ICPA TASKFORCE

Beyond Prisons: Women and Community Corrections

IN THIS ISSUE
1- MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIRS
2- WOMEN-CENTERED INTERVENTIONS
3- SPOTLIGHT FEATURE: STRIDE
4- SPOTLIGHT FEATURE: CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF ELIZABETH FRY SOCIETIES
5- HALFWAY HOUSES: CONNECTING FEMALE OFFENDERS TO THE COMMUNITY IN JAPAN
6- FEATURED JURISDICTION- UK
7- HER STORY – WOMEN’S PERSPECTIVES
8- IN THE NEWS
9- RESOURCES
10- SELECTED ACADEMIC ARTICLES
11- EVENTS

Photo of STRIDE volunteers, Canada
The world has changed! Unfortunately, the need for community support of justice-involved women is greater and solutions are not readily available or employed. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a much-needed focus on the global over-reliance on incarceration. However, the primary focus has been on the incarcerated population as a whole and it has been difficult to find strategies that focus directly on the situation of incarcerated women, whose incarceration has doubled over the past 20 years and continues to be the fastest-growing population. Given that women have different pathways into the criminal justice system and given their unique needs, the absence of any strategy for women during this time is concerning.

As jurisdictions grapple with the realities of safely managing offenders during the pandemic, one approach has been to fast-track releases of low-risk offenders. However, most jurisdictions do not have risk assessment tools specific to women, whose risk is often over-classified. This underlines the urgent need for investments in building and using risk assessment tools specific to women. Another challenge highlighted as a result of this pandemic, is the lack of or absence of various support services for women in the community, such as child-care, counselling, and meaningful supervision. On the other hand, some jurisdictions have noted that the pandemic has provided the opportunity for women under community supervision to build bonds with their children and family as a first priority, rather than have the additional burden to immediately seek employment or participate in programs or treatment.

Under pressure to prevent COVID-19 outbreaks in prisons, some jurisdictions have attempted to reduce incarceration levels by promoting bail for women for usually non-bailable offences, or by calling for the use of non-custodial sentencing for petty offences. Such actions, while piecemeal and not systematically directed towards women, highlight that other options are indeed available when there is political will. It is our belief that this global crisis should be an opportunity to lay the foundations of non-custodial sanctions for women as the rule, rather than the exception.

The importance of investing in communities rather than prisons and punitive responses could not be clearer. Recent weeks have seen mass civil unrest in the United States following the tremendous frustrations of Black people with centuries of unjust conditions, including the death of Black people by law enforcement. There is a resounding demand for systemic change, which requires tackling the root causes of inequality. Rather than investing further in police and prisons, an effective response must shift resources to what communities need to survive and thrive: housing, healthcare, education, vocational training, supportive services, and meaningful income supports including childcare.

Many lessons will be learned
from these crises, not least in the realm of corrections. Rather than rushing to return to our reliance on incarceration, this is an opportunity to build a better response, where gender equity and the use of community as a first option are cornerstones. We know that, for most women, there are more efficient and more effective approaches that can happen in a community setting.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Bangkok Rules (United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders). We must use this as an occasion to take a hard look at the lack of progress on many of these rules. It is also an opportunity to advocate for action and change, including the need for research and data on criminalized women, and the use of non-custodial measures when possible. The Beyond Prisons Task Force would like to hear about how your agency or organization has evolved during this pandemic to deal with the specific needs of women and how your agency is observing the 10th anniversary of the Bangkok Rules.

We also take a moment in these difficult though opportunity filled times to acknowledge the women and men who work in the corrections and conditional release. They are working to keep communities safe. Thank you Corrections Staff and Community Groups for your continued good work during this pandemic!

