

Locked Up Libraries: A Critique of Canadian Prison Library Policy

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ABSTRACT: Access to library services in prison is a minimum human rights requirement. These services impact people both while they are incarcerated and as they reintegrate into the community. Since the 1980s, there have been recommendations to improve library services to people in Canadian federal prisons. Although some advancements have been made, recommendations for the improvement of library and educational services in Canadian prisons have been largely ignored by prison administrators and policy makers. Canadian prison libraries at both the federal and provincial-territorial level are still underfunded, understaffed, and sorely lacking in basic library materials, making it impossible for prison librarians to meet the minimum human rights requirements of the people they serve. This article makes recommendations for changes to existing Canadian prison library services and policies, with a focus on providing library services in correctional institutions which support the needs of the prison population. In addition, this article highlights the need and provides recommendations for public, academic, and special librarians to support prison librarians and the people they serve.

Keywords: correctional services; human rights; prison librarians; prison library patrons; prison library policy



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Introduction

Since the inception of the modern Canadian prison, prison libraries have largely been considered a privilege exchanged for good behaviour rather than a well-planned service and a human right. The information they contain is seen as a tool for control and to mould incarcerated individuals into law-abiding citizens, and this insidious moralistic view of the prison library persists today. It is this combination of moralism, budget shortfalls, and a punitive philosophy within Canadian carceral environments that has allowed Canadian prisons to become sites of perpetual punishment and trauma for the people that inhabit them. Within this context, the prison librarian is faced with the impossible task of providing a level of service that matches the model of the public library while still operating under the security constraints of prison.

The history of prison libraries in Canada extends back to the mid-19th century, and in the past two decades alone, several authors have given detailed overviews of, and literature reviews pertaining to, this history (Chartrand, 2019; Correctional Service of Canada, n.d.; Curry et al., 2003; Ings & Joslin, 2010; Ramprashad, 2020; Ricciardelli et al., 2021; Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2021). For this reason, I will only provide a cursory summary of the history of Canadian prisons and focus instead on providing an overview of the modern context (from the 1980s to the present) in which the prison library finds itself. I have also provided my own experiences as a former prison librarian throughout this article to further contextualize the current state of Canadian prison librarianship.

As library services evolve with changing community needs, advancing technology, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, I put forth considerations and recommendations which look at the present and future of library services to incarcerated people in Canada. In doing so, I focus on recommendations which directly pertain to prison library policy and services, while also offering recommendations for how librarians working in public, academic, and special libraries can support prison librarians and their library patrons, and why it matters. These evidence and experience-informed recommendations address four key areas:

1. The need for more research on prison librarianship and prison library services in Canada;
2. The need for adequate library management and qualified library workers in prison libraries;
3. The need for changes to the existing policy that governs prison libraries; and
4. The need for continued and sustained support from public, academic, and special libraries.

A Brief History of Canadian Prison Libraries

There are two types of correctional systems in Canada: the federal system governed by the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), and the provincial-territorial systems governed by their respective provincial or territorial ministry or department

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(Ministry of Justice, Ministry of the Solicitor General, etc.). The federal system houses adults sentenced to two or more years in institutions with varying security classifications (minimum, medium, maximum, and special handling unit), while the provincial-territorial systems house adults sentenced to less than two years, youths between the ages of 12 and 17, and individuals who have not been sentenced and are awaiting trial.

The first large Canadian prison, the Kingston Penitentiary, opened in 1835, and this also marks the first recorded prison library in Canada, which consisted of a few books donated by the first Chair of that prison's Board of Inspectors (Curry et al., 2003, p. 141). As these libraries were modeled after those in prisons in the United States (Ramprashad, 2020), they were spaces of moral reform, run by prison chaplains and carrying mostly religious texts (Curry et al.; Ramprashad). Later, the *Penitentiary Acts and the Rules and regulations for the government of the penitentiaries of Canada of 1888* would require that a library exist in every federal institution and that it would contain both secular and religious books. It also provided instructions for federal institutions to include general library statistics in their annual reports (Ramprashad, p. 26). As these libraries began to grow and to hold works of fiction, the 1920s saw a wave of calls for censorship. This was because prison administrators equated crime and criminality to an inability to evaluate complex ideas or the inability to understand right from wrong (Ramprashad, p. 33). Ramprashad states that these calls for censorship, "...revealed the widely held belief that criminality was a disease or disorder and as a consequence, prisoners were malleable, to be cured by the institution and its philosophy," (p. 33). This idea persists today within the CSC's own mission statement, which is that the CSC, "...contributes to public safety by actively encouraging and assisting offenders to become law abiding citizens, while exercising reasonable, safe, secure and humane control" (CSC, 2012a).

A standardized federal prison library policy would not exist until the publication of the *National guide for institutional libraries* in 2012, and in 1938, the *Archambault report* would harshly critique this lack of standardized library service, noting the unacceptable spaces in which prison libraries were located, their lack of organization, their lack of appropriate content, and their lack of trained library staff (Ramprashad, pp. 35 – 36). This same critique would appear time and again in the federal prison library recommendations that would follow it (Artinian, 1989; MacLeod, 1964; Nason, 1981; Peat-Marwick, 1984). Still, federal prison libraries would not begin to provide services like public libraries until after the Second World War (Ramprashad, p. 37). It was around this time that full-time, experienced librarians were hired in federal prison libraries, and these librarians drove many changes in prison library services which would allow people in prison to take a more direct role in their own library service and to interact more with society through the creation of interlibrary loans (ILLs) and other programs (p.41). Although ILL programs still exist today in many federal institutions, most often in minimum and medium-security prisons, they are not a standard of prison library service across all federal institutions. As of this writing, it is unclear whether these programs have been established in provincial-territorial prison libraries at all.

The first real critiques of prisons as places of perpetual punishment arrived during the MacLeod Era. Indeed, Allen Joseph MacLeod, the Commissioner of Penitentiaries in the 1960s, stated in his 1964 *Notes for an address to the John Howard Society of Journal of Radical Librarianship*, 8 (2022) pp. 1–24

Nova Scotia that,

The penitentiary was, in truth, designed to make men “penitent”. Consistent with the earlier philosophy it was intended to keep the offender out of the sight of the public and therefore out of the mind of the public. Paradoxically enough, the prison regime under which the prisoner was treated like an animal was supposed, in the course of time, to return him to society as a human being.

