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# Through the Eyes of Women

## What a Co-operative Can Mean in Supporting Women During Confinement and Integration

Isobel M. Findlay, James Popham, Patrick Ince, and Sarah Takahashi

**A research report prepared for the Northern Ontario, Manitoba,  
and Saskatchewan Regional Node of the Social Economy Suite**

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Entreprises sociales  
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## THROUGH THE EYES OF WOMEN

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ISOBEL M. FINDLAY, JAMES POPHAM,  
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## ABSTRACT

**T**HIS RESEARCH STUDY considers criminalized women’s lived experiences while in custody and upon release. The study pays particular attention to women’s perceptions of institutional programming with the purpose of outlining service and other gaps and clarifying how co-operative initiatives might fill these gaps. The research designed collaboratively by the Community-University Institute for Social Research and the Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan explores how participation in a co-operative can impact the capacity of provincially sentenced women to negotiate incarceration and successfully reintegrate into the community upon release from custody. The study provides women the opportunity to voice their needs and hopes, their stories and experience of imprisonment, and their capacity for social, economic, cultural, and civic integration. It explores how living under conditions of confinement may structure women’s choices, their social, cultural, and civic identities, and shape their mental well-being and their capacity to manage their lives upon release — and what participating in a co-operative might mean for their capacities and choices.

Women imprisoned in the Canadian Criminal Justice System (CCJS) have few opportunities to participate in effective training programs. Research has noted that the CCJS reintegration strategies for women in prison are seriously flawed in offender assessment tools that do not differentiate genders; delays in program delivery leading to delays in release; a dearth of substance abuse programs; few effective employment and work-release programs; a failure to address Aboriginal women’s needs; and inconsistent post-release support. Indeed, criminalized women exiting institutional settings return to the challenges that they faced prior to incarceration, with the added anxiety of their prison experiences, and little reintegrative support. For too many of the women encountered in research studies, criminality has become yet another layer of marginalization in a world of exclusion and oppression.

A May 2012 Public Safety Department report on the Correctional Service of Canada's Corcan work programs concluded that demand exceeded access to programming and that programming was neither cost-effective nor supportive of public safety because of a failure to match skills training with labour market needs and projections. Similarly, the Correctional Investigator Canada (2013) deplored the ten-year 85 percent increase of Aboriginal women's incarceration rates and the chronic underfunding and underuse of existing legislative provisions.

By contrast research has established that participants in prison co-operatives can significantly reduce recidivism and improve quality of life. The co-operative model is based on the seven co-operative principles that promote co-operatives as member-owned and controlled businesses where all are included so long as they accept the responsibilities of membership. People use their power to work together for a common purpose, and each member-owner has the same voice in decisions. The co-operatives' balancing of economic and social objectives has responded creatively to critical social situations. In particular, the co-operative programs running in several Italian penitentiaries have recorded recidivism rates as low as 1 percent.

A wealth of academic literature has also acknowledged the unique obstacles that face women (the fastest growing prison population worldwide) before, during, and after incarceration and criminalization. Against this background, this study explores through semi-structured interviews women's experience of confinement at Pine Grove Correctional Centre (PGCC), the provincial custody facility for women in Saskatchewan, to highlight the challenges and opportunities they face in negotiating confinement and in reintegrating into society upon release. It explores their perceptions of available skills programming and its value in preparing them for reintegration and identifies gaps in the current programming regime.

The interviewed women demonstrate that criminality is often the by-product of adverse life experiences, trauma, grief, and impoverished living environments that remain largely unaddressed by current correctional policies. The study's interviews confirm that individuals who come from impoverished environments are disproportionately overrepresented amongst those who offend and that education and work-related skills generally deteriorate as a result of incarceration, exacerbating their difficulties and adding new social stigma as criminals.

Educational programming at PGCC was perceived as inadequate and often inaccessible

because of long and overlapping waiting lists. In addition, individuals with short sentences were not even eligible. Likewise, the expressed life experiences and stressors which culminated in these women's incarceration were also often unaddressed by the available programming at PGCC. Overcrowding added to health risks and general levels of anxiety and stress, while dietary issues for those with diabetes were concerns. Women were also troubled by the absence of cultural and spiritual programs including morning smudging and adequate Elder support.

More than half of the interviewed women felt that their connectedness to their families and communities had been compromised at PGCC. Phone service and visitation costs left many inmates isolated and hopelessly tormented by their inability to connect with family members they felt they had let down. Overall, the theme of connectedness was important to short-term inmates who would soon return to their families and communities.

Many of the women considered a co-operative an opportunity to work together on something that put well-being before profits and that included everybody in the decision making as a valuable way to help them succeed outside of prison. In a co-operative, there would be no losers, no one left out of decisions. Being heard, doing what they chose, and being supported were critical factors in feeling empowered and acting constructively to change life patterns and build work and social skills to increase success.

Despite reporting difficult prison experiences, women also reported finding comfort and support within the bonds they formed with other inmates to whose life experiences they could easily relate. Building on this strength of PGCC's prison environment, a prison-based co-operative would include opportunities for women to overcome their issues alongside other members with similar life experiences and goals. And the women celebrated the range of talents and gifts they could potentially contribute to a co-operative. The possibilities of voice and choice and a measure of self-determination, self-worth, and support were especially attractive to the women.

Despite unique obstacles and opportunities that incarcerated women encounter, the majority of interview participants at PGCC believed that a prison-based co-operative would maximize personal and social gains during incarceration and reintegration into the community. Alongside worrying reports of an overburdened justice system, the study's findings highlight the important role prison-based co-operatives could play. For the women, the benefits of co-operatives reside not only in work-related skills and income but also in the

way such co-operative business entities in prison provide a sense of self-efficacy and the opportunity to form strong social bonds with other co-operative members in an empowering and legitimate business entity.

The conclusions drawn from the present study are similar to those of studies of prison-based co-operatives in Europe: incarcerated individuals are more likely to succeed upon their release when they feel empowered by their capabilities and supported by quality social bonds and effective coping strategies. The findings identify gaps in the current programming regime and raise serious questions about current services and policy emphasis on education, training, and income support as insufficient to empower full citizens. The findings should serve as the impetus for developing prison-based co-operatives with the potential to improve the quality of pre- and post-release life for criminalized women by offering meaningful and responsible choices and a supportive environment promoting respect, dignity, and independence.

## INTRODUCTION

IT IS EASY TO MAKE ASSUMPTIONS about criminalized women in Canada. Newspaper articles illustrate a “troubling trend” (Stone 2010) in the number of women being incarcerated in Canada, often depicting these female prisoners as misguided souls living in regret over decisions made in the past (see Kennedy 2003, for example). Such perspectives do little more than scratch the surface of the challenges faced by criminalized women in the Canadian Criminal Justice System (CCJS) whose numbers have grown by 40 percent in the last five years and Aboriginal women by 85 percent in the last ten years (Correctional Investigator Canada 2012; 2013).

A wealth of academic literature has begun to acknowledge the unique obstacles that face women, who represent the fastest growing prison population around the world (Pate 2011) before, during, and after their periods of incarceration and criminalization. National statistics reveal Canadian women commit significantly less crime than men do (Belknap 2001; Kong and AuCoin 2008). According to Bloom and Covington (1998), criminalized women often share common experiences prior to incarceration:

- They are often involved in non-violent or economic crimes.
- They are more likely to be from marginalized groups facing extremes of poverty and/or under-education.
- They are often fighting depression and substance dependency issues.
- They are typically the lone caregivers for their families.
- They have often faced repeated violations through sexual and physical abuse.

In fact, a survey of Canadian female inmates in federal penitentiaries reveals that 63 percent of these women were abused or were addicted to alcohol, while 50 percent were addicted to drugs, 37 percent had antisocial personality disorders, 34 percent had psychosexual

disorders, 33 percent had experienced major depression, and 20 percent suffered from anxiety disorders (Blanchette and Motiuk 2006; Laishes 2002; as cited in Robert et al. 2007). Accordingly, Messina et al. (2006) emphasize that women are at a substantial disadvantage prior to incarceration in comparison to men when considering their histories of unemployment, substance abuse, psychological functioning, and sexual/physical abuse. Building on this picture, recent literature has also emphasized gender-specific needs in both the recovery process (Messina et al. 2006) and transition into the community upon release (Bernier 2010). As expressed by far too many of the women encountered in these studies, criminality has become yet another layer of marginalization in their world of exclusion and oppression.

The present research report explores women's experience of confinement and remand in Pine Grove Correctional Centre (PGCC) to highlight the challenges and opportunities they face integrating into society upon release. Particular attention is paid to participants' views of the value of skills and rehabilitative training. The research also evaluates how the development of social economy initiatives, and co-operatives in particular, might improve the quality of pre- and post-release life for criminalized women.

The social economy, a term used most commonly in Europe, and more recently in Québec, describes a variety of socio-economic initiatives addressing new opportunities and needs. The social economy is defined in this way:

That sector of the economy including co-operatives, mutuals, not-for-profits, and the voluntary sector associated with alternative development models, is concerned with people before profits, with entrepreneurship with a social mission; with community economic development and multiple bottom lines; with autonomous management, inclusion, and democratic participation; and with sustainable environments and communities (Pattison and Findlay 2010, 3).

Social-economy enterprises direct organizational and community resources to the pursuit of social and community goals, focusing on providing flexible and sustainable tools to assist communities achieve their own objectives in the areas of job creation and skills development, the environment, social support networks, economic growth, and neighbourhood revitalization (Diamantopoulos and Findlay 2007). This effective balancing of economic and social objectives has resulted in initiatives that have responded creatively to urgent social needs and critical social situations faced by marginalized groups and individuals. These initiatives have also proved instrumental in creating innovative organizations capable of seizing

opportunities to create new wealth. Such enterprises exist across Canada and elsewhere building on the tradition of co-operatives and non-profit community enterprise as well as other innovative approaches.

By definition, “A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise” within the larger social economy (ICA 2012). Incorporation as a co-operative requires, according to Pattison and Findlay (2010), that these organizations adhere to specific legislation and regulations requiring a clear mission and bylaws which spell out member, board, and staff roles and responsibilities. As legal entities, co-operatives receive the same benefits as other corporations — namely external legitimacy — though they differ from other businesses in their primary objective: to meet members’ cultural, social, and economic needs. Fundamentally, co-operative member decisions balance economic and socio-cultural goals, such as community capacity building, environmental sustainability, local employment, and good governance practices as highlighted by the International Co-operative Alliance’s seven co-operative principles:

- Voluntary and open membership
- Democratic member control
- Member economic participation
- Autonomy and independence
- Education, training and information
- Co-operation among co-operatives
- Concern for community (ICA 2012)

Co-operatives, in other words, are member-owned and controlled forms of business where all are included so long as they accept the responsibilities of membership. People use their power to work together for a common purpose, and each member-owner has the same voice in decision making. The co-operative operates locally and keeps profits in and for the community; member-owners care about the development of their communities.

This co-operative approach to community engagement has been successful in a number of penitentiary settings. Perhaps the most promising examples are the co-operative programs running in several Italian penitentiaries that have achieved remarkably reduced rates of recidivism (Celeste 2005; Hoyt 2010). Similarly, when a group of lifers in Prince Albert’s medium security penitentiary was involved in forming an arts marketing co-operative — Just Connections — the chair of its board, Ricky Perepelkin, anticipated these results: “The pro-



ject will provide a sense of direction and allow our members to bring out their talents, build confidence and improve the community inside and out” (Lagimodière 2003, 24). It was designed so that members could remain active and supportive members once they were released. According to Findlay (cited in Lagimodière 2003), “There is mutual benefit to selves and broader community.... Members will be building capacity in governance as well as business and cultural ways. They are putting their money and talents to work to build their own and others’ accountability and independence and strengthen community spirit and identity” (24).

In contrast to the Italian and Saskatchewan prison examples, women currently imprisoned in the CCJS rarely have the opportunity to participate in effective training programmes. An Office of the Auditor General report (2003) noted that the CCJS reintegration strategies for women in prison are seriously flawed in these ways: the use of general offender assessment tools that do not adequately differentiate genders; delays in program delivery eventually leading into delays in release; a dearth of substance abuse programs; a lack of effective employment and work-release programs; and a failure to address the needs of Aboriginal women; and generally inconsistent post-release support. Ultimately, the Auditor General report calls for an update of the blueprints for managing sentenced women, which “must evolve with changing conditions and developments” (22) relative to community strategies. A May 2012 Public Safety Department report on the Correctional Service of Canada’s Corcan work programs (accessed and reported by Mackrael 2013) concluded that demand exceeded access to programming and that programming was “a waste of scarce resources and counter-productive to public safety” because of a failure to match skills training with labour market needs and projections. Indeed, criminalized women exiting institutional settings frequently return to the same challenges that they faced prior to incarceration, with the added anxiety of their prison experiences and little reintegrative support (Maidment 2006). The Correctional Investigator Canada (2013) *Spirit Matters* report on Aboriginal Corrections underlined the particular inequities faced by Aboriginal women in the context of “Aboriginal-specific legislative provisions” being “chronically under-funded, under-utilized, and unevenly applied by the Correctional Service.”

Taken together, this evidence clearly calls for a re-evaluation of the services offered by Canada’s penal institutions and the adequacy of current penal policy emphasis on education, training, and income support to empower full citizens. It is against this background that this research study aims to explore the positive potential of a co-operative alternative, considering

what co-operatives have meant and could mean for women negotiating confinement and preparing to return to their community. Considering research indicating inter-relationships between women can be a particularly effective tool in fostering self-empowerment and personal growth (Bloom and Covington 1998), this study also explores gender-sensitive programming for incarcerated women throughout their sentence and upon their release into their community.

After the literature review and methods section, the present report offers a thematic analysis of the stories of sixteen interviewed women incarcerated at Pine Grove provincial correctional facility — located about five kilometers north of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. The findings capture rich details of the women’s life before prison, their prison experience at Pine Grove, their concerns about their release back into the community, and the potential of a prison co-operative to benefit them throughout their sentence and upon their release. The final section of this report includes a discussion of the implications of current correctional policies and the contributions that co-operatives and other community-based organizations might make to the successful reintegration of women released from correctional facilities across Canada.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A LIFETIME OF STORIES AND RESEARCH underlines the hardships of marginalized and criminalized women. Blanchette and Brown (2006) use the term *gestalt* (German for *shape*) to describe the histories of criminalized women, which are the culmination of various aspects of their lives. For instance, Comack (1996) illustrated the detrimental impact of childhood and spousal abuse on imprisoned women’s lives. Women in this study attributed feelings of negative affect (i.e., anger, shame, self-hate) to their history of abuse and often used criminalized actions as a means of coping with these experiences (Comack 1996). Similarly, Maidment (2006) documented the detrimental effect financial hardships and poverty had on criminalized women and their families.

Maidment (2006) stresses that, for many criminalized or incarcerated women, economic concerns are deeply rooted in their responsibilities and expectations as mothers. Recent literature suggests this situation is likely intensified by the fact women are more prone than men to be the primary, or only, caregiver for their children (Braithwaite 2005), leading these

women to participate in criminal activities to fulfil their parental duties. The stressors encountered by criminalized women have also been related to substance abuse issues, with recent literature indicating criminalized mothers often have substance abuse issues and/or developmental and learning disabilities which cause them to encounter stressors over and above those already faced by other women in Western societies (Greenberg 2008). Taken together, evidence related to the unique hardships facing women underlines the reality that these stressors help account for the disproportionate number of disadvantaged and racialized women in contact with the correctional system. To make matters worse, incarceration is linked to the exacerbation of already strained family relationships between incarcerated women and their loved ones (Greenberg 2008).

In light of this research, this literature review aims to consider these and many other systemic challenges faced by women today. These unique circumstances should feature prominently in any discussion of potential rehabilitative programming for criminalized women. The primary concern considered below is how, through the various systems and bureaucracies of corrections in Canada, institutional regimes may have failed to adequately address the unique needs of women — and to consider how those needs might be better accommodated. First, this review illustrates a statistical picture of today’s correctional system and criminalized women in Canada, subsequently highlighting the marginalization these women encounter before, during, and after their incarceration. Next, literature related to the social economy and co-operatives provides a sense of their potential benefit for criminalized women.

### **An Over-Burdened Correctional System**

Statistics indicate a perfect storm of policy and governance issues taking hold within the CCJS. The Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) has long been a proponent of “tough-on-crime” responses to criminality (Brown-John 2010). In fact, successive speeches delivered from the throne have outlined faith in a system where harsher punishments and further restrictions to rights for all criminalized persons are the best response to crime. The Government of Canada’s (2010) throne speech is exemplary in this regard:

Our communities are built on the rule of law, the cornerstone of peace, order and good government. The law must protect everyone, and those who commit crimes must be held to account. Canadians want a justice system that delivers

justice. We know we can protect ourselves without compromising the values that define our country.

Specifically, the passing in 2009 of Bill C-25, *The Truth in Sentencing Act*, further exacerbates this situation. Intended to restrict the amount of time served and credited in cases where the accused has served pre-trial time in custody, these amendments to section 719 of the Canadian Criminal Code (CCC) are anticipated to dramatically increase the number of persons imprisoned and drive up the costs associated with maintaining this system. Writing on behalf of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, Rajekar and Mathilakath (2010) estimated that these changes to the CCC would translate into a 28 percent increase in the number of the incarcerated and that these individuals on remand will spend, on average, an additional 159 days in prison.

To address increased incarcerated populations, various levels of government have begun to implement changes within their respective corrections services. Piché (2010) has outlined the breadth of these changes in a presentation made to the House of Commons detailing the estimated costs of some twenty-two new provincial/territorial institutions and sixteen additions to provincial/territorial institutions. Although he did not have access to similar federal-level data, he anticipated similar expansions. According to Piché (2010), the anticipated result is a 41 percent increase in necessary full-time staffing at these correctional facilities, which would require at least \$2.89 billion annually, with an additional \$343.9 million needed per year for upkeep. In the meantime, only one of these new facilities and five of the expansion projects are currently operational (Piché 2010). With only a handful of new beds, it seems inevitable that many of Canada's provincial and territorial corrections facilities will be housing this influx of criminalized people in their already over-burdened facilities.

