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COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS
PROGRAM

PROGRAM REPORT

SEPTEMBER 1972

INTRODUCTION

It is the purpose of this report to outline the findings of an actual working alternative to the imprisonment of women. This alternative is outlined in a proposal drawn up by Community Corrections For Women. Briefly stated, it contends that the present system of imprisonment is not defensible and that the community at large must share the responsibility of those who do not conform to our twentieth century, urban society.

The rationale behind our present penal system includes: the protection of society, a deterrent effect, and rehabilitation. The Ouimet report states: "Crimes (committed by women) involving violence are rare." There seems little need to protect society from these "criminals" when most of the offences committed by women are those that do not have a direct victim, for example, crimes such as public intoxication, and prostitution. The deterrent effects of prisons cannot be seen in the recent statistics at Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Institute where 58.7% of the female population over the first six months of 1972 were repeaters and 41.2% during the same period were first offenders. Moreover, the rehabilitative effect of imprisonment is questionable as can be seen by these same statistics. The Ouimet report observes:

"A second factor which has been drawn to our attention is an apparent tendency of women offenders to need and use specialized medical, psychiatric and social treatment resources in higher proportion than is true of the same number of an undifferentiated group of men offenders."

These needs are not met by the present penal system and the question is: could they be? It is counselling and support that the women alcoholic needs, that the shoplifter needs, that the 'bad cheque' writer needs, that the neglectful mother needs. And these are the types of "crimes" for which the majority of women are incarcerated. The isolating world of prison does nothing to prevent the recurrence of these non-violent, anti-social acts. It is the belief of Community Corrections For Women that the only just and humane way to deal with this social problem is to assist the women to cope with their problems within the community in a non-institutional, but supportive environment.

HISTORY

The Community Corrections Committee was established in the fall of 1971. One year previous to this, a group of people representing various agencies, who were involved with programming at the jail (Native Brotherhood, FLEC, Y.W.C.A), began meeting to discuss "gaps" which they felt existed for women upon release from the "Fort" into the community. Not only did they face a lack of resources in jail but after release there were few agencies that were able to help them. It was felt that the whole situation of women in the jail should be looked at more thoroughly. Consequently a workshop was held. Workshop I on the Female Offender was organized with assistance from the Edmonton Social Planning Council in March of 1971 and was an effective means of gathering together a small, strong group of people who shared a basic goal, that is, to provide an alternative to the women's jail. Throughout the summer, study sessions were held and ideas and information were exchanged. In the fall the Committee prepared two proposals for submission to the government; the Team Concept and the Community House Drop-In Centre Concept. It was not until March of 1972 that funds were provided; Federal Local Initiatives Project (LIP) monies were granted in the sum of \$8,090.00 to finance the Project to the end of May. This money was to be used to put the Team Concept into operation. A staff of five was hired and the Community Corrections Committee became the Advisory Committee giving direction and support to the staff. The staff then set about organizing the Professional and Volunteer arms of the Team. The LIP grant was subsequently extended until the end of September and it is the workings and findings of the period from March to August 31 that are discussed in this report.

METHODOLOGY

The Team Concept, now an actuality, consists of community people acting as a support system for the woman offender. The staff act as a co-ordinating body for the rest of the Team. Other members of the Team include representatives of agencies within the community (Professional Team) and volunteers (Volunteer Team) who were drawn from all sectors of the community and include those people who have been incarcerated and have successfully re-entered society.

The Professional Team members provide the expertise and resources necessary for the volunteer who will eventually work on a one-to-one basis with the women.

The Team does not do any counselling but refers the women to the appropriate services. The friendship and support of the volunteers and staff strengthens the Woman's ability to cope with her individual situation.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers have a vital function as members of the Team. They are able to provide support for a woman on a one-to-one basis; or are able through time and commitment to be available to any woman as they would be to any friend in need.

Volunteers may have experienced incarceration themselves and successfully re-entered the community, or they may be interested citizens from the surrounding community.

