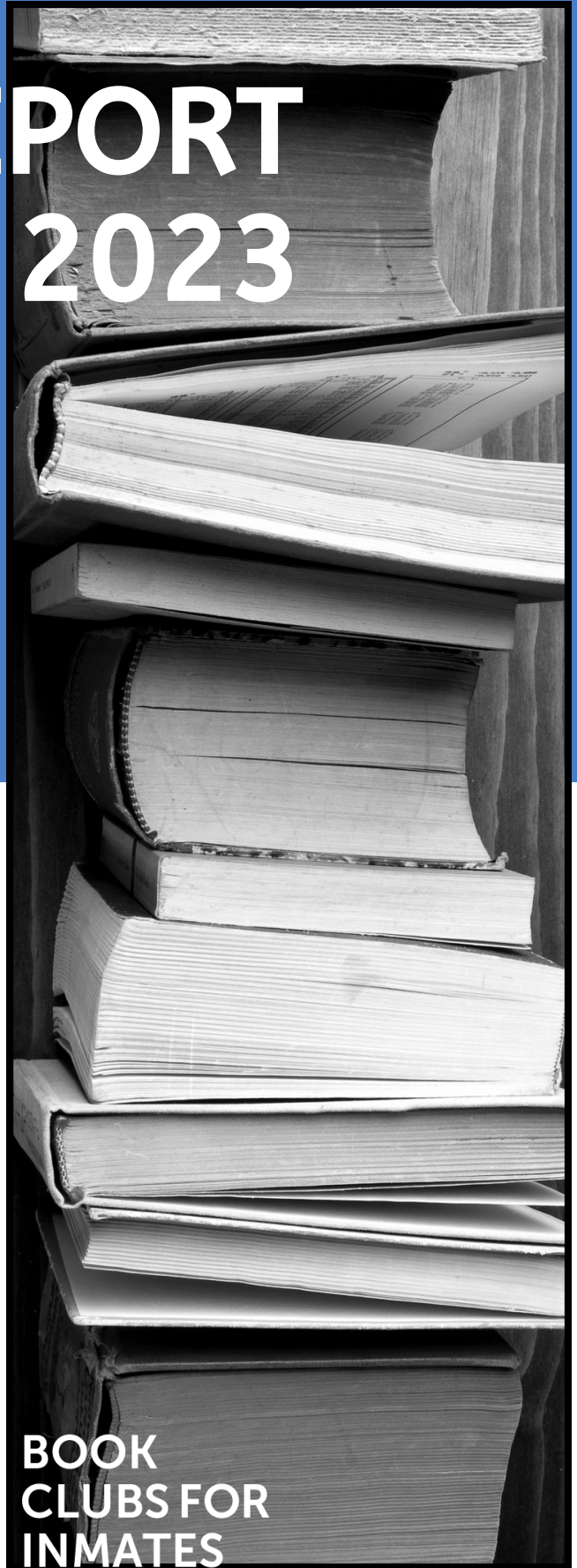


ANNUAL REPORT 2023



**BOOK
CLUBS FOR
INMATES**

A Message from our Executive Director

Dear Supporters, Volunteers, Board Members, and Potential Donors,

As we bid farewell to 2023, I am filled with immense gratitude for the incredible journey we've shared at Book Clubs for Inmates (BCFI). Our mission to transform lives—one book at a time—has been made possible by your unwavering support and dedication.

Our Accomplishments in 2023

1. **Expanding Our Reach:** BCFI now operates 40 volunteer-led book clubs across the country, fostering a love for literature within correctional facilities. Inmates have delved into thought-provoking texts, igniting conversations that transcend prison walls. Our Children of Inmates Reading Program (ChIRP) has rapidly grown this past year, connecting inmates with young family members and rebuilding important bridges with their families. (See Carla's report)
2. **Pro-Social Skills Development:** Through our book clubs, inmates have honed pro-social skills such as respectful listening and effective communication. As they read and discuss literature, they also strengthen their reading abilities, setting the stage for meaningful life changes upon reintegration into society.
3. **Increased Donor Support:** To our donors, your generosity has been our cornerstone. Your increased support in 2023 has allowed us to expand our programs, provide more books, and create a positive impact on countless lives. Thank you for believing in our cause and standing by us.



