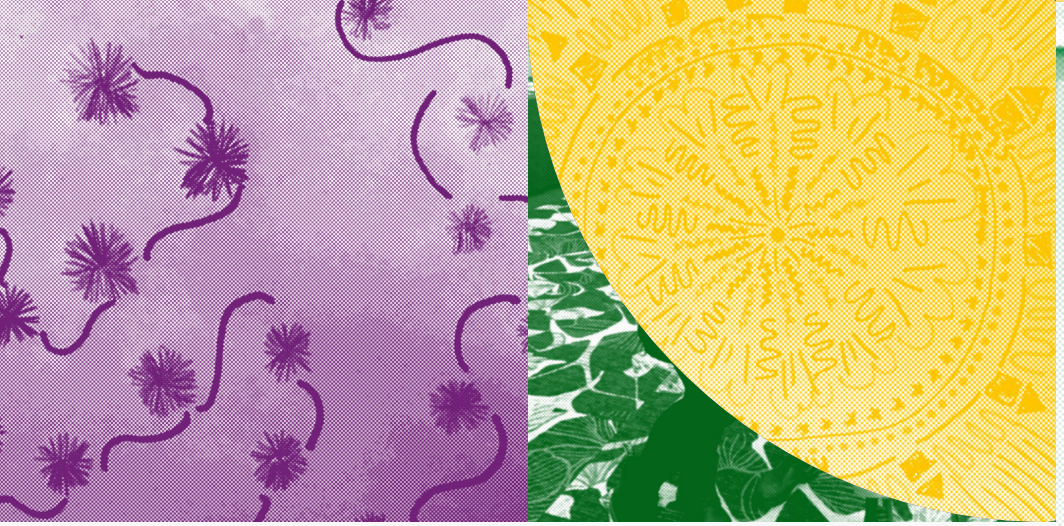
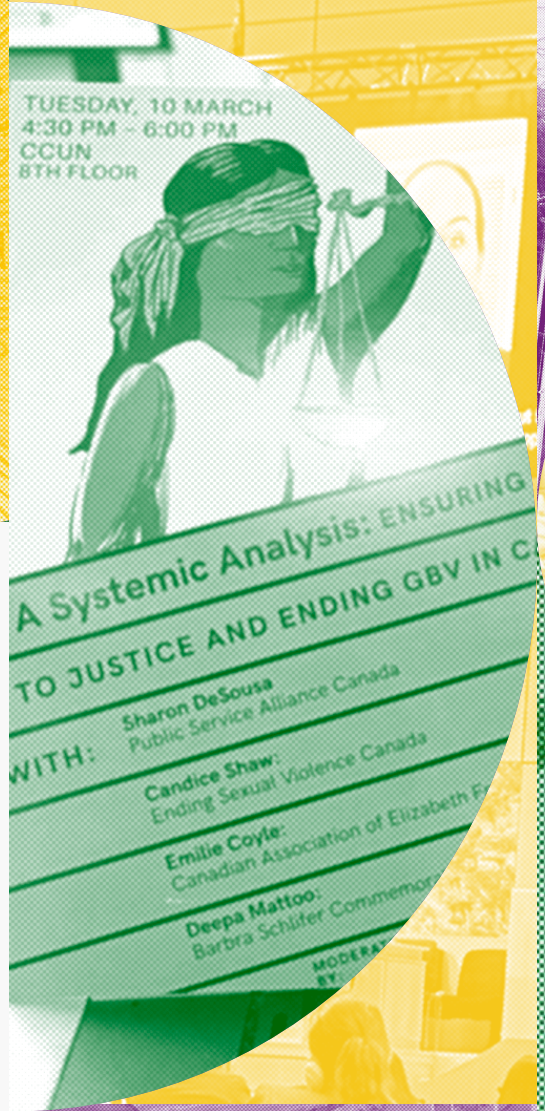










2025 – 2026

Annual Report

CAEFS

Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies



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A LETTER FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

We want to begin by thanking everyone in our network and beyond. Every achievement reflected in this report is the result of collective and community led efforts that allow us to advance systemic change at the national level. We reflect on this past year from a place of deep gratitude to our member societies, volunteers, lived experts, students, board members, staff, partners, funders, and supporters. Together, our network creates communities of support with more access to dignity, justice, belonging, and care that can withstand and meet the complex socio-political challenges that we currently face.

This year was one of growth, collective action. Across Canada and internationally, CAEFS and our member societies brought forward the harsh realities facing criminalized and incarcerated women and gender-diverse people into spaces where decisions are made, and nurtured structures that allow criminalized women and gender diverse people to thrive. Together, we strengthened our capacity, deepened relationship across the Elizabeth Fry network and advanced conversations about human rights, housing, gender-based violence, and decarceration.

A common thread ran through much of our work this year: a commitment to addressing the ways in which criminalization is caused rather than its consequences. Whether advocating for housing rights, challenging prison conditions, participating in international human rights processes, or supporting community-led programs, services, initiatives, and research, we consistently advanced the message that people thrive when they are supported, connected, and valued.

This year also marked an incredible milestone for CAEFS: the implementation of our Co-Executive Director leadership model. Grounded in feminist values of shared leadership, collaboration, trust, and collective care, we could not be more proud of how this model has evolved in iterative process, and we could not be more thankful for the creativity, resilience, and capacity it has enabled for our organization to provide robust, responsive, and expansive approaches to shrinking prisons out of existence, while we support the building of strong, well-resourced communities for all. At a time when many organizations are struggling with leadership succession and high rates of burn out among leadership staff, we embrace the strength and support we bring together, to one another, to our National Office Team, and to our wider network.

We also celebrate significant accomplishments across our network. Our Annual General Meeting and Network Gathering in Chilliwack, British Columbia, on the unceded lands of the Stó:lō Coast Salish Peoples allowed us to come together through art and community to strengthen relationships and renew our collective vision. Our new research centre, CRPOI, continued its remarkable growth, creating new opportunities for leadership in research led by communities who have experienced criminalization. Regional Advocacy continues to grow its capacity and strategic strength, supporting us to empower women and gender diverse people while they are in custody, and bring their experiences to national audiences toward systemic solutions, as we appear before parliamentary committees, participate in and drive important litigation, engage with United Nations human rights mechanisms, and raise public awareness to combat harmful narratives about incarceration in Canada.
We leave this year inspired by what we have built together, and grounded and prepared for the immense work that lies ahead.



NYKI KISH & EMILIE COYLE
Co-Executive Directors of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies



KELLY POTVIN
President of the CAEFS Board of Directors

our people *our power*

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) works to address the persistent ways in which women and gender-diverse people impacted by criminalization are denied humanity and excluded from community.

VISION

A world without prisons with strong and well-resourced communities for everyone.





Our National Teams

Alphabetical, by first name. 2025-2026 Fiscal Year

STAFF

Brianna Bourassa, Regional Coordinator: Lead Advocate, Northern/Pacific Regional Advocacy Team

Carla Devlin, Making the Link, Lead Researcher and Project Coordinator

Chafia Touati & Elizabeth Venczel, Administrative Assistants

Chanelle Lajoie, Advocate Support, Prairies Regional Advocacy Team

Emilie Coyle, Co-Executive Director

Fiona Traynor & Shelby Thompson, Lead Advocates, Atlantic Regional Advocacy Team

Jackie Omstead, Senior Advocate

Patrick Falle, CRPOI Coordinator

Tise Ogunleye, Lead Advocate, Ontario Regional Advocacy Team

Kelsey Timler, Post-Doctoral Fellow, CRPOI Development

Nyki Kish, Co-Executive Director

Sheri Pranteau, Consultant

Yvonne Johnson, Consultant

BOARD MEMBERS

Aleksandra Zajko

Alison Aho

Chantal Banman

Debbie Carriere

Jennifer Murphy

Kassandra Churcher

Kelly Potvin

Lindsay Martin

Megan Rutherford

Micki Materi

Nancy Martel

Wanda Gabriel

Member Societies



ATLANTIC
- Elizabeth Fry New Brunswick
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Cape Breton
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia

QUEBEC
- Société Elizabeth Fry Quebec

ONTARIO
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Ottawa
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Peterborough
- Elizabeth Fry Toronto
- Elizabeth Fry Simcoe Muskoka
- Elizabeth Fry Hope and Help
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Northeastern Ontario
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Northwestern Ontario
- Elizabeth Fry Kingston

PRAIRIES
- Elizabeth Fry Manitoba
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Calgary
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Northern Alberta

PACIFIC
- Kamloops & District Elizabeth Fry Society
- Prince George and District Elizabeth Fry Society
- Central Okanagan Elizabeth Fry Society
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver
- The South Cariboo Elizabeth Fry Society
- Archway Society

REGIONAL COUNCILS
- Council of Elizabeth Fry Societies of Ontario (CEFSO)
- Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba Elizabeth Fry Societies (ASMEFS)
- Pacific Elizabeth Fry Societies (PREFS)

We must not accept the mass incarceration of Indigenous Peoples as a reality or normalize it as a new reality of incarceration in Canada.



Addressing the Mass Incarceration of Indigenous Women and Gender-Diverse People

The ongoing mass incarceration of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people in Canada's prisons — making up more than half of those federally incarcerated in institutions designated for women, represents an unacceptable human rights crisis and is emblematic of the devastating legacy of ongoing settler colonialism. Addressing and contributing to solutions to this human rights travesty ran intentionally through all CAEFS priorities this year, and will continue to.

