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# **St. Leonard's Society of Canada Position Paper**

*Parole Board of Canada Academic Think Tank on  
Community Corrections*

## **Community Supports: Alternatives to Traditional Approaches**

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for

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## Introduction

When current practices are not achieving ideal results, exploring alternatives to traditional approaches to conditional release is a worthwhile exercise for ensuring that innovative ideas and practices can emerge. It is important, however, not to default to equate the term ‘traditional’ with ‘outdated’ or ‘ineffective’. Canada’s current criminal and social justice sectors are attempting to bounce back from many years of harmful legislative reforms that run counter to effective corrections. Throughout that period of reform, many effective approaches were lost, or modified at the expense of efficacy. In the past few years, ‘turning the ship’ has proven to be a task that is more arduous than most in the community sector could have imagined. All the while, thousands of people who are involved in the criminal justice system in Canada continue to have their lives impacted – or lost – while our country tries to balance concepts of fairness, justice, and human rights within political discourse, public opinion, and the ever-growing body of literature on effective correctional practices. In an effort to seek out innovative alternatives, it will be equally important not to overlook sound correctional practices that are working now, or have worked successfully (though perhaps quietly) in the past. As the federal conditional release population increases, it is ever more critical to examine whether Canadian approaches to the conditional release system are working to the best of their ability.

For more than 50 years, St. Leonard’s Society of Canada (SLSC) and its member agencies have been invested in safe, effective, and humane integration of people returning to our communities after incarceration. Member agencies operate Community-based Residential Facilities (CBRFs) through residential and other programs, supporting thousands of youth and adults annually. As a national organization informed by its members, SLSC’s mission is to promote a humane and informed justice policy and responsible leadership to foster safe communities. It:

- endorses evidence-based approaches to criminal and social justice;
- conducts research and develops policy;
- supports our member affiliates; and,
- advances collaborative relationships and communication among individuals and organizations dedicated to social justice.

As a result of the nature of the community corrections related work that stems from the operation of CBRFs, SLSC has been particularly engaged on issues related to parole in a variety of capacities including service, policy, and research.

From a service lens, St. Leonard’s agencies have had a strong history of bridging the experience of incarceration and community readiness for people with some of the most challenging sentences: lifers. Through the genesis of the LifeLine® program in the early 1990s and its service provision through 2012 until funding for the program was ended, SLSC was part of a network of agencies that utilized a peer mentoring approach to have successfully paroled lifers support incarcerated lifers to navigate their sentences.<sup>1</sup> Many of these peer mentors, known as ‘In-Reach Workers’, facilitated confidence in Parole Board decisions by attending parole hearings, and supporting people in their preparation for those

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® LifeLine is a Registered Trademark of St. Leonard’s Society of Canada.

<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of the LifeLine program, and outcomes following the loss of program funding, see: [\*Life\(r\)’s Work: An Historical Analysis and Evaluation of a Program for Life Sentenced People in Canada\*](#). (2017). PeerLife Collaborative.

hearings. Some semblance of this work has been maintained in parts of Canada largely by the voluntary sector, which recognizes the need for this type of service provision for people integrating to the community.

From a policy perspective, SLSC has responded over the years to changes in legislation which impact the parole review process, (e.g. *Bill C-479: An Act to Amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (fairness for victims)*). SLSC has maintained the position that legislative changes must be conducive to the good functioning of Canada's institutions, as well as the integrative prospects for people who are incarcerated. While past – and indeed current – calls for change are often rooted in fairness for victims, it has become challenging within the legislative discourse to make such changes without unnecessarily sacrificing the rights and privileges of those who have been convicted.

Finally, research undertaken by SLSC has identified significant impacts on community corrections-related work and its intersection with parole. In the past decade, SLSC has focused research in the following key areas that may intersect with current interests for the Parole Board of Canada: utilization of peer mentoring to facilitate improved correctional outcomes; access to community-based mental health supports following incarceration; provision of second stage housing within a community corrections context; and, social enterprise and labour market integration for people exiting the correctional system.

