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User Report

THE RELEASE STUDY

Survey of Federally Sentenced
Women in the Community

No. 1991-5

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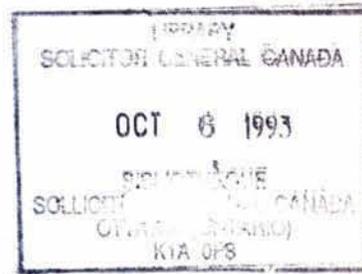
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with

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THE RELEASE STUDY

**Survey of Federally Sentenced
Women in the Community**

No. 1991-5

This report was prepared on contract for the Corrections Branch, Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada and is made available as submitted to the Ministry. The views expressed are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada.

The French version of this document is - La version française de ce document est: Étude sur la mise en liberté - Sondage auprès des femmes purgeant une peine d'une durée de plus de deux ans dans la collectivité 1991-5.

Supply and Services Canada
Cat. No. JS4-1/1991-5
ISBN: 0-662-18975-2

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Not everyone feels they can talk about events they want to leave behind them, and we are very grateful to all the women who agreed, some with reluctance and some very adamantly, to talk to us. As many pointed out, it is almost impossible to leave the experience of imprisonment behind. It changes you and your place in society for life.

We also owe a debt to the innumerable people on the Task Force, in Correctional Service Canada, in regional offices, provincial headquarters and local parole offices who helped us locate federally sentenced women out in the community. Rosemary O'Brian was the vital link who kept us all in touch.

As with the previous survey, we owe a special debt to John Evans and the Secretariat for funding the study, and to Bob Cormier for his support. Finally, Lada Tamarack and Tricia Crawford both gave up a lot of their time to talk about what happens, and the way they see conditional release.

PREFACE

There are probably as many women out in the community on conditional release as there are serving federal sentences in prison. Most of us have long since ceased to believe that what happens to people in prison will automatically stand them in good stead when they leave. Being released is a gradual process which can take a long time and requires more than a brief period of supervision.

Because there are no walls to write about, or major deprivations experienced, there is generally less concern about conditional release. It is also difficult to be concerned about collective grievances when women are scattered in small numbers across the provinces. Nor do those on conditional release have any real knowledge of what other people in their circumstances are experiencing.

Without the cooperation of the women who took part in this study, we would have only one side of the story. While we may have views about what conditional release means, and how it should be organized, those who experience it know what the realities are for them. They know what would have helped them most and what they need now in returning to the community.

This study is the second part of the survey of federally sentenced women undertaken for the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women in 1989. The first part was the prison survey (Survey of Federally Sentenced Women, Companion Volume No. 2 to the Task Force Report and User Report 1991-4). A separate survey of aboriginal women in the community was carried out at the same time as this study by the Aboriginal Women's Caucus (Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Companion Volume No. 1 to the Task Force Report).

While the survey was undertaken for the Task Force it also formed part of a larger study of federally sentenced women funded by the Secretariat. Two additional reports have also been completed, a background study on the imprisonment of women in Canada and a report which looks at the offending histories of federal women in the context of their life experiences and backgrounds (The Federal Female Offender: Report on a Preliminary Study, Companion Volume No. 3 to the Task Force Report, User Report 1991-3, and Paying the Price: Federally Sentenced Women in Context, Ottawa: Ministry of the Solicitor General 1991).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Around 200 federally sentenced women are serving sentences on conditional release in the community, including day parole, full parole and mandatory supervision. Facilities for such women are very limited, particularly at the day-parole stage since few half-way houses exist. Many women are isolated in regions without adequate facilities, or forced to stay in areas far from their home communities. Arrangements for their supervision are also very varied across the provinces, and involve both federal and provincial parole boards and officers.

At the request of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women two surveys of women in the community were conducted. Aboriginal women are the subject of a separate report, all federally sentenced non-aboriginal women were approached for this survey. The report is concerned with how in practice women in the study experienced release planning, day and full parole and mandatory supervision, and how far current arrangements and supervision meet their needs.

THE SURVEY

Fifty seven women were interviewed, two-thirds of them on full parole. It is estimated that they represent between 1/4 and 1/3 of all those on conditional release. Women on mandatory supervision were under-represented. It is probable that the survey underestimates the problems experienced on release since women with the greatest needs are less likely to have taken part.

RELEASE PLANNING

Experience of release planning was very varied. Few women had access to pre-release courses. One third had good parole preparation and support from Classification Officers. Two thirds had experienced problems including long delays, and felt CO's did not have the necessary knowledge of facilities in the area they wanted to go to. Voluntary workers and others outside the prison had provided more support. In general greater assistance with release planning was needed.

For one third of the women pre-release preparation had been very bad, compounded by poor relationships with their CO, serious delays, and slow paperwork. They felt they had got little support. Delays or failure to arrange temporary absences prior to day parole eligibility had a 'knock-on' effect on eventual release. A number of women, including those on mandatory supervision had missed parole for this reason, or chose to avoid it because of the conditions involved, or the implications that they would be 'judged all over again'. Women who were perceived as difficult or 'poor risks' had particular difficulties at the release planning stage and parole board hearings. They felt they received insufficient support, and tended to be blamed for all past mistakes.

Women in provincial prisons experienced considerable confusion over the benefits of opting for provincial or federal parole, and in some cases difficulties getting provincial parole when their case had a high public profile.

DAY PAROLE

Fifty two of the women had experience of day parole. There were wide variations in the length of stay across the provinces. There was a dual problem of a lack of half-way houses, but with existing houses often found to be too restrictive. Some houses received great praise, but for the majority the lack of choice, restrictive house rules and parole conditions, and relations with other residents created problems. Women were placed in environments which did not suit them because

of their age, the location of the house or the lack of support services. Those with families and a home nearby found the 'double life' of day parole unnecessarily restrictive. In the absence of half-way houses, residence in alternative facilities often proved unsatisfactory.

Around half the women found parole conditions and timetables too inflexible at this stage, and felt they did not receive support from their parole officer or house staff, the remainder had developed good relationships with their parole officer. Only 21% were satisfied with all aspects of their day parole.

FULL PAROLE

Two thirds of those on full parole had been well prepared for the transition, and had good relationships with their parole officer, the remainder had experienced delays, or lack of support. A willingness to be flexible or accept minor breaches as part of a learning process was an important component. The importance of good relationships with those in positions of authority over the women, both parole staff and others, was clear. Few women had specific conditions imposed at this stage, but a number found monthly reports to the police (who were not always discrete) and restrictions on travel difficult.

THE CENTRAL PROBLEMS

Relations with family members appeared to be very important and the main source of support for most women. Those released from provincial prisons generally had much closer contact with their families than those released from P4W (as they had in prison). Problems of loss of custody or access to children were still an issue.

One third of the women had good steady jobs. They tended to be those who had been well employed prior to their imprisonment. For the remainder, many of whom had few job skills, finding and retaining a good well-paid job was a major problem, and especially for older women. While very few had any work or skills training in prison, among those who did had found successful jobs.

Serious financial problems at the day and full parole stage were evident. Lack of money to pay basic living expenses was a problem for those with no job or work skills, particularly women on mandatory supervision, and mothers on welfare. There was some confusion over entitlements to special grants and allowances, and concern that medical treatment was no longer paid for when on full parole. Women released from provincial prisons found they had fewer entitlements than those at P4W.

Finding low cost housing was a particular problem at full parole and mandatory supervision stage. There was a clear need for greater provision of supported and low cost housing alternatives for women. This is an acute problem in some areas of the country.

Over a third of the women still had problems with substance abuse. Those with long-term addictions tend to be doubly penalized in failing to get parole because of their addiction, but little help in terms of finding jobs, accommodation or treatment on release. Those taking long residential programmes in the community found them particularly helpful, although some women had good AA sponsors and found this approach satisfactory.

