

Task Force on Reintegration of Offenders: A summary

During its meeting of September 1996, the Executive Committee of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) approved the terms of reference of the Task Force on Reintegration of Offenders, which submitted its report in January 1997.¹

Since 1994, fewer and fewer offenders are being granted a discretionary conditional release. Although some recent initiatives had been undertaken to isolate causes and suggest changes to CSC reintegration processes and activities, a group committed to handling the problems defined had yet to be formed.

Recent Auditor General reports had also identified areas where CSC has not managed its operations well enough. As summarized in the November 1996 Auditor General report on offender reintegration, CSC lacks commonly accepted work standards or practices, quality assurance procedures, and performance information. Also, CSC suffers from inadequate change management skills and needs to clarify case management roles in institutions.

The problems related to reintegration activities, combined with the identified management weaknesses, affect CSC's ability to carry out its mandate to reintegrate offenders safely into the community. These problems also lead to non-compliance with the requirement to provide each offender with the least restrictive environment possible.

Improvements in targeted areas should improve use of correctional resources and enhance public safety.

The Task Force mandate

In light of the above, the Task Force on Reintegration of Offenders was to:

- propose what CSC must do to improve its management of reintegration activities, and suggest a plan for implementing the improvements;
- propose short-term improvements to reintegration processes and activities to enhance effectiveness; and
- suggest changes to the current design of reintegration activities to enhance CSC's ability to achieve its objectives.

The Task Force was required to review the official description of the current operational design and management framework of the reintegration activity and propose specific changes where improvements were needed.

To complete this program, the Task Force chose to examine three parts of the reintegration process: first, the offender intake and assessment process; second, institutional case management and programs; and, third, community supervision and its program components.

For each of these areas, the Task Force examined documentation such as policy and procedures to find descriptions of the values, processes, jobs and structures related to reintegration, and information on associated management activities and day-to-day measures. These tests were used to find out whether the organization could effectively and consistently articulate its operations and, where it could not, to locate and identify weaknesses and recommend appropriate changes.

Major findings and observations

The following observations established much of the rationale for the proposals made in the report.

The Task Force observed that reintegration is a complex endeavour that requires focus and order at all levels of the organization. In this, the Task Force made specific observations that resemble observations of the Policy Review Task Force. One very important observation was that authority, responsibility and accountability is extremely diffuse for much of the work required in reintegration: when everyone is supposed to do everything, the organization cannot be sure that anyone actually does anything.

Reintegration and population management are delicately balanced, especially in institutional settings, but also in community supervision. The balance must be well understood and supported to keep reintegration a constant priority throughout the organization. Reintegration of offenders is not a population management tool, and CSC should neither use nor appear to use reintegration to keep down the number of inmates.

Although the process descriptions in the Case Management Manual amount to a form of case differentiation, CSC policy and staff practices do not handle the various groups of offenders in significantly distinctive ways, and this observation applies to all three reintegration processes. Therefore, all offenders may be subjected to the same exhaustive analysis, assessment and programming, whether they need it or not. The evidence also indicates that we tend not to consider an offender's individual risk and needs assessment in planning and delivering programming and other services.

The Task Force also found that ideas about risk assessment were easier to discuss and organize than ideas about risk management. On the risk management side, core programs tend to be seen as the only valid technique; therefore, we tend to refer nearly all offenders to programs and insist that offenders complete programs before conditional release. This perception also leads us to downplay the usefulness of other correctional interventions that could either replace programming for particular offenders, or augment programs for higher-risk offenders.

Community corrections demands continuous attention from the organization. The Task Force reviewed a significant body of work produced by the Community Corrections Council over the past two years, and the work achieved to date should lead to further improvements in the management of community corrections.

The quality of work is most critical when the National Parole Board or a Warden is at the point of deciding to release an offender. If, by

this stage, the process is flawed or incomplete, the wrong decision is likely to be made — and, unfortunately, work cannot be corrected retroactively. We must do a consistently good job throughout the offender's incarceration, ensuring that the links in the process are first created and then reinforced, and that high-quality work is expected and performed throughout the case management process.

