

# **INMATE INDUSTRIES**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The trend toward developing inmate industries which operate as viable businesses that compete fairly in the open market place has gained momentum over the past two decades. The history of inmate employment in Canada plays a significant part in understanding current developments in inmate industries. The earliest recorded effort to employ offenders in Canadian penitentiaries was in 1835. Since then, there has been a steady reorganization and expansion of inmate industries within Canadian federal corrections.

The CORCAN Corporation was created in 1980 to serve as the production and marketing arm of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). Currently, CORCAN programs operate in over half of the federal correctional facilities across Canada, employing 4000 offenders throughout the year (CSC, 2001). CORCAN currently operates five main business lines: Agribusiness, Construction, Manufacturing, Services and Textiles. Each business line is responsible for providing services or products that range from agriculture commodities to computer data entry and data base creation services.

In 1992, CORCAN was granted the title of Special Operating Agency (SOA), which provides certain organizations with the opportunity to become more productive, efficient and competitive. The move to SOA status does not represent the privatization of CORCAN, but does allow CORCAN greater control over the creation of various work programs and the revenue these programs generate.

The CORCAN work program at Warkworth institution currently employs 70 inmates and 12 correctional staff, and is the most profitable of all federal correctional industries in Canada. The program manufactures a variety of components for office furniture. Production facilities include a cabinet shop, paint shop, sheet metal shop, welding shop and an upholstery shop (Getkate, 1993). To increase inmate involvement, the Warkworth program uses incentive plans, inmate employment strategies and cost sharing plans.

Although there is still debate about the advantages and disadvantages of private sector involvement in inmate industries, joint venture programs between private firms and correctional institutions are proliferating, as the growing inmate population and economic necessity dictate that the correctional industry be managed more like a business. Support for increased private sector involvement is based on three main assumptions. The first assumption is that the private sector is more efficient than is government. The second assumption is that private sector employment offers more to the inmate worker, in that it closely resembles employment in the free world. The last assumption is that private industry will reform the prison environment.

Several concerns have been raised over the use of inmate work programs. One frequently raised question concerns the immorality of profiting from the misfortune of others, in particular the disadvantaged, and inmates have been described as "the most disadvantaged of the disadvantaged" (Gandy & Hurl, 1987, p. 195). Another concern deals with the fact that CORCAN is CSC's most expensive rehabilitative program. It was estimated that between 1992 and 1995, CORCAN had net operating losses of approximately \$7.3 million (CSC, 1996, p. 9). However, in recent years,

CORCAN's net losses have decreased substantially. In fact, the annual report for the year 1999/2000 indicates that losses equalled \$700,000 in the year 2000 (CSC, 2001b). Issues regarding inmate wages are another concern that must be addressed. Issues such as inmate salary deductions, wage differentials and low wages can create morale as well as security problems.

Proponents of inmate work programs argue that CORCAN and other inmate industry organizations offer inmates an excellent opportunity to experience "real life" work under certified professional trades people. This experience leads inmates to feel pride and satisfaction in their accomplishments. The second argument in favour of inmate work programs suggests that the re-offence rate after release of inmates who had participated in a work program is considerably lower than the re-offence rate of inmates who had not been involved in a work program. In fact, there was a 27.8% reduction in readmission to federal custody for CORCAN participants released on full parole when they were compared to the national average readmission for this type of release. Furthermore, recent research suggests that there are ways to improve the effectiveness of inmate work programs. For example, improving inmate attitudes toward work and matching programming to work related skill need levels are two means of making inmate work programs more effective (Gillis, 2002).

Inmate industries appear to be in a state of transition, attempting to make the shift from being solely corrections operated, make-work warehouses to professionally managed, economically viable businesses. CORCAN has become more businesslike by becoming more economically efficient, involving the private sector in several joint ventures and operating in the community more rather than solely within the institution. Only time will reveal whether the future structure and operation of inmate industries will incorporate the best of history or will simply repeat it, mistakes and all.

