

**Policy Internships and Fellowships Program
Final Report**

**Just Visiting? More than meets the eye!
Government & Community Working Together for Families**

Joanne Murray

1. Preamble

Home Organization: John Howard Society of Greater Moncton Inc.

The John Howard Society of Greater Moncton Inc. is a non-profit community-based organization mandated primarily to address crime prevention. The Society belongs to a federation of 55 local, provincial, and national organizations. Generally, direct client services are performed by the local societies, while research and communications services tend to be managed by the provincial societies and the John Howard Society of Canada. Societies operate independently at the provincial level through incorporation under the appropriate provincial legislation, and come together as the John Howard Society of Canada through a “federation” type of relationship.

The John Howard Society (JHS) has been actively involved in the area of justice and corrections in New Brunswick for over 50 years, and has had a presence in the Moncton region since the early 1950s. The John Howard Society of Greater Moncton Inc. serves the local area by providing education, support and direct services that respond to the needs of those considered to be at risk to offend (due to economic, emotional, social or other factors), those who have been involved with the law, and their families.

Our local agency has developed a reputable knowledge of the issues related to the root causes of crime and to effective crime prevention interventions. We are involved in community-based crime prevention activities and in local, national, and international professional memberships, and have been invited to talk about our work in Canada and the United States.

The programs we offer are research-based and target criminogenic factors. We have successfully developed and implemented three programs that have received national attention. The first is an employment strategy that features four days of on-the-job experience with one day per week of living skills, and the involvement of trained job coaches who work with crews of six men or women on the job to reinforce, in real life situations, what they have learned in the classroom. Work projects selected have a community beautification component, and each six-month project involves at least five partners, including municipal, provincial and federal governments and the community. The second program is a community-based substance abuse treatment program that features a multi-sectoral approach to wrapping services around a client who is also participating in a structured relapse prevention-based treatment program. The third is a restorative justice project that also involves multi-sectoral funding and many community partners, and this has resulted in the recruitment and training of about one hundred volunteers who are helping out in restorative justice-based activities in the community.

The John Howard Society in Moncton is located in the downtown area of the city and occupies approximately 2,200 square feet on the top floor of a local credit union. Eleven of the twenty staff have offices at this location, while the rest are located off-site in a variety of settings that range from home offices in nearby cities, to classrooms in church basements, to mobile offices on construction sites. My own office was spacious and airy, with a full wall of eight-foot tall windows, plenty of cabinet and shelf space, and a collection of artwork from family that provided both inspiration and pleasant distraction! The working environment was very collegial, with a healthy balance of fun and work.

Host Organization: Correctional Service Canada, Regional Headquarters

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) is a federal government agency responsible for administering sentences of two years or more imposed by the court. In New Brunswick, through the Canada/New Brunswick Initiative, CSC also administers sentences of six months or more.

This role is governed by the *British North America Act*, the *Criminal Code*, the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* and related regulations, as well as by other federal legislation.

The specific responsibilities of CSC are stated succinctly in its mission statement:

“The Service believes that the best way to protect society over the long term is through the successful reintegration of offenders as law-abiding citizens. Achieving this results from the balance of CSC's two main strategies: providing active assistance to offenders to reintegrate into the community successfully along with the least restrictive controls necessary for the protection of society. Corrections is not only confinement; it is the process of bringing about a change for the better in offenders so that they may eventually be safely returned to their communities as law-abiding citizens.”

Regional Headquarters (RHQ) of CSC is located in Moncton, New Brunswick in the federal building on Main Street. It comprises 13 departments that serve four districts in the Atlantic Region. RHQ's core services provide support in implementing and maintaining national policies and programs and in developing and implementing regional policies, plans, programs and accountability mechanisms. A number of clustered divisions providing services to field operations are also located at RHQ.

In conjunction with the Regional Management Committee (composed of five wardens, the four district directors, one treatment centre director, the Assistant Deputy Commissioner and the Regional Administrators), the Deputy Commissioner directs the activities of the Atlantic Region. The Assistant Deputy Commissioner oversees the correctional agenda of the region with the assistance of counsels, project teams and advisors; he is second in command to the Deputy Commissioner in the management of the Atlantic Region.

