

Task Force on Long-term Offenders: A summary

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During one its meetings in 1997, the Executive Committee of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), approved the terms of reference of the Task Force on Long-term Offenders which submitted its report in February 1998.²

Over recent decades, the Service had more and more long-term offenders. Although some recent initiatives had been undertaken to address their concerns, a group committed to handling the problems defined for long-term offenders was also formed.

In conjunction with the Life Line concept that was adopted by the 1998 Task Force on Long-term Offenders, recommendations were made for focused research activity on managing long-term offenders in a variety of targeted areas. Such work should lead to improvements in the use of correctional resources and enhance public safety.

Background

In the early 1980's, several representatives from St. Leonard's House in Windsor, Ontario met with senior officials from the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) and the National Parole Board (NPB) to discuss the feasibility of developing improved and comprehensive methods to respond to the needs of offenders serving life sentences. These efforts culminated in a 1990 report prepared in partnership with the CSC, NPB and non-governmental organizations and funded by the Donner Foundation. This report set out the Life Line Concept (In-Reach Workers, Community Resources, Public Education).

In 1991, CSC accepted the report of the first Task Force on Long-term Sentences.³ Its major recommendation was to adopt an overall strategy for managing long term sentences (defined as ten years or greater) according to four stages of the sentence: adaptation, integration, preparation for release, and reintegration.

In 1992, a report was produced ("More Than a Matter of Time") which outlined how the Life Line Concept could support implementation of most aspects of the 1991 Correctional Service Task Force Report on Long-term Sentences. In 1996, the CSC re-established the Life Line National Resource Group, a group made up of senior CSC and NPB officials and non-government organization partners. Their general mandate was to guide the development of programs aimed at assisting the offender to make more productive use of their time

while in custody with a view to increasing the likelihood of a safe release to the community.

Then, in 1998, the work of another Task Force on Long-term Offenders advanced implementation of key aspects of earlier efforts. This Task Force emphasized a partnership made up of the CSC, NPB and non-governmental proponents of the Life Line Concept. It also intended to set out a framework for the adoption of the Life Line Concept by CSC and by the NPB. The report provided an overview or directional approach and identified areas where further study, development, consideration and action are required. It also contained a number of recommendations of substance where there is ready consensus.

The Task Force Mandate

The 1998 Task Force on Long-term Offenders, based on, but not limited to, the ideas and experience with the Life Line Concept, addressed the management and program needs of offenders serving life or long-term sentences. It recommended a national strategy involving CSC, NPB, Life Line and other partners, as appropriate, to ensure the highest level of public safety is achieved consistent with the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*, the Missions of the CSC and the NPB and the basic elements of the Life Line Concept.

The 1998 Task Force on Long-term Offenders was to:

1. provide a profile of long-term offenders currently under the supervision of CSC;
2. describe current Life Line services available to offenders under federal jurisdiction, and
 - a) assess the capability of expanding the services;
 - b) identify prerequisites for successful service delivery including:
 - definition of the scope of work, qualifications, remuneration, orientation, training, and
 - ongoing development and integration within current operational regimes, etc.;
3. develop a set of minimum Standards and Guidelines for Life Line-type programs, and propose an approach to conducting a review and evaluation of all such programs against these Standards and Guidelines;

4. develop a potential role for long-term offenders both in penitentiaries and in the community including but not limited to involvement in programs, training, employment and community service;
5. develop a proposed approach to the early completion of a short term research study to identify key elements which contribute to the successful reintegration of long-term offenders, as well as a strategy to incorporate the results of this study into the overall approach to the management of this group of offenders;
6. estimate the type and amount of resources required to carry out its recommendations, with particular attention to points 2 and 3.

Major findings/observations

The 1998 Task Force on Long-term Offenders established a profile of the institutional and community population of offenders serving life sentences, indeterminate sentences and those serving determinate sentences of ten years or greater. At the time of the 1998 report, there were 3,800 federal offenders serving life and indeterminate sentences in Canada, 31% of them being supervised in the community. The Task Force recommended that comprehensive profile of lifers and long-term offenders are produced at least every three years.

Community resources dedicated exclusively to offenders serving life sentences are rare, with only one residential centre in Canada. Nearly all Community Residential Centres will accept lifers, except those who may be bound by agreements with communities to refuse certain types of offenders, such rules are not based on sentence length but rather type of offence. While In-Reach services do not currently reach all incarcerated lifers, they are much more commonly available than are community services specifically designed for and dedicated to lifers.

In examining the feasibility of expanding Life Line services, the Task Force identified issues to be resolved. The first was the status of Life Line. It was agreed that trying to apply the term "program" to Life Line would be self-defeating, as this has come to be known within the correctional community to have a very specific meaning related to dealing with factors or problems affecting offenders' criminal behaviour. However, the term "service" also has meaning for effective corrections, and the 1998 Task Force on Long-term Offenders recommended adoption of this designation.