Taskforce Co-Chairs

Jennifer Oades
Board member, ICPA & Chairperson, Parole Board of Canada

Diane Williams
ICPA Treasurer

Taskforce members

• Rosemary Caruana (Australia)
• Denise Robinson (United States)
• Stephen Pitts (United Kingdom)
• Melissa Hamilton (United Kingdom)
• Kelley Blanchette (Canada)
• Mary Mbau (Kenya)
In the early 2000s, the Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) was developed as a strategic planning tool by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) Gains Centre. This linear model informed community-based responses to the involvement of people with mental health and substance use disorders in the criminal justice system.

The Task Force recognizes the importance of this model to community corrections, and sought to complement this model by developing a holistic, women-centered model where community options are represented as the primary option no matter where a woman is within the judicial process. The Taskforce’s website has a fuller model available with examples of gender-based interventions. **We invite you to share with us your own examples of women-centered community interventions, so we can add to the model.**

**Women-Centered Approach**

**Trauma-Informed**

**Relational**

**Holistic**

**Strengths-Based**

**Culturally Responsive**

5 CORE principles of Gender Responsiveness: Alyssa Benedict, MPH. [https://womensjustice.net/gender-lens](https://womensjustice.net/gender-lens)

**CLICK HERE TO SEE THE VARIOUS INTERCEPTS WITH EXAMPLES OF GENDER-INFORMED INTERVENTIONS**
SPOTLIGHT FEATURE: STRIDE

A Relational Solution to Reintegration
By Kate Crozier, Director of Programs, Community Justice Initiatives

When Grand Valley Institution (GVI) for Women opened in 1997, Community Justice Initiatives was invited to create a reintegration support program using restorative justice values and practices. Julie Thompson, a graduate of Rec & Leisure studies at the University of Waterloo, oversaw this project and built the Stride model that has been successfully connecting with women housed at GVI for 23 years. Stride has piqued interest across North America for its innovative and community-based model for reintegration.

Stride is rooted in relationship building and the values of Creating Choices. Starting months and even years before their release from prison, Stride is at work laying the foundation of the relationships that will support women back at home. Each week, Stride brings 20-25 trained and supervised volunteers into the prison at the medium security gym at GVI to participate in activities alongside the incarcerated women. Unlike other programs, these volunteers are specifically screened and trained to be people comfortable with building relationships – participating in the activities alongside the women – not teaching, helping or advocating. As a result, together we build a space where women have choice, autonomy, fun and kindness. Women say that it feels like a night away from prison. Our volunteers say that Stride Night feels just like a community gathering.

Whether card making, or playing cards, listening to a speaker, or sharing in circle, Stride Night builds strong, trusting relationships between volunteers and women in prison. Through these gradually forged friendships, the myths we have about one another fall away and we find ourselves in a space where we can start to see one another as whole person. We get to see one another’s strengths and get to be trusted with each other’s struggles.

During reintegration planning, women will confide in us that they are nervous about the lack of supports that they have back in the community. We know that this can have a significant impact on their success in the community and that we can help with this. We respond by asking which volunteers have they gotten to know that they feel comfortable connecting with outside of prison. If the feeling is mutually shared, then we go to work preparing the volunteers with 12 hours of additional training. We want to prepare our volunteers on what they need to know about supporting women leaving prison such as relapse prevention, typical parole conditions, community resources and thinking though healthy boundaries for this relationship moving into a new dynamic.

We mirror that process with the woman in prison. We want to spend one to one time with them to understand their reintegration goals, stresses, and needs. GVI supports our Circles to meet outside of programming hours to do this work. With this information we can ensure that we are creating a Stride Circle that is filled with volunteers who have the skills and interest in providing that identified gap. For some women, simply having a volunteer check in on them for the first few weeks of release is all that they feel they need. For others, they crave the social support of having healthy friends with whom to have fun and participate in community activities. Some women have very practical support needs such as a drive to their halfway house, or help looking for housing. Our volunteers are prepared to help with the needs that they have time and skill to support.
Stride Circles are like family and friendship networks that we all rely upon. Our Stride Circles volunteer together, worship together, take community courses together, and care for the relationship together. These Circles are as unique as the people in them and the Circles have lasted from one week to nearly a decade.