Given the breadth of activities undertaken that intersect with Canada's parole system, SLSC is pleased to consider alternatives to traditional approaches, and highlight effective traditional approaches, within the context of community-based supports. This position paper will explore complexities that have been encountered through the community sector in relation to housing options, work opportunities, and mental health needs for people who are integrating to the community from prison; and, will provide additional considerations based on growing concerns from our network in recent years.

The recommendations put forward may not be exceptionally creative or 'outside the box'; however, they are bold in their simplicity for the people on whose behalf we advocate. Overall, the common thread that this paper establishes is the necessity to generate a paradigm shift away from exclusively risk-based assessments, and incorporate a needs-based analysis into the framework. To do so means understanding how to meet people at their point of need, in a complementary way that also addresses their points of risk.

## Housing Options

Community-based Residential Facilities (CBRFs) are the cornerstone of the community corrections sector and have a long history dating back to the early 1960s. Whereas Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) operates 14 Community Correctional Centres (CCCs), there are over 200 CBRFs across the country.<sup>2</sup> Over time, CBRFs have evolved to become inextricably linked to the discharge process from institutions, and parole supervision in the community. Given their unique position as non-government/not-for-profit service providers, CBRF mandates for client support often require going above and beyond what is required for traditional risk-based decision frameworks.

Unfortunately, going above and beyond is typically outside the scope of investment of resources in supporting community integration. As a result, there is an urgent need to recognize – and invest in – CBRFs

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<sup>2</sup> Correctional Service of Canada. 2018. *Community Based Residential Facilities*. Retrieved Feb. 4, 2019 from: <http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/facilities-and-security/001-0001-eng.shtml>.

as legitimate partners who are addressing both the criminogenic and non-criminogenic needs of the people they support. Typically, investments are made only for the risk-based framework for support; but, research is demonstrating the need to address non-criminogenic factors as necessary for desisting from criminal activity.<sup>3</sup> CBRFs recognize that the traditional frameworks of risk-analysis have reliably demonstrated outcomes for long term change; however, they also recognize the importance of addressing non-criminogenic factors in a way that fosters improved client outcomes and public safety results. Often, this means prioritizing mental health (including trauma-informed care), physical health, and housing needs in conjunction with risk-related supports.

Long term change cannot be achieved without the incorporation of need – and housing is a fundamental need for all Canadians. Indeed, 2017 saw the introduction of the first National Housing Strategy in Canada, and experts in the sector are exploring the right to housing as part of that discourse.<sup>4</sup> SLSC has undertaken research in recent years that explores the intersection of the criminal justice system and homelessness, and demonstrates why people who have experienced incarceration must not be left out of the national conversation.

SLSC's research on housing outcomes following discharge from CBRFs has yielded consistent findings with other research which suggests that approximately 30% of people exiting correctional facilities are at risk of homelessness.<sup>5</sup> While the reasons for that risk vary, one clear factor is the legal discrimination against people with a criminal record from accessing the housing market. As a means of addressing that risk, many community-based services have expanded the scope of their services to provide second stage housing as a necessary 'next step' for ensuring housing readiness after prison and conditional residency at a CBRF.<sup>6</sup> In addition to continued receipt of services and supports, this option helps with other barriers such as the stigma of listing a 'previous address' and landlord reference, and helps to build skills for successful long-term tenancy.

Despite the positive impacts that second stage housing has demonstrated for many residents and service providers, they are nonetheless something of an anomaly in the spectrum of community corrections. Typically, these transitional housing supports are self-funded by a non-governmental organization (NGO) service provider, or supported federally through social development funding streams – especially during

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<sup>3</sup> Stewart, L. et al. 2017. *Preliminary Examination of Factors Related to Success on Release for Offenders With Mental Disorders*. Journal of Community Corrections.