4. **Volunteers: Our Unsung Heroes:** To our dedicated volunteers, you are the heartbeat of BCFI. Your commitment to facilitating book clubs, offering parolee support, and sharing your talents has touched the hearts of inmates. We appreciate you more than words can express.
5. **Foundations, Authors, and Publishing Partners:** Our heartfelt gratitude extends to the foundations, Canadian writers, and publishing partners who have stood by us. Your financial support has been instrumental in our growth and success. Authors have begun visiting prisons to discuss their latest work. Publishers have donated a record number of books. Together, we are rewriting narratives and fostering hope.

A Bright Future Beckons

As we step into 2024, our aspirations burn brighter than ever.

Here's what lies ahead:

1. **Expanding Our Footprint:** We aim to establish book clubs and Children of Inmates Reading Program in every federal institution, ensuring that no inmate or their families are left without the transformative power of literature.
2. **Literacy Beyond Bars:** BCFI will continue advocating for literacy programs within correctional facilities, emphasizing education, empathy, and rehabilitation. We will continue to grow the number of authors visiting our book clubs throughout the year.
3. **Community Engagement:** We envision stronger ties with local communities, bridging gaps and fostering understanding between inmates and society.
4. **Empowering Lives:** Our commitment remains unwavering—to empower lives, one book at a time.

Thank you for being part of our journey. Together, we'll create a future where every story matters, regardless of the circumstances. Let's turn the page and write a new chapter—one of hope, resilience, and redemption.

With heartfelt appreciation,



Tom Best

Executive Director

Our Projects

ChIRP (Children of Inmates Reading Program)

ChIRP (Children of Inmates Reading Program) initiative builds and enhances healthier parent/child relationships, develops literacy and listening skills, and promotes a love of learning in children through the consistent presence of a parent and books.

Each month, with the support of dedicated volunteers, incarcerated family members can send a book and a voice recording of themselves reading the story to their families at home.

This valuable initiative directly connects the child with their incarcerated family member. In addition to the joy of hearing a parent's voice, the reading initiative underscores the value of reading and the importance of books. For several participants, reading aloud to their child has not been a pattern of their parenting, nor was it modelled for them as part of their early childhood.

Studies show that children need 1,000 books to read before they begin to read. Imagine a child's delay if they had never had even one book read to them. This program is changing that for these at-risk children. We all know that reading aloud is the most important thing a parent or caregiver can do to help a child prepare for reading and learning. More than half the children in this country will not hear a bedtime story tonight. As book lovers, we cannot imagine that!



Over the years, we have heard from participants how these books have brought so much joy to these abandoned children. They eagerly await the arrival of the brown envelope, knowing they will listen to the voice of their missed family member before it's opened. We have listened to how caregivers get tired of hearing the same story repeatedly as the child awaits the arrival of a new book. We hear how children have created their own libraries of these treasured books, with some participants sending over 60 books over the past.

2023 became a year of tremendous growth as the program spread nationwide. We began the year with 4 sites and ended with 15 active sites.

We were encouraged as we saw new volunteers step up as facilitators and CSC staff at most of these sites, recognize the value of this initiative, actively participate, and promote the program to the inmates. The feedback from the participants has been very encouraging, with families being grateful to have these positive connections.

These are the words from a participant at Beaver Creek. "This is a great program. I have sent books to my daughters and 3 grandchildren. It brings us all a lot closer together during these trying times."

We, too, are grateful for the 200 gift cards from the Indigo Love of Reading summer initiative. We provided each child with a \$50 gift card for an online purchase of reading materials during the summer months. Early in the Fall of 2023, Kids Can Press generously donated 100 books to each of the 15 sites to celebrate their 50th Anniversary.

The word is spreading across the country. The momentum continues as we look forward to adding 8 new sites in the first quarter of 2024.

We are making a tremendous impact in the lives of these children, one book at a time!

