



Annual Report 2020

BOOK CLUBS FOR INMATES

www.bookclubsforinmates.com
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Book Clubs for Inmates (BCFI) is a registered charity which organizes volunteer-led book clubs within federal penitentiaries across Canada.

It is our mission to establish book clubs in every federal penitentiary across Canada.

Transforming lives one book at a time.

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FROM THE FOUNDER

Carol Finlay

Our annual reports have been, until this past year, opportunities to share our news and accomplishments with you, our supporters. This past year has been very different. As I write, it has now been over a year since our volunteers have gone home and the prisons have been under lockdown. We are very aware of how difficult this has been for most incarcerated people in our prisons across Canada. Early in the pandemic, BCFI joined with a number of our colleagues calling the government to de-populate the prisons to ameliorate the crowded conditions and suffering of so many prisoners. Unfortunately, this did not happen. Inmates have been mostly confined to their cells, or units, and as predicted, the toll on their mental health has been severe. We will only know how severe when we are finally given access to meet with them once again.

First, I would like to hail these incarcerated men and women who are surviving such extreme conditions. Bravo! Except in long term care and seniors' residences in Canada, no other group of people has had to suffer through this sort of extreme isolation. You are an inspiration to us all; and personally, you men and women give me pause anytime I feel like complaining about the effects of the restrictions on my own life.

Secondly, I want to thank our 130 volunteers who are continuing to send in books and questions for reflection to the men and women inside. Our volunteers tell us that they cannot wait to resume in-person book clubs. What spirit! They are ready to go and have missed their book clubs hugely. Without their patience and eagerness to resume, we would have no future. Bravo! We are so grateful for such wonderful, dedicated volunteers.

To our many friends and supporters, I also wish to say thank you for not giving up on us. We are so grateful for your generosity and patience through these turbulent times. We are hopeful that we can resume our activities later in the year, and soon we will be sending you updates and many good news stories.

To all of you, bravo!!

Carol Finlay
O.Ont, MSM





Collins Bay Institution in Kingston, Ontario, where BCFI began in 2008. Photo credit: CSC

WHERE WE HAVE BEEN AND WHERE WE ARE GOING

Our pandemic year

Soon after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared in March 2020, we closed our in-person book clubs. We didn't wait for the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) to tell us it would be dangerous to continue working inside prisons; instead, we told our volunteers that for their own safety, they needed to stay home. Indeed, the way that COVID has ripped through Canada's prisons has been a sobering reminder of the vulnerability of men and women living inside these institutions.

In April, the BCFI Board of Directors met virtually to discuss our options moving forward. Could we run 'slow poke' discussions through written letters and CSC email? Were there any digital platforms available so we could hold book clubs virtually? Would CSC staff be willing to deliver books to members in their cells? And with much we could no longer do, did we still need offices and so many staff hours?

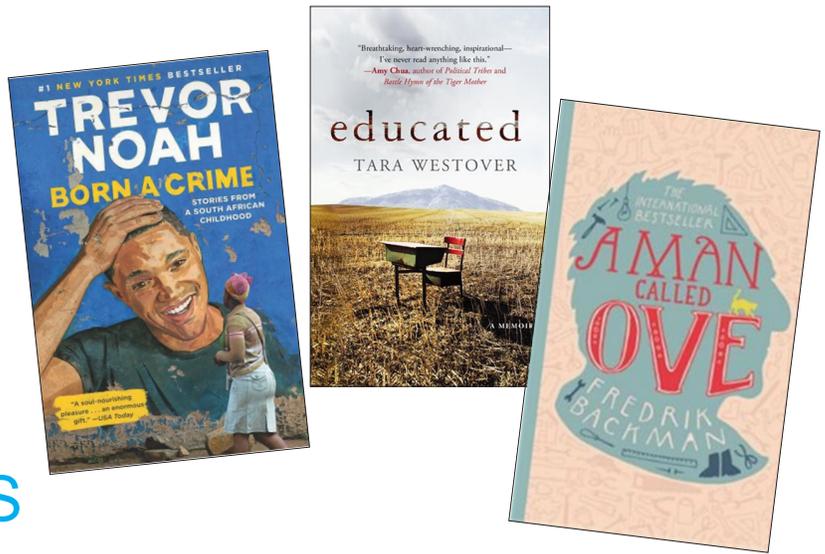
After much deliberation, we decided to scale back our staff to just a few hours a week, and we closed the offices at the Centre for Social Innovation. A few months later, we said good-bye to our Program Coordinator, Amanda Beattie, and our Executive Director, Erin O'Sullivan. On an interim basis, I have returned to the duties of executive director. Last fall, we decided not to pursue any fundraising since the future was still uncertain and our operations were far from normal.

