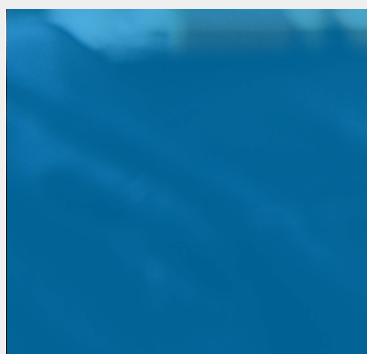


2025

Annual Report



BOOK
CLUBS FOR
INMATES



A Message from Our Executive Director

As we reflect on the past year, we are filled with a deep sense of gratitude and renewed purpose. At Book Clubs for Inmates, our mission continues to guide everything we do: to provide incarcerated men and women with opportunities for personal growth, education, and connection through the transformative power of literature—helping them transition back into society with fewer barriers.

This mission is both simple and profound. Books open doors. They create space for reflection, foster empathy, and build connections in places where these opportunities can be scarce. Through our book clubs, author visits, ChIRP, and our Library Project, we are working toward an ambitious but essential goal: to bring these opportunities to every federal penitentiary across Canada.

None of this work would be possible without the extraordinary dedication of our volunteers, whose compassion and consistency bring each book club to life. We are equally grateful to our Board of Directors for their thoughtful leadership, and to our small but mighty staff for their tireless commitment and care in delivering and growing our programs.

To our donors and supporters, we extend our deepest thanks. Your generosity sustains this work and affirms the belief that access to books—and the dignity, learning, and hope they inspire—matters deeply. Your support ensures that we can continue to reach individuals who benefit so meaningfully from these programs.

We are also grateful to our many partners. Publishers and authors enrich our programs with powerful and relevant voices, helping to spark meaningful discussion and reflection within our clubs. We are equally appreciative of the many individuals within Correctional Service Canada who support and facilitate our work every day. Their collaboration makes it possible for us to reach incarcerated individuals across the country.

Together, this community—volunteers, staff, Board members, donors, partners, and institutional collaborators—forms the foundation of everything we do. Because of you, we are able to continue expanding our reach and deepening our impact.

Thank you for standing with us in this important work.

With gratitude,



Tom Best



A Message from Our ChIRP Program Director

Through ChIRP we continue to encourage positive, meaningful connections between children and their incarcerated family member. We are restoring family connections by allowing inmates to read and send off the recorded reading along with the book to their families at home. This simple yet endearing program has been so positively received by families and continues to help restore the communication gap that develops when a family member is incarcerated.

2025 was once again a year of tremendous growth as new sites across the country spread with the total now up to 28 sites nationwide. This initiative is facilitated by volunteers who faithfully commit to attending the sites monthly to record the readings and prepare and mail out the books and recordings to the families. We are so grateful to our volunteers across the country.

Once again we were grateful to partner with Indigo's Love of Reading Foundation to provide each family with a holiday book, *The Gift of Words* by Peter Reynolds. These books arrived wrapped lovingly in Christmas paper by our volunteers who all go the extra mile to make each recorded reading a treasured gift.

Along with our monthly reading program we have also been supplying read alouds to Visitation Centres at Institutions across the nation. These books, along with fun activity books that we provide, have been instrumental in making what could be a stressful visit more engaging and enjoyable.

It's exciting to know that our goal of getting ChIRP into every Federal Institution across Canada is becoming a reality. Our warm welcome and reception at each site has led to our continued growth, which shows no signs of slowing as we head into 2026.

We continue making a tremendous impact in the lives of over 375 children, with the help of over 50 volunteers who are committed to facilitating the program at 28 sites across the nation each month.



Carla Veitch



Book Clubs for Inmates Board of Directors

Max Binnie, Board Chairperson

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



Joanie McEwen, Director

Labour mediator/arbitrator in Vancouver, and author of *Innocence on Trial: The Framing of Ivan Henry*.

Stephanie Sinclair, Director

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

Jake Brunt, Director

Senior Brand Manager at Labatt Canada and former Program Coordinator for BCFI.

Elamin Abdelmahmoud, Director

A bestselling Sudanese-Canadian writer and the host of *Commotion* on CBC Radio.

Stephanie Domet, Director

Co-executive director, AfterWords Literary Festival, and award-winning author.

Anne Mahon, Director

Author and Chancellor Emeritus of the University of Manitoba.

Book Clubs for Inmates Honorary Members

Margaret Atwood CC, Oont

Honorary Patron
Canada's preeminent writer.

