

2019-2020 Citizen Advisory Committees Annual Report

Overview

One of the principles articulated in the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* is for the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) to involve the public in its operations. Citizen Advisory Committees (CACs), amongst other advisory committees, contribute to CSC meeting its legislated mandate.

Initiated in the early 1960s by citizens to be a bridge between prisons and the communities where they are located, CACs help CSC build stronger links between offenders and the public. They are the eyes and ears of the public in an environment closed off to most of society.

CAC members are citizens appointed to serve on committees in a voluntary capacity. They believe in public safety, the right of all citizens to be involved in the correctional process, and the ability of offenders to become law-abiding citizens.

CACs have three main roles:

- **Observe** – CACs are impartial observers of CSC's day-to-day operations. They help assess if offenders are getting adequate care, supervision, and services. They also ensure that CSC is operating under the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*.
- **Liaise** – CACs listen to public concerns and offer CSC a community point of view on the impact of its policies, programs and services. They also help raise awareness on federal corrections and promote the important work that CSC undertakes to encourage citizens to get involved.
- **Advise** – CACs give independent advice to CSC on its policies, programs and services, and on how it runs correctional facilities. Members visit facilities regularly to meet with offenders, CSC officials and staff.

Summary of membership

During the 2019-20 fiscal year, there were 87 committees with 331 citizens acting as impartial observers and advisors, either within institutions, community correctional centres as well as parole offices. These CAC members also served as liaisons between the various stakeholders as outlined by their mandate (the public, offenders, staff and management).

CAC operates at the same three levels that CSC operates: there is a CAC at the local site level (institution and parole offices), and there are also five (5) regional committees and one national committee. The members of the regional committees, as well as the National Executive Committee, are drawn from the local committees.

The heart and soul of CACs are in the local committees, and they supported by dedicated CSC staff and officials without whom the Committees would not be able to meet their mandate.

At a national level, the committees are represented and supported by the following individuals:

- **National** Chelsea Morrey (NEC Chair)
- **Atlantic Region** Peggy Joiner (NEC Vice Chair) and Sherry Jackson-Smith (CSC)
- **Quebec Region** Anthony Gagnon (CAC), Ingrid Schmidt (CAC), Julie Charest (CSC), and Marjorie Bernard (CSC)
- **Ontario Region** Mark Jowett (CAC) and Jacqueline Edwards (CSC)
- **Prairie Region** Michael Swait (CAC) and Nell Hales (CSC)
- **Pacific Region** Tatiyanna Kolesnichenko (CAC) and Reeta Shandil (CSC)

Thank you to Commissioner Anne Kelly for her continued dedication to Citizen Advisory Committees. We were grateful to have her attend our in-person meeting in February 2020. In addition, we have been well supported by the Communications and Engagement sector at National Headquarters, including Amy Jarrette, Acting Assistant Commissioner, Communications and Citizen Engagement; Katherine Cole, CSC co-chair and Director of Citizen Engagement; along with Lise Jolicoeur, Suzanne Leclerc and Donat Bilomba. In January 2020, we also welcomed Kirstan Gagnon as the Assistant Commissioner, Communications and Engagement.

Summary of 2019-20 Achievements

A survey in January 2020 of CSC staff and CAC members across the country suggests that at a minimum our local committees held over 600 two-hour meetings. Each regional committee has meetings monthly as does the National Executive Committee. A conservative estimate of the number of person hours given by our committees is 1300 hours or over 35 work weeks as volunteer advisors.

During these 600 or so sessions, members have held meetings with inmate committees, shadowed staff, observed programming, participated in CSC educational sessions, organized forums and contributed to formal policy consultation. They organized awareness days that saw members of the general public tour facilities and learn about the programs and processes, in order to assist the public to better understand the correctional process. Other CAC members have spoken to a variety of Service agencies within their communities as well as in classrooms.

At each site, members observe, ask questions and, on occasion, offer advice to CSC management. CAC's continue to work at improving communication with staff as well as management. Prior to the implementation of the Structured Intervention Units (SIUs) in November 2019, they visited segregation units and then began to visit the SIUs.