This year, we have worked to ensure we can support many decarceration efforts as an ally organization to Indigenous led programs, organizations, and initiatives, while we work to address conditions Indigenous women and gender diverse people under sentence face, and to advance systemic legal strategies. One priority across this work is to support the mobilizing of communities of impacted Indigenous women and gender diverse people, working side by side with them in solutions building.

What follows are a few highlights of this important priority that intersects through every facet of our work:

Making The Link

Finding and Supporting Federally Sentenced Sixties Scoop Survivors

Making the Link is a project generously funded by the National Sixties Scoop Healing Foundation of Canada.

This project team seeks to identify federally sentenced Sixties Scoop Survivors and their descendants in federal penitentiaries designated for women and in community on conditional release. Together, the team is collecting first of its kind insight into how many federally sentenced Sixties Scoop Survivors and their descendants are incarcerated in federal penitentiaries designated for women, and building connections between federally sentenced Survivors and community organizations that provide Sixties Scoop-related support.

A Survivor-Led Team

This year, **Making the Link** established themselves as a team, and designing a culturally grounded, community-informed program through a Survivor-led Indigenous team that includes Sixties Scoop and intergenerational Residential School Survivors, formerly federally incarcerated women, Indigenous social workers and mental health professionals, transformative justice practitioners, a Two-Spirit individual, and an Elder and Knowledge Keeper. Four of the First Nations women on the six-member team have lived experience of federal incarceration.

Carla Devlin — Lead Project Coordinator
Louella Tobias — Project Elder and Knowledge Keeper
Latasha Wilson — Project Advisor
Sheri Pranteau — Project Advisor
Kris MacMillan — Project Advisor

EXPERIENCE



Our team brings decades of experience advancing social justice through direct advocacy rooted in healing, empowerment, and community-building. We stand firmly with those who have been overlooked, silenced, or pushed aside.

CULTURE



Our team brings deep foundations of lived understanding, grounded in unique teachings and traditions, allowing us to create safe, respectful spaces in which participants are seen, heard, and empowered in sharing their experiences.

PERSONAL JOURNEYS



As a team, we carry shared wisdom shaped by lived experiences of surviving incarceration, colonial oppression, intergenerational trauma, and the impacts of the Sixties Scoop.

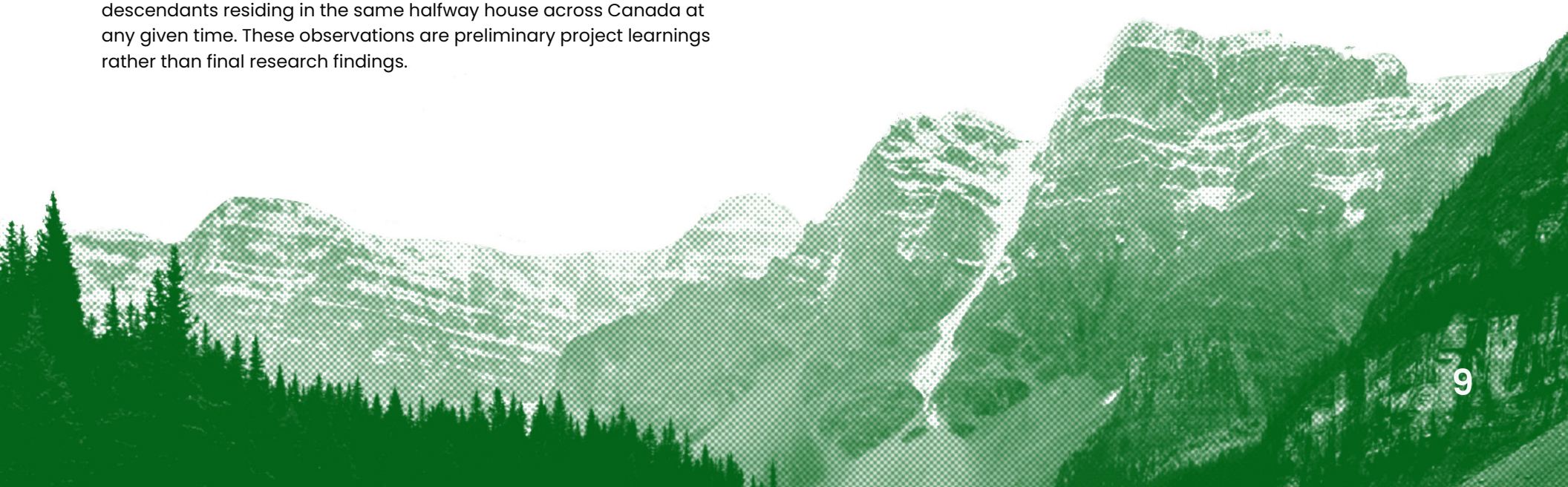
LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Foundational work has included project team relationship building and the development of a care and accountability-based operational framework; the creation of surveys, consent processes, and focus group frameworks using arts-based methodologies; wellness toolkits and gifts for participants; and the identification of emergent issues and needed solutions. All project activities were developed using trauma-informed, culturally grounded, and community-led approaches, guided by Indigenous community ethics.

Extensive national outreach was undertaken across halfway houses, Indigenous organizations, shelters, outreach services, and other community partners. This outreach revealed early insight into the significant systemic barriers faced by Survivors and their descendants, including the difficulty of locating Survivors after release, limited Indigenous representation in community residential facilities, unstable housing, mental-health and substance-use concerns, and disconnection from culturally relevant services. Notably, it was not possible to identify even two Indigenous women Survivors or descendants residing in the same halfway house across Canada at any given time. These observations are preliminary project learnings rather than final research findings.

WHERE THIS WORK GOES

Findings will be shared directly with federally incarcerated and formerly incarcerated Indigenous women and gender-diverse people through accessible, Survivor-specific resources distributed across participating sites using CAEFS' established networks. Anonymized findings will also be shared with Sixties Scoop-serving organizations to support knowledge mobilization, strengthen community responses, and ensure the benefits of the project are returned to the communities from which the knowledge originated. The project team is also committed to making presentations and creating resources nationally, and to building a research plan to scale the work to prisons designated for men.



At the Supreme Court



Meaghan Daniel
LAWYER FOR CAEFS



Jessica Rose
LAWYER FOR CAEFS

DID YOU KNOW?

Gender-based violence and mass incarceration of Indigenous women are not separate crises — CAEFS argues in court and at the UN alike that both trace back to the same root cause: settler colonialism.

R. V. COPE

Lawyers Meaghan Daniel and Jessica Rose represented CAEFS at the Supreme Court of Canada in R. v. Cope. CAEFS intervened because the Crown's reading of the sentencing provisions in section 718 of the Criminal Code, provisions designed to protect Indigenous women and their communities, risks over-criminalizing the very Indigenous women the law is meant to protect.

These provisions confront the ongoing crises of mass incarceration and gendered violence faced by Indigenous women and girls, both symptoms of the same root cause: settler colonialism. CAEFS argued the Court should reject the false choice between protecting Indigenous women and reducing the over-incarceration of Indigenous men — harm in communities is not neatly divided by gender. Incarceration does not heal; it perpetuates colonial harm, breaking ties to community, land, and responsibility.

Federal Court Judicial Review

Kate Engel, Lawyer for CAEFS



"CSC [knows] that the maximum-security unit at EIFW is not designed to adequately control temperatures within a safe and habitable range. As a result, the incarcerated people in the secure unit — the majority of whom are Indigenous — are made to endure excessively hot and cold temperatures that are inescapable, and that CAEFS views as inhumane."

CONDITIONS AT EIFW

On April 16, 2024, CAEFS filed an application in Federal Court under section 18.1 of the Federal Courts Act, challenging the legality of the Correctional Service of Canada's refusal to comply with its legal obligation to ensure safe and healthy living conditions at the Edmonton Institution for Women (EIFW) under section 70 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

Since at least 2006, CSC has known that the maximum-security unit at EIFW is not designed to adequately control temperatures within a safe and habitable range. As a result, the incarcerated people in the secure unit — the majority of whom are Indigenous — are made to endure excessively hot and cold temperatures that are inescapable, and that CAEFS views as inhumane. For well over a decade, CAEFS and incarcerated people have raised these conditions with CSC. Despite these efforts, CSC has not acted sufficiently to end them, and CAEFS holds that CSC has condoned conditions known to cause physical and mental harm to some of the most vulnerable people in Canadian society. The application was argued in Federal Court on June 11, 2025 by CAEFS' counsel, Kate Engel of Taylor Janis LLP.

Committee Appearances



Each year, CAEFS makes submissions to House of Commons and Senate committees on a variety of topics, including newly proposed legislation. In addition, CAEFS presents its work and analysis with partners and others who are interested in our work. Two examples from this year are highlighted below.

Both appearances reflected CAEFS' commitment to ensuring that parliamentary decision-making is informed by both research and lived expertise. At a time when public discussions about crime and safety have become increasingly polarized, we continued to advocate for policies that are evidence-based, responsive to the realities facing marginalized communities, and consistent with human rights obligations.

SENATE PRESENTATION ON BILL S-205 "TONA'S LAW"

In November 2025, CAEFS appeared before the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs in support of Bill S-205 (Tona's Law), an important initiative aimed at strengthening oversight, accountability, and protections within Canada's federal correctional system.

