

Halfway houses for federal offenders: What do we know about them?

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At the present time, the state of the art does not allow an extensive evaluation of community-based residential facilities because of a lack of basic knowledge of how they function. As a first step, it is necessary to establish a database that will: (a) provide current and continuing information on how community-based facilities function; (b) allow for a more reliable tool for management to monitor the operation of the facility; and (c) provide baseline information to assess the impact of releasing federal inmates on the institutional population, the criminal justice system and the public².

Canada has a strong history of involvement of the voluntary sector in the provision of transitional residential services to federally-sentenced persons on conditional release. According to the Correctional Service of Canada's (CSC's) Standard Operating Practices of Community Supervision "gradual release is the safest correctional strategy for the protection of society"³. Residential services are a key component of this approach. Yet, in the 26 years since Zeitoun arrived at his conclusion that we really do not know very much at all about our halfway houses, we have made little progress in gathering accurate and useful information about them.

The St. Leonard's Society of Canada⁴ (SLSC) identified a lack of evidence-based research on "what works" in halfway houses. Our primary concerns were the gap in knowledge about halfway houses generally, the trend towards accreditation for programs and services and the lack of a framework which could be used by the houses to that end, and the need for the public to have access to relevant comprehensive information about these 175 non-government resources in our communities.

Since the opening of the first halfway houses in the late 1940s and early 1950s⁵, a number of organizations in Canada have provided accommodation, food, services and programs to ex-offenders. The Salvation Army, Anglican Houses, St. Leonard's, John Howard and Elizabeth Fry Societies have each played a significant role in the growth of the halfway houses.

Correctional halfway houses were initially designed to help offenders negotiate the critical transition from confinement to the community. They also assisted offenders in need of short-term supervision in a community residential setting. It was felt that the provision of a supportive environment, the basic necessities of food and shelter and assistance in securing employment, education and counselling services would facilitate adjustment to the community and thus contribute to the correctional goal of reintegration.

There are currently two primary types of residential facilities in the community for federal offenders in Canada. Firstly, there are non-governmental privately run facilities, identified as Community Residential Facilities (CRFs). CRFs are funded through fee-for-service agreements with CSC, to provide a variety of services including accommodation, counselling, employment preparation and supervision of offenders. There are approximately 175 non-governmental CRFs that provide services to federally released male and female offenders. Secondly, there are Community Correctional Centres (CCCs) which are government-run facilities. CCCs are minimum-security facilities whose primary roles are as transition centres, program delivery centres and intervention centres. Currently, there are 17 CCCs run by CSC.

Research project: The effectiveness of halfway houses

In February 2002, SLSC and CSC, in collaboration with the Canadian Training Institute, initiated a research project on Canadian halfway houses. This multi-phase research project involves the participation of a National Advisory Committee and residential service providers throughout Canada, reflecting cultural, gender and profile specificity to achieve the goals of the research. It involves an examination of CRFs in Canada in order to discuss "what works" in community-based residential services and programs for federally sentenced persons in Canada.

It is anticipated that the project will involve two phases. Phase 1 (2002-2003) involves developing a

profile of residents in halfway houses over the last few years. It includes interviews with directors in a sample of halfway houses to describe various models currently in use and issues they are facing. In addition, this phase involves developing appropriate outcome measures to examine what works in these facilities. Phase 2, tentatively scheduled for 2003-2004, will include an examination of the effectiveness of the various models of halfway houses and make recommendations for areas of improvement.

Additional partners are being encouraged to join the project as it progresses. The involvement of parole, crime prevention and the Solicitor General of Canada is key to the success of the multi-disciplinary approach.

Background

CRFs have developed over time in response to needs identified by local communities. Therefore, there is a great deal of diversity in the approaches used in providing services to offenders across Canada. For example, while updating the CRF directory we encountered a variety of non-traditional approaches to the halfway house model. Currently, some halfway houses operate as privately administered facilities, some as residency programs that co-exist with detoxification and drug treatment centres and homeless shelters, and some house clients in provincial institutions.

