

THE POINT OF NO RETURN:  
ABORIGINAL OFFENDERS' JOURNEY TOWARDS A CRIME FREE LIFE

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The goal of this study was to gather information from Aboriginal offenders and develop a categorical map that describes the factors that help and hinder maintaining a crime free life after incarceration. The critical incident technique was utilized to examine 42 Aboriginal offenders' journeys from prison to the community. Three hundred and forty-one incidents collapsed into nine major categories representing themes that were helpful in maintaining a crime free life: 1) transformation of self; 2) cultural and traditional experiences; 3) healthy relationships; 4) having routine and structure in daily living; 5) freedom from prison; 6) purpose and fulfillment in life; 7) attempting to live alcohol and drug free; 8) professional support and programming; and 9) learning to identify and express oneself. Seventy-eight incidents formed four categories representing obstacles that interfere with maintaining a crime free life: 1) self; 2) unhealthy relationships; 3) substance use; and 4) lack of opportunity and professional support.

The findings were compared and contrasted to two major theories in the literature: desistance and the risk-needs-responsivity principle. Most of the categories were well substantiated in the literature contributing knowledge to theory, policy, practice, and the community. Information obtained from this study provides an increased understanding of the needs of Aboriginal offenders and offers guidance concerning useful strategies to incorporate into their wellness plans when entering the community, most notably respecting Aboriginal culture and traditional practices. The findings also add awareness of those circumstances, issues, and problems that arise during transition that may be harmful or create obstacles to a successful transition.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Indigenous peoples across the world have disproportionately high rates of imprisonment, suicide and alcoholism.

~Linda Smith (2004, p. 154)

Research indicates that Aboriginal peoples are over-represented within the Canadian Criminal Justice System (CJS). The term Aboriginal refers to the Indigenous peoples of Canada. Although the term Aboriginal is utilized throughout this study, it must be noted that this may refer to people who identify themselves as *First Nations (status and non-status)*, *Native*, *Indian*, *Inuit* or *Métis*. Using any one term is problematic because it implies that these people are homogenous when they are not; however, for simplicity, the term Aboriginal will be used. LaPrairie (2002) defined over-representation as “the fact that more Aboriginal people are incarcerated or represented in probation and other criminal justice processes when compared to their proportion of the population (both nationally and regionally)” (p.202). In Canada, Aboriginal peoples constituted a large percentage of federal and provincial inmates, while only representing a small percentage of the general adult population (Boe, 2000; CCJS, 2001; McGovern, 1998; Task Force, 1988).

According to the Canadian Center for Justice Profile Series (CCJS; 2001), statistics gathered in 1998-99 demonstrate that not only were Aboriginal admissions to custody astonishing, they were also extremely disproportionate with respect to the general Aboriginal adult population. The authors of the profile reported that although the population of Aboriginal adults only represented 2% of Canada’s population, Aboriginal offenders constituted 17% of the federal inmate population (two or more year sentence).

Admissions to provincial institutions (less than a two year sentence) also followed this trend. The proportion of Aboriginal peoples admitted to adult provincial facilities in Saskatchewan (76%) was nearly ten times that of their proportion of the adult population (8%); in Manitoba, Aboriginal adults comprised 9% of the general population, yet they represented 59% of admissions to provincial custody; in Alberta, compared to representing 4% of the adult population, 38% of admissions to provincial facilities were Aboriginal peoples; in British Columbia, Aboriginal offenders represented 20% of admissions to provincial custody, while only constituting 5% of the adult population.

The Correctional Services of Canada (CSC) reported similar statistics. According to CSC ([http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/prgrm/correctional/abissues/know/10\\_e.shtml](http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/prgrm/correctional/abissues/know/10_e.shtml)), Aboriginal peoples constituted 2.7% of the general population, yet they accounted for 17% of the federal inmate population. CSC gathered the following statistics in 2001: in the Atlantic region, Aboriginal inmates comprised 5.6% of the inmate population (117/2081); in Ontario, Aboriginal inmates made up 7.4% of the total inmate population (427/5771); in the Prairie region, Aboriginal inmates represented 36.3% of the inmate population (1874/5160); and in the Pacific region, Aboriginal inmates constituted 19% of the inmate population (582/3057). As in CCJS reports, the disproportionate rates appear to be greater in the west.

To make the situation more challenging, Aboriginal inmate admissions have been growing and were projected to continue to grow (Performance Measurement Division, National Parole Board, 2001). According to a paper written for the National Parole Board (NPB; Performance Measurement Division, NPB, 2001), from March 1997 to March 2001, the federal Aboriginal inmate population rose approximately 3%, while the general

inmate population decreased approximately 3%. Not only were Aboriginal peoples incarcerated at a higher rate than are other ethnic groups (and this rate is projected to continue to grow); they were incarcerated for longer due to various circumstances such as: being less likely to apply for and to receive day parole or full parole and being more likely to recidivate and return to prison (Performance Measurement Division, NPB, 2001; Jackson, 1989; Sioui & Thibault, 2002).

Aboriginal peoples are going to prison, staying in prison, and returning to prison at astonishing rates. In addition, CSC has stated “it should be noted that the number of Aboriginal offenders represented in federal and provincial institutions may be an underestimate as many Aboriginal offenders do not identify themselves as such upon entry into a correctional facility” ([http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/prgrm/correctional/abissues/know/10\\_e.shtml](http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/prgrm/correctional/abissues/know/10_e.shtml)). Thus, there are likely more Aboriginal peoples involved in the correctional system than has been reported. The plight of Aboriginal offenders in the Canadian CJS is discouraging. The punitive approach of corrections does not appear to be effective and a better understanding of the experiences of Aboriginal offenders within the CJS would be useful. There are a number of areas of the CJS that contribute to the over-representation of Aboriginal offenders (e.g., sentencing, release rates, recidivism, reintegration), but not all of these issues can be addressed in this study. One important component of the CJS, and the focus of this study, is the reintegration of offenders into the community. Gaining knowledge, from an Aboriginal perspective, of transformation and how to maintain a crime free lifestyle is necessary in order to decrease incarceration rates of Aboriginal peoples. The research question for this study is: what factors facilitate and hinder Aboriginal offenders in maintaining a crime free lifestyle?

### *Purpose of the study*

Since there is a disproportionate rate of Aboriginal offenders within the CJS, research concerning successful reintegration of offenders into the community is vital. The goal was to gather information from Aboriginal peoples who have been involved with the CJS and establish a set of categories that describe the factors that have contributed to maintaining a crime free lifestyle. The obstacles that inhibit maintenance of a crime free lifestyle were also examined. This exploration was intended to contribute to the larger field of Aboriginal offender transformation by providing information from an Aboriginal perspective and by gathering information concerning appropriate methods to facilitate reintegration of Aboriginal offenders into the community.

### *Rationale of the study*

There are a number of reasons why this study was conducted: Aboriginal offenders are over-represented in the CJS, they have experienced negative consequences of colonization and assimilation attempts, and they are from a distinct cultural group. Accordingly, Aboriginal offenders represent a unique group of individuals within the CJS. There is a lack of research investigating both successful reintegration and the obstacles that hinder reintegration of Aboriginal offenders into their communities.

### *Colonization*

Aboriginal peoples have been profoundly affected by colonization and have suffered numerous adverse consequences since contact (Chisholm, 1994; Hart, 2002). In reference to Aboriginal offenders in a mental health correctional facility, Waldram &



Wong (1995) stated, “indeed, it may be difficult for non-Aboriginal staff and patients to truly understand the legacy of colonialism as it has affected and continues to affect Aboriginal peoples” (p.51). As a consequence of residential schools, reserves, assimilation attempts, and Canadian laws, Aboriginal peoples have struggled to survive in a western world (Bateman, 1997; Ellis, 1994; Tobias, 1991). Jilek-Aall and Jilek (2001) remarked that there have been “decades of social deterioration due to the systematic destruction of Aboriginal culture under past governmental and ecclesiastic policies” (p. 53).

Wilson (2004) captured the essence of colonization when she stated that it was “the disaster resulting from the centuries of colonialism’s efforts to methodically eradicate our ways of seeing, being and interacting in the world” (p. 359). Essentially, colonization is the imposition of one worldview over another and represents an extreme form of oppression. Colonization introduced foreign constructs to Aboriginal peoples: a patriarchic structure; relocation to reserves; a change in economic structures; residential schools for their children; and an overwhelming change in lifestyle (Hart, 2003; Oetzel & Duran, 2004). Combined, these factors produced disastrous changes in Aboriginal peoples’ spiritual, social, physical, emotional, mental, traditional, and economical structure. Duran, Duran, Woodis, and Woodis (1998) suggested that these drastic changes created historical trauma, which is defined as “unresolved trauma and grief that continues to adversely affect the lives of the survivors of such trauma” (p. 99). This trauma is passed on from generation to generation, continuing to impact Aboriginal peoples today.

Hart (2002) emphasized that colonial experience becomes internalized and attacks Aboriginal peoples on all levels: emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually. Once this

internalization process occurs, Hart stated “we feel confused and powerless since we are pressured to detach from who we are and are left with no means to alleviate the pressure” (p. 27). Hart continued by suggesting that the further along in the internalized colonial process, the more likely Aboriginal peoples are to degrade themselves for being Aboriginal peoples, contributing to a loss of their identity and sense of self, subsequently, creating great challenges for themselves (like substance misuse and incarceration).

A wealth of evidence has clearly illustrated some of the difficulties experienced by Aboriginal peoples. Garrett and Pichette (2000) noted that, along with high rates of poverty and unemployment, Aboriginal families have incomes approximately 50% that of non-Aboriginal families. Chisholm (1994) reported that acculturation of Aboriginal peoples can lead to a profound sense of alienation and emotional problems that manifest in a variety of forms: increased suicide rates compared to the national average, increased rates of violent death (three times the national average), increased rates of academic failure and dropouts, substance abuse, and over-representation in the CJS. Similarly, Hamilton (2001) reported that domestic violence and sexual abuse plagues communities; unemployment rates on reserves average eighty to ninety percent; suicide rates are six to eight times the national average; and incarceration rates are twelve to seventy percent the national average.

Specific to offenders, LaPrairie (1992) examined the demographic characteristics of federally incarcerated Aboriginal inmates and reported that, in comparison to other inmates; Aboriginal inmates were often very low on social economic indicators such as income and education. In 1994, LaPrairie examined the relationship between social marginalization and involvement with the CJS for 600 Aboriginal peoples residing in the

inner cores of four Canadian urban centers. Results indicated that the more socially marginalized the group, the higher the involvement with the CJS (LaPrairie, 1994). Johnston (1997) interviewed 10% of the federal Aboriginal inmate population and examined their childhood backgrounds. His results indicated that early drug (60%) and alcohol (58%) problems, childhood behavioural problems (57%), physical (45%) and sexual (21%) abuse, parental absence (41%) and severe poverty (35%) were commonly part of these offenders' childhood lives. Additionally, 21% of Johnston's sample had attempted suicide. Given that research has indicated that factors resulting from colonization, such as poverty, substance misuse, disrupted social networks, and low socioeconomic status, are related to crime, and since Aboriginal peoples often live under these circumstances, it is not surprising that they are over-represented within the CJS.

### *Indigenous knowledge*

An important aspect of colonization that warrants discussion is the impact it has had on Indigenous knowledge. Wilson (2004) emphasized that colonizers taught Aboriginal peoples that traditions and knowledge were worthless and inferior to that of the dominant culture. Smith (1999) noted that "the globalization of knowledge and Western culture constantly reaffirms the west's views of itself as the center of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge and the source of *civilized* knowledge" (p. 63). This imposition of Western culture continues to oppress Aboriginal peoples, so it is vital to acknowledge this consequence of colonization and the potential positive influence of Indigenous knowledge in decolonization. Because of the relationship between colonization and incarceration rates, decolonization may be one strategy to assist

offenders in their transition from prison to the community. However, Indigenous knowledge is often neglected within the CJS, ignoring a vital component of creating change for Aboriginal offenders.

Western forms of offender rehabilitation are often implemented without considering or respecting Indigenous knowledge of healing and wellness. It is essential to acquire a better understanding of what Aboriginal offenders say assists them in the journey of maintaining a crime free life. Culture becomes especially relevant concerning Aboriginal peoples because Aboriginal and mainstream North American culture reflect diverse systems of beliefs, values, and customs and because Aboriginal peoples have had to struggle to maintain their cultural identity within the dominant North American culture (Couture, 1992; Ertz, 1998; Garret, 1999; Krawll, 1994; LaFromboise, Trimble & Mohatt, 1990; Poonwassie & Charter, 2001; Sandner, 1996; Ross, 1992, 1996; Waldram, 1997). Within a psychological context and with reference to value differences, LaFromboise et al. (1990) noted the following:

Psychological therapy programs-in both theory and practice-are derived from and serve to affirm the values of American culture. They are not value free but are infused with the individualistic philosophy and priorities of the dominant culture. Those biases must be recognized and corrected in order to create a fair and effective counselling environment (p.634).

Values exist among all cultures; they affect a person's world-view and partly determine how an individual handles stressful situations (Garrett, 1999). According to Trimble (1981), "values reflect one's wishes, desires, goals, passions or morals" (p. 207). Cultural values represent those characteristics that members of a particular group consider

desirable and important as guiding principles or as a set of standards to live by, often reflecting belief systems. Garrett (1999) remarked, “In American mainstream ideology, the purpose of life consists of ‘life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness’; from a traditional Native perspective the corollary would be ‘life, love and learning’” (p. 198).

Extensive research has been conducted investigating Aboriginal values (e.g., Dufrene & Colman, 1992; Garrett, 1999; Heinrich, Corbine & Thomas, 1990; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Sue & Sue, 1990, Trimble, 1981). Waldram (2006) has argued that the majority of this research is based on studies marked by poor methodological design and/or were not based on empirical research. Much of this literature repeatedly cites previous work without questioning the validity of original studies and sources. Thus, Waldram concluded that literature concerning Aboriginal values should be read with caution. For example, he referred to a seminal piece of research by Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck (1961). In this study, the authors presented a 22-item questionnaire to approximately 25 adults in each of five communities (Spanish-Americans, Texans, Mormons, Navajos, and Zunis). The questionnaire ranked value orientations (human nature orientation; man-nature orientation, time orientation, activity orientation, and relational orientation). The results represented a schematic comparison of these value orientations. For Aboriginal peoples, these values were summarized as reflecting a preference for (1) being, (2) collateral relations, (3) present time orientation and (4) harmony with nature. In comparison, Western values were considered to represent a value orientation preference for (1) doing, (2) individualistic relations, (3) future time orientation and (4) mastery over nature. Waldram argued that this study has many

methodological flaws (e.g., small sample size), yet other authors (e.g., Heinrich et al., 1990; Sue & Sue, 1990) have used these data without question.

Since the Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck (1961) study, others have also suggested differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal values. Traditional Aboriginal values have been reported to emphasize the importance placed on being, cooperation, sharing, community and extended family, non-interference, living in harmony with nature, living in the present time, and respect for Elders (Dufrene & Colman, 1992; Garrett, 1999; Heinrich, et al, 1990). Comparatively, mainstream Western values emphasize the importance of self-promotion, domination, individualism and the nuclear family, mastery over nature, competitiveness, time orientation towards the future and an admiration for youth (Garrett, 1999; Sue & Sue, 1990). Waldram (2006) reported that problems arise when attempting to compare and contrast *lists* of values, which implies that Aboriginal peoples are homogenous (as would be non-Aboriginals); it creates stereotypes and judgements, and often neglects similarities.

Although Waldram (2006) presented a powerful case against the methodological flaws of research concerning Aboriginal values, appearing to indicate that Aboriginal values are not different from mainstream values, he did acknowledge -in a footnote- the following:

At no point do I suggest that Aboriginal peoples do not share some values, or that their values and cultures are not different from those of non-Aboriginal peoples, or even that Aboriginal people should not be treated differently in psychotherapy... My concern here, and in this book as a whole, is with comprehending how the knowledge about Aboriginal peoples has been

constructed and the need to grasp the meaning of contemporary Aboriginality (p.332).

Waldram not only provokes one to question research on Aboriginal peoples' values, but also to evaluate the entire construct of *Aboriginality*. That construct is too large to tackle in this study, but, Waldram made a valuable point, acknowledging the importance to be critical of research. Although it should be scrutinized, attempting to distinguish between Aboriginal peoples' values and mainstream values is important to this study because it stimulates a discussion about reintegration alternatives for Aboriginal offenders that may be influenced by values.

As cited in Hart (2002), Gaywish (2000) reported nine customary values within many Aboriginal cultures: (1) vision/wholeness; spirit-centered; (2) respect/harmony; (3) kindness; (4) honesty/integrity; (5) sharing; (6) strength; (7) bravery/courage; (8) wisdom; and (9) respect/humility. Hart also noted that the Anishinaabe have emphasized that the values held in the highest regard include: wisdom, respect, love, bravery, honesty, truth, and humility. He also acknowledged that there are conditions that oppose these values that might result in a person's inability to have a good life. These are: envy, resentment, not caring, jealousy, a negative attitude and feeling inferior. Although he believes it is important to acknowledge these values, he is not suggesting that they are held by all Aboriginal peoples or that non-Aboriginal peoples do not have similar ones.

Respecting Indigenous knowledge and cultural values provides a foundation for creating change for Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal offenders in particular. Without acknowledging these perspectives, one neglects a vital component in attempting to successfully establish reintegration strategies for Aboriginal offenders.

*Lack of research on Aboriginal reintegration*

Very little research has examined the reintegration potential of Aboriginal offenders living crime free in the community. Most studies have investigated incarcerated men (e.g., Howell, 2003; Johnson, 1997; Waldram, 1994, 1997). The only two studies found concerning Aboriginal offenders in the community were both conducted in Alberta. Hodgson and Heckbert (1994) interviewed 20 Aboriginal offenders concerning successful reintegration; Heckbert and Turkington (2001) conducted a follow-up study and interviewed 68 Aboriginal offenders, also concerning successful reintegration. Both studies, which are discussed in detail in the literature review, examined reintegration strategies for Aboriginal offenders and have provided important information, but more research needs to add to this limited body of literature. In addition, these two studies do not address the obstacles that interfere with the transition from prison to the community.

There is a lack of research pertaining to the obstacles that Aboriginal offenders face when released from prison; therefore, this study also investigated factors that hinder the transition from prison to community in maintaining a crime free life. Gathering information concerning the obstacles, issues, and problems that Aboriginal offenders meet when exiting the prison system provides awareness and a better understanding of the struggles that Aboriginal offenders face when in transition. Without this knowledge, proactive strategies cannot be employed. Most research related to offender reintegration is specific to rehabilitation programs, which typically evaluate specific treatment programs and their effectiveness (e.g., sexual offender treatment programs: Craissati & McClurg, 1997; Hanson & Bussiere, 1998), rather than general research concerning reintegration. Studies have investigated the specific characteristics related recidivism (e.g., the risk-



needs-responsivity principle: Andrews, Bonta & Hoge, 1990), typically evaluating risk assessment tools (e.g., Barbaree, Seto, & Langton, 2001). An Aboriginal perspective is often neglected in these studies. As mentioned previously, utilizing Aboriginal knowledge is a positive and necessary step for improving reintegration strategies. This knowledge will contribute to enhanced program design and reintegration strategies.

In summary, the overrepresentation of Aboriginal offenders within the CJS, the impact of colonization, cultural differences, acknowledging Indigenous knowledge and the lack of research on reintegration strategies for Aboriginal offenders each contribute to the purpose and rationale of this study. Attempting to discover appropriate reintegration strategies for Aboriginal offenders *from* an Aboriginal perspective is important in order to better meet the needs of this marginalized population.

### *Literature review and theory*

Literature relevant to Aboriginal offenders, reintegration and rehabilitation (transformation) of Aboriginal offenders, culture and traditional practices, healing, spirituality, Elders, and world view on wellness are presented in this section. First, descriptions of the terms *offender*, *reintegration*, *rehabilitation*, and *transformation* are presented. Next, two theories are discussed in terms of reintegration: the risk-needs-responsivity principle and the theory of desistance. Research concerning Aboriginal offenders is described, followed by a discussion of Aboriginal knowledge. A discussion concerning the incorporation of Aboriginal knowledge into reintegration strategies is presented. Finally, the research question for the study is presented.

### *Defining terms*

For purposes of this study, *offender* refers to individuals who have been convicted of and served time in a correctional facility for a crime that resulted in a federal sentence, that is, a sentence of two years or more. *Reintegration* is much more difficult to define. It refers to the transition from living in a correctional facility to living in the community. In general, the literature suggests that recidivism (re-offending or technical violations such as disobeying curfew) determines successful reintegration, thus an offender is considered to have been successfully reintegrated into the community if he/she has not been caught perpetrating another crime or has not committed technical violations that would result in re-admission to a correctional facility (Gendreau & Cullen, 1994; Heckbert & Turkington, 2001; Helfgott, 1997; Sioui & Thibault, 2002; Wilson, Huculak, & McWhinnie, 2002). However, researchers also include lifestyle changes such as obtaining employment, academic achievement, and remaining drug-free (Seiter & Kadela, 2003), as well as rehabilitative concepts such as defining personal values and identity, self-improvement (e.g., healing), and connection with family and friends (Heckbert & Turkington, 2001) as necessary components of reintegration. The theory of desistance captures these *process-based* concepts and will be discussed more thoroughly further in the chapter. In this study, defining successful reintegration is a goal of the study and will be defined from the participants' perspective; they will have the opportunity to describe what worked for them. However, a requirement for participation was that a participant self-identified as maintaining a crime free life for a minimum of two years, which has been taken into account as part of this study's definition of successful reintegration.

The literature on offender reintegration often discusses reintegration in terms of rehabilitation. An example of this is that journals are titled *Journal of Offender*

*Rehabilitation* and books titled *Offender Rehabilitation and Treatment*. However, this term appears to be pejorative. According to the *Gage Canadian Dictionary* (1979) *rehabilitation* is defined as “restore to good condition; restore to former standing, rank, rights, privileges, reputation, etc. *The former criminal completely rehabilitated himself and was trusted and respected by all*” (p. 949). Interestingly, the sentence used as an example refers to an offender. The definition appears to indicate that something was wrong with the person that needed to be fixed or altered in some way. Comparatively, *transformation* is defined as the “fundamental change in the appearance, shape, or nature of a thing or person: *Responsibility transformed him from a happy-go-lucky youth into a capable leader*” (p. 1193). Transformation is more similar to the goals of reintegration than is rehabilitation and refers to a process of change. For purposes of this study, the word *transformation* is preferred and will be used throughout the text, except when prior research is being described that used the term *rehabilitation*. Now that a better understanding of terms has been described, two theories of offender transformation are presented: the risk-needs-responsivity principle and the theory of desistance.

#### *Risk-needs-responsivity principle (RNR)*

Research, from a non-Aboriginal perspective, has demonstrated that reintegration programs are most effective when they address the risk-needs-responsivity principle (RNR) proposed by Andrews, Zinger, Bonta, Hoge, Gendreau, & Cullen (1990). Opatka (2001) reported that over 500 studies have confirmed the utility of treatment programs aimed at reducing recidivism and suggested that appropriate interventions utilize the RNR. This principle suggests that programs should correspond to an offenders level of risk (low, medium, or high), needs (target criminogenic needs such as substance abuse,

peer relations, employment and antisocial attitudes, feelings, and behaviours), and responsivity (treatment programs that match clients' needs and learning styles).

Following is a description of the RNR.

### *Risk*

The first component of the RNR principle is determining an offenders' level of risk. Risk assessment is incorporated into various stages of the criminal justice system (e.g., sentencing, security level, parole) and is a process of determining an offender's level of risk to reoffend in or outside of correctional facilities (Rugge, 2006). There are three risk categories: low, medium, and high, which are determined by a number of risk factors. Assessing and measuring risk has been an on-going challenge and developmental process within corrections for decades. The risk assessment literature is considerably large with many questions not fully answered (e.g. how to measure risk, definitions of risk, accuracy of risk assessment, etc.) but continuing to be investigated.

The literature has indicated that we have now shifted into the fourth generation of risk assessment (Andrews, Bonta, & Wormith, 2006). Research conducted in the 1960's-1980's has often been referred to as the first generation (Andrews et al., 2006; Borum, 1996; Monahan, 1981), at which time the underlying theme of psychologists inability to make accurate predictions, emerged. Monahan (1981) indicated that when making predictions, psychologists were only correct approximately 1 in 3 times; not a very promising result. Thus, the first generation consisted of unstructured professional judgments of the probability of offending, not a very reliable method of risk assessment. Later research (late 1980's-1990's) created more promising results. This was the birth of

the second generation of risk assessment, when atheoretical empirically based risk instruments consisting mostly of static variables (i.e., variables that don't change such as age at first offence) emerged (Andrews et al). Thereafter, the third generation of risk assessment surfaced with the development of theoretically based actuarial (i.e., empirically derived) tools which increased psychologists' ability to make accurate predictions (Quinsey, Harris, Rice and Cormier, 1998). These theoretically based tools incorporated in dynamic risk items, that is, factors that took criminogenic needs (those that can change over time) into account (Andrews et al, 2006). Most recently, the fourth generation of risk assessment has transpired. According to Andrews et al, the fourth generation "guides and follows service and supervision from intake through case closure. With postclosure follow-up, outcome may be linked with intake assessments of risk, strengths, need, and responsivity, with reassessments, and with service plans, service delivery, and intermediate outcomes" (p. 8). Andrews and colleagues emphasized that a goal of the fourth generation assessments is to adhere to principles of treatment effectiveness devoted to increase public safety by decreasing recidivism.

Risk assessment has journeyed from clinical judgment, through atheoretical and theoretical underpinnings of assessment tools, to combining the usefulness of both. The inherent objective of risk assessment is to determine what risk factors (static and dynamic) are related to recidivism in hopes of developing effective interventions and strategies to facilitate decreased recidivism and effective reintegration of offenders (Rugge, 2006). However, there continues to be a debate in the risk assessment literature concerning psychologist's abilities to accurately make predictions. Defining *dangerousness*, base rates of violence and offending behaviour, and the utility of

assessment tools continue to contribute to this debate. Each of these is briefly discussed in terms of implications for risk assessment.

Often referred to as *dangerousness* assessments, the assessment of predicting future behaviour of offenders is a difficult task. The term *dangerousness* may be problematic. As noted by Monahan (1981), “‘dangerousness’ confuses issues regarding *what* one is predicting with the *probability* one is assigning to its prediction. The word has a tendency in practice to degenerate from a characteristic of behaviour to a reified personality trait” (p.25; italics in original). There is no dangerousness trait that has been empirically demonstrated. Shapiro (1988) suggested that rather than conducting dangerousness assessments and concluding whether an individual will be dangerousness or not, psychologists should be restricted to “a statement that within a range of a given probability, there is a particular likelihood that the individual will act-out in a particular manner under a particular set of circumstances” (p.83).

Related to attempting to define dangerousness, base rates of behaviour create challenges in risk assessment. Since risk assessment often attempts to capture an offenders potential for violence, concerns of low base rates arise. Monahan (1981) defined the term *base rate* as “the proportion of people in some population during a specified period of time who fall into the criterion category that is to be predicted” (p. 49). As Borum (1996) mentioned, trying to make accurate predictions with low base rates is a difficult task and will result in substantial error, resulting in questioning the ability to assess risk.

Researchers (see Rogers, 2000; Roehl & Geurtin, 2000) have concluded that risk assessment tools need to be critically evaluated before being used. Rogers mentioned that

although risk assessment has considerable merit, he questions whether these evaluations are thorough and balanced. He stated that most adult risk assessment models stress risk factors, and de-emphasize or disregard protective factors, emphasizing those protective factors may play an important role in risk assessment. Since many of the tools used to predict future violence use risk factors thought to be associated with recidivism, these risk factors need to be assessed more closely. That is, using the risk factors, are psychologists predicting what they think they are predicting?

Hanson & Bussiere (1996) conducted a meta-analysis across 87 different articles examining 28, 972 sexual offenders studied from six different countries. The goal of the study was to identify risk factors associated with sexual offenders' recidivism, violent non-sexual recidivism and general recidivism. Overall, correlations that the authors found which were significantly related to recidivism were mostly in the range of  $r = 0.10-0.30$ , investigating both clinical judgment and actuarial tools. They noted that the actuarial tools provide "higher correlations since they are designed to select optimal weights *for that sample*" (p.17), however, one must practice caution when using these tools because the results will vary when used on different samples. In this meta-analysis, actuarial tools used were inconsistent study to study, without a single item being common in all the studies. Other researchers have commented on this lack of generalizability of actuarial tools, as well as the validity of these tools (Campbell, 2000; Hanson, 1998; Litwack, 2001, Rogers, 2000), especially since individual risk factors associated with actuarial tools are not necessarily predictive of recidivism.

Research has provided conflicting opinions as to the extent that risk assessments should be conducted, what tools to use, and how they should be used. Low base rates and

defining *dangerousness* add to this debate and vigor in the field. However, risk assessment has been deemed significant in facilitating treatment and reintegration strategies and forms a foundation for the RNR principle, which has also been extensively investigated.

Since the inception of the RNR principle nearly 20 years ago, a plethora of research has been conducted. Numerous risk factors have been recognized, with eight central risk factors being identified: antisocial personality, antisocial cognition (e.g., values, beliefs, and attitudes), antisocial associates, a history of antisocial behaviour, family/marital problems, school/employment difficulties, absence of positive leisure or recreational activities, and substance abuse (Rugge, 2006). Andrews and colleagues (2006) refer to this list as the *big four*, the top four on the list and the *central eight*, all eight major factors. Although Aboriginal offenders are over-represented within the CJS, little research exists examining Aboriginal offenders (Rugge). Specific to RNR, the literature is deficient concerning risk assessment and risk factors applicable to Aboriginal offenders. Rugge stated “Aboriginal offenders, as a special population, have not received nearly as much attention as is needed” (p. 7). Considering there is an over-representation of Aboriginal offenders in the CJS, this lack of research is surprising, discouraging, and demonstrates the necessity of gaining a better understanding of Aboriginal offenders.

The risk component of the RNR principle dictates that the level of intervention provided to offenders should reflect the level of risk to reoffend, that is, low risk offenders should receive less intervention than high risk offenders who benefit most from intensive interventions (Andrews et al., 1990; Rugge, 2006). Being able to identify risk



factors that are related to recidivism is closely linked to the needs of offenders, and the second element of the RNR principle.

### *Needs*

The needs principle purports that interventions should target the criminogenic needs of offenders. Criminogenic needs are those related to offending behaviour (e.g., antisocial peers), which coincidentally are also the major risk factors that contribute to the above mentioned risk assessment discussion. Andrews and colleagues (2006) do not distinguish between risk and needs and often refer to risk and/or needs. The following table from Andrews et al, (2006, p. 11) captures the eight central risks and/or needs of offenders.

Table 1

#### *Major risk and/or need factors and promising intermediate targets for reduced recidivism*

Factor	Risk	Dynamic Need
History of antisocial behaviour	Early and continuing involvement in a number and variety of antisocial acts in a variety of settings	Build noncriminal alternative behaviour in risky situations
Antisocial personality pattern	Adventurous pleasure seeking, weak self-control, restlessly aggressive	Build problem-solving skills, self-management skills, anger management and coping skills
Antisocial Cognition	Attitudes, values, beliefs, and rationalizations supportive of crime; cognitive emotional states of anger, resentment, and defiance; criminal versus reformed identity; criminal versus anticriminal identity	Reduce antisocial cognition, recognize risky thinking and feeling, build up alternative less risky thinking and feeling, adopt a reform and/or anticriminal identity
Antisocial Associates	Close association with criminal others and relative isolation from anticriminal others; immediate social support for crime	Reduce association with criminal others, enhance association with anticriminal others
Family and/or Marital	Two key elements are nurturance and/or caring and monitoring and/or supervision	Reduce conflict, build positive relationships, enhance monitoring and supervision

Factor	Risk	Dynamic Need
School and/or Work	Low levels of performance and satisfactions in school and/or work	Enhance performance, rewards, and Satisfactions
Leisure and/or Recreation	Low levels of involvement and satisfactions in anticriminal leisure pursuits	Enhance involvement, rewards, and Satisfactions
Substance Abuse	Abuse of alcohol and/or other drugs	Reduce substance use, reduce the personal and interpersonal supports for substance-oriented behaviour, enhance alternatives to drug abuse

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NOTE: The minor risk and/or need factors (and less promising intermediate targets for reduced recidivism) include the following: personal and/or emotional distress, major mental disorder, physical health issues, fear of official punishment, physical conditioning, low IQ, social class of origin, seriousness of current offense, other factors unrelated to offending.

Thanks to Shad Maruna and colleagues (Maruna, Lebel, Mitchell, & Naples, 2004) for expansion of antisocial cognition to include the broader construct of personal identity.

Although this table captures the essence of the RNR, it neglects a major component of transformation, *how to* work towards reaching the dynamic needs. Additionally, since there is a lack of research concerning Aboriginal offenders, it is not clear how effective it is to apply the RNR principle to Aboriginal offenders. However, Rugge (2006, p. i) commented that “although there is not an abundance of research in this area, research to date suggests that the majority of risk factors *are* applicable to male Aboriginal offenders”. In addition, there is a lack of understanding on the role of what Andrews and colleagues (2006) deem minor risk factors/needs (e.g., social class of origin). Rugge mentioned that specific to RNR, the literature in this area is virtually non-existent for Aboriginal offenders. Thus, the current chapter turns to other studies concerning the needs of offenders during reintegration.

Research not specific to RNR has indicated that meeting the diversity of offenders’ needs is vital: vocational training, educational training, drug rehabilitation, life skills/social skills training (e.g., finding housing, opening a bank account) family and

community support, and personal/emotional issues (Bouffard, MacKenzie & Hickman, 2000; Crozat and Kloss, 1979; Gerber & Fritsch, 1995; Helfgott, 1997; Place, McClusky, McClusky, & Treffinger, 2000; Seiter & Kadela, 2003). Following is a discussion of research investigating the needs of offenders when transitioning from prison to the community, commencing with a description of two studies specific to Aboriginal offenders, followed by studies not specific to them.

Place et al. conducted a study that compared the recidivism rates between Aboriginal offenders enrolled in the *Second Chance Project* and Aboriginal offenders in a control group (Place et al., 2000). *Second Chance* was an intensive career program that consisted of two phases: an 11-week classroom-training program followed by a 4-week job placement. The 11-week component included: counselling, training in creative problem-solving, career awareness (e.g., resumes, interview skills, and impression management), life skills training, social skills training, goal-setting, and vocational and educational assessment. The 4-week job placement consisted of working at a full-time job for one month. At a one-year follow up, the results indicated that 39% of the *Second Chance* group, compared to 90% of the control group, were deemed recidivists. The authors noted that programming designed to meet the needs of offenders had had a positive impact in decreasing recidivism rates in Aboriginal offenders. This is a promising result as recidivism rates were daunting for those in the control group. Place et al. concluded that:

The distressingly high rate of recidivism in the non-treated group is a clear indictment of our present system which warehouses, then releases, criminals only

to have them return time and time again... The *Second Chance Project*, however embryonic, has laid a foundation on which to build (p. 173).

A study by Roberts and Harper (1997) investigated the effectiveness of *Fresh Start*, an intensive career development project utilized with 40 Aboriginal offenders who were considered “high risk individuals in need of various interventions” (p. 116). The goal of the program was to assist offenders in obtaining employment. The program provided a number of services: career assessment, pre-employment skill development (e.g., resumes, interviews, and job applications), job-training skills (e.g., work ethic, communication, self-respect, cooperation, and problem-solving skills), career and vocational exploration, life skills training, academic skills upgrading and individual counselling (e.g., alcohol and drug counselling). At the end of the program, significantly more *Fresh Start* participants obtained employment compared to control participants, 75% versus 50%, respectively. Roberts and Harper concluded that the program was successful and recommended that it was essential to consider the special needs of Aboriginal offenders. The authors also suggested that:

Counsellors should attend to specific issues of the population such as emphasis on nonverbal communication, use of imagery, extended support systems, diverse values and a culturally sensitive individualized approach. Also, issues such as racism, anxiety and lack of education and employment opportunities cannot be overlooked (p.6)

Findings from both studies suggest that the minor risk and/or need factors discussed in RNR may be pertinent to Aboriginal offenders’ successful reintegration and that Aboriginal offender’s represent a unique group.

Bouffard and colleagues (2000) conducted an extensive study investigating the effectiveness of a number of vocational education (13 programs), correctional industry (i.e., employment while incarcerated-5 programs), and community employment programs (e.g., halfway houses-7 programs). A program was considered effective if it decreased recidivism. The authors concluded that there was “overall empirical support for program effectiveness, several types were identified as generally successful at reducing offender recidivism” (p.1). However, they also remarked that more thorough program evaluations were necessary to substantiate current findings.

Like Bouffard et al. (2000), Seiter and Kadela (2003) examined the effectiveness of a number of re-entry programs implemented for offenders in North America. Thirty-two programs were reviewed: vocational and work programs (7 programs); drug rehabilitation (12 programs), educational programs (2 programs), sex/violent offender programs (5 programs), half-way house programs (4 programs), and prison release programs (2 programs). Programs were considered effective if they decreased recidivism rates, as well as contributed to lifestyle changes (e.g., increased employment, decreased drug use).

Overall, vocational programs were considered effective in decreasing recidivism and increasing employment of offenders. Drug rehabilitation programs were also considered effective in decreasing recidivism and relapse and “do work in easing the transition from prison to the community” (p. 376). Educational programs were effective in increasing educational achievement but not in decreasing recidivism. It was concluded that educational programs need to be linked to other community programs (e.g., vocational training) in order to decrease recidivism. Sexual/violent offender program

effectiveness provided mixed results; some appeared to decrease recidivism, whereas others did not. Pre-release programs, which attempt to prepare offenders for living in the community, also produced mixed results; some decreased recidivism whereas others did not. It was recommended that pre-release programs should be linked to post-release programs in order to maximize program effectiveness. Half-way house programs (supervised living, as well as social skills training, education and vocational training) were considered to assist offenders with transition from prison to community and were effective because they contributed to decreased recidivism. Overall, programs that target the needs of offenders were deemed effective in decreasing recidivism and contributed to lifestyle changes; however, more research needs to be conducted. Seiter and Kadela (2003) concluded:

We do know that certain programs can improve prisoner re-entry and reduce the revolving-door syndrome. With billions of dollars focused on imprisonment, it is only fitting that a few million more be focused on prisoners' return to the community (p. 381)

Helfgott (1997) interviewed 20 offenders who were in transition from prison to community living. The offenders in this sample indicated that the following components were important to them while attempting reintegration: support from family/friends, positive role models and circle of friends, housing, employment, drug rehabilitation/counselling, education, clothing, food, transportation, and medical care. Barriers to meeting these needs included discrimination, having a criminal record, lack of employment skills, lack of social support, lack of programming, lack of knowledge of services available, and low self-esteem. Furthermore, offenders expressed the importance

of having programs that met their needs and indicated that a support group to assist them with reintegration issues would be beneficial. Helfgott concluded that it is vital to match the self-identified needs of offenders with services provided in the community.

