



Healing Lodges for Aboriginal Federal Offenders



Correctional Service
Canada

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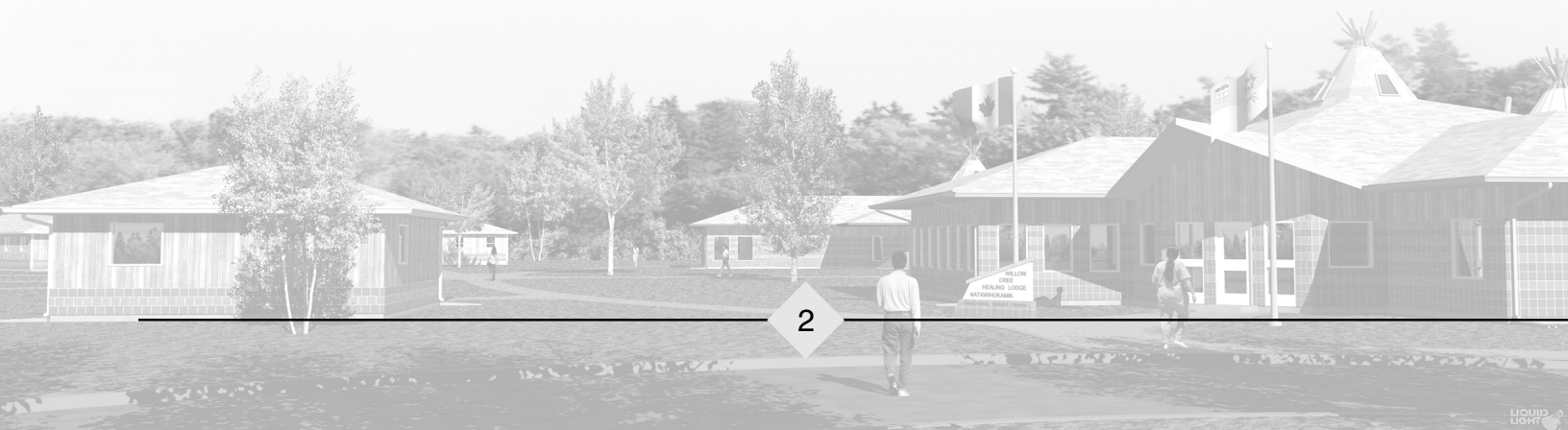
INTRODUCTION

In the last five years, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) has introduced a new concept in federal corrections for Aboriginal offenders. “Healing lodges” offer services and programs that reflect Aboriginal culture in a space that incorporates Aboriginal peoples’ tradition and beliefs. In the healing lodge, the needs of Aboriginal offenders serving federal sentences are addressed through Aboriginal teachings and ceremonies, contact with Elders and children, and interaction with nature. A holistic philosophy governs the approach, whereby individualized programming is delivered within a context of community interaction, with a focus on preparing for release. In the healing lodges, an emphasis is placed on spiritual leadership and on the value of the life experience of staff members, who act as role models.



Two important considerations prompted the creation of healing lodges. There has been significant concern among members of the Aboriginal community that mainstream prison programs do not work for Aboriginal offenders. Furthermore, there is a dramatic over representation of Aboriginal peoples in Canada’s correctional system. While representing only 2.5% of the general Canadian population, Aboriginal offenders make up 17.8% of federal penitentiary inmates - a figure that has doubled since 1987. In Saskatchewan, for example, Aboriginal peoples are incarcerated at a rate 35 times higher than the mainstream population. Estimates suggest that these numbers are growing.

A recent follow-up study by CSC of Aboriginal offenders who have been admitted to the Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge, the Pê Sâkâstêw Centre, and the Stan Daniels Healing Centre, revealed a relatively low federal recidivism rate for some Aboriginal healing lodge participants. This is an early indication that this approach is having a positive effect. It also demonstrates that the CSC is achieving some success in fulfilling its mandate to safely and successfully reintegrate offenders.



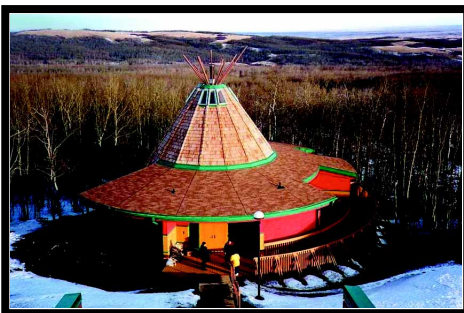
THE HEALING LODGES

Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge for Women

In 1990, the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women recommended that one of five new regional federal facilities be planned specifically for Aboriginal women. The healing lodge concept was proposed by the Native Women's Association of Canada, and by former federal offenders who were themselves Aboriginal and served as advisors to the CSC on the project.



