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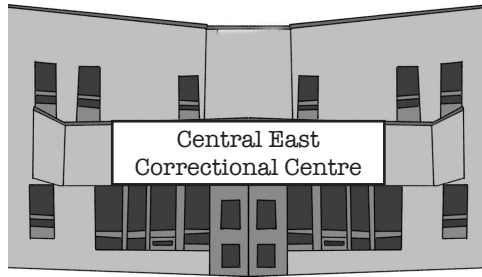
**“Every time I come out of jail, I’m homeless.” - Daniel**

Owen: "I was living in Lindsay. I left Oshawa and went to Lindsay on the run, lived there four years on the run and went to jail and turned myself in when I was ready to stop being young and dumb." Daniel: "I believe if there was a place that, when you got out, you could go and stay for like a month to help you get on your feet. I think that would help. I think that would make it so that most of those people would be stabilized. Not go back to jail and not be homeless." Bill: "They give you a bus ticket that lets you travel home in the winter. They gave me a winter jacket. It really sucked." Josie Lewis: "They brought me to the hospital for assessment and the hospital discharged me. I tried to go the next day and they wouldn't let me in. I got quite upset and the police were called. So I was arrested, charged with something or other, trespass or something. And spent about a month in jail again." Daniel: "I had a place from FourCAST ... and I lost the place ... I got kicked out of the program, too, because I was in jail for over two years. In the program you have a re-evaluation every six months and they couldn't do it with me because I was in jail. So, I got kicked out of the program."

# Park Stories

## Issue One: Jail

**Warning:  
This zine contains  
strong language and  
distressing content**



*In the summer of 2022, the Research for Social Change lab set out to learn: What is it like to experience homelessness in Peterborough, Ontario? And what are people's experiences seeking services from Peterborough's homeless-serving system?*

*Over about a month, we interviewed 48 people who were experiencing homelessness or had a history of homelessness in Peterborough. Most of these interviews took place in Victoria Park, a popular hangout and sometimes camp site across the street from the One Roof Community Centre. Participants were given a \$25 honorarium to thank them for their time.*

*We are sharing what we heard in a series of zines called Park Stories. When the series is complete, we will collect them into a larger volume. Every individual quoted in this zine has been given a pseudonym to protect their privacy.*

*This zine and the research it draws on was supported by Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy and United Way Peterborough & District.*

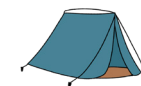
The City of Peterborough is a forty-minute drive from the Central East Correctional Centre, a provincial jail in Lindsay, Ontario. For many people experiencing homelessness in Peterborough, the Lindsay jail looms large — lack of housing has been shown to expose people to increased criminalization.

Of the 48 people we interviewed, 20 shared that they had spent time in jail, and almost all of those specified that their time was spent in Lindsay. A handful more shared experiences of criminalization and police-involvement, but didn't share whether it had landed them in jail or not.

In Canada, sentences of less than two years are served in provincial jails, and longer ones are served in federal prisons. That means provincial jails like the Lindsay one "are characterized by short stays and rapid turnover," which leads to "considerable movement between the correctional system and the community."<sup>1</sup>

The short sentences served in provincial jails are typically meted out in response to minor offences, including offences against the administration of justice such as missing a court date. No individuals we spoke with said they'd ever received a federal sentence. Instead, many described multiple minor infractions resulting in multiple trips in and out of jail — a cycle that destabilizes lives and makes maintaining housing next to impossible.

In this zine, we share a few stories that are representative of what people experiencing homelessness told us about jail, and how experiences of homelessness, criminalization, and incarceration interconnect.



## Getting into Trouble

Not everyone we spoke with wanted to discuss why they were sentenced to jail time. But among those who did, some described being sent to jail after many different minor charges against them piled up, including administration of justice charges for failing to appear at court or failing to adhere to a probation order. For others, an experience of incarceration resulted directly from homelessness (getting caught trespassing or breaking and entering to sleep in abandoned buildings, for example), substance use, or mental health challenges.



### Mari's story

Mari says she sometimes gets into trouble with her boyfriend. Once, after a fight between the two of them turned violent, the police became involved. "I didn't want to charge him," Mari said. "I loved him." But the police saw things differently. "The cops ended up charging him and put a no-contact order on us. So now anytime we get caught together we have a breach of undertaking, release order, and probation."

"That's why this time when we got arrested, because I had an outstanding warrant, because of my failure to appear. And I was like, 'You know what ... whatever.'"

