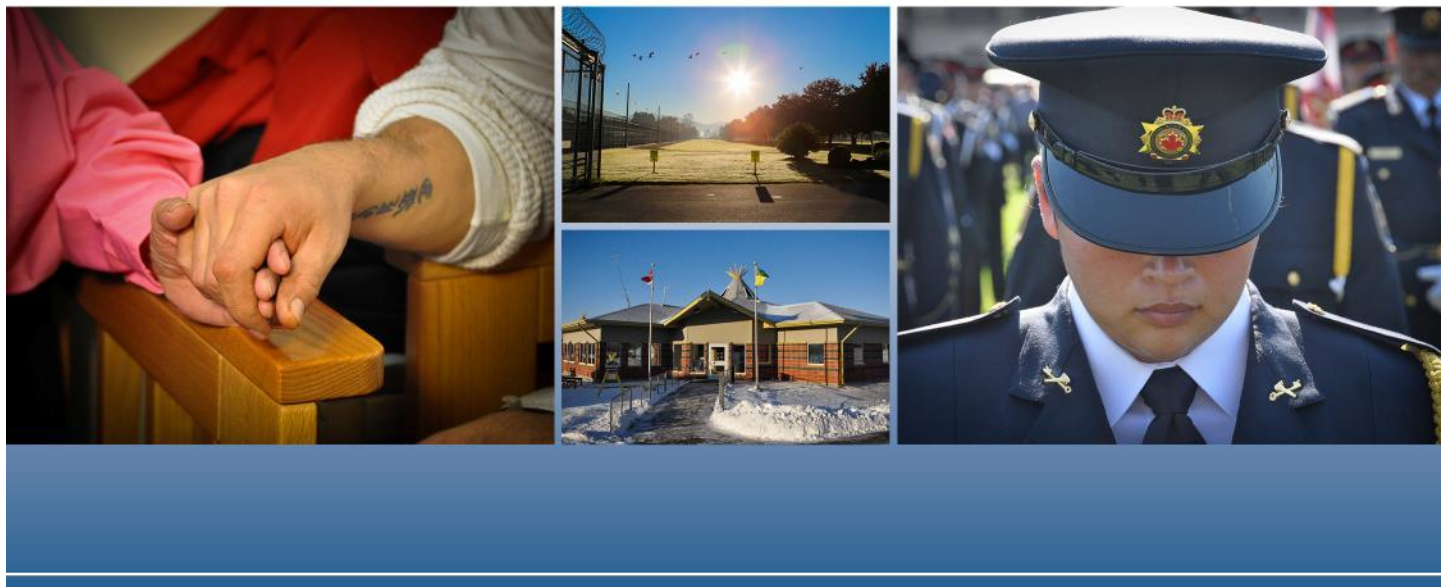


# CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.



## RESEARCH REPORT

### Experiences at Men's CSC-Operated Healing Lodges: A Qualitative Examination

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# **Experiences at Men's CSC-Operated Healing Lodges: A Qualitative Examination**

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2023



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## Executive Summary

**Key words:** *Healing Lodges, Indigenous offenders, residents, experiences, operation*

Healing Lodges are environments that use Indigenous values, traditions, and beliefs to offer culturally-relevant services and programs for Indigenous offenders. The goal of the current research study was to qualitatively examine the experiences at the men's Correctional Service of Canada (CSC)-operated Healing Lodges, in order to gain understanding of the impacts, interventions, and overall operation of these sites.

To capture a holistic and comprehensive understanding, this study entailed site visits and semi-structured individual interviews with residents, Elders, and staff members from across the three CSC-operated Healing Lodges for men; Pê Sâkâstêw Centre (PSC) in Alberta, Kwîkwêxwelhp Healing Village (KHV) in British Columbia, and Willow Cree Healing Lodge (WCHL) in Saskatchewan. In total, interview data was collected and thematically analyzed for 36 residents, 7 Elders, and 22 staff members.

The narratives revealed various opportunities offered within the Healing Lodges for residents, many of which are cultural-specific or weave Indigenous perspectives and approaches. The opportunities include a range of ceremonies, various hobby crafts/cultural activities, national and in-house programming, education/vocational and employment opportunities, as well as different temporary absences. While the amount and breadth of these opportunities varies by Healing Lodge, these opportunities are crucial for keeping residents connected and engaged in their culture and for their transition into the community.

The experiences shared through the interviews further revealed that the environment within the Healing Lodges, which emphasizes Indigenous culture, offers a unique space from mainstream institutions and in turn, allows residents to intricately work on their path towards healing. In particular, the Healing Lodge setting fosters a space for residents to engage in introspection, find balance within themselves, and enable a sense of commitment and accountability. Additionally, the relationships present within the Healing Lodges that residents have between each other, with staff, as well as with the Elders demonstrate a unique dynamic and sense of community.

Finally, the research findings shed light on some of operational challenges and best practices present across the three Healing Lodges, including those related to community engagement, resident profile, and staffing. Notably, despite the prominent benefits of these Healing Lodges, arising as a common challenge across the sites is the merging of CSC policies or practices with the underlying vision of the Healing Lodges as environments guided by Indigenous traditions.

Taken together, the emerging themes and findings highlight the various unique aspects of the Healing Lodges that collectively help guide residents through their healing journeys and support reintegration. While previous quantitative research has demonstrated that Healing Lodges promote safe reintegration (Hanby et al., 2020), this study supports the significance of men's CSC-operated Healing Lodges in offering culturally appropriate approaches that are responsive to the needs of Indigenous offenders.





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## Introduction

In light of the over-representation of Indigenous offenders in Canada's correctional system, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) introduced Healing Lodges as an initiative to address concerns around the applicability of mainstream institutional approaches for Indigenous offenders (CSC, 2019a). Healing Lodges<sup>1</sup> are correctional institutions that use Indigenous values, traditions, and beliefs to offer culturally-relevant services and programs for Indigenous offenders. Healing Lodges are a part of CSC's Continuum of Care of ensuring culturally relevant approaches and interventions are available to Indigenous offenders. There are two types of Healing Lodges: 1) CSC-operated Healing Lodges, which are managed by CSC in cooperation with an Indigenous community, and 2) Section 81 Healing Lodges, which are managed and operated by an Indigenous community or partner organization through an agreement under Section 81 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA, 1992; CSC, 2019b). Despite the long-standing operation of Healing Lodges, the research examining these sites remains largely limited. In particular, there is a gap in the literature looking comprehensively at the different Healing Lodges from a qualitative perspective. This report represents the second phase of research that aims to holistically examine Healing Lodges. With the first phase of research looking at the impact of Healing Lodges on reintegration and community outcomes (Hanby, Ridha, Sullivan, & Farrell MacDonald, 2020), the purpose of the current study is to qualitatively examine the experiences, impact, and overall operation of men's CSC-operated Healing Lodges through the perspectives of residents,<sup>2</sup> staff, and Elders.

There are currently three men's CSC-operated Healing Lodges; Pê Sâkâstêw Centre (PSC), Kwikwêxwelhp Healing Village (KHV), and Willow Cree Healing Lodge (WCHL). Following the recommendation and the development of the first Healing Lodge for Indigenous women (CSC, 1990), PSC opened in 1997 adjacent to Samson Cree Nation, Alberta as the first Healing Lodge for men. KHV was established in 2001 on Sts'ailes First Nation in British Columbia, followed by WCHL in 2004 on Beardy's and Okemasis First Nation reserve in

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<sup>1</sup> There is a broader understanding and conceptualization of Healing Lodges within Indigenous communities across Canada, which offer culturally-specific healing programs. This study focuses on Healing Lodges within a correctional context and encompasses those that identify also as Healing Villages or Centres.

<sup>2</sup> Consistent with the approach and language used at the Healing Lodges, the term 'residents' is used herein to represent the federal offenders who are incarcerated/serving their sentence at the Healing Lodges.

Saskatchewan. Operating through an Indigenous approach, these sites weave cultural-specific teachings and ceremonies into traditional correctional interventions and case management strategies to address the needs of residents. CSC's Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with First Nations communities are intended to ensure commitment to these communities, including Indigenous and local representation among Elders and staff, as well as community involvement through collaboration and support to the Healing Lodges. Benefiting from the spiritual leadership offered by Elders as well as interactions with staff and community members, the primary goal of Healing Lodges is to address the factors that originally led to incarceration, as well as prepare residents for their release into the community. In order to be transferred to a men's CSC-operated Healing Lodge as a resident, one must be classified as minimum-security<sup>3</sup>, be committed to their healing journey and correctional plan, as well as respect the rules and Indigenous approach of the Healing Lodge. While Healing Lodges are designed for Indigenous offenders, non-Indigenous offenders may also be transferred to Healing Lodges under the expectation that they respect traditional healing concepts and demonstrate commitment to participating in Indigenous programs and interventions (CSC, 2018a).

### **Healing Lodges and Correctional Outcomes**

Much of the literature that has examined Healing Lodges employ quantitative research methods to examine correctional outcomes. For example, using a comparison group of Indigenous offenders in mainstream minimum-security institutions, Trevethan, Crutcher, and Rastin (2002) examined release outcomes of 426 CSC-operated and Section 81 Healing Lodge residents released between January 1995 and October 2001. Release types were similar for both groups, as the majority of offenders were released on day parole (53% Healing Lodge residents; 48% comparison group) followed by statutory release (40% Healing Lodge residents; 44% comparison group). Readmission for a new offence was also comparable (6% of Healing Lodge residents; 5% of comparison group). However, when observing long-term outcomes, a higher proportion of Healing Lodge residents (19%) than the comparison group (13%) were readmitted for a new offence. Although this would suggest negative outcomes to be associated with Healing Lodges, it should be noted that Healing Lodge residents were more often rated as high need (64% vs 50%) and high risk to reoffend (53% vs 45%) than those offenders in the comparison

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<sup>3</sup> In rare instances, medium-security cases may be considered for transfer decisions to Healing Lodges (Didenko & Marquis, 2011).

group. Additionally, data was collected during the early development of Healing Lodges, therefore these findings may not be reflective of the current realities of Healing Lodge outcomes.

As part of an evaluation of Healing Lodges conducted by Didenko and Marquis (2011), correctional outcomes of residents in CSC-operated Healing Lodges were examined, which included measures of change in criminogenic needs, rates of discretionary releases, and likelihood of failure while on conditional release. Indigenous men released from CSC-operated Healing Lodges ( $N = 853$ ) between 2000 and 2010 showed greater improvements in six areas of criminogenic need than did a comparison group of Indigenous men released from other minimum-security institutions. In terms of release type, Indigenous residents at CSC-operated Healing Lodges were 0.7 times less likely to be released on statutory release than those released from minimum-security institutions, once controlling for overall need and motivation levels prior to release. Indigenous residents conditionally released from Healing Lodges were as likely to be maintained in the community (i.e., no revocations) as those from minimum-security institutions for men.

Most recently, the first phase of the current research study examined the post-release outcomes of both CSC-operated and Section 81 Healing Lodge residents released between 2013 and 2018 (Hanby et al., 2020). Compared to a matched control group of Indigenous offenders at minimum-security institutions, men Healing Lodge residents ( $n = 614$ ) were higher in static risk at intake, but demonstrated positive changes in motivation level and the Attitude domain of dynamic risk from intake to release. Compared to their counterparts, Healing Lodge residents participated in more Escorted and Unescorted Temporary Absences (ETAs; UTAs) as well as work releases. Despite these efforts at gradual reintegration, Healing Lodge residents were less likely to receive a discretionary release (54% versus 63%). Overall, compared to the control group, Healing Lodge residents had commensurate post-release outcomes in terms of suspensions of release and returns to custody (with or without an offence).

Much of the remaining literature on Healing Lodges employs a case study approach on a single Healing Lodge (Delveaux et al., 2007; Nafekh, Allegri & Li, 2005; Trevethan, Crutcher, Moore, & Mileto, 2008). For instance, Trevethan and colleagues (2008) examined changes in criminogenic needs, as well as post release-outcomes for residents of PSC between 1997 and 2003. Residents showed significant improvements in the criminogenic need areas of personal/emotional issues and substance abuse over the course of their incarceration at the

Healing Lodge. In terms of release type, PSC residents were more likely to be released on day parole (56% vs 45%) and less likely to be released on statutory release (38% vs 46%) than those in the comparison group. Post-release outcomes between groups were comparable, with 17% of PSC residents and 15% of the comparison group returning to custody with a new offence.

Overall, there is growing evidence for the relevance of Healing Lodges in providing culturally-specific and effective interventions for Indigenous offenders. For instance, in their study examining various factors related to offender success in the community upon release, Wardrop and colleagues (2019) found that Indigenous men released from a Healing Lodge were 2.49 times more likely to demonstrate success than their counterparts not released from a Healing Lodge. Although informative, quantitative outcome data may not be sensitive enough to capture all changes experienced by Healing Lodge residents (Trevethan et al., 2008). For instance, while quantitative research methods are useful in examining outcome data, these analyses cannot dive into the experiences and specific aspects of Healing Lodges that impact residents. Given that the focus of Healing Lodges is on traditional healing, changes in terms of greater understandings of, and connections to Indigenous spirituality and culture are expected, yet these are not represented in measures of quantitative post-release outcomes, such as suspensions of release and returns to custody. Therefore, it is important that research examine Healing Lodges more comprehensively, using qualitative research methods to capture the contextual experiences within these sites.

### **Healing Lodge Experiences**

As part of Trevethan and colleagues' (2008) study on PSC, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 residents and 22 staff members of the Healing Lodge. Findings indicated a high degree of satisfaction from residents with their experience at PSC. Staff and residents identified a number of benefits including the importance of spirituality and culture for the impact on the healing journey of the residents. More specifically, cultural teachings, ceremonies, and activities were found to be valuable features of the Healing Lodge, with a particular emphasis on the hobby crafts<sup>4</sup> and cultural events in the community that were made available to residents. Interviews also showed that for 79% of residents, PSC helped them in improving their self-awareness as an Indigenous person, as well as to progress with their healing journey. This is

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<sup>4</sup> "Hobby crafts" is a term used within CSC to denote arts and crafts. At Healing Lodges, the emphasis for hobby crafts would be on traditional Indigenous arts and crafts, such as rattle making or beadwork.



consistent with broader research which has found that Indigenous ceremonies can be transformative in nature for a correctional population, influencing an offender's personal healing, positive self-perception, sense of belonging, self-control, and the ability to trust and care for others (Brault, 2005). Furthermore, the staff-resident relationships appeared to be largely positive, as the majority of residents (73%) stated that they were very satisfied with the staff (Trevethan et al., 2008).

However, some of the issues identified through the interviews were also associated with staffing (Trevethan et al., 2008). For instance, it was noted that there were insufficient funds for Elders, a high level of staff turnover at the management level, and that many staff had little correctional experience, causing them to find the work at PSC to be overwhelming. Additionally, 55% of residents stressed the need for more staff that are Indigenous or that have experience in traditional Indigenous healing approaches. Issues raised from the interviews included a lack of appropriate programs to address the needs of residents, limited resources for program facilitators, and a need for increased support for program delivery. Likewise, some residents expressed concerns about the personal relevance of the Indigenous traditions that were available within the Healing Lodge, as the residents came from diverse Indigenous backgrounds with distinct cultural teachings and ceremonies.

In a subsequent evaluation of Healing Lodges, Didenko and Marquis (2011) examined the other two men's CSC-operated Healing Lodges (KHV and WCHL), along with two Section 81 Healing Lodges<sup>5</sup>. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff ( $N = 36$ ) and residents ( $N = 38$ ) at these sites in 2010. Compared to other institutions, most residents reported improved interactions and positive relationships between staff members (84%), as well as amongst residents (81%). Residents expressed that these relationships helped to shape overall positive environments in the Healing Lodges. The most prominent benefit identified by residents was the availability of cultural support through the guidance and teachings of Elders, ceremonies, and cultural activities. From the perspective of staff, many Indigenous residents were able to open up about past traumas because of their ability to trust and relate to Elders. This is consistent with previous research that has found a statistically significant relationship between the use of Elder services and post-release outcome (Sioui, Thibault, Conseil, 2001; Wilton, Nolan, & Stewart,

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<sup>5</sup> Section 81 Healing Lodges included Waseskun Healing Centre in Quebec and Prince Albert Grand Council Spiritual Healing Lodge in Saskatchewan.

2015). Although most residents (63%) described being satisfied with the availability of Elder services, others mentioned that there was a need for more Elder contact on evenings and weekends (28%). While positive and mutually beneficial relationships were also evident between the CSC-operated Healing Lodges and surrounding communities, 53% of staff reported strengthening community contact and collaboration as an area of opportunity.

To enhance reintegration and healing, both staff and residents felt that increased opportunities for vocational, education, employment, and activities would be beneficial (Didenko & Marquis, 2011). Additionally, many residents (42%) and staff (55%) also underlined a need for improvement in temporary absences, as issues with stability, staffing, and resources were identified. Staff at CSC-operated Healing Lodges also identified discrepancies between CSC policies and the vision or operations of a traditional Healing Lodge. In particular, there was an expressed incompatibility and limited flexibility of some CSC policies with the inclusion of Indigenous culture, such as ceremonial protocols. Staff turnover was also a reported issue within the Healing Lodges. Consistent with findings of Trevethan and colleagues (2008), staff turnover and cultural competency of staff were reported issues, highlighting the need for more Indigenous awareness training and staff participation in cultural and spiritual activities. However, overall findings from the qualitative interviews revealed that almost all residents (97%) expressed that their needs were being met in the Healing Lodge, and that most staff (74%) agreed, stating that the cultural activities and community contact helped to meet the specific needs of residents. Similarly, 82% of residents reported personal growth while in the Healing Lodge, including improvements in areas such as knowledge of Indigenous culture, understandings of their own lives and offences, responsibility and accountability, communication with others, self-discipline, self-confidence, and motivation.

Taken together, these studies underline the influence that Healing Lodges may have on residents' personal growth and connections to culture (Didenko & Marquis, 2011; Trevethan et al., 2008). Given that much of the struggles of Indigenous peoples stem from intergenerational traumas that are largely centered on a loss of cultural identity (Hyatt, 2013), this is important context that can be best captured through qualitative research approaches. Despite the presence of some qualitative research examining Healing Lodges, much of this research is limited as it employs quantitative methodological approaches (i.e., analyzing and reporting on qualitative data numerically or statistically), and thus does not provide nuanced understandings.

Additionally, there remains a gap in the literature comprehensively exploring the experiences, impacts, and overall operation of men's CSC-operated Healing Lodges.

### **Current Study**

This report represents the first of three qualitative reports which will explore the specific experiences of CSC's different Healing Lodges.<sup>6</sup> Previous research has not looked jointly at the impacts and experiences of all men's CSC-operated Healing Lodges (PSC, KHV, and WCHL). Thus, the goal of the current research is to expand on previous findings by using qualitative research methods to gain an understanding of the experiences and impacts that men's CSC-operated Healing Lodges have on residents. In addition, this research aims to identify the types of interventions offered at these sites, such as programming, education, cultural approaches, and available opportunities for temporary absences. The current study also seeks to identify the overall benefits of men's CSC-operated Healing Lodges, as well as the challenges and best practices at these sites. The following research questions will be addressed through semi-structured interviews with Healing Lodge residents, Elders, and staff:

1. What interventions are offered at men's CSC-operated Healing Lodges?
2. What impacts do Healing Lodges have on Indigenous offenders?
3. What are the best practices and current challenges facing the operation of men's CSC-operated Healing Lodges?

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<sup>6</sup> Future research will qualitatively examine women's Healing Lodges separately as well as men's Section 81 Healing Lodges.

## Method

### Participants

To capture a holistic and comprehensive view of the experiences at the men's CSC-operated Healing Lodges, this study entailed interviews with residents, Elders<sup>7</sup>, and staff members from across the three sites. In total, 36 Healing Lodge residents, 7 Elders, and 22 staff members were interviewed. Resident participants included those residing in KHV (30.6%;  $n = 11$ ), PSC (33.3%,  $n = 12$ ), and WCHL (36.1%;  $n = 13$ ). The majority of the residents (88.9%,  $n = 32$ ) self-identified as Indigenous, and more specifically, as First Nations (69.4%,  $n = 25$ ) or Métis (19.4%,  $n = 7$ ). The residents were serving a determinate sentence in 63.9% ( $n = 23$ ) of cases, while the remaining 36.1% ( $n = 13$ ) had indeterminate sentences. For those serving determinate sentences, the mean sentence length was 4.4 years ( $SD = 2.2$ ). Before being transferred to the current Healing Lodge, the mean length of time incarcerated was 1.2 years ( $SD = 1.1$ ) for residents with a determinate sentence and 22.9 years ( $SD = 10.9$ ) for those with indeterminate sentences.<sup>8</sup> Half of the sample was incarcerated in a medium-security institution (50.0%,  $n = 18$ ) prior to transfer to the Healing Lodge, while the other half was in minimum-security (50.0%,  $n = 18$ ). However, 97.2% ( $n = 35$ ) had a minimum-security rating at the time of transfer. While for the majority of residents their current residency represents their first transfer to a Healing Lodge, in a quarter of cases, the residents had previously resided in either the same or a different Healing Lodge (25.0%,  $n = 9$ )<sup>9</sup>. The average length of stay of the residents in the current Healing Lodge at the time of the interviews was 389 days ( $SD = 419$ ), with a range from 11 days to 1811 days.

