

Families and Corrections Journal

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Families and community reintegration: A missing priority?

“You cannot treat me like crap during his incarceration and then tell me how wonderful I am because I was there when he got out.”

This comment from a family member summarizes in one sentence the experience of many family members who are affected by incarceration and reintegration. It captures several concepts related to Community Corrections very concisely.

The CSC's recent Transformation Agenda makes it clear, and in a variety of ways, that what is required in the correctional process needs to begin at Intake and Assessment and continue through incarceration and into the community. The family member's quote says something similar. A continuum of care for families needs to begin at Intake and Assessment and stretch through to family and community reintegration.

While the family member might agree that “Offenders come from the community and most will return to the community,” I believe that she would say more – that the family is a missing priority. Offenders also come from families and return to families. It is not just about community reintegration and the provision of programs and services to ensure that this is successful. Community reintegration has to include family reintegration. Not so surprisingly, if there is no family support “when he gets out,” the correctional process works toward assisting the offender to create alternative support, the very kind of support that prosocial family can provide. While family support may not have to be created, family support requires support. It is not a matter of locking the offender away from family ties during incarceration, then opening the door at the end of the sentence.

Andrews and Bonta point out, in “The Psychology of Criminal Conduct” that family support and family ties are one of four ‘natural’ influences that are known to positively influence pro-social human behaviour. The other three influences are school and work, leisure and neighbourhood. These four influences may serve to mediate the influence of criminal history, antisocial attitudes, antisocial associates, and antisocial personality – what Andrews and Bonta call the ‘Big Four’ variables that are predictors of criminal behaviour.

“Building stronger and safer communities by assisting families affected by criminal behavior, incarceration and community reintegration.”



"Contribuer à bâtir des milieux de vie plus stables et plus sûrs, en offrant un soutien aux familles qui doivent composer avec le comportement criminel, l'incarcération et la réinsertion sociale."

The Canadian federal correctional system is one of the best in the world when it comes to its visiting programs for offenders and their families. The regular visiting program usually provides for up to three visits per week, while the Private Family Visiting program allows for families to visit in the institution for up to 72 hours within the private family visiting units on the correctional reserve. In fact, the Private Family Visiting program was initiated because family support was seen as particularly important for the Lifer and his or her family to maintain meaningful contact throughout incarceration and into reintegration.

The introduction of the calling card telephone system has gone a long way to ensure affordable telephone calls between the offender and the family. There is an added benefit that it is the offender that must budget their money in order to make phone calls, even if the family is able to provide funds to the offender's account to help pay for the calls. The offender has to decide what is most beneficial: paying for phone calls to their loved ones or spending it on other items. They have to determine where their priorities lie.

Family support requires support, and these kinds of activities go a long way to mediate the effects on the family of incarceration - one of the consequences of their family member's criminal behaviour.

One needed priority within the correctional process is the safety and security of the community and of the family. Applications of security procedures have an impact on families, and care is needed in its implementation. It is this sentiment that is also captured in the family member's comment above.

Families understand the need for security: it protects them and it protects their incarcerated family members. The family is significantly affected because the criminal actions of the offender have meant that their family member is incarcerated, and not with them. The second greatest impact on the family is the implementation of security practices that keep the family and the community safe during the incarceration process. The third greatest impact on the family- what happens during the family and community reintegration component of the correctional process, will be mentioned later.

Some family members are not pro-social. Some family members can be manipulated by the incarcerated family member to either attempt to smuggle contraband into the institution. The dilemma for correctional staff when families come to visit is, "Which family member is it? Which visitor is not pro-social? Which family member was pressured?" It is for this reason that the security practices can have significant and negative impact on the family. It isn't, and can't be, about "innocent until proven guilty." Security procedures work on the basis of probable risk.



The Private Family Visiting program was first introduced at Millhaven Institution in December 1980. This picture shows the Private Family Visiting unit being raised over the wall of Kingston Penitentiary. Because the first units were trailers, the stays inside the institution are still referred to in prison slang as 'trailer visits.'

It is still possible within the implementation of the Drug Strategy and the use of ion scan technology, drug dogs, metal detectors, x-ray machines, security cameras, Threat Risk Assessments to be 'family friendly' in their application. Sometimes it can be by simply being transparent about procedures or describing what is taking place or why. It may involve information and referral services to the family. It may also mean methods of recourse to challenge decisions. Being family-friendly does not violate the security of the institution or the

community. It may, in fact, increase security as family members may feel that correctional staff will be approachable about security issues.

The correctional process directly or inadvertently affects family support through its policy, practice or through attitudinal issues toward the family of the offender. Policy, practice and attitude needs to be reviewed in its capacity to be family-friendly. Family support is too important throughout the correctional process, not just upon release, as the quote from the family member above summarizes so succinctly. It is important that policy and practice be considered in a 'family-friendly' lens while at the same time having an appropriate concern for the safety of the institution and the public, including the families themselves.

Where family relationships have been problematic in the past, it makes sense that programs and services be in place within CSC to assist the offender. This can include treatment for family violence and treatment for sexual offending.

