

**Individuals with a Criminal Record and Volunteering
Project Report**

Susan Haines

The National Associations Active in Criminal Justice

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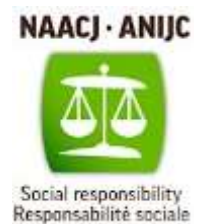


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Employment and
Social Development Canada

Emploi et
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Overview of the Study

As part of Employment and Social Development Canada's (ESDC) work on the Philanthropy file, this study allowed us to better understand the opportunities and gaps that exist for people with a criminal record (PwCR) to be engaged in their communities through volunteering. With about 10% of the Canadian population holding a criminal record, approximately 3.8 million people are uniquely vulnerable to social exclusion, and represent an undervalued, untapped human resource in our communities and workforce.

While we know that volunteering benefits individuals and communities by contributing to social and economic inclusion and integration, there are significant barriers for PwCR to take part in these opportunities. Individuals with a criminal record, especially those returning to our communities after incarceration, are particularly vulnerable to exclusion, addiction, unemployment, homelessness, crime and even re-incarceration.

By facilitating and providing supportive networks, knowledge and compassion, professional partnerships and personal connections, we can create greater opportunities for PwCR to gain confidence, obtain practical experience, build social and professional networks, and demonstrate their value as a contributing member of society.

Scope

The project began with a scan of recent, accessible literature as it relates to social inclusion for people with a criminal record. A brief summary of what we found is included below.

Although the perspectives of “first voice” experts can be undervalued, it is vital to ensure that we understand their experiences so we may appropriately address gaps and needs to support successful integration and inclusion. As such, the next step in our study was followed by four facilitated focus group discussions with fifty-four participants, all of whom have a criminal record. The following focus groups were held in three Canadian cities across three provincial jurisdictions:

Group 1.	2 October 2019	Halifax NS	12 participants
Group 2.	3 October 2019	Halifax NS	12 participants
Group 3.	10 October 2019	Ottawa ON	10 participants
Group 4.	13 November 2019	Edmonton AB	20 participants

We refined the agenda, discussion questions, documentation and the categories of targeted sub-populations based on feedback from participants and lessons learned as the groups were carried out. (*See Annex A for a copy of the final focus group agenda, and Annex B for a final copy of the Consent and Voluntary Disclosure form*). Particular attention was given to include:

- Individuals who have served short sentences of 1-4 years
- Individuals who have served sentences of 5-9 years
- Individuals who have served long sentences of 10 years or more
- Individuals of Indigenous ancestry and other visible minorities
- Young adults aged 18 to 25
- Individuals who are aging (50+ years of age).

Finally, we were presented with the following questions, which served to guide the work and our conversations across the country:

1. What are the opportunities that exist for individuals with a criminal record to be engaged in their communities through volunteering?
2. How does volunteering contribute to the social and economic integration of individuals with a criminal record?
3. What are the barriers to accessing volunteering facing individuals with a criminal record?
4. How can individuals with a criminal record be best supported in their volunteering? What are some promising practices/approaches that support or enhance inclusion through volunteering?
5. How could public policy support the social and economic integration of individuals with a criminal record through volunteering?
6. How does volunteering differ among the six sub-populations in the study? What are the specific needs of each sub-population in the study?

A **précis** of our findings has also been developed, based on these questions, to summarize and highlight the opportunities that exist for people with a criminal record to become more engaged in their communities through volunteering, and to promote positive change to public policy that will enhance social inclusion for PwCR¹.

¹ The précis is enclosed in PDF as a separate document.

Summary of the Literature

With 20 million Americans, approximately 4 million Canadians, 6.3 million Germans and over 11 million people in the United Kingdom burdened by legislation and policy that limits access to opportunities such as employment, education, volunteering, housing, adoption and travel, it is no surprise that we are seeing more and more research to explore the various aspects and impacts of criminal records on individuals, their families and our communities.

To date, shame and stigma have dominated the academic literature (Goffman in Harvey, 2019; Foucault in Henley, 2019; Cherney & Fitzgerald, 2016). Research into the social inclusion of people with criminal records (PwCR) continues to emerge alongside the prevalence of background checks in the United States, Canada and now Europe, but remains limited. Just as we have seen increased securitization and surveillance in society and a greater public demand to feel safe (Harvey, 2019), so too have we seen greater study into the use of police background checks and the impact of criminal records (Henley, 2019).

Our review reaffirmed that criminal records continue to disproportionately impact and punish people who are racialized and marginalized (Canesco, 2019; Harvey, 2019; Henley, 2017; Ispa-Landa and Loeffler, 2016), thereby contributing to exclusion, “civic purgatory” (Henley, 2018) and even “social death” (Krállová, 2015) for more and more people.

It also foreshadowed the frustration and pain felt by individuals with a criminal record, as expressed by many focus group participants, that they face an *extended* punishment, i.e. they continue to be punished through the denial of rights and entitlements associated with “meaningful citizenship,” even after having served their sentence and paid their debt to society (Henley, 2017).

Recognizing that criminal records are “increasingly being used outside of the remit of the criminal justice processes” the research calls upon us to “strive for pain-reduction” by reducing social harms that “exacerbate the suffering and exclusion of some of the most vulnerable members of society” (Henley, 2019). This reaffirms previous literature highlighting the importance of “better [matching] people’s skills and experience to the needs and opportunities in organizations (Volunteer Canada, 2012).”

Keeping this in mind and considering long-standing research telling us that “desistance [from crime] is the norm” after 10-15 years (Hanson et al, 2018 in Henley, 2019), particularly after having heard from study participants who reinforced what we read in the literature, Henley’s approach provides a reasonable and balanced principles-based framework within which to approach criminal records and social inclusion:

- Retraction:** To limit access of criminal records to police and courts.
- Relevance:** To ensure the criminal record is relevant to the purpose for which it is sought.
- Recency:** To recognize desistance, and the evidence around the “time to redemption.”
- Redeemability:** To provide the “right to hope” and ensure that no one is automatically excluded from justice and fairness (Henley, 2019).

We will see these themes emerge from our conversations with first voice experts in the coming pages.

Focus Groups

Recognizing that it can be difficult to discuss personal experiences and hardship, particularly when shame and stigma are involved, it was important to ensure that research participants were comfortable sharing their stories with us. Two factors significantly influenced individual participation in the focus groups:

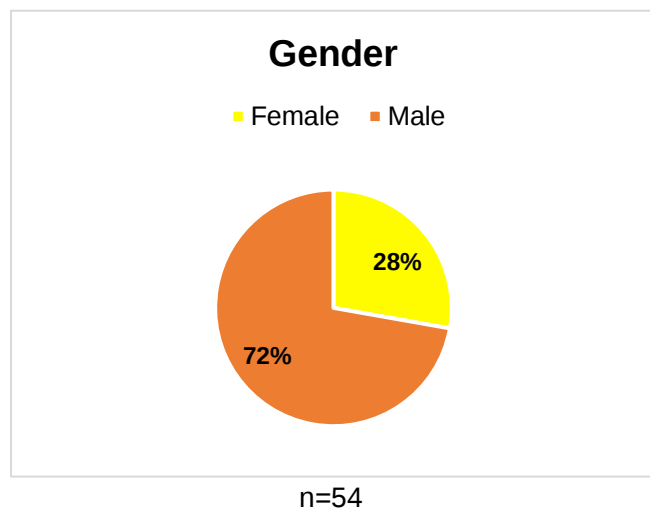
- Communication with and engagement of partners in each city, who had personal connections in their communities, and therefore could encourage individuals to participate; and,
- Incentives for participating through food and cash compensation.

There was great interest from people wanting to participate, in large part to obtain a meal and honorarium. It became very clear after the first group that we would not have been able to conduct the study without these key factors.

Research Participants: Demographics and Target Sub-populations

Despite our efforts to encourage greater voluntary disclosure of profile information throughout the study, rates of disclosure were much lower than anticipated, thereby limiting the statistical analysis of feedback and findings. *(See Annex C for the demographic profile information of all research participants and data disaggregated by city.)*

Gender was the only demographic fully disclosed, voluntarily, by all research participants. Of 54 participating individuals, 28% were female and 72% were male. The proportion of women who participated is excellent given their relatively low involvement in crime as compared to their male counterparts.²

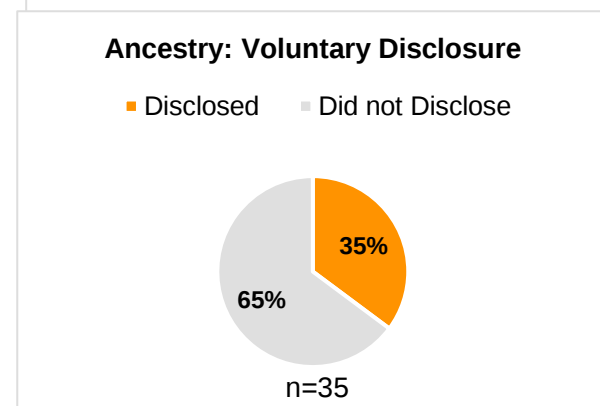
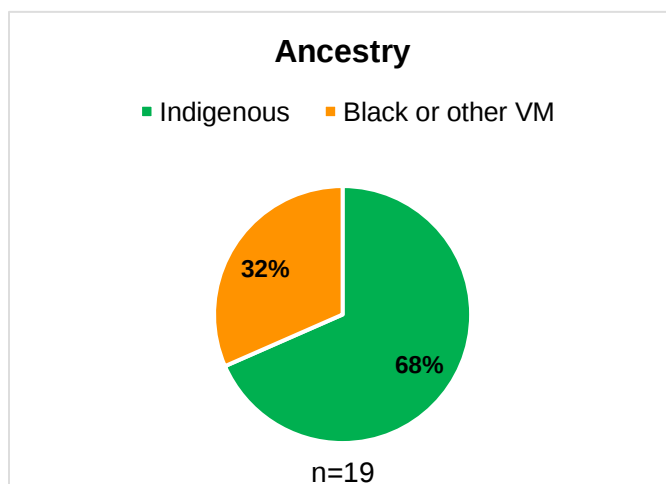
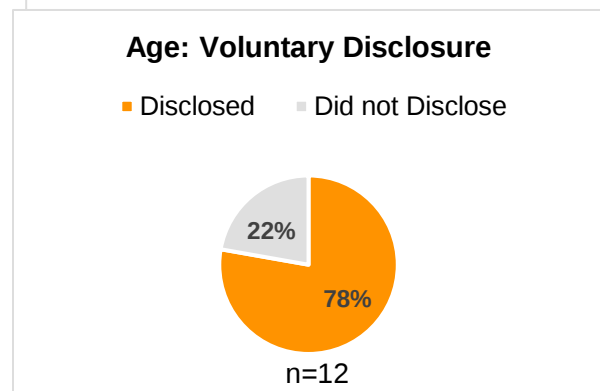
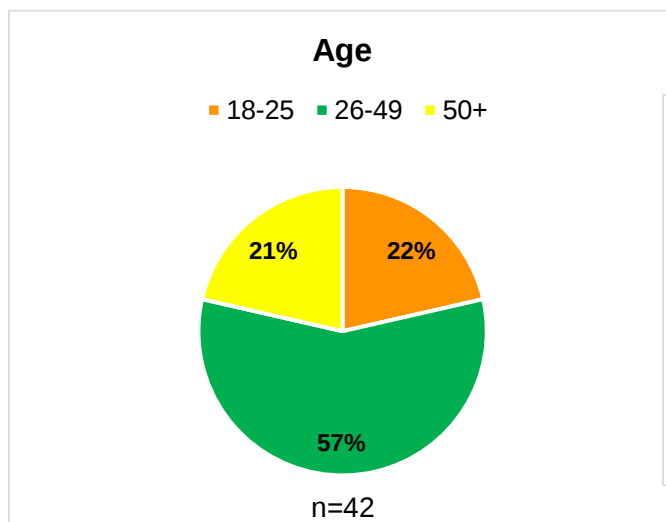


