

EJ Barker Fellowship - Correctional Services of Canada

Adrian Mc Millan

University of Ballarat

Ararat and Langi Kal Kal Prison Education Campuses

P.O. Box 431

Ararat, 3377

PH/Fax: 53521799

aprison@netconnect.com.au



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In agreement with the EJ Barker Fellowship awarded in 2004 by the University of Ballarat a study tour of Canadian correctional institutions was undertaken in June/July of 2005. Canada is considered a world leader in corrections. Correctional Services of Canada maintains regular contact with corrections systems in other countries to share experiences and work together to develop solutions to correctional issues. Specifically areas of interest were the Canadian educational programs, their assessment processes, their indigenous programs and their reintegration programs for ex-offenders. The primary province of the study tour was Ontario however some investigation of the federal prisons in Alberta province was made possible by CSC staff. The tour included three days at Correctional Services Canada (CSC) head office in Ottawa the capital city of Canada with the bulk of the time spent in Kingston, Ontario where 9 prisons of various types are currently in operation. CSC is the federal agency responsible for administering the sentences of adult offenders who have been sentenced to serve terms of two years or more. The agency manages 53 federal penitentiaries and 90 parole offices and is responsible for 12,413 men and women (April 11th 2004). Of the 12,034 men who were serving sentences at this time 2193 were aboriginal (18%) the female population consisted of 379 (3% of total population) women of which 108 (28%) were aboriginal. Canada has a population of approximately 32 million.

Australia by comparison has a population of about 22 million and had (June 30th 2004) a total number of 18,738 men and women who were incarcerated. The female population contributed 7% to this total and 21% of the total population was indigenous.

In addition to managing federal offenders inside the penitentiaries, CSC is also responsible for supervising offenders who are serving part of their sentences in the community on conditional release.

When offenders enter a federal penitentiary, the factors that contributed to their criminal behaviour are identified. This assessment process takes a maximum of 60 days for offenders doing sentences other than life. Offenders who are doing life sentences can take up to 90 days to complete their assessment process. This assessment process includes psychiatric, cultural, spiritual, educational, employment, economic and family support evaluations that are currently paper based but will soon be entirely electronic. The assessments identify the offender's needs and the risk they may present to the community. These assessments are ongoing and help to determine whether the offender should be held in a maximum, medium or minimum-security penitentiary. However the key result of this assessment process is the development of the offender's individual correctional plan.

The correctional plan identifies the programs and treatments required to address the behavioural needs of offenders in the areas such as mental health, anger management, substance abuse, sexual deviance and family violence. Individual counselling is also available when appropriate. Aboriginal elders

provide culturally appropriate programs to address the spiritual needs of the indigenous offenders. Offenders are also encouraged to take programs to improve their educational standard, problem solving and decision-making skills. Additional programs are provided to increase offender's reintegration through CORCAN the employment and employability skills unit that contributes to the offender's reintegration into society by giving the inmates appropriate work skills.

Progress against the correctional plan is monitored throughout the sentence and all decisions affecting offenders are based on the evidence provided by these assessments.

Since almost all offenders will return to the community, the programs offered by CSC penitentiaries are designed to reduce the risk of re-offending once they are released. The programs and treatments provided in the prisons are constantly monitored and evaluated by CSC. To ensure that all of the programs and treatments are appropriate and effective, CSC established its own Research Branch whose primary role is to conduct an applied program of research that advances effective and efficient pedagogy for corrections. The goal of all branches of CSC is crime prevention and public protection. CSC considers the establishment and maintenance of positive and reciprocal relationships with its own and international communities to be a necessity to effective public support for its correctional programs and ensure effective support for offenders when released.

Over 105 Citizen's Advisory Committees have been established across Canada these committees provide an effective method to provide a positive and effective comprehension of CSC mission and goals for the community.

10,000 volunteers make a major contribution to all aspects of CSC institutions. These volunteers have to be 18 years or older have no criminal record, have an understanding and support for the CSC mission and complete an appropriate training course. The services they provide are an integral part of many offenders' lives. Volunteers contribute to a variety of institution-based programs including chaplaincy, recreation activities, classroom and workshop instruction, social events and cultural activities. In the community, volunteers support families of incarcerated offenders and help released offenders re-adjust to life in the community.

Finally Correctional Services of Canada mission is based on the philosophy of restorative justice, which views crime or conflict principally as harm done to people and relationships. Programs that espouse this philosophy in their approach to provide safe support and safe opportunities for participation and communication between those affected is encouraged. CSC continues to strategically advance restorative justice approaches through education, training, demonstration projects, inter-government and international collaboration, partnerships, research and expanded engagement in the community.

Clearly CSC programs have been or are being carefully designed to service the specific needs of the different cohorts found in Canadian penitentiaries. Among offenders who have special needs that require carefully targeted programs the aboriginal, women and sex offenders programs are of interest to our jurisdiction. Programs that provide assistance to the families of offenders and to victims of crime is also an interesting model for other jurisdictions.