In August 1994, construction of the CSC-operated lodge began. In 1995, the Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge was opened for residents. Okimaw Ohci, which means “thunder hills” in Cree, is located in the territory of the Nekaneet First Nation, in southern Saskatchewan. The organization of Okimaw Ohci is circular rather than hierarchical, with the *Iskewak* (Cree word for Women) at the centre of the circle. The building's structure is also circular, complementing both the lodge's organizational character and the surrounding environment. The focal point is the Spiritual Lodge at the centre, where teachings, ceremonies, and workshops with Elders take place.



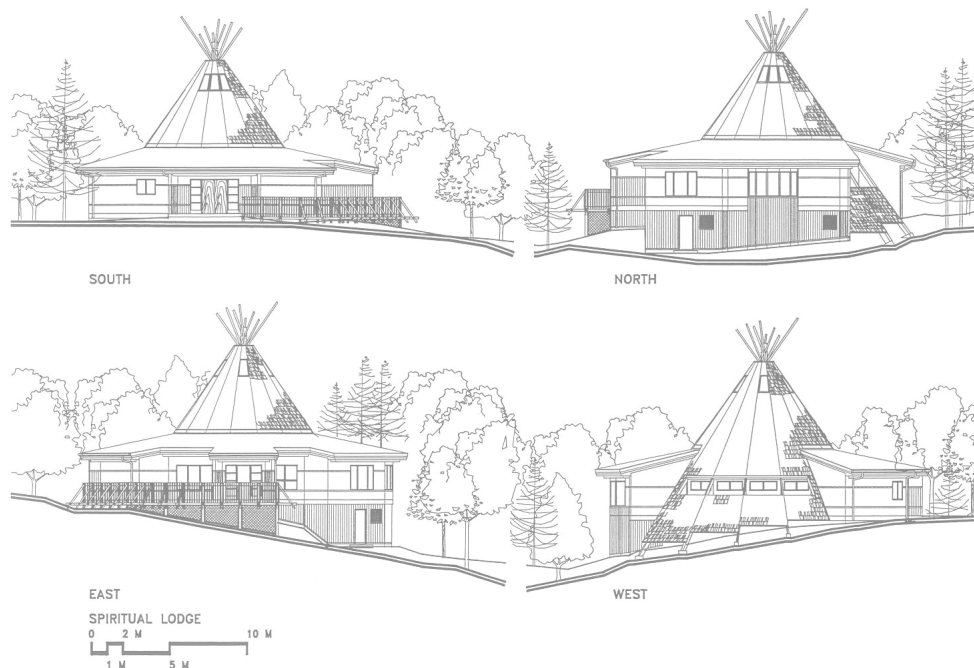
Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge is a 30-bed facility that contains both single and family residential units, as residents may arrange to have their children stay with them. Each unit contains a bedroom, a bathroom, a kitchenette with an eating area, a living room, and, in those units that are built to accommodate children, a playroom.

A personal life plan has been outlined for each of the Iskewak at Okimaw Ohci, which delineates what she needs emotionally, physically, and spiritually to heal. The women also engage in aspects of independent living by cooking, doing laundry, cleaning house, and doing outdoor maintenance chores.



The Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge programs help the women gain skills and begin the healing process. The aim is to help the Iskewak build the strength they need to make essential changes in their lives. Services include education and vocational training, family programs, on-site programs for mothers and children, on-site day care, outdoor programs, and Aboriginal-specific programs, such as language and teaching studies.

Follow-up studies conducted by the CSC have shown that the recidivism rate of offenders who were admitted to Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge is low. This demonstrates the positive effect the lodge has had on the Iskewak and the success the CSC is encountering with the healing lodge initiative.



Pê Sâkâstêw Centre



After the Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge opened, the CSC began planning the first facility for Aboriginal men, in consultation with the Samson Cree First Nation near Hobbema, Alberta. The result was Pê Sâkâstêw Centre (pronounced bay-saw-ga-stay-o), meaning “new beginnings” in Cree.