The mean age of the residents was 43 years ( $SD = 12$ ), and most of the men were single (52.8%,  $n = 19$ ) or married/common law (36.1%,  $n = 13$ ). Most of the participants had moderate (63.9%,  $n = 23$ ) or high (33.3%,  $n = 12$ ) criminogenic need levels at their last assessment. The majority of the residents had high (50.0%,  $n = 18$ ) or moderate (47.2%,  $n = 17$ ) levels of static risk, and a moderate reintegration potential (77.8%,  $n = 28$ ). All resident participants were rated

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<sup>7</sup> Distinct from CSC staff, Elders within the Service are contractors.

<sup>8</sup> In a few cases, the resident had previously been released into the community during the current sentence, but received a suspension or revocation of conditional release. Length of time prior to Healing Lodge transfer was calculated based on the initial Warrant of Committal in all cases.

<sup>9</sup> For policy regarding the transfer of inmates, refer to Commissioner's Directive 710-2 (CSC, 2018b).

as engaged, with a high (72.2%,  $n = 26$ ) or moderate (27.8%,  $n = 10$ ) motivation level, and a high (58.3%,  $n = 21$ ) or moderate (41.7%,  $n = 15$ ) level of accountability.

Across the three Healing Lodges, staff participants represented a range of areas including Indigenous services (e.g., Indigenous Liaison Officer; ILO), programs (e.g., Program Officer/Facilitator, Social Programs Officer, Program Manager), education (e.g., Teacher), employment (e.g., CORCAN instructor), security (e.g., Correctional Officer, Correctional Manager, Security Intelligence Officer), management services (e.g., Chief of Works, Chief of Material Management and Institutional Services and Supplies), and senior management (e.g., Deputy Warden). Elders and staff were located at KHV (37.9%;  $n = 11$ ), PSC (31.0%,  $n = 9$ ), and WCHL (31.0%;  $n = 9$ ).

## **Procedure**

Participants were recruited from KHV (Sts' ailes First Nation, Harrison Mills, British Columbia), PSC (Samson Cree Nation, Maskwacis, Alberta), and WCHL (Beardy's and Okemasis' Cree Nation, Duck Lake, Saskatchewan). This represents all of the men's CSC-operated Healing Lodges. Site visits and interviews were conducted between November 2019 and February 2020. All those residing in these Healing Lodges during the study period were eligible to participate, as well as Elders and staff working at these sites. Purposive sampling<sup>10</sup> was used to recruit a sample of residents, Elders, and staff that were generally representative of the population. Posters outlining the overall purpose of the study were distributed to both the residents and staff in each site at least three weeks prior to the research team's site visit, with the assistance of a designated site contact. Participants were also recruited through announcements at assemblies and resident committees (e.g., Inmate Wellness Committee), staff referral, and directly recruiting participants while on site. Sign-up sheets were provided in advance for participants to sign-up, as well as being able to inform and sign-up with the research team directly—in order to maintain anonymity.

Interviews across the Healing Lodges were conducted in-person during a one-week visit to each site. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted by two members of the research team in private offices at the Healing Lodges, each taking approximately thirty minutes

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<sup>10</sup> Purposive sampling is a non-random sample whereby a specific target population is recruited. Given the nature and objectives of the study, participants entailed individuals who specifically reside or work at a men's CSC-operated Healing Lodge.

to an hour to complete. Prior to commencing the interviews, all participants were provided with a brief verbal explanation of the project and an informed consent form to sign, which described the components of the study. Participants were reassured that participation was voluntary and that confidentiality would be maintained through the removal and nondisclosure of any identifying information (see Appendix A for residents and Appendix B for Elders and staff). Participants were also informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time, and that support services are available in the event they experience distress during or after the interview. Following these clarifications, informed consent was obtained, which included permission to have the interview audio recorded. All interviews were audio recorded, while detailed notes were also taken in the event that the audio recording failed. Following data collection, all interviews were transcribed verbatim by the research team to facilitate data analysis. Transcription, coding, and analyzing were all done using NVivo 10, a qualitative data analysis software package that aids in the management and organization of narrative information.

To identify emerging themes, interviews were thematically analyzed. All interviews were coded by one researcher to ensure consistency in analyses. Responses were grouped and coded into separate themes<sup>11</sup> or categories based on a review of all the interview data. As codes were generated, the emerging themes from the narratives of the participants were organized into main themes and over-arching, organizing categories. Codes were compared to each other to ensure that they were distinct, while those within the same theme were similar. In determining what constituted a discrete theme, effort was taken to preserve the language used by the participants.

## **Materials**

The semi-structured interview protocol was developed for this study based on the research questions and prior research on the Healing Lodges. Specifically, interviews focused on the experiences, services/interventions, as well as the operation of the Healing Lodges. Separate interview guides were created for residents, as well as for Elders and staff in consultation with CSC's Indigenous Initiatives Directorate (see Appendix C for residents and Appendix D for Elders and staff). Residents were asked about their participation/involvement in various interventions and activities (e.g., programs, employment and vocational training, education, hobby crafts and social programs, and temporary absences) and their experiences in each area.

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<sup>11</sup> A theme captures an important element from the data and represents a level of patterned response or meaning that often relates to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Residents were also asked reflective questions about their experience at the Healing Lodge, such as about their transfer, their healing journey, the dynamics, as well their preparations for release. For Elders and staff, questions were more tailored based on their role within the Healing Lodge to obtain a thorough understanding of the different areas (e.g., case management, interventions, security). Elders and staff were asked to speak about their work, experiences and observations from being at the Healing Lodge, the areas that are having a positive impact, as well as on the challenges facing the operation of the Healing Lodge. Questions were listed along with possible prompts or follow-up questions that could be used at the discretion of the interviewers, leaving room for more open-ended or flexible discussions to take place. The interview guides were intended to serve as a reference for relevant topics and questions that may be asked, rather than a strict guide to be followed.

Offender demographic, sentence and risk information was extracted from the Offender Management System (OMS), the automated system used by CSC to store decision-making and offender management data from the beginning of an offender's sentence until the sentence is complete.

## Results

The interviews with the residents, Elders, and staff from PSC, KHV, and WCHL revealed a variety of themes around the overall experience within the Healing Lodges. The results are presented into four organizing themes, many of which reveal the impact that the Healing Lodges have on the healing journeys of the residents. The first section will closely examine some of the opportunities offered within the Healing Lodges, such as the cultural ceremonies and activities, programs, as well as temporary absences. The second section will explore the environment within the Healing Lodges and the impact that it has on residents and their healing journeys. The third section will examine the unique relationships and dynamics present within the Healing Lodges. Lastly, the fourth section will consider the operational challenges and best practices present within these sites. While the results in this study are presented into four organizing sections, the themes are not to be seen as strictly dichotomous. Rather, many of the emerging themes are interconnected in that they contextualize each other and thus, collectively shed light on the overall experiences within Healing Lodges.

### Opportunities

*You got to find something you're going to do, you got to find something you're going to learn or get into... When I first started my sentence, I was just locked up all the time— so you're always in your own head and you start building a lot of emotion that way, frustrations and anger. [Here] at the end of the day, you do learn a lot... you have a lot of good choices, a lot of good options here. (KHV resident)*

Across the Healing Lodges, a range of opportunities are available for residents to engage in. These opportunities include various cultural ceremonies, hobby crafts/activities, programs, education/vocational/employment prospects, as well as temporary absence opportunities. Notably, the narratives of residents, Elders, and staff shed light on the significance of these various opportunities within the Healing Lodges and reveal how they contribute to the cultural connection and overall healing of residents.

**Cultural Ceremonies.** Notably emerging from the narratives of the residents, Elders, and staff are the opportunities offered at the Healing Lodges for residents to take part or engage in Indigenous cultural ceremonies. A diverse range of ceremonies are offered throughout the Healing Lodges, such as: Sweat Lodges, Sundances, Pipe Ceremonies, Smudges, Blanketing ceremonies, Pow Wows, Welcoming and Farewell ceremonies, Tea Dances, amongst many



others.<sup>12</sup> While some ceremonies are held daily at the Healing Lodges, such as morning smudge and prayer, other ceremonies such as Sweat Lodge ceremonies, take place on designated weekdays at the sites. In addition to this, the Healing Lodges organize and support larger ceremonies that occur on scheduled months or occasions, including Change of Season Ceremonies, Sundance Ceremonies, as well as ceremonies that take place in the beginning of each month bringing residents, Elders, and staff together. Notably however, across the Healing Lodges, opportunities for residents to take part and participate in ceremonies are available as they are needed. That is, beyond the scheduled opportunities that are available, Elders across the Healing Lodges commonly shared how they are able to guide and help residents through ceremony whenever there is a need. An Elder at KHV speaks to this as they share the importance of being able to hold ceremonies in this way:

There are times that we bring brothers [residents] in ceremony that have special needs for their trauma, they might be suffering right now...they might come to me and say, “something has come up for me.” So, we do ceremony ... we could do a Smudge...or we could go to the sacred grounds and use the Sweat Lodge, or instruct them to go in the cold water and cleanse themselves [in a Spirit Bath].

Residents across the Healing Lodges commonly shared how their involvement and participation in ceremonies plays an essential role in their connection to their Indigenous spirituality, culture and overall healing. For some residents, attending the ceremonies at the Healing Lodge represents a continuation of their previous engagements, while for many other residents, their connection to culture through ceremonies commenced at the Healing Lodge. As a resident at WCHL shares through his reflections on attending the Sweat Lodge and other ceremonies:

Going to the sweats— I was never familiar with going to sweats ever...The Elders they speak, they do the ceremony, they’re actually giving us knowledge inside the Sweat Lodge. ... At first, I wasn’t taking it serious until I started getting more involved. After that it just became regular to me, like attending the Pipe Ceremonies— I had never been to one ever.

A resident at KHV shares a similar experience with his introduction to the Spirit Baths:

I’ve been doing things I’ve never done before, like doing a Spirit Bath in the morning, every morning I go down and take a Spirit Bath and I’ve never done that before ... I’m really challenging myself to do things I’ve never done, and now ... I love to start my

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<sup>12</sup> While some of these ceremonies are common to all the sites, such as Sweats, other ceremonies are unique to specific sites, given differences in Indigenous teachings and traditions. However, common amongst all ceremonies across the sites are the guidance and leadership of the Elders.

morning with going in that water. It's just everything here is really helping me grow—the ceremonies.

Further to the opportunities to take part in ceremonies and engage in their culture, ceremonies appear to be instrumental in the residents' path towards healing. In particular, residents share how taking part in ceremonies as well as learning and understanding associated teachings helps give a sense of direction and purpose. A resident at PSC speaks to this as he reflects on his engagement with the ceremonies:

Sometimes I can't wait to go to the Sweat, even though it's a week away—I think about it and I get excited as the days come by for the Sweat Lodges, or the Pipe Ceremony. And it's not an excitement, it's just a feeling of doing something that is going to be beneficial for me... you are committing yourself to something that is beneficial—and it's a good thing.

Across the Healing Lodges, Elders reinforced how the teachings associated with ceremonies help give residents clarity as they learn to participate with intention and purpose. An Elder at KHV illustrates this as they speak to the level of dedication and effort observed by residents:

We do a ceremony up on the hill here, we do what we call a fast. The brothers [residents] will go up for four days and give up all the worldly goods—no food, no water for four days, but they go up there with meaning and purpose for why they're going up—they don't just go up and lose weight. ... There's a lot of purpose and meaning for why you do something—it's not just done, there's got to be a purpose to it, and our purpose here is to heal, to make change, and to reintegrate.

More specifically, residents indicated the emotional healing resulting from participating in ceremonies, as they felt there were opportunities to be vulnerable and work through pains. For many of the residents, this was often expressed as opportunities to reconcile heavy feelings of shame, guilt, remorse, and grief. As a resident at PSC shares, “The way I look at it is if I'm carrying excess baggage, you know emotional or just issues in the facility, then I'll go to the Sweat and I use that to help me move past it.” Specific to KHV, many residents view the opportunity to practice ceremonies in the longhouse, and often alongside community members, as a sacred privilege and source of energy.<sup>13</sup> The opportunity to take part in the various ceremonies is expressed as a cleansing experience and a release valve for many residents. At KHV, residents indicate that the Spirit Baths are especially beneficial in this regard and for

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<sup>13</sup> The longhouse is a sacred space common amongst some Indigenous cultures, including where ceremonial events are customarily conducted. KHV's longhouse is recognized as the fifth longhouse on the traditional territory of Sts'ailes First Nation, and is the only longhouse within a CSC institution.

allowing them to feel grounded and connected to nature. In speaking to this, a resident at KHV explains:

I can swim in there, like literally swim against the current, so letting go a lot of pain in there too, a lot of hurt. When you address the honour of the land, you know you connect with Mother Earth, you connect with yourself and it's just like a transcending experience, there's really no words for it, it's a feeling right.

Given the value that ceremonies hold in connecting residents to their Indigenous spirituality, culture and path of healing, residents often expressed how participating in ceremonies is a spiritual practice that they desire to continue once they are out in the community. Residents emphasized the importance of their continued involvement in order to further their path of living an Indigenous way of life, maintaining a cultural connection, and for some residents, passing those traditions on to their families. As a resident at WCHL shares, "There is a lot that I'm going to take back with me. There's a lot that I've learned here—like the cultural ... I can take back the smudging—smudge with my family."

While the narratives of the residents reveal that the ceremonies are evidently instrumental and resonating with them, several residents stress the need to increase the diversity in the ceremonies offered at the Healing Lodges. That is, with ceremonies practiced at the Healing Lodges being generally guided by the teachings or traditions of the associated Elders and First Nations community, some residents note that they do not identify with all the ceremonies, given differences in Indigenous backgrounds and teachings. For example, ceremonies observed at WCHL and PSC are generally guided by Cree teachings, while those at KHV are generally more common to Sts'ailes First Nation. In reflecting on his experience with the teachings and ceremonies offered at the Healing Lodge, a KHV resident shares:

This is all new to me, like the cultural stuff is not new to me, but out here all the stuff they do is way different from how we do stuff in [location]. Where I am from, the Pow Wows are different, there's no spirit baths, there's no longhouses—so this is all new to me, but I find it all very interesting.

Several residents and staff across the Healing Lodges expressed an added value in providing different Indigenous ceremonies or cultural practices that are reflective of the diverse Indigenous resident population (e.g. Cree, Ojibway, Coast Salish). Through this, residents can access traditional knowledge and Indigenous services that are reflective of their own identity, and in turn, more specific to their distinct needs.

As a way of offering a range of ceremonies from various Indigenous traditions, residents

and staff shared a desire for more opportunities to have visiting Elders come to the Healing Lodges. The opportunities to have visiting Elders who carry different Indigenous teachings can be seen as an avenue for diversifying the ceremonial opportunities and traditions that residents can connect with. As a staff at WCHL notes, “I think it would be nice to have more ceremonies, a broader spectrum of ceremony, visiting Elders that could come and provide those ceremonies to the men.” Nevertheless, despite variations, residents find the ceremonies offered at the Healing Lodges to be beneficial in enhancing their spirituality and contributing to their healing. As a resident at PSC summarizes, “For [Indigenous] ceremonies there is no wrong way, it’s a spirituality thing, you got to be open to the way they’re taught, listen to their views, understand where they’re coming from...there is no wrong way.”

**Hobby Crafts and Cultural Activities.** Further to the ceremonies, other notable cultural opportunities highlighted at the Healing Lodges are hobby crafts. As noted through the narratives of the residents, Elders, and staff, hobby crafts are also valuable for the residents’ cultural connection and healing journeys. There are various opportunities for engaging and learning cultural hobby crafts, such as drum and rattle making, beading, star blankets, tipi making, as well as a range of carving and woodwork activities. These opportunities were expressed as being particularly accessible at PSC and KHV.

For some residents, engaging in hobby crafts helped bring them back to a place of cultural connection. A PSC resident sheds light on how the involvement in hobby crafts helps motivate some residents to become more involved and engaged in other aspects of their culture, “I think the guys that get excited about the hobby crafts, I see them more at the Sweats, at smudge in the morning— you know, it lights a spark.” Importantly, commonly emerging from the narratives of the residents is the spiritual and healing experience associated with taking part in cultural crafts. This was often noted as providing residents with a creative outlet to heal and work through their emotions. As a resident at PSC further explains:

I like to stay busy crafting making things, it gives me a good way to kind of work out my emotions. To me, hobby craft had been apart of my healing journey. I know that you are allowed to do hobby craft in Bowden [Institution], but it’s very controlled there, it’s very structured and limited in what you can and can’t do... I honed on my skills crafting—and to me, that’s a healing thing, to create and to make.

Notably, opportunities are available and supported for residents at the Healing Lodges to learn about different hobby crafts and cultural items from one another, such as the making of

rattles and drums, as well as wood carving. In many of these processes, residents expressed how they are able to reflect and build understandings of their culture, given that cultural items carry sets of meaning and teachings. For example, a PSC resident illustrates the process of teaching other residents to create drums:

The drum teaching usually takes about 45 minutes, maybe an hour. I'll talk about what I've learned and what I know, maybe some history about the drum, some stories that I picked up along the way. It's a little different every time. And then we cut up the face, cut up the flaking, they soak, and then a few days later we come back and I show them how to put it together... its been a way to share what I know and what I've been given in a cultural way. And it has been healing for me and healing for some of the others too.

Moreover, the engagement and teaching of the hobby crafts contributes to the growth of residents through their discovery of their own personal talents and strengths. For many of the residents, this is associated with a sense of pride and accomplishment. In reflecting on the woodwork and carving skills he has developed, a resident at KHV shares:

I picked it up all here. I didn't know how to read a tape measure before I came here. So I went to the hobby shop one day and asked if I could build a box, and the guy that was working here showed me how to make a box. One box and then that was it, I was gone—doing boxes, drum frames, plaques, tables. My knowledge just kept growing.

While the narratives of the residents highlight the relevance of opportunities to create hobby crafts and cultural items, many residents also shared having great appreciation for being able to donate items they create for giveaway items at celebrations and ceremonies. This was frequently expressed as a valuable opportunity to give back to the community and further connect with their Indigenous, traditional way of life. A resident at KHV speaks to this:

I'm a carver. I carve spiritual things not for money, but for giving it, because I know it will come back to me when I struggle. Those things will all come back, and if that's the way I feel, that's the way I look at things. ...that's my own— my spiritual thing; like you carve and you do, you give out— that's the way we do things the spiritual way.

Beyond hobby crafts, there are other cultural activities at the Healing Lodges that were identified as assisting residents in connecting to their culture, as well as forming connections with others. This was evidently the case for the tipi making projects at PSC, as well as the drumming and singing groups observed at the Healing Lodges. In speaking of the drumming groups, a KHV staff member explains:

From 11:30 to 12:00 daily whoever wants to, we go in the longhouse and we drum, drum and sing a few songs for half an hour. So, it's good because people practice, and it brings that community feeling because it's staff and residents—it's not just residents. So, all

those little things, same idea with the Thursday night we have drum practice.

While opportunities for residents to engage in hobby crafts and cultural activities appears to be fruitful at PSC and KHV, the narratives that emerged from WCHL suggest limitations in this regard. In particular, WCHL residents, Elders, and staff expressed limited opportunities and available support for hobby crafts initiatives. While there are some barriers noted by residents in having the appropriate resources to make hobby crafts, such as access to materials, it appears that the absence of an assigned and designated Social Programs Officer at WCHL at the time of data collection was the main contributing factor to the limited opportunities. Many residents, Elders, staff expressed the need for this position to be filled in order for hobby crafts and cultural activities to be facilitated and gain more prominence at the site, particularly given residents interest in engaging in such activities. As an Elder noted:

We don't have a Social Programs Officer, we should have one, this place lacks that... we have a lot of people [residents] here that have skills... In terms of making drums, making hobbies, bead work, and leather work—we're not equipped for that. That's one area that is really needed.

While some efforts are in place for star blanket making and beading, many of these opportunities were done independently by the residents. As such, residents at WCHL further reinforced the need for a Social Programs Officer. Speaking of the process of taking part in hobby crafts, a resident at WCHL shares: “We have catalogues and stuff to order from. I think it would be a lot easier with a SPO [Social Programs Officer].” In turn, the limited support appeared to make it difficult for some residents to connect with their culture through the avenue of hobby crafts and cultural activities.

