



# **PROGRAM STRATEGY FOR WOMEN OFFENDERS**

**August 2004**

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# PROGRAM STRATEGY FOR WOMEN OFFENDERS

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### PART 1 – STRATEGIC OUTLOOK

#### **Background**

Mandated by the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA), the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) assists the rehabilitation of offenders and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in institutions and in the community. Pursuant to the Act, CSC is also mandated to meet offender needs through correctional programs. The Act states that correctional programs must respect gender, ethnic, cultural, spiritual and linguistic differences of offenders. Therefore, programs must be designed to meet the special needs of women, Aboriginal offenders, ethnocultural offenders, as well as other groups who have specific needs (Ref.: CCRA Articles 76, 77, and 80).

The 5 guiding principles outlined in the 1990 Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women: Creating Choices—empowerment, meaningful and responsible choices, respect and dignity, supportive environment, and shared responsibility—remain the foundation of the revised Program Strategy for Women Offenders. Programs designed and offered to women offenders reflect this foundation and also the overall statement of principle of the Task Force: “The Correctional Service of Canada with the support of communities has the responsibility to create the environment that empowers women offenders to make meaningful and responsible choices in order that they may live with dignity and respect.”

The original Correctional Program Strategy for Federally Sentenced Women (1994) was developed prior to the opening of the regional institutions for women. Ongoing development in correctional programming (substance abuse, violence prevention, sexual offending), mental health programming (Dialectical Behaviour Therapy and Psychosocial Rehabilitation), education, employment and employability programs, and social programs, as well as research in the area of programming for women offenders<sup>1</sup> prompted the need to update the Program Strategy.

#### **Program Strategy for Women Offenders**

The Program Strategy for Women Offenders provides the framework for program development and program implementation for women offenders in order to maintain a high rate of success on conditional release.

The Strategy outlines the distinctions to be made between correctional programs, mental health programs, and other programs (Education, Employment and Employability, and Social Programs). This distinction, however, does not preclude programs from being “integrated and having a mutually reinforcing effect”<sup>2</sup>. Interventions are multiple, may be different, but most importantly, all interventions support CSC’s reintegration efforts with offenders. The Strategy provides CSC staff, the women themselves, and other stakeholders with a scope of the Reintegration Programs available to women, provides guidelines for the delivery of those programs, and the rationale for each type of intervention in relation to CSC’s reintegration efforts.

Program participation is voluntary and based on informed consent. Program participants are given the opportunity to accept, decline, or withdraw from a program. However, every effort is

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made to encourage the offender to remain engaged in their correctional plan.

### **Women Offenders**

At any given time, approximately 50 to 60% of women offenders under federal jurisdiction are on conditional release in the community. While the figure varies from region to region, overall, women offenders have a high reintegration potential; a high level of motivation to take charge of their lives; they are active participants in the supervision process; and, are receptive to the forms of assistance they are being offered.

Women offenders of all cultural groups often present many inter-related problems which need to be addressed (simultaneously or comprehensively) in order to effectively enable them to move forward. Common issues are low self-esteem, dependency, poor educational and vocational achievement, parental death at an early age, foster care placement, constant changes in the location of foster care, residential placement, living on the streets, participation in the sex trade, suicide attempts, self-injury, and substance abuse. While women are held accountable for criminal behaviour, interventions must take into account the social, political and cultural context unique to women in society. "Crime is a choice, or series of choices, made according to the social context" and mediated by an individual's perception of her environment<sup>3</sup>. CSC's reintegration efforts are designed to offer an increased number of pro-social choices to help women become law-abiding citizens.

Although some basic elements of effective correctional programming may apply to both men and women offenders, there are some elements that differentiate the two. Gender-specific programming must reflect an understanding of the psychological development of women. Current thinking in this area suggests that women place great value in the development and maintenance of relationships<sup>4</sup>. Consequently, "situational pressures such as the loss of valued relationships play a greater role in female offending"<sup>5</sup>. While social learning theories and cognitive behavioural interventions have proven effective with offender populations of both genders<sup>6</sup>, some academics<sup>7</sup> believe that relational theory is an approach that adds effectiveness to programming for women. Relational theory focuses on building and maintaining positive connections and relationships. The main goal is to increase women's capacity to engage in mutually empathic and mutually empowering relationships. To enable change, women need to develop relationships that are not reflective of previous loss or abuse<sup>8</sup>.

### **Risk, Need and Responsivity Principles**

*The Risk Principle:* the risk rating is an assessment of future probability of re-offending if identified treatment needs are not met. The more intensive the risk presented by an offender, the more intensive the intervention should be<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, offenders who present a low risk should receive low-intensity intervention or no intervention. Higher intensity interventions have actually proven detrimental to offenders who present a low risk due to the fact that they are forced to associate with criminal peers through the group process. Similarly, they learn beliefs and values linked to a criminal lifestyle. Effective correctional programming is directly linked to reduction of risk and, therefore, to recidivism.

*The Need Principle:* offender needs are dynamic in nature and measure a variety of interpersonal areas in an offender's life. The identified needs domains from the Offender Intake Assessment

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are: substance abuse, personal and emotional factors, attitudes and beliefs, social interactions and associations, family and marital relationships, education level and employment skills, and community functioning. Assessing a woman's needs provides insight into life history and guides program requirements to ensure effectiveness. Emphasis in correctional programs must be on factors that led to incarceration. Literature suggests<sup>10</sup> that the need principle is applicable to women. However, while some criminogenic needs such as pro-criminal attitudes and association with criminal peers are criminogenic for women, there is preliminary evidence to indicate that some factors are more relevant for women offenders: emotional dysregulation, self-injurious behaviour, suicide attempts and self-esteem<sup>11</sup>. There is evidence that self-injurious behaviour is linked to recidivism<sup>12</sup> and to institutional incidents of violence, substance abuse, and disciplinary problems<sup>13</sup>.