And so, with the Confederation, we adopted a penitentiary system based on the principle that the offender was to be punished physically, spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically. (pp. 9 – 10)

MacLeod’s critique of the treatment of people in prison would lead to the creation of three distinct security classifications: minimum, medium, and maximum. This, in turn, would affect library services to people in prison differently depending on their security class.

Although MacLeod’s intentions were for Canadian prisons to move away from their punitive, dehumanizing models, it instead created an undesirable class of people in prisons: maximum-security. Where people classified as minimum or medium security are afforded the freedom to move about their respective institutions with minimal supervision and given many job and program opportunities, people at the maximum-security level are usually only able to move through institutions under armed escort and have far less access to work opportunities and programming, including working in and using the prison library. The effect this security classification has on library services is devastating. When I left prison librarianship in 2021, people classified as maximum-security could not freely enter the prison library; instead, they had to compose written requests for reading material and were provided small satellite collections on their housing units.

Since they first opened, critiques of Canadian prisons as spaces of perpetual punishment have emerged. Because of those, actions like the ones that I noted above were taken to move the system towards a more rehabilitative model. Unfortunately, MacLeod had the right of it when he stated that the penitentiary was designed to make men penitent. Ultimately, no number of calls for reform can change prisons from places of punishment to places of rehabilitation, as punishment is in the very nature of prisons as they exist today. That said, these reforms elevated many federal prison libraries from small spaces run by chaplains and full of religious tomes to spaces which could be considered “[...] an oasis of equality and respect” (Vogel, 2009, p. 20) in otherwise punitive carceral environments. Brenda Vogel calls this phenomenon ‘library as place,’ while Ramprashad argues that prison libraries are ‘spaces of mercy.’ I would argue that prison libraries are spaces which have the potential to be rehabilitative, if given the chance.

Canadian Prison Libraries in the Present

Prison librarians continue to face a plethora of unique challenges which stem from

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working in a carceral environment. When I worked as a prison librarian, I noted that prison libraries received only limited recognition of the value of library services within their own institutions and were virtually invisible to the greater library and information science professions. This was further exacerbated by the fact that many prison libraries were staffed with untrained individuals such as incarcerated workers, correctional officers, educational staff, and social programs officers. Furthermore, correctional staff generally considered prison library services to be a privilege rather than a minimum human rights requirement as mandated by the United Nations in *The United Nations standard minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners*, known today as *The Nelson Mandela Rules* (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015) and affirmed by the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA) in their position statement on prisoners' right to read (2016).

The devaluation of their work is only the tip of the iceberg of issues which prison librarians in Canada face. Other challenges include censorship, lack of technological resources or lack of technology altogether, lack of alternative formats such as ebooks and audiobooks, lack of legal reference ability or of a legal reference collection altogether, and lack of library accessibility. These issues are not new, and many have persisted since the first Canadian prison opened in 1835.

Prison libraries in Canada at both federal and provincial-territorial levels continue to be mostly understaffed or staffed with untrained workers, with services and accessibility varying widely between institutions. These libraries are forced to rely heavily on donated and outdated print materials, with Sapers stating that: "Funding to purchase new acquisitions is chronically low, inconsistent, and inadequate" (2016, p. 57). Little or no planning has gone into existing Canadian prison libraries, leaving library workers to fend for themselves with minimal direction in the isolating and oppressive prison environment.

Prison Library Patrons

The Canadian prison population is overwhelmingly racialized, with large percentages of people in prison identifying as indigenous. In their 2021 policy brief titled "Correctional services during and beyond COVID-19," Ricciardelli et al. found that racial disparities in prison have steadily increased over the past 15 years with the incarceration rates for people of colour rising by 75%. They noted that indigenous adults accounted for 28% of admissions to provincial-territorial prisons and 28% of admissions to federal prisons (p. 501). Furthermore, Ricciardelli et al. observed that people in prison are disadvantaged in a myriad of ways, from having lower levels of educational attainment, literacy and numeracy, and technological literacy, to facing mental health and addiction challenges (pp. 493 – 494).

The Office of the Correctional Investigator conducted an investigation into federal prison education in their 2019-2020 *Annual report*, entitled *Learning behind bars: An investigation of educational programming and vocational training in federal penitentiaries* (Zinger, 2020). In the introduction to this section of the *Annual report*, Zinger refers to incarcerated people's access to information and technology as 'backward and obsolete,' stating:

Offenders have limited access to outdated stand-alone computers that still use
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floppy disks. CSC runs Local-area Networks, which are equipped with software from the early 2000's, have no access to the Internet, contain limited reference materials and have almost no technical capacity to support or facilitate eLearning of any kind. Moreover, many prison shops visited for this investigation require offenders to work on obsolete machines no longer used in the community... *Federal corrections maintain environments that are information-depriving, often using security concerns as a basis for maintaining the status quo* [Emphasis added]. (2020, p. 67)

It is obvious that prison library patrons are disadvantaged in almost every way possible. The current state of prison libraries in Canada only serves, at best, to frustrate the incarcerated and, at worst, to exacerbate the difficulties they face.

Rule 64 of the *Nelson Mandela Rules* mandates that:

Every prison shall have a library for the use of all categories of prisoners, adequately stocked with both recreational and instructional books, and prisoners shall be encouraged to make full use of it. (p. 19)

Although the *Nelson Mandela Rules* are non-binding, Canada has committed to implementing these rules and has accounted for them when drafting correctional policy and legislation (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, p. 59). If current federal and provincial-territorial prison libraries in Canada are understaffed, underfunded, stocked with outdated materials, and mostly inaccessible, and if access to technology and electronic resources is limited to the point that the prison environment is considered 'information-depriving,' then Canadian prisons are actively violating the human rights of people in prison as set out by the *Nelson Mandela Rules*.

This violation is a direct result of the lack of planning and awareness on the part of prison officials, policy makers, and others, and the failure on the part of prison library staff to advocate for themselves, their libraries, and their library patrons. The utter invisibility of the Canadian prison library is further demonstrated by the fact that prison libraries are not mentioned a single time in the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights' 2021 report on the *Human Rights of Federally Sentenced Persons*, even though Chapter 5 of this report is devoted to the rehabilitation and reintegration which these libraries are supposed to support.