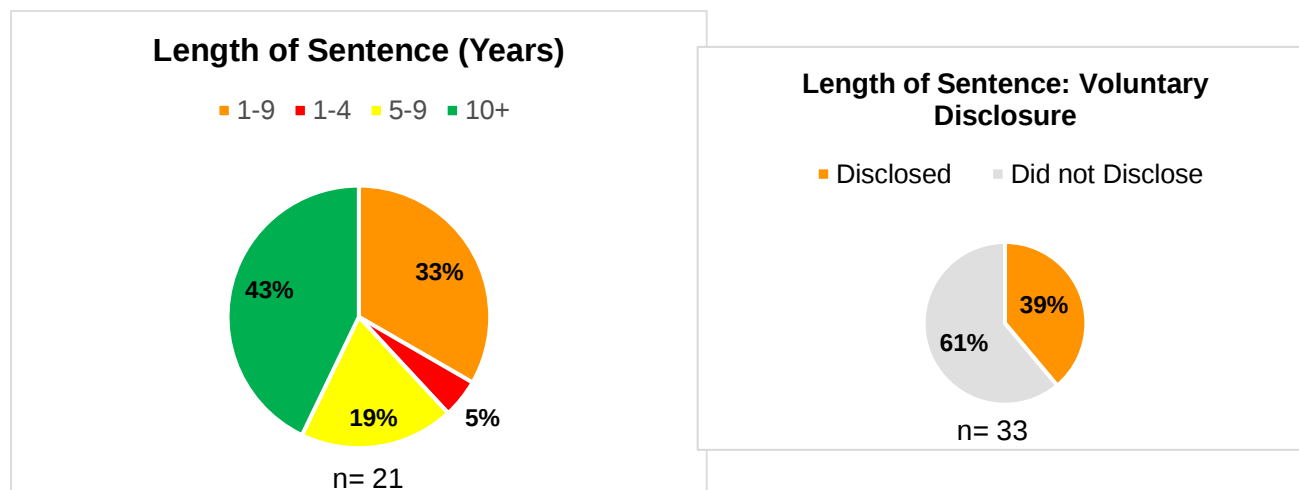
“People judge you right off the bat once they see your skin.”

² In 2017, females accounted for one in four (25%) individuals accused in police-reported criminal incidents in Canada. (Statistics Canada, 2019.)

Notwithstanding these disclosure rates, we were able to obtain a relatively diverse mix of research participants. In addition to gender, we are able to report on the following demographics:

- Forty-two people disclosed their age. The majority of participants (57%) were aged between 26-49, while 22% were aged 18-25, and 21% were aged 50 or older.
- Of the 19 people who disclosed ancestry or race, 68% were of Indigenous descent, and 32% were black or another visible minority. One man disclosed both Indigenous and Black ancestry (1.85%).
- Twenty-one of 54 participants disclosed the length of their sentence:
 - 5% had served 1-4 years in custody
 - 33% had served 1-9 years in custody
 - 19% had served 5-9 years in custody
 - 43% had served (or are currently serving) 10-year sentences or longer.





Key Themes

Honest, open dialogue gleaned remarkable insights and ideas from participants.

It is worthwhile noting, however, that the people we spoke with were primarily concerned with finding adequate *employment*, rather than volunteer opportunities, so that they could earn a living wage, cover the basic costs of living, remain crime-free, stay out of the criminal justice system, and become independent without relying on social assistance. As one participant explained: “We need to be safe. There needs to be a few steps before volunteering... Volunteering doesn’t pay my rent.”

Having said that, each focus group garnered helpful information and real-life examples that were unique to its respective group and province, while at the same time touched upon six shared themes from across the country, explored further below:

1. The value of volunteering
2. Ongoing stigmatization and marginalization
3. Access to information, resources and opportunities
4. Matching individuals to the role, position or tasks
5. Media and technology
6. Raising awareness through public education.

“We’re all painted with the same brush.”

1. The Value of Volunteering

Individuals become institutionalized after being isolated in custody, and there is a period of re-socialization that takes place upon return to the community. Many participants expressed having a great deal of social anxiety upon their release, particularly after having served longer sentences. As one man in Halifax described: “especially after max [maximum security], I didn’t know how to talk to people.” Another man in the Ottawa focus group explained that he “was just a ball of fear” at release.

We saw considerable self-awareness from most individuals about the various benefits of volunteering both personally and for the greater good. There was widespread recognition across the focus groups that **volunteering created opportunities for personal and professional growth, pro-social interactions, and “opened doors” to employment.** One person indicated that “we

carry bad habits out with us from inside,” which can be unlearned by interacting with positive people and “acting properly”. Each group emphasized the **value of being surrounded by “positive” or “pro-social” people**. Participants also mentioned the value of volunteering insofar as:

- Proving oneself
- Learning about self
- Learning about the community
- Passing skills on to others
- Keeping busy
- Gaining positive support
- Developing a strong work ethic
- Learning respect for self and others
- Building trust with the community
- Showing initiative
- Obtaining references

Although it was abundantly clear that volunteering has tremendous potential to support an individual’s transition and re-socialization in the community after periods of incarceration, research participants reminded us that it is “a lot of work” and “laborious” to find volunteer opportunities, especially for those who are not “tech savvy.” Self-confidence, learned helplessness and a preoccupying fear of rejection were also noted as major factors for PwCR to seek out a volunteer role.

A few participants who had experience volunteering shared stories of being fired after several months, once the employer found out about their criminal past. One woman in Halifax reported feeling “worried... always looking over my shoulder, wondering when they’re going to find out [about my criminal record].” Conversely, another woman who volunteered with Indigenous events and ceremonies in Edmonton was applauded when she shared her success with volunteering, having been promoted to Stage Manager.

Otherwise, PwCR perceived not-for-profit associations, food banks, soup kitchens, telephone help lines and indigenous ceremonies as more flexible, “open and accessible” places for them to obtain a volunteer position. A couple of participants in the Halifax focus groups emphasized the value of volunteering with the **Seventh Step Society of Nova Scotia’s Public Education Program**. The program “delivers a powerful message about the realities of crime and the criminal justice system. Ex-offenders ... use their personal stories to educate people about the pathways in and out of crime, as well as the experience of being incarcerated and involved in other aspects of the criminal justice system (e.g., parole).” (Seventh Step Society of Nova Scotia, n.d.). It is an excellent example of a volunteer opportunity that is meaningful for PwCR, because the speakers contribute to young people’s knowledge about crime, custody, the collateral consequences on family, and the consequences of life choices generally.

Despite their different experiences, participants in all four focus groups recognized that volunteering is an opportunity to improve their transition to the community by increasing self-esteem, building confidence, providing a meaningful routine, being able to give back to society, and being exposed to positive people and networks.

**“I had a lot of bad karma.
I needed some good
karma.”**

2. Ongoing Stigmatization and Marginalization

Research participants were adamant that criminal records serve as an extension of punishment. Even though **participating individuals have served their time and paid their debt to society as mandated by the courts, they very clearly felt that they continued to be punished through stigma and exclusion as a result of their record.** Regardless of her/his rehabilitation, sobriety, training, skills or experience, or the time that had passed since their crime, most participants were locked in social welfare systems and unable to afford the cost of a Record Suspension as the first step in moving forward beyond their criminal history.

We heard numerous stories and experiences of shame, embarrassment and frustration despite individuals' efforts to move beyond addictions, mental health issues such as Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and crime. To the individuals we spoke with, a criminal record means "you're still cuffed". Some participants even expressed despair, similar to one gentleman in Halifax who said: "A criminal record isn't tolerated for most positions, so it's almost like, why bother?"

**"We want an opportunity.
We don't want to go back.
We're capable of change."**

Another man in Ottawa recounted his experience during last year's flood. Even during a local state of emergency and mass call-out for citizen volunteers, his criminal record excluded him from helping with sandbags. Another individual expressed his frustration by saying "I can't even volunteer to clean up dog poop. It really sucks." In Halifax, one particularly frustrated man had been out for 13 years, but was "still looked at as through [his] sentence wasn't completed." A young woman in Halifax recounted being "turned away by four churches before I found one," while another participant shared that he had been clean, sober and crime-free for 28 years, but that his record "is still hanging over [his] head" as a barrier to opportunities and inclusion.

We heard several times that PwCR are discouraged to apply for opportunities once they see a checkbox to obtain a police background check on application forms. **Countless experiences in all three cities illustrated the automatic refusal of most employers to engage someone with a criminal past, as though a blanket exclusionary policy existed.** Real or not, the perception of PwCR was well articulated by an individual in Halifax who said that "ninety-nine percent of employers will turn you down" for having a criminal record.

Unique to the two groups in Halifax NS, each relayed experiences whereby various employers did not ask for a police record check at the outset of their screening process, but rather after a probationary period of three months. We heard that two other people, also in Halifax, had been asked for criminal background checks after five and eight years on the job, thereby speaking to the emerging prevalence of criminal background checks as seen in the literature. **In each instance that was relayed to us, the individuals had been recognized as a productive, contributing employees prior to the disclosure of their records. Sadly, they were quickly dismissed once employers learned about their records, without any opportunity for dialogue or understanding** (through an exit interview, for instance). One of these women, who had been praised for her performance prior to the disclosure of her criminal record, was humiliated by being escorted out the front doors of the store by police. "They could have brought me into the back, had a conversation.... But it's how they handle it" that could have been improved. Another woman mentioned that there was "not even an acknowledgement that

**"Employers discriminate.
Even cleaning – it's
ridiculous."**

I've worked hard, been a good employee for the past three months."

While most individuals lacked the confidence or reported "not having the energy" to pursue these businesses or organizations, the few individuals who did follow up with an employer were not able to speak with them. Individuals felt disempowered and discouraged without this opportunity to meet with the employer, explain the circumstances of the crime or their personal progress, generate understanding, nor discuss potential opportunities that might exist - despite a record. **Several individuals even questioned if it was legal to exclude PwCR as such, and wondered if they could file human rights complaints owing to discrimination.**

"We are the most discriminated against people on the planet."

Individuals across the country insisted that their criminal record was a preoccupying barrier to overcome, but simultaneously emphasized their own capacity, and that of others, to change. Participants went on to explain that "it's scary to put yourself out there," especially knowing "how people look at you," and how the public negatively perceives PwCR in general.