*The Responsivity Principle:* responsivity has to do with matching the style and delivery mode of the program to the learning styles of the participants, as well as their motivation level, their aptitude and ability<sup>14</sup>. Examples of responsivity factors include gender, age, culture, and disability. One major concern with women offenders is the prevalence of mental health needs. Similarly, the needs of low functioning women who need assistance in daily living skills must be addressed. Also, given the added stress associated with prolonged incarceration, timeliness of program participation is of great importance for women serving long term sentences (10 years and over).

### **Principles of Programming for Women Offenders**

CSC is committed to the following principles in its programming activities targeting women offenders in institutional and community settings:

*Women-centred:* each woman's actions must be understood and addressed within the context in which they live. Programs must take into account the socio-political and economic environment from which women offenders have evolved and to which they will return to once released. Recognition of the need for ongoing support must be integrated in all programs. Current programming must also respect the importance and centrality of relationships in women's emotional development.

*Holistic:* The approach to women's successful reintegration is multi-dimensional; therefore the approach to programming must be holistic. Programs designed for women must recognise the importance of understanding the link with all the areas of a woman's life such as her own self-awareness, her relationships with significant others, her sexuality, and her spirituality.

*Supportive environment:* Loss of freedom is the primary consequence of incarceration. An environment that is safe<sup>15</sup> and supportive in its physical layout and which promotes personal interaction and the exercise of responsible choices will help to empower women. It is also essential for staff to assist women in working towards a safe and successful reintegration. To do so, staff must be sensitive to women's issues, and should be fully aware of the goals of correctional programs, mental health programs, education, employment and employability programs, and social programs. The generalisation and transference of skills acquired in reintegration programs is essential to successful reintegration.

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*Diversity:* women offenders as a group are not homogenous. Aside from having different needs, the group includes individuals from varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Diversity also adds to the richness of differences amongst participants. Differences are a benefit to correctional programs, mental health programs, education, employment and employability programs, and social programs. Those differences must be recognised and celebrated. Program staff, and agency staff, must foster an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding of racial issues, sexual orientation and other roots of power differentials in Canadian society. Respecting diversity and minority groups among women not only means recognising differences but also learning about them.

### **Intake Assessment**

Programming for women offenders is an integral component of the Reintegration Process. Women offenders are referred to interventions to address treatment needs to reduce the risk to re-offend. Assessment of risk, of criminogenic needs and referral to programs are initiated at the Offender Intake Assessment.

The Correctional Plan details all programming activities to be undertaken by the offender during the sentence to address the problems which led to criminal offending. Based on the information obtained during the Intake Assessment, the plan incorporates the full spectrum of individual needs and choices, including cultural and spiritual needs. Efforts should be focused on preparing for safe release into the community at the earliest possible time. Release strategies are identified during the Intake Assessment phase; steps to achieving them are outlined early in the correctional planning phase.

Correctional planning is an ongoing activity. Review and updating of the Plan through the Correctional Plan Progress Report occurs on a regular basis, which allows the Case Management Team and the offender to assess progress and accomplishments as she reaches agreed upon goals, and to make adjustments to the Plan if necessary.

### **Correctional Programs, Mental Health Programs, Education, Employment and Employability Programs, and Social Programs**

Commissioner's Directive (726) on the Management of Correctional Programs establishes a framework for the development and management of those correctional programs which contribute to offenders' successful reintegration into the community and are effective in reducing re-offending. **Correctional programs are defined as interventions which address the multiple factors that contribute directly to criminal behaviour.** A correctional program has clearly articulated objectives, participant selection criteria, a process for evaluating progress made by the participant and a process for measuring program effectiveness. Correctional programs are facilitated by qualified and trained program staff and/or agency staff under contract.

There is international support for the development and implementation of correctional programs that are gender specific<sup>16</sup>. In the past decade, the Correctional Service of Canada has set standards of practice that are based on research that is sensitive to the unique situation of women offenders<sup>17</sup>. Consequently, the practice of delivering non-gender specific programs to women offenders is dissipating. Studies based on women offenders highlight the range and density of presenting difficulties<sup>18</sup>. Not all difficulties are criminogenic though, and while it is recognised



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that to be effective, institutional and community interventions must focus on factors that contribute directly to offending, for women offenders there are important responsibility issues to take into consideration (e.g. victimisation issues)<sup>19</sup>.

Programs for women must use an approach that is relevant in dealing with the multi-faceted needs of women offenders as opposed to narrow windows of issues. Women need to address emotional regulation issues which underlie other needs such as cognitive functioning and/or substance abuse. Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) and the Women Offender Substance Abuse Program (WOSAP) are approaches that address emotional regulation needs as well as cognitive functioning and/or substance abuse. Future program development should also be DBT/WOSAP informed to ensure congruency in programming. Spirit of a Warrior is a program which also addresses the multi-faceted needs of Aboriginal women though the focus is on violence prevention and anger management issues. Referrals to programs such as DBT, WOSAP, and Spirit of a Warrior allow for the targeting of the main risk factors while providing an holistic framework for healing<sup>20</sup>. Voluntary participation in Survivors of Abuse and Trauma Programs provide a complement to treatment for women who wish or need to address past issues of victimisation.

### **Programming Guidelines**

The priority for interventions to be set out in the Correctional Plan is on Correctional Programs, Mental Health Programs, Education, and Employment and Employability Programs.

Amongst the array of correctional and mental health programs available to women, the main programs designed to address criminogenic needs are:

- Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT)
- Women Offender Substance Abuse Program (WOSAP)
- Aboriginal Programming
- Institutional and Community Relapse Prevention/Maintenance Program for Women

Considerations for program planning:

- ✚ When a woman is assigned to DBT in the Structured Living Environment, then simultaneous assignment to other correctional programs is inappropriate and may be a burden to the participant.
- ✚ When a woman is serving a relatively short sentence, and she has a high need for substance abuse intervention, then the focus should be on substance abuse.
- ✚ For women in the Secure Units, the focus is on DBT or Psychosocial Rehabilitation (PSR). Other programs should be made available when the woman integrates the medium security population.
- ✚ When a woman is assigned to and completes the DBT Skills Training Program, then she is not required to complete Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R&R).
- ✚ When a woman completes WOSAP, she is not required to complete R&R.