Carla Veitch

Carla Veitch
Program Coordinator

The Ephesus Project

THE EPHESUS PROJECT

This year, The Ephesus Project celebrated its tenth anniversary. We arrived at Edmonton Institution (EI) in June of 2013, and by the time September arrived, we were working with several students. A lot has happened since then!

A year ago, I shared with you the story of our first ever on-campus, incarcerated Ephesus student at The King's University. In the last twelve months this student has studied full-time and successfully completed six courses. One of those courses was a senior seminar in book history. He loved this course. His term paper explored the topic of book collecting in prison, and his professor was so impressed with it that she offered to mentor him with an independent research project. In May this student completed Government of Canada sponsored Tri-council training in research ethics. In July his research project was approved by the university ethics board. Unfortunately, the permissions for this project have stalled with the Correctional Services of Canada. Hard to say when that log jam may be cleared, but as we remind our students, the victory has already been won. It was a stellar first year of study.

While our on-campus student research project has been a highlight, other good things are



happening too. We have had continued success with our first small class at both Bowden and, new this year, at Saskatchewan Penitentiary Minimum. The group at Bowden has cohered beautifully. A group of three students grew to five, and then shrunk to four students as they completed their first course together, a theology course in the history of human rights. The team of four is now halfway through a second course in English literature. This blended online and in-person model has extended our capacity and promises to be sustainable. Meanwhile, this year two long-time students who were serving time at Grand Cache were moved to a minimum placement, so we moved our plans for a group class at Grand Cache to Saskatchewan Penitentiary. The CSC teaching staff at Saskatchewan Penitentiary have been magnificent. There have been a few bumps in setting up the first class, but we are now on our way.

While these developments are positive, we have had a few disappointments this year too. For the first time we are breaking down our student cohort into three categories: active, blocked, and suspended students. While our total number of students exceeds last year's number, we had an uncharacteristic level of disruption as four formerly active students either decided to suspend or to earn a reclassification to a higher security level where CSC has not offered a forwarding address. Two other students have been on ice because of CSC blocks at Mountain Institution. So far that is the only CSC location in all of Canada that cannot make post-secondary study work for Ephesus Project students. We will keep everyone who has earned the right to do credited study with us on our list. They might return at some point.

It has been a good tenth anniversary year. We are pleased with what we are building while remaining true to our original vision to make a meaningful difference for a few neighbours. Over the next twelve months, we will invite new students to the program to fill the slots vacated this year. We also plan to do a little navel-gazing to see what we can learn about the group that moved out of studies during 2023. As a preliminary observation, all but one of those students was added to our program during the COVID-19 pandemic when our usual in-person non-credit course had to be delivered over Webex. Is this a coincidence? We will see what we can find out. We will also explore opportunities to deepen our engagement with key CSC locations and to expand our ability to bring informal educational opportunities and experiences into the prisons we serve locally. Guest lectures and choral performances are just a few of the novel ways we have been able to bring the university community into contact with our prisons. Planning for a spring performance at Edmonton Institution is already underway. Finally, we will continue to learn what reintegration will look like for Ephesus students, and how best to partner with existing community groups to ensure positive change for our communities, one reintegrating student at a time.

As always, we are honoured to be doing this work with Book Club for Inmates. Thank you for generously sharing your wisdom and wealth. We are grateful for both.



Arlette Zinck

Professor of English, The King's University and
Executive Director of The Ephesus Project

The Library Project

In pursuing education, rehabilitation, and the successful reintegration of incarcerated individuals, prison libraries are indispensable sanctuaries of transformation. They serve as beacons of learning, avenues for personal growth, cultural connections, and sources of joy. More critically, these libraries cultivate critical thinking, empathy, and practical communication skills—paramount for a seamless transition back into society.

However, the state of prison libraries in Canada reveals a distressing reality. Underfunded and understaffed, these libraries often house outdated, damaged, or unsuitable books that fail to cater to the diverse needs and preferences of the inmate population. The pandemic has further exacerbated the problem, causing a significant decline in used book donations.

