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Canada

HEALING, SPIRIT AND RECOVERY:
Factors Associated With Successful Integration

An Exploratory Study Examining the Lifestyles of Aboriginal Offenders Who Have Become Law-abiding Citizens

December 1994

Nechi Institute

and

KAS Corporation Limited

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada.

Aboriginal Peoples Collection

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Executive Summary

This report is an in-depth study of twenty Aboriginal persons who came into serious conflict with the law, served time in Canadian penal institutions, and subsequently turned their lives around.

Seventeen men and three women agreed to participate in unstructured interviews designed to elicit their own understanding of their early years, how they got into trouble, how they got out of trouble, and how they stayed out of trouble.

Seven of the participants had convictions for murder or manslaughter, all had convictions for a variety of assault charges, some had been sentenced to life imprisonment and were currently on parole, and some had spent most of their adult life going in and out of prison. Now, all of the participants are employed full- or part-time, some are in college or university and all are maintaining their sobriety. All are considered to be law-abiding citizens.

The type of research used for this report focuses on the meaning attached by the individuals to their experiences and how these experiences and meanings fit into the pattern of their lives. It is considered a particularly useful research tool for Aboriginal corrections, since a perennial concern is that many correctional programs are not "holistic" and tend to be based on standard models which do not fit Aboriginal peoples' way of looking at things. The report consists of verbatim quotes from the participants, together with analysis by project staff.

The study finds that most of the participants had early lives which were painful and difficult in significant respects. Although a few had happy early years, most experienced troubled childhoods and suffered from negative influences such as drinking and violence in their immediate environments. Many of them emerged into their teenage and early adult years with feelings of anger, fear, grief, loss, and rejection by significant others and by society as a whole (often in the form of perceived racism).

The participants had different experiences of getting into trouble, and attached significance to different factors and feelings. For all the participants, getting into trouble was associated with extensive use of alcohol or drugs or both. Drinking and taking drugs began in different ways and, to some extent, had different uses for the various participants in the study, but for all of them, the dependency became a serious problem, and getting control of it critical to turning their lives around. Relapses on the path towards sobriety were a common experience.

For some, one or more pivotal movements stood out in the events that led to the eventual change in their lives. Sometimes these were associated with a particular person or a realization that life was not working for them.

Getting in touch with one's own Spirituality was identified as a key to recovery by all the participants. Spirituality was, in turn, linked to a sense of life purpose and personal identity and was seen as a key

element or individual to find their right place in the world. Since "living the good life" is, in the end, a personal choice, a personal responsibility and personal goal, the strength given to the individuals by his or her Spirituality can be critical.

Important influences along the path to successful reintegration included Elders, family, recovering alcoholics, and counsellors or other professionals in the correctional or addictions fields. Some of the useful things which correctional and other staff did in the lies of these twenty individuals are described and analyzed Other Aboriginal persons are more likely to be seen as able to "reach" these offenders that are non-Aboriginal persons. On the other hand, Aboriginal workers whose actions are inconsistent with their teachings can be a singularly destructive force.

The report makes a number of recommendations regarding correctional programming, staff training and selection, the presence of spiritual advisers and practices in correctional facilities, future research, and related matters. They include:

the critical need for and active promotion of substance abuse programs in institutions and in the community, including treatment, intervention and prevention programs;

the need for a holistic approach which incorporates mental, physical, spiritual and emotional dimensions;

the need for private and public-sector correctional and aftercare staff who exhibit certain qualities, such as caring about their work and about people; demonstrating that they can focus on and point out an offender’s positive qualities and abilities; not giving up on people, and "keeping after them"; noticing when an offender takes an interest in something positive; the ability to communicate their humanness, respect for others, and ability to forgive; following through on undertakings; and "walking their talk" through sobriety and integrity in particular; and

the continuing availability of Aboriginal spiritual programs and representatives in correctional settings, with great care being taken to ensure these programs incorporate genuine teachers and teachings.

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The Aboriginal Corrections Unit of the Ministry Secretariat, Solicitor General Canada, particularly Ed Buller and especially Joan Nuffield, for their decision to fund the project and to provide on-going support.

A special thanks is extended to Dave LaSwisse for his courage to talk and write about his life. His story is an inspiration!

Finally, we acknowledge Bert, a participant in this study who, in his own way, said what we all had in mind:

".... It takes a long time to get over, like to stay out of jail, to learn how to stay out of there. A person has to learn how to stay out and not go by time, like just living more each day out in the street. Eventually, it adds up, it builds up and trying to learn to cope with a new life too, of having a street life. That is something that I never used to have, I never knew. Probably what for me, and any suggestions too, as far as all this too, what I was saying earlier, it might be good to make a book. Make a story out of these kinds of things, like these interviews and distribute them in the jails, that is what I was thinking might help. I know for me, if I was in jail, I would rather have gotten something like that, where I wanted to read something like that. It might trigger, a story about ex-cons or something. You know, like have that on the book. It might get people to really read it and start reading some of these stories and they realize that they are not the only ones that went through it and going through it and actually to realize there can be a life out there. You know, I never used to believe I would ever stay out and try and have a steady job, or to make my own living. I never knew those things, but maybe that would help."

Maggie Hodgson, Nechi Institute
Doug Heckbert, KAS Corporation Ltd.

Background to the Project

Rationale

The Nechi Institute, in Edmonton, Canada, was incorporated in 1974 by Native people who were determined to reduce the devastation caused by alcohol and drug abuse in Native Canadian communities. Neichi maintains a comprehensive program of training. In 1990-91 Nechi Institute contracted with Mr. Dave LaSwisse to write a story of his recovery. At that time, he was working as a counsellor at Poundmakers Lodge, an Aboriginal treatment centre located near Edmonton and St. Albert, Alberta. Staff at Poundmakers receive some of their training through the Nechi Institute. Nechi staff, particularly the Executive Director, Maggie Hodgson, recognized the power in his story. That account took the reader from Dave's childhood in Saskatchewan, his family and residential school experiences to his entrance into the world of alcoholism and crime. He described the despair he faced and his experiences in correctional facilities. From this emerged hope and a desire to change.

Dave documented the people, services and programs that helped him in his struggle to become a law-abiding citizen. His reawakened spirituality and his explorations of his own personal values and attitudes towards other people were powerfully described.

He concluded:

"I am always on the lookout for any way I can be of further use and yet sometimes I feel that though I may have something, I fear risk. I have never sought attention, nor have I tried to be above or better than others in a negative or selfish way. I feel that through humility and patience, the Creator will feed my spirit with the things that I used, so that when I, too, leave for the spirit world, I may leave some of these tools for others to use and pass on."

This project is based on Dave's story. The authors believe there are many other success stories that, if systematically documented, may provide some of the tools many are looking for to help Aboriginal offenders.

Aboriginal Over-representation

Many researchers, writers and criminal justice officials have documented the over-representation of Aboriginal persons in the justice system (Griffith et al, 1994; Report of the Task Force on the Criminal Justice System and Its Impact on the Indian and Métis People of Alberta, 1991). In Alberta, it is estimated that up to 5% of the total population is Aboriginal, yet it is well-known that police services deal with a much higher proportion of Aboriginal persons as offenders and victims. As well, Aboriginal persons appear in high numbers in the courts. The over-representation continues into the correctional institutions. In Alberta, from 25 to 50% of inmates in provincial centres are Aboriginal. (Report of the Task Force on the Criminal Justice System and Its Impact on the Indian and Métis People of Alberta,

1991; Vol III).

Conversely, there is evidence that a much lower proportion of Aboriginal offenders are granted parole or temporary absences. (Report of the Task Force on the Criminal Justice System and Its Impact on the Indian and Métis People of Alberta, 1991; Vol III).

The picture painted by this evidence is not a pleasant one for the Aboriginal community. A relatively small number of people find themselves in a very noticeable and disadvantaged position relative to the justice system.

Coupled with this condition is the evidence of the disadvantaged status of Aboriginal persons in relation to other social indicators, such as employment, education and health (see Appendix I; also see Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Overview of the First Round* (1992) pages 18-34).

Overall Setting

To further complicate the picture, the Law Reform Commission of Canada reports of Aboriginal peoples "their sense of injustice is bottomless .... If the truth be told, most have given up on the criminal justice system." (Law Reform Commission of Canada, 1991:6).

What emerges from this information is a dreadful picture of despair, frustration and a sense of hopelessness. It leads many persons, whether they be justice officials or concerned citizens, to ask: "Why are things like this? What can be done to change these conditions?"

Success Stories

Despite the gloomy picture above, justice officials and others working with Aboriginal offenders are aware of success stories. Despite the high recidivism rate for Aboriginal offenders, there are those who successfully reintegrate into society. They stop coming into contact with police, courts and correctional agencies.

While these successes may not be readily visible to all justice officials or the general public, they are more visible to members of the Aboriginal community and to the staff of Aboriginal service agencies. Places where the success stories are well known are at Aboriginal service agencies such as Native Counselling Services of Alberta, Poundmaker's Lodge, and the Nechi Institute on Alcohol and Drug Education. At these agencies, many staff members are ex-offenders who have left behind a lifestyle of extensive criminal activity for a new lifestyle of service, sobriety and stability. These persons are often hailed as role models, especially in the Aboriginal community, but also in the wider community as well.

Proposing The Research Project

Just as there are questions as to why so many Aboriginal persons are in conflict with the law, there are questions as to how do Aboriginal offenders become law-abiding citizens, especially ones who have

extensive criminal records.
Since 1990, the authors of this report have discussed the importance of documenting this process of change from offender to ex-offender, from criminal to role model. Discussions were also held with justice officials, researchers, staff at Poundmaker/ Nechi, Aboriginal leaders and ex-offenders. They were asked for their advice, comments and direction as to the feasibility and usefulness of a research project focusing on successful integration.

Gradually, the discussions pointed to the need for exploratory research to examine the lifestyles of Aboriginal offenders who have become law-abiding citizens. Through the discussions, the focus of the project gradually took shape and important principles were established. The main principle was that Aboriginal offenders who had become successfully integrated into society and who were no longer committing offences had an extremely important story to tell. The research challenge would be to document these stories in a systematic way and in a manner that would be respectful, appreciative of the extremely sensitive nature of the information and would be culturally appropriate. We wanted to capture the richness and the emotion of their stories of success, including personal qualities, community resources, family relationships and correctional interventions that may have impacted positively on them.

Another principle was that the information gathered from the research would be useful. In addition to adding to the knowledge base about Aboriginal persons and the justice system, there was a strong feeling that the findings would assist in program planning and case management processes for those who deal with Aboriginal offenders – correctional services in institutions and in the community as well as Aboriginal agencies and services in the Aboriginal community.

It was decided, as well, that the focus of the research would explore how offenders turned their lives around and how they stayed out of trouble. In order for the offenders and researchers to put their stories into context, data would be collected concerning their early years and what they thought contributed to their coming in conflict with the law. For the purposes of this project, the main focus would be on factors related to getting out of trouble and staying out of trouble.

Another principle to be followed dealt with the administration of the project. It would be conducted under the direction of an Aboriginal agency using Aboriginal staff wherever possible. Specific expertise would be contracted as required, but overall, this would be a project about Aboriginal offenders conducted by an Aboriginal agency with Aboriginal staff.

Once the features of the project were defined, various potential funders were approached. These included various foundations based in Alberta, the Government of Alberta (Department of Justice) and the Government of Canada (Ministry of the Solicitor General.) Funds were obtained from the Aboriginal Corrections Unit, Ministry Secretariat, Solicitor General, Canada.

The overall framework for the research would be as follows:

- select twenty Aboriginal ex-offenders who were no longer in conflict with the law use relatively unstructured interviews to enable participants to tell their story as to: the early years growing up; getting into trouble; getting out of trouble, and; staying out of trouble
- record and transcribe the interviews
- analyze the contents of the interviews to identify factors that impacted positively on the process of successfully developing a law-abiding lifestyle.

Methods

This section of the report deals with the sample, the interviews and the analysis.

The Participants

Twenty Aboriginal ex-offenders were selected for this project. This number was chosen on the basis of the funds allocated for the research. The term "Aboriginal" referred to persons who would identify themselves as Status Indians, Métis or non-Status Indians.

The following two criteria were used to select the sample in relation to ex-offenders who had become successfully reintegrated into the community:

1. They had been in conflict with the law. For the purposes of this project, this meant dealing with offenders who had clearly posed a high risk to the community, rather than offenders who would be considered more of a nuisance in the community. We were looking for offenders convicted of serious criminal offences. This included two categories of offenders. One category was serious repeat offenders, defined as persons with three or more convictions for indictable offences occurring at different times, with one or more of the convictions resulting in a sentence of imprisonment. The other category was offenders who had been sentenced to a term of imprisonment for five or more years on one or more charges.

   The above definition of persons in conflict with the law was used to show that we were dealing with serious offenders who had clearly been a threat to the safety of the community. For these persons, becoming law-abiding would have been a real challenge and a real accomplishment.

For a profile of the participants, including gender, Aboriginal status, age and self-reported criminal convictions, see Appendix III. For the purposes of confidentiality, each participant was assigned a pseudonym.

For a list of the convictions as reported by the participants, see Appendix III. No attempt was made to verify these convictions with law enforcement or correctional personnel. An assumption was made that the self-reported convictions were accurate. Some participants had so many charges/convictions that they could not clearly report when these happened and what sentences they received. Others were very precise on their involvement with the law. For example, one participant, Harry, had three convictions in his criminal career: he was put on probation for joy riding, fined for resisting arrest and sentenced to life imprisonment for a charge of non-capital murder. He is currently on parole.

One participant, Tony, provides a good example of a career criminal. He reported:

"So over a period of twenty-three years, from 1960 to 1983, I finished bits and pieces like that, which covers about ten years of doing time."

Another participant, Richard, describes his extensive criminal career as follows:

"Most of my convictions have started off with petty things, like theft under, break and enter and then led to stealing vehicles. That went on for many years, stealing vehicles and I went into a little bigger stuff, heavier stuff, like I was charged at one time for assault causing bodily harm. Another time, it was robbery with violence. The robbery with violence stems back in 1978 and that was the longest sentence I have ever had – it was five years, that was my longest sentence at one time. Other than that, it has been three years, thirty months, four years, two years, three years; it is like a yo-yo, my life. That is the way it has been and it accumulated to a period of twenty-nine years, all total."

1. The second criteria was that the offenders were no longer in conflict with the law. This was defined as not being in trouble for a period of two or more years. An assumption was made that after two years, ex-offenders will have become reintegrated into the community to an acceptable degree. An additional assumption was that any serious illegal activity occurring during the past two years would have most likely been detected and dealt with by law enforcement agencies. Thus, offenders selected for this study could have been on parole, mandatory supervision, or probation, or they could have completed their sentences.

Participants in this study who had been convicted of murder were on parole; all others had completed their sentences.

Locating persons to be included in the sample proved to be a challenge. When the project was formally

announced, letters were sent to correctional and Aboriginal service agencies, informing them of the project, outlining the criteria for the sample, and asking their cooperation by referring potential participants to the project.

Only two referrals were received. Of these, only one referral met the criteria. Several correctional agencies informed the project they could not make referrals because of issues of confidentiality, or because they did not keep information on file about offenders no longer under their jurisdiction.

When this source of potential participants did not materialize, project staff began compiling a list of potential participants who they personally knew and who they believed would meet the criteria. Some potential participants were located by virtue of statements they made about themselves to staff at Poundmakers Lodge and the Nechi Institute. For these reasons, our group of participants cannot be considered a "random sample" of Aboriginal ex-offenders.

The potential participants identified this way were discreetly contacted, the project was outlined to them and they were invited to participate if they met the criteria. Of the potential participants approved by project staff, only one declined to be involved. This person explained to the interviewer that he was not ready yet to tell his story.

The response of the ex-offenders to the idea of the project was very positive. Several expressed the idea that it was about time people heard from them. Most expressed hope that something would be done with the information, that it would not just be filed away somewhere and not used. A few participants said they hoped telling their story would help others see their innocence. They felt they had been wrongly convicted and hoped other people would realize this.

One participant, Tony, summed up his feelings in these words:

"I was just thinking before we started this that I think this is a hell of a good idea, for all the people that are going to be sharing and for yourself. It must be quite an experience to sit with each one of us individually and go through, you know, expand your awareness, your knowledge.... I envy you in a good way, it is like a blessing with so many different guys coming and sitting and talking to you, ... put it on tape. Wherever it is going, I hope it is helpful too. I hope it really helps a lot of them... That is pretty neat. I am glad I had this opportunity to come and talk about it. It brought out some emotion. It brought out a lump in my throat again, you know. Thinking about it, the hard parts for me were talking about the losses in my life and also gratitude for finding direction and making it this far and the people that have been helpful to me so far."

The eventual group of twenty participants was well diversified in terms of gender, Aboriginal status, age, criminal record and residence.

Seventeen out of the twenty were men and three were women. We had planned to include five females, however, it was not possible to locate this number. The referrals from correctional agencies and Aboriginal services agencies did not materialize and the project staff did not have the time to conduct the interviews as well as go looking for more female participants.

Taking part in the study were fourteen Status Indians, five Métis and one non-Status Indian.

The ages of the participants ranged from 32 years to 53 years. The mode was 36 years, the median 42 years and the mean 42.9 years.

The criminal records of the participants included convictions ranging from minor offences such as illegal possession of alcohol to the most serious crimes such as murder. Several indicated they had been involved in plea bargaining to reduce their charges from murder to manslaughter. In relation to their overall criminal records, some indicated they had no idea how many times they were charged – it was a lot! The self-reported criminal records in Appendix III indicate clearly the sample included a wide range of offences, the bulk of which constituted a distinct risk to the community. Given their criminal histories, it becomes all the more important to understand how these men and women turned their lives around. Somehow, they went from being very disruptive and dangerous to being law-abiding citizens who are making positive contributions to society.

Fifteen participants indicated they currently lived in a city. Five participants indicated they currently lived in a rural area, either a small town or on a reserve.

The Interviews

Participants for this project were initially approached as to their participation by the researchers if it appeared they met the criteria in terms of convictions and the time frame of being crime-free. For all but one participant, the researchers either personally knew the person's criminal history well enough to warrant consideration, or potential participants had disclosed some of their criminal history to other staff at the agency sponsoring the project.

Two interviewers were contracted to approach potential participants, discuss the general nature of the project and invite participants to take part in an interview. This approach was done in a cautious, respectful manner. Asking a person to discuss their upbringing and criminal lifestyle is a very sensitive and personal matter. It is all the more delicate given the nature of some of the offences reported by the participants, ie. murder and manslaughter. In addition, the abuse and oppression experienced by many Aboriginal persons is not something that is to be talked about casually.

With this in mind, the two interviewers selected for this project were chosen because of their Aboriginal status (both are status Indians), their previous work in the Aboriginal community, their knowledge of Aboriginal socio-economic conditions, their knowledge of and experience as an offender and their

experience as interviewers. The interviewers did not have interviewing experience directly in relation to social science research, but they have extensive experience interviewing in child welfare investigations, correctional services case management and addictions interventions.

Once a person agreed to be interviewed, a date, time and location were scheduled. Each participant was asked to sign a release-of-information form authorizing project officials to present the information in the form of written reports, conference presentations, or other formats.

Each participant was paid $100.00 for taking part in the project and they signed a form acknowledging this payment.

The interviews were conducted in a variety of settings – one in a participant's home, eighteen at the Poundmaker/Nechi Centre and one via phone with a participant at her home in Saskatchewan.

Each interviewer was provided a high quality, small tape recorder, a remote microphone, a supply of batteries and a supply of 120-minute audio cassette tapes.

The interviews ranged in length from 1 1/2 to 3 hours.

After discussions with project staff, consultants and personnel from the office of the funder, an interview guide was developed (See Appendix II). Overall, the interview format was to be relatively unstructured, enabling the participant to tell their story their way. The interviewers were to guide the discussion in the general areas of the early years, getting into trouble, getting out of trouble and staying out of trouble. The plan was to allow the participants to relate what they saw as important influences with gentle reminders, if necessary, from the interviewers.

According to the interviewers, the interviews were intensely emotional. Many participants had tears in their eyes at some point in their interview. For some, the process of recalling and talking about their past became overwhelming – they broke down. In these cases, the interview was stopped until the participant became composed enough to continue.

One participant, Walter, said he felt a sense of relief at being able to talk about his crimes. As well, he commented to the interviewer: "I shared stuff with you not even my family knows."