She/he initially becomes aware of the Project in the recruitment stage. Volunteers have been recruited by various methods including:

- workshops
- media (newspaper articles, television, or radio programmes)
- shopping centre booths
- word-of-mouth
- volunteer community centre
- church groups
- community resource people e.g. professors teaching community development courses.

Having once been recruited, a prospective volunteer is invited to five weekly sessions in which she or he can become better acquainted with the Project and assess her or his desire to become a Team member.

Thus far, all training sessions primarily have served to give prospective volunteers an opportunity to gain confidence in order to work with a woman.

The knowledge, information and skills that are exchanged during the training can be seen in the following brief outline of the training sessions.

SESSION ONE

A Goals and objectives of Community Corrections are outlined.

B The ways a volunteer might relate to these goals and objectives are described. Such as:

- 1) making themselves available for a one-to-one relationship with a woman.
- 2) entering into a social group of women and volunteers .
- 3) acting as a court advocate.
- 4) visiting a woman at the jail.
- 5) babysitting or providing any other service for a woman e.g. driving her to a job interview or to a hospital.

C Although a volunteer can function in numerous ways, a prospective volunteer ultimately becomes aware that she or he best serves the needs of a woman by offering her friendship.

SESSION TWO

A The volunteer trainee attempts to become aware of the circumstances that surround the lives of the women. Various recognized techniques of increasing interpersonal communication skills are used i.e. the montage, roleplaying, assimilation games etc.

SESSION THREE:

A A video tape prepared by Community Corrections, with women who have experienced incarceration, is presented.

B The film, expressing the feelings and attitudes of the women, is followed by a group discussion.

SESSION FOUR

A The trainee is given access to practical knowledge i.e. resources and services available to a woman within the community.

B She or he is then given an opportunity to test her or his knowledge by matching hypothetical women and their needs, to an appropriate service or agency.

SESSION FIVE

A Assessment by the volunteer of his or her own desire and ability to relate to the Project.

B Assessment of the training sessions by the volunteer and how she or he sees herself or himself working with the Project.

C Expression of commitment of time by each volunteer in writing.

D Assessment of the volunteer by the Volunteer Co-ordinator.

To keep a viable corps of volunteers it is necessary that recruitment and training remain an ongoing process.

Although no volunteer works entirely on her or his own but works as part of the Team, motivation and self-confidence have been found to be the keys to a successful volunteer relationship.

Once a volunteer is assigned to a woman, she or he is then responsible for maintaining regular contact with the Team of any progress in the relationship. In this manner the services of the staff or professional may be obtained.

Motivation and commitment has waned for many Project volunteers during the spring and summer months. This was to be expected as many were involved in holiday and/or family activities. It did, however, place the staff in a position of a larger workload and, in some cases, the needs of the women went unmet.

Of the twenty-three volunteers recruited during the Spring Workshop in April of 1972, five actively worked with the women during the holiday months.

Under the current fall recruitment and planned training sessions, it is expected that more committed volunteers will become part of the Team. This is expected to increase the present amount of contact between volunteers and women. A volunteer for each woman referred to the Team is our ultimate goal.

It is anticipated that as the group becomes established and accepted in the community the recruiting and maintaining of volunteers will become increasingly successful.

In the short experience of the Project it has been found that women whose children require minimal care, and have a car, have been the most able to give of their time. The problem rests not only with securing interested individuals, but individuals who are able to offer a commitment of involvement.

PROFESSIONAL TEAM

The Professional Team consists of individual representatives assigned by agencies within the community (see list below). They work as liaisons with the Volunteer Team and staff. Rather than deal with a large and impersonal agency, the staff and/or volunteer is able to deal with one specific person within that agency. The agency represented is able to provide immediate information and advice regarding the problems of the women.

The Professional Team meets with the staff and Committee members on a monthly basis to exchange information regarding their services. This exchange provides an opportunity to become aware of overlapping services, if any, and information of new services when they arise.