In general women had more control over their health than in prison, and reported it to have improved since their release. Some felt they had been given too many drugs in prison, and that current mental and physical problems stemmed from conditions and the treatment they had received there.

The control exercised by classification officers, parole officers and half-way house staff was felt to be too restrictive by many women, and did not allow for the development of self-determination or sufficiency, or for individual differences in the pace and way they wished to work. There should be opportunities for changing supervisors if the relationship was not a good one. There tended to be an inflexible application of conditions, time-tables and routines which did not suit all women.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While women on conditional release have many basic needs in common they represent a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Current arrangements do not suit all circumstances or make for a satisfactory release. Far greater help with release-planning to reduce delays and provide up-to-date information is needed. This could include computerized and video information systems.

Apart from increases in the scattered provision of treatment, work skills or day-parole facilities, the quality of relationships with staff and others who support, supervise or control them is crucial to their progress. Greater flexibility in the arrangements for women on conditional release and less formal control are recommended.

Far more pro-active help in work training, job finding and support is needed. The central problems - in particular work, money, housing and addiction - create circular patterns of difficulties. The problems are greatest for those women with high need, and who ironically tend to receive least support and assistance. These women are under-represented in the study, and as a whole the survey probably underestimates the degree of difficulty experienced by women on conditional release as well as the lack of provision for such women across the country.

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THE RELEASE STUDY

SURVEY OF FEDERALLY SENTENCED WOMEN IN THE COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

While at any time there are some 200 women serving federal sentences in prison, there are a further 200 or so on conditional release in the community, either on day or full parole, or serving mandatory supervision. Attention inevitably tends to focus on those in prison, and it is not surprising that little information is available in Canada overall about the circumstances and experiences of those in the community. Once outside prison, women are scattered in small numbers across the provinces, in a variety of types of accommodation, and subject to varying parole authorities and conditions.

Yet the conditions under which these women serve out their sentences in the community are as crucial to their re-adjustment to life outside as those in prison. The Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women felt it was important to assess their views and experiences.

In principle, offenders are eligible for day parole after serving one sixth of their sentence (or six months, whichever is the longer) and for full parole after one third of their sentence. Day parole, as a form of gradual release, usually entails living in a community residential facility such as a half-way house, and is expected to be preceded by a series of escorted (ETA's) and unescorted temporary absences (UTA's).

Those who fail to get, or do not want, parole may be released on mandatory supervision after serving two thirds of their sentence. They are then subject to supervision by a parole officer for the remainder of their sentence. All offenders on conditional release are also subject to a series of standard conditions including where they may live, and requiring consent from their parole officer for travel or changes of address. In addition, a number of specific conditions may be attached to release such as abstaining from alcohol or drugs, taking part in treatment programmes, or not associating with particular people.

Facilities for federally sentenced women in the community are very limited. Elizabeth Fry Societies, the main voluntary group concerned with women in conflict with the law, for example, run only 7 half-way houses, most of them catering for both federally and provincially sentenced women.¹ A few of these have 'second-stage' accommodation attached to them or satellite apartments for one or two women. In many parts of Canada, however, such as the Maritimes, no such facilities exist, and accommodation may have to be found in a YWCA, or a residential facility for men. Houses which cater specifically for aboriginal women are even more restricted. The absence of day-parole facilities severely restricts the opportunities for women from remoter regions or towns without such accommodation to settle back into the communities from which they come.

¹. These are located in Toronto, Brampton, Hamilton, Kingston, Ottawa, Montreal, and Vancouver.

At the request of the Task Force two separate surveys of women in the community were carried out. Aboriginal women on release were contacted by the Native Women's Association of Canada². All other women were approached for this survey (see Appendix I for details of the approach used).

It was agreed that all women on conditional release would be approached through their parole officer. While in principle this seemed a simple process, it coincided with a strike by federal parole officers making the task of locating women in the short time available for the study very difficult. In addition, across the provinces women are subject to a variety of different parole systems. Thus in the Maritime provinces the National Parole Board (NPB) undertakes the supervision of women serving both federal and provincial sentences. In Quebec, only federal women serving life sentences or on mandatory supervision are seen by the NPB, the rest are supervised by the provincial board. In Alberta, federal women are supervised by provincial parole officers.

Nor do all women have the same access to day parole. Women in Quebec, for example, can be granted temporary absence to stay in a half-way house or elsewhere on the basis of a decision made by prison staff rather than a parole board.³ Again in a number of provinces some supervision is undertaken by NPB officers, some on behalf of the NPB by parole officers appointed by Elizabeth Fry Societies. All of this added to the difficulties of identifying, and making contact with federal women on release, as well as comparing their experiences.

This report outlines the experiences of the women taking part in the survey of pre-release planning, of day parole, full parole and mandatory supervision. It deals with the actuality of release rather than with how it is intended to work in principle. Planning satisfactory release is not an easy task, but because of the small numbers of federally sentenced women, and the scarcity of facilities compared with those available for men, additional problems are imposed on the system. The experiences of the women interviewed, and the issues which they raise for the conduct and provision of community resources for women coming out of prison on conditional release are, therefore, of considerable importance.

². See Task Force Report Companion Volume #1 Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Fran Sugar and Lana Fox, Ottawa, January 1990. Companion Volume #2 Survey of Federally Sentenced Women, Margaret Shaw et al., Ottawa, December 1989, reports on the earlier survey of women in prison.

³. See Acts and Regulations Respecting Imprisoned Persons Gouvernement du Quebec 1980. An inmate qualifies for temporary absence after serving one third of their sentence. New regulations have been introduced since the study was conducted.

1. THE SURVEY

A total of 57 women agreed to take part in interviews:

- 38 (67%) were on full parole,
- 14 (25%) on day parole or "absence temporaire" and
- 5 (9%) on mandatory supervision.

Interviews took place between November 1989 and January 1990. It is not possible to estimate how many refused to be seen. Certainly parole officers reported that some women did not wish to take part, preferring to leave their prison experiences behind them. In other cases it proved impossible to contact women in the time available. Nevertheless, a rough estimate suggests that they represented between a quarter and a third of all those on conditional release.⁴

On the basis of figures provided by the Offender Information System of Correctional Service Canada (CSC) in December 1989, roughly 63% of all women on release were on full parole, 15% day parole, and 22% mandatory supervision (MS). This suggests that women on day parole were over-represented and those on mandatory supervision under-represented among those interviewed.⁵

There was also a greater response from women coming from provincial prisons than from Prison For Women at Kingston (P4W) which normally houses around two-thirds of the federally sentenced population. Of those responding, only 28 (49%) were on release from P4W and 29 (51%) from a provincial prison⁶, although 8 women had spent time in both during the current sentence.

It is likely that women who have experienced the greatest problems on release, or have been out a long time, were less easy to contact or willing to be interviewed than others. The low response from women released from P4W or on mandatory supervision, and the exclusion from this survey of aboriginal women all suggest that the responses underestimate the difficulties encountered by federally sentenced women.⁷

⁴. Figures provided by the Offender Information System of the CSC in September and December 1989 identified 205 and 182 women respectively on conditional release in the community (including aboriginal women). The December figure excluded provincially sentenced women supervised by federal parole officers, but both excluded federal women on day parole in Quebec and those on full parole (apart from life sentences or on MS) in that province.

⁵. The Offender Information System gives a picture of the total population of women on conditional release at any time. This is different from a release sample such as that used by Canfield (1989) in her study of factors associated with parole decisions. She looked at all releases from P4W over one year and found that 48% were released on MS and 36% on full parole. Although women released on MS tend to have shorter periods of supervision, the need for services to meet their requirements is often greater.

⁶. Under Exchange of Service Agreements with the Federal Government some women can serve their sentence in their home province in a provincial institution.

⁷. A study by Betsy Kappel (1986) focused on women in Ontario who have had the greatest problems on release. They included 25 women from P4W who had been rejected for parole, or had their parole revoked, and who were regarded as a high-risk/high-need group.

