

2025

Impact Report



Innocence Canada



Letter from the Co-Presidents

Dear supporters and friends,

We are filled with pride and gratitude for the progress Innocence Canada has made in pursuing justice for the wrongly convicted in 2025.

This year marked a historic milestone with Canada's first-ever post-humous conviction review remedy under the Criminal Code, ordered by Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Sean Fraser, in the case of Russell Woodhouse. We are hopeful this will result in another exoneration. This remedy follows the exoneration of Russell's three co-accused in 2023 and 2024 — Brian Anderson, Allan Woodhouse and Clarence Woodhouse. Their names were cleared through the tireless work of Innocence Canada lawyers.

In 2025, we also celebrated the exonerations of Robert Sanderson, Roy Sobotiak and Tim Rees. All men spent a considerable amount of time incarcerated. Mr. Sanderson spent 25 years behind bars, Mr. Sobotiak 36 years, and Mr. Rees 23 years. These cases stand as a sobering reminder of the human cost of injustice.

Beyond our legal case work, we also held our first exoneree retreat since 2019 and welcomed our supporters, wrongly convicted, and friends at our 11th International Wrongful Conviction Day gala. Our education program continues to reach law schools and universities across the country, inspiring future legal leaders to do their part in preventing wrongful convictions.

While this year brought many triumphs, it also brought with it sorrow. We said goodbye to long-serving volunteer and Board member Billy Wine, as well as Bobby Mailman, who only received his exoneration in January of 2024 after living with the burden of wrongful conviction for nearly 40 years.

We are deeply appreciative of the ongoing support of our donors, partners and friends. Your belief in our mission makes a profound difference in the lives we serve. None of our achievements would have been possible without you.



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon Freedman".

Jonathan Freedman

Co-President of Innocence Canada
and Innocence Canada Foundation



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ron Dalton".

Ron Dalton

Co-President of Innocence
Canada & Exoneree



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Thank You to Our Supporters



Lindy Green Family Foundation in honour of Sam Chaiton and Terry Swinton

Family member contribution in memory of Irene Anja Lehtiniemi

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Letter from the Executive Director

Greetings,

As we reflect on 2025, I am proud to share the strides the team at Innocence Canada has made in support of our mission to exonerate the wrongfully convicted and prevent future miscarriages of justice.

This year brought historic wins, including the post-humous conviction review remedy in the case of Russell Woodhouse — Canada's first under the Criminal Code — and the exonerations of Robert Sanderson, Roy Sobotiak and Tim Rees. These victories are a testament to the dedication of our legal team and the resilience of those we serve.

Our Director of Client Services continues to provide compassionate support, and we were thrilled to host our first Exoneree Retreat since 2019, as well as an International Wrongful Conviction Day event, both of which were deeply meaningful moments of connection and healing.

Education and outreach efforts allowed us to reach new audiences — we participated in two forensics conferences as keynote speakers and panelists, as well as a National Symposium on the new Miscarriage of Justice Review Commission. We look forward to continuing to expand our reach even further in 2026.

Operationally, we have made meaningful progress. We undertook a major relaunch of our website, designed to be more accessible, user-friendly, and reflective of the people we serve. We hope you find it easier to navigate and more engaging.

We were fortunate to grow our team as well. We welcomed two staff lawyers, Sheridan Smith and Maryam Hassan, increasing our legal team's capacity to review claims of wrongful conviction. Abigail Miller also joined us as our Manager of Education, bringing fresh energy and vision to our educational programming.

Looking ahead, we are committed to a more strategic focus across all areas of our work, from education and outreach to legal advocacy and client support. We are grateful for your continued belief in our mission.



Stéphanie Nowak
Executive Director

Exoneree Statistics

The following statistics are based on the wrongful convictions from Innocence Canada's 34 exonerees since 1993.

365
Years

Collectively Spent
Wrongfully Incarcerated

851
Years

Collectively Spent
Wrongfully Convicted

(From Date of Conviction
to Exoneration)

2025 Exonerations



Tim Rees

Exonerated: Dec 18, 2025

Convicted: Sept 15, 1990

Time Served: 23 years

Tim Rees was wrongly convicted of the second-degree murder of 10-year-old Darla Thurrott and sentenced to life in prison on September 15, 1990. Despite maintaining his innocence, Tim spent 23 years in prison before being released on parole in October 2016. In the same year, Innocence Canada adopted his case and soon after filed an application for ministerial review. The application was based on the nondisclosure of critical evidence: a tape-recorded conversation that had been withheld from the defence.

