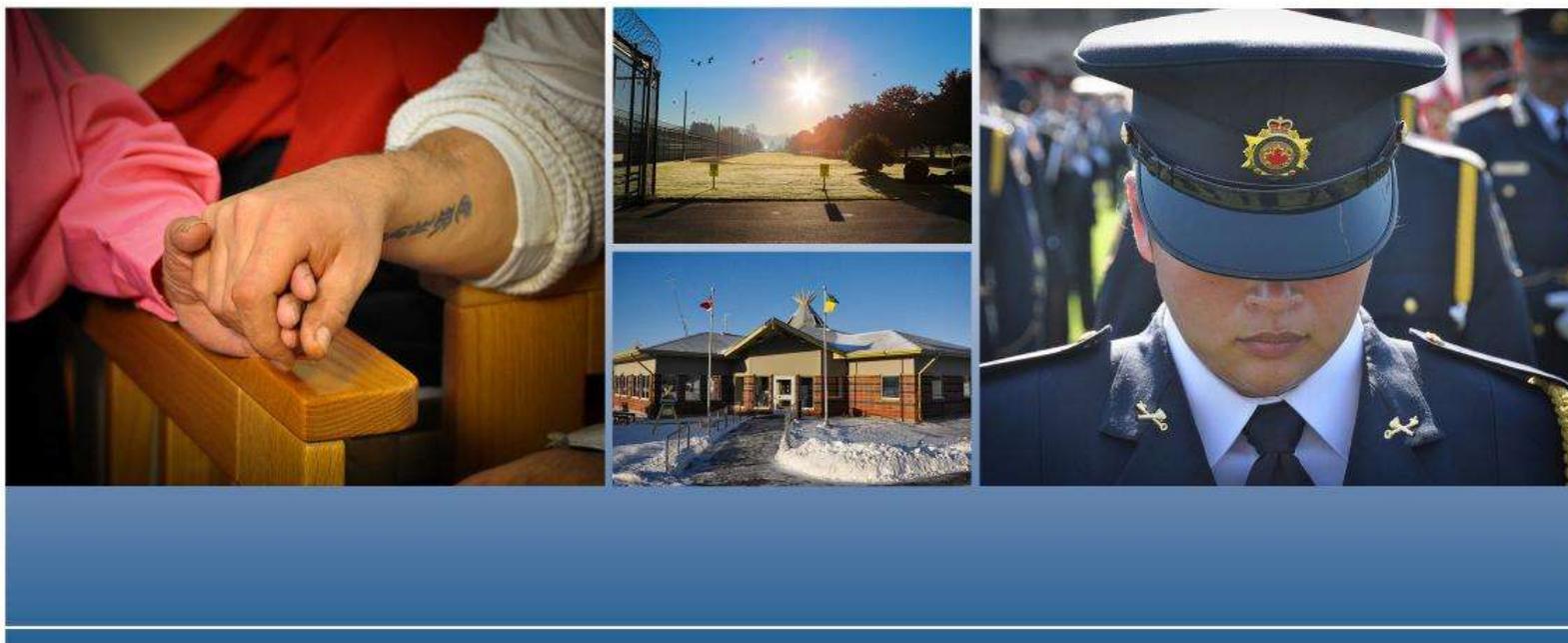




CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.



Defining the value of volunteers in corrections

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Background

Why we did this study

- In accordance with Bill C-16, on December 27, 2017, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) implemented its interim policy for gender diverse offenders to identify operational practices that may require accommodation for these offenders, particularly regarding the placement of offenders in a federal correctional institution that aligns with their gender identity.
- CSC policy established the requirement to develop Individualized Protocols (IPs) for gender diverse offenders in relation to accommodation requests related to their gender identity.
- This study was undertaken to provide a profile of federal gender diverse offenders in Canada.



OVERVIEW

Volunteers are an integral part of the correctional and conditional release system. CSC benefits from thousands of Canadians who want to contribute to offender rehabilitation and reintegration. However, it is a challenging environment, which makes raising awareness about their value paramount.





CSC's Mission

- CSC administers all court sentences of two (2) years or more across Canada as per the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*.
- Our mission is to contribute to public safety by actively encouraging and assisting offenders to become law-abiding citizens, while exercising reasonable, safe, secure and humane control.





