



St. Leonard's Society of Canada
Société St-Léonard du Canada

Life(r)'s Work: Supporting a Modernized Strategy for Life-Sentenced People in Canada

Submitted to

Public Safety Canada

by

St. Leonard's Society of Canada

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Introduction

St. Leonard's Society of Canada (SLSC) is pleased to submit this report to Public Safety Canada following the completion of the *Life(r)'s Work: Supporting a Modernized Strategy for Life-Sentenced People in Canada* project, per the Policy Development Contribution Program (PDCP). This project supports certain priorities outlined in the September 2018 [mandate letter issued by Minister Goodale for the Commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada](#)¹ (CSC) concerning the importance of providing programming and interventions that include peer mentoring to all people in custody.

The objective of this project was to develop a curriculum for structured training for the revised Lifer Resource Strategy (LRS). It builds on earlier work completed in 2018-19 by SLSC to inform an enhanced strategy for life-sentenced people in Canada, through the *Life(r)'s Work: Developing a Modernized Strategy for Life-Sentenced People in Canada*² project. That earlier project mobilized recommendations identified in an evaluation of the former LifeLine®/Option Vie®³ program, and enhanced the capacity of the [PeerLife Collaborative](#)⁴ (PLC) to provide services to life-sentenced people (also referred to herein as “lifers”). SLSC worked in collaboration with the PLC to provide CSC with an up to date program that could address service delivery needs for supporting countless lifers over the long-term, and ultimately facilitate their successful integration into the community.

The main project activities in 2018-19 included reviewing and revising the 2010 Lifer Resource Strategy⁵ (LRS) modules to reflect the current correctional context, enhancing the capacity of the PeerLife Collaborative by expanding services in Ontario and Quebec, training additional peer In-Reach Workers (IRWs) under the modernized LRS, and developing a methodological report to inform policy development and provide partners with a better understanding of the lifer population.

What was made clear through the completion of project activities was that the updated LRS required a corresponding structured training curriculum. This would ensure that the LRS could be implemented consistently within federal institutions and/or community services interested in facilitating service delivery. The multi-stage LRS is a comprehensive tool that is used by community-based service providers to employ and supervise peer In-Reach Workers (IRWs) for service delivery. The various stages and modules within the LRS tackle a wide range of complex issues related to the unique carceral experience of people with life sentences. A structured curriculum will ensure that those who are trained to deliver the LRS service have a systematized understanding and approach, which in turn can support a standard process for measuring the impact of service delivery on clients.

¹ Goodale, 2018.

² St. Leonard's Society of Canada, 2019.

³ LifeLine and Option Vie are registered trademarks of St. Leonard's Society of Canada.

⁴ The PeerLife Collaborative (PLC) was developed in response to the cancellation of the LifeLine service in 2012. The PLC comprises of representatives from four St. Leonard's community-based agencies in Hamilton, Peterborough, Ottawa, and Windsor. It is also supported in a research and advisory capacity by SLSC and Maison Cross Roads (Montreal). For more information, see: <http://www.stleonards.ca/peerlife/>

⁵ The original (2010) multi-stage LRS developed as a response to a specific need – the need to catalogue the efforts of dozens of In-Reach Workers (IRWs) who had been using their valuable lived experience to support their peers within institutions and communities across Canada. The objective was to systematize their understanding and approaches to inform a standard process that could measure the impact of their work. However, the opportunity to establish these metrics was cut short in 2012 when government funding for the LifeLine®/Option Vie® services associated with the LRS, was ended.

In the past decade, life-sentenced people constituted less than 4% of all persons admitted to federal prisons annually, but collectively they now represent one quarter of the total inmate population.⁶ In March 2020, the Chairperson of the Parole Board of Canada stated that on average, lifers stay in custody seven years past their parole eligibility date.⁷ To date, there is no clear strategy in place to support the unique needs of this population.⁸ Of further concern is that half of the people in Canada's prisons aged 50 and older are serving a life sentence, and face the effects of accelerated aging as a result of an institutional lifestyle.⁹ The principles of incarcerating people who are aging/elderly within Canada's justice system merit unique considerations and calls for sound strategies to address their eventual, safe integration to the community – especially those serving a lengthy sentence. As such, SLSC gratefully acknowledges **Public Safety Canada** for providing support through this project at a critical time in Canadian corrections. This project provides an opportunity to engage federal partners on supporting a national strategy for life-sentenced people that is connected to humane and effective evidence-based services that SLSC's network has been providing for decades.

SLSC is a membership-based, charitable organization dedicated to community safety since 1967.¹⁰ Its mission is to promote a humane and informed justice policy and responsible leadership to foster safe communities. We endorse evidence-based approaches to criminal and social justice, conduct research and develop policy, support our member affiliates, and advance collaborative relationships and communication among individuals and organizations dedicated to social justice. SLSC's membership of nine direct service agencies provide residential and other programs to youth and adults in British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec. SLSC is governed by a dedicated volunteer Board of Directors whose membership spans western to eastern Canada.