The Toronto Homicide Cold Case Squad found a box containing the missing recording.

The tape captured a conversation between police and the landlord, James Raymer, whose room was across the hall from Darla's. The recording clearly implicated Raymer as a viable alternative suspect. Raymer is deceased.

On November 27, 2025, 35 years after Tim's conviction, the Ontario Court of Appeal quashed the conviction and ordered a new trial. On December 18, 2025, at the Ontario Superior Court of Justice, The Honourable Justice J.E. Kelly acknowledged Tim Rees's wrongful conviction and ordered the charges be withdrawn:

"You have maintained your innocence for all those years, and quite frankly, that resulted in you serving additional time in custody. It looks like, by my calculation, that's eight years. But 23 years is simply too long on the basis of what I've heard today. One day would have been too long on the basis of what I heard today."



Roy Allan Sobotiak

Exonerated: Aug 1, 2025

Convicted: July 11, 1991

Time Served: 36 Years

Roy Sobotiak, was arrested in 1989 for the presumed murder of Susan Kaminsky, a single mother who had once babysat him. With no physical evidence linking him to the murder, the police used a controversial tactic known as a Mr. Big Sting undercover operation to elicit a confession. Roy was plied with alcohol and pressured to confess by undercover officers posing as criminals. After consuming a full bottle of vodka, Roy “confessed”.

His story changed repeatedly under further questioning, shaped by what officers told him.

Despite the lack of forensic evidence, Roy’s coerced confession became the foundation of the prosecution’s case. He was convicted of second-degree murder in 1991 and sentenced to life with no parole for 16 years. Roy spent 36 years in prison, making him Canada’s longest-serving wrongly convicted man that we know of.

Roy never stopped fighting for to clear his name. He filed his own Ministerial Review Application in 2021. The Criminal Conviction Review Group (CCRG) then asked Innocence Canada to support Roy with his application. In 2025, the Minister of Justice quashed his conviction and ordered a new trial. Roy was released on bail in May, and in August, the Alberta Crown stayed the charges.



Rob Sanderson

Exonerated: June 2, 2025

Convicted: June 26, 1997

Time Served: 25 years

Robert (Rob) Sanderson, a Métis father of two, was wrongly convicted in 1996 of a triple homicide. Despite no physical evidence linking him to the crime scene, the Crown alleged gang involvement.

He was convicted on three counts of first-degree murder and sentenced to life without parole for 25 years. He served his full sentence.

The conviction relied on two now-discredited pieces of evidence: a hair sample allegedly

linked to Rob, later proven by DNA testing not to be his, and an eyewitness who was paid over \$15,000 by authorities, which was not disclosed to the defence. The Crown prosecutor was the late George Dangerfield, who gained notoriety for his role in several other wrongful convictions, raising serious concerns about the case.

In 2017, with Innocence Canada’s help, Rob applied for a Ministerial Review. In 2018, the Criminal Conviction Review Group found grounds for a possible miscarriage of justice. Although his bail was denied, he was released on full parole shortly after.

In 2023, the Minister of Justice referred the case to the Manitoba Court of Appeal. On June 2, 2025, nearly 30 years after his arrest, the Crown acknowledged Rob’s wrongful conviction and entered a stay of proceedings.



Life After Wrongful Conviction: Rob Sanderson's Journey

Rob Sanderson spent almost 30 years trying to clear his name. In this candid interview, Rob shares the emotional toll of wrongful conviction, the healing power of family and the challenges of rebuilding a life in freedom.

When you first went to prison after being wrongly convicted, how did you cope?

I gave up. Once the appeals were done, I figured there was nothing more they could do to me. I got into a lot of trouble in the first 10 years. I was in maximum security, in the SHU, and drinking moonshine. But then I started reconnecting with my family, my daughter and my son, then my mom got sick. I made her promises. I said enough is enough. I had to fight.

What was the transition like going from incarceration to parole but still carrying the weight of a wrongful conviction?

Huge relief. But then all the fear came, the fear of getting out, the fear of what to do. I didn't know how much things changed out here till I actually got out on parole. It went quickly from that joyous moment of, finally, to then getting out and still waiting for a decision.