<sup>4</sup> For more information see: Employment and Social Development Canada. 2018. [Backgrounder: Reaching Home](#). Government of Canada; Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. 2018. [Submission to the National Consultation on a Human Rights-Based Approach to Housing](#). Desai, A. 2018. [Unpacking 'Bold' Changes: What it Really Means to Create Opportunities for All Canadians](#). Homeless Hub Research Matters Blog.

<sup>5</sup> Zorzi, R. et al. 2007. *Housing Options Upon Discharge from Correctional Facilities*. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).

<sup>6</sup> Within a correctional context, the term 'second stage' is used given the specific presence of a 'first' stage – incarceration or a CBRF. 'Second stage' and 'transitional' can be used interchangeably within the literature because of their similar long term but temporary structure; yet, they differ from supportive housing which is permanent in nature. Within mainstream literature, SLSC utilizes Barrow & Zimmer's (1999) definition of second stage housing, which defines it as consisting of relatively private accommodations provided on a temporary basis along with intensive services intended to facilitate the transition to permanent housing. It is intended to offer a supportive living environment along with tools and opportunities which foster social skills and development, and has been conceptualized as an intermediate step between emergency crisis shelter and permanent housing. It is more long term, service-intensive and private than emergency shelters, yet remains time-limited to stays of three months to three years.

a period of significant investment in Housing First models.<sup>7</sup> SLSC has long recognized, however, the importance of the need to establish parameters for using a Housing First approach for people involved with the criminal justice system. These individuals often face additional challenges with the effects of institutionalization, and have spent a great deal of time in structured environments that dictate their activities. As such, a Housing First approach for this population requires evaluation. Furthermore, the role that problematic substance use has played in a person's offending behaviour may dictate the need for zero tolerance policies or abstinence-only environments in order to prioritize the need to minimize risk to the community. This runs against the core principles of Housing First and, thus, SLSC has advocated for further research and investment in second stage housing as a logical next step for community integration.

Due to high housing market costs and available resources, when second stage housing is adopted within the community corrections sector it typically utilizes a single site (i.e. small apartment building or triplex) rather than a scattered site model. It has typically been invested in when CBRFs see significant numbers of people discharged to unknown, short-term, or emergency sheltered options which are seen to exacerbate risk factors. As a relatively new approach, however, utilization of these residences risks being subject to limited understanding of how they operate from the perspective of external stakeholders – including the local area parole office. Within SLSC's network of affiliates, there are accounts of parole officers refusing to consider second stage housing programs as a viable option since they may violate non-association conditions if the other units are available for rent by clients of the CBRF. Threatened with breaching people if they move in, the units are left to sit vacant.

Another example of how second stage programs can be impacted was demonstrated in a research study undertaken by SLSC. The housing program that participated in the study did not have issues with tenant placements; but, the study sought to improve services and resident outcomes. One of the variables introduced was a peer support component to the residential service. A limitation of that study was the inability for an expert peer mentor – who had clearance to provide mentorship support inside the walls of a federal institution – to provide support inside the second stage residence because he was deemed to be in violation of his non-association conditions if he entered the dwelling.

These few examples demonstrate the crossroad between managing risk and managing need; and the need for investment in research to better understand how exclusively risk-based frameworks may impede longer term goals of successful integration when non-criminogenic risk factors are not similarly prioritized. Real success in habilitating and integrating people who have been incarcerated means addressing their needs in addition to addressing their risks – in other words, a holistic view of each person. Based on the population supported by SLSC's affiliate agencies, some needs that could be better assessed in conjunction with risk assessment include:

- capacity to obtain safe, stable housing;
- age-related factors that mitigate criminogenic risk factors;
- health-related factors that mitigate criminogenic risk factors;
- capacity to obtain and retain reliable community-based mental health supports; and,
- capacity to obtain and retain reliable community-based substance abuse support.