Drawing on the experiences of federally incarcerated women and gender-diverse people, CAEFS highlighted the ongoing harms caused by isolation and emphasized the need for meaningful safeguards to uphold human rights in federal prisons. We welcomed the bill's efforts to enhance accountability and advance more humane approaches within the correctional system.

BAIL AND SENTENCING REFORM

In October 2025, CAEFS appeared before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights during its study of Canada's bail system, sentencing practices, and responses to repeat violent offending. CAEFS', Co-Executive Director Nyki Kish provided testimony grounded in CAEFS' decades of experience working alongside criminalized women and gender-diverse people, as well as CAEFS' longstanding advocacy for evidence-based justice policy.

Our submission emphasized the importance of approaching public safety through prevention, community supports, housing, mental health services, and effective reintegration rather than relying solely on increasingly punitive responses. CAEFS highlighted how women and gender-diverse people who experience criminalization are often survivors of violence, poverty, homelessness, and systemic discrimination, and that reforms must take these realities into account if they are to improve safety and reduce harm.



Regional Advocacy

Increasing access to justice and monitoring conditions of confinement for federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people across Canada

CAEFS' Regional Advocacy Program works to increase access to justice and monitor conditions of confinement for federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people across Canada. We support incarcerated people to develop awareness, tools, and resources related to their legal and human rights, advocate alongside women and gender-diverse people navigating complex legal and administrative systems, and monitor conditions within federal penitentiaries — documenting systemic issues and advancing accountability.

"CAEFS is essential both in the lives of people who are currently incarcerated and to the broader Canadian public's understanding of human rights violations in prisons.

—
VOLUNTEER REGIONAL ADVOCATE,
ATLANTIC REGIONAL ADVOCACY TEAM

AT A GLANCE

The program is delivered by four Regional Advocacy Teams — Pacific, Prairies, Ontario, and Atlantic — with collaboration in Quebec. Teams are comprised of CAEFS staff, Peer Advocates, volunteers, local Elizabeth Fry Society staff, former Peer Advocates, and community members from diverse backgrounds.

1.

Monthly advocacy visits to Fraser Valley Institution, Edmonton Institution for Women, Grand Valley Institution, and Nova Institution for Women, with virtual advocacy support to Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge, and a consistent advocacy presence in Joliette Institution for Women through partnership with E Fry Quebec

2.

A national advocacy phone line, with a toll-free option for incarcerated people to connect with advocates

3.

Regular meetings with penitentiary management teams addressing systemic issues

4.

Monthly advocacy letters publicly documenting systemic issues, recommendations, and institutional responses

5.

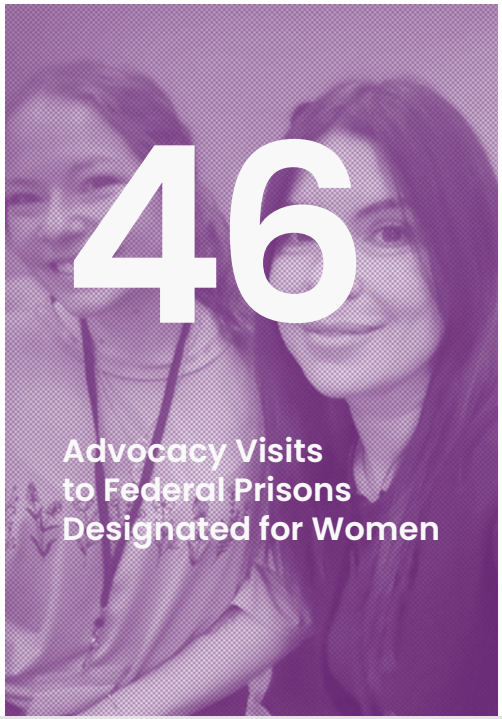
In addition to monthly institutional visits, CAEFS connects with federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people through advocacy phone lines, virtual meetings, evening drop-ins, and ongoing support for peer-led initiatives within penitentiaries.

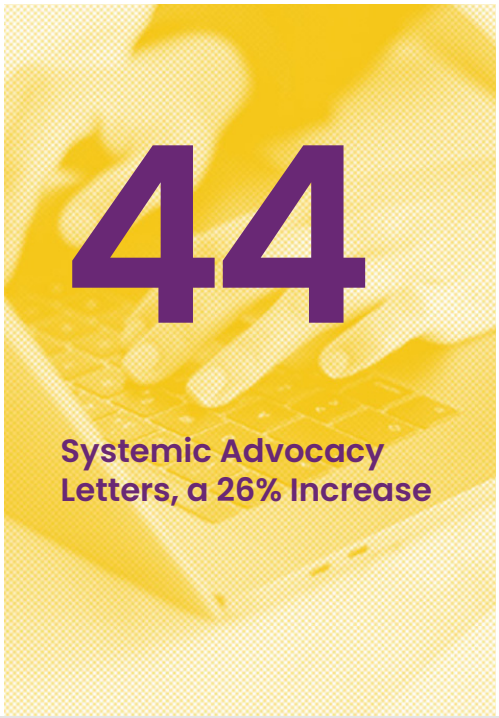


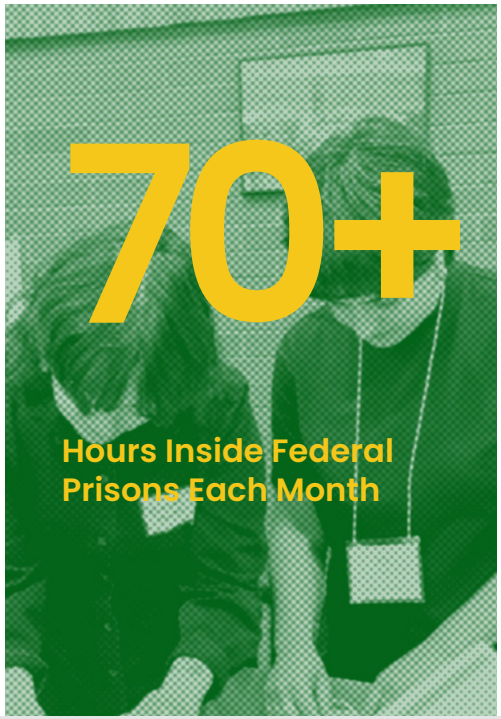
" I have found small wins stay with me, where a bit of advocacy pulls apart the barriers to family visits or dental appointments. Even just the labour of picking up breakfast pastries or snacks to share feels like a form of care, a way of building community.

— VOLUNTEER REGIONAL ADVOCATE, ONTARIO REGION

The Year in Numbers







In the 2025–2026 fiscal year, CAEFS Regional Advocacy Teams conducted 46 advocacy visits to federal prisons designated for women and produced 44 systemic advocacy letters documenting conditions of confinement. While the number of visits remained relatively consistent with the previous year, the number of advocacy letters increased by 26%, strengthening the evidentiary record of conditions experienced by federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people.

Each advocacy visit involves approximately 18 hours of direct engagement with incarcerated individuals, peer committees, and institutional representatives. Collectively, Regional Advocacy Teams spend more than 70 hours each month inside federal prisons, providing advocacy support, legal literacy education, independent monitoring of conditions of confinement, and building sustainable advocacy structures.

"When you're doing this work, you see positive change in the small, vital moments, like a person finally getting the specific resource they've been denied, or just seeing the visible relief on someone's face when they realize they actually have someone in their corner who is listening and fighting for them."

— VOLUNTEER REGIONAL ADVOCATE, PRAIRIES REGIONAL ADVOCACY TEAM

Volunteers: Building Community-Based Advocacy

The success of the Regional Advocacy Program depends on the commitment of volunteers across the country. During the year, volunteers contributed nearly 200 hours every month to advocacy efforts, including participating in advocacy visits, answering the advocacy phone line, responding to individual requests for support, creating written resources, and assisting with systemic advocacy letters.

We were pleased to welcome new volunteers to our teams this year while maintaining strong volunteer retention. Many members of our Regional Advocacy Teams have been involved in this work for more than three years, contributing valuable expertise, continuity, and institutional knowledge. Our volunteers bring diverse experiences and perspectives to this work, including people with lived experience, researchers, students, lawyers, healthcare professionals, community advocates, and former Peer Advocates.

Peer Advocacy

This year, CAEFS delivered Peer Advocacy Trainings at Fraser Valley Institution and Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge. These trainings support incarcerated individuals in developing advocacy skills, understanding their rights, navigating institutional processes, and strengthening peer-led support within federal prisons. Peer Advocacy is a recognized employment position through the Correctional Service of Canada, and over 15 federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people currently serve as Peer Advocates.

Peer Advocates continue to play an important role in connecting individuals with information, resources, and support while helping to identify systemic issues affecting their communities.

STUDENTS

In 2025–2026, CAEFS continued to support experiential learning opportunities for students interested in advocacy, human rights, law, criminology, social work, and community-based justice. This year, we welcomed two Pro Bono Law Students from Thompson Rivers University, two students from the University of Ottawa, and one student from the University of Alberta. Through placements with CAEFS, students engage directly with advocacy initiatives, systemic research, legal and policy analysis, and the realities facing federally incarcerated women and gender-diverse people.

