

POST INCARCERATION  
EXPERIENCES: LISTENING TO  
ABORIGINAL AND  
NON-ABORIGINAL  
EX-PRISONERS

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By

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## ABSTRACT

This research investigates and documents the nature of the challenges faced by men upon their release from federal incarceration in the Province of Saskatchewan. Due to the high number of Aboriginal peoples incarcerated in Saskatchewan, this research necessarily investigates the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ex-prisoners. A qualitative approach is employed in order to understand post-incarceration from the perspectives of those who have experienced what it is like to return to the community after prison and those who work with men making this transition. This thesis fastidiously describes parole board hearings, the difficulties related to integrating into society as perceived by ex-prisoners, and the role of the service providers and agencies in Saskatoon that assist former inmates. It is shown that there are certain difficulties common among ex-prisoners, such as finding employment and housing and accessing appropriate support resources. The particular difficulties of Aboriginal ex-prisoners are highlighted, revealing that the difficulties experienced by all ex-prisoners appear to be amplified for Aboriginal ex-prisoners. Racism and the overall disadvantaged position of Aboriginal peoples in Canada are identified as significant barriers to Aboriginal ex-prisoners attempting to integrate into the community.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to those who have done their time, but are still being punished.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The difficulties and challenges that men face after release from federal incarceration are usually only researched with the intention of predicting recidivism or determining the risk factors related to recidivism. Studies that seek to predict, and therefore generalize, behaviour are necessarily based on aggregate data and therefore do not permit in-depth analysis of the subject area. Further, much of the research on post-incarceration in Canada is conducted under the auspices of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), an agency which has a vested interest in quantifying both the behaviours that are associated with re-offending and the environmental factors that contribute to them. Although the research done by the CSC is extremely important for academia, the community, and for those who assist former offenders in their transition back into society, other approaches to studying post-incarceration have yet to be explored. The research reported in this thesis takes a qualitative approach to understanding the difficulties associated with returning to society after prison by investigating the perspectives of former offenders and the people in the community who work with them.

Studying the difficulties men face after prison through a qualitative methodology has both benefits and drawbacks. Qualitative research allows the researcher to become intimately involved with an area of study, which, in turn, facilitates deeper understanding. Further, qualitative methodologies generally use an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world in an attempt to understand and interpret phenomena through the meanings that people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 2). In addition, post-incarceration has not



previously been studied in this way in Canada and a qualitative approach to the issues and difficulties associated with post-release will contribute to greater understanding of this topic by academics, community members, policy makers, and service providers. This research provides a snapshot of what it is like to be released from prison in Saskatchewan, Canada. Moreover, as will be explained further in the third chapter on methodology, the focused ethnographic approach utilized in this research implies a more personalized, rather than impersonal, description of the findings.

### 1.1 Background Information

In Saskatchewan, the adult Aboriginal incarceration rate is over 1,600 per 100,000, compared to 48 per 100,000 for adults who are non-Aboriginal (Correctional Service of Canada, 1999). In view of the over-representation of Aboriginal people in prison in Saskatchewan, a research project on post-incarceration in this province must necessarily address the issues of Aboriginal former offenders in addition to those of non-Aboriginal offenders. Consequently, the literature that was reviewed to inform this thesis related not only to post-incarceration and former offenders, but also the particular circumstances of Aboriginal offenders.

As stated earlier, studies that deal specifically with the difficulties faced by newly released offenders are scarce. I did, however, locate one study that looked at the transition process former offenders experience upon their return to society. McMurray (1993) conducted a study on high-risk parolees being returned to the community in North Carolina. McMurray's study is relevant to the research presented here because it identifies both community factors and individual factors that hinder the adjustment of offenders back into the community. McMurray examined "aspects of community adjustment" in a variety of ways (McMurray, 1993: 149). He reviewed offenders' responses on a Parole Transitional

Analysis Interview Schedule (PTAIS) that was constructed with the purpose of recording not only criminal, institutional, and parole histories, but also the problems that parolees might identify themselves, such as drug and/or alcohol addiction, finding employment, financial, and personal concerns. McMurray conducted in-depth interviews, using his PTAIS, with 37 parolees. He reported results on six main subject areas: Preparedness for Release, Support, Motivation, Parole Agency Issues, Post-Release Problems, and Recidivism. McMurray's study examined a community in the United States therefore not all of his findings are applicable in Canada. However, some of his findings might be expected to hold true in other jurisdictions, including Canada. The results of McMurray's study which assisted in framing the current research project were related to support, parole agency issues, and post-release problems.

Concerning support, McMurray found that after release from prison, many parolees had little money, were living with their parents or other relatives, and were largely not aware of any formal agencies where they could go for assistance upon their release. The parole agency issues that McMurray identified were that most parolees viewed the role of their parole officer as one of surveillance. However, the majority of parolees McMurray interviewed indicated that they needed the assistance they were getting or had received from the parole agency and their parole officer. Finally, McMurray asked parolees to report on the difficulties they had experienced after their release from prison. The most frequently mentioned difficulties were: personal problems, discrimination, drug use, and financial problems. McMurray's findings helped to shape this research by identifying possible "red flag" areas where offenders might indicate having difficulties.

Under the auspices of the Correctional Service of Canada, Motiuk and Porporino (1989) examined offender risk and offender need factors by studying 221 offenders on

conditional release. Among correctional agencies in both Canada and the United States it is fairly well accepted that two sets of factors contribute to an offender's risk of reoffending: the offender's criminal history and the offender's need factors. Criminal history is obviously an unchangeable factor that cannot be "managed" under the community supervision of a parole officer. Needs areas, however, can be addressed and met. When the needs of offenders in the community are met, the relative risk of an offender reoffending is reduced. Motiuk and Porporino's study is the first examination of the adequacy of a risk/needs assessment process to establish guidelines for determining levels of supervision for offenders on conditional release. Motiuk and Porporino's study informs the research in this thesis because it suggests that some need factors are more important to the successful reintegration of offenders than others.

Motiuk and Porporino (1989) based their analysis on eight need factors: Employment, Financial, Marital/Family, Emotional Stability, Living Arrangement, Companions, Alcohol/Drug Usage, and Attitude. Interestingly, their results revealed a non-significant relationship between the need factors of Employment, Financial, Marital/Family and Emotional Stability, and the failure or success of an offender on conditional release. Further, they found a significant relationship between the need factors of Living Arrangement, Companions, Alcohol/Drug Usage, and Attitude on an offender's release outcome. According to Motiuk and Porporino, these need factors were related to the outcome of release in four ways. An offender is more likely to have his or her release revoked if s/he has unstable living accommodations, if s/he has negative friends or associates, if s/he has an unmanaged alcohol or drug addiction and finally, if s/he is unresponsive to assistance. From Motiuk and Porporino's study I concluded that housing, friends, substance abuse, and resistance to support services and/or people would be issues

that I would need to probe whilst talking with former offenders and the service providers who work with them.

The issue of housing and former offenders was an area that I thought might need to be investigated further. Although I was unable to find any studies done in Canada that dealt specifically with housing and former offenders, I located one article on housing and ex-prisoners in the American context. Bradley, Oliver, Richardson and Slayter (2001) discuss housing and the ex-prisoner in a policy brief that argues for the importance of suitable housing in the reintegration of offenders. Bradley et al. claim that stable, suitable housing is an integral part of the reintegration process because without it, post-release programming, substance abuse treatment, and employment opportunities might be compromised. The authors further suggest that housing is one of the most critical barriers to successful re-entry, calling it the “lynchpin that holds the reintegration process together” (p. 1). Bradley et al. identify a number of issues that limit the housing options of former offenders. First, and most obviously, the difficulty of finding suitable and affordable rental accommodations is almost insurmountable due to the limited funds and scarce employment opportunities available to the newly released offender. Second, it is not always feasible or even desirable for an offender to move in with friends or family members. On the one hand, the offender might be viewed as a disruptive influence on the household as well as a financial burden and therefore may not be readily accepted. On the other hand, for some offenders, returning to live with family or friends might mean returning to the same criminogenic environment that the offender was in prior to incarceration. Finally, some ex-prisoners are simply unable to find suitable and affordable accommodations and consequently end up homeless. According to Bradley et al. homelessness is neither in the best interest of the individual offender nor of the community at large. Bradley et al. make a

convincing argument for the importance of housing to the successful reintegration of offenders. Bradley et al.'s arguments coupled with the identification of suitable accommodations as a key reintegration success factor by Motiuk and Porpino (1989) suggest that the issue of housing and post-incarceration needs further investigation, a task that this thesis undertakes.

As mentioned earlier, investigating the difficulties of former offenders who are Aboriginal is of utmost importance to this thesis. As with non-Aboriginal former offenders most of the research on Aboriginal former offenders is related to recidivism. It is therefore difficult to predict how the needs of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal former offenders differ. However, the research on re-offending shows that the recidivism rates for Aboriginal offenders housed in federal institutions tend to be about one-third higher than non-Aboriginal offenders (Hann and Harman, 1993). This disparity might be an indication that the needs of Aboriginal former offenders are either not met very well upon their return to the community or that their needs are greater than those of non-Aboriginal offenders. Although there has not been much research on the unique needs of former offenders who are Aboriginal, there has been a fair amount of work done on the possible causes of Aboriginal overrepresentation in the criminal justice system.

Aboriginal peoples are overrepresented in Canadian prisons. In 2000-2001, 18% of men incarcerated in Federal institutions were Aboriginal while Aboriginal people only made up 2.8% of the population in Canada (Correctional Service of Canada, 2001). Carole LaPrairie (1996) has outlined four possible issues that contribute to this overrepresentation. Two of the issues LaPrairie mentions are simply that Aboriginal offending rates are high and the types of offences that Aboriginal people commit are more likely to result in imprisonment. However, there are two other more theoretical issues that might

also contribute to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in prison. First, it is possible that criminal justice processing is both racially and culturally discriminatory. It has been shown in the inquiry commissions of Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan that Aboriginal peoples are potentially subject to racial discrimination at virtually every stage of the criminal justice process. For example, the Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry revealed that, when compared to non-Aboriginals, Aboriginal persons were more likely to be denied bail, to be held in detention prior to their trial, were more likely to be charged with multiple offences and to end up incarcerated (McNamara, 1993: 18). Many of these differential outcomes for Aboriginal persons might be turned around if they were more adequately represented by legal counsel or if police processing, court proceedings, and sentencing were more sensitive to the Aboriginal person who has been accused and may not know his/her rights or understand the Canadian judiciary. The final possible reason that LaPrairie identifies for Aboriginal overrepresentation is that "criminal justice policies and practices have a differential impact on Aboriginal offenders due to their socio-economic conditions" (LaPrairie, 1996: 60). LaPrairie points out that the crimes committed by Aboriginal people, particularly in certain parts of Canada (like the Prairies), are related to their socially and economically marginalized positions in society. Since the Canadian criminal justice system treats the symptoms of crime and not the causes or underlying social problems that lead to crime, LaPrairie argues that the practices of the criminal justice system itself are actually part of the problem, and not a solution.

The overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in Canadian prisons is relevant to research on post-incarceration because it indicates that there is something about Aboriginal offenders that differs from non-Aboriginal offenders. Although this thesis does not seek to explain Aboriginal overrepresentation it does investigate the particular needs of Aboriginal

former offenders. By identifying the unique needs of former offenders who are Aboriginal, the needs of Aboriginal people who are at risk of committing a first offence or reoffending whilst on release might be proactively met.

### 1.2 Purpose and Rationale

The main purpose of this research was to investigate and document what happens to offenders upon their release from prison, using a qualitative methodology. A secondary, but no less important, purpose was to understand the challenges that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal former offenders face. This research addresses one overarching question: what does the environment into which male former inmates are released look like? More specifically, this study provides insight on the following four areas. First, how do the experiences of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal former offenders differ? The literature seems to suggest that Aboriginal offenders have different needs and problems than non-Aboriginal offenders and this research investigates this difference in the context of post-incarceration. Second, this thesis recognizes that racism plays a role in the barriers encountered by Aboriginal former offenders. Although racial discrimination is a difficult accusation to investigate, the qualitative nature of this research allows me to document whether or not Aboriginal former offenders perceive racism to be an obstacle in the reintegration process. Third, this thesis tests the findings of the Correctional Service of Canada and other experts who have identified need factors of former offenders (such as, suitable accommodations, support, and financial considerations) by probing the perceptions of former offenders and service providers on the topic of reintegration need factors. Finally, this research identifies, through the perceptions of post-incarceration “experts” (ex-prisoners and service providers), how the transition from prison back to society might be made easier for former offenders.

### 1.3 Organization of Thesis

The brief examination of current research related to former offenders contained in this Introduction establishes the groundwork which informed the planning of this thesis. The initial review of the research literature cited in this Introduction was instrumental in helping to formulate my research questions, directing my subsequent reviews of the relevant literature, and in the construction of the interview guides for the fieldwork.

Chapter Two is a more thorough examination of relevant literature and statistics on three main topics. The pre-arrest social circumstances of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders, the return of offenders to criminogenic environments and the systemic marginalization of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and how their social reality is tied to their overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. The purpose of Chapter Two is to educate the reader on the importance of social circumstances to an individual's potential involvement with criminal activity. Its contents foreshadow what will be revealed in the chapters to come.

Chapter Three introduces the methodology used for this thesis. It first defines the methodology as being qualitative in nature and identifies it specifically as a focused ethnography. A definition of this research method is provided in Chapter Three as well as a detailed explanation of the format the 'results' are presented in. The chapter goes on to expound on how I went about gathering information for this thesis and how it was subsequently analysed. The chapter concludes by identifying the limitations of this thesis.

Chapters Four and Five detail the substance of the fieldwork. They are substantive in nature and tell the story of how the research phase of this thesis unfolded. The fieldwork is written up using a descriptive method of writing which allows the researcher to include a



very detailed description of what was revealed during the research, what participants said, and what the researcher's own perceptions of the field were.

The final chapter of this thesis, Chapter Six, includes the discussion and final summary of the research. The discussion section identifies the main conclusions that can be drawn from the fieldwork and identifies areas of concern that relate to post-incarceration. The discussion concludes by making eight recommendations. The recommendations are based on the identification of certain problems that impede the transition of ex-prisoners back into the community as they were identified to me during the course of the fieldwork.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE SOCIAL AND STRUCTURAL SOURCES OF CRIME

#### 2.1 Overview

This chapter discusses the linkages between certain social circumstances and crime. There are two purposes behind making these linkages. First, presenting a clear and detailed argument for social sources of crime provides evidence that the social environment into which offenders are returned is equally, and possibly more, important than other factors, such as an offender's previous criminal history. Second, demonstrating a link between involvement in criminal activity and certain social environments gives cause for analysis of the broader social structures responsible for shaping the social world. The examination of the political, economic, and legal structures of society is used to locate the study of former offenders squarely in the social sphere and argue against the popular belief that involvement in criminal activity is purely the choice of the individual. The social conditions in which offenders live prior to or after incarceration are not usually taken fully into account by the criminal justice system, the media or the general public. In fact, for the most part, society is very reluctant to consider anything about the life of an offender other than that single defining moment when s/he ran afoul of the rules of society and committed a crime. The underlying purpose of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the social circumstances many offenders find themselves in. By illustrating that there is more to crime than the act of committing it, this chapter provides the theoretical rationale for examining post-

incarceration from the perspectives of those who have either lived through it or have worked with someone who has.

Section 2.2 describes the social circumstances *from* which most offenders originate. It is shown that those who end up in prison are usually drawn from society's most marginalized ranks. In view of the fact that the offender population in Canada is disproportionately aboriginal the level of marginalization of Aboriginal peoples is examined. Section 2.3 discusses the social environment *into* which most former offenders are returned. The difficulties associated with the return to society after a lengthy prison sentence are discussed. The section shows that the re-integration of offenders is a difficult task, considering they were never integrated fully into society the first place. The final section in this chapter describes the political, economic and legal factors responsible for the differential opportunities of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, and the subsequent problem of Aboriginal criminality. The section describes how racism, paternalism and colonialism all play a role in the continued subjugation of Aboriginal peoples. Examining the structural forces that the general population of Aboriginal peoples must overcome helps to put in perspective the social conditions into which Aboriginal former offenders are returned.

## 2.2 The Social Circumstances of Offenders Prior to their Arrest

“When we come to make an intelligent study of the prison at first hand, which can only be made by one who has had actual contact with convicts and who himself has suffered under the brutal regime that holds sway in every penal institution, and arrive at a final analysis of our study, we are bound to conclude that after all it is not so much crime in its general sense that is penalized, but that it is poverty which is punished, and which lies at the bottom of most crime perpetrated in the present day” (Debs, 1927: 138).

This poignant quote from Eugene Victor Debs, an advocate for workers' rights and a driving force behind the formation of the American Railway Union and the American Socialist Party, is taken from his book *Walls and Bars*, published in 1927, and presented here

as evidence that linking criminal acts to the social conditions of those who commit them is not a new idea. Many researchers, authors, academics, and community groups have ascertained that there are particular social, economic, and demographic circumstances that put people at risk of becoming involved with criminal activity. It is useful to look, first, at offender populations in the United States, where the commonalities among prisoners' pre-incarceration circumstances provide an amplified example of the link between social disadvantage and crime. Reiman (2001) contextualizes the realities of incarceration in the United States by framing his information against a backdrop of startling statistics. According to Reiman, the adult male population in America is about 94 million. There are approximately 1,715,000 adult males incarcerated in state prisons and jails. The significance of these numbers is that "one out of every fifty-five adult American men is behind bars" (Reiman, 2001: 143). Those who are imprisoned in the U.S. are not drawn from the various segments of society; instead they mainly come from the poorest and most disadvantaged ranks of the population. Reiman points out that in 1998 there were approximately 1.2 million Americans serving time in state prisons and of those 1.2 million people one third were not employed at the time of their arrest. In addition, the unemployment rate of prisoners at the time of their arrest is three times that of the general population of adult males. Further, 41 percent of incarcerated offenders in the U.S. have not even graduated from high school, as compared to 20 percent of the general population. The similarities in the pre-arrest social circumstances of incarcerated offenders in the United States illustrates that fact that certain social conditions are more likely to prevent full participation in society and subsequently induce involvement with criminal activity than others. This conclusion is consistent with the pre-arrest circumstances of inmate populations in Canada as well.

According to the John Howard Society (n.d.), when we look at the common pre-incarceration circumstances of offenders in Canada we can typify the average Canadian offender. Generally speaking, the 'typical' offender in Canada is male, between the ages of 18 to 34, is living in impoverished conditions, and is more often than not of Aboriginal ancestry. Poverty plays a pivotal role as a risk factor because it is associated with other living conditions which exacerbate the circumstances of individuals. Poor health and nutrition, a dysfunction family environment – which may or may not include physical abuse – unstable accommodations and a transient lifestyle, are all conditions of poverty and, consequently, social marginalization. Those who occupy the most disadvantaged positions in society are at the highest risk of becoming involved in criminal activity. As stated in the introduction, people of Aboriginal ancestry make up almost 40 percent of the offender population in Canada, but constitute less than 3 percent of the total population in Canada (Correctional Service of Canada, 2001). Based on the common pre-arrest characteristics, which have already been discussed, the disproportionate incarceration rate of Aboriginal peoples suggests that they must also be disproportionately marginalized.

