Kim Pate:
A Canadian Activist
Working with and on Behalf of Criminalized Women and Girls

Colleen Anne Dell

ABSTRACT. This essay provides an overview of the life of Kim Pate, a Canadian activist who works with and on behalf of criminalized women and girls. Highlights of Kim’s commendable personal, occupational, political and academic contributions and achievements in both Canada and abroad are presented. Featuring pivotal occupational achievements in Kim’s life simultaneously offers a glimpse into the state of affairs in the past decade facing women in Canada’s criminal justice system. This essay is based on interviews held with Kim, her colleagues and friends, and my personal acquaintance with her. It brings to life how Kim has and continues to challenge and progress the Canadian criminal justice system as an activist, and how her success is rooted in her extraordinary character as an individual. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2003 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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Often when we commit our thoughts to paper, we begin with what we identify as the most important or intriguing information. In chronicling the life of an individual who has in countless ways challenged and progressed the Canadian criminal justice system, this is a difficult task. Kim Pate is a Canadian activist who works with and on behalf of criminalized women and girls, and her life is characterized by impressive personal, occupational, political and academic accomplishments. This biography begins by featuring pivotal achievements in Kim’s occupational endeavors, which simultaneously offer a glimpse into the state of affairs in the past decade facing women in Canada’s criminal justice system. Attention is then turned to Kim’s formative years, which are the foundation of her commitment to political and social struggle. Next, highlights of Kim’s current undertakings in pursuit of justice for criminalized women in Canada and abroad are discussed. To begin, a resounding impact Kim has had on the criminal justice system that cannot be measured by her legislative undertakings or contributions to penal reform—her influential role as a mentor—is introduced.

**A MENTOR TO MANY**

Kim is a mentor and role model in the lives of numerous individuals, some who comment at later points in this essay. I was introduced to Kim and her work in the early 1990s through my employment with the Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba, one of 24 sister agencies across Canada that assist women and girls in or at risk of coming into conflict with the law. This was an exciting time in Canadian history, signified by the re-structuring of the federal correctional system’s approach to women’s imprisonment. It was a time of potential growth for the system with signs of movement toward adopting a women-centred approach to corrections. Canada’s one central federal correctional facility for women was scheduled to close, the Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario, and the construction of six regional institutions were in the planning stage. During this time Kim provided informed, innovative and solid leadership to the Elizabeth Fry network and the correctional system. This will be detailed in a forthcoming section.

In 1996 I met Kim in person at the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) Annual General Meeting in Montreal, Quebec. CAEFS is the umbrella association of the local Elizabeth Fry agencies. This meeting took place soon after the first two new regional facilities...
for federally sentenced women were opened in Canada, the Edmonton Institution for Women in the province of Alberta and the Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge in Saskatchewan. Although the construction of prisons was not supported by the majority of the CAEFS network, the local agencies and Kim as the network’s Executive Director were being forced to advocate within the confines of state actions. Unbeknownst to Kim, her leadership strengthened many people’s belief that it was possible to effect positive change for women and girls within the restrictive boundaries of the Canadian criminal justice system, while continuing to advocate for community alternatives to incarceration. Meeting with Kim in 1996 became a defining point in my life; I decided to resign as the Executive Director of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba and to pursue my PhD with the goal of effecting macro-level policy change for incarcerated women in Canada. I wrote to Kim following our meeting:

June 17, 1996
Dear Kim,

Hello! I am writing to express my enthusiasm regarding my PhD research after finally meeting you in person in Montreal at the CAEFS Annual General Meeting. I was particularly impressed with your vision for progressive change within the Canadian criminal justice system and commitment to follow-through. Your knowledge and understanding of the system and example of how to work to effect change is impressive. I find it both hopeful and refreshing to see a woman established in her career reveal such optimism and perseverance in her views and actions. Upon learning of my acceptance to graduate school, my initial decision was to remain in Winnipeg, Manitoba. However, I carried with me an indefatigable feeling that I was limiting my potential to work on behalf of women involved in our criminal justice system. I was thoroughly impressed with you and your work in Montreal, Kim, which has made my decision to leave my position at (though not my commitment to) the Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba feel right. . . .

Sincerely,

Colleen Anne Dell

Almost six years to the date of this letter I completed my dissertation research on women’s imprisonment in an area Kim assisted in conceptual-
izing, Correctional Service of Canada Ideology and “Violent” Aboriginal Female Offenders. My experience of knowing Kim is a minor illustration of her ability to invigorate and advance others’ struggle for change.