The Future

It is now over a year that we have all been living with the pandemic, trying to find ways to adjust to the 'new normal', and imagining what might be possible when Canada reopens again. We continue to hear how much the men and women in the prisons miss their book clubs. Cautiously, optimistically, we are preparing for 2021 book clubs by ordering books, hiring a part-time coordinator, and re-opening our offices. We're looking forward to the day when the book clubs will all be running again, offering lively discussions and modelling respectful listening and speaking.

We know, too, that ChIRP (child inmate reading program) and the Ephesus Project (inmate university studies program) will flourish again too. Even though very few of our sponsored university students have been able to continue their studies at the same pace as before, we all look forward to hearing about their progress.

Our mission remains this: to establish a book club in every penitentiary in Canada. After we are able to re-establish former book clubs, we will turn our attention to starting new ones where we have the support of CSC. The coming year may well provide some exciting opportunities as we all emerge from this difficult time, rekindle connections in our communities, and with our dedicated volunteers, continue to share our love of literature with those inside the prison walls.



OUR VOLUNTEERS

We are so grateful to all our volunteers who facilitate the book clubs, read for the annual book list, seek out writers to visit the book clubs, and support parolees. We would not be able to accomplish all that we do without these wonderful dedicated volunteers. One volunteer we would like to highlight in this Annual Report is Louise Hoelscher who supports BCFI in a myriad of ways.

From Louise Hoelscher, Reading Team Coordinator

I have a BA in Sociology from McGill University and I live just outside of Montreal with my 6 dogs and many many stacks of books.

In 2016 Michèle Tibblin (another volunteer) and I had just started a French book club for BCFI at Joliette Institution for Women outside Montreal when CSC asked us to add an English book club there too. So, we started the English book club as well. Then in 2018 I also joined the Rev. Tim Smart at another book club at Cowansville Institution, also just outside Montreal.

Before our pandemic shutdown, a book club had just been started at Donnacona Institution, near Quebec City, and we hope to re-start it and also start a new French book club in Cowansville when we re-open. As the BCFI Area Director for Quebec my work is also to support and expand prison book clubs throughout Quebec.

At the end of 2017 I also became the Reading Team Coordinator, compiling our yearly reading lists with the help of our 16 Volunteer Readers. Each Volunteer Read-

er makes several suggestions of books that the inmates would likely enjoy reading and discussing. These books are carefully screened for appropriate content and potential triggers, and as a team we strive for diversity in our reading lists which include classic and contemporary, fiction and non-fiction titles.

I am very proud and honored to be part of this wonderful organization which creates human connections through books for those whom society has discarded and forgotten.





OUR PROJECTS

CHILDREN OF INMATES READING PROGRAM

BCFI's commitment to the successful reintegration of inmates and to stronger, healthier communities includes the development of Children of Inmates Reading Program (ChIRP). The mandate of ChIRP is to build and enhance a healthier parent/child relationship, develop literacy and listening skills, increase vocabulary and attention spans for children and promote a love of learning in children through the consistent presence of a parent and books.

