

March 2025

Book Clubs for Inmates

NEWSLETTER

Kicking Off the First Two Months With Some Fantastic Author Visits.

In early January, author Jane Urquhart visited Warkworth Institution to discuss her novel *In Winter I Get Up at Night: A Novel* with book club members. Our volunteers described the conversation as “moving, relevant, and honest.” The discussion opened with Urquhart sharing her thoughts on her visit. “She explained the overlap of fiction and nonfiction, with so much inspiration coming from family folklore. After the meeting, Jane said the experience was one of the most amazing she has had—in fact, she agreed with Stephen Brunt, who said it “was life-changing.” She said she had never had such an authentic experience, and the participants' depth of questions and preparation were moving and incredible for her. Jane indicated that she would like to come again and be more involved somehow, and she said she would pass the opportunity on to some of her novelist friends. The experience was really worthwhile and left us all feeling so positive and encouraged.”

Mission Institution welcomed author Minelle Mahtani in early February as part of our Author Visits initiative. She engaged in a meaningful discussion about her recently released book, *May It Have a Happy Ending*. The event was a tremendous success—so much so that Ms. Mahtani later shared a heartfelt email expressing her joy and gratitude for being part of this initiative.

“I am writing to express my sincere gratitude for the experience I had yesterday in Mission. The conversations I had at both places were extraordinary—we spoke about redemption, grief, intergenerational trauma, and so much more. They showed sincere interest in me and did such close readings of the memoir. At times I thought they knew my book better than I did! The men teared up several times speaking about how the book moved them,



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and they told me how much they appreciated it.

They even read out passages that stayed with them. They were particularly struck by the ways I had experienced multiple forms of racism and were outraged on my behalf. The non-linear form of the memoir was attractive to them; they said—they liked to pick it up on any page and be told a story, apparently. Some of the most poignant moments emerged when the men spoke about losing their own parents, either by estrangement or by death—and what it meant to lose a parent when you could not be physically close to them. I teach my book at the graduate level here at UBC, but the ways these men explored the themes in the memoir surpassed some of the discussions I've had with PhD students. One of them even quoted Oscar Wilde! It was an experience I will never forget. I'm still digesting. Thank you for trusting me and my work enough to bring me into your organization in this way."

Collins Bay Institution welcomed two esteemed writers in late February as part of our Author Visits initiative. Ian Williams, author of *Disorientation: Being Black in the World*, visited the maximum unit, while Lawrence Hill engaged with inmates in both the medium and minimum units, leading a discussion on his novel *The Book of Negroes*. Both visits were highly successful, with The Honourable Senator Kim Pate attending Lawrence Hill's session. A dedicated supporter of our program, Senator Pate strongly advocates for the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals.

Meanwhile, Bath Institution hosted author Karl Subban, who shared insights from his book *Raise Your Roof: The Hidden Power of Your Potential*.

All three authors participated in our Author Visits to celebrate Black History Month. Attendance was not limited to book club members—any interested inmates were invited to join the discussions. Each visit was a resounding success, fostering meaningful conversations and inspiration.



Minelle Mahtani, Mission Institution



Ian Williams, Collins Bay Institution



Lawrence Hill, Collins Bay Institution, maximum unit



Karl Subban, Bath Institution

Welcoming Three New Board Members

At BCFI, we are thrilled to welcome three new board members, effective January 2025.

Allow us to introduce them:

Elamin Abdelmahmoud is a Sudanese Canadian writer, culture and politics commentator, and broadcaster based in Toronto, Ontario. He is best known as the host of *Commotion* on CBC. His debut novel, *Son of Elsewhere: A Memoir in Pieces*, was published in 2022. In this deeply personal work, he reflects on his shifting identity—from seeing himself as Arab as a child to being defined as Black upon arriving in Canada. His book has resonated with many of our book club members and volunteers.



Stephanie Domet has been writing since she first figured out how to hold a pencil. She is the author of *Homing* and *Fallsy Downsies*, with a third book on the way. A freelance editor and writing coach, Stephanie also runs the **Tiny Empire Writing Workshop** for both kids and adults and is the co-founder and co-executive director of the **AfterWords Literary Festival** in Halifax, NS.

Jake Brunt is a leading marketing professional at **Labatt Canada** with a passion for storytelling and brand building. Formerly working at Book Clubs for Inmates as a program coordinator, he is proud to return as a board member after nearly a decade working in the private sector. Jake strives to connect people through creativity, empathy, and meaningful experiences in everything he does.



Volunteer Appreciation Week

Bath Institution held a Volunteer Appreciation Week in February, providing inmates with the opportunity to contribute their creative works and writings to the event. One inmate, a participant in our ChIRP program, penned a heartfelt tribute to our dedicated volunteer ChIRP facilitator, Hayley, and the impact of our program. We are delighted to share his inspiring words with you. **Enjoy!**

Through children's storybooks and voice recordings,
I've been able to be a part of my son's daily bedtime routine every evening
Reading him stories that he's so fond of, and can joyfully read-along with,
While hearing my voice, feeling like I'm right there at his bedside reading to him
Once a month like clockwork, Hayley Milligan is here at the Institution,
Taking the time out from her personal life to be here for us, no matter the weather or season
ChIRP has, and continues to generously offer their volunteer services,
Helping Fathers and Mothers in the Prison System to connect, and stay connected with their children
Building and fortifying unbreakable bonds in a very heartfelt significant way,
Which are extremely valued, cherished, and continuously strengthened by the simple flip of a page
Those bonds and connections are also deeply treasured in ways that words can never express,
And they make us feel a sense of humanity that Prison sometimes makes us repress and forget
I am extremely grateful for the ChIRP Program, and for all the ways that they go above and beyond,
And I appreciate all their efforts in helping me grow closer to my youngest son
Recognizing Hayley, and her commitment to the call,
And all of the people behind the scenes that make this program possible
Especially all those responsible for its existence and success,
Please know, that "your time", "dedication", and "selfless acts of kindness" are "precious and priceless"
Because without all of you to make this program happen,
Some of us may not have otherwise been able to make this kind of strong parental connection
Or be able to make such an influential impact in our children's lives,
Simply through the opportunity of reading a storybook to our kids at bedtime,
So thank you, all of you, for your commitment, your time, and all the work that you do,
May God continue to bless each and every one of you, and all that you put your hands to.

Written by: **Anthony**, inmate and parent

