

## **Release Housing Program for Women**

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*A Supportive Housing strategy for prisoners released from  
the Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women to  
British Columbia communities*

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for the Elizabeth Fry Societies Provincial Council  
October 1996

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

More than 100 women and a few men contributed to this research project, and to each of them the Research Team expresses our gratitude. Nearly everyone interviewed has some involvement with the Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women (BCCW). This report seeks to communicate the experiences, hopes and recommendations of prisoners and ex-prisoners, and those who work directly with them: correctional officers, Elizabeth Fry Society workers, parole and probation officers, chaplaincy services, teacher, peer support, native liaison, and street outreach workers.

The *Release Housing Program for Women* report is sponsored by the five autonomous member agencies of the Elizabeth Fry Societies Provincial Council. Thanks especially to Margaret Cissell, former executive director at the Kamloops & District Elizabeth Fry Society, for taking on the tasks of liaison with the sponsors and the funding ministry.

Team members include four women who have served federal sentences in the past, and an outside researcher who has been involved with the criminal justice system as a volunteer and journalist since 1979.

Thanks to Gayle Horii for making introductions and for all the voluntary consultations; Juliet Belmas for interviewing prisoners at BCCW and Balaclava House; and researchers Lou DeMaeyer and Kris Lyons, who interviewed prisoners and ex-prisoners, created a computer data base, surveyed community housing resources, worked on the recommendations for action, and spent many hours analyzing what is needed to provide homeless women with supportive housing when they come back into the community from prison.

The *Release Housing Program for Women* report was written by project coordinator and principal researcher Mary Lasovich.

This research project was made possible through funding from the Community Housing Initiatives Component of HOMES BC, a grant program which was introduced by the Ministry of Housing, Recreation and Consumer Services and is now an initiative of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research was undertaken to identify the housing needs of women released from the Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women (BCCW), and to suggest how these needs could be met. This report makes recommendations which build the framework for a coordinated response to community re-entry housing, referred to as "release housing" for homeless ex-prisoners. Research findings are based on interviews conducted between March and May 1996 with BCCW prisoners and those who work with them; with women on conditional release and those who work with them; and with ex-prisoners living in the Greater Vancouver area.

A literature review of Canadian research on women prisoners' community resettlement needs was undertaken, and exemplary community-based housing services for women ex-prisoners in the U.S. and England were investigated. As well, the 22 member agencies of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies were surveyed about how they respond when they become aware that a woman ex-prisoner is homeless or living in a situation that increases her risk of going back to prison.

The recommendations contained in this report are meant to help women to stay out of prison, and to respect their stated desire to also help themselves. Of particular concern are the homeless women caught in the "revolving door" between BCCW and unsafe hotels in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside ghetto, as well as federally sentenced women who return to BC communities after many years' imprisonment and isolation.

As part of the research process, representatives of corrections and of community based groups reviewed a draft report and endorsed these recommendations (see *Summary of Recommendations*, pages 59-64 for the full text):

- ♦ Recommendations for Peer Support Resources
- ♦ Recommendations for a Coordinated Response
- ♦ Recommendations for Release Housing Pilot Projects

Safe, affordable housing is the cornerstone of community reintegration. Isolation, loneliness, and despair about the entrapment of poverty are known to draw newly released prisoners back into the cycle of drugs, prostitution and criminal behavior. When imprisoned women are asked what they need to make the transition from prison into the community, low-cost housing is identified as a priority. And when they are asked what would help them to plan for their release, and to resettle in the community, many women express a need for direct involvement by ex-prisoners, who could provide them with realistic expectations and practical support. Research into the role of peer support in women's community re-entry is at an early stage. Interviews conducted with federally sentenced women at the Prison for Women in Kingston (Kendall: 1993) and with women ex-prisoners in Great Britain (Eaton: 1993) reflect our finding that many newly released women feel excluded on the outside.

Women who have shuttled back and forth between BCCW and the Downtown Eastside repeatedly being released without adequate housing, income or connections to community services, expressed distrust of authority and despair at breaking the cycle. A false sense of the size of the problem is created by the relatively small number of women incarcerated at BCCW on a given day. Of 42 prisoners interviewed, more than 70 per cent had one or more prior sentences; and one in four women had been imprisoned at least six times.

Prisoners and ex-prisoners indicated a strong desire for privacy and independence in their choice of

housing. They overwhelmingly asked for supportive housing with structured programs "but not a lot of rules." The strong preference among imprisoned women for un-staffed release housing indicates that women equate staff with institutional rules, and suggests their unfamiliarity with house staff as support workers. Most women expressed a negative view of Balaclava House, seeing the province's only halfway house for women as an extension of corrections rather than the entry into community living.

Prisoners and ex-prisoners said they would like release housing to provide: peer support; a "clean and sober" environment; shared decision making among residents on household chores and rules; pro-active help to access educational upgrading and job skills training; transportation to medical services; basic life skills, including money management; and voluntary participation in counselling and healing circles. In the simplest terms, women said they need "a place to get away" from drugs and violence, and they want the help of others who understand their struggle to survive.

Interviews with prison staff and other Corrections Branch workers, Elizabeth Fry Society workers, and representatives of community-based services, identified several housing-related barriers to women's resettlement, namely: very few housing resources in the community for women coming out of prison; too few staff resources at BCCW to address known communication problems and inadequate liaison with service providers and policy makers; and too few volunteers available to escort women on passes into the community to help them make connections with existing services.

Researchers conducted an extensive survey of Vancouver-area housing resources for poor and specialized populations, seeking to determine the current availability of low-cost housing to women coming out of BCCW. Of 72 resources identified, only two emergency shelters, one residential addictions treatment program, and one recovery house reported having space available. Another bed was located at a transition house in Prince George, which has accepted ex-prisoners from BCCW in the past. Survey findings and interviews confirmed that newly released women have almost no choices about where they can live.

Sponsors and researchers support current and future initiatives that increase the use of appropriate community-based corrections and alternatives to imprisonment for women. Reality, however, is that women continue to be released from BCCW with very little, or no, support for community re-entry. Our focus on release housing responds to urgent needs that are recognized by prisoners, ex-prisoners and those who work with them, both at BCCW and in the community.

Supportive housing is not a panacea to the underlying issues that bring the most disadvantaged women into conflict with the law. But it is the place to start the healing process. To deal with women's criminal behaviour effectively, society cannot continue to spend the bulk of its resources on imprisonment, which is the most expensive and least effective response.

Our recommendations are designed to actively develop new community linkages with BCCW, and to strengthen the participation of governments and community resources in the resettlement of newly released women. We address a wide range of housing and program-related issues, and advocate an innovative and cost-effective strategy that would narrow the gap between inside and outside through the introduction of peer support workers.

While this research process has created a blueprint for release housing pilot projects, implementing the recommendations will require the active participation of policy makers, funders, community-based service providers, advocates for women prisoners, and ex-prisoners themselves.

This report completes work that was made possible through a Community Initiatives grant provided to the Elizabeth Fry Societies Provincial Council by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

# WOMEN'S RELEASE HOUSING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

## I. INTRODUCTION

Women who are released from prisons and jails have many different needs and face many different obstacles when they come back into the community. But all newly released women have basic human needs - for food, shelter, clothing and health care - which must be met for them to *stay out* of the criminal justice system.

In the past decade, research on correctional programs and facilities for women has concluded that there is no lack of awareness about the gaps in release planning and supportive services for women coming out of corrections facilities. One of the first companion reports<sup>1</sup> to the 1990 Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women noted that

"One of the most frequently repeated suggestions regarding female corrections was the perceived need for a continuum of treatment with follow-up after-care in the community. All jurisdictions considered themselves inadequate in this regard and suggested a variety of alternatives for remedying this situation."

Researcher Lee Axon, who interviewed U.S. corrections administrators, program managers and prisoners, as well as officials within state departments of corrections, community corrections and social services program managers, also found that:

"Repeatedly, correctional experts emphasized the need for extended pre-release and post-release services for inmates whether in the realm of employment, housing, parenting or substance abuse. Once again, it did not appear to be a question of inadequate knowledge or ideas."

Closer to home, a BC Corrections Branch Discussion Paper<sup>2</sup> acknowledged that "programs designed to address the needs of adult female offenders in the community are limited or non-existent."

When imprisoned women have been asked what they need to make the transition from prison into the community, their replies universally include safe and affordable housing. Isolation, loneliness and despair about the entrapment of poverty are known to draw newly released prisoners back into the cycle of drugs, prostitution and criminal behaviour. Without the resources that most British Columbians take for granted, many women cannot help but fall back into circumstances that led to their imprisonment.

For homeless women released from the Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women (BCCW), shelter can only be found in the Downtown Eastside ghetto, where human misery is synonymous with the street intersection of Main and Hastings. Housing is a slum hotel: rooms infested with rats and cockroaches, doors with no locks, the constant fear of rape and robbery, drugs to numb the pain.

Understandably, the women's prison is sometimes viewed by high risk/high need ex-prisoners as a preferred housing option. In April, around the time members of the Research Team began to interview prisoners, staff and contract workers at BCCW for this study, a young woman was released from the prison on mandatory supervision after serving eight months.

She was released to the streets with virtually no transition experience, other than having been granted a temporary absence to attend her sister's funeral. She used heroin while imprisoned and

knew that she needed support to break her habit, so she called Long-Term Inmates Now in the Community (LINC), a prisoners' support group, and asked for help in getting into a detox centre. LINC contacted an ex-prisoner, who agreed to provide overnight accommodation for the woman in her own home and to drive her to detox the next morning.

After three days in detox she was ready to come home — but she didn't have a home. She appealed to the Elizabeth Fry Society for permission to move into Balaclava House, the province's only halfway house for women, and was told her request would be reviewed.

So the ex-prisoner who had provided emergency overnight accommodation agreed to work with the woman on her plans for resettling in Vancouver, and to let her stay at her home temporarily, so that she had a safe place from which to search for work and housing.

"I got her interested in upgrading her education and took her to the King Edward campus for testing. It turned out that she needed schooling to upgrade to Grade 7. She also needed glasses, which should have been taken care of during her sentence."

The only identification the woman possessed on her release from BCCW was a grainy Xerox of the "mug shot" taken by Corrections when she was first imprisoned. In her third week in the community, the woman learned how to take a bus. Her spirits rose as she started to identify her goals and to plan to complete her GED (graduation equivalency diploma) within a year, supported by the ex-prisoner's promise to connect her with a community volunteer team who would provide additional tutoring.

Then the woman was informed by the Ministry of Social Services (MSS) that she must be on welfare for six months before she'd be eligible to apply to go back to school. Both social services and the school are able to approve, or deny, requests for assistance with high school upgrading at their discretion. But in this case, being in prison was not seen as sufficient to make an exception to the six-month rule. There was still no decision by Elizabeth Fry on her request to stay at the halfway house. So the ex-prisoner looked for help for the woman. She contacted the office of a government MLA, but could find no one who could cut through the red tape.

Demoralized and defeated, the woman decided to return to prison. At BCCW, she had friends. She would not be alone with her fear and hopelessness. She walked up the street and threw a rock through a store window. She waited on the corner and watched as the police arrived. Fifteen minutes after the crime, "she approached the police and was arrested. She had earlier packed her few worldly possessions for transport to the prison.

## **II. THE RESEARCH STUDY**

This report records the views and experiences of prisoners at the Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women, the only institutional facility in British Columbia for provincially and federally sentenced women; residents of Balaclava House, the province's only halfway house for women; and ex-prisoners in the Vancouver community. Researchers interviewed 42 women, using a questionnaire that took approximately one hour to complete. Another 22 ex-prisoners participated in a focus group, sharing their experiences of living in the community.

The report also records the views and concerns of 25 individuals who work with imprisoned women and prisoners on conditional release, including BCCW staff and contract workers, Balaclava House staff, parole and probation officers, a Ministry of Health Street Outreach nurse, a halfway house

worker in Victoria, and a member of the Victoria Community Chaplaincy Services.

Interview responses are the raw data of the research study, which used a participatory action research model<sup>3</sup> to identify the housing needs of women re-entering BC communities from prison. Our approach is premised on the belief that women who have been imprisoned are society's best resource for building upon and extending the knowledge gathered within numerous reports over the past decade. This research is consistent with the spirit of the 1990 Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women<sup>4</sup> which charts a radical new direction for responding to women in conflict with the law.

This research study was designed to strengthen the skills of participants, researchers and project sponsors by jointly creating knowledge as a force for social and personal transformation.

Specifically, our objective was to identify the supportive housing needs of newly released prisoners coming out of BCCW, and to develop implementation strategies for pilot housing projects. From the outset, our work was intended:

- ♦ to empower current and former prisoner-participants by hearing and heeding their experiential knowledge of what kinds of community-based housing would support them in rebuilding their lives outside prison;
- ♦ to develop the advocacy skills and abilities of the Elizabeth Fry Societies Provincial Council to educate policy makers and service providers on the housing needs of women released from prison; and
- ♦ to create a framework for action that promotes new partnerships between government and community groups which are working toward the goal of expanding community capacity to provide affordable and supportive housing for this long-neglected population of women.

This report offers recommendations based upon the interview responses and investigation of community housing for women coming out of prisons to the American cities of San Diego, Boston, New York City, and to Birmingham, England. As well, a review of the literature on release planning and exemplary programs for sentenced women was undertaken; and a questionnaire was mailed to the 22 member agencies of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS), seeking information on how Elizabeth Fry societies respond when they become aware that a woman ex-prisoner is homeless or living in a situation that increases her risk of re-offending.

We found that there is no identifiable network of community support for women who leave the Burnaby prison, although many ex-prisoners access social services in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. As a group, women who experience the most difficulty in staying out of prison share several characteristics: they are addicted to drugs or alcohol, poorly educated, lack family support, and/or have few marketable job skills.

Safe and affordable housing - as the cornerstone of women's transition from prison to the community is so clearly, and desperately, needed in the Greater Vancouver area that we have focused our recommendations on the needs of those women who go back and forth between BCCW and the slum hotels located near Main and Hastings.

This is not to suggest that the needs of women who want to settle in other parts of the province, from Vancouver Island to remote northern communities, are any less important. Nor is the absence of

specific recommendations to support the reintegration of Aboriginal women meant to diminish, in any way, the barriers erected by systemic and individualized racism. The funding proposal for this study anticipated greater consultation with Aboriginal women's groups than actually occurred, although a conscious effort was made to invite participation.

In February and March, the Indian Homemakers' Association (IHA) was contacted by phone and fax for their input into the research study. The research model overview (Appendix A) was provided, and we asked for help in connecting with native agencies and individuals working with women prisoners or ex-prisoners in the community. We asked for suggestions on how to do street outreach to Aboriginal ex-prisoners, and whether the IHA would like to take part in an upcoming focus group or to recommend a second focus group for Aboriginal women.

Interviews were conducted with the IHA's Native Liaison Worker at BCCW and a Native elder who goes into the prison, and with Aboriginal prisoners; and about half the participants at the Vancouver focus group in May were Aboriginal women. Further research should be undertaken to develop programs and services that support the community reintegration of Aboriginal ex-prisoners, connecting women to their heritage and healing traditions. Our research also illuminated the desire of many non-native women to have access to Aboriginal healing traditions, such as the healing circle.

But change must begin now. For women coming out of prison, safe housing can be the difference between living and dying — from drug overdoses and the violence that scars the Downtown Eastside community.

Innovative partnerships, and the political will to redress the debilitating effects of imprisonment, are urgently needed to help women coming out of BCCW to find homes in the community, a safe place to develop life skills and new ways of seeing themselves and others. Research has shown that women who return to prison, again and again, feel excluded from the world on the outside. Only recently has peer support been identified as a positive alternative, replacing exclusion with a sense of belonging. A groundbreaking British study<sup>5</sup> of the post-release experiences of 34 women notes that:

"Again and again those who talked about the organizations run by ex-prisoners stressed a sense of belonging resulting from a shared prison experience. Using metaphors of transition (for example, stepping stones, bridge) they also expressed a sense of progress."

The recommendations contained in this report are premised on the interview data, the personal insights of ex-prisoners who worked on the research study, and the nascent research, in Canada and elsewhere, on women's experience of community re-entry. They grow out of real life situations and hold out real promise for helping newly released women to stay out of prison, and to resettle successfully in BC communities.

### **III. BACKGROUND**

To our knowledge, this research study is the first to focus specifically on the release housing needs of women coming out of prison to BC communities. It follows in the footsteps of a growing number of Canadian research studies which include pre-release and community options for sentenced women, although not as their primary focus. However, issues linked to helping women return to the community from prison or jail are still badly underrepresented in research on women in conflict with the law. Given that both the federal and provincial correctional systems are mandated to provide

sentenced women with "access to a range of community and institutional programs," we anticipate that well documented research and strategies for building cooperative relationships, and expanding community involvement in the resettlement of women prisoners, will be examined closely by both BC Corrections Branch and the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC).