One of the divisions providing core services at RHQ is the Correctional Programs Division. In this division, emphasis is placed on the development of effective core programs for both male and female offenders both in the institutions and in the community. Priorities in the area of personal development programs include the development of personal, rehabilitative and cognitive skills, anger management, substance abuse, family violence, sex offender treatment programs, violence prevention, education and offender employment.

The challenge of programming is not only to ensure that it is driven by offender needs and directed at changing behaviour, but also to ensure that there is continuity between the institutions and the community. Programs in the community must help reinforce the gains made through program involvement already undertaken in the institution and be designed to meet the different situational needs of offenders on release. The John

Howard Society in Moncton has, with CSC, been involved for many years in the delivery of both institutional and community programming.

During my fellowship with the Policy Internships and Fellowships Program (PIAF) I was housed in the Correctional Programs Division. Office space was very limited, and at times I had to share an office (cubicle) or work from a home office. The atmosphere was much more operational; however, staff were very welcoming and interested in the work that I was doing. I was supplied with an e-mail address right away, and had access to it from any personal computer at RHQ or any other CSC site. This allowed me to keep up-to-date on correspondence when doing research out of the institutions. Access to additional resources, such as a national library, the Internet, research journals, and a nearby research department, helped facilitate the fellowship.

2. Introduction

I joined the John Howard Society in Moncton as Executive Director in 1995. At that time the agency was in a rebirth stage, with 1.5 staff and an annual budget of about \$60,000. The organization operated out of an unused space in the local parole office (CSC) and was given access to surplus office equipment. In the eight years since, the agency has evolved into a large organization (revenues almost reaching \$1 million annually) with a strong community presence in the Greater Moncton area. This was effectively achieved through the agency's strong entrepreneurial spirit, and its partnership approach that flows from within the agency, between staff, to outside the agency, with clients, funders, and the community.

Prior to joining the John Howard Society, I was self-employed as an adult educator and computer skills trainer. I have worked in the municipal, provincial, and federal government, and in the private sector since 1979, mostly in administration. I have been a volunteer for 24 years, serving the community as a board member or providing direct service, in organizations that serve women, children and youth, persons with eating disorders, and those who are homeless, on a methadone program, or illiterate. As a result, I have a very broad base of knowledge and a comfort level with the various sectors.

I fully enjoyed my job as Executive Director. Through the agency I was able to fulfill many personal and professional goals. I worked comfortably with the provincial and federal government, and managed to negotiate many contracts for service that involved partnerships with both. Things were beginning to change, however. The John Howard Society was already playing a lead role in crime prevention in the Greater Moncton area, through community forums, the development of research-based programs, and participation in many crime prevention activities and committees. For years the agency was in a growth mode with a focus on meeting client needs through program and service delivery. The agency had systematically developed and implemented programs and services that could effectively address the root causes of crime. Having done that, the agency began to look at the broader issues: the way in which persons with mental illness or disabilities were processed in the courts; the fact that discrimination against those with a criminal record was allowed under the current *Human Rights Act*; the fact that female prisoners are not provided with the same level of programming as male prisoners; and the fact that family members are deeply affected by the incarceration of a loved one, yet receive very little, if any, support in the community.

The John Howard Society in Moncton is part of a federation of provincial and national agencies, and as such benefits from the policy work that is carried out nationally. Our agency could have been more effective in gathering and packaging information for the provincial and national society to use in their policy work, although some of the issues addressed by the agency were more local in nature. Clearly, we felt that there was a gap in the agency's capacity to influence policy locally and nationally in an effective way.

I had received information about the Policy Internships and Fellowships program and immediately thought that it could provide the opportunity to develop those skills the agency was lacking. At the same time, it would give me a chance not only to step outside the agency and look at its operations objectively, but also to learn new management skills through observation and mentorship within the host organization. Although keenly interested, I felt conflicted about leaving the "community" to which I so securely belonged. Working, paid and unpaid, in the voluntary sector was a decision I made long ago based on my interest in being part of solutions to social problems at a grassroots level. I was concerned about the repercussions of "moving to the other side" or being seen as a "traitor" in the eyes of my partners in the voluntary sector. For many weeks I struggled silently over what to do.