Although the punishment for committing a crime – the removal of the individual from society – has already been carried out, prisons remain sites of perpetual punishment and trauma for the people who inhabit them. Within this context, the prison library is treated as a privilege one is awarded in return for good behaviour even though it is a right which every Canadian citizen should be able to claim. This right has been affirmed by many advocates and should not be sacrificed in the name of prison security.

Review of Canadian Prison Library Policy

Currently, there is only one policy specifically written for federal prison libraries in Canada: The *National guide for institutional libraries (NGIL)*, published by the CSC in

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2012. There have been no updates to the *NGIL* since its publication. There are also several CSC *Commissioner's directives (CDs)* which affect the federal prison library (Correctional Service of Canada, 2021). Finally, there are the federal *Corrections and conditional release act (CCRA)* (Minister of Justice, 2021a) and the *Corrections and conditional release regulations (CCRR)* (Minister of Justice, 2021b). There is also the CFLA's statement, *Prison libraries network: The right to read* (2016), which affirms that reading and access to information is a basic right and an essential part of intellectual freedom.

Although the provision of education and educational resources is mentioned multiple times in various policies provided by the provincial-territorial ministries and departments which govern provincial prisons, there are no publicly available policies which specifically mention the provision of library services to people incarcerated in provincial-territorial institutions. Therefore, this policy review can only provide insight into federal prison library policy, though my recommendations apply to provincial prisons as well.

CFLA's Position Statement on the Right to Read in Prison

The CFLA's 2016 position statement on the right to read in prison, *Prison libraries network: The right to read*, asserts that reading and access to information are basic human rights. It emphasizes the role prison libraries play in guaranteeing those rights, including asserting the intellectual freedom of prison library patrons. It calls for prison libraries to actively promote literacy and technological literacy, that prison libraries be given adequate spaces to provide library collections and programming that meets their patrons' recreational, cultural, educational, and other information needs, and for prisons to acknowledge their key role within colonialism.

This position statement notes the direct link between access to adequate library collections and programming and lower rates of recidivism. They emphasize the importance of the prison library mirroring the outside world, stating,

When inmates' information rights are respected, their ability to grow positive connections both inside and outside of the prison setting grows. This area of personal growth helps to prepare them for their release. Outside of prisons, libraries in the community can play a critical role in supporting the successful reintegration of former inmates. (CFLA, 2016)

Although this position statement is non-binding, it is important to note that it echoes the recommendations provided by the Office of the Correctional Investigator in their 2015-2016 *Annual report* (Sapers, 2016) which evaluated library services and access to learning in prison.

Federal Acts

The *CCRA* states at para. 96:

The Governor in Council may make regulations

[...]

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- (w) providing for inmates' access to
 - (i) legal counsel and legal reading materials,
 - (ii) non-legal reading materials, and
 - (iii) a commissioner for taking oaths and affidavits; (pp. 64 – 65)

The *CCRR* repeats this and provides further direction regarding what non-legal reading materials must be provided to people in prison. It states that Commissioner's Directives and regional instructions and institutional standing orders must be made available (Minister of Justice, 2021b, para. 97(3)).

These sections contain the only mentions of the provision of any type of reading materials in either of these Acts, and there are no specific references to library or educational services. These acts provide a legal justification for the existence of prison libraries in Canada with an emphasis on the provision of certain legal materials, while leaving the specifics of prison library service provision up to the *CDs* and other prison policy. With that said, the language used in these acts is determinative that legal reading materials must be provided to incarcerated individuals. This in turn provides a strong case for the creation of either a central legal reference library at the CSC's national headquarters, well-curated legal reference collections in every federal and provincial-territorial prison, or both.

Commissioner's Directives

The matter of who should manage prison libraries is a contentious one within the *CDs*. The objective of the *GL 005-1* is to define the roles and responsibilities of institutional management. This guideline specifies that the area of Programs and Activities led by the Program Manager includes federal prison library services. It should be noted that 'Programs and Activities' does not solely comprise institutional libraries and education, but also covers a vast area of programs and services for people in prison, including work assignments and pay, social programs, and volunteer coordination, among other things (Correctional Service of Canada, 2008a). *CD 700* states that the Assistant Warden, Interventions will manage all federal correctional interventions, which include education 'etc.' (Correctional Service of Canada, 2017a, para. 8). *CD 720*, the most significant *CD* when it comes to federal institutional library services, states, "The Chair of the Correctional Intervention Board and/or the Manager, Programs, in collaboration with the Chief of Education, where this position exists, or education delegate, will... manage the delivery of library services for inmates" (Correctional Service of Canada, 2017b, para. 7). This is directly contradicted at para. 12(a), which states that the librarian will "deliver library management services which support and promote institutional programming, employment, social, ethnic and cultural development, legal research and personal enrichment." This is contradicted again in *GL 720-1*, which states that, "The Director, Reintegration Services, will oversee the management and monitoring of library services" (Correctional Service of Canada, 2018a, para. 2).

When it comes to the question of who actually manages library services in Canadian federal prisons, it appears the waters have been muddied by policies which seem to

send the institutional librarian in circles. If one attempted to follow the management hierarchy outlined in these policies, one could infer that the Director, Reintegration Services, the Assistant Warden, Interventions and Chair of the Correctional Intervention Board and/or the Manager, Programs in collaboration with the local Chief of Education, and the institutional librarian somehow all directly manage library services at the same time. Presumably none of these individuals, except for the librarian, have ever worked in a library or have even a basic understanding of standard library services and practices. This lack of clarity around who actually manages the institutional library and library services can only serve to remove all accountability for the state of federal prison library services from federal prison administrators. Furthermore, there is no mention of what educational and/or professional qualifications the librarian should have. This allows for federal prison administrators to staff the library with whomever they see fit, exacerbating the issue of a lack of qualified library professionals working in prison libraries. This is likely one of the causes of the wild variation in library services between federal institutions mentioned by Sapers (2015).

