

# Correctional Officer Onboarding Program: Impacts on Staff, Training and Workplace Culture

*The Correctional Officer Onboarding Program is having a direct positive impact on Correctional Officers; however these positive impacts have not yet extended to the broader workplace culture.*

## Why we did this study

A Correctional Officer Onboarding Program is being piloted at Kent Institution in response to concerns surrounding organizational culture. The program's objective is to support new Correctional Officers (COs) in their transition from the Correctional Service Canada's (CSC) Training Academy to the realities of working at the institution. The goals of the program include reinforcing fundamental competencies, supporting the application of skills to the correctional environment, creating a strong work relationship between a team of mentors and the new COs, developing strong values and ethics, and establishing a review board to evaluate the performance of new COs.

The purpose of this research was to examine the impacts of the program on COs and on the broader correctional environment. This research is a collaboration between the Research Branch and the Learning and Development Branch.

## What we did

Staff at Kent Institution completed online questionnaires between September 13 and October 8, 2021. Current and previous participants of the Onboarding Program ( $n = 54$ ) and other staff working at Kent Institution ( $n = 21$ ) provided feedback on the program. Impacts on the training and transition of new COs, staff relationships, and elements of workplace culture were examined.

## What we found

Both Onboarding participants and other staff reported positive impacts of the program on assisting participants with their transition to the realities of the correctional environment. Onboarding participants also reported positive experiences with the training provided through the program, while other staff identified some issues with the implementation of the program's training, due to overwhelming numbers of Onboarding participants and a shortage of experienced staff working at the institution. These findings indicate that although the program is helpful to the transition of new COs, the effectiveness of the training has been influenced by challenges with the program's implementation, some of which may have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although relationships amongst new COs were described to be largely positive, ongoing concerns were reported regarding relationships between new COs and senior staff and management. Specifically, there appeared to be somewhat of a disconnect between staff and management. Relationships between Onboarding participants and the program's team of mentors were viewed as positive, however many participants were unable to establish relationships with mentors due to a decline in available mentors as the program progressed.

Three aspects of workplace culture were examined in this study: job performance, values and ethics, and organizational commitment. Findings were split between the study groups in this area. Onboarding participants reported positive impacts of the program on their job performance and integration of CSC values and ethics, while other staff viewed no impacts or more negative impacts of the program on these outcomes. Both groups described negative impacts related to organizational commitment and ongoing concerns with staff turnover.

## What it means

Taken together, the results of this research show that the Onboarding Program is having a direct positive impact on the program's participants. However, these positive impacts have not yet extended to the broader workplace culture as measured in the current study. Issues with the implementation of the program and resource limitations due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic may have influenced the results. Findings highlight the potential benefits of a structured Correctional Officer Onboarding Program, although future research would be beneficial once the program is operating at its full potential.

## For more information

Sullivan, R., & Hanby, L. (2023). *Impacts of a Correctional Officer Onboarding Program* (Research Report R-460). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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