If we are to examine the social context in which Aboriginal peoples live in Canada, we find that people of Aboriginal ancestry do indeed occupy the most marginalized positions in our society. A review of census data helps to illustrate the social circumstances of Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal people in Canada. The 1996 census includes data gathered from registered, not registered, Métis, and Inuit peoples as well as non-Aboriginal groups. Unfortunately, 77 reservations were incompletely enumerated in the 1996 census and were consequently excluded from the census data. As a result, the information included here is an incomplete picture of the total population of Aboriginal peoples. The general trends that these data reveal, however, are assumed to be fairly accurate.

With regard to education, the census includes data on the total population of enumerated Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals who are 15 years of age or over. Using this criterion, the census reveals that 20 percent of the enumerated Aboriginal population has less than a grade-9 education as compared to 12 percent of non-Aboriginals. Similarly, 34 percent of the Aboriginal groups included in the census have not received a secondary school graduation certificate as compared to 22 percent of non-Aboriginals. Like the educational sphere, there are similar discrepancies between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals with regard to employment. The 1996 census reveals that the rate of unemployment for enumerated Aboriginal Canadians is 24 percent, whereas for non-Aboriginal Canadians the rate of unemployment is only 10 percent. Further, Aboriginal peoples are lagging behind the general population in terms of full-year, full-time employment: 34 percent of enumerated aboriginal groups are employed full-time and full-year as compared to 51 percent of non-Aboriginal groups. It is interesting to note that, according to the census data, Aboriginal peoples in Canada are more often employed at part-time, part-year work (52%) than the non-Aboriginal population (43%). However, having a steady income is essential for maintaining social stability and part-time or part-year employment simply does not guarantee a permanent or steady income. The census data show that high unemployment, sporadic job opportunities, and low levels of education are more common among Aboriginal people in Canada than non-Aboriginals. And as mentioned earlier, high unemployment and low levels of education are also linked to poverty and marginalization. These factors are not only common among Aboriginal groups in Canada, but also among Canada's offender population thus providing evidence that social causes are at least partially responsible for Aboriginal overrepresentation in Canadian prisons.

By examining the pre-arrest social circumstances of offenders it is evident that the same risk factors (discussed in the Introduction) that relate to re-offending, such as limited financial resources, unemployment, unstable accommodations and so on, can also be identified as risk factors for *becoming* involved with criminal activity in the first place. This is an important connection to make when considering the release of offenders because unless the environment into which an offender is going to be released is substantially different from that which he left, his chances of successfully integrating into the community are greatly diminished, perhaps even more so than prior to his incarceration. The specific concerns about the return of offenders to the same social circumstances they were in before their incarceration are discussed next.

### 2.3 Returning Former Offenders to Criminogenic Environments

The return of an offender to the community is not an uncomplicated “second chance” for him to become a law-abiding citizen. A return to the community often means a return to the same criminogenic environment – characterized by the same hardships and lack of opportunities – which the offender left before he was incarcerated. Upon the typical offender’s return to the community after incarceration he is likely still under-educated, still without job skills, and still without financial resources. The only difference is that after prison the former federal inmate is more isolated in society. He returns to society not only as an ex-con, an ‘outlaw,’ but the offender himself is thrust into a fast-paced social environment that he is now unfamiliar with because of a lengthy incarceration (Griffiths & Cunningham, 2000).

In prison, inmates are exposed to an anti-social world where responsibility is all but removed from them, and their day-to-day lives are heavily structured within a closed institution. By contrast, the social structure on the “outside” is based on social interaction,

is filled with personal choices, and is extremely unpredictable. In essence, the criminal justice system contributes to the alienation and social isolation of offenders. The cycle works like this: those who are least capable and adept at participating in and contributing to the market economy are those who are most likely to become involved with the criminal justice system. Once imprisoned, the apparent social "misfit" is exposed to an artificial reality that is so dissimilar to the outside world that the inmate's social skills not only deteriorate but they are actually moulded toward the anti-social. Upon release, many inmates are socially less prepared for society than before they entered prison, thus increasing the likelihood that they will reoffend. Griffiths and Cunningham (2000) point out that "[a] newly released offender can feel like a stranger, embarrassed and inadequate, and believe every person on the street can tell he or she has been in prison by appearance alone" (p. 361). Part of the reason for the myriad difficulties that offenders experience upon their release from prison is that post-incarceration is simply an area of corrections that has not been given enough attention by the Canadian criminal justice system. Griffiths and Verdun-Jones (1994) suggest that "While the Canadian criminal justice system has perfected the mechanisms for removing individuals from society and transforming them from citizens into inmates, techniques for re-establishing the status of citizen and reintegrating offenders back into the community are less developed" (p. 552).

The variety of needs of the newly released offender were identified in the Introduction and re-examined in this chapter by comparing the pre-arrest social circumstances of offenders to the social circumstances offenders face upon release. For an offender on parole, it is assumed that his parole officer will assist his adjustment back into the community by helping to address unmet needs. However, community parole officers in Canada generally have heavy caseloads (15-20 parolees per officer) and maintaining the



paperwork required for the case files of offenders is a considerable task on its own besides having to physically supervise, monitor, and assist parolees in the community (Griffiths & Verdun-Jones, 1994: 553). The workload of a parole officer therefore suggests that the amount of time he or she can spend with a parolee is probably quite limited. The end result of the inadequacies of criminal justice post-incarceration procedures is that most offenders experience high levels of stress, anxiety, and a sense of dislocation upon their release. In order to cope with these feelings, some former offenders will return to the familiar and comfortable criminogenic environment they know so well, resuming their abuse of alcohol and/or drugs, and reacquainting themselves with the people and behaviours that facilitated their involvement with the criminal justice system in the first place.

The pre-arrest and post-incarceration social circumstances of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders reflect a lack of social integration. As shown earlier in this chapter and discussed explicitly by Frideres and Gadacz (2001), four influential factors facilitate participation, and thereby integration, in modern industrial society. Social members must have an education, be able to participate in the labour force, have a steady income, and the ability to gain occupational status (p. 90). Social integration, in this context, can be defined as the level of connection individuals have to other people in the community through social units such as family members, schools, and workplaces (Braithwaite, 1990). Braithwaite suggests that deviant behaviour is reduced when the relationships between social members are interdependent. Individual social members need to build relationships with each other through connections in social units (like workplaces). Without these connections an individual social member cannot achieve a very high level of social integration thereby increasing his or her chances of engaging in deviant behaviour. If we consider the lack of integration that offenders exhibit prior to incarceration the idea of

re-integration after release from prison seems almost absurd. That is, how can you *re-integrate* someone into society who has never been *integrated* in the first place?

Brathwaite (1990, 1993) argues that the lack of opportunities for social integration experienced by Aboriginal peoples gives a plausible explanation for why some Aboriginal people become involved with criminal activity. According to Braithwaite, those who occupy the lowest classes in society and are most marginalized lack opportunities to become integrated into mainstream social structures. Aboriginal peoples experience not only a low level of integration with the dominant society but a deterioration of integrativeness within Aboriginal communities. LaPrairie (1996) points out that there has been a "loss of customary social control practices, movement, and traditional roles and obligations" (p. 63) due to the various effects of implementing the reserve system on Aboriginal communities. The end result has been a deterioration of the interdependence between and within Aboriginal communities. Further, the opportunities available to Aboriginal peoples for relationships of interdependence with structures in the dominant society are extremely limited. Braithwaite concludes that the Aboriginal offender is consequently unable to find a community to integrate into.

The particular difficulties of Aboriginal former offenders are exacerbated by the larger social structures of the dominant society that seem to work against Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Although this chapter has already examined the everyday social circumstances of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, the broader social structures that account for those everyday social circumstances have not yet been discussed. The particular social context in which Aboriginal peoples live was created and continues to be shaped by both historic and contemporary political and legal structures (Opekokew, 1987). Although a foray into the structural issues behind the particular social circumstances of Aboriginal

peoples in Canada might, at first, seem irrelevant to a study focused on post-incarceration, however, it soon becomes clear that the particular issues of Aboriginal former offenders cannot be understood outside the context of broader social structures. That is, the issue of Aboriginal criminality and the issues that former offenders must battle upon their release from prison are inextricably intertwined with the legal, political, and economic structures that are characteristic of modern industrialized society.

#### 2.4 Systemic Marginalization of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada

The examination of the particular social environments of Aboriginal peoples in Canada illustrates the way the structures of society manifest themselves in the lives of individuals. Demonstrating the linkages between broad social structures and individual social environments and between individual social environments and involvement in criminal activity illustrates context into which former offenders are returned. The social circumstances of Aboriginal peoples and their subsequent involvement with the Canadian criminal justice system cannot be fully understood or considered without examining the “political, legal, and socioeconomic framework which has contributed directly and indirectly to the criminalization of natives both as natives and as persons who occupy subordinate socioeconomic positions” (Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 2000: 185). Inequitable public policies, systemic racial discrimination, and a devaluation of the rights of Aboriginal peoples all contribute to the criminalization of Aboriginal peoples. Further, public misperceptions on how Aboriginal people became and have remained marginalized only serve to perpetuate stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples. This chapter now turns to the task of discussing how the broader social structures of Canadian society, which appear to function equitably on the surface, actually work to subjugate people of Aboriginal ancestry, people living in poverty, and people who come into conflict with the law.

The first matter that needs to be demythologized about Aboriginal peoples in Canada is the perception that they are somehow collectively responsible for the level of social disruption that their peoples experience. In this chapter, I have already illustrated that Aboriginal peoples generally occupy the most marginalized positions in our society, but aside from the statistics and the intellectual knowledge that Aboriginal peoples are disadvantaged, their circumstances are often visibly apparent in some inner cities and on many reservations in Canada. The dominant perception, that Aboriginal peoples somehow wilfully choose marginalized lifestyles, reflects the trappings of the dominant ideology of modern society. According to Reiman (2001) the ideology of modern society is, at least in part, reinforced through the structure of the criminal justice system.

The structures of modern society, of which the criminal justice system is one, are built upon certain tenets of positivism, such as reason and rationality. The concept of the “rational man” suggests that the individual is responsible for the choices that s/he makes. Modern social organization focuses on the needs, goals and achievements of individuals. Achievement of success in our society is related to individual goals, such as social status and personal wealth. With such an emphasis on the individual and what s/he can achieve, there is a tendency to blame the individual for his or her lack of success. According to Reiman (2001), “the social and economic order suggests that poverty is a sign of individual failing, not a symptom of social or economic injustices” (p. 171). The criminal justice system is uniquely suited to play a role in this deception because it is assumed that the Canadian legal system, built on positivist values, is consistently just, equal, and true. Therefore, when someone commits a crime or is otherwise detained in the courts there must be something wrong with the individual because we *know* there is nothing wrong with the established social order. Reiman asserts since the social order reinforces the ideas that the problem of

crime is solely the responsibility of offenders and that the problem of poverty is a condition under individual control, the social order itself is not questioned, but is seen by the general public as being reasonable and not intolerably unjust (p. 166). The criminal justice systems in modern industrialized societies such as Canada and the United States are so focused on individual blame, that the fallibility of the social order is not even considered when someone is accused of a crime. The result is that the entire burden of blame is placed on the individual, suggesting s/he has failed in his/her duty to society. Unfortunately, the other part of the contractual agreement between citizens and civilized society is never questioned: that is, how has society failed the individual? Reiman explains that criminal justice procedures focus on proving, examining, and evidencing how an individual has wronged society, but no procedural allowances expose and examine the way(s) in which the individual's social or human rights have been violated (p. 167). The net effect, for Aboriginal peoples, of a social order that overemphasizes individual responsibility and ignores social responsibility is that the social structures that have worked systematically against them for decades are absolved of responsibility and Aboriginal peoples are not only blamed for their own marginalization but are also persecuted for it.

The second matter that needs to be demythologized about Aboriginal peoples is the perception that racism, colonialism, and paternalism no longer play a part in their struggles to participate more fully in Canadian society. The use of Critical Race Theory (CRT), a social theory rooted in critical legal studies, allows for a systematic and critical examination of the causal factors related to both the historic and contemporary subjugation of Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal communities in Canada. Three assumptions of CRT relate directly to the issues identified as problematic for Aboriginal peoples. The first, and most basic, assumption is that inequality exists between Caucasians and all non-white racial

groups. The structures of western capitalist society work both overtly and covertly at reinforcing white superiority and non-white inferiority. This racialized mandate is an historical legacy that pervades western society to the present day. The two other assumptions of CRT that are relevant here are concerned with law and justice, respectively. Critical race theorists point out that the law is a mechanism of the dominant economic order and as such it is incapable of recognizing its own (or society's) racial biases and therefore cannot be relied upon to try to eliminate racial inequality. Similarly, "justice" (or what is rhetorically referred to as justice) is determined and shaped by the colour of the participants as well as any economic interests that might be served through its processes. By reducing the problem of crime to a problem in race relations, critical race theorists remove the criminal element of blame and individual responsibility from the social justice equation. Applying CRT to the Canadian context and to Aboriginal peoples requires an analysis of the ways in which the legal system reinforces the Euro-Canadian dominant culture overtly through the legal system itself and covertly through other institutional organizations.

It is difficult in a country that purports to be "multicultural" and "tolerant" to admit that institutional racism is a part of Canadian history and contemporary Canadian social structure. Li suggests that:

"[T]he injustices done to racial minorities cannot be understood outside the context of social and economic developments in Canada and the structural conditions that are inherent in such developments" (Li, 1998: 9).

According to Menno Boldt (1993), racism has pervaded Canada's relationship with its First Nation's people since the beginning. He identifies the fact that "the Crown's denial of aboriginal rights and interests in their ancestral lands on grounds that they were 'uncivilized' was based on racism" (p. 11). Boldt points out that the Canadian judiciary is fully aware of

the fact that King George III's denial of Aboriginal peoples' land claims was blatantly based on racist assumptions and yet, "the Canadian court continues to flatly reject Indian claims to proprietary title to their ancestral lands and it denies Indian claims to sovereignty" (p. 11). The actions of the Canadian judicial system with regard to Aboriginal peoples' rights have had a number of repercussions. First, for Aboriginal peoples in Canada, the devaluing of their rights by a transplanted judicial system that is, incidentally, supposed to be a superior example of equality, fairness, and rationality, proves that Euro-Canadian social institutions are untrustworthy. Second, for the Euro-Canadian populace, if the "just and fair" judicial system, that we so strongly support and believe in, continually denies the rights of Aboriginal Canadians, then the claims of Aboriginal peoples must be unfounded and Aboriginal claimants are simply in the wrong – both in the eyes of the law and in the eyes of the public at large. To take this logic one step further, if the law suggests that someone is wrong then they must also be "guilty" or at least subversive and disorderly. As a result, Aboriginal peoples in Canada come to be seen as "troublemakers," who stubbornly refuse to conform to the superior social organization of modern "civilized" society. The continual inaction on the part of the Canadian judicial and political systems and their reluctance to make a move toward equalizing social, and ultimately race relations has the (perhaps unintended) consequence of promoting a racist ideology.

In spite of all the structural barriers discussed here, many Aboriginal peoples have managed to overcome the hurdles associated with achieving full participation in society, but the journey has not been easy. The combination of racism and the common misperceptions about Aboriginal peoples and their social circumstances make it incredibly difficult for Aboriginal peoples to overcome the stereotypes imposed on them. Discussing some of the particular obstacles that Aboriginal peoples in general must combat helped me

to put into perspective the level of difficulty the Aboriginal former offender must face upon his release from prison.

## 2.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have illustrated for the reader the rationale for conducting a qualitative research project that documents the challenges and social circumstances of a population that few members of society have sympathy for: ex-prisoners. The main thrust of this chapter is to contextualize the social circumstances that many offenders come from. This approach helps to inform the reader about the systemic causes of crime to show that the incident-based approach to criminal justice used in Canada does not consider the big picture. And, as a result, methods of maintaining order and dealing with crime are ineffective. That is, we continually return offenders back into the same disadvantaged positions they were in prior to their arrest, thus potentially starting the cycle all over again. In this chapter, I argue that the social context in which we live dictates and limits many of the opportunities and chances for success that are open to us. The effect that social structures can have on the lives of individuals is illustrated when the circumstances of Aboriginal peoples in Canada are examined. Colonialism, paternalism, racism, and a devaluing of the rights of Aboriginal peoples have historically been and continue to be problematic for Canada's Aboriginal population. Examining the circumstances of offenders prior to their arrest, the known difficulties that former offenders have when they return to the community, and the particular social obstacles that Aboriginal peoples face help to prepare the reader not only for what to expect in the following chapters, but also for understanding why it is important to gain a deeper understanding of the social conditions into which former offenders are released.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Overview

This chapter discusses the methodological approach used in this thesis. It begins by identifying this research as a qualitative study of the culture of post-incarceration and provides a detailed explanation of the research methods used during the fieldwork. The rationale for choosing these methods is provided to illustrate the appropriateness of the methodology employed and to explain the format in which the 'results' are presented in the following two chapters. The way in which information was gathered and interpreted for this thesis is detailed and a brief description of the different facets of the fieldwork illustrates how information for this research was collected. The final section of this chapter outlines the potential and known limitations of doing this kind of research, but reinforces the benefits of qualitative, in-depth analysis.

#### 3.2 Research Method

The research method used in this thesis is qualitative in nature and is best described as a focused ethnography. Focused ethnography "differs from traditional ethnography in that, the topic is specific and may be identified before the researcher commences the study" (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 53). The goal of ethnographic research is to try to understand a particular social setting from the perspective of those who live in that setting. Most of the information gathered for this thesis was collected through the means of open-ended interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted with former inmates, parolees, parole officers, halfway house operators, and community service providers who come into contact

with ex-prisoners on a regular basis. I wanted to gather information from this variety of sources because I felt that each target group would provide a different piece of the ethnographic puzzle. Although the interviews were open-ended and relatively unstructured, interview guides (see Appendix A) were prepared for each of the target groups of participants so that I would remain focused on specific issues related to post-incarceration. The interview guides for service providers working with ex-prisoners were based, in part, on my curiosity about the particular agencies for which each participant worked for. The other basis on which I formulated both the service provider and the ex-prisoner interview guides was my desire to investigate the issues related to post-release that were revealed in the literature, such as employment, housing, education levels, and poverty. In spite of the fact that I created these interview guides, I did not 'bind' myself to using them in their entirety or even using them at all. I did, however, feel it was necessary to have a guide for the interviews just in case conversation about the difficulties associated with post-release did not occur naturally. In addition to conducting interviews, the fieldwork also consisted of observations, informal conversations and the compilation of information documents from various agencies around Saskatoon. Since an ethnography includes not just the act of observing and conducting other aspects of fieldwork but also the production of a written, "thick description" of what has been observed or discovered by the researcher, the information gathered during the fieldwork was synthesized into the write up of the 'results.'<sup>1</sup>

The 'results' of this research are presented using "thick description." This form of writing is descriptive in nature and is developed through the process of "summarizing, synthesizing, and extracting the essential features or characteristics of situation[s]." (Morse

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<sup>1</sup> I have written the word 'results' in quotations because the substance of my research is presented in pure text and does not include any statistical or other quantitative information.

