

# **Ending the Cycle: Incarceration, Reintegration, and Discharge Planning**

**A Case Study of the John Howard Society Reintegration Centre**

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A Major Paper submitted to the Faculty of Environmental Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Environmental Studies

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## Abstract

A growing trend persists in the Canadian criminal justice system—inmates cycle through correctional facilities to homelessness and re-offend, resulting in subsequent periods of incarceration. The prison door revolves; previously incarcerated individuals receive minimal support upon release, and are required to navigate difficult social circumstances with the perceived understanding that freedom will necessarily translate to a positive transitional process. Canadian studies demonstrate the risk of homelessness upon release is significant (Kellen et al., 2010), and numerous US-based studies articulate the importance of transitional support services to ensure reintegration occurs successfully (Petersilia, 2003; Metraux and Culhane, 2004; Parhar and Wormith, 2013). The positive implications of providing accommodation upon release are substantial, and necessarily impact employment, social well-being and health outcomes. Canadian policy is dated and does not reflect the conclusions reached by recent studies, as inmates in provincial correctional facilities released from remand do not receive discharge planning. This is immensely problematic because the percentage of people held in Canadian pre-trial detention is greater than those in sentenced custody, thus numerous inmates are released on a daily basis without any support services.

The John Howard Society acts to address inadequacies in government policy through the establishment of a Reintegration Centre located four minutes away from the Toronto South Detention Centre. The Reintegration Centre aims to provide a safe and welcoming environment for inmates upon release, with clothes, food and logistical supports. Peer support workers accompany individuals to their point of destination, and referrals are possible to the other social service agencies located at the Reintegration Centre. This paper explores the factors which led to the Reintegration Centre's establishment, and seeks to understand initial challenges and

successes, following the first year of operation. Interviews were conducted with John Howard staff and questions focused on the development of the Reintegration Centre, its innovative structure, the peer support worker program, and Ontario's approach to reintegration. The interviewees widely questioned the current state of affairs, and posited facilities such as the Reintegration Centre represent a scalable model in other communities. Widespread implementation of similar centres will help to ensure systemic improvements occur, and policy development will ideally reflect community initiatives. These research findings demonstrate the vital role of discharge planning, and indicate substantial changes are required to ensure the prison door stops its revolutions.

## **Foreword**

This paper is being submitted to partially fulfill requirements for the Masters in Environmental Studies degree. The case study conducted for this major research paper relates to my area of concentration, components and learning objectives outlined in my Plan of Study. My area of concentration focuses on homeless communities and how they are affected by social and community planning policies, thus a case study of a prisoner reintegration centre is a relevant example of community-based planning to address the needs of marginalized individuals. This research contributes to my understanding of the relationship between the criminal justice system and homelessness (Learning Objective 2.2). It also investigates the connections between policy and planning, as the Reintegration Centre was established to directly address the lack of support services provided by governmental authorities, and the inadequate capacity of the community to accommodate high needs individuals (Learning Objective 1.2). Finally, because the Reintegration Centre offers services to formerly incarcerated and unstably housed clients, this

paper investigates power dynamics within the city, and the strategies employed to accommodate marginalized communities (Learning Objective 2.1).

# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1: What’s the Problem? .....	1
1.2: The Approach .....	3
1.3: Methodologies .....	5
1.4: Roadmap.....	7
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b> .....	<b>7</b>
2.1: Defining Reintegration .....	8
2.2: What Constitutes Reintegration?.....	9
2.3: Reintegration in Practice .....	10
2.4: The Economic Argument.....	21
<b>Chapter 3: Discharge Planning in Canada</b> .....	<b>23</b>
3.1: What is Discharge Planning?.....	23
3.2: The Current Canadian Discharge Planning System.....	24
3.3: The Emergence of a Service Gap and the Revolving Door.....	27
<b>Chapter 4: The John Howard Society Reintegration Centre</b> .....	<b>30</b>
4.1: Operational Vision.....	30
4.2: Community Hub Model.....	32
4.3: Peer Support Worker Program .....	34
4.4: The Toronto South Detention Centre .....	37
<b>Chapter 5: Everyday Realities</b> .....	<b>40</b>
5.1: The Early Days .....	40
5.2: The Challenges .....	43
5.3: Housing - The Missing Piece.....	46
5.4: Initial Accomplishments.....	49
<b>Chapter 6: A Way Forward</b> .....	<b>53</b>
6.1: Systemic Challenges.....	53
6.2: What is the Ideal Form of Discharge Planning?.....	55
6.3: Political Climate .....	58
<b>Chapter 7: Conclusion</b> .....	<b>59</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>Appendix A: Interview Questions</b> .....	<b>69</b>

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1: What's the Problem?

Individuals released from prison experience significant challenges re-entering society. Incarceration is a very de-stabilizing process, due to the time spent away from the routine of everyday life. Upon release, many former inmates struggle to find suitable work, as numerous employers refuse to hire citizens with criminal records. Housing is a crucial element of the transitional process, effectively providing a safe environment for releasees to re-start their daily lives; yet, many inmates lose their housing during prison, and are released into homelessness. Social networks may no longer provide the same supportive functions upon release, due to the time spent incarcerated, away from family and friends. These challenges are substantial, and demonstrate why supportive services are needed to facilitate a successful transitional process. In the absence of reintegration programming, releasees with the best of intentions are left with limited options, which frequently leads to recidivism. From a financial perspective, it is economically beneficial to reintegrate inmates; providing community services is drastically more affordable than the monetary commitment required to keep individuals incarcerated. Failing to provide these essential services fuels the cycle of homelessness to incarceration, which is inhumane and fundamentally against the social welfare tenets of the Canadian state.

Numerous US-based studies have identified the importance of providing support services to prisoners immediately upon their release from correctional facilities (Bradley et al., 2001; Metraux and Culhane, 2004; Travis et al., 2001). The Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Corrections intends that “prisoners should receive some form of support and planning by corrections staff prior to discharge” (Gaetz and O’Grady, 2009: 5), yet discharge planning is not officially required for all prisoners in Ontario, only those who have been convicted of a crime

(Gaetz and O'Grady, 2009). Recently, the number of individuals in remand<sup>1</sup> has grown substantially, representing more than 60% of the prison population in Ontario, however the Ontario Government does not provide programming or services to those released from remand (Statistics Canada, 2015b). Travis and Visher (2005: 1) define reentry as “the inevitable consequence of incarceration”, yet resources remain disproportionately concentrated on imprisonment. Seiter and Kadela (2003: 381) posit, “with billions of dollars focused on imprisonment, it is only fitting that a few million more be focused on prisoners’ return to the community”.

Discharge planning and support varies significantly across institutions, and in different jurisdictional contexts. It is usually comprised of many possible services, such as a needs-based assessment, distributing appropriate information, creating community connections, securing adequate accommodation and providing additional supports (Gaetz and O'Grady, 2009). An effective reintegration process depends on holistic programming, thus a commitment to providing comprehensive support and services during incarceration, prior to release and post release is part of a successful approach to reintegration. Ensuring appropriate accommodation upon release is critically important, especially in relation to reducing recidivism and facilitating employment opportunities (Visher and Travis, 2003; Walker et al., 2014; Banks and Fairhead, 1976; Parhar and Wormith, 2013). Some Canadian studies such as Novac et al. (2006) and the City of Toronto’s (2006) “Street Needs Assessment” have demonstrated individuals recently released from correctional facilities experience heightened susceptibility to homelessness, yet further Canadian research regarding the relationship between incarceration, prisoner reentry and homelessness is limited. Discharge planning and supports must be implemented in order to

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<sup>1</sup> Remand refers to pre-trial custody, where accused people await their next court appearance.

provide assistance to those recently released from prison by enhancing community reintegration and at the same time reducing recidivism, thereby “closing” the revolving prison door.

The Reintegration Centre is an example of innovative community programming in the absence of adequate government policy. According to Kellen (2015a: 14), “no other projects like this have been found in the existing body of literature and certainly not within a Canadian context”. In this study, I will conduct an in-depth examination of the factors which led to the centre’s establishment, while also focusing on the unprecedented one-stop shopping approach to post-release programming, and the inclusion of peer support workers with lived experience of the correctional system or substance abuse. The case study will attempt to answer why the centre was created, how the centre was started and what challenges were encountered during this process, as well as challenges that have occurred since the centre was opened. Interviews with three peer support workers and one managerial staff member will focus on their experiences, and possible avenues for improvement, while two interviews with housing support workers will focus on the role of accommodation upon release. The Toronto South Detention Centre opened recently, thus the interviews will include questions about the relationship between the Reintegration Centre and the Toronto South Detention Centre. The research will attempt to provide preliminary guidelines for other organizations attempting to offer similar services since the reintegration centre is the first facility of its kind in Canada.

## 1.2: The Approach

The John Howard Society of Toronto is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing and advancing programs that lessen the consequences of crime. One of their primary goals as an organization is “making our community safer by supporting the rehabilitation and re-integration of those who have been in conflict with the law” (John Howard Society of Ontario, 2016). The

Toronto organization concentrates service delivery around three distinct initiatives: alternatives to prison and crime prevention; in-reach to prisons; and post-release strategies and services (Kellen, 2015a).

The Toronto South Detention Centre was recently opened in south Etobicoke, replacing older local jails and offering capacity for 1,620 male inmates (Kellen, 2015b). Many of the Toronto South Detention Centre inmates are held on remand, which results in high turnover rates, at an estimated 180-200 releases a week (Kellen, 2015b). Previous inmates comprise a large, identifiable group of vulnerable individuals who typically lack the support services to successfully re-integrate into society. Federal and provincial policy inadequately prepares individuals for release, especially with regard to those released from remand, who have not been convicted of a crime. Due to the shortfall of governmental programming, the John Howard Society of Toronto created a Reintegration Centre to address the social and economic complexities that arise upon release.

The Reintegration Centre is located across the street from Toronto South Detention Centre, providing essential services in a very convenient location. An informational presentation, titled “All About the Reintegration Centre” (Kellen, 2015a) lists the Reintegration Centre’s main objectives:

- Afford better access by releasees to services and programs as indicated by need;
- Respond to immediate needs;
- Reduce high-risk behaviours and/or accidental drug overdoses causing death;
- Improve the flow between services (inside/outside);
- Provide hope, positive role models, and support (PWLE);
- Increase community safety;
- Decrease recidivism.

The centre is described as a “HUB-like venue” as four different social service agencies are located within the centre under the same roof (Kellen, 2015b). Multi-sectoral collaboration is

essential to the centre's success; distinct agencies must learn to operate together, with the goal of offering improved discharge programming services. The services provided at the Reintegration Centre attempt to address the immediate and diverse needs of recently released inmates, which is difficult due to the complexity of need, and the limited funding the centre has been able to secure. The services at the Reintegration Centre include: needs assessment programming; HR education and support; community accompaniment to referral points; phone/computer access; transportation assistance; clothing and food; as well as a waiting room and resource area for family members and loved ones (Kellen, 2015a).

The Reintegration Centre is a powerful example of a community planning initiative which seeks to redress inadequacies in governmental programming. Many of the services provided are short-term responses to a difficult transitional process; yet ideally, the Centre will represent part of a greater initiative to provide sufficient discharge programming to all of those released from provincial correctional facilities.

### 1.3: Methodologies

In order to explore the factors which led to the Reintegration Centre's establishment, a case study methodology was used, along with key informant interviews. Yin (2009: 18) defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g. a "case"), set within its real world context – especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". This definition is very relevant to the study because of the Reintegration Centre's environmental setting. While the interviews focus on the work that takes place at the Reintegration Centre, the nearby detention centre drastically shapes the interactions which occur at the Reintegration Centre. Stake (1995: xi) provides a similar definition: "case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity

within important circumstances”. The Reintegration Centre lends itself to case study analysis due to its unique position as the first reintegration centre in Canada. By examining and focusing specifically on the unique factors which have affected the Reintegration Centre’s development, it is possible to draw inferences about potential program design for similar future facilities. Yin (2012) explains how case study findings may clarify the relationships between specific concepts, theories or events, which might influence other situations, away from the case study environment, where similar concepts, theories or events are present. This study does not aim to generalize findings to other comparable settings. However, the qualitative data obtained in this study could be used to guide the development of other reintegration projects.

