



SPECIAL REPORT

Inmate Services and
Conditions of Custody in
Saskatchewan Correctional
Centres

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Correctional Services for Aboriginal Inmates



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Correctional Services for Aboriginal Inmates

Aboriginal people are disproportionately represented in jails in Canada, and this is especially true in Saskatchewan's jails. Statistics Canada has reported that in 1999, 8% of our population was aboriginal, yet 76% of the inmate population in our adult correctional centres was aboriginal.

This disproportional representation is mirrored in every Canadian province, although the gap is widest in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, which also have the largest percentage of aboriginal residents.¹

We anticipate that the issue of aboriginal overrepresentation in Saskatchewan's jails will be addressed by the Commission on First Nations and Métis Peoples and Justice Reform that was established in 2001 by the Saskatchewan Government to "review [Saskatchewan's] justice system with the intent of devising solutions to overcome systemic discriminatory practices and address attitudes based on racial or cultural prejudice."² Other than discussing the issue generally, we will defer to the commission.

Programming that has been offered in Saskatchewan's correctional centres has not satisfied aboriginal organizations, which have been claiming for decades that the programming Corrections is delivering does not work for aboriginal inmates. Among other things, these organizations want to see more programming with an aboriginal focus and more aboriginal corrections staff.

The Alberta report "Justice on Trial" highlighted the long-standing call for more aboriginal programming by listing the following trends in rec-

ommendations made in 22 reports published between 1967 and 1990.³

- + Native agencies should provide services on contract for Native inmates.
- + Native-tailored programming in institutions should be available.
- + A wider range of Native programming is needed.
- + Spiritual programs should be allowed.

The aboriginal community's lack of confidence in the correctional system's ability to meet the programming needs of aboriginal inmates is reflected in the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations' 1996 publication titled "Corrections Conceptual and Organizational Framework Document."

One of the key principles cited as guiding the development of this document is that First Nations inmates need a system that will guide their behaviour using First Nations values.⁴ Three of the document's recommendations called for First Nations governments and agencies to develop and administer First Nations programs for inmates.⁵

These recommendations are in line with a conclusion of the Manitoba Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry:

*"We wish to stress that we believe this problem will not go away until Aboriginal people and Aboriginal organizations are directly involved in developing and providing spiritual, educational, vocational and counseling programs within or outside correctional facilities."*⁶

¹ Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada* (2001), 10. This phenomenon is not unique to Canada. It also exists in Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United States (Proceedings, International Indigenous Symposium on Corrections, Vancouver, Canada, March 1999).

² Terms of Reference, Commission on First Nations and Métis Peoples and Justice Reform (2001), 1.

³ Task Force on the Criminal Justice System and its Impact on the Indian and Métis people of Alberta, *Justice on Trial* (1990), 11.

⁴ Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, *Corrections Conceptual and Organizational Framework Document* (1996), 2.

⁵ *Corrections Conceptual and Organizational Framework Document* 59.

⁶ A. C. Hamilton and C. M. Sinclair, *Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba* (1991), 443.



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The common argument supporting the need for more aboriginal programming is that aboriginal inmates will be more willing to participate in programming and will be more receptive to the objectives of the programming if it is tailored to aboriginal philosophy and delivered by aboriginal instructors familiar with traditional culture.

Based on our own discussions with aboriginal inmates, aboriginal organizations, and Corrections staff, and our examination of the literature on the subject, we believe that this argument has merit.

Although the problem of overrepresentation of aboriginal inmates has existed for a long time, it is only in recent years that Corrections has been making a concerted effort to tailor their rehabilitative and reintegrative programs and services to meet the unique needs of aboriginal inmates.

Presently, Corrections offers four aboriginal programs that have not yet been tested but may meet its definition of 'effective' programs, that is, programs that have been shown to reduce recidivism.⁷

The Healing Lodge in Prince Albert, which is the result of a 1997 agreement between Corrections and the Prince Albert Grand Council, provides an environment in which aboriginal inmates can work with their needs in a manner consistent with their own cultural and spiritual beliefs. The Lodge is set up to house twenty-five low-security provincial inmates.

The Children's Visiting Program offered at the women's correctional centre helps mothers strengthen their relationship with their children. The Balanced Life Styles program offered at the Regina Correctional Centre and the Journey to Healing program offered at the Prince Albert Correctional Centre are both directed toward improving the life skills of aboriginal inmates. In the fiscal year 2000/2001, 32 inmates participated in the Balanced Life Styles Program, 308 in the Journey to Healing program and 100 in the Children's Visiting Program.

In addition to these four aboriginal programs, the centres offer many activities specifically for aboriginal inmates, including powwows, round dances, feasts, healing circles, sweats, elder counseling, outside speakers on aboriginal culture and spirituality, and pipe ceremonies. Corrections has also entered into early release agreements with eight First Nations, under which these First Nations will supervise and assist aboriginal inmates with reintegration into the community at the end of their sentence.

Saskatchewan Corrections is working toward providing more programming designed for aboriginal inmates and is doing so in consultation with aboriginal groups such as the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, tribal councils, Elders serving the correctional centres and aboriginal community operations.

Corrections' objective is, through consultation, to adopt approaches to programming that meet the goals of both Corrections and aboriginal organi-

⁷ See "Programming" for an explanation of effective programming.



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zations and representatives. Corrections is also working with Correctional Service of Canada on aboriginal programming with a view to sharing resources.

In addition to working toward providing more aboriginal programming, Corrections is steadily increasing the number of aboriginal staff. As of March 31, 2001, there were 99 self-declared aboriginal employees working for Corrections. By January 11, 2002, the number had increased to 125 or 15% of all employees. In all centres except Regina, the percentage of aboriginal employees is greater than the percentage of aboriginal people in Saskatchewan.

Despite Corrections' agreement with the effectiveness of aboriginal programming and the need for more aboriginal programming, and although significant steps have been taken, overall progress has been slow. More aboriginal programs and more aboriginal instructors are needed. This will inevitably require more program space, which is already falling short of needs. It will also require more instructors qualified to deliver aboriginal programming from an aboriginal perspective.

Our discussion of the issues has been admittedly brief. We look forward to a more in depth analysis from the Commission on First Nations and Métis Peoples and Justice Reform.