

\_\_\_\_\_ **Research Report** \_\_\_\_\_

**Buffalo Sage Wellness House  
(BSWH) Process Review**

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## **Buffalo Sage Wellness House (BSWH) Process Review**

Amy J. M. Pilon

Department of Psychology, University of Saskatchewan

Dr. Lisa M. Jewell

Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science & Justice Studies, University of Saskatchewan

Dr. J. Stephen Wormith

Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science & Justice Studies, University of Saskatchewan

&

Dr. Patti Laboucane-Benson

Native Counselling Services of Alberta

Correctional Service of Canada

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## Executive Summary

**Key words:** *Aboriginal women offenders, Section 81 agreements, Buffalo Sage Wellness House.*

Buffalo Sage Wellness House (BSWH) is a relatively new (2010) facility operated under a Section 81 agreement with Native Counselling Services of Alberta (NCSA) in Edmonton, Alberta. It is a 16-bed, minimum security facility for federally sentenced women offenders and also serves as a community residential facility for women offenders who are on release in the community. The purpose of the study was to provide the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) and the NCSA with an understanding of the implementation, processes, and where applicable, the measurable outcomes of BSWH. The study was a process review in recognition of the small number of women who have attended BSWH to date and CSC's desire to better understand Buffalo Sage's structures, programs, processes, and operations. It was also intended to provide information to CSC with advice and opinions regarding the treatment and management of women offenders.

The study was designed to provide a description of the profile of women who have ever attended the Buffalo Sage facility and the unique model of case management practiced at Buffalo Sage. In addition, 16 in-depth interviews with 9 offenders and 7 BSWH staff members informed the examination of the relationship of Buffalo Sage with CSC, the processes in place, and best practices that can inform CSC on the management and treatment of women offenders. To help understand how the Buffalo Sage model applies to the work conducted with the women in the facility, the life histories of three offenders who had lived at BSWH were collected using a case study method.

The quantitative profile analysis included 48 offenders; 35 were Aboriginal and 13 were non-Aboriginal offenders. The majority were single, around 31 years of age, and serving a sentence for homicide or drug offences. Their average sentence length was approximately four years. Forty offenders had been released from BSWH. Overall, the revocation rate for any reason was 25%; only one released woman was returned on a new offence.

The results from the interviews with the staff at BSWH portrayed the Buffalo Sage model as a culturally informed approach that helps women understand and heal themselves, reconcile relationships, reclaim an interconnected worldview, and deal with historical and past trauma. As well, the staff described the processes in place at BSWH including the admissions process, escorted and unescorted temporary absences, programming/training, remote access to CSC's Offender Management System, and the development of healing plans. The results from the offender interviews indicated that the women found BSWH to be a positive, empowering, and supportive environment that allowed them to have increased self-confidence, to heal and gain a better understanding of themselves and their past, and to feel empowered to change. Overall, the results of the study demonstrated the success of BSWH with respect to successfully reintegrating women back into society. It was noted that processes that could improve efficiency were the provision of wait lists which would expedite the transfer process, and an increase in the awareness of BSWH and how Section 81 works, provision of funding that would allow for services, particularly for teachers and escorts for ETAs, and the provision of facilities to permit private family visits for the women whose support system lives outside of Edmonton.





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## **Introduction**

In Canada, the care and custody of men and women sentenced to over two years is the responsibility of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). The purpose of CSC, as stated by the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA, 1992), is to contribute to public safety by assisting with the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders into their communities as law-abiding citizens through the safe and humane custody and supervision of offenders.

### **Women Offenders**

The number of women offenders in the custody of CSC remains small compared to the male offender population, representing about 4% of the federal population (Public Safety Canada, 2015). However, over the longer term, the women offender population has been increasing (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2013a). In the last ten years, the number of women admitted each year to federal jurisdiction increased 13.9% from 237 in 2003-04 to 270 in 2012-13. During the same time period, there was an increase of 18.5% in the number of men admitted to federal jurisdiction (Public Safety Canada, 2013). Dating further back, the increase in the number of women sentenced to a federal term is even more marked. In 1981, only 96 women comprised the total incarcerated federal women population (Matheson, Doherty, & Grant, 2008). Today, there are over 500 incarcerated women (Corporate Report System, February, 2015) who are housed in the following CSC facilities: Fraser Valley Institution, Edmonton Institution for Women (EIFW), Grand Valley Institution for Women, Joliette Institution, Nova Institution for Women, and Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge (OOHL; CSC, 2010). CSC also has a Section 81 agreement with NCSA for the operation of Buffalo Sage Wellness House, and also Exchanges of Services agreements with several provincial jurisdictions to house women offenders in other facilities.

Women offenders in CSC are likely to be young, single, and Aboriginal. It is estimated that 82% of federally sentenced women have histories of physical and/or sexual abuse (Walsh, Krieg, Rutherford, & Bell, 2013). An examination of all women under CSC jurisdiction at the end of fiscal year 2013-14 showed that 58% were serving a sentence for a violent offence; 18% for first and second degree murder and 39% for a schedule I offence<sup>1</sup> (Public Safety, 2015). Drug related offences accounted for 25% of all major offences for women, while property and other

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<sup>1</sup> Schedule I is comprised of sexual offences and other violent crimes excluding first and second degree murder.

non-violent offences accounted for 17% of offences (Public Safety Canada, 2015). Federal women are infrequently repeat offenders, but for those who are, their crimes tend to not escalate in severity (Kong & AuCoin, 2008).

Women federal offenders comprise a distinct population that have unique program requirements. Five principles guide the development and delivery of interventions for women federal offenders in Canada: empowerment, meaningful and responsible choices, respect and dignity, supportive environments, and shared responsibility (Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, 1990). Programs delivered to female offenders also reflect the social realities of the women and respond to the individual needs of each woman (CSC, 2010). The majority of women admitted to federal custody in 2012-13 were found to have needs for intervention in the following domains: personal/ emotional (83%), substance abuse (64%), associates (57%), marital/family (52%), and employment (56%) (Correctional Service of Canada, 2013).

### **Aboriginal Offenders**

An Aboriginal person is defined as a person who is of Indian (i.e., status and non-status), Métis, or Inuit ancestry (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982). Statistics Canada (2013) indicated that 4.3% of the Canadian population self-identified as Aboriginal in 2011, comprised of approximately 61% First Nations, 32% Métis, and 4% Inuit. It is widely known (e.g., Kunic & Varis, 2009; Perreault, 2009; Public Safety Canada, 2013) that Aboriginal populations are over-represented in the criminal justice system. The over-representation has been a longstanding issue for at least the last 25 years and continues to increase with an influx of young gang-affiliated Aboriginal offenders entering the system (Dauvergne, 2012; Public Safety Canada, 2013). In fact, the Supreme Court of Canada has referred to the Aboriginal over-representation as a crisis in the Canadian justice system (Rudin, 2008). Both Aboriginal males and females are overrepresented in federal corrections; however, this overrepresentation is dramatically higher for Aboriginal women offenders. For instance, between 2001-2002 and 2011-2012, the incarcerated Aboriginal population increased 37.3%, while incarcerated Aboriginal women increased by 109% - representing 33% of women federal offenders (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2016). In CSC, approximately 18% of male federal offenders are Aboriginal, a rate six times more than their representation in the Canadian population (Kunic & Varis, 2009), but approximately 33% of women federal offenders are Aboriginal, which is sixteen times more than their representation in the Canadian population (Walsh et al., 2013).

This is even more dramatic in the western provinces where the incarceration of Aboriginal male and female offenders is 30 times higher in Saskatchewan and 11 times higher in Alberta than their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Perreault, 2009).

### **Aboriginal Women Offenders**

Since 2003, the number of federally sentenced Aboriginal women offenders has increased by 83.7% (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2013a). Notably, 50% of maximum security female federal offenders are Aboriginal (Walsh et al., 2013). Moreover, the profile of Aboriginal women offenders is quite different from the profile of non-Aboriginal women offenders. For example, Aboriginal female offenders have a higher risk and a higher need for correctional programming (Bell, Trevethan, & Allegri, 2004), and approximately 90% of federally sentenced Aboriginal women have histories of physical and/or sexual abuse (Walsh et al., 2013). Further, more than 80% of Aboriginal women offenders were identified as having a high need for intervention to address substance abuse compared to only 37% of non-Aboriginal women offenders (Dell & Boe, 2000). In addition, Aboriginal female offenders are disproportionately involved in the use of force interventions and incidents of self-injurious behaviours while in custody (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2013b).

Aboriginal women offenders are also released later in their sentences (i.e., they have lower parole grant rates) compared to non-Aboriginal women offenders; however, it is unclear whether this is a result of lower parole grant rates at parole hearings or a result of the Aboriginal women postponing or waiving parole reviews at a higher rate (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2013b). Aboriginal women offenders have fairly extensive criminal histories compared to non-Aboriginal women offenders (Bell et al., 2004). Further, when examining the Aboriginal women offender population, they are more likely to be returned to custody on revocation of conditional release, often for technical reasons, rather than for reoffences (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2013b). As well, Aboriginal women offenders are often mothers and will have childcare responsibilities upon release (Bell et al., 2004). As one of the many responses to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal male and women offender populations in the criminal justice system, CSC has introduced healing lodges across Canada.

### **Healing Lodges and Section 81 Facilities for Aboriginal Men and Women in Canada**

Two important issues prompted the creation of healing lodges for Aboriginal male and

female offenders. These included members of Aboriginal communities being very concerned that mainstream prisons and the programming offered were neither working for Aboriginal offenders nor an adequate response to the dramatic over-representation of Aboriginal peoples in Canada's correctional system (CSC, 2012; Didenko & Marquis, 2011). There also was support emerging for the development of a correctional environment designed specifically to meet the needs of Aboriginal offenders. Thus, in 1990, CSC drafted plans for five new regional federal facilities (four for Aboriginal males and one for Aboriginal females) that were further supported in 1992 with the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA); a piece of legislation that strengthened the relationship between CSC and Aboriginal communities (CSC, 2012). Aboriginal communities were now involved in developing and delivering services and programs to Aboriginal offenders, thereby creating an environment that was inclusive of Aboriginal spirituality and culture (CSC, 2012). In addition, the Task Force for Federally Sentenced Women released a report titled *Creating Choices* recommending that one of these new federal facilities be created specifically for Aboriginal women. This recommendation was supported by former federal Aboriginal offenders who were serving as CSC advisors at the time (CSC, 2012).

CSC introduced healing lodges for Aboriginal males and females as institutions that are holistic in their approach, incorporating Aboriginal people's traditions and beliefs and providing programs and services that reflect Aboriginal teachings, ceremonies, and spirituality (CSC, 2011; Didenko & Marquis, 2011). The healing lodges for Aboriginal women offenders are minimum/medium security facilities and for Aboriginal men they are minimum security facilities (CSC, 2012). Non-Aboriginal offenders can also reside at a healing lodge if they choose to follow Aboriginal programming and spirituality (CSC, 2012). The philosophy of the healing lodge model centres on Aboriginal culture and healing. The guiding principle underlying both the male and female healing lodge models is that core aspects of an Aboriginal identity may be crucial to the healing process and that a cultural approach may help offenders gain the skills required to manage their risk to re-offend (Trevethan, Moore, & Allegri, 2005). To date, healing lodges have shown promising results. For example, recent studies (CSC, 2011; Pilon & Wormith, 2012) found that offenders who are released from Aboriginal male healing lodges have relatively low recidivism rates compared to the average recidivism rates for male federal offenders (Bonta, Rugge, & Dauvergne, 2008).

Healing lodges for males and females can operate in one of two ways, either as a CSC



operated healing lodge or as a facility operated under a Section 81 agreement (CSC, 2012). There are currently four healing lodges operated by CSC and four facilities that are under Section 81 agreements (CSC, 2012). A CSC operated healing lodge is funded by CSC and operated by CSC staff (CSC, 2012). The CSC operated healing lodges include three men's institutions (Willow Cree Healing Lodge, Pe Sakastew Centre, and Kwikwexwelhp Healing Village) and one women's institution (Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge; CSC, 2012). Section 81 facilities for males and females are funded by CSC and operated by an Aboriginal community (CSC, 2012). The Aboriginal community signs an agreement with CSC under Section 81 of the CCRA (CSC, 2012). These agreements operate on a five-year cycle and it is not guaranteed that the agreement will be renewed (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2012). Section 81 facilities for males and females were intended to enable a degree of control and participation to Aboriginal communities from the point of sentencing to the offender's warrant expiry date, as well as to allow Aboriginal communities to have a key role in delivering programs within correctional institutions and to Section 81 offenders (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2012). The Section 81 facilities include three male facilities (Stan Daniels Healing Centre, Waseskun Healing Centre, and Ochi-chak-ko-sipi Healing Lodge) and one female facility (Buffalo Sage Wellness House).

### **Buffalo Sage Wellness House**

Buffalo Sage Wellness House (BSWH) is a Section 81 facility that is operated by the Native Counselling Services of Alberta (NCSA) and is located in Edmonton, Alberta (Aboriginal Research Institute, 2012). The facility welcomed its first residents on September 6, 2010 (Aboriginal Research Institute, 2012). BSWH is a 16 bed minimum security facility for women offenders as well as a Community Residential Facility (CRF) for women offenders who are on release in the community (CSC, 2012).

The goal of BSWH is to effect change within each woman offender to assist them with making different choices after their release (Aboriginal Research Institute, 2012). Similarly, the mandate is to prepare the women for their release and reintegration into society with a focus on healing (MacDonald, 2012). BSWH's mission is to honour the commitment they have made to the Aboriginal women offender, the community, and to the releasing authorities (BSWH, 2012). The success of BSWH is measured through the women being granted and having positive escorted and unescorted community time, successfully integrating into the community, and self-

reporting positive changes in their behaviour (Aboriginal Research Institute, 2012).

The facility has no bars on the windows or doors, no cells or towers, and is situated in an unmarked location in a residential Edmonton neighbourhood. Security measures, such as alarms and cameras on the doors and screens, are used at the residence; however, these are employed to keep others out rather than to keep the women in (MacDonald, 2012). At BSWH, there are approximately 17 employees consisting of staff and Elders who prepare the women to return to the community by helping them make appropriate choices and positive changes in their lives (CSC, 2012).

The majority of the women offenders who reside at BSWH transfer from the Edmonton Institution for Women to serve the last six months of their sentences (MacDonald, 2012). Very few of the women that reside at BSWH come from middle class backgrounds but rather many have lived and/or worked on the streets (MacDonald, 2012). Claire Carefoot, who is the founding Director of the BSWH, described the type of offenders that reside at BSWH:

One of them [a woman offender] has been here 20 years, so we're trying to de-institutionalize her. One of them went into the social welfare system when she was 6 or 7 because her mother was deemed unfit. She went from the social system into the prison system and she's never been out on the street on her own. Another inmate's mother and sister are on the streets. Her dad's an alcoholic and her brother's a schizophrenic. She's the strongest member of her family and she's here. Those are the kinds of women we're trying to help (cited in MacDonald, 2012).

### **Funding/Partners.**

The funding for BSWH is largely provided by CSC (Aboriginal Research Institute, 2012). In addition to NCSA, partners that are involved in BSWH include CSC, as well as their facilities: Edmonton Institution for Women, Edmonton and Area Parole, and Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge. In addition, BSWH partners with local organizations, such as: Catholic Social Services; Elizabeth Fry Society; Bent Arrow; Bissell Centre; Boyle Street Community Services; Canadian Native Friendship Center; Women Building Futures; YouCan; BGS Career and Corporate Development; Lifeline Society of Alberta; YMCA; and the City of Edmonton libraries (Aboriginal Research Institute, 2012). The term continuum of care describes the method of communication between staff at BSWH, CSC, and their community partners, which is continuous and fluid with no start or stop in the process of working with federal women in conflict with the law (BSWH, 2012). It is this fluid approach and active continuum of care that allows BSWH to deliver key results for the community at large (BSWH, 2012).

BSWH is operated by the Native Counselling Services of Alberta (NCSA). In 1970, NCSA was established as an Aboriginal organization and offers diverse services such as court worker assistance, family and community wellness programs, parole and probation services, resource, media, and research departments. It also runs residential correctional and healing centres (NCSA, 2010). NCSA has been in operation for 40 plus years and has established strong links to the community as well as a solid reputation in delivering results to municipal, provincial, and federal departments (BSWH, 2012). The mission of the NCSA is to contribute to the holistic development and wellness of the Aboriginal individual, family, and community; promote fair and equitable treatment of Aboriginal people; develop, maintain, and honour partnerships; evolve pro-actively with the changing environment; and strategically plan and deliver culturally sensitive programs and community education (NCSA, 2010).

### **Programs/Services.**

In line with NCSA's mission, programming at BSWH is culturally sensitive and held in a structured and traditional environment that reflects the needs of the Aboriginal women offenders, community, and releasing authorities (CSC, 2012). At BSWH, a correctional plan that identifies each woman's needs is created to help them with their holistic and spiritual rehabilitation and self-esteem (CSC, 2012). Programming at BSWH addresses childhood trauma, substance abuse, life skills (e.g., writing resumes, preparing for job interviews), parenting, and work release (MacDonald, 2012). Services and ceremonies are provided at BSWH as well as at various locations in the community (Aboriginal Research Institute, 2012). The women begin their reintegration into the community gradually, working towards a possible conditional release (Aboriginal Research Institute, 2012).

### **Theoretical Model.**

The theoretical model guiding BSWH is grounded firmly in the philosophy and history of Aboriginal people. The model is based upon the Cree worldview, takes into account colonization and its impact on Aboriginal peoples, and describes how healing can be achieved vis-à-vis resiliency and restoration of an interconnected worldview (LaBoucane-Benson, 2009; LaBoucane-Benson, Gibson, Benson, & Miller, 2012). Within the model, family and community resilience is synonymous with a state of connectedness to the members of one's family and community and being resilient is equated with having the ability to maintain this connectedness between family and community members (LaBoucane-Benson, 2009). The more connected the

family is (internally between members and externally with community and environment), the more likely the family or community will be resilient (LaBoucane-Benson, 2009). Moreover, the quality of connection between people will dictate the quality of life that can be achieved and the principles of respect, caring, sharing, kindness, humility, honesty, and self-determination are considered to be the foundations of good relationships (LaBoucane-Benson, 2009). The more these principles are evident in relationships between individuals and other environments, the more resilience the family and community will manifest.