From Carla Veitch, ChIRP Coordinator

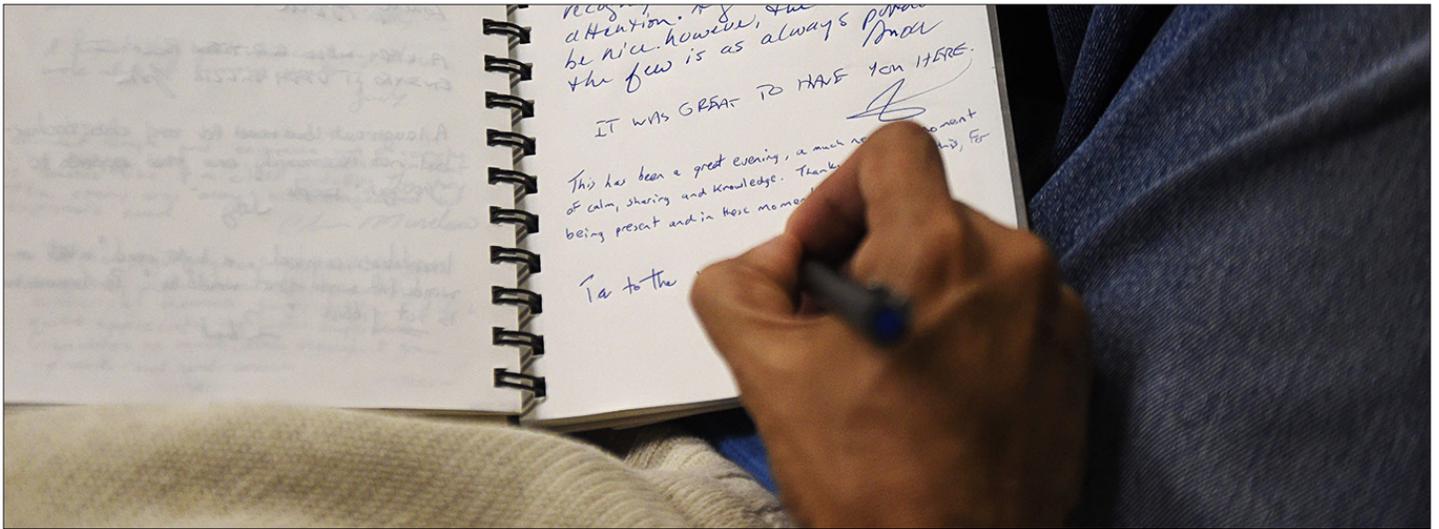
The COVID pandemic and lockdown restrictions in Ontario have nearly brought the ChIRP inmate reading program to a halt. But there is a glimmer of hope.

We have been able to maintain the program at both minimum and medium security sites at Beaver Creek Institution in Gravenhurst, Ontario. We currently have between six and nine men at each site, many of whom are new to the program. It is not the same, since no volunteers are permitted on site. However, CSC staff members have been willing to meet with the prisoners so they can record their stories. I meet staff outside the institution and retrieve the recording device and the books the inmates have read to their children/grandchildren. As before, CDs are then made with the recording and mailed to families, along with the books.

So, despite the limitations, family connections are being supported through the gift of literacy. I receive messages, letters, and updates from prison chaplains, all telling me that participating men and their families are so grateful the program is running again and that they are very happy with the selection of the quality, hardcover books they receive.

As the year progresses, I trust we will be able to resume programs at other sites as well.





THE EPHEBUS PROJECT

For a number of years, BCFI has supported inmates in their pursuit of post-secondary education. We are delighted to continue to support post-secondary education through The Ephesus Project, an Edmonton-based initiative in which professors volunteer to teach university courses (via hard copy materials, as no internet is allowed in Canadian prisons) to incarcerated students.

From Arlette Zinck, The Ephesus Project Coordinator

To say the past year was 'extraordinary' is an understatement. In late March 2020, universities and the federal prisons closed within days of each other to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As a result, many of the Ephesus Project's plans were postponed or delayed. With the assistance of the regional CSC education departments, we have continued with our correspondence learners who are spread out across the country, but our core activities at the Edmonton Institution came to a halt. This meant no new students were added to the program in 2020.

