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It was 25 years ago today
Former Jets remember emotion-filled 'last game' in Winnipeg / **D1-2**

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PM defends aide, says office didn't know nature of allegations

LEE BERTHIAUME

OTTAWA — Prime Minister Justin Trudeau vigorously defended his top aide on Tuesday, saying that while his office knew there was a complaint against then-defence chief general Jonathan Vance three years ago, no one knew it was about sexual misconduct.

The comments came in response to fresh questions about what the prime minister and his chief of staff, Katie Telford, knew about the allegation against Vance in March 2018 following testimony last week from one of Trudeau's former advisers.

Responding to a question during one of his regular COVID-19 briefings, Trudeau described his chief of staff as "an extraordinarily strong leader" who has been instrumental in pushing the federal government to become more feminist.

"It's because of Katie that I have sat down with multiple women leaders within the Armed Forces and elsewhere to have conversations about this over the years to look at what more can and should be done," the prime minister said.

He went on to say that while "my office knew there was a complaint against (now retired) general Vance, nobody knew that it was a 'Me Too' complaint. We did not have information on what was the nature of that complaint of that allegation."

Trudeau later repeated the comments in the House of Commons in response to Conservative questions, adding in French that "there was no one in my office or in (Defence) Minister (Harjit) Sajjan's office who knew the nature of the complaint."

Former Trudeau adviser Elder Marques told a parliamentary committee on Friday that Telford or her assistant contacted him in early March 2018 to speak with Sajjan's top aide about an issue relating to Vance.

That request came shortly after then-military ombudsman Gary Walbourne raised a complaint against Vance of inappropriate sexual behaviour with Sajjan during a closed-door meeting on March 1, 2018.

● ALLEGATIONS, CONTINUED ON A2



JOHN WOODS / THE CANADIAN PRESS FILES

Former gang member Ryan Beardsley spent years in prison and now works with the John Howard Society. 'Human interaction is huge' behind bars, he says.

Life in solitary takes torturous toll

Isolation practices in prisons regularly exceed limits set in international law

RYAN THORPE
PART 2 IN A FOUR-PART SERIES

DEVON Sampson, a 34-year-old man diagnosed with schizophrenia, hanged himself at Stony Mountain Institution in 2013. He spent 187 consecutive days in solitary confinement prior to his death; during a previous incarceration, he spent 294 consecutive days in solitary.

For decades, isolating inmates — often those with serious psychiatric conditions — in solitary confinement was a common practice in Canadian

prisons. Officially, it was called "administrative segregation," a sanitized, bureaucratic label for something far more troubling: state-endorsed torture.

The prolonged use of solitary — defined as 15 days and up — was classified as torture under international law in 2015. Four years later, the federal government mandated Correctional Service Canada to put an end to the practice.

Instead, it continues to this day — including at Stony Mountain Institution north of Winnipeg — but under a different name.

"This is a very serious issue. Our concern is that this is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of people being subjected to functional solitary confinement. It's bad. It's just really bad," said Catherine Latimer, the national executive director of the John Howard Society.

"You've got to stop torturing them and subjecting them to these long solitary confinements."

The psychological toll of solitary on inmates is well established, something Ryan Beardsley, a former gang member and current freelance journalist, mentor and justice advocate,

knows all too well.

Beginning as a youth and continuing into adulthood, he repeatedly spent time in solitary confinement during stints at various correctional facilities, including Stony Mountain. Now, he works with the John Howard Society to raise awareness about prison conditions in Canada, and organizes a weekly support group for men in Winnipeg.

● SOLITARY, CONTINUED ON A5

\$1 million stolen from child welfare agency for trips, gambling

DEAN PRITCHARD

A Winnipeg woman has been sentenced to four years in prison after admitting she had defrauded a social services agency of more than \$1 million earmarked for Indigenous children.

Gwendolen Reid, 47, pleaded guilty to one count of fraud over \$5,000.

Reid was hired in January 2016 as manager of finance and administration for Shawenim Abinoojii Inc., an agency that provides foster care, support worker services and program-

ming aimed at reducing the number of Indigenous children in care. Less than two months after she was hired, Reid began manipulating agency financial accounts for her personal benefit.

"She took complete advantage of us," executive director Jason Whitford told provincial court Judge Sandy Chapman at a sentencing hearing Tuesday.

