



St. Leonard's Society of Canada
Société St-Léonard du Canada

Life(r)'s Work: Developing a Modernized Strategy for Life-Sentenced People in Canada

Submitted to

Public Safety Canada

prepared by

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Introduction

St. Leonard's Society of Canada (SLSC) is pleased to submit this report to Public Safety Canada following the completion of the *Life(r)'s Work: Developing a Modernized Strategy for Life-Sentenced People in Canada* project, per the Policy Development Contribution Program (PDCP). This project supports certain priorities outlined in the mandate letter issued by Minister Goodale for the Commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) concerning the importance of providing programming and interventions that includes peer mentoring to all people in custody.

The objective of this project is to inform an enhanced strategy for life-sentenced people in Canada (also referred to herein as “lifers”), by building on recommendations identified in an evaluation of the former LifeLine®/Option Vie® program, and, enhancing the capacity of the PeerLife Collaborative (PLC) to provide services to life-sentenced people. SLSC worked in collaboration with the PLC to provide CSC with an up to date program that can be implemented following the completion of this project. Doing so will set the stage for supporting countless lifers over the long-term and ultimately facilitate their successful integration into the community.

The main project activities included reviewing and revising the 2010 Lifer Resource Strategy (LRS) modules to reflect the current correctional context, enhancing the capacity of the PeerLife Collaborative (PLC) by expanding services in Ontario and Quebec, training additional peer In-Reach Workers (IRWs) under the modernized LRS, and developing a methodological report to inform policy development and provide partners with a better understanding of the lifer population.

The original (2010) multi-stage LRS developed as a response to a specific need – the need to catalogue the efforts of dozens of In-Reach Workers (IRWs) who had been using their valuable lived experience to support their peers within institutions and communities across Canada. The objective was to systematize their understanding and approaches to inform a standard process that could measure the impact of their work. However, the opportunity to establish these metrics was cut short in 2012 when government funding for the LifeLine®/Option Vie® services associated with the LRS, was ended.

Since that time, St. Leonard's Society of Canada (SLSC) and its members have not ceased to hear calls for the return of this service. It was truly unique, bridging people using peer supports from institutions into communities across the country. While some semblance of peer support services have been maintained in different ways in different regions, there has been a real recognition that letting too much time pass will erode the foundational work, lived experience, and expertise of doing 'In-Reach'.

Presently, one quarter of Canada's prison population is serving a life sentence with no clear strategy in place to support their unique needs.¹ Of further concern is that half of the people in Canada's prisons aged 50 and older are serving a life sentence.² As a country, we must consider the principles of a justice system that incarcerates people who are aging inside, and strategies for their eventual safe integration to the community, especially those serving a lengthy sentence. As such, SLSC

® *LifeLine* and *Option Vie* are registered trademarks of St. Leonard's Society of Canada.

¹ The Office of the Correctional Investigator & The Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2019.

² The Office of the Correctional Investigator & The Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2019.

gratefully acknowledges **Public Safety Canada** for providing support at this critical time. It provides an opportunity to connect to the deep roots of an historical record of providing humane and effective services – a sound starting point for developing any national strategy.

SLSC is a membership-based, charitable organization dedicated to community safety since 1967.³ Its mission is to promote a humane and informed justice policy and responsible leadership to foster safe communities. We endorse evidence-based approaches to criminal and social justice, conduct research and develop policy, support our member affiliates, and advance collaborative relationships and communication among individuals and organizations dedicated to social justice. Our membership of eight direct service agencies provides residential and other programs to youth and adults in British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec. SLSC is governed by a dedicated volunteer Board of Directors whose membership spans western to eastern Canada.

Per the terms of the Contribution Agreement, the report consists of the following components:

- Report on the **work plan** items, detailing how the objectives were met;
- Report on the **expected outcomes**;
- A list of **additional considerations** that address key successes and challenges, and lessons learned; and,
- A list of **recommendations** to support policy development and knowledge dissemination activities related to an enhanced strategy for life-sentenced people in Canada.

Reporting on Work Plan

1. Review and revise existing LRS modules at a one-day, in-person meeting in Ottawa

On December 18th, 2018, the advisory group consisting of representatives from St. Leonard’s Society of Canada, St. Leonard’s House Windsor, St. Leonard’s Society of Peterborough, Maison Cross Roads (Montreal), House of Hope (Ottawa), The St. Leonard’s Society of Hamilton, and two expert peer mentors (also former LifeLine In-Reach Workers⁴) met in Ottawa for a one-day, in-person meeting. The agenda consisted of the following items, and all were accomplished over the course of the one-day meeting:

Review Project Mandate and Meeting Objective

Current Realities for Program Delivery in Ontario and Quebec Institutions

Balancing Project Mandate with Current Realities: *Key Considerations for Achieving Meeting Objectives*

³ Registration #12894 06600 RR0001. Online: www.stleonards.ca. SLSC is not a religious organization.

