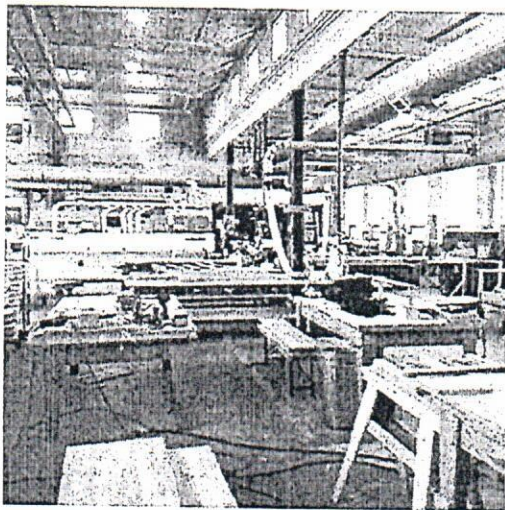


# Employability Hurdles for Inmates Reintegrating on Release

By George Fraser

Subject: Offender Feedback on Employment and  
Employability Program



CORCAN operations – Saskatchewan Penitentiary

The following is intended as an attachment to the CSC-Corcan Employment and Employability Program Survey.

*First and foremost, Correctional Service Canada is an 'abject failure' in their CCRASc. 3(b) mandate "assisting the rehabilitation of offenders and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community".*

That's not just my opinion but it is what the Correctional Investigator regularly reports i.e.

- "there appear to no end to the issues--that have been created by CSC's maladministration"<sup>1</sup>
- "disappointing and frustrating"<sup>2</sup>

Equally critical of CSC rehabilitation and work readiness is the Auditor General:

- "current employment programs (Corcan) improve the likelihood of employment on release by only 9%"<sup>3</sup>
- "employment programs are not targeted to those with the greatest need to improve their employability skills"<sup>4</sup>
- Reports that only 5% of offenders participating in

employment programs were assessed as having a 'high need' to acquire and develop job readiness.

- "lack of corporate vision and set of strategic objectives for employment and employability programs in Federal corrections"<sup>5</sup>

Voila! The proverbial revolving door whereby:

- > "roughly 9 out of 10 offenders now have a previous criminal conviction"<sup>6</sup>
- > "more than 2/3 of released inmates end up back in prison within 3 years of their release"<sup>7</sup>
- > 90 % of Millennials will recommit

It's not easy for released felons to succeed because a 'criminal record' is a stain that doesn't go away.

It is standard practice for employers and some landlords to ask for background checks from Canadian Police Information Center (CPIC) that is maintained by the RCMP.

In addition, employers can check local police records. In doing such a background check, the local force may contact other police departments in Canada and the United States. Information stored in police data banks include complaints filed by or against a person, pending criminal charges, allegations of child and spousal abuse withdrawn/dismissed charges and even notations on someone's record if police have escorted them to a hospital because of a mental breakdown.

- > Prisoners looking to enroll as a student in a co-op program or required to do community service could be denied placements because 'information of concern' comes back from a police record check.

Then there is society's predilection to obtain more and more information on their neighbours and work cohorts—one only has to <google> a person's name to bring up their social media footprints and criminal history.

- > Now combine that 'criminal record stain' with Correctional Service Canada's 'abject failure' in "assisting the rehabilitation of offenders"<sup>8</sup> with educational opportunities and employment training





*that is 21<sup>st</sup> Century relevant and you get the aforementioned voila statistics.*

**Review of some basic facts that are germane to the 'Employment and Employability' Survey:**

**1.) Corcan's generic skills not to be confused with job readiness skills!**

We fully recognize that **any** structured employment initiative within CSC is meritorious whether as:

- A farm labourer with a background in animal husbandry
- Making cheese, or
- As a 'low tech' Corcan fabricator

We are in the development of generic skills, attitudes and behaviours like problem solving, communications and team work"<sup>9</sup>

However, these generic skills don't qualify as job readiness skills on a resume. These are prerequisites of any job applicant in the same way appropriate dress and good personal hygiene are implicitly understood.