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- ✦ WOSAP does not target needs in the area of violence prevention. However, both DBT and WOSAP address issues of emotion management.
- ✦ For those women who are not targeted for either DBT or WOSAP who have a need for R&R and/or the Anger and Emotion Management (A&EM) Program, the National Program Guidelines apply.
- ✦ To avoid over-programming, offenders who complete an Aboriginal program to address a needs domain will not be required to complete a non-Aboriginal program that addresses the same areas of need. For example, a woman who successfully completes the Circles of Change Program will not be expected to participate in R&R as both programs address the same level of need and are mutually exclusive. The same scenario applies for women who successfully complete the Spirit of a Warrior Program. Those women will not be required to participate in the A&EM Program or other violence prevention programs.
- ✦ The Institutional Relapse Prevention/Maintenance Program for Women is multi purpose. The Program is designed to offer continuous support to facilitate the earliest possible release.
- ✦ The Community Relapse Prevention/Maintenance Program for Women is a risk management tool for Community Parole Officers. Entry is continuous and based on risk and needs. The Program can also serve as an alternative to suspension.
- ✦ Programs for Survivors of Abuse and Trauma are mental health programs which are complementary to all interventions. Participation in those programs is voluntary and not to be included in the Correctional Plan.

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### **PART 2 – CORRECTIONAL PROGRAMS, MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS, EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMS, AND SOCIAL PROGRAMS**

#### **Introduction**

Correctional programs target criminal behaviour (e.g. substance abuse). Mental health services are aimed at symptom reduction and well being (e.g. personality disorders, schizophrenia). Education programs prepare offenders to access improved employment opportunities upon release. Employment and Employability programs are interventions that directly focus on increased job readiness of offenders. Social programs (e.g. community integration program, leisure program) assist and reinforce successful reintegration of offenders as productive members of society. Social programs allow women to demonstrate their wellbeing and support the transfer and generalisation of skills learned in correctional programs.

The distinction to be made between these types of interventions allows CSC to better direct its resources based on its legal mandate. Each type of intervention plays an essential role in safe and successful reintegration and may contribute to reducing the risk presented by women offenders in different phases of their sentences. All programs should be integrated and have a mutually reinforcing effect.

### **CORRECTIONAL PROGRAMS**

#### **Substance Abuse Programming**

Research indicates that women are likely to have a different range and types of problems related to their use of substances than male offenders do<sup>21</sup>. There is accumulating evidence that eating disorders, major affective mood disorders (e.g. depression) and a history of abuse, possibly related to post-traumatic stress disorder, are highly prevalent in women with substance abuse disorders. It should be noted that the physical impact of substance abuse is often worse for women than for men; that the serious physiological ailments caused, for example, by alcohol abuse, may occur with a lower level of consumption or after shorter abuse history for women than for men.

Experts have suggested that programming is most effective when it includes all aspects of the environment. A key component of *Women Offender Substance Abuse Programming (WOSAP)* is community building. The framework for WOSAP is a strengthening of the community or 'milieu' through program integration. WOSAP is a shift from a separate collection of programs to a systemic approach to substance abuse. The interdependency of the different programming components can create momentum and move programming beyond structure and content to living and experiencing change, therefore, creating a supportive environment for remaining drug and alcohol free in the immediate surrounding community. Community building efforts reinforce program goals by fostering a positive institutional culture. As a community building strategy, the implementation of Intensive Support Units in the women's institutions complements programming by offering supportive housing to those women who are committed to remaining alcohol and drug free. Additional community building strategies include: peer support, self-help

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groups, and community forums.

The Programming components of WOSAP are:

- Initial Engagement;
- Education & Pre Treatment;
- Intensive Therapeutic Cognitive/Emotive Intervention;
- Institutional Maintenance and Community Maintenance.

### **Sex Offender Therapy for Women**

*Sex Offender Therapy for Women* is available at all the women's institutions as well as in the community. There are five sex offender specific modules: self-management; deviant arousal; cognitive distortions; intimacy, relationships and social functioning; empathy and victim awareness. The primary goals of treatment for women who sexually offend are to learn to identify the factors that influenced their offences, and to learn how to deal more effectively with them, in order to reduce the risk of re-offending. Factors that influence offences of women who sexually offend may include past victimisation and/or relationships with intimate partners.

A Protocol for the Assessment and Treatment of Women Who Sexually Offend has been implemented to ensure consistency in the assessment and treatment of this small group of women. In addition, a national consultant in the field of women who sexually offend is available for consultation on each of the cases. The intervention begins with a specialised assessment at the time of admission, is ongoing and includes maintenance in the institution and the community. Both short and long-term evaluations will be carried out. In the absence of an empirically based static and dynamic assessment tool, evaluation is based on responsiveness to treatment.

### **Reasoning and Rehabilitation Program (Cognitive Skills Training revised)**

The literature suggests that deficits in the area of living skills are common among women in conflict with the law. Therefore, the *Reasoning and Rehabilitation Program*, adapted for delivery to women offenders, is being offered at the women's institutions.

The *Reasoning and Rehabilitation Program* consists of 38 sessions that focus on the development of interpersonal reasoning skills for effective life management. The Program targets the following specifically identified cognitive deficit areas:

- Self-regulation/self-management: impulsivity;
- Self-regulation/self-management: poor emotions management;
- Egocentrism and social perspective taking;
- Assertiveness and social interaction;
- Criminal attitudes and attributions;
- Critical reasoning;
- Rigid cognitive style.

### **Anger and Emotion Management Program**

The *Anger and Emotion Management Program* has also been adapted for delivery to women offenders who have learned to use violence, or have learned to use anger in conflict resolution. The Program incorporates the past experiences of women as both survivors and aggressors. Time

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is built in for discussion of personal issues, with recognition to the importance of childcare and child custody, of histories of personal abuse, and of grief associated with loss and trauma. There is also recognition that the context of relationships for women offenders is a priority.

The *Anger and Emotions Management Program* consists of 25 two-hour group sessions, structured into six sections. It is based on a cognitive-behavioural approach to anger reduction. It is meant to teach offenders the skills needed to manage anger and other emotions associated with the occurrence of aggression. Although the primary focus of the program is the management of anger, it contains a section on the management of other emotions.