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## INTRODUCTION

How to effectively and profitably employ the inmate population in Canadian and American penitentiaries has become one of the major challenges facing corrections officials. While the practice of putting inmates to work is not new, the demands of economic restraint and rehabilitation oriented correctional practices are forcing changes in the organization and operation of inmate industries. No longer is it enough to have inmates working in isolated make-work programs for the sole purpose of keeping idle hands busy. The growing trend is toward developing inmate industries that operate as viable businesses that compete fairly in the open marketplace. This paper will discuss the history and development of inmate industries, and provide an overview of the types of industries and work programs operating within the Canadian correctional system. It will also explore the development of, and major issues facing, private sector involvement in inmate industries.

### THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF INMATE INDUSTRIES

The history of inmate employment in Canada plays a significant part in understanding current developments in inmate industries. Many of the changes being made to the operation of today's inmate, or correctional, industries closely resemble inmate employment practices dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest recorded effort to employ offenders in Canadian penitentiaries was in 1835, when six inmates of the Kingston Penitentiary were assigned the task of cutting stone blocks to be used in the construction of the institution's perimeter wall. From this emerged a make-work policy, whereby inmates were employed in a limited number of institution projects such as penitentiary construction, maintenance and food preparation. However, the amount of work provided was not sufficient to employ all inmates. By the late 1800s, a limited form of inmate industry had developed, in which wardens would lease inmate labour to commercial firms operating small shops within the penitentiaries, to produce goods for sale in the open market. This practice was abandoned soon after, however, due to strong criticism about using inmate labour for private gain (Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), 1981, p. 1).

In 1913, a Royal Commission was appointed to investigate the state and management of the Kingston Penitentiary, but the commissioners broadened their investigation to include other institutions, as well. One of the observations made by the Commission was that, while attempts were being made by prison officials to keep all inmates employed, "there is not a single well-equipped, well managed, continuously busy shop in the whole circle of prisons" (CSC, 1981, p. 2). To remedy this, provisions were made to employ inmates in manufacturing goods for government use, and by the early 1930s, federal penitentiaries contained a small number of industrial workshops and maintained farming operations at seven of its eight institutions.

Despite these extra work opportunities, a significant number of inmates remained unemployed. A 1938 report from a Royal Commission investigating the penal system recommended completely reorganizing inmate industries, in order to employ the maximum number of federal inmates. These

recommendations called for the modernization of prison workshops, provision of trades instruction, self-sufficiency in penitentiary farm production and implementation of an inmate pay system. Although a limited form of vocational training was in place by 1947, many of the Commission's recommendations were not fully implemented until the 1970s. A 1974 memorandum, drawn up jointly by government, business and union representatives, was presented to cabinet outlining a policy for the complete reorganization of correctional industrial programs. This time the federal cabinet endorsed many of the recommendations, which included creating a mandate for CSC to pursue, and stabilizing long term outlets for industrial products. By 1976, a pilot project was in place at an institution in Ontario to produce modular steel shelves under contract to government departments. Fifteen inmates were selected to work 7-hour days at hourly rates ranging from \$1.25 to \$2.85 (CSC, 1981, p. 4).

Since then there has been steady reorganization and expansion of inmate industries within Canadian federal corrections. The CORCAN Corporation was created in 1980 to serve as the production and marketing arm of CSC. Currently, CORCAN programs operate in over half of the federal correctional facilities across Canada, employing 4000 offenders throughout the year (CSC, 2001a). Offenders can earn anywhere from \$5.25 to \$6.90 per day. CORCAN currently operates five main business lines: 1) agribusiness 2) construction 3) manufacturing 4) services and 5) textiles. The aim of these business lines is to actively encourage and assist offenders in practising good work habits, and developing marketable skills through the production of saleable goods in a structured, cost efficient work environment comparable to that in the private sector.

Historically, the expansion of prison industry programs was obstructed by the Penitentiary Act (1985), which specified that goods and services produced by inmates could be sold only to federal, provincial and municipal governments or to charitable, religious and non-profit organizations (Griffiths & Verdun-Jones, 1994). However, the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (1992) replaced the Penitentiary Act, thereby allowing CORCAN to supply goods and services to the private sector under competitive conditions.

