



Operations Manual

MODULE 1





The Power of Stride for Women in Prison: An Overview

This Module is geared for individuals looking for an overview of the Stride program. It contains the core values of the Stride Program, Stride's history, an overview of Stride's 4 main programs, and explains why Stride is a Restorative Justice program. It will explore the reintegration needs of women existing prison and how Stride addresses them. Please see the Appendices for Stride's model, brochure and a digital story told by a Circle participant. For a deeper look into the Stride Programs, please see Module 2 on Stride Night.

We'd Like to Say Thanks for the Fun on Tuesday

*Tuesdays at GVI are so much fun
At 7:00 it's time to run
Get here early to beat the crowd
Enjoying the quiet before it gets too loud
Once the noise starts to sound
So many smiles all around
The games, the music, the fun, the laughs
We enjoy it all, especially the crafts
We appreciate it all, everything you've shown
Coming to Stride sure beats staying at home
We enjoy your company; we don't want you to go
Please come back soon, we'll miss you so
Once again we'd like to say
Thanks for the Fun on Tuesday*

– Angelina, Stride Night Participant

Stride – An Overview

Stride is a very simple concept: having volunteers build relationships with criminalized women, and to support this relationship as it moves into the community where she reintegrates. Stride volunteers act as a support system for women – similar to how our family and friends do for us.

While the concept of the program is simple, the implementation of the program can be complex, with many components working together, like in a growing garden. Just as the health of a garden is influenced by many factors, the health and success of your Stride programs depends on the successful interaction of several program components. From the soil in which you are planting your seeds (see Establishing a Stride Program) to the different plants you chose to put in your garden (see External Relationships) to the water you use to nurture your plants (see Funding), Stride is built on and

supported by a wide array of funders, community partners, program volunteers and staff – the interaction of which are crucial to our program's long history of success.

Stride is a relational program that assists women who are or have been incarcerated to make the difficult, often-traumatic, transition from prison to the community. Founded on restorative justice principles, Stride's strengths-based, women-centred approach empowers women to take responsibility for their actions. It equips them for independence while shifting community attitudes and navigating obstacles to their reintegration. Stride enables the women to improve their quality of life, resulting in healthier families, neighbourhoods, and communities. Stride serves the women, their families and the communities in which they live.

A key difference between Stride and other reintegration support programs is that the bonds formed between the women and the volunteers happen more naturally and before she needs the support in the community. The women are not arbitrarily paired with volunteers; instead, the women are supported by the volunteers with whom they have developed a natural, supportive relationship through shared activities. Rather than as experts or teachers, Stride volunteers participate in Stride activities as equals, learning together. These relationships can start in the prison or halfway house and are then encouraged and supported by Stride staff and follow the woman into the community.

Stride was established in 1998 by Community Justice Initiatives of Waterloo Region (CJI), a non-profit, volunteer-based organization. Stride has been identified as a "best practice" in assisting women who have been incarcerated to reintegrate. All Stride programming is congruent with the Correctional Services of Canada (CSC) recommendations outlined in the Revised National Community Strategy for Women Offenders (March, 2010) and follows the guiding philosophy of "Creating Choices", a report authored by the Task Force on Federally-Sentenced Women in 1990.

CJI & Stride History

Stride is one of CJI's restorative justice-based programs. CJI has a forty-year history of providing a breadth of restorative justice-based services in the community and within institutions – from federal prisons, to public schools, to our criminal court system. CJI provides conflict resolution, group support for persons impacted by sexual trauma, and reintegration support for youth returning to the



community from prison. Our programs and services are made possible through volunteers, donations, individual and public support. For more on CJI and its programs see www.cjiwr.com

Stride came to CJI as Project Another Chance (PAC). PAC was started by a woman who had been incarcerated at the Prison for Women (P4W) in Kingston, Ontario, who became frustrated with the lack of female-oriented community programs and supports. PAC's services included a widely used telephone support line, a data bank of community contacts and resources and a newsletter for female inmates. Community support for PAC was widespread. Its supporters included social activists such as June Callwood, Claire Culhane and Clayton Ruby as well as community agencies including the Salvation Army, the Mennonite Central Committee, the John Howard Society and the Elizabeth Fry Society.