& Richards, 2002: 150). Thick description provides an in-depth documentation of both the substance of the research or the 'results' and also a description of how the research process unfolded. Geertz (1973) suggested that a true ethnography *is* thick description and says that "what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to. Analysis, then, is sorting out the structures of significance" (p.9). Thick description helps to establish the significance of the experiences of the social or cultural group that is being studied. Chapters Four and Five, therefore, document the different facets of the fieldwork, including observations, quotations from the interviews, and information gathered about the various community agencies in Saskatoon which assist former offenders.

I opted to conduct this research on post-incarceration using a qualitative methodology for four reasons. First, I wanted to understand, on a personal level, what it is like to be released from federal prison and returned to the community. Second, I did not feel that a quantitative examination of the subject area, using surveys or other quantifiable methods, would be a satisfying process either for me or for my participants. That is, I wanted to be engaged with both the material and the individuals that I was studying. Third, a study of this kind has not been conducted before and I thought it would be interesting to examine the particular circumstances of ex-prisoners in Saskatchewan. Finally, it is my perception that there is generally not much sympathy for the plight of ex-prisoners, largely because their circumstances are not very well understood. It is my hope that the style of documentation used for the write up of the fieldwork – "thick description" – will advance the literature on former offenders and facilitate understanding among academics, policy makers, service providers and even the general public of the issues that ex-prisoners face.

### 3.3 The Participants

A total of 20 interviews were conducted for this study. Eight former offenders (five Aboriginal and three non-Aboriginal) and twelve individuals who work in areas where they come into contact with former offenders, such as halfway house operators, parole officers, community service providers, and representatives from the National Parole Board. In addition, three of the former offenders are currently working as service providers and were considered as informants in both of those categories. All of the former offenders and eight out of twelve of the service providers, parole officers, and National Parole Board representatives were male.

Aside from interviews, informal conversations occurred during the field work. These conversations took place at National Parole Board Hearings, the Saskatoon Chaplaincy, the Indian Métis Friendship Centre and during in-person and telephone conversations with a few people who work in the housing industry. These conversations were casual encounters that often occurred spontaneously and were not considered to be “interviews” per se. However, each of these impromptu informants was told about the research project and each gave verbal permission for me to use our conversations in this study. These conversations were not recorded using any audio devices. The information gathered in these informal conversations was written down as field notes. The field notes do not include any direct quotations and the anonymity of these impromptu informants is protected by the assignment of pseudonyms and the removal of any personal details they may have disclosed. Most of the participants who were formally interviewed requested that pseudonyms be assigned to them to protect their anonymity, but some of the service providers gave consent for me to use their real names.

### 3.4 Gathering Information

I will digress only for a moment to contextualize what the first steps of conducting this research were like. As a (relatively) young, White, female university student from a middle-class background, the actual circumstances of ex-offenders were initially foreign to me. From my perspective, it was somewhat daunting to contemplate interviewing people whose backgrounds, social circumstances, and personal histories I had no frame of reference for. That is, I understood on an academic level what some of the issues and concerns would be, but an academic understanding is a far cry from a practical understanding. Similarly, I was anxious about how I would be perceived by potential interviewees, who might view me as an outsider. My main concern was that my personal demographics (White, educated, female) might be an obstacle in trying to elicit self-disclosure from some of the individuals I would inevitably want to interview. However, my interest and curiosity about the subject matter helped me to overcome my fears and misgivings and I began the process of gathering information by contacting various agencies in Saskatoon. The fieldwork began in September 2002 and continued through February 2003.

The first agency contacted was the Correctional Service of Canada Saskatoon Area Parole Office, where permission from the regional director was required in order to talk to parole employees. Permission was granted after my research supervisor wrote a letter to the regional director that detailed the parameters of my interest in the Parole Office. The Parole Office turned out to be extremely cooperative and assisted my research goals at various intervals throughout the research process. The director solicited volunteers from Parole Office personnel during their staff meeting, and sent me the names of the individuals who were interested in participating in my study. Three parole officers and one

Correctional Programs Officer were interviewed. In the process of the interviews at the Parole Office, other service providers associated with parole were identified, such as an employment and a housing coordinator who work on a contractual basis at the Parole Office. Interviews were subsequently set up and conducted with these individuals.

The next set of interviews was conducted at Saskatoon's two Federal Community Release Facilities (CRF) or halfway houses. There were two interviews with Salvation Army representatives and one interview with the owner/operator of Meewasinota Healing Centre. In addition, I also interviewed two former offenders residing in each of these community facilities who were contacted with the help of the operators of the halfway houses. During the CRF interviews two further agencies were identified as being important to the experience of some former offenders, the Saskatoon Chaplaincy and the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre. One interview was conducted at the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre with a director of the centre and I spent approximately three hours at the Saskatoon Chaplaincy, where I conducted two interviews and collected observational data.

As a part of the fieldwork, I applied for and received observer status for five National Parole Board hearings. Three of the hearings were conducted using regular parole board procedures and two of the hearings were Elder assisted. My attendance at these hearings generated further observational data as well as conversations with parole board members, offenders, institutional parole officers, and other employees of Saskatchewan Penitentiary and Riverbend Institution. This experience was productive for me because it aided my understanding of an offender's first steps toward release and it also gave me an opportunity to have informal conversations with a few offenders about what they anticipated they would do should they be granted a conditional release.

In view of the fact that there is somewhat of a housing shortage in Saskatoon and that housing was identified in the literature to be an important aspect in the integration of former offenders into society, I attempted to make contact with landlords in Saskatoon to discuss their perceptions on the suitability and availability of housing for former offenders. I contacted the Saskatoon Rental Housing Industry Association and a few property management companies. Unfortunately, no one, other than the initial contact people I spoke to, was willing to be interviewed. I did, however, make contact with the Saskatoon Housing Authority to gather information on the services they offer and to determine the eligibility of former offenders for their programs.

Through contacts in the community I identified and interviewed one non-Aboriginal lifer who was working as the John Howard Lifeline in-Reach worker at the Saskatchewan Penitentiary. Other former offenders, who were not living in Community Release Facilities, were contacted through the Saskatoon Area Parole Office, which resulted in three interviews. In spite of my initial concerns about my personal demographics getting in the way of this research, no significant difficulties in eliciting personal disclosures from ex-prisoners were encountered. In one instance, toward the beginning of this research, I felt that I lost 'control' of the interview and was engaged, instead, in the agenda of the interviewee, who wanted to discuss political matters. However, once I relaxed and let go of the idea that I needed to remain focused on the subject matter, the conversation eventually ended up turning to the state of relations between First Nations peoples and Euro-Canadian society, which turned out to be highly relevant to the subject matter after all. After this incident, I was much more at ease with whatever might occur in an interview situation. I found that the key to a 'good interview' with either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal former offenders was taking the time to listen to them and to not let myself take

complete control over the conversation. Also, with Aboriginal ex-prisoners particularly (although this was true to some degree of non-Aboriginals as well) some self-disclosure on my part helped to build trust and break down some of the barriers between us so that we could speak freely about more sensitive issues. Again, in spite of my initial trepidations about my own suitability as an interviewer of ex-prisoners, I found the actual interviews and my reflections on them afterward to be among the most rewarding aspects of this research.

### 3.5 Working with and Interpreting the Information Gathered

Most of the interviews were taped onto audio cassette, but there were situations where this was not possible. On those occasions, notes were taken during the interview and then transcribed more formally into a word processor directly after the interview. Interviews that were recorded onto audio cassette were subsequently transcribed verbatim into a word processor after each interview. The interviews ranged in length from four transcribed pages to twenty-eight pages. The average length of the interviews was nine pages. Also, twenty-six pages of handwritten field notes were taken and numerous documents from various agencies in Saskatoon were collected for information purposes.

I deliberately decided against using a qualitative software package to analyse the interviews. I wanted to experience the process of organizing the data in a personal way and was concerned that I would feel disconnected from it if I were to enter it all into a program and have a computer organize it for me. I began the task of organizing the data by first selecting participant groups in which the interview data would be placed. Through the process of reading and re-reading the transcripts, five groups were identified. Service Providers (including Community Release Facility operators) were considered to be a separate group from parole officers because there was a definite division in the tenor of the responses of parole officers versus other service providers. Further, even though



Community Release Facilities (CRF) are technically run under the auspices of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), the responses of the operators of the CRFs that were interviewed seemed more appropriately placed into the Service Provider group, rather than a CSC group. National Parole Board Representatives were placed into their own group because their responses did not seem to fit with either the CSC parole officers or with Service Providers. The remaining two groups were Former Offenders and Former Offenders who are Service Providers. The interviews of former offenders who were also service providers warranted their own group because their responses were distinctive from both the Former Offender group and the Service Provider group. There were really no tangible criteria used to divide the interviews up into these five groups. The decisions on how many groups there should be and who fit best into which group were made after numerous reviews of the interview data and were based on my own impression of the underlying essence of what each particular interviewee had said.

After selecting the groups in which to organize the data, I examined the transcripts again and carefully selected key quotes and phrases that seemed to inform the research area and either directly or indirectly answered the research questions of this thesis. After completing phrase selection in each interview group, quotations were cut out and glued onto different coloured 3" x 5" index cards according to subject group. The subject groups for each interview were compared across participants in the same grouping to look for themes and to organize the information that was gathered.

There were ten main themes or topics identified in the interviews with former inmates. Although there were perhaps only two or three quotations under some of the topics, I deemed that a minimum of two quotations on a common topic was worthy of inclusion. The topics identified in the interviews with former offenders were as follows:

First Steps out of Prison; Housing (including halfway houses) after prison; Plans for the Future; About the Institution (prison), Living on the Outside: Concerns, Barriers, Activities; Hobbies, Supports on the Outside; Perceptions of Parole, Correctional Service of Canada (including halfway houses), National Parole Board, and Specific Barriers of Aboriginal Offenders.

There were six main themes or topics identified in the interviews with service providers and parole officers: Job Satisfaction, Workload, Resources of the Agency; Explanation of Job, Philosophy of Agency; Purpose and Goal of Organization; Aboriginal Offenders; Obstacles, Issues that Need to be Addressed, and Housing. The sixteen themes identified were then broken down into areas of primary importance in order to formulate an outline for the final write up. The themes were broken down only after carefully considering them as a whole and determining the overarching nature of each of them. The result of these considerations was the realization that the information would best be understood by organizing it into two main aspects of post-incarceration. The first aspect relates to initial experiences, including the actual granting of an offender's release at a parole board hearing and his first steps in the community once his release is granted. The second aspect of post-incarceration relates to an offender's struggles with day-to-day living. This second aspect is distinct from the first because the challenges associated with life on the outside might continue to affect an offender indefinitely, whereas most of the initial difficulties an offender encounters can and will be overcome. The data and themes that related to this second aspect of post-incarceration were then re-considered and re-organized. The final review of the information revealed four dominant factors that influence the daily lives of former offenders: Community Supervision and Support, Employment, Housing, and for Aboriginal offenders, Culture and Racism. After this final

consideration of the interviews, and the creation of a precise outline, I began the task of synthesising quotations from the interviews, the field notes, and the other information collected during the fieldwork into descriptive text.

### 3.6 Limitations

As with many ethnographic research projects, the sampling method used for this study was cumulative, non-random sampling. In cumulative non-random sampling, the researcher depends on initial participants to assist in identifying and/or recruiting subsequent participants. This sampling method was chosen for three reasons. First, it seemed the most appropriate sampling method for an exploratory study of the culture of post-incarceration because, as an outsider, it was difficult to know where to begin. Second, the former offender population is difficult to locate, so I needed to rely on referrals from initial contacts to generate additional participants. Third, it was not possible to know at the outset how to identify the people who work most closely with former offenders. There are inherent limitations to using cumulative, not-random sampling. The technique does not guarantee a representative sample of the former offender population. Further, I was only able to speak to offenders who were willing to speak to me and who are, presumably, at a certain level of social functioning. Finally, there is always some question about the validity of the researcher's interpretation of the interview data gathered. To reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation on my part, several of the interviewees were asked to provide feedback on my interpretation of their words. Whenever possible, I re-contacted interviewees in order to check and re-check that I had correctly interpreted what they had said during previous conversations. In spite of these limitations I feel that the in-depth approach to this research will help to inform the sociological literature on post-incarceration by bringing the perspectives of those who understand the difficulties associated with release from

prison first hand. In addition, I am hopeful that public perception of former inmates might also be influenced by illustrating, on a more personal level, the social context into which both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal former inmates are released.

### 3.7 Summary

This chapter detailed the research methods used to meet the objectives of this study. The rationale for studying post-incarceration using a focused ethnographic approach was explained and defended. The main motivation for using this method was revealed to be my own desire to understand how offenders feel when they are released from prison and to get a sense of what the main issues are from the 'experts' on post-incarceration – ex-prisoners and the service providers who assist them. This chapter described how the sample of participants was developed and how the fieldwork was conducted. The means of interpreting and analysing the information gathered in this study were discussed and shown to be both labour intensive and time consuming. However, the benefits of working closely with the information gathered were argued to be extremely worthwhile because they increased my level of understanding of the subject area exponentially. The underlying purpose of this chapter is to prepare the reader for the chapters that follow by introducing the practical and philosophical groundwork behind both the planning and the execution of the research phase of this thesis.

## CHAPTER 4

### GETTING OUT OF PRISON: FIRST STEPS

#### 4.1 Overview

This chapter is the first out of two that depicts the substance of the fieldwork. It begins with a description of what parole board hearings entail and includes my own observations from the regular and Elder-assisted National Parole Board hearings attended. The second half of the chapter describes my interpretation of an ex-prisoner's first steps after he gets out of prison as it was described through interviews and information gathered from former offenders and service providers in the community. The initial difficulties and concerns of the ex-prisoners I interviewed are outlined and described. The chapter introduces the various needs that former offenders identified and outlines both the internal and external struggles that were experienced by the men with whom I spoke.

#### 4.2 Getting Released

There are a number of different conditions under which an offender might be released. In most cases, an offender is first released on some form of parole or conditional release, which means he will continue to be supervised in the community. Among the offenders with whom I spoke, most were on either full parole or day parole. To facilitate my own understanding of what it is like to be released from prison, I attended five National Parole Board (NPB) hearings at Riverbend Institution, a minimum security facility in Prince

Albert, Saskatchewan.<sup>2</sup> Anyone can apply for and obtain observer status at a National Parole Board Hearing. The *Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA)* permits observers to attend NPB hearings in the spirit of openness and accountability, and to contribute to better public understanding of the parole decision-making process. I ended up attending five hearings because I wanted to observe both regular parole board hearings and Elder-assisted hearings. Three of the hearings attended were regular hearings and two were Elder-assisted. The hearings were held on two separate days and were scheduled one week apart.

Attending parole board hearings was helpful for me to understand the process that an offender must enter into to apply for conditional release. In addition to the hearings, I also interviewed a Communications Officer with the NPB who was able to clarify for me the different roles of parole board members versus the roles of parole officers. The NPB operates a separate arm under the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada. The other agencies within this Ministry include the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Canadian Security Intelligence Services, and the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). The NPB, however, is an independent administrative tribunal that has the exclusive authority to grant, deny, cancel, terminate, or revoke parole. During an offender's sentence in prison, his progress and activities are monitored and assessed by an Institutional parole officer (an employee under the Correctional Service of Canada Branch of the Ministry) who meets with the offender inside the institution to manage his case. Likewise, after parole has been granted by the NPB, the responsibility for managing the offender in the community is left to a parole officer. The NPB, then, is not involved with the offender in any way outside of the actual hearings. The board does, however, receive substantial reports on each offender

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<sup>2</sup> All of the offenders whose hearings I attended had previously been incarcerated at Saskatchewan Penitentiary but had been gradually stepped down from maximum security down to minimum. As such, they had all done considerable time (more than two years) in federal custody.

detailing his personal history, his criminal history, and his progress in prison. The granting of conditional release is based not only on the information brought to the board during the hearing, but through extensive written information that is collected in the offender's file. Parole board members and parole officers do not communicate with one another outside of parole board hearings. The independence of the NPB and the procedural disconnect between board members and Community parole officers, working under the CSC, provides a safe-guard against board member bias.

The regular parole board hearings were much like any bureaucratic process. The members of the parole board met in a board room at the institution and presumably discussed the case behind closed doors. The offender, the offender's institutional parole officer, anyone else the offender brought with him to speak on his behalf, and I all waited together in the "Inmate Waiting Room" until the parole board members were ready to begin the hearing. The hearing assistant came into the waiting room to let us know that the hearing was about to begin and we all filed into the board room. At the very beginning of the hearing, the hearing assistant explained what was about to happen and checked with the offender to make sure procedure had been followed correctly up to the date of the hearing. The offender had access to all his own files prior to the parole board hearing. The hearing was taped onto audio cassette to be included in the inmate's file. I was allowed to bring in a pad of paper and a pen, and as an observer I was not allowed to speak during the hearing. The offender also had to be informed, in advance, that I applied to attend his hearing as an observer.

The offender's parole officer was asked to speak first on why she or he was recommending the offender for conditional release. The parole officer summarized the offender's institutional record and discussed why conditional release would be appropriate

for this offender at this particular time. The offender was asked to speak next. Although the parole board members would be asking the offender pointed questions later on in the hearing, the offender was asked to make a statement about why he felt he should be granted conditional release. The offender could take this opportunity to provide as little or as much information about himself as he wanted. Out of the three regular hearings I observed, only one of the offenders used this time to try and fully communicate his perspective and progress in prison to the parole board members. That is not to say that the other offenders were uncommunicative, but the hearing itself was somewhat nerve-racking in its officialness and thus not very conducive to meaningful self-disclosure. Anyone else the offender brought with him to speak on his behalf had an opportunity to do so after the offender's statement. Only in one case that I observed (in the regular hearings) did a support person accompany the offender – a representative of a church group. Finally the parole board members spoke, in turn, and mostly asked questions. In all five of the hearings attended, two parole board members were present. The parole board members were overtly focused on risk management, support systems or support opportunities on the outside, employment opportunities, programs completed inside the institution, programs to complete upon release to help manage risk, how the offender feels about his victim(s), how the offender will manage his addictions problem, and where the offender will live. After the parole board members completed their questions and comments, the offender was offered one last opportunity to speak prior to the completion of the hearing portion of the meeting. The parole board members then asked us all to return to the inmate waiting room while they deliberated.