The research design is based on a mixed-methods approach, using key informant interviews to analyze the factors contributing to the Centre’s creation, and how the Centre has functioned since its opening in September 2014. My research objective was to examine the historical development of the centre, thus I conducted six interviews with John Howard Society staff to understand the experiences of those involved at the grassroots level. The interviews were loosely structured, based on questions included in Appendix A, and spanned a range of 15 minutes to 45 minutes. Interviews were conducted at the Reintegration Centre, during the day, at a time convenient for the interviewees and were recorded with the permission of the interviewee. Three interviews were completed with peer support workers, who provided a nuanced description of the peer support model, and highlighted the powerful impact of their work. The relationship between incarceration, reintegration and housing supports requires significant attention, thus two interviews were conducted with housing support workers, who provided valuable insight regarding the precarious housing position many individuals experience upon release from correctional facilities. Lastly, one interview was conducted with a managerial staff

member who focused on funding challenges and operational capacity in the context of limited financial resources.

Data from key informant interviews was supplemented with newspaper and journal articles, as well as several books focusing specifically on reintegration. Policy and legal documents, as well as census data, complemented the qualitative answers obtained in the interviews. Given the recent timeline of events, academic data on the Reintegration Centre is limited; thus, media reports provided pertinent contextual information. The literature review is grounded in academic discourse, and while many of the authors focus on US-based case studies, there are certain seminal Canadian texts that influenced this study.

#### 1.4: Roadmap

The literature review will follow this chapter, providing a contextual background to prisoner reintegration and recidivism (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 explains the current status of Canadian discharge planning, which will describe the significance of Toronto South's high remand population, and the "revolving door syndrome" (Gaetz and O'Grady, 2006). In Chapter 4, the reader will gain an understanding of the John Howard Society Reintegration Centre in terms of the centre's history, its relationship to the United Way's community hub model, and the peer support worker framework. Chapter 5 presents the results from the interviews, which will illustrate the Centre's successes and challenges over its first year of operation. In Chapter 6, comprehensive analysis focusing on the necessity of mandating discharge planning for all of those who access provincial correctional facilities is presented.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following chapter will explore the background knowledge necessary to comprehend the subsequent case study. Prisoner reintegration is examined in-depth, concentrating on

different definitions. The connection between reintegration and recidivism is introduced, as well as the relationship between incarceration and homelessness. Financial implications are evaluated; the current emphasis on imprisonment is unsustainable, and large savings may be accrued with a policy shift to reintegration.

## 2.1: Defining Reintegration

Reintegration escapes a simplistic definition. Travis and Visher (2005: 1) define reentry as the “inevitable consequence of incarceration” and while incarceration without reentry is close to impossible, barring death while incarcerated, or a life sentence, such an obvious relationship is often ignored by policymakers and government officials. Petersilia (2003: 3) provides a more comprehensive definition; “prisoner reentry includes all activities and programming conducted to prepare ex-convicts to return safely to the community and to live as law-abiding citizens”. Seiter and Kadela (2003: 368) specify a two-part definition:

1. Correctional programs (United States and Canada) that focus on the transition from prison to community (prerelease, work release, halfway houses, or specific reentry programs) and
2. Programs that have initiated treatment (substance abuse, life skills, education, cognitive/behavioral, sex/violent offender) in a prison setting and have linked with a community program to provide continuity of care.

Gaetz and O’Grady (2006: 20) argue effective prisoner reentry programming encompasses “three interconnected spheres of activity: discharge planning, in-prison support programs, and post-release supports and community supervision”.

Defining reintegration is of fundamental importance, yet the narrative surrounding reintegration is problematic and requires substantial alterations. Taxman (2004: 32) explains the paradoxical relationship between incarceration and reentry; “the very nature of prisons is counter to the stated goals of reentry – to improve public safety by providing offenders with services that are perceived to reduce the risk of recidivism and improve integration into the community”.

Maruna (2001) describes the difficulties associated with the societal expectation that inmates will seamlessly and instantaneously transition from incarcerated individuals to law-abiding citizens. Instead of thinking about “going straight and being crooked”, society would be better to consider reintegration as “going curved” or “straight enough” (Maruna, 2001: 43). Petersilia (2003: 173) defines the ideal: “every facet of the correctional experience – both inside and outside prison walls – should be connected in some way to the preparation and support necessary to help the offender make a successful transition”. For the purposes of this research, reintegration refers to Petersilia’s (2003) broad definition; however, it is important to note that reintegration must account for the processes of change to occur. Reintegration is complex, requiring significant time and adequate preparation, as each individual requires unique services upon release.

## 2.2: What Constitutes Reintegration?

Incarceration forcibly excludes prisoners from society, thereby necessitating a comprehensive reintegration process. Visser and Travis (2003: 96) highlight the many critical tasks that must be completed upon release: “finding a place to live; securing formal identification; re-establishing ties with family; returning to high-risk places and situations; and the daunting challenge of finding a job, often with a poor work history, and now, a criminal record”. Reintegration is complex. Holistic support services must be available to address the many facets of daily life which have been disrupted by incarceration. Graffam et al. (2005) suggest four principles that should comprise any successful support program for previous inmates: early intervention; responsiveness; comprehensiveness; and long-term commitment.

In terms of the services provided, reintegration planning can differ substantially across institutions and jurisdictions. Taxman (2004) articulates a transition process that addresses both the survival needs (e.g. food, housing, employment) as well as skill-based services (e.g.

treatment, literacy, job training). The scheduling of providing support services is also important to consider as many formerly incarcerated individuals face a myriad of challenges. Reintegration planning is most effective when completed gradually (Petersilia, 2003). The formerly incarcerated population is highly diverse, thus a case management approach tailored to meet the needs of former inmates may be a more successful method than standardized programming (Cnaan et al., 2008). Petersilia (2004: 6-7) conducted substantive research regarding successful prisoner reentry programs, and established the following criteria:

We would design prison reentry programs that took place mostly in the community (as opposed to institutional settings), were intensive (at least six months long), focused on high-risk individuals (with risk level determined by classification instruments rather than clinical judgments), used cognitive-behavioural treatment techniques, and matched therapist and program to the specific learning styles and characteristics of individual offenders.

Cnaan et al. (2008) describe a rehabilitative environment premised on strong relationships and social support systems, available employment, financial assistance, and a gradual progression to independence. While reintegration programming may vary in different contexts, the underlying intention is to facilitate an efficient transition from incarceration back into society.

### 2.3: Reintegration in Practice

Former inmates require a multitude of services upon release from prison, due to the complexity of re-establishing life after incarceration. Reintegration is perceived differently by academics and practitioners; yet, there is some consensus that the moment of release from prison is pivotal to the transition back to community life (Travis et al., 2001; Bradley et al., 2001; Metraux and Culhane, 2004; Petersilia, 2003). Reintegration is a time sensitive phenomenon; Petersilia (2003: 18) provides the following assessment:

We must front-load post-prison services during the first six months after release. Recidivism statistics show that two-thirds of people released from prison will eventually

be rearrested... nearly 30% of all released inmates are rearrested for a serious crime in the first six months.

The timing of reintegration programming is fundamental to effective service provision: Bradley et al. (2001: 8) explain: “the ‘port of entry’ for prisoners – that time immediately leading up to and following discharge – is generally seen as a very vulnerable time for this population”. Travis et al. (2001) emphasize the moment of release as pivotal, regarding the hurdles that arise immediately upon leaving prison. Such hurdles are primarily logistical, which illustrates basic discharge planning services can substantially improve the reintegration process (Travis et al., 2001). Metraux and Culhane (2004) justify immediate interventions upon release due to the increased risk of shelter use upon reentry, which substantially subsides after two months. The following sections explore the challenges releasees face regarding housing, family reconnection, social supports, community integration and engagement, healthcare, and employment supports.

### ***Housing***

Individuals must access appropriate accommodation upon release and housing is generally considered the essential element that defines a successful re-integration process (Bradley et al., 2001). Lutze et al. (2014: 472) re-enforce this claim; “within a coordinated response to reentry, homelessness and residential instability has been identified as one of the greatest challenges confronting ex-offenders and their chance to achieve successful reintegration”. Furthermore, access to adequate housing facilitates reintegration, which ensures the successful reentry of recently released individuals into society as they are able to navigate social situations and access jobs, transportation and finances (Walker et al., 2014). Conversely, Lutze et al. (2014: 473) describe the negative impacts associated with a lack of secure accommodation upon release: “Homelessness and housing instability increases the likelihood of social stigma, exposure to antisocial peers, victimization by others, and ‘shadow work’ that

exists outside of the formal economy such as panhandling, scavenging and street vending that is criminalized in many jurisdictions”. Housing is a critical aspect of a comprehensive and successful reintegration process. However, obtaining accommodation upon release is challenging due to a multitude of reasons. Barrenger (2013: 165) argues that, “acquiring housing postincarceration is difficult due to lack of funding to pay rent, lack of affordable housing stock, and anticrime policies that make certain types of subsidized housing unavailable to persons convicted of certain crimes”. Financial limitations restrict an individual’s ability to access housing, yet structural policy barriers pose a major impediment for many former inmates in their attempts to acquire suitable accommodation.

Previously incarcerated individuals must receive assistance to secure housing arrangements because the risk of returning to prison is greater for those who are discharged into homelessness (Gaetz, 2012; Kushel et al., 2005). Schram et al. (2006) conducted a study which found that unstable housing was the strongest predictor of parole failure, thereby increasing the odds of recidivating by over 900%. While recidivism is measured in different ways, a common approach uses any reconviction during a fixed follow-up period after release (Bonta et al., 2003). For Bonta et al. (2003: 1), “knowledge of the recidivism rate of released inmates is important because it is one of many indicators of success of a prison system’s attempt to reintegrate offenders safely into the community”. The literature on recidivism concentrates on the positive impact of providing accommodation immediately upon release (Parhar and Wormith, 2013; Metraux and Culhane, 2006). According to Parhar and Wormith (2013: 17), “offenders who are released without established accommodation have been found to be three times more likely to reoffend than those who have kept their accommodation”.

A study completed in Washington State confirms these claims: The Reentry Housing Pilot Program (RHPP) offered housing assistance to high-risk inmates leaving prison. From 2008 to 2011, 208 previous inmates were given housing and additional support services and were compared against a group of 208 formerly incarcerated individuals that were under traditional parole supervision. At the conclusion of the three-year study, those who participated in RHPP held significantly fewer convictions and readmissions to prison than the control group (Bahr, 2015). Other studies demonstrate the impact of appropriate accommodation on recidivism: Willis and Grace (2008) establish lack of adequate housing to be the strongest link related to sexual recidivism. The possibility of homelessness upon release is significant, and given the likelihood that those without appropriate accommodation are at a greater risk of recidivism, targeted reintegration housing services are vitally important.

### ***Family Reconnection***

Prison severs many important societal connections as inmates are unable to interact with those outside of prison and previous relationships are jeopardized by the time spent in prison. The absence of support services and employment opportunities, as well as disconnection from family members during incarceration, are associated with reintegration failure (Lynch and Sabol, 2001). Former inmates struggle to resume family relationships upon release, particularly in the case of regaining child custody or visitation rights (Graffam et al., 2004). Challenges linked to family reunification, returning to roles of responsibility within the family unit, and alienation from families and friends are well documented (Baldry et al., 2002; Waul et al., 2002). Although housing is the “lynchpin” that holds the re-integration process together (Bradley et al., 2001), strong family relationships may facilitate the acquisition of suitable accommodation. As Nelson

et al. (1999: 8) explain, “family support has been reported as critical to successful reintegration, particularly in relation to accommodation and emotional support”.

Family relationships represent a substantial, and predominantly accessible resource in the reintegration process. Families are primarily associated with housing; many individuals leaving correctional facilities stay with family members following release. Travis et al. (2001) indicate such housing arrangements may be short-lived solutions, due to social housing regulations, and the strained and tenuous nature of familial relationships. Although families are not always the answer to housing problems, the impact of family ties is demonstrably impactful, especially regarding recidivism. Hairston (1999) found that prisoners with strong family ties during the period of incarceration do better when released than those without such connections. The value of emotional support provided by such relationships is significant and reflects conclusions reached in a study evaluating the effects of family connections in relation to recidivism.

La Bodega de la Familia, a former drug addiction recovery agency situated in the Lower East Side in New York City, connected substance-abusing individuals and their families to services and supports in the community (Travis et al., 2001). The agency is no longer operating and, yet it was founded based on the notion that strengthening family relationships will improve treatment outcomes, reduce the use of arrest and incarceration in response to relapse, and reduce the intrafamilial harms often associated with substance abuse (Sullivan et al., 2002). The program primarily revolved around family case management, with the goal of engaging the individual, family members, supervision officers and treatment providers to create a plan for using the family’s strengths in the reintegration process. While the agency predominantly focused on treatment outcomes, a study completed by the Vera Institute of Justice showcases the agency’s success at reducing recidivism, through improved family relationships. Researchers

compared outcomes for a sample of Bodega participants with outcomes for a comparison group of drug users and their families, and found that Bodega users were half as likely to be arrested and convicted of a new offense as comparison users, both during the study period and in the following six months (Sullivan et al., 2002). These results exemplify the positive consequences of a strong family support system in comprehensive reintegration programming.

