

# **HALFWAY HOUSES**

**JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY OF ALBERTA  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A halfway house is a community based residential facility for offenders who, having been sentenced to a term of incarceration, are serving a portion of their sentence under supervision in the community.

Halfway houses provide twenty-four hour supervision and general counselling and assistance to offenders. Some halfway houses may also offer treatment or other programming. Typically, offenders live in halfway houses while they work, find a job, go to school or attend treatment or other programming.

Halfway houses may also be called Community Based Residential Facilities, Community Based Residential Centres, Community Residential Centres or Community Residential Facilities. There are currently 175 halfway houses in Canada.

Halfway houses are on a continuum of correctional services that are provided to offenders during their term of incarceration. The halfway house experience is a form of gradual release into the community while the offender is still under a prison sentence. Halfway houses create an important bridge between institutional care and the community. They provide needed rehabilitative and residential services and they provide an opportunity for unique and innovative programming that is tailored to the needs of residents and the community. Further, halfway houses are a vehicle for community awareness and involvement in corrections.

Some agencies hoping to establish halfway houses may meet with resistance from community members and groups. People may fear that the establishment of a halfway house in a neighbourhood will lead to increased crime or decreased property values. Communities may also regard the establishment of a halfway house as a loss of efficacy where the facility is imposed with little community support or consultation. These concerns are real and should be carefully considered by agencies hoping to establish halfway houses.

Research has shown that halfway houses do not contribute to increased crime rates or to decreased property values. The vast majority of offenders who reenter the community through a halfway house successfully complete their stays. Further, recidivism rates are low for offenders who have been gradually released into the community.

The John Howard Society of Alberta recognizes the value of halfway houses and supports their presence in Alberta communities.

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## INTRODUCTION

A halfway house is a community based residential facility for offenders who, having been sentenced to a term of incarceration, are serving a portion of their sentence under supervision in the community.

Halfway houses provide twenty-four hour supervision and general counselling and assistance to offenders. Some halfway houses may also offer treatment or other programming. Typically, offenders live in halfway houses while they work, find a job, go to school or attend treatment or other programming.

Following is an outline of the purpose, function and types of halfway houses in Canada, an explanation of where halfway houses fit in the context of corrections in Canada and a discussion of the main issues surrounding halfway houses.

## FACTS AND BACKGROUND

Halfway houses may also be called Community Based Residential Facilities, Community Based Residential Centres, Community Residential Centres or Community Residential Facilities.

Halfway houses are similar to Community Correctional Centres [CCCs], but there are differences between the two types of facilities. CCCs are run by the Correctional Service of Canada and are designated as minimum security correctional institutions, whereas halfway houses may be run either by the Correctional Service of Canada or by voluntary agencies who contract with the Correctional Service of Canada to provide residence and services to offenders. Examples of agencies who run halfway houses for the Correctional Service of Canada are the John Howard Society, the Elizabeth Fry Society, the Salvation Army and St. Leonard's Society. (Griffiths & Verdun-Jones, 1994, p. 537)

There are currently 175 halfway houses in Canada. This is in addition to 17 CCCs operated by the Correctional Service of Canada (Correctional Service of Canada, 2001a, Facilities page). Of these, approximately 45 are in the Prairie Region and approximately 20 are in Alberta (Correctional Service of Canada, 1996-97).

### **Purpose, Function and Types of Halfway Houses**

Halfway houses create an important bridge between institutional care and the community. They provide needed rehabilitative and residential services. Halfway houses provide an opportunity for unique and innovative programming that is tailored to the needs of residents and the community. Further, halfway houses are a vehicle for community awareness of and involvement in corrections.

There are four main types of halfway houses:

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

### **Halfway Houses in Context**

Community based corrections is not a new concept. The vast majority of offenders under correctional supervision are supervised in the community. Offenders under supervision in the community include people who have received a community based sentence (such as probation or a conditional sentence) and people who have received a prison sentence but are being gradually released back into the community through parole or statutory release. In 1998-99, there were, on average, 150,986 adults under the supervision of correctional authorities in Canada, and almost 8 out of 10 (79%) offenders in the correctional system were under some form of supervision in the community. (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, June 2000, p. 3)

Of the small percentage of total adult offenders in Canada who are sentenced to a term of incarceration, most offenders return to the community before the end of the term (Correctional Service of Canada, 1995, p. 1). Release into the community before the end of a prison term is called conditional release. Conditional release is based on the premise that a period of supervised transition from prison to the community enhances public safety and the rehabilitation of offenders. Conditional release may be granted (discretionary) or it may be required under certain circumstances. Some forms of conditional release that are discretionary are:

- Escorted and unescorted temporary absences: These are short absences that are granted for various reasons including contact with family and medical consultations. Offenders on escorted temporary absences [ETAs] may be escorted by prison staff or volunteers. Offenders on unescorted temporary absences [UTAs] are monitored by correctional staff in the community. (Correctional Service of Canada, 1995, p. 2)
- Day parole: Day parole is a restricted type of parole that may be granted to offenders to allow them 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 such as a halfway house and they must abide by any conditions that are placed on their release. Most often, offenders become eligible for day parole six months before they become eligible for full parole.

- Full parole: Full parole is a less restricted form of conditional release that may be granted to an offender. Full parole allows offenders to serve the remainder of their sentences under supervision in the community. That is, they are usually allowed to live at home provided that they report to a parole officer and obey the conditions of their release, although some offenders who are granted full parole may have a “residency condition,” which means that they must reside at a supervised facility such as a halfway house during their parole period. Offenders are usually eligible for full parole after serving one-third of their sentence.

Forms of non-discretionary conditional release that may be required under certain circumstances include:

- Accelerated Parole Review: Some offenders who are serving their first term in a federal prison are required to be released on full parole after they have served one third of their sentence. These offenders must be released on full parole unless the National Parole Board determines that the offender is likely to commit a violent offence before the end of the sentence. Accelerated parole review applies only where the offender is serving a sentence for a nonviolent offence (or the offender is serving a sentence for a drug offence for which the judge did not set parole eligibility at one half of the sentence). (National Parole Board, 1996, p. 12. See also National Parole Board, 2001, Parole Eligibility page)
- Statutory Release: Statutory release is different from full and day parole because statutory release is not granted. Rather, statutory release is a legal provision that automatically entitles most offenders who have not 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 including, for some, a residency condition. Offenders serving life or indeterminate sentences are not eligible for statutory release.

Most offenders in halfway houses are there on day parole, although some may be on unescorted temporary absences, full parole or statutory release if their release includes a condition that they reside at a halfway house (for a statistical analysis of full parole and statutory release residency conditions see National Parole Board, 2000, p. 13). The provincial government can also grant offenders temporary absences which require the offender to reside at a halfway house.

The process that leads to an offender’s arrival at a halfway house on day parole begins early in the offender’s term of incarceration. Within six months of an offender’s admission to a federal penitentiary, the Correctional Service of Canada will notify the offender of his or her parole eligibility dates. The Correctional Service of Canada will prepare the offender’s case for the National Parole Board to consider at the parole eligibility date and at any further reviews. If the offender is granted day parole, the offender will most likely be transferred to a halfway house. The offender may be granted full parole during the time he or she is staying at the halfway house, which usually means that the offender could move out of the halfway house to live independently under supervision. (National Parole Board, 2000, p. 11)

Except under certain circumstances involving accelerated parole review, just 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 to a halfway house is part of a process that is commonly known as “risk assessment.” As soon as a sentence is imposed on an offender, the federal or provincial correctional service begins assessing risk and preparing for the day the offender will be released. In preparing for the offender’s parole review, the Correctional Service of Canada provides the National Parole Board with a complete package which includes details about the offender’s previous criminal history, most recent offence, behaviour while incarcerated and evidence of change. It also includes information such as psychiatric or psychological reports and the opinions of other specialists. This information helps the National Parole Board make an objective and well informed decision. (National Parole Board, 1996, p. 11. See also National Parole Board, 2001, Parole Eligibility page) Although risk assessment is not an exact science, correctional service providers do have a large body of research to draw from to analyse the offender’s risk (Correctional Service of Canada, 1995, p. 4).

