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Living Between The Lines

Stories from our community

Living Between the Lines is part of a larger kit called **Between the Lines**, designed to raise public awareness and stimulate social action towards caring, safe, literate communities. **Between the Lines** was produced by

National Associations Active in Criminal Justice
383 Parkdale Avenue, Suite 308
Ottawa, Ontario
K1Y 4R4.
Tel.: (613) 761-1032
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Senator Joyce Fairbairn
Minister with Special Responsibility for Literacy

You can get a copy of the complete kit by contacting
NAACJ at the above address.

NAACJ thanks all the people who helped make this book
by sharing their stories.

Illustration, design and printing of **Between the Lines** was
co-ordinated by The Prison Arts Foundation of Canada.

Please feel free to photocopy and share this booklet

Working together for a fair community

“What is the world coming to?”

Almost everyone these days

feels like there is something wrong in society.

People don't feel secure -

maybe they're afraid of not having enough money,

maybe they're afraid of violence in the neighborhood.

Some say the problem is crime,

some say it's unemployment,

some say it's the school system or the welfare system.

Often we think some person or group of people are to blame.

The people we are blaming may see it another way.

The stories in this booklet are told by different people
who have been blamed for problems in society.

They have felt shut out because they are poor,

or can't read and write very well,

or have been in trouble with the law.

They face many barriers as they try to make a better life
for themselves and their children.

Their stories show what can happen when people are shut out,
and what can make a difference.

Caring and understanding, or a new chance,

can help turn someone's life around.

We would like these stories to bring some hope to the many people who are still struggling with these barriers. Reading all of the stories will help you look at things from different points of view. Some of them may surprise you.

People who have faced these barriers have developed strengths and talents that can benefit their community. They can also tell us a lot about what is needed to make a better society. Listening to each other will give us a better chance to help others as well as to get the help we need. Understanding each other better can help point the way to building communities that are caring, safe, and fair.

Stories from some of the people in our community

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Mother and Child - Ralston Bennett

His teacher had written him off at 7 years old...

When my son was in grade 2,
I was called to pick him up from the school.
I thought he must be sick, but when I got there I found him
with a huge lump on his head and his new parka all ripped.
They told me they were suspending him for fighting.
I said, "It looks more like he was beaten up.
How many others are being suspended?"
They told me he was the only one.

When I finally got to the bottom of it,
I found out it was some grade six kids that did it.
He was sitting out in the hall and they teased him about it,
and he said he would punch their face.

I found out he had been spending most of his time
out in the hall. His home room teacher said he was lazy
and had an attitude, because he was refusing to read.
When I tried reading with him myself
I found he had tried to memorize the story,
but he couldn't read at all.
When the teacher would tell him to read out loud in class,
he would say the story was stupid and refuse to read it.
Actually he was ashamed because he couldn't do it,
and he was too proud to admit it.
His teacher had written him off at 7 years old!

His French teacher was different.
She was concerned about him.
It turned out he has learning disabilities
and needs special help with reading.

Our Family Learning Program started from some of us talking
over coffee about our problems with the school system.
A lot of us don't have that much schooling ourselves.
We felt our kids were being labelled
as slow learners and troublemakers
because of living in public housing,
and the older ones were being pushed
toward vocational high school programs.
We didn't know our rights as parents.
Some of us felt too intimidated to confront the teacher.
Others tried and were told to leave the decisions to the experts.

We asked over 400 families here
if they were having the same kinds of problems.
We asked if they would be interested in tutoring
for themselves and their kids,
if they would be willing to help out with it,
and what would it take for them to be able to attend.
It turned out people were very interested.

Now we have a daycare program for the little ones,
a homework program for school age kids,
and literacy and English programs for the adults.

Our program works for us
because we set it up to suit our own needs.
It is not full-time because we want to be home
for our kids before and after school.
We like it being right here in our own community.
We have other services right here at the community centre
to help with things that would get in the way of our learning.
We work on what we feel we need: such as parenting,
budgeting, assertiveness and self-esteem.

We get experience and skills other than just schoolwork.
Students can be volunteers or sit on the Board of Directors.
The Family Learning Program can be the start
of getting involved in the community in new ways.
It lays the groundwork for solving problems together.

Discussion questions

- Have you had experiences like this as a child
or as a parent?
- What would you like the school to know about your
child or a child you care about?
- Should young children ever be suspended from school?
Why?
- What should we do to support children who have been
suspended?
- What might happen if we don't do anything to help?

Did you know . . . ?

- About 1 person in 10 has a learning disability. Some people prefer to call it a learning difference, because it doesn't mean the person is not able to learn, it means they learn in different ways than the average person and may need special help. They may see or hear differently, or have problems concentrating.
- There are Learning Disability Associations in every province and territory, and in 140 communities across the country.
- The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada has brochures about different kinds of learning differences, and guides for helping you or your child. It can help you find the nearest Learning Disabilities group or tell you how to start one in your area.

Suggestions for action

To find out more about learning disabilities:

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada

323 Chapel Street, Suite 200, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 7Z2

Tel.: (613) 238-5721

To find out more about family literacy programs, and about helping your child become a good reader:

Family Literacy Interest Group of Canada

35 Ellerbeck Street, Kingston, Ontario, K7L 4H5

Tel.: (613) 549-3657

Services in your community

Learning Disabilities Organizations

Family Literacy Programs



(Untitled) Reggie Eaglechild

A few of the schools are making a special effort

Not being able to read can make children feel really bad about themselves. Sometimes their frustration will come out in bad behaviour.

A child needs to be reading well by the end of grade 3. By grade 4, we have finished working on how to read and they have to be able to use reading to learn about other subjects.

Reading is the basis of everything they learn all through school, so it's important to make sure they really catch on to it at the beginning.

It's OK if it takes them an extra year.

And if they do need an extra year, before grade 4 is the time to take it.

It will help your kids a lot in school if you can read to them, or look at books with them.

Even if you can't read yourself, you can look at the pictures and talk about them together. This will help them learn how to think and express themselves as well as how to read.

It also helps them learn new words.

Most kids can get good help with reading
if they stay in one school long enough.
It takes time to find out what the problem is,
and the best way to help that child learn.
Trust and familiar surroundings are really important.
Changing schools a lot is hard on kids' learning,
even though we understand
this is often beyond the parent's control.

Kids sometimes need special help to catch up at school.
They don't all start out with the same advantages.
A few of the schools are making a special effort to understand
the needs of families who have less money and education.
We want all kids to have a chance at a good education,
and we set up the school to make sure this happens.
The way we talk to the parents and the kids,
the information we send home,
all needs to be done in a way that makes sense to them.

We think kids need clear rules, and lots of routine.
They like to know what they can expect,
and what's expected of them.
They do well with lots of attention and rewards
for good work and good behaviour.
Working in small groups helps them
develop their self-confidence.
In this school the kids spend a lot of their time
in small reading groups that let them learn in their own way.