### ***Social Supports***

Incarceration is an isolating experience for many inmates, which is particularly damaging for those prisoners who began their sentences with limited social networks. The consequences of an individual's prolonged societal separation complicates the reintegration process, making it immensely difficult for those with limited resources to re-establish former social connections (Nooe, 2010). Metraux and Culhane (2004: 142) focus on the detrimental social impact of being released into homelessness and contend that "the crossing over from incarceration to homelessness, and vice versa, threatens to transform spells of incarceration or homelessness into more long-term patterns of social exclusion". The Canadian criminal justice system facilitates the cyclical relationship between incarceration and homelessness due to the absence of thorough reintegration programming, thereby ensuring individuals remain isolated from their communities. Hattery and Smith (2010: 94) explain the consequences of isolation that pertain to social networks: "The inmate is doubly disadvantaged: he or she is disadvantaged based on his or her location in the social hierarchy and within that location his or her period of incarceration is likely to shrink the little social capital that existed prior to incarceration". A strong and well-developed social network enables previously incarcerated individuals to access other forms of capital, essential to the reintegration process.

During incarceration, prisoners struggle to maintain previous relationships, which negatively impacts social capital stocks and the corresponding network connections. The correctional system erects a barrier between an inmate and the outside world; friends and family are able to visit, yet these visits are short, and many relationships suffer. Walker et al. (2014) describe the limited social resources available to prison populations during incarceration; inmates struggle to find individuals who can facilitate constructive connections to external networks. The relationships formed in prison may facilitate illegal behaviour upon release (Moore, 1996). Thus, positive peer relationships in the period after release help to ensure former inmates avoid returning to lifestyles which led to their incarceration (Maruna, 2001).

The positive consequences of a well-developed social network are numerous, and may lead to stable housing and suitable employment. The relationship is bi-directional – social connections may facilitate access to housing, and secure housing allows individuals to further develop social networks. Lutze (2014) indicates housing stability serves as a conduit to access and build the social connections essential to ensure long-term community reintegration. A social network comprised primarily of homeless shelter residents is unlikely to result in “instrumental returns, such as better jobs, earlier promotions, higher earnings or bonuses, and expressive returns such as better mental health” (Hattery and Smith, 2010: 96). Incarceration is a destabilizing social experience that jeopardizes previous relationships, negatively affecting the transitional process.

### ***Community Integration and Engagement***

Reintegration involves multiple stages and occurs in several locations. Yet, the community represents a critical transitional setting. Former inmates require numerous services, such as housing, healthcare, employment services, and counselling assistance upon their release.

Because a successful transition depends on the availability of such services, it is beneficial if these programs exist in close proximity to the inmate upon release. Travis et al. (2001) found that people leaving prison predominantly return to urban areas and specifically to disadvantaged neighbourhoods within these communities. Many of these communities lack the fundamental social services, treatment facilities, housing and employment opportunities that are essential to those leaving the correctional system (Pager, 2007). The locations previously incarcerated individuals access upon release must be sufficiently serviced to accommodate diverse needs, and these communities must ensure the risk of recidivism is mitigated where possible.

The literature on recidivism and neighbourhood supports emphasizes the importance of involving community-based agencies in the reintegration process. Petersilia (2004) explains how an effective reentry process depends on associations developed with community partners, families, justice professionals, and victims of crime. Because many diverse actors are involved during reentry, resources must be allocated broadly in a community. Travis and Petersilia (2001: 310) posit:

The creation of a community-based intermediary working on criminal justice issues could conceivably win the trust of the community and coalesce community capacity such as churches, small businesses, service providers, schools, and civic institutions to support the work of reintegration of returning prisoners.

Graffam et al. (2005) highlight recidivism is reduced when in-prison treatment is combined with community-based aftercare, which reveals the merits of a more holistic approach to reintegration programming. Community agencies are well positioned to address reentry challenges – “the risks to relapse can be identified here; and the positive power of social networks can be found here” (Travis and Petersilia, 2001: 309). The current funding scenario favours correctional facilities, yet a shift must occur to concentrate resources and financial investments in community-based agencies.

## *Health Care*

Upon release, ex-prisoners exhibit heightened vulnerability, especially in relation to health-related issues. Barrenger and Draine (2013) demonstrate persons with mental illness and co-occurring substance abuse disorders are overrepresented in jails and prisons. The difficulties associated with reintegration upon release are substantial, yet those difficulties are amplified for inmates experiencing mental illness and substance abuse disorders (Bahr, 2015). During incarceration, many inmates adhere to strict treatment programs for substance abuse disorders, as well as mental illness. These programs are comprehensive and require substantial coordination, which is difficult to replicate in a community setting. Hammett et al. (2001) emphasize the challenges that arise upon release. The prison setting is a controlled environment, and when individuals leave correctional facilities, they are exposed to high-risk behaviours. It is imperative that connections to medical services are established before an inmate leaves the correctional system.

The risk of overdose upon release is substantial and demonstrates the necessity of providing healthcare services, especially harm reduction programs. A study of 2330 drug-related deaths in Ontario was completed to identify characteristics of opioid-users whose death was related to opioid-toxicity; of the 46 individuals whose death was temporally related to custody or release from a correctional facility, 43% of these deaths occurred within 7 days of release from jail (Madadi et al., 2013). Many of these deaths were accidental—inmates lacked the knowledge concerning both lowered tolerance levels after reduced access to drugs during incarceration, and the increase in potency of street drugs over years of incarceration (Binswanger et al., 2012).

The period immediately following release is vitally important. Early interventions are essential to ensuring reintegration occurs successfully, as well as reducing the likelihood of

overdose. The social context upon release may affect the likelihood former inmates relapse. An environment which fails to integrate releasees and amplifies triggers to use drugs negatively affects individuals who are predisposed to substance use disorders, and makes it difficult for them to maintain sobriety (Binswanger et al., 2012). Seiter and Kadela (2003) compared two groups of releasees and found that participants of drug rehabilitation treatment programs were less likely to have been re-arrested or to have returned to using drugs. The impetus to mandate healthcare services upon release is evident, concerning both the social implications of healthier ex-prisoners and the demonstrated reductions in recidivism.

### ***Employment Supports***

The challenge of securing stable employment upon release is considerable – numerous barriers prevent ex-prisoners from entering the workforce. Prison disconnects inmates from the outside world and they leave correctional facilities unprepared to manage the changes that have occurred since their incarceration. Bahr (2015) explains the difficulties associated with obtaining work upon release; many ex-prisoners are uneducated and possess few jobs skills, and even if they had employable skills prior to their incarceration, such skills are likely obsolete at the time of release. The stigma of a criminal record is a major obstacle; many employers are hesitant to hire ex-prisoners with histories of incarceration and substance abuse (Seiter and Kadela, 2003).

Due to the time spent away from family and friends, social relationships suffer, which negatively affects network connections and may hinder an inmate's ability to access job opportunities upon release (Visher and Travis, 2003). Furthermore, financial difficulties pose a significant issue if an individual is able to secure an interview, specifically regarding transportation to the interview and specific clothing or equipment required to complete the interview (Webster et al., 2001). Additionally, personal difficulties, such as behavioural

problems and low self-esteem, confidence and motivation, hamper an individual's attempts to secure employment, and such challenges are felt acutely by ex-prisoners trying to enter the workforce (Webster et al., 2001). By acquiring stable employment, ex-prisoners are able to access housing, re-establish social connections, and initiate the complex mental transition associated with re-entry.

Petersilia (2003) recommends comprehensive prison rehabilitation programs to reduce recidivism, and increase employment; she suggests prisons develop academic skills training, vocational skills training, cognitive skills programs, and drug abuse treatment. Such programs are important, and provide valuable job skills training, yet assistance must continue upon release. For instance, programs such as the Safer Foundation, the Center for Employment Opportunities, and Re-Integration of Offenders assist with job skills training, but also provide case management for other services, secure job placements, and continue to work with ex-prisoners for a follow-up period (Travis et al., 2001). The follow-up period may prove influential for employers, who demonstrate a greater inclination to hire ex-prisoners if a case manager is available to work with the individual to help avert problems (Travis et al., 2001).

In addition to providing vocational training, and establishing community connections upon release from correctional facilities, policy and legal changes may help to ensure ex-prisoners are able to enter the work force. Currently, laws prevent individuals with criminal records from accessing particular jobs, and policy restricts employers from hiring ex-prisoners (Taxman et al., 2002). Employment options for releasees are limited to low-skilled jobs with no additional benefits, which is primarily a consequence of such formal and informal restrictions (Taxman et al., 2002). A successful post-release transition is contingent on a multitude of factors,

yet employment is a critical component of the reintegration process, and targeted support services are necessary to ensure inmates receive the help they require.

#### 2.4: The Economic Argument

Reintegration programs are practical from a financial perspective; “numerous studies show that the alternative of offering no supports upon the completion of their sentences often leads to continued criminal activity and therefore additional costs to all levels of government” (Stapleton et al., 2011). The current correctional system is expensive and recidivism rates remain significant. In Ontario, 41.6% of adults released with a provincial sentence of more than 6 months returned within 24 months (Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, 2008). The criminal justice system lacks rehabilitative capacity, yet millions of dollars are allocated to developing new prisons, which adheres to the predominantly unsuccessful model that remains the conventional practice.

Stapleton et al. (2011) demonstrate comprehensive reintegration programming has a substantial impact on recidivism, and is a cost-effective approach to reducing crime and ensuring other facilities, such as hospitals and shelters, remain an emergency option. Ontario’s Minister of Correctional Services, Yassir Naqvi, explains the problematic nature of the current correctional model, “Right now, it’s very much a warehousing system” (CBC News, 2016a). The financial implications of supporting a warehouse system with limited reintegrative capacity are substantial; cost-savings measures are possible by altering the existing correctional model.

A report commissioned by the John Howard Society of Toronto and the Toronto Community Foundation completed a cost benefit analysis of transitional housing and supports (THS) for two types of ex-prisoners; homeless persons and individuals released under Section 810 restrictions. Stapleton et al. (2011: 17) define a homeless ex-prisoner: “individuals who have

completed the incarceration portion of their sentences and who may be on probation or parole, and have ‘no fixed address’ upon leaving the correctional facility”. Section 810 persons are those who have completed their sentence and have entered into a recognizance, or bond, under section 810 of the Criminal Code (Stapleton et al., 2011). These ex-prisoners are deemed to be dangerous individuals, and agree to particular conditions upon their release. Section 810 of the Criminal Code articulates the possible offences which may warrant additional conditions in order to protect public safety. The offences are mainly where security of the person is threatened by fear of injury or damage; fear of criminal organization offence; fear of sexual offence; or fear of serious personal injury.

Stapleton et al. (2011) discovered the per-person savings provided by transitional housing and supports are estimated to be \$350,000 for a homeless person; and \$109,000 for a Section 810 prisoner. The provincial investment in correctional services is exorbitant; according to MCSCS (2010), the daily cost of incarcerating an adult is about \$183 as compared to about \$5 per day in community supervision. Shapcott (2007) establishes the financial consequences of relying on correctional facilities for housing; provincial jail accrues a government investment of \$4,333 per month. These statistics demonstrate the highly inefficient nature of correctional services. Furthermore, Minister Naqvi explains many of those currently incarcerated should be in treatment programs (CBC News, 2016a). As previously expounded, housing is integral to a successful reintegration process, and the costs of providing housing remain drastically more affordable than the investments required to operate correctional facilities. Subsidized housing requires a monthly municipal investment of \$701 for rent supplements, or \$199.92 for social housing (Gaetz, 2012). Providing housing upon release is a smart financial policy, as well as a proven means of reducing recidivism.

## Chapter 3: Discharge Planning in Canada

### 3.1: What is Discharge Planning?

Discharge planning represents a specific component of a comprehensive prisoner reentry strategy. Gaetz and O'Grady (2006: 20) specify "discharge planning refers to counselling and support programs that prepare inmates for release and reintegration into the community". Successful discharge planning is complex; numerous factors are essential aspects of a useful program. Firstly, assessment is essential to understanding the particular needs and circumstances of a former inmate. Bahr (2015) asserts the importance of conducting an initial needs assessment to assess where an inmate requires assistance. By completing a thorough assessment, programming and supports can be tailored to the individual, which is an important aspect of effective discharge planning. The transitional services offered to previously incarcerated individuals must reflect their unique circumstances. Former inmates are not homogenous, thus personalized programming is vital.

