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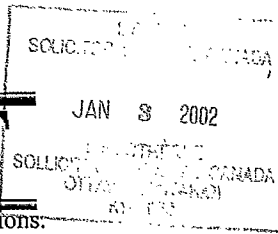
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CONTACT

This newsletter is produced with the cooperation of the regions.



Volume 7, no. 7

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FEATURE STORY

Creating Choices: The Prison for Women Closes and a New Era Begins

On May 8, the last inmate at the Prison for Women, better known as P4W, was transferred to another facility.

Two months later, on July 6, the Solicitor General of Canada, Lawrence MacAulay, hosted a "decommissioning ceremony" at the penitentiary, ending 66 years of hope, discouragement and controversy which ultimately blossomed into a new vision for the management of federal women offenders.

A reflection of its times

Construction of "The New Prison for Women" began in 1925. Its stone walls, copper roof and concrete floors pre-dated the first national radio broadcast, the 1929 Stock Market Crash and the Great Depression. Back then, movie theatres across Canada were showing silent motion pictures, television did not exist and computers were not yet even science fiction.

In January 1934, the new, 100-cell facility opened its doors to a female inmate population of 52 from the Female Department of Kingston Penitentiary. For more than six decades since then, women receiving a federal sentence of two years or more usually served a portion of their sentence at P4W.

Criticism and controversy

Public safety and overcrowding were the top issues in 1925 when work crews from Kingston Penitentiary began construction on "The New Prison for Women." Yet by the late thirties, after examining the state of correctional facilities across Canada, the *Archambault Report* recommended closing P4W as a women's prison on the grounds that it was too expensive for its small population of some 40 inmates.

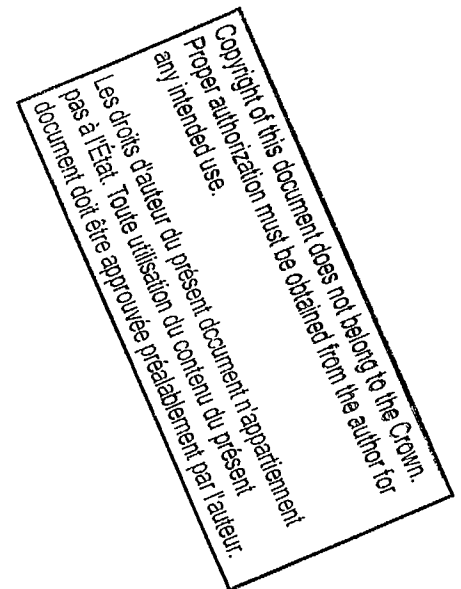
Other critics have variously contended that many of the women offenders incarcerated in P4W were being kept too far away from their families and communities. They complained that the institution's environment privileged the language of the English-speaking majority.

As years passed and awareness grew, other opponents spoke out against a lack of sensitivity to the cultural and spiritual needs of Aboriginal women offenders.

1989 Task Force on Women Offenders

In 1989, to address these issues, Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) Commissioner Ole Ingstrup struck a task force to develop a comprehensive strategy for the management of women offenders.

Co-chaired by the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies and CSC, the Task Force's mandate was to examine the management of federally sentenced women and to develop a plan to guide and direct the process in a manner that was responsive to the unique and special needs of this group.



The Task Force report, entitled *Creating Choices*, was endorsed by the federal government in September 1990.

Creating Choices had a major impact on the future of women's corrections. Its principles of empowerment, meaningful choices, respect and dignity, supportive environments, and shared responsibility served as the driving force behind a number of recommendations, including:

- the closure of Prison for Women;
- the construction of regional women's facilities and an Aboriginal healing lodge (all to be structured in accordance with community-style living environments);
- the development of women-centred programs, including survivors of abuse and mother-child programming; and
- the establishment of a community strategy to expand and strengthen residential and non-residential programs and services for women offenders who are conditionally released.

Since *Creating Choices* was released, and with the support of three successive governments and concerned non-governmental agencies, CSC has made most of the report's recommendations a working reality.

Regional facilities began to open in 1995

Between 1995 and 1997, CSC opened five new regional facilities for women offenders: the Okimaw Ochi Healing Lodge in Maple Creek, Saskatchewan; Nova Institution in Truro, Nova Scotia; Edmonton Institution for Women in Edmonton, Alberta; Grand Valley Institution in Kitchener, Ontario and Joliette Institution in Joliette, Quebec.

The main building of each facility accommodates staff offices, program space, a visiting area and an Enhanced Security Unit for segregation. Inmate houses are clustered behind the main building and typically accommodate six to ten women who are responsible for all of their daily needs.

This community living arrangement represents a dramatic shift from the early 20th century environment of P4W. It gives women control over their daily lives and encourages them to work together as a community.

However, unlike an ordinary house, the doors and windows are alarmed and a perimeter fence with a detection system surrounds the grounds.

Intensive intervention strategy for high needs women

In 1996, shortly after the first new regional facilities opened, it became clear that a small portion of the women offenders required a greater degree of structure and control than the regional facilities provided. After temporarily transferring this population to units in men's institutions and mental health units, CSC set to work on a national strategy for high risk, high needs women offenders.

