TURNING POINTS:

A STUDY OF THE FACTORS RELATED TO THE SUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATION OF ABORIGINAL OFFENDERS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examined the lives of 68 Aboriginal ex-offenders who, at one time, had been very serious offenders and who had turned their lives around to become law-abiding citizens successfully integrated into the community. A similar study (Hodgson & Heckbert, 1995) identified a number of factors associated with the successful integration of Aboriginal offenders. The present study served as a follow-up to examine these factors more thoroughly and to explore other factors associated with success.

The sample, chosen from the Edmonton (Alberta) area had to meet three conditions: the participants had to be Aboriginal; they had to have served one or more sentences in a federal penitentiary; and, they had to have been out of trouble for at least two years. Twelve women and 56 men took part in the study.

The participants were interviewed according to a questionnaire (Appendix A) that guided them through; their early years, getting into trouble, getting out of trouble and staying out of trouble. Each interview was tape recorded, the tapes were transcribed and the transcripts were used as the primary source of data, which is presented using basic statistical methods with excerpts from the interviews.

The study found that the majority of the participants said that their childhood years were dysfunctional. Almost two-thirds (62%) described their childhood as negative and 81% described their adolescence as negative. They experienced unstable family environments and living conditions of abuse and neglect. For example, 40% said that they had lived in an orphanage or in foster care and 28% said that they had been placed in a residential school. In addition, 40% reported being abused (physically, mentally, and/or sexually).

As a result of their early living conditions, many respondents resorted to crime and violence. The respondents reported committing a great number of offences and having spent large amounts of time in the correctional system. When asked what would have prevented them from getting into trouble in the first place, the two main factors were communication and family support.

Gradually, however, the respondents turned their lives around. This process took many different forms and different lengths of time for each person. There were many variables that influenced their getting out of trouble, but some of the main influences were: controlling alcohol and drug use, family support, and feeling sick and tired of being in trouble.

At this point in time, the participants have stayed out of conflict with the law for at least two years, but most have been crime-free for many years. There were many factors that influenced their life choices, but some of the main factors in staying out of trouble include: personal values and identity, family, staying clean and sober, self-improvement activities, and friends. For each respondent the

pivotal turning point was different. For some, it was the combination of different variables. Change was often slow with many relapses, but change took place. This process of change was often personal, thus, difficult to quantify.

This study also demonstrates that Aboriginal spirituality and cultural activities were a major factor in the respondents' recovery. However, many respondents mentioned that these activities were not always respected while they were in jail.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

This study developed from the observations of staff in the Aboriginal agencies, the Nechi Institute and Native Counselling Services of Alberta, of the astonishing changes that some Aboriginal persons made in their lives. They go from being in very serious conflict with the law to being successfully integrated into the community as law-abiding citizens. These ex-offenders are often seen as role models because of the extent to which they turned their lives around and the quality of their lives currently. These success stories are quite well known in the Aboriginal community because it is hard to be anonymous in those communities. Ex-offenders are often relatives, such as brothers, aunties, and uncles of community members. They are less well known to justice officials or to those in mainstream society. Changes in lifestyle by the ex-offenders is celebrated in Aboriginal communities, hence, there is no need to deny their history. By contrast, in mainstream society, ex-offenders usually must hide their past experience rather than celebrate it. In the eyes of some justice officials and community members, there is a sense of gloom based on the perception that the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system will continue and that nothing seems to work. In reality, many Aboriginal offenders do turn their lives around. Unfortunately, these success stories often get lost in the stories of recidivism.

The Nechi Institute and Native Counselling Services of Alberta wanted to document some of these success stories, partly to recognize the achievements of these people, but mainly to explore the influences in their lives that contributed to the process of change.

Literature Review

The number of Aboriginal people incarcerated in Canadian correctional facilities is largely disproportionate compared to their numbers in the Canadian population. This was evident in the 1980's and the 1990's (Jackson, 1989) and is still a reality today. Although they account for only 2% of the population 18 years

of age and over in Canada (Statistics Canada, 1996), Aboriginal persons make up 17% of sentenced admissions to federal and provincial/territorial correctional facilities (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2001). In Saskatchewan, Aboriginal people make up more than two-thirds (68%) of admissions to federal custody (compared to 8% in the general adult population of Saskatchewan). According to Trevethan, Tremblay and Carter (2000), there has been an increase in Aboriginal admissions to federal institutions - from 13% in 1988-89 to 17% in 1998-99.

Part of the reason for the over-representation of Aboriginal people is the large number of Aboriginal offenders who return to prison. According to Bonta, Lipinski, and Martin (1992), two-thirds of Aboriginal offenders recidivate. Jackson (1989) also found that Aboriginal offenders had a higher rate of being returned to prison than non-Aboriginal offenders.

Research has noted a link between various socio-economic conditions and the proportion of Aboriginal persons in the criminal justice system (LaPrairie, 1997; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). There are a number of risk factors that may relate to why Aboriginal people are over-represented, such as age, unemployment and poverty.

In addition to socio-economic conditions, there are other underlying reasons for the over-representation of Aboriginal people. For instance, a large number of Aboriginal crimes take place under the influence of alcohol. Waldram (1997) observes that for some offenders, the use of alcohol or drugs is a crutch against the feelings of despair, loneliness, incompleteness, nothingness, and being belittled by others and society. This lost feeling for most was caused by the fact that they had no idea of who they were. For many, this was caused by being placed in residential schools or foster care. For others, it was part of being in a dysfunctional family, which, when traced back in many of these people, had to do with having no cultural background. While the practice of putting Aboriginal children into residential schools stopped in 1975 (Hodgson, 1990), the practice of

taking Aboriginal children away from their families and their communities has not. According to Jackson (1989), an Aboriginal child is five times more likely to be taken under care by a child welfare agency than a non-Aboriginal child. The practice of taking away these children from their families and communities is increasing the number of displaced children without a culture.

According to Besozzi (1993), recidivism occurs because inmates have not developed a well-defined identity while in prison. The inmates also felt that they did not receive the help they needed to become law-abiding citizens. This is compounded even more so for an Aboriginal inmate. Although this has begun to change recently, there are still relatively few programs available for Aboriginal inmates to learn their culture. Waldram (1997) believes that Native spirituality programs have had a great effect on the health, both mental and physical, of offenders involved in these programs.

Hodgson and Heckbert (1995) documented that while ex-offenders thought they were healed, in their stories they admitted to still having problems. Not knowing how to deal with these problems was a precursor to them returning to their self-destructive behaviours. The insights of Judge Murray Sinclair (1997) are particularly relevant in the discussion of Aboriginal people and the justice system:

> What I see for our young people or all Aboriginal people who come before me in court is the tremendous imbalance they are confronted with. How out of balance each and every one of them is in their life that they end up coming to me in the process. I'm often involved at the end of a very tragic set of circumstances…
>
> So the reality then, for us as Aboriginal youth, was growing up with terrible conflicts over who we were. We did not know who we were and our young people today, they still do not know who they are. We have not been able to give our young people their sense of identity today…

> Many Aboriginal men who stop a life of crime tell us the answer for them was when they learned about their culture, and where did they learn about their culture? The first time they learned about their culture was when they were in jail. It's a terrible thing to say, that you can go to jail to learn about who you are and find your solution there. If that's the only thing to stop him from living a life of crime, then couldn't we find a way of doing that outside of jail?
>
> The reality is that some of our men and women do find their answer learning their culture while they are incarcerated. Incarceration for that purpose seems to me to be a little illogical, but there it is.
>
> So, I think we in the justice system are compelled to accept it is our responsibility for a vast majority of people who come before us, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to find a way to help them find out who they are. Then we can help them to answer those questions I mentioned earlier which are, where did I come from, why am I here and where am I going?

A concern in all aspects of criminal justice and corrections is often framed in the form of a question "What works?" This question is fundamental to the concern that the public and justice officials have in regards to the dual goals of corrections: one is the safety and protection of the public; the other is assisting offenders to become law-abiding citizens. In terms of the latter goal, many people wonder about the effectiveness of justice/correctional interventions when the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice and correctional systems continues to be so evident.

While it is tempting to echo Martinson's (1974) judgement that "Nothing works!" the reality is that many offenders do turn their lives around and become successfully integrated into the community as law-abiding citizens. This reality formed the basis of the 1995 study "Healing, Spirit and Recovery" (Hodgson & Heckbert, 1995). In this study, 20 Aboriginal ex-offenders who had committed very serious offences or had lived a life involving extensive criminal activity for many years and who had become law-abiding citizens, were asked to tell their story of their early years growing up, getting into trouble, getting out of trouble and staying out of trouble. Interviewers encouraged these success stories to describe the factors they thought were involved in these parts of their lives.

Factors such as quitting drinking or taking drugs, developing an awareness of Aboriginal cultural/spiritual teachings, the support of family, and seeing the value of a different lifestyle were found to be powerful influences in the process of becoming law-abiding citizens.

Current Project

The question facing this research project is "what can be done to solve this over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system"? One approach is to consider what can be done with those currently in the justice system in terms of programs and interventions that will reduce the over-representation. This research project is interested in why some Aboriginal offenders have no further conflict with the law.

This study developed from the findings in a preliminary report by Hodgson and Heckbert (1995) which examined factors associated with the successful integration of Aboriginal offenders who, at one point in their lives, had been serious offenders and who subsequently had turned their lives around to become law-abiding citizens. The objective of the research was to document the influences that contributed to the changes in the respondents' lives to lead a crime-free lifestyle. The general questions guiding the research were:

- What were the early years of growing up like?
- How did they get into trouble with the law and to what extent?
- What were the factors they associated with getting out of trouble?
- What were the factors they felt helped them to stay out of trouble?
- What were their perceptions of and experiences with correctional and related programs?
- Could their observations point the way to new and/or improved practices?

In the 1995 study, the interviewers encouraged the respondents to tell their story their way and did not direct the interview in predetermined ways. While this

approach enabled the men and women to document events and people that helped them along their path to becoming successfully integrated into the community, they tended to wander and discuss areas which, while of concern to them (such as their innocence), fell outside the parameters of the research.

Officials at the Nechi Institute, who co-ordinated the initial study, were convinced that additional and more in-depth information could be obtained from other Aboriginal men and women who had turned their lives around. Nechi proposed a second study, using similar methods, to explore in more detail the factors or turning points which contributed positively to serious offenders becoming law-abiding citizens. The project attempted to explore the lives of very serious ex-offenders for the imbalances and conflicts identified by Judge Sinclair. The project also attempted to get a deeper understanding of how their lives took a turn for the worse and then somehow changed direction, this time for the better. Finally, the project took a wider look at their lives to better understand the context within which they grew up, got into trouble and got out of trouble.

This study takes the life history of an individual and finds out what, if anything, worked for that individual. These insights will be a valuable contribution in general to the field of crime prevention in the Aboriginal and mainstream communities. Having a better understanding of these factors will assist criminal justice and correctional officials to design and implement intervention programs that could speed up the process of helping Aboriginal offenders to change their direction in life. It is hoped that these turning points will turn out to have a noticeable and measurable positive impact on Aboriginal offenders. By learning "what works" for some Aboriginal people who had been very serious offenders, we believe we can meet the challenge posed by Judge Murray Sinclair (1997):

> We need to find ways to help them confront these questions (Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?) and find answers. For by answering these questions each person in society is able to find a way of functioning properly.

In the initial study (Hodgson & Heckbert, 1995), often referred to as Phase I, the data were qualitative in nature. In this study, plans were made to include both qualitative and quantitative data.

RESEARCH METHODS

This project was modelled after the study "Healing, Spirit and Recovery" (Hodgson & Heckbert, 1995). The central theme was that Aboriginal ex-offenders had an important message to tell related to their getting into trouble and their getting out of conflict with the law. In this study, 20 respondents were asked to describe their early years, their getting into trouble, their getting out of trouble and their staying out of trouble. The 17 men and three women were prompted by the interviewers only to tell their stories. The interviews were taped with a small audio cassette and the tapes were transcribed. The transcripts were reviewed by the Project Co-ordinator who analyzed the contents for themes and issues related to the factors at work in the various stages of their lives.

