

**Release Potential of Federally-Sentenced Aboriginal Inmates to  
Communities: A Community-based Research Project**

**(5-Community, Prairie Region Pilot Study)**

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## ABSTRACT

This interim pilot project report entitled ***Release Potential of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Inmates to Communities: A Community-Based Research Project*** examines the issues, concerns and strategies of five First Nations communities, as well as people who have been released from federal prisons and are returning to their communities.

The report describes the research purpose, objectives, methodology and process used in the pilot study. A summary and analysis of the findings from the four research instruments used are provided, followed by an overall analysis and feasibility of release potential of federally sentenced Aboriginal inmates to communities. Lastly, for the pilot research process, some observations and conclusions are offered.

A final report will be available when translations of the five community reports is completed.

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## INTRODUCTION

This report describes the research objectives, pre-test methodology and process used in this research. The results and analysis of the five communities piloted in this research will be reported, and the feasibility of release potential for federal offenders will be outlined.

This report was initiated as a result of the growing realization that the criminal justice system has not served the needs of Aboriginal people. This initiative represents the initial commitments by the Correctional Service of Canada to incorporate measures within the existing system that is respectful of Aboriginal people. This strategy reflects an area that will enable the federal corrections system to serve Aboriginal peoples by building bridges through Aboriginal community based justice systems. The goal of this research initiative is to ascertain the Aboriginal communities release potential; the opportunities that will support types of community based restorative justice programs; to develop alternative programs and services for newly released offenders; to clarify feasibility of restorative programs and factors that would influence the use of reintegrate programs.

### ***Research objectives***

The specific objectives of this study were to:

- Determine the place and state of community based justice and corrections initiatives.
- Determine the perceptions, attitudes, and values of First Nations community people towards offenders and their release.
- Determine the possibility of utilizing community based initiatives and feasibility to monitor, facilitate and sustain release.
- Ascertain healing initiatives within institutions and Aboriginal community based restorative justice initiatives.
- To examine and analyze the Aboriginal communities feasibility and needs to facilitate the return of federal offenders in the long term.

### ***Research process and methodology***

Five First Nations communities from Saskatchewan and Alberta were invited to participate in this pilot pre-test research inquiry. Each of these communities was invited to participate in the study and recommend and/or support the community based researcher identified. Each of the researchers was trained in the purpose, process, data collection and analysis of the research project. A brief overview of the research process included understanding the purpose for the study and its' objectives and relationship to Aboriginal community justice initiatives. The research methodology training including Aboriginal research paradigms, developing research collection instruments using individual household questionnaires, key informants, Elders and Circle/Focus Groups questionnaire. The research training included data collection, identifying people, numbers of interviews, financial and administrative matters. The data analysis training was the actual data collection, the coding of information gathered, data analysis and interpretation. Communication strategies, community reporting and development of community action/strategy completed the research process.

A total of 145 people participated in this study. The participation breakdown is as follows: total of 62 individual households, 34 key Informants, 15 Elders, 4 community circles involving 21 participants, 6 interviews with released offenders and one circle of 6 offenders currently in prison and one Elder 1 working in prison participated in this five community research inquiry.

## **SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS – FOUR RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS**

This section will examine the community profile followed by a summary and analysis of each of the four key research instruments' findings.

### ***Community profile***

The five community profiles show the following characteristics that have impacted the capacity of Aboriginal communities in developing alternative programs and services for newly released federal offenders.

- Off reserve populations ranging from 40% to 60% percent of total population.
- Social/economic problems and issues such as; population growth rates, significant alcohol/drug/solvent abuse, disproportionate family dysfunction (violence, suicides, child abuse/neglect), single parent families, unemployment rates of 60% - 70%, increasingly criminal activities, and the prevalence of youth gangs.
- Basic services such, as housing is grossly inadequate for most people in the community.

These characteristics all contribute to a higher risk to re-offend for offenders released to the communities.

A great number of people are on social assistance (approximately 60% to 70%). Most employment opportunities are in First Nations service sectors (such as, education, social development, health, Child & Family Services). There is limited employment in band enterprises such as grocery store, or seasonal labour type jobs (for example, housing, forestry, cattle and other band economic ventures). However, self-employment in private business and cottage industry is growing.

Community programs are increasing the scope and range of programs and services under band governance. Some of the communities in the study have contract agreements for corrections programs and alternative sentencing. Some of the communities have facilities on reserve to address alcohol/drug abuse, training and education.



## ***Individual household questionnaire***

### **1) *Summary of individual household questionnaire***

A total of 62 people were interviewed through the individual household questionnaire from the five First Nations communities. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents interviewed were middle aged (30-50 years), 77% were women respondents ( $N = 48$ ) and most of the respondents are bilingual (for example, a First Nations language and English). Ninety-four percent of the respondents ( $N = 58$ ) knew people who have been in prison and returned to the community.