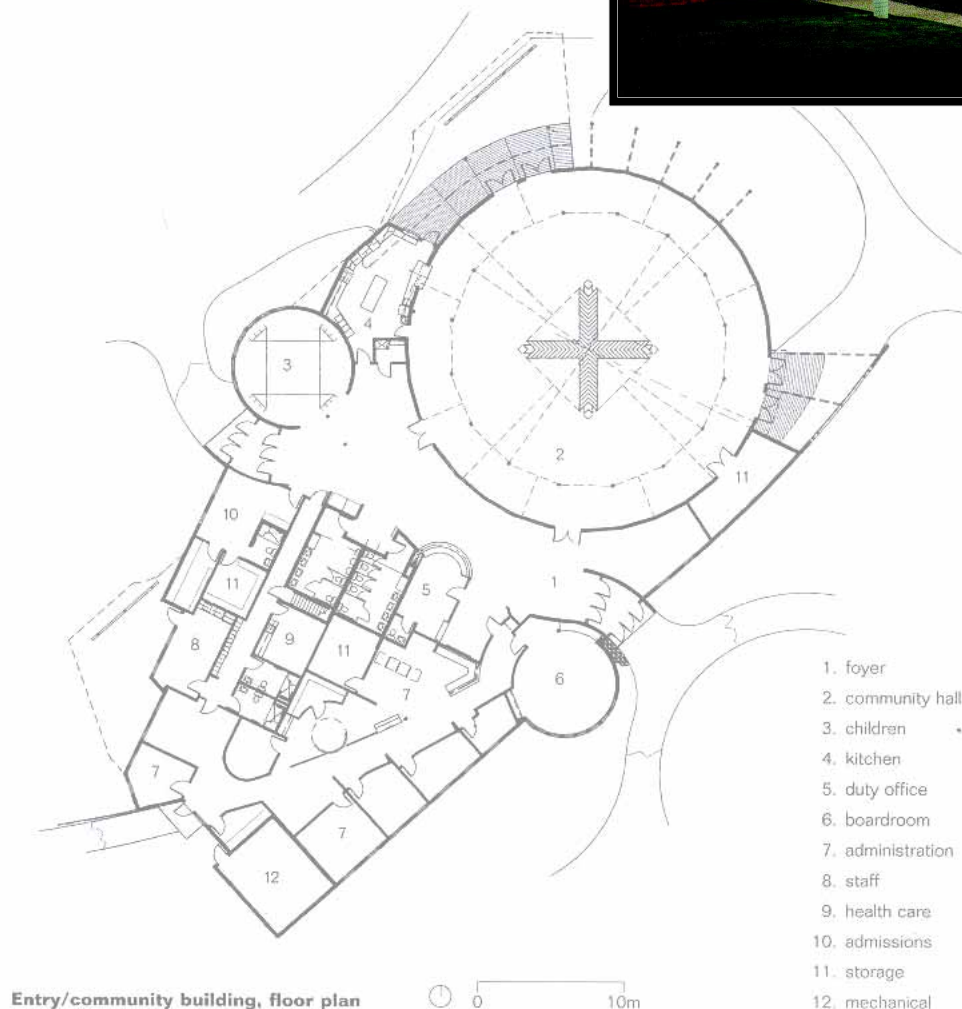
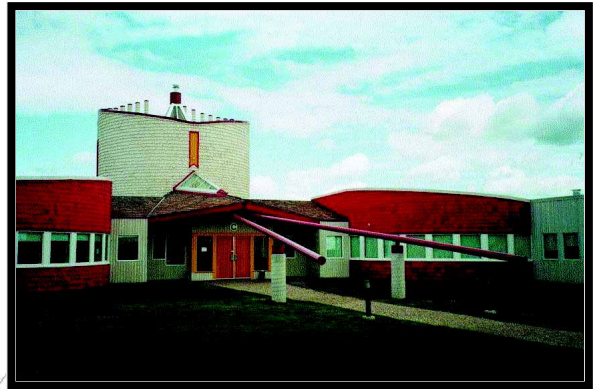
Pê Sâkâstêw Centre is a federally owned minimum-security facility, located on land owned by the Samson Cree First Nation and leased to the CSC. Consultations with community Elders on the values and beliefs of the Samson Cree led to an architectural design that reflects the Aboriginal world view. Six circular buildings are arranged in a large circle on the 40-acre site. Symbols significant to the Samson Cree First Nation, such as the medicine wheel; the four directions; and the colors red, yellow, white, and black, were integrated into the Centre’s design.