Similar studies have been conducted by Waldram (1994, 1997) and McCormick (1995) wherein Aboriginal offenders were interviewed as to their perceptions of their criminal lifestyles. Waldram, however, interviewed offenders still in custody. The present study sought to draw upon the experiences of Aboriginal offenders who had demonstrated some success at turning their lives around, for example, to “walk the walk; not just talk the talk”.

In the current study, plans were made to interview a sample of 80 respondents who met the following criteria:

1. The participant had served one or more sentences in a penitentiary (a sentence of two years or more);
2. The participant had not been in conflict with the law for a period of two years;
3. The participant had to be Aboriginal (Métis, Inuit, Status Indian, or non-Status Indian).

These criteria were selected because they were similar to those in Phase I. It was felt that participants who met these criteria would be excellent examples of persons who had been serious offenders and had turned their lives around. The

only difference was in relation to the second criteria. Since this study was funded by Correctional Services Canada, all participants would have to have served a sentence in a federal penitentiary.

The survey design was based on the questionnaire used in the interviews and was modelled after the one used in Phase I. A decision was made for this study to conduct the interview along more structured lines than in Phase I. It was intended that the discussion of the lives of the ex-offenders would be guided more than in the initial study, which allowed the participants to talk about whatever they wished, within some very general guidelines. In the current study, we hoped to narrow the range of attention to factors identified in the initial study plus those added by the sponsors of the study.

The Project Co-ordinator, project staff, officials from the Nechi Institute and officials from Native Counselling Services of Alberta reviewed the questionnaire used in the initial study, selected research questions that would best guide the discussions with the ex-offenders and added some questions designed to round out the exploration of their stories. The focus was on guiding the participants to reflect on the influences in their lives that they identified as being related to their getting into trouble with the law, getting out of trouble and staying out of trouble. The project team decided to also guide the discussions in areas of the offenders' experiences and perceptions with correctional and related services and programs in the community and in the institutions. Again, the research was looking for "what worked" based on the experiences of people who had made remarkable changes in their lives. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

In order to select 80 respondents, letters announcing the project were mailed to many Aboriginal service agencies and criminal justice agencies in the Edmonton region. As well, staff at the Nechi Institute and Native Counselling Services of Alberta were requested to make referrals to the study. It was expected that this method would generate a large list of suitable respondents. In reality, this method did not prove to be effective. Some referrals came from Nechi and

Native Counselling Services staff but only one referral was received from Aboriginal agencies.

As a result, project staff decided to discuss the study with correctional workers who were known to have close contact with the target group–staff at the Stan Daniels Healing Centre in Edmonton. The Centre is a community residential centre housing minimum security inmates, day parolees and full parolees. The Director and several staff met with the Project Co-ordinator, went through various lists of clients at Stan Daniels, both past and present, and developed a list of potential respondents who it was believed, met the project criteria. This list was made available to the interviewers who attempted to contact the respondents at their last known address or through next of kin. The method proved to be quite successful despite the fact that many of the referrals had moved and several declined to take part in the study, explaining that they were not interested in discussing the criminal aspects of their past lives. This explanation was similar to a few encountered in "Healing, Spirit and Recovery".

As the study progressed, it became obvious that additional sources of referrals were needed if the project was to stay on track in terms of the expected time frames. As a result, four Aboriginal ex-offenders were hired to search for their contacts in the community as to who they knew who would qualify to be included in the study. This approach proved to be most effective. These people compiled lists with names and phone numbers that were given to the Project Co-ordinator who, in turn, gave the names to the interviewers.

Once the interviewers had a few names, they contacted the respondent, re-checked their eligibility and asked them to take part in the study. At this stage, most people agreed to be interviewed although the Project Co-ordinator and the interviewers discovered a few people who did not meet the criteria. These people were not interviewed and were not included in the study[1]. One

[1] A few respondents said that they had served their time in provincial institutions even though they received federal sentences. These respondents were included in the study.

interviewer did not find out a referral was non-Aboriginal until near the conclusion of the interview. This respondent was excluded from the study.

During the review of the questionnaires after the interviews were completed, the Project Co-ordinator noted that a few participants replied that they had not served a sentence in a penitentiary. With each potential participant, the interviewers reviewed the study's criteria, which clearly stated that those to be included in the study had to have served a penitentiary term. It is not clear why there were some discrepancies here. In these cases, however, the Project Co-ordinator decided to include the respondent in the study rather than exclude them.

The time it took to select the sample turned out to be much longer than expected. After the initial success of hiring ex-offenders to make referrals and following the leads provided by the staff at the Stan Daniels Healing Centre, more participants were still needed to reach the goal of 80. In discussing the matter with the funders and sponsors, it was decided to stop the expensive and time-consuming search for more participants. It was decided to proceed with the 68 participants that had been interviewed. There was an agreement that the remaining 12 potential participants would not likely contribute new data that had not been presented in the stories of the 68 men and women already taking part in the study. Each respondent earned an honorarium of $100, paid in cash at the conclusion of the interview.

The two interviewers met a fascinating range of ex-offenders, from those who had clearly turned their lives around and were well established in the community as law-abiding citizens to those who lived on the street in the inner city, struggling every day to find shelter, food, sobriety, and stay clear of committing criminal offences. For an account of the experience of one of the interviewers, see Appendix B.

The interviews were held in offices, homes, and on the telephone. After explaining the purpose and method of the study, the formal interview began with

the interviewer following the questionnaire, recording specific information and taking rough notes. Some of the participants spoke clearly and loudly enough so that their words were clearly recorded by the tape recorder. These respondents were eloquent and expressive. Others, however, spoke softly and at times it was difficult for the interviewers to hear what was said. On these occasions, their words were not tape-recorded clearly and, as a result, the transcribers could not decipher what was said. In such cases, the transcripts read, “inaudible.” These moments in the interview often coincided with accounts by the participants of troubled times, such as rough periods in their childhood or when recalling some of the offences in which they were involved. Some of the participants gave very brief responses to the questions and did not elaborate in response to prompts from the interviewer or in response to pauses and periods of silence. At other times, the participants and an interviewer shared a good laugh together. Sometimes, the interviews proceeded quite briskly and business-like; at other times, the interviewer and the participant shared personal experiences. As noted in the reflections of one of the interviewers, it was difficult not to react personally to some of the experiences of the women and men in this study.

During the interviews, the interviewers were challenged to follow the format and structure of the questionnaire while, at the same time, respecting the need of the participants to describe issues and events that were of considerable importance to them but did not fit nicely into the intended focus of the discussions.

The interviewers did a very good job of keeping the interviews on track or getting them back on track. Also, the interviews in the current study were more focused and dealt with less extraneous experiences than the interviews conducted in Phase I. As well, the Co-ordinator observed that the participants generally did a more thorough job of describing their experiences in the earlier stages of their lives (Section II and III of the questionnaire) than they did in describing their experiences with correctional and other programs (Section IV and V). This insight will be helpful should further research be undertaken on these topics using similar methods. Researchers will have to consider ways to elicit more

thorough and in-depth responses from respondents who seemed to run out of energy during the latter part of these interviews.

Once the interview concluded, the interviewer gave the audio-tapes and questionnaire to staff at Nechi, where the tapes were transcribed word for word, as much as possible. The questionnaires were given to the Project Co-ordinator who made one copy. Identifying information such as names, address, and phone number was deleted on the copy. The Co-ordinator kept the original and the copy was given to a project staff member who used the information in the questionnaire to code the responses and enter the data into an SPSS package (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 8) created for this project. The coding was done by the project staff member who developed a code book based on the items in the questionnaire. The staff member went through each questionnaire and placed the response onto a transfer sheet and then entered the transfer sheet data into the SPSS program. In SPSS, each respondent was given a random identification number (1, 2, 3, etc.) in order to protect the identity of the participants and to ensure the confidentiality of their replies. Each participant was also randomly assigned a pseudonym (Alex, Aaron, Arby, Alice, etc.). There were 126 different variables taken from the questionnaire. Some variables were classified as “yes” or “no.” Others, however, were more complex, featuring more than one possible response due to the open-ended question upon which it was based. For example, Question #33 asked, “Please choose three words that best describe what your childhood was like.” These three words were classified as either positive or negative. If a question arose as to the meaning of these words, there was a follow-up question, number 34, designed to seek an explanation of each word.

In terms of qualitative data, such as the factors related to getting into trouble, getting out of trouble, and staying out of trouble, all transcripts were examined and the presence/absence (yes/no) or a range (none, low, medium, high) of these factors in the stories was used. The presence had to be readily apparent, not a fleeting reference. The analysis of this information yielded data that were

presented in terms of a percentage coupled with excerpts and quotes that "fleshed out" the meaning of the variable.

Two copies of each transcript were produced. One copy went to the co-ordinator and one to a staff member. These copies were reviewed carefully in terms of their content in order to explore the richness and depth of the respondents' experiences. This content analysis, based on qualitative data, was combined with the quantitative data produced by the SPSS program. This blended approach was employed in the hopes of adding to a deeper understanding of the factors associated with the successful reintegration of these serious offenders into the community as law-abiding citizens.

In terms of the qualitative analysis, the review and assessment of the information in the transcripts was conducted by two people, the co-ordinator and a staff member. Both reviewed all the transcripts, looking for general themes emerging from the experiences of the participants. Particular attention was paid to experiences that were elaborated upon by the speaker. These experiences often appeared in the transcripts as four or more lines where the respondents commented on an incident, person or experience. Brief replies, such as a "yes" or "no" were passed over by the researchers. While these comments may have been insightful, the researchers paid more attention to the longer replies and explanations. Both researchers were free to include or exclude factors that were of interest or not. The qualitative data presented in the report reflects what both researchers deemed to be important factors. This approach enabled two different backgrounds, perceptions and experiences to focus on the stories and information reported by the respondents. It was hoped that as a result of using this approach, there would be less likelihood the findings would be potentially skewed by the perceptions of only one researcher.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Respondent Profile

A comprehensive respondent profile was developed to describe the people who participated in the project. The profile should help the reader better understand the experiences participants reported and the socio-demographic context in which their experiences occurred. It should also contribute to an understanding of some of the dynamics participants experienced as they turned their lives around. The profile is presented below using the following areas: demographic characteristics, socio-economic characteristics, health, and criminal history. Appendix C provides a list of pseudonyms and general profile information on each respondent.

Demographic Characteristics

Of the 68 participants, there were 12 women (18%) and 56 men (82%) (see Table 1). We had hoped to include more women in the sample, and several women volunteered to participate in the interviews. However, in the course of the initial discussions, it was found that they did not meet the eligibility criteria. That is, they had not served a federal sentence of two years or more, and therefore they could not be included in the study.

