resource Centres play an active role in assisting the family in their journey of supporting the inside family member.

The visiting area of a correctional institution is not a normal environment for family connections; however, *being a family is normal*. Many visitors have not experienced the strict restrictions of a correctional facility and may feel nervous of the security during the clearance process, while at the same time emotional driven and committed to make contact with the inside family member. Visiting can be expensive, especially if your person is in custody out of province, as it may result in airfare, long drives, hotels, and meals. Regardless of the challenges, family visits need to be encouraged as an asset during incarceration.



Once the family members and children arrive inside the visiting area, the Visitor Resource Centre personnel offer a trust-based relationship where families are treated with dignity and respect. The focus of the VRC is to support families in maintaining their relationships and encouraging the parent-child bond. The significance of the visit is respected, as personnel provide a pamphlet with a list of resources such as the toll free number (1-888-371-2326) and web page for CFCN ([www.cfcn-rcafd.org](http://www.cfcn-rcafd.org)), where written resources, such as: *'Time Together: A survival guide for families and friends visiting Canadian federal prison; A New Time: A reintegration toolkit for families of female offenders; Times Up: A reintegration toolkit for families of male offenders; One Step at a Time: Reshaping life following crime within the family; and Coping Over Time: A resource for family members* are all available. VRC personnel also talk about CFCN's storybooks *Jeffrey Goes to Jail; Jeffrey's Out of Jail;* and our upcoming storybook *Jemma's Baby Brother "IN JAIL"?* Families are invited to take CFCN's pamphlet and seek support in the community using the information provided. Families who are not computer friendly or wish to have a hard copy of the resources are mailed one in a timely manner. Family visits and needs are respected by the VRC personnel as they follow the family's cue as to how long this connecting time is.



The family member that is in the visiting area is required to wait for the inside family member to come to the visiting area. This waiting time may be five minutes or more. The VRC personnel may help to pass this time by affirming the family for coming to visit; debriefing the family if they are stressed with entering a correctional setting; explain where the inside family member will enter the visiting area or where the washrooms are; and answer any questions such as if they are permitted to touch the inside family member.

Connecting and building on relationships are of the utmost importance during the visiting time. Where much of this is done through conversation and sharing, there are frequently times when families wish to play a game or do a craft activity together. Families may make greeting cards for each other for special occasions with paper and pencil crayons provided by the VRC personnel or play games such as Connect Four, Scrabble, cards, or Snakes and Ladders. Special nuggets and memories are created in the visiting area that family members hang on to in order overcome the struggles

of their life circumstances. Correctional Service of Canada has a ‘nothing in - nothing out’ ruling which means that families will not be permitted to take their finished craft from the visiting area; however they relish in the joy of sharing this time together.

Inside parents may not have had contact with their children for several years prior to the first visit with a son, daughter, nephew, niece, or grandchild. Adults may be both excited and anxious on how this meeting will go. Children frequently express their feelings with their behavior which may or may not be appropriate in the visiting area.

CFCN’s philosophy is that, “a visit **with** the child is a visit **for** the child”. This is reinforced by providing the parents with many options on ways they can connect with the child. Puppets can be created out of toilet paper rolls to play with, family pictures can be drawn together with each member of the family being given a different pencil crayon, or they may play with board games that are provided. CFCN is currently developing a ‘How to Plan Your Family Visit’ Resource and we have many Parent-Child Activity sheets that are very popular. In some of the institutions a person who is designated as a photographer will take pictures that are paid for by the inside family member and treasured by all.



Families have frequently expressed their appreciation for information the VRC personnel are able to give on economic transportation, parole hearings, community-based family support groups, support for reintegration, and confidential discussions focused on relationships and parenting.

Visitor Resource Centre personnel currently work in Millhaven, Bath, Collins Bay, Joyceville, and Grand Valley Institutions.