Gerber and Fritsch (1995) reviewed a number of studies that evaluated educational, social, and vocational correctional programs for incarcerated men. The programs varied considerably but included components such as educational training, vocational training (e.g., job skill development), life skills training, and/or social skills training. Gerber and Fritsch concluded that, although it is difficult to generalize the results of the studies reviewed, educational, social, and vocational programming led to a decrease in negative institutional behaviour and once the offender was released to the community, there was an increase in employment, decrease in recidivism, and an increase in participation in educational training.

Clearly, these few studies have suggested that although the major risks and/or needs of offenders are important in reintegration, the minor risks and/or needs of offenders are deemed effective in assisting offenders in successful reintegration into society and should be addressed. However, as many authors have commented, further research is necessary in order to gain a better understanding of the risks, needs and reintegration of Aboriginal offenders (e.g., Rugge, 2006; Bonta, LaPrairie, & Wallace-Capretta, 1997).

### *Responsivity*

Once the risks and needs of an offender are determined, responsivity should be determined and applied. According to Rugge (2006), the responsivity principle “states

that the treatment provided to the offender should be delivered in a means that acknowledges the offender's abilities and learning style" (p. 4). Two forms of responsivity exist: general and specific. According to Andrews and Bonta (2003), general responsivity suggests that when targeting offenders' behaviours, cognitive behavioural interventions are most effective. More importantly, the specific responsivity principle pertains to the offender as an individual, with personal characteristics that must be taken into account when establishing intervention strategies (Andrews & Bonta). In reference to responsivity, Andrews et al. (1990) stated "service is matched not only to the criminogenic need but to those attributes and circumstances that render cases likely to profit from that particular type of service". This is the component of the RNR principle that allows for cultural sensitivity and awareness. However, responsivity is the least studied of the three RNR components and has not been investigated in reference to Aboriginal offenders (Rugge).

### *Summary of RNR*

The RNR principle has provided useful information concerning offender reintegration strategies and has been substantially utilized in the Canadian CJS, from risk management and treatment need assessments within prisons to program development and individual case management for offenders entering the community. RNR has created a better understanding of risks and needs; however, it neglects the *process* of transformation and lacks a wholistic approach to reintegration. One major criticism of the principle is that it is based on recidivism, whether or not offenders re-offend. As Petersilia stated (2004):



Recidivism is an important, perhaps the most important, measure of correctional impact, but it is insufficient as a sole measure of the effectiveness of reentry programs. After all, the ultimate goal of reentry programs is reintegration, which clearly included more than remaining arrest-free for a specified time period...if we truly want to measure reintegration, we need to build into our evaluation measures of attachment to a variety of social institutions. Research shows that these factors are related to long-term criminal desistance (p. 7)

Thus, the theory of desistance is also presented to facilitate a theoretical balance between two important contributions of offender transformation.

### *Theory of desistance*

Desistance is not easily defined. The concept stems from criminology and sociology and is lacking in psychological literature and research, but warrants discussion. Farrington (2007) noted that desistance has been used in two contexts: as an empirical variable and as an underlying theoretical construct. As an empirical construct, Laub and Sampson (2001) simply define desistance as ceasing to offend, which would simply mimic the term recidivism, and suggest that it was a static variable. The underlying theoretical construct of desistance introduces the notion of a *process* necessitating continuous change that occurs when offenders re-enter society after prolonged institutionalization and Farrington views desistance as the “decrease in the underlying frequency, variety, or seriousness of offending” (p. 125). Continuous change requires a dynamic process to occur, indicating that offenders gradually shift away from crime (Deane, Bracken, & Morrisette, 2007). However, the mechanism of this process is not

entirely known, partly due to the lack of consensus in the literature concerning the definition of desistance and the difficulty in measuring it (Brame, Bushway, & Paternoster, 2003; Farrington, 2007; Kazemian, 2007).

Understanding the mechanisms of desistance is like attempting to understand the risks and/or needs in the RNR principle. The causal process of desistance could potentially support or refute reintegration strategies for offenders. However, without a solid definition of desistance, it is challenging to confidently know what does and does not assist offenders during reintegration. Kazemian (2007) presented a table outlining the diversity of operational definitions utilized in past studies (p. 9). This table (Table 2) demonstrates how a lack of consensus about a definition “has led to disparate results regarding the causes and correlates of desistance from crime” (p. 8).

Table 2

*Operational definition of the concept of desistance in past studies*

Study	Definition
Farrington & Hawkins (1991)	Conviction at age 21, but not between ages 21-32
Farrington & Wikstrom (1994)	Age at last officially recorded offense up to age 25
Haggard, Gumper, & Grann (2001)	During the follow-up period, no reconviction in the previous 10 years (at least)
Kruttschnitt, Uggen, & Shelton (2000)	Absence of new officially recorded offenses or probation violation throughout a 2 year period
Laub & Sampson, 2003	Absence of arrest (follow-up at age 70)
Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, Van Kammen & Farrington (1991)	Non offending throughout a period of less than a year
Maruna (2001)	Individuals who identified themselves as long-term habitual offenders, who claimed that they would not be committing offenses in the future, and who reported at least 1 year of crime free behaviour
Laruna, LeBel, Burnett, Bushway & Keirkus, (2002)	Absence of reconviction after release from prison during a 10-year window

Study	Definition
Mischkowitz (1994)	Last conviction having occurred before age 31 and lack of conviction or incarceration for at least 10 years
Pezzin (1995)	Individuals who reported having committed offenses in the past but who did not report any criminal income in 1979
Sampson & Laub (1993)	Juvenile delinquents who were not arrested as adults
Shover & Thompson (1992)	No arrests in the 36 months following release from prison
Uggen & Kruttschnitt (1998)	Behaviour desistance: Absence of self-reported illegal earnings during a 3 year follow-up period Official desistance: no arrests during a 3-year follow-up period
Warr (1998)	Individual who did not report having committed any offenses in the past year

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In spite of this lack of definitional consensus, there is a large body of literature investigating the correlates of desistance (Bushway, 2003; Chu, 2007; Deane et al, 2007; Farrall, 2005; Farrington, 2007 Laub & Sampson, 2001). Laub and Sampson presented a seminal review of desistance, including an examination of the key elements that contribute to the process of it. They emphasized that “desistance stems from a variety of complex processes-developmental, psychological and sociological- and thus there are many factors associated with it” (p. 3). Factors that often surfaced included, but are not limited to, aging, a good marriage, employment, and a ‘go straight’ attitude (weighing the costs and benefits of crime). Farrall reported similar findings but distinguished between internal and external factors. External factors included marriage and employment, while internal factors included self-identity and attitude. Farrington summarized developmental and life course theories that contribute to desistance. These theories each included significant life events such as marriage and employment, but the process of desistance is described in different ways: life events decrease antisocial potentials thus increasing desistance; life events may influence changes in opportunities, rewards, costs, and

bonding thus, leading to desistance; increasing internal and external constraints, bonding, prosocial models, and maturation contribute to desistance; and, increasing social controls and structured routine activities facilitate desistance.

Specific to Aboriginal offenders who experienced gang life and prison, Deane and colleagues (2007) investigated the factors that contributed to desistance from a criminal life. Their findings were broken into three main categories: 1) staying away from crime, 2) group values and social support, and 3) Aboriginal identity. Within the first category, factors included not wanting to return to prison, the importance of not leaving family again, beginning to see oneself as different from offenders, and a progression toward a new identity. The second category, group values and support, were represented by acknowledgment of Aboriginal values and gaining social support from peers. Lastly, within the Aboriginal category a number of factors were acknowledged as significant contributors to desistance and maintaining a crime free life: the importance of Aboriginal identity, acknowledging the impact of colonization, attending ceremony, traditional practices, forming a positive identity as an Aboriginal man, and developing and solidifying Aboriginal values. These *factors* have been well established in the literature on healing among Aboriginal peoples, a topic discussed in detail further in this paper.

### *Summary of desistance*

The theoretical underpinnings of desistance fit well within the context of this study, specifically around the notion of the transformative process that offenders embark on when in transition from prison to the community. Gaining an understanding of factors that may or may not facilitate this process is vital in order to design and implement

supportive interventions for Aboriginal offenders. Knowledge of desistance and RNR will provide a better understanding of the factors that facilitate and hinder Aboriginal offenders in their journey of maintaining a crime free life. To gain a better understanding of Aboriginal offenders, the next section discusses the circumstances of Aboriginal offenders.

### *Aboriginal offenders*

As previously mentioned, the impact of colonization has been substantial and one result has been the disproportionately high rates of Aboriginal men being incarcerated. Also previously mentioned, Aboriginal offenders spend more time in prison and are less likely to apply for and receive parole. In order to gain a better appreciation of Aboriginal offenders within the CJS, a brief description is presented.

According to the Board of Parole for British Columbia, “parole is the conditional release of an offender from custody. It is an opportunity granted to offenders under law by the Government of Canada and allows those offenders to serve the remainder of their sentence in the community with supervision and specified conditions” ([www.gov.bc.ca/bcparole](http://www.gov.bc.ca/bcparole)). There are different stages of parole: day parole, full parole, and statutory release. Day parole is intended to assist offenders as a first-step with supervised reintegration into the community and consists of a number of restrictions on the parolee (e.g., living in a half-way house, curfew). An offender is eligible for day parole after serving 1/3 of his sentence. Full parole is a less restrictive form of reintegration into the community (e.g., the offender does not necessarily have to live in a half-way house) but the offender is still subject to supervision and conditions imposed by the Parole Board

(e.g., must refrain from substance use, attend certain programs). Similar to day parole, an offender is eligible for full parole after serving 1/3 of his/her sentence. Statutory release (i.e., he has to be released) occurs when an offender has reached 2/3rds of his sentence. The offender is supervised in the community and is subject to conditions of the Parole Board (e.g., cannot commit crime; must refrain from substance use, attend programs). Persons on day or full parole or statutory release are under the supervision of the NPB and his parole can be revoked at any time, which results in a return to custody. The final method in which an offender can be released from prison to the community is when he reaches the warrant expiry date (WED). This is when the offender has served his full sentence. He is then released into the community without any restrictions or supervision.

From the same NPB paper mentioned above, it is noted that from March 1997 to March 2001, of all offenders under the jurisdiction of the NPB, Aboriginal offenders were under-represented for those on day parole and full parole and over-represented for those on statutory release, suggesting Aboriginal offenders are spending more time incarcerated and less time supervised in the community. In a sample of 4,819 Aboriginal offenders and 25,222 non-Aboriginal offenders, Sioui and Thibault (2002) reported that Aboriginal offenders were less likely to be granted day parole (59% vs. 66%) and more likely to be released for statutory release (34% vs. 26%). Moreover, Aboriginal offenders were more likely to be re-admitted to federal institutions after being released. In the same sample mentioned above, Sioui and Thibault reported that at a one-year follow-up of offenders released to the community, 33% of the Aboriginal offenders and 20% of the non-Aboriginal offenders were re-admitted to prison and classified as recidivists.

Trevethan, Moore, and Rastin (2002) surveyed all offenders under the supervision of the Correctional Services of Canada. Trevethan and colleagues noted that, at the time of admission to federal institutions, there are statistically significant differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders for age, education, and employment: 69% of Aboriginal offenders, compared to 55% of non-Aboriginal offenders, are under the age of 35; 26% of Aboriginal offenders and 18% of non-Aboriginal offenders have less than a grade 8 education; and Aboriginal offenders are more likely to be unemployed when entering federal custody (75% vs. 66%). Additionally, Aboriginal offenders are rated at the maximum-security level more often than non-Aboriginal offenders (24% vs. 19%) and are more often labeled as high-risk offenders (74% vs. 57%). Furthermore, when measured for reintegration potential, compared to 36% of non-Aboriginal offenders, 69% of Aboriginal offenders are rated as having a low potential for reintegration, suggesting it would be difficult for most Aboriginal offenders to successfully transition back to society. The authors also explored the needs of offenders at their time of release into the community. The following were reported for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders, respectively: high overall need (29% vs. 19%); personal/emotional need (76% vs. 59%); substance abuse counselling (63% vs. 36%); employment (48% vs. 33%); family support (45% vs. 27%), and negative peer association (44% vs. 36%).

It is evident that compared to other offenders, Aboriginal offenders are spending more time incarcerated and are less likely to be released, early in their sentence, into the community. When released, Aboriginal offenders have been labeled as having a higher risk to reoffend and having more substantial needs than non-Aboriginal offenders. It appears as though Aboriginal offenders may require special assistance when released to

the community. According to Trevethan et al. (2002), “The differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders, and the issues facing Aboriginal offenders points to the importance of providing appropriate programming... to address their needs... to reduce the percentage of Aboriginal peoples entering the criminal justice system” (p.19).

However, the plight of Aboriginal offenders does not seem to be changing. Even though research repeatedly emphasizes the over-representation of Aboriginal offenders in the CJS and CSC acknowledges Aboriginal offenders as a *special population*, programming, supports, and reintegration strategies do not appear to be effective. This suggests that perhaps new strategies need to be investigated and employed. This study argues that acknowledging Aboriginal offenders as a *special* or *unique population* is vital; however, gaining a better understanding of what that means needs to precede the label *unique*. For Aboriginal offenders, Aboriginal history and knowledge may play a substantial role in the transformational process from prison to the community. Cultural identity, world view on wellness, healing, culture, spirituality, Elders, and traditional practices are all important concepts that require discussion.

#### *Aboriginal knowledge*

Aboriginal knowledge plays a key role in reintegration strategies and warrants discussion. Cultural identity, differences in worldview, healing, healing as treatment, and traditional practices are each be discussed in this section.

#### *Cultural Identity*

According to Tseng (2001), culture is referred to:



A set of beliefs, attitudes, and value systems that derive from the early stages of life through enculturation and become an internal mode of regulating behaviour, action and emotion... culture changes continuously and dynamically through the generations in response to environmental demands (p.6).

Tseng noted that within each cultural group, subcultures may exist; therefore it is important to be aware of heterogeneity within cultures. Since North American society consists of people from a variety of cultural backgrounds providing for a diversity of beliefs, attitudes, values, traditions, and customs in North America, awareness of other cultural beliefs and systems is necessary for those working with people from a different cultural background than themselves. Cultural awareness and sensitivity is paramount when providing services to people who do not belong to the dominant Western culture, especially since “cultural issues are often mystifying, misinterpreted or even unrecognized” (Tseng, 2001, p.3). A particular individual’s level of acculturation (level of cultural change when two or more cultures co-exist) and/or assimilation (one culture absorbing another) in Canadian society is extremely important when discussing Aboriginal peoples within North America, especially because of the effects of colonization (Waldram & Wong, 1995; Waldram, 1997).

For research purposes, Waldram (1997) divided Aboriginals into three categories: traditional, Euro-Canadian and bi-cultural. Traditional individuals are those who are involved in Aboriginal culture, spirituality and lifestyles; Euro-Canadian individuals are characterized as growing up in a Western culture and lacking involvement in Aboriginal culture; bi-cultural individuals are those who have experienced and learned different

aspects of both cultures. In a sample of 249 male inmates from correctional institutions in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, 28% were identified as traditional, 39% as Euro-Canadian and 33% as bi-cultural (Waldram, 1997). Gaining an understanding of a particular person's cultural background and level of acculturation into mainstream society is important when designing and implementing treatment programs, as the effectiveness of treatment may be partially determined by level of acculturation (Garrett & Pichette, 2000; Sue & Sue, 1990; Waldram & Wong, 1995).

In a study of acculturation and self-esteem, Lefley (1976) found that those Aboriginals who identified themselves as more traditional had higher levels of self-esteem in comparison to those who identified themselves more strongly with the dominant culture. Lefley also found that those who were more assimilated into the dominant culture may have been confused by conflicting systems of beliefs and values and may have found it difficult to deal with and adapt to problems and obstacles. This finding suggests that acculturation/assimilation may have detrimental effects on Aboriginal individuals.

Waldram and Wong (1995) investigated the effects of group treatment with nine Aboriginal and 13 non-Aboriginal offenders. They observed group treatment as well as interviewed the offenders about their experiences in the group. Acculturation of Aboriginal offenders was determined through extensive assessment of: their proficiency in language(s); urban versus reserve living; educational experience; occupational experience; and self-identification. Aboriginals were described as (1) traditional, (2) bicultural or (3) Euro-Canadian (acculturated). Waldram and Wong reported that the nature of group therapy (e.g., confrontational, maintaining eye contact, speaking loudly)

was culturally inappropriate for Aboriginal offenders and that many of the offenders in their sample had difficulties with group treatment. Waldram and Wong concluded that group therapies reflecting the social, cultural, racial, and class structures of Euro-Canadian society are problematic in the treatment of traditional Aboriginal offenders but much less so for acculturated Aboriginal offenders suggesting that program effectiveness may depend on an individual's level of acculturation

Although not specific to offenders, Bigfoot-Sipes, Dauphinais, LaFromboise, Bennett and Rowe (1992) reported that, in comparison to those students who strongly identified with a Western culture, those who strongly identified with an Aboriginal culture more often reported that they prefer Aboriginal counsellors, 53% and 84%, respectively. Bigfoot-Sipes et al., emphasized that the counselling environment, an individual's level of acculturation should be known as it may affect treatment outcome.

Another example of identity contributing to maladaptive behaviours was reported by Chandler and Lalonde (1998). With respect to identity, Chandler and Lalonde discussed cultural continuity and self-continuity as important protective factors against suicide in Aboriginal youth. An overview of their argument is that individuals have a perception of themselves in time which involves a belief of the self existing in the future; any person experiencing extreme personal or cultural change may be at an increased risk to suicide because they lack a belief in themselves existing in the future; adolescents are especially likely to encounter difficulties when in transition; and Aboriginal peoples are also likely to experience difficulties because many communities lack a sense of cultural continuity; thus, youth and Aboriginal persons are at an increased risk for suicide. Chandler and Lalonde reported that building community practices that act as markers of a

collective effort to “rehabilitate and vouchsafe the cultural continuity of these groups” results in a decrease in suicide rates of Aboriginal youth in those communities (p. 191). Community practices included: self-government, resolution of land claims, education, health services, cultural facilities, and police and fire services. Although this study was specific to suicide, it is not excessive to suggest that identity, cultural continuity, and community practices are important for Aboriginal persons, including those who have been incarcerated.

Stuart Hall (1994) described cultural identity as a process rather than as something that is stagnant or dormant. He suggested that it should be thought of as a process “constituted within, not outside, representation” (p. 392) and that there are two ways of thinking about cultural identity. First, cultural identity is a shared culture “which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (p. 393). Second, not only are there similarities, there are also differences in cultural identity “which constitute ‘what we really are’ or rather-since history has intervened- ‘what we have become’... we cannot speak for very long ... about ‘one experience, one identity’ without acknowledging the other side-the ruptures and discontinuities...” (p. 394). He emphasized that difference persists alongside continuity, which has suggested that individuals create not only a cultural identity, but also personal identities within that cultural identity which may or may not be similar to others in the same cultural group.

Although cultural identity influences individuals in different ways, research has clearly indicated that acculturation and cultural identity must be taken into account when reviewing reintegration strategies and treatment programs for Aboriginal offenders (Heinrich et al., 2001; Poonwassie & Charter, 2001; Thomason, 1991; Weaver, 2002). In addition, cultural identity may influence the *risks and/or needs* of offenders in the RNR

principle and likely play a significant role in the process of desistance. Moreover, and essential to this study, Aboriginal versus mainstream North American views on wellness requires discussion.

### *Differences in world view on wellness*

Acknowledging the disparity between Aboriginal and Western views on wellness is essential when discussing reintegration programs for Aboriginal offenders as it may affect the design, implementation, and effectiveness of a program (Benson, Sloan, & LaBoucane, 2000). The literature consistently affirms that healing and treatment encompass two very different worldviews and belief systems (Ertz, 1998; Mulcahy, 1999; Poonwassie & Charter, 2001; Sandner, 1996; Weaver, 2002). The Task Force on Aboriginal peoples in Federal Corrections (1988) made this distinction by noting that the concept of health to Aboriginals is wholistic and is a state that encompasses physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well being as compared to the Western concept of health that often, but not always, concentrates on “disease and infirmity” (p.12). This is similar to the prior discussion about transformation and rehabilitation; transformation appears to be more aligned with Aboriginal views of wellness, while rehabilitation is more similar to Western views of wellness.

### *Healing*

Given that healing is multifaceted and complex, it is difficult to define. As mentioned by Krawll (1994), there is no single definition or description of healing. It is a learning process experienced differently by each individual (Krawll, 1994; Mulcahy,

1999; Waldram 1993). As noted by Mulcahy, healing is a unique experience for each individual and is a process of discovery allowing for the investigation and development of one's spiritual self. In reference to learning, Bopp, Bopp, Brown, and Lane (1984) remarked:

There are four dimensions of 'true learning'. These four aspects of every person's nature are reflected in the four cardinal points of the Medicine wheel... It cannot be said that a person has totally learned in a whole and balanced manner unless all four dimensions of her being have been involved in the process (p. 29)

Although healing is a process learned on an individual basis, underlying components of this process are represented by the wholistic approach to life based on the Medicine Wheel and the need for balance and interconnectedness in one's life between the heart, mind, body, and spirit (Garret, 1999; Crowfoot Graham, 2002; Poonwassie & Charter, 2001; McCormick, 1995; Sandner, 1996; Weaver, 2002). In a study conducted by McCormick (1995), he remarked that, "the First Nations world view as represented by the Medicine Wheel has balance as one of the basic tenets of healthy living" (p. 259). To obtain balance, an integration of all four features of the Medicine Wheel (mental, spiritual, emotional and physical) is required (Garret, 1999; Hodgson & Heckbert, 1994; Poonwassie & Charter, 2001; Weaver, 2002). Furthermore, this balance can only occur if not only the self is integrated, but if one connects with family, friends, community, Elders, spirituality, traditional ceremonies, Mother Earth, and the Creator (Mulcahy, 1999). It is important to note that although the Medicine Wheel has become widely accepted, it originated as a prairies or plains tradition. The teachings of the Medicine

Wheel symbolize wholism, but other Aboriginal cultures have other symbols for this representation. This emphasizes that there is diversity within Aboriginal cultures.

McCormick (1995) interviewed 50 Aboriginal peoples from British Columbia in order to determine what facilitated healing. He found that, based on the participants' reports, healing was facilitated by: participation in ceremony, expression of emotion, learning from a role model, establishing a connection with nature, exercise, involvement in challenging activities, establishing a social connection, gaining an understanding of the problem, establishing spiritual connection, obtaining help/support from others, self-care, setting goals, anchoring self in tradition, and in helping others. McCormick noted that, "[a] preliminary examination of the healing outcomes of these facilitating events suggests that an effective healing program for First Nations people would invoke empowerment, cleansing, balance, discipline and belonging" (p. 317). Additionally, four major categories necessary for healing were apparent: separating from an unhealthy lifestyle; obtaining social support and resources; experiencing a healthy life; and living a healthy life.

### *Healing as treatment*

In terms of illness, a person is often considered to be living in an unbalanced manner; in order to heal successfully, balance must be restored (Hammerschlag, 1988; Poonwassie & Charter, 2001; Weaver, 2002). According to Weaver (2002), wellness and healing can only occur when a person maintains balance and symmetry among all four parts of the whole and that balance will equal prevention of illness. In order to effectively counsel, assist and encourage Aboriginal offenders to change, the Aboriginal concept of

healing is required, or at a minimum, must be considered and is an important concept for reintegration strategies (Benson et al. 2000; Waldram, 1994).

Waldram (1997) interviewed 30 inmates regarding their identity and cultural background and concluded that learning about one's background and culture, participating in Aboriginal traditions and forming and/or solidifying one's Aboriginal identity can be very empowering and an essential component for healing. Additionally, Mulcahy (1999) says that traditional ceremony and spirituality are necessary in the formation of Aboriginal identity and that developing a strong sense of cultural identity is required in order to heal. LaFromboise et al. (1990) suggested that *retraditionalization* could be an effective means of assisting Aboriginal peoples with reaffirming and achieving self-determination and empowering Aboriginal persons and communities. *Retraditionalization* uses cultural beliefs, customs, and traditions to provide culturally appropriate coping techniques (LaFromboise et al. 1990) and may be especially beneficial to offenders as it provides a sense of identity and self-determination and can assist an offender in accepting his heritage and ultimately increase success in maintaining a crime free life.

It has been suggested that there is a need to recognize that traditional healing methods and spirituality are viable methods of treatment and that it is necessary to embrace both Western concepts of medicine, technology, and treatment as well as the Indigenous Knowledge in program design (Poonwassie & Charter, 2001; Sandner, 1996). Although it may be difficult for some people to understand healing, balance, and the Medicine Wheel, these concepts should not be disregarded because when incorporated



into programs, they can prove beneficial to Aboriginal offenders (Waldram, 1993, 1994; Smallshaw, Rugge & Bonta, 2002).

*Spirituality, culture, Elders, and traditional practices*

It is important to establish the significance of incorporating spiritual beliefs within the healing process (Krawll, 1994; McCormick, 1995; Waldram, 1997). Spirituality is an attempt to develop the inner self using culturally affirmed ethics and practices, in order to function harmoniously within one's surroundings. Spirituality can encompass culture, healing, traditions, laws, and ethics in diverse ways. For the most part, when addressing Aboriginal culture, it is difficult to separate spirituality from culture as they are deeply entwined (Hodgson & Heckbert, 1994; Ross, 1992, 1996; Waldram, 1997). As well, the role of Elders and practicing traditions are both important components in Aboriginal culture. When discussing spirituality, Couture (1992) stated:

It is a total way of life, a way of life rooted in a direct experience of a Creator, ever involved in an unfolding creation. A range of activities provide a setting within which such experience is initiated, sustained, repeated ... the learnings, which are emotional, mental and spiritual in nature, bear on the self, people, all living things and the environment/world in its totality. The central action area is the realm of the inner self, particularly self to self and self to others ... Traditional spirituality is for the survival of the individual and the People (pp.200-1).

To reinforce the challenge of defining spirituality and separating it from culture, Hodgson and Heckbert (1994) noted that the participants in their study (all Aboriginal)

interchangeably used the words *spirituality* and *culture* and that these words were perceived as a way of life and necessary for healing (Hodgson & Heckbert, 1994).

According to Hammerschlag (1988), the spirit plays a significant role in illness and the needs of the spirit must be addressed in healing, along with the needs of the mind and body.

A number of studies have not only discussed the importance of spirituality and culture but also emphasized the vital role Elders play in healing and spirituality (Couture, 1992; Green, 2000; Heckbert & Turkington, 2001; Hodgson & Heckbert, 1994; Johnston, 1997; LaFromboise et al., 1990; Waldram, 1993, 1997). Elders are highly regarded and well respected in Aboriginal communities playing an influential role in the lives of Aboriginal peoples (Couture, 1992; Johnston, 1997; Ross, 1992; Waldram, 1997). They are teachers, counsellors, spiritual guides, leaders, and keepers of the history.

Within Aboriginal culture, traditional practices and ceremony are an integral component of healing and spirituality, reinforcing adherence to cultural values and beliefs (Poonwassie & Charter, 2001; Ross, 1996). Although each ceremony has its own purpose, ceremony allows an individual to connect with his or her spiritual self and maintain balance and connection (Ross, 1992, 1996). Being involved with Aboriginal traditions and practices appears to be beneficial to some offenders (Johnston, 1997; Hodgson & Heckbert, 1994; Waldram, 1993, 1997) and could potentially play a role in reintegration.

#### *Aboriginal offenders and reintegration research*

Hodgson and Heckbert (1994) extensively interviewed 20 Aboriginals who had met two requirements to be a participant: (a) the person had to have committed a serious

crime (e.g., assault, murder, manslaughter) and/or had served a sentence of at least 5 years, and (b) at the time of the study, had not been in conflict with the law for at least 2 years. Regarding spirituality and culture, 95% of participants indicated that spirituality and learning about their culture had had a significant impact on their getting out of and staying out of trouble. The majority of the participants (90%) mentioned that an essential feature of their culture, the wholistic view of life, must be incorporated into Aboriginal programs. Furthermore, 95% of the participants acknowledged that Elders in correctional institutions played a significant role in assisting them in turning their lives around and maintaining a crime free lifestyle. The authors indicated that all 20 participants acknowledged that a combination of factors assisted them in the process of change but particularly salient were Elders, spirituality, cultural activities (e.g., sweat lodges), and being on the healing path.

Heckbert and Turkington (2001) conducted a follow up study of the above utilizing a sample of 68 Aboriginal ex-offenders. Research participants had to meet the same requirements as mentioned above and were asked similar questions about reintegration into the community after incarceration. One salient finding was that the majority of participants indicated that spirituality and cultural practices were a major factor in reintegration after incarceration. As well: 94% of the participants indicated that learning about personal values and identity was essential; 91% reported that staying alcohol and drug free was vital; 90% reported participation in self-improvement activities was key; 87% acknowledged the importance of friends and family; 74% noted employment was important; 71% acknowledged that education and training were essential; and 71% indicated that participating in Aboriginal spirituality, ceremonies, and

cultural activities played a vital role in maintaining a crime free lifestyle. These data demonstrate that Aboriginal offenders have a diversity of needs when leaving correctional facilities.

Johnston (1997) conducted a study with 556 Aboriginal offenders from across Canada. One aim of the study was to investigate reintegration strategies for Aboriginal offenders. Participation in cultural activities was strongly related to a decrease in recidivism. Education and employment program participation that was Aboriginal-specific was strongly correlated with a decrease in recidivism. Participation in spiritual activities and having access to Elders were both strongly correlated to a decrease in recidivism and had an impact on reintegration success. Programs targeting the emotional, social, and community needs of offenders were strongly correlated with a decrease in recidivism. Johnston also remarked that although some programs exist targeting the specific needs of Aboriginal offenders, access to these programs is limited and not enough Aboriginal offenders have the opportunity to participate. Regarding ratings of low, medium, and high risk and needs, Johnston viewed 449 case files (the other files were incomplete). Of the 449 offenders, the top three groups that the offenders fell into were: high risk-high need (41%) medium risk-high need (16%) and medium risk-medium need (16%). This demonstrates that in terms of reintegration, a large proportion of Aboriginal men have high needs.

In reference to offenders who have been released into the community, Smallshaw et al. (2002) interviewed 17 Aboriginal offenders on probation, as well as 6 Aboriginal Probation Officers (PO), 31 non-Aboriginal PO's, and 15 providers of Traditional Healing services concerning the use of Aboriginal approaches when supervising offenders

who have been released on probation. Smallshaw et al. reported that, while on probation, 65% of Aboriginal probationers attended at least one culturally specific program or activity (e.g., smudging, sharing circles, sweat lodge, Elder teachings); 57% of the PO's reported that it was very important to them to assist their clients in engaging in these activities; and 43% indicated that they believed that culturally specific programs/services were very important in probation.

Clearly, Aboriginal practices and traditions should be seen as important program options for Aboriginal offenders, so incorporating Aboriginal knowledge into reintegration strategies is paramount.

*Incorporating Aboriginal knowledge into reintegration strategies*

Successful transition from prison to community is crucial if there is to be a decrease in the over-representation of Aboriginal offenders in the CJS and an increase in the likelihood of Aboriginal offenders' maintaining a crime free lifestyle. Clearly, the concepts of cultural identity, world view on wellness, healing, culture, spirituality, Elders, and traditional practices are fundamental components of correctional programming and reintegration strategies for Aboriginal offenders. Each concept has been well established in Aboriginal knowledge and literature and may contribute significant information to the transformational process that offenders embark on when attempting to maintain a crime free life. Aboriginal ways may be related to the underlying theoretical construct of desistance, emphasizing the importance of transformation as a dynamic process. When thinking about the responsivity component of the RNR and reintegration strategies, cultural sensitivity and awareness should be incorporated. Both desistance and RNR lack

research pertaining to Aboriginal offenders; however, they do provide a theoretical framework to build upon when investigating Aboriginal offenders' transition from prison to the community.

### *Research question*

It is proposed that in order for Aboriginal offenders to successfully transition from prison to the community and maintain a crime free life, the CJS and community programs must specifically address the unique circumstances of Aboriginal offenders and hear the voices of these men. Therefore, this study will explore Aboriginal offenders' perspectives on transformation. The following research questions will be explored in this study: what factors facilitate and hinder Aboriginal offenders' in the maintenance of a crime free lifestyle. In the following chapter, the methodology utilized to investigate this research question is presented.

## CHAPTER TWO

### METHODOLOGY

The critical incident technique was utilized as the methodology for this study. The CIT was chosen for three reasons. First, because CIT utilized an interview, participants' were given an opportunity to share their perspectives and voice their knowledge, feelings, and experiences. Second, this technique allowed for the exploratory nature of this study because it captured an exhaustive number of incidents'. Third, this methodology was able to yield a detailed description and comprehensive map of what factors Aboriginal offenders report facilitate and hinder their process in maintaining a crime free lifestyle. Following is a detailed description of the CIT.

#### *The Critical incident technique (CIT)*

The CIT originated with the work of John Flanagan (1954) and is a methodology that attempts to capture descriptive accounts of events that facilitate or hinder a particular aim. According to Flanagan, "The Critical Incident Technique consists of a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behaviour in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles" (p. 327). The CIT has been described as a set of flexible principles for qualitative research. As Fisher and Oulton (1999) suggested, "It does not consist of a set of rules governing data collection but rather should be thought of as a flexible set of principles which must be modified and adapted to meet the specific situation at hand" (p. 114).

Flanagan (1954) developed the CIT during World War II as part of an aviation psychology program to determine effective and ineffective behaviour among pilots. Flanagan continued to develop the technique and since its inception, the technique has been extensively used in a variety of fields (Kemppainen, 2000; Woolsey, 1986). Fields that have utilized the CIT include, but are not limited too: counselling psychology (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson and Maglio, 2005; McCormick, 1995; Woolsey, 1986), clinical psychology and psychiatry (Plutchik, Conte & Karasu, 1994), library and information management (Fisher & Oulton, 1999), and nursing (Keatinge, 2002; Kemppainen, 2000). Additionally, the CIT is useful for different levels of research. That is, as Woolsey (1986) suggested, the CIT can be used for exploration and foundational work, theory or model building, verifying and refining models already established, or for criterion development. Thus, the CIT is adaptable and useful in various domains of research. Butterfield et al. have provided an excellent summary of the origin, evolution, and utilization of the CIT during the past 50 years and have outlined important future directions for the CIT.

Before continuing to describe the technique, an understanding of *incident* and *critical* is warranted. By *incident*, Flanagan (1954) meant “any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act” (p. 327). The term *critical* refers to the idea that the “behaviour described in the incident plays an important or critical role in determining the outcome” (Kemppainen, 2000). Woolsey (1986) acknowledged the flexibility of the CIT within counselling psychology when she remarked:



It can be used to study a wide range of phenomenon, for example, relationships, decision-making, self-actualization, vocational choice, and group process. It can be modified to collect data on factual happenings (rather than restricting its use to “critical” incidents), and on qualities or attributes; to use prototypes to span the various levels of the aim or attribute (low, medium, high); and critical or factual incidents to explore differences or turning points (p. 251).

This idea of *factual happenings* is especially relevant in the field of counselling psychology, as it is consistent with the experiences and values of counselling psychologists (Woolsey). For purposes of this study, it is important to emphasize the utilization of collecting data that represents *factual happenings*; this study utilized both what Flanagan (1954) described as *critical incidents* and what Woolsey described as *factual happenings*. For ease of understanding, *critical incident* will be utilized as the term throughout the paper.

Flanagan (1954) developed a set of guidelines and procedures for data collection. The following description of the procedures has been described by Flanagan (1954) and other researchers (e.g., Fisher & Oulton, 1999; Woolsey, 1986). There are five steps that include:

- a) *Establishing the general aim of the activity*. This step determines the research question. Notably, the aim of the study should be clear, concise and the language used should be simple everyday language that communicates clear meaning (Woolsey, 1986). In the present study, the aim is *living a crime free life*.
- b) *Plans and specifications*. This step determines data collectors, research participants, method of data collection (e.g., interview, questionnaire), and what will constitute a

critical incident (critical incidents have to be an observable activity relevant to the general aim of the study). As previously mentioned, factual happenings will be considered critical incidents. Data collectors should be familiar with the topic of research and have an understanding of the literature pertinent to the study.

Participants are chosen for a study based on experience with a particular aim. In the present study, I collected the data, the participants had to meet certain criteria (see methods section) and I gave clear instructions to the participants regarding the nature of the study.

- c) *Data Collection*. There are a number of methods that can be used to collect the data: interviews, questionnaires, group interviews, etc. This should be established in advance and be consistent with the nature of the study. It is important to note that according to the CIT, data collection is based on the number of incidents collected, not sample size. Flanagan suggested that data collection ceases when incidents become redundant. In addition, Flanagan specified the criteria for collecting critical incidents, which include the following:
- i. An actual or complete behaviour was reported (e.g., “staying alcohol and drug free”)
  - ii. The research participant directly observed the behaviour
  - iii. Relevant factors were given regarding the situation where the behaviour occurred (e.g., “during times when I feel like drinking, I attended an AA meeting”)
  - iv. The participant made a judgment regarding the behaviour as critical (e.g., decided not to drink)

- v. Participants indicate why the behaviour was critical (e.g., “staying alcohol and drug free helps me live crime free”)

Notably, Flanagan emphasized that in order to obtain relevant critical incidents, it is important that research participants are aware of the research question. Therefore, it is essential that a detailed description of the aim of the research project be described to participants before the study commences. This study used interviews as the method of data collection and detailed information about the project was discussed with participants prior to the interview.