Per the terms of the Contribution Agreement for this project, this report consists of the following components:

- Report on the **work plan** items, detailing how the objectives were met;
- Report on the **expected outcomes**;
- A list of **additional considerations** that address key successes and challenges, and lessons learned; and,
- A list of **recommendations** to support policy development and knowledge dissemination activities related to an enhanced strategy for life-sentenced people in Canada.

Reporting on Work Plan

1. Identify Subject Matter Experts to Develop Curriculum Content

Subject matter experts (SMEs) were vetted during the proposal stage of the PDCP application and were confirmed to participate in early September 2019. SMEs included: **Catherine Brooke**, Executive Director, St. Leonard's House Windsor, and, Chair, Peer Life Collaborative; **Tracey Cortes**,

⁶ The Office of the Correctional Investigator & The Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2019.

⁷ Oades, 2020.

⁸ The Office of the Correctional Investigator & The Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2019.

⁹ The Office of the Correctional Investigator & The Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2019.

¹⁰ Registration #12894 06600 RR0001. Online: www.stleonards.ca. SLSC is not a religious organization.

Executive Director, House of Hope Ottawa; and **Michel Gagnon**, Executive Director, Maison Cross Roads Corporation, Montreal, and co-author of the 2010 LRS. All were formally engaged to support project activities based on the following criteria related to their roles and responsibilities:

1. Become familiar with 2017¹¹ and 2019¹² *Life(r)'s Work* reports.
2. Support project lead to establish an expert advisory group and other representatives for consultation.
3. Support consultation on training curriculum.
4. Draft content for training curriculum as mutually agreed upon by project personnel, and per a mutually agreed upon timeline.
5. Support project lead to investigate capacity within CSC to establish and implement service delivery to lifers.
6. Provide feedback on project materials in a timely fashion.
7. Collaborate with Project Lead as needed to ensure that the research is conducted to the satisfaction of all parties involved.
8. Accommodate participation by residents as appropriate for the purposes of the research.

Under the same engagement criteria, SLSC's Project Lead **Anita Desai** committed to the following roles and responsibilities:

1. Collaborate with subject matter experts and advisory group to identify elements to be researched, and develop a mutually agreed upon strategy for achieving the project work plan.
2. Operate as the lead organizer to ensure sufficient communications among subject matter experts and/or the advisory group members.
3. Convene two in-person meetings of the subject matter experts and advisory group members to consult on and support the development of the training curriculum and related materials.
4. Conduct research and produce research tools, if necessary, for achieving the project objectives and completing the work plan.
5. Support subject matter experts in editing, formatting, and layout of the training curriculum.
6. Execute initiatives outlined by the advisory group or subject matter experts that are assigned to the project lead.
7. Assist subject matter experts as needed to ensure that the project is executed to the satisfaction of all parties involved.
8. Produce a final report deliverable to Public Safety Canada that comprises: a qualitative summary of the processes undertaken by the expert advisory group to develop the training curriculum; results of the discussions with Indigenous and women lifers on the revised LRS; and, results of discussions with Correctional Service Canada regarding service implementation within target institutions.
9. Provide Public Safety Canada with a copy of the completed training curriculum.

To assist with carrying out the roles and responsibilities of the SMEs and Project Lead, SLSC's research assistant, **Danielle Kouri** supported coordination of the research team in an administrative

¹¹ PeerLife Collaborative, and Heath, S. 2017.

¹² St. Leonard's Society of Canada, 2019.

capacity, and by aggregating input from the research team, advisory group members, and consultation data; and, assisted with content development, research, and formatting for the curriculum document.

On **October 25, 2019**, the research team (i.e. SLSC project lead, SLSC research assistant, and SMEs) met in Ottawa for a one-day, in-person meeting. The agenda comprised the following objectives which were accomplished over the course of the meeting:

1. Basic Theoretical Considerations Regarding Facilitator and Group Dynamics
2. Review & Share Feedback on earlier models for a Two-Day Training Program
3. Review Options of Structured Facilitation Manuals
4. Select Structured Facilitation Method for Draft Training Model
5. Clarify expectations for Advisory Committee
6. Next Steps

On **January 14, 2020**, the research team reconvened in Ottawa for a one-day, in-person meeting. The agenda comprised the following objectives which were accomplished over the course of the meeting:

1. Review of Advisory Group Feedback
2. Review Draft Curriculum for 3 Day Training, including:
 - a. finalization of training objective/principles
 - b. co-creation opportunities for learning/facilitation/activities
 - c. evaluations
3. Next Steps/Action Items/Timeframes

In **February 2020**, once a draft curriculum was completed, the SME's were expanded to include Rick Sauve and Michel Dunn. Both are expert peer mentors, and were engaged to consult on the draft curriculum based on their knowledge and experience delivering services to life-sentenced people. Both were asked to provide expertise on the relevance of the content in relation to delivery to potential trainees, as well as the current context for service delivery within federal institutions in Ontario and Quebec.

