

## **Life Within the Confines of CSC Institutions**

*Justin Joseph Germa*

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**M**y name is Justin Joseph Germa and I have been within the Correctional Service of Canada's (CSC) confines on four separate federal sentences. It has been my goal for a very long time to change my behaviour and attitude, which have brought me into conflict with the law. Therefore, it is with this willingness to succeed in being a productive citizen within society that I feel justified to criticize the following aspects of punishment that I have experienced during the course of my incarceration. As far as I can tell, the issues that I will present as needing change are all within the control and power of CSC. I believe that if they were changed it would help those individuals who have a real desire to obtain rehabilitation and their rightful place in their communities. I would also like to point out that not only could these changes be implemented in an expeditious manner, but also in a cost-effective way.

### **PRISONER PAY**

I have an extremely hard time understanding how it is that back in 1992 Parliament created an act that included prisoners to be provided incentive pay, yet at present we are in an era where the CSC commissioner appears to have more authority than Parliament. It seems as if the commissioner has effectively abolished incentive pay. Not only that, Canadian prisoners have not seen a pay raise from rates established in the 1990s (Shook, 2018) and if that does not seem oppressive enough, the Commissioner has devised a plan that we no longer are able to enjoy the pay we once did by charging us room and board (ibid). So not only did we not get any pay raise in roughly 30 years, we actually had our pay cut in half and are now forced to choose between underpaid labour or cell confinement. Thanks for "rehabilitating" me.

Where do we go from here? A good place to start might be by looking at the fact that the Canadian penitentiary system is an untapped resource of individuals that have the drive, yet not the education, to fill the void of trades people that are much needed in our society. The government should implement a plan that brings back incentive pay and provides a number of trade positions within the prison walls. I believe that it would be surprising to see the benefits and that the 'crime' rate would drop if we as a society trained our prisoners to be a productive member of that society by making

them feel like they have actually got a place in the world, along with the means to support their families and themselves in a positive way.

### **THE CENTRAL FEEDING SYSTEM**

The central feeding system is a complete farce, brought about by some CSC henchmen to cut a budget corner (Harris, 2019). A system such as this only deteriorates the taste and quality of the food that us prisoners have to survive on. Moreover, this system can only be attributed as a form of punishment, as most of the food given to the prison population is not deemed to be fit for public consumption (ibid). How is this supposed to rehabilitate a person? I am not saying we should be eating like we are at The Keg, but how about not being fed food that is inedible? The message that I hear with this policy is that we are just dirty convicts and do not deserve to be fed food that has the same quality as the regular population of society. This has to change, as it is clear even from the Correctional Investigator that the quality of food is terrible and that this could possibly lead to violence in the prison system (OCI, 2018). Take Saskatchewan Penitentiary as an example (ibid). That will eventually be going happen everywhere across Canada if CSC continues to cut corners.

### **REHABILITATION AND PRISON TIME**

CSC has one program for prisoners, the Integrated Correctional Program Model (ICPM) (CSC, 2014) and it takes roughly six months to complete (for high intensity referrals). If a person does not do well in the program, they are then referred to do a maintenance program. Let us place this argument into the most realistic situation and training we have for other human beings at this time. Let us look at how we train doctors and consider this against the length of time many prisoners remain incarcerated to achieve 'rehabilitation'. It takes more or less a decade for a person to obtain a doctorate in a specialized field. These are the people that we as a society trust the most, sometimes with our own lives. If we can train people that we entrust with our lives with in ten years, how much longer after ten years of rehabilitating a person does rehabilitation become monotonous? How long after ten years does a human lose hope and rebel?

## HOBBIES

Lastly, I would like to express my concerns surrounding the fact that I am currently in Archambault Institution and there are no hobbies or constructive ways to pass one's time. CSC is not providing any avenue for those to use their free time constructively in a soothing environment, enjoying their creativity, and producing gifts for their loved ones. Moreover, when it comes to budget cuts the individuals that suffer the most are lifers. Lifers rely on becoming accustomed to incorporating daily routines in prison to eliminate stress. To systematically fade out tools that a lot of prisoners use to feel like they are doing something positive and beneficial is wrong. It is our right as a human being to express ourselves with art. We have to think about a person's satisfaction, pride and sense of accomplishment when they have created something exotic and beautiful with hobby crafts. Imagine that it was you losing a piece of your dignity. Do you not think that a country as 'progressive' as Canada cannot do better when dealing with us people in society who have made a mistake and need help to get our lives back in working order to become productive citizens? I am a Canadian prisoner and I am asking to please allow us an avenue to grow as individuals.

## REFERENCES

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Justin Joseph Germa* is imprisoned at Archambault Institution.