

Fraser Valley Institution: A new federal corrections facility for women

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In January 2002, the government of British Columbia announced that it would be closing Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women (BCCW) by 31 March 2004. At that time there were approximately 40 women serving sentences of two years or more living at BCCW. These women were managed under an Exchange of Service Agreement between Correctional Services Canada (CSC) and B.C. Provincial Corrections. This meant that they were afforded all of the programs and services available to women serving federal sentences in federally operated institutions in other regions of Canada. However, they were co-located with women serving provincial sentences, on remand or under immigration hold orders.

When the imminent closure of BCCW was announced, CSC assessed the number of options including the return of jurisdiction to CSC for women serving sentences of two years or more. In September 2002, the Solicitor General announced that these women would be returned to CSC's jurisdiction and housed on the site of the former Sumas Community Correctional Centre in Abbotsford, B.C.

Background

I had the honour of being appointed Commissioning Warden for the newest institution in the Pacific Region. We did not have a name, we did not have any inmates, and we did not have staff. We had only eighteen months to open. The success of this project required cooperation and the efforts of National Headquarters (NHQ), Regional Headquarters (RHQ), Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC), the commissioning team, federal women at Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women (BCCW), BC Corrections Officials, Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) staff, Community Corrections, partner agencies and community members. The new institution will be located on the Matsqui Complex in Abbotsford, British Columbia, and will join the existing structures of Matsqui Institution — medium security, Regional Treatment Centre/Pacific Institution — multi-level facility, Community Corrections Administration offices for the region and the Regional Supply Depot.

Guiding Principles

The Operational Plan for the institution is grounded in the principles established in *Creating Choices*: Empowerment; Responsible and Meaningful Choices; Respect and Dignity; Shared Responsibility and a Supportive Environment. These principles guided the commissioning team in all of its endeavours including design of the physical structures, staffing, operational policies, transition planning with the women at BCCW, development of community partners and communicating with various publics.

In June 2003 the facility was named Fraser Valley Institution (FVI). The institution is being constructed in two phases. Initially FVI will house approximately 50 minimum and medium classified women. The minimum and medium units will include residential style housing each accommodating six women. As in other regional women's facilities, these houses do not have a continuous staff presence. In addition, a Structured Living Environment (SLE) that will accommodate 8 minimum and/or medium security women with mental health needs that require more intensive support. A multi-disciplinary team of professionals will operate this house, including a Team Leader, Psychiatric Nurse, Psychologist, Behavioral Counselors, and Primary Workers. There will be 24 hour staff presence in this house.

Physical Plan — Phase I and Phase II

During the first phase there will be many temporary working areas including Case Management, Institutional Services, Maintenance, Spirituality, Visits and Correspondence, Admissions and Discharge and Food Services. The Principal Entrance, Secure Central Control (SCC) and Segregation are temporary structures. The completion of Phase Two (scheduled for mid 2005), will include a Secure Unit with capacity for 10 maximum security and four segregation cells, a recreation centre, principal entrance, SCC, Visits, Administration area, Institutional Services, CORCAN, Food Services.

Maintenance — Admissions and Discharge

During the construction of the Secure Unit, women classified as maximum security will be housed in one of the secure units at another federal Women's facility, or they may apply to remain with British

Columbia Corrections. They will remain in secure custody pending the completion of the Secure Unit or until there is a reduction in their security classification.

Transition from Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women Staff

The opening of FVI will involve significant transition for both incarcerated women and those women under community supervision. Several programs have been offered to the women while at BCCW to assist them with the transition to Fraser Valley Institution. In January 2004, the women became actively involved in the development of a landscape plan for Fraser Valley Institution. Once they arrive on site they will implement the plan in stages, including creating child friendly areas, Aboriginal gardens, and developing healthy outdoor living spaces. This undertaking will be made possible through partnership with a non-profit organization (Evergreen) involved with bringing communities and nature together for the benefit of both.

Programs

Similar to the existing regional facilities, FVI will offer Correctional Programming that has been developed specifically to address women's needs and is delivered using a woman centered approach. Programs include substance abuse, survivors of trauma and abuse,

reasoning and rehabilitation, education and continuous learning, and employment skills development.

Staff

When the institution is fully operational there will be a staff complement of approximately 110. FVI will have a diverse, enthusiastic, professional and well-trained work force. All staff working at the institution will participate in Women Centred Training and the majority has completed non-violent crisis intervention, mental health and suicide awareness training.

Transfers of the women from BCCW to Fraser Valley Institution began during the month of March 2004. The challenges of opening a new facility are many. However, the team has worked together to create the best possible environment for the women, staff and visitors to Fraser Valley Institution.

It is our responsibility to Canadians to prepare the women for safe return to their communities and to contribute to the safety of communities during the incarceral as well as the community supervision phase of the women's sentence. At Fraser Valley Institution, the staff is committed to CSC's Mission and serving the Canadian public to the best of our ability. ■

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