"What her theft has done to our organization is taken away opportunities for children. It's taken away opportunities for resources, for programming, for supports in children's lives," Whitford said. "To have that happen

in an organization that works with the most vulnerable in our population... it's despicable. It's very difficult to forgive those actions."

An agreed statement of facts provided to court says Reid had signing authority for agency cheques and was the only person on staff with "complete access" to the financial and payroll software programs.

Reid altered her personal direct payroll deposits to sometimes pay herself triple her normal salary. She created direct deposit accounts for five former employees and rerouted

\$220,000 into her own bank accounts before the fraud was uncovered in January 2019.

Reid siphoned another \$740,000 from the agency by forging 151 cheques, which she entered into agency ledgers as "one-time payments to vendors." Reid used an agency credit card to rack up another \$70,000 in unauthorized cash advances and purchases.

Reid used much of the money for family vacations, Las Vegas getaways, including \$5,000 for Celine Dion concert tickets, and new furniture for

her children.

"This is calculated and this offender is sophisticated," Crown attorney Terry McComb told court. "This is white-collar crime by somebody who knew her job well."

Reid claimed she lost \$800,000 of the agency's money at city casinos. McComb said an investigation revealed that figure was closer to \$450,000, adding Reid didn't start gambling until well after she had begun defrauding the agency.

● STOLEN, CONTINUED ON A2



INSIDE

SOMETHING SMELLS

St. Andrews homeowners hit with big bill to connect to city's wastewater service / **B1**

HARD LESSON

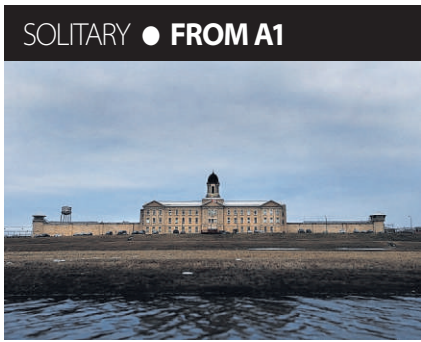
St. Vital mom speaks out after her son contracts COVID-19 at school / **A8**

NO MUMS FOR MOM

City florists hard-pressed to source flowers for Mother's Day due to huge demand / **B5**

RAGING STREAM

Winnipeg-based Ameba, a streaming service for kids, booming due to COVID / **C1**



SOLITARY • FROM A1
JOHN WOODS / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Solitary confinement continues at Stony Mountain Institution — but under a different name.

“I don’t know how many times I was looking through a crack in the wall just wishing that a nurse would walk by, or a guard would walk by, just so that I could ask them the time. Human interaction is huge. When we don’t have human interaction, we actually forget how to interact,” Beardy said.

Beardy points to a growing body of research that suggests not only does solitary confinement have a psychological effect on inmates, but a physiological effect as well. Studies have shown that extreme isolation can inhibit the development of neurons in the brain.

“If in any country, someone was sent to prison and they chopped off their limb, that would be barbaric. It would be a huge violation of human rights. So why is it all right in Canada to send someone to solitary confinement where they’re losing neurons?” Beardy asks.

“We shouldn’t have it in Canada at all.”

Craig Haney, an American psychologist who has studied the impact of solitary confinement on prisoners, has said the endless monotony and lack of human contact can trigger a “descent into madness.” Symptoms can include suicidal ideation, depression, paranoia, panic attacks and hallucinations.

For years, the Office of the Correctional Investigator — the federal prison ombudsman — has sounded the alarm about the use of solitary, pointing to the high number of cases where inmates killed themselves during long periods of isolation.

In 2015, the United Nations adopted an amendment to the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, known as the “Nelson Mandela Rules,” which classified the prolonged use of solitary as torture, and cruel and unusual punishment.

And yet, solitary confinement continued in Canadian prisons until 2019, when the federal government passed a law ostensibly banning it. Instead, the feds said, solitary would be replaced with new “structured intervention units.”

Solitary is the term used internationally to refer to the practice of confining a prisoner in a cell for more than 22 hours per day without meaningful human contact. With structured intervention units, inmates are supposed to have four hours outside of their cell each day, with two hours of meaningful human contact.

To implement the change, CSC was given \$300 million. The agency’s annual budget is \$2.6 billion.

The federal government also set up a committee of independent experts tasked with reviewing progress in phasing out the use of solitary. One of the committee members was Anthony Doob, a criminologist and professor emeritus at the University of Toronto.

The only problem, according to Doob, was that CSC stonewalled the committee’s work.