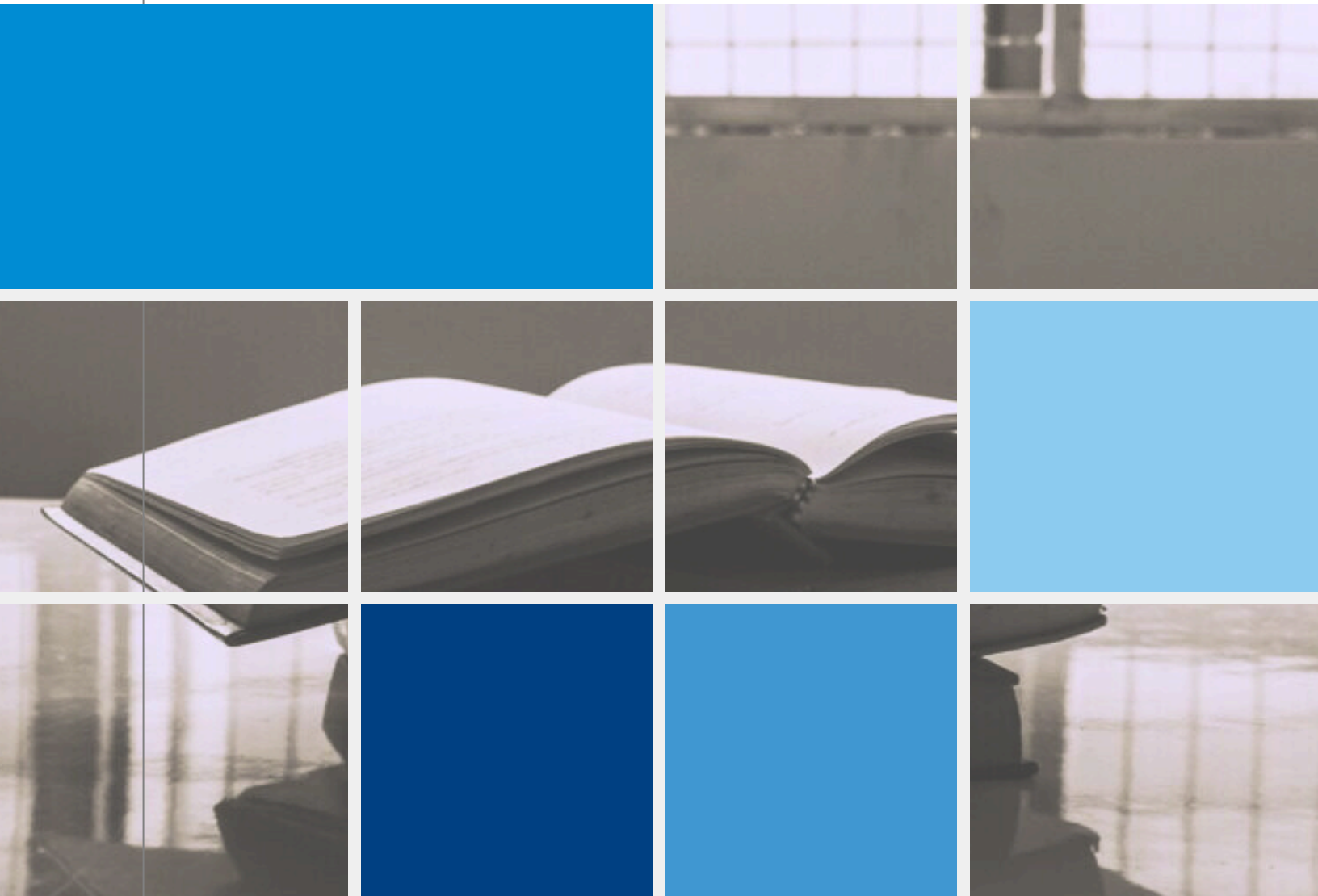
Ian Binnie CC Q.C

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

MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to provide incarcerated men and women with opportunities for personal growth, education, and connection through the transformative power of literature, helping them transition back into society with fewer barriers.

Our goal is to establish our programs in every federal penitentiary across Canada. Our four core programs include: book clubs in federal and provincial institutions, the Children of Inmates Reading Program (ChIRP), the Library Project, and Author Visits.





Number of Programs and Locations

Federal Book Clubs

47

Provincial Book Clubs

10

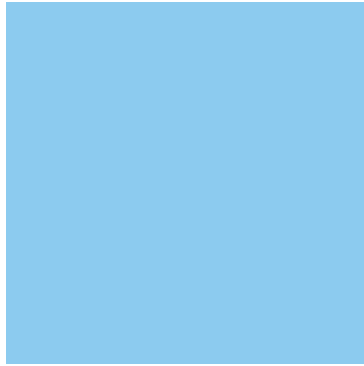
Federal ChIRP

27

Provincial ChIRP

1





BCFI 2025 in Numbers



Book Club
Volunteers

101

Book Club Volunteer
Hours

2,424

Book Club Titles
Purchased & Read

10,470

ChIRP Volunteers

40

ChIRP Volunteer
Hours

1,440

ChIRP Books Purchased
& Read

3,600

Book Club Members

684

ChIRP Participants
(parents & kids)

700

Children's Books Donated
to Family Visiting Centres

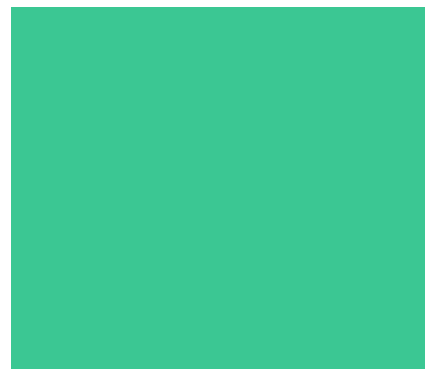
10,815

Books Donated to Prison
Library Collections

66,660

Author Visits to Book
Clubs

38





The BCFI Library Project

Recognizing that not all inmates can participate in book clubs, we are increasing access to the transformative power of literature through the Book Clubs for Inmates Library Project, which aims to add a total of 500,000 new books to prison libraries across Canada by 2027.