NCSA programmatic and restorative practices are grounded in this understanding of resilience in which clients are reoriented to an interconnected worldview by placing importance on building good relationships with their family and their community. Programs can also work towards fostering (or enhancing) a sense of belonging and responsibility to the people and world around them. Essentially, the interventions facilitate reparation of the spiral of relationships, which have been fragmented or confused with trauma-based behaviour (LaBoucane-Benson, 2009). The healing of those relationships is the process of building resilience which is to say that healing and building family resilience are essentially the same process.

At BSWH, the residents are given an opportunity to explore the way in which colonization has created trauma-informed behaviour for them personally and in their families of origin. Understanding historic trauma and intergenerational cycles of family violence, instilling a positive sense of Aboriginal identity, taking responsibility for personal actions, and repairing relationships are amongst the most important outcomes for case planning and implementation. Staff at BSWH are trained to understand how historic trauma shapes clients' behaviour. Ultimately, the goal is to shift the focus from placing blame, administering consequences, and engaging in adversarial relationships with the residents to facilitating healing processes that address historic trauma-based beliefs and behaviours.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the study was to provide the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) and Native Counselling Services of Alberta (NCSA) with an understanding of the implementation, processes and, where applicable, the measurable outcomes of Buffalo Sage Wellness House (BSWH). BSWH is a relatively new facility and has had no outcome study completed to date (Aboriginal Research Institute, 2012). Although a recent comprehensive evaluation of CSC-run healing lodges and Section 81 facilities was conducted as part of a broader evaluation of the

Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Corrections, Buffalo Sage was excluded given its recent implementation. Buffalo Sage has now been open for a sufficient period of time to warrant a review; therefore, a process review was undertaken to examine the profile of women offenders at Buffalo Sage as well as to gather more information on the Buffalo Sage model, its processes, and its relationship with CSC. Specifically, the current study focused on both quantitative profile-based information and qualitative interview data that allowed for an in-depth understanding of Buffalo Sage's model and processes.

Specific questions pertaining to the implementation of BSWH, the processes at BSWH, the relationship between CSC and NCSA and between BSWH and the Parole Board of Canada (PBC), and ways to improve BSWH guide this study. These questions are as follows:

- 1) What is the profile of women who have attended/are attending Buffalo Sage?
- 2) What is the Buffalo Sage model?
- 3) What processes are in place at Buffalo Sage?
- 4) What is Buffalo Sage's relationship to CSC?
- 5) What best practices can be identified to advise CSC on the management and treatment of lower risk women offenders in the community?

## **Method<sup>2</sup>**

There are three components to this study that will be described in turn. The first part of the study is quantitative and employed a file review to develop a profile and examine the outcomes of 48 women who have attended/are attending BSWH. The second part of the study is qualitative where semi-structured interviews were used to gather in-depth information from offenders and staff at BSWH. The third part of the study uses a case study method with a small number of residents from BSWH to examine the life histories of these women. The methods and findings for each part of the study will be presented in three independent sections.

### **Quantitative Methods and Findings**

#### **Participants**

The sample included 48 women offenders who had served federal sentences at BSWH; 35 Aboriginal women and 13 non-Aboriginal women.

#### **Measures/Material**

Data for the study were collected through CSC's automated national database, the Offender Management System (OMS). OMS stores information used to manage offenders from the beginning until the end of their sentence (Grant, Kunic, MacPherson, McKeown, & Hanson, 2003; Kunic & Varis, 2009). Examples of data captured in OMS include offence histories, profile information of the offenders' risk and needs, demographic information and data on returns to custody on a revocation. The study examined the profile information of women who have attended and are still attending BSWH.

#### **Procedure/Analytic Approach**

Data analysis, including a profile analysis, of the descriptive profile variables of the women who have attended/are attending BSWH was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistical tests in SPSS, a statistical analysis software package. Demographic, sentence and risk-related information, as well as involvement with Elders, Pathway units and programming both

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<sup>2</sup> Article 2.5 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement for ethical conduct for research involving humans states that program evaluation studies do not require a research ethics board review (CIHR, NSERC, and SSHRC, 2010). Thus, a letter to receive exemption from the ethics review process for the study was submitted to the University of Saskatchewan's Behavioural Research Ethics Board. Although this study did not undergo ethical review, there were still several precautions taken to ensure that the study was conducted in an ethical and respectful manner. These considerations are discussed in relation to the methods employed in each component of this study.

before and while at BSWH were examined. Finally, conditional release and revocation of this release were examined up until November 30, 2014. Note that we did not report on results with cells under five offenders in order to maintain offenders' confidentiality.

## **Results**

In total, 48 women have been incarcerated at BSWH. Of these women, 73% ( $n = 35$ ) were of Aboriginal ancestry and 27% ( $n = 13$ ) were not of Aboriginal ancestry. The majority of women of Aboriginal ancestry reported being of First Nations descent (75%). Most of the women were single (see Table 1). Overall, the Aboriginal women tended to be younger than the non-Aboriginal women (30 years vs. 34 years) at the time of admission to federal custody.

Compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts, Aboriginal women were more likely to be convicted of a violent offence, but this did not appear to have an impact on sentence length for the women; both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women were likely to have sentence lengths of four years or longer. Although the majority of women were rated as having high motivation to participate in their correctional plans, most were rated as high or moderate static and dynamic risk (need) and moderate reintegration potential at intake in a CSC institution. The vast majority of women had high or moderate needs in five of seven domains (i.e., personal and emotional orientation, substance abuse, associates and social interaction, marital/family, and employment). Compared to non-Aboriginal women offenders, the Aboriginal women were more likely to have high or moderate dynamic risk in the employment and substance abuse domains.

Table 1

*Profile of Women Offenders Incarcerated at Buffalo Sage Wellness House (BSWH)*

	Aboriginal Women ( <i>n</i> = 35)	Non-Aboriginal Women ( <i>n</i> = 13)
	% ( <i>n</i> )	% ( <i>n</i> )
Marital status		
Married or common-law	37 (13)	31 (4)
Single	63 (22)	69 (9)
Offence type		
Violent	69 (24)	38 (5)
Non-violent	31 (11)	62 (8)
Sentence length		
Less than 4 years	49 (17)	46 (6)
4 years or more (including indeterminate sentences)	51 (18)	54 (7)
Static risk <sup>a</sup>		
High/moderate	80 (27)	50(6)
Low	18 (6)	50 (6)
Dynamic risk <sup>a</sup>		
High	58 (19)	42 (5)
Low/moderate	42 (14)	58 (7)
Reintegration potential <sup>a</sup>		
High	15 (5)	33 (4)
Low/moderate	85 (28)	67 (8)
Motivation <sup>a</sup>		
High	64 (21)	75 (9)
Low/moderate	36 (12)	25 (3)
High or Moderate dynamic(criminogenic) need at intake at CSC		
Employment	58 (19)	†
Marital/family	55 (18)	58 (7)
Associates	64 (21)	50 (6)
Substance abuse	82 (27)	58 (7)
Community functioning	18 (6)	†
Personal and emotional	79 (26)	75 (9)

Note. <sup>a</sup>*n* = 3; † Information suppressed due to small cell sizes and to ensure anonymity.



Rates of involvement with Elders, Pathway units<sup>3</sup> and programming both before and while at BSWH were examined. Aboriginal women were more likely to have participated in multiple Elder reviews and to have lived on a Pathways unit prior to their stay at BSWH (63% vs. 23). Although amount of time between admission and first Elder review or first placement on a Pathways unit did differ by Aboriginal ancestry, most of the women had an Elder Review within nine months of admission to CSC and placement on a Pathways unit took generally took less than six months.

Most of the women transferred to BSWH just after a year of being admitted. Notably, on average, Aboriginal women were admitted almost two-years earlier into their sentence than non-Aboriginal women to BSWH. Once at BSWH, most women stayed at least 7 months before release. While at BSWH, the majority of women had at least one Elder review (61%) but less than one-third of women participated in programming<sup>4</sup>.

Finally, the rates of conditional release granted by the Parole Board of Canada and the rates of revocation after release were examined. The majority of women had been released from BSWH (83%). Of those who were released, most were released on day parole<sup>5</sup> (see Table 2). Overall, 25% of women released from Buffalo Sage had their release revoked; 31% of the Aboriginal women and none of the non-Aboriginal women. Only one conditional release was revoked due to the commission of a new offence.

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<sup>3</sup> A Pathways unit is a living environment that addresses the cultural and spiritual needs of Aboriginal offenders (Amellal, 2012). Created in 2000, they were introduced into a number of CSC institutions in all CSC regions. A Pathways unit is a special healing environment within an institution that offers solutions to alleviate certain social problems by allowing offenders to reconnect with Aboriginal culture and philosophy.

<sup>4</sup> These programs are Spirit of a Warrior and Relationships. Both of these programs are provided to BSWH residents by the Elder.

<sup>5</sup> Day parole release allows offenders to participate in community-based activities; however, these offenders must return nightly to an institution or halfway house (PBC, 2010). Statutory release occurs after an offender has served two-thirds of his/her sentence.

Table 2

*Frequency of Offender Release Type and Revocation Rates*

	Aboriginal Women ( <i>n</i> = 30)	Non-Aboriginal Women ( <i>n</i> = 10)
	% ( <i>n</i> )	% ( <i>n</i> )
Release Type		
Day Parole	53 (16)	60 (6)
Statutory Release	47 (14)	40 (4)
Revocation of Conditional Release	25 (10)	0 (0)

**Qualitative Methods and Findings****Participants**

The interviews with offenders included nine women who had served federal sentences at BSWH or were currently residing there. The interviews with staff were conducted with seven current employees from BSWH.

**Measures/Material**

One-on-one interviews were conducted with selected staff and residents at BSWH. Interview guides for both offenders and staff at BSWH were created to address the specific research questions (Appendix A).

**Procedure and Ethical Considerations**

The process review was conducted in a manner that was both ethical and respectful of culture. A traditional pipe ceremony and feast was organized to commence the data collection. The pipe ceremony is used to open negotiations between people as a way for truthful and respectful talk to take place (Asikinack, 2006). In this context, it was a way to create a trusting and respectful relationship between the researchers and the staff and residents at BSWH.

Prior to the interviews, offenders and BSWH staff received a consent form describing the purpose of the interview, their rights as participants, and the contact information for the researchers. This information was summarized verbally for the offenders before they reviewed the document on their own. Participants were made aware that they did not have to answer any question that they did not want to, could stop the interview at any time, and could withdraw from the study without any type of penalty. If participants chose to remain anonymous, their data were assigned a number and they were given a pseudonym in the report. All data were stored

separately from the signed consent form.

NCSA was consulted and identified potential individuals (i.e., BSWH staff and offenders) to interview. If an individual consented to participate, the researcher proceeded to interview the person by using the appropriate interview guide (Appendix A). All interviews were conducted by one of the authors in a quiet and private space within the facility. With permission, notes were taken during the interviews that were as close to verbatim as possible.

### **Data Analysis**

The interview data were reviewed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method used for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns/themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) describe that thematic analysis allows researchers to organize and describe the data in rich detail. Thematic analysis can result in the reporting of the experiences, meanings, and the reality of the participants; therefore, both reflecting reality and unraveling the surface of reality through an understanding of the meanings and experiences for the participants. Thematic analysis involves a constant moving back and forth between the entire data set, the coded extracts of data that are being analyzed, and the analysis of the data that is being produced where writing is an integral part of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the current study, the interview notes were examined and extracts were coded for similar content. The themes were then developed and organized to describe the similar patterns that emerged from the interview notes.

### **Findings**

The results presented in this section reflect the themes that emerged from the seven BSWH staff and nine offender interviews. The results are presented in five sections. The first section provides demographic information for the residents and staff, while the remaining four sections correspond to the questions guiding the study: the Buffalo Sage Model, processes at BSWH, BSWH's relationship with CSC, and advice and opinions related to the management and treatment of lower risk women offenders. The results are presented separately for offenders and BSWH staff.

#### **BSWH Staff**

The sample interviewed included seven employees from BSWH. Six of the employees were female and one was male. Their job titles and duties were collected at the beginning of the interview by asking the staff to describe their position and responsibilities at BSWH. The staff

members included the Executive Director, the Elder/Program Facilitator, Coordinator of Residential Services/Living Unit Supervisor, Parole Officer, OMS Clerk/Administrative Assistant, Associate Director, and a Living Unit Officer. There is only one of each of these positions at BSWH, with the exception of the Living Unit Officers. BSWH employs 11 Living Unit Officers.

The Executive Director is responsible for the facility, reporting directly to the CEO of NCSA. The role of the Executive Director is to ensure that the facility operates within the philosophy, vision, and values that NCSA follows and within the contract they have with CSC. He participates in all decision-making processes and signs off on all of the decisions at BSWH. The Associate Director also has a host of administrative duties that include: supervising the Parole Officer, OMS Clerk/Administrative Assistant, and the Elder; collaborating with the Coordinator of Residential Services/Living Unit Supervisor to ensure the operations at BSWH are flowing smoothly; case management with all of the residents; and approving all release planning applications.

The onsite Elder has a multitude of duties, such as conducting all traditional ceremonies (e.g., pipe ceremony, smudging, sweats, sharing circles, etc.), engaging in one-on-one counselling with the residents, assisting residents in their PBC hearings, writing the Elders Review and Assessment reports, doing the healing plans with the residents, submitting order requests for supplies, attending training (i.e., at NCSA's head office, in Halifax, with CSC) and meetings (i.e., staff meetings, offender management meetings, case management meetings, meetings which occur when there are problems with the residents, NCSA head office meetings, and spiritual meetings with all the NCSA Elders), and preparing and delivering presentations for NCSA. She is a member of the National Elders Working Group with CSC's National Headquarters Aboriginal Initiatives Division where they meet approximately 3 to 4 times per year for about a week in different areas of the country. The Elder also functions as the Program Facilitator. As a Program Facilitator, she teaches the programs that are offered at BSWH including Spirit of a Warrior, a relationship program, and a loss and recovery program. She is also the most senior NCSA Spirit of a Warrior trainer; as such, she has trained NCSA and CSC employees, as well as hundreds of Aboriginal community members to facilitate the NCSA warrior programs.

BSWH's Parole Officer is also onsite and is responsible for case planning, providing

support, case preparation, release planning, and meeting with all of the women who reside at BSWH. In addition, she meets and provides support to the women on day parole and statutory release who provide her with updates on their lives, such as the meetings they are attending, how their employment is going, and stressors encountered in the community. Her duties consist of writing all of the reports for the facility (e.g., those related to ETAs, UTAs, day parole, full parole, statutory release, work release), connecting with collaterals (e.g., psychologists, counsellors, community members), referring residents to psychology, and having meetings with all of the residents, including those on conditional release in the community.

The Coordinator of Residential Services also functions as the Living Unit Supervisor. Her duties consist of supervising the Living Unit Officers, arranging escorts, escorting the residents in the community, and ensuring all operations are running smoothly. Of the 11 Living Unit Officers at BSWH, four are full-time and seven part-time employees. The Living Unit Officers are responsible for the general security of BSWH and ensuring that everyone is accounted for, wherever they are, at all times. Their duties include: admitting residents and visitors in and out of BSWH; signing, documenting, and filing paperwork regarding the residents' comings and goings or any incidents that occur; ensuring residents are home by curfew; monitoring residents' behaviours; and conducting room searches, pat downs, bag searches, and urinalysis and breathalyzer tests.

Finally, the onsite OMS Clerk also functions as an Administrative Assistant. Her duties as an OMS Clerk include: inputting information, such as reports, into OMS, and making permits for temporary absences. As an Administrative Assistant, she monitors and purchases supplies (e.g., food, cleaning supplies) that are needed, deals with accounts payable, and sends invoices (e.g., for maintenance and supplies) to NCSA's head office for payment. She also is in charge of the residents' bank accounts and financial transactions (e.g., doing their cash requests, keeping records of all their spending and transactions), answering phones, and filing.

## **Offenders**

Six of the offenders self-identified as Aboriginal and three self-identified as Caucasian. Specifically, the six Aboriginal offenders identified as First Nations, Sioux, Ojibway/Cree, Aboriginal, and Métis. The mean age of the sample was 36.7 years, ranging in age from 26 to 46. Five of the offenders self-reported that they were single, two were engaged, and one was divorced. One resident indicated that she was currently employed as a kitchen supervisor at a

catering kitchen, while also completing a business management program at a technical institute. Another resident indicated that she was employed in a position where she was doing outreach services for an organization that focuses on poverty and addiction. Five of the nine women disclosed that they are mothers. All had previously lived in one of the Prairie Provinces prior to their current sentence.

Three of the residents were newly admitted to BSWH in June, July, and August, 2014. Three women had arrived in the previous year and two had been at BSWH for approximately two years (since 2012). Four of the women were voluntary transfers from OOHL, two came from EIFW, and one indicated that she was transferred from Saskatchewan.

The women interviewed were incarcerated on long sentences. One woman stated that her sentence length was seven and a half years. Another disclosed that she has completed five and a half years and had six more years to go. A third resident admitted that she has been in the correctional system for over half of her life; she was serving a life sentence for second degree murder. When she received day parole, she had already served 16 years. As well, one woman indicated that she was incarcerated for a violent offence, the manslaughter of her spouse, and was a long term offender. She has been in the system for 13 years and picked up six more years since the original sentence and currently has four years left. In addition, a past resident received 20 years on her conviction and another stated that she has already served more than 20 years. One resident did not state her current sentence length but rather that she has been involved in the correctional system since 1988, and another woman indicated that she has been in and out of the system since 2003.

### **Buffalo Sage Model**

Both BSWH staff and offenders were asked to discuss the model employed by Buffalo Sage, including the overall philosophy that guides BSWH and the strengths and weaknesses of the model. Staff and offenders also were asked to describe the admissions process, programming and training, healing plans, and access to resources. In addition, employees were asked to comment on BSWH's views on community reintegration, while offenders were asked to comment on their general likes and dislikes about BSWH. The themes that emerged in relation to each of these topics are presented below, with the responses provided by staff and offenders being presented separately to ensure that both perspectives are fully represented.