With the impending closure of P4W, the federal government opened five new regional institutions. PAC's founder and its board decided to move the program to Kitchener and PAC became a program of CJI. In 1998 Julie Thompson was hired to re-focus the service into a "Community Circle" of support program. The program became Providing Alternative Choices for Women (PAC), a combination of the old acronym and a new direction and focus. In November 2003, the name was changed to Stride — a metaphor to reflect women taking steps to move forward.

Under CJI's umbrella, the Stride program focused on four initiatives. First, it established a support line for both inmates and parolees in conjunction with the Distress Line of Canadian Mental Health Association of Waterloo Region. Second, CJI created a newsletter geared toward the reintegration of federally sentenced women in their home communities. Third, CJI began a weekly recreation night (now Stride Night) at Grand Valley Institution to provide recreational activities, such as crafts and sports, which helped the incarcerated women and volunteers get to know each other. Lastly, CJI set up a "Circles" program which matched trained volunteers with federally sentenced women wanting support to assist them with their reintegration. The use of circles in restorative justice programs was not new – Many Aboriginal communities and other community agencies use a circle model to pull together community members to support change and resolve conflict within their community. Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA), Wrap-Around, and Support Clusters were all models that were studied to develop the Stride Model.

CJI now provides four Stride services in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario.

Stride Night (The "Shared Activity")

Each week, male and female volunteers go to Kitchener's federal prison, Grand Valley Institution for Women (GVI) to build supportive relationships while they make crafts, play sports, and talk with the women. The women are enthusiastic and appreciate the activities and the opportunity to build friendships with volunteers. The volunteers who come to Stride Night bring community into the prison by providing meaningful, normalized socialization and a welcome break from prison life.

CJI currently operates two Stride Nights at GVI – one in the main compound for the medium security women and another in the Minimum Security Unit (MSU) outside the fence line of GVI.

Stride Circles

Stride Circles provide intensive networks of support for women leaving prison. The women can choose two or three Stride Night volunteers to form a Circle to provide important social and emotional support. Circle volunteers and social organizations contribute to a woman's positive reintegration by helping her establish a home, find a job, gain access to education and assistance with parenting, as well as by helping her build critical thinking and problem-solving skills. These friend-like relationships and connections may last years and equip the women with options for creating a new, self-sufficient life.

See Appendix 1 – the Stride Model – for a visual representation of the program.

Fresh Start Creations

When the women at GVI wanted to give back to the community, CJI helped them launch Fresh Start Creations. The artisan pieces they create during Stride Nights are sold in the community under the brand that the women created, Fresh Start Creations. The women currently donate all of the proceeds to a charity that they choose. To date, women living at GVI have donated thousands of dollars to local organizations that benefit women and children. Women participating in this program have an opportunity to participate in and be viewed differently by the community. They also learn valuable business skills.



Stride on the Outside

Stride on the Outside is a shared activity similar to Stride Night that can support Stride Circles in the community. Stride on the Outside groups provides an affordable means to bring many Circles together to learn a new skill or to talk about common challenges to reintegration. Stride on the Outside enhances the Circles Coordinator's ability to facilitate and monitor Circles in the community while also providing opportunities for women involved in the justice system and volunteers to learn new skills alongside one another.

A Restorative Approach to Incarceration

How the Stride program is grown from the values of restorative justice is not immediately clear to all. Certainly women involved in the justice system have caused harm – sometimes great harm. We also know that in general, they have been harmed prior to incarceration and through incarceration. Trauma is a clear example of this. Correctional Services Canada reports that 87% of women entering GVI self-report experiencing at least one form of abuse. Rates of mental health challenges, addiction, and suicide attempts by women in the justice system also far exceed the national average. Therefore we can not look at women in federal prison only as causing harm, nor as being victims. Their relationship to harm is complex.

Whereas restorative justice offers peaceful solutions to conflict and crime by addressing harms, the opportunity to work with women in the justice system highlights for us the harms that are caused by incarceration. Through almost two decades of meeting women worry about their ability to successfully reintegrate, the harms caused by incarceration become hard to ignore.

We noticed:

- If a woman found it difficult to find employment before prison, it would be even more difficult after
- If a woman had strained family relations before prison, they would be exasperated by incarceration
- If a woman lacked parenting skills and attachment to her children, this would be exasperated by incarceration
- If a woman had experienced trauma before prison, it would be exasperated by the significant stress of incarceration
- If a woman didn't trust authority figures, this would be exasperated by Incarceration.

