

Selected Quotes from Our Staff on the Management of Long-Term Offenders

The long-term offender is exiled to prison, a world within our world. The structure, systems, customs, norms and even the language of prison are unique. Prison irrevocably changes the offender, much as time irrevocably changes the world he or she left. For the exile returning home, nothing will ever be the same. As staff, we must appreciate the profound impact the loss of a familiar past will have. We must expect newly released offenders to be emotionally adrift in a now foreign world. We must help them cope...despite our limited ability to truly empathize with their situation.

Cindy Pressé, Psychologist Regional Psychiatric Centre Prairie Region

Misconception 1 - Long-term offenders have extensive criminal records. Reality - *The Report of the Task Force Report on Long-Term Sentences* found that only 45% of long-term offenders had previously served terms of federal incarceration. The remaining 55% had either no criminal record or a minimal provincial record.

Misconception 2- The number of individuals committing murder has significantly increased since capital punishment was abolished. Reality - Although there have been fluctuations in the murder rate during the past several years, the actual rate, in comparison to the period before the abolition of capital punishment, does not substantiate this commonly held belief. At this time, approximately 13.5% of Canada's federal inmate population is doing time for murder.

Misconception 3 - A life sentence does not mean "life." Reality - Offenders sentenced to life are incarcerated or under correctional supervision for the rest of their natural lives.

Misconception 4 - Lifers represent a high potential for additional violence, both during their incarceration and while under supervision. Reality - It is commonly acknowledged by most corrections professionals that lifers generally represent a stable inmate population and respond well to parole supervision.

Misconception 5 - Paroled lifers frequently commit new crimes and are returned to incarceration. Reality - In the Atlantic region, since the abolition of capital punishment, we have released approximately 85 lifers into the community on day parole or full parole. Of this number, approximately 13 have been returned to federal incarceration - five for violations of various regulations and eight for new offences, none of which were murder.

Terry Hatcher, Assistant Regional Administrator Case Management and
Willie Gibbs, Deputy Commissioner Atlantic Region

I found long-term offenders the most interesting people to work with. Faced with an end-of-the-line situation, they were often deeply shaken and displayed a willingness to enter a new pilgrimage. There is the possibility for in-depth work, which is not present with shorter sentences. The organization as a whole has yet to tap the full potential of developing programming in partnership with these people.

Reverend Pierre Allard, Director
Chaplaincy National Headquarters

Front-line workers often feel overwhelmed when a newly sentenced long-term offender is assigned to their caseload. If staff members have these feelings, one can only imagine how the offender feels. Breaking up a long-term sentence into stages makes the sentence more manageable and a plan more easily established.

Female long-term offenders, who often have been the only parent in the lives of their children, usually do not have a significant other on the outside to support them and bring their children for visits. Therefore, they often suffer greater hardships in this regard than their male counterparts.

Rules cannot be universal in terms of short- versus long-term sentences. The Correctional Service of Canada has to understand the unique needs and behaviours of long-term offenders and have different expectations of them (for example, inmates may regress at different stages of their sentences).

Odette Gravel-Dunberry, Director
Native and Female Offender Programs
National Headquarters

I have always found it interesting that we have such difficulty dealing with long-term offenders. While I believe that the sentence of a long-term offender requires some attention and management, I fundamentally believe that they are first and foremost offenders who, not unlike other offenders, have a variety of needs associated with their criminal behaviour. As with most offenders, we need to ensure that we direct our attention to those needs and focus on providing appropriate interventions that are timely (in terms of the sentence length and with respect to other interventions that are required), of proper intensity and compatible.

I believe, perhaps naively, that if we attended to all offenders in this manner, including long-term offenders, the management of offenders' sentences would automatically become a need factor. However, I believe that we get caught up with the issue of sentence length and, as a result, only deal with long-term offenders ineffectively and in a panic as they get closer to their release date.

