

EFry CONNECTIONS

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A Newsletter for
Friends of the
Elizabeth Fry Society
of Greater Vancouver



Demand for our services has never been greater, as this year's global economic crisis has impacted many people in the Lower Mainland.

A Message from the Executive Director

In the fall of 1939, a handful of Vancouver women came together to form the country's first-ever Elizabeth Fry Society. Focused on pursuing equal and fair treatment for women behind bars, this small contingent of volunteers inspired many others to join with them in giving a voice to the voiceless and making real and lasting differences in people's lives.

On this 70th anniversary of our inception, we celebrate our founders' vision and the myriad of positive changes EFry has affected over the years. While we achieved much in our history, this is no time to rest on our laurels. Demand for our services has never been greater, as this year's global economic crisis has impacted many people in the Lower Mainland. Fortunately, we are blessed with many dedicated staff, volunteers and supporters who are all working together to support the growing needs of our clients.

In this issue of *Connections*, we are privileged to profile EFry's longest-standing volunteer, Maida Duncan. With over 50 years of service to EFry, Maida has been a key supporter of our growth and evolution.

I wish you all a happy and a productive fall. ■



Shawn Bayes,
Executive Director
EFry

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Shawn Bayes, Bonnie Moriarty, Nima Ghaemi and Doris Sai Boateng celebrated their service milestones at 2009's AGM.

Annual Report 2009

If you have not yet received a copy of EFry's Annual Report 2009 and would like one, call (604) 520-1166 or email us at info@elizabethfry.com.



Annual General Meeting

EFry's 70th Annual General Meeting took place on September 24 at the Vancouver Lawn Tennis and Badminton Club. Guest speaker Constable Rick Lavalle, the Vancouver Police Department's Aboriginal Liaison Officer provided those in attendance with an insider's look at the positive impact peer support can provide Aboriginal youth in our community.

Following the business portion of the meeting, outgoing Board member Kasandra Cronin was recognized for her contribution to EFry. As well, several staff members achieved significant service milestones this year.

They are Nima Ghaemi, 5 years; Sue Bush, 10 years; Doris Sai Boateng, 10 years; Bonnie Moriarty, 16 years and Shawn Bayes, 20 years. Thanks to you all for your dedicated efforts in helping EFry touch so many lives. ■

EFry Welcomes New Board Members

We are pleased to welcome three new members to EFry's Board of Directors for the 2009 – 2010 year.

Camille Cook brings a frontline perspective on justice issues to EFry. A Simon Fraser University Criminology graduate, her background includes being a court worker in the downtown eastside and a support worker in the city's emergency shelters.

Kim Maust is the vice president of Bastion Development Corporation. Her background in the development, construction and property management industry spans 20 years. For half her career, she worked with Habitat for Humanity, a non-profit, low-income housing organization.

Lois Elizabeth Salmond is a criminal defense lawyer interested in how mental health issues intersect with criminal law. She recently lived in Kamloops for a year, where she sat on the Board of the Kamloops & District Elizabeth Fry Society's Board of Directors. ■

Help Us Bring Warmth and Happiness to Children in Need

Each year at EFry's holiday client party, we give over 400 new toys to children living in poverty who would otherwise receive nothing for Christmas. From our shelters, we also provide hundreds of children with gently-used warm winter clothes — coats, mittens, hats, boots and sweaters. This year, the need is greater than ever and we need your help.

If your workplace, building or school is able to host either a winter wear or toy drive, please contact Odessa Tapia at (604) 520-1166. Your contribution would go a long way towards helping our community's children enjoy a brighter holiday season. ■

Volunteer Profile – Maida Duncan

EFry’s work has inspired many dedicated long-term volunteers, but none more so than Maida Duncan. It was over 50 years ago that Maida was invited to her first EFry meeting by the wife of her husband’s colleague.

“Back then there was no paid staff, only volunteers,” remembers Maida. “EFry had just started working with a girls’ school and I started off by visiting with some of them. But what really captured my interest was spending time with the women in prison. They had the same thoughts and concerns as I did, as all women did. They may have done something wrong, but that didn’t make them bad people.”

Although many of her friends had a hard time grasping why she would choose to spend her free time visiting people behind bars, Maida believed strongly in the value of the service she and her fellow EFry volunteers were providing. “Sometimes the only difference between me and the women I met was life circumstances. Giving people a second chance benefits everyone. Why wouldn’t we want to do that?”

