

A New Identity:

The Place of the 7th Step Society in Offender Reentry

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Susan Hornby
for
7th Step Society of Canada

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Helping incorrigible offenders change their behaviour and attitudes to become productive members of the community. -7th Step Society of Canada

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To obtain additional copies please contact:

7th Step Society of Canada

Box 2017

246 Stewart Green S.W.

Calgary, AB T3H 3C8

Email: seventh@7thstep.ca

Website: 7thstep.ca

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Dedication:

This report is dedicated to past and present members of 7th Step Society of Canada and to those 'incorrigibles' who believe they have the right to a new identity.

*Each of you as an individual has only the strength of one.
Each of you, as a member of this group, has the strength of many.
I believe sincerely that each of you can honestly use that strength to
maintain your freedom. I believe in all of you and
I further believe that none of you will let all of you down.*

(Closing Thought, Seventh Step meeting, 1960s. Sands, 1967, p. 115)

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	4
Introduction.....	7
Purpose of Literature Review.....	7
Literature Selection Process.....	7
What do Career Criminals – Incurables – Look Like?.....	9
Offender Demographics.....	9
Young Offender and Chronic Offender Comparisons.....	11
Corrections Environment.....	14
1960s: Rehabilitation Era.....	14
1970s: ‘Nothing Works’.....	15
1980s-2000: What Works.....	15
21st Century: Options in a ‘Tough on Crime’ Era.....	16
Research Questions.....	21
Research Question 1: Key Theories of Criminal Behaviour and Rehabilitation.....	22
Labeling Theory: In Search of an Identity.....	22
Incarceration stigma.....	23
Gang identity.....	23
‘Identity nakedness’.....	24
General Strain Theory.....	24
Differential Association Theory.....	24
Cognitive Transformation Theory.....	25
Research Question 2: Principles of Effective Treatment and Self-Help Programs.....	30
Professional Treatment Programs.....	30
Mutual Support Programs.....	32
A. Self-help group principles.....	32
Ideologies.....	33
Finding the diamond.....	33
B. Volunteerism principles.....	33
Research Question 3: National Endeavours to Reduce Recidivism.....	39
Current Incarceration Statistics.....	40
Endeavours.....	41
Reentry courts.....	41
Reasoning and Rehabilitation.....	41
Circles of Support and Accountability.....	42
LifeLine.....	42

Research Question 4: Self-Help and Treatment Exemplars	46
Self-Help Models	46
Alcoholics' Anonymous	47
Synanon	47
UNLOCK	48
Therapeutic Communities	49
Faith-Based Models	50
Ready 4 Work	50
Welcome Home Ministries	50
Research Question 5: 7th Step Model and Offender Commitment	54
7th Step 1960s	55
Hot Seat	56
Origins	56
Hot seat considerations	57
Research Question 6: 7th Step's Place in 21st Century Rehabilitation	61
Prisoner Reentry	61
Offender Identity	62
Exiting a Gang	62
Positive Peer Group	63
Conclusion	68
Discussion	68
Recommendations	70
Final Word	70
Appendix A: List of Offender Support Websites	72

Executive Summary

The people of focus for 7th Step Society of Canada are the ‘incorrigibles’. These career criminals are the difficult population in prison because of their multiple crimes and their problems both entering society from prison and staying there without reoffending. This is also a powerful group, often the leaders in prisons. The 7th Step Society provides a way out for chronic offenders – a way out of prison and a way out of the patterns of offending that maintain cycles of crime and incarceration.

This report is a review of the literature of 7th Step as a pathway to freedom for career criminals. It also places 7th Step within a broader context of corrections, offender rehabilitation, and the correctional environment over the past 50 years – since the establishment of Seventh Step Foundation in the United States. While the Canadian and American criminal justice systems and offender programs and supports are explored in the greatest depth because these are the countries where Seventh Step has existed, literature from the United Kingdom and, to a lesser degree, other countries is also reviewed.

The terms ‘7th Step Society’ and ‘Seventh Step Foundation’ are not used interchangeably in this paper. The latter was the original name of the organization formed in the 1960s in the United States by offender Bill Sands with the assistance of prison chaplain Rev. James Post and supported by offenders as well as criminal justice leaders. The Seventh Step movement came to Canada in the latter part of the 1960s and became known as the 7th Step Society. This report continues the practice of calling the American organization as Seventh Step or Seventh Step Foundation and the Canadian organization as 7th Step or 7th Step of Canada.

The report is organized into sections around six research questions. The first questions are broad in scope in order to examine 7th Step Society in the correctional environments in which it has existed. The later questions focus directly on key elements of 7th Step Society and also on its potential as an organization dedicated to the desistance of chronic offenders away from criminal lifestyles.

The term ‘desistance’ appears frequently in this report. Desistance means more than the word’s literal definition – to stop, to terminate. In criminology, desistance is the process of moving from the moment when criminal activity stops to a new definition of self for the offender, a new identity. Desistance literature forms an integral part of this report because this body of research, like 7th Step Society, pays respectful attention to the voices of offenders.

Key Points

The 1960s was the era of encounter groups and self-actualization when professional therapists and patients came together as equals for experiential learning and improved lives. The 1970s, however, represented a return to a more punitive response to crime. The next two decades became noted for the many precise, scientifically-developed standardized tools to assess and to treat the risk an offender presents to public safety. The undercurrent throughout the decades is the separation of offenders from the mainstream of society, the differences between 'criminals' and 'citizens'. The research literature since 2000 appears to be more multiply directed: while the science-based programs are still heralded as the 'gold standard', other researchers are less enamoured of this work and argue for the need to have offenders play a role in their own recovery.

Key theories on long-term recidivism and on rehabilitation situate 7th Step into a place of evidence, rather than as an ad hoc gathering of criminals for the purpose of talking about areas of interest to them. Four theories are described in detail. The first, labeling theory describes the effect of labels and stigma on the identity of an offender; the label of ex-prisoner in particular leaves offenders in a group outside of social definitions of 'citizen'. The effort required to leave a criminal lifestyle takes offenders to a state of 'identity nakedness'. This is clearly a role where 7th Step can help. The second, general strain theory, argues that it is not just the absence of positive relationships but the presence of negative ones, including 'noxious stimuli', which lead one to delinquency. The third, differential association theory, also describes negative relationships but differs from strain theory in targeting the need to rehabilitate an individual by rehabilitating his group. The fourth, cognitive transformation theory, explains the effect of adopting a new narrative, a new definition of self in order to 'transform' from offender into another, healthier identity.

Professional rehabilitation programs differ from mutual support (self-help and volunteer) initiatives, but there are also similarities. Here, the notion of 'identity' is again raised; a principle of effective treatment, regardless of the direction, is that an offender adopt a new identity that will allow him to become known to himself and the world as something he considers to be positive.

Despite the current 'tough-on-crime' environment in North America in particular, there are national endeavours in place to reduce crime rates and to assist offenders in the process of reintegration. Initiatives chosen are: in the United States, the reentry court; and in Canada, Reasoning and Rehabilitation, Circles of Support and Accountability, and LifeLine. I should explain that I include Circles of Support, even though they focus on sex offenders – a group outside the mandate of 7th Step – because it is a community, volunteer-run program targeting the reentry of high-risk offenders.

Peer support and volunteer programs offer another perspective to reintegration for offenders. Some of the programs described provided foundational elements in the creation of the Seventh Step Foundation, even though they do not offer support specifically to offenders.

The section that responds to Research Question 5 is the heart of the report, in that it lays out two of the biggest strengths, as well as two of the greatest challenges for 7th Step Society: the use of self-help in a chronic offender population, and the origins and the benefit of the 'hot seat' method of intervention. The literature used in this section points firmly to the necessity of self-help for this group of offenders, in order to have them become personally involved in their own recovery, to see choices for their lives that are authentic and attainable because of the efforts and experiences of other incorrigibles.

The use of the 'hot seat' as a central feature of 7th Step meetings is not easily described. The literature did not show the origins and theory behind the 'hot seat' as an intervention. In fact, one reason Sands may not have used 'hot seat' was because it was slang in the mid-20th century in the United States for the electric chair (though there was no indication found that he consciously chose to NOT use the term). To find some basis for it, the literature rather roundly looks at the beginnings of encounter groups in the 1960s, as well as the work of therapists such as Frederick Perls (Gestalt Therapy) and Albert Ellis (Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy).

The final Research Question places 7th Step in the context of Canadian corrections, as an organization premised on the concepts of self-help and peer-support, not a member of the official correctional system but a partner with that system. It is a voice of the offender both through the Society's groups across the country and also as an advocate of prisoner justice. It contributes to safe communities by respecting and engaging the chronic offender to become realistic, set on a path to freedom, and embracing a new identity – a full citizen, a volunteer, a 7th Stepper. This gives career criminals a reentry self-concept, one that is an option for gang members as much as for those from other socially excluded communities, including drug networks and inner city neighbourhoods.

The current correctional climate is not offering much in the way of reentry support to this group of offenders, as many are released at their Statutory Release date. 7th Step is well placed to help fill that gap. It has a history as a respected organization and the timing is in favour of community engagement in offender reentry.

Introduction

Almost everyone who is labeled as a 'criminal' eventually goes straight. (Maruna, 1999, p. xv)

They are called career criminals, incorrigibles, chronic offenders. They are isolated from society, often for years at a time, and stigmatized upon their return to the community. These men and, less frequently, these women who commit multiple crimes are largely rejected and outcast by their families and their communities. Often they commit non-violent crimes, such as break and enters or drug offenses, but this group also includes those guilty of robberies, weapons use, and gang violence. They represent a majority of Canada's prison population, and are the bane of corrections workers, police, and public safety organizations. What can be done to stop these individuals from the destructive lives they lead?

Purpose of Literature Review

The purpose of this report is to provide a review of the literature on the effectiveness, potential, and challenges of the 7th Step Society of Canada in assisting chronic offenders to break away from criminal lifestyles and find pathways to freedom. Further, this review also, and more broadly, explores the correctional environment, specifically in Canada but in the United States and other countries as well, to identify chronic offender rehabilitation and reentry needs and the ways these needs are, and are not, being met by the official organizations. This environment situates the perspective and role of self-help, peer-support, volunteer groups such as 7th Step in the criminal justice landscape.

Literature Selection Process

This is not, though, a systematic review, in that it is not an exhaustive search of all literature on these topics; rather, the literature included provides an overview of the historical (1960s) and current needs of incorrigible offenders, and the benefit of 7th Step in offering a way out of crime, a way to life outside of prison. It is important to note that, while 7th Step offers membership and support to offenders serving life sentences, the predominant focus is on those offenders who return to crime, and to incarceration, time and again¹.

The search for literature began with a wide sweep, as there is no previous research on 7th Step activities and very few mentions of this organization's American forefather, Seventh Step Foundation², in the literature. The following were the most frequently searched keywords: self-help groups; offender support; offender programs; Seventh Step; peer support and offenders; prisoner reentry; gang members and reentry; volunteers and offenders; attack therapy. Academic peer-reviewed journal articles and grey literature

¹ For more information on long-term and life-sentence offenders, see CSC Research Branch, 2000, 'Managing long-term offenders' and all other articles in the special issue on long-term offenders: FORUM on Corrections Research, 2000 12(3).

² 7th Step Society is the more commonly used title for this organization in Canada; Seventh Step Foundation is the original and current American title.

(usually books) were selected with the above keywords and from the reference lists of reviewed publications. In addition, websites of offender support organizations and groups were also examined to determine the level to which they focus on chronic, career criminals. The following qualifiers were imposed on this search:

1. Books and journal articles written in the English language;
2. Materials written, with rare exceptions, since 1960;³
3. Works from Canada, United States, and international sources;
4. Current and past organizations that, like 7th Step, offer support to incarcerated and post-release offenders.

³ The Seventh Step Foundation was begun in 1963 in the United States and in 1968 (as the 7th Step Society) in Canada. In order to provide an overview of the correctional reform views and offender reintegration concepts, as well as prevailing psychological perspectives of the day, the literature dates to 1960.

What do Career Criminals – Incurrigibles – Look Like?

Socially excluded street offenders... have the most difficult time 'reintegrating,' because they were usually never integrated in the mainstream in the first place (Maruna, 1999, p. 58).