**Other Activities.** Beyond cultural hobby crafts and activities, across the Healing Lodges there appear to be meaningful opportunities for residents to engage in other activities, such as leisure and recreational activities. Residents and staff highlighted numerous activities that help keep residents engaged, such as sports tournaments, skating, music bands, card and chess tournaments, book clubs, writing activities, as well as book and movie rentals through the library. While many of these activities are supported by staff members or volunteers from the community, the narratives across the Healing Lodges highlight the prominent role the Resident Wellness Committees have in supporting many of the activities available at the sites.<sup>14</sup> These

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<sup>14</sup> Nîcisân Wellness Committee (NWC) at WCHL; Owîcîyîsîw Wellness Committee (OWC) at PSC; Resident Wellness Committee (RWC) at KHV.

committees help raise funds for various resources needed to implement activities, such as music and sports equipment. A resident illustrates the value of the Nîcisân Wellness Committee at WCHL:

Basically we put on fundraising to help pay for our cable bill, sports equipment, social meals, stuff, whatever we need to spend money on. We just spent three grand on weight equipment, and that was basically all due to fundraisers that we do.

Thus, these residents-run committees help to create various outlets to keep residents occupied in meaningful ways. Similarly, a PSC resident speaks to the way in which funds for activities are raised through the Owîcîyîsîw Wellness Committee:

We build tipis from 6 foot to 30 foot. So the OWC, which is the committee, we get funds from selling these tipis. So, we go buy a roll of canvas, it comes in, we build tipis, and they sell it to whoever and that goes into the OWC account...And I would never want this to stop, because it's also a good skill.

While many of the activities and initiatives are common across the Healing Lodges, there are varying or unique opportunities available at each site. For example, residents at PSC commonly noted the extensive collection of books and movies available for rent through the Healing Lodge library, while bee keeping was expressed as a unique opportunity for residents at KHV. While each site has different activities in place, residents voiced the value of staying occupied, rather than having too much idle time, especially in the evenings and on weekends. A KHV resident reflects on the importance of keeping himself occupied in order to remain inspired and motivated while incarcerated:

It's kind of like living Groundhog Day over and over and over again. So you have to try to find different things to you know, keep your interest. For me obviously the carving is a big one. But I also try to read anything educational, Scientific America, National Geographic.

Evidently, the narratives of the residents reveal that the availability of meaningful pastimes is highlighted as a way to keep busy, and invoke feelings of productivity. However, common amongst the experiences of WCHL residents, many identified challenges regarding the accessibility of activities given the extended renovation and repair closure of the multi-purpose recreational area, the Tawow building, at the time of data collection. As such, residents at WCHL expressed a challenge in keeping busy on evenings and weekends. A resident of WCHL speaks to the consequences of lacking activities to engage in, "You know especially when it comes to us keeping ourselves busy. That's what got us in here is not having enough to do or you

know...our addictions and everything else. It's those idle hands." Given the closure of the Tawow Building, which housed the library, pool table, music room, amongst many others resources, residents also noted challenges over the availability of space to engage in leisure activities or pass times. With the only indoor recreational space accessible for use being the gym area, a WCHL resident speaks to this challenge:

You basically just have to find a little corner in the gym to play. Either that, or you try to play in the weight room—take a table and chairs in the weight room and try to keep out of the way, but if there's too many people in there...you know. The building they're renovating basically has to be fixed...to socialize.

While circumstantial and temporary, the prolonged closure of the multi-purpose Tawow building appears to have further exacerbated the limited leisure and socialization activities for residents at WCHL.

**Programs.** Across the Healing Lodges, significant opportunities are available for residents to participate in programs. In order to address the risk factors and needs of residents, all the Healing Lodges deliver the Indigenous Integrated Correctional Program Model (IICPM), CSC's national correctional program for Indigenous offenders.<sup>15</sup> The IICPM is viewed as instrumental as it targets factors linked to offending through an Indigenous lens and the consideration of intergenerational impacts, childhood trauma, cycle breaking, and substance abuse. Residents across the Healing Lodges often noted that taking part in the IICPM at the Healing Lodge aided them in their progression in their healing journey. A PSC resident demonstrates his understanding of the importance of cycle breaking and his increased sense of self-awareness when describing his experience with the IICPM within the Healing Lodge:

It's a good program, I learned a lot, I learned a lot about myself and a lot about why I am the way I am. I never knew that intergenerational impacts affected me because I didn't grow up in a home with a lot of booze or a lot of drugs, I never grew up like that, but now I know where my grandparents are coming from—like residential school...Ya, it's about cycle breaking, you know how to break the cycle.

While the IICPM is not unique to the Healing Lodges, residents and staff commonly shared the advantage of availability of these programs at the sites. Notably, residents often shared that they were able to participate in the IICPM soon after their initial transfer to the

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<sup>15</sup> WCHL, PSC, and KHV all deliver the IICPM multi-target and sex offender streams (commonly at moderate intensity levels), as well the primer and maintenance program components. For details about the IICPM please refer to Commissioner Directive-726 (CSC, 2018c).



Healing Lodge, which many contrasted to their previous experience of often being waitlisted and unable to participate at mainstream CSC institutions. Additionally, different from programs at other institutions, staff and residents note that participant groups at the Healing Lodges are often smaller. While these programs may run with fewer than ten residents, which may be standardly seen as operating under-capacity, staff across the sites note that program delivery in this way is inevitable given the smaller resident population in comparison to other institutions. While some staff note that program delivery with smaller groups can create a challenge for broader discussions to take place, some residents appear to appreciate the smaller group setting with others who are in a similar place in terms of motivation and engagement. As a resident at WCHL shares:

[Being] able to talk in smaller intimate groups is a betterment. It really is. Instead of having ten plus guys in one room—it doesn't work—and I get really antsy when there's that many people in a room. Having you know eight people in a room, perfect. You're able to talk, you're able to become more vocal, you're able to contribute something, you're able to bring something back with you, so that's a good focus to have.

Despite the availability of IICPM at the Healing Lodges, many residents shared that they completed their required correctional programs prior to their transfer to the Healing Lodges. This appears to be the case particularly amongst those residents who are serving longer sentences or otherwise have spent significant time at other institutions prior to their transfer. As such, emerging from the narratives of staff, residents, and Elders, these instances highlight the importance of supplementary in-house programs at the Healing Lodges.

Both WCHL and KHV operate in-house programs, which are culturally-based programs unique to the sites and are designed by staff or Elders. In-house programs are commonly viewed as beneficial because they are designed specifically for the populations of the Healing Lodges, and therefore address the unique challenges faced by Indigenous residents. Unlike the national correctional programs, these programs are more specialized in that they target particular areas of need. Notably, WCHL offers a range of in-house program opportunities for residents to take part in, such as programs on grief, traditional parenting, substance abuse, anger management, family violence, amongst many others. Both staff and residents emphasize the significance of such in-house programs as not only are they culturally-based, but they provide avenues for residents to work on particular aspects of their healing. As a WCHL staff explains:

With the in-house programs we can adapt it and it's very flexible— so we can kind of adapt it to our target group, whatever that may be...The thing with the multi-target

[correctional] programs for example, is they're not just focused on say substance abuse. You talk about substance abuse, you talk about violence, you talk about all of these different benchmarks, but you only talk about an area just to a certain extent.

Many of the residents shared an appreciation for in-house programs as they were seen as essential for their healing. For example, a WCHL resident speaks to the influence that the grieving program had on his journey:

The grieving program, it teaches you how to cope and how to bring out your feelings, like a lot of people grieve differently with maybe their wife or a lot of times families break up, families split up... So, it kind of works hand in hand— if you don't work on yourself to talk about your loss with your partner it becomes bottled up and it's like a time bomb, it explodes and it harms the family. It doesn't only harm two of you, the one person, or both of you, it effects the whole family. The whole family's hurt now because of grief.

Another resident shares a similar experience as he reflects on his involvement in the anger management program available at WCHL and the role it had in better understanding himself:

The anger management [program] really dealt with a lot of the traumas, the ineffectual traumas that get you to where you're at, you know what triggers you to become in grieving and everything else. What I thought was anger was actually just my hurt.

The significance of in-house or alternative programs also commonly emerged from the narratives of residents, Elders, and staff at KHV. Reflecting on his experience with the respectful relationships and basic healing program run by Elders at KHV, a resident explains:

I found them helpful. Just learning how to do stuff in the right way. You know like expressing my emotions, talking about them. Before jail, I had no family, so I had to learn everything on my own which wasn't right. I didn't express my problems, I didn't express what was wrong, I just kept it all in. The Elders... [are] able to put the words to the emotion, or to the thoughts and feelings.

In addition, many residents at KHV expressed positive experiences and value in their opportunity to take part in the Change of Seasons program. Organized and delivered by an Elder, this program, which was designed for Indigenous men, deals specifically with domestic violence and violence towards women. The significant involvement of Elders in this way is viewed as especially valuable as they are able to weave teachings and traditions into the program. Notably, the two-week Elder orientation program available at KHV was routinely shared as being valuable for integrating residents into the Healing Lodge. As an Elder at KHV shares:

They [the residents] have to get to know the place and get to know us, so they come to see all of us everyday if they can for those two weeks. They're reinforcing their commitment to the reason why they came here and so they get to get used to their

surroundings. Some of them when they get here they are mesmerized by what they're coming to. Sometimes it feels overwhelming because some of them say, "I don't know if I can trust myself," because they're always so used to being behind fences and gates and everything.

Evidently, in-house programs supplementary to mainstream correctional programs at the Healing Lodges offer valuable opportunities for residents. As such, offering resources to support or develop such programs may be seen as area of opportunity for PSC, particularly given the previous availability of an Elder-run grief program as well as the expressed interest amongst staff, Elders, and residents. In particular, these unique programs, while contributing to the healing journey of residents and their connection to culture, also appear to offer opportunities for reintegration. As expressed by some staff and residents at KHV and WCHL, select residents who are deemed low-risk do not have the opportunity to participate in correctional programs because they are not referred or required to do so<sup>16</sup>. As such, in these instances, the alternate, in-house programs available at Healing Lodges for residents to engage in and learn from become particularly noteworthy. As staff member at WCHL explains:

I'll just use sex offender because it's one of those you know kind of labels that individuals get. When they run the guys through the system, there's the potential that they come out as no programming, even though they've been convicted of a sexual offence. That being said, they're also, when they go up for parole, well they're seen as a sex offender that has had no treatment, so an untreated sex offender so what's the likelihood that they're going to get paroled? So, we have the in-house programs.

Beyond these program opportunities, across the Healing Lodges there are also a number of resident-run programs, such as the Wellbriety program<sup>17</sup>, in addition to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), and Narcotics Anonymous (NA), which address substance abuse. Many residents expressed an appreciation for the availability of these programs to address their struggles and journeys communally. Many of these programs entail residents organizing and facilitating weekly meetings amongst each other. Although these program meetings are appreciated, some residents noted the enhanced benefits for opportunities to attend AA and NA program meetings in the community.

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<sup>16</sup> Consistent with the literature and with the Risk-Need-Responsivity model of offender rehabilitation indicating that the intensity of services should be proportionate to an offender's risk to reoffend, low-risk offenders are not referred to correctional programs (Andrews, Bonta & Hoge, 1990; Bonta & Andrews, 2007; Nolan & Stewart, 2017)

<sup>17</sup> The Wellbriety program is a 12-step cultural program for sobriety originating from the US.

**Education, Vocational Training, and Employment.** There is an emphasis on education in the Healing Lodges, as residents are encouraged to engage and complete Adult Basic Education, and are provided various avenues for doing so. Options include completing a high school equivalency test, taking vocational training courses for credits, or taking traditional high school courses. Residents working towards completing their education or are enrolled in school at the Healing Lodges are often doing so on a part-time basis (e.g., mornings or afternoons) to accommodate their enrollment in programs, which are given priority. Notably, residents commonly indicated an appreciation for opportunities to achieve their high school diploma and educational goals, especially in preparing them for their release. A resident of PSC speaks to this:

I've done math, well actually I did two math, trying to get my calculus done right now and I finished my Social, did my English—just stages, moving up you know, trying to get ready for when I get out so I could pursue post-secondary or something; get back on the right track.

Evidently from the experiences of the residents, the teachers across the Healing Lodges offer extended support for residents interested in applying or pursuing post-secondary education. While some residents are enrolled in post-secondary courses or programs while at the Healing Lodge, these opportunities are self-guided and often limited, particularly given restrictions to internet access and technology, which can present barriers. However, residents often shared that there are more educational support and opportunities within the Healing Lodges than at other institutions. This is largely due to partnerships between the Healing Lodges and educational institutions in the community, such as the Inside Out Prison Exchange Program at KHV where students from Kwantlen Polytechnic University learn together alongside residents.

Importantly, teachers at the Healing Lodges recognized the particular challenges associated with school for many of the residents. They spoke to the importance of providing a safe and understanding environment for residents to attain their education given past traumas and experiences with residential schools. As a staff member at WCHL explains:

I have to take into consideration what experiences they had with school systems, which normally would've been negative, and my goal is to try to get them to accomplish something. So, I've got guys in there who went through residential school, I've had guys who didn't even want to set foot in the classroom...So it's all about making the guys feel comfortable within the environment that we're in. We're also getting them ready for the outside which I think is crucial that they become more and more accustomed to a regular classroom setting, what it's like, and that they're adults, not kids.

As such, there is a holistic approach taken to education within the Healing Lodge, which often includes the acknowledgment of the trauma that may be associated with school for some of the residents. A teacher at KHV highlights the importance of integrating all aspects of the healing journey in the classroom:

I have to get them to focus not only on their schooling but on their healing plan.... I try to connect education with programs, with culture, with spirituality and with living on the outside beyond the bars and living inside behind the bars.

Further to education, many opportunities for vocational programs are available at the Healing Lodges, which are largely focused on skill development and training within the trades. Examples of these opportunities include programs for chainsaw safety, forklift and skid steer, fire safety, first aid, as well as cultivating skills in areas such as grounds maintenance, horticulture and construction. Residents and staff highlighted the value of offering relevant vocational and job training, particularly when residents are able to attain tickets (i.e., certificates), which can benefit them in securing employment once they are out in the community. Unique to WCHL and PSC, there are opportunities for residents to participate in training programs and courses through CORCAN.<sup>18</sup> These offerings include operations related to carpentry and construction and were similarly regarded as valuable for attaining appropriate skills for post-release employment. As a resident at WCHL shares:

I am going to take what I've learned here back with me. There's actually a lot that I've learned here... I've learned more than I used to know. My supervisor...he actually showed me a lot of quick safe ways to use the machines, like the power saws and what not. ... I've gained most of the experience and now I'm showing the other guys how to use the power tools, how to paint and what not...They just pretty much prepare you for a job.

Further to reintegration, instructors for vocational and job training at the Healing Lodges aim to have residents recognize the relevance of these opportunities for their healing journey. As a staff member at PSC describes:

There needs to be emphasis on the importance of vocations here—because in a Healing Lodge... it's supposed to be showing the best parts of culture,...but smudging and going to Sun Dances every single day doesn't pay the bills. And I'm coming at this from a cultural standpoint ...because the guys [residents] they need that purpose, that sense of spirituality, but I see how vocations also holds them accountable... I try to teach that... to show them that there's a golden carrot to having a trades ticket and maintaining a job

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<sup>18</sup> As a Special Operating Agency within CSC, CORCAN offers employment and employability skills training for those incarcerated, and for brief periods of time after release.

because it gives you freedom to do other things like go to the gym, like smudge, doing prayer— because now you can put food on the table.

Across the Healing Lodges, opportunities are available for residents to apply their training skills and engage in service work in the local communities, such as helping out with renovations, repairs, and building. These opportunities are viewed as particularly valuable as they provide residents avenues for reintegrating into the community as well as gaining hands-on experience in applying their skills.

Beyond education and vocational training opportunities, employment opportunities within the Healing Lodges are considered important for preparing residents for release. Aspects of the employment process are viewed as valuable in preparing residents for job opportunities once they are out in the community. Many residents indicated that the employment procedures being similar to those outside of the Healing Lodge were important in exposing them to real world endeavours and preparing them for release. For instance, a PSC resident provides detail on the job application process at the Healing Lodge:

You have the option to apply. It's just like the real world, you can apply for a different job if you like, there is an application for it. You fill it in, you talk with the facilitator of whatever job posting, and if you're a good fit you just transfer that way. And that's a great part of this place is it's a lot like the real world. Something to get used to, right?

Residents also indicated having opportunities to prove themselves and earn more desirable jobs, as well as switching to different work positions every few months, giving them chances to experience diverse work opportunities and gain a wide variety of skills. Examples of occupations at the Healing Lodges include operating the canteen, food services, services and supplies, working at the library, maintenance work, cleaning, and tutoring. As such, job opportunities within the Healing Lodges operate similarly to those outside in the community, as individuals have options for different shifts, are expected to perform duties and maintain a schedule, as well as establish an earning.<sup>19</sup>

Notably, there are also a number of cultural-specific employment possibilities for residents at the Healing Lodges. These are recognized as particularly valuable, as they provide individuals with a further opportunity to connect with their culture, while developing culturally-relevant skills. Jobs such as building tipis, carving, working in the longhouse, taking care of the

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<sup>19</sup> Payment levels and allowances are in accordance with the applicable criteria identified in Commissioner's Directive-730 (CSC, 2016).

Sweat Lodge, or working in the hide room were underlined as valuable cultural-specific employment opportunities for residents. Beyond the cultural employment opportunities, residents commonly indicated that having a job that is meaningful and gives them purpose is particularly important. A KHV resident speaks to his experience working in the longhouse at the Healing Lodge: “[I] wake up at six in the morning and start the fires, and just keep it clean. I feel really connected to this job, just because of my own spiritual journey coming here. I just put really good energy into the work I do when I’m in there.”

One of the challenges identified at WCHL with regards to resident employment at the Healing Lodge is that there are limited job opportunities available. Staff and residents recognized that some residents are asked to do jobs that appear to be put in place to simply keep them busy, rather than giving them opportunity to contribute meaningfully. A resident of WCHL expresses his observations about the realities of employment at the Healing Lodge:

I know there’s a real shortage of jobs here right, like there’s 64 guys here and there’s probably only 40 real jobs. The rest of it is kind of just made up shit that they do. So I don’t know what the thing is, I like a job where I have to go there and do something that helps [with] your time, it’s time management right.

This challenge seen in employment opportunities is further highlighted by staff. As a staff member at WCHL explains:

When it comes to employment, I’m finding we don’t have enough jobs for the amount of men coming in, so I have to do some creative thinking sometimes—like okay, for two days you’re working there and then let’s figure this out. So, it’s really hard sometimes – well where are we going to put this guy? He needs to get paid, he needs to have an income coming in, that’s priority but what is he going to do?

**Temporary Absences.** Across the Healing Lodges, opportunities for residents to go out to the community were underlined as a vital aspect for the residents’ healing journeys and overall reintegration. These opportunities, most often presented as Escorted Temporary Absences (ETAs) and Unescorted Temporary Absences (UTAs) provide residents with various avenues for engaging in work, taking part in programs, and attending ceremonies in the community. Common amongst the Healing Lodges are ETA and UTA opportunities for residents to take part in service work to assist the local community. This includes a range of community service tasks, such as shovelling, digging graves, grass cutting, splitting wood, as well as performing a range of general maintenance and building tasks. Residents routinely spoke of the value of being able to service the community and “give back” in meaningful ways. Some residents further expressed

the sense of accomplishment and gratitude they experience knowing they are helping out the community.

Different approaches are taken at the Healing Lodges to facilitate and organize these community service opportunities. At WCHL there are a group of residents that are designated community workers. The community workers are rotated between residents every couple of weeks in order to provide more residents the opportunity to participate. At KHV these opportunities are particularly notable given the presence of a Cooperative Program Board where representatives from the Sts'ailes First Nation coordinate community service projects for the residents to participate in. A KHV resident describes the numerous ways residents are able to take part in helping and assisting the local community:

There's been so many things, help with the elderly... We go do wood, we build the little sheds so they can store their wood; we help in every sense of the word. We help set up for ceremony, we help like today—we have three men going out to dig a burial site for someone who passed away in Sts'ailes community. I've never had that privilege yet but I mean I would at any moment.

Opportunities for KHV residents to contribute to community service work are not limited to those in the local community. Rather, there are further opportunities that extend beyond this, such as temporary absences to Emma's Acres.<sup>20</sup> Residents highlighted the value of their involvement with Emma's Acres, as it offers an opportunity for them to engage in meaningful agricultural work, as well as give back to the community and to victims. Given that the garden is sustained by formerly incarcerated volunteers, Emma's Acres also serves as an opportunity for residents to form connections for helpful resources and support networks upon their release. A KHV staff member speaks to the relationships between residents and community members working at Emma's Acres:

There's strong relationships with the guys too so and they have that continuity and that continuum because they do work with a lot of guys once they're released right. So definitely, they provide that again like that extension of "we support you while you're here and we're here for you when you're out also", but very much like "don't mess around, like straighten out right."

Beyond community service work, commonly shared across the Healing Lodges are the opportunities that temporary absences provide for residents to engage in cultural ceremonies and

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<sup>20</sup> Emma's Acres is a garden managed by the Long-term Inmates Now in the Community (L.I.N.C.) society.



activities in the community. Attending and assisting with ceremonies in the community through ETAs and UTAs are seen as especially valuable, as residents are provided an avenue to give back to the community, interact and form connections with others, as well as benefit from ceremonial practices that may not be offered within the Healing Lodges. While cultural temporary absences are common to all the Healing Lodges, these opportunities are particularly abundant at KHV given the close partnership with the local community of Sts' ailes First Nation. Residents at KHV shared how they are frequently invited to ceremonies taking place in the community longhouses. A KHV resident highlights the value that these opportunities can offer for residents:

I had my spiritual awakening down below in Sts' ailes in one of their longhouses. It was eye opening and some good feelings and good prayers right...For me, getting to know the people and the families, it allows me to drum and sing with them and participate in their ceremonies.