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### MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS

#### Introduction

Gender appropriate mental health programs must respond to the experiences and related mental health needs of incarcerated women. This includes systemic factors such as marginalised backgrounds and situations that may include poverty, discrimination, abuse, and substance abuse.

Commissioner's Directive 840 on Psychological Services defines treatment as therapeutic intervention which targets problem behaviour directly related to criminality and essential mental health needs. The 2002 Mental Health Strategy for Women Offenders defines principles essential to all mental health services for women offenders. The principles are wellness, access, women-centred, client participation, and least restrictive measures. These principles are compatible with the principles defined in Creating Choices.

#### Abuse and Trauma

The high prevalence of violence in the lives of incarcerated women has only been acknowledged since the early 1990s. Surveys of women offenders in Canada indicate that the majority of offenders are survivors of abuse and trauma in their families of origin or with their intimate partners. A 1998 study of women serving sentences for homicide found that 82% had been victims of physical or sexual violence during their lives<sup>22</sup>. Previous studies<sup>23</sup> found that 60% to 90% of women in Canadian federal institutions had been victims of some form of violence in the course of their lives. Furthermore, women offenders under federal jurisdiction have been found to suffer longer periods of abuse and at an earlier age. Abuse was found to be more widespread amongst Aboriginal women<sup>24</sup>.

Though surviving abuse and trauma has not been linked directly to criminal activity, services for survivors are an important component of treatment for women offenders and the need was identified by the women in Creating Choices. Each of the women's institutions has ongoing contracts with community agencies to offer counselling for survivors of abuse and trauma (refer to: Program Guidelines Survivors of Abuse and Trauma).

#### Dialectical Behaviour Therapy

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy is a systematic and comprehensive mental health treatment program targeting emotion dysregulation and the various behavioural difficulties associated with it. In DBT<sup>25</sup>, problematic behaviour is viewed as the result of: 1) deficits in important interpersonal, self-regulation and distress tolerance skills, and 2) personal and environmental factors that reinforce maladaptive behaviours and/or inhibit the use of existing behavioural skills and the development of new skills and capacities.

DBT targets skill development to address dysregulation in the sphere of emotions, relationships, cognitions and behaviours while increasing adaptive behaviours. The goal of DBT is for individuals to increase dialectical thinking, emotional and behavioural patterns—to learn and refine skills to identify and change rigid, dichotomous patterns associated with significant problems in living that are causing them considerable distress.

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DBT treatment is a process that involves the collaborative efforts of the clinicians/service providers and the individual in order to devise the most effective intervention. This process encourages individuals to acquire and generalise skills to more appropriately and effectively address their mental health and other needs at a pace consistent with their needs and learning styles.

CSC has adapted three models of DBT available at the women's institutions that differ with respect to intensity of treatment components and milieu: Comprehensive DBT (for use with inmates residing in the Structured Living Environments); General DBT (for inmates in regular population); and Secure Unit DBT (for maximum-security women). The two primary treatment components are: 1) Individual Psychotherapy (1 hour/week); and 2) DBT Skills Training Sessions (individual and/or group). It is imperative that in the implementation of DBT, these two components are provided concurrently; individuals cannot be in DBT Skills Training without concurrent individual DBT psychotherapy. Other treatment components include: Support /Coaching; Team Consultations (various formal and informal consultations with DBT treatment team members); and DBT National Consultations.

DBT Skills Training involves weekly (or bi-weekly) 2 hour sessions in which specific skills considered relevant to addressing dysregulation in the sphere of emotions, relationships, cognitions and behaviours are taught.

There are six Modules:

4 focus on developing skills in the following areas:

- ✓ Mindfulness;
- ✓ Interpersonal Effectiveness;
- ✓ Emotion Regulation; and,
- ✓ Distress Tolerance.

2 focus on:

- ✓ Formulation of Goals;
- ✓ Self Management;
- ✓ Skills Generalisation; and,
- ✓ Analysis and integration of crime cycle and relapse prevention materials.

Modules in the DBT Skills Training Program are usually taken at least twice during participation in the treatment. For both the CSC Comprehensive and General DBT Models, DBT Skills Training Sessions follow sequential order in terms of delivery. In the CSC Secure DBT Model, the order of Modules is made in consultation with the Unit Psychologist (based on individual needs), and the content is delivered individually or in dyads.

As part of the CSC Comprehensive DBT Model, Skills Training is an ongoing requirement while residing in the Structured Living Environment.

### **Psychosocial Rehabilitation**

Psychosocial Rehabilitation is a comprehensive approach that is the most appropriate and potentially effective program model for individuals with basic skill needs and cognitive

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challenges (particularly persons with severe and persistent mental illness, e.g., severe and treatment-resistant mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and related disorders). A fundamental assumption of the approach is that all persons with mental illness, no matter how severe, have the potential to learn and grow. The main goal of PSR is to help clients take back control of their lives so they can formulate goals and plans that improve their quality of life.

Successful reintegration to the community has often been impeded by an individual's: loss of community living opportunities and supports because of their institutionalization; limited resources, skills and supports; isolation, and a sense of hopelessness brought on by institutionalization; and, inappropriate behaviour patterns learned through institutionalization.

PSR interventions have proven effective at increasing adaptive behaviours, including self-care, interpersonal, vocational and living skills and at reducing problem behaviours, including psychotic behaviours and aggression. It uses a social learning approach that incorporates a variety of techniques based on fundamental learning principles, as well as a variety of skills training, cognitive remediation, positive reinforcement, vocational training and psycho-educational components. This is done within a highly structured schedule. As much as possible, skills are taught in the daily context where they would usually be used.