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<sup>7</sup> A Housing First model provides a homeless person with immediate access to permanent housing, and abstinence from drugs and alcohol is not a prerequisite. Participants are supported by having staff periodically visit them at their new homes. For more information see: Falvo, N. 2008. *The Housing First Model: Immediate Access to Permanent Housing*. Canadian Housing Special Edition.

## Mental Health

Despite excellent efforts across the country to avoid criminalizing people with mental health problems and illness, there remains a serious prevalence of people with mental health disorders in prison. SLSC's research on the intersection of the criminal justice system and mental health has long recognized that the criminal justice and mental health sectors are more successful at advancing social justice goals when they work together; however, this type of partnership was not common across our studies, and were not without complexity when it did exist.

Our research on this subject has indicated that for people with mental health problems and illnesses who are released to the care of a CBRF, the main challenges of their post-release success pertain more to integration than recidivism.<sup>8</sup> There is evidence, however, that the presence of a mental health disorder can profoundly impact integration because of an individual's increased likelihood of experiencing social isolation, difficulty finding suitable accommodation and employment, requiring further medical and therapeutic services, and being at risk for a co-occurring substance abuse disorder.<sup>9</sup>

Given the growing evidence and firsthand experience of these challenges, it has become increasingly common across SLSC's network of CBRF service providers, and the sector as a whole, to incorporate a more holistic approach to programs and staff with mental health backgrounds in order to address the conditions of parole, as well as the gaps in access to adequate community-based mental health supports. What remains of concern is the limited investment in the community corrections sector to provide adequate staffing for CBRFs to support people on conditional release in a manner which addresses the needs of individuals while simultaneously addressing their risks.

It is reasonable to consider that efforts made by the community sector to rise to the challenge of addressing individual needs would be made better by enhancing institutional training across a variety of levels, including institutional and community parole officers, correctional officers, case managers, etc. to be complementary to community-based efforts.

In 2013, SLSC produced a 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of its publication *Towards an Integrated Network, Working Together to Avoid Criminalization of People with Mental Health Problems* which provided promising practices and strategies to reduce the criminalization of people with mental health problems and illness. Many of the recommendations from that study remain relevant within the current context for enhancing collaborative capacity to achieve humane and effective conditions for parole.<sup>10</sup> These include working collaboratively to:

- Create a common reality between institution, community partners, and parole;
- Identify key players willing to actively participate in the development, planning and implementation phases of promising practices on an ongoing basis;
- Focus on prevention, intervention and community capacity building;

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<sup>8</sup> St. Leonard's Society of Canada. 2010. *Community Connections: The Key to Community Corrections for Individuals with Mental Health Disorders*.

<sup>9</sup> Shinkfield, A., & Graffam, J. (2009). Community Reintegration of Ex-Prisoners: Type and Degree of Change in Variables Influencing Successful Reintegration. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 53(1), p. 30; Griffiths, C., Dandurand, Y., & Murdoch, D. (2007). *The Social Reintegration of Offenders and Crime Prevention*. National Crime Prevention Centre, Public Safety Canada: Ottawa, ON.

<sup>10</sup> St. Leonard's Society of Canada. 2013. *Towards an Integrated Network, Working Together to Avoid Criminalization of People with Mental Health Problems*. Ottawa, ON

- Identify what works, why it works and what the shared guiding principles and values are;
- Implement flexible and adaptable programs and services guided by similar principles and values;
- Challenge how we talk to the community; and
- Work the media: Educate and provide success stories.

Support the individual to:

- Accept mental health as it is rather than creating a mould into which it should fit;
- Accept the individual first as a person, then as someone who lives with a mental health problem;
- Focus on definitions of mental health that do not impede an individual's right to appropriate services; and
- Address exclusions, complex cases, and dual diagnoses.