Mari is out of jail now, but her boyfriend isn't. She still wants to see him. "We have a kid together. Like, I can't not talk to him." Mari's goal is to get housing before her boyfriend gets out of jail. That way, the two of them can stay sober together. "I know him ... If he's on the street when he comes out, he's gonna use again ... I don't want him to die."

Stan:

**"I blacked out one night and I was looking for shelter. And they had already moved out of the church to the new Mission, so it was an empty building and apparently, they had me on camera breaking in and as soon as I got access to go in, I turned around and left. I didn't even go in, it was stupid, dumb shit. They charged me criminal charges and shit."**

Owen:

**"I left Oshawa and went to Lindsay on the run. Lived there four years on the run and went to jail and turned myself in when I was ready to stop being young and dumb."**

Josie Lewis:

**"I tried to light myself on fire, and that caused a bit of a house fire. Wasn't a huge fire, but it was enough that they charged me with arson."**

Harvey:

**"I had a bench warrant for me. So as soon as I left the [inpatient mental health] hospital, me and ----- took off in the truck. And then we piled the truck into a street sign. And the OPP showed up, so they took me to the Lindsay jail."**

## Nathan's story

For Nathan, turning his music up loud set off a chain of events that landed him in the Lindsay jail for eight months and then homeless for two years.

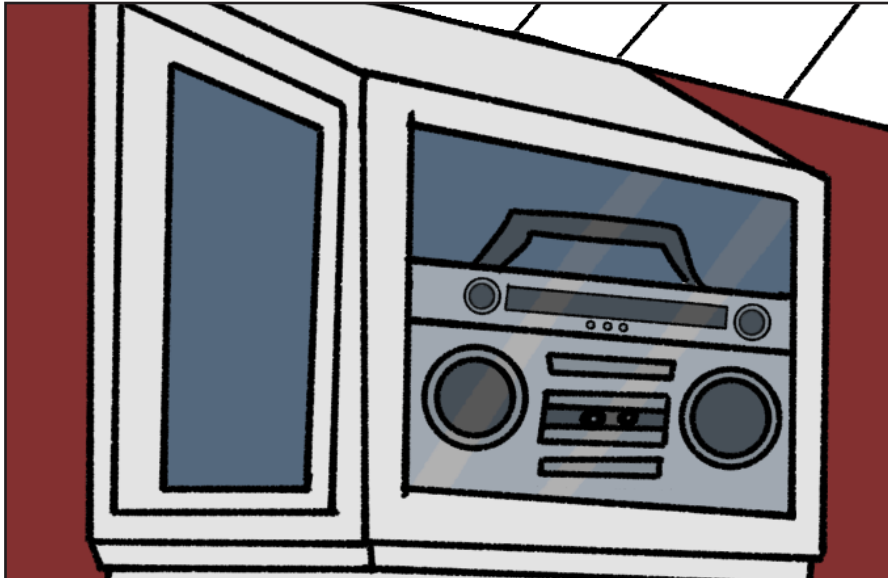
It was his first time in trouble a while. When it happened, Nathan hadn't been in trouble "for 20 odd years," he said. But then, COVID hit, and he was told he had to stay at home. "You can't go anywhere. You can't do anything," he said. "Okay, then I'm going to stay at home and crank my music."

"I got charged with mischief because I kept turning it up," Nathan said. "Three mischief charges, I got."

But then, other charges started piling up. "Things started adding up," he said. After the incident, he returned to the property when he wasn't supposed to, and that was trespassing. "Then it'd be a breach of [Inaudible] and other charges got added and added and added. I had 26 charges in the six days or something."

Nathan gave up his apartment while he was in jail. So when he got out, he was homeless for the first time in his life. "It's been two years since I've been homeless," he said in summer 2022. "You know, I was never homeless before that."

Homelessness makes people vulnerable to criminalization, because people must do things in public that aren't criminalized in private (going to the bathroom, for example). But as Nathan's story illustrates, the opposite is also true: criminalization threatens people's housing and is a key driver of homelessness.



## Drugs in Jail

A jail sentence can mean involuntary detox for some drug users — making the first week or two behind bars a period of painful withdrawal. And release back into the community can be a dangerous period, too, if a person's tolerance has decreased during their time in jail.



### Mari's story

"I wasn't on the [methadone] program when I went to jail this time, so I was, like, majorly dope sick," Mari said. "I never want to go through it again." Mari got some help to manage the symptoms. "They give you, like, a withdrawal cocktail. So its Gravol, Motrin, Advil or Tylenol, can't remember which one, and then clonidine to help you sleep," she said. "The doctor prescribed it for two and a half weeks."

