

"I can honestly say that had I not become involved with M2, I never would have tried to straighten out my life... I would like to thank M2 and God for giving me a second chance to get to know my family again and to start a new life." (Jake)

"What it has meant for me to have these people (W2) reach out to me is in the final analysis a miracle. To relate woman to woman with W2 volunteers has meant life -- life with purpose and meaning. It's been a healing process." (Marie)

"Because Gilberto saw this love, God's love in us, he responded and he loved to be in church, to read the Bible, and to be with Christians. Love can set people free from their past sins and failures." (Bert)

"I can tell you that in my eleven years with the Correctional Services of Canada, the M2/W2 volunteers have been intimately involved in some of the most significant changes that I have seen inmates and parolees undergo." (John)

"Being an M2 volunteer has changed our lives and I would encourage anyone who is thinking of becoming an M2/W2 volunteer, to do so. It can be one of the most rewarding experiences in your life." (Kurt)

"Had it not been for that family (M2 volunteer), M2/W2 and God, I doubt whether I would be alive today, because at that point in my life all I could see was revenge and suicide as an answer." (Morris)

"I consider my time as a Parent to Parent volunteer a valuable way to contribute to the social and emotional support of a lonely and struggling mother in the community, who has now become my friend."

Let's ensure, by our attitudes and actions, that such testimonials continue to be shared. In them, our lives, too, will be greatly enriched.

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A BRIEF HISTORY of the M2/W2 Association Restorative Christian Ministries

"Where there is no vision, the people perish." So states Solomon in Proverbs 29:18

History has often produced people whose vision was to bring hope, healing and new life in the midst of pain and darkness. People such as *John Howard* (1700's), *Elizabeth Fry* (1800's), and *John Augustus* (1800's) were such visionaries in relationship to prison reform.

Dick Simmons, founding father of the M2/W2 Association, was also such a visionary. His deep concern for needy people, especially for the fatherless and abandoned, began to take root during his years as a Presbyterian clergyman in downtown New York City. During his first two years in that parish, over thirty murders were committed in the area around his congregation. His inability to motivate his congregation to become involved in the social problems, which these crimes created, was a keen disappointment to him.

His concerns in this regard became a vision in the early 1960's after he and his family had settled in Seattle, Washington, and he had spent some time visiting a prisoner in the State Reformatory in Monroe, Washington. The friendless, hopeless state of the prisoners in that prison led him to conclude: *"We've got to get to the prisoner before he's released and help him build some positive attitudes. I'm convinced that this can only be done on a man-to-man basis, with a free man going to visit the imprisoned man for one reason only...because he cares. I'd like to call the program M2 – Man to Man."*

By 1965, Job Therapy Inc. (M2) was incorporated in the State of Washington. By the winter of 1966, an ad hoc Committee of people interested in starting a similar program in B.C. had been formed. Dick provided significant initial leadership and inspiration. Informational meetings were held with Correctional Staff at two Lower Mainland prisons, namely Haney Correctional Centre in Maple Ridge and Oakalla

Prison Farm in Burnaby. Both long since were phased out.

The March 21, 1966 Minutes of the Ad Hoc Committee state that 16 volunteers had started relating to prisoners at Haney Correctional Centre. *Canadian Job Therapy (M2)* was incorporated in 1970, at which time the first official Board of Directors was formed. Two of those original Board members, Cal Chambers and Tony Vanderwal, are still active volunteers in 2009! The women's program (W2) was added in 1974. The name of the association was changed to *M2/W2 Association - Christian Volunteers in Corrections* in 1979. In June 2001, the name of the association was again changed to *M2/W2 Association - Restorative Christian Ministries*. These changes reflect the evolving vision of M2/W2 and the varied work we are involved in beyond one to one matches. The most recent name change points to the worldwide Restorative Justice movement that began in the mid-seventies with a vision of *peacemaking* not warmaking towards all in response to crime committed, and *embrace* rather than exclusion of victims, offenders, and impacted community when crime happens. This vision has significant Christian and spiritual roots as captured well in *The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice* (ed. Michael Hadley, SUNY Press, 2001; excerpts available online under "Google Books Result").

Key committee people, in addition to Dick Simmons, in those first pivotal years were *Cal Chambers* (first Committee and Board Chair), *Bob Birch*, *Les Pritchard*, and *Paul Davies*. *Les Pritchard* also served as a volunteer Executive Director for some time. A total of 86 people served on the M2/W2 Board over the first 30 years.

Ray Coles (1970-72) and *Mel Cox* (1971-75) were the first staff members to serve the Association. *John Vandenbrink* became the first paid Executive Director of the Association in 1973 and served in that capacity until 1979. The Association has operated with full & part-time staff, as well as utilizing volunteer coordinators. Four staff served the Association for over 20 years and one for over 30 years.

The M2/W2 Association steadily expanded the number of prisons in which its services were offered. By 2003, it included 20 prisons in B.C. In 2009 six full- and part-time staff work for the Association in prison ministry coordination, and nine volunteers are similarly active in 13 prisons. About 370 volunteers regularly visit in the prisons.

The exact number of prisoners and volunteers involved in M2/W2 since 1966 is not known since precise records were not kept during earlier years. Based on records since about 1975, and estimates prior to that, we conclude that close to 4000 individual volunteers have visited prisoners under M2/W2. Many volunteers have given years of service to this ministry, many of them over 30 years. One staff member has worked with M2/W2 since 1971; two others since 1980.

In January 2002, M2/W2 added a crime prevention program known as Parent-to-Parent (P2) Chilliwack. This program matched volunteers with mothers of young children at risk of abuse and neglect, and officially ended in 2009. In 2006 an Abbotsford component of P2 was also added under a Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) contract, and continues. We have run many related programs over the years.

M2/W2 has also operated a *Circles of Support and Accountability* program well described on the Correctional Services Canada website. In 2009, we are poised to receive funding with 15 other sites to operate a five-year National Demonstration Project through a national funding agency. *CoSA* has been enormously successful, something well described in an article by Barbara Kay entitled "'Befriend the sinner, banish the sin'" (<http://www.proudtobecanadian.ca/index/writergroup/printer-friendly/2066/>)

M2/W2 finances have grown from "love offerings" in earlier years to a budget of \$450,000.00 for 2009/10. Some Government funds have been received every year since 1972. We trust M2/W2 supporters, churches and businesses will donate the balance.

Through M2/W2, God, by His love and grace, has changed many lives -- prisoners, volunteers, staff, board members and others -- as people have given themselves to building relationship-bridges with each other in the spirit of Christian love, accountability and forgiveness. For this we are truly thankful.

Perhaps some quotes will convey some idea of what God has done, as people were willing to reach out to those in prison. (*back page*)