#### **BSWH Staff.**

One theme that emerged in the description of Buffalo Sage was that it uses a cultural model to help the women understand and heal themselves, reconcile relationships, reclaim an interconnected worldview, and deal with historical and past trauma. Another theme that emerged is that the model is to empower the women and build up their self-esteem and self-worth. The Parole Officer explained this model in detail:

It's a connection to relationships. The reconciliation of damaged relationships – that's all of our women...They're all survivors of their own experience. Just by acknowledging that, that's step 1. They've been through abuse, they're survivors. Not one of the women hasn't been abused. They've done that reconciliation by relearning about culture, themselves, and their inner child. They have spent their lives learning things like that it's bad to be Aboriginal, you're not supposed to talk or share feelings or cry. So it's about expressing self, and encouraging that. The [Aboriginal model of building resilience] is about reclaiming an interconnected worldview, they work on past traumas, through psychologists, ceremonies, working with the Elders, getting teachings, completing Spirit of the Warrior with the Elder and being able to acknowledge and talk about the abuse and trauma. Women have been learning that if they can work on themselves and stop the cycle of violence in themselves, they don't have to pass it on to the next person and their children. What happened to them was wrong, but they didn't have control over what happened, but now they're in control. It's part of self-determination. It's all about empowerment. Also with the interconnected worldview, they work on the self first; establish connections with family and the community. It involves getting a job, so they feel like they contribute in some way, volunteering and giving back to the community. They go to Sundances. They have community involvement and support from many angles, which helps support them back up from where they were. They learn about healthy relationships and healthy boundaries. They learn about the cycle of violence and themselves. Then they go on to recovery and the ability to self-determine and make those decisions themselves. They make meaningful choices for themselves, have the community engaged, become responsible, and have that encouragement in there.

The staff all believed that the model used at BSWH was effective. The Elder has been in corrections for many years and described her thoughts:

I always wanted a place like Buffalo Sage. Now it's real, it's happening. Basically, we treat people like people, we all make mistakes. We help them understand themselves; if you don't understand your history, there is confusion and anger, the inner child, carrying things over from childhood. The experiences of residential schools and the abuse; they learn to understand their parents which helps them understand themselves better and builds knowledge. We do a family tree and look at the abuse and drugs and alcohol, it provides a visual pattern of the intergenerational trauma, the historical trauma.

It is believed by staff that all aspects of the model are working well, especially the ceremonies and empowering the women. The Parole Officer noted, “we practice it [the model] everyday, a strength of our model at BSWH is really being able to do that”. Likewise, the

Executive Director reported that all aspects of the model were working well, “If you’re engaged, if you believe what we believe, that the Elders traditionally were the leaders, then there aren’t a lot of challenges”.

### **Offenders.**

The residents described the model at BSWH as compassionate, supportive, empowering, and valuing safety. It is a model of mutual respect and trust and provides balance in all aspects of life, with an understanding that everything is connected. They also thought that the model promoted healing. One resident commented that it is about “providing you with an opportunity to become a stronger and more confident woman, building you up for success”. Another resident explained, “It is healing, a grounding place that is safe and a solid foundation. They build you up for success like they make sure you are good, healthy, and happy”. Further, one resident described how the model is based upon realistic expectations, “You’re not punished here for making mistakes or having a bad day”.

There were two common themes that emerged regarding the aspects of the model that have helped the residents the most. One woman attributed some of the success of the facility to a program offered at BSWH: “Spirit of the Warrior program, definitely. I’m so sad that they’ve taken the program out of penitentiaries. That program changed my life”. The other was the reconnection to the Aboriginal culture, ceremonies, and values facilitated by BSWH that allowed residents to be proud of their Aboriginal heritage. A resident stated, “I am able to have dark hair again [she was previously ashamed to have dark hair and to be First Nations]...I can now pray and concentrate and have a connection with a higher power, I used to have to run out of sweats before”.

The women also explained that the support, non-judgemental attitudes, and compassion which characterize the BSWH model have helped them gain confidence and insight and to have realistic goals. One resident described that, by becoming a stronger and more confident woman, she is learning to understand herself better. Her crimes were against men and she now has gained insight into what and why it happened: “I want to make changes for the future so it doesn’t repeat itself....I used to be on anxiety and depression pills but the meds made me feel worse so I came off of them. I have a clear head now, I know what I am doing”. Another resident also discussed how being at BSWH has made a huge difference in her communication with family:



Something that's very amazing for me as a mother and grandmother, we're allowed to have electronics. I have a tablet and am able to Skype. Over the last 10 months when I'm not home, I can Skype with my children and grandchildren. It's made a big difference in communication. It's pretty amazing.

The aspects of the model that were least helpful as disclosed by two residents were a lack of communication among the facility's staff at BSWH and not having much to do when you first arrive.

### **Overall Philosophy of BSWH.**

#### ***BSWH Staff.***

The overwhelming majority of the staff indicated that the philosophy of BSWH is about the holistic wellness of the Aboriginal women, families, and communities. BSWH is operated by an Aboriginal organization and is guided by Aboriginal teachings, programming, spirituality, and cultural ceremonies that are used to break the cycle of incarceration and help heal the women.

The Parole Officer described:

It's [BSWH] based on traditional teachings, based on healing, based on the Elders and following the culture. The Aboriginal community is in charge of running BSWH. Instead of it being more of an institution, it's more of a healing environment. It's a supportive and rehabilitative environment for the ladies. The overall philosophy is not punitive. It's rehabilitative and about being out in the community, applying culture to one's healing journey, and encouraging that with the women.

Further, the Executive Director explained how operating a facility following an Aboriginal worldview changes the dynamics of the facility:

One of the basic differences here is that the women are empowered in the knowledge of what it is to be a traditional woman....Self-esteem comes with understanding who you are and how you came to be who you are. Dealing with historical trauma makes a big difference as well....It's about looking at how you got involved in the things that led you to jail, and how continuing that cycle is not going to do yourself any good. We hold them to a higher level of accountability. It may seem like you're a community here and you don't have that in CSC. The women here see the traditional way of doing business and how that holds them to a higher accountability....We make it as much of a community as we can. We use the grandfather teachings/seven teachings of the people and use them in our interpersonal skills. The way we conduct business with the staff and the women are pretty much the same. We don't stand on titles, because in the community you don't stand on titles. The title isn't the person; the person is what you have in here [points to chest], how you're prepared to share, and how you're prepared to help someone. When the work you do doesn't have that sense of community, when you have to put the mask back on when you go back to your cell/unit, because the environment doesn't support you

being able to do that work such as in a CSC penitentiary, it doesn't work as well. There [in CSC], the grandfather teachings don't reside where you live, but here they do.

The second major theme that emerged in the interviews related to the overall philosophy of BSWH was the facility's focus on healthy reintegration back into the community and supporting the women in their reintegration. For example, the Associate Director explained the philosophy as, "Basically, just to be here, walk hand-in-hand with the ladies with respect to building and helping them be successful in the community in reintegration, with connecting them to resources in the community being a guiding principle". Similarly, another staff member described how important it is to teach the women how to be successful in reintegrating into the community:

We are trying to reintegrate the girls to the community. Their next step is to live in the community. We get them out as much as we can on prosocial activities and community events to show them everything's positive and the realities of the community. They are excited to get out, but they need to know the things they have to look out for when they're in the community – rent, bills, family. We try to get that all in order before they are released to the community. And we're just here for them anytime they need to talk.

Another staff member stressed the important theme of reintegration while also focussing on keeping the community safe: "Also, in terms of keeping with the reintegration of the women and keeping the community safe at the same time, our primary goals are attending to offender's needs and keeping the community safe".

### ***Offenders.***

Three patterns emerged from the offender interviews with respect to their perceptions of the philosophy that guides BSWH. The most common description of BSWH's philosophy was the focus on successful reintegration by teaching residents how to ask for help and preparing them with healthy living skills for the outside world. One resident noted, "They [BSWH] fully support and empower women to become prosocial members of the community". Another common theme was using culture to heal and placing emphasis and value on the seven sacred teachings and traditional ceremonies. She further explained, "They [BSWH] work with women who are broken and are now on their healing journey". In addition, residents perceived that the philosophy at BSWH was to provide a supportive environment and have supportive staff, functioning like a community. One resident commented:

It's a small little community. They want us to be open with each other. They are very open to us, as much as they can be. I think the staff all they want to do is help us, they

want to see us succeed. Sometimes I need a little nudge, I get called in and I get called on my stuff. And that's something people never did to me, they never called me on it.

### **Admissions Process at BSWH.**

#### ***BSWH Staff.***

Initially, before a woman completes the admissions process at BSWH, she must apply for a transfer to a Section 81 and she must be interviewed and accepted by the facility. The Associate Director provided a detailed description of this process:

First, they [the women] submit a letter to me. And then I read it, and schedule an interview to meet with the person to see them one-on-one and see where they're at or I schedule interviews with their institution, come in and meet with the ladies interested and then they submit a letter. Essentially, the letter initiates my review. I do a thorough file review. I read files on OMS indicating what they're serving for, how they're doing, institutional charges, programs their completing, and whether they're working with Elders. Then I send a letter back indicating whether I think she's a good fit. The interviews are integral to the decision. They may be waiting for a long time for the transfer to occur. When I go on a monthly basis to OOHL and EIFW, they come and update me and I can often see a difference from my first to second time visiting them....Then, after the file review at EIFW or OOHL, the ladies have to put a transfer application in. This initiates the paperwork to be completed on their end. If the Warden approves it, it goes to the region for the RDC [Regional Deputy Commissioner] to approve it. This can be a couple weeks to as long as it takes. If the report is not done, the RDC can't render a decision without a report in the system. For Section 81 inmates, the eligibility criteria are that they have to be minimum security, low risk, and have low supervision. They have to be able to police themselves in communities. We want to see them on UTAs or work release without having staff around. We want them to be following the culture, working with the Elders, going to ceremonies, and have an Elder review on file. It would be perfect if they were in the Pathways unit to help the transition.

Further, the Executive Director stated that this beginning process usually:

Takes about 4 months, which is completely unnecessary....I understand why Section 81 has to be approved, but if you have the Executive Director of the site, and the Elder of the site, and the Warden agreeing to it, it seems to me the research would have been well documented as to why it's a good move. I understand why issues have occurred in the past, but I don't see why that can't be a quick review within a few days.

Once a transfer is arranged, when a resident first arrives at BSWH, she will go through a week of orientation. The Living Unit staff record all of her belongings and medications are kept with the Living Unit staff. She is provided with a tour and a resident handbook, shown her room, introduced informally to the other women and staff, and given a general overview how BSWH operates (e.g., meal times, general protocols, expectations, chores). She will meet with the Parole

Officer and the Associate Director, who explains how things work, the responsibilities of employees, and who to talk to for different matters. She will also meet with the OMS Clerk/Administrative Assistant who will explain how the finances work. She will go through and sign contracts regarding the mission statement of BSWH, randomized urinalysis tests, and the expectations while at BSWH. They must complete their healing plan and hand this in to their case management team.

During the first week, residents are allowed to eat at Cunningham Place which is a youth transitional centre attached to BSWH where meals are prepared for inmates. However, they are not allowed to leave on any ETAs. After this period, they are reviewed for and, if successful, receive ETAs for spiritual/cultural activities and to obtain basic necessities (e.g., hygiene products), as there is no canteen at BSWH. After the first 30 days, they receive the rest of their ETAs for numerous reasons such as narcotic and alcohol abstinence and reintegration meetings, community activities (e.g., walks, movies, library), administrative reasons (e.g., to get their identification cards, birth certificate, Social Insurance Number card, and driver's licence), community service (e.g., volunteer work to give back to the community), and family contacts.

### ***Offenders.***

From the interviews with the offenders, the most common themes in the description of the admissions process at BSWH included a tour upon arrival. Several remarked that the intake process was a slow process. One resident noted, "when you get here everything halts for a while, but in that process you get to better understand the staff. I came at a bad time and we just got our ETAs back". The women seemed very positive about the simplicity of the admissions process, describing it as "Just basic like pee in a cup" and "There were no strip searches. It's nice and friendly". Another resident indicated that the women are welcomed when they arrive, spend time going over some paperwork, answer some questions, and sign a contract about the rules and regulations for the house. However, one resident described that the admissions process: "wasn't good enough".

### **Programming at BSWH.**

#### ***BSWH Staff and Offenders.***

The staff and offenders presented similar information with respect to programming at BSWH; thus, the results from both are presented together. The Elder serves as the Program Facilitator on site at BSWH and the residents also do programming in the community. The

Program Facilitator offers the following programs at BSWH: Spirit of the Warrior, grief and loss, healthy relationships, life skills, a maintenance program for Spirit of a Warrior, and one-on-one counselling. She also offers cultural ceremonies (e.g., pipe ceremony, smudging, sweats, sharing circles) to the women. One resident explained the impact that these programs have had on her life:

I did the relationship program and Spirit of a Warrior. It was my second time taking Spirit of a Warrior. It was hard. Both times I took it, it was hard. I'm in the mother-child program. It's one of the best things they have to offer. The mother-child program helped me build a better a relationship with my son.

Some of the community partners come into BSWH to deliver programs; other programs are offered only in the community. A teacher was coming into BSWH to help the women obtain their GEDs. If the women are interested in post-secondary education, staff will help them schedule appointments with academic counsellors and apply to programs. CSC psychologists also do one-on-one counselling with some of the women.

Some women access Armour for Every Day Anxiety which is a program offered by Edmonton Area Parole where a psychologist teaches the women how to cope with anxiety and stressors. The Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women delivers a financial literacy program that teaches the women how to budget and save money. Cunningham Place offers a family life improvement program. The women can also attend a reintegration program and there is a self-management program for those who are released on day parole which helps with reintegration and everyday living. In addition, the women can attend AA and NA meetings in the community. There is also Quest for Success, which, at one point, had an employment coordinator who functioned as a job retention worker and would help the women find employment in their fields. Additionally, the Elizabeth Fry Society offers a traditional parenting class in the community. Finally, the women can attend cultural ceremonies, such as powwows, drumming, and singing. One resident described:

I Sundanced this year and two years ago as well. I received the eagle whistle, a high honour at the ceremony. I do lots of arts and crafts like moccasins, mitts, star blankets, and would like to have a home-based business in the future.

### **Training at BSWH.**

#### ***BSWH Staff and Offenders.***

The staff and offenders presented similar information with respect to training at BSWH;

thus, the results from both are presented together. The educational and employment training that the women receive is completed at BSWH and in the community. For educational training, the women had access to a teacher that came to BSWH to help the women obtain their GEDs; however, this opportunity is no longer available. The Elizabeth Fry Society comes to BSWH and assists the women in writing resumes and cover letters. For employment training, when the women are on work releases, their employer provides the necessary training. The Associate Director indicated, “For getting their tickets, etc., they could go through Aboriginal Resources or Alberta Labour Market to get their ticket”. The Elizabeth Fry Society has employment coordinators that help residents find work release that suits them. Also, the Associate Director explained that many of the women at BSWH have previously received some training in CSC institutions: “In institutions, when they get to, most have their first aid, H2S, food safety, so they already have those tickets in place”. This training, as well as Alberta Job Corps, is also available for the residents to complete in the community. One resident explained how training obtained through work releases was beneficial:

A lot of the time, if you’re on inmate status, you can go on work release. For me it was really helpful, because I was working as a food services coordinator at a non-profit organization. If you want to get out there and do stuff, there’s opportunities. It really helped me with my resume when I wanted to find a new job and move on....One of the girls is in Job Corps and they get construction, carpentry. Once you finish that program, they help you apply it while you’re in it, and then you can put it on the resume. One of the other girls did that and she also found a job as a supervisor at a place that builds hot tubs. Another girl is on work release and counts her hours working under a red seal chef. She is counting the hours that she needs to get into NAIT [Northern Alberta Institute of Technology] to take the culinary arts program.

### **Healing Plans.**

#### ***BSWH Staff.***

Healing plans are completed within 30 days of transferring to BSWH. They are developed mutually with the Elder through one-on-one counselling. According to the Parole Officer, the healing plans address the mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional dimensions of the resident’s lives:

The healing plans address the medicine wheel, the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical. They will state what you are working on to address that part of the medicine wheel. If it’s mental, it might state working on past trauma, maybe sexual abuse. We help the women strive to work towards those goals, and they work with the Elder in developing it themselves. One thing might be going to AA every week.

The healing plans are shared with the Parole Officer as well as the women's case management team. The Living Unit Officer described: "Every 45 days there's a review and it's submitted. It's basically an update to the last 45 days. It tries to entail things like changes in life, any new job, being denied parole and how it's affected them". Further, the Parole Officer described how she uses the healing plans: "I use the healing plan in all reports and apply it when we need to make decisions. We need to consider Aboriginal social history and the Gladue principles [Aboriginal social history]. Lots of the healing plan is based on that".

The employees were in agreement that the healing plans were effective in helping the women set goals and plan for their futures. For example, the Associate Director expressed:

Our healing plans have been effective; we have an idea of where they're going to be and where they're at. And they can be updated. If someone has finished recommendations or goals set out, they can update that for the most part. They usually follow through because if someone needs more one-on-ones and ceremonies, we'll help them get that. So they're effective and helping to manage their risk in community, too, because healing plans are a big factor in making sure the Gladue principles [Aboriginal social history] are being considered in a lot of the decisions made. The healing plan is integrating that part.

### *Offenders.*

The offenders indicated that correctional plans (also referred to as healing plans) are developed before they get to BSWH. One resident explained, "As soon as you get sentenced you have to do a healing plan and that works for any institution. You have to keep on updating it, especially if you're a long-termer". The mandatory items on the healing plan need to be completed before a resident is able to transfer to BSWH:

You develop a healing plan at the beginning of the sentence. If you have things to add to it, we do one-on-ones with the Elder....We're always working on a healing plan, but it's more in a verbal or action way here....This is a place where, when you get a sentence, you have a correctional plan. It has all the mandatory stuff and you have to be well good and done with that by the time you come here. This goes above and beyond what we have done before to continue growing and healing. It's a way to continue. I knew I wanted to take Spirit of the Warrior; I wanted to continue getting strong. My correctional plan had been completed well before that.

Many of the women indicated that reintegrating with their families and community achieved through access to children and family, UTAs, ETAs, and work release, is a large part of their healing plan. One resident described, "My healing plan is building back my credibility by attending ETAs and developing UTAs and work release. My ten month old daughter comes three times a week, two days for eight hours and Fridays she spends the night". Additionally, cultural

ceremonies and programming both have an important role in their healing plans. Another resident indicated that psychological risk assessments play a role in her healing plan.

