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THE CLOSING OF THE PRISON  
FOR WOMEN IN KINGSTON

July 6, 2000

# END OF AN ERA

HV  
8738  
E53  
2000

Correctional Service Canada / Service correctionnel Canada

Canada

## Table of Contents

End of an Era . . . . .	6
Women in Prison in Canada: The Early Years . . . . .	7
Building the Prison for Women . . . . .	9
The First Inmates . . . . .	10
The War Years . . . . .	10
Post-War Decades . . . . .	11
The Modern Era . . . . .	13
Under Fire . . . . .	14
A New Beginning . . . . .	16
Events Leading to the Arbour Commission of Inquiry . . . . .	18
Intensive Intervention Strategy . . . . .	19
Prison for Women: The Last Years . . . . .	20
New Facilities . . . . .	21
Profile of Women Offenders . . . . .	23
Conclusion . . . . .	23
Appendix	
Helping Hands . . . . .	24
List of Prison for Women Directors, 1934-2000 . . . . .	24

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# MESSAGE FROM THE SOLICITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

The Prison for Women was officially opened in 1934 as the answer to the problem of what to do with women under federal sentence in Canada. For the first time, women inmates would have a separate facility of their own.

High expectations were overcome by the realities of the time. The deficiencies in the design of the prison continued to hamper rehabilitation efforts. Also, many of the women incarcerated at the Prison for Women had to bear the additional hardship of being separated from their communities and families, including, in some cases, from their children.

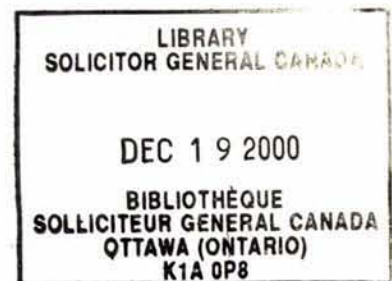
Staff at the Prison for Women, many of whom served there throughout their entire careers, often worked under difficult and stressful circumstances. Despite these challenges, not only did they strive to provide the offenders in their custody with a safe and secure environment, but in many cases, they made valuable contributions to the offenders' lives and futures. They are to be commended.

With the establishment of the five new women's facilities across the country — four regional centres and one Aboriginal healing lodge — we have entered a new era of corrections for women under federal sentence in Canada. We recognize that women offenders have unique needs as individuals and different needs as a group. It is our responsibility — in fact our duty — to meet those needs. We are doing just that.

Today, the new facilities for federal women offenders offer supportive environments and a wide variety of new, innovative programs. The number of professional staff has been increased. Vocational and educational training courses have been expanded. Volunteers and representatives of non-governmental organizations play an increasingly important role. The offenders are closer to their support networks and families. I am confident that women offenders will be better for it and our citizens safer.

In closing, I can only add that we could not have gotten to this point without the contributions made by the staff and management, past and present, of the Prison for Women. On behalf of the Government of Canada and all Canadians, I would like to offer my sincere thanks.

LAWRENCE MACAULAY  
*Solicitor General of Canada*



# MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER OF THE CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF CANADA

The closing of the Prison for Women signifies the end of an important chapter in the history of corrections for women under federal sentence in Canada. Further, its closure symbolizes the culmination of a process that began in 1990 with the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women and its report, entitled *Creating Choices*.

The closing of the Prison for Women marks another important milestone with respect to the commitment that I made early in my career as Commissioner to change the face of women's corrections. With the opening of five new women's facilities during the last decade and the introduction of many new programs designed specifically to meet the needs of women offenders, we have made an important contribution to our Mission to provide safety, respect and dignity for all.

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) and its partners in the criminal justice system can take great pride in what we have accomplished. Women offenders in custody now live closer to their families and support networks. They live in humane but secure and safe environments, most of them in community-like accommodation where they are responsible for their daily living needs. They receive individual and group counselling and other services from qualified professionals. Many of them are involved in educational and training programs. For Aboriginal women, unique programming is being provided at the Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge in Maple Creek, Saskatchewan. This concept has spread to the other women's facilities. Women's corrections is now a very important and distinct part of what we in CSC do.

In closing the Prison for Women, I would like to pay tribute to the staff and management team who, throughout the years, have worked so diligently to meet the challenges of working with a small, unique group of offenders. Your efforts have not only contributed to the mission of this institution, they have also helped make this new beginning a reality.

OLE INGSTRUP

*Commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada*

# MESSAGE FROM THE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOR WOMEN, CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF CANADA

In 1996, I became the Correctional Service of Canada's (CSC's) first Deputy Commissioner for Women. It was a time of profound change for federal women offenders, as the Service responded to challenges represented both by the complexity of the inmate population and the environment within which sentences were carried out.