Family-based programs and services can be forward-thinking as there are several family factors that affect

intergenerational criminal behaviour. For example, the provision of parenting skills training for offenders who are, or might become, parents may serve to influence later behaviour among their children. Most offenders do not want their children to become in conflict with the law and this can be capitalized upon through the provision of cognitive-behavioural based parenting programs. In the best of all worlds, the visiting area would be an opportunity to practice parenting skills during incarceration, for effective parenting following incarceration.

The family of the offender may be harmed by the consequences of the criminal behaviour of the offender. They may also be a family-victim, a victim in which the perpetrator is their own family member. The CSC Victim Services, at their web site, state:

There is a greater likelihood of an offence being perpetrated by someone known to the victim than by a stranger. Victims are often in a kinship relationship with the offender, be it a spouse, partner, child, or other relative; or the victim may have been in a relationship with the offender which ended.

When a crime occurs, family members are affected. Some family members may cease all contact with the offending family member while others may choose to remain in contact. This can result in conflict between family members. For example, family members may cease talking to each other, may maintain the relationship with and visit the offender in secret, and/or may ask another family member or friend to maintain the relationship and visit the offender. Approximately 30% of registered victims continue in relationship with the offender who harmed them.

Retrieved April 20, 2010, <http://www.csc-ccc.gc.ca/victims-victimes/fav-vfa-eng.shtml>.

The high percentage of family-victims who choose to remain in contact with the person who harmed them is surprising. While the reasons for maintaining contact may vary from family to family, one thing may be evident: the family hopes that the offender will receive the best services and treatment possible within the correctional process so that the offender will not harm anyone, anymore, including the family themselves. The future well-being of the offender, the family and the wider community depend on this.

It may seem like this article has drifted far from its stated purpose of seeing the family of the offender as a missing priority. This is not the case. It is just that Community Corrections, in its broadest definition, encompasses the entirety of the correctional process. Justice and corrections happens within the context of community and cannot be isolated behind prison walls. Corrections is always about safe and successful family and community reintegration. It is just that, for some offenders, there needs to be a period of safe and successful incarceration.

Recent discussions about Community Corrections, including comments by CSC's Commissioner Don Head and by Bev Arseneault, Director General, Community Reintegration, have centered on four theme areas: Accommodations, Employment, Interventions and

Community support. While the Correctional Service of Canada may be able to create and fund programs and services to meet these four need areas, it makes sense that CSC acknowledge and support families because the family already helps the offender in these exact areas during release and reintegration. It is critical to acknowledge the positive role of the family in Community Corrections: how many offenders will be accommodated now or in the future by a family member? How many offenders will gain their first employment because a family member hired them or assisted them to find a job? How many family members know long before the parole officer that the offender has, or is contemplating, a return to crime, or that interventions are needed? How many families ensure that appointments for treatment or programs are kept? How many family members already provide community support both during incarceration and into reintegration and beyond? Finally, as was already stated, it is more cost effective to provide funding support to something that already exists and works, such as family support, while creating new approaches to assist with reintegration.

It is important to realize that the family is not a secondary parole officer or to take a utilitarian or instrumental view of the family i.e. that the family is only as good as what it can be of use to the correctional process. They are Canadian citizens who need support. They, in turn, can provide support in return.

Strengthening family capacity improves public safety. Family support can play a pivotal role in each step of the correctional process. It is important to strengthening family capacity by supporting family ties. It will improve correctional outcomes from Intake and Assessment to release. The family of the offender should be seen as a Community Corrections priority. They, as should we all, have a vested interest in safe and successful reintegration.

Lloyd Withers is the Executive Director of the CFCN.

Women in the Shadows

“Women In The Shadows” (WITS) is a support group for women who have a loved one who is incarcerated. The group provides women with a place of safety to talk about the prison experience for them and their children, to develop a support network for themselves during incarceration and to have some fun with women and volunteers who have similar life experience and shared empathy. The women learn about the Correctional System, other community based support agencies or programs, parole, the National Parole Board and other areas of interest depending on the needs of its members.

I would like to paint you a picture of “family life” when you love someone who is incarcerated. Family members have increased responsibility with single parenting due to the loss of a participating parent. The financial responsibility and management is a burden due to the loss of one income and the increased costs associated with having someone in

the family who is incarcerated. The extra costs include travel costs to maintain family contact, possible long distance or collect telephone calls when the inmate is not working within the system. Often telephone contact is the weekly life line for the entire family unit (including the children). Food costs are often needed if the family has been approved for Private Family Visits and the costs of meals when prison visits happen for the family members as they travel.

Family members often experience the same stigma as the offender, who is the one who actually committed the offense. Unfortunately, there is little understanding given to family members. Once justice has been served in the judicial system, family members are left to live out the consequences of incarceration. Family members “do time” as well. The prison experience is very real, front and center, in the lives of most family members.

Members of society often do not know how to respond to family members, serving to further isolate family members who have usually been abandoned from friends and family. It is difficult for them to support what they do not understand. After I was married, one of the members of my church said, “I just do not understand why anybody would do something like that” (marry someone who was incarcerated) and my response was, “You’re right, you don’t understand.” And there was no attempt on their part to try to understand. I do have to say that as a family member trying to make the best of a challenging situation, I made no attempt to explain it - her decision was already made.