The significance of these factors for criminalized women is further complicated when recent trends in incarceration are considered. As outlined by both Kong and AuCoin (2008) and Gartner et al. (2010), the overall rate and total number of women entering the corrections system in Canada has dramatically grown throughout the past decade. Specifically, Kong and AuCoin (2008) note that, while the rate of sentenced incarceration had dropped 8 percent between 1995 and 1996, the number of women remanded into custody had more than doubled; thus resulting in an aggregate growth of female incarceration rates by 30 percent.

Relevant literature also indicates that those that spend short periods of time in a state of

legal limbo often actually suffer the most while imprisoned. For instance, Lösel (2007) suggests that participant groups consisting of incarcerated persons who spent less than one year in prison were significantly more likely to reoffend than those with longer sentences. In fact, the author's study reported a negative correlation between the length of time served and the likelihood of recidivism when examining individuals incarcerated for one year or more. To account for this high recidivism for short-term inmates, the author concludes that "[t]hey rarely receive intensive educational, therapeutic or other services, and are not able to cope with problems of resettlement" and that, "[a]t recidivism rates of more than 70 percent, the incarceration of these offenders is particularly ineffective but contributes substantially to prison overcrowding" (516). Taken together, this work demonstrates the debilitating cycle of short-term sentencing without adequate rehabilitative measures contributing to further overcrowding and undermining the efficacy of available correctional programmes.

### **Incarcerated Women: A Statistical Background**

A 2010 edition of *Juristat*, Statistics Canada's periodical newsletter for the CCJS, has shed light on the imprisonment of women in Canada. Of the 371,800 adults admitted to custody during fiscal year 2008/2009, 6 percent of federal admissions, 12 percent of provincial/territorial admissions, and 13 percent of admissions to remand were for women (Calverley 2010). At the provincial/territorial level these rates varied widely across Canada, with the greatest levels of female incarceration occurring in the western provinces and territories. Of these, Saskatchewan had the highest level of provincial female incarceration, with women representing 15 percent of the 15,082 admissions to provincial/territorial institutions in 2008/2009 (Calverley 2010). While these figures may not seem overwhelming at first glance, "the fact that women's rates are very low relative to men does not address the reality of what is occurring" (Gartner et al. 2010, 190).

The statistical realities of imprisoned women become clearer in the following example: roughly 2,200 women who passed through Saskatchewan's corrections facilities during 2008/2009 had to do so in a system with only seventy-five beds (personal communication, C. Wright 2010). Relevant to this issue, Gaes (1985) has described how living in prison environments can induce higher levels of stress, personal illness, and assault amongst prisoners. Arriola, Braithwaite, and Newkirk (2006) agree that women's incarceration often leads to poor health outcomes due to noise, unsanitary living conditions, and their lost capacity to

engage in self-care (i.e., hygiene, exercise, diet). Arriola, Smith, and Farrow's (2006) research also indicates that they experience high rates of infectious disease, respiratory complications, digestive conditions, headaches, ear infections, musculoskeletal diseases, skin diseases, genitourinary disorders, as well as more frequent histories of abuse, substance abuse, and sex work which places them at heightened risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS.

### **The Remand Crisis**

According to Kong and Peters (2008), the nature of incarceration has changed immensely within the CCJS in the last fifteen years, especially in the number of adults on remand; that is, "the temporary detention of a person while awaiting trial, sentencing or the commencement of a custodial disposition." According to the Criminal Code, adults and youth can be admitted to remand for a variety of reasons, including to ensure attendance in court, for the protection or safety of the public or to maintain public confidence in the justice system" (Porter and Calverley 2011). Adults on remand once accounted for less than 30 percent of the incarcerated population in Canada, yet within the first decade of the twenty-first century this custodial population accounted for more than 55 percent of inmates. Likewise, the average length of time spent on remand has significantly grown to three or more months (Kong and Peters 2008). Those incapable of posting bail, or deemed unfit for release, find themselves in maximum security settings with long-lasting negative implications (Gartner et al. 2010). This upswing in remand rates has been associated with longer pre-trial incarceration periods for defendants, decreased access to supportive and bail services, and a heavy burden on the CCJS whereby as many as 75 percent of incarcerated adults have not been found guilty of their charges (Weinrath 2009).

An alarming number of Canadians are incarcerated in the CCJS without ever having faced the courts. Remarkably, the United Nations' (1990) Standard Minimum Rules for Non-Custodial Measures ratified by the General Assembly, including Canada, states, "Pre-trial detention shall be used as a means of last resort in criminal proceeding" (6.1). Despite this mandate, Canadian courts continue to use remand to detain persons who are unable to provide sureties or immediately ensure their return to court due to distance, financial concerns, or numerous other reasons (Johnson 2003). Weinrath (2009) conducted an extensive study of adult pre-trial sentencing throughout Canada, noting that from fiscal year 1985/1986

to 2005/2006 the rate of remand grew by 190 percent while post-trial custodial sentences declined by 20 percent. Notably, this growth occurred despite a general crime rate reduction of 25 percent within Canada (Weinrath 2009).

Webster et al. (2009) report that the rate of pre-trial custody in Canada has, in fact, increased by almost 300 percent over the last half-century. They explain that, because remand is controlled provincially, there is also a vast disparity across jurisdictions in Canada. In particular, Manitoba and Saskatchewan report remand rates of 90 and 56 per 100,000 citizens respectively in 2007, notably higher than other regions in Canada (Webster et al. 2009). Similarly, at least 40 percent of CCJS populations in Manitoba, Alberta, and Saskatchewan consisted of persons on remand, with rates in Manitoba reaching 70 percent (Webster et al. 2009). These authors argue this is at least partially due to the fact the CCJS capacities have been stretched beyond their limits by the greater proportion of accused held in custody for “a judicial determination of pre-trial release or detention in 2007 (50.2 percent) than in 2001 (39.2 percent)” (Webster et al. 2009, 97). Additionally, Webster et al. (2009, 97) contend that the bail process itself is also taking more time than ever:

Specifically, upon being detained for a hearing to determine whether release is appropriate, it is likely that the accused will be required to remain longer in pre-trial detention than in the past.... This “extended” or delayed process would appear to be rooted predominantly in the significant increase in the number of court appearances to resolve the question of bail rather than in any form of court backlog whereby accused are required to wait for an available court date.

Gartner et al. (2010) conclude that “total admissions of women to provincial custody, unlike sentenced admissions, have increased over the last decade and this increase is the result of a growth in the number of women admitted to provincial custody on remand” (Gartner et al. 2010, 184). Moreover, this study emphasizes that “the increase in the female remand population outstripped the decrease in the female sentenced population, creating a pattern of steady growth in the total population of women in Ontario’s prisons” (Gartner et al. 2010, 184). This explosive growth in the use of remand has contributed not only to overcrowding, but also to undue harm for marginalized persons in pursuit of successful reintegration into their communities.

The significance of these findings is apparent in European correctional research by Player (2007), who discussed similar patterns of sentencing in the United Kingdom within



the framework of human rights violations. The focus of her argument was that “women remanded into custody have lost their liberty not as a legitimately imposed punishment for a crime, but for reasons purporting to uphold broader communal interests” (402). Given the nature of the charges most often faced by women, Player (2007) suggests that the legalistic reasoning that remand serves to protect the public from risky persons is fanciful at best. She goes on to dismantle the various justifications for remands to custody for women as a poorly fitting suit tailored for male prisoners — with “profound implications for the human rights of defendants” (Player 2007, 425).

In other words, literature reveals that the process of bail and remand in Canada has created something of a *Weberian Iron Cage*, wherein the accused are trapped and jailed due to bureaucratic rationalities. Weinrath (2009) stirs this debate with a qualitative study that considers the experiences of male prisoners held in remand. These inmates felt administration of justice charges were often unfounded and designed to deprive them of freedom rather than serve in protecting community safety (Weinrath 2009).

In fact, very rarely do remanded individuals see any benefit from their incarceration. Johnson (2003) documented that these periods of unsentenced imprisonment are often referred to by criminalized persons as “dead time,” a period where “the inmate may have little or no access to activities such as recreation, work and rehabilitative programs and services” (5). Johnson (2003) explains that provincial institutions, where most remanded persons are held, generally use programming designed for short-term or definite sentences that make most individuals on remand ineligible given that they frequently spend less than a week in custody. As one participant from Bernier’s (2010) study explained, provincially incarcerated women in Atlantic Canada often relied on community-based organizations: “In terms of services offered by the institution there was none. It was really ... outside groups like the Elizabeth Fry Society [and] Coverdale Court Services” (161).

### **Aboriginal Involvement**

The history of Aboriginal persons incarcerated within the CCJS is, by many accounts, an extremely dark, longstanding blemish on Canada’s record. Since the early 1960s, the over-incarceration of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis persons in the nation’s penal institutions has undergone extreme scrutiny (Monture-Angus 2005); however, neither adequate policy nor even a significant endeavour has been made to rectify this imbalance and



racialization serves further to marginalize Aboriginal women (Findlay and Weir 2004). By 2010/11, the Correctional Investigator Canada (2013) reported an 85 percent increase in federally incarcerated Aboriginal women in a decade and a persistent underfunding and under-use of Aboriginal-specific provisions designed to reduce over-representation as well as substantial funding discrepancies between Correctional Service of Canada and healing lodge facilities.

Despite repeated calls for action and constant research reports indicating Aboriginal persons are over-represented in Canadian custodial institutions, the latest statistics confirm that this problem is ongoing. For the period 2007/08, incarcerated Aboriginal persons represented 22 percent of the 369,200 admissions to correctional services in Canadian facilities, while representing only 3 percent of the general population (Perreault 2009). However, since these statistics represent aggregate data collected throughout Canada, they actually substantially under-represent the true rate of Aboriginal incarceration. For example, Calverley (2010) notes that Aboriginal women accounted for 28 percent of all women remanded and 37 percent of women admitted to sentenced custody, with Aboriginal men representing 20 percent of remand and 25 percent of custody sentences in Canada. Despite the fact that jurisdictional data are not readily available on gender specific differentiations in Aboriginal status, Calverley (2010) has recently exposed the general rate of Aboriginality in each of the provinces and territories. Notably, 98 percent of all incarcerated persons in Nunavut claimed Aboriginal identity for the fiscal year of 2008–2009, as did 88 percent of the Yukon territory's inmates, 80 percent in the Northwest Territories and Saskatchewan, and 71 percent of all incarcerated persons in Manitoba. As was the case for every province and territory, the rates of Aboriginal incarceration are clearly disproportionate to the Aboriginal population in each Canadian jurisdiction. In fact, with Aboriginal persons making up just 11 percent of its population, Saskatchewan's rate of incarceration of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit is considerably higher than the majority of other jurisdictions in Canada (Calverley 2010). Saskatchewan's proportion of Aboriginal adults on remand and in custody is also five times the national average, sitting at 80 percent and 81 percent respectively (Perreault 2009). Moreover, young Aboriginal adults aged twenty to twenty-four from Saskatchewan were incarcerated at a rate of 26.6 per 1,000 adults — an astonishing 26 times the rate of custody for non-Aboriginal persons (Perreault 2009). According to Calverley (2010), the percentages of women remanded or sentenced to custody in Saskatchewan were 10 percent and 15 percent respectively, with a staggering 79 percent to 81 percent of these women of Aboriginal heritage

(Calverley 2010). These data mean that approximately 8,200 Aboriginal adults were in custody across Canada on any given day during the 2007/08 fiscal year. In Saskatchewan alone, the average daily prisoner count for the province was 1,442 adults (Calverley 2010); an Aboriginal incarceration rate of 81 percent means that 1,168 Aboriginal adults were imprisoned on any given day in Saskatchewan during 2007/08.

The negative impact of racialization and gender, according to Comack (2006), means that Aboriginal women are particularly at risk to be under- or unemployed (24 percent unemployment). Moreover, Comack (2006) adds that Aboriginal women are also more likely to be members of lone-parent families (86 percent of single-parent Aboriginal families) and are responsible for parenting nearly half of the Aboriginal children in urban Saskatchewan despite low levels of education and high poverty rates. Maidment (2006) notes that “all too often, the common denominator among criminalized women is a chronic cycle of poverty and dependence on welfare” (59). Trapped by poverty, Aboriginal women are often forced to turn to economic crime or the sex trade, leading inevitably to incarceration in the CCJS (Maidment 2006).

A wealth of illuminating literature has been produced which examines the experiences of racialized women whilst imprisoned. For example, Tasevski (2009) contributed an extensive thesis detailing these experiences with particular focus on Aboriginal persons. Amongst her concerns is the “animalization” of Aboriginal women whereby their individualism is stripped through penal processes, the over-classification of their security risks, and the extended periods of time they serve (Tasevski 2009). In pursuing her study, Tasevski (2009) found that racialized women held in custody often encountered extreme challenges to their civil rights and privacy; and that the rehabilitative programming offered through their institutions did not adequately meet their needs. Similar experiences have been recorded by Poon (2009) and Comack (1996), whose qualitative examination of women in prison highlighted the dearth of positive experiences in Canadian institutions. In light of this criticism, it is increasingly obvious that the nature of Canada’s correctional system is particularly ineffective in successfully reintegrating racialized prisoners into their communities.

### **Institutionalization**

Maidment (2006) emphasizes that long-term involvement in state-controlled environments such as prison contributes to feelings of *institutionalization*, a process whereby

inmates internalize the norms of their correctional facility leading over time to the shaping of a prisoner's thoughts, behaviours, and identity (Bernier 2010). According to Foucault (1977), institutionalization is a purposeful and powerful mechanism used by correctional systems to promote self-regulation of prisoners' behaviour and maximize their conformity to the prison environment. As illustrated by Foucault (1977, 11; as cited in Robert et al. 2007),

The body [...] is caught up in a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions. Physical pain, the pain of the body itself, is no longer the constituent element of the penalty. From being an art of unbearable sensations, punishment has become an economy of suspended rights.

Bernier's (2010) dissertation examined the life and prison experiences of women incarcerated in provincial correctional facilities throughout Atlantic Canada. These women commented throughout interviews that they were particularly concerned with being stripped of their dignity, humanity, and independence as a result of being "institutionalized" and also felt this could result in long-term effects on their overall well-being (Bernier 2010). Specifically, these women explained that institutionalization made returning to their community upon release from prison even more difficult because of their reduced abilities to maintain independence.

One practice impacting the mental well-being of Bernier's (2010) participants was a surveillance strategy consistent with "panopticism" (Bernier 2010, 120), a term introduced by Foucault (1977), which subjects prisoners to constant observation by prison staff from a central location in order to deliver both discipline and punishment (Bernier 2010). Cameras within sight of washroom facilities were particularly violating as one of the interviewed women illustrated, "You're being watched 24/7, even when you use the bathroom. It's so hard to use the bathroom here too!" (120). Given that women in the provincial correction system are often incarcerated for non-violent or economically related crimes, it remains unacknowledged that panopticism and camera surveillance are frequently detrimental to the reintegration process.

Relevant literature indicates that institutionalization often distinguished between those who successfully reintegrated into the community and those who continued to cycle through the system (Maidment 2006). Incarcerated women want more from their prison experience than punishment; these women acknowledge they need help to address the issues that catalyzed their incarceration and also see the potential for prison to be a place where they could

receive therapeutic treatment unavailable to them in their communities (Pollack 2008). Reflecting on these women's experiences Bernier (2010) concludes:

In an era of women's corrections where principles such as empowerment, women-centredness, and shared responsibility are being espoused by the federal system, it appeared from the experiences of women who participated in this study that the provincial correctional system is still very much rooted in punishment, surveillance, and control (127).

### **Mental Health**

A study by Fazel and Danesh (2002) revealed that one in seven prisoners from Western countries suffer from psychotic illness or major depression. While these rates are noteworthy and clearly indicate many women enter the CCJS with existing mental health problems, such rates have been found to vary widely by study. Several diagnoses, including psychosis, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse-related disorders (CIHI 2008), are disproportionately represented within Canadian correctional facilities. Recent evidence also suggests that many incarcerated women in particular suffer co-occurring mental disorders not limited to substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and other serious mental illnesses (Covington 2003). Consequently, Greenberg (2008) argues that correctional personnel should acknowledge the importance of effective examinations and interventions in order to maximize the well-being of both the incarcerated and their families.

Regardless of the Canadian province or territory, correctional policies are predominantly driven by a mandate to manage Canada's complex inmate populations in a timely manner while also acknowledging their wide range of needs, including mental illnesses (*Mental health* n.d.). According to the *Mental Health Strategy* (n.d.), "this is best achieved using evidence-based practices which both promote and support the safe transition and mental health of individuals with a mental health problem and/or mental illness upon return to the community and beyond sentence completion" (7).

Individuals with mental health problems and/or mental illness who do encounter the CCJS often have multiple points of contact with provincial/territorial and/or federal correctional authorities, health care institutions, or social services. Accordingly, a common mandate and integrated approach is needed for active client engagement, stability, successful

community integration, and general harm reduction sensitive to diverse individual and group needs (*Mental health* n.d.). The proposed framework for mental health for Corrections consistent with the Canadian Human Rights Act (1977) stresses that “Mental health services are client-centred, holistic, culturally sensitive, gender-appropriate, comprehensive, and sustainable” (*Mental health* n.d., 9). It further stresses, “Meaningful use of time, including participation in programming for individuals with mental health problems and/or mental illnesses, is critical to their becoming contributing and productive members of the community” (10). It also acknowledges:

In addition to their involvement in correctional systems, individuals with mental health problems and/or mental illnesses experience a compound stigma that creates barriers in their ability to obtain services, and also influences the types of treatment and supports received, reintegration into the community and their general recovery (*Mental health* n.d., 10).