Nearing the deadline for application, I received a call from a representative of Regional Headquarters of Correctional Service Canada inquiring as to whether I would be interested in an internship with the department. CSC was interested in research and policy on offenders' families, an area in which our agency had been working for the past year. I thought about the opportunity not only to learn more about the issue, but also to conduct research that could be used (as evidence) to recommend changes to policy. The internship could serve to strengthen the agency's relationship with CSC. It could increase my skills in the area of research and policy-making, and therefore the capacity of the agency to respond to the changing demands of government and the community. The committees and Board of Directors in which I participated at the time would also benefit from these new skills. They say "timing is everything" and this call came to me on a day when I had the courage to say "yes"!

My placement

After spending an exceptionally stimulating two weeks at the summer institute in Victoria, British Columbia, I returned to Moncton ready to begin my fellowship with CSC. Jane Steeves, Regional Volunteer Coordinator with RHQ, who would be my immediate supervisor, also participated in the summer institute. These shared learnings would prove to be beneficial throughout my fellowship with CSC.

The goal of my fellowship was to complete a research study. I was presented with a broad focus, namely, offender families. I began my fellowship by contacting people within my network who had worked, or were working, in the area of offender families, in order to identify the "hot topics" in the field. This led to the establishment of a Research Advisory Committee, which was instrumental in helping me work through a series of potential research questions. The Advisory Committee was representative of each federal prison in Atlantic Canada and, as such, provided a perspective on minimum-, medium-, and maximum-security institutions, and on female prisoners and their families.

Research that is carried out within CSC must follow the department's policy guidelines. Its methodology must be scientifically sound. The RHQ does not have a research department, and so in order to meet these standards, I contacted Dr. Brian Grant, Director of the Addiction Research Centre (ARC) in nearby Prince Edward Island. Dr. Grant and his staff were a tremendous support and having the opportunity to learn from him was a gift. In fact, for the past eighteen months, John Howard Society had been involved in a demonstration pilot project with ARC that was designed to have government and community work together in program development. The project had suffered a series of unforeseen delays that resulted in fewer than anticipated referrals to the program and it was in jeopardy of being terminated. In the process of working on my PIAF research study, Dr. Grant and I developed a very productive working relationship that helped to facilitate solutions-based discussions of the problems associated with the aforementioned pilot project. Once we identified where the breakdowns were (and building on the success of our partnership on the PIAF research project), we were able to build commitment not only to continue the demonstration pilot project, but also to extend its pilot phase for another twenty-two months. We also co-authored a paper for submission to CSC's quarterly research journal on the topic of government and community working together.

Management at RHQ have been consistent in including me in operational activities in order to fulfill the mandate of PIAF. In addition to the research, I was given three other small projects. The first was to develop an audit tool that would be used to verify compliance with CSC's *Commissioner's Directives (CDs)* related to programming. The second project was to pull together a series of statistics related to program delivery in Atlantic Canada, by district, over a two-year period. In reviewing the *CDs* I gained an in-depth understanding of the policies related to programming. My plans are to develop a set of program policies for facilitators at JHS, with similar audit tools, to ensure compliance with contracts for service with CSC and other funders. Management regularly included me in regional and local management meetings and gave me opportunities to present the research, talk about PIAF, and share some of the tools that have been developed (websites, Codes, research on voluntary sector that may be relevant).

The third project involved the formation of a coalition of community agencies and government departments whose mandates are directly, or indirectly, related to social problems that have been identified as contributing to crime. Jane Steeves presented the concept to CSC and they enthusiastically encouraged her to pursue this possibility within the community. Jane asked me to chair the coalition during the start-up phase, which has taken place over the past six months. This coalition has provided an effective platform for government and community to learn more about each other in a very practical way.