Table 1. Demographic and Socio-Economic Characteristics

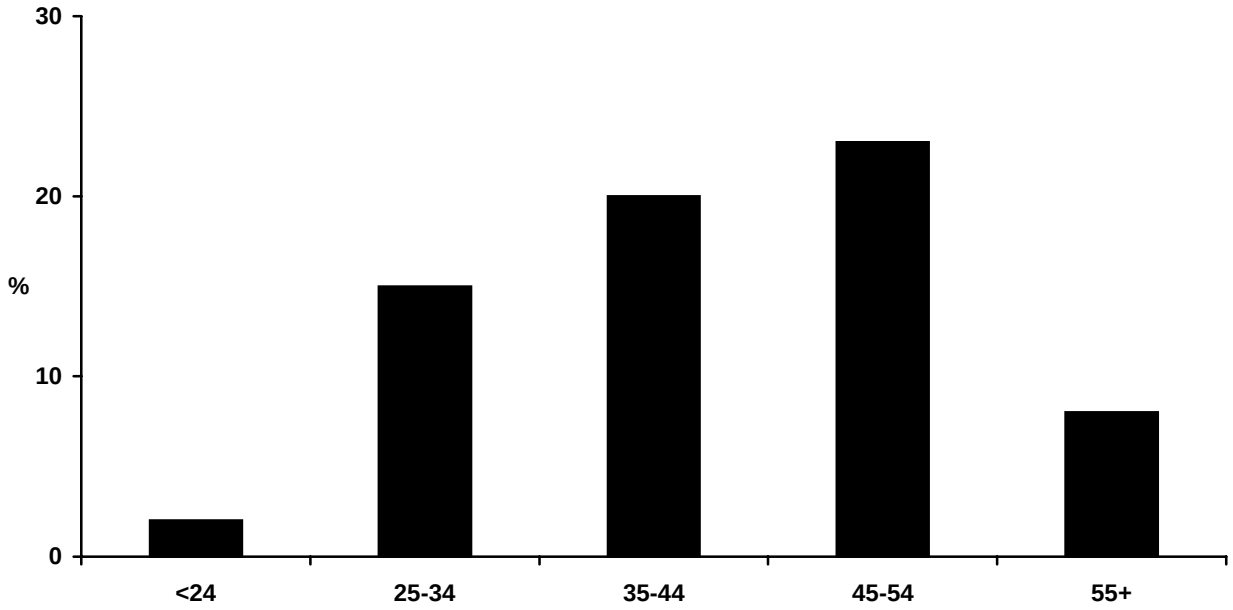
Demographic and Socio-Economic Characteristics		
	#	**%**
Total	**68**	
Gender	68	
Male	56	82%
Female	12	18%
Age	**68**	
<24	2	3%
25-34	15	22%
35-44	20	29%
45-54	23	34%
55+	8	12%
Mean Age		43
Aboriginal Status	**68**	
Status Indian	37	54%
Non-Status Indian	4	6%
Métis	26	38%
Inuit	1	1%
Past - Highest Grade Completed	**68**	
Less than Grade 9	24	35%
Grade 9-12	43	63%
More than Grade 12	1	1%
Current - Highest Grade Completed	**68**	
Less than Grade 9	14	21%
Grade 9-12	47	69%
More than Grade 12	7	10%
Other Educational Programs[1]		
Vocational/Business School	34	50%
College/Technical School	30	44%
University	14	21%
Other Training Programs	49	72%

Demographic and Socio-Economic Characteristics - cont'd		
	#	%
Employment Status	68	
Full-time	27	40%
Part-time	12	18%
Unemployed	29	43%
Type of Job	39	
White Collar	5	13%
Blue Collar	32	82%
Artist	2	5%
Monthly Income	47	
Less than $500	0	0%
$500 to $999	9	19%
$1,000 to $1,999	23	49%
$2,000 to $2,999	11	23%
$3,000 or more	4	9%
Mean Monthly Income		$1,759.00
Past Residence[1]		
City	30	44%
Town	18	26%
Rural Area	16	24%
Reserve	18	26%
Settlement	14	21%
Current Residence	68	
City	50	74%
Town	1	1%
Rural Area	1	1%
Reserve	7	10%
Settlement	9	13%

[1] Multiple responses were allowed for this question, therefore does not add to 100%.

Figure 1 illustrates the age distribution of the participants. The average age of the respondents was 43, with the youngest being 21 and the eldest 64. The age of the respondents is older than that of the Aboriginal federal prison population (average current age is 34; Correctional Services of Canada, 2000a). This is not particularly surprising since these are people who have been in the federal system and have been released.

Figure 1. Age Distribution of Respondents

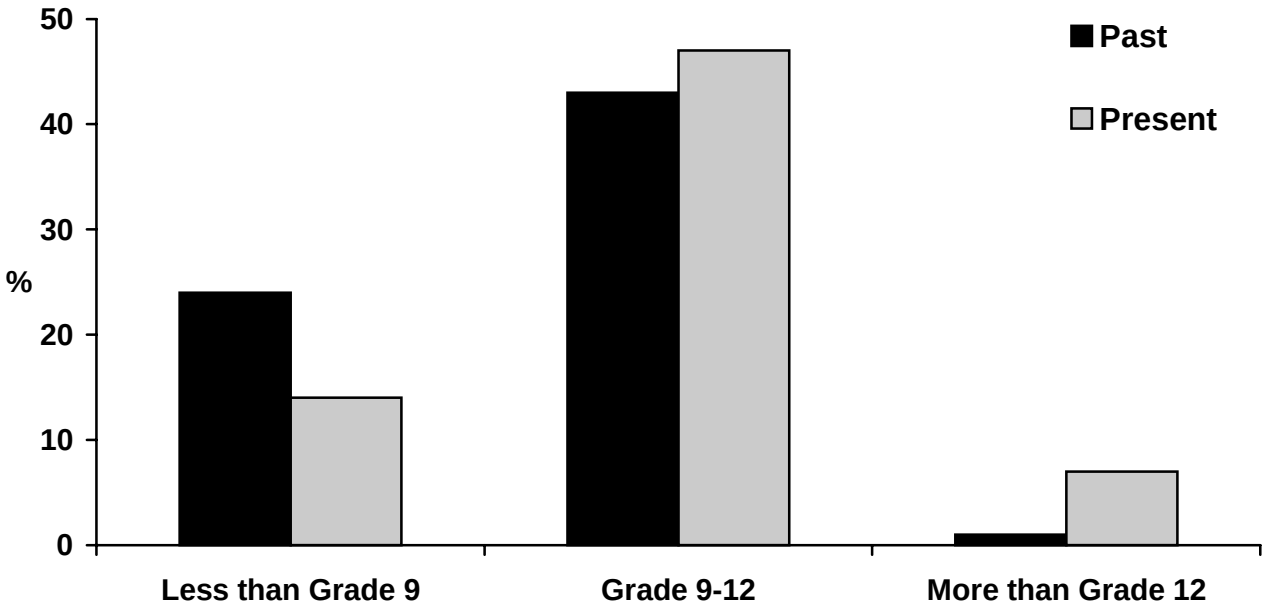


The largest proportion of respondents (60%) were North American Indian (including status and non-status Indians). A further 38% were Métis and 2% (1 respondent) were Inuit. The Aboriginal composition in Alberta is fairly similar, with 58% North American Indian, 41% Métis, and 1% Inuit (Statistics Canada, 1996).

Socio-Economic Characteristics

For each respondent, past and present education levels were obtained. Figure 2 indicates the level of education achieved by the participants in both early and later experiences with the education system. In terms of past education, the lowest level achieved was three years, and the highest was 15 years. About one-third (35%) of the respondents had completed less than grade nine. A further 63% completed grade 9-12 and 1% completed more than grade 12. In comparison, about one-half of the federal prison population have less than a grade eight education (Correctional Services of Canada, 2000b).

Figure 2. Level of Education - Past & Present



In recent years, some of the respondents said that they had attained higher levels of education. The lowest current level of education remained the same (three years) and the highest was 18 years. Only about one-fifth (21%) currently have completed less than grade nine. Sixty-nine percent have completed grade 9-12 and 10% have completed more than grade 12. Participation in additional education occurred during incarceration or upon release from an institution.

The participants were also asked about involvement in educational programs beyond elementary school. One-half (50%) reported involvement in vocational or business school, 44% in community college or technical institutions, and 21% in university. In addition, almost three-quarters (72%) reported attending training programs such as those that focused on healing, life skills, substance abuse, and employment.

The participants were also asked questions on their past and present employment. For many offenders, having a job provides a focus to the day or week, which can be helpful in maintaining a pro-social lifestyle. A relatively stable employment situation is often thought to be associated with staying out of trouble with the law. For instance, Motiuk (1996) found that offenders with unstable employment patterns are at a greater risk for re-offending than those with stable employment histories. The income also provides a basis of personal and family support for necessities such as food, clothing and accommodation. Currently, more than one-half (58%) of the participants said they were employed, either part-time or full-time. Respondents were also asked how much of the time over the last three years they were employed. One-third (35%) worked for the entire three years, 52% worked for part of the time, and 13% did not work at all during this time. It is estimated that 75% of the federal prison population have unstable job histories (Correctional Service of Canada, 2000).

Of those who were employed, the majority (82%) were employed in the blue-collar jobs, such as construction and labourer jobs. The remainder of the employed sample was comprised of white-collar workers (13%) and artists (5%).

Some respondents who were unemployed were supported by medical pensions or other income support programs. There were 21 participants that stated they were not earning an income at the time of the interview. The largest proportion of respondents who earned an income reported they earned between $1,000 and $1,999 per month (49%). Excluding those individuals without an income at the time of the interview, the average income was $1,759 per month.

In general, it is clear that the majority of the respondents did not present a strong and stable employment profile given that almost one-half (43%) were unemployed and an additional 18% were only employed part-time. Furthermore, the average monthly income of $1,759 does not represent a high-income bracket. However, despite their relatively disadvantaged employment situation, the participants have maintained a crime-free lifestyle.

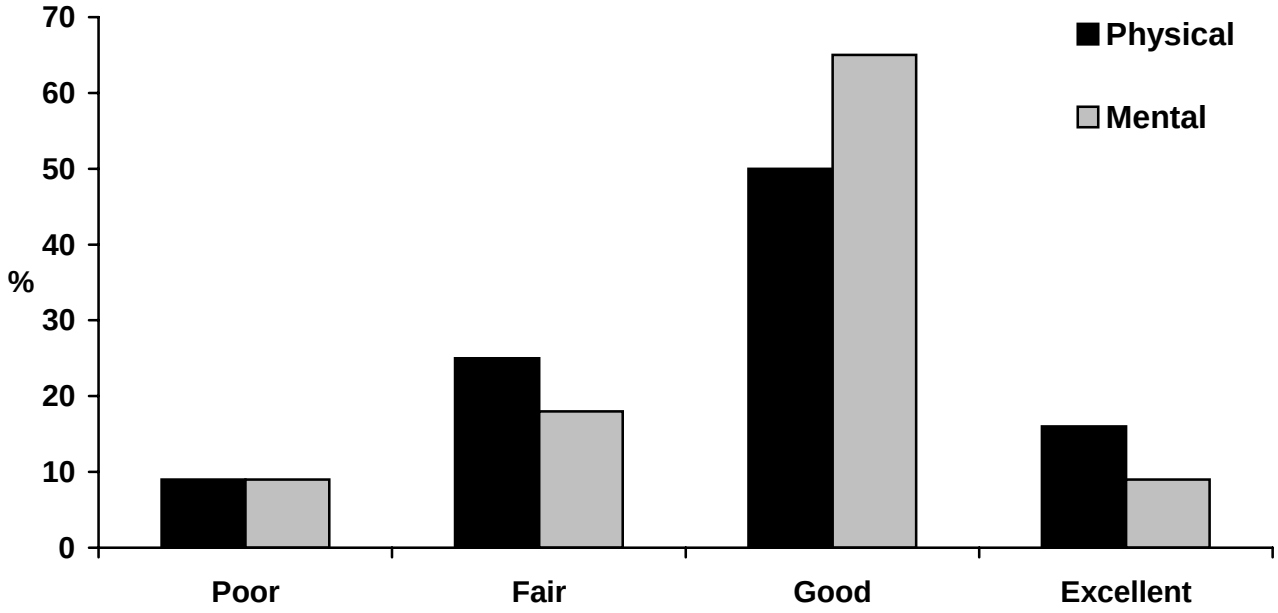
In addition to the other socio-economic variables, the participants' current place of residence was examined. The majority of the respondents currently reside in a city (74%). Thirteen percent reside on a Métis settlement, 10% reside on a reserve, 1% reside in a town, and 1% in a rural area. As will be shown later, there has been a noticeable shift in place of residence from childhood to adulthood.