Only *CD 720* addresses the actual federal prison library services and materials which the library must provide. This *CD* provides significant details on the provision of library services, including a full and complete management hierarchy and the duties of each management level. The librarian's duties are stated at para. 12:

12. The Librarian will:

- a. deliver library management services which support and promote institutional programming, employment, social, ethnic and cultural development, legal research and personal enrichment
- b. organize materials and information to reflect library standards for optimum use and access
- c. determine the needs of library users and match library services and resources to meet those needs and interests when possible and appropriate
- d. ensure the institution's library has available historical and current copies of legal, regulatory and official reference materials including, but not limited to:
 - i. Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
 - ii. Corrections and Conditional Release Act and Regulations
 - iii. International Transfer of Offenders Act
 - iv. Criminal Code of Canada
 - v. Canadian Human Rights Act
 - vi. Access to Information Act and appropriate access request forms
 - vii. Privacy Act and appropriate access request forms
 - viii. Official Languages Act
 - ix. Immigration and Refugee Protection act
 - x. Commissioner's Directives and associated Guidelines
 - xi. the Standing Orders for that institution, except those orders or parts thereof related to security matters
 - xii. Security Reclassification Scale/Security Reclassification Scale for Women Functional Specifications (scoring matrix)

- xiii. Parole Board of Canada Policy Manual
- xiv. Info Source
- xv. relevant publications produced by CSC regarding programs and services for inmates
- xvi. reports by the Office of the Correctional Investigator. (Correctional Service of Canada, 2017b)

The above-noted required legal reading materials are increasingly available only in digital formats. Although prisons at the federal level do provide digital copies of these items to incarcerated individuals on stand-alone computers, as mentioned by Zinger in 2020, these computers are equipped with outdated software and, in my experience, were often inaccessible or broken, and updating them was not a priority for IT staff. This contributes to yet another barrier to access for federally incarcerated individuals that directly contravenes the *CCRA* and *CCRR* as well as *CD 720*.

Regarding the library collection, only *CD 720* and *CD 764* along with its respective guidelines identify what items should and should not be included. *CD 764* and *GL 764-1* also contain provisions for collective and individual limitations (i.e. censorship) of 'expressive materials,' which are defined as, "...material in any form (including books, magazines, newspapers/articles, photographs, videos, films, music, clothing, items created/produced by an offender) that conveys an expression, message, thought, or attitude of mind" (Correctional Service of Canada, 2018b). These directives indicate that the Institutional Head (i.e. the warden) and the District Director may limit access to expressive material for a multitude of reasons varying from their contributing to an unhealthy working and living environment to recommendations for censorship made by the individual's Case Management Team (Correctional Service of Canada, 2018b, paras. 13 and 16; Correctional Service of Canada, 2018c, para. 6). As set out in *GL 764-1* at para. 2, materials that would automatically be withheld from people in federal prison include:

- a. information that clearly and purposely explains and/or demonstrates how to:
 - i. fabricate, assemble or conceal a weapon
 - ii. produce an intoxicant or mask its ingestion in order to defeat detection
 - iii. carry out a criminal act or suppress evidence of a criminal act
- b. material that supports genocide, promotes a theory of racial superiority or incites hatred towards any identifiable group or sub-population
- c. material of a sexual nature that involves violence, coercion, degradation, bodily harm or threats thereof to a person, whether real or fictional
- d. material that recruits membership in, encourages adherence to, or promotes the aims of a security threat group, criminal organization or terrorist ideology, pursuant to CD 568-3 – Identification and Management of Security Threat Groups. (Correctional Service of Canada, 2018c)

Although it makes sense to restrict some of the above-noted materials in a carceral environment, section b, and especially section c, are mostly subjective in nature, making it more difficult for the prison librarian to weed out material which would fall into these categories and easier for prison officials to censor materials to their own taste. In my own experience, Anton LaVey's *Satanic Bible* was censored by the prison Chaplain due to them considering it as 'hate speech,' and many romance novels could *Journal of Radical Librarianship*, 8 (2022) pp. 1–24

potentially be censored for their content as well. The removal of these materials is not only based on personal views of morality, but is also moot, considering that people in federal and provincial-territorial prisons can and do subscribe to pornographic magazines and have access to violent and/or sexual videogames and television.

It is important to note that the act of censorship goes against the *IFLA Code of ethics for librarians and other information workers* (2012) and its Canadian counterpart, the *CFLA-FCAB Code of ethics* (2018), which both mandate at s.1 that librarians and information workers reject censorship in all its forms. The encouragement of censorship in the prison library reveals Canadian society's moralistic and paternalistic view of the prison library as a tool both to control and to 'fix' people in prison, rather than as a minimum human right and an educational and recreational resource.

This idea of censorship in prison and reading as a tool for behavioural control has existed since the inception of the prison library (Ramprashad, 2020, p. 61), and was studied by Austin et al., who note just how problematic this idea can be. They affirm that this type of censorship is a form of state violence and call out its paternalism, stating, "There is an 'underlying assumption that people in prison aren't sophisticated readers' and must therefore be carefully guided to more constructive reading patterns," (2020, p. 176). Furthermore, the act of censorship of library materials is a violation of intellectual freedom, which is protected under s. 2(b) of the *Canadian charter of rights and freedoms*.

While *CD 764* and its respective guidelines restrict the materials available in the federal prison library, *CD 345* restricts the librarian's ability to circulate more than a few items at a time. Under the section titled, "Permitted Combustible Material in Cells and Bedrooms," this *CD* states that, "The amount of combustible material permitted in cell blocks, living units and dormitories shall be strictly limited in accordance with the requirements outlined in the Fire Safety Manual" (Correctional Service of Canada, 2008b, para. 20). Unfortunately, printed materials such as books are considered 'combustible material' and, in my own experience, safety concerns such as this were often used as a reason to restrict access to library materials in prison.

Other such safety concerns which I was made aware of while working as a prison librarian were that hardcover books could be used to create body armour and that people in prison might hide needles and prison-made weapons inside the books. These safety concerns were not always unfounded, as situations like this did occur on occasion. However, books are not the only items in prison being lit on fire, used to create body armour, or to hide contraband, and such concerns should not be used to restrict access to the library or library materials.