That’s how we engage the community to help women reintegrate. But that’s only half the story.

The other equally important aspect of our work is to build the capacity of our community to support women after prison. Our restorative justice and social justice values tell us that community must play a role in addressing harm, conflict and crime. So many of the times, we, collectively, have failed women before they become criminalized and so we must be a part of addressing the impact of prison.

However, simply telling others about the needs of women leaving prison is ineffective to inspire meaningful action. Once again, it’s through relationships that we as a community are motivated to change our perspectives and actions. Stride is trusted by GVI to bring in over 50 volunteers, 15 guests, and 10 local community services agencies into Stride Night each year. Our training and supervision of our volunteers and guests is done with autonomy from the prison and is the starting place for educating the community about women in prison in Canada.

But the real shift happens when people meet one another. High nerves and anxiety that volunteers experience prior to entering the prison for the first time are quickly quelled by the chorus of women waiting in the hallways exclaiming their welcomes to our parade of volunteers. They sit down at a table with perfect strangers in a situation they never dreamed they’d be in, and an hour later, they have connected with someone who they want to see succeed after prison.
More than that, they want to be a part of her success.

Our guests ask to come back again. Our community services contact us the next day to ask for a meeting to see how they can do a better job to support criminalized women. Our volunteers no longer tolerate slander and hate against those in prison and find themselves educating the people in their lives about the reality of who is in prison and what they need from us. Over 23 years, we have built a community that cares about the people inside GVI and who consistently asks, how can I help?

If political will to create progressive change in prisons requires the support of the electorate, then Waterloo region’s Stride program and our partnership with GVI is a model for influencing popular support for progress.

Last year we celebrated the conclusion of a 10-year research project, the ARC-W, in partnership with the University of Waterloo who explored the impact of Stride Circles (n=35) against a control group (n=34). Still in the process of working toward publication, some of the significant findings were:

- Women with Stride Circles experienced significantly less stress than women with no Circle
- Women felt their Circles were very helpful to their reintegration (M= 4.19, scale from 1-5)
- Women with a Stride Circle reported significantly higher personal growth after incarceration compared to women without a Stride Circle
- Circles are helpful mediums for community involvement

After a 5-year partnership with Public Safety Canada, Stride is positioned to replicate across Canada to those who want the support of this model to be a conduit of connection between prison and community. Funded by a local grant, we are currently funded to actively support nation-wide interest in Stride’s Replication in women’s prisons. Importantly, we have piloted this model in a men’s institution and found strong evidence that this model works for men too. I welcome contact from anyone seeking more information at katec@ cjiwr.com.
Breaking the Cycle: Investing in Communities, Not Prisons
By Emilie Coyle, Executive Director
Jackie Omstead, National Coordinator

The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) is an association of self-governing, community-based Societies. Our local community-based societies do the crucial work of providing services and supports to vulnerable and criminalized peoples across the country, while CAEFS’ national office focuses on systemic level advocacy.

CAEFS’ advocacy is focused on federally sentenced women and gender diverse people in Canada, who are serving their sentences in federal women’s prisons. We are also an organization that is invested in prison abolition. To us, abolition means ending the reliance on prisons to ‘solve’ social problems and instead investing in community-based solutions and working to dismantle systems that disproportionately criminalize particular communities.

Central to our advocacy work is monitoring the conditions of confinement in all 6 federal institutions designated for women, which is done through our Regional Advocacy teams. We make regular monthly in-person visits to these prisons. During these visits we discuss the systemic human rights concerns of the people who are incarcerated there and strategize and work with them to remedy the situation. Concerns have ranged from the practice of routine strip searches, the over-classification of Indigenous people, and the use of solitary confinement (now called Structured Intervention Units) for managing self-harming behaviour. We then bring these concerns to the upper management of the prison, seek responses and remedies, and document.

