

# In-Reach workers: The foundation of Life Line

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**L**ife Line, like any successful correctional program, requires an effective working relationship between motivated offenders and involved staff and community support. Together, these components become a powerful, progressive partnership.

*The Mission of Life Line is to provide, through the In-Reach component and community resources, an opportunity to motivate inmates and to assist them to derive optimum benefit from correctional planning and program participation.*

*The purpose of In-Reach work is to “reach-in” to institutions under the sponsorship of an established non-profit community based correctional agency to provide inmates with hope, sensitivity, and continuity throughout lengthy prison sentences.*

## Some facts and background

**A**bout 4,000 offenders are serving life sentences. There are approximately 128 women and 520 Aboriginal offenders serving life sentences. Of this number, one-third are under parole supervision in the community for the rest of their lives. The inmate population of life sentenced and indeterminate male offenders has increased by 26% since 1990 and represents 18% of the total institutional population.<sup>2</sup>

There are 179 women serving sentences of ten years or more and 128 of these are serving a life sentence.

Aboriginal offenders are over-represented in the lifer population as in the offender population generally, compared to their representation in the Canadian population. Aboriginal offenders make up 17.8% of the total offender population. Thirteen percent of the male lifer population are Aboriginal (15% of incarcerated lifers, 12% of lifers under community supervision) and 13% of women lifers are Aboriginal.

## In-Reach Worker

The first In-Reach worker commencing in 1991 was the late Tom French. He described his role as initially keeping lifers “...alive, sane and out of trouble.” From that first contact he went on to help the lifer plan and carry out a program that offers hope and a chance to successfully return to society.

Tom’s venture into Millhaven Institution soon led to his presence into the other major institutions in the Kingston area and paved the way for In-Reach workers in the future. Today, 24 In-Reach workers in all five regions of the Correctional Service of Canada, (Pacific, Prairies, Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic) help new inmates develop a “correctional career” that spans the length of their stay in the institution rather than aimlessly drifting through their incarceration.

## Role of the In-Reach worker

With the objective of contributing to the successful reintegration of long-term and life sentenced offenders, the In-Reach worker must assess and understand the needs of lifers and long-term offenders during the incarceration and community phases of their sentences. They will also provide those inmates with ongoing support and advice that will enable them to adjust to the daily reality of institutional life and acceptance of their sentence.

The In-Reach workers actively encourage individual lifers to contribute to the management of their own sentences by informing them of the programs available, the case management process and other appropriate resources in institutions and in the community.

In-Reach workers participate as well in Parole hearings and Judicial Reviews and assist lifers and long-term offenders in dealing with decisions of such hearings.

## Services for women offenders

For the most part, there are more similarities between men and women lifers than differences. There are only a few specific areas where the interests and needs of women lifers or long-term offenders may differ:

- Women are more likely to have had custody of their children before incarceration. Therefore, maintaining contact and responsibility for their children is a higher priority and a bigger worry.
- Women are more likely to have problems with using or being prescribed medications.

Female In-Reach workers are currently established in the Quebec, Ontario and Pacific regions.

### Feedback from an In-Reach worker

René Durocher is a In-Reach worker since 1994, and has dealt with an average of 120 clients a year. René has been assisting his clients by motivating them to achieve the goal of turning their life around. He has attended case conferences with the purpose of “having his clients take charge of their own lives by planning with case managers and In-Reach workers to fulfil their case plans.”

In addition, René attended the Offender Management Review Board to support the client in the reduction of their security clearance application. By meeting with his clients an average of once a month, René became the continuous link with his clients during their incarceration period. Therefore, at the choice

of the In-Reach worker, he has been able to attend Parole Board Hearings and judicial reviews.

### Conclusion

In-Reach workers are providing that necessary link and lifeline exemplifying that a lifer cannot only survive, but succeed. The In-Reach worker is the visible evidence that somewhere there is someone who cares. They also offer a message to correctional staff — here is living proof that rehabilitation, reintegration and even redemption works... perhaps more often than we realize. ■

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<sup>2</sup> 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9.

<sup>3</sup> Life Line National Resource Group (1998), *Implementing the Life Line Concept: Report of the Task Force on Long Term Offenders*, Ottawa.

## New Release

# The Safe Return of Offenders to the Community

Statistical Overview  
April 2000  
Research Branch, CSC

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