In 1989, the federal government introduced the concept of the Special Operating Agency (SOA), which would give certain government organizations, such as CORCAN, an opportunity to become more productive, efficient and competitive (CSC, 1992; Getkate, 1993). To qualify for SOA status, a government organization must be large enough to justify the change, be wholly concerned with the delivery of goods and services, be subject to the influences of the marketplace and offer a potential for improvement. CORCAN achieved SOA status on April 1, 1992, with the transitional, implementation phase completed by the end of the 1992/1993 fiscal year. This status gives CORCAN greater flexibility to market its products, purchase goods and services, deploy staff and enter into contracts with private sector organizations. In addition, it is able to offer an expanded range of training and employment opportunities to offenders.

The move to SOA status does not represent the privatization of CORCAN. Indeed, CORCAN functions as part of CSC, and its operation is guided by CSC's Mission and Core Values. Although

much of the basic role and responsibility of CORCAN under SOA remains the same, important differences are created through the granting of specific mandates, called delegations. Delegations enable CORCAN to operate in a more businesslike manner, and provide a wider range of services to inmates. One of the key delegations is the right to operate on revolving funds, which means that revenues and profits generated by CORCAN can be retained by CSC and put back into additional correctional programming, rather than going to general government revenues, as had been the case in the past. Another important delegation is the right to establish a separate inmate pay system. This is expected to enhance motivation among participating offenders, and may eventually include the payment of Employment Insurance (EI) and Canada Pension Plan (CPP) benefits. Unfortunately, there have not been any changes to inmate pay, such that inmates have been allowed to earn between \$5.25 to \$6.90 for nearly the past twenty years, regardless of inflation rates or other economic factors.

Under SOA status, CORCAN is able to expand its correctional activities by investing program revenues in certain correctional activities that support the overall CORCAN mandate. These include pre- and post-release employment counselling and job placement, job skills certification and accreditation and job related training courses. Post-release community based programs offered by CORCAN have experienced growth over the past few years (G. Stewart, Executive Director of the John Howard Society of Canada, personal communication, May 16, 2002). In 1996, the Auditor General conducted an evaluation of CORCAN, noting that 95% of resources were spent inside the institution, and recommended expansion of programs in the community. Since then, CORCAN has implemented several community operations that vary across the country.

The community program that has experienced the most growth recently is WorkSITE (Work Skills, Instruction, Training and Employment). WorkSITE provides a support service in the community that assists offenders in developing interview and computer skills, writing resumes, finding job opportunities and accessing other employment services. Before 2001, WorkSITE operated in two locations in eastern Canada but, since then, 25 additional locations have opened in every region of Canada. There are five WorkSITES in the Atlantic region, eight in Quebec, two in Ontario, four in the Prairies and six in British Columbia. To date, WorkSITE has placed over 1,100 offenders in suitable employment conditions and has counselled over 1,930 clients (E. Henderson, Senior Communications Council, CSC, personal communication, May 23, 2002). Other community based employment programs include a carpentry shop in Moncton, as well as many short term community employment projects offered across the country from time to time (CSC, 2002). Although the number varies, there are usually over 1,000 offenders working in community based CORCAN programs each year in Canada.

However, there are issues of concern surrounding CORCAN's involvement in the community. One argument against such involvement is that other organizations may be better equipped to provide community services. For instance, non-profit organizations, such as the John Howard Society, that have provided community based work programs in the past may have the resources and experience necessary for community programs to be effective (G. Stewart, Executive Director of the John

Howard Society of Canada, personal communication, May 16, 2002). Therefore, CORCAN's programs may be more appropriately provided by other agencies that have served offenders in the community for many years.

Since SOA status was achieved, CORCAN has made efforts to allow inmate participants to engage in many of the routine administrative tasks. Because of these efforts, inmates now carry out several tasks that used to be carried out by CORCAN staff (E. Henderson, Senior Communications Council, CSC, personal communication, May 23, 2002). When inmates perform such duties, they gain valuable experience, and CORCAN achieves cost efficiencies since inmates are paid less than staff.