The *needs identified* for people who have been released from prisons are Elder Counselling, traditional cultural guidance and healing circles, and structural transition programs for the individuals and community. Most respondents mentioned emotional support such as the need for Belonging/Acceptance from family and community. Basic needs such as housing, clothes and financial assistance were also identified by many of the respondents. Programs and services that are coordinated, integrative and holistic were identified by many of the respondents including:

1. Support programs for federal offenders and families (such as, Elders program, conflict resolution, and anger management).
2. Employment/education/training programs.
3. Halfway houses.
4. Recreational houses.
5. Professional Therapy and Counselling.

The responses in regards to meeting the needs of people released from prisons varied. The respondents stated responsibility should be shared between the individual and the family, extended family systems, community programs and services. A few of the respondents indicated shared responsibilities at the level of federal and provincial Justice/Correctional Services. All of the respondents indicated that there are limited educational, training and employment

opportunities in their communities, therefore, it would not be different for people who have just been released from prisons. Most respondents were not aware of any specific programs in the community for people who have been released from prison. The establishment of support groups such as healing circles, anger management, AA, and other outreach programs were mentioned.

A wide range of programs and services that should be available to people being released from prisons were identified. These included:

1. Cultural and traditional services such as Elders, sacred societies, sweat lodges and other ceremonial lodges;
2. Probation and parole services;
3. Sentencing circles, healing circles, talking/releasing circles;
4. Halfway houses – reintegration and planned release, lifeskills, reintegration based on community expectation;
5. Clinical Intervention including counseling, anger management, lifeskills, self-help, addiction, family programs and support groups for offenders;
6. Addictions support programs to address alcohol/drug substance abuse;
7. Alternative job re-training/educational supports for employment, career developments and opportunities;
8. Social Development Services to meet immediate basic needs.

The respondents indicated that family members play a significant role to a family member released from prison. Common responses were that the family provided a sense of belonging, acceptance; emotional, financial, cultural and spiritual support. Most felt that the family support systems are being practiced “to a certain degree” in the community. In a few instances, some individuals do not have family supports in place due to high levels of family dysfunction or were raised off reserve and therefore did not have an established family relationship on reserve.

Most of the respondents indicated that the seriousness of the criminal offence determined the treatment of the person released from prison. Offenders imprisoned for rape, murder, and child sexual offences were treated with more

distrust, fear, and ostracism. Safety concerns for women and children were commonly directed towards serious offences. Other offenders that return to the community were treated the same as everyone else largely depending on individual offenders' attitudes, values and behaviours. Most of the respondents indicated they would want to be treated with respect, normalcy, acceptance, support and compassion if they were returning to the community from prison.

All of the respondents indicated that alcohol/drug addiction contributed to people going to prisons. Most respondents indicated that alcohol/drug/substance abuse alters behaviours and makes one lose control thus bringing out underlying issues that sometimes contributes to criminal behaviour. The accessibility, availability and acceptance of alcohol/drug abuse lifestyle by segments of the Aboriginal community were perceived by some respondents as making life more difficult for released offenders' substance free living and may thereby contribute to recidivism.

Other prevalent and multiple factors identified that contributed to people going to prison and requiring treatment were:

- 1) family dysfunction;
- 2) mental health problems, i.e. anomic depression;
- 3) anger management issues;
- 4) residual affects of the residential school system;
- 5) sexual abuse;
- 6) physical abuse/assaults;
- 7) social and economic factors such as; poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment;
- 8) loss of cultural identity and low self-esteem;
- 9) lack of education.

Most of the people interviewed felt that there was more competition and barriers for people who have been released from prisons because of lack of acceptance and trust, and the stigma attached to ex-federal offenders. Also mentioned were fears of personal instability and fear of violence; negative attitudes that community people hold towards them as a result of the nature and seriousness of their crimes; criminal record checks required for most jobs eliminating federal offenders from certain types of employment and positive character references; and lack of education and qualifications for job eligibility.

Most respondents felt those reintegration initiatives such as; educating people about federal offenders and their crimes, and the programs and services available in prisons, should be available to community people. Educating Federal offenders on returning to the community, with regard to realistic post release scenario such as their behavioural impacts on family and community, including victims, attitudes and perceptions of community people, and reintegration programs, were also mentioned. Healing circles were recommended to strengthen family support systems. Other factors identified that would reduce barriers for opportunities were cultural/traditional services, education, volunteer work, therapy, and addiction services; as well as, community education programs based on traditional and cultural values and principles.

## **2) *Analysis of individual household questionnaire***

Overall, most of the 62 people interviewed support the return of federal offenders to their community and giving them opportunities to change. Most felt that released offenders should be treated like a human being; that is with fairness, respect and in ways congruent to First Nation's values and principles. More women than male respondents were apprehensive about the post release scenario in some communities, especially related to serious sexual offences against children; premeditated murder, and rape. However, the majority of respondents felt supportive of reintegration with certain terms and conditions

based on the seriousness of the crime. Knowledge of victims and family system also determined community responses towards offenders.