- d) *Analyzing the Data*. Woolsey (1986) mentioned that this is the most difficult, frustrating, time consuming stage of the CIT, as it requires “an analysis of thematic content, arrived at by inductive reasoning... The objective of data analysis is to provide a detailed, comprehensive and valid description of the activity studied” (p. 248). In this step, categories are established from the critical incidents. Critical incidents are grouped by similarity and categorized to describe events that encompass the description given by participants. According to Flanagan (1954), the goal of analyzing the critical incidents and categorization “is to increase the usefulness of the data while sacrificing as little as possible of their comprehensiveness, specificity, and validity” (p. 344).
- e) *Interpreting and Reporting the Findings*. With the CIT, vivid and detailed descriptions of the categories are important. Woolsey (1986) suggested that the “categories and subcategories need to be given self-explanatory titles. Simplicity, brevity and clarity are essential here” (p. 251). Additionally, detailed descriptions of the categories should be rich and depict an image of the kind of incidents included in

the category (Woolsey). Furthermore, using quotations from participants is a useful method to describe incidents in a category and allows for the voice of the participant to be heard.

### *Credibility checks*

When using the CIT, there are a number of methods to test the credibility of the results (Andersson & Nilsson, 1964; Butterfield et al., 2005; Flanagan, 1954; Woolsey, 1986). To determine whether the categories are well founded, sufficient, and establish trustworthiness of the data, credibility can be tested in a number of ways. Butterfield and colleagues have provided an excellent description of nine credibility checks that can be undertaken to substantiate the findings: independent extraction; participant cross-checking; independent judges; exhaustiveness check; experts in the field; participation rate; theoretical validity; descriptive validity; and interview fidelity.

### *Independent extraction*

The purpose of this check is to determine whether an independent coder and the researcher agree on what is deemed a critical incident. According to Butterfield et al., (2005), it has become customary for an independent coder to extract 25% of the total incidents from the transcripts or interviews, which are then compared to that of the researcher. The higher the agreement between coder and researcher, the more valid the incidents are deemed to be critical to the aim of the study (Butterfield et al.).

### *Participant cross checking*

The role of participant cross checking is to determine whether or not participants agree with the construction of the categories, whether these categories make sense, and whether or not their experiences are sufficiently portrayed in the categories. Butterfield and colleagues (2005) suggested building a second interview into the research design, which occurs after the researcher develops categories from the analysis of the first interview. This allows for participants to be active in the data analysis stage by providing them the opportunity to add, delete, or amend their initial interview (Butterfield et al). Additionally, it gives participants a stronger voice in the research, as it is their stories being told.

### *Independent judges*

Another method of investigating credibility of the data is to determine whether the categories are consistent. This can be done by having volunteers, who have not been involved in the research project, re-categorize 25% of randomly chosen incidents' (Butterfield et al., 2005). The volunteers are provided with the titles of the categories, a description of the categories, and the incidents and are required to code them into the categories developed by the researcher. The inter-rater reliability between the researcher and the volunteers is calculated. It is presumed that the higher the agreement between the independent judges and the researcher, the greater the reliability of the categories and the more sound the data is assumed to be. Flanagan (1954) suggested that the inter-rater reliability should be at least 75%.

### *Exhaustiveness check*

Researchers have suggested that it is important to track the point at which exhaustiveness of the incidents is achieved, which is the point at which no new categories emerge from the data (Butterfield et al., 2005; Flanagan, 1954; Woolsey, 1986). As cited in Butterfield et al., “Flanagan suggested that adequate coverage of the domain could be assumed when only two or three critical behaviours emerge from 100 critical incidents gathered. This is only a general guideline, however, and needs to be tailored to each specific study” (p. 487).

### *Experts in the field*

It has also been acknowledged that consultation with two or more experts in the area can increase the credibility of the data analysis. This provides an excellent opportunity for experts in the field to substantiate the categories and determine whether or not the categories are useful, if they are surprised by any of the categories, and based on their experience, whether or not anything is missing in the categories (Butterfield, et al., 2005). Similar to the other credibility checks, the categories have increased credibility and are considered more trustworthy if there is agreement with experts in the field.

### *Theoretical validity*

Similar to the credibility check of experts in the field, investigating whether categories are consistent with the literature is another important measure of credibility. Butterfield et al., (2005) suggested that there are two ways of achieving this: 1) making explicit assumptions that underlie the proposed research and then examining them with

regards to existing literature to determine if they are supported; and, 2) contrasting the categories to the literature to determine the support or refutation of the category. It must be noted that, “lack of support in the literature does not necessarily mean a category is not sound, as the exploratory nature of the CIT may mean the study has uncovered something new that is not yet known to researchers” (Butterfield et al., 2005, p. 489). The goal is to determine what the support or refutation of the categories implies.

#### *Participation rate*

Investigating whether incidents come from one participant or many is also a useful measure of validity. If a category is formulated by incidents mentioned by only one participant, the validity of the category might be questionable; however, if a number of the participants are reporting similar incidents in a category, validity is more likely to be assumed (Flanagan, 1954). According to Butterfield and colleagues (2005), the participation rate is calculated by determining the number of participants reporting an incident in each category and dividing this number by the total number of participants in the study. A participation rate of 25% for a category has been suggested as the validity standard (Butterfield et al.)

#### *Descriptive validity*

This credibility check characterizes the accuracy of the account by the participants, thus, it has become customary to tape record interviews and either work directly from the tapes or from transcriptions of the tapes in order to precisely replicate

the participants' words (Butterfield et al., 2005). This allows for accuracy in capturing participants' experiences and opinions.

### *Interview fidelity*

Interview fidelity allows for an expert in CIT research to review the tapes or transcriptions to ensure that the researcher has followed the guidelines of the CIT methodology. This “ensures consistency is being maintained, upholds the rigor of the research design, and checks for leading questions by the interviewer” (Butterfield et al., 2005, p. 488).

### *Summary*

The CIT is a flexible methodology aimed at gathering information from the participants' perspective. Flanagan (1954) and others (Kemppainen, 2000; Urquart, et al., 2003; Woolsey, 1986) have described the detailed process of using this methodology, which consists of five steps (general aims, plans and specifications, data collection, data analysis, and data reporting). The technique has proven itself as a valid and reliable method of collecting and analyzing data in a number of research domains. Due to its flexibility and ability to address exploratory research, this methodology has proven to be useful in the current study.



## *Method*

Participants, measures, and procedure are discussed in this section. Ethical concerns and the researcher's perspective are also presented in this section.

### *Participants*

Forty-five Aboriginal men were interviewed; 42 participants met the following criteria and were included in the study:

- 1) Self-identified Aboriginal men
- 2) Have maintained a crime-free lifestyle for at least two years (because offenders are most likely to reoffend within the first two years of being released from correctional facilities);
- 3) Have been incarcerated for a federal crime (i.e., minimum two year sentence).

Participants who meet these criteria are excellent examples of those who have been serious offenders and have transformed their lives. The participants represented a heterogeneous group of Aboriginal peoples with diverse criminal histories. Participants self-identified as Aboriginal, which included status/non-status First Nations, Métis, or Inuit, and reflected different Aboriginal nations (e.g., Cree, Coast Salish, Ojibway). Participants were relied upon to report their criminal history and time since incarceration. For two of the participants, criteria three was not met, and for one of the participants, criteria two was not met; therefore, they were excluded from the study.

### *Cultural background*

Forty-two Aboriginal men participated in this study; 24 participants (57.1%) reported to be status Aboriginal persons by law, seven (16.7%) self-identified as Métis, six (14.3%) reported to be non-status, and five (11.9%) indicated they were Inuit.

Participants were requested to report their cultural background, resulting in approximately 20 different Aboriginal backgrounds. Consistent with correctional statistics, these were collapsed into four geographical regions: Western (i.e., British Columbia), Northern (i.e., Northwest Territories, Yukon Territory, Nunavut), Prairies (i.e., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba), and Eastern (e.g., everything east of Manitoba). The breakdown of the cultural backgrounds representing the four geographical regions was as follows: Prairies (47.6%), Western (28.6%), Northern (11.9%), and Eastern (11.9%). The following represent examples of the cultural backgrounds for the four regions: Cree (Prairies), Haida (Western), Gwichi'n (Northern) and Ojibway (Eastern).

In addition to gathering cultural background, information was gathered concerning languages spoken. Nineteen (45.2%) participants reported that an Aboriginal language was their first language spoken, 22 (52.4%) reported that English was their first language spoken, while 1 (2.4%) participant left the question unanswered. At the time of participation, 15 (35.7%) participants reported that they could speak their Aboriginal language, while 27 (64.3%) reported that they could not speak their Aboriginal language.

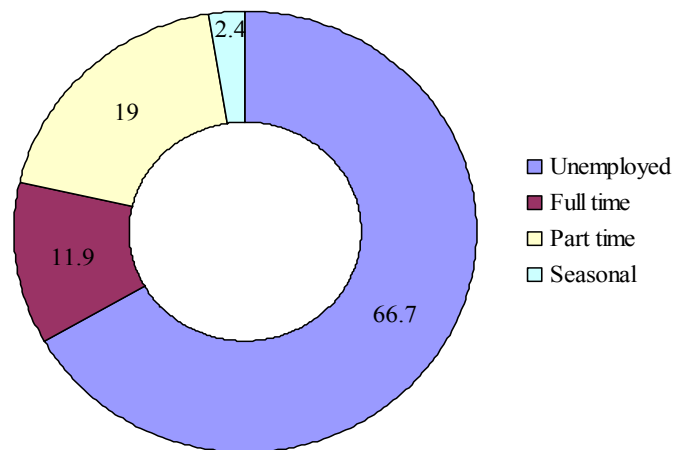
### *Social description*

Participants ranged in age from 25-59 years, with a mean age of 44.7 years ( $SD = 8.7$ ). With respect to marital status, 21 (50%) were single, nine (21.4%) were married/common-law, five (11.9%) were divorced, four (9.5%) were widowed, and three (7.1%) had partners but were not cohabiting at the time of data collection. Educational history was also collected. The mean level of education reported, not including post-secondary education, was 9.9 years of school ( $SD = 2.1$  years), with a range of grade three to grade twelve. Some of the participants attended post-secondary education including college (23.8%), technical schools (21.4%), and university (11.9%).

Information was also obtained concerning residential school attendance. Thirteen (31%) of the participants attended residential school, while 29 (69%) had not. Although the majority of participants did not attend residential school, over half (59.5%) of their parents had, approximately one third (31%) had not, while 9.5% did not answer the question. To better understand the involvement of residential school in participants' lives, an analysis was conducted combining participants' and parents' residential school attendance, indicating that 30 (71.4%) participants either attended residential school themselves or had a parent attend residential school. Nine (21.4%) of the participants did not attend residential school, nor did their parents, while 3 (7.1%) did not answer the question.

Participants also reported their current employment status. As can be seen in figure 1, the majority of participants were unemployed at the time of the study.

Figure 1

*Employment status**Criminal history*

Participants had extensive offending histories, commencing at a young age. On average, participants were 15.9 years old ( $SD = 4.1$ ), with a range of 10-34 years, when convicted of their first offence. Their age at the time of their last conviction ranged from 17-50 years old, with an average age of 29.3 years ( $SD = 7.8$ ). The length of their longest sentence averaged 6.25 years ( $SD=5.27$ ) with a range of 2-25 years. Participants also frequented youth detention centers, jails and prisons with the average number of times incarcerated equal to 8.9 ( $SD = 9.3$ ), with a substantial range (1-50 times) of frequency. Participants were last released from a correctional facility anywhere from 2-35 years prior to the study, with an average of 10.7 years ( $SD = 8.9$ ). Participants also reported the security level of the prison that they were released from (Figure 2), as well as the type of release they received (Figure 3).

Figure 2

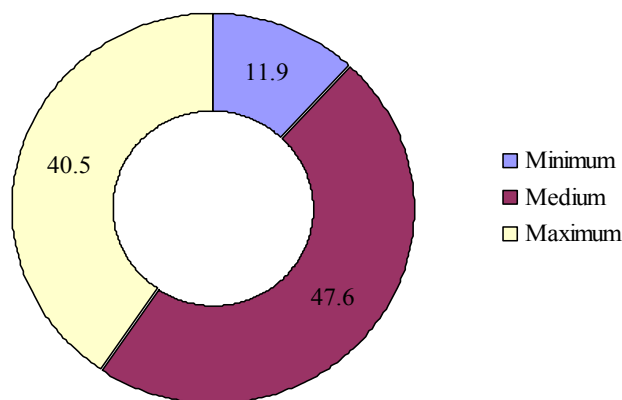
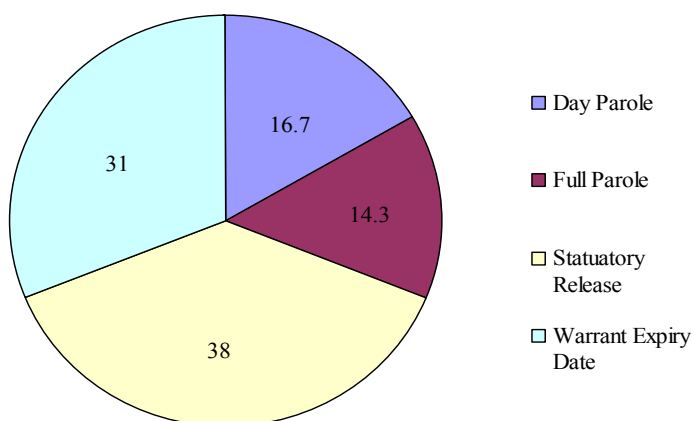
*Security level upon release*

Figure 3

*Release status*

The reported index offences (i.e., their most recent offence) were collapsed into the four following categories: violent, sexual, property, and other. Within the category of violence, crimes include the following: 1<sup>st</sup> degree murder, 2<sup>nd</sup> degree murder, manslaughter, attempted murder, domestic violence, assault with a weapon, assault causing bodily harm, and armed robbery. Sexual offences include the following: sexual assault, incest, sexual touching, sexual assault with a minor, and sexual assault causing

bodily harm. Property offence crimes include: break and enter, theft, and fraud. The other category includes offences such as: possession of drugs for the purposes of trafficking, impaired driving, possession of a firearm, and conspiracy. If a participant was convicted of multiple index offences, the index offence carrying the greatest sentence was the offence recorded. Table 3 displays this breakdown of offence type.

Table 3

*Index offence*

Type of Offense	Frequency	%
Violent	27	64.3
Property	11	26.2
Sexual	2	4.8
Other	2	4.8
Total	42	100.0

Participants were involved in a number of activities and programs, both while incarcerated and when in the community after release. The following figures (4, 5, 6, 7) display participation in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal activities and programs, while incarcerated and post-incarceration.

Figure 4

*Aboriginal program involvement while incarcerated*

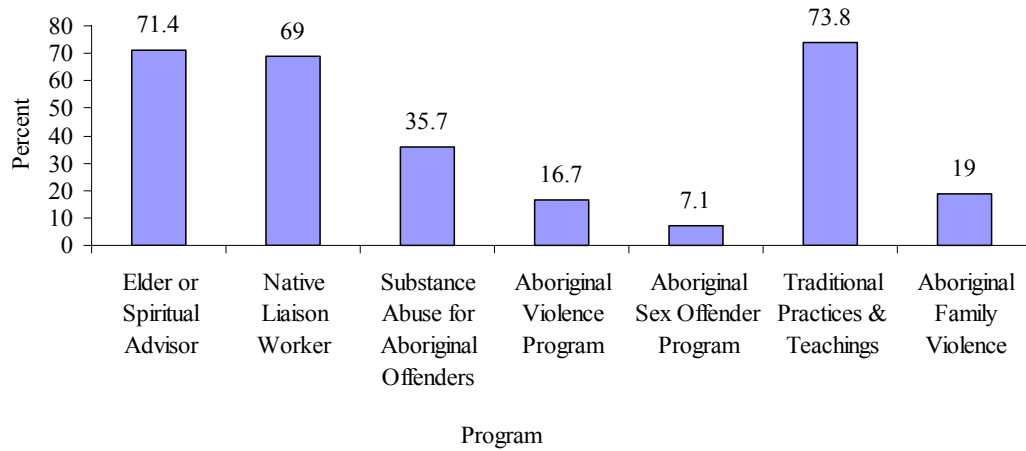


Figure 5

*Non-Aboriginal program involvement while incarcerated*

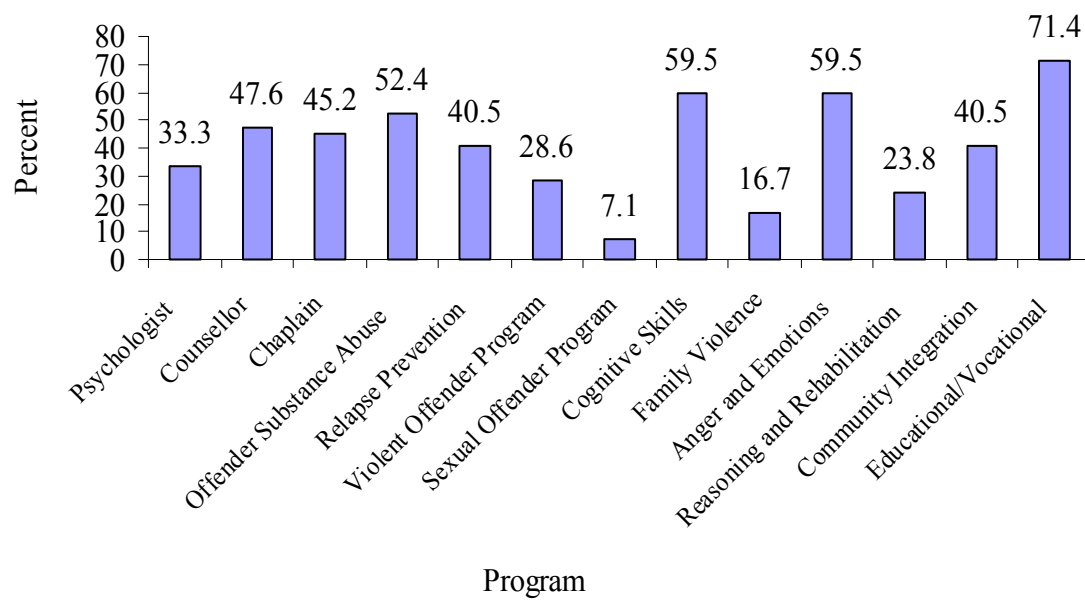


Figure 6

*Aboriginal programs and activities after release*

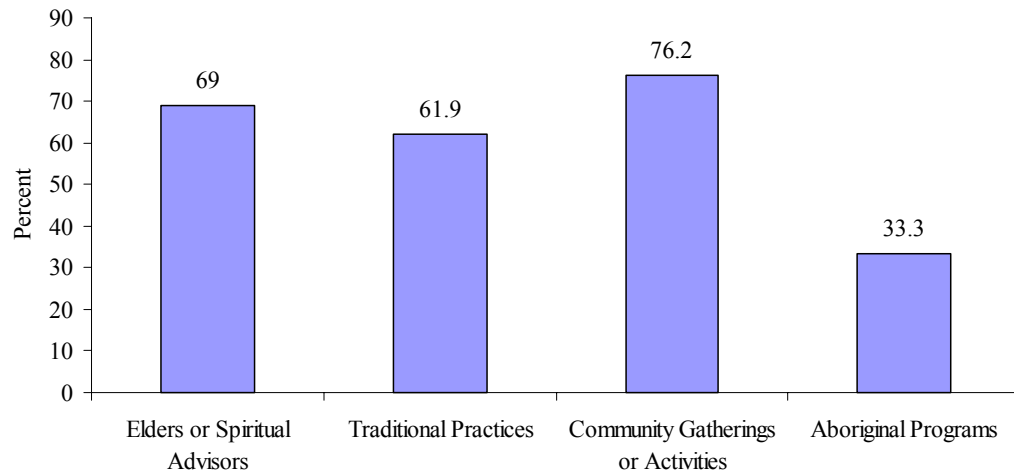
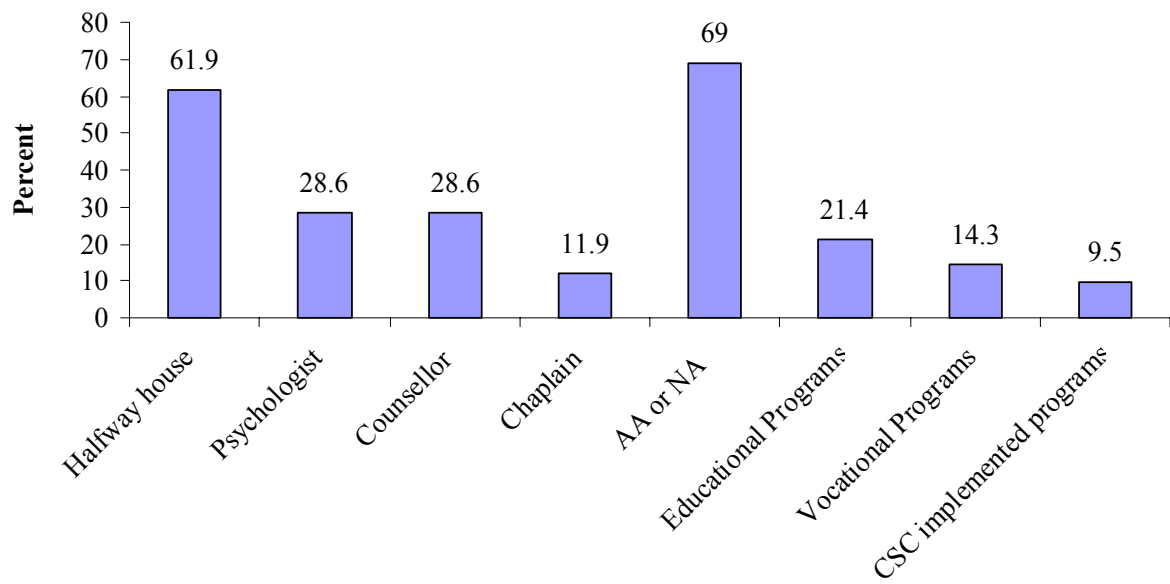


Figure 7

*Non-Aboriginal programs and activities after release*



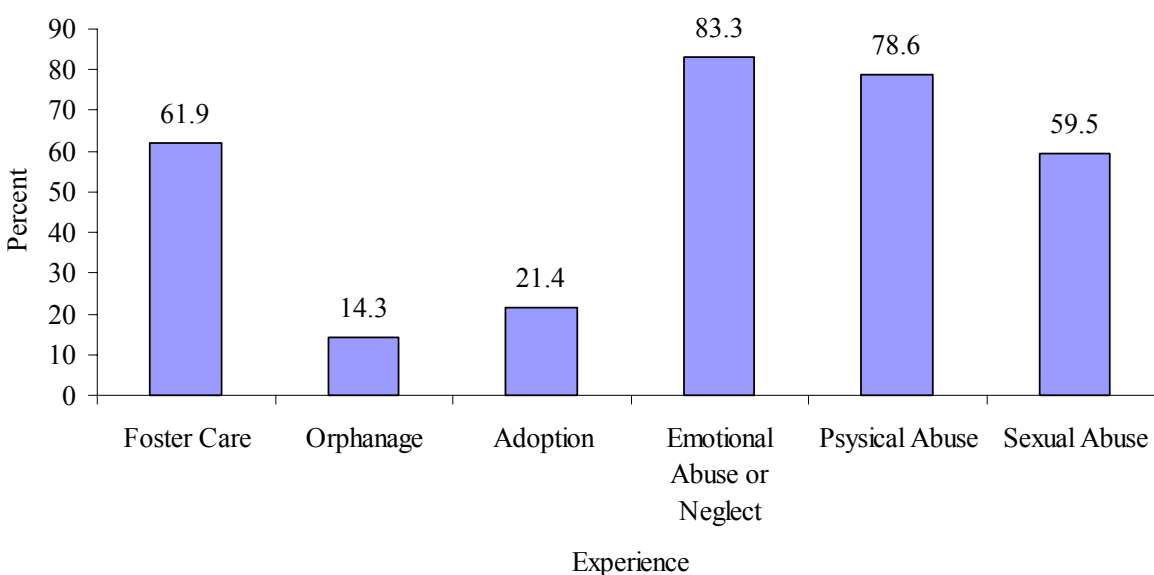


### *Wellness history*

Participants reported extensive histories of childhood abuse, as well as experiences of foster care, orphanage stays, and adoption (Figure 8). Moreover, with respect to suicide attempts, 50% of the participants indicated that they had attempted suicide at least once in their lifetime.

Figure 8

#### *Self-reported childhood experiences*



Participants reported very extensive histories of substance use, addiction, and current use (Figure 9). Participants reported that, on average, they first tried substances at 11.5 years old ( $SD= 3.4$ ), ranging in age from 5-19. Additionally, participants reported the age they were at when substance use was acknowledges as a problem. Two participants indicated that they had never had a substance abuse problem, while 40 participants reported that they had. For these 40 participants, acknowledgement of a substance abuse problem occurred, on average, at 25 years old ( $SD= 9.5$ ), but ranged from 13-48 years

old. Participants were questioned about what most often influenced their substance using behaviour. As can be seen in Figure 10, substance use was most influenced by peers.

Figure 9

*Substance use history*

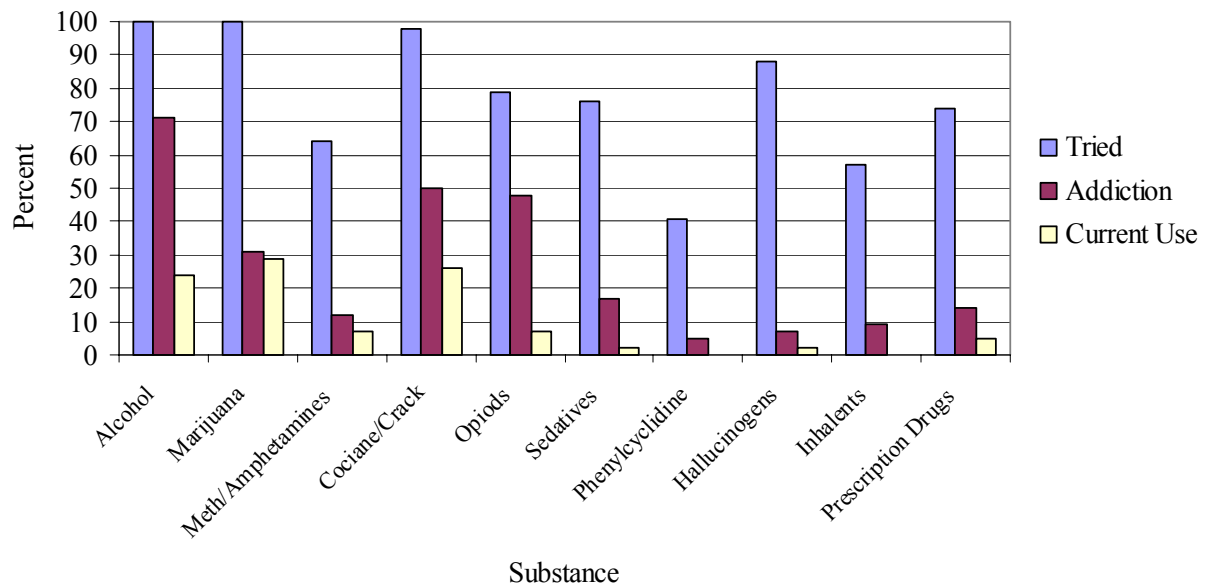
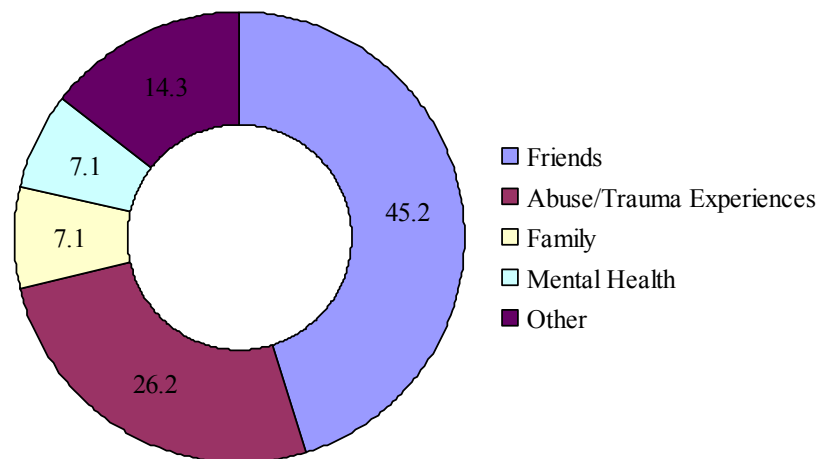


Figure 10

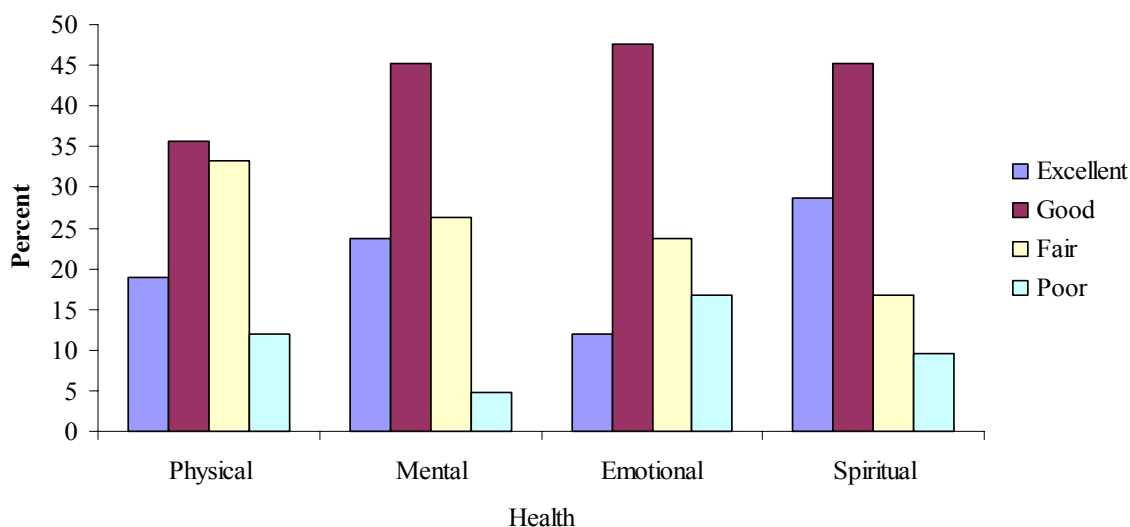
*Greatest influence of drug use*



Although participants reported traumatic experiences as children, lengthy criminal histories, high unemployment, and extensive substance abuse histories, participants considered themselves to currently be in relatively good health: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually (Figure 11).

Figure 11

*Health status*



*Demographic background summary*

With respect to age, cultural background, and offending history, the Aboriginal men in this study reflect a representative sample of the Aboriginal offender population. In addition, these men have extensive criminal histories, substance using histories, negative childhood experiences, and low educational and employment histories signifying a group of men who have experienced serious challenges during their lives. Although these challenges are present, the participants in this study have been able to successfully transform their lives by maintaining a crime free life in the community for at least two years.

### *Measures*

The design of the methodology was chosen in order to gain relevant information concerning reintegration strategies for Aboriginal offenders. With that in mind, it was important to gather background information, as well as conduct an indepth interview allowing participants to tell their own story. It was important to provide an environment where participants could express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions concerning living a crime free lifestyle, allowing the participants to have a strong voice in the research. Participants were asked to fill out a consent form and a background information form. Participants were also required to participate in an audiotaped interview.

#### *Consent form and background information form*

The consent form described the nature of the study and informed participants of their rights as research participants. There was a section in the consent form that included a request for permission to contact him in the future for transcript review, manuscript review, and future research. This was optional and was up to the discretion of the participant. In addition, there was a section on the consent form asking whether or not participants wanted to remain anonymous or if they preferred their name to be attributed to quotes. The purpose of this was to embed a sense of responsibility into the research design, that is, allowing research participants the choice of their level of involvement and acknowledgement. Too often, Aboriginal persons have been taken advantage of for research purposes, thus, allowing participants the choice to self identify and let their voices be known, was important. This will be discussed in greater detail later in the study. The background information questionnaire solicited information such as: age, family

history, incarceration history, criminal history, etc. and provided a deeper understanding of the social, cultural, educational, and historical aspects of the participants' lives.

### *The use of CIT*

As described in detail in the methodology section of this paper, the current study utilized the CIT to collect and analyze the knowledge obtained from Aboriginal offenders pertaining to living a crime free lifestyle. The research question was explained, in detail, to the participants, so that they had a complete understanding of the aim of the study.

### *Procedure*

During all meetings with participants, the researcher provided a light snack and beverages. In addition, participants were permitted to take breaks at their leisure. At the beginning of our meeting, participants were invited to begin the interview in a cultural way (e.g., prayer, smudge), if he so chose. On most occasions, participants smudged or said a prayer. Once we began the meeting, the researcher introduced the nature and purpose of the research study. Next, the researcher read the consent form out loud, asked the participant to read the form and informed him that by signing the form, he was giving his consent to participate. Participants were also asked whether or not he would like to provide contact information in order to be contacted in the future to review the transcripts, manuscript and participate in future research. It was emphasized that this was optional. The majority of participants (95%) consented to future contact. The consent form also gathered information concerning anonymity. Participants were able to choose whether or not he wanted his name attributed to quotes. Once the form was completed,

participants were provided with the option of filling in the background information form himself, or the researcher could fill it out with him. Of the 42 participants, only one chose to fill out the form himself. Once the form was completed, the interview commenced.

The interview began with a brief introduction to the purpose of the interview, which allowed me to emphasize the aim of the study. The researcher read the following to the participant:

Thank you for being here with me today. As described in the consent form, the reason you are here with me today is to talk about your experiences of transition from being incarcerated to living a crime free lifestyle. I am going to ask you some questions and I am requesting that you answer them to the best of your ability. The questions will focus on two different situations: things that helped you in your transition and things that interfered with your transition.

It is important for you to know that there is no right or wrong answers and if you have any questions, please ask me at anytime. During the interview, I might need to stop you and ask some questions along the way. Does this sound all right with you?

Once this was completed, the digital tape recorder was turned on and the following broad, open-ended question was asked: “During your transition from being incarcerated to living in the community, what HELPED you maintain a crime free lifestyle?” The participant was able to tell his story at his own pace. During the interview, notes were taken in order not to interrupt the flow of his story. Questions would be asked for clarification. For example, when a participant stated, “recovery helped me stay out of jail”, the researcher asked a question like “What does recovery mean to you?” Once the participant was finished telling his story concerning what helped him maintain a crime free life and clarifications were made, the second research question was asked: “During your transition from being incarcerated to living in the community, what INTERFERED with maintaining a crime free lifestyle?” The same procedure was employed for this part of the interview. Lastly, the following question was asked: “If you could pass on words of

wisdom to men who have experienced incarceration and are in the process of transitioning back into the community, what would you say?” Once he was finished sharing his story, he was provided with an opportunity to share anything more by being asked “Is there was anything else you would like to tell me about maintaining a crime free lifestyle”.

Once the interview was completed, the participant was thanked for his time and was offered a small gift of appreciation (a candle). Before he left, if he had given consent to do so, he was reminded that he would be contacted in the near future to go over the transcripts of the interview. He was also provided with a copy of the consent form for his records and was invited to close the interview in a cultural manner (e.g., closing prayer).

### *Summary*

The CIT was the methodological approach employed for this study. The interview was conducted in a culturally sensitive manner and allowed each participant to voice his opinion of successful reintegration after incarceration, as well as, obstacles that hindered his transition from prison to the community. The next section of this study discusses two significant elements of this research that necessitate illumination: ethical concerns and the researcher’s perspective.

### *Ethical concerns*

When undertaking this research project, there were a number of ethical concerns that were taken into consideration. Respect, responsibility, relevance and reciprocity were important components of ethical research embedded within this study. An invaluable

learning experience that I was a part of, that has powerfully informed this research, was when fellow students and I were asked to design what we thought a model of Indigenous research could look like. The model we constructed emphasizes important ethical considerations that should be addressed when conducting research in the Aboriginal community. As can be seen in Illustration 1, we designed an ethical model based on the Medicine Wheel, incorporating mind, heart, body, and spirit. The center of the model represents the research participants. From there, each circle represents different *players* within research. The lines represent respect, reciprocity, relevance, and responsibility (4R's). This emphasizes that research should be designed with the participants as the foundation and that it is essential to consider respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and relevance. Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) developed the 4R's in regard to higher education for Aboriginal students. Although developed with education in mind, the 4R's are applied in different domains (e.g., research, community activities, and treatment programs) and has proven useful as ethical considerations in research. Next a description of the 4R's is illustrated, followed by a description of how the 4R's were embedded within this project.



