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FEATURE ARTICLE

Halfway Houses

A *halfway house is a community based residential facility for offenders who have been sentenced to a term of incarceration, and are serving a portion of their sentence under community supervision. A halfway house provides twenty-four hour supervision, general counselling and assistance to offenders. Some halfway houses may also offer treatment or other programming. Typically, offenders live in a halfway house while they work, find a job, go to school or attend treatment or other programming.*

A halfway house is an important bridge between institutional care and the community, as it is a form of gradual release for the offender back into the community while that offender is still under a prison sentence. A halfway house provides needed rehabilitative and residential services, and an opportunity for unique and creative programming that is tailored to meet the needs of residents and the community. A halfway house serves as a vehicle for community awareness and involvement in corrections.

There are four main types of halfway houses:

- ? *Private Home/Satellite Apartments:* usually limited to room and board and a helping relationship.
- ? *Non Structured Residences:* usually multi-purpose facilities with a diverse clientele and minimum intervention.
- ? *Structured Program Facilities:* strict admission and discharge policies, and formally structured counselling and assistance services.
- ? *Special Program/Treatment Facilities:* generally deal with specific offender needs such as psychiatric or addictions treatment.

Community based corrections is not a new concept. The vast majority of offenders under correctional supervision are supervised in the community. These offenders include people who have received a community based sentence (i.e., probation or a conditional sentence) and people who have received a prison sentence but are being gradually released back into society (through parole or statutory release).

Most adult offenders in Canada who are sentenced to a prison term return to the community before the term ends. This form of release is called conditional release, a concept based on the premise that a period of supervised transition from prison to the community enhances public safety and the rehabilitation of offenders. Some forms of conditional release are:

Day parole: this is a restricted type of parole that allows offenders to participate in community based activities to prepare for release on full parole or statutory release. Offenders on day parole must usually return nightly to a supervised facility and must obey any conditions that are placed on their release. Most often, offenders are eligible for day parole six months before they become eligible for full parole.

Full parole: this is a less restricted type of parole that allows offenders to serve the remainder of their sentences under supervision in the community. They are usually allowed to live at home provided that they report to a parole officer and obey the conditions of their release. Offenders are usually eligible for full parole after serving one-third of their sentence.

Statutory Release: this is different from both day and full parole because statutory release is not granted - it is a legal provision that auto-

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matically entitles most offenders who have been granted parole to serve the final one-third of their sentence in the community. Although an offender may be entitled to statutory release, he or she may still be required to obey certain conditions. Offenders serving life or indeterminate sentences are not eligible for statutory release.

As an offender's parole eligibility date approaches, CSC provides the National Parole Board (NPB) with a complete package of information, to help NPB make a well informed decision about releasing an offender. This information includes:

- ? the offender's previous criminal history
- ? the offender's most recent offence
- ? the offender's behaviour while incarcerated
- ? evidence of change in the offender
- ? psychiatric or psychological reports, and
- ? opinions of other specialists.

As mentioned above, an offender is first eligible for day parole six months before he or she has served one-third of the imposed sentence, at which time that offender becomes eligible for full parole. However, because an offender becomes eligible for day or full parole does not mean that parole will automatically be granted. The decision to release an offender on parole is part of a process that is commonly known as "risk assessment." Although risk assessment is not an exact science, correctional service providers do have a large body of information (as outlined above) to consider when determining an offender's risk.

"Halfway houses have a great deal to offer the community in terms of effective reintegration of offenders and increased community safety."

The NPB may grant parole if an offender will not present an undue risk to society before his or her sentence ends, and if his or her release will assist in the protection of society by helping the offender return to society as a law abiding citizen.

When offenders are granted (or, in the case of statutory release, when they become entitled to) conditional release, the NPB or other responsible authority may impose a variety of conditions on their release. These conditions may include a requirement to obey a set curfew, to abstain from alcohol or other drugs, to attend substance abuse or other treatment, to attend school or other programming, or to stay away from certain communities or people.

If an offender is granted day parole, he or she will likely be transferred to a halfway house. However, before an offender

can be released to a halfway house, that halfway house must approve the offender as a resident in its facility. A halfway house can refuse offenders for a variety of reasons, including availability of resources and the potential risk of an offender.

While an offender is living at a halfway house on day parole, he or she may later be granted full parole. Once full parole is granted, the offender usually moves out of the halfway house to live independently while remaining under supervision.

ISSUES

An examination of the main issues surrounding halfway houses reveals that halfway houses do not harm the community and, indeed, have a great deal to offer the community in terms of effective reintegration of offenders and increased community safety.

Value of Real Estate. A common belief in many communities is that the presence of a halfway house results in lower property values. However, there does not appear to be any research to support the conclusion that the presence of a halfway house drives down the value of real estate in a community where it is located. In six major studies of communities where a halfway house was opened, no significant change in average housing prices could be found. One study performed in Ontario communities revealed that, in five out of nine communities where a halfway house was opened, average housing prices two years after opening were equal to or higher than average housing prices one year before opening.

In 1995, the British Columbia government formed a task group to study changes to property values in British Columbia communities that had "non-market housing" (which includes halfway houses). In all seven cases studied, the task group found no evidence that the presence of non-market housing negatively affected housing prices in impact areas. In five of the seven projects examined, the average annual sale price increased more in the impact areas than in their control areas. This means that the presence of halfway houses in those communities did not drive down the value of real estate in those areas.