In 1990, the *Creating Choices* Task Force report recommended that the federal government develop:

"A community-release strategy that would expand and strengthen residential and non-residential programs and services for federally sentenced women on release. These facilities are to be developed by community groups, and other interested agencies, including halfway houses. Aboriginal centers, satellite units, home placements, addiction-treatment centers, multi-use women's centers, mixed-group housing, and mother and child care centers. In response to this proposal, the Ministry of the Solicitor General recently opened a minimum-security institution for female offenders in Kingston to provide inmates with the opportunity to prepare for release into the community (Pale Green Paper on Correctional Reform, 1990: 39).<sup>6</sup>

Criminologist Kelly Moffat envisioned the benefits of the proposed community-release strategy, as follows:

"A community approach allows women the use of services and programs available in the community, since it does not attempt to duplicate these costly services in the institution. This proposal would be particularly beneficial to women prisoners who have historically had a difficult time acquiring funding and resources for programming and treatment services. The mobilization of community resources provides the distinct advantage 'in providing community-based services to offenders, including better access to community resources, a greater ability to involve the local community in program initiatives, and the capacity to provide services beyond those mandated by the government' (Ekstedt and Griffiths, 1988: 276). Overall, proposals with respect to women's imprisonment in Canada seem to be following the broader trend toward 'community-based corrections.'"

Task Force members bluntly acknowledged that the process for supporting women's re-entry into the community needs a major overhaul, noting that "both our research and consultations suggest that there are inadequacies at almost every stage of the community release process." Prisoners received too little information about resources in the community, and very few housing resources could be accessed by women being released from institutions. Where community services may be helpful, there was no coordinated approach for helping a woman to make the transition from inside to outside.

Despite formal recognition by both federal and provincial correctional authorities of their responsibility to support the resettlement of women prisoners, the following observation in *Creating Choices* aptly describes the situation for women now being released from BCCW, more than six years later:

"A variety of federal, provincial, regional and municipal agencies may be involved in one or more parts of the puzzle. Community agencies, voluntary groups and individuals may also be involved. Often, however, the overall picture of availability and gaps in services for women is not collectively known, let alone evaluated and addressed." (Task Force report, 1990: 119)

*Creating Choices* was the result of a unique collaboration, in that both its steering and working groups were jointly chaired by representatives of the federal government (Correctional Service of Canada) and the non-governmental Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS); and included a report by two Aboriginal women who had themselves served federal sentences. No previous government inquiry into women's imprisonment had involved so many voluntary sector representatives, or aboriginal or minority groups, and certainly no women who had personal experience of The spirit of the Task Force is mirrored in recent research initiatives undertaken by BC Corrections Branch, notably, its contract with the Criminology Research Centre at Simon Fraser University (SFU) to report on programming for women prisoners in the province. The comprehensive 1995 SFU study<sup>8</sup> incorporates the views and experiences of women prisoners and young female offenders themselves, and those of institutional and community staff and service providers. Researchers observed:

"Release planning is an area in the literature that receives less attention than most other programming needs for female offenders. What appears to be consistent, however, are suggestions for individualized release planning and community networking." (1995: 12)

The SFU study reports on recommendations made by the Women's Issues Task Force (*Correctional Services: A Discussion Paper*. Ottawa: Ministry of the Solicitor General, 1993), which include providing women prisoners with more information on community resources, more frequent use of temporary absence passes, and a social assistance plan to ensure that financial assistance will begin as soon as the woman is released.

Our research suggests that little progress, or none, has been made in overcoming these barriers to women's successful re-entry into BC communities. While only the need for liaison between the Ministry of Attorney General and the Ministry of Human Resources<sup>1</sup> is specifically addressed as a recommendation in this report, the need to strengthen connections between imprisoned women and community resources, partly through increased use of temporary absences, is fully supported by the changes envisioned in our recommendations as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, those interviewed refer to the Ministry of Social Services. On September 23, 1996, the province announced that a new cabinet portfolio will take over responsibility for children and families. With the dismantling of the Ministry of Social Services, income assistance programs become the responsibility of the Ministry of Human Resources.

#### **IV. WHAT WOMEN SAY THEY NEED**

For almost any woman, the relief of getting out of prison is quickly replaced by the anxiety of being out.

*Karlene Faith, Unruly Women*

From the outset, this research study focused on women's housing needs on their release to the community. In the shadows of our spotlight on supportive housing are the many other pressing concerns of women who are not used to taking care of themselves and a household. In prison,

women's lives are organized, structured and controlled by others. They do not cook their own meals, manage money, or take responsibility for most of the daily routines and commitments that must be learned to function as independent adults in the community.

A recurring criticism of women's prisons around the world is that unnecessarily high security levels result from women being classified according to systems developed by correctional authorities to incarcerate men, who can be housed in a range of institutional and community-like facilities. Because of their small numbers – women represent only three per cent of all federally sentenced prisoners, and less than six percent of provincially sentenced prisoners in British Columbia - imprisoned women are often housed in facilities which are officially rated as "multi-level" but are, in fact, devised to meet corrections standards for maximum-security prisoners.

Respected SFU criminologist Karlene Faith, who has been an advocate for women in prison since 1972 and writes extensively on prison education, incarcerated women, and media images of "criminal" women, observes that women's prison experience results in "lethargy, claustrophobia, depression, self-injurious behaviour and suicide."<sup>9</sup>

Imprisoned women universally complain that they are treated like children. Yet the constant electronic surveillance and entrenched power relations of the Burnaby facility, which opened in late 1990, doubtless influences public perceptions of BCCW prisoners as dangerous criminals. In reality, most women do not have violence on their records; and, at any given time, 75 per cent of the sentenced women at BCCW are serving provincial sentences of less than two years. The 1995 SFU study concluded that "the heavy security requirements for internal control witnessed at BCCW" arise from a flawed classification system, and recommends that:

"the initial needs/risk assessment/classification process to be initiated in the near future, allow for a realistic evaluation of security risk of the women.... It is predicted that appropriate assessment would mean that a majority of the women could be classifiable, without public safety concern, to community residential attendance centres in regionalized setups." (1995: 186-87)

Research has uncovered disturbingly common life histories among imprisoned women: they have been sexually abused as children and adults, and have been repeatedly the victims of physical and psychological abuse, often within their own families. Many women arrive at prison with a poor sense of self-worth, substance abuse problems, and little optimism about the potential for positive changes in their daily lives.

Although these difficulties are well known to correctional staff, and caring individuals offer support on a piecemeal basis, the structure and daily operations of high security prisons, such as BCCW, afford few meaningful treatment options and very limited programming to enable women to acquire the kinds of life skills which are learned by making well considered decisions. For most women, the prison experience fosters dependency and infantilization.

Release into the community is further complicated by the fact that some women are released directly to the streets from BCCW, or are given a bus ticket and sent on their way, with neither financial assistance nor a support network in place. At sentence expiry, they are somehow expected to magically transform themselves into capable, self-reliant and law-abiding citizens.

Women know, at least in broad terms, what they need to make the transition from inside to

outside. For a very long time, however, the traditional neglect of incarcerated women meant that they were never asked. Being "too few to count" - as the first comprehensive Canadian research on incarcerated women<sup>10</sup> aptly noted — women's needs have long been relegated to "afterthoughts" by correctional authorities. But the past decade has seen significant expansion in the literature on women in conflict with the law, along with increased pressure for changes in how the criminal justice system responds to women.

In the late 1980s, Canadian researchers began asking imprisoned women what assistance they need to prepare for release and to settle back into the community. An international survey by Lee Axon<sup>11</sup> reported that women's self-identified needs included assistance with money, job-training, employment and accommodation. She concluded:

"More often than not, as this report indicates, it is precisely these things which correctional authorities, for the most part, have not provided to female offenders up to this time." (1989; 111)

Axon reported extensively on the Australian experience of women's imprisonment, and discussed the work of the New South Wales (NSW) Task Force (1985; 282) which observed that "[t]he quality of correctional treatment is tested at the point of release. The wish of a woman prisoner to make a new start in life is frequently nullified by the fact that some women prisoners do not even know where community agencies that are able to offer support are located."

The NSW Task Force made extensive recommendations for changes in the response to women in conflict with the law and the treatment of incarcerated women, including a call for "expansion of accommodation facilities for women, ranging along a continuum from crisis care to longer term residency [to] provide a variety of alternatives for women, including those women on bail."

The Canadian Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women also resulted in several companion research reports which document the opinions and experiences of imprisoned women and federally sentenced women in the community. With respect to release housing, the responses of many BCCW prisoners interviewed for this study echo the needs identified in the 1991 *Release Study* by Margaret Shaw<sup>12</sup> and her research colleagues. They interviewed 57 women, two-thirds of them on full parole, who had been incarcerated at Kingston's Prison for Women, then the only Canadian prison for federally sentenced women. Shaw notes that prisoners in the community identified as their main needs "not only services and facilities, but changes in the way they, as women, are dealt with."

Specific needs were cited at every stage of the release process, including:

- ♦ more opportunity to take pre-release courses
- ♦ far greater availability of half-way houses across the provinces
- ♦ opportunity to opt for alternatives to half-way houses e.g., stay with own family and report more frequently, stay in supported lodgings or home placements
- ♦ satellite, low-cost or co-operative housing available to women coming out of half-way houses or prison on full parole or MS [mandatory supervision]
- ♦ pro-active help finding jobs especially for remoter areas and for older women
- ♦ provision of low-cost housing
- ♦ more post-release skills and job training programs
- ♦ greater availability of information and legal support
- ♦ greater encouragement of responsibility and self-determination
- ♦ greater flexibility in the application of the release process

More recently, women living in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside were surveyed about their health care priorities. Frustrated with the lack of response to a 1994 research report<sup>13</sup> sponsored by the Vancouver Women's Health Collective, women who live in the Downtown Eastside and their supporters formed an advocacy group, Core Women Care, and conducted street-level research to establish priorities for action. Last year, researchers interviewed 142 women living in the Downtown Eastside, and published *The Place to Start*.<sup>14</sup> The August 1995 report stands as a powerful and poignant indictment of the fragmented and inadequate services that are currently available to women in the most dire need. It is a timely reminder, as well, that research without follow-up action serves little purpose.

While no one has tracked the community residency patterns of women released from BCCW, we know from experiential data that the Downtown Eastside draws back into its underworld many of the most high need/high risk prisoners — those who are addicted to street drugs and alcohol, HIV-positive women, Aboriginal women who have lost contact with their heritage and their home communities. *The Place to Start* bears repeating:

"There are no words to even begin to describe the reality of what these women's lives are like. Diabetes runs out of control. Untreated wounds fester, abscess, and become gangrenous; limbs are amputated as a result. Women die of overdoses or get beaten to death. Half of the women who gave information for this report identify themselves as being HIV positive or having full blown AIDS. There is a growing epidemic of passive suicide. Poverty, violence, disease and death reign in the Downtown Eastside. Many have given up hope of getting the help they need from medical services. As a result, many of the women who gave information in last year's health care report are now dead." (1995: 1)

Housing was the most frequently identified health care priority: 72 per cent of the women stated that more/better transition houses are needed, with "transition" being defined broadly to refer to the process of moving from one place in their lives to another. Transition houses mean safe places where women can heal, learn, grow, and develop the skills that they will need when they leave. Two other health care priorities identified by most women were street outreach workers and alcohol and drug services. The women want more street outreach workers who have lived "street life" and can draw on their own experiences for referrals to community services, peer counseling, crisis intervention, suicide prevention, AIDS education, and helping women set up their own support system. And 52 per cent of the women identified a need for more alcohol and drug services, especially flexible and holistic treatment programs that address the underlying issues.

Core Women Care recommends that funding be made available "to create a NEW kind of transition house for women in unsafe situations, who don't meet the criteria for admission to existing transition houses." Women coming out of jail are included in the description of women who "are falling between the cracks" and single women are identified as a priority, because existing shelters must give priority to women with children. Recommendations also call for new transition housing for women to "be located outside the Downtown Eastside, but close enough that the women don't feel out of touch with their geographical and social community."

## **V. PLANNING FOR RELEASE**

In theory, planning for a woman's return to the community starts early in her sentence with assessment of what programming and treatment options can be made available to help develop the skills which she will need to stay out of prison once released. In practice, however, the release

planning process at BCCW is not adequately supported by correctional authorities or adequately linked with community resources.

While our research process made no attempt to include a comprehensive investigation of release planning at the Burnaby prison, interviews with prison staff and contract workers echoed the concerns documented by SFU researchers (1995: 39-42);

"Over two-thirds (67.9%) of staff and administrators felt that release planning did not provide sufficient information about community resources available for the women when they are released. The two main factors that affect the adequacy of release planning are case management and community support. While both staff and administrators stated that the case management at BCCW is better than that provided at other institutions, the adequacy of the plan for each individual woman is determined by the "resources of the case manager and the level of commitment getting the information to the woman. Administrators voiced the need for more case managers, resources and time. The lack of community resources also limits the opportunities available to women when they are released."

Open Living Unit (OLU) Director Donna McLean explained that case management was redesigned in April 1996 to respond to the need for better sharing of information:

"We're moving toward a case management team concept and involving the psychologist, the nurse and the teacher... If there's a particular issue with an Aboriginal woman, we would get the Native Liaison worker involved."

Sentence management coordinators often have more than 30 women on their caseload. They expressed consensus on the need for more staff resources, although comments on the constraints of time and limited information about community resources were sometimes contradictory:

"There's quite a bit of onus on the woman to approach staff for help with release planning, especially if she's not applying for parole."

"We don't have time to research their housing needs. If there's space available in a treatment centre, I do everything I can to get them into a suitable place."

"We have pretty good resource files on what's available. If there's anything out there that will take women [from BCCW] we know about it."

"It's very hit and miss how we hear about new housing options. Sometimes I hear about a new place from the women."

"There's not enough time for me to sit down and spend a half-hour with a woman. And there are no regular meetings of case management so that we can share information and our experiences because there's no time."

Problems were also evident in the communication between case managers and individuals who work at the Burnaby prison under contract to community-based agencies, such as the Elizabeth Fry Society, Indian Homemakers Association and Douglas College. For example:

"Women will come to me a day before they're getting out, or a week before sentence expiry, freaking out because they don't know where they're going to go."

"A lot of release planning is really informal. I hang out in the rotunda [at the centre of the prison's secure unit] and talk to the women, and if they say they're getting out we make an appointment."

"Release planning is very lacking in process. It changes with whoever is in charge of

sentence management, but the emphasis is more on management of the person inside."  
"It's really hard to coordinate because we all do this off the corner of our desk. Why not pay an inmate to create and update a computer list of community resources?"

The SFU study reports (1995: 75) that less than 30 per cent of the prisoners interviewed said that they are aware of the community resources available to help them when they are released. Women said they relied on other prisoners and their own research as much as they did on staff and case managers at BCCW. Prisoners identified a number of pre-release services and training that would support them in going back into the community. The needs identified most frequently were addictions services, vocational and educational training, and a job placement service.

Prison administrators and staff had even more suggestions for pre-release programs. The majority agreed that interpersonal communication skills training, information about community health resources, job placement service, financial counseling and budget skills training, information about sources of vocational and educational upgrading, and family counselling should be included in release plans (1995: 40).

There are no pre-release courses offered at BCCW. "We've sent one staff on training for pre-release courses, and what I hope to see come out of that is a course adapted to the women's needs," said Sentence Management Director Debbie Hawboldt. "It's a question of funding."

Frustration with the release planning process is a hallmark of correctional systems around the world, and the problems reported at the Burnaby prison are certainly not unique. Programs and services designed to help women re-enter the community from prison are few and far between - and, like imprisoned women themselves, those that exist are largely hidden from public view.

A 1995 literature review<sup>15</sup> on "exemplary community programs for federally sentenced women" reports that the most recent Canadian directory dates back to 1985, and many of the resources listed are no longer in existence.

No such directory exists specifically to identify services for federally sentenced women. Nor is there a directory of resources specifically available to women coming out of the Burnaby prison to BC communities. Case managers at BCCW, and Elizabeth Fry Society workers at the prison and at Balaclava House, refer most often to two primary sources of information: the Red Book, an extensive directory of community services and programs in Greater Vancouver which is updated annually, and the Directory of Substance Abuse Services in British Columbia 1994-95 (known as the White Book). With the exception of the Vancouver halfway house operated by the Elizabeth Fry Society, neither directory lists resources designed for women coming out of prison.

## **VI. PAST EXPERIENCES OF PRISONERS AND EX-PRISONERS**

For this research study, we interviewed 38 provincially and federally sentenced women, three women being held on remand at BCCW, and one woman who was living at Balaclava House under an arrangement between the halfway house and the Ministry of Social Services, which funds two beds for emergency use. All 42 women were asked about their past experiences of re-entering the community from prison or jail, with specific focus on:

- ♦ what information they received while in prison about where they could live on their release;
- ♦ whether those women who had a release plan were successful in following that plan;
- and

- ♦ what help, if any, women were able to obtain from housing referrals and services in the community after their release.
- ♦

Their average age was 37, and more than 70 per cent had been incarcerated prior to their current sentence. Of the 30 repeat offenders, 22 had criminal records that went back 10 years or more. On average, the women interviewed for this study had been incarcerated three times over the past 15 years; one in four had been imprisoned six times or more. Excluding lifers and remand prisoners, women who were interviewed had sentences that ranged between two months and 13 years.