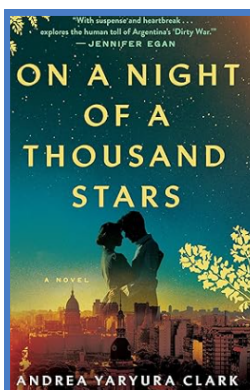
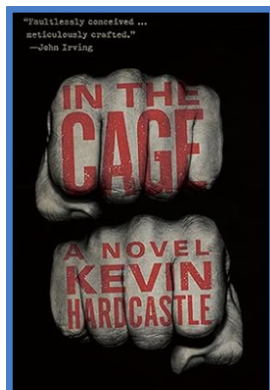
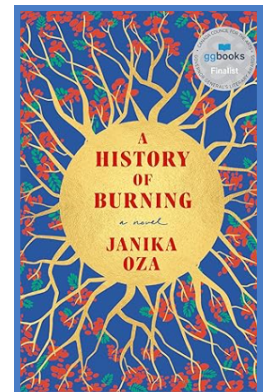
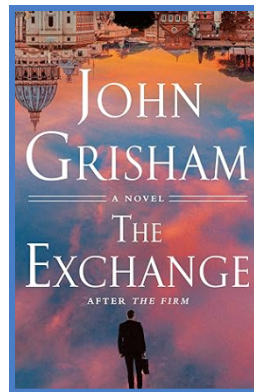
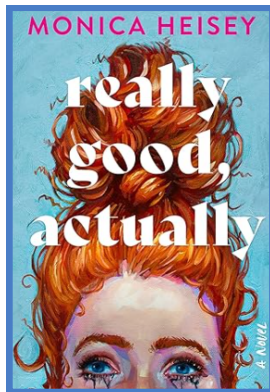
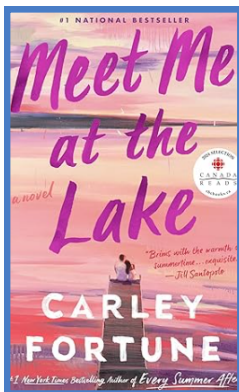
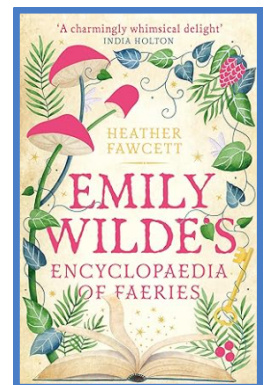
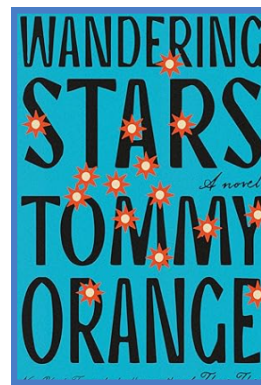
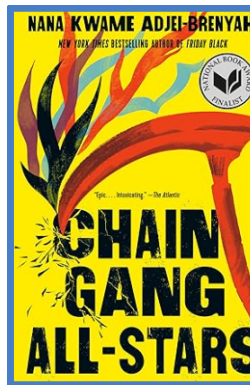
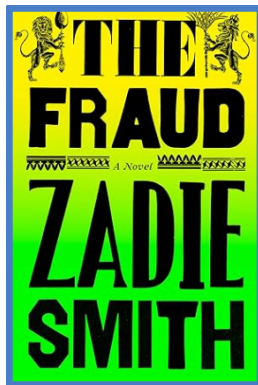
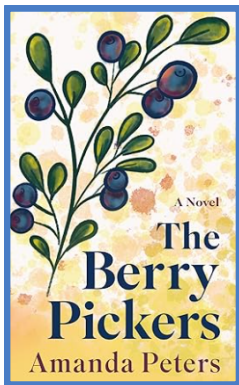
Prison librarians are struggling with annual budgets allocated to these libraries often languishing below \$1,500. Shockingly, some institutions lack books altogether. Within the confines of a correctional facility featuring varying security levels—minimum, medium, maximum, and a segregated Intervention Unit (SIU), the existing libraries are in dire need of revitalization and replenishment.