Schools now are also trying to help children learn how to get along with others and work out their problems without fighting. We have a poster that shows a traffic light. The red light says “stop and think”. The yellow one says “agree to talk it over”. The green light says “make a deal”. The point is, it’s OK to wait until you cool down before you try to sort out a problem. That’s good advice for all of us!

Discussion questions

- Do you think it’s true that when kids feel really bad about themselves, their frustration might come out in bad behaviour, or maybe even in crime?
- Do you agree with the advice in this story?
- Do you think this kind of advice could prevent crime?
- What do you think teachers are up against? What do you think they need from the rest of the community?

Did you know . . . ?

- Parent groups (including Home and School Clubs and Parent-Teacher Associations – PTAs) are one way to have a say in your child's schooling. Over a hundred thousand parents across the country belong to these groups. Belonging to a local parent group can help you share information and concerns with other parents, develop a closer relationship with your children's teachers, and learn about ways to help your child do better in school.
- More and more schools have programs to teach children how to get along, how to understand each other better and how to work through disagreements without using violence. These programs are usually called Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation programs.

Suggestions for action

Your child's teacher should be able to help you contact the PTA at your child's school. If there is no such group in your community, contact the national office for information on starting one in your area.

Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation
858 Bank Street, Suite 109B, Ottawa, Ontario, K1S 3W3
Tel.: (613) 234-7292

If your child's school does not offer Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation programs, you might suggest that your PTA ask for information from:

The Network for Conflict Resolution, Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario, N2L 3G6
Tel.: (519) 885-0880

Parents' Welcome is an excellent booklet for parents about their role in their child's education and the school system.

You can order it from:

The Canadian School Boards Association, 130 Slater Street, Suite 600, Ottawa, Ontario, K1P 6E2
Tel.: (613) 235-3724.

Services in your community

Parent-teacher Groups

Local School Boards

Conflict Resolution Organization



#1 of Phase #4 - Two-faced - Derek Flaro

I felt like there was no place for me in the world

It's hard to figure out what really matters.
I mean, a big star can commit murder
and keep making millions.
Hockey players score big bucks
and their fans love them for bashing heads.
It makes you feel like being free to do whatever you want
means violence and killing.

Schools can also make you feel like nothing matters.
They just keep putting you in higher grades
even if you don't know how to read and write.
They don't try to really help you if you're having problems.
They just get mad and ignore you, or treat you like trouble.

After a few years of that, I felt like nobody cared about me.
In grade 11, I still couldn't read a book.
I felt really bad about myself.
I was always scared people would find out.
I was scared to look for a job.
I couldn't imagine trying to get into college.
I was scared to be honest with anyone. So I hit the streets.
I did whatever I had to do to take care of myself.
I felt like there was no place for me in the world.

The big problem is that nobody cares.
It's not just the kids that should take the blame.
It's the teachers and welfare workers and psychologists and
police. All those people who tell you it's your fault
and don't help you should take the rap.

And what about the parents?
Look at the parents of those two 11 year old kids
who shot a drifter 18 times.
Their parents said they didn't see why the judge
was making such a big deal about the 18 shots.
The guy was dead after the first shot.
Why isn't someone asking what's wrong with them?

Why aren't teachers learning to help kids?
Before teachers graduate from teachers' college
they should have to work with Children's Aid workers
to find out what kind of lives their students live.
Teachers need to know the signs of a kid
getting abused at home,
or taking drugs, or having trouble learning,
and what they can do to help.

Kids need to know someone cares,
when they're still young.
Otherwise they'll grow up scared and mad and frustrated.
If you get to kids when they're really young,
if you can relate to their lives
when they're 5 or 6 years old,
there won't be the same problems later.

Discussion questions

- What are young people up against today?
- What do you think they need?
- Do people with money and fame have a different set of rules?
- How can it happen that a student could reach higher grades without being able to read and write?
- This young person says teachers, welfare workers, psychologists, police and parents are to blame. Is there a better way to deal with this unfairness than by blaming people?
- What do you think of his suggestion about teachers learning more about how their students live?
- What are some of the ways violence is pushed at young people in society? How do you think this affects them?

Did you know...?

- The most common crime committed by young people is theft of items worth less than \$1,000.
- About 50,000 children and youth across Canada are temporary or permanent wards of the state.
- Most children and youth in care have suffered abuse in their families.
- Boys and Girls Clubs offer programs for children and youth. The programs may include recreation, homework help, drug prevention, employment preparation, and life skills, depending on the community. Some have mentoring programs which match up kids with adult mentors or peer mentors. Many have "Stay in School" programs.

Suggestions for action

Find out about organizations that work with young people in your area. Check the phone book, or contact these organizations:

The National Youth in Care Network
251 Bank Street, Ottawa, Ontario K2P 1X3
Tel.: (613) 230-8945

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada
7030 Woodbine Ave., Suite 703, Markham, Ontario, L3R 6G2
Tel.: (905) 477-7272

Young people often wish there was a way they could help others. If you are involved in a group that uses volunteers, make a place for youth to participate.

Talk to people in your neighbourhood about setting up more after-school activities for young people, such as music, art and drama programs as well as sports activities.

You can complain about violence you see on television by calling a hotline set up by the Coalition for Responsible Television. Their telephone number is 1-900-451-3664. Your message will be sent to the people who make decisions about what is allowed to be shown on TV. The call will cost \$3.00 on your phone bill.

Services in your community

Youth in Care Organization

Boys and Girls Club

Other Youth Organizations



The Warriors - Chuck Chan

Some doors that opened for me were closed for too many of my old friends

You know I still feel guilty sometimes
when I think about how different my life turned out
compared to my high school friends.
People think that because I have a professional job,
a good income, great kids and a nice home
that I've always been there.
But from the time I was in grade six
I was always in trouble.
I hung around with the "wrong" kids.
I was into drugs. I would skip school a lot.
I was not a nice person.

I got into as much trouble as any of my friends,
but most of them ended up with a record.
Some of them did time.

I credit a lot of my success
to learning to read and write early.
People excused my rebellious behaviour because
they figured I was so smart I was bored at school.
No one blamed me for any of the bad stuff ...
other people got the blame.
Even my friends protected me.
Once they hid me in a drug bust because they figured
I was the one with the best chance of making it.

Doors didn't close for me the way they did for my friends.
Those open doors led me to experiences
that helped me decide after high school
to live my life differently.

I had a music teacher who took me to plays and concerts
and opened my eyes to the world.

I worked for an old folks home part-time
when I was in grade ten. At first I took the job for the money,
but I ended up really caring for those people.

They were like grandparents to me.

And when they closed that home,
leaving many of those old people with nothing,
I learned to fight for other people, not with them.

The chances I was given
and the people who believed in me no matter what I did,
helped turn my life around.

And yet some of the most important people in my life
have lived on the edge of the law, and on the edge of society,
and sometimes on the edge of sanity.

These are the people who remind me that
we all have the same needs, the same feelings,
the same longings and hopes.

The only real difference
is that some doors that opened for me
were closed for too many of my old friends.