We also saw remarkable personal accountability, introspection, honesty, humour and perseverance across the focus groups. Participants seemed to take genuine responsibility for their "situation, crimes and actions," and just wanted a chance to do better, get further ahead in life, and be autonomous.

Participants in all focus groups expressed a genuine desire to continue making good choices, to remain crime-free and to stay out of jail or prison. Where PwCR were given an opportunity to prove themselves, most had a positive volunteer or employment experience. **It was only the disclosure of criminal records that resulted in their dismissal, thus demonstrating that individuals with a criminal past can be valuable, contributing members of our communities and work force if they are simply given a chance.**

Each focus group recognized that criminal records cannot be ignored, but also reinforced that we must see the whole person; someone who has skills, abilities, strengths and potential beyond just their criminal record.

3. Access to Information, Resources and Opportunities

"Nobody seems to know where to go, what we can do."

Individuals expressed the need for greater resources and supports to transition from custody to the community. Most PwCR we spoke with did not know who to contact, where to go, or how to obtain opportunities without discrimination.

One young woman in Nova Scotia who got out of prison just a couple of weeks prior to our conversation told us that she "had absolutely nothing to do, no idea where to go, or what to do." As was suggested by research participants in the forthcoming focus groups, she posited that an agency is needed - solely for ex-offenders - to connect with volunteer or employment opportunities.

Literacy and digital literacy play a significant role here as well. One participant recounted his experience after incarceration: Upon asking someone "How do I get a job?" he was told to "just punch it into google." His response was striking and almost tragicomical: "what's a google?" He went on to say that it took him "years to slowly get into computer technology." Another participant illustrated prison as "the same everyday inside, like Groundhog Day," noting that once he was

released, “outside, technology is so intimidating; it changes and moves so fast.” Without meaningful programs and opportunities in custody and throughout the release process, PwCR risk being left behind in terms of technology and digital literacy upon release, which are now considered essential, basic skills in our communities and in the workforce.

This speaks to the government’s obligation to provide rehabilitative programming and skills training that allows prisoners and PwCR to make the best use of imprisonment, improve themselves, learn to read or write, graduate secondary school or post-secondary school, and rejoin our communities as productive, law-abiding citizens.

Not surprisingly, **financial resources were also emphasized as a major barrier for PwCR**³. Many participants did not have a telephone or appropriate work clothing, as a first step towards inclusion. Individuals in each focus group expressed frustration with the prohibitive costs of Record Suspensions, thereby keeping them in a cycle of poverty without a way out. In fact, one young man

“Most of us are stuck on welfare like me.”

in Halifax reached out to us several days after his focus group to thank us for the cash honorarium provided to research participants because it allowed him to purchase a cell phone. As a result, he could reach employers and make contacts in his new community in Dartmouth NS.

A woman in the Halifax group went further by pointing out the rates of compensation for other experts who serve as advisors to federal government departments and services. Although we know that cash compensation was appreciated by all participants in this study, the first Halifax group expressed feeling particularly undervalued in terms of their time and input. A brief conversation about participants’ contributions to consultations and federal government per diems made it abundantly clear that the perspectives of “first voices” must be valued equally to others.

Interestingly, we saw varying degrees of awareness about provincial and territorial programs that provide start-up funding for clothing or work boots, etc. Although many individuals had knowledge of these programs, many did not. This lack of awareness might be attributed to either: legal conditions that restrict the internet access of PwCR; or, confusion about the administration of government services across federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions. **There was widespread agreement across the country that the provincial funding available to PwCR be better promoted.**

In Halifax, a few participants spoke about volunteer and job opportunities that exist for individuals who have personal contacts that could hire them. Essentially, **a trusting relationship** replaced the need for a police check. Conversely, in Edmonton, participants were exposed to greater and more diverse options thanks to the co-hosting organization, the Native Counselling Services of Alberta (NCSA). **In the preceding years, NCSA had made significant inroads with private industry, raised awareness and reduced perceived fears of employers and business leaders, thereby clearing the path for individuals on parole to**

“Programs inside are important but the outside support is more important [for self-management].”

³ Individuals in federal custody are excluded from the *Canada Labour Code*, and are therefore only paid between \$5.25-\$6.90 per day (if they are able to work in the institution). These rates do not include an automatic deduction of 30% for food, accommodations and telephone that was implemented in 2013.

be given a chance and eventually gain permanent employment.

One individual in Edmonton advised that a **“work empowerment program”** is necessary for PwCR. As she articulated: “We keep trying to overcome barriers, but we need to learn *how* and *what* we can do.”

This same group went on to highlight the emergence of **professional development**, executive coaching and other training programs - now common practice in many fields. Perceptively, individuals in Alberta were swift to note that these “opportunities invest in employees... but not people with a criminal record,” thereby speaking to the choices we make as a society *not* to prioritize supports for citizens who are vulnerable, marginalized and need it the most.

Boundaries and eligibility criteria were noted by the Edmonton focus group as essential pieces of information that must be made clear and more accessible by the federal, provincial and territorial governments. Four of five groups also expressed confusion about **what it means to be “bondable,”** and most individuals across the country did not understand if being bonded was a prerequisite to volunteer or employment opportunities. Moreover, several participants in Edmonton, who had faced the question if they were bondable, perceived the question as “a sneaky way to ask if you have a criminal record.”

4. Matching Individuals to the Role, Position or Tasks

As we saw in the literature, **each focus group was adamant that an individual’s criminal history, i.e. the nature and gravity of the offence(s), in addition to her/his skills, qualifications and abilities, must be considered as it relates to the job, role or opportunity in question.**

People with a criminal record felt as though they were “written off” as soon as they were asked to complete a police check. If they did get that far and a criminal record was found, most individuals weren’t able to speak with employers – nor their progress to move beyond it. In some cases, this frustration was exacerbated by the knowledge that police background checks do not provide employers with details about the specifics of a criminal record, i.e. the offences it contains.

“I’m good enough to knock on doors [for Elections Canada], but only for free.”

Further to the four principles that were articulated in the literature by Henley (retraction, relevance, recency and redeemability), participating PwCR expressed similar parallels to the recommended practices outlined in Volunteer Canada’s Screening Handbook: to “better match people’s skills and experience to the needs and opportunities in organizations,” while at the same time maintaining safety and minimizing risks (Volunteer Canada, 2012). **Through “matching,” individuals are screened *into*, not *out of*, existing opportunities.**

It’s worth noting that at some point during each focus group, **participants recognized the legitimacy of some boundaries for certain roles**, and each engaged in a conversation to explore those limits. In Ottawa, one man shared his perception based on experience: “If it’s applicable, like trying to work at a bank with bank fraud [charges... that makes sense;] but [not being able to volunteer at] a shelter to walk dogs?” When it came to a position of trust involving money or finances, research participants seemed to agree that “it should be crime related.” The length of time since committing the offence(s) was generally accepted as a significant factor across all groups as well, although we were not able to explore what that would mean for PwCR in practice.

“Why doesn’t the crime correspond to the job?”

We were surprised to hear nuanced views to contextualise some individuals’ violent offences. While **we heard very clearly that “aggression needs to be a factor,”** one man in Edmonton did not understand why he had been denied an opportunity as a result of his previous violence: He went on to explain that he had harmed gang members, thereby implying that his victims were more deserving of

harm than other, ‘innocent’ people.

Predictably, **the only clear consensus in all four groups was that children must be protected from people who have committed sexual offences against children. Otherwise, ideas to restrict what and where PwCR should be able to volunteer ranged among the participants in our focus groups.**

Participants across all groups indicated that **there does need to be greater flexibility in terms of working around some restrictions and limitations.** One young man made his point by asking the question: “Why can’t I even get a janitor job *after* the kids are gone [from school]?” Although this is an example relating to his specific employment, the same principle of flexibility can be applied to support social engagement and volunteering, rather than excluding people simply for having a criminal background.

While the importance of being more appropriately matched to a particular job or position has a legitimate occupational requirement for exclusions in some instances, it was not clear from first voice experts where those parameters should be drawn, only that flexibility must be applied to accommodate all individuals wherever possible.

Individuals in each group also remarked upon their **lived experience as an asset** in many instances, such as public speaking, youth counselling or peer mentoring. Many people recognized that they could use their mistakes and experiences, as well as their resilience and skills to overcome them, to positively influence others, give back and contribute to the common good. **“Peer support” was referenced as an undervalued but vital service** by each group we convened, echoing the literature to date that **peer mentors provide an essential service, which merits investment and support tantamount to any other service provider.**

Finally, we heard from at least one individual in each focus group that not-for-profit organizations and small or medium sized-businesses were perceived to be less risk-averse and more likely to give PwCR a chance to volunteer. Interestingly, the belief here being that smaller agencies are less likely to have stringent blanket policies that automatically exclude PwCR, whether or not this is indeed the case.

5. Media and Technology

“Criminals” are an easy target with relatively little sympathy from the general public, and we have long known that the media can reinforce stereotypes and stigma, thereby negatively impacting attitudes about people with a criminal record⁴. We are so grateful for the openness of participants who shared their

“It’s a media problem too.”

⁴ See: Blomberg, T. G., Brancale, J. M., Beaver, K. M., & Bales, W. D. (2016). Advancing Criminology and Criminal Justice Policy. In *Google Books*. Routledge; Ray, C. M., & Kort-Butler, L. A. (2019). What you See Is What You Get? Investigating how Survey Context Shapes the Association between Media Consumption and Attitudes about Crime. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-019-09502-7>; and, Roberts, J. (2018). Public Opinion, Crime, And Criminal Justice. In *Google Books*. Routledge.

stories with us, and allowed us to see beyond labels to see the individuals affected by particularly sensational media or inaccurate articles.

The ubiquity of media and the accessibility of information on the internet were reported to be considerable barriers to social inclusion and volunteer opportunities for various reasons.

First and foremost, participants pointed out that the media generates and contributes to an irrational fear of former prisoners and PwCR. This was particularly interesting to us given the remarkable fears and social anxiety that PwCR had expressed and were discussed earlier in this report.

That “anyone can be looked up online” was viewed by some participating PwCR as an infringement of privacy rights and personal information, with little or no disagreement from others. Some research participants contemplated or inquired about their rights under the *Access to Information Act* and *Privacy Act*. As one man stated quite simply: “If you do a crime, it should be private. It shouldn’t be on the computers.”

Some individuals seemed to feel shame for their past actions and any subsequent notoriety, while others expressed irritation or anger with the “blatant lies” and “not true facts” presented in the public domain. As we would expect, the individuals’ reactions appeared to be proportionate to their experiences with, or in, the media.

These statements further illustrate the impacts of negative media exposure on some of the people we heard from:

“There’s always someone that recognizes me.”

“They use your picture from your worst, more horrible moment.”

“Lots of employers will look people up even before they start.”

“Even for housing, they look you up on Google or Facebook...it doesn’t give you a fair shot.”

“Google is a problem.”

As we had discovered throughout our conversations with the focus groups, many individuals relayed experiences whereby they were recognized by a colleague or peer, and subsequently reported to the employer and/or police. In each instance, this resulted in the individuals’ termination.