Nonetheless, this fallow year has allowed us the time to be creative and to dream. We enter 2021 fully resourced and replete with great ideas about how we might continue the work once Edmonton Institution and other prisons where our students are incarcerated open their doors again. While that site has been closed to volunteers, our colleagues on the CSC adult learning education team have helped no fewer than 11 in-

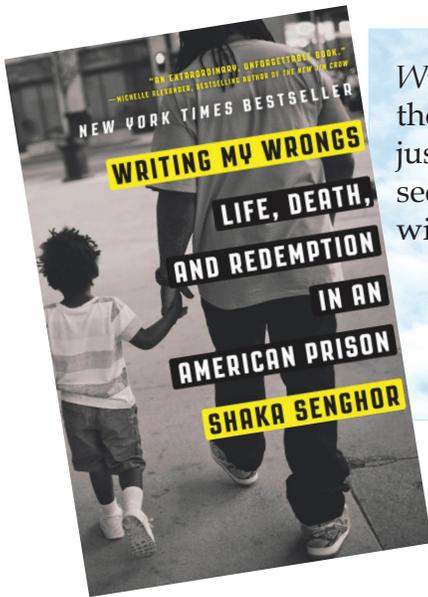
carcerated learners complete their Grade 12 this past year. That is a remarkable number, and it means a larger pool of eligible applicants for The Ephesus Project.

We are currently making arrangement with the Edmonton Institution to resume modified studies with our current learners and to begin interviewing for new participants.

As always, we are extraordinarily grateful for the support and encouragement of BCFI.

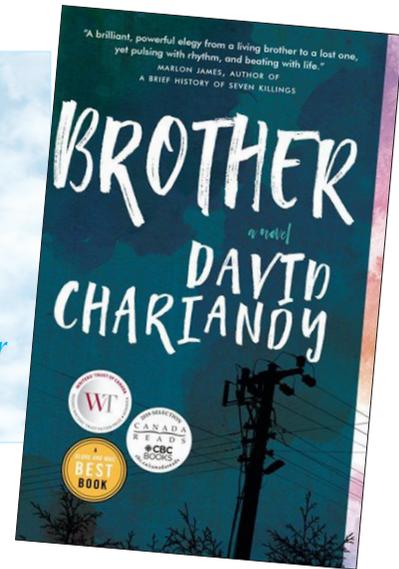


2020-2021 BOOKS



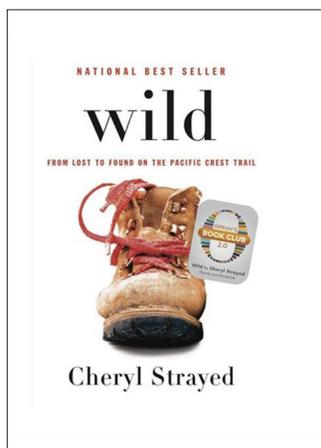
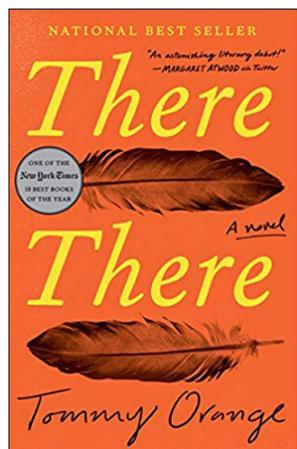
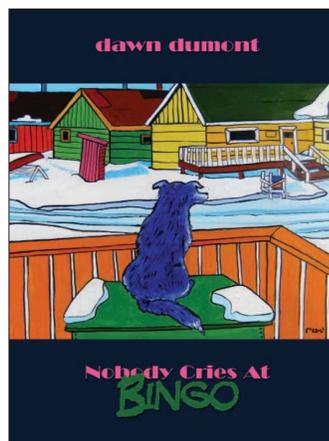
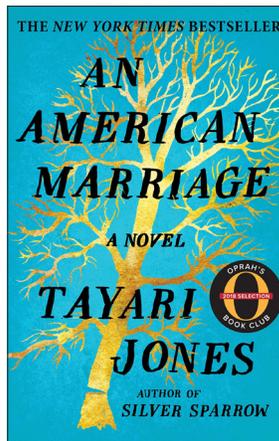
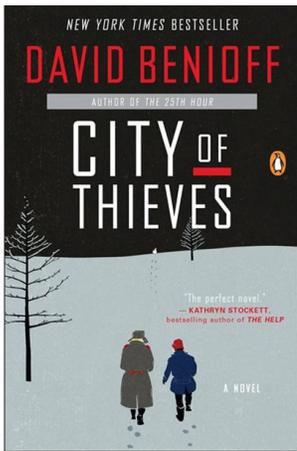
Writing My Wrongs provoked thoughtful discussion about the justice system and the value of seeking redemption and living with hope for a better future.