Our regional advocacy work uses a harm reduction approach to prisons by advocating for better conditions within the prisons. As an organization invested in prison abolition, we grapple with the tension that sometimes arises from this. As we do our monitoring work, we must continually ask ourselves: is what we are asking for giving prisons more power (including one of the more tangible forms of power: money), or is it taking power away from the prison and putting it toward community?

We know that the only real alternative to prisons are thriving communities and thus the scope of our advocacy must include building communities and ensuring that robust and supportive reintegration processes are utilized. This understanding has inspired our current project: Breaking the Cycle.

Breaking the Cycle (BTC) is a four-year project funded by the Canadian Federal department of Women and Gender Equity. The goal of the project is to facilitate the long-term reintegration of women and gender diverse people exiting incarceration while at the same time curbing the number of these individuals being imprisoned in the first place. The project does this by identifying the resources that women and gender diverse people need, finding out if these resources exist, and then ensuring that those who need these resources are aware of and can access them. Should the resources not exist, the BTC seeks to create partnerships and build capacity within key sectors, like housing, childcare, and employment.

While we are only in year one of this project, by the end we will have two key deliverables: (1) a National Legal Resource Network of firms, lawyers, and clinics willing to provide pro bono legal services. And (2) a guidebook for women and gender diverse people exiting situations of incarceration. This work is supported by four regional coordinators and
three expert consultants with lived experience of incarceration. These coordinators and consultants also work closely with local societies, other people with lived experience, and broader stakeholders.

COVID-19 has laid bare the injustices and lacunae in our communities and is reaffirming the urgent need for decarceration. This pandemic has demonstrated that mass decarceration is possible and that caring and supportive communities are vital to our collective safety. Through the BTC project and other similar advocacy projects, CAEFs intends to continue this process of decarceration and community building well into the future.

---

**Halfway houses: connecting female offenders to the community in Japan**

Ayaka Takai  
**Professor, United Nations Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNAFEI)**

In Japan, 45.8% of female inmates admitted in 2018 were convicted of theft, and 38.6% were convicted of violating the Stimulant Control Act. (White Paper on Crime 2019, Research and Training Institute, Ministry of Justice, Japan (not yet available in English).) The reality is that theft and stimulant use are at high risk of recidivism, with nearly 50% of those offenders re-entering prison within five years.

The national comprehensive strategy for recidivism prevention, which was established in 2017 as the “Recidivism Prevention Promotion Plan”, incorporates measures that aim to address the special needs of female offenders. The enhancement of support for female offenders in halfway houses is one of these measures.
Halfway houses in Japan are facilities where mainly parolees are provided with temporary accommodation, meals and treatment programs if they have no adequate housing when released from prison. Generally, halfway-house residents are expected to go to work during the day to earn and save enough money to find their own place to live and make their own living.

Ryozenkai is a halfway house designed for female offenders, located in the center of Tokyo. The capacity of the house is 20 residents, and most of them have been released on parole and are still under probationary supervision. Reflecting the percentage of crimes committed by female inmates mentioned above, theft offenders and drug offenders make up 80% of the residents.

Compared to men’s facilities, Ryozenkai is characterized by the fact that it offers a number of treatment options to its residents in addition to routine individual interviews, in response to the problems which most residents face. Theft prevention counseling, substance-abuse treatment, computer classes, legal counseling, and medical counseling are examples of programs provided weekly or monthly. For theft prevention counseling, eight trained Volunteer Probation Officers (community members who collaborate with professional probation officers, known as Hogoshi) visit the facility and conduct individual interviews with residents. This has the effect of deepening residents’ self-understanding, raising their self-esteem, and helping them imagine their lives without crime. For substance-abuse treatment, a professional adviser conducts individual or group meetings based on cognitive behavioral therapy. Opportunities to acquire computer skills necessary for employment, to consult with a lawyer about problems such as divorce and debt, and to consult with a doctor about mental and physical issues are all provided in order to meticulously address the problems that residents face when reintegrating into society.

