

The Challenge of Managing Long-Term Inmates in Minimum-Security Institutions

A support program for long-term inmates has been in place for several years at the minimum-security Ste-Anne-des-Plaines Institution. What sets our institution apart is that inmates are transferred to it toward the end of their sentence. The program has four objectives:

- *to actively encourage inmates to take part in social and personal skill-development activities;*
- *to involve inmates in the management of their sentences;*
- *to encourage exchanges between inmates and staff and*
- *to harmonize relations among the inmate population.*

1. Actively encourage inmates to take part in social and personal skill-development activities. This key objective can be reached by setting up different groups, some of a clinical nature and others with a more cultural or community scope.

Participation in some of these groups is mandatory given their impact on inmates.

Every three months, activities are organized to meet the needs of the current group. Long-term inmates are encouraged to sponsor other inmates who are experiencing specific problems. This type of relationship can benefit both the inmates with problems and their sponsors. 2. Involve inmates in the management of their sentence. Inmates must play an interactive role in the development of their treatment plans.

Emphasis is placed on sobriety, literacy and participation in volunteer projects.

Meetings with all participants are held regularly. 3. Encourage exchanges between inmates and staff. To provide a safe and stimulating work environment for staff in general, personnel are encouraged to participate in activities organized for inmates involved in the program. By increasing opportunities for exchanges between inmates and staff, a relationship of mutual trust can develop.

Inmates also have responsibilities. For instance, they each act in turn as the group's representative to the administration. They have priority for assignment to some positions of trust. Their private family visiting privileges are increased. 4. Harmonize relations among the inmate population. This objective creates a calm atmosphere which eases exchanges between inmates and, consequently, between inmates and staff.

This positive environment, in which inmates can further their social and personal skills, is created by fostering community spirit, organizing group discussions and activities specifically designed to meet the needs of inmates and by encouraging participation in charity activities.

The presence of long-term inmates within the institution has a stabilizing influence on the general prison population. They hold leadership positions among inmates. They also represent the institution when activities, special leaves, workshops and conferences are held.

The program is a way to slow the institutionalization of long-term inmates and to prepare them for

possible release into the community.

The shortage of participants is the greatest hurdle we have had to overcome. The program was intended for 24 inmates serving long sentences; however, there are currently only 12 participants. With the conversion of the Federal Training Centre into a minimum-security institution (with a capacity of approximately 400 inmates), several long-term inmates have decided to transfer to it and to take part in its kitchen program developed for long-term inmates.