Likewise, cultural ETAs and UTAs give residents chances to both participate in and contribute to Sweat Lodges, Tea Dances, Pow Wows, and Sundances in the community, offering benefits beyond those that they have access to within the Healing Lodges. Residents of some Healing Lodges highlighted their work as Elder's helpers in the community, such as picking Grandfather rocks or medicines, and gathering wood for the community's ceremonies. A PSC resident highlights the unique benefits of interacting with diverse community members attending these ceremonies, and points to the value of being appreciated by the community for the work that they do for them while on temporary absences:

And when they (Elders) take us out on ceremonies like Sundances and Pow Wows, tea dances—it's a total different atmosphere, everyone is totally different— it's like we've become part of that community. Ask anybody in that community out there, they know it, they see it. And we're highly recommended and highly respected because we do everything for them and that's how its supposed to be—give back right. And that's where I feel that our way of life comes out the best is when we are in ceremonies.

A WCHL resident speaks further to the benefits of connecting with community members and participating in ceremonies through ETAs and UTAs:

Once I get out I was going to plan to come back to the community because I met a lot of people in the community as well. A lot of different Elders that don't work here. And I plan on do coming back to attend ceremonies here because this is where I found the ceremonies and become comfortable with the ceremonies. So, I am going to come back to the community.

Thus, beyond providing residents with additional opportunities to connect with diverse Indigenous cultures, cultural temporary absences also hold an important role in preparing residents for release and reintegrating them into the community. Many residents expressed interests in returning to ceremonies that they had exposure to through their temporary absences once they leave the Healing Lodges. These opportunities are important for creating connections and networks in the community.

Another notable advantage of temporary absences for residents is providing opportunities to attend programs in the community. A number of residents across the Healing Lodges emphasized the benefits of attending AA and NA meetings through temporary absences. As a resident at PSC shares, “AA on the street— I enjoy that, you know hearing other people’s stories, hearing where they’re at with their addiction, you know, how they face it down day to day.” As such, although the Healing Lodges hold their own substance abuse programs, including AA and NA meetings, residents spoke to the unique benefits of attending these meetings in the community. Residents view the community meetings as an opportunity to interact with individuals struggling with substance abuse in “the real world,” as well as hearing the challenges they face and strategies they use to cope, which are seen as invaluable in preparing residents for their reintegration.

Unique to KHV, staff and residents highlighted the presence of notable opportunities for residents to take part in a range of programs in the community. For example, several residents spoke of being able to attend Telmexw Awtexw, a longer term substance abuse program operated by the community of Sts’ailes. This 12-week day treatment program takes a cultural approach to healing, and was viewed as particularly beneficial by residents given its emphasis on the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical components. As a resident at KHV shares:

It’s the 12-week program down on the reserve here once a week every Wednesday and it was pretty good. They teach you a lot...It deals with all types of stuff like substance abuse, anger management, how to handle your emotions, a little bit about trauma, about your past as a kid growing up, and stuff. It was good.

Likewise, residents at KHV highlighted the value of other opportunities to attend programs outside of the Healing Lodge, such as vocational training programs, as well as a four-day camp program, which involves chances to connect with nature, as well as engage in cultural ceremonies and activities.

Further to the reintegration benefits of temporary absences, across the Healing Lodges

staff highlighted the value of being able to escort residents on ETAs, particularly for family contact visits. Being with residents individually appears to provide an avenue for staff to build positive relationships with residents. This one-on-one time outside of the Healing Lodge context was identified as helpful in allowing the resident to be open and vulnerable and often placed staff members in a personable position to help guide residents on their healing journey. A KHV staff member speaks to this as they reflect on their experience escorting residents on ETAs:

You take an individual on an ETA, whether to a medical appointment or to a home, and that's an awesome time to get to know these guys, knowing where they're at, why they're here and where they want to go and stuff like that. And when you deal with guys on an individual basis you sometimes get a different perception than you would just seeing them in a group. Not that they act out because the others are there, but they're not as open, right, cause they don't want guys finding out about them and stuff.

Similarly, staff and Elders pointed to the importance of allowing the residents to embrace the feeling of relief and freedom felt when out on temporary absences, as that is when they could really see them let their “guard” down, open up, and experience a sense of normalcy. As an Elder at PSC illustrates:

I took the guys out and we would go out into the forest and we would just cut wood, or just walk around in the bush, and we would go out in the ceremony and we would help out where it was necessary. And so I found that when the men were going out that it was a relief because there was no guards [Correctional Officers], you know that was probably the biggest change that I noticed with the men was that you began to see more the human side of them. You know, they were no longer on guard, they were no longer being watched.

Although it is apparent that temporary absences are instrumental to the residents' healing journey and overall reintegration, residents, Elders, and staff commonly expressed a need for more ETA and UTA opportunities. A resident of WCHL highlights the importance of having more temporary absences:

I'm thinking it would be good, [to have] more cultural ETAs for guys to experience, maybe they could find themselves out there cause there may not be just this certain ceremony that's going to connect the person, make the person feel connected. Maybe it's something else other than the Sundance, or the sweat out there.

Residents and staff commonly indicated that staff shortages, particularly Correctional Officers, limit opportunities to have staff escorts take residents out in the community. This was particularly noted at PSC and WCHL. Additionally, the application and approval processes of ETAs and UTAs are extensive and tend to take a long time which further limit opportunities.

Notably, residents also reflected on occasions where their planned ETAs are often cancelled. These cancellations tend to occur when staff take sick leave or are otherwise unable to come to the Healing Lodge on a day where they are scheduled for escorting a resident. Residents expressed frustration in these instances, particularly when cancellations occur on family contact ETAs. As a resident at PSC shares:

It doesn't make sense... Guys are trying to communicate with their families, they go through the process to get this all set-up and then somebody— for some reason calls in sick. Majority of the time, most of the guys get cancelled and they have to wait another 18 days to re-apply... Repeat the process, you got to wait another 18 days. Meanwhile your family is out there in the community expecting you to come and they got to adapt— make supper, clean up, and they don't expect you to not be there [show-up].

Additionally, unique to PSC, recent changes in ETA application rules for residents now require an 18-day notice before the date of the ETA, which can be challenging as many community events are not planned that far in advance. This 18-day rule presents another barrier to temporary absences, as residents can no longer be involved with the ceremonies and feasts taking place on short-notice, such as a death in the community. Furthermore, PSC has also recently experienced a change in the regulations surrounding Elders escorting residents on cultural ETAs, resulting in the revocation of their escorting abilities<sup>21</sup>. This was commonly indicated as a challenge and an unfortunate loss because of the significance these engagements in the community have for residents. As PSC Elder explains:

Well, since August everything's changed last year with us Elders...[we] are not allowed to drive the vehicles, the institutional vehicles, so we're not even supposed to be in the vehicles we were told. So, this place since I can remember they would have an average of, last year I think we had 2,200 ETAs and I don't think we'll even get to half that.... The way it's going, we, as in us Elders we're the ones that did a big bulk of the ETAs, so when we're not allowed—last fall we went out picking medicine on our own, we don't have a group [of residents] anymore.

Thus, the recent decrease seen in cultural ETAs with Elders at PSC has had a negative impact on residents in a number of ways. As it stands, the residents receive fewer teachings by Elders through cultural activities and ceremonies in the community, there are fewer opportunities to obtain exposure and connection to culture, and there is less interaction occurring with the community. As a PSC residents shares: “[Before] all this was happening, it was really, really

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<sup>21</sup> Following data collection for the study, changes have been made to regulations and Elder insurance, which may have reinstated ETA opportunities.

good because I got to learn all about ceremonies within the surrounding communities, I got to meet people, I got first-hand experience about the way of life.”

Beyond ETAs and UTAs, temporary absences through work releases arise as meaningful opportunities for residents to gain employment experience outside of the Healing Lodges and in the community. However, across the Healing Lodges, and particularly at PSC and WCHL, there appears to be limited work release options. Residents routinely expressed interest in applying for work releases, but noted an absence of such opportunities being offered. Some staff across the Healing Lodges pointed to the remote locations of the Healing Lodges as a barrier to providing sufficient work releases. A staff member of WCHL speaks to this challenge:

Right now we have one [work release] and I think it boils down to just our location. If we were say located in Saskatoon or very near Saskatoon I don't think it would be so much of an issue, but we're 40 minutes from PA [Prince Albert], an hour away from Saskatoon, so when we look at work release, you know, we're very limited in Duck Lake.

At KHV, residents highlighted a unique opportunity for a work release, which is offered through Aghelh Nebun, a community residential facility in Prince George. This 12-week work release allows residents to enroll in vocational training as well as participate in wellness programs. As such, establishing similar partnerships with the community and with potential employers for work releases appears to be an area of opportunity for PSC and WCHL.

### **Environment and Healing Journey**

*I didn't know places like this even existed...I didn't even know there was such thing as a Healing Lodge, but I am so glad there is. I think when people really want to heal; this is the place to be (PSC resident).*

Beyond the opportunities offered throughout the sites, the holistic and unique environments of Healing Lodges, which emphasize Indigenous culture and spirituality, further help guide residents on their healing journeys. Prominently noted throughout the experiences of the residents is how the Healing Lodge environment is seen as markedly different from mainstream institutional settings in that it fosters a space for engaging in introspection, finding balance in oneself, and enabling a sense of commitment and accountability. These themes, which emerge from the narratives of the residents and are further reinforced by Elders and staff, collectively illustrate the ways in which residents are able to intricately engage in their healing journeys at the Healing Lodges.

**Introspection.** In discussing the impact that the Healing Lodges have on their healing

journeys, the narratives of the residents continuously pointed to the introspective work they are able to engage in. This was often expressed through engaging in personal reflection and working towards building an understanding of one's self and experiences. For many of the residents, engaging in self-reflection and introspective work meant the need to look into their offences and the circumstances surrounding them. As a resident of WCHL explains:

You know, this place means a lot of things to different people. For me...right now, if I was behind the wall in the penitentiary, I'd do my time—I wouldn't have to think about my crime. Maybe I would think about it, what else is there to do? But it's like I wouldn't have to *deal* with my crime, I'd have to deal with the time...so in here, it makes you think...you deal with a lot of thinking and you deal with yourself.

While dealing with their offences and engaging in deep reflection is evidenced throughout the narratives of the residents, this was expressed as being a difficult and personally intimate process for many. This is largely because this process of healing encompasses looking at the pains residents carry for those that they have affected and attaching meaning to those experiences. However, despite this difficulty, residents across the Healing Lodges pointed to the cultural and spiritual environment foregrounded within the sites as guiding them, “to address it in a good way, in an honest way,” as a KHV resident shares. In discussing their introspective and deep reflective work, the residents' accounts continuously pointed to the cultural and spiritual setting of the Healing Lodges. In speaking to this, a resident at PSC shares how much of his self-awareness emerged from his experience at the Healing Lodge:

Often times I think, what if I stayed in Bowden [Institution]—I don't think I would've been able to heal and thrive and grow as much as I would of if I came here. I think that people really embrace that idea, this idea of the Healing Lodge and accept the teachings here and the opportunity here. There is real potential to heal and to put things behind you. I think everyone has the right to heal, not just the victims, the perpetrators too. So I've had a lot of moments here where I've awoken to realizations that I think I would have never ever had in Bowden.

Notably, Healing Lodges foster a safe space that empowers residents to engage in introspective work. For many, this environment is one that is markedly different from tense institutional settings where such advances towards one's healing cannot be taken in the same degree. From WCHL, a resident illustrates this through his account of how conducive his experience at the Healing Lodge is for engaging in personal work:

This place compared to being in a medium [security] CSC [institution], they're two completely different things...We've got the advantage of trying to deal with ourselves, and become more personal. In corrections we're not allowed to do that because in there

you're always constantly looking over your shoulder, or you're preparing yourself for the worst because that's exactly what happens inside there.

A resident at KHV further speaks to this as he shares how the spiritual and cultural approach of the Healing Lodge, including the integral support from the Elders, helps him “dig” and reflect within himself:

I could have gone to a different minimum [security institution], absolutely, but I don't think I would have had my individual needs met at those sites. It would have just been do my time, I don't know... I've just been taking opportunities head on and optimizing the support from the Elders and the healing plan as a whole. And when I see that my Correctional Plan is deemed a healing plan—it gives me hope right,... correct what needs to be corrected, but in a good, honest way—with cultural and spiritual aspects.

The introspective work that residents are able to engage in at the Healing Lodges goes beyond self-reflections. Additionally, as a part of the introspective work for their healing journeys, residents spoke of how the Healing Lodges are spaces that help them understand and work through their past histories, traumas, and experiences as Indigenous peoples. For many of the residents, experiences of trauma, both personal and intergenerational are woven into their life stories. Experience with residential schools throughout childhood, significant sexual, physical and substance abuse, as well as family issues were common backdrops to the narratives of many of the residents. Notably, it is the cultural and spiritual environment of the Healing Lodges that residents express as permitting them to unpack and understand their unaddressed histories, much of which were realized to have led to their current circumstances. As a resident from WCHL explains:

[We] did an Aboriginal [Indigenous] Social history<sup>22</sup> on myself, which was identifying where the alcoholism started, where the sexual abuse started, the mental, physical abuse from prior living with family members. It was like a cycle past on and on and on and over and over and it kept happening and finally, I got to realize that I need to stop this cycle—and here I am. I found a Healing Lodge that I've asked the Creator for to help me, to guide me to a place where I could heal myself.

For the residents, the introspective “hard work” of uncovering or otherwise acknowledging past traumas, pains, and histories is a fundamental step in their journeys as this not only assists them in understanding their personal lives and circumstances, but it helps them establish the

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<sup>22</sup> The various circumstances that may have affected the lives of Indigenous peoples and which may be considered for alternate options when dealing with Indigenous offenders or residents. These can include circumstances such as effects of residential school system, Sixties Scoop into the adoption system, as well as family or community fragmentation (CSC, 2013).

recognition of the need for healing. Through the support they offer, an Elder from KHV highlights this in their discussion on the residents:

[Many] grew up on the streets, some of them since they were babies— grew up on the streets. So, they're bringing that into their life ... These men have been traumatized and we work with them, and we have that understanding... When they can acknowledge that, that's the beginning of their healing— is putting it on the table and exposing it— and that's where they have difficulty, and that's where we, as Elders, get them to do that and be honest and truthful with yourself.—With yourself, not with me, so that doorway is open.

The cultural and spiritual environment of the Healing Lodges, further fostered by the teachings and guidance of the Elders, creates a foundation for which residents can realize how their intergenerational traumas and stories are related to the pains and circumstances in their own life. As a KHV resident reflects, being at the Healing Lodge has given him the courage to look at his trauma through spirituality and look at the root causes of why he made the decisions he made in his life. Similarly, a resident at WCHL spoke of how he was “isolating and bottling things [he] did not want to talk about,” but it is through his introspective work alongside the Elders and ILO that he was able to address them. Importantly, in doing this, residents are able to work in the process of acknowledging and transcending these difficult histories or experiences and take part in cycle breaking. An Elder at PSC notes how much of their work with the residents is about building resilience and thriving in spite of these circumstances. For these reasons, many of the residents expressed gratitude and appreciation for being at the Healing Lodge and being able to work on themselves. As a resident at KHV shares:

I wake up here and so grateful and so blessed... Everything is geared towards cycle breaking so when the time comes you know, I'll have the opportunity to share with people and hopefully it'll deter them from coming inside. And yeah, the goal is to move on and restore trust, safety, and wholeness to community and ancestral way of life and pass on the teachings really, and that's going to keep us out. And it starts here.

While the Elders are evidently fundamental in supporting and guiding residents through their introspective work and journeys towards healing, the holistic approach within Healing Lodges adopted by staff further assist residents in this regard. Across the Healing Lodges, staff spoke of how they assist residents in realizing how their current behaviour or circumstances may be interlaced, or otherwise linked with their social histories and traumas. As such, the environment throughout the Healing Lodge is characterized by a sense of recognition and understanding of the experiences of the residents. In reflecting on this approach taken at the Healing Lodges, a staff member at WCHL shares:



It's everything that we do right, like the way we write our reports— everything, it's 100% incorporated. So, when we write our reports, we do our assessment it's always weighed against what brought them in initially... The way you approach each individual case –its all based on their ASH [Aboriginal/Indigenous Social History] factors and what their triggers are. So, it's very much part of our everyday... like the way you write out a Correctional Plan, you're basically telling their life story ... telling their story and all their experiences and the things they witnessed, heard and were victims to, it just explains it, it just puts all those kinds of pieces together.

Evident throughout the narratives of the residents and the observations and efforts of Elders and staff, the spiritual and cultural environment of Healing Lodges offers a space whereby residents are able engage in introspective work. As a KHV staff summarizes, “By the time they [the residents] leave and you hear them from their initial time to when they've left, they have truly been impacted. They've truly been able to peel away some of those layers of the onion—they felt supported and safe to do so.”

**Balance.** While the introspective work at the Healing Lodges is one way residents are able to work towards their healing journeys, similarly a prominent theme emerging from the narratives of the residents is how the environment of the Healing Lodge permits them to achieve balance within themselves. Across the sites, residents routinely spoke of how much of their growth and path towards healing stems from their ability to work on attaining and maintaining balance as it relates to teachings of the Indigenous Medicine Wheel.<sup>23</sup> Apparent from the perspective of many of the residents, prior to coming into a Healing Lodge, their life was expressed as being out of balance concerning their mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional self. In speaking of his experience prior to being at WCHL, a resident shares how the components of his personal Medicine Wheel were characteristically unstable:

They all have to be balanced and for myself I was honest right from the beginning that I needed this help and I was willing to go to any length to get it, so I've opened up... When I got here my spirit was very dim, my self-esteem was very dim, I had no sense of direction, I was lost... This was the place and help that I was looking for—and the Creator has guided me.

In particular, residents identify the spiritual and emotional dimensions as often being the source of imbalance within themselves and that it is these dimensions specifically that the Healing Lodges assist them in strengthening. It appears that the holistic environment within the

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<sup>23</sup> The Medicine Wheel varies according to different Indigenous traditions, teachings and regions. It is commonly understood as a symbol of the circularity of life and the importance of wholeness or balance, as well as the interconnectedness of the four aspects of the self (CSC, 2013).

Healing Lodges permits residents to work through and build these aspects of their Medicine Wheel. Explicating this is a staff at KHV who shares the approach taken within the site:

Once they get to minimum [security] they have done their programs, they've done their Correctional Plan as CSC outlines, and [now] it's really working from a Medicine Wheel basis. We really start to work on the emotional component of the Medicine Wheel, and spiritual component.... It's that emotional piece, it's that spiritual piece; those are the two components that I find that we specifically here are working with versus medium or even maybe other minimums for that matter.

Common amongst the narratives of the residents is that their knowledge and connection to both their culture and Indigenous spirituality was low prior to coming to a Healing Lodge. As such, for a significant portion of the residents, the request or plan to transfer to a Healing Lodge appears to have stemmed from their desire to build their spirituality. As a resident from PSC shares, "My biggest desire to come here was actually to build up my spirituality because when I was doing time before for so many years I left my spirituality behind because I was too involved in drugs and alcohol, and the street life." Some residents point to losing their spirituality as linked to the circumstances that led to their offence. As another PSC resident explains:

I stepped away from my culture, from my family; from a lot of the things I was blessed with on the outside—I threw it all away. ...When I came here, this place kind of opened my eyes back towards my culture, realized going this route would benefit me better than being out there and going the other way, you know.

The sense of imbalance and disconnect with their spirituality that residents express having prior to their experience at the Healing Lodge is an aspect that was notably reinforced by the observations of staff. As a staff member at WCHL shares:

In regards to connection to their culture and whatnot, very few of the men, I mean I can't give a percentage, but very few actually come in with a full connection and understanding, and if they did, they wouldn't be in jail, right? Like if they are truly following their culture out there, and as we call it "walking the Red Road"<sup>24</sup>, they wouldn't be engulfed in drugs and alcohol—because that's frowned upon... So, if they were fully committed and engaged in the community, very unlikely would they'd be committing offences. So, the majority of the men, although they may have some knowledge or maybe history of being connected—like when they were younger or intermittently throughout their life, often the men that we see have a great disconnect.