### **Warkworth Work Program**

The CORCAN work program at Warkworth institution is an example of a leading prison industry in Canada. The program currently employs 70 inmates and 12 staff members, and is the most profitable of all federal correctional industries in Canada (M. Elkins, Regional Director overseeing Warkworth Institution, personal communication, May 30, 2002). The program manufactures a variety of components for office furniture. Production facilities include a cabinet shop, paint shop, sheet metal shop, welding shop and an upholstery shop (Getkate, 1993).

An incentive program was implemented at Warkworth to improve inmate productivity and involvement. Under this plan, inmates can earn up to three times more than they would in other activities within the institution (Getkate, 1993). As expected, the work program has become very attractive to many inmates at Warkworth. The high demand for a position in the program has resulted in a waiting period of 12-18 months.

Warkworth also increases inmate involvement by providing inmates with the power to make decisions regarding daily operations (Getkate, 1993). Inmates can suggest solutions to a problem and, in many cases, implement the appropriate actions to solve the problem. A third method for increasing inmate participation involves allowing inmates to have open access to production and financial information. Allowing inmates such access enhances their perceptions of control and power within the program.

The greatest motivator at Warkworth has been the CORCAN incentive, or cost sharing plan. This plan provides inmates with their standard base pay, as well as a percentage of the gross revenue earned by the program (Getkate, 1993). Furthermore, it is hoped that, over the course of being rewarded externally for participation, the work will eventually lead to intrinsic rewards such as feelings of accomplishment and self confidence. A review of the Warkworth Work Program reveals that inmates hold positive views toward the program (Getkate, 1993). The inmates used terms such as honest, fair, trust and open to describe the program and their instructors.



## THE MOVE TOWARD PRIVATE SECTOR INVOLVEMENT

It is no longer a question of whether, or even when, there will be private sector involvement in the operation of inmate industries; it has become more a question of how to best implement it. Public/private partnerships, or joint ventures, are defined as voluntary, operational, economic relationships entered into by private firms and correctional jurisdictions, in order to create a product or service. The purpose of such joint ventures is to bring immediate benefits to the offender, the correctional system, the private sector partner and, ultimately, to society as a whole (Canadian Criminal Justice Association (CCJA) & CSC, 1986, p. 9). Although there is still some debate about the advantages and disadvantages of private sector involvement in inmate industries, joint venture programs are proliferating as economic necessity dictates that correctional industry be managed more like a business. By the late 1980s, an estimated 50,000 inmates in the United States were employed in correctional industries, and generated approximately \$800 million in sales (Flanagan & Maguire, 1993, p. 125). Under the "optimal model" of maximum inmate employment, 658,000 inmates in the United States could be employed, yielding \$13.2 billion in sales. In Canada, 4000 out of a total 12,815 federal inmates were employed at CORCAN, with \$70 million in sales for the year 2001 (CSC, 2001a; CSC, 2001b).

While the re-involvement of the private sector in Canada is still progressing cautiously and on a relatively limited scale, the significant reorganization of CORCAN indicates that there is a serious government commitment to pursue the joint venture option. Support for increased private sector involvement in correctional industries appears to be based on three main assumptions. The first assumption is that the private sector is more efficient than is government. This assumption is based on the pervasive belief that government is inherently inefficient. American studies that have explored the efficiency of inmate industries reveal that the production levels of private sector prison industries do not differ substantially from state run industries, which use private sector concepts such as worker incentives. Studies indicating superior performance of private sector industries may merely reflect the heightened emphasis, increased resources, expansion and modernization that accompany privatization, rather than the advantages of private participation, per se. The option of retaining government run industries appears more attractive when the costs of private sector subsidies are taken into consideration. The costs of direct and indirect subsidies required as incentives for private sector involvement are sufficiently great that they may reduce, or negate, any fiscal advantages that privately run enterprises might offer to government (Gandy & Hurl, 1987, p. 188).