Discussion questions

- What were the things that made a difference for this woman?
- Were you like her? Like her friends?
- Was there someone who believed in you? Who? What difference did this make?
- Can you think of something you did that could have gotten you in trouble if you had been caught? How would your life be different if you had?
- How do we decide who gets to be called a criminal? Are there groups of people more likely to be labelled or given up on?
- Would you like to fight for other people? Why? How?

Did you know?

- A 1993 Statistics Canada study “Leaving School” found that 18% of 20 year old Canadians did not finish high school. Young people who dropped out were more likely to have come from families struggling with low income or other troubles. They were also more likely to have had a hard time in school, and to have gotten involved with drugs or alcohol. Working while going to school also played a role for some.
- The same study found that young people who drop out are much more likely than graduates to be unemployed. If they are employed at all, their jobs often have long hours and low pay, making it hard for them to go back and upgrade their education.
- A 1993 study of people who have come in conflict with the law in Quebec shows that 70% of these people quit school.
- The same Quebec study found that most people who get in trouble with the law share the same values as “law abiding citizens” – to be loved, to like themselves, to have the power to earn a living for themselves and to get along in their community.
- For many offenders, poverty is their greatest crime. For example, 30% of women sent to prison each year are jailed for non-payment of fines.

Suggestions for action

Think of how you could make a difference in the life of a child or adult you know.

Contact Big Brothers or Big Sisters, to see how they could help your family or how you could help someone else. If they are not in your local phone book, contact the national group to find the office nearest to you.

Big Brothers of Canada
5230 South Service Road, Burlington, Ontario, L7L 5K2
Tel.: (905) 639-1461

Big Sisters of Canada
101-270 Yorkland Blvd., North York, Ontario, M2J 5C9
Tel.: (416) 490-0249

Services in your community

Big Brothers

Big Sisters

Other services for young people



Alone - David Jones

I didn't know how to go straight

Anyone who's been in jail knows that jails
are not going to keep people from committing crimes.
For a lot of guys, they're nothing on the street,
but they're important people in jail.
These are the people you look up to
the guys who control the guards,
the guys who call all the shots.
My first role model was a guy like that in the Don Jail.
When you get out, you have nothing.
You are nothing.
It's almost like landing on Mars.
You've come out of a place
where muscles and drugs equal power.
How does that prepare you for a life without crime?

I learned to read, and got my high school diploma
while I was inside. It was a scam for me at first.
It was a way to get out sooner, to get good behaviour.
But I started to see that there was something better
than the life I was living.

I used to be scared of the straight world.
All I knew was abuse and drugs and gangs.
I'd never had a job. My parents never worked.
I didn't know how to go straight.

About ten years ago,
a guy in one of the drug treatment programs I was in
really pushed a button for me.
He got at the false pride.
He let me admit to myself how scared I was.
He was the one who helped me understand
that I'm totally responsible for my own freedom.
I've taken this understanding
and I've used it to get where I am.
For the last six years
I've been co-leading drug and alcohol programs
for offenders and ex-offenders.

I used to think that freedom was just being out of jail.
Now I know I'm responsible for my freedom
and I know how big freedom is.
To have absolute freedom, you have to work hard.
You have to take responsibility for yourself.

Discussion questions

- What do you think it takes to turn someone's life around?
- Do you think that jails prepare people for a life without crime?
- What would a better justice system be like?
- What could we do to start making it happen?

Did you know?

- A 1993 Quebec Government Study found that 19% of people who have come in conflict with the law have been victims of violence as children in their own family.
- Among women inmates this figure is much higher. 72% of women in Provincial Institutions have either been physically or sexually abused. 82% of women at the Federal Prison for Women in Kingston have been physically or sexually abused or both.
- The Quebec study found that 34% of those interviewed said they had committed crimes to pay for drugs, alcohol or pills.
- 43% of women at the Prison for Women in Kingston are addicted to drugs, alcohol or both; 69% say that this played a major part in their offences.
- 75% of women at the Prison for Women in Kingston had only junior high school level education or less; 40% can not read and write well enough to get by.

Suggestions for action

The Elizabeth Fry and John Howard Societies help people who have been in conflict with the law to turn their lives around. They also work to make changes in the justice system.

Ask the Elizabeth Fry and John Howard societies near you how you could volunteer as a literacy tutor, a prison visitor, a “pen pal” for someone in prison, or how you could support their advocacy work. If you can’t find a number for these groups in your phone book, the national offices listed below can tell you how to contact the office closest to you.

Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies
Suite 600, 251 Bank Street, Ottawa, Ontario K2P 1X3
Tel.: (613) 238-2422

John Howard Society of Canada
383 Parkdale Avenue, 4th floor, Ottawa, Ontario K1Y 4R4
Tel.: (613) 761-7678

Services in your community

Elizabeth Fry Society

John Howard Society

Other services to help people who have been in
conflict with the law



What Am I Doing Here? - Pierre Ouellet

Artiste 607-231 Bank Street, Ottawa, Ontario K2P 1A3
Télé: (613) 238-2422

John Howard Society of Canada
363 Jarvis Avenue, 4th floor, Ottawa, Ontario K1T 4R4
Télé: (613) 761-7672

but then who takes responsibility?

I grew up and went to school on the Prairies.
At the time I had trouble reading and writing.
Let me tell you, I was always staying in after school
writing my mistakes out 25 times.

I got by because I would always listen really hard in class.
I learned that if I paid attention,
it wouldn't matter so much
if I didn't read the books and do homework.
I failed grade 6 and grade 10, but I didn't hate school.
I didn't blame my teachers.
I think that's because I was interested in the sports
and extra activities like drama.

Besides, in Grade 8 I had a really good teacher.
He understood me and my best friend, Tom.
He knew reading and writing were hard for us.
He never took the attitude that if you fool around,
I'll kick you out of school. What good does that do?
Then kids are on the street, getting into trouble.
We need more teachers like him.
Kids need someone who understands them,
who will believe in them and help them find their talents.

I went to a technical high school.
It was the best thing that
could have happened to me.
I could use my talents there.
Everything you learned was connected
to what you were doing with your hands.
Today, they don't have those schools
or they say you have to have high marks to get into them.
So kids who are having trouble are dropping out.

Schools could get the kids back
if they discovered what a kid likes, what he's good at.
If a kid likes to draw, let him draw.
Help that kid work on his talent
so he can do something he enjoys with his life.
Don't force him to learn things he can't do
and will never use.

Schools could keep kids from dropping out
if they would make sure they all learn how to
read and write.
If they can do that, they can learn anything else
they want to,
when it's time for them to learn it.
There's no point making a kid learn science or history
when he can't even read the science and history books.

For the last 20 years, I've worked as a police officer.
I see a lot of kids getting into trouble.
Low self-esteem is the biggest thing.
Lots of these kids have trouble learning too.
But I also think we make it awful easy for kids
to get out of the home and live on their own.
We have not done enough to keep the family together.
I've seen too many kids sleeping in cars and behind buildings.

We all should take more responsibility for our neighbours.
If Johnny shoplifts, if he's one of ours, it's up to us to
deal with the problems that led to his crime.
Community pressure can be really important too.
Our society is so busy trying to hide everything,
but then who takes responsibility? We have to take a stand.