In addition to their healing plans, some of the residents attend the truth and reconciliation conference. One resident explained how attending this conference has taught her about herself and helped her on her healing journey:

I went to a truth and reconciliation conference. I feared my family, and all my violent offences were committed when I was drinking alcohol. My grandma went to a residential school, all my offences were related to men, the sexual abuse and then as my victims. When I was becoming a grandma I needed to change, had to accept what happened so I cut off ties with certain family members. People come into our life for a season, a reason, or a life time. I had to do that, cut off ties with certain family members, for a while to heal on my journey....I wrote my life story down and shared/read my story at the University of Alberta and MacEwan University. I connected with one of the girls in the crowd; it was “powerful” to give back to my spouse’s family and my family.

All of the women agreed that their healing plan has been helpful. For example, one resident described how her healing plan has empowered her, “It has been very helpful by empowering me...They are like let’s come up with what you need, they recognize that I know what I need...My voice was heard”. Similarly, another resident described how comforting her healing plan has been for her:

It’s very helpful, when you are going through something, say emotional or when I need advice or guidance, even if I just need a hug or reassurance, I’ll just go in and talk with her [the Elder]. She’ll give you some advice and ways to deal with what you’re going through. And because it is an Elder, it’s a little bit different than going to a staff or a psychologist. It’s more, you’re not under a microscope; you can just be real.

All of the women described various ways in which BSWH has had a positive impact on their lives. The majority of the women stated that having access to community and family support has had the greatest impact on their lives while at BSWH. One resident explained how access to community supports has made an impact on her life:

It has given me the opportunity to plant roots in the community. It has provided me with a solid foundation, with my needs being met and being able to assertively communicate when they are not being met. It has helped me by being able to build a support network.

The women also indicated that staying at BSWH has allowed them to learn how to be in balance with themselves, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. For example, one resident stated, “I am learning how to be in balance without feeling the need to reach out and grab a



crutch, I don't like that feeling". Another resident described how staying at BSWH has made her more confident and motivated:

Buffalo Sage has had a huge impact on my life. I was already content with myself when I first got here, but it just made me have a better feel of being out there, being faced with my triggers. It made me feel more at peace with myself knowing what I want, and makes me strive for what I want in my future. BSWH gave me lots more opportunities to test myself.

Similarly, one resident reported that her confidence and communication skills have improved as a result of her stay at BSWH: "My self-confidence has gone way up. Through Spirit of a Warrior, I learned how to trust people again, be vulnerable in front of people, communicate better, and how to ask for help". Finally, one resident commented that BSWH helped her develop more self-awareness and independence: "I got to know my strengths and weaknesses and learn how to do things on my own".

#### **Access to Resources.**

##### ***BSWH Staff.***

All of the staff believed that the women have all the access to the resources they require or could benefit from. The Living Unit Officer described her thoughts regarding the women's access to resources:

If they're determined to access them, we'll do everything to link them up and find them a contact. We're always available to look up different things and different requirements. Because of different links through NCSA or different institutions in Edmonton, there's a general knowledge of groups to contact or we'll be forwarded on to. If it suits women's goals and plans, we try every route.

Further, the Executive Director described the access that BSWH has to numerous resources:

NCSA is larger than Buffalo Sage and Stan Daniels and we have all kinds of expertise in this building. We have expertise in terms of court workers, family workers, and we work very closely with all of those. We're not afraid to ask other agencies who specialize in other things that we lack expertise. Elizabeth Fry is a good partner. We put it out there to the women as to what they would like to do. There is a signup sheet for one of the guys with NCSA who wants to do a class on how to manage stress and anxiety, so we're open to it. We get the request and see if the women are interested. We have the person come in and give a description, and, if interested, we're in.

##### ***Offenders.***

All of the women stated that they had access to all of the resources that they needed and some mentioned that they received access to more than what was suggested to them. When

respondents were asked whether they have access to all of the resources they required, one responded: “Yes and then more. There are so many but you can’t do everything”. Another explained that she received all of the resources she wanted:

I wanted to get my IDs. I started working with the teacher for upgrading, I got work releases, I got UTAs. I got to do Spirit of a Warrior, I got to have my son, and my case team fully supports me for day parole.

A third resident described how accessing resources is helping her with her future reintegration into the community:

In CSC, their work releases are only, they have a few community contacts they do releases with and you’re only allowed to work there. At EIFW, you can only work at waste management or doc works. At Buffalo Sage, you can work anywhere as long as it doesn’t put you at high risk or breach conditions. That’s super awesome. I’m getting so strong and prepared for what I’m going to do in my future after my release.

### **Community Reintegration.**

#### ***BSWH Staff.***

Building on the theme of community reintegration, all of the staff members were supportive of community reintegration and, through their respective roles, provided support to the women in their reintegration back into society to allow for an easier transition once released. As the Living Unit Officer described:

We try and make it an easier transition. We want the women to feel comfortable and safe in the community. As they start going out independently, we can see how they grow as a person and they gain that confidence back. We really try and make it accessible. Once they are eligible for passes, we try to support them the best we can.

Further, the Parole Officer explained that reintegration is a process and needs to be adjusted for each individual:

We work on their release plans. We figure out their risk factors and need areas, and put it together and work as a team....There is no set equation that will ensure someone’s successful release. The women have extremely different needs. Something different is going to work for different people in different ways....The thing we believe in here is to model what it would be like to live in the community. All of the women that have jobs out in the community every day, they do budgeting for saving money, they have skills that they need out in the community that they may not learn in the institution, such as how to take a day off work. We encourage them to save 30% of their pay check...Once they get comfortable having a job, building employer relations, getting references, developing job skills, we see their identity starting to form and a sense of belonging and being connected to a larger community. Being connected and supported prevents people from falling back to their old ways.

Thus, community reintegration is about planning ahead and preparing, supporting, and individualizing each woman's release. This is done through building supports in the community, building up the woman's confidence and sense of belonging, helping them find employment and housing before they are released, and teaching them financial skills.

### **Likes/Dislikes of BSWH.**

#### ***Offenders.***

All of the women were enthusiastic about residing at BSWH. One woman stated, "I like it here. It's one of the best places I've been since I've been incarcerated. There are lots of opportunities". The most common reason for liking BSWH is the support system that it allows the residents to build in the community through ETAs and UTAs and their ability to have easier access to family supports. For example, one resident explained, "They point you in the right direction to community supports. They help you to make changes and to become prosocial...So many doors are closed in your face when accessing support in the community on your own". Similarly, another resident commented:

Reintegration is amazing, I have ETAs. They take us out into the community all of the time. Myself, I have a UTA, work release, and I'm going up for parole in February. In order to get that, I had to go on a lot of ETAs which Buffalo Sage provides, and they let us do normal things like take us swimming, shopping [to obtain basic necessities], and to movies.

In regards to the access of family support as a reason for liking BSWH, one resident stated:

My sister lives here in Edmonton too. Two of my sisters and their kids. For me, I think maybe being so close to my sister in a more open environment and having that chance to contribute to my family made the biggest impact. You could have given me every impact in the world, and I probably wouldn't have appreciated it as much if I didn't have that impact.

As well, having access to their children was important for the women. One resident commented: "My son is living here and gets to spend weekends with me, he gets to sleepover...I didn't get to see him for five years. Now I get to see him every day".

Further, most participants cited the support received from the staff as another reason for liking BSWH. One offender explained:

I would have to say one of the main reasons for liking BSWH first and foremost is that the staff treat us with such respect and kindness. There's no feeling here of hierarchy or they're better than us. There's just none of that here. We're just treated as we would be

treated in the real world as opposed to when we're in a CSC penitentiary.... Management here just supports you in any way that they can.

Another offender described why this support from BSWH staff is an essential component of reintegration:

Staff get to know you one-on-one, you actually have a chance to build a support network, and you have a relationship with the Parole Officer, and everyone else who lives and works here....If you have a relationship with staff that work here, you're more likely to not want to let them down. You're more likely to be more truthful and honest.

The other themes that emerged from the interviews on why the women liked BSWH were the cultural aspects that characterize the facility and the accountability for one's actions, where not all residents get punished for someone else's mistakes. One resident explained why the cultural aspect was so important to her:

We have sharing circles here. Smudge together. You can just be human with these people here. They cry with us, we cry with them. We eat together, laugh, joke around, talk about families, give each other hugs....There's not what we call, there's no con-con, no pen mentality around here. At all. It's a completely different world than being inside. It really is a healing house.

Another resident explained why the accountability at BSWH is preferred: "One thing I really like is that if one person screws up, they don't make everyone pay for it, which is usually the case in penitentiaries. They deal with things on a one-to-one basis, creating more trust". One interviewee also described how accountability decreases facility charges:

If you have an issue, if there's something, the staff will bring you in and speak with you about it, instead of at CSC, they'll just make an assumption, write a report and you're charged. It's basically like being back in society, how you get treated here.

The majority of the women who were interviewed indicated that there was nothing they disliked about BSWH. However, four offenders did indicate that there were aspects of BSWH that they disliked. One resident did not like the phone system, indicating that they needed to have longer hours on the weekends, and that there was no visiting and correspondence (V and C), which is offered by CSC. She stated:

How we have to visit with families, it gets really packed and they are not allowed in our suites. When our kids and families come, they have to stay in hotels which is very pricey. It is hard for out of town families, having no V and C.

The second resident stated that she does not like that she thinks that CSC is not aware of what goes on at BSWH. As well, she indicated that she does not like that staff sometimes coddle the

women by telling them what they should do and providing them with advice. She stated, “A lot of times they’ll give you advice but I’m not always looking for advice because I trust my own judgements. When that happens, I just sort of shut down a little bit”. Another dislike that she noted was that the cultural aspect is sometimes too much for her:

Are you supposed to go to cultural activities and ceremonies because that’s the idea that people have for natives? What if you are halfway and you go to church like me? Like, I grew up halfway in one world and halfway in the other. Some people just need it when they need it, they don’t need it every day. It is voluntary to participate in ceremony here, but it is very strongly encouraged. But if you have culture shoved down your throat, sometimes you don’t want to do it.

The third resident described a number of things that she did not like at BSWH including: the long wait time for work release (which only becomes available a year and a half before day parole), lack of escorts, location of BSWH, and having a male Executive Director. If an offender transfers to BSWH and still has a lot of time in her sentence before she is eligible for day parole, she is not able to secure work release outside of BSWH. This is problematic as she cannot save money if she is not employed, which she requires to buy her basic necessities. The lack of escorts was also problematic for her as she felt that it affected her education because she was unable to access a library for her studies. The fourth resident did not like that family members could be employees at BSWH, which she stated is a “conflict of interest.” As well, these latter two offenders both mentioned that they did not like how poor BSWH was. This resulted in residents having to buy their own personal items (e.g., laundry soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes) and having less staff to assist in escorting the residents on their ETAs.

### **Processes at BSWH**

In order to understand the processes employed at BSWH, the BSWH staff were asked to describe the use of OMS; the handling of internal security, ETAs, and UTAs; the processes employed to prepare and support the women who are eligible for different release types; and Buffalo Sage’s relationship with the PBC. In addition, staff were asked to describe any operational strengths or challenges encountered when the facility was first opened and that are currently being experienced at BSWH. The staff and offenders were also asked about the changes they would like to see at BSWH. The themes that emerged in relation to each of these topics are presented below.

#### **BSWH Staff.**

All full time staff and some Living Unit Officers have remote access to OMS. In fact, the site only has remote access to OMS which is achieved using a white usb stick. An employee has to request and be approved to have access to OMS and, just like in CSC, use of OMS is permitted on a need-to-know basis. OMS is used for varying tasks such as to review case files, access RADAR, approve reports, create and close passes (e.g., temporary absences), and submit various other types of paperwork. As well, 45 day case review reports are uploaded and submitted on OMS, as one employee explained:

The Living Unit officers do a structured 45 day case review on OMS. And they do case work records. That could be anything from so and so went to the doctor and felt sick, so and so was feeling sad today because her mom passed away, anything that happened in the community for the Parole Officer to know about. To have that on OMS, that's really important.

The internal security at BSWH is similar to security measures taken at other CSC minimum security institutions including having security cameras, counts, criminal record checks for visitors, residents and visitors sign in and out of the facility, visiting hours, bag checks, pat downs, urinalysis testing and breathalyzers. The Living Unit Officers conduct the internal security at BSWH. The Executive Director described that public safety is a top priority at BSWH:

We have alarms, cameras. Public safety is still priority number one. Just because you don't see us with handcuffs on our belts doesn't mean we're not monitoring the same we would any place else. Minimum security standards at this place are the same as anywhere else and, in some cases, better. Some minimum security places don't have cameras, we do. We have regular rounds, regular counts, processes developed for emergencies and crises, and contingency plans.

Escorted Temporary Absences (ETAs) are passes that offenders must apply for and be granted that allow them to be temporarily absent from the facility while under the supervision of an escort. The escorts are either volunteers from the community or employees from BSWH. Most ETAs (some are PBC authority) are granted by the Executive Director. All of the women receive ETAs while at BSWH. If there is an additional ETA that they would like, they must put in the request and the Parole Officer has 30 days to complete the report. ETAs can be used for personal development activities, parental responsibilities, family contacts, and compassionate or administrative reasons. The site has a van that is used for ETAs with the women. One of the employees described the process for an ETA:

We'll put up a sign up sheet and arrange for an Escorting Officer. The Escorting Officer will come in and get the permit. The Living Unit staff will have the permit ready; she will go around asking with a staff member who's going so she knows who's on the permit. They may or may not take a picture. The Living Unit officer will go over the permit with the Escorting Officer. They can't go anywhere else, they have to be back at this time, and explain special conditions and rules. There is no stopping anywhere. If any information is given to the Escorting Officer that may be vital, they pass it along to us. If they suspect anything, we tell them to let us know. We then sign the permits, and the girls sign out on a green card. The Escorting Officer makes sure she has everyone and they go off in the BSWH registered van. They are to bring them back at the designated time frame, and relay any concerns/feedback. If they are late, they must provide a good excuse at the time. If the Escorting Officer knows she will be late, she must phone in. A good excuse is weather related, not just because someone's taking too long to shop.

The employees were asked to describe the process of granting Unescorted Temporary Absences (UTAs) at BSWH. UTAs are basically a pass that offenders must apply for that allows them to be temporarily absent from the facility, unescorted. UTAs are a stepping stone in offender reintegration. Thus, while at BSWH, offenders are first released on ETAs and then UTAs. UTAs help the women secure conditional release, such as day and full parole, because the PBC can assess how successful an offender is while out in the community on her own. UTAs can be used for personal development activities, parental responsibilities, and compassionate or administrative reasons. The Executive Director explained that the UTA process at BSWH is the same at CSC:

The process in terms of case management and the approval of UTAs is exactly the same as any place else. We provide more opportunity but the process to determine whether it is risk manageable is the same used at any other minimum. Our Escorting Officers [staff on ETAs] are held to the same standards. We provide training for them. They get escort [staff] training, security awareness, and anatomy of a set-up.

It should be noted that within federal corrections, the granting authority for UTAs is different for women who are serving time for Schedule 1 versus Schedule 2 offences. Schedule 1 offenders must be granted UTAs from the Parole Board of Canada (PBC; although this is not applicable to all Schedule 1 offenders), while Schedule 2 offenders are typically approved by the BSWH Executive Director. The Parole Officer described the process that Schedule 1 offenders use for UTAs:

For Schedule 1 offences, the Parole Board makes the decision on UTAs. The process is the same for all corrections anywhere; they'll typically get in front of the Parole Board in 5 or 6 months. Then they will give a paper decision or they will panel them. For Schedule 1, it typically is a panel parole hearing.

Schedule 2 offenders apply for UTAs at BSWH and the Executive Director can grant UTAs for 60 days at a time, and they can be renewed until day parole. The typical process of using an UTA once it has been granted is described by one employee below:

It's the inmate's job to put in an UTA request for the date and time, the Parole Officer will approve it, the OMS Clerk will draft up the permit and special conditions and it's left downstairs with the Living Unit staff. When it's time to sign out, the Living Unit Officer will go over it. There's no stopping anywhere, not even taking the long way there, they have to take the shortest way there, and don't go anywhere else except what's listed, and follow the special conditions. It's signed and dated by the offender and staff. They take one, we take one. Sometimes we'll get a spot check done on them, just to see if they're going to the meeting. We'll see if the girl is actually there. All residents know that we do spot checks. Some are allowed to take their cell phones if approved by the Associate Director or the Parole Officer, but they have to return it upon getting back/checking in. They take it for safety concerns. They are to come back for the designated timeframe or earlier. And then they get searched. If it's a meeting, they'll have an attendance sheet, and they will get the meeting chair to sign the meeting sheet proving they were there.

The employees were asked to describe what processes and supports were in place for women who are eligible for day and full parole. To begin the process of applying for either day or full parole, the women must discuss this intention with the Parole Officer: "The Parole Officer's door is always open. She knows the process very well. She can speak to the women about it. Women that have day parole can seek advice as well". The Parole Officer described how the employees and the residents work together to begin the application for parole:

We usually work on release plans. We help prepare the women to write a strong application for parole. We fill in details about what they have been doing, and how they will be successful. I will tell some women to put it off for two months – you have to focus on this first. Their release plan is well thought out, researched, and spelled out in detail.

Once they have applied for parole, they will have a parole hearing with the PBC at BSWH. One of the Living Unit Officers described the process and supports of a typical parole hearing at BSWH:

At their hearings, they usually have the opportunity to have not only their case worker and staff members there, but they would personally be there. They can also invite supports like family, Elders, just to really show who's behind them and who's available to help them as they transition into that. During the days of the hearings, we keep the house quiet. No slamming doors, things like that. Many of the women will wait in anticipation during the deliberation to hear the outcome. The success of one person can lead to the success of the whole house. Usually during that week, not always, but it's often the case that the women will be anxious, not eating regularly, so our job is to keep an eye on them and be available to discuss things. If they have questions, we have the



paperwork and access to the internet to help provide answers if they have questions or doubts.