When she got out of jail, Mari hadn't used drugs in over a month, and she resolved to keep it that way. "I'm not gonna go and put opioids into my system once I get out if I'm clean, you know? Like, no thank you."

### Aiden's story

Unlike Mari, Aiden was using methadone when he received his most recent jail sentence. He's noticed an improvement in access to methadone in jail: "They're pretty good with that now. Like before, like years ago, when I had been in jail, there was a bit of a waiting period. So, when you first go in, you wouldn't get your methadone for a couple of days, which can be pretty rough. But now it's the next day you're in there, you get your methadone. They call your clinic and verify it and then you're good to go."

### Keith's story

A long period without using drugs can lower a person's tolerance to a substance, sometimes with tragic results, as Keith shares. "My cousin passed away from an overdose last year," he said. "He got out of jail, he was out for six hours, went to the library, went to the washroom and never came out."



## Consequences of Being in Jail

Incarceration is a big disruption in a person's life, and it can significantly destabilize their efforts to obtain or maintain housing.

Losing touch with the outside community can have negative impacts on a search for housing. For example, the housing wait list for people experiencing homelessness in Peterborough, the By-name Priority List, requires people to check in every three months to stay active on the list. That can be tricky from jail.

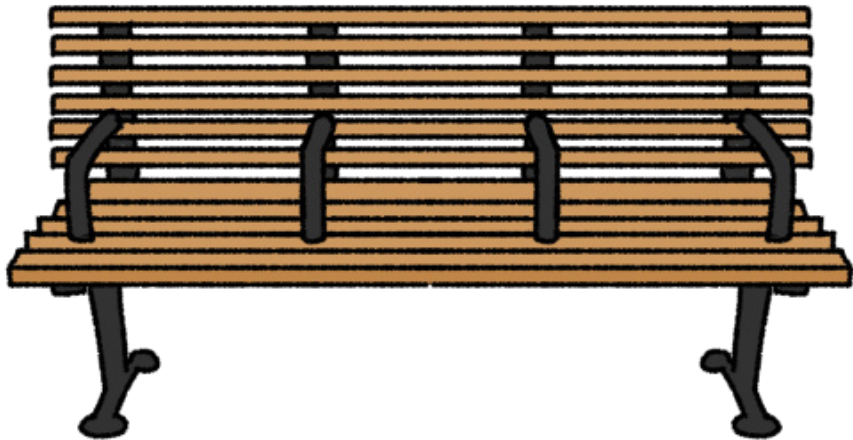
Andrea said she's been on the By-name Priority List for years. But when asked whether she checks in with the list regularly to stay active, she said, "No. I've been in jail a lot of the past couple years, to be honest."

Something similar happened to Caitlin. She said she was on a waitlist for supportive housing with a local agency (and likely on the By-name list). But after going to jail for five months and then being released, she came out uncertain what her standing with the agency was.

And Daniel lost his spot in publicly-supported housing because he went to jail. "I got kicked out of the program, too, because I was in jail for over two years," he said. "In the program, you have a reevaluation every six months and they couldn't do it with me because I was in jail. So I got kicked out of the program."

Steve said you can't find housing when you're in jail. "You gotta be out in the real world to fight for" a place, he said. On the inside, "you're just on the phone," he said. "Shit gets stressful, I'm telling that."

Unfortunately, this means people are discharged from jail directly into homelessness — which puts them at increased risk of ending up back in jail again.



Josie Lewis accrued social assistance debt while in jail:

**"They kept giving [ODSP] to me when I was in jail. And I still have to pay that back, which I'm slowly working on ... [I] have what they call an overpayment."**

Nathan accepted a buyout from his landlord when he was in jail:

**"While I was in jail, I got a letter from my [landlord] saying he'd give me \$3,000 to leave."**

Aiden loses his housing whenever he goes to jail:

