Ethno-Cultural Offenders’ Needs Challenges & Recommendations

UPDATED REPORT
December 27, 2011
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A letter from the Program manager

The Canadian system is complex, defined by the ideas of liberalism, multiculturalism, and individual liberty, the Canadian way of life is marveled and envied by much of the world. However, taking part in the Canadian system and tapping its full potential, is a life-long commitment. Learning how to manage finances, employment, education and training, as well as home and family, are skills that require a lifetime of learning and adjusting. A prolonged period of isolation from these learning and living skills experiences can hinder one’s ability to pick up and go again. For offenders generally and specifically ethno-cultural offenders and those soon to be paroled and or released this prolonged isolation can be intriguing and challenging.

As part of Audmax’s contractual agreement with Correctional Service Canada (CSC), Audmax works collaboratively with CSC, other public, private and social sector organizations and key stakeholders to ensure that Ethno-cultural offenders avail themselves of programs and services that are culturally appropriate for their rehabilitation so that they can return to the community as law abiding citizens.

To undertake such responsibility, Audmax applies a TeamUp strategy to mobilize and accomplish its work. This TeamUp strategy has taught us to be knowledgeable and keep abreast of CSC and its relevant legislation, policies and practices. It has also taught us that we must be able to quickly provide culturally appropriate solutions while being responsive – quick to act in a non-judgmental manner.

As Audmax’s project manager, the experiences gained while working with our TeamUp players have given me the opportunity to apply added value expertise to a uniquely challenging yet rewarding mandate. It is through this TeamUp approach and my frequent liaison with our CSC Project Manager, Christine Mangan has afforded me the opportunity to become knowledgeable of the various institutions’ working culture and work styles. Her unwavering commitment to the success of this project continues to permeate Audmax team and volunteers.

Over the past several months our scorecard indicates that we have fostered and enabled the offenders, their next of kin and the various communities to be part of the solution while making balanced and realistic recommendations. But we have just begun and there are lots more to do.
Therefore, over the coming months, our primary goals are:

• to continue to build upon CSC’s Ethno-cultural systems and resources
• to apply the recommended solutions identified in this report
• to continue to design develop and implement programs and services that are culturally appropriate, fair and inclusive
• to build on the many volunteers and communities links that we have put in place
• to continue to work collaboratively with the consulates
• to evaluate and input project level interventions

To do this, we will increase collaboration with the private public and social sectors to continue identifying effective practices, develop and implement workable and affordable improvements to benefit all key stakeholders.

As part of the solution Audmax staff is dedicated and committed to enable these offenders to become law abiding citizens within their respective communities.

The following contents of this report and those of the coming years, will serve as indicators of our commitments.

Maxcine Telfer
Project Manager
Executive Summary

This update of the November 15, 2011, Regional Ethno-cultural Offenders’ Needs, Challenges and Recommendations report represents a compilation of the same issues as was presented. However, unlike the November 15 report, this updated version includes the recommendations and programming approved by Christine Mangan, for Grand Valley Institution (GVI) specifically, all of which will be rolled out in 2012 and beyond. The reporting period is also updated to cover data up to December 28, 2011.

There are two objectives to this report. The first is to report on the consultation processes otherwise referred to as the “Shopping List”. The second, but equally important, objective is to provide insight into how CSC can continue to build on the solid foundation of serving its ethno-cultural offenders.

The essence of this report is the analysis of the responses from: ethno-cultural inmates of the twelve (12) federal institutions in Ontario; the community, relevant stakeholders including consulates and private sector organizations, CSC staff and managers and social service agencies. These responses were gathered using a variety of methods; this report will begin by showing these methods and their levels of success. We will use cases in point to prove our findings and drive home the real purpose of the “Shopping List”.

The report is presented in four sections:

Section one - gives an overview of “Topics of Concern”, which range from information about Canadian law, to education, to employment and training. These topics dominated group and one-on-one discussion with the stakeholders. This section also provides an introduction to the different methods and case studies used by Audmax in breaking the ice.

Section two - provides a synopsis of the approach - The Consultation process including the three phases we have and continue to apply. It also identifies gaps within the programs and services and highlights the main areas of need with suggested recommendations.

