

# **PRISONERS' STRUGGLES**

## **Fighting for Improvements to the Experience and Outcomes of Incarceration**

*Prisoners United*

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**P**risoners United is an organization created by and for prisoners in the Canadian federal penitentiary system. Our purpose is to explore the ways in which both the experience and the outcome of incarceration may be enhanced. This purpose is best achieved through disclosure and discussion of current conditions and practices within the Correctional Service Canada (CSC). Our primary focus is on rehabilitation, reintegration and the effectiveness of the CSC's efforts to adhere to these mandates. The intent of our examinations and discussions is to assist CSC with improving the methodology for returning prisoners to society as law-abiding citizens, thus minimizing risk and enhancing public safety. Some of the initiatives we are currently working on are briefly discussed below.

### **INSIGHT INITIATIVE**

The insight initiative focuses on the role technology plays in the Canadian federal correctional system. The initiative's goal is to reintroduce Inmate Computing, along with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) back into corrections. The initiative, through disclosure and transparency, will highlight and discuss the adverse effects the current prohibition has on prisoners during incarceration and after their release back to the community. Moving forward, the initiative will examine new ideas and methods, as well as explore new services and ways of doing business CSC can adopt to bridge the current digital divide. This work will help bring the federal penitentiary system and CSC into the 21st century. These efforts will be focused towards rehabilitation, reintegration, employment and employability skills, education, maintaining community support, and eventually providing prisoners a seamless transition back into society.

### **PRISONER GRIEVANCE REPOSITORY**

The purpose of this repository is to provide prisoners with access to reference material and supporting documentation in an effort to help improve the outcome of their grievance submissions. This project is

based on the fact that prisoners have a difficult time properly addressing and resolving their grievance issues within the penitentiary environment. Prisoners have minimal resources and lack experienced help to assist in producing a successful grievance. Moreover, at the present, there is no meaningful database for prisoners to research and access past grievance materials to support their case. This situation also contributes to a case-by-case repetition, thus creating delays in an already overburdened and slow system. The repository would be comparable in part to the case law database used by lawyers (i.e. CanLII). This project is still in the developmental stage, almost nearing completion.

### **PRISONERS' UNION OF CANADA**

The purpose of the Union is to advocate for prisoners' rights and provide a unified voice for prisoners in the public square. The Prisoners' Union of Canada will engage the government through judicial and extra-judicial processes to address the challenges and injustices imposed on prisoners by CSC. This Union will also focus on prisoner's needs, living conditions, treatment programs, and fair representation for collective bargaining for goods and services to enhance correctional outcomes for prisoners, while limiting the adverse effects resulting from incarceration. Some of the issues the Union will address are the appropriate and kindly delivery of programs, psychological therapy, meaningful education, vocational training and certification, adequate pay for work, and access to community support and family. The Prisoners' Union of Canada is an organization outside the scope of the CSC and therefore will not be subject to the restrictions inherent to the penitentiary environment. The Union intends to seek the national support of Inmate Committees from all penitentiaries and correctional institutions, and with their support will form a unified front capable of peacefully and successfully addressing prisoners' issues, needs, and grievances.

### **WHERE TO FIND AND CONTACT US**

We welcome everyone to visit our website at [prisonersunited.org](http://prisonersunited.org). We encourage you to share your stories on our forum (<http://prisonersunited.boards.net>) and our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/prisonersunited>) to shed light on the current practices and problems within the Canadian penitentiary

system. We invite prisoners and their families to write us and let us know how we can improve our site to better serve them. We also invite everyone to let us know what new developments or concerns they may have in their respective institutions. Lastly, we are still looking for a sponsor to provide us with a mailing address, as such at this time we can only accept online submissions through our contact form or email at [infoserv@prisonersunited.org](mailto:infoserv@prisonersunited.org).