Recognizing that not all inmates can participate in book clubs, we aim to rectify this situation. Our library project is a dedicated initiative to rebuild institutional libraries across Canada. By doing so, we strive to ensure that every incarcerated individual has access to the best and most relevant books, fostering an environment conducive to education, personal development, and successful rehabilitation. Over the next three years, we will ship over 500,000 brand-new books to federal penitentiaries in Canada. In 2023, we shipped over 50,000 books to 16 institutions. In 2024, we hope to double the number of books donated and triple the number of institutions we hope to reach.



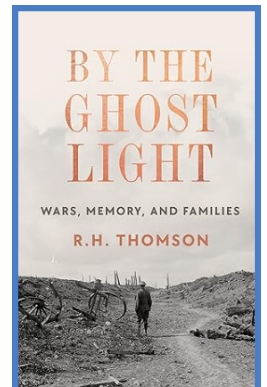
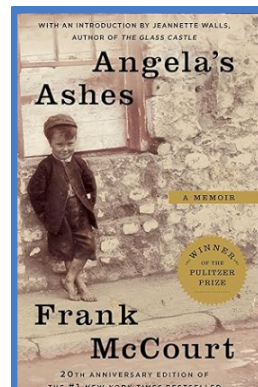
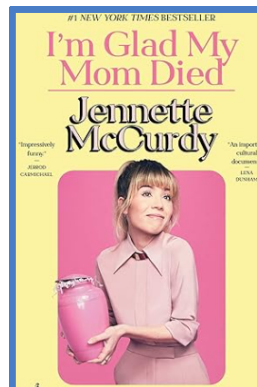
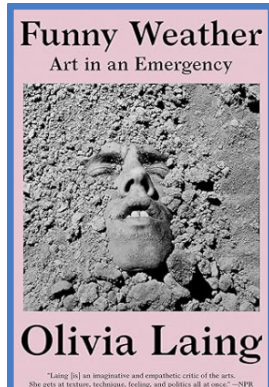
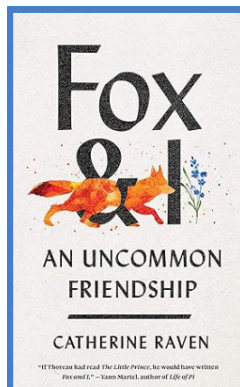
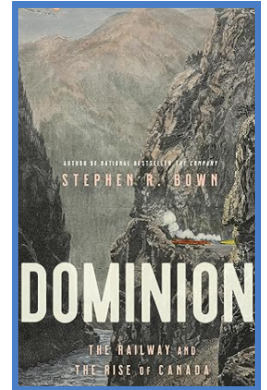
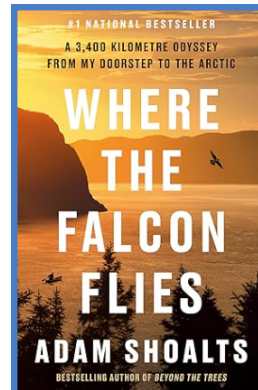
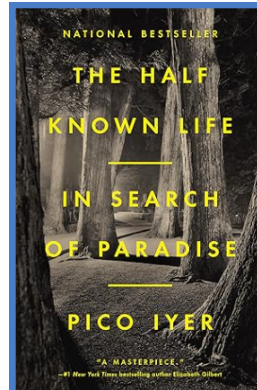
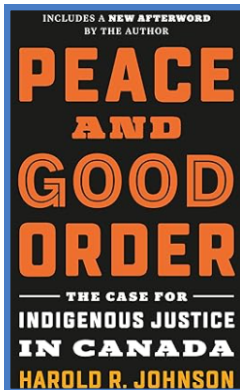
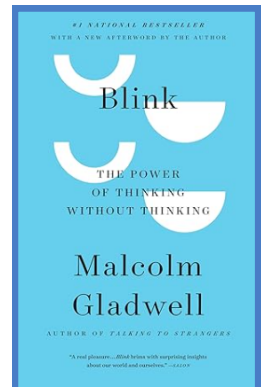
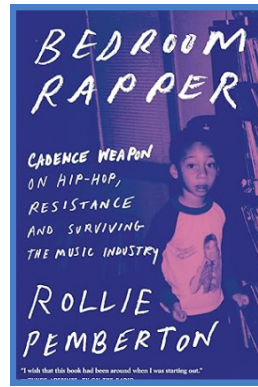
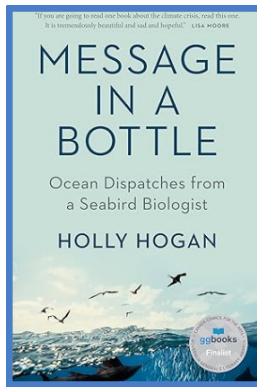
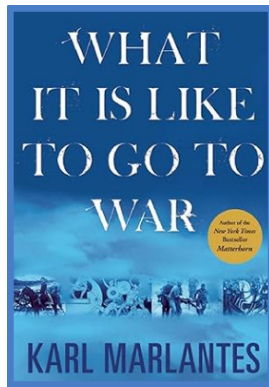
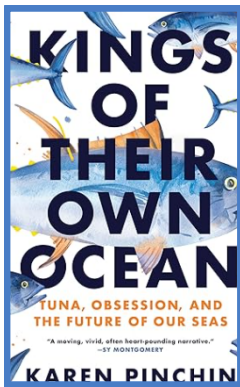
Some of the Books in our Line Up This Coming Year

