

————— **Research Report** —————

**The Restorative Justice Living Unit at
Grande Cache Institution: Exploring
the Application of Restorative Justice
in a Correctional Environment**

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**The Restorative Justice Living Unit at Grande Cache Institution:
Exploring the Application of Restorative Justice in a Correctional Environment**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past decade, restorative justice (RJ) has been garnering increased international attention among criminal justice practitioners, governments, victims, offenders, and the media. The benefits of RJ have been explored and RJ processes have been used to provide victims, offenders, and communities with an opportunity to address serious harm stemming from crime while providing an opportunity for recovery and healing through safe and respectful dialogue.

Since 1996, Correctional Service Canada (CSC) has explored RJ through the Restorative Justice and Dispute Resolution (RJDR) Division. In 2001, CSC took a progressive step by pilot testing Canada's first RJ environment within a correctional facility. CSC created the Restorative Justice Living Unit (RJU) at Grande Cache Institution (GCI), integrating RJ principles and values into prison operations.

The RJU sought to positively impact the attitudes, behaviours, and correctional outcomes of offenders. The present research project was designed to evaluate the impact the RJU had on those who chose to live there. Using qualitative and quantitative measures, 20 randomly selected RJU offenders were interviewed, while the remaining 90 RJU offenders were invited to complete a questionnaire. The parole officers for each of the 20 interviewed RJU offenders were also interviewed. Data were drawn from the Offender Management System (OMS) to quantify the impacts of the RJU in relation to program participation, institutional charges, incidents, offender grievances, and release/returns. These results were then contrasted against two comparison samples.

The qualitative results showed strong support for changes in attitudes and behaviour, if not in correctional outcomes. Staff and all offenders described the RJU as a respectful environment that provided motivation and support to offenders who became committed to causing no further harm. Offenders and staff attributed these results to the positive influence that the principles, values, and processes of the RJU environment offered to offenders. However, contrary to qualitative data, quantitative results demonstrated little impact and were comparable across all three samples.

This study suggests that RJ within a prison environment shows promise and may yield benefits to offenders, particularly in terms of attitude and behavioural motivation. The project provided important "lessons learned" that could be incorporated into a redefined RJU model for prisons. Specifically, the issue of a continuum of RJ care/organization from intake to community reintegration is discussed. If implemented, this more comprehensive approach could present opportunities for further research in this area.

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INTRODUCTION

Correctional Service Canada (CSC) defines restorative justice (RJ) as a non-adversarial, non-retributive approach to justice that emphasizes healing in victims, meaningful accountability of offenders, and the involvement of citizens to create healthier, safer communities. Restorative justice treats crime as harm done against people, relationships, and the community (Zehr, 1990). Restorative justice thus shifts the emphasis away from the state and retribution, and encourages dialogue and participation between those impacted by crime (victims, offenders, their respective family members, and the community). The needs and interests of those impacted by a criminal offence can be identified, explored, and articulated through a restorative dialogue (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2007). The overall goals of a restorative justice model and a restorative justice dialogue are to encourage accountability, reparation, and the attainment of a satisfactory outcome that promotes healing and allows all parties to move forward (Harris, 2001).

Various restorative justice models have been developed to turn these principles and goals into praxis. Such models include victim-offender mediation, community justice conferencing, peacemaking circles, and surrogate victim/offender dialogues (Lecky, 2003). Restorative justice was initially applied only to crimes of a less serious nature such as property crimes. Evidence of its success provided the impetus for its application to more serious crimes such as violent crimes, including those causing death (Roberts, 1995).

In 1989, CSC funded the Victim Offender Mediation Program (VOMP), operated by the Fraser Region Community Justice Initiatives Association (CJI), which focused solely on serious crime. This was the first application of RJ principles and processes to address serious offences in Canada (Harris, 2001; Roberts, 1995). By the mid-1990s, politicians and policy-makers began to examine and consider the potential of restorative justice.

CSC further explored the potential of restorative justice by establishing the Restorative Justice and Dispute Resolution (RJDR) Division in 1996. The goals of RJDR were to explore the expanding body of knowledge on restorative justice and to find ways in which restorative justice could be applied to corrections in Canada (Harris, 2001). CSC worked to advance three principle areas of RJ: 1) criminal justice reform; 2) restorative opportunities for victims, offenders and community members; and 3) restorative correctional environments. From 1999 to 2001, the Federal Government Dispute Resolution Fund provided CSC with \$300,000 to fund 14 pilot projects. The Restorative Justice Living Unit (RJLU) was an extension of the successful

pilot project *Making Things Right (MTR)*. MTR was developed and launched by a former parole officer at Grande Cache Institution (GCI) and utilized ‘meetings’ as a forum to encourage offenders to contemplate their offences and the impact their offences had on victims (Blanchet, 1999).

The RJU was established at GCI in Grande Cache, Alberta in 2001. This unique Unit provided a completely separate drug-free environment within the larger institution. It was designed to have a positive impact on the safe reintegration of offenders into the community upon conditional release. The RJU introduced both staff and offenders to RJ by incorporating RJ principles into the daily life of a correctional environment.

The Mission Statement of the RJU asserted that, “The Restorative Justice Unit shall, using a holistic approach, work towards healing and restoration for all those affected by conflict and crime” (Blanchet, 2001). The main objective was to provide a supportive and respectful environment that fosters and promotes accountability, healing, and restoration.

Offenders had to complete an application form to apply to live on the RJU and were then assessed against the admission criteria. Admission criteria included voluntary participation, sincerity, and motivation. In addition, the offender had to demonstrate willingness to maintain the confidentiality of personal disclosures, be open, honest and accountable to the restorative justice community as a whole, and adopt and practise a pro-social value system.

Once admitted to the RJU, offenders were expected to abide by Unit rules and were encouraged to actively participate in various activities, such as the Unit’s weekly RJ Coalition Meetings. They were expected to be actively involved in their correctional plans (employed and/or involved in core programming) and to display pro-social behaviour with staff and other offenders. RJU offenders worked collectively to solve problems and challenge negative belief systems. Two offenders, elected by the offenders on the RJU, served as mediators on the Unit to facilitate the resolution of any conflict that arose or other Unit issues that became problematic.

Weekly Coalition Meetings took place on the RJU for a period of two hours and were seen as an integral part of the Unit. Historically, following the success of the MTR pilot project “meetings”, two offenders at GCI developed the weekly RJ Coalition Meetings in 2000. The weekly Coalition Meeting was an offender driven initiative later incorporated into the RJU project model.

Each week RJU offenders volunteered to chair the Coalition Meetings on a rotational

basis, providing each with an opportunity to lead the meeting and affording a level of responsibility and leadership. RJU residents received encouragement to engage in a process of self-examination, to consider the effects their crime had on their victims, and to share their thoughts and feelings in an honest and open manner. Topics covered at these meetings included, but were not limited to: What is Restorative Justice?; The Impact of Crime; Trust; Forgiveness; Accountability; Faith, Hope and Beliefs; Guilt/Shame; Coping Skills; Making Amends; Identity; Anger; Acceptance; Freedom; and Willingness and Choices.

Purpose

This research project seeks to evaluate the impact the GCI RJU had on offenders. The three research questions ask, “What effect does integrating restorative justice processes and principles into prison operations have on: 1) the attitudes of offenders in terms of understanding the impacts of their crimes, promoting remorse, and stimulating a desire to repair harm done to the victim or the community in general; 2) the behaviour of offenders in terms of program participation, interpersonal problem solving, commission of institutional infractions, use of formal complaint processes, and use of informal conflict resolution; and 3) correctional results in terms of success at parole hearings, success on conditional release and recidivism.

