

Educational and Vocational Areas

- ⇒ Poverty is a major contributing factor in recidivism. Marketable skills could assist the former prisoner to support herself/himself and his or her family in an adequate manner
- ⇒ Education to attain those skills is a necessary requirement
- ⇒ Creative and critical thinking are attributes necessary for an evolution towards positive coping skills. (The "on-site" university program was canceled by the CSC June 30, 1993)

Some reasons for advocating for educational and vocational needs

- Many of the activities that brought people to prison were activities carried out for economic purposes. The expectations that these people would consider working at a job paying the minimum wage are unrealistic.
- Many prisoners lack a sense of control over their lives, and have very low self-esteem. Lack of choices linked to poverty is an important factor. Many of these people have never earned enough money to pay for essential items of living and/or believed that they could better their standard of living.
- Some prisoners are products of generations of people on welfare, people who have succumbed to living at a bare minimum level. Role models of independence are absent in their lives.
- 40% of prisoners are functionally illiterate and 40% of prisoners are not in relationships

Though various prison regimes offer their version of "programming" there are only a very few programs that might qualify as viable entry requirements for accredited positions outside of prison. Additionally:

- very few prisoners "qualify" for these programs and some programs are available only on a ½ day basis
- Programs such as welding for men and flower arranging for women provide questionable credentials so that gaining a job once released through completing these prison programs may be an unreasonable expectation.
- Prisons offer education to grade ten levels and/or GED while most apprenticeship programs require grade twelve graduations.
- Correspondence programs for university level courses are expensive and difficult to complete due to the absence of enabling study space and equipment and the impossibility of adequate research abilities particularly in the area of literature reviews.
- Any gains and/or knowledge the prisoner may achieve in any program is limited due to:
 - a) the dearth of the extent and/or duration of that program,
 - b) a lack of qualified instructors and
 - c) an inability for the prisoner to have expectations of continuity should s/he be transferred to another prison.

Over 10 years ago, in June, 1989 the Council of Europe adopted recommendations from its final activity report on education in prison. This was a result of seven meetings held over a four-year period by select experts from nine European countries (1991:3).¹

The predominant theme was FIRSTLY that the education of prisoners must, in its philosophy, methods and content be brought as close as possible to the best adult education in the society outside, and SECONDLY that the education should be a constant seeking of ways to LINK THE PRISONERS WITH THE COMMUNITY OUTSIDE and to enable both groups to interact with each other as fully and as constructively as possible. These recommendations were made in concert with the philosophy that the whole person in the totality of his or her social, economic and cultural context is taken into consideration.

As an Educational and Vocational Advocate, you can:

- 1 Provide updated educational and vocational information for prisoners
- 2 Liaison with Employment agencies, Vocational Schools and Universities
- 3 Advocate for prisoners in their desires to obtain sufficient study space, materials and equipment, sufficient study time and seminar areas in a separate area of the prison
- 4 Advocate for outside guest speakers and tutors for motivation and specialty learning

One who seeks justice for women in this area might specifically advocate for:

- (a) equivalent pay levels for all “programs” with prisoner participation whether they are the usual prison programs like kitchen worker or academic education
- (b) Full payment to prisoners for their labour and work products by ensuring there is no differentiation between “work programs” and “cottage industry.” If need be the payments could be paid to an outside trust fund. *(At present some prison authorities utilize prisoner’s labour to benefit the operational budget of the prison and deny the prisoner the ability to “save” money for her or his release needs and/or families’ benefits – i.e. BCCW ceramics and flower shops)*
- (c) educational, vocational, and self-help programs such as “survivor” programs to include community participation in each class in order to promote a better understanding of the similarities of each other’s needs. These programs would include First Nations’ language and life skills. *(Costs for these classes could then be shared with the community and would therefore be affordable by the prison industry.) (tip: research how this was accomplished at Matsqui Prison for Men with university classes in the 80’s)*
- (d) a Women’s Studies program to be implemented on an ongoing basis that would:
 - help to educate women about many of the historical struggles for economic independence and liberty by women over the globe.
 - assist in motivating women in prison towards the understanding of how difficulties can be overcome through education, skills training and networking
 - how financial independence for the women and their children may result

¹ Bedford, Pam. Ed. 1991. *EPEA- Newsletter*. Vol.1 No.1.March. European Prison Education Association:Kent.