Section three - sums up the most important institutional and organizational capacity needs of the ethno-cultural offenders and identifies key strategic issues for implementation including suggestions to overall enhancing the service delivery model. By way of conclusion, recommendations are made for both the Ethno-cultural project’s regional work plan and specific work plan.

Section four - states the challenges faced by Audmax and its team, as well as proposed solutions in moving forward with program delivery, and in continuing to serve CSC, and its stakeholders.
Section 1: The Topics of Concern

Topics of Concern

A Case Study from the Diversity Workshop
Topics of Concern & Cases in point

Information about Canadian laws

Canadian Laws should be taught in schools and in the community, ideally as a series of classes or workshops.

“…people don’t know about the Canadian law, I can say even people from here too. Not until probably they started getting in trouble or have a specific class that teaches about it but, even in school they don’t teach much about it, yet ignorance of the law is no excuse.

“’Cause some people can’t learn stuff in one day, so it’s gotta be step by step – something like that because some of us don’t go to school.”

Positive, Supportive Relationships

Positive relationships with teachers, parents, care givers, peers and helping professionals may serve to lessen the impact of negative influences in their lives.

“I guess it’s just the fact that like, somebody listening and giving different advices on how to do certain things and how to control yourself and how to make the right decisions, something tiny like that can go a long way.”

“On the streets it’s me and my N*****. We go to war together, we win and lose together, we hustle and put in work together. It’s a supportive family, but support to do the wrong things.”

Opportunities for Personal Growth

Increase programs and services such as those provided by community-based organizations which offer programs, opportunities, and mentorship that may help keep at-risk youth out of trouble.

“Like programs that would encourage at least like a lot of youth to be involved in like let’s say sports different activities than they just take them off the mind of like looking for something else to do.” (i.e. activities keep us occupied)

“But me coming to this prison it kinda… I won’t say they change me in like you just change your picture and stuff, but I say it kind of lead me to think about the direction in that I wanted to go.”
Lack of Guidance

Limited supervision or guidance can leave youth vulnerable to negative influences in their communities.

“…there’s no one who’s there like to guide you – like here, this is good, this is bad…”

“He’s going there making drug deals. And like this is normal stuff – that’s how they see it. So they go and they do it. And they grow up with that mentality.”

“…stay close to family and actually true friends and stuff – like there’s some people that would tell you that if you’re new and stuff they’ll tell you ‘oh, selling drugs, it’s okay.’

Family Poverty

Poverty and pressure to contribute to the family income can interfere with one’s academic success.

“I was working two jobs and I was going to school. You gotta do what you gotta do.” “…what made me kind of like drop out of school was more like I feel like I can’t afford to go to school and pay and still survive so I feel like I had to work.”
A Case Study From The Equity and Inclusiveness Matters Workshop

A key programming which Audmax’s team found to be very effective is the series of inclusiveness workshops that preach among other things: diversity, equity, inter-cultural problem solving and cross communication. Its defining feature is the “Peacock in a Land of Penguins” case study. This case study puts audience into a scenario not unlike one they would face inside the institution. Using animals – birds – the audience is brought into a diverse society where a problem arises from similar forces to those that cause problems inside the institution. So the case study really helps offenders to look at their own issues, challenges and barriers without knowing it.

The offenders are asked to analyse the challenges presented in the case study, and find ways to resolve them in a cross cultural manner. This simple case study has made great progress in cracking the paradigm offenders have;

- towards the system
- towards outside workers
- towards themselves and each other (after all, we know what “birds” are in prison terms)

Once the ice is broken, Audmax’s team - volunteers and staff sit down with the Ethno-cultural offenders and listen to their concerns, while filtering the jargon that would naturally be mixed in with genuine distress. Many of these concerns are not “how do I stay out of prison” but are more like “how do I obtain affordable housing” or “I would like to study kinesiology and become a gym teacher or sports therapist, what high school course do I need to take right now?”. Their concerns are justified, most of these men and women were children when they entered the Corrections system, and because they did not know how to fend for themselves then, they are still children when they leave but with adult ambitions and goals. All they need is guidance and quality information to push them along.
SECTION 2: THE FOUR PHASES

Phase 1: Consultation processes (Shopping List)
Phase 2: The analysis
Phase 3: Findings – Case on Points
Phase 4: Evaluation and Reporting
THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

The objective of our consultation process is to review and examine CSC’s current practices, programs and services relevant to the ethno-cultural needs of offenders. Also to identify effective practices that can be implemented using ethno-cultural lenses.

