

Native Women's Association of Canada



ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S HEALING LODGE

~ July 1993 ~

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An NWAC Report

Prepared by

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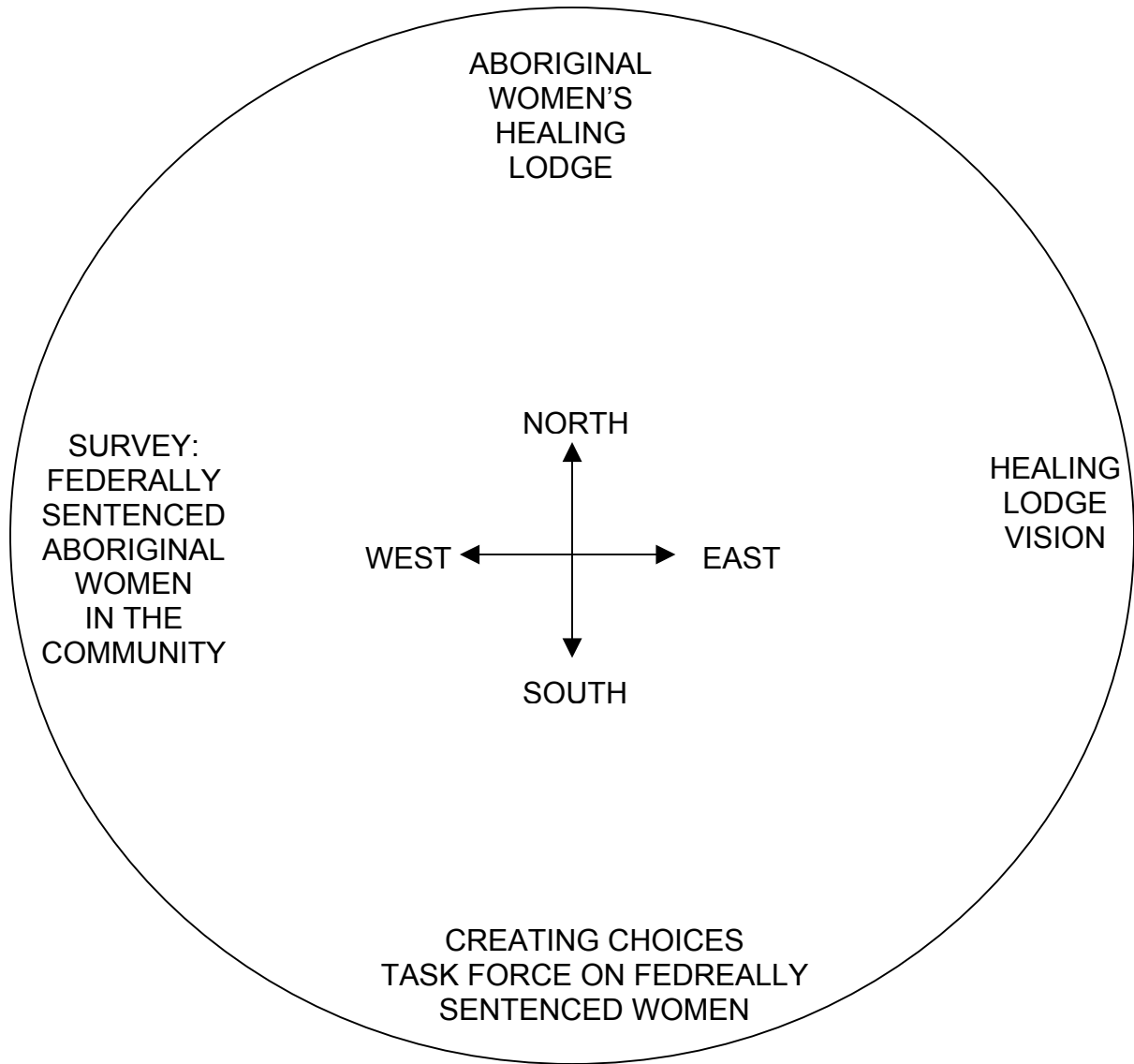
for

Native Women's Association of Canada
July 1993

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BACKGROUND PAPER – HEALING LODGE
NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

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1. A Prisoners Perspective

"I am taking this opportunity to voice my opinions, witnessing issues in a perspective which consists solely of emotional and personal knowledge spoken from all of my heart. First of all I do not imply, condemn or discriminate against any specific individual, group or task force for that matter. This is my opinion -- it is all in one and one in all. What you are about to read is one Native woman taking the time to share what has been sealed up and silenced... now is the time to open that up.

While attempting to write about "The Task Force on Aboriginal Peoples in Federal Corrections", my mind was pacing, wondering on the possibility of doing something I can't make myself believe in. Coming to the conclusion of recognizing that I am not out to condemn certain peoples or parties or task forces. This is only one of many speaking as an individual. I believe deeply that I will speak when given the chance -- and on any Native issue.

"My mind is Indian;
"My heart is Indian;
"My life is Indian."

I wear such a facade to hide the animosity and hurt I feel until I see a time fit to introduce it to others who see it on the same level as I do. All this deals with us presently and more importantly, our future generations. Any opportunity that opens and invites ways for our people to better our lives inside and outside of prison - "My heart belongs to my people."

All I ask is the truth be spoken, written and heard. No more rearranging the puzzle so it looks good in their eyes, for their files. Stop and remember all of us women who are striving for survival, for our lives and for our futures. We are left with high hopes and fewer dreams. It is my concern there is a thirst for understanding, good hearted and open minded people needed in choosing the right allies acceptable to deal with issues and reports, dealing our cards and bringing reports... more task forces that will show us another solution or another "answer". To some people their job is work to be done. Once the job is finished they put us in neat brown files and pass these on to the next one down the line. A better name for their whole concept is masking tape -- white man's style. It is our lives and our people's future at stake here. Decisions made by the so-called "powers that be" don't have the least bit of understanding of how we live and feel. Do they realize that they hold our future in their hands? They are deciding our future but fail to acknowledge that it is our lives and bodies in here... not theirs! They may not see it now but in 10 years when another Task Force is on the prowl and they go through the statistics, analyzing the changes made (if any) and how they've worked. Will they feel satisfied? A better question -- are we satisfied? How do we feel?

I get restless and begin to feel melancholy inside because as I believe and still do, that there is always hope. Even through all the interviews being analyzed and watched like animals, of course, only willing to help my people, but they are supposedly to know our needs better than ourselves. I am still hopeful that maybe something will be successful and will work for our people. I feel raped of what I cherished and cheated for all I gave and never received, not in a materialistic sense but a moral one. I don't regret all I've seen and what is trying to be done for our Sisters inside. Very little is all I ask and the bottom line to all this talk is... "Action Talks, Bullshit Walks."

"A skeptical but Sincere Sister, Sandy Sayer Prison for Women, Kingston, Ontario, July 1989" (Reprinted from Tightwire newsletter, P4W)

In Tribute to the Sisters who died at Prison For Women (P4W):

Marlene Moore (Shaggy)	Dec. 1988	Suicide
Pat Bear	Mar. 1989	Suicide
Sandy Sayer	Oct. 1989	Suicide
Marie Ledoux Custard	Feb. 1990	Suicide
Careen Daignault	Sept 1990	Suicide
Janise Gamble Sanderson	Sept 1990	Accident
Johnie Neudorf (Musqua)	Nov. 1990	Suicide
Patrice O'Donnell	Dec. 1990	Aids
Lorna Jones	Feb. 1991	Suicide
Corine Cole	June 1992	Accident

"If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together". Lilla Watson, an Australian Aboriginal Woman, quoted by Tightwire newsletter produced by women at Prison for Women.

a) Author's Forward

In the circle of contents, I have used the Four Directions of the Circle of Life as represented in the Medicine Wheel for each section of this document. I believe I would not do justice to my sisters in prison, if I were not to use this format as a teaching tool to non-Aboriginal people and to people in power in the justice system to better understand our cultural teachings; for, if they were to understand, they would treat Aboriginal* People more respectfully.

The Circle teachings were the hope that maintained the Aboriginal Women while they were in prison. They state: "That little hope flame in our circle wasn't for ourselves, wasn't because it might get us parole or pardon, but because at every meeting someone in our circle was always missing, usually in segregation on some ridiculous charge. And that hope flame raged into a strong fire in our circle because we could speak for each other and those words were strong heartfelt words that were hard to say out loud especially to white people who had the political power to change the punishment of prison."¹

"We never said out loud that we were teaching them something about being a people. The circle of chairs, we sat, represented the cycle of life from birth to death and that circle did not exclude anyone. In the ceremony of life that we are told to celebrate, we forgive and accept each person as an individual who has made mistakes on their path of learning and teaching, and who can strive to reach a place where spirit is healed. We'd come out of our circle meeting relieved at the outlet of anger at the prison system."..."We felt that even though those officials were our enemies, our jailers, our keepers, the all-powerful representatives of white authority and the state, that they would have heard our truth."²

The Circle represents life in Aboriginal Peoples cultures. It is the Circle of Life, the beginning of birth, to the change of life and events, to the rebirth of new beginnings.