Current examination of CORCAN's annual financial information reveals that the organization has become more economically efficient since SOA status was granted. Initially, yearly losses incurred by CORCAN were phenomenal, and totalled \$7.3 million between 1992 and 1995. However, net losses in the year 2000 were much less, totalling \$0.7 million. Apparently, economic efficiencies have prevailed from CORCAN's SOA status, but only after huge start up costs were addressed. As mentioned earlier, these fiscal advantages may be a result of CORCAN's shift toward conducting itself as a privately run enterprise.

Interestingly, one of the more salient features of research done on private sector involvement in correctional institutions is that private sector involvement, at least to some degree, is dependent upon the local economy. Private sector initiatives undertaken in correctional facilities are usually done in times of low unemployment. It is only when private corporations are desperate to fill entry level positions that do not carry many benefits and have high turn over rates, that they turn to prisons to find employees (Unwin, Mayers & Wilt, 1999). Sadly, prisoners are victims of the last hired, first fired philosophy. In order to protect inmates from being used in this way, it is imperative that CORCAN and other non-profit organizations provide a solid commitment to inmates seeking employment. This is to ensure that reintegration and rehabilitation efforts are not undermined by the private sector that is quick to abandon recruitment from prisons once employment rates are higher.

A second assumption upon which support for increased private sector involvement in correctional industries appears to be based, is that private sector employment offers more to the inmate worker. Advocates of private sector involvement believe that the environment of privately run prison industries more closely resembles the free world environment, and that private industries maintain closer ties with non-correctional industries. From this, it is assumed that privately run correctional industries provide inmates with better opportunities for rehabilitation and improved chances of obtaining employment upon release. A high-tech rehabilitation project at Collins Bay institution in Kingston, Ontario, greatly improves inmates' chances of finding employment upon release (Landriault, 1997). CDI College has joined CORCAN and Collins Bay institution to provide inmates with the theoretical and practical knowledge necessary to understand and repair computer equipment. Inmates leave the institution with the ability to repair and maintain computers and work in a business environment. Graduates of the program are welcome to use CDI as a reference to find employment.

The third major assumption is that private industry will reform the prison environment. This notion suggests that private sector involvement has the potential to change correctional institutions from non-productive custodial institutions to institutions filled with productive, industrious workers. Accompanying this change is the expectation that the tone or climate of correctional institutions will be made more tranquil through the introduction of private sector concepts. However, the fact that poor inmate morale results from a number of factors, such as isolation from friends and family, loss of social status and loss of privacy, renders the claims about the private sector's effects on the corrections environment possibly overly optimistic (Gandy & Hurl, 1987, p. 192).

When it comes to specific ways in which the private sector can be involved in correctional industries, there is a wide range of options. These include private sector advisory boards, private vendors, inmate enterprise, private management of government owned industries, franchising and government management of privately owned industries. There can also be privately owned and operated industries located within correctional facilities, privately owned and operated industries located outside the correctional institution, and the industrial prison in which industry constitutes the core program, around which all other work programs are arranged and subordinate to the needs of the industry (Gandy & Hurl, 1987, p. 192-195). Each of these options offers different advantages to

those wishing to encourage private sector involvement in inmate industries. However, they are also accompanied by problems and unresolved issues which are inherent in the nature of corrections and the environment of correctional institutions. Some of these issues are common to each of the options.

## **CONCERNS WITH INMATE WORK PROGRAMS**

One frequently raised question with respect to the use of inmate work programs relates to the immorality of profiting from the misfortune of others, in particular the disadvantaged, and inmates have been described as "the most disadvantaged of the disadvantaged" (Gandy & Hurl, 1987, p. 195). This viewpoint contends that, while government might use inmate labour to minimize the costs of incarceration, government is not morally justified to seek profit from it, and private employers are even less justified.