Gaetz and O'Grady (2006: 21) identify the second feature of discharge planning: "the development of a release plan that prepares an inmate for release, and outlines housing, employment and educational needs and opportunities that will have to be in place in the community once the inmate is released". The release plan provides concrete measures to ensure the inmate is able to access services immediately upon discharge from a correctional facility. Parhar and Wormith (2013) explain the turbulent atmosphere releasees experience upon returning to the community; in addition to the challenges posed by finding employment and housing, many former inmates suffer emotional instability and a lack of social supports. A release plan provides some sense of stability in a chaotic environment and mitigates the challenges associated with the transitional process.

Lastly, discharge planning involves the transfer of responsibility from the correctional facility to the community, where support services must be available (Gaetz and O’Grady, 2006). Travis et al. (2001: 30) insist, “the critical point for reentry management is to link prison-based services with community based services”. The reentry process does not end upon release; community-based treatment and support programs are critically important to ensure a smooth transition occurs. The assumption individuals are able to faultlessly transition back into society upon release is problematic—community-based care is essential to ensuring a successful reintegration process. Travis and Visher (2005: 255) articulate the importance of involving multiple actors in assembling “a consortium of reentry agencies that would work with families, employers, local residents, community organizations and ex-offender groups to create ‘concentric circles of support’ for returning prisoners”. A constructive discharge planning program is contingent on the involvement of vital community organizations.

### 3.2: The Current Canadian Discharge Planning System

Discharge planning in Canada reflects the nuances of the federal and provincial judicial systems. Statistics Canada (2015b) explains, “The provincial/territorial system is responsible for adults serving custodial sentences that are less than two years, those who are being held while awaiting trial or sentencing (remand), as well as offenders serving community sentences, such as probation”. The federal system has jurisdiction over adults (18 years and older) who have been sentenced for two years or more, and is responsible for supervising individuals on conditional release in the community, otherwise known as parole or statutory release (Government of Canada, 2013). Gaetz and O’Grady (2006) argue the quality of discharge planning for federally incarcerated individuals is superior to what provincial inmates receive, which is reflected in federal and provincial policy. Federal correctional facilities complete several steps upon

sentencing. An intake assessment is conducted to determine an individual's risk level and needs; this assessment is then utilized to prepare a correctional plan which outlines the rehabilitation activities and programs for the inmate (Government of Canada, 2014). The Corrections and Conditional Release Regulations (SOR/92-620) stipulate:

The institutional head shall ensure that a correctional plan for an inmate is developed as soon as practicable after the reception of the inmate in the penitentiary, and is maintained, with the inmate to ensure that the inmate receives the most effective programs at the appropriate time in the inmate's sentence to prepare the inmate for reintegration into the community, on release, as a law-abiding citizen (Government of Canada, 2016).

On the day of release, federal inmates are supplied with: "a copy of the release certificate; an updated CSC Identification card; trust account money; two weeks supply of medication; and personal effects" (Government of Canada, 2014). Discharge planning in Canadian federal correctional facilities exists, yet community-based support services remain minimal, and improvements are possible. Novac et al. (2006) demonstrate federal facilities are mandated to provide supervised parole, yet post-discharge support in the community is not required. Useful discharge planning depends on comprehensive programming—an imbalanced approach which focuses exclusively on the time spent incarcerated is insufficient.

Provincial correctional facilities adhere to their own distinct guidelines governing discharge planning; Gaetz and O'Grady (2006) suggest there does not seem to be a standardized procedure in place across provincial jurisdictions. The Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services adheres to the following mandate (Commissioner's Directive 726): "to ensure that correctional programs meet the identified needs of offenders and promote successful reintegration" (Gaetz and O'Grady, 2006: 56). It appears to be a positive directive, yet the realities of implementation are unclear. Furthermore, the Province of Ontario does not officially

mandate discharge planning for all prisoners, only those convicted of a crime (Gaetz and O’Grady, 2009).

Those held on remand, who may be defined as “accused people who are placed into custody while awaiting a further court appearance”, are not mandated to receive any form of discharge planning (Gaetz and O’Grady, 2009: 2). The remand population has experienced significant growth over the last two decades, and currently represents approximately 60% of Ontario’s prison population (Statistics Canada, 2015b). The Supreme Court of Canada describes the deplorable pre-trial conditions, “an accused placed in remand is often subjected to the worst aspects of our correctional system by being detained in dilapidated, overcrowded cells without access to recreational or educational programs” (*R v. Hall*, 2002). The Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA) demonstrates the median length of pre-trial detention is 7 days, which appears minimal, however, this process is extremely disruptive and may result in “lost income and employment, eviction, emergency child care needs, missed medication and any number of negative repercussions” (Deshman and Myers, 2014: 9). Additionally, the bail procedure is exceedingly problematic because it disadvantages marginalized individuals: “Legally innocent individuals are processed through a bail system that is chaotic and unnecessarily risk-averse and that disproportionately penalizes – and frequently criminalizes – poverty, addiction and mental illness” (Deshman and Myers, 2014: 1).

Gaetz and O’Grady (2006) explain convicted prisoners are given a “correctional plan” that indicates needs and offers recommendations for appropriate programming. Intensive support services, such as psychological assessments, are mandatory for inmates convicted of violent crimes and sex offences, yet those living with mental health concerns are not required to complete an assessment (Gaetz and O’Grady, 2006). Prisoners experiencing substance use

problems receive counselling (Gaetz and O'Grady, 2006), thus certain support programs are offered, yet many are contingent on the particular individual, and are not universally available. Gaetz and O'Grady (2006: 56) describe the release process: "All prisoners (who were convicted of a crime) receive information on the conditions of their discharge, a 'certificate of release', and identification. They are issued any savings they may have accrued while in prison, and all prisoners are released with a minimum of \$50". The items provided primarily address short-term, logistical concerns. Long-term reintegration programming and associated support services are not officially mandated, and consequently remain markedly absent from provincial discharge planning policy.

### 3.3: The Emergence of a Service Gap and the Revolving Door

A service gap has emerged in which community agencies and non-profit organizations have developed programs to fill the role of provincial government discharge planning. Cathexis Consulting (2007) indicates housing needs of releasees are routinely ignored, which leaves community groups responsible for a substantial portfolio of homeless, or at-risk of homelessness individuals. These organizations generally do not have adequate capacity to fill this role, yet without their contributions, housing needs are completely ignored. Many of these agencies are also responsible for discharge planning, as correctional staff do not provide services to all inmates, only those convicted of a crime. The John Howard Society and Ontario Multi-Faith Council on Spiritual and Religious Care perform discharge planning services with incarcerated inmates, in addition to the provision of transitional services in the community (Gaetz and O'Grady (2009). The John Howard Society of Ontario (2000: 1) explains: "Funding for many community-based programs and services for offenders have been eliminated or reduced. These include programs geared to: employment, family counselling, men who are abusive, community

youth support, diversion and discharge planning for those being released”. Community agencies are an essential element of Ontario’s inadequate discharge planning system as funding cuts have diminished organizational capacity, which negatively impacts the inmate reintegration process.



*This image depicts the cyclical relationship between incarceration and homelessness (Kellen, 2015b).*

Discharge planning is a vital aspect of successful reintegration programming, especially considering the likelihood that individuals cycle through correctional facilities. Novac et al. (2006) characterize the relationship between homelessness and incarceration as a revolving door effect where imprisonment destabilizes housing arrangements, causing homelessness, which has become increasingly criminalized. Policies across Canadian urban centres have entrenched the likelihood that homelessness leads to incarceration. The Safe Streets Act in Ontario and Vancouver’s efforts to criminalize sleeping and panhandling in public spaces turn homelessness into a criminal activity (Gaetz and O’Grady, 2009). Homeless individuals are frequently arrested for subsistence-related strategies, such as being charged with trespassing or sleeping outside (Fischer et al., 2008). Conversely, incarceration increases the likelihood of homelessness upon release (Kellen et al., 2010).

Kellen et al. (2010) conducted a study on the housing situation of adult men serving sentences in Toronto area jails. Survey results indicated that 22.9 percent of prisoners

interviewed were homeless upon incarceration, while projected rates of homelessness upon release would increase by 40 percent. Overall, 32.2 percent of recently released inmates intended to go to a shelter, live on the street, or couch-surf at the home of a friend, while 12 percent remained at a risk of homelessness since they were unsure of their destination upon release. If these two groups are combined, a total of 44.6 percent are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Kellen et al. (2010: 27) conclude: “This is a large, identifiable stream of people who should be targeted for assistance to reduce chronic homelessness”.

The chronically homeless population can be characterized as “those persons most like the stereotypical profile of the skid-row homeless”, who typically suffer debilitating substance addictions and mental illness (Kuhn and Culhane, 1998: 211). This population is deeply embedded within the homelessness system—they access emergency shelter services as a form of long-term housing (Kuhn and Culhane, 1998). Aubry et al. (2013) studied shelter users in Toronto, Ottawa and Guelph and determined that the chronically homeless population is responsible for over half of the shelter bed stays in Toronto and Ottawa over a four-year period. Gaetz (2012: 6) re-enforces this sentiment; “research indicates 20% of the American homeless population that is defined as chronic accounts for 60% of total service costs”. These statistics illustrate the importance of an intervention aimed to address chronic homelessness, as a targeted approach could have lasting and substantial impacts (Culhane and Metraux, 2008).

Due to the inadequacy of services, institutional reliance develops in which emergency health care facilities and correctional institutions become long-term housing options. Homelessness is associated with severe mental disorder and prior psychiatric history (Zapf et al., 1996); upon release, many former inmates access hospitals, which also leads to eventual homelessness upon discharge, and reincarceration. Novac et al. (2006: 7) posit, “For some

individuals, going from shelter to jail to hospital and doing so repeatedly became a revolving door from which it is difficult to escape. This is a pernicious pattern of transinstitutionalization”. Discharge planning services actively address such patterns and initiate a process of comprehensive societal reintegration, involving the acquisition of stable accommodation and employment assistance.

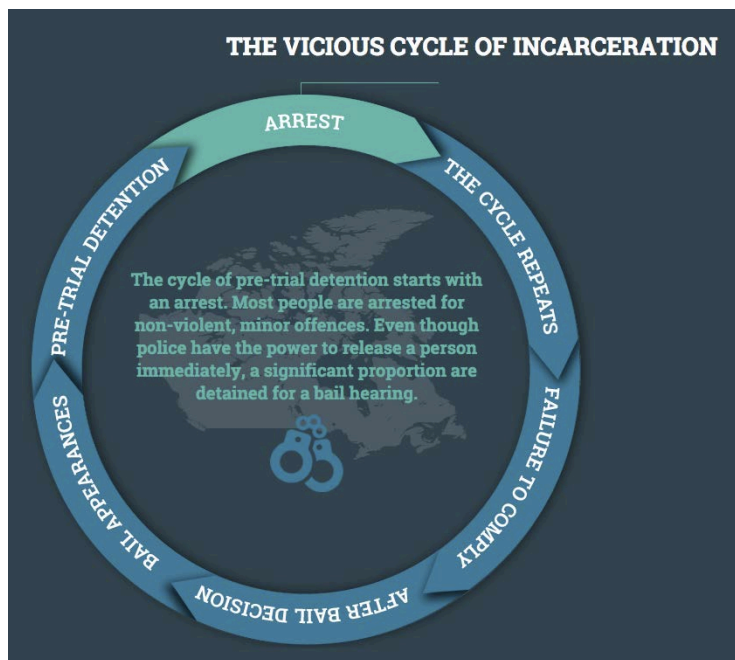
## **Chapter 4: The John Howard Society Reintegration Centre**

### **4.1: Operational Vision**

The Reintegration Centre in south Etobicoke is a product of the John Howard Society’s dedication to “effective, just and humane responses to the causes and consequences of crime” (John Howard Society of Ontario, 2016). As stipulated in their mandate, the John Howard Society of Toronto offers alternatives to prison/crime prevention; in-reach to prisons; and post-release strategies and services (Kellen, 2015b). The Reintegration Centre is a facility created to address the service gap which exists upon release from correctional facilities, and was established in response to the opening of the Toronto South Detention Centre. The Toronto South Detention Centre was opened on January 27, 2014, as the replacement to the Toronto Jail, the Mimico Correctional Centre and the Toronto West Detention Centre (Kellen, 2015a). The Toronto South Detention Centre is the largest correctional facility in Canada, with capacity for 1620 male inmates held primarily on remand (Kellen, 2015b).