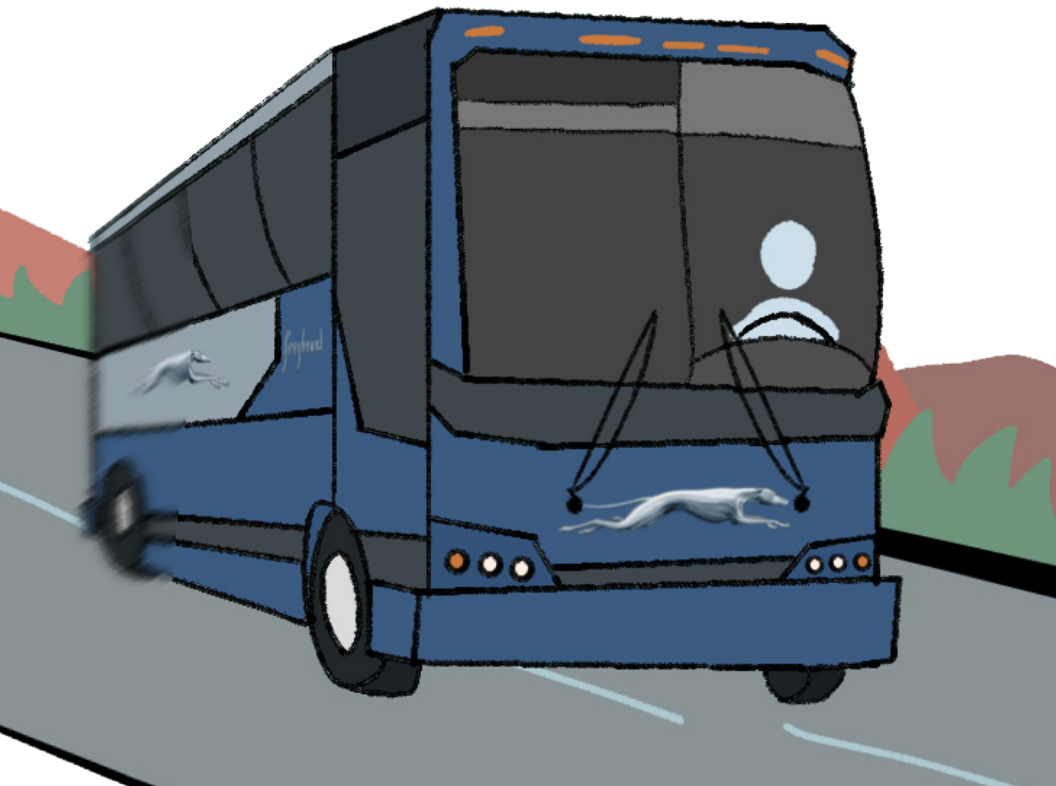
**"I lost my place and I had to come back into the Brock when I got out. And, yeah, so it's just kind of a few different times I had to stay there."**

## Released into Homelessness

According to Ontario's information guide for inmates, "Some institutions have a discharge planner who can help you get ready for release. In institutions where there is no discharge planner, classification staff or the social worker can help you." The guide also states, "When you are being released and need help with your travel plans and/or transportation needs, you should put in a request form to see a discharge planner at least two weeks before your release date."

Despite the guide's suggestion that some discharge planning exists, most of the people we spoke with described a total lack of support to find housing upon release. For the few who said there were some efforts from jail staff to help, it doesn't appear to have led to anything. "They did try to do some, like, planning before release," Josie Lewis said, "but nothing came to fruition and then it just kind of became, you know, where do you want to be dropped off?"

It's not surprising, then, that nearly everyone we spoke to about their experiences in jail described being released straight into homelessness — even if they had been housed before going to jail.



**Mayor:** "There's no support for you to be outside [of jail]. When you get outside, you're fucked. You're stranded."

**Stan:** "The day you get out of jail, you don't know where you're gonna sleep that night. I never did. My mum would give me one night and that'd be it. And she's gone now, anyhow."

**Aiden:** "They give you a ride to the bus terminal from Lindsay. And they just let you go."

**Andrea:** "They just leave you in Peterborough. When you get out of jail, either they pay for a cab for you to come to Peterborough or they transport you here by an officer."

**Josie Lewis:** "I was coming out of jail and needed a place to stay. And I didn't have any options, so I managed to stumble upon the Warming Room."

**Steve:** "You go to jail and you come back out, you're homeless, 'cause you don't have a place ... You're still on the street, obviously, because you don't have a place lined up. They don't let you find a place in there at all!"

## Jail — Sometimes Preferable

Sometimes, jail turns out to be the most comfortable or safest place for a person to be.

### **Andrea's story**

For five years, Andrea lived “on the run” with “an older gentleman who bailed me out of jail.” She eventually got caught and sent to jail again, but she said this made her more safe. “It was an abusive relationship, so it was for the best that they found me anyway ... I was going through a lot of abuse at the time. Getting beat up and hospitalized and stuff.”

### **Coli's story**

Coli prefers jail to some of her other options on the outside.