Initiatives for successful reintegration were recommended such as educating community people about federally sentenced offenders and the nature of their crimes; and developing an integrated, holistic and coordinated strategy to enhance community capacity for reintegration initiatives.

### ***Key informants interviews***

#### **1) *Summary of key informants interviews***

A total of 34 "key informant" interviews were conducted in the five First Nations communities for the pre-test research. Most of the key informants were managers/directors, mainly in social, health, education, justice/corrections programs and services at the community level. A few were in leadership roles in the community. Most of the informants were over 30 years of age representing an equal percentage of both men and women.

Respondents indicated that the nature of the relationship between First Nations and non-First Nations communities is improving especially among young people. There are movements towards joint partnerships/agreements/initiatives between some of the First Nations and non-Native communities with regard to community policing, and court systems. There is a high degree of business interaction but not a lot of social interaction between people in the First Nations and non-First Nations communities. There is some interaction in recreational activities and religious/church events. Negative racial attitudes, feelings and behaviours that existed were perceived to be related mostly to issues of taxation, recreational rivalry, bar-room environment, and in some communities with individuals within institutions such as the police, justice systems, hospitals, landlords, hotels, schools, and non-First Nations employers. The degree of racism has gradually lessened over the years, but it is evident that it has still a long way to go before relationships reach satisfactory levels. This climate will to a minor extent influence the successful reintegration of released offenders.

Generally, there were high participation rates of people in community activities especially in recreational and informal activities. There is high community support for community projects from the people who work in the community. The support for community involvement in present and future programs and services for people being released from prisons is diverse. Most respondents view people who have been released from prisons in generally receptive ways, empathizing with the factors that contributed to their criminal behaviour. Most respondents felt that released Federal offenders need to be given an opportunity to reintegrate back to the community. Most felt that community people would participate in providing support systems, and monitoring, that would be relevant and appropriate to each of the communities in order to make the post-release work. The seriousness of the criminal offence(s) determines the level of community support and tolerance, therefore determines the support services that would be needed.

Some of the identified community programs appropriate to people who have been released from prisons included Elders educational workshops, reintegration centers, healing circles, crime prevention, and traditional justice training/education. Community awareness is directly related to whether the community programs have or have not been initiated.

In communities, where community justice and corrections programs have not been initiated; community awareness appear to be low; therefore there are more negative perspectives expressed towards people who have been released from prison and comments towards community safety. According to the key informants' responses, the community awareness programs, the justice and corrections reintegrate programs in the community have generally had an impact on peoples' attitudes, feelings and perceptions.

The community's experiences with the release of offenders into their communities were diverse, and most of the responses reflected the following observations:

- Unease, not sure what to expect, avoidance, fear, community and family divided, no coordinated services for community safety and for federal offenders;
- High tolerance level in First Nations community based on the Key Informants own experiences and community experiences, however, the seriousness of the crimes committed, the nature and individual personalities of released offenders generally determined community perception of people who have been released from prisons.
- Released offenders' decision to return to their community may have implications and affects on victim, family/relatives and community.
- Lack of economic opportunities for everyone in the reserve communities adds to increasing barriers for offenders competing for incredibly scarce employment/education and training opportunities. Thus the lack of specific programs and services and an environment considered high risk, offenders face a huge challenge to remain sober and continue their healing process.
- Most community people don't know — or have limited knowledge — about programs and services available in prisons for offenders.

Most of the respondents felt that the community has the capacity to reintegrate people who have been released from prisons. Tolerance, acceptance, giving a sense of belonging, and giving an opportunity to change, as well as resiliency in community people; were common responses towards federal offenders who have been released from prisons and returned to community. The development of existing and new initiatives was perceived to be facilitated to accommodate the needs of the released offenders. These included traditional justice systems, reintegration programs, educational awareness and halfway houses.

Generally, families were perceived to play a significant role for reintegration as a support system/network, as a resource, not only for immediate family but extended families, that bridged the needs of offenders and the community. There were mixed responses on extended families to take responsibility for monitoring the reintegration of federal offenders. In some communities there appears to be more willingness to monitor at the individual and family level while in other communities the responsibility was perceived to be at the community level (for example, programs and services). Community responsibility also emphasized the

need for reintegration support including Elders and cultural programs, release circles, and monitoring. Many of the respondents from the different communities mentioned a collaborative and joint process of monitoring and reintegration at the family, extended family, community and federal corrections/levels. Furthermore, that monitoring is flexible and consistent with each community values/lifestyles. The community Key Informants were divided with regard to provision of support services for serious sexual offenders and some types of offenders such as pedophiles, offenders with violent behaviour and serious psychiatric disorders. There are currently no community systems in place to address these specific classes of offenders through monitoring, reintegration services and community safety. Setting up a whole new system supported by band by-law and regulations, security rating for serious offenders were required before consideration would be given for serious offenders.

Victims and victims' family needs also was emphasized by some of the respondents. Elders, healing and post release circles, professional western therapy and consultations were also recommended to support an offender's release back to the community.

