

## CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

# Pê Sâkâstêw Centre: Resident, Elder, and Staff Experiences

*While PSC has a positive impact on residents, there remain challenges in providing a traditional healing experience.*

## 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 with the Indigenous Initiatives Directorate and aims to provide a more holistic understanding of Pê Sâkâstêw Centre (PSC) in Mâskwâcîs, Alberta, through the experiences and perspectives of residents, Elders, and staff.

## What we are doing

As part of a larger study, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 residents (Oskapios/Owîcîyîsiwak), as well as 9 Elders and staff at PSC in January 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

PSC provides an environment for offenders to work on themselves as they begin or continue their healing journey and connection to Indigenous identity. The various opportunities for engaging and learning hobby crafts, such as drum and rattle making, beadwork, and star blankets, were identified as particularly valuable for residents. These opportunities benefit the residents through their associated teachings and serve as an avenue for connecting to culture. Beyond hobby crafts, other activities and social programs, including resident and community run-groups help keep residents occupied in a prosocial manner while further assisting them through their healing journey.

Despite some of the unique opportunities available at PSC, residents, Elders, and staff, do not perceive PSC as operating in its full potential as a Healing Lodge that forefronts Indigenous culture and traditions. The security emphasis and infrastructure (e.g., fences, x-ray machine, metal detector) resemble that of higher security institutions

and are not representative of a true traditional healing experience. Additionally, Elders were reported to have little control and input in the operation of the Healing Lodge.

The recent decrease in cultural Escorted Temporary Absences (ETAs) with Elders was identified as an issue given that these opportunities fostered engagement and allowed residents to both assist and participate in community ceremonies. Despite residents signing a Solemn Agreement upon arrival to PSC, there appears to be a lack of accountability, enforcement, or interventions provided for residents who may be complacent and disengaged in their healing journey.

In regards to staff and resident relations, there is an expressed lack of inclusivity and rapport marked by limited staff participation and engagement in ceremonies/events alongside residents. A need for more Indigenous staff, particularly representation from the local community was identified as a necessity within PSC.

## What it means

While there are a number of positive aspects at PSC, gaps were identified in offering a traditional healing experience and promoting an Indigenous way of life. Based on the experiences of residents, Elders, and staff, it is clear that a better balance is required between the security aspects of Correctional Service of Canada and the original vision of the Healing Lodge as an environment guided by Indigenous culture, teachings, and traditions.

The desire to have Elders play a larger role in the direction and decision making of PSC (e.g., in resident selection, operations, consultation) may provide a more stable vision and environment for the Healing Lodge. Further, removing barriers for Elders to take residents on cultural ETAs would be beneficial in preparing residents for reintegration, while exposing them to a sense of community.

## 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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