Due to the current capacity restraints, the detention centre averages 890 daily inmates (Kellen et al., 2015). The predicted average stay for remanded inmates is 34 days (Kellen et al., 2015), and as illustrated in *R v. Hall*, remanded prison populations experience the worst aspects of the correctional system. A presentation prepared by staff from the John Howard Society of Toronto, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto South Detention Centre, and Cota

Health reveals the implications of such a high remand population; “Many remanded inmates spend very little time at the facility due to frequent court appearances, and medical appointments.



*This image depicts the cyclical process of incarceration (Deshman and Myers, 2010).*

High volume of inmates with complex needs and high turnover of remanded inmates makes it difficult for staff volunteers to engage with each inmate” (Kellen et al., 2015). The Reintegration Centre attempts to address these issues by offering a supportive environment where inmates can access services immediately upon release.

The “Reintegration Centre Dream” involves several interconnected goals, which reflects the conditions of successful reintegration programming. Inmates are unique, and the challenges experienced at the Toronto South Detention Centre are incredibly diverse. Many of the available services at the Reintegration Centre predominantly address short-term needs. However, seemingly minor services such as transportation assistance, clothing, and food drastically improve the inmate reintegration process. Novac et al. (2006: 32) explain:

It is not unusual for persons to appear before the court and be released on the same day, from the courthouse. Some people are transported to the court in their jail issue uniforms

(orange jumpsuits and blue shoes) and are released by the court in this attire, not having had a day to work towards their release plan.

This quote illustrates the extent to which inmates are unprepared for release; any support services provided at the centre are highly useful.

The location of the Toronto South Detention Centre merits further consideration, as the impact of the Reintegration Centre's support programs are predicated on the unavailability of services in the nearby neighbourhood. Located south of Lakeshore, the Detention Centre and Reintegration Centre are situated in a primarily industrial neighbourhood, close to GO Transit Maintenance Facilities, as well as rail yards and warehouses. Social services are primarily absent from the local community; for instance, there is no men's shelter in south Etobicoke.

Furthermore, assistance with logistical complications upon release may affect more long-term goals, such as recidivism rates. The Reintegration Centre's primary goals revolve around ensuring a successful reintegration process, by conducting immediate triage, assessment and "warm referrals" from dedicated professionals to "homeless shelters; housing help; addiction detox and treatment; legal assistance; mental health assessment and referrals and other support services and programs across the city" (Kellen et al., 2015). Comprehensive reintegration programming may reduce the risk of recidivism, and may also act to lessen the likelihood of accidental death caused by overdose following release.

#### 4.2: Community Hub Model

The Reintegration Centre is conceptualized similarly to the United Way Community Hub model, in which multiple social service agencies are conveniently located in one facility – otherwise termed a one-stop shopping approach. This strategy has been recognized as an valuable service provision framework and the Government of Ontario is dedicated to delivering public services through local, community hubs. The Strategic Framework and Action Plan for

Community Hubs in Ontario states, “Community hubs provide a central access point for a range of needed health and social services, along with cultural, recreational, and green spaces to nourish community life” (Government of Ontario, 2015). The Hub model was inspired by the growing need to address underserved communities in Toronto’s inner suburbs.

The Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force, an initiative created by the City of Toronto and United Way of Greater Toronto, and funded by the Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario, designated particular areas of Toronto as Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) and identified several concrete strategies to improve quality of life and reduce gun related violence. Many of the so-called NIAs lack essential services, and suffer from insufficient capital investment; thus, the community hub model was designed to target these issues and locate multiple services in a central facility, easily accessible to the particular community. The Strategic Framework and Action Plan for Community Hubs in Ontario identifies two major benefits associated with community hubs; economies of scale allow service providers to capitalize on shared “back-office” duties and residents can access a wider array of services with ease (Government of Ontario, 2015). The report acknowledges the importance of collaborative partnerships; previous service provision models reflected the rigidity of service silos; yet, that approach is demonstrably out-dated and inefficient. Program coordination is greatly improved by locating services at a central, accessible facility.

The literature surrounding reintegration supports a systems-oriented approach to service provision (Hammett et al., 2001; Lutze et al., 2013). Releasees are faced with a myriad of physical, social and mental challenges upon release. Requiring such individuals to access multiple facilities which address one aspect of their needs is time-consuming, logistically challenging, and may be expensive, depending on the location of particular services. A

constructive reintegration program involves multiple partners, and stipulates facilities will provide diverse services. Hammett et al. (2001: 397) explain, “Another stumbling block for transitional programs is the lack of coordination and information exchange among cognizant agencies, including the correctional department, the public health department, and community-based providers”. Lutze et al. (2013) emphasize the multiplicity of challenges faced by former inmates and how such diverse needs frequently exceed an organization’s operational capacity. Coordinated responses are fundamental to ensuring a functional reintegration process.

The Reintegration Centre is currently partnered with Cota Health, African Canadian Legal Clinic, Margaret’s Housing and Community Support Services, Fostering, Empowering and Advocating Together for Children of Incarcerated Parents, and key stakeholders include: Toronto South Detention Centre, Toronto Justice Collaborative, 22 Division, Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre, as well as Advisory and Funding Committee members (Kellen et al., 2015). The facility is very conveniently positioned; the Detention Centre is situated at 160 Horner Avenue, while the Reintegration Centre is located at 215 Horner Avenue, which is approximately a four-minute walk. The centre is strategically located to provide accessible support services for former inmates who lack access to social service agencies and other essential programs.

#### 4.3: Peer Support Worker Program

The Reintegration Centre employs 3 part-time peer support workers, with lived experience of incarceration or substance abuse to provide support to releasees upon their arrival at the centre. There is a growing body of literature which suggests the inclusion of peer support workers is a best practice model to viably serve marginalized populations, including those with

mental illness and substance abuse (Campbell, 2005; Craig et al., 2004; Mead et al., 2001; O'Hagan et al., 2010).

Peer support models are increasingly utilized in correctional facilities, due to the unique nature of the challenges experienced by formerly incarcerated individuals. According to the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (2011), there are four main purposes of peer interventions:

- Targeted: to find employment, refrain from engaging in criminal behaviour, or to help integrate individuals into the community
- Change behaviour: to improve relationships and reduce anti-social behaviours
- Expand opportunities: to help develop personal skills, build confidence, and improve attainment
- Supportive: to build trust and resilience and reduce social isolation.

The purposes outlined above are reflected in the work completed by the peer support workers at the Reintegration Centre.

From a change behaviour perspective, the peers serve as “identity models”, which are individuals previous inmates can easily identify with, and learn from (Maruna, 2001). Their legitimacy derives from their own involvement with the criminal justice system, and by “speaking the same language”, peer support workers provide practical support and act as positive role models to formerly incarcerated individuals (Devilly et al., 2005).

Professional staff are not always appropriate support workers—previous inmates may be less inclined to access their services due to their status as authority figures and their attachment to the correctional facility (Devilly et al., 2005). Many individuals experience loneliness and isolation upon release, due to the difficulty of maintaining social connections while incarcerated. Peer support workers are able to build trusting relationships with former inmates who access the centre; “when people identify with others who they feel are ‘like’ them, they feel a connection” (Mead et al., 2001: 135).

The peer support workers at the Reintegration Centre offer a variety of supportive services. Primarily, they provide accompaniment to referral programs, including mental health agencies, addiction and detox organizations, rental housing offices, educational facilities, and



*The Toronto South Detention Centre, at 160 Horner Ave., and the Reintegration Centre, at 215 Horner Ave (Google Maps).*

other John Howard Society of Toronto support programs. Successful reintegration involves a multitude of agencies and requires organizational collaboration, yet many agencies continue to operate according to isolated sectoral silos, which fails to address the systemic issues relating to reintegration. Peer support workers perform a partnership function, through the Reintegration

Centre's referral process. Many previous inmates access the centre presenting complex needs, and requiring additional services. The peer support workers accompany the individuals to alternate community agencies that provide more specialized support services, regarding addictions, housing, employment and education. Community connections are an important aspect of a successful rehabilitation process, especially considering many formerly incarcerated individuals do not know where to access resources, and frequently lack the capacity to do so.

The peer support workers provide an important role regarding harm reduction, which is of significant concern to those leaving correctional facilities, due to the heightened likelihood of overdose upon release (Madadi et al., 2013). Huang et al. (2011) demonstrate individuals experience anxiety upon release from custody which leads to an increase in high-risk activities involving drug use. Harm reduction kits are offered at the centre, and peers provide guidance to ensure previous inmates are aware of the elevated risk of overdose.

The peer support worker model persuasively addresses many of the challenges experienced by releasees; however, the model is also beneficial to the peer workers themselves. Devilly et al. (2005: 220) posit, "when offenders act as agents of change, they increase the likelihood of changing their own opinions and beliefs regarding offending behaviour, to be consistent with their new role as model". The peer support worker component of the Reintegration Centre is a vital aspect of successful reintegration programming, and positively impacts staff and previous inmates.

#### 4.4: The Toronto South Detention Centre

The Reintegration Centre is fundamentally dependent on the Toronto South Detention Centre, as the majority of the Reintegration Centre's clientele originate from the Detention Centre. Furthermore, the factors which led to the Reintegration Centre's establishment relied

heavily on the projected estimates of daily inmates and releasees at the Toronto South Detention Centre. Because of the high remand population, the turnover levels were estimated extremely high, at approximately 180 releasees per week (Kellen, 2015a). In south Etobicoke, support services for former inmates remain predominantly absent, thus the Reintegration Centre aimed to address the needs of a vulnerable population in an underserved community. Since its opening in January 2014, the Toronto South Detention Centre has operated without sufficient staff, which has impacted its ability to function at full capacity. The Toronto South Detention Centre's current operational situation has negatively affected the Reintegration Centre, in that the number of releasees from the Detention Centre is significantly lower than anticipated; however, the understaffing has also created a desperate situation of poor prison conditions.

A timeline of events yields startling results and demonstrates the severity of the situation. Media outlets, such as the Toronto Star, reported in December 2014 that the jail operated without an infirmary for a year, and was forced to relocate sick inmates to solitary confinement (Dempsey, 2016). Minister Naqvi identified "commissioning activities, including recruitment of new staff" to be responsible for the inadequate health care services at the Toronto South Detention Centre, yet the situation continued to worsen (Dempsey, 2016). Reports demonstrate the Ministry only began to recruit infirmary staff in January 2015, a year after the jail's opening, which highlights the Ministry's incompetence and prompted community outrage (Dempsey, 2016). In January, a human rights complaint was launched against the province; an inmate alleged he was held in solitary confinement for three months because other inmates had complained about his HIV-positive status (Dempsey, 2016). The health care allegations are serious breaches of legislation governing imprisonment; however, the relationship between understaffing and lockdowns is of significant concern to the Reintegration Centre.

Inadequate staffing at the Toronto South Detention Centre heightens the likelihood of lockdown, which exacerbates the current situation of poor prison conditions. A recent sentencing application alleges an inmate was subjected to “frequent and ever-increasing” lockdowns at the Toronto South, amounting to “arbitrary administrative segregation” (Dempsey, 2016). The application suggests the inmate’s time in custody violated the United Nations’ “Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners”, as well as the inmate’s rights under Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms, i.e., his right to be free from cruel and unusual punishment and his right to security of person (Dempsey, 2016). During lockdown, inmates are confined to their 12-by-8-foot cell, and cannot access showers, yard time or visits from family or lawyers (Dempsey, 2016). Lockdowns may last for a few hours, or several days and may occur for security reasons, or because of staff shortages. Staff shortages are primarily a result of vacation leave or sick days, which should be a manageable scenario; however, the Toronto South Detention Centre is understaffed, thus any staff absences are highly detrimental to operational capacity.

Due to the negative publicity surrounding the Toronto South Detention Centre, judges have begun to alter sentencing to divert individuals to alternate correctional institutions. Two recent examples illustrate the impact on judicial sentencing: Ontario Court Justice Elliott Allen cited inadequate medical facilities in her decision to divert two people from jail time at the Toronto South Detention Centre; and Justice Melvyn Green delivered a reduced sentence due to “oppressive and medically compromising” pretrial jail conditions (Dempsey, 2016). These examples represent the possible development of a pattern, and with the jail already operating under capacity, further reductions to inmate population will negatively impact the Reintegration Centre.

