



**2020**

# ANNUAL REPORT

@WWHealthJustice  
WWW.WELLNESSWITHINNS.ORG



# WELLNESS WITHIN

An Organization for Health & Justice

# WHO WE ARE

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Wellness Within is a registered non-profit organization that advocates for prison abolition and provides support to women, gender diverse and trans individuals who have experienced criminalization and are pregnant or parenting young children in Nova Scotia. The group began working together in 2012 and we served our first incarcerated client in 2014.

WW's 90+ members include formerly incarcerated people, doulas, health care providers, lawyers, students, researchers, and mentors. WW volunteers have security clearance to provide support at the Nova Institution for Women Federal Prison, the Central Nova Scotia Correctional Facility Provincial jail, the Nova Scotia Youth Facility and in the community.

WW works in partnership with the Chebucto Family Centre, the Elizabeth Fry Societies of Cape Breton and Mainland Nova Scotia, Coverdale Courtwork Society, East Coast Prison Justice and other community organizations across the province to protect human rights for people experiencing criminalization.



Photo Credit: Jodi Brown

# WHAT WE DO

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## SERVICE

WW supports individual clients who have experienced criminalization or are currently incarcerated while pregnant or parenting young children. WW facilitates workshops twice a month on health and parenting issues with people incarcerated at the Central Nova Scotia Correctional Facility in Dartmouth.



## EDUCATION

WW leads seminars for health professionals and students and speaks publicly to raise consciousness of the rights and reproductive health experiences of people who experience criminalization. WW sees criminalization through a health lens and aims to improve general understanding of how health intersects with the experience of criminalization, and how this process can be redressed.



## ADVOCACY

WW advocates for access to housing, income, resources, and health care for criminalized women, gender diverse and transgender people. Our advocacy campaigns emphasize the need to develop alternatives to incarceration to advance reproductive justice.



## RESEARCH

Women, gender diverse and transgender people who have experienced criminalization face barriers to access access to basic health services inside and outside carceral facilities. There is a gap in evidence about these issues and WW collaborates to conduct research that generates evidence to guide clinical practice and policy development.



# 2020 OVERVIEW

## In 2020, we...

- Changed our name (previously Women's Wellness Within) to be gender inclusive.
- Supported clients at Central Nova Scotia Correctional Facility & Nova Institution for Women
- Delivered three workshops in Burnside prior to the COVID-19 shutdown.
- Organized a national campaign to call for an inquiry into the April 18/19 Nova Scotia Massacre. The day after our rally and #22ReasonsWhy campaign, the province called for the inquiry.
- Supervised a Canada Summer Jobs student and a Dalhousie University Schulich School of Law pro bono student placement.
- Hosted a national online conference about abolition and reproductive justice, *Breaking It Down, Building Something New*, in November 2020. Proceedings will be published in a special issue of the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*.
- Attended rallies in solidarity with organizations against police violence and continued our campaign about police violence against women, gender diverse and transgender people.
- Hosted a doula training program with Paqtnkek First Nation.
- Planned and fundraised for two Black doula trainings (postponed due to COVID-19).
- Created a queer doula curriculum and fundraised for multiple queer doula trainings in 2021.



Artist: Damini Awoyiga

# 2020 OVERVIEW (continued)

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Photo Credit: Jodi Brown

- Called for an end to the practice of birth alerts, the removal of children at birth by state agencies, a practice that disproportionately affects criminalized people, Indigenous and Black communities.
- Launched a study with ethics approval from Dalhousie University about the impact of provincial incarceration on mothers in Nova Scotia.
- Published Op Eds and did news media interviews about the urgent need for decarceration and vaccination to protect people from COVID-19 outbreaks in prison.
- Awarded first Junior Artist Residency to poet-painter-activist Damini Awoyiga.
- Screened the French film *Omblin* and a discussion about Mothering in Prison led by Brandy White.
- Updated Volume 5 of the Community Resource Guide.
- Brought on our third employee through the Canada Summer Jobs program.
- Participated in 33 news media interviews and published 9 Op Eds.
- Provided expert clinical opinion for criminal cases and human rights complaints.
- Received grants from NSPIRG (Nova Scotia Public Research Interest Group), NS Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Community Health Boards, the Tegan and Sara Foundation, Mi'kmaw Family Healing Centre, and PLANS.
- Collaborated with allies across the country on <https://www.noprison.ca/abolition-syllabus>

# DOULA TRAINING

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Building on the success of our three doula trainings in 2019, we collaborated to host three doula trainings in 2020. Due to the second wave of COVID-19 in NS, two Black doula trainings were cancelled and have been rescheduled for Spring & Fall 2021. One training was held in Paqtnkek First Nation for Indigenous doulas. These trainings aim to increase representation of Black, Indigenous, and people who have experienced criminalization in the doula workforce. We provide training free of cost to participants. In 2020, over 16 individuals completed the training.