CSC Profile

- **CSC manages:**
 - 43 institutions of various security levels, five of which dedicated to women
 - 14 community correctional centres
 - 10 healing lodges
 - 92 parole offices and sub-parole offices
- **Responsible for 21,512 offenders (2020-2021 data):**
 - 12,399 were in custody
 - 9,113 were supervised in the community



Volunteering in Corrections

- CSC relies on the important work that community volunteers can offer to assist in the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders.
- They are important to the correctional environment. They have a profound impact, by offering diverse support and interaction that goes beyond what staff may be positioned to offer.
- In turn, volunteer involvement can provide a degree of additional support to frontline staff since offenders engaged in volunteer-led activities may cope with the correctional environment better.



Volunteer Profile

- Approximately 4,000 volunteers
- In the community, provide support by way of accompanying offenders on conditional release and organizing their personal needs, such as:
 - Finding a doctor
 - Finding employment
 - Securing appropriate housing
 - Finding educational/academic courses
 - Assisting with opening an online bank account
 - Helping them develop a budget
 - Assisting in obtaining appropriate ID
 - Finding information on community resources
- Community volunteers also offer practical skill development workshops (e.g. interview, etiquette, resume/CV creation, financial literacy)



Program Governance

- CSC's volunteer program is guided by operational policy
 - [Commissioner's Directive 024 – Management of CSC volunteers](#) (available on CSC's website)
- National Headquarters manages the policy framework, providing guidance, support, reporting on program performance and maintaining a volunteer database
- Regional staff advise and support frontline volunteer coordinators based in institutions and in the community
- Coordination and management of the volunteers delegated to the site level
- All volunteers are approved by the operational unit head



Volunteer Management

- In the community, dedicated Community Volunteer Coordinators work out of the district offices
- In the institution, volunteer coordination functions are shared by staff in Social Program Officer positions
- Rather than a national training standard on the coordination and management of volunteers, NHQ offers a number of tools that outline the procedures
- Volunteers are approved after a rigorous screening process. All volunteer activities are risk assessed. All procedures of registering volunteers must be in accordance with CSC's policy framework.



Volunteer Recruitment

- CSC Volunteers go through a rigorous application and screening process. Some of which includes:
 - An interview for identifying potential conflicts of interest.
 - Applying for a Government of Canada security clearance, which requires a fingerprint and criminal record check. Some also must undergo a credit history check, depending on the level of protected information they need access to.
 - Completing an on-line orientation, which takes 2-4 hours. More orientation and training may be providing on-site to support their onboarding and specific activities.
- Many of the volunteers registered with CSC are also affiliated with non-governmental/non-profit organizations who contribute to recruitment, training and retention.



Value of Volunteers

- Volunteers support CSC's programs and interventions by providing another layer of human interaction and meaningful human contact.
- Volunteers expose offenders to a wide and diverse range of people, activities, knowledge, and interests.
- They can relieve the sense of isolation that an offender may face, providing additional emotional support especially important for those without family or support networks.
- They can link offenders to various community supports. This helps the individual know that they are not alone upon release.
- Interactions can often help offenders draw hope, strength and/or self-respect.
- Volunteers complement the many important functions that staff play in rehabilitation and reintegration.



Benefits for Offenders

- Volunteers are positive role-models and mentors, promoting pro-social behaviour.
Working with a volunteer can:
 - Improve communication skills
 - Assist in managing an offender's institutional adjustment and increase the reintegration potential for offenders in the community
 - Contribute to offender's mental wellness (e.g. decreases their sense of isolation)
 - Improve the quality of life
 - Offer diverse support and perspectives
 - Help with motivation and goal-setting



Benefits for Volunteers

Research shows the people volunteer for many reasons, which can include, but are not limited to, altruistic motivations.

Volunteering provides people with:

- Practical experience
- Professional development
- Networking opportunities
- Employment and educational references

For CSC, these benefits extend to the community:

- Better understanding of the criminal justice system
- Involvement in rehabilitation and reintegration
- Stronger ties with the community



Benefits for Staff

- Volunteers bring enthusiasm and positive energy to a challenging work environment. This offers renewed energy and hope for more positive outcomes.
- They also provide collateral information that parole officers can use in the management of their cases.
- Their presence and contributions can improve the behaviour and success of offenders, which can ease the environmental conditions in which they fulfill their roles and lower stress for staff.
- Volunteers are flexible and eager to take on challenges and often think of creative and innovative solutions that may assist staff.