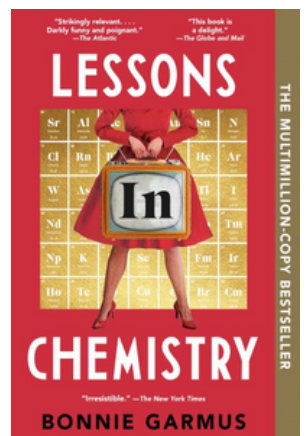
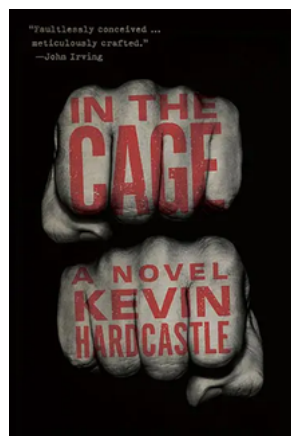
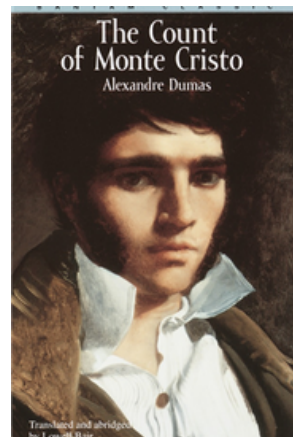
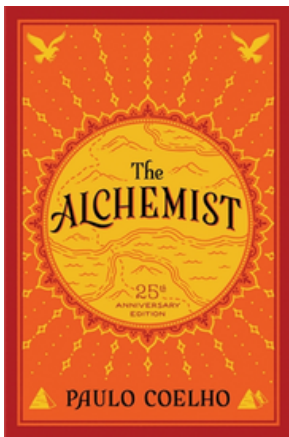
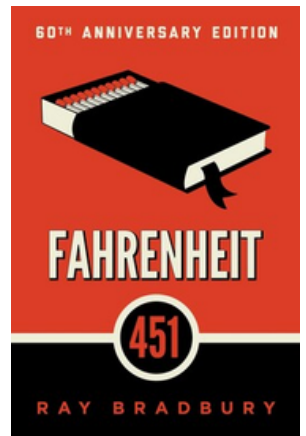
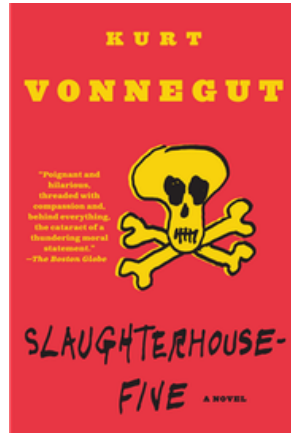
In pursuing education, rehabilitation, and the successful reintegration of incarcerated individuals, prison libraries are indispensable sanctuaries of transformation. They serve as beacons of learning, avenues for personal growth, cultural connections, and sources of joy. More critically, these libraries 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; this is especially concerning given that Black and Indigenous peoples are overincarcerated in Canada.