Health

Participants were asked about their physical and mental/emotional health and the extent to which their health has remained stable over the years. Given the high rate of drug and alcohol abuse often found in Aboriginal communities, it was anticipated that the overall state of health of the respondents may be fairly poor.

However, as illustrated in Figure 3, the majority of respondents reported good physical health. Two-thirds (66%) reported that their overall physical health was good or excellent (also see Table 2). Of those who reported relatively poor health, the reason was typically the result of past, extensive use of drugs and alcohol.

Figure 3. Physical & Mental Health



The overall mental/emotional health conditions of the participants was even better than their physical health, with almost three-quarters (74%) reporting good or excellent mental health. Of those who reported poor mental health, several said that their mental illness interfered with their normal daily functions. Depression was also mentioned by several respondents, either as periodic episodes or constant re-occurrences.

Table 2. Physical and Mental/Emotional Health

	Physical Health		Mental/Emotional Health	
	#	%	#	%
Total	**68**		**68**	
Poor	6	9%	6	9%
Fair	17	25%	12	18%
Good	34	50%	44	65%
Excellent	11	16%	6	9%

Criminal History

In order to demonstrate the dramatic changes that the respondents have made, it is important to gain a clear understanding of their extensive and serious criminal histories. The extent to which these individuals have improved their living situation is a key factor in understanding their successful reintegration.

A large proportion of participants (84%) reported convictions for violent crimes. In particular, as seen in Appendix C, 16 respondents (24%) had criminal records for murder, attempted murder or manslaughter. Clearly, these respondents were serious offenders who had been very much a danger to the community.

The Early Years

The purpose of this section is to provide information on the respondents' living environments in their childhood and adolescence. By examining the participants' past experiences, we may identify the factors that influenced their criminal behaviour. Areas examined include: place of residence, caregivers, involvement in the child welfare system, and experiences during childhood and adolescence.

As indicated earlier, 74% of the participants currently reside in a city. However, a smaller proportion (44%) said they had lived in a city in the past (see Table 1). Approximately one-quarter said they had lived in towns previously (26%), one-quarter (24%) had lived in rural areas, one-quarter (26%) on a reserve, and 21% on a Métis settlement. These percentages do not add up to 100% as respondents could provide more than one past residence. It is clear that a shift has occurred from rural to urban areas. This pattern is similar to the one reported by Boe (2000) who emphasizes the growing concentration of Aboriginal people in large city cores, especially throughout the Western provinces.

The respondents were asked who had raised them as a child (Table 3). The majority (59%) said they were raised by both parents at some point in their lives. A further one-quarter (26%) were raised by their mothers, 22% were raised by their grandparents, and 4% were raised by their fathers. It is important to note

that the respondents may have lived in more than one home with different caregivers each time.

Table 3. Person(s) Who Raised the Respondent

	#	%
Caregiver[1]		
Parents	40	59%
Mother Only	18	26%
Father Only	3	4%
Grandparent(s)	15	22%
Aunt &/or Uncle	4	6%
Siblings	3	4%
Other Relatives	2	3%

[1] Multiple responses were allowed for this question, therefore does not add to 100%.

Respondents were also asked if they had been placed in other living arrangements, such as orphanages, foster care or residential schools (Table 4). Forty percent of the respondents said they had lived in an orphanage or in foster care. Further, over one-quarter (28%) of the respondents reported that they had been placed in a residential school.

Table 4. Involvement in the Child Welfare System

	Total	Yes		No	
		#	%	#	%
Involvement in Child Welfare System					
Orphanage/Foster Care	**68**	27	40%	41	60%
Residential School	**68**	19	28%	49	72%
Residential School - Length		**19**			
Less than 1 year		1	5%		
1 to <4 years		12	63%		
4 to <7 years		3	16%		
7 to <10 years		3	16%		
Mean # of Years			3.5		
Orphanage/Foster - Length		**27**			
Less than 1 year		9	33%		
1 to <4 years		7	26%		
4 to <7 years		5	19%		
7 to <10 years		0	0%		
10 years or more		6	22%		
Mean # of Years			4.6		

Forty percent of the respondents reported incidents of psychological, physical, sexual abuse, and/or neglect in their childhood. These numbers may under-represent the true figures due to the sensitive nature of the questions. Gerald, a 51 year old Métis, gave an example of sexual abuse:

> When we grew up, we were constantly sexually abused by the priests… Very depressing, you know, by the time you go to this guy's place and you're kind of forced to do that by your parents, again, not knowing that this game was going on. It's constantly (inaudible) at school, you're constantly thinking about what I have to do at this guy's place for dinner

> and you know what is going to happen when you get there… He was quiet, you know, and if we were to tell our parents, we would have gotten a lickin' so we had to keep our mouths otherwise he (inaudible)… taking a program that I was able to start talking about it. When you're a child like that, the thing is such a shame–it's not my shame, it's his shame but when you're scared, it's shame. It's in yourself…

In addition, almost one-half (47%) of the respondents reported they became violent during their child and adolescent years.

The findings described above are similar to that reported by Johnston (1997). He found that behavioural problems, physical and sexual abuse, and severe poverty were common characteristics of childhood among Aboriginal inmates.

Each participant was asked to describe their childhood using three words, which were coded as either positive or negative. Positive descriptions included: happy, fun, caring, loving, and stable. Negative descriptions included: discouraging, neglectful, oppressive, alone, and frightening. Almost two-thirds (62%) of the respondents described their childhood as negative and 81% described their adolescence as negative (Table 5). Sue, a 46-year old Status Indian, gave the following negative comments about her childhood:

> I remember right from the time I was three… there's, it's foggy, but I remember. I was sexually abused from the time I was three until I was eleven, um, by a variety of people, I think it was, ah, two uncles or three uncles. You know, I'm not even sure now but I know they were relatives. And, and, I mean that wreaks a lot of havoc in... my life, you know? And, ah… living in alcohol and drug addicted environment with my family, cause everyone in my family was messed up. You know, my mom left my dad and then I was thrown back and forth. I was thrown in that orphanage and my mom finally rescued me out of there and that's why I ended up with her. And then, ah, and then the man she had been living with at that time, had tried stuff with me. But he never, I could never touch him. But, he used to talk dirty to me. I could never figure out what the hell he was talking about.

Table 5. Childhood and Adolescence - Positive or Negative

	Childhood		Adolescence	
	#	%	#	%
Total	**68**		**68**	
Positive	26	38%	13	19%
Negative	42	62%	55	81%

Frank, a 40-year old Métis, talks about his negative childhood:

> I was in a lot of homes where there was double standards. Where… the real family or the white family would eat steak and pork chops and we'd eat macaroni and beans and that type of environment and the beatings that we went through, the, ah, the psychological and physical abuse. The sexual abuse of my sisters that I saw take place… You know I saw so much, so much. Those things that you're supposed to learn to respect as a child, the authority, the parents, the ah government - those types of people, I found to be, ah, hypocrites. Um, non-trustable… you couldn't count on them, crying for God or a higher power didn't help so there was… nobody there for you. And so, you had to trust and do things on your own. And, there was not respect for anything or anyone because you gave them that rope, you found out that they were all bad. You couldn't trust them. So, and the painful component is… kind of believing that nobody cared.

The findings indicate that the majority of the respondents regarded their childhood and adolescence as negative. The participants experienced unstable family environments and living conditions of abuse and neglect. In response, many resorted to violence in their early years. While some of the alternative childcare settings may have been more positive than their family homes, it is clear that many foster and group homes did not provide good environments for Aboriginal youth and children (Shorten, 1991; Fournier & Grey, 1997).

Getting Into Trouble

This part of the study was designed to explore how the respondent got into trouble and how he/she was dealt with in the criminal justice system. Respondents were asked a series of questions regarding their involvement with the young offender or juvenile delinquent systems. By examining the seriousness of offences committed by the respondents, we were able to recognize and appreciate the significant changes made by the participants.

This study found that 62% of the respondents were first charged between the age of 13 and 17, and 15% were under the age of 13 (Table 6). Therefore, respondents were quite young when they came into conflict with the law. The majority of first offences were property offences (56%). Approximately one-quarter (24%) committed offences against the person, and 21% committed system-related offences.

As also shown in Table 6, 54% of the participants had been dealt with as young offenders. The majority of the respondents (57%) were involved with the juvenile or young offender system for between one and three years. As young offenders, the sentences were carried out in a variety of locations, but the largest proportion (25%) said they had served their sanctions in a closed correctional facility.

Table 6. Involvement in the Young Offender or Juvenile Delinquent Systems

	#	%
Age First Charged	**68**	
8 to 12	10	15%
13 to 17	42	62%
18 to 24	11	16%
25 to 34	4	6%
34 +	1	1%
Mean Age	14	
First Offence	**68**	
Person	16	24%
Property	38	56%
System	14	21%
Involvement in YO System	**68**	
Yes	37	54%
No	31	46%
Type of Placement		
Foster Home	6	9%
Group Home	7	10%
Training School	2	3%
Closed Institution	17	25%
Community	3	4%
Elder	0	0%
Community Member	1	1%
Other	6	9%
Length of Time as YO	**35**	
Less than 1 year	6	17%
1-3 years	20	57%
4-6 years	7	20%
More than 6 years	2	6%
Mean		2.44

One-half (51%) of the respondents said they had between 1 and 10 convictions (see Table 7). A further 19% had between 11 and 20 convictions. In terms of dispositions, 86% had been sentenced to a federal institution[2] and 85% had been sentenced to a provincial institution. Over three-quarters (79%) had received a fine, 69% probation, 41% community service, and 40% received a warning.

Respondents were also asked which of the sentences or dispositions had the most impact on them. For the majority (75%), the turning point was the impact of a federal sentence upon their lives. Provincial sentences (22%) and warnings (1%) did not have such a powerful impact on the participants. Although the prison environment was not a new experience for many of these people, a federal sentence appeared to create the realization that they would be spending a longer period of time in an institution.

Some respondents offered additional explanations in terms of impact. Several claimed they were not guilty of the offence for which they were convicted. Obviously they were very shaken by the reality that they were going to prison for a long time for something they felt they did not do. Some others said they were impacted by the realization that their anger had been misdirected toward people they had not intended to hurt, such as family members. Others commented that they finally realized that they had harmed another person, and in some cases, caused the death of another human being. Prior to this, they said they had not fully understood the consequences of their actions or lifestyle.

[2] As noted in the methodology section, a few respondents who received federal terms said they served their time in provincial institutions.

Table 7. Number of Adult Convictions

	#	%		
# of Times Convicted	**68**			
1-10	35	51%		
11-20	13	19%		
21-30	8	12%		
31-50	7	10%		
More than 50	5	7%		
Mean # of Convictions	22			
	No		**Yes**	
	#	**%**	**#**	**%**
Dispositions				
Fine	14	21%	54	79%
Probation	21	31%	47	69%
Provincial Institution	10	15%	56	85%
Federal Institution	9	14%	57	86%
Warned	41	60%	27	40%
Victim Compensation	57	84%	11	16%
Community Service	40	59%	28	41%
	#	**%**		
Longest Sentence	**68**			
Less than 1 year	4	6%		
1 to 3 years	32	47%		
4 to 6 years	19	28%		
7 to 10 years	7	10%		
11 to 15 years	3	4%		
More than 16 years	3	4%		
Mean Sentence Length	5			
Disposition with Most Impact	**68**			
None	1	1%		
Provincial Institution	15	22%		
Federal Institution	51	75%		
Warned/Sent Home	1	1%		

Participants were asked to provide explanations for their conflict with the law. Four general categories were developed from their responses: wrong place at the wrong time, an addiction and criminal lifestyle, anger and rebellion, and confusion. Leman, a 34 year-old Status Indian says he was at the wrong place at the wrong time:

> Sometimes I go for walks at night, and, happen to be in the wrong place and they start harassing me… Yeah, all I know is that they're sending you up (inaudible) the street questioning. People asked me all the time… I've been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

A more frequent explanation offered by the participants involved drug and alcohol addictions. For instance, Sue, a 46 year-old, Status Indian, blames her criminal involvement on addictions:

> I was an addict. I was an alcohol and drug addict and I was a prostitute and…and, ah, my life was so disordered that, I mean, I didn't know any other way. No one took the time to try to teach me that there is another way to live. I lived… and grew up with street people. You know, that's all I knew.