The Centre is a 60-bed facility that accommodates 40 minimum-security inmates and 20 day parolees. Many of the Pê Sâkâstêw staff members come from the four surrounding Aboriginal communities.



The programs at Pê Sâkâstêw Centre are based on the belief that Aboriginal spirituality is central to the healing process for Aboriginal offenders. Elders from surrounding Aboriginal communities instruct inmates in traditional values and spiritual practices, while offering counselling and serving as role models. Aboriginal values and beliefs inform the programs, whether they are specifically Aboriginal in subject or not. Thus, inmates who are unfamiliar with Aboriginal practices have a chance to learn about them, while those who are familiar with them are re-exposed to the traditions that will aid them on their path to healing.

A statistical follow-up by the CSC of inmates who have attended Pê Sâkâstêw Centre shows positive results in the areas of recidivism, conditional release, and revocation. This points to the success of the programming at Pê Sâkâstêw Centre.



Prince Albert Grand Council Spiritual Healing Lodge

In 1994, the CSC, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice, and the Prince Albert Grand Council began discussing a shared Aboriginal/federal/provincial healing lodge for male offenders in the Wahpeton Dakota First Nation Community. In August 1997, the Prince Albert Grand Council Spiritual Healing Lodge was opened.

The healing lodge operates under agreements with the Prince Albert Grand Council Management Company Ltd., the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice, and the CSC, in accordance with Section 81 of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA)*, 1992.

The mission statement of the Prince Albert Grand Council (PAGC) Spiritual Healing Lodge is:

To provide First Nations people with a solid grounding in their culture, values and customs: to address the mind, body, spiritual and emotional needs of the individuals, to develop and increase the role and level of responsibility of First Nations in dealing with people who are in conflict with the law.



The structure of the PAGC Spiritual Healing Lodge reflects its commitment to Aboriginal culture, values, and customs. The lodge is a 30-bed facility, in which 25 beds are designated for provincial offenders, and 5 for federal offenders. The PAGC Spiritual Healing Lodge has a staff of 15 people, including an Elder. The buildings are situated on five acres of land in a circular pattern around an inner courtyard. The main lodge contains a spiritual room, meeting rooms, a dining room/social area, and a visiting room. Five residential buildings are used by inmates (who are referred to as “relatives”), while one residential building is reserved for the Elder. The doors and windows are not locked, nor are there any security alarms on the property.

The focus at the PAGC Spiritual Healing Lodge is on self-healing through programs and Aboriginal spirituality and culture. In addition to having an individualized healing plan, each inmate works with his caseworker and an Elder to develop a “healing contract.” In this document, the offender’s goals are identified, as well as the obstacles he faces in achieving them.

The lodge programs deal with the spiritual, mental, physical and emotional dimensions of healing. The PAGC Spiritual Healing Lodge's commitment has created a safe and supportive environment for male offenders who want to follow a traditional Aboriginal spiritual path to healing.

Stan Daniels Healing Centre

Until 1999, the Native Counseling Services of Alberta operated the Stan Daniels Center in Edmonton under a contract with the CSC. In 1999, correctional operations were transferred to the Native Counseling Services of Alberta in accordance with Section 81 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, 1992 (CCRA).

The facility has now become the Stan Daniels Healing Centre. Its mission statement is:

To contribute to the wholistic development and wellness of the Aboriginal individual, family and community. By respecting differences, we will promote the fair and equitable treatment of Aboriginal people and advocate for the future development of our organization and our partners. By developing and maintaining strong partnerships and honoring relationships, we are committed to evolve proactively with our changing environment. We will continue to strategically plan and deliver culturally sensitive programs and community education through accountable resource management.

The Stan Daniels Healing Centre provides a safe, supervised, and supportive residential environment for male Aboriginal offenders. The centre's healing philosophy emphasizes a strong cultural identity as the foundation for building self-esteem.