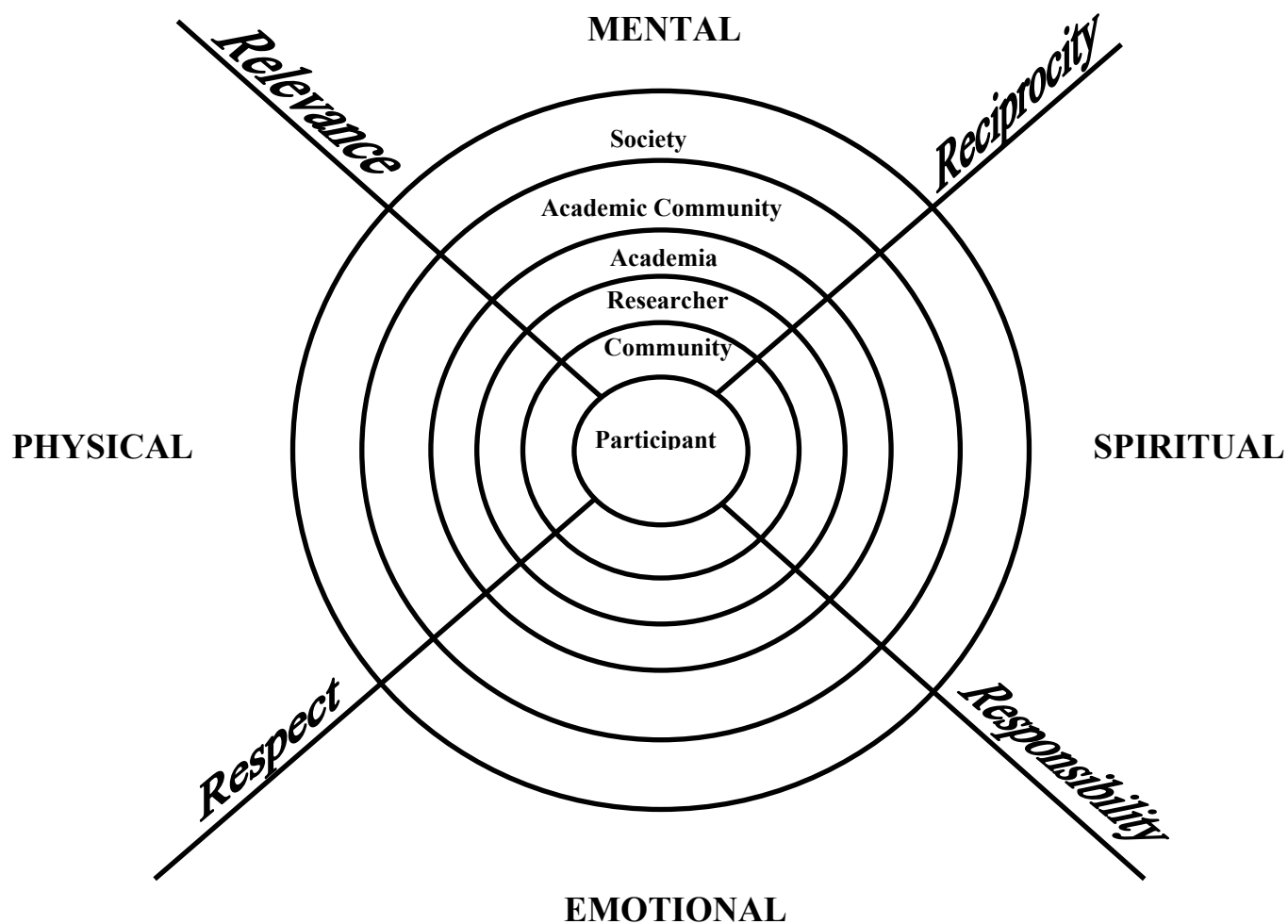


Illustration 1: *Model of Indigenous research*

### *Respect*

The first ethical concern is respect for Aboriginal traditional knowledge, beliefs, values, customs, and traditions: “They are factors to be built into research explicitly” (p.15). This idea highlights that respecting Aboriginal traditional knowledge is an essential factor in research.

### *Reciprocity*

The second ethical concern is reciprocity. Smith (2004) mentioned that important factors that are often not taken into consideration when conducting research in Indigenous communities include *reporting back* and *sharing knowledge* with the people in the communities (Smith, p.15). The teachings that have been shared with me by Elders and Spiritual Advisors have always emphasized that when we are given something, it is important to give back. Reciprocity is a two-way process of learning and is a very significant part of research design. *Giving back* to the community should be embedded within the research.

### *Responsibility*

Responsibility and accountability are essential components of conducting ethical research. Responsibility allows the research participants to feel empowered by playing an active role in the project. An example of responsibility is incorporating participants and the Aboriginal community into as many stages of the research as possible (e.g., research design, transcript review, etc.).

### *Relevance*

Smith (2004) has emphasized that research in Indigenous communities has not always been based on ethical foundations of research. She remarked, “the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous worlds vocabulary” (p. 1). Smith also commented that research and the results of research have often resulted in policies that intrude into the lives of Indigenous peoples and has often been useless to

Indigenous communities but useful to those who used it as an instrument (p.3). This stresses that research with Aboriginal peoples has to be relevant to Aboriginal peoples.

*Use of the 4R's in this study*

This study was designed with the 4R's in mind. Although the study used the CIT methodological approach, which is not Indigenous, my sensitivity and awareness has allowed for this research to be conducted in a respectful, reciprocal, responsible, and relevant manner.

I respect both traditional Aboriginal knowledge and Western concepts of research; therefore it was important for me to incorporate cultural practice into our meetings (e.g., prayer, smudge) and offer a gift of appreciation to the participants'. Although these appear to be small gestures, it was essential for me to follow the cultural protocols that I have been taught because it demonstrated respect for culture, traditions, and most importantly, that I valued the time the participants' shared with me. Following the CIT also allowed for the participants to share their knowledge and experiences, which gave them a voice in the research.

In reference to responsibility, providing research participants with transcripts of the interview so that he could review them and make any changes that he felt were necessary would be an important method of inclusion. This step assisted in giving participants a voice in the research. Additionally, giving participants a draft of the dissertation and requesting their feedback also incorporates the participants more fully into the research. Furthermore, asking for permission to use quotes from the interviews (and asking whether they would like their name attributed to the quote or not) is another method. Quotes provided an excellent way of demonstrating a participant's point of view. Consultation with Aboriginal peoples in the community (who are familiar with

corrections, offenders, transformation, etc) about the results of the research was an important step in incorporating community members into the project.

With respect to reciprocity, participants were given the opportunity to review the transcripts of the study. I will also provide copies to the communities that were involved in the research and it is hoped that results of the study will be published in places that members of the community will access (e.g., Aboriginal newspapers, journals). Since the information shared is from the Aboriginal community, it is important that Aboriginal peoples are provided with results of this study.

Admittedly, I have designed this research project from my perspective of the CJS and Aboriginal experiences within that system and I think it is important to acknowledge my biases. I believe that it was my responsibility to ask the community for assistance so that the research would be relevant to the Aboriginal community. To facilitate relevance, I held circles (meetings) with Aboriginal peoples who work in Aboriginal agencies. The goal of the circles was to obtain community members' thoughts and ideas concerning this project. The circles provided me with guidance, support, and excellent feedback concerning this project. They indicated that this is important, relevant research that should be conducted.

As a researcher, it was vital for me to incorporate the 4R's into this study to create validity and to allow community involvement. Consistent with this framework and my teachings, I also believe that it is important for the reader to get a general sense of who I am and my experiences within the Aboriginal community and the CJS in order to gain a better understanding of what is written in this document.

*Researcher's perspective*

I was born in Vancouver and have lived here most of my life. I have grown up in an urban setting within a Western paradigm. However, I was always given the freedom to establish my own values and beliefs, especially from a spiritual perspective. I have been involved in the urban Aboriginal community for a number of years and have relationships with Elders and cultural teachers who have diverse knowledge, teachings, and experiences. I feel honored to have received the teachings that I have. Learning is a life-long journey and I will always be gaining new insights and understandings mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. I am actively involved in the Aboriginal community and participate in ceremonies and gatherings in the community. Being accepted into the Aboriginal community has played a significant role in my personal and professional development. Without the support and guidance of my *spiritual family*, I would not be the person that I am today. The knowledge that I have gained has influenced all aspects of my life, including this dissertation.

Within the community, I am a counsellor for an Aboriginal mental health and addictions service, as well as a community council member for an Aboriginal transformative justice program. In the past, I was a victim support worker for an Aboriginal organization, I was the project coordinator of the Aboriginal Concurrent Disorders Coordination Project, and I have given workshops on mental health issues to different Aboriginal communities.

The Aboriginal mental health and addictions service that I have been involved with for over three years, has provided a strong foundation for working within a helping profession within the Aboriginal community. I am a therapist for this program and I have

had the opportunity of working with Aboriginal peoples from many different communities. This position has allowed me to assist Aboriginal peoples with exploring a variety of concerns, issues, or problems they might be experiencing. I have worked with people who have experienced trauma, lived in residential schools, have been incarcerated, or have mental health concerns (e.g., depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder). I have heard stories of distress and great sadness, but I have also heard stories of strength and courage. Working in this setting is extremely valuable to me because I am gaining knowledge from many different people who are on their healing journeys.

In addition to my work as a therapist, I am a volunteer for a transformative justice program that provides a cultural approach to working with Aboriginal peoples in conflict with the law. It is also known as restorative justice and is an alternative to attending court. An important component of the program is that it involves Aboriginal community members and Elders. Some goals of the program are: to reduce the rate of recidivism among Aboriginal peoples, reduce incarceration rates of Aboriginal peoples, assist reintegration of victims and offenders into community life, and enhance public safety.

The program was designed from a healing perspective and not a retributive perspective, thus clients are assisted in developing healing plans. As a volunteer for this program, I am a community council member. I participate in forums with 2 other community council members, an Elder, the offender, and a program coordinator. We work together in finding a solution to whatever problems the client may be experiencing. I believe that this program is an excellent example of a program that was developed because of training and research initiatives by Aboriginal peoples. The CJS clearly struggles with how it is handling Aboriginal peoples and it is time for change. This

program is attempting to assist with achieving justice for Aboriginal peoples and will hopefully set precedence for other areas of research, such as health research, to follow suit. I am proud to be a community council member for this program and believe that I have learned a great deal from being involved in the program.

I also have experience working with victims of crime. For two years, I was a victim support worker for an Aboriginal organization. In this position, I assisted victims through the court process by performing a range of services including: attending court with victims, providing information about the CJS and court process to victims, liaising with Crown Counsel and other agencies, assisting victims and their families with paperwork, making referrals to other organizations, and, most importantly, being supportive and providing counselling to the victim. I have learned a vast amount from the people that I have worked with and feel honored to have been able to be a part of their lives.

In relation to research, I was the project coordinator for the *Aboriginal Concurrent Disorders Coordination project* (ACDC Project). The ACDC project was a research project intended to gain a better understanding of what types of services are provided to Aboriginal persons with concurrent disorders. An Aboriginal organization and CJS organization worked together on this project in hopes of building working relationships between the CJS and Aboriginal organizations and Aboriginal communities. A project goal was to gain access to Aboriginal treatment centers, programs, or one-to-one counselling for Aboriginal peoples with concurrent disorders, and more specifically those who are in the CJS.

Often the CJS is unaware of Aboriginal mental health issues and Aboriginal organizations and communities are often unaware of the needs of CJS clients. Thus, a project goal was to educate the CJS about Aboriginal issues and to educate Aboriginal organizations and communities about the needs of Aboriginal offenders. In the role of project coordinator, I learned a great deal about conducting research in the community. I gained knowledge about Aboriginal mental health treatment centers, alcohol and drug treatment, mental health treatment, and the necessity to have appropriate programs for Aboriginal peoples with concurrent disorders. Additionally, I learned the importance of reciprocity. Since we gathered information from Aboriginal organizations and people in the community, an important goal of the study was to give back to the community. We provided information to the Aboriginal organizations and communities about the results of the research by developing a written report and CD-rom that was distributed throughout British Columbia.

Within the CJS, I was a mental health screener at a provincial jail for approximately one year. The jail houses male and female offenders for short periods of time. It is often referred to as a remand center because most of the inmates are on remand. Remand means that the person has been charged with an offence, but they have not been convicted and are waiting to attend court. Because of this, there is a high turn over rate of inmates that live in this jail. My position consisted of conducting brief interviews screening for three broad categories: suicide, violence, and mental health concerns. I came into contact with a disproportionate number of Aboriginal peoples, another indication that Aboriginal peoples are over-represented in the CJS. From my experience of working within the Aboriginal community and the experience I have acquired working



within the CJS, I believe that I have gained important knowledge that has and will continue to assist me with furthering my research interests.

I recently completed my Master of Arts degree at UBC. My thesis was titled *Culture, Healing and Spirituality and Their Influence on Treatment Programs for Aboriginal Offenders* (Howell, 2003). Forty Aboriginal men, who were incarcerated at the time of the study, participated in my research. The results of the study supported prior findings indicating that spirituality, culture, and practicing traditions are fundamental components of treatment programs for Aboriginal offenders (Hodgson & Heckbert, 1994; Johnston, 1997; Waldram, 1994). More specifically, of the 40 Aboriginal participants in this sample, 52% indicated that they considered Aboriginal programs effective because of their cultural and spiritual components. Additionally, Aboriginal participants reported that healing contributed to treatment effectiveness for both Aboriginal programs and non-Aboriginal programs. Furthermore, an encouraging discovery was that these participants reported that Aboriginal programs are, in their view, moderately to highly likely to decrease recidivism. As well, of the Aboriginal participants, 92% and 85% reported that they most often solicit assistance and support from Aboriginal peoples when experiencing personal problems or institutional problems, respectively. In addition, 90% of the participants indicated that they consider Aboriginal peoples to be the most supportive people to them. Aboriginal offenders in this study acknowledged that culture, spirituality, healing, Elders and practicing traditions were important components of rehabilitation. The present study followed the path initiated by my Masters, this time interviewing Aboriginal peoples who have been incarcerated, but are living crime free in the community.

Of significance, I view this project from a *restorative* perspective. According to Linda Smith (2004), *restoring* is one of twenty-five Indigenous research projects that inform Indigenous research:

Restoring is a project, which is conceived as a wholistic approach to problem solving. It is wholistic in terms of the emotional, spiritual and physical nexus, and also in terms of the individual and the collective, the political and the cultural.

Restorative programmes are based on a model of healing rather than of punishing (p. 155).

A restorative perspective fits well within this project, as it represents an Indigenous framework. As well, I believe that the CJS should take a restorative, wholistic approach to rehabilitation rather than a punitive approach.

### *Conclusion*

The goal of this study was to gain knowledge concerning what is necessary for Aboriginal offenders to maintain a crime free life when transitioning from prison to the community. The categories obtained from the CIT have allowed for a comprehensive map of reintegration strategies for Aboriginal offenders, as well as, factors that inhibit transformation. Most importantly, the information was from the participants' perspective giving them a voice in the research. Furthermore, it is evident that this research was conducted in a respectful manner; it is relevant to the culture and community of Aboriginal peoples with regard to health and wellness; reciprocity is necessary, as is responsibility to empower the individuals involved. I would like to be able to give back to the community what I have learned. I want to inform the participants that their voices are

important in this research. I hope that my research can make a difference by contributing information to offenders and organizations concerning reintegration strategies for Aboriginal offenders. My hope is that the Correctional Services of Canada, the National Parole Board and people in the community will hear the voices of the participants and will recognize the importance of Aboriginal traditional cultural knowledge and how it can effect and promote wellness for offenders.

Knowing who I am, where I come from, and my beliefs will allow the reader to have a better understanding of this study and the subsequent pages. No study is truly objective, so being fully aware of my perspective will allow the reader to appreciate a fuller picture of this study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### FINDINGS

Don't be afraid of change. There's a drastic change from prison life  
to the outside ... you have to face it bravely.

~Words of wisdom from participant 28

Forty-two Aboriginal men shared their stories by voicing their experiences of transition from living in prison to living crime free in the community. One of those stories was not included in the categorical map that was developed; rather, it stands alone as an Elders story. This section begins with this story, followed by an examination of the categorical map that emerged from the participants' stories. A discussion focusing on the incidents' that were helpful in living successfully in the community is presented, followed by a description of the incidents' that hindered maintaining a crime free life. Lastly, the participants' words of wisdom are shared. This section then shifts focus to discuss the credibility checks that were utilized in this study. Finally, this section concludes with a summary of the findings.

#### *An Elder's story*

During the interviews that I had with research participants, I followed a scripted interview protocol and a similar procedure for each person that I met with. When participants arrived, I invited them to smudge and/or say a prayer. I also offered snacks and beverages. I always began by reading the same question, and only interrupted the flow of the story when I needed clarification. If participants wandered off the topic, I summarized what they had been saying or asked a question that would bring the focus

back to the research question. I *attempted* to follow this process, and for the most part, it was useful. However, during one interview, I sat with an Elder, a spiritual man, whose energy was welcomed into my office. As I sat with this Elder, I could not interrupt the flow of his story; I just listened. I did not ask questions, or bring him back to the research question when I thought he was wandering off topic; I just listened. During the interview I felt he was telling me stories, and I wasn't sure how much of it would be relevant to *my research*. When I typed the transcript of his interview, I realized that I had learned very important lessons- this is not *my research*, and his story *was the knowledge* I was seeking to gather. I read and re-read his story, each time, learning something new. I've been told that when an Elder tells a story, it is important to listen carefully because the meaning behind the story is not always immediately known and that each person will interpret the story and take her or his own teaching from the story. I have interpreted his story in my own way, and I pass this story on to the reader, to interpret the story in your own way. Please note, that I have done some minor editing and have added in titles (**bold letters**) at the beginning of different paragraphs. However, this is the Elder's story as it was told to me- this is his voice, not mine. This story is about the first research question: what helped maintain a crime free life.

### **How it all began...**

When I think about the time I used to drink and do those drugs it's like I was a little baby, just fresh out of the cradle board, trying to experience life. Had nothing but trying to grab at everything. If I had been at home, it probably would've been different. The reason why I started doing those B&E's at home, is that the life I grew up with, my mom drank lots,

my dad was sickly and died when I was 13. He couldn't do anything anymore because one of his lungs was cut out. He must've had asthma. When I look back now, at how he must've suffered, not being able to breathe and he couldn't do anything anymore, virtually nothing. . . . And then my mom, the transition that she was in . . . she never went to school, she didn't know how to read or write.

One of the things that I've seen is that there are some guys that went to reform school from my hometown. They had brand new clothes and at the time, brylcreem was a big thing, eh. They talked different from us, the people up north. It was like they were so smart, they knew so much, they spoke English, eh. It was like attractive, eh. Compared to the way that we lived and they said they had 3 squares a day, like breakfast, there was no such thing as breakfast, you have what you have. . . . This person was saying that they had a TV there, there's TV there and they can watch them all day, watch cartoons all day. I thought oh, man I'd like to see this. They said they went horse back riding, trampolines, all those kinds of things, eh . . . Geez, I wanted to go there, what can I do to go there?

I wanted to go there so bad. So they said that you got to break in somewhere. So where do you break in . . . eventually about the third time, [the police] said we have to do something about you guys . . . They sent us. And then I got there and the people were different. They were so different from the way we lived. But it was nice because it was the first time in my life that I ever slept in a bed with sheets and I had my own pyjamas. I couldn't believe it. And uh, they used to give us 6 cigarettes a day, and I couldn't believe

that. All the food that we had and they took us all over. Man, I never wanted to leave; I thought I was in heaven.

### **The cycle...**

So that's how it all started. I got into that cycle. One of the things that they said there when I was in reform school, there was more than one that talked about how you have to survive. He said "anybody that carries a lunch box is a loser". You gotta use your mind. That kinda stuck with me. I was a green kid from the bush and didn't know anything. These guys, the way they talked was like they were the most intelligent people in the world. What a journey. But now when I look back at it, man, was I ever dumb and green.

### **Alcohol and drug use and the experience of anxiety...**

The direction of my life changed because I was focused on the working, working environment, working culture. It was a different way of looking at life, altogether. [Different from] that way I had been used too, like living on skid row. Which is from the moment you wake up you are searching for the next drink or next fix. And of course being into bars and getting involved with uh, other people that are in that frame of mind and getting away from them people in that frame of mind allowed me to be able to see that there's another way of life, different way of living.

One of the things that happened to me that contributed a lot to getting away from drugs and alcohol is that my nerves got shot. Because of all the drugs that I took and the alcohol that I took, I started having anxiety, a lot of anxiety, especially when I had hangovers. It

was really, really severe, so I drank to get rid of that anxiety. I didn't know there was such a thing as having a family doctor and stuff like that, I had no idea, so I was my own doctor using those drugs and alcohol to get away from that. It seemed like the more drugs I took the worse I got so I took more to try and get over it but it got worse and worse and worse. Finally even in my times when I was sober it still affected me a lot so I wanted to get away from it, so I moved back home. So eventually, I stayed, I quit drinking for 2 years and started trapping, fishing, just living off the land.

### **Going home and being given a break...**

It worked pretty well and then I did have some charges that uh, were historical that I had run away from in Vancouver so when I eventually wanted to deal with it, I had to plead guilty to bring them to Saskatchewan because I didn't want to come back to Vancouver because I knew that if I did then I'd be doing federal time once again. So I got to Isle a La Cross and I talked to the RCMP so we got the charges waived over there. There was a judge there named EZ Anderson, everybody called him Easy Anderson because he was pretty good and he would give breaks to people. . . .

So I was standing outside the courthouse. . . And uh, this guy came and talked to me and he was asking me about the lake and who I was and how the fishing was and what kind of fish we caught. We were having a really good conversation for quite some time. I guess it was time to convene court and he said "by the way are you coming up in front of me today?" I didn't know he was a judge. I said maybe, I don't know. It really shocked me; I didn't know what to say. His name was King, Judge King and everybody was scared of him because he was just a hard nosed kind of a guy. "I don't think so, I've got some other



charges that are still outstanding that haven't come in yet". He said "what kind of charges are those, what were you coming in front of me for". I said "ones a robbery that's here, the other charges are common assault". He said "that's nothing; you should come in front of me". But uh, he said "judging from what I've heard from you young man, you've never had a break in your life. We're talking probation here, a suspended sentence". I didn't believe him, I thought, I still didn't have a lot of trust of people especially him. He's a judge he's on that side and I'm on this side.

I was thinking what you want to do is get me in front of you to plead guilty and then you are going to give it to me, that's what I was thinking in my mind. He said, "You got a lawyer?" I said "yes I do". He said, "go talk to him and I'll go talk to the prosecutor". I went and talked to my lawyer and he said "Geez", and that scared me further. I said "I think we better postpone it", and he said "yeah, we might have too. Let me talk to the prosecutor". The prosecutor, judge and my lawyer talked and he came back and said "I think it's going okay go ahead and plead guilty, but it's up to you, you know about judge King. But they've assured me that they were gonna give you a break". Boy was I ever scared when I went up there. I went in front of him and I knew I was going to plead guilty, my legs were just shaking. I went up in front of him and he read the charge and I said guilty. That's it right- THE POINT OF NO RETURN. He said "2 year suspended sentence. Plus, you're gonna have to stay away from alcohol and go to a treatment center". I said, "Yeah, I'll do that".

**Treatment center...but he was not ready for treatment...**

So I went to a treatment center but I wasn't ready ... I didn't have faith in a treatment center. I really didn't get a lot from that treatment center because I wasn't participating, I was kinda coerced. ... Again, this nervous, anxiety started to come again and I ended up in the hospital because of alcohol poisoning and uh, I thought well this has got to stop.

**Began to attend ceremony... the seed was planted... talked to a medicine person...**

So I said okay, I'm going to quit, that's it. I was going to sweats. There was a guy there, his name was Bobby Woods, I was in prison with that guy in a federal institution but then he had changed his life and he was doing sweats and stuff like that. So I used to go to sweats with him. Then I quit. I don't know why I quit. I never went back and uhm, but anyway there was a medicine person that came to town in Isle a La Cross from the states. And I told I wanted to talk to him and I said "I want to talk to you and I want to see you. This is what I want, I want to quit drinking and in my life there have been so many women and there has been abuse on both sides. I want quit all of that, I just want one woman that I live with, I want to treat her right and I want to do the right thing". I said "if you can help me do that, I would really appreciate it". He said "okay" and he smudged me, him and his wife and he gave me something to chew on. I don't know what it was. But I left and was okay now, in my mind I was committed and I knew I didn't want to do that again. And it worked out really well. It worked out for a long, long time.

**Being around others that drank... the role of bad influences...**

In 1985, 1984, I think 84, the woman and I, it wasn't working out, we were having all kinds of problems. My way of dealing with stuff, I used to run away and dump everything

and get away from there. And that's what I did. I went to Saskatoon. I took a course, Native Studies Instructors program. One of the problems I had was that the people that were teaching us were non-Aboriginal. I was having a really, really difficult time. I couldn't believe that someone who is non-Aboriginal could be telling me something about me: "who the hell are you?" But I made it through because the counsellor that we had was Aboriginal and really helped me a lot. I made it through there but during that process I lived with 4 girls that lived in an apartment. I stayed with them, eh. I was going out with one of them. They were drinking girls. And I used to go sit in the bar and I'd drink coffee and I'd drink coke. And they'd say "gee you're strong, really strong". I'd puff up my chest you know, sitting in the bar not drinking, just drinking coffee. But it wore me down, eventually, I felt I was not a part of them, I was still apart from them.

### **Began to drink again...**

This one day I said "to hell with it". We went into a liquor store and they bought all their drinks, their whiskey and whatever they drank, eh and I grabbed a big gallon of wine and they said, hey we don't want that shit. I said that's not for you, it's for me. They said, well you don't drink, I said its all right, it's going to be for me. They said no you don't, put it back, put it back they said. But I bought it and when we got in the car and I opened it up and I took a drink and when I took a drink they all cheered like they were welcoming me back. So I drank for about 6 months and I really, really drank lots. But then, I uh, I my girlfriend at that time was in another town from Isle a La Cross, about 30 miles away taking a course, so I wanted to go and see her and I was drunk, driving drunk. And I took off and I must've fallen asleep in the car and I woke up and I was bouncing around and I

woke up and here I was in the ditch, driving in the ditch, so I pulled over on top of the road and I'm still drunk and I'm going hahaha, because I thought it was a big joke. But when I got there, here she'd been out with somebody else, seeing this guy. When I found this out, I slept in the car. The next day I said okay "it's finished, I'm going home and I'm going to quit drinking, I'm going to quit everything". So I went home and I did, I quit drinking.

### **Bad experience with alcohol and a relationship which lead him back to ceremony...**

As I drove back home, I watched where I had drove in the ditch. There was these big power poles and I missed 3 of them, just missed 3 of them. That really said something to me. So I quit drinking, I quit smoking dope, I quit everything. And that's when everything started. And uh, a couple days later, she sent this guy over on a motorcycle. The guy came about 3 times to come get me because she wanted me. I said, "No, it's finished". I said, "The next time you come back, I'm going to kick the shit out of you", I told that guy on the motorcycle. So he never came back. But that lady came. She came and started coming. I was living with my mom, she had a little shack and I heard a crash. I went outside here and my windshield had been smashed. She smashed my windshield eh, because I didn't want her. But she took off eh, I don't know where she went and I didn't chase her. But that was when everything started and then I started going to ceremonies.

### **The experience of ceremony...**

The first Yuwipi ceremony I ever went to was in Hobemma. A group of people were

there. I'd never been to a yuwipi before and so we went to a sweat first. And when we went to that sweat a rattle took off and was going all over the place and wings were going all over and I thought Jesus what's going on. And then this old lady came in and started talking. She used such old Cree it was hard to understand. She had a really, really cracked voice. And she was telling us how happy she was that we came from such a long way and that she had been waiting for us. And told this guy that you must have a ceremony tonight; this was during the day that we had the ceremony, that sweat.

And it was incredible; it was like an opening for me. It was like the clouds parted, and I could see. I thought if everybody knew about this, if everybody came in here, we'd have no alcohol problems, we'd have no drug problems. Everybody would be able to get along. This was the thing that hit me so hard when I went to that sweat and the grandfathers came and the first time I ever heard them. And when we went to the ceremony, they came, again the grandfathers came in and the grandmothers and they talked to us. It was incredible. I never experienced anything like that, the presence of the grandfathers and their voices, it was incredible.

And there's what they call the opposite man or some people call them Heyokas, backwards people. And this guy told us about him, he's gigantic, he's loud and but he said that he will never hurt you, he's very gentle. But when you ask him something you have to ask him backwards, like you don't want it. So we're all sitting around like this in a basement and the altar was in the middle. And a lot of these people we went with had never experienced anything like that. One of them was sitting here beside me a younger

guy and this guy come in and when he came in he came in strong and the house just shook when he came in. He came around here and I could hear him. I could hear these people as they were coming around and he was beside me. Couldn't see him, and I don't know what he was doing to that young guy, but that young guy was going 'oh, oh' like that eh and I thought holy Jesus, what's going on here, I'm next. And then I felt him come and he was looking at me kinda like this, I could feel him. I couldn't see him, but I could feel it. And I told him 'look I don't want you just keep going, I don't need you, you don't have to help me' but that's calling him right. And then he grabbed my head like this and he just shook it and he left. But I felt his fingers and his thumbs, just like holding a little orange. And there was wood. Right up to here I could sense his arm and it was like wood, solid like wood. I thought wow, that's incredible.

That was the first and then from there I was converted- a whole new way of looking at things. And from there I really, really went into that spirituality. And that's what's helped me all these years, is walking in that way. It's changed the lens that I see the world through. And finding out more about my language, the Cree language, and looking at it and doing research on it. It was just incredible. And the medicine wheel, what they call the medicine wheel concept-very powerful visions that I have had in sundances and sweats, even in dreams that I've had. The things that have happened to me and how it relates back to my childhood.

### **Story from childhood linked to culture and ceremony...**

The first time, when I was 13 years old, a tree saved my life, what they call a trembling

aspen, you know what that is? It's white poplar. They've got tiny little leaves and they dance in the wind like that. Just like trickling water. There were 4 of us in Isle a La Cross; we were about 12-13 years old. The lake just froze and people were skating along the shore. It must have been frozen about 5 nights in the shore but the lake had just frozen over, maybe 2 nights. Very thin and it was just like glass, just beautiful, not a scratch on it. I was just admiring it. There's an island close to the other side of the lake, Big Island they call it. We decided to go over there and people were telling us don't go, it's not safe, the ice is not thick enough. Of course, as kids we didn't listen, we took off. When we got close to the middle there was a big crack on the ice and we had to go over it and we stepped over it and I was first and the others followed me and then we went and skated over by the island until the sun started getting low. Then we thought we better get back home and we got close to the crack and they said "how are we going to get across?" and I said "the same way we came across, we'll step over it", except for me. I was the last one this time. I said, "I'm gonna jump over that crack", so I skated back and got a lot of speed and I jumped over it, when I got over to the other side I hit the ice and I went right straight through. And I looked up and it was just pitch black all over, I couldn't see nothing because the ice, eh. But I could see a little bit of ice I guess that is where I fell through.

So I started swimming for that light. And the water pressure pushed me right out. The pressure from that hole, but then I dropped down again. In the fall time, the ice doesn't break right away it's like a car windshield, like it's got some kinda plastic in it. So when I tried to get on top, I would start to slide down. So one of these guys said he'd try to help

me and he jumped in beside me and he was in trouble too. So the other small guy comes near and pulled him out and away they went. So that left one guy, the biggest guy in our group was the only one left. He tried to come close but he couldn't the ice would crack when he'd come close, so he would jump back. All this time I am trying to stay on top and my clothes are just soaked and getting heavy and I'm getting tired. So he said, I'll get the cops and took off. It's a long ways to town. I could see him going so I'm just screaming at him come back, come back- Astum, in Cree.

And I seen him stop and he looked. Astum, Astum. And finally he started coming and during this time I was just starting to sink. That was it, eh. I thought well I'm going to drown, I'm finished and in my mind it was there already. And what came to my mind, a picture in my mind came of these trembling aspens, this tree, these leaves blowing in the wind. And I thought I'll never see that again and a big lump came in my throat and my heart got really, really sore and tears started coming down my eyes because I'll never see that again. I didn't think of my mom, I didn't think of anybody else. It was a tree that I thought of. And I thought, well you know, I've got to try once more. So I kicked and I went like this and there was a hole there where there was none before and I hung onto that hole in the ice till that guy came. Then I told him to throw me his coat and I said "come closer, come closer". Finally I could grab it and he pulled me out. And I was about 13 and I had no idea what that meant.

Till I was about 38, I think, 38 years old. I was with this medicine woman in northern Alberta. I gave her tobacco and said I want to tell you a story about something that



happened to me in my childhood and I told her that. And she prayed with it and she said “Moka mowachth tik, moka mowachth tik, that’s the center pole of the Sundance lodge in Cree. That’s what it’s made of; it’s made of the trembling aspen.” She said “he saved your life, some day you’re gonna have to go back and pay him, pay him back.” So that year, I went to a Sundance and I just helped around. The next year I started dancing.

And it wasn’t until about probably 8 years later that I brought prints and tobacco to pay back for that life. That was in Bonnyville, Alberta. And I told this guy that I knew and said I need to talk to an old man. He said, “I know just the guy” when I told him what I wanted, he said “come on”. The tree stands like this on the ground; they have it on a tripod before they raise it. And that’s the way it was sitting there with all the ropes and he come and talk to this old man, and that old man said come and stand here beside me. I gave him a beautiful blanket. And the flag that they tied on that tree it happened to be the longest one there. I didn’t plan for it; it just worked out, beautiful dark blue cloth.

When they said okay and they raised that tree, all these old men, Elders here started crying and water works just came, I just started crying too, it just happened. I don’t know why and then after it stood up, tears shut down, crying shut down, everyone just cheered eh. So this lady that I was with at the time was pregnant and uh, I guess these Elder ladies told her, come up to her and said you’re gonna have the baby tonight, that was on the last night of the Sundance. She said “no, the doctor said 2 more weeks”, they said “no, tonight”. She said “no- 2 more weeks”. She didn’t want to believe them. They went away, they were laughing. Sure enough, about 4 o’clock in the morning I was in the Sundance

lodge, sleeping and they said you gotta take your wife to the hospital. I was still out of it. So I jumped in the car and took off, eh and I forgot her. So they were hollering for me to stop and I came back. So when I got her in, I got lost on the reserve, but how do you do that. I was still not here. We finally made it to the Bonnyville hospital and we knocked on the door. It took a long time. Finally 2 nurses came and then they stopped, they were telling stories to each other and I was pounding and pounding. Finally they came and said “what do you want?” I said “well she’s pregnant; she’s going to have a baby”. They said, “We don’t have a doctor here”. I said “well geez, give her a room, put her in a room somewhere”, so they did, they put us in a room and said “we will see if we can find a doctor” and took off.

So in the meantime, the baby’s coming and I’m looking for a towel or basin or something, I didn’t know what to do. And the baby just came, had a little girl. So I named her for the reserve and her second name was because it was in July, summertime. So then I fell asleep in a big Lazy Boy in the hospital and that is where I was going to stay. She woke me up and said, “are you going to go back?” I said “no, I will stay here with you, I’ll watch you”. She said, “I’m all right, you go back, our son is over there”. I said, “oh yeah”. I went back.

And the Sundance, they were already dancing when I got there. And uh, I opened the zipper in the tent and my son was sleeping there so I crawled in with him. And I was just falling asleep and somebody shook my leg. It was one of those Elders. He said “are you going to go and finish?” I said, “no I’m gonna stay with my son”. I didn’t want to go, eh.

He said, “you never mind that, I got a lot of daughters here, granddaughters, they’ll take care of him, you go back and finish”. I was kinda shaking my head; I didn’t want to go, eh. So I got in there, in my stall. They were already dancing so I finished that dance and they were down there and I was smudging and I heard him coming. It was about 9 o’clock in the morning. He said, “Tom, stand up”. I stood up. He announced to everyone that uh, we had a beautiful baby girl that was born, healthy, so all the whistles and their drums started going, everyone started cheering, eh. Then he broke into a song, and when he did, the lodge started to spin, to spin around like this and faster and faster and faster and I was lifting up eh, spinning.

And all I could see was those flags, prints, the long lines of colors, like the rainbow. I was spinning around so fast and I flew somewhere and I came to this place where there’s beautiful green grass all over and little paths all over and people were walking and talking, very, very gentle voices. They were laughing. I was there all day; I didn’t even know I was in the Sundance. I was in the Sundance all day; I was at that place, wherever that was. But I could hear- I could hear the singing, I could hear the drumming, I could hear the whistles, I could hear people talking, but I wasn’t there. I wasn’t tired, I wasn’t nothing. And then they announced that they were going to have one more song and then shut it down. In my mind, I was thinking, no, no, don’t stop it. And they said, “yeah we’re gonna have one more song and the Sundance will be over”. I was thinking I wonder if there is another Sundance that I can go to. Then they brought me back. So that to me now, my understanding of that, is that I acknowledged the tree and that tree acknowledged me back again through the life of my daughter. Those kinds of experiences tell me that there

is a lot more to life than what we see here, than what we live. And that's only one experience. I've been there before.

Since, I should say. I've been to that site. There's other times that have been very, very difficult for me. Again that anxiety came and I stayed away from the sweat for maybe about 3 years. I wouldn't go near a sweat. I'd go to medicine people and give them tobacco and offerings and say this is my problem, and I'd like help. As soon as they'd say go to a sweat house, I'd be gone. In that way it was difficult but it was all part of what's unfolding for me. I didn't understand it at the time; I understand it now a lot better. And that's where I'm at in terms of my development and in terms of ceremonies and stuff like that.

### **Ceremony changed his life...**

*I'm at a totally different level of seeing things now. I am in a place where very few people are. So those are some of the things that helped me stay out. Having a sense of identity of who I am, what life was about and having a circle of people who followed the same way. That sense of belonging. That's what it was. All of those things were missing for me when I was a child.*

Each time I read this story, I can see Tom sitting in front of me, telling me this story. I can see the excitement when he speaks of ceremony; I can see the sadness when he speaks of alcohol and drug use and unhealthy relationships; I can see his genuine attempt to help me-some young woman who is just learning her way. I find it very

powerful and I am grateful: grateful that he took his time to teach me; grateful that he didn't answer my research question in a *cookie cutter* manner; grateful that I had to *LISTEN*. Each of the participants has contributed a considerable amount of their knowledge and wisdom to this research; however, Tom's story is the foundation upon which the rest of the data lies. Almost every major theme that was discovered in the data can be found in Tom's story. When reading the subsequent findings, please keep Tom's story in mind.

### *Categorical map findings*

The aim of this study was to determine what factors facilitate and what obstacles hinder maintaining a crime free life for Aboriginal offenders' during their transition from prison to the community. Subsequently, from the experiences of the Aboriginal men who shared their stories with the researcher, a categorical map describing these factors was developed. Following is a description of this categorical map broken down into two major categories: helpful incidents and hindering incidents. Additionally, participants were asked to share their words of wisdom in relation to what they would say to men leaving prison. The categorical map resulting from the participants' stories is captured well through a presentation of quotes from the participants.