Maida’s volunteerism took many forms over the years. In addition to visiting EFry’s clients, she took on the role of accountant, managing the books and setting program budgets in tandem with another volunteer. She also actively lobbied city officials for the green light on EFry’s first halfway houses. “It’s a big change moving from life in prison to life in the community. These women didn’t know how to make the transition without support. I saw it as our job to help them get it.”

Dedicated to ensuring EFry’s ability to continue offering our clients support over the long term, Maida was instrumental in shaping the EFry we know today. “Volunteers are absolutely vital to an organization like this one,” she says. “But it was clear that we also needed staff if we were to effect real change. We found the right fit in Ethel Allardice, our first executive director, as she had a strong volunteer background and understood what we were all about.” EFry’s staff compliment now sits at 150, with close to 300 volunteers.

“Volunteers are absolutely vital to an organization like this one.”

When asked to identify a situation that reaffirmed her decision to give so much of herself and her time to EFry, she remembers the face of a particular inmate. “We had a program where women in prison could create art – beautiful painted plates and things like that. There was this one woman who’d had a very hard life and had done some bad things. She had just finished decorating this floral plate, and she’d made the whole thing herself. And you could just see from the look on her face the pride she felt in discovering her ability to create something wonderful. To her, it was a moment of great empowerment, and it was my privilege to witness it.”

The scope of both EFry’s clients and services has grown exponentially during Maida’s tenure. “To see a need and be able to step forward and say ‘yes, I will help’ is a powerful thing,” she says. “I am tremendously proud of how the organization has grown and the positive differences we have made. I can only imagine how much more we will achieve in the next 70 years.” ■



Maida Duncan

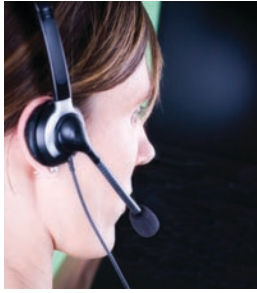


In Memoriam – Jessica Wolfe Leeming

On August 9, EFry client Jessica Wolfe Leeming passed away suddenly. Just 22, Jessica was a talented musician and poet. A former resident of Cynthia’s Place, Jessica made several friends at EFry and is sadly missed.

We were honoured when Jessica’s mother, Barbara Wolfe, requested that those wishing to celebrate Jessica’s life make donations in her name to EFry. While nothing can mitigate the tragedy of a life cut short, gifts such as these enable us to both honour friends who have passed and continue to support those who walk through our doors. Thank you to everyone whose generosity has helped make our work possible.

Selections from Jessica’s body of original music and writing can be found at www.jwl.com.



Storybook Project Brings Parents' Voice to Children of Prisoners

Since the summer of 2009, EFry has been connecting incarcerated mothers with their children through the power of storytelling. With our Storybook Project, EFry provides new books and the equipment necessary for women in the Fraser Valley Institute for Women, the Allouette Correctional Centre for Women and the Surrey Pretrial Centre to record personalized messages to their children and read them a story. A CD recording, along with the book their mother was reading from, are then delivered to the children so they can follow along as their mother tells them a story.

We have received much enthusiastic feedback on the program, including the following from Michelle, aunt of some of our story recipients:

My sister is currently incarcerated in Vancouver, and has four children who are staying with me on Vancouver Island...they are very far from their mom and the changes are hard for them. We received in the mail a package that included a discman, and books with CDs. On the CDs were recordings of the kids' mom reading each of them their own story....It is absolutely amazing to watch the effects this gift has on the kids.....they are sitting down and reading, which is wonderful, but at the same time they are comforted by their mother's voice, which they sorely need right now. Thank you so much for putting this program in to place....you are an amazing society. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Since the project began, EFry has helped mothers and their children enjoy more than 300 stories together. The program has been so successful, it was expanded to men held at the Surrey Pretrial Centre and is now being extended to include fathers incarcerated in the Ferndale Institution in Mission, B.C. ■



EFry Creates Community Quilt

As part of its Fabric Arts Program, the Downtown Eastside Centre for the Arts introduced the Community Quilt Project earlier this year. Inspired by the treasured Women's Memorial Quilt, the project brought together handmade quilts contributed by area residents, cultural groups and community associations in a public exhibition which culminated in a silent auction on October 24.

EFry was invited to participate. Members of our management team and clients contributed to our quilt, entitled *Connections*. The quilt raised \$250 for the Downtown Eastside Centre for the Arts.



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