As another participant, Gary, described being taken to residential school, it brought back some of the emotion he felt over twenty-five years ago:

" .... and I looked out the window and my heart just leaped and I was shocked. I was terrified because there was that blue station wagon that took my cousins away months before that. Oh, was I terrified. I just grabbed at my grandpa and told him don't let them take me. It was hard. Oh, God, I can just feel that pain right now."

The interviewers reported that the process of hearing the stories reinforced their respect for persons who had the resilience to overcome personal, family and cultural dysfunctions and to become successfully integrated as law-abiding citizens.

Once the interviews were completed, the tapes were transcribed, word for word. Each participant was assigned a code number (01.94 to 20.94) and each was assigned a pseudonym. A cover sheet for each transcript contained the participants code number, the name of the interviewer, the date of the interview and the name of the project (Nechi Institute Aboriginal Offender Research).

Questions and comments from the researcher were included in the transcript. They were printed in italics and were indented so as to clearly distinguish between the words of the participant and the words of the interviewer. The comments made by the interviewer were intended to clarify comments made by the participant or to encourage the participant to keep on telling their story.

In order to ensure further confidentiality, the word processing operator and the project coordinator carefully reviewed each transcript. Changes were made to conceal identifying information without changing the context. For example, if a participant referred to his wife by name, this information was altered by removing the personal name from the transcripts and replacing it with the term "wife". The concealed word(s) were enclosed in brackets.

There were some words or phrases on the tape that could not be understood. In these cases, the word(s)/phrase was noted as "**".

Other examples of editing in order to maintain confidentiality included changing the actual name of a city, town or reserve, (ie. Edmonton, Morinville, Saddle Lake) to [a city], [a town], [a reserve].

A number of participants felt more comfortable expressing some of their thoughts in their Aboriginal language. In such cases, the transcript read [Cree spoken].

In some cases where it was felt some explanation was needed, a word or two was added in brackets ie: Fort Saskatchewan [provincial correctional centre].

The Analysis

Once the transcripts were complete, the process of analysis began. An Analysis Sheet was created for each participant. It contained headings of the four major areas of investigation. (see Appendix IV).

Each transcript was carefully reviewed by the Project Coordinator and the contents analyzed to identify persons and/or events that reportedly impacted on the participant.

The analyst noted the reported highlights within each section, then recorded the highlights on the

Analysis Sheet. The sheets were then reviewed, searching for common themes, common circumstances and important influences as identified by the participants. As the themes emerged, the analyst referred back to the transcripts, searching for portions that could be quoted as illustration.

An attempt was made to quantify some of the major influences that seemed to emerge from the stories. The Project Coordinator counted the number of times such influences were cited by the participants. Influences that seemed to be important to them were counted, whereas what appeared to be passing references to influences were not counted. This measure of frequency was expressed as a percent. While imprecise, it is intended to give a sense of the strength of the influences reported by participants.

Some of the transcripts were made available to the consultants to this project for their review and comment. This was done to double-check the thoroughness of the analysis and to achieve as much as possible a thorough review of the influences.

Findings

This section deals with the participants' early years, getting into trouble, getting out of trouble and staying out of trouble.

The findings presented here are based on the content analysis of the interviews with participants. The common themes are highlighted, along with quotes from selected participants as examples.

The findings will be presented as common themes within the four major headings in the Interview Guide.

As noted previously, the emphasis in this research is on the concepts of getting out of trouble and staying out of trouble. The other concepts – the early years and getting into trouble – received less thorough attention.

The Early Years

Participants were asked to describe their early years of growing up. Their early years varied from happy to mixed and unhappy. A happy childhood was one where family stability, personal happiness and positive community relations were the norm. Other people had mixed early years, with some good and not-so-good times. Unhappy early years were ones where the norm was often personal, family and community dysfunction.

Good Times, Mixed Times, Unhappy Times

There was wide variation in the early years experienced by the participants. Most of them reported some good times in their early years but, on the whole, their childhood and youth were difficult and painful. In this group of twenty, three participants characterized their early lives as happy, though that happiness later faded. Eight participants were classified as having mixed early years, with some good

and not-so-good times. Nine participants had early lives that were clearly unhappy. On the whole, then, seventeen of the participants experienced a notable degree of unhappiness in their early lives; only three had happy early years.

An example of happy early years was reported by Edward, a forty-nine year old Status Indian with convictions for theft, break and enter, assault, robbery and impaired driving. In a span of twenty-nine years, he estimates he spent twenty years in prison. He has been out of prison for two years, now, and currently works for a Native organization as a counsellor in a community residential centre. Although life on the reserve involved lots of hard work and discipline, having to grow up fast, and a certain amount of parental drinking, Edward reports that "there was a lot of unity and togetherness and a lot of fun within our community at that time." In particular, his grandparents brought a sense of connectedness:

"When I was growing up, from the time I can remember, a way way back, which was five years old, my grandparents were still up and around, my mom and dad and there was five of us at that time, five of us. There was myself, my oldest brother and three other sisters. Anyways, as far as I can remember with my family, within my own family, there was closeness. There was a lot of closeness. There was good teachings in the sense of love shown. I seen love shown within our family, through my grandparents. They cared for us, they nurtured us, helped us and talked with us and trying to show us certain things. Even at an early age, we were taught about Native culture somewhat and also Native spirituality and praying."

Despite the positive influences, Edward began drinking and eventually stealing cars during his teenage years.

Another participant, Wilfred, reported a relatively stable period growing up. He is a forty-eight year old Métis who was born and raised five hundred miles northeast of a major Alberta city. He has an extensive criminal history involving thefts, break-ins, assaults, robbery and impaired driving. As an adult, Wilfred developed a serious alcohol problem which led to a period of twenty-five years of conflict with the law. He has been sober and crime-free for the past five years. He is still in and out of prisons, but now as a counsellor and spiritual leader. Wilfred's early years were spent in a small, isolated community, working on the land amid stable influences:

"I was brought up in a non-alcoholic family; both my father and mom never drank. I have nine sisters which are still with us today. I had three brothers who are no longer with us. They have passed on into the spirit world. I was brought up mostly on the trap line from a very young age. I was in [a small community] and had friends there. I went to school in a residential school for a short period of time. I associated with the friends there that I was growing up with."

It was not until, around age 16, Wilfred began working with loggers who were much older than him and were into "partying" that he started drinking and getting into trouble with the law.

For participants who experienced happy early years, this usually involved a stable family with close ties to grandparents. They referred to memories of traditional ceremonies, knowing an Aboriginal language and experiencing supportive community ties.

Eight participants experienced a childhood with good elements and some not so good. Their early years contained mixed blessings and mixed experiences – some positive and some negative.

Harry's story provides a good example. He is a forty-eight year old Status Indian currently on parole for murder and he works as a counsellor in an Aboriginal treatment centre. He grew up poor but happy on a reserve, living in the same house with another family. He recalled:

"Even though we were poor, I think those were pretty happy times for me. And then of course spending a lot of time with my grandmother, too, going down there every chance I had. I think those were for me very educational because I used to remember I used to spend long evenings, long nights with my grandmother, sitting there together drinking mint tea and telling me all these old legends. I hate to call them legends but sort of stories. They were beautiful and she used to sing and she'd tell us this is better than sitting in front of a T.V. watching a movie. Those were beautiful."

At the age of seven, Harry was sent to residential school. He commented:

"I think where my life got haywire, I guess, or started to go downhill, is when I went to residential school. In there, I seem to felt as if I was abandoned in there. It was very lonely times for me there. Not only having to watch out for myself in there with the supervisors but with my own peers and stuff. If you couldn't handle yourself in there, you are going to get trampled over and you are going to suffer quite badly there so you' ve got to know how to fight for yourself, take care of yourself ..... It even had a reputation – people going through that school, they called it Dumbo High. If you were good in sports and on one of the major teams, they didn't care about education. No. When I left residential school, I must have had about a grade three, grade four. I could barely read."

By the time Harry left residential school at age 17, there was a greater degree of drinking and fighting on the reserve, including among his immediate family.

Another example of mixed experiences is provided by Gary, who has convictions for break-ins and dangerous use of a firearm. He is a thirty-six year old Status Indian who has been out of prison for nine years, sober for ten years. Currently, he is employed with a Tribal Council. Gary reported:

"I was born into a very spiritual and traditional family. My grandparents were following the Native ways very strongly, the belief, and I guess I was lucky to be born into this family. There was a lot of respect in our community. As a child, I remember attending ceremonies and enjoying

them, too. I also remember mom and dad, being together, everyone being together as family ....."

Two things happened to Gary that seemed to undercut his positive experiences. One was alcohol:

"As my early years went on year to year, I started seeing a lot of fighting amongst our family members and where the brew was starting to be introduced in our community. I seen a lot of people who couldn't walk straight and who always fell asleep and then I seen my grandpa and my grandma doing the same thing. They would keep me sometimes but then they too would drink this stuff and they would fall asleep. Sometimes I would be hungry and I wouldn't know what to eat in those early years....."

The other negative influence was tuberculosis:

"Tuberculosis came and I became sick with T.B. That contributed to their (his parents) drunkenness and irresponsibility of rearing me up. It was good for a little while until brew was introduced to our community and the whiteman started coming to our community as well. Then I was rushed to the hospital. That was very new to me. They took me to a world where I couldn't understand the languages, their language. As much as I wanted to talk to them, they couldn't understand me. The pain I was going through, I couldn't relate to them. I was too young. The only one I could communicate with at that time was my mom and she too could not communicate to the doctors and nurses around there and it was difficult. When I seen her going away, I was abandoned. I could not understand that at that time, why she left me with all those strangers .... I spent at least three to four years in this hospital."

Ron's story is further evidence of the mixed positive/negative early years. He is a forty-two year old Métis with a record of thefts, break-ins, robbery, impaired driving, drug possession and drug trafficking. Now, he has received a pardon and has worked as a substance abuse counsellor. Ron recalled that he had seven happy years with the Métis couple who raised him until his birth mother took him back, unfortunately to a negative environment:

".... I was given up by my mother, who was a single parent, at three months old. I was raised by an elderly couple, a Métis couple that lived in [another province] who did not have any children of their own so they took me in at three months old ... those earlier years of my childhood were probably some of the best years of my childhood that I can remember ...."

Then, things changed drastically for Ron:

"They raised me until the lady I called my mother, I guess she was the one that raised me, she died when I was about six, six and a half years old. I continued to stay on with my dad there, my step-dad, who was blind and he was trying to raise me as best as he could. About a year after my

mom died, my real mother, whom I knew of but I didn't know, she was living up in [the north]. All of a sudden, I guess, she decided that she wanted me back. Unfortunately for the old man that raised me, they did not adopt me at that time. You know, back then adoption wasn't really a big thing. If someone took in a kid, it was considered theirs and pretty much that was it. It was kind of a shock to him and a shock to me because, meanwhile, these were the parents I knew all my life .... I left there when I was seven years old, I guess, seven and a half. My mother wanted me back up in (the north) and I had no choice. The old man had no choice even though he didn't want to let me go and I didn't want to go but I had to go. From that time on, it was just like total culture shock to go from an environment where there was love, there was affection, there was a good upbringing, a positive upbringing and going to an environment where there was total chaos. There was alcohol and constant drinking and beatings, a lot of times for nothing and being exposed to alcohol. My mom got me drunk when I was eight years old; the first time she got me drunk, eight and a half. From then on, when there was parties at the house, I would just start stealing booze and drinking and running around. When you are not being supervised, you get into a lot of trouble ...."

For the majority in this study, their early lives were not generally pleasant experiences.

Stan was one participant who had early experiences that were difficult and painful. He is a thirty-nine year old Status Indian with convictions for assault, dangerous driving, firearms offences, and manslaughter. He came from a very dysfunctional family that migrated from town to town. His father worked for local farmers. When he was small, his mother miscarried and bled to death; most of the people close to him died at a relatively early age. The children were apprehended by Child Welfare authorities and they were placed in a residential school. He recalled:

"My dad would come down and take us to these places [of relatives] for the day and bring us back again. A few times he took us to [a city] but in [the city], in rooming houses. We were taken back from there. The R.C.M.P. would pick us up. I guess my dad was trying to sneak us back but they kept interfering."

Following his father's suicide, Stan went to a series of foster homes. He recollected:

" .... they beat the hell out of me for no reason. I don't know how you would call it. It just seemed like, after awhile it just seemed like I was there because they needed the money. None of them ever showed me any affection or done anything with me or tried to help me out. They just woke me up and sent me to school and when the social services worker, or whatever they were, used to come and visit, they would have me all cleaned up and looking nice although I had bruises on my back and my legs from getting beaten up from them. I had to hide all that so I kept running back to the reserve until they finally gave up on me."

Even for participants who felt that their early lives were unhappy, there were some positive elements.

Several reported being exposed to traditional spiritual or other teachings which they still count as being very important to this day. Often a parent or grandparent was the teacher. Bert, a forty-two year old Status Indian with convictions for assault, theft, break and enter, escape and criminal negligence, experienced an early home life of drinking, neglect, hunger, spousal and child abuse. Yet, he remembered:

" .... my grandfather was the one who was the biggest influence for me. Even all the years, like I remember things he said to me when I was a kid .... He even told me the things I would be doing today, like the lifeskills, working in lifeskills; he told me all that, that I was going to be doing that, when I was a kid. I remember, even when I was sitting in skid row or some place and I used to think, well, where is the things that my grandfather told me I would be doing? Like, all of those things he predicted; what was I going to be in my life?"

Other blessings reported in the early years included closeness to one or more family members. Sometimes this closeness was so evident that it masked the bad experiences which were only fully understood later in life. An example here is Mary, a thirty-six year old Métis who estimates she served about eleven and a half years in various prisons for offences including robbery, stolen property, narcotics and prostitution. She recalled:

"My whole young life was centred around my family and the more I look at it, the more I realize that it wasn't centred around my family and the closeness of my family, out of siblings or whatever comradery. It was out of necessity. My father was an alcoholic who physically abused my mother and emotionally abused the children but never in a way that seemed to us like it was an abuse .... I never realized what kind of an abuse it was until, I mean, just a couple of years ago .... It was a very abusive situation that we were always put into. I was sexually abused at a really young age and my first memory of it was when I was five years old and that was by one of my aunt's husbands. Looking back on it now, I know a lot of why I turned out the way I did and a lot of why my family fell apart and a lot of why the girls, my sisters, and my brothers turned out the way they did, too."

Mary became a runaway, got into serious intravenous drug use, and a series of abusive relationships with men. She now operates youth programs and is a consultant to correctional agencies.

Walter is another example of a person whose life went from beautiful in the early years to horrible and eventually, later in life, to sobriety and success. He is a fifty year old Status Indian with convictions for assault, theft, mischief and robbery. The first eight years of his life were, as he says, "beautiful". Walter's father and grandfather had been pipe carriers and during those years, he had a good life on a farm, a close family life amid traditional teachings. Then, he reported:

"When my dad died, they took us and put us all in a convent [residential school]. Them years were the most terrible years of my whole life. I went through a lot of pain because of the fact

that I lost my mother. I never seen my mother for two years after my dad died. That was very painful. It was a painful time in my life .... When I came back home at ten years old, I found that I was in just as much pain when I went home as when I was in the convent. I stayed home all summer and was just nicely getting used to being free and I ended up we had to go back to the convent again. Again, that hurt. I guess being a figure in an all-male environment, I learned very young to be violent. If somebody did something to me, I did something to him. If somebody hit me with something, I hit them back with something, and hopefully harder. That was the way I grew up. I grew up with silence; you didn't tell, you didn't talk. I grew up and got into the system that you don't tell on anybody because you get hurt from somebody else."

An additional dimension of the early years was mentioned by Tom, a thirty-six year old Status Indian with convictions for assault, break-ins and murder. He is currently on parole. Tom grew up amid traditional teachings on a reserve. He had a sound spiritual background and he reported that he was the only one in his family to be in trouble with the law. The source of his troubles seems to have been a series of clashes involved in trying to, or having to, fit into the dominant white man's world. The first time he saw a white man was when an R.C.M.P. officer came to speak to his dad about trap lines. Later, after his dad died and his mother was having difficulty coping, he recalled:

"I seen people dress up in white and come shooting at our cabin for no reason .... we had to hide in the bush for a couple of days until it was quiet and then we moved again .... From there on, when I started school, I went to a little school and couldn't speak English. I couldn't even write my name. I couldn't even understand the children in there speaking English. Same with the teachers; the only persons I talked to was my brothers and sisters. Some of them spoke English, some of the older ones, but the younger ones, we couldn't. Therefore, we started getting a rough time from the teachers because we couldn't learn what they were trying to learn us .... There is a lot of things that I see now that are changed but it is still there. We used to work for farmers doing fields for them, working, picking roots, burning scrubs, picking rocks. There is a lot of time when a lot of farmers would rip off my dad, I guess. I never forgot that .... as I got older, you know, I said to myself, well, this is for the old man and I took out the barn. I took everything in there, chickens, cows. I just demolished that farm. I felt good after because the old man had to slave himself off working for these people and they turned around and spit at him. So that is what they got. I guess it was revenge .... As I got older, I left school when I was about twelve. We moved to a different school and there was lots of racism there. I was always fighting with the white kids and always getting lickings by the white man teachers, getting slapped around. Then I just said, finally, like by that time my dad wasn't around, just my mother. She couldn't raise us; there was too many of us. I left and started hitchhiking and being on the road and being by myself and the next thing I know, social services picked me up and took me to a foster home."

After a series of runaways, Tom was placed in a juvenile institution.

Earlier in the report we met Mary, who was molested at an early age and became a runaway.

She, too, struggled as a child with societal reactions to her being Aboriginal:

"It wasn't only the abuses of what went on in my family and what I learned to accept from them but I had a very strange feeling of the social abuses that went on. We were known then as Métis or half-breeds but to the non-Native, it didn't matter. You were still a dirty little Indian and I really hated that stigma. I hated that stigma of being a dirty little Indian. I never wanted to be a dirty little Indian so when I seen my brothers or my sisters being picked on or abused, it used to make me so angry that I did a lot of fighting. I was seven years old when I started beating people up with my anger and nine years old when I started stealing and abusing drugs."

Amanda, is a forty-five year old Status Indian with convictions for assault, prostitution and trafficking in narcotics. She had a relatively stable but strict and unloving unbringing in a home where ther was drinking and spousal assault, and she herself turned to alcohol and intravenous drugs. She is now a successful consultant, specializing in staff training. She related a similar experience:

"So when I went to school and I heard them [the term half-breed] at school, coming from the white kids and I heard different comments like squaw, Cochise, and people making noises with their mouths like you see Indians do in the movies. I really started questioning who I was, what was wrong with me."

Eleven of the twenty participants mentioned drinking in their family of origin, drinking which they viewed as being frightening, excessive, out of control, or in some other way a problem. A twelfth participant mentioned drinking in his family, but did not seem to see it as a problem. For most of these twelve persons, there were other significant problems as well, or a series of incidents and difficulties which together led to a downhill slide, during their early years.

Earlier we met Stan, a thirty-nine year old man who killed someone while driving impaired. Two years later, he allegedly killed another man, a friend, while blacked out. Both parents died within a year of each other, when he was about seven, and his brother committed suicide. He attributes his drinking to trying to forget death.

"Actually, I spent thirty months altogether on that manslaughter charge, twenty months, ten months in jail then ten months in the remand centre and ten months at Bowden and then they let me out. Within that time, my main concern was trying, if I am going to live any longer or if I am going to be around, I want to be useful to my kids, my children and myself. I tried my best to find out what makes me tick and what happened and that's where I found out that I went the wrong way in dealing with that grief, involving (the impaired driving victim) and probably the death of my dad, the death of my mom and the death of a few other close friends. I think this really devastated me and I didn't know how to handle grief and I probably still don't today."

We have met Amanda, a woman who came from a home where her mother was beaten, both parents

drank, and she felt little love. She was sent to a residential school fifty kilometres from their Saskatchewan town when she was six years old. She too reports becoming isolated and to some extent unable to communicate as a result of residential school, even though it carried one advantage:

"Like, my father drank, and so my family really struggled for a while and so it was like, perhaps it was a blessing to them, that they were able to send their children to school there .... It was a long time for me, because it was the summer I turned six years old and I had never been away from my mom and dad .... By the time [my sisters and brothers] came to school, I was just cold. I knew that they were my sisters and there was a part of me that wanted to be with them, but there was also a part of me that shut them away, that didn't want them to get close to me. I know what it is, it is about abandonment, it is about rejection and it is about looking after myself, saying, it ain't going to happen again."