Indeed, the treatment of women offenders in this country has come a long way since the early days of the Prison for Women. Recognizing that the rehabilitative needs of women inmates are different from those of their male counterparts, we have moved from a "onesize fits all" approach to one where the chances of reform and social reintegration are better than ever before.

The goal of women's corrections in CSC is to identify creative, practical, gender and culturally sensitive solutions to housing and assisting women offenders. The focus today is on education, programs and treatment interventions, and, where appropriate, support from the women's families and communities.

However, none of these innovations would have been possible without the hard work of the staff at the Prison for Women, who strove to meet the special requirements of the inmates. They truly paved the way for the future, and their efforts and compassion will never be forgotten.

The story of the Prison for Women is one that reflects the dedication of all those who have served on staff, stretching over a period of seven decades. To all these women and men, I would like to express my gratitude for a job well done.

NANCY STABLEFORTH  
*Deputy Commissioner for Women*  
*Correctional Service of Canada*

# END OF AN ERA

*"I think the Prison for Women has outlived its usefulness . . . We're the last physical remnants of the past."*

THÉRÈSE LEBLANC, WARDEN, PRISON FOR WOMEN  
(*Kingston Whig Standard*, September 4, 1999)

On May 8, 2000, the last inmate was transferred from the Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario, to Grand Valley Institution for Women in Kitchener, Ontario. The event brought an end to a process, begun in 1995, that saw scores of inmates leave the prison, bound for new institutions, challenges and opportunities.

The date of the last departure was particularly significant: it marked the early fulfillment of the Solicitor General's commitment of September 3, 1999, to close the Prison for Women within two years.

There is no denying that the Prison for Women had its shortcomings. Its design was flawed and, as the only federal women's prison in the country, it separated many of its inmates from their loved ones and support networks. Nonetheless, for some inmates, it offered hope and gave help. For many of the staff who served diligently over the years, the Prison for Women was an integral part of their lives. The memories will remain.

Closing a prison, like closing a hospital or decommissioning a naval ship, can be fraught with emotion. It can also signify progress. Today's closing ceremony is one such occasion. While the official closing of the Prison for Women marks the end of an era, it also symbolizes the progress that has been made toward improving corrections for women offenders in Canada.

# WOMEN IN PRISON IN CANADA: THE EARLY YEARS

The story of the Prison for Women is inextricably tied to the past. In many ways, its construction marked a continuation of that past.

In 1835, almost a hundred years before the Prison for Women opened, the first three women arrived at Kingston Penitentiary, just across the road from the future site of the Prison for Women. Susan Turner, Hannah Downes and Hannah Baglen, all serving one to two years for larceny, were housed temporarily in the prison hospital until a separate facility could be found. It was not until 1839 that they were moved to part of the North Wing, then designated as the first prison for women in Canada.

Women inmates rarely came into contact with their male counterparts. While several babies were born inside the walls, the women conceived before they had been admitted to the prison. In some cases, mothers were allowed to keep their babies in their cells, usually only as long as was necessary to wean them, after which the child would be sent to an orphanage or to family members.



Women inmates at Kingston Penitentiary, at the turn of the century.

Conditions for the women were similar to those for men, or worse. Their quarters were cold, damp and crawling with bugs. Punishment for infractions of rules included floggings and placement in the "box": a coffin-like container with air holes, in which a woman was forced to stand, hunched over, for hours at a time. Women, like men offenders, could also be chained, submerged in ice water, put in a dark cell or fed only bread and water. And so it went for years. In 1881, Matron Mary Leahy reported for the year that various members of the inmate population of 15 had spent a total of 14 days in solitary confinement on a diet of bread and water.

Although their numbers were comparatively small, women prisoners in Kingston Penitentiary seldom had enough room; as their numbers increased they were moved several times within the prison. In 1858, the Warden reported that eight women were forced to sleep in the corridor due to a lack of cells. In 1867, the Inspector strongly advocated in his annual report that a proper women's prison be built outside the walls of Kingston Penitentiary.



The Northwest Cell Block located within the walls of Kingston Penitentiary housed women inmates from 1913 to 1934.

Regrettably, no action was taken and conditions for incarcerated women remained poor. Productive activity for the women was often in short supply and limited to typically "female" pursuits: the manufacture of inmate clothing and other needlework activities. In 1872, Matron Leahy reported that the women inmates had made, among other things, 201 aprons, 34 sun bonnets, 406 pillowcases and 1,480 pairs of socks.