Stride looks at these harms and sees that we need to address them if we want women in the justice system to contribute to our communities. Institutional programming is important, however, there are repercussions to a systems that locks people up than can not be undone through classes taken inside of the prison. The community, in the form of volunteers, is needed to create a place of belonging for women so that they can start to see where they fit in to our community and where they can contribute. In providing them with a place in the community and a social support network to facilitate their transition, the woman's belief in herself is restored as she transforms from an offender in prison to a valued member of the community. Staff and volunteers model responsibility and healthy alternatives to past lifestyle choices.

Stride is designed not only to prepare the women for their release, but also to prepare the community to receive them. As the community volunteers work in Stride, they begin to see the commonalities that unite them with the women, which reduces stigma and works to reduce the fear around this often misunderstood group of people.

Stride also helps to restore the women to their former selves – providing them with a place in the community and a social support network to facilitate their transition. The woman's belief in herself is restored as she transforms from an offender in prison to a valued member of the community. Staff and volunteers model responsibility and healthy alternatives to past lifestyle choices.

"To deepen community is to find opportunities for on-going connection with those we care about and those who care about us. This connection strengthens the bonds between us. It builds an emotional resilience within and between us that, in turn, builds mutuality and reciprocity. We begin to open ourselves up to receive and give. Mutual acts of caring become the basis of an ever-stronger feeling of belonging"

– Paul Born, Deepening Community



Reintegration After Incarceration: The Forgotten Needs of Women

Without a doubt, when women are preparing to leave a federal institution and move back into the community, housing, employment, child custody, sobriety and other medical supports are at the forefront of their planning for a successful transition. Missing from their formal planning are considerations for social support. Prohibited to keep in contact with peers inside prison and avoiding friends from the past who are not healthy supports, leaves women isolated and vulnerable. It doesn't have to be this way. This module contains information regarding how Stride addresses the social needs of women after prison. It begins with an overview of the values that guide Stride's programming, followed by an explanation of the reintegration needs of women, how supportive relationships between women and volunteers are built inside of the prison (Stride Night), then, how these relationships are formalized, supported and supervised at they move out of the prison (Stride Circles). It concludes with an overview of the impact Stride Circles have on women's ability to reach her goals.

The Value of Social Supports

Just as you or I would need the support of family or friends when we face difficult times or move into a new community, so too do women starting over again after prison. Many women will not need the support of a program to assist with this; they may have marriages, parents, or friends who continue to support them throughout incarceration and afterward. However, for those who don't, or who want to start over again with only healthy people in their lives, this need must be addressed.

Isolated and excluded women on the margins of society will fail to thrive. It is much more likely that they will relapse into unhealthy, and destructive decision making. However, surrounded by two or three people who are accepting of their mistakes, who see their strengths and are their cheerleaders, their shoulder to cry on, and their role model for healthy lifestyles, women have a better chance at preserving through challenges to reach the goals she has set for herself.

A Stride Story – "Learning to Adapt" (A Stride Circle Woman)

I suppose you could say my journey began in Panama as I was being arrested in the Tocumen Airport; though there were many contributing factors that led me to committing my crime.

While in Panama, I witnessed and experienced the many injustices constituted by both the criminal court system, and the prison system. I learned very quickly that I was stuck in a country that played by very different rules, and these rules were bendable depending on how much money you possessed, status or who you were associated with.

Although conditions by Canadian standards were deplorable, for many women at Centro Femenino de Rehabilitacion, the reality was that three meals a day in an over-crowded prison, with minimal resources to contribute to the women's daily basic needs, (hygiene products, bedding, a healthy balanced diet etc.) was better than being in the community. As for myself and many of the other English speaking women from across the world, we had to learn how to adapt to our surroundings in an attempt to survive the horrendous condition of the prison.

Though we lacked much in terms of our physical, emotional, mental, and even nutritional needs, as women we bonded, and a group of minorities became a community. For two and a half years while in the Panamanian prison, this community of women was my saving grace and a reminder that my journey is only beginning, and that someday our reality will change and be the driving force for our individual success.