The Native Counseling Services of Alberta and the Stan Daniels Healing Centre have developed programs to help prepare offenders for their release into the community. Elders play a critical role as spiritual and cultural teachers. With guidance from Elders, feedback from residents, and the contributions of staff, residents are given the opportunity to heal, to grow spiritually, and to reconnect with Aboriginal culture. Services offered at the Stan Daniels Healing Centre include a Relationships program, a Loss and Recovery program, a Family Life Improvement program, an Elders Healing Circle, a Relapse Prevention program, a four-week (28-day) Substance Abuse program, and activities and ceremonies (including the Sundance Ceremony).

The Stan Daniels Healing Centre is located in an urban area. With an emphasis on Aboriginal core programming, and a commitment to healing and the safe reintegration of Aboriginal offenders into the community, the centre offers offenders an alternative to the standard correctional approach.

Elbow Lake Transition



The CSC creates healing lodges not only by building new facilities but also by converting existing federal institutions. The Chehalis community is participating in the transition of Elbow Lake Minimum Security Institution into the Elbow Lake Healing Village. The Chehalis community is participating in creating the Elbow Lake Healing Village, which will be the first healing lodge in B.C.

The facility's physical structure is undergoing significant changes. The Elbow Lake Institution accommodated up to 101 federal offenders, but was in need of renovations. It is now being redesigned to reflect the Aboriginal culture of the surrounding area.



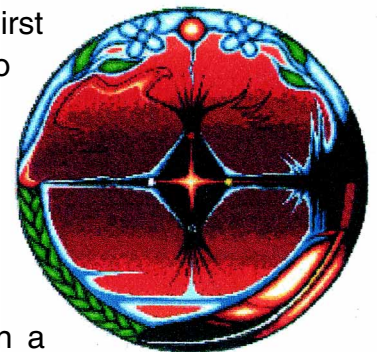
The Elbow Lake Healing Village Advisory Senate Committee was created to oversee the redevelopment, planning, and implementation of the project. The committee consists of five members of the First Nations in the area, and a representative from both CSC and NPB. The committee gives advice on the redevelopment of the master plan and the operational aspects of the transition.

The concept of restorative justice is central to the Elbow Lake Healing Village philosophy. The primary focus is the healing and successful reintegration of Aboriginal offenders into society. In addition to core CSC programs, services will include Aboriginal-specific programs that will involve Elders and incorporate traditional West Coast practices. Consultations on staffing and programming are already under way with neighbouring Aboriginal groups.

Since the healing lodge concept was introduced in B.C., improvements have been noted in the areas of temporary absence, conditional release, and revocation.

Ochichakkosipi Healing Lodge

Since 1990, the Ojibway First Nation of Ochichakkosipi in Crane River, Manitoba, has been working toward creating a community-based centre where First Nations can help their people find healing. In 1998, the CSC began to work with the Ochichakkosipi First Nation toward this objective. The goal was achieved in February 2000, when the CSC began transferring Aboriginal offenders to the Ochichakkosipi Healing Lodge under a Section 81 agreement in accordance with the terms of the CCRA.



The Ochichakkosipi Healing Lodge is a 24-bed facility located on a picturesque, Lake Manitoba peninsula. An Aboriginal architect designed the earthen spiritual centre, which consists of a tipi-inspired central lodge, four residences, and a nearby family cabin for visitors, all designed to inspire spiritual healing and growth.

The lodge's "healing community" consists of 16 full-time employees and 24 offenders who have been accepted into the healing community. The mission statement of the Ochichakkosipi Healing Lodge reads as follows:

The Ochichakkosipi Healing Lodge will assist its members to heal, grow spiritually and to reintegrate successfully into family and the community. In so doing, the Lodge will assist the Correctional Service Canada to meet its own objectives.

The Ochichakkosipi Healing Lodge is more than a correctional program. It is a community that focuses on the mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional healing of all the members. The lodge emphasizes the importance of traditional values, beliefs, and practices. A healing plan is designed to meet the specific needs of each member of the healing community. Offenders are encouraged to attain the goals of personal development set out in their healing plan, with help from staff, Elders, and other community members.

The Ochichakkosipi Healing Lodge offers programs that include training in Life Skills, Alcohol and Substance Abuse, Personal and Family Counseling, Problem-solving, Career Planning, and Leadership. Healing lodge programs emphasize the importance of better lifestyle choices in areas of nutrition, exercise, stress relief, anger management, positive parenting, and sexual/health issues (e.g., choices that reduce the risk of exposure to HIV/AIDS).

The goal of the Ochichakkosipi Healing Lodge is to develop initiatives that will help other communities become healing communities.