Incarcerated women in Canada have a diversity of unique needs, underlining the potential benefits of gender-specific programming and interventions. Specifically, empirical evidence emphasizes gender-sensitive programming that promotes support systems and relationships to help women address trauma and develop self-esteem, healthy relationships, physical health, sobriety, sexuality, mental health, parenting skills, decision-making skills, and cultural/spiritual awareness (Bloom and Covington 1998). Despite early indications of progress towards gender-specific programming during the 1990s, CCJS programs designed for the needs of men continue to be used in female correctional facilities.

### **Overcrowding**

Literature acknowledges that incarceration, including the shortest prison terms, heightens an individual’s risk for a potentially lifelong sentence of criminality. However, this reality is particularly damaging for women who have already faced a lifetime of victimization. Ruback and Carr (1984) state that overcrowding negatively affects women’s sense of personal control, thus leading to more frequent instances of disciplinary action and heightened levels of stress to go along with the negative physical implications. The authors conclude that women are more affected by overcrowding than men, indicating that this may be due to their pre-existing societal obligations and subordination developed through years of entrenched patriarchy and oppression.

Sharkey (2010) has contributed a valuable qualitative study on the impact of overcrowding on anxiety and panic, decaying relationships with family, recollections of childhood victimization, and even suicidal thoughts. Simply put, when trying to reach out for support, no one was available to listen to these women or to help them negotiate their histories of victimization and pain. Sharkey (2010) explains this lack of support was the catalyst for attempted suicide or self-harm. Moreover, these criminalized women also frequently discussed how simple things such as post-incident conversations with corrections staff were immensely beneficial in preventing self-harm incidents. In its thirty-ninth annual report, the Correctional Investigator (2012) noted that self-injury, often a symptom of underlying mental health issues, had increased three-fold in five years; women accounted for 25 percent of the self-harm in 2011–2012.

Bernier (2010) offers a valuable account of the differences in the life and prison experiences between male and female inmates. For example, it was the female prisoners who were locked down more frequently than their male counterparts in the same facility (Bernier 2010). The study's findings emphasize that these restrictions for incarcerated women were exacerbated for individuals on remand as these women were confined to their units to an even greater degree than those who were not on remand. Being on remand made them ineligible for co-ed programming (available to those serving longer sentences) and restricted them to female-only programming which was much less frequently available.

Bernier (2010) adds that the interviewed women were “consistently housed in smaller units and had greater restrictions placed on their movement around the jail” (116) than their male counterparts. Moreover, Bernier (2010) contended that incarcerated men in provincial corrections also received more services, programming, treatment options, and available support than their female counterparts who were housed in the same prison. Women also often went long periods of time — even weeks — “without yard” (123). Arguably, revelations such as these add support to existing allegations of basic human rights violations among female prisoners at the federal level (Canadian Human Rights Commission 2003). The Canadian Human Rights Commission (2003) report illustrated that these women often suffered discrimination based on gender, race, and physical abilities which resulted in their being classified as higher security risk than necessary and robbing them of many freedoms while incarcerated.

### **Collateral Effects of Women's Incarceration**

Even families who live close to and who have the means to visit their loved ones in prison are disadvantaged by the jail environment during their visits, especially when children are involved. Women in Bernier's (2010) study complained that visitation facilities were overcrowded, lacking privacy, and frequently occurred amongst male prisoners. This was particularly concerning for many women who complained that their children had to share the same visitation area as male inmates whom the women did not always trust. For these and other reasons, many women in provincial jails across Canada simply do not wish for visits with their children at all, while others go without seeing their families for long periods of time (Evans 2006).

Long-distance charges also impacted family connectedness (Bernier 2010). Given that many incarcerated women arrived in the system with little money, it is not surprising that many of Bernier's (2010) participants are unable to afford such phone calls. Accordingly, the narratives of incarcerated women are repeated in research on the emotional pain of inmates associated with being separated from children during periods of incarceration (Evans 2006; Richie et al. 2001).

The straining of family relationships as a result of parental incarceration is particularly well documented (Greenberg 2008; Foster 2010; Mumola 2000). For instance, Foster (2010) uses the term "collateral effect" (5) to describe the unintended and often persistent negative consequences — personal, social, financial, emotional, psychological, and physical — for those close to the incarcerated women, particularly their spouses and children. On a more global level, the community is also affected by high levels of concentrated crime and the destructive cycle of incarceration within the community also diminishes human capital, physical capital, and social capital (Foster 2010). The research findings are important when 90 percent of prisoners eventually return home to their community and more than half return within two years of their release from prison (Beck 1999; Petersilia 1999; as cited in Foster 2010).

According to Greenberg (2008), children of incarcerated mothers represent a group of young individuals who often have unique developmental and mental health needs and who are at heightened risk for adverse developmental outcomes. To explain, Greenberg (2008)



utilizes a *transactional model* (Sameroff and Chandler 1975; as cited in Greenberg 2008) that assumes that the interplay between various biological and environmental factors affect, and even determine, the eventual outcomes of children with incarcerated mothers. As children encounter additional risk factors, a cumulative effect leads to the child's increased potential for negative long-term developmental outcomes (Greenberg 2008).

Statistics show that the majority of children with incarcerated mothers move into the care of grandparents, relatives, or into foster care. In fact, children were reported to be five times more likely to enter foster care when their mother, rather than father, was incarcerated (Krisberg and Temin 2001). A growing literature suggests children of incarcerated mothers suffer interruptions in their natural social and emotional development (see Kaufman and Henrich 2000; Zeanah and Boris 2000; as cited in Greenberg 2008). However, the paucity of longitudinal research from the time of the parents' incarceration to the time of their release contributes to uncertainty about whether it is in the best interest for children to visit their parents in prison (Hairston 2003; as cited in Greenberg 2008).

One particularly serious issue children of incarcerated women face is the lack of communication they have and the known impact this has on the relationship between mother and child (Greenberg 2008). Mumola's (2000) estimation that children did not visit 50 percent to 60 percent of incarcerated mothers clearly illustrates family relationships are compromised for many women in prison. Inevitably, many significant obstacles, not limited to distance from home, remote geographic areas, scheduling problems, and costs to make the trip, must be overcome by families hoping to visit their relative in prison (Greenberg 2008). Taken together, the literature underlines the importance of providing criminalized parents with the resources necessary to support their children and maintain healthy relationships with their families during their prison sentence and continuing upon their release into the community.

### **Relationships in Prison**

Despite the reality that quality and supportive relationships are hard to come by in prison, especially in overcrowded settings, women in Bernier's (2010) study expressed the view that the formation of positive relationships and shared experiences were a potential source of emotional support and comfort. Unfortunately, these women also noted that overcrowding exacerbated tensions between women due to personality clashes, differences in opinion, and bullying exchanges (Bernier 2010).



The women's relationships with provincial corrections personnel was a defining feature of how positively these women experienced incarceration (Bernier 2010). Bernier's (2010) participants felt that prison staff members were genuinely concerned about their well-being; however, a minority of prison personnel were unprofessional and caused women to internalize feelings of disrespect, worthlessness, degradation, and dehumanization. Supporting this, previous research indicates that correctional personnel oriented primarily towards rehabilitation, rather than discipline, were favoured by provincially incarcerated women; control-oriented guards were frequently reported to be involved in encounters involving tension and conflict (Micucci and Monster 2004).

### **Inadequate Programming**

A commonly encountered theme in the literature on criminalized women in the CCJS is the failure of institutional programming to address their unique needs as women. As Bernier (2010) explains, women's corrections have historically used an "add and stir" (112) demonstrated by the fact female provincial correctional facilities continue to force their women to "fit" (112) into traditional male models of corrections. Most of Bernier's (2010) interviewed women reported that service provision at the provincial level was inadequate to meet their needs. In fact, as Bernier (2010) notes, numerous other researchers (Pollack, 2008, for example) have also contended that federal programs fail to support incarcerated women. To make matters worse for provincially incarcerated women, a range of federal programming remains unavailable at the provincial level and thereby results in inconsistency in terms of policy, regulation, and service provisions of provincial jails in Canadian (Bernier 2010).

In light of this literature, it is clear that there remains a severe shortage of gender-specific programming in provincial correctional facilities across Canada. The available programs also fail to address the underlying needs of women (Bernier 2010; Comack 2006; Maidment 2006; Micucci and Monster 2004; SSCPIW 1994; Vir Tyagi 2004). Moreover, gaps in provincial level addictions support have also been noted (SSCPIW 1994), in addition to a lack of support for women suffering the effects of trauma and abuse (SSCPIW 1994; Vir Tyagi 2004). Women incarcerated in provincial corrections also frequently suffered serious mental health issues (Maidment 2006; SSCPIW 1994). However, most of the women in Bernier's (2010) study reported that meaningful one-on-one counselling was not available at the provincial level in Atlantic Canada. The need for differentiation between male- and female-oriented rehabilita-

tive programming has long been acknowledged (Hannah-Moffat 2006). Yet the CCJS has been slow to respond and has led to many criminalized women to request federal sentences in hopes they will receive the help they desperately want and need (Bernier 2010; Maidment 2006).

### **Policies for Federally Sentenced Women**

In 1990 the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women (TFFSW) attempted to address many of the unique concerns women encounter by publishing *Creating Choices*, a report on and recommended plan for reforms to the treatment of women in the CCJS. Primary amongst the concerns of this report was the poor programming offered to women in prison. Notably, the TFFSW (1990) stated, “virtually every report [on incarcerated women] since 1934 identified federally sentenced women as a ‘correctional afterthought’” (32) and that “incarceration does not promote rehabilitation” (35). After a large number of interviews with criminalized women and extensive quantitative research, the TFFSW (1990) identified a number of “perennial” concerns within the existing justice system for women. Ultimately, the TFFSW’s report painted a picture of a system preoccupied with security at the cost of adequate programming; subsequently making use of programmes designed with the needs of men in mind, dislocating women from their homes and families, failing to offer community-based alternatives, and neglecting to address the unique realities of racialized women.

To address these shortcomings, the TFFSW (1990) identified principles for change and a vision to implement change. The resulting principles themselves were straightforward and effective: empowerment of women in the system; meaningful and responsible choices during their incarceration and beyond; respect and dignity promoting a sense of independence; and a supportive environment that promotes “physical health, psychological health, and personal development” (110):

The federally sentenced women who shared their experiences ... urged a more woman-centred approach. They spoke of new solutions based on meaningful choices. They spoke of shared responsibility between governments, federally sentenced women and the community, both for the harm done through the crimes committed by women under federal sentence, and for preventive solutions to reduce further suffering.

This vision also called for progressive centres of rehabilitation and a widened network of community support (TFFSW 1990). The report offered an insightful and telling depiction of the harm caused to women by the CCJS, thus underlining the potential opportunity for this system to change. Hannah-Moffat (2006) praised the TFFSW's (1990) report as "enabl[ing] a gendered knowledge of punishment and offending to filter from feminist critiques into Canadian penal policy and, over time, into the managerial regimes governing women's prisons" (183).

Unfortunately, despite acceptance by the federal government, the principles were never implemented. The mid 1990s saw an attempted restructuring of women's prisons; however, a perceived lack of empirical data on women's needs and gender-responsiveness left programming requirements undefined. As a result, a myriad of competing, ad hoc, definitions have since emerged and mired the process of restructuring women's prisons and also facilitated the return of traditional correctional measures (Hannah-Moffat 2006). Maidment (2006) suggests that the layers of social control exerted upon criminalized women have a significant negative impact on a woman's likelihood of success upon her return to "normal" life in the community.

Since the CCJS has yet to successfully restructure women's prisons and address their lack of gender-responsive programming, the rehabilitative processes of criminalized women remain severely compromised in a variety of ways. For example, as discussed by Maidment (2006), many women facing the courts actually request longer-term sentences because they are aware of the inadequacy of programming in short-term, provincial institutions. The women interviewed in Maidment's (2006) study also complained of the limited financial and staff-based support during their time in the CCJS and voiced their belief that this led to inadequate service delivery. Moreover, several women encountered a general sense of apathy from various members of the CCJS with regards to their potential for successful reintegration (Maidment 2006). Comack (1996) encountered similar situations a decade earlier, at a point that should have been the height of the *Creating Choices* era. Instead, Comack (1996) found that women were critical of most available programs, often stating that the quick turnover of enrolment and institutional bureaucracies limited any sort of positive outcomes (Comack 1996).

The primary concern emerging from this body of literature regarding the inadequacy of rehabilitative programs in carceral settings for women is that these programs were developed for men (TFFSW 1990; Comack 1996; Hannah-Moffat 2006; Sorbello et al. 2002). As result,

the risk assessment criteria used to determine relative programming are rarely female-specific (Blanchette and Brown 2006) and the programming is similarly gender-biased (Heilbrun et al. 2008).

The failure of these institutional measures has been illustrated at length by Heilbrun et al. (2008), whose empirical study of 1,435 incarcerated men and 883 women found distinct differences between the self-perceived treatment needs using Level of Service Inventory, Revised and Level of Service, Case Management Inventory tests. Specifically, women had significantly higher scores for financial need, a greater likelihood of having lost intimate partners through divorce or death, and a greater need for social group support (Heilbrun et al. 2008). Similar responses were recorded anecdotally by Comack (1996); however, gender-relative programming has yet to be successfully implemented, or even genuinely pursued, by the CCJS (Correctional Investigator Canada 2010).

Much the same has been stated by Blanchette and Brown (2006), who write, “It is a commonly held belief that the context of female offending is markedly different from that of male offending” (8). The authors’ review of available literature on such correctional programming development concludes that “[s]ound, gender-specific program theory is non-existent, and researchers continue to debate the most appropriate methodology” (Blanchette and Brown 2006, 113). The authors ultimately conclude that a shift toward treatment based on the responsivity principle — programming designed to match the criminogenic and circumstantial needs of imprisoned women (Andrews et al. 1990 as cited in Blanchette and Brown 2006) — is required to address the individual needs of criminalized women. Similarly, Sorbello et al. (2002) add that program enhancements targeting well-being and quality of life of women, in part by developing means for individuals to acquire their own basic needs, have significantly aided in the application of the responsivity principle for women.

That these research findings have not been implemented has further overburdened the CCJS and led to mounting financial cost for Canadian taxpayers. In his 2009–2010 *Annual Report*, the federal Correctional Investigator of Canada introduces the plight of women in prison in this way: “My Office is increasingly concerned that we are moving farther and farther away from the progressive principles of women’s corrections articulated 20 years ago in *Creating Choices*” (49). The report goes on to question current vocational programming which is criticized for its focus on domestic chores, the difficult restrictions of its access-to-children programs, and a governance structure that fails to differentiate men and women

(Correctional Investigator Canada 2010). Hannah-Moffat (2001) adds that such obstacles provide opportunities, emphasizing efforts should be made to genuinely “empower” women. Instead, as this author contends, the existent correctional system forces them to conform to normative standards of female behaviours in adherence with the status quo.

### **Provincial Corrections Release Support**

Participants in Bernier’s (2010) study indicate women conducted little release planning and were provided with even less support, or no support at all, from provincial correctional staff. Upon release, many of these women were even unaware of who their case worker was because they were never actually introduced in person or made aware of the nature of support such case workers could provide (Bernier 2010). Participants also noted community-based organizations were most helpful for women planning for their release by “assisting them in obtaining personal identification, setting up social assistance, securing a place to live, getting accepted into residential treatment facilities, finding employment, accessing programming, and making various appointments (e.g., probation, social workers, methadone maintenance clinic, etc.)” (Bernier 2010, 171). Accordingly, numerous other studies have underlined the need for gender-specific release programs to address women’s unique post-release needs for their successful reintegration into their communities (Bernier 2010; Maidment 2006; O’Brien and Harm 2002; Pollack 2008; Richie et al. 2001; SSCPIW 1994). Bernier’s (2010) participants frequently described their release as a very emotionally charged event; however, these women reported that they were provided with very little emotional support from provincial correctional staff as they went through their difficult transition between prison and community.

### **Factors Impacting Women’s Experiences of Reintegration**

Bernier (2010) identified nine factors impacting the reintegration experiences of provincially incarcerated women:

- housing
- financial resources
- education and employment
- substance abuse and addictions
- community-based support

- adjusting to life outside
- family and peer relationships
- stigma and shame
- personal capacities

To Bernier's (2010) participants, their previous failures to secure housing were just an extension of their economic marginalization as women, ex-cons, and often Aboriginal people. For instance, research indicates that the stigmatization associated with these women's histories makes it increasingly challenging to obtain housing even when they can afford accommodations (Maidment 2006). Subsequently, many criminalized women experience periods of homelessness and/or abuse before and after their incarceration that add to recidivism (Bernier 2010). Many criminalized women are forced back into unstable or unsafe living accommodations with friends and family who were entangled in addictions and/or crime and who posed a threat to the released women's future health and well-being (Bernier 2010).

The feminization of poverty is increasing on a global scale (Findlay and Wuttunee 2007). For most of Bernier's (2010) participants, release from prison often meant returning to a life of poverty affecting their families and children. Moreover, complementary research findings also indicate that cuts to social welfare have ultimately left many women to survive on incomes well below the poverty line (Chunn and Gavigan 2006). Adding to the traumatic experiences of their jail sentences, criminalized women are often far worse off on release into the community than when they entered the system making it increasingly challenging to "break free from the vicious cycle of repeated criminalization once they exited the system" (Bernier 2010, 190).

A major challenge for incarcerated women who participated in Bernier's (2010) study was the perceived limited number of educational opportunities in Atlantic Canadian provincial facilities. Criminalized women across Canada are also likely to experience hardships while searching for meaningful employment in a job market dominated by low-wage, gendered, and racialized positions. Moreover, female inmates' poor education affects their ability to secure meaningful employment even when it is available (Chesney-Lind 1997; Micucci et al. 1997; Shaw 1994a; Vir Tyagi 2004; as cited in Bernier 2010). As emphasized by Eaton (1993), education and skills help inmates to obtain employment and instill a feeling of being a useful, valuable member of the community. Particularly consequential for criminalized women is the fact that two of the most common crimes women typically commit are fraud or theft resulting in difficulties gaining meaningful employment and financial stability after serving

time for these crimes. As Bernier (2010) puts it, “The stress associated with job searching was intolerable for many of the women who participated in this project and left them feeling desperate. As a result, many women found themselves turning back to alcohol and drugs to ease the pain of what they were feeling” (197).

