



PROJECT SNAPSHOT

The Credit Transfer Experience of the Remand Population in Ontario

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Project Summary

This research provides a scan of programs aimed at providing education and post-secondary level training and courses to individuals who are incarcerated/in remand. The research aims to understand to what extent educational programs are accessible and in what ways this learning is formally recognized by post-secondary institutions after release. The first phase of the project is a literature review. In phase two, I will interview individuals to capture their lived experiences accessing education while incarcerated and their pathways post-release.

In addition to the research scan, I developed a research strategy to address the following research questions:

- What are the experiences of remanded individuals who receive educational training as they attempt to enter PSE, post-release?
- More specifically: Is their learning (and more specifically, credits) formally recognized by the colleges or universities they enter? What hurdles do they experience during this process?
- Based on an understanding of students' experiences, what could be done to streamline their transition into PSE and maximize credit recognition? (by receiving institutions, Amadeusz, students, government).

The research outlines how access to post-secondary education for those incarcerated within Ontario and on a larger scale in Canada remains limited and an under-developed sector with minimal opportunities. Organizations such as Amadeusz and Walls to Bridges are leading the way in Ontario by creating opportunities for access to post-secondary education for those incarcerated, but they are not able to keep up with the demand for education. Access to education needs to be treated as a priority on a systemic level supported by various levels of government, with funding and resource allocation, to further support rehabilitation of those

incarcerated as education is a key protective factor in reducing recidivism (Davis et al., 2013). To make this a reality, a more holistic approach is needed requiring synergetic partnerships and collaborations with organizations, non-profits, community agencies, and post-secondary organizations to drastically revamp the current system and its policies and practices at all levels.

Research Findings

Beyond correspondence programs, there are no post-secondary programs in Ontario or in Canada designed with the needs of those incarcerated in mind along with their limited access to technology and resources. This is a step in centering this issue and ensuring access to education and existence of multiple pathways where access to education as a human right is upheld and supported by educational institutions.

This will contribute to the long-term goal of rehabilitation and reduction in recidivism.

Concerns and Finding #1: There is a lack of information available to the public about education programs offered in correctional facilities, who it is used by, and its outcomes. Information that is currently available via government websites are generic in nature. Access to information is a systemic barrier that disadvantages families of those who have a member incarcerated as well as those who are released and are seeking relevant programs and services to better themselves and their living circumstances.

Concerns and Finding #2: Access to education needs to be more of a priority, supported with funding and resources, to promote rehabilitation and effective reintegration back into the community. This will lead to savings for the justice system as it “costs Correctional Service Canada an average of \$111,202 annually to incarcerate one man (and twice as much to incarcerate one woman), with only \$2950 of that money spent on education per prisoner” (Chan et al., 2017, para. 16). Currently, the types of programs offered are limited, there is a lack of capacity within institutions to meet educational demands, programs offered lack quality due to restrictions imposed in how it can be delivered, and overall there is a lack of partnerships with postsecondary institutions to offer education in prison. The majority of the educational programs offered are high school diploma focused or do not take into consideration the unique needs and circumstances of those incarcerated, such as limited access to learning tools and platforms.

Concerns and Finding #3: There is a need to modernize policies, practices, and processes involved at various levels within jails, prisons, and correctional facilities to create more opportunities for access to quality education. This involves creating a unique intake assessment for the remand population similar for those sentenced, improving the processes involved within intake assessment for those sentenced, more effective data collection and sharing across institutions, and more resources and space allocated for educational programs. This would contribute to an increase in educational opportunities available to meet demand, increase in attendance for programs with low enrollment, and overall raise the quality and consistency of how educational programs are offered.

As we continue to navigate the challenges affiliated with the COVID-19 pandemic, which includes many educational programs being impacted ranging from being put on hold to adapted or offered less consistently, we must take the opportunity to reflect and ask ourselves whether the current system at various level of government and points in the justice system is prioritizing access to education to promote and reinforce the long-term goal of rehabilitation for those incarcerated. This report outlines why the current system is inequitable and unjust, how

systemic barriers impact different social groups leading to disparities in outcomes at various levels within the justice system, and why we need to introduce new legislation, policies, and practices to improve and modernize the system with respect to access to education for those incarcerated. New improvements and changes will contribute to reinforcement of rehabilitation which will lead to savings in monetary costs by reducing recidivism and ensuring more effective reintegration of those incarcerated back into the community post-release. The introduction and implementation of such new changes needs to be a collective effort involving all levels of the government and advocacy and allyship from organizations and community members to make it an urgent issue.

Future Research

This phase of the project has been a literature review. In phase two, individuals will be interviewed to capture their lived experiences accessing education while incarcerated and their pathways post-release. It recommends creating a national funding organization, similar to the Laughing Gull Foundation in the United States, which has a unique branch focusing on “Higher Education in Prison,” that annually reviews proposals for programs and partnerships to improve access to education for those incarcerated. A committee should be created with representatives from various stakeholders to assess the applications based on clear criteria outlined and communicated in advance to the public. This will allow for innovative ideas, programs, and partnerships to be presented, assessed, approved, and initiated to meet the demands of access to education within prisons, jails, and correctional facilities. Overall, more funding and resources needs to be allocated for education, and the government needs to provide incentives for universities to create post-secondary educational programs for those incarcerated. We also recommend creating a national list that outlines various educational programs offered by universities and important factors such as criteria for getting in, costs, duration of the program, and how courses are delivered.

The creation of a national and/or provincial government branch dedicated to “Higher Education in Prison” will centre the goal of rehabilitation, reduce long-term costs affiliated with keeping people incarcerated, and lead to more effective reintegration of those incarcerated back into the community. Such level of commitment from the government in making access to education a priority with incentives for post-secondary education to create and maintain partnerships will lead to innovative policies and practices that will modernize how education is offered given the limitations affiliated with delivering programming in jail settings.

Student Outcomes

Beyond correspondence programs, there are no post-secondary programs in Ontario or in Canada designed with the needs of those incarcerated in mind along with their limited access to technology and resources. This is a step in centering this issue and ensuring access to education and existence of multiple pathways where access to education as a human right is upheld and supported by educational institutions. This will contribute to the long-term goal of rehabilitation and reduction in recidivism.

Tips

Access to information is limited. Therefore, it’s important to work with key figures to obtain information and synthesize it. Access to education while incarcerated and recognition of such credits earned by post-secondary institutions can be a key protective factor in creating opportunities for upward social mobility and crime deterrence post-release. Education is a human right, even if incarcerated, and consequentially a foundational tool and investment in

securing employment, as “stable employment is one of the major pillars for the successful reintegration of releasees” (John Howard Society of Ontario, 2016, p. 20). These issues need to be centred to receive attention.