Many of the participants explained their conflict with the law on anger and rebellion. Jason, age 34 years, explained:

> I was a very angry kid and I learned it from my ah (inaudible) molested. I didn't know how to deal with my, my when I was victimized and I, I, I thought everything was (inaudible) growing up the way that I was it was normal to be that way.

Similarly, Kim, a 24 year-old, viewed her criminality as follows:

> I think it was just a matter of me being (inaudible) rebellious towards anything with authority that including my mother, my grandmother, the police, you know? I don't know if that's all there was, but just a matter of that. And I think to this day too I still have problems with authority figures.

Finally, some respondents experienced a feeling of confusion. Bill, age 34, explained "I was always in, in and out of trouble. I guess I really had no direction.

I was just, ah, kind ah spirit of the moment kind of guy then". Ashley, a 42 year-old male, who described his early years as lonely, hateful and confusing, reported "I think it was mostly my own, ah, my own confusion I had bottled up within myself".

Participants were also asked to reflect upon what they would have needed from their parents or caregivers to make better choices and to prevent their criminal involvement. Two major responses were communication and family support. Earl, age 53, made these comments about the importance of communication in the family:

> Yeah, well I think if I probably was brought up in a family where there was some communication or some love that was shown or you know, if there was some understanding if I have somebody in my family a mom or dad, that I could go, that I could talk to, let them know how I was feeling or what. That just didn't happen in my family. I didn't have anybody to turn to. I didn't have nobody to talk to about how I was feeling.

Many participants identified lacking family support in their lives. They believe if this support had been a part of their family experience, their lives may have turned out very differently. Zane, a 40 year-old Status Indian commented:

> I would have wanted them to be, be better parents. Well, it's like not using alcohol. To be more involved in, in my culture. Native Culture. More, more ah, stability, more money.

Similarly, Lou wished for "more support, more affection, [and] more attention".

These insights illustrate the importance of supportive and attentive families with solid communication and problem solving skills. As seen in the responses, these family characteristics were lacking in the participants' lives, and more so, in terms of crime prevention. One of the numerous challenges facing Aboriginal communities, governments, and family service agencies, is the need to ensure that Aboriginal families become stronger and healthier. This observation

reinforces the argument that funding for family intervention and crime prevention programs will have a positive and long-term impact on reducing Aboriginal crime.

Getting Out of Trouble

This section addresses the factors that were associated with participants finding their way out of trouble with the criminal justice system. Respondents were provided with a list of factors that were identified as influences that helped people out of trouble. Information from the participants concerning these influences can point the way to "what works". These insights can be a basis upon which to design and implement treatment and intervention programs that can initiate and/or reinforce the process of behavioural change.

Table 8 provides a list of influences that respondents said helped them get out of trouble. The list of influences can be grouped into three general categories: culture, programs, and personal. The culture category refers to the positive impact elicited by learning more about Aboriginal history, culture, and spiritual practices. The program category referred to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal programs offered inside and outside of institutions. The personal category referred to personal changes experienced by the participants. For example, respondents stressed the importance of receiving support from family and friends, ending their substance abuse problems, desiring a better lifestyle, and feeling sick and tired of crime.

Table 8. Influences for Getting Out of Trouble

Type of Influence	Yes		No	
	#	%	#	%
Controlling the use of alcohol and drugs	58	85%	10	15%
Family	56	82%	12	18%
Sick and tired of being in trouble	55	81%	13	19%
Seeing a better way of life	52	76%	16	24%
Sense of personal identity	52	76%	16	24%
Contact with Elders	49	72%	19	28%
Friends	49	72%	19	28%
Aboriginal spirituality and ceremonies	48	71%	20	29%
Programs by outside agencies	48	71%	20	29%
Aboriginal programs in institutions	44	65%	24	35%
Correctional programs in institution	38	56%	30	44%
Prison visits	34	50%	34	50%
Aboriginal programs in community	29	43%	39	57%
Correctional staff	29	43%	39	57%
Other spirituality	24	35%	44	65%
Correctional programs in community	22	32%	46	68%

The largest proportion of the participants (85%) stated that controlling or stopping their alcohol and/or drug abuse was a strong influence for helping them out of trouble. It is important to note the role carried out by addiction programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Relapse Prevention. Furthermore, the relationships established with others in these programs also seemed to play a critical role in offender rehabilitation. This is demonstrated in the following comments made by Earl, a 53 year-old Métis:

> Well, after about two and half years of being dry… I reached a point where I couldn't go on anymore. I was thinking about suicide on a daily basis. I was thinking about going back to drinking cause I didn't know what was wrong. I didn't know that just not drinking is not enough, that I need more in my life and that when I started to get involved in AA and that started the change for me.

The second largest proportion of respondents (82%) said that family members were an important factor in prompting change. In addition, 72% of respondents noted that the influence of friends helped them get out of trouble. One respondent, Bob, was very clear about the influence of his family:

> Oh yeah, they were a support… they were always working and they come to visit me and they never lost hope on me. My Native family, all my brothers and sisters and their families, and a few friends.

As illustrated, the presence of family members and friends in an offender's life could be a positive influence. However, family and friends were not always a good presence, sometimes they were a negative influence.

Many of the participants (81%) explained they had become sick and tired of being in trouble with the law. In addition, 76% said that they realized there was a better way of life. Dennis, a 38 year-old Inuit, said:

> I was sick and tired of being sick and tired, of just being sick and tired. I just said that helped a lot and that kept me out of trouble with the law… It was more like, I need my life. I don't need this life in jail.

For many, a criminal lifestyle centred on drugs and alcohol had become tiresome. Others grew dissatisfied with the process of committing crimes and returning to jail. It is possible that a combination of factors or certain life events affected these central influences. It is unlikely that one sole factor was responsible for turning a person's life around. However, this does not negate the importance of these influences, nor their implications for corrections and community intervention strategies.

Three-quarters (76%) noted that a sense of personal identity was important in their straightening out. Barry, a 37 year-old Status Indian, believed that his new sense of personal identity was very important in his rehabilitation:

> I had to be honest with myself eh? First time I was… really honest with myself. I put my life in the hands of true friends eh. So, but what I done was begun to look into myself, began to go… talk to the Elders and I'd sit alone… I take one day at a time. Do what you can, better yourself. Be the person you want to be.

Aboriginal culture and spirituality represented a strong theme in the participants' responses. The respondents emphasized the importance of Elders and Aboriginal-centred ceremonies and programs in the institutions as factors for change. Seventy-two percent of respondents said that Elders had a positive effect on turning their lives around. Barry, a 37 year-old Status Indian, believed an Elder first introduced him to Aboriginal culture:

> Elders… when did I first meet an Elder? I was about, maybe, 24. And I met an Elder inside and I sat down with him and I spoke to him about… who I was as a person, eh? Who gave me information on my blood relatives, who knew them, right? And that's when I first learned that, ah, my great-uncle was, ah, Lightening, eh? He was a well respected Elder in the community at the time, eh? So, I had to learn… about him and about myself… That first time I sat down with an Elder… I've always gone back. Even today, I go back with an Elder or something. Indian, Indian cultures, I thought, was a way of life. I was… told that it was a way of life and I was taught by these Elders.

In addition, 71% said they were involved in Aboriginal spirituality and ceremonies within the institutions. Bill, a 34 year-old Status Indian, believed that Aboriginal spirituality and ceremonies started his healing process:

> I used to go to sweats once a week when I was in Drumheller. It started my healing… give me time to think about, reflect back on what… happened in the end. And, to pray for those people who done what they done to me. For… forgiveness for them. And… that made me madder and made myself feel real good about myself and be at peace with myself and those people.

Aaron said:

> I think that's one of the things that ah really turned my life around… Like I went into a sweat and confessed. You always (inaudible) ask forgiveness from the Creator, you know. And, ah, even from when I was a child, when I did that, that's (inaudible) sweats. So, spirituality and ceremonies are really important to me.

A large number of respondents (71%) said that programs administered by outside agencies helped them get out of trouble. An examination of the differences in programs delivered by correctional staff, Aboriginal agencies, and non-Aboriginal agencies would perhaps help to understand these contrasting opinions. Alex demonstrates the importance of working with people in the community and establishing outside contacts:

> Because you're with people, you're working with people that are out there on the street. And you know what they're going through and you know where you're heading. You know? And… what you could be running into. You hear from all these different people. Their downfalls and what happened. And you learn to see, well, okay, hey, I'm heading where this guy was heading, and I better slow down here, you know? That's what I seen. That's what I found very helpful. I…went to that program last Spring.

The development of community programs and contacts is an area that warrants further research and evaluation. It is evident by these comments that offenders regard these intervention strategies as fundamental upon release from institutions. Improvements must be made to both the quality and quantity of programs and community links offered, if Aboriginal offenders are to successfully reintegrate into society.

Two-thirds (65%) of respondents said that Aboriginal programs in the institutions were helpful in turning their lives around. Conan, a 41 year-old non-Status Indian, discusses why Aboriginal programs are important:

> They're all very important in prison today. Um, the brothers and sisters, Native offenders really need this. There's a big difference in prison, you

> know, between all offenders… So, it's hard to really get to an institution and go through those programs and open up when there's other inmates sitting around. Um, but you notice once you get into an Elder's program… the atmosphere, everything changes. Like, everything just turned right off and you're in a whole different environment and it's like it's just a natural way to… go through these teachings, to speak and… to be open and honest about yourself and not worry about someone respecting what you had to say or laugh at you… It's very important for Native spirituality and Talking Circles, especially.

One participant expressed the need for Aboriginal programs to be "grounded in the culture of the people". Some respondents expressed concern that the purpose of Aboriginal programs and Elder assistance may be exploited within a correctional setting.

These excerpts demonstrate the importance of offering Aboriginal inmates access to Aboriginal culture and spirituality within institutions. It is partly these practices that are central to successful rehabilitation and reintegration for Aboriginal inmates.

Aboriginal programs in the community were not strongly cited as influencing factors for getting out of trouble (43% said they were useful). For example, Frank, a 40 year-old Métis, expressed the following reservations about Aboriginal programs in the community:

> Aboriginal programs and services in the community… a large component of them are administrative only. They aren't real, something that Aboriginal people have designed the policies and procedures with, um, I mean, there's one thing to administer a program, be it a community support worker or whatever it is for when you have to work for the community instead of going to jail. A lot of stuff is just courses. And, ah, we need to… design real programs and real services for… those people coming out of the system.

Staying Out of Trouble

The participants were asked to describe the influences that they believed helped them stay out of trouble. The influences should provide direction toward what programs and services are needed in the community for offenders being released from prison and those already released. Programs and services are not only necessary when offenders are first released from prison. For many, these supports are needed long after they get out. Table 9 provides the list of influences for staying out of trouble.

Table 9. Influences for Staying Out of Trouble

Type of Influence	Yes		No	
	#	%	#	%
Personal values and identity	64	94%	4	6%
Family	64	94%	4	6%
Staying clean and sober	62	91%	6	9%
Self improvement activities	61	90%	7	10%
Friends	59	87%	9	13%
Helping others	54	79%	14	21%
Employment	50	74%	18	26%
Education and training	48	71%	20	29%
Aboriginal spirituality and ceremonies	48	71%	20	29%
Cultural activities	46	68%	22	32%
Therapy and counseling	40	59%	28	41%
Self-help groups	29	43%	39	57%
Programs in community	28	41%	40	59%
Other spiritual practices	27	40%	41	60%
Correctional staff	17	25%	51	75%
Correctional programs in community	14	21%	54	79%

Almost all respondents (94%) stated that personal values and identity were a strong influence in their staying out of trouble. Jean, a 47 year-old Status Indian stated:

> My personal values… I've learned to like myself, you know? And, I know before I can do anything for anybody else, I've gotta… learn to like myself.