The number of federally sentenced women in the interview data base for this study was disproportionately high at 60 per cent, including nine women serving life sentences. At the time the interviews took place, the Burnaby prison held 26 federally sentenced women, 31 provincially sentenced women, and 24 women on remand. A false sense of the size of the "revolving door" syndrome is created by the under representation of provincially sentenced women. While fewer than 650 women across Canada are serving federal sentences - split almost evenly between those in penal institutions and those on supervised release in the community - more than 10,000 women are admitted to provincial jails each year.<sup>16</sup>

Women account for less than six per cent of imprisoned adults (sentenced and remanded) in British Columbia.<sup>17</sup> In actual numbers, there are about 2233 adult women under community supervision (bail, probation, parole) on any given day. Corrections Branch data for the fiscal year 1995/96 show 404 releases from BCCW, of which 111 (27.5%) were Aboriginal women. It should be noted that data is based on releases so that one person may be charged, convicted, sentenced to custody and released multiple times within the 12 months.

Of the 30 prisoners interviewed for this study, who had been incarcerated more than once, 29 responded to a series of questions about pre-release assistance in finding housing in the community. Only nine women said that they had received information about where they might live in the community. Identified sources of assistance with housing placements included case management officers (5), Elizabeth Fry Society worker (5), Native Liaison worker (1) and the Salvation Army (1).

When asked "Did your release plan feel like your choice of housing?" five women responded affirmatively, although one explained that she went to an emergency shelter for homeless women in Edmonton; and another described how she was referred to housing agencies by an MLA's constituency office, but did not obtain housing. Of the remaining three who had a plan that felt like their own choice, two went to addictions treatment centres; one woman moved in with her father for a few weeks, then rented her own apartment.

Because the province has only one halfway house, day parole applicants from BCCW invariably seek transfer to Balaclava House. Women's comments underlined the illusion of "choice" in release plans:

"You made a plan you knew the parole board would accept"

"Case management in the past just wanted to get me a place to live so I'd get out of prison but they didn't organize a realistic plan for me"

"I fit the criteria [for going to the halfway house] but I had no choice in housing alternatives"

Interview responses do not provide accurate information, for the most part, on women's housing situation at the time of their re-arrest or return to the Burnaby institution for, parole breach. Many women felt they had no release plan when they left prison on mandatory supervision or sentence

expiry. Over and over again, women said that they went "back to the streets" — an all encompassing phrase for a nomadic existence which includes homelessness, skid row hotels, emergency shelters, and staying with friends.

Given that three-quarters of the interview sample are repeat prisoners, our data suggest a link between inadequate post-release housing and the "revolving door" syndrome. And there is evidence of a strong connection between substance abuse problems and criminal behaviour. Because so many women left prison without a release plan, just over half the prisoners and ex-prisoners interviewed responded to the question; "Were you able to carry through with that housing plan?" Sixteen of the 22 responses were negative:

"I got caught for drug use"  
"returned to substance abuse on streets"  
"my plans were thwarted by street life and drugs"  
"I used. I got bored. Or it was the other way around?"  
"I went back to Vancouver Island and lived in motels, then lived on the streets for two months before being charged with another offence"  
"went back to the streets"  
"I started to drink and was unaware of [my] alcohol problem"  
"got pressure from student loan office, panicked and ran"  
"the apartment was the first thing I found and I wanted out of here [halfway house]. It was an undesirable place, off the main strip with easy access to liquor stores, drugs and hooking"  
"no support system to help me deal with substance and sexual abuse"  
"I went back to street life and living at risk, without shelter and safety"  
"Social services took me to a group home, told me the new rules and left me. I stayed and adjusted for about six months. Then I found out I became a ward of the court until I was 18, and everything went downhill. I didn't care. I did drugs, ran away, got pregnant"

One-third of the women said they had asked for accommodation or a referral from a community housing service after their release. Eight women said they were helped, although only four actually found housing - two were housed by the Elizabeth Fry Society, one was accepted into "Metis Housing" and one stayed intermittently at an emergency shelter and a transition house for battered women. Four women were provided with lists of low-cost housing, including "downtown hotel rooms" and the names and phone numbers of Vancouver-area landlords. Another seven women, including three with dependent children, said they applied for subsidized housing but were turned down or were put on long waiting lists.

## **VII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PEER SUPPORT RESOURCES**

Housing is central to staying out of prison. However, for newly released women to make changes and move toward independent living, they must be connected to others in the community and to community services and programs. Prison is an isolating experience. In evaluating therapeutic services at the federal Prison for Women, Kathleen Kendall found that:

"They [imprisoned women] felt that ex-inmates could provide them with the most practical information and realistic expectations on how to prepare for release and what to expect once released. Seeing someone who was successful would also provide them with optimism....When asked what would help them to adjust back into the community once released, many women mentioned a support group for ex-inmates for the same reasons

that they wanted such a group inside the prison. Most fundamentally, such groups would provide an opportunity to be with others who had shared their experiences of incarceration." (1993: 63-64)

The 1993 report addressed a number of ways that women's reintegration into the community can be facilitated. In response to prisoners' criticisms of release preparation at the Kingston prison, and the women's expressed need for direct involvement by ex-prisoners in release preparation, Kendall made the following recommendations:<sup>18</sup>

- ♦ "A pilot project, the design and implementation of a peer support group for women who are soon to be released, be undertaken at the Prison for Women."
- ♦ "A project be undertaken by the appropriate authority to examine Prison for Women inmate patterns of access to the outside community. The purpose of this undertaking would be to determine ways of increasing inmate access to the outside community within the legal limitations."
- ♦ "A needs analysis be undertaken at the Prison for Women to determine the job skills most appropriate for inmate training programs... [to] assist inmates in the attainment of employment once released into the community."
- ♦ "The appropriate authority resource support groups for ex-offenders."

The Federally Sentenced Women Program was asked about the implementation status of these four recommendations. In a letter of reply, accompanied by a report<sup>19</sup> on the *Proceedings* from a national workshop held in March 1996, we were advised that: "While the recommendations related to community integration have not specifically been implemented, CSC has been working on a national Community Strategy for Federally Sentenced Women." Included among the "key issues" for a national strategy are numerous suggestions for improved release planning, and expanded use of volunteers and community agencies to provide appropriate intervention and support for women/returning to the community.

Workshop participants also called for creative development of new options for supportive housing services, including private family home placements, healing centres for Aboriginal women, independent living (apartments), and contracted beds with residential facilities designed to accommodate women with particular needs. A synopsis of group discussions at the workshop, held in Toronto on March 5-7, 1996, clearly indicates awareness of the multidimensional problems faced by federally sentenced women, and the need for new partnerships between governments and with communities.

Unfortunately, however, the role of peer support in release preparation and post-release adjustment is notably absent from the broad-based discussions. The recommendations put forward by Kendall must also become part of a cohesive strategy for responding to imprisoned women. As stated in the opening remarks<sup>20</sup> by Assistant Commissioner Arden Thurber, Correctional Research and Development (CSC); "Together we must find more and better ways to safely release offenders as early as possible. Equally, if not more important, we must find better ways to assist these women to stay in the community."

The 1990 Task Force explicitly advocated the direct involvement of women prisoners and ex-prisoners in planning for community-based services for federally sentenced women. Yet, as

noted in the 1994-95 CAEFS annual report:

"CSC has yet to develop transitional planning committees comprised of FSW, for each region. Representatives from each regional committee will, in turn, form a national steering committee, the membership of which federally sentenced women have requested include CAEFS. Once these committees are established, it is anticipated that Elizabeth Fry societies in the regions will be linked into the respective transitional group in order to facilitate planning for community-based services for the women once they are in the regions."

The importance of peer support is further acknowledged in the research by British sociologist Mary Eaton, whose study of the structural blocks which many women encounter on their release from prison is based on interviews with 34 women, most of whom had been out of prison for over two years. In *Women After Prison*, Eaton writes:

"Women coming out of prison bring with them the sense of self that was cultivated in response to the prison. This may well continue to exclude the woman from the world about her. Socialized into prison routine and discipline, many women found it difficult to take responsibility for the most mundane of tasks. A lack of confidence and a loss of competence resulted in a self inadequate to the new situation. Women also felt excluded by the reactions of others, either to a known ex-prisoner or to a generalized idea of what it means to be an ex-prisoner... For many women, it was the organizations run for and by ex-prisoners which provided that space in which to grow out of the prison self. Here they could recognize and move beyond the prison self. Here the women felt included but not confined. Acceptance here was premised on the woman's wish to take charge of her life and stay out of prison." (1993: 18-19)

To move into a new life after prison, many women need pre-release programming which prepares them for re-entering the community and a post-release transitional period, during which they can re-evaluate the old behaviours that got them into trouble, recover from the debilitating effects of imprisonment, and learn to take responsibility for staying out of prison. The cost of providing support and resources which are designed to respond to high need women on their release must be calculated against the cost of future imprisonment. Inside and outside corrections, we have encountered deeply felt concern that women who leave prison without a safe place to live, and a network of support on the outside, are being set up to fail. At the same time, we understand that proposals for change cannot ignore fiscal reality. Our first three recommendations for peer support resources are, therefore, deliberately modest in cost and pragmatic in focus:

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PEER SUPPORT RESOURCES**

### ***Peer Support Coordinator***

1. The fulltime position of Peer Support Coordinator be supported by appropriate funding agencies; the position to employ a woman ex-prisoner who has resettled successfully in the community.

Responsibilities of the Peer Support Coordinator include:

- ♦ maintaining regular communication and access to the prison population at BCCW for the purpose of helping sentence management staff to identify the kinds of prison-based and community-based resources that are needed to support a woman in her planning for release

and on her re- entry into the community, including a program of temporary absences to promote positive re-entry.

- ♦ advocating for individual prisoners, at their request, to encourage pro-active release planning that focuses on a woman's needs and her potential for change, rather than on her criminal record.
- ♦ follow-up on "start up" checklist to ensure that each woman applies for personal identification (i.e. photo I.D./Care card/S.I.N.), as needed, and receives health and educational assessment without undue delay.
- ♦ working in partnership with Corrections Branch, sharing information and consulting on release housing pilot projects and related services for women coming out of prison.

### ***Volunteer Coordinator***

2. The full time position of Volunteer Coordinator be supported by appropriate funding agencies; the position to employ a woman ex-prisoner who has resettled successfully in the community.

Responsibilities of the Volunteer Coordinator include:

- ♦ developing and strengthening connections between BCCW prisoners and the community by networking with Vancouver-area social service agencies and organizations, businesses, schools, service clubs, and churches to recruit volunteers for pre-release and post-release support; programs.
- ♦ recruiting formerly imprisoned women and other interested individuals in the community to serve as prisoner-escorts, upon completion of the Citizens Escort Training program, to accompany prisoners to a range of community-based services and activities.
- ♦ supervising a Peer Support Team of ex-prisoners, which will be comprised initially of women who have completed training modules, to be delivered jointly by the Peer Support Coordinator and Volunteer Coordinator at BCCW and in the community. Team members will provide pro-active, individualized assistance with practical resettlement matters, such as helping a woman to secure housing prior to her release, introducing her to community resources and services, and encouraging her to participate in discussion groups and other activities initiated by resettled ex-prisoners.
- ♦ working in partnership with Corrections Branch, sharing information and consulting on release housing pilot projects and related services for women coming out of prison.

### ***Peer Support Team Training***

3. Peer Support Team training will support the development and implementation of peer support programs inside BCCW; strengthen connections between programs in the prison and those in the community; and create a volunteer network of ex- prisoners to assist newly released women with community resettlement. Continuity will be provided between Peer Support Team training for prisoners and a community based component for ex-prisoners. Delivering and participating in peer support training should be recognized by Corrections

Branch as work placements for prisoners at BCCW.

These initial recommendations are designed specifically to facilitate individualized release planning, as needed, for women coming out of BCCW; and to create new linkages between the Burnaby prison and community agencies and services.

### **VIII. AVAILABLE HOUSING FOR WOMEN COMING OUT OF PRISON**

The *availability* of safe, affordable housing to support women in making the transition from prison into the community is what this research study is most concerned with, because we know that many women have no home to go to when they are released. These women have almost no choices about where they can live.

For some women leaving prison, federal or provincial parole board standards apply - yet only a handful of halfway houses for women exist across Canada. The shortage of halfway house beds for sentenced women has become even greater since late 1995, when the Ontario government withdrew funding for a range of community services, including most residential community corrections. The sweeping cutbacks resulted in the closure of a halfway house which had been operated by the Elizabeth Fry Society of Ottawa for 17 years.

For many women, housing costs are beyond their welfare cheque in all but the poorest, and most dangerous areas of the city. Even those who have marketable job skills may need time and support to readjust to the freedoms and responsibilities of living in the community. Options which women prisoners and ex-prisoners have repeatedly said are needed include satellite apartments, co-operative housing and low-cost rental accommodation.

It is well known that "the first six months of release is a risky time for offenders and it may be necessary to vary level of supervision and interventions accordingly," as the Correctional Research Manager<sup>21</sup> for CSC told participants at the National Workshop to Develop a Community Strategy for Federally Sentenced Women. On a practical level, providing safe housing is the most basic way of supporting women in staying in the community — and out of jail.

Little has been published, however, about exemplary programs for sentenced women released into the community; and housing is a particularly neglected area of research.

#### *SURVEY OF CAEFS MEMBERSHIP*

In Canada, CAEFS is the primary source of community-based assistance for women in conflict with the law. The 22 independent Elizabeth Fry societies that form the national association provide a variety of programs and services to adult and young women, and are mandated to provide public education and advocacy which encourages reform at all levels of the criminal Justice system.

As part of our research into the availability of housing for women coming out of prison, the CAEFS membership was surveyed by mail (Appendix B). We recognized that finding out what housing resources are available in any particular community or region can be time consuming, so we asked survey recipients "simply to respond to our questions with information that your staff have at hand." Completed surveys were returned by 12 Elizabeth Fry societies<sup>22</sup> providing a snapshot of the resources available to a newly released woman who is homeless or living in a situation that puts her at risk.

Elizabeth Fry societies in larger Ontario cities, Winnipeg and Halifax all identified housing for women coming out of prison as a "high priority" need; and the Elizabeth Fry Society of Cape Breton has developed a funding proposal for a transition house which would provide eight women "with a safe, supportive environment with access to programming and appropriate after-care services to ease the reintegration process."

Six societies across Canada operate halfway houses for women on conditional release. Halfway houses are located in Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal and the following:

- ♦ Elizabeth Fry Society of Kingston has operated Joyce Detweiler House, a 10-bed halfway house, since 1970; and manages a one-bedroom satellite apartment for federally sentenced women on conditional release. The Society also runs Kaye Healey Homes, a program for low-income single persons and families, which provides 25 geared-to-income apartments in 11 properties scattered throughout the city and one 12-unit apartment building. Women coming out of prison are eligible to apply for Kaye Healey Homes; however, waiting lists are more than a year and the Society gets requests for housing assistance "on a regular basis" from women released from the federal Prison for Women.
- ♦ Elizabeth Fry Society of Peel (Brampton) operates a 10-bed residence for provincially and federally sentenced women on conditional release. The Society reports that newly released women are referred to Peel Non-Profit Housing; "however, they are accorded no special consideration and the current waiting period is approximately one year."
- ♦ Elizabeth Fry Society of Simcoe County (Barrie) operates a residence for five women on conditional release or full parole (not available to women who require 24-hour supervision). The Society gets about one request for housing assistance every 3-4 months, and works with local agencies and services, including non-profit housing authorities, the Canadian Mental Health Association and probation services, to secure housing placements.

In British Columbia, the Kamloops & District Elizabeth Fry Society operates two low-income residential projects which are not designed specifically for women coming out of prison. Four subsidized rental units are available at a second-stage house for women and children who are leaving a crisis, relocating, or needing a place to live. And in 1994, the Society developed a 35-unit housing project, in partnership with BC Housing Management Commission, which offers subsidized 1-, 2- and 3-bedroom rental units.

The Atlantic region has no community residences for women on conditional release, although women serving federal time can be paroled to men's halfway houses in Sydney and Halifax, where the Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia reports that it gets a request for housing assistance "at least once a week" from women newly released from prison or jail.

Other comments by survey respondents about the lack of availability of housing include

"We receive requests for assistance with finding suitable housing almost every day.

Generally, we work with the women, and the housing agencies that we refer to, to ensure that she does not return to the street when she is released." (Elizabeth Fry Society of Calgary)

"The lack of housing to meet the needs specifically for women ex-offenders is also of concern to us here." (Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba)

"No low-cost housing in Ottawa is specific to women coming out of prison. Any subsidized city units have very long waiting lists and applications can only be taken from the

community." (Elizabeth Fry Society of Ottawa)

"There is a great need for low cost, long-term supportive/second stage housing. Rooming houses are not the answer!" (Elizabeth Fry Society of Peel)

"Most women being released from prison end up in shelters, either for homeless or abused women. There is the familiar problem of there not being space for them on the day they arrive." (Elizabeth Fry Society of Hamilton)

### *SURVEY OF VANCOUVER-AREA HOUSING RESOURCES*

A telephone survey of 71 treatment centres, recovery houses, transition houses, groups that subsidize housing, emergency shelters and housing referral services was conducted in July 1996 to determine the current availability of these resources to women coming out of BCCW.