Most of the key informants indicated that people who have been released from prison face more barriers and competition for employment, education, training in their communities. Issues related to criminal record checks, criminal labeling/stigma, lack of trust, safety issues were considered significant barriers for re-employment, training and education. Some of the recommendations aimed at reducing barriers for people who have been released from prisons varied from; programs specifically designed to offer traditional and cultural services from Elders, access to professional treatment and supports, community acceptance and awareness and the individual offenders' motivation for change reflected in his/her behaviour.

There are no specific educational, training and employment opportunities in most of the communities for people who have been released from prison. Most of the



employment/funding opportunities identified included First Nations public band programs and services, seasonal employment opportunities and social assistance as a safety net. Only one of the five communities identified specific programs and services for persons who have been released from prisons. Most of the specific programs and services offered by the communities were felt either to be effective or very effective in meeting the needs of people who have been released from prisons, or the respondents mentioned they did not have enough information; i.e. statistics, results; to comment on the matter.

The most common multiple psychological and social problems identified and needs of offenders released from prisons included; family violence, family breakdown, residual impacts of residential schools, physical/sexual abuse, alcohol/drug abuse, wellness issues, parenting skills, and neglect. The overall poverty, underdevelopment, housing shortages, endemic to most First Nations communities were also needs common to all First Nations including offenders released from prisons. However, some of the basic needs that were identified required additional resources and funding. These included resources and funding for basic needs, such as food, shelter/housing, clothing followed by employment/education opportunity/training. Follow up services such as therapy/counseling, mediation and post release programs, community support/guidance, support services not only for offenders but also for their families were also identified to meet the needs of offenders.

Most key informants felt that the barriers to reintegration to the communities were largely dependent on the seriousness of the crime, the person's social/economic status, family political standing, the motivation level of the person who has been released from prison and the degree of effort in his/her reintegration into the community.

## **2) *Analysis of key informant interviews***

Overall, the key informants interviewed support people who have been in prison and their return to the community. However, they were specific about programs

and services to be available for the released offenders, families and community supports, emphasizing Elders involvement in the re-integration/healing process through traditional and cultural methods.

### ***Summary of Elders interviews***

#### **1) *Summary of Elders interviews***

A total of 15 Elders were interviewed from only four of the communities. The comments by the Elders with regard to Federal offenders reflected common themes that included the following.

In one of the five communities, the Elders provided historical and traditional perspectives about people going to prisons for horse stealing/capturing and related cross-cultural conflicts of law dated from the late 1800's. Laws influenced by mainstream English values, behaviour and lifestyle sometimes are in conflict with First Nations values, lifestyle of that particular era, (the traditional and cultural practice of re-distribution of wealth and restorative justice were mentioned). A few of the Elders mentioned *"First Nations people breaking the Canadian criminal laws for associated conflict resolution differences and related conflict escalation with police (i.e. police homicide) and were hung for those actions"*.

Elders traditionally and historically played a significant role in giving advice, counsel and reprimands to offenders without condemning them. They facilitated mediation and restoration of relationships between offenders, victims and community through ceremonies and giveaways. They also provided other traditional and cultural support services through prayer ceremonies, restorative ceremonial dances and healing of the offender (i.e. sweatlodge ceremonies). These Elders roles were perceived as just as relevant today as they were historically.

First Nations federal offences were almost non-existent over 50 years ago. Crimes like murder, violence and assaults started about 50 years ago and have increased with every decade. Most community members expressed fears of

offenders, distrust was very high, in some cases community ostracism practices were part of the community norm for some crimes (such as, sexual offences against children).

The seriousness and quantity of crimes have increased especially over the last 40 years. Factors such as the long-term impacts of government assimilation practices; such as residential schools/mission schools and legislative changes such as in the 1960's when Indians were allowed to go into bars, purchase liquor and social welfare introduced contributed to the escalation of crime in the First Nations communities. Other contributing factors were alcohol/drug addictions, breakdown of traditional cultural structures, values and language. Urban migration, high unemployment levels, increased mobility were mentioned as having a significant impact on increases in severity and numbers of crimes.

Trends towards increased crime among youth and more serious and violent crimes (murder, assaults) related to more serious forms of alcohol/drug/solvent addictions were observed by the Elders. The enforced assimilation policies practiced by the Federal Government over the last 100 years contributed to the displacement of families and traditional cultural structures and processes, and a cycle of dependency and in other ways. The impacts were considered deep-rooted and problematic in First Nations communities. The symptoms of the impacts were community behaviours prevalent in most First Nations communities. These include, increased dissension among families, conflicts between siblings, mistrust among people especially youth, people do not leave doors unlocked, weakened family and community identity, and people want payment for services are the norm in most communities today.