In the Circle of Life that encompasses the Four Directions, the first direction begins in the East, the place of birth, vision and prophecies. It is appropriate that the vision of the Healing Lodge comes from the East, New Brunswick, through Alma Brooks.

The second direction moves to the South of the Medicine Wheel in the Circle of Life and represents our learning. Creating Choices was a learning process for all those involved.

* The term *Aboriginal* is used throughout this report to represent the First Nations, the Métis and the Inuit peoples.

¹ *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Sugar & Fox, 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

² *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Sugar & Fox 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

The third direction in the Medicine Wheel, the West, represents the healing part of our lives, the looking within. Indeed the Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community was a process for looking within and healing for the federally sentenced Aboriginal women.

The direction of the North in the Medicine Wheel represents the peace we attain when we find our spiritual path. The Healing Lodge as represented in the North will provide the guidance and support for federally sentenced Aboriginal women to find their spiritual path, once they have gone through the healing process.

Then we move to the East, again, in the Medicine Wheel of Life to repeat our life's lessons until we learn to deal with them effectively. This is known as "coming full circle". We have travelled our life's path around the Medicine Wheel in the Circle of Life, and begin our journey to travel again, and again, until we fulfill our path in life.

b) Introduction

The Solicitor General's department sponsored a preliminary consultation meeting in March 1989 with twenty Aboriginal women who were involved or had been involved in justice issues of sentenced Aboriginal women. The meeting was arranged to discuss the Women In Conflict With the Law (WICL) program and was a preliminary consultation with government officials providing an overview of activities on women and corrections.

The group of Aboriginal women who had reviewed the WICL program decided that it failed Aboriginal women as: "only one quarter of the WICL program budget was allocated to Aboriginal women's projects; many of the projects were viewed as unsuccessful primarily due to under-funding and bureaucratic delays; and, the federal government failed to appropriately consult with Aboriginal Women on important program and project issues, and needs".³

The representatives who gathered at this consultation meeting emphasized the need for a national Aboriginal women's justice network to deal specifically with corrections issues. They mandated the Native Women's Association of Canada, as their umbrella organization, to coordinate a comprehensive national workshop.

As mandated, the Native Women's Association of Canada succeeded in obtaining funds for a national workshop. In August-September 1989, thirty-five Aboriginal women from across Canada met in Ottawa for the workshop to review and discuss: various models of service delivery for federally sentenced Aboriginal Women, an Aboriginal Women's communication network, an update on services provided by communities and Correctional Services Canada, and the establishment of a forum to make known the views of participants to government. This group of Aboriginal women became known as the Aboriginal Women's Caucus. They emphasized to the Solicitor General's department that they ensure consultation with Aboriginal offenders, Aboriginal Women service providers and Elders.

A list provided by the Aboriginal Women's Caucus to the Solicitor General for Canada requested:

1. The appointment of four women recommended by the Aboriginal Women's Caucus to the National Advisory Committee. (its members were all men)
2. Funds to establish a "medicine lodge", a wholistic halfway house in the Kingston area
3. The appointment of a liaison person for sentenced Aboriginal women recommended by the Aboriginal Women's Caucus.
4. An annual grant to the Native Sisterhood to allow meaningful access to Elders and teachers.
5. Ongoing support for the Aboriginal Women's Caucus.

³ *Summary of the Working Notes of the Aboriginal Women's Caucus, March 1989, Ottawa, ON*

The Aboriginal Women's Caucus believed that the government had the opportunity to make some meaningful changes in its justice system and that another task force was not needed. They indicated that the government was always creating task forces, yet nothing changed within its systems.

A Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women had already been commissioned in March 1989 to review the prison systems and their effectiveness in dealing with sentenced prisoners. The overall recommendation of the Task Force Report released April 1990 was to close the Prison for Women for smaller regional women's institutions including an Aboriginal women's facility.

The Solicitor General announced, July 1991, the Prison for Women would be closed September 1994 and be replaced by five regional institutions, in each of CSC's regions, one of them a healing lodge facility in the prairies. Within CSC, this became known as the Federally Sentenced Women's Initiative with the evaluation committee consisting of CSC staff and Status of Women Canada. The sites selected were Truro, NS (Maritime Region); Kitchener, ON (Ontario Region); Tonge, PO (Quebec region); Edmonton, AL (Prairie Region) and Burnaby, BC (Pacific Region). Although Burnaby Correctional Centre had already been in operation, it was considered one of the new five regional institutions. Saskatchewan was chosen as the site for the Healing Lodge. That announcement was made by the Solicitor General, December 1991.

2. The East

SPIRITUAL/SPIRIT GIFTS
OF THE EAST: Sacred Gift of Life,
Sacred Fire & Grandfather Sun; Morning
Star, New Dawn. Season: Spring/Spring
Equinox. Plant Life: Flowers herbs for medi-
cine. Animal Kingdom: Two Legged (woman/man).
First Hill of Life: Infancy & Innocence. Sacred
Law of the East: Law of Control. Spiritual
Principle of the East: Unconditional love.
Birth & Rebirth. Vision & Prophecy.
Spirit Animal: Buffalo. Nation of
Humanity: the Red Nation.
Direction Color: Red

a) **The Healing Lodge Vision**

At the August 1989 Aboriginal Women's Caucus meeting, the vision of a Healing Lodge was introduced by Alma Brooks, an activist in the justice system for her home community of Tobique Reserve in New Brunswick. She spoke of a place without bars, a medicine lodge, where people could heal instead of be imprisoned. She felt the present punishment system of locking up people was not working. She expressed this to government representatives who met with the Aboriginal Women's Caucus.

Ms. Brooks presented more on her vision of a Healing Lodge at the June 1991 Healing Lodge Sub-Committee meeting. "In the prisons are brothers, fathers, sisters, and mothers with feelings of anger and pain. Prison does not work. A study in federal prisons by CSC has found that offenders come from juvenile detention centres to provincial institutions to penitentiaries with a high rate of recidivism (return to prison). There has to be something else."

She added that the Prison for Women's Native Sisterhood's vision of the healing lodge is that Elders, children and family would be involved with cultural teachings from all nations; Anishnawbe (Ojibway), Assiniboine, Cree, Haida, Lakota & Dakota (Sioux), MicMac, Mohawk, etc. As well, the architecture of the building had to be reflective of many cultures.

It is fitting that the vision of the Healing Lodge come through an Aboriginal Woman as Aboriginal People (the Red Nation) are given the gift of vision and prophecy, as they come from the East Direction of Birth and Rebirth in the Circle of Life's Medicine Wheel. The Spiritual Principle of the East is unconditional love, and it is with this principle that the federally sentenced Aboriginal women will be accepted at the Healing Lodge.

The Healing Lodge guided by the Morning Star and Grandfather Sun will symbolize a new dawn for federally sentenced Aboriginal women. As spring is the time of new growth and new beginnings, the Healing Lodge will provide opportunities of new growth and new beginnings for the federally sentenced Aboriginal women. The First Hill of Life from the East Direction is infancy and innocence. The federally sentenced Aboriginal Women will begin their stay at the Healing Lodge in their infancy and innocence to learning.

The Sacred Law of the East, the Law of Control, is control of self, through freedom of choice of positive or negative thoughts and actions. This Sacred Law will be taught to the federally sentenced Aboriginal women as part of their Aboriginal cultural teachings.

3. The South

GIFTS OF THE SOUTH:
EMOTIONAL/HEART; Sacred Gift of Life:
Rock/Mother Earth. Season: Summer, Summer
Solstice. Time of Day: Mid-day. Plant Life:
Grasses. Animal Kingdom: Winged Ones. First
Hill of Life: Childhood. Sacred Law of the
South: Law of Order. Spiritual Principle of
the South: Honesty, Enlightenment. Spirit
Animal: Eagle. Nation of Humanity:
Yellow; Direction Colour:
Yellow

a) The Learning - Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women

The mandate of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women which had been commissioned March 1989 by the Commissioner of Correctional Service Canada was "to examine the correctional management of federally sentenced women from the commencement of sentence to the date of warrant expiry and to develop a plan which would guide and direct the process in a manner that would be responsive to the unique and special needs of this group".⁴ The Task Force was co-chaired by the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies and Correctional Service Canada, with a number of community and government agencies brought together to form a Steering Committee and a Working Group.

The Steering Committee co-chaired by CAEFS and the Deputy Commissioner of CSC provided the overall direction and context for the work of the Task Force.

Despite reservations about the mandate and organization of the Task Force, the Native Women's Association of Canada participated to address the concerns of Aboriginal Women who come into conflict with the law. This was outlined in their press release of April 20, 1990 in response to the public release of the Task Force Report, by the Commissioner of the Correctional Service Canada.

"CREATING CHOICES documents how the correctional system is failing Aboriginal women in conflict with the law in the federal carceral setting. ... Our involvement precipitated on the need to know where all our Aboriginal women prisoners are located in this system and to articulate their concerns and needs while incarcerated and on parole in the community."⁵

At the first Steering Committee meeting, the Native Women's Association of Canada requested stronger representation for Aboriginal Women; therefore, prior to the first working group meeting Aboriginal membership was increased from one to four Aboriginal women on the Steering Committee and from one to two Aboriginal Women on the Working Group.