⁴ In-Reach Worker is a term used for a life sentenced person (“lifer”) who has demonstrated success on parole in the community. They ‘reach in’ to the institution to provide support services to people in custody, and sometimes others on parole, to help navigate the system. The term In-Reach Worker was used under the previous LifeLine service, and continues to be used by the PeerLife Collaborative and Option Vie for the services they provide.

Group Review: *Stage 1 - Adaptation*

Group Review: *Stage 2 – Integrating into the Correctional Environment*

Group Review: *Stage 3 – Preparing for Return to the Community*

Group Review: *Stage 4 – Returning to Community*

Group Discussion: *Reporting Mechanisms (Utility of Form 1 & Form 2; Establishing Key Metrics)*

Next Steps

Steps set following the meeting consisted of: sending out meeting notes by early January; SLSC updating all sections of the LRS, and sending them to advisory members as each section was completed for their review and feedback; and, for SLSC to coordinate teleconferences as needed to seek input on project activities. These activities were completed throughout January – March 2019.

2. One site visit to up to three institutions to obtain feedback from the respective Lifer Committees on existing LRS and how a revised tool could support better integration outcomes.

Site visits were conducted by some Advisory Group members and SLSC staff at various institutions, and were able to go beyond the three anticipated institutions. Consultations were done at five penitentiaries throughout early 2019 with Lifer Committees:

- Millhaven (ON)
- Joyceville (ON)
- Collins Bay (ON)
- Cowansville (QC)
- La Macaza (QC)

In its 2016-17 response to the Office of the Correctional Investigator, Correctional Service of Canada stated:

*CSC is committed to addressing the unique needs of offenders serving a life sentence and offering targeted programs that provide appropriate support for all offenders as they work towards their rehabilitation. The Lifer Resource Strategy, which replaced the Lifeline Program, **is available in all institutions**. It includes 15 modules that are tailored to each stage of a life sentence: adaptation, integration, preparation for release, and release into the community. The Lifer Resource Strategy is designed to provide a standardized approach to supporting and managing life-sentenced offenders in a way that recognizes their specific circumstances and complements other programs and interventions provided by CSC staff. It is available alongside many other services offered by CSC including psychology, chaplaincy, community partners and numerous stakeholders, to support successful reintegration of long-term offenders.⁵*

⁵ Correctional Service of Canada, 2017. (Emphasis added).

Ontario and Quebec sites were chosen as these regions hold the highest concentrations of life sentenced people in the country. CSC's response to the OCI Annual Report highlights that the LRS is available in all institutions. In the regions with the highest concentration of lifers, it was of significant concern that none of the Lifer Committee members at any of the five sites had access and/or familiarity with the original LRS. Further, no confirmation could be made (by staff or by committee members) that it existed in the institutional libraries, and there was no guidance on how the manual could be obtained. Additionally, individuals noted that library access is very limited, and getting through the large quantity of materials by oneself was unrealistic. This reinforced the perspective of the Advisory Group members that the original LRS was not designed to replace the LifeLine program as CSC has stated, but rather was designed to standardize the service delivery through its facilitation by an In-Reach Worker. This was reinforced across the institutional visits by consistent requests for guidance from peer experts who have navigated life sentences beyond prison and into the community.

Taking into account these considerations, a strategic approach to lifers which facilitates their access to customized services and tools, including the LRS, is recommended. The mere 'availability' of a manual within an institution does not provide the type of intervention that it was designed for. Therefore it is worthwhile to explore how the investment of resources in tools such as the revised LRS produced through this project can generate returns. **One way is to ensure that fidelity to the concept is maintained is by safeguarding the active service delivery component of the LRS.**

Given that there was no pre-existing access to the original LRS at any of the institutions visited, the opportunity to discuss a "revised" tool was limited. However, an approach for supporting better integration outcomes was discussed in general, and that feedback was applied to the revised LRS manual produced through this project.

Some feedback from Lifer Committee members on what would support better integration outcomes included:

1. **Accessible, relevant programming** tailored to people with life sentences to ensure it is meaningful and appropriate for their needs; many felt they were overlooked for programs so that 'short-termers' could complete them. Additionally, many lifers noted that programming is not addressing issues related to long-term incarceration and ageing inside such as institutionalization, geriatric needs, and PTSD.
2. **Peer support** right at intake for lifers/long-termers, that could serve as a resource from the community to let them better understand the scope of their sentence beyond the legal system. Peers would also support getting them into "the right mindset" and give hope. For example, it demonstrates through lived experience that it is possible to serve a long sentence and not lose oneself completely.
3. **Opportunities to contribute to their case management** teams with more regular contact with Institutional Parole Officers (IPOs), enabling them to develop a relationship that could be built on and generate opportunities to demonstrate progress. There was a suggestion to re-establish a case conference between a peer support worker, IPO, and correctional staff.