The protection of society is the paramount consideration in any decision of release. The National Parole Board will only grant parole if the offender will not present an undue risk to society before the end of the sentence and if the release of the offender will contribute to the protection of society by helping the offender return to the community as a law abiding citizen. (National Parole Board, 1996, p. 15. See also National Parole Board, 2001, The Decision Process page. See also Correctional Service of Canada, 2000, p. 24)

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

Halfway houses must adhere to minimum standards established by the Correctional Service of Canada. These standards ensure quality of service, accountability, credibility, protection for staff and clients, effective planning and management, and proper evaluation. Among other things, the minimum standards require the agency operating the halfway house to clearly define who its clients will be, to carefully record arrivals and departures, to follow an established intake procedure, to develop an intervention plan for the offender, to report to the Correctional Service Canada, to maintain case files for each offender, to establish and distribute copies of house rules to each offender, and to ensure that staff are qualified, oriented and trained in accordance with the Correctional Service of Canada’s standards. In addition, certain established safety and emergency measures must be adhered to by the agency operating the halfway house. (Correctional Service of Canada, 2001b)

## ISSUES

An examination of the main issues surrounding halfway houses reveals that halfway houses have a great deal to offer the community in terms of effective reintegration of offenders and increased community safety.

### **Community Reaction to Halfway Houses**

Although the public is generally supportive of rehabilitation in the community rather than in prison (Griffiths & Verdun-Jones, 1994, p. 562), some agencies hoping to establish halfway houses may meet with resistance from community members and groups. Common explanations for community resistance to halfway houses are fear about escapes, increased crime rates and decline in property values (Shichor, 1992). These common explanations are collectively known as the “not in my back yard,” or “NIMBY” phenomenon.

Although it has received widespread attention from researchers and agencies hoping to establish halfway houses, the “NIMBY” phenomenon is not the only explanation for community resistance to halfway houses. Lindsay wrote the following about community acceptance of residential correctional facilities such as halfway houses:

While the concept of community-based care is gaining wider acceptance, the development of new programs is being hindered by stiffening resistance from the communities within which they are to be placed. To many citizens, the community-based trend is yet another government policy, like busing and affirmative action, that subordinates the rights of “ordinary people” to the rights of special groups. Citizens see such programs as being foisted on them without their having a voice in where they will be placed or how they will be run. (1990, p. 2)

Lindsay’s explanation for community resistance appropriately goes beyond common explanations. Although the “NIMBY” phenomenon is real, it does not fully explain why people resist the establishment of halfway houses in their neighbourhoods. In his article entitled “Community Opposition to Correctional Facility Siting: Beyond the “NIMBY” Explanation,” Krause (1991) took Lindsay’s explanations a step further by warning:

Recent research suggests that policy makers misperceive public attitudes regarding incarceration. Specifically, they read the public as being more punitive than it really is. The public, it seems, is more supportive of rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders into the community than policy makers perceive. This misperception is partly the fault of researchers 1) whose methods often don’t allow them to detect complexity (wanting offenders to serve their full sentences and wanting them to be rehabilitated, for example) and 2) who don’t effectively communicate the complexity of the public’s views to policy makers. (p. 240)



Krause concluded that a community's efficacy, or power to control outcomes for itself, is an important predictor of its reaction to siting issues (1991, p. 252 and Sechrest, 1991, p. 12). A good relationship between the community and the agency running the halfway house can have a significant impact on the quality of life of staff at the halfway house, the community, and the offenders being reintegrated (Krause, 1992, p. 27).

Where fear is a significant factor contributing to community resistance to halfway houses, agencies hoping to establish halfway houses must recognize that it is natural and understandable for people to be wary of having halfway houses in their neighbourhoods. In addition to feeling a loss of control and feelings of inefficacy, people may indeed believe that halfway houses will "stimulate crime" (Keller & Alper, 1970, p. 109) or that their property values will decline. To be sure, the media is quick to report halfway house incidents (Shichor, 1992, p. 73). What must not be forgotten, however, is that the media does not accurately represent the overall safety and effectiveness of halfway houses.

While there are no guarantees that halfway house residents will comply fully with the conditions of their release, halfway houses in general do not jeopardize community safety. Indeed, research suggests that halfway houses actually *contribute* to community safety by offering gradual, appropriately supervised reintegration combined with necessary treatment. Offenders who experience gradual reintegration into the community through halfway houses have the greatest success both while on parole and after their sentence is completed. As stated by MacNeil & Kappel (1986), "Research literature suggests that...negative attitudes are based on influences other than first-hand experiences and actual fact" (Part II.B.). The following discussion reveals that communities have little to fear and, indeed, a great deal to gain by accepting halfway houses into their neighbourhoods.

### **Effectiveness of the Halfway House Experience**

Halfway houses may be seen by some as too lenient. This may be particularly true for those who believe that longer, more severe prison terms will deter people from committing crimes or from reoffending. It is true that halfway houses do not resemble the type of place most of us imagine when we think of a correctional facility: they are community based rather than separated from society by chain link fences or concrete walls, and offenders are not supervised as closely as they are when they are in prison. However, as the following discussion reveals, halfway houses are not "getting off easy." They are a critical component of the correctional process.