Corcan's soft employment and vocational skills include transferable lessons and life-skills including the value of completing an honest day's work and the self-respect that from punctuality, self-discipline, dependability, responsibility and pro-social attitudes and behaviours. While these are skills and attitudes that are valued by employers, they are skills that every employers expects of a job applicant and as such **they don't even merit a time on a job applicant's resume.**

**2.) Corcan is deficient in many areas!**

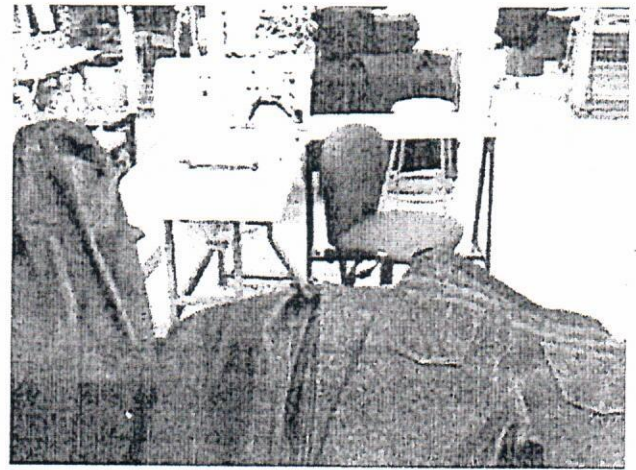
A 2013 internal audit of Corcan's employment and employability program yielded several critical findings:

1. 'Lack of corporate vision and set of strategic objectives for the employment and employability programs in federal corrections.
2. The lack of commitment to provide relevant and meaningful jobs, skills training and work experience for federal offenders.
3. No overarching governance structure was in place
4. Lack of clear, single policy instrument specific to employment and employability in federal corrections

5. Results of employment and employability initiatives were not accessible'<sup>10</sup>

**Also reported:**

6. Limited performance measures in place with respect to vocational training
7. Limited to no partnerships between CSC and the leading sectors of Canadian industry
8. Limited to no opportunities for offenders to engage in community employment
9. Limited to no opportunities for apprenticeship programs
10. Prison pay rates remain frozen since 1981.



Corcan shop where jeans are sewed for inmates.

It bears reminding:

> The maximum amount that a federal inmate can earn while gainfully employed in a federal penitentiary was set at \$6.90 a day almost more than 40 years ago. With the loss of Corcan incentive pay prisoner participation numbers have declined. **The majority of offenders are receiving pay level 'C' @ \$5.80 per day, after deductions that translates into a net hourly pay of \$0.44 per hour. \$0.44 per hour is equivalent to a can of pop at the inmate Canteen.**

11. Textile, wood and metal working industries in Canada and the US are generally shuttered with few job opportunities except in the 3<sup>rd</sup> world and Pacific Rim countries.
12. Computer literacy and practical applications of information technology are not emphasized.

**Major Complaint:**

**"There is often a lack of correlation between vocational**



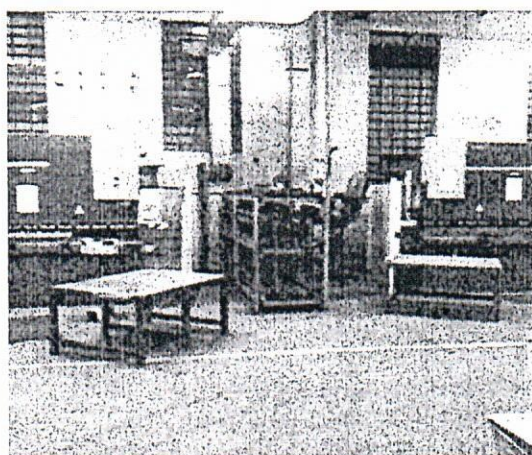
skills training and job readiness.”<sup>11</sup> whereby, prison employment **does not match the needs of employers on the outside** in the real world. For example, employment as an institutional cleaner, range representative or prisoner Library staff member and even for the more structured Corcan employment does not meet the needs of employers who are putting increasing emphasis on higher education and computer skills to operate the ubiquitous artificial intelligence (AI) equipment in today’s manufacturing sector.

### 3.) Missed opportunities in trades and technology!

While demand in the Canadian trades sector remains high, CSC and the Bath Institution offers nothing in the way of trades and technologies opportunities from basic to advanced.

> **Trades and technologies are the fuel of Canada’s growing resource based economy.**

These are the millwrights, welders, electricians and plumbers that build commercial structures and homes, manufacture the output of the economy and provide the amenities of a thriving society.



CORCAN operations – Joyceville Institution

And, it is in College that they learn their craft.

To achieve Journeyman status in a trade—the training process combines theory, project work and on the job apprenticeship.

To complete an apprenticeship for example to achieve electrician journeyman status, it is a 4 year program combining classroom and on the job training.