In 1889, Inspector James G. Moylan, referring to the women's area of Kingston Penitentiary, stated as follows: "I have always considered this portion of the penitentiary unfit for the use that is made of it. Apart from its objectionable proximity to the male

prison, the cells being underground in a gloomy and dismal compartment is sufficient cause for recommending a change."

In 1909, a partial remedy was decided upon: a new, separate prison for women would be constructed, but it would still be located within the walls of Kingston Penitentiary. By February 1913, male inmates had completed construction of the Northwest Cell Block and the women inmates moved into their new quarters. There were 32 single-occupancy cells and two double sick-bay cells.

The following year, the Royal Commission on Penitentiaries, having favourably commented on the new building, nonetheless stated ". . . that the interests of all concerned would be best served if those few inmates were transferred to an institution for women. It may be possible that, as has been suggested elsewhere in this report, in connection with certain other classes, arrangements might be made with the provincial authorities for the custody of all female offenders."

In 1934, after 99 years, the women were at last moved from Kingston Penitentiary to a separate institution — across the road, behind the Warden's residence and into the new Prison for Women. It wasn't any closer to home and it certainly wasn't what many of them had hoped for.

# BUILDING THE PRISON FOR WOMEN

*"I think it was the era at the time in terms of building prisons. There was, I think, a mindset that it was important that there be a great deal of control, that there be a great deal of structure."*

LORI MACDONALD, DEPUTY WARDEN, PRISON FOR WOMEN

(Citytv News, Toronto, May 3, 2000)

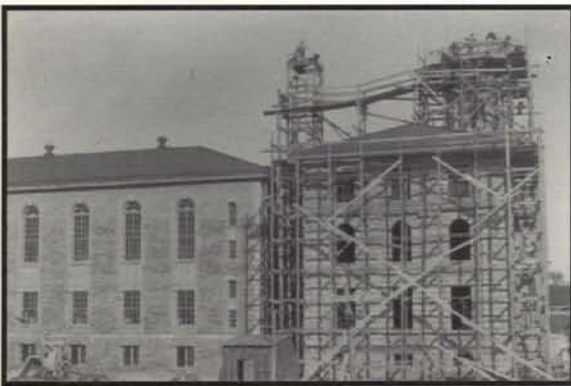
The Prison for Women was a long time in the making. Numerous reports over many years recommended a separate prison for women, but it wasn't until 1925 that construction finally began with the help of men's labour gangs from Kingston Penitentiary.



At the time, 27 women inmates occupied the Female Department of Kingston Penitentiary. By 1927, their number had grown to 40, exceeding their cell capacity and requiring some of the women to sleep in the corridors.

By 1929, the new prison had begun to take shape: the stonework for the cell block's main walls was finished and the roof framework was in place. Stonecutters at Kingston Penitentiary had begun cutting the stone for the Administration Building. In 1931, concrete was poured to form the floors in the recreation room, basement storeroom, galleries, corridors and the 108 cells. That same year, 1,620 square metres of copper roofing was installed on the cellblock, and construction of the boundary wall was started. In 1932, the Administration Building was finished.

The total cost of construction of the prison was approximately \$374,000.



Construction of the Prison for Women started in 1925 with the help of men's labour gangs from Kingston Penitentiary. It was completed in 1933.

## THE FIRST INMATES



Edith A. Robinson,  
Supervising Matron from 1934 to 1944.

It was ironic that after so many years without a separate women's prison, the first inmates of the Prison for Women would be men and not women.

In 1932, overcrowding pressures at Kingston Penitentiary, exacerbated by a riot, left the Warden with little choice but to transfer 100 men to the Prison for Women despite the fact that it was still under construction. They remained there until December 1933.

On January 24, 1934, under the guidance of Supervising Matron Ms. Edith A. Robinson, the first women arrived at the new prison, ending a serious overcrowding problem at the Female Department of the Kingston Penitentiary. With the exception of the two chapels, the prison was complete.

In that first year, the population averaged about 40 women.

## THE WAR YEARS

The first German alien was admitted to the prison in 1939-40. Like other prisoners of war who followed, she was kept segregated from the general population and governed under a different set of Regulations and Instructions from the general population.



During the war, the inmates manufactured pillow slips for the Department of Service.

The Prison for Women's war effort began in 1941-42 when inmates began manufacturing thousands of pillow slips for the Department of Service (now the Department of National Defence). As the war progressed, the textile product line expanded and, also in 1941-42, inmates began to raise poultry for larger scale egg production.

# POST-WAR DECADES

In 1949, during the tenure of Supervising Matron Miss Amelia May Gibson, the first representatives of the Elizabeth Fry Society began visiting the prison, first leading recreational and educational activities and, later that year, giving courses on language and art.

