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PRISON COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAM (PCOP) & RECIDIVISM:

HIGHLIGHTING OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS AGED 30 AND UNDER -2019-

Program Description

The Elizabeth Fry Society of Calgary's (EFry) Prison Community Outreach Program (PCOP) assists women and youth (18-30) during their incarceration and as they transition back into the community upon release. While in prison, individuals enrolled in the program are provided with support to manage incarceration constructively and to develop competencies that better prepare them for successful reintegration. Upon their release women continue to work within intensified case management to address the core issues leading to their incarceration and criminalization.

1.1 What are the recidivism rates for PCOP clients aged 30 and under?

There are challenges to identifying recidivism rates based on the lack of data collected by provincial institutions as well as a diverse approach to definition of recidivism between provinces, territories and federal correctional institutions. Recidivism, for example, is not tracked beyond 2 years in federal institutions post release.

Although EFry is unable to conduct longitudinal research on clients based on internal structures, and possesses limited internal data on our information management system implemented in (2012), we are reliant on reviewing trends related to individual client data. This approach has limitations for a number of reasons; 1) our agency has improved upon data practices since 2012

when our system was first implemented, therefore, we are unable to identify some nuances which were not captured earlier and 2) We cannot establish strong assumptions based on clients who have not returned for services in or out of prison.

Data collection processes within EFry have evolved in the last 5 years between 2015-2020. Based on our current data collection capabilities, we are only able to establish trends we have observed rather than assert with certainty an absolute reduction in recidivism rates.

However, some assumptions can be made regarding our current data; such as individuals who have engaged in services may not be re-institutionalized as many times as previous years or have not returned to incarceration and accessed services in our community program. We cannot assert that individuals are not being incarcerated outside of Calgary or Alberta and/or for those that have not returned for services within our agency. Equally, if they have closed their file, we cannot definitively assert whether they have continued to progress for the long term after incarceration or not.

Another way we analyze client improvement is through our Medicine Wheel Service Plan (MWSP) evaluation tool. This tool allows us to identify progress during and after individuals' complete services. Again, this data would be limited in its ability to establish recidivism rates, but it is helpful in identifying the continual progress of clients.

Despite some indication of adapting criminalization from our internal data, there are many variables which may not indicate clear outcomes. The complex issues that some women experience may mean they are engaged in services for a number of years off-and-on before there is sufficient progress towards their achieving independence. However, this does not mean progress has not been achieved, as progress is subjective and is individual to each person based upon their initial and current challenges and barriers.

With this in mind, what we can demonstrate through the data we collect is a look at the specific services and programs offered under PCOP, the percentage of our clients aged 30 and under accessing them, and how these interventions can work to mitigate circumstances that may place strain on successful reintegration for our clients and could leave them vulnerable to reoffending.

1.2 What are the programs under PCOP and how do they work to promote successful reintegration and protect against recidivism for women aged 30 and under?

According to a literature review conducted on behalf of The Elizabeth Fry Society of Calgary in 2019, "younger adults account for the majority of admissions to correctional facilities in

Canada" and are overrepresented in federal as well as provincial and territorial institutions, as compared to the general population[1] . There are multiple risk factors for recidivism among young women. These risk factors can be broken down into two categories: 1) Offender risks, and 2) Women-specific risks[2]. Offender risks encompass variables that are not gender specific, such as insufficient housing, lack of employment, and untreated addictions and mental illness[3].

Women-specific risks are an area of risk-factors shown to be particularly tied to female offenders such as "low self-esteem, parenthood and history of abuse" and can increase the possibility of recidivism if not sufficiently addressed[4]. Overall, the set of risk factors for re-offending is markedly similar to the cycle of factors that lead to incarceration for many young women in the first place: "trauma and abuse in early childhood, addictions in their youth, and subsequent homelessness, poverty, and criminal engagement[5]."

The work undertaken by the PCOP case management team and group programming facilitators seeks to directly address many of the above-mentioned risk factors for re-offence, in both the "Offender Risks" and "Women-Specific Risks" categories. As EFry engages predominately with women, a majority who identify as Indigenous, our programming places a special focus on working to address women-specific risk factors for re-offence from an Indigenous perspective. All of our programming can be understood as working to promote the conditions necessary for a more effective reintegration process for our clients and putting in place measures which act to protect against their reoffending. This will be explained in greater detail below as the work accomplished surrounding successful reintegration and safeguarding against recidivism is highlighted according to the data provided for each program included under PCOP.