Aside from my involvement in the host organization, I have become much more active in the voluntary sector. Until now, I had little sense of the scope of the voluntary sector as a whole. My view was rather compartmentalized by agency. Even though I worked closely with many NGOs in the Greater Moncton area, and with some national voluntary organizations, I had not spent a lot of time drawing parallels between them in the context of the sector as a whole. My first introduction to the sector at large, outside of my participation in the Broadbent panels in 1998, was at the Voluntary Sector (VS) Assembly in Ottawa last fall. I left that event absolutely inspired by the passion for the sector expressed by the people in the room. I have often felt that people who work in

charitable organizations are stigmatized and that work in the sector is perceived as less professional or of less value than the “real” work in the government or in the corporate sector. At the VS Assembly, I developed a pride for working in the sector that came from learning about its scope as well as its economic and civic importance.

3. Context

The project idea that Jane proposed was in the area of family visiting in prisons. This was of particular interest to me because my agency had just completed a series of community forums on the topic and I realized how much work still needed to be done. The fellowship would give me an opportunity to explore the issue directly with inmates and their family members. I felt that the study could be very beneficial to CSC; at the same time, it could help JHS better understand the needs of its clientele. Families are an important part of the rehabilitation process and having an opportunity to study the strengths and weaknesses of the family visiting process could help to make it easier for families to stay together when a member is incarcerated. Maintaining family ties is important because research has shown that offenders who have strong family ties upon release are more successful at reintegrating into the community and therefore less likely to re-offend.

Family visiting is supported by Correctional Service Canada as a way to minimize the effects of separation through incarceration. Those families that choose to remain connected through the visiting program will face many challenges and barriers in doing so, and will have few resources or supports to assist them through the period of incarceration.

We do know that the incarceration experience can affect children, spouses, parents and siblings profoundly and differently. Most families experience financial hardships when one member is incarcerated (Canadian Families and Corrections Network [CFCN], 2002). Withers (2001, p.9) suggests that “the family maintains ties in a correctional atmosphere that challenges the survival of the family”.

Children who have a parent who is incarcerated experience problems with learning/school, behaviour, health/mental health, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and other areas (Phillips, Bloom, 1998). Two-thirds of the Aboriginal inmates in a recent study reported being involved in the child welfare system at some point in their lives. It was not clear whether the child welfare system caused the instability, or whether the home environment leading up to the placement caused the instability (Trevethan, S. et al, p.44). A 2000 Oregon study found that children with at least one parent involved in the criminal justice system were five times more likely than their peers to become involved in crime (*Juvenile Justice Digest*, anonymous, 2002). In the context of the over-representation of Aboriginals in the federal correctional system, maintaining family ties becomes even more critical.

Spouses and caregivers experience financial loss, emotional trauma, confusion over new roles, disrepute in the community and grief at the “loss” of their loved one. They also experience anxiety over how to tell other family members, how to maintain contact within the complexity of the criminal justice system and how to deal with prison environment (Hostetter, Jinnah, 1993). These problems are largely hidden and represent a significant uncalculated cost of imprisonment (Hagan, 1996).

The social stigma attached to incarceration can create anxiety for family members, related to maintaining the relationship, and is further exacerbated by the whole visiting process (Weissman, M., LaRue, C., 1998). Yet, there is little research on the effects of incarceration on the parents or siblings of an offender. A recent community forum, coordinated by the John Howard Society in Moncton, heard from a brother of an inmate who chose to remain in contact with the latter while he was incarcerated for a period of about ten years. His other family members had severed their ties with the brother. So not only was he struggling with the pain of seeing his brother incarcerated, but he also had to deal with animosity from his other family members. A mother reported that her "middle-class world" was shattered overnight with the incarceration of her teenaged son. During the months between the time of the arrest and the date of sentencing, the media kept the story front and centre. "I assumed everyone in town saw me as a failure as a parent." (Dallao, M., p.97) Eventually, the family had to seek counseling.