During 1950–51, while Miss Lorraine L. Burke was the Supervising Matron, the prison's recreational facilities were improved and more activities were introduced, including concerts at Christmas and Easter. Organized softball was a big hit, no doubt bolstered by the Prison of Women's team participation in a prison league and additional games against "outside" teams. Tennis and volleyball became increasingly popular, and the Elizabeth Fry Society began supervising shellcraft and leathercraft hobbies, as well as giving physical education and folk-dancing classes. Motion pictures were shown more frequently, often paid for by the Inmate's Welfare Fund or provided by supporters on the outside.



In the 1950s, the prison's recreational facilities were improved and more activities were introduced such as softball and volleyball.

In 1950, the arrival of the first of 14 Doukhobor women placed serious strains on maintaining discipline and good order at the Prison for Women. These women, members of a religious sect, employed a number of strategies while incarcerated, including hunger strikes and disrobing. A prison administrator of the time stated as follows: "Their presence has had a most disturbing effect on the balance of the population."

The years 1951–52 saw marked improvements for the now 121 inmates. The library was expanded and improved, and ear phones were installed in each cell and in the prison hospital, dramatically improving radio-listening quality. School activities including

stenography classes were expanded and improved (14 students were enrolled in typing). A beauty parlor was completed and home grooming courses commenced, and hobby craft activities continued to advance beyond traditional knitting and embroidery.

Helpers from the "outside" continued to make their mark. The Elizabeth Fry Society played an increasingly significant role, counselling individual inmates, offering formal classes and assisting women to find employment upon release. The Salvation Army offered individual guidance and donated soft drinks, ice cream and candies for various group activities.

The late 1950s saw the continuation of the move toward more humane treatment of prisoners. Fifty-six garden plots were allocated to inmates to plant seeds and grow plants provided by the farm at Kingston Penitentiary. An annual Field Day was begun with prizes provided by the Inmate Welfare Fund, and an ice-skating rink was built. Thursday evening recreation programs, conducted by the Elizabeth Fry Society, grew in scope and popularity, with the last Thursday of each month devoted to entertainment. Other weekly programs included ballroom dancing, charm school, woodburning, jewelry and wire designing, belt making, choral singing, square dancing, lacing slippers and drama.

Institutional privileges also became more generous during this period. For example, the Inmate Canteen was opened two times per week, on Wednesdays and Sundays, for an hour on each occasion and, in 1956–57, Christmas gifts purchased from the Inmate Trust Fund were distributed for the first time. Entertainment and treats were available at Christmas and Easter. In September 1956, television was introduced to the prison and was received with much enthusiasm, particularly by the older inmates who could not participate in physical activities.

Contact between the inmates and the community was promoted during these years. Competitive sporting activities, from softball (typically 20 games a season) to volleyball, brought more and more inmates into contact with "outside" competitors. Various organizations, church groups and service clubs became more frequent in their visits and, for the first time, representatives from the Children's Aid Society began to visit.



Concerts, dancing and drama became regular activities for inmates.

Increasingly, the notion that not all women inmates were the same and that they could and should be assisted as individuals began to take hold. In 1956–57, the first "pre-release program" was carried out. The Elizabeth Fry Society would pick up an inmate at 1:00 p.m. and return her to the prison at 4:00 p.m., between which times she was escorted to stores and homes and taken for a drive. In 1957, the first social worker was appointed to the staff and the first classification reports were completed on new inmates with a goal to provide initial, follow-up and pre-release reports on each woman. Psychiatrist Dr. O. Karabanaw was appointed to the staff in 1959.

From its opening until 1962, the Chief Administrators of the Prison for Women reported to the Regional Director through the Warden at Kingston Penitentiary. Between 1962 and 1965, they reported through the Warden at Collins Bay Institution for men and the position became known as a Superintendent in the early 1960s. In 1965, the Superintendent was given powers equal to that of wardens at men's institutions reporting directly to the Regional Deputy Commissioner.

## THE MODERN ERA

By 1960, the Prison for Women was starting to come into its own. The first Superintendent of the Prison for Women, Miss Isabel J. McNeill, was appointed that year and the first training course for staff was conducted. During the year, construction on the recreation building and school were completed.

To accommodate increasing population pressures, a wing area was built and opened in 1962. Over time, this wing became a preferred living area for selected women meeting mostly medium and minimum-security classifications. Greater autonomy was the focus in the unit, which allowed for less restrictive supervision, more privacy, and greater freedom of movement. Trustworthy inmates were given the key to their rooms, which had solid doors instead of bars.