Discussion questions

- Do you think it's true that a lot of young people drop out because they can't read and write very well?
- How could we give families the support they need so that kids would not be forced to leave home because of abuse and neglect ?
- Do you agree that we should take more responsibility for our neighbours, even for those that commit crimes? How could we do that?
- What do you think the police are up against?

Did you know?

- People from “all walks of life” can have literacy problems.
- 38% of Canadian adults have some problems with reading and writing. 7% can not read, 9% can only read simple words, 22% can read if the materials are simple.
- More and more police departments are working closely with their communities to find ways the whole community can be involved in preventing crime. This is called community policing.

Suggestions for action

Phone your city hall and municipal/community services to find out about relevant community-based youth and social change programs and how you can get involved.

Call your local police station and ask if they have community policing programs. Find out how you can help.

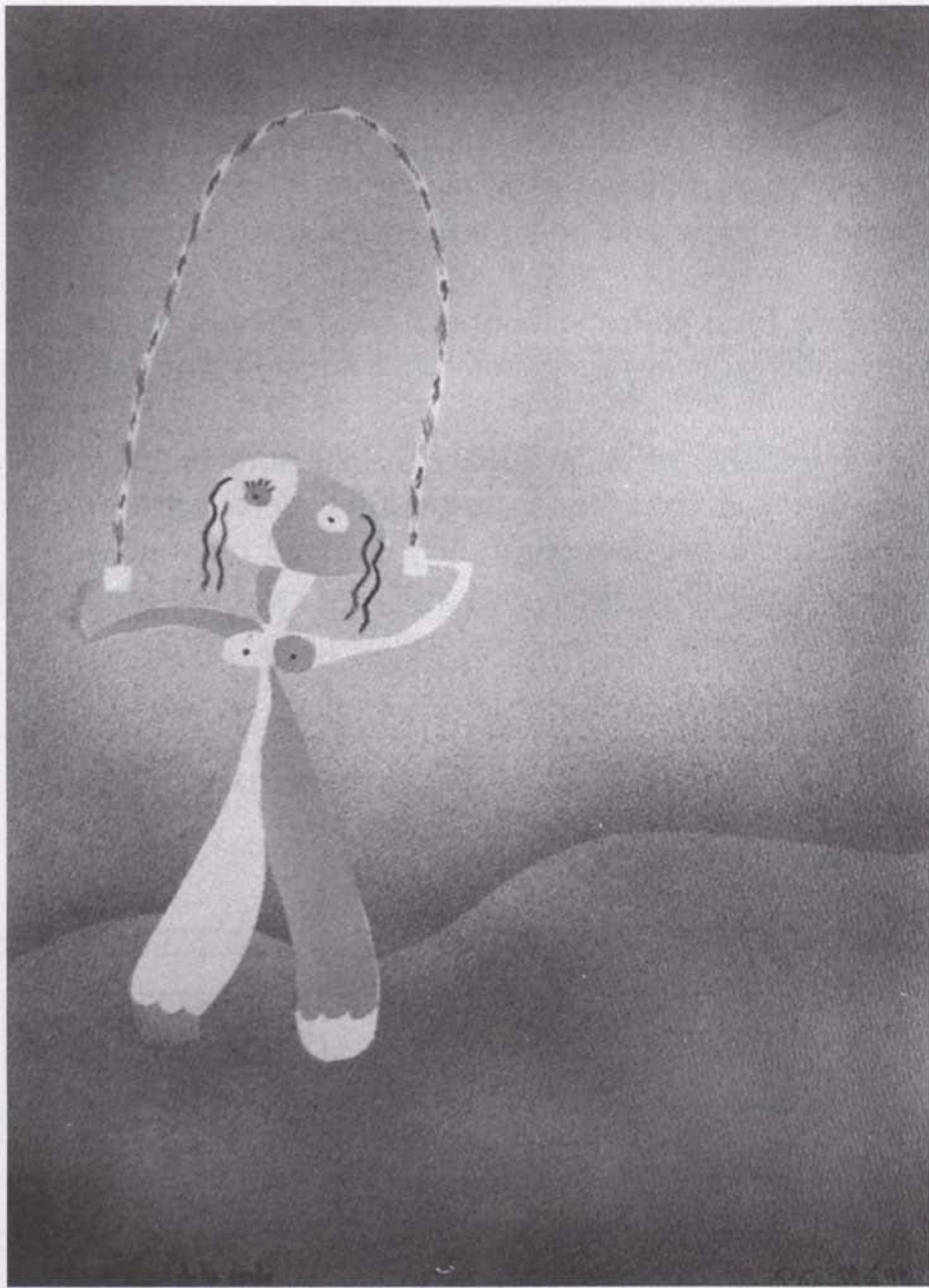
You don't have to be an expert to help someone learn to read. You can volunteer to tutor someone through a literacy program, or you can help a friend on your own. Look in the yellow pages under "Learn" and call your local literacy programs for more information.

Services in your community

Community Policing Programs

Youth Programs

Other social change programs



Girl Skipping - Pierre Ouellet

They're our kids ...

2 Halloweens ago, the kids got together
and did a lot of damage.

The older ones were drinking and things got out of control.
They really went wild with firecrackers
and set some deserted buildings on fire.
Someone could easily have been killed.

This is a tiny little community -
just a collection of farms really.

We have no corner store, no community centre.
The only meeting places are the churches.
I guess the kids get bored.

My husband doesn't talk much,
but I know he was real concerned. We all were.
We're all worried that our community
will get to be like the big cities.

We had some meetings of the parents
to talk about what we could do.

We kept closer watch on our own and each others' kids,
we kept in touch with the other parents,
and we took turns patrolling the roads
when we knew the kids were partying,
just so they'd know we were around.

In the city, I guess the kids would have been arrested.
But we didn't think of going to the police.
There's too much red tape,
and they would have taken over.
They're our kids ...

Discussion questions

- Did the people in the community think the damage their kids did was a crime? Do you?
- Can you think of some examples of actions that cause harm that we don't call crimes? Why do we call some harmful actions crimes, but not others?
- For example, why are employers who allow their workers to be exposed to harmful chemicals that ruin their health not called criminals?
- If a 12-year old girl runs away because she is being abused and steals food to eat, should she be treated like a criminal?

Did you know?

- Most of the people who come into conflict with the law do not cause danger to public safety or significant financial loss to victims. Only 12% of the people in prison are considered really dangerous.
- Canadians believe that the violent crime rate is seven times higher than it actually is.
- People are six times as likely to die from an industrial accident as from being murdered.
- The police report that the crime rate went down by 5% between 1992 and 1993. This was the largest one-year drop since crime statistics were first collected in 1962 .
- Research tells us that community-based help from the family and the school can prevent a lot of problem behaviour from turning into serious criminal behaviour.
- We know that putting more people in jail and prison has not worked to cut down crime for over two hundred years.

