



Research at a glance

Buffalo Sage Wellness House (BSWH) Section 81 Healing Lodge Process Review

A process review demonstrated the success of BSWH in providing services for, and reintegrating, women offenders

Why we did this study

Buffalo Sage Wellness House (BSWH) is a relatively new (2010) Section 81 Healing Lodge in Edmonton, Alberta. It is a 16-bed, minimum/medium security facility for federally-sentenced women offenders and also serves as a community residential facility for women on conditional release. The purpose of the study was to provide the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) and the Native Counselling Services of Alberta (NCSA) with an understanding of the implementation, processes, and where applicable, the measurable outcomes of BSWH. In recognition of the small number of women who have attended BSWH to date, the study was a process review to describe and understand BSWH structures, programs, processes, and operations and identify best practices in the treatment and management of lower risk women offenders.

What we did

The study profiled 48 women who have ever attended BSWH using data from CSC's Offender Management System, and described the unique model of case management practiced at the facility. Sixteen in-depth interviews with 9 offenders and 7 staff members informed the examination of the relationship of Buffalo Sage with CSC, the processes in place, and best practices that can inform CSC on the management and treatment of women offenders. In addition, the life histories of three offenders who had lived at BSWH were collected using a case study method.

What we found

Thirty-five of the women who have lived at BSWH were of Aboriginal ancestry and 13 were non-Aboriginal. The majority were single, about 31 years of age, convicted of a homicide or drug offence, and serving a sentence of four years or more. Forty offenders had been released from BSWH.

Overall, the revocation rate of conditional release for any reason was 23%; only one released woman was returned on a new offence.

The results from the interviews with the staff portrayed the Buffalo Sage model as a culturally-informed approach that helps women understand and heal themselves, reconcile relationships, reclaim an interconnected worldview, and deal with historical and past trauma. The results from the offender interviews indicated that the women found BSWH to be a positive, empowering, and supportive environment that allowed them to have increased self-confidence, to heal and gain a better understanding of themselves and their past, and to feel empowered to change.

What it means

Overall, the results of the study demonstrated the success of BSWH in successfully reintegrating its women residents back into society. It was noted that some refinement to the following processes could improve efficiency: development of wait lists (which would expedite the transfer process), an increased awareness within CSC of BSWH and how Section 81 works, provision of funding that would allow for additional services for the women, particularly for teachers and escorts for ETAs, and the provision of accommodations to permit private family visits.

For more information

Pilon, A.J.M., Jewell, L.M., Wormith, S.J., & Laboucane-Benson, P. (2015). *Buffalo Sage Wellness House (BSWH) Process Review*. (Research Report R-371). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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