In 1963–64, vocational training courses offered included business practice and home economics. The following year the hairdressing school was opened. Classification and counselling services continued to expand. Two milestones were reached that year: the Prison for Women's first Family Day was held and, for the first time, some inmates were allowed to go home at Christmas, Easter and on other special occasions. The detrimental effect of having only one centrally located prison for women in Canada continued to be noted: of a total population of 81 that year, fully one-third did not receive any visits from family members.

In 1966, Mr. Donald Clarke was appointed as Warden of the Prison for Women and he remained in that position until 1970. Mr. C.A.M Edwards followed from 1970 to 1972 until Mr. Doug Chinnery was appointed to the position and remained in charge until 1980.

The number of inmates increased significantly during the 1970s, reaching an all-time high of 210 in 1978–79.

In 1983, while Mr. George Caron was Warden, in an effort to equalize and improve treatment opportunities, some women were transferred to a special and separate wing at the Regional Treatment Centre within the walls of Kingston Penitentiary.



The first training course for staff was conducted in 1960.

Pressure to incarcerate women offenders in their home provinces began to increase. By 1984, the federal government entered into transfer agreements with every territory and province except Ontario and Prince Edward Island. By 1985, most women from Quebec were held in Maison Tanguay, a Quebec provincial facility, but the majority of women from the other provinces were still incarcerated at the Prison for Women.

The years 1987–88 saw the following major treatment initiatives:

- a 12-week substance abuse session (including a special session for Native women) provided by the Elizabeth Fry Society;
- a Women in Society program focusing on self development;
- a program based on confrontation therapy provided by Brentwood Addiction Counselors;
- counselling provided by a sexual assault therapist;
- Native Sisterhood meetings held three times each week; and
- women occupied six seats in university classes conducted at Collins Bay Institution.

In 1990, a new residential facility opened its doors near the Prison for Women, under the leadership of the Prison's Warden, Ms. Mary Cassidy. Isabel McNeill House continues to provide a supportive, minimum-security environment to help women offenders successfully reintegrate in the community upon their release. The House can accommodate up to 13 women in transition, providing them with job skills, personal development programs and constructive leisure activities, among other services.

In November 1994, Ms. Thérèse LeBlanc became the Warden of the Prison for Women. She ultimately became the last Warden of this institution, seeing it through its closure in July 2000.

## UNDER FIRE

While the Prison for Women offered improved conditions to its first inhabitants, it came under fire very early in its history for its deficiencies. In 1938, only four years after it opened, the Archambault Report recommended that the prison be closed as a women's facility and used for some other purpose.

This report noted that the prison was far too large for the only 40 women that it accommodated at that time, that it had no school, lacked sufficient space for outdoor exercise and did not provide adequate programs or meaningful work. The report concluded that the women should be moved closer to their families and communities.

Since the Archambault Report, no less than 15 government reports have criticized the federal correctional system, and by extension the Prison for Women, for its failure to provide adequate services for women offenders. One solution — building a new prison — never materialized, plans being made and abandoned in 1956, 1965 and 1968.

In 1969, the *Report of the Canadian Committee on Corrections*, the Ouimet Report, proposed the decentralization of the federal women offender population into provincial facilities by way of Exchange of Service Agreements between the federal and provincial governments. The Committee saw this as a way to provide a unified service. The first of these agreements was implemented in 1973, allowing some women from Quebec to reside in Maison Tanguay, a provincial facility in Quebec. Agreements were also developed with several other provinces to accommodate federal women offenders.



To varying degrees, most reports found that the majority of women were over-classified in terms of security and their accommodations were inferior to those of male offenders.

In 1970, the Royal Commission on the Status for Women recommended that the *Federal Prisons and Reformatories Act* be revised to eliminate all provisions that discriminate on the basis of sex and religion. Its report included recommendations for services and programs for Aboriginal and Francophone women. In addition, it called for the closing of the Prison for Women.

In 1974, the National Advisory Committee on the Female Offender, the NACFO-Clarke Report, was established by the Solicitor General of Canada to set out a plan to address the security and program needs of women inmates. The Clarke Report raised the issue of women having unique "special needs."

Further reports from other sources were to follow: in 1977, the Subcommittee on the Penitentiary System in Canada (MacGuigan); in 1978, the National Planning Committee on the Female Offender (Needham), the Joint Committee to Study Alternatives for the Housing of the Federal Female Offender (Chinnery) and the *Progress Report on the Federal Female Offender Program*; in 1979, the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status for Women; in 1981, the Canadian Human Rights Commission; and, in 1988, the Canadian Bar

Association, the Standing Committee on Justice and the Solicitor General in their *Review of Sentencing, Conditional Release and Related Aspects of Corrections* (Daubney).