A second issue was the target group. Life Line was originally targeted at those serving life sentences, however, offenders with indeterminate sentences, or those serving long determinate sentences, may share many of the same problems faced by lifers. The 1998 Task Force on Long-term Offenders recommended that the target group include all those serving life sentences plus the approximately 260 offenders with indeterminate sentences. This target group should be reviewed after a period of experience with it to determine whether it should be changed or expanded.

The 1998 Task Force on Long-term Offenders was specifically required to develop detailed standards for In-Reach Workers. A common scope of work, list of qualifications, ratio for Workers and minimum compensation level were submitted. The 1998 Task Force also believed that contracts for In-Reach services should address the funds required for compensations, travel and administration, and should set out the parties' respective obligations for information sharing and protection. The major responsibilities of In-Reach Workers would be working with the lifers in the institutions to make the most of their time, maintaining team-work relationship with case management and participating in public education initiatives while inside institutions and in the community.

Proposed standard qualifications would require In-Reach Workers to be either lifers or long-term offenders with integrity and credibility with CSC, the NPB, other lifers and the community. Also, they should have demonstrated the knowledge, skills and experience needed to deliver the responsibilities of the job. Furthermore, they must be eligible for enhanced reliability screening.

The Task Force was also asked to provide a draft approach to orientation and training for In-Reach Workers. A three part package (required reading, skills training and on-the-job orientation) was developed to form the basis of consultations at various levels to determine the most effective ways to deliver the training.

The 1998 Task Force on Long-term Offenders was also concerned about the special needs of federally sentenced Aboriginal offenders and women offenders being addressed. For Aboriginal offenders, it recommended that consultations take place involving the CSC, the NPB, Native liaison workers and their agencies, Aboriginal offenders, Elders and the National Aboriginal Advisory Committee. The Task Force also felt that it is important on an ongoing basis to seek input from those with expertise on Aboriginal issues in managing the Life Line Concept.

To address the special needs of women offenders serving long sentences, the 1998 Task Force recommended that the Deputy Commissioner for Women take the leadership role in consultations and other work leading to developing services for women lifers and long-term offenders. The Task Force suggested that the ongoing elaboration of direction and policy applying to federal offenders in the Life Line Concept should also address and reflect the special needs of women.

The 1998 Task Force developed draft standards and guidelines describing the three components of Life Line and how they could operate. It was recommended to use these draft standards as the basis for extensive consultation within the CSC, the NPB, and among the agencies that are now, or may in the future be interested in providing services. In developing these standards and reviewing the progress to date in implementing the Life Line Concept, it became increasingly apparent to the 1998 Task Force members that creating specialized, dedicated community residential facilities for lifers across the country was not a realistic goal. Therefore, it recommended that the community component of Life Line recognize that achieving safe, gradual and progressively independent release for lifers can be achieved using a variety and combination of community residential and program resources.

Values/beliefs related to long-term offenders

The Task Force looked at ways to achieve better sentence planning and make more constructive use of time for all incarcerated long-term offenders. The concept of long-term offenders participating in correctional careers offered a constructive alternative to allowing offenders to possibly drift within the system for ten or fifteen years before they become the focus of real attention immediately prior to their release. These offenders could support and assist staff in the conduct of their correctional work while at the same time contribute significantly to their own personal growth. They should have the opportunity to acquire and practice the skills to contribute to society while incarcerated.

Research proposals

The 1998 Task Force report provided an outline for research activity on long-term offenders. The purpose was to examine long-term offenders from three perspectives:

- Demographically (age, gender, etc.);
- Psycho-socially (education, employment, addictions, mental health, etc.); and

- Personally (perspectives of the long-term offender of the factors they believe were most significant in their safe re-entry to the community).

These profiles of the long-term offender were also to be taken at three different points in the sentence, upon entry to the federal system, at time of release, and several years later while under supervision. The 1998 Task Force suggested that the research results could be of assistance in the areas of institutional placement, programming, safe release and community supervision.

Public education

The 1998 Task force on Long-term Offenders proposed a process for the development of an overall public education strategy related to lifers and long-term offenders. The Task Force strongly urged consultation, with a wide range of individuals and a variety of groups, to develop, approve and implement an effective public education plan. Thus, the overall goals, messages and timeframes were to be open to discussion and debate with potential partners, who must know that their concerns and views are being taken seriously in these discussions. To be effective, the strategy must be developed and implemented across three levels — national, regional and local.

Conclusion

The central defining characteristic of the Life Line Concept is an equal partnership among CSC, NPB and the proponents of the Life Line Concept. Further expansion of the Life Line Concept requires building a large network of focused support on managing long-term offenders nationally, regionally and locally. This network should help to provide expertise on lifers and long-term offenders, and reflect the diversity of Canada. ■

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² This version of the Task Force report and its executive summary has been edited for stylistic consistency with other *FORUM* papers.

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³ See *Forum on Corrections Research* on Long-term Offenders, vol. 4, n° 2, 1992.