A basis for much criminological research is the notion of the 'born criminal,' the deviant destined to a lifetime of crime [2, 3, 1, 4]. One frequently-cited definition of a chronic offender [4,5] is an individual who has had five or more police contacts by age 17, although researchers have found this applies more readily to males than to females [4]. All agree that career criminals are those who have spent much of their lives incarcerated, involved in criminal justice operations – probation, parole – and engaged in criminal pursuits: "Many of them commit crime over several years and serve multiple jail or prison terms in the process. In a word, they are men who failed to learn their lesson" [6, p. xiii].

An equally strong correlation in the research is the relationship of crime and age: Young people commit the most crimes, and an individual's lambda, or frequency of offenses, falls as he or she ages [2]. However, in an extensive review of criminological research on age as a factor in desistance – or stopping – of criminal offending, Hirschi and Gottfredson [2, 3] were unable to provide causal relationship of either age or of early onset of police contact with length of criminal career, despite reviewing the literature from the mid-1800s to 1980 across North America, Europe, Australia, and Asia. What does this mean? It means that although most crime is committed by the young, the length of criminal careers is not related to the aging process of the individual offender or to his/her age at first contact with the police. It also means that while age slows down a person's criminal activity (as is the case with most human activity) it does not necessarily have an effect on his or her propensity for crime, or criminality [3].

This distinction is significant for 7th Step: If the organization is to be effective over the long term as a pathway to a non-criminal life, its direction is not to the aging criminal, but to the criminality of chronic offenders. For, while a career criminal may commit fewer crimes with age, he or she may still identify with a criminalized lifestyle unless other personal and social changes are made. This may be the greatest value of 7th Step, to provide 'incurrigibles' with a new identity.

Offender Demographics

From first offenders, they become second offenders, multiple offenders, eventually habitual criminals and every sentence they serve in hatred and resentment (Sands, 1967, p. 16).

The majority of prisons are filled with men and women born into families and into communities of poverty, low literacy, and chronic health problems – environments which

have been socially isolated, spatially deprived for generations [8]. As Piquero, Farrington, and Blumstein noted in their extensive 2003 review of longitudinal studies of criminal careers, “ineffective parenting, poor school performance, low measured IQ, drug use, and parental criminality were related to participation” in criminal careers beginning in teen years [4, p. 379].

The North American inmate population⁴, as is the case in prisons in most other First World countries, has seen much higher numbers of persons with mental illness, illiteracy, and impoverished living conditions pre-arrest than exist in the non-offender population [9, 10]. Homelessness is much higher in the prison population: Greenberg and Rosenheck’s 2008 study of American state and federal prison inmates found that homelessness in this population was four to six times higher than the national numbers [11].

In the 1950s and 1960s, when Bill Sands was engaged in his criminal career and resulting prison term, poverty and illiteracy were a factor in the life courses of many inmates [12, 13]. However, mental institutions were still prevalent throughout North America⁵ and Europe; the mass de-institutionalization of the mentally ill had not yet taken place [9, 14]. As a result, there were proportionally fewer inmates suffering from mental illness than is the current case [12, 15, 16]. Today, prisons are seen as the final repository of the mentally ill and the nuisance street people, the only facility that cannot turn anyone away on the premise that the beds are full [15]. A Canadian study found that the prevalence of mental disorders in incarcerated Canadians surpassed 84%, together with significant comorbidity of mental illness and addiction [17]. While the rate of mental illness in prisons changes, depending on the assessments and definitions⁶ used [9], researchers in a number of countries point to mental conditions in inmates as a standard in prisons [18, 19, 20, 21].

The reentry of persons with mental illness, often with co-occurring substance abuse issues, presents both a challenge and an opportunity for community organizations and, in particular, for an agency such as 7th Step which provides services both inside the prison and outside in the community [22]. As Draine and Herman (2007) note: “They enter an extreme life transition in which there are few, if any, rehabilitative resources for former prisoners, much less for those with behavioral health needs” [23,p. 1577].

Not all chronic offenders have debilitating mental illness. Yet, all are released to face a multitude of personal problems: they often have no financial resources, no means to secure housing that is safe and affordable, limited employment prospects, and diminished family or community supports [22, 10, 24, 25]. For 7th Step Society, the reality of greater number of offenders with mental illness, often combined with addictions, means the need for re-examination of its services: Does it meet the needs of the chronic offender population of the 21st century?

4 7th Step Society (Canada) and Seventh Step Foundation (US) have been, since the beginning, active only in these two countries.

5 In the U.S. over a 50-year period (1955-2005), the number of public psychiatric beds was reduced by 95%, from 340/100 000 to 17/100 000 [9].

6 Some researchers reflect numbers of offenders who experience general mental discomfort and functioning impairment; others count only clinical mental illness diagnoses [9].

Young Offender and Chronic Offender Comparisons

Incorrigibles tend to begin their criminal behaviours in adolescence and, for some, even younger in childhood [12, 2,26, 27, 28, 29]; this life-course pattern is also known as the criminal career paradigm [30, 4]. In the years since the Gluecks' 1950 study [1] of delinquency and criminality⁷, researchers of criminal patterns have argued that, in general, the earlier the start the longer the duration [4, 32,]. Moffitt's [27] developmental taxonomy⁸ separates adolescent offenders into two groups: the 'adolescent limited' or those whose criminal careers end at the onset of adulthood, and the 'life-course persistent,' tossed off from society as " 'bad apples' who exhibit significant deficits in early childhood socialization and are rarely likely to get back on track" [4, p. 399].

Gendreau referred to the 'striking' connection between juvenile and adult criminal behaviours [34] and called for more research looking at linkages between juvenile thinking and behaviours and adult criminal careers. Wileman, Gullone, and Moss [32] studied persistent young offenders in Australia and found that primary group deficiency, from inadequate parental attachments to limited youth connections to excluded social networks, brought about concrete thinking and high anxiety, and inhibited youths' ability to adapt to prosocial standards.

Abrams [35] found that youth feel the need to stay away from old friends if they are to remain crime-free, but that associations with their peer group cannot be entirely avoided; 'selective involvement' with peers allow some youth to avoid a return to crime and incarceration.

Summary

In the end, who these chronic offenders are depends on a multiple group of factors, both social and individual. As Hochstetler, DeLisi, and Pratt note, "prison is difficult" [19, p. 601] and positive supports for chronic offenders both during incarceration and post-release are not abundant.

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8 The classification of the development stages of a person, from infancy to adulthood.

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Corrections Environment

We must accept the reality that to confine offenders behind walls without trying to change them is an expensive folly with short term benefits – winning the battles while losing the war. It is wrong. It is expensive. It is stupid. (Former US Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger, in Gideon, 2011, p. 14).

1960s: Rehabilitation Era

Seventh Step Foundation was born in a time of excitement and expectation about the possibilities for authentic and successful treatment of crime. The post World War II period of the 1950s and 1960s was considered by criminologists as the ‘halcyon days’ of correctional change, a time when they would become leaders of a social reform “away from punitive responses to criminals and delinquents and toward a society in which treatment, rehabilitation, and reintegration of deviants and lawbreakers would be dominant cultural motifs” [2, p. 272]. In the United Kingdom, as well as in Canada and the United States, parole and probation officers were trained in befriending and respecting offenders: the approach was based on social work, rather than police practices [3].

Yet, as Gendreau reflected in his 1996 review of correctional treatment from the 1960s to the mid-1990s, “although there was a zeitgeist favorable to rehabilitation 30 years ago, there never was, despite the claims of rehabilitation skeptics, a halcyon era when offender treatment flourished in practice” [4, p. 145]. Sociologist Donald Cressey [5, 6] explained that the gap between theory and practice in this period was, in part, the fault of sociologists who neglected to bring clinicians to the practice of changing the behaviour of the offender by changing the attitudes and actions of the group with which he associates.

The behavior, attitudes, beliefs, and values which a person exhibits are not only the *products* of group contacts but also the *properties* of groups. If the behavior of an individual is an intrinsic part of groups to which he belongs, attempts to change the behavior must be directed at the group [emphasis in original] (Cressey, 1955, p. 117).

Prior to World War II, rehabilitation was virtually unknown: Prisons were places of incapacitation and punishment [2]. The early years after the war saw very few gains in correctional treatment, other than special considerations given to select offenders. Correctional officers were untrained and universities did not offer much in the way of criminology courses; those that offered ‘penology’ courses focused more on prison management than on offender treatment [2]. However, by the beginning of the 1960s, Gibbons and others were developing theories, such as differential association theory, that

explored the treatment of offenders by offense groups and by individual needs: some needed psychiatric treatment; for others, group programs were more successful [2]. In his 1965 book, *Changing the Lawbreaker*, Gibbons discussed milieu management – “more ambitious activities to create entire correctional ventures, such as therapeutic prisons” – and environmental change – “community-wide efforts to change social milieus that are thought to be criminogenic” [2, pp. 274-275].

1970s: ‘Nothing Works’

The optimism of the 1960s gave way, by the latter part of that decade and throughout the 1970s, to a pessimism about correctional treatment [7, 4, 8]: It was an era when rehabilitation of prisoners went from “common to condemned” [9, p. 1343]. This was most notably reflected in Martinson’s 1974 ‘nothing works’ review of correctional programs [10]. In fact, Martinson’s article actually posed a question – “What works?” – but subsequent authors turned his conclusions that the studies reviewed showed insufficient results into a conclusion that ‘nothing works’ [10, 11].

As Andrews et al. [11] noted, the neo-conservative dissatisfaction with correctional programming in the 1970s led to a renewed call for a punitive-only, ‘law and order’ response to crime. This response has become known as the “justice model” or retribution as the appropriate answer to law-breaking behaviour [12]. Sentencing reforms in Canada and the US echoed “the decline of the rehabilitative ideal” [12, p. 370] and attempted to correct what legislators viewed as the lasting image of the 1960s – a decade of social and moral disarray [11]. In the United Kingdom, the long-standing welfare approach to offender supervision came to an end; in fact, the welfare element of the 1969 Children and Young Persons Act in England and Wales was never implemented [3].

According to the Harvard Law Review [9], rehabilitation failed in this decade because there was no one and no group to champion the basics of prisoner reentry: (1) involvement of stakeholders, including the community and the offender; (2) timing of offender change and the stages of change; and (3) measures of evaluation to ensure that prisons, in and of themselves, actually reduce recidivism [9]. In addition, the 1970s, with widespread protests and the Vietnam War, became an era marked by public disbelief both in the ability of humans to change and in governments’ ability to be well-intentioned and effective [9].

1980s-2000: What Works

In Canada, research into rehabilitation of criminal offenders was led by the work of Andrews, Gendreau, Bonta, Motiuk, and others [13, 14, 7]. Through them, Canadian corrections adopted the risk, need, and responsivity approach to rehabilitative programs – a statistical, quality-controlled, and carefully assessed approach to rehabilitation that addressed both the conservative view of incapacitation and the Marxist/socialist calls for community responses [11, 14, 7, 15, 16, 17]. These researchers and others working in Canada in this period intended their work to be “clinically relevant and psychologically informed” [11, p. 372]. Indeed, Canadian research in the 1980s and 1990s set international standards for correctional assessment and programming [7, 3, 4, 18, 19].

In short, the risk, need, responsivity approach was characterized by the following: (1) the most intensive programming should only be offered to those presenting the greatest risk, with little or minimal treatment for low-risk offenders; (2) programming is effective only when an offender's criminogenic needs, or the factors that directly contribute to crime, are addressed; and (3) the responsivity of the treatment is based on a cognitive-behavioural approach to change, addressing the offender's thinking patterns and providing for anti-criminal skills development [11].⁹

This approach did much to bring offender rehabilitation to a place of respect in the scientific community as program accreditation became standard in Canada and as international criminal justice bodies came to this country for training [15]. Yet, interestingly, Bonta and Cormier also note: "It is easy to be dazzled by the numerous empirical studies and lose sight of the development in our thinking about criminal offenders" [15, p. 236]. Not only did the official direction disregard the more organic evolution of self-help programs and groups such as 7th Step, it pointed out as a cautionary tale "the failure of unstructured, peer-oriented group counseling and permissive, relationship-oriented milieu approaches" [11, p. 376]. In large measure, these researchers and others, on a national and international scale [3, 20, 21], did not concern themselves with actual discussions, conversations, interactions with offenders – the basis upon which Seventh Step was founded.