To varying degrees, common threads ran through the many reports. Correctional programming offered to women was described as largely inferior in quality, quantity and variety to that offered to male offenders; the majority of women were over-classified in terms of security; accommodations were inferior; and women prisoners were denied their right to equal treatment, particularly with respect to being closer to their families and communities.

The Canadian Human Rights Commission Report of 1981 was particularly influential in that it ruled that the Correctional Service of Canada discriminated against women prisoners because it did not provide equal services and facilities. It was the first of several formal reprimands that were to mark the 1980s. Within the prison, several suicides, hunger strikes, self-mutilations and major incidents reinforced the belief held by many that the system was not working well.

The 1981 report also led to the construction of better facilities at the prison and to the establishment of additional programs to deal with many of the problems identified.

## A NEW BEGINNING

In April 1990, *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*, again drew attention to the shortcomings of the Prison for Women. Co-chaired by the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies and the Correctional Service of Canada, the Task Force included a wide variety of community and government organizations brought together to form a Steering Committee and Working Group.

Their mandate was all-inclusive: to examine the correctional management of federally sentenced women from the commencement of sentence to the date of warrant expiry and to develop a plan to guide and direct the process in a manner that was responsive to the unique and special needs of this group. The *Report of the Task Force* was exhaustive and had a major impact on the future of women's corrections.



The 1990 *Creating Choices* report drew attention to the shortcomings of the Prison for Women, such as the high-perimeter wall surrounding the prison.

Among the key problems that the Task Force highlighted were the following.

### **Accommodation**

The environment at the Prison for Women was described as noisy, inadequately ventilated and without sufficient space to provide for community interaction and program delivery. Further, it was noted that the majority of women were living in a higher security environment than required and made worse by the addition, in 1981, of a solid, high-perimeter wall that added to the fortress-like atmosphere of the prison.

### **Geographic Dislocation**

It was noted that of the 130 women offenders at the prison, only 60 originated from Ontario. The rest came from communities scattered across the country. As a result, the offenders suffered from separation from family members, support networks and their communities.

### Limited Programs, Particularly for Long-Term Offenders

Among other things, the report suggested that transfer agreements with the provinces did not fully address programming needs. An increasing number of federal women offenders were serving their sentences in provincial institutions and while this allowed them to remain closer to their communities, they were not receiving adequate programming. In part, this was attributed to the fact that provincial correctional institutions focused mainly on women offenders serving sentences of less than two years.



Following the Task Force's recommendations, an Aboriginal healing lodge was built in Saskatchewan in 1995.

The Task Force's recommendations were based on five principles: empowerment; meaningful and responsible choices; respect and dignity; supportive environments; and shared responsibility.

It proposed the following guiding statement of principle: "The Correctional Service of Canada, with the support of communities, has the responsibility to create the environment that empowers federally sentenced women to make meaningful and responsible choices in order that they may live with dignity and respect."

*Creating Choices'* recommendations included the following:

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

It was a call to action. From that point on, correctional experts increasingly emphasized that women in prison were equal to, but different from, male inmates. Reports focused on the "special needs" of women offenders and the profound impact of the physical and sexual abuse that many of them had suffered. In response, more suitable and unique programming was designed. The Correctional Service of Canada placed a high priority on corrections for federal women offenders like never before. It also began to plan for the future — a future without the Prison for Women.

# EVENTS LEADING TO THE ARBOUR COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

As plans were being made, numerous issues at the Prison for Women came to a head in April 1994 with violent confrontations between six inmates and a number of correctional staff. Within days of the first incident, several other inmates took a hostage and attempted suicide. Disruptions continued at the prison, particularly in the segregation unit. On the evening of April 26, 1994, the Warden of the Prison for Women called in a male Institutional Emergency Response Team (IERT) from Kingston Penitentiary to conduct a cell extraction and to strip search eight women in segregation: the six who had been involved in the original confrontation, and two others. CSC taped the event and the footage was eventually aired on national television. Many people were outraged by what they saw. Many others began to seriously question the state of women's corrections and the Correctional Service of Canada.

In response, the Government appointed Madam Justice Louise Arbour to conduct an investigation into those incidents and the Correctional Service of Canada's management of related issues and events. The Commission investigated incidents beginning April 22, 1994, including the role of the IERT, its conduct, and the subsequent confinement in administrative segregation of the inmates concerned, the reasonableness of their treatment while in segregation and the duration of the segregation.

In April 1996, the Solicitor General released the report *Commission of Inquiry into Certain Events at the Prison for Women in Kingston* prepared by Madam Justice Arbour. The report was exhaustive. Many recommendations resulted from this report, not the least of which was recommending the establishment of a Deputy Commissioner for Women. These events served to underscore the need to accelerate the move toward modern regional institutions specifically designed to meet the security and programming needs of women inmates.