The Working Group, co-chaired by the Director of CSC's Native and Female Offender Programs and CAEFS, developed work plans, assessed research needs, conducted consultations, and drafted the task force report.

The Task Force found that physical and sexual abuse was extensive in the histories of the federally sentenced women; that Aboriginal women were overly represented in the federal prison system; that there was systemic discrimination of Aboriginal women, and also hardship caused by separation of mothers from their children.

⁴ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

⁵ *Press Release, April 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

The Native Women's Association of Canada, in their press release affirmed that: "It is our Aboriginal Women that represent the greatest disadvantaged group in all of Canada. They are also in the greatest of need and understanding by the correctional system, the criminal justice system and Canadian Society."⁶

The Task Force recommended a more comprehensive approach to the unique program needs of federally sentenced women, and the importance of bringing them closer to their families, cultures, and home communities.

The Native Women's Association of Canada emphasized the unique needs of federally sentenced Aboriginal Women by saying: "The Report describes the very different circumstances that affect Aboriginal Women prisoners prior to, during and subsequent to their incarceration" ... "This distinctiveness is clearly evident in every aspect of the task force report to the degree that the distinct and unique recommendations and programs have been identified as essential to succeed in putting their lives together following the completion of their sentences."⁷

The distinctiveness of Aboriginal women was further clarified by Patricia A. Monture, Professor of Law at the Dalhousie University and a member of the Task Force Working Group.

In chapter II of CREATING CHOICES, Ms. Monture states: "Our distinct experience as Aboriginal women must be recognized. We cannot be either women only or Aboriginal only. Our race and gender are integrally linked. Our identities as women flow from the teachings of our various Aboriginal Nations. That we are distinct must not be trivialized."... "Not only can we not separate the Aboriginal and the woman, it is important to understand we also share a common Aboriginal history. That common history is the history of racism, oppression, genocide and ethnocide. It is one further way in which we are distinct."... "Being distinct means that within this new correctional philosophy of choice, choices for Aboriginal women must be guaranteed as meaningful."⁸

In response to the Task Force Report's recommendation that the Prison for Women be closed and be replaced with smaller regional institutions and an Aboriginal facility, the Native Women's Association of Canada expressed their support in this way: "We as Aboriginal women are cautiously optimistic that this report will succeed in addressing the problems facing Aboriginal Women prisoners. We support the recommendation to close the Prison for Women in Kingston."⁹

⁶ Press Release, April 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON

⁷ Press Release, April 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON

⁸ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

⁹ Press Release, April 1990. Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON

"With this closure, we are strongly recommending, and have been supported by the Task Force, the creation of an Aboriginal healing Lodge" ... "This Aboriginal Healing Lodge, which will be premised on Aboriginal philosophy and principles, calls for the involvement of Aboriginal People at the grassroots level. The Healing Lodge will be designed, developed and implemented by Aboriginal Women." ... "The Aboriginal women prisoners, in an environment that allows them to work closely with our Elders and children, will then be able to reconstruct their lives in a positive manner that will hopefully reunite them with our Mother the Earth, their families and communities."¹⁰

This reiterates a part of the vision of Alma Brooks, the visionary for the "medicine lodge", a healing lodge; although, her initial intent was to have the medicine lodge in the Kingston area for all sentenced Aboriginal people.

Most women in conflict with the law were victims of abuse prior to committing a crime and need to heal through their trauma. This was expressed by an Aboriginal parolee: "Most of us were raised in residential places like prisons and the judges convict us for that. I believe we are victims being victimized. We get federal sentences for running away from jail and yet that's all we've ever done is run away from institutions."¹¹

The isolation from family and relationships was further validated by another Aboriginal woman, now on parole, who stated: "When I went to prison, I lost everything I ever had, not just the material things, but all the relationships I ever had in my life."¹²

CREATING CHOICES sites many injustices to Aboriginal Women prisoners. One Aboriginal prisoner at Prison for Women states: "If my little brother had died in a big city in Ontario rather than on a reserve in Saskatchewan, I know I would have been allowed to go to his funeral."¹³ Another Aboriginal woman in a provincial institution says: "Even for me, from southern Saskatchewan, it is too far for my kids to come to see me. For women in jail, the thing that keeps us going is that our kids are waiting for us to come home."¹⁴

The report described the problems of the present correctional system: an antiquated Prison for Women that can't be modified to meet modern standards of correctional facilities; women imprisoned far from their families and communities, and programs insensitive to women's needs. An Aboriginal Parolee states: "We need to provide child care and parenting classes to all mothers in prison. You are virtually crippled on release in terms of caring for your children."¹⁵ Most sentenced women are disadvantaged by being poor, under-educated, unemployed, and are single parents and sole supporters of their children.

¹⁰ Press Release, April 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON

¹¹ Press Release, April 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON

¹² *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

¹³ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

¹⁴ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

¹⁵ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

Further, Aboriginal Women are highly over represented in correctional institutions and are the most disadvantaged group suffering from triple discrimination: of being women, of being Aboriginal and that of being prisoners. The pain from these hurts find their way inward to the vulnerable heart, mind and spirit and the result is suicide. The suicide deaths of two federally sentenced women during the Task Force was deeply felt by all who wanted to see justice, equality and fairness for federally sentenced women. If it was not suicide, it was slashing to release the tension of built up frustrations. A prisoner in a federal institution asks: "Why have I witnessed over 100 slashings... wiped up pints of blood from floors and walls and carried blood soaked mattresses outside to the garbage... held women in my arms as they bled... and as they cried... why?"¹⁶

The report's recommendation to replace the Prison for Women with four regional institutions for women, an Aboriginal women's facility and a Community Release Strategy with expanded community-based services for women released from federal custody was contained in "A Vision for Change". Indeed, a vision for change is needed within the present prison systems to ensure that no more people die because their spirits have been broken and they no longer have the will to live.

Because of the desperate need and circumstances of federally sentenced women, the Task Force members presented a separate report to the Commissioner of Corrections with eight emergency measure recommendations to improve the present conditions at the Prison for Women:

1. Eliminate transfers from provincial correctional institutions to the Prison for Women.
2. Recruit additional feminist and aboriginal counsellors to provide individual and/or group therapy and services to assist prisoners in healing from sexual and other forms of abuse or trauma.
3. Admit prisoners who have engaged in self-injurious behaviour directly to the health unit in the Prison for Women, or to a community hospital. Provide prisoners with medical or counselling support, and return them to the general population as soon as possible.
4. Establish daily presence of an Aboriginal Elder at the Prison for Women. Guarantee payment for travel and accommodation for Elders to visit the institution and provide space and social development staff to facilitate the work of the Elders.
5. Facilitate for prisoners, the maintenance of family and cultural ties through such measures as funded visits with family members, provision of resources to permit attendance at funerals; and enhanced paid telephone contacts."¹⁷

¹⁶ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

¹⁷ *Correctional Service Canada Background Document, The Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women Emergency Measures, July 1991, Ottawa ON*

- "6. Establish two liaison workers at Prison for Women to facilitate information sharing, and to assist women in maintaining linkages with their families, cultures and communities. One of the liaison workers should be Aboriginal and should be accountable to a group designated by the Aboriginal women's Caucus. The other position should be administered by the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS);
7. Ensure that waivers are used only in the federally sentenced women's self-declared interest. Establish a system to monitor and investigate waivers on an individual case basis; (NOTE: A waiver refers to an inmate's right to defer his/her parole hearing to a later date or to give up the right to a parole hearing); and,
8. Provide enhanced opportunities for fresh air and exercise."¹⁸

All of these emergency recommendations were supported by the Correctional Service Canada and immediate efforts were made to begin their implementation. "In summary, the Region is actively engaged in the implementation of the Emergency Measures as proposed by the Task Force on Federally Sentenced women."¹⁹

Some of the recommendations involving funding needed some time to be reviewed for costing. "The recommendation regarding funded family visits requires careful consideration before a final response can be provided. A small committee has been established to examine options that will satisfy the spirit of the recommendation."²⁰ ... "In addition, the Coping with Sexual Abuse Education program will be renewed for both staff and inmates. Proposals for the delivery of this service, as well as another sexual abuse counsellor, are currently under review by the region."²¹

CREATING CHOICES heard from Aboriginal prisoners at the Prison for Women that the "security and structure of this place works against good programming"²² which indicates that not only does the physical structure of the present institution have to change, so would its programming and security aspect.