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## Transportation

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CFCN is trying to identify groups that provide transportation for those that have a loved one involved in the justice system. Below are the ones we know about across Canada. If you know of others please let CFCN know at (888) 371-2326 or email us at [national@cfcn-rcafd.org](mailto:national@cfcn-rcafd.org) to help us share the information with other families in need.

1. Manitoba Prison Rideshare (Bar None, Winnipeg, MB)

– rides to southern Manitoba prisons

Website: <https://barnoneblog.wordpress.com/rideshare/>

Email: [barnone.wpg@gmail.com](mailto:barnone.wpg@gmail.com)

Facebook: “Prison Visiting Rideshare – Manitoba”

Call: (204) 599-8869

2. Transportation Program (John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area, ON)

– rides to Warkworth + Kingston prisons

Website: <http://johnhoward.on.ca/hamilton/services/community-programs/>

Call: (905) 522-4446 ext 221

3. Family Visitation Program (Fostering, Empowering, Advocating Together (F.E.A.T) for Children, Toronto, ON)

– rides to Southern Ontario prisons

Website: <http://featforchildren.org/family-visitation-program/>

Email: [info@featforchildren.org](mailto:info@featforchildren.org)

Call: (416) 505-5333



4. Support & Advocacy for Family Enrichment (S.A.F.E.) Transportation Program (The Salvation Army, Kingston, ON)  
– rides to various Kingston rural Correctional Institutions

Website: <http://www.salvationarmy.ca/ontariocentraleast/kingston/volunteer-opportunities-kingston/>

Call: (613) 549-2676

5. Correctional Visitation Assistance Program (The Salvation Army Barrhaven Church, Ottawa, ON)  
– rides to Southern Ontario prisons

Website: <https://www.salvationarmybarrhaven.ca/ministries/correctional-visitation-assistance-program/>

Call: (613) 440-7555



## Behind the Glass: the Importance of Visiting



By J. Lavigne, Formerly Incarcerated

I will never forget my very first visit while incarcerated at Vanier Centre for Women. They called my last name and I stood with anticipation at the red line, waiting for the officer to open the door. I stepped out into the rotunda where the two visit guards stood to take me down to the visit area. I was not able to move anywhere within the institution without two guards. Being on the maximum security unit also meant I was only allowed to have visits behind glass.

Those were the most amazing, yet heart wrenching, thirty minutes of my life. It really is right out of the movies. The door was unlocked for me by the visit guard, who then locked me into a 4 by 6 foot room. I sat on a steel stool and waited for my mom and husband to walk through the door on the other side of the glass. As soon as I saw them, but realized they were out of reach, my heart broke. I placed my hand on the glass and my husband did the same as I picked up the phone through which we talked and cried.

Being allowed two visits each week, no one can understand, unless they have spent time inside, how important those minutes can be for your loved one. It is a chance to feel somewhat normal. It is a connection to reality. Even though maximum offenders have visits behind glass, it is still thirty minutes of being able to be close to family or friends. For me, visits were very much my lifeline.



Often, I was the only inmate to walk the halls twice a week to visit with my family. This saddened me, but I had to savour every moment that I had. It was my only way of survival. I could break up my week knowing that I had thirty minutes to look forward to each Wednesday and Sunday. Visits for inmates mean a connection, they mean that they have something to look forward to, a reason to get out of bed that day. Even if that visit is spent just looking at each other and hearing the other person breathe it is worth it. Human “connection” is so important for inmates. We fast become forgotten members of society, and without any contact, it is easy to remove yourself from the world.

After each visit, I would try to walk a bit slower, taking in every last bit of euphoria as I went back to the unit. When the door reopened to the range, some of the women would wave me over and get me to tell them everything. They craved the normalcy and being able to hear about my visit allowed them a bit of that. Often I would relive the visit over and over in my head until my next chance to see my family.

Being separated from family and loved ones can be one of the most difficult parts of incarceration, but if given the opportunity to have visits, it can make some of the longest days in an inmate’s life, about 30 minutes shorter.