# INTENSIVE INTERVENTION STRATEGY

Corrections for women offenders have come a long way since *Creating Choices*. The new facilities for women offenders were completed and opened between 1995 and 1997. These facilities consist of regular housing units where inmates are responsible for all aspects of daily living, with expectations similar to those in the community.

In 1996, following the opening of the first new facilities, several incidents at the Edmonton Institution for Women demonstrated that due to their disruptive behaviour, high escape risk and risk to the public, a small portion of the women offenders required a greater degree of structure and control than could be provided within the existing regional facilities. This prompted CSC to remove these women from the regional facilities. The interim strategy put in place was to house these maximum-security women in small units in men's institutions in Nova Scotia, Quebec and Saskatchewan. These units are physically separate from the rest of the institution. Women offenders requiring long-term intensive mental health treatment that could not be provided by the regional facilities were offered the opportunity to transfer to the mental health unit at the Regional Psychiatric Centre in Saskatchewan and later to the Prison for Women.

Following this, the Correctional Service of Canada worked to develop a national Intensive Intervention Strategy for high-risk, high-needs women. The key elements of this strategy announced in September 1999 are as follows:

- the regional facilities' current Enhanced Security units be modified to accommodate maximum security women who require a greater degree of structure and control. These units will be physically separate from the remainder of the facility, but will be located within its existing perimeter. Specialized staff will provide high-level intervention and supervision;
- a Structured Living Environment house, also known as a Healing House, will be constructed at each regional facility to accommodate minimum and medium security women with serious emotional or cognitive difficulties. These houses will provide 24-hour staff support and supervision; and
- specialized programming will be provided to both populations through an inter-disciplinary team approach.

The regional women's facilities are currently being redesigned to meet the security and mental health needs of these women, with an anticipated completion date of September 2001.

# PRISON FOR WOMEN: THE LAST YEARS

When the decision was made in 1996 to remove certain women from the regional facilities and place them, as an interim measure, in co-located units in men's institutions, the Ontario Region put a plan into action to place Ontario women in a separate unit at the Regional Treatment Centre in Kingston, Ontario.

The women who were to be transferred to the Regional Treatment Centre successfully challenged CSC in January 1998. CSC kept the Prison for Women open to house Ontario Region women classified as maximum security, along with those of any security level requiring more intensive mental health treatment.

The staff assigned to the Regional Treatment Centre crossed the street and began to work at the Prison for Women. With the influx of "treatment-oriented" staff, a change came over the old institution. There was now a strong core of both mental health staff and correctional staff that began to work together as a team. Eventually, the dynamic approach

used with women in the Special Needs Unit began to be applied to the maximum-security inmates as well. This method had such a positive impact on the population at Prison for Women that it became one of the foundations of CSC's Intensive Intervention Strategy, along with the experiences and successes learned in the co-located units and at the Intensive Healing Program at the Regional Psychiatric Centre in Saskatchewan. This approach has also been credited for the significant and sustained reduction in the maximum security population.



The method used in the past few years by the mental health staff and correctional staff had such a positive impact on the population at the Prison for Women that it became one of the foundations of the new Intensive Intervention Strategy.

# NEW FACILITIES

*"I think that being in a place like this [Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge] is more conducive to working with your issues. When you are in a place like the Prison for Women, the only thing that you're really dealing with is right now—the anger around you, the emotions around you, the tension. You really don't have time to ever focus on what got you incarcerated."*

ADELLE BREESE

Resident at Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge, April 30, 2000

Today, nearly all of the approximately 350 federal women offenders in custody live in the five new facilities: Nova Institution for Women in Truro, Nova Scotia; Joliette Institution in Joliette, Quebec; Grand Valley Institution for Women in Kitchener, Ontario; Edmonton Institution for Women in Edmonton, Alberta; and the Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge, in Maple Creek, Saskatchewan. Women offenders in British Columbia are incarcerated at the provincial Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women, with whom CSC has an Exchange of Services Agreement.

A range of programs and services are available to these women. In the words of Nancy Stableforth, the Deputy Commissioner for Women, "CSC has designed an environment which, on the one hand, respects the rights and dignity of offenders, and on the other hand, holds them accountable for their actions."

Core programs offered at the new institutions for women include the following:

**Living Skills** — This group of programs (Cognitive Skills, Parenting Skills, Anger Management, Leisure Education and Community Reintegration) is similar in scope to those for male offenders, but has been modified to meet the needs of women.



Most of the 350 federal women offenders now live in regional facilities such as this one, located in Truro, Nova Scotia.

