

***TOWARDS IMPROVED CORRECTIONS:***

***A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK***

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## INTRODUCTION

The First International Symposium on the Future of Corrections, was held in Ottawa, Canada, in June 1991. Delegates to that symposium agreed on the need for a strategic framework, that is, a statement of values and principles for corrections.<sup>1</sup> Following the symposium, a drafting committee convened by the Correctional Service of Canada worked on developing such a framework. The result was a framework document, "Towards Excellence in Corrections."

Delegates to the first symposium also agreed to hold another symposium in two years' time to examine the strategic framework and test its validity for a variety of correctional systems. The second symposium was held in Poland in October 1993. Senior officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and academics from 29 nations attended the second symposium. They endorsed the strategic framework in principle and recommended a number of changes and improvements, which have been incorporated into this version, which has been given a new title.

The intent of the strategic framework is to assist correctional organizations in defining their role within the criminal justice system. This involves:

- explaining what corrections is;
- defining what is meant by effectiveness in corrections;
- explaining what corrections can realistically achieve; and
- expressing the values that are vital to corrections in a democratic society.

This framework is not a set of precise, specific standards but a broad vision that will serve to guide developments in the field of corrections. Its aim is to inspire improvement in performance, not just change. As such, it should serve as a starting point for discussion. How the framework is used must be determined by each system that is in search of a better future. It can serve as a reminder of the opportunities for improvement and an impetus for action. Commitment to the values and principles contained herein will allow correctional systems to achieve significant progress and improvement.

This document is intended to contribute to:

- a greater emphasis on crime prevention to clarify for members of the public, politicians, and the other components of the criminal justice system how corrections contributes to society's efforts to achieve domestic peace and justice and the limitations of that contribution;

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<sup>1</sup> The term "corrections" is used throughout this document to denote those segments of the criminal justice system responsible for prison administration and the supervision of offenders on conditional release in the community.

- systemic improvements in corrections and criminal justice policies and legislation through a consistent approach to offenders<sup>2</sup> based upon shared values and principles;
- the appropriate use of imprisonment through a stronger emphasis on community corrections and non-custodial measures combined with effective programs to safely reintegrate offenders into society;
- the development of improved risk assessment tools and risk management strategies through on-going research and sharing of information nationally and internationally;
- increased staff professionalism; and
- a clearer understanding of, and commitment to the responsibilities of the following in contributing to an effective corrections system:
  - society, which provides the mandate, resources, and support;
  - corrections, which provides programs, expertise and professional, committed personnel;
  - offenders, who choose the programs that will assist them to become law-abiding citizens.

Corrections faces a number of challenges that are unlikely to change in the short term:

1. There are public demands for more punitive sanctions and an increasing reliance on incarceration as the crime control measure of choice. This hinders the development of meaningful community sanctions. Approaches to dealing with offenders are fragmented, even within the criminal justice system itself.
2. Severe crowding in some jurisdictions, has stripped corrections systems of their ability to treat offenders in a humane manner.
3. There are unrealistic expectations that corrections alone can solve the crime problem. Public confidence in the criminal justice system is limited and fragile and there is a general intolerance of any failure. Adding to the problem is a lack of understanding about corrections, a view that "nothing works," and a reticence to support alternative sanctions and a more judicious use of imprisonment.
4. A continued denial of community responsibility for crime prevention and control leads to expectations that corrections alone will provide a solution. Once offenders are sentenced,

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<sup>2</sup> The term "offenders" refers to prisoners and parolees (or others conditionally -released), collectively.

corrections is expected to redress long-standing inadequacies of education, housing, social welfare and discrimination.

These expectations are compounded by public perceptions of increasing violent crime; which, in many counties are unfounded. Nevertheless, fear of crime is a reality that must be addressed if corrections is to gain credibility and public support.

5. There is a clear need for better public education about corrections. The public needs to understand the roles to be played by the community, the criminal justice system, and corrections in striving for a safer and more peaceful society. The community must participate in the correctional process. Leaders in the corrections field must become actively involved in the development of public policy.
6. Incarceration is costly and demands resources that would be better invested in social programs that have a more direct impact on crime prevention. In some jurisdictions, the cost of constructing and maintaining prisons threatens basic programs of employment, education, economic development, health, housing and income maintenance. While good correctional practice contributes to crime prevention, other social programs can have a greater effect in addressing the underlying causes of crime.
7. There is a growing demand for all public services to become more effective and efficient, to be more open to public scrutiny, to give better quality service to the public and, generally, to be more accountable.

The strategic framework that follows sets out fundamental objectives to meet these challenges, expressed in the form of values and principles.