Kim’s resounding influence on people is evident in all realms of her life, from the women and girls with whom and on whose behalf she works, to her colleagues, friends and family. Possibly their words are the best testament to this. Donna Maidment, co-founder of the Newfoundland and Labrador Elizabeth Fry Society expresses the impact Kim has had on her life and work: “I have had the tremendous pleasure of witnessing first hand Kim’s influence on the lives of women in prison. The sheer joy and sense of connectedness Kim elicits from others is truly amazing. And in my own academic and advocacy work, Kim has deeply compelled me and others to seek to effect progressive change in the area of women and social justice.” Karlene Faith (see biography in WCJ 12(1), 2000), Kim’s ally in prison abolition work states: “There’s no one like Kim. Every day she gets a hundred e-mails, and everyone wants something from her. And she delivers. She’s responding routinely to women in crisis, often in person at prisons everywhere in the country. She’s routinely consulting with one or another agency or group, or giving public lectures. She’s also responding to people like me, and there are a lot of us who rely on her first-hand information. She knows the system like no other outsider.” But quite possibly Kim’s influence is clearest in the voices of the women she endeavors for. Lisa Neve, the first woman in Canada to be declared under the Dangerous Offenders Act states: “Kim has never been prejudiced toward me, she has always respected and cared about me, she is able to look past my actions. I have known Kim since I was twelve and she has always strived to help me. She is a role model and wonderful person and I strive to be like her.” The enduring qualities and wealth of knowledge Kim brings to and depends on in her work are deeply embedded in her character as an individual. And these qualities are evident in her employment with the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies.

CAEFS: A DECADE OF CHALLENGE AND CHANGE

On January 20, 1992, Kim started work as the Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies. The network is founded on the work of Ms. Elizabeth Fry, an early nineteenth-century social activist who worked to educate prison officials and the public regarding the abhorrent conditions for women at the Newgate Prison in London, England, and later throughout Europe. Today, the 24 sister
agencies carry on Elizabeth Fry’s legacy through promotion of community education and awareness about women in conflict with the law as well as by offering supports, services and programs to women and their children.

As the Executive Director of CAEFS, Kim not only embodies Elizabeth Fry’s original vision in her work, but she also coincidently espouses her personal qualities; that is, understanding, humility, honesty, vigor, intellect, and unwavering dedication to women, girls and social justice. Dorothy Proctor, who came to know Kim several years ago as a result of Dorothy’s law suit against the Canadian government regarding her conditions of incarceration in the 1960s, eloquently states: “If I were to believe in reincarnation, I would say that Elizabeth Fry has returned. In my opinion, in what I know historically of Elizabeth Fry, there has been no one since who carries the spirit with such grace, dignity and feistiness as Kim Pate.”

January 2002 marked Kim’s 10-year anniversary as the Executive Director of CAEFS. In review of her labor over the past decade, it can most simply be described as embracing challenge and enacting change. Kim’s executive position requires a multi-faceted and broad based awareness of rising national and provincial criminal justice issues. A liberal characterization of her role is that it entails encouraging suitable legislative and policy reform within the criminal and juvenile justice systems; maintaining direct contact with federally sentenced women across the country, including visiting at least twice a year the eleven Canadian federal prisons, including four male institutions and one provincial jail where women serving two years or more are imprisoned; liaison with the Elizabeth Fry sister societies across Canada and responsibility to a Board of Directors for the effective management of the Association; developing and maintaining positive working relationships with political and bureaucratic contacts and other women’s groups, First Nations, social and justice organizations; and, challenging negative stereotypical depictions of women and girls who come into conflict with the law.

Kim admits that it was not until she worked for CAEFS that she fully comprehended the extent to which women were marginalized in the Canadian criminal and social justice systems. She knew from her earlier occupational experiences with the youth justice system, male prisoners and her legal training that females were treated different from males, but she was not aware of the boundless impact patriarchal ideology had on the system. Kim recalls her first visit to the Prison for Women as an utterly mentally and emotionally exhausting experience. From this one
visit it was very apparent to Kim that her new position with CAEFS was not comparable to work she had done in the past. She immediately identified the foundation of her struggles as being in the system’s unwillingness to treat women as women, and instead as “add-ons” to rules, programs, assessment tools and the like designed for men. Since Kim’s first visit to the Prison for Women her work has focused on attempting to ensure women in prison have choices, are treated with dignity, humanity and respect, are empowered from a woman-directed perspective, and are provided with adequate supports and services.

The impact of Kim’s work in the criminal justice field is apparent in countless ways, and possibly the most multi-dimensional illustration is with regard to the Commission of Inquiry into Certain Events at the Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario. Commonly referred to as the Arbour Inquiry, reflecting the Honourable Madam Justice Louise Arbour presiding over the Commission, it was mandated to investigate and report on the state and management of the federal correctional system, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), pertaining to incidents that occurred at the Prison for Women and CSC’s response in April 1994 and the months that followed. In brief, an Institutional Emergency Response Team (IERT) was called into the P4W on April 26, 1994, to extract eight women from their cells following four days of institutionally instigated resistance to authority. A video of the incident was made public on February 21, 1995, on the Canadian television program the Fifth Estate, despite attempted legal injunctions on the part of CSC. The video showed women being stripped, shackled, prodded with batons and forcibly removed from their cells by a primarily male IERT. In the months following the IERT’s cell extractions, the human rights of the women involved in the incident were continually violated, including extended periods in solitary confinement, personal harassment and involuntary transfers.