Large scale evaluations of CRFs have not been conducted in Canada in about two decades. With a few exceptions, the main body of research on the halfway house concept was conducted between the 1960s and 1980s. These studies tended to conclude that halfway houses are neutral at best in terms of effectiveness. However, these results reflect an era of correctional programming that preceded the “what works” literature. Much has changed in both correctional planning and technology. Principles of effective correctional programming, effective correctional treatment and evaluations of their outcome largely emerged in the early 1990s. These currently inform both the design and operation of many correctional programs. The late 1990s also witnessed advances in the determination of critical process variables in positive community-based residential program outcomes. Together with the development of risk/need assessment instruments and advances in research technology, these factors make it timely to develop models to evaluate the effectiveness of community-based residential facilities.

Methodology

The first step was a Literature Review, prepared by the Canadian Training Institute in March 2002. *Toward an Evaluation of Community-Based Residential Facilities in Canada: A Review of the Literature*⁶ confirmed that there is a dearth of current information on the effectiveness of halfway houses and identified the historical trends in the field.

The next step was to develop a broad-based advisory committee. St. Leonard’s Society of Canada is committed to working in co-operation with all those interested in this area. It is our conviction that these agencies often work in isolation, lacking the support that can be provided by increased connections among other agencies. As the halfway houses are community-based, we want this project to be informed by the best practices and advice of those in the field. In June 2002, CSC funded a meeting of a group of about 25 interested advisors from the voluntary and public sectors to consider the results of the literature review and to provide perspectives on appropriate next steps.

A feature of this project has been the development of a group of persons and organizations who are interested in the project and who wish to be informed of its progress. Initial information was provided to them in the spring of 2002, an update was distributed in the early fall, and a report will be sent out in spring 2003. People expressing interest are added to the list on a regular basis.

During the summer of 2002, a Directory of Community Resource Facilities was prepared by CSC and SLSC. This comprehensive update helped to identify the wide range of approaches in the field.

Three aspects of the project are concurrently underway:

1. A profile of offenders residing in halfway houses for the last 5 years is being developed using data compiled from the CSC Offender Management System.
2. The Research Branch of CSC and St. Leonard’s have developed an interview protocol designed to gather comprehensive information about the nature, approach and status of the halfway houses. Interviews with a sample of directors of halfway houses in each region were conducted. These focus on describing the halfway house, its governance, staff, residents, programs/

services, best practices, and issues they are facing. Components include:

- Philosophy / goals / objectives
- Historical background
- Program and service delivery
- Referral and intake process
- Criteria for inclusion
- Organizational structure
- Physical layout
- Institutional and community roles

It is important to note that this phase is for background purposes only and is not an assessment in itself nor will the material gathered be used for assessment purposes.

3. Through a contract with CSC, the Canadian Training Institute is preparing a report proposing a comprehensive methodology to evaluate effectiveness using a range of outcome measures and performance indicators.

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² Zeitoun, L (1978). The development of community-based residential centres in Canada, *Offender Rehabilitation*, 3, 133 - 150. Cited in *Toward an Evaluation of Community-Based Residential Facilities in Canada: A Review of the Literature*, Canadian Training Institute, May 2002, unpublished. Available on request electronically.

³ Correctional Service of Canada, 1999.

⁴ St. Leonard's Society of Canada is a national registered charity that affiliates non-profit agencies and individuals committed to

Next steps

The information gathered through the interviews will be included in a report describing halfway houses in Canada, including models in place and a profile of individuals residing in halfway houses. The proposed methodology will be the focus of discussion, debate and review by the advisory committee.

It is anticipated that preparation for Phase 2, the testing of the methodology, will begin in the spring of 2003. During Phase 2, the plan is to provide an opportunity for representatives of the halfway houses to share best practices and establish ongoing links which will foster improved access to their peers and knowledge of the range of highly effective interventions which exist in the field in Canada. The working group is confident that the basis will be laid for supporting halfway houses as they seek to assess and improve their service to clients and their continued contribution to community safety in Canada. ■

the prevention of crime through the provision of service. Our member societies serve men, women and youth in conflict or at risk of conflict with the law with an historical emphasis on services for federally sentenced men. The first St. Leonard's House opened in Windsor, Ontario in 1962.

⁵ Ingles House for young women was founded in 1947 to serve women released from Mercer Reformatory; Beverly Lodge in Toronto for men leaving provincial jails opened in 1954.

⁶ Canadian Training Institute, May 2002, unpublished. Available on request electronically.

Coming up in *FORUM on Corrections Research*

The September 2003 issue of Forum will focus on Performance Measurement.