When I got out, I was mentally the age I was when I went in. I'd look in the mirror and think, "I'm an old guy now". In a lot of ways, I'm just starting to come to the realization that I'm older.

Coming out, what were some of the biggest changes from before you went in?

Technology. Learning how to use the phone, learning how to take my art from paintbrush into digital. I actually became quite good at it, and people now ask me to teach them.

I've also never really worked. Being around people, taking orders, it's hard after years of guards telling you what to do. I rely on my artwork now. It's what keeps me going.

What was it like when the Court of Appeal finally quashed your conviction and the charges were stayed?

Stressful. I was out for five years, just waiting. I kept saying, "Come on, James (Lockyer), let's get it going". When it finally happened, it was a huge relief and excitement, but then I had to wait for the media to release it. I didn't even tell my sister. When she found out, she got excited, and the next thing I know, I'm getting messages from family supporting me.

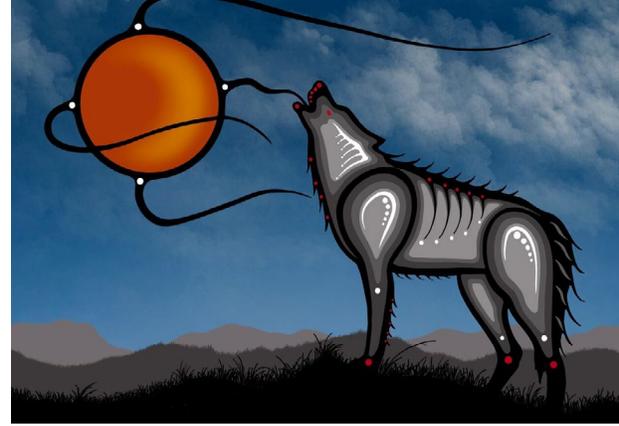
What do you want for the future?

I just want a home. A place where my grandkids can come, where people I care about can stay. I don't care who lives there, just be good.

What do you hope comes from your pain and struggle?

The recognition of my wrongful conviction came after serving my full sentence. If this could happen for me, there's still light for other people who have been wrongly convicted. I think about those people still inside. There will be more wrongful convictions. We are not at the end of the story. I even think about the past and how many innocent people were executed, before the law became more civil. We will never know how many innocent lives were lost. To others going through wrongful conviction, even if it is just a bit of hope, hang on to it because that's all I had.

Artwork by Rob Sanderson



Our Legal Work

For almost 33 years, Innocence Canada has worked tirelessly to expose and overturn wrongful convictions. In that time, we have achieved 34 exonerations, reflecting our team’s dedication to uncovering the truth. Nearly half of these exonerations followed the pivotal 2017 case audit, led by Jerome Kennedy, Chair of the Case Review Committee (CRC). This audit transformed our approach to casework. Under Jerome’s expert guidance, Bhavan Sodhi (then Legal Director) implemented this new approach. Since 2022, Chief Legal Counsel Pamela Zbarsky has continued to refine processes and provide strategic direction to the case team. CRC members and senior criminal defence lawyers Jerome, Bhavan, Joanne McLean and James Lockyer have also been instrumental in identifying cases of wrongful conviction and advancing them through the review process. **Over the past seven years, our legal team and CRC have conducted more reviews, filed more applications, and delivered more remedies than ever before.**

This momentum continued in 2025. We expanded to five staff lawyers and welcomed another articling student through the Law Foundation of Ontario’s Public Interest Articling Fellowship grant. We were also able to hire more experts and external reviewers thanks to the generous support of the Lindy Green Family Foundation.

These advancements allowed us to make significant progress in reducing our case backlog: **the waitlist has decreased from six years to four and a half years**, with continued efforts underway to further reduce wait times in 2026.

Key milestones this year include:



Three
exonerations



First post-humous
application remedy
received



Intervener in *R. v. Bouvette* before the
Supreme Court of Canada

2025 Case Statistics



131

Cases

Includes 62 actively
undergoing reviews and 69
on the waitlist



1,800

Hours Preparing a
696.1 Application



18

Case Reviews
Completed



33

New Applications
Received

73% increase from 2024

In 2025,
Innocence Canada



Delivered 38 Learning
Opportunities



Engaged over 2,100
Participants



Hosted 20 Students
through our Student
Programs

Our Education Program

Our education program seeks to inspire the next generation of lawyers to recognize and address miscarriages of justice and to inform criminal justice system actors to prevent, detect, and remedy wrongful convictions.