It was hypothesized that the RJU would: 1) increase the offender’s understanding of his crime, the remorse he had for his crime, and his desire to make amends or reparation for his crime; 2) increase an offender’s program participation; improve his problem-solving and communication skills; and the way he manages interpersonal conflict; and 3) improve success rates upon release into the community.

METHOD

Participants

This investigation involved the 110 offenders who resided on the RJU at GCI from its inception in 2001 until February 2005. Ninety of these offenders received an offender survey, and another 20 offenders were randomly selected to complete interviews. Of the 20 offenders selected for interview, 12 were interviewed in person in Alberta between March 7th and 11th, 2005. As 8 offenders could not be interviewed in person during the assigned week, alternative arrangements were made to complete the interviews by telephone. Once contacted, 3 offenders declined to participate. Those who declined participation were not substituted.

The identity of the randomly selected offenders determined which staff members were interviewed. For each offender interviewed (n=17), their current or last known Parole Officer (PO) was interviewed (n=17). A telephone interview took place with those who could not meet with a researcher in March 2005.

William Head Institution (WHI) and Bowden Institution (BI) 'Annex' were the two institutions first identified to provide potential comparison samples. The first comparison sample was drawn from William Head Institution and consisted of 28 offenders. Those chosen had participated in organized RJ Coalition Meetings held on a weekly basis at WHI over a five-year period. This made the WHI sample comparable to the RJU sample as they attended similar restorative justice meetings, but did not live in a restorative justice environment or unit.

The second comparison sample was drawn from BI's 'Annex' Unit. This sample represents an institutional match for the purpose of comparison between RJU offenders and institutionalized general population (POP) offenders. Bowden Institution did not have a restorative justice program in place and matched the RJU based on two common features: similar structural design and security level. One hundred and two BI 'Annex' offenders were matched to 110 offenders from the RJU based on age, level of risk, and offence severity.

The following demographics were used to draw the most comparable sample match from the Offender Management System (OMS) between the GCI RJU (n=110), the WHI RJ Coalition (n=28), and the BI 'Annex' (n=102) offenders. As shown in Table 1, among all three samples, three-quarters of the offenders were aged over 30 years. Table 2 reveals that the samples were comprised of offenders demonstrating high needs, moderate to high risk, but also over half demonstrated high levels of motivation. Table 3 shows the wide range of serious offences

committed by sample participants demonstrating the serious societal harm this population has inflicted in the past. Table 4 shows that offenders from WHI are primarily “Lifers”, while the distribution of sentence length at GCI and BI Annex are similar with the bulk of offenders serving 2-4 years.

Table 1

Age Distribution of Samples

Samples	Under Age 30	Over Age 30	Total
Grande Cache - RJU	28 (25)	82 (75)	110
William Head Coalition	6 (21)	22 (79)	28
Bowden ‘Annex’	27 (26)	75 (74)	102

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent percentages. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Table 2

Need, Risk, and Motivation Level of Sample Participants

Assessment	Grande Cache - RJU	William Head Coalition	Bowden ‘Annex’
Need^a			
Low	11 (10)	0 (0)	5 (5)
Medium	47 (43)	4 (15)	42 (41)
High	52 (47)	22 (85)	55 (54)
Risk^b			
Low	22 (20)	0 (0)	10 (10)
Medium	54 (49)	3 (12)	41 (40)
High	34 (31)	23 (88)	51 (50)
Motivation^c			
Low	7 (6)	3 (11)	4 (4)
Medium	46 (42)	8 (30)	36 (35)
High	57 (52)	16 (59)	62 (61)

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent percentages. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

^aFrequency Missing for William Head Coalition = 2. ^bFrequency Missing for William Head Coalition = 2.

^cFrequency Missing for William Head Coalition = 1.

Table 3

Number of Offence Type of Samples

Offence Type	Grande Cache - RJU	William Head Coalition	Bowden 'Annex'
Homicide	4 (4)	19 (68)	17 (17)
Sexual Assault	17 (15)	0 (0)	4 (4)
Robbery	30 (27)	4 (14)	19 (19)
Assault	15 (14)	2 (7)	31 (30)
Drug	17 (15)	0 (0)	16 (16)
Other Offence	27 (25)	3 (11)	15 (15)
Total Offenders	110	28 ^a	102

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent percentages. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

^aFrequency Missing for William Head Coalition = 1.

Table 4

Sentence Length of by Sample Group

Sentence Length	Grande Cache - RJU	William Head Coalition	Bowden 'Annex'
Lifers	2 (2)	16 (59)	8 (8)
Less than 2 yrs	2 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)
2-4 yrs	90 (82)	3 (11)	68 (67)
5-9 yrs	11 (10)	5 (19)	17 (17)
10-14 yrs	3 (3)	0 (0)	6 (6)
15+ yrs	2 (2)	3 (11)	3 (3)
Total Offenders	110	27 ^a	102

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent percentages. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

^aFrequency Missing for William Head Coalition = 2.

Instruments

This evaluation sought to explore the impact the RJU had on offenders since they began to reside on the Unit in October 2001. To this end, and in response to the three research questions, both qualitative and quantitative instruments were utilized.

The offender survey was designed to assess the impacts that the RJU had on the offender's attitude, behaviour, and release into the community, as well as their general perceptions of the Unit. The survey consisted of two sections. The first section requested

administrative information regarding the offender's profile and admission to the RJU. The second section requested feedback from the offenders illustrating their observations of the RJU and their perceived experience in relation to key concepts. These concepts included the offenders' understanding of their crime, the impact on their sense of remorse, their desire to make up for their crime, their program participation, their problem solving and communication skills, the impact on their National Parole Board (NPB) hearing (if applicable), and the impact on their release (if applicable).

Structured offender/staff interviews were used to collect qualitative data. The offender survey was used as a question guide during offender and staff interviews. The interviews, similar to the offender surveys, used open-ended questions to explore the impact offenders and staff felt the RJU had on the offender's attitude, behaviour, and release into the community.

Once all the offender surveys and the offender/staff interviews were completed and transcribed, the plain text transcripts were imported into QSR N6, document system software licensed to RJDR, which served as a qualitative research tool. This software serves to code data from surveys/interviews and allows the user to complete a semantic analysis. In order to complete this analysis, a coding system was developed and transcribed to a coding book.

The OMS is an automated database used by CSC to manage information on federal offenders. Offender case files include demographic information, criminal history, static and dynamic risk assessment results, and behavioural indicators related to institutional performance. Data collected from the OMS were used to quantify research variables for the 110 RJU offenders and the two comparison samples. The time frame of the data drawn from the OMS specified a start date of September 2001 and an end date of February 2005. These data provided meaningful research variables related to the assessment of program participation, institutional charges, incidents, offender grievances, and the number of institutional releases and returns.

Procedure

Data collection was completed in 4 phases: 1) offender surveys; 2) offender interviews; 3) staff interviews; and 4) OMS data. Phase 1 involved the analysis of offender surveys which were designed to collect data in response to all three research questions from the offender's perspective. The distribution of surveys was completed over a three-month period (March to June 2005). Surveys were distributed either through the RJU Coordinator, the offender's

institutional/community parole officer, or the offender’s last known mailing address.

Offenders were provided with two self-addressed and stamped envelopes to facilitate the return of surveys. The first envelope contained the consent form and the second envelope contained the offender survey. Once the offender completed both documents, the envelopes were sealed and mailed back separately to maintain the offender’s anonymity. Each offender survey was marked with an identifier code not associated to the name of the offender. Table 5 shows that 50% of GCI offenders, and those transferred to other institutions for treatment, returned completed surveys. However, response rates from parolees and those offenders post-Warrant Expiry Date (WED) were much lower.

