

March 2024

# Book Clubs for Inmates

# NEWSLETTER



## Remembering Navalny and the Importance of Books in Prison Life

The heroic Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who tragically died in a prison in the Arctic last week, kept himself busy by reading books, writing letters, and keeping himself aware of what was going on in the world. According to The New York Times, Navalny “sought solace in letters” and wrote to many friends, acquaintances, and writers. “Books appeared to be at the center of Navalny’s prison life, all the way until his death,” said the NYT. For instance, Navalny re-read *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn on Stalin’s gulag. Having survived a hunger strike and gone months without adequate nutrition, Navalny wrote that he could now “grasp the depravity of the Soviet-era labour camps. You start to realize the degree of horror.” He read Mikhail Fishman’s book on Boris Nemtsov, another opposition leader who had been assassinated (*The Story of Boris Nemtsov and of the Country in Which He Didn’t Become President*) at the Arctic prison called Polar Wolf, where he spent his last few months. Navalny had access to only those books available in the library, and he read the classics by Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Anton Chekov. “Who could’ve told me that Chekov is the most depressing Russian writer?” he wrote in a letter to journalist Sergej Parkhomenko.



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In prison, books were his best friend. His letters reveal that Navalny read as many as 44 books last year and studied political memoirs. In a letter dated April 20, 2023, Navalny told his friend, Krasilshchik, that he read 10 books simultaneously and used to “switch between them.” Navalny’s love for memoirs grew when he was in jail. “For some reason, I always despised them. But they’re actually amazing,” the former politician said.

This year, thanks to generous donations from our supporters, we can offer inmates in our book clubs a remarkable array of literature for discussion. Because of support from foundations and donors, we have donated thousands of brand-new books to prison libraries from coast to coast.

## Looking Ahead to 2024

This marks a significant milestone for Book Clubs for Inmates and the Children of Inmates Reading Program (ChIRP) as we navigate through a pivotal year. Both programs are now operating at full capacity post-pandemic, and we've successfully launched new book clubs and ChIRP initiatives in additional institutions. Looking ahead to 2024, our ambitious plan is to further extend our reach to more facilities, fostering literary connections where they are needed most.

Amidst the progress, we acknowledge that there are still numerous institutions waiting to be touched by our programs. This year, we are committed to bridging these gaps and expanding our impact. One of our key objectives is to secure a corporate sponsor for our Library Project, a crucial step towards enriching the resources available to those we serve.

Additionally, 2024 is set to be a year of heightened visibility and fundraising efforts for our Author Visits program. We aspire to bring renowned authors into the lives of those in correctional facilities, fostering inspiration and providing unique literary experiences.

With determination and passion, we embark on this journey, dedicated to making a positive impact on the lives of inmates and their families through the power of literature.



## 2023 Author Visits

In the midst of 2023, we reignited the flame of our Author Visits program, which the pandemic-induced hiatus had temporarily dimmed. Now, we find ourselves in a vibrant resurgence, actively engaging with the literary world. The outpouring of support from numerous Canadian authors has been extraordinary, with these literary luminaries generously contributing their time to grace our book clubs and delve into their most recent work. Among the esteemed authors who visited Book Clubs for Inmates in 2023 were Heather O'Neill, John Valiant, Eddy Boudel Tan, Dan Kalla, Robert Hough, Wayne Grady, and Judii Merle.

Looking ahead to 2024, the anticipation builds as we welcome a new roster of distinguished authors passionate about their craft and committed to extending their insights to the federal penitentiaries. The upcoming year sees visits from R.H. Thompson, Sarah Polly, Lawrence Hill, Judy Bates Fong, David A. Robertson, Carrie Snyder, Stephen Brunt, and Michelle Good.

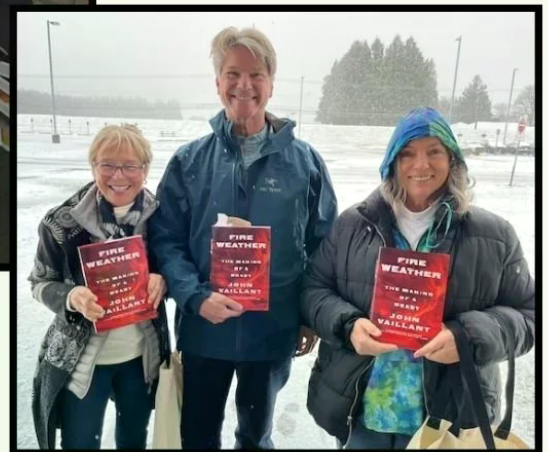
Immersing the prison community in the world of literature goes beyond the pages of a book; it's a catalyst for change and growth. Author visits are a key to this transformation, serving as a beacon of hope and a bridge to a brighter future. The impact is profound, touching not only the individual reading abilities but also nurturing a collective appreciation for the written word within the prison walls. The magic of author visits lies in their ability to ignite creativity within inmates. As real-world writers share their stories and insights, dormant imaginations awaken, opening doors to new possibilities. This creative spark has the potential to be a driving force in reshaping the life chances and opportunities of those behind bars. Meeting with authors becomes a beacon of normalcy and a reminder of the shared humanity that transcends prison walls. This connection not only broadens horizons but also serves as a lifeline to hope and transformation.

Join us in making a lasting impact on the lives of those seeking redemption and a second chance. Your continued support. Your continued support is a beacon of hope, illuminating the path towards a brighter, more literate future within the prison community. To support this program, [click here](#).

Mountain Institution, with Daniel Kalla



Cowansville Institution, with Heather O'Neill



Pacific Institution, with John Vaillant