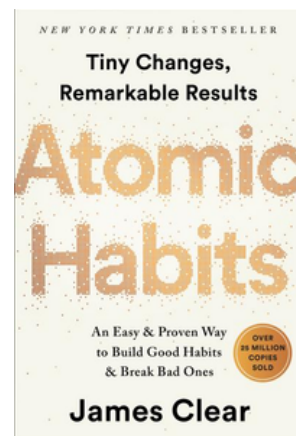
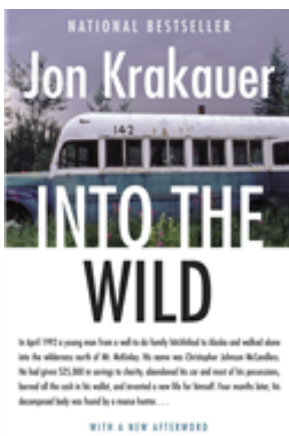
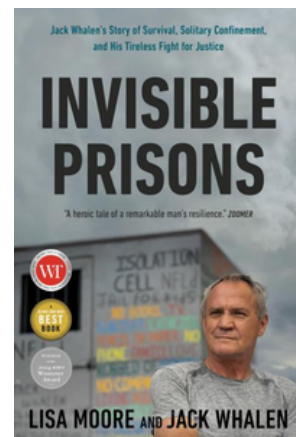
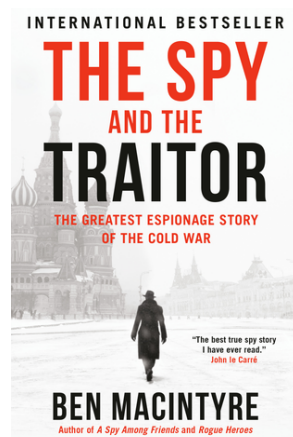
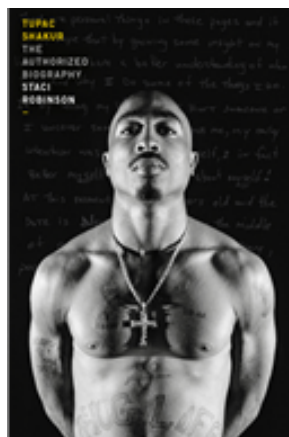
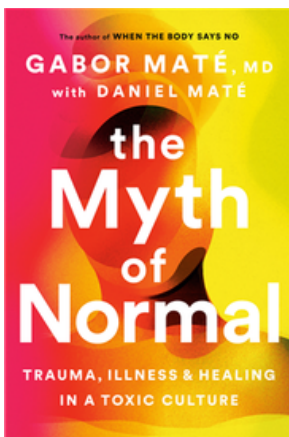
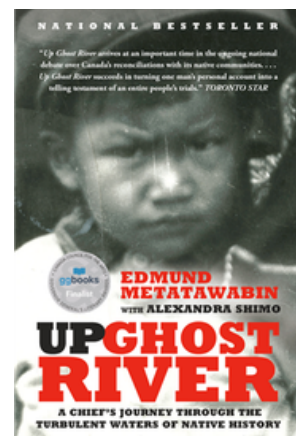
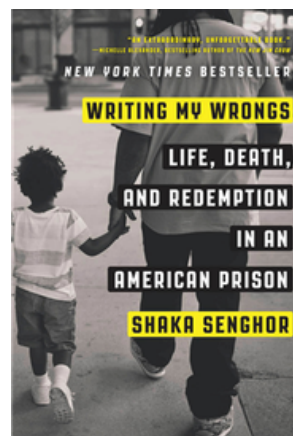
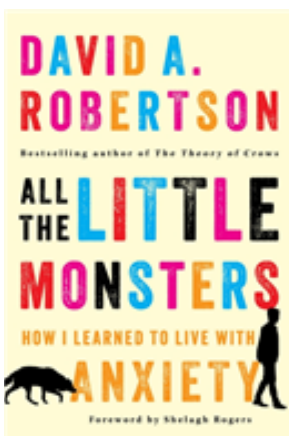
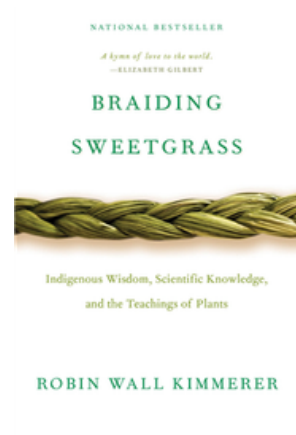
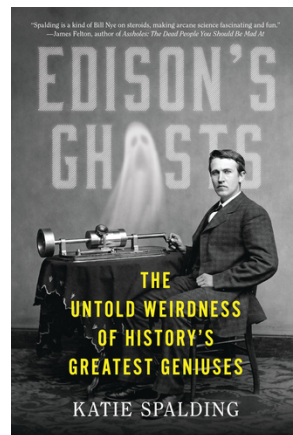
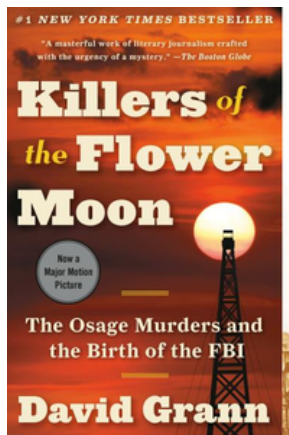
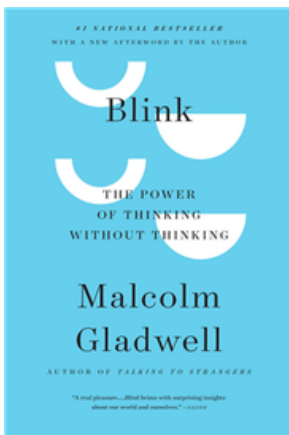
Our Library Project replaces outdated and damaged collections with high-quality, engaging, and representative books that serve as a lifeline for education and personal growth.

Thanks to Penguin Random House Canada's generous support, as of 2025, we have donated over 250,000 books to institutional libraries across Canada, bringing us halfway to our goal of 500,000 books donated. We are incredibly grateful to Penguin Random House Canada and every single sponsor for supporting our Library Project; you are helping us ensure that every incarcerated individual has access to the literature they need to imagine a different future.