Announced on September 3, 1999, the Intensive Intervention Strategy called for the modification and expansion of the existing enhanced units of the regional facilities to accommodate those women classified as maximum security or classified as minimum- and medium-security women but with special needs and/or mental health problems.

This Strategy ensures that these offenders receive 24-hour staff support and supervision. All such units in the regional facilities are expected to be operational by September 2001.

No offenders left in P4W

With the last offender gone, 66 years after its thick stone walls were erected, P4W no longer functions as a correctional facility. It now sits empty on the eastern shores of Lake

Ontario, testimony to another time and to the lives of the thousands who have worked or been incarcerated there.

The closure of P4W heralds a major shift by CSC in its approach to the unique needs of women offenders.

Many issues remain to be addressed, such as cross-gender staffing and the over-representation of Aboriginal women offenders. Still, positive changes will continue for the care of women offenders, and P4W will now settle into history.

ACROSS THE SERVICE

ATLANTIC REGION

Citizens' Advisory Committees (CACs) Active in Atlantic Region

- On June 10, the CACs of the Atlantic Region held their annual meeting, with close to 40 participants focusing on the role of CACs in relation to emerging issues within the field of corrections, including Circles of Support and Accountability, Aging Offenders, Offender employment and the new DNA Bank.
- On June 22, the Saint John Parole/Parrotown CAC sponsored a community forum on lifers, with In-reach Lifeline workers sharing their experiences with lifers.
- On June 24, The Halifax Metro CAC engaged in a half-day planning to chart their course for the coming year, with the African Canadian file topping the list of priorities.
- On June 29, two members of the newly formed Truro Parole CAC were key participants in a public forum aimed at explaining conditional release to a small community concerned over the release two sex offenders.

Halifax Metro District appoint Employment Board

- The Halifax Metro District has established an eight member Employment Board of Directors to promote employment for offenders as a means of effectively integrating into the community.
- The role of the Board will include identifying community resources, outlining gaps in services and identifying barriers to employment.

QUEBEC REGION

Program honours Regional Mental Health Centre staff member

- The Regional Mental Health Centre, which is a unit within Archambault Institution, selected a staff member for recognition through the "Mention d'excellence" program.
- Through this program, a staff member is chosen for his or her professionalism, initiative and team spirit.
- On June 7, the organizing committee recognized the efforts and abilities of M. Roger Desjardins, Correctional Officer II.

Regional Reception Centre (RRC) celebrates National Aboriginal Day

- On June 20 and 21, fifty persons at the RRC celebrated National Aboriginal Day through two activities that enabled all Aboriginal inmates within the RRC to participate.
- On June 20, all of the Aboriginal inmates at the Special Handling Unit, which is within the RRC, were able to share a traditional meal with an Elder and representatives from Betsiamites and Kahnawake Reservations.
- On June 21, a traditional meal including caribou, bison and bannock was held for RRC Aboriginal inmates, staff from the orientation Sector and two invited guests.

ONTARIO REGION

Warkworth Institution helps keep Toronto mobile kitchen on the streets

- In keeping with Warkworth Institution's tradition for community assistance, Warden Peter White responded to a request from the Street Connection Christian Church of Toronto for help keep their mobile kitchen running and on the street.
- The mobile kitchen, which is really a converted 16 passenger school bus, required extensive body work, and this was undertaken by inmate crews under the direction of Auto Body Repair and Repainting Teacher Gary Jasman, Motive Power Training Shop teacher Ray Barber and Sheet Metal Training Teacher Ken Ross.

- The project was completed with the application of a new topcoat of automotive paint, and the end result was not only a job to be proud of but also a project to allowed people on the street to continue receiving hot meals.

PRAIRIE REGION

Public Education Night at Edmonton Institution

- On June 28, Edmonton Institution held a public education night, giving neighbours of the institution an opportunity to visit, meet Warden Chris Price, learn about CSC's Mission and the role of Edmonton institution in protecting the public and assisting offenders to successfully reintegrate into society.
- Twenty-five residents of the surrounding rural community enjoyed the tour and the information session, which enabled them to ask questions about the operation of the institution and the integrity of the institution's security.
- Light refreshments and an open, friendly sharing of information resulted in all the participants leaving with positive attitudes towards the institution and CSC in general.

PACIFIC REGION

Staff contribute to local communities

- Staff at Mountain Institution wanted to raise funds for the Children's Hospital and decided to do so by some brave souls getting their hair bleached.
- In all, ten staff are now "blondes" and over \$3000 was raised for this worthy cause, including \$1000 that was donated by the institution's inmates.
- On June 17, William Head Institution's 24-hour Relay Team held a garage sale to obtain funds to donate to the annual Lions Society relay event for children with disabilities.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Tenth International Symposium on Victimology

Montreal, Palais des Congres, August 6-11

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Internet site www.victimology-20000.com

NHQ Womens' Conference

Ottawa, September 7

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Contact is produced in collaboration with the Regional Managers of Communications in the Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Prairie and Pacific regions. *Contact* is available on CSC's Internet web site at <http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca>.

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