In the criminal justice system, family and marital support for the offender makes a difference in coping and desistance, and is related to successful reintegration of an offender. "Stronger family ties are an effective form of crime prevention and lead to safer communities. Strengthening the well-being and relationships within families is crime prevention." (CFCN, 2002) Correctional Service Canada also recognizes the value of maintaining and strengthening family ties. The Service's guiding principles include recognition of "the value of family and community relationships" and "that the establishment and maintenance of positive community and family relationships will normally assist offenders in their reintegration as law-abiding citizens." (<http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca>). These guiding principles are strengthened by the *Commissioner's Directives*, a policy document that identifies the need "to provide the mechanisms by which inmates can be encouraged to develop and maintain positive community and family relationships that will assist them to prepare for reintegration as law-abiding citizens" (*Commissioner's Directive*, Visiting, 770). Further, the *Corrections and Conditional Release Regulations* (created under the authority of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*), s.9 (d), supports "family contact for the purposes of assisting the inmate in maintaining and strengthening family ties as a support to the inmate while in custody and as a potential community resource on the inmate's release."

The *mechanisms* referred to in the Directives are "general visiting", "private family visits", "escorted temporary absences" and "unescorted temporary absences". General visiting and private family visits take place within the institution, while the temporary absences are community-based. The study, which I am conducting as part of the PIAF placement, will be confined to general and private family visiting programs.

The bulk of the work being done to address the needs of families is currently being carried out by CFCN. At the time of my fellowship, the Network had just completed a national project sponsored by the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI), and was in the process of developing recommendations for CSC. As part of this national study, JHS had worked on a very successful community forum that formed a part of the national study. The draft recommendations were shared with me at the start of my project, and we continue to communicate. I have been invited to present my research findings at CFCN's Annual General Meeting to be held in Moncton in late June, and will be a panelist in a one-day policy conference in Kingston, Ontario.

4. Summary of the Research

A number of studies have indicated that strong offender-family relationships are beneficial to offenders. Family and marital support make a difference in coping, desistance, and successful reintegration. The Correctional Service of Canada recognizes the value of family relationships, and as such provides for general and private family visiting within the institutions. An exploration of the literature around the dynamics of the actual visiting experience reveals that family members are more likely to experience financial hardships, anxiety, fear, humiliation, frustration, and increased feelings of stigmatization within the community.

This study is meant to be a preliminary examination of the impact of the family visiting experience on the maintenance of the family relationship. The study looks at both general and private family visits and involves a sample of approximately 50 inmates and 50 family members, designated by the offenders. The sampling frame was created from institutional visiting rosters for the three-month period October to December 2002.

A personalized letter was sent to each inmate in the sample. The Visits and Correspondence department in each institution reviewed the letters with each inmate personally and had them sign a consent form, and scheduled him or her for an interview. The consent forms were then mailed to me.

At the time of the interview, the inmate was asked to submit the name of a family member who might be interested in participating in the study as well. A consent form and a copy of the questionnaire were mailed to the family member identified, with information as to when they would be contacted to discuss an interview.

The researcher administered the Inmate Questionnaire. Completed questionnaires were coded by the researcher, with personal identifying information removed, and names replaced with codes to identify each case. Coded questionnaires were then mailed to the research assistant at St. Thomas University, who entered the coded responses using SSPS software. Research assistants administered the Family Member Questionnaire to those family members who expressed interest in participating.

Based on recommendations by the Research Advisory Committee, the final report will be disseminated to key stakeholders within CSC, relevant provincial government departments, and community agencies that work with offender families in a variety of ways. Commitments have been made (for me) to share the findings as plenary speaker at the "Focusing on the Family: Partnerships for Success" conference in Kingston on May 29; and as guest speaker at the Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Families and Corrections Network on June 21. The report will be presented to both RHQ staff and JHS Board of Directors at the end of June.

The report will be a valuable tool for understanding and responding to the needs of offenders and their families in the community through direct service and public policy. This work will be incorporated into my work plan when I resume my position as Executive Director of John Howard Society in Moncton.

A final report on the research will be complete by June 15, and will be posted on the following websites:

- www.cvsrd.org
- www3.sympatico.ca/cfcn

- www.csc-scc.gc.ca
- www.johnhoward.ca/NewBrunswick/Moncton

5. Voluntary Sector-Public Sector Comparisons

During my placement I had the opportunity to explore the research process in both the voluntary and the public sector. First, I attended a one-day workshop on Participatory Action Research, organized by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. I became very excited about this interactive form of research because it involved input from the client group into the design of the research, sought the clients' feedback on recommendations, and provided the opportunity for learning while doing the research. The process really set the stage for client empowerment and fit well with my partnering philosophy.