The training is based on the curriculum developed by the Doulas of North American (DONA), however it is constantly under revision based on participant feedback to be more culturally relevant and safe. Demand for WW training exceeds capacity every time it is offered. Participant evaluations highlight strong satisfaction with the training quality, content and actionability.

We received funding support from the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Community Health Boards, and PLANS. This year we also welcomed Clark MacIntosh to WW as the Queer Doula Training Coordinator and Kilah Rolle as the BIPOC Doula Coordinator. Clark secured a grant from the Tegan & Sara Foundation to support the development of queer doula curricula for WW, with two trainings planned for 2021.

# ANNUAL CONFERENCE

On November 25, WW hosted our fourth annual conference (first online!)

## *Breaking it Down, Building Something New*

- Sara Tessier and Ashley Avery, [Coverdale](#). *Decarceration in Nova Scotia During COVID-19*
- Dr. Fiona Kouyoumdjian, McMaster University. *Health Research with People Experiencing Incarceration*
- Aisha Francis, [Restore FIBI](#). *On the Brink: The Liminal Place Between Ruin and Restoration*
- Michelle Gushue, [Elizabeth Fry Society Newfoundland and Labrador](#). *Building an Abolition Movement in Newfoundland and Labrador*
- Rachel Fayter, University of Ottawa. *Shifting Societal Perceptions and Stereotypes of Criminalized Women*
- El Jones, Poet. *Reading*
- Linda Mussell, Queens University. *Disrupting Intergenerational Incarceration*
- Patricia Whyte, [Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia](#). *Traditional Mi'kmaw Healing for People Who Have Experienced Incarceration*
- Kilah Rolle and Kalkidan Gebre, Wellness Within. *Doulas Supporting Black Maternal Health*
- Courtney Pennell, Wellness Within. *The Wellness Within Doula Program*
- Keisha Jefferies, Leah Carrier, Helen Hudson, Martha Paynter. *Nurses for Abolition Panel*



NSPIRG provided funding for our conference Artist in Residence, Omobolanle Adesiyani, who produced custom satin bonnets for WW, for sale on our website.

# RESEARCH

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**In 2020 we continued work on three research projects:**

## **Doula Training**

With our community partners, we conducted qualitative research with partners to understand the participant goals, experiences and suggestions to improve the WW doula training program. This qualitative research project was approved by the Dalhousie University Research Ethics Board. Recommendations are being implemented and a manuscript is under peer review.

## **Nurse Practitioner Study**

We are collaborating with community partners, the IWK Health Centre, the NS Advisory Council on the Status of Women, NS Health, and the Department of Justice on a large study about sexual and reproductive health outcomes, services and systems change associated with nurse practitioner-led care for people experiencing criminalization. This work is at the proposal development and ethics review stage.

## **Mother/Child Bonding and Provincial Incarceration**

We are collaborating with community partners including Coverdale and Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland NS to interview mothers about their experiences during provincial incarceration to understand the impact and develop recommendations for policy change. We have completed 18 interviews and this project is in the analysis stage.



# ADVOCACY

## KEY 2020 CAMPAIGNS

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### ENSURE HEALTH, SAFETY AND HUMAN RIGHTS OF INCARCERATED POPULATIONS AS WELL AS PUBLIC SAFETY DURING COVID-19

Wellness Within continues to call for action to be taken to ensure health, safety and human rights of incarcerated people during the pandemic. We called on NS Departments of Justice and Health to commit to these actions:

1. Grant all people with intermittent sentences temporary absence from custody.
2. Using mechanisms such as temporary absences, move persons at heightened risk of complications from COVID-19 out of facilities into appropriate community settings immediately.
3. Using mechanisms such as temporary absences, release from custody all pregnant people and primary caregivers.
4. Ensure that health segregation is not used as an alternative to community placement, and that no one is placed for any duration in the most oppressive of health segregation cells – in CNSCF, the windowless pressurized cell apparently intended for immunosuppressed or contagious prisoners.
5. Ensure that risk mitigation strategies are evidence-based and do not unduly restrict prisoners' liberties – this means avoiding reliance on prolonged or indeterminate lockdowns / solitary confinement.
6. Ensure that prisoners have regular access to phone communications with lawyers and family – e.g., through cost-free use of additional cordless phones.
7. Ensure that prisoners have regular access to programming and other activities, modified as required by evidence-based public health considerations.
8. More generally, identify and implement best practices to ensure that the highest public health standards are met in a manner that is least restrictive of residual liberties.
9. Finally, make detailed action plans for prevention and treatment of Covid-19 among incarcerated people available to the public in a transparent and accessible manner.

## GENDER AND HALIFAX REGIONAL POLICE RESPONSE: A CALL FOR CHANGE

Prompted by the Halifax Regional Police's violent arrests of women and children in winter 2020, Wellness Within members and partners collaborated to develop Calls for Change. We call for HRP to respond through public engagement and policy change.

1. Hold the officers who assaulted Santina Rao accountable. A root cause analysis that considers misogyny and racism must be completed into the officers' actions against her.
2. Apply a gender lens to arrest. Anticipate mothers will be panicked to be separated from their children and do not interpret resistance as anything other than predictable, protective maternal response.
3. Do not arrest mothers in front of their children.
4. Allow mothers to arrange to see to the childcare of their children before they are brought to lock up (see United Nations Bangkok Rule #2: <https://cdn.penalreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/BangkokRules-Updated-2016-with-renumbering-SMR.pdf>).
5. Never hold a breastfeeding mother, a pregnant person, or a lone parent in lock up.
6. Never charge a person with violation of bail if they are the victim in a domestic violence situation (e.g., have been using substances prohibited as terms of bail).
7. Always seek medical attention for anyone who appears impaired. Police are not able to make diagnoses for alcoholic intoxication or other conditions, and deaths have resulted.
8. Always ask individuals subject to arrest if they are currently taking medications and ensure they have access to those medications immediately.
9. All HRP staff are to demonstrate understanding on what trauma looks like for all citizens, especially for those who experience misogyny and racism: women, trans and nonbinary people, and Black, Indigenous, and people of color.
10. All officers are to utilize conflict de-escalation techniques as the primary response to all calls that do not involve direct, intentional physical violence prior to police arrival.

## DISARM AND DEFUND THE HALIFAX REGIONAL POLICE

Wellness Within is joining calls from anti-racist organizations across North America and the world to defund, or at least drastically restrict police funding, and to redirect funds into our community. We've heard the calls for sensitivity and bias training, trauma-informed approaches, body cameras, dialogue with community members, and we've watched other communities struggle and fail, even amidst great efforts to 'reform', at reducing anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racist violence inflicted by law enforcement.

As Professor Alex S. Vitale wrote for the Guardian on May 31, the scope of policing has expanded significantly over the past half-century. Funding and services provided by all levels of government across North America has slowly been siphoned away from providing aid and support to the marginalized, racialized and disenfranchised towards an increasingly armed and militarized police force, now tasked with responding to folks in mental health distress, in poverty, those experiencing addictions, and gender-based violence.

In Halifax just last year, we watched in horror as the municipality allocated a whopping \$500,000 for an armoured police vehicle. WE looked for evidence of the potential benefits the vehicle could bring to public safety and found none.

In April of 2020, Nova Scotians bore witness to the worst mass shooting in Canadian history. In spite of a well-funded and armed RCMP hot on his trail, the gunman evaded police for over 8 hours and 22 lives were taken, leaving so many of us asking how such a tragedy could have been avoided.

We are now reeling from the death of a Black American man, George Floyd, at the hands of law enforcement in Minneapolis and questions remain around the possible murder of a young Canadian Afro-Indigenous woman, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, whose life in Toronto was cut short after a fall from her balcony while surrounded by police. Regis is mourned by many here in Halifax.

People in Halifax deserve better. Policing is broken and more money for tanks, training or community dialogue will not fix it. WW demands disarming and defunding the HRP. Lets spend money on making our communities stronger and finding ways of meaningful, restorative, non-violent justice for all.