I was inspired to become an advocate early, in my first year of incarceration. I had seen and experienced some pretty horrific things in those early months and while I didn't believe that I deserved better, I knew the women I was doing time with deserved better.

— Peer Advocate



LEAD ADVOCATES: SUSTAINING REGIONAL ADVOCACY

CAEFS' Regional Advocacy Program is coordinated by a CAEFS staff team of Lead Advocates who provide leadership, training, mentorship, and strategic direction across regions. Lead Advocates coordinate advocacy visits, support volunteers and Peer Advocates, respond to individual advocacy requests, prepare systemic advocacy letters, facilitate meetings with institutional management, and contribute to national policy and advocacy initiatives.

WHAT ADVOCACY ACHIEVED THIS YEAR

Advocacy contributed to improved access to family contact. At Edmonton Institution for Women, the Private Family Visiting Unit reopened for private family visits for the first time since 2018.

Access to programming in maximum security improved. At Edmonton Institution for Women, correctional programming became available in the maximum-security unit for the first time in approximately ten years.

Peer representation and knowledge sharing were strengthened. At Fraser Valley Institution, an Inmate Committee representative was hired for the maximum-security unit for the first time.
The full record of what we heard this year, our responses, and the improvements that followed is set out in Appendix A: Conditions of Confinement.

"I believe that the consistency of our presence in federal prisons designated for women — enabled by our structure — along with the clarity of our roles and the quality of training and supervision provided to Lead Advocates, is reflected in the strength of our relationships with incarcerated people, the trust they place in us, and the retention of our volunteers."

— CAEFS' Senior Advocate

"If CAEFS was not a part of the lives of those behind the wire, many would be lost and without hope. CAEFS brings a sense of peace, leaving an individual feeling heard and that they matter. Without CAEFS, the prison environment would be far more damaging.

— Former Peer Advocate and Current Volunteer Regional Advocate, Pacific Region

Showing Up, Making Change

OUR MEMBERSHIP - BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND STRENGTHENING OUR MOVEMENT

With Our Membership

CAEFS' national network of 22 local Elizabeth Fry Societies work in communities across this land known as Canada. While each society is deeply rooted in and responsive to its own community, we are united by a shared commitment to feminism, human rights, dignity, and community care. Together, we work to address the social, economic, and systemic conditions that contribute to criminalization and incarceration, while advancing community-based responses rooted in belonging, wellbeing, inclusion, and justice. Through collaboration, solidarity, and a belief in the power of collective action, we share knowledge, strengthen advocacy, support one another's work, and build a stronger movement for social change. By working together, we amplify our collective impact and create greater opportunities for criminalized and marginalized women, gender-diverse people, and their families to thrive in their communities.

CAEFS is a national network of 22 local Elizabeth Fry Societies

Why it Matters

Real change happens when communities work together. Our network amplifies local expertise, strengthens collective advocacy, and advances a shared vision of dignity, and belonging.

In-person Gathering and AGM in Chilliwack

Our 2025 in-person gathering and AGM took place in Chilliwack, British Columbia, bringing together leaders, advocates, board members, staff, volunteers, and lived experts from across the Elizabeth Fry network.

Over several days, participants engaged in strategic discussions about the future of the movement, shared promising practices from local societies, strengthened regional and national connections, and explored how we can continue responding collectively to the growing harms of poverty, housing insecurity, criminalization, and gender-based violence. The gathering deliberately created space for creativity, reflection, and community-building through art, celebration, and cultural exchange.

We were honoured to hear from Sara Tessier of the Northpine Foundation and Danielle Merasty, whose insights on belonging, reintegration, and community responsibility challenged us to think more deeply about what it means to truly welcome people home after incarceration. The Gathering reminded us that our strength lies in our relationships. Participants left beautiful Chilliwack with renewed energy, stronger connections, and a fun connection to the city after participating in our version of "The AMAZING RACE CHILLIWACK"



"CAEFS' member gathering and AGM was focused on building relationships, enjoying and making art, and learning about what it takes to be welcomed back into community post-incarceration. Having fun together!"

— AGM 2025



The artwork seen throughout this document were created at the AGM in Chilliwack in 2025

Visits to Local Elizabeth Fry Member Societies

This past year, CAEFS visited local Elizabeth Fry Societies across the country — from the Elizabeth Fry Society of Northwestern Ontario and the Elizabeth Fry Society of Northeastern Ontario, to societies across the Pacific region in Kamloops, Ashcroft, Vernon, Kelowna, Prince George, and Vancouver. Each community looks different, shaped by its own geography, history, and needs, offering everything from harm reduction, transitional housing, and bail programs to court support and children's spaces designed for safety rather than judgement. But what stood out most everywhere we went was how much these societies share an unwavering commitment to community, a refusal to let anyone be defined by their criminalization, and a deep, tangible sense of care in every space we visited. We are so grateful for the warm welcome we received, and left each visit inspired by the safer, more connected communities these societies are building every day.



REINTEGRATION – BUILDING PATHWAYS HOME

This year, CAEFS launched a

3 YEAR
reintegration pilot project

in the Prairie and Atlantic regions with generous support from the Northpine Foundation.

The project was created to strengthen the bridge between prison and community by ensuring that women and gender-diverse people have access to coordinated supports before and after release. Led by the local Elizabeth Fry Societies in the two regions, the initiative focuses on helping incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people navigate housing, health care, family reunification, income supports, cultural connection, and other factors that are essential to successful community reintegration.
The reintegration project builds on CAEFS' long-standing work inside federal institutions designated for women.
A collaborative approach helps ensure that concerns identified while people are incarcerated can be connected to practical, individualized supports as they prepare for release and return home.

Although only launched partway through the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the project demonstrated significant early momentum. Reintegration teams established a regular presence inside the Nova Institution for women, the Okimaw Ochi Healing Lodge, identified key Correctional Service of Canada staff, developed new partnerships with community organizations, created coordinated referral pathways across regions, and connected with hundreds of women and gender-diverse people. Early learning has reinforces what we have always known; that successful reintegration is rooted in relationships, continuity of support, and strong connections to community.

As the pilot continues, it will help strengthen the ability of our network to support women and gender-diverse people throughout their journey, from incarceration through to community reintegration and will look to expand to other regions across the country.



Across the Sector

CAEFS continues to sit on a number of coalitions and boards, working to bring our voice to a variety of sectors in order to by deepening their understanding of, and commitment to, the needs of federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people, and to advance shared goals.

- Leadership positions in the Fresh Start Coalition & NAACJ
- National Feminist collaborations
- Patient Advocacy Advisory Group
- Life Sentenced People Strategy Working Group
- Legal Aid Ontario's Prison Law Advisory Committee
- Trans Inclusion in Feminist Workplaces
- Demand Better pre-election campaign
- GAC-CSO Human Rights Dialogues

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT ON THE RIGHTS OF CRIMINALIZED WOMEN AND GENDER-DIVERSE PEOPLE

ICCPR

In February 2026, CAEFS joined over 30 other Canadian civil society members at the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland for Canada's review under the ICCPR, bringing independent research, lived expertise, and community-driven insight directly into an international human rights process. Our submission addressed the mass incarceration of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people, prison conditions and state obligations, institutional and legal frameworks, and gender-based violence in custody. Our goal: push governments to uphold their human rights obligations, not just in principle, but in practice.

CAEFS was pleased that the Committee's Concluding Observations underscored what CAEFS and our civil society partners had been asking for, including a sped-up timeline for the government to report back on its progress.

DID YOU KNOW?

The United Nations Human Rights Committee monitors how countries implement the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), a global human rights agreement adopted in 1966 and in force since 1976, and reviews whether they are meeting their obligations under it.

Fifty years of turning big ideas about human rights into concrete rules for how governments must treat people.

"The State Party should redouble its efforts to prevent and address the excessive use of incarceration of Indigenous peoples and persons of African descent. It should, wherever possible, make greater use of alternatives to detention, including restorative justice programmes."

— UN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE (CCPR), CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS ON CANADA, MARCH 2026



INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

UNCSW70

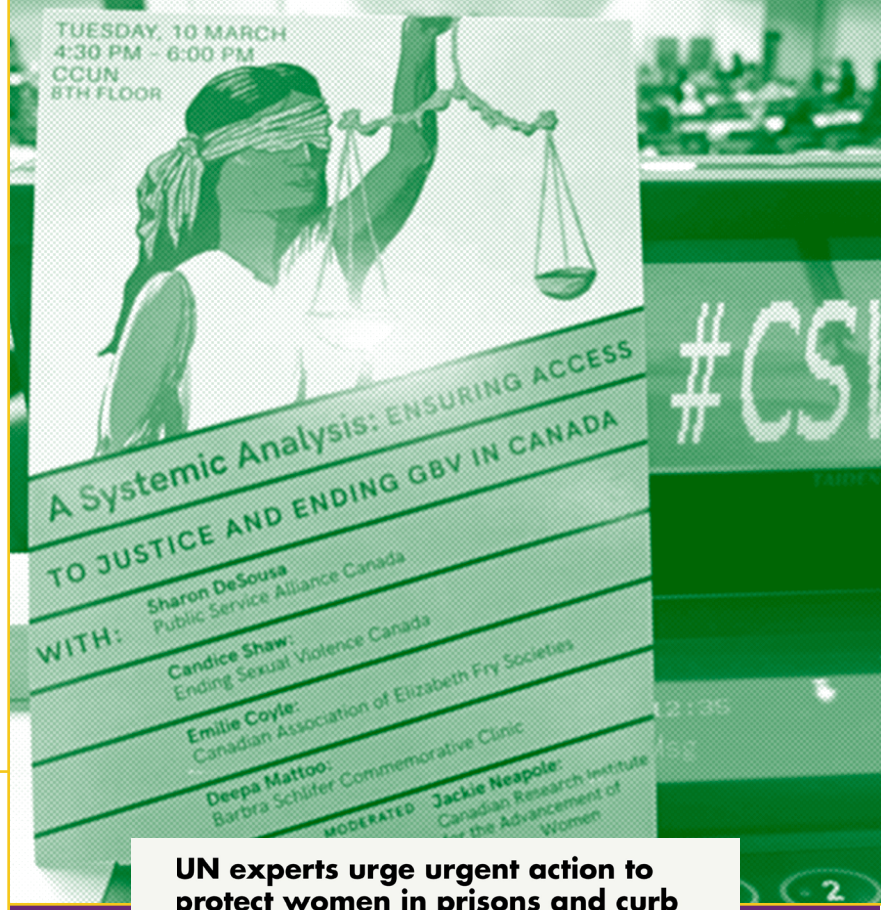
CAEFS was honoured to be chosen as part of Canada's official delegation to the 70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW70), led by Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE), alongside five other civil society organizations.

We were grateful for the opportunity to participate in a significant way in this important year, where the criminalization of women was recognized for the first time by the United Nations as part of the intersectional experience requiring attention, a meaningful acknowledgment of the work our members carry out every day.

CAEFS' Paper In preparation for advocacy for the 70th Commission on the Status of Women

In preparation for advocacy at the UNCSW70, the Canadian Beijing+30 Network commissioned several civil society organizations to write position papers on this year's priority theme, which was "Ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls", including by promoting inclusive and equitable legal systems, eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, and addressing structural barriers. CAEFS contributed a submission focused on the systemic failures of the Canadian justice system and what it will take to initiate substantive transformation.

CAEFS' paper makes the case that equal access to justice requires addressing the root causes of criminalization, not perpetuating cycles of harm. It exposes a system that criminalizes poverty and trauma and leads to the mass incarceration of Indigenous women, and speaks to a carceral system severely misaligned with international human rights standards.



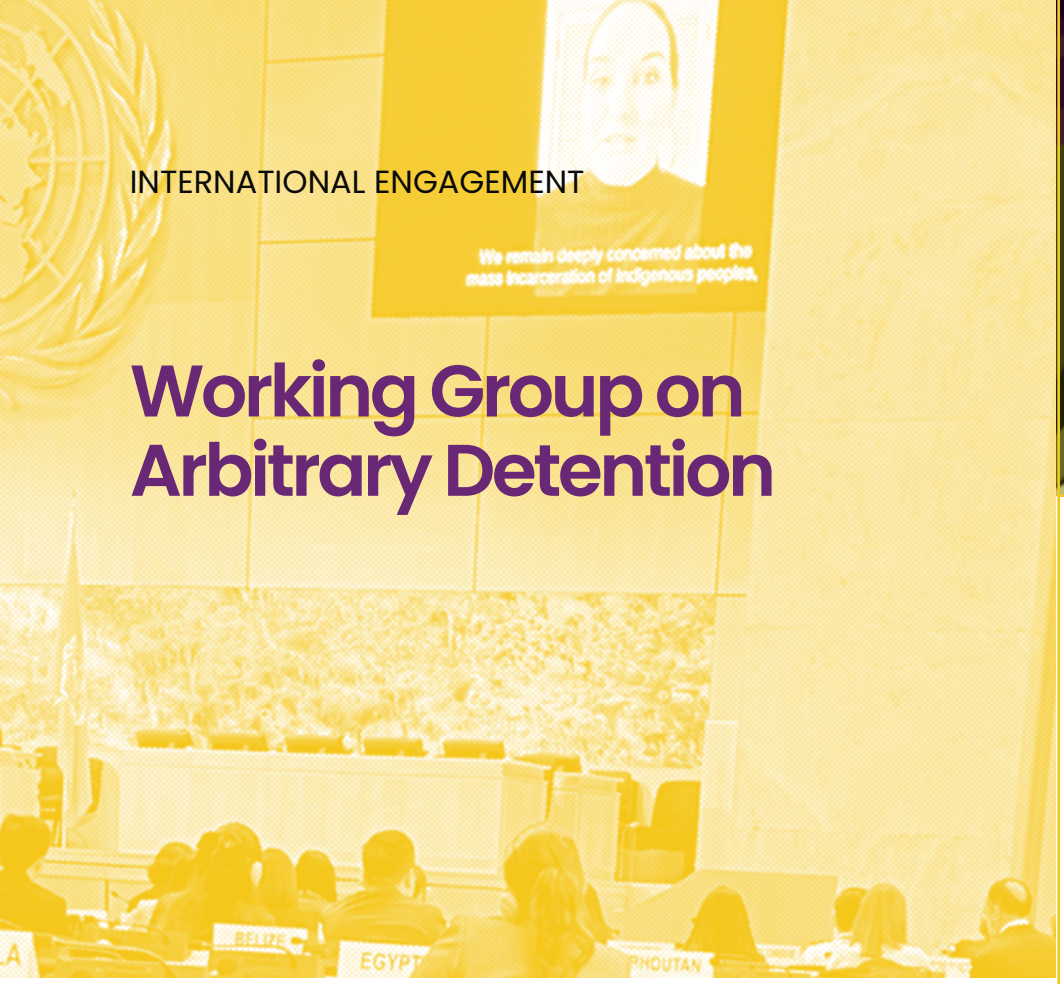
UN experts urge urgent action to protect women in prisons and curb over-criminalisation ahead of CSW70

"No amount of reform within the existing system of criminalization and punishment aligns with international human rights standards."

— Access to Justice for Women and Girls in Canada, CAEFS Paper for UNCSW70

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

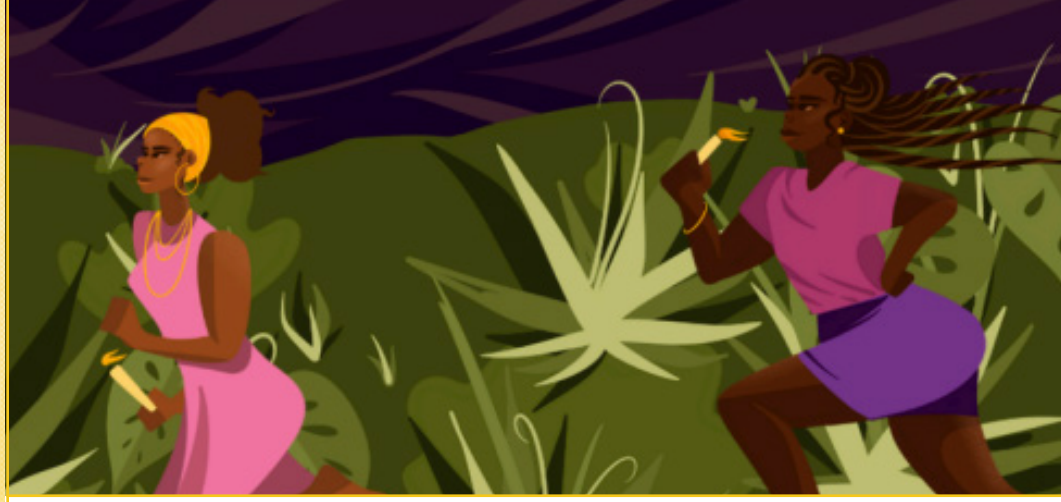
Working Group on Arbitrary Detention



This year, CAEFS responded to the findings of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention following its country visit to Canada. The Working Group raised concerns about the disproportionate impact of detention and imprisonment on Indigenous Peoples, Black communities, people living in poverty, migrants, and people experiencing mental health challenges.

When the report was presented to the United Nations Human Rights Council, CAEFS delivered a statement highlighting the need to reduce reliance on incarceration and invest in community-based responses that uphold human rights, dignity, and wellbeing.

The report affirmed many of the concerns CAEFS has long documented through its advocacy and provided an important opportunity to elevate the experiences of criminalized women and gender-diverse people on an international stage.



Global Dialogues for Change

What began as a conversation at the 2025 session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has grown into a dynamic cross-border collaboration reimagining justice beyond punishment from a feminist perspective. Out of that encounter, a collective space was born — led by Corporación Humanas, Inter Pares, CAEFS, Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights, and the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic — which launched a webinar series designed to amplify feminist movements and unpack punitivism and carcerality as responses to gender-based violence.

The dialogues centred on three main discussions: Strategies Challenging Punitive Models, Violence Prevention, and Practical Alternatives to Criminalization — exchanging strategies that centre survivor-led, community-based alternatives to justice grounded in prevention, healing, accountability, and collective care.

"Real safety cannot be built through more punishment, but through survivor-led, culturally grounded, and well-resourced community responses that address root causes and strengthen collective care. These alternatives are not theoretical — they are already happening. The question now is how we scale them, fund them, and stand behind them."