Literature has long underlined the need for addictions support amongst women in the correctional system (Bernier 2010; Evans 2006; Pollack 2008; Richie et al. 2001; Vir Tyagi 2004). Confirming the findings of these studies, Bernier’s (2010) participants argued that community-based addictions services and treatment were paramount for women upon their release from prison. Moreover, many of these participants reported that addictions were one of the most challenging aspects of their release (Bernier 2010). The unfortunate reality is that incarcerated women battling addictions to intravenous drugs often lack the support system they need prior to, during, and after, their incarceration (Patten 2006; as cited in Bernier 2010).

Consistent with the literature, securing community support — unemployment centres, educational and skill development programs, mental health workers, counselling services, various religious affiliations, supportive housing, food banks, and clothing depots — was something Bernier’s (2010) participants felt was an important factor for them to achieve successful reintegration and avoid reoffending. The Elizabeth Fry Society (EFry) was especially beneficial to their reintegration (Bernier 2010; Pollack 2008). O’Brien and Harm (2002) concluded that the presence, or absence, or community-based support was one of the major determining factors in whether women’s reintegration was a success. Likewise, the lack of continuous support systems has long been indicated as a significant factor in predicting future criminalization (Richie et al. 2001). The process of readjusting to day-to-day activities outside of prison was particularly challenging for women institutionalized to the extent that their behaviours, thoughts, and overall identities had become shaped significantly by the routinization, regulation, and control (Bernier 2010).

Family support is a vital aspect of women’s transition back into their community, one that often distinguished women who avoided reoffending from those who did not (Bernier 2010; Maidment 2006). Despite the potential benefits of having strong family connection throughout the inmates’ sentences, and upon their release from prison, this is actually a major source of concern and conflict for many incarcerated women (O’Brien and Harm 2002). For instance, Evans (2006) reported that many incarcerated women were temporarily, or even permanently, abandoned by their families. However, as noted by Pollack (2008),



parole and probation conditions make it unfeasible for many women to gain support from those with whom they feel most comfortable given the potential of ongoing criminality or substance use.

O'Brien and Harm (2002) contend that the stigma that criminalized women suffer can often contribute to feelings of social exclusion. Overall, converging evidence indicates that social stigmatization, leaves these women feeling that no alternative exists other than to return to their former life of criminal activity and the peer network that enabled lives of criminality and/or substance abuse (Bernier 2010). Incarcerated women often lost their resiliency — or ability to make personal choices — during their sentences, leaving them challenged to regain autonomy upon their release from prison (Bernier 2010). According to O'Brien (2001), women's successful reintegration ultimately begins with their becoming active participants in the social world, rather than merely passive individuals of social exclusion.

### **Social Economy in Corrections**

Findlay et al. (2013) provided a literature review and environmental scan of available correctional programs and services available in Saskatchewan to support incarcerated Aboriginal people returning to their communities. In order to identify the gaps, challenges, and opportunities of this target group, these authors reviewed programs inside the justice system as well as the available programming within the social economy in this socio-economic context:

an economic boom, labour shortages, and a housing crisis in Saskatoon that heightened awareness of the need for employment and basic skills training to access employment, especially for the Aboriginal underemployed community in Saskatchewan whose unique needs and challenges required a coordinated effort to ensure individual and community success.

These researchers found that housing and homelessness were critical issues and that “success depended in large part on stable shelter and the safety of the men, women, and youth returning to community from incarceration” (Findlay et al. 2013, 1). One particularly problematic obstacle in obtaining housing is the role of policy and organizational mandates that disallow agencies from providing for the complex needs of the target group. Findlay and Wuttunee (2007) similarly stress the damaging consequence of the current policy



environment: “[P]olicy-making typically depends on social science expertise and methodologies applied to ‘problems,’ reducing people to objects of policy discussion rather than enabling them as active participants” (19). Similarly, while current policies emphasize education, training, and income support for Canadians, it does too little in fully empower marginalized citizens. Notably, programs or initiatives that were successful in Findlay et al.’s (2013) study were those which provided individuals with essential personal development skills as well as skilled labour training that focused on tangible results (i.e., obtaining employment) for successful reintegration and preventing reoffending. According to these authors, social economy has the potential to offer necessary positive support for marginalized individuals within the CCJS by going beyond notions of training individuals for employment in favour of these principles (CCEDNet 2005):

- service to members of community rather than generating profits
- autonomous management (not government or market controlled)
- democratic decision making
- primacy of persons and work over capital
- principles of participation, empowerment

In terms of social economy’s potential benefits, literature indicates that increasing prison populations, disproportionate rates of incarceration for ethnic minorities, and high recidivism rates are all social problems that can be addressed through community economic development (CED) strategies (Foster 2010). Moreover, Foster (2010) indicates that CED is effective in addressing social problems in communities where many citizens have experienced incarceration. It invests in human capital and community infrastructure, generating community revitalization projects which facilitate business retention, business ventures and entrepreneurship, neighbourhood capital accumulation, education and training, as well as labour-based development and community planning (Foster 2010). Central to the reintegration of criminalized women is the empowerment of community members, increasing their capacity to make independent and responsible decisions that affect their own lives and the lives of those in their community (Rubin and Rubin 1986; as cited in Foster 2010). Foster (2010) concludes that this process-oriented community revitalization is fully beneficial only when it includes a cognitive link to the community’s culture, supports and nurtures the community’s existing social networks, and fosters the economic empowerment of individuals through self-determination.

Social enterprise, an emerging trend in Europe where it has proven especially beneficial

for marginalized individuals in several countries, is one option to address the needs of women in the CCJS. For instance, Spear and Bidet (2005) argue that social exclusion from the labour market has been a problem across Europe, adding that social enterprises have been effective in addressing these issues for many marginalized groups. These authors stress that social enterprise, which operates between the profit-oriented private sector and the public sector, provides welfare services and work integration for marginalized people while also addressing unemployment and social exclusion.

The key to the social economy is found in “its participative nature, community oriented, and solidaristic creating and utilizing social capital” (Spear and Bidet 2005, 196), which empowers its members to become independent. Accordingly, social enterprises operate under a high degree of autonomous member management which necessitates that workers learn personal and social skills and become self-governed, self-organized, and self-initiated (Spear and Bidet 2005). Learning to manage and belong to such organizations provides disadvantaged and/or marginalized individuals with a new sense of status, identity, and empowerment (Spear and Bidet 2005). Thus, social enterprises can help build human and social capital to assist incarcerated women both within the system and upon release to reduce recidivism.

### **Prison Co-ops in Italy**

One social economy initiative that is building an impressive record for its positive support of marginalized individuals is prison co-operatives. In European countries, specifically in Italy, they are one of the emerging programs offered to incarcerated individuals. Hoyt (2010) describes prisons in Italy, like correctional facilities across Canada, as generally very old and with limited space for prisoners. Moreover, high proportions of prisoners were immigrants, and prisoners usually had limited work opportunities within prisons and beyond. This meant that once prisoners were released from prisons, minimal post-release supports typically awaited them. As a result, Italian recidivism rates were as high as 90 percent (Hoyt 2010). It is in this context that the prison co-operatives have much to offer. The Rebibbia-Roma penitentiary institution located near Rome, for instance, plays host to a fashion co-operative called Made in Jail (Celeste 2005). This organization oversees the convicted learning new trades such as silk screening and fashion design, affording them the opportunity to earn wages whilst incarcerated, and to find gainful employment upon their release (Celeste 2005). Similarly, Hoyt (2010) discusses a number of Italian prison co-ops

such as cosmetics manufacturing at Rio Tera de Pensieri in Venice, outdoor furniture manufacture at Il Gabino, near Portguaro, and agricultural products at Giotto. Each of these programs offers some level of social support and reintegration services, with some also offering post-release employment support. Beyond these reintegrative successes for inmates, Hoyt (2010) points out these co-operatives also enjoyed administrative success as illustrated by recidivism rates as low as one percent.

Hoyt (2010) identifies two types of social co-operative in Italy: Type A and Type B. Type A co-operatives provide social services and focus primarily on basic life and work skills. The inmate assumes the role of a consumer, not a producer, and the pay is very low. Type B co-operatives engage in business activities and focus on work integration; members are workers as well as multi-stakeholders. Additionally, Type B social co-operatives require at least 30 percent of their membership to consist of disadvantaged individuals, including those living with physical disability, mental or sensory disability, former drug addicts, alcoholics, the unemployed, minors, and prisoners (Hoyt 2010). There were 127 Type B co-operatives in three northern Italian provinces, and 19 of them were Type B prisoner co-operatives. Among the 127 Type B co-operatives, there were 30,141 disadvantaged group members, and 8.7 percent or 2,622 of them were prisoners (Hoyt 2010). Type B prison co-operatives focus their efforts on work integration, must succeed as a business, and require members (i.e., prisoners) to work both inside and outside the prison (Hoyt 2010). Members receive equal wages, and once prisoners are released, they receive significant support post release (Hoyt 2010).

Another type of co-operative, a Type C known as The Cooperativa Sociale Il Gabbiano, supported up to 177 disadvantaged people with the majority of its members incarcerated or receiving alternative sentences. This co-operative produces street furniture for parks and gardens such as benches, tables (Gabbiano 2012). Another Italian co-operative, The Giotto, also supported disadvantaged people. Sweet Giotto, a pastry brand in the prison of Padua, Italy, is famous for candies, chocolate, and other pastries (Giotto 2012). A third co-operative example in Italy, Alice, is a social co-operative that manages tailoring services in the San Vittore prison, Italy. The Alice offers training to women in prison, in collaboration with other partners, with the intention of professionalizing the operation of the tailoring industry (Alice 2012). Together, these three co-operatives sell their products online, hold professional clients, and serve as an ideal model for the CCJS efforts to adopt gender-sensitive programming and support for incarcerated women in Canada during and post sentence.

The success of the prison co-ops is reflected in recidivism rates that have been steadily

declining since their implementation in Italy (Hoyt 2010). The average recidivism rate of prisoners involved in prison co-operatives has been 1 to 5 percent; however, in one instance, the recidivism rate was 20 percent (Hoyt 2010). This huge decline underlines the immense potential of prison co-operatives to maximize positive life and work experiences, provide bonding opportunities and a group identity to support individuals during their incarceration and in their pursuit of successful reintegration on their release from prison. Such findings add incentive for further research.

### **Programming in Canada**

Corriveau (2007) tells the story of InsideArt, an arts marketing co-operative for federally sentenced men serving sentences of fifteen and more years in Mountain Institution, Agassiz, BC. In 2002 in Mountain, she found “a group of men thirsty for knowledge and with a passion for artwork, particularly wood and glass” (5). With Co-operative Development Initiative funding for three years, Community Futures South Fraser explored the potential for an inmates’ arts co-op within the penitentiary system that could help take inmates into the community and as “taxpayers, relying less on the social safety net not only after prison time, but perhaps even during it” (5). If Corrections Canada approved of inmates pursuing hobbies and even running “Inmate-Operated Business,” perhaps a co-op would fit. But there were no operational standards to support decisions and wardens refused. With the inmates, Corriveau wrote the standards that were approved by CSC National Headquarters but not Mountain. Although the co-op was incorporated in 2004, it remained technically a marketing club at Mountain.

There were obstacles to overcome with inmates who had never seen the Internet, feared ATMs, and who had to learn about market preferences for art costing \$15 rather than unique pieces worth thousands. There were obstacles too in the timelines and bureaucracy of an institutional environment so that activities could take four times longer than normal to work through the system. Members (some of whom had never held a job) also had to learn all aspects of business to build their capacity to manage the operation themselves. There were tensions with expert advisers and worries about long-term sustainability, which led to restructuring as a multi-stakeholder co-operative in 2007 with non-incarcerated members acting “as a stewardship body that is accountable to the general co-op membership” (Corriveau 2007, 8). Members have learned to focus on social as well as financial results and to recognize

victories when members leave prison “equipped with positive connections plus the greater likelihood of work, supplemented by art sales” (Corriveau 2007, 8).

A video by Cindy Harris documented “the outstanding improvement in confidence and communication,” and a founding member has spoken powerfully about what it meant to him: “Bottom line, it all made me realize that there are still people out there that appreciate who I am, and that led me to want to be a better person. Life is a work in progress. Since the co-op, it feels like a new beginning. I will keep this whether the co-op lives or dies” (cited in Corriveau 2007, 8).

Canada has hosted programs comparable to social enterprises that have proved similarly beneficial for the incarcerated. The Langstaff Gaol Farm, which operated near Toronto, Ontario, from 1913 to 1958 is one good example (Popham and Findlay 2013). Those who had been charged with minor crimes were granted the ability to go out to this farm to participate in paid work. In terms of its resulting benefit, the province saved maintenance costs of over \$100,000 in addition to the inmates’ earned wages of \$245,000 (Kirkpatrick 1964; cited in Popham and Findlay 2013). The Yarrow Youth Farm program for “at-risk” youth in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, provides youth experiences similar to those at Langstaff Gaol Farm (Popham and Findlay 2013). This literature seems to suggest that the social economy and co-operatives in particular have the potential to encourage women to participate in programs, improve their self-esteem, increase the likelihood of their successful reintegration into the community, and help reduce reoffending (Popham and Findlay 2013).

## METHODOLOGY

**T**O ASSESS WOMEN’S SENSE of a co-operative’s potential to assist them in negotiating confinement, and to enhance their capacity for social, economic, cultural, and civic integration, this study learns from women’s stories, their needs and hopes, and their experience of imprisonment as they participate in research centred on the following research questions:

- What are the lived experiences of confined women?
- Do confined women feel that rehabilitative and skills development programmes offered through provincial custodial institutions prepare them for reintegration into the community post-release?

- How might the use of social economy principles in forming a co-operative improve institutional programming to benefit the post-release quality of life for criminalized women (i.e., by improving social inclusion and developing sustainable life and career skills)?

Participants for the one-on-one semi-structured interviews were provincially sentenced women currently sentenced to custody or on remand at Pine Grove Correctional Centre (PGCC). After receiving approval from the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Committee and from the Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing (CPSP), Government of Saskatchewan, which has its own ethics review process, and Pine Grove Correctional Centre, researchers applied the following recruitment protocol. Using the invitation letter included in Appendix A, researchers invited all women at PGCC to participate in the study. For those with low literacy, the information was presented and explained orally.

The student research-intern, accompanied by Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan representatives, visited the potential participants within the correctional facilities to explain the study in detail. The women were provided with an opportunity to discuss the study's purpose and procedure, and to ask questions. Details from the participant consent form (Appendix B) circulated amongst the women were read aloud to them. Candidates were asked to indicate on the letter their interest in participating, and the researcher collected their responses confidentially.

At the time this report was conducted, PGCC housed an average of approximately one hundred inmates. Data were collected using one-on-one semi-structured interviews with a small sample of sixteen participants. The researchers attempted to interview approximately two to three participants from each of the seven units at the PGCC. Using a conversational approach and a conversation guide (Appendix C), the student research-intern addressed each of the research questions in a respectful manner.

Interviews with participants were arranged to best fit their schedules. The Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan has offices in the institution and offered their use for the purposes of this research. Interviews had to fit into the strict scheduling routines encountered at a secure custody facility. While the highly visible design and nature of the facility may compromise the study's confidentiality, the Elizabeth Fry Society and CUISR designed a method to help mitigate these challenges. CUISR interviews occurred at the same time as Elizabeth Fry Society site visits in order to obscure the visibility of participants. Because private offices were afforded to both the society and CUISR, it was unclear in which programme inmates were participating.

If women chose to review their interview, they had the opportunity to read the transcripts or listen to an audio recording. If they decided on the latter, the student research-intern replayed the audio recording in front of them on-site. If a participant decided to review transcripts, they were delivered via an Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan staff member.

This process ensured that their participation was voluntary; no one forced them to participate, nor penalized them for doing so. The researcher contacted only those who agreed to participate, and participants were free to withdraw from the study at any point.

Transcripts were generated from the recordings of the interviews, and the identity of the participants remains anonymous. These transcripts formed the database for the study. To ensure anonymity, quotations from interviews do not include identifying information. Because this is a qualitative study, the research team, led by the PI, employed an iterative process involving content analysis / thematic analysis methods to analyze the data.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### **Life Experiences of Incarcerated Women**

Researchers interviewed sixteen women incarcerated at Pine Grove provincial correctional facility, which is located roughly five kilometres northeast of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. These women responded to questions related to their previous life experiences, their experiences while in prison, and their interest in a possible prison-based co-operative. Half of the sixteen women were between thirty-one and forty years old (n=8), with the remainder aged between twenty and thirty (n=4), forty-one to fifty (n=3), and sixty-one to seventy years of age (n=1). These women came from various communities in Saskatchewan:

- Regina (n=2)
- Nipawin (n=2)
- Cote First Nation (n=2)
- Canora (n=1)
- Carry the Kettle First Nation (n=1)
- Deschambault Lake First Nation (n=1)
- Thunderchild First Nation (n=1)



- Dillon (n=1)
- Saskatoon (n=1)
- La Loche (n=1)
- Cumberland House First Nation (n=1)
- Montreal Lake First Nation (n=1)
- Samson Cree First Nation (n=1)

Nine of these women identified themselves as First Nations and thus confirmed that the study's sample provided an accurate illustration of the Saskatchewan's current prison population (see Calverley 2010). Moreover, eight of these women came from First Nations reserves, meaning at least 56 percent of the sample lived outside of Saskatchewan's major urban centres (Saskatoon, Regina, Prince Albert).

In light of available evidence that women who enter the correctional system often possess limited formal education, this study directly investigated this issue in its interview procedure. Confirming previous research, responses in the present study revealed that two women were uncertain about the grade level they had completed. As illustrated by one interviewee, entering the prison environment often reduces women's educational and work-related capacities:

I want to pursue, to check out, my grade level now because it's been a while since I've went to school. So I want to take upgrading, and whatever level of schooling I'm at, I want to start from there and work my way up again because I know I'm probably back down to a grade 5 or something.