Additionally, it was common to hear from lifers that throughout the course of a life sentence there are countless changes in staffing. Many lifers noted that frequent personnel changes are disruptive, cause unnecessary delays to case management as people familiarize themselves with caseloads and recommendations, and, hinders the individual's opportunity to develop trusting relationships with CSC personnel. Peer support brings continuity and can ensure that individual history is not lost over the course of personnel changes within the institution.

4. **Support for navigating their sentence** – Where feasible, realistic and within prison constraints, lifers noted the need for tools and opportunities to create a new, healthy life that empowers them to avoid institutionalization. Actively preparing to become a useful, respectful, law-abiding citizen is in the best interest of the individual, the institution, and the community to which they will eventually be released. This can be reinforced with literacy skills (including digital literacy), understanding the law by increasing access to the library, and ensuring that services are available in Official Languages.
5. **A voice** – a neutral/impartial mechanism that would allow lifers to voice concerns and frustrations in a safe space. LRS facilitation can generate a healthy outlet for lifers to learn skills that empower them to find their own voice and channel concerns and frustrations in healthy ways, and role models to demonstrate that it is possible.

3. Identify existing capacity within Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) to support an enhanced LRS delivery model.

SLSC supported the PeerLife Collaborative (PLC) to explore existing capacity a provincial level through consultation with the Regional Deputy Commissioner in Ontario. Further, CSC Ontario Region has expressed interest in reviewing the findings of the *Life(r)'s Work* project to inform how services for lifers can be improved in this region, and based on the research findings, will also consider how to raise the profile of the findings within CSC National Headquarters. Finally, SLSC will support the PLC in preparing for a scope of work with CSC Ontario Region for fiscal 2019-20 that incorporates findings and resources from this project.

SLSC has supported an additional partner in Quebec, OptionVie, to build on momentum in Ontario based on positive responses from both prisoners and CSC staff to the institutional site visits. This has further developed into more comprehensive discussions with the Regional Deputy Commissioner in Quebec who has expressed interest and support for the project activities. Both CSC Regions are working to identify resources that would support an enhanced LRS service delivery model; however, at the time of this report resources remain to be confirmed.

4. Identify (with the assistance of local area parole officers), recruit and train (two days) qualified applicants as new In-Reach Workers in Ontario and Quebec.

In Ontario, Kingston area parole assisted in identifying two people successfully serving life-sentences in the Kingston community. They were vetted as qualified and motivated candidates to be trained as In-Reach Workers. With the support of St. Leonard's House Windsor, an advertisement was published in January. The recruits, one man and one woman, were trained over a two-day period in

mid-March. With support from the Regional Deputy Commissioner, CSC Ontario Regional Headquarters generously offered training space within its Kingston offices for SLSC to host the training.

Training was led by Rick Sauvé, expert peer mentor with the PLC, supported by two SLSC staff. Both trainees were introduced to the revised LRS, though neither had been previously familiar with the original LRS during their own periods of incarceration. Agenda for the two days of training included history of the training, principles of the LRS, a review of learning styles, expectations for undertaking In-Reach Work and need for self-care, and an introduction to the 4 main areas of the LRS.

The trainees were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the training through evaluation forms, which stated a high degree of satisfaction with the format and content. Both trainees successfully completed the training and were willing to continue with the process to become an In-Reach Worker if additional funding is made available.

In Quebec, two men were recruited as candidates to receive training under the revised LRS. The training was facilitated in mid-March by Michel Dunn, expert peer mentor with Maison Cross Roads, as well as by Michel Gagnon, Executive Director of Maison Cross Roads. (Note: Mr. Dunn and Mr. Gagnon are the original authors of the 2010 LRS). The training took place in Montreal, and introduced trainees to the revised modules.

It is worth noting that in the December 2018 meeting of the Advisory Group, it was recommended that the two-day training period would best be utilized as an introductory training. This was due to the quantity of the material, and the complexity of the issues within the modules. This proved to be a sound recommendation, as the full two days were utilized solely for going through the four stages of the LRS and allowing for in-depth discussions with the expert peer mentor trainers about appropriate facilitation methods. Should additional resources be made available to implement the revised LRS through In-Reach services, **a formal, structured training process would be required to ensure that In-Reach Workers are adequately prepared to provide services.**

5. Design mechanism for monitoring program achievements and a plan for data collection/analysis to report on program implementation and impacts.

