

PRESS Release
May 14, 2003

Strength In SISTERhood Society
Womyn 4 Justice

At midnight on February 23rd, 2003, three federal women native prisoners being held in Springhill men's penitentiary in Nova Scotia began a hunger strike. This hunger strike is noteworthy, despite ending after three days, because it is the only public cry for help amongst many that has managed to reach the media from the four women's units contained deep within men's penitentiaries. Since closing the Prison for Women in 2000, maximum security women have been transferred en masse to men's prisons, where there has been a dramatic increase in hostage-takings, suicide attempts and other self-destructive acts as one prisoner, Renee Acoby explained, "women try to find a way out of these inhumane conditions, even through death."

Although the Correctional Services of Canada (CSC) has been busy building maximum security units alongside the five new regional prisons for women, Kim Pate of the Canadian Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) states that "these new units do not represent an improvement in prison conditions for women." In fact the Elizabeth Fry Society is in the final stages of an official complaint launched with the Canadian Human Rights Commission alleging discrimination against federally sentenced women.

The women in Springhill decided to hunger strike to protest the prison administration's refusal to allow them to attend native sweat lodge ceremonies; the extension of the closure of the women's unit until September 2003 from the original date of March 31, and the lack of programs that would enable women to reduce their security designations.

The hunger strike ended temporarily when one of the women, Tamara Papin, was told she was being transferred to the new maximum security unit at Nova women's prison in Nova Scotia in a matter of days. However this transfer did not resolve her grievances as, once again she was denied access to a native sweat lodge ceremony, spurring on a decision to embark on a second hunger strike that also lasted three days until the administration reversed their decision and allowed her to attend the sweat ceremony.

Despite the CSC's own regulations which guarantee, "for greater certainty, Aboriginal spirituality and Aboriginal spiritual leaders and elders have the same status as other religions and other religious leaders," access to native ceremonies is being denied in two ways. According to Kim Pate, "the women are being told that they have to be at a certain level of security to go to sweats, and when native elders are consulted they can not make informed decisions because they only have access to prison officials."

"When 40-50% of the maximum security women prison population is native in a country where native women only make up 1-2% of the general population, and then you deny those women unconditional access to their religious rights under the Canadian Charter, you have a situation that can only be defined as racist," commented Gayle Horii from Strength in Sisterhood, a national prisoner's advocacy group.

The other important issue that has not been resolved despite the prisoner's hunger strikes and other acts of desperation is lack of programming. Ironically, Lucie McClung, Commissioner of the CSC in her official remarks at the opening of the new women's maximum unit at Joliette, Quebec, stated, 'It is my pleasure to be here today to mark the opening at hand of a program for women offenders. I say "program" rather than "unit"

made of bricks and mortar because it is a program." Yet according to Kim Pate, "on paper there are activities but practically when you visit women, they are silting around in their 'pods' with nothing to do with the exception of one woman who is assigned to help the cook prepare meals." Strength in Sisterhood's submission to the Human Rights Commission corroborates CAEFS position, "Federally sentenced women must now endure even more egregious conditions following their transfers from the men's penitentiaries into the newly constructed, special maximum security 'pods' located in each regional prison for women. Suffice it to say, that aside from what might otherwise be referred to as work that is traditionally viewed as women's unpaid labour, such as cooking, cleaning and sewing, there are very few opportunities to obtain other training or employment experience."

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Women for Justice: A group of women ex-prisoners working collectively to both support women and children in and out of prison as well as working with other equality seeking women's groups to change the social conditions that are the root cause or crime.