The maintenance and improvement of unit management is a major reintegration issue for institutions. As it is currently implemented, unit management is more effective in population management than in reintegration, basically because day-to-day issues demand the constant attention of key staff, particularly unit managers and case management officers. Although unit management is still the best institutional correctional model available to CSC, the Task Force proposed changes to institutional operations related to reintegration. After reviewing the original unit management principles and plans, the Task Force concluded that unit management can be operated according to its principles, in a way that is both effective and supportive of sound case management and reintegration strategies for offenders.

Values and beliefs related to reintegration

The Task Force believed that, although Core Value I and Core Value II of the Mission Document provide a strategic framework for CSC's values and beliefs about reintegration, CSC's values specific to reintegration are neither fully articulated nor recognized as such in related policy and process documents. The following are the values the Task Force considered applicable to the day-to-day work that must be done to accomplish our reintegration goals.

- CSC has at its disposal a range of people-oriented intervention techniques that will manage the risk posed by offenders, and the use of these techniques should be tailored to the risk of the individual offender. Since offenders are different, we do not use the same techniques for all offenders.

- Criminogenic needs and risk must be identified at the beginning of an offender's sentence, during the assessment phase.
- We set a high value on dialogue between community and institutional staff at all phases of the reintegration process.
- Excellent case management is based on the use of professional judgment and objective tools to justify, support and explain decisions or recommendations.
- All staff involved in reintegration need qualified supervision, and the quality of their work and their professional development should receive close and continuous attention from line supervisors.
- In the community, risk is managed through several intervention techniques, and the relative importance and use of these techniques depends on the risk and needs of the offender. An offender must be not only seen by staff at a certain frequency, but he or she must also receive good-quality contacts with appropriate content and purpose.
- The case management officer should be personally responsible for his or her work on an individual offender's case, and should carry out the first step in the quality assurance process.
- While the offender moves through various placements in the institution and in the community, everyone — that is, CSC staff and managers and offenders — must view the transfer from institution to community as one step in a progression from more to less control.
- Reasonable decisions require the assembly of enough information from all relevant sources.

Proposals

The Task Force made specific proposals related to its terms of reference, based mostly on the observations noted above. The following summary covers the most important proposals in the report.

The **operational design** of reintegration should outline the values, processes, jobs and structures, and management measures that apply to reintegration.

A review of the major policy documents and the Case Management Manual should permit CSC to develop standard operating practices that state our values and beliefs about reintegration, explaining them clearly and requiring the process of reintegration to flow from assessment through the institutional phase into the community. Concepts, goals, policies and procedures should be consistent throughout the three sub-processes.

One of the most important problems identified by the Task Force involves **compliance control and quality assurance**, and **performance measurement**.

The Task Force stated that the areas of compliance control (work to be done and the timeliness of that work) and quality assurance (quality enhancement and reduction of errors) must improve. Improvements in quality assurance can also improve timeliness and content, but the central concern of quality assurance is the work as it is being done. For each reintegration sub-process, the Task Force proposed a list of compliance control and quality assurance elements, and recommended that standards and instruments be developed for each sub-process.

The Task Force also proposed a comprehensive set of performance and management indicators to be implemented at all levels in CSC. The management indicators were intended to help managers diagnose operational problems and detect strengths and weaknesses, while the performance indicators would produce a retrospective view of overall performance.

Risk-based case differentiation. This is one of the most strategic proposals in the report. The Task Force proposed that the overall risk/needs rating produced by the offender intake assessment should be used to place offenders in one of three basic intervention categories:

1. The **release-oriented intervention** category would apply to low-risk offenders. Core intervention (defined as the programs set out in the correctional strategy) would not normally be required and, if required, programs would be delivered in the community. Release of the offender at the earliest eligibility date would be the goal.
2. The **institution and community intervention** category would apply to moderate-risk offenders. Based on the level of need, the program strategy could include institutional programming combined with follow-up in the community, or programming delivered entirely in the community. Depending on the nature and level of needs, the preferred release date could be at day parole eligibility.
3. The **high-intensity intervention** category would apply to high-risk offenders. Core interventions would be delivered in institutions before release is considered and pursued after release in the community, as required.