Elizabeth Fabiano, Manager
Program Development and Implementation National Headquarters

Long-term inmates have a vested interest in creating and maintaining a stable institutional environment. They have the most to lose when the environment is unstable and the most to gain from a stable environment. After all, they are in our institutions for the long haul. One or more long-term offender ranges in an institution can teach us a lot about sharing responsibility for the creation of a stable environment.

Research has a role to play in defining the most critical stages in the sentence of the long-term offender more clearly and identifying the most appropriate programs to offer at each critical stage.

D.G. Wheaton, Warden
and Staff of the Correctional Programs Division Atlantic Institution (Atlantic Region)

Long-term offenders are the stabilizing elements in our units and programs. But we must make sure that this is not to their detriment.

Community volunteers are favoured tools for the social reintegration of long-term offenders because they allow the offender to maintain or to progressively regain contact with real-life situations.

Normand Granger, Director
East/West District of Quebec
St. Jerome Quebec Region

As a Living Skills program coach in an institution, I often thought about program opportunities for long-term offenders. These inmates should not be pushed aside so fast-trackers, or those who are close to their parole hearings, can get the first chance at programming.

Some long-term offenders feel hopeless about their lives. They see no end to their sentence and fall into lethargy and depression. For these offenders, program involvement gives renewed hope. They become motivated to apply for passes, to reconnect with forgotten family and friends, to begin thinking about those on the outside again. And for others, program completion stimulates them to change their direction, to apply for transfers for new programs or just to get out of a comfortable rut by moving to a new environment. It was my experience that when program opportunities were provided for long-term offenders, they responded with enthusiasm and a personal (rather than administrative) interest in the program.

Joanne Reynolds, Program Officer
Program Development and Implementation National Headquarters

During a visit to an institution in the Ontario region a couple of years ago, I had the opportunity to speak with several lifers. Family visits and the critical nature of family support in doing time were mentioned several times by these inmates. Some thought that family visits should be expanded to include friends. They mentioned that the pressure to marry in order to get family visits was unfair, probably unrealistic and not necessarily a good idea under the circumstances.

Community interaction during the course of their sentence was cited as important to keep links with the reality of life outside the prison. It was suggested that escorted passes be granted, even in the early part of their sentences, to remind them that there was still something out there that they wanted to return to and to keep this focus in mind despite the length of time in prison that always lay ahead.

These lifers expressed frustration with the lack of continuity or advancement in programming and employment over the course of their sentences. Case managers gave them little attention. While they acknowledged and recognized the pressure that case managers were under to deal with short-termers, they were frustrated by the attitudes with which their concerns were greeted. Acknowledging that their personal skills equipped them to grow despite the environment, they also pointed out that many lifers fell into the doldrums and lacked the social and planning skills, education and focus to go ahead on their own. These latter inmates are the real victims of an environment that is indifferent to their problems.

It seemed that some lifers were pointing us in the right direction by saying that it is at the beginning of the sentence that we need to intervene in terms of programming. Otherwise, we run the risk of missing out on an opportunity to initiate successful intervention by waiting on other factors to affect the long-term inmate.

Alan Sierolawski,
Acting Assistant Director, Policy
Policy, Planning and International Development National Headquarters

One of Kingston Penitentiary's case management officers told me that probably one of the greatest obstacles a case manager has to tackle when dealing with a lifer is convincing the lifer, not the Parole Board, that he's a good candidate for release.

Tom Epp, Warden
Kingston Penitentiary (Ontario Region)

We must prepare long-term offenders for their release. To do this, a program of escorted passes is necessary. We must also encourage long-term offenders to go to minimum-security institutions as quickly as possible.

Huguette Sauvé
Conseil des Églises pour la justice
et la criminologie Montréal, Quebec

Lifers' groups are an example of organization, of taking things into one's own hands with lots of initiative.