New metrics were designed as part of the revised LRS as means to acquire data for broader analysis on service delivery impacts. These metrics consist of three evaluation categories to be completed by participants:

1. **Stage Pre/Post-Tests** Tailored to stage-specific content. Administered before a stage begins to establish a participant baseline, and repeated at the end of the stage to measure change.
2. **Self-Evaluations** Tailored to individual modules within the stage to provide participants opportunity for self-assessment and reflection on the module subject matter.
3. **Module Evaluations** Standardized questions administered after the completion of each module, to assess service delivery and integrity of the module against its counterparts within the LRS.

Figure 1 demonstrates how the various participant completed metrics are applied.

Figure 1: Structure of Evaluation Metrics within the Stages of the LRS

Stage Pre-Test	Self-Evaluation	Module Evaluation	Stage Post-Test
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage-specific content • Establishes baseline data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module-specific questions • Administered following completion of module • Establishes opportunity for self-reflection on subject 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardized questions • Completed at the end of each module • Assesses service delivery • Assess integrity of individual modules against counterparts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage-specific content • Repeated after all modules within the stage have been completed

The evaluations are not designed to assess or test the individual lifers, or, to report on their correctional plan. The principle of these metrics allows participants to identify the aspects of the LRS that worked well for them (i.e. how it is meeting their unique needs and priorities), areas for improvement, self-identify how they have grown personally, and set goals for further growth. Self-assessments also generate a different opportunity for the participant to share with the In-Reach Worker (IRW), helping the IRW to tailor services more specifically to the individual. Responses that are shared with the IRW can be coded and anonymized, then aggregated for analysis. The design of the tools ensures that the evaluation of an individual’s progress on their correctional plan remain with correctional staff/Institutional Parole Officers. Doing so also ensures fidelity to the integrity of the LRS service delivery model.

New pre/post evaluations were established for each individual stage. The evaluations consist of questions specific to each stage (e.g. current self-esteem level, understanding of main correctional programs), and are administered at the beginning of each stage, and repeated after the entire stage has been completed. Considering it will take considerable time to complete a stage (months, or even years), repeating the questions provides the ability to demonstrate impacts and changes of the LRS over an extended period of time. This will allow for more robust analysis of service delivery as well as participant progress over the course of each stage. Application of metrics in this manner generates a shift for the revised LRS from its former capacity for evaluation, and ensures that service providers and/or investors can determine service efficacy and continue to identify areas for improvement.

The self-evaluations that comprise the final component of a given module have been updated to reflect the material covered in each specific module. The items for self-evaluations have been divided into three priority areas: *important to your success*, *very important to your success*, and *most important for your success*. Participants are able to rank on a scale from 1 to 10 how they are managing each

issue covered in the module (e.g. level of commitment to the programs that make up their correctional plan, taking responsibility and acknowledging their circumstances). Although each participant may vary in their specific priorities due to individual circumstances, classifying the items in this way helps guide the participants to identify how their items for improvement should be prioritized. The results of these self-evaluations can be shared with the IRW, but are intended to help the participant to reflect on their strengths and identify areas that need more work.

Each module concludes with standardized evaluation questions that are consistently applied across all modules. These are designed to allow participants to indicate aspects such as their satisfaction with the module, comprehension of the material, and their motivation level to continue on to the next module. Participants are also provided space to provide qualitative responses regarding how the module can be improved and any additional comments such as areas of interest/need that are not currently being addressed in the module. Standardization of module evaluations informs service providers on how the individual modules compare against each other and will identify areas of strength and for improvement.

6. Collaborate with CSC to establish metrics/protocol necessary for program implementation within select institutions for FY 2019-20.

Discussions with CSC regarding program implementation have consistently noted that evaluation metrics must reflect a modernized approach. The revised LRS metrics have been designed with a variety of options (as reflected in section 5 of this report), and with flexibility to adapt to the context to which they are being applied. This was done intentionally as CSC has yet to determine how services can be implemented formally across institutions. Any needs related to future implementation can be taken into account, and metrics can be adapted.

Protocol for program implementation will consist of collaborating with the Regional Deputy Commissioners of both Ontario and Quebec to review the findings of the *Life(r)'s Work* project, as well as research being conducted by the PeerLife Collaborative. Based on their review of the findings they will consider, in collaboration with SLSC and its PLC partners, how they can best be presented to CSC's senior executives. Both Ontario and Quebec will continue to seek opportunity for regional implementation of service delivery from community partners.

7. Drafting of final report that will inform an enhanced strategy for lifers.

Submission of this report to Public Safety Canada comprises the seventh and final item of the project work plan.