Economic Benefits. A halfway house is much less expensive to operate than a prison. The average annual cost of maintaining an offender in a halfway house is approximately

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\$30,000. This is less than the average annual cost of maintaining an offender in a federal penitentiary, which is currently around \$60,000 for male offenders and \$114,000 for female offenders.

Recidivism. Research has shown that the presence of a halfway house in a community does not contribute to increased crime rates. Recidivism rates are low among offenders who are released back into the community gradually, in particular when offenders are released through a halfway house. CSC keeps track of success rates for offenders on various forms of conditional release, and offenders on day parole (which most often means offenders who undergo gradual release through a halfway house) are consistently the most successful.

Indeed, over 80% of offenders successfully complete day parole, compared to approximately 70% of offenders on full parole and approximately 60% of offenders on statutory release. Even among offenders who do not successfully complete periods of conditional release, the majority of offenders fail because they violate a condition of their release (such as failing to attend school or other programming or failing to return to the halfway house before curfew time) - not because they commit a new offence.

Breach of Conditions of Parole. Offenders living in a halfway house who do not obey the conditions of their release can have their release revoked and will be returned to prison if they are believed to present an undue risk to the public. While there are no guarantees that halfway house residents will comply fully with the conditions of their release, a halfway house does not, in general, jeopardize community safety.

Research suggests that a halfway house actually contributes to community safety by offering gradual, supervised reintegration combined with necessary treatment. As noted above, offenders who are gradually reintegrated back into the community through a halfway house have the greatest success, both while on parole and after their sentence is completed.

In conclusion, the presence of halfway houses benefits both offenders and society itself. Offenders are provided with an opportunity to reintegrate themselves into the community with support and supervision. Society is safer because of decreased recidivism, and it saves money through the lower cost of supervision of offenders in the community.

THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The John Howard Society of Alberta sees the value of halfway houses and supports their presence in Alberta communi-

ties. We believe that a halfway house is an effective, just and humane response to the causes and consequences of crime.

We further believe that the presence of halfway houses allows a community to accept responsibility for its role in corrections. Moreover, by supporting the presence of halfway houses and their residents, we believe that a community creates greater safety in its neighbourhood.

Research has shown time and again that offenders who experience gradual release into the community are more likely to successfully complete their sentences, and are less likely to reoffend after their sentences are completed than offenders who are released without any period of community supervision. Virtually all offenders who receive a prison sentence will eventually return to the community, yet many offenders lose their ability to live independently through the experience of being in prison.

Keeping these two things in mind, it is not difficult to conclude that halfway houses, with the many types of supervised community living they provide, are a necessary component of correctional planning. Every halfway house provides supervised living for people who have not lived independently for a while, which is why these services have considerable value.

References available upon request.

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Please Be Advised

The Annual General Meeting
of The John Howard Society of Alberta
will be held on
Saturday, June 8, 2002
at 4:00 p.m.
at the Edmonton John Howard Society Office
Main Floor Boardroom
10526 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta.

PROGRAMS IN BRIEF

John Howard Society of Grande Prairie

Child and Family Domestic Violence Project

Recently, the John Howard Society of Grande Prairie embarked on a pilot project for children and parents where domestic violence has occurred within the family. Support for the project has been provided by the Alberta Mental Health Board, the County of Grande Prairie Family and Community Support Services and the Grande Prairie Council For Lifelong Learning.

The project is based on a series of sessions that include: the "Live and Learn" group program for children ages 6 – 12, the "Whole Mom" group program for single mothers who have left an abusive relationship, and the "Couple's Enrichment" group program for couples who have chosen to remain together to work on their relationship. Each program consists of 7 sessions.

The "Live and Learn" children's program explores community building, feelings, needs, choices and decision making, thinking, conflict, and planning and safety issues.

The "Whole Mom" program focuses on learning about self-esteem and awareness, planning and identifying resources, personal care, life management, communication, dynamics of abuse and change, and parenting skills.

The "Couples Enrichment" Program focuses on increasing awareness of open communication, conflict management, assertiveness, trust, partnership goals, respect and safety. It is designed to build upon the Renaissance Program (a program that has been offered through our organization for the past 10 years) for men who have been abusive in intimate relationships. The program provides an opportunity for ongoing supported behavior changes for both men and their partners.

Upon completion of their respective group programs, families are encouraged to participate in 1-2 individual family sessions whereby members are brought together to review and plan for the future.

The project recognizes that domestic violence is a complex issue that requires a comprehensive approach. Domestic violence affects all members of the family unit. Everyone has a unique role and we must not continue to deal with each family member in isolation if we are to have any meaningful and lasting impact.

A final report on the pilot project is expected in September 2002. For more information, contact: The John Howard Society of Grande Prairie at: (780) 532-0373 (phone) or (780) 538-4931 (fax) or jhsgp@telusplanet.net. For additional information, visit The John Howard Society of Alberta's website at www.johnhoward.ab.ca under "Services."

CONTACT US

The John Howard Society of Alberta [Reporter](#) is distributed free of charge to a wide audience of citizens, educators, agencies and criminal justice system staff. Our goal is to provide information and commentary on timely criminal justice issues. We welcome and encourage your feedback on [The Reporter](#).

The John Howard Society of Alberta is an agency composed of citizens in Alberta who are interested in criminal justice reform and preventing crime in our communities. We recognize that dealing with crime is as much the responsibility of the community as it is of government.

We gratefully accept donations to help offset the costs of our efforts in criminal justice reform and crime prevention. Donations are income tax deductible.

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To provide feedback, obtain information or make a donation, please contact us at:

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Visit our website at: www.johnhoward.ab.ca to find out 'what's new' and view recent research publications.

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