The present study's sample was generally undereducated. Specifically, two women had grade nine education while two others had completed grade ten and grade eleven, respectively. As demonstrated by one woman's narrative, this epidemic of limited education amongst incarcerated women is likely attributable to the fact that these individuals are often exposed to substance abuse and criminality at an early age:

I only made it to grade ten at school. When I hit grade nine, I started smoking weed and then I started getting into the harder drugs like acid, mushrooms, stuff like that. I got into trouble; my first time I did incarceration.

Only one woman had completed grade twelve and had subsequently completed a special homecare certificate from SIAST Kelsey Campus. When asked if she felt as if she had all the



education she needed, this individual indicated that she was still interested in pursuing education during her sentence: “I really want to but I don’t know what’s available [for courses, diplomas, etc.]”

Taken together, the responses of these interviews largely confirm previous research on the lives of women in provincial and federal carceral settings; these individuals enter the corrections system with impoverished education and all too often are released no better off. Consequently, previously incarcerated women often encounter marked obstacles in pursuit of legitimate employment, thus forcing far too many of them to rely on criminality to provide the basics for their survival. The life narratives of these incarcerated women illustrate that their criminality is best understood when considering both their unique hardships and the inadequate coping strategies they rely on. In sum, the narratives of the women interviewed for this study parallel findings of previous investigations that indicate incarcerated women are frequently repeat offenders.

Only four of the sixteen women interviewed in this study, for example, were in prison for the first time. More alarmingly, three women had been in prison on so many occasions that they were uncertain of the exact number. One of these women commented, “I don’t know. More than ten,” when asked how many times she had been in the correctional system. Although the factors that led to each of these women’s reoffending is beyond the scope of this report, literature indicates that women’s unique hardships (i.e., impoverished education, substance abuse issues, poverty, physical, emotional, and/or sexual victimization) are rarely addressed once they enter prison and are often exacerbated by adverse prison experiences and subsequent social stigmatization.

The hardships of criminalized women are clearly illustrated by the fact that eleven of the sixteen interviewees had some sort of previous experience with government agencies, including social assistance/income assistance (n=5), family services/social services (n=3), substance abuse treatment centres (n=2), and disability assistance (n=1). And the histories of these women portrayed the hardships for both incarcerated women and their loved ones. Remarkably, fifteen of the sixteen (93.8 percent) women interviewed had children. Two women had one child, while others parented two (n=2), three (n=5), four (n=3), five (n=1), six (n=1), and nine (n=1). The incarceration of these women will also have had profound effects on the fifty-three children in their lives.

One woman explained how her incarceration had influenced the lives of her children: “I

have two children but my oldest son is in YO [youth offenders] here and my daughter I have given up for adoption and she is in Saskatoon with her family.” Another woman described the consequences of her incarceration for all five of her children: “My mom’s taking care of them and my baby [the youngest] is living with his dad.” The unfortunate reality illustrated by these narratives suggests that, in terms of the relationships between incarcerated women and their families, “any semblance of the pre-existing one is a major challenge” (Greenberg 2008, 170).

The difficulties of communicating with family and the effects of trauma and grief were repeated themes. Three separate women described the persistent emotional pain that resulted from the death of family members. The first of these women explained that her fifty-two-year-old mother’s death led to her subsequent substance abuse and incarceration: “I was hurting and I wasn’t grieving properly for my mom. I was prescribed OxyContin [a pharmaceutical painkiller] for my rheumatoid arthritis and I ended up abusing them, and it got out of hand.” Another woman’s narrative revealed how death had contributed to the separation of her family:

My mom, she passed away, so I don’t know. My dad, he lives in Regina. I have a sister who I’m close to; she lives in Regina. My other sisters, I have three other sisters and one brother. My brother is in the pen and my sisters, one is in foster care and the others are on their own.

A third woman illustrated the emotional strength and resilience required to overcome losing several family members at a young age:

My parents are gone to heaven. They left me very young ... and my brother is up. My brother is up in heaven, too, now, but I’m strong. I believe I will see them again, so I’m staying strong for them because that’s what they’d want me to do.

As these examples illustrate, the interviewees generally found themselves incarcerated after direct exposure to criminality, substance abuse, and emotional pain that they found persistent and difficult to overcome. Confirming relevant literature, the narratives of the present study indicate that these women were often incarcerated for reasons linked to their use of ineffective coping strategies such as substance abuse and criminal behaviour. The women identified environmental factors as adverse to their rehabilitation and overall well-being at Pine Grove.

### **Prison Experiences of Incarcerated Women**

Five of the sixteen interviewed women expressed dissatisfaction with various aspects of health care services at Pine Grove. Four of these women complained that they often sent numerous medical requests before they received attention from health professionals. One interviewee described a fellow inmate whose dental needs were left unattended because she was serving a short-term sentence:

This one girl in here had a toothache; her tooth was really bad. She needed to see a dentist and get it pulled out, but they wouldn't take her to the dentist because she was doing under three months. When there are emergencies like that, they should just take care of it right away. She had to write to the director and phone the office and do all that to get her to a dentist appointment, you know? And she did, she got her tooth pulled. So there's always a way of dealing with it [the inadequacy of inmate healthcare].

When asked what the most difficult thing about incarceration was, another woman living with diabetes responded that Pine Grove did not adequately monitor her blood sugar and blood pressure levels:

My health, I feel like my health is not being addressed.... I just think that by the time they do something, it could be too late because when I got here my high blood pressure was so dangerously high and I haven't been to the doctor. I get my blood pressure checked when only certain nurses are on. I don't know, I don't feel like they are addressing my needs health-wise because I am always worried in the back of my head like what's my level at? Is it low or high? Like I don't know! I feel that being a diabetic locked up like this, I cannot check my sugar whenever I want and they do the diabetic clinics only once a week and it's very difficult to know what your level is. That's the only concern that I have is my health.

A third woman echoed these complaints related to health-care services, describing how she was recently issued a medication despite informing staff she had previously had an allergic reaction to it:

I was put on an antibiotic on February 1st but I was allergic to it so they switched my antibiotic. And yesterday they gave me *the exact same* antibiotic that I was allergic to, so I had an allergic reaction and I didn't sleep all night. I was sick all night and I told them I was allergic to it and they *still* gave it to me, the nurse.

When this woman was asked if this allergic reaction was addressed promptly, the woman explained, "No, I'm still waiting for my treatment." Finally, a fourth woman suggested that the waiting list to see a doctor at Pine Grove was very long:

The nurses are good, I have no complaints about it, but I don't know about the doctor thing. Seeing the doctor, you have to get this blue slip and sometimes you can't because it's [the medical concern] not enough reason to see him. Or else it takes a while, because there's always so much ahead of you seeing him, and they'll say you're going to be waiting for another week and that it's going to be up to three weeks to see him. So, by that time, you've already gotten better and you don't need to see him anymore.

Medical literature indicates that incarcerated individuals are far more likely to have contact infectious diseases than the general population, and the women at Pine Grove expressed anxiety over infectious diseases during their sentences due to overcrowding and communal facilities. Of the lesser known infections, MRSA — or methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus* (*Staph*) *aureus* bacteria — is a strain of bacteria that is immune to the antibiotics used to treat regular *Staph* infections (Mayo Clinic 2012). Within crowded environments, community-associated MRSA is spread through casual skin-to-skin contact. Although this bacterial infection generally begins as a painful skin boil, it has the capacity to develop deep abscesses that burrow into the body and cause potentially life-threatening complications, including infections of the bones, joints, surgical wounds, bloodstream, heart valves, and lungs (Mayo Clinic 2012).

Not surprisingly, many of the interviewed women at Pine Grove were highly concerned about the fact that others around them were living with infectious diseases and some were engaged in sexual activity. Specifically, the women were "all grossed out" and voiced their anxiety over acquiring infectious diseases such as Hepatitis C, HIV/AIDS, and MRSA during the time they shared living quarters, showers, and eating utensils with infected women. One woman expressed her concerns:

There are two ladies in my unit that have MRSA; it's a type of bacteria that cats fight off, antibiotics, I don't know how to explain it. There's two ladies and a lot of us are very cautious about what we touch and things like that, and there's nowhere to put them.... I don't want to say somewhere to put them, like somewhere where they have their own space, but a precautionary site or something. A group discussion with the head nurse or something. We don't have that, and a lot of us don't know if it's affecting animals it's going to affect *my* health.

As the previous excerpt illustrates, the interviewed women were uncertain about what MRSA was and how it is transmitted. Their anxiety stemmed from not knowing what these diseases were and how they could be prevented. According to one woman's experience at Pine Grove, this anxiety was legitimate:

Yeah, I just don't like it here. I don't like how there's girls who have HIV and Hepatitis C and stuff like that, and I don't like being in the same unit as them. I was thinking they should have their own unit because I came here with nothing and ended up with MRSA.

Several women expressed concern about the fact that Units 1 and 2 were required to share a single bathroom and shower facility. When asked how many women she was required to share with, one woman responded, "Seven of us and then the other unit.... We have to go next door to shower and there's about ten in that unit and then there's seven in ours." Another woman commented on the overcrowded conditions in her cell unit:

Right now there's twenty-three of us and it's OK, but there's some good ones and some bad ones. But we all do get along; we just maintain to ourselves and don't get involved with everybody else. But then some of them come in, they don't realize how bad it is, how dirty, they come in and it's not healthy in some parts. They don't realize that they should be in a cell by themselves instead of the open because there's some not nice diseases.

Echoing this complaint, another woman described how unsanitary cell conditions and overcrowding made her paranoid about fellow inmates living with infectious disease:

Yes, it's too many per unit. Like it's all cramped up; everything has to be sanitized every time I go to the washroom. I like to wipe everything down and I'm

always paranoid because so many people here, you know, chronic illnesses? And I don't want that. Yeah, way too, just too many in every unit.

When asked what she felt needed to be changed at Pine Grove, another woman expressed her concerns with infectious diseases:

Bathrooms, yeah, you really have to watch your cleanliness. Like myself, I don't take baths unless I clean out the tub and I wear my sandals in the shower because you do not know. You don't know about the contact you come into. I very much so like to be clean and I'm very much so looking forward to getting out.

Two women in this study complained that Unit 3 and Overflow Unit 1 were the most overcrowded, loud, and generally detrimental environments to their mental health. One woman housed in Unit 3 described her lack of privacy: "I don't know, it's just real sad because I don't have any privacy." Similarly, another woman explained which cell unit she most disliked: "Unit 3. There's too many beds in one unit, no privacy." This same woman went on to illustrate one situation where her personal privacy had been compromised: "This one time my roommate was sleeping on the top bunk when I was at Sharber and the guard walked in. I had my pants down because I was changing my pants. That embarrassed me a little."

Another woman also complained how overcrowding in Overflow Unit 1 negatively affected her mental well-being and ability to relax:

In the overflow, yes, because there's ten beds with a small room, you know? There is a lot of invasion of privacy and, being bunked in together, it causes some tension. So I think, you know, it could be better.

The privacy issue was an element in the women's preference of some units over others. One woman stated her preference for Sharber: "More privacy, you can do your own laundry, you get more benefits there, but you have to be on low security to go there. It's very nice." Another woman preferred Sharber for similar reasons:

It's more open, it's more like you're just in an achievement centre there. Sharber is way more open, the bedrooms, and you're not locked in your room. You can open your own door and walk out and go to the bathroom in the middle of the

night. You have more freedom there, I believe, so I like it there because it helps my time go faster and easier, a lot easier.

Two women pointed out that overcrowded conditions at Pine Grove also contributed to noise levels that caused them sleeping difficulties. One woman responded that this was the number one thing she would most like changed in her unit at Pine Grove: “No, well there’s nothing really you can change, the quietness level.” A second interviewee also described how overcrowding in her unit had compromised her ability to sleep properly:

In Unit 3 you get bunks and, I don’t know, sometimes it’s difficult to sleep because girls are laughing and talking.... You can’t sleep in Unit 3, so I don’t really mind being in Unit 4 [high-security unit], but if I wanted to get out of here, I would go to Unit 3 because there’s things you can do to get you out of here quicker.

Two interviewees complained that the quality of the prison’s bed and bedding negatively affected their daily well-being. The first woman explained how poor bed quality had affected her physically: “I have hip pain and arthritis; I have to take those pains. Our beds are like this [thumps the table loudly]. We can’t complain, there’s nothing they’ll do about it.” Another woman complained that the prison’s bedding was the one thing that she most wanted addressed: “We only get two blankets, thick blankets, but it’s still very hard to sleep on. So that’s what I would like to see change; give us thicker mattresses.”

Other interviewees voiced concerns about other aspects of their prison environment such as poor food quality and insufficient daily food rations, the latter of which seemed to be linked to those cell units that were most overcrowded. Specifically, a perceived lack of food was reported by women from Units 2, 3, and 4. When asked about Pine Grove’s food, another woman complained: “We don’t even have real coffee, there’s no caffeine. We have nothing that we can change in our eating. If we don’t have enough food, I guess we’ll starve. There’s nothing I like about this place.”

A woman in Unit 2 believed that Pine Grove purposely made life in prison more dehumanizing than it needed to be:

It’s just hard. I think they do that on purpose because we are “savages locked in jail.” They lock up the food and they lock up everything; they just open it when it’s time and I don’t like that idea.

In contrast, four women from Overflow Unit 1, Overflow Unit 2, and Unit 1 commented that they were fed too much relative to the amount of exercise time they were given at Pine Grove. As one woman said:

Yeah, all the girls agree with me and what I'm saying. We need more outside time because the way they feed us here it's like, it's OK the way they feed us, but they kind of feed us lots of food and they expect us to work out.

Seven women cited lack of exercise as the most difficult issue related to their incarceration at Pine Grove. One woman commented on her struggle to stay healthy with the amount of exercise time provided at Pine Grove:

So to me, I don't think we get enough exercise time for the amount of food that they give us here. I do understand that we are in jail, but I think we should be entitled to more exercise time.

Another woman explained that Pine Grove did not provide sufficient time or equipment for its inmates, "Nothing to do, just walk, and why walk when we can do something else? Our weight lifting is only once a week."

One diabetic woman revealed that she was not provided with diabetes-friendly options at Pine Grove; thus forcing her to eat foods she knew were inadvisable given her medical condition:

I think they can only give you extra fruits. I don't know, when I go to dinner, they just feed me like everybody else. So it's hard when you are hungry, you want to eat it, but you are not supposed to, but it's there and you eat it anyway.... So there should be certain meals for diabetics, but there is not.... Thank God that I am not here long. So hard not to eat when you are hungry, and it's there, and that's the only thing there.

In sum, although Pine Grove's food service provided enough food for these women to survive, the interviewees seemed to perceive this aspect of their prison experience as more punitive than rehabilitative.

Asked how well Pine Grove's rules were explained when they first entered prison, most interviewees felt that they were explained adequately and were easy to understand. Three



women, however, complained that the rules were either hard to understand or had not been explained to them adequately. One woman said that she had been forced to ask other inmates about some of the prison's rules because they had been poorly explained at orientation and inconsistently enforced by staff:

No. I think that a lot of it you learn from other inmates because things are not very consistent around here, and neither were guards. Everybody has their own way of doing things, so nothing is ever consistent.... There are a lot of inconsistencies within the staff; there is not just one way. They all do things different and they are following the rules, but they make it their own, sort of. They are not making prison rules, but they are doing things a little bit differently in their own way, so to speak.

Another woman raised similar concerns, revealing she was required to learn Pine Grove's rules on her own, given the shortcomings of her orientation:

No, I waited three days to go to orientation. I think they just have to wait for some other people to come in for a group orientation. They just do a quick handbook orientation and it's not being explained that much, but that's OK because I asked for more pamphlets and handouts and I read it by myself.

Another woman reported feeling hopeless and ill-prepared for Saskatchewan's correctional system even after orientation:

After a few weeks I didn't know anything; I just had to ask the girls from the unit what the system was like and I don't know, it's so different here. In Alberta [where the interviewed woman was from], when we go to court we see our lawyer right there, but the lawyer I always had I always talked to on the phone. *So* different.

Orientation was also deemed far too brief for this individual, who explained, "They took me to an orientation and explained a few things, but they didn't really, they just went over things really quick and made me sign a paper and that was it," adding that the whole process took "about a half an hour."

In light of stories like these, it seems clear that the interviewed women often found

learning and understanding the prison's rules difficult. Not surprisingly, this also made life for these women considerably more stressful, considering they faced write-ups for violating prison rules. As reflected by the range of responses, inconsistencies surrounding *when* prison orientations were provided were arguably even more profound than *how*.

Given the obvious importance of understanding the rules that regulate Pine Grove, it was noteworthy that the length of time the interviewed women waited for prison orientation was highly inconsistent. Five women stated that their orientation took place upon admission or sometime during the next day, while four others were able to verify only that theirs occurred within a couple of days. More alarmingly, two women revealed that their orientation had taken place a substantial time after their intake. The first explained that her orientation took place "the week after I got in," whereas the second stated, "After a few weeks I didn't know anything. I just had to ask the girls from the unit what the system was like, and I don't know, it's so different here." Taken together, responses suggested that orientations provided to women at Pine Grove may often be inadequate, even nonexistent, for several weeks after their admission.

Since literature strongly indicates that incarceration strains relationships between those who serve time and their family, the present study was particularly interested in the interviewed women's perceived connectedness with their families and communities. Of the sixteen individuals interviewed, nine women felt that their incarceration had compromised their ability to communicate with either their family and/or community. Notably, most complaints were related to the prison's telephone service, which was perceived to be expensive for both inmates and their respective families. As one woman explained, Pine Grove's phone service was so expensive she could afford to call only one of her two children:

The phone calls are awful. You're being listened to, you don't know what to say, and you can't afford it. One call is fifteen bucks or more and I can't afford [that]. I can't even phone my son; I only phone my daughter. They put in \$25 whenever they can, but I tell them, "You don't have to do this." They need it more than I do.