The result was that the wealth of knowledge, experience, and understanding of offenders by correctional staff, community supervisors, and others was tossed aside in favour of actuarial assessments and other scientific tools measuring criminal risk and potential [15, 20]. While some claimed that it was the implementation and not the instruments that were resulting in less than significant success rates [7, 22, 23] others, including Maruna [20] and Sampson and Laub [21], put less faith in the quantitative risk prediction scales:

An entire cottage industry has emerged around the development of these prediction scales, which are increasingly replacing case history methods and expert testimony in decisions to release inmates from custody. Rife with false positives, false negatives, and false promises, this prediction literature has been plagued with high hopes yet weak results (Sampson & Laub, 1995, p. 150).

21st Century: Options in a 'Tough on Crime' Era

Since the millennium, rehabilitation and reentry research has taken a number of pathways [24] – from the continuation of the meta-analyses¹⁰ of effective corrections treatment begun in the 1980s to a body of literature on desistance from crime and post-release adjustment to the community [25, 26, 27, 28, 29]. More recent literature includes not only quantitative analyses of large numbers of prisoners [30, 31] but also qualitative papers

⁹ Although outside the parameters of this review, the work of Gendreau [4], Motiuk & Porporino [17], and Andrews, Zinger et al. [11] explores the relationship among effective assessment measures, programming for offenders' needs and risks, and recidivism.

¹⁰ Meta-analyses are statistical methods of combining evidence from several research studies.

involving lengthy interviews of small numbers of offenders about their experiences [32, 27, 29, 33]. Although more visible in the past decade, studies of prisoner reentry and resettlement are not a new trend: Cohen and Taylor [34] discussed the effects of lengthy prison terms on the inmates who served them; Corden and Clifton [35] interviewed accessibility to community services of released prisoners; Matza in 1964 [36] introduced the concept of 'drift', the movement of offenders both toward, and away from, criminal pursuits; and Farrell and Bowling [37] explored how changes in an offender over his/her life course contribute to desistance from crime.

In the old era of the rehabilitative ideal, the prisoner had no say in how he was to be rehabilitated. This practice was one of the root causes of the political critiques, whose proponents feared that prisoners' autonomy suffered because they were coerced into participating in the rehabilitation to begin with and remained passive throughout, with major changes taking place in their lives and minds without their consent (Harv. Law Rev. 2010, p. 1354).

It is, of course, impossible to predict how the current correctional climate for rehabilitation, reentry, and prisoner programs will be reflected in the literature yet to be written. Like offender assessment – past behaviour is the most frequently-used predictor of future behaviour – the 'what works' of prisoner treatment and offender reentry and resettlement in the community is often based on past directions of correctional services and offender support agencies. Occasionally, new ideas such as 'justice reinvestment' are quickly analyzed and, if publically popular, implemented as policy direction, sometimes without the research behind them to investigate the potential consequences [12]. However, in the main, researchers and practitioners lament the return to the retribution justice model, as inmates are released with no services and no expectation of success [38].

Yet, researchers have begun to link criminal rehabilitation research with health prevention models to apply the knowledges and experiences of many disciplines and perspectives, including non-professionals and non-academics [3]. In this way, rehabilitation and crime prevention research has begun to look at, among other things, the 'risk factor paradigm' [24], a model based on health promotion that can easily, for non-researchers, line up protective and risk factors in an offender, i.e. high IQ (protective) and parental neglect (risk), and use these to develop programs that are not directly working on criminogenic factors per se but still have positive results, i.e. parenting program. For an offender-support group such as 7th Step, the use of protective and risk factors is key to sustained membership and effective hot seat interventions because they allow the group to understand a member's strengths as well as his challenges.

This paradigm shift into searching for risk and protective factors represents a significant advance in criminology and has fostered links between explanation and prevention, fundamental and applied research, and scholars, policy makers, and practitioners (Piquero et al., 2003, p. 469).

Summary

The five decades since the birth of Seventh Step have seen pendulum swings in correctional systems' responses to crime: moving back and forth between rehabilitation and retribution. Many treatment approaches have been introduced and analyzed, but others have become popular immediately, like a new flavour of ice cream. Some treatment directions are maintained as good practice, others are rejected; in both cases, success or failure depends more on the dominant discourse of correctional systems than on the opinions of offenders.

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Research Questions

There are six research questions that channel the information collected for this report. While the primary direction is the effect of 7th Step Society in helping chronic offenders find their individual sense of freedom, the material also explores the reentry needs and community support factors impacting the potential of career criminals for long-term desistance from crime. The questions are as follows:

1. What does the literature suggest are key theories on long-term recidivism and on the rehabilitation of long-term recidivist offenders?
2. What does the literature suggest are the key principles of effective treatment programs, including self-help and volunteer programs?
3. What are the national endeavours in Canada and other countries, in work with offenders, ex-offenders, and community groups, to reduce recidivism and enhance pro-social attitudes and behaviours among criminalized individuals?
4. What other kinds of programs, including self-help and volunteer initiatives, are exemplars of rehabilitation success?
5. How does 7th Step Society of Canada's use of self-help and hot seat interventions compare with formal recovery programs in terms of offender commitment to sustained recovery and community reintegration?
6. After more than 40 years, what does 7th Step Society of Canada offer to long-term offenders, to criminal justice organizations, and to the safety of Canadian communities?

Research Question 1: Key Theories of Criminal Behaviour and Rehabilitation

There are many theories of criminal behaviour and of criminal desistance.¹¹ Matza's concept of 'drift' explored the pathways in which young law-breakers travelled from crimes to desistance via a series of stops and starts rather than a clearly-defined commitment to, and then away from, a delinquent life course [1]. The life course perspective of desistance was proposed by Sampson and Laub [2, 3]; they also developed the cumulative disadvantage theory [4] to describe the build-up of negative childhood interactions with family, school, peers, and state as a developmental pathway to crime. Social learning theory [5, 6, 7, 8] and Stages of Change [9] have influenced the cognitive-behavioural foundations of official programming over the past three decades [10, 11, 12].

Canadian criminologists, particularly Andrews et al. [13] developed the risk, need, responsivity theory or principle [14]. Andrews and his colleagues also argued against the 'criminal sanctions theory', citing research from their reviews; their counter claim was that criminal sanctions without treatment have little or no effect on recidivism [13].

Other theories, such as labeling theory [15], differential association theory [16, 17], and general strain theory [18] all reflect the pathway of criminal lifestyle, or "the act of committing a crime transforms the offender's life circumstances in some way that increases the probability that future crimes will occur" [19]. Still other researchers [20, 21] argued that cognitive transformation theory [5, 22, 23], defined as offender agency or "a reconstruction of one's internalized life narrative" [20, p. 170], is essential to sustained desistance.

Labeling Theory: In Search of an Identity

One of the most consistently cited [24, 22, 25, 26, 19] of the theories defining both criminal longevity and desistance is that which encompasses identity, and includes labeling as well as stigma. Labeling theory [15] denotes the stigma, or negative repercussions of having a criminal record, especially when it includes a history of incarceration in prison. The concept of stigma is defined as some attribute about the person stigmatized that changes him in society's eyes from "a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" [27, p. 364].

According to this theory, criminal justice treatment programs actually do more harm than good because they perpetuate the label or identity of the offender as 'inmate, convict, deviant, incorrigible' and they serve more to socially exclude than to readmit this individual back into mainstream society [19, 28, 29]. Maruna calls these correctional treatment programs "deviant smithing" [22, p. 230]. Link and Phelan argue that much work on stigma is completed by researchers who have no lived experience as members of the group under study, that "scientific theories and research techniques" [27, p. 365] lead to generalizations and misperceptions of the individuals being studied.

¹¹ While a number of theories are used to explain criminal offending, chronic offending, or desistance patterns, this report will discuss only those of direct relationship to the work of 7th Step.

Incarceration stigma

For all of its problems, being a criminal provides individuals with excitement, power, and notoriety. If going straight means accepting boredom, docility, and stigma, and does nothing to relieve the shame felt for past crimes, there is little reason to go straight (Maruna, 1999, p. 134).

It is difficult enough for a chronic offender who still has family and social supports to reenter the broad society from incarceration [5, 30, 31]. Most career criminals, though, have lost those supports and must face a reentry on their own with few, if any, personal or official supports [32, 33]. For those with mental illness diagnoses requiring acute care, their incarceration label will often make them unacceptable for community mental health services [34]. In the United States, persons released from prison in some states are denied student loans, driver's licenses, welfare, and public housing [35]. Everywhere, offenders are looked upon as 'outsiders', as less than citizens [20, 33]. How can someone who has spent multiple years incarcerated ever accept a pro-social lifestyle, a world away from crime, a place in a society that stigmatizes him?

Gang identity

"My world was so small"

(Young gang member, in Aresti et al., 2010, p. 178).

In addition to the general stigma of being identified as a criminal, those who have participated in gangs while on the street and/or in prison are doubly labeled: convict and gangster [36, 37]. Aresti et al. interviewed a former gang member who had become a desister and he talked of his gang life as being 'stuck', being 'trapped', unable to 'free' himself from the gang; it was another form of imprisonment [20, p. 177].

Gardner et al. [38] proposed that loneliness and social isolation are the consequence of not knowing how to socialize in acceptable ways and that the socially isolated are more sensitive and anxious about verbal and non-verbal responses from others. However, it is in the nature of humans to seek out others, to feel belonging to a group [39]. Hip hop artist Tupac discussed this need in his song, *Dear Mama*: "I hung around with the thugs, and even though they sold drugs, they showed a young brother love" [40]. Knowles and Gardner investigated the extent to which socially isolated persons inflate the importance and strength of their group in order to attach meaning and importance to the group and belonging to themselves [39]. Fleisher and Decker explored the importance of gang identity for gang members even when they no longer were actively criminal:

Men and women now in their 40s and 50s have retained since their youth a self-identification to a gang and with that affiliation have retained social ties with people whom they have know since their teens [36, p. 70].

'Identity nakedness'

An offender who makes the decision to desist from crime confronts a period when he is suspended between a past life and a hope for future happiness and freedom, a mental place that Lofland calls the "horrors of identity nakedness" [41, p. 288]. The offender cannot stay 'a nothing'; he must either revert to his former identity as a criminal or take on a new identity [20, 22, 21]. Many try to completely leave their past behind; others reform their criminal life into a 'generative narrative', a 're-biographing' that allows them to declare their past rather than running from it [22, p. 205]. For this reason, many desisters find lives that include working with socially excluded [20], other ex-offenders [42], or delinquent youth [21]. Still, the transition period involves a dance between the two worlds, often with no bridge to provide a solid path. In truth, this lack of connection with a social group may continue for years [20]. A lasting reformed identity comes about with narrative reconstruction [21] of the self as one who no longer is a criminal, but now is a desister, a pro-social member of society, a citizen [20].

General Strain Theory

The main components of the general strain theory [18] lie in (1) the types of social relationships connected with delinquency and (2) the individual's motivation for delinquency. The social relationships focused on in this theory are negative; in them, the person is not treated in the way he or she wants. It is the existence of negative "noxious" [18, p. 49] relationships, rather than the absence of positive ones, that is key in this theory. "Adolescents are pressured into delinquency by the negative affective states – most notably anger and related emotions – that often result from negative relationships" [18, p. 49]. The delinquent response in the individual, according to this theory, is to apply their own coping strategies, by self-medicating through drugs/alcohol, by finding criminal ways to achieve goals, and/or by attacking or escaping from the other person or persons [18]. While other social theories "view delinquency as the result of drift or of desire, strain theory views it as the result of pressure" [18, p. 50].

The three tensions of the strain theory are: (1) disappointed hopes: that one's birth factors (social class, ethnicity, neighbourhood) will prevent one from attaining his/her ideals – socially acceptable life goals; (2) social comparison: that there is a disconnect between an individual's expectations and actual achievements, resulting in frustration, disappointment, anger, shame; and (3) equity: that there is a disconnect between an individual's idea of fair treatment and actual outcomes [18].

Differential Association Theory

Differential association theory [17], like labeling and general strain theories, is based on the offender's view of an external world, a society that has some opinion about him [16, 43]. The differential association theory is a social determinants approach in that offenders are socially isolated from non-criminal groups – families, peers, workplaces, neighbourhoods, social groups – and, as a result, associate with groups who accept a criminal lifestyle

[16]. Cressey argued that in order to change the criminal, and criminal groups, small numbers of offenders should be brought together, along with non-offenders, into “special groups whose major common goal is the reformation of criminals” [16, p. 118]. He also stressed that the success of the group depends on the strength of its commitment to the reformation of offenders; while other activities, recreational or employment-centred, may be helpful to individual members or for group cohesion, they will not alone succeed in the primary purpose of reformation. In addition, the members must have a strong sense of belonging to the group, such that they will not want to let the group down by returning to their former ways of behaving [16].