Table 5

Number of Offender Surveys by Status

	Distributed	Completed	No Response	Declined	Undelivered
GCI	21	11 (52)	10 (48)	0 (0)	0
Via IPO ^a	13	6 (46)	4 (31)	3 (23)	0
Parolees	19	1 (5)	18 (95)	0 (0)	3 ^b
WED	14	2 ^c (14)	12 (86)	0 (0)	20

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent percentages. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

^aIPO = Institutional Parole Officer. ^bUnlawfully at Large from suspension/revocation warrants. ^cThe two Warrant Expiry Date (WED) offenders responded to the offender survey in September 2005. Since these two surveys were received late, they were not included in the data collection, data analysis and reporting of offender survey results.

Phase 2 provided for the analysis of data collected through offender interviews. Offenders incarcerated at GCI were interviewed individually on the RJU March 7th and 8th, 2005. Offenders incarcerated in other institutions, on parole, or post-WED in Alberta, were interviewed from March 9th to 11th, 2005. Each offender was interviewed in a room that afforded a level of privacy in the presence of one interviewer. Offenders who chose to participate completed an offender interview consent form. All offender interviews were recorded and marked with an anonymous identifier code for transcription. Table 6 shows that incarcerated offenders were willing to take part in the research project but parolees and post-WED offenders were less inclined to do so.

Table 6

Offender Status at Time of Interview

	Interviewed	Declined
Incarcerated		
GCI - RJU	5	0
Other Institution	6	0
Parolees	5	1
WED	1	2

Phase 3 involved the analysis of staff interviews. Staff interviews were not random. Staff participation in the interview process was determined by assignment as the institutional or community parole officer to one of the 17 offenders that completed an interview. Nevertheless, staff participation was entirely voluntary. Staff members completed a consent form prior to the interview. Participation in the interview process was 100% (n=17). All staff interviews were recorded and marked with an anonymous identifier code for transcription.

Data collected from the offender surveys and offender/staff interviews were entered into a QSR N6 database. An independent coder was used to determine inter-rater reliability. Using Cohen's Kappa to measure the agreement between two raters, the interview transcripts were coded with an inter-rater reliability of $K=0.72$. This indicates that there is substantial agreement between the two raters.

Phase 4 involved the quantitative analysis of the OMS data and compared the GCI RJU sample to the WHI RJ Coalition and the BI 'Annex' Unit samples. Chi Square analysis was the primary statistical test utilized.

In order to measure the effect the RJU had on offender program participation, the RJU offender sample was analysed in contrast to the two comparison samples. Using the OMS data, the three samples were divided into "successful" or "unsuccessful" completion of their program(s), and by the number of programs they had participated in: no programs, one to three programs, four to six programs, seven to nine programs, or more than ten programs.

The number of institutional charges was used to obtain a further indication of institutional behaviour. Offenders were divided into two nominal categories, "Minor Charges" and "Serious Charges," as well as five ratio-based categories: no charges, one to three charges, four to six charges, seven to nine charges, and more than ten charges.

The nature and number of “institutional incidents” in which the offenders participated was compiled as a further measure of behaviour. Each institutional sample was grouped by the nature of the incident, i.e. contraband, injury, disciplinary problem, intelligence incidents, disturbance, and assaults, and then divided into five ratio-based categories: no institutional incidents, one to three institutional incidents, four to six institutional incidents, seven to nine institutional incidents, and more than ten institutional incidents.

As RJU offenders and staff used more informal mechanisms to resolve conflict and issues on the Unit, the number and type of offender grievances filed by offenders were collected to explore the impact of this alternative practice. Data was gathered regarding the number of grievances processed at each of the four levels (L1-4) by the three offender samples, i.e. L1-complaint (to the Unit Manager), L2-institutional (to Warden), L3-regional (to CSC Regional Headquarters), or L4-national (to CSC National Headquarters). These four nominal categories were then divided into five ratio-based categories: no grievances, one to three grievances, four to six grievances, seven to nine grievances, and more than ten grievances.

Several factors were examined to determine the effects the RJU had on offender success with regard to parole hearings, as well as their release into the community. First, the number and type of first decisions made by the NPB were tabulated after the offenders in each of the three samples were placed on their respective units. Secondly, the number of offenders released from each unit and the reason for their release, were collected using the OMS. Finally, the number of offenders from each of the three samples who had been returned to their respective institution, as well as the reason for their return, i.e. ‘warrant of committal’, ‘revocation without offence’, ‘revocation with offence’, or ‘revocation with outstanding’, were collected from the OMS.

A pre-post design was used to measure how many offenders fell into each category before and after their placements in their respective institutions. The “pre” time point refers to the period from current admission to a federal institution to the time when the offender entered his respective environment (i.e. RJU, WHI Coalition, or BI ‘Annex’ Unit). The “post” time point refers to the period in which the offender was a part of his respective environment until either the offender left or August 1st, 2005, the program end date for the purpose of this research.

RESULTS

Offender Surveys

Of the 90 surveys distributed to offenders, 18 were completed and returned. Responses to all 13 questions and those added to the comment section were short and concise when compared to responses given during the offender interviews. First, responses to the two introductory questions (unrelated to the established research questions) will be explored along with the comments made at the end of the survey. Subsequently, results drawn from all of the remaining survey questions will be presented according to the research questions they were designed to answer.

Question #1: Why was the offender motivated to apply to the RJU?

Offenders reported that a combination of personal goals and the environmental characteristics of the RJU drew them to the Unit. Fifty-six percent (n=10) of the survey respondents became interested in the RJU through the influence of offenders living on the Unit. They cited as the main motivational factor that those living on the Unit seemed to be committed to change and self-improvement. Fifty percent (n=9) were seeking a way to improve themselves and to understand their crimes and the impacts that their crimes had had on their victims and society. One hundred percent (n=18) of the survey respondents felt that the environmental characteristics of the RJU, as well as the positive influence of their peers living on the Unit, would help them achieve these ends. Twenty-eight percent (n=5) of offenders cited the accepting and supportive nature of the RJU as a motivational factor.

Question #2: How are restorative justice principles lived out on the RJU?

Perceptions regarding how restorative justice is lived and exists on the RJU varied among offenders responding to the survey. Sixty-one percent (n=11) of respondents described experiencing/living restorative principles through their interaction with each other and reported that mutual respect and accountability to one another characterized these interactions. Fifty-six percent (n=10) described the RJU's offender conflict resolution process, as well as the weekly Coalition Meetings held on the RJU, as forums where restorative justice was actively experienced and interpersonal dynamics and conflict were addressed and resolved appropriately. Forty-four percent (n=8) felt that restorative principles were exercised through an accepting

environment that supports the open expression of an offender's thoughts and feelings through safe dialogue.

General Comments

Offenders used the space at the end of the survey to record their general comments. Many used this opportunity to express gratitude for their time on the RJU, point out problems on the Unit, and/or make recommendations to resolve such challenges. Contrary to the offender interviews, 56% (n=10) of respondents to the offender survey expressed gratitude for having the opportunity to reside on the RJU with very few offenders criticizing it.

The gratitude expressed by respondents focused on their belief that restorative justice helped them and their peers and provided them with an opportunity that may not have otherwise been available within the general population. Offenders also praised the staff on the RJU for being helpful and supportive of their efforts.

Twenty-two percent (n=4) of offenders cited areas of potential improvement for the RJU. Three of the four expressed a desire to see restorative justice expand throughout the correctional system, both within correctional facilities and in the community.