As the Executive Director of CAEFS and in sisterhood with other equity seeking and social justice groups, Kim garnered a significant role in the Commission happenings and the events leading up to and following it. Under Kim’s leadership, CAEFS in partnership with the Office of the Correctional Investigator and other groups was instrumental in calling for and insisting the Inquiry took place. Possibly Kim’s greatest accomplishment was her role in facilitating the women prisoners’ granting of standing at the Inquiry as witnesses, which was a first in Canadian history. Their voices were given equal weight with Corrections officials and community agencies in re-constructing the incidents that led to the Inquiry. In addition, as a representative of CAEFS, Kim was the only
non-CSC community group invitee to present at the fact finding stage of the Inquiry. Further, in the year proceeding the Inquiry Kim was greatly involved in advocating against the blatant disregard and extreme violation of the women’s rights, such as assisting in the launching of habeas corpus applications for five of the women who were involuntarily transferred to the wing of a male psychiatric treatment facility. And, of course, Kim’s personal support to the women prisoners in such volatile times of need was unwavering.

Since the release of the Arbour Inquiry report in 1996, Kim has been an enduring voice in communicating the continuation of abhorrent human rights violations by CSC, and most unfortunately in the operation of the newly constructed regional federal female facilities. In a 1999 article published in the Women’s Studies journal, Kim states:

[the following examples] provide a mere taste of the sorts of human rights issues we have tried to address since Arbour: women being strip searched outside the legislation and policy and mandatory routine way where ever the Correctional Service of Canada policy permits strip-searching for cause; women being stripped, shackled and left chained naked to a metal bed frame, without a mattress, in segregation; women being strapped to body boards in segregation; [and] minimum security women being sent into the community in shackles for various forms of temporary absences. . . . (45)

The figurative walls of the Prison for Women may be gone, but its contemptible conditions of incarceration persist and so Kim’s role and dedicated work remains ever so vital. In fact, in a panel presentation on women’s imprisonment at the Canadian Congress on the Social Sciences and Humanities in June 2002, Kim claimed that in her 10 years with CAEFS, it has been within the past 12 months that she has witnessed the greatest number and most blatant violations of human rights against women prisoners in Canada. Kim links this to the increasing law and order agenda of the state.

Today Kim views herself as a feminist penal abolitionist who struggles to achieve equality in society by raising awareness of the need to create opportunities to enact such equality. She mobilizes her perspective through what she refers to as contributing to a platform for social justice, and there are countless ways in which she has and continues to effect meaningful change. Before such examples are discussed, Kim’s introduction to penal reform through her employment with the John
Howard Society is established. Much of the knowledge Kim acquired with the Society laid the foundation for her work with women prisoners.

THE JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY:
INTRODUCTION TO PENAL REFORM

Kim’s work with the John Howard Society of Calgary marked her initiation into the arena of penal reform in Canada. The John Howard Society is a counterpart of the Elizabeth Fry network and provides direct service to mainly male youth and adults in the justice system. Kim accepted an appointment with the Society in 1984 to develop a literacy program for the school boards of Calgary. This position merged Kim’s training as a lawyer and a high school teacher, and as well addressed her growing lack of interest in practicing law and increasing desire to advocate for social justice.

Early evidence of Kim’s impending impact upon the Canadian criminal justice system was her design and implementation of the Calgary literacy program. Setting in motion her pedagogical philosophy, Kim matched adult literacy tutors from the community with youth and adults in the justice system. The project was effective in addressing more than literacy skills; it established a bridge between the public, youth and adult-serving social justice community organizations and correctional facilities. The program was the first of its kind in Calgary and continues to run today with increased emphasis on criminalized youth in the community. In fact, the program was so successful that Kim was seconded in 1988 and 1989 to work with the John Howard Society of Canada on a national literacy project, which set the foundation for prison literacy programs across the nation.

Inherent to Kim’s early struggles for change in the criminal justice system and in particular prison, was her unwavering commitment to initiatives being done in tandem with individuals, not just for them. To illustrate, Calgary Social Services approached Kim while she was at the John Howard Society as the Director of Research and Development, for assistance in accommodating approximately 50-60 youth who, for various reasons, chose not to reside in their assigned child welfare group homes and were consequently identified as “at large” by the state. In the spirit of collaboration Kim approached the youth to discuss the situation and the outcome was a “kid run safe house.” The youth were involved in all aspects of its establishment and operation, from the tendering process, to the hiring of the Executive Director, staff selection and training,
representation on the Board of Directors, and payment for their work at the house (e.g., peer counseling). The house remains in operation today as an incorporated entity. Kim similarly adhered to this approach in her concluding role with the John Howard Society of Calgary as the Assistant Executive Director. A few of her legacies include attaining approval to have a former prisoner on the Board of Directors, hiring a former prisoner on staff, and incorporation of a team supervision model within the agency to replace the traditional hierarchical management structure.