Offenders in halfway houses are still serving sentences. They are not free to do as they please at the halfway house. Offenders in halfway houses are simply on conditional release from prison. When offenders are granted (or, in the case of statutory release, when they become entitled to) conditional release, the National Parole Board or other responsible authority may impose a variety of conditions on their release. Standard conditions include requirements to travel directly to and from one's place of residence and to report regularly to a parole supervisor. Additional 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 neighbourhoods or people. (Correctional Service of Canada, 1995, p. 3-4)

In addition to conditions of release, all offenders in halfway houses are expected to follow house rules. House rules may include shared cleaning tasks or maintenance of one's personal living and sleeping area. Offenders may be required to pay a certain room and board fee toward the cost of maintaining the house. Halfway houses that grant weekend passes may also require offenders to follow certain rules regarding coming and going on weekend passes.

Offenders who do not follow 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 (National Parole Board, 1996, p. 23 and Griffiths & Verdun-Jones, 1994, p. 555).

Success rates are excellent for offenders who are released back into the community through halfway houses. The Correctional Service of Canada 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. Over 80% of offenders successfully complete day parole. This is in comparison to rates of around 70% for offenders on full parole and around 60% for offenders on statutory release. (National Parole Board, 2000, p. 15 and p. 89 and Solicitor General of Canada, 2000, item D.4)

Even among offenders who do not successfully complete periods of conditional release, the majority of offenders fail because they violate a condition of the 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 crime (Correctional Service of Canada, 2001a, Information About Release page). In 1999-2000, only 5.6% of offenders on day parole were convicted of new offences and only 0.8% of offenders on day parole were convicted of violent offences. Convictions for violent offences by all offenders on conditional release have dropped steadily over the past several years. (National Parole Board, 2000, p. 17)

Recidivism rates are low among offenders who are released back into the community gradually. The Correctional Service of Canada and the National Parole Board compare post-warrant expiry recidivism rates (recidivism rates after the entire sentence is completed) of offenders who have experienced gradual release (parole) to offenders who were held until their statutory release date or until the end of their sentence. Year after year, parolees are the least likely to reoffend. In 1996-97, the recidivism rate after sentence completion among parolees was only 2%. (National Parole Board, 2000, p. 19)

The above statistics make a powerful statement about the advantages of parole over statutory release. In the words of the National Parole Board:

There are strong and persistent indications that offenders released on parole (based on risk assessment and discretionary release) are more likely to successfully complete their supervision period than offenders released on statutory release. (2000, p. 88)

The Correctional Service of Canada echoes this sentiment: “Most criminals are more likely to become law abiding citizens if they participate in a program of gradual, supervised release” (Correctional Service of Canada, 1995, p. 1).

### **Economic Benefits of Halfway Houses**

Halfway houses are considerably less expensive than prisons. The average annual cost of maintaining an offender in a halfway house is approximately \$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. (Correctional Service of Canada, 2001a, Cost of Federal Correctional Services page)

### **Impact of Halfway Houses on Property Values**

As stated previously, community resistance to halfway houses may be based on the fear that the presence of a house full of offenders will negatively impact property values in a neighbourhood. There does not, however, appear to be any research to support the conclusion that halfway houses drive down the value of real estate in neighbourhoods where they are located.

In six major studies of communities where halfway houses were opened, no significant change in average housing prices could be found (MacNeil & Kappel, 1986, Part III.A.). One study of over 4,400 real estate transactions in Ontario neighbourhoods revealed that, in 5 out of 9 neighbourhoods where halfway houses opened, average housing prices two years after opening were equal to or higher than average housing prices one year before opening (MacNeil & Kappel, 1986, Part III.D.1. and Part VI.).

