



Effective, just and humane

RESPONSES

to the causes and consequences of crime.

Increasingly, mental health concerns are included in discussion on Canada's responses to crime and deviance. A major focus is the (in)ability of our criminal justice system to appropriately handle cases where mental illness is a core contributing factor. With the recent review of Nova Scotia's Mental Health Court, we were inspired to use this issue of *Responses* to look at the topic more closely.

Canada's criminal justice system defines crime as having two essential parts: 1) that an act (*actus reus*) has occurred which defies the law, and 2) that there was intent (*mens rea*), knowledge or recklessness to commit the criminal act. An individual is to be held criminally responsible for their actions only when these two elements can be attributed. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, "mental illness" is characterized by alterations in thinking, mood or behaviour associated with significant distress and impaired functioning. As we know, mental illness can precipitate deviant behaviour and become relevant to a person's involvement with the criminal justice system. Our criminal justice system has interpreted "mental disorder" as a "disease of the mind which could include all illness and disorders which diminish the human mind from proper and normal function" but excluding self-induced circumstances caused by alcohol or drug consumption.

Recent studies clearly illustrate a very strong correlation between individuals with mental disorders and illicit behaviour/crime. This is consistent with the current situation of Canada's correctional institutions, where the rate of mental disorders among inmates is up to three times higher than among the Canadian population at large. In response, mental health courts (MHC) have been implemented in a number of jurisdictions as alternatives to the traditional criminal law courts. The vision was to develop problem solving courts with particular understanding and consideration of mental health. For many, they have become indispensable fixtures for responding to the needs of offenders with significant mental health concerns in a sensitive and compassionate manner.

The term "therapeutic jurisprudence" was first used in the 1980s to introduce the discussion of mental health issues to the criminal justice system. Ongoing debate about the reciprocal causal relationship between legal systems and mental health eventually led to Canada's first MHC in the mid-1990s. Mental Health Courts are relatively new to Canadian law, yet the need for special considerations for mental health during legal matters has become undeniable. In our Feature Story (page 4) we examine the Nova Scotia Mental Health Court more closely.



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JHSNS Regional Directors and Executive Director are now working on developing an operational plan that will put our Board's strategic plan into action.

Freeing the Human Spirit



FTHS was taken on by John Howard Canada in 2013. Since then, JHSNS has been working to get yoga programs running in our provincial correctional facilities.

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

As fall is in the air and everyone is getting back to their routines, the Board of Directors of The John Howard Society of Nova Scotia is returning to business as well. Our mid September meeting had many items on the agenda.

We have been working on developing a strategic plan for the Society, led by our Vice President, Cheryl Fraser. There has been input from staff as well as the board and it has been a wonderful exercise to have these two groups work together toward a common goal. We expect to finalize the plan and then begin implementation later this year.

Also, our bylaw review is almost finalized after the Society voted on some key issues at our 65th AGM in June of this year.

On the topic of our 65th AGM, this event was organized by Bob MacDonald, Secretary/Treasurer of the board and former Executive Director of the Society. Bob and his recruits worked tirelessly on building displays for everyone to enjoy as well as organizing the food and venue for this special meeting. The highlight was a video that featured current and former staff, board members, volunteers as well as members of the Society. Many former staff, members and directors attended and it was a great occasion for many of us to catch up and for some of the newer staff and members to meet long-time friends of the society.

The board is looking forward to completing some projects that we have been working on for many months and establishing new goals to work on for 2016 and beyond.

Flora MacLeod, JHSNS President

OFFICE UPDATE: NORTH EASTERN REGION (WESTVILLE, NS)

During the past few months our office has been working on some exciting ventures, we are looking forward to offering further supports to the clients we serve.

In May, our staff enjoyed participating in The John Howard Society of Nova Scotia Anger Management and Emotional Intelligence Program training. Our office plans to deliver this much needed program to our clients and also work alongside community partners to ensure the program is accessible to those in need.

This past June we were pleased to receive confirmation of funding from the Canada Post Community Foundation to support our Employment Readiness Program. When working with our clients we noticed that many of our youth do not have a lot of work experience or work skills. Our Employment Readiness Program offers assistance to youth clients who identify that they would like help writing a resume or with employability skills such as interview skills.