- Book Club facilitator



Brother was extremely well received by the men and we had an absolutely fantastic discussion with them, one of the best this year.

- Book Club facilitator



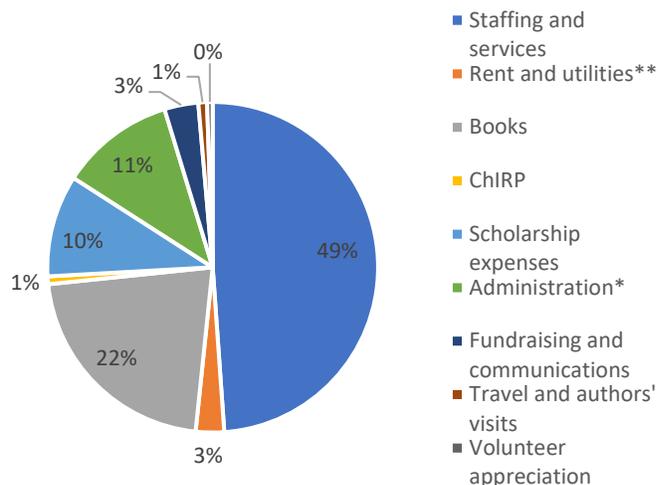
2020 FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Year end December 31, 2020

BCFI Charitable Registration No. 80417 0009 RR0001

Full financial Statements are available at: info@bookclubsforinmates.com

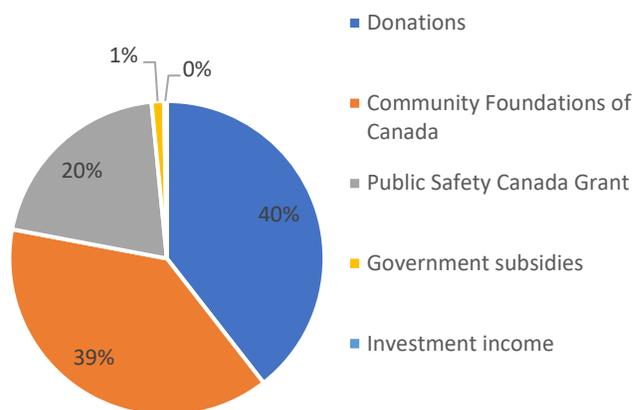
EXPENSES



* Includes professional fees

** Includes rent, telephone and internet, amortization, and insurance

REVENUE



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Bryan Finlay, QC, Chair
Senior litigation counsel

Max Binnie
Department of Justice litigator and former political staffer
living in Ottawa

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Retired businesswoman with a lifelong interest in the arts

Dan McDonald, QC
Senior litigation counsel living in Calgary and working in
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Joanie McEwen
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Institution in Kingston

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nance and not-for-profits

Erna Redekopp
Retired healthcare management consultant and nurse educa-
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