Suggestions for action

Get some people together to talk about these questions. Talk about what you could do about problems in your community before they lead to crimes.

Consider doing a Safety Audit. A group called METRAC has developed a guide to help you find out how safe your community is and how you can make it safer. METRAC, 158 Spadina Road, Toronto, Ontario, M5R 2T8
Tel.: (416) 392-3135

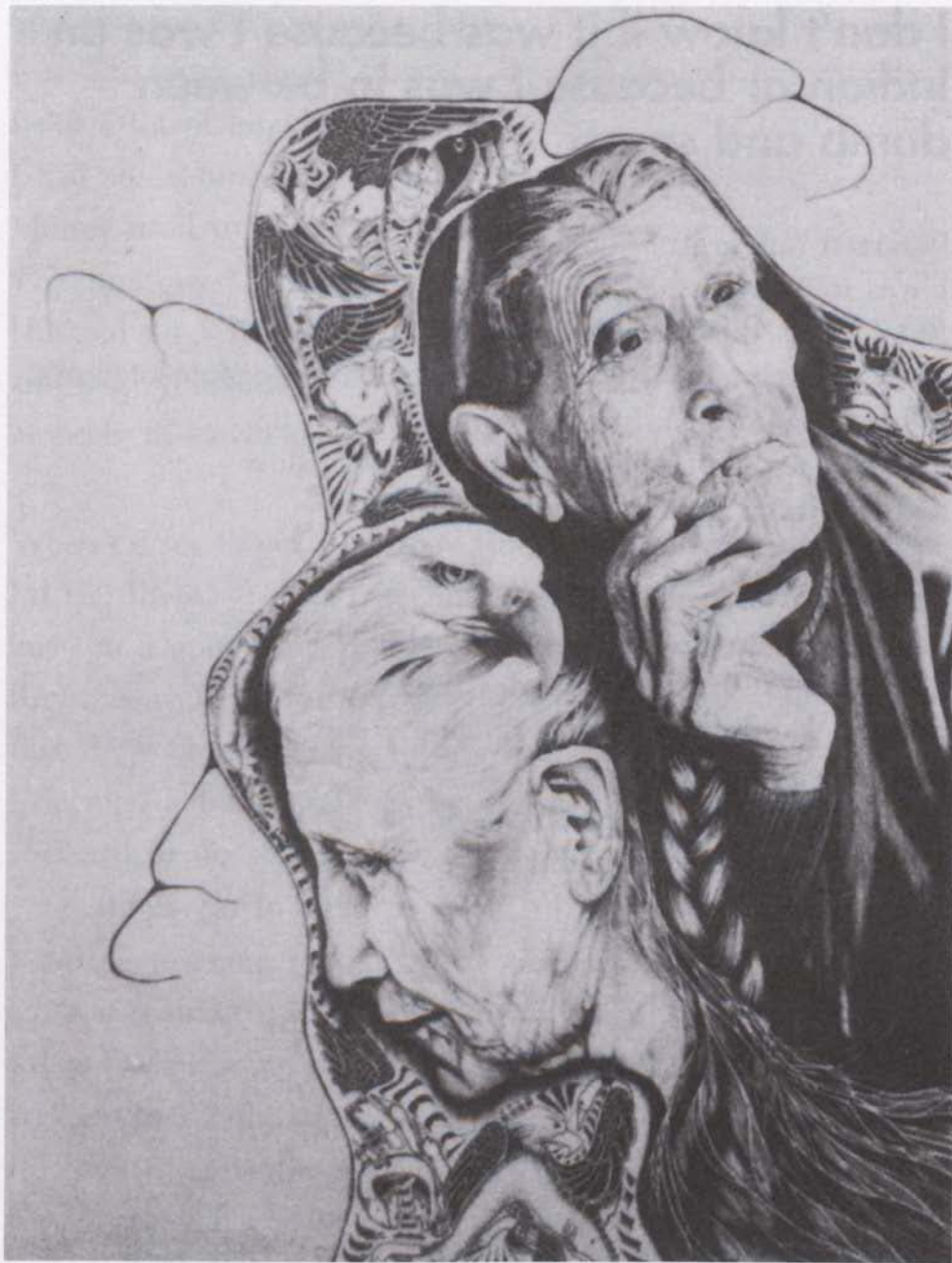
Ask your local government offices and your municipal government about social development activities and crime prevention groups in your community.

Services in your community

Anti-Poverty & Social Development Organizations

Crime Prevention Groups

Neighbourhood Watch



Linked Wisdom - Kurt Takakenew

I don't know if it was because I was an Indian or because I was in between dumb and smart

I started out pretty good.
I was in a regular school for grade 1.
But I guess there was some family trouble
and I got sent to a residential school for a couple of years.
When I came back home I couldn't keep up.
The teacher kept telling my mom I was slow
and my mom kept calling me stupid.

Then I got in trouble for stealing.
The judge sent me to a reform school.
They put me back two grades there
because I didn't know my religion.
It was really embarrassing.
All the kids used to call me a dumb Indian.
It was really mind-boggling.
I felt really angry - like I'd been stripped of my rights.
I guess I was really hurt
but I didn't have nobody there to talk to.

When I got back home after that I was really lost.
I had no interest in trying to learn at all.
They stuck me into an occupational program
work half a day, go to school half a day.
They kicked me out of there for fighting. They said:
"You're a big boy - it's time to venture out on your own."

So I got my first job on a farm.
I used to work about 12 hours a day, for about 5 dollars a day.
I did a lot of hitchhiking to find work.
I had some problems.
Money used to burn a hole in my pocket.
This one guy I worked for used to watch out for me.
He told me, "I'm going to be your banker
and help you look after your money?" It was great.
Nobody had ever taught me that.

When I'd try to get a job they would ask me what grade I had.
I'd tell them, "I didn't get much schooling,
but I'm a good worker - if you show me I can learn."
Right away I could see from the expression on their face
that they weren't going to hire me.
I decided I didn't want to be on welfare all my life,
so I had to do something.

I started teaching myself in my own way.
I had a real bad problem filling out forms.
I'd go to different companies and pick up applications
and try to fill them out. If I didn't understand a word,
I'd look it up in the dictionary.
Or I'd ask a friend to explain it to me.

I'd go out to a construction site
and watch people work for hours and hours.
I would pick up on things like operating machinery really fast.
It was like kids' games to me. Then I would apply for a
job there. I'd say I had experience and grade 10.
It worked once, so I kept doing it.

Sometime along the road I got fired from a job
because of my drinking. My wife left me and took the kids.
I fell apart and I really hit bottom.
I'd look at the people on the street
partying, drinking, taking drugs.
I began to realize that a lot of the people I knew
were already dead from drug overdoses or getting hit by cars.
That really started to make me think.

I met a wonderful woman. She taught me a lot of things.
She made me open my eyes to life, to myself,
how things can really work out if you try hard.
This woman would read to me about things
that were happening around the world.
If I didn't understand she would tell me what the words meant
and how they were related to how we live.
We'd talk over coffee or a meal.
I thought to myself "Maybe there's a chance for me yet."