We focused our review on CSC present programming, literature and oversight functions. We conducted interviews with senior departmental officials and examined supporting documentation such as the ethno-cultural terms of reference from the CSC website.

From the onset, Audmax’s team applied a four-phased approach:

1. **Phase One**, consists of a monthly application of a needs assessment tool referred to as the “Shopping List”. This shopping list has helped us to identify the challenges faced by both CSC and the ethno-cultural offenders, current available resources, present and future programs and services to be applied

2. **Phase Two**, the synthesis and analysis of the results of phase one

3. **Phase Three**, recommending, designing, developing and implementing customized programs and services.

4. **Phase Four**, consists of reoccurring evaluations and reports to our project manager and the replication and implementation of new programs and services to feed back into the Shopping list of phase one
Main Areas of Need

When asked, the question: “What is the biggest requirement for success that you feel is lacking?” the twelve most frequent responses shown below. (These show the resolve and progress that many of these offenders have towards getting back on track; however they just need a little support). The shopping list includes the following topics:

1. Information and guidance
2. Employment and training
3. Language barriers and education
4. Initial orientation
5. Finances
6. Cultural integration
7. Social and emotional support
8. Health
9. Housing
10. Deportation and immigration process
11. Self-employment
12. Legal services

We then assessed our list to identify: the issues and areas of need which pose the greatest challenges to the fairness, openness and transparency of the offenders. These areas of need affect offenders in all time phases – from incarceration to parole. While some topics are more frequent than all are common among inmates from the various institutions. There are strong relationships and interactions between many of these areas of need. Each category is described in more detail below:

Information and guidance

Balanced and accurate information about the benefits and challenges of half way house should be provided. Some feel that ethno-cultural (or culturally sensitive) staff should be available to understand their needs better.

Information on education as some offenders plan to go back to school again because they have never been employed or feel interested in different kind of areas. So, they need information on how to enroll themselves into a college within their region to continue their education.

Employment

This was the biggest priority for nearly all offenders. They are looking for a job that is commensurate with their education, skills and experience and one that can enable them to pay the bills.

The need for employment is closely related to three other perceived barriers:
  a) Obtaining certificate for any kind of training seminars or workshops that they've attended within the institution
b) Obtaining recognition for previous work experience

c) Obtaining references for work, housing, and other purposes

Difficulties obtaining work are a leading cause of depression, boredom, and isolation, hence they return to a life of crime.

Bridging programs such as mentorship and co-op programs create opportunities to demonstrate competency in a particular area while in the institution.

Most ethno-cultural offenders recognized the value and importance of volunteering. However, these opportunities are not always a good fit as they are often unrelated to particular professions, difficult to afford them when considering earned wages lost, and can take valuable time away from other priorities (especially if other needs are present such as child care).

**Language**

Obtaining functional language skills is a priority for all whom English is a second language. On the whole, some offenders are happy with the experiences of speaking English to their peers, but their ability to absorb what’s going on around them and react is tainted. Because of this, they are finding it hard to obtain information to help solve this problem. A better system, of identifying and documenting language barriers, as well as sharing these barriers with outside workers is needed.

**Case on point:** Warkworth Institution Training in September:
There was a Francophone offender who was at a disadvantage because we were unaware of his language barrier. Had we known, we would’ve had our French speaking volunteer with us.

**Initial orientation for parole**

Offenders found that due to the cultural and ethnic barriers, they experience challenges when they are placed in non-ethnic halfway houses. Some have stated that they have experienced cultural shocks such as specific food needs and religious obligations. The communities in which these halfway houses are located can also become part of the problem.