The Professional Team consists of the following:

- Department of Health and Social Development
- Alberta Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Commission
- Adult Probation
- Native Counselling Services
- City of Edmonton Social Services Department
- Department of Manpower and Immigration
- John Howard Society
- Community Psychiatric Services
- A Physician
- National Parole Service
- Grant Mac Ewan Community College
- Adult Continuing Education
- Voice of Alberta Native Women

STAFF

The staff is guided in all its decision-making by the Advisory Committee and is responsible to this Committee for its actions and for appointing the woman to a volunteer and/or appropriate members of the Professional Team. Weekly staff meetings provides an open communication of news and happenings of the preceding week. Bi-monthly meetings are held between the Advisory Committee and staff.

THE PROJECT CO-ORDINATOR is responsible for the over-all administration of the Project. She is responsible for the seeking and exchanging of community resources related to the Project. She works with the Finance Committee, in seeking funds for the Project.

THE VOLUNTEER CO-ORDINATOR is responsible for the recruiting, training, and assigning of volunteers to women. She is also in charge of public relations and community education regarding the Project.

THE COURTWORKER works closely with the judges and other court workers from Adult Probation, Native Counselling Services and Student Legal Services. She assists women making their first appearance in court; visits women in the City Cells; speaks to sentence upon the invitation of the presiding magistrate; and refers women to the Project Co-ordinator. At present the courtworker also acts as a liaison with the Women's Emergency Overnight Shelter.

THE STREETWORKER works directly on the street with the women, referring them to the Project if necessary. She talks with the women either in the bars or on the street, assisting those who have specific needs. She keeps in close contact with the Boyle Street agencies and works with women in the jail on a weekly basis.

THE SECRETARY/BOOKKEEPER maintains office correspondence and books as well as answering the telephone.

WOMEN

The women who come into contact with the Team are from three areas. The Potential Offender, that is, the woman who appears headed for the courts if assistance and support is not given to her. Most potential offenders are referred from the Women's Overnight Shelter, the streets and the Bissell Centre.

A second area from which the women are referred is from the courts through the Courtworker.

The third area from which the women come to the Team is from the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Institute.

We can make these women aware of our services; however, only those who want assistance and state their needs can be helped.