## END BIRTH ALERTS

Wellness Within is calling on the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services to follow British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and most recently, PEI, in ending the discriminatory and racist practice of issuing birth alerts for “at risk” parents and their babies. In this province Indigenous children are removed from their families at a significantly disproportionate rate: 23% of children in care are Indigenous, while Indigenous Nova Scotians comprise only 6 percent of the population at large. Nova Scotia also has the distinction of being the province with the third highest rate of child poverty in the country.

Child welfare agencies argue that birth alerts are intended to protect the children from inadequate or harmful treatment in the care of their “at risk” birth parents. Young parents, poor parents and racialized parents have been placed on alerts by virtue of their own previous connection to the child welfare system – an experience which, again, was largely inflicted on Indigenous and racialized children by centuries of paternalistic and racist colonial laws and policies.

Given the legacy of residential schools in Canada (schools intended to “kill the Indian in the child”), the impacts of the Sixties Scoop, and continued marginalization of Indigenous peoples, WW asks that Nova Scotia does its part to implement the recommendations put forward by both the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

We ask that Nova Scotia focus on adequate pre-, peri- and post-natal care for all new parents, with special attention and supports made available to parents who may be younger than the average, poorer than the average, with culturally sensitive and targeted supports for Indigenous, African Nova Scotian or otherwise racialized families.

Wellness Within knows well the impact that apprehensions and family separations have on parents, children and society at large. We ask that birth alerts are ended immediately, and enhanced supports are made available to help marginalized parents with their pregnancies, birth, and parenting experiences.

# IN THE MEDIA

## Highlights

**MAR 12** “Canada’s prisons preparing for COVID-19”  
NATIONAL POST | INTERVIEWER LIAM CASEY

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“Should police be allowed to do wellness checks?” **JUNE 10**  
CBC NEWS | INTERVIEWER JOANNA BREWER

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**AUG 19** “Wellness Within founder provides direction for  
police interacting with women”  
CHRONICLE HERALD | INTERVIEWER FRANK CAMPBELL

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“Doula training in Mi’kmaw community hopes to  
better serve families, rural areas” **SEP 6**  
CBC NEWS | INTERVIEWER HALEY RYAN

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**OCT 27** “Well renowned Nova Scotian teen becomes Wellness Within’s first  
junior artist in residence”  
CHRONICLE HERALD | INTERVIEWER NOUSHIN ZIAFATI

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“Black doulas training program aims to create  
diversity in the profession” **NOV 23**  
CTV NEWS | INTERVIEWE CEILIDH MILLAR

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**DEC 26** “Advocates say immediate action needed to  
curb COVID-19 outbreaks in jails and prisons”  
CANADIAN PRESS | INTERVIEWER LAUREN KRUGEL

# OPINION PIECES

["Worsening conditions in prisons during COVID-19 further marginalize criminalized women"](#)

THE CONVERSATION  
OCTOBER 18

["If Canada is serious about confronting systemic racism, we must abolish prisons"](#)

THE CONVERSATION  
JULY 6

["Humiliating 'dry cell' practice retraumatizes women"](#)

CHRONICLE HERALD  
NOVEMBER 9

["Prisons Petri dishes for coronavirus"](#)

THE CHRONICLE HERALD  
MARCH 3

Artist: Damini Awoyiga



# PARTNERS



# SPONSORS



Nova Scotia  
Advisory Council on  
the Status of Women



T E G A N  
A N D  
S A R A  
F O U N D  
A T I O N





I missed your first date and the dress for your prom  
Thank you for taking a minute to send photos to mom  
I wish I was there with the whole of my soul  
Maybe a year from now they might give me parole  
You're a young woman now, a graduate  
I'm so grateful you didn't repeat the mistakes that I made  
And I know there were years you were so angry at me  
I'm just so thankful our relationship had time to heal  
When I look in the mirror my hair's going gray  
But I still have to believe that I'll hug you some day  
You didn't have to stay you could have left me alone  
My beautiful daughter in college who still picks up the phone  
And one day soon you'll have a career and kids of your own  
And they'll call me grandma when I get home  
But until this world sees prisoners as human  
Know somebody loves you in Nova Institution.



- El Jones  
*Excerpt from 'Somebody Loves You'*





Nurses for Prison Abolition by Julia Hutt

## CONTACT US



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