In all the cases I observed, all applications for conditional release were approved. In one case, the offender was coming close to his statutory release date (which means that,



by law the offender will automatically be released because he had served two thirds of his sentence) and since statutory release is not determined by the National Parole Board there would be no conditions placed on his release. According to the NPB and the CSC, this is an undesirable situation when releasing offenders because offenders out on statutory release may not be monitored as closely as those who are granted parole and given special conditions by the National Parole Board. In the case of the parole board hearing I observed, where the offender was close to his statutory release date, it seemed to me that the members of the parole board were unconvinced that this particular offender was ready for release. It was revealed in his hearing that the offender did not know what he would do for employment upon his release. He had taken the meat cutting course in prison and so he thought he might be able to work in food services, but was not sure. This offender had been involved with crime since around the age of twelve and was currently twenty-one years of age. He was going to live in a different city from where he was living when he got into trouble. The offender had an uncle with whom he could live until he could make his own arrangements. He did not want to go back to the same city because he was a gang member and did not want to return to that lifestyle. He was a member of Native Syndicate, one of Saskatchewan's Native gangs. According to the offender, in order to join or be released from a gang, prospective and outgoing members receive a three-minute beating from the members of the gang and this offender did not want to put himself through that by returning to the community where he had been an active gang member. It seemed to me that the difficulty with this particular offender was that if he were to be let out on statutory release he would not receive the support that a lengthy stay in a halfway house could offer him (this will be examined in more detail in the next chapter). As such, the decision was made to grant him day parole so that he could live in a Community Release Facility (CRF)

or halfway house until his statutory release date, which was less than a month away. In an ideal situation, this offender probably should have been granted parole earlier, so that he could have spent more time in a CRF and met with a parole officer for a few months. However, with this particular offender, it seemed as though previous parole board members were not confident that this offender was ready for release and so he remained incarcerated. The NPB members appeared to me to be genuinely concerned for both the safety of the public and the best course of action for the offender. In all the cases I observed, I saw myself as both a researcher and a member of the community in which some of these offenders would be returning. Wearing both these hats, I felt confident in the decisions that the parole board members made. That is, I left the hearings feeling confident about the methods and procedures of the National Parole Board of Canada.

The Elder-assisted hearings were both procedurally distinct and substantially different than the regular parole board hearings. Unlike the regular hearings, the hearing assistant came into the inmate waiting room *prior to* the beginning of the hearing to do all the same duties that occurred at the beginning of the regular parole board hearing. After this was complete, we went into the same boardroom where the regular hearings are held. Elder-assisted hearings are conducted in a circle which included the hearing assistant, the parole officer, the offender, any assistants the offender asked to be there (this may include a Native liaison, an Elder from the institution, family members of the offender or other people from his support system), the parole board members, and an Elder appointed by the National Parole Board.

At both of the hearings I attended, the offender requested that the hearing begin with a prayer and a smudging. The Elder prepared the smudge and took it to each member in the circle. The Elder said a prayer and asked for a good hearing, and a good day. The

Elder did not ask the Creator for a positive parole board decision; he only asked that the proceedings be a positive experience. Everyone in the circle introduced him/herself and stated his/her position. The Elder said a few words prior to the talking circle getting underway. He told the offender that he would be expected to talk about his crime, his development since coming into the institution, and his general state of well-being. There was an empty chair in the circle. The Elder explained to the offender that he was to address the empty chair as if it were someone he loves that could not be at the hearing. He also told the offender to address the chair as though it were his victim. The Elder explained that there must be a victim or the offender would not be in prison. The hearing allowed each person in the circle to speak in turn. The hearing assistant spoke next and explained that her role in the circle was basically clerical. The parole officer explained why she (in both Elder-assisted hearings the institutional parole officers were female) was recommending the offender for whatever form of release that was being applied for. It was a testimonial of her experiences with this offender and her perception of his readiness. The offender spoke next and was expected to present his case with honesty, humility, sincerity, and respect. He talked about his crime, his victim, and his journey toward healing. Covering all of these areas was a lengthy and emotional process. It was heart-wrenching to watch. It seemed much more difficult for the offender to speak in this context than in the regular hearing. The format of this hearing did not allow the offender to hide behind his words or the procedures; he seemed to have to come to the hearing with an open, humble heart. It seemed, to me, more appropriate to conduct the hearing in this way in that it called for more effort on the part of all the members of the circle, especially the offender.

The assistants who were there in support of the offender spoke next (in one case there was one assistant present, a Native Liaison from the Penitentiary and in the other case

there was both a Native Liaison and an Elder present to speak on behalf of the offender). They discussed in great detail the journey they had observed the offender taking. They also discussed their own involvement in that journey. Their testimony was also very honest and forthright. Finally, the parole board members asked questions of the offender, which was much like a regular parole board hearing, but the questioning seemed to be on another level. The Elder-assisted parole board hearings were *necessarily* concerned with the same issues as the regular hearing (i.e. supports, risk management, employment, etc.), but the questions asked by the board seemed, like the hearing itself, more holistic. All the board members' concerns were addressed but they were addressed throughout the entire hearing, not just during the time the board members asked questions. The board was certainly not easier on the offender in the Elder-assisted hearing, but the general atmosphere was more comfortable. It felt like a safe space, where each participant was able to be true to him/herself and it did not seem the offender felt as if he was being judged. In all honesty, the parole board members at the regular hearing were not judgemental either, but the structure of the regular hearing, by comparison, was somewhat cold, austere, and bureaucratic in nature. As with the regular hearing after everyone had his or her turn to speak, the offender was offered the last word before everyone left the room so that the board members could make their decision. Once the board members made their decision, we all returned to the room where a board member told the offender what their ruling was and pronounced any conditions that applied to their decision. The Elder then spoke for a few minutes more about the way the hearing went, the offender's journey, and the meaning of the decision. The Elder said a closing prayer. Everyone shook hands in turn and the hearing was complete.

Offenders who have been granted day- or full- parole spend a few more days in prison before all the paperwork is prepared for them to be released into the community. But, again, those who are released from prison prior to their statutory release date are both supervised and supported during their transition into the community. Although the offender might see the supervisory aspect of the parole officer's role to be an unnecessary provision, I felt that the support services an offender could access through his parole officer and the Parole Office might ease some of the pain of integrating into the community, depending, of course, on the offender, the parole officer, and the opportunities available to the offender upon his release. Offenders who end up serving the full two-thirds of their sentence and are, therefore, not released on parole are basically left to their own devices upon their return to the community. Over the course of this research, I came to understand that this was not the best-case scenario either for the offender or for the community. I will illustrate reasons for this conclusion in the following discussion of the offender's first steps back into the community and, in the next chapter, when I discuss the role of the Community parole officer.

#### 4.3 First Steps Back into the Community

The first steps offenders take returning to the community can be as different as individual offenders themselves. I spoke with former offenders who were living in halfway houses as well as those living on their own. The men who were living in halfway houses had not been out of prison for very long and were trying to adjust to life on the outside. The offenders that I spoke with identified a number of their concerns to me. I cannot say which of their concerns were more or less important because there seemed to be many issues that each offender was trying to deal with simultaneously. Employment, money, their parole officers, community acceptance, and trepidation about the future were all mentioned

by the offenders as being on their minds a lot. Each of these concerns will be discussed next.

The offenders seemed to feel pressure from their parole officers to find employment. This was a source of frustration for many offenders not only because of a soft job market, their low levels of education, their lack of employable skills, and their criminal records, but because they are often released from prison without their identification. It was reported to me by more than one offender, by parole officers, and by community support persons that although offenders are supposed to have their identification returned to them upon their release from prison, this often does not happen. One particular offender felt pressure to find a job because he would be living in the halfway house only for a few months but he was waiting for his identification and so he was feeling very anxious. He was fully aware of how much money he would need to have saved up before he could find a place of his own, including first and last month's rent, damage deposit, and so forth, and waiting for his identification was keeping him from acquiring employment and therefore from saving money. These inter-related road blocks are all cause for concern in and of themselves, but combined together they create a huge source of anxiety for a newly released offender.

The absence of personal identification causes at least two complex problems. First, if an offender is granted parole close to his statutory release date (such as the example I observed at one of the parole board hearings) there will not likely be enough time to have his identification replaced before he is released from the halfway house. Second, parole officers and other community support persons (such as an employment coordinator contracted by the Parole Office) are frustrated when offenders are returned to the community without proper identification because gainful employment is seen by the

Correctional Service of Canada as a main contributor to the reduction of an offender's risk of reoffending. Put more simply, you cannot get a job without identification and if you do not have a legitimate means of making money, your alternatives are very limited.

Attempting to figure out how to interact with a parole officer is another first step an offender on parole will take when returning to the community. Offenders' interactions with their parole officers were reported to me to be largely positive, but sometimes frustrating, confusing, and unproductive. Most of the offenders with whom I spoke seemed to like their parole officer, but they did not seem to fully understand his or her role, therefore many of the ex-offenders did not see their parole officer as being particularly effective. One offender, living in a halfway house, did not know how to interpret his relationship with his parole officer, 'Roger'<sup>3</sup> stated that:

"I see her about once every two weeks, she tells me I'm doing good, but what does she know about me? She doesn't know me....At the beginning, she seemed really supportive, but now it seems like more about control. I'm just a criminal to her."

He went on to talk about what he had expected it to be like once he was released on parole, suggesting that he expected more than what he actually got:

"I wanted to come out, and have a job, have money. I was told that I'd come out and be given a one-month bus pass, for the first month and I met with my parole officer and she gave me four bus tickets. She said that's all they could spare because of budget cuts. No one was really helpful. I try to look at it from their side, they want to look good, they want us to show they're doing their jobs by keeping us out of prison, by helping us reintegrate and making sure we don't go back to jail. But, they don't help us very much."

It seems that offenders feel as if they are getting mixed messages from the Parole Office, in that the Parole Office seems quite committed to the offenders getting into the programs they need, such as Choices (a program that helps with addictions), but when it comes to

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<sup>3</sup> All names appearing in single quotation marks are pseudonyms.

living day-to-day, the offender must take the initiative. Although this will be discussed further in the next chapter, I will just mention quickly that parole officers struggle both philosophically and logistically with how much support to provide. Philosophically speaking, the parole officer wants to know that the offender will be able to do things on his own when he is no longer on parole. And in a logistical sense, parole officers' case loads are so heavy that they often feel as if they cannot spend as much time with their parolees as they would like. It is difficult, however, for an individual offender to know how much support he is supposed to get versus what he is expected to do for himself. This is particularly difficult, considering the fact that most offenders were not integrated into society prior to their incarceration, so *re*-integration then is not only a misnomer, but very difficult to do when the individual offenders were really not sure how to live in legitimate society. From offenders' comments, I was led to believe that many parolees do think a lot about doing the things their parole officers ask them to do. However, actually getting things done – like finding a job or a place to live – is extremely difficult and so meetings with the parole officer increase the offender's anxiety further when he has been unable to meet his parole officer's expectations.

Other offenders indicated that although they were unsure of any personal benefit from meeting with their parole officer, they understood that the community might feel safer with the reassurance that an offender was being monitored in the community. I interviewed a former offender, 'Steven', who is a "lifer", which means he will meet with a parole officer for the rest of his life. He intimated to me that he did not feel it was necessary for him to see a parole officer because he knew he would never re-offend, but that he understood society's rationale, 'Steven' remarked:

"My opinion, no [I do not feel I need to see a parole officer for the rest of my life]. But, if it's the public's concern then I have no problem with it



because then it shows that I'm doing what I need to do. I'm a member of the community, I'm back in society, I'm not someone that my neighbours need to be worried about...the parole officer with their job, they see me once a month in the office and they tend to do a home visit to make sure everything's good at home too, so they're basically doing what they need to do to make sure the community is safe and all that kind of stuff."

The quotation leads me to another concern outlined by offenders: their perception that they will not be accepted by the community now that they are ex-cons, and the sheer fear of living on the outside. This perception can be particularly crippling if the offender has spent considerable time in prison. 'Steven,' the lifer quoted above, recalls his first day out of prison after being incarcerated for twelve years:

"I walked in there [the halfway house], they did their little introduction, they showed me my room. It was a dorm room; I think there were four beds in that room. And their comment was "be back here at eight o'clock" on my first day in....So, this was it, suddenly free. I can remember going outside, looking. And I could see the cars and I figured no. I basically went back up to my room and unpacked. I was procrastinating to go back outside....And then I was expected to be at the Parole Office, I think that afternoon, they told me how to get there. I took my papers, my resumé, I had done a lot of work for myself prior to that and went there...[After the meeting I] went back downstairs, I was walking out of the building and there was an individual, basically to me he looked like a police officer or whatever. But we're walking and if we kept walking the same way we were we were going to hit each other. So I adjusted my angle or my gait to change and as he walked by, he just grabbed my arm. And my papers fell on the ground, I don't know why he did that...he looked normal, [I think] he's just schizophrenic or whatever. And I remember just flipping "you got a fuckin' problem?" You know, and I chased him down the street, right downtown Saskatoon, you know, just stressed right out. I went back, picked up my stuff. People were looking at me and I went back to the halfway house, you know, went to my room and I crashed and I slept, I think until four o'clock the next day. And that was my first day."

'Steven's' story illustrates how a troubling, but not overly distressing event that a person might experience in daily life might be amplified into a very traumatic experience for someone who is just out of prison and very unsure of a social world that has become foreign to him. 'Steven' also communicated to me that when he was first released he would be walking down the street and would try to avoid eye contact with passers-by because he

would think to himself “they are going to know I’m a killer.” Some offenders I spoke with were less affected by their concerns about acceptance, but all the offenders I spoke with had been federally incarcerated and thus spent more than two years in prison which made their first days and weeks out of prison extremely stressful. Many of things we all take for granted in day-to-day life were mentioned to be sources of anxiety by former offenders. The speed at which cars drive by you when you are walking down the street, the sounds of their horns, how to go about getting a driver’s license, the cost of renting an apartment, buying groceries, and learning to keep appointments were conveyed by offenders to be serious stressors to them after their release.

My sense of what they were trying to communicate to me about their feelings on having just been released was that all their concerns were rooted in the uncertainty of the future. The questions they seemed to be constantly asking themselves were: when will I get a job? What kind of a job will I do, can I do? How am I going to move out by myself in a couple of months without money? Am I going to be able to keep myself out of prison? Am I going to be able to stay clean? Further, the offenders seemed concerned with the idea that people in the community would know, just by looking at them, that they were ex-cons and that this would affect their chances of getting a job, their chances of finding housing and their day-to-day interactions. The next chapter describes how some of these apprehensions are alleviated to varying degrees through community supports, including help from the Parole Office. Regarding support, several of the offenders acknowledged that they were ultimately responsible for themselves but that appropriate support is absolutely essential to them “making it” on the outside.

#### 4.4 Summary

This chapter began the process of detailing what it is like to be released from prison. The first section of this chapter discussed how regular and Elder-assisted National Parole Board hearings are conducted and how they differ procedurally. I noted that although the Elder-assisted hearings might be a more humbling and emotionally draining experience, they appeared to me to be more efficient than the regular parole board hearings. The intricacies and inherent difficulties of parole board decisions were illustrated. The complexity of parole board decisions lies in the perceived risk an offender will pose to the community should he be granted parole versus the consequences of refusing his parole application and waiting until his statutory release date to return to the community. The granting of a conditional release prior to the statutory release date was revealed, in this chapter, to be more desirable for both the offender and the community because the offender will have not only more support available to him, but he will also have to abide by conditions of release that are put in place to minimize his risk of re-offending.

The second half of this chapter outlined the concerns of newly released offenders as they were communicated to me. The process of beginning to integrate into the community was shown to be a difficult task considering the level of integration an offender experienced prior to their incarceration is questionable at best. Employment, financial resources, difficulty relating to their parole officer, community acceptance, and uncertainty about the future were all identified as concerns of ex-prisoners. The main issue related to employment that was identified was that many ex-prisoners are released from prison without identification. Replacing identification cards is a lengthy process, which slows the offender's integration into the community and prevents him from addressing other needs

such as money and finding a place to live. Little or no job skills and low levels of education were also identified as barriers to finding employment.

Most of the offender I interviewed had positive things to say about their parole officers but were sometimes frustrated by their parole officer's expectations of them versus what they are actually able to achieve on their own. High levels of anxiety and apprehension about the future seemed common among the ex-prisoners with whom I spoke. Part of the difficulty for some ex-prisoners was their perception that they would not be accepted by the community. Self-defeating ideas such as these add a significant barrier that can prevent an ex-offender from becoming motivated to go out into the community, thus causing further anxiety when he meets with his parole officer and reports that, for example, he has not yet found a job. I concluded the chapter by mentioning that some of the concerns of offenders can be ameliorated through various supports in the community, a topic that will be expounded upon in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE DAILY STRUGGLES OF LIFE ON THE 'OUTSIDE'

#### 5.1 Overview

In this chapter, I outline the issues that I identified in the fieldwork as the utmost importance to the integration of former offenders in Saskatchewan. As such, it discusses issues related to community support services, employment, housing, and racism. The first part of the chapter systematically details the roles that various agencies around Saskatoon play in the integration of offenders. The Saskatoon area Parole Office, Saskatoon's two Community Release Facilities, the Saskatoon Community Chaplaincy, and the Indian Métis Friendship Centre are all discussed at length. The service providers who work at these agencies are quoted on their perceptions of what their respective agencies offer to newly released offenders and on the difficulties they encounter in assisting with the transition of offenders back into the community.

The remainder of the chapter discusses the difficulties of managing day-to-day activities of ex-prisoners. The issues that are identified as particularly problematic for former offenders are related to employment and housing; for Aboriginal offenders these concerns are shown to be exacerbated due to their encounters with racism. The chapter concludes with the happy discovery that in spite of the myriad difficulties that Aboriginal ex-prisoners face, the benefits and tools available to them through Aboriginal spirituality and traditional Aboriginal teachings are quite significant.

## 5.2 Community Supervision and Support

Several interviews were conducted in the community with people who provide support to former offenders. Community parole officers were very helpful in facilitating my understanding of the role of Correctional Service of Canada in the successful reintegration of offenders and the role of individual parole officers in that mission. Parole officers discussed their own perceptions of their effectiveness in helping offenders reintegrate. 'Teresa,' a parole officer, reflects on her role:

“it's a big responsibility to help somebody reintegrate...you need to develop the rapport and everything else with that person and learn how to help them and know their case needs and things like that and that takes a lot of time and energy...”