¹⁸ *Correctional Service Canada Backgrounder Document, The Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women Emergency Measures, July 1991, Ottawa ON*

¹⁹ *Correctional Service Canada Backgrounder Document, The Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women Emergency Measures, July 1991, Ottawa ON*

²⁰ *Correctional Service Canada Backgrounder Document, The Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women Emergency Measures, July 1991, Ottawa ON*

²¹ *Correctional Service Canada Backgrounder Document, The Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women Emergency Measures, July 1991, Ottawa ON*

²² *Correctional Service Canada Backgrounder Document, The Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women Emergency Measures, July 1991, Ottawa ON*

The report also states there has to be better pre-release planning that is culturally oriented, as expressed by an Aboriginal prisoner at Prison for Women: "I think the best way to help is pre-release planning. We need grants and jobs and housing. We need a gradual taste of what it is like to be back on the street. We need pre-release planning for Natives."²³

Over three hundred individuals and organizations made presentations to the Task Force: politicians, members of women's groups, government officials, Elizabeth Fry Societies, Salvation Army workers, correctional staff, Elders, counsellors, women who had been in prison, members of Aboriginal organizations, academics and many others. They spoke for many others who cared but were not reached by the Task Force.

Here are some of their views:

"The small number of federally sentenced women, and the knowledge that they are not perceived nor are they in reality a threat to society, are two facts that give us a wonderful opportunity to do something different...to try a new model." Bonnie Diamond, Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, and co-chair, Steering Committee, Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women.²⁴

"With very few exceptions, the level of security required for the female offender is low relative to their male counterparts, and the risk presented to the community, as a result of walkaway or escape is lower. This level of societal tolerance would permit very significant flexibility for C.S.C. if we have the imagination to seize the opportunity," Jeff Christian, CSC Alberta/North West Territories.²⁵

"Compared to non-Native inmates, federally sentenced Native women are more likely to have addiction problems, less likely to have grade ten and less likely to have an employment history. They are also more likely to both have children and be raising these children on their own. At the time of their arrest, 67% of Native Offenders had been residing in urban communities while only 20% of them had been born in such communities, suggests that almost half of them could be lacking the skills needed to cope in an urban environment." Native Counselling Services of Alberta.²⁶

²³ *Correctional Service Canada Backgrounder Document, The Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women Emergency Measures, July 1991, Ottawa ON*

²⁴ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

²⁵ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

²⁶ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

"The endless cycle of Native incarceration and recidivism will only be broken if the underlying causes of this situation are identified, addressed and dealt with in a realistic and holistic fashion. Otherwise, the endemic poverty, under-education and ensuing frustration will continue to generate anti-societal responses." Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research.²⁷

"When we consider that 85% of federally sentenced women have been sexually or physically abused, we must understand the importance of dealing with the inner pain before we can hope to rehabilitate the person. A wholistic approach to healing is the only way to complete recovery," Major Hillary Jackson, Salvation Army Correctional Services Dept.²⁸

Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON "The need for a 'medicine lodge' is very real and an immediate problem. Many of the inmates I have encountered in prison have lost their sense of who they are and for this reason spiritual guidance is necessary." Elder, Aboriginal Women's Caucus.²⁹

"Resources should be provided for Native Healers and Spiritual Leaders to attend to the needs of Native Women. These people should be given the same status as licensed doctors and clergy." Elizabeth Fry Society of Hamilton.³⁰

"From our experience, there has never been a program that has so drastically changed the lives of our clients as has the native spirituality program. Almost for the first time in their lives, they have had to take a good look at themselves: they have had to take account for their actions; and they have had to take responsibility for their own lives." Cliff White, Allied Indian & Métis Society of B.C.³¹

"Institutions must examine the difference between privileges and rights. Fresh air is not a privilege or a reward, but it is a right." Aboriginal Women's Caucus.³²

"Building prisons to replace Prison for Women is defeating the purpose of trying to supply preventative programming." Aboriginal Women's Council of Saskatchewan.³³

²⁷ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

²⁸ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

²⁹ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

³⁰ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

³¹ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

³² *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

³³ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

Since 1934, eight out of nine government commissions and task forces who had reviewed the problems of federally sentenced women have recommended closing the Prison for Women, with a move toward regional and/or community facilities and services.

The first request for the closure of Prison for Women was only four years after it was opened, by the 1938 Royal Commission on the Penal System, the Archambault Commission. In 1977, the Parliamentary Sub-Committee Report on the Penitentiary System in Canada, the MacGuigan Report, re-iterated its closure by saying it was "unfit for bears, much less women".³⁴

In 1969, the Ouimet Report and the Royal Commission on the Status of Women expressed concern regarding the maximum security environment used to house all women regardless of their security classification. Again, in 1988, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs, the Daubney Committee, reviewed sentencing, conditional release and related aspects of corrections.

Its report, *TAKING RESPONSIBILITY*, stated: "The Committee is concerned that large numbers of women prisoners across the country are being detained in facilities which provide much higher security than most of them require and than most of them would be subjected to if they were men."³⁵

During the task force review, five research projects were commissioned to provide for additional knowledge and data so that the concerns being raised could be confirmed.

The first project, by Margaret Shaw, focused on interviews with federally sentenced women in prison, on parole, or on mandatory supervision in the community. The survey provided a better understanding of the experiences of imprisonment, parole and mandatory supervision; the need for programs and services; and views on where and under what conditions federally sentenced women would like to serve their sentences. The study also provided a clearer understanding of the backgrounds of women serving federal sentences through interviews conducted with 84% of federally sentenced women in prison, and fifty-seven interviews with women on parole or on mandatory supervision.

The second survey was conducted by Fran Sugar and Lana Fox with federally sentenced women of Aboriginal ancestry. Aboriginal women on the Steering committee felt that the Task Force had not adequately heard the views of Aboriginal women in the community. The Aboriginal Women researchers shared a common history with the thirty-nine federally sentenced women they interviewed as they had been through the prison system, as well. This survey was certainly unique in that respect. For the first time, in a Canadian Task Force, the voices of federally sentenced Aboriginal women would be heard.

³⁴ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

³⁵ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

A third report, also done by Margaret Shaw, provided an historical overview of the imprisonment of women and a current accounting of the issues surrounding imprisonment of women in Canada, with a comparison of responses to the issues in other countries.

A fourth study by Lee Axon was commissioned to gain an update to a 1987 international review on the analysis of exemplary programs, services and opportunities designed to address the special needs of women serving long-term sentences in the United States.

A fifth report provided an inventory of institutional programs available to federally sentenced women, in provincial/territorial and federal institutions, as well as the gaps of programming in various institutions. The data was collected by Price Waterhouse as part of a "Survey of Provincial/Territorial Correctional Institutions for Adult Offenders" for the Federal/Provincial Policy Review. The analysis for the Task Force Report was prepared by Maureen Evans, a working group member of the survey.

Other research conducted prior to and in conjunction with the Task Force and used for information was a study of the self-injurious behaviour of women at Prison for Women. Forty-five federally sentenced women, forty-one security staff members, and staff from health and treatment services for Prison for Women were interviewed.

Another study conducted by the Research Branch of Correctional Service Canada involved the study of the mental health of federally sentenced women at P4W as part of a nation wide study of the incidence of behavioural and mental disorders among federally sentenced offenders.

In the Task Force review every attempt was made to ensure that the research took into account its priorities with a strong emphasis on women-centered research which included interviews with federally sentenced women. The surveys of federally sentenced women in prison or on community release and the survey of Aboriginal women on community release provided additional information on the women which helped convey the views and experiences of the majority of federally sentenced women.

The Research showed that women in prison felt they had lost control over their physical and mental health and contact with their children and families. They wanted counselling and support groups for physical and sexual abuse survivors. They needed effective programs for drug and alcohol abuse. There was a need to reduce language and cultural barriers. They wanted meaningful work and training. There was a great need identified for work-release and pre-release programming, legal advice and assistance, programs for long-term sentenced women and programs concerning children.

When consulted on the preferred environment, the most common choice was a small community residence for women close to home, although a large number of women chose a regional prison. This indicates that only a small percentage are serving sentences close to home communities.

The recommendation from the Task Force Review was to close the Prison for Women at Kingston, replaced by five regional women's institutions, each located in one of CSC's five regions. "These facilities will be located in or near Halifax, Nova Scotia; Montreal, Quebec; central / southwestern Ontario; Edmonton and the lower mainland of British Columbia. These facilities will house federally sentenced women for the portion of their sentence which must, under current law, be served in a penitentiary... A Healing Lodge where Aboriginal federally sentenced women may serve all or part of their sentences, will be established in a prairie location."... "The Task Force does not project a requirement for a Regional Women's facility in British Columbia unless the Burnaby Agreement fails to meet the underlying principles of the Task Force plan."³⁶ Most of the locations of the regional facilities have remained consistent with the recommendations of CREATING CHOICES except for Halifax, Nova Scotia and Montreal, Quebec.

As well, a comprehensive and effective Community Release Strategy involving centres for women upon release was to be developed with community release centres for women in communities across Canada. These centres would include halfway houses, Aboriginal centres, satellite units, home placements, addiction treatment centres, and multi-use women's centres.