After leaving Panama in 2011, I spent a year at Grand Valley Institution for Women (GVI). Though I was elated to be back home in Canada, close to my family again, I felt out of place and I missed the community I was a part of in Panama. Things were different at GVI, and the women related to one another in a way that I was not familiar with. If it had not been for Stride Nights, I would have spent many of my evening confined to my living unit.

The idea of Stride Night afforded me with a peace of mind that contradicted the general thought that I was simply an inmate. On some nights I was asked if I was a volunteer, and that's when it hits you. The realization that every week, a group of individuals come into the prison and treated us like human being. Someone was interested in my story, who I was outside of my crime, and who I wanted to be when I left prison.



I was fortunate to have a Circle of support once I was released into the community in 2013. By this time I had already spent three and a half years in prison, and completed five months at a halfway house. Though I was determined to change my life, it was the interaction with my Circle that allowed me to feel more comfortable about being in the community. Essentially, they were the first group of people I could trust, meet with, and just talk to without judgement because they understood what I have endured. It is encouraging to have someone walk alongside you when you're learning how to navigate through all the obstacles such as employment, housing, income taxes or debt.

One of my main goals for reintegration is to make a difference in the lives others. There are many gaps between services that make it difficult for individuals to transition into their communities fluidly after being incarcerated. I would like to be a part of the solution that creates education and employment opportunities, housing options, family supports and more. I hope to provide insight into the real issues women face when trying to make it in the community, and eventually ensure systems and programs are in place that cater to needs of women reintegrating into the community.

I believe in the impact Stride is making on the community and the women reintegrating into the community. I know first-hand how hard it can be, just trying to find yourself in the midst of chaos. To date the Stride program continues to be a very crucial part of my life, and success in the community. I am in my last year of the Social Service Worker program at Conestoga College, completing my co-op placement at CJI and living independently. I speak publically about my story with the hope that it will change the hearts and minds of those who think ill of persons leaving prison. My hope is to continue to change and create change for others who may be on the same or similar path I began.

Stride's Guiding Values for Building Healthy and Supportive Relationship in a Prison

a) Voluntary participation of the women

Stride is completely voluntary. At Community Justice Initiative's (CJI) Stride Night, there is no sign-up sheet and no requirement that the women attend the whole session. We use different types of activities to interest different women and maximize the percentage of women who attend Stride Night at least once. The woman chooses if and how she participates. Some women choose only to come for the snack. Our hope is that on one of those occasions she might start a conversation, and the next time look for that person to continue that conversation.

Likewise, in Stride Circles, the women chooses to continue relationships that she has started with volunteers in Stride Night in the form of a more formalized Circle. With her Circle, the woman determines what kind of support she needs and wants.

Voluntary participation in Stride Night sets the tone for how the Circle will function in the community – it will be woman-led, strength-based and will meet the woman where she is at. This process is one that belongs to the woman and as such she should always be directing how she participates in the program. Ensuring that Stride remains voluntary is essential for the success of the program in your community.

b) Building Mutuality Through a Shared Activity

At Stride Night, it is imperative that volunteers and the women participate in a “shared activity” alongside of one another. Activities create a reason for the women and volunteers to come together and for conversation to start. Shared participation in activities allows relationships of equality and mutual respect to develop and provides a framework for volunteers and the women to discover who they really like. A woman who wants a Stride Circle can then choose complementary volunteers to support her.

Through regular attendance at Stride Night, volunteers get to know the women. They hear their stories and begin to understand issues that contribute to incarceration. They are part of the excitement as women prepare for release, and the disappointment as some women return. This forms understanding of the many barriers to reintegration.

Stride seeks out any opportunity to bring mutuality to our programming. If we are hosting a training on trauma or addictions, we aim to invite both women and volunteers to learn the material together. If we are joining a community committee, we ask to bring with us a woman who has experienced incarceration.