Referral Sources

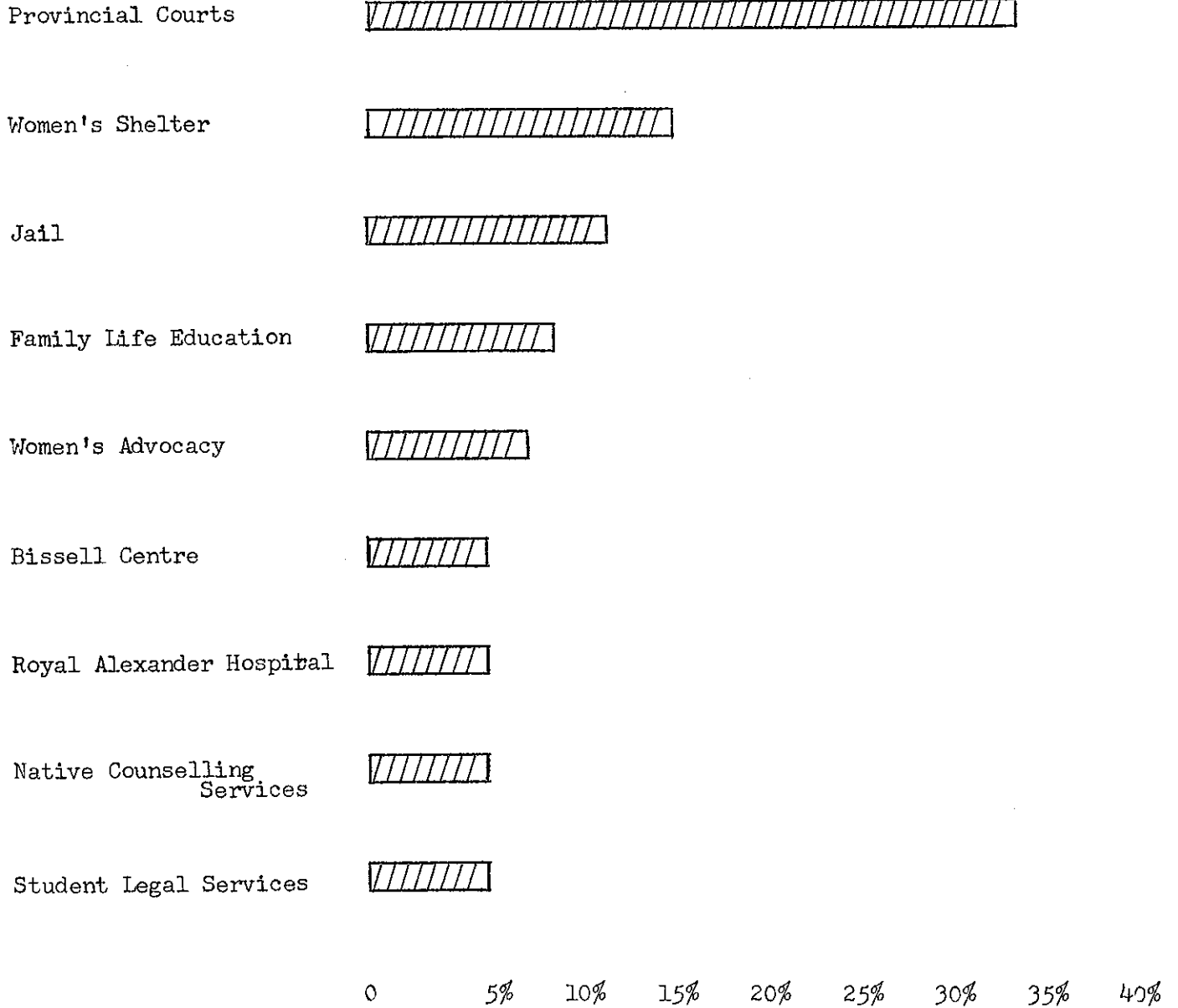
The women are referred from a variety of sources including community agencies, the courts, and provincial institutions. On the following page a chart shows specific sources of agency referrals.

Contact between the Team and the woman was established in the following ways:

- by direct contact either in the courts or on the streets
- by telephone
- through contact with the Professional Team on behalf of the woman
- through a volunteer making either a personal or telephone contact with the woman
- the woman contacting the staff
- through the contact of services and agencies not on the Professional Team

Referral Chart

Source of Referral:



Records of these contacts are maintained by all staff members. The number of women who had come into contact with the Team by the end of August was forty. A total number of 292 contacts were made with an average number of 7.3 contacts made with each woman. The least number of contacts with a woman being one and the highest number of contacts being twenty.

SERVICES Of the agencies listed on page 4 listing the Professional Team members, the agencies most used were Dept. of Health and Social Development, Alberta Legal Aid, and Continuing Adult Education. The scope of services provided to the woman are explained here:

The courtworker has acted as Court Advocate for twelve women thus far. She has: gone to cells and spoken to the women; has, upon the judges' request, "spoken to sentence" for a woman; she has had women assigned to the Team as part of a probation order, she has advised confused and distraught women both before and after appearing before the court; she has assisted women in getting Legal Aid and/or advice from Student Legal Services; and she has worked alongside Adult Probation and Native Counselling Services in the courtroom.

Transportation, through the use of volunteers, was provided for twelve women. One woman whose leg was in a cast had need of transportation sixteen times. These rides were to the hospital, the doctor, Social Development, for house hunting and occasionally where staff or volunteers visited at their homes. The majority of the other rides were for house or apartment hunting, medical visits, job hunting, welfare visits, and answering crises.

Accommodation was found for eight women. This included one-person dwellings as well as housing for women and their children. Also used were existing facilities such as Hilltop House, McDougall House and the Women's Emergency Overnight Shelter. It has been found that many of the women had no resources for finding suitable housing or accommodation by themselves. It has also been the experience of staff and volunteers that a woman on welfare with children as well as the young girl without a job and/or on welfare has a great deal more difficulty in obtaining accommodation than the average citizen.