The amount of money the interviewed women spent on phone services was often hard to fathom. One woman described a fellow inmate who had spent more than \$600 in one week of phoning home to family in Saskatoon. Another interviewee revealed she had spent \$700 herself in less than one month, while another had spent \$500 over three weeks phoning

home. The high cost of phoning home regularly was an issue that made relationships with family and children very challenging: “I cannot phone home when I want, and they cannot phone me.... I am very emotional and I don’t call home because my baby misses me and I feel like she is doing time too without me.”

A related complaint was the prison phone’s inconvenience, given that it was managed by an American security phone company that required inmates to preload cards with minutes using either debit or credit cards. Underlining this point, one woman summarized her complaints around Pine Grove’s phone services:

Well, you can’t buy the [calling] card; you have to put money on it through your account in here. So, your friends or family out there have to put money through a credit card or bank card to your account or your pin number through the phone and it’s really expensive. It’s way more than a normal calling card; you don’t get half as much time with it.

Ultimately, the women’s experience was exacerbated by the low wages for prison work. One woman illustrated the point:

They [Pine Grove’s phone service] made it very difficult for people who don’t have any money. They make it almost impossible to keep in touch with our families because it’s so expensive. It’s \$7 for twenty minutes and we only make a maximum of \$5 a day. A twenty-minute phone call is \$7, so we cannot even make that in a day! I think that it’s just so wrong....

Another individual echoed this concern, indicating that her inability to afford phone calls meant going without the emotional support of her family on occasion: “Well, my mom, I can call her collect sometimes if she answers, but it’s expensive. So, she doesn’t always accept it and some days I just need to talk to her, you know?” A second woman said the worst thing about the phone service was her inability to contact her family promptly:

Something very bad happened to my daughter last week and I can’t get a hold of her until I get the minutes and I don’t know how the system [works]. It’s really frustrating. I just want to know my kids are okay out there, just hear them. Stuff like that, it’s mostly the phone thing; it’s really hard on girls.

Finally, one woman complained that she was not provided with enough information about phone services upon being admitted to Pine Grove:

I was given the little card with my numbers that stays with me until I leave and then I had to ask the girls how to use this — “What do you do?” A lot of girls get frustrated.... It’s very difficult [understanding the phone system]. I didn’t think of it, but it is.

In addition to the hardships created by Pine Grove’s phone service, four of the interviewed women reported that physical distance between prison and their families compromised their perceived sense of connectedness with home. When asked if or when she had been visited by her family most recently, one woman simply replied that for her, visitation was impossible: “Well, no, they live so far away; they live in Alberta near Northwest Territories, so I have a hard time to see them. I haven’t seen them since I came here.”

In contrast, four women openly stated their preference that their families did not visit during their prison terms because they did not want their families to worry about them or remember them as inmates. One interviewee explained that this was for the well-being of her family: “I wouldn’t want my grandchildren or daughter to see me in here; or my grandchildren, I don’t tell them anything because I don’t want them to get sick. They’d get sick.” Another woman commented that she also preferred her children not to visit her at Pine Grove any longer: “I just don’t want my kids to remember coming to jail to visit me, and when they had to leave they were crying and stuff and I didn’t like it.”

One interviewee suggested that a solution would be to provide inmates with supervised computer and Internet access so they could communicate with their families in a convenient and cost-effective way. At the time of the interviews, four individuals stated that they preferred to communicate with family via written letters rather than phone calls for a variety of reasons. One woman felt that written letters were an adequate way to keep in touch with friends and family: “As long as I can write and send and receive mail, it’s all good.” In contrast, another woman commented that she wrote letters to family but that they lacked the sense of connectedness of phone calls: “Oh, yeah. Yes, definitely yes, I write but still that’s not the same.... I just really, really, really want to express it about that phone because I don’t think it’s fair to us.”

Given that the phone system was a major source of dissatisfaction amongst the present

study's sample of women at Pine Grove, it is worth noting that one woman remained satisfied with this service. For her, the phone calls were a source of emotional support that she found beneficial in coping with her time in prison:

I'm really fortunate that God has brought in some really supportive people through my prayers. A few of them I just came into contact with, and I was just on the phone with prior to coming to talk to you, with a person. So I'm kind of anxious to get back and talk with that person for some emotional support right now.

Like other incarcerated individuals documented by previous research, the present study's interviewees voiced their belief that being incarcerated at Pine Grove had compromised their mental well-being in various ways. One interviewee clearly illustrated how her well-being was damaged at numerous levels:

Mentally it affects me; it's depressive. Emotionally it's gloominess. Physically it affects my health, my aching bones I call them, my hip, my fingers, they're sore. I don't take medication for it; they won't give me medication anyways. I just ask for Ibuprofen and Tylenol every night; it doesn't really help but it's better than it being full blown.

Another woman described the emotional pain she endured at Pine Grove, despite the availability of counselling services:

There's counsellors but it doesn't help me. It's not to the core. I'm devastated, I'm hurt; 2011 was not the year for me. That year I lost a parent, an uncle, nephews, a sister ... then after that, my grandson and then they have nothing for that here.

Responses of three interviewed women demonstrated that their prison experiences at Pine Grove culminated in feelings of hopelessness and apathy. When asked if incarceration affected her mental well-being, one of these women responded, "I don't know, I feel like I'll never go home. Like, I think that way and then I just pray. Pray or phone home and tell them that I'm still OK." While women expressed how Pine Grove affected them *during* their incarceration, it is also notable that one woman expressed her belief that prison had made her emotionally callous and therefore less likely to succeed once released back into her community:

I think it made me feel like I'm becoming a meaner person. I feel like when I get out of here I'm not even going to care about my children and stuff like that. It makes me feel mean because you have to watch your back, and I'm not a mean person, but being here I have to try to protect myself because you never know what's going to happen.

It was encouraging to observe that seven of the sixteen interviewees felt that their cultural and spiritual needs were met by activities such as bible studies, chapel service, and smudging. However, two women complained that Pine Grove provided limited smudging. One would have liked smudging in the morning:

They have the smudging, the sage, you can do that at night before bed but not in the mornings.... Yeah, it cleanses you. It cleanses your soul, your spirit inside. It makes you feel more comfortable and relaxed with yourself and the people around you.

Another woman echoed this view that morning smudging would be beneficial to women wanting to purify themselves for the day ahead:

I would like to see the smudging, the cultural stuff, morning times to smudge because when we wake up we want to be cleansed and purified for the morning, when we want our day to go good for us. You know, go say a prayer for your day and then at night before we go to bed? That's one thing I would like to see.

One woman also reported that the Elder support at Pine Grove was inadequate: "You can talk to the Elders here, but you just got to wait until she has time and comes and finds you. You have to put a request in." Another interviewee expressed similar concerns, adding that she was not sure if Pine Grove had a qualified Elder:

We go to church because we have a hard time seeing our Elders; we don't have an Elder. Do we have an Elder? And people don't look at our Elder as an Elder because she's young, you know what I mean?... In our Aboriginal ways, when you're over fifty you're an Elder. So, I'm an Elder already. So they'll come and see me, but they won't come see her. But that's how it works. Even me, I won't go to a woman younger than me for an answer to what I want to know. I'll just look up to an Elder, older than me; that's how it is in our Native ways.

One interviewee noted the absence of alternative religious services for individuals with faiths other than Evangelical Christianity as something that she would like to see addressed. This woman commented that inmates often held faiths and beliefs that were not equally acknowledged by Pine Grove's religious services:

I think there should be offered a variety of church people. All of us are not all Christians. Some are different, you know? They want to go to church but the way we believe, they [Evangelicals] don't believe the same but they're there anyway. So, there should be more people coming in for different religions.

Despite the numerous hardships noted by the women interviewed for the present study, four individuals stressed that their time in prison also proved to be positive as it provided a safe environment where they could address personal problems and/or substance abuse issues. One woman suggested that her time at Pine Grove might help her combat her addictions upon release:

Well, being here really gives me restraints on my addictions. But that's all it is and then I'll be out; when I get out there, they'll still be there. But this way, I abstain, and I want to stay abstained from it. I'm not too sure on that part.

Comments such as these underline the potential benefit of post-release substance abuse programming to build upon the restraints the women in Pine Grove already found beneficial. Demonstrating the benefit that long-term substance-abuse supports could have for inmates, one interviewee explained:

[Prison] ... saved my life because, if I'm still out there, I would have overdosed from cocaine. I was getting that bad, so that's a positive side. It's given me a clean safe place to be with food and all things I need.

Another woman confirmed that Pine Grove was a positive environment where she could effectively address her addictions while forming quality relationships: "[Prison] ... keeps me away from my addiction. It helps me to deal with my inner self. And I meet good people."

Women also commented that the social bonds they formed with other inmates were the most beneficial product of their incarceration. When asked if prison was difficult for her, one woman explained, "I can make friends and a lot of the time the guards are friendly. I don't mind being here; I just feel lonesome missing my family and being away from home."

Whereas the majority of the interviewees felt that prison staff was generally respectful and “just doing their job,” two women expressed concern over certain guards whom they deemed especially disrespectful. One felt that guards went out of their way to make prison time harder than it needed to be:

I think the way the guards try to get on your back all the time when you're not even doing anything wrong, they just try to piss you off and, like, say you're having fun and laughing and everything and talking, they come and stand there and listen to your convos, you know? They purposely tell us we're being too loud when we're not. ... It's difficult because, for me, I'm a person who likes to make people laugh and it doesn't help to pass time because what else can I do in here?

Another woman shared a narrative describing how her time at Pine Grove rekindled painful memories of suffering in residential schools:

I was just getting up; I was feeling good about myself. I was having a good day because that morning they asked me if I could wash the kitchen walls because we had all of the tables moved because of that smell. We moved into the day room to eat and stuff, but that morning, the staff Sherry asked me nicely to pay me five bucks just to wash the walls and sweep, so I did that and I felt good about it because I went to the boss there and I said, “Oh, how is this now? I washed the walls, I did it all that you guys asked,” and she says, “Oh, that's good enough. Yeah, you did lots, thank you,” and I felt good. I was feeling good about what I did, and then the shift change is going on and another staff came on shift and now she says to me, and that wasn't a joke because she would have laughed and giggled about it if it was a joke, but she didn't. She just said, “Oh, you're always stinking up this place,” or like that. And honestly, she just put my self-esteem right down. Like I was feeling really, really good that day and then the way I went after, the way I felt, my anger in me built up and built up and I just had to go walk it off. I was just saying prayers in my head to help me cope, to help me take the anger out of me because I just wanted to just lash out at this woman, but I stayed calm and I just went for a walk and talked to one of my friends.

The same woman felt this treatment was humiliating and unnecessary, given the traumatic life experiences of many incarcerated women:



We're dealing with enough, the hurt from our past. People called us that [stinky] when we were kids, when we were growing up, even in residential school. I've been through all of that, and that [the guard's insult] just brought me back down to that because I used to be called a lot of names and be put down.

Yet another woman recalled, "That's where my pain comes from. I was in residential school and being here I get that flashback."

### **Prison Programming**

The women interviewed in this study were generally aware of, and had taken, programming such as Parental Effectiveness Training (n=6); Addictions Education (n=3); Relationship Skills (n=2); Holistics (n=1); "Thinking for a Change" (n=1); Employment Essentials (n=4); "Criminal Thinking" to address cognitions and behaviour (n=1); Counseling (n=1); Bible Studies (n=1); Chapel Service (n=1); Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous (n=2); and Aerobics (n=1).

In terms of the benefits of the above programs, six of the sixteen interviewed women commented that Parenting Effectiveness Training (PET) was particularly beneficial, given that it improved their ability to effectively communicate with, and thus parent, their children once they were released from Pine Grove. One of these woman emphasized that PET improved her awareness of more effective parenting strategies that benefit the relationship between parents and their children: "The other one [PET] is about living with children, learning how to talk to them instead of being aggressive and helping them understand themselves and them understand you." Another interviewee echoed this view: "Oh my, I think it is going to help a lot for communication with my children and stuff like that."

One woman felt the Relationship Skills program would be beneficial in helping her to maximize the health of her future relationships:

They teach you about how to be more open with your partner and let him know if something is bothering you, to share with one another and to respect one another's boundaries and space. Stuff like that, in order to have a healthy relationship.... I want to be open with my partner; I want to be able to express how I feel because in my previous relationships, with my kid's dad, for example, I couldn't be open. I couldn't say nothing. If I did, I would get a hit because he'd

go right against it right away. He wouldn't even give me the time of day to listen to me because he didn't want to.

Unfortunately, this narrative confirms previous research: incarcerated women are far too often the victims of physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse. In summary, the present study suggests that prison-based programs that provide women with strategies to pursue healthy relationships are potentially beneficial in identifying the family and peer supports the women require to overcome substance abuse, victimization, and reoffending.

Five interviewees stated that substance-abuse programs were beneficial, informing them of the health risks involved with substance abuse and helping them acknowledge the negative impact it was having on their loved ones. One woman commented on how this program helped her improve the way she coped with stress in her life:

They give you a coping strategy.... You have to be realistic and be specific to your own recovery plan. That's what they do. They work with you to build your own recovery plan and your relapse prevention plan. They get you numbers and names of people that support you back in your community, wherever it would be. They go over above and beyond to get you that stuff. It's awesome.

These improved coping strategies also helped women acquire a clearer perspective of their addictions:

Yeah, I'm beginning to understand how I fall to alcohol and what it does to people. Plus, I learned that so many people are dying because of alcohol. It [substance-abuse programming] taught us about alcohol and what it does to your brain and body and that if you're pregnant, what it does to your baby.

Another woman stated that substance-abuse programming at Pine Grove helped her acknowledge that overcoming substance abuse was an important step towards a successful transition back into her community:

It got me more in touch with myself and opened me up and then it acknowledged substance abuse [program] for instance was a good one. It kind of opened my mind up more about stuff like boundaries, just taught me some stuff I didn't know and how to deal with it and how to keep busy without using and stuff like that.

Still, one woman compared programming inside to that outside: “In here you can’t talk!... Nothing stays there; it goes out, but you have to go because your case manager says you have to go.” This woman felt life skills and self-esteem were more important because they “would help because it kind of looks inside a person’s feelings.... They’ll know themselves;... They’ll know ‘This is who I am.’”

The interviewees gave little priority to resuming their education during their time at Pine Grove, with only three of the sixteen expressing ambition to further their schooling in the near future. However, numerous women did express interest in learning non-school skills related to First Nations culture and ancestral languages as well as life skills and self-esteem, anger management training, Women’s Community Training Residence (W-CTR), massage therapy training, and real estate training. As one woman commented, women at Pine Grove also wanted self-esteem programs, including non-traditional healing: “There’s no self-esteem programs out there, programs that are willing to help the person heal themselves, like holistically.” Encouragingly, only one individual stated that she had no interest in any future programming at all.

Despite the fact that many women found Pine Grove’s programming beneficial, others complained that a variety of obstacles limited their ability to attend. For some, sentences were not long enough for them to be eligible for the programming because waiting lists were long and their sentences were brief. Unfortunately, according to at least one woman, ineligibility meant that women often missed opportunities that could have benefitted them in important ways during their sentence and upon release:

Yeah, I wanted to go for treatment for my alcohol and I can’t. These three weeks I could be doing in a treatment centre and learning so much about it more, and when I get out that will help me not to do it. But, when I’m here, it’s just building up. I want to do it when I get out ... but short-timers, they cannot apply. There is only certain days and months they have these courses.

Another woman made the following complaint over the lack of programming availability for inmates on short-term sentencing:

Yeah, it’s just that it [emotional training] is only offered at certain times and it’s not when I’m here. Like when I leave, then they offer it, so I can’t participate. I would like to but I can’t because I won’t be here. During my stay I would have

liked to, so maybe if they had two different times instead of just one, that would help lots.

Obstacles that limited the women's ability to attend programming also included overlapping program dates that, according to three interviewees, caused inmates to miss valuable opportunities, including certificate training. As one woman explained, "They're offering tickets, and some girls are taking that. I wanted to get into that but I'm already in a program so I couldn't get into that one right now."

Further underlining their beliefs that programs were too difficult to get into, three women voiced discontent over the fact that they believed it was necessary to obtain a case worker's recommendation to get into programming:

And why I got into my second program was because my case worker faxed a letter saying she thought it was good. That was the only reason I got in, because if she never faxed that letter in, I would have never got in because they already made the list up.

A second woman echoed the need for a recommendation: "Yeah, you cannot go unless your case manager recommends you for it. So it's really up to them.... I don't know what the process is."

Another woman's story demonstrated that she simply did not know enough about the availability of programs to make a decision to attend. When asked if she had taken any programming, she responded:

No, you know what I thought? I thought they only gave the ones that were doing a lot of time like years, two years or under two years, you know? I thought they only gave the big timers, like the ones doing the most time here, that they give them that [programming eligibility]. But then, no, I didn't know you could apply for it; I didn't know that; but now it's too late for me because I'm getting out now and it's not going to apply to me right now.

Interviewees commonly complained about the length of waiting lists for programming. As one woman explained, she was unable to begin schooling upon her admission to Pine Grove:

No. When I came here, it was already running. Can't take anything anytime. It's difficult. [I] just can't do anything, just difficult in here going to school. [I] feel just helpless because you have to wait for dates to happen and you might not get accepted in it. It's just frustrating.

Although women at Pine Grove had opportunities to work daily jobs, many stressed that the shortcomings of these jobs affected their willingness to participate. Nine women, in fact, stated that the poor wages they earned in exchange for doing prison work were especially demotivating. One woman illustrated how low wages were insufficient to cover the costs incurred during her sentence: "Because we're working even way below minimum wage in here, you know, and we have to get paid once a month in order to purchase canteen. Canteen, too, is expensive." Moreover, many women did not feel prison work (i.e., cleaning, cooking) would benefit them or better prepare them for release. One interviewee sarcastically joked, "No. Not sweeping and mopping, no. Getting paid \$3 here (laughs)."