Kim’s employment at the John Howard Society strengthened her ability to work as an advocate for individuals in conflict with the law by working with and gaining the respect of representatives of the system. Respect from the criminal justice system is often an insurmountable barrier when working for an advocacy agency. Kim admits that she too initially dubbed the John Howard Society as “a group of 60’s throw back, hand holding do-gooders!” However, Kim has been able to overcome such stereotypes held by others, as evidenced in her receipt of two community contribution awards from the Calgary Police Service in the early 1990s.

Kim’s various occupational positions with the John Howard Society also took her into the prison environment, which provided her with a lived understanding of the criminal justice system and its devastating impacts upon individuals’ lives. In turn, it introduced and over time solidified Kim’s dedication to the need for policy and legislative reform in Canada, and culminating in her on-going support for prison abolition.

Kim’s work with the John Howard Society also introduced her to her partner, Mark Green. Kim met Mark while he, too, worked at the John Howard Society of Calgary. Mark’s own reasons for entering the criminal justice field are rooted in the experience of the murder of his father. This was a reality that furthered Kim’s awareness of the importance of social justice work for all involved in the criminal justice system. Mark is currently a lawyer in Ottawa, Canada. Kim attests that a foundation of her commitment to penal reform and, more broadly, social justice in Canada is her supportive and understanding family. Kim appreciatively acknowledges that she is able to accomplish all she does because of the strength and succor of her relationship with her partner, and the understanding of her children and their willingness to sometimes “share their mom.”

Working for nearly eight years with the John Howard Society of Calgary exposed Kim to the successes and struggles of the national office, the John Howard Society of Canada. It also introduced her to an expan-
sive network of community agencies whose mandates it was to address social inequality. While at the John Howard Society, Kim intermittently revisited her law school goal of implementing macro-level political and legal change. This ideal translated into practice when Kim accepted the position of Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies in 1991. Her work with the John Howard Society provided her with an excellent foundation for her occupational endeavors. Moreover, an even earlier foundation to Kim’s current work is her upbringing.

**GROWING UP**

**Childhood**

Kim was born the eldest of four sisters, Alison, Tracy and Shelley, on November 10, 1959, in the small village of Arvida, Quebec, where she resided until the age of four. Kim is a self-identified “service brat” and acknowledges that the associated upbringing had a very influential impact on the person she is today. Her father, Peter, was a Master Corporal in the Canadian Armed Forces (Air Force) and had determinate postings throughout Canada and West Germany during Kim’s childhood and adolescent years. With her father being an uncommissioned member of the Canadian military and her mother, Marion, a civilian hairdresser, Kim experienced early in life the negative ramifications of the military hierarchy and social stratification. Kim attests that she learned privilege was not impartially afforded based on her father’s low military ranking and family’s social class position.

Though Kim’s family’s social ranking did not afford her material opportunities in Canada, the travel associated with her father’s postings and both parents’ desire to expose her and her sisters to a broad range of personal, cultural and ethnic experiences, offered her a broad landscape of educational adventures. Kim credits her parents for making their travels scholastic and stimulating her passion for history. In comparison to Canada, Kim was introduced to “a very different world.” She recalls being in Spain at the age of 8 and seeing children begging on the street, and her father introducing Kim and her sisters to the slums in Barcelona. Kim similarly recalls experiencing distressing nightmares about children starving and being beaten, and struggling with the reality that literally there were “those who had and those who had not.” Kim’s experiences of and witness to the realities of Canadian military ranking...
and the social class hierarchy in Canada and abroad superseded her commitment to social justice in the coming years.

Adolescence

As an adolescent Kim may be best described as “independent,” a trait her grandmother fostered—whom she adoringly called “Happy” and identifies as a mentor in her life—and her parents skillfully managed. Kim cherishes the wisdom Happy passed on to her, some of it captured in her grandmother’s frequently recited phrase: “Love many. Trust few. Always paddle your own canoe!” There was a period during Kim’s early adolescence in Canada when her parents were not supportive of some of her choices and peers, yet endured to provide her with enough freedom and support to foster her independence. Looking back today with children of her own, Kim can appreciate her parents’ concern.

Mr. and Mrs. Pate identify Kim’s entry into the workforce as the “turning point” in her young life. At 14 years of age Kim acquired two part-time jobs, one as a student marker and the other as an aide in a retirement home. The home hired girls under the age of 16 so that they did not have to pay minimum wage. At the retirement home Kim also encountered stratification by social class, but this time as a spectator. The retirement home operated for profit and Kim recalls notable disparity in the treatment of affluent residents and those who were supported by the state. She recalls feeling that the owners of the home did not treat the latter residents as people, but rather as pay cheques. Kim was also introduced to the merits of volunteering in this job. She frequently attended the retirement residence on her days off to provide companionship to residents who did not have family or friends to visit with. Kim remained at the job until she was nearly 16, at which time the home was sold and she went to work in other helping fields, including with individuals who had cognitive disabilities, mental health patients and at a community crisis center.