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 5 of the 7 projects examined, the average annual sale price increased more in the impact areas than in their control areas. (British Columbia Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security, 1996, p. 2)

## **The Need for Community Support and Involvement**

Ideally, halfway houses have the support and involvement of the communities that they are located in. In the words of Philip Schiller, a Toronto parole officer who wrote about his work in corrections in 1998:

I hope that one day, when I tell people that I work in corrections, their response won't be, "How can you work with *those* people?"; instead, they will say, "Don't we all?" (p. 44)

There are two main reasons why halfway houses require the support and involvement of the community. First, halfway houses represent an acknowledgment on the part of the community of its role in taking responsibility for crime in society. As such, where halfway houses exist, the community must play its role:

The halfway house represents only one positive action. There is a rising recognition that as crime, similar to other expressions of social pathology, originates in the community, responsibility both for preventing and correcting criminal behaviour must originate there as well. (Keller & Alper, 1970, p. 10)

Second, virtually all offenders who receive a prison sentence will eventually return to the community. For this reason, correctional planning must anticipate the offender's eventual reintegration into society. The community itself must therefore be present and actively participate in the process of reintegration.

An excellent example of community involvement in halfway house activities is the Action Volontaire Saint-Laurent project that took place at Maison Saint-Laurent halfway house in Montreal between 1988 and 1991. The project used mainly volunteers to provide services to halfway house residents:

At the centre of the project are the volunteers who number twenty at this time and who provide services directly to our target clientele. Through their constant involvement they bear witness to the very real desire of the community to become involved in a responsible manner in the fight against crime. (Chastenais, 1993, Background page)

Over the three year project, volunteers became involved in four stages of correctional intervention. During the first stage they participated in social and leisure activities at the halfway house. During the second and third stages they worked with parolees and residents who were in the final stage of their stay at the halfway house and in the fourth stage they helped the residents maintain links with the community through contacts and visits. (Chastenais, 1993, p. 2) The final report indicated that the project demonstrated that the public is able to show awareness and get involved in halfway house activities, that professional correctional service providers are open to working with volunteers and

that the project contributed to an improved quality of life in the facility and in the community. As of the date of the final report, the project had become a permanent branch of Halfway Houses of Montreal Inc. (Chastenais, 1993, p. 62)

The ActionVolontaire Saint-Laurent project and other initiatives that involve community members in correctional intervention reflect an acknowledgment of responsibility on the part of the community for the causes and consequences of crime as well as an acknowledgment of the need for community involvement in the gradual reintegration of offenders. As stated by the Correctional Service of Canada, "Volunteers enrich and supplement supervision by establishing positive relationships with offenders, helping them to socialize and providing links to the community" (Correctional Service of Canada, 1995, p. 9).

## CONCLUSION

There are two important things that are commonly known about the release of offenders. First, research has shown time and again that offenders who experience gradual release into the community are more likely to successfully complete their sentences and less likely to reoffend after their sentences are completed than offenders who are released without any period of community supervision. Second, 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. Further:

Dedication to an atmosphere and program which aims to be truly and consistently rehabilitative, is productive of a correctional way of life for offenders which is demonstrably more civilized, more humane, and less destructive. In the process, the values of the larger society in which it makes its contribution, through its influence on those committed to its care, are sure to be enhanced. (Keller & Alper, 1970, p. 162)

Every halfway houses is quite unique. Halfway houses may provide a supervised environment for an offender who is working or going to school during the day but who could not live independently yet because his living skills have been atrophied in an institutional environment. Halfway houses may shelter women offenders and their children during a period of transition so that the offender receives needed treatment or supervision while at the same time reconnecting with her family. Halfway houses may offer intense substance abuse, sex offender or anger management programming in a supervised but community based setting. For all their differences, every halfway house provides supervised living for people who have not done so for a while and, as the above discussion has revealed, this service has considerable value.

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## APPENDIX A

### **HALFWAY HOUSES: BASIC FACTS AND FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

A halfway house is a community based residential facility for offenders who, having been sentenced to a term of incarceration, have been allowed to serve a portion of their sentence under supervision in the community.

Typically, offenders live in halfway houses while they work, find a job, go to school or attend treatment or other programming.

Halfway houses may also be called Community Based Residential Facilities, Community Based Residential Centres, Community Residential Centres or Community Residential Facilities.

Halfway houses are similar to Community Correctional Centres, but there are differences between the two types of facilities. Community Correctional Centres are run by the Correctional Service of Canada and are designated as minimum security correctional institutions, whereas halfway houses may be run either by the Correctional Service of Canada or by voluntary agencies who contract with the Correctional Service of Canada to provide residence and services to offenders. Examples of agencies who run halfway houses for the Correctional Service of Canada are the John Howard Society, the Elizabeth Fry Society, the Salvation Army and St. Leonard's Society.