Once day parole has been granted, the Coordinator of Residential Services/Living Unit Supervisor helps them to get a health card and the women become responsible for their property (e.g., identification cards) and electronics. Offenders on day parole can also reside at BSWH but must abide by the house rules as one staff member explained: “If the women are on day parole, they can have their own place while they live here, as long as they spend a minimum of 6 hours per night here. They don’t often do that”. However, the curfew is 11 pm, and the same rules apply: “no drugs or alcohol, no overnight visitors; they know they can’t bring certain stuff into the house”.

The Executive Director explained that the preparation for release on full parole is a little more intensive, as these residents will no longer reside at BSWH:

For full parole, we try to get them out to work and save some money in their account for when they get out. If you’re going to live in the city, or if they have children or other family involved, we don’t want them in a rooming house that is a hole. Child Protective Services bringing children there is unlikely. They need to have a safe home and plan for that. We’re running a program with the Alberta Treasury Board (ATB) to help the women with saving money for when they get out. We also work with Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women. We try and get them everything that we can conceivably believe that they will need in place for the leave. If the time allows for that.

The employees were asked to describe the relationship between the PBC and BSWH and how well the two groups interacted. All of the employees stated that BSWH had a very positive relationship with the PBC. In fact, the Parole Officer indicated that the PBC visits BSWH for parole hearings:

We get along very well. We feel very respected by the Parole Board. They’re very understanding of what we do here. Their reports are always on time and written well. Women opt for Elder-assisted hearings here. Elder-assisted hearings take place in the ceremonial room. The Parole Board sits in the same circle, and the Parole Board Elder starts with a smudge and prayer to start the hearing. The circle is more holistic, and the women do much better. 99.9% of the ladies do Elder-Assisted; one lady is Filipino and chooses not to....We have almost a 100% success rate with the Parole Board. We’ve had only 2 denials.

The Executive Director noted that the founding Executive Director was previously on the Parole Board for years and thought that this facilitated the strong relationship between BSWH and the PBC. “The Parole Board loves coming here. They get it. Claire [founding Executive Director]

was a Board member before she came to be a Director here. They would not have been able to escape hearing about BSWH”.

Victim services also visits BSWH in regards to parole hearings and the Associate Director indicated that BSWH has a positive relationship with them as well:

Also, we have a relationship with the Victim Services of the Parole Board because they have somebody assigned. Sometimes it has its ups and downs because they have to work with the victims and we have to keep the offices separated. Now that we can separate the populations, ladies don't have to be confined to their rooms if victims are here. We have a separate area where they can wait for a hearing and when the hearing deliberates.

### **Operational Strengths and Challenges.**

#### ***BSWH Staff.***

There were only three staff members who could speak to the operational challenges that were encountered during BSWH's implementation. The other employees were not employed at BSWH when it first opened. When BSWH opened, one of the main challenges encountered was that the offenders were not being released from the CSC institution with all of their property.

The Associate Director explained:

Getting the ladies over here and not being released with all their property was a challenge. Property was taking forever to get here. The first five came with the clothes on their back and that was it. We had to go purchase personal hygiene items and clothes because none of that stuff was released with them, it came later. So, because it was brand new, there were a lot of challenges that were faced in regards to general operations just because it was so brand new.

The employees mentioned that the Executive Director at the time had to take the women to buy hygiene products and clothes and purchased them on her own credit card. They also received assistance through the Mustard Seed, a community organization where the women can acquire some of their basic necessities. This issue has since been resolved.

Another identified challenge that continues to exist today was finding and keeping staff members. According to one staff member, “In terms of staffing, they had a hard time finding staffing. A bunch quit when it first opened. They got other jobs or they didn't like the shift work. Mostly this was Living Unit Officers”. As well, they only had one office, so the Executive Director shared her office with the Parole Officer and other staff. Some individuals did not have an office which comprised their ability to complete their work; one employee explained: “I never had an office, which made it hard to do my work. I would have to go bum a computer

somewhere”. As well, the women who first arrived had no ETAs and permits needed to be done in order for them to eat next door. These have both been resolved. Lastly, gossip was identified as an early operational challenge but has since been resolved.

The factors that facilitated the implementation of the model included finding the right people for the positions. Creative solutions also helped to overcome issues such as the offenders not having ETAs and permits when they arrived. According to one staff member:

They got six girls, but there were no ETAs at all. They got around that by taking them for daily walks. They would go for 2 hour walks during the day only. Permits needed to be done in order for them to eat next door. This has changed because it’s now considered our property.

Although there were initial challenges in the implementation of BSWH, the Executive Director indicated that these were resolved along the way:

When we opened, meds, the fact that we don’t have the same resources as the service, hygiene products, all came up. There were lots of operational issues. A lot. Most of those are gone now. Now they have regular shopping trips [to obtain basic necessities] where we take them out. They go to the store to get what they need. There is no local canteen here. There were a lot of those things that had to be worked through the first 6 months.

One of the most commonly cited current operational challenges at BSWH included the budget and staff pay. A lack of funding was tied to not being able to offer staff competitive wages and placed BSWH in a position where there was high staff turnover, particularly among Living Unit Officers:

Being external to CSC, we’re a non-profit organization. Anyone working in corrections is making double what we make here. We do the exact same work, but CSC contracts out our services and, as a result, it’s a non-profit that is paying us. But we’re expected to do the exact same work. We had a great Living Unit officer, but if someone can pay her \$30,000 more, where is she going to go? Most would prefer to stay here, everyone likes working here, but when it comes down to survival, it has to come out at some point. People would benefit from better non-profit pay. They are still doing the same work in the institution.

Another challenge identified by the staff was the very slow process of getting women transferred to BSWH and keeping the beds at BSWH full. It was suggested that the transfer process may be delayed if the “institutions aren’t getting their transfer reports in, and it’s just sitting there waiting in limbo”. Another staff member attributed the delayed process to the fact that “they opened up a huge minimum at EIFW plus the slowness to get people approved to get here”. Therefore, many offenders may be requesting a transfer to the new minimum facility

rather than BSWH. One of the negative consequences of not being able to transfer women quickly into BSWH is that it can cause the residence to have vacant bed space which affects BSWH's budget. According to the Associate Director: "it's the responsibility of CSC in keeping those beds filled so we can keep this place running. If we can't keep at least half of the beds full, we'll be in the hole". Thus, BSWH's budget depends on having the beds full and, if they are not full, they could end up going in debt because they do not get paid for empty beds.

Another identified challenge was that CSC is not fully aware of what a Section 81 is which, in turn, has implications regarding which offenders are supported to transfer, as the Parole Officer explained:

CSC staff being unaware of Section 81 and 84 and that non-Aboriginal people can come here too is a challenge. Especially for Aboriginal offenders, if you're feeling disconnected from home and the community, that's just going to continue intergenerational effects. By coming here, they're in a supportive environment, and they need that cultural focus. It's holistic and healing and the cultural aspect just changes the atmosphere of this place a lot.

The Executive Director also noted how the lack of understanding of Section 81s in CSC is frustrating and believes that the women at BSWH are held to a higher level of accountability compared to other CSC minimum security institutions:

Another challenge is a general lack of understanding of what we do; people don't understand the concept of Section 81. It's not a hard thing to understand. It's the Minister agreeing with the Aboriginal community for Aboriginal people to deliver corrections. But CSC kind of thinks we're doing something ass-backwards, not as good, so different, it doesn't work, or we're way over the line. There is not an understanding that we're providing the same service, professional services, managing risk, in a way that is spiritually appropriate. They don't understand how culture and spirituality play into that. I would suggest that the women here and the men at Stan Daniels are held to a higher level of accountability than at a minimum anywhere else.

To address this, BSWH has made a video illustrating what BSWH does and the experiences of its residents.

The remote access to OMS was identified as a challenge due to the slowness of the computers. A final challenge that staff mentioned is that they were not always sent CSC emails regarding important information. The Associate Director described those issues:

OMS, with us just being external users, we have remote access. The log in process is longer and not as efficient and fast as if you were an internal user. Also, always not being included on a lot of information that's being relayed through CSC because they see us as an external user is a challenge. They see us like more of a halfway house rather than as a

facility. Section 81 is often coined together with CRFs [Community Residential Facilities].

Despite the several operational challenges mentioned, several strengths that facilitate the operations of BSWH were also identified. The current strengths regarding how BSWH operates included the use of staff meetings and dealing with incidents in a cultural manner and setting, as the Living Unit Officer described:

Sometimes people will butt heads, or little incidents of conflict will occur, but there are opportunities to discuss those at staff meetings. They don't always come up, but we're given the opportunity to do so. If there is an incident with one of the residents, the staff member/resident can suggest a circle and it's a way in a controlled environment to discuss and resolve issues instead of resorting to conflict, which was what may have been a 'go to' in a woman's past. It's about talking it out, solving things, and healing; not getting mad and leaving it like that.

Another strength noted at BSWH was that the facility does not have to follow CSC's Commissioner Directives, which allows the facility to be more flexible, focus more on reintegration, be more community minded, and foster a positive work environment. The Associate Director described these strengths:

We don't have to follow the CSC policy that governs CSC institutions. We're more flexible in that regard and more in tune with the client and having them included in their reintegration and their plans. And just having that sense of community and being a close knit unit, where everyone's getting involved, there's no lateral violence with staff, and it's more cohesive.

Lastly, an additional strength at BSWH included having a good relationship with CSC and the PBC. A good relationship with the PBC was deemed important, as the Parole Board will eventually be approving or rejecting the offenders' conditional release applications. The Associate Director explained:

There's lots of strengths to this place such as just having really good relationships with the Parole Board and CSC and them seeing how well we're doing, especially with the Parole Board. We have a 95-96% success-rate with the Board. The Board views behaviour at BSWH as a predictor of success, how offenders behave here, predicts how they will behave in the community, because they are one step in the community.

The majority of the staff said that there were no changes needed to the BSWH model as the model is running smoothly and successfully. However, the staff did identify staffing issues as a current challenge, as well as inadequate funding. Specifically, they would like to have a lower turnover rate among the Living Unit Officer staff and more money to pay staff competitively

(which would likely enhance the ability to retain staff). One staff member described:

One thing that I've seen since I've been here is a major turnover rate with staff. Mainly with the Living Unit staff. It's one of the things – most places, positions like that, have a huge overturn rate. I think mainly because a lot of times people in that position are students, in school, and they work here. I don't work in the field for the big bucks, because it doesn't have it. That's one of the reasons why there is a huge turnover rate. But all across the board, it is not that great. But Buffalo Sage's wages are lower because it is not recognized the way that it is. Therefore, they don't have the funding, and therefore the pay is not that high because of the budget. People often find jobs that pay more, so they don't end up staying. When students are done school, they find other jobs. It becomes a stepping stone.

In addition, it was also mentioned that the Living Unit staff are usually shorthanded due to the high turnover rate which makes it near impossible for employees to have time off. One employee explained:

I know working at the Living Unit office that somebody has to be here 24/7. So it's like people were having life issues and having to come to work. We don't have relief and we don't have all that stuff. It is very hard working as a Living Unit officer. If you have to ever call in sick, you are expected to never call in sick because there is nobody to cover you. Even in my position, there is no one to cover for me. There's the Stan Daniels staff but if I go away, a staff member in the same position at Stan Daniels has to cover for me or vice versa. If you leave, there's no one to cover for you.

It was also recognized that structural improvements could be made to the premises such as having bigger offices, as some offices are only made for two people, but are sometimes shared by four people, and having fewer stairs. In addition, one of the Living Unit Officers mentioned that having a gym facility would be helpful for the new residents:

I guess what we hear first is they're kind of bored. That's if they don't have any passes. By having chores, they have that one thing a day to accomplish. We don't want them to be too bored. The only change would be to have a gym facility. They do go over to Stan Daniels and use that facility. They do have a walking pass for Monday to Friday, it's for within 2 km, of course, escorted....So there are opportunities to get outside, but it might not be for everyone.

### ***Offenders.***

The women were asked to identify ways in which they thought BSWH could be enhanced. Four of the women provided recommendations about how BSWH could be improved. According to the residents, the most commonly cited areas of improvement needed at BSWH included a visiting space for the families and longer hours permitted on the phone system during the weekends. The women suggested that BSWH should have something similar to CSC, such as

a V and C area or Private Family Visiting (PFV) accommodations. One resident described why this would be helpful:

I don't have family that live in this area, but that was very well put out there. They told me that we wouldn't be able to have family contacts as much as you would at the lodge. No PFVs. I think there should more opportunities for girls that don't get to see their families as much as other people do. Their families may not be well off or they aren't able to see people here. There should be more opportunities for girls to travel to visit their family. PFV would be nice. This area [within the same building as BSWH], just opened up, there could be a PFV setting connected to Buffalo Sage. I think the family or bringing your family to be reconnecting with family more. That's maybe one of the down falls of BSWH.

One resident mentioned that BSWH needs to provide a handbook to women who are considering transferring to a Section 81. Another resident indicated that BSWH should hire employees that follow and participate in the Aboriginal culture.

### **BSWH's Relationship with CSC**

Both BSWH staff and offenders were asked to describe the relationship between BSWH and CSC from their vantage points and to discuss the channels of communication that exist between the two. In addition, the BSWH staff were asked to discuss the types of support that are required from CSC for BSWH to continue to successfully operate. Moreover, offenders were asked to comment on the differences between a CSC institution and BSWH based on their experiences. The themes that emerged in relation to each of these topics are presented below, with the responses provided by staff and offenders being presented separately to ensure that both perspectives are fully represented.

#### **BSWH Staff.**

Overall, most of the employees viewed CSC and BSWH's relationship as good and positive, as expressed by the Associate Director: "For the most part, CSC, especially with the women offender sector, we have a good relationship. They really include us in a lot of information and training". Furthermore, the Parole Officer described the positive relationship that exists between CSC and BSWH:

It's a positive relationship for the CSC staff who know about BSWH. But the relationship's just in its early stages. It's not as positive for those who don't know about Section 81, they're missing out from knowing about this opportunity.

In addition, the Executive Director explained that CSC and BSWH have different worldviews which complicate the relationship:

We try to be good partners. And we are good partners. But we come at things from a different point of view. I think getting them to understand and realize or at least see that we're not off the wall. We actually have, we may do business, what appears to be very differently, but the intention of our business is the same as their mission statement. We're both about returning people safely to the community. We look from a holistic standpoint. And not just the date that they're done with the law, but about being a good responsible role model when they get there. And we go a lot deeper in terms of what we're prepared to do to help them out. We understand the historical trauma and we deal with it. And the service doesn't. They think they might, but they don't.

In addition, some of the staff at BSWH are former CSC employees and others still work for CSC. These individuals reported that they are part of both worlds and have learned a lot from both. Also, with respect to CSC and BSWH's relationship, much of the paperwork at BSWH is received from CSC. As well, BSWH utilizes psychologists from CSC, regularly works with the women offender sector in CSC, and participates in training sessions offered by CSC.

The BSWH staff were also asked to discuss the channels of communication that exist with CSC. The staff indicated that the channels of communication that exist between CSC and BSWH include phone calls and emails. Some training is also done together. Overall, BSWH staff perceived that the two organizations communicate with each other well. Not all staff have as much contact with CSC; it is primarily the Executive Director, Associate Director, Coordinator of Residential Services/Living Unit Supervisor (for healthcare needs), and the Parole Officer who are in regular contact with CSC.

The challenges that were identified with respect to communication between BSWH and CSC included having differing opinions regarding certain matters and the staff turnover rates at CSC. When asked about the challenges encountered when communicating with CSC, the Associate Director commented: "Staff turnover rates – having someone new in the position each time and having to rebuild the relationship each time".

BSWH staff were asked about the types of support they would like to see from CSC to continue to successfully operate. Their responses included the Section 81 contract that has to be signed and renewed, the funding and budget that is provided by CSC, the Urinalysis Coordinator from CSC who collects samples for urinalysis testing at BSWH, training for BSWH staff, and the health care needs that are met through CSC. The Parole Officer discussed that additional supports that are required for BSWH to successfully operate include an increased awareness in CSC regarding what a Section 81 is and the Aboriginal continuum of care:

I think if CSC could arrange to do ETAs for women who want to come here, they could



see BSWH, see our offices, and see that we're not scary. It would increase awareness; when they meet with offenders, they can share what BSWH is about. Even if they go to OOHL or a healing lodge first and then want to transfer here. We also need increased awareness of the Aboriginal continuum of care. CSC staff and offenders need to be more trained on what to bring for protocol when they want to come here and speak to the Elder. What different things are. Women that talk to me, they want release plans to be to this First Nation. So we sit down and talk to them about the Band and Band code. Chief and Council may have to be involved if the person returns before their warrant expiry date.

In addition, BSWH would like CSC to help keep their beds full, employ a faster transfer process, including the creation of a waiting list of offenders who are eligible for BSWH, as this would help the facility's financial situation. The budget that BSWH receives is based on the daily number of residents that reside at BSWH. The Executive Director explained:

The Service could help us by streamlining their process to get the women here. That is critical. We work on an operating budget based on beds being full. If it's not full today, we don't get paid for today. We have staff and programs. The big challenge is keeping our beds full. It will be a bigger challenge for the service if it is looking at either duplicating this and/or expanding BSWH. We do have the capacity of doing that. But their budget is their budget and it is very tight.

### **Offenders.**

Overall, most of the residents indicated that CSC and BSWH have a good relationship, as one resident stated when asked about the relationship between the two organizations. "It's pretty good, I like how they work together". In contrast to the previous resident, another resident perceived that, "They don't really have a relationship and don't work together. The Elders had to find out information on BSWH for me". One resident was unsure of the relationship between the two.

The majority of the women mentioned that there was good communication between BSWH and CSC with respect to their transfers. However, two residents' experiences were different from the other residents, "I found out three days before I was leaving. There was not good communication; I don't think it was BSWH's fault. In CSC, there are more channels to go through. I was not prepared and not knowing". The other resident indicated that "there was no communication".

The women were asked to describe how living at BSWH differed from living at a CSC institution. The most common themes in how these differed were that at BSWH they felt more respected and that they started their stay with complete trust. One resident described: "At BSWH, they recognize how hard we worked to get here and it starts with complete trust".