In addition, this theory also attends to the role of the novice or potential member of the group. His status in the group is not determined by outside power or influence, but by a gradual acceptance of the purpose of the group. Status in the group is awarded by adhering to anti-criminal values and, thus, the new member becomes alienated from his former pro-criminal group.

The most effective mechanism for exerting group pressure on members will be found in groups so organized that criminals are induced to join with non-criminals for the purpose of changing other criminals (Cressey, 1955, p. 119).

Interestingly, in light of his later condemnation of psychodynamic groups of offenders gathered for talk therapy, Andrews and colleagues [44] affirmed that there well might be positive effects from grouping offenders with non-offenders provided that the discussion is structured around anti-criminal values, attitudes, and behaviours.

Cognitive Transformation Theory

A person’s identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reaction of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going (Maruna, 1999, p. 33).

In order to stop committing crimes, to ‘desist’ from crime as a life course, an offender must adopt a new and different narrative, be open to change and to ‘redefining’ himself [5, 21, 23]. The cognitive transformation theory argues that this new sense of self and new life narrative is essential to sustained change, and more significant than external factors such as employment and family, while acknowledging the importance of these as contributors to a prosocial lifestyle [20, 5, 45, 21]. This theory espouses a sociological view of change as existing in an interplay between individual agency (capacity for self-efficacy) and interactions with other people and external events (marriage, children, employment, friends) [45, 39].

Summary

Theories of criminality are placed in two camps: on the one hand are the theories that offer explanation of why offenders begin, and return to, crime as a life course; on the other are the theories on the process of transformation from offender to citizen.

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Research Question 2: Principles of Effective Treatment and Self-Help Programs

I took all goodness and badness, morality and immorality out, and started talking only on a basis of what's smart and what's stupid. (Sands, 1966/1995, p. 228).

There is a clear difference between 'professional' treatment programs and 'mutual' organizations of assistance offered to people in need [2,3]. At first blush, the most obvious mark between the two program delivery systems seems to be characterized by objectivity, assessment, and science on the part of the professionals, and nurturance, subjectivity, and a 'friend' commitment on the part of the self-help and volunteer groups¹² [3, 4]. The literature on the two approaches will be described separately.

Professional Treatment Programs

Clinicians have often commented that offenders seek to avoid responsibility for their own behavior. If we persist in the negative view of correctional treatment, we are encouraging the correctional system to escape its own responsibility. By labeling the offender as untreatable, we make it apparent to one and all that we cannot be held accountable for his improvement or his deterioration (Gendreau & Ross, 1979, pp. 488-489).

The Correctional Service of Canada, in 2009, offered programs for sex offenders, women offenders, and aboriginal offenders; programs to treat violent offenders, substance abusers, and those who commit family violence [6]. There was also a program to assist with community adjustment. However, the last program only admitted just over 300 participants in three years in the entire country; it does not appear to be widely offered or utilized. There do not seem to be any offered to assist chronic offenders in developing skills to solve problems, manage social situations, or think more critically. One program, Alternatives, Associates, and Attitudes, (AAA) is listed under the 'General Crime Prevention' heading; it is being delivered in regions across the country although the CSC website does not provide budget figures [6, 44].

The zeitgeist of corrections may well be no longer in favour of formalized rehabilitation programs [7, 8, 9]. However, the work in Canada of Andrews, Bonta, and others set the stage for programs that did result in reductions in recidivism. Gendreau's list of characteristics of programs successful in reducing recidivism are instructive for 7th Step in that they do not point so much to formalized programs as to essentials in offender rehabilitation:

¹² As expressed by the DeJongh quote that introduces the section on Mutual Support Programs, there are many similarities between the membership composition of the volunteer and the self-help agencies: The objectives and format of these groups are often similar [3, 4].

1. Programs should be intensive, spanning a few months, and based on differential association and social learning theories.
2. They should be based on cognitive-behavioural models and target criminogenic needs.
3. They should adhere to the responsivity principle, in that they should develop pro-social skills and attitudes.
4. Interaction between program leaders and participants is to be respectful and fair.
5. Program leaders' relationship to participants is to be constructive; training of leaders in sensitivity to offenders' issues is essential.
6. Activities are most successful when they reach out into the offenders' "real-world social network" and disrupt the "delinquency network" [10, p. 149].

Gendreau also remarked that the greatest reductions in offender recidivism were found for "community-based rather than prison programs" [10, p. 149]. But, it appears this is a perspective in the research that has gone unnoticed [7]. In addition, offender agency or self-change is a concept of criminal reform not often pursued by researchers who conduct risk assessment analysis [11, 12]:

A prisoner's future reentry is judged, not against their own progress and ability, but against the past behaviours of ex-convicts presented as an actuarial norm (Munn, 2009, p. 28).

As noted previously in this report¹³, there are opponents to the view that formalized and structured treatment programs contribute to offender rehabilitation and desistance from crime [14, 15]. Specifically, some researchers have found that forced participation in correctional treatment programs, including addictions, simply does not work because the participants are in treatment for external reasons – court orders, prison case plans, parole conditions, family ultimatums [16, 17, 15]. Others question the ethics of forcing individuals into programs [18, 15] where the participant becomes a "mere functionar[y] of the state" [18, p. 210]. Still others [19, 4, 20] discuss the existence of spontaneous desistance or the behaviours that offenders take on their own to end their criminal identity and engage in what Maruna calls 'redemption' or 'salvation scripts' [4, p. 193]. These and more [14, 21] argue that government agencies should endorse policies and programs where offenders are involved in their own treatment; without this policy change, the men and women who are the subject of correctional intervention will not fully benefit from the treatments. Actually, two Canadian researchers who were members of the evidence-based treatment approach said much the same thing in a 1979 paper when discussing a study "that has highlighted the importance of involving offenders in planning and implementing their own treatment" [5, p. 474].

¹³ See Section 5(A).

Mutual Support Programs

In the life of the individual, as well as in the life of groups, self-help and help from others are equivalent features. They reflect basic aspects of the human situation. The one begins where the other ends or fails. Seen in human life as a whole, self help and help from others are not contrasts but complements (DeJongh, 1955, p. 51, as cited in Katz & Bender, 1976, p. 266).

In the end, it seems that there is not one pathway to rehabilitation; indeed, 'what works' is a combination of the best evidence that official agencies such as Correctional Service of Canada have been able to develop and adapt to offender assessment and treatment, in combination with the role of the community in supporting prisoner reentry and, above all, the personal choices and resolve of the offenders themselves.

A. Self-help group principles

If offender involvement in their own change process is not heralded by the official programs, still the necessity that offenders change their thinking and view of the world is recognized as a key element in rehabilitation models [22, 23, 10, 19]. Indeed, LeBel and his colleagues explored four areas key to the differences in the thinking and self-concepts of desisting offenders and active offenders: Hope and self-efficacy, shame and remorse, internalizing stigma, and alternative identities – and the ways these personal or subjective areas combine with social/external factors to provide a pathway to desistance, what they call the 'subjective-social model'.

Hope may be viewed as a soft or non-scientific goal, but "it has specific meanings in the psychological literature relating to an individual's overall perception and confidence that personal goals can be achieved" [19, p. 136]. In this context, hope is more than a desire that something good will happen; rather it is the belief in one's ability to be successful along with the availability of goal attainment, or the 'will and the ways' [19].

Shame and remorse are set in the realm of an altered view of one's past criminal and harmful behaviours. It is a less direct route to desistance, however, as it may also trigger depression and a sense of powerlessness, and may not be an effective point of confrontation with chronic offenders [19, 24]. The stigma that comes from shame and remorse is not that discussed elsewhere in this report in the social sense, but here in the personal sense, the 'internalized stigma'. What is crucial for the desisting offender is that he separate the person – himself – from the deed [19].

Although all of the four areas are important considerations for the work of 7th Step, the last is the most critical, as the offender moves towards 'alternative identities' where he can replace the former criminal self with a new identity – an employee, a student, a father, a volunteer, a '7th Stepper'.

As part of this new identity, and founded on the work in the 1950s and 1960s on both the differential association theory [25] and on the principle that helping another is critical to 'going straight', one possible identity choice for this offender is known as the 'professional

ex-' [26] or the 'wounded healer' [11]. This concept is not new: in fact, Alcoholics' Anonymous is based on alcoholics helping and sponsoring other alcoholics [27]. J.D. Brown [26] found that, in the mid- to late-1980s, more than 70 per cent of substance abuse counselors in U.S. treatment centres were former addicts.

Ideologies

The crucial element within a peer group which concentrates on forming new identities among its membership is the wisdom of the group about the problem it is trying to correct, and the teachings of the group: the 'ideologies' are 'venerated' by the group as the "secret to recovery" [2, p. 324]. Within this kind of peer group is a structure that members take on as a new lifestyle. The structure has five elements [2]:

1. A fixed community of belief. Unlike professional treatment programs, the peer support organization's members commit to group beliefs and do so over the long-term.
2. Each member's lived experience becomes the teaching moments of the group.
3. In the same vein as the 'helper therapy principle' [28], the members giving advice are reinforcing their own commitment to change.
4. The specialized focus of the organization leads to a relatively homogeneous membership; those who do not feel they belong often are excluded through "a natural sorting process" [2, p. 326].
5. The singular life problem common to the membership tends to be extreme and the individuals who join the group do so out of desperation to find a pathway to change.

Finding the diamond

Maruna's PhD thesis [4] and book [11] explore the desire by many desisting offenders to find the 'silver lining' in their criminal pasts by giving something back to the community, by helping others, by finding the worth in people who have been ostracized. For some, this means becoming part of a criminal justice system that has, at one time, controlled them. For one of Maruna's participants, his desire to help others was not about becoming part of the moral order; it was about correcting it: "Fuck authority. The system needs fixing and I know how to do it" [4, p. 209]. For another:

The main reason I do this job [working with other ex-cons] isn't because it's easy for me because I've been there and I speak the language. I do this because I still believe in justice. A lot of the people I work with have been shunned by society. They're seen as scum. A lot of people would just as soon kill them. They really would. But I see the diamond (Maruna, 1999, p. 129).

B. Volunteerism principles

The importance of volunteerism to this review lies in what Uggen et al. call "civic reintegration" [29, p. 260], the need for desisting offenders to become full participating citizens with rights and the capacity to be accepted by the broad public [7, 30].

There is much debate about the true nature of volunteer work, whether one volunteers to help another and improve that person's life, or to help oneself by increasing one's positive self-feelings [31]. Volunteer literally means, from the Latin, *voluns* (choice) or *velle* (free will) and requires that the individual act to assist a stranger/non-family member with no monetary reward, often within a formal organization and over the long term [31]. However, the reasons behind making the choice to volunteer are less concrete. Without getting too immersed in the philosophy of human acts, it is enough to say that the two sides, roughly speaking, are utilitarianism, or a view that people act out of self-interest, and deontology, or the moral code, the framework of good intentions [32].

In her exploration of the connections between volunteerism and altruism, Haski-Levanthal [31] takes a social disciplines approach; she discusses the decision to volunteer from psychological, sociological, socio-biological, and economics perspectives. The strength of this for this review is that it helps to focus a discussion on reasons why people would volunteer, broadly, with criminals and why they might volunteer, specifically, with 7th Step.

So why would someone choose to volunteer with an organization or an institution developed specifically around criminals? In general, volunteers come from among certain populations: they tend to be older, in part because older and retired people have more free time, and also because altruism increases as humans age¹⁴ [31, 33]. They also tend to be relatively well educated, members of a church community or espousing a faith belief, and moderate to liberal in their politics; these are not characteristics of most offenders [33, 34]. Decisions to volunteer in young people reflect influence from institutions – family, school, church – and potential benefits for school programs and careers [35]. There is, however, little research on the characteristics of volunteers within the criminal justice system [33].

A sociological view of volunteerism connects volunteering to a sense of belonging to a community, a way of enhancing social capital, social networks in the volunteer [31, 34]. This supports Maruna's work with desisting offenders that volunteering is part of a public sign of redemption and reconnection with a community [4]. Social psychologists contend that volunteering is based on a connection between the individual and the group, that there is an emphasis on emotional reactions, situational factors, and social relations [31]. Again, this is significant for 7th Step; many times volunteers in the criminal justice realm contribute personal knowledge about offenders or victims, have local community knowledge, and/or can provide both social control and social support to offenders [33]. In addition, volunteers may be a way for communities to take back some of the control over public safety that was co-opted by institutions such as police, the courts, and the prisons [7, 36, 33, 30].

