

## **JOURNALISTIC APPROACH**

This story came from a released FOIPOP request on Nova Scotia's online database. While I did not file the FOIPOP request myself, I came across the data 3-months following its release, and the story had not yet broke. Upon looking through the data, I was interested to see if the overrepresentation of Indigenous women in provincial jails was a trend all across Canada, although the only trend I was able to find was jail populations, for the most part, are disclosed from the public.

In my third year of journalism at the University of King's College, I worked as a research assistant to Fred Vallance-Jones for his investigative workshop class. In doing so, I gained an in-depth understanding of the investigative process. I used my background as a research assistant to aid my reporting going forward.

After gathering the data, I began to research and read previously published articles on overrepresentation in prisons and jails. I knew that earlier that year, the correctional investigator reported that Indigenous women now account for 42 per cent of women in federal prison – a percentage that's been on the rise for years. From there, I looked further into differences between federal and provincial custody in Canada to get a better understanding. I found that most people are serving time in a provincial facility due to small-scale crimes, like robbery or drug possession, or are awaiting trial – crimes that, largely, are due to economic and socioeconomic inequalities. I also found that following release, those serving time in federal prisons have a considerable amount of support to ease reintegration, whereas jails offer no transition supports. That knowledge directed my reporting going forward, as it led me to believe that without adequate supports, jail could be a revolving door for those in its custody.

Once I'd gathered enough research, I began looking for sources to interview. This was one of the most challenging parts of reporting the piece, and it was the part that I learned the most from. I connected with From The Ground Up: Women's Wellness Society, with an invitation to interview for the story. Of the three women interviewed, one was Laura Toney. Toney is a member of Annapolis Valley First Nation, and she shared her experience in Nova Scotia jail with me. I used her story to guide the rest of reporting, as she'd mentioned things such as religious and spiritual inequalities in Nova Scotia jails, a lack of Indigenous supports in place, and being unjustifiably singled out of spiritual ceremonies.

This is when I began to further my research in order to prepare for expert interviews. I became familiar with healing lodges, and legal and communal supports in place for Nova Scotia's Indigenous community. I interviewed Mona O'Brien, who is a member of Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation and an Indigenous court worker with the Native Council of Nova Scotia. She provided me with further insight into the experiences of Indigenous peoples going through the justice system, as well as what she believes needs to be changed in order to properly address, and reverse, overrepresentation in Nova Scotia jails.

I requested an interview from the Department of Justice, although I was only provided with a statement. Shortly before the story published, Nova Scotia's then Premier, Stephen McNeil,

made a public apology for systematic racism in the justice system. To date, I am unsure whether or not action has followed that apology.