Attitudinal Effects

Questions 3, 4, 5, and 6 of the offender survey explored attitudinal effects related to the first research question. The attitudinal effects that were reported most often were:

- 89% (n=16) of the offenders increased their understanding of their crime through the assistance provided by staff and offenders on the RJU;
- 50% (n=9) reported an increase in their sense of remorse; and
- 44% (n=8) reported an increase in victim empathy.

Offenders credited the environmental or structural characteristics of the RJU, the accepting and supportive atmosphere, as well as the weekly Coalition Meetings for the above findings.

In terms of offenders' desire to make amends for the harm caused by their crime,

- 39% (n=7) indicated a desire to help others in the future; and
- 33% (n=6) expressed a specific desire to help youth to avoid crime, i.e. the same offence that they themselves committed.

Behavioural Effects

Questions 7, 8, 12, and 13 of the offender survey explored behavioural effects related to the second research question. The majority of offenders indicated that they felt their interpersonal skills had improved as a result of their experience on the RJU.

- 44% (n=8) reported that their abilities to empathize with others had improved;
- 39% (n=7) felt that the RJU helped them express thoughts/feelings in a healthy manner; and
- 28% (n=5) said that the RJU helped them acquire and practise alternative methods of conflict resolution.

Offenders frequently identified the main influence responsible for the above findings as the positive influences of other RJU offenders who offered encouragement regarding program participation and non-violent methods for problem-solving and conflict resolution.

With regard to the actual occurrence and resolution of conflicts on the RJU, 67% (n=12) of offenders reported that they had experienced conflict on the RJU; while 33% (n=6) reported that they had not. Almost all respondents emphasized that conflicts were largely managed by the offenders themselves, by offenders with the assistance of designated offender mediators, or in a group setting at the weekly Coalition Meetings.

Effect on Parole Hearing/Release into Community

Questions 9 and 10 of the offender survey explored the effects related to the third research question in regard to the impact that living on the RJU may have had on an offender's parole hearing:

- 61% (n=11) felt that living on the RJU had no impact on their hearing before the NPB; and
- 39% (n=7) felt that the RJU would have or had a positive impact on their NPB hearing.

Of the 39%, five of the seven felt the RJU helped them to gain a better understanding of the personal issues that led them to commit their offence(s), while two of the seven noted that the RJU had assisted them in improving their communication skills.

With regard to the impacts that the RJU would have on the offender's actual release into the community on conditional release:

- 50% (n=9) reported "no impact" as they had not been released;
- 44% (n=8) anticipated positive impacts; and
- 6% (n=1) reported anticipating a negative impact.

Offender and Staff Interviews

Interviews were conducted with 17 offenders and 17 separate interviews were conducted with their assigned parole officer. Both offenders and staff were asked the same questions during these separate interviews.

Question #1: Why was the offender motivated to apply to the RJU?

As can be seen in Table 7, offenders and staff differed in their perceptions regarding offender motivation for applying to the Unit. For both groups, the weekly Coalition Meetings were seen as important; universally so for the offenders, while staff members mentioned this less. Twenty-nine percent of offenders mentioned that the structured and challenging environment of the RJU helped them address their criminogenic needs and work toward their goals. An equivalent number of offenders commented on the pro-social environment available to them on the RJU, effectively removing them from the negative offender mindset prevalent in general population.

Staff members had a different understanding of the motivation that resulted in their offender wanting to become an RJU resident. In contrast to the offenders, only 24% (n=4) of staff members felt the weekly Coalition Meetings were a contributing motivational factor, as compared to 100% of offenders. Forty-seven percent of the staff felt the Unit's emphasis on RJ values, principles and conflict resolution processes motivated offenders and helped them to meet their goals and address their criminogenic needs. Twenty-nine percent stated that they felt offenders were attracted to the RJU because they considered it to be "quieter" than the rest of the institution. Within the staff interviews, the word "quiet" often referred to the relative calm and orderly nature of the Unit. The word "quiet" held a negative connotation for staff. Staff were often of the opinion that older offenders and sexual offenders preferred the "quiet" and calm nature of the Unit, while those with offences related to illegal substances were attracted to the drug-free environment. Regardless, several PO's still felt that the Unit and its concomitant principles had a generally positive effect on their respective offenders.

Fifty-three percent of PO's believed that their offender was genuinely seeking to improve himself; however, they were less likely to attribute positive motivations to other offenders on the RJU. In other cases, PO's felt that restorative justice principles were consistent with how their offender was thinking and feeling before applying to or expressing an interest in the RJU.

Table 7

Comparison of Offender and Staff Interview Responses to Question #1: Why was the offender motivated to apply to the RJU?

Offender Responses	n	Staff Responses	n
1. Supportive nature and openness of weekly Coalition Meetings	17 (100)	1. Their offender motivated by self-improvement	9 (53)
2. Structured and challenging environment of the RJU	5 (29)	2. RJU Environment helps offenders meet goals / criminogenic needs	8 (47)
3. RJU – a better alternative to general population	5 (29)	3. Type of offence: sexual or illegal substance offence	6 (35)
		4. “Quiet” environment	5 (29)
		5. Weekly Coalition Meetings	4 (24)

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent percentages.

Question #2: How are restorative justice principles lived out on the RJU?

Staff and offenders identified a set of overlapping factors that described the practice of restorative justice principles on the Unit. These factors included offender autonomy, a positive environment made up of respectful and supportive peers, and weekly Coalition Meetings.

Table 8 shows that the most common response to this question involved the autonomy that offenders had on the RJU to resolve conflicts and create/implement the rules that governed the Unit. Offenders played an active role in holding each other accountable to the rules. Participants found the weekly Coalition Meetings allowed for processes that facilitated peaceful conflict resolution and problem solving on the RJU.

Offenders frequently made reference to the community support, mutual consideration, and openness evident on the RJU. They spoke of community, which held

As expressed by an offender:

“Because we met regularly, they [the meetings] gave us an opportunity to work through the problems that we were having.”

As expressed by an offender:

“We had no problem with talking to each other. If I had a problem, I had a few friends, so we could talk openly...”

a positive connotation, even though their community was created within an institutional setting. Included in their expressions of community were the RJU staff members, with whom they interacted respectfully and turned to when they needed assistance in addressing interpersonal conflicts left unresolved through other processes.

Staff referred to many of the same processes, such as the supportive community environment of the RJU. Staff also highlighted the autonomy that RJU offenders had within the group to create and enforce rules in a peaceable manner. Thirty percent of PO's felt that this system helped hold offenders accountable for their actions and instilled a sense of responsibility.

Three of the PO's interviewed stated that they had no knowledge of how the RJU was run, nor did they have any knowledge of how the restorative justice principles were lived out on the Unit. Even PO's who provided full answers to this question often began their response with statements indicating a lack of knowledge regarding the operation and daily routine of the RJU.

Table 8

Comparison of Offender and Staff Interview Responses to Question #2: How are restorative justice principles lived out on the RJU?

Offender Responses	n	Staff Responses	n
1. Autonomy in conflict resolution and creating/implementing RJU rules	17 (100)	1. Supportive community environment of the RJU	8 (47)
2. Weekly Coalition Meetings facilitating conflict resolution	17 (100)	2. Processes instil accountability and responsibility	5 (30)
3. Positive peer influences	6 (35)	3. No knowledge of how the RJU operates or of RJ principles	3 (18)

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent percentages.

General Comments

When given the opportunity at the end of the interview to make additional comments, offenders reiterated their feelings and expressed gratitude for experiencing the RJU (see Table 9). In addition, they discussed some challenges they had with the RJU and made

recommendations for the Unit’s improvement.