Haski-Levanthal references Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory that emotional attachments are made by young infants with their care givers; she uses this theory to posit that early attachment leads to increased altruism and compassion in adulthood and, consequently, greater interest in volunteering [31]. The gap in her work, for our purposes, is the question why many ex-offenders with, presumably, poor childhood attachments are interested in volunteering with others who were likewise neglected by their caregivers.

14 This argument is especially put forward by developmental psychologists but also refers to Freud's work on the ego [31].

The answer may, in part, be from the situational factors that lead people to volunteer: the situations may be acute, such as a disaster, but they may be social and chronic, such as the plight of the needy. People who volunteer from this perspective do so to aid those they consider to be “helpless” [31, 37] or because of a personal or social connection between volunteer and receiver [31].

The social connection may explain the motivation behind some who volunteer in prisons, with chaplaincy programs, or from a social conscience standpoint. This view aligns with Andrews et al. [38] in supporting the differential association theory [25], stating that community volunteers in prisons and with offenders will offer a non-offender perspective in this milieu which is important in challenging offender beliefs. However, it also helps to explain the motivations of ex-offenders who volunteer with 7th Step, in that they are socially and personally connected with the other members of the group [39].

Yet, how does an organization recognize self-serving or even illegal reasons why someone would volunteer? How does it differentiate the altruism of former prisoners [40, 4, 11, 13] from those individuals who volunteer for personal or vicarious reasons [41]? The literature recommends that appropriate reasons for volunteering are negotiated with screening and training to distinguish between self-serving motivations that are acceptable, such as employment or educational interests [31], and those that are not suitable [41]. The 7th Step Society discusses appropriate and inappropriate conduct among core and volunteer members in its volunteer training literature [42]. Yet, the greater portion of the literature on volunteerism concentrates on the altruism of volunteers, or “the psychology of goodness” [43].

Summary

Offenders gain the greatest benefits from programs or initiatives, whether from paid staff, volunteers, or peers, when they have a voice in the intervention, are responsible for their treatment planning, and are treated with respect.

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Research Question 3: National Endeavours to Reduce Recidivism

We want them to have self worth.... So we destroy their self-worth

We want them to be responsible ... So we take away all responsibilities

We want them to be part of our community So we isolate them from our community

We want them to be positive and constructive So we degrade them and make them useless.

We want them to be non-violent.... So we put them where there is violence all around them.

We want them to be kind and loving people ... So we subject them to hatred and cruelty

We want them to quit being the tough guy ... So we put them where the tough guy is respected

We want them to quit hanging around losers ... So we put all the losers in the state under one roof.

We want them to quit exploiting us ... We put them where they exploit each other.

We want them to take control of their own lives, own their own problems, and quit being a parasite ... So we make them totally dependent on us.

(Justice D.A. Challeen, 1986, p. 58).

There is a perception that the public believes crime rates are increasing and that, in order to adequately protect the public, national governments must respond with more punitive and carceral responses to crime [2, 3, 4, 5]. Tough-on-crime bills have framed the political corrections agenda in both Canada and the United States in recent years [6, 7, 8]. While defenders of the legislation argue public protection, those opposed note that these measures will further erode the social safety nets that prevent crime and actually do not reflect public sentiment [9, 10, 11].

Gideon and Loveland tested the idea that the public advocates a 'tough on crime' response and found that increasingly punitive punishments may reflect politicians' rather than the public's views. Their 2008 survey of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut residents showed 83 per cent were in favour of recovery and reintegration measures and not in favour of "harsh, simplistic solutions" [4, p. 21]¹⁵.

¹⁵ A similar response was found in a recent study of English and Welsh residents [11].

Politicians typically led public opinion about crime rather than followed it, in effect raising public fears and anxieties and then proposing harsh, simplistic solutions to ameliorate them (Tonry, 2006, p. 4).

Current Incarceration Statistics

In both Canada and the United States, crime rates began to rise in the 1960s, fuelled by the unprecedented birth rates following World War II – the ‘baby boom generation’ [12]. However, the commission of crime in Canada has been steadily dropping among all offense types, including homicides and most violent crimes, for the past 30 years [13]. Yet, the use of incarceration as a means of punishment for crime has risen to the point that Canada incarcerates more people than most other industrialized nations in the world (110/100 000), more than the average among G8 nations (96/100 000) if the United States (738/100 000) and Russia (607/100 000) are excluded [14, 15, 13].

The Seventh Step Foundation was born in the United States in 1963. At that time, the country incarcerated 330 000 of its citizens. In 2008, it incarcerated 1.3 million. Of these, 93% will return home [8]. Approximately 1 700 prisoners were released every day in that country in 2008 either on parole or on expiry of the custodial sentence. In 2007, more than 824 000 men and women were on parole in the US [8, 16].

The rate of incarceration in the US is the highest in the world [8, 5]. The greatest rise in the inmate population occurred during an era in which crime rates showed the greatest decline, 1992-2006. In that time, federal employment and training program spending was cut in half; correctional facilities spending was increased by 521 per cent [8]. Many states have opted to abolish parole: “As a result, local and state governments are reallocating funds previously designated for public health, employment, and education programs to construction and management of new jails and prisons” [8, p. 5].

This atmosphere of sanction and imprisonment without parole is not unique to the United States [17]. Howard Sapers, Canada’s Correctional Investigator, has cautioned that this country’s incarceration rate is already high by international standards, and that the legislative activity of the past year or two will result in substantial increases to the “rate, cost, duration and distribution of incarceration in this country” [18, “Correctional Investigator’s Message,” para. 3]. He expresses concern that “statutory release has become the most used form of access to the community for the majority of offenders under federal sentence” [18, “Correctional Investigator’s Message,” para. 4].

Researchers and the Correctional Investigator state that community integration is not an issue of concern for correctional systems in Canada, the United States, or the United Kingdom. These countries have, instead, turned to a risk management system to decide prison placement, to deny parole applications, and to prevent appropriate and humane releasing supports [2, 8, 18, 19, 20]. Moreover, the focus on punishment has extended to the community supervisors who once relied on case work and professional judgment to assist and support offenders [2, 21]: Current measures of success are not that an offender completes community supervision with success, but that the supervisor has

him or her arrested and returned to incarceration for a violation [21]. Furthermore, while offenders are not trusted to be released on parole, they are subsequently released without parole supports and counseling, and expected to perform perfectly in the community; many believe that 'perfection' – total compliance with release conditions and pro-social behaviour – is expected *before* any treatment is offered [2, 21, 19]. In addition, the formal structures of parole and probation supervision prohibit improvement in an offender's sense of social control and equality, of citizenship: officials are paid to spend time with offenders; offenders are unable to give, only to receive social support [22].

Endeavours

There are many initiatives among corrections systems, with varied assessments of rates of success [23, 24, 25]. Among the best practices are those that attempt to listen to the offender and stabilize the difficult entry to the community from prison.

Reentry courts

Examples of rehabilitation and prisoner reentry are being introduced in the United States through formal sources such as reentry courts, which attempt to resolve disputes that arise during an offender's first weeks in the community in an effort to prevent the disruption, shame, and further stigma that comes from having parole or probation orders revoked. The system of reentry courts recommends that reentry measures be started in communities where recidivism rates are so high that new ideas may be accepted where they would previously have been rejected [26].

For initiatives such as reentry courts to be successful, it is important for participants – the offenders – to believe that the system will actually go to new measures to assist them in getting out and staying out [26]. Yet chronic offenders tend to have little faith that the system will look after anyone or anything except itself; in this regard, non-official programs and agencies play a critical role [27, 28].

Reasoning and Rehabilitation

The Cognitive Skills Program (also known as Reasoning and Rehabilitation) [29, 30] was developed in the early 1990s, at a time when Canada felt itself a much more humane and rehabilitative environment than the United States with its "punishment options" approach [30, "Introduction," para. 2]. The premise of the Cognitive Skills program was that "what and how an offender thinks, how he views the world, how well he understands people, what he values, how he reasons, and how he attempts to solve problems plays an important role in his criminal behaviour" [30, "Development of the Cog. Skills Training Program" para. 4].

This program was discontinued by CSC in 2009, but evaluations of it indicated that it offered high-risk offenders a genuine opportunity to take charge of change in their lives. The results showed clear improvements in recidivism [31]. It was long, by official program standards, lasting almost two months, and the sessions were focused on challenging offender thinking errors: blaming others, concrete thinking, and inability to distinguish between their emotional states and attitudes and those of others [30]. Its innovation was that it taught rather than treated offenders and emphasized social competence rather than wrongdoing [30].

Circles of Support and Accountability

Begun in 1995 in Hamilton, Ontario, Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) was initially a faith-based endeavour to have the community 'circle' around a many-time sex offender, especially one who had been targeted as publicly dangerous, to support and challenge him [32]. The circle was developed around each sex offender, not to publicly shame but to offer a helping hand while holding him responsible for his actions. The offender needed to commit to a one-year involvement in the program; evaluations showed non-recidivism of 60 per cent [31]. Volunteers were people who, at times, needed to be convinced to work with this group of people:

I used to be like everyone else. I hated these guys. Then I met one. I realized pretty quickly that he's just like me. He's a human being just like I am. Once I understood that, I could not turn my back on him. I hate what he's done but if he's willing to do his part, I'm willing to be there to help him. I don't want there to be any more victims" (CSC, 2009b. para. 9).

LifeLine

One way that Correctional Service of Canada has tried to assist with offenders' reentry needs has been through a successful three-way partnership with a community non-government organization (NGO) and with ex-offenders. LifeLine is a Canadian support group for offenders serving life and other long sentences, developed in partnership in the 1980s between the non-profit organization St. Leonard's Society and the Correctional Service of Canada. The purpose of the organization is to have 'lifers' (those serving a life sentence) in the community visit 'lifers' and 'long termers' in prison to offer support, assistance in making productive use of their time inside, and guidance for release to the community [33].

Summary

The official criminal justice systems in Canada and the United States are operating in a 'punitive measures' environment. However, there remain examples of initiatives that provide support, rehabilitation, and reentry to offenders. The gap in these services is that there does not appear to be officially sanctioned endeavours to address the multiple needs of chronic offenders.

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Research Question 4: Self-Help and Treatment Exemplars

If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a part of his own heart? (Solzhenitsyn, 1974, p. 168)

Into this environment of what Richards and Jones call “the perpetual incarceration machine” [2, p. 201] have come organizations, largely volunteer, to offer encouragement, aid, and a measure of ‘citizenship’ to the imprisoned “many time losers” [3, About Us, para.1].

There are numerous current and past prisoner support groups in Canada, the United States, and United Kingdom: many were formed by ex-offenders and existed as purely self-help or as a blend of not-for-profit with a few paid staff and a group of volunteers. Other groups, including therapeutic communities, blended ex-offenders and professionally trained staff together in an effort to provide a safe and healing residential environment [4]. Still other groups came forward to help ex-offenders out of a sense of mission: of these, the faith-based organizations are the most well known [5].

Self-Help Models

The literature on offender reentry names many organizations, historic and contemporary¹⁶. In his 1988 review of the prisoner self-help movement, Hamm notes the following groups: Prison Jaycees, Man-to-Man, Lifers’ Group, People-to-People, Human Dignity, Old Timers’ Group, Beyond the Wall, and Fortune Society (United States); Dead Numbers, Recidivists’ Anonymous (United Kingdom); and Johoso Club (from the first letters of John Howard Society) (Canada). In addition to many of the above, Abdul-Mu’Min referred to the Prison Preventers, and Ring of Keys [7]. Most of these appear to be no longer active.

Current websites on prisoner support offer the following: Ex-Prisoners’ Assistance Committee (ExpAC, 2011), St. Giles Trust (2011), Bridging the Gap (2011), Fortune Society (2011), Welcome Home Ministries (2011), and SWIFT (Strength to Walk In Freedom Together) (2011). The first three groups are from the United Kingdom, the next two American, and the third Canadian. The first in this group, ExpAC, claims to support all prisoners but its primary affiliation, from its base in Ireland, is to former Republican Army released prisoners and other political prisoners.

The following groups are representative of self-help and have offered welcome to released offenders, even though the primary purpose of the first two is not only to those with

¹⁶ For the purposes of this review, lists of prisoner support groups do not include those based on a particular race or religion.

a criminal record. They are described in greater detail because of their influence in the foundation of Seventh Step or, in the case of the third group, provide guidance, respect, and advocacy .