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Personality defined as "the whole of your personal characteristics, the group of behavioural and emotional tendencies that make up you...your personality, in essence, is the pattern of behaviour that distinguishes you from everybody else. Personality depends partly on genetics and biology -on the unique set of genes you inherited from your parents...also shaped powerfully by the family you grow up in, the environment that surrounds you, and the culture and subcultures that influence you." [Howard S. Friedman, *The Self Healing Personality*,1991 p.1]

Mental illness is a term [too] often applied to stress-related emotional difficulties...emotional strains...are better understood and handled if they are seen for what they are - **acute stress, too much stress for too long, or a harmful reaction to stress** - rather than as mental illness," [Walt Schafer, *Stress Management For Wellness*, 2000, p131]

Correctional Service of Canada is not giving female prisoners what they need; instead they are forcing upon the women what CSC thinks they should have. [Evans]

"The rules governing [Ontario's] doctors, nurses and other health professionals state that treatment without legally valid consent is professional misconduct" [Rights and Responsibilities: Mental Health and the Law; p.34]

“Watch Your Back”

"Don't Trust Anyone"

These were the signs littering the walls of the Regional Correctional College in Kingston, ON, in 1990...

...are they still there??

I found it surprising to hear that correctional officers who have always been trained in *paranoid politics* were/are now receiving special training as **mediators**, a term that does not describe their job requirements and/or job training.

Correctional officers are now referred to as *primary workers*, their functions vary within the women's prisons. As an example, one guard's position may be as follows:

- i) **intake** officer
- and ii) **classification** officer
- and iii) **security** officer...she strip searches the women at any given time
- and iv) **escort** within the prison...she puts on the handcuffs, the leg irons, and if she's feeling *nervous*, she has the body belt put on the women as well...as she and two other officers, with pepper spray, escort her to her counselling session with, you guessed it!!!...
- and v) her primary worker.

Sadistic Irony in it's true form

The captors have also assumed the role of therapists, and under the CSC's new regime, a maximum security woman who is in prison is first asked to fill out questionnaires regarding her lifestyle and habits, then she is *diagnosed* by CSC staff based on the answers she gave in the questionnaire as having a mental illness/disability/disease. Suggesting that people with mental illnesses are dangerous, is a stigma that has been fought against for many years³by organizations who represent people *with disabilities*. I should also mention that institutionalization is the last resort with consumer survivors. Their support team will go above and beyond to help the people that are on their case loads. The CSC also suggests that personality characteristics and/or traits that do **not** conform to the *status quo* are a danger to the public. We, as a society, cannot afford to blindly put our faith and the lives of our women and children into the hands of the CSC, solely *because they say so*.

Since ail women's services have now been cut, there is but one 'program' that the CSC implements, *Intensive Healing Program*. While healing is a must for these women and their families, it is not the responsibility of Corrections Canada to **enforce** a *healing-based* module within the walls of Canada's prisons. In truth, healing cannot be forced upon anyone. Not only does it go against their fundamental right to choose their own therapy if and when they see fit, it opens the doors to a great many injustices that these women have already faced, and continue to face. *All in the name* of rehabilitation.

Rehabilitation cannot and does not exist within the walls of prison, this isn't a new thought, rather an old fact that has been weighed and documented throughout the history of prisons, and since the beginning of prisons.

At this moment in time, being April 2003, federally sentenced *women* serve out their sentences in super maximum security prisons. Each woman who has a lengthy sentence is ***automatically*** designated as a high risk prisoner. This assessment, using the Custody Rating Scale, is made by the CSC after she has arrived in the prison. Her high risk status is no longer based on her risk to the public if at large, rather she is now considered a maximum security for the first two years of her sentence, solely *because* of her sentenced/suggesting perhaps that the courts were somehow too lenient. The Custody Rating Scale that the CSC uses, further oppresses an already oppressed part of our society. Corrections Canada is under the impression that because a woman has/is on welfare, she is a risk to the rest of the community.-.CSC is under the impression that because a woman has overcome childhood violence, she is therefore not suitable to live like everyone else

CSC assumes that having an addiction throws her right up there with the scum of the earth.-.CSC is under the impression that being caught in an abusive relationship makes her a threat to society...CSC is under the impression that a woman of colour or of religious/spiritual beliefs that do not conform to the norms of society are a threat to the public...CSC assumes that a woman who commits **or speaks of** committing a violent offence, has therefore given up her humanistic rights to choose what is best for her and her children...CSC wants us to believe that gay & trans...gendered prisoners are a threat...CSC expects us to believe that because a woman is a single parent, she is a danger to society...CSC assumes that a woman with all of these stigmas attached must therefore be locked up and put through the ***intensive Healing Program***, so that they can cure her...CSC **assumes...**