Most of the housing resources surveyed are listed in books and pamphlets which are available at BCCW. These include:

- ♦ two directories used by prison sentence management workers and Elizabeth Fry workers at Balaclava House as their main sources of information on housing placements for newly released women ("Red Book" of Vancouver-area community services and "White Book" of province-wide alcohol and drug treatment facilities), and;
- ♦ two brochures which are distributed to BCCW prisoners: "Surviving in Vancouver" (January 1994), one of a series of public information pamphlets provided by the Canadian Mental Health Association; and "Help in the Downtown Eastside" (November 1995).

Researchers also found and contacted community housing services which are not listed in the above sources. Responses were received from 42 of the 71 resources included in the survey. By talking with ex-prisoners and others in the community, information was also obtained on seven treatment centres which did not respond to the survey.

#### *Survey Highlights*

- ♦ Five community housing services had beds available for newly released prisoners returning to the community at the time of the survey (four in the Vancouver area and one located in Prince George); a sixth bed was reported as coming up in two weeks.
- ♦ Another 20 residential facilities said they accept women from BCCW, provided the woman meets their admission criteria, and they have taken women coming out of prison in the past.

Of the five available housing resources, two are emergency shelters:

- ♦ New Beginnings (Salvation Army Homestead), which provides 11 short-term beds for women in need of emergency housing. Clients must be "detoxified and medically and mentally stable" and must be approved by MSS before admission.
- ♦ Lookout Emergency Aid Society, a 42-bed co-ed shelter which provides emergency accommodation on a "first come" basis.

Availability fluctuates during the day, but both survey respondents said they are full by the evening. Because these housing resources provide crisis accommodation for adults who have no other housing options, there is no assurance that space will be available on the day a woman is released from prison.

One bed was available at the Salvation Army Homestead treatment centre, which offers an

eight-week residential addictions treatment program for women (12 beds). The treatment program, which provides 24-hour supervision and support, accepts only one BCCW prisoner or newly released woman at any time.

Integrity House in New Westminster, a recovery house opened earlier this year, reported having four spaces available at their 12-bed facility. The service offers a structured residential environment for men and women with addictions problems. Only one woman prisoner is accepted at any time. In its first three months of operation, Integrity House has been used by a handful of women on conditional release from BCCW. Researchers were told that women coming out of prison have left the residence after only days or weeks, although no time limit is imposed on their length of stay. Concern was expressed that paroled prisoners appeared to view the facility as a "stepping stone to freedom" and lack commitment to the recovery process. Three ex-prisoners who stayed at Integrity House said that the requirement that residents participate in structured group discussion and one-on-one counselling, was too rigid.

Another available bed was located at the Phoenix Transition House in Prince George, which has accepted women coming out of BCCW in the past. Researchers were told that availability fluctuates but the residential facility is often full and regularly maintains a waiting list.

### *Methodology*

Phone queries focused on these questions:

- Do you accept women coming out of prison?
- Do you have space available now? If no, how long is your waiting list?
- Have you accepted women from BCCW in the past?
- Do you have specific admission criteria?

Researchers attempted to make initial contact with the 71 resources on the survey list by phone. Follow-up was made by phone or fax and messages were left on answering machines, whenever possible. The list of questions was expanded for fax queries to solicit information on accessibility once a woman has been released from prison to the community.

Eight of the resources listed in the sources available to BCCW staff or prisoners could not be contacted because phones were not in service or the published number was incorrect. Of those contacted, 21 did not respond to messages or faxes.

### *Survey Findings*

Of the 42 survey respondents:

- ♦ Two accept men only
- ♦ Two refused to give any information on availability and use of their service
- ♦ Two residential services said they do not accept women from prison (Cythera Second Stage Housing and Fraserside Emergency Shelter)
- ♦ Eleven are housing referral services, all reporting lengthy waiting lists except the Ministry of Social Services, which does not maintain a waiting list but refers people to emergency beds held by the ministry at a number of provincially-funded community residences; only four referral services said they would not deal with women coming out of prison
- ♦ Twenty residential facilities said they would accept women coming out of prison, providing the woman met their eligibility criteria, but had no beds available at the time of the survey

- ♦ Five community housing services had space available at the time of the survey.

Housing referral services are overwhelmed by demand. The BC Housing Management Commission (BCHMC), which is listed as a "general resource" in the information package distributed to BCCW prisoners, has some 10,000 names on its registry. The Affordable Housing Advisory Association reports a waiting list of 1,300. The Downtown Eastside Residents Association described its waiting list as "useless" and said priority is given to finding emergency shelter for homeless people.

Researchers identified 39 community housing resources — more than half of the 71 listed resources in the survey — that report being willing to deal with women coming out of BCCW. These include seven housing referral services, as well as six addictions treatment centres around the province which are known to have accepted women from the prison in the past, although they did not respond to the survey.

Of these 39 resources, only five actually had space available.

And of the 20 residential facilities which said they accept women coming out of prison but had no space available when surveyed, only Balaclava House is designed specifically for community re-entry for women prisoners.

Potential community housing placements for women ex-prisoners include:

Six emergency shelters in the Lower Mainland:

- ♦ Sheena's Place, Evergreen Transition House, Virginia Sam Transition House, Margaret Dixon House, Triage Centre, and Fine Day, which provides crisis accommodation to native individuals and families who do not have addictions problems or mental illness.
- ♦ Three addictions treatment centres:
  - Peardonville House in Abbotsford, which has a 10-week program;
  - Charlford House in Burnaby, which has a program length of 1-3 months;
  - Crossroads Treatment Centre Society residence in Kelowna, which has a 28-day program and requires that clients have lived 3 months or more in the community.
- ♦ One residential housing service for people with mental illness who are in crisis (Venture).
- ♦ Six supportive recovery houses, which serve different client groups, and most of which require that a woman live in the community for between 30 days and three months before seeking admission:
  - New Dawn House, supportive recovery, structured program for women
  - Sancta Maria House, individual and group counselling for women with substance abuse problems
  - Surrey House, 12-step program for women
  - Garfield House, co-ed
  - Step by Step
  - Lana House, for men and women awaiting treatment and post-treatment

In summary, the survey found that homeless women coming out of BCCW may be able to find short-term accommodation at an emergency shelter.

Despite the willingness of most housing referral services to deal with requests for assistance from women returning to the community from prison, she has virtually no prospect of getting into low-cost housing for many months or years.

Residential treatment centres may be able to provide a woman with structured housing for 2-3 months as a first stage in community re-entry, although waiting lists and costs to the client make it difficult to access this option without effective release planning. Acceptance into residential treatment programs is now arranged for a small number of BCCW prisoners and Balaclava House residents; and it is appropriate to view these facilities as programming options rather than community housing.

Supportive recovery houses may be an option for women coming out of BCCW, although demand exceeds the number of bed spaces. Availability is further restricted by house policies which limit acceptance to one ex-prisoner at any time. Supportive recovery houses generally operate under capacity only until they become known to community social services and referral agencies.

The survey updates the current community housing options for women coming out of BCCW, and illustrates the difficulty of accessing resources without a central data base. At the same time, the survey findings reflect a stark reality: Downtown Eastside hotels are the only low-cost accommodation readily available to many newly released women.

### *BCCW AND THE COMMUNITY*

Prison and contract workers at BCCW and Elizabeth Fry staff at Balaclava House were asked what resources were available to them in assisting women coming out of prison to find housing in the community; what pro-active help they were able to provide, if any; and which community agencies they had found to be the most useful in identifying housing options for women on their release. Frequently identified problems included:

- ♦ very few housing resources in the community for women coming out of prison;
- ♦ too few staff resources at BCCW to address known communication problems and poor liaison with service providers and policy makers, especially Ministry of Social Services; and
- ♦ too few volunteers available to escort women on passes into the community.

Nearly all interview respondents expressed a need for more information on how to access directories of community housing services, and how to place women on waiting lists for subsidized housing while still imprisoned.

Although each living unit has a file of community resources that is updated as new services are opened, the Director of Sentence Management acknowledges that BCCW has "few links with the community" and inadequate liaison with bureaucrats. Debbie Hawboldt explained that "one of the biggest problems we run into is that we don't always know about what's available in the community. We need more communication with both the federal and provincial governments."

Poor coordination with MSS was cited by senior administrators, contract workers and case management officers as a significant barrier to pre-release housing placements. Unless a prisoner has the down payment on rental accommodation in their prison account, she will not be granted an escorted temporary absence (ETA) to look for housing in the community.

OLU Director Donna McLean feels that the solution requires a new protocol which would enable

homeless prisoners to secure approval for welfare benefits prior to their release;

"Six weeks before a woman's release date, if we could take her to MSS and fill out the forms we could have her set up with a place [to move into when she's released]. We've been trying to solve this problems for years. We need to have a liaison person from MSS assigned to BCCW."

The experience of contract workers at the prison illustrates that MSS employees may exercise their discretion in approving social assistance. As an Elizabeth Fry worker said:

"If a woman already has a [MSS] worker and they've had a positive relationship, it's possible to arrange for an emergency cheque or have the deposit paid on an apartment. But it's very difficult to set up. I've spent days [escorting] women on TAs, helping to look for an apartment, only to have to wait an hour and a half at the ministry office to get an Intent to Rent form, then wait again to have the form approved. By that time, the apartment is gone."

Social Worker Dawn Duncan, who works half-time at BCCW under contract to Forensic Psychiatric Services, has found that "all kinds of pragmatic problems" are created by the absence of interministerial coordination on income assistance for women coming out of prison. She was assigned to the prison in 1992 as part of the expansion of a case management program for mentally disordered prisoners, The Interministerial Project (IMP), which recognizes the need for intensive support for "hardest to place" individuals.

Funded by the Forensics Psychiatric Services Commission, BC Corrections Branch and the Greater Vancouver Regional Mental Health Services Society, the project was designed as a "hands out" outreach program to assist multi-problem offenders on probation to successfully resettle in the community. Duncan works closely with a caseload of about five prisoners for a few months, helping them to access community support networks and find somewhere to live: "Women have ended up in emergency shelters [on their release] because I couldn't find anywhere for them to go."

Many of her clients have a combination of mental illness, severe social or behavioural problems and, in some cases, substance abuse problems. With one exception – an MSS worker who made all the necessary financial arrangements and dealt "very kindly" with a woman being escorted on a pass by the social worker — Duncan echoes frustration with the poor relations between the women's prison and MSS offices. She describes an encounter with a ministry employee who refused to allow her to pick up a welfare cheque for a prisoner, who had completed an application for welfare and subsequently learned she would be released on the weekend:

"I had the woman's permission in writing. I showed [the MSS employee] all my Forensics photo ID and explained the situation, how the woman would end up getting out without any money, and she sent me away. In the end, the woman was released a day early so that we could get her to the MSS office."

Awareness of the community re-entry obstacles that are created by the absence of interministerial coordination on social assistance benefits have also been identified in earlier research studies<sup>23</sup> on women coming out of BCCW.

Interviews for this study stressed the need for an integrated response to women coming out of

prison, involving governments and communities. Education and information sharing are required to raise the profile of the women's prison, and to advocate for greater community participation in the resettlement of ex-prisoners. BCCW Chaplain Henk Smidstra has found that public support for reintegration has declined since the *Creating Choices* report appeared in 1990:

"We've felt that in trying to place women in the community... ! see that as a real ethical issue, that women do not have choices about where they are going to go [from BCCW]. I think community agencies don't even want to think about people coming out of prison."

Elder Ann Johnston, who works part-time on contract at BCCW, says most Aboriginal prisoners are isolated from native support services in the community.

"We've begged native groups to come into the prison [but] there seems to be such fear about what prisons are all about."

Because volunteers are not available to escort women on TAs, Johnston believes there are fewer opportunities than in the past for prisoners to attend community events, such as sweat ceremonies. She said she can "count on one hand" the number of Aboriginal prisoners who have made a successful re-entry into the community from BCCW, and cites isolation — from the community and from their native heritage — as one of the biggest reason women come back to prison:

"The women have such intense fear of dealing with society and being on their own. They become very dependent in here because everything is done for them. Prison is an intense psychological dislocation."

BCCW Native Liaison worker Marilyn Mura, who works on contract to the Indian Homemakers' Association, says the Greater Vancouver area offers many resources for native people but none designed for women being released from prison. Because native support services are linked informally within the province and across Canada, she's "able to pick up the phone and find out what's available" when a woman asks for assistance with release planning. However, there are very limited resources in remote northern communities:

"Many of the women come from very small communities where the Alcohol & Drug counsellor comes in every two weeks, and a psychologist may come once a month... To heal these women you have to heal the whole family."

Most of the women have family - children they don't want to sever ties with - but they don't have the life skills and parenting skills to look after them without support."

Social worker Dawn Duncan said she encounters "a lot of resistance" from community residential services in seeking to access resources for her clients:

"I've never placed a woman [from BCCW] in a mental health boarding house outside the Lower Mainland... People in community services are afraid of these women. There's very little understanding or patience in the community for people coming out of prison."

## **IX. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A COORDINATED RESPONSE**

### ***Interministerial Committee***

4. An Interministerial Committee be established to develop a coordinated response to the continuum of housing services and supportive programs that are needed to assist formerly imprisoned women to stay out of jail or prison; initially, membership should include the ministries of Human Resources, Attorney General, Health, Aboriginal Affairs, Women's Equality, Municipal Affairs and Housing, Multiculturalism, and Education, Skills and Training, as well as the office of the Deputy Commissioner for Women (Correctional Service of Canada). The Peer Support Coordinator and a representative of the Women's Release Housing Society must also be active participants.

### ***Ministry of Attorney General - Ministry of Human Resources Protocol***

5. A memorandum of understanding be established between the Ministry of Attorney General and the Ministry of Human Resources to provide for ongoing liaison on issues related to financial assistance for community reintegration. The memorandum should include a protocol which enables a woman to access income assistance prior to her release from prison and while living at a government-funded community residence, as needed; specifically, provision must be made for Intent to Rent forms to be completed before a woman returns to the community.

### ***Women's Release Housing Society***

6. A new non-profit, registered society, to be known as the Women's Release Housing Society, be established by community members to advocate for supportive housing for formerly imprisoned women, and to develop and administer release housing pilot projects in the Lower Mainland, in cooperation with funding agencies and governments. Aboriginal women's groups will be encouraged to join the Society and/or to recommend an additional consultation process that is specific to the needs of Aboriginal ex-prisoners. The board of the Women's Release Housing Society shall include ex-prisoners).

## **X. EXEMPLARY RELEASE HOUSING SERVICES FOR WOMEN**

What this BC research study has found echoes a 1995 review of the literature<sup>24</sup> on exemplary community programs available for women released from prison across Canada and the United States, namely, that community resources for women coming out of prison are very limited or non-existent, and women are often released from prison having made little connection with community resources:

"It was discovered that while an abundance of information exists on community services accessible to male offenders, the opposite was true for women. While the subject of women's criminality has gained more attention in the past decade, little remains available in the literature on community-based programs. The bulk of research which explores programs for women tends to focus within institutional settings.... It was further discovered that few services for women were framed to specifically address the needs of female offenders; many programs were willing to accept offenders though the majority of participants were those with no criminal history. Moreover, many services claiming to be available to women, particularly those formulated for Aboriginals, were offered in conjunction with men. Further, most programs were found to target a particular problem area rather than implementing a holistic approach to treatment." (P. 14)

When the focus is narrowed to community housing resources, it is evident that supportive services for women coming out of prison constitute one of the most neglected areas of traditional research. This study, therefore, made use of Internet technology to identify exemplary release housing services in Great Britain and the United States. The research process involved an extensive search of World Wide Web sites for prison-related resources in January and February 1996, and follow-up queries on electronic discussion lists (e-mail) to connect with individual researchers and service providers.

Far more time and resources than were available are required to conduct an exhaustive study. Global and unregulated, the Internet is currently an unstable database. New resources are continually being created and consolidated, and web sites disappear overnight. Predictably, women prisoners are no more visible on the electronic "highway" than they are within male-dominated corrections systems. Peer support groups are likewise nearly invisible on the Internet, lacking access to the financial and technological resources required to participate in electronic information exchange.

Nonetheless, the process of posting a summary of this research project and requesting information on community housing for newly released women did produce information on exemplary services that are scarcely documented, or overlooked entirely, in the literature. The following examples of community release housing models are a place to start. Each of these exemplary programs should be further investigated as part of the development of implementation strategies to provide supportive services for high need/high risk prisoners being released from BCCW.

#### ***STEP TWO (NACRO)<sup>25</sup>***

***Birmingham, England***

The Step Two project in Birmingham is part of NACRO Community Enterprises Ltd., a housing association which manages 15 projects providing 800 bed spaces in England and Wales. Step Two has provided semi-independent accommodation for women ex-prisoners since 1984, and the Birmingham project offers two such houses.

NACRO (the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders) has existed in its present form since 1966. Funded by grants and contracts from government agencies, local authorities, Training and Enterprise Councils, charitable trusts and companies, and by individuals' donations and legacies, NACRO works to prevent crime and promote the resettlement of prisoners in the community. It supports a wide range of practical services: some 25,000 people participate in NACRO's employment training and work experience programs; more than 1,000 prison officers have been trained to give advice on housing and employment to prisoners approaching release; nearly 3,000 people live in NACRO housing projects - over three quarters are ex-prisoners and more than one-third are women.

