

Mission Institution

Anonymous Prisoners

In speaking with key members of our resident population here at Mission Medium Institution, we hope our response provides relevant insight into just how severe the current ‘correctional’ system has deviated from how we believe real corrections, justice and true human rights interests fit with the ‘Canadian values’ identity of this country. As the Harper government gutted CSC, they in effect created a series of warehouses for the incarcerated and a set them up for failure model of release. Coming up with the first five of our top ten areas of reform that are needed was easier than the remainder. In fact, curbing it just to ten was more than difficult.

1. Pay Structure

- a. Per diem pay rates dating back to the 1980s – there has to be a way to implement an increasing pay structure based on job skill sets and accountability so that residents can again *save money* for eventual and successful release.
- b. The additional 22 percent deduction for room and board, along with the 8 percent deduction for phone system administration instituted in 2014 needs to be abolished.
- c. Ineffective employment programs and subsequent performance reviews need to be reviewed, along with the cash grab that ties a resident’s pay scale (performance) as Commissioner’s Directives 710-1 *Progress Against the Correctional Plan*¹ and 730 *Offender Program Assignments and Payments*² lack clarity.

2. Food and Beverage Policies – “Cook Chill” Meal Plan

- a. Current food and beverage policies, which were modified in the name of cost savings, do not meet Canada Food Guide criteria.
- b. The portions have been cut and served by stewards who openly speak about being disgruntled and underpaid, which makes food lines stressful.
- c. There is no training – vocational, safety or otherwise – in the kitchen as everything has been cut to the bare bones. A kitchen where actual skills are taught is needed.

3. “Prototype Catalogue” – Sole-source Supplier Model

- a. The new sole-source supplier model has resulted in price gouging, with significant mark-ups (e.g. a television at \$215 in the catalogue

can be purchased at Walmart for \$89 or running shoes at \$118 that can be bought in any store outside for \$49 – how is that fair market value?). In response to grievances on this matter, we have been receiving a form letter stating that prisoners “are receiving fair market value prices”.

- b. We have access to poor, low-quality selections that ship inconsistently or not at all, increasing frustrations for us and our loved ones.
- c. Local businesses and community support has been cut-off, leaving us without a means to make contacts and offer support that are valued on paper in our various reintegration plans.

4. Correctional Management Team (CMT) Process and Support Model

- a. There is little case management outside of timelines. Correctional Plans lack any reality and teeth in that they act more as a record of ineffective programs. We need tools to help us move forward into a more productive lifestyle as a contributing member of society, which requires updated programs with accurate facts.
- b. There are few opportunities to apply goal setting or model the behaviours using the very skills taught in our Integrated Correctional Program Model (ICPM) programs.

5. Vocational, Educational and Employment Models

Simply, the model is broken. A limited number of prisoners get basic vocational skill ‘workshops’ (e.g. first aid, landscaping theory, core construction basics, etc.). There seems to be *no* real integrative plan of action. Rather, like so much of what we see now, it is all just shoot from the hip, and repeat the failing programs and policies so someone, somewhere can show they have done something. Educational programs are thin at best. This is such a major component of life success and is most likely a major reason for a vast majority of the incarcerated populations backstory (how and why we have arrived in prison), yet it is always cut (sometimes first) with *no* real plan of action. Why? We need to begin focusing on skills for release in this new job market. Educational programs and training that reflect the society we will be returned into need to be implemented. Otherwise, what is the option (recidivism usually with escalation)? There could be more real opportunities inside

these walls through employment that will build skill sets necessary for success outside. Instead, with most jobs CSC chooses to placate the residents with meaningless opportunities. We fully understand routine and basic work ethic is important. We get these types of lower skilled opportunities may be a starting point, but what about an action plan that a resident can see movement forward and work toward achievement as opposed to simply existing throughout their sentence with no real plan? Where does the term ‘Correctional Plan’ come into play? Is it just to “maintain employment”, nothing more, nothing less? How does this really help? Putting a plan together with the prisoner would require not only regular meetings with them, but also breaking down the silos and communicating with CSC colleagues and coordinating between departments.

6. Healthcare Model (Overall)

- a. There is little tangible mental health and addictions support.
- b. Eye care has been cut to the point of real concern.
- c. Basic dental care and costs post-release must be increasing, because the ‘care’ offered inside is pathetic.
- d. The failed mental health and addictions policies lead the individuals with immediate needs to monopolize healthcare time, leaving the vast majority of other residents with limited or no time. When care is available, the medical staff are highly suspicious of prisoners or turned off to any listening or offering real compassion – few get served.
- e. Make no mistake, healthcare is horrendous today. Men with cancer, blood in their urine and stools (for months at a time), diabetics and other health based / nutritional diets are ignored, and we could go on.