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### EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMS, AND SOCIAL PROGRAMS

#### Introduction

While correctional and mental health programs focus on the individual and the factors that directly contribute to criminal behaviour, education, employment and employability programs, and social programs are interventions that focus on the safe integration of offenders into society. Education programs are interventions that have been shown to reduce recidivism<sup>26</sup> and also function as preparation to participate in other programs such as employment and employability programs and correctional programs. Employment and employability programs are interventions that focus directly on increasing job readiness of offenders and are ultimately aimed at sustained employment in the community upon release. Research has consistently shown that employment instability predicts re-offending<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, employment is an important area that can aid offenders in their efforts to remain law-abiding. Employment needs must be identified at intake, built into correctional plans and in release planning. Vocational programs and all work-related assignments must be considered as a set of integrated tools to address the significant employment and employability deficits in the offender population.

Social programs help offenders to identify pro-social lifestyles, to choose activities that will integrate them as productive members of society and law-abiding citizens. Women offenders are encouraged to participate in activities and social programs relevant to their interests and needs. Social programs allow for transfer of skills learned in correctional programs, teach women offenders healthy ways of living, and introduce them to increased pro-social choices. Even though they do not directly target wellness or criminal behaviour, social programs, as activities supportive of correctional and mental health programs, play an essential role in CSC's efforts to actively encourage offenders to become law-abiding citizens. Institutions **are required** to offer education, employment and employability programs, and social programs that are deemed essential to CSC's efforts to safely and successfully reintegrate offenders.

### EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT & EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMS

#### Education Programs

Education is an essential program to assist women offenders to become productive members of society. Institutions **are required** to offer education programs as per Commissioner's Directive 720 on Education of Offenders. The purpose of CD 720 is: "To provide offenders with provincially accredited or certified programs which meet their identified education needs to assist them to reintegrate into the community as law-abiding citizens". The focus is to actively encourage women offenders to complete a grade 10 level of education as a pre-requisite to employment while serving a federal sentence. This does not preclude participation in work assignments concurrently.

In all women's institutions, offenders have the opportunity to complete provincially accredited or certified programs.

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The *Keys to Family Literacy Program* provides a creative and flexible approach to literacy while facilitating learning and is closely related to parenting programs. The goals of the program are to link literacy with parenting skills, and to encourage positive familial attitudes and behaviours. This Program is a literacy program that further enhances and expands literacy skills.

### **Employment and Employability Programs**

Employment presents a unique challenge for women as they face a double jeopardy; they have a criminal record and they are members of socially disadvantaged groups in terms of accessing meaningful employment. Therefore, employment and employability programs are needed not only in the institution but must be accessible in the community as well.

Employability is an important contributing factor in enhancing successful reintegration. The collective responsibility of CSC is to ensure that all offenders are job ready. While incarcerated, women offenders need to be given the opportunity to: develop employability skills; gain certified work experience; understand and experience the performance expectations of a private sector employer in terms of pace of work, quality of work, hours of work, etc. Once in the community, women need help and support to access meaningful employment. To achieve this, women offenders should be referred to employment centres in the community where available and when appropriate to the women's needs.

Vocational programs are programs that are normally three months in length, and third party certified. They provide marketable work skills that will prepare women offenders for employment in the institution and the community. Vocational programs for women offenders must provide an adequate amount, intensity, and quality of training in work that is relevant to the job market. Vocational testing is a requirement for women who meet the criteria. Where possible, testing results should be matched to appropriate employment opportunities in the institution.

Institutions **are required** to offer employment opportunities to women offenders.

## **SOCIAL PROGRAMS**

### **Parenting Skills Program**

Parenting Skills Programs are designed based on the 1995 Guidelines for Parenting Skills Programs for Federally Sentenced Women. The Guidelines were designed to help CSC plan, develop, implement, and evaluate parenting skills programming for women. The Guidelines were also meant to help program developers design and deliver material that would best match the needs of this specific population.

A 1999 study based on a review of the Offender Intake Assessments of women offenders<sup>28</sup> revealed that 81.2 % of women offenders have or have had children. Many women offenders are concerned over the lost custody of one or more of their children and have reported that contact with their children, regardless of their age, was essential to their personal well being.

The most promising parenting programs allow for mothers and children to bond, or re-bond in some instances, through long-term contacts. Parenting Skills programs typically include child visitation. Visitation fosters the development or re-development of positive attachments between

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mothers and children, which are linked to the principles of relational theory. By encouraging women to establish positive attachments to their children, parenting programs produce considerable benefits: more stable mothers, who after resolving their conflict with the criminal justice system, can then model pro-social values for their children.

Consequently, the women's institutions **are required** to offer Parenting Skills Programs.

### **Mother-Child Program**

One unique program for women is the Mother-Child Program. Commissioner' Directive 768, Institutional Mother-Child Program aims "to provide a supportive environment that fosters and promotes stability and continuity for the mother-child relationship". The pre-eminent consideration is **the best interests of the child in all** decisions relating to participation in the Mother-Child Program. This includes ensuring the safety and security as well as the physical, emotional and spiritual well being of the child. Institutions **are required** to offer the Mother-Child Program to eligible inmates. However, this requirement is based on long-term accommodation availability.

### **Community Integration Program**

The Community Integration Program was designed to assist offenders in their transition to the community by offering them relevant information. The Program aims to: provide factual information surrounding community living; influence participants' readiness to integrate into society; decrease stress associated with community living; provide an opportunity for participants to objectively evaluate their lifestyle; influence motivation to be successful; identify and develop goals that will assist with personal progress; increase awareness of possible roadblocks to goals; acquaint participants with the development of affirmative action alternatives; and increase participants' awareness of valuable resources available in their community. Offender **must have** the opportunity to complete the Community Integration Program either in the institution or the community.

### **Choosing Health in Prison (CHIP)**

Choosing Health in Prison was developed to provide offenders with education on various health-related topics with the goal of enabling them to make healthy choices. Throughout the program, several topics are covered such as: how to manage stress, the importance of exercising, the different types of infectious disease and nutritional facts.

The Choosing Health in Prison Program includes nine sections that consist of eight individual workshop topics. The sessions are one hour in length. The written workshop presentations are one-half hour in length and are designed to encourage discussion.