This year, Innocence Canada launched hands-on workshops for law students, using real case studies to explore the causes of wrongful convictions and how new matters of significance are identified. From Mr. Big stings to evidence assessment and investigative strategy, Innocence Canada looks forward to expanding these workshops nationwide in 2026.



A Spotlight on our Student Programs

Ryann Barr was hired as a summer student in 2024 and is now articling with Innocence Canada. Here is what she has to say about her experience as a student at Innocence Canada:



“It’s an experience that has shaped both my legal career and my understanding of justice.”



I first joined Innocence Canada as a summer student in 2024, where I had the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the organization’s mission of advocating for the wrongfully convicted. I assisted staff lawyers by reviewing police notes, summarizing trial transcripts, and conducting legal research. I was also involved in public legal education and student outreach initiatives, which gave me a broader understanding of the systemic issues that contribute to wrongful convictions.

Now, as an articling student in 2025, I’ve had the opportunity to work more in-depth on cases. One of the most rewarding aspects has been seeing the research I contributed as a summer student come to life in active files. Watching these cases progress is an incredibly powerful experience. The opportunity to work at Innocence Canada is one that I value deeply. The impact is real, personal, and lasting.



Causes of Wrongful Convictions

Wrongful convictions rarely result from a single action or inaction. Instead, it is a combination of causes that lead to this storm of injustice. Based on Innocence Canada's 34 exonerees, the most frequent causes of wrongful convictions are:



Tunnel Vision

In the Morin Inquiry, tunnel vision was defined as "...a single-minded and overly narrow focus on a particular investigative or prosecutorial theory, so as to unreasonably colour the evaluation of information received and one's conduct in response to the information."



Evolution of and Errors in Forensic Sciences

While the introduction and evolution of DNA analysis has helped exonerate some wrongfully convicted individuals, errors in forensic science—such as unreliable methods like hair microscopy and bite mark comparisons, or mistakes in interpreting valid techniques—have contributed to wrongful convictions.



Faulty Expert Testimony

Faulty expert testimony occurs when experts provide opinions that are misleading, scientifically unsound, or beyond their area of expertise. This evidence is problematic because juries often treat it as virtually infallible, and an expert who offers an opinion on guilt or innocence may improperly influence the jury's independent judgment.



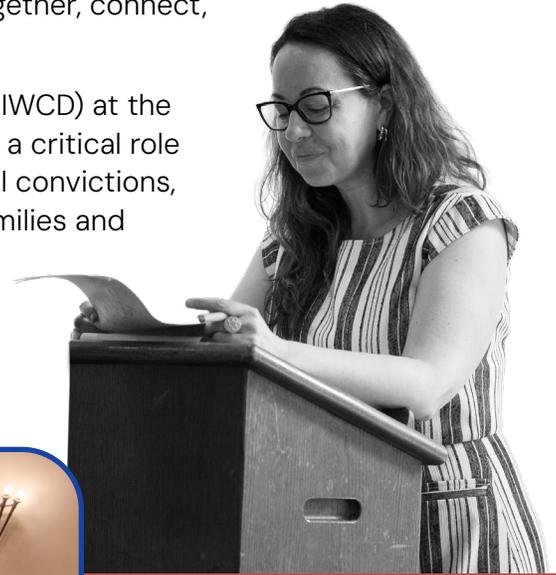
Eyewitness Misidentification

Eyewitness identification evidence may appear credible but can be unreliable due to factors such as stress, the presence of a weapon, emotions, lighting, distance, the racial background of the perpetrator, and memory recall.

Supporting the Wrongly Convicted: A Year of Connection

This year marked a significant milestone for Innocence Canada. We hosted our first Freedom Retreat since 2019. It was an invaluable opportunity for those who have endured a wrongful conviction to come together, connect, and reflect in a safe and supportive environment.

We also recognized International Wrongful Conviction Day (IWCD) at the Law Society of Ontario. This annual event continues to play a critical role in shining a light on the profound human impact of wrongful convictions, not only on those wrongfully convicted but also on their families and communities. IWCD serves as both a moment of reflection and a call to action, reinforcing the need for a justice system rooted in truth and accountability.