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## First Visit to my Son

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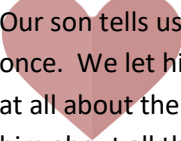
By D.D. , Toronto ON

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I go to visit my son for the first time. My husband and I stand in line when the time comes to be checked in. We show our ID and get a locker key. Everything goes in the locker. Someone wearing very provocative clothing is told to leave and does. I talk with the woman sitting next to me. She's been visiting for more than a year. She explains that visits are about the incarcerated man and keeping up their spirits, as jail is very hard and lonely. She states that after a visit negative thoughts can take over as the guilt the men hold will be a source of brooding later on. She advised I keep my tears for later. The purpose of the visit is to let my son talk and know he is loved.

We go through the screening (like the airport) and get led to our visiting area. They have put him on suicide watch so we are in a small room with 2 chairs and a telephone. Our son is led in to a small room on the other side of the glass. He is wearing a quilted white hospital gown. It is sleeveless and looks like an A-line dress that is not heavy.



Our son tells us that he is not suicidal. His first goal becomes to get off the suicide watch unit and we only visit him there once. We let him know that he is loved, that we will assist him in getting a lawyer while awaiting his trial; we cannot talk at all about the crime. We tell him we will come twice/week to visit and he can call collect when he is allowed. We tell him about all the support we have gotten and about his friends who have been in touch and care about him.

He tells us all he can about the trip there, being processed, his cell, the food and the boredom and loneliness of it all. You learn quickly about deprivation and the loss of individual identity.

The guard gives us the 2 minute signal. I have not cried. We place our hands on the window as a kind of touch and I give myself a hug and point at him - this is my hug for him. I blow a kiss. His father waves and is strong - manly. The guard takes him out and we turn to leave. I begin to cry.

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## 3 Letter Writing Tips

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By Melissa Martz, Kitchener ON

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Tip #1: Think of how often you called, emailed or texted your loved one before they were incarcerated. Keep that communication flowing with writing letters. YOUR letter just might be the only thing that brings your loved one a smile that day. Writing letters make a difference!...Write them often!

Tip #2: One may believe you shouldn't use humour or ask questions, as to make the person inside feel sad. On the contrary, yes, there may be some sadness there, but it will hopefully brighten their day, help to ward off depression knowing that someone cares enough to help them through this difficult period in their life, to make sure they keep smiling and staying positive, verses making them feel sadness.

Tip #3: Try and cater to their hobbies and interests in your writing (i.e. sending news articles as to make their own personal newspaper, or keeping up to date the wins and losses of their favourite sports team).



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## Why Write a Letter?

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By José Cormier, Moncton NB

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1. Those incarcerated may have the feeling that the world has gone without them. Any reminder that you are still thought of brings hope and shines light around a person.
2. Letters can be read and re-read several times during days when the inside person has no contact with anyone, during lockdowns, and when in segregation.
3. A letter is more personal and it's an experience that only two people share.
4. Writing a letter gives you the chance to get all your thoughts and feelings down on paper that you wish to say to the person without any confrontation.
5. Most of those in prison react positively to pro-social community people and their thoughts.
6. A letter can break bouts of prison depression and the negative feelings incarceration can have on a person.
7. Letters can be very therapeutic and a good way to have no distractions or interruptions in getting your message across.
8. Writing and receiving a letter will bring joy and will also give something that both can look forward to.
9. Letters are a great way to keep the inside person up-to-date with what they are missing by adding pictures, newspaper clippings, and drawings, as the prison allows. Focus on the positives, not their crime or negative information.
10. You can write a letter like you write texts. Combining short bursts of information on different days shows how you feel and what you are thinking of at different times.



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## Donations

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**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 our Parent-Child Activity sheets to a child to promote family bonding!**

**Change lives by assisting a family member today. Every donation helps!**

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](http://www.cfcn-rcafd.org) and click the **DONATE NOW** button to pay by credit card or PayPal  
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