When Circles have formed and are meeting in the community, we look to build mutuality into these relationships as they develop. Taking a cooking course together, volunteering at a festival together, or learning about better ways to parent together creates bonds that more closely mirror other friendships in our lives. We also expect that support to Circle participants can flow from everyone to everyone. When a reintegrating woman is able to provide encouragement, concern or validation to a Circle volunteer, we encourage the Circle to accept her contributions to the well-being of her Circle.



c) Screened, Trained, Supervised and Supported Volunteers

Stride facilitates trained community volunteers to join and support the women during their community reintegration process. All Stride programming requires a qualified and dedicated staff to liaise with the institution, coordinate Stride Night activities, recruit, train and supervise volunteers, meet and prepare women wanting Circles and support the Circles operating in the community. A staff person must be responsible for ensuring that volunteers are attending Stride Night for healthy reasons, that they are informed about the population that they are hoping to work with and that errors in judgment are addressed promptly and remedied. As volunteers get to know women and hear their stories, Stride believes that we are obligated to support our volunteers by providing regular Peer Support meetings and opportunities for one to one support to address the impact their volunteerism may have on them.

Sound volunteer training is key to program effectiveness. The Stride Night and Stride Circle trainings equip and educate volunteers on supporting vulnerable people, roles and responsibilities, challenges and protocols of working within a prisons or Halfway House, keeping themselves safe in the community. Stride has developed an extensive training program consisting of a four-week (12 hours) Stride Night training and a four-week (12 hours) Stride Circles training program.

Stride Night gives Stride staff the opportunity to see our volunteers in action and assess readiness for Circles. While all volunteers are screened and trained before they enter the facility, regular attendance in Stride Night allows Stride staff to better assess potential concerns regarding boundaries, good judgment and commitment.

Addition information regarding Stride Volunteer Training is in the Stride Night and Stride Circles Volunteer Training manuals that have been provided to you in the Appendix. If requested, CJI will provide your agency with recorded-versions of components of these trainings that are not captured in the manuals. You may adapt the training to fit your local circumstances (for example, changing language to fit a specific group or details regarding your local institution), but it is important that the content remains consistent.

d) Strengths-based support

Stride believes women have many strengths and skills and an inherent ability to identify and address their own needs and make their own decisions. If a woman wants the support of a Circle, it is important that volunteers meet her where she are at and support her in reaching her self-selected goals. This means the women determine the type of support they need. Some women require more practical support, for example, assistance searching for housing, applying for social assistance, looking for employment, while others focus more on social and emotional support.

Volunteer training assists volunteers in, not only identifying women's strengths, but to also look for opportunities where women can demonstrate them. It is for this reason that neither Stride Night volunteers nor Stride Night staff ask women about their crimes. Volunteers are trained to understand that the women sitting with them at Stride Night are likely different, changed, since they committed their crime. If, since committing their crime, they have become kinder, than we ought to accept this kindness. If, since coming to the prison, they have discovered that they have a talent for writing, then we ought to include this quality in how we would describe her.

Stride seeks opportunities for women to demonstrate their strengths. When providing new volunteers with a tour of the prison, we ask a woman who demonstrates good organizational and interpersonal skills to guide the tour.

When we facilitate an intake for Circles, our paperwork begins with exploring a woman's talents, skills, and capacity to be a friend before we talk about harms she is responsible for in the past. By no means does Stride ever want to minimize a woman's crime or ignore that there are ripples of harm she caused that others are continuing to live with. As detailed later in this section, Stride must be fully aware of a woman's charges both laid outside and inside the prison before she is supported to join a Circle. We aim to hold these two truths; that she has caused harm and that she has strengths that require nurturing.



e) Community Participation

Stride is based on restorative justice principles. Stride is designed not only to prepare the women for their release, but also to prepare the community to receive them. If our focus were only on assisting women in reaching their goals for successful reintegration, yet she was relocating to a community who had no knowledge of, or empathy toward, women in the justice system, then our efforts would surely fail.

Where we can invite someone from the community to provide a workshop at Stride Night, or to come in for a tour of the prison, we make every effort to see this through. People are highly impacted by their visit to a prison and these impacts lead to our guests talking to others about issues concerning our justice system. More often than not, it also leads to our guests asking how else they can continue to participate in Stride.

The third benefit of continuously involving the community in Stride is that it creates a connection between women and the services they might need in the future. Stride often brings guest such as the Ontario Early Years Centre, Women For Sobriety, or sexual abuse services into the prison to not only provide a workshop, but to build a connection with women so that they might be more open to accessing these services when they move back into the community.

