



KINGSTON COMMUNITY CHAPLAINCY

PROMOTING SAFE AND HEALTHY REINTEGRATION INTO THE COMMUNITY

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CHAPLAIN'S REFLECTION

There is much to reflect upon as a year of working with Kingston Community Chaplaincy comes full circle, and I share thanks with all the individuals so far who have shared this journey with me.

To learn from - and with - each other is the intention I attempt to hold in my practice, and every person I have had the privilege to encounter has joined me in that aim.

We each come with questions, some very practical, like: How often can we meet? How long can we continue to meet? These questions are pretty straightforward and answerable: we can meet as often as need be. Sometimes immediately upon release, I will meet with clients two or three times a week, but the frequency lessens over time. The understanding is that we can continue to meet as long as it seems beneficial but definitely beyond the official end (warrant expiry or WED) of a sentence. The goal is always for individuals to be cultivating greater independence or better yet, interdependence, in the community - to have a broad network of support and various communities of sustainable and meaningful engagement.

Some questions are a bit more complex. One of the big ones for me this year has been: What shall we call each other? My identity is much larger than the various roles I fulfill, and so I am always cautious about taking on the labels that go with those identities. As an organization, KCC is responsible for describing the work it does, and so I ask the individuals I work with how they want to be referred to. No KCC clients have introduced themselves as an inmate, offender or ex-offender. They are

individuals whose lives have intersected with the criminal justice system and who, like all of us, are on a journey of learning, becoming, and healing. They play various roles within the institutional community, within their families and in the general community: roles and identities are evolving continually over time.

Other questions are enormous: Why did I make the choices I did? How could I not have foreseen how much pain my actions would have caused? How will I survive not being able to see my children? Learning to sit with big and often unanswerable questions has got to be one of the greatest tasks of our lifetimes...

The words of poet Rainer Maria Rilke are often a source of reassurance to me and I share them regularly: "Be patient to all that is unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves."

Navigating the criminal justice system, surviving time, and making a life for oneself outside of prison requires great strength, fortitude and resilience. It requires creative problem solving and the ability to think on one's feet. Learning that not all questions have obvious answers and to have some sense of equanimity around that can be extremely challenging. I am grateful for the work of community partners like the John Howard Society who do a wonderful job of supporting individuals in so many practical aspects of reintegration. The seemingly mundane but critical tasks required to be

HELPING CREATE A SAFE COMMUNITY

We believe that when crime happens, it is not only the victim and offender who are affected but the whole community. We seek to promote healing and safety for all people as we learn how to live together in community once again.

'officially' connected to receive health care and other social benefits are not to be underestimated. Navigating these systems, finding housing and employment - I am able to support these processes in small ways, most often by being an additional empathetic, encouraging and celebratory presence. My role more often, however, is to be present as individuals wrestle with questions, often of the heart, that can seem overwhelmingly complex and painful. My role is to be present as individuals work to discern their particular questions and longings, support them in realizing that there may not be immediate answers, and that with some questions, our job is to simply carry them as gently as we can. Thanks to everyone for continued sharing and support.

Kara Braun, Community Chaplain
B.Ed., Master of Theological Studies

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING REPORT

The speaker at our AGM, held on Friday, May 30th at the Kingston Unitarian Fellowship, was Tyler Fainstat. Before becoming the Executive Director of the John Howard Society of Kingston and District, Tyler worked for 9 years with Medecins Sans Frontieres, or Doctors Without Borders. His message was very relevant for Board members, volunteers and all KCC supporters, since our work is so closely related to that of the John Howard Society. The following is a summary of the key points in his talk.

Tyler expressed that, in his view, the values of JHS and KCC are very close and that they face similar dilemmas and situations every day. The work of both organizations is “motivated by the core value of humanity”, he stated, which is a belief that “all human beings have intrinsic value” and are endowed with freedoms. These freedoms include “negative” freedoms such as freedom from fear, torture and hunger and “positive” freedoms such as freedom to associate, move, participate, etc.

The other common core value would be the commitment to be present. Tyler pointed out that “the most valuable action we have to offer is our presence with those who are suffering and living in fear.” This is closely related to the concept of “bearing witness”. MSF was founded in 1971 on

the belief that “bearing witness to suffering generated a responsibility for humanitarians to speak out about what they had seen.” This does NOT involve proposing solutions, making political statements or trying to assign blame. Tyler felt this concept is “very relevant to working with people who are involved with our criminal justice system, and especially in prisons, and should form the basis of how we communicate about what we do...Our communication is most powerful when it is rooted in what we have the legitimacy to speak about, which is essentially what we do, what we bear witness to through our work.”

