



Opening Remarks

Happy New Year Walls to Bridgers!

2025 was another packed year. The GVI Collective extends a big thank you to all W2B students, instructors, and supporters working tirelessly to create W2B programs and keep them going. The W2B community is growing with regional and national gatherings to share updates, ideas, collaborate on funding opportunities, and reduce barriers to education.

Earlier this year, McMaster evolved the National leadership to include Wilfrid Laurier, Toronto Metropolitan University, and the coordinators of the GVI and OCC Collectives. As a board of directors, we're striving to build a sustainable funding model and encourage inter-provincial W2B collaboration.

The 2025 W2B facilitator training included instructors from business, creative writing, community psychology, philosophy, and more. Every year, themes emerge from the cohorts, and this year, the group explored reciprocity and community. Congratulations to the new instructors! We look forward to supporting your programs.

The Ontario Community Collective had an incredible year. We hosted a rich set of community-building and learning events—from our international conference in Spain to our Prison Art as Resilience series here at home. We also delivered several transformative justice workshops, along with multiple W2B sessions. We're excited to share that we received two new grants this year: one from the Centre for Criminology and Sociolegal Studies and one from the Women & Gender Studies Department at U of T. The Criminology grant will support the development of a Research Ethics Board dedicated to safeguarding the rights and dignity of people who are criminalized and ensuring accountable academic research practices. The WGS grant will allow us to bring W2B workshops into selected courses across the university. There is so much important work ahead—and we're grateful to be doing it in community.

We want to congratulate Dr. Sandy Lehalle, Dr. Alexis Truong, and the University of Ottawa for developing the first French language W2B instructor training! Commencing summer 2026, the training will be held at the Hull Detention Centre and the University of Ottawa. We look forward to including updates in the next newsletter!

2025 included several GVI ETAs including McMaster University's Indigenous Research Day and workshops at Wilfrid Laurier. Remember to reach out far in advance to offer ETA opportunities in your classes, conferences, or events.

2025 also witnessed new programs at Acadia University and Toronto Metropolitan. Dr. Liz Rondinelli's "Seminar in Family Issues" was held at Nova Institution for Women in Fall 2025. Dr. Rai Reece and her team at TMU are gearing up for a community-based W2B course in Winter 2025 called "Law, Justice, and Abolition" at The Salvation Army in downtown Toronto. Congratulations to you both!

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this edition of the W2B newsletter! We hope you had a relaxing holiday season!

We create educational opportunities in correctional settings where the experiences of teaching and (un)learning challenge assumptions, stigmatization and inequality.

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Facilitators Tiina (left) & Lorraine (right) at GVI to facilitate Transformative Justice & Conflict Resolution Certification

W2B GVI Collective

2025 W2B Instructor Training

When reflecting on the 2025 cohort of the W2B Instructor Training, the GVI Collective identified reciprocity as a central theme that shaped the experience. Collective members were deeply moved by the trainees' final project, which emphasized inclusivity, relationality, and the shared responsibility of building transformative learning spaces.

Sixteen trainees from Ontario, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, and Manitoba came together to learn, share, and build community. While they were united by a commitment to W2B's pedagogy, their pathways into the program were diverse. Among them were two professors from McMaster University with expertise in Business and Social Entrepreneurship, who hope to develop future innovative learning opportunities within the W2B prison education program.

- W2B GVI Collective

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Participant Reflections

"I learned more about pedagogy from this week than from reading a dozen books."

"It has shown me there are other ways of teaching. I understand embodied learning now. It isn't just words anymore. It is a rich and deep way of learning and eventually knowing that is as hard to forget as a tattoo is to rub off."

"I especially love how the collective modelled and embodied the values of W2B, gave us the chance to work through the class experience and activities, and share so much wisdom."
 "All collective members did an amazing job, yoyenare! I absolutely loved uplifting and honouring circle pedagogy, having the medicines and helper present was calming. Having the panel, guest speaker, and learning by doing activities – I truly connected to."

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GVI Collective Community Participation

W2B Collective members regularly participate in conferences, facilitate workshops for university classes, and represent the program at community events—with some inside members attending through Escorted Temporary Absences (ETAs).