Furthermore, 94% identified the family as having an important influence in their lives. Fred, a 57 year-old Métis reflects on his positive relationship with his family:

> I have a good relationship… I have kids… I am very proud of my kids. They're all really successful young people. And, ah, most of my kids are surprisingly very well… placed and, ah, they're smart. They've never been in trouble.

In addition to families, 87% of respondents noted the importance of friends. However, it was often noted that new friends are necessary for their new lifestyles. Larry emphasizes the need to choose good friends who help you stay out of trouble:

> I still have a lot of trouble with friends cause it's that lack of trust again. I been burnt in so many ways that it's… starting to show, you know? Even as a child, I mean, I had friends but they were always doing stuff I did or I'm doing the stuff they do, you know? It's getting involved in trouble and stuff like that. To me, friends don't do that… Now, I know that. I'm picky with the friends I make. Yeah. I mean, if I had to do it different, the same lifestyle I did before, I'd be choosing all the wrong friends. And, that could lead me back to prison, you know? I'm not blaming them but usually hitting walls with them and stuff happens and even though, if you don't do anything, you're still a part of the scene, the picture. So, it's kind of hard to get out of it. No matter what you say, people are going to say it anyway. So… for me, the best thing is to stay away. Be choosey, I guess.

A large proportion of the participants (91%) stated that staying clean and sober was an important factor in staying out of trouble. Derik, a 32 year-old Status Indian believes that being sober and clean gave him back his life. Before he gave up drinking he was always in trouble, but once he stopped his life slowly

started to turn around. Jason, a 34 year-old Status Indian, said the following about his sobriety:

> What I value is, ah, my sobriety and, ah, how I look at myself… I believe in myself and, ah, that… I can accomplish things… if I want to, you know? There's nothing that can stop me from being, doing things the way… I've always wanted to do. I'm very proud of who I am.

Another theme elicited from the participants' responses focused on helping themselves. The influences of self-improvement activities (90%) and self-help groups (43%) illustrate this. Self-improvement activities involve taking part in leisure activities that help the rehabilitation process. These may include sports, reading, or spending time with family members. Self-help groups are activities a person undertakes with a group of people such as healing or friendship circles. Dan expressed his feelings about these groups:

> AA program, traditional healing circles, talking with friends, and exchanging ideas… There are some beautiful experiences. Like, there's a lot of help here in town. I could talk about the healing circles, AA. Some of it, it is okay. Yet, the program tells us that sometimes we have to go outside the program for the help we need. For me, that was the Elders.

In addition to helping themselves, respondents also noted that helping others was a factor in staying out of trouble (79%). A large majority of the respondents volunteer their time for various organizations. Their volunteer work demonstrates their willingness to become productive members of society. This is exemplified in Ashley's story of his volunteer work:

> Yeah, I still go do my talks and stuff, whenever I'm asked to. Kids… around here I talk to a lot. Kinda, I think it helps my own self. I know that I'm trying to give something back that I see, ah, took when I was younger. You know, and the kids today out here, most of them, are abandoned even if their parents are at home. They're abandoned… So, when I see it, myself, in these kids that are running the streets and it's sad because they're heading… to a cage, you know what I mean? Social Services first then Reform School, then Provincial then the Penitentiary. You know and we see it coming and they don't have this

> ‘don’t give a shit’ attitude. Yeah, just to let them know that someone cares. That someone is gonna listen, you know what I mean? Someone will listen if you just hold on and stop running around with these stupids.

Employment (74%) was another important influence noted by the participants. According to some respondents, employment gave them focus to their lives and provided them with support from their co-workers. Lane, a 32 year-old Status Indian, believes that having a job keeps a person to busy to get into trouble:

> Cause without a job, you start getting that element back into your head again, like, it would be easy for me, right now, as I’m speaking, to go downtown and pick up a gun… So, I choose to earn my own money. It makes me feel more productive and it makes me feel a lot better to know I earned this money… Took me two weeks opposed to, maybe, one day but still I earned it with my own physical effort. And, it makes me feel more productive, in other words, more responsible.

In addition, 71% of respondents said that education and training represented positive influences. Nancy, a 43 year-old Status Indian, believes that education was a turning point for her:

> I decided to go to school and, ah, so that’s actually what… kind of was a turning point for me. Because I started to realize I still had potential or I had something there. I didn’t know what it was, cause I was very ignorant and naive in a lot of ways about things. Just… knowing that I was still capable of, you know, making these marks. Um, you know, getting up and being, you know, getting up everyday in time; taking a bus into Lac La Biche; going to all these studies. Things started changing for me there because before I didn’t have that kind of living schedule. Yeah, because… I had many, many years of… no routine.

Support for education is further related to the importance associated with learning about Native history and establishing an identity. This is demonstrated in the following comment by Sally:

> I’m really “wholified” to my Native identity, you know? I remember when I was going to, ah, the Saskatchewan Confederate College… and it was in the College that I learned about who I was. You know, learned about my people, who they were. And, that’s really helpful to me. Actually, just to

> overcome the negative feeling inside. And some days in class, I would have to literally force myself to put my hand up to answer a question because I would hear my mom's name – you stupid old squaw, you know, you'll never amount to anything. Stuff like that held me back a lot. So, I looked around the class and I seen all these people with their hands down. All these Native people and, I thought, maybe they're thinking the same thing, you know? But, one professor told me, he said, "Don't be… shy to put your hand up and answer questions." And, I still remember that, you know? The College really did help me, you know… in having a good identity.

Seventy-one percent of respondents said that participation in Aboriginal spirituality and ceremonies were integral factors in staying out of trouble. For example, Barry, a 37 year-old Status Indian, believed that Native spirituality gave him a positive self-image:

> That's when I started learning about... myself a little more and going to sweat lodges and… in 1985, well, I went to a Native giving ceremony, eh? Which is, ah, something that I cherish because it identifies me, not only in… other dimensions, I will say… Spirit world, you know… It allowed me to finally be identified, I guess, you know, as a… person.

In addition, 68% of participants said that taking part in cultural activities such as sweats, sweetgrass, pipe ceremonies, and sacred circles were positive influences. Derik explains the important role Aboriginal culture has in keeping his life straight:

> I run sweats now… I'm heavily involved in making different pipes for most of the prominent people all over the world. I've been heavily involved in all different kinds of ceremonies, ah, in a healing capacity way as well as a counselling way. And, I've been all over the world… delivering programs, delivering presentations, and doing healing works.

Fifty-nine percent of respondents stated that therapy and counselling were important influences. For example, Glenn, a 46 year-old Status Indian, believes that therapy and counselling helped him become the person he wanted to be:

> I took the EMRD Psychologist, ah, criminal psychologist I've seen. Elders, Native Elders, I've seen. Um, Bear Woman, you know, drug and alcohol treatment centres. Um, scripture studies help me quite a bit. And, right now, I'm… involved with a lady that's… they call medical intuitive. Yeah, that's the one that brings the spirit back to the spirit. Like, it's from its original state. That's where I'm at right now. I just… for our son. That's why I said I was out there. And what she does is that she brings the spirit back to its normal position. And that's where it explodes. You take right off. There's no stopping you. So that's where I'm going.

Once again, it is necessary to highlight the importance of elders in the respondents' integration. For many, elders act as role models, friends and advisors. Couture (2000) suggests that their intimate knowledge of Aboriginal culture and history allows them to work as both teachers of tradition and holistic healers.

In this study, we found that the respondents had no or little concept of Native culture. For many of the respondents, their knowledge of and experience with Native culture had been negative. It was one of abuse, neglect, shame, and self-degradation. A recurring theme in most of the stories was that a positive Native culture did exist. In most cases, it was the contact with the Elders that clarified this misconception of Native culture. Marvin's story is an ideal example of how Elders lead offenders into recovery:

> Native Elders, sweats, going to Sacred Heart Church, meetings, AA meetings. I made first contact with [name] in 1975. That was my Elder and I asked him how you pray on residential school. He told me just acknowledge where the anger's coming from… and all these books and meditation. About 15 months now, I been meditating and turned into a Buddhist monk. I always remember the Elder and he told me that acknowledge where that anger comes from and that's how I do. I meditate and I go to a sweat and I meditate and I sweat. So, that's what I do. That's my major change in life.

This finding reinforces the need to have Elders available to offenders in the institutions, as well as in the community upon their release.

The respondents were asked for their advice on what could be done to help others straighten out their lives. Joe, a 53 year-old Status Indian, believed that inmates need to be taught real skills:

> To me the government's not been doing right. Now, when an inmate gets out they should find him a job and…either re-train them. You know, something with what they want. Like, cause when I… got out, they didn't offer me nothing… to help better yourself, like. Get prepared more when you're going to get out.

Felix believed successful reintegration into society depended mostly upon the individual. Many respondents talked about gaining control of their lives and taking responsibility for their actions. Marcus, a 27 year-old, exemplifies this point by stating that change could only be achieved if the person changed for himself:

> I just know one thing is for sure… a person has to really want something… They have… to want it themselves. They can't have it for other people. And, you'll know that no one can by how far they'll go to look for it, those little things that will help them.

However, it is still important to acknowledge the role played by others in the rehabilitation and reintegration process. For example, family, friends, community supporters, Elders, therapists, and counselling groups have all made a significant impact on the offenders' lives to varying degrees. The continued and positive support from outside individuals is clearly important, in addition to, the programs and Aboriginal practices available in the community. From these responses, it has become evident what areas of community intervention need to be further developed and expanded.

CONCLUSION

These respondents have shown that staying out of trouble can be done but only when certain elements in their lives are right. In most cases, it took many abuses, for example, physical, mental, neglect, abandonment, to create the person they had become before they straightened out their lives. Conan, a 41 year-old non-Status Indian, believed that he was trained to be a non-caring person from the abuses that he suffered, “So, I mean, you’re already trained at birth, you know? You see nothing, hear nothing, feel nothing, say nothing… And, you take this with you into the world”. This was a typical attitude for most respondents.

The majority of respondents described their childhood and adolescence as negative. From their stories, the abuses they suffered were atrocious, and it is amazing that some even survived. Many described situations of physical, sexual, psychological and/or neglect. Some of these abuses were perpetrated by family members, priests, foster care parents, foster care children, and step-parents. These abuses left permanent scars on the recipients. These respondents went into their troubled teenage years not trusting nor caring what they did nor what was done to them by others. This was demonstrated in a story told by Earl, when he said, “I just started to get angry at the system, at society, at my family, and there was just much anger building”. This was a typical sentiment held by most of the respondents. Their hatred for society was staggering but, even more disturbing was their hatred for themselves which was portrayed in many different self-abuses. Barry, believed that alcohol and drugs caused him to be abusive:

> I was abusive to myself and to other people. You know, ah, I was into… drinking and doing drugs… Ah, I was abusive toward myself, eh? But I had, you know, I had fun, I guess you could say. I wouldn’t look at it as fun now. I mean, I’ve learned a lot from it.

Barry never explained what had happened to him in his childhood but to say that he left home at the age of 13 to live on his own. He is still on the road to recovery but has yet to explore within himself the reasons for his behaviour when he was younger. He does talk about his volunteer work with kids and how he treats them with kindness no matter what they have done. This could be a window into what happened to him (a lack of compassion when he was a child). Jean, a 47 year-old Status Indian, blames her self-destructive behaviour on low self-esteem, "My self-esteem was pretty low and I remember cause of my upbringing. Like, my father always used to [be]… verbally abusive and physically abusive." This lack of self-esteem was a common characteristic for many of the respondents.