Nevertheless, this does not imply that those who did respond have had an easy time. They represent a cross-section of experiences and requirements. Twenty five of them (40%) were first offenders (compared with 39% of those still in prison) and 9 were serving life sentences. They had been on release for periods ranging from one month to ten years, and had served from 6 months of their sentence to 10 years in prison.

The distribution of those responding is shown in the following table.

	Day Parole	Full Parole	Mandatory Supervision	Total
Released from P4W	02	22	04	28
Released from provincial prisons	12	16	01	29
Total	14	38	05	57

2. RELEASE PLANNING

"I'm not the same person any more"

"You're not like the prison describes you!"

Planning for release involves a number of stages: finding out what services and facilities are available outside, making contact with half-way houses, employment or treatment programmes, finding jobs or accommodation, developing a release plan in preparation for the parole board hearing. Obtaining parole may require the prior completion of escorted and unescorted temporary absences (TA's). Work release or pre-release courses may also be part of the pre-release process although their availability is very restricted.

All of these stages are designed in principle to help women readjust to being outside in the community again. Not all of them can be controlled by the women themselves, however, and while some may be anxious to make their own arrangements, almost all are placed in a position of considerable dependence upon personnel inside and outside the prison.

Experience of planning for release among the women interviewed was very varied. A few women at P4W (8) had attended pre-release classes.⁸ One or two others had not felt they needed to take the course, or had sufficient help from other sources, but for the majority no such course had been available either at P4W or in provincial prisons. A few women had undertaken work release outside prior to their release, which they had found very helpful. Some had escorted and unescorted TA's over the period leading up to release, but in many cases considerable delays over their completion had a 'knock-on' effect on eventual release dates.

Across the country a variety of people seemed to be involved in release plans, from Classification Officers at P4W, to social workers, caseworkers, counsellors, parole officers, and workers from Elizabeth Fry, John Howard, and other voluntary organizations.

Attitudes towards release planning also varied. Some women serving shorter sentences began their preparation for release soon after they arrived, some waited to be told what to do. Others badgered their Classification Officer (CO) to begin their 'paperwork' as their parole dates came nearer or went by. A few felt that it was up to them to undertake the work or it would not get done. Others needed their CO or social worker to make arrangements on their behalf. Much depended on previous experience, the personality of individual women, as well as on their own resources and knowledge.

"The day my sentence began I began working on parole - I've seen too many women get messed up."

"You're advised of your eligibility dates. If you don't put in your request you don't get out. It's up to you to assume responsibility."

"It depends on your social worker. Mine made all the arrangements. She really helped me."

⁸. All had been released from P4W, and all but one found the course very helpful.

Preparation for the Board

Around one third of the women would appear to have had a relatively smooth experience in planning release, applying for, and getting parole. They experienced no problems, TA's has gone well, they had found their CO or social worker supportive, and were released on or near their day parole date. In general these women tended to be first offenders or those serving relatively short sentences.

"No problems at all - the paperwork was done on time, my CO attended [the parole hearing]. I got parole the first time I applied."

On the whole these women were also satisfied that their CO or caseworker knew about the kinds of programmes and facilities available in the community which they intended to go to.

For the majority, however, there were problems. A small group of women from provincial prisons felt they had been pressured into going out on day parole when they had not expected it, or had not had time to prepare for it. A much more constant complaint was the slow completion of papers by CO's or parole officers which resulted in delays in eventual release. Many women felt their CO did very little, and could tell them little about the content of addiction programmes outside, for example, or the benefits of different half-way houses.

Those going to more distant places got even less guidance. This had led to problems on their eventual release since satisfactory support had not been set up. In many cases women sought information from other inmates, from chaplains, or lawyers, but it was E. Fry or other voluntary organization workers, and Parole Officers who had provided them with most information, helped arrange jobs and set up their release plans.

For over a third of the women, however, problems were far more extensive and in part appeared to be compounded by a bad relationship with their CO or caseworker. The latter had not completed paperwork, given them misleading information, been unhelpful, made mistakes with release dates, been over-critical, failed to tell them about resources, tried to control them in a way they felt unjustified. Some felt there was no trust between them because of a previous revocation.

One woman said she had three successive CO's who gave her different information, or didn't meet with her or follow through. Other women had to appeal (successfully) to CSC Headquarters because of mistakes over release dates. Another's experience was described as "nothing less than a nightmare". She was told on around six occasions by her CO that she was not ready to apply. This usually meant another four to six months' delay in each case, setting up a vicious circle of frustration leading to discipline charges, and hence further delays. She felt the CO did not like her and never said anything on her behalf. Seeking to change her CO she was told this was not allowed since it was a personality conflict.

Another woman similarly experienced serious delays, with dates of hearings being set back constantly for reasons not of her making (e.g., lack of escorts for TA's) and felt she had been lied to in order to cover up slow paper completion. In such cases resort to legitimate complaints procedures such as inmate grievance procedures, or putting in requests for changes of CO only seemed to exacerbate the situation.

Delays and slow paperwork were particularly common at P4W. Staff shortages, and heavy caseloads do not ease the difficulties of planning release applications for women, some of whom have very complex personal and institutional histories. Yet their grievances against a system they

feel to be far from fair, are justified. Some found in the end that parole dates were so long passed that they would prefer to waive day or full parole or to go out on mandatory supervision.⁹

A related problem was that experienced by women with long histories of offending often combined with addiction. Half-way houses would not accept them for day-parole and their chances of ever getting parole seemed negligible. One woman after years of frustration had sought the help of her lawyer and gained her first ever parole.

Coming out on Mandatory Supervision

All five women who were on mandatory supervision had wanted day parole, but because of previous revocations, slowness in completion of papers, or lack of support in the community, they failed to get their parole.

The release experience of those on mandatory supervision highlights the ironies of the parole process. They were all women who in various ways needed quite a lot of support to deal with problems of addiction, physical and sexual abuse, low employment prospects and homelessness. Four of them felt they had got very little help at the time of release. Three of them were without work, and one at school. All found lack of money a problem.

Opting out of parole

On the other hand there were some women currently on day parole who did not want full parole. One felt she was "too far down the road", another likewise had passed her full parole date and would wait for MS. One refused full parole on the grounds that the Board would have tried to control her further, for example, by imposing conditions of treatment "which would have been intolerable", and she did not wish to be "judged all over again."

Parole hearings

"I wasn't able to explain...I was too nervous, and I was crying too much."

As became evident from interviews with women in the earlier prison survey, those serving their sentence in provincial prisons were often confused over the benefits of waiving federal rights in favour of provincial parole. They were unsure whether or not they would get earlier TA's or day parole from a provincial board, or from P4W. A number of women in the release survey chose to go to P4W in the hope of obtaining an earlier release. Some had experienced considerable difficulty getting parole from a provincial board where their offence had a high public profile, or for speaking out publicly about prison conditions. In some cases they had been before the Board up to six times before parole was granted.

The problems confronting women who are perceived as 'poor risks' because of their offending or institutional histories are compounded at the parole stage. Apart from the difficulties of completing papers, getting acceptances at half-way houses and setting up a release plan, others emerge on reaching the hearing itself. They may find CO's or Parole Officers withdrawing their support for parole. They may be asked to justify past revocations they themselves feel to have been unjustified, or be 'tried' all over again. One woman, for example, had a previous charge of attempting to escape. It arose from an incident in which she had climbed on a roof in protest

⁹. In her study of parole at P4W Canfield (1989) found considerable evidence of slippage. The majority of women had not got day parole by the time they were eligible for full parole.

against repeated delays over being transferred to P4W. Rather than fight the charge and spend a further two months in the provincial prison, she chose to plead guilty and was transferred. At the parole hearing that conviction was used as evidence that she was not a good risk.