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- (e) an immediate cease to the practice at the BCCW of the use of women to sew men's prisoner's uniforms in BCCW in favour of implementing sewing programs which are designed to provide women with accredited skills which lead to employment and to women being paid for their labour
- (f) university level programs to be included in the educational agenda and that graduates be sought out to form an on-campus advocacy *group (i.e. the Canadian Federation of University Women)*
- (g) prisoner attendance as audit students for women who have incomplete educational requirements for entry
- (h) prisoners to attend programs in the community when programs are not cost-enabled within the prison setting
- (i) accredited fine arts programs be included (*such as those conducted by the Emily Carr School of Art and the Simon Fraser University film, video and theatre programs be available along with Aboriginal creative arts such as carving, beading and leatherwork*)
- (j) a national education and job coordinator to be appointed who will:
 - search out, advise on and implement regionally beneficial programs for women in prison
 - coordinate the delivery of these programs to all disadvantaged women in that community, and
 - to seek support and advocacy from the National Action Committee on the Status of Women
- (k) the participation of all incarcerated women in the formulation of programs and policies which may affect them, as is lawful under Bill C-36, *The Service shall provide inmates with the opportunity to contribute to decisions of the Service affecting the inmate population as a whole, or affecting a group within the inmate population, except decisions relating to security matters*²

June Callwood once said that freedom without economic security is not liberty.

One who seeks justice for women in the area of educating and strengthening women's understanding of employment methods, expectations, law, negotiation skills and economic and budgetary survival might specifically advocate for

- (a) a National Prisoner's Union to be formed, with regional representatives comprised of women serving a minimum of a five-year sentence . Representatives could be nominated by the prison population from any of the boards of the Prisoners' Committee, the Native Sisterhood, the Student Council or other groups from every prison facility which houses federally-sentenced women.
- (b) positions of regional representatives to be deemed permanent, paid jobs

² Bill c-36. Item 74.

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- (c) communication lines via telephone fax and/or modem to enable liaison between regions and community union organizations be established and protected
- (d) the rights of such National Prisoner's Unions to negotiate terms of pay, job conditions, training and upgrading, holidays, and similar such matters as exist in Canadian society

Through participation in a Prisoners' Union, the prisoner might be better positioned to return to society as a ready, willing and able contributor

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See also: _____

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One who seeks justice for women in an area of discrimination against minorities may specifically advocate for

- (a) the woman's cultural, language, spiritual, health related specialty needs assessed promptly so that the applicable community organization(s) may be contacted . From this organization, a funded community worker might be enlisted to provide support, guidance and assistance on a regular basis such that the assistance in maintaining family ties and the pursuit of personal goals will be enabled
- (b) language and content specific media and entertainment be available on a weekly basis (funding for this proposal could be cost-shared with various non-governmental organizations)
- (c) the appointment of the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada (or other applicable organization) as ongoing consultants in each region.
- (d) lesbian and gay support and community groups be utilized for specialized counseling and meetings on a weekly basis

One who seeks **justice for Aboriginal women** in prison, may specifically advocate for