### *Helpful incidents*

The research question that captured the helpful incidents was: During your transition from being incarcerated to living in the community, what helped you maintain a crime free lifestyle? From this interview question, 341 incidents were coded and

collapsed into nine major categories: 1) transformation of self; 2) cultural and traditional experiences; 3) healthy relationships; 4) having routine and structure in daily living; 5) freedom from prison; 6) purpose and fulfillment in life; 7) attempting to live alcohol and drug free; 8) professional support and programming; and 9) learning to identify and express oneself. In each major theme, the number of incidents, a description of the sub-themes and the participation rate is presented. Additionally, examples of the incidents will be provided from the transcripts. The categories are presented in order of number of incidents; however, this does not necessarily represent level of importance. In addition, each category begins with a quote that captures the essence of the category. These quotes are from the participants and reflect their words of wisdom. In order to contribute to respecting research participants and their voices, on the consent form, they were asked whether or not they would like their name attributed to quotes. This allows for the participant to choose anonymity or for his quotes to be attributed to his voice. Of the 42 participants, 17 did not want their names attributed to the quotes, while 25 participants did want to be acknowledged for their quotes. Therefore, when reading the transcript examples, R stands for researcher (author) and P stands for participant. When P was utilized, his participant number was also included. When a participant requested his name to be attributed to the quote, his name is inserted in the place of P. The quotes are direct quotes from the participants, using their words.

*1) Transformation of self (63 incidents)*

Life is precious and it's what you make it. Nobody can make your life but you.  
~Words of wisdom from Ralph

This category embodies an underlying transformation of oneself. The participation rate was quite substantial, with 29 of the 42 participants (69%) represented in this category. There were a number of factors that contributed to the creation of this category: identity transformation, self-learning, self-esteem, self-awareness, self-reflection, making decisions, being aware of choices and options, maturity, growth, accepting and making amends with self, positive thinking, and change (behaviour, patterns, attitudes, and thoughts).

Participants acknowledged the significance of the process of change, through awareness and conscious decision making to change thoughts, feelings, behaviours, patterns and/or attitudes. For this process to occur, learning about oneself, increasing self-esteem, having self-awareness (e.g., aware of feelings) and being aware of consequences of actions are just a few steps in this process. Additionally, maturity and age were mentioned as contributing to change. Identity was referred to as a vital component of transformation, by acknowledging and owning a cultural identity with pride. Values like honesty, integrity, and humility were also referred to as important in growth, acceptance, and the process of change. For the reader to grasp the depth of this category, examples of these incidents are presented next.

**Art:** As far as incarceration, I know this conversation is about incarceration, I had to get rid of that jailhouse attitude. I went to this place called the Last Door about me getting rid of my jailhouse attitude within the house. It's a thought process. You do the time. It took you all your life to get where you are and it will take a long time to get to the place where you want to be.

**Art:** I had to change my thoughts, take a look at myself. There was a lot of things,

things to do with patterns, things that you do to go out and get money, to obtain money illegally. I had to change all of that. I had to change things, if I didn't like what I had to do, I had to change it.

**P39:** ... because for my alcoholism and my drug addiction and stuff, when you are living that kind of lifestyle and stuff, changing your thinking, so if you have the desire to change and you know what you are doing is wrong. If you change your thinking and stuff like that, you just change who you are as a person, you change your character.

**Barry:** Anyhow the anger, the anger, the rage and everything mixed together, you know. That's what caused it. How to deal with things, eh, I never knew how to deal with things. The only thing I knew how to deal with things was uh, drinking and doing dope. If I wanted to feel better, I didn't talk about how I felt, I just injected something and felt better, you know, or smoked a joint or whatever ... And again, when I practice the culture. Culture, you know. To me, a real Indian, real Indians don't drink. You know, our people never, our ancestors weren't drunks. They were real Indians. Today we are just synthetic, we're not real, you know. So, uh, the culture doesn't promote alcohol. It's really against it, you know. When you do drugs and alcohol, you are stepping on your culture. Anyhow, we are not synthetic, but you know what I mean. You also got to remember that, like I uh, there was one time in my life I started asking questions: Why do I use? Why do I need something to make me feel better? Why can't I feel better on my own? I started asking questions like this, eh. And uh, I used because of how I felt, you know. I was pretty angry and uh, really hurt, you know by what happened to me.



And uh, so I connected that when I drink, there were consequences to my use.

Usually it came out in crime.

**P38:** Looking within. I think that is the basis, the uh, foundation of someone's successes, being able to look within. I did a lot of work with a Native Elder. He helped me to have an understanding of your own people, your language, your culture. Uhm, things I didn't grow up with. I had to go looking for them. Just by sheer fluke, the person who was the Elder was also Ojibway. So he was able to give me a lot of answers that I didn't have. I had all these questions and I didn't have any answers. He really helped put things in perspective and uh, but it came down to me just making that choice. I don't need this, I don't want this, this is not me. I guess having the humility to look at you, know, why, how I got there in the first place. What I was doing, how I was living, who were the people I was hanging around with, how was I living my life and, making the choices, making the changes, uh, to take my life in another direction. I wasn't uh, uh, it all has to do with working on yourself too. Your self-esteem, uh, it has to come down to, how much, what is your freedom worth? I saw a lot, and I can say that I never want to go there again. That was enough, and uhm, you just, uhm, soldier through it, I guess, and, uh, you have things resolved and uh, when that day does come, you have planned everything out and you know exactly what changes you are making. Follow a path that is different.

**Daniel:** This time being different and looking at character change, deep character change and healing and acknowledging who I am and not just distorted. Learn from Elders about who they think we are and who they know they are. Listen to

the stories; I've heard some amazing stories. Uhm... that I did not even imagine like burning of the canoe like the guy who goes out, I forget exactly how it goes, but you go off to another place. It's about courage and a whole bunch of stuff, but you burn your canoe and you're basically, you've burnt that road of drugs or harm that you've caused or you know has been caused to you. You just kinda look at the new you.

**John:** Self-awareness, acceptance, acceptance, just accepting who I am today. I'm ok with that. It's alright that I'm a Native. I'm proud I'm Native, actually.

**R:** How has that helped you?

**John:** Not having to carry the guilt and shame around, that I am less of a person than anybody else cuz I'm not. I'm not less than or better. I am John, that's it. I look at the world through my eyes now.

**Tom:** So those are some of the things that helped me stay out. Having a sense of identity of who I am, what life was about and having a circle of people who followed the same way. That sense of belonging. That's what it was. All of those things were missing for me when I was a child.

**Barry:** For me it's all about wanting to, uh, looking for who I am in here (points to heart). My past really messed me up, eh. It really messed me up. But, uh, also too, I am learning things. It seems like this time around I am looking at myself more, you know. I am learning to be more open minded. I don't know why, maybe it is because I am a little older, you know.

**Charles:** As I said, at this stage in my life, I'm learning to grow inside, learning the spiritual elements of being a good person, a good person, a good law abiding

person. When I was out in the community, when I would go to my home community, I used to go out of the community and into the bush and help my daddy and my other brothers to trap and fish. Those things took me away from the bad influences that got me in trouble. I learned that you could uh, be a bad person and you could learn off it. You learn the stigma from all these bad behaviours and turn it into positive behaviour.

**P27:** Yeah, well basically, keep my inner self, uh, in good mental health, like my mind and my spirits and that. If I can always think positive and a lot of the stuff I am doing right now is pertained to the First Nations. First Nations people are good people. I've got to keep that trend going as to how we're doing positive things, for mother earth, for other people.

**Gord:** I realize that it's my choice. If I want to stay out of jail, I can.

**P28:** Uhh, well there was a little bit of everything as I went through life and umm you know, AA meetings and listening to speakers. I used to go to AA a lot eh so listening to other people who have gone through hell and then back has also helped me, hearing other stories ... it was helpful in that it clarified that I make my choices and umm it's the choices that I make that either good or you know I realize that it's very clear to make either good choice or bad choice. It's very clear today with the choices I make. Whereas before, I was carefree now I care about being free. Hah. So it's an accumulation, it just wasn't some moment that hit me, the moment of clarity.

**P21:** Well I feel that I have grown in my spiritual way. In other words, I've grown up instead of going out and doing crime. I'm actually grown up enough to go out

and stop and help people stop doing crime too.

**P38:** So that's growth. And that's uh, what kinda drives me today. I want not only my son to have a father he can be proud of, but I want to be able to look in the mirror and say I turned it around and have done something positive in my life. And, uh, that it's uh, it was a learning experience. It was an expensive learning experience, but it is one that, uh an Elder once said that our lives are preordained. That, uh, everyone is on this journey, they don't know what it is, but everything happens for a reason and it's kind of just sitting back and saying, why did that just happen? There won't be a lot of people to sit back or to think about what, or why things are happening the way they are happening and why they are. The one thing that I can say, the one benefit that I got was that I had enough time on my hands to think about why I did this, why am I here, what can I do so it doesn't happening again. And in doing that maybe I can use that and hand it on to someone else and say, hey it worked for me. It's not glorifying, it's just acknowledging it for what it is.

## *2) Cultural and traditional experiences (57 incidents)*

The culture is who I am ... Follow who you are  
in a true sense, in a cultural way.

~Words of wisdom from Barry

Cultural and traditional experiences was a significant category that emerged, with over half (60%) of the participants acknowledging incidents in this category. As the researcher has experience with traditional and cultural activities, these incidents were easily coded; more notably though, participants' accounts of cultural and traditional

experiences were often presented in a very succinct and descriptive manner. Factors that are represented in this category included: attending Aboriginal gatherings, relationships with Elders, participating in traditional ceremonies (e.g., sweatlodge, yuwipi), cultural values and beliefs, living a spiritual life, feeling connected to the Creator, and acknowledging the importance of cultural practices. Cultural and traditional experiences were often the foundation of the transformation that was spoken about in the above category. Participants learned to embrace their culture, their traditions, and their teachings, which have permitted growth, transformation, and identity formation. Accepting a cultural identity and being proud to be Aboriginal was emphasized. Examples of these incidents are captured in the following quotes.

**Art:** I brought myself into the sweatlodge to talk about this stuff quite a bit, and I practiced my spirituality quite a bit. I went back to the thought processes, the lost child, the inner child. I went and did vision quests, and I went to sweatlodges, spirit winter sweats, buffalo sweats, yuwipis, and sundances.

**Don:** My smudging, my smudge, my prayers. Every two weeks, I buy some broad cloth and tobacco and I go to the bush and I take tobacco and broad cloth and I hang it and give thanks to the Creator for, just for helping me be out here, helping me be strong, and walking in a good direction. I think that without that, I'd probably be back inside. It's just that, it's a feeling that, it's something, I don't know. I get away. My spirit, my spirit wanders, but it comes back clean. It comes back feeling good. It doesn't come with negativity, you know.

**P9:** [Spirituality] for me, it gives me something to believe in. It gives me something to believe in, yeah. If I didn't believe in spirituality, I don't know what

I would be doing. I believe in the Creator... Just gotta keep the spiritual side alive. That's one thing. Getting out [of prison], you've gotta have that spirituality on your side. You can't do it on your own.

**Tom:** I thought wow, that's incredible [referring to a ceremony]. That was the first and then from there I was converted- a whole new way of looking at things. And from there I really, really went into that spirituality. And that's what's helped me all these years, is walking in that way. It's changed the lens that I see the world through.

**Barry:** You know, everything is about the culture, because, to me my culture is who I am. That is my identity, you know. And uh, there is a thing I heard a long time ago-people who are addicted have a lack of identity. And that is true, in my case anyways, you know. Because sticking needles in my arms, and drinking, smoking dope, you know, and popping pills is not who I am, you know. My people never did that. My people lived off the land and uh, they were healthy and they loved each other. And uh, that is who I am, you know. I did drugs because I was angry and I didn't want to uh face my problems, you know. So, the culture opened me up to who I am and I really like that, eh. It's great. It's great when you are out there dancing with your Elders and little kids. Man, it is beautiful stuff. Healing, very healing, you know. All our ceremonies, when you are dancing, singing or taking part in sweats, it's all commemorating yourself here today. So, it's good, it's good stuff.

**Brian:** Uhm, getting involved in the Aboriginal spiritual guidance kind of thing from Elders. That was the biggest opportunity to help me. It gave me strength. I

was no believer in the Creator and stuff like this. I've been involved with the Aboriginal Front Door, I've been going for the last year and a half. I've been doing once a week healing programs for two hours and then I'm involved in a Native Elders program there for over a year and that was a big influence on me. It's the Elders that give me guidance, like, it gives me hope.

**Glenn:** Meeting Robert was probably the turning point in my life. That was the moment of acceptance because he taught me about the medicine wheel, that we all belong. There is no red, white, yellow, black and he just explained what it was all about, that we all belong there. That we are all children under the same Creator, call him whatever you want-Buddha, God. Uhm, so he honors all nations. It made it easier for me to accept that I am half white and half Native. But what do I identify with the most. I always wanted to be Native but I was never accepted as being Native, because I didn't look Native. But uhm, now that is how my heart feels, so as long as I feel that way, that's ok. It doesn't matter if other people accept me.

**Don:** Elders always telling me, before you leave, smudge; take your spirit with you. And that's what I do everyday, everyday that I leave my house. But I always give thanks, eh. Like I said for the littlest things that I did, for the littlest things that I get, you know. I give thanks for the Elders that I meet. If it wasn't for the Elders, I wouldn't' be walking out here, I'd be back in jail.

**P38:** It was more, uhm, me embracing a new way of life. I was introduced to smudging, to sweats, to the four directions, the Medicine Wheel, the things I didn't grow up with. And uhm, I was really, really, uh, because it was so new to

me, I was really taking it ... I don't think it was any one thing that, uh, it was part him and part me. It was, uh, he treated me, I guess almost like a child. Because he said that "you are like a new born baby, you are coming into this new world and you don't know anything, and you are relying on everyone, around you, who does know about it, to teach you these things" and that is how the whole feeling of humility and I just sit here and sit there and listen to what he is saying. Unlike anything, it was just very calming. I don't know how to describe it, like talking to your grandfather or something. You know what I mean, like, uhm, just a different way of looking at things; it gave me the opportunity to see things from another, from a way that I had been seeing them, to something more spatial. It did something. I can't put my finger on it, what it is.

**Glenn:** By going to the sweats, I know that I have to be clean. I was going there when I was on the methadone program but I was totally honest with my Elders. I told them that I was on the methadone program but a big part of me was dead spiritually. I mean I would go to the sweats but I couldn't feel nothing. I was like totally numb. Until I got off the methadone, I never had a spiritual connection again. So going to the sweats, they kept me going even though I wasn't feeling it. But I knew that when the time was right, I would let go of the methadone. When I quit using methadone and got off all the other medications, I was spiritually awoken again. I can connect with the sweats now. I can feel when I go there and when I leave, it's like I am alive again ... The overwhelming feeling that I get when I go to the sweat or when I hook in with Elders and they recognize the walk that I am doing today. If I use, I commit crimes and I lose that connection with my



Elders again ... Knowing that I am walking in a good way that helps me stay crime free, cuz, uh, it's good to be alive.

### *3) Healthy relationships (48 incidents)*

If you run with the wolves, you're a wolf-  
stick with the winners, you'll be a winner.

~Words of wisdom from John

Sustaining healthy relationships was acknowledged as a vital component of maintaining a crime free life during the transition from prison to the community. Thirty-three of the 42 participants spoke about healthy relationships, representing a 78.6% participation rate. The healthy relationship category included being around people who were supportive, loving, and caring (including friends and family), people who are not using alcohol or drugs, people who are not living a criminal lifestyle, and people who create a positive influence. In addition, because of a fear of losing important relationships, participants' referred to their personal responsibility in being able to maintain healthy relationships by abstaining from criminal behaviours. Similarly, participants acknowledged the importance of being available and present for others in their lives, as well as being a good role model for their children. Feeling a connection to others and the community, as well as having a sense of belonging, also emerged in this category. Examples of the participants' descriptions of sustaining healthy relationships are presented next.

**Harry:** Family ... They never give up on me. Uh, no matter how bad, even when I was doing drugs, they came. They kept bringing me stuff and telling me they love me.

**Glenn:** I would have to say the support of my family. Well, I mean it doesn't matter how bad I messed up and stuff like that, they were always there, especially my wife ... I have been with her since I have been out of jail, the day after I got out. I have known her for about 30 years now ... She has remained clean and we got kids together and stuff like that. So every time I messed up ... She was there for me ... There was no judgment and no blame.

**Gord:** Family ... making that connection again. I had uh, a falling out with my family because of my drug problem because of my, most of my family are alcohol and drug free. I chose this path that I was on-destructive path. I chose to use drugs, I chose to push them away, uhm, and they did not want to have any part of me and uh, as long as I was on that path, they gave me a choice-if you use drugs, we don't want to be there. They tried so many times to help me and I chose to push them away, I chose to steal from them. And it helped me by the confrontations; they would confront me and say if you are going to be here, you are not going to use drugs, you are not going to drink. So just knowing that I've got my family back is important. And I don't want to lose that again.

**Daniel:** I feel part of community. I feel part of the world and I really feel a connection. That's one of the biggest part of the whole thing that we've been talking about in NA, just being around people, it's about feeling connected. I have to feel like I am part of society. If I feel like I am not part of society, then I am going to rebel against it. And I'm basically going to tell everyone to just beat it because I just couldn't care about anyone. So it's really important for me to feel like a part of the community or I rebel big time. And when I rebel, people get

really hurt and I end up in jail for a long time.

**Mike:** Just being able to socialize with normal people, you know, other working people... especially after you've being locked up with a bunch of morons for so long. Just to hang out with normal people.

**P38:** I have had to block a whole lot of people out. I may have to be distant, but that's the life, uhm, because those are the choices that I make that I don't want to be a part of that life anymore. The people that I hang around with today ... they are the people I want to have around me today-people that are doing good things in their life. You feed off of that. If you are surrounded by good people, you are, uh, you feed off of that.

**Nathan:** That's when it really hit me, you know, "what am I doing? What am I teaching her?" I didn't want her to be like me. And then I thought to myself I was doing the same thing. I didn't want to be like my dad but I turned out just like him. He'd done federal time; in fact he ended up in the same jail that I ended up in. And there I was going down the same trail. I think that's what really made me look at myself ... I wanted something better for my daughter.

**P26:** ... my children, my two sons. They look up to me ... They look up to me, so I had to straighten out.

**P38:** Uhm, I guess well one is I uh, relationship developed that uh, that was one thing. There were children, who have taken to me. Not that I am their biological father but they have really bonded with me and uh, they look up to me as a role model. They ask me for advice for guidance, for the things that children do. I have these two little boys ... who look up to me and they want to imitate me, they want

to dress like me, they want to be little mes, kinda thing. So I want to do the right thing for them, you know, it's, I look down at them and I have to do the right thing ... It makes me feel good that I can contribute something to their lives and it enriches my life.

**P29:** My mom ... I felt like I sort of in a way I owed her because of all the years I was in prison I was away from her right. And umm because I mean she was my main community support. And I mean when you enter the prison system you find out who your friends are and all that who's there to support you. Usually there's no one there right and umm you're up against the wall by yourself right. But umh, my mother, she did everything humanly possible to try to help me out while I was in there and I owed her something ... She's my main pillar of support.

**Tom1:** All kinds of relationships, friends, family. I mean you get to know your family. After a while, you look back at all the stuff where you couldn't do for them and now you can ... because you can be there. That all builds on not going back, right, you don't want to lose all that.

#### *4) Having routine and structure in daily living (44 incidents)*

It takes time to become deinstitutionalized ... What I did was set up my own little familiar environment ... something I've become accustomed to.

~Words of wisdom from Stephen

This category established having routine and structure in daily living. Twenty-three of the 42 participants represent a 54.8% participation rate for this category. The factors captured the essence of having the basic necessities to function in society: food, shelter, income, work, routine, and structure. Participants' frequently acknowledged that

financial stability was helpful in maintaining a crime free life because it allowed them to financially support themselves, thus decreasing the need to be involved in criminal activity. Being able to stay busy, work, and have routines and schedules was also acknowledged by participants as important in maintaining a crime free life because it not only instilled values, but permitted structure and stability to emerge. In addition, being able to have a home and afford food was helpful to participants. Participants' quotes are presented next.

**Daniel:** Working is another great big thing that I have to admit has probably been a big part of me not going to prison. Because I was trapped in that cycle before where you get this little welfare cheque ... but if I go out and work ... I feel like I am at least a little bit a part of society cuz I'm working.

**Ralph:** I didn't have to steal. Which itself was my main crime. So I got a job, had lots of money so I didn't have to steal. And it was easier than stealing, you know what I mean, gave me a sense of doing something rather than taking something.

**Mike:** keeps my occupied ... busy hands, can't remember the old cliché ... idle hands or whatever it is. It's better to keep busy and have some kind of structure; you know get up everyday and go to work.

**Mike:** Employment ... because I find that most people, just my opinion, most people, well obviously you have to have money to survive and uhm, my self, personally, I like to be busy. So I get bored easily if I'm not. And so if I keep myself busy, it keeps me out of trouble cuz, if you're making a good living, which I usually do when I am working, then uhm you don't get into that desperate situation when you worry about rent and then, you know, whereas, other people

they can't find employment for whatever reason, that's when they start stealing stuff or, you know, start dealing or doing things along those lines to survive.

That's when they get in trouble. So I keep working and save a reasonable amount of money, so I'm not blowing it all like some people do or a lot of people do ... I always make sure the essentials are at least taken care of, rent and things like that. So I don't get into a desperate situation ... Financial stability, yeah, I think that's important for anyone, I mean, I'm not a money type person, but I know how to make money, legally.

**P14:** Just working. Trying to stay, trying to work as much as I can ... Because it keeps me busy all the way through the day and then getting the money that comes in. Feels better having extra money sure helps ... it keeps me busy and then I just come home and I'm tired and I don't want to do anything anymore, just stay home.

**Tom1:** Well, just uh, if I get bored, or, need to do something, instead of wondering what to do, I can always do my hobbies [e.g., woodwork]. Plus I can earn extra money to get what I need. It helped me when I was getting out. Helped me get established and stuff.

**P5:** ... We had our apartment and all our furniture and had a car and everything. It was good ... just, didn't need to do the crime.

**Brian:** Getting into Native housing ... like that was a big influence, having my own stable place.

**Stephen:** I think if I didn't have enough money to be relatively satisfied with my life then I would be going to get money ... so this is the stability, what Canada has

provided for me has stabilized my life to the point of keeping me crime free.

**Ray:** I guess knowing that most of my personal responsibilities are taken care of like umm I'm not gonna starve to death on the streets, umm I have a roof over my head. How that come to be is that I applied for disability. And umm so I was granted disability ... your rent gets automatically paid. So I was guaranteed that I had a roof over my head and Vancouver is a place that I don't think anybody would ever starve to death on the streets ... so I find that if worse comes to worse I'll always have a roof over my head and I'll always have food. And those were the things that used to make me panic before.

#### *5) Freedom from prison (32 incidents)*

Nothing's gonna work till you're ready ... You've gotta wanna be able to keep yourself out. You've gotta wanna stay out. You've gotta want to be free, right?  
~ Words of wisdom participant 29

Twenty-five (60% participation rate) of the participants firmly emphasized that freedom has motivated them to maintain a crime free life. Not wanting to return to prison, acknowledging that freedom is precious, and the deterring effects of incarceration are the sub-themes that have contributed to the development of this category. Coding the incidents for this category was easily achieved, as participants were very concise when describing this theme. This can be seen in the following examples.

**Harry:** Me. I just got fed up ... you can only handle so much of the swinging door, right. And there is one thing I hate worse than being down sick is going into jail with cuffs on. I cannot stand it. I don't like being locked up ... I just don't like being locked up...

**Mike:** Memories of doing time. God you have to have done it to even begin to understand it. It's pretty harsh, that's an understatement. It can be very, very, harsh ... I did 3.5 years in one shot and it seemed like 20 years. I don't know if I could go through that again.

**Brian:** ... the 2 years that I did, never again. That was hell ... It was scary, a lot of scary stuff there. I don't even want to mention it.

**Clyde:** What helped me? The fact that I didn't want to go back to a federal penitentiary. I'm not scared to do time. You do the crime, you do the time. There are regrets and repercussions. At the time, there were no qualms about it, but I do know, I am not going back to federal.

**P12:** Just wanting to stay out of prison. Uh, just, don't, I don't want to go back again, that's all.

**Vincent:** The will to stay out. Just to stay out, helps a lot. I don't like incarceration. It's not the kind of thing a man wants.

**Alfred:** Umm, what helps me is I just crave freedom. Freedom. If I wanna stay out of jail, I do not do the crime. Cuz otherwise you're gonna lose all that freedom ... I want freedom, I don't want the time.

**P17:** ... I think it probably the fact that I got such a stiff sentence and uh, the fact that I did go to a penitentiary instead of a provincial jail. That was a big deterrent for me from committing any kind of crime.

**P26:** My thoughts. I don't want to go back to jail, sick of it. I just don't want to go back to jail, period, end of story.

**P39:** What helped me was my state of mind after coming out. Uhm, after seeing



the inside of the jails and how everything worked and stuff, it was the only choice that I had. Going in at twenty and not experiencing the system at all besides foster care and going into the jails and stuff and seeing it from that point of view was scary. So one of the things that helped me was fear, fear of going back, fear of the stigma that comes with being in jail and uh everything else.

*6) Purpose and fulfillment in life (30 incidents)*

They just need to find what they believe in ... don't lose hope.  
~Words of wisdom participant 39

Striving to have a sense of purpose, meaning, and fulfillment in life was deemed a significant incident in maintaining a crime free life during the transition from prison to the community. Almost half (47.6%) of the participants reported an incident in this category, signifying the vitality of this category. Factors that emerged to form this category were on a continuum from having an abstract sense of purpose or meaning in life to having a simple sense of daily goals. In addition, being able to give back and help others was strongly represented in this category, as many of the incidents reflected this as a motivator to maintain a crime free life. Volunteer work was often discussed as a method of giving back to others, as well as finding a sense of purpose for oneself. The following incidents provide examples of the sub-themes in this category.

**Art:** To find your purpose on mother earth, to find yourself, why you are here.

You know what I mean. Am I here just to go down to Hastings and Main to do drugs and this and that? No. There's a reason and a purpose for you to be here ... Everybody's got a destiny.

**P42:** My purpose. I believe that all First Nations people have a purpose in life ...

That is how I maintain who I am today.

**Barry:** Giving back? How has it helped me? Uh, I like being there for people, for our people, our kids. I can really relate. When I help people it makes my heart feel good.

**P38:** And uh, being, I have been able to go back and reflect on my own childhood and with the information that I have been provided about my life that might play a role in the way my life has gone. The feelings that I have now and the experiences that I have had, I can help others. So, it's turning a negative into a positive. Saying hey, it's not all bad, you know, things happen for a reason and uh, it's using that as a tool to help others. That's kinda of where I am, that stage right now, finding the right resources and the right people. That's uh, so others don't follow in the same steps.

**Daniel:** You know what, I can actually see in a community how, I used to have this misconception that there was all this money that everybody had all the time. And anyone who is middle class is rich and anyone who is rich is even richer and I am just poor. But it's not like that. I know people who have to work hard to have businesses and companies and there's a lot of heart and soul that goes into it. ...So volunteering, I've had the satisfaction for working for money; I've had the satisfaction of just learning misconceptions about where money comes from. There's a lot of big money, I don't know how it works if you're really rich but that doesn't matter to me. What matters to me is that when I give up my time, it's just as valuable as or sometimes more valuable than money. Because giving my time and talents, that's everything that I as an individual can give. And that's

everything, that's giving my whole heart and soul.

**Art:** Also, a lot of volunteer work. I talk a lot about volunteering work. I could take on a job, but I haven't had a paid job in 5-6 years ... without any kind of volunteer work or doing things for people without expectations, it all comes back to me in other ways, you know. [Volunteer work] keeps me in balance. If I done something nice for you without expectations, I would feel good, happy.

**Daniel:** Also just volunteering. I mean I did some volunteering with uhm a church group ... So, just for me to go and volunteer my time is really important ... just giving back to the community in general.

**P28:** Umm, well just for the yearning for something better in life, like to be independent. You know living in my own bachelor or something like that or going to school or something that's you know like a distant hope of mine ... [Having] a loose plan for the future. Yeah ... some goals.

**P35:** I started planning for the future. I never used to do that. I was just in there to get drunk and probably end up back in jail for fighting again or being in the hospital or whatever. So the, like planning for like next week, at that time, if I didn't plan it, I wouldn't go for that goal, eh. So that made me the boss of myself.

**P38:** Sticking to my goals, sticking to my vision. You have enough time on your hands to think about what you are going to do in your future. Hopefully that you are, not such a huge amount of time so that you can still get out and do something with your life, turn it around. Some people don't get that chance, they are there for like 20 years. Uh, that is the, the, kinda, you do it for yourself but you also do it and say hey, it's not the end of the road ... You can leave this place, you can turn

your life around and have your life. It's, you get sucked into that, a lot of negativity. And you uhm, it starts from the ground up ... I changed uh, it's kinda like reinventing your self. You don't want to be the person you were before, and you acknowledged that that is who you were at that time, but the person that you become, who do you, at the end of the day when you are sitting in your rocking chair when you are 80 years old and you are thinking, what legacy have I left, what has my life meant. What is your purpose? I can say that I helped others to, you know, I want to be able to reflect on my life and say that I have had some meaning for someone or for something and stood for something.

*7) Attempting to maintain an alcohol and drug free life (28 incidents)*

It took me 30 years to realize that I am not a bad person just because I do bad things. If it wasn't for drugs and alcohol, I wouldn't have done the things I did.

~Words of wisdom from John

This category highlighted the will to maintain a life free from drugs and alcohol. Thirty-eight percent of the participants mentioned that this category reflects an important step in maintaining a crime free life. The relationship between alcohol and drug use and criminal behaviour was frequently emphasized; thus, participants highlighted the significance of maintaining sobriety and a drug free life. Furthermore, being involved in recovery activities such as attending Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and/or Narcotics Anonymous (NA) or attending treatment centers and/or recovery houses was reported as very helpful. On occasion, harm reduction (e.g., methadone maintenance program) was reported to assist with maintaining a crime free life. Lastly, participants acknowledged that spending time with those who are not using alcohol or drugs was vital in sustaining

ones own alcohol and drug free life. The following transcript excerpts reflect incidents represented in this category.

**Charles:** As I mentioned before, you just don't go to the meetings [AA/NA] to listen, you go there to be instrumental. And, open up to the meetings. It's just the way they were ... [learning] to open up ... They taught me to frame my balance: emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually. Those things taught me, not to, uhm, taught me to refrain from uh, jail life.

**Glenn:** Sobriety has been a big thing and NA/AA helped, but at the same time uhm, there's so much more. If someone was to ask me if NA was for me or AA, yeah it is, provided you are there for the right reasons. You're there for yourself and not for other people. I did my step work, but half heartedly. I had a sponsor and we were really close, uhm, and if it weren't for the program, I probably would have used a lot sooner ... I believe it was because of the program [AA/NA] that I stayed clean as long as I did.

**John:** Methadone. And I am not saying that sarcastically, I mean that. I don't need any more drugs. I don't need it anymore, it's uh, it's only a want and I don't steal because I want to get high. I only stole because I needed to get high. There's a big difference. I'm not trying to justify anything in the past that I've done, I'm just stating what happened. The addiction to heroin was too overwhelming. I couldn't beat it myself, but I thought I could.

**P29:** Going on the methadone maintenance program. Stopped me from having to go and commit crimes in order to support my drug habit.

**Harry:** Uhm, getting off the heroin.

**R:** Getting off heroin, how has that helped you?

**Harry:** No more crimes.

**R:** So did you commit crimes so that you could have money for drugs?

**Harry:** Yeah.

**R:** So now that you don't need drugs, you

**Harry:** Don't do the crime.

**P13:** Uhm, sobriety ... I've never been in trouble since I left alcohol alone and pills and stuff like that.

**Barry:** When, I'm uhh, cuz when I do drugs and alcohol, that's when my crime kicks in, you know. I've never been convicted of anything when I am not under the influence... When I am straight, I am straight. When I am bad, I am bad.

**Daniel:** Not using drugs. Uhm, almost all my crime, all my crimes have been because I have either been drunk, high or want to get high. So when I'm not using drugs, I have no, generally, I have some assaultive behaviour, like I'm still aggressive and uh, rough around the edges. But uh, I think, just, I have more of a choice of whether I'm going to be violent or whether I am going to commit a criminal act or not.

**Gord:** Because if I choose to use drugs again, I know how addicting it is. You know that I'll be honest, if I was to do either heroin or crack, I would go chase it. In order to chase it, you have to use more. I do have money saved up but once all that's gone, I would have to turn to crime.

**Nathan:** Yeah-Alcohol free. I think if I stayed on alcohol and drugs you know I probably would've ended up stealing cars or doing something.

**Tom1:** If I am using, then I am going to need more money to buy drugs. I'll have to commit crime. A lot of people out there don't give away money, right, and drugs aren't free ... the people you are hanging out with, if they are using drugs, they are committing crime already, of some kind. Selling drugs, I mean, it's all committing crime, of some kind.

**P21:** It makes me wanna stay away from crime and all that too cuz when you start doing the needle and getting back into all those hairy drugs like earlier, uhm, that'll lead you faster into the crime scene than anything ... because you get, well we call it sketching and all that because you get all sketched out and can't figure out where you can get our money or get something to get our drugs.

*8) Professional support and programming (21 incidents)*

There's people willing to support you if you try.  
If you're gonna try, they'll help you.

~Words of wisdom participant 5

Support from professionals and having the opportunity to attend programs were deemed helpful in the transition from prison to maintaining a crime free life in the community. Twelve of the 42 participants (28.6% participation rate) reported incidents that characterize this category. Psychologists, counsellors, medical doctors, and parole officers were each mentioned as supportive professional allies. In addition, utilizing programs in the community such as life skills, enhancing education, or Aboriginal specific programs (e.g., Hey way noqu Healing center) assisted offenders in maintaining a crime free life. Half-way houses were also noted to be helpful during the transition from prison to the community because of their structure and support from others in the house.

Transcript passages representing incidents in this category are presented next.

**Barry:** Life skills is a good program. And that is actually like one of the first programs that I have taken in my life that where it kinda opened me up to my feelings, before I was angry or happy. When I did life skills, I was like 22-22 and in jail. And here we talked about these feelings, a lot of stuff. I had a good time, learning all this new stuff. I was in jail and I was starting to you know. That is where it all began, for me anyways.

**P9:** The Aboriginal outreach ... They pointed me in the right direction. When I got out of prison, I didn't know where to go. They were the first people that I walked into. They help me today, yeah. It kept me busy ... didn't keep me out there doing nothing. Kept me away from crime, I could say.

**P29:** Let's see, one thing I forgot was that Native Prerelease program, the 45 day one. The 45 days- what I did was I broke the 45 days up instead of taking the whole 45 day pass to a halfway house like most people would've. I went out 3 days for Christmas. Then January, I went out for seven days. February ten. March fifteen. When I came back in March I only had a couple days and then I was at my warrant expiry. So I planned it all out so that I started on pass in December and I increased my passes each time right. So when I went out I started taking things out to the street, emptying out my cells, all my art supplies and tools and everything right. So when I finally came back in March I knew that I only had like 2 or 3 days ... More than anything, it made me more comfortable with wanting to get out.

**P42:** I, like so many other people, had no living skills, ok. And programs that



were in the institutions like life skills had helped, ok. I had to take that program not just once; I had to take it a couple of times ... but something sank in every time that I took it. Now, upon release I had some skills, but of course I had to, you know, learn more myself.

**Gord:** Because they've [Native center] got things there that, they've always got something there for me to do down there. They've got counsellors there so when I am having a rough day or if I'm having a rough time that I can go pick up the phone and call somebody down there and there's always somebody willing to talk to me or direct me some place, things like that.

**Barry:** Well, uh, just addressing my issues. When I was in Edmonton, I saw a woman psychologist and a man psychologist, you know and it worked because I had issues with both, eh. And they helped me. I talked a lot about a lot of my childhood. When I talk about things, you know, it releases it, you know. Instead of holding it in there, and you know festering you know. I uh, needed to release and I feel better.

**P28:** Well yah you know I'm thinking, what I'm thinking is like I was put on antidepressants. And umm they helped me in the fact that I didn't get too down on myself. And where as that would trigger drinking ... It helps me in the fact that I don't get in a low mood. And when I'm in a low mood that's when I'm susceptible to veer off into the wrong way. So that's why I got on antidepressants to help me. I've suffered from depression all my life and I was undiagnosed for 43 of my 46 years. So now that I know I suffer from depression and I know that alcohol is a depressant. So I've recently learned that in the last couple years so

that's really helped me leave the alcohol alone ... my doctor explained that to me ... It's, uh, you know probably saved me even some jail time and whatever.

**Nathan:** [School] gave me something to do to keep my mind off what everyone else was doing like crime and stuff like that. It gave me kind of a purpose to learn and get out and get away from all those other things.

**P39:** The half way house helped me when I first got out. Uhm, it was a place to stay when I first got out and stuff. It helped me because they kinda had structure. I had to be at my appointments on time and things like that or else I would have to go back in. So that got me in to the mental thinking for preparing myself for getting up for work and things like that. When I went to the half way house, it helped me ... Because if you don't have a structure when you first come out, there is like a lot of empty gaps and stuff. With everything you need to change your habits, you need to change your behaviours and stuff. So when you come out, you need something to fill that time gap. So being in the half way house, having those laws laid down, being home at a certain time. That helped me out, a lot.

#### *9) Learning to identify and express oneself (18 incidents)*

There are people out there who will help you, if you ask. Pride probably keeps most of us stuck where we are at. So put your pride aside and ask for help.

~Words of wisdom from Glenn

This category reflected the value of learning how to acknowledge and express feelings in a healthy way. In addition, simply being able to share feelings, thoughts, experiences, and problems with a keen listener was noted as vital. Furthermore, being able to ask for help was considered essential in maintaining a crime free life, especially

because participants' sometimes believed that asking for help was a sign of weakness, thus, diminishing self-esteem. The combination of being able to ask for help, acknowledge feelings, and express feelings and experiences to others has assisted participants in maintaining a life free from crime. Twelve participants are represented in this category, producing a 28.6% participation rate. The following examples characterize the sub-themes in this category.

**Daniel:** Being able to talk about things ...I think it's a release and acknowledgement. I think that when I live in secrecy, it's a very oppressive place. I don't like be stuck by myself with my own thoughts. Having people to express what's really going on, it's just freeing.