Sitting with Kim on her back porch and watching her children play outside—Michael, 12, and Madison, 4—Kim comments that her consciousness and celebration of individuality and difference was an inherent part of the early years of her life. She reminisces today about how her awareness of social differences between people based on the social structure and social conditions impacted her life choices. She further feels that she has a responsibility to teach her children to recognize their current position of privilege and the need to work to achieve equality for
others. Kim also reveals that she decided early in her life that education would be her “way out” of the lower ranks of the social strata.

**Academia**

Just about to turn 17, Kim entered the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. Rooted in the enlightenment of her childhood travels, Kim received her Bachelor of Arts degree in 1980 with a major in history. The course Kim remembers most fondly as having an impact on her was offered by the psychology department. The course addressed the civil rights and treatment of the mentally handicapped and stirred within Kim a growing discomfort with the social structure and its detrimental influence on individual lives. The course also introduced Kim to the importance of critical analysis. Although social stratification was a theme in Kim’s lived experience, she did not yet commit to pursuing it in her studies.

In 1980 Kim entered a post-degree professional program at the University of Victoria in the faculty of education and gained certification at the secondary school level. As imparted earlier, Kim admits that being a teacher was not one of her long-term objectives and that she entered it foremost to allow her to earn sufficient resources to attend law school. However, once Kim started teaching she thoroughly enjoyed it and recognized she had to soon go to law school for fear that she never would.

In 1981 at the age of 21, Kim enrolled in law school at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She graduated from the Faculty of Law in 1984. Kim admits that her initial intention for attending law school was also economic; that is, a ticket out of poverty for her and her family. However, her experiences significantly altered this.

Law school acquainted Kim with a refined awareness and understanding of gender inequality. This culminated in numerous ways during her time as a student, and a few illustrations are provided. In Kim’s first year it was disturbingly apparent to her that less than one-third of her class was female. During her introductory year she also met Professor Christine Boyle and Anne Derrick, well-known Canadian feminists. Both the feminist legal scholar and activist lawyer became significant mentors in Kim’s life. Kim participated in Professor Boyle’s courses as well as a research focus group on rape, with the latter eventually leading to the historic reform of rape legislation in Canada. In Kim’s second year she joined the association of Women and Law Society at Dalhousie Law School and this heightened her awareness of misogynous practices within the law school, the university and society in general. Kim also at-
tended her first Take Back the Night March and recalls being thoroughly energized by it.

Kim claims that while in law school her understanding of gender inequality seemed new, but upon reflection this understanding was rooted in snippets of her displayed intolerance of inequality while growing up. Illustrations range from Kim as a young girl rebelling against her mother’s efforts to have her adhere to the traditional female role and act like a “young lady,” to Kim questioning why at the age of 12 she could not be a member of the Air Cadets Squadron. Through perseverance Kim won the latter battle to be faced with yet another; as a female member of the Air Cadets Squadron she was required to wear a skirt and pumps! Such social adversity and advocacy have become indicative of Kim’s adult life.

During law school a new and disturbing dimension was appended to Kim’s understanding of social stratification. The influence of money became flagrantly apparent and it alarmed Kim that she felt ashamed of her social background. True to herself, Kim decided she was not going to practice law—where the economic rewards were and as revealed her initial intent for entering law school resided—but instead she was going to change the law. Kim’s new goal was to work for the Department of Justice in Ottawa, Canada. Today Kim characterizes this as a young, naive perspective, but I would hasten to add that Kim has influenced policy and legal change in Canada by both working closely with the criminal justice system and at odds with it. Examples of this are provided in the next section of the essay.

CAEFS: PRACTICING PENAL REFORM

Kim’s experiences growing up, and later with the John Howard Society, provided a solid foundation for her future work with CAEFS. Four themes that characterize Kim’s work toward penal reform and abolition with CAEFS are highlighted here: changing policy and practice; coalition building; facilitating communication; and, enacting change within the CAEFS network. To start, it is important to point out that although Kim works on behalf of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, the progress of the Association is highly contingent upon the effectiveness of her position. CAEFS is governed by a Board of Directors and staffed by Kim and her Administrative Assistant. Kim’s pivotal role with the Association is supported in the message from CAEFS President, Dawn McBride, in the 2001 annual report. Dawn states: “Kim Pate, our
Executive Director, continues to challenge and energize all of us. I have enjoyed working with Kim throughout this past year and I wish to recognize and thank her for her efforts and commitment to our organization. Kim has brought a national and international face and voice to CAEFS. She has been at the forefront of our accomplishments . . .” (2001:5).