During the process of involving the private sector in inmate industries, correctional officials become wary of giving unfair advantage to the industries with which they contract. Claims of unfair advantage from competitors can sabotage public/private ventures. There is also the difficult task of calculating subsidies that are both attractive and fair. Meanwhile, labour unions have concerns about private sector involvement in correctional industries. Their major concerns tend to be that:

1. the government employees currently managing industries are not made redundant;
2. private industry not exploit inmate workers, and;
3. jobs are not taken from free workers. (Gandy & Hurl, 1987, p. 196)

However, some research has shown that these concerns, and any resistance resulting from them on the part of the labour movement and the general community in particular, may be overestimated. A Canadian survey of a wide range of community groups, including business and labour, found widespread support for paying inmates and allowing inmate produced goods to be sold on the open market, as long as these products were not subsidized or given any other unfair advantage. Similarly, an American survey concluded that, while the public has hardened in its view of criminal offenders and feels that stringent criminal sanctions should be applied, there is widespread support for the notion that inmates should be provided with work opportunities and, in particular, if a portion of the monies earned by the inmates were paid to their victims in the form of restitution (Griffiths & Verdun-Jones, 1994).

Another concern deals with the fact that CORCAN is CSC's most expensive rehabilitative program (CSC, 1996). CORCAN jobs, on average, cost \$13,000 per full time job in 1994/1995, while educational and vocational training cost approximately \$7,500 per full time student (CSC, 1996, p. 1). Furthermore, it is estimated that between 1992 and 1995, CORCAN had net operating losses

of approximately \$7.3 million (CSC, 1996, p. 9). However, net operating losses have declined in recent years, with a \$0.7 million loss in the year 2000 (CSC, 2001b).

Most correctional industries face conflicts between the goals of the industries and those of the wider institution. The involvement of the private sector has the potential to exacerbate many of these conflicts. For instance, profit making or cost reducing goals could conflict with goals of internal security and correctional rehabilitation/retraining. The goals of inmate rehabilitation are compromised when many inmates who might benefit from the opportunity for meaningful work are excluded due to lack of skills. To be efficient, industries must make the best use of a skilled and experienced work force. Thus, employees that are not productive are not used. These aims run counter to security and stability practices, which have traditionally employed as many inmates as possible. This practice, also called “featherbedding”, ensures that a large number of inmates participate in work programs even though inmates may not be as efficient as private sector employees (Gandy & Hurl, 1987, p. 197).

Inmate industries have traditionally been accorded a low status in correctional institutions because they were seen to offer little in the way of either rehabilitation or cost reduction. This has meant that industrial programs have had to accommodate the demands of other correctional programs. The trend toward increased attention to industries, combined with goals of increased financial returns, may change this, especially if private sector employers become involved. For example, counselling and education programs might have to be run outside of the normal work day. It would also be important that the incentives used to attract inmates to industries not discourage their involvement in other rehabilitation programs. Without parity in incentives between programs, there is the possibility of syphoning off the best workers into industries, regardless of the needs of the inmates or of the institution -- a situation referred to as “creaming.”

Inmate wages are the incentive most accessible to private sector employers. However, paying wages to inmate workers has its own set of problems. First, public opinion is not generally supportive of the idea that inmates receive substantial wages for their labour. Paid labour may be seen as a benefit when, in fact, inmates are incarcerated as punishment. Second, it is difficult to relate wages to productivity standards of the free world, when many of the conditions that limit inmate productivity are beyond the control of workers, such as call outs, lock downs, security checks and transfers. Third, there are problems associated with wage differentials. Higher wages offered to attract inmates to work in correctional industries may, as mentioned earlier, discourage inmates from participating in other correctional programs that they need. Wage disparities also have the potential for creating unrest among inmates. A fourth problem related to wages concerns salary deductions. It has been the practice that, when inmates receive more than the nominal wage, they make some contribution toward the cost of room and board, the support of family members, restitution to victims and agree to some form of enforced savings. However, problems could arise over assessing reasonable deductions for these items, and ensuring that sufficient funds are left to serve as incentives to work (Gandy & Hurl, 1987, pp. 198-199).

Maximum security institutions could be attractive to private sector involvement industry because of high productivity associated with low inmate turnover. However, the security requirements place too many restrictions on productivity. Minimum security institutions experience the opposite problem. Because they house the least dangerous inmates, most of whom stay at a minimum security institution for a short period of time, these institutions experience high inmate turnover and, on that basis, could be expected to have limited productivity. Medium security institutions have been identified as being the most likely to have profitable industries and be the most attractive to private industry and to governments wishing to minimize operator subsidies. Such institutions, housing relatively long term, moderate risk inmates, appear to offer conditions most conducive to productivity and profitability (Gandy & Hurl, 1987, p. 200).

