

Results of a pilot study of the peer support program for women offenders (R-73, 1998)

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This report provides a summary of findings from the pilot study of the Peer Support Team (PST) program at Edmonton Institution for Women (EIFW). While the results of the investigation suggest some minor modifications to the evaluation framework itself, these will not be addressed in detail. Rather, this report will provide an overview and preliminary evaluation of the PST program at Edmonton Institution for Women.

The remainder of this paper is organized into three major parts: method, results, and conclusions. The method section provides an overview of the instruments and procedures used, as well as a description of the sample achieved for the evaluation pilot study. The result section describes findings obtained through both quantitative and qualitative data analyses. Finally, the conclusions outline some of the study limitations and offer recommendations for potential improvement of the PST program at EIFW and integration at other facilities.

Overall, staff and offenders in terms of both process and outcome rated the PST very positively. The program's activities are linked to its goals in a valid and logical way, and it appears to have its own place and function at EIFW. Importantly, the program meets key principles in the women's mental health continuum of care, particularly: access, woman-centredness, and client participation.

Evaluation results suggest that the program generally serve the targeted clientele. Recipients of peer support cited a variety of reasons for using the service, and generally reported satisfaction with the support received.

Some interviewees stressed that the PST does not help with crisis intervention, nor is it intended for that purpose. However, there is good evidence that peer support may help in crisis mitigation and in crisis resolution. While some maintain that the PST has facilitated positive atmosphere change at EIFW, the observed changes appear to be restricted to particular inter-individual relationships. ■