For the eight participants who mentioned they were sent to residential school, this marked a difficult or even very painful period in their lives. Reactions included anger, loneliness, rebelliousness, and fighting. Rebelling in residential or other schools marked for some, the beginning of years of conflict with authority. Even where the experience had some positive aspects (two mentioned learning a sport), none of the participants reported enjoying residential school.

There is evidence that the residential school experience institutionalized the young people. Consider the comments of Harry, who spent ten years at residential school:

"I was working on the reserve as [an employee] and one night I just got all sloshed up and I shot a guy and killed him. I was drunk out of my mind and when I went to prison, it was nothing strange to me. I had never been in jail before in my life but when I walked into the big house in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, it was just like me going back to residential school. All of these old, these guys I went to residential school with, some of these guys were already sitting in there. I went in there with the same routine."

The ambivalent experiences of residential school, and its impact on the later adjustment to prison, is also described by "Richard". Originally from the Northwest Territories, Richard contracted tuberculosis at age two and was sent to a hospital in the South for four and a half years. There, he developed a strong, positive relationship with a nurse who cared for him during much of that time. However, upon his recovery, that relationship was severed when he was sent back to his home community, which then seemed very alien to him. Residential school there brought its share of hardships, but by age sixteen, he was a fine athlete with dreams for the future. Then, in his very first encounter with the law, his life changed forever:

"Going into grade ten, I was sixteen years old and I was going to [a Northern city] and I was already in trouble now at 16. Like I said, I got drunk on my birthday, and I got picked up and I was really a disgrace. I felt like I was really a disgrace now and not only to myself, but to my

relatives, to my community, because I was an outstanding athlete, I was a good athlete, good hockey player, good boxer, I was a terrific basketball player, track and field star, long distance runner and at 16 when I got picked up, it was my first introduction to jail. I really felt that I had lost my dreams. I felt that I lost my career to be a professional boxer, or even an NHL hockey player, because I was led to believe that once you go to jail, you lose everything, you are nothing but a convict, you are nothing but dirt, and that is what I believed From that time on, like I said earlier, I started going to jail ...

I really felt a sense of loss until I got into that institution and I realized that a lot of these guys have the same problems that I have and it was just like, welcome. They welcomed me into the institution like a brother, saying 'Hey, if they don't like us out in society, you might as well stay with us'. The next twenty-five years, that's what I did... Once I got into the penitentiary, I realized, gee, this is like the residential school, the only difference is that they have a key. You have a lot of people that are locked up and they have sports and I really loved it, I really liked being in jail, I really enjoyed being in jail, because I felt that it was my home. I felt that these people, or these boys, accepted me for who I am, and society didn't accept me."

Eleven participants indicated that they felt themselves to be victims of abuse of one form or another in their family of origin, which might include extended family members. Here, "abuse" is defined as something which is objectively very serious, such as a beating which punctured an eardrum, or it might be something which the participant found significantly painful or frightening. Thus, it might be as severe as "beatings" or "lickings", sexual assault, or having to witness spousal assault. Or it might be something which is less "objectively" severe, but which the participants themselves defined as particularly painful to remember: verbal abuse, not feeling loved, being frightened by their father while he was drinking.

Several participants experienced acute grief in their early years, either from the loss or death of a member of their nuclear family, or from the cumulative effect of several deaths in their community. Two reported grieving over the persons they had killed. None of them reported knowing how to deal with grief, and all carried the anger and bitterness of it well into adulthood. As we will see later, a number of the group reported feeling that their drinking originally began as a means for trying to deal with grief.

Summary

The early years were not pleasant for most of the participants. If their childhood started out happy, it soon changed for the worse. Along the way, the participants experienced the deaths of parents and siblings; parental drinking, fighting and break-up; residential schools; foster homes; dysfunctional communities; sexual, physical and emotional abuse; racism and discrimination; grief; and substance abuse. They lost confidence in themselves, saw their self-esteem plummet and felt an attack on their identity as an Aboriginal person.

For most of the participants, there was a multiplicity of factors, not one single factor, that paved the way for their getting into trouble. For these participants, the formative years were very turbulent years.

Getting Into Trouble

The participants were asked, as part of telling their story, to indicate factors they believed contributed to their getting into trouble. Just as the patterns in their early years were diverse and multidimensional, so, too, were the explanations of what they thought contributed to their getting into trouble. Only one participant, Harry, attributed his troubles to one main factor – alcohol. Even though he did not have particularly good experiences in residential school, he had served in the Canadian Armed Forces and was employed on his reserve in a high profile and well respected job. As we saw earlier, he shot and killed a man one night while drinking.

All the other members of the sample seemed to feel there were several factors involved in their getting into trouble. All participants indicated drinking was a factor, either as part of a lifestyle or central to the events leading to a major criminal offense, such as murder. Seven participants indicated violence was a major influence in their lives leading to their conflict with the law and their subsequent imprisonment. Eight participants believed anger and rebellion were major influences. Four participants attributed their criminality to forces of racism and oppression. A few participants mentioned that criminal activity was a way to relieve the boredom of living on a reserve. When these principle factors were coupled with each other, the combination proved incredibly powerful, pushing each participant into extensive criminal involvement.

Drinking

The use and abuse of alcohol was cited by every participant as an important influence that got them into trouble. Drinking affected the participants quite differently and they offered varied reasons for drinking.

Mary, who appeared earlier in the report, is thirty-six years old and came from an abusive family. Her mother was physically abused by her father, and eventually the two separated. She was sexually abused, but no one believed it when she reported it. In later life, Mary went through a series of abusive relationships with men, and used alcohol and drugs to try to handle the pain of that abuse. She reported:

"We learned to do that at an early age, push everything aside. With the abusing of alcohol and drugs, we didn't have to deal with it .... I was kind of lost, I didn't have a real outlet to find something, besides the drugs and the alcohol .... It always fell apart for me, so I knew then, I recognized back then, that one of my key things for staying straight, was ending the abuse, whether it be somebody physically, emotionally, mentally, any kind of abuse to me was abuse and that was what made my world fall apart."

Slowly, however, she began to realize over a period of many years that drugs and alcohol were not, in

fact, an answer to the abuse which she kept experiencing:

"So I had to find a way to be strong through the abuses and the alcohol and drugs, they could shut it off, but it wasn't taking care of it, because I was still being abused and I knew that, but I didn't know how to end it."

There was another aspect to her drinking, in addition to using alcohol to mask the pain of abuse. Mary had gone to residential school after the family fell apart and she felt the abuse continued, only now in a different form:

"We had been forced to go to Catholic schools, eat their foods, dress in their clothes, be the way they wanted us to be so we wouldn't be 'those dirty Indians'. It never fit. So, I was kind of lost. I didn't have a real outlet to find something besides the drugs and alcohol. At least the drugs and alcohol at that point in my life masked the hurt, the pain, the abuses. It took everything away. So, at eleven years old, when my dad passed away, I just couldn't handle it."

Another participant reported similar experiences of "not fitting" and making a connection, instead, with alcohol. Tom grew up moving around a lot as his parents hunted and worked for farmers. His father died when he was thirteen years old and:

"She [Tom's mother] couldn't raise us – there was too many of us. I left and started hitchhiking and being on the road and being by myself and the next thing I know, social services picked me up and took me to a foster home [after running away]. I went right to a juvenile institution in [Saskatchewan] .... There were other Native kids there. A lot of them were locked up in steady lock up and finally they released me to population, which was upstairs. Finally, they let me go home. I didn't know what was happening. Nobody come to visit me or nothing. Just straight segregation. When I left there, I went back home. By that time, too, I learned how to steal, I learned how to drink but I never really got into drugs. I never got into that. I learned how to drink heavily."

The impact of alcoholism on some Aboriginal families is powerfully described by Tony. At present, he is a 52-year-old university student. Tony's early life was marked by separation from things important to him: his parents' separation, his own separation from the family during nine and a half years in residential school, the loss of all but one of his family members to alcohol. Tony feels he started drinking at age 14 as a way to drown his grief over the departure of his mother:

"I had a chance, I was a really good hockey layer back then, I had a chance to play hockey. I got invited to two junior camps, but the principal wouldn't let us go there, three of us from the residential school I cam home and my dad, one night he had two gallons of wine and just like that, he told me, here, have a drink, and so I started. A tin cup of wine, my first drink. That wine was under the cutter seat outside and it was chilled. I took a drink and all of a sudden I could

feel that thing just going down here and spreading, just like that and all of a sudden just like the moon was shining bright and I could feel light. All this time, I didn't know that I was missing my mom so much, until after I took a drink and the first thing I thought about, I don't miss my mom. Gees, I got drunk and I got sick, but then I found out something, I found out how not to miss my mom, how not to grieve for that life, like close like this and all of a sudden I dropped out of school when I was fifteen, just before I was sixteen. At Christmas holidays I dropped out of school and from there, it was booze steady, twenty-four years."

Tony spent those years, from 1960 to 1983, in and out of prison, serving about ten years in custody, with death and alcohol on his mind:

"All of that was also alcohol, drunk all those years from before the time I started going to jail until the time I ended up going to jail the last time. Everything was all alcohol involved. A lot of other things, too – family deaths and stuff like that. My dad and my mom, my brothers and sisters – both of my brothers and four of my five sisters have all died from alcoholism. Eight members of my family and then me, too. I got into attempted suicides and stuff like that."

Tony provides a glimpse at some of the family and community pressures that paved the way for the use of alcohol:

"He [my dad] had worked hard to try to keep us together. For whatever reason, [my father and mother] broke up. You know, there is a lot of jealousy on the reserves, you know. I can remember people would come around our house, twenty, thirty people, knocking on the walls at night, chasing our horses off, cutting up the harness and wrecking stuff; you know, trying to terrorize us. My parents stuck it out. Finally, I think they had no support system and they started turning on one another and it blew up on us; the wheels came off. As I grew older, I had a lot of resentment towards that. I used to want and go – we lost out on that land deal – sometimes, I would think of torching the crops, going and burn down people's buildings, stuff like that. Big resentments grew."

Other participants had different experiences with drinking. Wilfred was brought up in a non-alcoholic family that lived on the trap line and in logging camps. When he was seventeen years old, he started going to parties and drinking. He worked and he drank; he worked and he drank. Wilfred estimates he spent sixteen years in jail, all provincial sentences of less than two years. He reported:

"I didn't like the R.C.M.P. and I didn't like the city police. When I was drinking and they started to talk to me, there was always an argument, a fight and resisting arrest and ending up fighting them. That is what put me in jail a lot of times. A lot of it was violence. It was all related to alcohol."

Wilfred got caught up in drinking and crime for a period of twenty-nine years. Wilfrid has received a

pardon and currently works as an escort officer, taking Aboriginal inmates from institutions to community-based programs such as university, AA meetings and healing circles.

Edward's descent into alcoholism started in a similar way to Wilfred's, socially when he started drinking with his teenage buddies. He recalled going to dances on his reserve and watching couples dancing but he was too shy to try it:

" .... I used to really like watching them, it really turned me on. They were really happy; they were really doing things together. Boy, I wanted to do that but I am scared. I know I can't do it and I wanted to learn. I was really discouraging myself, putting all these thoughts in myself, so I can believe I can't anyways. So, what the hell, but, there has got to be a way and I said, okay, if I drink, I will feel good and I won't care what people think or say, whatever. I would go and drink with the boys just before the dance would start and then when we would get there, I would forget about dancing. I would end up drinking, run out of booze, chip in again for some more beer, get another case, come back. It became a habit, without really realizing it."

"Ralph" is another person who got into drinking as a seemingly natural part of the social patterns where he lived. Ralph is a status Sioux who grew up in Manitoba. When he was about eleven, he started drinking with friends and relatives. Drinking was a way to pass the time in the company of others, and to avoid boredom:

"… So my grandpa bought my mom a house in that town and that is where we grew up there. All of us were home and by that time I had already begun to drink, sort of on a weekend basis and there was a lot of kids in that town, white kids, that were my age. They all knew I could get a hold of alcohol if I wanted to, so they used to give me money and we used to party every weekend. By that time I was fourteen, so on weekends after that I used to go back to my reserve an drink with my relatives on the reserve and that is when I started to get into trouble with the law at that time. They were all under age. I wasn't worried, because I knew I would be put on probation, because they all told me to go ahead and take the rap. You will only get put on probation for awhile, so I wasn't scared or anything like that. I would steal cards, do break and entries and just something to do, because we were bored. We would shoot police cars on the reserve with sling shots and they couldn't catch us, because we knew all the hiding places and stuff like that …. I started working wherever I could, so I could have money to drink and I used to drink with my dad. He used to pick me up, because I would have money to drink."

Eventually the drinking began to lead to violence. After Ralph had served six months for impaired driving at the age of 22,

"… after that I started drinking a little bit heavier and slowly drinking with my relatives. They all started getting violent. My relatives fought quite a bit when they were drinking and stuff with other people and I stuck up for them and helped them out in the fights… [At home,] we had hard

times, because my dad used to drink quite a bit and I used to see that and he used to beat up my mother, not all the time, but sometimes ..."

Gary, who now works as an addictions counsellor, started drinking because that was a sure sign of being a "man". He grew up in a very spiritual and traditional family. He developed tuberculosis and was hospitalized for four years. After many years in foster homes, he returned to his community to live with his grandparents. At age fifteen, he was taught that if he wanted to be a man, he must work.

He worked, quit school, and wanted to work more. Gary saw drinking as one of the evil temptations, which he learned about in an earlier foster home:

"The more I learned what to do with money, the more I started getting temptations again and then came my alcoholism. You know, that spinny stuff that made me drunk, I used to think: maybe I should try it again, now that I am a man. All the men were drinking, it was a man thing now."

Violence

The role played by violence in the lives of the participants was a major one. As we have seen from their convictions on Appendix III, all participants had committed violent crimes.

In some cases, the nature of the assaults were minor; in other cases, the assaults involved a death.

Not only was violence an end-product for the participants in the form of a criminal offence, it was a feature in many of their lives. In a way, a number of the participants were part of a sub-culture of violence.

Walter learned to be violent at an early age:

"When I came home at ten years old, I found that I was in just as much pain when I went home as I was when I was in the convent. I stayed home all summer and was just nicely getting used to being free and I ended up we had to go back to the convent again. Again that hurt. I guess being a male figure in an all male environment, I learned very young to be violent. If somebody did something to me, I did something to him. If somebody hit me with something, I hit them with something back, and hopefully harder. This is the way I grew up. I grew up with silence: you don't tell, you don't talk. I grew up and got into the system that you don't tell on anybody because you get hurt from someone else. This is the system I grew up in, in the convent. That is the environment I grew up with, my ears being pulled and all this stuff. So I started at twelve years old. I was already running away from the convent. I went to a bush camp to go to work at twelve years old. I worked in a bush camp all winter. I came out in the spring and the R.C.M.P. picked me up and then a priest came and picked me up and took me back to the convent. Again,

that was a painful part of my life. I was still a kid but I thought I was already grown up but I was still a little kid. I don't know what I was rebelling against but I was rebelling all of the time. I was constantly getting in trouble with the nuns, getting in trouble with the priests, the brothers, the police, all kinds of little things. I guess I was very good at being somebody I wasn't."

Walter moved into adulthood, drinking and fighting. This resulted in many arrests and many trips to prison. He noted that the violence continued:

"In the prison system, I didn't feel anything, like to be suffering behind bars. It wasn't really that much more bad than in the convents. After that, when I got out, I always drank lots. Every time I got a chance, I was drinking and then I ended up I would get a couple of days and then I'd be back in there. It wasn't really anything that was bothering me. I'd just hit somebody or something, just to go back to jail. It wasn't a big problem for me."

Some participants saw fighting all around them – in their families and in their communities. Allen is now a 53-year-old status Indian who grew up fast. He worked on the land until he was ten, then started going to school. After his mother died, when he was two, Allen took care of his little brother and, together, they moved around to stay with various relatives with his dad. He reported getting into fights from age eleven in order to protect his brother. On the reserve, there was a lot of drinking and fighting:

"The dysfunction was there already – the fighting, the abuse. There was a lot of conflict between my dad and my oldest auntie and the other siblings. There was a lot of fights between the uncles and aunts. This is what I seen and I seen this all on the reserve, too – everyone was fighting. Yes and I was taught even as a kid that if I got a licking, I had to go back and beat that guy. If I came home crying because I got a licking, I got another licking at home. They taught me to fight. All my life, that's all I did was fight, fight, fight."

Ron was given up by his mother at 3 months. He was raised by an older couple. At age 7, his mother demanded he be returned to her custody. He went from a situation of love and affection to one of alcohol, violence and abuse. He reported:

"I don't know. I look at my life and it was tough as a kid growing up. There was times that I contemplated suicide as a child growing up – eight, nine, ten years old. I contemplated suicide. There was times that if I ever would of gotten a hold of a gun, I probably would have shot my mother. Those are the kind of thoughts that used to go through my mind because I was so angry and so hateful and stuff like that. Even when you are growing up, after you are still so angry and stuff and you don't know how to release that anger. I used to, some of the guys we used to beat on, just crazy. I am fortunate, grateful, that we never ever killed anybody when we were living on the skids, finding people to rob and we half kill them. It was crazy but I guess that was one of my ways of releasing some of my anger."

The violence exhibited by some participants was related to feelings of anger, rage and bitterness. For example, Harold reported having been in 28 different foster home placements by the time he was sixteen. He was in trouble with the law by age six. He always felt different from everyone else; he ran away a lot. At age five, he was placed in a very physically abusive home where he was sexually assaulted. By the time he started doing time in jail, he was filled with rage: "I always fought back". With his first penitentiary term at age sixteen, "I had no intention of ever straightening out, because I wanted to kill somebody."

"Henry", now 45, grew up in a Métis settlement where his father became increasingly abusive as his drinking got worse and the family lost much of what they owned. Henry says he was a fighter all his life. For him, the anger and resentment he felt towards his father was directed at many targets, in addition to his father. He lost so much control over his anger that once, while in his teens, he almost turned on the one person whom he respected the most, his grandmother. He recalled:

"When I was a child growing up, I used to have a lot of physical abuse from my father. He used to just beat me; not because he was cruel; it was just his way of disciplining us. That was the way he was taught, I guess. This is what I know now about that, but then I held a grudge against him. Me and my brother, we weren't very old and we were going to trip him and get him down and beat him with a baseball bat. That's how resentful we were towards him. He used to beat me up pretty bad just for silly old things, just because he was angry. I carried that right into adulthood, that resentment, being resentful towards authority .... All my life, I have been a fighter, like fighting all of my life, one way or the other. If it wasn't my father, it was somebody else. I was always scrapping. It was a way of life that they brought us up to believe. He believed that as long as I stayed strong and tough, brawly and violent, that people wouldn't hurt me .... I learned that you could step on people and keep them afraid. As long as you could do that, you can get away with just about anything you wanted to get away with .... I was getting really angry. It was getting out of control because I even turned against my grandmother."

Still, Henry deeply regretted his own violent episodes:

"I never really did any time for assault, because it wasn't really bad. I always held myself and I always felt really bad. As soon as I knocked somebody down I would feel really bad, my heart would start hurting. I would even cry after I beat somebody up."

The sub-culture of violence showed itself in the prisons, too. Many participants felt that their experiences in residential school nicely prepared them to adapt to prisons. Harry reflected on his three years in Prince Albert, before being transferred to a minimum security institution:

"Even though there was violence, whatever, you never knew from day to day what was going to happen but I enjoyed staying in Prince Albert .... I wasn't scared of nobody, like I was ready to kill again in there. I didn't know this until when I mellowed out in about a year and then I seen

what was happening to me. It really scared me, what the brain could do to a person. Just having no control."

Henry, now forty-five years old, described his method of coping in a prison during his ten year sentence:

"I went to the B.C. penitentiary from court. It took me a long time, for the first three or four years of doing my time, I just went crazy in there because I was small and skinny and I was afraid of these guys who were 280 pounders and they were all muscled and walking around like monsters. I was just a scared kid walking in that pen .... I was in there with [nick name], too. He was a guy who killed a whole family and cut an eight year old girl's gut open and ate the corn flakes out of her gut and they called him [nick name]. I was in there with him. It was kind of an environment. I guess I went from one stage to an extreme stage and I just about flipped out for awhile. I became dangerous because it was survival in there. I had to survive. I learned how to stab people and straighten them out and to get them to do what I wanted them to do – I would stab them .... Pretty soon, everybody got the message – don't fool with that kid because he will stab you. I survived."