However, one story we heard in Edmonton was especially concerning as it alerted us to **the potential of vigilante justice and the safety of PwCR, particularly when photographs are published**: A young woman who had had a lot of media exposure also had an identical twin. The twin, not the perpetrator, was approached by a member of the victim’s family while working at a restaurant. The family member went on to mistakenly report the twin as a criminal to the employer.

While we recognize that Canada’s system of justice is open, and that media outlets are independent, for-profit enterprises, **our findings tell us that the education of journalists and reporters, as well as employers, victims of crime and the general public, would benefit from a greater understanding of people who are successfully moving beyond their criminal history.**

6. Raising Awareness through Public Education

Public education is necessary to increase awareness about the value of social inclusion and rehabilitation, particularly among vulnerable populations such as people with criminal records. We uncovered many aspects, and target audiences, under this theme throughout the course of the project.

“Only an addict understands an addict, and only an ex-con understands an ex-con.”

First of all, many individuals indicated that they had been marginalized prior to their crimes. As we have known from the research for many years, factors such as poverty, education, abuse in the home, addictions and substance misuse often served as pre-cursors to crime for many of this project’s research participants. **They very clearly agreed that it is**

important for employers and the general public to learn about criminal behaviour in this context, with a view to increasing understanding, and hopefully compassion, for the circumstances that PwCR have successfully overcome.

First voice experts from across the country also expressed a primary interest in the **education of employers in particular**, given the focus of our study. They wondered why we weren’t speaking with employers, rather than people with a criminal record, to better understand and alleviate employers’ concerns about engaging PwCR through volunteering (or employment, for that matter). One participant went further still, suggesting that we **bring employers and PwCR together to facilitate dialogue, educate each other about their perceptions and realities, as well as to generate understanding**. Communities and in particular employers would benefit from meeting with people with a criminal record. PwCR simply want an opportunity to dispel myths, to prove themselves, and to develop their skills and abilities.

In fact, **several participants reported seeing shifts in attitudes and opinions about them, after being prejudged based on a label, following the opportunity to connect individually and more personally with others**. This was illustrated most effectively through the experience of speaking engagements at schools, colleges and universities in both Nova Scotia and Alberta, where several participants had shared their stories with students. In every instance, speakers obtained positive feedback. More importantly, students quite often approached speakers to share their insights and to remark upon the impact of this exposure. This confirmed what we know anecdotally, which is that personal interaction such as this can have a meaningful influence on individuals’ beliefs and assumptions about PwCR.

“It was demeaning. [The students] didn’t know I was a Lifer.... People’s attitudes changed immensely once they heard my story.”

Focus group participants further agreed **that the appropriate use and application of police background checks** must be part of educational initiatives or curricula for employers, as discussed earlier. Contextualization, matching and the opportunity to meet and speak with employers were viewed as paramount to improve understanding and create pathways to volunteering and social inclusion.

“The public’s attitude and the lack of education is a huge barrier.”

People in the Ottawa and Halifax groups suggested that governments follow a campaign and now promising practice that has emerged out of the United States to “Ban the Box,” which, “essentially, ... moves the question about criminal background to later in the screening and hiring process” (Mollica, 2017).

Another sub-theme that emerged involved the skills, experiences and resilience of people who have been in conflict with the law. As expected, and as we have seen in the social and criminal justice field in Canada, **PwCR are**

undervalued for the skills and strengths they *do* have.⁵ Moreover, many of our focus group participants felt deserving of volunteer and employment opportunities given the significant progress they had made to obtain education and training, certifications and accreditations, and/or participate in treatment or programming in order to improve themselves. Similar to the existing and emerging research about the value and effectiveness of peer support, several respondents voiced that they, like other PwCR, are well-suited to – and indeed an asset – in some occupations, e.g. addiction, mental health, and youth case work. It is clearly a “win win win” for individuals, employers and society to employ people with a criminal record, by creating off-ramps from the cycle of crime and social assistance.

Further still, participants in the Edmonton group remarked upon **the transferability of some skills they had acquired or demonstrated through their criminal history**. For example, certain crimes were reported to require and demonstrate skills in management, human resources, networking, proactiveness, communications and perseverance.

All of our focus groups wondered about the legal grounds on which employers can discriminate. There was considerable confusion across the country about human rights and violations of those rights, likely owing in part to Federal/Provincial/Territorial (FPT) distinctions in law. Several people asked for guidance in terms of disclosing criminal records, i.e. **is the onus on the employer to ask or the applicant to disclose?**, and most research participants did not understand what it meant to be “bonded” or “bondable.” Taken together, this tells us very clearly that both **employers and PwCR would benefit from education and training about existing laws and policies that relate to basic human rights**. With so many jurisdictions in Canada, combined with issues accessing justice and legislation and the increasing mobility of individuals across provinces and territories, it is certainly understandable that PwCR and employers alike may not understand their rights and obligations under the law. Regardless, it incumbent upon us to ensure that everyone’s human rights are respected and upheld, without discrimination.

**“I’ve been clean and sober
28 years, and it’s still
hung over my head.”**

When discussing how to educate the public, there was some disagreement in terms of the capacity of society to change. One individual said it was “impossible” to raise awareness as such, while others were more positive. A television reality show, similar to *Redemption Inc.*, was suggested as one creative approach to reach the general public, and allow them to see PwCR as productive, contributing members of society.

Each focus group recommended that **a central repository, database or not-for-profit association be responsible for collecting and posting information for PwCR to find opportunities** based on each individual’s personal circumstances, history and skills. In Ottawa, the suggestion was equated to **a high school guidance counsellor** because their role is to work with and for individuals based on their strengths and limitations, while serving as a bridge to the opportunities that are available within those parameters. This concept was reiterated by others insofar as PwCR are **looking for options and to know what they can do, rather than what they cannot do because of their criminal record**. This was not a surprise to NAACJ given that PwCR and parolees are typically

⁵ See the John Howard Society of Calgary’s “*I am More Than My Criminal Record*” public education campaign for an excellent initiative to inform individuals and communities that PwCR are more than simply their record or their label as “criminal”: <https://morethanarecord.com/>.

“Once I got a chance, I got another chance.”

guided by conditions that limit behaviours and actions, rather than encouraging potential opportunities. **Re-framing exclusionary restrictions into positive, strengths-based opportunities is one means of promoting a positive lens that allows PwCR to better see their potential beyond existing restraints.**

Recommendations

This study made it very clear that while there are tremendous barriers for people with a criminal record to be engaged in their communities through volunteering, there are also remarkable opportunities and creative ideas to generate or improve pathways to social inclusion for PwCR. And while the first voice experts we engaged through this project may not have agreed on every approach or idea, we heard considerable consensus among groups that investments are needed.

The following recommendations, by theme, merit consideration and action going forward if we are serious about social inclusion for vulnerable Canadians.

The Value of Volunteering

1. Volunteering is an excellent opportunity for PwCR to increase self-esteem, build confidence, provide a meaningful routine, give back to society, make valuable connections in the community and be surrounded by positive, pro-social people and networks. Individuals with a criminal record should be encouraged and supported to identify and obtain volunteer opportunities.

Ongoing Stigmatization and Marginalization

2. People with a criminal record have paid their debt to society and are often discriminated against by employers, organizations and individuals. Blanket corporate policies that do not consider PwCR as potential volunteers should be revisited to ensure that discrimination does not occur, legal and human rights implications are mitigated, and individuals and businesses can benefit from volunteers and volunteering.
3. Individuals with a criminal history are capable of change and should be given consideration for volunteer opportunities. Employers should be open and clear about their policies to screen, train and support volunteers prior to engaging them in an active volunteer role. Both applicants and businesses would benefit from dialogue at the outset of their relationship so they may better understand each other's expectations, needs and limitations.
4. People with a criminal record have skills, abilities, strengths, experiences and potential. They are hardworking and should continue to seek out supports that will encourage and assist them to apply for volunteer opportunities.

Access to Information, Resources and Opportunities

5. A national not-for-profit association should be engaged to create and maintain a central repository, database and/or website for PwCR and potential employers. Not only could the NFP and website collect and maintain legislation, policy, promising practices, available resources and potential opportunities for volunteering and employment, it could also serve as a bridge between PwCR and employers, serving as a liaison and support to both individuals and organizations. It is worthwhile noting that these initiatives and activities must be framed in terms of strengths and opportunities.

This "central place for volunteerism and employment" could allow PwCR to access existing F/P/T programs, services, realistic opportunities and connect with open-minded employers.

6. Existing F/P/T programs and services providing financial and emotional support to vulnerable people, PwCR and people on social assistance must be better promoted and funded so that they are accessed as needed.

Community-based groups and organizations that work with vulnerable populations and PwCR and that are well-established in our communities could be targeted as a primary resource and liaison.

Matching Individuals to the Role, Position or Tasks

7. PwCR understand that their actions have consequences, and they understand that employers must take into account the nature and gravity of crime(s), but also the time that has passed, the progress that has been made since committing the offences, as well as her/his skills, qualifications and abilities as they relate to the particular role in question. Prospective volunteers and employers must have the opportunity to discuss existing opportunities in addition to the boundaries and limitations that need to be in place. Greater flexibility must be given through this screening process to find a suitable match between employers and volunteers.
8. The lived experience of PwCR can be an asset in many roles, positions and occupations. Peer Support has emerged as a good practice in many fields, and should be valued particularly within law, corrections, community-based corrections, social work, addictions, mental health and related service provision.

Media and Technology

9. Education and awareness campaigns should target journalists, reporters and media outlets about PwCR and the impacts of sensational news on them, their children and families. Facts, data and personal stories demonstrate that individuals with a criminal record are not necessarily dangerous, but rather an asset in many cases. By giving first voices the opportunity to volunteer, grow, and participate in our communities without stigma and prejudgment, they will be better able become autonomous, productive citizens.

Raising Awareness Through Public Education

10. Public education, particularly through personal interaction and sharing stories, has the potential to change attitudes and beliefs about PwCR as more than simply “criminals”. Once members of the public are exposed to PwCR and learn about crime in the context of childhood trauma, poverty, abuse, neglect, mental health and addictions, they gain a deeper understanding of the systemic factors that influence criminal behaviour and begin to see the whole person. Awareness campaigns led by individuals with lived experience should be developed and promoted to support greater social inclusion.
11. Employers and volunteer centres should also be targeted for education and awareness campaigns in order to create greater opportunities for them and for individuals with a criminal record who are seeking to become active and give back to their communities. Awareness raising activities and workshops with Chambers of Commerce, for instance, would help both individuals and employers to understand each other’s needs and realities, thereby creating pathways to social inclusion through volunteering.