2025 Most Popular Fiction Book Club Selections



2025 Most Popular Nonfiction Book Club Selections





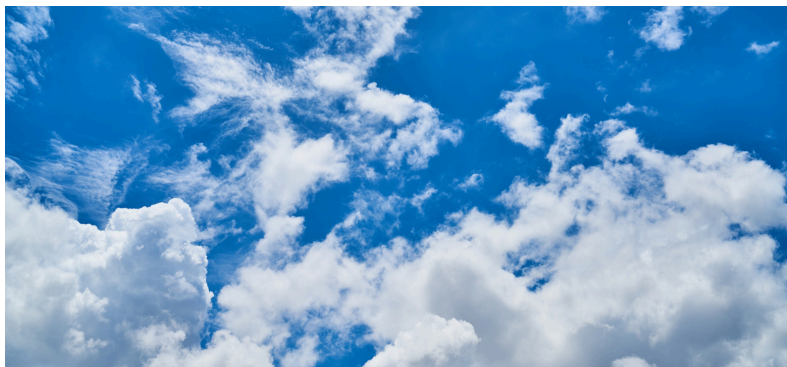
Book Club Locations

Federal

- Archambault Institution, Minimum
- Archambault Institution, Medium
- Bath Institution, General Population
- Bath Institution, Ethnocultural
- Beaver Creek Institution, Minimum
- Beaver Creek Institution, Medium
- Bowden Institution, Medium
- Bowden Institution, Minimum
- Bowden Institution, Indigenous Book Club
- Centre de readaptation pour les jeunes
- Collins Bay Institution, Maximum
- Collins Bay Institution, Medium
- Collins Bay Institution, Minimum
- Collins Bay Institution, Ethnocultural Book Club
- Cowansville Institution, English
- Cowansville Institution, French
- Dorchester Penitentiary, Medium
- Dorchester Penitentiary, Minimum
- Drumheller Institution, General Population
- Drumheller Institution, Indigenous Book Club
- Edmonton Institution for Women
- Federal Training Centre, Medium
- Fraser Valley Institution for Women
- Grand Valley Institution, Medium
- Grand Valley Institution, Minimum
- Her Majesty's Penitentiary
- Joliette Institution for Women, English
- Joliette Institution for Women, French
- Joyceville Institution, JAU
- Joyceville Institution, Minium
- Kwikwexwelhp Healing Village
- Millhaven Institution, General Population
- Millhaven Institution, J Unit
- Mission Institution, Medium
- Mission Institution, Minimum
- Mountain Institution
- Nova Institution for Women, Medium
- Nova Institution for Women, Minimum
- Nova Institution for Women, SIU
- Okimaw Ochi Healing Lodge
- Pacific Institution
- Regional Psychiatric Centre
- Stony Mountain, Medium
- Stony Mountain, Minimum
- Stony Mountain, SIU
- Warkworth Institution
- William Head Institution

Provincial

- Central East Correctional Centre
- Ford Mountain Correctional Centre
- Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre
- Hamilton-Wentworth Detention Centre
- Quinte Detention Centre
- Red Deer Remand Centre
- South West Detention Centre
- Toronto East Detention Centre
- Toronto South Detention Centre
- Vanier Centre for Women



ChIRP Locations

Federal

- Atlantic Institution
- Archambault Institution
- Bath Institution
- Beaver Creek Institution, Medium
- Beaver Creek Institution, Minimum
- Bowden Institution, Medium
- Bowden Institution, Minimum
- Collins Bay Institution, Medium
- Collins Bay Institution, Minimum
- Collins Bay Institution, Maximum
- Cowansville Institution
- Dorchester Institution, Minimum
- Dorchester Institution, Medium
- Drumheller Institution
- Edmonton Institution for Women
- Grand Valley Institution, Medium
- Grand Valley Institution, Minimum
- Her Majesty's Penitentiary
- Joliette Institution for Women
- Kent Institution
- Millhaven Institution,
- Mission Institution, Medium
- Pacific Institution
- Springhill Institution
- Stony Mountain Institution
- Warkworth Institution
- William Head Institution



Provincial

- Central East Correctional Centre



2025 ChIRP Testimonials

My family lives in Kitchener and I read for my grandkids. They really enjoy the books I have chosen for them. THIS IS A GOOD PROGRAM. Thanks.

—Anonymous

I and my family love this program and value CSC and the volunteers for allowing and facilitating, the Social Programs Officer putting for putting the time in after hours, we appreciate this and value every session. Thank you.

—Anonymous

She loves the books, the program is awesome. She gets so excited every time a new book shows up, we talk about it on the phone a lot. Everything is great and I like the coloured markers for messages.

Thanks for all you guys do. —JZ

I can only say, what you do for us, helping us connect to our children, has a beautiful ripple of love and hope not only for us but for our next generations so I say thank you, or in Mohawk – Nyaiwen!! —Anonymous



2025 BCFI Testimonials

To whom it may concern,

My name is Robert. I am a long-term offender at the Drumheller Institution. I am writing to express my gratitude and thanks for giving us a little joy in a place such as this. I have been incarcerated for the last eighteen years, and during that time, I have been in three institutions, Drumheller being my third; neither of the other two had a book club, but it was a joy to hear that this one did.