**Charles:** But now I open up a lot to my support by letting out my emotions, trying to find my balance. Once in awhile I would draw my balances on a chart and see where, if the emotional goes too far down then I'd have to reach out and get on the phone and talk to one of my support network.

**Andy:** Just being able to talk to people, stuff like that, it's always good to do.

**P13:** You know, if you had a problem, you'd talk to somebody and you'd express your feelings, you know, because when I was young I had nobody to listen to my problems.

**P21:** I've been able to talk about my problems. Because if I didn't have anybody to talk to it would all build up and then I'd get into trouble... might end up fighting or get mad and end up going to the bar and drinking and then end up fighting. Or end up getting into crime. Being able to talk ...that makes it a lot easier to stay clean and out of crime.

**Vincent:** I have a lot of voice, I have a lot of concerns, but at first, nobody was listening, but once I started getting the community backup, I started getting my voice inside and people started listening and that's what encouraged me to stay outside [out of prison] was people listening. Just having my voice being heard, says a lot. And that's what kept me crime free.

**John:** Talking about it. Socialize. I was taught not to wash your laundry in public. Real men dealt with their problems, they didn't talk about them. That's how I was raised ... Drinking was a symptom, it wasn't the problem. The problem was my insecurities, my shame, guilt, shame that I carried around with me everyday ... And knowing that it's okay to not have the answer to every problem. To reach out and ask for help, it's ok. Whereas before, the way I was raised, you didn't ask anyone for help. That meant that you were lesser than a man. You didn't talk about your problems. You didn't ask for help. You dealt with everything. You had to be that, invincible ... Being able to ask for help, that was a big, big step in my life was being able to put my guard down and actually let somebody inside. Let them know that I am just that scared little boy. Knowing that I am not invincible today ... even today I have problems. My ego steps in sometimes. My uh, self centeredness kicks in and I try to be that big macho idiot that I used to be and uh, before long God kicks that block out from underneath me and lets me know that I am not so super human. I am not invincible today. And that's ok. I'm okay with that. I really am. There is a lot to be ashamed of but that was then, this is now. I don't carry it around. If there is something weighing on me, I talk about it before I do something stupid. It's not easy, for me, nah, its very hard, the hardest thing in

my life. Let down my guard and let people know that yeah, I get scared, yeah I get lonely, yeah I get tired, yeah I get hungry. I am only human.

### *Hindering incidents*

The research question that participant's answered to capture the hindering incidents was: During your transition from being incarcerated to living in the community, what interfered with maintaining a crime free lifestyle? From the transcripts of the interviews, 78 incidents were coded and collapsed into four major categories: 1) self; 2) unhealthy relationships; 3) substance use; and 4) lack of opportunity and professional support. It is important to note that the incidents participants reported as a hindrance to maintaining a crime free life reflect the opposites of the incidents that were deemed helpful. For example, healthy relationships contribute to maintaining a crime free life, while unhealthy relationships create a barrier in the successful transition from prison to the community. Following is a discussion of each major theme, together with a description of the factors in each theme and the participation rate. Additionally, for the reader to gain a deeper understand of the themes, passages from the transcripts are presented. The categories are presented in order of the number of incidents.

#### *1) Self (20 incidents)*

Get honest ... it all starts from yourself. If there is one person you can get honest with, it's you, doesn't have to be anybody outside of yourself. Everything starts within.

~Words of wisdom from Art

In comparison to helpful incidents, this category represented the opposite of the transformation of self category and the learning how to express oneself category.

Fourteen of the 42 participants reported incidents in this category, representing a 33.3% participation rate. There were a number of factors that emerged, indicating that participants had a responsibility in living crime free. Having criminal and negative attitudes, including thoughts and behaviours associated with antisocial lifestyles, were documented as interfering with a crime free life. Similarly, poor decision making, being in environments that are unsafe, putting others needs before oneself, and not reaching out for help were also recognized as being harmful. Poor emotional regulation and not talking about feelings could also potentially lead back to a criminal lifestyle. Lastly, being unaware of social expectations, feeling unsupported by society (e.g. prejudice), and not knowing options were also potential hindrances in the transition from prison to the community. The following transcript excerpts demonstrate these incidents.

**Barry:** Just my anger I guess, you know. Anger, rage, undealt with issues related to childhood. That is the most things that have held me back. Not talking about it.

**Art:** My self. Self-will. I had to do things on my own. You gotta be involved, right. You gotta. You can't just, you can't just, people try to say to you that you talk the talk, you gotta walk the walk. You've gotta combine the both. You can't do one thing and not do the other. You gotta be honest about it. You gotta have integrity about what you are doing. If you don't have integrity, you're not, well you're doing all of this just for show and its going to eventually come out somewhere.

**Charles:** But sometimes, I always didn't have that genuine attempt to reach out- "I can do it on my own". But I, I fall into a trap and I uh, have to lift myself back up and talk to the Elders again and say look "I am still struggling".

**Daniel:** Uh, probably, not, not knowing how to appropriately treat my partner too, because I have a record of assault towards my wife. That interferes too, when you don't know how to respect your partner the way you should. You know, making choices, and take matters into my own hands like have in many other times in my life, right. It's shameful to admit that, but I guess its no less or more shameful than anything else. I think part of it actually that it seems a little more shameful is the fact that it's in the home and she's trapped and you're trapped and not willing to ask for help and not willing to take the initiative and what not.

**Charles:** I had a negative attitude. I had that "I don't care attitude".

**Daniel:** Uhm, interfered with maintaining a criminal life? Well, uhm, I guess with what I ended off with in the last question, not really knowing exactly what all my options are and if you don't have the courage to ask, and I don't think many people do ... I think just not having maybe as much guidance along the way.

**Tom:** I guess a lack of understanding about what society is about. How to conduct yourself in society, that's a really big one because one of the things that I really got myself into was a lot of debt. Student loan and that, thinking well the hell with it. How is the government going to know that I owe them money? There is a system in place for everything. I didn't know that if you don't pay back those things, it follows you for the rest of your life and affects your credit rating. So even when you straighten out you still have to address those historical things.

**P32:** Yeah, my old behaviours were drink and just be violent and don't give a shit.

**P29:** But umm it was just that whole thing that you know here I am helping everybody else out but I'm not doing anything for myself.

*2) Unhealthy relationships (20 incidents)*

Choose wisely about who you wanna be with or hang around with ...

Don't give into peer pressure.

~Words of wisdom participant 21

Participants stressed that engaging in unhealthy relationships created obstacles in attempting to maintain a crime free life. This generated the opposite effect that healthy relationships have on living crime free. The participation rate was 41%, indicating that almost half of the participants reported incidents in this category. Being around others that could potentially influence crime, substance use, or an unhealthy lifestyle was reported to interfere with the transition from prison to the community. Friends, family members, and spouses all fell into this category, with those who were actively participating in criminal activity or substance use causing the greatest influence and likelihood of hindering a crime free life. This category was easily coded, as participants were succinct in their description of bad influences. The following examples capture this category well.

**Ralph:** Stopped seeing my friends because they influence and some of the influence aint good. So I did what was best for me. I made new friends, went to new places.

**Charles:** Being involved with your uh, your uh, old friends, bad influences, uhm. It's hard for me to say no. It's hard for me to turn my back on my friends.

**Glenn:** Yeah, uhm, my dysfunctional family. Brother's who were using, uhm, they would always come and seek me out "let's get high, let's get drunk, let's party". Peer pressure and friends from prison.

**John:** Peer pressure.



**Mike:** Yeah the old friends that I knew that were on the shady side.

I gradually pulled myself away from them. Spent more time with my quote unquote hardworking straight people that aren't into drugs or possibly guns or any of that kinda stuff ... I could've gone back into that group of friends and I guarantee that somewhere along the way, something would go wrong again. You want to be hanging out with a certain group, there is a far higher chance of something going wrong ... Don't take Einstein to figure that part out I really don't think.

**P14:** Seeing some old friends ... Just mostly old acquaintances and stuff, meeting other people from jail.

**P17:** Peers. Friends were always getting me, edging me on or giving me ideas about crime, type of thing.

**P26:** Some of my colleagues ... some of them just got out of prison and they want me to go do crime with them and I say no, no, not doing it, see you later. It's not helpful when they want you to go rob people or fight.

**P28:** Yeah, other addicts ... they want you to get high too ... And I've made that mistake.

**P29:** The half way houses are the worst places I'm telling ya. "Who wants to go do a robbery?" You know. That's what it's like with some of them. It's all game to them you know.

**P32:** Old friends, old behaviours. Yeah. Old friends and old behaviours ... they'd drag you into their old style again. I have a hard time saying no.

**P39:** You have to share a house with them [other ex-convicts]. So it's hard that

way. It's really easy to glorify things that shouldn't get glorified-"I remember I robbed this guy"-that kind of stuff. That was one of the difficult things about living in a half way house.

### *3) Substance use (20 incidents)*

I have had some freedom from crime; I've had some freedom from addiction dependence ... it is for sure possible. I can guarantee that, because as one human being sitting here, I can guarantee that it's possible and I'm doing it.

~Words of wisdom from Daniel

Participants strongly acknowledged the relationship between substance use and criminal behaviour, thus, substance use was highlighted as very probable in influencing criminal activities and making the transition from prison to the community quite challenging. Since attempting to live an alcohol and drug free life was acknowledged as helpful, it is not surprising that using substances was considered an activity that would hinder maintaining a crime free life. The participation rate for this category was 41%, indicating that substance use is quite influential. Similar to the unhealthy relationship category, this category was easy to code as participants' descriptions were succinct.

**John:** Alcohol. I've never been involved with the law, unless alcohol was involved. Never. Never. Not one single time.

**Clyde:** Alcohol.

**Vincent:** Drugs ... drugs is a bad thing because it makes you make a choice between good and bad. You can go and do drugs or alcohol and you can get the bad things that go with it. You can go to jail along with it, if you want to.

**P9:** Drugs and alcohol. You lose... you lose focus of what you want in life.

**P14:** Drugs too, I guess. Doing drugs and getting wired there for awhile and end

up doing stuff you shouldn't just to make money to get your next drugs.

**P17:** Oh, uhm, drugs and alcohol was a factor. It's always been a factor. When you do drugs and alcohol you're not in your right state of mind, right. So when you're like that, and whether it be your friends, or just because maybe the situation that presents itself to do crime, when you're all drunk and you're not thinking properly, you're not thinking straight, so you know, even though I know it's not the right thing to do, I end up doing it anyway. I guess for the money of it I guess. That's always a motivator. Yeah, like drugs and alcohol, they're always a big factor in me living a crime free life. If I was doing crime or if I was doing drugs and alcohol, they always seem to fit hand in hand.

**P29:** Drugs.

**P36:** Alcohol.

#### *4) Lack of opportunity and professional support (19 incidents)*

I think there's hope, you know, with all these resources that we have now. Our own people have gone through the system and a lot of them I see nowadays are sober and walking down the street... All you gotta do is reach out.

~Words of wisdom from Nathan

Lacking educational, training and work opportunities were noted as creating a barrier in the transition from prison to the community. In addition, not being supported by parole officers, police, halfway houses, and the community represented a hindrance for the participants in successfully living in the community. When compared to the helpful incidents, this category reflected the opposite of the professional support and programming theme. Sixteen out of the 42 participants (35.7% participation rate) indicated that lack of opportunity and professional support interfered with maintaining a

crime free life. Examples of these incidents are presented next.

**Glenn:** Uhm, my parole officer, the police, like in the police's eyes, uhm, I was never going to change and uhm on a daily basis they reminded me of that. Uhm, if I was working, they would go to my employers and stuff like that and let them know who I was. I lost jobs, uhm, if I was on the street ... I'd get jacked up, searched, accused, hauled in, you know. So yeah that was a big obstacle ... because like they said "you're never going to change, you're a piece of garbage, you're worthless". A lot of nasty things. My parole officer didn't believe in me. She believed what the police said because they were constantly making reports. But there was never anything substantial, you know, where she could revoke me. But she constantly reminded me that when the police did come to her with something that they could prove that I would be back in prison. So I mean, uhm, that didn't help. Uhm, the lack of support from, I don't know, from the professionals.

**Don:** Cops. They used to harass me all the time because of being in prison. I found actually when I came out here, they knew I had a record and [had] been in prison.

**Stephen:** Lack of support, obviously is what hinders. Of course lack of support. Even in the half way houses I didn't even have to take a program. So I mean that's lack of support, right?

**Robert:** Then I had this man [parole officer] who asked "what is going to work for you? If you're not going to do this program, what is going to work?" I keep telling him that "there is this program at Hey way noque healing circle". "We

don't recognize that program; we haven't done that program, so how do we know that it is going to work for you?" "Well it worked for me in Matsqui". "Well we are not going to let you do it, you're gonna do this". So stuff like that. It is very frustrating.

**P5:** He [parole officer] was an asshole too ... any little thing that went wrong, he'd put me back in jail. I lost my job, one time, for speaking to someone. Another time I went downtown shopping at Eaton's I got stopped and I went back to jail for 6 months. You know he didn't have to put me in jail. He said, "It's on your parole certificate, you can't go downtown." So I went to Eaton's to buy something for a Christmas present. He said, "I don't care what reason it is you were down there, you were down there." Back I went for 6 months. Three times he sent me back for 6 months and no crime was committed ... bullshit. That's what it was, straight bullshit. I lost my job and everything else, you know, just for talking to someone. I had a good job, union job. I worked there for 2 years and because I speak to someone, I lose my job.

**P42:** Yeah, the barriers were the RCMP. I mean, me being a First Nations person, I was harassed and stopped and always questioned. What my motives are and why I am here, what I am doing am I being a criminal or whatever, you know. And uhm, since society in general will always question me of my presence. Yeah, those barriers will always be there.

**Brian:** Well, if I was younger, I'd like to have the opportunity to go to school or job training kind of thing. I wish I had the opportunity for that. Cuz I had no schooling. So it was hard for me. I had to get my upgrading kind of thing. That's

what really stopped me. You need your grade 12. I remember I came here years ago here I applied for the city for a garbage man. Stand on the back of the truck, pick the garbage can up and put it in the truck. You needed a grade 12 education for that. For what- to tell the difference between the can and a paper? No shit. They told me “you need grade 12. You got no education”.

**Daniel:** Employment is huge for helping. So I guess it would be the other side, unemployment is a very much difficulty in maintaining a crime free life ... Lack of education, lack of employment.

**Tom:** The system and the way it was structured. When the logging was finished, it was difficult to get a job because I was not trained for anything else and there was no training for anything else. There was no training for Aboriginal people at that time, so that was a big obstacle and challenge.

**Mike:** ... [Not] being able to support yourself. So you don't get into that desperate financial mode where you start thinking stupid and doing something stupid to get some money together.

**P17:** Sometimes when [there's] no work. Sometimes there'd be periods where I wasn't working, or I'd be laid off ... not working sometimes is a factor ... financially I guess is what it comes down too. Not having money, so when you're broke, you need money for something to live or whatever. So eventually, you end up going to crime if you're not working or whatever.

**P18:** Lack of education. I didn't think of it at the time, but you know, I think back about it now. I had only my grade 10 at the time and I didn't do a GED 12 because I never finished high school ... lack of education kind of hindered me in getting

into college. That was a barrier.

*Categorical map summary*

[Change] doesn't happen overnight. Uhm, you just gotta keep working at it.

It's like, life is work.

~Words of wisdom participant 38

Forty-two Aboriginal men provided information about their journeys of transformation from prison to maintaining a crime free life in the community. Three hundred and forty-one incidents collapsed into nine major categories that reflected the helpful factors in sustaining a crime free life, while seventy-eight incidents collapsed into four categories highlighting those factors that hinder the transition from prison to the community. Through transcript excerpts, the participants' quotes demonstrated each of these major categories. To solidify the credibility of this data, a number of credibility checks were embedded within the study.

*Credibility checks applied to the findings*

The following credibility checks were utilized to substantiate the validity, credibility, and trustworthiness of the data: independent extraction; participant cross-checking; independent judges; exhaustiveness check; experts in the field; participation rate; theoretical agreement; descriptive validity; and interview fidelity. These are each presented next.

### *Independent extraction*

The goal of independent extraction is to determine whether a critical incident, deemed so by the researcher, is considered a critical incident by an independent judge. Butterfield et. al (2005) suggested that 25% of the incidents from either the taped interviews or the transcripts, be reviewed and coded by an independent judge. It is assumed that the higher the agreement between the coder and the researcher, the more credible the data is considered to be. A coder was utilized to review 25% of randomly selected transcripts and code the data for incidents. The coder and researcher attained an 85% agreement rate for what was deemed an incident; thus, it is assumed that the identified incidents are critical to the aim of this study.

### *Participant cross checking*

Butterfield and colleagues (2005) reported that incorporating a second interview into the research design would allow for participants to comment on the validity of the categories that were developed. In this study, a second interview was not conducted; however, participants were provided with the transcripts of their interview and were invited to make any changes by adding, deleting or amending the interview if they chose to. This was incorporated into the study to reflect the intention of allowing the participants' voices to be heard during different levels of the study. Of the 42 participants, two did not want to be contacted to review their transcripts. The remaining 40 participants did not want to make any changes to their interviews, with some commenting that the story was meant to be heard as it was said the day of participation. Although, this is not participant cross checking in the manner Butterfield and colleagues have suggested, it is



important to document that an attempt to include participants at different stages of the study has been incorporated into the study.

### *Independent judges*

Two independent judges volunteered to code the incidents into the categories that were developed by the researcher. They were provided with the titles of the categories and a description of the sub-themes that belonged in each category. Rather than randomly selecting 25% of the incidents (as suggested by Butterfield et. al, 2005), all of the incidents were coded by both judges. The researcher believed that this would allow for a more credible interpretation of the categories. For the helpful incidents, 341 incidents collapsing into nine major categories were established from the transcripts. The two independent judges agreement scores were 82.1% and 80.2%, thus exceeding Flanagan's (1954) suggestion of above 75% agreement, indicating that the categories developed are sound and trustworthy. For the interfering incidents, 78 incidents collapsing into four major categories were established. Again, the independent judges coded all of the incidents resulting in agreement scores of 93.1% and 88.6%. Similar to the helpful categories, the agreement between the researcher and coders for the hindering categories well exceeded the 75% agreement suggested by Flanagan.

### *Experts in the field*

Two Aboriginal experts were approached in a culturally appropriate manner (i.e., offered tobacco) and requested to review the findings from the study. Each expert has

extensive experience working with Aboriginal offenders and agreed to review the findings.

Expert One has been working as a Spiritual Advisor for an Aboriginal Half-way House for approximately 9 years and has very comprehensive knowledge and experience working with Aboriginal offenders. When reviewing the findings, he agreed that both the helpful and interfering incidents were an accurate reflection of his experiences working with Aboriginal men in transition from prison to the community. Based on experience, he believes that alcohol and drug use has played the most significant role in determining whether or not an Aboriginal man returns to prison or is successful in the community, and indicated that this was an important finding in the current study. He also emphasized the importance of the *process of change* and the role that culture, spirituality, and traditions play in this process. Lastly, he identified the importance of both healthy and unhealthy relationships in their role during transition.

Expert two has been working as a Spiritual Advisor with the CSC for almost two years. He is also a well respected Spiritual Advisor in the community, with over 20 years of experience working in the Aboriginal community. He has experience working with people who have mental health and addictions histories. He has attended conference presentations of the preliminary data and was spoken to about the findings. Similar to Expert one, he acknowledged the significance and importance of the findings, especially noting the importance of the cultural and spiritual component of reintegration. He strongly supports the use of traditional practices in health, healing, and wellness for Aboriginal peoples.

### *Exhaustiveness Check*

When extracting the incidents from the transcripts, exhaustiveness occurred at approximately interview 37; where very little new information was being added to the data. The researcher interviewed five more participants, to ensure exhaustiveness had been reached. This was one more assurance that the data was credible.

### *Participation rate*

In order to investigate the credibility of each category, the participation rate for each was calculated. This was also intended to gain a better understanding of how many participants' voices are represented in each category. Participation rates were presented in each of the categories mentioned above. All of the categories exceeded the suggested 25% participation rate.

### *Theoretical validity*

Theoretical validity is another useful credibility check to establish whether a relationship exists between a study's findings and current knowledge in the literature. This is discussed in detail in the discussion component of this paper.

### *Descriptive validity*

Capturing the essence of participants' descriptions is a vital credibility check. Butterfield and colleagues (2005) suggested that by tape recording and transcribing the interviews, an accurate reproduction of participants' voices can be achieved. By doing this, researchers do not have to rely on their memories of interviews and allows for the

application of the CIT method to occur after the interview. This study incorporated both taped interviews and transcription of the interviews into the research design to establish descriptive validity. In addition, whenever possible, direct quotes from the participants were utilized to emphasize the depth of their descriptions of incidents.

### *Interview fidelity*

A professor, with extensive experience using the CIT methodology, reviewed 25% of the transcripts to investigate the fidelity of the interviews. He agreed that the interviews followed the CIT methodology, were conducted with great rigor, and did not contain leading questions. He concluded that the interviews were well done, thus, contributing to the credibility of the data.

### *Summary of credibility checks*

This study employed nine credibility checks in order to establish sound, valid, and trustworthy data. Due to the demonstrated rigor utilized, it is assumed that the findings provide an accurate and valid description of what Aboriginal offenders' believe are critical incidents that help and interfere with the transition from prison to maintaining a crime free life in the community.

### *Words of wisdom*

In hopes of being able to capture the participants' voices and pass on their words of wisdom, one last question was asked: "If you could pass on words of wisdom to men who have experienced incarceration and are in the process of transitioning back into the

community, what would you say?” Participants’ words of wisdom ranged on a continuum from just a few encouraging words to inspirational quotes; these passages are presented next.

**Barry:** In Cree, Akameemoh, Akameemoh. It means, keep at it, you’re healing yourself, allowing God to heal you. Ksimanito, my number one relationship today is with God. Ksimanito, because when I have that in my life, it just opens me up, opens me up, gives me peace, peace of mind, peace of my heart. And that’s the culture. The culture is who I am. That’s it...Follow who you are in a true sense, in a cultural way; you know, but also too, your relationship with God. Maybe some people are Christians and follow a different way. Just follow that way, whatever works for you. Keep at it. It is the number one thing, in everything ... good things happen. When you follow God, good things happen- Ksimanito.

**Brian:** Spiritual guidance. Spiritual guidance is a good help. Talk to some Elders, they know a lot. That’s why they’re old and grey, they’re wise ... So uh, guidance and believe in the Creator. Cuz he’s there and he’s very powerful. That’d be my advice. And if that don’t work, try again.

**Vincent:** Listen to your Elders very well cuz it’s the last people that’s going to help you, honestly.

**Don:** Get in touch with the Elders. Keep in touch with your culture. If you don’t have it, work your way to getting it. Keep in touch with your Native people like programs or Native outreach and stuff like that. Get them for support; because I know that they ain’t going to misguide you, they’re gonna help you. They’re gonna help you, but you’ve gotta be sincere for what you want. It’s like, this way,

you've got that Eagle feather, you've got the good Eagle feather.

**Tom:** One of the first things I would like to say is that they are very, very powerful people, beautiful gifts from the Creator and they have a message to bring on this earth and nobody else can say that message as well as they can because they have been given that mandate by the Creator ... If you want to grow, if you want to be successful, you have to have that sense of identity. Find out who you are and what you're all about. And, in time, it will come to pass that you will understand what your reason is for being here. But it's not all the things that have happened to us historically, like residential school and colonization and all of that. That doesn't stop us. It can, if we allow it. But we have the choice, yes, that's a learning process, it makes me a lot stronger than I was before, it has enlightened me.

**Gord:** Find an Aboriginal center...whatever they have in their community...Be patient and find somebody that they're comfortable with because 99 percent of the people I was incarcerated with always had certain people that they felt comfortable with, the Native Liaison worker or the Elder or the Brotherhood. Just find somebody that's there and be patient.

**Robert:** Be patient and uhm, use the support group that is there, like the Elders and just make sure that before you get out, that the Liaison worker makes sure that these supports will be there for you. What works for you where you are at, will work for you where you are going ... It worked for me because ... knowing that they were there, knowing that I was able to take part, and knowing that I was able to go see them ... Just be patient, everyone's time will come. If you follow your

heart, listen to the Elders, your guidance, you will make it.

**P 9:** Bring the Creator with you. Bring the Creator with you. And you will have a chance. I made it this far with the Creator.

**P27:** We need the Elders experiences and their voices, Elders and their voices. And their experiences cuz I think a lot, that's where I learned a lot of my stuff, I think a lot of the younger generation can learn a lot from it too. A lot of things they got to do or say the way they've lived their lives ... Listen to the Elders and learn. Learn from them.

**P42:** Just never give up. Like the song says, never give up. Stay with your Culture because that will save you.

**Daniel:** Wow, that's heavy. To just imagine that my words could be heard by anybody, even one person, I would have to say ... I think that, just to know that I, as one person, I have had some freedom from crime; I've had some freedom from addiction dependence and that to know that it is for sure possible. I can guarantee that, because as one human being sitting here, I can guarantee that it's possible and I'm doing it...so I would say ... maybe think about even in your mind that, who do you know that has gone out and stayed out that you hear good things about? Remember that guys another example ... To know that there are people who have never spent a day in jail that actually do care. And people that have never spent a day on the street using drugs, they do care. And uh, yeah, and that not everything you hear about is going to be helpful. It is for you, as an individual, that you can hear about something and it might be good for someone else and not for you and that's okay. Just keep listening for what is next.

**P39:** That it's going to be ok. Even though it may seem like the world or whatever is against them, it's ok. It's ok to feel that way...they just need to be themselves and find their traditions or you know, what grounds them and keeps them healthy: their mental, their physical, their spiritual. They just need to find what they believe in ... I don't want people to lose hope when they come out. I have had opportunity after opportunity since I've been out. ... And I have had opportunity after opportunity to do well, even though I have seen the hard core of the bad spectrum. When you do bad, there is this much good on the other side. You just have to work for it. Everything is balanced. Just don't lose hope. I remember when I first got out that I had lost hope. And someone gave me the chance. I woke up with this feeling every single day because of my dreams and stuff that I had. They became actual to me. And I was living in the dream like I was there. I was pulling that good energy. It's just hope. Don't lose hope.

**Glenn:** Be honest. This is where I am coming from, this is where I am at, and this is where I would like to be. I know that I am not happy where I am coming from, and it is hard to be where I am at, and I don't know how to get where I am going. But if you ask for help, there are people who will help you achieve those goals to get you where you want to be, where you're happy, where you're comfortable ... The one biggest thing that I ever did for myself, was I finally came to a place where I couldn't do it alone anymore. So the biggest thing is to ASK for help. And a lot of people coming out of prison don't do that, you know ... Ask for help, you know. Whether that be an Elder, or family member who is clean, anybody. Ask for help. You don't have to do it alone anymore. There are people out there who



will help you, if you ask. Pride probably keeps most of us stuck where we are at. So put your pride aside and ask for help.

**John:** It took me 30 years to realize that I am not a bad person just because I do bad things. If it wasn't for drugs and alcohol, I wouldn't have done the things I did. I wouldn't have reacted the way I did, in anyway. And that saved my life. A minister said that to me one day because he knew. He said that he could see me carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders, literally. He said "you can put it down anytime John. We don't expect you to be superhuman". I didn't see it when he first said it. It took me years to figure out what he was talking about because I didn't know. I thought I knew everything, I knew very little. And don't think you know it all, because you don't. I realize that today. I know nothing. The more I think I know, the less I know. The more I learn, the less I know. Don't be afraid to be human. Don't be afraid to be you ... Stick with the winners and we all know who they are. We can pretend we don't know, but if you choose to hang around with the same peer group, guys who drink and use drugs and commit crime, well, if you run with the wolves, you're a wolf. Stick with the winners, you'll be a winner...don't be afraid to ask for help. We're all human. The number one thing, don't be afraid to ask for help.

**Paul:** I would ask them to phone or get in touch with people ... Circle of Eagles, Native organizations but they don't have to be native. But come for counselling or, come to their sweat lodges that they're able to have access to and uhm, get back in touch with their family.

**Alfred:** A person can't learn unless he asks questions. And, uh exchanging

knowledge- I know this much and you know something that I don't know... you know we could teach other. I think that'd be it... And I still do that, you know, I ask questions.

**Nathan:** I think all that anger that we pack around and all the injustice that's happened to us in the past. I think there's hope, you know, with all these resources that we have now. Our own people have gone through the system and a lot of them I see nowadays are sober and walking down the street... All you gotta do is reach out.

**P 5:** I'd tell them to ah try and go to a few groups that they might be interested in. Cuz, uh, they can always learn something or there's counsellors usually they can talk to. There is always someone there to listen to your problems or to help you, you know, in a certain way. Give you some advice, you know. There's always something, even NA, right. If you don't go to AA, go to NA meetings and you know, listen to the people. There's people willing to support you if you try. If you're gonna try, they'll help you.

**P17:** Thinking back about it, when I got out of jail, out of the pen, I didn't have really much support other than my family. Although it was good, I don't think that at that time in my life, just my family was enough. I needed a better support group. If anything that I could say to some of the guys that are coming out of the penitentiaries is to find some place where there's peers their own age that are going through the same so that they can help each other. Me, when I came home, I came home cold turkey into the real world. And it was just too much, you know ... Being out in the real world in the working class world, even among my family,

it felt awkward. And I needed to be some place where I felt some familiarity and being around old friends or doing old habits like doing crime, you know, there's something that, it was somewhere that I fit, I seemed to fit...so, uhm, yeah, I strongly believe that anybody coming out of jail ... whenever you do something that's new and coming out of the pen to even their home is something that they have to readjust too. I would say to anybody that's coming out, find a support group, even NA or AA, people that you can ... just relate too.

**Andy:** Get a trade or something before you come out, makes things a lot easier.

**P14:** Try to keep busy working and, I don't know. Find something that you enjoy doing that keeps you out of trouble. Like, I like to work, I like to have a family and a girlfriend. Find something that you, like my life is my kids and my girlfriend and just to try to take care of them the best that I can ... Just find something you really like to do, like hobbies or stuff.

**P26:** Depending on the person ... I'd tell him to get some education.

**Tom1:** I would say- take your time, you can't catch up with what has already passed you by. And uh, you know take care of your own stuff. Do what you got to do for yourself before you involve somebody else in your life ... It's easy to get side tracked and your priorities all screwed up if you get into a relationship right away ... I can see why guys get sent back: either drugs, crime, or relationships. The 3 things guys get sent back for.

**Ralph:** [You have] one life and you make it. There are two roads: a good one and a bad one. It's your decision...Find and think about all the joys in life before you go out and do what you're going to do. Again because life is precious and it's

what you make it. Nobody can make your life but you, all right. They can give you advice, they can do whatever- you have the final say. So, think before you jump.

**Art:** Get honest. Get honest. If there is one thing I have said in this conversation, it all starts from yourself. If there is one person you can get honest with, it's you, doesn't have to be anybody outside of yourself. Everything starts within. Take it within, like I did. If I felt like I was honest with somebody else other than myself, why? Think about the good things that make you feel good. Just have honesty with yourself for like what you need...

It all comes back to you, taking ownership. I can't uh, validate myself. Take ownership. Get honest. Yeah I did this. Get honest and see what happens. Get honest with yourself. Open mind will follow... The 3 requirements, through willingness, through open mind. Take honesty. Whatever one will work for you, you gotta make a choice out of those 3 requirements. But you know something. You have to have all of them ... Simple. Whenever working on life, whatever happened in life ... No matter which way you want it to work, it will work, when you just accept life on life's terms. Get involved, do a little counselling, coaching on yourself, your schemas, your blocks. Get out of that negative place, cognitive distortions, schemas. Move on. Move out of that place. That is what works for me.

**Harry:** I'd tell them don't follow anybody, make your own decisions, and take each day as it comes. That's my best advice I would give anybody.

**Stephen:** So what would I say? Like anything it takes time to become deinstitutionalized ... What I did was set up my own little familiar environment

... something I've become accustomed to. And I'd recommend that for anyone to actually set up an environment, because apparently some people can actually become fizzed by doing laundry, buying groceries.

**Charles:** I would say ... to ... friends or uhm people on the street to, grow up. You know, uh, get a grip of life, take a reality check. Try to uhm influence them to come to meetings with me or come to see the Elders with me. Because a lot of uhm, Aboriginal offenders out there, they, they, they are lost. They're struggling yet. They don't know where to go.

**Roy:** Don't do it again.

**Ray:** I guess just learning to be humble.

**P13:** I'd say- learn from your mistakes and learn it once and if you can't succeed, try again.

**P22:** I would tell them... Don't focus on doing something really bad like drinking. Focus on what you can do for yourself

**P32:** Good luck. Good luck, that's it. Yeah, that's it-good luck.

**P21:** Choose wisely about who you wanna be with or hang around with. Umm, trust your gut feeling- if you feel like someone's gonna end up getting you into trouble, leave...and don't let peer pressure get to you. That's the main point. Peer pressure is the main thing cuz you wanna fit in. That's not the problem. The problem is that you're not willing to get out there and try and find the right people to associate with. Don't give in to peer pressure.

**P35:** Think back of who was with you all the rest of the times you went back to jail. See who more or less influenced you to do the crime. Try to stay away from

them... because they're gonna get you into trouble.

**Clyde:** No. Learn to say no ... just learn to say no and you are wasting your life. I have wasted 10-15 years of mine.

**Mike:** Two things. Uhm, I would say, at least from my case and I have a little experience in knowing life stories of a heck of a lot of people ... Two basic things- be careful about who you spend your time with-that's the circle of friends. And certainly get a job, even if it's a low paying job to start. Don't feel down about it and you you'll get something better later on.

**P38:** It doesn't happen overnight. Uhm, you just gotta keep working at it. It's like, life is work ... Don't expect everything in the first week ... It will come in time. Whatever it is, it will come. But if you expect it and want to get it all within the first 48 hours and you want to catch up, so to speak, on lost time, then it is not going to work ... You have to have an open mind to possibilities. Things you wouldn't even think of. I never thought I would be working in the field that I am in now. An Elder told me, "If you do what you love then its not even work". That's right, if you do what you love, it's not like work ... You can't get back the time you lost, you just have to look at it for what you got out of it. How did you spend that time? If you were there for two years, how did you spend that time? Did you just sit there and do nothing at all or did you do something to make yourself better. I found that there were two different camps: the ones that are doing what they can to make positive changes and then there are those who are doing what they can to beat the system, what they can get away with. This is the question: "who do you side with?"

**P43:** Don't be in such a rush; take care of things day by day because it doesn't all happen at once. Take time. You did the time, you can do the time on the streets ... Be where you are, it's always going to be the same, time is time is time. You can't rush it; you can't make it go faster than it is. Just relax, do the time. I did mine.

**P28:** Don't be afraid of change. There's a drastic change from prison life to the outside ... you have to face it bravely.

**P29:** Nothing's gonna work till you're ready, you know, to do it. Took me a while... You've gotta wanna be able to keep yourself out. You've gotta wanna stay out. You've gotta want to be free, right?

As demonstrated above, words of wisdom capture the essence of the research question concerning transition from living in prison to living a crime free life in the community. This question was added to strengthen the voices of the participants and although not *analyzed*, the qualitative nature of the information provided is significant and contributes fascinating information not only to this study, but to the field as a whole. The overall findings are extensive and represent Aboriginal offenders' voices concerning transformation. Now the paper shifts focus, transitioning to the discussion section.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DISCUSSION

Don't be in such a rush; take care of things day by day because it doesn't all happen at once. Take time. You did the time, you can do the time on the streets ... Be where you are, it's always going to be the same, time is time is time. You can't rush it; you can't make it go faster than it is. Just relax, do the time.

~Words of wisdom participant 43

Through sharing their stories, the participants have voiced personal experience and wisdom concerning their journey from being incarcerated to maintaining a life free of criminal behaviour. The findings from this study are substantiated in the literature and contribute knowledge to theory, policy, practice, and the community. Information obtained from this study provides an increased understanding of the needs of Aboriginal offenders and offers guidance concerning useful strategies to incorporate into their wellness plans when entering the community. The findings also add awareness of those circumstances, issues, and problems that arise during transition that may be harmful or create obstacles to a successful transition. This section begins with a discussion about the demographic characteristics of the participants, followed by the theoretical and practical implications of this study, as well as suggestions for future research. This section also provides limitations to the study.

The participants in this study reflect similar demographic characteristics as the overall Aboriginal offender population. Although the data was collected on the West Coast, almost half of the participants are from the Prairie region. This is not a surprise, as federal inmates tend to be transferred throughout the country, and large urban centers often consist of Aboriginal peoples from different regions of Canada. Compared to Western, Eastern and Northern regions, the Prairie region of Canada is the one region



that, per capita, incarcerates Aboriginal offenders more frequently. It was therefore expected that many of the participants would be from the Prairies. It is difficult to know whether the breakdown of status, non-status, Métis and Inuit reflect the offender population, as CSC does not provide this information.

The participants in this study represent a marginalized group, which is consistent with experiences of Aboriginal offenders in general. On average, they have a grade 9 education, with one third having attended residential school. Most were unemployed at the time of the study. Many of the participants also had substantial physical and mental health concerns, suffered abuses as children, had considerable struggles with substance misuse, and half attempted suicide at some point in their lives. In addition, the participants had extensive offending histories, with over half committing violent offences and over half were not released from prison until close to the end of their sentence. On average, the participants spent six and one quarter years incarcerated. Participants were approximately 10 years older ( $X = 44.7$  years) than the average age of men incarcerated however, since these men were out of prison, it was expected that they would be older. Considering the difficulties these men have endured, they have overcome substantial challenges and have been able to maintain a crime free life, on average for 10 years, signifying that transformation is possible. At the time of the interviews, the participants also identified themselves as currently being mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually healthy. The participants have been able to overcome substantial challenges, suggesting that change is possible and that Aboriginal offenders can maintain crime free lives.