Kim has been involved with and influenced numerous policy and practice changes in the Canadian criminal justice system, a few of which have been identified (e.g., the granting of standing for women prisoners at the Arbour Inquiry). An achievement early in Kim’s position at CAEFS that was particularly gratifying for her was a direct consequence of her first visit to the P4W. Kim assumed that when she attended the prison she would be granted visitation throughout the institution, including the segregation unit. To her bewilderment this was not the practice of CAEFS or the prison; the women were to be seen only in the visiting room. Consequently, Kim’s initial victory in women’s correctional policy reform was ensuring that CAEFS and the local Elizabeth Fry agencies had access to federally incarcerated women 24 hours a day and without restrictions on their meeting location.

Over the past decade with CAEFS, one of Kim’s most personally satisfying accomplishments has been her active role in facilitating necessary and open dialogue and working toward solidarity with other equality seeking groups, with the goal of countering the increasingly regressive law and order agenda in Canada. Kim refers to her efforts as coalition building; that is, bringing primarily women’s groups on side for a stronger voice and presence. In her view, coalition building is the foundation to facilitating sustainable change. Kim’s success at working with such groups was evident in CAEFS’s partnership with the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centers and other equality seeking women’s groups in the 1996 Canadian Battered Women’s Self-Defense Review. Together, the groups adopted a unanimous position and put pressure on the Canadian Department of Justice to enact the review. The consequent review examined the cases of 98 Canadian women who claimed to have killed their partners in self-defense, with seven being recommended for and five receiving some form of relief (e.g., termination of sentences and conditional pardons; although one of the enduring tragedies is that no woman was released from prison). Kim believes the review would most likely not have occurred had she and CAEFS continued to work in isolation.

A recent example of Kim’s coalition building effort was her co-organizing role for the Women’s Resistance: From Victimization to Criminalization conference, held in Ottawa, Canada, from October 1-3, 2001. This
conference, co-sponsored by the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies and the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres brought together over 650 activists, academics, researchers, practitioners, allies, policy makers, lawyers and individuals with lived experiences to serve as a springboard for longer-term social program, policy and law reform for women who are criminalized or have been the victims of violence. The conference was designed to build upon strategic discussions and alliances that have characterized some of Canada’s unique contributions to policy and law reform. One of a multitude of outcomes is that CAEFS received government funding to finance its human rights complaint against the Government of Canada on behalf of women prisoners serving sentences of two years and more (see below). In addition, a woman on contract with the Swedish Government is now working in partnership with a rape crisis centre in Vancouver and a women’s centre in Quebec to address prostitution and trafficking of women in Canada. A second conference is in the planning stage.

Partnerships and alliances such as those fostered at the Women’s Resistance conference supported CAEFS’s registration of a complaint regarding the discriminatory treatment of federally sentenced women by the Canadian government in March 2001. Under Kim’s leadership, CAEFS is requesting that the Commission conduct a broad-based, systemic review and issue a special report regarding the treatment of women serving federal terms of imprisonment. This complaint is made on the grounds that the manner in which women prisoners are treated is discriminatory, as it contravenes several of the prohibited grounds articulated in s. 3(1) of the Canadian Human Rights Act. It is further suggested that special attention be paid to discrimination experienced by Aboriginal and other racialized women, as well as discrimination on the basis of disability experienced by federally sentenced women with cognitive and mental disabilities. The Human Rights Commission undertook a systematic review and issued a special report in March 2003.

A new direction for CAEFS under Kim’s guidance has been its commitment to increasing public awareness about the plight of criminalized women and girls. Kim has extended this to include public presentations, academic participation through guest lectures, publications and conference presentations, and participation in grassroots gatherings. Kim rarely declines an opportunity to speak publically, which is fortunate for the network because she is a powerful speaker. Debbie Blunderfield, Executive Director of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba, characterizes Kim in her public speaking role as: “a woman who speaks with extreme passion and empathy for circumstances that lead many lives into
conflict with the law.” Nancy Lewis-Horne, a professor at SUNY College at Potsdam, New York, describes Kim’s guest lectures in her criminology courses as: “bridging the gap between academic theory and community activism which students have a desire to learn about. Students hang on her every word.”

Although public speaking may not have been Kim’s chosen role (she admits to still getting nervous), she describes herself as energized into action as a result of oscillating between rage and absolute despair over the plight of women in prison in Canada and internationally. She has been involved in countless television and radio interviews since she started with CAEFS in 1992. A notable few which I encourage the reader to access are The Voice Set Free, the documentary of Jo-Ann Mayhew’s life, which has been nominated for a Gemini Award, and the Fifth Estate’s exposure of the April 1994 strip search and shackling of women by the men’s riot squad at the Prison for Women.

