

CIF FEATURE STORY:

The Bridging Program



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Feature Story: *The Bridging Program, Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan*

The Bridging Program assists women who are incarcerated at Pine Grove Correctional Centre by helping them navigate their way through their sentence and overcome barriers to successful reintegration in their home community. The program consists of building and developing an institutional diary, addresses risk factors that prevent incarceration, encourages personal development, identifies a personal and professional support network, and creates a reintegration plan that targets all the identified needs of the individual. Each participant, with help from [Elizabeth Fry](#), creates a self-directed reintegration plan that is both ambitious and realistic. **“Women who participate in the Bridging Program find it easier to connect with their designated case manager at the Correctional Centre,”** shared Stephanie Saulnier, Women Services, Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan.

Pine Grove Correctional Centre is Saskatchewan’s only provincial prison for women, holding upwards of 200 women at any given time. Pine Grove is located just outside Prince Albert, but women from all over Saskatchewan are transferred there if they are being held in custody. **“Most of the participants in the Bridging Program are in their mid-twenties, are mothers to multiple children, and identify as being Indigenous/Metis. Poverty, addiction, and mental health issues, are, (for many), the root of their involvement with the justice system. Each participant has their own history that affects their present circumstances, and each one has different barriers to overcome and goals they would like to achieve,”** shared Saulnier. The Bridging Program hopes to connect participants with one another, to staff at the institution who can help them with their plan, and with outside organizations and professionals.

“The Bridging Program has increased the quality of life and wellbeing of individuals in communities across Saskatchewan by increasing the sense of connectedness that incarcerated women feel. Most of the women who participate in the program are striving to make significant changes in their lives. We have heard from some women that they were grateful for the time spent in prison, as it allowed for reflection on the direction their life was headed in, and the opportunity to make changes” Saulnier said.

The Bridging Program does just as it says; it creates bridges to the outside world, so that women feel more connected to their community when they are released. The women are referred to the various services and resources they will need, from addictions counselling to housing locators to doctor’s appointments. **“We believe that the key to successful reintegration is feeling connected with as many supports as possible. When individuals are connected to the community, when their basic needs are being met, and when they are physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually supported, they are well along on their healing journey. The Bridging Program works with women at an individual level to support them to make these positive changes in their lives,”** shared Saulnier.

Personal Story: *The Bridging Program*

“The Bridging Program seeks to provide a continuum of services to an individual: before, during, and after incarceration. There was one woman who we worked with along this continuum. We met with her after she was arrested and then transferred to Pine Grove. We assisted her through our court working program and did our best to provide her with the legal information she needed to navigate the justice system and understand what was happening to her. While she was at Pine Grove, we discussed her release plan, and did our best to connect her with the supports she would need when she returned to the community. When she was back in the community, we continued to work with her. We helped her obtain emergency shelter, financial support, transportation and long-term housing for her and her son. This is just one example of how we bridge the divide from prison to community for the individuals we work with. We understand that the struggle isn’t over once people are out of jail. It takes time for some people to get back on their feet, and we want them to know we are always here for them. We continue to work with women for as long as they require our assistance, and do our best to provide low-barrier, non-judgmental and flexible services that meet them where they are at.”

Pictured: Staff & students at *Stuff the Bus* in September 2017



Elizabeth Fry Society
of Saskatchewan