PCOP CASE MANAGEMENT

(PRISON/COMMUNITY OUTREACH)

2019	# (%)

[1]

[i] Alexandra Kanters, "Women's Incarceration in Alberta," *The Elizabeth Fry Society of Calgary*, accessed June 1, 2020, https://elizabethfrycalgary.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/PCOP-Backgrounder.pdf.

[2] Kanters, *Women's Incarceration.*

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

Total Clients	518
Clients Aged 30 & Under	47%
Gender	100% women
Indigenous Status	59% Indigenous

Table 1.

Table 1 shows the total number of clients enrolled in PCOP during 2019. The Prison and Community Outreach programs are all under the oversight of the EFry case-management team. Clients aged 30 and under comprised almost half of the total PCOP caseload last year. All of these clients identified as women and 59% of these individuals identified as Indigenous. According to the case notes recorded by PCOP case managers during 2019, the case management team was able to provide their clients with critical support in accessing applications to external addictions treatment, healing and mental health programs; help them apply for and find housing; assist them in requesting needed income supports through Alberta Works and other income support programs; aid them in the application process for education upgrading, as well as to assist them with accessing application forms for important government documentation such as Alberta Health Care Cards and Birth Certificates. Provision of these supports help to intervene in and work to solve issues that can otherwise leave our clients vulnerable to being pushed toward reoffending and impede their overall ability to undertake a successful reintegration process.

The following tables dissect the PCOP numbers further by focusing on data specific to both the Prison and Community Outreach Programs.

PRISON PROGRAM

The prison program involves EFry case-managers meeting and working one-on-one with incarcerated women (18+) remanded in the Women's Annex in the Calgary Youth Offender Centre and the Lethbridge Correctional Centre to offer resources and provide support which contributes to managing their time constructively in prison. Case-managers also connect women with the different group programming EFry offers in prison. These programs focus on developing important life-skills and promoting emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing for the women who participate that is essential to creating a foundation for successful reintegration into the community upon their release. A more detailed account of the group programming offered under PCOP will be provided later on in this report.

During 2019 44% of the overall population of clients enrolled in the prison program were aged 30 and under. All of the clients in this age cohort identified as women, and 58% identified as Indigenous.

To provide a more in-depth examination of the numbers for the prison program in order to assess the possible impact it has had on diminishing recidivism, the prison program data was analyzed to observe what number of those in the 2019 aged 30 and under cohort had been released from prison in 2019 that had 12 months or more time elapse since their release date. A year or more since release from custody was considered ostensibly enough time to assess whether or not a client had been documented as reoffending. It was then determined what percentage of this cohort identified as Indigenous and the percentage that had participated in group programming. The following table shows the results of this analysis.

2019 Prison Program Numbers – A Closer Look		
% of 2019 Prison program participants (aged 30 & under) having had 12 months or more elapse since their release from prison.	**12%**	
	% of individuals (aged 30 and under) released from prison in 2019 with 12 months or more elapsed since their release from prison documented as having reoffended since their release	**0%**
	% of these same individuals that identify as Indigenous	**52%**
	% of these same individuals that participated in EFry group programming	**22%**

Table 2.

As is demonstrated in the above table, 12% of the women released from custody in 2019 were found to have at least 12 months or more time transpire since their release from custody. Slightly more than one fifth of these women took part in the group programming offered under PCOP, and bit more than half identified as Indigenous. None of the women in this cohort are currently documented, according to EFry files, as having reoffended since their release. When including all women aged 30 and under released from prison during 2019, only one individual, or 0.5% of the cohort, was documented as reoffending and facing reincarceration.

To offer some perspective, these findings were then compared to federal recidivism rates. A recent 2019 study on recidivism rates in Canada conducted by Statistics Canada examined a cohort of offenders released from custody between 2011 - 2012 and used reconvictions within two years after release as the measure for determining recidivism. This study found that women overall had a recidivism rate of 12% and Indigenous women, in particular, were found to have a recidivism rate of approximately 20%[6]. When comparing the data for Federal recidivism rates with the findings in Table 2, it would seem these findings suggest the existence of a protective relationship between participation in PCOP programming and recidivism: in particular, that participation in PCOP does support individual progress on reducing recidivism rates among female participants aged 30 and under in the program. However, as mentioned earlier in this report, there are limitations to the ability of this analysis to make any definitive statements concerning recidivism rates and successful reintegration regarding these findings, as not all the women who were released are ready to participate in intensified case management.