Lou, a 27 year-old, Status Indian, explains why he did not care what happened to him when he was younger:

> I was abused quite, ah, frequently within these foster homes. Ah, which had, I think, a devastating impact on my self-esteem and my self-worth. So, I became very isolated with my feelings and, ah, wouldn't even talk to anybody or socialize…. I felt worthless. The abuse started when I was about, ah, nine years, progressed until I was about 13. Started drinking at that time, I started, ah, stealing alcohol off my mom and dad and we'd come home and party... The abuse was, like, all forms: sexual, physical, mental, spiritual. Any kind of abuse you could really think of, I was basically given. I became angry, I guess. Very angry… I was always told that, ah, I would never amount to anything. That I was a dirty little savage. So, I began to believe it cause it was almost daily basis, which, um for me, really ah hurt me and made me, ah, feel dirty and made me feel that, just basically worthless, eh? Not really caring if I was gonna live. I think, at times I even wanted to die. I attempted quite a few times to take my life by injecting cocaine…

Self-esteem and self-worth were repeated in most respondents' stories. These two important factors of being a healthy person were usually missing in most of these respondents. Lou gave great insight into what caused him to have such a troubled life. There was not one abuse but many abuses that caused Lou to turn out as he did. He was told he was worthless. He began to believe he was

worthless and started acting like he was worthless. A big turning point for Lou was Native culture as it gave him a feeling of pride in his Native heritage instead of feeling like a “dirty little savage”.

When discussing why they were in conflict with the law, most respondents had similar types of reasons, for example, no values, loss of identity, drug and alcohol dependencies, no family support, no culture. For example, Lee, a 49 year-old Status Indian says:

> Yeah, I… felt rejected and felt an outcast. I felt nobody loved me in my… family anymore. I felt that I was just a number out there and people weren’t paying attention to me. People were scared of me. So… when I was in the community, I normally just went in the bush by myself. So, I was sort of stand-offish because of the way things… were, ah, I didn’t have what I wanted when I was young. I didn’t get what my stepbrother had. You know, I had a stepbrother and he had more opportunity to get what he wanted and I didn’t.

What helped turn these people around? The respondents often mentioned the word respect - the respect they received and gave to others. Gary, a 29 year-old Métis, stated that you need to stop hating yourself and accept yourself if you’re going to straighten out:

> Coming to terms with yourself, ah, there is a lot of programs provided but it’s no good if people don’t want it. So, there’s got to be acceptance. You know, a person gains just from doing it - there’s no carrot dangled in front of their eyes… just by being involved. It’s kind of like a fifty-fifty shot if you get an inmate working in a place to help other inmates because they can cause jealousy or it becomes a domination thing as well as, ah, a role model.

For Gary, his love for his children helped turn him around. “The thing is that I wouldn’t ever let anybody near and I’d love it, you know? My god, they got a big smile! They showed me how to let people be people”. For the first time in Gary’s life, he was accepted for who he was. It was this acceptance that changed his perception of himself, “It’s like, I think differently - different walk, feel different, look different”.

Most respondents also said they had an attitude change. Felix, a 57 year-old, Status Indian, had this to say about his new attitude:

> My attitude has always been a part of my recovery, my success. An attitude that I can always help people. I have an attitude that, um, has grown out of dysfunction that I grew up in… Most of my life evolved, revolves around the Church. So, there's been a lot of… new friends, non-alcoholic friends and, ah, acquaintances and the acceptance that I receive there.

These respondents did not change their lives by a miracle but it took many different factors combined to put them on the road to recovery. These factors include: staying sober, spirituality, cultural identity, positive personal identity, and education. For most respondents, it was a combination of these factors that turned their lives around. For some, the steps were different but for most, they all ended with them having a positive sense of personal identity.

Another common theme is giving something back and showing the people they are helping that someone cares for them. This could be something that they were missing in their young lives. Volunteering also shows that they are being accepted by society instead of being outside society. McCormick (1995) stated, "Becoming socially connected with other people is one of the keys to healing for First Nations peoples".

In these life stories, we found that healing took many different forms. The report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) defined healing in Aboriginal terms as "personal and societal recovery from the lasting effects of oppression and systematic racism experience over generations". Csordas (1983) described three kinds of healing: physical, spiritual and healing of memories. These three kinds of healing were shown many times in the respondents' stories in their recovery. Many respondents had false starts in their recovery but were de-railed by old self-destructive behaviours. It was only when they experienced all three healings did they start on their road to full recovery. The road may be different for all respondents but they all had these factors in

common: staying sober, spirituality, cultural identity, positive personal identity, and education.

This study also demonstrates that Aboriginal spirituality and cultural activities were a major factor in the respondents' recovery. However, many respondents mentioned that these activities were not always respected (while they were in jail). According to Zellerer (1992), Aboriginal spirituality was not always permitted and may be discouraged by the institution. The current study found that Aboriginal spirituality was not always taken seriously by the institutions. There was mention of open displays of discourtesy and disrespect for Aboriginal people, objects, and places. The institutions need to show respect for these programs if they are to be respected by employees, inmates, and participants of the programs. Cory, a 53 year-old Status Indian male found that Native ceremonies were often not respected by correctional staff:

> I've encountered a lot of harassment, a lot of obstacles in trying to even get an assessment done in a sweat lodge. There's always guards and they're counting heads. And here I'm trying to do an assessment on every inmate that comes in that circle… all of a sudden, time's up! You know? There's always a way that they try to traumatize the system… We have lots of Elders that work there, but they're just tokens, they're not recognized.

Cultural identity was another important factor in the healing process. For many of the respondents, their first contact with a cultural identity came from contact with an Elder. Some of those contacts were: personal, acting as a role model, and professional (the Elder running the program).

There are many strengths and some weaknesses in this study. The offenders' stories are a great strength and the backbone of this study. The stories were more structured and complex than the first study (due to changes in the questionnaire). Therefore, it was possible to analyze the data in a more systematic way. Using the transcripts as back-up for the questionnaires allowed for better coding. The way the interviews were conducted, very in-depth and

conducted with empathy, was a great strength in having the respondents share openly.

One weakness of the study was that the respondents' energy appeared to diminish partway through the interview. Therefore, the sections on getting out of trouble and staying out of trouble were not as fully examined as the previous sections.

What are the implications of this study? We now have some knowledge of what works for Aboriginal offenders. Aboriginal offenders need not only specific programs, but also need to be taught their culture because most have never had the opportunity prior to entering the correctional system. Most respondents had no self-respect; we need programs directed at this specific need.

It is also clear that there is no one solution for this problem but, many solutions. These respondents started their recovery once they discovered they were worth something and they belonged. Almost all respondents believed they were apart from society. Once shown they were actually part of society or that they could be, they started their healing process.

These responses have important implications for communities, reintegration strategies, and program design and delivery. Key agencies and individuals in corrections and communities possess a unique role in offering culturally appropriate programs and services to Aboriginal offenders. The respondents have extensively claimed the positive and influential impact Aboriginal culture and spirituality has on the healing and rehabilitation process. The importance of family and friends in their lives is also evident, and community support must continue these positive connections for successful reintegration to occur.

Furthermore, the data provide both the evidence for, and the opportunity to, apply crime prevention measures within a community and correctional setting. It is intended that implementing holistic community-based interventions will strengthen Aboriginal persons, families, and communities. More specifically, it is

hoped that the expanded support for and encouragement of Aboriginal culture and spirituality inside and outside institutions will reduce the number of Aboriginal persons involved in the criminal justice system.

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APPENDIX A

NECHI TRAINING RESEARCH AND HEALTH PROMOTIONS INSTITUTE

and

NATIVE COUNSELLING SERVICES OF ALBERTA

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION: A Follow-up Study of Aboriginal Offenders

PHASE II

QUESTIONNAIRE

June 16, 1999

NAME OF INTERVIEWER:

PLACE OF INTERVIEW:

DATE OF INTERVIEW:

PARTICIPANT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER:

SECTION I: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

I'd like you to give me some information about yourself.

Identification Data

1. Full Name of Participant:
   First Name Middle Name Family Name

2. Date of Birth: Day Month Year

3. Where do you live now? City
   Town
   Rural Area
   Reserve
   Settlement

4. Address and Postal Code:

5. Phone Number:

6. Social Insurance Number (for honorarium):

7. Age:

8. Gender: Male: _____ Female: _____

9. Aboriginal Status: Métis __ Status Indian __ Non-Status Indian __
   Inuit __

Employment

10. Are you working now? Yes __ No __ Full Time __ Part Time __

11. In the past three years, how much of the time were you employed? %

12. If not working, how long have you been unemployed? __ weeks

13. If working, what do you do?

14. Is this what you usually do? Yes __ No __ (explain)

15. If working, what is your income per month?

Health

16. Generally speaking, how do you consider your physical health to be?
    Poor __ Fair __ Good __ Excellent __

17. Generally speaking, how do you consider your mental/emotional health to be?
    Poor __ Fair __ Good __ Excellent __

18. Was your health always like this? Explain.

Education

19. Highest grade completed:

20. Attended vocation/business school: Yes No

21. If yes, briefly describe

22. Attended community college or technical institution: Yes No

23. If yes, please give the name and program:

24. Attended university: Yes No

25. If yes, please give the name and program:

26. Attended other training programs? Yes No

27. If yes, please give the name and program(s):

28. Did you attend a Residential School? Yes No
    If yes, where?

29. If yes, how long?

30. Did either of your parents attend Residential School? Yes No

31. Who were you mainly raised by?

Your parents	An uncle
Your mother only	Grandparents
Your father only	Grandmother
An aunt and uncle	Grandfather
An aunt	Siblings
Other relatives	

32. Did you ever have to live in an:
    Orphanage
    Child welfare foster home

    How long?

SECTION II: THE EARLY YEARS

Now, I'd like you to talk about your early years

33. Where did you grow up (check all that apply):
    City
    Town
    Rural Area
    Reserve
    Settlement

34. Please choose three words that best describe what your childhood was like

35. Give an explanation of each word

36. Please choose three words that best describe your adolescent years

37. Give an explanation of each word

SECTION III: GETTING INTO TROUBLE

Now, I'd like you to talk about your getting into trouble

38. Were you ever in the young offender or juvenile delinquent system?
    Yes No

39. If yes, were you ever placed in:

foster home	group home
training school	closed institution
placed with an Elder	placed with a community member
other type of placement	completed sanction in the community

    How long?

40. How long were you dealt with as a juvenile delinquent/young offender?

41. How old were you when you were first charged with an offence?

42. What was the offence?

43. Over the years, what kinds or types of offences did you commit?

44. Over the years, approximately how many offences did you commit altogether?

45. Over the years, approximately how many times were you convicted of offences(either pled guilty or found guilty)?

46. In terms of dispositions and sentences, how many times, as an adult, were you:
    Fined?
    Put on probation?
    Sentenced to a provincial institution?
    Sentenced to a federal penitentiary?
    Warned and sent home?
    Ordered to compensate the victim?
    Ordered to do community service?
    Other dispositions:

47. Which of these sentences/dispositions had the most impact on you? Why?

48. What do you consider to be your most serious offence?

49. What was the longest sentence you received?

50. How old were you when you were last convicted?

51. Over how many years do you consider yourself to have been in conflict with the law?

52. How do you explain why you were in conflict with the law?

53. What did you need from your parents or caregivers that would have helped you make better choices and may have helped prevent you from becoming involved in crime?

SECTION IV: GETTING OUT OF TROUBLE

Now, I'd like you to talk about how you got out of trouble; how you turned your life around:

54. Can you tell me what, for you, were the influences which helped you to get out of trouble? (Explore each of the following thoroughly if applicable–what was involved; who were the important people; and what they did that was influential).