Based on the rigorous credibility checks utilized, the findings from this study are considered to be an accurate representation of Aboriginal offenders' journey from prison to the community. A categorical map was developed from the findings. Nine major themes were deemed helpful to offenders in maintaining a crime free life: transformation of self (63 incidents); cultural and traditional experiences (57 incidents); healthy relationships (48 incidents); having routine and structure in daily living (44 incidents); freedom from prison (32 incidents); purpose and fulfillment in life (30 incidents); attempting to live alcohol and drug free (28 incidents); professional support and programming (21 incidents); and learning to identify emotions and express oneself (18 incidents). Four major themes represent the obstacles that hinder living crime free: self (20 incidents); unhealthy relationships (20 incidents); substance use (20 incidents); and lack of opportunity and professional support (18 incidents). The themes represented in the helpful and hindering categories are interrelated and capture the participant's stories of transformation. A multitude of factors appear to be working together during this process and it is difficult to discuss the categories independent from each other.

The categories that hinder maintaining a crime free life can be seen to reflect the opposite category of what is helpful in maintaining a crime free life. The *self* category is contrary to the *transformation of self* category; *unhealthy relationships* is the opposite of *maintaining healthy relationships*; the *substance use* category counteracts the *attempting to live alcohol and drug free* category; and the *lack of opportunity and professional support* category reflects the opposite of *having professional support and programming*. The categories were not purposely labeled to represent opposites of each other, but instead, were formed based on the participants' accounts, and only later were they

acknowledged as opposites. The relationship between helpful and hindering incidents substantiates the findings because intuitively, factors that promote a criminal lifestyle would have opposite factors that inhibit a criminal lifestyle. Thus, if policies and programs can enhance factors contributing to the helpful categories and minimize the obstacles simultaneously, offenders will have the opportunity to be more successful during their transition from prison to the community. The themes that captured both helpful and hindering incidents are presented first, followed by the themes that stand alone. These are examined in terms of theory, implications for policy and practice, and potential for future research.

#### *The role of self in transition*

During the transition from living in prison to the community, a dynamic process appears to be woven throughout the lives of the offenders. An underlying theme that emerged during this transition is the transformation of self. Identity transformation, self-learning, self-esteem, self-awareness, self-reflection, making decisions, being aware of choices and options, maturity, growth, accepting and making amends with self, positive thinking, and change (behaviour, patterns, attitudes, and thoughts) are all features of this category that contribute to transformation. Offenders acknowledged that taking responsibility for their lives was extremely important in this transformation. This category not only had the largest number of incidents, the participation rate was also substantial, with 69% of the participants being represented in this category.

An offender is not only his greatest ally, but also his greatest enemy as those strategies that help him can also inhibit him. The opposite category that emerged as an

obstacle to staying crime free was labeled self. There were a number of features that surfaced in this category suggesting that participants have a responsibility in living crime free. Participants acknowledged that having criminal and negative attitudes, thoughts, and behaviours associated with antisocial lifestyles create obstacles to a crime free life. Similarly, poor decision making, being in environments that are unsafe, putting others needs before oneself, and not reaching out for help were also recognized as being harmful. Although only 20 incidents and a participation rate of 33.3%, this was one of the most often endorsed categories in the obstacles section and especially represents significant information because of its likely impact on transformation.

When a person shifts from one surrounding to another, in order to survive, change is necessary. It is not surprising that offenders have to make deep mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical changes when the world is changing around them. Participants acknowledged the importance of this transformation, emphasizing that without making changes, one would likely return to prison. This finding is supported by Heckbert and Turkington's (2001) investigation of 68 offenders successfully living in the community, where 90% indicated that participating in self-improvement activities was essential and 94% reported that learning about personal values and identity was important in maintaining a crime free life.

Transformation is no small feat. One must challenge personal beliefs, values, and attitudes, and explore different aspects of self creating a dynamic process that is ever evolving. Ignoring the necessary changes one must make could be detrimental and result in a return to incarceration. Although the current findings are unable to describe *how* change occurs, concepts from the desistance theory are helpful in understanding *why* this

category emerged as it is consistent with the underlying theoretical framework of desistance, which purports that “rather than seen as a sporadic or abrupt cessation of criminal behaviour, desistance should be considered a sustained change from criminal or delinquent behaviour. This implies that desistance is a voluntary action involving a continuous process” (Chu, 2007, p. 663). There are a number of different factors that influence an offender’s desistance from crime, with many of the factors suggesting a change process. The formation or solidification of personal and social identities appear to be a consistent theme in this process and represented in the current findings. Sampson and Laub (2001) stressed that desistance is a social transition entailing an identity transformation “as from a smoker to a non-smoker, from a married or coupled person to a divorced or uncoupled person, or from an offender to a non-offender” (p. 12). Maruna (2001) emphasized the importance of identity change as a part of desistance, by asserting that offenders require the development of a coherent, prosocial identity for them to account for and understand their past, their present, and subsequently the ability to envision their future selves.

Maruna, LeBel, Mitchell, and Naples (2004) discussed the importance of society’s influence on an offender’s view of self by discussing the *looking glass self*. This *looking glass self* is based on the idea that one’s self-concept is partly determined by how others see them. If one is seen as unable to change and deviant, it would be much more difficult for desistance to occur compared to someone who is seen as able to change and become a law abiding citizen (Maruna, et al., 2004). Thus, fostering a positive identity for offenders who are in transition is vital. Maruna and colleagues concluded (p. 279):

In our formulation, then, both, societal reactions and “agentic” experiences are necessary, but neither is sufficient alone. Ex-offenders need to be morally and socially reintegrated, but they have to feel that this reintegration has been justified by their own efforts to “make good” and redress past crimes...maintaining successful desistance from crime might involve the negotiation of a reformed identity through a process of prosocial labelling.

Not being provided the opportunity of a prosocial label, offenders potentially maintain an offender identity, which could contribute to negative attitudes, low self-esteem and confidence, and an inability to break free from criminal behaviours. Participants acknowledged that having these negative thoughts of self and not taking personal responsibility created obstacles to living crime free. Being provided with a chance to have a prosocial label could increase the possibility of change.

Giordano et al. (2002) have proposed a provisional theory that focuses on cognitive shifts that commonly occur during the process of desistance. Conceptually, there are four cognitive transformations that are connected to each other and required for desistance to occur. Briefly, these are: 1) the offender’s openness to change; 2) a set of *hooks* (e.g. employment, marriage) that are recognized as an opportunity for change with the understanding that by grasping at the hook, the offender will be moving away from criminal activity; 3) the ability to acknowledge that the present self is beginning to be different from the past self; and, 4) the offender can no longer identify with a criminal self or the past behaviours as feasible, relevant, or positive. To summarize, the authors stated “our fundamental premise is that the various cognitive transformations, not only relate to one another, but they also inspire and direct behaviour” (p. 1002). This suggests

that offenders have to take responsibility and actively work towards change, which is similar to what participants have emphasized in these findings. Transformation is inspiring because it allows for personal agency and for offenders to consciously apply effort toward sustaining a different way of life.

According to the RNR principle (Table 4), the major risk and/or need factors that are linked to these categories that could be targeted to decrease offending behaviour include antisocial personality pattern and antisocial cognition. The RNR principle suggests that targeting the dynamic need associated with the risk of antisocial personality pattern would consist of building problem solving, self management, and anger management skills, as well as developing coping skills. In reference to antisocial cognitions, the dynamic need factors that should be addressed include: recognizing risky thinking and feeling, developing alternatives to this risky thinking and feeling, and adopt a reformed and/or antiriminal identity. The current findings capture the importance of these needs and suggest that by addressing them in reintegration strategies, Aboriginal offenders could be more successful during their transition from prison to the community. Table 4 combines Andrews and colleagues risk and need factors with the current findings (including quotes representing this study's categories).

Table 4

*Major risk and/or need factors and promising intermediate targets for reduced recidivism with current findings*

Factor	Risk	Dynamic Need	Quote from Findings	Current Study
History of antisocial behavior	Early and continuing involvement in a number and variety of antisocial acts in a variety of settings	Build noncriminal alternative behavior in risky situations		
Antisocial personality pattern	Adventurous pleasure seeking, weak self-control, restlessly aggressive	Build problem-solving skills, self-management skills, anger management and coping skills	<i>Art: I had to change my thoughts, take a look at myself. There was a lot of things, things to do with patterns, things that you do to go out and get money, to obtain money illegally. I had to change all of that. I had to change things, if I didn't like what I had to do, I had to change it.</i>	Transformation of self
Antisocial cognition	Attitudes, values, beliefs, and rationalizations supportive of crime; cognitive emotional states of anger, resentment, and defiance; criminal versus reformed identity; criminal versus anticriminal identity	Reduce antisocial cognition, recognize risky thinking and feeling, build up alternative less risky thinking and feeling, adopt a reform and/or anticriminal identity		Self
Antisocial associates	Close association with criminal others and relative isolation from anticriminal others; immediate social support for crime	Reduce association with criminal others, enhance association with anticriminal others	<i>Mike: Yeah the old friends that I knew that were on the shady side. I gradually pulled myself away from them. Spent more time with hardworking straight people that aren't into drugs or possibly guns or any of that kinda stuff. I could've gone back into that group of friends and I guarantee that somewhere along the way, something would go wrong again. You want to be hanging out with a certain group, there is a far higher chance of something going wrong. Don't take Einstein to figure that part out.</i>	Healthy relationships Unhealthy relationships
Family and/or marital	Two key elements are nurturance and/or caring and monitoring and/or supervision	Reduce conflict, build positive relationships, enhance monitoring and supervision		



Factor	Risk	Dynamic Need	Quote from Findings	Current Study
School and/or Work	Low levels of performance and satisfactions in school and/or work	Enhance performance, rewards, and satisfactions	<i><b>Daniel:</b> Working is another great big thing that I have to admit has probably been a big part of me not going to prison.</i>	<i>Routine &amp; Structure</i>
Leisure and/or recreation	Low levels of involvement and satisfactions in anticriminal leisure pursuits	Enhance involvement, rewards, and satisfactions	<i>Because I was trapped in that cycle before where you get this little welfare cheque ... but if I go out and work ... I feel like I am at least a little bit a part of society cuz I'm working.</i> <i><b>P42:</b> I, like so many other people, had no living skills, ok. And programs that were in the institutions like life skills had helped, ok. I had to take that program not just once; I had to take it a couple of times ... but something sank in every time that I took it.</i>	
Substance Abuse	Abuse of alcohol and/or other drugs	Reduce substance use, reduce the personal and interpersonal supports for substance-oriented behavior, enhance alternatives to drug abuse	<i><b>Nathan:</b> Yeah-Alcohol free. I think if I stayed on alcohol and drugs you know I probably would've ended up stealing cars or doing something.</i>	<i>Alcohol and drug free</i>

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NOTE: The minor risk and/or need factors (and less promising intermediate targets for reduced recidivism) include the following: personal and/or emotional distress, major mental disorder, physical health issues, fear of official punishment, physical conditioning, low IQ, social class of origin, seriousness of current offense, other factors unrelated to offending).

These categories have implications for policies and practices when working with Aboriginal offenders entering the community. It is important for NPB members, Parole Officers, mental health professionals, and others who work with Aboriginal offenders during their transition, to be aware of the transformational process and identity changes that occur. These changes are slow, time-consuming, and difficult; therefore, supporting and encouraging offenders during this time is vital. Since offenders highlighted the importance of personal responsibility in change as being helpful and that lacking this would create an obstacle to maintaining a crime free life, it is evident that transformation is vital during the transition from prison to the community.

Transformation is a complicated process to measure. Because the participants in this study have been out of prison, for an average of ten years, it is difficult to know how long this process takes, what stage it occurs at (e.g. before release, at release, 6 months after, 1 year after 2 years, etc.), if it starts and stops, and/or what it looks like. Future research could investigate more thoroughly how this change occurs and how other variables like time since release and age are related to it. More specifically, future research could study Giordano et al.'s (2002) cognitive shift theory and investigate the relationship with an offenders' change process. These categories captured a number of sub-categories like self-esteem, attitudes, values, beliefs, taking responsibility and being active in personal change, which make it difficult to attribute any one form of *transformation*. Is it self esteem that is important? Or is a prosocial attitude the key to change? Does lacking these mean one will undoubtedly return to prison? It is difficult to determine this from the current findings; therefore, further research could investigate the role of the different sub-themes represented in the categories.

Although offenders frequently endorsed transformation and this process of change as an important step in maintaining a crime free life, how they made the changes is unknown. Theories of desistance and RNR likely contribute to this change; however, gaining knowledge around the role of professionals would be helpful. Considering that many psychologists, social workers, and counsellors take on the role of helping people change, future research could investigate the relationship between offenders and the helping profession. There has been research concerning offenders and specific treatment programs (e.g., sexual offender treatment programs: Craissati & McClurg, 1997; Hanson & Bussiere, 1998) but very little on the personal process of change during the transition from prison to the community.

#### *The role of relationships in transition*

Healthy relationships have been noted by the participants as an important feature in maintaining a crime free life. This category had one of the highest participation rates, with just over 78% of the participants represented in this category. Participants emphasized that being around people who were supportive, loving, and caring, and those who create a positive influence are important during transition. They acknowledged the importance of being present for others in their lives, as well being a good role model for their children. Feeling connected to others, to the community, and having a sense of belonging, also emerged.

Just as having healthy relationships is vital in maintaining a crime free life, having unhealthy relationships interferes with staying crime free. Negative peer associations were deemed as very detrimental and if one was not provided with the opportunity to

form prosocial bonds and activities, participants indicated peers had a great influence. Being around others that could potentially influence crime, substance use, or an unhealthy lifestyle was reported to interfere with the transition from prison to the community. Forty percent of the participants acknowledged this as problematic.

Researchers have recognized the significant role of peers and family in criminal behaviour. One of the risk factors in the RNR principle that is repeatedly emphasized is that negative peer associations are detrimental to offenders and in order to decrease the level of risk to reoffend, one strategy would be to “reduce associations with criminal others and enhance relationships with antirriminal others” (Andrew et al, 2006, p.11), suggesting that healthy relationships can play a positive role in the lives of offenders. Heckbert and Turkington (2001) reported that 91% of their participants highlighted the important role that family and friends played during reintegration after incarceration. Helfgott (1997) stated that the participants in his study identified that gaining support from family and friends, having positive role models, and having a positive circle of friends were all essential needs during transition to the community.

Many findings in the desistance literature have emphasized the importance of marriage and friendships, which supports the current study’s findings concerning relationships. Sampson and Laub’s (2001) seminal paper on desistance, that extensively reviewed the desistance literature, frequently acknowledged the importance of marriage in desistance. However, how the *marriage effect* works is debatable. Sampson and Laub (2001) believe that the development and quality of the marital relationship encourages desistance but the influence is gradual and cumulative over time. They stated “the effect of a good marriage takes time to appear, and it grows slowly over time until it inhibits

crime” (p. 20). Their theory follows a life-course model that allows for social malleability across the life span. Warr (1998) also supported the positive role that marriages plays in desistance, but suggested that the reason marriage effects desistance is not because of a life course trajectory; rather, getting married decreases an offender’s opportunity to spend time with delinquent peers, emphasizing a differential association theory. Giordano et al. (2003) highlighted that peer relationships may be just as important as marital relationships in desistance. They stressed that marriage is only one route away from negative peer relationships and that other factors, like human agency and decision making, contribute to changing peer relationships. As “friends have historically been strongly implicated in the onset and persistence of criminal behaviour” (p. 319), shifting from negative peer relationships to more positive relationships, is beneficial to offenders. The current findings substantiate this and suggest that marital and peer relationships both play a role in enhancing and interfering with a crime free life.

The positive impact of healthy relationships on the transformational process and maintaining a crime free life is encouraging and has implications for policy and programming. It provides valuable information to offenders, CSC, the NPB, and others working with offenders during their transition from prison to the community. Assisting offenders in establishing and maintaining healthy relationships and encouraging them to decrease involvement with offending peers would be extremely beneficial at this time, as it would increase the likelihood of maintaining a crime free life. Implementing and following policies that allow offenders increased contact with positive peer and family relationships prior to release would be helpful.

Currently, CSC has implemented a number of programs to facilitate this process for offenders. Programs like private family visiting, escorted temporary absences (ETA), unescorted temporary absences (UTA), and visiting, enable incarcerated offenders contact with close friends and family. For example, “The aim of the Private Family Visiting Program is to enable inmates to develop and maintain positive family and community relationships that will assist them in preparing for reintegration into society as law-abiding citizens” (<http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/fami/visit-eng.shtml>). Similarly, ETA’s and UTA’s allow the offender to leave the institution for designated periods of time (usually less than 72 hours). Each of these programs only permits certain offenders to access to the programs, and is based on funding, staffing, and availability. How often an offender actually has access to the programs is unknown. Research about these programs and their effects could provide helpful information about offenders’ relationships.

Because of their role with offenders on conditional release (in the community but under the supervision of a parole officer), the NPB can also play a significant role in assisting offenders with building healthy relationships or inhibiting negative peer relationships. When offenders are granted a conditional release like day parole, full parole, or statutory release, they are supervised by parole officers and are required to follow conditions of release. At this stage, a condition could be to abstain from negative peer relationships. Parole officers could also try to facilitate positive relationships with role models and other prosocial people in the community. Acknowledging the importance of the Aboriginal community and assisting in maintaining strong communal ties would also be very beneficial.

Future research could provide a better understanding of the familial and community relationships that impact offender transitions. When this study began, it was suggested that rather than collect data from a large number of offenders, gathering information from only a few offenders *and* their families, friends, and social support network would contribute to a deeper understanding of offender and community needs when offenders are returning to the community. Although this did not happen for this study, future research could collect this data. It would also be interesting to gain a better understanding of the marriage effect that Laub and Sampson (2001) discuss and the importance of peer relationships suggested by Giordano et al. (2003).

*The role of substance misuse in transition*

The relationship between substance use and criminal activity was frequently emphasized by the participants. Thirty-eight percent of the participants highlighted that the will to maintain a life free from substance use is an important step in maintaining a crime free life. In terms of creating obstacles to living crime free, 41% of the participants emphasized that substance use was probable in influencing criminal activities and making the transition from prison to the community very challenging. In the current sample, the majority of participants have tried drugs or alcohol, with a substantial percentage of them experiencing addiction to one or more substance at some point in his life. However, at the time of the study, the majority of the participants were alcohol and drug free.

It is well-known that incarcerated populations have high rates of substance use. Sibbald (2002) stated that “according to a CSC study, 80% of inmates have abused alcohol or drugs and 34% used injection drugs prior to their incarceration; 11% reported

using them while in custody, and 25% said they were under pressure to smuggle drugs into the institution” (p.1154). Howell (2003) found that 86% of her inmate sample reported to have experienced addiction to at least one substance in his lifetime, and at the time of the study, 40% reported substance use within the past six months. Plourde & Brochu (2002) randomly selected 317 offenders in ten Quebec federal institutions and asked participants to report substance use in the past three months. One hundred and five (33%) of the participants reported that they had used alcohol, drugs, or both. Higher rates of substance use were also related to an offenders’ security level (e.g., 52% of those in maximum security reported drug use). In an American study, Clayton and Harry (2002) reported that in 2001, 635,000 inmates were released from state and federal prisons, and that of these offenders, up to 70% have had drug abuse problems during their criminal careers.

According to the RNR principle, substance abuse is one of the major risks for recidivism. Andrews et al (2006) mentioned that, in order to decrease criminal behaviour, reducing substance abuse and the personal/interpersonal supports for substance abusing behaviour and attempting to enhance alternatives to drug abuse should be targeted. This suggests that it is not enough to target substance using behaviour alone, it is also vital to target other behaviours and relationships associated with using behaviours. Sung and Richter (2006) highlighted that substance use among offenders is a societal issue, not an individual problem and that well designed substance abuse treatment programs can decrease offending behaviour.

Many of the findings in this study are not mutually exclusive. Participants indicated that being involved in cultural experiences and healthy peer relationships were



vital in sustaining ones own alcohol and drug free life, and subsequently criminal activity. Specific to substance abuse in Aboriginal peoples, McCormick (2000) emphasized that rehabilitation strategies that facilitate reconnection to cultural values and traditions are useful. The relationship between purpose in life and substance use has also been shown, indicating that incorporating purpose in life in substance abuse treatment can likely prove effective in decreasing substance abuse (Nicholson et al., 1994). Each of these findings contributes to a better understanding of the factors required to maintain a crime free life.

This category has critical implications for policy, reintegration strategies, and future research. Substance abuse is not only a concern within the CJS, there are also social, economic, and health issues that arise. Sung and Richter (2006) stated “societal or structural strains that directly preclude recovering offenders from attaining a healthy and productive lifestyle should be identified by researchers and dealt with by policy makers” (p. 365). Research targeting the specific substance abuse treatment needs of Aboriginal offenders could provide useful information for the CJS as well as the health system. Policies that reflect the relationship between substance use and criminal behaviour could potentially increase funding for substance abuse treatment before, during, and after incarceration. Strategies, like harm reduction, that support offender’s substance abuse treatment during transition to the community may prove effective in decreasing criminal behaviour and perhaps increasing health.

Because of the relationship between substance use and criminal activity, there is a zero tolerance policy with CSC and NPB when it comes to substance use. Offenders are not permitted to engage in substance using behaviours while incarcerated or on parole and suffer consequences when *caught* using. For example, using substances is often a parole

violation, which results in the return to custody and further incarceration; while incarcerated, additional time can be added to an offenders sentence if found guilty of using substances. Yet, as previously mentioned, offenders represent a high substance using population who would benefit from appropriate treatment versus punishment. CSC implements a number of addiction treatment programs, but considering the high rate of substance use, the efficacy of these programs is questionable. It would be beneficial to conduct research concerning these programs and their effectiveness. Other strategies, like harm reduction and drug court programs, might also prove useful in decreasing substance use and criminal behaviour. Substance misuse is a major social issue, so perhaps providing funding, enhancing and developing more programs and gaining a better understanding of this overwhelming social issue could help decrease criminal behaviours. However, further research would be necessary to substantiate these suggestions.

#### *The role of professionals and programs in transition*

Feeling supported by professionals (e.g. psychologists, counsellors, medical doctors, and parole officers) was important to the participants in this study. Having the opportunity to attend programs like self-help groups, educational programs, or Aboriginal specific programs (e.g., Aboriginal counselling centers) was also deemed helpful in maintaining a crime free life in the community. Just under one-third of the participants (28.6% participation rate) reported incidents that characterize this category. It is evident that healthy social interactions and feeling supported not only by family and friends, but professionals as well, is vital during the transition from prison to the community. The findings represent the importance of personal development during transition. It would

appear that support from professionals would be better suited to the healthy relationships category; however, from the participant's perspective, support from professionals belonged to this category not necessarily because of the relationship, but because professionals could often support and encourage program participation and personal development. Educational programs belong to this category for the same reason. Often, education is categorized and discussed in the literature with work activities; however, from the perspective of the participants, work was about having routine and structure, while education was important for personal development.

The opposite category emerged as an obstacle. Not being supported by professionals (e.g., parole officers, police, and halfway houses) and the community produced challenges for the participants. Similarly, lacking educational and training opportunities were noted as creating a barrier in the transition from prison to the community. Just over one-third (35.7%) of the participants indicated that the lack of opportunity and professional support interfered with maintaining a crime free life.

Factors in these categories are represented in two of the major risk factors for recidivism in the RNR principle. Andrews and colleagues (2006) suggested that having a low involvement and performance in school and/or work activities and low participation and satisfaction in anticriminal leisure pursuits are major risks for recidivism. They suggest that enhancing involvement, performance, rewards, and satisfactions in these areas can facilitate a decrease in recidivism. As participants in this study highlighted, educational programs and leisure pursuits like self-help groups and Aboriginal specific programming were important in maintaining a crime free life. Lacking the opportunity to engage in such activities created an obstacle.

Although education and programming were acknowledged as important crime reducing strategies, access to such programs is not always feasible. It would be helpful if future research, funding, and policies could address this finding more specifically. For example, Aboriginal specific programs are not often evaluated and it would be beneficial to both offenders and the community to have a better understanding of these programs. Research could also clarify how easily accessible funding, education, and programs are for offenders.

As the literature does not often discuss the impact of professionals (programs are often evaluated, but not the persons providing the program) in offenders' transition, the finding that professional support can both help and hinder the transition in the maintenance of a crime free life was not anticipated. Within psychotherapy research, the therapeutic relationship has often been noted as the best predictor of therapy outcome (Wampold & Ahn, 2001). Similarly, research has supported the notion of the therapist's involvement (e.g., genuineness, support, and acceptance) in the therapeutic process and has indicated that this assists clients in becoming more self-involved and self-accepting, thus it facilitates positive therapy outcome (Schneider, 2003). Detailed research investigating this topic could provide insight into the mechanisms of this category. Investigating the role of the relationship between offenders and professionals could contribute to program development and policy change. Examining, more specifically, which professionals are particularly helpful or create obstacles for offenders would also add valuable information to the field.

*The role of cultural and traditional experiences in transition*

The significance of cultural and traditional experiences was well substantiated by the participants in this study. Attending Aboriginal gatherings, relationships with Elders, participating in traditional ceremonies (e.g., sweatlodge, yuwipi), cultural values and beliefs, living a spiritual life, feeling connected to the Creator, and acknowledging the importance of cultural practices were recognized as essential components of this theme. It is not surprising that cultural and traditional experiences emerged as an important category in the findings, as this theme is prevalent in the literature and is supported by prior findings.

Cultural and traditional experiences can be seen as a catalyst for change and contribute to an underlying foundation of the transformation that was spoken about earlier, with literature supporting this view. Deane and colleagues (2007) examined desistance in 34 Aboriginal men who had been involved in an urban Aboriginal gang and had been released from prison. In reference to their findings of desistance, they noted:

Perhaps the greatest importance was the recognition of Aboriginal values and identification of one's self as an Aboriginal person, experienced through acceptance of and participation in Aboriginal traditions and ceremonies and the roles this played in a break from criminal activity (p. 134).

In reference to rites of passage rituals among Navajo adolescents, the following quote from Markstrom and Iborra (2003) captures a sense of identity transformation through cultural involvement. They emphasized that the "understanding of values, roles, and beliefs of a culture are acquired through participation in ritual activities that are thought to

influence and transform the identity of the initiates” (p. 401). Cultural and traditional experiences can be seen as the catalyst for transformation.

Through qualitative interviews with Aboriginal healers and persons who have received healing, McCabe (2007) reported that there are 12 therapeutic conditions in Aboriginal healing that are helpful in effecting positive changes in thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. These are: readiness to heal (one must be ready to heal); understanding inner and unknown experiences (one must work to understand inner life and the relationship between the inner self and external world); lessons of daily living (creates ongoing opportunities for problem solving, self-care, productive behaviour); challenges to change (healers should challenge a person to change and heal), empathy (being understood emotionally was very important), acceptance and respect (feeling judged was “antithetic to healing” p. 154); role modeling (being able to identify with healers as role models); genuineness, credibility, and legitimacy (healers are most helpful when they have these characteristics); trust and safety (without these, healing is quite difficult); the sacred teachings (Aboriginal spirituality facilitates change); ceremonies and rituals (essential when on the healing path); belief in the healing spirit (therapeutic condition for healing); and self-acceptance and discovery (Aboriginal identity and acceptance of self facilitate change and growth). Although not specific to offenders, these *conditions of healing* are very similar to the findings reported by participants in this study highlighting the importance of cultural and traditional experiences during change.

Hodgson and Heckbert (1994) stressed the importance of spirituality and culture in their findings reporting that 19 of their 20 participants indicated that spirituality and learning about Aboriginal culture had a significant impact on getting out and staying out

of trouble. For 18 of the participants, forming a spiritual and cultural identity was imperative to staying out of prison. Heckbert and Turkington (2001) reported that 94% of the 68 participants in their study expressed that participating in Aboriginal spirituality, ceremonies, and cultural activities were vital in maintaining a crime free life. Johnston (1997) stated that participation in cultural and spiritual activities, as well as having a relationship with Elders was strongly correlated with a decrease in recidivism and had an impact on reintegration success of Aboriginal offenders. Deane et al (2007) commented that “ceremonies experientially present the thought forms and values that have aided Aboriginal people in survival for millennia. The teachings are a sacred experience of one’s positive identity” (p.137). There appears to be a clear link between cultural experiences, identity, and living a crime free life. As there are only a few studies reporting Aboriginal offenders’ perspectives of reintegration, this finding supports prior findings and is an important contribution to the field, emphasizing the significance of culture.

The concept of retraditionalization and/or decolonization support the notion of utilizing Aboriginal ways of being, knowing, and living in order to overcome substantial hurdles like incarceration. LaFromboise (1990) speaks of retraditionalization and the importance of utilizing Aboriginal beliefs, traditions, and customs as a means of strengthening identity and self determination. Decolonization is equivocal. Hart (2002) emphasized this when saying “decolonization involves coming to know ourselves, our histories and our worldviews” (p.35). Although it is not known how many of the participants in the study were involved with cultural or traditional practices prior to or during incarceration, it is clear that being involved during the transition from prison to the

community was vital for maintaining a crime free life. Retraditionalization and decolonization are necessary during transformation and provided a source of empowerment for the Aboriginal participants in this study. Programs that reassert Aboriginal identity, cultural beliefs, & practices are a form of treatment and should be considered useful in Aboriginal offenders' transition from prison to the community (Brady, 1995; Waldram, 1997).

The major risk and/or need factors captured in the RNR principle seen in Table 1, does not directly make a link to this category, neglecting a significant finding. One of the weaknesses of the RNR principle is this lack of acknowledgement of culture, especially considering the over-representation of Aboriginal offenders in the CJS. However, the least understood component of the RNR principle (specific responsivity) could enhance meeting the needs of Aboriginal offenders during their transition. This part of the RNR principle *recommends* that offenders be viewed as individuals, with personal characteristics, which must be taken into account when establishing intervention strategies (Andrews & Bonta, 2003). Considering personal characteristics of offenders *could* allow for cultural sensitivity and awareness in programming. However, as Rugge (2006) commented, responsivity is the least researched or substantiated component of the RNR principle, especially concerning Aboriginal offenders.

There are a number of policy and practical implications that are supported by this category. Incorporating cultural and traditional practices into reintegration strategies strongly supports the continued strategies of the Aboriginal Initiatives Branch (AIB) of CSC. See <http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/prgrm/abinit/agenda/5-eng.shtml> for the National action plan for Aboriginal corrections. To briefly summarize, the AIB has



created strategies to address the unique needs of Aboriginal offenders which include: Aboriginal Treatment and Healing Programs, Aboriginal-specific health strategies in HIV/AIDS, FAS/E and traditional healing, Research projects on Aboriginal Reintegration, Aboriginal Healing Lodges (currently 8 across Canada), Halfway Houses for Aboriginal offenders (currently 24 across Canada), Agreements with Aboriginal Communities to offer services to Aboriginal offenders, A National Aboriginal Employment/Recruitment Strategy, Elders working in institutions and in the community, Liaison Services in federal institutions, Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood Groups, Offender Employment and Job Placement, and a Gangs Reintegration Project. The findings of the current study clearly support these initiatives and would encourage AIB to continue employing these initiatives and implementing policies that support cultural and spiritual programming for Aboriginal offenders both within the institution and during transition to the community. The participants in this study substantiate the importance of cultural and traditional experiences being a part of their transition into the community.

A component of the Correctional and Conditional Release Act (CCRA) has been specifically created to address the needs of Aboriginal offenders. Section 84 was implemented to facilitate the release of Aboriginal offenders to Aboriginal communities (First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban). According to the act (<http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/prgrm/abinit/challenge/7-eng.shtml>): Where an inmate who is applying for parole has expressed an interest in being released to an Aboriginal community, the Service shall, if the inmate consents, give the Aboriginal community: a) adequate notice of the inmate's parole application; and b) an opportunity to propose a plan for the inmate's release to, and integration into, the Aboriginal community. According to <http://www.csc->

[scc.gc.ca/text/prgrm/abinit/know-eng.shtml](http://scc.gc.ca/text/prgrm/abinit/know-eng.shtml), there have been approximately 100 releases under this act, however, the timeframe is unknown. What is known is that Aboriginal offenders are much less likely to be released early in their sentences compared to non-Aboriginal offenders. For example, according to a study by the AIB (1998), which gathered data from 1993-1998, Aboriginal offenders were more likely to be released on statutory release than on full parole: of the 609 Aboriginal people on day, full, or statutory release supervision, 292 (48%) were on statutory release; 230 (38%) were on full parole; and 87 (14%) were on day parole. Comparable figures for the non-Aboriginal supervised population were: 1,826 (29%) were on statutory release; 3,744 (59%) were on full parole; and 779 (12%) were on day parole. The relationship between Aboriginal offender release and having CCRA section 84 being implemented is unknown. The findings from the current study suggest that increasing CCRA section 84 releases would be beneficial to Aboriginal offenders.

Cultural and traditional experiences during the transition from prison to the community are vital in maintaining a crime free life. The findings in this study support future Aboriginal specific programming and activities during and post incarceration. To gain a better understanding of cultural and traditional experiences, future research should investigate the impact that the AIB initiatives have had, specifically concerning the reintegration strategies of CCRA section 84. It would also be beneficial to become more aware of the relationship between cultural and traditional experiences and identity transformation of Aboriginal offenders.

*The role of routine and structure in transition*

Fifty-five percent of the participants acknowledged that routine and structure in daily living was important when released from prison. The sub-themes capture the essence of meeting basic needs in order to survive: food, shelter, work, income, routines, and structure (e.g., schedules). Unfortunately in a first world country like Canada, having basic needs met is not always feasible. Having a criminal record, being newly released from prison, and belonging to a minority group often creates barriers to employment and income. Without income, or having a low-income often results in poverty, which is linked to criminal activity.

The participants' frequently acknowledged that financial stability was helpful by decreasing the need to be involved in criminal activity. The literature consistently confirms that employment programs and employment decrease recidivism and contribute to desistance (Bushway, 2003; Place et al., 2000; Sampson & Laub, 2001; Seiter & Kadela, (2003); Wilson, Gallagher, & Mackenzie, 2001). Wilson and colleagues (2001) conducted a meta-analytic review of 33 vocation, prison education, and work programs concluding that those in the programs had a recidivism rate of 39% compared to a 50% recidivism rate for those not in programs. This is a substantial decrease in recidivism; however, Wilson et al suggested that one limitation to their meta-analysis was that the studies investigated were methodologically weak (e.g. participants in the programs were not randomly selected). In a study specific to Aboriginal offenders, Place and colleagues reported a substantial decrease in recidivism rates for those in the *Second Chance* work program compared to those not in the program; rates of 39% versus 90%. In Sampson and Laub's (2001) extensive review of desistance, they discussed the impact of life situations

on the process of desistance, strongly emphasizing the role of employment in contributing to fundamental change in offender's criminal behaviour.

Since most federal penitentiaries are highly structured and provide a strict routine for inmates, it can be challenging for some men to implement such structure into their lives once released. Being employed often facilitated this routine, filled time and allowed for the participants to establish a work ethic. The literature has also indicated that employment often provides a positive prosocial network, contributing to an increased likelihood of positive change for offenders and an increased likelihood of staying crime free (Laub and Sampson, 2001; Maruna, 2001).

Bushway (2003) also spoke about the importance of work for offenders during re-entry and emphasized the importance of offender's taking an active role in their transition. He mentioned that there is more to work programs than just their implementation. He suggested that it is important for offenders to have support during their transition and entry into the workforce and comments that "managing the transition is clearly a crucial stage in the process of 'staying straight'... we need to learn far more about effective ways to encourage offenders to 'stay straight' in the context of work programs" (p. 14-15). Shivy, Wu, Moon, Mann, Holland and Eacho (2007) conducted focus groups with 15 participants and reported 11 domains that capture the barriers offenders face when re-entering the workforce. The following domains were described as very important and requiring attention when in transition: focusing on education, training, and, programming contributes to empowerment; thinking through career and occupational possibilities and being able to identify these goals; understanding the role of social networks (both positive and negative relationships); navigating the system (e.g., policies,

limitations of, resources), recognizing stress and challenges/finding motivators because transition is a stressful time; coming to terms with offender status (e.g., criminal record effects employment opportunities); dealing with substance abuse issues and the relationship to crime; addressing basic needs (e.g., food, housing, transportation); having children impacts reentry because of the responsibility and childcare issues; doing time means aging and acknowledging that age can limit opportunities; looking to your spiritual side is very helpful. Although Shivy et al were interested in workplace re-entry; many of these domains are similar to the categories described by participants in the current study (e.g., relationships, substance use, spirituality), indicating that there appear to be fundamental categories that warrant attention during transition.

This category provides important information for policy and program implementation. Service providers and organizations working with offenders during transition could assist them in finding appropriate work programs, scheduling, and implementing a prosocial routine into their lives. Sung and Richter (2006) have suggested that it would be beneficial if policy makers implemented incentives for employers to hire offenders and educate the community concerning offenders vocational needs. Shivy et al (2006) highlight that although offenders represent a highly marginalized group in the workforce, very little research and/or efforts are put into meeting their needs. Further research, funding, and policies would benefit this group. There is also a lack of research specific to Aboriginal offenders and the field would profit from a better understanding of the unique needs of this population.

*The role of freedom in transition*

Sixty percent of the participants firmly emphasized that freedom has motivated them to maintain a crime free life, emphasizing the deterring effects of incarceration. Considering that the justice system's approach to managing crime is punitive, it appears that the goal of removing freedom is helpful. However, the mechanism through which this operates is unknown. Is it a lack of freedom? Is it the unhealthy, violent environment that one must live in? From the participants' stories, it appears as though both of these are operating in this category. In one of the few studies mentioning freedom, Hughes (1998) reported that in a sample of 20 African-American and Latino American inner city men, fear of physical harm, incarceration, or both was one of the factors contributing to desistance. Other factors included concern and respect for their children, not wanting to be away from their immediate environment, and being supported by a dedicated person, which is similar to the healthy relationship category in the current findings. In a study of 440 drug abusing offenders who successfully completed a drug treatment program, Sung and Richter (2006) found that offenders increased risk of being incarcerated was a protective factor in maintaining a crime free life and stated that "all things being equal, a one-percentage-point increase in the incarceration rate decreased the odds of being arrested by 24%. Completing treatment and returning to the community during times of certain incarceration deterred recovering ex-offenders from this sample from being rearrested" (p. 370).