- (a) a protected and separate Spiritual area within the prison grounds of every regional prison (federal and provincial) across Canada to be available so that women may have daily access to First Nations' elders and a private meeting place for the Sisterhood Groups (*Aboriginal women account for up to 85% of some provincial prison populations*)
- (b) sweatlodge participation and pow-wows to be honoured as the spiritual observances that they are
- (c) guarantees under section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms - freedom of association and freedom of religion be designated a right to people in prison and that under no circumstance will attendance for spiritual guidance from an elder and/or sweatlodge participation be construed to be a "*program*" which can be denied by prison authorities for any reason
- (d) guarantees that funding for First Nation's Spirituality and programming will be protected from administrative misappropriation or decrease, by ensuring that Trust Funds will be provided by a Ministry outside of Justice and/or Solicitor General and further that all accounting for use of these funds will be completed by the attending First Nation's Elder or the First Nations' community liaisons
- (e) a life contract with the Native Women's Association of Canada to be mandated to monitor and report on the adherence to and/or discrepancies in the treatment and needs of all incarcerated First Nations' Women
- (f) federal transfers to the Healing Lodge be based on order of application and family/community proximity
- (g) the right to be housed in the Healing Lodge and the order of acceptance into the Healing Lodge not be determined on the basis of performance outside of the Healing Lodge; that all women are first given the opportunity to abide by the standards as set out by the Aboriginal administrators of the Healing Lodge facility, before labeling any woman as too "*dangerous*" or of too high a security level to be considered for transfer
- (h) an unbiased response by staff and an equal opportunity for positive self-realization for federally sentenced women transferred to the Healing Lodge by insuring that any internal prison records from other prisons concerning discipline should be made available on a confidential basis only to the warden of the Healing Lodge
- (i) funding provisions to construct transition houses in every region of Canada to be designed, staffed and administered by First Nations' elders and counselors for First Nations' women who are eligible for release from any prison in Canada including the Healing Lodge

Parenting

Nearly four generations of Aboriginal people were never parented. Children were taken from their parents and grandparents, from an environment that provided the groundwork for maturity and cultural identity through love, teachings, counsel and example to an agency schooling process. There, Aboriginal children endured the fanaticism of their keepers whose ethos included the erasure of all traces of cultural traditions including languages. All of the children suffered years of varying degrees of every form of abuse imaginable. Most learned only painful lessons of silence and shame. After returning to their communities many turned to alcohol and/or drugs as a way to cope with their unresolved conflicts and unacknowledged pain. They became abusers themselves. For generations much of the violence and abuse was turned against their own families and community. Suicide rates are extremely high on reserves. Many Aboriginal people relocated to urban centres where the bigotry and racism are also endemic furthering the cycle of violence.

The increasing rate of imprisonment for Aboriginal men is in epidemic proportions. In the federal system alone in the years 1992 to 1997 the numbers of Aboriginal men as a % of men imprisoned rose from 10.9% to 14.4%. The numbers (1560 to 2130) represent a 36.5% increase. For the years 1997-2007, the CSC forecasts a 38.3% increase in Aboriginal men imprisoned (+816). Numbers sentenced to provincial and territorial reformatories, jails and prisons may be assumed to be as high if not higher. Additionally, due to "high risk behaviours", the "rate of infection of HIV/AIDS among Aboriginals is estimated at 5-6 times the national average."³ Fetal alcohol syndrome "(FAS/FAE) is also much higher amongst some Aboriginal groups."

Aboriginal people cannot possibly heal in a prison environment that simply mimics the conditions they have endured as children. And what of their children? Statistics support the conclusion that many family members of Aboriginal prisoners also have criminal records. It is therefore paramount that Aboriginal women in prison be granted all opportunities to break the cycle that they were born into; to find pride and dignity in their Aboriginal identities and to begin once more to pass these teachings on to their children. Those who founded the idea of the Okimaw Ochi Healing Lodge in Saskatchewan envisioned that these teachings could begin in the Healing Lodge. These Aboriginal women would then re-discover their dignity and identities and be able to teach their children so that the brutal cycle of children abused and neglected = adult abusers of children, could be broken.

Unfortunately, the Okimaw Ochi Healing Lodge appears on its way towards the predictable focus of punishment and control. The CSC are gradually replacing Aboriginal workers and elders and the path towards healing through the integration of Aboriginal spiritual teachings and cultural identity⁴ with CSC custodial staff focused upon control.