Some of the Elders felt that federal prisons do not serve as a deterrent for most offenders. *"It is a place to get three meals a day, shelter and no responsibilities. Many go to jail because they have nowhere else to go."*

Elders have to exercise their roles along with other family and community support systems based on traditional values, principles and philosophy. Elders saw their

role to continue to provide these services for people who are released from prison and wanting to reintegrate into the community in the contemporary context of reintegrative justice systems, courts, probation and correctional centers and through other more culturally appropriate approaches such as sentencing circles.

## **2) *Analysis of Elders interviews***

All of the Elders support playing a role for those released from prison. They mentioned the role of prayer, ceremonies, and counselling/advice. They cautioned that for healing to occur there must be the willingness on the part of the offender to change. Additional other community programs and services must also be available.

### ***Community circles/focus groups***

#### **1) *Summary of community circles/focus groups***

There were four community circle/focus groups initiated in four of the communities involving a total of 21 participants. The circle consisted of mostly adults, a balance of men and women respondents and usually a couple of Elders.

The community circle participants generally felt that people who have been released from prison should return to the community. Community acceptance, tolerance, understanding and transitional readjustment were common responses reflecting community perception towards people who have been released from prison. In some of the participating communities, this tolerance has some limits in that the seriousness and type of crime (for example, violent, dangerous and child sexual offences) determined a communities receptiveness and acceptance to provide supports and services for the offenders. Community receptiveness to provide reintegration services is directly related to the individual offender's responsibilities to make amends, show self responsibilities, are remorseful of their behaviours and actions that led to a prison term and willingness to change and contribute as community members. In some communities, the community members are more inclined to worry about how to protect their children from sex

offenders. The majority of the community people either do not want serious offenders returned to their community or they want assurances of community safety and the offender to perform an integrated, holistic and coordinated approach to address their issues.

For other offences and conditional to offenders responsibility; the community members who participated in the circles would support initiatives to reintegrate the people who have been in prisons. Suggested reintegrative initiatives were programs and services aimed at addressing the issue of anger and hate for the victims and victims families, and other programs included traditional, cultural and addiction services.

## **2) *Analysis of community circles/focus groups***

Overall, the participants of community circle/focus groups, supported reintegration efforts and initiatives to restore balance back into community, with the exceptions being violent and dangerous child sex offenders. The community is willing to work to give them a chance at rehabilitation and reintegration. Comments were expressed to secure necessary resources and funds to offer a variety of programs and services for offenders, families and victims.

Programs and services for transitional halfway houses situated in isolated settings and natural environment conducive for healing were recommended, coupled with support programs and services for offenders and their families. Traditional and cultural healing activities involving Elders were recommended. Other initiatives needed to be implemented such as reintegration and releasing circles prior to the release of the offenders to the community with a follow up of continued programs and services.

Comprehensive, culturally based therapy and treatment of underlying, unresolved psychological and social issues related to family violence, trust issues due to neglect and abuse, cultural identity were raised by many. Other support systems

articulated by the community circle included the accessibility of recreational and employment activities.

The responsibility for people who have been released from prison and returned to their community were generally perceived as a shared responsibility between the individual, family and community.

### ***Interviews with people released from prison***

#### **1) *Summary of interviews with people released from prison***

A total of seven First Nations community people who were released from prison were interviewed from three of the five communities who participated in this study.

The reaction towards being released and “going back home” to their communities was as follows.

It would appear that about half of the people who had served time for federal offences returned to the community.

Initial transitional skills such as applying for Social Insurance Numbers and health cards, securing drivers licenses were difficult, as was a lack of money management skills. The transition from prison to the community was difficult for the released offenders because of the institutionalized conditioning. All of the people released from prisons recommended consistent follow-up programs and services available in prisons should also be available as part of the community supports.

Community members’ reaction to people released from prison were mixed. Transitional phase of release was very difficult for offenders. Developing trust, family worry over re-occurrence of dysfunctional behaviours such as alcohol/drug abuse especially for those on parole were mentioned.

In some communities offenders are negatively perceived; lack of trust, rejection, labeling and stereotypes. In other communities acceptance was perceived as

positive. In all cases, offenders should expect conditional acceptance by the community.

**Reintegration program identified by people who have been released from prison included:**

- First Nations culture and traditional way of life a priority;
- Community traditional and cultural values such as respect, responsibility, unconditional love, honesty, values to be put into practice;
- Federally released offenders' support group and ceremonies for recovery to prevent relapse and to get in touch with feelings;
- Restorative justice programs;
- Employment/education/training opportunities;
- Family and community release circles and supports;
- Justice workers required;
- Prevention programs for youth and teachings about alcohol and drug abuse;
- Recreational programs.

**2) *Analysis of interviews with people released from prison***

Approximately 50% of the people who have been in prisons had returned back to their community. The transitional phase of release to the community was considered the most difficult phase. Preparation (post-release) was considered a necessity to assist in the successful re-adjustment phase. A community reintegration program was needed on reserve to promote community acceptance, awareness and needs of released offenders, as well as support programs and services to meet the basic needs considered essential.