### **Peer Support Program**

Partly based on relational theory, the Peer Support Program is a national program and is an inmate-based program for which inmates provide peer support services to other inmates. Parolees can provide similar support to other parolees in the community. Peer Support Team members are volunteers and accepted based on personal suitability and are trained to offer support services to their peers. Recent evaluations<sup>29</sup> have demonstrated that offenders who complete the training feel empowered. Furthermore, the research demonstrated the value of this program for its contribution

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to creating a safe and secure environment in the institutions.

### **Leisure Education Program**

The Leisure Education Program is a national program which has been developed locally by the institutions. The Leisure Education Program promotes health, wellness and nutrition.

Recreational and leisure activities and involvement both with and in the community are important areas of concern for women offenders.

### **Lifeline Program**

Unlike most other offenders, those receiving life sentences do not have fixed release dates. The Lifeline Program is an innovative service provided in partnership with CSC, the National Parole Board and non-governmental organisations. It is a correctional concept involving convicted, but paroled, men and women serving life sentences who have been successfully reintegrated into the community for at least five years. The mission of Lifeline is to provide, through the In-Reach component and community endeavours, an opportunity to motivate inmates and to marshal resources to achieve successful, supervised, gradual reintegration into the community. In-Reach workers are recruited to help other lifers throughout their sentences by returning to institutions to help develop programs for lifers; help motivate offenders; help offenders reintegrate; and contribute to public safety.

The Lifeline program is disseminated through three key components: In-Reach, community resources, and public awareness. In-reach workers try to help other lifers use their time in prison productively. Community services assist lifers as they leave the institution to reintegrate into the community. In-Reach workers and other members of the partnership (CSC, NPB, community-based sponsoring agencies) also meet with interested groups to raise public awareness as to effective, humane corrections, and the situation facing lifers, which in turn fuels community support. They also perform preventive work by trying to deter young people from getting involved in crime or drugs and by developing positive role models.

### **Spirituality & Spiritual Services**

Spirituality is a key component for all women. It impacts on her outlook on life, her self-worth, her purpose, moral and ethical values and ultimately her choices<sup>30</sup>. There is also a strong connection between spirituality as it relates to grief and loss, which is an important part of Chaplaincy ministry.

The Interfaith Committee on Chaplaincy functions in an advisory capacity to the CSC and ensures that religious and spiritual care of offenders are being provided for in a manner that meets the standards of what is acceptable. Chaplaincy to Women is represented on the Interfaith Committee. Spiritual beliefs and practices are often closely linked with an individual's culture and as such must be considered in addressing spiritual needs. To fulfil the requirements to offer spiritual services, CSC considers a number of factors including religious diets, sacred writings, different days and ways of prayer, and diverse religious and/or spiritual leaders. The [CSC Manual on Religious and Spiritual Accommodation](#) offers guidance as well as direction on what the community standards are as well as what is possible in the correctional environment. Through connection with community volunteers and faith groups, CSC endeavours to meet the multi-faith needs of women offenders by providing support from the faith community.

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Aboriginal offenders have access to Elders, traditional social, cultural and spiritual activities.

Community Chaplains provide innovative and supportive initiatives that assist women to safely and successfully re-enter society. Among these are Circles of Support. Circles ideally begin while the woman is incarcerated and continue long after the woman is released to the community. This assistance comes in the form of mentorship, fellowship and practical support. They help many women stay out of prison.

### **Canine Program**

The Canine Programs offered in some of the women's institutions has proved beneficial in many ways. Participants have the opportunity to develop specialised skills in animal training, to provide useful services for the community, to learn a skill which may help them find meaningful employment, and that enables them to use the skills learned in correctional programs. For example, inmates who work as dog handlers gain numerous benefits as they:

- Contribute to society by rescuing and training an unwanted dog;
- Experience a completely accepting, non-judgmental relationship;
- Become exposed to another disenfranchised group by training an assistance dog;
- Become skilled in Operant Conditioning/Behaviour Analysis, a non-punitive, reward-based system of training;
- Practice self-discipline and the setting of boundaries;
- Learn to end relationships in a healthy manner;
- Learn to respect the efforts and successes of others.

### **Recreational Therapy**

Recreational therapy is a process which uses recreation for purposeful interventions in some physical, emotional, cognitive and/or social behaviour to bring about change and to promote growth and personal development. Leisure education encourages offenders to acquire leisure skills, awareness, and knowledge necessary for initiating, planning and participating in recreation activities and maintaining a fulfilling and self-directed lifestyle. This becomes an important factor in self-management and relapse prevention. The types of activity facilitated by the recreational therapist include arts and crafts, music, games and fitness programs.

### **Horticulture Program**

Horticulture is a program offered in some of the women's institutions. The program's objective is two-fold: to foster personal development through self-knowledge and working with others; to foster the acquisition of knowledge and development of autonomy. Horticultural knowledge and the ability to organise work increases job readiness skills.

### **Arts & Crafts**

Arts and crafts are a recognised valuable leisure activity available in all institutions. Commissioner's Directive 760 on Leisure Activities is the policy document which enables arts and crafts activities to be available for inmate populations.

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### PART 3 – ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS

#### Introduction

In Canada, Aboriginal peoples account for 3.3% of the population. In April 2004, 22% of the population of women offenders were of Aboriginal descent, 40% of which were under some form of release in the community.

Aboriginal correctional programs for women offenders must be delivered in accordance with women-centred principles, but also, within an Aboriginal context. Aboriginal programs for women offenders address the needs as identified in this revised Program Strategy and may be a more culturally appropriate alternative to mainstream reintegration programs for Aboriginal women offenders. The programs for Aboriginal women described in this Strategy are relatively new. Evaluations will determine their long-term effectiveness.

#### Aboriginal Programs for Women

The *Circles of Change Program* is a unique and gender-specific program that addresses the criminogenic needs of Aboriginal women offenders. The *Circles of Change Program* includes three rehabilitative strategies: relational, cognitive-behavioural, and solution-focused. The modules include: the process of change; increasing the knowledge of Canadian Aboriginal culture; communication styles; self-esteem and self-care issues; problem solving skills; woman's role in her family of origin; healthy and unhealthy relationships; and social injustice.