Another woman had been given conflicting instructions by case officers inside and outside the prison concerning at whose house she was to spend an unaccompanied TA in order to be with her young son. The lack of communication between the case officers meant she had to change addresses. No explanation of the error was communicated to the Board. At the parole hearing she was confronted with being unable to respect the conditions imposed, and found herself unable to explain the error. Her parole was denied, prolonging imprisonment and separation from her son.

Such stories are repeated in many different forms by other women. Their frustration and sense of injustice with 'the system' is very understandable from their point of view. They feel that outside Parole Officers, and Parole Board members see them only in terms of the institutional 'image', not as they really are, that they are never allowed to forget past errors, or be able to put their point of view, and that any mistakes are of their own making.

3. GETTING DAY PAROLE

"It's scary when you get out...I'd still wipe my utensils, hear bells and the sound of keys..."

The Half-Way House

"You can't beat the rent. I have a room alone and basically the same things as the rest of society."

Overall 52 of the women had been or were currently on some form of day parole. Of these 36 were or had been at houses run by Elizabeth Fry Societies, and 16 in a variety of other settings (including houses run by Seven Steps, John Howard, the YWCA, a mother and baby, or psychiatric home). One woman chose to serve her day parole in a Correctional Centre (see footnote p. 17) and one was released from prison to her home for increasing periods of time for humanitarian reasons.

On their release the majority of women had been met by staff from the half-way house. A few were driven by parole officers, the chaplain, or family members. Having planned for release, however, does not necessarily prepare you for being outside. Women's reactions to being in a half-way house varied widely. Some were very enthusiastic. At least two different houses were described as "the best in Canada":

"very good, very professional"
"the staff were very supportive and easy to talk to"
"excellent, the staff were easy to talk to"

Others found it 'OK' but with some reservations. They found the home 'too unstructured', for example, would have preferred being in a house in another part of Canada, and near their families, or in one which was less controlling.

For some, however, it was worse than prison. They felt insecure, frightened or threatened by the other women, and a loss of privacy. This was particularly the case for several of the elder women who had often never been in prison before, or for those who regarded themselves as protective custody cases. They had found prison itself a traumatic experience, but the half-way house setting much worse:

"After the first days I said to myself "I'm going to put in a request to go back to ***." At least in prison, at night, you have a sense of security. But there, in the evening, the rooms are not locked. There, girls sometimes come in 'high', and at night there is just one supervisor. She does the rounds once an hour. A lot of things can happen in an hour. But I finally mastered my fear."

"The half-way house was hell - much worse than prison. There was no justice. At least in prison everyone is on an equal footing."

Others also found it a stressful experience for other reasons. One said she had hated the half-way house because she had wanted support and counselling which was not available there, and she found it noisy and poorly managed. Subsequently, on her own initiative she had found local counselling support "around the corner" which no one in the house had told her about. Others also complained that their house was dirty, or other residents stole within the house or brought in drugs, that it was difficult always being surrounded by other women from inside, or being with women who had never been in prison.

A number of women coming out of P4W found it difficult to relate to provincial women in shared houses, and would have preferred a home for federal women only. Others found being with women from inside in itself difficult, and wanted to get away from the same setting.

"It's the same milieu, the same women, you fall right back into things."

The location of houses was also a problem. Women from remote regions, or areas such as the Maritimes with no half-way houses continued to be far from their homes. A number of women had long journeys to work - one spent five hours a day travelling to and from work. For some women it also meant returning to city centres where they had got into difficulties in the first place.

"The area where [the half-way house] is situated, there are bars, drugs, homosexuals. That's not the place for girls who have been criminalized....in the city centre."

The lack of half-way houses

Because of the paucity of half-way houses for women coming out of prison, some found themselves in houses primarily for men, or in residences which acted as sheltered accommodation for women or men who had no offending histories. Some had no support services, or were run by staff who they felt to be too 'middle-class' and without the training or experience to help them. One woman housed in a YWCA found she could not sleep at night because hourly room checks always woke her up, while many other residents had 'mental problems' which she found "very depressing". A number found it difficult to relate to other residents. Another, as the only woman in the house, found herself relegated to a damp and cold basement, and went through a succession of three unsatisfactory houses during a lengthy day parole. One woman was assaulted while staying in a hostel for men.

It is clear, nevertheless, that there is no perfect blueprint for a half-way house which will suit all women, although some came pretty close. Of the same house one woman declared it "was wonderful" and another "dirty, nobody cares, and the Provincials steal". The lack of half-way houses forces women into environments which do not suit them. They are not a uniform group of people with similar interests. They have widely differing needs because of age or prison experiences or their previous life style, although their basic needs for accommodation, work and support may be similar.

Overall, around a fifth of the women (11) felt their half-way house experience was very satisfactory, 20 found it tolerable but had some reservations, and a third (17) felt there were major problems.

Day Parole Conditions

"I have to stay here, do my daily tasks, show them my bank balance, tell them where I'm going, who I'm seeing....."

A wide variety of conditions had been imposed on the women. Apart from the standard conditions of residence and reporting, not travelling beyond a given radius without permission and not taking alcohol or drugs etc., there were a number of special conditions. These included not communicating with certain people, seeing counsellors or psychiatrists, attending addiction or work skills programmes, or giving urine samples when requested.

While some women found the imposed conditions very reasonable, others objected to those which they did not think appropriate to them (e.g., abstaining from alcohol if they had no drinking problem, or seeing a counsellor when they did not think they needed one). A number of women pointed out that it was ridiculous to bar them from associating with addicts or ex-offenders when they had to live in the half-way house. One woman found she had to get anyone she wished to spend time with 'vetted' by her parole officer, and one was barred from associating with her boyfriend until the condition was dropped after she consulted a judge on the legality of imposing such a restriction.

House rules

Most houses imposed house rules of their own, such as attending weekly or fortnightly house meetings, eating evening meals in the house, or attending church services. Some women were clearly subject to far more restrictive regimes than others. While most women were expected to return to houses by 11.0 pm on weekdays and 1.0 pm at weekends, one house had imposed 7.30 pm and 11.0 pm deadlines. Other women had to attend twice-weekly NA meetings imposed by the house.

Some found there were too many petty rules and that you were often treated like a child, such as being grounded for not cleaning your room. In some cases staff checked bank accounts, or smelt your breath to see if you had been drinking. Another house imposed limits on the ages of children allowed to visit their mothers and eat meals there, which for one woman - until the rule was changed - had meant her three children could not eat together. Another house was felt to impose a lot of restrictions on visits by children. One woman in a house which allowed children to stay with their mothers objected that they 'pushed' religion too much, and she had to take her child to church every week.

A double life on Day Parole

"The bed could have gone to someone who really needed it."

A major objection was the condition of residence in a half-house itself. Thirteen of the women, all of whom had homes which they could have gone to, felt it was pointless having to stay in the half-way house when, as a number of them pointed out, the place could have gone to someone who really needed it.

"Staying in the half-way house brought me down."

A number of women were spending weekdays or weekends in their own home, returning to the half-way house at night. For them the disparity between having to be responsible citizens and often mothers during the day and obeying house rules at night like children was difficult to cope with. One said she would rather live at home and phone in every day or report to her parole officer three times a week than stay at the house.

"It's ridiculous living a double life - straight during the day and an ex-con at night."

Not all women who went out for increasing periods to their families felt this way. Many of them were glad to get a '5 and 2' or a '6 and 1' allowing them to spend the week living at home and only one or two nights at the half-way house. A major factor seems to have been the rigidity or flexibility in the application of rules by the half-way house.

Relations with Parole Officers

"She's a great lady."

"A great guy - he always started with the good stuff and ended with the good stuff."

"I regarded [her] as a friend."

On the whole, relationships with parole officers or caseworkers on the outside were much better than those with CO's or social workers in prison. Some women saw their parole officer every two weeks, others worked with staff in the half-way house who relayed reports on their progress to parole officers. In some cases women kept the same caseworker they had in prison.

