



From Offender to Responsible Citizen: Learning for Life

Description



Incarceration and supervision do not produce the long-term changes that many offenders require in order for them to lead productive, law-abiding lives in the community. To help offenders safely return to the community and improve their chance of getting and holding a job, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) has established correctional programs enabling them to make positive changes in their behaviours. This module provides students with an overview of the main educational and correctional programs operated by CSC in institutions and in the community at large.

Learning objectives

As part of their sociology coursework, this module will allow students to:

Sociology

- Discuss the factors influencing the individual's self-concept;
- Identify the behaviours that promote health and well-being;
- Understand the importance of education and employment in self-esteem and rehabilitation of offenders;
- Understand how social organizations are necessary to maintain an orderly community;
- Describe the effects of family violence;
- Consider, on the one hand, the basic need of all individuals for food, shelter, interpersonal relations and management of resources and, on the other hand, individual and social responsibilities.

“Changing Lives; Protecting Canadians”

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) is clearly mandated by the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* to provide a range of programs that address the needs of offenders and contribute to their successful reintegration into the community. Each of these programs includes several levels of intensity.

The ultimate goal of the CSC is to allow for a safe transition of offenders into the community. This transition is achieved through awareness-raising and behavioural changes that allow for rehabilitation as a respectful, responsible, and productive citizen.

Social and economic factors are often the roots of wrongful conduct, so it is essential to provide offenders with tools to help them establish healthy social relationships, deal with everyday problems, and find and hold a job.

One program established by CSC is the **Alternatives, Associates and Attitudes Program**. This program targets offenders with a pattern of property, fraud or drug offences that are not associated directly with substance abuse. The program focuses on **antisocial peers, pro-criminal attitudes** and self-regulation problems associated with criminal behaviour.

Although crime does not always go hand in hand with violence, federal penitentiaries nonetheless hold many detainees for violent crimes. Various programs address these problems.

The reduction of repeat violent offences is another priority of the CSC that led to the implementation of a series of **violence prevention programs**: the Violence Prevention Program – High Intensity, Moderate Intensity, and Maintenance; the Women’s Violence Prevention Program; the Spirit of a Warrior program for female Aboriginal offenders; the In Search of your Warrior for male Aboriginal offenders; and the Family Violence Prevention Programs.

For 50% of the offenders entrusted to the CSC, there is a direct link between their substance abuse and criminal behaviour. The CSC provides a range of **substance abuse treatment programs** geared towards specific populations (male, women, Aboriginal, incarcerated, community offenders) and to varying risk and need levels to best match offenders to the most appropriate programming.

Finally, the **sex offender programs** was designed to reduce repeat offences among violent sexual offenders. The CSC offers a National Sex Offender Program- High Intensity, Moderate Intensity, and Low Intensity, as well as the Women’s Sex Offender Program, the Tupiq Program for male Aboriginal offenders, and the Inuit Community Maintenance Program for Inuit offenders.

Glossary

Antisocial peers: Friends and acquaintances who encourage activities that oppose good social integration.

Pro-criminal attitudes: Attitudes that encourage criminal behaviour.

Education and employment: A gateway to the community

The programs we have considered so far help offenders to change their behaviours so that they can function better in society. But successful reintegration demands more on the part of offenders than an ability to practice sound management of their emotions and relationships; they must also integrate into the community and play an active role there.

Many studies have shown that employment helps offenders successfully integrate into society and reduces the rate of re-offending. Unfortunately, however, a high proportion of them do not have the necessary education and skills to get a stable job; before thinking about finding and keeping a job, offenders must therefore achieve an educational level that will enable them to meet employers' minimum requirements.

All CSC institutions provide offenders with educational programs appropriate to their needs, achievements and abilities.

- Adult Basic Education (Grades 1 to 10)
- Secondary Education
- Vocational Education
- Post-secondary Education

Adult Basic Education: Upon arrival in institutions, the great majority of offenders test at a completion level lower than Grade 10 (Secondary 4). Adult Basic Education (ABE) includes areas such as math, language and science to the Grade 10 level, thus enabling offenders to fill the gaps in their education and deal more effectively with daily problems encountered in the community. Moreover, the sense of achievement and confidence that results from successfully completing such a program may encourage offenders to make further positive changes in their lives. Successful completion provides a basis from which offenders can further their education in other areas where literacy is essential.

Secondary Education: The secondary education program leads to graduation at the Grade 12 level. A secondary school diploma has become a prerequisite for securing lasting employment and for entry into a variety of training opportunities.

Vocational Education: Vocational programs provide training in a wide range of job-related skills that are relevant to employment opportunities that exist in the institutions as well as in the community. Some of the subjects currently taught by CSC vocational programs are:

- welding and metal trades
- hairdressing
- small engine repair
- auto mechanics and auto body repair
- electronics
- carpentry and cabinet making
- upholstery
- plumbing
- cooking
- computer programming

The vocational education programs include a generic skills component that is applicable to a number of vocational fields. This component addresses, for example, industrial and shop safety and personal and interpersonal skills for success in the workplace.

Education and employment: A gateway to the community (continued)

Post-secondary Education: Post-secondary education gives offenders the opportunity to acquire a trade or profession, as well as to update trade qualifications prior to their release. Offenders generally pay for their own post secondary studies, unless it can be demonstrated that the education addresses a very specific need.

Skills for Employment: All correctional programs call for group interaction through which offenders learn and practise skills they will need to facilitate reintegration and adapt to private sector work settings. More specifically, they include problem-solving, critical thinking, punctuality, interacting with co-workers, being respectful of other people's opinions and feelings, and dealing with authority figures.

Offenders who work while in an institution may earn between \$5.25 and \$6.90 daily, depending on their performance. Unemployed offenders are given a daily allowance of \$1.00. Those who are unemployed through no fault of their own receive up to a \$2.50 allowance per day. Pay may be suspended for offenders who refuse to work or to participate in institutional programs.

CORCAN is a key rehabilitation program of the Correctional Service of Canada. It provides employment training to offenders in federal correctional institutions and enables them to gain the employment experience and skills they need to become productive citizens, successfully reintegrate into society and reduce their risks of re-offending.

CORCAN shops make products and provide services in a businesslike manner and strive for the most realistic work environment possible. Its products and services are produced to private sector norms and standards because it has discovered that the more realistic the work experience, the more effective the rehabilitation experience.

Most CORCAN products are used internally within CSC. By contributing to institutional operation and maintenance, offenders help to reduce the costs to the government of their incarceration and rehabilitation. CORCAN also provides opportunities to observe offenders in a “real-world” work environment and assess how well other programs like anger management and substance abuse are working.

In addition, CORCAN operates community employment centres across Canada where offenders are helped to find jobs in fields such as construction, food and beverage services, janitorial services, trucking, tourism, manufacturing and call centres. In addition, these employment centres deliver a variety of job counselling services—including career counselling, Internet job search, résumé and letter preparation, and mock interview sessions—to offenders who have been released from prison and are in the community.

As we can see, safe rehabilitation of offenders depends on a large number of programs that help them become responsible, productive and well-integrated citizens.

However, the biggest factor for success is found in the team of people who train, deliver, and support CSC correctional programs. They are the **pro-social role models** who transform the lives of the offenders they work with.

Glossary

Pro-social role models: Individuals who set an example of good social integration.