While the Healing Lodges were identified in some instances as being an avenue for

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<sup>24</sup> When one lives or walks the Red Road, one is understood to be on the path towards healing and living an Indigenous way of life. Additionally, "One is seen and deemed to be whole in body, mind, spirit, emotions and behaviour" (CSC, 2013).

residents to continue their healing journey or path towards achieving balance— given previous involvements with Elders or the Pathways Initiative,<sup>25</sup> for others the Healing Lodge marked the beginning of this journey. Residents often expressed how they were “never cultural before” or were not engaged in their spirituality and Indigenous culture prior. However, being in the Healing Lodge where Indigenous culture is woven into everyday practices, residents are immersed in a spiritual and cultural environment that promotes efforts of achieving balance. As a staff at KHV shares through their observation of residents, “A lot of them don’t have anything, like literally this is the first time they’ve seen anything. So you’ll find a lot of them that are on the Red Road are sponges— they just want to learn...”. Several residents share the significance of the concept and teachings of the Medicine Wheel being reinforced at the Healing Lodges given that it allows them to break down, understand, and work on parts of themselves easily. As an Elder from PSC elucidates:

We’re always at the forefront of introducing concepts to men who have never grown up in a tradition, who have never grown up in a cultural setting, to learn about themselves, to learn about the traditional concept... You know, they want to work on themselves, they want to heal something about themselves, so we do the work of introducing this concept so it becomes workable for them.

Further to the spiritual component, the emotional aspect of the Medicine Wheel is an area that Healing Lodges appear to be uniquely valuable in fostering for residents. Evident from the accounts of the residents and the observations of the Elders and staff, residents often come into the Healing Lodge with limited experience in working through their emotions, or otherwise being in a supportive environment where they can understand them. With the environment of the Healing Lodges being less tense than mainstream institutions and instead focused on Indigenous culture and spirituality, residents are able to work towards healing and developing emotional awareness. As a staff member at KHV explains:

We do a good job in Corrections with doing that mental stuff and teaching skills and physical, you know they’ve got abilities to do all that. Some emotional work might get started at the higher levels of security, but really most guys aren’t relaxed enough, feel safe enough to be vulnerable and open up [there]. Once they get here specifically versus even another minimum for that matter, that’s what they work with the Elders on is they start opening up those wounds.

For many of the residents, opportunities to acknowledge their emotions and effectively

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<sup>25</sup> Seen within some institutions across CSC, Pathways aims to provide an Indigenous environment for offenders dedicated to following a traditional path (CSC, 2013).

manage them is a process and comes with its struggles, as it requires vulnerability. As a resident at WCHL describes, “Making the connection from my heart to my brain, that’s the hardest one to look after. It’s so short, it’s only like a foot, but it’s the hardest one...” In particular, evident from the narratives of the residents and staff, it appears that within the Healing Lodges, residents are able to work through expressing and addressing feelings of anger and shame. These emotions, which appear to be the focal struggle of many residents, are targeted and addressed at the Healing Lodges through the spiritual and communal environment, as well as through teachings and support from the Elders. For example, a resident at PSC points to how he is better able to express his emotions and does not need to “bottle them up” inside himself. An Elder at KHV share how the Elders work with residents in the identification of emotions and understandings of anger and shame:

They call it anger. I disagree with anger because I say we’re allowed to be angry, but what you do with it, that’s what makes the difference, and they learn that...At the same time, we teach them about these teachings around what shame is, what shame can do to you. And they carry that for a long time for the life that they might have taken, for the people that they violated, they carry that shame.

Overall, it is apparent from the narratives of the residents and observations of staff and Elders that the Indigenous cultural approach and safe environment fostered within the Healing Lodges aids residents in achieving and maintaining balance as a part of their healing journey, particularly spiritually and emotionally. Several residents alluded to their time at the Healing Lodges as “the most stability” they have had in their lives, coming inside and actually learning about themselves and their culture. This is an important step for both their healing journey and reintegration process. As a KHV staff member testifies:

The personal growth of their Medicine Wheel, that’s the whole intent is to continue to grow and so when they leave here their Medicine Wheel should be round and full and balanced and roll like a really smooth car instead of you know, hitting pot holes all the time, right, that concept.

**Commitment and Accountability.** While the environment within the Healing Lodges plays a significant role in healing journeys of the residents, it is essential to highlight how it can also foster accountability and commitment. Apparent from the perspectives of the Elders and staff as well as the experiences of the residents, the environment and approach within the Healing Lodges is one in which residents are held accountable for their engagement with the Indigenous way of life and their commitment to their healing journeys. Unlike traditional

institutional settings, within Healing Lodges there are continuous expectations that residents are engaging and taking part in ceremonies, opportunities, and teachings throughout the Healing Lodge. A resident at WCHL speaks to this as he reflects on his arrival to the Healing Lodge:

My experience when I first got here, I thought about it as like easy time—I can come here and just relax, do my time. But no—it was not like that; I had to participate in the culture and the programming, you know whatever they had offered to me and what not. At first, I thought I was just going to sit around and do my own thing, but no...I used to think they are being strict...But [they] didn't want us getting used to sitting around and being lazy.

Examples of measures at some of the Healing Lodges include attendance being taken during daily morning smudges or the enforcement of mandatory participation in ceremonies, such as at WCHL and KHV. As an Elder at WCHL describes, you can tell who really wants to change from their involvement in the culture and their engagement in all aspects of the Healing Lodge. Importantly, putting these measures into practice are meant to engage residents and draw them closer to their Indigenous spirituality, culture and path towards healing. As a staff at WCHL explicates:

It's not meant to be like disciplinary, it's more that if we're telling them they have to go, they'll eventually see the benefit of it and then go. You know, when they're sitting in the pen [penitentiary] or wherever, they can just go about their day. They just do time, they don't have to really engage. But, here we expect that engagement, and if they want to just do their time and just get out, then they shouldn't be here, right. We very much expect and demand that engagement and sometimes they need that encouragement, so that's why we say you know, ceremonies are mandatory. And then once they learn the protocols and everything around it and the benefit and the value of it, then they want to be there... Over time if they're truly committed you can see the change, night and day, like it's very evident.

Across the Healing Lodges, residents are expected to sign an agreement, to acknowledge and accept that they will commit, be engaged, and be dedicated to both their culture and their healing journeys. Signing this agreement is intended to be a method of holding residents accountable to their engagement throughout the Healing Lodges and serve as a reminder to their commitment. As a way to further reinforce and have the residents demonstrate their commitment, some Healing Lodges have other procedures and measures in place. For example, KHV organizes a blanketing ceremony for all new residents. As a staff describes:

We blanket them and we welcome them at a ceremony and we walk them around the floor and we ask them to speak to their commitments on their healing journey here, their reasons why they want to be here, what they're going to contribute to this community, to this environment, not just do time.

Additionally, throughout the interviews, staff provided examples where residents would be reminded of their commitment to their journeys in order to instill and reinforce accountability. Residents who are seen as disengaged in their healing journeys or show signs of complacency may have intervention from staff or Elders. For example, staff and Elders within WCHL and KHV spoke of how they would check in with residents, meet with them, or hold a circle if they notice signs of disengagement. That is, Elders and staff will guide the residents and accompany them in their journey, but they do not “walk it” for them. While present in other institutions, the level or standards of accountability placed on residents within the Healing Lodges appear to be particularly high. As a staff at WCHL shares:

I [tell] the guys before it's the little things in here that get you into trouble, the little things in Sask Pen [Saskatchewan Penitentiary] don't mean nothing. It's the big things that'll get you in trouble in Sask Pen, but here it's all about accountability, and if you can't beat the little things here, then you're going to have a lot of difficulty when you have free reign when you're out. So it's just a way of trying to help you to monitor yourself.

The expectations within the Healing Lodge are different from mainstream institutions, and thus, several residents expressed an adjustment period during their transfer to the Healing Lodge. However, notwithstanding this adjustment, evidently many residents take their time within the Healing Lodge seriously and make strides towards engaging with both their healing journeys and culture. In reflecting on his placement within the Healing Lodge, a KHV resident shares his commitment:

I felt privileged and honoured. I felt it was my sacred responsibility to continue the path that I'm on and conduct myself and abide by the Seven Sacred Grandfather Teachings: love, honour, respect, truth, wisdom, humility and courage... You have to put a lot of work in, a lot of gains to come to a place like this... yeah I've made a lot of um, strides in CSC to make it here so I'm really privileged, really proud, and just grateful, you know..

With the integration of the Seven Grandfather Teachings, amongst many other traditional teachings throughout the Healing Lodges, staff note that the engagement and commitment of potential residents to Indigenous spirituality, culture or way of life is essential for projecting their fit within the Healing Lodge environment. As a KHV staff explains, “we need to have commitment to cultural engagement, we don't make decisions on their minimum-security, we make decisions on the transfer—are they actually going to engage and be a part of a community environment with a cultural lens...” Shared amongst the staff and realized by the residents, is that one's level of engagement and commitment could determine whether they will remain

within the Healing Lodge.

While narratives around commitment and accountability are evident across the Healing Lodges, it is important to note that the procedures and level of enforcement in this regard is not the same across the sites. Notably, evident from the interviews is that while WCHL and KHV really foster engagement amongst their residents, the experiences of both the residents and staff at PSC demonstrate gaps in this regard. It was often shared that there appears to be residents within PSC that are disengaged, uncommitted, or otherwise taking the opportunity of being at the Healing Lodge for granted. Importantly, there appears to be limited oversight or interventions in terms of efforts to reinforce engagement amongst residents and keep them on track towards their healing journeys. As a resident at PSC shares:

All they do here is give me a solemn agreement and tell me this is in your contract and this has to be done. Right? But the solemn agreement is basically take that responsibility, that accountability to wake up every day and go to smudge and go to ceremony, and participate in the spirituality. If you're in your bed sleeping and not participating or being transparent with the Elders, then you're not-- you're in for the wrong reasons. And I've been in for so long that I know who is doing it sincerely and who is not. And unfortunately, there are people that using the system, and that's what I see, right.

Residents who are engaged in their healing journeys, participate in the ceremonies, and appreciate the opportunities that are offered, expressed frustration in the complacency and lack of motivation seen amongst some residents. As another PSC resident adds, “I came here for a desire to change and to do good for myself—my healing journey. So, when I see individuals that come here and then don't participate, I have a hard time to think about why they're here.”

This complacency or disengagement in some of the residents at PSC may be partly due to the need for a more comprehensive or rigorous selection process of residents, given that Elders and select staff did express a desire to be involved in the process in order to help identify residents who may be a good fit for the Healing Lodge. However, beyond this, evidently from the narratives of both residents and staff, there needs to be more efforts in place to keep residents engaged once they are there, while also accountable for their disengagement. This is vital, because as a resident expresses, “Being accountable and responsible for who we are— that's a Healing Lodge! Or it should be, you know, but it's not. It's just a regular minimum [security institution] basically.” For example, in speaking to the small portion of residents that take part in the morning smudge, an Elder describes how there are “no repercussions” for those who choose to not attend, because it is not deemed as mandatory. Other staff shared how there needs to be

more follow-ups with residents, mandatory participation, as well as fostering more of a communal spiritual environment to ignite more interest and engagement. As echoed and summarized by a resident at PSC:

Here, it seems [like] they lay it down, they make everybody sign a solemn agreement that you agree as an individual to participate 100% in all of the cultural activities here because this is a Healing Lodge, but, they don't enforce it.—They say you have to do it, but then if you don't do it, there's no follow-up... everything is relaxed—and when you get relaxed, you become complacent.

### **Relationships and Dynamics**

*Our guards are coming down...if we're here, we're able to trust each other, learn to govern ourselves, become a community, that's the one thing that we have going for us. We learn to become part of a community, so we are getting prepared to move forward...*  
(WCHL resident)

In further view of the environment, the relationships fostered throughout the Healing Lodges warrant particular consideration given their unique aspects that help further guide residents through their healing journey. Namely, relationships residents have between each other, with staff, as well as with the Elders are collectively viewed as being strong and built on a sense of community, unlike those often experienced in other institutions. The narratives and experiences shared are demonstrative of this theme, which underlies the various relationships and interactions throughout the Healing Lodges<sup>26</sup>.

**Residents.** Across the Healing Lodges, residents spoke of the strong and positive relationships they established amongst each other. Underpinning the narratives of the residents is how the Healing Lodge setting supports positive relationships amongst one another and helps foster a sense of connectedness. The smaller populations seen within the Healing Lodges permit these closer bonds and interactions to form with others. As a resident at WCHL explains:

My experience here with the Nîcisânak [residents], it's actually really good. I get along good... one of my friends—I take him as a brother because I talk to him a lot, and he's kind of dreading for me to leave. But, we are from the same city so we are probably going to see each other eventually. The relationships you make here— it does become strong with the guys... It's like, you can feel comfortable, it's like a family member. I don't have like negative feelings or anything towards anybody else here.

Characterized by shared residential living units, residents expressed that through their

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<sup>26</sup> For many Indigenous peoples, relationships are conceptualized in a concentric circle (i.e., relationship to self, family, community, Creation, and Creator).



time at the Healing Lodge, they learn to cooperate and live with one another. For many of the residents, living in a unit with other residents where they have to collaborate and work with others is very different from previous experiences at higher security institutions. As a resident at WCHL describes:

The sharing, we learn to share with one another here. There are eight guys that live in one house and we all cook for ourselves.... Every week we order out of food services and that's how we live, we share, we learn to share, we learn to cook for ourselves. It's like reintegrating ourselves back into the community.

Additionally, as mentioned earlier, residents regularly spoke of opportunities where they help and support one another with different skills and crafts, such as carving. Importantly, beyond the collaboration that the environment fosters, residents learn to respect one another, an aspect that is reinforced throughout the Healing Lodges by the Seven Grandfather teachings. As a resident at KHV shares:

I've learned, you got to learn how to live with people, you got to learn how to not react to your emotions. How to check yourself, how to correct yourself. We always say we treat each other with respect; we get that respect. Courage. All those beautiful words, those seven directions— teachings. So, that goes with this [place].

As such, the positive relationships commonly noted amongst residents may be fuelled by their shared goal of working towards following a path of healing and Indigenous way of life. Put together, collaborating and respecting each other can be seen as an extension of the residents' commitments to their healing journeys

With ceremonies representing a key feature of the healing journeys of residents, as explored earlier, the narratives of the residents also reveal that they are imperative for fostering more meaningful connections and collaborations amongst each other. Illustrative of this is the testimony of a WCHL resident who reflects on the level of collaboration involved in holding a Sweat Lodge ceremony:

When we have the sweats, there would be a hosting house and they'll give the hosting house food [supplies] and they'd make the food—like the soup, the bannock, and the offering. And the food they would bring to the Kihyew [Healing Lodge building] and after we are done the sweat we would all come eat together; like a little feast—that's actually a good thing too because we all get to sit with each other and interact with each other instead of isolating ourselves.

Beyond the collaborative aspect of ceremonies, which helps support a positive collective amongst residents, the accounts of the residents also reveal that the close bonds seen in the

Healing Lodges partly stem from ceremonies as well. For example, through healing circles, residents are able to connect to one another at a more personal and trusting level, which reinforces the sense of community experienced by residents. As a resident of WCHL explains:

I notice when people first come in they have this mentality— criminal histories, gang violence, and gang activities— and then they come here and they are uneasy and on edge, hard to talk to...And, that's how most of them are—they come here with that; its the 'pen mentality'...I was actually just talking to one of the new guys here and he told me 'its really nice here, everyone is really open with each other and with themselves'. It took him going to a circle to become open with himself and with other people...because he felt that comfortability because everyone else is sharing and whatnot. And he came in with that mentality and now it's all different.

While the Healing Lodges promote a sense of connectivity and collaboration amongst residents, the environment and positive relationships that are fostered also help many of the residents look past previously held ideas of one another. Residents throughout the Healing Lodges continuously shared how the Healing Lodge helped them drop what they often referred to as the “pen mentality” or “con code.” Being in the Healing Lodge setting where residents are collaborating and interacting closely with one another evidently leaves no place, or otherwise little room for the continuation of notions of a social order, which mainstream institutions and higher security facilities often perpetuate. As a resident of WCHL shares:

We call it the “pen” mentality, penitentiary mentality, because you don't need to bring that here, that edge and everything else— you know, the expectation is when you sign that contract you drop that shit at the door, you don't come in with it because it does not belong in this environment.

As such, the narratives of the residents suggest that distancing themselves from the ‘con code’ or ‘pen mentality’ is an essential step to progressing through their healing journeys and leading a traditional way of life. As an Elder at WCHL contextualizes:

A lot of them come here [and] that's the mentality. So we sit down with them and we kind of take the ‘con code’, leave that ‘con code’ where it was, out the door. We don't need that here, you don't need that here, you're here for yourself—for your healing, this is the kind of approach we use. And there's no need [for the con code], especially when you're in an environment such as this where you have culture.

While it is evident from the residents' accounts that excluding judgments or negative attitudes is both expected and necessary within the Healing Lodge setting, doing this is an adjustment for many of the residents. As noted by several residents and observed by staff, relaxing previously held notions and learning to cooperate is a process. A staff at KHV speaks to

this transition as he shares the relationships that are reinforced within the Healing Lodge:

You have to understand that you know a lot of these guys given a different setting like a high level institution would never ever interact with each other. You have a sex offender and a guy who just killed somebody back in the day—one guy in a medium or max [security institution] sees this guy and he's after him. In this setting, they have to somehow work it out— work together. They don't have to interact on a daily basis, but they have to learn to live together and that I find is really tough for them as well right.

Though some residents expressed difficulty in being able to completely put aside their judgments towards each other, they nonetheless still show tolerance and acceptance for one another.

Demonstrative of this is the experience of a resident at WCHL:

I got my set little group that I hang out with. Some people I don't want anything to do with. I got to be polite to them though, and I try never to be rude— but for me to go and be buddy buddy with some child molester...I suffered sexual abuse through the residential school and other places through my youth ... if it was behind the wall they wouldn't be allowed with general population ... When you come to a minimum security place you've got to put your blinders on because it's part of being in minimum security right... you got to accept certain things—you don't have to like it, but you got to accept it eventually.

The acceptance and tolerance characterizing the relationships between residents in the Healing Lodges was also expressed in terms of the diversity of the population. Across the Healing Lodges, different Indigenous backgrounds form the resident population, including Cree, Blackfoot, Ojibwe, Coast Salish, and Métis, amongst various others. Notwithstanding these diversities or differences, residents expressed acceptance and respect towards all. The narratives of non-Indigenous residents further reinforce this as they shared their experience of being generally welcomed by the dominant Indigenous resident population. As a staff of KHV observes, “the brotherhood will let anybody in...They'll treat everybody the same so as long as they're interested in showing the path, they'll get their teachings— and that's good.”

Evident from the narratives and observations shared, the relationship between the residents fostered throughout the Healing Lodges is unique. The strong connections and collaborations appear to help residents progress through their healing journey and begin to shift away from the “pen mentality.” As a resident at PSC summarizes, “I've met everybody and they all get along really well, I guess looking at it they want to be able to get in and out in as good a way as possible. They don't want to mess it up.”

**Staff.** Beyond the relationships between residents, in looking at the environment throughout the Healing Lodges, a significant component is the relationship between residents

and staff. As expressed by the experiences shared, the relationships are very open, dynamic, and reflected as being particularly connected. Within the Healing Lodges, a fundamental feature is that staff work closely and directly with residents, often spending considerable time interacting with them as a part of the greater goal of assisting residents through their healing journeys. As a staff member at WCHL puts it, residents are, “no longer a nameless, faceless, number.” A staff at KHV speaks further to this as they explicate the approach taken within the Healing Lodge:

[It is] 100% dynamic, there’s no static security here.... I mean we don’t carry a gun, we’re not sitting in one place—we are very interactive with these guys, and if you don’t have dynamic skills this is the wrong place for you to work because you need to communicate with these guys— it’s what this place is all about, right.

Rather than having a static or clear division, staff tend to be approachable and have both regular and open communications with residents. Across the Healing Lodges, numerous staff spoke of having an “open door policy” whereby residents are able to drop by and chat as needed. As a staff member at WCHL shares, “A lot of guys will come into my office and just sit down and talk, right... My door is open, right, so if a guy comes in I won’t turn him away unless I’m extremely busy. My work can wait.” Evidently, a significant and unique feature of the Healing Lodges is that staff prioritize having meaningful and supportive interactions with residents.

Beyond the open communication and dynamic approach taken at the Healing Lodges, the narratives reveal an evident sense of community and connectedness between the residents and staff. A major factor that underlies this at KHV and WCHL is the engagement of staff with the culture and their active participation alongside residents through joint ceremonies, events, and activities. A staff member at KHV speaks to the importance of taking part and engaging in ceremonies and events together alongside residents, even if it means them being held outside of working hours:

Guys [residents] notice that. They notice who’s there and who’s not there, and you don’t get paid for it right, that’s all voluntary stuff in the evening, ... and the guys all see who shows up, so if you want respect to working with the guys part of it is to show up. But I also find it [ceremony] interesting, I’m fascinated.

While the relationship between residents and staff within the Healing Lodges are open and dynamic, notably the narratives reveal that this type of interaction and sense of community is unlike those found in mainstream institutions or higher security facilities. As a resident at WCHL shares:

When I was there, in the penitentiary, the other inmates told me to stand eight feet away from the guards, away from their desk and speak loud enough so they [the other inmates] can hear—so they don't think I am ratting on somebody. But here, we can just interact with them and talk with them.