NACRO is developing a computer database of updated resettlement information which can be accessed by prisoners and prison staff. The project "links what happens in prisons to what happens afterwards; it brings together information about services on offer to prisoners across geographical boundaries."

NACRO reports that people released from prison stand a 44 per cent chance of having no permanent place to live and an 80-90 per cent chance of being unemployed. A 1992 resettlement survey asked 3,000 men and women in 10 prisons, both sentenced and on remand, what sort of help they needed in order to resettle successfully in the community. Finding a job (59%) topped the list, followed by long-term housing (45%).

Step Two has two houses for women in Birmingham: one with seven beds, the other with eight. The accommodation consists of single bed setting rooms with a bathroom and kitchen shared between two women. Residents have their own keys to both the main entrance and the doors of their unit. Both the houses are large old buildings which were refurbished for specific use as semi-independent housing.

The houses are staffed by one female worker from 9 am to 5 pm weekdays. This staffing system was planned as a conscious move away from the more restrictive and institutional model of special needs housing, which NACRO describes as "unattractive to many potential users." The semi-independent model provided by Step Two is designed "to foster independence while providing support and guidance."

The majority of referrals come from the probation service. Referrals also come from social services, other voluntary housing projects and - increasingly - direct from custody through referrals initiated by prison staff.

Women with serious drug or alcohol misuse problems or diagnosed psychological problems, who require more than minimal support to find long-term housing, are not considered appropriate referrals.

The goal of Step Two is to "maximize housing opportunities for its residents" by providing a secure base from which to search for permanent housing in the community; by helping women to make applications and claims for welfare benefits; and by assisting them to overcome problems which had affected their housing in the past, including basic life skills and communication skills, money management and paying off "bad debts" acquired before they went to prison.

Most women remain at Step Two for nine to 12 months, and they are offered support by the house staff worker for up to six months once they move into their new accommodation. Applications for subsidized housing tend to be given priority status by local housing authorities because Step Two residents are technically homeless.

### ***SARAH POWELL HUNTINGTON HOUSE***

**New York City, NY**

Opened in New York City in the fall of 1993, Huntington House is a transitional residence specifically designed to assist homeless women who are coming out of prison or jail to rebuild their lives in the community and to reunite with their children. Created and managed by the Women's Prison Association, which established the first women's halfway house in the U.S. in 1870, Huntington House is a six-storey building with 28 apartments. It can accommodate 37 women — 19 families and 18 "single" women who are working toward family reunification. Sharing two-bedroom units, two newly released mothers take turns caring for their visiting children on weekends. Once custody is approved by welfare officials, the woman and her children move into one of the units reserved for families.

In its first two years of operation, this program reunited 40 mothers with 65 children (half of whom were in foster care) and 28 families moved on into permanent housing. Only one child has been returned to foster placement.

Huntington House is a safe, drug-free environment with 24-hour supervision. No overnight visitors are allowed for the first 30 days, and the building is secured against all outsiders except those who are on residents' lists and agree to leave ID at the front desk and depart by curfew. Rules are

strictly enforced: no drugs, no weapons, no unexcused absences, and no physical violence, especially no spanking children. House services include comprehensive case management, substance relapse prevention, HIV/AIDS education and services, peer support, life skills and parenting skills programs, educational/vocational referrals, on-site child care, supervised family visits and activities, and permanent housing placement.

Women can remain at Huntington House for up to two years, but the average stay is between six and 18 months. Residents must be approved by the New York City Department of Homeless Services, and must have custody of their children or a reasonably good prospect of regaining custody.

Women with a history of substance abuse problems must complete a treatment program and enter the program drug-free. Huntington House does not accept women with "severe mental illness" or a serious communicable disease. Pregnant women and HIV-positive women are accepted into the program.

### ***NEIL J. HOUSTON HOUSE***

**Roxbury, MA**

Located on the campus of a community health center, Houston House is a residential pre-release treatment program for incarcerated pregnant women and their newborn infants. Designed to provide women prisoners with pregnancy support services and ongoing medical care, and to support their return to the community, Houston House is operated by the Boston-based Social Justice for Women, Inc.

Pregnant women are released early from the state's prison for women to finish their sentence at Houston House. Programs include individual and group counselling, substance abuse treatment, crisis intervention, educational workshops and "aggressive resettlement services" to help women to re-enter the community and stay out of prison. Women who complete the program may access one year of outpatient services, which include support in the areas of housing and education.

Houston House is the recipient of national and local awards for its successful treatment model for pregnant addicted women prisoners. In 1990, Social Justice for Women was recognized for creating systemic change in the criminal justice system by being named the 38th recipient of President George Bush's "1000 Points of Light" initiative.

### ***COMMUNITY CONNECTION RESOURCE CENTRE***

**San Diego, CA**

Comprehensive re-entry and recovery services for prisoners and ex-prisoners are provided by the Community Connection Resource Centre (CCRC), which operates under grants from public and private sector sources. The CCRC is an unique example of co-operation between corrections and communities, with funding support provided by the County of San Diego (Community Action Partnership), San Diego Consortium & Private Industry Council, Sacramento Employment & Training Agency, California Department of Corrections, San Diego Sheriffs Department, and private foundations.

Both residential and non-residential programs are available to women and men coming out of prison, including life skills, family services, community referrals for food, clothing and child care assistance, vocational assessment, job counselling and placement. Program length varies but most last between two and six months. Ex-prisoners are employed on staff and work as volunteers in CCRC programs.

Centre staff regularly visit jails and prisons to inform prisoners about CCRC services, and to assist with pre-release planning. They also provide help with job search plans, and active support in scheduling interviews and follow up with potential employers. Bus tokens are provided to job interviews.

Ex-prisoners facilitate an ongoing support group ("Freedom First") where participants meet to discuss problems and successes of making the transition into the community. Clean and sober recreational outings are organized, and newcomers are linked to community-based aftercare programs for substance abuse.

Community residences for women include Freedom House, a highly structured 20-bed re-entry home for women on parole, where residents stay for between nine months and a year, followed by an individualized six-week aftercare program in the community. CCRC also offers a "Stepping Out" program at the San Diego County women's jail, and program graduates are eligible to move into a nine-bed clean and sober house as the first stage in community resettlement.

## **XI. BEING OUT: WHERE WOMEN LIVE IS UNSAFE, UNHEALTHY AND UNSEEN**

"I spend a lot of time on the phone because resources change all the time. But you can't always find a place, so the woman can't go before the parole board. It happens. And if there's nowhere and the woman is at sentence expiry, she just walks out the door with nothing [except] a Skytrain ticket - that's it. I've seen staff tell a woman to leave her [prison-issued] sweat suit and go out in shorts and a T-shirt in December. They're asked for their underwear because the regulations say that you can't take any institutional property."

*Elizabeth Fry Society of Vancouver Worker*

Twenty-two ex-prisoners living in the Vancouver area took part in a focus group in late May, accepting our invitation to share their insights on release housing and the kinds of supportive programs that would help women coming out of BCCW to rebuild their lives in the community. Posters announcing the May 27 meeting were distributed to the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, the WISH drop-in (a support service for prostitutes) and other services that are frequented by poor women in the Main and Hastings area. Participants received a \$15 honorarium. One woman recognized the research team contact name on the poster from BCCW meetings of Strength in Sisterhood (SIS), a peer support group founded by federal ex-prisoners and community activists. She invited all her friends. On the evening of the focus group, a WISH board member drove women to La Quena restaurant on Commercial Drive, carload after carload.

Nearly all of the focus group participants were high need/high risk ex-prisoners, most between the ages of 30 and 35. Many are addicted to heroin, and some were on methadone treatment. Many support their addictions through prostitution. All of the women who talked about drugs and working the streets said they wanted to quit both.

Most of the women live in slum hotels in the Downtown Eastside. All wanted to live anywhere else. Descriptions of their accommodations were replete with terrifying and humiliating experiences: rooms infested with rats and cockroaches; doors with no locks, or padlocks with keys that were kept by previous residents, who regularly returned and stole the women's belongings and sometimes attacked them; the lure of drugs to numb their pain; the constant fear of rape and robbery; the verbal abuse from hotel workers. In the ghetto that is their home, landlords and residents alike "treat you like garbage, every woman is a whore to them." Women talked about the hopeless feeling of having no means of escape from the misery of skid row. They talked about their anger and their fear. Coming back into the community from prison "seems to always be a spiral down," said a paroled

prisoner. "Every time you move you lose things, so you have to start over. It's exhausting." Some of the participants admitted to having deliberately committed crimes so they could return to prison, exchanging their freedom for safety. A native woman poignantly described her struggle to survive, moving from one dirty hotel room to another for nearly 10 years.

Women talked about their despair at breaking the cycle, back and forth between prison and the Downtown Eastside — "stuck here again." They said they were often afraid to close their eyes, sleeping only when exhaustion overcame fear. They survive on welfare, unable to afford decent housing, partly because they simply can't figure out how to escape the trap of poverty and addiction. What little money they do have - in most cases, \$175 monthly after their rent has been paid - is spent on heroin, alcohol and cigarettes. They said they could not quit drugs while living amidst addicts and dealers.

Several women had been in residential treatment programs or had stayed at Balaclava House in the past. Only one participant felt she had received the help she needed, citing the 10-week program at Peardonville House in Abbotsford. There was strong criticism of the "education" focus at the Vancouver halfway house, which women described as "out of touch" with the reality of their lives: "They teach us how to buy herbal medicine when we can't afford to buy that stuff." The women's number one request was for safe housing with structured programs "but not a lot of rules." Underlying the two-hour discussion was a pervasive resentment and distrust of authority, based on the women's personal experience of being sent back to prison for relapsing into drug use. There was consensus that release housing must be "clean and sober" and consequences must be "written into a contract" - but the women feel strongly that enforcement of contracts must be the decision of all house residents "because each person is different."

Collectively, focus group participants stressed that women coming out of prison need peer support, motivation, and time to learn how to live in the community. They said they needed to be kept busy while they readjust to "normal" life on the outside. Their vision of a "transition house" includes on-site peer support; shared decision making among residents on household chores, meal planning and cooking; pro-active help to access educational upgrading and job skills programs; transportation to medical services; basic life skills, especially money management; and voluntary participation in counselling and healing circles.

In the simplest terms, the women said they need "a place to get away" from drugs and violence and they need the help of others who understand their struggle to survive. Despite the risks, the streets are the only place they feel a sense of belonging. And for many women, ex-prisoners are their only community. Being out of prison is made far more difficult by the lack of preparation for getting out. Release housing must be seen as the continuation of re-entry planning which begins while the women are imprisoned. As a senior correctional officer at BCCW told SFU researchers, parole breaches usually result from loneliness: "The women get lonely and drift out to old haunts for companionship, not necessarily to use [drugs] but because they can't make new friends. They may not relate to new people so they re-mix with the element who is not trying to change." (1995; 42)

## **XII. GETTING OUT: RELEASE HOUSING PREFERENCES**

Interviews with prisoners at BCCW and the halfway house affirm longstanding concerns about the problems caused by too few resources -- inside and outside the women's prison - being available to support community reintegration. Thirty-nine women answered the question; Have you talked with anyone about your housing / accommodation plans? Just under half (18 respondents) said they have discussed where they can live when they get out of prison with one of the following: case management officer, sentence management officer, parole officer, Elizabeth Fry (Balaclava

House), ex-prisoner support groups (LINC, SIS), prison chaplain, native liaison worker, Needle Exchange worker, or a friend.

Asked what suggestions have been made about the kinds of housing support that may be available to them, 10 women said they'd been told that Balaclava House was their only option for early release; two women indicated that they would apply for "native housing" or "low-rental co-op housing" operated by the Positive Living Network; and one said that case management had approved her plan to live with her brother in Prince George, with the possibility that she would be accepted into an addictions treatment program before the end of her one-year sentence.

Of the 21 women who said they had not discussed post-release housing with anyone, most did not offer a reason. Several women described their return to the community as "too far away" to contemplate. The release dates for these women ranged anywhere from six months to more than six years in the future. Included among the respondents who had not talked to anyone about where they would go from prison were seven women whose release dates were between four weeks and three months after their interview. All had sentences of between 60 days and seven months, and only one had been incarcerated prior to her current sentence.

Thirty-two of the women interviewed said they know where they would like to resettle when they are released, with the majority opting for Vancouver (12) or nearby Lower Mainland municipalities (6). Three want to live in Victoria and one identified Vancouver Island without naming a specific locale. Native reserves were chosen by three women. Another two women selected Prince George, and each of the following communities are the preferred destination of one woman: Salmon Arm, Kamloops, and Kelowna. Only one woman expressed a desire to leave the province, saying she would like to move to Ontario.

There was an overwhelming sense of resignation in prisoners' comments on what kind of housing awaited them on release:

"not a lot out there"

"nothing for women"

"no concrete suggestions for where I can live"

"for lifers, Balaclava is it, and I refuse to go there because of all the drug use"

"my parole officer said I have to live by my family [in Vancouver]. I told her that doesn't feel right. She says I'm strong enough not to go back to the streets, but she's missing the point. I don't want to be in the east end"

"I have no idea where I'll go"

Researchers introduced questions on release housing preferences as follows:

"The final series of questions asks you to try to imagine what kind of housing conditions would be most supportive in easing your re-entry to the community. Please don't limit your imagination to what exists now — but what you'd like to have made available to you."

Forty-two women indicated their first and second choices from a list of housing options which included:

- ♦ residential addictions treatment
- ♦ staffed and unstaffed group residences for several different resident populations, both women-only and co-ed

- ♦ shared private residences, including family placement (room and board in a private home) to shared housing with a friend or relative, and satellite housing
- ♦ unstaffed private residence

Preferences indicated a strong desire for privacy and independence. The most popular category was "unstaffed private residence" which was the first choice of 17 women and the second choice of 14 respondents. Of those whose first choice was to have their own space, eight selected "own apartment"; five chose "sole occupant of satellite apartment" (lease held by a community agency which screens tenants) and four opted for "co-op housing." There was a similar pattern among women who named this category as their second choice, with 10 of 14 respondents expressing a desire for move into their "own apartment" in the community.

As a first choice, eight women selected "unstaffed group residence" and seven opted for the following: "I would choose to enter a residential addictions treatment program which offers specialized counselling and help for a few weeks or months *before* I would feel ready to make a decision on other kinds of housing that may be available." Four women said that their first choice would be to "share housing with a friend" and one woman chose each of the following: room and board in a private home; and "staffed group residence" for women ex-prisoners.

The overwhelming predominance of unstaffed housing choices suggests strong distrust of authority and unfamiliarity with house staff as support workers. Women's comments emphasized a need for more control over their own living space, and equate staff with institutional rules. This may reflect the fact that the only knowledge Burnaby prisoners have of staffed accommodation is based on the highly structured Balaclava House model of conditional release housing.

By comparison, a survey of residents of NACRO's Step Two housing (where an on-site project staff works weekdays) found that "all of the women interviewed felt that the staffing times could be longer and reported that the practical support of the staff was important to them." Asked to describe what "gradual re-entry" into the community could look like for them, about one-third of the women (13) had no response.

Asked how long they would want to be able to stay in supportive housing, the most common responses ranged between six months and two years, with 11 women indicating "as long as needed" to get settled in permanent housing.

Regardless of expressed housing preference, researchers asked the women to identify what they feel would be very important to promote a safe living environment within a staffed group residence, choosing from the following list:

- ♦ on-site counseling
- ♦ residents must be clean and sober (no drug/alcohol use)
- ♦ facilitated group process (life skills/communication skills)
- ♦ stable resident population (no short-term crisis beds)
- ♦ house rules on curfew, visitors, chores, etc.
- ♦ "buddy" program (community volunteers to introduce you to public transportation, banking, shopping, skills training, recovery support groups, etc.)
- ♦ access to recreation, sports, crafts
- ♦ peer support from ex-prisoners
- ♦ "pets allowed" policy
- ♦ other

At least half of the 42 women interviewed feel it is very important that release housing provide all of the above. The most frequently requested supports were: access to recreation, sports, crafts (32), clean & sober (30), peer support (29), on-site counseling (28) and stable resident population (28).

With respect to personal space, 41 women identified a need for their own bedroom, and 19 would like their own bathroom. Three-quarters would expect to contribute to the cost of their housing in the community; and one-quarter said that their "special needs" included space for children or grandchildren to visit or live. One woman identified herself as having special health care needs because she's HIV-positive.

Overall, the women expressed a desire to achieve independence and safety through community reintegration. They said they want "responsibility" "to be trusted" "to be self-sufficient" "to be around people like myself" "to be on my own" "privacy" and to have this "support of chosen friends and relatives". And they identified the kinds of supports that they feel would help them to resettle and stay out of prison.

### ***Those Who Work With Prisoners***

This research study asked BCCW staff, contract workers, Elizabeth Fry workers, and probation and parole officers for recommendations on release housing models. There was consensus that a range of housing was needed because the women have different backgrounds and face different obstacles when they get out of prison. There was consensus, as well, that the lack of decent, affordable housing for women coming out of the Burnaby prison represents one of the biggest barriers to community resettlement.