Research into whether smaller or larger industrial ventures would be better is not extensive. However, there are indications that the training and scheduling problems imposed by the inherent instability of the inmate workforce favour smaller industries. Smaller industries would be less likely to disrupt correctional programs by laying off many workers at one time, and they may be more likely to exhibit commitment to, and personal involvement with, inmate employees (Gandy & Hurl, 1987, p. 201).

### **ADVANTAGES OF INMATE WORK PROGRAMS**

CORCAN programs offer inmates the opportunity to experience "real life" work under certified professional tradespeople. Participating inmates are treated as apprentices and, therefore, carry the responsibility of providing a service or manufacturing a product that meets international standards for quality. Due to the considerable amount of responsibility, these inmates feel a sense of pride in their accomplishments. According to CORCAN's Construction Coordinator, Terry O'Neill:

Construction is as close to a real life situation that they will get. There are defined goals which are constantly changing and which they must meet. ...At the end, they can point to what they have built, [and] there is a feeling of accomplishment (O'Neill as cited in Laurin, 1997, p. 3).

CORCAN programs may also reduce recidivism among participants. One study of the effects of participation in a work program on post-release recidivism was conducted on 269 male offenders who had worked for CORCAN for at least six uninterrupted months (Motiuk & Belcourt, 1996, p. 15). These offenders had been working for CORCAN within one month of their release, and had been released at least one year prior to the study. The results of the study indicate that participation in CORCAN prison industries prior to release lowers offender post-release recidivism, in particular for offenders released on full parole. In fact, there was a 27.8% reduction in readmission to federal custody for CORCAN participants released on full parole when they were compared to the national average readmission for this type of release.

In 1998, there was an extension of the Motiuk and Belcourt study that included an additional year of follow up for a subsample of offenders whose employment status after the first six months after release was known. The subsample consisted of 99 of the original 269 males, and the researchers found that “offenders who were employed were convicted at less than half the rate of unemployed offenders (17% versus 41%) and committed only one quarter as many new violent offences (6% versus 21%)” (Gillis, Motiuk & Belcourt, 1998). The results of this extension study confirm the findings of the original study, and strengthen the argument that prison work program participation and post-release employment will reduce recidivism.

## **MAKING INMATE WORK PROGRAMS MORE EFFECTIVE**

Gillis et al. (1998) found that post-release employment reduces recidivism. Therefore, the focus of inmate employment programs should be to increase post-release employment, so that the risk of reoffending is reduced. A comprehensive examination of inmate work programs by Gillis (2002) revealed factors that are most relevant for increasing post-release employment of inmates such as the economy, the prior work skill attainment of inmates and the attitudes of inmates.

The results of this research showed that the unemployment rate had an effect on the post-release employment of inmates. This is not to say that the economy is the sole determinant of released inmates' employability, but it does suggest that the immediate situation of the environment into which an inmate is released does have an effect. Not surprisingly, the higher the rate of unemployment, the less likely it is that an inmate will find employment after release. Also, associations with individuals involved in crime was found to effect the quality of employment that a released inmate obtained. Quality of employment was measured as: 1) the type of occupation (skilled vs. unskilled), 2) salary adequacy (meets needs vs. does not meet needs) and 3) satisfaction with income (satisfied vs. not satisfied). It was found that inmates with more criminal associations had a lower quality of employment.

Unfortunately, realizing that the unemployment rate and an inmate's criminal associations after release effect an inmates' post-release employment does not expose any methods for making inmate work programs more effective. Inmate work programs have no control over these factors. However, work programs can become aware of them and take them into account.