On **March 13, 2020**, the research team reconvened in Ottawa for a final one-day, in-person meeting to finalize the curriculum and review/incorporate final advisory group feedback. Following an assessment of project finances following the meeting, it was determined that a portion of professional fees be designated to support translation of the curriculum into French as an extra value-added element of project activities to advance intermediate and ultimate outcomes for the project (as described in the 'Reporting on Expected Outcomes' section of this report).

Overall, the research team worked in a collaborative manner to review pre-existing materials, new resources, and research to co-develop curriculum content to produce the final *Life(r)'s Work: Lifer Resource Strategy Training* document. All sections, research, timings, and activities were reviewed by each member and the final document – completed in English in late March 2020 – was reviewed and approved by the full research team prior to submission to Public Safety.

2. Establish an Expert Advisory Group to Consult on Training Curriculum

The research team worked collaboratively to identify and contact experts to form an advisory group, with a focus to connect with people having expertise in supporting Indigenous and/or women lifers. In total, eight qualified individuals were engaged from a variety of backgrounds. All eight were supportive of the project; however, only 4 were able to provide the in-kind support needed for advising on the development of the training curriculum. These four advisory members included:

- Tracy Armstrong, expert by experience;
- Mary Campbell, retired Director General, Corrections & Criminal Justice at Public Safety Canada;
- Sarah Heath, Associate Professor, University of Winnipeg; and,
- Jo-Ann Stacey, Restorative Justice Coordinator at Mohawk Council of Kahnawake.

Collectively, this group offered expertise in public service related to corrections/criminal justice, academic expertise on research related to corrections including people with life sentences, lived experience of serving a life sentence including unique gender and cultural experiences, and direct service provision to people serving a life sentence including unique gender and cultural needs. The research team was incredibly fortunate to have the opportunity to engage with people who offered a breadth of expertise to round out the fundamental considerations related to this project.

The members were contacted in October 2019 and provided introductory materials and a work plan on the project. Beginning in mid-November, the advisory members were provided with the following documents:

1. SLSC's March 2019 Lifer's Work report¹³ to provide more details on the Lifer Resource Strategy (LRS), including a history of service delivery and recommendations to Public Safety Canada;
2. a summary of the revised LRS (2019);
3. a draft Training Curriculum concept; and,
4. a questionnaire about the unique needs faced by the people advisory members work with/research/advocate on behalf of (see Appendix 1).

A variety of options for input were provided to advisory members. The 'LRS summary' and 'Draft Curriculum concept' documents contained specific notes for advisory member attention to consider and provide feedback on. The research team created the survey as an additional engagement measure to offer advisory members another tool for providing feedback/considerations to the research team as the curriculum was developed. The questionnaire was available to be completed as a standalone, or, in addition to any feedback provided to SLSC based on the other documents. The survey also served a second purpose, for distribution to those identified for consultation due to their expertise on Indigenous and women lifers and/or their representatives.

¹³ St. Leonard's Society of Canada, 2019.

3. Consult with Indigenous and Women Lifers and/or their Representatives on the Revised LRS

In addition to engaging the advisory group (which was inclusive of Indigenous and women lifers and/or their representatives), SLSC also took opportunities to consult with other people having expertise in these areas. Members of the research team attended the Canadian Criminal Justice Association's (CCJA) Congress in Quebec City held November 6-9, 2019. Prior to the event, members of the research team conducted a preliminary review of workshops/presentations and reached out to people presenting on Indigenous and/or women's issues to set up a consultation opportunity during the Congress.

Consultations were conducted during Congress and following the event with: **Angela Connidis**, Deputy Commissioner for Women at Correctional Service of Canada; **Vicki Chartrand**, Associate Professor at Bishop's University specializing in Indigenous issues; **Marty Maltby**, Director General of the Indigenous Initiatives Directorate at Correctional Service of Canada; **Dr. Esmorie Miller**, a lecturer in Criminology at London South Bank University specializing in the rights of racialized, gendered, classed and sexual minority youth; and, **Jessica Rumboldt**, Community and Criminal Justice Professor at Conestoga College with an interest in the pedagogical approach of the LRS into a training curriculum.

Individuals consulted for this project were provided with an overview of the concept of the revised LRS, the history of the LRS within correctional practice in Canada, and, the rationale for the modernized service delivery model developed in 2018-19. The following major conceptual points were shared during consultation:

- The critical element of the modernized LRS is that it does not separate the resource out into three distinct categories as the previous iteration did (i.e. 'General', 'Women's' and 'Aboriginal'). Instead, the LRS was redesigned to be gender and culturally-neutral and framed within one concept – the unique experience of serving a life sentence.
- Best practices and activities from the former LRS iterations were woven throughout the modernized LRS and considered for their benefits regardless of a person's gender or cultural identity. Further, the LRS reinforces that participants with unique needs be encouraged and supported to seek out additional relevant cultural or gender-based services to achieve person-centered care. In-Reach Workers can serve as a referral source, and only take on the responsibility of assisting people to navigate the unique aspects of the life sentence (i.e. not claiming to be an expert on everything).