CSC assumes no responsibility for their actions. If they did, they would realize that putting an already marginalized woman in prison, labelling her as having a mental disability, because of her life choices, forcing her into a cage, and giving her ONE thing to do for the rest of her sentence, is nothing more than a set up. They are encouraging *failure*. After waking up in the mornings, she's allowed to clean her cage. Since she gets to do this each day, there is very little dirt, mostly because there really is nothing to clean. She has nothing. She is not allowed to have the small hobby crafts, not allowed to have pens/pencils & paper«, not allowed to keep a toothbrush in her cage, because she may harm herself or another. Not that she has done so in the past, it's just her profile, and how her life choices have been further used against her. She has already been tried, convicted & sentenced in a court of law. Now instead of serving out her sentence in the *least restrictive way*, with services available to help her rehabilitate herself, she must conform to what the CSC thinks she needs. Now that she has cleaned her cage, and given back her toothbrush, she sits...all day...there is only one program available to her. it's called *Dialectical Behavioral Therapy DBT*. And it's not a choice, not really. It reminds her of all of the bad choices she has made in her life...and the circumstances surrounding them. The fact that she is coerced into the dialectical behavioral therapy that the CSC offers only reinforces all the negative images that she has been forced to carry throughout her life. Any program who's only other alternative is death, is terribly wrong. Since there is no *informed consent* and the alternative is frightening, she attends the DBT...

imagine...what it would be like to walk in her shoes.

Her days begin like this:

wake up in the morning, eat breakfast brush teeth, clean cage.

Wait....for DBT.

Up until this point there is no human contact. The food is bad, quite often rotten. The meals are in small portions and they are cold. She gets her meals pushed through the food slot in her cage. She is not allowed to leave her cage, not even onto an already secure unit. When she does leave, she is handcuffed and wears leg irons, all of this to move onto a secure unit. She's not a violent person. Except for her crime, she has only been the *victim of violence*. Her leg irons are removed once she sits down with her primary worker. Yet the handcuffs stay on. And it is here, with this captor/guard/therapist where she is expected to open up about her past abuses. If that door is open, it's like a tidal wave of emotions overflowing. It's been so very long since she has felt anything at all. Now it's all coming out!!

Yet, she is told that she is not permitted to show any form of aggression
not emotional
not physical
in essence-she is told that she must conform to the new regime
she must open up
she must feel again
yet don't show anything...

she is being re-victimized by the Correctional Services of Canada.

THIS IS AN ABUSE OF POWER.

The more I try to put into perspective information from various resources, the more I find my thoughts taking a "dialectical turn". The idea behind the dialectical behavioral therapy DBT is to find a healthy medium between two very different ways of thinking. To bring about positive change in the woman with Borderline Personality Disorder BPD by confronting her choices...making her see that her choices are unhealthy...and helping her to change her ways.

**That's a very simplistic view
yet accurate.**

The dialectical behavioral therapy in itself is not what I choose to debate. Rather, it's the circumstances with which the Correctional Service of Canada CSC's perverse ideas that they can somehow take an otherwise "healthy form of treatment" and use it in a punitive setting. A woman on the street who enters into the DBT does so of her own free will. It is not meant to be forced upon her. Yet, CSC has managed to turn what should be a voluntary situation/therapy into a coerced and *intensive Healing Program*.

"DBT is a broad-based cognitive-behavioral treatment developed specifically for BPD. The woman with borderline personality is believed to have suffered extreme trauma as a child. Traumas ranging from childhood abuses such as sexual abuse / physical abuse / emotional abuse. Having very little or no support to help this child to understand that what happened to her was **not** her fault, *creates* coping skills that allow the child to survive in a hostile environment. This type of environment is coined as an "invalidating environment" by Marsha Unehan. An example of an invalidating environment for the child may be the parent who minimizes the child's efforts when they try to do something on their own; or perhaps a parent/someone that they look up to, who continually puts them down, says that they are *stupid* or *dirty* or *ugly* or *you'll*

never amount to anything, just like... The Invalidating environment is a negative environment. And from that negative environment, the child has managed to overcome tremendous obstacles by whatever means that she can. She grows up with negative habits; she doesn't learn to deal with conflict properly, because she has not been given those tools. She is angry, abused quite often, and abusive to those that she loves. Another example of an invalidating environment is poverty. A child who grows up in poverty with, as an example, a single parent, will quite often see her parent angry, and struggling. This child is a victim of systemic abuse, another obstacle at such a young age.