However, in CSC, many women felt that they carried a stigma and were not trusted. Another resident explained, “In CSC, we carry a stigma of past discretions, have an untrusting rapport, we must prove ourselves to be taken seriously”. Another resident further described:

But CSC, I understand they have a job to do, and they are trained in a certain way for their own safety and wellbeing to do a job, but it was very belittling to me in CSC.... In CSC, you’re guilty of anything they say. Then you have to prove your innocence. And we’re already down on ourselves as federally incarcerated women. It’s hard enough taking responsibility for our own actions.... We’re still people. I think they kind of forget that. I don’t know if that’s part of their training. A lot of it is their training for their own security and safety. They’re trained to think we’re liars and the worst, I understand that, but you’re not going to have people not re-offending. It doesn’t work that way. It’s not like that here. They don’t tell you you’ve done something here, they ask you. They make mistakes, we make mistakes.

Another major difference between BSWH and CSC was the focus on reintegration. In CSC, the women found that there was not a lot of contact with outside supports whereas at BSWH there are numerous opportunities and they are encouraged and supported to begin reintegrating into the community, “We are incarcerated, we are, but we get the chance to get out there”. Other differences that the women noticed included: “BSWH feeling safe and more like a home environment, where staff use an open door policy and use communication to solve problems – there are no strip searches, hierarchies or institutional charges like in CSC”. One resident indicated that due to the small size of BSWH, “You are more of a person here, you don’t feel like a number here”. Another resident shared her own experience of how living at BSWH differed from living at a CSC institution:

On a scale of 1-10, it’s [BSWH] an 11. It’s very good. Everything, the [BSWH] staff are good. Reports are done. You get to walk into a staff’s office and talk to them and know what’s going on. There are opportunities for getting out whereas, at CSC, you don’t see reports.

### **Advice and Opinions Regarding the Management and Treatment of Women Offenders**

Both BSWH staff and offenders were asked to provide advice to CSC with respect to the treatment of women offenders and to provide any remaining comments that they had. Also, BSWH staff were asked to provide advice with respect to the management of women offenders. The themes that emerged in relation to each of these topics are presented below, with the responses provided by staff and offenders being presented separately to ensure that both perspectives are fully represented.

#### **BSWH Staff.**

The advice that was provided from BSWH staff regarding the management of women offenders included having sensitive, understanding, and supportive employees that work with women. According to the Associate Director, in order to effectively manage women offenders, CSC staff need to focus on: “Being more open with the women and being more accommodating and accepting as opposed to thinking of them as less just because they’re in jail”. Similarly, another BSWH staff member advised, “Treat them as people. A lot of the times when they come to us, all we hear are complaints. That they’ve been disrespected and mistreated. It would be nice if they came on a good note”. It was also mentioned that CSC staff should have training in order to work with Aboriginal peoples. Furthermore, they advised that CSC place a greater emphasis on release planning and being supportive and understanding of each woman’s individual needs:

There needs to be more understanding of their needs and what resources need to be available for them and providing those resources to them and connecting them to their resources and working with them to build solid release plans instead of telling them what needs to be done. And working with them as a team as opposed to one feeling they’re in control of the other instead of working together.

The employees were also asked to provide advice to CSC with respect to the treatment of women offenders. The majority of the employees advised CSC to treat offenders with respect and empower them. For example, the Elder stated: “Basic human rights, be respectful, it works both ways; be understanding, caring, sharing, just use common sense”. Also, the Living Unit Officer advised, “I would say look at them as humans first. And really the golden rule prevails”. In addition, many mentioned that the employees have to be culturally sensitive: “Being more open and understanding of the importance of Aboriginal culture and ceremonies and Elders involved in case management and involving them a lot more”.

Moreover, the Parole Officer wanted to bring awareness to some offenders not being able to get work release:

Right now, CSC only allows work release for only those inmates with moderate and high needs [on the Employment domain]. Offenders deemed as low risk aren’t getting work release. We would like our women to be out working. The only way for them to have low need is if they have the ability to work, build relationships with employers, get experience, and build skills for future careers. One woman did year 1 to 3 in welding. She got out on full parole, and still has 6 years left in her sentence. But she always had low need for work release. A work release can be written up for 60 days, but if the RDC says no, that’s a barrier.

### **Offenders.**

Three common themes emerged from the data with respect to providing advice to CSC on the treatment of women. The first theme was around the specific needs of Aboriginal people such as more healing lodges for women and more resources for Aboriginal programming, including bringing back the Spirit of a Warrior program. Another common theme that the women disclosed was that CSC should focus more on successfully reintegrating offenders into the community which they believed would result in more positive release outcomes. As one resident described, “change the outcomes and open the door for change”. When offenders are not prepared for reintegration back into the community, they are returned to custody at high rates, as one resident who has spent many years in corrections observed: “People that get out of a penitentiary, they’re not going to make it. As opposed to here, this place has pretty good success rates”. Another long-term offender described that she and other offenders compiled their own information on the success rates of offenders on conditional release:

In Pathways, we kept a tally of women going for parole and their success. In 10 months, 50 Aboriginal females went up for parole and only 2 got it. I have had three different parole dates at EIFW. Aboriginal females inside are following correctional plans and go for parole and are not getting support, they are falling through the cracks. I would like to ask: ‘Why do you have so many female offenders?’ It’s just another thing to keep us down – keep us in prison and poverty.

In providing recommendations to CSC on the treatment of women, the majority of the women discussed that the personalities of CSC staff and their views need to change. The women expressed the CSC staff need to have: more compassion, more respect, more belief in the women, less sarcasm, less malice, and less ignorance. As well, the women discussed that CSC staff need to be more supportive, more professional, less judgemental and cannot let the power of their position of authority go to their head. One resident discussed her experience with staff members that she encountered while in CSC:

Yeah, we get put in jail, we did some terrible things to lead us there, but don’t throw it in our face, don’t be ignorant about it, don’t be disrespectful about it, because something’s going on outside. Don’t take it to work and take it out on us. Some girls are so quiet, they don’t do nothing, but they pick on them. They can do whatever they want to us because we’re just inmates. I think that when people file grievances upon their staff members, I think they should be really investigated and not just pushed over. I think that every CSC worker needs to know the background of the person. When I first got in, I was very unapproachable; I had a shitty attitude because I was a long-termer. And if they were disrespectful to me, I’ll be disrespectful back. I bumped heads with a lot of [CSC] staff because of how they were towards me. I would write grievances, grievances, and grievances, but it’s not going to do anything. It’s going to be worse, not better. I think

correctional officers need to take programming, Spirit of the Warrior or have a program all about how some ladies talk about their problems. Spirit of the Warrior, part of it is rage, talk about their life, and how everything led up to their crime and where they are today. Have videos like that, [CSC] staff need to know. They can't think, oh well, she killed somebody so she doesn't deserve a hello or anything. All of them aren't like that. I was okay with a few [CSC] staff. But it wasn't me, I wouldn't go out of my way and say hello, but if they approached me I would talk to them. I just think that they need programming and need a better understanding of us girls and why we're in and our background. And don't judge us on our crime....Their authority is too high. I told the [CSC] staff, your authority's too high up your ass. They wanted to strip search, but not telling me why. It's just like ripping apart your rooms. If they need to do a room search – they're supposed to put stuff back and they would break stuff. BSWH does searches, but they don't trash your room. It's pretty much the same. Sometimes I feel like they just do that to get a reaction out of it.

At the conclusion of the interview, the BSWH employees and offenders were provided with an opportunity to mention anything else that they felt was important to share. The Living Unit Officer felt that CSC needs to be open to change and discussed why this is important:

There are always things to change and adapt. I think it's good to sometimes shuffle [CSC] staff and see what fits best. And to be open to change. And just to keep striving to do better for the women....We realize we're in a special position and that more healing lodges is the way to go. Not to build bigger prisons. It's about healing and rectifying the things that have led up to incarceration. Not everyone is afforded equal opportunities to succeed. We try to do that, after the fact.

In the residents' final comments, the women expressed the need for more healing lodges and more empowering environments within penitentiaries that assist in successful reintegration:

When you just do time in the pen and they throw you out there, you have minimal chance of success when you're just released from the pen into the community. One of the ladies who just transferred to BSWH on the day you [researchers] arrived was transferred with the clothes on her back and \$65 to her name, how can she be expected to be successful if she was released straight into the community?

### **Case Studies**

Case studies constituted the third component of our study. A case study produces a narrative description that is provided by the individual (Ray, 2006) and allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 2009), such as the life stories of some of the residents at BSWH. In our study, we wanted to understand how and why BSWH was successful for participating residents.

## **Participants**

The sample included three offenders who were serving or had served federal sentences at BSWH. Two of the offenders had a long history in corrections and were still residents at BSWH, while one offender had been released from BSWH, first on day parole, and then on full parole. One offender self-identified as Caucasian and the other two offenders self-identified as Aboriginal.

## **Procedure**

Prior to the data collection, a traditional pipe ceremony and feast was conducted. NCSA identified residents who may be interested in being part of the case studies. Interviews were conducted by one of the authors in a quiet and private space within the facility. Offenders received a consent form describing the purpose of the interview and their rights as participants. If they consented to participate, the researcher proceeded with the interview using the interview questions found in Appendix A. With permission, notes were taken during the interviews that were as close to verbatim as possible.

## **Data Analysis**

The interview data were reviewed using thematic analysis in the same manner as the interviews focusing on the residents' experience at BSWH. Interview notes were examined and extracts were coded for similar content. The themes were then developed and organized to describe the similar patterns that emerged from the interview notes.

## **Findings**

The results for each of the participants are presented separately. Within each case study, four sub-sections were examined: Life History, Experience at BSWH, Reflections on CSC, and Advice on Managing and Treating Women Offenders. The three women were given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

### **Mia**

Mia is a 45 year old Caucasian resident at BSWH. She is single, with no children. She came from a supportive, two-parent (biological) family and has three siblings. In her childhood, Mia's family did everything together, with one of their pastimes being camping. Mia did not hang out with delinquent friends when she was younger but rather was heavily involved in sports such as curling, skating, baseball, and swimming. Her home community, where she was born and

raised, was located in Saskatchewan.

Mia was 14 years old the first time she experimented with drugs and alcohol. She acquired an addiction to the drugs but never sought treatment. She turned to drugs and alcohol because she liked “happy highs”. Mia quit school after completing Grade 10 when she was 16 years old, and started waitressing. When she was 17 years old, she moved to another province and work in the service industry there for five years.

Mia is in overall good health. She has never had any physical or mental illness and has never experienced any physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or neglect. She became involved in the correctional system over 20 years ago. She has only ever been arrested once and has never done provincial time. She believes that she got into trouble with the law due to a bad relationship in which she was involved. Since she has been incarcerated, she has spent time in four CSC institutions including the Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario, EIFW, Regional Psychiatric Centre, and OOHL. She wanted to transfer to BSWH to have more freedom and to start experiencing reality. She has been at BSWH for just over one year.

Mia likes BSWH. Specifically, she likes going out into the community, being able to smoke cigarettes, and that the residents “can have pretty much everything”, including laptops. There is nothing that Mia dislikes about BSWH. Further, Mia believes the overall philosophy of BSWH is “trying to get living out of the jail and making it more of a reality”. This is due to the many opportunities that BSWH residents get to receive in the community on ETAs and UTAs. Mia expressed that the model used to help women at BSWH is a cultural model such as having sweats, powwows, round dances, and ceremonies. She believes that it is a good model and that the sweats have been the most beneficial for her. When questioned what aspects of the model have helped the least, she expressed, “None, it is all good”.

The admissions process when she arrived at BSWH included being introduced to the staff and being asked about her history. Reflecting on this process she stated: “There is not much of an intake”. She has taken the Spirit of a Warrior program and participated in cultural ceremonies, but has not completed any education or employment training as of yet. She has had complete access to all of the resources that were suggested to her and that she needed. The healing plan that was created for her was done through talking with the Elder and included elements such as continuing to participate in cultural ceremonies, such as smudging and sweats, and staying focused on getting out. Her healing plan has been very helpful, she noted, “especially the one-on-

one with the Elder”. The impact that BSWH has had on her life is that it keeps her focused, she is more positive now, and there is no drama. The only recommendations or advice that she has for the management to improve BSWH includes, “Keep doing what they are doing. I have nothing bad to say about any of them”.

In distinguishing the differences between living in a CSC institution compared to living at BSWH, Mia had a lot to share.

In CSC, there is drama. They never did anything for me. Here is like reality, they get you focused to be released. Inside [CSC] you are only allowed so little and here you are allowed so much more stuff, which helps!

In discussing how well CSC and BSWH communicated with each other when she was being transferred, she indicated that the OOHLC staff drove her to BSWH and that she received a lot of notice and time to prepare before her transfer.

Mia’s advice to CSC with respect to managing women offenders was, “Give them a chance, everyone deserves a chance”. In regards to the treatment of women offenders, Mia would like to advise CSC, “They need to calm down on how they treat the women; here, they just leave us alone. If they show me respect, I’ll give them respect”. At the conclusion of the interview, Mia was asked if there was anything else that she believed was important to mention and she stated, “It is important that CSC funds BSWH more. This will increase the services available”.

## **Victoria**

Victoria is a 46 year old Métis resident at BSWH. She is single, with no children. She came from a two-parent (biological) family and has one sibling. When discussing her family growing up, Victoria expressed that “nothing was ever good enough” for her parents. Victoria did not hang out with delinquent friends when she was younger but rather was involved in sports, such as curling, skating, and swimming and she went camping often. Her home community, where she was born and raised, is in Manitoba. It was a safe community with not much violence and no gangs; however, there was a lot of alcohol abuse and adultery within her home. When she was 11 years old, her dad got a work transfer, so the family moved to another province. Victoria ran away at 12 years of age and hitchhiked for the next four years across Canada. When she was 16, she returned to Manitoba.

Victoria was 12 years old the first time she experimented with drugs and alcohol. She acquired an addiction at 12 years of age to drugs (e.g., sniffing gas) but never sought any type of



treatment. She turned to drugs and alcohol because she wanted to rebel, to be cool, to gain acceptance while living on the street, and to belong, “it gave me a feeling of belonging, like a family, because there was no affection at home, my dad was always absent working”. Victoria quit school but has since received her GED and received a certificate from a community college. She has never been diagnosed with or suffered from any type of mental illness. However, she has experienced physical and sexual abuse. She has been emotionally abused in past relationships and experienced “neglect in every aspect from her parents”. Additionally, Victoria was diagnosed with Hepatitis C. Thankfully, she stated, “I go for my last shot tomorrow because it’s gone now”.

Victoria became involved in the correctional system in 1988. She believes that she got into trouble with the law due to drinking and driving and theft to support her drug habit. She has been arrested over 25 times and convicted over 10 times. For most of those offenses, she was incarcerated in provincial prisons. Before transferring to BSWH, she was doing federal time at EIFW. She wanted to transfer to BSWH because of her interest in native spirituality and, overall, she is much more comfortable here. She has been at BSWH for less than three months.

Victoria mentioned that she likes BSWH now but that she came at a bad time, as she described, “It is ok now. I came at a bad time. There was a lock down due to an incident that occurred on an ETA. We had to stay inside for about two months”. There were four things in particular that she liked most about BSWH:

There is no thug mentality here like in the Pen. It is a supportive environment with all women who stand together. It is more personal like the one-on-one’s with the Elder and the Parole Officer is approachable. There is also no racial profiling here.

There were two things in particular that Victoria did not like about BSWH. The first was, “We have to buy our own laundry soap and other things that should be paid for”. Second, Victoria mentioned that family members work at BSWH, which she believes becomes a conflict of interest.

Victoria described the overall philosophy of BSWH as providing reintegration and rehabilitation in a successful way through being supportive and providing the resources and tools (e.g., access to community supports, employability skills) that are needed to be successful in the community. She mentioned that it is also about empowerment and confidence building. When describing the model that is used, she stated: “It is about leading a balanced life emotionally and physically like with culture...being prepared for release, increasing knowledge, and

empowerment”. Victoria thought that the model at BSWH was working successfully and should be expanded across the country as “others need to know”. The aspects of the model that have helped her most include, “the sense of community pride, family, and confidence building. You got the pussy, you got the power”. There were no aspects of the model that did not help her, stating “Nothing, it’s all good”.

Victoria was not thrilled with the admissions process, “It wasn’t good enough. I got a handbook this week but at first I had to learn from the other women. There was no hygiene provided”. The programming that Victoria has taken while at BSWH includes attendance at NA and AA meetings and a women’s reintegration group which are both provided in the community. In addition, she regularly attends church, the YWCA, and cultural ceremonies and traditions, such as powwows, round dances, drumming/singing. She also participates in community walks with the other residents for exercise. Further, Victoria will be beginning a full-time job for 60 days at a recycling company, explaining, “If you have a low need for employment, you can only receive a 60 day permit to work, but there is no continuous work release”. She has not completed any education/employment training as of yet. Victoria has had total access to all of the resources that were suggested to her or that she needed. She developed her own healing plan and is focusing on continuing to participate in ceremonies and her healing journey. For instance, she is researching Métis funding in order to start her own business and living a balanced life. Her healing plan has been helpful as it gives her direction and realistic goals, allowing her to take one step at a time.

Residing at BSWH has had a huge impact on Victoria’s life. She feels hopeful for the future, has learned patience, feels safer and at peace, and has come to believe that she can be successful. She further described:

BSWH allows me to connect deeper with my culture which has helped access resources, like financially, spiritually, and emotionally, which helps to create community supports....I feel ok to go out in the community, I feel different. I feel like a locomotive that got off the tracks in life but now feel a purpose.

The advice that she would like to provide to the management of BSWH about how to improve the lodge includes:

They need to provide a handbook to women who are considering Section 81 to know what they are getting themselves into. The women need to know the exact procedures on their rights, obligations, and privileges, or the lack of, in comparison to CSC. Section 81

does not follow the Commissioner Directives only the Canadian Charter of Rights. This misinformation and not knowing equals anger.

Victoria could not describe the relationship between CSC and BSWH but rather stated, “BSWH needs more money like a bigger budget. The [BSWH] staff here care”. Victoria was also asked to describe how living at BSWH was different from a CSC institution and she stated, “In CSC, it was about power and control, who’s better. Here, if we succeed, they succeed, like we are a reflection of their success. We receive respect here”. Furthermore, Victoria was asked to describe how well CSC and BSWH communicated with each other in regards to her transfer and she mentioned, “There was no communication. At EIFW, they had no clue; there was no piggyback between the two”.