Through the Canada Post Community Foundation grant we are able to offer participants certifications in Emergency First Aid, WHMIS, OH&S, World Host, Food Handling and Traffic Control. With a completed resume package, interview skills and certifications, the youth in the Employment Preparation Program will be job ready and have the confidence to approach employers in a professional manner.

We are also pleased to announce that "Freeing the Human Spirit" – a yoga and meditation program for prisons – has started at the North East Nova Scotia Correctional Facility in Priestville, Pictou County. The program was initially developed by a partnership between Freeing the Human Spirit and the John Howard Society of Canada, but has since been adopted by affiliated John Howard Societies across Canada (such as our Nova Scotia Society!).

Susan Hughes, Director

OFFICE UPDATE: CENTRAL REGION (TRURO, NS)

Volunteer Recruitment

Central Region has several volunteer opportunities available, both in the office and within the community. Volunteers can get involved by taking on roles as community representatives (more information below), community service supervisors, office support, and program facilitators; we also accept student practicums.

What is a Community Representative?

The Restorative Justice Program voluntarily brings together those who have been harmed and have caused harm through crime. All parties can become active participants in their journey for justice, accountability, and reparation.

A community representative participates in a restorative justice session on behalf of the community of harm. Their role is to speak about the crime and its impact on them and the community, be involved in the circle,

and to listen and speak openly and honestly. To become a community representative, we offer an orientation to the JHS mandate, crime prevention programs, restorative justice initiatives and ongoing refresher workshops.

What's happening in our community?

We were happy to receive a *United Way Community Impact Grant*, which enabled us to purchase a new Combo Multi Media Projector. This will enhance our formal presentations to the community and delivery of our crime prevention programs.

Client donations through the Restorative Justice Giving Back Project have been directed to Maggie's Place and the *United Way Back to School Campaign* (see photos).

Our office also participated in *The Northern Aids Walk For Life* again this year, held on September 27th.

Christina King, Director

OFFICE UPDATE: HALIFAX REGION (LOWER SACKVILLE, NS)

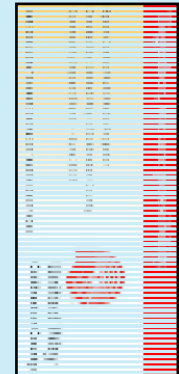
The Spring and Summer months were dynamic and busy. In late May we wrapped up a third term of the Employment Readiness Program. This was our second ERP project and was even more successful than the first in terms of the number of participants who graduated (improved their employability) and who (re)entered the labour market. We look forward to the opportunity to deliver another ERP, and have noticed that we are recognized in the community as a welcomed expert in supporting those with a criminal record to find employment.

Our office has worked through a number of staffing changes without service interruption. We were funded by provincial and federal summer student programs to hire two summer students. MJ Montgomery had been volunteering with us for over a year and we were happy to offer her a term of employment. The second student, Arash Rastgou, was new to the organization and proved to be a hard-working addition. We were grateful for their help with managing a busy, diverse workload (*and that they stayed on as volunteers!*). As of June 1st, Adrienne MacDonald became Halifax Regional Director. Shortly after, a fulltime employee left for parental leave (congratulations Natalie!) and we were able to offer Michelle Hierlihy (previously a student placement with us) employment to cover Natalie's responsibilities. By September, another fulltime employee took leave to return to school (good luck Rob!), and, after being approached by Correctional Service of Canada to temporarily deliver employment support to parolees, we hired Jenna Tucker (see Volunteer Spotlight) for a temporary fulltime position to fulfill the contract.

In June a dedicated group of volunteers began facilitating the Freeing the Human Spirit yoga program in Central Nova Scotia Correctional Facility! It took nearly a year to develop and implement the program but it has been well-received by the staff and inmates of the facility.

In late summer we were guest speakers for both Dartmouth Parole and Northern District Probation, presenting on our programs/services but also the record suspension system. Record suspensions is another area where we have gained community appreciation for our expertise.

To learn more about our volunteer opportunities, please call 902-843-4969 ext.151.



Employment Readiness Program (ERP) is an employability program funded by Employment NS for adult males who identify their criminal record as a barrier to employment. We've now delivered 5 terms over 2 projects!



Care Package items from clients, to be donated to various shelter/housing organizations in HRM.