FICTION



Some of the Books in Our Line Up This Coming Year

NON FICTION



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Max Binnie, Board Chairperson

A Department of Justice litigator and former political staffer living in Ottawa.

Joanie McEwen, Director

Writer, labour mediator/arbitrator in Vancouver, and author of *Innocence on Trial*, *The Framing of Ivan Henry* (2014)

Shelagh Rogers OC, Director

A veteran broadcast journalist, most recently at CBC Radio as the host and co-creator of *The Next Chapter*, the award-winning program devoted to writing in Canada.

Elder Caroline Buckshot, Director

In-House Elder for the Justice Institution of British Columbia (JIBC) and Elder for the Parole Board of Canada (PBC)

Erna Redekopp, Director

A retired healthcare management consultant and nurse educator living in Toronto.

Stephanie Sinclair, Director

Publisher, McClelland & Stewart and Hazlitt, Vice president, Penguin Random House Canada

Honorary Members

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Honorary Patron
Canada's preeminent writer.

Ian Binnie, CC Q.C

Honorary Chair
Eminent retired Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada.

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(Thank you for helping us make a difference.)

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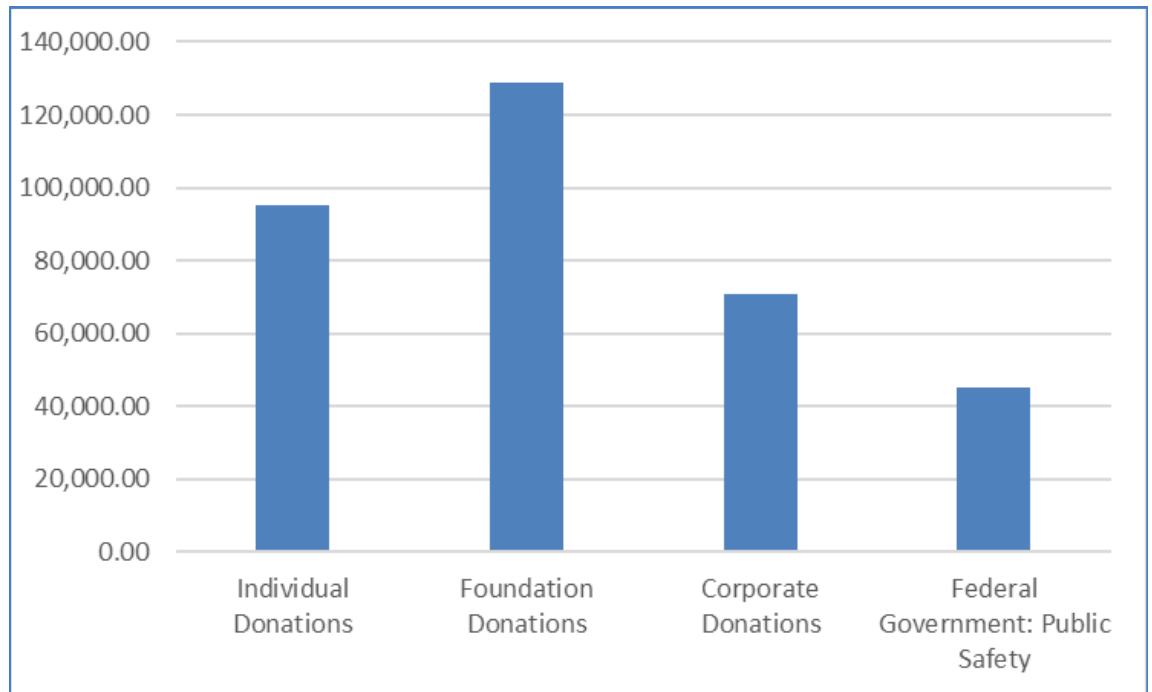
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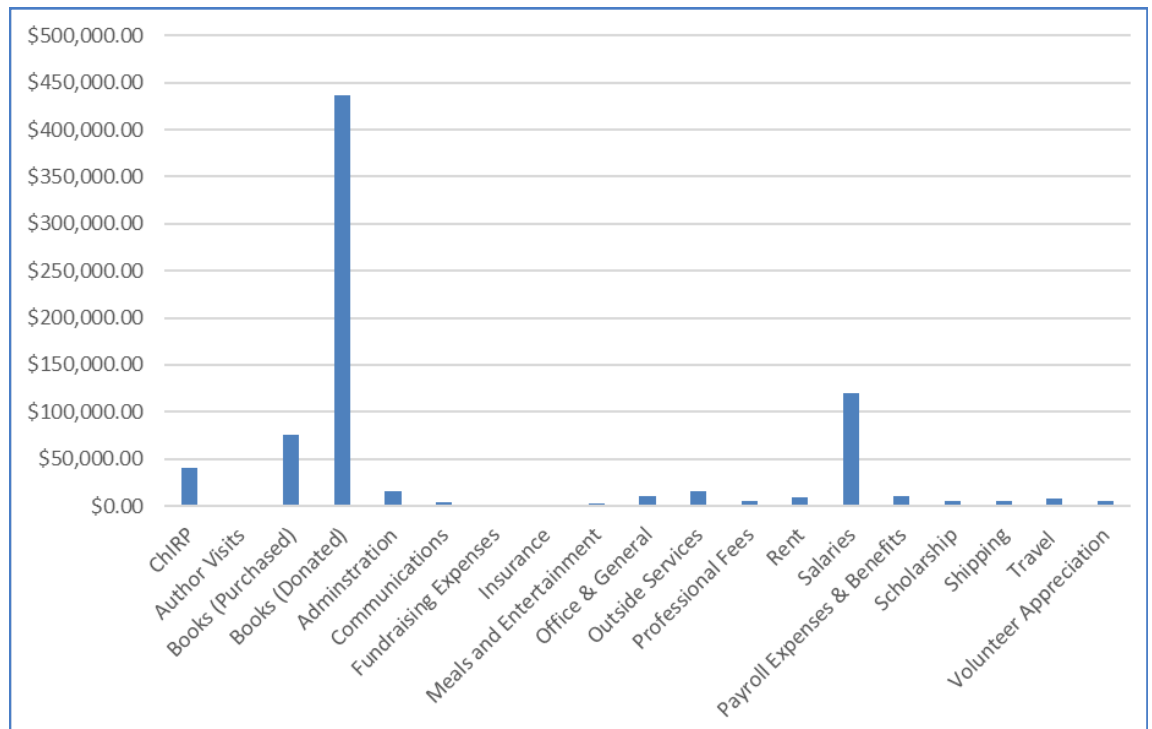
2023 Financial Highlights