Challenge the mental health service delivery network to:

- Offer a client-centered approach for all people who need support, promoting confidence, dignity and respect;
- Build and maintain relationships through trust and communication with justice-oriented organizations;
- Encourage use of manuals and protocols through provincial and federal support;
- Encourage staff empowerment and confidence to support justice-involved persons; and
- Campaign for mental health and corrections as a career choice.

When considering incorporation of these promising practices and strategies into the parole context, one example of where to start could be to address inefficiencies with the 'following a treatment plan' condition, i.e. to take medication as prescribed. This is not to diminish the importance of medication compliance; however, medication non-compliance should be considered within a needs-based lens. Often, 'non-compliance' with this condition results in a breach, and may not account for the full degree of challenges faced by people with mental health problems and illnesses to be compliant. Indeed, many people *without* cognitive limitations forget to take medications. The institutional setting does little to facilitate independence or accountability since support staff administer medications while people are incarcerated. Working with CBRFs so that they can better assist with meeting the needs for medication compliance may have significant impacts on reducing the numbers of breaches related to these types of conditions.

Overall, the heightened priority seen in recent years – both internal and external to a correctional context – to provide mental health service and support across Canada is encouraging, and has the framework to provide tangible and positive results. Much remains, however, to be achieved as we struggle to address co-occurring problems caused by addictions and mental illness. Given that statistics from CSC indicate that approximately 75% of incarcerated persons enter prison with a serious substance abuse problem,<sup>11</sup> bridging the divide between addictions and mental health must continue to be a focus of all who want to see meaningful advances. National initiatives to fight stigma and discrimination are showing impact; however, those who are hardest to serve, most difficult to reach, and most seriously ill, often are met by barriers outside their control that limit their opportunity to succeed. The criminal justice sector has the opportunity to demonstrate real leadership in addressing these issues in a way that could have significant cross-sectoral impact.

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<sup>11</sup> Correctional Service of Canada. 2010. *Profile of a Canadian Offender. Quick Facts*. Ottawa, ON.

## Work Opportunities

SLSC has conducted some research in the area of work opportunities – namely social enterprises. The 2015 study *Social Enterprise and Labour Market Integration for Individuals Exiting the Criminal Justice System: A Synthesis of Pilot Project Evaluations* endeavoured to develop a synthesis of evaluations findings of five Federal Horizontal Pilot Projects (FHPPs) funded under the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) of Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC).<sup>12</sup> The five projects were all tied to organizations that support people exiting federal institutions, and some of the findings were tied to conditions of parole:

*The evaluations showed that some participants had difficulty balancing their parole obligations and conditions while also trying to attend training, complete apprenticeship hours, or show up at job sites. The level of difficulty may be related to the extent of the collaboration of the program with the parole office. It was also noted that despite success achieved in the program, parole conditions can create setbacks in achieving the goals of the pilot – for example a participant might do very well in the program; but if they breach a parole condition they may return to custody. The social enterprise by itself is not enough to allow the participant to meet his or her parole requirements.*

*In addition to parole obligations, the stigma of simply being on parole and having a criminal record was a significant barrier listed across all evaluations. It was reflected in baseline data collection that many participants stated that their criminal record was a major impediment to obtaining employment on their own, or resulted in only seeking low-paying jobs with little opportunity to gain access to meaningful and permanent employment.<sup>13</sup>*

The study utilized information contained within four program evaluations related to social enterprise to aggregate data related to attrition and participant outcomes. While the methodology for tracking participants varied greatly across all five evaluations, it was possible to aggregate several indicators to summarize people's trajectories. Table 1.1 details those trajectories, and a general summary shows that 42.5% of participants had negative trajectories (i.e. revocations, unemployment, deteriorating mental health, breaches/returns to custody); and, that 48% had positive trajectories.

For the purposes of this paper, it is important to consider that the challenges highlighted in this study were prevalent for a population that had been identified and screened by service providers as good candidates for employment. Further to this, they were able to have access to community-based employment opportunities tailored specifically to people with criminal records. The conditions for obtaining successful employment typically are not this ideal for most residents of CBRFs.