Reporting on Expected Outcomes

SLSC is pleased to report on the following expected outcomes:

1. Greater capacity of the PLC to provide support to life sentenced people including expanding services beyond Ontario into Quebec;
2. Creation of modernized LRS tools and modules; and,
3. A report that provides recommendations for an enhanced strategy for life sentenced people in Canada.

Greater capacity of the PLC to provide support to life-sentenced people including expanding services beyond Ontario into Quebec.

Among others, the PeerLife Collaborative (PLC) members comprised part of the Advisory Group for this project. As such, they were engaged from the beginning to inform how the LRS tools and modules were modernized. The PLC's direct engagement and familiarity with these materials has increased their capacity to provide support to life sentenced people as they work to collaborate with CSC to conduct in-reach to the institutions. As the members of the PLC are also direct service providers in the community, the modules and tools specific to community corrections can be utilized for life sentenced people who access their services.

Further, the two training opportunities provided in Ontario and Quebec identified a total of 4 potential new In-Reach Workers (IRWs), two in each region. An introductory training was provided to each trainee to familiarize them with the context of the Lifer Resource Strategy and each of the modules and evaluative components. The trainees were vetted and are considered to be excellent candidates. Trainees are presently available and interested in pursuing an opportunity to work with the PLC and OptionVie in Quebec to expand services in these two regions; however, their employment is pending based on the availability of funding to support a formal engagement.

Finally, SLSC supported the PLC to enhance its online presence by generating a webpage that details the background of the group, as well as some resources and contact information. It is envisioned that as capacity grows, the webpage can serve as an easily accessible and adaptable resource for the PLC.

Creation of modernized LRS tools and modules.

The most substantial component of this project was the creation of modernized LRS tools and modules, supported by engagement with an expert Advisory Group. The Advisory Group included community-based service providers who regularly provide residential services to paroled lifers, including: Catherine Brooke, Executive Director, St. Leonard's House Windsor, John Clinton, Executive Director, The St. Leonard's Society of Hamilton, Larry Cook, Executive Director, St. Leonard's Society of Peterborough, Tracey Cortes, Executive Director, House of Hope, and Michel Gagnon, Executive Director, Maison Cross Roads Corporation (co-author of the handbooks prepared for the original Lifer Resource Strategy in 2010). Additionally, Skip Graham, former Executive Director, St. Leonard's House Windsor, who was one of the producers of the first 'Adaptation' stage to address the needs of lifers upon admission also served in an advisory capacity. Finally, the Advisory Group also benefitted from the expertise of two people with invaluable lived experience who remain active as expert peer mentors in Ontario and Quebec: Michel Dunn (co-author of the 2010 LRS) and Rick Sauvé.

Modernizing the LRS tools and modules involved a multi-phase process that began with an in-person meeting of the Advisory Group in Ottawa, LRS revisions drafted on individual modules by SLSC, followed by input from the Advisory Group on the revised materials. Additionally, the evaluation tools were re-created to reflect an enhanced capacity for gathering more consistent and robust metrics.

The revised LRS consists of four stages: *Adaptation*, *Taking Control of a Life Sentence*, *Preparing to Return to the Community*, and *Returning to the Community*. The first stage, *Adaptation*, was designed in 2005 as a standalone document and was not part of the 2010 LRS. Given that both original authors of those earlier works were part of the Advisory Group, after consultation it was determined that the *Adaptation* stage would be well suited for incorporation into the LRS. However, the stage was noted to be unique, and needing a unique approach for delivery at maximum security institutions. Due to the difficult nature of accessing maximum security institutions for community-based service providers it was determined that a presentation that can be done semi-annually by an In-Reach Worker would best suit an interim approach to the LRS. **To better understand the complexities of service delivery in this security setting, it would be beneficial to determine the average number of years lifers spend in Maximum security before cascading to lower levels.**

Establishing relationships is essential to facilitate In-Reach Workers entering maximum security institutions for LRS service provision on a more frequent basis. It is also recommended that **an Adaptation workbook be developed to reinforce the presentation and initiate an introduction to the material.** This will raise awareness of the LRS service and pertinent subject matter for people who are in the early stage of serving a life sentence, while striking a balance to ensure that their time is prioritized for core CSC programming. Raising awareness and delivering resource materials at this early phase prepares an individual for transfer to Medium security institutions where formal LRS services (i.e. Stage 2) can begin.