2023 Revenue

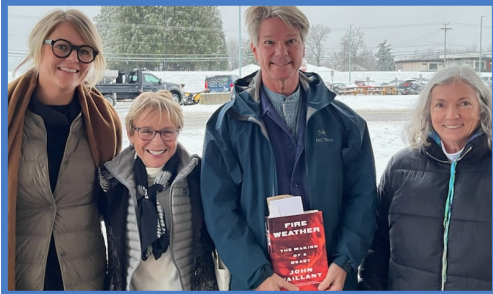


2023 Expenses



Highlights from 2023

Author Visits



Pacific Institution with author, John Valliant



Bath Institution with author, Heather O'Neill



Bath Institution with author, Lawrence Hill



Mountain Institution with author, Daniel Kalla

Volunteer Appreciation Meetings



Our team of volunteers at Bowden Institution



Our team of volunteers at Grand Valley Institution for Women

Word on the Street - Toronto



Highlights from 2023

15th Anniversary Celebration at WeirFoulds LLP



Tom Best, Carol Finlay, Emily O'Brien, Bryan Finlay and Saad Gaya



Author, Claire Cameron



Weirfoulds LLP



Emily O'Brien, founder of **Come Back Snacks** with Tom Best, executive director of **BCFI**



Linden MacIntyre with guest



John Irving with guest

2023 Impact Report

As of **December 2023**, BCFI actively facilitates book clubs in **40 institutions**, marking a notable increase from **33 in 2022**.

In **2023**, BCFI joyfully welcomed **13 new volunteers** to our dedicated team, and their contributions have been truly appreciated.

BCFI boasts an engagement with **over 500 inmates actively involved in our book clubs**, encouraging a culture of literary exploration within the incarcerated community.

In 2023, we had over **10 author visits**, hosting book club meetings across Canada. Starting in 2024, we've already hosted 5 author visits. **As we approach the quarter mark of the year, our ongoing commitment is stronger than ever.**

In 2023, our reading list boasted **149 captivating book titles**. Fast forward to 2024; we are up to **198 book titles**.

2023 Impact Report

Children of Inmates Reading Program (ChIRP)

ChIRP was active in **4 institutions in 2022**. As of **December 2023**, we are active in **15 institutions**. As of **February 2024** we have **8 new institutions** in the works.



Talking about family, back in **2022**, we kicked it off with a fantastic **squad of 5 volunteers**. Roll into 2023, and we've welcomed **18 more wonderful volunteers** to our ChIRP team.

2023 Impact Report

Testimonials

"I am writing to thank and acknowledge BCFI for your work organizing volunteer-led book clubs within federal penitentiaries across Canada, including the recently launched Library Project initiative to rebuild federal prison library collections, to train and mentor prison librarians and volunteers, and to empower incarcerated people by supporting their ability to benefit from the joy and power of reading."

*-The Honourable Kim Pate, C.M., B.A., B.Ed. P.D.P.P., J.D., M.Sc.Dip., D.U., LL.D. (h.c.)
Senator*

"It helps me to listen to others and see other points of views that would not have occurred to me"

-Inmate, Mission Institution

"I love to hear the different views on some books, so improved my listening skills, reading skills, and different kinds of book selections is good."

-Inmate, Bowden Institution

"I enjoy exposure to books I wouldn't otherwise read, and I appreciate the intellectual discussions we have."

Inmate, Bowden Institution

2023 Impact Report

Testimonials

“The adult books that you sent in are also well appreciated. New materials in our limited archive in extremely beneficial for us. Most of the new materials have already been checked out, since people crave new books and escapes from the everyday monotony. Their excitement when they see the new material is likely the best part of the donations we receive. Individuals like yourself for donating to our facility proves to us that we aren’t forgotten. Thank you very much for thinking of us.

-Inmate, Joyceville Minimum Institution

“For the last 15 years, I have grown to become a good editor and author.”

-Inmate, Pacific Institution

“There aren’t enough words to tell you how much we appreciate all you do for us and our families. You help us interact and stay connected with our loved ones, a gift that definitely beats anything that could fit under a tree?”

-Beaver Creek Family

“Reading is outside my personal bias and comfort zone. Helps me stretch my mind and emotions.

-Inmate, Fraser Valley Institution for Women



**BOOK
CLUBS FOR
INMATES**