The *Family Life Improvement Program* is offered as a six-week full-day program and is designed to give women offenders practice in positive living skills and spiritual awareness. It offers exercises that promote a balanced approach to dealing with anger, violence, grief, jealousy, family relationships and holistic living. This program is based on the belief that Aboriginal culture and traditions can provide a catalyst for the healing of Aboriginal peoples. The Program prepares the participants for more in-depth treatment with Psychologists, Elders, or for other programming activities. It offers alternatives for dealing with many emotions and situations that arise in the lives of women.

The *Spirit of a Warrior Program* was specifically designed to address the needs of Aboriginal women offenders. The Program is divided into four sections: introduction; childhood; adolescence; and adulthood/alternatives to violence. The Program consists of an in-depth intervention that is intended to reduce the risk to re-offend with violence, reduce risk to relapse, improve family relations, improve ability to communicate with others, improve coping skills, and adapt Aboriginal culture and spirituality into all aspects of behaviour and everyday life. It is expected that with a more informed base of traditions, Aboriginal women will be better able to manage their lives.

#### Guiding Principles for the design of Aboriginal Programs for Women

- ✚ Address the prevention of criminal behaviour;
- ✚ Be culturally appropriate and gender-specific;
- ✚ Be (preferably) developed by Aboriginal people who have recognised expertise in



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effective correctional service and traditional cultural healing and will include advisory groups composed of Aboriginal members;

- ✦ Collaborate with external partners on program development and in partnership with CSC;
- ✦ Include the means by which the program and participants can be evaluated so as to determine what, if anything, should be changed, developed or modified. When appropriate, the methods used to evaluate Aboriginal programs will be the same as those used for non-Aboriginal programs;
- ✦ Be managed with appropriate consideration given to staff awareness, program integrity, quality assurance, and performance measurement;
- ✦ Delivery by trained Aboriginal program staff, or agency staff;
- ✦ Choose staff that have experiential knowledge of Aboriginal ancestry, program content, and demonstrated ability to impart the knowledge and skills the program aims to deliver.



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### PART 4 – COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING

#### **Introduction**

Fifty to 60% of women offenders under federal jurisdiction are on conditional release in the community at any one time. However, offering reintegration programs in the community presents unique challenges as there are so few women offenders and they are geographically dispersed (Community Strategy for Women Offenders). Therefore, it is essential that at the community planning stage the plans be creative and flexible. Also, when approaching release planning for women offenders, the approach must be personalised to the women's projected needs in the community.

#### **Community Programming**

Community programming is a complement to, and necessitates, working in partnership with community agencies. The majority of women offenders are involved with CSC for a defined period of time in their lives. It is therefore essential for women offenders to develop a community network to provide them with the assistance they require to lead healthy pro-social lives during their period of supervision and after warrant expiry. Over the years, each parole office has developed close relationships with local partners; these partner-based relationships must continue, as they are an integral part of the present strategy.

Residential facilities in the community are very creative in their approach to programming. They offer locally designed programs to assist women in their safe and successful reintegration. Programs that address a multitude of needs are offered: e.g. substance abuse programs, social skills programs, mother-child programs, relapse prevention programs, etc.

For program development and delivery, the preferred approach is for group delivery, with the flexibility of delivering individual sessions, due to the low numbers of women. Forming groups of more than three participants in the community is rarely possible because of the geographic dispersion of the population. In urban centres, there are rarely sufficient numbers of women offenders under supervision in one area with the same need in the same timeframe. Also, child care issues may interfere with program participation. Therefore, program delivery must be flexible to accommodate both individual and small groups.

#### **Community Maintenance/Relapse Prevention Program for Women**

The Women Offender Substance Abuse Program (WOSAP) was designed to offer intervention and support from admission to warrant expiry. It is a program continuum that recognizes that needs are dynamic and intervention is most effective when it reflects context as well as content.

The Maintenance/Relapse Prevention component is multi-purpose. It is intended to sustain and enhance program gains as well as function as a community program for women, based on the risk they represent. The module has been broadened to meet the needs of all women. The program targets all lifestyle factors which are contributing factors in increasing the risk that women face while under supervision in the community.

This module was also designed to offer continuous support and to facilitate the earliest possible

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release. Women may start CM/RP in the institution and continue in the community. Others may complete it in its entirety prior to release while some may not begin until they are in the community. Continuous entry is also designed to significantly reduce the period women will wait prior to accessing program participation. Given the increased risk of relapse in the first weeks and months of release, early engagement in the group is a priority.

There is no pre-requisite for participation in the Community Maintenance/Relapse Prevention Program.

The Relapse Prevention/Maintenance Program is the third module in the continuum for the Women Offender Substance Abuse Program (WOSAP). It consists of 20 group sessions (which can also be delivered one to one) and targets social skills such as problem solving, conflict resolution, parenting, use of leisure time. The Module is designed around the principles of relapse prevention and acquiring self-management skills. The main goal of the Program is to consolidate continued recovery by providing ongoing skill building, goal setting and support. The Module also includes a transition phase prior to release in the community.

### **Peer Facilitators for Community Maintenance/Relapse Prevention**

Women who have completed CM/RP may be appropriate candidates to play an ongoing role as a peer assistant. This is not a program requirement, but is suggested as another opportunity to promote empowerment.

The following criteria apply to peer facilitators:

- Peer facilitators must have cycled through the program at least once;
- Peer facilitators must have been at a high functioning level in the community for a significant period of time.

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### PART 5 – PROGRAM EVALUATION

Applicable to all correctional programs, the Standards for Correctional Programs form the basis for program evaluation.

#### **Program Development**

Program development is based upon needs analysis, review of literature and current practice, consultation, specific program design, and demonstration projects.