Understanding comes with an attempt to empathize. As empathy happens, understanding becomes easier. It is really quite simple. There is no deep, dark, twisted psychological explanation. Family members have done nothing wrong except love someone who has committed a crime and is paying the debt our judicial system imposes. Judgment, ignoring or pretending that this group do not exist are not helpful responses to families in crisis nor will it bridge the gap between unawareness and understanding.

There is a tension between their right to privacy and the need to not accept the stigma and shame of the offender’s actions or the lifestyle of prison. There is a tension between being true to God, self and children and supporting the loved one in prison. The children are not only innocent, but vulnerable and very impressionable during their prison experience. Maintaining family contact is essential for everyone, as challenging as it may be.

Family members are scared, overwhelmed and confused with the complexities of the correctional system and processes. They are in survival mode for the entire time of incarceration and during reintegration. They appear to be in crisis a lot. Family members are dealing with a great deal. Correctional Services Canada has the responsibility to keep the institutions safe, attempting to eliminate drugs and other contraband from being brought in. During incarceration, family members can be considered a security risk. While preparing for reintegration, family members are seen as

important and valuable. It is difficult for family members to reconcile these two polarized views at different times during the prison experience. Family members are kept from their family member at times when they are seen as a risk but then feel used during reintegration. Family members experience intrusive processes and procedures throughout the entire prison experience, even though it was not their crime.

Assisting family members through support is one of the easiest and most effective ways of being part of the solution, both for the family and for the change process for their loved one to become a member of society who gives to the community instead of takes from it. Without opportunities for healthy relationships with neighbors, friends, churches and communities, falling back into old patterns of coping and functioning are inevitable. Family members cannot be the only influence for productive living because living in community together requires a community solution. Men and women are being released into our communities every day. The solution is accepting the challenge and the risk - get to know family members and learn about the challenges and the successes so the fear is lessened with understanding. Most of the time listening without judgment is the best way to support family members. Family members need the safety of a friend who is trying to understand that can provide friendship and support while respecting their need for privacy.

You have heard the saying, “it takes a community to raise a child.” Well, those children include the children of those who live the prison experience. While the correctional system is supporting the offender, supporting the entire family makes sense. It is the family unit who is willingly tasked with living out all that goes into making changes for success. They may not always know what to do, so they need support. Families have to reorganize their life during incarceration and the offender has to reorganize their life during reintegration. More often than not, there is no manual to read to learn how to do this.

Get to know family members with a heart of compassion and an attitude for supporting. You will be blessed, as I have been, when family members privilege me with the opportunity to support.

To family members, be aware of those people who are attempting to support you. Be wise in who you invite to share your life with. Accept help from people who are successful, have overcome their own obstacles and who are respectful of privacy and who treat others with dignity and respect. There are people who are willing to help, who have lived the prison experience and who know how to support you. You too will be blessed by developing relationships with those worthy of your trust.

Debra Barriault is the General Manager of Bridges of Canada Inc. She can be reached at debbie@bridgesofcanada.com or at 506 443-9960 Ext 224.

Jeffrey is going to jail this weekend...



and he didn't do anything wrong.

Jeffrey is going to jail this weekend to visit his incarcerated parent.

Crime and incarceration are not normal, but being a family is. Strengthening family ties may assist Jeffrey's incarcerated parent to realize the effect that continuing in criminal behavior has on Jeffrey, and on the entire community.

Research also shows that Jeffrey may be at an increased risk of being involved with crime later in life. Support to Jeffrey's family may serve to interrupt this troubling possibility.

The Canadian Families and Corrections Network is a Canadian charity that assists those like Jeffrey and his parents. It provides information and orientation to families about crime and healing the harm. CFCN volunteers and staff work in correctional institutions and in the community to help strengthen the parent-child bond, using parent education as a means of crime prevention. The CFCN supports families through its Family Group Decision-making for Reintegration service for successful family and community reintegration. It provides training and policy and program development about how assisting families leads to stronger and safer communities.

The Canadian Families and Corrections Network is a registered Canadian charity, Registration Number 875428062RR0001. Your donation helps us to continue this unique form of crime prevention. With the purchase of a \$30.00 membership to support the CFCN, you will receive a receipt for income tax purposes of \$20.00.

Your financial support beyond your membership is also requested. Please consider a further charitable donation to the CFCN to assist in our unique approach to crime prevention and harm reduction. You will receive a charitable receipt for the full amount of any donation of \$10.00 or more.

Thank you for your support. Please send your donation to:

Canadian Families
and Corrections Network
Box 35040 Kingston ON K7L 5S5
(613) 541-0743 / 1-888-371-2326



For further information about the CFCN and its services, please call us at the telephone number above, email us at national@cfcn-rcafd.org or visit our website at www.cfcn-rcafd.org.

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April 1, 2010 – March 31, 2011

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Canadian Families and Corrections Network: Building stronger and safer communities by assisting families affected by criminal behavior, incarceration and community reintegration.

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