These elements were discussed with each person consulted to better understand whether it was considered to contribute to the support and service delivery needs that are unique for Indigenous and/or women lifers. General highlights from in-person consultations suggested that:

- A consolidated LRS that focused on the experience of a life sentence, with Toolkit¹⁴ items to refer/address unique needs of diverse sub-populations, was considered to be a sensible

¹⁴ The 'Toolkit' is a separate document that accompanies the LRS. It contains additional information and activities to motivate participants to engage with case management staff, enhance learning on specific topics, and/or encourage them to get involved in programs and services available inside the institution and in the community. Update pending.

approach to maximize service opportunity for an underserved group of people in the prison system.

- Service delivery should, as much as possible, be provided by IRWs that are reflective of the diversity among the lifer population they will serve.

As a follow-up to the consultations done in November, the research team discussed initial input and produced a brief questionnaire (see Appendix 1) to create a consistent metric for consultation and to consolidate feedback on key areas related to the development of the training curriculum. This was also distributed to advisory group members as an additional method for input and engagement.

Respondents were asked to consider: the greatest concerns facing the lifer population at large; the unique needs of the lifer population that they are engaged with (related to their psychosocial, peer support, and learning style needs); and, the major impediments to meeting the needs of the specific population they are engaged with. Additionally, they were asked about exercises/activities that could be included as LRS Toolkit items that specifically facilitate a better understanding of the modules (e.g. public speaking, discussing sensitive subjects), and/or that provide a unique lens to the topics discussed in the modules (e.g. Indigenous specific approaches to accountability, tools for women to discuss trauma/abuse).

The data analysis from the questionnaire highlighted the following themes related to women and/or Indigenous lifers in general:

- There is difficulty with navigating parole release conditions which do not align with traditional life on a Reserve;
- Interacting with 'successful' peers can serve as a powerful resource;
- There is a 'double-burden' for Indigenous women (both a result of being Indigenous, but also as women) related to the effects of colonization, lack of culturally appropriate resources, exposure to violence, and lack of consultation compounded by factors such as discrimination and extreme rates of gender-based violence; and,
- There is a clear need to establish and connect with culturally and gender-specific community-based supports and resources.

Feedback related to 'peer support needs' reflected the following:

- There is a natural ability for people to relate better to those they share experiences with;
- There is a need for support that occurs as a continuum over the course of the sentence and after release. Waiting until release to help navigate is too late to address the difficulties that lifers face;
- In rural areas, peer support improves transition and assists with the stigma that may be prevalent in a small community; and,
- Peer support generates an opportunity for positive peer associations.

Feedback related to the 'major impediments to meeting the needs of the specific populations that respondents engage with' reflected the following:

- Lack of a service specifically for life-sentenced people;

- Gaps in integration support done “off the sides of desks” rather than with meaningful intent to support effective integration, especially as related to employment, travel/transit post-release, and digital technology;
- Adequate resources to connect people meaningfully to become part of ‘mainstream’ society;
- For Indigenous women specifically: there is limited research on their needs, and limited understanding of sexual exploitation, racial discrimination, and gender-based violence; and,
- Navigating parole release conditions that are inconsistent with cultural norms.

These highlights are made more pressing given the recent findings of the 2018-19 Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator (OCI), which reveals troubling trends for Federally sentenced Indigenous Peoples:

*Over the last decade, while admissions to federal jurisdiction have decreased, the number of Indigenous offenders has increased. In 2016-17, while only accounting for approximately 5% of Canada’s overall population, Indigenous offenders represented 23.1% of the total offender population (26.8% of the in-custody population and 17.2% of the community population). **Over-representation is even worse for Indigenous women, who as of March 31, 2019, accounted for 41.4% of all federally incarcerated women.** In terms of release, Indigenous offenders serve a higher proportion of their sentences before being released on parole.¹⁵*

In addition to the OCI report, in June 2018, two parliamentary committees (the House of Commons Standing Committees on Public Safety and National Security [SECU] and Status of Women [FEWO]) completed studies and provided reports and recommendations on Indigenous peoples in the federal correctional system, and Indigenous women’s experience of federal corrections, respectively.¹⁶ Among the many recommendations collectively presented by these committees, not surprisingly a call for access to culturally-relevant, correctional programs/services is among them. Furthermore, the recommendations also call for improving and increasing engagement with Indigenous communities to provide reintegration services for those being released to the community. Finally, a call for trauma-informed therapeutic approaches to programming and interventions, particularly for Indigenous women, was also recommended.

Service delivery implementation of the Lifer Resource Strategy will create capacity within Federal institutions to connect Indigenous Peoples serving a life sentence with these recommendations. This is especially plausible as the life-sentenced cohort is likely to have a greater risk of encountering systemic barriers than their non-life-sentenced counterparts given the nature of their sentence.

4. Investigate Capacity within CSC to Establish Service Delivery to Lifers

Throughout the course of the project, the research team explored several aspects of how service delivery to lifers could be established through partners at CSC. The following activities took place:

¹⁵ Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2019, p. 64 (emphasis added).