The National Guide for Institutional Libraries

While the *NGIL* provides the skeleton from which an intentional, well-rounded prison library policy might emerge, it is still lacking in almost every area. It provides some basic objectives that a federal prison librarian in Canada may strive for as well as a few guidelines on basic library processes. However, it does nothing to alleviate the confusion caused by the *CDs* regarding who manages library services at the

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institutional level. It is also sorely in need of concise guides on collection management, including how many items the library should have in its collection, censorship of library materials, and collections maintenance. There is no information on the provision of ILLs, ebooks, audiobooks, and other alternative materials, especially ones which would be helpful for individuals with print disabilities and/or low literacy. Furthermore, it lacks details regarding how and by whom the library should be staffed, what job classification the library staff falls under (EC or LS), what training, support, and guidance the librarian should receive, and who ensures this. It also requires more focus on the areas of literacy-based programming, technology, budget, privacy, and physical space requirements and designs. The *NGIL* does not include any guidelines on how the federal prison library might offer eResources or eLearning of any kind, even though these resources would not only provide access to more current information but also would enable people in prison to practice using digital technologies, which would help to better prepare them for their return to society.

The *NGIL*'s section on donations also proves problematic, as it places the onus on the CSC's National Headquarters to both receive and distribute donations, a regulation which only serves to create extra work for National Headquarters while taking autonomy away from the institutional librarians. The detailed nature of this section and the lack of detail regarding how the librarian might acquire new library materials using the library's operational budget promotes the idea that prison libraries should rely solely on donations, when in fact the reliance on donated library materials creates collections that are consistently outdated, in poor condition, and often irrelevant. This is only worsened by the *NGIL*'s section 6.11, "Maintenance of collection," which states at para. 6.11.4, "Librarians should receive proper training in book repair and in turn, train their library assistants." This section does not provide any information on where the librarian might receive training in book repair (a skill which is usually only taught to archivists and conservators). Furthermore, it does not provide any direction on how and why the librarian should discard materials, leaving the process of deselection up to the whims of library and prison staff.

The *NGIL*'s Budget section consists of only three points: Firstly, that CSC's National Headquarters provide annual operating budgets commensurate to the needs of the institution, that the budget factor in the need to provide a broad range of materials, and that librarians should develop needs assessments for their institutional libraries and submit plans, priorities, and schedules to their supervisors on an annual basis (CSC, 2012b, s. 10.0). Although funding formulas based on prison populations exist internationally, such as in Lehmann's *Guideline's for library services to prisoners* (3rd ed.) (Lehmann, 2005), the *NGIL* provides no such funding formula. Nor does it provide any real details about who should develop and administer this budget, nor how much of the budget should be allocated to library stock, computers and other technology, collections maintenance, etc. Lehmann's *Guidelines* also notes that, 'the startup materials budget for new libraries should be sufficient to establish at least 50% of a full-service collection,' (p. 11) where the *NGIL* assumes that full-service libraries that match public library services have already been established in every federal prison, which is simply not the case.

In its current form, the *NGIL* is outdated. It is lacking in many provisions which would standardize federal prison library service across Canada, which would serve as a

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model that provincial-territorial prisons could use to standardize their own prison library services, and which would allow the prison librarian to meet the purpose of the library in a federal institution, which is, as it sets out in s. 1, “[...] to meet the needs of the correctional community by providing an essential service which emulates the public library model, with free and equitable access to a wide range of ideas, information, and perspectives.” Finally, it does not follow most of the policy recommendations for federal prison libraries in Canada which have been made since the 1980s.

Review of the Policy Recommendations for Canadian Federal Prison Libraries: 1980s to the Present

There is a dearth of knowledge on Canadian prison library policy in Canada, and, as previously stated by Curry et al., it is rare that prison libraries are mentioned in publications by government or private citizens (p. 142). The most significant federal government reports on federal prison library policy are the *Nason report* published in 1981 and the *Peat Marwick report* published in 1984. Drastic cutbacks in 1994 seem to have quashed any further inquests into these services and reversed any improvements to federal prison library services which may have been made (Ings & Joslin, 2010, p. 402).

The Nason Report

The *Report on institutional library service* (The *Nason report*), commissioned by the CSC and written by C.M. Nason, was completed in 1981. In it, Nason provided an in-depth report on library standards, reader services, technical services, personnel, organization, facilities, resources required, and performance measurements, with recommendations for each.

At the beginning of the report, Nason delineates the role and importance of the library in federal correctional institutions, stating that, “Library services are an integral part of a humane penitentiary system. The incarcerated individual retains the intellectual freedom to stimulate and to develop the mind and one of the principal means of this stimulation is the right to read” (p. 2).

Nason also emphasized the importance of the support which the library provides to other federal programs and services available in prison, such as the Education and Training Programme. Nason pointed out that alleviating the boredom of people in prison is a means of ‘dynamic rather than static control’ (p. 3).

Indeed, the antiquated belief that the prison library should be used as a means of control was even upheld in Ings and Joslin’s 2010 article, “Correctional Service of Canada Prison Libraries from 1980 to 2010,” which stated that, “Prison libraries continue to contribute to public safety by supporting the Correctional Services mandate to provide safe and secure control of offenders, while preparing them for reintegration into the community” (p. 407). Although this remains an excellent way to market the prison library to prison administrators and decision-makers, it distracts from the fact that access to a library is a human right, and again points to the issue of these libraries being used as tools of control and state violence and oppression. In order to effect real change, prison librarians and policy makers must

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step away from the idea of the library as a means of control and focus on the positive influence the library can have as a safe space where people in prison might go, both to alleviate boredom as Nason noted, and to escape the harsh realities of prison as Garner noted in her study of libraries and reading as facilitators of mental escape (Garner, 2020).