As suggested earlier, many of the participants who got into the pattern of going in and out of prison became institutionalized. Some didn't mind going to prison; others didn't like to do so but they kept committing offences. Obviously the courts had to focus on protecting the public from most of the participants as opposed to placing a higher emphasis on rehabilitation. The repeated incarcerations became a difficult cycle to break, according to Allen, a fifty-three year old Status Indian with convictions for assault, break and enters, and manslaughter. He left home at age fifteen:

"I found a new home, Regina jail, when I was fifteen years old. I spent quite a few years of my life in and around Regina – a lot of break and entry; you know, committing break and entries and fighting and stuff like that. I felt that [prison] was where I belonged. I was scared to come out. I was scared to be in the community."

Aboriginal/White Relations

In addition to the perception that drinking and violence contributed to their getting into trouble, many of the participants felt they were also negatively influenced by their status as an Aboriginal person from an Aboriginal community. They reported they were aware of and influenced by their place in society, that being a distinct minority group within the mainstream. The nature of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal was experienced negatively and it was seen as another influence pushing the sample into conflict with the law. This influence was not experienced solely on its own but in combination with the drinking and the violence they experienced as well.

One participant, Henry, grew up in an abusive home and he became a heavy drinker. He was a violent young man who resented authority. He had frequent contact with police, amply described by the

following account:
"At fifteen years old, they chased me out of [a small town]. We moved there after awhile. The cops didn't want me there because I was starting to turn violent and I was beating them up. I attacked them one time. One young cop was in the car and I was walking from the pool hall or from the hotel to the pool hall and this was about eight o' clock in the evening. He just said something like `Hey, you young punk, you better get home.' There was nothing in it but I took it personally because being a kid. I was already at that age and I just attacked him. He had his one leg out the door. He had the door open and I just smacked the door. I just ran at the door with all of my body. He smashed his head against the doorway of the car and his leg. He went down and he called for back-up and they laid a licking on me."

A few years later, Henry reported:

"Me and this other guy got drinking in a bar and these two women were involved there, too. This guy, this white guy, was being really abusive and I hated white people by then because of a lot of stuff, the cops. They always made me feel inferior and stuff as a child."

The racial tensions between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities was documented by Tom, who, as we saw earlier, experienced the deaths of many people he knew at an early age, as well as terrorism from white racists. He reported later:

"When I got home [from a juvenile institution], I got into trouble again with alcohol. There was alcohol involved and I got six months for assault causing bodily harm. That time, I was just about sixteen. I got six months and my brother got nine months. The both of us got charged – fighting and drinking – towns people. I got out after six months and I got into trouble again. This time I was in a very serious situation because one of my cousins shot a man in [a town], shot this white guy. It has something to do with his sisters. There was some kind of a sexual assault that happened to the girls. So, he got mad; he didn't care. He was a pretty militant guy. He didn't like white people and he didn't like the laws so he shot the guy right in the shoulder with a .30-30. He blew him away. I was with him but I didn't see it happen .... Sure enough, we were on the run. We kicked in a hardware store .... You see, we were still drunk when this theft went down. Like, I got stabbed that night. There was a big fight, a town fight, with the white guys in town. They were always beating up Indians. They were always assaulting Indians all the time, even the police. Like, we had meetings, Métis and non-Status Indians, always had meetings with the police in this town but nothing was ever resolved. In other words, I guess we took the law in our own hands, saying we had enough of it. Fuck it, right? We will do what we have to do ....."

Earlier in the report, we saw evidence of racism and discrimination, especially at school. This was difficult for the young people to handle and they often turned to alcohol and violence as a response to being picked on because they were Aboriginal.

The feeling of oppression was powerfully described by Sheila. Sheila, now 32, is a status Indian from Saskatchewan. She grew up in a verbally abusive home where there was drinking, and no permission to show or receive love. She left home at age fourteen for the city, where for eleven years she was an intravenous drug user. Her record includes assault, soliciting and robbery. She currently is a fourth year university student. Sheila reported:

" .... and I hung around Indian people but the oppression was there. It was there because I didn't feel good about being an Indian because society looked down on them. My features aren't really that of an Indian, like, I can pass for non-Native but the oppression was there and I didn't want to say, unless I was surrounded and I was strong and tough and the whole bit."

The racism experienced in the community was also experienced in prison. According to Tom, who was sentenced to life imprisonment for murder:

"So, in other words, I just kind of graduated from boy's school to [provincial] correctional to federal and then also I knew the guys that I did time with in the boy's school. They were in the correctional centre and [now] they were in there doing life, too. In other words, it was just like at home, P.A. Anyways, finally, there was so much racism going on there, you know, really at that time. I didn't give a shit about anything, like, I ended up just close to three years in the hole for a lot of bullshit that happened in there. A lot of racism, you know. Like, one time they lined us up – 24 of us Indians; stripped us down, with shotguns behind our heads while the white inmates bat us around. That's how bad it was in there. There was a time when they turned around. We had drums, pipes, things that are very sacred to us and they burned them. They burned the Sweat Lodge; they burned everything and thought nothing of it."

Another participant described his relationship with the dominant white society. Earlier we met Stan, age 39, who had a difficult early life, moving around a lot, losing his mother and then his father, and being sent to loveless foster homes. At age thirteen, he started attending school in a new town. Stan recalled:

"When I went there, I went into an environment where it was cowboys and Indians. Because we were from the reserve, we were worthless and good-for-nothing. Welfare bums, they used to call us and everything. At that time, maybe because it was true or I didn't have too much self-esteem or whatever, I would react the only way I knew how – you know, like, beat the hell out of them. I kind of developed a reputation as a fighter in there. I fought because there was no other way I could shut-up these people that were taunting me."

In a broader context, William alluded to other conditions on Indian reserves in the 1950's and 1960's. At that time, the notion of Aboriginal self-government and Aboriginal control over services provided to their communities was hardly mentioned. Control over virtually all aspects of reserve life rested with Indian agents and other staff employed by the Federal government. Given the ever-present poverty, abuse of substances, and violence on the reserves, there wasn't much to look forward to. William

recalled:

"I only did my schooling at the reserve until I was probably fourteen because, I guess, I did like going to school. I really tried hard, like, getting there on time, being punctual and to be at my best behaviour; although, what got me into trouble would be my break and enters at the store. I guess, basically, I try analyzing myself, taking myself back to why I did those things with myself. Like, why did I do all those things for? The only solution that I could come up with is I was hungry. I was hungry and I was lonely. I wanted something, like, I want recreation. I wanted something, like, I was, I guess, in a way of saying, I felt like I wanted to do something but there was nothing to play. I didn't see nothing, nothing within the reserve then."

To William and his young friends, joyriding and doing B and E's were exciting activities, especially when there was nothing else to do.

Summary

In terms of getting into trouble, these participants felt tremendous anger at their family, residential schools and the dominant white society. All abused alcohol and/or drugs and all became violent to one extent or another. For some, peer pressure was instrumental in their drinking and criminal activities. For most, their role models were negative ones that demonstrated and reinforced substance abuse, violence, and criminal behaviour.

Conversely, there were few positive role models in their lives – they didn't know many other Aboriginal people who lived prosocial, functional lives. They were stereotyped in a negative manner by the dominant society and sometimes by members of the Aboriginal community. Often they lived up to these dysfunctional stereotypes. Many in the sample grieved over the loss of family members and friends and the loss of positive cultural and spiritual times. They fought back against the tyranny they perceived coming from the hands of white employers, white teachers and white police. Many were institutionalized through residential schools and easily made the transition to prison life's regimentation. Going to prison was not a shock, nor was it shameful for many. Prison became a way of life, just some of the experiences they had come to expect.

One factor emerging from the study is the loss of self-esteem experienced by the participants. Whether it was due to childhood abuses, put-downs as an Aboriginal person or the criminal havoc they inflicted on the community, the participants did not feel very good about themselves. They didn't see many alternatives to their situations, nor were they hopeful of living another way. They lost a sense of identity as a person and as an Aboriginal person. They became someone other than their real selves – either a drinker, a fighter or a tough con.

The various influences documented in this study led to a pattern of very serious crimes and/or a long history of criminal activity. A review of the offences listed in Appendix III reminds us of the very serious risk these men and women posed to the community for long periods of time. A review of their lifestyles,

particularly of the women, also reminds us they were a risk to themselves – several contemplated or attempted suicide.

For the criminal justice and correctional system, these men and women proved to be very difficult to deal with.

Getting Out of Trouble

This section deals with the influences and factors identified by the participants that were instrumental in turning their lives around. As we have seen, the participants generally led rather notorious lives centred around substance abuse, violence, and crime. They were real trouble-makers, either because they committed very serious offences such as murder or they had accumulated lengthy criminal records featuring the revolving door of going in and out of jail. It really is amazing to see that, somehow, these people stopped committing crimes, overthrew the impact of institutionalization and eventually became students at colleges and universities or became valued employees such as counsellors, trainers or youth workers. This part of the study focuses on how the participants went from being criminals to being law-abiding citizens. How did they go from being a danger to themselves and to the community to being positive role models?

As with the previous sections, there are complex combinations of influences that emerge from the stories. In each case, a variety of influences combined to be important positive influences in the lives of the participants. This process, however, was not without obstacles, feelings of discouragement, relapses and setbacks. As we shall see, it was no easy task to become a law-abiding citizen. The stories and experiences of the participants are stories of courage and perseverance; they are stories of healing, spirit and recovery. The influences identified as positive ones in terms of getting out of trouble were quitting drinking or drugs, Elders, spirituality and culture, becoming sick and tired of prison, the desire for a better life, the Native Brotherhood, Correctional staff, and the support of other persons.

Quitting Drinking/Drugs

Earlier, we saw the extent to which all participants abused alcohol or drugs, some of them both. The result was an alcoholic lifestyle or a drunken episode ending in very serious charges. Alcohol had become a powerful part of their lives. The participants realized the destructiveness caused by their use of drugs and alcohol and they decided to make some changes.

Fifteen participants identified stopping their use of alcohol or drugs with turning their lives around. In many cases, this involved attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in the prisons.

Sheila had lived eleven years of alcohol, drugs and prostitution. She gave up her two children because she could not take care of them. Gradually, Sheila saw the fun and excitement go out of her criminal lifestyle and she began thinking:

".... I realized that there has got to be a better life. At four o' clock in the morning, when I am sitting on the toilet with my pants down, looking for a vein or looking in the palm of my hand for a vein, I know that something is wrong."

Later, when she was sentenced to two years in prison, she had a chance to think about what she wanted. She started attending Alcohol Anonymous:

"There were AA meetings and I remember going to the AA meetings and I remember the speakers coming in. They were so happy and here was this solution of life. I didn't take it seriously at first but when I went back to my cell, I thought about it a lot. My sister used to come in there too .... She would come in from the community and some other people that I still remember to this day. I knew, then, there too that there was something that could keep us sober. Not only that, but my dad was introduced to AA at one point in his life because my mother had asked him to leave so he brought the program home. I remember a little bit about it, that he came home with this book and he told us he was getting help for his drinking. So, there was a couple of little factors that helped reinforce the influence that helped me change my life."

Amanda, now forty-five years old and a successful consultant, also had a life of substance abuse, violence, prostitution and other crimes. The day she was sentenced to her first lengthy term, the shock of it caused her to think about how she could get released as soon as possible. She said to herself:

".... I ain't doing three and a half years! I'm going to get a parole. I started getting involved in all the programming and everything – going for walks, playing volleyball – whatever there was for recreation I did that and whatever there was for programming – AA, churches, Pentecostal, Catholic. You name it; I did it."

Amanda continued:

"I didn't make a decision to turn my life around. I made a decision to get a parole. So, I knew what I had to do and part of that was going to AA. I went to AA and did all the other things I did to get a parole and somehow, along with getting a parole, they got me. My thinking started to change. I started to get honest. I started to make choices, like not to hang out with those same people that I was fixing dope with. I started to see them for what they were and, you know, they said that if you don't like somebody, probably part of it is that you can see in them what you can't see in yourself. I seen in people that I was in jail with things I didn't like and I said 'I don't need that' and I choose not to hang around with them. I spent a lot of time praying. I went to a church, started thinking about my family, my children and really, as long as I can remember, I always had a desire to be a good mom and I thought about my little kids without me. That was sure a motivator and then the people that I met that came into the AA meetings, they were different than anybody I had ever known. The look in their eyes, the laughter. I always say 'the tinkle in their laughter'. They were genuinely laughing. They weren't laughing at me. They were

very, very genuine and their lives were what my life had been. Not exactly, but certainly they had experienced a lot of what I had experienced. I heard a fellow say one time 'I know some ex-cons came into prison' and then there was another fellow and somebody said 'Oh, you know, he did time for manslaughter'. I thought, well, if they can do it, I can do it and so they influenced me. Another thing is somebody said at an AA meeting if you never want to go to jail again, all you have to do is quit drinking and the most successful way I know how to quit drinking is with Alcoholics Anonymous and so I just kept going to meetings."

Quitting drugs and alcohol often required the help of a treatment centre. Many participants attended a treatment centre in the community as part of their plans to stop drinking and using drugs. Often, one term in treatment was not enough to assist the participant to abstain totally. For some, attendance in several programs was needed before they had sufficient knowledge of substance abuse and a strong enough commitment to quit.

Harold, age 35, grew up in foster homes, twenty-eight of them, in a period of fourteen years. From foster homes, he graduated to juvenile centres, then to adult prisons. He finished his last sentence when he was twenty-four years old. He recalled:

"I remember I finished my last sentence on December 31, 1981 and they let me out. This was in the [city] Correctional Centre and I remember thinking I am never ever gonna go back. I can't take this, I can't take this anymore. I can't take this living this lifestyle anymore. That is when it started to kick in that I had to do something about my life. I went to the Native alcohol [treatment] centre in [a city] in January, 1982. That was the first time I had ever gone into treatment but something stuck with me through that. I remember I felt really good some days in that treatment program; really, really good about myself and I never ever forgot that feeling."

Walter is now fifty years old. He had a long history of drinking and violence. As a result, Walter spent a lot of time in jail but, as he pointed out:

"In the prison system, I didn't feel anything. Like, to be suffering behind bars wasn't really that much more bad than in the convents."

Walter attributed his change in lifestyle to Elders, work and treatment, all of which contributed to starting to see the positive side of things:

"Treatment is very, very important in my life. It just happened two years ago but, still, I have never felt good about myself until I had treatment and I started working on myself a little bit at a time; working on this addiction, working on that addiction. Seeing. To be able to open your eyes and see around you and see the beauty instead of looking for the negative all the time. I think before that, I always looked for negative. In my whole life, I looked for something negative. To me, negative was excitement. Instead of looking at the beauty, I looked at all of the negative

stuff and treatment opened my eyes to all of that stuff."

This new path was not an easy one to follow. Six of the participants suffered relapses in their recovery. Sometimes this led to new offences. Harry had been convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. Staff in various prisons saw his potential and he was released on parole. He was offered challenging and demanding jobs as a counsellor, yet he was somewhat uncertain as to his ability. After five years of what seemed to be excellent progress on parole, he was asked by his employer to move to another job in the agency. What was offered as a legitimate job change was not perceived that way by Harry. He responded:

"Right away, I just blew my stack. Son of a guns, I says, you just use me and now you are spitting me out. I told him to shove it up your damn ass. The hell with this. Now you wanted to change my god damn career. I quit and I went on U.I.C. and of course I had a lot of bills and those bills caught up to me. Before I knew it, I had no more income coming in to pay these big bills. These bill people were hounding me and I just told them you are just going to have to wait. I'm unemployed, plus, they were onto [my wife's] case too. From 1988 to 1992, I went through some sure hell and in 1990, I relapsed. I guess maybe with all of the pressure and the bills, whatever. We moved to [another city]. I started off where I had a few beers and I totally neglected my spirituality. I felt like I was abandoned and what is this whole world against me again? Anyways, one night I got all drunked up and I raised hell with [my wife] and the kids. They called the police and the police came and I had a big fight with the city police. I was black and blue from head to toe. They laid a severe beating on me and out of this licking, five charges: uttering death threats, resisting arrest, disturbing the peace and I forget the other two. By the time this whole dust settled, it cost me $4500 to get out of it. My lawyer made a plea bargain with resisting arrest."

Harry's parole reporting conditions were tightened up immediately. He clearly had lots of potential as a law-abiding citizen but he still posed a risk to the community.

Ron, too, experienced relapses, several of them. His life was highly influenced by alcohol, violence and crime. On one of his many sentences, he was paroled. When he went to an appointment with an Aboriginal agency that had promised him a job:

"I walked into their office and there was a couple of guys there playing crib and a couple of mickeys sitting there on the table. I thought, how the hell are these guys going to help me out, I thought. I kind of got discouraged, you know, and I guess I shouldn't use that as an excuse but I did. I thought oh, shit, man. I just gave up and I just got back in and that was when I started getting into drugs in [that city]."

He was later charged with theft, had his parole revoked, got out on parole again, re-offended, and then was recommitted. Upon release, he was soon drinking and using drugs. His next sentence was for

fifteen months.
Ron's hold on a law-abiding lifestyle was fragile and it did not take much to propel him back to alcohol, drugs and crime. As with Harry, Ron relapsed after he had been doing well in the community, at least on the surface. In reality, they had not yet reached a point where they were strong enough to withstand the pressures faced by most law-abiding citizens.

For most participants, they gradually brought their alcoholism under control. When they finally stopped drinking, they also stopped committing crimes.

Elders

The role played by Aboriginal Elders was identified by nineteen of the twenty participants as helping them turn their lives around. Some of the men and women in this study had, for awhile in their early years, experienced a traditional lifestyle where Elders played a major role in their communities. The importance of Elders faded from their lives, to be replaced by other interests such as alcohol and drugs and crime. Other participants grew up in extremely dysfunctional circumstances and really did not know much about Elders.

The decision by correctional officials to allow Elders into prisons took a long time and was a controversial move. The role of Elders as spiritual leaders was not readily understood or accepted by prison staff. Today, Elders working or visiting in prisons are to be treated as other spiritual leaders such as priests and ministers. Once the Elders' presence became established in correctional institutions, the impact of the Elders was remarkable. Gary, who spent most of his early life in hospitals and foster homes, turned to fighting and drinking as a young man. When incarcerated, he survived by continuing to fight and to be violent. Around Native inmates, however, he felt comfortable. Gary made new friends, took some programs like life skills and upgrading and started noticing that Elders came into the prison from time to time. When he was transferred to a medium security institution, he noticed Elders were very active:

"I think Bowden [penitentiary] was my turning point in my life because Elders started coming in there .... Elders were coming in, gees, every God darn weekend sort of, every Brotherhood week, every meeting and this was attracting me. The more I sent letters out to Elders, the more they came and I organized a pow wow there and pretty soon I took advantage of these Elders and started asking them questions and talking to them and, oh boy, they were just feeding me this information .... So now in Bowden all of these Elders are giving me encouragement and I am learning everything all over again, what my grandparents taught me. Spirituality was coming back; hey, this is the thing .... I quit taking up everything and I started really getting Elders to talk to and speak to and everything. Oh, God, they helped me a lot. They brought back all of the things I was taught as a kid growing up, everything, and the strengths were coming back, my intention was coming back as to being good and I was sick and tired of the jail life."

Here, the Elders were performing the traditional role of teacher, helping the offenders learn about their culture. More precisely, the Elders re-kindled cultural awareness. They helped many participants remember the rules of conduct, values and beliefs they had been taught in their early years but had lost. Many participants referred to the impact their grandparents had on them in their early years. As Tom stated:

"I really cared about my grandparents. They were living. They taught me a lot. They taught me who I am, what my name was. I learned there how to live off the land and what to do, especially when it comes to spiritual things. They teach you about plants. They teach you how to pray. They teach you how to sing. They teach you to talk about legends, story telling, and stuff like that. Stuff like that. I paid close attention to them because I understand them because I speak my language pretty good."

Despite the personal, family and community dysfunction experienced by the participants, their addiction, and their institutionalization by virtue of long periods of imprisonment, they still recall the impact of their grandparents.