55. Controlling the use of alcohol and drugs

56. Contact with Elders

57. Aboriginal Spirituality and ceremonies

58. Other spirituality such as Christianity

59. Aboriginal Programs in the institutions such as Native Liaison Workers, Talking Circles, Native Brotherhood, Elders' Program

60. Aboriginal programs and services in the community

61. A new sense of personal identity

62. Sick and tired of being in trouble

63. Seeing there could be a better way of life

64. Correctional Programs in the Institution run by CSC or other Provincial corrections such as cognitive Skills, Breaking Barriers, Relapse Prevention, Education, Psychologists, Trades, Case Management–which ones were helpful and why

65. Programs run by outside groups, such as AA, NA, Nechi, N.C.S.A, etc.

66. Correctional Programs in the community–which ones were helpful and why

67. Correctional Programs which were not helpful and why

68. Correctional staff–what were some of the things that individual staff (such as CO, recreation officers, program staff, parole officers, etc.) did that were helpful?

69. Family

70. Friends

71. Your personal values

72. Other helpful influences

73. Visits while you were in prison

Ask the participant to rank the three overall most important influences (1, 2, 3).

SECTION V: STAYING OUT OF TROUBLE

Now, I'd like you to talk about what you do and what you find useful in helping you stay out of trouble. Explore each of the following thoroughly, if applicable– what it means; what is involved; what people are important; and what they do that is helpful.

74. Staying clean and sober
75. Aboriginal spiritual development and taking part in ceremonies
76. Other spiritual practices
77. Cultural activities
78. Personal values and identity
79. Helping others, such as volunteering
80. Employment
81. Education and training
82. Therapy and Counselling
83. Family
84. Friends
85. Correctional Programs in the community such as supervision, relapse prevention
86. Correctional Staff, such as parole officers
87. Programs in the community
88. Self-help groups
89. What self-improvement activities do you do?
90. Other helpful influences

Ask the participant to rank the three overall most helpful influences (1, 2, 3).

APPENDIX B
ONE INTERVIEWER'S EXPERIENCE

My first interview dated July 16, 1999 took place in a dark, un-kept, small apartment building in the no-so-healthy part of the city. I was a bit nervous when I entered the home of a convicted killer, sexual abuser, wife and child abuser. He offered me a cup of coffee and we proceeded to conduct a taped interview. At first, the man sitting just a few feet from me wears a mask and carries a shield in front of him in case I attack, I guess. Approximately one hour into the interview, the shield comes down and later, the mask comes off too. He was just as nervous as I was, if not more, because no one had ever taken the time to sit and talk with him at length before. No one had ever spoken to him without judgement or fear. No one had ever taken the time to get to know who he was, his fears and his dreams. No one had ever shared respect with him. Three hours later, his spirit has touched mine and we hug as I walk out the door. Nine months later, we still keep in touch. He is currently working on writing a book about his life because someone out there really does want to hear his story.

I have interviewed forty-four men and ten women, a total of fifty-four ex-offenders in Alberta. It is an experience I shall never forget. My friends and family would sometimes ask me, "Are you not afraid? These are ex-cons you're sitting alone with!" No, I was not afraid. These were people that were misguided, not taught morals, values or boundaries, not loved. These were people that just plain made some big mistakes and have now learned from them and would like to move on with their lives.

I have learned so much in the short time I spent with these resilient and beautiful people. Through their open and honest sharing I have come to be aware of my personal struggles as a mother trying hard to teach my children 'right from wrong.' I have learned that no matter how much I give to my children, they, as individuals, will ultimately make the final decision of how their lives will unfold. It is their path to walk. We all have a desire as parents to do our best. Some of our children will get pulled into the wrong crowd; some will experiment with drugs; others will kill someone. Some of our children will group up healthy, strong and will succeed in school and become doctors, lawyers and police officers. Our love must endure over all, not matter what our children do because they are not what they do.

I have also learned that it is people like you and me that have never been down the harsh road these men and women have walked, who judge most critically. We are biased by our own views of 'right and wrong.' We label them weak and meek. We forget about the great strength that it must take to walk down that rough road. Have you ever wondered how much patience, tolerance, and overall strength it would take to live on the street? To survive abuse of all kinds and then to be disowned by everyone, including family? Wouldn't you deserve to have a second chance at life? Who are we to judge so harshly? We forget to

forgive, support, enhance and love our brothers and sisters back to health and wellness. We forget about creating harmony and balance. It is better to pick someone up when they have fallen than to kick them when they are down.

Each and every one of these people have become a part of me. I am honoured to have had the opportunity to share a part of me with them and the privilege to be their student.

APPENDIX C
RESPONDENT PROFILE

Code Number	Gender	Aboriginal Status	Age	Pseudonym	Self-Reported Criminal Convictions
1	Male	Métis	49	Alex	Assault, impaired, car theft, B&E
2	Male	Status Indian	52	Aaron	Impaired, B&E, contributing to a minor, assault causing bodily harm, carrying a dangerous weapon
3	Male	Status Indian	36	Arby	Assault, aggravated assault
4	Female	Non-Status Indian	52	Alice	Fraud
5	Male	Status Indian	42	Ashley	Possession of stolen property, violent assault, possession of a weapon, impaired driving
6	Male	Status Indian	37	Barry	Car theft, dealing drugs, made alcohol, robbery, B&E
7	Male	Status Indian	34	Bill	Stealing, assault, trafficking, drug possession, property offences
8	Male	Status Indian	35	Bob	Theft, car theft, wilful damage, murder
9	Male	Status Indian	49	Blane	Car theft, property offences, shoplifting, impaired driving, firearm
10	Male	Métis	35	Colin	Mischief, B&E, obstruction, theft, possession, property related
11	Male	Non-Status Indian	41	Conan	Robbery, assault, attempted murder, murder
12	Male	Status Indian	38	Carl	Trespassing, impaired driving, assault, murder
13	Male	Status Indian	41	Doug	Theft, property damage, armed robbery, assault
14	Male	Status Indian	59	Darin	Assault causing bodily harm, robbery, assault, sexual charge, petty offences, escape
15	Male	Status Indian	32	Derik	Theft, B&E, drug possession, trafficking, armed robbery, unlawful confinement, impaired driving, hit and run, discharging a firearm
16	Female	Status Indian	54	Carla	Possession of liquor, mischief, assault, attempted murder
17	Male	Métis	34	Don	Sexual interference with a minor
18	Male	Métis	46	Dean	Trafficking, impaired driving, assault, theft of a vehicle, manslaughter, possession of a drug
19	Male	Métis	50	Dan	Impaired driving, theft, robbery with violence, assault causing bodily harm, breach of probation, B&E
20	Male	Métis	53	Earl	Assault, B&E, driving offences, car theft, carrying weapons
21	Male	Métis	39	Erik	Impaired driving, possession of drug, assault, trafficking, robbery, possession of stolen property
22	Male	Métis	40	Frank	Possession of drug, assault, theft of a vehicle, weapons, discharging guns

Code Number	Gender	Aboriginal Status	Age	Pseudonym	Self-Reported Criminal Convictions
23	Male	Métis	57	Fred	Robbery, violent crimes, attempted murder, accessory to the fact, theft
24	Male	Status Indian	47	Felix	B&E, possession of drug, theft, fighting
25	Male	Métis	28	Franz	Assault, theft, manslaughter, armed robbery, possession of a weapon, public mischief
26	Male	Status Indian	46	Glenn	Attempted murder, fraud, B&E, assault causing bodily harm, robbery, assault, high-jacking, confining unlawfully, kidnapping
27	Male	Métis	29	Gary	Assault, attempted manslaughter, shoplifting
28	Male	Métis	32	Garth	B&E, shoplifting, theft, grand theft auto
29	Male	Métis	31	Hank	Robbery, assault, theft, grand theft auto, stolen property, failing to appear, assault police officer
30	Male	Métis	52	Harry	Theft, assault police officer, forgery, impaired driving, dangerous use of a firearm
31	Male	Métis	64	Harold	B&E, impaired driving, assault
32	Male	Métis	57	Henry	B&E, theft, forgery
33	Male	Métis	55	Jake	Forgery, theft, driving offences, B&E, assault
34	Male	Métis	53	Jerry	Impaired driving, causing a disturbance, assaulting police officer, assault causing bodily harm, possession of drugs
35	Male	Métis	51	Gerald	Liquor charges, theft, B&E, impaired driving, property offences, fraud, escapes
36	Male	Métis	57	Kane	Assault, B&E, car theft
37	Male	Métis	56	Ken	Impaired driving, B&E, assault, escapes, car theft
38	Male	Status Indian	40	Larry	B&E, sexual assault, aggravated assault, manslaughter, violent torture
39	Male	Status Indian	32	Lane	Assault, B&E, theft
40	Male	Status Indian	34	Leman	Assault, manslaughter
41	Male	Status Indian	27	Lou	B&E, possession of drugs, car theft, robbery, drug trafficking
42	Male	Status Indian	49	Lee	Assault, B&E, theft, drinking underage, forgery, fraud, attempted murder
43	Male	Status Indian	58	Lyle	Open liquor, drunken charges, robbery
44	Male	Status Indian	27	Marcus	Possession of stolen property, assault, drinking and driving, robbery, B&E, possession of drugs
45	Female	Status Indian	42	Candice	Shoplifting, car theft, abandonment, impaired driving, drinking in public, theft
46	Male	Métis	21	Chris	B&E, car theft, theft, driving offences
47	Male	Status Indian	53	Cory	Liquor offence, assault
48	Male	Status Indian	50	Marvin	B&E, theft, assault, trespassing, property charges, assault with weapon
49	Male	Status Indian	39	Jason	B&E, theft, armed robbery, arson
50	Male	Status Indian	53	Joe	B&E, robbery with violence, impaired driving

Code Number	Gender	Aboriginal Status	Age	Pseudonym	Self-Reported Criminal Convictions
51	Male	Non-Status Indian	48	Jeff	Wilful damage, theft, mischief, B&E, assaulting a police officer
52	Male	Métis	47	Mel	Impaired driving, theft, driving offences, drunk in public, violent crimes, grand theft
53	Male	Status Indian	52	Neil	Theft, violent crimes, forgery, drug offences, attempted murder, armed robbery, assault
54	Female	Status Indian	47	Jean	Grand theft, B&E, attempted murder, assault, possession, assault causing bodily harm
55	Female	Status Indian	29	Kim	Assault causing bodily harm, theft, assault, solicitation, failure to appear, concealed weapon, aggravated assault, fraud, intent to wound
56	Female	Non-Status Indian	33	Kristi	Robbery with violence, armed robbery, prostitution
57	Female	Status Indian	39	Diane	Theft, assault, solicitation, attempted murder, aggravated assault, assault causing bodily harm, possession
58	Female	Status Indian	46	Sue	Violence, theft, assault causing bodily harm, fraud, forgery, robbery with violence
59	Female	Status Indian	38	Sally	Assault causing bodily harm, robbery with violence, B&E, soliciting, possession of stolen goods, failure to appear
60	Female	Status Indian	43	Nancy	Robbery with violence, theft, B&E, alcohol charges, prostitution
61	Female	Status Indian	24	Kim	Theft, impaired driving, failing to appear
62	Male	Métis	43	Jay	Violence, assault, B&E, mischief
63	Male	Status Indian	34	Jason	Theft, B&E, assault, aggravated assault, dangerous use of a weapon, sexual assault
64	Male	Inuit	38	Denise	Theft, drinking under age, drunk in public, assault causing bodily harm, attempted murder, uttering death threats
65	Female	Métis	43	Monique	Mischief, theft, arson, trespassing
66	Male	Métis	51	Wayne	B&E, assault, driving offences
67	Male	Status Indian	25	Terry	Robbery, theft
68	Male	Status Indian	40	Zane	Sexual assault, alcohol offences