She says jail staff are generally more respectful than the staff at homeless shelters. “They don't judge you. They know that everybody fucking fucks up in life. You know what I mean? They're there to do a job, not to fucking judge us ... They're actually real down to earth fucking chicks that are just doing their job in there, you know?”

Whatsmore, in jail there is no risk of losing your shelter, even if you break the rules. As someone who's slept outside in the winter after receiving a service restriction from a shelter, Coli appreciates that.

“Minus 25 for a week straight. A week straight. I had to sleep with 3 layers clothing on and snow pants and a jacket. Two jackets ... When I went to jail, this part of my nose had frostbite. It was all black.”

Coli eventually got sent to jail. “I was never happier to be arrested than I was [in January] of this year,” she said. “It's pretty sad to say, you know, I'd rather be in prison or in jail in the winter, just to have three hots and a cot.”

**“A lot of homeless people, they go to jail in the wintertime. They go to jail because they need a warm place to stay.” - Daniel**

# Concluding Reflection

When we set out to make this issue of Park Stories, we were already familiar with the existing research showing how homelessness makes people more vulnerable to criminalization and jail time. Conflicts and activities that would not be criminalized if they happened in a private home are criminalized if they happen on the streets, and some of the stories in this zine illustrate that dynamic.

But what struck us most in making this zine were all the stories that show how the reverse is true. For many of the people we spoke to in Victoria Park, experiences of criminalization and jail appeared to be a key driver of their homelessness. A jail sentence can destabilize someone's housing, and can put up barriers to obtaining housing. This has the potential to trap people in a cycle, where criminalization leads to homelessness, and homelessness leads to further criminalization.

**Opportunities** — As we read these stories, one big opportunity to address homelessness jumps out at us: providing better discharge planning and housing for people coming out of jail. Especially considering how criminalization is a State intervention that actively destabilizes people's housing, it seems absurd that we don't arrange proper housing for people upon release. Any response to crime that makes people homeless is counterproductive.

A second opportunity emerges as we read these stories: Connecting people to addictions and mental health supports in jail and upon release. For better or for worse, jail is often a period of involuntary detox. As Mari's story illustrated, that creates opportunities for individuals who want to change their substance use habits. As Mari herself observed, however, it can be hard to keep one's resolve up if you don't have housing and supports upon release.

**"I believe if there was a place that, when you got out, you could go and stay for like a month to help you get on your feet. I think that would help. I think that would make it so that most of those people would be stabilized. Not go back to jail and not be homeless." - Daniel**

Check out the other zines in this series:

Issue One: Jail  
Issue Two: Possessions  
Issue Three: Shelters  
Issue Four: Navigating the System  
Issue Five: Losing Housing  
Issue Six: Encampments  
Issue Seven: Coordinated Access

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*This zine's lead author was Will Pearson, the RSCL's lab manager. It relied on contributions from Thamer Linklater, Jimmy Frickey, Samantha Blondeau, Marisa Mackenzie, Naomi Nichols, and Joey Lavictoire (who did all the illustrations).*

*Thanks for reading!*

[www.socialchangelab.ca](http://www.socialchangelab.ca)





Andrea: “I ended up moving in with an older gentleman who bailed me out of jail when I got into trouble. Stayed with him in Toronto for five years on the run ... They found me when I got a job in Toronto five years later.” Stan: “The day you get out of jail, you don’t know where you’re gonna sleep that night. I never did. My mom would give me one night and that’d be it. And she’s gone now, anyhow.” Cherry: “I have bad boyfriends who were using me. And they started running drug houses. So I was put in the middle of it. And now I’m out homeless because of them. I even served jail time because of them.” Josie Lewis: “I tried to light myself on fire and that caused a bit of a house fire. Wasn’t a huge fire but it was enough that they charged me with arson.” Harvey: “I had a bench warrant for me. So as soon as I left the hospital, me and ---- took off in the truck. And then we piled the truck into a street sign. And the OPP showed up, so they took me to the Lindsay jail.” Mari: “My main thing is, like, I want to try and get housing. Like, before [my boyfriend] gets out [of jail]. Because I know him ... He’s been shooting up since he was 14 ... If he’s on the street when he comes out, he’s gonna use again. He’s clean. I’m so proud of him ... I don’t want to trigger him ... I don’t want him to die.”



**PARK STORIES** is a series of zines produced by BfE SuperCrew at Trent University’s Research for Social Change Lab. The zines document the stories and observations that people with experiences of homelessness shared with us in Victoria Park in 2022.

You’re holding Issue One — Jail.

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