There are currently 175 halfway houses in Canada. This is in addition to 17 CCCs operated by the Correctional Service of Canada.<sup>1</sup>

Halfway houses are considerably less expensive than prisons. The average annual cost of maintaining an offender in a halfway house is approximately \$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.<sup>2</sup>

There are four main types of halfway houses:

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



Halfway houses create an important bridge between institutional care and the community. They provide needed rehabilitative and residential services. They provide an opportunity for unique and innovative programming that is tailored to the needs of residents and the community.

### **How do most offenders end up in halfway houses?**

Most offenders return to the community before they have served their entire sentence of incarceration. Release into the community before the end of a prison term is called conditional release. Some forms of conditional release are:

- **Day parole:** Day parole is a form of conditional release that may be granted to an offender. Day parole 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 they must abide by any conditions that are placed on their release. Most often, offenders become eligible for day parole six months before they become eligible for full parole.
- **Full parole:** Full parole is a less restricted form of conditional release that may be granted to an offender. Full parole allows offenders to serve the remainder of their sentences under supervision in the community. That is, 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:** Statutory release is different from full and day parole because statutory release is not granted - it is a legal provision that automatically entitles most offenders, who have not been granted parole, to serve the final one-third of their sentence in the community.<sup>3</sup> 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.

Most offenders in halfway houses are there on day parole. The provincial government can also grant offenders temporary absence which requires the offender to reside at a halfway house.

Within six months of an offender's admission to a federal penitentiary, the Correctional Service of Canada will notify the offender of his or her parole eligibility dates. The Correctional Service of Canada will prepare the offender's case for the National Parole Board to consider at the parole eligibility date and any further reviews. If the offender is granted day parole, the offender will most likely be transferred to a halfway house. The offender may be granted full parole during the time he or she is staying at the halfway house, which means that the offender could move out of the halfway house to live independently under supervision.<sup>4</sup>

## **How does the parole board or other granting authority decide that an offender is ready to go to a halfway house?**

Just 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 to a halfway house is part of a process that is commonly known as “risk assessment.”

As soon as a sentence is imposed on an offender, the federal or provincial correctional service begins assessing risk and preparing for the day the offender will be released. In preparing for the offender’s parole review, the Correctional Service of Canada provides the National Parole Board with a complete package which includes details about the offender’s previous criminal history, most recent offence, behaviour while incarcerated and evidence of change. It also includes information such as psychiatric or psychological reports and the opinions of other specialists. This information helps the National Parole Board make an objective and well informed decision.<sup>5</sup> Although risk assessment is not an exact science, correctional service providers do have a large body of research to draw from to analyse the offender’s risk.<sup>6</sup>

The protection of society is the paramount consideration in any decision of release. The National Parole Board will only grant parole if the offender will not present an undue risk to society before the end of the sentence and if the release of the offender will contribute to the protection of society by helping the offender return to the community as a law abiding citizen.<sup>7</sup>

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

## **Are offenders free to do as they please while they are in halfway houses?**

No. Offenders in halfway houses are still serving sentences. Offenders in halfway houses are simply on conditional release from prison. When offenders are granted (or, in the case of statutory release, when they become entitled to) conditional release, the National Parole Board 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 neighbourhoods or people.

In addition to conditions of release, all offenders in halfway houses are expected to follow house rules. House rules may include shared cleaning tasks or maintenance of one’s personal living and sleeping area. Offenders may be required to pay a certain room and board fee toward the cost of maintaining the house. Halfway houses that grant weekend passes may also require offenders to follow certain rules regarding coming and going on weekend passes.

## **What happens to offenders who do not obey the conditions of their release while they are in halfway houses?**

Offenders who do not follow 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.<sup>8</sup>

## **Isn't it dangerous to have a halfway house full of offenders in a residential area?**

While there are no guarantees that halfway house residents will comply fully with the conditions of their release, halfway houses in general do not jeopardize community safety. Indeed, research suggests that halfway houses actually *contribute* to community safety by offering gradual, appropriately supervised reintegration combined with necessary treatment. Offenders who experience gradual reintegration back into the community through halfway houses have the greatest success both while on parole and after their sentence is completed.