## Chapter 5: Everyday Realities

### 5.1: The Early Days

The interviews conducted with John Howard Society staff covered a wide array of topics, due to the diversity of staff member responsibilities. The interviewees unequivocally recognized the importance of the Reintegration Centre; yet, because only one managerial staff member was interviewed, the rationale surrounding the centre's creation was limited to that respondent's perspective. In order to understand the factors which led to the centre's development, a timeline of events merits some consideration.

The Ontario government launched an infrastructure renewal program in the late 1990s, which inspired the development of superjails. In order to create superjails and capitalize on economies of scale and efficient service provision, previous jails were decommissioned, existing facilities were expanded and retrofitted, and new facilities were built (John Howard Society of Ontario, 2006). The then conservative Ontario government was determined to create a new, tough-on-crime environment, where correctional facilities were described using terminology such as "spartan" and "no-frills" (John Howard Society of Ontario, 2006). In addition to the perceived benefits of centrally locating hundreds of inmates, the superjail concept was motivated by a desire to reduce staffing requirements, through an increase of indirect supervision with surveillance technologies. The superjail concept directly contravenes the United Nations *Minimum Standard Rules on the Treatment of Prisoners*, specifically regarding the magnitude of the proposed facilities; "the size of the institution should not be so large that the individualization of treatment is hampered, generally no larger than 500". The political will was unshakeable, and superjail development began in the late 1990s. Such rhetoric essentially fueled the construction of Toronto South, a facility capable of housing 1620 inmates and the replacement to the Toronto

Jail, the Mimico Correctional Centre and the Toronto West Detention Centre (Kellen et al., 2015).

John Howard staff referenced the implications of the policy shift to superjails, and private correctional facilities, yet the interviewees primarily focused on the complications associated with the location of the Toronto South Detention Centre. South Etobicoke does not have a men's shelter; one respondent emphasized the disconnect between opening the province's largest correctional facility without previously constructing a shelter in the surrounding neighbourhood. The neighbourhood is primarily industrial, which reveals the lack of service provision, as nearby facilities are warehouses and maintenance centres. A John Howard staff member states, "It's almost the perfect spot, if you want to talk about not in my backyard". Furthermore, the Toronto South Detention Centre is located in a high-risk neighbourhood, with a significant drug presence, as affirmed by two interviewees. The transitional process is inherently challenging, and by locating a correctional facility in an under-served neighbourhood, the process is unnecessarily complicated.

One respondent explained the impetus behind the Reintegration Centre's creation was primarily due to concerns about the capacity of the community to deal with high needs individuals. Prior to the opening of Toronto South Detention Centre, Humber College and the John Howard Society of Toronto conducted a preliminary study regarding the perception of students, Humber staff, residents, business owners, school officials and social agencies to the new jail. The study yielded important insights: respondents anticipated reductions in property value, a worsening of neighbourhood perception, and female respondents expressed concerns over safety. The surrounding community was worried about the impacts of the jail on the neighbourhood, and indicated the lack of support services was troubling.

The need for additional services in south Etobicoke was evident; however, the vision of John Howard staff remained a dream for many months, as financial support was not easily



*This image was taken at the Reintegration Centre, and lists some of the Centre's ground rules (Bahen, 2016).*

procured. A John Howard staff member explains, “there seemed to be this imagination that most people had that there was funding for this project”. Early grants from Urban Land Institute funded soil assessments and other land assessment procedures, but a suitable location for the Reintegration Centre continued to prove elusive. The clientele projected to frequent the Reintegration Centre made existing landlords extremely wary to lease space, and many of the buildings in the area were larger than what the Reintegration Centre required and could afford. John Howard staff identified a new build as the ideal, especially in terms of proximity to the Toronto South Detention Centre. The possible plots of land were environmentally undesirable and unavailable; one space was provincially owned and promised to Metrolinx transit, and the

other space was privately controlled by owners who wished to construct lucrative parking spaces. The plot of land which remained the most appealing was eventually discovered to be City property and involved a complex tenancy dispute, which rendered it unavailable for the purposes of the Reintegration Centre. Fundamentally, the Reintegration Centre was located in an old plastics facility because of its proximity to the jail, and because John Howard was unable to find an alternate location.

## 5.2: The Challenges

The Reintegration Centre's first year was fraught with structural challenges regarding the facility's maintenance. Previously a plastics factory, the Reintegration Centre required significant, costly renovations. One respondent indicated the renovations were overly expensive, and placed significant strain on John Howard's financial resources. During the first year of operation, heating issues were prominent and contributed to a difficult work environment, where employees were required to wear winter coats inside (CBC News, 2016b). Fundamentally, these issues are logistical complications easily solved with additional funding. A John Howard staff member articulates the paradoxical approach employed by many politicians and community organizations toward the Reintegration Centre: "This model is very interesting, it is very popular, everyone loves it, and no one wants to pay for it". The funding for the centre is severely constrained, to the point which operational viability is not guaranteed past March 31<sup>st</sup>. Recent press releases demonstrate the severity of the situation:

Its partners can no longer pay the rent that is required to stay in its prime location next to the giant jail, and the non-profit John Howard Society has until the end of March to figure out how to continue its services without the building (CBC News, 2016a).

Amber Kellen, Director of Community Initiatives, Research and Policy, is determined to continue offering services. She acknowledges the current situation is "a bit of a crisis", yet she

recognizes the fundamental importance of the Reintegration Centre and insists services will continue to be offered, “whether it’s in a bus or a tent, we know we need to be here” (CBC News, 2016a). Initially, the Reintegration Centre was partnered with six organizations, yet funding challenges have caused two organizations to withdraw their services, with Cota Health following suit March 31. Adequate financing is a major hurdle for the Reintegration Centre, and inadequate partnerships due to funding issues threaten the nature of the “one-stop shopping” model.

Structural issues pose substantial obstacles to efficient service provision; however, the majority of the challenges faced by the Reintegration Centre stem from the Toronto South Detention Centre. The Reintegration Centre was conceptualized as a necessity primarily due to the size of the Toronto South Detention Centre, and its high remand population. At capacity, the jail was projected to release 180 inmates per week, and while the number of weekly releases currently totals 160, inmates are primarily released from courts located throughout the GTA, and are thus unable to access the Reintegration Centre’s services due to its location in south Etobicoke (Kellen, 2015a). Thirty inmates are released directly from the Toronto South Detention Centre; thus, this group comprises the Reintegration Centre’s possible clientele, and is drastically less than what the Reintegration Centre had projected. The Reintegration Centre has struggled with low clientele usage, which opened based on the assumption that the jail would be operating at capacity. John Howard staff explain the implications:

So, we thought we would see between 30 to 40 clients a week...sometimes we were seeing none. Right now, we are seeing 1 out of every 3 to 4 people that are released, but it is very difficult to convince partners to stay invested. It is hard to rationalize staff resources if it is slow.

The success of the Reintegration Centre is entirely dependent on the jail, which is troublesome due to the current circumstances. Another respondent echoed similar claims regarding the issues

associated with the Reintegration Centre's reliance on the jail, and provided insights concerning the understaffing and associated sub-standard conditions at the jail:

I think the centre would do a lot better once the jail got their systems in order... We are at the mercy of the jail. They are overcrowded now at 900, and the jail was supposed to hold 1600... You don't have enough staff. But the turnover rate for the staff is a lot... The South is very violent and they've had a lot of issues. They just did a huge hiring... Well, they consider it a huge hiring of 140 people, but that doesn't mean they are all going to the South - it is a dispersed 140 people. Realistically, is that actually helping the problem? I think we are being able to promote, I think we are getting more people, but once the jail is up and running at full capacity, we are going to see tons of people being released, and they are going to be coming to the RC.



*The Toronto South Detention Centre is located exactly behind the Reintegration Centre, approximately a 4-minute walk away (Bahen, 2016).*



*The Reintegration centre uses the first two floors of the old plastics facility—much of the building remains empty (Bahen, 2016).*

The Reintegration Centre is designed to address the lack of provincial correctional discharge planning services, and strives to provide essential supports to vulnerable populations. The centre occupies a vital position regarding holistic reintegration programming, yet its

longevity is seriously threatened by the jail's understaffing and associated under capacity scenario. John Howard staff reiterate the precarity of their current situation:

We are hopeful that government partners will come through with some solutions at least to tide us over until such time that the jail is busy enough to allow for more traffic at the centre which we believe will help encourage other partner agencies to reinvest in shared space.

The Reintegration Centre occupies an integral role in the transitional process for ex-prisoners; however, further funding is needed to ensure the centre remains open until the jail is fully operational and client usage rises to projected levels.

### 5.3: Housing - The Missing Piece

A presentation prepared by the John Howard Society and presented at the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness conference acknowledges the Reintegration Centre lacks one essential element; “transitional housing that is accessible immediately upon release for inmates exiting detention” (Kellen, 2015b). The importance of providing adequate accommodation upon release was frequently referenced by interviewees. Although housing is not an objective of the Reintegration Centre, and the funding situation restricts program expansion, all interviewees emphasized the value of offering a safe place to sleep at the centre.

One interviewee recognized the importance of social networks in relation to housing, and acknowledged the negative consequences that arise when former inmates return to high-risk neighbourhoods. Although such neighbourhoods are detrimental to an individual's transitional process, these places are familiar, and may provide an inmate with temporary accommodation. Currently, many formerly incarcerated individuals are not given many options upon release; transitional housing is markedly absent from government programs, and community organizations lack the resources required to develop housing for releasees. Thus, many previous inmates return to communities where their social networks remain intact, which facilitates their

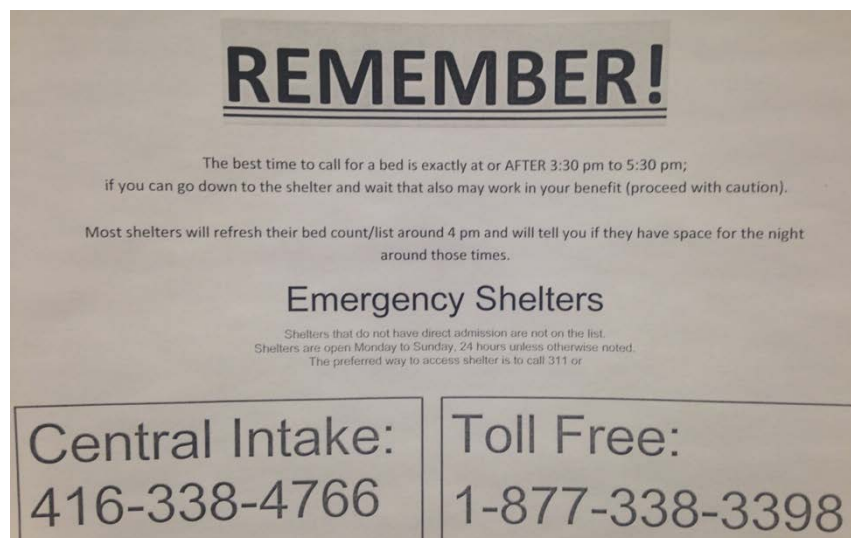
access to temporary housing arrangements. A John Howard staff member explains, “the street network is incredible, and makes it easier to get housing with a family member or friend”. The implications of these arrangements are substantial; the street environment heightens possible exposure to substance use, which may complicate the tumultuous transitional process.

Several respondents identified a “perfect world” scenario that would involve the Reintegration Centre operating as both a “one-stop shopping” social services hub, while also providing transitional housing. Two interviewees emphasized the unused potential of the current facility; the Reintegration Centre operates from the second and third floors of the building, and the rest of the building is vacant. One of these interviewees suggested, “Ideally, if John Howard had funding, we could have our own beds downstairs. If we had our own facility for transitional housing, that would be great because you don’t lose the client to the shelter system”. While operating transitional housing programs out of the Reintegration Centre is an ideal, the necessity of providing some form of housing supports upon release is evident, and demonstrably lacking. An interviewee insists on the need for transitional housing “not just for mental health and addictions, but for individuals who have been institutionalized, traumatized by jail”. The consequences of releasing an individual to the shelter system are considerable, and require additional attention.