The facility has a curfew of 6 pm. This curfew is necessary to ensure that residents with problems such as family issues, addictions, and other mental health issues can use their evening hours to participate in these treatment programs and interviews. It may not be easy for them to earn money during the day as do the residents of other facilities and attend programs in the evening; however, one resident commented, “I’ve had the experience of having someone to face my problems with me and share my feelings with me, which I’ve never experienced before.”

The facility also emphasizes the importance of maintaining connections with former residents. After leaving the facility, it is easy for former residents to become isolated, which exposes them to the risk of reoffending. Therefore, former residents are permitted and encouraged to continue to participate in theft-prevention and substance-abuse programs even after they leave the facility. For this reason, the theft-prevention program is called “Re-connect”. By providing personalized and long-lasting support, halfway houses help female offenders rehabilitate themselves in the community, increasing their chances to successfully reintegrate into society.
As is the case in many countries, women make up a relatively small proportion (around 10%) of offenders managed by Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service England and Wales (HMPPS). At the end of 2019, there were 223,512 male offenders under the supervision of probation in England and Wales and 24,247 females. Of these female offenders 16,144 were subject to community orders or suspended prison sentences and 4,998 to post custodial release supervision. (*1). The remainder of the caseload is made up of those under probation pre-release supervision.

HMPPS provides reports to the criminal courts, supervises offenders on community order and on release from custody. The probation Service has a small headquarters and comprises of 12 operational regions headed by regional directors of probation. Its overall aim is to reduce offending and protect the public.

Given the low proportion of women in the criminal justice system, it is perhaps not surprising that prison and probation services have been designed predominately around the needs and risk of men. It sounds obvious but the risks and needs of women are different to men. They tend to be lower risk of serious harm than men and have greater needs in terms of substance misuse, mental health and past experiences of sexual and domestic abuse. They are also more likely than men to be the sole carer of dependant children. (*2).

In the last decade there have been a number of factors which have led to a greater focus on the bespoke needs of women in the criminal justice system (CJS) including: a report written by Baroness Jean Corston (*3) which argued that too many low risk women were serving prison sentences, an expanding evidence base about the specific risks and needs of women who commit crimes and successful lobbying of Parliament by a range of women’s groups.

In 2018 the Ministry of Justice published its evidence based Strategy for Female Offenders (*4). This strategy specified what should happen to women at each stage of their contact with the criminal justice system. The key role for the Probation and Prison Services in implementing this strategy was recognised by the senior leaders in HMPPS. They provided leadership, resources and set clear priorities including an objective for operational staff to reduce the number of women sentenced to custody for less than 12 months.

Examples of work to support this objective include:

- Development of an evidence based Aide Memoir to help improve the quality of Pre Sentence Reports (PSR)s on women.
- Collaboration with non-government organisations (NGOs) to support delivery of community orders/licences. This is often delivered via a network of Women Centres where women can access a range of support services to meet their needs. They are female only spaces which operate in a trauma informed manner and many provide creches for children. NGOs providing services to
women have been allocated a share of £5m to support them in offering services to women offenders and are soon to bid for a share of a further £2.5m to improve the sustainability of the sector.

- The government is supporting development of residential women centres (RWCs) which can be used by courts as an alternative to a short prison sentence. £800 000 has been announced to begin development of the first of these RWCs in Wales this year.
- HMPPS has worked with the Department of Health and Social Care to improve access to drug, alcohol and mental health treatment as part of a community order. This has increased the number of women sentenced to community based mental health treatment requirements.
- Development of an offender management model which links women’s complexity of need to the time allocated to staff who manage them.
- Implementation of a training programme for prisons and probation staff who work with women (POWER). This incorporates trauma informed approaches and sets out how to respond to a woman’s gender specific needs at each stage of her contact with HMPPS. Many probation staff (and all female prison establishments) have additionally undertaken training in trauma informed approaches.