Some 50% of the women (24) said they received very good support from, and developed a good relationship with their parole officer or caseworker while they were on day parole. One felt she was able to know her parole officer who in turn had remarked "It's fun working with you. You're not like the prison describes you." Another relied on her caseworker totally:

"He's been my counsellor since the beginning. I never want to change I know that what he does is to help me....He has opened my eyes to things. He directs me and gives me advice...I can see that that helps me a lot...He is a person in whom I have a lot of confidence."

Thirteen others found their PO 'alright' but often did not feel they could trust them or talk to them openly. One described her PO as supportive, but rather formal and not friendly. Another felt she was "just another case."

"He's good to talk to, but I don't reveal everything because he's CSC."

Finally, nine women felt they received little support and had poor rapport with their parole officer or caseworker. In part this may reflect the double role parole supervisors have to play in providing support but also maintaining control.

"sadistic and tough"

"A jerk, strictly by the book and hard to please."

"...very untrusting, I'm always having to prove myself to her."

"...couldn't confide...always looking for errors...not confidential..."

"very inefficient....she messed up my papers and put my application to college in late"

One woman was told by her PO that he didn't want her on his caseload because he was used to petty crimes. He had not granted her travel passes, even when her father had a heart attack. Another felt her PO was unreasonable, and she always left the office in tears. A number of women were upset by the lack of confidentiality in half-way houses. They had not expected staff to keep files with intimate information on them or their family members. They felt this was a breach of trust.

In the final analysis only 11 women (21%) were satisfied with all aspects of their day parole.

4. FULL PAROLE

Thirty eight women were on full parole at the time of their interview. All but two had completed periods on day parole varying from two months to over three years.¹⁰

Length of time on day parole (completed cases only)	
Under six months	06
6 months to under a year	14
One year to under two	06
Two years to under three	06
Three years or more	04
Total	36

The length of time they expected to be on full parole also varied considerably reflecting the wide variation in length of sentence. (Some had also spent considerably longer periods of time in prison on a similar length of sentence than others).

Expected time on full parole (time so far plus to warrant expiry date)	
Under one year	03
One year to under two	08
Two to four years	13
Five to twelve years	05
Life	09
Total	38

¹⁰. One woman had stayed at a Correctional Centre so that she could take a night shift job. She would not have been able to do so at a half-way house. The other wanted to avoid the half-way house and was released on full-parole.

Getting full parole

Two thirds (24) of those on full parole had no problems at the hearing stage. They had been well prepared, received support and advice from their parole officer or caseworker and had got their parole first time. In some cases they had made written application rather than appear before the Board.

"My PO got everything ready and said very positive things at the Board hearing."

"I knew I was going to be paroled, because at the day parole hearings I was told I didn't belong in prison."

"I simply applied and received notice from the Board."

One third, however, had experienced delays, failed to get parole the first time, or felt they did not receive the support they needed. Some acknowledged they had problems on day parole and had been advised by the parole officer to wait.

Six women felt they had particularly bad experiences. One woman had not been asked to see her caseworker prior to the Board as was the normal pattern, disagreed with the caseworker's assessments of her, and relied on an outside doctor's report to provide a more balanced view. She had also asked to be released back to her home community but found no arrangements had been made. Another woman in a remote area asked for a hearing before the Board. While her fare to the hearing was paid, that for her parole officer was not. She was assigned another parole officer one hour before the hearing and felt "devastated" by the experience. Similarly, in the absence of her parole officer on holiday, another woman said that the 'stand-in' had told lies about her at the hearing causing her to break down in tears.

"I got it 7 weeks late because of a one day revocation...because I changed jobs on a weekend..."

It is evident, that what is crucial for almost all women is a good working relationship with their parole officer. Even when parole officers delay applications to the Board, if the relationship is a good one, the women were more willing to acknowledge that the delays were reasonable.

Getting on with parole officers

Relationships with parole officers while on full parole or mandatory supervision were overall much better than at earlier stages of release. Two thirds (27) felt they had an excellent relationship with their PO. They were concerned and supportive. They were not inflexible in their approach to breaches, but willing to regard minor breaches as a part of the 'learning process'. Twelve women still felt some reserve, or did not feel they needed the supervision imposed, and only 4 women had bad relationships. One had lost her job when her PO had told her boss she was on parole. Another felt that her needs were not being taken seriously when it was suggested that support for counselling be withdrawn as too expensive (and that it would be cheaper to treat her in prison).

Conditions of full parole

Few women had specific conditions attached to their full parole, which may be one reason why relations with parole officers seemed more satisfactory. Six women were to continue counselling, four addiction programmes, 12 were to abstain from alcohol or drugs, a few were barred from

associating with certain people. One woman was still very closely supervised with weekly visits to her PO, and conditions on who she was to live with, and what time at night she was to return.

Some of the women commented that they found the continued condition of monthly reporting to the police unnecessary and "ridiculous". One remarked that it was very embarrassing because "some of the police are not very discreet". Other women found the 25 mile travel limit unnecessarily restrictive, given the remoteness of some locations, and the distances to be travelled to get to nearby towns. Nor were travel passes always easy to get.

For women released on a life sentence these conditions are often a continuing source of disquiet, even more so when they feel that their debt to society has been paid in full, or they had been wrongfully convicted in the first place. There is a sense for a number of these women in which being on parole - for life - means being forgotten about by society, but continually having to fulfil routine requirements.

"You can't bury a life sentence."

Asked if they would have preferred other arrangements at the full parole stage, a common request was to have less restrictive control, particularly in terms of monthly reporting to the police or their parole officer. More than one woman convicted with a boy-friend or husband found her conditions more restrictive than her partner's. Others needed still to find good jobs or better financial support, a few mentioned the need for co-operative, or low income housing, or being able to have a place of their own (and independent of boy-friends, or relatives). Finally, a few still sought addiction or counselling support.

In terms of the main tasks they felt they needed to deal with now, money, jobs, and housing were all crucial. Some had legal problems in terms of fighting deportation, or getting charges or convictions dropped, or obtaining a court order against an abusive partner. For many it was still a question of coping with the psychological and the practical effects of having been in prison.

Overall, there had been a gradual improvement in experiences, and relationships with support staff, the further women moved along the release process (see Appendix II). Those who reach this stage are by and large the more successful since a number of women on day parole will have been returned to prison for breaches of conditions or new offenses. Nevertheless, it reflects also the greater self-determination allowed them.

5. THE CENTRAL PROBLEMS

In one of the few studies of women on release from prison in Canada, Lambert and Madden (1976) found that family support and employment were the two most important factors related to successful return to the community. In relation to stable employment in particular they concluded: "The significance of this finding cannot be over-estimated...."

Families and children

"they just believed in me...they meant everything to me.."

As with the women interviewed in the prison survey, family contact and support was very important to those on conditional release. Asked what had helped them most over the course of their sentence, the most common reply was the support of family members, and knowing that their children needed them. But the differences between those released from provincial prisons and those from P4W were still evident. The former had usually had good contact throughout their imprisonment, the latter were too far from their families to have been able to see them regularly. At the day parole stage, some of those from P4W had been able to arrange placements in half-way houses nearer their families, but in a number of cases, because of the absence of houses they were still far from home.

Thirty of the women felt they had good support from their families and saw them regularly on day parole, often spending days with them. Others kept in contact by phone or had occasional visits. Twelve women had no contact or support from family members. Only a third of those released from P4W had good contact, compared with over two thirds of those from provincial prisons.

Thirty seven of the women had children, and thirty one of them were still responsible for at least some of them. This meant that some 38 children aged 16 or under were still dependant on their mothers at the release stage. Only three woman had their children with them on day parole. The rest remained in the care of relatives or foster parents as they had done during the period of imprisonment.