The *Nason report* established that federal prison libraries should follow the public library model and, with some exceptions, offer the same materials and services. Regarding these exceptions, Nason provided an in-depth guideline on censorship. To standardize these services in prison libraries across Canada, Nason proposed the creation of a policy statement on the provision of library services in federal prisons and made the following recommendations for prison library service standards:

- a) All medium and maximum-security institutions will provide library services as comparable as possible to those services available from a public library;
- b) The library shall provide an institution-wide service to meet the needs of both inmates and staff;
- c) The institutional library participates in interlibrary loan programmes and makes optimal use of community resources;
- d) Institutional libraries must provide adequate material for legal research, especially in the field of criminal law;
- e) The institution will ensure that inmates have adequate access to library services;
- f) The library collection will be of sufficient size and quality to meet the needs of the inmate population;
- g) Written policy defines the principles, purposes and criteria used in the selection and censorship of library materials;
- h) Library materials will be formally organized to ensure adequate bibliographic control;
- i) The institution has a qualified librarian on staff full-time whose sole duty is the operation of library services;
- j) The library is functional in design and inviting in appearance;
- k) The institution will ensure that the programmes and other services of the library, will be sufficiently funded, so that a viable library facility can be maintained. (p. 84)

Although the *Nason report* provided a strong basis from which the *NGIL* emerged, his in-depth recommendations for collection management and maintenance, library budgets, and staffing were seemingly ignored. The most important recommendation that institutional librarian positions be filled with qualified library workers approved by a professional librarian at National Headquarters (p. 86) is still not being followed as of this writing.

As of 2021, the position of librarian at National Headquarters still did not exist, despite recommendations for its creation since the 1980s. This means that the hiring of federal prison librarians is being done by regional Chiefs of Education under the direction of regional headquarters; institutional librarians, therefore, are being chosen by individuals who have never professionally trained for or worked in libraries. It is no wonder, then, that the institutional librarian faces such widespread devaluation and defunding of their work; prison officials have not consulted professional librarians on these matters since the 1980s.

The Peat-Marwick Report

The *Correctional Service of Canada review of institutional library services report* (The *Peat-Marwick report*) was commissioned by the CSC and was prepared by Peat, Marwick and Partners in March of 1984 and submitted to the National Chief of Education and Training. This report surveyed existing federal prison library services in Canada, and the authors conducted institutional visits in Alberta, where library facilities were toured and services were observed. The authors also interviewed five institutional librarians in Quebec, Ontario, and Alberta.

Based on their findings, the *Peat-Marwick report* made the following recommendations for federal prison library services:

- That Headquarters hire a librarian with an M.L.S. (Master of Library Science) degree with sufficient skills to coordinate the activities of libraries on a national basis.
- That basic library standards be established for the institutional libraries.
- That basic procedures be developed for all institutional libraries and that a manual be written outlining them in detail.
- That CSC re-examine staffing of institutional libraries so that consistent qualifications are found in all institutional libraries.
- That every region have a Regional Librarian with a B.L.S. or M.L.S. degree.
- That more appropriate staffing levels be maintained in institutional libraries.
- That all CSC institutional libraries should have a minimum basic adult literacy collection.
- That separate budgets be developed for the libraries and that they are reviewed regionally and nationally before they are submitted to Wardens.
- That the libraries prepare an annual plan outlining goals and objectives for the upcoming year.
- That consideration be given to developing a catalogue of all the holdings of the institutional libraries.
- That presently ongoing work on improved facilities receive the full support of Education and Training.
- That the institutional library facility planning be done in conjunction with the local librarian.
- That each region hold an annual meeting for its librarians and that all Correctional Service librarians meet at least once a year at the Canadian Library Association Meeting. (pp. 2 – 3)

The *Peat-Marwick report* was also able to provide a more complete picture of the difficulties which federal prison librarians face. Regarding the relationship between library and other institutional staff, this report found that 42.9% of survey respondents considered that cooperation between library and other staff was non-existent or inadequate (s. II, p. 11). They found that 78.6% of institutional librarians wanted increased contact with outside libraries and librarians, and especially with other prison librarians (s. II, p. 12). They also pointed out the unique nature of prison librarianship, noting the many disadvantages faced by their library patrons (s. II, p. 12).

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As remains the case today, prison librarians were, “[...] forced to make decisions with little support,” with, “...only minimal broad guidelines exist[ing] to help the library staff” (s. II, p. 13). They were expected to ensure that the minimum human rights requirements of their library patrons were being met, and to handle their patrons’ complex needs with grace and respect in an isolating environment which is conducive to neither. This situation was only exacerbated by the fact that no “champion” existed to assist prison librarians in advocating for themselves and their libraries and to ensure that they were fairly treated within the system (s. II, p. 13), and these issues persist as of this writing.

Peat-Marwick also cited the still contentious issue of librarians vs. library technicians, noting that the CSC does not use the LS classification – a federal government job classification which comes with a hefty salary increase – when hiring institutional librarians, causing library staff with post-graduate degrees to feel resentment towards their colleagues with library technician diplomas (s. II, p. 13). Their solution to this elitist view among these Master’s-level library workers was to recommend that librarians with post-graduate degrees only be hired at the Regional and National levels (i.e. in a regional and/or national Chief of Library services position). Again, these positions still did not exist as of 2021.

Recommendations

Although a few studies and recommendations have been made since the 1980s (Artinian & McEwan, 1989; Curry et al., 2003; Ings & Joslin, 2010), there have been no studies which focus solely on Canadian prison library policy and the improvement of library services. There exists a plethora of examples of progressive prison library studies, policy, and calls for change which could be used as a framework to enhance prison libraries across Canada (e.g. Canadian Federation of Library Associations, 2016; Krolak, 2019; Lehmann, 2005), yet it appears that the CSC and the ministries which govern provincial-territorial prisons are still lagging behind the rest of the world in terms of library and educational services to people in prison.

There have also been studies and recommendations on the ongoing role which incarceration plays in colonialism and the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in prison (Chartrand, 2019). Furthermore, there have been studies on the way in which Indigenous knowledge, and particularly Indigenous cultural teachings reduces recidivism and aids in rehabilitation (Hewitt, 2016; Quantick, 2017). The Toronto Abolition Convergence’s *Indigenous abolitionist study guide* (2020) calls out the long history of criminalization of Indigenous people in Canada and colonial incarceration, noting that, “The violent removal of Indigenous peoples from their lands continues to be an active form of colonization in Canada, not just a relic of the past” (2020). Indeed, further discussion on the role of cultural belonging in carceral spaces and whether it is curtailed through inadequate library services and restricted access to cultural information and programming is merited. Further research is required to explore this topic substantively and with the care it deserves.