Alcoholics' Anonymous

If Seventh Step Foundation is the “midwife” of offender self-help groups [6, p. 51], then the quintessential self-help organization is Alcoholics' Anonymous [8]. It has both similarities and differences with 7th Step. Among the commonalities are: (1) the reliance on members to guide and support other members, (2) the concept of changing identity for the purpose of self-actualization, (3) the charisma of the original founders, and (4) the growth of the movement in an era when members were castigated as morally deficient[8]. In addition, the AA model aligns with an existentialist philosophy that says the individual is limited by his or her own personal experience and that, in order to gain security and growth, it is necessary to abandon the protective behaviours the individual has used to maintain that very security [9]. This is not dissimilar to the purpose of 7th Step's hot seat intervention.

Among the differences are AA's requirement for spiritual conversion in turning one's will over to a higher power [8] and its refusal to be aligned with any outside organizations. Power in AA rests with the members at the local level and all finances are accrued through the donations of the members and through the sale of written materials [8]. The basic therapeutic framework of AA also differs from 7th Step: the latter bases its work of offender change on confrontation about thinking errors; the former focuses on the “sharing circle” [8, p. 150] or the shared narratives by members of their lived experiences.

Although AA's egalitarian and collective democratic approach to self-help has been successful for almost 80 years [8], this approach would be problematic for 7th Step: alcoholics may have been considered morally degenerate in the 1930s when AA was founded, but gatherings of groups of alcoholics in public with no outside influence has never been seen as a public safety issue. The deeper stigma faced by chronic offenders necessitates more structured forms of support and guidance.

Synanon

I suspect that none of us who came of age in the 60s will forget Synanon. Here was a bunch of ex-dope-addicts who were living together, getting clean, starting businesses --- peers caring for peers in a living situation. And with what they called The Game, they showed that therapy could be practiced by all (Janzen, 2005, para. 1).

The Synanon Foundation also has similarities and differences with 7th Step. The two groups were founded in roughly the same era, though Synanon's beginnings predated Seventh Step by approximately five years. Both were created by charismatic persons, although Sands's criminality predated Seventh Step and Dederich's criminality was activated after Synanon had become successful [11, 12]. Synanon introduced the 'Game', a form of encounter group confrontation or attack therapy [13, 14] not dissimilar to Seventh Step's 'hot seat' [11].

Both groups were premised on the power of the peer group to bring about healing in individuals. Yet, unlike Seventh Step, Synanon formed itself into a kind of therapeutic community and became a for-profit organization [11]. Synanon also believed itself to be a kind of utopia “seeking to create an alternative form of human existence [11, p. 2]. The “Game” would start with one person starting the ‘indictment’ on the person under attack, followed by others “accusing, teasing, and provoking the target player until he ‘breaks,’ either by crying or by exploding in anger” [13, p. 339]. This would be followed by a quiet period in which the target player discusses problems or feelings and is given constructive advice by the other group members. Usually, all the members would face the Game in the meeting, which would last from three to four hours [13]. Synanon’s confrontation style was more aggressive and more intense than 7th Step’s ‘hot seat’. Synanon members found that the emotional intensity was cathartic; the resulting discharge of feelings reduced their drug relapses [13, 14].

Instead of pointing to the need for more heroin, these feelings come to indicate the member’s need to ‘empty his gut’, to play another Game soon. Thus the Game experience reshapes the whole meaning of stress (Antze, 1976, p. 342).

UNLOCK

The National Association of Reformed Offenders (UNLOCK) is an offender support organization in current operation in England, formed in 1998 by ex-offenders. The group has been supported by former Inspectors of HM (Her Majesty’s) Prisons and combine paid and volunteer staff in work that ranges from prison visits, to working with youth, to public advocacy in combating discrimination of ex-offenders [15]. UNLOCK leaders have been quite public in their work, appearing in television and print media to call for increased citizen rights for ex-offenders. While the organization’s commitment to offender visits and support is not foreign to the work of 7th Step, the latter has been less public in its advocacy work. One aspect of UNLOCK’s work that may be useful for 7th Step is its website. The website has an online discussion board for the 4,000 members to exchange views on issues such as employment, training, travel, finances, and successes and challenges [15].

UNLOCK is one of a number of offender support organizations, many of them active in the United Kingdom. Many concentrate on housing and employment issues; others on offender rights, advocacy for increased citizenship, and reduction in stigma.

Therapeutic Communities

The birth of the therapeutic community (TC) in prison was, in some ways, a response to the birth of prisons themselves in the 1840s [16]. Therapeutic communities are defined as “a living-learning situation” in which inmates and staff work together as a “peer community to facilitate social and psychological change in individuals” [17, p. 382]. Within the prison, therapeutic communities adhered to organizational structure, but involved inmates in development of TC practices [18]. Maxwell Jones, a noted British psychiatrist and dominant figure in the development of prison TCs, [19] retired in Nova Scotia; his last work in the 1980s was to evaluate the TC at Springhill Institution in that province. Prior to that, he worked on the TC in an Arizona prison that mixed schizophrenic and personality disordered inmates. After the departure of Dr. Jones, the Arizona psychiatrist Dr. Garcia-Buñuel remarked on the effect of the TC on the inmates:

In the therapeutic community, each person has the right to deserve respect and a say;

each person is accountable for his or her action, both staff and residents, and there is a clear structure of rules which is respected and adhered to.

Violence – the currency which enforces much of the antisocial environment – is not tolerated.

Drugs – the currency that continues and refines the antisocial culture ... – are not tolerated.

Within such a setting, individuals can re-address their own histories, and grow” (Day & Doyle, 2010, p. 383).

It was very moving to see how some of our recalcitrant social offenders were able to respond to many of these ‘crazy’ patients and how they even helped them with elementary personal hygiene needs. It was an unforgettable lesson for all of us... that scoundrels and madmen could work together and even offer and receive help from one another (Briggs, 2006, p. 86).

In his work, Dr. Jones used three elements of conflict resolution: confrontation, compromise, and integrating opposing ideas and practices toward new solutions [19, p. 87]. In maintaining these elements, the Arizona prison TC remained in operation for 10 years; the one in Springhill, NS remained for 14 years [19].

However, as Day and Doyle note, “the provision of therapy is, typically, not a primary goal for prison systems” [17, p. 381]. The concept of self-help mixed with “sleep-in treatment” [20, p. 183] is difficult enough for hardened correctional staff and inmates; the concept of prisons allowing ex-inmates back in to the institutions to work as therapists is not easily marketed [20]. The difficulties faced by TCs in combating the ‘prisonization’ process (the socialization of inmates into the prison subculture and attitudes) is such that many inmates and staff believe these institutions are not the places for therapeutic recovery [20].

Yet, the warden of the Sharon prison in Israel, in the 1990s, turned the entire institution into a therapeutic community: from the beginnings where a few cells were marked off as

a drug-free unit, a process of transferring TC inmates into the prison and non-TC inmates out of the prison ensued. The inmates housed in the new Sharon Rehabilitation Centre, as the prison came to be called, had to fulfill three criteria: (1) they were no longer using drugs, (2) they had the cognitive capacity to make change and deal with treatment, and (3) there was enough time (six months) remaining in the sentence for effective treatment [20]. The results included improved inmate behaviour in the prison and on release, and improved staff morale [20].

Faith-Based Models

Some offenders worry that faith-based support groups include proselytizing tactics in their programs or that the workers make judgment of their criminal pasts [21]. Other inmates find solace, guidance, and a life purpose in spiritual programs [22]. Many not-for-profit organizations that work with offender populations come from faith communities, either from a particular denomination or from a more generic spiritual perspective. For offenders who have dealt in anti-social ways with strong and poorly managed emotions – anger and depression in particular – alignment with a faith-based group may provide a positive emotional outlet [23, 24]. The 7th Step Society is not a faith-based organization; however, one of the seven steps discusses “a Power from which we can gain strength” [3], which may or may not have a spiritual basis.

Ready 4 Work

The Ready4Work group in the US is based on a mentoring model that includes peer support [21]. It notes that having staff that are well-trained in mentoring and familiar with high-risk populations is ideal. It does not require that mentor coordinators have lived experience as ex-offenders; in fact, a criminal record check is required before a potential mentor is hired, although it also recognizes that, in some cases, former prisoners – ex-offenders – should be recruited to become mentors [21].

Welcome Home Ministries

This San Diego, California program was begun by a minister in the mid 1990s as a community bridge for women being released from prison. The minister began by visiting inmates, and developed a “revolutionary, peer-to-peer holistic community reentry program” [25, p. 299]. The minister, Warner-Robbins, took then President George W. Bush’s passing of the Second Chance Act¹⁷ as an opportunity to address the complex needs of offenders in the daunting transition from prison to community [25, 26]. This program cites “belief in God” as the first of 11 “critical transitioning factors” [25, p. 299]; it also works with women through a peer-letter writing campaign, attendance at court, assistance with housing and employment and family, and dual diagnosis¹⁸ peer-support meetings. In addition, Welcome Home Ministries researches its effectiveness through qualitative interviews with women participants and statistics on the recidivism rates of its members in comparison with national recidivism.

17 Passed in 2008, the Second Chance Act was called “the first comprehensive legislation attempting to address the multifaceted problems offenders face during and after incarceration” [27, p. 24].

18 Dual diagnosis in an inmate population usually refers to an individual with both addiction and mental illness.

Summary

There exist many volunteer and peer-support groups, past and present, which offer encouragement, advocacy, and assistance to offenders. None of these groups and no others found in this exploration of the literature offers support specifically to the chronic, incorrigible offenders.

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Research Question 5: 7th Step Model and Offender Commitment

I'll tell you this – bein' the toughest con in the joint don't make the time no easier. I gets awful lonesome. (Long-term offender, Sands, 1966/1995, p. 56).

The concept of offenders helping other offenders to stay out of trouble is not new; it also is not widely applauded. The Parole Board of Canada regularly places non-association clauses on release certificates for offenders exiting to the community; indeed, one article in the Correctional Service of Canada's research journal, FORUM, argues that non-association is the one special condition linked to offender success on release [2].

Yet, 7th Step and other offender support groups premise their existence on the association of offenders with one another in a manner that is healthy, helpful, and necessary for developing pro-social attitudes:

Convicts may listen politely to educated free men, but they do not answer back. They are not polite at Seventh Step meetings, and they do answer back – because they are deeply involved. The movement is their own (Sands, 1967, p. 224).

Sands also argued that in the United States in the mid-1960s, the Seventh Step Foundation boasted a success rate of 85-90 per cent of the 4 000 'graduates' of the Foundation's pre-release program; during the same time, the Federal Bureau of Information (FBI) statistics showed a national recidivism rate of 70 per cent [3, p. 224].

Sands was not alone in his conviction that offenders do best when listening to the advice, challenges, and reflections of other offenders. Indeed, peer support may be more important for this group. LeBel [4] and Grounds and Jamieson [5] referred to the notion of mutual support among groups of released prisoners as essential in the transformation from an identity as prisoner to an identity as citizen. LeBel discussed the "helper therapy principle" developed by the social work discipline in the 1960s [4]; this principle supported desistance from crime because offenders gained self-esteem and a non-criminal identity by helping others like themselves. The concept of 'professional ex-' [6, 7] or 'wounded healer' [8] is as fundamental to the success of Alcoholics' Anonymous as it is to Seventh Step [9]; it became the identifying factor for many prisoner self-help groups of the 1970s [4, 10]. In 1976, Antze studied the effect of peer support and noted that research found "peer therapy organizations achieve their results with precisely the segment of the population that is least likely to benefit from professional psychotherapy" [11, p. 323]. Groups of peers helping one another use "a relatively simple cluster of social-psychological processes, most notably confession, catharsis, mutual identification, and the removal of stigmatized feelings" [11, p. 323-324]. In other words, 7th Step provides its offender members with a new identity, and a sense of belonging, both critical to sustained desisting from crime [8, 12].

7th Step 1960s

I have spent a whole lifetime learning to be pretty careful with people, to be sort of delicate and gentle.... The idea that you mustn't say a loud word to anybody because it might traumatize him or hurt him, the idea that people cry easily or crack easily or commit suicide or go crazy if you shout at them – that maybe these ideas are outdated (Maslow on Synanon, 1967, p. 28).