According to the RNR principle's risks factors, fear of official punishment is considered one of the many *minor* risk factors and a "less promising intermediate target for reduced recidivism" (Andrews et al., 2006, p. 11). The current findings suggest that

freedom is an important motivator for maintaining a crime free life; however, it must be noted that this does not indicate that harsher sentencing or ‘getting tough on crime’ will have a deterrent effect on offending. It merely indicates that freedom plays a role – but the mechanism is unknown. As there has been very little discussion in the literature concerning freedom and the impact on maintaining a crime free life, this category was not expected to occur in the data. Since little is known about this category, the findings contribute new information to the field encouraging further research. It would be beneficial to conduct research investigating the role that freedom plays during an offender’s transition from prison to the community. Examining the role of the lack of freedom compared to the role of the institutional environment would provide more detailed information about this category.

*The role of purpose in life and fulfillment in transition*

Almost half (47%) of the participants acknowledged an incident in this category indicating that striving to have a sense of purpose, meaning, and fulfillment in life was deemed a significant incident in maintaining a crime free life. Sub-themes that emerged were on a continuum from having an abstract sense of purpose or meaning in life to having a simple sense of daily goals. In addition, being able to give back and help others was strongly represented in this category. Volunteer work was often discussed as a method of giving back to others, as well as contributing to feeling a sense of purpose for oneself contributing to an increased self-esteem and pride.

Findings in the literature support the positive relationship between purpose in life and non-offending behaviour. Research has demonstrated that, in comparison to non-

offenders, offending behaviour is linked to a decreased sense of purpose in life. In a study conducted by Black and Gregson (1973), 30 repeat offenders, 30 first time offenders and 30 non-offending individuals (control group) were compared on the purpose in life test (PIL) (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964). They found that purpose in life significantly decreased with increased offending: repeat offenders' scored significantly lower on the PIL than both the first time inmates and the control group and first time inmates scored significantly lower compared to the control group. Similarly, Reker (1977) reported that in his sample of 48 inmates, scores on the PIL were significantly lower than that of the 805 *normals* in Crumbaugh and Maholicks (1969) sample and the control group in Black and Gregson's sample. In a more recent study, specific to Aboriginal offenders, Howell (2003), found that in a sample of 40 Aboriginal inmates, the PIL scores were similar to that of both Black and Gregson's repeat offenders and Reker's inmate sample.

Although not specific to offenders, Zika and Chamberlain (1992) investigated the relationship between the PIL and psychological well-being in a sample of 194 mothers and 150 elderly people. A statistically significant relationship was found between purpose in life and psychological well-being; those with low purpose in life scores showed detrimental effects in all aspects of psychological functioning (e.g., depression). The authors suggested that increasing meaning in life might be an important component of increasing psychological well-being.

In reference to individuals with substance abuse problems, Nicholson, Higgins, Turner, James, Stickle, and Pruitt (1994) reported that, compared to 49 control participants, 49 drug-abusing participants had significantly lower scores on the PIL. Nicholson and colleagues suggested that since low purpose in life appears to be



associated with maladaptive behaviours, treatment programs should consider purpose and meaning in life in their intervention strategies. Evidently, research supports the relationship between purpose in life and offending behaviour, psychological wellbeing, and substance misuse.

Wormith, Althouse, Simpson, Reitzel, Fagan, and Morgan (2007) discussed the current landscape and future directions for the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders. The authors suggested that researchers and clinicians should continue to investigate the role of positive psychology on offender rehabilitation highlighting that positive psychology may provide a potential alternative to current models of offender treatment, calling for further investigations into this topic. However, they noted that the concepts of positive psychology may be ideologically different from the current model of criminal justice and stated (p. 886):

Concepts such as “flourishing”, “a meaningful life” and “offender happiness” are not consistent with the current social and political antipathy toward offenders or with the punitive retributive model of criminal justice. However, data that reflect the lack of efficacy of our current crime-management system clearly invite a re-examination of that model.

Similar to purpose in life research in the psychological literature, Farrall (2005) introduced existentialism in the sociological literature. He discussed *identity change* as an *existential* process located *within* an individual that is often difficult to identify as influencing desistance. The quest for purpose and meaning are likely related to the underlying process for transformation and connected to strengthening a personal, cultural, and/or social identity. Although existentialism is an important feature of identity change,

Farrall stated that it has received very little attention in the desistance literature. Farrall suggested that the search for a meaningful identity “presents certain threats to an individual at an existential level” (p. 368), creating discomfort with the current identity, leading to a search for purpose and meaning, self-exploration, and ultimately identity change.

The participants in the current study have reported that both transformation and purpose in life were important in maintaining a crime free life; however, the relationship between the two categories is unknown. It can be speculated that they influence each other but the process by which this occurs is a topic for future research. As spirituality is often a part of existentialism, research could also investigate the relationship between purpose in life and Aboriginal spirituality and culture. Volunteer work emerged in this category, but work emerged in the routine and structure category suggesting that there are differences between the two; thus, future research could investigate whether this is a feature of this study, or if the two represent different motivators for maintaining a crime free life.

Implications for policy and practice are also apparent. As there is a relationship between purpose in life and offending behaviour, developing programs and implementing policies and practices that would allow for an increase in purpose in life, would be beneficial to the well being of offenders, and increase the likelihood of maintaining a crime free life. This could be fashioned in many ways. Treatment programs could be designed to enhance purpose in life. For example, Whiddon (1983) studied 20 inmates who attended a 6 month logotherapy treatment program (based on enhancing purpose in life). The group of inmates requested to move to a living unit together and subsequently

developed a self governed therapeutic community. At a two-year follow-up, all 20 offenders had increased their purpose in life. Of the nine offenders that had been released, 8 did not recidivate. Programs of this type could be an intermediary step between incarceration and the community. Additionally, when in the community and under the supervision of the NPB, parole officers could support offenders in pursuing activities that they define as meaningful. Half way house programs and/or community programs could be designed based on enhancing purpose in life. Since many of the participants in this study emphasized being able to volunteer and give back to the community, programs could be designed that connect offenders with volunteer programs and would be considered as a valuable component of their release plan.

#### *The role of emotions in transition*

This category reflects the value of learning how to acknowledge and express feelings in a healthy way (i.e. non-violent). Being able to share feelings, thoughts, experiences, and problems with a keen listener was noted as vital, as was being able to ask for emotional support and help. Twelve participants are represented in this category, producing a 28.6% participation rate. This category is likely strongly related the transformation of self category, healthy relationships and professional support categories; however, based on data analysis, it is important for this theme to stand alone. Participants highlighted the importance of this theme because of the difficult nature of identifying and expressing emotions and asking for emotional support, but not necessarily from a professional.

Learning the necessary skills to identify, process, and regulate emotions is vital in both a social context, understanding and interpreting others' behaviours, as well as a personal context, understanding one's own emotions. Since emotions affect both cognitions and behaviours, a lack of emotional understanding could lead to many difficulties like misinterpreting other's behaviours as hostile or misunderstanding one's own emotions. This lack of understanding could result in erroneous cognitive, behavioural, and/or emotional responses with subsequent consequences like violence. Greenberg has been researching and writing in the area of emotion for many years. One of his most recent papers (Greenberg, 2008) discussed the theory and research on emotion in psychology and psychotherapy, emphasizing the importance of targeting five principles- emotional awareness, expression, regulation, reflection, and emotion transformation- as a process of change that should be incorporated into psychotherapy. In reference to violent offenders and treatment programs, Howells and Day (2006) proposed that "for violent offenders to successfully engage in treatment, they not only have to experience and accurately label their emotional states, they have to be able and willing to disclose these states to others, and they have to have some motivation to do this" (p. 176). Although the participants in this study didn't specify that emotional expression was necessarily in the context of treatment or with professionals, this category highlights the value of learning these skills.

Similar to the transformation of self category, in regards to the RNR principle (Table 4), the major risk and need factors that are linked to this category that could be targeted to decrease offending behaviour include antisocial personality pattern and antisocial cognition. Targeting the dynamic need associated with the risk of antisocial

personality pattern would consist of building problem solving, self management, and anger management skills, as well as developing coping skills. In reference to antisocial cognitions, the dynamic need that should be addressed include: recognizing risky thinking and feeling, developing alternatives to this risky thinking and feeling, and adopt a reformed and/or antiriminal identity. This category demonstrates the importance of addressing these needs in order to assist offenders in maintaining a crime free life.

Because of the close link to other categories (e.g., healthy relationships, professional support), it would be helpful to further investigate the role of emotional expression in maintaining a crime free life. Perhaps research could thoroughly investigate Greenberg's (2008) five principles for working with emotion and therapy. Since this study did not capture information about the role of therapy, research could examine the impact of therapy on offender's emotional identification and regulation. Other studies could explore the effect of emotional disclosure based on the person the offender utilizes as a support person (e.g., professionals, friends, family, spiritual advisor). There is also a lack of research in the area of emotions specific to Aboriginal peoples; thus, further research should examine cultural differences and similarities in this area.

### *Limitations of the study*

There are a number of limitations for this study: self-report bias, selection bias, differing experiences, female researcher, loss of information through the CIT, and the number of incidents in the helpful versus obstacle categories, are a few limitations to be discussed. In addition, there is a substantial gap of research with female offenders-also a limitation to this study.

### *Self-report*

Although a goal of the study was to represent the voices of participants, some limitations are associated with self-report data. As with any self-report data, participants may not be reliable historians. That is, their memories for the critical incidents that contribute to or hinder the maintenance of a crime free life may not be entirely reliable. Memory is fallible and it will never be known how accurate the recollections of their transition are. There was also a substantial range of time since incarceration (2-35 years), which could contribute to memory loss. In addition, since the topic of inquiry was large, there was likely a great deal of information that was not shared with the researcher. Even though attempts were made to incorporate participants' voices in at all stages of the study (e.g., reviewing their transcripts), it is difficult to capture all aspects of the research question. Although self-report data is not without its challenges, for purposes of this study, it is not considered a hindrance, merely something to be aware of when reviewing the findings. To help overcome this challenge and add to the self-report, future research could include a thorough review of their correctional files, NPB files, and other written documentation of things like program involvement.

### *Selection bias*

As participation in the study was voluntary and a random selection of participants was not obtained, a self-selection bias may be a confounding factor. Specifically, it may be that the participants who chose to participate in the research did so for reasons that may comprise a selection bias. Some may have participated purely for the honorarium

and truly did not care about answering the questions to the best of their ability. Others may have participated because it provided them with something different to do. Yet others may have been truly interested in sharing their voices and stories of transition with the researcher. In addition, the criteria to participate (Aboriginal, federal time, out for at least 2 years without being involved in criminal activity) were based on participants' self-identification and the researcher trusts that participants were representing themselves truly. With this population, selection bias is difficult to overcome without a rigorous quantitative methodology. However, future research could attempt to overcome some of the challenges. For example, a thorough file review could substantiate information like the criteria to participate.

### *Differing experiences*

The participants in the present sample are of varying ages, have had differing incarceration lengths (2 years to indeterminate), have been out of prison for a substantial range in time (2-35 years) and represent a diversity of social and criminal histories. Each of these factors likely impact the experiences that participants have had when in transition from prison to the community. For example, the experiences of an offender who was released and has stayed out of prison for 35 years, is likely quite different from the experiences of an offender who was released two years ago. As such, different factors facilitating and hindering transformational strategies may be required at different stages of the process. Offenders' experiences with the CJS (both positive and negative) may have affected those who volunteered to participate in the study and/or what a participant chose to report. A participant may have excluded himself from participating in the

research because of his past experience with the CJS or research. This is a difficult limitation to overcome, as participation in research is voluntary and the researcher cannot control which persons choose to volunteer. Future research could assist in overcoming some of these concerns by investigating offenders' experiences based on their time since release (e.g., less than two years, two-five years, more than five years, etc.). This might allow for a better understanding of whether there are "stages of reintegration" that create different barriers.

#### *Female researcher*

Since the sole researcher was a 29 year-old female and all the participants were male, it is unknown whether or not gender has played a role on what participants' chose to share in their stories. Perhaps it did not matter and participants would have shared the same story with a male researcher. Conversely, maybe participants' shared only what they considered was appropriate to share with a female researcher. It is unknown what, if any, impact gender has played in the information gathered but it is hoped that participants provided information that they considered important to the research question. Future research could utilize researchers of varying genders and ages to determine whether or not this plays a role in the information provided by participants.

#### *Limitations of the CIT*

As this was an exploratory study, the CIT was a very useful methodological approach for this study. However, it is important to note that a great deal of information is lost when categorizing participants' stories into themes. The essences of their stories were



translated into generalized categories, potentially losing that essence. Although information is lost, much is also gained through categorization. The ability to contribute information concerning what facilitates and hinders a crime free life for Aboriginal offenders was the goal of the study; the CIT allowed for this. More importantly, CIT provides a vessel for the voices of participants to be heard.

### *Helpful versus hindering incidents*

The findings reflect a substantial difference in the number of incidents reported by participants; 341 in the helpful category versus 78 in the hindrance category. This was not anticipated and not entirely understood. As mentioned earlier, this could be a reflection of the order the questions were asked, with the helpful category being asked first, resulting in more information being shared. It is unknown how or if the order of questions has impacted the results or what the numbers of incidents represent. To determine the influence of the order of questions, future research should reverse the order of questions for half of the participants. Although not reported in this study, in my experiences of working within the Aboriginal community and with prior research, when one is attempting to live a positive life and is on a *healing journey*, one attempts to stay focused on the positive rather than the negative. In a prior study conducted by myself (Howell, 2003), one participant did not want to answer a question concerning treatment ineffectiveness because he did not want to focus on anything negative as he believed that it is always possible to “find the good in things and it is better to look for the good instead of looking at the bad” (p. 72). This could be a reason for the difference between the helpful and hindrance categories. Another reason the obstacle categories have less

incidents reported could be because participants believe that there are fewer obstacles in the transition from prison to the community.

### *Summary of limitations*

Although there are a number of limitations in the study, these are minor in nature and the findings are well substantiated by the literature. As this was an exploratory study, the information gathered contributes important information to the field and it is hoped that future research will answer some of the questions that still remain.

### *Conclusion*

The goal of this study was to gather information from Aboriginal offenders to establish a set of categories that describe the factors that help and hinder maintaining a crime free life after incarceration. The critical incident technique was utilized to examine 42 Aboriginal offenders' journey from prison to the community. A categorical map of both helpful incidents and the obstacles that hinder maintaining a crime free life was developed. Three hundred and forty-one incidents collapsed into nine major categories representing themes that were helpful in maintaining a crime free life: 1) transformation of self; 2) cultural and traditional experiences; 3) healthy relationships; 4) having routine and structure in daily living; 5) freedom from prison; 6) purpose and fulfillment in life; 7) attempting to live alcohol and drug free; 8) professional support and programming; and 9) learning to identify and express oneself. Seventy-eight incidents formed four categories representing obstacles that interfere with maintaining a crime free life: 1) self; 2)

unhealthy relationships; 3) substance use; and 4) lack of opportunity and professional support.

The findings were compared and contrasted to two major theories in the literature: desistance and the risk-needs-responsivity principle. Most of the categories were well substantiated in the literature contributing knowledge to theory, policy, practice, and the community. The findings that were not well established in the literature create avenues for future research. Information obtained from this study provides an increased understanding of the needs of Aboriginal offenders and offers guidance concerning useful strategies to incorporate into their wellness plans when entering the community, most notably respecting culture and traditional practices. The findings also add awareness of those circumstances, issues, and problems that arise during transition that may be harmful or create obstacles to a successful transition. It is hoped that the information gathered from this study will inform policies and procedures that affect the lives of the Aboriginal men who are involved in the CJS. To conclude the study, I leave you with an image of how I conceptualize the categorical map representing the findings. This map was not included earlier in the text because I do not want it to be mistaken as a new theory. It is just the beginning of my conceptualization of the data, is not a theoretically substantiated diagram and is still evolving.

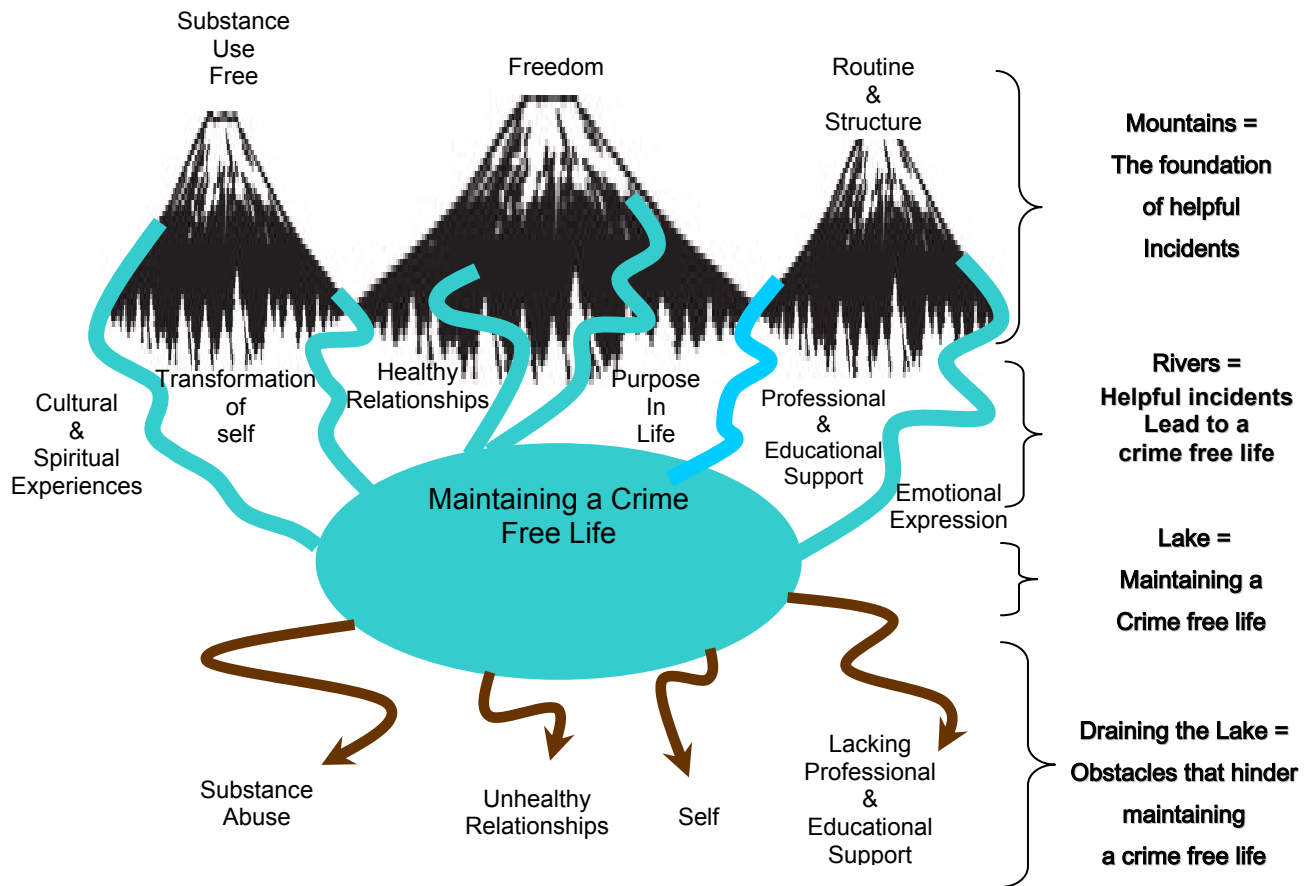


Illustration 2: Mother earth's categorical map

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## APPENDIX I

## UBC Ethical Approval

B05-0637 - The Point of No Return: Aboriginal Offenders' Journey Toward a Crime Free ... Page 1 of 1



Shirley A. Thompson | My Home | Projects | Logoff

RISe Welcome Page Committees Studies Help

... &gt; Studies &gt; B05-0637 - The Point of No Return: Aboriginal Offenders' Journey Toward a Crime Free Lifestyle

## Current State

Terminated

## I would like to create ...

☐ PAA - New Post-Approval Activity

## Activities

☐ REBA REBA Comments

## Viewing/Printing

Application - Full

Application - Review/Print

Return to My Home

## (H05-80637) B05-0637 - The Point of No Return: Aboriginal Offenders' Journey Toward a Crime Free Lifestyle

<b>Principal Investigator (PI):</b>	Rod McCormick	<b>Approval Department:</b>	Educational & Counselling Psychology, and Special Education
<b>Primary Contact:</b>	Rod McCormick	<b>Department Approver:</b>	
<b>Type of Study:</b>	Behavioural	<b>Review Board:</b>	Behavioural Research Ethics Board
<b>Minimal Risk:</b>		<b>Co-Investigators with Signing Authority:</b>	There are no items to display
<b>Initial Approved Date:</b>	August 15, 2005	<b>Date Expires:</b>	August 15, 2006
<b>Current Approval Certificate:</b>		<b>Version:</b>	1.0
<b>Type of Funding:</b>	N/A		
<b>CM Conflicts:</b>			

Correspondence   Provisos   Post Approval Activities   Application Changes   Activities Log

This contains all the correspondence and activities completed on the application before the initial approval. The title bar shows each activity that was completed, who completed it, and the date and time it was completed.

Activity	Author	Activity Date
<input type="checkbox"/> Terminated	Snezana M Milosevic	10/10/2007 3:24 PM PDT

☒ According to our records, the Certificate of Approval for this study expired more than 10 months ago; therefore we have terminated the file. Please note that any funds remaining in research grants associated with this Certificate of Approval will b...

**APPENDIX II**

**RESEARCH PACKAGE**



**Department of Educational and Counselling  
Psychology, and Special Education**  
 The University of British Columbia  
 Faculty of Education  
 2125 Main Mall  
 Vancouver BC Canada V6T 1Z4  
 Tel 604-822-8229 Fax 604-822-3302  
 www.ecps.educ.ubc.ca

## ***PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM***

**Title: THE POINT OF NO RETURN: ABORIGINAL OFFENDERS’  
JOURNEY TOWARD A CRIME FREE LIFESTYLE**

***Principal Investigator:*** Rod McCormick, PhD, Department of Counselling Psychology,  
 University of British Columbia (604-822-6444)

***Co-Investigator:*** Teresa M. Howell, MA, Department of Counselling Psychology,  
 University of British Columbia (604-785-4534)

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Hello. My name is Teresa Howell and I am a graduate student in Counselling Psychology. This research is being conducted as one of my requirements for a doctoral degree. Thank you for being here with me today.

The goal of this study is to gain knowledge concerning what is necessary for Aboriginal offenders when transitioning from prison life to living in the community. The research question is: What factors facilitate and hinder Aboriginal offenders in the maintenance of a crime free lifestyle?

The information obtained as a result of this dissertation will enable an enhanced understanding of what is effective in assisting Aboriginal offenders in maintaining a crime free lifestyle. The information will contribute information to offenders, community members, and organizations concerning reintegration strategies for Aboriginal offenders.

Participants will be given a chance to voice their experiences of transformation.

Involvement in the study will require that you fill out a background information form and participate in an interview regarding your experiences of the transition from living in



prison to living in the community. Specific questions may be asked in order to clarify any uncertainties. You may ask questions at any point during the session and are free to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice.

Interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed. You will be given the opportunity to read the transcripts and make appropriate changes. The tapes will be erased upon completion of the study. The total amount of time that will be required of you will not exceed 2 hours. You will receive a \$30 honorarium upon completion of the interview.

All documents and tapes will be identified only by code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet. Individual participants will not be identified in any reporting of the results of this research unless you give permission to do so and want to be acknowledged for your participation.

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant you may contact the Research Participant Information Line at 604-822-8598.

I have read and understood the above and by signing, I CONSENT to being a research participant. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

CIRCLE:

I AGREE DO NOT AGREE  
to be contacted in the future to review  
the transcripts and drafts of the written  
report.

I DO DO NOT  
Want my name acknowledged in the  
research.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

CIRCLE:

I AGREE DO NOT AGREE

to be contacted in the future for  
research participation in similar studies  
by the same researcher.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



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### **Background Information Form**

Please answer the following questions the best that you can. If you have any questions, please ask me.

\*\*\*Remember that the information you provide here is strictly **CONFIDENTIAL** and will be used for research purposes only.

Please note that throughout this form, you will see the term *Aboriginal*. For purposes of this form, the term Aboriginal refers to the Indigenous peoples of Canada. It must be noted that this may refer to people who identify themselves as *First Nations*, *Native*, *Indian*, *Inuit* or *Metis*. I acknowledge that using one term is problematic because it implies that these groups of people are heterogeneous when they are not; however, for simplicity, the term Aboriginal will be used and I apologize if this upsets you.

**Ancestry:**

1. Where are you from (which Band, Nation or group of people-Please include the name of the province)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your first language? (circle one)  
1-Aboriginal      2-English    3-French      4-Other: \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your Aboriginal language: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you speak this language (circle one):      1-Yes      2-No
5. Aboriginal Status: (circle one)  
1-Status Indian      2-Non-Status Indian      3-Metis      4-Inuit

**Social:**

6. What is your marital status? (please circle)  
1-Single      2-Married      3-Common-Law      4-Partner but not  
CL  
5-Divorced      6-Widowed
7. Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_  
(year/month/day)
8. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

**Employment:**

9. Are you working now?  
1-No      2-Full time      3-Part Time      4-  
Seasonal
10. In the past 2 years, how much of the time have you been employed? \_\_\_\_\_%
11. If you are unemployed, how long has it been? \_\_\_\_\_ (weeks)
12. If you are working, what do you do? \_\_\_\_\_

*Health:*

13. In general, how do you consider your physical health to be?

1-Excellent      2-Good      3-Fair      4-Poor

14. In general, how do you consider your mental health to be?

1-Excellent      2-Good      3-Fair      4-Poor

15. In general, how do you consider your emotional health to be?

1-Excellent      2-Good      3-Fair      4-Poor

16. In general, how do you consider your spiritual health to be?

1-Excellent      2-Good      3-Fair      4-Poor

*Community:*

17. **Before** incarceration, where did you **mostly** live? (please circle)

1-Reserve      2-Rural      3-Urban      4-Other: \_\_\_\_\_

18. **After** incarceration, where did you **mostly** live? (please circle)

1-Reserve      2-Rural      3-Urban      4-Other: \_\_\_\_\_

19. Where do you **currently live**? (please circle)

1-Reserve      2-Rural      3-Urban      4-Other: \_\_\_\_\_

20. Have you ever lived on a reserve? If so, please list location with approximate number of years:

Location	# of Years

--	--

21. Have you ever lived in a rural area? If so, please list location with approximate number of years:

Location	# of Years

22. Have you ever lived in an urban area? If so, please list where with approximate number of years:

Location	# of Years

***Education:***

23. How far did you go in the Western Education System? \_\_\_\_\_ (grade)

24. Did you ever attend college? 1- Yes 2-No

25. Did you ever attend university? 1-Yes 2-No

26. Did you ever attend a technical school (e.g., BCIT)? 1-Yes 2-No

27. Have you ever attended any other formal education program? 1-Yes 2-No

Where: \_\_\_\_\_

28. Have you ever attended a residential school? 1- Yes 2- No

29. If yes, how many years did you attend the school? \_\_\_\_\_

30. If yes, where did you go to residential school? (list all that you attended)

School	Approximate Dates

31. Did either of your parents ever attend a residential school? (please circle)

1-Yes

2- No

32. If yes, how many years did they attend the school? Mother: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Father: \_\_\_\_\_

33. If yes, where did they go to residential school? (list all that they attended)

Mother	Father

***Program Involvement:***

34. To the best of your ability, indicate whether you attended the following programs while incarcerated.

a) Elders or Spiritual Advisor (talking with an Elder about your problems)	1-yes	2-no
b) Native Liaison Worker	1-yes	2-no
c) Substance Abuse Program for Aboriginal Offenders	1-yes	2-no
d) In Search of Your Warrior (Violence program)	1-yes	2-no
e) Aboriginal Sexual Offenders Program	1-yes	2-no
f) Traditional Practices and Teachings	1-yes	2-no
g) Mama Wi Program (Family violence Program)	1-yes	2-no
h) Psychologist (talking with a Psychologist about your problems)	1-yes	2-no
i) Counsellor (e.g., Alcohol and Drug Counsellor)	1-yes	2-no
j) Chaplain (talking with a Chaplain or Minister about problems)	1-yes	2-no
k) Offender Substance Abuse Program (OSAP or NSAP)	1-yes	2-no
l) Relapse Prevention	1-yes	2-no
m) Violent Offender or Violent Prevention Program (VOP or VPP)	1-yes	2-no
n) Sexual Offenders Program (SOP)	1-yes	2-no
o) Living Skills-Cognitive Skills Program	1-yes	2-no
p) Living Skills- Family Violence Prevention Program	1-yes	2-no
q) Living Skills- Anger and Emotions Program	1-yes	2-no
r) Living Skills- Parenting Skills Program	1-yes	2-no
s) Living Skills- Reasoning and Rehabilitation	1-yes	2-no
t) Living Skills- Community Integration Program	1-yes	2-no
u) Educational or Vocational Programs	1-yes	2-no
v) Other-please list:	1-yes	2-no
w) Other-please list:	1-yes	2-no
x) Other-please list:	1-yes	2-no

35. To the best of your ability, indicate whether you attended the following programs while on conditional release and in the community.

a) Elders or Spiritual Advisor (talking with an Elder for support, guidance, etc)	1-yes	2-no
b) Traditional Practices and Teachings (e.g., Big House or sweats)	1-yes	2-no
c) Community Gatherings or Activities (e.g., powwows)	1-yes	2-no
d) Aboriginal Programs- Name:	1-yes	2-no
e) Half-way House	1-yes	2-no
f) Psychologist or Counsellor (talking with a Psychologist for	1-yes	2-no

support, guidance, etc)		
g) Counsellor (e.g., Alcohol and Drug Counsellor)	1-yes	2-no
h) Chaplain (talking with Chaplain, Minister for support, guidance)	1-yes	2-no
i) Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous	1-yes	2-no
j) Educational Programs	1-yes	2-no
k) Employment Programs	1-yes	2-no
l) CSC implemented program (e.g., Choices)	1-yes	2-no
m) Other-please list:	1-yes	2-no
n) Other-please list:	1-yes	2-no
o) Other-please list:	1-yes	2-no

***Criminal History:***

36. How old were you when you were convicted with your **first** offence? \_\_\_\_\_

37. What was the offence?

1- Violent: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2- Sexual:

3- Property: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4: Other:

38. Over the years, what kinds or types of offences were you **most likely** to be committing and or charged for?

1- Violent: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2- Sexual:

3- Property: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4: Other:

39. How many offences do you think you have committed? \_\_\_\_\_

40. How many of these offences were you convicted of? \_\_\_\_\_

41. How many times have you been incarcerated? \_\_\_\_\_

42. What is the longest sentence that you have received? \_\_\_\_\_

43. What was your **last** criminal offence that you were convicted of? (Please circle and list name of charge)

1- Violent: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2- Sexual:



3- Property: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4: Other:

44. How long was your last sentence? \_\_\_\_\_

45. How old were you when you were last convicted? \_\_\_\_\_

46. When were you last released from prison? \_\_\_\_\_

47. What institution were you released from? \_\_\_\_\_

48. What level of security was that institution?

1-Minimum  
\_\_\_\_\_

2-Medium

3-Maximum

4-Other:

49. What type of release did you receive?

1-Day parole

2-Full parole

3-Statutory release

4-Warrant Expiry Date

5- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

50. If released on parole, did you ever return to prison for committing another crime?

1-yes

2-no

51. Which offense did you commit?

1- Violent: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2- Sexual:

3- Property: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4: Other:

52. If released on parole, did you ever return to prison for a technical violation  
(e.g., positive urinalysis, out of jurisdiction, curfew violation)?

1-yes

2-no

53. Which technical violation? \_\_\_\_\_

54. What do you think has been your most serious offence?

1- Violent: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2- Sexual:

3- Property: \_\_\_\_\_

4: Other:

***Personal History:***

55. In childhood, did you ever experience the following?

a) Foster care	1-yes	2-no
b) Orphanage	1-yes	2-no
c) Adoption	1-yes	2-no
d) Emotional abuse or Neglect	1-yes	2-no
e) Physical abuse	1-yes	2-no
f) Sexual abuse	1-yes	2-no

56. Have you ever attempted suicide? 1-Yes 2-No

***Substance Use History:***57. For the following, please circle yes or no for all of the drugs that you have **tried**:  
(for purposes of getting high or intoxicated)

g) Alcohol	1-yes	2-no
h) Marijuana	1-yes	2-no
i) Amphetamines and Methamphetamines (e.g., speed)	1-yes	2-no
j) Cocaine, Crack, etc.	1-yes	2-no
k) Opioids (heroin, morphine, dilaudid, demoral, codeine, etc.)	1-yes	2-no
l) Sedatives (e.g., sleeping pills like valium)	1-yes	2-no
m) Phencyclidine (e.g., PCP, Hog, Tranq, Angel Dust)	1-yes	2-no
n) Hallucinogens (e.g., mushrooms, acid, LSD)	1-yes	2-no
o) Inhalants (e.g., gas, glue, paint)	1-yes	2-no
p) Prescription drugs (e.g., sleeping pills, Tylenol)	1-yes	2-no
q) Other:	1-yes	2-no

58. Please circle the letter of all the drugs that you have been **addicted to**:

a) Alcohol	1-yes	2-no
b) Marijuana	1-yes	2-no
c) Amphetamines and Methamphetamines (e.g., speed)	1-yes	2-no
d) Cocaine, Crack, etc.	1-yes	2-no
e) Opioids (heroin, morphine, dilaudid, demoral, codeine, etc.)	1-yes	2-no
f) Sedatives (e.g., sleeping pills like valium)	1-yes	2-no
g) Phencyclidine (e.g., PCP, Hog, Tranq, Angel Dust)	1-yes	2-no
h) Hallucinogens (e.g., mushrooms, acid, LSD)	1-yes	2-no
i) Inhalants (e.g., gas, glue, paint)	1-yes	2-no
j) Prescription drugs (e.g., sleeping pills, Tylenol)	1-yes	2-no
k) Other:	1-yes	2-no

59. Please circle the letter of all the drugs that you are **currently taking**:  
(for purposes of getting high or intoxicated)

l) Alcohol	1-yes	2-no
m) Marijuana	1-yes	2-no
n) Amphetamines and Methamphetamines (e.g., speed)	1-yes	2-no
o) Cocaine, Crack, etc.	1-yes	2-no
p) Opioids (heroin, morphine, dilaudid, demoral, codeine, etc.)	1-yes	2-no
q) Sedatives (e.g., sleeping pills like valium)	1-yes	2-no
r) Phencyclidine (e.g., PCP, Hog, Tranq, Angel Dust)	1-yes	2-no
s) Hallucinogens (e.g., mushrooms, acid, LSD)	1-yes	2-no
t) Inhalants (e.g., gas, glue, paint)	1-yes	2-no
u) Prescription drugs (e.g., sleeping pills, Tylenol)	1-yes	2-no
v) Other:	1-yes	2-no

60. How old were you when you first experimented with Alcohol or Drugs? \_\_\_\_\_

61. If you had a substance misuse problem, how old were you when you acknowledged this problem? \_\_\_\_\_

62. What do you think has influenced you the **most** in using drugs?

1-Friends/Peers

2-Family

3-Abuse experiences/Trauma

4-Mental Health (e.g., depression/anxiety)

5-Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Interview Protocol

Thank you for being here with me today. As described in the consent form, the reason you are here with me today is to talk about your experiences of transition from being incarcerated to living a crime free lifestyle. I am going to ask you some questions and I am requesting that you answer them to the best of your ability. The questions will focus on two different situations: things that helped you in your transition and things that interfered with your transition.

It is important for you to know that there are no right or wrong answers and if you have any questions, please ask me at anytime. During the interview, I might need to stop you and ask some questions along the way. Does this sound all right with you?

Part 1: During your transition from being incarcerated to living in the community, what HELPED you maintain a crime free lifestyle?

For each answer, ask about:

SOURCE (eg self, program, other people)- What was the source of this incident?

ACTION -What exactly happened?

OUTCOME-What was the outcome of this situation?

Approximately when did this incident occur (for order effects)?

Is there anything else that played a positive role and helped you maintain a crime free lifestyle that you are not willing to share with me? (yes or no answers are acceptable, but if possible-get a CATEGORY e.g., intimacy with partner)

Part 2: During your transition from being incarcerated to living in the community, what INTERFERED with maintaining a crime free lifestyle?

For each answer, ask about:

SOURCE (eg self, program, other people)- What was the source of this incident?

ACTION -What exactly happened?

OUTCOME- What was the outcome of this situation?

When did this incident occur (for order effects)?

Is there anything else that played a negative role and interfered with maintaining a crime free lifestyle that you are not willing to share with me? (yes or no answers are acceptable, but if possible-get a CATEGORY e.g., bad parole officer)

If you could pass on words of wisdom to men who have experienced incarceration and are in the process of transitioning back into the community, what would you say?



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## *Information Notice*

### ***THE POINT OF NO RETURN: ABORIGINAL OFFENDERS' JOURNEY TOWARD A CRIME FREE LIFESTYLE***

Investigators: Dr. Rod McCormick, PhD & Teresa M. Howell, MA, University of British Columbia.

**PROJECT:** Hello. My name is Teresa and I am a graduate student in Counselling Psychology. This research is being conducted as one of my requirements for a doctoral degree. I am requesting your voluntary participation in a research project concerning reintegration into the community after living in prison. We are requesting Aboriginal men (who have been incarcerated in the past) to fill out some forms and participate in an interview about their transition from living inside the prison to living in the community.

Specifically, we are interested in hearing about what you believe has helped you maintain a crime free lifestyle. We believe that the information that you provide to us will help us better understand reintegration strategies for Aboriginal men. Too often, Aboriginal voices go unheard. This is a chance for Aboriginal men to talk about their experiences.

**TIME COMMITMENT:** Approximately 1-2 hours

**HONORARIUM:** \$30

**WHAT YOU ARE REQUIRED TO DO:** Fill out some forms and participate in an interview regarding your experiences with maintaining a crime free lifestyle.

**CRITERIA:** 1. Aboriginal Men (self-identified, including: First Nations, Metis, Inuit, Status, Non-Status)  
2. Have been incarcerated for more than 2 years (Federal Sentence).  
3. Have been OUT of prison for at least 2 years.

**All information you provide will remain strictly *confidential*  
and will only be used for the purposes of this study.**

**If you are interested please contact Teresa and she will get back to you as soon as possible.**

# *THANK YOU*