Challenges

- General lack of awareness of the role or opportunities volunteers may offer
- Staff concerns over security risks and lack of trust with respect to volunteer intentions
- Offender opportunities to work with volunteers are not equal across the system
- Volunteer programs are not accepted in the organization's culture as an integral part of the rehabilitative process
- We need to have the empirical evidence to raise awareness of the value of volunteers in rehabilitation and reintegration



Common Theme

Prisons Managing Volunteers in EU (VOLPRIS), which brings together eight organisations from five European Member States, observes:

Community organisations are able to empower civil society's response to crime, rather than putting full responsibility for rehabilitation and reintegration solely in the hands of statutory criminal justice services. Yet, those who work with volunteers and volunteering organisations in prisons seem to struggle to embed these initiatives and make them self-sustaining. Despite recognising the value that volunteers bring, few are expanding their community programmes in this way.



Opportunities

Though more discussion is required before CSC would be in a position to implement these ideas, we see two opportunities that we are exploring and “socializing”:

1. Creating a standalone Volunteer Program
2. Anchoring volunteers in offender case management and correctional planning.



Standalone Program

- Volunteers are currently seen as a facilitator of social programs
- Policy is focused on administrative roles and responsibilities and, to some extent, managing the volunteer lifecycle.
- Creating a Volunteer Program would require a new, standalone policy running in parallel / supporting client service delivery and programming.
- Referral program, matching volunteers to offenders' needs and interests. This could be facilitated by technology.
- Sounds easy but...will take years of development *and* change management. It will take organizational capacity and resources.



Referrals

- Targeted volunteer-led interventions could include:
 - programs to address criminogenic needs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous for substance use (complements correctional programs)
 - life skills courses (complements social programs)
 - tutors, post-secondary courses, English or French as a second language (complements education)
 - AIDS/HIV awareness, mental wellness, suicide prevention (complements health care)
- Who would do the referrals?
 - Anyone interacting with the offender on a daily basis, such as correctional officers, teachers, nurses, or members of the offender's case management team.



Offender Case Management

- Want case management team to connect volunteer interventions to the domain need being addressed (e.g. involvement with A.A. to address substance use)
- Integrate volunteer-led interventions into the offender's correctional planning and assessments for decision
- This presents a research opportunity to look at offenders engaged in a volunteer-led intervention and their impact
- Need to start by increasing awareness among CMT about the value of volunteers. Need data!
- Integrate into the policy framework and support with training and coaching



PM and Evaluation

- Volunteer program performance currently measures outputs, not impact
- Developing qualitative data will also be obtained from offering surveys for volunteers and program relevant staff
- It is harder to gather information from offenders
- Working towards a mechanism to flag offenders in the Offender Management System to create a cohort of individuals for potential research



Common theme

Prisons Managing Volunteers in EU (VOLPRIS), which brings together eight organisations from five European Member States, observes:

The authors foresee an advantage to having greater perspective of how and when to evaluate the impact of volunteering initiatives on the prisoners themselves, on the culture of the prisons which support them, on the communities into which former prisoners are released and on the volunteering beneficiaries themselves: these unknown factors perpetuate doubt in the value of volunteering programmes in supporting rehabilitation services in prison, and put up unnecessary barriers for prison staff keen to promote and engage civil society in efforts to reduce criminal behaviour.



Conclusion

- None of these challenges are limited to CSC. Global cooperation could foster more rapid knowledge generation, program and practice development
- CSC will lead a new Network Group of the International Corrections and Prisons Association. The group will be launched at the conference in Orlando this fall
- Members of the International Corrections and Prisons Association interested in working with this group is encouraged to express their interest
- We welcome all countries, with big, small or no volunteer programs, in prisons or in the community, to get involved



Thank you

Thank you for your interest!

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Discussion

- Do you have a volunteer program in place?
 - If so, are they integrated into the rehabilitation process in the community?
 - If not, do you have the intention of building one?
 - Is your program working well or could it work better?
 - What is your biggest success?
 - What is your biggest challenge?
 - What are your barriers to success?
 - Do you measure outcomes of your volunteer program on offender rehabilitation and reintegration?
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