— Global Dialogues for Change: Community Safety Beyond Punitive Approaches

ALTERNATIVE FEDERAL BUDGET 2026

CAEFS contributed to the Alternative Federal Budget's vision for a safer, healthier, and more equitable Canada by advancing a roadmap to reduce reliance on incarceration and reinvest in communities. Rather than continuing to spend billions on prisons that do little to address the root causes of harm, the chapter outlined practical steps to shift resources toward housing, mental health care, addictions supports, income security, education, employment opportunities, and community-based services.

The chapter proposed a coordinated approach to reducing incarceration by 30 per cent by 2035 through investments in prevention, diversion, decarceration, and reintegration. Recommendations included criminal record reform, strengthened implementation of the Federal Framework to Reduce Recidivism, expanded community-based alternatives to custody, and increased supports for people both during and after incarceration.

At its core, the chapter challenged the assumption that prisons create safety. Instead, it argued that lasting safety is achieved when people have access to stable housing, meaningful supports, strong relationships, and opportunities to thrive. The roadmap offers a practical framework for gradually reducing prison populations while investing in the communities that make incarceration less necessary in the first place.

30% LESS BY 2035

The AFB offers a roadmap to meaningfully and responsibly reduce incarceration by 30 per cent by 2035.

— Alternative Federal Budget 2026, AFB Working Group

WHY IT MATTERS

Every dollar invested in housing, mental health care, education, and community supports is a dollar invested in preventing criminalization and reducing the need for incarceration. Building safer communities means investing in people, not prisons.

Housing is a Right

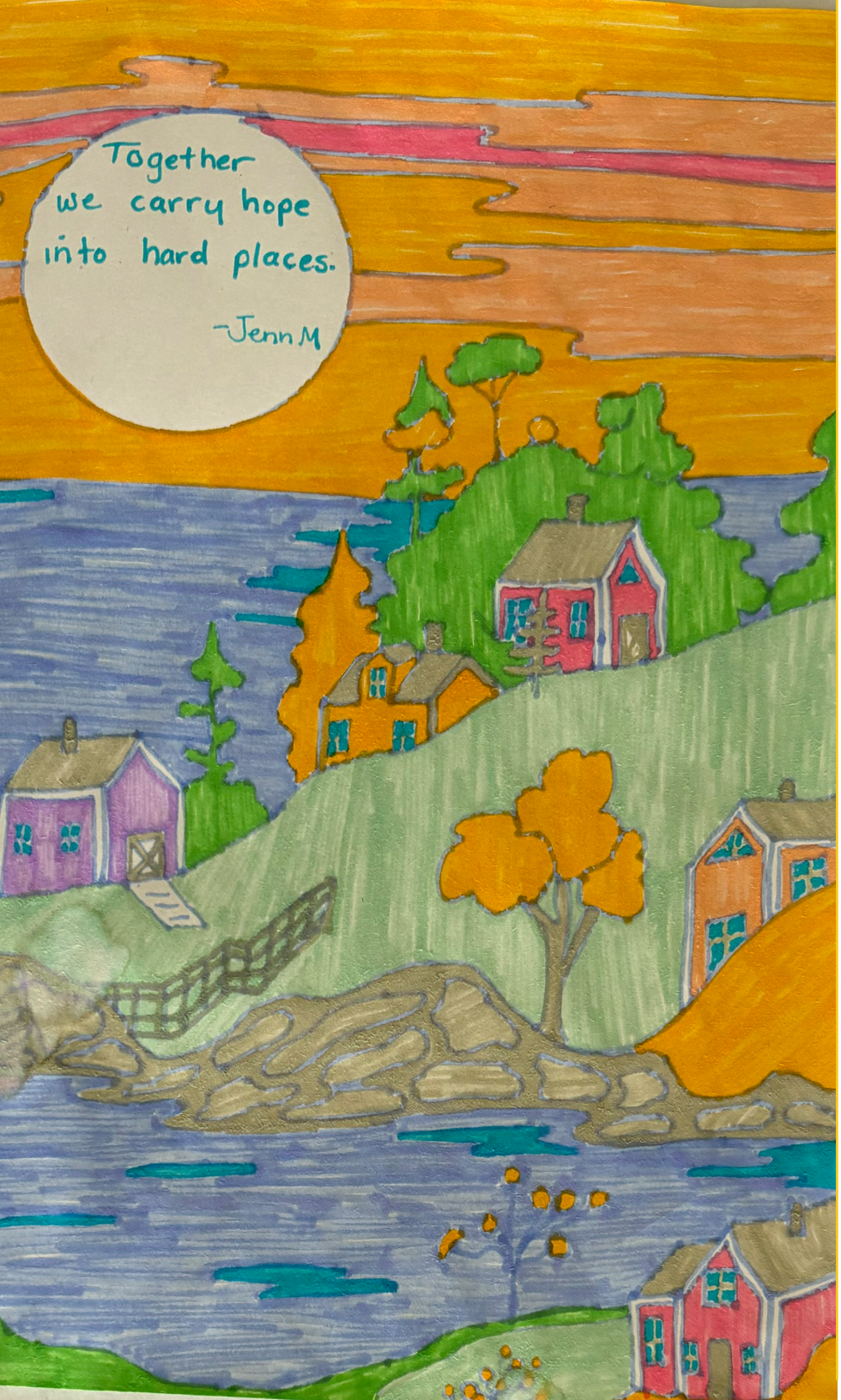
How CAEFS is naming the link between criminalization and housing precarity

Why Housing, Why Now?

Housing continues to be a national priority.

National legislation on the right to housing along with a national housing advocate, provide opportunities for us to share our voices in making the link between lack of adequate housing and criminalization. This work, based on the mandate of the Federal Housing Advocate created under the National Housing Strategy Act, gives formal avenues to raise these connections directly with government.





Elizabeth Fry Week 2025: The Right to Housing

The theme of Elizabeth Fry Week 2025 was "The Right to Housing," where we explored the linkages between criminalization, incarceration, and housing precarity. Highlighting these linkages is essential to understanding how systems of punishment disproportionately target and manage marginalized communities. Examining these intersections reveals how inadequate housing, homelessness, and poverty are too often met with carceral responses rather than meaningful social support — reinforcing cycles of exclusion and instability.

Throughout the week, we were honoured to share the advocacy of local Elizabeth Fry Societies across the country on housing-related issues for criminalized women and gender-diverse people. We also hosted a public panel on the national right to housing, featuring Stefania Seccia (Executive Director, Advocacy & Public Affairs, Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network), Michelle Biss (Executive Director, National Right to Housing Network), John Gordon (on the challenges and opportunities facing Indigenous housing providers), and Patti Pettigrew (Executive Director, Thunder Woman Healing Lodge Society).



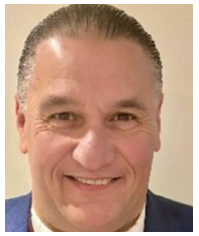
Stefania Seccia

Executive Director, Advocacy & Public Affairs, Women's National Housing and Homelessness Network



Michelle Biss

Executive Director, National Right to Housing Network



John Gordon

On the challenges and opportunities facing Indigenous housing providers



Patti Pettigrew

Executive Director, Thunder Woman Healing Lodge Society

The NEHA Review Panel

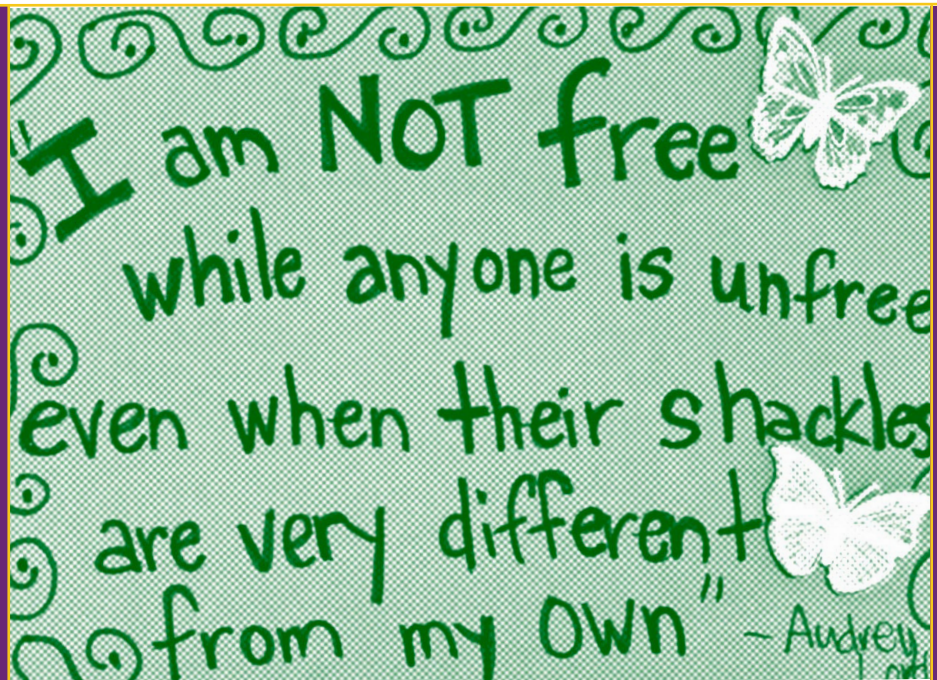
In 2025, CAEFS engaged with the review panel initiated by the National Housing Advocate (NEHA) to examine the conditions of homelessness for women and gender-diverse people in Canada.