As a PIAF participant I attended the Conference of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) in Montreal in November. I was totally in awe of the body of research that is being conducted within and about the voluntary sector that I (and anyone I know in the sector!) had been completely oblivious to. I found the experience very stimulating intellectually, and this is where I learned of the diversity in research methodologies between the two sectors and academia.

As a participant of the "Moving Forward" symposium in Mississauga in January 2003, I was able to actively participate in discussions around those diversities. I observed that academia, government, and the voluntary sector thought that there would be value in working together. I also learned that there were many issues that had to be resolved. At the symposium, the concept of a "community of inquiry" was born; a "community of inquiry" brings together people from all sectors who are interested in research, respectful of the others' methods, and have a common focus on doing good research.

This "community of inquiry" concept trickled down into the province of New Brunswick. Through PolicyLink's Research Sub-Committee, I was involved in organizing and participating in a one-day exploration with academia, government and community around the possibility of partnering in research. The event was very successful, and a follow-up day is planned for May, to continue the discussion with a broader audience. This commitment to reach across the sectors, valuing diversity and sharing best practices, set the stage for a wonderfully symbiotic relationship. I learned that academics were often searching for research projects in the community; that the community has access to a rich body of data which it may or may not be documenting in a useful way; and that government needs valid research to make or change policy.

Throughout all of this, I was learning first-hand about the scientific way that CSC must carry out its research. I am accustomed to working very collaboratively with clients, and feelings of being "one of them" surfaced often during the data collection phase. In my role with John Howard Society I am very accessible and approachable, and my relationship with the client usually involves a problem-solving orientation. The level of detachment from the client during the research interview made me uncomfortable, even though I understood why it was necessary. I often left interviews feeling that there was unfinished business because clients would present situations, or talk about feelings, that I normally would have helped them to process, but that in my role as researcher I was unable to address.

I am leaving this fellowship feeling that there is something that each sector could learn from the other and I'm proud to belong to the voluntary sector, which acts as a catalyst in what may well be a new, responsive way of doing research that will be respected by all three groups. What is exciting to me is that all of the things that we in the voluntary sector "know", intuitively, because of our intimate connection to the problem, we will now be able to capture in a way that is valid and sound and, therefore will be heard by the policy-makers.

6. Conclusions

Thinking back to the weeks before my departure for the summer institute and subsequent move to the federal government, I remember being afraid that I would be so changed from my experience that I would not "fit" back into my old "space". I knew I would be a different person when I returned, and my fear was that the new part of me would not be satisfied with the old job. I feared I might have expanded my horizon to a point where I couldn't see myself in the community anymore.

In my year with PIAF I have learned and experienced more than I ever anticipated. I have stretched well beyond my previous comfort zone. In this year, I have had the privilege of learning first-hand about public policy development and experiencing it at its worst (Vancouver's response to the downtown Eastside). I have developed existing working relationships and built new ones, based on effective models of collaboration learned during the summer institute and my fellowship. I have observed some excellent and effective methods of managing people and processes while at RHQ. I have joined a few new committees and boards of directors where the focus is not on local issues, but on broader voluntary sector issues.

As I am nearing the end of this journey, and reflecting on my reintegration into the John Howard Society, I find that I am a different person from the one who left last summer. I am sure that I no longer fit my old space. But I am no longer afraid, because I also realized that my space has grown bigger. My horizon has expanded. I have broadened my capacity beyond the agency's walls, and in so doing, I have expanded the capacity of the John Howard Society.

One of the John Howard Society's main reasons for supporting my involvement with PIAF was to bring new skills to the agency in the area of policy and to build a stronger relationship with our partner, CSC. I am returning to John Howard Society with the knowledge that our agency (and many others like it in Moncton) has (have) an abundance of information and data just waiting to be captured through research. I am returning to the agency with research skills that are enhanced by a healthier and more collaborative relationship with CSC and its research division. The possibilities for taking what we know, backing it up with valid research and presenting it in the form of policy recommendations are exciting.

I have valued every moment of my fellowship, and I am looking forward to my return to John Howard Society, and to the opportunities that will be afforded the agency because of what I have learned.