



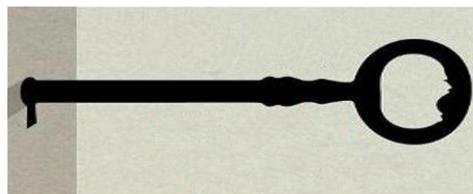
## Bill C-54

# Not Criminally Responsible

### A Bill to Keep Mentally Ill Offenders Locked Up?

"Our Government is committed to making Canadian streets and communities safer," said the Prime Minister. "The new legislation introduced today focuses on victims and places public safety at the forefront of decision-making. This will ensure that not criminally responsible accused people found to be too dangerous to release are no longer a threat to their victims or Canadian communities." *The Prime Minister of Canada's Website*

The Conservative government is proposing new legislation to keep those designated "not criminally responsible because of mental illness" locked up. On February 8, at the announcement of Bill C-54, Prime Minister Harper referred to a disturbing case where a father murdered his three children. The presence of the children's mother at the announcement would suggest that stopping tragedies like this is one of the goals of this legislation. One of the dangers of making such sweeping legislation is that, while it is meant for only a few, those "too dangerous to be released," the consequences apply to many people. Under the new legislation, the courts, instead of a review panel, will be given the power to label offenders as "high risk." They could be locked up for as long as three years before undergoing a review. Only a court can decide if they are eligible for release. While being detained they will not be allowed to go out on an unescorted pass and can only go out on an "escorted pass in narrow circumstances." (*continued on page 2*)



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

**1 Bill C-54: Not Criminally Responsible. A Bill to Keep Mentally Ill Offenders Locked Up?**

**2 Reaction to Bill C-54**

**3 Important Changes to Unemployment Rules**

**4 March Break on a Budget**

The rate at which offenders with a mental illness re-offend is low. According to Dr. Sandy Simpson of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, the percentage of those with mental illness who do re-offend is only 8% compared to a 40% re-offence rate for convicts who are released from federal prisons. The new legislation is considering public safety and is not taking into consideration the rights of those who have been found not criminally responsible because of mental illness. The current law balances public safety and the right of offenders with mental illness to receive treatment. These people are not criminals. They suffer from a legitimate medical illness.

The mental health community in Canada has come together to oppose the proposed changes in this new legislation. A press release by a working alliance of mental health groups stated, "Implementing such legislation cannot be in the best interest of Canadians without consulting and working with the mental health community."

They believe, if the government would consult with them, they can offer the "knowledge, tools, and resources" needed to make positive changes to this legislation. It would focus on the treatment and recovery of mentally ill offenders, which in turn would promote the safety of society. If they are living in recovery they will be much less likely to re-offend.

For more information, contact your MP or the Schizophrenia Society of Canada at [info@schizophrenia.ca](mailto:info@schizophrenia.ca).

By Tony Legere

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## Reaction to Bill C-54

Schizophrenia Society of Canada chief executive Chris Summerville, said this type of legislation does little to combat prejudice and stigma toward people with mental illness.

Noting three per cent of people with a mental illness come in conflict with the law, Summerville said 0.001 per cent are found not criminally responsible. Furthermore, 93 to 97 per cent of them find treatment that works and do not reoffend.

"The announcement today was fear based. It wasn't evidence based," Summerville said. "High risk must not be defined or determined by the severity or atrociousness of the crime, but by how well the person responds or does not respond to treatment."

-Tobi Cohen, Post Media News



#### Reference:

<http://www.canada.com/bill+cracks+down+criminally+responsible+raises+questions+fairness+necessity/7938268/story.html>

This issue of **A Mental Health Perspective** has been funded by donations in memory of Carson Ferdinand, the father of a CMHA-Kings staff member. Carson was a man who lived a life of love and service to his family and community, and is greatly missed.

## Important Changes to Employment Insurance Rules

Canadians who are looking for work while claiming Employment Insurance saw several changes go into effect recently as a result of the federal government's EI reform announced in last year's March budget.