## ***Interviews with people currently in prison***

### **1) *Summary of interviews with people currently in prison***

One circle of six people who are currently in prison and one Elder who was employed as an Elder in residence was completed by one of the five communities who participated in this pilot research project.

Alcohol/drug/other substance abuse is considered one of the biggest contributing problems for First Nations people getting into trouble with criminal law and ending up in prison. Gang violence, residential schools, introduction of provincial citizenship rights in the 1960 such as social welfare, being able to buy liquor resulting in the “child welfare scoops” of the 1960’s and many children being raised in non-Aboriginal foster homes were identified as contributing factors. Many of the federal offenders were former foster children. They have little identification with reserve community people having lived in urban centers all or most of their lives. Consequently, many of the offenders don’t have a sense of community belonging and no links to their relatives on the reserve. The only alternatives are off-reserve and urban centers, which leads back to alcohol and drugs and going back to what they know, dependency, institutionalization and criminal behaviour.

Most of the people interviewed that were currently in prison recommended various helping support systems to keep people out of prison. These included:

1. Prevention and Awareness programs especially with children. Early intervention about issues related to gang violence, drug and alcohol addictions;
2. Community involvement in the reintegration of federal offenders through developments such as employment training, crafts initiatives, services reintegration activities and on going support (such as, 24 hour crisis line, crisis counseling services, sharing circles).
3. Elder services should be offered to people returning to the community.

The only program currently available is the parole program.



Most of the offenders currently in prison perceive it is their primary responsibility for their return to the community. They felt they are responsible for their own actions but require additional supports for issues related to addictions, housing and other areas. A reintegration transitional phase involving Elders and a reintegration program to develop basic life-skills, deprogramming healing promoting healing and wellness through the traditional and cultural ways were seen as essential.

## **2) *Analysis of interviews with people currently in prison***

The needs and reintegration initiatives discussed by people currently in prison correspond to what other community people have responded to (through the Household Questionnaires, Key Informant, and Elder's Questionnaires). These include:

- community belonging, acceptance;
- addressing addiction and underlying psychological and social issues through Elders counselling and traditional and cultural ways, (such as, sharing circles as well as counselling or therapy initiatives);
- Participation in prevention and early intervention awareness programs;
- Community reintegration initiatives, such as job retraining, crafts developments, recreational and basic needs of housing and employment.

## OVERALL SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

### ***The place and stage of First Nations community-based justice and corrections initiatives.***

In the five communities that participated in this pilot study, three have started some community based justice or corrections initiatives and the two other did not have any type of programs and services.

All three communities that have some community based justice and corrections initiatives appear to have:

- More knowledge and awareness of the needs of federally released offenders thus more tolerance towards diverse reintegration programs and services;
- The existing programs and services are relatively new, therefore general comments with regard to their effectiveness, recommendations for change, were considered too soon for comments;
- However, the interest is high in the programs and services as demonstrated by the comments with regard to recommendations for structured and program development.

The two communities that do not have community based justice and corrections initiatives had mixed and diverse reactions to federally released offenders. There was more concern over community safety, and over the type and classification of offenders as well as the needs, issues and feasibility of community based justice and corrections initiatives.

### ***Perceptions, attitudes and values of First Nations community people towards offenders and their release***

Generally, there is majority community based support to address the needs, issues and supports necessary for offenders and their release back to the community.

All respondents knew people who have been to prisons and returned to the community. Respondents would either be related or known to offenders through association in community life. This form of association and relationship somewhat

reduces the stigmas/negative stereotypes towards offenders. The trend is to give federal offenders another opportunity for change, to be treated like normal human beings.

Most of the respondents can identify and empathize with the contributing factors that result in alcohol/drug abuse, and to criminal behaviour, thus the support for reintegration, high tolerance levels and community resiliency and family supports exist despite over a hundred years of colonial oppression and assimilation effects.

Traditional values were emphasized and these values such as respect, honesty, acceptance, and culturally appropriate principles and philosophies should also be extended to offenders.

The community receptiveness to offenders did not fully extend to serious criminal offenders without assurances of safety, support programs and services. This level of tolerance, and degree to which it is conditional on the community's classifications of serious criminal offences, needs to be further clarified in the next phase of the proposed national research. The majority of the community respondents support the development of reintegration programs for released federal offenders. These were common recommendations from all sectors for program supports for released offenders related to their needs and issues in pre-release, transitional and post-release phases.

***Possibility of utilizing community-based initiatives and feasibility to monitor, facilitate and sustain release***

Community based initiatives such as Elders' counseling, traditional and cultural activities, healing circles were identified and should be formally recognized and supported. The possibility of utilizing existing community-based initiatives were strongly recommended and supported by most respondents. These included formal initiatives such as AA programs, sentencing and release circles, mental health programs and healing and wellness initiatives that are growing and increasing in numbers for men, women and other segments of the First Nation communities. The feasibility of community based initiatives to monitor, facilitate

and sustain release largely will depend on the resources to support existing services. Suggestions for transitional halfway houses, monitoring of offenders, facilitating and sustaining release requires the development of community infrastructure that would address many of the needs and issues identified by all of the respondents in a coordinated, integrative and holistic way.