Offenders praised the RJU and its staff by expressing their gratitude for the time they spent there. Thirty-five percent referred to the supportive and positive peers that surrounded them on the RJU. Offenders used the term “peers” to include the RJU Coordinator and correctional officers assigned to the Unit. Twenty-nine percent stated that the RJU environment was a very positive one. Seventy-one percent of the offenders brought attention to the challenges facing the RJU and the correctional system as a whole. These suggestions will be dealt with in the Discussion section.

PO’s had fewer concerns regarding the RJU; only three PO’s (18%) used the general comments section of the interview to address challenges facing the Unit. Two of the three PO’s felt that the RJU needed to do more Victim-Offender Mediation (VOM), while the other one felt that the Unit was too lenient on offenders but did not wish to qualify this comment.

Many PO’s took the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction when it came to the difficulties the Unit created for them as they tried to do their job. These included dissatisfaction with the breadth and scope of the information that the RJU provided to the rest of the institution, a lack of information sharing, communication, and information recorded on the OMS.

Table 9

Comparison of Offender and Staff Interview Responses to the General Comments Section

Offender Responses	n	Staff Responses	n
1. Presented challenges facing RJU-sustainable RJ services in CSC system wide and in community	12 (71)	1. RJU creates difficulties for PO job: info sharing	6 (35)
2. Expressed gratitude for RJU participation	11 (65)	3. Challenges facing the RJU- need more VOM	3 (18)
3. Thanked staff	6 (35)		
4. Thanked supportive peers (offenders and staff)	6 (35)		
5. RJU a very positive environment to model pro-social behaviour	5 (29)		

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent percentages.

Attitudinal Effects

Prior to RJU participation, most offenders reported attitudes that minimized or dismissed areas such as self-examination, personal openness, communication skills, victim empathy, and the consequences of their criminal actions. Once on the RJU, both staff and offenders reported improvements in all these areas, in addition to the offenders' understanding of their crime.

As expressed by an offender:

“Nobody was going to judge me or put me down or harass me or anything. I felt very comfortable there, comfortable speaking.”

Offenders credited the RJU environment and the weekly Coalition Meetings for challenging their perceptions and attitudes in a productive manner, which was made applicable to each individual. Staff reported that this new level of openness and increased ability to communicate spilled-over into their casework outside of the RJU. This proved beneficial to their casework with the offender.

As expressed by a PO:

“RJU is an area where you can open up and feel relatively safe doing it.”

While staff did acknowledge that the RJU was a unique environment where offenders could explore their issues openly, staff perceptions differed with regard to the offenders' focus when doing so. Staff reported that almost half of their offenders were more focussed on resolving their own emotional and personal issues with an emphasis on release, rather than on making amends or reparations to victims. As shown in Table 10, while there is overlap in what was reported, these responses can be broken down into 3 categories.

Understanding Impacts of Crime

Half of the offenders reported that the weekly Coalition Meetings directly impacted their understanding of their crime and victim empathy. Similar proportions of staff and offenders felt the RJU environment had an impact on the offenders' understanding of their crime, allowing for discussion of specific crimes, related criminogenic issues, and an exploration of the spectrum of impacts. Staff found that offenders developed and were able to demonstrate a great improvement in forethought regarding the consequences of their actions, impacts upon the direct victim, and subsequent impacts upon extended victims.

Promoting Remorse

All offenders expressed regret for their crime; however 59% expressed high levels of remorse and related this to their increased understanding of their crime and victim empathy.

Offenders felt that the involvement of victims from the community had profound impacts on their levels of remorse. Offenders also felt that these tangible interactions with victims were beneficial but were in reality too few. Staff, interestingly, stated that 82% of these offenders were remorseful before entering the Unit, possibly indicating pre-existing pro-social attitudes.

As expressed by an offender:

“It really helped me to see the other side of it, being involved in the meetings and having people coming in from the community that have been victimized by crime.”

Desire to Repair Harm

While “desire to make up for their crime” existed among all 17 offenders, uncertainty lingered regarding how they could do so. Offenders and staff equally expressed that the desire to repair the harm caused would translate in the offender not causing further harm to any person by not re-offending post-incarceration. Other than this expression, offenders and staff both had difficulty providing specific examples of ways the offender could make reparations for their crimes. Staff clearly expressed that opportunities such as VOM were not available to offenders while on the RJU; nor did a quarter of the staff believe that their offender was prepared to experience such an exchange with their victim.

As expressed by a PO:

“I don’t think he’s gotten to that point, where he’s talking about how to repair the damage yet. He’s just come to terms with what he’s done in accepting full responsibility.”

Table 10

Comparison of Offender and Staff Interview Responses for Attitudinal Effects

Offender Responses	n	Staff Responses	n
1. Greater understanding of emotional/personal issues through self-examination	11 (65)	1. Increased victim empathy/understanding of consequences their actions	10 (59)
2. Improvement in communication skills and improvement in self-expression	11 (65)	2. Greater understanding of emotional/personal issues through self-examination	8 (47)
3. RJU a place where thoughts/feelings and expressions of remorse can be safely explored	10 (59)	3. Inmate focussed on self improvement/release issues	8 (47)
4. Increased victim empathy/understanding of consequences of their actions	9 (53)	4. Felt the offender on their caseload was emotionally or cognitively unprepared for VOM	4 (24)

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent percentages.

*Behavioural Effects**Program Participation*

There was a difference in perspective regarding Unit function between the RJU offenders and staff (see Table 11). While 53% of offenders considered the weekly Coalition Meetings as a correctional program in and of itself, staff, on the whole, did not agree. When offenders were asked about ongoing program participation, they stated that the skills they had learned and practised on the RJU gave them a greater ability to participate in greater depth and that they “got more out of” their prescribed correctional programs. Offenders also reported that this was a two-way process. The skills they learned in other correctional programs were often brought back to the RJU, discussed, and processed safely among accepting peers on the RJU. Offenders opined that this would not have been possible had they been in the general population. In contrast, staff felt that offenders were highly committed to programming before arriving on the RJU, while a few others reported that their offenders had already completed all correctional programming.

Conflict Resolution

Seventy-seven (n=13) percent of the offenders reported that they had experienced interpersonal conflict on the Unit, saying that most of these conflicts were subsequently resolved by the offenders through dialogue. Six of the thirteen offenders addressed their issues at the weekly Coalition Meetings. Seven of the thirteen offenders reported that to resolve conflicts they accessed the services of one of the “on-unit” offender mediators. The offenders stated that the option of involving staff in conflict resolution was considered a rare event and a last resort. Staff, on the whole, were not aware that the offenders were experiencing and resolving as many conflicts as the offenders reported. Only 18% (n=3) of staff members reported any awareness of their respective offender experiencing conflict on the RJU. PO’s similarly expressed that RJU staff were rarely involved in the resolution of conflicts unless all other avenues pursued by the offenders did not lead to a resolution.

Table 11

Comparison of Offender and Staff Interview Responses for Behavioural Effects

Offender Responses	n	Staff Responses	n
1. Used learned problem-solving and introspection skills to address emotional barriers, anti-social behaviour and offender/staff issues	11 (65)	1. RJU offenders had positive impact on other offenders on the Unit	6 (35)
2. Coalition Meetings contributed to correctional program participation and understanding/application of skills learned in programs	9 (53)	2. Conflict resolution and communication skills practised on the Unit helped offenders open up and share feelings	5 (29)
3. Modelling of pro-social behaviour of RJU offenders/staff	8 (47)	3. Coalition Meetings contributed to CSC program participation	2 (12)

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent percentages.