Shelters provide a vital emergency housing role, however, their services are overly relied upon for longer term housing options, especially with the absence of affordable market housing and transitional programs. The trauma experienced in jail heightens an inmate’s needs upon release, and many shelters do not provide additional support services. One interviewee clarifies the current system is not tailored to individual circumstance; “Don’t just plop him into a shelter and give him the 1-800 number to call, it’s like, what is the best fit?”. A more involved approach

is necessary, especially concerning recently released individuals. Their needs are complex, and require substantial treatment and support. An insightful interview with a John Howard staff member primarily responsible for housing support services demonstrates the negative implications of releasing inmates directly to shelters. She explains:

A lot of guys don't want to go to the shelter because of relapse and because of the activity going on in the shelter. Many guys say 129 Peter St, they don't want to go there...it's downtown, there is active drug use. In Toronto, there is nowhere else to send them, and when I'm seeing the guys tell me I can't go downtown, I'll either die, or end up back in here... I keep it together, but I don't know... I mean, he is right, he is correct, which is unfortunate.



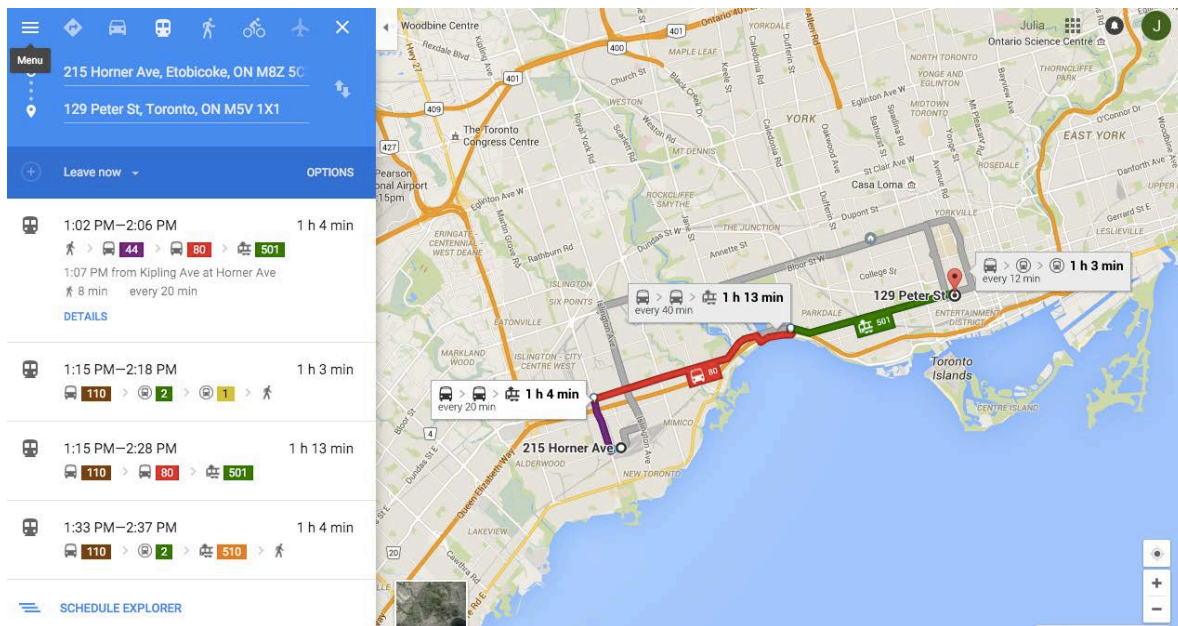
*This image was taken at the Reintegration Centre, and provides a sense of the challenges associated with securing a bed through the shelter system (Bahen, 2016).*

The shelter housing system in Toronto operates from a central intake facility, located at 129 Peter Street. At this location, individuals are sent to different shelters with available beds. While it is possible to call other shelters beforehand, the practice in place stipulates individuals wishing to access a shelter bed in Toronto must visit the central intake facility. Thus, while there are no shelters in south Etobicoke, and although other shelters do exist closer to the Toronto South Detention Centre, the organizational structure primarily requires individuals to visit 129 Peter Street before they can access a shelter bed.

The commute from the Toronto South Detention Centre to 129 Peter Street is challenging from a logistical perspective, but primarily due to the environmental implications of downtown neighbourhoods. A John Howard staff member explains,

There is a big gap... We see them pre-release, release and then to come into the housing office to do an intake, that is a huge high-risk opportunity. On the way downtown, it is not the best area... It is easy to relapse, reoffend, even if they have the best intentions.

The Google Maps image below shows the transit route required to reach 129 Peter St. from the TSDC – 2 buses and 1 streetcar are required, which is a difficult journey for former inmates to navigate, especially if they have been incarcerated for a considerable length of time.



*This map represents the commute required to access a shelter bed upon release from TSDC (Google Maps).*

These journeys are unavoidable in the current model of service provision, yet the high-risk environment may be mitigated by the accompaniment of a peer support worker.

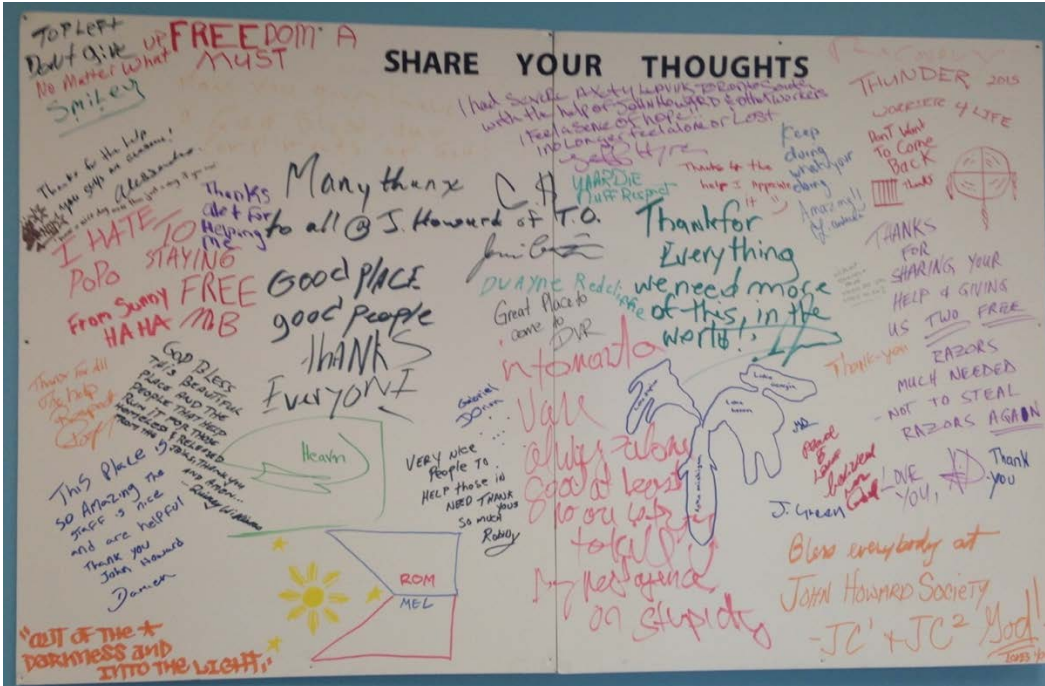
#### 5.4: Initial Accomplishments

The Reintegration Centre faces major obstacles to successful service provision, however, several features of the current model demonstrate meaningful achievements and illustrate the

positive impact of peer support work. Several respondents identified the peer support model as the most successful aspect of the centre, as expressed in their ability to form trusting relationships with previously incarcerated individuals and the power of their shared lived experience. An interviewee depicts the opposing environments of the Toronto South Detention Centre and the Reintegration Centre: “From that building over there, the Toronto South, to here – it’s like heaven and hell. That’s what I gather from the guys coming in. There is a lot of pain with them, a lot of stress, so we kind of make them feel comfortable, get them back into the swing of things”. This sentiment is evident in the reports regarding the Toronto South Detention Centre’s problematic understaffing situation, which has resulted in frequent lock down conditions.

In the Reintegration Centre, several graffiti walls are available for previous inmates to use when they access the centre. Pictured below, these walls illustrate similar notions: “Like a glass of water after a walk in the desert”; “There is light after darkness”; and “Out of the darkness and into the light”. The importance of the peer support workers lies in their ability to immediately relate to an inmate’s experience of incarceration. According to interviewees, involvement with the criminal justice system frequently limits an individual’s ability to trust authority figures. A John Howard staff member explains:

The main purpose of the peer support program at the RC is that obviously people with lived experience, just being able to create...I don’t want to say immediate trusting relationships, but when you’re coming out of jail, you don’t really trust a lot of suits, you’re going from intake to intake, authority people – you don’t have great relationships with social workers, and with mental health workers, so the last thing you want is to go into a place where you feel like you are going to get judged, discriminated through this whole process, all over again. It is nice to be able to talk to people who understand where you’re coming from.



Taken at the RC, this is a picture of a graffiti wall, featuring artwork by the RC's clients (Bahen, 2016).



Taken at the RC, this is a picture of a graffiti wall, featuring artwork by the RC's clients (Bahen, 2016).



*Taken at the RC, this is a picture of a graffiti wall, featuring artwork by the RC's clients (Bahen, 2016).*

Several John Howard staff who are not peer support workers acknowledged the peer's expertise: "They are just so capable in ways that I could not be"; and, "I do my best to see eye to eye with the clients, but the peers – they can just naturally do that".

In addition to establishing trusting relationships, the peer support workers provide a vital function accompanying people to their point of destination upon release. The journey to a shelter, detox facility or housing office is difficult for previous inmates to navigate alone, especially concerning the likelihood of relapse and recidivism. An interviewee explains, "we are basically a friendly person who has been where they've been, who can understand where they've been and can have a conversation... If their intent is not to use, sometimes having that person along for the ride can help to distract from triggers which might cause you to use". While the Reintegration Centre continues to struggle with logistical challenges, peer support workers capably offered services as soon as the centre opened to the public. An interviewee articulates their vital role succinctly; "They have always really been the backbone of the reintegration centre". The

literature clearly demonstrates the success of peer support programs, especially concerning individuals with mental health issues, and the Reintegration Centre overwhelmingly reflects the positive outcomes of peer involvement.

## **Chapter 6: A Way Forward**

This chapter examines policy implications for discharge planning in Canada. Interview results indicate discharge planning is an insufficient response to adequately address the current lack of reintegration services; systemic issues represent a significant barrier to creating comprehensive reintegration programming. Funding remains a dominant challenge, and many interviewees insist major attitudinal changes must occur to facilitate a renewed approach to incarceration. This chapter addresses the role of government support, and discusses recent statements by prominent Ontario politicians. Lastly, evaluation for the centre is lacking. However, a study examining the impact of the centre on recidivism is planned to commence shortly. The study is led by the Reintegration Centre evaluation committee, which is comprised of five academics from different institutions. Such initiatives will provide concrete data that may strengthen the Reintegration Centre's case for increased support and sustained funding.

### **6.1: Systemic Challenges**

Fundamentally, discharge planning represents a critical component of larger reintegration programs, which provide comprehensive supports pre-release, during incarceration, and post-release. The impact of the remand population on discharge planning is significant, as legislation currently provides reintegration support services to inmates convicted of an offence, which disregards 60 per cent of Ontario's prison population. An insightful interviewee response illustrates the magnitude of challenges faced by individuals upon release:

Discharge planning or not, there are other larger issues at play. Lack of affordable housing, lack of transitional housing, lack of supportive spaces, discrimination, many of these people should be on Ontario Disability Support Program – and even if full time employment were available, it isn't necessarily viable. There are a plethora of reasons why discharge planning isn't working – there are far too many people in jail, based on the crime rate. Most people have significant substance use and mental health issues and while there has been attention to that matter, legislation hasn't necessarily come in line to ensure that fewer people are coming into conflict with the law. It needs to be a two-fold response: there shouldn't be that many people in custody and discharge planning should start at the time of arrest, not two minutes before release.

The lack of affordable housing stock has become a pervasive issue across Canada.

Beginning in the 1980s, federal funding for affordable housing was drastically reduced, and, in 1993, the federal government's national housing strategy was cancelled (Gaetz, Gulliver and Richter, 2014). Without a clear directive governing the creation and maintenance of affordable housing, many municipalities have experienced significant growth in homelessness.

Furthermore, the creation of new affordable housing units has drastically diminished, and existing units have deteriorated, becoming close to inhabitable. An interview with a John Howard housing worker demonstrates the severity of the challenges encountered to secure accommodation upon release:

The waitlist is five years for Access Point, so you can see their faces drop when I tell them that, because in the meantime, all we can do is help them look for something in the private market, but sometimes I don't think the client is able to function independently just because he would benefit having supports [available from organizations like Mainstay]. So, I fill out the Access Point application for them, because Mainstay has support there 24/7. And the Housing Connections waitlist is 10 years.

Renewed support for affordable housing requires an intergovernmental commitment, in order to address the growing crisis which has been ignored for too long.