**Case on Point:**
A few pointed out that while they were placed in the halfway house in Kingston, they visited the seven eleven store and was harassed by the owner who reported them to the institution.
Financial information

All expressed desire to contribute to Canada’s success but face difficulties in the banking system, including starting bank accounts, credit cards, grants and loans.

Case on Point
Some offenders from Frontenac and Beaver Creek, while assessing their release and next steps, pointed out that there is a lack of information regarding how to save money, and more specifically: balancing the home and family life with little to sometimes no income and for those who want to start a business there is no grant or loan available for them.

Social and emotional support

A range of mental health services are required to help offenders. In some cases, informal, one-on-one counseling is enough to help deal with issues, namely culture shock and parenting issues. In other cases, professional psychological or psychiatric support is necessary. Loneliness and depression resulting from social isolation were also mentioned by a few offenders.

Case on Point:
In Collins Bay, one offender stated that during his first parole while at home, he heard voices that sounded like the police and many times when the telephone rings he thinks it is the police trying to check up on him.

They strongly recommended the creation of additional or new opportunities for social interaction among offenders and community groups in order to foster networking, sharing of experiences, exchange advice, or simply for relaxation.

For youth and working parents, additional or new organized, structured and free (or very low cost) after school programs are needed because they are still not ready for the workplace.

Housing

Obtaining housing is a great challenge for offenders. A large percentage of half way houses staff lack of understanding of the various ethno-cultural needs and obligations as stated earlier.

Offenders in general are also concerned about the difficulties for someone in their position to secure rental accommodations, as well as the poor availability of adequate and affordable housing.
Personal
Some offenders stated that they need services and training tailored to their personal situation, needs and goals. Suggestions include: information on personal guidance, decision-making and socio-economic activities including long-term finances and education, advice about employment trends, additional language skills, housing, and the creation and maintenance of social networks and goals.

Youth programming
Youth offenders pointed out that they would like some programs that reflect the needs and inquiries unique to their age group.

Case and Point:
Millhaven youth who are serving life sentences and or long term sentencing have identified the need for programs that can motivate them and keep their minds off the negative past.
SECTION 3: CHALLENGES, SOLUTIONS AND THE FUTURE

Suggested Solutions
Recommendations
The Future
Suggested Solutions to Address Main Areas of Ethno-cultural Offenders’ Needs

1. Better information and guidance

Some of the organizations that we contacted agreed that they were unable to cater to offenders, because they are lacking personal and professional guidance and would have difficulty in decision making concerning offenders. However, if more awareness programs are implemented then they would consider taking some on board.

Some offenders say the quality of content and quantity of information they receive is not satisfactory on its own and should be coupled with more personalized, one-on-one service. Because an offender must restart their life upon release; it is imperative that they receive as much support as possible as they walk the full “resettlement pathway”. Accurate information and quality assistance is also required prior to release and those soon to be paroled may properly prepare themselves.

We recommend a coordinated approach defined by, liaisons and partnerships between agencies. It is imperative that these communication channels be maintained, and current services must retain some flexibility to meet the changing needs of offenders over time.

2. Employment

All offenders agreed that employment is the top priority for them as it forms the basis for successful re-integration into the community. Some of the employers we spoke to are biased towards offenders, because they doubt that the offenders have resolved the challenges that brought them in the institutions and assume the likelihood to re-offend is high. This causes a reluctance to recognize and consider professional status and experience in the application process, once they find out that the applicant is an offender. Offenders are mindful of writing or filling the gaps when they were away from the workforce.

We recommend providing open channels of information between CSC staff, employers and support firms. Communication between these groups is an important part of the solution to cracking employer’s ignorance, and giving them advice and support in ex offender employment /career decision making. Targeted education programs are also needed to raise awareness around ethnic and racial biases and to reduce sensitivities to workplace diversity.

To promote efficiency, the open cables of communication for employment be combined with other information networks that are recommended in this report.
The government needs to provide incentives to encourage employers to hire offenders and to participate in bridging programs and onsite education and development. Incentives such as grants, subsidies could be offered in conjunction with screening and training aid. On-the-job development programs would also be an asset including the ongoing provision of workplace practice firms for those interested in self-employment.