Effect on Parole Hearing

While all offenders anticipated that RJU participation would have a positive effect upon their chances of release, some of these men had not been before the NPB. Several were aware that RJU participation was generally not presented to the NPB.

Offenders believed that the skills acquired through RJU participation would have a positive effect on their presentation before the Board. First, RJU offenders felt that their sincere understanding and expression of accountability would be evident to the Board. Second, RJU offenders believed that their increased ability to express themselves with improved ease and confidence would, in part, offset some of the intimidating nature of NPB parole hearings. Finally, the few who did present themselves before the Board and were subsequently denied parole, felt that the skills acquired on the RJU helped them process, in a pro-social manner, the reasons for their parole being denied and their personal frustration associated to the decision.

Staff reported that living on the RJU had little to no effect when offenders appeared before the NPB. For those that had appeared before the Board, the topic of the RJU was not raised. As seen in Table 12, few staff agreed with the offenders who felt the RJU contributed to improved communication skills and levels of confidence before the Board.

As expressed by a PO:

“We talked in detail about victim empathy and crime cycle relapse... He had a very sound understanding of all of that... I have no doubt that he presented quite well to the Board.”

Table 12

Comparison of Offender and Staff Interview Responses to Effect on Parole Hearing

Offender Responses	n	Staff Responses	n
1. Reported “little to no effect” on NPB decisions	7 (41)	1. No effect on NPB decision	17 (100)
2. Understanding of criminogenic factors contributed to presentation before the Board	4 (24)	2. Communication skills contributed to presentation before the Board	2 (12)
3. Communication skills contributed to presentation before the Board	3 (18)		

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent percentages.

Effect on Release into Community

Offenders felt unanimously that their experience and skills acquired during their time on the Unit would benefit their release into the community. Less than half of the staff expressed similar sentiments. The most common theme that emerged among all offenders was the assertion that the RJU helped them develop pro-social skills and commit to pro-social life

choices that would continue once they were released (see Table 13). Four of the seventeen stated that the weekly Coalition Meetings and the general support of the RJU were factors that facilitated the development of pro-social skills. A few offenders expressed continued anxiety over their return to the community, stating that they expected rejection from their community and a lack of RJ support systems in place to assist them.

Less than half of the POs believed that the RJU had or would have a positive impact on the offender’s release into the community. Four of the seven provided no reason for this assertion. The other three reported that the RJU helped their respective offender open up and express themselves while developing empathy for others which, in turn, would help them discover alternative avenues through which to express themselves and relieve the anxiety of stressful situations. These staff members believed that this would help the offenders avoid re-offending.

Table 13

Comparison of Offender and Staff Interview Responses to Effect on Release into Community

Offender Responses	n	Staff Responses	n
1. RJU helped develop pro-social skills and life choices	17 (100)	1. Believe RJU participation would have positive effect	7 (41)
2. Desire for community RJ resources upon release	3 (18)	2. RJU would have little or no effect on return to community	5 (29)

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent percentages.

Quantitative Sample Comparisons

Quantitative data were collected to respond specifically to the second and third research questions exploring the effects of integrating restorative justice processes and principles within prison operations. No quantitative data was collected in relation to research question 1 exploring the effects the RJU had on offender attitudes with respect to their understanding of the impacts of their crimes, promoting remorse, and stimulating a desire to repair the harm done to victims and the community. Rather, the gathering of quantitative data from the OMS was used to analyze behavioural effects in relation to offender program participation, interpersonal problem solving, commission of institutional infractions, use of formal complaint processes, and use of informal

conflict resolution. Finally, quantitative data explored correctional results concerning success at parole hearings, success on conditional release, and recidivism. The RJU sample was compared to the two samples (WHI RJ Coalition and BI 'Annex' Unit).

Behavioural Effects

Program Participation

Overall, offenders who lived on the RJU completed more correctional programs than those who did not. Program completion measured the number of programs offenders completed pre-RJU and post-RJU. This data demonstrated a significant difference between the samples. Prior to living on the RJU, 103 of the 110 offenders had not fully or successfully completed any programs. While on the RJU, all but 23 fully/successfully completed their programs. Therefore, prior to living on the RJU only 6% (n=7) of offenders had completed 1 or more programs; whereas after living on the RJU 79% (n=87) had completed 1 or more programs.

Offenders taking part in the WHI RJ Coalition demonstrated no change in program completion from pre to post. Offenders residing in BI's 'Annex' Unit had a significant drop in successful program completion post-'Annex' Unit. Pre-'Annex' Unit 80% (n=82) of the offenders successfully completed programs as opposed to 29% (n=30) post-'Annex' Unit.

The program drop-out rate increased among 20% of offenders post-RJU, meaning that 22 offenders dropped out of programs either because of suspension or incompleteness, as compared to 1 pre-RJU. Comparatively, the drop-out rate increased among 18% of offenders post-WHI RJ Coalition. BI's 'Annex' Unit did not have a notable difference in this area.

Institutional Charges

Overall, offenders who lived on the RJU had fewer minor institutional charges than those who did not. The RJU increased the number of offenders with no minor charges post-RJU by 5% (n=5), as compared to the number of offenders with minor charges pre-RJU. None of the offenders living on the RJU had any minor charges against them during their time on the Unit. In comparison, WHI demonstrated an 8% (n=1) increase in minor charges post-RJ Coalition. Bowden 'Annex' had a significant increase of 69% (n=35) in the number of offenders with no minor charges post-'Annex'.

Serious charges increased among 9 offenders during their time on the RJU, an increase of

8%, compared to the number of offenders with serious charges pre-RJU. In comparison, serious charges declined post-WHI RJ Coalition by one offender. Bowden ‘Annex’ demonstrated an 18% (n=14) decline in offenders with serious charges.

Incidents

Reported incidents increased among 51 (46%) of the total 110 offenders sampled during their time on the RJU, as opposed to the 2 offenders with reported incidents pre-RJU. The following lists the type of incidents reported among RJU offenders: 17% (n=16) Disturbance Problem Incidents; 13% (n=12) Contraband Incidents; 21% (n=20) Intelligence Incidents; 19% (n=18) Other Incidents; 17% (n=16) Disciplinary Incidents; and 13% (n=12) Assault Incidents.

The WHI RJ Coalition recorded an increase in the number of offenders without reported incidents from 18 offenders pre-WHI RJ Coalition to 21 offenders post-WHI RJ Coalition. Bowden ‘Annex’, which does not have an RJ program, recorded an increase in the number of offenders without reported incidents from 65 offenders pre-‘Annex’ to 86 offenders post-‘Annex’.

Grievances

There were significant increases in offender grievances among all four grievance levels. The biggest increase was found in the category of RJU offenders who filed a Complaint grievance. Offender grievances increased from 6 RJU offenders who filed a Complaint pre-RJU to 25 offenders post-RJU. This represented an increase at the Complaint level among 23% of the 110 offenders who lived on the RJU. The number of offenders who had formal grievances at all four levels declined among offenders post-WHI RJ Coalition and post-Bowden ‘Annex’.

Effect on Parole Hearing/Release into Community

Release from Institution

Living on the RJU did not improve chances for parole as compared to offenders residing in a non-RJ environment such as Bowden ‘Annex’. Eighty-eight offenders, representing 80% of the GCI RJU offender sample, were released after completing a portion of their sentence on the RJU. This number ranked second to the 88 offenders, representing 86% of the ‘Annex’ offender sample released from Bowden Institution.