Participation in all EFry programing is voluntary, therefore we are restricted around our data with women who exhibit readiness and capacity to engage in services. For some women, progress is a slow process, which cannot always be captured easily through data points. With these constraints in mind, a strong, conclusive statement regarding the relationship between the prison program and a reduction in recidivism cannot necessarily be made with this data. It can, however, be inferred with some confidence, that these low rates of recidivism among our clients point toward a positive relationship between the services we offer clients and a subsequent reduction in circumstances which can leave individuals vulnerable to reoffending and experiencing poor reintegration in the first place.

EFry tends to have better outcomes for women with complex issues due to the relationship that is built with them during their incarceration, which tends to influence contact after release. Women who may be less ready to address core issues enter into services at the level where they are ready, which may mean basic needs support, systems navigation of referrals and supports, and emotional support. Over time, women tend to increase the level of supports they require to improve their circumstances. The more engaged women become in their relationship with EFry case management and our programming, the more likely they are to progress through the system of care and achieve positive outcomes for themselves.

To outline client outcomes in more detail, included below are three tables demonstrating client feedback on the prison program in 2019. Table 3 below describes how clients were impacted regarding the supports and services that their EFry case-managers provided to them throughout their time in prison and after release.

2019 Prison Program Feedback

[6] "A Comprehensive Study of Recidivism Rates Among Canadian Federal Offenders," *Statistics Canada*, accessed June 1, 2020, https://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/research/err-19-02-en.shtml.

Client Feedback Concerning Supports & Services Provided by Their EFry Caseworker		
% Clients Meeting Target Outcome		
Received Meaningful Support During Incarceration	Received Help Accessing Resources in the Community Upon Release from Prison	Received Help with Healthy Decision Making and Avoiding Further Criminal Involvement
81%	82%	78%

Table 3. This table illustrates the percentage of clients who responded to each question indicating that they either "Agree" or "Strongly Agree". A response of "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" was assessed as meeting the Target Outcome for each client in the program.

The information provided in Table 3 clearly demonstrates the overwhelmingly positive and impactful experience clients in the 2019 Prison Program reported having with their case-managers. 81% felt they had received meaningful support from their case-manager during their time in prison and received the help they needed to be connected to essential resources in the community upon their release from prison. Most saliently, in relation to the primary assertion of this report, is that more than three quarters of the women enrolled in the prison program in 2019 reported that the help they had received from their EFry case-manager had directly assisted them in making healthier decisions for themselves and in avoiding further criminal involvement. This finding provides additional evidence to support the main contention of this report: that enrollment in EFry's PCOP works to mitigate circumstances that can leave clients vulnerable to reoffending. It is clearly demonstrated through this data that a substantial majority of the Prison Program clients in 2019 report that the program has impacted their lives in such a way as to provide them the support, access to resources and healthy decision-making skills necessary for them to avoid reoffending.

To build yet a stronger foundation of evidence to reinforce the claim that the 2019 Prison Program was able to provide the necessary supports to enable a meaningful reduction in the risk factors for re-offence and poor integration, two additional tables will be examined.

2019 Prison Program Outcomes					
% Participants Indicating Specific Needs Their EFry Caseworker Helped them Manage During Their Incarceration					
Emotional Support	Understanding Legal/Correctional Processes	Maintaining Family/Community Supports	Provided Activities That Supported Well-Being	Crisis Management	Other
65%	58%	57%	68%	40%	30%

Table 4.