Willow Cree Healing Lodge Natawihokamik

In 1994, the Beardy's and Okemasis First Nation, near Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, created a Wellness Committee, which focused on correctional issues. The committee has been vital in generating interest among community members and Elders in the healing and reintegration of offenders. As a result, releasing circles have been used effectively in the community, under Section 84 of the CCRA.

Plans are currently in place to construct a 40-bed facility for Aboriginal male offenders in the Beardy's and Okemasis First Nation community. The design of the healing lodge will reflect the culture of the surrounding Aboriginal communities. Involving the community, and primarily the Elders, in all aspects of programming will reinforce a community-based, holistic program, delivered within the CSC framework. A culturally- appropriate environment, combined with a traditional healing process at Willow Cree Healing Lodge will foster the Aboriginal offender's personal growth, cultural identity, and the development of living skills within the context of a balanced lifestyle.



Offenders wishing to be transferred to Willow Cree Healing Lodge must have a minimum-security classification. Applications will be reviewed by an offender management review board.



Programming at the Willow Cree Healing Lodge will include Substance Abuse Treatment, Brothers-by-Choice programs (which will include an initiation ceremony and community service projects), Relapse Prevention programs, Anger Management, Sex Offender Maintenance, Release Ceremonies, CSC core programming, and psychological services. All core treatment programs at the lodge will have intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual components. In each program, an Elder and a facilitator or counselor will work hand-in-hand.

Although the Willow Cree Healing Lodge is in the preliminary stages of development, it is expected to create a safe, community-supported healing environment for Aboriginal offenders.

Waseskun Healing Centre

The healing lodge approach has also found its way into the halfway houses that the CSC supports. Among these is one that is now called the Waseskun Healing Centre, which is located approximately an hour from Montreal in the foothills of the Laurentian mountain range. After 10 years of operating as the Waskeskun Centre, the facility officially became the Waseskun Healing Centre in 1999.

The centre offers services in French and English and provides residential therapy for men and women referred from Aboriginal communities, and from prisons and federal penitentiaries. Programming is informed by a community-based holistic healing philosophy that incorporates both western and traditional therapeutic approaches. Fundamental to the Waseskun Healing Centre philosophy is a strong belief in the responsibility of Aboriginal communities to participate in the healing journey and reintegration of their members. Some of the services provided at the Centre include intensive residential therapy, group programs, supervision and follow-up support, intensive personal development sessions, and training for communities in prevention and intervention.

To date, Waseskun House and Healing Centre has helped approximately 400 men reintegrate into their communities.

Somba Ke' Healing Lodge



Located just outside of Yellowknife, NWT, the Somba Ke' Healing Lodge seeks to work with all cultures in as many northern communities as possible, towards reintegration of clients into their communities. They currently are under contract to CSC as a community residential facility, in the treatment of Aboriginal federal offenders. CSC hopes to initiate discussion towards establishing a Section 81 Agreement with Somba Ke' in the near future.

The mission of the Somba Ke' Healing Lodge is,

To provide culturally sensitive treatment programs for residents of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut with a focus on the mental health and addictions problems arising from trauma including residential school abuse, family violence, grief and loss of aboriginal residents and northern inmates incarcerated in federal and territorial institutions.

Their programs are run in conjunction with a Traditional Healing Program, and include such topics as Anger Management, Family systems/Healthy Relationships, Addictions Recovery and Traditional Knowledge and Culture. Their goal is to help their clients regain hope and confidence for themselves, their family and their communities, as well as to reduce the rate of recidivism.

The Spiritual Lodge at Stony Mountain Institution

The concept of the healing lodge has even been adopted in existing federal institutions. In 1999, the Spiritual Lodge was opened at Stony Mountain Institution in Winnipeg, Manitoba. In this particular institution, the majority of offenders are Aboriginal. As these numbers grew, it became apparent that specific programming was required to address the needs of the Aboriginal population. The Lodge does not house inmates, but provides a central location for Aboriginal programming, spiritual circles, and ceremonies, as well as office space for the Elders who lead the programs.

Conclusion

CSC will be continuing to review the progress of the Aboriginal Healing Lodges over the next few years. The Aboriginal Issues Branch has already hosted 2 national meetings of Aboriginal Healing Lodge representatives over the past 6 months. There is a definite confidence amongst the Aboriginal people and CSC officials involved in this initiative that we are moving in the right direction.

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