Opportunities to Assist With Successful Reintegration

The needs of women moving out of prison and into the community are urgent, diverse and lacking. There are some reintegration issues that she will be aware of – those that are tangible, practical and are necessary for her survival. In addition to these issues are those which the woman is often totally unprepared for. Emotional issues, the fear of leaving the secure prison environment, leaving established inmate relationships behind, and leaving staff who have been particularly helpful. She fears a loss of structure. She fears starting over. She fears failure. And, remarkably, she fears success.

Stride does not pretend to be the only solution to positive reintegration. Functioning, well-funded systems to support safe and affordable housing, income supports, employers who will hire persons with criminal records, and access to effective mental health and addictions supports are crucial. (See Appendix A for a list of women's formal, informal and emotional needs after incarceration.) However, Circles can create bonds of trust that help women

cope with perceived stress and stigma, and develop a more positive sense of self. In particular, Circles seem to play a role in women developing stronger perceptions of the positive aspects associated with the stigma of incarceration.

Experience working with women reintegrating has demonstrated that there are many important issues that she may be finding challenging at the least, unbearable at worst. If we can understand even some of the complexity of what she is experiencing, we can better support her. The issues listed below remind us that her challenges to successfully re-integrate are not due to her character, but caused by poverty, oppression, and systems which are designed to be difficult to navigate.

The women request a Stride Circle:

- Want to take responsibility for their lives
- Want to make positive lifestyle changes
- Do not want to come back to prison

Unresolved Trauma Issues

We know that about 85% of women in prison have experienced abuse prior to their incarceration. Indeed, exposure to neglect or violence be it physical or sexual will be the underlying reason that women have offended. For many, **being incarcerated will have compounded that trauma**. While counselling is available to women in GVI, it is short term and offense focused. Deeper, painful issues such as childhood sexual abuse, abandonment, a lack of safety provided by parents, or incest, will not be dealt with during incarceration.

Abuse and neglect can cause people to feel unworthy, unlovable and shameful. Imagine then how being sent to prison compounds this self-identity. Consequently, women will not only leave prison with their original wounds, but with compounded issues as well.

You can **tell women that counselling helps**. How? By helping her make connections of how the past is informing the present, by helping her regulate difficult emotions and by giving her tools to contain painful thoughts and memories.

Like any profession, not all counsellors are great. Even if they are great, a woman should have the opportunity to **see if there is a good 'fit' when she first meets with a counselor**. She can consider her first appointment an interview. She can ask "How much experience do you have with people with my issue? How will I know that I am doing better? What type of therapy do you use and how does it work?"



Fear of Leaving the Prison

There are many fears associated with leaving the prison. It has been the inmate's home for an extended period of time. Prison often represents safety, security, positive relationships, structure, a sense of community, etc. A woman may also be fearful of what she is returning to in her own community. Fear of leaving might be unexpected or unrecognized by the woman.

It is important to **acknowledge** the woman's experiences and feelings about leaving prison. Make sure she knows that you understand what she is going through. Commend her for her self-awareness. With awareness of her feelings and their cause(s), she can now take steps to work them through and to progress.

Encourage the woman to speak to someone in the prison that she trusts it could be the chaplain, her Primary Worker (PW), a psychologist, a staff member, or a volunteer that she feels comfortable with. These people know how to help the woman to prepare for her departure.

You can also **refer her** to community agencies or organization. Refer to the "Resources" section at the back of this manual for a listing of agencies that assist women who have been in prison. Maybe a support organization like Stride can help to ease the transition.

Finally, **encourage** her to make plans for her departure. What does she need to do? Who does she need help from to do things? Help her understand that a plan will definitely ease the fear of the unknown.

Emotional Needs

A woman's feelings around leaving GVI are complex. They range from sheer joy and excitement, to the often unexpected, and sometimes unrecognized panic. It is important to listen and reassure her that her often-**conflicting emotions are quite normal**. Help her sort out the different feelings that she has, and ask her to start to identify the root causes of those feelings. By untangling these feelings and identifying what the causes are, the woman can then move into problem solving mode, and with your support, she can start to set up strategies of dealing with her issues one by one.

Be aware that the woman may resist sorting through her feelings because chaos helps her to feel numb, and in turn feel safe. Creating chaos can be a coping mechanism, which may be a longstanding pattern for the woman, when she feels unable or unwilling to hope for other possibilities.