Advocates, grassroots groups, lived experts, and national organizations mobilized by submitting testimony and participating in oral dialogues with the panel, which heard from over 500 individuals and groups, complemented by in-person gatherings, including one that CAEFS hosted alongside the Womens Housing and Homelessness Network in the federal prison and provincial jail in Nova Scotia. The result is a public record and the latest snapshot of how housing rights violations are impacting women and Two-Spirit, trans, and gender-diverse people in Canada right now.

Then on November 24, 2025, the NEHA Review Panel submitted its final report and recommendations to the Honourable Gregor Robertson, Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, which marked a pivotal moment in Canada's commitment to gender and racial equity in housing. The report centres the right to safe, adequate, and affordable housing for women, Two-Spirit, trans, and gender-diverse people, and the government's duty to uphold that right. Having listened to the people impacted, the panel concluded that Canada is not yet fulfilling the conditions needed to realize the right to housing in an inclusive, gender-responsive, and human rights-based manner.

"CAEFS was encouraged to see the NEHA Review Panel include the voices and expertise of criminalized women and gender-diverse people, including those living in prisons and under criminalization in the community. When people are punished instead of supported, criminalization does not solve aissues and makes it even harder for them to secure safe, adequate housing and exercise their human rights."

— Emilie Coyle, Executive Director, CAEFS



WHY IT MATTERS

Housing is a human right

— and it's often the first thing criminalization takes away. Safe, affordable, adequate housing is one of the most effective ways to prevent criminalization.

Research That Drives Change

The Centre for Research into the Processes, Outcomes, and Impacts of Incarceration (CRPOI) continues to grow as a national hub for collaborative, community-accountable, and justice-oriented research on incarceration in Canada. Operating under the umbrella of CAEFS, CRPOI brings together researchers, community organizations, legal and policy advocates, and people with lived experience of incarceration to support knowledge-building that strengthens advocacy, legal and policy reform, and systems change.

Supported by a SSHRC Partnership Development Grant, CRPOI contributes to CAEFS' goal of becoming a learning organization by building research capacity, strengthening partnerships, and mobilizing accessible knowledge grounded in lived experience. Academic collaboration is supported through partnerships with scholars and institutions across the country, including co-directors Dr. Tamara Humphrey (University of Victoria) and Dr. Helen Brown (University of British Columbia). CRPOI is staffed by Coordinator Patrick Falle, who oversees day-to-day operations; Kelsey Timler, who leads grant writing; and Brianna Bourassa, who acts as Projects Manager.

NETWORK GROWTH & COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Since launching in May 2025, CRPOI has grown to more than 160 members — including both individuals and member organizations across Canada — together representing upward of 350 people connected through the network. The network includes researchers, students, NGO representatives, legal and policy experts, members of the public, and 32 Expert Advisors with lived experience of incarceration who are motivated to collaborate on or lead research and advocacy initiatives. Roughly half of members identify as researchers, academics, or students, about a quarter come from NGO, legal, or policy backgrounds, and the remainder are CRPOI Expert Advisors and interested members of the public.

In its initial years, CRPOI has been guided by a National Steering Committee of 7–8 members with lived experience of incarceration, whose leadership helps ensure that CRPOI's work remains grounded in accessibility, community accountability, and meaningful participation. All Steering Committee members have experience leading and collaborating on research and advocacy projects spanning a wide range of topics related to incarceration.

CRPOI BY THE NUMBERS:

350+
Individuals Connected Through CRPOI

160+
Members Across Academic, NGO & Lived-Experience Groups

32
Expert Advisors with Lived Experience

3
CRPO Staff Members

7-8
National Steering Committee Members

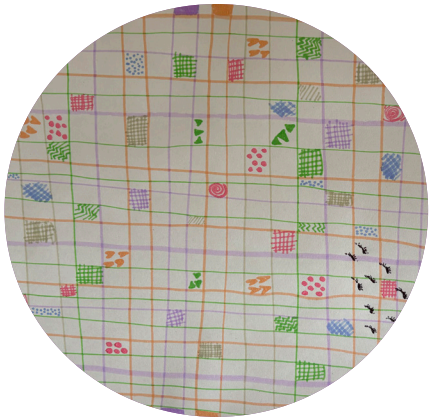
RESEARCH THAT DRIVES CHANGE

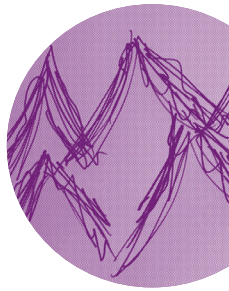
Certificate in Applied Research Methods

One of CRPOI's major accomplishments this year was launching the Certificate in Applied Research Methods, developed with the UBC School of Nursing, the University of Victoria Department of Sociology, and lived experience scholars and community experts. Created in response to feedback from the CRPOI community, the certificate addresses the need for practical research training for people with lived experience contributing to research as advisors, research assistants, collaborators, or participants.

The inaugural cohort supported 14 participants with lived experience of incarceration to gain university certification through four two-hour virtual sessions covering research foundations and ethics, design, data collection and analysis, and knowledge mobilization — plus weekly Homework Club sessions for assignment support and community building.

the certificate addresses the need for practical research training for people with lived experience contributing to research as advisors, research assistants, collaborators, or participants.





DID YOU KNOW?

CRPOI's first Certificate in Applied Research Methods cohort graduated 14 people with lived experience of incarceration — a new vocational pathway into research careers.

WHY IT MATTERS

A research network is only as strong as who it's accountable to. Nearly a fifth of CRPOI's network holds lived experience of incarceration — not as subjects of research, but as its co-leaders.

RESEARCH THAT DRIVES CHANGE

PAYMENT & HONORARIA GUIDE

Over the past year, the National Steering Committee developed a Payment and Honoraria Guide to support fair and equitable compensation for people with lived experience of incarceration contributing their expertise to research, teaching, speaking engagements, workshops, and more. The guide encourages researchers, institutions, and organizations to plan compensation more intentionally by recognizing preparation time, expertise, accessibility needs, and institutional context. It is in the final stages of review and will be published on the CRPOI website in the coming months.

MINI-GRANTS

CRPOI continued its mini-grant initiative to support community-led and early-stage research. This year, two projects led by Expert Advisors received support: one on program development and evaluation for older adults in a community-based residential facility, and another examining barriers associated with day parole, including bed shortages, parole conditions, and gaps between law, policy, and practice. CRPOI currently has funding available for six additional mini-grants and is exploring options to sustain and expand this work.

KNOWLEDGE SHARING & COLLABORATION

CRPOI continues to strengthen access to research and policy knowledge that supports evidence-informed advocacy and decision-making. Over the past year, the Centre added approximately 100 new resources to its members-only database — research articles, policy documents, and plain-language summaries of legal and policy developments — and circulated more than 30 calls for collaboration, participation, and project support across the network.

This year marked significant progress in CRPOI's development as a national research network rooted in lived experience leadership and community accountability — from growing our membership, to launching new training opportunities, developing compensation guidance, supporting community-led projects, and expanding access to knowledge.

This year, CRPOI has added approximately

100

new resources to its members-only database

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES CONFERENCE 2025

The 14th annual Critical Perspectives conference — hosted by CAEFS and the University of Victoria, and co-organized by the CRPOI national committee — took place in Victoria, British Columbia in May 2025.







THIS YEARS THEME:
"Transforming Justice"





This year's theme, "Transforming Justice," offered a venue for critical dialogue about how justice is upheld and undermined under current systems in Canada.

The conference brought together people working across academic and community settings to exchange ideas and weave diverse understandings of how practices of justice might be transformed across law, policing, sentencing, incarceration, politics, and community organizing.

APPENDIX A

CAEFS' Report On

Conditions of Confinement

2025–2026 FISCAL YEAR

Based on a review of 44 systemic advocacy letters from Grand Valley Institution, Edmonton Institution for Women, Fraser Valley Institution, Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge, and Nova Institution for Women, seven key themes emerged consistently across penitentiaries.

"Witnessing issues being brought up month after month, and slowly seeing them addressed is incredibly meaningful. Most of all, it is an honour to witness Peer Advocates and others inside become empowered to share their experiences, file complaints, and advocate for themselves."

— Volunteer Regional Advocate, Atlantic Regional Advocacy Team

These categories represent broad thematic groupings; many reported concerns intersected multiple categories. Given that Indigenous women and gender-diverse people make up over 50% of people in federal prisons designated for women, all of these issues disproportionately impact Indigenous women, and their concerns are woven throughout every major category.

44 SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY LETTERS

7 KEY THEMES

5 FEDERAL INSTITUTIONS

Most Frequently Reported Issues

based on number of letters

- 28 Access to Healthcare and Dental Care
- 28 Barriers to Conditional Release and Reintegration
- 25 Maximum-Security Unit Conditions
- 25 Physical Conditions of Confinement
- 24 Access to Family and Community Supports
- 20 Participation, Procedural Fairness, and Decision-Making
- 11 Indigenous Cultural and Spiritual Supports

commonly reported issues

1. ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE AND DENTAL CARE

Healthcare concerns were among the most frequently reported issues across federal prisons designated for women. Individuals described long waits for medical and dental services, difficulties accessing mental health supports, barriers to gender-affirming care, concerns regarding medication management, and inadequate responses to chronic pain and substance use needs, along with concerns about privacy and continuity of care.