Victoria provided the following recommendations and advice to CSC with respect to managing women offenders:

[CSC] staff and correctional officers need sensitivity training as far as race and religion. There is a lack of professionalism and power struggles between the officers. The improper pat downs feel sexual....Also, they shouldn’t make you sign a grievance without being informed, I signed for a resolution that had never even happened. There needs to be easier access to the case management team like the primary workers and the attitude of oppression needs to go away. There should also be accountability, like our success reflecting the success of the primary workers.

In addition, Victoria provided advice and recommendations with respect to the treatment of women offenders and stated, “It needs to be done with respect! You get what you give. They need to have empathy like put yourselves in my shoes”. At the conclusion of the interview, Victoria felt that it is important to “want to share the success of this place [BSWH] and wants it to be heard by CSC and the general public”.

### **Andrea**

Andrea is a 31 year old First Nations past resident from BSWH. She is single, with no children. She came from a two-parent (biological) family and has nine full- and half-siblings. Andrea did not have a supportive family growing up:

My parents were both gambling addicts. Both my parents worked and sold drugs. But then my mom got ill...so I had to take care of her and, at age 10, I did drugs. When I was 12, I got drunk for the first time. There was sexual abuse occurring in the house. My dad wasn’t violent at home but he was violent with other men in the community. My oldest sister was violent though. We were kept away from the reserve school like secluded from our own generation. We did start attending the community school though after my Mom got sick. We were not really accepted from our own so we did things to fit in. I fought a

lot and recognized the power and popularity that it gave me. I had abandonment issues because I was separated from my siblings and school.

Andrea did not spend any time in foster care; however, her aunty also helped to raise her and her siblings. Andrea spoke fondly of her aunt, “She didn’t speak English so I had to speak for her in public. She was the most caring, loving, affectionate mother that I ever had”.

While growing up Andrea like to spend her time being active like playing in tree houses, swinging, go carting, and riding four wheelers. Her family would travel around together, camping, for about 2 to 3 weeks in the summers. As a family, they hunted, tamed, fed, and rode horses, and did traditional cooking such as drying meat and making stew. She mentioned that, other than their summer trips, they stayed home a lot because they were not really allowed to go anywhere, except when she would sneak away to visit her grandfather.

Andrea’s home community is a politically divided community, and this division interfered with life on the reserve because all of the residents could not stand united. There was a lot of violence and substance abuse but not much gang activity. She indicated that it is worse now with respect to gangs and gang activity and described life on her reserve, “It’s like a cycle, members are incarcerated, they join gangs, and once released, they bring contacts back to the reserve and drugs are being brought into the community”. When questioned about her involvement with delinquent peers when she was younger, she stated that she was the delinquent one:

Once I started going to the community school, I got involved in drug dealing and stealing cars, dine and dashes, theft but I was the initial decision maker. I fought a lot and in Grade 7, I got expelled from school.

She was ten years old the first time she experimented with drugs and 12 years old the first time that she got drunk. She acquired an addiction to both drugs and alcohol. She sought treatment once but got into a fight with a former enemy while she was there. She also mentioned that her dad did not believe in addiction, so she had no support from her family. She turned to drugs and alcohol, “because she felt alone, angry, abandoned, sexually abused by a community member because Dad sold drugs and this was done to hurt him. After Mom got sick, we didn’t do anything, everything changed”. Andrea quit school, but has since completed her GED and is currently completing English 30 in order to get into university.

Andrea has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and borderline antisocial personality disorder. She also has chronic anxiety disorder, heart murmurs,

and suffers from panic attacks. She disclosed that she has never been physically abused but she has been emotionally abused and neglected numerous times by her family. In addition, she has been sexually abused.

She was sentenced for 20 years on her current offence and is currently being investigated for another charge. She believes that she got into trouble with the law due to her father and feeling abandoned by her boyfriend. She has been arrested four times, and this is the first time she has done federal time. Since she has been incarcerated, she has been at EIFW. She explains why she wanted to transfer to BSWH: “I felt ready to make changes in my life. I tried to transfer to OOHHL two times. I wanted to transfer to Buffalo Sage to find my culture and make connections with the community; I wanted an opportunity to make connections”.

Andrea is no longer a resident at BSWH and has been released on full parole. She has her own place and is living with two other women. Her supports in the community include her family, her friends, her parolee friends, and Elders. She spends her time in the community working, attending meetings, driving around as a support for other women, shopping to obtain basic necessities, going to movies, attending sweats, and just staying in her house. She explained that having a job and routine in her life has helped her most in keeping out of trouble with the law. She also mentioned that BSWH helped prepare her for reintegration by giving her exposure and teaching her how to deal with people in the community, giving her support, and teaching her how to express how she feels. Andrea was asked to provide advice to other women who are still incarcerated and stated:

It’s only up to you to give yourself what you need or want in your life. Never hold others on a pedestal. Never be afraid to ask for help and take it when it is offered. Give back in return.

Further, Andrea gave the following advice to youth at risk in the community: “You are never alone. We have all gone through the same experiences, just dealt with them differently. Don’t be afraid to reach out. Contact agencies/counsellors for help”.

Andrea liked BSWH. She liked the cultural aspect, the Elder, the use of sharing circles when there is conflict and mediation circles with BSWH staff members, the Spirit of a Warrior program, and the open door policy. She also liked the support she received when she asked for help, the visiting hours, and the telecommunications. She stated, “it is much better here” and “it has helped a lot”. However, there were a few things that Andrea did not like about BSWH:

The [BSWH] staff's unhealthiness, hearsay, they come here with their own attitudes and not understanding, the lack of awareness on people who are reintegrating, that we can't utilize work release earlier, only a year and a half before day parole, the lack of education as we can't utilize the library because of a lack of escorts and staff [at BSWH]. I don't like the location or lack of money. I had no vehicle for 2 months before full parole so it was hard when I was working because I had to bus to go home. I had to contact my own supports while on day parole for work release with Alberta Job Corps, and I don't agree with having a male director, Claire [founding Executive Director] was much better.

Andrea perceived the overall philosophy at BSWH to be women helping women reintegrate into society in a real life setting through the use of UTAs which helps the women to learn how to live in the community again. Also, she stated that BSWH shows the residents reality. Andrea described that the model at BSWH helps achieve balance in life, stating, "There is mental and emotional help such as the Elder, doctors, and psychologists, and spiritual help like smudging. Also physical exercise because there is three floors". Andrea stated that the model helps the women to find a balance in a cultural way which is helpful. Other thoughts she has regarding the BSWH model included that they struggled to find permanent Elders and the residence is too small compared to other CSC institutions she has been at, which has been the hardest part for her. The aspects of the model that have helped the most include the spirituality and support in shaping her identity as an Aboriginal woman. Andrea found that all aspects of the model were helpful.

The types of programming that Andrea has completed while at BSWH was the Spirit of a Warrior program, a grief and loss program, a financial management and self-management program, and a maintenance program for Spirit of a Warrior. All of her training was done through Alberta Job Corps. Further, Andrea indicated that she had full access to all of the resources that were suggested to her and that she needed. In discussing her healing plan, Andrea expressed that she developed her own and, "I received a pamphlet with questions and I made goals to follow through with the Elder". Her healing plan was helpful because it helped her to stay focused, identify her own needs, and be responsible for her "own self-analyzation". The impact that BSWH has had on her life included getting to know her strengths and weaknesses and learning how to be independent by doing things on her own. Andrea's advice to the management at BSWH to improve the facility was: "Hire [BSWH] staff that are more equipped to participate in the culture. [BSWH] staff need to walk the walk. The staff at BSWH don't sweat with us".

Andrea perceived that BSWH and CSC have a good relationship. When describing how living at BSWH compared to living in a CSC institution, she stated:

In CSC, it is stricter; we get institutional charges for no reason. There was no smoking and broken/no culture. In CSC, you were violated and it builds resentment with Aboriginal people...They [CSC] wanted me out because I was an advocate and fought grievances against CSC...Here, Claire was so good, it's more laid back. There is an open door policy. We live our life in our culture. It is difficult here when you don't like someone, but you just pray for them and feel release. You are allowed to have kids in here which is good.

Andrea's advice for the treatment of women offenders included:

Help women become better. When you hire males, know who you are hiring. Be more respectful to the women and motivated by challenge. Have sensitivity towards the mothers who don't have contact with their kids and help them learn how to reconnect with their kids. CSC lacks in helping mothers and children remain in contact. There is a lack of staff [at CSC] and security and preparedness.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of the study was to provide CSC and the NCSA with an understanding of the implementation, processes, and where applicable, the measurable outcomes of Buffalo Sage Wellness House. The study was a process review in recognition of the small number of women who have attended BSWH to date and CSC's desire to better understand Buffalo Sage's structures, programs, processes, and operations as well as to provide advice and opinions regarding the treatment and management of women offenders.

### **Profile of Women**

Our sample was comprised of 73% Aboriginal and 27% non-Aboriginal offenders. Overall, the majority were single, around 31 years of age, and serving time for either homicide or drug offences. The average length of their sentences was approximately four years. The majority were assessed as having a medium security risk level upon admission to CSC. These results were consistent with past research (e.g., Dell & Boe, 2000; Didenko & Marquis, 2011; Kong & AuCoin, 2008; Wesley, 2012) noting that women offenders are likely to be young, single, and Aboriginal. The Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women residents of BSWH were similar in some aspects but differences in important areas were noted.

Specifically, Aboriginal offenders were approximately four years younger than non-Aboriginal offenders when admitted into federal custody. The relative youthfulness of the Aboriginal population in CSC is well established (e.g., Bonta, LaPrairie, & Wallace-Capretta, 1997; CSC, 2010; Kong & AuCoin, 2008; Moore & Trevethan, 2002; Rudin, 2008) in the literature. As well, Aboriginal offenders were more likely to be serving time for homicide and other violent offences (e.g., assault) whereas non-Aboriginal offenders were most often serving time for drug and other non-violent offences. Didenko and Marquis (2011) had likewise found that a high percent of Aboriginal offenders were serving sentences for violent offences.

Overall, Aboriginal offenders were assessed as high needs and medium risk. Non-Aboriginal offenders were more likely to be assessed as medium needs and low risk. This finding is consistent with other studies that noted that Aboriginal women offenders have more extensive criminal histories and a greater need for interventions than non-Aboriginal offenders (Moore & Trevethan, 2002). When examining the criminogenic need domains, Aboriginal offenders were assessed as higher need in the following domains: employment, associates and social interaction, substance abuse, and personal and emotional orientation. The most problematic area was



substance abuse, which is, again, consistent with the literature (e.g., Dell & Boe, 2000; Johnston, 1997; Walsh et al., 2013).

At the time of the study, 40 offenders, 30 Aboriginal and 10 non-Aboriginal women, had been released from BSWH. Of these, 25% had returned to custody on a revocation and only one was returned with a new offence.<sup>6</sup> None of the non-Aboriginal offenders were returned to custody on a revocation. Overall, this revocation rate appears to be low. Other CSC research (e.g., Thompson, Forrester, & Stewart, in approvals) has found that when women offenders' outcomes were measured by revocations of any kind, 54% of Aboriginal women and 24% for non-Aboriginal women were revoked. It should be noted, however, that the Thompson et al. (in approvals) study included all women who had been released, at all risk levels, while women at BSWH are transferred there based on their lower risk profiles.

There is research indicating lower recidivism rates among offenders being released from other Section 81 facilities and healing lodges as well. For example, CSC (2011) found that offenders released from healing lodges have relatively lower recidivism rates compared to offenders released from other types of CSC institutions. For instance, offenders released from Stan Daniels Healing Centre have a recidivism rate of 20% (MacDonald, 2012).<sup>7</sup> Similarly, only 3% of the offenders from Willow Cree Healing Lodge were reconvicted and 11% of the offenders from Pe Sakastew Centre were reconvicted over an approximately three year follow up (Pilon & Wormith, 2012). Thus, the low recidivism rates at BSHW over the period examined are consistent with rates found for offenders released from other Section 81 facilities and other healing lodges. One exception to this general finding of lower recidivism being associated with healing lodges is the work of Didenko and Marquis (2011). In their study, the type of correctional facility from which offenders were released was not associated with the risk of conditional release failure for Aboriginal women. It is important to note that their study only compared OOHL to other CSC multi-level security women institutions and did not have any Section 81 women's facilities to use as a comparison.

### **Buffalo Sage Model**

The Buffalo Sage model is a cultural model used to help the women understand and heal themselves, reconcile relationships, reclaim an interconnected worldview, and deal with

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<sup>6</sup> Another woman was returned due to a revocation with outstanding charges on a previous offence.

<sup>7</sup> The author did not specify the length of follow-up period over which recidivism was tracked.

historical and past trauma. It serves to empower the women and build their self-esteem and self-worth. According to the residents, the aspects of the model that have helped them most included the program Spirit of a Warrior, and the reconnection to Aboriginal culture, ceremonies, and values. Most interviewees indicated that there was no need for any changes to the model that is used at BSWH. Didenko and Marquis (2011) found that similar cultural models, with an emphasis on spirituality and healing, are commonly used in other healing lodges and Section 81 facilities as well. Many Aboriginal women have noted that a return to cultural and spiritual traditions was instrumental in breaking their incarceration cycle (Walsh et al., 2013).

Both BSWH staff and residents agreed that the residents have access to the resources they require at BSWH and on their healing journey. All of the BSWH staff were supportive in reintegrating the women back into the community and helping them build community supports, find employment and housing, and gain financial skills to facilitate an easier transition once they are released. Both BSWH staff and residents agreed that the overall philosophy guiding BSWH emphasizes the holistic wellness of the women, their families, and communities while also focusing on successful reintegration back into the community.

All the women interviewed reported that liked being at BSWH and indicated that it had made a positive impact on their lives by empowering them, increasing their self-confidence, and preparing them for their release. Didenko and Marquis (2011) had also observed positive changes in residents of healing lodges, such as increased self-awareness, self-control, motivation, personal responsibility, and prosocial attitudes. The admissions process was a positive experience for the BSWH residents due to its simplicity, but it did seem to differ for each resident. The BSWH staff indicated in more detail what occurs before and during admissions, including that the women must apply for a transfer to BSWH and, if accepted, the resident will undergo orientation upon her arrival.

The women are able to participate in many different types of programming at BSWH and in the community, such as Spirit of the Warrior, financial literacy programs and AA and NA meetings. In fact, many of the women stated that the programming at BSWH had a substantial impact on them and had changed their lives. Varis, McGowan, and Mullins (2006) found that culturally appropriate programs (e.g., Spirit of a Warrior) improved Aboriginal offenders' program completion rates. Educational training occurred at BSWH (when the teacher was coming into BSWH) while employment training was completed in the community. Didenko and

Marquis (2011) found that educational services, vocational training, and physical activities need strengthening in healing lodges to further the holistic development of the offender and to increase their potential for reintegration. Our findings suggest that BSWH is following in line with these best practices with the programming and training at BSWH contributing to helping the women heal and find balance in their lives, with residents and BSWH staff seeing no foreseeable changes needed. Further, at BSWH, each resident develops her healing plan with the Elder in which cultural ceremonies, reintegrating back into their families and the community, work release, and programming, all play a major role. Didenko and Marquis also found that Elders played a major role in delivering interventions and services to offenders in other healing lodges. The healing plans are useful in keeping the women focused on their release and future by giving them direction and goals and helping them become empowered.

The process for UTAs and ETAs is the same process that CSC follows. That is, UTAs are mostly granted by the PBC to residents who are serving time for Schedule 1 offences (although this is not applicable for all Schedule 1 offenders). The institutional head in CSC or the Executive Director in healing lodges or Section 81 facilities grants UTAs to residents who are serving time for Schedule 2 offences, as well as ETAs for most of the residents (again, this is not applicable for all offenders applying for ETAs). UTAs and ETAs are used for personal development activities, parental responsibilities, family contacts, and compassionate or administrative reasons. The escorts for the ETAs include volunteers from the community and employees from BSWH. Didenko and Marquis (2011) found that reciprocal relationships between healing lodges and the community help offenders gain valuable skills to prepare for reintegration. However, they noted that these relationships can be challenging; specifically, regarding the availability and training of community volunteers and opportunities for temporary absences for offenders. This did not seem to be the case at BSWH, as most residents utilized both ETAs and UTAs extensively.

Like Didenko and Marquis (2011), we found that a large majority of the residents at BSWH were likely to be released on their statutory date. At BSWH, many of the women wanted to stay at the facility until their statutory release date due to the support they were receiving from staff at BSWH and in the community. BSWH and the PBC have a very positive relationship and the Parole Board visits BSWH for parole hearings. BSWH staff reported that the women were very successful in their parole hearings. This is consistent with the findings of Didenko and

Marquis (2011) who noted that Aboriginal men and women were more likely to be granted discretionary release from healing lodges compared to Aboriginal men and women in CSC minimum and multilevel security institutions.

A number of strengths and challenges were identified with respect to BSWH's operations. One of the challenges that was encountered during the initial implementation of BSWH was offenders not being released with their property (e.g., hygiene items, clothing). Also noted as problems were high staff turnover rates at BSWH and having to get permits to eat next door at Cunningham Place. Similarly, BSWH (2012) indicated that a significant amount of consultation and education was required in order to gain support for the Section 81 facility and to provide food services to the women offenders while they interacted with male members of the community at Cunningham Place. Otherwise, an initial challenge was having to create permits for BSWH to eat at Cunningham Place; however, it is operated by NCSA and located within the same building space; therefore, permits are no longer needed.

The current operational challenges at BSWH included the lower budget as a result of being a non-profit organization. Budget restrictions contribute to BSWH not being able to offer employees competitive wages comparable to CSC, which was perceived to result in the loss of employees who moved on to higher paying jobs. Additional challenges identified included CSC not understanding what a Section 81 facility is; remote access to OMS, which is not as efficient or fast; and not receiving emails or helpful information from CSC. The Office of the Correctional Investigator (2012) had also found that the chronic underfunding of Section 81 facilities results in them being unable to provide comparable CSC wages or unionized job security to employees. Another operational challenge that was uncovered included the slow process of getting women transferred to BSWH and keeping the beds full. Similarly, Didenko and Marquis (2011) found that other healing lodges have challenges related to operating at maximum capacity due to a small number of Aboriginal offenders being classified at the minimum security level and the limited availability of healing lodges across CSC regions. In the Prairie Region, there is only one healing lodge and one Section 81 facility for women, one in Saskatchewan and one in Alberta, and offenders from other regions have to sacrifice being closer to their families when they are transferred to a healing lodge or Section 81 facility in another region. This was apparent in our interviews as some residents were coming to BSWH and did not know anyone in the city or have any family supports near them. The Aboriginal Research Institute (2012) also stated an

identified challenge experienced by BSWH included waiting for the security reclassification of Aboriginal women in CSC institutions. Similarly, the Office of the Correctional Investigator found that one of the major factors that inhibits existing Section 81 facilities and healing lodges from operating at full capacity is the requirement that they limit their admissions to minimum security or low risk medium security offenders which was neither Parliament's intent nor CSC's original vision. This policy excludes almost 90% of incarcerated Aboriginal offenders from even being considered for transfer to a Section 81 facility or to a healing lodge.