The impact on first release decisions before the NPB for offenders residing in a

restorative justice environment was minimal. Forty-five of the 98 offenders considered for first release decision were granted parole. The numbers were much higher among the comparison samples. Bowden ‘Annex’ authorized release on first decision for 75%, while 65% of the WHI Coalition offenders received parole at first opportunity. Interestingly, as seen in Table 14, a significant percentage of GCI offenders deferred their appearance before the NPB, preferring to remain on the RJU.

Table 14

First Release Decision

Sample Population	Authorized	Not Authorized	Deferred
GCI (n=98)	45 (46)	13 (13)	40 (41)
WHI (n=20)	13 (65)	6 (30)	1 (5)
Annex (n=69)	52 (75)	7 (10)	10 (15)

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent percentages.

Return to Institution

Table 15 shows that of the 88 offenders released from the RJU, 30 were returned, representing 34% of offenders released from the RJU. This return rate was comparable to that of the Bowden ‘Annex’ comparison sample, which also had a return rate of 34%. The WHI Coalition comparison sample had the greatest number of returns at 47%.

Of the 30 offenders returned to GCI, 16 (53%) did so upon revocation without offence, while 11 (37%) were returned ‘Revocation with Offence’.

Table 15

Return Types

Sample Population	Warrant of Committal	Revocation without Offence	Revocation with Offence	Revocation with Outstanding
GCI (n=30)	0	16 (53)	11 (37)	3 (10)
WHI (n=9)	1 (11)	6 (67)	1 (11)	1 (11)
Annex (n=30)	0	22 (73)	5 (17)	3 (10)

DISCUSSION

The Grande Cache Institution RJU was established as a pilot project to explore what would happen if correctional staff and offenders were empowered to design a day-to-day operational framework rooted in restorative justice principles and practices.

Before this research began, the anecdotal evidence in support of the RJU was very strong. The majority of individuals who had contact with the initiative acknowledged its significance in terms of fostering an environment in which offenders could focus on the harm of their crimes and develop skills in a supportive environment prior to their release (Butler, 2004). However, when we turn our attention to the results of the study, and particularly upon review of the quantitative data, the results are less clear.

The qualitative data supported much of what was reported anecdotally about the initiative and supported the hypotheses presented in response to the three research questions. When we look at the quantitative data, however, there were virtually no differences between the Grande Cache offenders and the samples from William Head Institution and Bowden Institution.

Attitudinal Effects

It was hypothesized that the RJU would increase the offender's understanding of his crime, the remorse he had for his crime, and his desire to make reparations for his crime. The RJU fostered an environment within the institution that was different from that of the units housing the general population. The promotion of RJ values and principles, entrenched in the daily functioning of the Unit, were voluntarily embraced by offenders who chose to redirect their lives and to actively address their offences as they served their sentence. To this end, the RJU and its residents facilitated dynamic processes through which offenders could safely address antisocial attitudes, counter stereotypical offender perceptions, and encourage offenders towards an attitudinal shift with respect to their crimes, the residual impacts, and their criminogenic needs.

The confidential nature of the weekly Coalition Meetings, held within the confines of a safe environment, were instrumental in an attitudinal shift allowing offenders to explore the concepts of accountability, harm, and victim issues. This resulted in 90% of offenders reporting an increased understanding of their crimes and half reporting an increase in victim empathy. Offenders felt this was rendered possible because of their active involvement in working on

issues with like-minded offenders who chose to confront the wrongs they had committed. In spite of its existence behind the institutional walls, the RJU managed to create a network of positive peers and staff focused on offender accountability. Offenders emphasized the significance of the support and positive reinforcement they received from staff assigned to the Unit. This type of support had a profound impact on the improvement of offender attitudes as reported by offender and staff feedback. Most staff interviews reported that this shift in attitude, level of understanding, and open communication facilitated their casework with the offender.

The RJU experience also motivated an attitudinal shift as offenders demonstrated a desire to make amends to their victims. Their expressed intentions were to do this by using restorative justice approaches and by practising the skills they had acquired on the Unit to not re-offend and to not cause any further harm. Interestingly, while a third of offenders reported a desire to help others in the future, with a specific focus on diverting youth from committing the same errors, these reparations were aimed at the community and not at the victims they harmed.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that specific reparation to the victims' community, and more specifically to the victim of their offence, were not readily available to offenders on the RJU. At the time, few victims entered the Unit to share their experiences with the residents. Moreover, few opportunities for victim-offender mediation were made available to offenders in the RJU. Offenders pointed out that these elements would need to be explored in greater depth to reinforce future RJ projects. Offenders believed that the realism of a victim's experience, as presented to an offender by a victim, was perceived to be a beneficial means to further and solidify the teachings of the Unit. Offenders also commented that this area should have been explored with greater purpose.

Behavioural Effects

The second research question explored the effects that integrating restorative justice processes and principles into a prison setting had on the behaviour of offenders in terms of program participation, interpersonal problem solving, and the use of informal conflict resolution. These should result in a decrease of minor and serious incidents/charges and the number of offender grievances filed.

The data shows that offenders residing on the RJU completed more programs than those in the comparison samples. There was a relative increase in program drop-outs for the RJU

sample. Offenders reported that the RJU motivated offenders to participate in their correctional plan. RJU offenders encouraged each other in these initiatives in addition to the support they received from RJU staff. However, these results may be due, in part, to selection bias with regards to the offenders chosen to reside on the Unit. Many of the RJU offenders had entered the Unit shortly after intake; they would, therefore, not have completed any programs pre-RJU.

Half of the offenders categorized the weekly Coalition Meetings as a correctional program even though it is not officially considered as such. Most offenders agreed that whatever was taught in their prescribed CSC programs only became internalized when they were able to process and practically apply these teachings during Coalition Meetings and through their interactions with RJU offenders and staff. This finding motivated many to participate in core programs as they reported seeing benefits. However, for some this caused reported frustrations which resulted in an increased drop-out rate. Firstly, core correctional programs, which offenders must complete as part of their correctional plan, were delivered outside of the RJU environment. RJU offenders felt they could not participate to the extent they had become accustomed to on the Unit. During core programs, it was not safe for them to apply core program teachings in direct relation to their crimes, with full disclosure of their crime and expressed level of accountability. For example, sex offenders could not disclose the nature of their offences and other offenders were not comfortable disclosing personal information and incidents of abuse, as core programs do not provide a safe space for RJU offenders to do so among general population offenders.

Offenders practised interpersonal problem solving skills and informal conflict resolution processes in their interactions with RJU offenders and staff. In doing so, they pro-actively negotiated their problems and disagreements to resolve their conflicts on the Unit. Having an encapsulated weekly forum such as the Coalition Meetings allowed residents to use real, everyday, Unit-based conflicts to practise the skills they were developing. Using real conflicts for practice within the RJU community was seen as more practical and realistic than the standard role-play or program exercises available in core correctional programs. Offenders expressed that this would not have been possible had they not been afforded an environment conducive and supportive of this focus.

When interviewed, PO's stated that there was no reporting mechanism allowing them to assess how much informal conflict resolution offenders practised without staff intervention on

the RJU. It became apparent that minor interpersonal disputes were resolved at the informal level and therefore this process was not seen as worthy of comment. However, several correctional officers at GCI reported during preliminary interviews that they preferred not to work the RJU because the offenders were behaving in a manner that was “too model” and that it was “too quiet”.