Success rates are excellent for offenders who are released back into the community through halfway houses. The Correctional Service of Canada 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. Over 80% of offenders successfully complete day parole. This is in comparison to rates of around 70% for offenders on full parole and around 60% for offenders on statutory release.<sup>9</sup>

Even among offenders who do not successfully complete periods of conditional release, the majority of offenders fail because they violate a condition of the 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 crime.<sup>10</sup>

Recidivism rates are low among offenders who are released back into the community gradually. The Correctional Service of Canada and the National Parole Board compare recidivism rates of offenders who have experienced gradual release (parole) to offenders who were held until their statutory release date or until the end of their sentence. Year after year, parolees are the least likely to reoffend. In 1996-97, the recidivism rate after sentence completion among parolees was only 2%.<sup>11</sup>

The above statistics make a powerful statement about the advantages of parole over statutory release. In the words of the National Parole Board:

There are strong and persistent indications that offenders released on parole (based on risk assessment and discretionary release) are more likely to successfully complete their supervision period than offenders released on statutory release.<sup>12</sup>

## **Do halfway houses affect the value of real estate in the neighbourhoods where they are located?**

There does not appear to be any research to support the conclusion that halfway houses drive down the value of real estate in neighbourhoods where they are located.

In six major studies of communities where halfway houses were opened, no significant change in average housing prices could be found.<sup>13</sup> One study performed in Ontario neighbourhoods revealed that, in 5 out of 9 neighbourhoods where halfway houses opened, average housing prices two years after opening were equal to or higher than average housing prices one year before opening.<sup>14</sup>

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 5 of the 7 projects examined, the average annual sale price increased more in the impact areas than in their control areas.<sup>15</sup>

### **ENDNOTES**

1. Correctional Service of Canada (2001). Basic Facts About Federal Corrections, Facilities page [On-line]. Available: [http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/faits/facts07\\_e.shtml](http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/faits/facts07_e.shtml).
2. Correctional Service of Canada (2001), supra note 1, Cost of Federal Correctional Services page.
3. Under the detention provision of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, the National Parole Board may detain an offender until the end of the sentence where the offender is likely to commit an offence causing death or serious harm to another person, a sexual offence involving a child or a serious drug offence. Where a detention order has been made, the National Parole Board must review the order annually.
4. National Parole Board (2000). 1999-2000 Performance Monitoring Report, p. 11. Ottawa: National Parole Board. Also available: [http://www.npb-cnrc.gc.ca/reports/pmr\\_e.pdf](http://www.npb-cnrc.gc.ca/reports/pmr_e.pdf). See also National Parole Board (2001). Parole: Contributing to Public Safety, Parole Eligibility page [On-line]. Available: <http://www.npb-cnrc.gc.ca/infocntr/parolec/contribe.htm>.
5. National Parole Board (1996). Parole: Contributing to Public Safety, p. 11. Ottawa: National Parole Board. See also National Parole Board (2001), supra note 4, Parole Eligibility page.
6. Correctional Service of Canada (1995). Protecting Society Through Community Corrections, p. 4. Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada.
7. National Parole Board (1996), supra note 5, p. 15. See also National Parole Board (2001), supra note 4, The Decision Process page. See also Correctional Service of Canada (2000). Myths and Realities: How Federal Corrections Contributes to Public Safety, p. 24. Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada. Also available: [http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/pubed/mr\\_e.shtml](http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/pubed/mr_e.shtml).

8. National Parole Board (1996), supra note 5, p. 23. See also National Parole Board (2001), supra note 4, In the Community page.
9. National Parole Board (2000), supra note 4, p. 15 and p. 89. See also Solicitor General of Canada (2000). Corrections and Conditional Release Statistical Overview, item D. 4. Ottawa: Solicitor General of Canada. Also available: <http://www.sgc.gc.ca/EPub/Corr/eStatsNov2000/eStatNov2000.htm>.
10. Correctional Service of Canada (2001), supra note 1, Information About Release page. See also National Parole Board (2000), supra note 4, p. 17.
11. National Parole Board (2000), supra note 4, p. 19. See also Solicitor General of Canada (2000), supra note 9.
12. National Parole Board (2000), supra note 4, p. 88.
13. MacNeil, J. and Kappel, B. (1986). Halfway House Executive Summary Community Impact Study: The Effect of Locating Correctional Group Homes in Residential Neighbourhoods, Part III.A. Unpublished manuscript.
14. MacNeil & Kappel, supra note 13, Part III.D.1. and Part VI.
15. British Columbia Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security (1996). Toward More Inclusive Neighbourhoods: Property Values Unaffected by Non-Market Housing, p. 2 [On-line]. Available on Housing Policy page at: <http://www.sdes.gov.bc.ca/housing/NEIGHBOUR/index.htm>.