Table 4 demonstrates the specific needs that EFry case-managers assisted their clients in meeting and managing throughout their time in custody. A majority of clients reported that their case-managers had played a vital role in offering them emotional support, understanding

legal and correctional processes, maintaining family and community supports and helping them access activities that supported their overall well-being. These findings offer evidence that during participation in the Prison Program throughout a client's time in custody, an infrastructure of emotional wellbeing, social connectedness, and practical support was established that worked to be of both immediate and future benefit to these women during their time in prison as well as upon release. Table 5 goes on to illustrate the various issues focused on for each individual in the prison program in anticipation of their release from prison. Release plans were created by each client with the help of their case-manager in order to have supports in place that were tailored to the specific needs of each client upon release. As is depicted in this table, a substantial number of 2019 Prison Program clients designed their release plans to prioritize housing, treatment programs, acquiring necessary identification documents, working on income, benefits and taxation documents, as well as seeking out education, training and employment programs. All of these interventions reflect the primary risk factors for recidivism and poor reintegration (i.e., lack of housing, untreated addictions and mental illness, lack of employment, etc.). Research on release plans has pointed to the potential of release plans to be "the difference between recidivism and successful transition to the community"[7]. As such, the use of release plans clearly demonstrates yet another way the Prison Program works with its clients to solve for and mitigate the risks for re-offence they may encounter upon their release from custody and to work to provide the conditions necessary for a successful transition back into the community.

2019 Prison Program Outcomes					
% Participants Indicating the Focus of Release Plans Created with their EFry Caseworker					
Housing	Treatment	Identification	Income/Benefits/Taxes	Education/Training/Employment Programs	Other
53%	65%	51%	58%	44%	15%

Table 5.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAM

2019	(%)
Aged 30 & Under	31%
Gender	100% Women
Indigenous Status	71% Indigenous

[7] La Vigne, Nancy, Elizabeth Davies, Tobi Palmer and Robin Halberstadt, "Release Planning for Successful Reentry: A Guide For Corrections, Service Providers, and Community Groups," *Urban Institute*, accessed June 1, 2020, https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/32056/411767-Release-Planning-for-Successful-Reentry.PDF.

Table 6.

The Community Outreach Program continues the work of the Prison Program in seeking to assist women previously enrolled in the Prison Program who have been recently released from prison and are transitioning back into the community. These individuals continue to be provided with a case-manager that supports them in meeting their various needs and achieving the targets indicated on their release plans for essentials such as housing, income support, treatment programs, education upgrading, mental and emotional support, and finding employment. As illustrated above in Table 6., in 2019, 31% of the clients we worked with in the Community Outreach Program were women aged 30 and under, and almost three quarters of this age cohort identified as Indigenous.

Both the Prison and Community Outreach programs connect the women they serve to programming that offers the support necessary to aid in the prevention of reoffending and promoting ongoing successful reintegration into the community. These programs, their 2019 outcomes and the relationship they have to protecting against recidivism will be explored in more detail below.

GROUP PROGRAMMING FOR PCOP CLIENTS

(UNLOCK/INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE/INDIGENOUS RESOURCES)

Group programming provided within our prison, community and outreach programs plays a vital role in assisting to create the practical, psychological and emotional foundation required for successful reintegration for our clients upon their release from prison. EFry offers a number of different group programs that focus on promoting healing and wellness for women. These programs are offered both in the community and within provincial institutions. For EFry, Indigenous culture is at the core of how our organization operates. Elders and Knowledge Keepers provide valuable guidance and contributions to our organization's work with women and youth on their healing path. This includes individualized supports, talking and healing circles, ceremonies and gender-based teachings. We also provide Indigenous cultural programming such as beading, and drumming sessions on a weekly basis at the EFry offices for community members and also at the Calgary Young Offender Centre (CYOC) and the Calgary Remand Women's Annex for incarcerated youth and women. In 2019, we saw altogether 1732 non-unique clients participate in these programs. In addition to this, we offer personal-growth and skills-based programming such as our UNLOCK program and programming to reconnect women with Indigenous language and culture, such as the Indigenous Language program. These two programs and their connection to reducing recidivism will be highlighted and explained in greater detail below.

UNLOCK PROGRAM

UNLOCK, which stands for “Unlocking New Levels of Capacity and Knowledge”, is a program offered under PCOP that conducts workshops for women both in prison and the community. These workshops focus on teaching important life skills and promoting emotional and mental wellbeing from an Indigenous epistemological and ontological standpoint. “Healthy Relationships,” Codependency,” “Communication Skills,” “Renting Smart,” “Emotional Expression,” “Goal Setting,” “Self-Esteem,” and “Anger Management,” are some of the topics presented in UNLOCK workshops. The themes addressed in these workshops and the practical advice given are important to building a healthier psychological, emotional, and spiritual base for the women who participate. The new understanding, knowledge and skill-sets that are gained from attending these sessions are an important aspect of aiding in the overall mitigation of the aforementioned risk factors for re-offence, especially women-specific risk factors such as low self-esteem and histories of abuse and trauma.

