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FEATURE STORY

Caring for Elderly Inmates at Sumas Community Correctional Centre

A Handi-Dart bus pulls up to the front entrance of a building in Abbotsford, British Columbia. An elderly man in a wheelchair is pushed up to the bus and is helped gingerly into the small bus, which is used to provide transportation for people who are physically challenged.

It is a typical, every day scene in the community, but this scene is now being repeated daily in an atypical place - Sumas Community Correctional Centre (SCCC).

The number of elderly offenders in Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) institutions is growing and the Pacific Region of CSC has initiated a project to address the problem of providing a humane system of caring for the senior citizens of its inmate population. The Handi-Dart bus is now a regular visitor to the facility. It's cheaper than a taxi and the offenders are on tight budgets.

Most Canadians would have an easier time imagining federal offenders on motorcycles instead of wheelchairs.

Three housing units at SCCC have been dedicated to accommodate elderly and infirm offenders. Many of them have serious difficulty in caring properly for themselves. They are weak and many suffer from a variety of debilitating illnesses. The majority of them are serving long sentences. Some of them will die here.

Number of older offenders growing

The number of older offenders in the CSC is growing at a much faster rate than that of younger offenders.

Inmates who are 50 years of age and older now comprise 12 per cent (1,600) of the institutional population. Thirty-eight per cent of the lifers group will be 55 years old or older before they are eligible for parole.
The older inmate group includes those who have been incarcerated for a long period and have grown old in prison; repeat offenders who have been incarcerated numerous times; and those who are serving their first sentence. There has been an increase of 500 inmates in this group over the past four years.

Geriatric offenders are estimated to cost up to three times more to maintain in a regular institution and, as federal offenders, their health costs cannot be shared with, or offset by, provincial government health plans.

**Unique program trains able-bodied offenders to help infirm offenders**

The SCCC project is called the RELIEF Program. RELIEF stands for *Reintegration Effort For Long-Term Infirm and Elderly Federal Offenders*.

"This is something we had to do," said Jack Stewart, Senior Parole Officer at SCCC, and the person responsible for operating the RELIEF program.

The program is unique in Canada not only because of the concentration of elderly offenders in one facility but also because the infirm offenders are being cared for by other, younger offenders who have been trained as care-givers at medium-security Mountain Institution.

There are four infirm offenders, one care-giver and a care-giver's aide in each of the dedicated units.

The care-givers were trained initially at medium-security Mountain Institution to provide basic assistance in areas that included wheelchair pushing, helping inmates remember to come for their treatments at the institution's Health Clinic, housekeeping and hygiene issues.

The care-givers who were involved with the program soon recognized the requirement for further training in order to meet the needs of their peers.

Mountain Institution implemented a program of care for long-term offenders. This program consisted of training of peer counsellors in basic living skills, chronic and infectious diseases. Those selected for care-giver training have been carefully screened and recommended by their case management team as suitable to take the program. They are trained to provide housekeeping services to the disabled and assist the more vulnerable inmates in maintaining a healthy lifestyle while incarcerated.

Through this program offenders learn to care about others and to be a friend to another in need. They are part of the caring community and provide a valuable service to the prison population. Mountain Institution currently has ten inmate caregivers.
The first group in the program was introduced at SCCC on January 16, 1999 and it consisted of five elderly offenders and two caregivers.

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Randy is a serious man who looks as if he would fit in very well in a lumber camp. His gruff appearance belies his compassion and his tenderness when he is providing care to one of his elderly charges at SCCC.

"We don't consider them our patients, they're our friends," he pointed out. "We just try to give these guys a comfortable day. We make sure they're warm, well fed and rested."

His chores include ensuring that his friends take their medication, helping them to shower and make their beds, helping them to get in and out of their wheelchairs and to get around, and to help keep their rooms clean.

He said he enjoys his work with these offenders but he was shaken up when one of the patients died of cancer. He said it was his task to help the man die with dignity. "That's what we do – we help each other."

Randy was busy helping an offender named Les who has been at Sumas CCC since the care-giver program began. He is confined to a wheelchair.

Les was playing hockey 30 months ago, Randy said. But today his body is weakening, as he suffers from cerebral atrophy with progressive deterioration.

He also described SCCC as much "more accommodating" to him as a challenged person than his previous institution.