¹⁶ Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, 2018; and, Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 2018.

- At the project onset, Scott Harris, Regional Deputy Commissioner (RDC) in Ontario was made aware of the current phase of the *Life(r)'s Work* project, given his support for and interest in the previous year's work. Additionally, CSC ON Region has continued investment in the PeerLife Collaborative (PLC) to pilot the updated LRS modules in select Ontario institutions this fiscal year. Following the completion of projects, SLSC will jointly present results, outcomes, and findings with the PLC to the RDC to discuss options for raising the profile of this work with senior levels of CSC nationally.
- Prior to attending CCJA Congress in November 2019, the research team investigated the potential to meet with members of CSC's Executive Committee (ExCom), who were scheduled to meet during the conference. Members of the research team offered to provide a brief presentation to the committee to raise awareness about the community sector's capacity to deliver services to lifers. Initial indications suggested that an opportunity might be arranged to speak to ExCom, however, no such opportunity was made available. Nonetheless, the research team was able to meet with CSC's Director General (DG) of the Indigenous Initiatives Directorate to discuss the project and investigate the capacity for service delivery. His pre-existing familiarity with the historical In-Reach concept assisted in productive discussions about how the modernized LRS might fit with Indigenous lifers. Ongoing communications between the research team and the DG are taking place, with anticipation of identifying metrics such as the number of Indigenous lifers in Canada, and the regions and/or institutions where they are located to help determine an appropriate course of action for potential service delivery.
- In December 2019, a meeting was held with Angela Connidis, Deputy Commissioner for Women at CSC. The purpose of the meeting was to explore the possibility of implementing the revised LRS with the modernized program in a women's institution in Ontario. One of the Ontario based In-Reach Worker recruits is an Indigenous woman who is ready to receive training using the new resources developed by SLSC. A history of the LRS service delivery model and updates were provided to the Deputy Commissioner following the meeting, including a written summary with suggested next steps.
- In March 2020, research team members met with Parole Board of Canada (PBC) Executives Jennifer Oades (Chairperson), Sylvie Blanchet (Vice-Chairperson), and Daryl Churney (Executive Director General) to discuss the *Life(r)'s Work* project and ongoing PLC project in Ontario. PBC has indicated a strong degree of support for the work, and is supportive of assisting with identify options for knowledge dissemination and implementation as efforts continue.
- A meeting between Carmen Long, Director General (DG) of the Offender Programs and Reintegration Branch, CSC and the Project Lead also occurred in March 2020. CSC has started an internal process within the past year for investigating what might be done to better meet the needs of the lifer/long term population. Currently, with support from placement students, a literature review is being completed on best practices to help inform a broader assessment of available tools to support lifers' correctional plans - which presently follow the original 4 stages of the LRS (and which complement the 2019 revisions). There was indication that the

timing of the availability of the new resources is good, given that there is some focus on how to improve services to this population. Following completion of the curriculum and final report, it was agreed that a follow up meeting could be held to help identify potential avenues for implementation within institutions given their perceived alignment with the direction CSC might take to improve services to this growing population. Consensus that the biggest challenges is a funding mechanism to support sustainable In-Reach work to institutions.

- In addition to the activities listed above, as a member of National Associations Active in Criminal Justice (NAACJ), SLSC has provided updates about the ongoing work of this project at opportunities where NAACJ met with CSC and other government stakeholders. SLSC also investigated the potential to have NAACJ collaborate with the Parole Board of Canada (PBC) on a joint policy forum on life-sentenced people in Canada; however, the date for the anticipated annual forum for NAACJ for 2020-21 has not been confirmed, and may be re-conceptualized based on NAACJ, CSC and Public Safety priorities.

5. Collaborate with CSC and/or Community Partners Regarding Service Implementation within Target Institutions for Fiscal Year 2020/2021

SLSC has maintained ongoing support for its community partners within the PeerLife Collaborative (PLC), which received project funding to test the revised Lifer Resource Strategy (LRS) modules in select Ontario penitentiaries. Funding was made available by CSC's Ontario Region. The project also implements several recommendations from the 2018-19 *Lifer's Work* report, including an information session with senior members of the Parole Board of Canada about the project findings.

SLSC will continue to raise awareness about the potential for service delivery given Public Safety Canada's investment in the tools developed through this project and the previous year's investment in the production of a revised LRS; however, proceeding with the majority of this work is contingent on production of final tools and reports that will support appropriate 'marketing' of these tools to institutions. Preliminary indications from the staff at institutions who are familiar with the In-Reach concept and/or the LRS suggest a high degree of support for programming to address the unique needs of life-sentenced people, as do lifers inside prisons that SLSC and its colleagues interact with.

As discussions occur with more senior levels of CSC, there appears to be strong support for the concept and service delivery model. However, CSC's capacity to operate a Grants and Contributions program was lost in 2012, and a persistent challenge remains identification of funding to support a more robust roll-out to institutions across Canada.