Kim’s public speaking engagements are geared toward national audiences, though her international reputation is fervently increasing. Recently Kim presented with Angela Davis and Debbie Kilroy, founder of the Australian prisoner run group Sisters Inside, at the Women in Prison Round Table in New York City in June 2002. Previously, she was selected as a Canadian representative to attend the 10th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Treatment of Offenders in Austria in September 2000; she was the Key Note Speaker for the Institute of Criminology, Women and Corrections Conference, held in Australia in November 2000; she facilitated workshops on women and prison and young women in conflict with the law for the Indo-Canadian Shastri Institute in India in April 2000; she spoke about battered women and women who kill at the International Conference on Penal Abolition in New Zealand in February, 1997; and she spoke, along with thousands of other international activists at the Berkeley launch of the Critical Resistance Conference: Beyond the Prison Industrial Complex in September 1998. Lee Lakeman of the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres comments that “Kim is working for an international perspective, with as one example, Critical Resistance, whose mission it is to build a national campaign to challenge the Prison Industrial Complex. There are also key American and Australian feminist socialist activists Kim is currently working in partnership with and learning from. Kim is trying to lead a movement.” Kim is currently working on collaborative projects with individuals involved in work with women in conflict with the law in Nepal, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Costa Rica, and the United States.
Kim’s public speaking role transcends beyond her own presentations. She sees part of her position as encouraging and promoting the voices of women who have the lived experience of prison. With the guidance and support of Kim, Dorothy Proctor spoke publically for the first time at the CAEFS Annual General Meeting about her experiences in the Canadian criminal justice system and has been vocal ever since. Similar experiences resulted from the Women’s Resistance conference.

Kim’s communication building efforts have also extended to representatives of the criminal justice system. As revealed, her success at communicating with representatives of the system was evident in her early work with the John Howard Society of Calgary. In her current position, Kim maintains regular contact with the Correctional Service of Canada’s Deputy Commissioner for Women, and various Ministers and Deputy Ministers to identify and discuss advocacy issues, impending concerns and other pressing matters. She remarks that taking on the system is at times a daunting task (with her views not always welcomed or appreciated), but regardless she believes such communication efforts are vital if CAEFS is to continue to be a contributing and valued member of the criminal justice community.

Although Kim is known for posing tough opposition to current policies and practices of the criminal justice system, she is well respected by the community. Kim was recently invited to conduct training for members of the National Parole Board of Canada. She focused on issues specific to working with marginalized women and spoke to global trends toward the criminalization of women and girls. She also provided concrete suggestions to the Board members about the need to review gender biased Parole Board hearings, assessment tools and processes. Likewise, the Honourable Madam Justice Louise Arbour has high regard for Kim. In her 1996 report following the Commission of Inquiry into Certain Events at the Prison for Women in Kingston, of Kim, Madam Justice stated: “[t]he level of involvement of CAEFS, not only in the events under investigation by this Commission, but in the life of the Prison for Women in general is nothing short of remarkable. One is hard pressed to think of other voluntary organizations which exhibit the level and intensity of commitment and dedication that Kim Pate, the Executive Director of CAEFS, exhibited before this Commission” (1996: 195). Further, in 2001, commenting on her decision to decline speaking engagements for a specified period of time but accepting Kim’s invitation as a panel presenter at the Women’s Resistance conference, Madam
Justice stated with a smile, “If you know Kim, you know you cannot say no.”

In addition to Kim’s success at individual policy and practice changes, efforts at sustainable coalition building, and facilitating communication among the criminal justice community, she has spearheaded change within the CAEFS organization. True to her efforts that commenced at the John Howard Society, under Kim’s leadership CAEFS has renewed its effort to hear women’s voices and incorporate them into their own operating policies and procedures. The organization has reconfirmed its commitment to be a voice with and on behalf of women and girls in the justice system. Kim frequently quotes Lilla Watson, an Aboriginal woman from Australia whose words were introduced to her by Gayle Horrii when Gayle was incarcerated at the P4W: “If you’ve come here to help me you’re wasting your time. If you’ve come here because your liberation is bound up in mine, then let us work together.” Gayle comments: “Because of Kim, Federally Sentenced Women have a voice. She is clearly responsible for including our voices, and different voices. It was because of Kim that Federally Sentenced Women were at the Arbour Commission meetings.” Expressing similar sentiment, Dorothy Proctor asserts that CAEFS was the first group to come into solidarity with her in her law suit against the Canadian government, and that Kim provided her with immense assistance and support. She states: “I benefitted so much from Kim’s humanity and understanding, and not just as a representative of Elizabeth Fry, but Kim Pate as an individual in solidarity with me.”

**Ongoing Efforts to Address Critical Issues**

As the primary representative of the CAEFS membership, Kim’s position involves establishing and addressing several priority issues each year. Areas she is currently addressing reflect the state of affairs for women involved in the Canadian criminal justice system. Three key issues Kim currently faces in dealing with the criminal justice system are presented. First, Kim continues to challenge mandatory minimum sentencing laws in Canada. Similar to the United States, mandatory minimum sentences for murder in Canada produce extraordinarily long sentences of incarceration. Compared with international standards, Canada falls just behind the United States by having the second longest average sentence for first degree murder (28.4 years), while the average sentence served among other nations is 14.3 years (CAEFS 2000). The position of the CAEFS network is to abolish the mandatory minimum
sentence of life imprisonment, recognizing the realities experienced by battered women who defend themselves and others with lethal force. Recent evidence of Kim’s notable work was her invitation as the only Canadian to attend the 2002 National Clearing House for the Defense of Battered Women working group meeting in Philadelphia on the overreliance of the battered women’s movement on the criminal legal system, including the role of mandatory minimum sentences.