In the fall, members of the Collective participate in McMaster University's annual Indigenous Research Day. This year, Stone Rivers, Anishinaabe Kwe, a member of the GVI Collective and a Master's candidate in Indigenous Studies, presented her research on the impact of incarceration on Indigenous motherhood, cultural continuance, and oral tradition.

Gurpreet, GVI Collective Member, attended the event. In her words:

"This was my first experience attending this research day. I gained a deeper understanding of both the historical and ongoing struggles of Indigenous peoples of Canada, as well as the profound effects of colonialism, oppression, and intergenerational trauma. I also witnessed the strength, resilience, and cultural vibrancy that continue to guide Indigenous communities as they resist injustice, rebuild, and teach us about the possibilities of healing, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Stone — one of our inspiring collective members and a student at McMaster University — delivered a remarkable and deeply moving presentation on her research of over-incarceration of Indigenous women in Canadian prisons. Her insights were both heartbreaking and illuminating. I am proud of Stone for her hard work, dedication and courage. Her presentation was flawless, professional and profoundly heartfelt."



From left to right: Stone, Tori, and Gurpreet - W2B GVI Collective members at McMaster University's annual Indigenous Research Day

Among the numerous opportunities that become available through Walls to Bridges (W2B), one unique prospect for inside collective members is the position of Teacher's Assistant (TA) for W2B courses offered at Grand Valley Institution for Women. It is understood that should a person choose to be a TA, they forfeit being a student within the course.

As a TA there are several responsibilities, such as setting up the classroom before class to ensure that seating alternates to diminish the formation of cliques and encourages the development of new bonds, as well as assisting in community-building openers and closers and other foundational activities. Outside of classes, there are generally weekly office hours held with the professor to assist with and answer any questions that students may have. The role of a TA is ultimately to co-facilitate and assist as necessary.

As a TA, it is important to have weekly independent meetings with the professor to prepare for the upcoming class, to discuss any concerns between the facilitators, and to consider how best to support everyone. These meetings also help maintain a pulse on the classroom, including changing dynamics, how sensitive topics impact both inside and outside students, and how to offer support throughout the semester. Something is fulfilling about having someone to bounce ideas off of and to notice anything that might otherwise be missed. Part of the TA's responsibility includes supporting inside students in their understanding of course content and writing assignments, and serving as a conduit between the W2B program and the staff at the institution.

- Tanya and Terri, GVI W2B Collective Members

"The most rewarding part of being a TA is witnessing your fellow peers achieve and accomplish post-secondary education, many of whom thought this was not possible, but with your support and encouragement came to believe in themselves and invest in their future." - Tanya, GVI Collective Member

"As a collective member that has been a TA for several W2B courses – Carceral Seminars, Mental Health and Addiction, Indigenous Creative Arts & Drama, Death, Dying & Bereavement – the content may vary, but the support is substantial. Particularly for inside TAs, it is extremely empowering to provide such leadership and support in a meaningful way while still experiencing the course content. The impact of being a TA is lifelong and incomparable - the role of learner and teacher is something everyone should experience."

– Terri, GVI Collective Member

Katarokwi W2B Collective

The Katarokwi W2B Collective is a new Collective at Collins Bay Institution with the inspiration from the Walls to Bridges class of 2025. After graduation and with the connections built throughout the class, Walls to Bridges HQ in consultation with Professor Nicole Myers and Professor Lisa Guenther, decided that a Collective to train professors who wanted to not only participate, but also lead their own Walls to Bridges classes in other institutions could be possible at Collins Bay. Since training is only available in Ontario at Grand Valley Institution, Collins Bay could be pivotal in growing Walls to Bridges in a prison populated city that's without a Collective.

The Walls to Bridges class was transformative for all who participated, which is evident through the continuity of working together. It is obvious that none of us can really let go and that this is something that all involved in the newly birthed Collective felt should not only be nurtured, but shared. The unexpected bond, community and support that Walls to Bridges brings about empowers everyone to learn and evolve, inspired by the Indigenous Peoples from which our Collective is named.