We have worked with five women who have had their children taken away from them. The main reason for this action was neglect of children due to alcohol. Three of these women now have their children back as a result of our services. Those services included aid in finding a job, alcohol counselling and locating suitable accommodation. Two families are coping well with their situations; the third remains in need of a good deal of support from the Team.

The Department of Health & Social Development has been of the greatest assistance to the Project for many and varied reasons. Thirteen women have been assisted by this Department. Most of the assistance came in the form of rent, food and clothing, however; they have also been helpful and understanding in extraordinary situations.

Counselling services are not provided directly by staff or volunteers of the Project; however, eight women were referred to various agencies for this type of assistance. Two women had psychiatric sessions set up for them; four women used the counselling services offered by the Alberta Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Commission; and women were also referred to counselling services provided by Adult Continuing Education.

There are four women now attending classes and obtaining up-grading because of the Team's liaisons with schools such as Alberta Vocational Centre, and Grant Mac Ewan Community College.

Hospital visits were made to six women over varying lengths of time.

Visits to the jail are being made on a bi-monthly basis. Visits consist of making the inmates aware of our services before they are released and being of assistance to the women while they are incarcerated.

Many of the women we come in contact with lead lonely and isolated lives. This sometimes gives rise to petty crime, such as shoplifting or alcohol-related offences which may temporarily relieve the woman of her frustrations. It is hoped that we may be able to meet this need for recognition by involving the women in weekly social gatherings. These gatherings are unstructured and give the woman an opportunity to make friends and form a support group. The groups consist of six to eight women, two volunteers, and a staff member.

CONCLUSION

During six months of operation (two months of which were spent hiring staff and mobilizing the Volunteer and Professional Team members) forty women have been assisted.

As a co-ordinator of services to potential offenders, women appearing in the courts and those leaving jail, the Project has proved viable.

This function has been strengthened by the presence of volunteers and professionals working together.

PROJECTIONS

I The COMMUNITY HOUSE DROP-IN CENTRE is envisaged as the centre of activities for the Project. The house would accommodate six to ten women. The office staff would work out of the house and social groups, committee meetings and numerous other activities would take place here,

The house would be used by women:

- a) who were on remand and would otherwise spend time in the "cells",
- b) who were assigned by provincial magistrates as an alternative to sentencing,
- c) who were coming out of jail and needed a temporary place to stay,
- d) and those who needed the stabilizing effect of a home-like atmosphere and temporary support while they became better able to cope with their problems.

The house would be a non-institutional, non-custodial centre from which the individual girl would have the opportunity to learn new skills, become better informed, and would be a base from which she would move into the larger community.

II As it stands, none of the staff members have experienced the circumstances that most of the women have found themselves in at one time or another. Those who have successfully dealt with and surmounted their problems have a greater understanding and knowledge of the "system".

It is felt that the resources that they would have to offer would be of great benefit to the woman going through the same type of situation.

WITH THIS IN MIND, WE WOULD HOPE THAT SOME OF OUR FUTURE STAFF MEMBERS, COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS WOULD CONSIST OF WOMEN WITH WHOM WE HAVE WORKED.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I We recommend that a central registry be set up of all community organizations, federal, provincial and municipal departments that can provide funding and the necessary information required to obtain such monies. This would eliminate a time-wasting, effort-consuming search on the part of various community organizations interested in innovative programs.

II We recommend that all provincial magistrates be made aware on a continuing basis, of services and programs within the community. This would assist them in postponing or eliminating sentence by offering them a worthwhile alternative. Our provincial magistrates would make use of such services in the community if they knew of their existence and value.

III We recommend an opportunity for an exchange of information between the provincial magistrates, corrections personnel and other agencies involved in the corrections field. One suggestion might be an annual day-long workshop at which such an exchange might take place.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1 Report of the Canadian Committee on Corrections, March 31, 1969, p. 389.
- 2 Data derived from statistics obtained from the Corrections Branch,
Department of the Attorney General, Government of Alberta, September 1972.
- 3 Report of the Canadian Committee on Corrections, March 1969, p. 398.