Not everyone has a chance to get an education.
Like farm families - everybody has to help at certain times.
If you don't bring in the crops when it's time
then you don't have money to live.
And a Native man - if he's trapping, he moves his family
into the bush and there's no way to get the kids to school.
I guess even in the city it's the same way. Poor kids have to
quit school at an early age and go to work to support
themselves.

It seems like you have to be hurt or on compensation
before the government pays you to upgrade your skills.
There's no leeway for people to better themselves.
Either you go look for work or you get cut off welfare.
But if you have no education you can't get a job.
You're always looking over your shoulder -
when am I going to get cut off?
I don't think anybody on welfare ever feels really safe.

I've met a few social workers that were really rude.
I don't know if it was because I was an Indian
or because I was in between dumb and smart.
I just didn't like their attitude.
If I got angry enough I'd like to tell them:
"If it wasn't for us people, you wouldn't have a job either."

If they ask you how come you haven't got a job,
and you tell them you've got no education, they ask you why.
Then if you tell them "You won't let me",
it's always someone higher up.
I can understand the social workers' problem, though.
They have to go by the policies that are handed down to them.
I'm sure they take a lot of abuse -
maybe it makes them harder.
It's really not their fault.
It's the government that makes the rules.

The government has to
open the doors to education to everyone.
Then when the social worker tells you to look for a job,
you won't have to be afraid
because you can fill out any form
and walk proudly and say:
"I can do the job if you give it to me."

I like being involved in volunteer work
but I don't like feeling taken advantage of.
Sometimes groups use disabled people
or ethnic groups or learners to get funding
and then forget them when the money comes through.

I've heard a worker brag that he doesn't need to come to work when I'm here because I can do the job better than he can.

I'm doing the work and he's getting paid.

It's good to be made to feel important but it's not good to feel like an unpaid servant.

It hurts for your so-called friends to treat you like that.

I don't know if they even realize they're doing it.

Discussion questions

- Do you agree that not everyone has a chance to get an education?
- Do you think that everybody has the same chance to get a job? Why do you think that is?
- Many of the people in prison are Native people. After reading this story, what do you think are some of the reasons?
- How does your community treat Native people?

Did you know?

- From the 1890's to the late 1960's, most Native children were educated in a system of residential schools. They were taken from their families at an early age and not allowed to speak their own languages or follow their own religion. This system badly hurt many Native children, families, and communities. Now Native people and communities are finding ways to heal the damage that was done.
- Some people who study our justice system believe that our prisons are places to store and punish our unemployed, undereducated poor people. Many Native people in Canada don't have much education, have trouble getting jobs, and are poor. They are also 5 times as likely as white people to be sent to jail for their offences .
- Many towns and cities have Native Friendship Centres, where community members can meet and get help with personal and family problems. The centres also help Native people and others learn more about Native languages and cultures.

Suggestions for action

Get in touch with a Friendship Centre near you to find out how you can help them or they can help you. If you don't know where the nearest one is, call or write to
The National Association of Friendship Centres
396 Cooper Street, Ottawa, Ontario K2P 2H7
Tel.: (613) 563-4844

Call your local welfare office to find out about the rules for people on welfare who want to go to school.

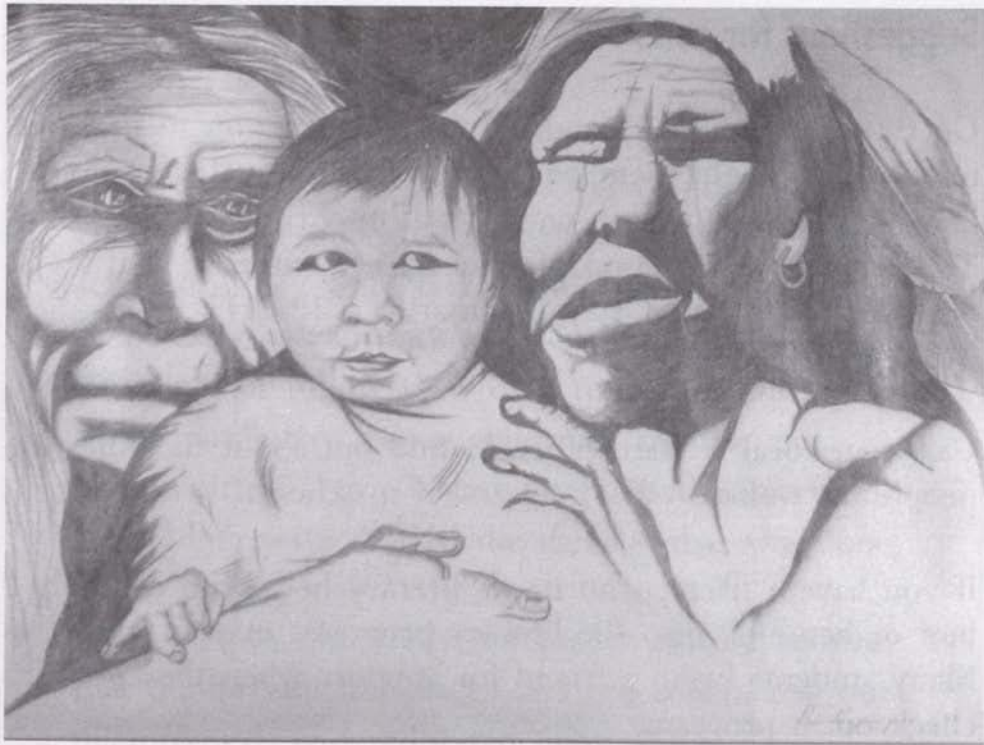
If you have a friend who needs literacy help, you can help him or her look into the literacy programs in your area. Many students bring a friend for support when they go to check out a program.

Services in your community

Friendship Centre

Welfare Office

Literacy Programs



Friends of the Family - Ron Paypompée

My dream was always that someday my kids would look back and remember this as a good time and place

My mom raised 5 kids on her own.
She brought us up to see ourselves as capable
of whatever we wanted to do.
We were poor, but we had pride and self-respect.
We were taught to be fair and not judge people.
But people judged us and blamed things on us
just because of our poverty and our family situation.
I always felt that we were being punished
for something we didn't do.
Mom didn't like to fight back, but I rebelled -
people should meet you halfway.

I've lived in this public housing community for 21 years.
I came here as a young mother on my own with 2 kids.
I was determined to be independent
and to make a decent life for my family.
I hadn't been here a year before I got involved
in the community association.
At that time we were working
to get sports programs for the adults and kids.
I saw it as building a better community
for my kids to grow up in.
My dream was always that someday they would look back
and remember it as a good time and place.

We have some problems here with the teenagers.
There are gangs, and some of them are racial gangs.
People are scared and fed up and for awhile
some of the white people said they just wanted to move out
and leave it to the black people.

Complaining about the problems to the Housing Authority
and the police was taken as racial prejudice.
It was getting nowhere.
The last straw was when some kids tried to set a fire
under a neighbor's gas meter.
The neighbor complained to the parents.
The parents came out fighting.
Practically the whole community got into it.