To help offenders to reintegrate, the parole officer will prescribe certain programs a parolee must participate in to manage, what the CSC calls, his “risk of reoffending.” These programs, which are taken through the Parole Office, are delivered by a Correctional Programs Officer. One of the most important programs, which all parolees must take when they are released, is the Community Orientation Program. This is a one-week program that assists offenders who are on parole with getting back into the community. Through this program, parolees fill out the necessary forms to get their identification back, they are taken out into the community and shown where to go to look for available jobs and they meet with the employment coordinator who works out of the Parole Office. Another program available through parole is the Choices program which is an intensive substance abuse program. Programming is generally a big focus. A lot of offenders, however, are not pleased to find out that they must complete programming on the outside. Some offenders did not participate in programming in prison (by their own choice), but to remain in the community they needed to participate in programs. A parole officer whom I interviewed describes it this way:

“The parole officer will prescribe, through a correctional plan, programs that meet the offender’s needs once he’s in the community. So we strongly recommend that the offender participate in programming that we feel will aid in the management of their risk – which is our paramount objective – is managing the offender’s risk while he’s in the community.”

Aside from the responsibility of managing an offender’s risk, most of the parole officers with whom I talked saw themselves in a supportive role. ‘Erin’ communicated the following to me:

“I see my role with these guys basically to assist and support them. I know there’s a stigma attached to “parole officer” with a lot of these guys that we’re just looking to find something wrong so we can send them back to jail, but that’s not the case.”

Ultimately, parole officers want their parolees to succeed and not return to prison. Support was defined somewhat differently among parole officers. As described briefly in the previous section, parole officers seem to struggle with how much support is enough. On the one hand, they need to build a rapport with their parolees to gain their trust so that their parolees will communicate their problems, concerns, and difficulties. Rapport-building necessarily requires a certain level of familiarity between parole officer and parolee even though there needs to remain a degree of detachment. On the other hand, a parole officer usually has a finite amount of time to spend with a parolee. An individual meeting with a parolee, for example, might last only half an hour to an hour. In addition, the length of time an offender remains on parole also varies and certain offenders only end up spending a very short time on parole. These time constraints make it a priority for the parole officer to encourage independence in the parolee so that he will be able to make it on his own in the community. The parole officer is loath to do too much on behalf of the offender because, in most cases, he will need to manage on his own at some point.

In spite of parole officers’ concerns about achieving the right level of balance with their involvement in parolees’ lives, the caseloads of parole officers are often so large that

too much time with an offender is not so much an issue as is the parole officer's ability to effectively manage all of his or her cases. Some comments which were made to me confidentially by parole officers revealed that their workloads are really unmanageable:

"One of our core values is that we value our employees. It's interesting how that translates to the types of workloads that we do because I think ultimately, that's going to have an effect....I don't think there is a higher work load anywhere in this business than there would be in the community....In terms of just the nuts and bolts, the Community parole officer [works long hours], with no qualification for over time.....The parole officer that stays late, because perhaps they sleep better at night knowing everything, or most things, are done usually does not win favour with some of the more seasoned parole officers..."

Large case loads are a concern for community parole officers because they end up translating into a lot of extra paper work. The same parole officer who wishes to remain unidentified stated that:

"Some would say that this sort of bureaucratic stuff is sort of our own watchdogs [we use] to make sure we're doing the job the way we need to. I mean there is public scrutiny, it sells papers to say that things are going wrong and no agency likes bad press, especially when there are things associated with protection of the public...So, I think one of the downfalls to capturing the information that we're doing our job is that we're not going to be doing as much of the job. More emphasis is put on saying that we're doing it and showing it, than the actual doing."

The interviews with parole officers ultimately revealed that they were all an incredibly dedicated bunch of people who care about the people they are supervising. However, budgetary and time constraints contribute to low levels of job satisfaction and severe over-work. I was deeply sympathetic to the circumstances of those working as parole officers but I could not help but to sympathise with the offender as well, whose opportunities and support resources are further limited because of the budgetary constraints of the Correctional Service of Canada.

Community parole officers said that they often rely on the operators of Saskatoon's two Community Release Facilities (CRFs) or halfway houses to help them supervise their



parolees. I interviewed the operators of both the Salvation Army CRF and Meewasinota CRF Healing Centre. I will discuss each facility in turn because they offer different support to offenders.

The CRF at the Salvation Army is called the New Frontiers Unit. The halfway houses can comfortably accommodate between 14 and 20 offenders. When I met with the operator of the halfway house, Albert Brown, there were about 10 former offenders living there. The Salvation Army also offers other types of housing services, including Short Term Residency for one day to three months, Long Term Residency for three months to more than two years, and Transitional Housing which is available to parolees to accommodate them while they look for housing of their own. Currently, the New Frontiers Unit has also been taking in some provincial offenders who are on electronic monitoring, due to the fact that the provincial facilities in Saskatoon are overcrowded. Programming is available to offenders through the Salvation Army. All the programming that occurs under New Frontiers is aimed at trying to assist the "total person." According to Salvation Army literature provided to me on New Frontiers, they try to encourage the individual offender to initiate his own process of reintegration:

"It is our hope and the ends we strive for that each client will develop an individual program aimed at his reintegration into the community. We believe that only when this effort comes from the individual rather than an outside source will his reintegration efforts be effective over the long term."

Within New Frontiers, a number of programs are available, including substance abuse counselling, personal one-on-one counselling, life skills training, anger management, community reintegration, and spirituality, to name but a few. I interviewed the Executive Director at the Salvation Army, Major Wayne McDonough, who differentiated the role of the Salvation Army versus the role of parole. He stated that:

“We try to show some compassion and understanding because our role is different than parole. Parole, they want to help and they fight as hard as they can to keep a person out and I say that because some people don’t realize that. Parole bends over backwards for the guys, but still they have a role that they are ‘parole.’ Whereas, we have the ability to go maybe a step different....I think the people coming out shouldn’t all be treated as if they’re the same, because they’re not, we can give the guys some level of personalized attention, on a personal level because we are not their parole officer.”

Major McDonough went on to say that offenders sometimes come back after they have completed their time at the halfway house:

“We have a number who come back and they’ll pop in and usually it’s the ones we don’t expect to come back. You know, they finish their time, they’re out working and they just pop back in and show up and say how they’re doing, it might be a year later. We have some who leave and they come regularly, especially for meals.”

Major McDonough’s comment points out the fact that grass roots community service agencies, like the Salvation Army, often end up being involved more consistently in the lives of offenders and for a longer period of time than any of the formalized governmental agencies. Two former offenders that I spoke with reported that over the years they have accessed the services available at the Salvation Army fairly regularly; either for food or for lodging. Both stated that they did not know what they would have done without the help of the Salvation Army.

In addition to the CRF, the Salvation Army offers some programs at their Community Centre that offenders can take part in, if they choose. They have Community Training Kitchens where people can go to learn how to cook and to stretch their food dollars. They also have a public dining room that provides three meals a day to people in need. Offenders who are staying in the CRF often help out in the kitchen to assist with the preparation and clean-up of the meals. The Salvation Army has a budget management service to help people with difficulty managing their money to make ends meet, and some

offenders utilize this service. Finally, there are occasionally other programs run in the Community Centre that offenders and other members of the community can participate in. Again, the difficulty in providing consistent support to offenders lies in inconsistent monetary resources.

Meewasinota Healing Centre CRF is located on 20<sup>th</sup> Street in downtown Saskatoon. It is owned and operated by Don Isbister, a dedicated community member who really seems to care about “the guys.” “Meewasinota,” a Cree name, meaning “a good place to camp.” When I interviewed Don about 25 offenders were staying at his CRF, but the facility can hold about 36. Meewasinota has an open door policy. There is generally an Aboriginal focus at this facility but their Mission Statement specifically declares that their doors are open to all offenders. Offenders staying at Meewasinota are required to attend a sobriety program such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous and/or a spiritual program that includes sobriety. Meewasinota runs its own wellness program that offenders are required to participate in, the H.A.W.K.S. Program. H.A.W.K.S. was created by Don Isbister and is delivered by him in weekly sessions. According to the document on H.A.W.K.S. provided to me by Don, the program takes a holistic approach and

“uses the participant’s daily living experiences as learning resources. Participants work toward achieving a healthy balance of values and integrating these principles into their thinking, decision-making, relationships, problem solving, and roles in the family and work.”

H.A.W.K.S. is an acronym for the guiding principles of the program: “H” stands for Honesty, Hope, Honour, and Healing; “A” stands for Awareness, Acceptance, Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Identity; “W” is for Willingness and Wellness; “K” is for Kindness and Kinship; and finally “S” is for Sobriety, Self-esteem, and Selfhood. According to Don,

“when a resident feels he has internalized these values to guide his life he flies like a hawk. He is free and strong, like a hawk.”

Don imparted to me, through our conversations, his own philosophy which he uses to try to help offenders who come to his CRF. I want to include a few of his quotations here that relate to the internal support system he teaches offenders to develop. I feel his words greatly advanced my knowledge about both the tangible and intangible struggles an offender faces and I think these particular quotations hold powerful intrinsic value:

“In our program here, we talk about kindness, wellness, and self-identity in a good way. And most of them don’t have that, they don’t understand those concepts. If you don’t feel that you’re wanted – and we talk about Aboriginal people, I mean when I was going to school, at a very young age people would ask me “what’s your nationality?” And I would say, “well I’m just Ukrainian.” ...Because, you see, back in my day they called you “half breed.” And if you were a half breed you weren’t accepted. And, you know, that still goes on today. So, that’s why we talk about self-identity in the H.A.W.K.S. program and being able to be proud of who you are and you can’t change who you are. If you have kindness and acceptance and awareness to accept people for who they are you can accept yourself. The people who have been incarcerated need to be taught that these are the things they need to be doing because they need to accept themselves.”

“Having awareness, but also having the acceptance of ourselves and others. There are always going to be people out here that are not going to be so accepting, but it’s having the awareness of who I am and what I can do to change that.”

Acceptance proved to be a problematic issue for many offenders. For example, former inmate turned service provider, Gerald Bissett, who works with lifers in Saskatchewan Penitentiary<sup>4</sup> through John Howard, faces difficulties with his co-workers who do not seem to accept him as a colleague.

“when I first came here, some of the staff knew who I was, they knew that I was an ex-offender, a lifer [and] one of the terms they like to use is, I’m a role model for some of these other lifers...And I’d be walking in front of some staff and they say “there’s our fuckin’ role model.” And this is coming from a staff member, you know?”

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<sup>4</sup> In May of 2003 it was announced that the funding for the Lifeline Program was being cut. As a result there are no longer in-reach workers going into penitentiaries helping lifers cope with life on the inside or the transition to life on the outside.

Gerald confronts this challenge on a daily basis due to the context in which he works. This example illustrates the fact that in spite of Gerald's apparent legitimacy in society, within the culture of the correctional system, he is still an outlaw.

Former inmates have really have only a few places they can go to meet one another or to just be themselves without having to worry about acceptance. Like the Salvation Army, Don Isbister remarked that his guys often return to see him after they are no longer living in the facility. This openness to former residents seemed important because, as explained earlier, sometimes an offender completes his parole but is not fully ready to be out on his own or just needs a little extra support. Don explained that:

"We just try to promote a lifestyle that's healthy and try to show them. We do follow-up here also. A lot of guys come back on a regular basis and they know they're welcome here and I always tell them come have supper with us, come and visit, come have coffee, the door is always open and it gives them another outreach place if they're starting to have difficulties out there, we've had them come back here...We also have a program here that if anybody leaves here and they are struggling, we've set up something through social services where they're allowed to come back here. We know relapse always happens, so we try to create a door that's open for them."

Both the Salvation Army and Meewasinota try to work with other agencies, like the Saskatoon Community Chaplaincy and the Saskatoon Indian and Métis Friendship Centre, as well as offender's family members if they are willing and able to help with the offender's (re)integration process. Circles of support such as these are essential in assisting offenders as they struggle to find their place in the community. The Aboriginal former offenders with whom I spoke, who had supports from Elders and other family members, seemed very confident that they would never go back to prison. 'Alex' was very appreciative of the efforts of Don Isbister at Meewasinota and the cultural programming he had received there, but he was really looking forward to getting back home. He said:

"I have some Elders over there that can help me and my dad's really good at that, he's someone I can talk to and get me through the tough times that I'm

going through. [And] I grew up around that kind of stuff, like sweats and ceremonies...I don't have the same friends I had just before I went to prison when I was in the city, but my old friends, there's one guy, that's from my reserve and I grew up with him. He's one of my best friends, he's like my brother.

Another Aboriginal Offender, 'Russell,' who got to know about his culture and began to learn his language at the Cultural Centre in Prince Albert Penitentiary, explained that:

"things make so much more sense to me now. I've learned about my own spirituality and about the Creator. I have to be honest because the Creator will know if I am not and I didn't know any of this stuff before. And I've met so many people who can help me keep learning, Elders and other people who understand my culture."

Aboriginal offenders that I spoke with who were learning traditional teachings and culture had well-developed support networks. Support from family, friends, community members, or grass-roots organizations seemed to be one of the keys to success for many offenders.

Representatives at both the Saskatoon Community Chaplaincy and the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre were interviewed. Both agencies have clients who wander in looking for help and many of their clients also turn out to be former offenders. It was remarkable to me, as I spoke with people at these two agencies, that the fact that some of their clients were ex-cons seemed incidental. That is, it was hard for me to get information from them about former offenders exclusively because at both agencies their clients were seen just as people in need of help, their "status" as ex-cons did not matter. This surprised me at the Saskatoon Chaplaincy especially because their mission is geared specifically toward helping ex-offenders, whereas the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre focuses on assisting people from all walks of life.

The Saskatoon Community Chaplaincy does outreach work that focuses on the restoration of ex-offenders to the community. According to an information brochure about the Saskatoon Community Chaplaincy, they are the only federally supported

community chaplaincy in Saskatchewan. As far as support services go, the Saskatoon Community Chaplaincy offers a continuation of the spiritual care which offenders may have received in prison from the Chapel or Elder Programs. They also try to help provide a link to the community for offenders by assisting them in finding accommodations, finding employment, advocating on their behalf, or referring them to other agencies for help. The Saskatoon Chaplaincy is located on 20<sup>th</sup> Street and as a result it is accessed by many people on a drop-in basis. I spent a few hours there, visiting with the people who staff the office and some ex-offenders who stopped by for a cup of coffee and some conversation. The atmosphere of the place was comfortable; there were couches to sit on and everyone was very friendly. I was struck by the open acceptance of the place. Basically anyone who comes in is made to feel welcome and as if they are important. The only rule seemed to me to be sobriety because I did witness someone being kindly asked to come back later when he sobered himself up, but even this was done in a respectful and polite way. Many ex-offenders who stopped by the chaplaincy said that they lived close by and liked to visit as often as they could because their living arrangements were not "very comfortable." The neighbourhood in which the chaplaincy is located is one of the most criminogenic in Saskatoon. The housing in that area is dilapidated and unsafe. Some of the former offenders who came to the chaplaincy seemed to see it as a refuge, where they could get the support and strength they needed so that the circumstances in which they were living would be more bearable. In my estimation, the Saskatoon chaplaincy provides essential services to ex-offenders. I was left to wonder, however, how many ex-offenders actually overcome their own fears and seek out the help they need. My perception of some of the offenders who came into the Chaplaincy while I was there was that it took a great deal of effort to come into the office and ask for help.

The Indian and Métis Friendship Centre is another agency where an offender might go to look for support. The Centre provides a number of services to Aboriginal people, but does not have a specific focus on services for adult former offenders. Having said that, two points need to be clarified – first, with such high numbers of Aboriginal people in prison in Saskatchewan, many of the people who come to the Friendship Centre are also incidentally former offenders. Second, the particular issues that former offenders have difficulty with, such as employment, housing, acceptance, and money, are also issues that large segments of the non-offender Aboriginal population need to address. As a result, little differentiation at the Friendship Centre occurs between ex-offender versus non-ex-offender. I am unsure whether it is a conscious decision of the Centre that is rooted in a restorative approach to justice that many Aboriginal cultures seem to embrace and the label of “ex-offender” is simply seen to be irrelevant if an offender has made amends with his community or if there are just so many Aboriginal people who are also ex-offenders that it has become unnecessary to differentiate. In either case, it seemed a good practice because people coming to the Friendship Centre were viewed just as “community members who need help” rather than as “criminals who need help.” In Euro-Canadian society, these are two very different classifications that usually invoke differing reactions from the public. That is not to say that any of the other agencies I examined made unfair classifications of the former offenders they work with, nor did they appear to pigeonhole offenders into a particular category. However, the fact that the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre was the only agency that did not differentiate between ex-offender and non-offender made a meaningful impression on me.

The Saskatoon Indian and Métis Centre offers several formal and informal services to people in the community. There is a Family Violence Program which provides



individual, family or group counselling to help heal families from the effects of family violence. The Centre runs a Hepatitis C Partnership program that helps people gain a better understanding of Hepatitis C, including how to manage the disease. Finally, there is a Family Worker/Trustee Program that works to help people in a variety of areas. The trusteeship aspect of the program helps people to manage their money and the Centre often gets referrals from Social Services, identifying people who need this program. Other services provided include advocacy, workshops, counselling, and help with finding suitable accommodation. Again, it is important to note that all the services provided by the Saskatoon Indian and Métis Friendship Centre which cater to the needs of Aboriginal people in our community are identical to the services other agencies provide to deal specifically with the needs of ex-offenders.

For the former offenders who seek out support services there are a variety of resources available; however, the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders who do not have these kinds of support systems or are unwilling to investigate them on their own sometimes feel lost. They just do not know where they fit in. 'Larry', a former inmate who has had a severe cocaine addiction for many years, does not know how to find support on the outside:

"You get out, you can't hang out with any of your old friends because you get like you want to go back to the old life. I don't know where I fit in in the 'straight-world.'"

This quotation suggests that for the former inmate, it is extremely difficult to figure out how to fit in to the social world. And for some Aboriginal former offenders who have not had the opportunity or are not interested in learning about traditional teachings, these feelings of social disconnect are even more amplified. 'Arnold' states:

“I went to that Cultural Centre in the Pen a few times, I wasn’t sure about it. I don’t know much about that kind of stuff. I didn’t seem to fit in there, but I feel like I should. It’s hard to figure out where I do fit.”

It is these offenders who often slip through the cracks because even though there are adequate support services out there, some offenders need a lot of extra effort which most agencies do not have the time or resources to provide. The result is hard to predict or track. Offenders who do not get the particular kinds of support they need may end up returning to prison, they may eventually decide to seek out the support they need, or they may just carry on living on the margins, never managing to pull themselves out of adversity.