Second, community release issues continue to be an area of extreme neglect by the federal correctional system in Canada. There remains the absence of a national community reintegration strategy for the provision of community release or supervision options for federally sentenced women. To illustrate the desperate need for attention to this area, there are currently no women-only day parole opportunities for federally sentenced women west of central Canada. In Kim’s extensive public speaking efforts, heightened awareness of and mobilization to address this are repeatedly sought.

And third, the criminalization of women with mental and cognitive disabilities is a growing concern. In fact, it is an integral component of the mentioned Human Rights complaint put forth by CAEFS. Physical and mental disability are included in Section 17 of the regulations of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act as factors which must be considered in determining security classification. To address this issue, Kim puts forth that using the need of mental health treatment as a reason to classify women as maximum security imposes harsher treatment on such women. Further, there is an overrepresentation of Aboriginal women classified as having serious mental health concerns; consequently, these women are classified as maximum security offenders and, in turn, do not have access to the Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge or the other regional federal prisons for women due to their high security classification. On behalf of CAEFS, Kim continues to pursue opportunities to challenge the increased criminalization of women.

Kim credits the foundation of her effective work at CAEFS to other Canadian feminist and social activists with whom she has and continues to work in cross-country coalition alliances, such as Lee Lakeman, Anne Derrick, Gayle Horii, Karlene Faith and the late Clare Culhane. Kim identifies her solid and encouraging relationships with other activists as an imperative source of support and education. Likewise, Karlene Faith comments of Kim: “I have an image of all the women prisoners’ rights activists in Canada forming an ever-expanding circle of informed support for new ways of thinking about women, crime and...
punishment. At the very center of that circle is Kim Pate. We all depend on her.”

Kim has equally been mentored by women who have shared their experiences of imprisonment with her, in particular Gayle Horrii, Jo-Ann Mayhew and Lisa Neve. And as others have expressed, she too has had an imminent influence on their lives. Lisa comments: “Kim stands for everyone. She is a strong woman. She helps us strive to be like that. I have so much respect for her. I was in for life and it was not clear if I was ever getting out. She still fought for me, never judged me based on my actions. She believed in me when I did not believe in myself. Kim is a good friend.”

Kim’s commitment to addressing the social, structural and personal needs of women and girls in conflict with the law in Canada transcends from her occupational commitments into her community volunteer service. Since Kim’s introduction to the merits of volunteering in the retirement residence where she worked as a youth, she has been an active and contributing member of her community. Since the late 1980s, Kim has been involved as an adult resource with the National Youth in Care Network and as a supporting member of Strength in Sisterhood. From June 1994-1998 she was a member of the National Crime Prevention Council, appointed by the Justice Minister and Solicitor General of Canada. Kim is also the current President and Chair of the National Associations Active in Criminal Justice. Volunteering time to marginalized women and children is a priority in Kim’s life.

Kim envisions her efforts to effect change for women and girls in conflict with the law in Canada continuing into the foreseeable future. She also anticipates a growing solidarity among community partners, both in Canada and abroad, in addressing gender inequality and discrimination within the criminal justice system. And alongside Kim’s struggle for equality and social justice, she will continue to take great comfort and enjoyment in her family and friends, traveling, and hobbies such as reading—with 5 or 6 books often on the go at once—biking and volunteering in her community. Donna Maidment remarks: “What follows on from Kim’s role as Executive Director of CAEFS is anyone’s guess. However, it is without a doubt that she will continue to blaze trails for women’s equality and social justice reform both nationally and internationally. She will continue to effect change, enlist compassion, and make progressive waves for feminist reform. It is her very being.”
CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of the biographical essay of Edna Mahan, who served as the superintendent of the New Jersey Reformatory for Women for 40 years (1928-1968) (see biography in WCJ 9(3), 1998), the author Mary Q. Hawkes states: “Today we need leaders with the courage to accept innovative challenges and who are not afraid to take risks. Edna Mahan was such a leader” (p. 20). North of the American boarder and three decades later Canada is very fortunate to have exemplary women activists, such as Kim Pate who are dauntless in addressing gender inequality and effecting pro-social change within the criminal justice system. Through Kim’s efforts and accomplishments, only partially evidenced in this essay, she has and continues to lead the way for others in coming together for social advocacy. In Canada and abroad, this will contribute to a strengthened social justice network and continuation of the legacy of Ms. Elizabeth Fry.

REFERENCES