Given the nature of the open and relaxed relationship, both residents and staff often expressed needing to adjust and adapt to this. For many of the staff, particularly Correctional Officers, their approach of working with residents is markedly different from their experiences at other institutions. As the reflections of a staff member at KHV help illustrate:

A lot of the staff that tend to come here also have been in other jails for a long time, you know usually 10 years or more. So, they bring that experience here and they quickly realize— like even for us, it's a healing kind of journey when you get here. My first week here I was always on edge because I wasn't comfortable with anything. You're used to watching your back everywhere, and then all of a sudden you come here, and it's so open, no uniforms.

A notable aspect of the environment within the Healing Lodges that further contributes to the generally positive relationship between residents and staff is the absence of uniforms amongst staff. In particular, Correctional Officers do not wear traditional uniforms as seen in mainstream institutions. This is particularly important given the Indigenous Social History of some residents (e.g., residential school experience), with uniforms serving as a trigger of distrust of authority. Additionally, this practice observed amongst the Healing Lodges is important as it helps with the approachability of staff while subduing any tense divisions. As a KHV staff highlights, “Not having uniform is a huge thing, it breaks down a huge barrier.” The value of not having uniforms amongst staff is an essential aspect of the Healing Lodges and one in which Elders express as being of imminent importance because of the support they have on the healing journeys of residents. As explicated by an Elder at WCHL:

We all blend in you know. There's no guards, you can see— there are no formal guards with uniforms. It's just basically the way you see us. And our Elders, we are very vocal about that, [we] didn't want that. There is a place for that in main institutions, but for here in a Healing Lodge, its trying to make that setting— that Healing Lodge setting... the guards that you see here, CXs [Correctional Officers], they're healers, you know by the structure itself, they're healers.

While the sense of community and inclusivity between residents and staff was evident from the narratives shared by those within WCHL and KHV, the experiences at PSC were different in this regard. Common amongst the experiences shared by many of the residents at PSC is the need for more inclusive relationships between resident and staff populations. A

prominent outlook amongst those at PSC is the desire for more joint ceremonies or efforts from staff to participate and engage with residents. As exemplified by a resident at PSC:

When it comes to community, everything is supposed to be done in the community, everything is supposed to be shared together. ...when they have their [staff] potlucks, they have it in our Community Hall, and when we are going for count or coming in we are standing on the outside looking in. Like—wait a minute. Where is this inclusiveness, where is this community? How does that make you feel, right?

Having staff engaged with them is essential for fostering rapport and open communication. As further shared by a PSC resident, “...They talk to us when they need to talk to us, but when you’re walking by them they don’t say ‘hello’ or ‘hi,’ ‘hey how’s your day?’”

As such, the narratives reveal that the general interactions between residents and many of the staff at PSC is rather static, similar to traditional or higher security institutions. As a resident explicates through his experience of being in the system and at PSC:

This is a minimum [security institution], this is a Healing Lodge-- these guys [Correctional Officers], it’s like they don’t even want to talk to you—it’s like max guards, so they have that mentality. And it’s kind of a bummer man, because our next step from here is freedom. We are going to see these guys out in the street, there should be that barrier broken down, and it’s not.

As a Healing Lodge, there appears to be a need for greater strides towards incorporating dynamic security practices throughout PSC whereby more frequent, open, and supportive interactions occur with residents, particularly amongst Correctional Officers. The narratives and observations of many of the staff and Elders reinforce this need, which would help foster more inclusive and community-like interactions between residents and staff. As a PSC staff member summarizes:

I would like to see more building on our dynamic security—like the day to day look of things— so we can be that support; it’s not us against them. We’re still your support, but we’re going to do it in a way that’s dynamic ...whereas a lot of times some of the things that I see here are very controversial, conflicting— just about ‘us versus them.’ And we’re a Healing Lodge, it shouldn’t be ‘us versus them,’ we’re all on the same team here.

**Elders.** Beyond the relationship amongst residents and the relationship with staff, in looking at the environment throughout the Healing Lodges, the relationship between residents and Elders emerges as particularly notable. Across the Healing Lodges, there is a strong bond between residents and Elders, one characterized by immense support and guidance. Elders work with the residents from a uniquely personal and cultural approach involving healing, rather than a strictly correctional perspective surrounding risk. As a staff at KHV observes:

[Elders] deal with the man first and the crime second, and that's what our Elders do. These are people, these are our people they'll say, these are my kids, my brothers, my sisters— so they deal with the [resident] as a person. Corrections will deal with them as an offender and do the correctional work, but together we're putting those pieces back together and making it whole and that's what our Elders do. Most of our Elders don't know much about the offence until we share that stuff with them in interview.

The approach Elders take helps build a unique and close relationships with the residents.

Common amongst the narratives of the residents is the genuine appreciation they have towards the compassion and understanding demonstrated by the Elders. In speaking to this, a resident at KHV shares:

They're the only reason I've healed and straightened out. Because they've seen a human, a person. And they know, they know by looking at you that you're not bad—you made a bad choice ... They see me, they want to know me, they want to understand me.

Evidently, from the experiences of residents across the Healing Lodges, the Elders and the overall relationships the residents have with them play a significant role in the healing journeys of the residents. Frequently shared by the residents is the value of being able to talk to the Elders candidly and have them share their insight, guidance, and teachings. In reflecting on the one-on-one meetings with the Elders, a PSC resident shares:

I find [it] beneficial to talk to the Elders on one-on-ones and to sit there and listen to them and their teachings and to learn and to accept all the good and all the positive things that the Elders have to offer us. I find that very beneficial for me because I never had that.

For many of the residents, having a close and honest relationship with the Elders where they are able to share and open up is part of their healing process. As the words of a WCHL resident exemplify, "I utilize my Elder and spill the beans. You know I trust him, he's not going to use this against me, there's that trust. There's a lot of laughing and sharing and that just goes with the healing." As such, raised often amongst residents is the role that Elders have in assisting them with understanding themselves, their traumas, and their experiences. A resident at PSC highlights this narrative through his reflection of the relationship he has with the Elders:

You have the Elders here to talk about how you're feeling, and I think they help me deal with things also, to come to term with things... they are there for emotional support—they're there to encourage you and to give compassion and love.

Having a strong and honest relationship with the Elders is described as an essential part for residents to move forward and work towards their healing journeys. An Elder at KHV further reinforces this as they share the support they strive to offer the residents:

When you're traumatized you leave parts of yourself all over and how are you going to gather all of that, bring it back to you so you can function again? And that's where you know a lot of these guys are; parts of them all over, so we need somebody who has that ability to provide some spiritual help and bring them all together.

Further to the relationship between the residents and Elders being one of guidance and support, it is essential to highlight the general respect residents have for the Elders and the strong bond they form with them. While across the Healing Lodges, monthly one-on-one meetings are required with an Elder, residents appear to spend more than this required time with them. Commonly expressed by residents is how the Elders are available for drop-ins and make themselves readily available for the residents on a daily basis. As a resident at WCHL shares:

The Elders, I give them props everyday because as much as we'd love to take up as much of their time as possible, they made it available so that we are able to make weekly contacts with them to get some of that stuff off our shoulders or out of our backpacks or dealing with whatever we need to do.

While residents are typically assigned an Elder, it appears that most residents see value and enjoy connecting with other Elders as well. Across the Healing Lodges, residents share how they would "break bread" with the Elders, share a meal or coffee with them, and overall enjoy spending quality time with them. Importantly, this type of regular contact and bond formed with the Elders appears to be unique to the Healing Lodge setting. Through their narratives, residents often shared how they did not have this level of contact and availability of Elders at other institutions or the Pathways Initiative. In reflecting on the time he spends with the Elders, a resident at WCHL shares:

Normally I couldn't do that when I was inside the penitentiary because we didn't have that access, and they had like one Elder for 200 people. Here there are like six Elders for like 62 guys. So, there is enough time to come here and talk to the Elders. I pretty much do that all the time, like whenever I get a break I come see the Elder, talk to [them] for a while. It's actually pretty good.

The testimony of a resident at PSC further reinforces this as he reflects on the difference of Elder availability found in mainstream institutions compared to the Healing Lodge setting:

[We] didn't have the daily contact with Elders and ALOs [Aboriginal/Indigenous Liaison Officers], or the ceremonies, as much as they have here [at PSC]. I was very limited to access that even though the Elders and ALOs worked down in the [higher] security parts. They were so busy down there dealing with a bigger population that they barely came out.

Importantly, Elders often expressed this concentrated and extended support offered to the



residents as an essential part of the Indigenous continuum of care of supporting residents through their healing journey and overall reintegration. As an Elder at WCHL points:

Our phone numbers are there, call me, you know, it don't matter what time, 11 o'clock at night, 1 o'clock in the morning it doesn't matter to me, I'll be here cause that's why we're here, we provide that service. The continuum of care—I really believe it.

Evident from the narratives shared throughout the Healing Lodges, the relationship formed between the residents and Elders is uniquely strong and interlaced with compassion, guidance, and support for healing. The approach taken by the Elders coupled with their knowledge and perspectives fosters a relationship with the residents that is deeply valued and honoured by residents.

### **Operational Challenges and Best Practices**

*I've always said that CSC and the how we do things as Aboriginal [Indigenous] people can come together and make things work. And, you know, sometimes it is a challenge, but...I still believe it can, you got to believe it can—you got to have faith. (WCHL staff member)*

Through the interviews with staff, Elders, and residents, notable themes and considerations emerge that shed light on the operation of the Healing Lodges. More specifically, the narratives reveal themes around some of the challenges and best practices evident in the operation of these sites. These themes centre around four main areas; the complexity of merging CSC approaches with Indigenous culture, community engagement and involvement within the Healing Lodges, staffing practices and needs, as well as patterns around the resident population within Healing Lodges. Given the role of staff and Elders, the themes around the operation of the Healing Lodges prominently arose from these interviews, while often further contextualized by the experiences and observations of residents.

**Merging CSC and Indigenous culture.** As Healing Lodges operated and managed by CSC, there is an evident operational need to merge CSC approaches with Indigenous perspectives and ways of life; that is, having CSC institutional aspects present, such as security policies and procedures, alongside Indigenous cultural traditions and beliefs. As described by a staff member at KHV and echoed by many staff and Elders, Healing Lodges are "...melding a minimum-security facility with a cultural way of life." However, a recurring narrative throughout the Healing Lodges and across the interviews is the complexity of merging and having these two perspectives come together and coexist in a way that upholds the integrity of both. Given the role

of Elders in sharing teachings, ceremonies, and Indigenous understandings, this appears to be particularly challenging for Elders within an institutional setting. As an Elder at KHV describes it, the operation of the Healing Lodges entails, “...blending traditional teachings to the mainstream correction[al] philosophy.” An Elder at PSC speaks further to this as they explicate the intricacy of working within a healing setting bounded by the constraints of being within an institution:

Working here [at the Healing Lodge] under that mandate is that we have to revitalize a lot of the teachings so that they would be applicable to a setting like this, and so we [are] almost doing new things with old method[s]— but to reintroduce those methods so that it would be workable in a setting like this.

The commonly expressed issue around the use of tobacco is illustrative of the complexity of having correctional procedures merged with Indigenous culture under a joint vision. Seen as a sacred medicine, being able to use or offer tobacco is a fundamental aspect of Indigenous culture that cannot be fully expressed within the Healing Lodge setting given CSC policy restrictions. A resident at KHV speaks to this as he reflects on the inability to offer tobacco:

Tobacco is a big part of the culture. It’s one of the main medicines. We have a hard time getting access to it... I should be able to offer it—the proper way is you offer the Elder tobacco to talk to [them]. That’s the proper way. And yet, so much bullshit is created over tobacco and this no smoking thing.

While the limitations around tobacco—even within the perimeter of its significance to Indigenous culture - is an issue that residents routinely expressed across the Healing Lodges, it was also commonly noted within the narratives of staff and Elders.

Beyond the contrasting forces underpinning the operation of Healing Lodges, it appears that the policies of CSC can often set limits or restrictions to having a Healing Lodge that is entirely guided by Indigenous culture, practices and overall way of life. That is, the narratives of the Elders from the Healing Lodges suggest there is a need for CSC to stretch its vision when it comes to understanding Indigenous culture. As an Elder at PSC shares, it can be difficult at times for the correctional vision to recognize Indigenous spirituality, culture and traditions as a way of life:

They only see that if you’re doing a Pipe Ceremony or doing a Sweat Lodge ceremony [as] cultural, everything other than that is not. They [CSC] have a hard time seeing anything beyond what is stereotypical cultural.

In this view, traditional healing methods and cultural practices are narrowed with CSC policies

and procedures in a way that as an Elder at PSC further explains, ultimately means the “...elimination of what is and [is] not understandable as cultural, except for just specific things that they feel comfortable with.”

A commonly shared narrative amongst many of the staff, Elders, and residents is the need for a clear balance between the underpinning vision of operating an institution, and the vision of operating a space guided by Indigenous culture. As a staff member at KHV shares “...Healing Lodge versus a Penitentiary [institution]—you get some people saying it’s a Healing Lodge other people saying oh it’s an institution, so there’s an imbalance between policy and practice.” While there is an evident blend of both visions when it comes to the operation of the Healing Lodges, staff, Elders, and residents across the sites —emphasized the importance of having Indigenous culture be in the forefront. As an Elder at WCHL notes, “Our focus was to try and get more high healing, low CSC, and we try to get that... that was first— that was our vision.” While having Indigenous culture in the forefront is regarded as fundamental for upholding the integrity of operating a Healing Lodge, there appears to be variation across the sites. That is, the Healing Lodges can be seen as operating through a spectrum with regards to the degree in which Indigenous culture or mainstream correctional practices are foregrounded. While the narratives emerging from the interviews at WCHL and KHV suggest much of the Healing Lodge practices are guided by Indigenous culture, the narratives from PSC suggest the contrary.

Commonly noted amongst staff, Elders, and residents at PSC is the over-emphasis of institutional security practices, procedures, and structure, which dampen the vision and integrity of the site as a Healing Lodge. Notably, the security measures within PSC were routinely reflected upon as being overly static and excessive for the context of a Healing Lodge. As a staff member at PSC shares:

We didn’t have metal detectors and all that [before]. I think we’re actually the only one that have metal detectors—it’s ridiculous. We started doing that now and I don’t think we’ve ever caught anybody. ... it’s a lot of work for nothing...if you’re going to put up a metal detector, it just changes everything right from the start, right from the start, everybody’s face and demeanor— people who visit, it’s drastic. It puts an immediate barrier in front of everybody having a metal detector and an X-ray machine.

Similar to the perspectives of staff and Elders, many of the residents within PSC also express dissent to the over-emphasis on security measures and procedures within the site. This is particularly with regards to the inspection of Indigenous sacred items, such as spiritual articles, objects, and medicines. Many residents shared concerns in this regard and problematized having

measures in place to inspect sacred items. A resident at PSC speaks to this as he reflects on the security practices that disregard the Elders and culture more broadly:

What's CSC doing? Why are they doing this to the Elders, why are they doing this to the people that come here to teach us? It's like they don't trust them. You know, where is the trust value? Where is the healing aspect of our Elders that have been working here for years and getting everything searched, and their lunch bags and everything? I don't know— for me, I don't see it as a reason, I don't see why they do that. This is minimum security. I can see them doing it at a medium or maximum security, but not here.

In describing the heightened security measures and practices that are in place, many of the residents compare PSC to their experiences at mainstream CSC institutions. In particular, some residents expressed the operation and security measures being more stringent than those seen at other minimum-security institutions: “It's definitely a different feel, it's higher security here than it was when I was in minimum.” Another resident at PSC further adds to this as he shares the perception of the Healing Lodge amongst the residents, “There's a joke around here that [we] call this Pê Sâkâstêw max, just because of the fences, the metal detectors and the big spotlights all the way around.” The high security measures at PSC, which are reflective of the correctional approach, are regarded as being incongruent with the vision of PSC as a Healing Lodge guided by Indigenous culture. As a resident summarizes, “there might be a sign up there that says Pê Sâkâstêw Healing Lodge but it's not, it's run just like an institution.”

While the issue of having the Healing Lodge being overly guided by CSC institutional practices and security procedures arose as a prominent issue at PSC, the complexity of applying CSC practices within the Healing Lodge setting is one shared across the sites. While classified as minimum-security institutions, routinely expressed amongst staff is the difficulty of applying CSC policies geared towards minimum institutions to the context of a Healing Lodge. That is, despite their designation, Healing Lodges have unique operational needs and demands that make the applicability of these broader policies rather difficult or otherwise incompatible to the setting. As a staff member at KHV explains:

I kind of see us as like the women's sector, you know, has unique needs and I think Indigenous offenders and Healing Lodges also do. A lot of policy ...it's not even applicable to a Healing Lodge— like perimeter clearance or perimeter security, well we don't even have a perimeter so this really excludes Healing Lodges. But they never make a statement about that, it just says all minimums or all mediums it's like okay but we really aren't the same as all minimums, and so it would be nice to have some additional identity.

The narratives of staff highlight how Healing Lodges are unique from minimum-security institutions in that much of what Commissioner Directives<sup>27</sup> and policies outline do not mesh with Indigenous traditions or the operational demands of Healing Lodges. As another staff at KHV echoes, “Policies are written for CSC as a whole, this place is very unique in that way and sometimes the policy—when it comes to security— is really hard to implement.” There appears to be a need for greater clarity in policy in a way that takes into account the distinct identity or operational setting of Healing Lodges, as well as their vision of operating within the milieu of Indigenous culture. As a staff member at KHV puts it, Healing Lodges are, “...a different style of doing the business.”

As a way to help mend the gap between operating an institution and operating a Healing Lodge, a meaningful practice emerging from the narratives of the staff at KHV and WCHL is the inclusion and consultation of Elders in most aspects of the Healing Lodge. Amongst these sites, much of the daily operational practices, procedures, as well decisions appear to be done either with or under the guidance of the Elders. For example, staff at KHV shared how Elders are consulted and informed about any operational or policy changes that take place at the site. In a similar fashion, at WCHL Elders are consulted when security measures need to take place. For example, in speaking to the need to access the sacred ground area for operational demands, a staff member at WCHL shares the approach taken:

We are searching the sacred grounds over there at the Sweat Lodge, so we need to consult with the Elders when we do that, and they were present while we were searching with the canine unit... We need to consult them – like, "This is what we're doing, can you help us out?"... The Elders here, they're central. So, you rely on them a lot more, you know, you're consulting with them.

The narratives from KHV and WCHL continuously suggest that Elders play a fundamental role in the operation or direction of the Healing Lodges. For example, to guarantee proper protocols are followed, any ceremonies or events that take place within the sites occur under the guidance of Elders. Additionally, Elders are included and are able to take part in various meetings and case conferences alongside staff and management. These practices are expressed as being a way of ensuring that actions or decisions within the Healing Lodges are done in a way that respects and upholds the culture.

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<sup>27</sup> National policies that provide rules and authorities of CSC, including establishing procedures to be followed to meet policy objectives, including outlining responsibilities and accountabilities.

The narratives emerging from PSC suggest that the opportunities are limited for Elders to be involved in a similar capacity to that indicated at WCHL and KHV. While Elders expressed a need and interest in being involved and consulted given their knowledge and experience, much of the decisions, actions, and operational practices appear to be guided by management and staff. As an Elder at PSC shares, “I think we have lost our voice.” Notably, the need for Elders at PSC to have a more active role came largely from the observations of both the residents and staff. Many residents expressed the need for Elders to have more of a say at the site. As a resident at PSC explains:

I think the Elders have to have more say .... Because if CSC is the voice, I mean why?—It’s just a minimum then. If they’re controlling everything and not following our culture and tradition, then it’s just a minimum and they shouldn’t have ‘Healing Lodge’ attached to the sign out there...Why do that? And to me it’s just an insult, it’s a joke to our culture and disrespecting the Elders.

In speaking of the more prominent role Elders should have at PSC, a staff member summarizes, “I wish there was more, like I mean originally when they planned this place they did that, they had the Elders’ input...that’s how they envisioned Pê Sâkâstêw Centre.”

**Community engagement.** Considering the vision and operation of the Healing Lodges, a recurring discussion across the interviews centred on the engagement and involvement of the local community. With a MOU in place between CSC and the Indigenous communities in which the Healing Lodges are hosted on, much of the narratives from the staff, Elders, and residents underscored the importance of establishing and maintaining a cooperative partnership with these communities. Importantly, this goes beyond the opportunities for residents to go out into the community, such as through temporary absences, as was explicated earlier in the report. Rather, this encompasses the opportunities for the local community to be actively involved and included within the Healing Lodges.