### **THE ROLE AND VALUES OF CORRECTIONS**

*The goal of every society is to maintain peace and to provide justice and safety for its members.*

*The criminal justice system contributes to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society, through the use of appropriate and reasonable sanctions.*

*As part of the criminal justice system, corrections contributes to the protection of society by actively encouraging offenders to take advantage of opportunities that will assist them in becoming law-abiding citizens, while exercising only the degree of control necessary.*

## **Discussion**

All people have the right to live in a just, peaceful and safe society. There will always be crime and a need for criminal justice. The definition of an acceptable level of crime within any society is a function of the values and culture of that society. Societal values also determine the nature of the response to crime.

There is clear evidence that the increased use of imprisonment and punishment does not reduce the level of crime, and, therefore, does little to contribute to the long term protection of society. Corrections has limited potential for the control of crime: Sanctions come into play far too late and leave the sources of the problem untouched. The majority of offenders can be safely managed in the community where appropriate sanctions can be imposed and effective programs provided. Offenders must demonstrate responsibility, repair the harm done to the community, and comply with stipulated expectations.

One of the greatest challenges to society is to develop more effective and credible community sanctions. Imprisonment, while the ultimate sanction in most societies, is probably the least promising, productive, or effective. Thus it should be used with restraint. Nevertheless, there will remain, for the foreseeable future, a need for prisons to deal with the relatively small group of serious offenders who pose a significant risk to society.

A term of imprisonment is appropriate for those offenders who pose an unmanageable risk to the public, or where the seriousness of the offence, in the eyes of society, requires imprisonment as a sanction. When imprisonment is necessary, corrections has an obligation to provide for the safe, secure and humane custody of offenders, while exercising only the degree of control necessary. Society is best protected in the long-term by the timely and safe release of offenders to serve the balance of their sentence in the community, under appropriate supervision and control. The vast majority of offenders will return to the community. The prison regime should facilitate their safe return to society by creating, to the extent possible within prison, an environment reflective of the community-at-large. It is equally important to provide a range of programs and activities that motivate offenders to address the factors that led to their criminal behaviour and to maintain family and community ties.

## **VALUE 1 – JUSTICE AS THE CORE VALUE**

*Corrections is that component of the criminal justice system, which has the greatest impact on the freedoms, liberties and rights of individuals. Therefore those who are involved in corrections must respect fundamental human rights in every aspect of their work and must be guided by a belief in:*

- fairness and equality under and before the law;*
- the dignity and worth of individuals, and*
- managing with honesty, openness and integrity.*

### **Principles**

In protecting the rights of offenders, correctional systems should build on the base established in international standards.

The foremost duty of corrections should be to promote, in staff members and with the public, respect for the inherent dignity, humanity, and worth of all individuals, including offenders.

Adopting justice as the core value sets the framework for the values and principles that guide the approach to offenders, the use of sanctions, decision making, partnerships, the development of professional correctional workers, the relationship with the public and the overall effectiveness of corrections.

## VALUE 2

*Fundamental to an effective corrections and justice system is a firm commitment to the belief that offenders are responsible for their own behaviour and have the potential to live as law-abiding citizens.*

### Principles:

Offenders must be treated as individuals.

There must be a focus on the specific circumstances, individual needs and risk posed by a particular offender and on addressing those needs while responsibly managing the risk.

Offenders must be informed, active participants in decisions affecting them and must be provided the opportunity for redress.

Positive and effective interaction based on mutual respect between staff members and offenders, is the cornerstone on which the future of corrections rests.

Opportunities must be provided and offenders actively encouraged to take part in programs that will reduce the risk they present and aid their reintegration into society.

Programs should be based on a sound framework of research and evaluation and innovative approaches to effective programs supported.

Conditions imposed on offenders must be appropriate to risk and need, facilitate positive change, and be clearly stated and understood by all involved.

Each offender should be encouraged to gain more freedom through responsible behaviour over time.

The religious, spiritual and cultural needs of individuals and minority groups should be accommodated, provided the rights of some other group are not impinged upon in the process and that reasonable requirements of safety, security, and good order are met.

### VALUE 3

*The majority of offenders can be dealt with effectively in the community by means of non-custodial correctional programs; imprisonment should be used with restraint.*

#### Principles

Imprisonment should be reserved for those not otherwise suitably punished, those who pose a serious danger to the community, and those who willfully refuse to comply with non-prison sanctions.

Offenders are sent to prison as punishment, not for punishment, and therefore prison environments must be safe and humane and as close as possible to conditions in the community.

Dynamic security, based upon active and consistent interaction between staff members and offenders, fosters a non-repressive, non-adversarial climate in which overall security is enhanced. Inmates are held accountable for their behaviour, and are expected to act responsibly and build positive relationships with staff members.

Static security, with its various physical means of containment, complements and reinforces dynamic security. Force is used only when necessary and then only to the degree required to preserve life, prevent injuries and restore order.

The interests of society are best served by the successful reintegration of offenders as early and safely as possible. This is a key aspect of corrections' contribution to crime prevention.