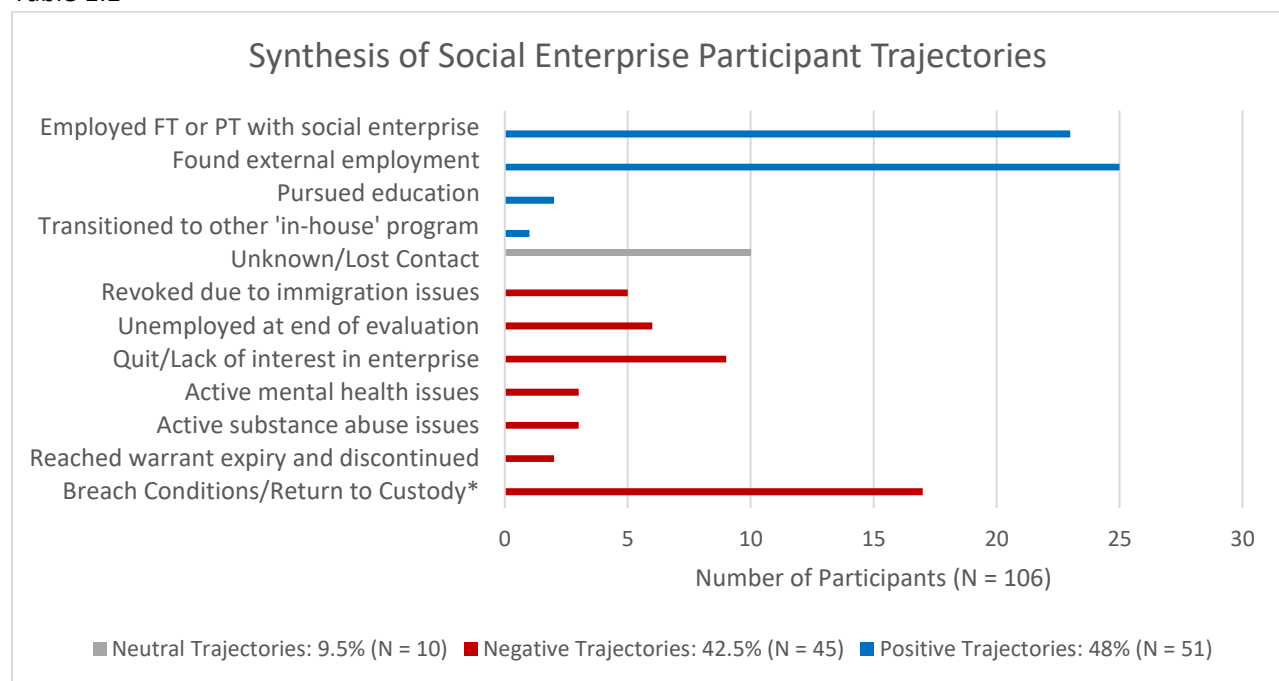
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<sup>12</sup> St. Leonard's Society of Canada. 2015. *Social Enterprise and Labour Market Integration for Individuals Exiting the Criminal Justice System: A Synthesis of Pilot Project Evaluations*. Ottawa, ON.

<sup>13</sup> St. Leonard's Society of Canada. 2015. p. 5.



Table 1.1



*\*None of the evaluations stated that a breach of condition/return to custody was the result of re-offending.*

Additionally, SLSC is increasingly concerned with the pressure for people on conditional release – particularly elderly people or people with mental illness – to seek and maintain employment. Based on reports of increasingly inaccessible opportunities while incarcerated for skill building, education/literacy, and work opportunities, coupled with growing concerns for an aging prison population who are unable to work, it will be crucial for the current conditional release system to consider alternate factors for community readiness. It is suggested that those factors prioritize housing stability, mental health needs, and protective factors against risk over employment.