Building on the existing community strengths, consultative and participatory decision making, equal partnership arrangements to empower community peoples' capacity is a challenge that is perceived to be equally shared by the individual offender, immediate family and extended families/clans, the First Nations community and the Federal government through the Corrections and Justice institutions.

***Healing initiatives within community institutions and aboriginal community-based restorative justice initiatives***

Community healing and wellness initiatives have started over the last ten years in many First Nations communities. Many of the respondents identified and empathize with many of the contributing factors symptomized by alcohol/drug/substance abuse. Most of the respondents would support community based restorative justice initiatives that could help enhance and develop cultural relevant and appropriate programs and services for federal offenders returning to the community. The resources to address many of the needs and issues identified are not being met for most of the community people let alone federal offenders released from prisons. The beginning of community based restorative justice initiatives are initially having a positive impact and creating community awareness with regard to offenders. Further developments and initiatives would be receptively received provided that they have community participation, ownership and additional resources to supplement existing scarce resources.

***Needs assessment and long term feasibility to facilitate the return of federal offenders***

The long-term feasibility to facilitate the return of federal offenders based on the needs identified by the respondents are dependent on variables that currently exist or need to be developed.

The community will to try to provide reintegration services for offenders can be strengthened through provision of coordinated, integrative and holistic approaches. This includes prevention, pre-release, transitional and post-release programs and services. Some of these initiatives do not require additional resources as much as effective, efficient coordination of programs and services for offenders. Other types of community based initiatives will require additional resources to develop, enhance and stabilize best practices, models, and approaches, in program and service delivery.

If new and existing resources are utilized under community based corrections and justice initiatives; with flexible management and operations of community based programs and services for federal offenders, including the recommendations offered by respondents, will significantly increase the probability of long-term success and viability.

## RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

This research initiative met most of the outstanding features and deliverables outlined in the proposal. It addresses community capacity building, it was community researchers driven, it facilitated the building of relationships, and trained community-based researchers through an extensive consultative process. The initial findings of the research initiative suggest the potential to offer viable alternatives for reintegration initiatives, a vision of a reintegration process, the community will and capacity to undertake initiatives, and the long-term potential to strengthen relationships between the Correctional Service of Canada staff and the First Nations communities.

To improve the research process; we offer the following recommendations for changes for the proposed second country wide national study:

- Improve the cross sectional survey by continuing to include the household questionnaire as one of the research instruments;
- To readjust the sequencing and number of questions in each of the research questionnaire's instruments as outlined in Appendix B. Inclusion of questions on women's offenders, classifications and types of criminal offences to ascertain tolerance limits, complete community profiles, etc. will be changes in the next proposed research process;
- Allowing more time from the start to the completion of the research process will help immensely;
- Research handbook including how to refine the process, methodology, training and expectations and a template for community analysis will improve the research;
- Reallocate resources to include Elders honorarium and tobacco for each of the participating communities.

## APPENDIX A. LIST OF COMMUNITIES IN THE PILOT STUDY

<b>Community</b>	<b>Interviews</b>
Community 1: Kawakatoose	Total = 61 interviews
Community 2: Beardy's	Total = 42 interviews
Community 3: Ahtakakoop	Total = 64 people
Community 4: Blood	Total = 51 people
Community 5: Samson	Total = 35 people

## **APPENDIX B. SAMPLES OF THE COMMUNITY BASED RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS**

### **1. Key Informant Questionnaire**

Objective: Gather information from knowledgeable individuals in the community.

The questionnaire will look at three areas: A) Relationship with the non- Native community; B) First Nations Community Attitudes towards getting involved in community initiatives; C) Community perceptions regarding the release of offenders.

Gender:

Age:

Agency/ Organization:

#### ***A. Relationship with the non- Native community***

How close is the nearest non-Native community in which most people from the reserve do business? (Shopping, banking, doctors, etc.)

What business or services do people access from these communities?

What business/service agreements does the band have with the non-native community?

Do non-natives use or participate in First Nation's community facilities and activities?

Generally, how would you rate how the communities get along?

(Very good, Good, Well/ Improving, Not well, Poorly)

What is the nature of socialization between the two communities? (For example: Do kids play together? Do young people date? Do adults socialize?)

Does your community experience racism with the non-native community? (If yes, explain - example: Refused service because of colour or family.)

Does your community experience racism with the police and the justice system in the non-Native community? (If yes, explain.)



***B. First Nations community attitudes towards getting involved in community initiatives:***

To what extent do people who work for the community get involved with community activities?

What are your views of people who have been released from prisons and the crimes they have committed?

What do you perceive are band employees' views of people who have been released from prisons and the crimes they have committed?

What community awareness programs have been initiated in the past year on the reserve?

Have any of the community awareness programs had an impact on their intended areas? How?