Sympathy is not what I'm looking for with respect to these examples; yet I do encourage people to take a deeper look at what's happening to our children. They are going through hell, and what the hell are we doing about it?

Her past in no way exonerates her choices, yet it is important to understand where she is coming from and why she has made the choices that she has. It is also necessary to validate her choices, and to allow her to come to a place within herself where she wants to make changes. *She cannot be forced to change.* It simply does not happen that way. And certainly not in yet another *invalidating environment*. Prison, clearly, is NOT a healing environment. A woman who enters into the DBT will not be able to heal on the levels that she needs. She is being *toyed with* by the CSC, and by the Canadian Government, for allowing this to happen to her. She is not the enemy.

A woman who commits a crime should be made accountable. Period. Yet how can we ask that she be accountable for her actions when the CSC is not accountable for theirs? As always, a double edged sword. It is clear that Corrections Canada should **not** step into the *therapeutic arena*, since they have neither the expertise nor the desire to give these women what *they need* to heal, which includes...respect...personal space-the choice to enter therapy...the freedom of choice with respect to the types of therapy and/or intervention she requires.-alternatives to the *intensive healing therapy* such as job experience. Hey, there's a concept! Wow. who would of thought of that? Why not give these women trades, skills that they can actually use. That's not to say that they cannot use therapeutic skills, yet let's face it, that's not what they are *being forced to learn in prison*.

This is a comparison chart between

Therapeutic relationship on the street* vs *Therapeutic relationship in prison

invalidating environment of the child	invalidating environment of FSW
fear-eliciting stimuli	zero tolerance for aggressive behaviour
good guy	bad guy
willingness	willfulness
reinforcing assertiveness	following the rules
forensic health unit	prison
healing, supportive environment	handcuffs, leg irons, peppers spray
therapist	guard
freedom to choose	perverse abuse of power
informed consent	inquisition
therapist reinforcement	environments that overuse punishment
skills reinforcement	punitive feedback
open up to me	don't show emotions
millions of dollars in government money	<u>SCAM</u>

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Womyn4Justice

Changing our perception of stress signals allows for a better understanding of the different types of stress-related symptoms, why they exist and how to go about changing them. It's essential to understand that stressors facing prisoners are much more intense than those generally faced in daily life. Other examples would be soldiers, refugees, victims of disasters [schE*r,pi2s] and victims of abuse. We must also take into consideration the stressors the women faced before coming to prison...what led up to her crime.

Stressors is the term used to describe events or environmental agents which initiate the stress response. According to Hans Selye, stressors can arise from within the body (endogenous or biological) or from outside the body (exogenous or environmental), [Porth p.146] There can be physical, psychosocial or sociologic stressors.

The obvious lack of nutrients in the prison's food, + the lack of exercise, + the lack of sunshine, + little or no human contact on a daily basis with their peers-include these wonderful perks of prison life for maximum security women to the growing list of unethical & irresponsible correctional practices, such as the removal of all work & educational programs and replacing them with the Intensive Intervention Program and all that it entails, **will** mass produce an increasingly "sick" sub-culture of federally sentenced women. To coin a phrase from Randolph & Moss, these women have been "thrown into that convenient medical waste-basket, the psychiatric category" [p.267]. It's imperative to the health [mental, physical & spiritual] & well-being of these women to eliminate **all possible stressors** before this *dialectical behavioural experimentation* occurs within Canada's prisons for women. [There are alternatives to the prison environment itself that would not exclude CSC's unions or their employees]

Psychosocial responses to prolonged immobility (such as sitting in a cage) begin a transformation of changes in *affect, perception and cognition*. These responses manifest themselves as **fear, increased anxiety, anger, hostility, depression, sadness, guilt, shame, alterations in normal sleep patterns, and rapid mood changes** [Schafer, p125; Porth. P16]. These changes occur in people who are confined in prisons [Porth 170]