In addition to maintaining dialogue with CSC and Public Safety for service delivery implementation, SLSC continues to seek alternative sources of funding (e.g. grants/foundations) that will yield a sustainable options to operationalize LRS resources.

Reporting on Immediate, Intermediate, and Ultimate Expected Outcomes

Immediate Outcome: Development of a Structured Training Curriculum

Achieved. The research team engaged for this project consisted of SLSC staff and three subject matter experts whose main role was to review, research, and revise the content for a structured training curriculum. The process for development involved a comprehensive review of the training curriculum used in 2010 to support LifeLine service delivery. The content provided a solid foundation from which to build on, and the focus was on enhancing the existing material to incorporate modernized pedagogical approaches (i.e. for layout/design), and person-centered learning to support a wide audience of adult learners. It is worth noting, however, that the three-day training model is not designed to be a 'standalone' to prepare an IRW for service delivery. Rather, it is designed as a comprehensive introductory training to the LRS, that would ideally be followed by shadowing an experienced IRW. As would be expected from any high-quality service standards for employment, the training should also be supplemented with ongoing professional development opportunities including techniques for motivational interviewing, and trauma-informed care.

The final curriculum was developed as a three-day training model (increased from the previous two-day training) and addresses the history, training objective and principles, LRS objectives and principles, the Code of Ethics and Conduct for In-Reach Workers, facilitation strategies, and the four stages of the Lifer Resource Strategy. These are grounded in evidence-informed practices such as adult learning styles and trauma-informed care (for themselves and others), and also establishes an opportunity for co-creation with trainees to generate a greater degree of participatory learning. The research team also aggregated historical 'Toolkit' items from the original LRS and did a preliminary assessment of their utility for the revised LRS. These resource items typically include activities and information, and would be an essential component for service delivery to complement the various modules within the LRS to meet the needs of diverse sub-groups.

Further, the final training curriculum is produced for facilitator use, but is formatted in a manner that allows for easy adaptation into a trainee manual if plans to implement service delivery are established. Finally, **one additional item** was achieved through sound financial management of the project, which was not on the original work plan: **translation of the curriculum into French.** SLSC was able to engage Michel Dunn, one of the co-authors of the 2010 LRS to provide the translation of the English document. Mr. Dunn is self-employed to provide professional translation services, and his expertise in the subject matter of the LRS and its revisions made him an ideal candidate for the professional services needed to achieve this deliverable. This added deliverable better allows SLSC to meet its intermediate and ultimate outcomes.

Intermediate Outcome: Greater Capacity of the Community Corrections Sector to Support Life-Sentenced People in Ontario and Quebec with Training Tools and Enhanced Service Delivery

Achieved. As a result of the investment in both the revised LRS (2019) and the training curriculum (2020), SLSC is confident that the community corrections sector is well positioned with a greater capacity to support life-sentenced people in Ontario and Quebec. The breadth of project activities has raised awareness not only with targeted government stakeholders, but also within core staff and members of SLSC. The recent project activities have consolidated historical knowledge of the LifeLine program, sought to identify and remedy gaps, and generated an in-depth understanding of the utility of the LRS as an important resource for the growing number of life-sentenced people in Canada. Furthermore, the three subject matter experts engaged for this project are well-established professionals within the community corrections sector in Ontario and Quebec and are well-positioned to support enhanced service delivery. Their familiarity with the training curriculum is an asset, and subsequent investment in the service delivery model would be of benefit for both regions to take advantage of available training facilitators with precise knowledge on the subject matter. SLSC is confident that the tools developed through this project to provide In-Reach services to life-sentenced people are ready for service delivery implementation, especially given that the curriculum is available in both Official Languages. The main obstacle to achieving this goal remains adequate funding to recruit, train, and employ In-Reach workers in both of these regions.

Ultimate Outcome: Project Activities will Enhance SLSC's Capacity to Promote a National Strategy for Lifers by Improving the Understanding of the Needs and Challenges of the Lifer Population (including Indigenous and Women lifers).

Achieved. The opportunity to collaborate with the three subject matter experts on the research team was of significant benefit to understanding the needs and challenges of the life-sentenced population. Furthermore, input from the advisory group and broader consultations with those who have additional insight into Indigenous and women lifers have enhanced SLSC's capacity to promote a national strategy for life-sentenced people. This understanding, paired with the tools now available to SLSC, can be used to raise awareness about the concerns of this population and its growing numbers, as well as about tangible, evidence-informed solutions at our disposal to address those concerns. SLSC will raise awareness at a variety of levels, i.e. during consultations with government partners, at academic conference opportunities, and through internal mechanisms such as promoting findings online through our website and social media platforms. SLSC will also strive to ensure that it is not alone in promoting a national strategy for lifers, and will align our findings and solutions with as many stakeholders in the government and NGO sector as possible to achieve a meaningful outcome for the long-term.