What social cultural and recreational activities (inside and outside of the community) are available for people? (For example: baseball, basketball, water sports, soccer, pow-wow, round dances and hand games.)

Do people participate in these activities?

Do people participate in spontaneous informal activities? (For example: card games, crib, dice, hand drums.)

Are there major social problems or issues in your community? If yes, please explain.

What are the economic bases of the community? (Elaborate - ranchers, social assistance, band employees, etc.)

Are there educational/ training opportunities in the community for people who have been released from prisons? Rate their effectiveness in addressing the needs of people who have been released from prison.

(Very effective, Effective, Not very effective, I don't know.) (Please explain.)

Are there employment opportunities in the community for those people who have been released from prisons? Please rate their effectiveness in addressing the needs of people who have been released from prison.

(Very effective, effective, not very effective, I don't know.) (Please explain.)

Are these services/programs in the community for people being released from prisons? Please rate their effectiveness in addressing the needs of people who have been released from prison.

(Very effective, effective, Not very effective, I don't know.) (Please explain.)

Do people who have been released from prison face more competition or barriers for employment, education/training or services/ programs? If yes, why?

What would reduce the competition / barrier in the community for people who have been released from prison?

### ***C. Community perceptions regarding release of offenders***

What has been the experience by the community with people who have been released from prison?

Is there awareness in the community about programs and services available in the prison for offenders?

What are the needs of the people who are released from prison and return to the community?

Do you think your community has the capacity to reintegrate people who have been released from prison?

What role do you think families have to reintegrate people who have been released from prison?

Would the families and the community take responsibility for monitoring the reintegration of people who have been in prison?

Are there specific circumstances that would make reintegration impossible?

(nature of the offence, impact on community)

(Additional comments.)

## **2. Elder Questionnaire**

Do you remember hearing stories from your grandparents/ elders about people going to prison?

Who do you remember as the first person going to prison?

What was the role of the elders, leaders, and families to support the people who returned home from prison?

What was the role of the elders, leaders , and families to support the people who returned home from prison?

How was it for the people who returned home from prison?

- a) Do you think charges/crimes have changed?
- b) If yes, how have they changed?
- c) How has the change effected the community?
- d) When did these changes start happening?
- e) What are the main contributing factors to the change?

How do elders support people who are released from prisons?

How should elders support people who are released from prisons?

(Additional comments.)

### **3. The Circle Process**

#### **1) *People released from prison***

We would like to thank you for coming here today. In this circle, we will talk about the return to the community of people who have been released from prisons. We will be going around this circle four times and each person will have the opportunity to say what they would like related to each of the questions.

What was your experience when you were released to come home?

What were your expectations when you were coming home?

What did you think the community expectations were of you?

If you had opportunities to integrate back onto the community what would you do different?

How should programs be designed for newly released or soon to be released prisoners in your opinion?

What kind of measures could a community take to prevent our people from going to prison?

Should these measurements be based on traditional values? Or current counselling practices?

What role should the community have towards released or to be released people from prison?

Should the roles be supporting individuals and families?

How can the role be supportive?

As a former prisoner, would you be able to provide support to help ingrate other future prisoners?

**2) Community circle of elders, key informants, leaders, community members)**

We would like to thank you for coming here today. In this circle, we will talk about the return to the community of people who have been released from prisons. We will be going around this circle four times and each person will have the opportunity to say what they like related to each of the questions.

What do you think about the people who have been released from prisons and returned to the community?

What do you feel about people who have been released from prison and returned to the community?

Is the community responsible for people who have been released from prison and returned to the community?

(This teaching was given to us by one of the First Nation's Elders: Danny Musqua, February 1999.)

*"A long time ago when people who were sent to prison returned to the community; they were sent to the elders. The elders would take them into the forest. During this period the person was provided with teaching and ceremonies of how to be good human being. Specific duties were given to help the person pay back those who looked after his family when he was in prison. The elders would decide when the person would return to his community." (Danny Musqua, February 1999).*

What does this teaching tell us?  
(Additional or closing comments.)

**3) People who are currently in prison**

We would like to thank you for coming here today. In this circle, we will talk about the return to the community of people who have been released from prisons, We

will be going around this circle four times and each person will have the opportunity to say what they would like to say related to each of the questions.

Why do you think some First Nation's people get into trouble with the law and end up in prison?

How do you think we should help people who don't want to end up in prison?

What services do you think need to be offered to people returning to the community?

Who do you think should be responsible for people returning to the community?

(This teaching was given to us by one of the First Nations Elders: Danny Musqua, February 1999.)

*"A long time ago when people who were in prison returned to the community they were sent to the elders. The elders would take them into the forest. During this period the person was provided with teachings and ceremonies of how to be a good human being. Specific duties were given to help the person pay back those who looked after his family while he was in prison. The elders would decide when the person would return to his community." (Danny Musqua, February, 1999)*

What does this teaching tell us?

(Additional comments.)