While on day parole 24 women had been able to have daily or weekly contact with their children, 4 had phoned every day or had occasional visits, and 6 had no contact. In some cases this was because they were refused access by ex-husbands, in others because of distance, or because they did not want to see their children having long since lost contact or involvement with them.

The effects of the entire period of imprisonment upon many of these children had been marked. In one case both parents had been remanded in custody, giving no opportunity for satisfactory arrangements to be made for their children. This resulted in a series of foster homes which together with adolescent crises proved disastrous. A number of the women had children going through adolescence which they had found very difficult to deal with from a distance. Some had lost custody of their children as a result of the sentence and were trying to regain it.

Finding work and staying employed

With the exception of a few women who wanted to look after their children, and a few who had reached retirement age, most women wanted full-time employment. Twenty one (37%) had found themselves what appeared to be good, steady jobs with reasonable pay, and which they were very content with. These included a few who had set up their own businesses. Others had more variable employment, low paid, seasonal, sometimes part-time in the absence of full-time work.

A number were currently looking for work, having found it difficult to get employment with their record, to return to a job at their previous level, or find a well-paid job. A few of these women were doing voluntary work but wanted a paid job. Older women, those with no work history, and those with addiction problems had all had difficulty finding anything other than voluntary work. In view of this it is surprising that so few women had taken or been offered work skills courses on their release on day parole, particularly since only a handful of women, mainly from P4W, had taken part in work training in prison.

Employment status			
	Day Parole	Full Parole & MS	Total
Good job	02	19	21
Variable, low paid	02	08	10
Unemployed & looking	05	07	12
Taking courses, school	05	02	07
At home plus baby, retired	--	07	07
Total	14	43	57

It was evident, nevertheless, that of the 21 with good jobs, only 5 had never had any real work experience or paid work before. All the rest were returning to jobs at a level similar to that they had prior to prison. The other five had developed work skills while they were in prison which had proved to be marketable and satisfying. In spite of their success, it must be acknowledged that the women who agreed to take part in the survey do not represent all women coming out of prison. Those who have the greatest difficulties are probably under-represented.

The threat of losing jobs if their record was known was still hanging over many of the women. One had been dismissed from a good public service job after complaints. Several others had lost or not found jobs when their record was disclosed. A number were careful to stipulate that the interviewer contact them at home.

"The most difficult thing to deal with is the stigma attached to ex-prisoners, and the Task Force can't do anything about that."

Financial problems and traps

Closely linked to the problems of finding a job - and somewhere to live - is that of money. Some women had gone into prison with outstanding debts, others were in dispute with Social Assistance or Federal or Provincial tax departments over money thought to be owing or unjustifiably claimed, or had Compensation Orders to pay. Overall a third of the woman mentioned they had serious financial difficulties at the day parole stage or later.

"I had a rough time at the half-way house because I couldn't get social services."

...on day parole

At the day parole stage women are not eligible for social assistance, and there appear to be major problems and differences in the amounts of money allocated to women in various places and stages of their day parole. It is not easy to get an accurate picture, since the women were themselves often unclear about their entitlements. Weekly allowances for those on day parole for those not working appeared to vary although most got around \$25 a week "from E. Fry" while they were in the half-way house. One woman, who had to stop work because of an illness and was not able to claim a disability allowance, was given \$50 a month "by the house". Another, unable to work because of her record and her age, got \$56 a month. A number of these women said they had a 'rough time' coping on so little. For those attending classes, pay was slightly better, but varied from \$7 to \$12.50 a day.

Knowledge of entitlement to special allowances also appeared to be variable, and can set traps for the unwary. Some women coming out of provincial prisons (and without the benefit of shopping passes from P4W) found they needed new clothes, and felt they should have had better financial support. One woman, for example, needing new clothes to start a job had been unable to get a clothing voucher because she was not working or paying rent. She was then charged with welfare fraud for giving a friend's address. Others had been given allowances for clothing, however. The availability of the special discharge grant of up to \$560¹¹ was mentioned by very few women although a number would appear to have been eligible for it. One woman had found out about it too late to claim, and felt her half-way house should have advised her. Only four mentioned that they had the benefit of the grant to buy furniture and set up their accommodation at the full parole or MS stage.

The need for better financial assistance at the day parole stage, especially for those who are without work, was underlined by many women.

...on full parole or MS

At the full parole stage or for those released on MS, when all living expenses have to be paid for, financial problems continued. A number were now on welfare but still found it difficult to manage, particularly those with children. One single parent with three children earned \$400 a month at a part-time job, and was expecting a cut of \$150 in her welfare benefits of \$235 because of a change in her circumstances. Others without work also found it difficult to manage on welfare or disability payments of \$400-\$580 a month, to pay day-care, or for drug maintenance programmes stipulated as a condition of their parole. Some had to use food shelters or rely on friends to help with accommodation, a situation which sometimes forced them into relationships which were not satisfactory.

An additional problem at this stage is that medical expenses are no longer paid by the CSC. For a number of women who felt they had problems arising from poor treatment while in prison this was a source of considerable grievance. Physiotherapy, dental treatment, counselling sessions are expensive and a number found they could not afford them, and felt that the CSC had dragged its feet in terms of agreeing to treatment at the day parole stage. It had been suggested in the case of some women that it would be cheaper to send them back to P4W for treatment, a notion they found totally unthinkable.

¹¹. This is payable to people discharged on MS or full parole who have spent more than 60 days in an institution, under the Federal Discharge Allowance Act. It is only available to people who are not working, but can demonstrate need. It can only be claimed within a limited period.

Housing

Half-way houses provide temporary accommodation, but no longer term solution. Nor do they help those coming out on full parole or MS. One woman had moved five times in the six months since her release on MS. The problem for a number of women is finding a balance between affordable rented accommodation and keeping away from city centres where they have got into trouble in the past. For some this means living with boyfriends, girlfriends or parents which may place them in a position of dependency. One or two seemed isolated, away from any friends or places they had known, or any prospect of jobs, in their attempt to separate themselves from the past.

Satellite apartments, co-operative housing, or low-income housing are all options which a number of women stressed were needed for those who did not have a home to return to. They could offer not only affordable accommodation, but some prospect of support. It is also worth considering ideas such as the supported lodging scheme (used by probation services in Britain for remand cases) as an alternative to half-way houses.

Help staying off drugs and alcohol

Around two thirds (30) of the women have had problems with alcohol or drugs at some stage in their lives. A few felt they had overcome their addiction, but 39% (22) still said they had problems with drinking or drug use. Eighteen women were seriously addicted to alcohol or drugs. Parole conditions proscribing the use of alcohol or drugs and compulsory weekly attendance at AA or NA meetings may provide some support for 'keeping clean', but the pressures to consume are very great for some women, and particularly in half-way houses in areas where drugs are easily available.

Thirty four women had taken some kind of programme for substance abuse while in prison. Two thirds of them had found the programme very helpful, the rest felt they were pressurized into taking them, or had to do so to impress the Parole Board. Nine had taken longer courses on leaving prison (e.g., Amethyst, Alcohol Recovery Centre, Oka, Henwood etc) as a condition of day parole, and some were in touch with AA sponsors or attended AA meetings. A few were on methadone maintenance programmes again sometimes as a condition of parole.

At the full parole or MS stage, some women continued working with AA or counsellors at addiction centres, or on methadone maintenance. Overall, comments on programmes taken since leaving prison were positive. Those taking long programmes were the most enthusiastic, and found follow-up sessions very helpful.

"Very good...it worked because I wanted it too."

"I got the support I needed."

"...it was wonderful...extremely helpful."

"This time it brought out a lot of things."