Each of the remaining modules within each stage were reviewed and discussed with the Advisory Group and consensus was reached on the methods for modernizing the content based on the current context for life sentenced people. The changes discussed were incorporated in their entirety in the final product, which was vetted by the Advisory Group. The modules have maintained their original design of one overarching stage, containing multiple sub-sections to cover various elements of the module's subject matter. The most common factors for modernization of content included use of gender-neutral language, greater incorporation of culturally-diverse materials and practices, and updating activities associated with the sub-sections. Research notes and citations were similarly updated.

There was consensus that the modernized materials should attempt to design one LRS rather than its previous iterations of 3 distinct manuals – one each for 'men', 'women' and 'Aboriginal'. The Advisory Group noted that with the current absence of a national strategy for life sentenced people, a document which strived to support and connect people by virtue of the uniqueness of the sentence would best serve the current context. As such, the resources were blended to incorporate relevant elements from all three original manuals, and gender-based language was converted into more neutral terms. This allows for a flexible implementation of the material, which can be adapted to the respective environments and populations that access the service to allow for their individual experiences to lead the active facilitation work. **Further consultation is needed with people who have lived experience – inclusive of women and Indigenous Peoples – to ensure that the language and content are relevant and inclusive of their unique experience.**

A final, clear opportunity to modernize the LRS was rooted in re-creating the evaluation tools to reflect an enhanced capacity for gathering more consistent and robust metrics. This was

accomplished by creating a standardized form for evaluating each of the module's subsections so that cross-comparisons could be made to determine gaps and successes for each. Additionally, unique pre- and post-evaluations were designed for Stages 2, 3 and 4 to enable assessment of service impacts before starting and once completing a stage in its entirety. By modifying the evaluation tools in this manner, the revised LRS has built-in mechanisms for short-term as well as longitudinal evaluation. These tools are simple to administer for In-Reach Workers and will allow service providers to stay apprised of how the service is impacting clients. It is worth noting that the tools are deliberately designed to evaluate service delivery, rather than the individual participants, as the LRS is not designed to be part of the assessment process toward an individual's correctional plan. Doing so would jeopardize the position of the IRW with participants, and the nature in which the LRS service is designed to be complementary to correctional programs.

In order to provide a degree of evaluation that does speak to participant outcomes, each of the subsections within the modules are equipped with a 'self-evaluation' for participants to measure their progress throughout the course of the modules. The self-evaluations are divided into 'priority areas' of varying degrees of importance to the individual's success (i.e. important, very important, most important). These evaluations are designed to help support the individual in communicating their areas of concern and success to institutional staff and/or their case management team, and even the In-Reach Worker.

A report that provides recommendations for an enhanced strategy for life-sentenced people in Canada.

Submission of this report to Public Safety Canada comprises the third and final item of the expected outcomes of this project. Recommendations are listed in the *Recommendations to Support Policy Development and Knowledge Dissemination Activities Related to an Enhanced Strategy for Life-Sentenced People in Canada* section of this report.

Additional Considerations

St. Leonard's has been involved with peer mentoring services for decades. Through these many years of experience, peer mentorship has demonstrated to be a best practice in supporting the safe and successful integration and habilitation of people who have been in conflict with the law, particularly those serving life sentences. In 2014, SLSC researched peer mentoring within a corrections context more formally, providing support for why peer mentoring has been chosen as the format for service delivery for the LRS. SLSC's research reflected literature that highlights peer mentorship as follows:

Peer mentoring is a deceptively simple concept that requires great skill to provide. Reduced to its basic elements it is about listening and sharing lived experience. It is an acknowledged best practice in many settings, and has had particular success in prisons. Historically, mentors came from the community into the institutions to mentor. In an informal way, peers inside prisons have long offered each other support and encouragement on their carceral journey.⁶

⁶ St. Leonard's Society of Canada, 2014, p. iii.

*In order to understand the concept of peer mentoring it is important to provide a definition. As explained in the literature, peer mentoring can be described as having a mentor (an experienced person) interact with a mentee (a less experienced/vulnerable person) in order to help facilitate personal growth and provide support for the mentee. Peer mentoring is primarily characterized by face-to-face contact between the mentor and mentee in which **both parties are equal**. The relationship between the mentor and mentee is one that encourages learning and personal development with a high level of commitment to the relationship. Although both of the parties can benefit from the relationship that is built through the mentoring process, the main goal of peer mentoring is to assist the mentees in their growth/transition and provide them with positive support. Peer mentoring is also a concept that entails some degree of flexibility in which the needs and goals for both parties can change and expand over time and space.⁷*

Additionally, SLSC's (2014) research findings identified the following best practices related to peer mentoring:

Research on peer mentoring and effective training models indicate that certain practices and methods of training stand out as the most promising. Most relevant research suggests that an effective peer mentoring training model consists of: carefully choosing trainers/mentors; providing high quality training for the trainees; ensuring trainees know their roles/responsibilities; focusing on building communication skills; and, providing interactive, flexible training.⁸