Elders played an important role in awakening a powerful influence that had become dormant in the lives of the participants. For some people, this began with a feeling that an Elder was able to see, touch and reach them in a way which was direct and intimate. Harry explained how an Elder helped to change his thinking around:

"The Elder, that's how I changed my way of thinking. I always looked at it this way – today I know and kind of understand what had happened there. I guess I must have had – the easy way to explain – a crack, where my spirit was in and he seen it and he reached in and touched it and changed things around. Then shortly thereafter, I went up north, the first time I had met this Elder from up north, and she really took me under her wings and took me in like a son. It was powerful up there. It seems like I just got deeper into this richness of our spirituality stuff. Things just got better. I have to give a lot of credit to where I am today, I guess I would say, to the Creator, God or Higher Power. Somebody up there must like me, to guide me all through this stuff and to be where I am today."

Here, the participant is referring to the role of the Elder as a guide, counsellor and teacher.

Allen is fifty-three. He grew up fighting and drinking and going to jail. His attitude towards life and those around him is nicely summed up in his own words:

"I thought nobody gives a shit; nobody cares."

In terms of his behaviour, Allen certainly showed that he was not concerned about others and he really did not seem to care about anything. During one of his later sentences, Allen began to change and to

have hope:

"Somewhere a change took place; I don't know what it is today. Maybe it is just being in the Stepping Stones program and learning more about the culture. By the Elder, not participating, but just learning a little bit about culture, our traditions. I would listen to him. I guess it took me back to when I was growing up and learning to respect the Elders. I started to learn to respect someone else and I guess it kind of rubbed off on me and learning to have self-respect for myself, too. It was dealing with emotions that was very difficult. In there, I didn't have an opportunity to deal with the pain that I went through in my childhood, but it gave me an opening, a hope, as small as it was, I had that hope when I came out of it and being allowed to go to school in the institution."

Spirituality And Culture

Coupled with the impact of the Elders is the impact of Aboriginal spirituality. For nineteen of the participants, spirituality was thought of as a way of life. It appears many participants used the words "culture" and "spirituality" interchangeably. Wilfred, who had twenty-six years experience at fighting, drinking and going to jail, indicated:

"When I came out of [a treatment centre], I stayed sober. I started going to programs, not so much AA, but I started learning my culture and Native spirituality."

The concept of spirituality and culture was also voiced as a road or path. Walter grew up amid traditional teachings but turned violent and rebellious after his father died and his mother remarried. He has now settled down and he reported:

"Today I speak to children or young adults and young youths and I speak to them and I use the words that my Elder used on me to discipline me and to put me on the right road so I can walk straight."

To most participants, the concept of spirituality referred to a sense of direction. Edward is forty-nine years old and he spent twenty-nine of those years in and out of institutions. He made a conscious choice to get help and he turned to Native spirituality:

"I was all by myself in the cell, then I would put my hands on the wall there, looking out the window and I would be crying and crying, openly and freely because I am by myself and crying and I said there has got to be a better way than this. There has got to be a better way. What can I believe, what can I do, who can I turn to, you know? I want it now. Help me. Help me. Then I remembered someone along the way, these different places I have been at in these institutions. We have had Elders coming in and, at that time, Elders were starting to come in already, coming in to have sweats and pipe ceremonies and Native spirituality and that .... I am going to commit my life to the Native spirituality, that is the way. I got to find my spirit and once I do, I am going

to nurture that spirit, I am going to take care of that spirit, help that spirit, whichever way I can."

Gary identified his sense of direction as being instrumental in his efforts to stop drinking:

"What helped me into sobriety was the spiritual part this program offered – the Sweat Lodge and the sweetgrass and the stories the Elder used to share with me. Some stories I already heard from my late grandfather. I was amazed those stories were even over here [in prison]. Everybody must know about them and, oh, that brought back a lot of strength with me again. I grew up as a little spiritual person and bringing that back to me was welcoming. It hit home. In a spirituality sense, I knew now that I found myself. This is me and I knew then, too, that I will never drink again."

Mary explained her spirituality as follows:

"I had to walk this way. I had to live this way. They [the Elders] taught me that my traditions are not a religion or just part of spirituality but it is a way of life and it is something that I try to incorporate, for myself, my children, my thoughts, my family, everybody that I have known."

Interconnected with a way of life, a road or pathway and a sense of direction is a sense of personal identity. Forty year old Richard spent twenty-five years in institutions (hospitals, residential schools, group homes and prisons). When he went to jail, he believed that was the end of any possibility of social acceptance from the community. In its place, he felt welcomed and accepted by fellow inmates. He felt very much at home in prison. Subsequently, while in Edmonton Institution, he became interested in his cultural and spiritual background and this helped him discover who he really was:

"I was getting into the culture itself and it really gave me a good sense of belonging, a good sense of security, identity and most of all I have been able to understand that I am a gifted man. I am a gift, not a down and out criminal, not a down and out person with a weak spirit because I realized that my spirit has strengthened, each day, each sunrise. The smell of sweet grass, whether it is in an institution or outside of an institution, it smells the same. It smells good. It gave me a sense of rejuvenation. I fasted, I prayed and I was becoming a happy man. ***I was starting to become me…***

I kept on going to sweats, fasts and before you know it, I received my Native name, while I was inside the institution. I received a Native name and I was really surprised, you know, like I was so surprised of the name, that it fit so good. After I received my name, some of the boys were saying, it looks like you are never alone now, which is true. I am not alone ... so I got out and I went on a fast on the outside. Oh, was it ever a fascinating feeling. It really felt good. That really rejuvenated my spirit, my belief, my faith because when I go on a fast, I actually place my life in God's hands, so it rejuvenates my spirit and I really come to the realization that this is the way

Natives used to live and this is the way they practiced that culture and by practising it, it makes them feel whole and real."

For most participants, the process of internalizing the cultural and spiritual influence was gradual. It slowly became a major influence in their lives, whether they were in prison or in the community. As Henry related:

"I had to practice what I was trying to do and the more I practiced the more, you see, the two went together. I realized that the more I practiced, the more I healed. I wanted to heal so bad that I practiced a lot. The more I practiced, the better I got."

For some, however, the commitment to the Indian way was dramatic and total. Mary grew up in an emotionally abusive and alcoholic family. She ran away from home at age eleven and spent years involved in prostitution, a series of abusive relationships with men and serious intravenous drug use to forget her pain. While in prison, Mary met an Aboriginal counsellor, a woman, who introduced her to Aboriginal culture and spirituality:

"This was the first time I found faith, blind faith. I believed this was going to do it for me and it did. I would pray and my prayers would be answered."

Henry was one of several participants who used the word "healing" to describe the outcome of his spiritual/cultural awakening. He explained:

"I am happy and I found my faith in there, in that Sweat Lodge. I always remember that Sweat Lodge. A lot of times I go back there and I remember the times by myself that I was sitting in there and what happened to me, what changed me. All I did was pray and put my hands on the ground and ask for forgiveness and all that bad stuff that is inside of me, that's eating me alive, I let it go to Mother Earth, absorb it all and asked the Creator to put new energy into me through the rocks and stuff; talk to the Grandfathers and stuff and that is how I started my healing."

Only one participant did not cite Aboriginal spirituality and culture as an important influence. This participant did, however, report the importance of a Christian church in helping him turn his life around.

Although these participants spoke passionately of the importance of spiritual/cultural influences in terms of getting out of trouble, some raised some cautions and concerns. Tony, who spent much of his adult life in and out of prison, is now a university student and consultant, conducting workshops and seminars in Aboriginal communities. He is a very spiritual person. Reflecting on his own spiritual development, particularly in prison, he alerts us to the importance of the sincerity and credibility of those who take part in ceremonies and those who conduct ceremonies:

"Looking at the pipe and ceremonies and sweats like that, again, I can't say that is right or

wrong. I only hope that those people who are leading these ceremonies are okay with who they are because they say we can't give something away that we haven't got, you know. For me, that is a very special part of life that I treat in a sacred way."

Relying on his experiences as a former inmate and as a man who conducts some ceremonies, he continues his caution:

"I know, I went to do some work in an institution one time for a few days and a lot of guys wanted to talk one to one and just about everyone of those had a dream that was a way out. It was hard for me to determine where reality ended and where fantasy began because I could relate to my early experiences when I was still doing time ... I don't know, sometimes I have trouble with the sweats because I have seen guys come out and say culture is the thing that saved my butt, that is what I am going to stick to, so like they go through treatment, come out, go out and fall down again and end up back in the joint and they say, what happened? I don't know, they say, well, where is culture now, it just happens like that. I watch those things and I wonder about them and I think, is there another way that they could be delivered. Is there another way?"

Similar concerns were voiced by Harry, who now works as an alcohol counsellor in a treatment centre:

"The only thing, though, that the people that are working with, particularly the people coming out of jails, it's this Native stuff. They are over doing it. They are killing it in there. They're using it the wrong way. They are distorting the whole concept, this spiritual concept, for their own use. They are using it in the wrong way. Of course, some of the people that they have that are teaching these things are people who have just found their Indianness about five or six years ago. [They say], here, I am a Medicine Pipe Carrier and they're just making a mockery and they don't even know the concept of this whole way of life. Some of them don't even know their own tongue. That is where the power is, the language. Without that, you're not going to get that and I just hope and pray they don't overly mock this or abuse this way of life. If they continue doing it the way they are today, the government, especially the Solicitor General, is going to say, 'hey this is a big farce here' and they will fire it out the window and right out of the institution. Like, the respect cannot be there and that's what I'm afraid of but I should be concerned, I guess, as a human being. Yes, but I think the guy upstairs takes care of things. Like the old saying: trust the process."

Sick and Tired

Five participants out of twenty reported reaching a point where they were sick and tired of prison and an alcoholic lifestyle. For many participants, the revolving door of drinking, fighting, stealing, and going to jail had been accepted and expected. They readily adapted to this way of living, both in the community and in prisons, for many years. However, this way of life was loosing its appeal. There was a growing feeling that they were wasting their time behaving and thinking as they had before. There were

now thoughts and feelings stirring up inside them, gnawing away at them, that led them to question what they had been doing. The Elders got some of the participants thinking. Their families got others thinking. Some started to express concerns about the children they saw so infrequently. It appears this notion of "rock bottom" is important when the participants could also see an alternative lifestyle. Gary reported:

"I quit toking up, everything, and I started really getting Elders to talk to and speak to and everything. Oh, God, they helped me a lot. They brought back all of the things I was taught as a kid, growing up, everything, and the strengths were coming back. My intention was coming back as to being good and I was sick and tired of the jail life. I got sick and tired of drinking because it always brought me back to jail and this pot and hash stuff."

Gary had heard a lot about Poundmaker's Lodge, an Aboriginal alcohol treatment centre near Edmonton, from the Elders visiting the prison. He was attracted to the hope held out by Poundmakers. He added, too that he was motivated by another attraction:

"That is where you can get a woman, eh; you can find a wife there. There is girls there, too, so these two things lured me to Poundmakers."

Gary successfully completed some passes, then was granted day parole to attend a Native half-way house prior to finally getting to Poundmakers. He could see an alternative to his former ways and he began taking tentative steps in that direction.

Some participants had become very institutionalized and they became solid cons. Yet, after awhile, they tired of this. Tom reported:

"You know, to try and stay away from all this shit that was happening inside because it is not worth it. It is not worth being a so-called solid hard core any more, a hard con, because all you do is land up in a special handling unit twenty-four hours a day for the next five years or even more. It depends how your behaviour is, your attitude. You know, I had enough of that. I changed my ways because I want to believe in myself. I want to try and make my life worthwhile without a lot of negativeness or a lot of bullshit as I call it."

Harold, age thirty-five, had a long record for thefts, robbery and serious assaults. He was a heavy drinker and drug user since he was young. Once released from a remand centre, he went to a detoxification centre but:

" .... I was a hash addict and that stuff stayed in my system. The alcohol stayed in my system for a little longer than usual and I had really bad withdrawals. For some reason, too, it seemed when it is in your body, it slows down the absorption or it slows down the alcohol withdrawals or something like that. I was really sick – really sick physically, emotionally, mentally and

spiritually. I was really, really physically, violently sick and those dreams that I had in there were terrible. That is where I met my bottom, was that last drunk. I had nothing. I had no where else to go but up after that."

A Better Life

A theme similar to being sick and tired emerges from the comments of seven participants. They were questioning the value of their life that they had lived prior to that point, consciously wanting something better. As Gary reported:

"I found that [a course] was taking a lot of my time, just thinking what I did and gees, I don't want to be in here for the rest of my life, wasting my life away."

Stan spent thirty months in prison on a charge and he reported:

"Within that time, my main concern was trying, if I am going to live any longer or if I am going to be around. I want to be useful to my kids, my children and myself. I tried my best to try and find out what makes me tick ...."

Sheila reported:

" .... I was a drug user for eleven years and it wasn't until probably my last year that I realized that there has got to be a better life. At four o' clock in the morning, when I am sitting on the toilet with my pants down, looking for a vein or looking in the palm of my hand for a vein, I know that something is wrong .... I started to think about, is this all there is to life? Those were my exact words."

What these participants were referring to was reaching a point in their lives where they had a view, albeit a fleeting one, of a better life. Generally, it meant sobriety. They had learned enough about themselves and about positive alternative lifestyles to want more. They had a taste of a better life, they liked what they saw and they felt a commitment to look for more of that better life. For most participants, this process of coming to a realization that there was a better way was gradual. It involved a slow awakening of teachings from their grandparents, their involvement with Elders and seeing friends or other family members succeed. Many conditions and factors gradually combined to make for a change in lifestyle, sometimes over a period of several years.

Native Brotherhood

Three participants cited the Native Brotherhood as an important part of their time in custody. It was portrayed as a setting where Native inmates felt comfortable with each other, away from the racial tensions that exist in prisons. Some of the Brotherhoods were instrumental in sponsoring or supporting programs such as Toastmasters, upgrading, and life skills – these were seen as helpful to the

participants.
The importance of the Brotherhoods in inviting Elders and others into the institutions was highlighted by Ron:

"Looking back now, I think my turning point was when we got those Elders into our Native Brotherhood group. At that time, they wouldn't allow too many people to come in but occasionally we would get an Elder to come and talk to us. ... That really helped and having other Native people come in and talk to us about what was possible, what was out there for Native people."

Correctional Services Staff

Regardless of where these participants were incarcerated (remand centres, federal penitentiaries, provincial correctional centres or half-way houses), they had a consistent and clear picture of the staff who helped them and how they did it. In this report, it was not possible to distinguish between the various correctional roles (security, casework, parole, manager, counsellor, etc.) in terms of the help they provided to the participants.

Harry had been sentenced to life imprisonment and he was initially placed in a maximum security penitentiary. He settled into that routine. After several years, he was suddenly transferred to a medium security institution, then to a minimum security community release centre. He was very grateful to the staff for the hope and faith they had in him:

"Thank God those people were very patient with me and tolerant with me .... They seemed to almost, I guess, sense that we have hope and we are not going to shut the doors on this little twilight light that's way far off on the horizon. He's going to come around ...."

Rather than focus exclusively on the offence (murder) or the sentence (life imprisonment), staff focused on Harry's potential. They saw what he could do, not just what he had done. Above all, for Harry, they showed that they were not going to give up on him, they believed he could make it and they let him know it.

Ron grew up drinking, stealing and running around. He had few positive role models until he met some counsellors who kept after him to work on himself:

"I was just surrounded by alcohol. I never really had no positive upbringing, as we call it today. No positive role model ¾ all I knew was drunks. All I knew were people who were fighting and thieving all the time. When I was running with a pack, when I was eleven, twelve years, ten years old, thirteen, fourteen, drinking, partying and running around; so these people, my peers, were kind of my idols and stuff. After growing up and after I quit drinking, I used to hae a couple of guys that were heavily involved with AA and they worked at [a Native counselling agency] and I

guess they seen some good in me and were constantly on my ass. Every time they would come to lock up, they would see me in there and they would shake their head and tell me when are you going to dummy up … I just thought, the hell, I got to get out of this and find something. I knew there was a better life."

Ron came to appreciate staff, especially Aboriginal staff, who saw what he could become. These staff did not lecture him or berate him. But they kept after him, challenging him to reach the point of making some real changes.

Staff can also help by encouraging initiate and taking notice when an offender takes an interest in something positive. Henry was from an abusive home. He drank heavily, was resentful of white people in authority and accumulated a long record of thefts and assaults, including murder. He spent a lot of time in high security and segregation settings. Then a guard in a minimum security facility not only allowed Henry to reactive a traditional practice, but actively participated with him in it:

"Two weeks later, after I got out of the hole, they shipped me to a [minimum security forestry] camp and that is where I started my healing, was there. There was a Native guard there and I seen there was a Sweat Lodge there and it had been blessed but nobody really uses it; it was just sitting there. Once I got there, I asked them does anybody use that and he said no. I says how about if I go and get some rocks and some wood and stuff? Will you help me and he said sure. So I can go and sweat with you. He was diabetic. He started coming to sweats with me there and that is how I started my whole process of letting go and forgiving and all this stuff."

Staff can also help by pointing out the abilities and strengths which inmates have. Although some offenders will at first wonder at the motivations staff members might have for doing so, things can eventually take root. Harold grew up with no recollection of stability because of the dozens of foster homes in which he was placed. He never learned how to love; he never learned how to trust. After many sentences of imprisonment, he gave up on the idea of straightening up:

"I was going to get killed in there or I was going to kill somebody or I was going to commit suicide."

Upon release from prison (for the last time), he decided to cut down on his use of drugs and take some courses to improve himself:

"In 1986, I came to Alberta and I enrolled in a life skills program. They told me things in this program, you got so much good qualities about you; you could become an excellent lawyer or something. You could do whatever you want. You got such a powerful mind. The first time they told me that I couldn't help but think: what do they want? What do they want because no one had ever told me these things before. I don't have anything. I sat back and smiled at them and said ya, ya, ya. It was at that time when they planted the seed, that, hey, I could do something

with my life and I did .... "

Staff can also help by showing that correctional work is not just a job for them, but something which they care about. Amanda had been using drugs and alcohol for many years. During her longest (and last) sentence, she immersed herself in many self-improvement programs. She heard AA was a successful program so she went to the meetings offered in the institution. There, she met staff who were AA and who went above and beyond the requirement of their job:

"One of the guards in the prison, in her own time, I would go to a [AA] meeting in the prison on Tuesday nights and on Friday or Saturday nights. This woman would come into the prison, on her own time and take us out to meetings, so I was able to go to two meetings a week. It really made a difference in my life."

Amanda has identified the importance of staff providing positive role models and the impact this can have on some offenders.

She further recalled an experience shortly after her release in which a worker showed that he saw her as a person (not an "offender"), and pointed out that she had abilities:

"Meantime, I lost my job I had because I drank again and then I ended up taking a human services course which was for three months and again it was what I needed because up until that point in time, I thought there wasn't anything I could do that was worthwhile. I looked at my experience and I said, well, how the hell am I going to write a resume and I said what am I going to put on there, that I worked on the street for ten years? Anyways, I was sharing that with [the group leader] and he said how many times have you been in jail and I said three times and he said how many years between each time you went to jail and I said five years and he said, well, you must of had some smarts. What did you have going for you that kept you out? Anyways, I had never thought of it that way and I said, ya, I guess you are right. I started thinking about it and my self-esteem started to be restored and he was just a wonderful human being. He seen me just as a human being, not as someone who had been in jail, not as somebody who had lived the life I had lived. That made a big difference ...."

Amanda attached great importance to staff`s ability to look beyond the negative to the positive, and to communicate that to her; and to focus on what she had accomplished, not on what she had failed to do.

Amanda also identified the qualities of staff she thought would be most effective in corrections. Respect for themselves and for others, including convicted offenders, was key:

"I believe that people who are working in the system have to be what I call people people – people that believe in people; people that understand their own humanness; people that are able to forgive and not look at people going through the system as losers."

Edward expressed a similar thought about correctional workers' abilities to show and communicate respect and humanness. Edward had a long record of theft and alcohol abuse, and in his dealings with staff identified an attitude and approach that can be either helpful or not:

"One of the things that really bothered me for years and years is that when I talk about parole people, probation people or case workers, there is a difference here. The difference is a lot of them ***talk to you*** *whereas they should be* ***talking with you****. By talking to you, they are telling you what to do. When they talk with you is when you are negotiating. Okay, what is best for you and for me? How can we do this? How can we tackle this? How can we help each other here? What are the options? What are the rules and steps? That is one of the things that I found was missing for me."* (emphasis added)

Tony tells of an incident where, in a very personal way, a staff member showed him that he cared. Tony is fifty-two years old and had been convicted of manslaughter. While serving that sentence, he became very involved in organizing and participating in institutional recreational activities. This gave him the opportunity to use some of his leisure time constructively.