There still remained the problem, however, of women who felt they did not need to attend programmes because addiction was no longer a problem. One remarked that she regretted saying that she had drunk heavily since she was now always regarded as having a drinking problem. Another found she had been described quite wrongly as a solitary drinker. One or two wanted the closer support of an AA sponsor rather than having to attend meetings. Those on methadone maintenance programmes had felt they wanted to get off drugs, but found methadone itself addictive, as well as being very costly on full parole or MS when costs are not covered.

Health issues

Health care and physical health in general were issues of considerable concern among those women interviewed for the prison survey. For the women in the community survey health care and their general state of health was less likely to be a major problem, reflecting their greater control over their own health care. Almost half of them felt they had no concerns about their health, but a third had moderate or serious concerns ranging from conditions such as epilepsy to lung infections, viral infections, cysts, liver problems, and spinal conditions. Some attributed their problems to past drug or alcohol abuse, some to conditions and poor treatment in prison.

Nine women mentioned they had particular problems coping emotionally at the release stage. Some had difficulties coming to terms with prison, or felt edgy or depressed since release, others had suffered memory loss and found they could no longer concentrate well.

A number of women noted that their health had improved considerably since release. Depression or eating disorders, for example, were no longer a problem for some. This suggests, as indeed did more than one doctor working with women on release, that their symptoms had been to a large extent situational, and not constitutional. Some felt they had been given too many drugs in prison, and sought help on parole to get them out of their system.

Experience of physical or sexual abuse among the women, as with those interviewed in prison, was high. A number had taken part in programmes or counselling at P4W concerned with abuse, and others were continuing counselling sessions or wanted to seek counselling at a later date. Just under half of those who said they had experienced abuse felt they did not want or need any counselling, that they were "OK about it" or had "learned to cope with it".

Control

"It doesn't help when you are pushed into something."

The issue of control and its converse, the absence of self-determination, runs through much of what the women had to say about their experiences of both being in prison, and being on release in the community. For some women it meant having to take courses they did not feel they needed, or comply with parole conditions which were not relevant to them. For others it meant being forced to move at a pace they did not want to move at. For others it meant the dual standards of being expected to obey rules 'like a child' at one moment yet being expected to function as a responsible adult at the next.

The overall control exercised by half-way house staff, and by parole officers or caseworkers was for some women too much. They felt that they were pushed into programmes, that they were "watched and probed" by house staff, not helped, that the latter were always looking for faults, and always ready to send you back to prison:

"It's like being in [prison] except that you can be out on the street. It's stressful. You have to watch what you do...like if you don't feel like going to school...or have to be in by 11.0'clock....It's as though you're a child. They shouldn't push people to do things they don't want to do. Like going to school. I feel they expect me to do it. I'm not doing it for me, I'm doing it for them. I feel I have to do it. I don't want to take any chances. You know, I've got a long time to do here."

"When you come in they come up to you and smell your breath. They turn the light right up so they can see your eyes."

"This guy won't let up, he's playing with my head. It feels like I'm an inmate and he's beside me with a stick. I have to sit there with the newspaper and make phone calls, but I'm not ready to work yet. I want to breathe a little bit. I stopped consuming two weeks ago and I'm having a hard time keeping clean."

Part of the problem seems to lie in an inflexible application of routine approaches. Thus, they are expected to have to work in relation to the stages of the release process, rather than in relation to their own timescale and needs or circumstances. They were expected too to 'be like others', to mix, to take part in activities.

"All I wanted was to be left alone. It took a while to get the message across, about a year....I had to get it through their heads that I'm not like their typical inmate."

Just as their approach to release planning varied, some felt they needed 'time out' at the start of day or full parole before starting school or training courses or looking for a job, while others had set everything up beforehand, or wanted staff support to do so immediately on release. In some places women were allowed to work at their own pace (e.g., one woman was allowed to rest for three months on arrival at the half-way house). This was clearly an option which some other women would have wanted.

Supervision and choice

Another implication of control is that of being unable to change parole officers or caseworkers - even counsellors - if the relationship proves incompatible. Some women for a variety of reasons found it difficult to get on well with certain staff in the prison or outside. They may have gained a reputation for being 'difficult' or 'high need' or a 'troublemaker'. They may have felt that they were wrongfully convicted or mistreated by staff. It may simply have been a question of a difference of personalities.

Such incompatibilities were evident among a number of the women, both those who had clearly been seen as 'difficult' and 'troublesome', and others who had never been in trouble with the law before, or kept a low profile in prison. In some cases they had found an alternative source of support with a doctor, psychologist or psychiatrist from whom they had sought treatment.

Yet the importance of having a good relationship with parole officers or caseworkers was very clear throughout the survey. Those who got on well felt they got tremendous support and encouragement. Some women had several changes of officer before finding one with whom they related well. In everyday circumstances people have the freedom to change their doctor or dentist if they find they do not relate well. These women need the opportunity to do the same. It should not necessarily be held against them if they find they cannot work well with certain people. For them, it may make the crucial difference between a successful reintegration back into the community or a difficult or failed one.

Yet another aspect of control is that of the dominance of 'professional expertise', which had meant that a number of women undertook counselling sessions, or took medication they felt they did not need.

"I was filled with medication at.....I don't know whether it was necessary. I didn't like it...I'm not one for taking pills."

Women's lives are subject to a vast array of controls in terms of how they are to behave. Some women have found themselves unable to conform to those expectations. From their point of view

the controlling nature of imprisonment and conditional release does not help them come to terms with their offending or the reasons why they ended up breaking the law. Nor does it provide solutions to existing problems. In some cases it may leave those problems untouched, in others exacerbate them. Often control is exercised where none is needed, creating unnecessary resentment.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"A prison is a prison...a volcano that empties and settles. Nothing can help when you're inside."

"[asking about our needs]...is predicated on the assumption that the criminal justice system is supposed to help people, when it's just legal revenge."

Those who took part in the survey do not fully represent all federally sentenced women on conditional release. Women released from P4W, and those on mandatory supervision were under-represented in the survey, and aboriginal women excluded since they took part in a separate study. Women in all these groups were likely to have had greater difficulties making release plans, being accepted by half-way houses and treatment programmes, and coping on the outside.

Collectively, those who did take part probably provided a more optimistic picture of the experience of conditional release than is the reality. This makes their criticisms more pertinent, since they are in reality likely to apply to greater numbers of women. It also means that the need for support programmes on release for women with addiction problems, counselling, housing provision, financial and job training or placement programmes are higher than might be gauged on the basis of this study, and particularly for those who do not get parole.

Nevertheless, the experiences and views of those who did take part cover the whole range. While they have some basic needs in common, they illustrate yet again the enormous variety in the backgrounds and experiences of women given federal sentences, and the dangers of presuming equal need:

They included middle aged women never previously in conflict with the law serving long sentences; women with severely disrupted childhoods, in trouble with the law since age of 12 or so, and abused and institutionalized for much of their lives; young women who became addicted to drugs in their late teens and whose one drug-related offence, and the difficulties they experience in prison, have given them a reputation as violent offenders.

They included women married for some years to men who have physically and emotionally abused them almost every day of their lives together; young women short of money who agree to carry a package through customs; couples with a family and financial problems who try to solve them by selling drugs or through financial misappropriation; elderly women who have been addicted almost all their lives, and committed numerous petty offenses to support their addiction, but with no work skills or job prospects.

And they included women serving life sentences for murder who have to live not only with the past, and with the effects of spending a long period of their lives in prison, but also with the consequences these have for re-establishing a life for themselves in the community.

Yet the central issue is not merely that of the provision of services, it is how women have experienced release, how they have been treated, the kinds of expectations which have been made of them, the quality of the relationships they have been able to establish with staff or others who support, supervise or control them and which are crucial to that experience. In this respect those who took part had much to say.

What is needed?