I love to read. When I heard that this one did, I had to join. Joining the book club gives me a release that is not necessarily found in other prisons. The book club allows us to discuss various books each month. It enables a type of debate that is not aggressive, non-violent, and just an all-around enjoyable time. It's a safe place for like-minded people to be part of something wonderful.

The books we read are carefully selected so there is always something for everyone to enjoy. The wide variety of books is nice because BCFI encourages us to expand our reading range. I have read books that I wouldn't normally read, and because of this, I have expanded not only the types of books I read but also my mind. So, thank you for that.

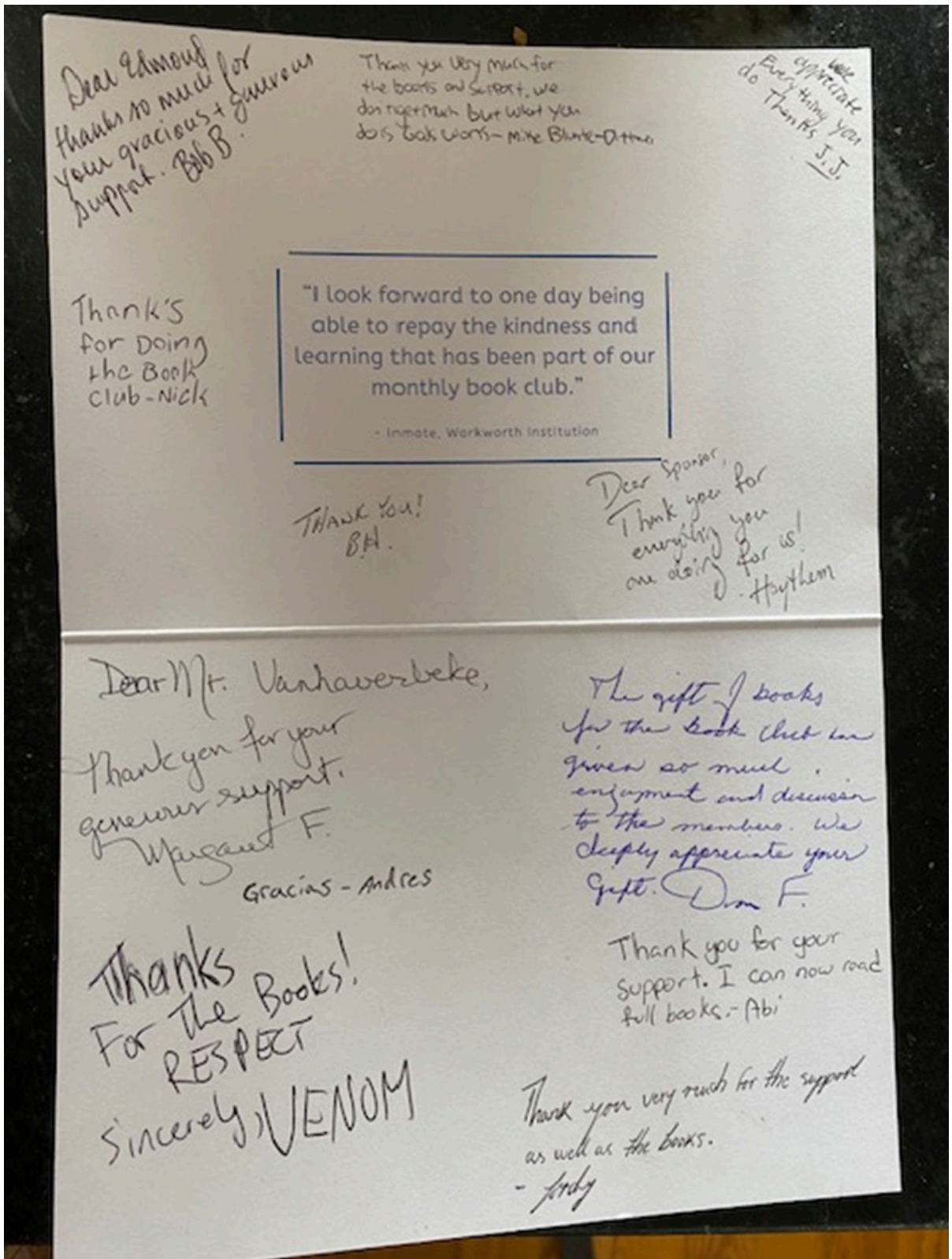
I would also like to thank you for your choice of volunteers; the two ladies and one gentleman who visit us every month are always great to deal with and have a great understanding of what we, as people, not inmates, need. They are always happy and respectful. They not only converse with us about books but will also spend time talking to us about regular, everyday life topics. So, in conclusion, thank you for providing something so well-needed and well-done. I would also like to thank BCFI for their support and for giving to those of us who appreciate what you do.

Yours truly, Robert.