12. Tools and training for PwCR, employers, in addition to public awareness strategies to ‘normalize’ PwCR and decrease fear, should be developed. This includes education about human rights, police background checks, criminological evidence, and the skills and qualifications that PwCR can bring to employers.
 - a. A campaign to raise awareness about the appropriate utilization of police background checks and the value of matching PwCR to the role or position in question, based on the applicant’s skills and the employer’s opportunity, should be developed.
 - b. Plain-language tools and information kits to share information with PwCR, schools, employers, and media outlets should be created.
 - c. Concise, palatable, intersectoral research summaries and fact sheets that bring together existing and emerging knowledge from various disciplines, should be created to inform employers and the general public.
 - d. Public awareness campaigns similar to “I am more than my criminal record” and “Ban the Box” should be expanded and supported.
 - e. Schools, colleges and universities, as well as community-based groups such as Rotary and Lions Clubs, could be targeted as well.
 - f. Some employers require cultural sensitivity training, e.g. body language and eye contact in the context of Indigenous people, which is often misunderstood as disrespectful by settlers.
13. Opportunities to facilitate dialogue and personal interaction between PwCR and employers should be developed.
 - a. The provision and accessibility of accurate and meaningful information and resources for PwCR and employers, must be framed in terms of strengths and opportunities instead of risks and restrictions.

Chambers of Commerce and Community Associations might be appropriate audiences to target at the outset.
14. Greater investments must be made in education, training, peer support and mentorship programs and services across the correctional continuum, from incarceration to the community.
 - a. Training and opportunities in custody should align with opportunities and needs in the community, e.g. animal therapy; trades, not gendered. Individuals in custody must have access to the same opportunities for personal and professional advancement.
 - b. Incentives for employers, similar to federal student summer jobs programs, would encourage employers to engage PwCR and could be developed.
 - c. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs should be identified, promoted and supported to engage PwCR.
 - d. Peer support programs and services are meaningful and highly effective, and should be supported and expanded through existing not-for-profit groups.
 - e. Programs and services such as “Walls to Bridges,” “Housing Help,” “Teamwork,” “Labour Ready,” John Howard Society of Ottawa’s “Arches”, Dress for Success,

Mustard Seed, Toastmasters, CORCAN, correctional peer support programs, and Seventh Step Society's Public Education Program must be adequately fostered, facilitated, resourced and expanded to meet the needs of PwCR and our communities.

- f. Flexibility must be afforded to the legal conditions that restrict any associations or contact between individuals with a criminal record, which undermine peer support and mentorship.
15. Support systems must in place to support individuals as they exit corrections and return to the community, in order to ensure that they can access existing and emerging resources.

Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and social workers were identified as key resources to walk alongside individuals who need support, and to liaise with employers where needed.

16. Employers and private industry must be engaged and educated to better understand the risks and realities of engaging or employing people with a criminal record.

As demonstrated by the Native Counselling Services of Alberta, Seventh Step Society of Canada and the John Howard Society of Ottawa, not-for-profit organizations are well-placed to serve as a conduit between individuals seeking inclusion and potential employers.

- a. Local volunteer centres and employment agencies should also be informed to support PwCR as a vulnerable population with tremendous potential.
 - b. Existing fine option programs and Community Service Order placements might also be engaged to expand our reach, and to learn more about what works and what doesn't to successfully engage PwCR in volunteering.
17. Consideration should also be given to the creation of an employment agency strictly for PwCR to be matched with employers for both volunteer and employment opportunities.
18. Canada would benefit from studying other international jurisdictions to further identify promising and successful practices.

In the United States, the "The Prison Entrepreneurship Program" (PEP), delivered in correctional institutions, has had remarkable success educating and employing prisoners and former prisoners, and reducing recidivism.

Last Words

19. First voice experts have the lived experience to inform policy and practice. Governments must seek out the perspectives of PwCR, respect their opinions, and consider their views when creating or amending programs and services that will impact vulnerable citizens.
20. Members of Parliament, Senators, Members of Provincial Parliament, Councillors and Mayors, as decision-makers, should be encouraged to support proposed federal legislation to Amend the *Criminal Records Act*.

Proposed legislation is currently in the Senate. During second reading, there was reference to a Parliamentary Committee report that stated that: Liberal, Conservative and NDP committee members agreed that it was time for the government to "examine a mechanism to make record suspensions automatic," in at least some circumstances.

21. Keeping in mind that only six Canadian provinces or territories recognize criminalization as protected grounds against discrimination, we must also continue to seek out legislative and regulatory amendments that are person-centered and principles-based (i.e. retraction, relevance, recency and redeemability) in every jurisdiction across the country.
22. The federal government, perhaps through the Employment and Social Development Canada, could provide tremendous leadership by engaging PwCR as volunteers and employees.

The open, honest and courageous contributions of focus group participants have illuminated just how significantly and systematically criminal records serve to exclude otherwise productive citizens. Their stories, experiences and input, which are remarkably similar to those in the existing and emerging literature, poignantly illustrate the need for legislative, policy and cultural change in order to improve social inclusion, support individuals and families, contribute to employment and the economy, and help create the safe, vibrant, diverse, healthy and inclusive communities we seek to achieve.

“If I’m good at a job I dislike, imagine what I can do with a job I like.”

Annex A: Final Agenda for Focus Groups

REVISED Agenda – NAACJ Consultations Edmonton, November 2019

6:00 pm	Welcome by Dave (Facilitator), Introduce Susan
6:02 pm	Round circle introductions of participants
6:10 pm	Introduction of the project and importance of understanding barriers to volunteering. (*Sign PURPLE Consent Form; keep white copy for information*)
6:15 pm	Ground Rules/ group expectations (see page 2) NB: Confidentiality, anonymity, notetaking and audio recording.
6:20 pm	Flipchart - What benefits (job-wise or other) does volunteering provide for someone who has a criminal record (in community, in custody, and/or post-incarceration)? +Probe
6:30 pm	Round table: Opportunities and barriers to volunteering with a criminal record.
6:40 pm	Sticky note exercise: What opportunities for volunteering should there be? What are the best-case opportunities from your point of view? What needs to change or improve? What has worked/not worked? Are there distinctions between in community, in custody, and/or post incarceration? + Probe Do you disclose your criminal record upfront? What happens if/when your employer or colleagues learn about your criminal past? Is there a conversation about how your history is relevant, or not, to the work? + Probe
6:50 pm	Round table: Debrief sticky notes.
7:00 pm	<i>Break for coffee, snacks</i>
7:10 pm	Discussion – Are there differences between opportunities and challenges: (1) For those who've served sentences between 1-4 years? (2) For those who've served sentences between 5-9 years? (3) For those who've served sentences 10 years or more? (4) For those of Indigenous ancestry? (5) For those who are Black or another visible minority? (6) For women, versus men? (7) For younger adults aged 18-25? (8) For older adults aged 50+? (9) What about impacts on families? (10) Other groups or considerations?
7:25 pm	Flipchart: What supports should be put in place to improve volunteer opportunities moving forward? Do people with criminal records need different or greater supports A) to find a job, or B) while on the job? What would encourage you/people with criminal records to volunteer? +Probe

What is the role of government/ voluntary organizations/ businesses/ community/other? to better support volunteering, employment and social inclusion of people with criminal records? +Probe

What do governments & employers need to know, to encourage them to give people with criminal records a chance?

7:40 pm **Sticky note exercise:** Other thoughts on improving volunteering in Canada for those with a criminal record? Have we forgotten anything?

7:50 pm **Circle Debrief**

8:00 pm **Thank you and Voluntary Disclosure & sign to receive honorarium.**

Let participants know they can contact Susan anytime to debrief/talk more privately, one on one, or withdraw consent at any time.

Questions guiding the consultations

- 1) What are the opportunities that exist for individuals with a criminal record to be engaged in their communities through volunteering?
- 2) How does volunteering contribute to the social and economic integration of individuals with a criminal record?
- 3) What are the barriers to accessing volunteering facing individuals with a criminal record?
- 4) How can individuals with a criminal record be best supported in their volunteering? What are some promising practices/ approaches that support or enhance inclusion through volunteering?
- 5) How could public policy support the social and economic integration of individuals with a criminal record through volunteering?
- 6) How does volunteering differ among the five sub-populations in the study? What are the specific needs of each sub-population in the study?

Group Agreement

1. Respect each other
2. Listen without interrupting
3. Participate fully
4. Use encouraging not dismissive language
5. Keep an open mind
6. Equal airtime
7. Mobile/ Smart phone
8. **Have Fun!**

Annex B: Consent and Voluntary Disclosure Form

Title of Study: **Individuals with a Criminal Record and Social Inclusion**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Dave Farthing and Susan Haines** for the National Associations Active in Criminal Justice (NAACJ), which is being funded by Employment Social Development Canada (ESDC). The data will be used, with your permission, towards the completion of NAACJ's project, **Individuals with a Criminal Record and Social Inclusion**.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact:

Susan Haines, Executive Director, NAACJ: <u>(613)-761-1032</u>	or	naaci@naaci.org
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PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to better understand the opportunities and gaps that exist for individuals with a criminal record to be engaged in their communities through volunteering. Volunteering contributes to their social and economic inclusion and integration, e.g. the capacity to engage in social networks and to become a contributing member of the community and workforce. This study will support Employment and Social Development Canada's work on the Philanthropy File and its goal to increase volunteering in Canada and specifically among vulnerable populations, such as individuals with a criminal record.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

- Participate fully
- Be as honest as possible
- Respect confidentiality
- Sign and submit a Consent Form to participate

HOW YOU WERE SELECTED TO PARTICIPATE

You self-identified & registered for a focus group because of your experience in the subject matter, or were referred to the study and focus group based on your profile and connection to individuals and groups through NAACJ's partner organizations, including: Direction 180, the Seventh Step Society of Canada, the John Howard Society of Nova Scotia, 902 Man Up, the John Howard Society of Ottawa, the Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre, the Native Counselling Services of Alberta, the Stan Daniels Healing Centre, Buffalo Safe Wellness House, REACH Edmonton, The John Howard Society of Edmonton, Safer McCauley and/or Redemption Icon.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

We do not foresee any potential risks or discomforts, however if you should feel uncomfortable or wish to stop participating at any time you are free to do so. Should you wish to debrief or speak privately following the focus groups, you may reach out to the Project Lead (Susan Haines) or Facilitator (Dave Farthing).

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

You will not be directly benefiting from this study. However, there is potential for you to increase awareness of the work done by this organization, and to contribute towards an increased understanding of the pathways and barriers to social inclusion for individuals with a criminal record, particularly through volunteering. With your input and "first voice," NAACJ will be making policy recommendations to federal government through ESDC in order to better support the social inclusion of individuals with criminal records in the future.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

There is no payment for participating in this study, but participants who complete the facilitated focus group sessions will receive \$50 for their time and contributions.

AUDIO RECORDING

I consent to the audio-recording of the interview. I understand this is a voluntary procedure and that I am free to withdraw at any time by requesting that the recording be stopped. I also understand that

my name will not be revealed to anyone and that recordings will be kept confidential. Anonymity of participants will be respected and materials will be for professional use only.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. We do not intend to disclose any personal information, but rather to use data anonymously. The information gathered will be released only to Susan Haines and Dave Farthing, Project staff.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. You also have the option of removing your personal data from this study.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE SUBJECTS

Research findings will be available by request, by contacting Susan Haines by phone or email. The final report can be made available to you upon request. It is expected that the project will be completed by the end of March 2020.