Prison staff involved in the planning and delivery of sentence management felt that group housing "with very limited, if any, supervision" would be appropriate for "more mature" women who are not drug addicted. Support was also expressed for private home placements where one or two women could benefit "from a home environment" and individualized support to link them with community resources. A sentence management co-ordinator described the need as "a foster care system for the women, safe places where they can get on their feet... A couple of months of supportive housing, where life skills are taught in a home setting, could make all the difference."

Women identified as having the most urgent need for community release housing include:

- ♦ federally sentenced women
- ♦ women who go back to the Downtown Eastside when they leave prison ("short termers you can steer away from the streets")
- ♦ women with mental illnesses
- ♦ women who are HIV-positive
- ♦ "young addicts with few basic life skills"

These women are also regarded as in need of the most structured housing with on-site programs to teach life skills, communication skills, and addictions recovery. Several of those interviewed stressed that the number of high-need women coming out of the Burnaby prison is small enough that group housing could support residents with specialized needs.

A member of the health care staff said that "having a house for ex-prisoners who are HIV-positive would be a way of [providing] follow-up" once the women go back into the community:

"They need support to follow through with appointments, get blood testing done, get help

with their diets. We see significant changes [in the women's health status] within a few weeks of coming back [to BCCW]."

Difficulties experienced in supporting ex-prisoners who abuse drugs and alcohol when they return to the community were often the focus of interviews with workers at the women's prison. Sentence management staff felt strongly that the prison must be able to better prepare women for release, stressing that "you really have to show [the women] the steps to independent living."

Most prison workers recommend "zero tolerance" of drug and alcohol use by residents of supportive housing, yet feel that the emphasis has to be on "consequences for behavior and dealing with relapse as part of recovery [from substance abuse]." An Elizabeth Fry Society worker explained:

"Dealing with the reality of women's lives means working with the parole board to get them to understand that relapse is a stepping stone, and not criminal behavior."

Street nurse Laura Moore-Dempsey points out that many of the women she works with would be excluded from housing support when they come out of prison, if drug-free residency policies were universally adopted for new services. Women she now sees at the Burnaby prison include:

"second- and third-generation injection users. They will always be addicts - and we can't fix that, nor can we fix all the things that have happened to them. We either let them fall through the cracks or we provide a safe place for them to live [when they get out of prison]."

She recommends that supportive housing include a "30-day house" where newly released addicts could live on their release, and where drug use on the premises would be prohibited. During their stay, women who request access to addictions treatment services could be helped, and women could be introduced to community resources that are working to reduce the health risks of substance abuse for women and their sexual partners. Even short-term supportive housing, with an emphasis on practical resettlement issues, may break the cycle for women who now go back and forth between prison and their old haunts in the Downtown Eastside, says Moore-Dempsey;

"These are not healthy people with positive coping skills, so it's too easy to slip back into the old lifestyle... If a woman doesn't choose to go into some kind of second-stage [clean and sober] housing, she should at least be provided with the basics - linen, table and chairs, a bed - to furnish a place. Most women come out with absolutely nothing."

Private home placements for newly released women were widely supported, although it was felt that considerable care must be taken in screening "foster" homes so that women had an appropriate level of support and structure when they come back to the community. The need to provide housing in remote, northern communities for Aboriginal prisoners, who often leave behind children when they are incarcerated at BCCW, was mentioned repeatedly. Housing options that allow for changes in custody and supervision are currently being explored by Corrections Branch and the CSC as part of the development of a community resettlement strategy for federally sentenced women.

Both financial resources and the involvement of ex-prisoners were cited by an Elizabeth Fry Society worker as the keys to successful private home placements:

"It's realistic if you have training - and training costs money. People who have been inside

are the best teachers about working with women coming out of prison. Your idea of success has to be altered until you're looking at baby steps. Learning to take a bus can be an accomplishment... You have to help these women build self-esteem through little accomplishments."

Probation officer Marna Leland, the only BC probation officer who supervises federally sentenced women in the community, said that finding post-release accommodation is "totally the woman's responsibility." Her caseload averages 90 youths and adults, with women accounting for roughly one-third, and "there is a revolving door" which means that a number of provincially sentenced women are on and off her caseload. Given the size of her caseload, Leland says she can't provide intensive case management, or even keep track of where many ex-offenders live and how often they move.

However, she sees a clear pattern among women released from the Burnaby prison:

"Many women can't go home because that's where their crime occurred, yet they have no family support because they aren't from the Vancouver area... I don't expect these women to get out of jail and immediately get a job and live independently. You have to take reality into account. Most women [released from BCCW] don't have family support, so you have to be flexible about approving housing. The common scenario is that women live with men who are ex-offenders."

As the parole board liaison to Balaclava House, Leland reviews all plans that provide for residency at the halfway house, as well as full parole applications from women seeking to move into the community. She believes that an expansion of community-based housing for newly released prisoners would address the need "to separate long-term and short-term offenders, and women with serious addictions problems from women who aren't dealing with drug and alcohol issues." Leland echoes the concerns raised throughout this research study:

"Women need to be able to live in a place where they feel safe and secure. There's no options for most women getting out of jail, other than to go back to boyfriends, even when the relationship is abusive."

### **XIII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RELEASE HOUSING PILOT PROJECTS**

The voices of imprisoned women and ex-prisoners, and those who work at BCCW and Balaclava House, have clearly identified the need for safe housing and community-based programming to help newly released women to stay out of prison.

This research study has benefited, as well, from the experiences of one member of the Research Team, who has provided "transition" housing in her home for a number of homeless women coming out of BCCW. Prison staff and administrators, judges, probation and parole officers, and MSS workers are aware of her efforts to support newly released women. A sentence management coordinator interviewed for this study lauded the voluntary services provided by Kris Lyons, saying: "The need is so great. That kind of stopgap [housing] is wonderful."

But it became apparent over a few months that the housing situation for women returning to the community from the Burnaby prison is so desperate that many doors must be opened to support high need women on their release.

On one of the coldest days of winter, Kris attended court at the request of a woman who had been remanded to BCCW where she was held in segregation for some eight months. The woman was sentenced to probation-, so she was free to go. But she had no home, no money, no possessions - not even a winter coat. Kris accompanied the woman to the probation office then took her home, with the intention of finding her housing in the community. Over the next six weeks the woman was turned down by numerous community resources. Some wouldn't take her because they said her behavioral problems meant she needed more support than they could offer. Mental health boarding homes wouldn't take her because she didn't meet their criteria. While on remand, she had spent one month at Forensics Psychiatric Services, returning to BCCW with no diagnosis of mental illness. Residential treatment centres weren't an option because she had no substance abuse history. MSS provided a list of emergency beds, but none were available. The woman was afraid to go to the only available emergency shelters in the Downtown Eastside. She was eventually accepted by the Salvation Army Homestead, even though its residential treatment program is meant for addicted women.

Meanwhile, a second newly released ex-prisoner asked Kris for temporary accommodation while her request to move into Balaclava House was being reviewed. She had spent one night at Kris' home, at the request of the ex-prisoner support group LINC, before choosing to go into a detox centre for a week. Soon afterwards, the courts released a third woman to Kris' supervision on a bail order, responding to a letter of support from the peer support group SIS.

Within days, the parole board also approved release to Kris' home for another prisoner - a decision that had been expected for months, as the result of consultation between Kris and BCCW case management on the woman's release plans. By now, word had spread that Kris offered a refuge. Newly released women began to turn up at her door. Many others surrounded her in the rotunda at BCCW on her twice weekly visits to the prison's secure unit, asking Kris for housing and counselling as part of their release plans, There was nothing she could do but say no — to everyone.

The "revolving door" between BCCW and the Downtown Eastside costs many hundreds of thousands of dollars annually. Redirecting financial resources to community supportive housing services would substantially reduce the costs that are now devoted to arresting, sentencing, and incarcerating these women. And the benefits to their lives would be incalculable.

Isolation, loneliness and depression are known to draw ex-prisoners back into the cycle of drugs, prostitution and criminal behavior. As we have seen, community volunteers, especially trained ex-prisoners and recovered addicts, will play a critical role in supporting newly released woman to resist the temptation to return to the familiarity of the Downtown Eastside ghetto. Finally, it is imperative that supportive housing be located far from Main and Hastings.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PILOT PROJECTS**

### ***Supportive Release Housing***

7. Pilot projects need sufficient funding for a minimum two-year implementation and evaluation. The Peer Support Coordinator and Volunteer Coordinator will recruit volunteers for regular drop-in visits at the following pilot housing projects, and will ensure that residents are connected with community support services, as

needed. Supportive release housing should include:

- ♦ at least one Transitional Group Residence for 4-5 women who have addictions histories, and who have completed peer support training while imprisoned at BCCW. The house environment must be clean and sober (i.e. No use of alcohol / drugs on the premises).
- ♦ two-bedroom satellite<sup>2</sup> apartments for women whose community re-entry plans may include going back to school, job skills training/placement, or participating in community-based programs which encourage and support family reunification (i.e. Parenting skills, life skills, health/nutrition, self-esteem workshops, recovery self-help groups).
- ♦ one- and two-bedroom satellite apartments for women with diagnosed mental illness, whose community re-entry plans are supported by the social worker at BCCW.
- ♦ one- and two-bedroom satellite apartments for HIV-positive women, whose community re-entry plans are supported by BCCW health care staff and the Ministry of Health Street Outreach nurse.
- ♦ housing specifically designed for Aboriginal ex-prisoners as recommended by Aboriginal women's groups.

<sup>2</sup>The Women's Release Housing Society will hold the lease on "satellite" apartments .

### ***Home Support Worker***

8. One or more Home Support Worker(s) be funded to assist high-need/high-risk supportive housing residents with money management, nutrition and meal planning, referrals to community health services, including resources for HIV-positive women and addictions recovery groups.

### ***Private Home Placements for newly released women***

9. A program designed specifically for women coming out of BCCW be developed by Corrections Branch to provide selected newly released women with access to a safe, semi-independent home environment. The need for supportive individual placements is especially urgent for Aboriginal women seeking to reintegrate into small, northern communities.

The "Foster Homes" program operated by the *Quebec Ministere de la Secunte publique* since 1982 may be an appropriate model for a network of private home placements and warrants further research.

### **Claire Culhane Centre**

10. Site development for the Claire Culhane Centre\* residential "farm" for newly released women ex-prisoners be undertaken by the Interministerial Committee, in consultation with the Women's Release Housing Society, the Peer Support Coordinator and Volunteer Coordinator. \* (with approval of the family)

The Centre is envisioned as the first stage of gradual re-entry into the community: a structured, rural, home-like, clean and sober environment that is supportive of women while they acquire skills for daily living.

- ♦ The length of stay will be at least three months, and no longer than one year, unless warranted by exceptional circumstances.
- ♦ Residents will take part in group day programs on site, including addictions recovery workshops by trained counsellors, "street-wise" health education and HIV-prevention by community-based street outreach workers, and basic life skills.
- ♦ Programming will be communicative and designed to encourage and support women in taking personal responsibility for their choices and actions. The community-based component of Peer Support Team training will be available at regular intervals.
- ♦ Staff will be required mainly to coordinate weekday programs provided by community-based social services, and to work with residents on problem-solving. The ideal situation would be to hire 1-2 women ex-prisoners who have successfully resettled in the community, and provide them with on-site accommodation separate from the main group residence.
- ♦ Community volunteers and residents who have completed Peer Support Team training will maintain a 24-hour crisis line at the Centre to assist women ex-prisoners in the Vancouver

area.

- ♦ Room and board for residents on income assistance be paid directly to the Women's Release Housing Society by the Ministry of Human Resources.
- ♦ Wage subsidy programs be accessed to enable a small number of ex-prisoners, including long-term residents, to acquire job skills and positive work habits while earning income assistance "top-up" for doing work that will be required to maintain the Centre (i.e. Kitchen supervisor, Repair/maintenance, Community shuttle transportation).
- ♦ Corporate and private donations will be solicited to support the development of income-earning schemes linked to community job skills training (for example, seamstress services, furniture refinishing, small appliance repair), and to acquire a multi-purpose van to collect donated household items, to help women move into permanent housing, and to take women to appointments or on group field trips.

#### **XIV. CONCLUSION**

What happens to women when they come back to the community from BCCW cannot be viewed as separate from their experience of imprisonment and from the terrible experiences which have shaped their lives, going back in many cases to childhood abuse and abandonment. Many of the women who are in the greatest need of support on their release are isolated from their families. Many are vulnerable to the self-destructive cycle of drugs, violence, poverty and hopelessness that characterize the Downtown Eastside ghetto.

Our research has shown that many ex-prisoners caught in the "revolving door" need- and want - to learn to look after themselves. They need the opportunity to acquire basic life skills and to move toward independent living. Above all, they need to build into their lives a sense of their place in society, a sense of belonging rather than exclusion.

What we have learned from talking with prisoners and ex-prisoners is that fear and loneliness are the greatest obstacles that many women face on the outside.

Supportive housing is not a panacea to the underlying issues that bring the most disadvantaged women into conflict with the law. But it is the place to start the healing process. To deal with women's criminal behaviour effectively, society cannot spend the bulk of our resources on incarceration, which is the most expensive response.

As a result of their experiences, many addicted prisoners seek to take themselves out of a painful and hopeless world. A small number of women replicate the violence they have experienced. "We must look beyond the substance abuse itself to the real story," says the head of the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York State. Elaine Lord,<sup>27</sup> superintendent of the maximum-security prison for women since 1984, explains:

"Working with women involves 'bearing witness' so that they can examine their life histories in a safe setting in which they can sort out the pathways that took them to prison, come to be aware of themselves in terms of those life histories, and finally accept and examine their own responsibility for their own actions... There is a need, therefore, to reconnect to other people and discover once again capacities for trust,

autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy. These seem to be basic essentials to guard against returning to prison. They do not grow out of traditional therapy visits but rather grow out of real life situations and real interactions. Prisons are not fertile ground for such work."

Effective interventions have to be tailored to individual circumstances and will differ depending on the resources in the communities where ex-prisoners may resettle. No matter what the differences in the kinds of release housing programs, this research study and the investigations and consultations which precede our report, leave no doubt that we need to broaden the community of people who know and care about women coming out of prison.

Our recommendations are designed to actively develop new community linkages with BCCW, and to strengthen the participation of governments and community resources in the resettlement of newly released prisoners. Above all, we advocate an innovative and cost-effective strategy that seeks to narrow the gap between inside and outside through the direct involvement of peer support workers. Working together, we can make a real difference  
Release Housing Program for Women

## **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PEER SUPPORT RESOURCES**

#### ***Peer Support Coordinator***

1. The full time position of Peer Support Coordinator be supported by appropriate funding agencies; the position to employ a woman ex-prisoner who has resettled successfully in the community.

Responsibilities of the Peer Support Coordinator include:

- ♦ maintaining regular communication and access to the prison population at BCCW for the purpose of helping sentence management staff to identify the kinds of prison-based and community-based resources that are needed to support a woman in her planning for release and on her re-entry into the community, including a program of temporary absences to promote positive re-entry.
- ♦ advocating for individual prisoners, at their request, to encourage pro-active release planning that focuses on a woman's needs and her potential for change, rather than on her criminal record.
- ♦ follow-up on "start up" checklist to ensure that each woman applies for personal identification (i.e. photo I.D./Care card/S.I.N.), as needed, and receives health and educational assessment without undue delay.
- ♦ working in partnership with Corrections Branch, sharing information and consulting on release housing pilot projects and related services for women coming out of prison.

#### **Volunteer Coordinator**

2. The fulltime position of Volunteer Coordinator be supported by appropriate funding agencies; the position to employ a woman ex-prisoner who has resettled successfully in

the community.

Responsibilities of the Volunteer Coordinator include:

- ♦ developing and strengthening connections between BCCW prisoners and the community by networking with Vancouver-area social service agencies and organizations, businesses, schools, service clubs, and churches to recruit volunteers for pre-release and post-release support; programs.
- ♦ recruiting formerly imprisoned women and other interested individuals in the community to serve as prisoner-escorts, upon completion of the Citizens Escort Training program, to accompany prisoners to a range of community-based services and activities.
- ♦ supervising a Peer Support Team of ex-prisoners, which will be comprised initially of women who have completed training modules, to be delivered jointly by the Peer Support Coordinator and Volunteer Coordinator at BCCW and in the community. Team members will provide pro-active, individualized assistance with practical resettlement matters, such as helping a woman to secure housing prior to her release, introducing her to community resources and services, and encouraging her to participate in discussion groups and other activities initiated by resettled ex-prisoners.
- ♦ working in partnership with Corrections Branch, sharing information and consulting on release housing pilot projects and related services for women coming out of prison.

### ***Peer Support Team Training***

3. Peer Support Team training will support the development and implementation of peer support programs inside BCCW; strengthen connections between programs in the prison and those in the community; and create a volunteer network of ex-prisoners to assist newly released women with community resettlement. Continuity will be provided between Peer Support Team training for prisoners and a community based component for ex-prisoners. Delivering and participating in peer support training should be recognized by Corrections Branch as work placements for prisoners at BCCW.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A COORDINATED RESPONSE**

### ***Interministerial Committee***

4. An Interministerial Committee be established to develop a coordinated response to the continuum of housing services and supportive programs that are needed to assist formerly imprisoned women to stay out of jail or prison; initially, membership should include the ministries of Human Resources, Attorney General, Health, Aboriginal Affairs, Women's Equality, Municipal Affairs and Housing, Multiculturalism, and Education, Skills and Training, as well as the office of the Deputy Commissioner for Women (Correctional Service of Canada). The Peer Support Coordinator and a representative of the Women's Release Housing Society must also be active participants.