With its dedicated leadership, funding and priorities for women offenders, HMPPS is moving ever closer to having a gender specific pathway for women at each point of their contact with the probation and prison services. This evidence based, bespoke pathway is what research suggests will ultimately deliver better outcomes for women.

References:

HER STORY – WOMEN’S PERSPECTIVES


US- Tutweiler. A Marshall Project/Frontline documentary about women in an Alabama prison who support each other through pregnancy, labour, and saying goodbye to their newborns.


IN THE NEWS

Afghanistan: Life inside Kabul’s women prison during Covid-19. Thousands of prisoners in Afghanistan have been released and pardoned as the country battles the Covid-19 pandemic. But in Kabul’s only prison facility for women, more than a hundred women, often with young children, remain behind bars. Coronavirus has made it more urgent than ever that prison should be a last resort for women with dependent children. https://www.france24.com/en/20200530-afghanistan-life-inside-kabul-s-women-s-prison-during-covid-19

Cambodia’s drug war has seen prisoner numbers skyrocket during coronavirus pandemic. Cambodia’s anti-drug campaign has led to sweeping arrests, increasing the number of pregnant women and children behind bars. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-31/cambodia-war-on-drugs-human-rights-abuses-torture-women/12288860

Women Offenders: Prison alternative to open in Wales first. A residential centre for women will be created in Wales, as an alternative to custody for those convicted of low-level crimes. https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-52533929


It’s harder for them than it is for me: when a mother does time, her children do too. Coronavirus has made it more urgent than ever that prison should be a last resort for women with dependent children. https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/apr/12/its-harder-for-them-than-it-is-for-me-when-a-mother-does-time-her-children-do-too

Coronavirus and women in detention: A gender-specific approach missing. The coronavirus pandemic has brought a whole host of responses by prisons and wider justice systems, but the plight of women has been neglected or overtly disregarded. Without a gender-specific assessment and response to coronavirus, lives of women in criminal justice systems are at risk and human rights violations will continue. https://www.penalreform.org/blog/coronavirus-and-women-in-detention-a-gender-specific/
The First Year Out. Makeda Davis emerged from more than seven years in prison to a life that is complicated, unfamiliar, and, sometimes, soul crushing. [https://www.marieclaire.com/politics/a32630854/prison-release-recidivism/](https://www.marieclaire.com/politics/a32630854/prison-release-recidivism/)

RESOURCES

US Commission on Civil Rights: Women in Prison: Seeking Justice Behind Bars
UNODC- Toolkit on Gender Responsive Non-Custodial Measures

SELECTED ACADEMIC ARTICLES

Curated by Melissa Hamilton

Anna Motz, Maxine Dennis, Anne Aiyegbusi, Invisible Trauma: Women, Difference and the Criminal Justice System (2020), [https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781315390000](https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781315390000)


Nadie Escobar et al., Prevalence of Human Papillomavirus Infection, Cervical Intraepithelial Neoplasia and Cervical Cancer in Imprisoned Women Worldwide: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis, Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health, 74(1), 95-102, [https://jech.bmj.com/content/jech/74/1/95.full.pdf](https://jech.bmj.com/content/jech/74/1/95.full.pdf)


EVENTS

Thailand Institute of Justice: Promoting the Social Reintegration of Women After Release' on Wednesday 24th June. Part of its Global Webinar Series on “Gender-Responsive Criminal Justice and Prison Reform”.

ICPA Webinar on Prison Design- September 2020 (date TBC).

Fifth World Congress on Probation and Parole- September 2021, Ottawa, ON. Theme “No One Left Behind: Building Community Capacity.” The Congress will explore the opportunities, challenges, and successes associated with building community capacity and successful partnerships that support reintegration for diverse groups of offenders, including women.
Want to be featured in our next newsletter, or join the conversation?

_email us at:_
international@pbc-clcc.gc.ca

_or visit our new website:_
https://icpa.org/taskforcewomen/