> Here at the Bath Institution where Corcan employs prisoners in cabinet and furniture making, there is no

apprenticeship offered in ‘cabinet making’. The question begs is this because there are no qualified cabinetmakers employed to supervise apprentices or is it just another lack of commitment to provide relevant skills training and work experience for Bath prisoners employed by Corcan.

### 4.) What a farce!

In the February 28, 2018 Federal Budget, \$4.3M was committed to restore the prison farms at the Joyceville and Collins Bay institutions for the reason(s), *“to provide federal inmates with training opportunities to acquire new skills while preparing for employment and successful reintegration and rehabilitation into the community”*.

*Really, this is laughable!*

Especially, when one considers that the local Member of Parliament in the Kingston area where the prison farms are located and the CSC ad hoc prison farm federal advisory group are touting the reactivation of CSC prison farms as a great step forward. What BS!

According to CBC News reports, *“The aim is to get the farms up and running in late 2018 beginning with 33 cows; the barnyard would eventually expand to include some chickens, pigs and possibly a colony of bees”*. (sic) Really, you just can’t make this stuff up!

Now put the prison farm \$4.3M stimulation package in the 2018 Federal Budget into context with the March 22, 2017 Federal budget when the Finance Minister said, *“current and meaningful 21<sup>st</sup> Century employment training is in crisis mode”* (sic). That recognition translated into \$200M for job training and a promise to encourage Canadian advantage in artificial intelligence (AI).

> The \$4.3M 2018 Budget commitment to re-open shuttered prison farms *“to provide federal inmates with training opportunities to acquire new skills, while preparing for employment and successful reintegration”* in a ‘barnyard with 33 cows, some chickens, pigs and possibly a colony of bees’ is without either justification or merit. Using a ‘farm’ metaphor, this is ‘hogwash’!

### 5.) Corcan’s failure to evolve to be 21<sup>st</sup> Century relevant

*“CORCAN operates just over 100 shops in 29 federal pris-*



ons, Planned spending on CORCAN for 2017-18 is \$36.613M. The agency has four main business or product lines: manufacturing, services, textiles and construction."<sup>12</sup> The textiles operations are at Women's facilities where the "jobs are stereotyped as textiles, laundry and sewing."<sup>13</sup>

> **"At any given time, CORCAN industries employ less than 10% of the total inmate population."**<sup>14</sup>

Offenders by majority want meaningful employment to learn, acquire and upgrade the skills and work experience necessary that will help them succeed on the outside.

> **The fundamental problem with Corcan is that Corcan employment does not reflect the current and emerging realities of the Canadian labour market.**

Corcan's failure is because it has not evolved into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Corcan's "business lines include manufacturing, construction and textiles".

For the most part, these are the 'rust belt industries' that have been shuttered or relocated to Mexico and Pacific Rim countries during the great recession.

When I say, 'Corcan is in big trouble struggling to be 21<sup>st</sup> Century relevant'. I remind you again of what the Auditor General said in 2015:

- **"current employment programs (Corcan) improve the likelihood of employment on release by only 9%"<sup>15</sup>** (9% likelihood of employment on release is significant and directly correlates to the 90 % recidivism rate for the Millennial demography)
- While CSC has identified that 75% of offenders in custody need to acquire and develop job readiness, **CSC employment programs do not target those with the greatest need.** Reports that **only 5% of offenders participating in employment programs were assessed as having a 'High need' to acquire and develop job readiness.**
- "CSC has not yet developed a strategy and guidelines for delivering employment programs to offenders and targeting offenders with the greatest need. Nor has it developed guidelines to prioritize the timely delivery of employment programs."<sup>16</sup>

6.) General Education Development (GED) is just a

beginning.

People who pass their GED would have completed the five sections reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies. While it is admirable and a great accomplishment for prisoners to achieve their GED, the fact of the matter is that while it opens the door slightly to post-secondary school training it is not equivalent to a Grade 12 for admission into post-secondary school.

Prisoners are simply being baffle gabbed and hornswoggled by telling them that a GED is equivalent to 'Grade 12'. Most fundamentally, a GED gives prisoners a confidence boost that they desperately need! For those prisoners hungry for more educational opportunities beyond a GED, there really isn't anything. Post-secondary correspondence courses are no longer available because the real world has moved into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and gone digital, while CSC remains stuck in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century analogue era.

> **Internet access and rehabilitation are inextricably linked in this the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.** The current analogue mentality of no computers is severely restrictive and without reasonable rationalization merit: CSC lags far behind progressive US prisons where 'prison suitable tablets' (Telmate & JPay) are in wide spread use.