Additional Considerations

St. Leonard's Society of Canada (SLSC) and its members have decades of experience with peer mentorship administered through a variety of brand identities. These include LifeLine® and Option

Vie®, peer-based services that sought to support people with life sentences (lifers) through their transitions in institutional and community settings. This firsthand experience has resulted in SLSC's appreciation for the impact that peer mentoring can have on the eventual release of an individual to the community. It has been shown to help establish a vision of hope, in what can be an otherwise hopeless environment.

Peer mentoring is a deceptively simple concept that requires great skill to provide. Reduced to its basic elements, it is about discussing shared, lived experiences. Peers inside prisons have long offered each other support and encouragement on their carceral journeys. Peer mentoring is an acknowledged best practice in many settings and has had particular success when formalized within the correctional context. Historically, peer mentors came from the community into the institutions to provide mentorship services.

In order to understand the concept of peer mentoring it is important to provide a definition. As explained in the literature, peer mentoring can be described as having a mentor (an experienced person) interact with a mentee (a less experienced/vulnerable person) in order to help facilitate personal growth and provide support for the mentee.¹⁷ Peer mentoring is primarily characterized by face-to-face meetings between the mentor and mentee in which **both parties are equal**.¹⁸ This is what makes in-reach work a distinct service from other correctional programs, and is also what allows it to be complementary to them. The relationship between the mentor and mentee is one that encourages learning and personal development with a high level of commitment to the relationship. Although both of the parties can benefit from the relationship that is built through the mentoring process, the main goal of peer mentoring is to assist the mentees in their growth/transition and provide them with positive support. Peer mentoring is also a concept that entails some degree of flexibility in which the needs and goals for both parties can change and expand over time and space.

SLSC recognizes the benefits of peer mentorship in a variety of contexts, including its ability to complement established practices within corrections such as motivational interviewing. To date, SLSC specifically has utilized peer mentoring with lifers, aging/elderly clients, and people with problematic substance use both inside institutions and in the community. SLSC has also been involved with supporting the PeerLife Collaborative in a research and advisory role to achieve a greater capacity for service provision of peer support services within institutions and in the community. People in all security levels can benefit from peer-mentorship. The implications of peer mentorship for each individual depend on which area, in particular, is being addressed; but, the ultimate aim is to assist the mentees to meet their personal goals. With respect to people who need to be separated from the general population (e.g. Structured Intervention Units), this intervention can help prevent placement in higher, more restrictive security levels. Alternatively, for those who are already separated, this intervention can help with preparing them for transition to lower security levels. Peer mentorship can be beneficial to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, and

¹⁷ Sambunjak & Marusic, 2009.

¹⁸ Holbeche, 1996.

research has also demonstrated that positive results are not only experienced by the mentees but the mentors as well.¹⁹ It is particularly useful for individuals transitioning into the community.²⁰

Additionally, SLSC's (2014) research findings identified the following best practices related to peer mentoring:

Research on peer mentoring and effective training models indicate that certain practices and methods of training stand out as the most promising. Most relevant research suggests that an effective peer mentoring training model consists of: carefully choosing trainers/mentors; providing high-quality training for the trainees; ensuring trainees know their roles/responsibilities; focusing on building communication skills; and, providing interactive, flexible training.²¹

The key components of an effective train-the-trainer model are outlined below:

- Choose the trainers by ensuring that those chosen care about others and are a positive role model for other life-sentenced individuals.*
- Ensure training sessions are hands-on, interactive, and that the trainee receives opportunities to practice the new skills they learn.*
- The most promising hands-on methods of training are role-playing/modelling with a mixture of demonstrations and discussions by experts (successful mentors/lifers).*
- Training should consider the appropriate length for the participants, and the key is to have multiple follow up sessions.*
- Training sessions should teach core concepts and skills needed to be an effective peer mentor, which include: clearly defining the trainees' roles, responsibilities, and expectations; teaching relationship building skills and strategies; building interpersonal skills; and, being trained in crisis management and health management.²²*

With these components in mind, the LRS training curriculum is designed to reflect these fundamentals for an effective model. Further to SLSC's research into the history, delivery, and results of peer mentorship, other researchers have been able to support these findings and highlight the important benefits of this practice. This research was detailed extensively in SLSC's 2018-19 report to Public Safety Canada per the [*Life\(r\)'s Work: Developing a Modernized Strategy for Life-Sentenced People in Canada*](#) project.

¹⁹ Beltman & Shaeben, 2012, pp. 37-40; and, Kalpazidou Schmidt & Faber, 2016, p. 146

²⁰ Marlow et al., 2015, p. 92; and Schinkel & Whyte, 2012.

²¹ St. Leonard's Society of Canada, 2014, p. 1.

²² St. Leonard's Society of Canada, 2014, p. 9, 10.