May 2025

2025 BCFI Testimonials

From the Joyceville Assessment Unit Book Club:



2025 Author Visit Testimonials

I felt both inspired and deeply moved by my experiences with Book Clubs for Inmates. I found the participants to be universally kind and thoughtful; and I found their engagement with my books to be exceedingly generous. Our group discussions were serious, heartwarming, and funny; and through them my faith was renewed about the power and true meaning of reading and writing. I would recommend Book Clubs for Inmates to any author. And I know that programs like these, as well as prison literature and library resources more broadly, must be supported. If you experience a book club in prison, you'll understand why.

—**David Chariandy**, Author Visitor to Bath, Joyceville, and Millhaven Institution Book Clubs



2025 Author Visit Testimonials

Dear Tom and Catherine,

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 and they told me how much they appreciated it. They even read out passages that stayed with them.

They were particularly stuck 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 that they could pick it up on any page and be told a story, apparently.

Some of 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 and I'm ever grateful to both Erin and Amy for thinking of me.

And I have to offer a special thank you to Cathy who made the day so compelling – even driving me home at the end of the night.

Thank you Cathy. Your generosity of spirit meant much to me. It was so terrific meeting a fellow geography teacher!

Minelle Mahtani, Author Visitor to the Mission Institution book club (February 2025)

2025 BCFI Library Project Testimonials

I want to say thank you again for sending the free books for the inmates here in our library. They absolutely cannot believe the array of books, genres and that it was gifted to them. How lovely and generous. I do not have any funding left for new books and I am seeking books on all walks of life that may help the offenders in either their spiritual traditions, history, current spiritual medicines.

On behalf of myself and the inmates here at GCI, thank you for your kindness and generosity.

Warmest regards,
Michele McCormick, Librarian, Grande Cache Institution (January 2025)

Hi Tom,

Your donation of books was received, and it is nothing less that brilliant! A wonderful selection of topics and authors, it will revitalize both the library and the classroom resources and make a huge difference for our detainee population!

On behalf of myself, and our Librarian, and HMP overall, I thank you for this generous donation and look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,
Mr. Peter Martin, Adult Education Consultant, Her Majesty's Penitentiary (July 2025)