To this end, I recommend that the CSC and the ministries which govern provincial-territorial prisons commission studies into prison library services conducted by qualified library and information professionals. My recommendations also include immediate actions which would improve library services to people in prison and

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support rehabilitation. I also offer recommendations for ways in which library and information studies professionals might support people while they are incarcerated and while they are returning to society. For ease, I have split my recommendations into four sections: Research; Library Management and Librarian Qualifications; Changes to the Existing Policy and services; and Recommendations for Public, Academic, and Special Libraries to Support Prison Library Patrons and Their Reintegration upon Release.

Research

1. That the CSC and all ministries which govern provincial-territorial prisons commission research conducted by library and information professionals into their respective prison library services, and that the findings of this research be published within two years.
2. That further research be conducted regarding how prison library services might support cultural programming with particular focus on Indigenous knowledge and cultural teachings.

To create a clear picture of the existing library services in federal and provincial prisons across Canada and to improve upon them, it is crucial that a large study be conducted of the prison library services available and how these services affect the lives of people in prison. Such a study would help to illuminate the unique issues which prison librarians face and would allow for improvements to be made to prison library services. Such improvements might help to standardize prison library services across Canada and could also help to mitigate the sense of isolation which prison librarians feel while allowing them to fully meet the minimum human rights requirements of the community which they serve.

Furthermore, it is important to remember and acknowledge the ongoing colonial history of both library and carceral institutions. It is well past time to seriously consider the impact that these institutions have outside of their designated contexts and to reimagine the way we organize and disseminate knowledge. For this reason, and to improve library services to Indigenous people in prison, I recommend that library and information professionals conduct further research on Canadian prison libraries and the way they relate to Indigenous ways of knowing and cultural programming through an Indigenous and abolitionist lens.

Library Management and Librarian Qualifications

3. That the CSC immediately create the position of a Chief of Library Services at the national and regional levels, that the ministries which govern provincial-territorial prisons create similar positions within their organizations, and that librarians with a post-graduate degree from an ALA-accredited library school be hired for these positions.
4. That both prison systems immediately establish separate and sufficient funding for prison libraries based on the size of the correctional community (both staff and incarcerated individuals) which they serve.
5. That central library collections be immediately established at CSC's National Headquarters and at the respective headquarters of the ministries which govern provincial-territorial prisons with an extensive collection of printed legal

- materials, and that an inter-library loans process be established for the use of this collection by correctional staff and people housed in federal prisons.
6. That all prison libraries provide adequate material for legal research, especially in the field of criminal law, and that special budgets be established for the ongoing purchase of these materials.
 7. That every federal and provincial-territorial institution immediately hire a qualified librarian (with either a library technician diploma or an ALA-accredited post-graduate degree) to work full-time, whose sole duty is the delivery of library services.
 8. That an annual audit of library services be conducted in all prison libraries and that all institutional librarians develop an openly accessible annual report outlining their respective library's circulation statistics, budgets, and goals for the coming year to be submitted to their respective department head.
 9. That federal and provincial-territorial prison librarians hold an annual meeting or conference for institutional librarians.

As previously noted, some of the greatest issues with prison librarianship are the lack of direction from management, a paucity of qualified library personnel, insufficient funding, and a sense of isolation felt by individual prison librarians. To create consistency in prison library services in Canada and to ensure that prison librarians can fully meet the complex needs of the communities which they serve, these library services must be directed by someone with expertise in this field and must be carried out by professionals who also have library expertise.

To ensure that prison libraries provide similar services across institutions, and that those services emulate the public library model with free and equitable access to a wide range of ideas, information, and perspectives as set out in the *NGIL* and other policy, these libraries must be sufficiently funded to create collections which reflect the needs of their library patrons. To fairly decide funding levels and to ensure that similar library services which meet the minimum human rights requirements of the patrons they serve are provided in every institution, annual audits must be conducted and coordinated by federal Chiefs of Library Services and their provincial equivalents. This would also ensure transparency within prison library services.

To fully meet the requirements of the *CCRA*, *CCRR*, and *CD 720*, a centralized collection of printed legal materials must be established and available via inter-library loan for the federal correctional community. A similar collection should be established by the ministries which govern provincial-territorial prisons.

Finally, to mitigate the sense of isolation which prison librarians feel and to create better lines of communication between prison librarians, an annual meeting or conference for institutional librarians should be held with the full support of the CSC and the provincial-territorial ministries which govern provincial prisons. These conferences would be a space where prison librarians could share their ideas and experiences with each other and work together to improve upon existing prison library services.

Changes to the Existing Policy and Services

10. That the National Guide for Institutional Libraries immediately be updated to include guides on library management, collection management and maintenance, the provision of inter-library loans, providing ebooks, audiobooks, and alternative materials for people with print disabilities, programming, library technology and computers, budget, patron privacy, and physical space requirements and designs.
11. That the National Guide for Institutional Libraries be reviewed and updated every three years by the National Chief of Library services.
12. That every institutional library immediately establishes inter-library loan programs with local public libraries and make use of these community resources.
13. That institutional librarians work with their institution's programs for education, psychology, health care, and social programs, as well as Indigenous culture departments to develop library collections which support these areas, and that every effort be made to allow incarcerated individuals to access these collections.
14. That basic library procedure manuals be developed by institutional library staff in all institutional libraries.
15. That all correctional institutions immediately reallocate funding and resources from areas such as new weapons and munitions purchases to educational, cultural, mental and physical health care, and library services.

Libraries have always reflected the changing needs of the communities they serve by growing and changing with them. This has included ongoing upgrades to library technology, the establishment of 'maker' culture and maker spaces, the provision of various types of materials and alternative formats, and the creation of online programs and services. To provide the best services possible, libraries must change and evolve with their communities, and this includes adapting existing policy to reflect their needs. Therefore, the *NGIL* must be updated to provide better guidance to federal prison librarians and must be cited as the sole authority on the provision of library services to people in federal prison. In addition, these updates should be carried out on a regular basis so that the changing needs of the prison population continue to be met.

To ensure the greatest access to information and library materials, it is imperative that all prison librarians contact their local public library and, where possible, establish ILL programs with them.