### 5.3 The Difficulties of Day-to-Day Living

Throughout my investigations of the culture of post-incarceration it was revealed that some of the day-to-day things that I take for granted are serious concerns and hurdles for former offenders. Further, there were some obstacles that I will never encounter but are, in fact, commonplace for the ex-offender. In Chapter Three it was mentioned that three former inmates who are now working as service providers were interviewed. Their insights on the difficulties that an ex-offender experiences on a day-to-day basis were particularly poignant. ‘Peter’ talked about his own struggles he has in trying to ‘go legitimate.’ ‘Peter’ was a prolific drug dealer, before he began working in the field of post-incarceration and he has had difficulty learning that you cannot make money as quickly as you can when you are doing things illegally. This was not an uncommon adjustment difficulty for ex-offenders who had been trafficking. To make matters worse, ‘Peter’ works on a contractual basis for the John Howard Society. As a result, his employment is sporadic. ‘Peter’ states:

“Ya, and now they’re not using my services. I gave up a good life of crime for this, guys. And that was a very hard thing to adjust to. I used to work two jobs. I used to do property management and the John Howard Society because, you know, they don’t pay a lot. Not at all. But, in all reality, with

two jobs, I was making less in a year than I made in a week. That's the only real thing I find very hard to adjust to. You call this the good life? And, I can live off what I make now, but it's still hard."

The idea of leaving behind a criminal lifestyle might seem a straight-forward decision for those of us who are not accustomed to that life. However, I came to understand that "going straight" seems just as obscure and difficult to imagine for some offenders as a criminal lifestyle seems to most of us. I had a difficult time understanding how it is that some offenders do not take advantage of support systems that are available or that they will sometimes pass up opportunities that to me would appear to solve many of their problems. I especially wondered about why an Aboriginal offender, serving time in Saskatchewan Penitentiary in Prince Albert, would not take advantage of the Cultural Centre located inside that prison. I had to return to some of the individuals I interviewed to answer some of these questions. I went back to talk to Don Isbister as well as two former offenders. All three of these informants answered each of my questions in a similar way. The general answer to all three of my questions (which were: why stay in a criminal lifestyle, why not take advantage of available supports, and why do some Aboriginal offenders choose not to access the Cultural Centre in P.A.?) was fear. At first I found this to be incredible. How could fear be the reason? Each of the informants that I consulted on these questions were very patient and led me slowly down the path of understanding. As foreign as a life of crime is to me, a life without it is just as foreign to many offenders. It is normal. It is what they know. It is comfortable. It is simply unthinkable for some offenders to imagine an 'alternative' lifestyle. The way they have always "got by" works for them and they see no reason to change. Further, they are unconvinced that it is a better lifestyle. The word "better," in fact, may be indefinable to them. What does "better" really mean? They simply have no faith in the fact that a change in the way they do things would necessarily be a

positive change. The fear of the unknown, “straight world” is probably worse than the fear of tomorrow when you are living on the stroll.<sup>5</sup> This questioning and answer-seeking process that occurred during my investigation of post-incarceration is included here in order to set up the context in which the more familiar struggles that many of us experience (looking for a job or a place to live) can be understood from the perspective of the offender.

### 5.3.1 Employment

Employment was identified as one of the most important issues that need to be addressed when a former offender is released from prison. According to parole officers, employment is important for three main reasons. It occupies the offender for a large part of the day. It is the means through which money can be earned. It allows for independent living for the offender (once he is no longer in a CRF). The Parole Offices of Saskatoon, Prince Albert, and Regina share an employment coordinator, Brent Stevens, who works out of the Saskatoon office. His role is to develop a database of potential employers for former offenders to apply to upon their release and to educate newly released offenders on where they can go to find available jobs and how to put together a resumé. Finding suitable employment for offenders is not an impossible task, according to Brent and to former offenders. But, more businesses in Saskatoon, Prince Albert, and Regina need to recognize the importance of hiring former offenders:

“More businesses need to know about this. They need to know the importance of it. They’re coming back to the community any way, if you want them to be productive citizens and stats show that if they’re employed they are better off.”

The job market for Aboriginal offenders is extremely soft; Ashley Kayseas, a director at the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre, put it this way:

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<sup>5</sup>A street where sex-workers carry out their business is often referred to as ‘the stroll.’

"I think the biggest social program you can think of is actually employment....there's not a lot of employment that's specifically targeted for Aboriginal people, which is kind of sad when you actually look at some of the demographics of it....In the past, we've tried to develop employment and training programs, but there's only so much work out there. For instance, we had basically an entry level position open up here [at the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre] in the last few months and this was very entry level, but we had over 80 applications for the position."

Further, the social programs that we do have to help people when they are out of work are simply inadequate. Fr. André, who works out of the Saskatoon Community Chaplaincy, talked about the inadequacy of the assistance available through Social Services:

"Many of these guys have no life skills, they come out of prison with no I.D., no bank account and social services won't help them until they have an address. Where will they end up going? Back to a criminal environment...There is not enough help. Guys are getting the same money for rent from social services as 15 years ago."

The issue of skills is a major difficulty in finding employment for ex-offenders because they generally have little or no work experience. Another former offender, now working in the area of post-incarceration, Gerald Bissett, stated that the difficulties he often sees with ex-offenders, particularly those who have served lengthy sentences, relate to the lack of skills the men have when they are released from prison:

"The guys I work with have access to people that help them do up their resumés and stuff like that, but even though they have a resumé – for some of them, what are you going to put? Range cleaner for 15 years? Or if they've got their grade 12 GED, that's as far as they can go unless they've got money themselves that they can afford to go to university because CSC doesn't pay for that. And if you're in physically good shape you might find some labour job, but if you're not in good shape, for example, and you have no skills, you're gonna wash pots."

Another employment issue for ex-offenders is finding the right job for the right person (as it is for all of us). 'Roger' and 'Peter' explained to me their difficulties in trying to find suitable employment, but both seemed to feel limited because of their ex-offender status.

When 'Roger' was interviewed he had been out of prison for about three months and still had not found a job he felt comfortable with:

"I'm still going out twice a week to find a job. I'm having a hard time. I'm a bartender, that's what I like to do and I could have had my old job back at [a local restaurant and bar] for \$12 an hour, but my parole officer said I couldn't go to work there, I had to turn it down. I was an alcoholic, but now I have a strong hold on my sobriety. I don't want to do manual labour, I don't want to work outside, that's not something I want to do. Maybe that's being selfish, but I want to have a job that I like. She said I couldn't work at a bar because of the temptation of being around alcohol all the time. So now I've sent out a lot of resumés and no one has even called me back."

'Roger's' comments illustrate how his ex-offender status makes it difficult for him to work in the industry he prefers. Similarly, 'Peter' seemed only able to get employment in physical labour jobs because of his size, but he was clearly unhappy in that work environment:

"I have to do something and I don't want to be out in the cold hammering nails or hauling heavy loads around. You're a big strong guy, you can haul heavy stuff around. It doesn't matter if you're smarter and better at what this little guy's doing, he can suck up and kiss ass way better than you and that's what we're looking for. And you can haul that heavy stuff around because we need that done too. But that's all I ever got to do in construction jobs."

The topic of education came up a several times as a possible solution to the difficulties that ex-offenders have in finding employment. However, the resources to help ex-offenders to get educated are limited. Albert Brown, from the Salvation Army CRF, suggested that perhaps CSC money could be better spent inside the institution, assisting offenders to learn a trade:

"There's no reason in the world why the government can't open classes inside the institutions. I mean the institution is huge, they have their own electrical, they could learn everything they need to know, right there. They have vehicles that the guys could be working on and actually getting credit for towards their journeyman mechanics papers. But you know if you can learn a trade and you do something well, there's something about be able to take some pride in what you do."

'George', a former offender working at a seasonal construction job, said that he would like to get out of construction and learn a trade, but he can never get enough money together to do it:

"I don't want to stay in construction for the rest of my life. I don't mind doing it, but I really only work a lot at certain times of the year and I will never make a lot of money because I am just doing unskilled labour. I would much rather learn a trade, like to be an electrician, I think I would like that kind of work."

Money, however, is not the only barrier to education for former offenders. Brent Stevens, the employment coordinator at the Saskatoon Parole Office, relayed to me an experience he had trying to get an ex-offender into school:

"I ran into a stumbling block just recently, where we had this one fella going in for testing because he said that he was at about a grade 8 level, but I figured maybe more like grade 5-ish. So I made some contacts and found that we could get him in for testing and he could start school in a program that had grades 3-6, 6-8 and 10-12. So, whatever grade his testing said he should be in, he would have fit in somewhere. And just the day before he was going to be tested, we got a call saying, no they're not going to accept anybody on parole."

Employment is clearly a concern for former offenders and for the people who work with them. It did seem that for most non-Aboriginal offenders, getting a job was not all that difficult but finding a job that would pay a decent wage, that the ex-offender felt some pride in, or where they could develop some skills was much more difficult. Aboriginal ex-offenders, by contrast, had a more difficult time securing full-time employment. As the statistics included in Chapter Two revealed, the jobs that the Aboriginal ex-offenders tend to get are part year or part time and therefore do not provide a steady income. However, that is not to say that no Aboriginal ex-offenders get good jobs. According to many service providers working in the community, there are some men doing very well for themselves. Unfortunately, I did not have an opportunity to meet with any ex-offenders (aside from

those working in post-incarceration) who are currently satisfied with their working conditions.

### 5.3.2 Housing

To investigate housing for former offenders I attempted to contact a number of agencies in Saskatoon that one would expect to “know” about housing and former offenders. Unfortunately, there turned out to be no formal agencies in Saskatoon that work specifically with former offenders. I did speak to the Saskatoon Housing Authority, which was a very friendly and helpful place, but all the programs they offer require a minimum income to qualify. After learning about the employment situation of former offenders, I deduced that most former offenders would not be able to meet the minimum financial requirements of the Housing Authority. Further, representatives that I spoke with at the agency were not aware of any former offenders currently using their services. Part of the reason I was unable to infiltrate the housing industry and learn about the official state of housing for ex-offenders is presumably because no one in the housing industry wanted to admit that they might discriminate against an ex-offender or be accused of it. Further, the owners of buildings that are all but uninhabitable (that is, slum lords) do not want to comment on why they do not improve the conditions of their buildings. I ran into roadblock after roadblock and even tried reassuring potential interviewees by offering such complete anonymity that there would be no conceivable way anyone would be able to identify them and further offered to give them the last word on what would appear about their interview in this thesis, all to no avail. Unfortunately, I can only provide here the perspectives of the former offenders and the people who work with them. The position of the landlords must remain undefended.



The Saskatoon Parole Office did have in their employ a Housing Coordinator who worked for them on a contractual basis. He was a former offender himself who had also made inroads in the housing industry with property management companies. I met with Brian Forsyth and discussed housing and other problems ex-offenders have and he proved to be a wealth of information. At the time he was interviewed, Brian's contract with parole had already been put on hold due to budgetary cut backs. In my opinion his job should be seen as an essential service provided to parolees and every effort should be made to reinstate the Housing Coordinator position. Brian in particular was well-suited for this job. He not only brought with him the contacts in the housing industry but he seemed to have a great rapport with the offenders and could speak to them frankly and honestly. Speaking to him greatly facilitated my understanding of the housing issues that former offenders face.

Brian explained:

"Generally speaking, most of the housing is too expensive for people getting out of jail who have to rely on social services. They end up in a glue sniffer's paradise. Finding landlords that will take a risk on a guy is difficult. If you were to look at the numbers of people getting out of jail who trash apartments, it's quite low, but the public doesn't know that. "Oh he's out of jail, he's a violent offender, oh he's going to trash the place." Well that rarely happens. Nobody's going to guarantee that the place won't get trashed, but you don't know who's going to trash it and who's not going to trash it. All they wanna know is who are we going to call if there's a problem, because they don't want to deal with it, and that's where I come in....You know, you could listen to some people and they've tried to do get a place for a guy, but when they go in there and identify themselves as "okay, I'm from Corrections Canada and I'm looking for a place for so and so" and people say "okay, well, what did he do?" And the Corrections people can't tell them nothing because it's all confidential, people just say "okay, bye, sorry we're full." But when I come along and people know me from the west side and I've worked for 5 or 6 different property management companies, I can usually get something set up."

Brian went on to explain the difficulties he has finding accommodations for ex-offenders with low incomes:

“Most of the guys I help are on social services so I try and get them on disability social assistance for at least three months because that way they get \$320 a month and they get a little better place than they do for \$210. Can you imagine what you’re going to live in for \$210 a month? Ya, pretty scary. Even for \$320 it’s tense. But, like I say, I’ve worked with a lot of landlords in town and there’s a lot of people that will, as long as I am available, they will rent to these people. The landlord just wants someone to call when things go wrong. And sometimes guys just can’t do it. The rest of the tenants get upset when the guy starts doing stuff, having parties or whatever, and the guy’s got to be evicted. Where does he go? Back down to glue sniffer’s paradise...because that’s where they’re from, that’s what they know and they’re either too old or too scared or just don’t quite have the ability to make any type of changes or adapt, they just don’t want to make that leap.”

From conversations with Brian, other service providers and former offenders, I was led to the conclusion that housing in the context of post-incarceration is reaching or has reached crisis levels. Parole officers revealed that nearly all their parolees live “within the alphabet streets,” like Avenue C, D, P etcetera, indicating some of the poorer neighbourhoods in Saskatoon. Housing for former offenders is a very important area that needs to be addressed with regard to successful (re)integration into the community, if not THE most important area. Further, the housing situation in Saskatoon is particularly serious for former offenders who are Aboriginal. All interviewees discussed the difficulties regarding suitable housing for former offenders, whether I brought this issue up first or not.

As discussed earlier, newly released former offenders and parolees have a lot of anxieties. The ex-offenders I talked to who were living in a halfway house or recalled what it was like when they were living in one talked about their anxiety about being able to get out on their own. They all wanted to be out of the halfway house, but were afraid that it would be difficult on their own. One newly released ex-offender who was still living in a CRF was quite anxious about looking for a place to live. ‘Roger’ was particularly worried about the fact that he had been out for three months and still did not have a job:

“So much has to happen before I can move out. I need at least \$900 up front to get a place, and [getting out of the halfway house is] just a few months away. I need money and I need a job and I don’t like living there, so I would like to get out of there...”

Another former offender, ‘Steven’ reflects back on when he was living in a halfway house:

“I guess you could say I had a closed mind, why send me there? It was a difficult place to live, basically, ‘cause of some of the individuals that you were living with, it was stressful. I guess your environment also put a stigma over top of you, of where you sat in society for being there. So, you didn’t really broadcast where you lived.”

Although many of the former offenders were grateful to the halfway houses they resided in upon their release, they all mentioned that they looked forward to getting out on their own, even though they were sometimes afraid of the challenges they would face looking for a place to live and generally fitting in to society. On a positive note, one Aboriginal former offender, ‘Alex’, was very much looking forward to getting back to his reserve, where he already had a house and his family was waiting for him. He said:

“I’ll probably live by myself, I have my own house over there. I don’t really like it in the city here. I’ve always grown up in the country and it’s my home. [Having a nice place to live] is very important to me. I want my kids to live in a good environment, I just want to raise them well.”

‘Alex’s’ statement attests to the importance of a supportive family and a stable home environment to which former offenders can return. Family supports *and* a proper place to live go hand in hand because without a decent home the chances of a former offender returning to an unhealthy environment are greatly increased. One such example is ‘Arnold,’ an Aboriginal ex-offender who has been out on his own for about three months and simply could afford a nice place to live. He states:

“I don’t live in a very nice place. There’s people in the building who have parties all the time and there’s used needles and what not in the parking lot, but I’m trying to stay clean. It’s bad ‘cause I can’t move anywhere else, I just can’t afford to.”

One former inmate and I discussed housing and the difficulties an Aboriginal guy coming out of prison is going to have in finding suitable housing. 'Edward' explained to me that it can be very alienating, especially when a guy has no relatives in the city and has limited funds. Where is he going to go? You can go to a hostel or stay with someone else. Even on social services, a single guy only gets about \$210 a month for rent and the kinds of apartments available for that kind of money are not exactly the nicest places. He told me that he knows many people who live in slum-like conditions after they come out of prison. 'George', another Aboriginal former inmate, made this brief statement on the places he applied to when he was looking for somewhere to live:

"You know people said to me to try and find a place on the East Side, and I went over there a couple of times, but I never was approved for a place over there. I only got a place over here on Avenue P, and it's okay, but it's not that great. But what are you gonna do?"

Fr. André, who works out of the Saskatoon Community Chaplaincy, made the following statement:

"Basically, if guys have just come out of prison [and are not on parole] they don't find housing. They end up crashing with someone they know. They don't have a place, money or an address. I often hear about guys sleeping on someone's floor all day and then moving around at night."

A further statement of Fr. André, related specifically to Aboriginal ex-offenders, was:

"You have 2 or 3 generations that are totally lost. The Indian Act is a big problem and the reserve system is a big problem. That brings up the problem of housing again. I'd say there's a small percentage of guys who try to get back into prison because they're more comfortable with life "inside." I know one guy who slept on the street all summer and he usually spends his winters in jail. With regard to finding housing, though, I try to recommend moving to the East side...Unfortunately, not a large number actually do get out, in my estimation. Not very many die old."

Ashley Kayseas, a director at the Saskatoon Indian and Métis Friendship Centre, and Don Isbister from Meewasinota CRF both spoke directly to the topic of housing for Aboriginal people. Ashley stated:

"...housing...there's another issue. A lot of people come through our doors and just finding out about their home life and stuff like that, not very good. You know, for the average person, I think it's kind of hard to imagine living in those kinds of conditions, it's pretty tough...Like, actually some of our employees here, when they have to do home visits, are kind of taken aback by what they see, the conditions that people are actually living in."

And Don Isbister made this comment:

"There are some that go back right into the same community and we don't hear much from them...and if you're Aboriginal and you go over to the east side sometimes it's not easy to be accepted, and we talk about acceptance, it's tough...Landlords, I suppose neighbours too [are unwelcoming to Aboriginal tenants]. And I'm sure landlords, if you have a room or a suite and you're living on the east side and we know this is fact, if I show up and I'm Aboriginal, I'm probably gonna be overlooked, so my choices are narrowed down. And sometimes maybe they're forced into the communities that are toxic still."

Finally, Albert Brown and Major Wayne McDonough from the Salvation Army CRF spoke on the issues of affordability and housing conditions in Saskatoon:

Albert Brown made the following statement:

"I work in the Family Services as well as the halfway house and a lot of the people that we help are forced to live in places that, if they had a choice, they wouldn't live there. And the landlords, a lot of them, they just don't care. I've had people in the last couple of days complaining about cockroach infested places and this is not a small place, and its downtown. And the Fire Department is the only one who can close a building, but then, if you go and close a building, where are these 30 people gonna live? So they need to be somehow made to fix what's existing."

And Major McDonough had this to say:

"Housing is not [affordable], it's not for anyone – affordable housing. Problem being that often times, the jobs that some folk get are low paying, some do very well, but some are low paying and to find housing in the range that they can afford, you wouldn't want to move there yourself. So, affordable, safe housing is very difficult to find. So, that is a challenge because in the inner city, it's just not appropriate, some of the housing. As far as work, I think there's work. And a lot of these inmates have skills, very good skills. So, on the whole, that's really not an issue as far as their skills. The bigger issue is where are they going to live?"