The committee had accomplished “absolutely nothing” by the time its one-year term was up because CSC refused to turn over the requested data on the use of solitary and the implementation of structured intervention units, Doob said.

“The people who were on (the task force) were people Correctional Service of Canada didn’t want on it. There were several people who they were not going to be able to push around... But they succeeded anyway by saying, ‘Well, we’re just going to close the door in your face,’” Doob said.

“In effect, they control things by having the key to the door.”

After Doob went public with the way CSC stifled their efforts, the federal government forced the agency to hand over the data.

Even though the committee had been dissolved, Doob was still interested in what the data had to say. He and



Catherine Latimer, executive director of the John Howard Society of Canada, says the practice of solitary confinement at Stony Mountain must end.

Jane Sprott of Ryerson University have produced three reports showing the practice of solitary confinement continues in Canadian prisons — just as structured intervention units.

According to their research, an estimated 28 per cent of all stays in the new units amount to solitary confinement, with an additional 10 per cent constituting torture under the Nelson Mandela Rules.

In a written statement sent to the *Free Press*, CSC said an external review kicks in if an inmate does not spend the required four hours per day outside of their cell, or receive the necessary two hours of meaningful human contact, for five consecutive days, or 15 out of 30 calendar days. The importance of this review process, CSC says, “cannot be understated.”

But according to Doob, like with many other facets of CSC operations, there is a lack of transparency when it comes to these reviews.

“There is no question that there is oversight. But the question is: What does that oversight consist of? We don’t know that to a large extent. There are these independent people who are supposed to be looking at why people aren’t getting out of cells. But we don’t have any idea of what information they’re getting,” Doob said.

While CSC has criticized aspects of Doob’s and Sprott’s findings, the agency has refused to release any research of its own. Meanwhile, Doob and Sprott’s work was accepted by Minister of Public Safety Bill Blair, and Correctional Investigator Ivan Zinger said it “speaks for itself,” adding that CSC was in “flagrant non-compliance” with the law.

James Bloomfield, the president of the Prairies region for the Union of Canadian Correction Officers, says CSC made a mistake when it changed the policy for solitary confinement overnight, rather than phasing it out more gradually. He believes front-line staff have not been given sufficient direction on how to manage inmates without solitary.

“They didn’t phase it out. The service just decided it was done, period... We’ve been dealing with that decision ever since. We have very concerning, very problematic inmate behaviours and we have no place to isolate them and put them away from the general population,” Bloomfield said.

“We just do our best to work with what we have.”

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic complicated matters further. Stony Mountain saw one of the worst outbreaks of any federal prison in Canada, with roughly 370 inmates — about half of the incarcerated population — testing positive, including one

who died.

Because of the inability to transfer inmates to different facilities during the pandemic, the stays in structured intervention units at Stony Mountain have been consistently longer than the 15-day cap, Bloomfield said.

“These structured intervention units, as they call it, for that, we now have people staying in there for over 100 days, because we can’t move them around,” he said.

“We end up with a lot more individuals sitting in an SIU for multiple, multiple days. We’re talking an average, right now, that is quite a bit over what we’re supposed to be. The 15-day mark is what they like to see... Right now, we’re sitting over 100 days.”

Last month, Minister Blair went back to parliament to ask for an additional \$135 million he said was needed to put an end to solitary confinement in Canadian federal prisons once and for all.

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Correctional Service Canada responds

STRUCTURED intervention units are about helping inmates and providing them with the continued opportunity to engage in interventions and programs to support their safe return to a mainstream inmate population as soon as possible.

SIUs are not about punishment or causing harm. They are meant as a temporary measure to help inmates adopt more positive behaviours that keep the institution as a whole, safe and secure.

The law is clear. While in an SIU, inmates have access to the same types of programs, services and activities as inmates in a mainstream inmate population. They are visited daily by staff, including their parole officer, health care profession-

als, correctional officers, primary workers, elders and chaplains as well as other inmates and visitors. Inmates must be provided with the opportunity to spend a minimum of four hours a day outside their cell, including two hours a day for meaningful human contact.

The legislation guiding SIUs recognizes that there are situations when an inmate may be held in their cell for longer, for example, if they refuse to leave. This is their right. We continue to make active offers for time out of cell, including access to programs and meaningful contact with others. We encourage inmates not only to take these opportunities but also to engage in them.



Anthony Doob: Correctional Service Canada refused to turn over solitary confinement data.

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