To ensure that well-rounded collections are established and that communication flows freely between various prison departments and the library, prison librarians must establish connections within their own prison and see to it that core resources from each department are also provided in the library. Furthermore, correctional institutions should reallocate funding and resources to effect improvement in all available rehabilitative programming and services, including the library.

Finally, to account for the operational differences between each institution (and thus between each institutional library), a basic library procedural should be created by the institutional librarian.

Recommendations for Public, Academic, and Special Libraries to Support Prison Library Patrons and Their Reintegration upon Release

1. That prison, public, academic, and special librarians make every effort to communicate with one another and to establish library programming in prisons, as well as offer reintegration information and supports for people who have been and/or will be released from these institutions.
2. That public, academic, and special libraries (especially law libraries) support existing correctional education and literacy programs by providing inter-library loans services as well as by donating gently-used, relevant library materials to local prisons.
3. That public, academic, and special libraries work with correctional institutions to help establish the provision of alternative resources (eBooks, audiobooks, and online educational resources) to people in prison and to make recommendations for ways in which prison libraries might improve access to technology, online educational resources, and the internet.
4. That public libraries provide basic reintegration programs and services to people returning to society from prison. These programs and services might include information on where and how to apply for government identification such as a driver's license, resume-writing workshops and job application services, information on accessing social services, etc.
5. That public, academic, and special libraries establish connections with and support non-library groups that provide programs and support to people in prison and those returning to society.
6. That library organizations across Canada make calls for radical change in prison library services, including calls for the defunding and abolition of prisons.

The *IFLA Code of ethics for librarians and other information workers* and its Canadian counterpart both establish in their first section that the core mission of library and information professionals is to ensure access to information for all. The fact that basic access to information is so hindered in prisons that they have become 'information-depriving' should be enough to mobilize public, academic, and special librarians to fight for the right of people in prison to access information, and to support prison librarians and advocate for prison library services which successfully meet the needs of the community which they serve.

Although many successful programs and partnerships exist internationally between public, academic, special libraries, and prison libraries-- the New Jersey State Library's Fresh Start Program (Hershops, 2021), and Washington State Library's Institutional Library Services (Washington State Library, n.d.), to name a few--these programs and partnerships are few and far between in Canada. Therefore public, academic, and special libraries need to contact their local prisons, discuss needs, and offer programming and support to prisons and prison libraries whenever they can.

More than that, though, public, academic, and special librarians should establish connections with and support groups through such as the John Howard and Elizabeth Fry societies, the Canadian Families and Corrections Network, Books Beyond Bars,

and other non-library groups who provide programming and support to people in prison and those returning to the community. These partnerships would help to center libraries as spaces of community support and allow for a better flow of ideas to and from Canadian prison library patrons and the broader community.

Finally, where possible, library associations and institutions should make calls for defunding/abolishing prisons and for reallocating those funds towards rehabilitative and other social programs. From the very beginning, criticisms of the dehumanizing and punitive philosophy of prisons and subsequent reforms have been made which have helped to improve conditions within these institutions, but none of these reforms have addressed the real reasons that people enter prisons in the first place: racism, poverty, and lack of access to mental health care and social supports. Over the years, there has been a steady increase in the prison population, and an increase in BIPOC in prisons (Ricciardelli et al, 2021), and no prison reforms have helped to mitigate this. Prison libraries may be spaces of rehabilitation, but they ultimately are still in prison, and no amount of policy change or prison reform can change the fact that prisons are places of perpetual punishment and trauma.

Conclusion

The argument that increased and/or better library and educational services in prisons reduces recidivism and therefore reduces the cost of the criminal justice system is nothing new, and there is admittedly strong evidence that these programs and services do reduce recidivism (Krolak, 2019; CFLA, 2016; Hewitt, 2016). However, I urge governments and policymakers to remember that these are people, and that prisons cannot and do not reduce recidivism when the people they house are being marginalized, exploited, and utterly failed by a system which prioritizes institutional safety and security over the human rights and the dignity of those in its care.

The library is a minimum human rights requirement – literally the least prisons could be doing to protect the intellectual freedom of the people they house – and yet adequate library services are still not being provided in Canadian prisons. Now is the time to rethink the goals of the prison library and the ways in which we measure its success. The prison library is one of the few spaces in the carceral environment which can help to reverse the sense of dehumanization that people in prison feel every day. As Brenda Vogel states,

The prison librarian meets the users where they are: in a nonnurturing environment of deprivation that fosters dependence through humiliation and compliance, in a hostile environment possessed by fear and intimidation, in an environment with limited media and communication. The user meets the librarian in an oasis of equality and respect, where there is opportunity to choose from a variety of media, formats, subjects, and titles, to possess something of value, and to exchange ideas. This is the library as place. (2009, p. 20)

Many library and information professionals have been faced with the devaluation of the invaluable work that they do. We have all heard the arguments that libraries have become obsolete, that they will not exist in the future, that online search engines have

replaced library services. The people who make these arguments have forgotten that the library is not just a warehouse full of books. The library is a safe space and, in prison where incarcerated individuals are not allowed the same access to information and technology as the general public, the prison library is likely the only space which offers not only information but a reprieve from the ennui of prison life. Library workers find themselves in the centre of that space not just as library workers but as educators, public service providers, social workers, and so much more. Our expertise matters, especially within the carceral context.

Library workers cannot thrive in the prison library on vocational awe alone (Ettarh, 2018). Prison administrators and policy makers also need to provide support to prison librarians. This support should involve giving library workers a seat at the table when planning prison library policy and services, promoting professional growth and development by ensuring funding for these opportunities, supporting the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of prison library staff, and ensuring that prison librarians are championed by a Chief of Library Services who understands the issues which they face every day. Prison librarians also need support from our colleagues on the outside who can help to advocate for prison library services and intellectual freedom and provide programming and services to people in prison and people returning to society. The prison library's purpose should not be controlling the prison population, nor should it be supporting safety and security within the institution, nor even reducing recidivism and costs. The purpose of the prison library is to ensure that the basic minimum human rights of incarcerated individuals are met. Prison librarians cannot do this without changes to the existing policy and without the full support of prison administrators, policy makers, and librarians on the outside.

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