VOLUNTARY DISCLOSURE: PROFILE INFORMATION

If you are comfortable doing so, please indicate your demographic information:

☐ Male	☐ 1-9 year sentence	☐ Indigenous ancestry	☐ Aged 18-25
☐ Female	☐ 10+year sentence	☐ Black or other Visible Minority	☐ Aged 50 +

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

This data may be used in subsequent studies. Do you give consent for the subsequent use of the data from this study? ☐ Yes ☐ No

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact: Susan Haines, Executive Director, NAACJ: Telephone: 613-761-1032; email: naacj@naacj.org.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I understand the information provided for the study **Individuals with a Criminal Record and Social Inclusion** as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. **I have been given a copy of this form.**

PRINT Name of Research Participant

Signature of Research Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF LEAD INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct this research study.

Susan Haines, NAACJ

Date

Annex C: Demographic Data of Research Participants

All Participants

Demographics by target sub-population	Gender		Sentence Length				Race/ Ancestry		Age		
	F	M	1-9 yrs*	1-4 yrs*	5-9 yrs*	10 yrs +	Indigenous	Black or VM**	18-25	26-49	50+
1.	X										
2.		X									
3.	X		X							X	
4.		X								X	
5.		X								X	X
6.	X					X					X
7.		X								X	
8.		X									X
9.	X									X	
10.		X								X	
11.	X		X							X	
12.		X				X				X	
13.		X								X	
14.		X								X	
15.		X									
16.	X										X
17.		X									
18.	X										X
19.		X						X		X	
20.		X					X			X	
21.		X									
22.		X									
23.		X						X			
24.	X									X	
25.		X	X							X	
26.		X	X								X
27.		X						X		X	
28.		X									X
29.		X	X							X	
30.		X	X							X	
31.		X	X				X				
32.		X				X		X			X
33.		X								X	
34.		X								X	
35.	X				X		X			X	
36.	X						X			X	
37.		X							X		
38.		X							X		
39.		X							X		
40.		X				X	X				
41.		X							X		
42.		X							X		
43.		X							X		

44.		X				X	X				
45.		X				X	X				
46.	X						X		X		
47.		X					X		X		
48.	X				X		X		X		
49.	X			X				X			
50.	X				X					X	
51.		X				X	X	X		X	
52.		X			X		X				X
53.	X					X	X			X	
54.		X				X					
Totals	15	39	7	1	4	9	13	6	9	24	9
Percentage	28%	72%	13%	2%	7%	17%	24%	11%	17%	46%	15%
Unknown / Did not disclose (by gender, length of sentence, ancestry/race, and age)	0%		61%				65%		22%		

* The length of sentences were originally categorized by 1-9 years and 10+ years. Based on feedback from participants, categories for the fourth group were revised to accommodate 1-4 year, 5-9 year and 10+ year sentences.

** Similarly, based on feedback from participants, groups three and four were given an opportunity to distinguish between Indigenous ancestry and Black or other Visible Minority.

Group 1: Halifax Nova Scotia | Mi'kmaq Territory

	F	M	1-9 yrs*	1-4 yrs*	5-9 yrs*	10 yrs +	Indigenous	Black or VM**	18- 25	26- 49	50+
1.	x										
2.		x									
3.	x		x							x	
4.		x								x	
5.		x								x	x
6.	x					x					x
7.		x								x	
8.		x									x
9.	x									x	
10.		x								x	
11.	x		x							x	
12.		x				x				x	
Totals Group 1	5	7	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	8	3
Percentage	42%	58%	17%	0%	0%	17%	0%	0%	0%	75%	17%
Did not disclose	0%		67%				100%		8%		

Group 2: Halifax Nova Scotia | Mi'kmaq Territory

	F	M	1-9 yrs*	1-4 yrs*	5-9 yrs*	10 yrs +	Indigenous	Black or VM**	18- 25	26- 49	50+
1.		X									
2.	X										X
3.		X						X		X	
4.		X					X			X	
5.		X									
6.		X									
7.		X						X			
8.	X									X	
9.		X									
10.	X										X
11.											
12.											
Totals Group 2	3	9	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	5	2
Percentage	25%	75%	0%	0%	0%	0%	8%	17%	0%	42%	17%
Did not disclose	0%		100%				75%		42%		

Group 3: Ottawa Ontario | Algonquin Anishinaabe Territory

	F	M	1-9 yrs*	1-4 yrs*	5-9 yrs*	10 yrs +	Indigenous	Black or VM**	18-25	26-49	50+
1.		X	X							X	
2.		X	X								X
3.		X						X		X	
4.		X									X
5.		X	X							X	
6.		X	X							X	
7.		X	X				X				
8.		X				X		X			X
9.		X								X	
10.		X								X	
Totals Group 3	0	10	5	0	0	1	1	2	0	6	3
Percentage	0%	100%	50%			10%	10%	20%	0%	60%	30%

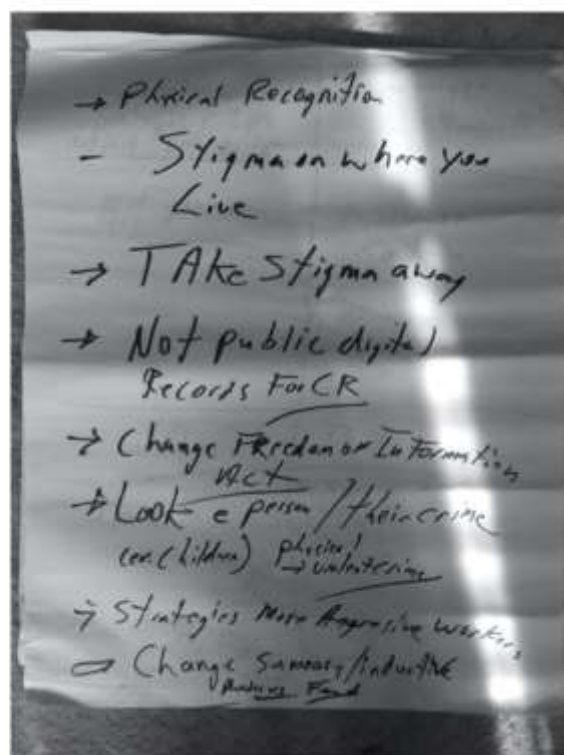
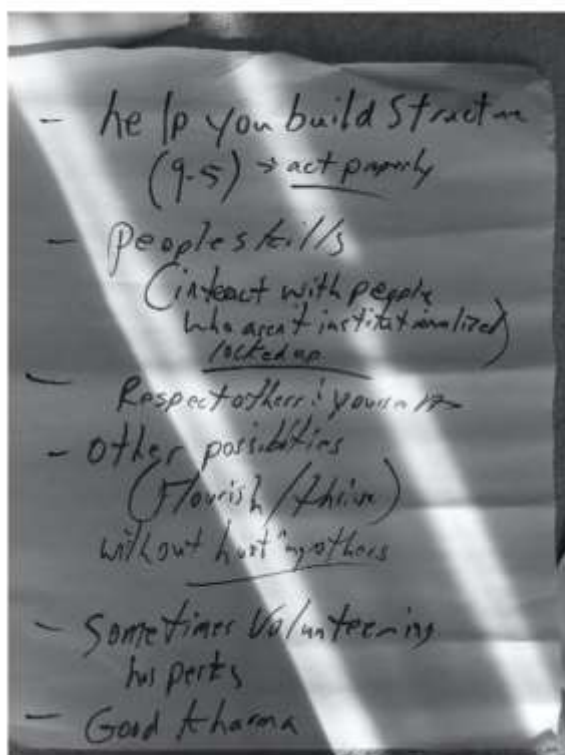
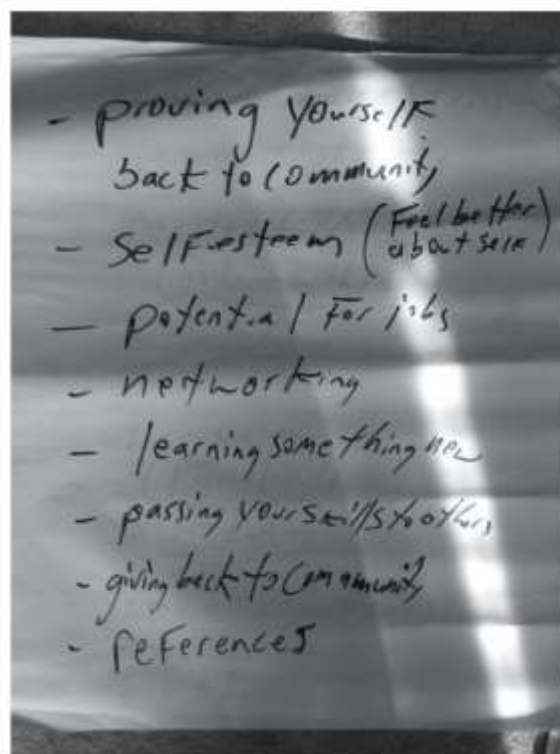
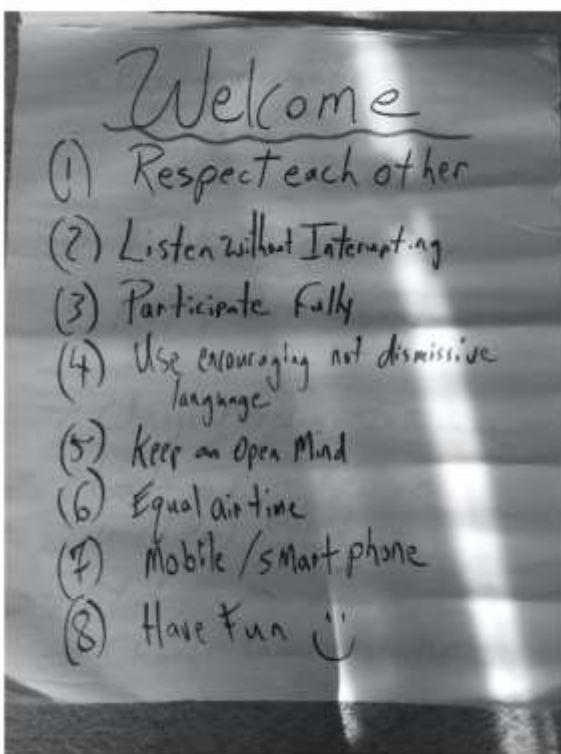
Did not disclose	0%	40%	70%	10%
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Group 4: Edmonton Alberta | Treaty 6 Territory

	F	M	1-9 yrs*	1-4 yrs*	5-9 yrs*	10 yrs +	Indigenous	Black or VM**	18-25	26-49	50+
1.	x				x		x			x	
2.	x						x			x	
3.		x							x		
4.		x							x		
5.		x							x		
6.		x				x	x				
7.		x							x		
8.		x							x		
9.		x							x		
10.		x				x	x				
11.		x				x	x				
12.	x						x		x		
13.		x					x		x		
14.	x				x		x		x		
15.	x			x				x			
16.	x				x					x	
17.		x				x	x	x		x	
18.		x			x		x				x
19.	x					x	x			x	
20.		x				x					
Totals Group 4	7	13	0	1	4	6	11	2	9	5	1
Percentage	35%	65%		5%	20%	30%	55%	20%	45%	25%	5%
Did not disclose	0%		45%				25%		25%		

