

Time for change

It is time for a change in corrections. The status quo can no longer stand. The public must be informed of this state of affairs and their elected leaders must be pushed into action.

As politicians consider putting more police on the streets and building more jails they need to also think about the women and men who will be working in these facilities.

Governments must reaffirm the valuable public role these workers fulfill in our society. It is a public service that needs to be honoured and supported—and kept under public, democratic administration.

It is time we all recognize that jails which support both the workers and inmates are essential for a

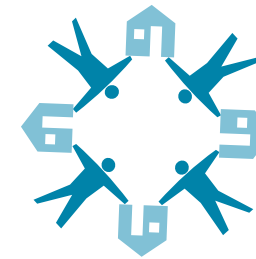


society to deal effectively with crime. Jails that are safe to work in will allow workers to be better able to rehabilitate offenders.

This is necessary for the working life of the women

and men who work in these facilities as well as the inmates and their families. It is also vital for protecting our communities.

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PROTECTING
OUR
COMMUNITIES

ADULT CORRECTIONS OFFICERS

Safe at home

Adult Corrections Officers go to jail for us every day.

It's a big part of the reason the rest of us can live safe at home.



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Going to jail is tough—even when you can go home every night.



Mitch Simpson

Correctional Officer
19 years on the job

A life behind bars is not pleasant.

But does it have to be almost as tough to work there as it is to live there?

And some days even worse.

MOST PEOPLE avoid areas where they believe that criminals gather. It is only reasonable to try and avoid the risks associated with crime and violence.

But the Correctional Officers of this country take that risk on a daily basis. They willingly go to work in an environment overwhelmingly comprised of people who have been convicted of breaking the law. Murderers, batterers, sexual offenders, thieves and more—Correctional Officers deal with them all.

It is a hostile environment. They must face it with not much more than their courage, convictions and intelligence. It takes a special individual to work in a place populated by criminals and keep

their professional ethics. Maintaining order and security in such an environment is a complex task that goes far beyond merely locking and unlocking doors.

Correctional Officers are responsible for both rehabilitating an offender and protecting our communities. It is a job with incredible risks and responsibilities. It is a job they take very seriously.

Unfortunately, the public is largely unaware of the job these women and men do.

What they do know is usually found in media portrayals and news reports. Highly sensationalized and skewed, these depictions of Correctional Officers serve to confuse the public as much as inform them.

Struggling to maintain order in the midst of chaos

Correctional Officers in Canada's provincial jails are highly trained and skilled workers. Almost all have some post-secondary education—many have university degrees. All want ongoing training in correctional methods.

They want to do the best job possible in what is often a difficult setting. Sadly that is becoming harder and harder to achieve.

There is a crisis in many of our country's jails. Decades of program cuts have undermined the rehabilitative function of these facilities. Inmates are left without treatment for a wide range of problems—addiction, anger management, mental illness and violence. Untreated problems can quickly become much greater problems for everyone.

Years of underfunding have resulted in aging institutions that are literally

crumbling around the workers. Often the buildings themselves pose a threat to the safety of workers and inmates.

Educational, training and work programs have been either seriously cut back—or terminated.

Over-crowding has made the prison environment more dangerous and unhealthy.

Without counselling, educational and work programs, inmates serve “dead time.” When combined with over-crowding, “dead time” increases the potential for violence, putting inmates and staff at risk.

Working in such high-stress environments takes its toll on workers. The incidence of many stress related illnesses is many times higher among Correctional Officers than the general public and even other high stress occupations.

Correctional Officers face violent incidents more than any other profession. They are the targets of harassment and abuse on a regular basis. Sometimes the threats and the violence follow them home, placing their families at risk.

Legislative and policy changes frequently turn the workplace topsy-turvy as the characteristics of those imprisoned change, staff turnover increases, bureaucracies reorganize and facilities close.

Prison privatization threatens to turn an important public program into a profit-making commodity. Rehabilitation becomes secondary to warehousing and low cost maintenance. Dedicated corrections professionals see their skills and training dismissed or devalued.