I went to the newcomer women and said, "You're on welfare,
you have no husband, your kids are in trouble.
Your kids are going to end up in jail.
It's the same for all of us. We're all in the same boat.
We have to do something.
Talk to the other women. Talk to your kids.
What do you need? What are we going to do?"

We set up a multicultural committee of community members
to look at the problems.
People are learning more
about each other's culture and background.

This helps us understand what other groups are up against.
Different cultures have different rules,
and some of our ways may be against each others' beliefs.

The community has to define its own problems and needs.
It can't be done from the outside.
You have to listen to people,
not just tell them what you think is good for them.
People are always coming in here
with programs they think we need.
Some of them maybe we do need,
but we need them to fit our lives
and we need them to last more than a year or so.

In a way, the community is our family.
We fight, but so do all families.
We're hanging in there and working together
to find solutions to our problems.
We've got to help each other get that hope back.

Discussion questions

- What is racial prejudice? Why does it happen?
- Can you think of times when you had a problem in your community? What happened?
- Do you know your neighbors?
- What is your community like? Do people feel they have problems in common, or do they feel other people are the problem?

Did you know?

- Tenants in many public housing communities or housing co-ops have gotten together to solve problems or set up services they need. Some examples are:
 - Women's Groups and Centres
 - Block Parents and Neighborhood Watch programs
 - Parent-child drop-in centres
 - Family literacy programs
 - Lunch and breakfast programs
 - Homework help programs
 - Safety audits.

Suggestions for action

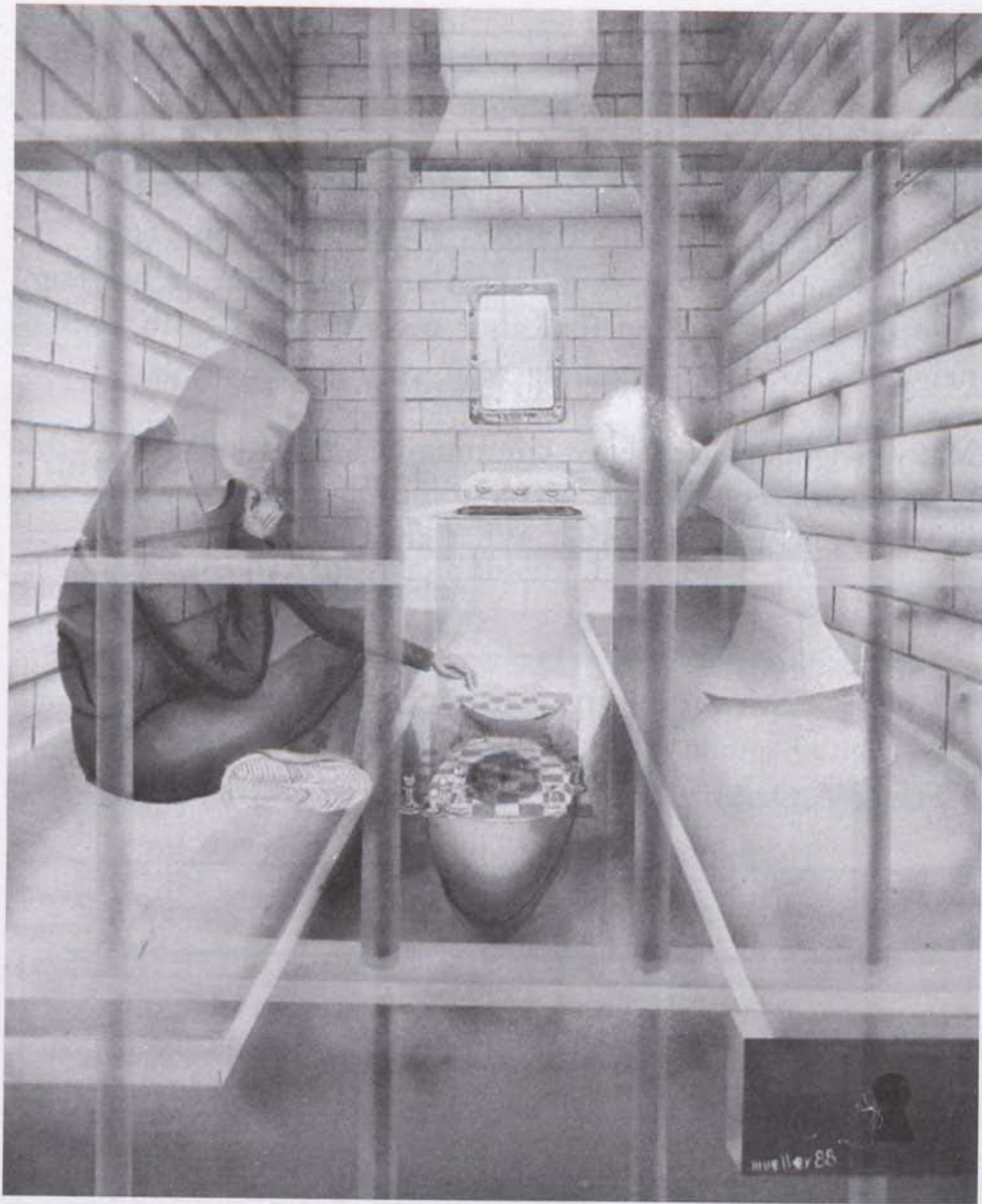
If you are a tenant in public housing, you could find out if there is a tenants' group there. Housing co-ops need members to help make decisions about the co-op. You could get involved in your tenant's organization or housing co-op, or start looking for other ways to work with your neighbors to start something your community needs.

Many neighborhoods have community associations that work to make the community better in any number of ways. Is there one in your area? What are they working on?

Services in your community

Tenants' Organizations

Community Associations



Only A Pawn In Their Game - Bjorn Mueller

I knew the difference between right and wrong, but I just couldn't relate it to myself

I started a steady life of crime when I was about 12 or 13. I stole because I didn't know any other way to get what I wanted.

The first time I stole, it was with the girl next door. She was three or four years older than I was. There was a pop company a few doors down. They used to leave bottles in the back. This girl would boost me over the back fence. I'd take the bottles and we'd each get 1 cent for them.

We had a big family of 14 kids. It was Depression times. My dad was an alcoholic. I sold newspapers on the corner as soon as I was old enough. When I was 14 I worked delivering ice. But I had to give all the money I ever got to my mother because my dad was out on a bender.

I always knew the difference between right and wrong, but I just couldn't relate it to myself. I was an altar boy until one of the brothers grabbed me by the ass and I smacked him. And there was my dad telling us to go to church. He made us go to church, while he stayed home and got drunk.

I never went past grade 8 till I was in prison.
I didn't go to school because it was a sign of weakness
for the guys I hung out with.
You didn't take courses that might help you.
You didn't go to church. You didn't go for counselling.
All these things made you look weak.
You had to be strong or you'd never survive.
So I turned into a tough little bastard.