Residents and BSWH staff were asked to provide any recommended changes to improve BSWH. They noted they would like longer phone system hours and identified several structural issues (e.g., needing a visiting space, bigger offices, gym facilities, fewer stairs). They also recommended more awareness in CSC (for staff and offenders) and the larger community about what a Section 81 facility is, having BSWH staff participate in the culture, more money to run the facility, and staffing issues at BSWH. Similarly, Didenko and Marquis (2011) found that staff turnover was an area that needs improvement in CSC-operated healing lodges and other Section 81 facilities.

Overall, the interviews indicated that BSWH and CSC communicate well with each other and that existing channels of communication include phone, email, and occasionally completing training together. The BSWH staff and residents viewed CSC and BSWH's relationship as good and positive. However, most also expressed that they believe that most of CSC does not understand what a Section 81 facility is and perceive that CSC views BSWH as more of a halfway house rather than an facility. The desired changes that the employees at BSWH would like to see are more stability among staff in CSC positions (i.e., lower CSC staff turnover rates), more training for BSWH staff, a bigger budget, streamlining the process to get women quickly transferred to BSWH by establishing a waitlist, and more awareness of what a Section 81 facility is among CSC staff and offenders. The types of supports required from CSC for BSWH to continue to operate included the funding and budget that is provided, the Urinalysis Coordinator who collects samples for urinalysis testing, and the provision of health care services. Upon its implementation, health care was also identified by BSWH (2012) as being problematic because the women residing at BSWH normally fall under the jurisdiction of CSC, so linkages had to be established between CSC, NCSA, and the province of Alberta to ensure timely and cost neutral provision of health care services to respect the various health jurisdictions (i.e., federal,

provincial, and First Nations). A source of uncertainty for the BSWH staff is the five-year agreement between CSC and the Section 81 facilities. This is a cause for concern and contributes to the staff at the lodges having no sense of permanency given that there is no guarantee that the agreements between CSC and the community partner organizations will be renewed (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2012).

The common themes that emerged from the advice and opinions offered by BSWH staff and residents regarding the treatment and management of women offenders included being attentive to Aboriginal offenders needs, such as creating more healing lodges and Section 81 facilities for women and allocating more resources for Aboriginal programming, focusing more on successfully reintegrating offenders, increasing the positive outcomes for the conditional release for Aboriginal offenders, and having CSC staff that work with women offenders be more understanding, compassionate, professional, respectful, supportive, and focused on empowering the women.

At BSWH, the women have plenty of opportunities to be able to reintegrate and to do it at a slow pace with support from BSWH staff. The community interventions and supports provide them with an opportunity to manage problems (e.g., triggers) that do come up in the community. One successful resident explained that her success in breaking her cycle of incarceration is due to having this exposure in the community and learning and being prepared to deal with problems as they arise in the community.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

A limitation of the study included having no random selection process to identify interviewees. Residents (current and past) were identified at the discretion of the Associate Director, and selected interviewees had to be available (i.e., not working or attending UTAs or ETAs). Another limitation of the study included the small sample size in the profile and outcome analyses. Due to the quite recent implementation of BSWH, many residents in the sample were only released in 2014; therefore, the small sample size and limited follow up period did not allow for a robust assessment of recidivism over time.

It is important to note that the scope of this report did not include visits or opinions from offenders at OOHL or other CSC minimum security institutions; thus, the opinions expressed by the BSWH residents cannot be compared to offenders in these other CSC institutions and no CSC documents or agreements were reviewed or CSC staff interviewed for the purpose of this

report. Further, there are numerous references regarding the lack of funding and a need for more funding at BSWH; however, the accuracy these opinions could not be established, because this study did not conduct a financial review, cost-benefit analysis, occupancy trend analysis, or an audit/analysis of the Section 81 agreement and finance use. Thus, it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions about the level of funding required by BSWH on the basis of the opinions cited in the current report. Similarly, there were several references during the interviews regarding the lack of a full bed occupancy at BSWH; however, no statistical data were reviewed with respect to bed occupancy. Thus, the comments provided in this report only reflect the views and opinions of BSWH staff and residents.

Our study found preliminary information suggesting positive results for the residents. However, the primary focus of our study was to understand the processes, operations, and relationships that BSWH has with CSC and the PBC. Future research should investigate whether recidivism rates of residents released from CSC-operated healing lodges and those released from Section 81 facilities differ. Another direction for future research includes the need for the development of a culturally-appropriate risk assessment tool designed for use with Aboriginal offenders. Past research (e.g., Ellis & Marshall, 2000) has found that offenders have improved public safety outcomes when they are released into the community on supervised conditional release and these decisions are based on a well-validated risk assessment tool. Presently, in CSC, no actuarial instrument has been approved to assess Aboriginal offenders' risk to reoffend although the Dynamic Factor Identification and Analysis (DFIA) tool and the Static Factor Analysis, both of which apply structured professional judgement to provide an overall estimate of risk and need, are used for all offenders including men and women offenders of Aboriginal ancestry. This is problematic considering that having an appropriate tool may reduce initial security classification levels for Aboriginal offenders and may improve parole board granting outcomes regarding conditional release with Aboriginal offenders.

### **Conclusions and Future Considerations**

Aboriginal offenders are overrepresented in all aspects of the criminal justice system, including federal correctional populations (Bonta et al., 1997). Aboriginal women offenders are the fastest growing offender population (BSWH, 2012); currently, one in three federally sentenced women offenders are of Aboriginal ancestry (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2013a). CSC introduced Aboriginal healing lodges and Section 81 facilities because Aboriginal

peoples and organizations believed that mainstream prisons and the programming offered were neither working for Aboriginal offenders nor an adequate response to the dramatic over-representation of Aboriginal peoples in Canada's correctional system (CSC, 2012; Didenko & Marquis, 2011).

Overall, our results provided preliminary evidence of BSWH's success with respect to providing the residents with a positive, empowering, and supportive environment. Our findings suggest that BSWH has allowed the women offenders to heal and gain a better understanding of themselves and their past, increase their self-confidence, and feel empowered to change. Moreover, early indicators suggest that the women released from BSHW have very low reoffending rates. These findings have important implications for Aboriginal offenders but also for CSC and public safety. An institution or facility that is successful in reintegrating Aboriginal offenders in the community is beneficial not only for the well-being of the individual offenders but also assists in keeping Aboriginal families and communities intact. By helping the women heal, deal with historical and past traumas, and increase their self-confidence and self-esteem, BSWH helps to create healthier individuals, families, and communities. If it can be established that healing lodges and Section 81 facilities like BSWH contribute to increased public safety, make economic sense based on a cost-benefit analysis, and provide humane and culturally appropriate assistance to a highly disadvantaged group of women, then, the future of corrections may be in creating more facilities based on the healing lodge model. It is estimated that it costs approximately \$211,618/year (in 2011/12) to house a woman in a federal penitentiary (Public Safety Canada, 2013) compared to \$88,000/year at BSWH (cited in MacDonald, 2012). Our findings support the emerging research indicating that Section 81 facilities may be a successful approach to improving outcomes in the criminal justice system.

Based on the results of the interviews with BSWH staff and offenders and a review of the processes at BSWH currently in place, the following are suggestions are made to further enhance the implementation and operation of BSWH and potentially other Section 81 facilities.

**1) Establish wait lists for BSWH in CSC facilities.**

There are difficulties in keeping BSWH at or even close to its capacity, which creates financial problems given that BSWH's funding is based on a per diem rate for occupied beds. This also decreases the opportunities for a full complement of offenders to benefit from being at BSWH. Establishing waiting lists in CSC institutions for offenders who express interest



in, and are approved for transfer to, BSWH, would allow an approved candidate to immediately replace a BSWH resident once she is released.

**2) Develop a more efficient process to expedite transfers of offenders from a CSC institution to BSWH.**

Some of the difficulties in maintaining BSWH at or close to capacity are due to the lengthy process of approving and transferring an offender to BSWH. Importantly, it is not an institution to institution transfer rather it is a transfer of custody from CSC to BSWH. Many individuals are involved in the admissions process and a considerable amount of paperwork must be completed before an offender can transfer into BSWH. Delays could be reduced if the process were more streamlined and more efficient.

**3) Increase awareness of Section 81 facilities in general and Buffalo Sage Wellness House in particular.**

Many complaints from BSWH staff and offenders concerned the lack of knowledge on the part of CSC staff and offenders about what a Section 81 facility is, what BSWH offers, and who can transfer to BSWH. The BSWH staff felt that this lack of understanding creates problems in their relationships with CSC staff. As well, the residents felt that many more women in CSC could benefit from BSWH if they understood and were informed that this is an available option for them. Many different avenues may be explored to increase the awareness of BSWH, such as pamphlets for offenders in CSC institutions; presentations provided by NCSA and BSWH staff and offenders to CSC offenders, CSC staff, and the general public; and media coverage on BSWH describing what it is, what it does, who is eligible, and what the transfer process is for federal women offenders.

**4) Incorporate family visiting areas to facilitate Private Family Visits and establish longer phone hours at BSWH.**

The women at BSWH may have visitors, but if their families are not from the area and lack the financial resources to travel to Edmonton and acquire accommodations in the city, it is very unlikely that they will be able to visit their family member while she resides at BSWH. In CSC, offenders have access to PFV accommodations but this is unavailable at BSWH. This is problematic as families are often part of the support system for the women on their healing journey and during reintegration. If offenders want to remain close to their families, this may dissuade potential residents from wanting to transfer to BSWH. As well, longer

phone hours was mentioned by a few interviewees, which would be helpful in assisting them with remaining in contact with their supports.

**5) Increase resources for program and rehabilitation services such as teachers and escorts for ETAs, encourage staff involvement in cultural activities, and introduce provisions to reduce BSWH staff turnover.**

It is suggested that BSWH introduce provisions to reduce staff turnover and increase their resources for programming which would help the women in their reintegration into the community. In addition, the women offenders indicated that their relationships with BSWH staff could be improved if BSWH staff were more involved in the cultural activities that take place at the facility. Further, the rate of staff turnover at BSWH is reported to be fairly high. This can be disruptive to offender-staff relations and impede the progress of the women at BSWH. Any mechanisms that can be introduced to increase staff participation in cultural activities and reduce staff turnover would be beneficial to both the organization and the offenders.

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## Appendix A: Interview Guides for Offenders and Staff at Buffalo Sage Wellness House

### Buffalo Sage Wellness House Residents (Current and Past) Interview Guide

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
2. How do you like Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
  - a. What do you like about Buffalo Sage?
  - b. What do you dislike about Buffalo Sage?
3. From your perspective, what do you think is the overall philosophy (e.g., values, beliefs) of Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
4. From your perspective, can you describe the model used to help women at Buffalo Sage?
  - a. What are your thoughts about the model used at Buffalo Sage?
  - b. What aspects of the model have helped you the most?
  - c. What aspects of the model have helped you the least?
5. What admissions process did you go through when you arrived at Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
6. What types of programming have you taken part in at Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
7. What types of training have you taken part in at Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
8. Did you have access to all of the resources that were suggested to you or that you needed? Please explain.
9. What type of healing plan was developed for you at Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
  - a. Was your healing plan helpful or not helpful? Please explain.
  - b. How has staying at Buffalo Sage had an impact on your life?
10. How would you describe the relationship between CSC and Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
  - a. How does living at Buffalo Sage Wellness House compare to living at a CSC institution?
  - b. How well do/did the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) and Buffalo Sage Wellness House communicate with each other when you were being transitioned to the facility?
11. What recommendations, if any, would you provide to the people who run Buffalo Sage Wellness House about how to improve the facility?

12. What recommendations or advice would you give to CSC with respect to managing women offenders?
13. What recommendations or advice would you give CSC with respect to treating women offenders?
14. Just before we close the interview, I would like to learn a little bit more about you.
  - a. What is your ethnicity?
  - b. What is your age?
  - c. What is your marital status?
  - d. What is the highest level of education that you completed?
15. Is there anything else that we have not talked about yet today that you think is important to mention?



## Buffalo Sage Wellness House Staff Interview Guide

1. Can you tell me about your position and responsibilities at Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
  - a. What is your job title at Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
  - b. What types of duties does your job entail?
2. What is the overall philosophy (e.g., values, beliefs) of the Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
3. What are Buffalo Sage's views on community reintegration?
4. What is the model used at Buffalo Sage? What are your thoughts about the model used at Buffalo Sage?
  - a. What aspects of the model are working well?
  - b. What aspects are not working well?
5. What recommendations or changes, if any, would you provide regarding the Buffalo Sage model?
6. What is the admissions process at Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
7. What types of programming is available for the women at Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
8. What types of training is available for the women at Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
9. What are your thoughts regarding the women's access to the resources that they require or could benefit from?
10. Can you describe the development and use of healing plans that are used at Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
  - a. What are your thoughts regarding the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the healing plans that are used at Buffalo Sage?
11. When Buffalo Sage first became operational, what challenges, if any, were encountered?  
What factors facilitated the implementation of Buffalo Sage's model during start-up?
12. What are some current operational challenges at Buffalo Sage? What are the current strengths of how Buffalo Sage operates?
13. What desired changes, if any, would you like to see at Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
14. Can you describe the internal security at Buffalo Sage?
15. What type of access do employees have to CSC's Offender Management System (OMS)?
16. What is the process for unescorted temporary absences (UTAs)?
17. What is the process for escorted temporary absences (ETAs)?

18. What processes and/or supports are in place to prepare the women who are eligible for day parole (DP) and full parole (FP) and other release types?
19. How does Buffalo Sage interact with the Parole Board of Canada (PBC)?
20. What is your view regarding the relationship between the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) and Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
  - a. How would you describe the relationship between CSC and Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
21. What channels of communication currently exist between CSC and Buffalo Sage?
  - a. How well are CSC and Buffalo Sage able to communicate with each other?
22. What types of support are required from CSC for Buffalo Sage to continue to successfully operate?
  - a. What additional supports, if any, are required?
23. What best practices would you provide CSC with respect to the management of women offenders?
24. What best practices would you provide CSC with respect to the treatment of women offenders?
25. Is there anything else that we have not talked about yet today that you think is important to mention?

## Case Study Interview Guide for Offenders at Buffalo Sage Wellness House

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
2. Where did you grow up?
3. Can you tell me a bit about your home community (e.g., was there a lot of violence, gangs, etc)?
4. Can you tell me a bit about your family growing up.
  - a. Did you grow up in a two parent family?
  - b. Do you have siblings?
  - c. Did you ever spend time in foster care?
5. How did you like to spend your time when growing up?
6. When you were younger, did you hang out with friends who would get into trouble with the law?
7. How old were you when you first did drugs or drink alcohol?
8. Would you say that you ever became addicted to drugs or alcohol or had to seek treatment for drugs or alcohol?
  - a. If yes, why do you think you turned to drugs or alcohol?
9. Have you ever had or currently have any mental health diagnoses?
10. Have you ever suffered from mental illness?
11. Have you ever had or currently have any physical illnesses?
12. Have you ever been physical abused?
13. Have you ever been sexually abused?
14. Have you ever been emotionally abused or neglected?
15. When did you become involved in the correctional system?
  - a. Why do you believe that you got into trouble with the law?
16. How many times have you been arrested?
17. How many times have you done provincial time?
18. How many times have you done federal time?
19. Before transferring to Buffalo Sage, where were you doing federal time?
20. What made you want to transfer to Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
21. How do you like Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
  - a. What do you like about Buffalo Sage?

- b. What do you dislike about Buffalo Sage?
- 22. From your perspective, what do you think is the overall philosophy (e.g., values, beliefs) of Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
- 23. From your perspective, can you describe the model used to help women at Buffalo Sage?
  - a. What are your thoughts about the model used at Buffalo Sage?
  - b. What aspects of the model have helped you the most?
  - c. What aspects of the model have helped you the least?
- 24. What was the admissions process like when you came to Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
- 25. What types of programming have you taken part in at Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
- 26. What types of training have you taken part in at Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
- 27. Did you have access to all of the resources that were suggested to you or that you needed?
- 28. What type of healing plan was developed for you at Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
  - a. Was your healing plan helpful or not helpful? Please explain.
  - b. How has staying at Buffalo Sage had an impact on your life?
- 29. How would you describe the relationship between CSC and Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
  - a. How does living at Buffalo Sage Wellness House compare to living at a CSC institution?
  - b. How well did the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) and Buffalo Sage Wellness House communicate with each other when you were being transitioned to the facility?
- 30. What recommendations, if any, would you provide to the people who run Buffalo Sage Wellness House about how to improve the facility?
- 31. What recommendations or advice would you give to CSC with respect to managing women offenders?
- 32. What recommendations or advice would you give CSC with respect to treating women offenders?
- 33. Are you still currently residing at Buffalo Sage Wellness House?
  - a. If not, where do you currently reside?
  - b. If not, are you still on parole?

- c. If not, where do you receive your support from in the community (e.g., family, friends, agencies, etc.)?
  - d. If not, how do you spend your time now that you are back in the community?
  - e. If not, what has helped you the most in keeping out of trouble with the law?
  - f. If not, what advice would you like to provide to women who are still incarcerated?
  - g. If not, what advice would you like to provide to kids at risk in the community?
  - h. If not, how did your time at Buffalo Sage help prepare you for living back in the community?
35. Just before we close the interview, I would like to learn a little bit more about you.
- a. What is your ethnicity?
  - b. Do you have children?
  - c. If so, how many?
  - d. What is your age?
  - e. What is your marital status?
  - f. What is the highest level of education that you completed?
36. Is there anything else that we have not talked about yet today that you think is important to mention?