"A wide variety of Community Release Centres will be developed by community groups, and other interested agencies. The location, structure and services offered in the Community Release Centres will reflect the needs of the federally sentenced women they serve. The environment in each Community Release Centre will be conducive to growth, healthy living and the development of self-empowerment and self-esteem. Cultural differences will be respected. Emphasis will be placed on personal choice, with the overall goal of living with dignity and self respect in the community at large."... "Community Release Centres will provide varying levels of structure, staffing and internal programming based on the needs of their residents."³⁷

"The community release centres will offer a wide variety of programs and services to women who no longer need, or are legally required to be held in, closed custody."³⁸

³⁶ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

³⁷ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

³⁸ *Creating Choices, The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, April 1990, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON*

Despite the well meaning work and research, some organizations were not content with the scope of the Task Force implementation of its recommendations. In a June 1992 press release, Dawn Fleming, President of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) stated: "despite assurances that resources would be provided to facilitate the development of services in the selected communities, none have been forthcoming. We fear that the citizens in these locales will eventually find themselves with new prisons in their midst, but without sufficient community-based support for the women incarcerated."³⁹ CAEFS urged the Minister to reconsider the decision to replace the steering committee without the representation of federally sentenced women or the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies.

To date, with the exception of the Healing Lodge location, the sites chosen for the new regional facilities have not met the criteria outlined in the Task Force. This has resulted in the withdrawal of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, as indicated in their press release of June 1992. "By with-drawing from the partnership with the Correctional Service Canada, CAEFS has re-affirmed its commitment to the implementation of Creating Choices, as it was originally proposed, and to its role as an advocate for incarcerated women, across the country."⁴⁰

³⁹ *Press Release, June 1992, CAEFS, Ottawa, On*

⁴⁰ *Press Release, June 1992, CAEFS, Ottawa, On*

4. The West

GIFTS OF THE WEST:
PHYSICAL/BODY; Sacred Gift of Life:
Water/Grandmother Moon. Season: Fall/Autumn
Equinox. Plant Life: Vegetables. Animal King-
dom: Swimmers. Third Hill of Life: Adulthood.
Sacred Law of the West: Balance. Third
Spiritual Principle: Unselfishness, Intro-
spection. Spirit Animal: Thunderbird.
Nation of Humanity: Black Nation;
Direction Color: Black

a) **The Pain & Healing - Native Sisterhood Sugar / Fox Report: Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community**

The Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community by Fran Sugar and Lana Fox which was completed January 1990 and presented to the thirteenth task force on Federally Sentenced Women described the experiences of thirty-nine Aboriginal women who had been through the prison system, and their stories of brutality, racism and oppression.

Racism and oppression came from the inability of Aboriginal women in prison to practice their own spiritual beliefs and follow their sacred teachings, as expressed by one of the women: "At times, when I would burn my medicines, when Sweetgrass was smuggled into us because sometimes it is seen as contraband, the sweet smell of the earth would create a safe feeling."⁴¹

Clearly, considering Sweetgrass, (the basis to the teachings in most Aboriginal cultures), as contraband attempts to kill the spirit of Aboriginal people through their spiritual beliefs, as Aboriginal people consider Sweetgrass sacred and very dear to their hearts. There is no freedom of religious practices when there is punishment for practising Aboriginal spiritual beliefs by adding time to sentenced time because the system considers Sweetgrass as contraband.

Regarding the task force process, the women had these words to say: "We'd be notified that another task force would be touring the prison requesting to meet with Native Sisterhood members. We always agreed to meet, somehow believing there was hope for change."⁴²

"In the past we have spoken to other Task Forces, Sentencing Commissions, reporters, investigators, correctional service staff and various other people who listened politely and nodded in apparent understanding. Yet, afterwards our conditions, the conditions of our sisters, remained unchanged. The segregation unit continued to hold us hostage without heat in the dead of winter... More seriously medical treatment for crisis situations was so deplorable that we often believed that death was inevitable for Sisters who slashed."⁴³

⁴¹ *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Sugar/Fox Report 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

⁴² *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Sugar/Fox Report 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

⁴³ *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Sugar/Fox Report 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

"We have been participants in the Task Force only because we feel a deep responsibility to our sisters still inside the walls. This, then is our first and foremost responsibility, to First Nations women in Canadian prisons, to echo their silenced pleas for improved lives. Our second responsibility is to the Aboriginal Women's Caucus and the Native Women's Association of Canada who made it possible for our voices to be heard by the 13th Task Force. Our third responsibility is as Aboriginal women to the Seven Generations of unborn Aboriginal people who will live upon the Earth Mother."⁴⁴

"Our participation in the Task Force has been difficult. We entered the Task Force as prisoners. As prisoners, we spoke with grave hesitation. It was our experience that the last 12 task forces, the numerous commissions, working groups, federal department officials, and other organizations that are said to represent women in cages had already conducted study upon study. We felt that another task force would be repeating what is already known and documented somewhere... in some brown file... in some room... covered with dust. We felt this task force would be as useless as all the other task forces that have been shelved."⁴⁵

"This project (survey of federally sentenced Aboriginal women in the community) began when we voiced our concern that the Task Force had not heard the views of Aboriginal women who had served time at P4W. We believe that these women have an essential contribution to make to the work of the task force. The life stories we have heard speak strongly to the special treatment needs of Aboriginal women, needs that differ from those of non-native women."⁴⁶

"The critical difference is racism. We are born to it and spend our lives facing it. Racism lies at the root of our life experiences. The effect is violence, violence against us, and in turn our own violence. The solution is healing: healing through traditional ceremonies, support, understanding and the compassion that will empower Aboriginal women to the betterment of ourselves, our families and our communities."⁴⁷

"It is racism, past in our memories and present in our surroundings, that negates non-native attempts to reconstruct our lives. Existing programs cannot reach us, cannot surmount the barriers of mistrust that racism has built. It is only Aboriginal people who can design and deliver programs that will address our needs and that we can trust. It is only Aboriginal people who can truly know and understand our experience. It is only Aboriginal people who can instil pride and self-esteem lost through the destructive experiences of racism. We cry out for a meaningful healing process that will have real

⁴⁴ *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Sugar/Fox Report 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

⁴⁵ *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Sugar/Fox Report 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

⁴⁶ *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Sugar/Fox Report 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

⁴⁷ *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Sugar/Fox Report 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

impact on our lives, but the objectives and implementation of this healing process must be premised on our need, the need to heal and walk in balance."⁴⁸

The racism is identified as systemic, coming from generations of colonialization. "When movement passes were introduced at Prison for Women in 1982 or 1983, they echoed another history .Our ancestors were required to obtain passes from the RCMP or from the Indian Agent to travel off reserve. Now, we required written permission to go up a flight of stairs or to move three feet from A range to the hospital. Our ancestors also understood that such laws were made to be broken. All this may seem trivial, but each part of prison existence for Aboriginal Women has a context. It is experienced through eyes and feelings that are FEMALE, ABORIGINAL AND IMPRISONED. Each of these things makes a great deal of difference to the way prison is experienced."⁴⁹ They also indicated that as native women they were seen as a collective, a war party that posed a risk to the order of the institution.

There were definite racial cultural barriers identified by the federally sentenced Aboriginal women in the survey. Because the Aboriginal women refused to go for treatment that was foreign to their culture and refused to accept drug treatments offered by the institution, their parole applications were not supported, as they were seen as not addressing their own treatment needs.

"We told the numerous task forces that medical-psychiatric evaluations were not culturally appropriate. We knew the questions they asked were questions made for white people, for white men. We vocalized that most of us were survivors of sexual abuse, rape and wife battering, and the only option for treatment was at Kingston Prison for Men. We pointed out that Kingston Penitentiary is older than Prison for Women and that it housed sex offenders, the perpetrators who symbolized the same men who victimized us."⁵⁰

"Twenty-seven of the thirty-nine women interviewed described experiences of childhood violence: rape, regular sexual abuse, the witnessing of a murder, watching our mothers repeatedly beaten, beatings in juvenile detention centres at the hands of staff and other children. Twenty-one had been raped or sexually assaulted either as children or as adults."⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Sugar/Fox Report 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

⁴⁹ *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Sugar/Fox Report 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

⁵⁰ *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Sugar/Fox Report 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

⁵¹ *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Sugar/Fox Report 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

"We have often said that the women inside have the understanding to help themselves, that all that is required is the right kind of resources support and help. The money spent on studies would be better spent on culturally appropriate help, on reducing our powerlessness to heal ourselves. But the reality is that prison conditions grow worse."⁵²

The federally sentenced Aboriginal women interviewed outlined many other issues that affected their lives in prison: archaic conditions (no hot water until 1987 and segregation units without heat), arbitrary mass punishment, and sexism and racism barriers imposed by administration. Medical treatment for crisis situations was so deplorable that they believed that death was inevitable for the Sisters who slashed.

The federally sentenced Aboriginal women also talked about living under the special handling unit standards of the blanket 230 code. Aboriginal women, under maximum security at Prison for Women, were prejudged as violent, uncontrollable, and unmanageable because they refused to co-operate when male guards ordered them to remove their clothes in population.