Our members were constantly educating themselves about the programs and policies of CSC, including the mental health of offenders, aging offenders, employment challenges and opportunities as well as issues around diversity. Each region also addressed specific regional issues during the year, including diverse recruitment initiatives, the offender catalogue, and communications with organizations such as the Canadian Families and Corrections Network.

2019 James A. Murphy Award

Anne Malick, a founding member of the CAC at Nova Institution for Women (Atlantic Region), was presented with the James A. Murphy Award in March 2020. The ceremony was held in the gym at NOVA and attended by RHQ and Nova staff. Anne's family, as well as past and present CAC members, were present to celebrate her contributions.

Challenges and Opportunities

The issues of recruitment and retention were top of mind for all regions during the year as committees continue to lose members and, therefore committees. In 2018-19, CSC reported 80 committees; however, a subsequent review of the data identified that there were in fact 80 sites and 346 members. Therefore, from 2018-19 to 2019-20, CSC gained 7 committees for a total of 87.

The National and Vice Chairs decided to develop a Strategic Plan to assist in the rejuvenation of CACs across the country for five years (2020-2025), whereas the previous strategic plan (2016-2018) was developed by the National Executive Committee (NEC) for the NEC. The NEC, with the assistance of CSC and an outside consultant, designed a number of tools to gather information to inform the plan.

An electronic survey was developed and sent to both CAC members and CSC staff in January and closed early February of 2020. The survey had a satisfying 35% return rate of CAC members. There was also an opportunity for in-person interviews with staff and CAC members across the country. Lastly, CSC conducted an environmental scan, which included a published literature review and outreach to other countries to understand CACs in relation to other citizen participation models.

The National Executive Committee met in person in Ottawa in February 2020 to review the results of these three inputs, and begin the construction of a new Strategic Plan including a revised vision for CACs. A draft of the strategic plan was shared with all National Executive Committee members in March. Given the pandemic, the NEC deferred the rollout until later in the year.

CACs in the public domain

CACs were mentioned in media in 2019-2020:

- Saskatchewan researchers explore impacts of human-animal bond on inmates in new magazine
Accessible online by clicking [here](#).
- [Animal Memories magazine highlights many benefits of animal-assisted interventions with inmates](#)

CACs acknowledged in reports in 2019-20:

- Community Reintegration of Aging Offenders: Gaps in Knowledge Report. Amber Colibaba, Trent University (May 2019). Funding for the report was provided by the Citizens Advisory Committee Kickstarter Grant Community Reintegration of Aging Offenders: Gaps in Knowledge Report. This grant was funded via MOU with Correctional Service Canada (Health Sciences). *Accessible online by clicking [here](#).*

CACs were mentioned on CSC's social media channels in 2019-2020:

- Correctional Service of Canada Citizen Advisory Committees: A citizen-led movement for more than 50 years
Accessible online by clicking [here](#).
- Truro volunteer honoured for her work with Nova Institute for Women
Accessible online by clicking [here](#).
- Interested in #PublicSafety? Looking to #volunteer in a...
Accessible on Twitter by clicking [here](#).
- Thank you to the Citizen Advisory Committee members across the country...
Accessible on Twitter by clicking [here](#).
- The CACs were mentioned in the House of Commons. MP Mark Gerretsen of Kingston and the Islands, ON, recognized...
Accessible on Twitter by clicking [here](#).
- Citizen Advisory Committee members believe in the right of...
Accessible on Twitter by clicking [here](#).
- #DYK that there are close to 400 CAC members volunteering...
Accessible on Twitter by clicking [here](#).

- Thank you to the Citizen Advisory Committee members across the...
Accessible on Facebook by clicking [here](#).

Conclusion

At the end of the 2019-20 year, COVID-19 was declared a national emergency and, on March 13, 2020, this became the context in which CAC had to operate. Commissioner Kelly sent a message to all CAC members seeking their support to maintain their function to observe, liaise and advise as much as possible by virtual means.

CAC members are grateful for the support from CSC at the regional, national and, most importantly, at the local sites that allows us to carry out this important mandate and to contribute to public safety.

Jay Pike, Regional Deputy Commissioner Atlantic Region, sums up what most CAC experience from CSC when he says:

“CSC feels privileged to join forces with our local, regional and national CAC members. Recognizing the CAC role to Observe, Liaise and Advise, we welcome your honest discussions.”