This differentiation is supported by the notion that certain groups would not normally receive programming in institutions and, if they require programs or other interventions to reduce or manage risk, these would be provided in the community. The distinction rests primarily on risk assessment and on the important concept that several key types of intervention can manage risk in the community as well as in an institution.

Offender intake assessment. The Task Force recommended that while certain changes can be made to the offender intake assessment process, it should remain centralized and designed to produce a comprehensive standardized assessment of offender risk and needs early in the sentence, thus providing a sound foundation for correctional planning and intervention.

Intake units should initiate the process of risk-based case differentiation, as this is an important (if not the most significant) determination that can be made shortly after the offender's admission to calculate his or her most probable release date and the best way to release safely.

The Task Force did not recommend changing the maximum time allowed for the initial assessment, but it is expected that if offenders are correctly differentiated as recommended by the Task Force, low-risk offenders will spend much less time in intake units than high-risk offenders, as recent data indicate is possible.

The Task Force also observed that intake units vary widely in available resources and in the supplementary assessments they conduct. The Task Force recommended that the seven intake units should be more consistent in their organization, operations and funding.

The Task Force also addressed information collection, recommending that intake units take responsibility for information gathering throughout an offender's sentence. In most cases, comprehensive assessments can be completed using the information provided through the Fingerprint Service, the post-sentence community assessment, the police report (or police information in the post-sentence community assessment) and the interviews and analysis conducted by intake staff. If, at that point, police or court reports are still outstanding, the offender should still be placed and the intake unit would obtain the missing reports for case management staff, who may need them to support release decisions.

A reintegration function for CSC institutions.

Under the premise that operational units must improve their management of reintegration, the Task Force turned its attention to the way institutions are structured to carry out the function. Programs are separated from case management at most institutions and case management staff often know less than they should about programs. Therefore, many offenders are referred to programs they do not need, and because program staff are often uninformed about case management, their performance is not effectively reported. Reintegration is so diffuse a responsibility that no single manager below the level of deputy warden has the authority to ensure that reintegration activities are properly integrated and carried out.

Program staff and case management staff should cooperate closely on reintegration, but the reality is that sometimes they do not, and sometimes they are at odds. This is a critical problem, as these groups do most reintegration work. Program and case management staff could be reorganized in a single department, or, to avoid a major organizational change, CSC could implement work practice standards requiring them to work together.

Because of strong concerns within CSC to consider the impact on unit management, the Task Force recommended that CSC develop a reintegration function within the unit management operational model.

As an interim measure, institutions must establish a reintegration function that ensures that case management and program staff work together in a single, timely, integrated process. This reintegration function should include a quality assurance system for case management and program delivery, and support unit managers' and program managers' quality assurance and compliance control efforts. The person heading the function should also work closely with the National Parole Board, acting as the institution's liaison on matters concerning the quality of case preparation.

This function should also be seen as a way to stop the significant erosion in recent years in the value of the work and expectations of case management officers. Case management officers work together too rarely to build on each other's expertise. They get little direct supervision that encourages quality analysis, and institutions have no managers who can devote sufficient time and attention specifically to case management. Whatever institutional organization is eventually chosen, the model must:

- achieve an appropriate balance in organizational commitment to reintegration activities, as the primary focus, and day-to-day population management;
- ensure that the structure gives reintegration staff and managers the responsibility and authority they need to provide appropriate accountability for the function; and

- integrate management measures and performance indicators that hold reintegration managers and staff accountable for results.

The Task Force recommended that each institution establish an interim position of reintegration manager. One of the first proposed tasks of the reintegration manager was to conduct an audit of the major compliance control and quality assurance elements of the institution's case management operations. Using the results of this audit, the reintegration manager would assign case management supervisors as needed to help units improve the quality of case management work. The Task Force suggested an audit tool that covered most of the areas to be examined to allow the reintegration manager to do this task quickly.