They pointed out the inequality of security between male and female institutions in that in a male institution, their crimes would not have been as noticeable. "Security classifications were applied to us because as native women, we were seen as a collective, a war party, that posed a risk to the good order of the institution."⁵³

"To be a woman and to be seen as violent is to be especially marked in the eyes of the administrations of the prisons where women do time, and in the eyes of the staff who guard them. In a prison with a male population our crimes would stand out much less. Among women we do not fit the stereotypes, and we are automatically feared and labelled as in need of special handling. The label of violent begets a self-perpetrating and destructive cycle for Aboriginal women within prisons. In P4W, everything follows from this label. But the prison regimen that follows serves to reinforce the violence that it is supposedly designed to manage. It creates for P4W a place in which it is impossible to heal."⁵⁴

"Essential to an understanding of the destructive nature of P4W is the history of violence that most of us share... All too often, we are the victims of long term and systemic violence. Many of our stories tell about sexual and physical abuse during childhood. Some of this violence occurred in our birth families, in some cases, it arose in foster homes and juvenile institutions."⁵⁵

⁵² *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Sugar/Fox Report 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

⁵³ *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Sugar/Fox Report 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

⁵⁴ *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Sugar/Fox Report 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

⁵⁵ *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Sugar/Fox Report 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

Given the stories of the thirty-nine federally sentenced Aboriginal women, one can only determine the stories of other Aboriginal women, who had been through the prison system and released prior to the survey, would have reflected similar atrocities. Given the four suicides that occurred prior to the release of the Task Force report and the announcement of the prison's closure, the Task Force Review had no choice but to recommend the closure of the archaic prison. Given three more suicides and one accidental death that occurred after the report's release, the Prison for Women had to close. Given the more recent death at Prison for Women which was labelled an accident, but which did not provide any caring or healing for its incarcerated victim, only confirms the need for something better, more healing not punishment oriented, for federally sentenced incarcerated women. Given the total of ten women, who died while incarcerated at the Prison for Women in the last four years, indicates the seriousness and the emergency of improving the needs and providing more women-centered services to incarcerated women.

The ten women who died while incarcerated at the Prison for Women need to be recognized as courageous for trying to live in conditions beyond human comprehension, conditions that kill the spirit, that kill the will to live.

This is expressed with conviction in the survey on federally sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, by women who know the system because they have lived it. "No amount of tinkering with prisons can heal the before-prison lives of the Aboriginal women who live or have lived within their walls. Prison cannot remedy the problem of the poverty of reserves. It cannot deal with immediate or historical memories of the genocide that Europeans worked upon our people. It cannot remedy violence, alcohol abuse, sexual assault during childhood, rape and other violence Aboriginal women experience at the hands of men. Prison cannot heal the past abuse of foster homes, or the indifference and racism of Canada's justice system in its dealings with Aboriginal people. However, the treatment of Aboriginal women within prisons can begin to recognize that these things are the realities of the lives that Aboriginal women prisoners have lead. By understanding this, we can begin to make changes that will promote healing instead of rage."⁵⁶

⁵⁶ *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community, Sugar/Fox Report 1990, Native Women's Association of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

**b) Native Sisterhood (P4W) & Provincial Institutions Housing
Federally Sentenced Women**

Brothers, I open up my heart and tears to you,
remorse and bitterness fill my soul.

I hurt for all the others that hold a lot of animosity inside of them
The only outlet we have is our Grandfathers and each other.

Here we sit, from one side of the country to the other,
entertaining ourselves day in and out.

Wearing facades that release themselves in violence, self-torture and fears.
And the "Powers to be" classify us only as a \$ and a file.

No feelings, no thoughts, no nothing. They see us only as
destructable robots, that are dangerous and heartless.

Our spirits will always remain free and for no immoral reason
shall we lower ourselves to their satisfaction of breaking us
by locking us up and taking our responsibilities and decisions from us.

In every soul there is strength so strong, that nothing
or not one ruthless people can take from us but ourselves.

Even then have pity for our people, that the system has taken from us.
Our brothers and sisters may now be free but
Great Spirit let us open our eyes to the pain they felt and let us all

Devote our anger, sorrow and pain in a positive way
where we can set an example for our younger brothers and sisters
that may face the same battles in the future...

Sandy Sayer, P4W
Native Sisterhood

Ongoing communication had been maintained with the Native Sisterhood at P4W to alleviate anxieties of change. In September 1992 their fear and anxiety was high as they were not receiving enough information on the Healing Lodge. They wanted to know who the committee members were, and whether a small group could visit them. They specifically requested an Elder, the Chief of Nekaneet Reserve and the CSC Regional Director of the Prairie Region. They wanted to know more about the Healing Lodge concept. They felt that as a correctional facility, it would not work, it would be another prison.

The representatives from the Healing Lodge, discussed ways in which the Sisterhood could have input and maintain communications with the Healing Lodge Committee. They were shown pictures of the land where the Healing Lodge would be situated.

A small group visited the women at the prison in November. They came back very moved about the incarcerated women and their circumstances. All had mixed feelings of sadness and empathy for the women who were having to live in such a place. The women in prison indicated they felt violated with no lack of privacy and that male guards were used for "high risk" women. The lifers had a concern about whether they would be included in the Healing Lodge.

All three national Elders from the Healing Lodge Circle have spent at least one week each with the women at the Prison for Women. The Elders have indicated that there have been mixed reaction, but, that the women were very anxious for the Healing Lodge to open.

c) Provincial Institutions Housing Federally Sentenced Women

Saskatchewan Penitentiary in Prince Albert was one of the institutions visited by the Saskatchewan Elder and an Aboriginal Woman employed with Correctional Services Canada in March 1992 to inform the federally sentenced Aboriginal women in that institution of the Healing Lodge and its concept.

As well another CSC employee, the B.C. Elder and a representative of the Native Women's Association of Canada have visited the institution at Burnaby, B.C. They indicate that the Aboriginal women in that institution would like to meet the other members of the Healing Lodge Circle.

In Fort Saskatchewan which housed twelve federally sentenced Aboriginal Women, an Aboriginal woman and the Saskatchewan Elder from the Healing Lodge Circle visited the prison to inform the women of the Aboriginal Women's Healing Lodge. Most of those women were intrigued with the idea of a Healing Lodge for federally sentenced Aboriginal women.

From the findings of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, the Minister made the announcement that the Prison for Women would be closed September 1994 and be replaced by five regional facilities with one of the facilities being an Aboriginal Women's Healing Lodge. The cost of the institutions that was announced certainly did not take into account the isolated areas wherein some of the institutions would be built; especially, the Healing Lodge which has kept within budget in terms of building and construction costs, but has gone over budget in terms of servicing to an isolated reserve. "The government announced that five new facilities for federally sentenced women would be established, including a Healing Lodge for Aboriginal women, and that the community based services for women would be expanded. The cost of the initiative is estimated at \$50 million dollars."⁵⁷

"The \$7 million Healing Lodge is part of a larger \$50 million national initiative to establish five regional institutions to replace the Kingston Prison for Women which will be closed in 1994."⁵⁸

⁵⁷ News Release, Solicitor General Announces Next Step in Process to Establish new Correctional Facilities for Women, July 1991, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON.

⁵⁸ News Release, Healing Lodge for Aboriginal Women to be located in Saskatchewan, Dec. 1991, Correctional Service Canada, Ottawa, ON,

5. The North

GIFTS OF THE NORTH:
MENTAL/WISDOM: Sacred Gift of Life:
Wind, Evening Star. Season: Winter/Winter
Solstice. Plant Life: Trees. Animal World:
Four Legged. Fourth Hill of Life: Old Age.
Sacred Law: Harmony. Fourth Spiritual
Principle: Purity, Serenity & Peace.
Spirit Animal: White Buffalo; Nation
of Humanity: White Nation;
Direction Color: White

a) The Aboriginal Women's Healing Lodge

February 1991 marked the first meeting of the ad-hoc committee of the Aboriginal Women's Healing Lodge in Saskatoon, Sask. It was represented by some members of the Aboriginal Women's Caucus, the Native Women's Association of Canada, Correctional Service Canada and Elders from the Native Women's Association of Canada and the Aboriginal Women's Caucus. The first three meetings developed membership criteria, discussed the role of the Elders and drafted the Terms of Reference for the Healing Lodge Planning Committee.

The membership criteria established that only members from the Aboriginal Women's Caucus would be accepted. Although most of the original 35 members of the Aboriginal Women's Caucus were not present at the meeting, they would be kept informed of the ongoing discussions regarding the development of the Aboriginal Women's Healing Lodge. Correctional Service Canada questioned the rationale of having three Elders instead of one, as two Elders were from out of province which resulted in higher costs. The Committee determined that all the Elders were essential to the work that needed to be done in terms of federally sentenced Aboriginal Women. As well, the Elders determined their own roles in relation to the Healing Lodge Sub-Committee work, they knew when to be silent on issues, when to speak up and still provide the much needed guidance; and, always they provided ceremonies and teachings for the committee members.

The Terms of Reference for the Healing Lodge Sub-Committee are that it be a working group remaining in existence until the Healing Lodge is fully operational to: develop the Vision of the Healing Lodge and to ensure that the Vision is respected, as well as develop a wholistic healing approach; develop and coordinate all operational input for the planning, design and construction of the Healing Lodge in consultation with the National Implementation Committee and CSC Construction; develop the location and site selection criteria, assess potential sites and make recommendations regarding the final selection for the Healing Lodge site; develop the management operation framework, including an organizational model, staff selection criteria and staff training programs to ensure the programs are consistent with the Healing Lodge vision and philosophy; review, suggest and develop policy changes to ensure the Healing Lodge Vision is implemented and respected and ensure that all aspects of the operation are culturally appropriate for federally sentenced Aboriginal Women; arrange for necessary workshops and consultations with various experts, Aboriginal organizations and communities to obtain advise and expertise; and to make recommendations to the National Implementation Committee for endorsement and provide input into the National Implementation Committee communication plan to keep Aboriginal organizations, communities and presently incarcerated female offenders informed of the progress.