UNLOCK

2019	**(%)**
Aged 30 & Under	37%
Gender	100% Women
Indigenous	47% Indigenous

Table 7.

Table 7 shows that 37% of the women involved in UNLOCK in 2019 were in the aged 30 and under cohort. All participants in UNLOCK in this age cohort were female and 47% identified as Indigenous. An example of the learning outcomes achieved in our most highly attended workshop in 2019 is provided in Table 8 below. The table reveals high levels of achievement for those who participated in the 2019 workshop focused on the topic of "Communication Skills.” The acquisition of the sorts of emotional and interpersonal relational skills which UNLOCK workshops promote can work to mitigate circumstances that may create conditions under which re-offending is more probable. For example, learning to gain the confidence in oneself and emotional competency needed to communicate negative feelings to others in a healthy way rather than internalizing negative feelings or attempting to express these feelings in ultimately unproductive, self-destructive ways.

2019 UNLOCK "Communication Skills" Workshop Learning Outcomes				
% Participants Achieving Target Outcomes				
I understand the four different communication styles	I can identify negative versus positive communication strategies	I understand the difference between verbal and non-verbal communication	I can identify strategies to improve my communication skills	I learned something new today
93%	93%	100%	100%	100%

Table 8. *This table demonstrates the 2019 UNLOCK "Communication Skills" workshop learning outcomes by identifying the percentage of participants meeting target outcomes upon completion of the workshop. A minimum rating of 4/5 was used to indicate success, due to the accompanying measurement scale which defines the number 4 as a response of "A lot" and the number 5 as a response of "Completely".*

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE PROGRAM

The Indigenous Language program, offered in both prison and the community, is similarly focused on building self-confidence, reconnecting women to their Indigenous culture and promoting mental, emotional and spiritual stability and well-being. Women enrolled in this program are taught the Blackfoot language (dialects of which are spoken among the Piikani, Siksika and Kainai Nations in Southern Alberta) and are exposed to various aspects of Blackfoot culture, teachings and ways of knowing.

45% of clients that took part in the Indigenous Language program during 2019 were aged 30 and under. According to those clients who took part in the client feedback survey conducted throughout the program during 2019, a significant majority of clients (88%) reported having gained confidence in themselves through their participation in the program. Almost all clients (98%) agreed that they had been made to feel a sense of belonging during their time in the program, and that the program had aided them in making progress toward their goals (92%) (see Table 9). This feedback offers notable insight into how participation in the Indigenous Language program for women aged 30 and under helped to improve their self-esteem and overall well-being by increasing their self-confidence, providing them with a sense of belonging and helping them to achieve the goals they had set for themselves. This is a clear demonstration of the way group programming under PCOP can work alongside the primary Prison and Community Outreach programs to help diminish women-specific risk factors for recidivism such as low self-esteem and other forms of emotional and psychological distress resulting from histories of abuse and trauma.

2019 Indigenous Language Program Feedback
% Clients Meeting Target Outcome

Gained Confidence in Myself	Felt Sense of Belonging	Program Helped Me Make Progress Toward My Goals
88%	98%	92%

Table 9. This table illustrates the percentage of clients who responded to each question indicating that they either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”. A response of “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” was assessed as meeting the Target Outcome for each client in the program.

1.3 Conclusion

Despite the noted limitations of EFry’s data to provide precise rates of recidivism among our aged 30 and under female clients, this report expresses strong evidence demonstrating how EFry case management and programing under our Prison Community Outreach Program works to deliver a network of supports and services to the aged 30 and under female client cohort. It further presents how EFry programing works in conjunction with Indigenous methodologies to help mitigate the risk factors for recidivism, both in general offender risk factors shared equally among both genders and those risk factors particular to female offenders. By offering such a comprehensive range of programming and case management support throughout both incarceration and upon release from prison, EFry is able to make a sustained, longitudinal impact in the lives of the women it serves. This continued involvement and effort to offer ongoing support in multiple realms of women’s lives, such as basic needs, cultural needs, spiritual needs and emotional and psychological needs is directly connected to creating the conditions necessary to promote successful reintegration into the community and to diminish the potential for re-offense.

References