The Seventh Step Foundation of the 1960s in the United States was not so much about prisoner peer support for individual change using a form of attack therapy known as 'hot seat' as it was about preparing inmates for release, by allowing them to state their "resentments" [14, p. 204] and by 'sponsoring' hard-core incorrigible inmates to have a job when they entered the community¹⁹ [14, 15]. However, the meetings quickly grew into the format still used today: the seven steps were developed, individuals were confronted on their thinking errors and their resentments, and the group challenged the individual in developing a pathway to freedom [3].

All the wise guys I know are in here [prison] – the smartest ones of all didn't even come to the show, they're in the hole – all the wise guys will go back to their cells and all us dumb square johns will have to leave and go away in our big cars to our nice homes and good pay and lovely wives. Yeah. All us square johns are on the outside (Sands, to Kansas State Penitentiary inmates, 1966/1995, p. 203).

The Seventh Step meeting format evolved within the first couple of years into a structure that began with an opening Purpose and ended with the Closing Thought (see Dedication Page at the beginning of this report). The Purpose went as follows:

We, in this room, share together the desire to live together constructively in a free society. We hope to be forgiven, and we practice forgiveness ourselves. With that thought in mind, we will now greet the man next to us with the knowledge that he, like ourselves, is sincere in attending this meeting. Now give yourself and your neighbor a big hand (Sands, 1967, p. 108).

Following hand shaking and group applause, all would stand to read the seven steps. Then the ground rules were read. Between meetings, committee members went to visit members and listen to their problems. A few men were singled out to be presented at the next meeting as having the sort of problem all in the group were experiencing or a problem of interest to all. During the meeting, each person so singled would be asked, in turn, to go to the front of the room where he would be challenged by the rest of the

¹⁹ In the United States in the 1960s, a prisoner could not be released on parole unless he had employment waiting for him. Because of this, many inmates were left in prison months and even years after their parole release date [14, 15].

group. However, the 'attack' seemed respectful of him as a person, in that he would be told to "get straight with yourself" [3, p. 110], not, 'You are a liar.'

At the end of a confrontation, the person would be told he helped a lot of others in the room because his problem was one that many people experience on the outside. He was also told that committee members would visit him to talk to him about his problem and that he would be called upon in a couple of weeks to see what "kind of progress you've made in your thinking" [3, p. 108]. Last, he was applauded for his honesty and effort [3].

Another man would be then asked to face the others and be confronted. Only one issue or two – not the whole person and his faults – were confronted at the Seventh Step meetings [3].

Hot Seat

One convict after another took the podium and faced the inevitable barrage of questions from his peers.... Men were helping each other to face the truth about themselves (Sands, 1967, p. 191).

Within the meetings, the feature piece has been the notion of the 'hot seat', a form of confrontation where the group challenges the concrete thinking and pro-criminal attitudes of the individual being 'hot seated' [16]. Like Synanon's Game, the hot seat works because "whenever a player reveals some new truth about himself, he is also forging certain emotional bonds with those who hear him" [11, p. 342]. The result is the individual in the hot seat and all those around him in the circle move a little away from the protection of their isolation and just a little towards emotional and social engagement [11].

Origins

There is no information that I could find in the literature on the foundation of the hot seat. But it did not drop out of the sky. It seems to be a combination of an encounter group mixed with attack therapy and the work of Abraham Maslow, Fritz Perls, and Albert Ellis [17]. Although not called such by Bill Sands in the early days of Seventh Step Foundation [3], the hot seat came about in the heady 1960s, a time of existentialism, the philosophy of individual truth and understanding, and humanistic psychology, which focuses on human potential and self-actualization [18, 19]. A term coined by Carl Rogers, self-actualization emphasized "personal growth through expanding awareness, exploration of intra-psychic as well as interpersonal issues, and the release of dysfunctional inhibitions" [17, p. 188]. It was seen as a way to combat dehumanization in society and was the inspiration of Synanon's Game and marathon group sessions [17]; the latter were seen as a stronger, more effective form of group psychotherapy. They were supported by the Gestaltists of Fritz Perls and the REBT (Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy) practitioners of Albert Ellis [17]. Although the original encounter groups were run by trained psychotherapists, some later ones were peer-support driven [17]. In his review of the marathon form of encounter groups, Weigel cautioned that those without trained leadership were more disruptive and less successful; that the marathon movement tried to be all things to all people and became fraught with unethical behaviours; and that the movement died when

researchers began to look for evidence of change in the participants. Without making recommendations, Weigel pointed to the need for training, ground rules for appropriate behaviour, and proper pacing to prevent an individual group or the movement as a whole from spinning out of control [17].

There are also aspects of the Gestalt (from the German, meaning 'whole') movement which resound in the hot seat. Frederick (Fritz) Perls, the founder of Gestaltism, argued that aggression can be useful as a survival tool, but is an element of non-survival when used as a response to negative emotions [20]. Perls also saw the advantages of group therapy in its forcing individuals to interact, its breaking down of a member's defenses, and its reinforcement of the individual's worth [21]. Perls's work focused on challenging the individual through exposing current feelings and actions and the differences between them and unstated preexisting attitudes [22]. Blaming outside forces and feeling shame are both considered self-deceptions. In the past few decades, Gestalt therapy has used less confrontational and shaming tactics and has placed greater emphasis on self-realization [22].

The third therapeutic basis for the hot seat seems to come from psychologist Albert Ellis's development of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) in the 1950s and used since by therapists and peer-support organizations [23]. Briefly, REBT works on one's thoughts about an event or situation that they do not like. Rather than responding emotionally, which it argues does not get one anywhere, this theory leads one to looking rationally at the situation, and challenging one's beliefs about it and one's ability to control this situation. Feelings are considered wrong because they are not useful; in fact, they actually contribute to one's feeling stuck. The aim is to have people look more rationally and logically at their problem issues [23], and to challenge 'absolutisms' and perfectionism: "This [the emotional view] means that when I act inefficiently and unlovably— which, as a fallible human I often will—back to shithood go!" [24, p. 150]. Ellis, rather, worked on the premise that one should accept oneself whether one is doing well or not and that it is not necessarily the role of the therapist – or the group – to hold one's hand and make one feel happy but to challenge one in a way that allows one to have greater control and agency in his/her own life [24, 25]. Ellis did not couch his directions in soft language:

Bite the bullet. Give up the audacity and chutzpah of your demandingness. Take it out of your head and heart, where it tends to wreak havoc, and stick it up your rear end, where it more properly belongs" (Ellis, 1997 p. 98).

Hot seat considerations

As noted earlier, Sands did not refer to the confrontation of Seventh Step members as a hot seat (at least not in either of the two books he wrote) [14, 3]. However, there is no question that Seventh Step members trod fiercely on the egos and the resentments of each other and that gentle treatment was not going to help these men either get out of prison or enter a world that had left them behind:

He has to learn that he is going back to the same world he left, the same world he could not adjust to before. The world has not changed in his absence; if he is to merge with it, it is he who has to do the changing (Sands, 1966/1995, p. 201).

How the hot seat is managed must be done with acknowledgement of the right of all to be treated with dignity and fairness, though [26], and with the acceptance that most chronic offenders have learned to commit crime as a matter of routine, and 'zig zag' between crime and desistance without the kind of intensive self-reflection being required of them in the hot seat [17, 28]. The goal of the hot seat is to achieve the kind of honesty and trust environment where the person being 'hot seated' "can drop the false fronts, or the masks or the roles... to discover something more basic, something more truly himself" [29, p. 109]. For this trust to occur in men who have developed mistrust as a survival instinct, the group direction must be led by the members themselves.

Among cautionary notes during confrontation is that the group refrain from 'shaming' the individual into adopting more prosocial attitudes and behaviours. "For chronic offenders whose emotional lives and selves are characterized by a large measure of anger and depression and who have been marginalized in multiple respects, shame only adds to the downward emotional themes about the self" [30, p. 1613]. Rather than shaming, the literature points to a benefit in transforming the 'toxic narratives' or 'glory stories' of past criminal behaviours into more critical considerations of these stories as examples as poor self management [30, 7].

Summary

The original Seventh Step meetings are not vastly different from those held today. However, there is merit in reflecting on the therapeutic approaches that popularized attack therapy forms of confrontation in the 1960s and whether changes in confrontation therapy in the past 50 years may have something to offer the 'hot seat'.

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Research Question 6: 7th Step's Place in 21st Century Rehabilitation

Even in the darkest corners of imprisonment, acknowledging its stress and negative effects, there is human optimism and altruism. Prisoners are surviving in prison because their organizations and leaders play a key role in prison management and prisoner development (Abdul-Mu'Min, 1980, p. 141).

The chronic offender has been called a failure, a loser, and a deviant [1, 2, 3]. His many releases from prison have been fraught with disappointment, rejection, and return to incarceration [4, 5, 3]. Prison-based correctional programs “actually create and reinforce deviant self-identities by stressing the abnormality and depravity of the offender’s inner self” [6, p. 230]. Maruna found that attention to the reentry needs of offenders have not improved to a significant extent in the past 100 years and that many of the professionals hired to assist released offenders feel themselves part of a system that is “uncomfortable, threatened, unsure of its role, and not at all confident of its social or political credibility” [6, p. 172]. Bill Sands says much the same:

Huge sums of money are spent to find a criminal, arrest him, try him, convict him, help him adjust to prison life, and then support him through years of incarceration. No money is spent to help him adjust to the free world (Sands, 1967, p. 120).

Prisoner Reentry

A strength of 7th Step is its partnership with, but distance from, government controls and mandates, such as are experienced by the Correctional Service of Canada. As a volunteer organization, 7th Step can assist in offender reentry where CSC cannot. Although speaking of the current environment in U.S. corrections, Baillargeon et al. could also be referring to difficulties in Canada: “With correctional expenditures increasing while state budgets are shrinking, many correctional systems are unable to provide the full range of recommended transition planning services” [4, p. 370]. There is clearly a gap. With many chronic offenders released not on parole but on statutory release, community supports are not formalized and there is little structure in place, such as a halfway house, to provide a bridge between prison and community living [8].

The time when chronic offenders are most disoriented amidst their surroundings and unsure of their future must be upon release from prison. “If going straight is understood as a cycle, this initial period of desistance is precisely the period when the ex-offender needs the most support” [6, p. 243].

Any successful reentry system must involve stakeholders, operate when the timing is right, and incorporate a process for revisiting and reevaluating itself (Harv. Law Rev., 2010, p. 1340).

The 7th Step Society has a long and admirable history of stakeholder involvement; national and provincial boards are composed of a mix of ex-offenders and non-offenders, community representatives and criminal justice professionals. In addition, 7th Step is included in national and provincial criminal justice and community associations.

But, how does any organization know when 'the timing is right'? In its almost 50 years, 7th Step's significance as an agency of social justice, offender support, and prisoner reentry has waxed and waned. In the past few years, Canadian corrections legislation has become more punitive and carceral; correctional programs are being reduced while prison cells are being constructed [10, 11]. Timing is, in part, the recognition of conflict, the knowledge that the current system is not producing satisfactory results [12, 5]. The time is right when current difficulty is matched by "a sense that a negotiated solution is possible" and that the supporting agency is able and willing to work towards the solution [9, p. 1342].

The Harvard Law Review's third point, on reevaluation, is critical for 7th Step. It recommends that, to be sustainable, a system or agency must adapt to new information, new opportunities, culture shifts, and changing methods of practice [9, p. 1342].

Offender Identity

Another strength of 7th Step is that it provides what Cressey calls "retroflexive reformation" [13, p. 118] or the feeling that the offender belongs to a group that will empower him towards a positive and free lifestyle and also give him a new identity – no longer a criminal, a thug, a delinquent, but a helper, a 'professional ex-' [14], a 7th Stepper. There is, in 7th Step, the opportunity for a sense of pride and accomplishment in being a role model and a mentor to the novitiates and to those members whose footing in a non-criminal world is still shaky [2]. This identity of professional ex- is found in the literature on volunteerism among delinquents: for those who volunteered with an organization, the risk of a return to crime was reduced [15, 2].

Exiting a Gang

In the reality of street life in a gang neighborhood, there are no yellow ribbons tied around trees and no placards welcoming home a former inmate. (Fleisher & Decker, 2001, p. 72)

Prison gang members will, in most cases, be released from incarceration and return to the community [16, 3, 17]. Again, in most cases, their reentry needs are not to reintegrate into the community but to integrate; these are individuals who never had socially acceptable and supported networks to family, neighbourhood, or economic structures [6, 18, 19].