“ I want you to know that your suffering has not been in vain. It fuels fire for change. As a First Nation person who has navigated and challenged the system for most of my life, I stand with you in solidarity and love. Let us build a Canada where no one endures what you have, where justice is swift, equitable and restorative. **”**

Justice Harry LaForme,
Going the Distance
(letters to the wrongly convicted)

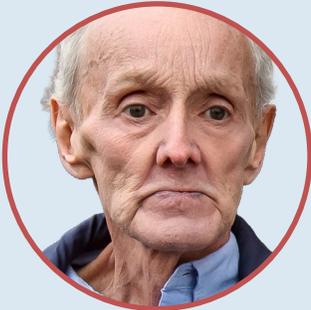


Remembering **William (Billy) Wine**

January 20, 1955 – March 23, 2025

Billy was truly one of a kind. He was a long-time supporter of Innocence Canada, and a member of the Innocence Canada Foundation Board of Directors. He was a committed advocate and friend to many of the wrongly convicted.

Billy attended court appearances of the wrongly convicted and he rarely missed an Innocence Canada AGM or International Wrongful Conviction Day event. He was also deeply involved in AIDWYC Benefit Concerts. You could always count on Billy to lend a helping hand. No task was too big or small. His generosity and leadership left a lasting impact. Above all, Billy cherished his family, friends, and horses. His greatest joy was his daughter, Audrey.



Remembering **Robert (Bobby) Mailman**

March 14, 1948 – October 9, 2025

Bobby was known for his dogged determination, quick wit, fierce loyalty, generous heart, and as a man of faith and integrity. For decades, he carried the weight of a wrongful conviction, steadfastly maintaining his innocence. In 2024, after years of tireless advocacy and perseverance, Bobby was finally exonerated. He was an innocent man who endured unimaginable hardship yet never lost his sense of self or his commitment to unlocking the truth.

He is now reunited with his two beloved sons, and his co-accused Wally Gillespie. Bobby is survived by his partner of 25 years, who stood by him through every disappointment and triumph. Bobby's story is a powerful reminder of the devastating cost when a criminal legal system fails, and the strength and indomitable spirit it takes to survive and overcome it. He is now at peace and will always be remembered with love and respect.

Our Exonerees

Guy Paul Morin

Exonerated: January 23, 1995

David Milgaard

Exonerated: July 18, 1997

Thomas Sophonow

Exonerated: June 8, 2000

Clayton Johnson

Exonerated: February 18, 2002

James Driskell

Exonerated: March 3, 2005

Steven Truscott

Exonerated: August 28, 2007

William Mullins-Johnson

Exonerated: October 15, 2007

Erin Walsh

Exonerated: March 14, 2008

Robert Baltovich

Exonerated: April 22, 2008

Anthony Hanemaayer

Exonerated: June 25, 2008

Kyle Unger

Exonerated: October 23, 2009

Sherry Sherrett Robinson

Exonerated: December 7, 2009

Romeo Phillion

Exonerated: April 29, 2010

Jack White

Exonerated: November 26, 2010

Dinesh Kumar

Exonerated: January 20, 2011

Richard Brant

Exonerated: May 4, 2011

Tammy Marquardt

Exonerated: June 7, 2011

Leighton Hay

Exonerated: November 28, 2014

John (Jack) Salmon

Exonerated: June 22 2015

Maria Shepherd

Exonerated: February 29, 2016

O'Neil Blackett

Exonerated: October 3, 2018

Frank Ostrowski

Exonerated: November 27, 2018

Glen Assoun

Exonerated: March 1, 2019

Joyce Hayman

Exonerated: April 12, 2021

Bernie Doyle

Exonerated: June 12, 2023

Brian Anderson

Exonerated: July 18, 2023

Allan Woodhouse

Exonerated: July 18, 2023

Robert Mailman

Exonerated: January 4, 2024

Walter Gillespie

Exonerated: January 4, 2024

Jacques Delisle

Exonerated: April 9, 2021

Clarence Woodhouse

Exonerated: October 3, 2024

Robert Sanderson

Exonerated: June 3, 2025

Roy Sobotiak

Exonerated: August 1, 2025

Tim Rees

Exonerated: December 18, 2025



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