Compounding the tragedy, it is not only Aboriginal prisoners who lacked parenting with love. Many prisoners grew up on the street after running away from abuse, impoverishment or cruel foster home situations. Some had already been separated from their siblings. Many have no understanding of what it means to be within a secure family. Many of these prisoners had also turned to drugs and alcohol as a means of escape from

³ CSC. 2000. *Report on Plans and Priorities 2000-2003*. <http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca>

⁴ Monture-Angus, Patricia. 2000. "Aboriginal Women and Correctional Practice: Reflections on the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women." In Hannah-Moffat, Kelly and Margaret Shaw. Eds. *An Ideal Prison? Critical Essays on Women's Imprisonment in Canada*. Halifax: Fernwood.

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their own memories and these people as well, are unable to parent their own children with dignity and in healthful conditions. The ongoing cycle of parents in prison = children of prisoners becoming prisoners is a statistical possibility when help is not available.

One who seeks justice for women as a Family Advocate may petition for:

- (a) the formation of “healing for life” centres for those struggling for liberty from addictions wherein the treatment may involve all members of the families directly affected
- (b) free legal services to assist mothers to regain custody where children have been apprehended by any governmental agency
- (c) safe and fully resourced community housing to be established to house women as an alternative to imprisonment
- (d) all imprisoned mothers with pre-school children to be granted three-hour, daily visiting rights in an area separate from other visiting areas. This special area should include facilities for play, indoors and outdoors, changing and feeding and rest areas and be open only to the child, the person accompanying the child and the mother.
- (e) funding to be awarded to community groups who can provide qualified volunteers to accompany and transport children for these special visits
- (f) a Special Family Advocate be appointed from CAEFS to assist all women in prison with any difficulties she encounters in any of her parenting and/or relationship efforts
- (g) mothers in prison to be encouraged and assisted in their efforts to provide gifts to their children, to have photographs taken, and to participate in their children’s school activities wherever possible.
- (h) parenting skills and child care courses to be provided to all women who seek better understanding in this demanding arena and/or who may also seek careers in this field
- (i) the **rights** of open communication and correspondence of women in prison with families and friends and the immediate order to desist from the practice of censorship in all forms

The basis for the jurisdictional separation of imprisonment as the punishment for criminal acts is found in the British North America Act. The standard is that if sentenced to imprisonment of two years or more the ruling jurisdiction is federal and the person is imprisoned in a federal penitentiary. If the sentence is less than two years, then provincial jurisdiction and imprisonment is ruled. Due to the small numbers of women imprisoned versus men, “economies of scale” cannot be accomplished which rationalizes the extremely poor and harsh conditions that women in Canadian reformatories, jails, prisons and penitentiaries exist under.

Additionally, provincially sentenced women can be transferred to a federal penitentiary at the request of provincial authorities. It is a fact that these transfers are usually enforced upon Aboriginal women. It is now also not uncommon for woman deemed to have mental health needs to be segregated in a men’s prison. All of these transfers are carried out with no regard to the hardships imposed with regard to any possible family contact.

One who advocates for all women in the area of Canadian criminal **justice** may seek

- (a) to raise the *standards* of provincially-sentenced women to those governing federally-sentenced women in the federal system where ever and when ever this results in better conditions for women in prison
- (b) to further the understanding that it is the organization of the prison which is the main factor explaining behaviour which accounts for the majority of the violence in prisons and **not** the violent nature of imprisoned women. (“...*harsh institutional practices, which induced defiant responses on the part of inmates, which in turn shaped the form of overt behaviour resulting in more punishment.*” (cited in Mandaraka-Sheppard 1986).⁵ “...*concentration on control is likely to stimulate disruption...*” and “...*punitive responses and isolation may increase the incidence of self-destructive behaviour.*”)⁶
- (c) to accept and honour the well-documented fact that since the majority of women in prison are not violent, women do not require the stringent security measures now imposed upon them, security measures which contribute to violence and unsafe conditions; therefore to immediately remove this form of unwarranted intrusion into the living conditions of incarcerated women in all penitentiaries including BCCW and other provincial prisons.
- (d) to promote the ideal of peaceful mediation, to desist immediately from the practice of using force to confront situations where the “peace and order of the institutions” may be temporarily challenged, in favour of utilizing prisoner committees, native sisterhood groups, and on-call advocacy groups