A graduated release program tests an offender's suitability for release while providing necessary support and control, and is preferable to release at the end of the sentence with no preparation or supervision.

Credible community programs, directed towards maintaining offenders in the community and consistent with the need to protect the public, are a cost-effective approach to dealing with offenders and should be the primary focus.

Offenders sentenced to a term of imprisonment will be supported in maintaining and developing family and community ties as an essential aspect of preparing for their return to society.

Continuity in programming is important so that offenders who are ready for release are able to continue to address their needs in the community.

Community programs focused on developing and maintaining support systems, gainful employment and social services significantly improve an offender's potential to become a law-abiding citizen.

Within a fair and rational sentencing process, a broad range of credible, safe and effective sanctions must be made available. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the various sanctions will provide empirical evidence of their relative merit to those responsible for sentencing.

## VALUE 4

*In the interest of public protection, decisions about offenders must be based on informed risk assessment and risk management.*

### Principles:

Given the nature of corrections, risk will never be totally eliminated.

Assessment of the risk an offender poses should be used as the basis for most decisions within the criminal justice system.

Informed, comprehensive risk assessment must be based on high quality information gathered and shared among the components of the criminal justice system. Risk assessment tools must be empirically sound, based on research, evaluation and testing.

The ability to assess risk must be continually improved, and offenders matched with programs that will reduce the risk they pose.

Risk management strategies must be based on the specific needs of an offender. A variety of interventions must be available to address the risk posed by a particular individual.

Changes in the level of risk posed by an offender must be consistently monitored to determine whether controls can be lessened, or, alternatively, whether action must be taken to reduce the risk.

## VALUE 5

*Effective corrections is dependent on working in close cooperation with criminal justice partners and the community in order to contribute to a more just, humane and safe society.*

### Principles:

Positive and constructive partnerships should be established and maintained locally, nationally and internationally, with those who have an interest, or a role to play, in criminal justice.

Cooperative efforts are successful when they are based on shared interests, clear understanding of expectations, and open communications.

The valuable contribution of community services and agencies in working with offenders in the community should be supported to the fullest extent possible.

Effective criminal justice policy will be based upon open, two-way communication among partners within the criminal justice system.

Identifying and promoting improvements to criminal justice and social policies will lead to a more just, peaceful and safe society.

An external focus should be adopted, seeking opportunities in the community to improve achievement of objectives.

Corrections systems should be sensitive to, and, as much as possible, responsive to, the needs of victims.

## **VALUE 6**

*Carefully recruited, properly trained and well-informed staff members are essential to an effective correctional system.*

### **Principles:**

To meet existing and emerging challenges, recruitment should reflect the diversity within society and staff members recruited who share the overall values of the correctional system.

The professionalism of all correctional workers should be recognized and furthered by actively involving them in achieving goals and seeking their views on policies, plans and priorities.

It is important to establish expectations and objectives with employees and provide opportunities for personal growth and development so that they can achieve their full potential.

Staff members have the right to clearly understand their roles and responsibilities and are entitled to the information necessary to achieve the objectives set.

It is important to encourage employee initiative, creativity, and reliance on self-direction and to support personal responsibility for continued learning and career development.

Providing the training and supervision required for employees to succeed at their jobs is vital to both the individual and the organization.

Relationships with, and among, staff members, and with staff organizations, should be based on effective communication, mutual respect, and a recognition of common objectives.

## VALUE 7

*The public has a right to know what is done in corrections and should be given the opportunity to participate in the criminal justice system.*

### Principles:

It is crucial to enlist public understanding, support and participation in correctional programs and activities.

Communications should foster greater public interest and a better appreciation of the challenges of corrections so as to create more realistic expectations of what corrections can and cannot do.

Openness, accessibility, and responsiveness to public criticism, along with a willingness to seek improvements, support the principle that the public is a responsible participant in the correctional process.

Rational performance indicators based on solid empirical data, should be set for programs and operations, and results clearly communicated.

Positive and proactive relations should be pursued with the media to assist them in their role of informing the public about correctional issues and a spirit of openness and accountability adopted (to the extent permitted by law).

Volunteers make a valuable contribution to effective corrections and their active participation should be encouraged.

## **VALUE 8**

*The effectiveness of corrections depends on the degree to which correctional systems are capable of responding to change and shaping the future.*

### **Principles:**

Continuous improvements will be achieved by:

- learning from experience;
- keeping abreast of trends, developments and emerging issues;
- sharing information nationally and internationally;
- maintaining a strong research and development focus;
- maximizing the use of the resources available;
- benefiting from the knowledge and experience of others;
- establishing effective accountability mechanisms;
- communicating well within and outside the organization;
- being open and responsive;
- constantly seeking ways to improve;
- providing the best possible service in a professional manner;
- taking the lead in the development of public policy.

A focus on setting objectives, achieving results, and continually monitoring performance, will lead to ongoing improvements.