Once a bunch of us tried to get into a boys club.
They had boxing there and other activities.
But the club wouldn't let us in.
They said we'd be a bad influence on the other boys.

Sometimes I felt there was an area in my brain
that was blocked off. I could read and write but not very well.
I had difficulty accepting, understanding.
I didn't like anybody bossing me around.
If people didn't talk at my level, I'd just turn them off.
Consequences didn't mean anything to me.
I figured I wasn't going to get caught.
I'd just block that out of my mind.
I had a really short attention span.
They'd call me "two-hour Jones" because in my adult life
I couldn't keep a job longer than 2 hours.
Even back then I wondered what was wrong with me.

I felt lonely a good part of the time.
Sometimes I used my skills at stealing and conning people
to buy friendship.
People figured out pretty quick that I'd do anything on a dare.
When a bunch of us guys were sitting in a bar
and we ran out of money,
if one said "I bet you're afraid to break into the bakery",
I'd go and break into the bakery
and come back to the bar with money
and we'd keep on drinking.

It got so I took real pride in being the best.
When I put my mind to stealing, I was good.
I was a good con man. I made a lot of money.
I relished the reputation I had.
People said that if only I could channel this energy
in a positive way, I could do anything.
But nobody told me how to do it.
It wasn't until I was almost forty years old and I found out
about a self-help group run by the Seventh Step Society
that somebody finally gave me a way to turn my life around.
They said "You have to stop breaking the law.
You've got to make a commitment to the guys in the group."
They put me on the "Hot Seat"
to help me face the truth about myself.
I finally, for the first time, felt like I belonged.
What turned me around was having the chance
to do things in a positive way with the support of friends.

I've been out of prison for 25 years now.
I finished my high school, went to college
and got a university degree.
In university I studied emotional growth and maturing
and how they relate to criminal behaviour.
Through these studies I was able to understand myself better,
but for me, that self-help group back in prison
turned my life around.

People told me I was stupid so often that I believed them.
I was told by police, prosecutors, judges and correctional staff
that a "leopard does not change its spots".
They were wrong. There was always a caring spark in me,
and when I put my mind to something, I do it.

I really think that we need to start community self-help groups
for young people, to use peer pressure in a positive way.
Kids in crisis need recreation programs as well,
to give them something to do.
We need our school systems
to concentrate more on reading and writing.
We need to give kids the chance to understand themselves
and to learn they can do something positive,
so they don't have to wait till they are forty years old
and have fifteen years of prison behind them.

Discussion Questions

- Why do you think some people feel that they can't learn?
- When you were growing up, did the things people said were right and wrong make sense to you?
- Some people believe it is easier to understand things when you are taught to think and feel new things at the same time. Do you agree?
- How could we try to help young people understand themselves and learn that they can do something positive with their lives?

Did You Know?

- Government statistics tell us that in 1994 the Canadian Criminal Justice System cost the Canadian public 9.3 billion dollars. This means that every man, woman and child in Canada paid about \$2,800 to support our justice system.
- It costs about \$51,000 each year or \$140 each day to keep one person in prison.
- A study done in Canada showed that our prisons are filled mostly with young men who were unemployed.
- The Seventh Step Society works to help people who have been in trouble with the law to lead a better life.

Suggestions for Action

Get together with some of your friends and neighbours and write to your local school board. Suggest that the School Board meet with local literacy workers to find ways to help students who are having trouble with reading and writing, or feel they don't really understand what they are being taught.

Invite someone from The Seventh Step Society to talk to your group about ways you can help young people who have been in trouble with the law to use their energy in positive ways. If they are not listed in your phone book, write or call The Seventh Step Society of Canada, 1177 11th Avenue, Suite 500, Calgary, Alberta, T2R 1K9, Tel.: (403) 228-7788.

Ask your local radio or Cable T.V. station if they would run a different kind of program on crime that shows how crime is connected to being poor, being unemployed, being abused and to people feeling like they don't belong. Get some people together to create a program. You could read some of the stories and facts in this booklet, or maybe you know people who would like to tell their own stories.

Learn more about ways of dealing with people who commit crimes that don't cost as much as prisons. These programs are sometimes called Diversion Programs or Alternate Measures Programs. Crime prevention organizations in your community may be able to help you.

If not, you can write or phone either The Church Council on Justice and Corrections, 507 Bank St., Ottawa, Ontario, K2P 1Z5, Tel.: (613) 563-1688, or the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Frye Societies, Suite 600, 251 Bank St., Ottawa, Ontario K2P 1X3, Tel.: (613) 238-2422

The booklets by Ruth Morris listed in the resource section at the end of this booklet also tell about different ways to understand and deal with crime.

You might also want to contact Strength in Sisterhood, a Vancouver based national group of women in prison and women who have been in prison at 7231 - 120th Street, Suite 407, Delta, B.C. V4C 6P5, Tel.: (604) 591-2076.

Services in your community

Diversion Programs

Alternate Measures Programs

Other Programs for people who commit crimes

Cable T.V. Stations

Radio Stations

Resources used for “Living Between the Lines”

The most important resources for the booklet “**Living Between the Lines**” were the people who agreed to share their life stories. We thank each one of them sincerely for their generosity, their openness, their wisdom and their time.

The references that follow are for the facts and figures used in the “**Did you Know?**” sections of the stories told in “**Living Between the Lines**”, and are provided to help people who want to learn more about the issues.

His teacher had written him off at 7 years old

Information for this section was provided by the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada.

A few of the schools are making a special effort

The Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation gave us information about their organization.

I felt like there was no place for me in the world

The statistic about the most common crime committed by young people came from the Statistics Canada publication "Juristat", Vol. 13, Number 5.

The facts on youth in care were provided by the National Youth in Care Network.

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada gave us information on their organization.

Some doors that opened for me were closed for too many of my old friends

The statistics in this section were taken from three sources.

Human Resources Development Canada, "Leaving School", Ottawa, Ontario, 1993

Gouvernement du Québec, "Portrait de la clientèle correctionnelle du Québec", 1993.

Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies

I didn't know how to go straight

The statistics in this section were also taken from the Quebec study referred to above and from information provided by the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies.

But then who takes responsibility?

These statistics on literacy problems were provided by the National Literacy Secretariat.

They're our kids ...

The facts on crime rates and danger to public safety are taken from the Statistics Canada publication "Juristat", Volume 14, Number 14 called "Canadian Crime Statistics, 1993".

Other points in this section are from pamphlets written by Ruth Morris in 1994 : "Just Give Us the Facts", "But What About the Dangerous Few", "A Practical Path to Transformative Justice" and "Creative Alternatives to Prison". You can order these booklets for \$1.50 each from Rittenhouse, A New Vision, 736 Bathurst St., Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2R4. Tel.: (416) 538-6900.

I don't know if it was because I was an Indian or because I was in between dumb and smart

The facts in this section were taken from "Just Give Us the Facts" by Ruth Morris, and from information provided by the National Association of Friendship Centres.

I knew the difference between right and wrong, but...

These facts came from "Just Give Us the Facts" by Ruth Morris.