## Additional Considerations

### People with Life Sentences

Trends from the Parole Board of Canada's *Performance Monitoring Report 2017-2018* are encouraging. In particular, the successful completion of day parole periods at 99.1%, and full parole periods at 98.3% are significant indicators that supporting people to reach day parole has significant community safety implications. Many CBRFs and other stakeholders can be confident in the efforts they put forward to support people in reaching that success; however, amidst these successful completions, SLSC and its members have had growing concerns about the numbers of people with life sentences who remain imprisoned beyond their parole eligibility dates (PED).

Life sentenced people now comprise nearly one quarter of CSC's population, with 65% in custody.<sup>14</sup> Yet there is no strategy in place specific to them. SLSC is hoping to change that as we undertake work to inform federal partners on a national strategy for lifers, though it is clear that the process needs to begin inside the prison, and will require collaboration between CSC, PBC, and community partners. Some initial

<sup>14</sup> Public Safety Canada. Corrections and Conditional Release Statistical Overview. 2017 Annual Report. p.59.

concerns have been made clear at the outset. Currently, there is no minimum standard of time within which an institutional parole officer (IPO) is required to meet with prisoners. In the absence of services such as LifeLine® which helped create a vision of hope, in what can be an otherwise hopeless environment, it is essential that a minimum standard of time be set and achieved. Doing so will ensure that those with longer sentences are not left to navigate their sentences alone while IPOs prioritize their caseloads for shorter term prisoners.

In a recent visit to Millhaven Institution to speak with the Lifers' group, SLSC sought input on what might be incorporated into a national strategy for Lifers. Their message was clear, concise, and reasonable:

1. Accessible, relevant programming tailored to people with life sentences to ensure it is meaningful and appropriate for their needs; many felt they were overlooked for programs so that 'short-termers' could complete them.
2. Peer support right at intake for lifers/long-termers, that could serve as a resource from the community to let them better understand the scope of their sentence beyond the legal system. Peers would also support getting them into 'the right mindset'.
3. Opportunities to contribute to their case management teams with more regular contact with Institutional Parole Officers (IPOs), enabling them to develop a relationship that could be built on and generate opportunities to demonstrate progress. There was a suggestion to re-establish a case conference between a peer support worker, IPO, and correctional staff.
4. Support for navigating their sentence— literacy skills (including digital literacy), understanding the law with access to the library, and services available in Official Languages.
5. A voice—a mechanism that is neutral, and which allows them to voice concerns without fear of repercussion; advocacy with authority, and an impartial audience to hear their frustrations and concerns could help them feel like they had a voice.

If the institutional parole system is not set up in a manner which can accommodate people with long-term and life sentences, then interim consideration should be given to implementing creative ways to facilitate access to relevant supports that have been established and maintained in the community. These ways do not need to be very far 'outside the box', and should be considered within the broader context of what is possible, happening, and valued in the community sector to ensure that people are integrated successfully into Canadian communities.

### Aging/Elderly People

As those in the sector well know, Canada's federally sentenced population is aging. In the criminal justice context "aging" typically refers to people in conflict with the law aged 50 and over, because of the accelerated aging effects of an institutionalized lifestyle. Age 50 is typically demarcated by recognized authorities as the threshold for aging institutionalized individuals. This was recognized in February 2018, for example, when the Office of the Correctional Investigator (OCI) and the Canadian Human Rights Commission jointly launched an investigation into the special needs of aging and elderly incarcerated people.