The key components of an effective train-the-trainer model are outlined below:

- Choose the trainers by ensuring that those chosen care about others and are a positive role model for other life sentenced individuals.*
- Ensure training sessions are hands on, interactive, and that the trainee receives opportunities to practice the new skills they learn.*
- The most promising hands on methods of training are role playing/modelling with a mixture of demonstrations and discussions by experts (successful mentors/lifers).*
- Training should consider the appropriate length for the participants, and the key is to have multiple follow up sessions.*
- Training sessions should teach core concepts and skills needed to be an effective peer mentor, which include: clearly defining the trainees' roles, responsibilities, and expectations; teaching relationship building skills and strategies; building interpersonal skills; and, being trained in crisis management and health management.⁹*

Further to SLSC's research into the history, delivery, and results of peer mentorship, other researchers have been able to support these findings and highlight the important benefits of this practice. In Marlow et al.'s (2015) study on the impact of peer-mentoring on parolees, it was demonstrated that peer-mentors provide structural support, emotional/social support, and role

⁷ St. Leonard's Society of Canada, 2014, p. 1. (Emphasis added).

⁸ St. Leonard's Society of Canada, 2014, p. 1.

⁹ St. Leonard's Society of Canada, 2014, p. 9, 10.

modeling, and that these outcomes are integral to successful integration and habilitation.¹⁰ The structural support helped parolees achieve goals such as obtaining legal identification, connecting to health care professionals, finding housing and employment/education, and enrolling in treatment programs such as those available for substance abuse.¹¹ The mentors provided emotional/social support by encouraging drug and alcohol recovery, assisting participants to think more judiciously about choices they had to make, and allowing the participants to feel accepted.¹² Parolees were also positively impacted by interacting with peers that modeled achievable stability and success, and effective interpersonal skills, coping mechanisms, and recovery habits.¹³

Quantitative and qualitative data indicate that exposing mentees to positive peer role models who can relate to them and provide guidance from a place of shared experience demonstrates that making meaningful changes to one's life is possible.¹⁴ ¹⁵ With respect to individual qualities of the peer-mentors, participants did not identify differences of gender, race, or ethnicity as barriers or problems to working with their mentors.¹⁶ Participants primarily placed value on their mentor's ability to be non-judgemental, understanding, and accessible.¹⁷ ¹⁸ In a study in Scotland that researched the impacts of peer mentors supporting people who have been in conflict with the law to integrate to the community from prison, it was found that participants were more likely to take the advice of the mentor more seriously than that of a non-peer worker/staff because the shared personal experience enhances the credibility of the advice and the individual providing it.¹⁹ The peer dynamic enabled clients to feel safe in speaking honestly about issues they were facing, including substance use and reoffending, without fear of judgement or obstruction caused by power dynamics.²⁰ This peer-based dynamic is also associated with mentees gaining the necessary tools to identify and achieve positive and concrete goals.²¹ Research findings indicate that peer mentors are able to establish effective, stable working relationships with participants.²²

Furthermore, both Beauchesne and Farquharson (2017) and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada (2017) have reported on the ability of peer mentorship to reduce the effects of toxic stress.²³ Toxic stress, or "the prolonged activation of stress response systems" is associated with adverse childhood experiences and ongoing trauma/negative life events such as neglect, poor living conditions, and abuse.²⁴ ²⁵ Those who experience toxic stress have an increased risk of short-term and long-term

¹⁰ Marlow et al., 2015.

¹¹ Marlow et al., 2015, p. 96, 97.

¹² Marlow et al., 2015, p. 97.

¹³ Marlow et al., 2015, p. 97, 98.

¹⁴ Marlow et al., 2015, p. 99.

¹⁵ Schinkel & Whyte, 2012, p. 365.

¹⁶ Marlow et al., 2015, p. 98.

¹⁷ Schinkel & Whyte, 2012, p. 365.

¹⁸ Kalpazidou Schmidt & Faber, 2016, p. 146.

¹⁹ Schinkel & Whyte, 2012, p. 365.

²⁰ Schinkel & Whyte, 2012, p. 365, 366.

²¹ Kalpazidou Schmidt & Faber, 2016, p. 142, 147.

²² Schinkel & Whyte, 2012, p. 362.

²³ Beauchesne & Farquharson, 2017.

²⁴ Beauchesne & Farquharson, 2017.