CMHA-Kings Outreach Employment Services want to ensure their clients are aware of the new rules so they can maintain their EI benefits. The new rules include:

You are required to maintain a record of your daily job search efforts.

You must do a daily search effort in order to demonstrate that you meet the two basic conditions of maintaining your EI benefits: **be looking for work** and **be available for work**.

*Reasonable job search activities include:*

- appointments at CMHA Kings-Employment Outreach
- searching for employment opportunities. Record every time that you search even if there are no jobs for which you can apply
- preparing a resume or cover letter
- registering for job search tools or electronic job banks or employment agencies
- attending job search workshops or job fairs
- networking
- contacting prospective employers
- submitting job applications
- attending interviews
- evaluating your skills and competencies

Document all your activities!  
(See CMHA staff for a Job Search form)

You may be asked to provide this information to Service Canada or risk losing your EI benefits.

The above information was provided by SERVICE CANADA.

For definitions of activities see  
[www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/sc/ei/ccaj/definitions.shtml](http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/sc/ei/ccaj/definitions.shtml)

For help, call CMHA Outreach Employment Services at 679-7464 or 690-2422



## 'Shelter Me' for CMHA Kings Branch

*(A Housing Partnership Strategy for Rural Communities)*

### Workshops

**Targeted workshops** – covering apartment searching, tenancy issues, computer skills, budgeting. (Topics vary based on needs of attendees). At VCLA offices, Kentville.

- Mondays, 9 a.m. – noon.
- Wednesday, noon – 4:00 p.m.

**Lunch and Learn** – Come enjoy fun, healthy cooking and shared meal, with life-skills topics (communication skills, shopping, problem solving, decision making, and social skills).

- Fridays, 10 am – 2 pm. First and second Fridays of the month at St. James' Anglican Church; all other Fridays at St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church

For more information contact:  
Trevor Moores  
Housing Support Supervisor  
(902) 679-7573

[sheltermesupervisor@cmhakings.ns.ca](mailto:sheltermesupervisor@cmhakings.ns.ca)

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## March Break on a Budget

March Break gives children a chance to wind down after months at school. How do you keep your school-age children occupied and away from the computer especially if you have limited funds? Here are a few suggestions for free local activities:

From arts to crafts to gaming, the Annapolis Valley Regional Library has many free March Break programs offered at all of its branches across the valley. Check the Events Calendar at their official website: <http://valleylibrary.ca>. Please note that pre-registration, by phone or online, is required for many programs.

The Greenwood Military Aviation Museum (<http://gmam.ca/>) and the Windsor Hockey Heritage Museum (<http://www.birthplaceofhockey.com/>) provide a chance to learn about interesting topics. Admission to these museums is usually free.

Skating in indoor arenas and outdoor rinks found in towns and villages around Kings County provides good opportunities for physical activity and are either free or with admission. Indoor swimming is available for a fee at Acadia University, Waterville or Greenwood 14 Wing. Indoor soccer at the Kentville Soccer Dome (<http://www.valleyindoorsoccer.com>) is free for families on certain days. Sledding can be done at a few public places such as Burger Hill in Kentville.

If bad weather or lack of local options keeps your family at home, there are plenty of indoor activities such as games, crafts, cooking and music that can be creative, fun and don't cost a lot. Check your local library or the Internet for indoor activity ideas.

Being physically active, socializing with others, learning new things and being creative while having fun are keys to good mental health so allow your children to take full advantage of March Break while they can! For full information on events or ideas for March Break, go to <http://valleyfamilyfun.ca>.



By Melinda Cadarette

### A Mental Health Perspective Mission Statement:

The purpose of this newsletter is to bring faith, hope and courage to members of the local mental health community of Kings County, Nova Scotia, as well as others who are involved with a mental, emotional or psychological condition.

Donations to support this newsletter and other important programs and services can be made to CMHA, 11 Opportunity Lane Suite 3 Box 10 Coldbrook NS B4R 0A5 (Cheque or money order will be accepted).



#### Staff & Volunteers

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