Jean-Noel Laplante, Chaplain
Drummond Institution (Quebec Region)

It is generally recognized that there is a need to instill a sense of hope in long-term offenders. This can be done by ensuring access, at the earliest possible time, to the programs, services and assistance currently available in federal institutions. Only when Correctional Service of Canada staff members internalize the principles expressed in Core Value 2 of our Mission, will providing a sense of hope for long-term offenders become the priority it should be.

Peter Grandy, Senior Parole Officer
Carlton Centre Annex
(Atlantic Region)

Some suggestions for improved correctional service to long-term offenders:

- increase the frequency or duration of private family visits for long-term offenders;
- ensure that each inmate committee has at least one long-term offender on it;
- develop a system of rotational transfers, with the inmate's consent, so that he or she need not

- stagnate in any one facility for an unduly long period of time; and
- develop special group-therapy programs involving carefully selected long-term offenders and first-time young offenders.

J.W. Stonoski, Warden
Mountain Institution (Pacific Region)

As lifers, we are suggesting that a support system be established in institutions specifically for long-term offenders. This would include having a counsellor for lifers who would explain the system and the opportunities available to them (e.g., conjugal visits, temporary absences, day parole, transfers, education, courses and trades). Such a system would give lifers a better understanding of what they are facing, would instill a sense of hope and offer an incentive to take advantage of these various opportunities. Counselling should occur as early as at sentencing, so that long-term offenders have a better understanding of their sentence and the behaviours that are accepted in prison. This position could be rotated at six- or 12-month intervals.

Furthermore, psychiatric or psychological assessments should be done annually, and case management assessments should be done quarterly, to keep abreast of any changes in the case plan and ensure that vision for the offender's release is not lost.

Finally, we suggest a lifers' range, some mandatory programs (e.g., anger management, substance-abuse and sexual programming and education) and the elimination of waivers for day parole.

Lifers (Residents' Council)
Carlton Centre Annex (Atlantic Region)

The reality is that a number of long-term inmates will never be released from prison. Consequently, it is not sufficient to provide activities and programs to fulfill only their basic needs. To maintain a sense of dignity, long-term offenders need opportunities to contribute not only to the betterment of the institution but to society as a whole. This need, and their ability to fulfill this role, have been displayed through involvement in ventures such as the Special Olympics that have been held in several institutions across the country in recent years.

In preparing offenders for release, community support has always been a significant consideration. When one looks at long-term offenders, their relationship with community support, outside of parents and siblings, was usually established during their current sentence. In many cases, support from parents and siblings is also renewed in the later stages of an offender's sentence. This emphasizes the need to provide avenues for offenders not only to renew relationships but to create new ones. Although the latter becomes somewhat contentious, we must, at the least, provide avenues to support relationships that were established subsequent to the offender's incarceration and that are deemed to be supportive for the offender and the individual(s) involved.

Brian Tkachuk,
Senior Project Manager

Correctional Programs
National Headquarters

At the Donnacona Institution, the situation of long-term inmates is one of our primary concerns. In keeping with the Correctional Strategy, a 20-week target program, "Group Discussion for Long-Term Inmates," was implemented on 16 January 1992. Topics for discussion include the correctional environment, family, roles of spouse and parent, frustrating life situations, obstacles to communication, conflict resolution and taking control.

Also, representatives of inmates serving life sentences have recently submitted a charter to us for the creation of a lifers' group, which I would rather see drawn up by a committee on long-term sentences.

Yvon Deschênes, Director
Donnacona Institution
(Quebec Region)

Specific follow-up research should focus on factors that enhance or detract from reintegration for offenders who have served long sentences.

What are the most difficult things these people have to face once they are out in the community? What contributes to their meeting the challenges successfully? What are the most appropriate forms and conditions of release? What indicators or predictors can help us in formulating the most appropriate release package? What can we learn from other long-term care institutions?

Clearly, the challenge is to keep these offenders stimulated, in touch with, and apace of, the changing reality of the community and optimistic about their future.

Rob Adlard, Acting Director,
Operations and Plans
Health Care Services
National Headquarters