Annex D: Flip chart notes from Focus Groups

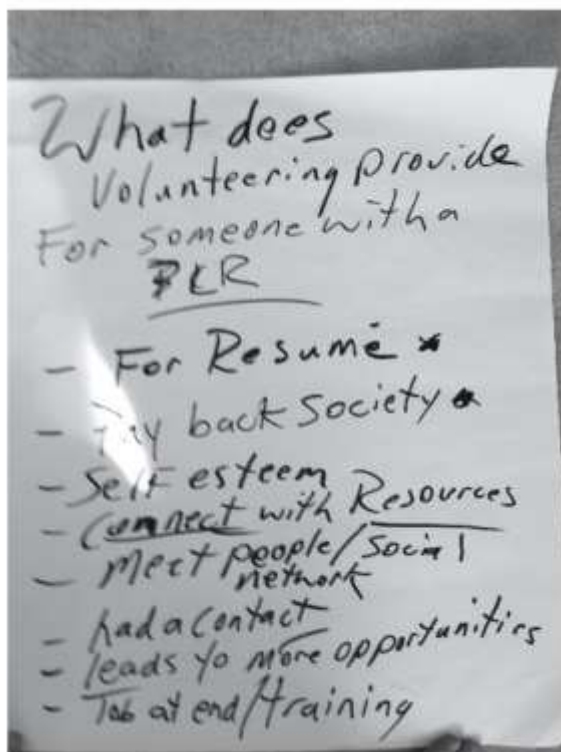
Group 1: Halifax Nova Scotia | Mi'kmaq Territory

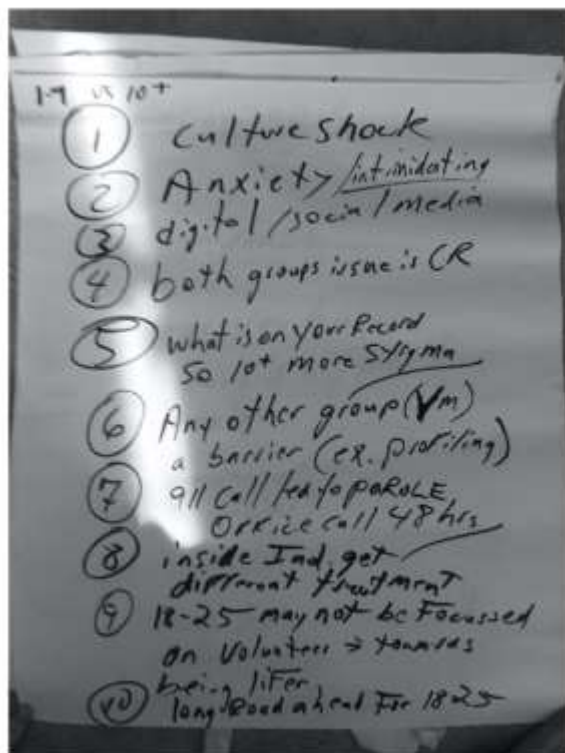
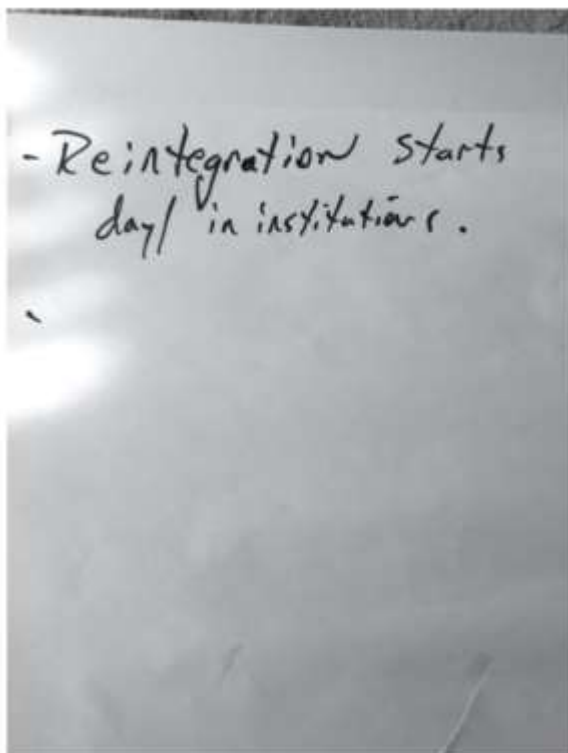
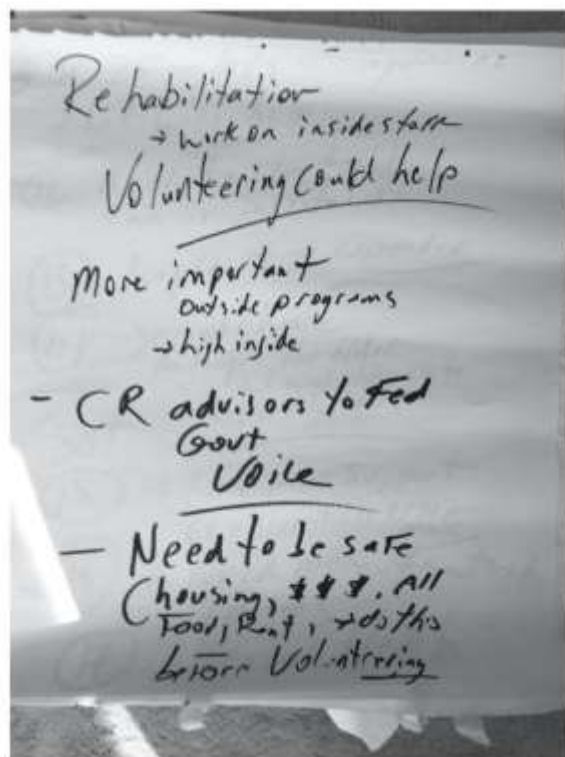
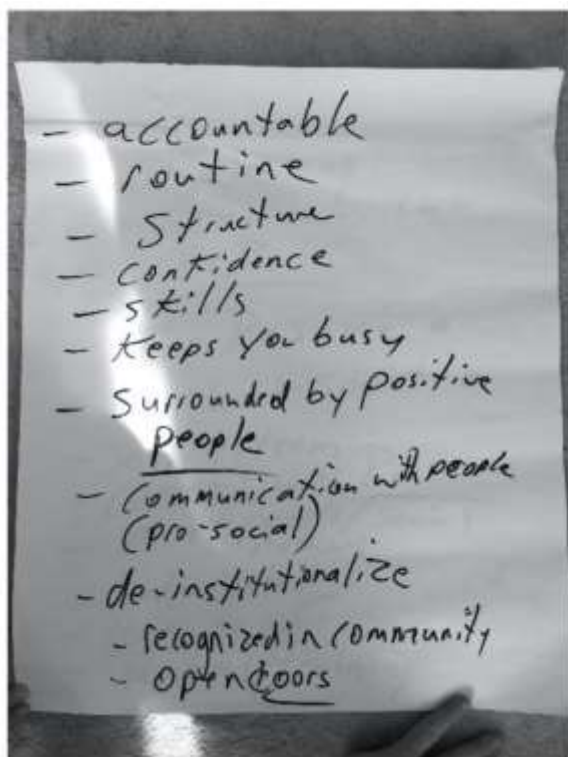


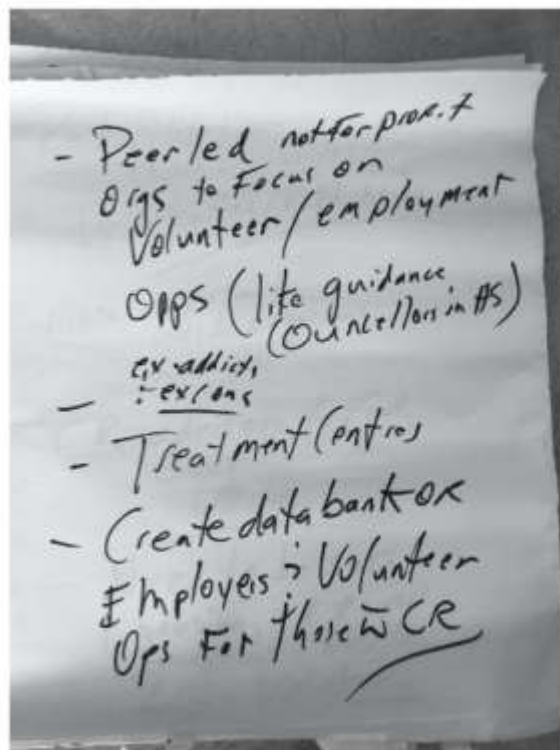
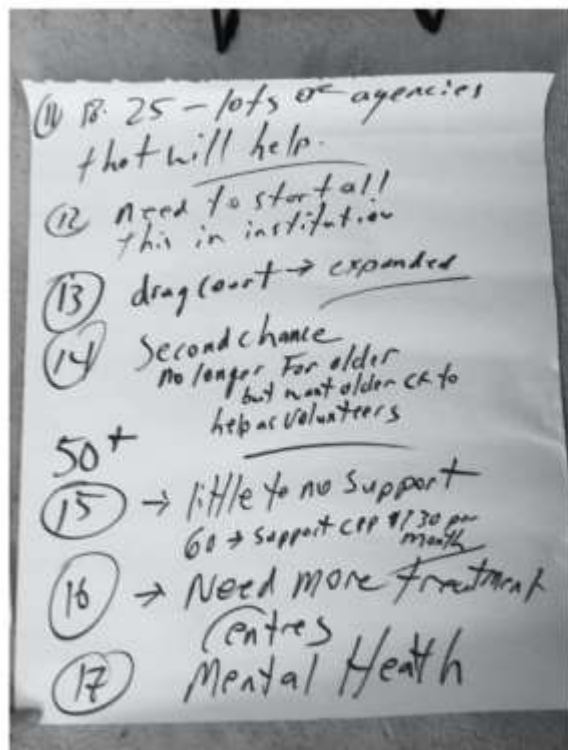
Shorter Sentences 1-9 yrs Not just a probation officer	Longer Sentences 10+
All the same	Psychologist Retain
	Categoric 1 → no prison
VM	Indy
harder	appears to less influence control
	Appearance
	Talk, dress, self confidence

18-25	50+
different Attitudes	Approaching Retirement
not worried about Volunteering	- no pension
- (smaller to Criminal lifestyle)	- Employment more difficult
→ time to	- McCreachy
	Research on hiring
	- health issues
	who pays
	? Factors re: rates