For those who work closely with them, much of what these women have experienced may come as no surprise. Nor should their criticisms be allowed to eclipse the fact that some women had very supportive and satisfactory experiences of release, and that some half-way houses work very well. What they identify as the main needs involve not only services and facilities, but changes in the way they, as women, are dealt with. They include the following:

Release planning

- more information to women in the provinces on the benefits of opting for federal or provincial parole
- the opportunity to take pre-release courses
- more information and support at all stages of the release process
- opportunity to complete TA's prior to parole hearings
- fewer delays in the completion of paperwork
- far greater support for women seen as 'poor risks' in planning release and applying for parole

Day parole

- far greater availability of half-way houses across the provinces
- some choice of half-way house e.g., exclusively for women coming out of prison, or mixed residences but with access to informed and supportive staff
- fewer controls and restrictions in the half-way house and greater encouragement of responsibility
- greater flexibility in the application of house rules
- opportunity to opt for alternatives to half-way houses e.g., stay with own family and report more frequently, stay in supported lodgings or home placements
- more realistic conditions on day parole
- greater flexibility in the application of parole conditions e.g., allowing women to work at their own pace rather than to a fixed timescale
- more opportunity for choice in taking programmes
- financial support for medical and dental treatment in the community

Full parole

- fewer routine conditions e.g., monthly reporting to police; greater freedom to travel over 25 miles particularly for those serving life or long sentences
- continued financial support for necessary counselling, medical or dental treatment in the community
- satellite, low-cost or co-operative housing available to women coming out of half-way houses or prison on full parole or MS

Supervision

- the right to change supervisors, without blame, if the relationship is poor
- supportive, concerned PO's, rather than coercive ones or those who work 'strictly by the book'
- a willingness to recognize change, and not judge solely on the basis of record or institutional assessments

- recognition that women should not have to take counselling or treatment programmes if they feel them unnecessary.

At all stages

- pro-active help finding jobs especially in remoter areas and for older women
- provision of low cost housing
- more post-release skills and job training programmes
- much clearer information on financial entitlements and special allowances
- more financial support on day parole, full parole and MS
- greater availability and choice in the types of programmes or counselling available for e.g., substance abuse, or physical and sexual abuse
- greater availability of residential addiction courses in the community

Overall

- greater availability of information and legal support
- greater encouragement of responsibility and self-determination
- greater flexibility in the application of the release process

Rigidity and flexibility

At the release stage, questions of distance from home and family or programme availability, which dominate consideration of life inside prison, are almost eclipsed by the problems of trying to make arrangements for release back to the community. The problems of how you plan for appropriate accommodation, individual counselling or find a job, when you are not only cut off from the community but many hundreds of miles from home cannot be overemphasised. This aspect of having a single federal penitentiary for women has tended in the past to receive less attention than others, but it also relates to the provincial prisons too. It is not just a question of 'making arrangements'. It requires comprehensive knowledge of facilities and resources, up-to-date information, persistence, and good contacts to ensure that the best possible arrangements and support are provided at the outset.

The range of arrangements made for these women indicates considerable room for flexibility in the application of release conditions. But in other ways, as the comments of many of the women indicate, there is a lack of imagination in applying conditions in individual cases. There is an over-emphasis on applying the same conditions to all women, particularly in the case of day-parole. And as is so often the case, those most in need seem to have had the greatest difficulties making arrangements for release, getting parole, or when they do get out.¹²

It also seems indefensible, and unjust, that bureaucratic problems should delay the opportunity to benefit from a well planned release process. Confusion and lack of information also seem automatic. The fact that many women do not feel their CO or caseworker has an in-depth view of the facilities and opportunities available in their community or city, is in part a consequence of the spread of women in different prisons and under different parole jurisdictions across the provinces. It is also in part a consequence of the fragmented nature of much information in the first place. Centres or organizations may start, take time to adjust and find their clientele, and disappear after a failure of funding, or a change of direction. Many of the kinds of people and settings suitable for

¹². There is some irony in the fact that the main reasons cited for refusal of parole in Canfield's study (1989) were 'inmates needs' and problems of alcohol and drug abuse.

women coming out are also likely to be small-scale and localized, and may depend heavily on the energies of particular people. They are often subject to changes in personnel.

Why cannot computerized information systems be used to keep people in touch with developments and facilities, or to keep up with release dates and parole applications? Why cannot the women themselves have access to a computer, cassette or video system which provides information and contact points for the areas they wish to go to?

Among the women interviewed for the prison survey, the desire for a good job on release was almost universal, and expectations were usually realistic in relation to their own capabilities. The gap between plans and reality is, however, quite high. The reality, as this survey suggests, is that it is hard to find a good job, whatever one's capabilities, coming out of prison. Yet there is ample evidence that having a job is of crucial importance for successful reintegration, and that pro-active job-finding and support is an essential area for development.¹³ Jobs bring not only money, but some measure of self-assurance and independence, as well as the possibility of companionship and support.

We expect an enormous amount of people coming out of prison. They move from a situation of deprivation and almost total dependence to one where opportunities to overstep the controls still in place are legion. The quality of the relationships and the support they receive from those still in positions of authority over them are essential components for tempering the controlling nature of that contract. It is no coincidence that the further along the release process one moves, the better the relationships with parole officers or caseworkers become, and the greater the degree of satisfaction the women feel about key decision-making points such as board hearings. This reflects in part the greater self-determination and empowerment allowed to them as they move away from the prison.

¹³. Apart from the study by Lambert and Madden (1976) mentioned above, Canfield (1989) found in her sample of women released from P4W that those who had a job, even for a short period, during conditional release, were much less likely to be reconvicted than those with none.

APPENDIX I

A NOTE ON THE SURVEY METHOD

In view of the very short time-scale of the Task Force, the survey had to be planned and completed within two months. A final decision to interview women on conditional release was not reached by the Task Force until the end of September 1989. Interviews took place between mid-November 1989 and mid-January 1990. A preliminary report on the findings was submitted to the Task Force at the end of December 1989.

It was agreed with the Task Force that all non-aboriginal women on conditional release would be asked by their parole officer if they were willing to be contacted by the interviewers for the survey, and have the right to accept or decline. Because of a strike by federal parole officers, and the wide variety of arrangements made by individual provinces for the supervision of federal parolees, it proved very difficult to obtain a complete list of the names and location of all federally sentenced women on conditional release. Official lists proved to be difficult to use. A number of women initially identified proved to be provincially sentenced women supervised by federal parole officers, for example.

In addition, because of time constraints, parole offices were contacted by a variety of people, and it was not always clear whether all eligible women on their caseloads had in fact been contacted. Overall, parole officers area managers were extremely helpful, but in some cases contact addresses or telephone numbers given to the interviewers were no longer correct, and one or two women failed to turn up for appointments.

The questionnaire used for the survey was developed in consultation with the Working Group of the Task Force. It was based partly on that employed in the prison survey, with additional material covering the various stages of the release process. It was mainly open-ended, and used in a way which allowed the women interviewed to elaborate on events and issues as much as they wished. The interviews were conducted by Karen Rodgers or Tina Hattem.

Interviews usually took place on neutral territory, such as a hotel room, or in their own home, and in as relaxed and informal a manner as possible. A few were conducted over the telephone because of extreme distance and transportation problems. Most interviews lasted a considerable time, in one or two cases up to four hours, reflecting the willingness of the women to share their experiences, and express their views.

APPENDIX II

THE RELEASE EXPERIENCE

The table below provides a general indication of the extent of satisfaction or difficulty experienced by the women in the survey in the process of their conditional release. The numbers on which the percentages are based vary slightly for each column since not all women are at the same stage of their release, or have gone through the same phases.

Summary of overall experience of the release process and relationships with case worker and parole officers			
	Good	Some problems	Bad
Experience of applying for parole and relations with CO's, PO's etc.	30 %	35 %	35 %
Experience of day parole and half-way house	23 %	42 %	35 %
Relations with PO on day parole	52 %	28 %	20 %
Experience of applying for full parole	63 %	21 %	16 %
relations with PO on full parole	63 %	28 %	09 %

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