From my perspective, I was most affected by the housing circumstances of former offenders. It was both depressing and frustrating to hear about the conditions in which some people end up living. Most people with whom I spoke seemed to think that housing issues in Saskatoon need to be addressed immediately because housing in certain areas of the city is rapidly deteriorating. Housing is particularly important for former offenders because the neighbourhoods in which they seem to be able to afford to live do not generally encourage a healthy lifestyle. Living in unhealthy, criminogenic environments puts former offenders right back into the very situations that got them involved in criminal activity in the first place.

### 5.3.3 Aboriginal Offenders, Racism, and Culture

In light of the fact that there is such a large proportion of Aboriginal people in prison in Saskatchewan, conversations and interviews often dealt with the particular difficulties that Aboriginal former offenders face. There were two main issues that came to the surface when interviewees discussed Aboriginal ex-offenders, namely, perceived racism and Aboriginal spirituality.

Nearly all of the individuals interviewed discussed racism on some level. The parole officers' perceptions of racism, however, were somewhat more conservative than other respondents. For example, 'Erin', a parole officer, commented on the situation of Aboriginal ex-offenders by saying:

"I guess what I've noticed is because, maybe the Aboriginal offenders are more likely to have more dysfunctional families so the support system may not be as strong which is a struggle. But, as far as employment, things like that, I haven't really noticed a difference. I really haven't. A lot of the guys that I have, that are Aboriginal, have incredibly good work ethics and I do find that employers more often are looking at that rather than at who the guy is."

By contrast, Don Isbister suggested that employment is indeed an issue:

“But I know if they’re just fresh out of being incarcerated, and they’re on the streets it is hard because the guys will comment and say ‘I’ve applied at numerous places and I can just about bet you that none of those places are going to call me back because I’m Aboriginal.’ ”

It may not be that ‘Erin’'s comments are incorrect, because Don went on to say that once his guys are in the workforce they seem to be accepted. However, ‘Erin’ did not indicate that she perceived racism as a barrier to Aboriginal ex-offenders who were looking for employment. I cannot help to disagree when the comments included in Section 5.3.1 made by Ashley Kayseas are taken into consideration. Ashley stated that there are not enough jobs specifically targeted for Aboriginal people, a conclusion he has come to because of the mass of applications his Centre gets every time they advertise a position. It seems that Aboriginal people generally have a difficult time finding suitable employment, which leads me to conclude that Aboriginal former offenders have an even worse time. Brian Forsyth’s comments seemed to confirm this conclusion when he pointed out that Aboriginal ex-offenders have more difficulty integrating due to racial barriers. Brian explains:

“Let’s just say they have the same problems, but theirs is more intense. There’s a lot of prejudice...a Native person with a criminal record still has less of a chance than a White person with a criminal record.”

Some of the ex-offenders with whom I spoke did not feel comfortable telling me about specific instances of racial discrimination that they had encountered in the community; others did share a few of their experiences. ‘Carl’, a former inmate looking for work was very discouraged:

“I went to this place to drop off a resumé and as soon as I walked in everyone turned to look at me. It was at a restaurant; I did some cooking in the Pen. And I went up to the counter to give the guy a resumé and he just looked at me and said ‘thanks.’ He didn’t ask me any questions or nothing and when I walked past the window after I saw he threw my resumé out. That really pissed me off, like at least give me a chance, you know.”

Another former offender, 'Russell', said that he just feels uncomfortable when he goes into a coffee shop or a restaurant or something when he's the only Aboriginal guy there:

"I know I sound kinda crazy or whatever, but I don't like going into a place when I'm the only Native guy there. Like I go to meet someone for coffee in a place and I just feel all these eyes on me. It doesn't happen every place I go, but if it's a place I've never been before, like out of my neighbourhood I feel strange."

I did feel a bit uncomfortable myself, being a White, educated female, trying to walk in and discuss a topic such as racism with Aboriginal former offenders. I felt somewhat out of place and unsure of myself. I did not want to make anyone feel uncomfortable while talking to me and so I tried to approach everyone I had conversations with or interviewed with humility and openness. I did not try to pressure anyone into talking to me or about things they did not want to discuss. I strongly believe that the people I talked to were the true experts on the issues I was investigating and I tried to communicate my respect for them in our conversations. To my surprise and relief I was shown nothing but absolute respect by everyone I spoke to. I was struck by this because in some cases the Aboriginal former offenders that I met were very distrustful of "White people" and communicated as much to me in the course of our conversation. However, in all cases where this sentiment was felt by the interviewees they extended me the benefit of the doubt and allowed me the pleasure of getting to know them. In spite of the dreadful experiences and circumstances that some of the Aboriginal offenders told me they had endured either in prison or in coming back to the community afterward I was left with feelings of hope and well-being after talking to these exemplary individuals. They all greatly increased my understanding of the particular issues that face the Aboriginal offender returning to the community.

'Edward', a former offender with whom I spent a fair amount of time, explained to me that it is important to differentiate whether or not an ex-offender is an 'urban Indian,'



raised on the streets, with the support of (or is under the influence of) older siblings, uncles or aunts, etcetera, or whether the individual has come from a reserve. In the case of the former, the 'urban Indian' may be better equipped to return to an urban centre, although he might have a tendency to go back to pre-incarceration behaviours. In 'Edward's' experience, he was told by his father that if you go to the city you should stay with the street people. They know where to get food and shelter, they know the hospitals, they know the city, they know where to get cheap liquor, such as Chinese cooking wine. Many times an Aboriginal guy, coming out of prison, has to return to the life he had before he was incarcerated because it's the only way he knows how to make it in the city. He uses whatever survival skills or resources he knows. Unfortunately, the use of these skills often results in an individual getting into conflict with the law. By contrast, for the rural Aboriginal guy, being released into an urban centre after incarceration, it is extremely difficult to try to survive in an unfamiliar place; according to 'Edward', the city is big and people are unfriendly and a guy may not know where to go for help. Coming to an urban centre may be a big change for a lot of guys.

One of the things that became evident to me was that if a former offender of Aboriginal ancestry was learning about his culture and traditions he seemed much more prepared to cope with the struggles one faces when coming out of prison. This may be valuable information for parole and other agencies to recognize and make more of a priority in their own program offerings, particularly because there seemed to be a certain amount of downplaying of the importance of culturally specific programming by some parole officers. My perception was that if a parole officer has an Aboriginal offender on his or her case load (and most of them indicated having at least 70% Aboriginal men on their case loads) and that offender chooses to try to learn about traditional teachings or

Aboriginal Spirituality on their own, then the parole officer supports that, but some of the parole employees did not seem very well versed in the options available to Aboriginal people seeking information about traditional Aboriginal teachings. The Salvation Army, by contrast, was very sensitive to the struggles an ex-offender might face in trying to establish a sense of place related to cultural ties. Major McDonough discussed what some former offenders who are Aboriginal struggle with:

“One of the difficulties for some [ex-offenders who are Aboriginal], not all of them, is that they are trying to find their way back into their spiritual system...So that’s a struggle, it’s kind of a struggle of two worlds...in terms of finding their own spiritual way...”

Learning traditional teachings and their language was identified by most of the Aboriginal former offenders as being important to them. They told me that prior to learning about their culture they had felt inadequate, not knowing where they fit in, stuck between two worlds. Finding out about who they are, who their people are seemed to give many of these men a sense of pride and a source of strength. My personal opinion on the secret behind their strength is that the cultural support system these men were able to tap into has given them an enviable sense of well-being that you do not often see in non-Aboriginal society.

#### 5.4 Summary

The first task of this chapter was to illustrate the importance of appropriate community support systems to the integration of ex-prisoners. It describes the services of the various community agencies which were contacted and visited for this research. The respective roles and the particular difficulties that each agency has in assisting the integration of former offenders into the community were outlined. Nearly all of the community agencies which I visited identified that the level of support they were able to provide to former offenders was limited by financial constraints. This was of particular

concern for the Community Parole Office, where budgetary cutbacks have led to a reduction of support services for parolees. Other community agencies, such as the Salvation Army and the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre, indicated that they would like to be able to expand their services, but are limited by the funds available to them. The importance of community agencies to the integration of former offenders was shown to be essential. Former offenders often have adjustment problems when they return to the community, and the support of community members, family and/or friends are essential in helping with this adjustment.

The subsequent sections of this chapter described the main difficulties of day-to-day living that an ex-prisoner encounters. It was shown that although many of the difficulties that former offenders face in daily life (such as trying to find a job or a place to live) are not unlike the problems that many of us face, the particular circumstances of former offenders exacerbate the severity of these difficulties. The problem of racism adds further complexity to the circumstances of Aboriginal offenders because it further intensifies their difficulties in integrating into mainstream society. In fact, in the areas of employment and housing, Aboriginal former offenders appeared to be somewhat worse off than non-Aboriginal former offenders. The particular needs of Aboriginal offenders were further discussed in the last section of the chapter where it was suggested that the support systems available to Aboriginal former offenders through their culture might prove to be far superior to those of non-Aboriginal offenders.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

#### 6.1 Discussion of the Fieldwork

As stated in the Introduction, the main question which I sought to answer with this research was what does the environment into which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal male former offenders are released look like? I think the fieldwork presented in Chapters Four and Five aptly answers this question. The culture of post-incarceration is a harsh one and the ex-prisoners who live within it are a fearful and anxious people who do not know how to integrate into the larger community. Further, the larger community in which their culture is situated is generally not a very welcoming place thereby making their attempts to integrate into it even harder. Aside from introducing me to the atmosphere of life after prison, the fieldwork enabled me to draw some tangible conclusions about post-incarceration that serve to answer the more specific questions about post-release that I had at the onset of this study.

The information gathered during the fieldwork prompted me to draw four main conclusions. The first conclusion relates to the operation of the Correctional Service of Canada and the National Parole Board respectively. The fieldwork revealed that *the roles of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) and the National Parole Board (NPB) are distinct and each agency faces different struggles in upholding their respective mandates*. Both the CSC and the NPB subscribe to the notions that prison is not necessarily conducive to successful re-integration and that it is for the good of the community that offenders are returned to the community expeditiously, provided they do not pose a high level of risk to other community members.

However, the roles between the agencies differ. The NPB is only involved with the offender directly when the board is asked to make a decision on the potential conditional release of that offender. Although the board makes an informed decision on each case, parole board members do not usually have any contact with offenders outside of parole board hearings. By contrast, the CSC is integrally involved with offenders from the moment they are incarcerated until the expiration of their sentence. The difficulties faced by the NPB, therefore, relate primarily to their efforts to ensure fair, culturally sensitive, and thorough parole board processes. The National Parole Board is able to manage these difficulties fairly effectively because it operates independently of other agencies under the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada and it has a very specific set of procedures and responsibilities. As a result of the clearly defined and focused nature of the NPB mandate, the NPB reliably addresses the needs of both the community and of offenders. The Correctional Service of Canada, however, plays a more diverse role in the re-integration process. Although parole officers and other parole personnel often go above and beyond the call of duty in assisting offenders in their return to the community, budgetary constraints and the burden of heavy caseloads make it exceptionally difficult for front line parole employees to do all that is in their mandate. The research in this study seems to indicate that part of the problem lies in the range of responsibilities that the CSC must shoulder. Prison administration, programming, institutional supervision, community supervision, and case management all fall under the single authority of the CSC. This range of responsibilities is very broad and seems to serve cross purposes. The CSC, as an agency, plays both a punitive and a supportive role to offenders. Similarly, the role of the parole officer is perceived by both parolees and the officers themselves to be one of surveillance and of support. The CSC model, then, seems loosely based on a kind of paternalism.

From the interviews with both former offenders and parole employees, I was led to the conclusion that the role of custodian is over-emphasised and the role of supporter or caregiver is underemphasised. I am not suggesting that either the individual parole employees or the CSC as an organization are at fault for this imbalance. What I am suggesting, however, is that it is difficult for a single agency to serve both these purposes simultaneously. I certainly do not have enough of an understanding of the internal administration of the CSC to critique it accurately, but it seems that it might be prudent for them to reconsider the breadth of their mandate, particularly with regard to their role in the re-integration of offenders into the community. It might be appropriate for the CSC to undergo some soul-searching to determine how it could better balance its role in the re-integration of former offenders so that support and services are equally as important as supervision. Of course, this shift in balance must be preceded by a rearranging of financial resources so that the CSC budget allotted to post-incarceration could handle all aspects of re-integration, not just those that are highly related to supervision.

The second identifiable conclusion that came to the surface through this research was *that there is chronic under funding amongst the agencies that assist former offenders with re-integration.* From parole to the Salvation Army to the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre the biggest obstacle encountered by the individuals who work at the various agencies visited is scarce financial resources. In most cases, the agencies that help former offenders are able to maintain a minimum level of services at all times and are occasionally able to augment these services with temporary programs, temporary staff and various pilot projects. However, as one can well imagine, fundraising for initiatives that will help ex-offenders are not the most popular campaigns with the general public and therefore these agencies have to depend on other sources of funding to support the services they provide to former offenders. For

example, the Salvation Army Community Release Facility (halfway house) is funded by the Correctional Service of Canada. The Salvation Army must try to stretch whatever money it gets from the CSC so that it can provide the programming that its ex-prisoner residents need. The difficulty seems to lie with the public's perception of crime and criminals as well as the public's reluctance to assume any responsibility for them. That is, taxpayers seem more comfortable directing their money toward the more punitive aspects of criminal justice such as law and order mechanisms and prefer not to see their money going toward community supports. The end result is that the agencies that recognize the importance of sufficient support to the successful integration of ex-prisoners are only able to afford to provide a bare minimum of support services to ex-prisoners, consequently falling short of meeting all or even most of the needs of former inmates. The fieldwork leads me to suggest that there needs to be more financial resources funnelled into the helping agencies in Saskatoon that work with ex-prisoners if there is going to be any change in the culture into which they are released.

The third main conclusion that can be made from the fieldwork is that *each offender has different needs upon his release from prison, but there are some essential factors that were revealed to be common among offenders*. Every group I talked to indicated that human support systems are absolutely essential. This need is acknowledged by the National Parole Board, the Correctional Service of Canada, and service providers who work in the area. The only group of interviewees which were not unanimously convinced of the benefits of support persons was the former offender group. It seemed the most recently released former offenders and those who were having the most difficult time with their transition between prison and the community had the least to say about their confidence in outside sources of support. Their reluctance to speak about their need for support did seem understandable

due to the fact that prison life generally discourages offenders from asking for help or showing any signs of weakness. Therefore, returning to the community, where they are expected to ask for help when they need it and take the initiative to do things for yourself, is undoubtedly a difficult adjustment to make. For those offenders who appeared to be managing well in the community, and for the former offenders who were also service providers, the importance of community support was reported to play a large role in the successful integration of offenders. Further, the former offenders who were also service providers suggested that the support of community, friends and family is important but many former offenders also need the support of people who are able to anticipate the needs of ex-prisoners and have enough experience with them to help them through the rough patches that can be encounter when an ex-offender is trying to 'go straight.' Their argument seemed to suggest that there should be more former offenders-as-service providers because individuals who have been through the system as offenders themselves are naturally better equipped to assist former offenders with the transition from prisoner to social member.

Related to the issue of employment, four common needs among former offenders were identified. Acquiring suitable employment was shown to be an obvious central concern; however, some former offenders were limited in their ability to find work due to their lack of job skills. Similarly, opportunities for education are limited for former offenders and most of them were extremely under-educated, thereby impeding their chances of finding a 'good' job. That is, their low-levels of education will negatively affect their chances of getting a job that will pay enough to keep them above the poverty line. The final area of concern related to employment was the fact that many offenders were found to be returned to the community without their personal identification. Returning an offender to the



community without identification sets an offender up for failure. I do not know how many of us have really thought of what it is like to be without identification, but we are virtually immobilized without it. You cannot obtain employment, secure a residence, or seek medical help. For former offenders, this bureaucratic over-sight adds both a significant barrier to their transition into the community as well as a high level of anxiety and frustration to their already difficult circumstances. Although employment was identified to be a major concern, it seemed that housing was revealed to be of greater concern.

Suitable housing was revealed to be a need of great proportion for ex-prisoners in Saskatoon. The information gathered in the fieldwork appeared to suggest that former offenders have only a very slim chance of finding appropriate accommodation. Part of the reason that finding housing is a problem is because it is contingent upon having financial resources. As already discussed, most former offenders have difficulty finding work, and if they do, it is often low paying. If you are an ex-offender who is on social assistance or who has only been able to find a minimum-wage job, there are not very many neighbourhoods in Saskatoon where you will find a place to live. If you are an ex-offender who has served the full two-thirds of your sentence and you are not first released into a halfway house, it is even more difficult. Although I did not speak to anyone who has had been in this situation, service providers on 20<sup>th</sup> Street made it clear that some ex-offenders released under those circumstances really have no where to go. They will stay in hostels in the winter, sleep on the streets in the summer, or try to find a friend to let them sleep on their floor. You cannot get social assistance if you have no address. Finally, for Aboriginal ex-offenders trying to find housing, the situation is just as dire, if not worse. Their particular issues with housing will be discussed more fully shortly.

Based on the information gathered from former offenders and community service providers, I was led to the conclusion that former offenders *require* assistance with finding suitable housing. I did not get the sense that most parole officers recognized the necessity of ensuring parolees had assistance with finding housing, although some did. As revealed in Chapter Five, when the Saskatoon Area Parole office began to experience budgetary cutbacks, the housing coordinator was among the first corners they decided to cut. In defence of this decision, there was probably no position or program that the directors of parole *wanted* to cut, but in the face of serious budgetary shortfalls, presumably all services that are not directly related to the supervision of offenders can be cancelled. The fact remains, however, that ex-prisoners need help finding housing for three main reasons. First, it is difficult to search for your own place to live when you have been in a prison setting for a lengthy period of time. The former offenders I spoke with said they felt anxious about looking for a place to live. They did not seem to know where to start. Having someone to assist them just to get started apartment hunting would help to alleviate some of their anxiety. Second, the fieldwork seemed to suggest that some landlords are unwilling to approve applicants who are ex-prisoners due to the perception that they might cause trouble. According to the former housing coordinator from the Parole Office, landlords are more willing to approve an ex-prisoner to live in their building if there is someone who can personally vouch for that tenant. Finally, without assistance in finding and learning to maintain stable living arrangements an ex-prisoner might begin backsliding and other problems might begin to emerge or resurface. As was mentioned in the literature contained in Chapter Two, housing can be seen as the lynchpin holding the components of an offender's re-integration together.