### ***Ministry of Attorney General - Ministry of Human Resources Protocol***

5. A memorandum of understanding be established between the Ministry of Attorney General and the Ministry of Human Resources to provide for ongoing liaison on issues related to financial assistance for community reintegration. The memorandum should include a protocol which enables a woman to access income assistance prior to her release from prison and while living at a government-funded community residence, as needed; specifically, provision must be made for Intent to Rent forms to be completed before a woman returns to the community.

### **Women's Release Housing Society**

6. A new non-profit, registered society, to be known as the Women's Release Housing Society, be established by community members to advocate for supportive housing for formerly imprisoned women, and to develop and administer release housing pilot projects in the Lower Mainland, in cooperation with funding agencies and governments. Aboriginal women's groups will be encouraged to join the Society and/or to recommend an additional consultation process that is specific to the needs of Aboriginal ex-prisoners. The board of the Women's Release Housing Society shall include ex-prisoners).

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## **APPENDICES**

APPENDIX A: Research Model Overview

APPENDIX B: CAEFS Survey

APPENDIX C: BCCW Prisoner Interview Questionnaire

APPENDIX D: Consent Form

APPENDIX E: List of Abbreviations

APPENDIX F: Advisory Committee

**APPENDIX A: Research Model Overview**  
**February, 1996**

**RELEASE HOUSING PROGRAM FOR WOMEN**  
**Community Housing Initiatives (BC Ministry of Housing)**

**RESEARCH MODEL**

This research study uses a participatory action research model to identify the housing needs of women re-entering BC communities from prison, and to develop recommendations that will assist community groups and governments to provide supporting housing to the target population.

Any research process has a design or plan — rules or guidelines that make it a systematic process—and participatory action research is no exception. The design outlines what kinds of information to collect and why; how to gather information (from whom and where); how to participate in the process, respecting rules about confidentiality; and how the research will contribute to fundamental knowledge.

Participant-focused research uses primarily *qualitative* measurements with in-depth interviews being the main data collection technique. Qualitative research is often described as "a conversation with a purpose" and the interviewers' approach arises from the belief that the information provided by interview participants is valuable.

Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, co-authors of *Designing Qualitative Research* (SAGE Publications Inc: Newbury Park, California, 1989), assert that qualitative research:

- ♦ entails immersion in the everyday life of the setting chosen for study;
- ♦ values participants' perspectives on their worlds and seeks to discover those perspectives;
- ♦ views inquiry as an interactive process between the researcher and the participants; and
- ♦ is primarily descriptive and relies on people's words as the primary data.

Marshall and Rossman explain: "Generally, by answering the question, How is this research important? The researcher can demonstrate the creative aspects of the work. The question forces a review of what is already working well and what is already known as well as what is not working well and what is not known..."

A preliminary literature review was conducted as part of the proposal development, initiating research enquiry into transitional housing initiatives in Canada, the United States and Great Britain. Interviews with prisoners at the Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women (BCCW), and with ex-prisoners in selected communities, have a dual focus (1) to explore their experiences, with respect to seeking housing on their release from prison, and (2) to identify their beliefs about what is needed to provide supportive and accessible community housing.

Interviews with BCCW case management officers will focus on issues related to finding housing in the community for women before their release, including referrals, access to information and resources, and barriers to community housing placements.

Traditionally, women in prison have been nearly invisible because of their small numbers. Women account for less than six per cent of all adult correctional admissions in British Columbia. On release, they scatter to communities across the province.

While the past decade has seen unprecedented expansion in the literature on women in conflict with the law, the criminal justice system's response to women is still based on very little gender-specific data at every stage, from arrest to imprisonment to release and community reintegration. And with the notable exception of two companion documents to the 1990 Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, the voices of imprisoned women have not been heard.

The objectives of this research study are:

- ❖ To fully integrate present and former prisoners in the development of a Release Housing Program for Women, designed to assist communities and governments to provide supportive housing for homeless or at-risk women released from prison;
- ❖ To publish a plain-language report that documents the research process and recommends implementation strategies, including demonstration housing projects;
- ❖ To create a framework for an interministerial response to the housing issues faced by women re-entering BC communities from prison.

Participatory action research (also called "participant focused" research) refers to a process that recognizes the knowledge and expertise of those who direct and do the work *and* those who are the users (the "target") of the work. The effort to link research with action emerged in the 1970s, challenging the traditional social science research ideology of "objective, value-free, apolitical knowledge creation" and its requirements that researchers must be distant and detached observers; data must be "quantifiable" and analysis must be empirical, relying on scientific methodologies.

Participatory action research is an alternative that is more than a different set of research techniques. It acknowledges many forms of knowing and knowledge inquiry, and emphasizes the importance of the link between learning and doing. Direct community action is an intended outcome of the research process.

Research is demystified by involving people in identifying and investigating problems in their lives, deciding what questions to ask, how to gather information, and how to organize and use information. Participatory research assumes that both the researchers and the researched have knowledge and experience to contribute.

In Doing *Participatory Research: a feminist approach* (The Center for International Education, School of Education, University of Massachusetts: 1987), Patricia Maguire writes: "Rather than merely recording observable facts, participatory research has the explicit intention of collectively investigating reality in order to transform it....Participatory research aims to develop critical consciousness, to improve the lives of those involved in the research process, and to transform fundamental societal structures and relationships."

She stresses that there is no guarantee that the practice of participatory research will empower participants and bring about effective social change. The outcomes of participatory research are influenced by many factors, including human, financial, and organizational resources. Maguire

points out that one of the most underrated limitations is simply time: "As outlined in the literature, conducting the 'ideal' participatory research project may be overwhelming, if not nearly paralyzing."

Ideally, participatory research is initiated at the request of a community group which is involved in the entire research process. Realistically, participatory research projects are more likely to be initiated - as in this case - by an outside researcher. Ideally, the participatory researcher has the commitment, teaching skill, financial and institutional resources, and the ability to set up a project structure and processes that transfer organizational, technical, and analytical skills to the participants — in this case, Assistant Researchers and the prisoner-participants at BCCW and focus groups.

Ideally, participatory research is structured to shift the power of decision making and decision taking to the participants, who have the will and resources to act collectively. Realistically, the objectives of this research study are meant to strengthen the skills of participants, researchers and project sponsors by jointly creating knowledge as a force for social and personal transformation. Specifically, our work is intended:

- ♦ to empower current and former prisoner-participants by hearing and heeding their experiential knowledge of what kinds of community-based housing would support them in rebuilding their lives outside prison;
- ♦ to develop the advocacy skills and abilities of the Elizabeth Fry Societies Provincial Council to educate policy makers and service providers on the housing needs of women released from prison; and
- ♦ to create a framework for action that promotes new partnerships between government and community groups which are working toward the goal of expanding community capacity to provide affordable and supportive housing for this long-neglected population of women.

Researchers and project sponsors ascribe to the principles of feminist research, namely, a commitment to activist research for the purpose of contributing to positive changes in women's daily lives. Our shared purpose is to influence public policy and perspectives with respect to programs and services for women in conflict with the law.

## **RESEARCH STRUCTURE & LINES OF COMMUNICATION**

This project was made possible through funding from the Community Housing Initiatives component of HOMES BC, an initiative of the Ministry of Housing, Recreation and Consumer Services.

The research study is sponsored by the five autonomous member agencies of the Elizabeth Fry Societies Provincial Council. The Kamloops & District Elizabeth Fry Society is the designated administrative agency, hence, Executive Director Margaret Cissell is the financial administrator and liaison between the Council and the Project Co-ordinator.

**Project Co-ordinator / Principal Researcher** Mary Lasovich is responsible for: researching existing housing services for women ex-prisoners; writing draft and final reports and recommendations, in consultation with Assistant Researchers and Colleagues, the Provincial

Council, and members of an Advisory Committee; facilitating focus groups of former prisoners; ensuring that the confidentiality / anonymity of individuals who participate in interviews, focus groups and other data gathering is protected through the research methodology; training, instructing and supervising Assistant Researchers and Colleagues.

Mary Lasovich reports directly to Kamloops & District Elizabeth Fry Society Executive Director Margaret Cissell, and indirectly to the Provincial Council.

The full Research Team includes the Project Co-ordinator, **Assistant Researchers** Juliet Belmas and Lou DeMaeyer, and **Research Colleagues** Gayle Horii and Kris Lyons.

The participatory action model adopted for this study resulted in a conscious decision by the Principal Researcher and the Elizabeth Fry Societies Provincial Council to hire Assistant Researchers with experiential knowledge of imprisonment. Prisoner interviews and street outreach in Vancouver will be conducted by the Assistant Researchers.

The project also employs two Research Colleagues: Gayle Horii, who serves as consultant on the research design and data analysis; and Kris Lyons, who will co-ordinate scheduling interviews with prisoner-participants, and respond to BCCW prisoners' questions about the goals of the research study and the protocol on informed consent and confidentiality.

Ideally, feminist participatory action research would have no hierarchy within the research structure and publication would be a collective enterprise. Realistically, however, the research structure retains elements of traditional control over the creation of knowledge. Assistant Researchers and Colleagues report directly to Mary Lasovich.

### *Communication*

The research process includes regular and respectful "critical discussion" - both within the Research Team and between researchers and an Advisory Committee.

The Advisory Committee will include the full Research Team and representatives of the project sponsors, the Elizabeth Fry Societies Provincial Council. The following agencies and organizations will be invited to participate in the research process as Advisory Committee members: Strength in Sisterhood (SIS) Society; BCCW staff, administration and Female Offender Advisory Committee; Native Court workers; Indian Homemakers; BC Native Women's Society; John Howard Society; Downtown Eastside Women's Centre; and the Provincial Association of Residential and Community Alternatives (PARCA).

### **Professional Standards of Conduct**

The research design is guided by accepted principles of ethical research. A non-identifying methodology is used for data gathering, analysis and reporting of prisoner-participant interviews to ensure that the confidentiality / anonymity of interview and focus group participants will be protected.

An informed consent form has been developed to address the issues of confidentiality, right to withdraw and right to participate without adhering to the interview questionnaire format. The form is to be reviewed by the interviewer at the outset of each scheduled interview, in order to

ensure that its terms are understood before the participant gives consent to proceed.

## **DESIGNING THE RESEARCH STUDY**

Because the strength of qualitative research arises from its exploratory approach, building in flexibility is critical to the research design. Data collected through the interview questionnaire developed for prisoner-participants will be reviewed and assessed, following three completed interviews by each Assistant Researcher. Finding will be used to modify the questionnaire, as necessary, and to develop a format for interviews with BCCW case management officers and contract workers.

### *Interviews*

The research study relies on one-to-one interviews, each approximately one hour in length, as the primary method of data collection. The purpose of these interviews is to have women prisoners and former prisoners tell their own stories in their own words about the problems they have faced in finding adequate housing on their return to the community, and what they feel are their most compelling housing needs on their release from prison.

Interviews with BCCW staff and contract workers will allow us to identify housing-related problems as perceived by those who assist prisoners in preparing for their return to the community. We will be particularly interested in participants' accounts of their efforts to coordinate release plans and housing services, and their recommendations for improved interventions to help women to secure adequate housing on re-entering the community.

It is anticipated that time and interest will allow for between 75 and 100 interviews to be conducted with current and former prisoners. Approximately two-thirds of the interviews will take place at BCCW. In addition, street outreach will introduce researchers to former prisoners now living in and around the communities of Vancouver, Victoria, Prince George and Kamloops.

### *Community Housing Services*

The focus of research into existing community resources, mainly in Canada, the United States and Great Britain, is two-fold:

- ♦ to identify and describe community-based housing services that have been developed specifically to assist women being released from prison or jail; and
- ♦ to build knowledge that will be shared with former prisoner-participants and the research study Advisory Committee as part of the process of developing recommendations for demonstration housing projects and implementation strategies for BC communities,

Community housing resources for women released from prison are few and far between. The preliminary literature review conducted as part of the proposal development turned up only a handful of programs, some initiated by ex-prisoners and others by corrections services. There is neither a Canadian nor international directory of community housing programs and services for ex-prisoners and parolees.

### *Focus Groups*

A summary of findings, to date, from both qualitative research interviews and quantitative research into community-based housing will be brought to focus groups of ex-prisoners in Vancouver and Prince George for assessment and critical discussion. Focus groups will be central to the process of developing recommendations for implementation strategies to assist BC communities and governments to provide supportive housing that reflects the reality of women's lives.

#### *Advisory Committee*

The Advisory Committee convened for the purpose of this research study will meet in late April to review research findings and offer direction for additional research; and, once again, in mid-summer to provide feedback on a draft report and to participate in developing recommendations for action.

#### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The observations of Marshall and Rossman on data analysis strategies sum up the difficulties and rewards of uncovering patterns, themes, recurring ideas and insights:

"Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data; it builds grounded theory."

In this case, data analysis builds on a solid structure. The research team is knowledgeable about the housing issues faced by women who are trying to rebuild their lives outside of prison. The research design reflects sensitivity to the issues, and the specific provision for review and recommendations by an Advisory Committee increases our capacity to be reflective about the choices and decisions faced by prisoners and prison workers.

*APPENDIX B: CAEFS Survey*

CAEFS MEMBERSHIP SURVEY  
for the Release Housing Program for Women

MARCH 1996

*Please send your responses to Project Coordinator Mary Lasovich by March 31:*

Address: 1975 Haultain Street, Victoria, BC V8R 2L6

Phone/Fax: (604) 598-8040

E-mail: mlasovich@tnet.net

(1) Do you provide any housing for women on conditional release, full parole or mandatory supervision? IF YES, please describe briefly (or enclose any printed material, brochures, etc which outline your services).

(2) Are you aware of any local, regional or provincial low-cost housing that is accessed by women coming out of prison? IF YES, please describe (or provide contact name and phone / fax of where women are referred).

(3) Do you get requests for housing assistance from women newly released from prison or jail? IF YES, please indicate how often, and describe the ways in which you respond.

(4) Are you involved in release planning, either by providing information and/or referrals to women at their request before their release, or at the request of parole officers or prison staff? IF YES, how do you deal with housing issues?

(5) Do you have access to current information on the availability of low-cost housing? IF YES, please list the best source(s) of information. Additional comments?

APPENDIX C: BCCW Prisoner Interview Questionnaire

INTERVIEW # \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

1. Your age?

? 18- 24   ? 25-34   ? 35-44   ? 45-54   ? 55-64   ? 65+

2B. Are you at BCCW on remand? ?Yes   ?No   IF YES, SKIP TO QUESTION #6B

3. When did you start serving your current sentence? (year/month) \_\_\_\_\_

4. How long is your sentence? \_\_\_\_\_

5B. What is your expected release date? (year/month) \_\_\_\_\_

6B. Have you been incarcerated at any time in the past?

?Yes   ?No   IF NO, SKIP TO QUESTION #11

7. How many times have you been jailed, and over how many years?

\_\_\_\_\_

*Sharing your own story, in your own words, will help us to describe what really happens when women come back to the community from prison — and what kinds of housing services are needed to support you in rebuilding your life on the outside.....*

8A. In the past, did you get any information about finding housing in the community BEFORE your release?

?Yes   ?No   IF YES, COMPLETE #8B/C/D:

Who gave you the information? (Tick box AND circle /EXPLAIN)

8B. ? Corrections staff: Guard   ;;  
Case Management Officer  
Other

Please explain:

\_\_\_\_\_

8C. ? Contracted prison worker: Teacher  
Elizabeth Fry Worker  
Other

Please explain:

\_\_\_\_\_

8D. ? Outside agency: Church group  
Support group (i.e. LINC / SIS )  
Other

Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\* *IF THE WOMAN SAW SHE WAS HELPED (YES TO QUESTION #8A) BE SURE THAT QUESTIONS #9 AND #10 REFER TO THE SAME RELEASE.*

\*\*\* *IF NO HELP WAS PROVIDED (NO TO QUESTION #8A) INTRODUCE THIS QUESTION..... "Please think back to the last time you got out of prison"*

9A. Did your release plan feel like *your* choice of housing?  
?Yes ?No

9B. Please describe where you were supposed to go from prison, and why:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10A. Were you able to carry through with that housing plan?  
?Yes ?No *IF NO, GO TO QUESTIONS #10B:*

10B. What happened?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

NOTE: The next two questions may have already been answered — but be aware of the difference between finding out what housing services women may have accessed and their feelings about the help / response they received....

11. At any time, **OUTSIDE OF PRISON**, have you asked for accommodation or a referral from any community housing service?  
?Yes ?No *IF NO, SKIP TO QUESTION #15*

12. Did you get the help you asked for?

12A. ?Yes Please explain. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

12B. ?No Housing Refusals / Reasons

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

13A. Did the person(s) you dealt with know you had been in prison?  
?Yes *IF YES,, GO TO QUESTION #14*  
?No *IF NO, GO TO QUESTION #13B*

13B. Why did you feel you needed to hide your prison record?