Using the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders - DSM-IV*) as a guide to diagnose women prisoners as having *mental illnesses*, based on their personality characteristics, their life choices, their emotions, et al!, is as draconian as the prison system itself, ifs very much an *old boy's network*. It's reminiscent of accusing a woman of not being responsible for herself, or her body because she exhibits some of the 150 symptoms associated with pre-menstrual *syndrome* PMS, a *mental illness* also found in the DSM. Women who have been pushed up against a wall, so-to-speak, and have committed crimes *worthy of life* sentences are now being re-criminalized by Corrections Canada, as welt as the Government of Canada. At this moment, women who are labelled maximum security prisoners are sent to **a prison within** a prison to serve their sentences in a *special handling unit* SHU, under the guise of the *intensive Healing Program*. The Correctional Services of Canada CSC has adopted a cognitive and behavioural modification model of *therapy* known as *dialectical behavioural therapy* DBT. The term coined by Marsha Linehan, who's controversial therapy is designed specifically for women who suffer from **borderline personality disorder**, a form of *mental illness* also found in the DSM-IV. Ms Linehan's therapy is meant primarily for women who are living in the community. Even for those who are in forensic health care facilities, it is a voluntary program, with informed consent, and all of the alternatives, meant to enable, encourage, empower and educate the women. CSC's sole program *dialectical behavioural therapy*, dis-empowers, humiliates, shames, and silences the women. Having the exact opposite effect on them than what is

supposed to happen.

Imagine...inducing 'fear-eliciting stimuli' to encourage the women to 'react' to their captors/therapists/guards/primary workers...and then telling them that they are not permitted to show their anger or aggression towards themselves or their captors...or whomever, because there is a zero tolerance for aggression of any form, be it emotional or physical. This type of *therapy* also known as *intensive healing*^ the hands of the Correctional Service of Canada is EXACTLY the same as a dog in a cage, with it's captor prodding it and encouraging it to respond aggressively towards the stimuli, and then punishing it for attempting to attack the very person who turned it mean. We have more laws set out for the cruelty of animals than we do for the apparent cruelty towards humans.

A noteworthy topic is taken from Karlene Faith's *Unruly Women*...she mentions a program that they began in the Santa Cruz Women's Prison. Known as the "Alternative Program Unit" (API), this was also a behaviour modification program that was eventually thrown out of corrections. The "Intensive Program Unit" and the "Management Unit" bear strikingly similar titles as the "Intensive Intervention Program" with it's "Intensive Healing Program" and of course the "Management Protocol" used to enforce the new regime. As I said, both are behaviour modification programs, and both held in closed-custody/special handling units SHU's. The CSC's targets are ALL federally sentenced women, with emphasis on the maximum security women. Women are *diagnosed* as having a mental illness...even after they have gone through the legal system and in most cases, seen a psychologist/psychiatrist, proven to be competent enough to stand trial. Not seen as having any *mental illnesses* tucked away in their pockets. CSC has chosen to turn this women's sentence around by ignoring the courts and their professionals and by *diagnosing* them using archaic and insane methods. Having stepped into this insane asylum, CSC further takes steps back in history by forcing a woman into mind controlling experiments such as chemical warfare for those who refuse *treatment*, sensory deprivation, these women are in separate cages within the same high security unit and are not permitted to touch each other. This reasoning is the dialectic and Linehan's belief that women with negative people in their lives should not be allowed to associate with those people, which is completely acceptable under *normal circumstances*. The CSC has taken it one step further by "assuming" that all women in prison are negative influences for each other, despite the many studies, and books that say otherwise. As well as their own peer support group made up of women prisoners within the walls of Prison For Women [Faith, p244-5]. The women lean on each other and they help one another out: CSC has stripped them of that by separating them.

The power of touch has both physical and emotional benefits. Studies have *proven* the positive effects from touch, such examples are touch through [daily] massage improves depression and anxiety; someone with a [specific] irregular heart beat who, when physically communicating with another, the heart beat stabilizes [Hafen et al.p286]; and no one can dispute the absolute need to be held, especially under such extreme stress as that of prison life alone.