In terms of skills these women felt would help them to gain and maintain employment, five expressed their desire to obtain cooking and cleaning certificates in order to gain employment in entry-level positions after leaving Pine Grove. Unfortunately, these were not available at Pine Grove at the time of the interviews. As one of these women suggested, "They should have cooking certificates in here; when you're cooking and cleaning a while, you should get a training certificate. Like how you can apply for cooking stuff through SIAST and Woodland campuses and stuff like that." A second woman suggested a basic housekeeping and sanitization certificate program would benefit women both during and after their sentence:

Because in a lot of the units, the girls that are sick, they should offer some sort of a cleaning programme or [teach] how to disinfect ... to properly train maybe chosen girls from each unit to know how to sanitize and do laundry like bedding, blankets, and that, instead of throwing everything in Javex. I think that would benefit people. That way if girls wanted to get out and do housekeeping or janitorial work, that skill would come in handy.

Another woman believed similarly that knowledge of how to use cleaning products safely would be helpful in finding future employment: "I guess for work, sweeping and handling products such as bleach, Pine Sol, or CLR. If you're doing daycare or house sitting they would want those things to be an asset."

Three other women believed that they needed GED training in order to find employment upon their release. Specifically, one of these women responded that GED training would improve the odds of her success outside prison walls:

Mostly just the going to school part, that would really help. Going to school, knowing what you wanted to do. At least at that point, you'll know. But we don't know; we are just shoved into it [the community]. It would help if you knew beforehand what you want to do even, because a lot of girls just take it [release] and they get out, and they just throw it away. I don't want to do that. There are so many people that come back saying that.

In addition to these suggestions, two women also expressed their interest in First Aid and CPR training to improve their odds of finding employment upon leaving Pine Grove. One woman commented:

If they offer food safety ticket handling. Yeah, food safety handling, CPR, First Aid, WHMIS. Those things will help you get a job, I think, when we get out.... I really like waitressing because I'm a very friendly person, so I like that too because I can get a lot of tips.

The women demonstrated interest in a broad range of programs. One interviewee anticipated the need to operate a vehicle once released from prison: "I would like to drive a car, get a learner's [license] while I am here. A driver's license or training to enter the mines or housekeeping or cooking courses, maybe. Something like that." Another woman believed that basic health and life-skills programming would be beneficial for the vast majority of inmates at Pine Grove:

Nutrition programs. Proper nutrition and health programs, how to take care of yourself. Basic nutrition, health, more physical activity programs like yoga. They need more physical activity, they need more machines here, they need cardio. A lot of these women leave here and they're a hundred pounds overweight because of the food in here. Then they get out, they wonder why they're so depressed, and they start putting needles in their arms and then end up back in here. It's a revolving door; people come in here twenty times. In and out, in and out.

In summary, the interviewed women at Pine Grove seem well informed about the

challenges they face upon rejoining their communities and the assistance they need to be successful. Unfortunately, the present study's interviews also indicate that the assistance needed by these women is often inaccessible to them for a variety of reasons. Their comments about the obstacles they experience reveal that inmates perceive current correctional mandates as more a matter of punishment than rehabilitation. There is an identified need to reshape prison-based programming. The social economy and co-operatives have already proven their value in helping marginalized individuals (including inmates and people with disabilities) in Europe obtain work skills and experience. Investigations of prison co-operatives in Europe, for example, demonstrate their ability to empower marginalized members of society and drastically reduce their rates of recidivism.

### **A Prison Co-operative: Probing the Potential**

After being provided with a detailed description of the central principles and potential benefits of co-operatives, thirteen of the sixteen interviewed women expressed interest in the idea of a prison-based co-operative at Pine Grove. Even more importantly, these women perceived the co-operative as being potentially beneficial both during their sentence and upon their release.

The women's responses also illustrated that many of them appreciated the fact that the priorities of co-operatives focussed on their members' interests and well-being rather than strictly on profit. Asked how she felt about the possibility of a co-operative at Pine Grove, for example, one woman responded, "I would like that. Like instead of one big boss has the final word, everybody does. Well that's good. I like the co-operatives; they co-operate with everybody and that's interesting." Another woman commented on a co-operative's potential benefits in these terms:

So they all [the members] work together, you know? That's the way everything should be. They work together on something, and that way everybody is happy with the decision and everybody is involved with it and no one is left out and no one is mad about it and there's no fights.

It became apparent that the empowering notion of being part of an autonomous decision-making process and legitimate business entity was very attractive for many of these women. One of the interviewees, for example, expressed interest in the fact that a co-op-

erative would allow her concerns to be acknowledged and supported by others who shared the same goals: “Well, everybody gets a say as a group and not just one person gets to bully everybody around. My voice, *what I choose*, is heard, and it matters, and there are people backing that up.”

The importance of empowerment was also apparent in the narrative of another: “Yeah, because we want to know what’s in the future for us and what, how do I put it, and what we have to do to make it happen.” These comments taken together, it seems that a prison co-operative would be well received by the vast majority of the women at Pine Grove, if for no other reason than that it would provide a means of voicing their opinions and empowering them in a society where they find themselves otherwise voiceless. Summing up this position, one woman seemed to feel that co-operatives would help the women at Pine Grove take back their voice and sense of dignity: “Yes, I think so. I think it’ll help us to have our voice heard, and a little bit of power back, so to speak.”

Another benefit the women cited was that a co-operative would allow them to establish quality relationships with members of similar backgrounds and life experience, thus developing a sense of belonging and togetherness to be shared amongst these marginalized women. One woman believed the co-operative would be beneficial simply “because the girls would be doing something together.” Another woman echoed this idea: “Yeah, all of us together, sharing the common bond which happens to be jail. But, a common bond between us and just having been able to voice more.”

In light of these narratives, it seems that the co-operative principle of putting the well-being of its members before profits was equally important. One interviewee, for example, explained why she would be interested in a co-operative:

I would because it’s good to hear everybody’s input instead of being not heard, because not being heard is like being someone in a choir and they want to talk but they don’t. It’s good, it’s better, to be heard because then they’ll work on how to make things better. Not for like just coming here and it being the best place, but it will help you to help yourself instead of always coming back and getting in trouble and doing wrong.

In general, the interviewed women believed that having a co-operative available to them at Pine Grove would provide a constructive way for them to pass their time during



incarceration and an opportunity to develop a set of skills that could be used to succeed upon their release. Demonstrating the importance of keeping busy while incarcerated, one woman admitted, “I’m interested in anything that keeps me busy, so that [the co-operative] would make the time fly.” Another woman added that a co-operative at Pine Grove would benefit women even after their release:

Yeah, it will help me do something, like not get bored and start looking for booze instead of work. I want a job. If I had a job, I’d stop drinking because most of the time I did seasonal jobs back home at the resorts and I don’t drink when I do those.

Another reason the women felt a co-operative could benefit them during their incarceration was related to the abundance of unused skills and talents women at Pine Grove possessed. After being informed of the central principles of a co-operative, one woman concluded:

OK, I think that would be good. I really think that would be good because, believe it or not, a lot of women are gifted with a lot of gifts and they make the choice not to express it when they’re out there. Who knows, maybe it’s drugs or alcohol or money issues or finance. But when they’re in here [Pine Grove] they have the time to do it, so that’s how they express themselves through their gifts or something they are really good at. I think that would help. I think that would be a great thing.

Two other women added that a co-operative would also allow inmates to determine themselves what is best for inmates as a whole. As one woman put it, one benefit a co-operative could have is to enable inmates to identify what is in their best interests:

See what’s better for the people here. That would probably be the first thing because it takes a group of people to talk about, for instance, in the jail here, it will take a lot of people to decide what is good for the jail. If I was sitting in one of them [a co-operative], I would want to know what they [the inmates] need.

Given the adverse circumstances that await many incarcerated women upon release, it was notable that one woman explicitly stated that a co-operative would ease specific hardships related to obtaining quality and affordable housing:

For job opportunities, that will help and for low income and housing I would like that for when I get home. As I know, a lot of women are struggling to find housing out there when they get out, and that's what I think a big deal for the women is in here. Some of them are scared to leave here now because they don't have a place to live when they get out. You know and that's pitiful, you know; everyone should have a home. Everyone should have somewhere to call home. No one should be left out in the cold and on the street. That's not too good, so I would like that for the women in here for them to have some place to go and they could be secure.

Another woman commented that the proposed idea of a co-operative would give inmates a chance to build necessary work and social skills to support their transition from prison back into the community:

It would give me potential skills for jobs outside [Pine Grove] and also give me training on how to deal with other people in different ways than here, "F this and F that," you know? Be a social person, better behaviour and stuff.

With social skills and work experiences in mind, these women clearly believed that a co-operative would boost their chances of success outside of prison walls by providing them with the skills and continuous support they required to maintain their independence and overall well-being. One interviewee explained that she felt a prison-based co-operative would ultimately benefit her family as a whole:

Because I want to be able to support my children and I want to support myself. I don't like being on welfare.... A lot of women here [at Pine Grove] don't have jobs and want to become better in their life and quit the bad habits that they have like alcohol and stuff.

In light of the responses from the majority of these women, it seems apparent that a co-operative would also be beneficial to individuals serving short sentences, including those on remand in provincial correctional facilities. Specifically, these interviewed women seemed eager to get their lives back on track and leave their criminal identity behind. Illustrating this attitude, one woman felt that a co-operative would have immediate and long-lasting benefits during her search for a better life:

I've said earlier that I'd like to see more available jobs with all the little experiences we have, you know? We don't have very much education. We don't have very much of something that's missing out in the work field. We don't have all the requirements, so I'd like to see something to help us get all that. Get something going for us when we get out there. Have a program happening for inmates who have been just released to go there to get some advice and get some help to get a job instead of living on the streets and going back to their old ways. They can go to that place and feel comfortable, finding work and help that they need, and housing and homes.

Another felt that a co-operative would tell women "there's people out there to help you."

Reassuringly, only two of the sixteen interviewed women had no interest in the idea of a co-operative at Pine Grove, feeling they would not be in Pine Grove long enough to benefit.

Although they were not typically members, women were aware of current examples of co-operatives (i.e., credit unions, co-op grocery stores). In contrast, one woman affirmed that she had previously belonged to a co-operative while growing up in the Philippines. She described it as a farmers' co-operative that pooled money to purchase pesticides in bulk to minimize cost:

It's just a farmers' co-operative. They just put their money together and buy pesticides for their fields. So I'm in there just because we have land, a little bit. So my family is part of it and I know a little bit [about co-operatives] because of that.

When asked what type of co-operative work they believed would be successful at Pine Grove, nine women responded that First Nations fashion and beadwork were skills that inmates already possessed and enjoyed. One interviewee suggested that a prison-based beadwork co-operative would be both tangible and educational for its members:

Beading is a big thing here. That's probably the number one thing that girls do here for money. Also, there is a lot of sewing and beading. Making them and learning how to have a small business and learning skills to advertise it and to come up with people to buy it almost like a little ordering. You have to fill orders. You'll learn how to do all those skills.

These comments reflected a perception that a co-operative would provide an opportunity to learn valuable work skills such as small businesses management, advertising, and sales skills. Moreover, the same interviewee who suggested a beadwork co-operative also indicated that she would be suited to serve the co-operative as a spokeswoman:

I think of myself as more a leader than a follower, so I could do speaking for a product that maybe we make and maybe being at the end of promoting them, so to speak.... I think I have people skills. I think I can most of the time voice things very well if I'm more informed.

Another interviewee with previous fashion and beading expertise felt she could also be an asset to a prison-based beading co-operative:

Well, I could probably make the patterns and then put them together and then make the designs for what's going to go on it. Yeah, just figure out what fashion should be out there. I think I have a lot of skill of making stuff because I do have a sewing machine at home that I use and I make hoodies and stuff, so that part I would know how to do and the beading part. I'm actually working on my own line but it hasn't come really yet because it's at home and I'm in here.

Another woman who was also expert in beading added that she had already taught beading designs to several other women in Pine Grove during her incarceration:

I'm teaching some girls. I've taught five girls in four months but they come to me; I don't go to them. They want to see how I do that and then I show them what I do and they make their own. Another woman was doing something and I wanted to know that one [bead design], so she taught me and now I know that one and I can show others.

The expertise of First Nations women in Pine Grove makes them ideal candidates to produce traditional First Nations designs and fashions, which are currently in demand. As illustrated by the narrative of one First Nations interviewee, many women at Pine Grove are blessed with hidden gifts and talents:

Beading. Arts and crafts or else even blankets like star blankets. A lot of Native people like to do Native work like that, star blankets, Native beading, a lot of

making lighter cases and I'd like to see more of that stuff. A lot of beading and artwork, a lot of stuff like that.

This woman went on to express her interest in the capacity of a co-operative to provide members with empowerment and employment opportunities:

Helping organize it, helping to make it a better place and make it easier to get employment and to have a choice, to help them make a choice. That would let us have a choice in what we want to do. Give us that choice, for what we want to do with our lives and with our work. Like bead, whatever the women know what to do, give them that opportunity to let them go do that and direct them to what you want them to do. Give them something they want to do, that's what I'd like to see, I'd let them have their choice.

## CONCLUSION

THROUGH SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS, the present study has explored women's experience of confinement and, in some cases, remand in Pine Grove Correctional Centre (PGCC). It has identified unique obstacles and opportunities that incarcerated women encounter both throughout their sentence and upon release into the community. These interviews also revealed that the majority of provincially incarcerated women at PGCC believed that a prison-based co-operative would maximize personal and social gains during both their incarceration and reintegration into the community. In addition to worrying reports of an overburdened justice system across Canada, the present study's findings highlight the important role prison-based co-operatives could play in more effectively rehabilitating criminalized women and reducing recidivism.

While media and public stereotypes associate crime with irrational or otherwise misguided souls, women such as those interviewed at PGCC demonstrate that criminality is more often the by-product of adverse life experiences, trauma, grief, and impoverished living environments that remain largely unaddressed by current correctional policies. Making matters worse, these same women relied on ineffective coping strategies, including substance abuse and criminality to escape the painful realities of their lives in the absence of strong,

supportive bonds with family and peers. Taken together, the present study's interviews confirm that individuals who come from impoverished environments are disproportionately overrepresented amongst those who offend and reoffend. Findings corroborate previous evidence that suggests that individuals' education and work-related skills generally deteriorate as a result of incarceration, exacerbating their difficulties and adding new social stigma as criminals.

Before their incarceration, 69 percent of the interviewees relied on government assistance for income assistance, family services, substance-abuse treatment, or disability assistance, suggesting problems in the face of overwhelming life stressors. Specifically, the majority of interviewed women were incarcerated as a result of ineffective coping mechanisms such as substance abuse and criminality. Taken together, responses emphasize that criminalized women face a number of obstacles before, during, and after their incarceration that are not being addressed and that often differ markedly from obstacles faced by criminalized men. For instance, gender and race inequalities today are known to intensify marginalization and vast overrepresentation in correctional facilities across Canada for Aboriginal people.

Moreover, findings indicated that educational programming at PGCC was perceived as inadequate because individuals with short sentences were usually ineligible for programs, or programs were made inaccessible by long and frequently overlapping waiting lists. Likewise, the expressed life experiences and stressors that culminated in these women's incarceration were also often unaddressed by the available programming at PGCC.

More than half of the interviewed women felt that their connectedness to their families and communities had been compromised by their incarceration, despite telephone and postal services being available at PGCC. The reality is that phone service costs were unreasonable for most inmates at PGCC and that the emotional and mental well-being of these women often suffered as result. Making matters worse, many of the interviewees' families resided in communities some distance from PGCC, meaning that visitation was a legitimate financial burden for most. Under these financial circumstances, many women at PGCC are unable to afford regular phone services or visitations, thus leaving inmates isolated and hopelessly tormented by their inability to connect with family members they often feel they have let down. One tangible recommendation made in the present study was to allow supervised Internet access to inmates to satisfy the need for cost-effective, real-time communication with families. Overall, the theme of connectedness was important, given that women at PGCC were almost always short-term inmates who would soon return to their families and

communities, meaning important supportive bonds with families were often compromised and potentially even unavailable upon their release.

Collateral damage to family relationships has been linked to long-lasting negative effects on children's emotional and social developmental outcomes, reiterating the importance of allowing communication between inmates and their families and fostering relationship building and a sense of belonging. Accordingly, this study's findings emphasize that correctional policies should better address the issues that bring women into the system and ensure that the relationship between inmates and their families is maintained. Demonstrating the effects of compromised relationships, one interviewee commented that prison had made her feel "like I'm not even going to care about my children."

Issues surrounding health services and the health risks at Pine Grove were especially frequent and reflected a general sense of anxiety. Specifically, interviewed women felt that the response time for health care was far too long, while others felt as if their current health issues (e.g., diabetes, arthritis) had worsened as a result of reduced exercise, poor food, and inadequate medical attention. The overcrowded environment further intensified interviewees' anxiety about contacting infectious diseases — including HIV/AIDS, MRSA, and Hepatitis — from women with whom they were required to share their cell units. Unfortunately, along with unhealthy noise levels, these concerns caused many women to describe their prison experiences as physically, mentally, and emotionally adverse to their well-being. At least one woman claimed that these living conditions had resulted in her becoming infected with MRSA during her time at PGCC, providing just one example of how women often felt their sentences were more punitive than rehabilitative in nature.

The present study also revealed food service issues at PGCC, in particular the inconsistent food rations between cell units and the quality of the food provided. In terms of food ration inconsistencies, many women responded that there was simply not enough food to leave them feeling satisfied. In contrast, other units explained that they were fed too much and that this was something they felt was unhealthy given their lack of exercise time. Perhaps most alarmingly, one woman with diabetes responded that PGCC did not provide a special diet for her, which led her to believe her health had been compromised.