FEATURE STORY— THE NOVA SCOTIA MENTAL HEALTH COURT

A significant portion of JHSNS clients self-identify and/or have been diagnosed as having a mental illness. As such, we are interested in the evaluation of the Nova Scotia Mental Health Court (NSMHC), conducted by Campbell and Adams-Quackenbush (2015). The report highlighted the positive impacts of the rehabilitative approach taken by the Court towards offenders living with mental illness and also identified where there is opportunity for improvement. The value of education and skill development reintegration and rehabilitation programs for offenders, especially those with mental health issues, has long been recognized by JHSNS. As an agency focused on understanding and responding to the causes and consequences of crime, we took this opportunity to consider how the Nova Scotia Mental Health Court could be better used and better supported for the benefit of our communities.

The NSMHC launched on November 5, 2009. It is a voluntary, offender-based program for adults dealing with mental illness who have come into contact with the law. The court recognizes the important role of rehabilitative processes in response to criminal matters. In fact, the vision and goals of the Mental Health Court are largely comparable to the Nova Scotia Restorative Justice Program, in which offenders are held accountable for the harm they have caused while working to repair damage done to the community and/or victims of the crime. Mental Health Court is uniquely diverse in its composition of court members, which includes a forensic psychologist and addictions social worker in addition to the crown attorney and defense counsel. This configuration is meant to ensure that the principles of fairness and equality are exercised for the accused individual.

Determining a person's eligibility generally begins with their appearance in Provincial Court for arraignment. Any party involved in the hearing (police, lawyers, the accused person) can request a referral to the Mental Health Court. Certain criteria must be met in order for the accused to be accepted into the MHC program, including a psychiatric screening through the Nova Scotia Health Authority, approval from the crown attor-

ney, and the establishment of the reasonable probability that the mental disorder is relevant to the committed offence. The judge ultimately decides whether to accept someone into the program but this is based in part on the professional recommendations from the MHC team members. Decisions made by the court are designed to help the accused address their mental health issues by providing access to community resources (social services, mental health and/or addiction services), but also to consider and address public safety concerns. Support for the program has been offered by many lawyers and social workers with expertise in mental health cases. The evaluation of the NSMHC also recommends that the Province continue to support and fund it.

Remarkable achievements were outlined in the NSMHC report, but also some shortcomings. Perhaps one of the most significant strengths of the MHC is the consideration given to participant needs. When compared to traditional criminal justice approaches, the MHC is better able to identify criminogenic issues and prioritize them for treatment. However, despite successfully identifying client needs, there has been difficulty implementing and connecting clients with the ideal interventions/programs in the community. This project has been found to be "more attentive to the Responsivity needs of its participants than observed in the traditional system" despite the fact that the project could not make meaningful changes in recidivism rates when compared with the traditional correctional approach. Overall, the benefits of the MHC program seem to outweigh the limitations, although there are certainly areas where improvements can be made.

Examination of the program and the evaluation report clearly posit that the development of community partnerships with organizations able to respond to some essential client needs such as employment and education are necessary in order to enhance the rate of success of the MHC program. Community agencies such as JHSNS, who work with clients who self-identify as having a mental illness, can play a substantial role in facilitating and developing services which lead to better access to education and jobs for participants.

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A collaborative approach among community based agencies is an essential factor for a successful reintegration of offenders with a mental illness.

According to Canadian Mental Health Association “the lives of people with mental health conditions are often plagued by stigma as well as discrimination.” JHSNS is committed to com-

bating the stigma associated with mental health issues while also facilitating mental health stabilization, recovery, and enhanced quality of life for those who are affected by them.

**By Arash Rastgou,
JHSNS Summer Student (2015)**

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: JENNA TUCKER

Jenna has been volunteering with JHSNS – Halifax Regional Office for over a year and a half. She got involved with us while she was a first year student at Nova Scotia Community College, in their Human Services program. At the time, she needed to complete a volunteer placement as part of one of her classes; she applied to JHSNS because she was interested in the criminal justice field. After finishing her first year, she went on to do a second year concentration in Correctional Services and continued volunteering with us.