- Co-written, Katarokwi W2B Collective members, Kingston, Ontario

W2B Ontario Community Collective (W2BCCO)

2025 was an exceptionally busy and energizing year for us. We received a remarkable number of requests for workshops, conferences, panel discussions, trainings, and exploratory collaboration meetings—coming from local, national, and international partners. One of the year’s standout invitations brought us to Oñati, Spain (June 19–20), where we delivered a paper about Walls to Bridges (W2B) and led a workshop on ethical research practices with people with lived experience of incarceration.

We are thrilled that participants consistently left our sessions eager to learn more about the W2B pedagogy and model, and many expressed strong interest in registering for future trainings. Feedback continues to affirm the impact of our work.

Two reflections from workshop participants speak for themselves:

“I know the students, and I as well, learned so much from you and about Walls to Bridges. You allowed them to open up in ways that were amazing to see.”

“Thank you so much for the absolutely brilliant workshop you ran yesterday with Tiina and Nichelle! I was so moved by the critically important work you are all doing. I learned so much pedagogically, too. I’m already thinking about strategies to make my own teaching less hierarchical and more centered on students’ lived experiences. Several students have already written to me about how important the visit was to their thinking about education as a tool for abolition.”

We are deeply grateful for the growing interest in W2B approach, and we look forward to continuing this work together with our community of learners, educators, and partners in 2026 and after.



Facilitators Lorraine (left) & Tiina (right)



W2B Facilitators from left to right: Shoshana, Lorraine, Marcia, and Melissa

Toronto Metropolitan University & Salvation Army

Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) and The Salvation Army, in collaboration with Walls to Bridges, are excited to announce an exciting opportunity for TMU students and Community Members who were formerly incarcerated to enroll in a full-credit course bringing together the wisdom of community members and university students. In this course, 15 people who have previously been incarcerated and 15 students from Toronto Metropolitan University will learn from each other at a community organization, through dialogue, and be inspired by experiential learning and readings. This course is being taught by Sociology Associate Professor, Dr. Rai Reece, and will explore historical and contemporary theoretical and practical approaches to examining the function of law in society, the degree to which justice is served in our society, and how abolitionist theory and practice can be used as an active process for abolishing judicial and carceral systems of systemic oppression. The course will specifically examine how the law has historically functioned as a tool of violent colonial oppression against Indigenous and Black peoples by analyzing the Prison Industrial Complex (prisons for profit industry).

Acadia University & Nova Institution for Women

My name is Elisabeth Rondinelli and I'm an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at Acadia in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. In Fall 2025, I taught my first Walls to Bridges course at Nova Institution for Women in Truro. There were 11 students enrolled - 6 outside and 5 inside and the course was a 4th year seminar in Family Issues. I'm proud to say that this is the first Walls to Bridges course that has been taught on the east coast of Canada.

The image below is of the students' final project. Students decided they wanted to create a large-scale puzzle. Each student created their own piece, representing the ideas and

insights they took away from the course. Each piece fits together to highlight the community they built over the course of these months. The students consistently rose to the challenges, not only of the readings and the ideas we discussed, but of meeting one another with an open and generous mind.



McMaster & Vanier

In Fall 2025, McMaster University introduced a new W2B program at the Vanier Centre for Women, featuring the course Indigenous Creative Arts and Drama. The class examined contemporary Indigenous visual and literary arts, primarily within North America, while situating them in a broader global context. Throughout these works, students traced longstanding artistic practices that address colonialism, racism, cultural appropriation, gender, sexuality, and representation; issues that continue to shape Indigenous experience and expression.

Within the course, art and drama functioned as practices of reclamation, restoring agency, political presence, and embodied sovereignty. The final project required students to create individual masks alongside a collective poem. The mask-making emerged from students' exploration of identity, community, and the enduring effects of colonial incarceration, both structural and psychological. Masks served as symbols of transformation, enabling students to interrogate the identities imposed by colonial narratives while asserting the right to self-definition.

