

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

Kwìkwèxwelhp Healing Village: Resident, Elder & Staff Experiences*KHV offers a unique environment that supports the healing journey and reintegration of Indigenous residents.***Why we are doing this study**

There is growing evidence for the relevance of Healing Lodges in providing culturally specific and effective interventions for Indigenous offenders. Through qualitative methods, the goal of the current research is to gain an understanding of the impacts that Healing Lodges have on Indigenous offenders, as well as the challenges that are currently facing the operation of Healing Lodges. This research represents a collaboration between the Research Branch and the Indigenous Initiatives Directorate and aims to provide a more holistic understanding of Kwìkwèxwelhp Healing Village (KHV) through the experiences and perspectives of residents, Elders, and staff.

What we are doing

As part of a larger study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 residents as well as 11 Elders and staff at KHV in February 2020. Interviews were conducted by two members of the research team, each taking approximately thirty minutes to an hour to complete. The interviews focused on the participants' experiences, involvements, and observations at the Healing Lodge.

What we have found so far

From the perspectives of residents, Elders, and staff, KHV is a unique environment that emulates a community and provides a sense of belonging and purpose. The cultural and spiritual environment fostered at KHV rooted in Sts'ailes First Nation traditions encourages residents to engage in their healing journeys and work towards achieving a sense of balance within themselves. The many and diverse range of ceremonies, cultural activities, and opportunities for hobby crafts further support residents in their healing journeys and connection to culture.

Elders are considered the pillars of KHV and essential to its vision, stability, and integrity. For residents, Elders are highly regarded as integral for guiding them through their healing journeys given the knowledge, compassion, and teachings they share. The interactions between residents and staff are open and barrier-free, with staff regarded as particularly approachable, engaged, and genuine in their desire to help residents.

KHV has a strong partnership with Sts'ailes First Nation, providing a reciprocal connection both for the community to be involved with KHV and for residents to get involved in the community. The opportunity to hold joint ceremonies in the longhouse (on the grounds of KHV) is viewed as a sacred privilege by residents. Additionally, the range of Temporary Absence opportunities to the community for residents to attend treatment programs, assist with service work, and attend ceremonies are seen as vital for forming connections and supporting reintegration.

While a holistic, interdisciplinary approach is taken at KHV, there were challenges noted related to hiring and retaining quality staff, given substantial turnover. In addition, with the emphasis on building a supportive relationship with residents, there are challenges with hiring Correctional Officers who embrace the approach of KHV and have the necessary skills for practicing dynamic security.

An additional challenge experienced at KHV is finding balance between the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) policies and Indigenous beliefs, traditions, and practices. For instance, while tobacco is banned from CSC facilities, this is viewed as an impediment to fully engaging in the culture given that it is one of four sacred medicines used as offerings and in ceremonies.

What it means

The impact of the Elder-driven approach is apparent in the effective functioning of this Healing Lodge. In many cases, KHV is instrumental in helping initiate or progress a resident's healing journey and connection to Indigenous identity and culture.

Given that CSC policies are written for minimum-security facilities as a whole, providing KHV and other Healing Lodges with a distinct identity may help address challenges related to the applicability of broader policies to the unique operational demands of Healing Lodges.

For more information

Please e-mail the [Research Branch](#). You can also visit the [Research Publications](#) section for a full list of reports and one-page summaries.

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