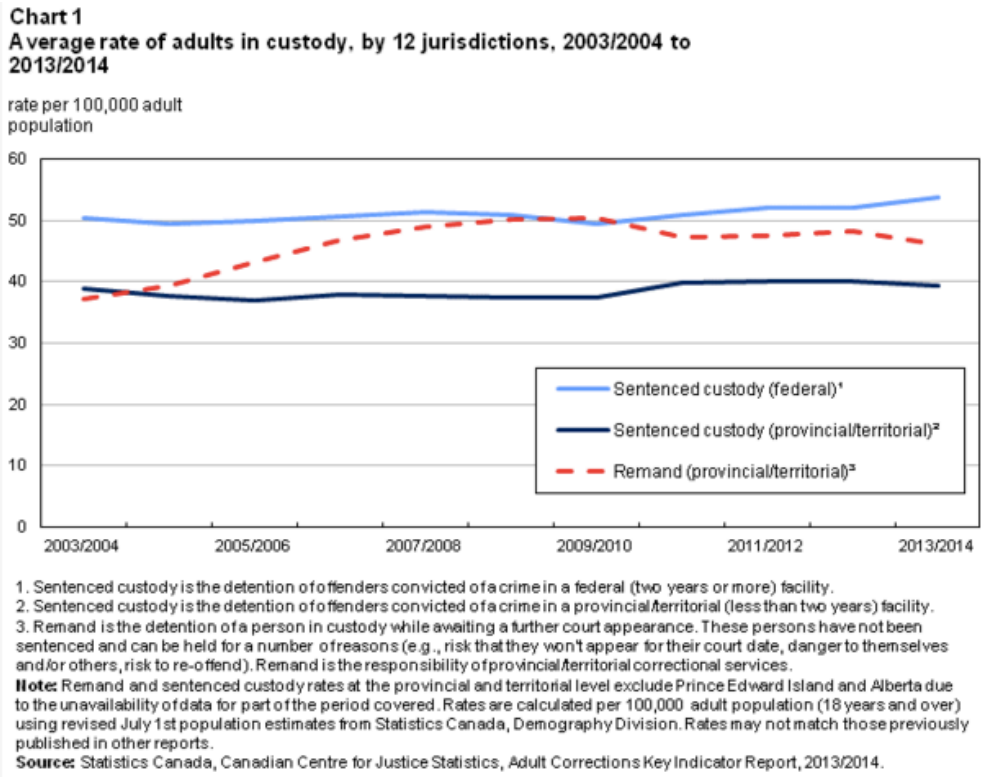
The number of Canadians detained in custody has drastically increased in previous years, yet the crime rate has continued to decline. In 2005, the number of Canadians in pre-trial custody surpassed the percentage of those in provincial sentenced custody (Deshman and Myers, 2014).

While the remand population continues to grow, an assumed correlation would be an increase in crime; however, the crime rate has steadily decreased for 25 years, reaching a historic low in 2013 (Deshman and Myers, 2014). The implications of the previous federal government's "tough-on-crime" approach, and mandatory minimum sentences, are reflected in the rising custodial population. Several interviewees criticized the current approach to corrections, and highlighted the necessity of altering the tough-on-crime mindset. One respondent articulates, "We need to realize it is the 21<sup>st</sup> century and punishment isn't effective. End the punishment and begin the opportunities".

## 6.2: What is the Ideal Form of Discharge Planning?

Interviewees presented diverse opinions concerning the "ideal" form of discharge planning. However, all respondents acknowledge the need for sweeping reforms and drastic policy renewal. One interviewee identifies an important aspect of successful reintegration programming – services must be tailored to reflect an individual's unique needs. She explains, "Sometimes, it is a very quick interaction... I need a coffee and a token, and I'm gone". The discharge planning process should begin in the detention centre, as many inmates would substantially benefit from thorough pre-release planning. Several interviewees acknowledged the challenging nature of current discharge planning with regard to timing; services begin at the time of release, and do not provide sufficient support to ensure a smooth transition has occurred post release. Furthermore, community-based reintegration services are constrained by a lack of funding, which has reduced their programming capacity.

The hub model of the Reintegration Centre featured prominently among the interviewee's responses. While the Reintegration Centre is struggling to retain partners, many respondents



*This chart illustrates the growth in the remand population; “for the last 10 years, the remand population has consistently exceeded the sentenced population” (Statistics Canada, 2015a).*

acknowledged the importance of locating essential services under one roof, to ensure ease of access. John Howard staff explains, “I can’t afford to give this person five tokens to go and do all the things they need to do, but if all the partners are in the same building, I can give them two tokens to get where they need to go, and that is sufficient”. Other interviewees identify the importance of particular partnerships, and envision a future Reintegration Centre model where Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) would also have offices on site. An interviewee justifies the inclusion of welfare offices in a future Reintegration Centre facility; “It is really important to have agencies with us, and the big one, that would make our numbers grow, is OW. If guys knew OW was here... Guys have no money, no funds, no benefits, and they only leave with one week’s supply of medication”.

Cota Health provides a similar vital role at the Reintegration Centre; numerous formerly incarcerated individuals experience mental health issues and require additional support services upon release. Due to financing struggles, Cota Health is scheduled to withdraw from the Reintegration Centre, with their partnership set to terminate on March 31<sup>st</sup>. John Howard staff references the positive impact of Cota Health's presence at the Reintegration Centre; "It was better when Cota was here...now, it is a bit more challenging. We just don't have the agencies we need here...you can't do referrals to FEAT [Fostering, Empowering and Advocating Together for Children of Incarcerated Parents]". The success of locating multiple social service agencies in one central facility was widely acknowledged by the interviewees, and many of them wished to expand service provision to provide multiple referrals onsite.

Discharge planning in Ontario is severely lacking, and while extensive improvements are necessary, small adjustments to the current scenario will result in significant benefits. John Howard staff describe the positive results of minor service provision:

I can do a referral right here, or at least set up that appointment, so the client has the card, the appointment, he knows when it is and it seems minimal, but it is not. They have a lot of anxiety initially, it can be overwhelming, so it can really help smooth that out.

Logistical challenges upon release are significant; tokens, food, and warm clothing are all very important, yet seemingly trivial features of successful reintegration planning. An interviewee explains:

I feel accomplished when they walk out and they have a bag of clothes and snacks, Tim card, token... They have the information to get their ID's replaced, and they just have so much more that they didn't have half an hour ago. It is so... It's a great feeling to see them have all this stuff we can give them in such a short time. We can do so much for them, because a little does go a long way for them.

Discharge planning serves a vital function for inmates leaving correctional facilities, and the interview results demonstrate the importance of scaling up service provision, and ensuring basic

supports are widely available upon release.

### 6.3: Political Climate

The involvement of federal and provincial governments is essential to the Centre's longevity. Evidence-based policy represents the new standard across government; without concrete data, it is difficult to secure funding for new initiatives. Minister Naqvi reflects this reality in recent statements that demonstrate his interest in monitoring and evaluating the Reintegration Centre's impact. He has publicly endorsed the hub model:

This is the beauty of this model, because hubs can be reproduced in different places. We know there are a lot of community partners interested in providing services – and they do provide these services in communities across the province – but they are doing it from their different, disparate areas based on their niche (Pelley, 2015).

In a Mandate Letter to Minister Naqvi, Premier Wynne explains the provincial government's priorities concerning the transformation of correctional services, and references the importance of improving community reintegration strategies:

Continuing to transform correctional services by working to improve strategies for the assessment, care and community reintegration of offenders. These efforts will include collaborating with other ministries to enhance skills training – and techniques for probation and parole staff to better address client risk factors and reduce recidivism (Wynne, 2016).

The provincial government is committed to addressing the glaring gap in current reintegration programming, yet the Reintegration Centre has yet to receive tangible supports.

The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness Conference involved numerous speakers and spanned a multitude of topics. Throughout the conference, a positive tone was present, as diverse speakers alluded to important studies, and referenced the impact of research on evidence-based policy development. Different programs implemented across Canada are beginning to address the causes of homelessness, yet programs are disproportionately concentrated on short-term, emergency services. Deb Matthews, MPP, is the minister responsible for Ontario's Poverty

Reduction Strategy, and was also the keynote speaker during one of the conference lunches. She talked about ending the pipeline from institutions to homelessness: “No Ontarian should leave a provincial custodial facility whether it is a jail or hospital to be homeless”. This statement is important and reflects the long term goals of the John Howard Society:

We would have transitional housing that is run by a community service provider and allowed treatment options associated with substance use and mental health, that provided a safe, affordable space for people to live immediately upon their release from custody (John Howard staff interview).

According to a John Howard staff member, Minister Deb Matthews, as well as the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ted McMeekin, are engaged in conversation with the John Howard Society, but additional funding remains elusive. The optimism exerted by staff members is encouraging; interviewees unanimously agree on the importance of the Reintegration Centre and maintain some form of facility will continue to offer services, regardless of the financing challenges. As a John Howard staff member explains, “We are not going to fail... We believe too strongly that this project is useful and can help people to bridge that gap upon the time of release to whatever that next step might be”. The future of the Reintegration Centre is uncertain; however, John Howard staff are confident that they will continue to offer vital support services to an extremely vulnerable population, in whatever capacity is possible.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

Throughout the course of my interviews, one response in particular deeply resonated:

Say if you spend six months in the hole, in segregation, and then they let you out onto the street. It’s like a dog that has been locked up for a day... You let the dog out, the dog goes crazy. And with so much anxiety, they might pee, they might poop, they might bite you... They aren’t socialized.

The notion that previous inmates can easily reintegrate into society after incarceration is inherently flawed – freedom is a challenging scenario, fraught with complications. Evidence

demonstrates the positive impact of providing services to individuals upon release, yet such evidence is absent from Canadian discharge planning policy. Assistance and support services are only available to those convicted of an offense; thus, the majority of Ontarian inmates are released without any form of assistance.

With the construction of the Toronto South Detention Centre superjail, and the limited support services in the surrounding south Etobicoke community, reintegration programming was desperately needed to facilitate the difficult transitional process. The Reintegration Centre was created as a “one-stop shopping” facility to address the needs of inmates upon release; food and clothing are provided, in addition to a warm referral process, where peer support workers accompany inmates to their point of destination. Locating multiple social service agencies under one roof is extremely practical, and while the Reintegration Centre is struggling to retain partners due to funding constraints, the presence of different organizations was very effective during the Reintegration Centre’s first months of operation.

The Reintegration Centre is an innovative model for several reasons, and the peer support worker program is a key aspect of its limited, yet positive reception. Evaluation and monitoring of the Reintegration Centre’s programs have yet to be completed; however, anecdotal evidence demonstrates the widely popular and successful impact of the Reintegration Centre’s peer support worker program. Systemic issues remain dominant concerns, particularly concerning the lack of affordable housing. The Reintegration Centre is constrained by labour issues at the Toronto South Detention Centre which have significantly reduced the inmate population at the jail, meaning the Reintegration Centre is receiving fewer clients than anticipated. An evaluation study is planned to begin shortly, in the hopes that research can demonstrate the positive impact of the Reintegration Centre on recidivism, and secure further funding for the centre.

Governmental support and financing are necessary to ensure the Reintegration Centre's permanence; yet, the John Howard Society remains a powerful example of how community-led development can address inconsistencies in government policy. Marginalized individuals, frequently ignored by the system, are able to find hope and solace in a safe and secure environment.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

*Question:* How did you get involved with the reintegration centre? Have you been involved since the centre opened?

*Question:* How do you define discharge planning? What are its key aspects? What does a successful model look like? What makes reintegration effective?

*Question:* What do you do at the centre? What kinds of services do you offer? What does an average day/week look like? How would you like it to look?

*Question:* How do you view the centre's first year of operation?

*Question:* Do you have a relationship with the social service agencies at the centre? What about the peer support workers?

*Question:* How do you feel about working in the same facility with many different social service agencies? Is this a successful approach? Why?

*Question:* Are there any aspects of the centre, and/or your work in particular, that have been successful/unsuccessful? Would you like anything to be done differently?

*Question:* What do you think is the most important part of the centre? Would you change anything about the current model?

*Question:* How do you see the centre evolving in the long-term?

*Question:* What can be done to improve provincial discharge planning services?

*Question:* What is your working relationship with Toronto South? What is the significance of the high remand population at Toronto South?

*Question:* How does the neighbourhood view the reintegration centre?

*Question:* What do you think about the idea of a 'revolving door' where inmates leave prison, without support services and reoffend? Where does housing fit into reintegration?