7. Ineffective and Inconsistent Policies, with a Lack of Timely Consultation with Prisoner Representations / the Inmate Wellness Committee – Commissioner’s Directives, Standing Orders, Security Bulletins, and Guidelines

- a. The approach to policy changes involves little consultation with prisoners.
- b. Policies are constantly changing with everything seemingly *very* off-balance (e.g. just think about NHQ policy being constantly

modified by RHQ and/or the individual institution), which increases tension and confusion at the institutional level. We live in a world of “alternative facts” within CSC institutions.

- c. Old and new changes often contradict each other.
- d. Attempts to deal with small portions of the penitentiary population through policy changes impact the whole, leaving no room for individualized planning and support.

8. Integrated Correctional Program Model (ICPM)

“Integrated” programming is premised on the idea of combining participants based on need. However, more often than not you have residents put together for personalities (i.e. tolerance), which obviously needs to be considered, but specific program needs must be paramount. This is a modular program and as such facilitators should be able to build productive groups with very specific program needs (e.g. addictions) using the modules.

9. Visits & Correspondence (V&C) and Private Family Visits (PFV)

- a. Both of these areas are considered key components of the rehabilitation and reintegration process, yet because of the historical contraband issues tied to this entry point into federal institutions, the resulting policies and Standard Operating Procedures continue to restrict (for *all*) and now new restrictions are bordering on illegally infringing on the rights of the incarcerated, *but also* the families and friends who visit (e.g. CPIC and criminal record checks, and forced visitor applications to verify relationships).
- b. There is *no* budget to support the maintenance of institutional PFV houses as this is left to the Inmate Welfare Committee. Given the constantly decreasing earning potential and ability to save these dollars, PFV visit opportunities are also decreasing. This very important component of our rehabilitation and reintegration plan is being slowly made smaller and smaller, thereby decreasing the incarcerated person’s ability to repair, maintain and build upon key inner circle relationships for their eventual release. There must come a point where CSC does their job as opposed to continually muddying the waters of policy and staying the course of becoming a simple warehouse where the incarcerated just ‘do time’.

10. Lifers' Programming

- a. A large portion of the incarcerated population are Lifers (the majority of prisoners at Mission Medium Institution) and many others are doing long-term sentences of ten years or more. Lifers programs need to be reinstated (e.g. Life Line) and their initiatives need to be adequately supported. There is a Lifer's Resource Strategy (a four-module program), but CSC does not recognize, nor provide any resources for its proper implementation (budget again), even though they produced the program in collaboration with the community agencies supporting the penitentiaries across Canada.
- b. Establishing Lifers living units where prisoners have the ability to manage their own meals, budgets and the like should exist when someone enters medium-security, which would go a long way in building institutional adjustment and quality of life.
- c. Like most of the institutions across the country, *every* institution should have a specific space for Lifers. Here at Mission, for example, we have *nothing* that is Lifer specific. The men here have very unique needs and these are not being addressed. Even the Lifers group is hindered on a daily basis to build positive directions at this institution for the more than 180 men that live within these fences.

In closing, we want to address that there is a serious split in the staff and management when it comes to how to deliver the mission and values that reside in Commissioner's Directive 001. There are still a serious number of staff that privilege 'coercive corrections' (punishment) that adopt the "take, take, take" model. The other side of their teams believe in more of a serve your time and build new skills to reduce recidivism model. This latter group of employees believe in a more conversational approach, while ensuring basic security and rules are followed, and they should be empowered as public safety and prisoner reintegration are better served.

Currently, we are still experiencing the tail end of the Harper government's agenda characterized by *cost-reduction driven 'corrections' as opposed to a focus on reducing recidivism rates*. This just seems wrong on so many levels. We would love to be a part of any focus group or planning opportunity to build a more collaborative and productive approach to corrections in Canada. There are many examples from our past that will show some of

the best practices and many that we can rule out as not workable solutions. The bottom line is that the incarcerated human beings living with federal penitentiaries today are some of the best voices when it comes to reality and what works versus what does not.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Please see: Correctional Service Canada (2017a) *Commissioners Directive 710-1 Progress Against the Correctional Plan*, Ottawa. Retrieved from <http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/lois-et-reglements/710-1-cd-eng.shtml>
- ² Please see: Correctional Service Canada (2017b) *Commissioners Directive 730 Offender Program Assignments and Inmate Payments*, Ottawa. Retrieved from <http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/acts-and-regulations/730-cd-eng.shtml>