“The healthcare concerns reported to advocates include access to urgent dental care, access to gender-affirming surgery, and access to a pain specialist in community. Each individual reported daily pain and a decreased quality of life due to their healthcare issues.”

— May 2025 Advocacy Letter, Fraser Valley Institution

2. BARRIERS TO CONDITIONAL RELEASE AND REINTEGRATION

Individuals reported barriers affecting their ability to prepare for release and successfully reintegrate into the community, including delays in parole preparation and security reviews, limited access to educational and vocational opportunities, insufficient programming, and challenges navigating correctional planning processes.

“People expressed that reductions in post-secondary education opportunities impede their ability to develop themselves vocationally and educationally while in prison, reducing long-term opportunities.”

— August 2025 Advocacy Letter, Grand Valley Institution

3. MAXIMUM-SECURITY UNIT CONDITIONS

Individuals housed in maximum-security units reported some of the most restrictive living conditions documented in advocacy letters this year, including limited access to programming, employment, outdoor time, telephones, and personal interaction, alongside poor food quality and a lack of transparency regarding classification decisions and transfers.

“Several individuals stated they feel ‘warehoused’ with limited access to activities and programming despite wanting opportunities to progress with their correctional plans and reduce their security classification.”

— May 2025 Advocacy Letter, Nova Institution for Women

4. PHYSICAL CONDITIONS OF CONFINEMENT

Individuals continued to report concerns regarding the physical environments in which they are confined: extreme temperatures, inadequate ventilation, overcrowding, barriers to accessibility, reduced access to outdoor spaces, and insufficient hygiene resources.

“Individuals brought up effects of extreme heat — lethargy, nausea, being generally overwhelmed by the heat, and the hardship of not enough airflow in houses.”

— June/July 2025 Advocacy Letter, Nova Institution for Women

5. ACCESS TO FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

Maintaining family and community connections remains a significant challenge, with concerns including delayed mail delivery, restricted phone access, barriers to visits and correspondence, difficulties accessing Escorted Temporary Absences, obstacles to maintaining parent-child relationships, and inter-regional transfers.

"Reports from people at OOHL indicate difficulties maintaining close family contact through both Escorted Temporary Absences (ETAs) and phone calls."

— October 2025 Advocacy Letter, Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge

6. PARTICIPATION, PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS, AND DECISION-MAKING

Individuals reported concerns regarding their ability to meaningfully participate in decisions affecting their liberty, correctional planning, and daily lives — including limited consultation on correctional plans and security reviews, delays in decision-making, barriers to accessing information used in correctional decisions, and limited opportunities to resolve concerns informally.

"People reported feeling as though unsubstantiated peer allegations are being included in their CSC paperwork and that these allegations are impacting their ability to progress on their correctional plan and access conditional release."

— June 2025 Advocacy Letter, Fraser Valley Institution

7. INDIGENOUS CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL SUPPORTS

Indigenous individuals reported ongoing barriers to accessing cultural, spiritual, and ceremonial supports, including inconsistent access to Elders, limited Indigenous-specific programming, and the handling of sacred medicines and ceremonial items during institutional searches.

"Individuals reported that CSC staff searched their sacred medicine bundles during routine cell searches without observing appropriate cultural practices or protocols. This search practice was described as violating and disrespectful."

— November 2025 Advocacy Letter, Edmonton Institution for Women



Responding to What We Heard

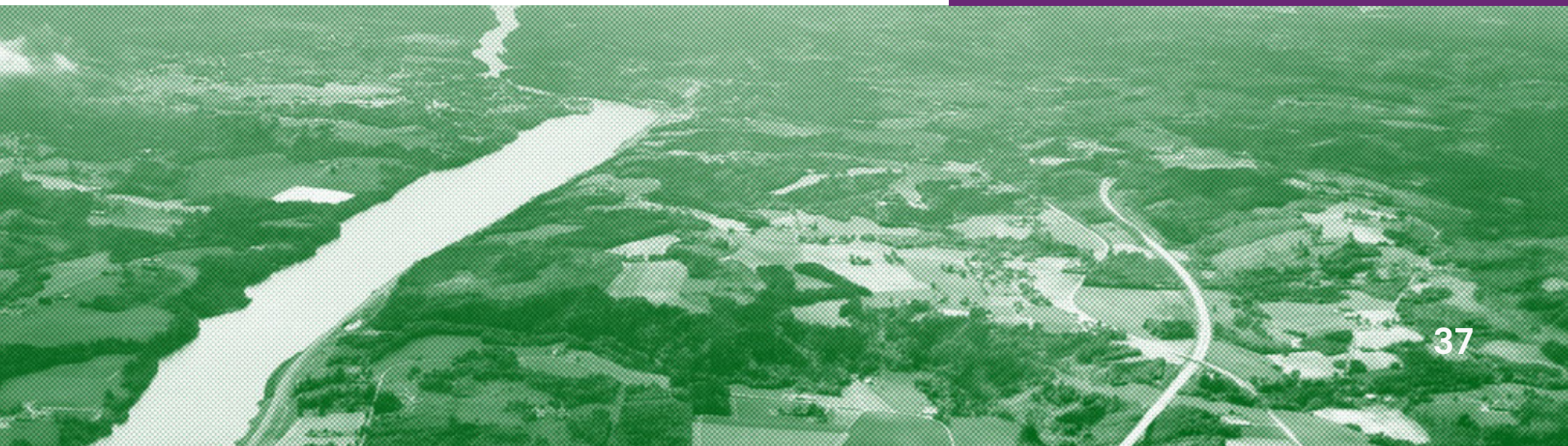
Throughout the year, CAEFS used individual and systemic advocacy to raise concerns directly with institutional management teams and support women and gender-diverse people in addressing barriers affecting their wellbeing, rights, and reintegration. Our advocacy teams held nearly 50 meetings with institutional management teams at the federal prisons designated for women, and engaged directly with senior management to raise pressing concerns between meetings and respond to emergent issues such as Structured Intervention Unit placements and institutional lockdowns.

Our letters include recommendations aimed at improving access to healthcare, strengthening family and community connections, removing barriers to conditional release and reintegration, expanding Indigenous cultural and spiritual supports, increasing participation in correctional decision-making, and ensuring dignity-preserving conditions of confinement — consistently advocating for trauma-informed, person-centred approaches grounded in the principles of Creating Choices, procedural fairness, meaningful consultation, and the use of the least restrictive measures possible.

Our advocacy letters and institutional discussions also informed national-level work between CAEFS leadership and leadership within CSC's Women Offender Sector, contributing to policy discussions and practice improvements. We supported dozens of women and gender-diverse people in filing complaints and grievances, shared advocacy letters and other evidentiary records with civil-society organizations and coalition partners, and prepared submissions and support letters related to parole, security reclassification, employment opportunities, and other correctional decisions.

"The inclusion of incarcerated people in decisions about their correctional programming and liberty is foundational to realizing the principles of Creating Choices and the purpose of the CSC."

— May 2025 Advocacy Letter, Fraser Valley Institution



Concrete Improvements This Year

First private family visits since 2018 at Edmonton Institution for Women

Advocacy contributed to improved access to family contact: at Edmonton Institution for Women, the Private Family Visiting Unit reopened for private family visits for the first time since 2018.

First-time maximum-security representation at Fraser Valley Institution

Peer representation and knowledge sharing were strengthened: at Fraser Valley Institution, an Inmate Committee representative was hired for the maximum-security unit for the first time, and CAEFS began a regular column in the Inside Ink newsletter highlighting key advocacy issues.

Improved access to dental care at Grand Valley Institution

Some healthcare barriers were addressed: at Grand Valley Institution, consistent documentation and a group grievance identified concerns regarding dental triage processes, and institutional management implemented changes that improved access to services.

Programming restored after approximately ten years at Edmonton Institution for Women

Access to programming in maximum security improved: at Edmonton Institution for Women, correctional programming became available in the maximum-security unit for the first time in approximately ten years.

While not all concerns were resolved during the reporting period, advocacy ensured that these issues were documented, escalated, and placed before institutional decision-makers — resulting in ongoing discussions, reviews, and commitments regarding healthcare access, family contact, escorted temporary absences, Indigenous cultural supports, mental health services, committee participation, and conditions of confinement across multiple penitentiaries.

Looking Forward

The concerns documented through this year's advocacy visits demonstrate the continued importance of independent, community-based advocacy for people in prison. Through advocacy visits, volunteer engagement, peer advocacy initiatives, and the production of systemic advocacy letters, CAEFS continues to amplify the voices of federally incarcerated women and gender-diverse people while building a growing evidentiary record of conditions of confinement in Canada's federal prison system. Through 46 institutional visits, 44 systemic advocacy letters, hundreds of hours of volunteer advocacy, and ongoing support to federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people, CAEFS continues to strengthen accountability, advance human rights, and build a growing evidentiary record of conditions of confinement across Canada.

> "But more than anything, it's about the connection built across lines that the system tries to draw between us. Standing in solidarity with criminalized women and gender-diverse people, and ensuring they know they are seen and valued, is exactly what gives this work its heart. It's a reminder that we are all tied to each other, and that real change only happens when we show up together."
>
> **— Volunteer Regional Advocate, Prairies Regional Advocacy Team**

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Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
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CRIAW ICREF