It also provided the opportunity for staff to get to know him, not just as a murderer, but as a person. Tony recalled:

"I had my stuff packed and I was sitting there and I was thinking, well, it is time to leave. All of a sudden, I heard the keys come out and I thought, oh, they are going to come and get me now. I was looking around my cell and one of the recreation guys came to my door and he stuck his hand through the bars to shake my hand. He said: I just wanted to come and see you before you left. I want to say good-bye to you, he said. If you do as well over there as you have done here, you will be okay, he said. He was pretty emotional. He didn't stay. Right after that he took his hand, he turned and he went walking and took off. I remember that guy and I think about him. One day, I would like to go back there and say: 'Hey, you were right, I kind of done okay for me in life'. That was one guy that really brought it to my attention that people do care ...."

Just as the participants had strong views on the type of staff that helped them, so too did they have strong views on staff that did not help them. Mary came from an abusive background and was so active as a young offender/juvenile delinquent that she was transferred to adult court at age fifteen. Years of correctional interventions such as psychiatrists, psychologists, AA, and treatment centres had little impact on her. Once the services of a Native Elder were available to her, she changed. She began to see she had some alternatives. Mary found that Native workers could be more helpful to her than non-Native staff. She recalled one incident where she went to a Native organization, well-known for its concern with Native people in conflict with the law:

" .... I walk in there and these people are, I will see a Native person sitting there, telling me, a Native person who has been through the system, what they want me to do to stay straight and

then I see them drunk that night. I am going: you are lying to me. How can you preach to me about how you want me to stay straight if you can't do the same thing. My Elders taught me that we live by example and teach by experience. If I wanted to teach my children or anyone else how to live life, I have to walk the walk and talk the talk, not just speak it or think it or say I am Native or go to a pow wow and say I have been to a pow wow and that makes me Aboriginal and traditional because it doesn't."

Here, Mary is referring to the importance of directly involving Aboriginal agencies and Aboriginal staff in the provision of correctional services. She points out, as well, that being Aboriginal is not enough. You have to "walk the talk". The agencies and staff must also be positive role models, demonstrating congruence between what they say and what they do.

Ron made similar comments, based on his experience with another Native agency:

"This guy says: 'Don't worry – I got everything all set up for you' and so I get out on my parole and the first thing I do, I was really excited about this course I was going to take and to get to school. I go and see this guy and he says: well, this and that and the bottom line was he didn't do a damn thing. These other people from the [political] Association says: 'Oh, ya, don't worry – we'll have a job when you get out. No problem. Come and see us. We'll help you out.' I walked into their office and there was a couple of guys there, playing crib and a couple of mickeys sitting there on the table. I thought how the hell are these guys going to help me out, I thought. I kind of got discouraged, you know and I guess I shouldn't use that as an excuse but I did. I thought, oh shit, man, I just gave up .... "

These comments from Mary and Ron illustrate the importance of the involvement of Aboriginal organizations and Aboriginal staff. The offenders have very high expectations of these agencies and staff. When these expectations are not met, the potential impact on offenders is lost. These comments underline the importance of careful selection and ongoing development of Aboriginal agencies and their staff involved in the provision of correctional services.

Other Persons

The participants identified a number of other persons who helped them turn their lives around. Sheila referred to a sister:

"My older sister had sobered up. This was later on. She was still a big influence to me because I knew that she was having difficulty and she did it. She sobered up so I kept thinking about how she was able to do it and if she could do it, I could do it."

Tom referred to a common reaction to imprisonment – rejection and isolation by the inmate:

"There was a time when I didn't really want to see anybody. There was a time when I shut everybody off and I didn't really want to have nothing to do with them, especially the first time when I got my sentence. That is really hard on you and it is also hard on your family. But, my mother has been there right through my time. She has been supportive, spiritually, out there in helping me out when I was inside ...."

Harry was married and raising a family when he received a life sentence for murder. His initial reaction was:

"I felt like I wanted to die. I even contemplated how I was going to kill myself. I didn't want to live, I'm telling you. If they were to hang me, sure, I would have been scared but I would have welcomed it. That's how shameful the whole thing was."

His family life, especially the relationship with his wife, fell apart but was renewed later when he was attending a treatment centre:

" .... we were separated after about the second year I was in P.A. [penitentiary] and she went on. I expected her to. I didn't want her to be suffering along with my craziness. We got back together. That is one of the blessings that I had, plus the people call it, maybe, a spiritual awakening, you know, through the Native way."

Stan had been imprisoned several times for serious offences and this was a source of conflict and stress in the marriage. He recalled:

"Even though you are aware of it, when I first went in, I knew that I wasn't going to come out to a wife that didn't sleep with somebody else and those kind of things or that didn't drink with other people and partied with other people. But, I always, what got me to go back to my wife was what I remembered staying with, the person that I stayed with originally. Like, from the time she stayed with me, she really tried her best and was just sort of an extraordinary person. She was by me. She stood by me and everything I did, all the drinking. In standing by me, she was trying to bring me out of it."

Children played a role in helping some of the sample to get out of trouble, not by what they actually did but by their presence. Ralph led a life of drinking and fighting. After several terms of imprisonment, he began to think of changing his ways:

"I had to really look at myself, you know, like where I was leading myself, where I was going and I thought of my kids, my two boys, that they were going to depend on me soon and I don't want them to follow my footsteps."

Mary, too, started to think about how her own behaviour could be affecting her daughter:

"Getting stoned on the weekend was recreation, a form of having fun, but I recognized then that my daughter was being, when I was getting stoned and drunk, I wasn't looking after her the way I should and it really hit me hard. I thought, this is how I felt when my mom and dad drank and when everybody around me was doing all of this stuff and I am doing it to my daughter ...."

When Amanda received her last sentence, she made some decisions:

"I didn't make a decision to turn my life around. I made a decision to get parole so I knew what I had to do .... [among other things], I spent a lot of time praying, I went to church and started thinking about my family, my children. Really, as long as I can remember, I always had the desire to be a good mom and I thought about my little kids without me. That was for sure a motivator ...."

Harold also refers to his children as an influence in his struggles to become law-abiding:

"Being in treatment before, I knew that if I wanted to get ahead in life, if I wanted to become productive, it wasn't for out of my concern for society. As far as I was concerned, society could go and screw itself. It was my sons that I was worried about because I didn't want to go out there and die; commit suicide, and have my sons growing up thinking that their dad was a loser. That was the real thing that made me straighten out my life, was I didn't want my sons to grow up thinking that their dad was a loser."

Pivotal Moments

A number of participants described moments or experiences which they associated with turning their lives around. For these participants, something "clicked", often suddenly, although it seems that other factors led them to attach particular meaning to the pivotal moment or allowed them to experience it as especially meaningful.

Wilfred is forty-eight years old and spent about twenty-five years (sixteen years of it in custody) fighting, drinking and going to jail. Currently, he works in correctional institutions as an escort officer:

"I have been working there for twenty-seven months in the prison system, not ever realizing that I would ever go back into prison, you know, instead of just staying in there as a resident to do time. I never ever figured to do these things. I had to get cleared across Canada because I have a record. I never ever dreamed that one day I would change my ways of life."

Wilfred did change his ways, quite dramatically:

"A doctor once told me, my doctor here in [a city] said: 'you know, one of these days, they are

going to leave you in the hospital and I won't be able to do nothing for you; it will be too late' . I knew what he meant. Again, I stopped using for awhile. It's been like that. I would quit using for awhile and then I would go back to it all the time. What really woke me up here this time, I guess, is when my wife left me and we separated. That really hurt me. I thought, you know, I couldn't keep on living without her."

Henry is another participant who experienced a pivotal moment. He grew up resenting authority of all kinds. He spent five years having mixed results with giving up drinking. Suddenly, he found himself with custody of his son:

"I had a little boy, I ended up having a little boy. His mother and I had a little boy. She came and dumped him on my lap and I guess that was because she was becoming a cop. We broke up. We agreed to break up because she wanted to take a career in that field, becoming a constable and here I am being a criminal and stuff, so the two didn't mix. We agreed for the boy's sake that we would break up. It took us about eight months to breakup but in the process, she ended up leaving the little boy with me here. I stayed at my mother's and I was sicker than a dog. I was just sick, trying to recover from my drug habit and alcohol and stuff and here I had this eight month old boy with me. He straightened me out. I had him for eight months and I straightened out all that time. When he was eighteen months old, she came and got him. She came over and might as well of tore my heart right out of my chest. That kid just meant so much to me. I thought, well, it is time I started straightening out."

Another example of a pivotal moment was recalled by Mary. She had a long history of serious childhood and adult abuse. She described two pivotal events, sixteen years apart:

"When I was about seventeen, I honestly got to talk to my first Native counsellor and she was a woman that came from the Friendship Centre .... the non-Native ways for me, up until then, did not work .... like I said, when I was seventeen, I met this woman. It seemed something changed. I seen there was another road to go but once I got out of jail, I no longer had contact with her because she worked specifically in the jail. I was lost again, so I just went right back into doing my old things ...."

Following a string of robberies, Mary was sentenced to four years imprisonment:

"When I went to Kingston, about four days after I walked into the penitentiary, I got to meet two Elders and the Elder said to me: 'I am doing some cedar baths' and I had never been to a sweat. I knew of sweet grass and I knew of pow wows and stuff like that but I never had been to one and I had never been involved with my Native culture. The Elder said to me, 'You are going to help, you are going to be my helper' and I said 'I don't know what to do.' She said 'yes, you do' and I did. I had helped her for two days. She works on sexual abuse for women and I became her helper which gave me at that time, after it was over, it gave me such a strong sense of

accomplishment. I seen some changes in some women that I had known from previous years in jail. I thought if two days of this can do this much for these women, just think what a lifetime of this could do for somebody. I thought, okay, I am going to let myself get into this and I got into going to the sweats, the pipe ceremonies, learning about everything I could, about the medicines, the teachings, listening to my Elders and the more I learned, the more I craved it; the more I thought it fits. This is not religion. This is not strict. They are not telling me I have to go to a sweat. They are not telling me I have to believe this one Elder or this way is right or wrong, but it fit. I thought, okay, this is where it has been all of the time. This is what I knew and the more I heard about my teachings and my traditions and what the Elders were passing on to me, the more everything in my life clicked."

Summary

What seems to emerge from this section is a pattern whereby the participants generally reached a point in their lives where they were dissatisfied with the combination of drinking or drug use and going in and out of prison. Those serving long sentences were having second thoughts about being solid cons. Generally, they were sick and tired of substance abuse and jail.

Coupled with this desire to change their criminal lifestyle was a sense that there had to be more to life than what they had experienced so far. There was a nagging feeling that there had to be a better way to live.

Juxtaposed with the above is a developing awareness of their Aboriginal culture and spirituality. In most cases, this rejuvenation was gradual but powerful. Over time, the participants found a new way of life that enabled them to overcome personal, family and community dysfunctions. This way of life empowered them with a personal sense of direction and ways of relating positively to others. It seems this paved the way for the participants to become successfully integrated into society.

As well, the support, encouragement and positive reinforcement of family, friends and staff of correctional agencies were cited by the participants as having a positive impact on their change from a criminal to a law-abiding citizen.

For most participants, a number of conditions and factors gradually combined to make a change in their lifestyle from extensive criminal activity to a law-abiding one. For a few participants, however, something clicked and they became law-abiding quite quickly.

Staying Out of Trouble

As with the previous section, there are some common themes emerging from the accounts of the participants as to how they stay on a path that is crime-free. How do they maintain the behaviour and attitudes that helped turn their lives around? In all cases, a variety of influences were cited, combining to help the participants stay out of trouble. These were staying sober, spirituality and cultural development,

personal identity, helping others, employment, education, therapy and processing issues, family, dealing with relapse and other factors.

Staying Sober

Eight of the participants said they worked diligently at staying sober, that it is something which remains an active and often difficult responsibility to themselves. They maintained their sobriety by attending AA meetings, by taking part in treatment programs and by developing their spirituality. Gary indicated:

"I am also on my ninth year of sobriety and through spirituality, I still maintain my sobriety .... through all that, the thing that keeps me going is that spirituality. When I grabbed onto it, I held onto it, because I knew that was my answer. If I didn't have that, I think I would be still getting into trouble and drinking and all that."

Sheila, now a thirty-two year old student, reported:

"When I actually first went straight for awhile, I came back to [a city] and I got into doing some valium. I didn't think they were a real drug because it was something I never did. I didn't really like valium. I didn't think it was a dangerous drug, so I had a slip and I got into a little bit of pills. It was while we were working on the shows and reading the Big Book. I got the Big Book, the AA Big Book, as a wedding present from my sister and I always carried this book with me. I never read it or anything but that night in our motel room, I picked it up. I was on such a fine line to going back. I picked up that book and I read it and in that book there was a story about a big Indian chief and his story of how he stayed sober. I read it and I burst into tears and I told my husband I need to get help."

Sheila enrolled in a treatment program and she joined AA:

"I have been a regular member of AA, regular. That is what helped me a lot."

The sponsorship aspect of AA was an important influence to helping participants stay sober. Tony reported:

"I came out and they talk about getting a sponsor so I had this old guy [name] for about five or six years. He was my sponsor. He was really significant in my life in regards to showing me that one guy could love another man. He taught me that, unconditional. He had his flaws. He had his shortcomings but he walked with me for quite a few miles. A lot of the stuff that I know today I learned from that old bugger. He was really helpful."

Harold indicated the influence of spirituality on sobriety:

"One of the things that has really helped me out in my sobriety was getting connected with the Sweat Lodge, connecting with the Sweat Lodge."

Walter, who now works as an alcohol counsellor, reported:

"Treatment is very, very important in my life. It just happened two years ago but still I have never felt so good about myself until I had treatment and I started working on myself a little bit at a time. Working on this addiction. Working on that addiction. Seeing, being able to open your eyes and see around you and see the beauty instead of looking for the negative all of the time."

Spirituality and Cultural Development

As noted earlier, the impact of spiritual and cultural identity in the process of becoming law-abiding was extremely powerful. It would appear to be the single most important and influential factor. Not surprisingly, the development of spiritual and cultural identity was mentioned by eighteen of the twenty participants as an extremely important factor in terms of staying on the right path. Tom noted:

"I go to sweats all the time because it makes me feel good. I am not there to try and show it off to my parole officer or any authority figure. I am there for myself."

William, who is currently taking upgrading, reported:

"I go to Sweat Lodges and ceremonies. Back in Manitoba, they have a spring ceremony somewhere by a mountain and they have spring ceremonies there. They have two Sweat Lodges, two or three Sweat Lodges and they have a group of people at their ceremonies, there. I did attend and it is alright. I enjoyed that and I keep coming back to sweats to learn more, to listen. That is what I like doing best – sitting back and relaxing and enjoying what others have to say for themselves."

Edward now works at a Native run community correctional centre and he reported the importance of "finding your spirit":

"Today, where I work, we have sweats once a week. It is a blessing and I am able to go to [a reserve] on Sundays when I can to have a sweat so I am always leaving myself open for that. If I can't go up there or over here, I will always find someone that I can talk to that is spiritual. You have to be spiritual whether you are a Native person or not but you gotta still believe in something that is positive .... Like I said, Elders were and are my teachers. Today, they tell me in order for you to function as a person, you have to find what are your values, who you are, your spirit. Once you find your spirit, you will be able to walk a road that is more pleasantful than you have before."

Stan reported:

"I use the drum and I have a hand drum and I can sing. I sing at round dances sometimes with my brother. His drum group, my girls always practice with them, dancing and stuff. [One daughter] is an excellent dancer. So is my niece. Like that part of it, [my brother] kind of keeps alive. We join him in and stuff and we always see him at the pow wow and stuff, wherever we go."

For Walter, a thirty-nine year old alcohol counsellor with many convictions for assault, including manslaughter, his spirituality is very important:

"My beliefs are I believe in the Pipe. I like to call it a way of life for me. I think praying is one of my values. I like to pray. I have never ever prayed in public before I came to [a training centre]. I had never ever prayed in public before. I always prayed but always under my breath and they were praying to Jesus. I prayed to the Creator [Cree spoken]. I prayed to him. I always prayed. That's one of my values. I believe in Native culture. I believe in the Native way of life, the Sweat Lodges, the Healing Circles, everything. It is one of the values I keep."

Two participants were not strong believers in Aboriginal spirituality. They were, however, active in Christian churches and this was reported to be very helpful for them.

Personal Identity

During the previous stage, *Getting Out of Trouble*, the participants spoke about the impact of spirituality and how it helped them develop a personal sense of identity. At the later stage, *Staying Out of Trouble*, the participants seemed to speak more about the importance and impact of what they did in terms of managing their own lives.

Gary stated that getting in touch with one's spirituality lends purpose to one's whole life:

"Through visions and fasting and everything, I have found my place and I know the Indian way of praying is a good way of praying. Native spirituality is the best thing for anyone. The belief, if a person doesn't have belief then they don't have a purpose in life. I chucked away my belief at the age of fifteen. I didn't have a purpose in life and I went astray. When I grabbed onto my belief again, then I had a purpose and it was stronger this time. I still maintain that purpose today. I can say I am happy. I am healthy and today I am thirty-six years old and I have been out of jail for nine years and that is how long I have been sober, too, going on ten years."

Stan observed the importance of personal responsibility, that ultimately it is the individual who determines whether he makes it:

"That is the main thing that keeps me going, keeps me staying out of jail, and it is all up to me,

not anybody else on how to prevent that from happening."

Ron had similar observations, especially about the importance of personal choice, and the recognition that making the right choices is a constant preoccupation:

" .... you got to work everyday at maintaining your freedom, everyday on a daily basis, and you got to work towards staying out. You got to learn to make the right choices .... If we put as much effort into staying out of trouble, making the right choices, as we do, as the effort that we do to go and break and enter a place or to go and steal a vehicle, or something, we would do alright. I know that everyone is capable of doing it but it is not easy."

Bert had some advice for offenders still in prison. Making the right choices means living your life according to your own lights, not for others:

"I think for me, like, what I would probably say is like for a person to try and learn to live their own life, like live your own life and don't let other friends influence you. Like it could be anybody in jail to influence you into decision-making. You know what you do in life. I think it is more if you want to be a man, you can do things on your own. It doesn't have to be in a crowd and to realize that a person has nothing to lose by going ahead and being honest with themselves and with other people ... It takes a long time to get over, like to stay out of jail, to learn how to stay out of there."

Knowing how to live your life for yourself requires knowing who you really are. Wilfred talked about his sense of personal identity:

"I have taken up my culture, my traditional ways and that has helped keep me going. I don't think I want to go back using again but I can't say I won't. I just like the life that I lie today. I know where I am. I know who I talk to. I know what I have done ... that is what did it, really, my identity ... I am not lost today."

Mary tied her struggle for personal identity into the larger picture of Aboriginal struggles and the difficulty of overcoming the momentum towards giving in and giving up:

"It is a whole lifetime and still some days I want to say the hell with it and then go back to my old ways because it is what everyone else does. I still sometimes, like I am the only one out there trying to change it for myself or trying to change it for my children or trying to change it for my friends or for the people I care about. I see so many people still, they will go so far with changing what they can for themselves and then give up because they see everyone else. That has been part of the genocide, I guess, for the Aboriginal people is that we have been so beaten down, that before we can even see a result happening, we say forget it. Everybody else is like this, we have accepted it for years and we will keep accepting it and this is one Indian, this is one Aboriginal

woman that says the buck stops here and take responsibility for it."

Coupled with a sense of personal responsibility was an appreciation of how tough it is to stay on the right road.

Tom also referred to the larger picture of Aboriginal people as a minority in the dominant society but he, too, focused on the person:

"You know all this that happened in my life, it is part of genocide but like I said you have to be very strong. You have to keep on with the struggle .... but it is what you have to do for yourself that counts."

Walter's comments illustrate that developing a sense of personal identity is not a one-shot deal:

"I also know it is a life long process .... This is where I am today. I feel good and I feel alive and I love people. I love everybody even if I still have lots to work on."

