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**DATE: NOVEMBER 5, 2013**

JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY OF ONTARIO LAUNCHES NEW PUBLIC EDUCATION SERIES TO DISPEL MYTHS ABOUT CRIME AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE; AIMS TO START PUBLIC DIALOGUE.

**TORONTO** - *The Counter Point*, a new publication series from the John Howard Society of Ontario's Centre of Research, Policy & Program Development (the "Centre"), aims to get Ontarians talking about issues that affect us universally; namely, community safety, crime prevention and prisons. The series seeks to demystify common myths around crime while making often complex topics or debates more accessible, especially for those who have never had any contact with the criminal justice system.

As part of the release of the new series, Centre staff spoke with individuals who have lived experience being in conflict with the law to give Ontarians perspective into their experiences. Luke, a former John Howard Society client as a youth, emphasized the importance of listening to the voices of youth who have been in trouble at school or with the law, and how even one person expressing concern and offering support can make all the difference.

Luke further stated, "[Some] people do need help just to get over some speed bump they're at and progress forward with their life." This progress, however, can often be undermined by views that people do not deserve second (or third) chances, or stereotypes associated with those with criminal records, leaving individuals feeling that they are irredeemable and, as a result, susceptible to falling into old patterns. Understanding how and why individuals get into conflict with the law, along with other crime trends, is central to the new *Counter Point* series.

"Even if crime has not directly impacted your life, everyone has a stake in community safety. And many have an interest in crime-related stories or issues" states Jacqueline Tasca, Policy Analyst at the Centre. "Our intention is that this public education series serves as a jumping off point for larger discussions in communities across Ontario. The portrayal of crime on television or in the press can vastly misrepresent reality. So, for example, through *Counter Point* we highlight what life is actually like for prisoners in Ontario, and we explore how issues like poverty intersect with criminal justice involvement."

The Centre welcomes public feedback on future topics that are of interest, and Centre staff are available to give presentations on topics related to crime and social justice. There are 19 local John Howard Society offices across Ontario that engage in direct service work with individuals who are at-risk or in conflict with the law who are also engaged in local public education activities.

To read the latest issues of the new series, *The Counter Point*, and to view video interviews with former John Howard Society clients, please go to: [www.johnhoward.on.ca](http://www.johnhoward.on.ca)

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