3. Language

The need to provide information that will improve the manner in which language skills are assessed, improving access to language programs (e.g., LINC and ESL), ensuring that these programs are efficient and relevant to the learner and stress the need to make a stronger link between language training for communication among offenders, staff and for employment.

For a better success rate, we recommend additional training in employment-related language, idioms, customs and other idiosyncrasies of Canadian English should be offered to those who have a proven need.

Some of the offenders along with Audmax staff have recommend solutions such as providing listening software language training and building more flexibility into language program access, changing the service provision framework to one that is more orientated to the learner and targeting language training more effectively. Suggestions are made to have offenders to volunteer their services to teach non English offenders while in the institutions.

4. Financial Stability

To help offenders achieve financial stability we recommend providing financial support from the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), and conduct training programs that teach banking rules, budgeting and other essentials.

5. Cultural Integration and Sensitivity

Offenders suggested creating more mentorship or hosting programs as well as networking and orientation sessions to help increase their awareness of cultural sensitivities.

A large percentage of the ethno-cultural population recommended that staff should take the inclusiveness training so that they are better able to understand how to cater to the diversity and sensitivity issues of the ethno-cultural offenders.

On the outside of the institutions we recommend educating Canadians to become more sensitive to the needs of ethno-cultural offenders. Recognition of these needs is an important element of a successful re-integration.
Some solutions include: increasing diversity training (in the work place, schools and the community), involving the media (both mainstream and ethnic), organizing community multicultural events and instituting community mentoring programs as ways of improving cultural awareness among Canadians so that an offender’s return to their community can be smooth.

6. Social and Emotional Support

Although there are agencies that provide mental health services there is a need for those that cater to ethno-cultural offenders (both general counseling and professional psychological services) specifically, as the needs for a person of Islamic faith (for example) differ greatly from those with Christian beliefs.

Education and training efforts aimed at increasing cultural sensitivity and understanding in mainstream systems and services would help.

A key recommendation is providing funding for offender families and couples counseling services with multilingual, multicultural counselors. Support for victims of domestic violence who are serving time could include provision of shelters and specialized counseling. The sensitive needs of women, seniors and youth should be addressed separately. Involving elements of civil society, such as the Canadian mental health board, can increase the portfolio of options in mental health provisions.

7. Housing

A large percentage of offenders echoed concerns about the need for affordable housing.

They suggested providing education and incentives to landlords and banks as a means of addressing some of the barriers faced by offenders in securing housing and to get information about their rights and recourse related to housing issues.
**Suggestions to Enhancing the Service Delivery Model**

Future services must be needs-based, client-oriented and flexible. Service providers must be able to adjust their programs and services quickly and easily for different subgroups. Coordination among multiple delivery models on a regional basis is required to improve and enhance services.

These services must be ethno-gender specific. Such service model to include: intake assessment, delegation and referral services to offenders. As well as identifying regional priorities, coordinate the efforts of the service infrastructure and advise on harmonizing service offerings, where appropriate. In other words, there should be an organization whose task is to bridge the gap between an ethno-cultural offender's issue and the information, direction and key people or organizations they'll need to tackle said setbacks.
**OVERALL MOST PROMISING AND RELEVANT SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS**

1. With respect to **employment**, provide bridging programs to help facilitate offenders’ entrance or re-enter into the work place. Programs should include: Resume writing, cover letters and interview techniques and the latest labour market trends as they pertain to offenders.

2. With respect to **financial stability**, establish a range of support mechanisms to assist offenders throughout their first three months (minimum) after release.

3. Ensure that proper **information and guidance** is available through a variety of delivery mechanisms, including web and podcasts for employers or through grassroots support groups and civil society for offenders.

4. With respect to **social and emotional support**, offer ethno-cultural family counseling and other social mechanism especially for those who are not embraced by their families after release.

5. With respect to **new workers**, implement new strategies to help offenders who fall into the category of new workers (those who have never worked in Canada) start the process of looking for work. For those returning to the workforce after their warranty expires assist them in finding **employment**.

6. Ensure that **health** and wellness services are more culturally sensitive.

7. Provide community based information about **housing** including information about shelters and low cost or subsidized housing (existing cultural non-profit communities could help with this).