While all the Healing Lodges are founded with the commitment of having the local community involved, there appears to be considerable variation across the sites in terms of what this involvement should consist of, as well as the degree to which this commitment is upheld. The narratives at WCHL and PSC revealed the need for greater efforts to include the community. While partnerships and joint ceremonies or events take place at WCHL with Beardy’s & Okemasis First Nation reserve, several staff expressed the need for greater strides to have the community involved in order to help foster understandings and transparency. As a staff member

shares:

You know, when you drive in you see the sign and you see the road, but you don't see the institution itself. I think it would be really good to maybe have—I don't know how it would work, but to have almost an open house type of a situation, where people who are interested from the community or surrounding areas could actually come; “So this is what it looks like, oh okay I see, now I understand.” Because all they know is that this is a federal institution, and all of the fears “oh there's murderers and there are rapists and there's bad people that stay there.” When really, you walk around sometimes and you can't even tell a CX [Correctional Officer] from a Nîcisân [resident].

By having more opportunities that facilitate community engagement, this can help “lift the veil of secrecy” that may be attached to having a Healing Lodge operating within the community. Another WCHL staff member adds to this as they share how such partnerships and invitations extended to the local community can also help expand the support system of the residents, whereby “...if we have people coming in from the community, then they have those connections.”

Staff, Elders, and residents at PSC also expressed the need for greater community involvement and engagement. While there are efforts in place at PSC aimed at maintaining a partnership with the community, such as an Elder Senate Committee comprised of Elders from Samson Cree Nation, these initiatives appear to skim the surface of establishing an inclusive partnership. Interviews revealed a need for more efforts to help foster greater engagement and bonds with the community. Several residents and Elders expressed the desire to have more joint ceremonies and events where the local community of Samson Cree Nation and Maskwacis are invited. In reflecting on this, a resident at PSC shares:

Other than the Pow Wow and the Christmas social, we haven't really had the community in here, for much of anything else I've seen. But those both went well....and several members of the community made a point to come around to us and wishing us merry Christmas and talking to us, and asking our names—they were really quite nice.

While there appears to be a desire for greater engagement opportunities and efforts, the palpable security and institutional emphasis at PSC may be seen as a barrier for a meaningful and active partnership with the community. As a staff member explicates:

The intent of when this place was first built, there was no gate and the community could come in and share...community members used to come to have AA meetings. We don't have any interaction with the community because we have a gate up and we have lights, we're a jail now, right.

As put by an Elder at PSC, “the correctional side of it has become louder” leaving little room for

PSC's community partner to be involved in the envisioned capacity of operating a Healing Lodge.

In contrast to the gaps identified in community engagement and involvement across some of the Healing Lodges, the narratives throughout KHV reveal the presence of a cooperative and inclusive partnership with the local community. As was often shared, the relationship between KHV and Sts'ailes Nation is seen like an "extended family." In speaking to this, a staff member at KHV shares how there is continuous effort to include and consult with the local community to ensure that the integrity of the MOU is upheld:

The critical components is in our agreement, in our integrity for what we do here is our relationship with the community so Sts'ailes we have a Memorandum of Understanding and it was very clear ...this is commitment to sincerity and integrity of the culture.

Reinforcing this, Elders emphasized and necessitated the close collaborations with the community as a means of ensuring KHV is respecting both the culture and territory in which it is situated on:

We're strongly affiliated with Sts'ailes band because we're within their territory so ...anything that we do traditionally, spiritually we coordinate with the nation— Sts'ailes and we talk about what we're going to do— is it appropriate, you know according to the teachings that we're going to follow.

Some of the approaches and practices highlighted by staff and Elders at KHV that help maintain a productive relationship with the local community are regular meetings and communications with the Senate Advisory Committee for consultations and cultural guidance. Additionally, staff shared the notable role of having a Community Engagement Officer in Sts'ailes to liaison with, such as for the organization of joint ceremonies and events, as well the coordination of cultural humility training for the staff at KHV. Having these systems in place allows for the maintenance of a reciprocal relationship between KHV and the local community of Sts'ailes Nation. As a staff member captures through their reflection on KHV:

The community [being] involved— I think that's one of the key factors that makes KHV as successful as it is—with all the community involvement with Sts'ailes ... I see that as the integral part of what makes KHV work right— their involvement.

**Staffing.** Looking within the scope of the operation of Healing Lodges, staffing challenges and practices arose as a notable theme from the accounts of staff from across the sites. A common challenge identified, and one that was further supported by the experiences of residents, is staff exhibiting attitudes of higher security institutions. Notably, as was touched on



earlier in the report, some Correctional Officers were identified as carrying what can be described as the “pen mentality.” In speaking of having Correctional Officers and staff coming in or deployed from higher security institutions, a staff member at WCHL shares how, “They bring over a different attitude because they’ve come from higher security levels, and they’re not used to our [Healing Lodge] level of security.” Importantly, the issue surfaces when staff approaches are not adjusted or adapted to fit the cultural and dynamic security practices of the Healing Lodges. In speaking of the “pen mentality,” a staff member at WCHL explains:

Some of them [Correctional Officers] have a hard time leaving it. Some of them almost don’t want to leave it. And ...you got to realize this is a different setting, absolutely of course no bars, no fences, no barriers, the open door policy.

While seen as a staffing challenge throughout the Healing Lodges, residents at PSC frequently shared concerns of having Correctional Officers and staff transferred from maximum-security institutions. As a resident at PSC explains, “See this place here, most of the staff here are max [maximum security] people... You shouldn’t be at a minimum with that mentality. You are two security [levels] down and it’s a place of release.” Staff at PSC expressed similar experiences and observations whereby it was shared that staff coming from higher security tend to be caught up in their old ways. As reinforced by another resident at PSC in regards to some staff maintaining the “pen mentality”:

This is a minimum—this is a Healing Lodge ...[but] it’s just like the penitentiary... There are some [staff], man they just have that mentality— I don’t know if they just got here, I have no idea, but they have that mentality and it’s just terrible... Like I say, our next step is community, what if we see you on the street? I’d rather say hi than have you turn and run from me you know. But, that’s just the way it is.

Further to the challenges that may arise from having Correctional Officer hires who have difficulty embracing the dynamic security approaches needed within Healing Lodges, an additional issue was prominently expressed across the sites from staff, Elders, as well residents. This staffing challenge, notably existing at KHV and PSC, is the need for greater Indigenous staff representation, particularly representation from the local communities. Common amongst the Healing Lodges, the MOU indicates a commitment for the Healing Lodges to have significant Indigenous staff representation from the local communities. However, emerging from the narratives across the sites, these commitments have not been fully achieved.

Importantly, residents commonly expressed the desire to have more Indigenous staff and hiring from the community. For many of the residents across the Healing Lodges, this is seen as

a focal point of connection and understanding; to have more staff that follow the culture. A resident at PSC speaks to this as he reflects on his experience coming into the Healing Lodge:

I figured that [the Healing Lodge] it's on the community, it's on the reservation—you know, there is going to be more people that I can connect with because they are from the reservation or from the community— they understand because of intergenerational trauma, and alcoholism, drugs, gangs... But, then I got here and it was like "no."

Like residents, staff and Elders also spoke of the importance of having greater Indigenous and local staff representation given that they are able to identify with or otherwise appreciate many of the experiences and social histories of the residents. As a staff member at WCHL indicates, “It’s really important to let them know that we [as Indigenous staff] understand where they’re coming from. A lot of us have lived that same situation, so it really works when it comes to that.”

While it was evidently expressed that more Indigenous and local staff are necessitated within the Healing Lodges, the narratives of the staff and Elders shed light on some of the complexities of upholding the commitment found in the MOUs. Staff across the sites indicated the presence of barriers or “hurdles” in CSC hiring processes, particularly those for Correctional Officers. For example, the location and distance of CSC Training Academies from local communities and the duration of Correctional Training Programs present a challenge for many community members. A staff member at WCHL speaks to this challenge:

[It's] through the grapevine...you're sent off for 3 months to either Kingston or Prince Edward Island, so how many people are able to leave for 3 months stint? You know, unless you were single and you have no dependents and no whatever. I know a lot of people applying are young parents, right so are you going to be able to leave your child and children and spouse for 3 months straight?

As such, achieving the commitment to the MOUs poses a challenge given the presence of broader barriers in hiring and recruitment. As another staff member at WCHL summarizes:

I mean staffing here is tough ... because when we have open positions especially in Parole or [Correctional] officer positions it's hard to staff, because unfortunately the community members don't often make it through the process.—And it's not because they wouldn't be phenomenal employees, it's just that CSC processes are so difficult and for people you know coming up more disadvantaged—it really does, it impacts it.

Parallel to the need for greater Indigenous staff representation, a further need expressed in some of the interviews across the Healing Lodges is the importance of having staff who demonstrate cultural competency and engagement. This was identified as essential given the significance of Indigenous culture, traditions, and practices within the Healing Lodges. As such,

given the unique competencies needed for the Healing Lodge setting, some staff expressed that having specific work descriptions in CSC for Healing Lodge staff may help bring clarity for staffing needs. This was expressed as being particularly valuable in the context of hiring and retaining Correctional Officers given the intricacy and restrictions in broader agreements in CSC related to staffing these positions. As a staff member at KHV outlines:

Much like women's institutions you know, yes you can be a Correctional Officer, but you still have to have some additional supports as a women's centered approach—and you're [considered] a primary worker— you've got a different job description. Well, Healing Lodge officers are the same kind of thing; there's a unique skill set, unique work that they need to be doing that's different from a Correctional Officer in a jail.

Through the narratives emerging from the staff, Elders, and residents at the Healing Lodges, there appears to be a broader pattern of instability related to staffing seen throughout the sites. This pattern of instability, though expressed in different ways, is seen at WCHL, PSC, as well as KHV. One of the aspects or challenges expressed by staff in this regard is the substantial number of acting positions seen throughout the Healing Lodges. Illustrative of this, is the reflections of a staff member at KHV:

They've been playing musical chairs, oh ya— every position here is acting, over 60% of the positions are acting— and consistently like that. I think that's a problem they have in the entire region too, there's actors everywhere...it's constant changes.

Though observed as necessary given operational demands, the narratives suggest the continued use of acting positions can create some strain on staff as they work to backfill positions, and wear “multiple hats” for different positions at once. In some instances, the various roles staff take on or oversee were also due to the demands of positions being vacant or otherwise unfunded. For example, the absence of a position for a Social Programs Officer at WCHL meant that efforts are made from other staff in attempt to fill the encompassed services or support this position is supposed to offer.

The pattern of instability seen in staffing across the Healing Lodges also relates to the high turnover rates and difficulty of retaining staff. Shared amongst the sites, many of the positions, particularly that of management were described as continuously changing. At PSC the narratives of staff revealed that this may be attributed to staff and management coming into the site for a period of time as a “stepping stone” for career development. Staff observe that it is not uncommon for individuals to take on positions at the site, only to obtain experience and depart

from PSC after a short time period. As a staff member at PSC explains:

People that want to climb the ladder, no matter what Indigenous or not, usually it's non-Indigenous, but they're here that want to climb the ladder...it's being used as a stepping stone because let's face it it's a lot easier to climb the corporate ladder here with 50 staff than it is at Bowden with 400 staff, and I find that very unfortunate.

Given this, staff commonly expressed how changes often occur throughout various staff levels and particularly management positions every few years. A staff member at PSC shares:

Every Director brings their own staff members and if you look at it a Director comes in, their friends come with them. After they become part of this, they work into management and that person leaves...and all their people leave with them or they go away, and all new people come in... And it's always been like that.

At KHV, high turnover and issues with staff retention was also expressed as a common pattern of instability at the site. However, at KHV the narratives of the staff suggest that the lower classification and pay rates seen amongst management positions may be attributed to the fast turnover or retention deficiency seen in these positions. That is, within the organizational structure of Healing Lodges, senior management positions, such as that of Warden/Executive Director, are lower in classification than that seen in other CSC minimum-security institutions. As a staff member at KHV shares, this creates “trouble getting people to come up here because in the Senior Management [roles] everybody's a level lower in pay to come here ...it's a drop in pay to come up here and be a manager because it's all at one level lower than the other institutions.” As for turnovers in staff, the narratives emerging from the interviews at KHV suggest that this may be linked in part to the existence of assignment positions for Correctional Officers. Though creating instability in staffing, assignment positions for Correctional Officers were suggestive of being in place for ensuring candidates are able to embrace the vision and cultural setting of the Healing Lodge prior to permanent hiring.

At WCHL patterns of instability in staffing emerged as specifically relating to Correctional Officer positions, as opposed to management. Instability in staffing has left vacant or unfilled positions within the roster of Correctional Officers. With a shortage of Correctional Officers, staff suggested this often dominos into the broader challenge of providing sufficient ETAs and other temporary absences for residents, as was explored earlier in the report. As a staff member points, “Because we're so short Correctional Officers we can't lose a Correctional Officer to take a Nîcisân [resident] all day to the city—you know what I mean, it's just not

feasible for us right now.”

**Population.** In relation to the operation of the Healing Lodges, discussions across the sites commonly emerged around patterns in the resident population. One of the most significant experience seen within the Healing Lodges is the challenge of maintaining a full capacity resident population.<sup>28</sup> That is, the narratives routinely revealed that regardless of fluctuations, the Healing Lodges are often operating with a portion of vacant or unfilled bed space. While this is a common experience across the sites, the narratives of the staff help shed light on the forces behind this situation. Notably, a common, positive attributing factor is the high turnover seen throughout the Healing Lodges because of releases. With residents often being granted discretionary or statutory releases, maintaining a high capacity is difficult. As a staff member at WCHL shares:

Our numbers do fluctuate—but we have great success with releases and stuff, and Parole Board hearings. So our door’s kind of always revolving; we’ll get three [residents] in and then two will leave, or we’ll get one in and five will leave, like it’s always up and down.

A staff member at PSC observes a similar situation whereby they note there are often high successes in day parole releases at the site. The observation of staff at KHV further speaks to this, as one staff member shares, “We’ve released eight guys in one month—well, [we] can’t get transfers to move in fast enough.”

While the thorough process of transferring residents into the Healing Lodges may be seen as a factor that contributes to the under-capacity of the resident population, the rigorousness involved in transfer decisions seen at some of the sites is regarded as essential. To ensure that residents being transferred display commitment and engagement with their Indigenous culture, spirituality, and healing journeys, the selection processes were often suggested as being notably intricate. KHV in particular appears to have a well-rounded approach to vetting in residents. As shared by the staff at KHV, transfer decisions are seldom based off file reviews. Rather, processes are in place whereby potential residents are interviewed. This process, which is done alongside staff and Elder support, is intended to more holistically understand the potential resident and their circumstances in a way that cannot be achieved by simply conducting file reviews. A staff member at KHV describes this process:

When we go do interviews the MAI [Manager of Assessment and Interventions] will

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<sup>28</sup> Rated capacity at WCHL is 80 residents, at PSC it is 60 residents, and KHV it is 50 residents.

typically go over you know the OSL [offender security level] in terms of institutional adjustment history, escape history, public safety, program completion, and then we'll talk about the cultural stuff. So the Elder will kind of ask questions about the role culture plays in their, in their day to day, how much they were engaged in and what they're doing today. ..we will also sometimes go back to the site and say ...we need to hear from the Elder that he works with... We ask specifically about their commitment to be engaged, their sincerity to follow those teachings and the way of life.

This process of involving Elders—both from the Healing Lodge and from the transfer site, is seen as critical for assessing the fit of residents. As an Elder at KHV shares, this is to ensure that, “they’ve done the work, or if they haven’t, [that] they’ve got the motivation—they’re willing to do that. They have to make that personal commitment when they get here.” Staff shared that these meetings and interviews are done either in person or through videoconferencing, depending on feasibility.

Similar narratives emerged from WCHL whereby staff shared that interviews were a common practice in transfer decisions. However, given the resource intensive nature of the process, it appears that interviews are less common practice now at WCHL. As a staff member explains:

Up until probably seven or eight months ago we actually interviewed every applicant either by videoconference or we would go to the institution and actually take an Elder, take an ILO [Indigenous Liaison Officer], Parole Officer and the MAI [Manager of Assessment and Interventions] and we would go and conduct interviews in person. But, that just slowed the process down so much... Our numbers were low so we opted to kind of forego videoconference or interviews in person unless necessary.

Collaborative case and file reviews are done instead now at WCHL by staff and Elders, known as the Nîcisân Management Review Board. This is similar to the approach taken at PSC. However, within PSC, staff and Elders expressed the need for a more collaborative and transparent process of selecting residents. In particular, the experiences and observations suggest limited opportunities for Elders to participate in transfer decisions in a meaningful way. As an Elder at PSC notes:

We get an email and then it says review this guy. How can I review this guy? I don’t know him, never met him, never interviewed him...if I’m going to review this guy I’d rather talk face to face and ask him my questions, not questions from case management, questions that pertain to what I do, so they just come here and they just take up space.

The narratives suggest that having Elders involved in transfer processes and decisions at PSC may assist in the selection of residents who demonstrate commitment and engagement to

Indigenous culture.

Pertaining further to the resident population across the Healing Lodges, the narratives from the interviews revealed a pattern of residents being brought into the Healing Lodge from intake. Often noted as “pen placement,” there appears to be an increase in recent years in the proportion of residents who have not cascaded or worked their way down to the Healing Lodges from higher security levels. This appears to pose some challenges as staff observe these residents are often less engaged and committed to their healing journeys. As a staff member at PSC explains:

The guys used to earn their way here, like I remember the guys I used to work with at [higher security institutions] wanted to be here and they earned it, but now we’re not seeing that— they’re pen placed here ... They kind of take advantage of it, whereas those that earn it you can clearly see they want to be here those are the guys that have proved in the mediums that they’re invested, they’ve proved, they’ve worked with the Elders, there’s no institutional charges, and we can see the difference here.

Further to this, in having residents “pen placed” at the Healing Lodges, some staff expressed that these cases often lack the initial and progress work that other residents who transfer in from medium or minimum security institutions often have, such as Elder reviews.

From a different view, emerging from the narratives of some residents across the sites, there appears to be some discontent with having individuals “pen placed” at the Healing Lodge. Residents tend to perceive individuals who are transferred from intake as less commendable for their presence. A staff member at KHV explicates this:

It can be tough for these guys individually because a lot of people that have come here have done time, whether it be, you know, a couple of years ... they believe they’ve earned their way to come here and they’ll look at those the ones who get pen placed here as “you don’t know what a jail is like.”

A final pattern that emerged with respect to the population at the Healing Lodges is the presence of what many residents and staff referred to as “short-timers.” That is, throughout the Healing Lodges, there appears to be a portion of residents who are only at the site for a short period of time, given the close proximity of their release. This was noted to create situations where much of the release planning for the residents would already be complete. As a staff member at WCHL explains:

Release planning it kind of depends on the case and at what stage that we get them. Some men will get here when everything is already planned. You know they’ve got maybe four months left in their sentence. ...so basically we’re kind of just housing him, you know

what I mean. Like keeping him going on his, you know, ceremony and working with the Elders but all the casework is done, so his plans are done.

This was noted by some staff as being a challenge with regards to what they can offer and work with for a resident when they are only spending a few months at the Healing Lodge. Speaking to this, a staff member at PSC explains the limitations in this regard:

We get a guy for four months, what's the point? Four months this guy we're not going to help this guy in four months. But when we have an offender for a year at least as a designated time, a certain amount of time, [then] he can make a change in his life, he can learn something, he can develop resources in order to get help. But four months ain't going to do it.

The narratives from the residents who are at the Healing Lodge for a short period of time also reinforces the staff observations. For example, a resident at WCHL describes himself as being in a state of "limbo," just waiting for his statutory release; "If I was here at a different time in my sentence it might have been better, but I'm just near the end." In turn, to ensure that the Healing Lodges are able to work with the residents in an adequate and comprehensive way, the narratives suggest that it would be most productive if residents spend an extended time within the Healing Lodge.



## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to expand on previous research regarding Healing Lodges by qualitatively examining the experiences of residents, Elders, and staff at men's CSC-operated Healing Lodges. In particular, through the narratives of the participants, this study shed light on the interventions and spiritual and cultural opportunities offered at the Healing Lodges, as well as the environment and relationships that are fostered that collectively play a role in the healing journeys of residents. Further, by including all of the men's CSC-operated Healing Lodges, this research sought to highlight the best practices and current challenges facing the operation and effective functioning of these sites.

The strength of Healing Lodges lies in their ability to provide a structured living environment that incorporates Indigenous spirituality and traditions throughout their interventions, case management, and operations. While there are opportunities available in the areas of education, employment, and vocational training that are comparable to traditional minimum-security institutions, Healing Lodges also present unique opportunities to participate in ceremonies and cultural events, learn and practice hobby crafts and traditional art, and engage in other cultural activities. While the amount and breadth of these opportunities varies by Healing Lodge, it is apparent that providing a range of both cultural-specific and other activities is crucial to keeping residents connected and engaged in their culture, productive, and focused on prosocial activities. Opportunities for temporary absences, particularly through ETAs and UTAs, were also clearly beneficial for residents to form connections and offer assistance to the community, further engage in their culture, and ultimately prepare residents for release through a gradual reintegration.