The OCI reports that people aged 50 and over made up 24% of the incarcerated population in 2015-2016. The community-supervised population was even greater at 37.6% aged 50 or older. The median age of individuals upon admission to Canadian penitentiaries also continues to rise, from age 33 in 2006-2007 to

age 34 in 2015-2016. Overall, the number of individuals between ages 50 to 59 admitted to federal corrections also increased by nearly 40% in the last decade. Common concerns particular to aging/elderly people in conflict with the law include:

- Estrangement from, or lack of, connection to other incarcerated people that extends to isolation in the community;
- Physical vulnerability to more serious consequences of assault;
- More difficulty adjusting to new environments and greater length of time to do so;
- Higher rate of completed suicide;
- Greater possibility of dying during incarceration;
- Higher incidences of loss of external support system (e.g., spouse, family, friends);
- Loss of autonomy;
- Difficulty reintegrating back into the community resulting from modernization, the effects of institutionalization; and
- Lack of institutional and community resources that are adapted specifically for the elderly.

Managing the sentences of the aging and elderly presents unique challenges for correctional administrators and community-based service providers and will come into sharper focus as the aging incarcerated and paroled population reflects and outpaces the larger, aging Canadian population. The challenge will be finding ways to balance public safety and safe integration mandates, along with the additional challenges posed by those with unique and costly physical and long-term needs. Alternative approaches may consider the intersection of risk and age, and assess security levels proportionately to age-related risk factors such as mobility, disability, and mental health. This is particularly significant for those whose parole eligibility dates have passed. A starting point may be tailoring community-based strategies that consider the special needs of aging and elderly people so that they can be appropriately cascaded to the community based on their current risk levels, or if they do not present a public safety risk.

These challenges have been prevalent for many affiliates of SLSC who are striving to meet the needs of aging/elderly residents within a community corrections context; however, greater awareness of physical and mental health challenges across the sector is needed to enhance sensitivity towards conditions of mental and physical age-related health constraints. Doing so will encourage pro-social activities and support effective integration for aging/elderly people in conflict with the law who may otherwise be isolated.<sup>15</sup>

## Recommendations

The work undertaken by our organization and its network of direct service providers forms the basis of our position on the housing, employment, and mental health needs of the people we endeavour to advocate on behalf of and support. By consolidating our experience and research findings on these subjects as they pertain to conditional release and successful integration, SLSC has distilled the following recommendations for the Parole Board of Canada:

- Develop and apply a needs-based analysis into existing risk management strategies. Needs should be prioritized based on physical health, mental health, and post-custody housing.

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<sup>15</sup> For more information, see: St. Leonard's Society of Canada [Policy on Aging and Elderly People in Conflict with the Law](#). 2018.

- Support community partners to reduce the number of breaches related to ‘non-compliance’ for conditions to follow treatment plans by adopting a needs-based lens to medication compliance.
- Support community partners to develop and generate access to housing solutions such as second stage programs; and, assess and address ‘ground-level’ parole decisions that are counterintuitive to effective integration.
- Seek opportunities to be included in dialogue with federal government partners regarding Canada’s first National Housing Strategy, *Reaching Home*.<sup>16</sup>
- Advocate for the return of peer-based services modelled on the LifeLine® concept with federal correctional partners, given their capacity to complement and support the parole process.
- Rethink opportunities for traditional employment within prisons and in the community with consideration for equally meaningful opportunities for people who are unable to work because of their mental health or age.
- Consider the intersection of risk and age and assess security levels proportionately to age-related risk factors such as mobility, disability, and mental health. Prioritize those past parole eligibility dates by tailoring community-based strategies. Cascade elderly prisoners to the community based on their current risk levels, and if they do not present a public safety risk.
- Finally, federal investment in corrections research is often insular to prisons and parole, which is limiting when trying to understand the bigger picture. It is important to consider the continuum of services that people must engage with along their carceral journey, and beyond. Investment in community partners to implement or improve promising practices will address the need to better understand how Canada can take an evidence-based approach to integrating federally sentenced people successfully to the community.

SLSC is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the dialogue on alternatives to traditional approaches for conditional release in Canada. We welcome further opportunities should they become available as the PBC and its partners strive to create more successful outcomes for the people in our shared care and custody.

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<sup>16</sup> For more information see: Employment and Social Development Canada. 2018. [Backgrounder: Reaching Home](#). Government of Canada.

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