8. Provide **support to service providers** to ensure they have the resources (e.g., financial, human, infrastructure, awareness) to provide information and guidance to offenders, supported by a coordinated information and assessment network with regularly maintained personal links and regional access. Personal guidance should be culturally appropriate and available to offenders in a way that is sensitive to their needs.

9. With respect to **cultural integration**, provide more structured training about Canadian culture, the law and conflict management techniques.
INFREQUENT BUT IMPORTANT ISSUES

Many of the following were not frequently mentioned; however, these issues do carry weight in rehabilitation and reintegration. Some of the potential solutions shown here were the result of brainstorming sessions amongst Audmax staff and volunteers, and some are drawn from experience in other socio-economic occurrences.

Prevention & Intervention

Develop government programs to increase awareness among: immigrant women of spousal abuse, societal views, human rights, the repercussions of abuse, laws, rights and choices (e.g. legal remedies, tools, birth control, health, feminist views, etc.) among immigrant men, women and communities and to help newcomers understand that violence (especially gender based violence) is not acceptable in Canada.

Community Involvement

Hold afternoon or evening gatherings in local schools and community institutions, these can range from support groups to social events so that the communities and people can be more aware of the integration of offenders. Use offenders who are back in the communities more effectively or they will return to a life of crime.

Empowerment Programming

Self empowering and self confidence building programs should be a core program among the offenders both inside and outside the institution.
Suggested Solutions for Youth

- Create a “buddy system” between existing and new offenders for support

- Provide information and orientation sessions about expectations within the institutions and after the institution and (how to integrate) to parents and youth

- Offer opportunities for youth to learn about Canadian Law and prevention

- Educate their parents about youth health issues (e.g., learning disabilities, ADHD etc.); and educate mainstream organizations to recognize issues that are related to cultural differences and the conflict with the law (e.g., not to misdiagnose issues based on cultural differences)

- Educate youth and their parents about the existence of extracurricular activities and their importance to the success in education, (e.g., show link between excellence in sports and academics)

- Offer positive leadership development opportunities, with emphasis on goal and life planning and holistic approaches to youth settlement, recognize and support links between after school programs, academic programs, social integration, etc.
SECTION 4: AUDMAX’S CHALLENGES

The Present, the Future and Their Challenges
The Present, the Future, and their Challenges

Audmax’s Challenges

This ethno-cultural programs and services have presented an opportunity for both Audmax and CSC to boost their services and gain some experiences in handling cultural sensitivities and issues arising from same. However were not without challenges in providing our services and include:

1. Getting in the institutions: this posed a challenge for us in the past, but due to our project manager, Chris Mangan’s interceding that problem as been resolved.

2. Our volunteers: although we have a large pool of Ethno-cultural volunteers who have been properly screened and trained, a large percentage of them commit but due to unforeseen circumstances can’t deliver. Hence, we are constantly recruiting volunteers. Most volunteers are from the Greater Toronto and Ottawa areas as we are finding it difficult to find ethno-cultural volunteers in the areas where the institutions are located.

3. Connecting to the parole offices: This sees to be our greatest challenge so far and needs to be resolved for effectiveness of the services.

4. Deportation issues: although, we try to involve the consulates by providing them with information around their fellow country personnel yet still they seldom follow-up. At the same time some of the offenders are not satisfied with our responses.

Despite these challenges, the Audmax team is quite excited with the progress made so far in this program. We looked forward to our third year, and to the new challenges to be faced. The offenders who have been properly rehabilitated, and have mentally paid their debt to society, will be on stronger footing upon parole. The hard work of CSC institutional staff and Audmax staff in preparing these sessions, analyzing their results, and the solutions they have generated are starting to bear fruit, and will soon pay off handsomely.

In conclusion, this project is so far successful, in delivering results, building the platform and model to enable ethno-cultural offenders to find and apply solutions to their concerns, help staff break the ice amongst offenders, and helped Audmax to apply new and learnt experiences in dealing with other issues arising from cultural differences. We can say that our programs are very popular amongst the offenders and our delivery is pristine.

We look forward to working more with staff to continue to identify problems, and finding and applying solutions.