

Mission Institution

P.R.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING, PROGRAMS AND JOB OPPORTUNITIES

The conservative ‘tough on crime’ approach trickled throughout Correctional Service Canada (CSC), negatively impacting both staff and prisoners. As a result, the foundations of belonging and rehabilitation were eroded, while opportunities to attempt to better oneself and morph from a nuisance to a contributing member of a growing society were stripped away in an attempt to appear pro-public safety. In the process, vast sums of taxpayer dollars were wasted.

Basic vocational training opportunities such as first-aid, WHMIS, H2S alive, forklift training to name a few are still offered, albeit very sparingly and with unrealistic criteria to qualify to get access to them imposed. Waitlists and general transparency regarding programs required to address dynamic risk factors are challenging and almost non-existent. The ability to learn about oneself and one’s criminal past, coupled with a chance to replace harmful thinking and pro-crime attitudes, hinges on CSC and their officers’ willingness to deliver programming opportunities. Some prisoners wait twelve to twenty-four months to receive programs they are mandated to take as per correctional plans.

So-called employment opportunities within the institutions have been clawed back, withdrawn, or split in half, creating conflict among prisoners, a poor work ethic, and hampering the ability to develop life skills such as motivation, continuity, and attention to detail. There are very few educational avenues available. Even the attempts at self-education through prisoner paid for correspondence courses are met with extreme administrative red tape and an all-around lack of support. There are limited opportunities to pursue some recognized trades, however course material, and access to write exams is outdated, and generally denied.

On paper, it may seem as if the penitentiary system is geared towards accountability, restoration, and rehabilitation, but in fact the system is broken beneath the surface, morale amongst staff is low as most feel handcuffed by unrealistic and uneducated political bureaucracy focused on punishment to win votes, as well as support from the lay public. The criminalized feel uncared for, which in turn lowers esteem and creates

explosive environments where people, both prisoners and staff, experience physical and mental trauma.

The idea of using one's prison sentence to reflect, rebuild, renew, and attempt to return to society seems a thing of years gone by, a relic of history, much like most of the education and opportunities offered to federal prisoners at present.