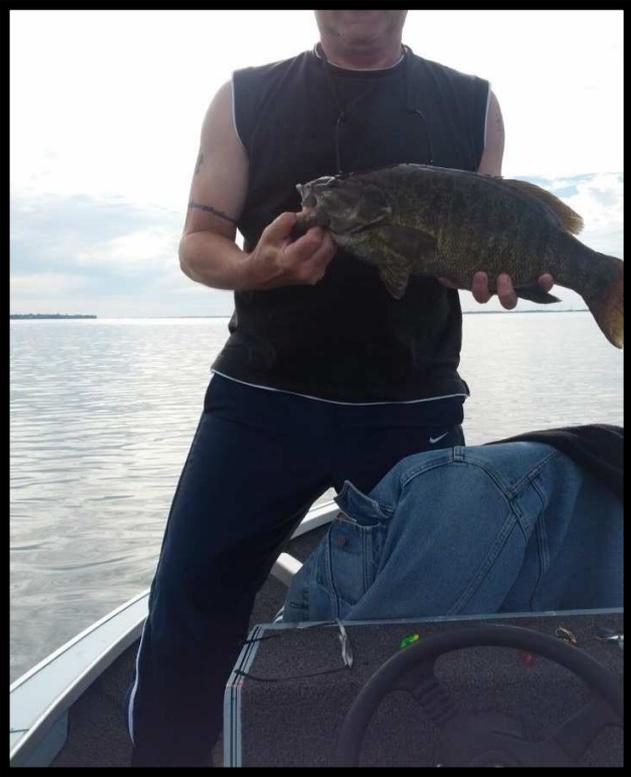
He also talked about the concept of neutrality and the value of impartiality. “By attempting to communicate as a disinterested party as opposed to an expert or authority, the organization manages to dance along the line of ...neutrality”. He felt that among not-for-profit organizations working in the justice field there is a tendency to overestimate the consequences of public communication, while minimizing the consequences of staying silent. “On almost all occasions,” he said, “there are ways to communicate while greatly reducing risks to an organization’s funding and institutional access.”

Finally, he talked about an organization’s accountability to its donors, volunteers, staff and ultimately its clients. He felt that “tension between our ideals and the shifting context and reality in which we work is the central dilemma of every values-driven humanitarian organization”. To keep an organization focused on its mission “heated, contentious, passionate debate is an extremely important ingredient.”

In a way, Tyler’s talk was a challenge to all not-for-profit organizations working in the justice field. The Board of Kingston Community Chaplaincy must constantly find a balance between providing the best service for our clients and being accountable to our donors, staff and volunteers. We can look at those values he has addressed in his talk, when making our decisions regarding KCC. Continuing discussion and debate around these values can only help to keep us focused on our mission: helping individuals successfully reintegrate into the community. Tyler’s complete talk can be found on our website: www.kingstoncommunitychaplaincy.com
Gordon Darrall, Chair

CLIENT'S CORNER

A recently released client shares his experiences with us.



Incarceration teaches you one thing very quickly....trust no one. They all tell you to "Do your own time", but the majority of them (inmates) do everybody's time but their own. If you say anything to anyone about anything or anyone it is quickly spread throughout the inmate community. I confided in nobody. That is until I was introduced to KCC. I opened up to them almost immediately, knowing that whatever was spoken was kept confidential. I looked forward to my community chaplain visits. They were very attentive and I could talk about anything. Being an avid fisherman I often spoke of the fishing I would do when I got out. Upon my release in May I have gone fishing on numerous occasions bagging my biggest fish in several categories. A 7lb Smallmouth on opening Bass day, a 12, an 8 and several 5-6 lb Pike and just this past Saturday my all-time biggest Walleye at 8lb. My community chaplains were instrumental in helping me get through my incarceration and I thank them very much.

SMALL MOUTH BASS ON OPENING DAY OF BASS SEASON

*Be not afraid of growing slowly. Be only afraid of standing still.
Chinese Proverb*

ABOUT KINGSTON COMMUNITY CHAPLAINCY

Our objectives are

- To enact the goals and principles of Restorative Justice in relation to victims, offenders and community.
- To accompany men and women from incarceration to successful reintegration in the community by facilitating emotional, spiritual and practical support systems during their transition.
- To assist those who are at risk of engaging in criminal activity to find constructive and life affirming community resources.
- To dialogue with community groups to further their understanding of and response to the needs of offenders, victims and their families.

A POEM FROM ONE OF OUR CLIENTS

CHAPLAINCY

Counseling one-on-one helped me to overcome some of my fears
While speaking to others I came to realize some of my challenges and how to overcome them

Healing process was established through emotional and spiritual support
My mind was set at ease as I came to realize that my journey does not have to be travelled alone

Acceptance of who I am and making me aware of my strengths
Knowing that others believe in me and are rooting for me gave me strength to forge ahead

Preparing for reintegration into the community through a pre-release program
Having some plan of action for coming home is a great first step

Light makes clear the path of transitioning – being a guide through uncertain times
Knowing there are others I can count on in difficult times reduces stress and worry

Acknowledge the present, accept the past and promote a pro-active future
Listening to the insights of others gave me a psychological boost

Involvement with the community is encouraged to promote self-esteem
By joining organizations to volunteer at, helped to promote the idea of being as asset

Networking with other organizations to find community support for my specific needs

I was offered referrals and connections to other resources to help me get on my feet again

Compassion with direction; offering practical and spiritual support along the way
Never was I being put down, but always a positive approach was presented for encouragement

Yield to the inner spirit and you'll produce a greater harvest

This is what I have come to understand, that collectively I can do more than when left on my own

Contact Us

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