Jenna has been involved with quite a few different projects. Some have been specific to the Halifax office, others for the Society in general. They include (but are not limited to):

- * developing and implementing the Freeing the Human Spirit yoga program;
- * the Record Suspension Application Service, where she carries her own case-load;
- * the Community Workplace Program, and specifically our Community Work Teams where she has supervised groups of clients as they do their community service hours;
- * the Employment Readiness Program and ongoing Employment Search Support, where she has helped clients develop resumes/cover letters, job search and apply for jobs;
- * Jenna played a major role in developing and implementing our US Waiver Application Service, where she researched the process and developed our program materials and brochures.

We asked Jenna a few questions about her time with us as a volunteer:

What is your interest in working within the criminal justice/corrections field?

Working in the criminal justice/ corrections field is something I enjoy simply because of the wide range of opportunities that it holds ... there are a wide range of professionals, and it seems to me that ... everyone has a different experience. No two people ... are the same. I think that the culture of working in criminal justice/ corrections is so different from other jobs because of the variety of backgrounds that people come from. I enjoy working with people, and learning where people have come from and what their stories are.

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Image from CBC.ca article “Nova Scotia mental health court working, report says” (June 2015).



Jenna has been volunteering at the Halifax Regional Office since January 2014.

THE JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY OF NOVA SCOTIA

SINCE 1950

The John Howard Society of Nova Scotia (JHSNS) is a provincial organization comprised of and governed by people whose goal is to understand and respond to problems of crime and the criminal justice system. JHSNS is a member of the John Howard Society of Canada.

JHSNS has three offices, each serving a different catchment area: **North Eastern Regional Office** serves Pictou, Antigonish and Guysborough Counties; **Central Regional Office** serves Colchester and East Hants Counties; and **Halifax Regional Office** primarily serves the urban area of Halifax Regional Municipality.

Learn more on our website:

<http://www.ns.johnhoward.ca>

Become a Member!

As a member, you are one of the owners of JHSNS. Membership includes:

- The opportunity to represent your community within the Society and/or as a Board member;
- The opportunity to elect individuals to the Society's Board of Directors;
- An invitation to the Annual General Meeting, a copy of the Annual General Report, and a copy of the Audited Financial Statement; and
- Invitations to learning events held throughout the year

For more information, or to apply, go to:
<http://ns.johnhoward.ca/about>

The John Howard Society of Nova Scotia

c/o 1-541 Sackville Dr.
Lower Sackville, NS
B4C 2S1

Phone: 902-429-6429

Fax: 902-406-7619

E-mail: jhsns@ns.johnhoward.ca



Considering that you've gotten involved with so many JHSNS projects, which initiative(s) have you enjoyed the most?

It's difficult to choose ... However, I would have to say that I enjoy participating in the community workplace program supervising community service hours. ... this and being involved with Record Suspension Application Service (RSAS) are the two that I find very rewarding. ... when supervising community service hours, the people who participate in the program get a positive response from the community. People often thank our clients for what they are doing, and it is effectively giving back to the community. As for record suspensions, I enjoy [helping with] these because it is truly something that most people cannot complete on their own. With our help in completing [the application] it can open up new doors [for opportunities] for our clients that they could not do before because of their criminal records.

Reflecting on your time with JHSNS, do you have anything else that you'd like to add?

The time that I have spent with JHSNS has been great ... I have had opportunities to meet with professionals who are currently working in the field, or who have had previous experience. It has also given me a chance to work with clients hands on. I think that it has been rewarding and has led to some great opportunities.

Jenna, The John Howard Society of Nova Scotia would like to thank you for your hard work and dedication! You have been so helpful with the many projects that you've been involved with, and the Halifax office has really enjoyed having you (in fact, we were excited to be able to hire Jenna on for a few months to fulfill a brief contract for CSC!).

JHSNS ANNOUNCEMENTS & UPCOMING EVENTS

This year National Restorative Justice Week will be held November 15 to 22.



Staff of our Central and North Eastern Regional Offices will be organizing several educational events during this week. Central Region is partnering with Nova Institution for Women for their activities.

Thank you to the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia. Our Halifax Regional Office has been granted funds to be able to continue offering free Anger Management & Emotional Intelligence programming to clients.



If you would like to be added to or removed from the newsletter's emailing list, please contact jhsns@ns.johnhoward.ca.