Education is no doubt a difficult issue because "over 60% of the overall inmate population has a formal education of Gr. 8 or less"<sup>17</sup> and > "75% do not have a high school diploma"<sup>18, 19</sup>. While CSC Guidelines<sup>20</sup> offer all offender's the opportunity to upgrade their education to a GED, there are unresolved educational program issues:

- "CSC has not developed guidelines to prioritize the delivery of education programs among other interventions identified in offender's correctional plans
- No tools to objectively measure how improvements to offenders level of education have addressed their assessed needs
- It is not entirely clear how an offenders educational improvements contribute to an offenders' potential for early release
- CSC has yet to develop assessment tools to demonstrate how educational programs contribute to the offender's progress for safe reintegration."<sup>21, 22</sup>



7) Living below the poverty line is defined as a single adult earning less than \$22,133 a year and \$38,355 for a family of three. Now considering that part-time precarious employment is the fastest growing employment sector, how is someone, i.e. a released prisoner on parole, working part time at \$14.00 minimum wage going to keep their head above the water.

*Time for a reality check!*

Corcan's 'dumb labour' employment training for rust belt shuttered industry has no place in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century of artificial intelligence (AI). The farm labour experience does not match the needs of employers on the outside for anything other than being farm labourers. The fact of the matter is that Millennials do not and will never aspire to pick apples or muck stables. In fact, Millennials and their progeny, Generation 'Z' will never accept minimum wage<sup>23</sup>, part-time, precarious employment and from my observation from the 'inside', the majority will never accept manual labour employment that requires safety shoes; however, Air Jordan safety boots may be the exception.

*This is not rocket science!*

*A lack of job skills means limited employment opportunities at minimum wage. Without employment that provides a quality of work life, there will be no quality of personal and family life. Without meaningful continuous fulfilling employment, the released inmate will default back to the crime and substance life style that brought him to prisons in the first instance.*

*> "people usually turn to crime due to problems in their lives such as lack of job skills"<sup>24</sup>*

Without 21<sup>st</sup> Century 'current and meaningful employment training' prisoners released back into society are ill prepared to manage the artificial intelligence automation that performs the labour in today's manufacturing facilities.

I repeat again for emphasis:

*"People usually turn to crime due to problems in their lives such as a lack of job skills"<sup>25</sup>.*

**In Summary:**

The Correctional Service Canada cumulative failures to per-

form to their CCRA Sc. 3(b) mandate results in wide spread prisoner distrust, cynicism, disgust and anger that no doubt reflects in the bottom line recidivism failure. *Sanity must prevail*—there needs to be an understanding by all stakeholders that the Canadian Correctional System as we know it is simply not working because there is an overarching failure to turn objectives into results.

**Correctional Service Canada's failure to provide 21<sup>st</sup> Century employment and employability skills is cheating prisoners the opportunity to successfully reintegrate on release.** ☹

<sup>1</sup> Correctional investigator annual report 2016-17, P. 7

<sup>2</sup> Correctional investigator annual report 2015-16, p. 17

<sup>3</sup> Auditor general of Canada 2015 Report #6 "Preparing Male Offenders for Release-CSC", p.9

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.19

<sup>5</sup> Correctional Investigator Annual Report 2014-15, p.47

<sup>6</sup> < [www.csc-scc.gc.ca](http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca) >

<sup>7</sup> B. Branstetter, 2015

<sup>8</sup> CCRA Sc 3(b)

<sup>9</sup> < [www.csc-scc.gc.ca](http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca) >

<sup>10</sup> With information from Correctional Investigators Annual Report 2014-15, p.47

<sup>11</sup> Correctional Investigators Annual Report 2014-15, p. 45

<sup>12</sup> Correctional Investigator Annual Report 2016-17, p.53

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 54

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 53

<sup>15</sup> Auditor General of Canada 2015 Report #6 "Preparing Male Offenders for Release-CSC", p. 9

<sup>16</sup> Auditor General of Canada 2015, "Report #6 Preparing Male Offenders for Release-CSC", p.20

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p.2

<sup>18</sup> Correctional Investigator Annual Report 2015-16, p. 51

<sup>19</sup> By contrast, according to Statistics Canada, approximately 80% of the Canadian population (15 or older) graduated from high school in 2010

<sup>20</sup> CD 720

<sup>21</sup> Auditor General "Preparing Male Offenders for Release-CSC", p. 29

<sup>22</sup> Correctional Investigator Annual Report 2015-16, p. 43

<sup>23</sup> \$14.00 per hour in Ontario currently

<sup>24</sup> < [www.csc-scc.gc.ca](http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca) >

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.