In turn, any issues arising from the National Implementation Committee in relation to the Healing Lodge Sub-Committee work would be referred to the Healing Lodge Sub-Committee for action.

April 1991 began the development of the selection criteria for the site of the Healing Lodge. Already a number of communities in Alberta, Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories had expressed interest in having the Healing Lodge in their communities. Final criteria was completed, August 1991 and approved by the Minister in December 1991.

May and June 1991 began the initial discussions of the Vision for the Aboriginal women's Healing Lodge as interpreted by each committee member. It was completed December 1991 and presented to the Minister during that month.

Some of the vision interpretations are:

"It would be a place of healing and family; men, women and children. Family can be healed there. It would be a place of serenity, slow moving to continue the flow of healing. Everyone would be in balance." Joan Lavallee, Elder, Saulteaux Nation, Duck Lake, SK

"It would be a place for healing our people with respect and vision, to respect the road given to Aboriginal People. It would be slow paced for creativity and not to rush into things. We need the balance to understand and reflect our ways. There would be no authority figures, as this brings about anger and hate. There would be choices available; for, it is not our place to tell the women what to do. We need to focus on the women's teachings, like the Starblanket Society, and the Woman of the East, as those are the teachings of the Grandmothers." Liza Mosher, Elder, Ojibway Nation, Sudbury, ON

"It would be a place with herbal medicines and cleansing, with water close by or going through the land for Sweatlodge Ceremonies, a place where the women can sit by the water as part of their healing, a place to have our own ceremonies. It would be a place for the heart, a place to get out feelings and express thoughts, a place to cry and heal through tears. It would be a growing place for the women and their families to learn about each other. It would be a place where the women could grow their own food, bead and tan hides to learn their traditional ways of self-sufficiency." Mary Louie, Elder, Okanogan Nation, Keremeous, B.C.

"It would be a place open to dreams where women take back their power as women. It would be a place of matriarchal teachings. To have whole, strong healthy women, we need to focus on the power of women through Aboriginal teachings of the Morning Star, the Woman of the East, who walks across the sky before Grandfather Sun begins the journey. We need to revive the teachings of women; for, women carry the Starblanket. It would be a place of de-institutionalization, as the women come first. The residents would work there teaching each other and included in the decision making. It would be a circle of kindness, love and sharing. There would be healing circles. There would be a traditional hospital with our own healing ceremonies which would include different tribal ceremonies." Fran Sugar, Aboriginal Women's Caucus, Saskatoon, SK

"It would be a healing place with Aboriginal People providing direction. It would be a place of balance where people would grow at a comfortable pace in a non-threatening manner, and decide for themselves to change their behaviour without authority figures. Change comes from within. They would be accountable to themselves and responsible for themselves. There would be equality and choices for the women. There would be balance in mind, body, spirit and heart. With the coming Earth changes, it would be a safe and self-sufficient place. Once there is balance and living in harmony with the Earth, the inner spirit can balance." Sky Blue Morin, Aboriginal Women's Caucus, Saskatoon, SK

"It would have programs geared toward native spirituality. Women, unfortunately have to live there; therefore, it should be a place where women can look within and heal themselves." Debra Black-Froman, Community & Youth Correctional Services, Winnipeg, Manitoba

"It would be Aboriginal in design with Aboriginal Teachings and Aboriginal Resource People, a pride to the Aboriginal Women. Programs would be based on individual choices which would empower self-esteem, personal individual plans with respect for diverse spirituality. It would be a safe place for women that respects children and family." Jane Miller-Ashton, Correctional Service Canada (CSC)

"It would be a place to protect the women until they are ready to deal with the world, a place of good feelings where they could do things like build a fire, watch fish in the water. The hope is that it would work so well, other people would want to go there." Joanne Severn, CSC, Prairie Region, Saskatoon, SK

"The programs and services would be geared to Native Services. It would be a place of peace, a model for other Healing Lodges." Lynn Daniels, CSC, Prairie Region, Saskatoon, SK

"It would be different than institutions we know. It would be a peaceful kind of place, a quiet place." Ginger Bacchus, Correctional Service Canada, Pacific Region, Burnaby, B.C.

The overall concept of the Healing Lodge Vision was derived from the teachings of the Four Directions in the Circle of the Life with a wholistic healing focus to develop the Spiritual (East), the Emotional (South), the Physical (West) and the Mental (North) aspects of the lives of federally sentenced Aboriginal women. We begin at the centre of the Circle, the Creator, Creation and ourselves with the original instructions given at Creation. As we grow, we move around the Medicine Wheel beginning in the East with our original instructions to work on the spiritual part of ourselves, to the south for the emotions of the heart, to the west to maintain the physical body and to the north to acquire wisdom and serenity. As we travel around the Medicine Wheel in the Circle of Life, we go around many times until we complete the teachings we were to learn through our original instructions.

Through the Vision of the Healing Lodge we can revive the spirit of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women. Through the Elders' teachings, the Sacred Laws of Women and the Matriarchy of Aboriginal Women can be revived to provide a spiritual base for life's lessons. All decisions and teachings would take into account the responsibility for the Seven Generations to come. The belief being that when one makes a decision, it needs to be responsible for the seven generations of children in the future, as they will be affected.

The Honourable Doug Lewis, Solicitor General for Canada, announced on July 31, 1991 that the Healing Lodge for federally sentenced women would be located in one of the prairie provinces, the region that was home to the majority of federally sentenced Aboriginal women. After reviewing the historical geographical distribution of federally sentenced Aboriginal Women from the prairies, and finding most of the residents to be from either Alberta or Saskatchewan, the Minister announced, December 1991, that the needs of the majority of the women would best be served by locating the facility in Saskatchewan.

"Mr. Lewis said that the majority of Aboriginal women under federal sentence have resided in either Saskatchewan or Alberta, with very few from Manitoba. "Recognizing this," he said, "I am confident the needs of these Aboriginal women can best be met through the previously announced creation of a new regional facility in Alberta and a centrally located Healing Lodge in Saskatchewan."... "The \$7 million Healing Lodge is part of a larger \$50 million national initiative to establish five regional institutions to replace the Kingston Prison for Women which will be closed in 1994."⁵⁹

With the influx of 44 letters of interest for the site of the Healing Lodge, the Healing Lodge Planning Committee spent two weeks in March 1992 to review 20 proposals that had completed their requirements of intent for the site of the Healing Lodge. At that meeting, a community had been determined as meeting all the essential requirements for the Healing Lodge site.

Although specific tools such as a selection criteria for scoring was developed, the Healing Lodge Circle had much help from other sources. The Elders were not part of the scoring team; however, they conducted ceremonies and prayed to assist the Planning Committee in their selection process. One of the Elders began a Sweatlodge Ceremony in her home community, the day the Committee started reviewing and scoring the documents.

The Elders that were present at the meeting, began the meetings with Pipe Ceremonies. Another Elder did a Healing Circle ceremony to help the committee members get in touch with their hearts and unclutter their heads from all the paperwork.

⁵⁹ *News Release, Healing lodge for Aboriginal Women to be Located in Saskatchewan, Dec. 1991, Solicitor General of Canada, Ottawa, ON*

The announcement was made five months later, in May 1992 by Solicitor General Doug Lewis at Maple Creek, Saskatchewan, the site of the proposed Aboriginal Women's Healing Lodge. The Nekaneet Band members and the Maple Creek Town members joined in the announcement to the press.

In June 1992, the Healing Lodge Planning Circle had their first meeting with the Nekaneet band members and town members from Maple Creek. The Nekaneet welcomed the Healing Lodge Planning Committee to their community with a traditional community Feast. There was concern that the sacredness of the land had to be kept in tact, and that there would be no clear-cutting. The Committee members were given a number of land site choices for the Healing Lodge. The Elders did a ceremonial walk on the land to ensure that this was the place for the Healing Lodge. They agreed on the first section of land that had been proposed which was a quarter section across from the road to the band office and the main community of houses. The Elders walked a section of the land three months later with the Public Works people to indicate and mark the area with a red ribbon tied on a tree.

August 1992 was the beginning of several information sessions for the community on the Healing Lodge vision, in the hopes of alleviating fears of the new facility. Although there was ongoing consultation with the federally sentenced Aboriginal Women at P4W, a visit was arranged in November for some Nekaneet Band Members and Maple Creek town members, to meet the women at Prison for Women (P4W) in Kingston and to see the archaic Prison. The group that went to P4W came back very much affected by what they saw. They were moved by the plight of the women, whom they saw as sisters, mothers, and women caught in their circumstances.