\_\_\_\_\_

14. Did it feel like anything changed in how you were treated once your prison history came out?  
?Yes ?No PLEASE EXPLAIN:

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*Now let's talk about what you need and want, with regards to housing, when you leave BCCW.*

15. Have you talked with anyone about your housing / accommodation plans?  
?Yes ?No IF NO, SKIP TO QUESTION #17

16A. What suggestions have been made to you about where you may live?

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16B. What have you been told about the kinds of housing support that may be available to you?

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17A. When you are released, do you know what specific community you would like to go to?  
?Yes ?No IF YES, GO TO QUESTION#17B:

17B. IF YES, record name of community (and geographical location, if needed) and why....

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18. Do you consider yourself to be a dependent or independent person?

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*The final series of questions asks you to try to imagine what kind of housing conditions would be most supportive in easing your re-entry to the community. Please don't limit your imagination to what exists now — but what you 'd like to have made available to you.....*

19. On release, which of the following kinds of housing would be your preference?  
Record 1st and 2nd choices (i.e. Tick two boxes A - E AND write in "1st" and "2nd" on the line opposite A-E).  
Check one box that further describes EACH of the two preferences. (Only A has no descriptive boxes).

?A. \_\_\_\_ I would choose to enter a residential addictions treatment program which offers specialized counselling and help for a few weeks or months before I would feel ready to make a decision on other kinds of housing that may be available.

?B. \_\_\_\_\_ I would prefer a staffed group residence for (please choose one):

- ? women ex-prisoners only
- ? women only
- ? women and children
- ? co-ed (ex-prisoners only)
- ? co-ed (adults only)
- ? other \_\_\_\_\_

?C. \_\_\_\_\_ I would prefer an unstaffed group residence for (please choose one):

- ? women ex-prisoners only
- ? women only
- ? women and children
- ? co-ed (ex-prisoners only)
- ? co-ed (adults only)
- ? other \_\_\_\_\_

?D. \_\_\_\_\_ I would prefer an unstaffed / shared residence (please choose one):

- ? family placement (room & board in a private home)
- ? share housing with a relative
- ? share housing with a friend
- ? shared satellite apartment (two tenants / off-site supervision by a
- ? community agency that holds the lease and screens tenants)
- ? other \_\_\_\_\_

?E. \_\_\_\_\_ I would prefer an unstaffed private residence (please choose one):

- ? hotel / motel
- ? town apartment
- ? sole occupant of satellite apartment
- ? co-op housing
- ? other \_\_\_\_\_

19F. Please explain the reasons for your housing preferences (*use back of page, if necessary*):

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20. If you were to go to a staffed home, which of the following would be very important, to promote a safe, supportive environment? (Choose as many as apply to you)

- ? on-site counseling
- ? residents must be clean and sober (no drug / alcohol use)
- ? facilitated group process (life skills / communication skills)
- ? stable resident population (no short-term crisis beds)
- ? house rules on curfew, visitors, chores, etc
- ? "buddy" program (community volunteers to introduce you to public transportation,
- ? banking, shopping, skills training, recovery support groups, etc)
- ? access to recreation / sports / crafts
- ? peer support from ex-prisoners
- ? "pets allowed" policy
- ? other \_\_\_\_\_

21 A. What kind of location would be best for you when you get out of prison?

- ?urban (medium to large city)
- ?small town
- ?rural
- ?Aboriginal reserve

21B. Please explain why

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22A. How long would you want to be able to stay in supportive housing? \_\_\_\_\_

**Record answer as # of months**

22B. What do you think "gradual re-entry" could look like for you? (for example, being released to a staffed group home , moving to an unstaffed shared residence, then to your own apartment)

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23. How much personal space do you feel you need?

- ?your own bedroom
- ?your own bathroom
- ?your own cooking area
- ?other \_\_\_\_\_

24. How important is a clean & sober housing environment?

- ?Very important
- ?Somewhat important
- ?Not important

25. Would you expect to be able to contribute to the cost of your housing in the community?

- ?Yes
- ?No

26A. Do you have any "special needs" with regards to housing?

- ?Yes
  - ?No
- IF YES, GO TO QUESTION #26B:

26B. Please explain:

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27. Would you prefer to be housed with women with the same "special needs" as yours?

- ?Yes
- ?No
- ?Don't care

28. Why were you willing to do this interview?

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*Thank-you very much for taking part in this study. Those are all the questions I have. Are there any interview questions that you would like to go back over? Is there anything else that you would like to ask me — about today? Or about the research project, in general?*

• APPENDIX D: Consent Form

**CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN "Research Interview / Housing Program for Women" (BC Housing Community Initiatives Project)**

This research study looks at the housing needs of women released from prison for the purpose of identifying what services are needed, and recommending implementation strategies to assist communities and governments to provide supportive housing. Listening to the voices of prisoners and ex-prisoners is an essential step in the planning and delivery of community-based resources that are effective in helping women to rebuild their lives on the outside.

**I understand that this project is collecting information on the housing needs of women re-entering the community from prison. I understand that I will be asked about my needs and past experiences, and what housing services I would use if they were available.**

Participants have the right to choose not to answer any question and to stop the interview at any time.

**I understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without explanation.**

The privacy of individuals who participate in research interviews is guaranteed. Pseudonyms will be used in reports on this study. Researchers will maintain strict confidentiality about the identity of individual participants, and interview data will be kept by Principal Researcher Mary Lasovich in a secure file.

**I understand that my name will not appear in any published reports, and that my anonymity will be protected by using pseudonyms to present the data collected.**

While the interview format helps us to focus our research, participants are not required to complete the questionnaire in order to provide useful information. I understand that I can participate in this study by choosing to discuss my housing needs and/or experiences in ways that are acceptable to me.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

\*Name (print) \_\_\_\_\_

\*Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**\* For purpose of scheduling the interview and depositing \$10. honorarium to your account.**

Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interview # \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX E: List of Abbreviations

BCCW	(pg1)	Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women
LINC	(pg2)	Long-term Inmates in the Community
MSS	(pg2)	Ministry of Social Services <i>Dismantled and replaced by two cabinet portfolios on September 23, 1996. Income assistance programs become the responsibility OF the Ministry of Human Resources.</i>
CAEGS	(pg5)	Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies
IHA	(pg5)	Indian Homemakers' Association of B.C.
CSC	(pg7)	Correctional Service of Canada
SFU	(pg8)	Simon Fraser University
OLU	(pg15)	Open Living Unit (minimum-security wing of BCCW)
ETA	(pg33)	Escorted Temporary Absence
NACRO	(pg38)	National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
CCRC	(pg40)	Community Connection Resource Centre (San Diego)
SIS	(pg43)	Strength in Sisterhood

## APPENDIX F: Advisory Committee

Researchers facilitated a day-long meeting in Vancouver on September 10, 1996, to review a draft report and recommendations, which had been provided to selected community-based services and agencies and to provincial and federal corrections authorities. The Advisory Committee meeting was attended by representatives of four of the five sponsoring Elizabeth Fry Societies, Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, Corrections Branch, Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women, Ministry of Attorney General, Correctional Service of Canada, Christian Volunteers in Corrections, Indian Homemakers' Association of BC, Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, Strength in Sisterhood Society, Long-term Inmates in the Community, Positive Women's Network, and the Provincial Association for Residential and Community Alternatives.

The consultation format included:

1. discussion of the overall report and research design
2. discussion of individual recommendations
3. discussion of steps required for implementing the recommendations.

Advisory Committee participants were nearly unanimous in their endorsement of the recommendations contained in this report. The Indian Homemakers' of B.C. representative withheld support because of concern that the research "lacks Aboriginal context" and consultation. The final report seeks to reflect the issues and concerns raised by Advisory Committee participants. Initial discussion revealed sensitivities to the different vocabularies that are used to refer to the criminal justice response to women. This report consciously adopts the words "prisoner" and "ex-prisoner" to focus on women's experience of imprisonment and community re-entry.

The need for expanded consultation and partnerships with Aboriginal women's groups evoked considerable discussion. We acknowledge, and regret, that consultation with Aboriginal women in the community was less than had been anticipated, and fully support the direct involvement of Aboriginal women in the planning and delivery of release housing.

Advisory Committee participants identified the need for research to articulate the barriers erected by systemic and individualized racism, and to ensure that appropriate programs and services are developed for Aboriginal women making the transition from prison to BC communities. Recommendations #4 and #6 address involvement and consultation with representatives of Aboriginal communities and organizations.

Other suggestions highlight the need for research into release housing strategies for smaller urban communities outside the Vancouver area, and for remote areas; better communication among community groups, service providers and governments with respect to available re-entry resources and new funding partnerships; and identification of the particular supportive housing needs of girls re-entering the community from juvenile facilities, and of women released from Forensics Psychiatric Services.

Throughout the review of individual recommendations, participants underlined the importance of adopting a collaborative approach to support the community reintegration of women ex-prisoners. As the first steps in an implementation strategy, it was agreed to proceed with invitations to participate in the establishment of an Interministerial Committee and the Women's Release Housing Society. These two groups - one within the provincial government, the other based in the Vancouver community — create the framework for implementation of Recommendations for Peer Support Resources and

Recommendations for Release Housing Pilot Projects.

It was further agreed that a hiring committee be established to develop detailed job descriptions and selection criteria, and to explore funding sources for the recommended positions of Peer Support Coordinator and Volunteer Coordinator.

Unanswered questions remained at the end of the day, above all: Who will coordinate the implementation strategy? How will the recommendations be funded?

The Elizabeth Fry Societies Provincial Council and the researchers gratefully acknowledge the valuable contribution of Advisory Committee members, and the willingness expressed by several participants to meet again to begin the work outlined in this report.

***Advisory Committee: List of Participants***

Denise Allan	South Cariboo Elizabeth Fry Society
Brownwyn Barrett	Positive Women's Network
Karen Borden	Long-term Inmates in the Community
Susan Christie	Ministry of Attorney General
Margaret Cissell	Provincial Association of Residential and Community Alternatives
Trish Cocksedge	Female Offender Advisory Committee (BCCW)
Anne Davidson	Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver
Marion Dubick	Downtown Eastside Women's Centre
Glen Flett	Long-term Inmates in the Community
Janna Francis	Central Okanagan Elizabeth Fry Society
Mollie Gardiner	Kamloops & District Elizabeth Fry Society
Debbie Hawboldt	Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women
Gayle Horii	Strength in Sisterhood Society
Ellen MacBean	M2/W2, Christian Volunteers in Corrections
Brian Mason	Corrections Branch
Wayne Oster	Correctional Service of Canada
Kim Pate	Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies
Wanda Sandy	Indian Homemakers' Association of B.C.
Mamie Sullivan	Central Okanagan Elizabeth Fry Society
Brenda Tole	Corrections Branch
Jennifer Wade	Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver
Trudi Wallace	Kamloops & District Elizabeth Fry Society
Lou DeMaeyer	Researcher
Mary Lasovich	Researcher
Kris Lyons	Researcher

## ENDNOTES

1. The research undertaken by Lee Axon, *Model and Exemplary Programs for Female Inmates: An International Review* (September 1989) examined all types of institutional programs with the exception of mother and child programs, which is the subject of another report prepared for the Ministry of the Solicitor General by Karen Cannings (1989). Field research included on-site visits to several American correctional facilities for women and community corrections.
2. Consultation on the discussion paper in the fall of 1994 preceded the adoption by Corrections Branch of a "Statement of Philosophy [on] Correctional Services to Women" (Nov. 15, 1995) to guide policy development and assess program delivery.
3. An overview of the research model was written in February 1996, during the second month of the research study, both to guide our research and communication process and to introduce the project to interested individuals. (Appendix A)
4. Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, *Creating Choices: The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*, Correctional Service of Canada (Ottawa: 1990). Task Force recommendations for construction of five new regional correctional facilities, including a healing lodge for Aboriginal women, to replace the aged Prison for Women in Kingston, have been partially implemented amidst controversy. *Creating Choices* also recommends the development of an integrated system of community-based services for women leaving prison. The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS), which co-chaired the Task Force, withdrew from the External Advisory committee in June 1992 to protest what it deems the failure of the decision making process to adhere to the principles and criteria outlined in *Creating Choices*.
5. Mary Eaton, *Women After Prison* (Open University Press: 1993)
6. Kelly (Hannah) Moffat, "Creating Choices or Repeating History: Canadian Female Offenders and Correctional Reform," *Social Justice* (Vol. 18, No. 3: 1991)
7. Margaret Shaw, "Reforming Women's Imprisonment," *In Conflict with the Law: Women and the Canadian Justice System*, edited by Ellen Adelberg & Claudia Currie (Vancouver: Press Gang 1993)
8. Margaret Jackson et al, *Corrections Branch Programming for Female Offenders: Perspectives and Visions*, BC Ministry of Attorney General, Corrections Branch (1995)
9. Karlene Faith, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Confinement and Resistance*, Press Gang Publishers (Vancouver: 1993)
10. In 1987, Ellen Adelberg and Claudie Currie co-edited the first comprehensive Canadian research on women prisoners, *Too Few to Count: Canadian Women in Conflict with the Law*. In their Introduction to an updated 1993 edition, they explain that their commitment to investigating the treatment of women in conflict with the law mirrors their concern that "women offenders' lives did not seem to improve after coming in contact with the criminal justice system. In fact, quite often just the opposite occurred."
11. Lee Axon, *Criminal Justice and Women: An International Survey*, Solicitor General of Canada (Ottawa: 1989-11). Research for this report involved contacting over 300 government ministries and authorities in female criminality in over 30 countries.
12. Margaret Shaw et al. *The Release Study: Survey of Federally Sentenced Women in the Community*, Solicitor General of Canada (Ottawa: 1991-5)
13. K. Gould & Friends, *Ideas About Health Care From Marginalized Women All Over Vancouver* (1994)
14. Core Women Care, *The Place to Start: Women's Health Care Priorities in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside*, Women's Health Bureau (Vancouver: 1995)

15. Mia Dauvergne-Latimer, *Exemplary Community Programs/or Federally Sentenced Women: A Literature Review*, Correctional Service of Canada. Federally Sentenced Women Program (Ottawa: September 1995)
16. Women make up a relatively small percentage of adult offenders in the Canadian criminal justice system, accounting for only 17 per cent of all persons aged 18 and over charged with criminal offences, and only 11 per cent of all adults charged with violent crimes. For details of women's involvement in criminal activity, see *Women in Canada: A Statistical Report (Third Edition)*, Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 890503E, Ministry of Industry (Ottawa: August 1995)
17. Corrections Branch data for the period April 1, 1993 to March 31, 1994 (cited in *Corrections Branch Discussion Paper*)
18. For the full text of Kathleen Kendall's recommendations on release from prison (7.1 through 7.4), see pages 65-66 of *Program Evaluation of Therapeutic Services at the Prison for Women* (August 1993)
19. *Proceedings: National Workshop to Develop a Community Strategy for Federally Sentenced Women*, Federally Sentenced Women Program, Correctional Research and Development, Correctional Service of Canada (May 1996)
20. For the full "Summary of Opening Remarks by Arden Thurber" see pages 2-3 of the *Proceedings* on the national workshop, which was attended by 47 participants representing CSC National Headquarters and all five regions, the National Aboriginal Advisor }-' Committee, CAEFS, Church Council on Justice and Corrections, Native Women's Association of Canada, and the National Parole Board.
21. From "Summary of Presentation" by Larry Motiuk, as reported in the workshop *Proceedings*.
22. Summary of the CAEFS survey is based on responses from Elizabeth Fry Societies of Cape Breton, Mainland Nova Scotia, Ottawa, Kingston, Peel (Brampton), Peterborough, Simcoe County (Barrie), Hamilton, Manitoba (Winnipeg), Calgary and two of the research study sponsors: Kamloops & District Elizabeth Fry Society and Prince George & District Elizabeth Fry Society.
23. The gap in provision of "incidental" benefits to women released to a government-funded community residence was reported by Mary Lasovich, *Female Offenders in British Columbia: Every Woman Counts* (Ministry of Women's Equality, 1994), and the 1995 SFU research study notes that a draft protocol is being developed to address release of social assistance benefits to prisoners.
24. Literature review by Mia Dauvergne-Latimer (cited in section V).
25. Information and order forms for NACRO publications can be obtained by e-mail (nacro@penlex.org.uk). This research study relied mainly on the 1994-95 NACRO *Annual Report*; the 1991 report. *Step Two: Housing Women Ex-offenders*; and the 1993 *Opening the Doors* series, which includes *The resettlement of Prisoners in the Community* and *Women Leaving Prison*.
26. In addition to materials from the Women's Prison Association, information is based on press coverage: Susan Brenna, "Mother & child reunion," *New York Newsday*, Aug. 25, 1994 (B4-5); Andrew Heusel "Hope For Homeless Mothers Behind Bars," *Fortune News*, February 1994 (p. 15); Michael Kaufman, "A Family's Values Endure, Six Generations Later," *The New York Times*, April 12, 1995.
27. Elaine Lord, "A prison superintendent's perspective on women in prison," *Prison Journal*(*Special Issue: Women in Prisons and Jails*), Vol. 75 No. 2 (June 1995)