Quantitative measures were also used to explore the question of behaviour with respect to institutional incidents and charges. Offenders who had resided on the RJU had fewer minor charges post-RJU. This may be attributed to the RJU’s conflict resolution processes in addressing minor problems and conflicts. However, the same did not apply for serious charges and total incidents reported, of which there was an increase among post-RJU offenders contrary to the research hypothesis. The inclusion of RJU staff in more challenging conflicts may have resulted in increased reported incidents and charges by RJU staff as certain behaviours are not tolerated on the Unit due to the established rules and the existence of the RJU as an Intensive Support Unit, i.e. substance-free. Anecdotal evidence suggests that offenders on the RJU were under more intensive scrutiny. Part of this increase in total incidents reported and serious charges can be attributed to offenders themselves holding each other accountable to Unit rules and being more willing to bring transgressors to the attention of RJU staff. The nature of the RJU made it an environment that is guided by strict rules that are not only enforced by correctional staff; offenders also played a role in enforcing the RJU community rules and encouraged offender transparency and accountability.

The organization of the RJU facilitated greater levels of interaction between staff and offenders such that staff were able to deliver more personal guidance and have a more personal impact on offenders, resulting in better use of existing staff resources.

Lastly, there was a significant increase in Level 1 (complaint) grievances for post-RJU offenders. This may be attributed to the offenders developed ability to vocalize issues and conflicts through communication skills and accessing an appropriate process to resolve conflict via a Level 1 grievance. Therefore, if a complaint could not be resolved during the meetings or was in regards to an issue existing beyond the walls of the Unit, RJU offenders may have felt more inclined to seek a resolution through Level 1 (complaint) grievances.

Effect on Parole Hearing/Release into Community

It was hypothesized that the RJU would improve the offender's presentation before the NPB and success rates upon an offender's release into the community. Contrary to the research hypothesis, offenders and staff reported that the RJU had little effect on the offender's presentation before the NPB as the Board did not explore the offender's RJU experience during the hearing. It did, however, have a reported impact on a small number of offenders who did present before the Board, as they found they were able to express themselves more easily and with a stronger sense of confidence. GCI did not have a higher percentage of offenders released post-RJU than the comparison samples. Interestingly, RJU offenders had the lowest percentage of first release decisions. Offenders and staff both reported that while their presentation may have improved, the offender's level of accountability and remorse resulted in the offender's assessment that they needed to continue to work towards becoming a more productive member of society.

This finding is supported by a high number of RJU offenders that deferred their first NPB decision hearing. Of those interviewed, many reported that they deferred their hearing as they needed more time on the RJU to gain greater understanding, practise the RJ values and principles, and practise the skills involved to meet their goals. A few participants reported the deferral was due to their newly gained understanding of the impacts of their crime and therefore did not feel it was appropriate to present before the Board at that point due to feelings of guilt and remorse.

The RJU 'offender success upon release' was also comparable to that of BI's 'Annex' Unit. RJU participation did not increase the rate of success upon release. The positive effects reported by both offender and staff on the Unit may not have increased success upon release as most offenders who left the RJU clearly expressed that they had lost their support group and an environment that lived RJ principles and values on a daily basis. Upon release, offenders expressed a sense of loss, disorientation, fear, loneliness, and a lack of support which could have been addressed by the availability of an RJ halfway house and/or Coalition Meetings in the community with a continued circle of support or an RJ continuum of care.

Limitations

This research project represents the first examination of a Restorative Justice Living Unit

operating under the jurisdiction of the Correctional Service of Canada. As the sample size was reasonable (110 offenders), the level of response to the offender survey and offender/staff interviews was deemed satisfactory. However, this research was challenged by three significant limitations.

First, there appeared to be a very high selection bias with regard to the offenders approached at Intake Assessment and those being considered from general population for the RJU. These offenders demonstrated expressions of remorse about their offences while they were processed at Intake or while serving their sentence. Pre-test data illustrated that in some cases there was little room for improvement.

Second, some distinct weaknesses became evident in the implementation of the model. As expressed by a number of staff and offenders, there was a deficiency in creating sustainable links with the external community. While it appears that the Unit was extremely successful at creating a supportive community within the walls, the same was not the case within the community upon conditional release. In fact, the most common factor identified for failure after release was a void in the community support in the absence of RJ related services. Essentially, offenders identified the need for continuity in their community supports – an RJ continuum of care. Another weakness of the RJU model lay in its ability to create legitimate opportunities for the offenders to “make right” for their offences. While most RJU offenders wanted to do something, they remained unable to identify any specific activities by which to do so.

Finally, quantitative measures were not specifically designed to adequately reflect the impacts of RJ processes. On the one hand, research participants had very positive things to say about the RJU and its impact on offenders; on the other hand, the standard measures did not reflect similar results. The measures used are standard measures when determining the impact of a correctional program and evaluating other correctional indicators. Therefore, part of the problem may be that such measures do not adequately reflect the impacts of restorative justice processes as they do not comprise a ‘correctional program’ designed to specifically influence the measures examined in the quantitative portion of this research. More precisely, measures used to quantify the impacts of RJ should explore the process and its impact on reducing harm by assisting offenders to develop and actively practise pro-social skills, develop empathy for others, and empowering them to not create more victims.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Restorative Justice Living Unit (RJU) is the first pilot project of its kind to operate within a Canadian correctional institution. It functioned for nearly five years. Designed as a drug-free unit, offenders living on the RJU learned and practised RJ principles and values. They were held accountable for their behaviour and their crimes while at the same time gaining a greater understanding of victimization and the harms they had caused to their victims, the families involved, and the community. The RJU sought to positively impact offenders' re-entry into communities upon parole and to positively impact on public safety. RJ processes allowed offenders to express themselves more appropriately and provided them with tools to resolve their conflicts.

The RJU research evaluation supports some dimensions of the model, but leaves CSC in a position of needing to refine and modify the implementation of a restorative justice unit in order to come to more definitive conclusions.

The RJU has impacted a number of offenders by fully and actively encouraging them to become law-abiding citizens. The Unit is demonstrative of a safe, reasonable, and humane environment which fosters respect and understanding of those who have offended and those who have been harmed. RJ holds offenders accountable by having offenders hold themselves accountable. In so doing, the RJU research supports the CSC mission statement and works with offenders, victims, and communities to promote public safety.

A redefined and modified implementation plan for a restorative justice unit within a correctional institution that is supportive of RJ processes would address the plans and priorities outlined by CSC. A restorative setting within a correctional environment made available to all interested offenders on a volunteer basis would result in a reduction of violent behaviour within institutions by providing offenders with tools and a support system to address conflict in a non-violent manner and gain a greater understanding of victimization. Restorative justice initiatives implemented throughout the correctional system to meet the needs of interested offenders would assist offenders that need to leave the RJU for another institution to complete their correctional program requirements. The same is true during an offender's transition into the community. A greater emphasis is needed to make RJ available as offenders prepare to live as law-abiding citizens upon conditional release and at the end of their sentence.

Of course, some modifications would need to be implemented to address the limitations

and weaknesses if CSC were to consider implementing a second RJU pilot project within a correctional environment. First, the institution would need to implement continuous education and training to address competing styles of corrections within the same institution. Second, communication protocol between the RJU staff and institutional staff would need to be revisited to address concerns such as information sharing and security, while maintaining the confidential nature of the Unit with respect to the Coalition Meetings. Finally, greater efforts would need to be made to ensure that offenders are afforded opportunities to “make right” the harms they have caused. This goal might be achieved through the efforts of an RJU Liaison Officer to introduce such opportunities during incarceration and to liaise with the communities that offenders are expected to enter upon conditional release. This could be facilitated through a circle of support, including community members, for each offender who volunteers to reside on the RJU. This type of support would facilitate the offender’s transition into the community upon release. It would also provide the offender with a continued community of support to which they became accustomed on the RJU. A continued level of support and relationship with RJ practitioners in the community could potentially allow the offenders to stay connected to RJ values and principles and not become disconnected from what they find most useful for maintaining a law-abiding lifestyle.

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