One who seeks justice for women in the area of the
elimination of dehumanizing conditions of imprisonment might advocate towards

- (a) closing all “*enhanced security units*” and the immediate ceasing of plans and expenditures for any future segregation units with the recognition that when such perceived segregation from other prisoners is proven necessary, that personal cell lock-up be substituted

Until all segregation for women can be eliminated seek justice for women held in any form of segregation in any lock-up, reformatory, jail, prison or penitentiary by advocating for:

- (b) the entitlement of her possessions and needs
- (c) the right to daily contact with legal advisors, Elders, Community Board members, Prisoners’ Committee member(s), Native Sisterhood members, counselors, and health care workers along with the right for daily personal telephone calls
- (d) the notification to the appropriate Community Board on a daily basis of all woman so isolated

⁵ Mandaraka-Sheppard, A.1986. *The Dynamics of Aggression in Women’s Prisons in England and Wales*. London: Gower.

⁶ Shaw, Margaret. 1991. *The Federal Female Offender. Report on a Preliminary Study*. No.1991-3:82-3. Ottawa: Solicitor General of Canada.

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- (e) the attendance at any hearing to maintain the segregated status of the prisoner by legal and community advisors as requested by the prisoner

One who seeks justice for women in the area of **Community Support** may advocate for

- (a) a National Community Board (NCB) whose primary functions will be interventional and auditorial in nature to be established with representation in each region where women are imprisoned; the NCB to have unlimited access to all areas of every prison
- (b) the members of the NCB be nominated from the justice, feminist and spiritually based organizations, be they Christian or otherwise whose advocacy for women in prison have already been positively demonstrated; the NCB to include women who have experienced and/or are experiencing prison.
- (c) the enabling for the NCB to conduct and negotiate conciliatory discussions between members of the prison population, the prison administrators and security personnel prior to the authorization of the use of any violent means by correctional authorities and in particular where prison administrators might consider the use of mace, weapons and/or involuntary searches of any kind
- (d) overseeing the regular audit of funds expended and funds incoming in all prisoner areas, not limited to the Inmate's Welfare Fund, programs and "cottage industry" income and expenditures, and hobby craft sales
- (e) the mandate for the NCB to report on a quarterly basis to and meet on an annual basis with a Parliamentary Committee
- (f) a steering committee to be formed in this regard.

One who seeks justice for women in the area of assisting women towards their earliest possible **release** may advocate to enable one or all of the following principles to ensure:

- (a) that all federally sentenced women are heard by the National Parole Board in their region with regard to all matters concerning release and applicable conditions.
- (b) that a representative from a prisoner-chosen advocacy group such as the National Association of Women and the Law, one whose primary source of funding is not the Solicitor General or provincial Attorney General's departments, be funded through the Ministry of Women's Equality to assist all women with parole matters. (Only in this way can women in prison will be assured of a gender-informed, racially-unbiased process)
- (c) that funding be available for community volunteers to escort women on passes
- (d) that funding be available to insure that no woman is forced to return to the prison when eligible for day parole or cannot be released on her earliest date due to the lack of halfway house beds as is the situation in B.C. (*By liaisioning with every available alternative such as approved community placements and enlisting the support of other societies such as the BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses, who have already agreed that many of the women leaving prison could be integrated into their facilities, this problem might be relieved.*)

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All of the areas of advocacy and items suggested as items to advocate for are only some of the areas of need and serve as examples. This paper by no means encompasses the totality of efforts that might contribute to the betterment of the status of these women.

However, should the advocate succeed in any of the areas of advocacy, s/he will most definitely become one of the most valuable assets some of these women would have, for true advocacy is a step towards the greater community of sisterhood, one term that could be used to describe an existence in a state of equality and liberty.