#### **Program Facilitators who deliver Programs to Women Offenders**

Programs should be delivered by qualified, well-trained program staff and/or agency staff; the effectiveness of correctional programs is in part determined by the quality of the program facilitators. Program facilitators delivering programs to women offenders should possess the following qualities:

- Knowledge in theories related to program design: social learning theory; cognitive-behavioural intervention; relational theory; and the process of change;
- Cognisant of an holistic approach (mind, body, spirit);
- Knowledge of (and preferably experience with) women offenders and criminal behaviour;
- Experience in facilitating groups;
- Ability to relate positively and with empathy to women, ensuring that boundaries are clearly defined and in a way that does not compromise the rules and regulations of the institution;
- Life experience or personal qualities that provide empathic understanding of program participants;
- Knowledge of trauma, recovery, grief and the impact of violence on women and children;
- Knowledge of and sensitivity to ethnic diversity in the Canadian context.

#### **Program Evaluation**

Program evaluation is an essential component to correctional programming. Correctional Programs have a framework to evaluate the program's effectiveness. Areas of evaluation include, at a minimum: recidivism, reintegration of participants, assessment of change against program targets, participant satisfaction, rates of participation and attrition, and influence of participant responsiveness on outcome. As an element of correctional programs, pre and post assessment batteries are made up of measures that have been validated with offender populations. Operational units (institutions and community parole offices) are responsible for the collection of program data, including any automated data, which is essential to the delivery and subsequent evaluation of correctional programs.

The theoretical model of evaluation needs to identify the goals of the program and the process. Finally, both qualitative and quantitative methods of evaluation are used for evaluating women offender programs.

#### **Quality Review**

Quality assurance is an essential component for ensuring and maintaining program integrity and serves to:

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- Monitor the appropriateness of offender selection;
- Monitor the participants' completion of the following: program referral, informed consent form, and documentation on premature exit from program;
- Review the number of enrolments relative to the number of program completions;
- Monitor the completion of program assessment data;
- Review post-program reports to ensure compliance with Standards;
- Monitor the completion of pre-, interim, and post-program reports and casework records;
- Monitor the frequency of program delivery;
- Evaluate program delivery through videotape review or direct observation of required sessions and procedures;
- Provide recommendations regarding certification of program facilitators;
- Report on other issues, as required.

### **Program Accreditation**

Program evaluation is a necessary component of the accreditation process. It leads to improvement in program development and delivery and helps maintain program integrity. For the last several years, CSC has been actively involved in a review process to ensure that programs are designed to maximise effectiveness and that they embrace the latest treatment techniques and delivery standards for each specific program area (e.g., substance abuse programs, violence prevention, etc.).

Programs are presented to review panels that consist of internationally recognised experts in the field who assess the program in relation to specific criteria. The panel then recommends those programs that are rated as fulfilling the required criteria to the Commissioner for accreditation. In turn, the quality of the delivery of accredited programs in the field (institutions and community) is then assessed through a process of site accreditation.

Similarly, it is expected that correctional programs designed and delivered to women will undergo a review process of accreditation responsive to gender differences to ensure maximum effectiveness.

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### APPENDIX

#### Relevant Legislation & Policy

The Corrections and Conditional Release Act states that correctional programs must respect gender, ethnic, cultural, spiritual and linguistic differences of offenders (CCRA, 4. (h)). Programs must also be designed to meet the special needs of women, Aboriginal offenders, ethnocultural offenders as well as other groups who have specific needs (Ref.: CCRA Articles 76, 77, and 80).

**CCRA, Article 4 (h).** That correctional policies, programs and practices respect gender, ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences and be responsive to the special needs of women and aboriginal peoples, as well as to the needs of other groups of offenders with special requirements.

**CCRA, Article 76.** The Service shall provide a range of programs designed to address the needs of offenders and contribute to their successful reintegration into the community.

**CCRA, Article 77.** Without limiting the generality of section 76, the Service shall

- (i) provide programs designed particularly to address the needs of female offenders; and
- (b) consult regularly about programs for female offenders with
  - (i) appropriate women's groups, and
  - (ii) other appropriate persons and groups with expertise on, and experience in working with, female offenders.

**CCRA, Article 80.** Without limiting the generality of section 76, the Service shall provide programs designed particularly to address the needs of aboriginal offenders.

Commissioner's Directive (726) on the Management of Correctional Programs aims to establish a framework for the development and management of those correctional programs which contribute to offenders' successful reintegration into the community and are effective in reducing re offending. Correctional programs are defined as interventions, which address the multiple factors that contribute directly to criminal behaviour. A correctional program has clearly articulated objectives, participant selection criteria, a process for evaluating progress made by the participant and a process for measuring program effectiveness. It is facilitated by qualified and trained Program Staff.

The Program Strategy for Women Offenders takes into account and is linked to The 2002 Mental Health Strategy for Women Offenders. The stated goal of the Mental Health Strategy is "to develop and maintain a co-ordinated continuum of care that addresses the varied mental health needs of women offenders in order to maximise well-being and to promote effective reintegration". Correctional programs should be viewed as an essential component to promote effective reintegration, but also constitute interventions, which are complementary to psychological services and treatment.

Similarly, the Program Strategy for Women Offenders must be read in parallel to the Community Strategy for Women Offenders. The Strategy provides a framework for the approaches to be

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taken with respect to women offenders on release in the community.

The Assessment and Treatment Protocol for Women Who Sexually Offend, revised in 2001, is also to be read in parallel to the Program Strategy as it defines the treatment needs of women who have sexually offended.

The following Commissioner's Directives and policy documents are essential components of the Program Strategy:

CD 585 National Drug Strategy

CD 700 Case Management

CD 702 Aboriginal Programming

CD 720 Education of Offenders

CD 726 Management of Correctional Programs

CD 730 Inmate Assignments and Payments

CD 760 Leisure Activities

CD 767 Ethnocultural Offender Programs

CD 768 Institutional Mother-Child Program

CD 840 Psychological Services

CD 850 Mental Health Services

Program Guidelines Survivors of Abuse and Trauma

Guidelines for Parenting Skills Programs for Federally Sentenced Women

CSC Manual on Religious and Spiritual Accommodation

Standards for Correctional Programs guide the development and implementation of correctional programs in CSC.

Program standards include but are not exclusive to:

-Administration of correctional programs;

-Program staff resourcing (selection, training, and certification);

-Program implementation (staff awareness; offender selection; program delivery; materials; group size; participant assessment; consent; and information sharing).

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