The fieldwork revealed that there is a serious shortage of safe and affordable housing in Saskatoon. Everyone I spoke with acknowledged the fact that most of the lower rent housing options in Saskatoon are basically dilapidated, not to mention unsafe. Due to the often limited incomes of former offenders, the conditions in which they end up living are simply deplorable. The dilemma, however, is that should the fire department be called in to inspect a building and subsequently decides to shut the place down, the tenants of that building would become homeless. According to the participants in this study, the first thing that needs to happen is that existing substandard housing structures need to be repaired and upgraded. Second, safe, affordable and attractive low-income housing options need to be constructed in this city. Finally, the issue of housing options for ex-offenders specifically needs to be explored. The stigma attached with being an ex-prisoner is pervasive enough that even their housing options are limited. It might be beneficial to investigate temporary alternatives to conventional rental accommodation for ex-prisoners. That is, some kind of transitional housing where ex-prisoners could live while they are adjusting to community life. This would be beneficial for the newly released offender because he would not have to worry about finding housing right away and could, instead, concentrate on other issues such as employment or the programming that he needs. Once these other areas are looked after, it would be easier for him to concentrate on finding his own accommodation.

The fourth, and final, main conclusion I drew from the fieldwork was that *the experiences of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal former offenders differ in particular areas*. With regard to the difficulties that Aboriginal ex-prisoners face, their basic areas of concern were not unlike those of non-Aboriginals. While both housing and employment are particular problems for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ex-prisoners alike, the severity of these concerns is amplified for Aboriginal ex-offenders. The job market for Aboriginal offenders is extremely “soft.”

It did seem that for most non-Aboriginal offenders, getting a job was not always difficult but finding a job that would pay a suitable wage expected by the ex-offender was far more difficult. Aboriginal ex-offenders, by contrast, had a more difficult time finding employment in the first place. This finding might be a result of the Aboriginal ex-offender's general lack of employable skills, but the fieldwork seemed to suggest it was much more likely related to racism. Similarly, the housing situation in Saskatoon is particularly serious for former offenders who are Aboriginal. The unsuccessful search for suitable housing is another area where racism is perceived to play a part. That is, even if an Aboriginal ex-offender has secured a good job (and there are a certainly some that have) they are still relegated to unhealthy neighbourhoods, because they are often simply not approved when they apply to live in other areas of the city.

It is important for me to convey that the most eye-opening experience during my research into the particular circumstances of Aboriginal offenders was my visit to the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre. Prior to visiting that centre, I had already learned from several of the people I met during the fieldwork that the difficulties of Aboriginal ex-prisoners seem almost insurmountable. After visiting the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre I felt that the difficulties of Aboriginal peoples *in general* seem almost insurmountable. Even though I understood this on an intellectual level prior to conducting this research (see Chapter Two), actually hearing about the conditions in which real individuals live gave me quite a different perspective. What I learned at the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre is the following. As stated in Chapter Five, the particular issues that former offenders have difficulty with, such as employment, housing, acceptance, and money are also issues that large segments of the non-offender Aboriginal population need to address. As a result, many of the services provided by the Saskatoon Indian and Métis

Friendship Centre which cater to the needs of Aboriginal people in our community are identical to the services other agencies provide to deal specifically with the needs of ex-offenders. This realization led me to the conclusion that Aboriginal ex-prisoners cannot help but return to the same criminogenic environment from which they were in prior to their incarceration. Due to racism on the one hand, and their label of 'ex-prisoner' on the other, Aboriginal ex-offenders face a greater level of disadvantage than non-Aboriginal ex-offenders upon their return to society after prison. Thus the difficulties they have to face in trying to integrate into society after prison can be seen as exponentially worse than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

In spite of the dismal circumstances of Aboriginal offenders revealed in the fieldwork, their situations can be ameliorated to some degree if they are building or have built close ties to their respective culture. It became evident to me that if a former offender of Aboriginal ancestry was learning about his culture and traditions he seemed much more prepared to cope with the struggles one faces when coming out of prison. The Aboriginal former offenders I spoke with who had supports from Elders and other family members seemed very confident that they would never go back to prison. Further, those who were learning about the traditional teachings of their culture had well developed support networks. This may be valuable information for individual offenders who feel they have nowhere to turn and for parole and other agencies who could make Aboriginal-focused programming more of a priority in the range of services they provide.

## 6.2 Theoretical Implications

The social circumstances wherein both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ex-prisoners find themselves after incarceration lead one to question the role of society in the successful integration of ex-prisoners. I feel that the fieldwork of this thesis assists in providing

evidence for two interrelated theoretical propositions. First, society does play a role in whether or not an ex-prisoner integrates into the community successfully. And second, society shares responsibility with individuals when social dysfunction leads to criminal activity. The first proposition is illustrated in the fieldwork which shows that many of the difficulties ex-prisoners encounter upon their release from prison are socially rooted. From this finding, it can be suggested that there is a degree of social responsibility for the circumstances in which former offenders find themselves. That is, the opportunities and options available to ex-prisoners can be limited or, conversely, broadened by society itself. The conclusion that can be drawn, therefore, is that society must share responsibility with ex-prisoners for their successful or unsuccessful integration after incarceration.

The second theoretical proposition advanced by this thesis, namely that society shares responsibility with individuals when social dysfunction leads to criminal activity, is more complicated. The fieldwork describes not only the societal barriers that ex-prisoners face, but also the level of marginalization to which most ex-prisoners return after incarceration. In effect, society locks ex-prisoners out of meaningful community participation and relegates them back to the margins from whence they came. Chapter Two introduced the linkages between the social circumstances of individuals and involvement in criminal activity. From the fieldwork in this thesis, it is clear that the social circumstances of ex-prisoners can be negatively influenced by social members who are unwilling to hire, house, or otherwise support and assist them. By blocking ex-prisoners from opportunities that might improve their social mobility and level of integration, society assists in creating a criminogenic environment. Although the experiences of ex-prisoners, detailed in the fieldwork, help to illustrate the importance of appropriate social support and social acceptance for ex-prisoners, this is not an easy concept for most social members to

understand. The political and legal structures of society divert public attention away from collective responsibility and focus, instead, on individual responsibility thereby making it difficult for the general populace to see ex-prisoners as social members in need of assistance and to see themselves or society as contributors to the success or failure of ex-prisoners becoming socially integrated. In order to overcome the structural barriers that keep society from understanding that there are often many factors which can lead an individual into criminal activity, societal members need to become more educated about the social sources of crime. This thesis provides for a deeper understanding of the circumstances of ex-prisoners and contributes to the literature that seeks to demythologize both crime and criminals. If we, as a society, are able to recognize some of the fatal flaws in our social structure we will be better able to begin to correct them.

### 6.3 Recommendations

I would like to make some broad recommendations based on the expertise of the participants consulted for the purposes of this study. I suggest that their identification of certain problem areas within the culture of post-incarceration in Saskatoon can be seen as accurate. It is on their identification of these problems that the substance of the following eight recommendations is based.

First, the Correctional Service of Canada should consider how it might better balance its role in the re-integration of former offenders so that support and services are equally as important as supervision. As discussed earlier, the dual role of the parole officer as custodian and support person is confusing for the offender and the cause of a very heavy workload for the parole officer. By re-assessing the way post-incarceration is managed within the CSC, they might be able to improve

the working conditions for parole officers and expedite the integration of offenders into the community.

Second, more financial resources need to be funnelled into the agencies in Saskatoon (including the Parole Office) that work with ex-prisoners. As it stands right now, financial resources are so limited among community service providers that only a bare minimum of services are able to be provided to ex-prisoners. The potential consequence of the chronic under funding of community agencies is that ex-prisoners will simply not receive the assistance they need, which in turn increases their risk of re-offending. The means through which funding can be increased within these agencies remains to be seen; however, a good first step is for the public to recognize what the consequences could be if these agencies continue operating under such severe fiscal constraints.

Third, a greater effort needs to be made to restore the personal identification of offenders prior to their return to the community. The return of offenders to the community without their identification delays their integration into the community by preventing them from seeking employment or beginning their search for a place to live.

Fourth, more ex-prisoners need to be employed by the various agencies that assist ex-prisoners in their transition back into society after prison. This strategy makes sense because ex-prisoners who have been through the system as offenders themselves have gone through the transition from prisoner to social member and are now able to function fully in mainstream society are uniquely equipped to assist other ex-prisoners who are struggling with this process.

Fifth, the Saskatoon area Parole Office should consider re-instating their housing coordinator and the CSC should research the viability of maintaining a permanent housing coordinator in Saskatoon. In view of the fact that the difficulties ex-offenders have in



finding housing was repeatedly identified, it might be argued that providing a housing coordinator for parolees is an “essential service” that the Parole Office should provide.

Sixth, existing substandard housing in Saskatoon needs to be repaired and renovated and new low-income housing needs to be constructed. Part of the reason that housing was identified to be such a large problem for former offenders in Saskatoon is because Saskatoon has a shortage of housing. The type of housing that most ex-offenders can afford is barely suitable for habitation. The fact that this kind of housing even exists in Saskatoon suggests that something needs to be done to improve the conditions of the poorer neighbourhoods of Saskatoon.

Seventh, research needs to be conducted on the viability of transitional housing for former offenders. Housing issues seem to pervade many other areas of the ex-prisoner’s transition process and can subsequently have a negative impact on the offender. If the task of finding suitable housing could be delayed until the newly released offender has dealt with other areas of concern, he would not have to address all his needs at once. If this were possible, an offender’s transition into the community might be made smoother.

Eighth, parole and other agencies in the community of Saskatoon that assist former offenders in their transition into the community need to make Aboriginal-focused programming more of a priority in the range of services they provide.

#### 6.4 Final Summary

This research set out to investigate what it is like to be released from prison in Saskatchewan. Due to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan prisons, studying post-incarceration here necessarily requires consideration of the particular circumstances of Aboriginal ex-prisoners. As such, part of the purpose of this thesis was to examine the respective challenges related to integration for both Aboriginal and non-

Aboriginal ex-prisoners. My initial perceptions about the issues associated with release from prison were shaped by a preliminary literature review that covered the Correctional Service of Canada's research on recidivism as well as a few independent studies on issues related to post-release. Through this initial review, detailed in the Introduction, it was revealed that some concerns would be more pressing than others and that the social circumstances into which ex-prisoners are released can have a significant impact on the integration of the offender into the community.

Due to the apparent importance of the social conditions into which ex-prisoners are released, an examination of theoretical and statistical literature on the pre-arrest circumstances of offenders was done. Further, I investigated the relatively small amount of literature available that looks specifically at post-release. Finally, in order to more fully understand the particular social circumstances of Aboriginal former offenders, literature that discusses the marginalization of Aboriginal peoples in Canada was examined. The substance of my examination of all of this literature is covered in Chapter Two.

The literature on recidivism, outlined in the Introduction, and the literature on the social sources of crime in Chapter Two informed both the practical aspects of this research, such as the creation of interview guides used in the fieldwork and the less tangible parts of this work, such as my own education on what I might expect during the fieldwork. That is, in spite of the fact that I wanted to enter the fieldwork with an open mind so that the research process itself would teach me about post-incarceration, it was necessary for me to familiarize myself with the relevant literature so that I would have some idea of what to anticipate in the fieldwork and what sorts of questions I should be asking those I met out in the field.

The research contained in this thesis is qualitative in nature and uses a focused ethnographic approach. The fieldwork included interviews with former offenders, parole officers and service providers who work with ex-prisoners. I also spent time in field observation and collected various information documents produced by the agencies who work with ex-prisoners in order to learn what kinds of services are available to former offenders. The substance of the fieldwork is presented using in Chapters Four and Five and uses a method of analysis called 'thick description.' The results, therefore, are presented in a substantive way using quotations from the interviews, my perceptions of the field, and information gathered during this research.

The results of this study revealed four main conclusions that relate to the challenges and difficulties that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders face after prison and to the mandates and resources of the agencies that were investigated. To sum up the overarching message of this thesis, it can be said that the results reveal that being an ex-con is a significant barrier to participating fully in mainstream society. As this research shows, even those who have served their time, have not re-offended and are working legitimately to try to make a difference in society are stigmatised. Employment is a problem for ex-offenders, but it is not the biggest problem. Housing appears, as other research suggests, to be a lynchpin in the re-integration process, holding other necessary components of the transition between prison and society together. However, the conditions and availability of housing are problematic and a certain degree of discrimination is levied toward ex-cons who try to move into better neighbourhoods. It seems that in society, we do not mind working alongside an ex-offender provided he is not taking away a job from a good working man, but we certainly do not want them living next door to us. There are obviously only certain degrees to society's acceptance of the former inmate. Further, if you

are a former inmate who is also aboriginal the degrees of acceptance are even further limited. That is, although all ex-offenders face difficulties being accepted in society, Aboriginal ex-offenders are more acutely disadvantaged because of the general status of Aboriginal peoples in Canada on one hand and their former offender status on the other. Aboriginal peoples in Canada are generally marginalized, living in sub-standard conditions and unhealthy, unsafe environments. It is very difficult for the average person of Aboriginal ancestry to pull him-/her-self out of these circumstances due to barriers such as racism, public misperceptions, or stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples, and an historic devaluation of the rights of Aboriginal peoples by Canadian political and legal structures. For the Aboriginal offender, returning to society after prison, he is not only returned right back into the same disadvantaged position he was in prior to his incarceration, he is returned as an "ex-con," a label that will work to further marginalize him in society if he does not get significant and appropriate support. However, the prognosis for Aboriginal ex-offenders is not all bad. There is definitely one advantage an Aboriginal former offender might have over the non-Aboriginal offender and that is his culture. Throughout many conversations and interviews with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people it was made very clear that if a former offender of Aboriginal ancestry was in the process of getting in touch with the culture and traditions of his people, he seemed far better prepared to cope with the struggles one faces when coming out of prison.

This research adds to both the criminological and sociological literature and has the potential of serving to educate non-academics on the issues related to crime, recidivism, and the difficulties of offenders returning to the community. The qualitative nature of this thesis is its greatest strength because it allows the reader to see the culture of post-incarceration from the perspective of the ex-prisoner. Philosophically, I believe in the

motto of most qualitative researchers which states that we cannot understand men and women without knowing them. That is, without 'getting to know them,' as individuals. This was perhaps the most important aspect of this research for me, learning about one of the most marginalized groups in our society (if not *the* most marginalized) from the perspective of that group. By studying post-incarceration through getting to know ex-prisoners I gained a better-rounded knowledge base on the issues and on the people themselves. I found that in spite of the significant levels of adversity that ex-prisoners face (particularly Aboriginal ex-prisoners), most of them had nothing but hope for the future, even though they were frightened of it. Their general resilience and positive attitudes were a source of inspiration for me and I hope their strength is evident in the write up of the fieldwork. This research provides a look at ex-prisoners in Saskatchewan from a unique perspective and adds a significant contribution to our understanding of the circumstances of former offenders.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDES

### Former Inmate/Parolee Interview

1. What did you do your first day of release?
2. What did you do your first week of release from prison?
3. What were the biggest problems you experienced within your first week out of prison?
4. Do you feel your experiences in prison prepared you for release? Examples: education, job skills, family relations, social relations.
5. Where did you go to live upon your release?
6. What kind of living arrangements do you have right now?
7. Are you satisfied with your current accommodations?
8. Did you access any formal public support agencies when you were released? Examples: social services, employment services
9. Is your parole officer helpful? What is his or her role in or day-to-day life?
10. Do you feel there are any benefits to being on parole? Any drawbacks?
11. Did you access any private community-based agencies? Examples: the Salvation Army, Saskatoon Chaplaincy
12. Do you have the support of your family or friends?
13. Were you assisted in finding employment?
14. What kind of work do you do now?
15. Are you satisfied with your job?
16. Do you see the same friends you had before you went to prison?
17. What would you say is your greatest strength?
18. What would you say is your greatest shortcoming?
19. What do you think should be provided to inmates coming out?

### Parole Officer Interview

1. Please describe the programs and services you offer to men released from federal prison.
2. How many parolees do you have on your caseload at any given time?
3. How many of your parolees are Aboriginal?
4. What is the maximum length of time you have with your clients, in total and per visit?
5. Do you feel you personally have the resources, time and support to do your job effectively?
6. What is your level of job satisfaction?
7. What do you feel is the primary purpose of parole? Examples: Surveillance, assistance, support.
8. What are some of the difficulties that former inmates and/or parolees face after being released from prison?
9. Do parolees report back to you about the difficulties they have being accepted? For example, by co-workers, employers, neighbours.
10. What types of programs and services do you feel are essential to meet the needs of men released from prison?
11. What is the level of difficulty inmates in Saskatoon face in finding suitable housing and employment?
12. In Saskatoon, what gaps (if any) do you feel exist in relation to programs and services for men released from prison?
13. What are the most important factors that need to be addressed to ensure the successful integration of inmates in the community?

### halfway house Operators Interview

1. Please describe the programs and services you offer to men released from prison.
2. How many clients do you serve at any given time?
3. How many of your clients are Aboriginal?
4. What restrictions (if any) do you have?
5. What is the usual length of stay of your clients?
6. Do you do referrals?
7. Do you work directly with parole and or social services?
8. Do you think inmates are being adequately provided for in the area of living accommodations? Are there enough places for them to go? Are they suitable?
9. What are some of the difficulties that ex-offenders face after being released from prison?
10. What are the most important factors that need to be addressed to ensure the successful integration of inmates in the community?
11. What types of programs and services do you feel are essential to meet the needs of men released from prison?
12. In Saskatoon, what gaps (if any) do you feel exist in relation to programs and services for men released from prison?

### Service Provider Interview

1. Please describe the programs and services you offer to men released from prison.
2. How many clients do you serve at any given time?
3. How many of your clients are Aboriginal?
4. Do you have any restrictions on who can access your services?
5. What is the average length of time you work with a client?
6. Do you work with any other agencies in the community?
7. Do you think the housing and employment opportunities for inmates in Saskatoon are sufficient?
8. What are some of the difficulties that ex-offenders face after being released from prison?
9. Do you feel your agency provides enough resources to meet the needs of inmates/parolees?
10. Do you feel you personally have the resources, time and support to do your job effectively? Do you have job satisfaction?
11. What types of programs and services do you feel are essential to meet the needs of men released from prison?
12. What are the most important factors that need to be addressed to ensure the successful integration of inmates in the community?
13. In Saskatoon, what gaps (if any) do you feel exist in relation to programs and services for men released from prison?

### National Parole Board

1. At what point in an offender's sentence does the NPB become involved?
2. How does the NPB work?
3. Does the NPB interact with parole officers?
4. Aside from granting parole, does the NPB have any further involvement with offenders once they've been released?
5. Are there different issues for Aboriginal Offenders, when they are applying for parole?

## APPENDIX B: FREQUENTLY USED ACRONYMS

CRF – Community Release Facility (halfway house)

CSC – Correctional Service of Canada

CCRA – Corrections and Conditional Release Act

CRT – Critical Race Theory

GED – General Education Development

NPB – National Parole Board

PTAIS – Parole Transitional Analysis Schedule