Richard noted the challenge that lies ahead for ex-offenders:

"It is not an easy process to heal yourself. It is not easy to commit and to admit humbly and to be a humble person, especially when you have been living a lifestyle for so many years. It is not an easy process and it is hard but if a person is dedicated like I am as dedicated as I will ever be. I am really happy I have stuck it out this far, this long."

Helping Others

Helping other people emerged as a fairly important aspect of staying on the good path. It was cited by eight of the participants. Often, it meant a job in the helping profession such as working with youth or as an addiction counsellor. For some, helping others took the form of doing volunteer work with community agencies.

When Ralph finished his last prison term, he felt he had to move to a new community in order to stay out of trouble. Once relocated, he said:

"I just stayed sober and I worked and I then got into volunteer work with the [inner city] Co-op and [a Native school] because I wanted to work with the youth, young kids that were in trouble with the law and I wanted to work with kids like that, to try and help them before they got into real serious trouble. The only way I could do that was to get in two hundred hours of volunteer work so I worked with [the school] three nights a week, Monday, Wednesday and Fridays and then at the Co-op. I used to work with the Co-op too, on Saturday evenings and that was for the first year. That helped me stay out of trouble and it helped me stay sober."

Tom talked about staying out of trouble in terms of taking control of his life and helping others:

"You have to take control of yourself and help yourself because, man, you can pick up a drink within a second and then all of a sudden you hit the wall. Where do you end up? Back in the same place where you started twenty years ago. You can take and stay on the positive road. We call it [Salteaux spoken] the Indian way. You walk on that road, you know, there is a reason for every human being on this earth. There is a purpose for them why they are here and it is up to them to find out why. You could be whatever you want to be, you know. You could be a teacher and learn youngsters and what's preventing them from being in your situation twenty years ago. You already know that. You could help them out. That is what I was doing for awhile, is going around and speaking to high school students and junior high school students for crime prevention with the Seven Step Society. I was a volunteer worker for them for awhile."

Mary used her own experience and that of her daughter to get involved in helping others, specifically troubled teens:

"Since my own past experience with running away and my past run-in with the life of crime, it has given me a different outlook and prospect on living. I decided that something must be done to protect these children from moving in that direction. My daughter brought three teens into my home, two of which were actual runaways, the other just couldn't work out the problem with her parents, so I welcomed them with open arms and provided them with the safest and securest, stable environment that I possible could."

Employment

Maintaining employment was identified as another important aspect of staying out of trouble. It was specifically mentioned by six of the twenty participants. Besides a source of income, employment was a source of satisfaction. Participants who worked as helpers felt very good about their work and themselves. Being able to pay rent, pay taxes and support a family was a source of pride.

Henry is on parole for life and, one year ago, had his reporting conditions increased to weekly from quarterly:

"That has been in a different stage now and I am reporting once a week again and I got a full-time job. I am working for [an organization] as a maintenance man and I get all of the benefits paid for so I am completely self-sufficient again, looking after my family and paying the rent and paying the bills. I am happy to do that ...."

Richard had been going to university for two years but took a year away from his studies to make some money:

"I felt a sense of accomplishment and feel real comfortable with myself, more so than I ever did in my life. I feel clean, I have a nice place and I pay rent like everybody else .... I have learned the value of money, which I didn't before ...."

Education

Education was another important aspect contributing to the participants becoming law-abiding citizens. Some took upgrading, and some were attending colleges or universities. Personal development courses like life skills and counsellor training at the Nechi Institute were seen as particularly valuable.

As Richard was nearing the end of his last term of imprisonment, he decided to go to university. It took quite awhile to obtain transcripts and funding. He was accepted in a small university in a city:

"For the first, I would say for the first two months, I had to learn how to learn. I know it is a really fast transition because, especially integration, right from two hundred hard core convicts to two hundred and fifty students and I am the only one there that is Native at the university level in my classes. I mean it is really fast. It is a really swift transition. You have to be able to stick it out .... My first year at the university, my self-confidence and self-esteem went up a notch. That was my lifelong dream, to go to university, talk to deans, be amongst professors and students .... I even forgot that I was in jail. By my second year, I forgot that I ever was in jail."

William is forty-one and still struggles to be law-abiding. He takes life one day at a time, even after four years of sobriety:

"It was not all that easy for me, even back in [a city]. All through my sobriety, I had to keep on going to programs like life skills, something to keep me motivated ...."

When asked about the importance of jobs and education, Harry replied:

"Oh, yes, all of those things come into play. Those are all good ways of looking at it. In particularly, if they wanted to go into education, before they are successful and knowing the type of commitment they are getting themselves into, say into education, first of all they are going to need to process a lot of hurt. They need to heal themselves first, get in touch and focus on their spirit. That has to be dealt with first."

Therapy and Processing Issues

A common theme identified by ten of the participants concerned the need for therapy and ways to process issues that interfere with healing.

For Harry, his feelings of being oppressed are ever present:

"I am very content, happy and I think my success is spirituality and that is where my success is but although I have a lot of delayed grief in here, a lot of issues. I know those things are going to take time. I am taking care of them now, going for professional therapy and processing these issues .... My issues are all of this oppression stuff that happened to me – the Indian Act, residential school, religion, racism. I guess for me and all this oppressed stuff, it is all in here. That is why I have a real issue with white people. That is my issue. When I see a white man, right now, I see his authority and I despise that. Right now, I tolerate it and I work with it and I handle it pretty good but that needs to be processed. For God's sake, I have a son-in-law who is a white guy, so that's where I'm at."

Allen came from a dysfunctional family complete with drinking, fighting and conflict. He was full of bitterness, resulting from his experiences with residential school and prisons. Allen was very violent, and didn't care about himself or others.

"It was a couple of years after I sobered up that all of these feelings started coming out. My anger, mostly ...."

He continues to receive therapy from a psychologist.

Bert is forty-two years old and, as a youngster, spent four years in a residential school:

"Even in there, I ended up getting abused, sexually abused by a worker and I used to see that with other boys in there too. Like, these men workers would come in and bother them at night. I never ever done anything about that, like to tell anybody. A lot of that was all something I never even wanted to face until recently."

As noted earlier, William is not finding it easy to stay on the straight road. He feels he needs a lot of help and support:

" .... I did go and see a psychiatrist, a team of psychiatrists, when I was maintaining sobriety and they did tell me the same thing. Do something like group therapy and they did ask me if I did attend some meetings and I did say yes and I did see a psychologist and he recommended group therapy meetings for me and that is what I do."

Sheila described how she still struggles with issues from her past:

"There was a lot of stuff in my past that hurt. A lot of the abuse was very painful. Even to this day it is but not as great as it was. I had to deal with all my past, all of it, because it affected my everyday life. It affected me dealing with my kids and I hated myself for a long time but with the help of other people, people just like myself, that I got through it."

Participants indicated they are still dealing with issues such as having children yet not carrying out the responsibility of raising them, seeking love through prostitution, sexual and verbal abuse and oppression.

These participants have identified issues and experiences from their past that they feel contributed to their getting into trouble. For many, these issues are still present and they continue to have to somehow deal with these issues. Some turn to peers for help; others to group or individual therapies. Some participants rely on their Elders for help in dealing with aspects of their past that still haunt them to this day.

Family

Another positive influence cited by ten of the participants was their family. The ongoing support of parents and siblings was identified as helpful. Children were significant in that they were often just coming back into the lives of the participants. When the participants were active criminals, their family often took a backseat to drinking, fighting, stealing and going to jail. Now that the participants were well on their way to becoming law-abiding citizens, their family, especially the children, re-emerged as important parts of their lives.

Tom expressed the importance of his immediate family:

"I try and be a good person in my ways even though there are so many things sitting in front of me. There is the drugs. There is the alcohol. There is the woman and there is also my life to think about – my life and my family, my wife and my baby. These are the important things for me because without these I think I would be like the rest of the brothers – in and out, in and out."

Tom made other observations about the importance of family:

"Getting back to this staying out of trouble, I think that is the only thing anybody can do, is to help themselves. If they want to stay out of trouble, it is there, who you hang around with is the most important factor, your friends or your family. Like, my family supported me a lot through my time. There was a time when I really didn't want to see anybody. There was a time when I shut everybody off and I didn't really want to have nothing to do with them, especially the first time when I got my sentence. That is really hard on you and it is also hard on your family but my mother has been there right through my time. She has been supportive, spiritually out there in helping me out when I was inside and now I help myself out. I do what I have to do. Now, I got a son and a wife. I took a lot of pride, a lot of heart, when I had my son. I was there when he was born and I was there when he got his [Indian] name .... anyways, that is what keeps me alive is my spirituality. That is what keeps me going and also my family and support."

Ron spoke about the importance of his wife as an influence that helps him stay law-abiding:

"I mean, for me, it took a good woman and a lot of people say, well, that is what it takes. But, for me, that is what it took and she is not tightening my belt and saying, well, you can go here and you can go there. It is an equal relationship and it is a trusting relationship. It is a supportive relationship and that is what worked for me. Hey, this woman believes in me. I don't have to go out and rob ten guys just so she will accept me. She accepted me for who I was ...."

A renewed focus on family became an important factor contributing to the participants' stability and integration into society.

Relapse

The path followed by the participants was not an easy one. Along the way, six of the participants encountered circumstances they found they could not handle positively. They started drinking again and/or committed more offences.

Harry related how he was out of work and the bills were piling up:

"From 1988 to 1992, I went through some pure hell and in 1990, I relapsed. I guess maybe with all of the pressures and the bills, whatever. We moved to [a city]. I started off where I had a few beers and I totally neglected my spirituality. I felt like I was abandoned and what is this whole world against me again? Anyways, one night I got all drunked up and I raised hell with [my wife] and the kids. They called the police ...."

Two other participants found themselves facing new charges. For those on parole, these new charges posed a real dilemma for everyone. Was the participant again a serious risk to society or was this a temporary set back?

For one participant, his parole was revoked and he was returned to complete his sentence in prison. He was later released. The other participant was fined and had his reporting conditions tightened considerably.

Henry continued to abuse drugs and alcohol but eventually regained sobriety.

"I was working still. I was into drugs and drinking lots already. I became a full fledged alcoholic by that time and then I came back here [a city] a couple of times. Every time I came back here, I ended up on the street. I got into drugs there and fighting again and all kinds of stuff. Eventually that led up to me straightening out but it took a little time from 1984 until 1989."

Amanda also relapsed. For her, the new lifestyle of sobriety was very boring compared to what she was used to:

"When I first got out, I stayed straight for four months and I would go down to the bars. I was going to meetings but I was also going to the bars because I couldn't stand those people because they were so old and they were boring because, you know, my life had been so exciting. I would go out to the bar where all the druggies were and the thieves and hookers and what have you and sit around with them. Pretty soon, one day I had a drink and I thought, oh, pretty good. Anyway, one day I just gave it shit, never stopped. I drank off and on from July to October and then that was it."

Shortly after being interviewed for this project, one participant on parole was suspended, allegedly on suspicion of violating the abstinence from intoxicants condition on his parole.

For Bert, his struggle to remain law-abiding was compounded on two occasions when he was charged with assault. He reported that on one charge, a stay of proceedings was entered; on the other, witnesses failed to appear at his trial and the charges were dismissed. Bert expressed feelings of bitterness and acceptance at these events:

"That is how it ended up and these guys [who laid charges against Bert] go on working with people and they are the ones who did it all. Nobody knows about that. Like, that is why sometimes when you try to straighten out, all this injustice, like, things get you frustrated from it because people don't listen. I ended up paying over $1,500.00, just about $2,000.00 to a lawyer .... This is my survival today. I walk this road like that. Like, to go around hurting people, I don't do that. I try my best not to do that, anyways. Some of the things that happened, like, really really gross things that happened since I sobered up, like, I had to cope with and to live with. I think today I kind of give myself credit for that because, you know, I think they took lots of guts, like to go through that."

In this study, there was evidence of six of twenty participants relapsing. This often but not always involved additional charges. Even though as a group, the sample was deemed to be successful, their success was fragile and elusive. This finding gives additional credence to the voices of the participants who report their success was a tough struggle and that it took time. It took tremendous resilience and determination to overcome the impact of the personal, family and community dysfunctions that were a way of life for so long.

Other Factors

From time to time in the interviews, the participants identified specific items they felt were important in their process of becoming law-abiding. These were exercise, time alone and support from unlikely sources.

Several cited the importance of working out and maintaining good physical conditioning.

Concerning spending time alone, Stan reported:
"Once in a while, if things are really out of control and if things are really going too fast or I am rushed and stuff like that, those kind of feelings come on, I just head for the bush and make a campfire and kick back and relax there and have some tea and sleep there even. I sleep overnight and you just have a really deep sleep, too, when you are in the pine areas and stuff and the next day you just feel all comfortable and relaxed. You can see everything, what the problems were or what is building pressure for you and stuff like that and I manage to prevent too many bad things from happening to me, nowadays."

Allen reported on a largely unknown support – his former drinking buddies:

"I wanted to straighten out on the street and I did it on skid row where my life was so involved for many, many years. I wanted to see if I could make it there, then I would be able to live in society. I had a lot of support from guys that I did time with and guys I used to drink with, that were still practicing but these other people, too, that supported me. They told me just to keep doing what you are doing, we don't want to see you drink and we don't want you at the party. I remember one time they escorted me out of a bar because I had to go to the bathroom and I couldn't make it another block. I walked in and I was stopped at the door. A couple of guys that I did time with and I drank with and I fought with and they said you don't belong here. When I told them I had to go to the bathroom, they escorted me to the bathroom and escorted me out again. That kind of support I got, even from those people who are still practicing, it really helped me. These guys that were still going in and out of jail really helped me to try and help myself. They pushed me. They said 'you can do it, you've got a chance' ."

Personal Responsibility

There appears to be a shift in the degree of responsibility voiced by many of the participants from the time they got into trouble through to their experiences in staying out of trouble. In the former, the participants saw themselves very much at the mercy of forces outside their realm of control. They saw themselves pushed into criminal activity because of factors like racism, alcoholism, and poor role modelling. They felt they were victims of abuse from personal, family, community and systemic forces. Many descended into a sense of helplessness and hopelessness and many settled into a pattern of substance abuse, violence and other criminal activity. It seems, however, that as they became aware of the possibility of a different way of living, their spirits and their confidence began to return. By the time they were quite well reintegrated into the community, many participants were expressing confidence and commitment to their new ways. They were proud of their achievements and a lot of their self-esteem had returned. They were "becoming themselves".

When the participants spoke about staying out of trouble, many spoke in terms of their personal responsibility. For many, staying out of trouble was up to themselves. Help was available via staying sober, maintaining a level of cultural and spiritual involvement and the productive use of time such as

working, pursuing education and helping others but this help was external. It was important but not as important as a personal commitment to remain law-abiding. Tony commented:

"I think it is the individual that makes what it is in life, with or without programs because looking at my own self and quite a few other guys, when there was a lack of programs, some of us are straight today. Some of us are doing not too bad without programs. I am not saying programs are not needed, they are helpful, too."

Ron expressed his concept of personal responsibility this way:

"You have to make that change and you have to learn to make choices and want to make them choices. I mean, people can program those people up the ass until they are blue but it ain't going to do no good. It's got to come from within."

Edward commented:

"Like I said, Elders were and are my teachers today. They tell me in order for you to function as a person, you have to find what are your values, who you are, your spirit. Once you find your spirit, you will be able to walk a road that is more pleasantful than you have before."

Summary

Staying out of trouble is not easy but it can be done. These participants did so mainly by staying sober, developing their spiritual and cultural identity and developing a stronger sense of personal identity.

Many participants devoted time to processing issues and feelings they had previously repressed. This was done in therapy with professionals and by talking about their feelings, opening up and expressing themselves as never before. The role as counsellor performed by Elders would be a part of the process of dealing with repressed feelings. It seems the participants were grieving the loss of their heritage, their pride and their former independent ways. The Elders can be most helpful in helping some participants come to grips in a positive way with these issues.

External factors such as working and/or taking courses were important. Some did volunteer work.

The importance of a support system from spouses, children and friends was identified. This usually meant associating with persons who were positive in their outlook. Most participants didn't associate very much with their former associates – they chose a different lifestyle and this meant new people in their lives.

The fragility of their success was highlighted. Some of these success stories were in trouble again,

sometimes on serious matters yet they persevered, trying to stay focused on the progress they had made toward becoming a law-abiding citizen. These participants did not give up easily.

Discussion

This exploratory project examined some of the influences that contributed to a sample of twenty Aboriginal persons getting into trouble with the law, getting out of trouble and staying out of trouble. In addition to systematically documenting the factors contributing to the successful integration of Aboriginal offenders, the project seeks to explore how this information could be useful to correctional and other agencies working with offenders.

Caution is advised when considering the results of the study and the discussion on ways of using the results. With in-depth research of this type, a small number of individuals are involved — here, only twenty. As mentioned at the outset, all of these twenty persons were either known to project staff or the staff at Poundmakers Lodge or the Nechi Institute. Therefore, while these results are interesting and suggestive, additional research with a much larger sample is really required.

The interview schedule was relatively unstructured. While this enabled the participants to tell their story their way, it depended somewhat on the motivation of the participants to focus on the principle research matters. Several participants went to great lengths describing the events leading to some of their offences. As well, it depended on the interviewers to guide the interview as intended. This posed a real challenge to them. They had to respect the participant's way of telling their story, yet they also had to keep the interview on track. The experiences and biases of the interviewers could have affected the direction and focus of the interviews to some extent.

Another potential weakness in the research is that the analysis of the transcripts was done by one person. Here again, the biases and perceptions of the analyst could influence the findings. The role of the consultants in the project was to minimize this possibility as much as possible.

Three participants were female and the analysis dealt with their stories together with those of the male participants. It is possible their experiences could have some distinct differences compared to those of male offenders. Further research with a larger sample of women is needed.

The importance of helping offenders to stop drinking and using drugs is clearly confirmed in this study. This would apply to offenders in custody as well as those in the community. The access to substance abuse programs such as AA and to treatment centres is very important for offenders. Such access should be actively promoted and made readily available to Aboriginal offenders. Correctional officials and staff from other agencies are advised not to expect one-shot cures – numerous attempts to stop may be required. Becoming sober is a process that takes time, not an event or incident that suddenly or magically happens.

In addition to having substance abuse programs available for offenders, they must also be available for friends and family members in the community. The long history of substance abuse in Aboriginal families and communities reminds us of the size of the task ahead to help families and communities work toward sobriety. The current efforts of detox centres, treatment centres, and community intervention cannot be stressed enough. New initiatives need to be explored. Any progress in this area will eventually be useful to Aboriginal offenders.

Related to the treatment and intervention services, of course, are the prevention programs. Reducing and preventing the incidence of substance abuse in Aboriginal communities will positively impact on Aboriginal offenders and on correctional agencies.

This project has documented the impact and importance of Aboriginal spirituality and cultural influences to Aboriginal offenders. This influence coupled with control of substance abuse seems to have had a major influence on the hard core offenders included in this study. Because of the very positive effects, Aboriginal programming needs to be emphasized in all correctional centres and in communities where Aboriginal offenders will be living. This would involve respect and support for Aboriginal ceremonies and Aboriginal values. The findings of this study confirm the importance of the initiatives taken in the last few years by correctional agencies, particularly institutions, to promote Aboriginal ceremonies and to use Aboriginal cultural resources. Continued emphasis on Aboriginal programming also involves recognizing the relevance of such programs in institutions and during post-release in meeting the needs of Aboriginal offenders. As correctional services struggle with allegations that "nothing works" or questions such as "what works," there is evidence here that "something works." There is a winning combination here that is very beneficial to offenders, their families, their communities and the justice system.

When it comes to planning and delivering Aboriginal programming, correctional officials must keep in mind the experiences of the participants. They saw Aboriginal spirituality and culture as a way of life, a path; not discrete symbols or ceremonies. What is important from the evidence of the men and women in this study is that there must be a holistic approach to Aboriginal programming, not bits and pieces of Aboriginal events.

There appears to be an additional aspect to Aboriginal programming that is beneficial. The presence and promotion of Aboriginal programming sends a message to Aboriginal offenders that their spirituality and culture is valued. For some, this message is very different from messages received earlier in their lives. Perhaps the perceptions and implications of non-Native cultural superiority can be replaced by perceptions and implications of Native/non-Native cultural reciprocity.