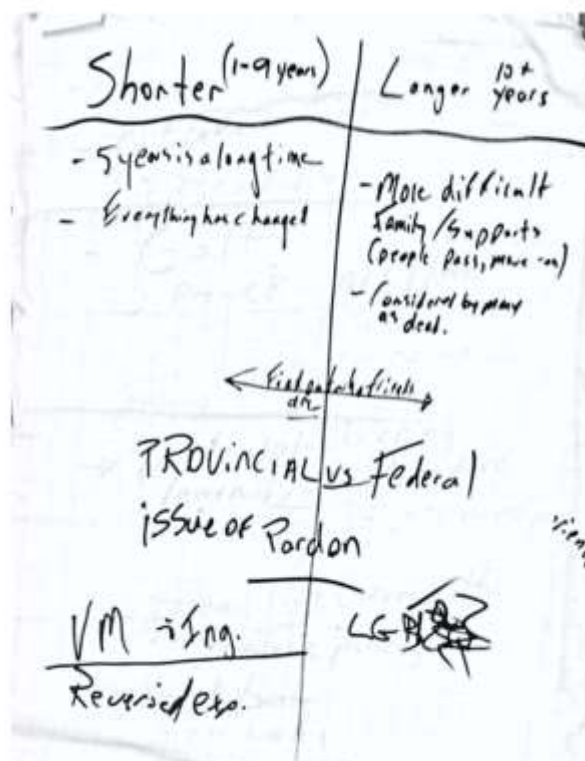
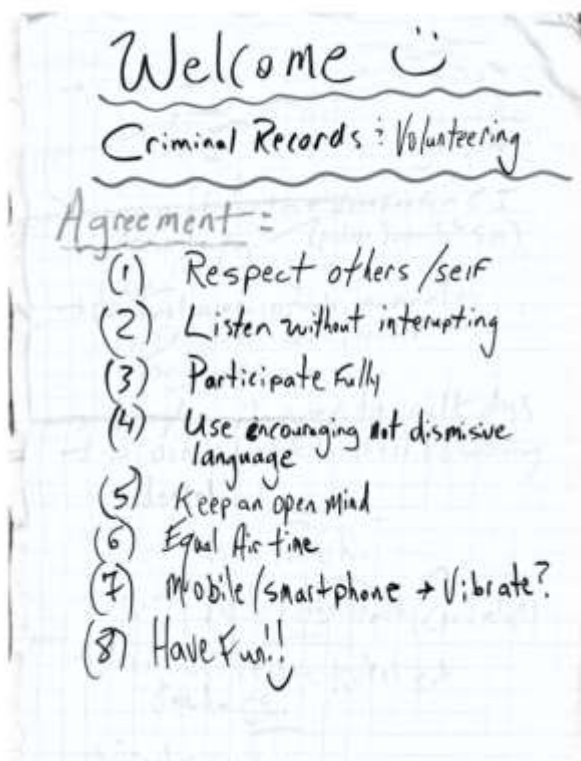
Group 2: Halifax Nova Scotia | Mi'kmaq Territory







Group 3: Ottawa Ontario | Algonquin Anishinaabe Territory



→ most discriminated group.

- Chrono's Foundation

- BBSC / BGC

- GOLF

→ Pre-CR All three
no post CR

Should be based on crime
~~Attd~~

→ trade volunteering
learn trade/explore

→ not a lot of in-prison experience

→ Alternative career paths
(ex. Music jockey)

→ Food Bank
→ Public works

→ CSC to position those inside
to document merits to showcase
Outside: 6-8 month period Temp Vol.
Co-op (Guidance Counselling)

→ had merit system & dorchester C.I.
Form backup (perhaps Jacevite's SM)
Contributed program

→ ^{Co-op} not give referrals, no reprint of
Certificates or hours tracked
For trades

→ not allowed to walk dogs
→ no one to speak to after Volunteering
denied

→ no box to check for CR.

→ Animal Shelters not allowed (Can't adopt)

→ treatment centre kicked out
due to CR.

→ Animal service dogs

— blanket CR
don't apply here
(ex. Tops)

— ARCHES Program

^{JH.}
Resumes (Steph/Rachel)
talk to employer

→ not a list, you find job
possibility → they help
with interview

→ Some 24 support, ^{Whims} First Aid

→ encourage Volunteering

→ MAPS, Mentorship
Career path oriented

→ Once flagged → with CR

All Painted → Some brush

→ Self employed / Freelance
Sometimes no CR check
graphic design

Group 4: Edmonton Alberta | Treaty 6 Territory

Welcome

Agreement:

1. Respect each other's
2. Listen without interrupting:
3. Participate fully:
4. Use encouraging not dismissive language:
5. Keep an open mind:
6. Equal airtime:
7. Mobile/smart phone:
8. Have Fun!

Benefits to Volunteering For Those with a CR?

- ✓ NCSA Sr's Centre (Need more options)
dishes Serving food → Again is about us?
- Flying Canoe Club
Rim Valley → Kananaskis Area Association
directions, setting up
- Food bank
pocket food bank
- Lady Flower Garden (for food bank)
- Elk Island - work cutting
- no internet - no phone

- Shows initiative
- Chain saw licence
- Recommendation letters
- Some people acquire positive work
- pro social environment
develop relationships
→ public
→ work ethic
- good for self esteem
- give back
- job skills
- Reintegration
- Community trust
- Positive support

- Networking
- Showing something about character that's opposite of CR
- Walls to bridges project
age 4 class + women taking
→ Education Inst. Women Credit
helped develop syllabus / speak on
panels / learn
at least 100 people now
Students for degree program
Thanks to pilot.

learn to perform publicly
(traditional songs / stage manager)

Working with union or city or Edman.
(need 6 years change form)
without a permit

- not welcomed in suburbs with CR
- Gas plant rejected
- Construction Field generally open with CR
(blue collar jobs)
- Can't go to oil fields
if at halfway house (distance etc...)
3000 on, 1 off (can't connect with PO)
- No Coaching (halifax)

Parole Conditions / Release conditions
pt. working in a restaurant / service industry
→ Alcohol & other access
Caretaker
Not Supervisor

Rules

- Calling when you're not work
- PO show up at work site
- 24/7 all day & work at night
Tough to kick in
- Obstacles to fail & not
Succeed
- places with machinics? many
- ex. of equipment driving
- Many cases where CR hasn't been
a barrier to employment
- being bondable (if you not
not hired)
is saying yes and you've
been charged with money offences,
can you be fired?
- if you're not having a half
way to house help → how do you overcome
barriers

illegal to discriminate
based on CR

Media Lies...

Google problem
/ cut you up. (barrier to housing
as well)

Need to work empowerment
program.

Overcoming barriers

- Not Same Programs

more opps in the walls → more in employment
if employer

→ Corcoran
→ Quality One
→ Women opportunities

Women more
opportunities
than men
Employment
rank #1 ex...

1-4 yrs	5-9 yrs	10+ years
- don't have as many opps - don't care - housing - mental health	→ most cases with → raise → license → graduate → license → health care - Physical ability (PTSD) - housing - not criteria for counseling	- More Serious - More Stigma - harder to explain to employer - lack of work history - Fights you - Work in change - a lot extra training re-work - more time to grow - Physical ability - PTSD - Mental health - not criteria for counseling → housing

Ind	VM/Black	Women / Men
tough different body type	Racism Systemic	programs → make you own under
Mainstream Discrimination		↔

Women / Men
programs → make you own under
↔

18-25-30	25-50+	Families
2 from opp young	tough physically	if people know? judgements in communities + win Take jobs away from family too young later Sensu

Annex E: Written Comments and Recommendations from Participants

Participants were given sticky notes to capture their ideas throughout the discussion, and/or provide responses in writing if they preferred. Although not all questions were answered in this format, the following responses were received from several participants (n=14):

1. What opportunities for volunteering should there be?

"In order to be sure of a good transition for an offender with criminal records, the following points might be useful:

- a. A social service client should be accompanied by a social advocate through housing, employment and keeping the progress achieved.
- b. Eliminating criminal record checks at OPP [Ontario Provincial Police].
- c. Educating employers on how to accommodate people with special circumstances."

"Knowing where to volunteer. Who to ask?"

2. What are the best-case opportunities from your point of view?

"Make it illegal to discriminate against anyone based on having a criminal record, just like it's illegal to discriminate on any other factor such as age, sex, religion."

"Finishing your time means debt is paid."

"Stop asking about criminal records: Ban the Box "

3. What needs to change or improve?

"Change the laws to help people with criminal records to obtain vulnerability security checks."

"A readily accessible list / directory of places which would allow us to volunteer & work with a record or on parole."

"They should create more programs to develop skills for people with criminal records."

"Volunteer opportunities should exist: Trades, music, non-traditional commonly overlooked charitable foundations, general food banks, radio stations, public works.

Perhaps the greatest barrier facing someone with a criminal record regarding volunteering in specific relates into the volunteering of information to the authorities. Fear of discrimination taints the field of support."

"Judgment, stigma and public opinion."

"Stigma."

"Public perception."

"Tickets or certifications are only good for 3 years. You could eventually be released and these things could expire just like a driver's license."

"I think the government could look into CSC [Correctional Service of Canada] and support and reintegrate federal inmates to the computer work force, or find and hire employable inmates that are willing to train and work as a citizen of Canada instead of bringing in more immigrants, or have more sufficient trades training for the inmates willing."

"Block name searches on Google by employers."

"One of the barriers I've struggled with was the media. They post pictures of us from our past. Make us sound like we're cold hearted killers when in reality we aren't who we were under the influence when committing the crime. I had to get a publication ban. And because they seen me on news they rejected me before I could even speak for the job interview." (sic)

4. What has worked/not worked?

“Barriers: Disclosing criminal record.”

“Institutional settings where accountability and transparency are valued – this attitude doesn’t always translate.”

“People [employers] don’t ask [about a criminal record] up front – after 3 months on probation.”

“The barriers are with the feds. Remove the barriers.”

5. Are there distinctions between in community, in custody, and/or post incarceration?

6. Do you disclose your criminal record upfront?

7. What happens if/when your employer or colleagues learn about your criminal past?

8. Is there a conversation about how your history is relevant, or not, to the work?

9. Other thoughts on improving volunteering in Canada for those with a criminal record?

“Building relationships with places like Universities? They are diverse, culturally sensitive and younger demographically.”

10. Have we forgotten anything?

“Funding should be available for school. Regardless of if we are in a halfway house. Not everyone can apply for a student loan. While living in a halfway house we still have to prove that we can support ourselves. Attending school is providing for ourselves.”

“Establishing meaningful change within the Canadian legal system begins with the associated socially cultured perspective. Educated in perspective, which influences the way one perceives another with a criminal record: the stigma is a manufactured product in need of *social* reform. Whilst it is certainly unfavorable to acquire a criminal record, we should practice as we preach. Hand upon the bible and judge not lest we be judged.

More relevantly, solutions which can positively impact the lives of people with whom struggle with a criminal record are capable of being implemented most impactfully within the services of policing. There would be benefit not only into the acquisition of justice, but also into an even greater benefit into the government in regards to the financial disposition of compensation when wrongful imprisonment occurs.

If there was a dedicated division within police services that provided reasonable resources to investigate upon behalf of an unbiased, neutral party capable of gathering all of the facts provided within relevance into a case. This is supposed to be a Canadian right. To an equal access to resources and services throughout the judicial proceedings.

Those whom judge unfairly, want to. Whereas, those whom judge fairly, don’t want to.”

“System [is] set up to have people re-offend.”

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