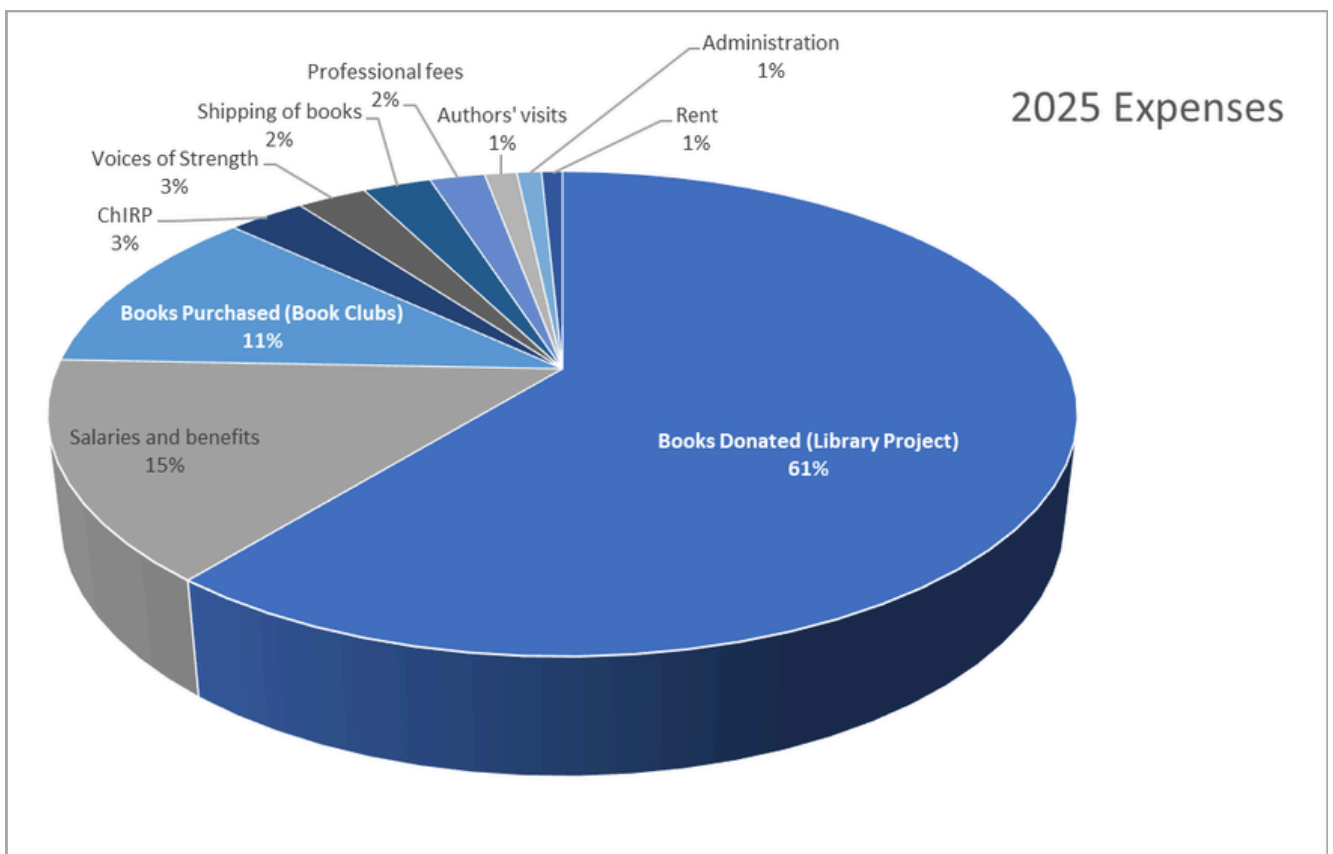
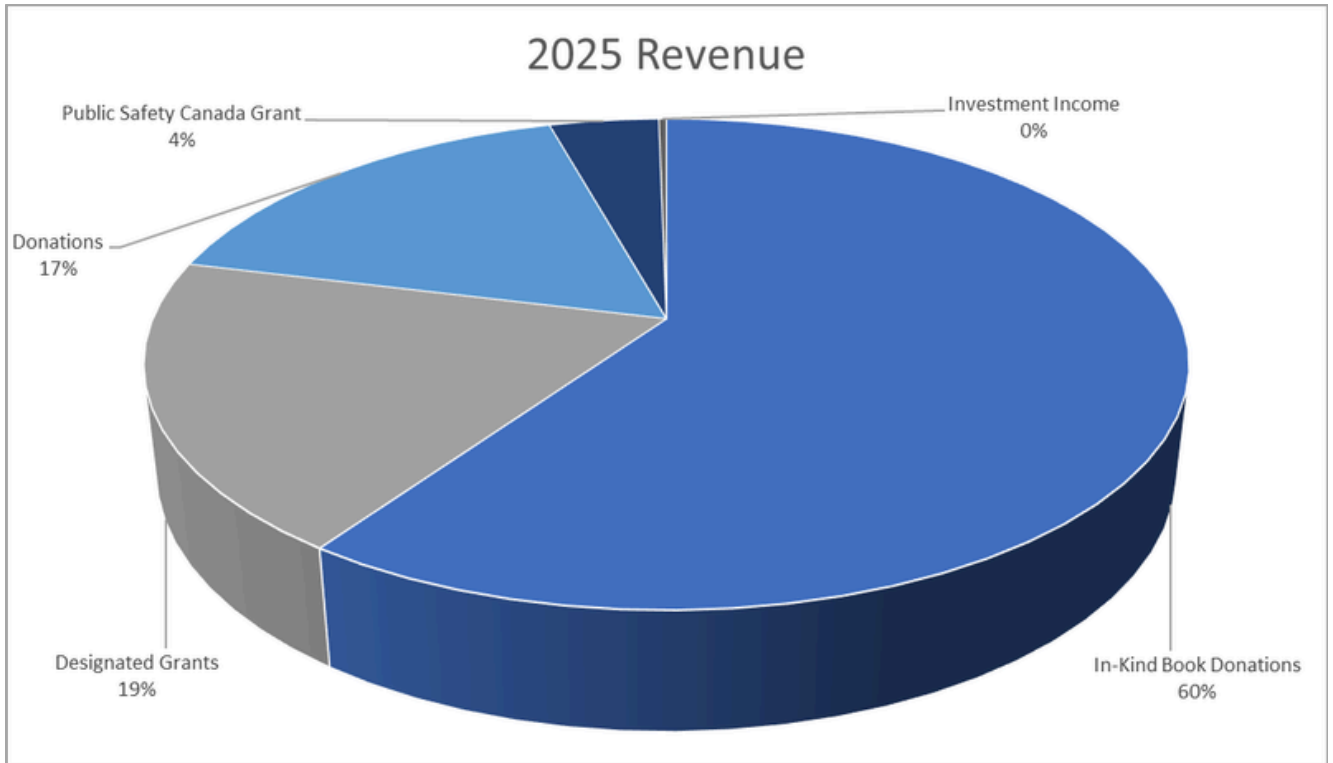
Hi Tom,

Thank you again for your generous donation of books. It is a very thoughtful collection, and I especially appreciate the number of Indigenous titles.

The men were thrilled as well. So far, the most popular titles are the reference books – especially the books on science (space!), math, and technology. They address a real gap in the collection.

Take care,
Sara-Lynn Hall, Library Technician, Beaver Creek Institution (November 2025)

2025 Financial Highlights



2025 Highlights

Turning Pages, Opening Minds at WeirFoulds



2025 Highlights

*Voices of Strength,
in partnership with The Forgiveness Project*



2025 Highlights

*Word on the Street,
in partnership with Penguin Random House Canada*



2025 Highlights

Author Visits



Tracey Lindberg visits Beaver Creek Institution



Antonio Michael Downing visits Pacific Institution



Ian Brown visits Warkworth Institution



Ashley Audrain visits Grand Valley Institution

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Thank you for your continued support!

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