²⁵ Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada, 2017, p. 3.

negative physical and psychological health outcomes, impacting brain development and the development of executive functioning and emotional regulation.^{26 27} Peer mentoring as an intervention has demonstrated a reduction in conflict, improved problem-solving skills, the potential to improve pro-social network of supports, including families, and reparation of other damage caused by toxic stress.²⁸ This practice has shown to be particularly effective with youth, which is relevant to lifers younger than 25 years of age.^{29 30}

Research has also demonstrated that positive results are not only experienced by the mentees, but the mentors as well. Beltman and Shaeben (2012) and Kalpazidou Schmidt and Faber (2016) found that through peer mentorship, mentors developed personal, professional and leadership skills, became more familiar with the resources available in their community, and experienced personal and emotional growth.^{31 32} Mentors reported gaining confidence and empathy through the process and were able to identify how they had progressed since being in the place of the mentee.^{33 34} Additionally, the mentors felt rewarded and appreciated for their work, and valued the increased opportunities for socialization and to learn about issues related to people of different backgrounds.^{35 36} By utilizing the peer mentoring approach incarcerated lifers are supported, as are their counterparts in the community, to lead successful, productive, and integrated lives.

Recommendations to Support Policy Development and Knowledge Dissemination Activities Related to an Enhanced Strategy for Life-Sentenced People in Canada

Presently, one quarter of Canada's prison population is serving a life sentence with no clear strategy in place to support their unique needs.³⁷ Of further concern is that half of the people in Canada's prisons aged 50 and older are serving a life sentence.³⁸ As a country, we must consider the principles of a justice system that incarcerates people who are aging inside, and strategies for their eventual safe integration to the community, especially those serving a lengthy sentence. The recommendations below are rooted in consideration of a national strategy, rather than solely based on the implementation of the LRS. Some of the recommendations reflect discussion at the in-person meeting of the project Advisory Group while reviewing the LRS material.

²⁶ Beauchesne & Farquharson, 2017.

²⁷ Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada, 2017, p. 3.

²⁸ Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada, 2017, p. 3.

²⁹ Beauchesne & Farquharson, 2017.

³⁰ Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada, 2017, pp. 3-5.

³¹ Beltman and Shaeben, 2012, pp. 37-40.

³² Kalpazidou Schmidt & Faber, 2016, p. 146.

³³ Beltman and Shaeben, 2012, pp. 37-40.

³⁴ Kalpazidou Schmidt & Faber, 2016, pp. 146-148.

³⁵ Beltman and Shaeben, 2012, pp. 37-40.

³⁶ Kalpazidou Schmidt & Faber, 2016, pp. 146-148.

³⁷ The Office of the Correctional Investigator & The Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2019.

³⁸ The Office of the Correctional Investigator & The Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2019.

To support policy development regarding an enhanced strategy for people with life sentences, SLSC recommends the following:

1. Support implementation of remunerated peer-based services for this population to address their unique needs. This will ensure that lifers are receiving skilled, necessary interventions during critical periods of the sentence that will lead to more successful transitions (e.g. the first 90 days after they are released into the community which has been established as particularly important for addressing co-occurring conditions).
2. Support development of a formal, structured training process for the revised Lifer Resource Strategy.
3. Engage people who have lived experience – inclusive of women and Indigenous Peoples – to ensure that the language and content are relevant and inclusive of their unique experience.
4. Establish a working group on life sentenced people that comprises representatives from the Parole Board of Canada, Public Safety Canada, Correctional Service of Canada, community-based stakeholders, and as much as possible, include people with lived experience. This group would review key concerns (e.g. number of lifers past parole eligibility dates, unique needs, and effective community reintegration) and strategize solutions to contribute meaningfully to an enhanced strategy.
5. Engage the Parole Board of Canada to find opportunities to extend temporary absences for lifers who are progressing well on their correctional plan.
6. Establish an employment strategy tailored to the significant number of hours lifers can potentially contribute to prison industry and develop transferable skills to the community.

To support knowledge dissemination activities, regarding an enhanced strategy for people with life sentences, SLSC recommends the following:

7. Establish a mechanism within existing institutional capacity for lifers to contact a centralized office to obtain support in navigating their sentence (e.g. re-establishing a toll-free number for lifers). This mechanism must consider limitations (i.e. resources, infrastructure) within penitentiaries to ensure that support is accessible.
8. Coordinate presentations to institutional and community Parole Officers and Parole Board of Canada members from In-Reach Workers and/or community service providers.
9. Support the development of an *Adaptation* phase workbook.
10. Inform Lifer Committee Chairs at every institution of the availability of a revised Lifer Resource Strategy; and, as a formal service delivery model has yet to be determined with CSC, engage Chairs and any others lifers that are available for consultation to determine the most effective way for the revised LRS to be utilized in the interim. This will ensure that knowledge dissemination can begin, and set the stage for an enhanced strategy that involves those who are impacted most: people serving a life sentence.

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