**Literacy and Continuous Learning** — These programs provide literacy and education to enhance the employment and personal needs of women.

**Substance Abuse** — These programs were developed specifically for women as the reasons and consequences of their substance abuse are somewhat different than those of men.

**Survivors of Abuse and Trauma** — This group of programs assists women offenders in dealing with and working through the violence that they have experienced, including childhood sexual abuse, sexual assault and partner abuse. Education and awareness programs, as well as more in-depth therapeutic and ongoing support programs are offered.

A range of other innovative programs and services are offered by individual institutions. They include multicultural, recreation and leisure, vocational and educational, peer support, and health programs and services.

CSC is also implementing a mother-child program. Its goal is to provide mechanisms that foster and promote stability and continuity for the child in its relationship with its mother. The best interests of the child, including his/her physical, emotional and spiritual well-being, is the primary consideration in decisions relating to participation in the mother-child program.



The Pawsitive Directions program is one of many new innovative programs offered to inmates.

In June 1996, Nova Institution for Women in Truro, Nova Scotia, started the Pawsitive Directions program. This program aims to instill higher self-esteem and a sense of responsibility in the inmates. The program also teaches them patience and new skills by training dogs chosen from local animal shelters to become suitable family pets or to meet specific needs of disabled individuals.

*"I'm willing to make the change, and I look at it this way: it's not a step backward, it's a step forward. And that's how I have to look at it in order to get through it because I don't want to leave."*

THERESA ANN GLAREMIN, THE LAST INMATE TO TRANSFER OUT  
OF PRISON FOR WOMEN

(Citytv News, Toronto, May 3, 2000)

# PROFILE OF WOMEN OFFENDERS

When *Creating Choices* was released in 1990, about 210 women were incarcerated under federal sentence. Today there are approximately 350 women incarcerated, while another 500 are being supervised in the community on conditional release.

Though their ages range from late teens to their eighties, 51 percent of incarcerated women are between the ages of 20 and 34. Twenty-three percent of the women are Aboriginal, 9 percent are black, 2 percent are Asiatic and 57 percent are Caucasian (9 percent are other or not stated). The community percentages reflect the incarcerated percentages except for Aboriginal women who make up only 14 percent of the community population.

Of incarcerated women, 18 percent are serving sentences for first- or second-degree murder (life sentences); 45 percent are serving sentences for Schedule I offences (crimes against persons); and 25 percent are serving sentences for Schedule 2 offences (drug-related crimes). The majority, 63 percent, are serving sentences of two to six years. Eighty-four percent are serving their first federal sentence (two years or more) and the majority are single.

Data collected during the *Creating Choices* Task Force showed that between 50 to 90 percent of the women had been victims of sexual or physical abuse, with Aboriginal women being the most affected. About two-thirds of the women were misusing drugs or alcohol at the time of their offence.

## CONCLUSION

The Prison for Women in Kingston has played a unique role in the history of our country's correctional services. Its history has reflected the evolution of correctional policies in Canada. Its closing marks the end of one era and the beginning of another in which the establishment of regional institutions entails a more humane, fair, safe and effective approach to the management of correctional services for women.

# HELPING HANDS

A number of organizations have distinguished themselves through their activities at the Prison for Women, but none more so than the Elizabeth Fry Society. In 1939, the first Canadian Branch of the Elizabeth Fry Society was formed in British Columbia to help women after their release from prison. In 1949, another chapter was formed to work with inmates in the Prison for Women.

The contributions of these groups did much to improve the lives of federal women offenders, their prospects for the future and the overall state of corrections for women.

## List of Organizations

Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies  
Elizabeth Fry Society of Kingston  
Citizens' Advisory Committee  
Native Women's Association of Canada  
The Salvation Army – Correctional and Justice Services Department  
Narcotics Anonymous  
Alcoholics Anonymous  
St. Leonard's Society of Canada  
Legal Education and Action Fund  
Prison Arts Foundation, and many more . . .

## LIST OF PRISON FOR WOMEN DIRECTORS, 1934–2000

1934–1944	Ms. Edith A. Robinson	Supervising Matron
1944–1950	Miss Amelia May Gibson	Supervising Matron
1950–1960	Miss Lorraine L. Burke	Supervising Matron
1960–1966	Miss Isabel J. McNeill	Superintendent
1966–1970	Mr. Donald Clarke	Warden
1970–1972	Mr. C.A.M. Edwards	Warden
1972–1980	Mr. Doug Chinnery	Warden
1980–1987	Mr. George Caron	Warden
1987–1994	Ms. Mary Cassidy	Warden
1994–2000	Ms. Thérèse LeBlanc	Warden