Of particular concern to women at PGCC was the absence of cultural and spiritual programs, including morning smudging and adequate Elder support. As a result, many First Nations women felt that they had less cultural and spiritual access than they were accus-

tomed to. Smudging and Elder guidance are important aspects of holistic healing within First Nations individuals' worldview. Without these services, First Nations people feel as if their recovery is not "to the core" until their cultural and spiritual recoveries are also complete. Although Evangelical and chapel services were provided for women at PGCC, the fact that alternative faiths were not accommodated was a major concern, given the known diversity of cultural, spiritual, and religious needs of residents in both Saskatchewan and Canada as a whole.

Although many aspects of their prison environment were deficient, the women generally indicated that they felt PGCC did its best as an institution to accommodate their needs. A small group of women, however, believed that guards intentionally made their time at PGCC more miserable than was necessary. As noted in this report's findings section, one woman provided an alarming example of the humiliating experience of being accused by a guard of "always stinking up the place," which led her to relive painful experiences she had endured in residential school, where she received similar treatment and insults. Although name-calling may seem insignificant in the context of prison, situations such as these reflect the type of abuse women face and the negative effect on their efforts to rehabilitate themselves.

Women were generally interested in participating in programming to pass time, although these programs often had long waiting lists and conflicting start dates, which made a large number of women ineligible for programs that could be beneficial to their rehabilitation. Those which women found particularly beneficial were Parental Effectiveness Training, Relationship Skills, and Substance Abuse. It was clear that these were the same issues that landed many of these women in prison. Evidence indicates that addressing these issues is paramount in successfully reintegrating criminalized women into society and reducing recidivism. After their release back into the community, women must also utilize and maintain skills, underlining the importance of continual support for recently released individuals, who often struggle to find basics such as employment and quality housing.

Against this background, many of the women felt that a co-operative, which would provide an opportunity to work together on something that put well-being before profits and which would include everybody in the decision making, might offer a valuable means to help them succeed outside of prison. A prison-based co-operative could provide support for women during their sentence and throughout their reintegration process, and would offer an ideal alternative to the current failures in an increasingly overburdened Canadian Criminal Justice System. Despite the negative aspects of incarceration, many women admitted that



their time at PGCC was a positive opportunity to address problems and obstacles in their lives. Equally important, women also found comfort and support within the bonds they formed with other inmates, to whose life experiences they could easily relate. Building on this strength of PGCC's prison environment, a prison-based co-operative would complement both of these processes as it includes opportunities for women to overcome their issues alongside other members with similar life experiences and goals. And the women came to recognize the range of talents and gifts they actually had and could contribute to a co-operative. The possibilities of voice and choice and a measure of self-determination, self-worth, and support were especially attractive to the women.

The conclusions drawn from the present study are comparable to those made by similar studies of prison-based co-operatives in Europe: incarcerated individuals are more likely to succeed upon their release when they feel empowered by their capabilities and supported by quality social bonds and effective coping strategies. The benefits of co-operatives reside not only in the work-related skills and income they provide but also in the way such co-operative business entities in prison offer both an empowering sense of self-efficacy that lifts self-esteem and the opportunity to form strong social bonds with other co-op members.

In contrast to the benefits of co-operatives, prison jobs currently available at Pine Grove Correctional Centre consisted mainly of cleaning and some cooking positions, which interviewees believed paid poorly and provided few beneficial work skills they could use upon release. Reiterating the potential of co-operatives, such evidence indicates that simple prison-based business entities could provide a myriad of benefits not afforded by current correctional policies and strategies.

Given the potential demonstrated by previous research pertaining to prison-based co-operatives, it was encouraging to learn that an overwhelming number of interviewees were interested in becoming members of a co-operative at PGCC. Although only one woman had previously been a member of a farming co-operative in the Philippines, almost all of the women were clearly attracted by the co-operative's capacity to provide them with a platform to have their voices heard and to empower them as members of a legitimate business entity. Equally important was the co-operative's potential ability to bring women with similar life experiences together in an effort to form healthy, supportive bonds during incarceration and even after release. Given the social and economic marginalization these women typically encounter upon their release from prison, co-operatives and the social economy represent an untapped alternative to the ineffective and costly strategies currently in place.

In addition to the benefits outlined above, interviewees also found attractive the work ethic and skills they could develop in a prison-based co-operative, as most agreed they had few skills and little experience to rely upon after their release. Although not explicitly mentioned, women seemed attracted to the idea of shedding their identity and developing a new, more positive identity as a responsible employee and well-rounded human being.

In terms of what women believed would be suitable products for the proposed co-operatives, interviewees revealed expertise in skills that were both marketable and in-touch with important spiritual and cultural worldviews of Canada's First Nations. First Nations beading and fashion designs, for example, are not only profitable merchandise but also important sources of pride and self-efficacy amongst First Nations individuals. Building on the strengths and interests of women at PGCC, co-operatives have the potential to better serve the rehabilitative needs of provincially incarcerated individuals, providing them with the opportunity to improve themselves during their confinement rather than merely seeing out their time and returning to the community no better off. Moreover, the financial gains made by members of co-operatives would also provide valuable positive reinforcement for demonstrated dedication to healthy, productive lifestyles.

In contrast to the abysmal results of the current correctional system, prison-based co-operatives have already proven effective in empowering marginalized populations, including the incarcerated across Europe. Moreover, we all have an interest in individuals serving short-term sentences in provincial facilities being effectively prepared for reintegration and rehabilitation in order to ensure that they never return to prison. In light of increasingly overcrowded correctional facilities in Canada, evidence-based alternatives, including co-operatives, offer a holistic range of benefits to the individual and to reduced recidivism.

## APPENDIX A

### **Invitation Letter**

Name Removed

I am a researcher from the University of Saskatchewan and want to invite you to take part in a study called “Through the Eyes of Women: What a Co-operative Can Mean in Supporting Women during Confinement and Integration.” I am being supervised in this research by Dr. Isobel Findlay, Associate Professor, Department of Management and Marketing, Edwards School of Business, University of Saskatchewan.

This study involves interviewing women at Pine Grove Correctional Centre (PGCC) and Women’s Community Training Residence (WCTR) and giving you and them an opportunity to voice your opinions. During the interview you will be asked to share your feelings about confinement, your needs and hopes, and how working in social economy enterprise (a co-operative or non-profit social enterprise) might help you and others develop skills and knowledge that can help you in your return to community.

The purpose of the research is to explore how you, and other women feel about the skills and knowledge gained while in confinement at PGCC, what you and other women know about social economy enterprises, and whether you see these as an opportunity during or after confinement. Another goal of the research is to help institutions, organizations, and individuals to support women during confinement and upon release. A better understanding of women’s views and needs may impact programs and policies, but the researcher cannot guarantee those results.

I would like to interview a number of women in PGCC and WCTR, including yourself, to hear about your experience of confinement and your opinions about opportunities in the social economy. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You are free to say “no” and to stop participating at any point without penalty. All of the comments that you provide will be confidential. The interview will last about 30 to 90 minutes.

Would you like to take part in this study?

YES

NO

If you would like to participate, please read the attached consent form very carefully. If you agree to participate after reading and understanding the description, please print your name and sign your name on the form. Please feel free to ask any questions you might have. Please return this letter along with the consent form in the envelope whether you decide to participate or not to ensure the front-line staff will not know whether you are participating or not. I will contact you to set up a time for the interview if you agree to participate.

Sarah Takahashi, Student Intern  
Community-University Institute for Social Research

## APPENDIX B

### **Participant Consent Form**

You are invited to take part in a study entitled “Through the Eyes of Women: What a Co-operative Can Mean in Supporting Women during Confinement and Integration.” Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

My name is Sarah Takahashi, and I am a student intern with the Community University Institute for Social Research (CUISR). CUISR may be contacted at (306) 966–2136. They will accept collect calls, if you are calling from out of town. This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Isobel Findlay, Associate Professor, Department of Management and Marketing, Edwards School of Business, Dr. Findlay may be contacted at 966–2385, or by email at [findlay@edwards.usask.ca](mailto:findlay@edwards.usask.ca). I may be contacted by email at [sarah.takahashi@usask.ca](mailto:sarah.takahashi@usask.ca).

### **Purpose**

- This study will explore how you and other women at the Pine Grove Correctional Centre (PGCC) or at the Women’s Community Training Residence (WCTR) feel about your conditions of confinement and what opportunities you may see in working in what we call the social economy (co-operatives, or non-profit enterprises or businesses).
  - We are trying to understand how the living conditions at Pine Grove or the WCTR give you a sense of who you are, how it allows you to make choices about your future, how it allows you to make decisions, and how it may affect your mental health and your spiritual well-being, as well as your ability to manage your life upon release.
- We will be finding out what women know about social economy enterprises and if women see opportunities in working together in co-operatives or non-profit enterprises or businesses in a way that could help you to build up your knowledge and skills and make your return to communities easier.
- We are trying to provide you with an opportunity to share your stories and experience about confinement, to hear about your hopes and needs, and to see how you feel about your ability to return to and contribute to society.

## Procedure

This study will interview you, and other women at Pine Grove CC and the WCTR. As the researcher, I will explain to you what the study is about, and what you may expect during this interview process. You may ask for an interpreter to explain this form and to help with the interview.

This interview will take anywhere between 30 and 90 minutes. If you agree to take part, I will give you a consent form to sign. After the form and a copy are signed by both of us, you will be given one copy to keep and I will keep the other for our records. Then, if you agree, we will start the interview and I will record it with a voice recorder. These recordings are used to review what you have said, and make sure that your words are accurately reported. If at any time you would like the recorder turned off, I will stop it.

When we have completed the recording, it is typed out as a transcription. Typed transcriptions make it easier for us to review and present the information accurately in a report. Once we finish the interview, I will ask if you want to listen to the tape recording right away, or review the transcript at a later time. If you wish, the transcripts will be delivered to you for your review in-person or delivered to you by Elizabeth Fry staff. Your answer to this request will also be recorded on tape. We will not use the transcripts until you have signed a transcript release form.

Would you like to review the interview?

YES

NO

## Potential Risks

The interview will create little or no risk to you, and I will do my best to make sure you are comfortable answering the questions. However, there may be questions which may bring up negative memories or emotions. If you are not comfortable with any of the questions, you may refuse to answer. If you feel uncomfortable answering these questions, you may stop and withdraw from the interview at any time and your recordings and forms will be destroyed. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you have the right to stop the interview and end the process. There will be no penalty to you if you choose to stop. If you feel you require counseling or debriefing with anyone (e.g., the Elders, counsellors, chaplains, etc.) because of the interview, I will make sure that you receive this service. I want you to under-

stand that your confidentiality is of the greatest importance in the research process, and I will make every effort to ensure it is protected. We will discuss limits to confidentiality in another section.

Elizabeth Fry Society staff will be available during the days of interviews and also by phone on weekends and evenings if you require assistance or support because of the interview. The staff will also travel to PGCC and meet you in-person during the day upon request (Women have to book an appointment for this).

Program staff within PGCC are generally not available on evenings and weekends. But there is a resource in the community that you can contact 24/7 by phone: the Prince Albert mobile crisis line 306-764-1011.

Support services available during the day within PGCC:

- Hazel Bear (Elder) is available 3 days a week for one-on-one sessions on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays - 953-3145
- Mrs. R (Chaplain) is also available on weekdays - 961-0033
- Iskew (counselling service) usually visits Pine Grove on Tuesdays - 953-6229/953-6217
- Joyce (cultural liaison) is also available - 961-0033
- Karla (Teacher) will also be available

### **Benefits of your Participation**

This is an opportunity for you to share your stories about confinement, about your hopes and needs, and about how working with other women in a social economy enterprise might help. Through this study, we hope to help institutions, organizations, and individuals better support women during confinement and upon release. The outcomes may allow better decisions by people in charge, the information may support improved public policy, support funding proposals, and improve delivery of service to women during incarceration and in their integration into communities, and reduce the chance women will return to institutions after release. We cannot guarantee these results.

### **Storage of Data**

The University requires that the transcripts will be securely stored by the project management team (Centre for the Study of Co-operatives) for a minimum period of five years. Dr. Isobel Findlay is the main researcher on this project and is ultimately responsible for

safe keeping of the data. The consent forms will remain separate from the transcripts, so that your confidentiality will be protected.

### **Confidentiality**

I will make every effort to ensure that you and our discussions are anonymous and confidential throughout the research. This means that your name will not be connected in any way with the information you share. Only the project researchers (or transcribers) will see the interview transcripts. When the final report is completed (or any information from the report is shared), your name will not be used, and no one will be able to connect your name to what you say, or any opinion included. Your name or any identifying information will NOT appear in any publication or presentation. If quotes are used in reports or book and journal articles, names will not be revealed; for example, “One woman said...,” may be used rather than a name to protect your identity.

The research conclusions will be shared in several ways, for example in print and in computer documents. The research findings may be used at conferences, or in university or other journals, or popular press, or student theses. In whatever form the information is presented, you and your identity will be protected.

There may be limits to confidentiality in special instances. For example, if you disclose self-incriminating information about any new offences, information about child abuse or intent to harm yourself or others, I am required to report these to the proper authorities for your own protection and the protection of others.

### **Right to Withdraw**

As mentioned before, you can withdraw at any anytime without any penalty in any way. If you are not comfortable answering any questions, you may skip them; if you are uncomfortable with the interview in general, you may withdraw. If you choose to skip questions, all information that you have contributed towards that question will be deleted; if you choose to withdraw entirely, all information will be permanently destroyed. If you choose to withdraw from the study before the transcripts are written, your data will not be used for the study; however, if you withdraw after the transcript is written and analyzed, the researcher cannot remove your answers from the analysis since they will be combined with the answers of others, and cannot be separated from the larger group.



**Questions**

Please feel free to ask questions at any time. The study was approved by the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Research on February 17, 2011; reapproved January 29, 2012. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Ethics Office at (306) 966-2084. If you are calling from outside of Saskatoon, you may call collect.

You will have access to published versions of the completed study. If you ask me, you will receive a copy of the final report or a short summary of the results.

**Consent to Participate**

I have understood the description. I agree and consent to participate in the study knowing that I may withdraw at any time and my information will not be used. A copy of this consent form has been given to me to keep.

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Participant

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Date

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(Signature of Participant)

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(Signature of Researcher)

## APPENDIX C

### **Conversation Guide for Participants in Individual Interviews**

Title of the Study: “Through the Eyes of Women: What a Co-operative Can Mean in Supporting Women during Confinement and Integration.”

#### **Questions**

##### **Breaking the ice/ Demographic information:**

- Age, children, family, where from, community identification, Aboriginal identity (Métis, First Nation, Inuit; identifying Nation and Band), Woman of colour
- Before being here, have you had any experiences with other government agencies (child welfare, social services, youth services, income assistance, etc.)?
- Is this your first time in the prison system?
  - If not, what type(s) of prison have you served your time in (federal/ provincial, minimum, medium, max security), and where was (were) the location(s) of the prisons?

##### **I would now like to ask you about the rules of this prison**

- Do you do feel you were adequately told about the rules? If not, why not? When were you told about the rules?
- How did you find out? Did someone tell you or did you have to read about them? Did you understand them at first? If not, why not?
- Do you think there is a better way to tell people about the rules? Can you tell me?

##### **Do you think being here affects your mental well-being? If so, in what way(s)?**

- Do you feel the prison is overcrowded? How do you think this affects you?
  - Which unit do you currently live in?
  - Approximately how many people do you share the bathroom with?
  - Have you lived in other units here?
    - If yes, which unit(s)?

- Do the conditions differ from where you live now? If so, how?
- Does the communal living (i.e., a lack of privacy) affect you mentally?
- What, if anything would you like to see improved?
- What do you feel is the most difficult thing about being here?
- Do you feel that you receive enough/appropriate health care service to stay healthy?
  - If not, why not?
- Do you feel that you have enough access to your community to stay connected?
- Do you feel that you have enough opportunities to connect with family members?

**The next few questions have to do with medication.**

- Were you on medication before you came in?
- Are you on medication now?
  - If yes to both questions, was your medication changed after you came to prison?
  - Do you feel the medication helpful for you to stay well?
  - Do you take the medication voluntarily? If not, why not?

**To investigate women's perceptions of the institution**

- What kind of programming is there here?
- Are you able to access these? If not, why not?
- Are any of them helpful to you? If yes, which one(s)? How are they helpful? If not, why not?

**Are you able to take any schooling? If yes, what kind or what grade? If not, why not?**

- Are you taking any programming?
- Are you able to exercise? Outside and/or inside?
- Are you able to practise your culture/spirituality in here? If no, would practising your culture/spirituality be helpful to you?

**The next few questions have to do with work and preparing for returning to the community.**

- Are you able to work here? If so, what do you do?
- What happens to any products that you produce?
- Are you developing skills that could help you gain employment on release?
- What sort of skills would you like to learn?

**The next questions ask about social economy enterprise and what it means to you.**

- What does social economy mean to you? (prompt: co-operatives and non-profits that are run and controlled by their members and earn money through selling products or services)
- Have you been a member of a co-operative? Or credit union?
- What benefits (if any) do you see to being involved in a co-operative? (prompts: member ownership, decision making)
- Does it matter that members have voice and vote in a co-operative? That they offer employment and training opportunities? That they put people before profits?

**The next questions ask whether you think forming a co-operative with the women here would help you in confinement and in preparing to return to community?**

- Would you support a co-operative here?
- Would you be inclined to become involved in running and working in the co-operative?
- If not, why not?
- If yes, what do you see yourself doing in the co-operative? What skills and knowledge would you bring (making products, designing products, keeping books, selling)?
- What activities or products would you be interested in? Prompts: sewing, fashions, arts and crafts, soap, cosmetics, or what?

**The next questions ask about benefits you would see (if any) in running a co-operative business?**

- Do you think running a co-operative would help you during confinement? If so, how?
- What benefits (if any) would working in a co-operative bring upon release?

**Is there anything that I have not asked you but you think is important that you would like to share with me?**

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- 2010 *Municipal Government Support of the Social Economy Sector.* Jenny Kain, Emma Sharkey, and Robyn Webb (8 1/2 x 11, 68pp., Research Report, co-published with the BC-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance)
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