Through the narratives of residents, and further reinforced by Elders and staff, it is evident that the opportunities that are offered throughout Healing Lodges play a fundamental role in the spiritual, cultural, and emotional healing journey of residents. Notably, the various cultural ceremonies, hobby crafts/activities, programs, education/ vocational/ employment prospects, as well as temporary absence opportunities collectively contribute to the cultural connection and overall healing of residents. Beyond the opportunities offered, the holistic and unique environments of Healing Lodges, which emphasize Indigenous culture and spirituality, further help guide residents through their healing journeys. The unique atmosphere is seen as

fostering a healing environment, particularly relative to other traditional correctional institutions. In effect, the environment fosters a space for residents to engage in introspection and self-reflection, find balance within themselves, and enable a sense of commitment and accountability both to their healing path and to the expectations of the Healing Lodge. Positive relationships and interactions with other residents, Elders, and staff further contribute to the sense of community and an atmosphere conducive to healing and prosocial changes. For the most part, Healing Lodges are marked by strong connections and collaborations between residents, open and dynamic relationships with staff, and strong bonds with Elders built on immense support and guidance.

Cumulatively, the impact of the opportunities, atmosphere, and relationships illustrate how Healing Lodges are a space where residents can focus on healing, practice their spirituality and culture, and from a correctional perspective, address the factors that ultimately led to their offence, as well as Indigenous Social History factors. This is consistent with previous qualitative research and evaluations that have found that the Healing Lodge environment improves the attitudes and behaviours of residents and positively influences their knowledge of Indigenous culture (Correctional Service of Canada, 2012; Didenko & Marquis, 2011; Trevethan et al., 2002; Trevethan et al., 2007). These improvements are supported by quantitative findings that indicate positive changes in offenders' criminogenic need levels (Didenko & Marquis, 2011; Hanby et al., 2020).

### **Challenges and Best Practices**

While the benefits of Healing Lodges are apparent, the operations of these environments is not without its challenges. The narratives of staff and Elders, and often substantiated by the experiences of residents, reveal themes in four main areas: 1) the complexity of merging CSC approaches with Indigenous culture, 2) community engagement and involvement within the Healing Lodges, 3) staffing practices and needs, and 4) patterns around the resident population within Healing Lodges. For the most part, these themes were observed at each of the Healing Lodges to varying degrees.

One of the most common issues raised by residents, Elders, and staff across the Healing Lodges were challenges related to the tension between CSC institutional policies with the Healing Lodge vision reflecting traditional Indigenous culture, traditions, and protocols. This is not a novel issue as it has been formerly documented in previous reviews (Didenko & Marquis,

2011; WCHL Joint Review, 2010). Given that men's CSC-operated Healing Lodges are classified as minimum-security institutions, they are required to follow CSC policies and procedures related to security, offender case management and reporting, correctional and other programming, as well as staffing and training. However, in some cases, the policies and procedures pertaining to the operation of traditional CSC institutions and offender management do not meld easily with the unique operational context and realities of the Healing Lodge environment. In other instances, it is apparent that CSC policies (e.g., tobacco bans) were not necessarily compatible with Indigenous culture and ways of life (e.g., the use of tobacco as an offering in ceremony). Finding an appropriate balance between maintaining the cultural integrity of the Healing Lodge and being compliant with CSC policies was an ongoing challenge to varying degrees at the sites, with PSC in particular demonstrating more intensive security practices. One possible solution raised by staff was a separate designation for Healing Lodges that would allow for distinct policies and procedures from mainstream minimum-security institutions. Developing clear, culturally-based definitions of what constitutes 'healing' or a 'healing lodge' may also reduce misunderstandings of how each site should be operating (WCHL Joint Review, 2010). Maintaining a clear and prominent role for Elders by including them in consultations and decision making is also instrumental in remaining dedicated to the purpose and vision of the Healing Lodge.

Various staffing challenges were also a recurring issue across Healing Lodges. These issues included 1) staff turnover, particularly in management positions, and 2) inadequate representation of Indigenous staff and varying levels of cultural competency amongst staff. High rates of staff turnover, particularly in management positions, were noted at each of the Healing Lodges. A lack of stability in management has been a consistent issue for CSC-operated Healing Lodges since commencing their operations in the mid-1990s and early 2000s (Didenko & Marquis, 2011; Trevethan et al., 2007; Willow Cree Healing Lodge Joint Review Board, 2010). These previous reviews suggest that staff turnover is problematic as it can negatively affect the continuity of community relationship building, consistency of protocols and procedures, retention of corporate memory, and overall staff morale. Retaining and hiring culturally-competent staff who are well-versed in dynamic security was identified as a barrier for staffing and for establishing positive relationships with residents. Stability in staffing and management remains to be an area of development for CSC-operated Healing Lodges. In the current study,

several participants described that the “pendulum” of Healing Lodge operations swinging between CSC security-focused policies and traditional Indigenous culture, traditions, and protocol was driven in part by shifts in management. As previously described by Didenko and Marquis (2011), a disincentive for long-term staffing is the lower classification (and associated rates of pay) for Executive Director positions at CSC-operated Healing Lodges compared to those in other federal institutions.

The original vision of Healing Lodges included high levels of Indigenous staff, and typically with a commitment to hire a proportion of staff from the local community. The ability to fulfill this intent has varied over time both within and across the Healing Lodges. Both residents and staff identified the need for more Indigenous staff as they can rely on shared experiences or understandings to build connections and act as positive role models. Barriers were identified to hiring from the local communities including challenging competition processes and the distance and duration of training. Addressing these barriers may increase Indigenous staffing (e.g., creating specific work descriptions, competition processes, and training for Healing Lodges). Regardless of Indigenous ancestry, there are also varying levels of cultural competency amongst staff at the Healing Lodges. Some non-Indigenous staff demonstrated a high level of interest and engagement with the First Nations culture of the Healing Lodge. However, the findings of this research are consistent with previous studies that found that not all staff understand the history and vision behind Healing Lodges, follow Indigenous traditions, or get involved in cultural and spiritual activities (Didenko & Marquis, 2011; Trevethan et al., 2007). It is important that staff reflect the culture of the Healing Lodge, and ideally, engage in cultural activities and ceremony in order to pass on cultural knowledge and model an Indigenous way of living.

Consistent with previous evaluations (Delveaux et al., 2007; Didenko & Marquis, 2011; Nafekh et al., 2006) which identified that available bed space was not utilized to full capacity, CSC-operated Healing Lodges continue to operate under-capacity. In the past, these capacity issues have been attributed to the small number of Indigenous offenders classified as minimum-security, a lack of interest from the offenders, geographical isolation of Healing Lodges and limited availability across CSC regions, and limited programming in Healing Lodges to address specific offender needs (Didenko & Marquis, 2011). However, it is important to note that this challenge is not unique to Healing Lodges as other minimum-security level institutions

experience varying levels of occupancy (CSC, 2012). In the current study, capacity issues were revealed to be attributed to the selection process of finding Indigenous residents who are culturally-engaged and that would be a good fit for the Healing Lodge setting that focuses on commitment and accountability of residents. Changes in the Healing Lodge population over time (e.g., residents that are directly penitentiary placed at the Healing Lodge after intake) bring forth challenges in engagement and commitment. Accepting offenders who do not identify with Indigenous spirituality, culture and traditions is a divergence from the original vision of Healing Lodges (Didenko & Marquis, 2011), and as such, effective selection and recruitment of appropriate residents remains a priority. This may include interviews, visits, and screening, as well as the resources in place to allow these practices to occur. Increasing staff and management awareness of Healing Lodge functioning and benefits at other minimum-security institutions may also result in increased promotion to eligible offenders.

Although there are challenges at each of the Healing Lodges, it is valuable to highlight some of the best practices in the areas of programs, hobby crafts and cultural activities, employment, and community involvement that should be emulated at all sites where possible. The in-house programs offered at WCHL and KHV were highly valued by residents. These programs have a strong cultural base as they were typically developed based on the practices and traditions of the First Nation and implemented with local Elder input. These programs also help fill a gap for residents that have previously completed their mandated correctional programs or do not qualify for programming. While the desire for such programs may exist at PSC, adequate resources were not in place to develop and administer in-house programs. The opportunities to learn and practice hobby crafts were highly supported at PSC and KHV. This is a key area of opportunity as hobby crafts help residents use their time productively and meaningfully, and were described as instrumental in the healing journeys of some residents. To facilitate hobby crafts, the appropriate resources and supports need to be in place including a Social Programs Officer, access to materials, and ideally, a designated hobby shop. Also at PSC and KHV, there were a number of cultural-specific employment possibilities for residents. While it is important for residents to have meaningful employment, cultural-specific jobs also offered some residents the opportunity to further connect to their culture. Given the challenges related to job opportunities at WCHL (i.e., the number of residents exceeding the number of jobs thus resulting in “make work” jobs that were not viewed as meaningful), creating employment opportunities

around traditional art or hobby crafts may help fill this void (e.g., carving, drum building, tipi making). Opportunities for employment, vocational training, and work release are all valuable in promoting a strong work ethic and developing the skills needed to secure employment upon release.

Lastly, community involvement is key for the success of the Healing Lodges. A reciprocal relationship is ideal as this affords residents the opportunity to get involved in the community (through ceremonies, community service, etc.) and for the community to be consulted on issues concerning the Healing Lodge and have their community members participate in Healing Lodge activities and ceremonies. Ultimately, this builds a sense of belonging and community for everyone, but in particular the residents who develop connections and benefit from a gradual release from incarceration through temporary absences. This helps to de-institutionalize residents in preparation for release and get them used to being within the general public again and in healthy social settings (Trevethan et al., 2007). Participation in cultural activities and ceremonies in the community is also beneficial for residents as it provides a richer exposure to various cultures, particularly when they may be residing at a Healing Lodge of a different nation than their own. While the narratives of residents in the current study expressed a desire for more ETA and UTA opportunities, previous research indicates that Healing Lodge residents benefit from more temporary absence opportunities as compared to those at mainstream institutions (Hanby et al., 2020).

The need to strengthen community contact and collaboration has previously been identified as an issue by community representatives, staff and management (Didenko & Marquis, 2011). Beyond the community with which the Healing Lodge has an agreement, it would be beneficial to establish partnerships with other surrounding communities, Indigenous bands, and community groups (Didenko & Marquis, 2011). This would also help address the concerns raised by residents regarding a lack of access to their own cultural traditions and teachings, which may differ from those of the Healing Lodge. KHV in particular exemplified a relationship of collaboration and cooperation with Sts'ailes First Nation, which in part has been nurtured by the role of the longhouse on site and the desire of the community to maintain a strong bond with the Healing Lodge. Some of the approaches highlighted by staff and Elders at KHV included hiring a Community Engagement Officer in Sts'ailes to liaison with, regular communications with the Senate Advisory Committee for consultations and cultural guidance, and cultural

humility training for staff.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Unlike quantitative outcome data that may not be sensitive enough to measure the intricate changes resulting from the Healing Lodge experience, the strength of this research lies in the use of qualitative information from interviews. Further enhanced by considering the perspectives of various sources at CSC-operated Healing Lodges, this study was able to examine impacts that are difficult to track or document using traditional correctional indicators (e.g., progressing on a healing journey, further developing an understanding of traditional Indigenous culture, cultivating positive relationships). Despite these strengths, a number of potential limitations of interviews with an incarcerated population that have been discussed in-depth elsewhere (e.g., Copes & Hochstetler, 2010) should be noted. In particular, residents volunteered to participate in the research, and this may have resulted in a skewed sample (e.g., residents that were particularly engaged and satisfied with their experience, residents that were especially critical of the Healing Lodge). Residents may have had ulterior motives for participating the research that may have influenced the information shared in their narratives and the type of details withheld. In addition, in order to achieve a manageable amount of data, a sample of residents, Elders, and staff were selected that were generally representative of the population. As such, given the limitations associated with purposive sampling and interviews with an incarcerated population, the insights gained from the participants may not be representative of the full CSC-operated Healing Lodge experience. Lastly, interviews with staff, Elders, and residents were utilized to describe the nature of community relationships and engagement. Obtaining the perspectives of community members would have been beneficial to obtain a more complete view of community involvement and partnerships, but was beyond the scope of the current study.

Healing Lodges provide structured environments in which Indigenous spirituality, culture and traditions are regarded as one of the foundations for healing and reintegration. Residents are able to make positive strides in their healing path by engaging in introspection, finding balance within themselves, and developing a sense of commitment and accountability. As with any operational environment, they are not without their challenges. Each of the CSC-operated Healing Lodges is thriving in various ways. As such, best practices can be drawn from each other to further strengthen the Healing Lodge experience for residents, help them advance in their

healing journeys, and better them for reintegration into the community. This research builds on previous research by providing a clearer picture of the experiences of residents at Healing Lodges and disentangling the impacts of those interventions, relationships, and environment that cannot be quantitatively assessed. Future research will extend this qualitative examination of Healing Lodges from a holistic perspective, focusing on women's Healing Lodges and men's Section 81 Healing Lodges.



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## Appendix A: Informed Consent Form for Healing Lodge Residents

### Informed Consent A Study on Healing Lodge Experiences

*This form has information to help you decide if you want to participate in this study.*

**Invitation to Participate:** You are invited to participate in a research study being done by the Research Branch of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), with the support of the Indigenous Initiatives Directorate.

**Purpose of the Study:** We are studying the experiences of Indigenous residents within healing lodges. In this research we want to understand some of the personal impacts that healing lodges have on residents.

**Participation:** To participate in this study you will take part in a 1-hour interview, which will be audio-recorded. Questions will be asked about your experience at \_\_\_\_\_ Healing Lodge, the environment here, as well as your involvement in the different activities, services, and programs offered within the healing lodge. We are also asking for your permission to look at your official files. All information we collect will not be shared with healing lodge staff or anyone else.

**Potential Benefits:** Your participation in this study will give you an opportunity to talk about your experience here as a healing lodge resident. This will help us better understand the importance of Indigenous-specific services and programs within the correctional system.

**Potential Risks or Discomforts:** Your participation in this study involves sharing your experience as a healing lodge resident. You may freely skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable throughout the interview. If you experience any discomfort, you may use the support services available at \_\_\_\_\_ Healing Lodge (e.g., Elder, other positions identified by Healing Lodge).

**Confidentiality and Anonymity:** Your participation in this study is confidential. Your information will be protected and will only be used for the purpose of this research study. You will remain anonymous and any personal information, like your name, will be removed. To protect your privacy, your information and interview responses will be safely stored on a password-protected computer that only the research team can access.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participating in this study and taking part in an interview is voluntary. You may also leave the study or stop the interview without consequences of any kind. Please note that participating in this study will not affect your status, services, or rights within the healing lodge.

**Participant Signature and Consent:**

By signing this form, I \_\_\_\_\_, understand what is required of  
(Participant's full name)  
me and agree to participate in this study as outlined above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Research Staff Signature:**

In my judgment, the participant is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Research Staff full name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*If any participant is unable to read or comprehend the information in this consent form, consent can be obtained orally. The participant's verbal consent will be documented at the beginning of the audio recording of the interview. A copy of the written form will also be provided.*

## **Appendix B: Informed Consent Form for Healing Lodge Elders and Staff**

### **Informed Consent A Study on Healing Lodge Experiences**

**Invitation to Participate:** You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by the Research Branch of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). This research is being done with the support of the Indigenous Initiatives Directorate.

**Purpose of the Study:** This research aims to gain an understanding of some of the experiences and personal impacts that healing lodges have on Indigenous residents. Part of this research aims to highlight the overall benefits of healing lodges, the types of interventions offered, as well as identify any challenges currently facing the operation of healing lodges.

**Participation:** To participate in this study you will take part in a 1-hour interview, which will be audio-recorded. Questions will be asked about your experiences and observations at \_\_\_\_\_ Healing Lodge, the environment here, as well as the impacts of the different activities, services, and programs offered.

**Potential Risks or Discomforts:** Your participation in this study involves reflecting on \_\_\_\_\_ Healing Lodge, which may cause some discomfort. To mitigate such discomfort, you may freely refuse to answer any questions throughout the interview. If the interview causes distress, you are encouraged to access any of the well-being tools or services available to CSC staff (\_\_\_\_\_).

**Potential Benefits:** Your participation in this study will provide you with the opportunity to talk about your involvement at \_\_\_\_\_ Healing Lodge. By sharing your experiences, you will highlight the overall benefits and/or challenges associated with healing lodges. This will help us to better understand the role and importance of Indigenous-specific services and programs within the correctional system.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity:** Your participation in this study is confidential. The information you share during the interview will remain protected and will only be used for the purpose of this research study. To ensure you remain anonymous, any information that may identify you, like your name, will be removed from the study. To protect your privacy, your information and interview responses will be safely stored on a password-protected computer that only the designated research team can access.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participating in this study and taking part in an interview is voluntary. You may also withdraw from the study at any time during the interview. Please note that whether or not you choose to participate in this study will not affect your involvement or position within the healing lodge.

**Participant Signature and Consent:**

By signing this form, I \_\_\_\_\_, understand what is required of  
(*Participant's full name*)  
me and agree to participate in this study as outlined above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Research Staff Signature:**

In my judgment, the participant is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Research Staff full name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Appendix C: Interview Guide for Healing Lodge Residents**

- How has your experience been at the Healing Lodge?
  - o How long have you been here?
  - o Did you request the transfer to the Healing Lodge, or was it suggested/recommended?
- Have you been to a Healing Lodge before?
- What programs do you participate in?
  - o How would you describe your experience with [xx]?
  - o What do you find helpful about [xx]?
- What are some of the other activities you do here?
  - o Hobby-crafts? (Beading, quilting, drumming, etc.)
  - o How is your experience with [xx]?
  - o Do you take part in the ceremonies?
- Are you currently working or involved in any vocational training or employment program? (e.g., food services, maintenance, etc.)
- Are you taking part in any of the education programs here at the Healing Lodge?
- Have you applied/participated in any escorted (ETAs) or unescorted (UTAs) temporary absences?
- What does your typical day look like here? (day-to-day schedule/routine)
- Did you practice traditional healing before coming to the Healing Lodge? (engaged in culture)
- What have you found most helpful about the Healing Lodge for your healing journey?
- How has the Healing Lodge helped you better understand your culture?
  - o Your cultural identity?
- Can you talk about some of the things you've learned here?
  - o Personal? Cultural? Skills?
- Have you noticed any personal changes from your time here?
  - o Differences in the way you feel?
- How is your relationship with the other residents at the Healing Lodge?
- Can you speak about your relationship with the Elders?
- Can you talk about your relationship with the staff?
  - o Do you have access to all the resources that have been suggested to you?
- How often do you have visits from family here at the Healing Lodge?
  - o Have you had a Private Family Visit (PFV)?
- Is the community involved in your healing journey?
- How has the Healing Lodge prepared you for your release?
- What is your plan upon release?
  - o Urban based community or Indigenous community/reserve?
  - o What kind of support are you receiving to prepare for your release?
- Is the Healing Lodge different from what you were expecting (before arriving)?
- Is there anything you would want to change here or see differently?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience at the Healing Lodge?

## **Appendix D: Interview Guide for Healing Lodge Elders and Staff**

*Note.* Some questions may not be asked depending on the role of the interviewee within the Healing Lodge.

### *Experience and Observations:*

- Can you speak about your role within the Healing Lodge?
  - o Title, duties and responsibilities, time
- How would you describe your experience of working in the Healing Lodge?
  - o Have you working in any other CSC institutions?
  - o If so, how are Healing Lodges unique/different?
- How many residents do you typically work with? Do you have regular interactions with all residents?
- How do you work towards creating an environment that is conducive of healing?
- From your experience, are there any particular issues or challenges you often see residents experience?
  - o What interventions/services/programs do you find best help to address these needs?
- From your interactions and observations, what are some of the changes you see in the residents at the Healing Lodge over time? (behaviours, attitudes, interactions, etc.)

### *Healing Lodge Operation:*

- Can you outline some of the programs/interventions that are offered at the Healing Lodge?
  - o How are these different programs delivered? (participation rates, schedule etc.)
  - o Who is involved in delivering and/or facilitating the programs?
  - o Which programs are unique to this Healing Lodge? (in-house programs)
- What are some of the activities the residents may take part in within the Healing Lodge?
  - o Have you taken part in any activities alongside the residents?
- Are residents involved in any hobby-crafts? (Beading, quilting, drumming, etc.)
  - o Are these structured, or are they done independently?
- Have you taken part in any escorted temporary absences (ETAs) with residents?
  - o Can you speak to some of the places or activities this included?
- What activities or programs do you find residents most engaged in?
  - o Are there certain activities that you often recommend or encourage residents to participate in?
- What role would you say the Healing Lodge plays in the preparation of the residents for release and reintegration into the community?
  - o Can you describe the process of working with the residents on their healing plans?
  - o What are some common elements or areas that are part of the residents' healing plans?
- Can you speak to the process of accepting/transferring in new residents?
- Is there any community involvement within the Healing Lodge?
  - o In what ways is the community involved?



- Are there any services or involvements that are used as a follow-up for the residents upon their release?
  - o What processes and/or supports are in place to assist in their transition?
  - o Are residents able to continue with their healing journey and/or cultural activities in the community?
- Are there any challenges you experience as X at the Healing Lodge?
- What are some of the broader challenges experienced by the Healing Lodge?
- Is there any service or activity you would like to see more of at the Healing Lodge?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience at the Healing Lodge?