Without alternatives, these doubly stigmatized offenders – inmate and gangster – will be back among a street gang and selling drugs almost as soon as they are released [16, 20].

This is a public safety and community issue; it is not met by official corrections systems, such as parole. The rising incarceration rates in North America mean that this will continue to be a significant problem for prisons and for communities [21, 16, 18].

Within prisons, the “stage is set” [16, p. 67] for gangs to grow when violent offenders are mixed with violent and non-violent drug offenders. However, gang reduction measures inside prisons do not affect gang membership in the community [18, 22]. And as a social group, a gang will bring about more serious and more frequent crimes by each member than would the individual gang member acting alone [16, 23].

Even if a gang member wants to exit, there are few alternatives to the economic structure and social belonging of the gang [18, 23, 22]. What works is patience, appreciation of the adversity facing him in trying to eke out a new identity in a world hostile to him, and recognition by the community that a gang member is one of them [21, 24, 22]. In advising communities on how to assist a gang member with reentry, Fleisher and Decker [16] offer some recommendations that will also help 7th Step Society in working with these offenders:

1. Do not hope to, or attempt to, sever ties between the individual and the gang. The goal is to stop criminal offending, and to offer a new identity, not to alienate the individual from a connection that may include virtually every person he knows.
2. Recognize that years of instability will not be turned around by even a strong desire in the individual for change, and that the road will be rocky, even with a commitment to desistance and the support of a group like 7th Step.
3. Understand that years of drug abuse will not disappear: work with community based treatment centres, preferably located in the gangster’s neighbourhood, to offer ongoing awareness on gang issues and addiction.
4. Appreciate that prison is probably closer to ‘home’ than any place in the community.
5. Work with community development groups to strengthen the links between gang neighbourhoods and the dominant economy.
6. Become a bridge between the correctional system and the community in working on behalf of these inmates and in training community responders to work with drug centres and social services in inner city and gang neighbourhoods.

Positive Peer Group

The notion of a group of ex-offenders meeting together on a regular basis to talk about their lives and their goals is not one that sits well with official organizations [25], the general public [17], or ex-offenders themselves [26, 27]. And yet, prisons offer correctional

programs to groups of offenders [25]; halfway houses provide residence to newly released prisoners [28]; and urban centres often contain residents with criminal histories in “geographic ‘hot spots’... characterized by the concentration of multiple forms of disadvantage” [29, p. 446]. In England, young ex-gang members mentor other youth gangsters to try to help them stay out of crime and gain necessary skills [21].

Both Maruna [19] and Sands [30, 7] subscribe to the idea that offenders provide ideal mentors for other offenders. They are not alone:

To expect deviants to have affective bonds for – to take as identity models – others who have not had that career is to expect an atypical, unusual and treacherous identification. Perhaps only deviants are expected to be so unusually responsive to persons different from themselves” (Lofland, 1969, p. 268).

Maruna explains that self-help groups provide an ex-offender with a reformed identity [6, 19]. McAnany and Tromanhauser argue that offender groups are integral to the self-determination of the members [32]. The latter authors note that prisons in the United States in the 1960s began allowing the formation of prisoner groups as a “pedagogy of the oppressed” [32, p. 69] and included ‘rap sessions’ as therapy techniques. What occurred for Bill Sands and the Seventh Step Foundation, they state, was occurring elsewhere across the country, both inside and outside prisons. When offenders that belonged to an inside group were released, they gathered together with other ex-offenders interested in conducting community ‘rap sessions’ and would then approach some ‘squares’ and propose the formation of a self-help group [32, p. 69]. The Seventh Step Foundation and Fortune Society (2011) were both noted as exemplars of this movement. These groups, and others like them, had two roles: the immediate needs of the offender post-release – housing, food, financial support, employment – and psychological support over the longer term. Many groups tried to take on too many objectives – basic needs, psychological support, prisoner advocacy – and could not sustain themselves. Many were disorganized and led by ex-offenders with varying ties to the group [32].

The offender self-help groups attempted to find sustainability in incorporation, tax exemptions, and private funding, but found that most of the people committed to them were not the sources of “financial miracles” [32, p. 72]. Many in the groups were relieved they were not well-funded; they worried that financial security would ‘ruin’ the group, that members would become more interested in paid positions than in the power of the group itself. However, the lack of money hindered the groups’ goals of getting men out of prison and keeping them out [32].

A third challenge was the fact that most prisons would not allow ex-offenders to return to support the inside groups and provide inmates with inspiration and hope. Prison wardens were not interested in having ex-prisoners talking about systemic wrongs and prisoner rights [32].

Then, the timing no longer supported prisoners' groups. The programs that offender groups espoused – personal 'rap' sessions, addictions discussions, employment help – were taken over by other official organizations; the offender group members that were still interested in working with their peers took on official, 'establishment' positions [32].

Lastly, the prisoner groups that failed to sustain themselves were, in addition to the above problems, without a charismatic leader, one with both street and corporate credibility [32].

Conversely, the groups that have sustained themselves have been supported by the official corrections agencies and had sustained leadership from within the group, the offenders themselves [33, 34]. From these groups, chronic offenders have emerged to show others the strength of community [33]. Perhaps it is through peer support and a sense of community that prison can begin to model a process of change and resilience for chronic offenders [35].

Summary

There is a strong body of literature that emphasizes the necessity of peer support in offering career criminals the chance of a new identity. The offender groups that have lasted have remained close to their original mandate, been led by trustworthy members, and earned and maintained respect of official agencies.

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Conclusion

After more than 40 years, 7th Step of Canada is still alive. Maintaining this organization over these decades has not been easy; there have been struggles of membership, relevance, and money. It lives because for its supporters, its members – non-offenders, ex-offenders, and active offenders – on a personal and on a social justice level, it is important. The 7th Step Society does what many other offender support groups have not done: it comes from inside the ranks of the most troubled and troublesome criminals to attack the thinking that prolongs their lives of crime and point the way, with guidance from the non-offender members, to freedom.

Does it still have a place in the criminal justice system of this country? That is the most important question, and this review of literature cannot answer it because, by its nature, this is a retrospective look. This question needs an answer that reflects the correctional environment and offender needs and interests today and into the future. However, as I've said earlier and repeat here, one answer has been used by many Parole Board of Canada members to thousands of chronic offenders: one's past reflects one's future. If that is the only criterion, then 7th Step will and should continue.

As all of those career criminals know when they have been denied parole based on their past behaviours, though, there is more to the story than a history will provide.

Discussion

Despite the focus on 7th Step, on peer support, and on offender voice and identity, it is worth returning to Gendreau's instructive assessment of successful offender assessment and treatment characteristics (1996). He discussed three 'obstacles' to sustained implementation of offender rehabilitation: theoreticism, technology transfer, and training. The three are also instructive for an organization such as 7th Step Society.

The first, theoreticism, Gendreau says refers to "accepting or rejecting knowledge on the basis of one's personal values and experiences" [1, p. 151]. He calls on practitioners, academics, and policymakers to respect the knowledge from other disciplines, other fields, and other countries on successes in offenders' desistance from crime. This is particularly useful for an organization like 7th Step and its 50 years of knowledge and experience in working to provide a pathway for offenders out of crime to freedom.

The second is technology transfer, also known in the non-bench sciences as knowledge transfer and exchange [2]. The Correctional Service of Canada is a partner of 7th Step. In embracing that partnership, CSC should be mindful – as should 7th Step – of a comment in a paper in 1979 by Gendreau and Ross, two researchers not unknown to the federal

To realistically prepare inmates for the future, we will have to do more than teach them to read and write, which were useful vocational skills in the early 20th century but are inadequate in the 21st century....

We must move quickly to narrow the training gap that now prepares former inmates for 1940s-like jobs. (Fleisher & Decker, 2001, p. 76)

organization: “Correctional researchers in the past resembled early medical adventurers bent on finding a single cure for a variety of complex problems” [4, p. 485]. In addition, Gendreau and Ross recommended that those in offender rehabilitation consider the following: multiple views of ‘success’, consideration of individual experiential differences, more treatment opportunities in the community, greater interrelationships among agencies [4].

The third is training. As all know who work, volunteer, and live in the world of criminal justice, training is the difference between credibility and contempt for staff, volunteers, and peer mentors [5, 6, 7]. For those who involve themselves as volunteers in 7th Step, the training is structured and sustained: a volunteer may enter an agency like 7th Step prepared to respect and listen to offenders, but there are many deeper levels of training required. In the Gendreau approach, training must be ongoing, sensitive to offender needs and circumstances, and inclusive of the approaches of the national corrections system as well as volunteer/ not-for-profit organizations.

7th Step does not have the research science behind its vision of offender resettlement²⁰ that is the hallmark of formal interventions. However, despite the use of the Stages of Change Model [8] to force resisters into treatment – the first stage of change is non-recognition of a problem – official treatment deliverers have not been able to show that their programs deliver success where self-help programs fail [9, 10]. Yet, carefully developed and evaluated programming is essential; the possible harm caused by program deliverers dumping their own ideas and pop-culture slogans and videos into a mix and calling it treatment does not bear contemplation. This is not the work of 7th Step. Rather, from the beginning, 7th Step has blended the structure of self-help programs such as Alcoholics’ Anonymous [11] with peer-mentoring and peer-leadership, volunteer training, and the combination of ex-offenders and non-offenders [12].

This review of the literature is really only a beginning of an exploration of self in 7th Step Society. It may pose as many questions as it answers: (1) Should it consider more concerted links with offenders – prison visits, letters to inmates, links to housing and employment for the thousands in this era released without parole? (2) Should it concentrate on being a pre-release peer-support for inmates to help them prepare for Parole Board hearings and release to the street? (3) Should it explore halfway house development – in the manner accomplished by the Alberta Seventh Step Society (2011) – to offer a first step to offenders? (4) Should it increase its work with youth, in the manner of 7th Step Society of Newfoundland? (5) Should it articulate in a more structured way the ‘hot seat’ – 7th Step Society’s most noted intervention – to examine its consequences for offenders and its mystery for outsiders?

These are questions that can only be answered with further research.

²⁰ I use the term resettlement here in the sense of journey, whether it be geographical or mental; for resettlement to occur, the offender must go from identity with a criminal lifestyle to a new identity.

Recommendations

1. 7th Step is the bridge between the “scientific theories and research techniques” [14, p. 365] of Correctional Service of Canada and the lived experiences of chronic offenders. Recognize and promote this singular and essential role in Canadian criminal justice work, public safety, and crime prevention.
2. Maintain strong linkages and partnerships: with CSC, criminal justice organizations such as National Associations Active in Criminal Justice (NAACJ), and NGOs such as St. Leonard’s Society, John Howard Society, and Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS).
3. Provide training on the teachings and the learnings of 7th Step, not only to volunteers and contract agencies, but more importantly to inmates and prison staff across the country; there is a need for 7th Step to be a much broader and more direct link to offenders. Training should also broaden to more criminal justice groups to promote understanding of the particular therapeutic process inherent in this organization.
4. Conduct regular self-evaluation and assessment to gather information on the needs of chronic offenders and to determine 7th Step’s role in meeting those needs.
5. Consider conducting research into the current work of 7th Step Society and potential directions for the future. Initial research may be best undertaken in the form of stakeholder interviews with 7th Step members, Boards of Directors nationally and provincially, partners, and offenders.

Final Word

The final word is given to Richards and Jones (2004), two ex-offenders who now conduct research into, and advocate for, prisoner reentry:

Prisoners cannot wait for prisons to improve or community punishments to recede. Instead, they must ‘do their own time,’ avoid reimprisonment and learn to rise above the chaos and confusion of the criminal justice machinery. A person descends when he or she goes to prison and then, if he or she can muster the intellectual or spiritual desire to remake him or herself, he or she ascends from the shadows to rejoin the world (p. 224).

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Appendix A: List of Offender Support Websites

- 7th Step Society of Canada*, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.7thstep.ca/>
- Bridging the Gap (UK)*. Retrieved from <http://www.btguk.org/>
- Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS)*. (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.elizabethfry.ca/>
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- John Howard Society of Canada (JHS)*. (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.johnhoward.ca/>
- New Bridge Foundation (UK)*. Retrieved from <http://www.newbridgefoundation.org.uk/>
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- The Seventh Step Foundation of Oregon (US)*. Retrieved from <http://www.angelfire.com/or3/tss2/seventh.html>
- Seventh Step Foundation, Hayward, CA (US)*. Retrieved from <http://www.volunteermatch.org/search/org11500.jsp>
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