This work also connected to Indigenous storytelling traditions, in which masks act as vessels for ancestral knowledge, healing, and truth-telling. At the same time, the project highlighted how institutions, especially prisons and post-secondary settings, require individuals to adopt metaphorical "masks" to navigate surveillance, power hierarchies, and expectations of compliance. By crafting and performing with masks, students confronted these institutional layers, revealing the tension between imposed identities and authentic selfhood.

The final prompt, "Art has the ability to say the unsayable," shaped a community poem written one line at a time, with each student seeing only the preceding line. The resulting collective work mirrored the course's central inquiry: how creativity exposes what institutions attempt to contain.

- Dr. Savage Bear, W2B Professor, McMaster University

Spirals, Scars and Brushstrokes

Art has the ability to say the unsayable.
It speaks the words I feel, but cannot say,
Art is the reflection of the self and how we interpret the world around us.
Art is being creative and fun,
It helps us without a voice to speak our truths.
Art helps us show where every line and curve comes from our face like scars.
Those scars harden to form the frame of the window we see the world through,
We can reimagine healing, heartbreak. We can create worlds we want to live in' one brush stroke, word, comic at a time. Art can portray the story we hold within, the happiness, the decay, the surprises and the deep sadness.
Art holds no boundaries and is governed by no laws. It just is ...
It does not ask for permission. It flows and moves and reflects the nature of its creator with perfect precision.
Unashamed. Unapologetic. It lives, unchanged by judgement, free to finally breathe.
Unchangeable by the outside world but evolves on the inside all year round.
Yet, inside the path is not linear. It is a spiral, constantly evolving.
If is in front of us, around every corner, in every little space. It's beauty.
You grow with it, learn from it, enjoy the journey it brings. You can gain comfort from knowing you will be understood for who you are.
EMBRACE THE DISCOMFORT; LEARN WHO YOU ARE.

- Vanier W2B Class Fall 2025

Ashley B, Brittany-June, Eric, Joey, Jodi, Kayla, Larissa, Maia, Mandy, Megan, Nicole I., Nicole S., Noah, Parminda, Rachel, Tansy, Trish

Announcements

ComPaS-W2B Training being offered in French

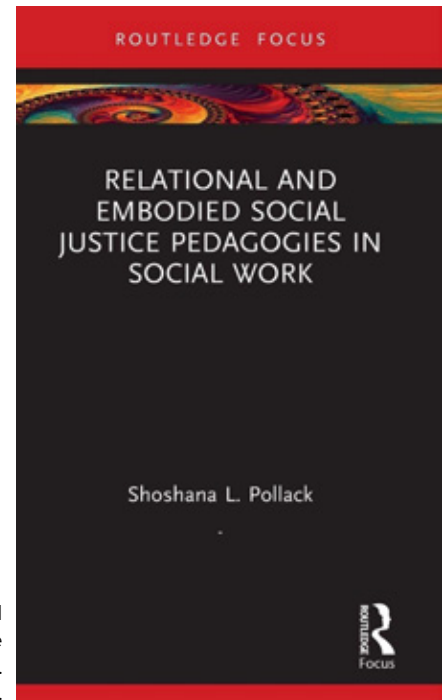
En 2026, le collectif Ottawa-Gatineau offrira la première formation ComPaS-W2B en français! Si vous désirez présenter une candidature pour cette formation ayant lieu du 6 au 10 juillet 2026, contactez le collectif à l'adresse courriel: ComPaS-W2B@uottawa.ca

In 2026, the Ottawa-Gatineau collective will offer the first ComPaS-W2B training in French! If you would like to apply for this training, which will take place from July 6 to 10, 2026, please contact the collective at: ComPaS-W2B@uottawa.ca

Relational and Embodied Social Justice Pedagogies in Social Work by Shoshana L. Pollack

Relational and Embodied Social Justice Pedagogies in Social Work by Shoshana L. Pollack includes a chapter on Walls to Bridges pedagogy: Relational and Embodied Teaching: The Walls to Bridges Program

Pollack, S. L. (2026). Relational and Embodied Social Justice Pedagogies in Social Work. Routledge.



WE ARE ONE
NOT THE OTHER



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