The importance of Elders has been clearly documented. This project reinforces the importance of encouraging and facilitating the contact of Elders with Aboriginal offenders. Elders are of vital importance to Aboriginal offenders. As a result, Elders must be seen by correctional officials as an invaluable resource as spiritual leaders, teachers, counsellors, healers and role models.

In addition to the importance of enhancing spiritual development, the development of cultural awareness is needed as well. This need can be met by Aboriginal staff and by members of the Aboriginal community. Often, the participants in this study saw spiritual and cultural development as synonymous. Several participants referred to the importance of Aboriginal persons coming into prisons. This serves to present role models and, as one participant noted, "it lets us know what is possible." This concept is incredibly important. All of the participants in this study came from very dysfunctional backgrounds in terms of their personal, family and community experiences. Many lived this dysfunction for years and years – they lived what they knew. Presenting them with viable alternatives will undoubtedly help them make choices as to the lifestyles they could have rather than just accepting the circumstances they have come to know.

Aboriginal programming in the prisons and in the community that promotes positive attitudes toward Indianness and Indian ways will undoubtedly help many Aboriginal offenders look for a different path.

As well, this same approach can erode and eventually replace the negative stereotypes held by some members of the non-Aboriginal community. Everyone needs to believe different paths are possible.

Many participants spoke about how long it took to genuinely incorporate Aboriginal spirituality and culture into their lives. There is a good lesson here – there can be no quick fixes, no instant Indianness.

How can this learning process for Aboriginal offenders be improved? Many of the participants expressed key concepts in their own language. This raises the possibility of offering Aboriginal language training so the Aboriginal stories, values, concepts and traditions can be imparted more effectively.

Several participants referred to a holistic view of life – mental, physical, spiritual and emotional. This feature of traditional Aboriginal culture must be incorporated into Aboriginal programming.

In the justice system in general and corrections in particular, the word "rehabilitation" is often used in reference to a goal of sentencing and to a process of change. In this project, none of the participants used that word. They would have been exposed to it by virtue of their frequent court appearances for sentencing. They would also have been exposed to the word "rehabilitation" throughout their frequent contact with correctional staff such as caseworkers, correctional officers and parole officers. In spite of their exposure to the word "rehabilitation", it did not surface in their stories of their success.

The word that was frequently used was "healing". This seemed to be used in reference to their process of change from criminal to law-abiding citizen. An interesting question emerges here – in the perceptions of these offenders, are the concepts of rehabilitation and healing synonymous? Or, could it be these words have important differences in their meaning and connotation? What is there about the concept of healing that appeared to be so important for these offenders? This is an area that might be fruitfully explored in the future.

The study also confirmed the importance of Native Brotherhoods as a self-help group. Correctional agencies need to encourage the development and operation of the Brother/Sisterhoods.

Due to the small number of females in this sample, attempts were not made to analyze their stories separate from the males. Given the recent changes in the housing of female offenders under the jurisdiction of the Correctional Services of Canada and the over-representation of Aboriginal women in female provincial centres, it become clear a similar study is needed for women. Some questions to be addressed would be:

- are Aboriginal women's issues similar to those of Aboriginal men?
- are incarceration and reintegration patterns similar for males and females?
- are there different criteria in terms of criminality and success for Aboriginal men and women?

The study challenges correctional officials to consider their role and methods in helping Aboriginal offenders to explore the following areas:

- are they ready to make commitments to a new lifestyle?
- are they developing a new sense of personal identity?
- what underlying issues need to be addressed?
- how will relapses and re-offending be handled?
- how can support systems be encouraged and maintained?
- how can resources in the Aboriginal community be used?

The offenders in this study testified to the value of Aboriginal staff and the use of Aboriginal agencies in the provision of correctional services. They felt Aboriginal agencies had more helpful, sincere and supportive practices in line with their needs. Although the participants were quick to criticize Aboriginal staff who failed to be consistent in what they said and what they did, they seemed to identify more closely with Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal staff. Non-Aboriginal staff were often portrayed as "up there", away from the realities of the lifestyles of their clients. Aboriginal agencies with mainly Aboriginal staff likely have a better chance overcoming this barrier. Certainly, non-Aboriginal staff in non-Aboriginal agencies will more likely be perceived by Aboriginal offenders as representing a continuation of the systemic and personal racism and cultural genocide faced by themselves, their families and their communities.

On a similar vein, the trend toward Aboriginal self-determination directs that Aboriginal communities and agencies become more responsible for servicing the needs of Aboriginal offenders. This reflects a view that it is no longer acceptable to expect the justice system alone to deal with troublesome members

of the Aboriginal community. The Aboriginal community must be willing to assume its share of this responsibility and it must be given the opportunity and resources to do so.

Several of the Aboriginal offenders on parole for life felt more aftercare services and support were needed. Possibly this is an area that could be further researched. What specifically is needed in this area for long-term Aboriginal parolees? Are there existing services they could be using but for some reason aren't?

The findings in this study raise some interesting implications for the training of staff, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal in corrections. Do staff understand:

- the rage, anger, hatred, pain and grieving that is associated with the dysfunction?
- the reason why several participants used the word genocide?
- the importance of Aboriginal cultural influences and spirituality?
- the nature of Aboriginal-White relationships, both past and present?
- the cumulative effects of generations of individuals, families and communities that lost control of many factors that influenced attitudes and behaviour?

As with many research projects, as many new questions are raised as were answered. This holds

true with this project. A number of issues related to additional research in this area are raised. For

example, would similar findings be evident if the sample was significantly larger? If more females

were included, would there be different experiences in the four stages used in this study

than there were for males? If there were unique differences for Aboriginal females, how could

these differences be taken into account in correctional programming and services in the

community? Would the results be much different if a rigorously constructed interview guide was used

in a more structured interview? Similarly, would different methods of analysis produce different

results? Would the results be different for a sample of less serious offenders? As well, would the results be different if the sample were drawn from offenders who were not as closely affiliated with Aboriginal agencies such as Nechi?

In summary, this study explored some of the influences identified by a small sample of Aboriginal offenders that they felt contributed to their going from being serious criminals to law-abiding citizens.

While some of the participants experienced some very good, stable times early in their lives, they all experienced a combination of incidents and events that proved devastating to them. Most often this involved family breakup or having to go to residential school. This instability in their lives contributed to a loss of self-esteem and to a loss of cultural identity. For most participants, they went on to experience violence, substance abuse, anger, racism and extensive involvement with the criminal justice system.

Four influences clearly emerged as significant factors associated with the process of getting out of trouble. These were: (1) quitting the use of alcohol and drugs, (2) developing awareness of and commitment to Aboriginal spirituality and culture, (3) reaching a point of becoming sick and tired of substance abuse and going to prison, and (4) looking for a better life.

As well, three influences clearly emerged as significant factors associated with the process of staying out of trouble. These were: (1) staying sober, (2) maintaining spiritual and cultural development and (3) fostering a sense of personal identity, including working on unresolved issues.

The findings confirm the importance of helping individuals, families and communities to stop drinking and using drugs. Of particular importance is the recognition and support of the increased awareness of Aboriginal culture and spirituality in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

The findings also speak to the importance of Aboriginal programming in corrections, particularly in institutions but in the community as well. Correctional agencies have to be constantly aiming at designing and implementing programs that do in fact meet the unique needs of Aboriginal offenders.

The findings also stimulate discussion of training requirements of staff dealing with Aboriginal offenders.

Given the importance of Aboriginal culture and spirituality to the participants in this study, the important role of Aboriginal agencies in working with Aboriginal offenders is highlighted.

When people wonder what can be done to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal persons in the criminal justice system, some of the answers rest with healing, spirit and recovery. These are some of the tools to which Dave LaSwisse was referring.

Thanks Dave!

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APPENDIX I: Socio-economic Conditions of Status Indians

Child Welfare:	The proportion of Indian children in care has risen steadily to more than five times the national rate.
Education:	Only 20 percent of Indian children stay in school to the end of the secondary level; the comparable national rate is 75 percent.
Housing:	Nearly 19 percent of on-reserve homes have two or more families living in them; these conditions affect forty percent of all status Indian families.
Facilities:	In 1977, fewer than 40 percent of Indian houses had running water, sewage disposal or indoor plumbing facilities; the national level of properly serviced houses is over 90 percent.
Income:	The average income of Indian people is one-half to two-thirds of the national average.
Unemployment:	The unemployment rate among Indian people is about 35 percent of the working age population; in some areas it is as high as 90 percent.
Prisoners:	Native people are over-represented in proportion to their population in federal and provincial penitentiaries. In Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the North, Native people represent more than 40 percent of the prison population. The proportion of Indian juveniles who are considered delinquent is three times the national rate.
Death Rate:	Despite improvements over the past ten years, the death rate among Indian people is two to four times the rate for non-Indians.

Causes of Death:	Accidents, poisoning and violence account for over 33 percent of deaths among Indian people, as compared with 9 percent for the Canadian population as a whole. Indian people die from fire at a rate that is seven times that for the rest of the Canadian population.
Violent Death:	The overall rate of violent deaths among Indian people is more than three times the national average.
Suicide:	Indian deaths due to suicide are almost three times the national rate; suicide is especially prevalent among Indians aged 15 to 24.
Infant Mortality:	The infant mortality rate (up to the age of four weeks) among Indian children is 60 percent higher than the national rate.
Life Expectancy:	If an Indian child survives its first year of life, it can expect to live ten years less than a non-Indian Canadian. The life expectancy of Indian women, for example, is 66.2 years, while non-Indian women can expect to live 76.3 years.
Hospital Admissions:	Indians use hospitals about 2 to 2.5 times more than the national population.

Indian Self-Government in Canada
Parliamentary Committee, 1984

APPENDIX II: Interview Guide

Introduction

The interviews with Aboriginal ex-offenders will focus on five general areas:

1. introduction

2. their early years

3. getting into trouble

4. getting out of trouble
5. staying out of trouble.

The introductory information is the preliminary

data such as name, address, etc. along with an explanation of the purpose of the project.

Information concerning their criminal history will be gathered in the first part of the interview

together with age, Aboriginal status and place of birth. This stage of the interview will help the

participant "warm up" and help the interviewer and participant relax by asking specific and closed

questions.

The information concerning their early years will set the stage for the next phase of their stories, that

being getting into trouble. These two areas will have established the factors identified by the

offenders that may have contributed to their becoming offenders. This, however, is not the main focus of the study. The areas of getting out of trouble and staying out of trouble are the principle areas of interest, so the bulk of the interview will concentrate on these areas.

Interview Questions

These questions will be asked in a gentle, probing manner. They are designed to encourage the offender to tell their story. Interviewers are to repeat questions and add encouraging comments as the interview progresses, so that the offenders are comfortable they have said everything they think will help us understand their story. The interviews are to be conducted as a discussion and friendly exchange of information, not an interrogation. Offenders will be prompted to "tell me more about that", to clarify and to expand on their stories in the four areas. They will be asked to reflect on their lives in terms of the things that they feel influenced them. If the interviewers know the offenders from before, they are to conduct the interview in a friendly, but objective manner.

It will be important for the interviewers to listen for and respond to the quality of the stories, not the quantity of what is said. The interviewers may have to steer the interview gently back on track if the participants get side-tracked or very much off topic. Interviewers must be prepared to use alternate phrasing to ensure the participants have every opportunity to tell their stories.

Opening of the Interview

The interviewers opened the interview as follows: "First, I want to thank you for being a volunteer for this research project. As I shared with you earlier, the purpose of this project is to explore with ex-offenders, what is working to help you stay out of trouble with the law. The information you provide will be kept confidential. When I am finished with the interview, a lady will type it up, like I told you and it will be turned over to the project manager. The project manager will summarize all of the interviews into a final report. The results of this research project will be to: (1) determine how corrections and other helpers can help ex-offenders return and adjust to community living, (2) to determine how corrections and other helpers can improve their services, and (3) to develop re-integration models from the information provided by you successful offenders. The interview will be focused on four areas: the early years, getting into trouble, getting out of trouble and staying out of trouble."

Introduction

This part of the interview is designed to relax the interviewer and the participant, gather some personal data and get the interview process going. The following points are to be covered and checked off when covered:

1.1 Getting started:

- greetings and welcome

Purpose of project:	•	document success stories in a systematic way
Use of information:	•	research reports, articles, conferences
Role of interviewer:	•	encourage offenders to tell their story, make a few notes and ask a few questions to help offenders reflect on success
Release form, honorarium:	•	these need to be explained and signed
Smoking, coffee, breaks, restrooms:	•	explained
Confidentiality:	•	assigned a number and a different first name only will be used
	•	identifying details will be changed to disguise the story
Tape recording:	•	set up; used so interviewer can concentrate on getting the stories
	•	tapes will be transcribed and securely stored
	•	check from time to time to make sure it is working
Taking notes:	•	quick reference for interviewer; reminder of things to talk about
Interview guide:	•	to ensure all points covered systematically with everyone
Follow up interview:	•	if necessary to clarify or get more information

Any questions?

1.2 Biographical Data:

Date and place of interview: ___________________________

Name: ____ Offender: # (1 – 20) _____

Date and place of birth: _______________________________

Present age: _______________

Aboriginal status:	☐ Métis
	☐ Status Indian
	☐ Other
Gender:	☐ Male
	☐ Female
Present residence:	☐ Urban
	☐ Rural
Criminal History:	Convictions and Sentences, with Approximate Dates

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2. The Early Years

This part of the interview explores the upbringing of the participants. The following questions can be used to get them talking about this part of their life:

- where did you grow up? Tell me about it, What was it like?
- tell me about your family, parents, sisters, brothers, extended family
- what was it like growing up?
- who had a big influence on you as you were growing up?
- what were the big influences on you growing up?
- tell me about your friends in your early years
- tell me about your community
- what significant events do you remember from your early years?
- anything else about your early years?

3. Getting Into Trouble

This aspect of the interview is intended to explore the influences contributing to the participants coming into conflict with the law. How did they get into trouble and what did they do are the areas to be covered.

- tell me how and when you started to get into trouble?
- what were the first offences you committed?
- how did your friends respond?/family?/community?
- any idea why you started getting into trouble?
- what kind(s) of trouble did you get into?

4. Getting Out of Trouble

This is one of the most important parts of the interview, exploring what influenced the offenders to

change their lives around, become a law- abiding citizen and re-stabilize their lifestyles:

- what were the turning points in your life that helped you get out of trouble?
- who had an impact on you that helped turn you around?
- did anything happen in prison – people, programs, to help you turn around?
- did agencies from the street help you?
- you started to change, how come?
- what changes do you recall in your self-concept, attitude and personal values?
- what was the impact of your family, friends and community at this time?
- thinking back, what other services do you think would help offenders get out of trouble?

5. Staying Out of Trouble

This is another crucial aspect of the project, exploring how ex-offenders stay law-abiding:

- what do you do to stay out of trouble?
- who helps you stay out of trouble?
- what agencies are helpful to you?
- what else would help you/any other services?
- how have family, friends and the community helped you?
- what is there about your values, attitude and self-concept that helps keep you from re- offending?

6. Summary

Anything else you'd like to say about your early years, getting into trouble, getting out of trouble or staying out of trouble? Anything else about your success?

7. Thank you!

Remind each participant there may be a follow-up interview.

APPENDIX III: Participant Profile

File #	Sex	Aboriginal Status	Age	Pseudonym	Self-Reported Criminal Convictions
01	Male	Status Indian	48	Harry	joy riding non-capital murder resisting arrest
02	Male	Status Indian	50	Walter	assault theft, robbery mischief
03	Male	Status Indian	36	Tom	assault causing bodily harm break and enter murder
04	Male	Métis	45	Henry	auto theft mischief assaults second degree murder
05	Male	Métis	48	Wilfred	break and enter assaulting peace officer theft under/over assault causing bodily harm robbery impaired driving
06	Male	Status Indian	53	Allen	break and enter assault causing bodily harm manslaughter
07	Male	Non-Status Indian	35	Harold	break and enter joy riding auto theft armed robbery assault uttering death threats

					theft dangerous use of weapon
08	Male	Status Indian	42	Bert	criminal negligence escape auto theft break and enter assault
09	Female	Status Indian	45	Amanda	prostitution assault causing bodily harm soliciting breach of probation running a common bawdy house trafficking in narcotics
10	Male	Status Indian	41	William	firearms assault wilful damage break and enter robbery joy riding
11	Female	Métis	36	Mary	robbery possession of stolen property prostitution possession of narcotics
12	Male	Métis	42	Ron	break and enter auto theft robbery impaired driving possession of drugs trafficking
13	Male	Status Indian	52	Tony	impaired driving break and enter assault

					manslaughter
14	Male	Status Indian	49	Edward	theft break and enter assault causing bodily harm robbery auto theft impaired driving
15	Male	Status Indian	40	Richard	robbery assault causing bodily harm inciting a riot attempted murder break and enter pointing a firearm hijacking kidnapping dangerous use of firearm
16	Male	Métis	49	Henry	non-capital murder break and enter assault impaired driving
17	Male	Status Indian	36	Ralph	impaired driving break and enter assault theft mischief resisting arrest
18	Female	Status Indian	32	Sheila	failing to appear assault robbery soliciting
19	Male	Status Indian	39	Stan	assault assault causing bodily harm manslaughter

					careless driving pointing a firearm dangerous driving
20	Male	Status Indian	36	Gary	break and enter dangerous use of firearm

APPENDIX IV: Analysis Sheet

Code #

The Early Years

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Getting Into Trouble

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Getting Out of Trouble

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Staying Out of Trouble

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Notes/Comments:

APPENDIX V: History of the Nechi Institute

During the 60's and 70's, Native people began seeking treatment for alcoholism. During the early 70's, Poundmaker's Lodge and Hobbema Centre were developed as the first Native Alcoholism treatment facilities managed by Natives for Natives. Previous to Nechi's development, there were few Native people who possessed the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for an effective alcohol and drug counsellor. Training was needed and from this, the vision of Nechi grew.

Nechi Institute was incorporated as a non-profit Society in Alberta on October 15, 1974 by Native people who were determined to reduce the devastation caused by alcohol and drug abuse in our communities. Our founding principles are:

1. Native alcohol and drug abusers can be most effectively counselled and rehabilitated by our Native people.
2. Native people can best manage and direct their own community programs an businesses.
3. Native people will research the most effective methods of dealing with community problems (i.e. employee assistance).

Nechi's Board of Directors are of Métis and Treaty descent and we believe Native people are best equipped to deliver programs to Native people. When Nechi was established, there were few Native people who possessed knowledge, skills and attitudes required to be an effective alcohol and drug counsellor.

Since Nechi's inception in 1974, it has maintained Native training staff of professionals and para-professionals. These staff members have knowledge and understanding in the field of addictions, management, research and Native cultural awareness, and facilitating group experience. We also utilize academic resource persons who work jointly with our staff in the experience. We also utilize academic resource persons who work jointly with our staff in the Advanced Counsellor Training Series and Program Management Training Series.

Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) commenced funding the Nechi program in 1974, In 1976, National Health and Welfare, through the National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP), now referred to as Addictions and Community Funded Programs, began cost-sharing the Nechi program with AADAC.

Through Nechi training, members of the "helping professions" acquired the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and cultural orientation required to reduce the suffering of Native people in Alberta caused by alcohol and drug abuse.

Our understanding of the training needs of Native alcohol and drug counsellors has evolved over the

past ten years, as 1,500 trainees have participated in our program.

We at Nechi believe Native people flourish when we direct our destinies. This organization is governed by a Native Board of Directors and staffed by Native people. We encourage feedback from the Native communities via the programs we train and we are able to continually improve to respond to changing needs. We owe a large part of our success to this continual interaction with Native communities and their willingness to implement the skills gained though our program.

Philosophy and Goals of Nechi Institute

Nechi Institute believes that problems of addiction, poverty or crime are by nature human problems and that they occur within a community context. An individual's behaviour must be considered in light of his community setting, personal experiences, cultural background and the social institutions that shape his life.

It is only when problems are approached in as totally a comprehensive manner as possible, with compassion and understanding that approaches to solutions are possible.

A primary Indian virtue is the development of a harmonious relationship between an individual and his environment. This requires that an individual be given an opportunity to discover and develop his skills and the knowledge required to effectively survive in his environment. Nechi Institute concentrates on developing the individual's basic learning skills — "survival skills". While recognizing this to be a life long project, the Institute realizes the urgent need for Native alcoholism workers.

APPENDIX VI: Project Personnel

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