Studies have been and are still being conducted to further prove to us that the power of touch can quite literally save lives. We ALL benefit. It has been said, and I quite agree, that touch is an absolute necessity of life; along with proper nutrients, water, air, exercise...without the gentle touch of another, people succumb to depression, disease, emotional instability, loneliness, death, University of Wisconsin researchers Harry and Margaret Hariow compared monkeys who received touch to those whose only social contact was seeing, hearing and smelling other monkeys. Their research showed that the monkeys who were deprived of touch by other monkeys "grew up with a variety of emotional abnormalities" such as self-mutilation at a young age. As they grew, they re-focused their aggression from themselves to other

monkeys [Hafen et al.p285]. Mothers who grew up without touch, don't know how to touch their babes. It's not something that we are born with, rather something that we learn along the way. We are all social creatures.

The very events which lead women to commit crimes should not be further held against them **after** they have been sentenced. These women are not "doing their time", they are "doing the CSC's time". They are being re-tried once they set foot inside the prisons. They are being UNlawfully and UNethically *diagnosed* as having mental illnesses. And once this *diagnosis* is in place, they are being punished for it. As if having a mental illness makes them such a danger to the world at large that in order to move about an already secure unit, they must be handcuffed...and in order to go for a family visit, they are paraded in front of all people within the prison handcuffed, shackled leg irons, and wearing a body belt...with three guards!

**Please explain to me how the CSC can legally justify these extremes?
How can the CSC dare to call this Intensive Healing?**

At what point do they think that this program will work?

Were you aware that there is a zero tolerance for any form of aggression...whether physical or emotional?

Did you also know that self-mutilation in itself is a form of aggression?

These women live literally **under the CSC's thumb.** Literally.

They are being held down, forced into mind-altering programs and drugs, denied their basic human rights **by a corrupt pris on regime** and beaten into submission by Corrections Canada.

Do tell me, what type of healing will occur here.

In the 2003 Auditor General's Report to the House, it mentioned that the dosing of Kingston's Prison For Women P4W was brought about by The Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women TFFSW [p.-i; 4.1], yet this statement is a misnomer. The Task Force made the same recommendations on closing P4W as every other task force/inquiry/commission before it...it wasn't the task force which brought about the closing of P4W, rather it was the public outcry when the [national] media showed the handcuffing & stripping of women inside by male guards with weapons. Eventually, Louise Arbour's inquiry into *Certain Events at the Prison For Women*, in Kingston combined with the law suits against the CSC/Government of Canada + the media attention to that event that closed the doors of P4W.

I bring this up because something so tragically wrong in our system was so blatantly swept under the rugs.

Accountability happens at all levels. Surely, if we expect federally sentenced women to be accountable for their actions by sending them to prison to serve out their sentences for crimes committed, then wouldn't we also expect the same system which warehouses these women to also be accountable?

Imagine...*living* in a country where you are not allowed to openly practice your beliefs...

Imagine...not being allowed to choose the best possible treatment for yourself...it's not the lack of funding that stands in the way, technically you're covered by your province's health care system—what does stand in the way???

YOU ARE A FEMALE

Imagine...not being permitted a second opinion...

Imagine...the torture of being forced into a box with very little light & no human contact...for years on end...

***Imagine*...being told by an UNqualified person that, based on choices you've made in your past, you have a mental disability...**

Imagine...that because of your “new status” as someone with a "mental illness", you are thrown into [a] so-called "therapy" by UNqualified, UNprofessionals, and forced to open up about ALL the past abuses...now, just

Imagine...that while trying to speak of these atrocities, you need to vent and are NOT PERMITTED...

Imagine...denying ALL FORMS of so-called "therapeutic help", exercising your God-given right to say "no thanks"...yet because of this denial of a "treatment" you are strapped to a table & injected with all manor of chemical warfare until you either agree to the "treatment" or die...

***Imagine*...**

what all of this would be like, close your eyes; try to place where you would be...

Would you have guessed Canada?

IMAGINE