The role of case management officers and level II correctional officers. The Task Force recommended that case management officers (CMOs) be the only staff who prepare decision documents and make recommendations requiring the conduct of risk assessment and analysis for conditional release and community contact activities. Concurrently, while level II correctional officers (CO-IIs) would remain the primary contact with offenders, CO-IIs would not be involved in preparing recommendation documents for conditional release and community contact. The Task Force recommended that the duties of CO-IIs reflect their role as the primary staff who interact with offenders and sustain the momentum of behaviour change, as was originally envisaged when unit management was introduced in institutions in the late 1980s.

Workload, recruitment and training of case management officers. The Task Force observed that the CMO workload is significantly increased by the constant reassessment of analysis and preparation of lengthy narrative reports, narratives that still sometimes fail to describe the offender clearly and succinctly. CMOs spend little time talking to offenders about their correctional plans, objectives and performance, and their recommendation documents are based too heavily on reports and observations collected from other staff.

CSC has no consistent explanation for its wide variation in caseloads. The Task Force reviewed CMO workloads in individual institutions, and concluded that, pending the completion of a recommended study to establish caseloads in institutions and the community, individual caseloads for institutional CMOs be established at 30 offenders in maximum security, 25 in medium security and 28 in minimum security.

The Task Force also recommended an integrated recruiting and training strategy for hiring CMOs with a minimum qualification of a bachelor's degree in a related discipline, without allowance for equivalency testing. The Task Force also recommended that external recruits receive initial training before starting work and that they undergo a period of on-the-job training leading to certification as a CMO. Serving CSC employees in acting CMO positions or recruited as CMOs should undergo the same training.

Community supervision and programs. Since 1995, the work of the Community Corrections Council has focused primarily on putting in place the management and resource framework recommended in the Auditor General's report of 1994, which found gaps in the management of community corrections similar to those detailed in the 1996 reports on rehabilitation programs and reintegration. At the same time, work has been done to improve policy and operations affecting the community. The Task Force therefore recommended that the Council continue the work it has begun.

In addition, it suggested that CSC will be in a better position to deal with the challenges of reintegration in the future if community corrections builds a consistent support framework in each community.

This requires a long-term commitment to developing working relationships with a variety of traditional and new community partners. These relationships would produce a stable source of community support for corrections and other criminal justice initiatives.

Although the Task Force conclusions were different for the community and for institutions, it recommended that a review of community organization still be conducted. The quality

assurance and supervisory coaching processes proposed by the Task Force require close, direct, continuous communication between community CMOs and their immediate supervisors; also, caseloads are currently low but they vary significantly among and within regions. These variations may be acceptable, but they must be scrutinized to determine whether the various approaches equip community corrections to carry out its mandate.

CSC's relationship with the National Parole Board. The mission of the National Parole Board and that of CSC are basically the same, and both organizations are governed by the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*, which sets out respective and common authorities and responsibilities.

Considering the complexity of the legislation, the many forms of releases that can be applied to individual offenders and the often different authorities for different forms of release, the Task Force recommended that opportunities be found for the two organizations to work together on policy development, and to express, from time to time, their policy or processes jointly in appropriate areas. It should also be possible to conduct joint training or at least share training packages.

The Task Force also recommended that the reintegration function proposed for institutions should be the regular point of contact for the National Parole Board on case preparation matters, and that each region assign an official as its day-to-day liaison with the Board.

All parts of CSC contribute to reintegration. The Task Force listed some staff functions, such as human resources, staff training, research and informatics, that contribute significantly to the establishment of an environment that promotes offender change. ■

¹ This version of the executive summary of the Task Force report has been edited for stylistic consistency with other *FORUM* papers.

Task Force members: from CSC — Lucie McClung, Nancy Stableforth, Marcel Chiasson, Robert Babineau, Normand Granger, Mike Provan, Jeff Christian, Doug McMillan, Linda McLaren and Denis Méthé; and from the National Parole Board — Jean-Marc Trudeau.