A role statement that began August 1991 became An operational plan for the Healing Lodge was initiated in May 1992 and was completed and adopted March 1993. The Operational Plan included a circular management model wherein the Healing Lodge National Committee would continue to be advisors to the Commissioner of Corrections. This, to be followed up by a resourcing document that would indicate the resources needed to put the Healing Lodge into operation, and where the resources would come from. During the course of the resourcing, a staff selection criteria was developed that would ensure that applicants were sensitive to Aboriginal culture. As well, the staff training that was outlined would include exposure to Aboriginal culture and beliefs.

During the development of the operational plan a number of areas were identified as needing policy changes within Corrections Services Canada. These are to be followed up by the Healing Lodge Circle and recommended to the Minister and/or the Commissioner as recommendations for policy change.

As part of the involvement in the overall planning, design and construction of the Healing Lodge, a sub-committee of the Healing Lodge Circle was initiated to deal with the selection of architects to build the Healing Lodge. The tendering of architects was initiated, in November, and a similar selection process (as for the site selection) was developed for the selection of the architects. A number of qualifiers were included in the scoring tool to ensure that an Aboriginal owned company would receive equal opportunity to a non-aboriginal firm.

It had originally been indicated by Public Works and Correctional Services Canada that architectural firms from out of province could apply jointly with a Saskatchewan firm. The engineering practices in Saskatchewan dictate that the architects be registered with the province or affiliated with a registered firm. On the day that scoring was to begin, the Healing Lodge Planning Committee was informed by Public Works that this was no longer the case, an out of province company could not affiliate with an in-province company. This would mean that all out-of-province submissions affiliated with a Saskatchewan firm would have to be written a letter indicated that they would have to drop out of the competition, or the submission could be scored on the Saskatchewan portion, alone. This was a major disappointment to many of the Healing Lodge Committee members as it excluded the best Aboriginal architect in Canada.

Nevertheless, the process continued and involved scoring 25 submissions in December, and the top ten for the final grading in January 1993. The top three architects were selected from the top ten within a five to twelve point spread, with the deciding factor being the lowest bid for the architect that was chosen.

The month of December initiated preliminary discussions around the issue of space for the Healing Lodge. With limited funds and costs already over-budget, Correctional Service Canada strongly suggested the downscale of space requirements. The Healing Lodge Circle did major cuts of space (giving up a gymnasium and omitting some washrooms, as some examples) at their February meeting from the initial plans, while stressing the need for federally sentenced Aboriginal Women to have sufficient resources and comfortable living space to accommodate their sentenced time spent in the institution. Throughout the negotiations, Correctional Services Canada's strategy was to house 6 to 8 federally sentenced Aboriginal women per housing unit. The Healing Lodge Circle believed the accommodations would be too cramped with no breathing room for the individual women to grow. The Healing Lodge Circle wanted seven single living units of two persons, and eight family units of two persons with their children.

Correctional Services Canada's proposals were then to have 7 to 8 living units housing 4 to 6 federally sentenced Aboriginal women each, or to have two federally sentenced Aboriginal women sharing a living unit, only if the women had children. If no children were involved then four federally sentenced Aboriginal women would share a housing unit. At a May sub-committee with the architects it had been determined through calculations that condensing the size of the living units to four or six person units would not save the building costs dramatically. The Healing Lodge Circle, at their May meeting, questioned the purpose of housing women in such cramped quarters and continued to maintain that the living units would be for only two women, and two women with their children depending on whether the women had children.

Correctional Service Canada then demanded another downsizing of the facility to bring it more into budget realities. In June the Healing Lodge Circle's sub-committee, did more major cuts (cutting the size of the kitchen in half, and omitting some more washrooms, as examples) to try to accommodate the request. This exercise downscaled a total of 352 net square metres (457 gross square metres) for a saving of approximately \$500,000. The Healing Lodge Circle, then, decided at their June meeting that there would be no more downsizing of the building or the living units, as it would no longer be a Healing Lodge, it would be a prison, and they would have to withdraw from the process of the healing lodge initiative.

Discussions had started on the design of the facility as a round building to a compound of buildings to outline a turtle shape. The logistics of having a round building to include the living units of the federally sentenced Aboriginal women and all the programs and administration would have provided for a cumbersome building with too much unused space in the center and too much land to be cleared to accommodate the flat land required for such a building design. The architects provided an elongated version with everything enclosed, a river scenario, as well as a rectangular design version. Members of the Healing Lodge Circle did not want the enclosed version; but, envisioned the shape of a buffalo or buffalo skull on the rectangular design version which they found more appealing than the enclosed elongated version of a river scenario.

The lay of the land is very sharp which has caused problems for some of the design considerations, as the Healing Lodge Circle did not want to have too much land cleared to build the building. The Nekaneet Band had requested at the outset of discussions that the land be kept as natural as possible with little disturbance to its environment, as the land was considered sacred.

At the April 1991 meeting of the Healing Lodge Sub-Committee, the Elders had identified approximately one hundred acres as the amount of land that would be required to conduct their ceremonies and allow for the land to replenish. The Elders felt that the location of the Sweatlodge needed to be relocated periodically, after use. As well, space was required for the federally sentenced Aboriginal women to conduct their Fasts. At the initial meeting with the Nekaneet Band, a quarter section of land had been offered for the Healing Lodge. Since the lease with the Nekaneet Band would be for forty-nine years, at least a quarter section (one hundred and sixty-five acres) had to be set aside to accommodate the land space needed for the ceremonies over time.

There was much delay in the negotiations of the Healing Lodge process because of the land issue with discussions starting in December 1992 and finally coming to a conclusion in May 1993, five months later. Correctional Services Canada representatives had difficulty with the concept of so much land, and proceeded to consult their own Elders as to what was actually needed. The indication was that the Minister did not want to be liable and was not comfortable with identifying so much land, a quarter section, as a Correctional Services Canada Reserve. It is unfortunate other Elders who were not involved in the negotiations of the Healing Lodge Circle were dragged into the process and used to provide arguments for some individuals who did not want the quarter section of land for the Healing Lodge.

6. Coming Full Circle

Cheyenne proverb: "When our women's hearts are on the ground, it is finished, because no matter how strong our warriors or how good their weapons, it is finished."

Indeed, the women at Prison for Women have their hearts on the ground, when their only recourse is to commit suicide. It is very serious when the spirit has been broken and the will to live is no longer there.

We all come full circle in our life's travel a number of times during the course of our life time. The federally sentenced Aboriginal women have come full circle in their travel on life's path to a new concept of incarceration, the Aboriginal Women's Healing Lodge. They need to be given the opportunity to travel their next journey around the Circle Of Life with all the healing and support systems that they need.

This new concept of incarceration will provide for the federally sentenced Aboriginal women to heal their past wounds, to deal with their present circumstances, and to prepare for their responsibilities for the future. They will have the resources to complete their journey through the guidance of Elders and the support of Aboriginal Peoples in their new way of life.

The correctional system has come full circle in its incarceration of federally sentenced women in that, now, it has a new initiative, the Healing Lodge concept. A new initiative based on a place of healing and growth as opposed to an archaic concept, a place of punishment. This new concept could extend to all the other regional institutions proposed by Correctional Service Canada. They could all be developed as Healing Lodges. Given the circumstances surrounding women who commit crime and their backgrounds, it is possible that the new direction in corrections can be one of healing instead of punishment.

As we make our journey around the Circle of Life, we have the obligation of completing our journeys with more humanity and compassion. It is with this same humanity and compassion that the Healing Lodge Circle developed the concept of the Aboriginal Women's Healing Lodge. It would provide the healing process for the women. There is also the obligation to provide Aboriginal teachings for the Aboriginal women to deal with their present life situations and to grow physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. It is with this same wholistic belief that the Healing Lodge Circle developed the healing component of the Aboriginal Women's Healing Lodge. Further, we have the responsibility for the teachings that are given to each of us to live on Mother Earth in kinship, and as family. It is with this same responsibility that the Healing Lodge Circle provides the guidance through Elders for the women in the Aboriginal Women's Healing Lodge.

In addition to the process, the design of the Healing Lodge vision has come full circle. The design envisioned by the Native Sisterhood at the Prison for Women presented at the first Healing Lodge meeting in February 1991, by a formerly federally sentenced Aboriginal woman, was that it be circular. The design of the building originally presented to the architects at a January 1993 meeting by the Elders was circular. During the six months of meetings to July 1993, the architects finally presented a circle design, a sunburst with the housing off to the edge of the hillside still overlooking the view of the beaver pond. The top of the building, above the entrance, which could be seen from one of the hillsides, would depict an eagle. The building represented a Medicine Wheel to some of the Healing Lodge Circle members and the eagle in the South Direction represented truth. We had come full circle.

The first concept, at the first meeting of the Aboriginal Women's Caucus talked about a Medicine Lodge, which became to be known as a Healing Lodge. Indeed the medicine wheel would represent the Medicine Lodge. A federally sentenced Aboriginal woman once wrote, "All I ask is that the truth be spoken, written and heard." Indeed, the Eagle would represent the truth that would be spoken, written and heard in relation to the Aboriginal Women's Healing Lodge. Indeed, we have come full circle.

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