He related how helpful Randy is to him, and added that Randy even helped him to build his garden.

He added that he is "honoured to be here."

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Dennis Finlay of the Pacific Region wrote the above article. A longer version of this article will appear in Let's Talk, vol.25, issue 3 due out shortly. This issue will also contain another article on the issues surrounding older offenders, by Pierre Simard of National Headquarters. These and other articles on the same topic will also appear in a new Older Offenders section on CSC's web site.

Contact: Dennis Finlay at (604) 870-7680, e-mail finlaydh@csc-scc.gc.ca
ACROSS THE SERVICE

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

CSC Commissioner Ole Ingstrup retires

- Lawrence MacAulay, Solicitor General of Canada, has announced the retirement of CSC Commissioner Ole Ingstrup effective September 9, 2000.
- Commissioner Ingstrup has served in this position for the past four years and served a previous term as Commissioner from 1988 to 1992.
- After 18 years of public service in Denmark, Mr. Ingstrup has spent 17 years in the Canadian public service and held positions as Chairman of the National Parole Board (NPB), Principal of the Canadian Centre for Management Development and CSC Commissioner.
- "During his tenure, Mr. Ingstrup has displayed an unwavering commitment to the protection of society," the Minister said. "On behalf of all Canadians, I would like to thank Mr. Ingstrup for his excellent service and his leadership of Correctional Service of Canada."

Lucie McClung named new CSC Commissioner

- On August 11, 2000, Prime Minister Jean Chretien announced that Lucie McClung would succeed Ole Ingstrup as CSC Commissioner effective September 9, 2000.
- Ms. McClung is currently Assistant Secretary, Priorities and Planning with the Privy Council Office, a position she has held since January of this year, and she is very well known for the 20 years she worked in a wide variety of positions in CSC.
- With a Degree in Criminology from Université de Montréal, Ms. McClung began as a Parole Officer at Cowansville Institution in the Quebec Region.
- The senior positions she has held at CSC include Warden of Montée St.-Francois Institution, Assistant Commissioner, Audits and Investigations and Senior Deputy Commissioner.
- In making the announcement of Ms. McClung’s appointment, the Prime Minister took the opportunity “to thank Mr. Ingstrup for his dedication and service over the years as Commissioner of Corrections, and to wish him well in his future endeavours.”

QUEBEC REGION

Graduation ceremonies celebrate success of inmate students

- On July 12, teachers, family, school board representatives and staff from Montée St.-Francois Institution attended the graduation of students from the institution’s school.
- Three graduates received their high school diplomas and six other students were cited for their exceptional efforts.
- In wishing all the students well, Deputy Warden Monic Laflamme said that it demonstrated the importance of school in successful reintegration.
- A similar ceremony took place at Drummond Institution last March 25, with three students receiving their high school diplomas.
PRAIRIE REGION

Staff Lend a Helping Hand to Pine Lake Tornado Victims

- On July 14, a campsite at Pine Lake in Central Alberta that was struck with a devastating and deadly tornado resulting in 11 people being killed and about 200 others being injured.
- As they always do when neighbours are in trouble, CSC staff helped out in a variety of ways, with many providing assistance as part of local volunteer fire department, Canadian Forces Reserve Units and with Bowden Institution Health Care helping out by providing supplies to the Innisfail Hospital.
- The Regional Staff College held a blood donor clinic to help meet the urgent needs of the Canadian Blood Service during this type of disaster.
- Inmates also joined in the efforts with work release crews from Bowden Institution working on clean-up efforts.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), NPB and CSC Joint Committee Meeting
Goose Bay, Newfoundland, September 6
Contact: Troy Demers (613) 947-4635, e-mail demerstm@csc-scc.gc.ca

NHQ Women’s Conference
Ottawa, Ontario, September 7
Contact: Trish Lepage (613) 996-0027, e-mail lepagepl@csc-scc.gc.ca

Citizens’ Advisory Committee National Executive Committee Quarterly Meeting
Ottawa, Ontario, September 15-16
Contact: Elizabeth Rothwell (613) 996-6144. e-mail rothwellel@csc-scc.gc.ca

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Contact: Graham Chartier Phone: (613) 746-6776 Fax: (613) 947-0091
E-mail: miep@sympatico.ca