Other findings do carry with them methods for making inmate work programs more effective. For example, it has been found that a positive attitude increases the chance of post-release employment. At the time of their release, inmates were asked to respond to a survey that was used to determine what factors upon release increased inmates' chances of obtaining employment. Then, two follow-up surveys occurred at one and six months after release, to determine the inmates' post-release employment status and quality. Gillis (2002) also compiled the surveys with other data derived from the Research Branch's automated systems. From these sources, it was found that inmates who reported that they liked working upon release were more likely to find and sustain employment

outside of the correctional facility (Gillis, 2002). Also, inmates who highly rated their chances of being employed were more likely to find work. Therefore, a positive attitude and optimism are important factors that contribute to finding employment after release. Gillis suggests that “these ratings are useful in that they show that an offender’s employment outcomes are strongly linked to their intentions to find and/ or keep a job, which offers potential for intervention” (2002, p. 6). Then, Gillis takes her interpretation one step further, and illustrates how intention is effected by employment experiences and self-confidence. Thus, Gillis recommends that inmate work programs should provide positive work experiences, and aim to improve self-confidence.

Additionally, Gillis (2002) found that work related skill level before incarceration was the most significant factor that determined the quality of employment an inmate obtained after release. Inmates with a higher skill level before incarceration were more likely than their lower skilled counterparts to work at skilled labour occupations, with higher pay that provided greater satisfaction post-release. From this observation, Gillis recommends that work programming and training may not be necessary for inmates who already possess high employment skill levels. However, intensive programming and training are absolutely essential for those inmates who are unskilled.

From the evidence cited above, it is clear that employment programs can become more effective in helping inmates find quality employment after release, by following Gillis’ recommendations. Gillis concludes her examination by stating that, “it is only by providing offenders with effective programming that allows for skill development and work experience (provided in accordance with their level of identified employment need), that they will be given a legitimate opportunity to successfully reintegrate into the community” (2002, p. 6). The legitimate opportunity that Gillis is referring to is finding post-release employment. Such an opportunity reduces recidivism, thereby making inmate work programs more effective.

## **CONCLUSION**

The history of inmate industries featured several distinct stages of significant restructuring of goals and operations, followed by lengthy periods of unmet expectations and diminishing effectiveness. In the 1990s, inmate industries appeared to be in a state of transition, attempting to make the shift from being solely corrections operated, make-work warehouses to professionally managed, economically viable businesses capable of competing fairly in the open market. As we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Canada’s prisons are still attempting to make this transition. There has been some success in lowering inmate industries’ yearly losses to become more economically viable, but they still have a long way to go before they can compete in the open market. The re-emergence of the idea of encouraging private sector involvement also suggests that the development of correctional industries has travelled a circle back to the earliest days, when inmate labour was leased to local employers. However, private sector involvement must be undertaken with caution, so that inmates are not simply used in desperate times, and then ignored when they are not absolutely necessary. Only time

will reveal whether the future structure and operation of inmate industries will incorporate the best of this history or will simply repeat it, mistakes and all.

Nonetheless, what can be said with some assurance is that correctional industries are here to stay, since they impact incarcerated inmates in a way that is desirable to all. CORCAN and other work programs are clearly a just, effective and humane means of dealing with offenders. Through employment, offenders can attempt to contribute back to society what they have taken away from it in the past. Furthermore, the effectiveness of work programs can be seen in the drop in recidivism rates for participants. CORCAN involvement has a positive impact on inmates, by reducing the amount of crime they commit after release. Finally, work programs are a humane way to deal with inmates. Offenders express happiness and hope for the future from CORCAN employment as is apparent from the behaviour and testimony of many CORCAN participants. For example, one former CORCAN participant at the Nova Institution for Women has been quoted as stating:

“I love getting up in the morning. Before you couldn’t get me out of bed...but now I get up at 6:30 in the morning and I am showered and dressed and ready to come to work...its helped me get ready for the outside...” (CSC, 2001b).

When the benefits of the work program are taken into account, it is obvious that inmate industries are a positive presence in the prison system. Anyone who understands the value of work to an individual’s self-esteem, outlook on the future and sense of accomplishment, could not deny inmate work programs the opportunity to provide these aspects that are a fundamental part of human life. Therefore, by incorporating inmates back into humanity, and ultimately into society, as productive rather than destructive individuals, inmate industries benefit us all.



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