Recommendations to Support Policy Development and Knowledge Dissemination Activities Related to an Enhanced Strategy for Life-Sentenced People in Canada

In the past decade, life-sentenced people constituted less than 4% of all persons admitted to federal prison annually, but collectively they now represent one quarter of the total inmate population. To date, there is no clear strategy in place to support their unique needs.²³ Of further concern is that half of the people in Canada's prisons aged 50 and older are serving a life sentence.²⁴ This merits consideration for the principles of Canada's justice system as it incarcerates people who are aging inside. It also calls for sound strategies for their eventual, safe integration to the community – especially those serving a lengthy sentence. The recommendations below are rooted in consideration of a national strategy, rather than solely based on the implementation of the revised LRS tools.

To support policy development regarding an enhanced strategy for people with life sentences, SLSC recommends the following:

1. Support implementation of remunerated peer-based services for this population to address their unique needs. This will ensure that lifers are receiving skilled, necessary interventions during critical periods of their sentence that will lead to more successful transitions within institutional settings and to the community (e.g. the first 90 days after they are released into the community – well established as a particularly important timeframe for addressing co-occurring conditions²⁵).
2. Establish a working group on life-sentenced people that comprises representatives from the Parole Board of Canada, Public Safety Canada, Correctional Service of Canada, community-based stakeholders, and as much as possible, include people with lived experience. This group would review key concerns (e.g. the number of lifers past parole eligibility dates, unique needs, and effective strategies for community integration) and identify solutions to contribute meaningfully to an enhanced strategy.
3. Engage the Parole Board of Canada to find opportunities to extend temporary absences for lifers who are progressing well on their correctional plan.
4. Support the Parole Board of Canada to review existing policies and make recommendations about parole conditions for people serving a life sentence.
5. Establish an employment strategy tailored to the significant number of hours lifers can potentially contribute to the labour/work force from within prison and develop transferable skills to the community.
6. Re-establish a process for CSC to provide Grants and Contributions to stakeholders that will provide critical services to the incarcerated population, including those with a life sentence. Doing so would address multiple recommendations from other government stakeholders such as the Office of the Correctional Investigator, and the Auditor General.

²³ The Office of the Correctional Investigator & The Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2019.

²⁴ The Office of the Correctional Investigator & The Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2019.

²⁵ Anglin, Hser & Grella, 1997; Scott & Dennis, 2012; and Brennan & Matarazzo, 2016, p. 5.

To support knowledge dissemination activities, regarding an enhanced strategy for people with life sentences, SLSC recommends the following:

7. Translation of the 2019 Lifer Resource Strategy into French to promote the resource in both Official Languages.
8. Establish a mechanism within existing institutional capacities for lifers to contact a centralized office to obtain support in navigating their sentence from knowledgeable staff (e.g. re-establishing a toll-free number for lifers). This mechanism must consider limitations (i.e. resources, infrastructure) within penitentiaries to ensure that support is accessible.
9. Coordinate presentations to institutional and community Parole Officers and Parole Board of Canada members from In-Reach Workers and/or community service providers. This process was initiated by SLSC and the PLC in 2019-20, but merits ongoing knowledge mobilization.
10. Support the development of *Adaptation* phase resources for lifers to engage with until capacity and willingness are identified in maximum security for service delivery.
11. Inform Lifer Committee Chairs at every institution of the availability of a revised Lifer Resource Strategy; and, as a formal service delivery model has yet to be determined with CSC, engage Chairs and any others lifers that are available for consultation to determine the most effective way for the revised LRS to be utilized in the interim. This will ensure that knowledge dissemination can begin, and set the stage for an enhanced strategy that involves those who are impacted most: people serving a life sentence.

SLSC appreciates the opportunity to submit this report and its recommendations to Public Safety Canada following the completion of the *Life(r)'s Work: Supporting a Modernized Strategy for Life-Sentenced People in Canada* project, per the Policy Development Contribution Program (PDCP). We are also grateful to the many people who contributed time and efforts to make this project a success, especially those with lived experience who continue to inspire us and motivate our work towards a more humane and informed justice system for all.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire for Consultants and Advisory Group Members

Input on Training Curriculum for Lifer In-Reach Workers

1. General Info:

Name:

What is the specific population that your work is focused on/you have experience with?

2. What do you see as the greatest concerns currently facing the lifer population at large?

3. What are the unique needs of the lifer population that you have been engaged with, related to their:

Psychosocial needs?

Peer support needs?

Learning style needs?

Other needs?

4. In your opinion, what are the major impediments to meeting the needs of the specific population that you are engaged with? (These may relate to the concerns listed in Question 2 and 3)

5. Are you aware of any exercises/activities or tools that could be included as a 'Toolkit' component (a separate resource to the LRS). **Specifically, those that might facilitate a better understanding of modules within the LRS?**

Examples may include: tips for public speaking, techniques for discussing sexual health-related topics...

6. Are you aware of any exercises/activities or tools that could be included as a 'Toolkit' component (a separate resource to the LRS) that **provide a unique lens to the topic discussed in the module (i.e. specific to unique sub-populations)?**

Examples may include: Indigenous-specific approaches to discussing accountability, tools for women to discuss their experience of abuse...

7. With respect to Question 5 and 6, are there any specific community-based resources that you are aware of?

8. Additional comments?

Done