Parole Hearing

When the woman is eligible for parole, she works with her Parole Officer to develop her correctional plan. She then goes before the Parole Board a process that is very intimidating, to present her case. Her lawyer and her Parole Officer will be with her, as may other supportive parties. The Parole Board is a separate entity from Correction Services of Canada and therefore GVI. GVI will do everything in their power to support the woman in her hearing if they support her plan. If she is turned down for parole, she will not get another hearing for 1-2 years. Therefore there is a lot riding on her hearing.

Again, it is important to provide supportive listening. If the woman needs to find out more about the process, **suggest she talk to her Parole Officer or her lawyer**. This may be easier said than done, as women are unable to receive phone calls while in the prison. Asking for the help of the chaplain, her PW and other staff members may be part of her strategy.

Help her identify how she can advocate on her own behalf to secure the help of her Parole Officer and lawyer. The squeaky wheel gets the oil, but the woman doesn't want to squeak so loudly that the proverbial wheel gets put aside.

Passes

At a certain point in her sentence, a woman becomes eligible for escorted temporary absences (ETA's) and unescorted temporary absences (UTA's). There is however a shortage of trained volunteers and accommodations for women wanting to utilize this privilege.

Encourage the woman to **advocate on her own behalf to her PW or her PO**, and if that doesn't work, to try the chaplain or the reintegration officer. Further concerns can be taken to the Inmate Committee. It is important that the woman know that sometimes things take time, but if she keeps asking the right people, her needs will more than likely be met.

Support Services

Currently there is no Community Support Worker whose position is designed to better support and link the woman with resources and services in her own community. There are also a number of community agencies that are striving to better meet the extensive and complex reintegration needs of the women. The reality is that those services either don't yet exist or are just starting to get established.

A woman may feel frustrated and overwhelmed with the lack of help and information on what is



available to her in the community. Listen and validate her feelings. If she is still at GVI, suggest that she approach her PO and PW for help. The PO and the PW can also contact community services such as Stride, Elizabeth Fry, and Community Chaplaincy on her behalf. **Encourage the woman to start early in her planning and problem solving**, and to thoroughly check out her options in order to develop for herself as comprehensive a plan as possible.

If she is in the community (or at a half-way house/treatment centre), use your own knowledge of community resources to help the woman, and contact the Stride office for support.

Parenting/Custody

The woman may have all sorts of parenting issues that intensify with her plans to return to the community. She may have put her kids in the care of a relative or the child's father. Failing to find a suitable guardian, the child may have been placed into foster care through Family and Children's Services or the Children's Aid Society (FAC & CAS). The woman may have had limited access to visits and phone calls with her children. Sometimes the woman's children are angry and refuse to visit or correspond with her. Sometimes the child's father refuses the woman contact with her child(ren), and sometimes CAS puts up roadblocks.

The separation of mother and child is difficult enough under normal circumstances. When the child has not talked to or spent time with their mother for an extended period, it can be extremely traumatic for both of them. Her child(ren) may have intensifying issues of abandonment. The child, if very young, may not remember the mother. **A woman can lose confidence in her abilities as a parent.** Through all of this, the woman may also need to ready herself for a custody battle.

The woman may have taken courses in parenting, or participated in counselling. She often has very high hopes of her reunification with her children. The woman often tries to regain custody prematurely in her reintegration process.

Once the woman is back in her community with her child(ren), the realities of parenting can feel overwhelming. The children may act strange with her. If they are older, they have had to get along without her for the past few months/years. **Where does she fit?** Will the limits she sets be respected?

Siblings may have been separated while their mother was in prison. They now have to deal not only with having their mother back, but also to each other. There can be significant rivalry for mom's attention, manifested by severe acting out towards each other, their mother and the community as a whole.

With parenting issues, it is important to listen and provide support to the woman. **Help her sort out her feelings from her practical concerns.** Make sure that she understands that parenting is not about being perfect. Reassure her that learning to cope with the stresses of parenting is a normal concern of all parents. Let her know that she is not alone. Encourage her to think creatively about how she can maintain contact with her children and if appropriate, their caregiver(s).

In planning to leave the facility, help ground her in the realities of returning to active parenting, and the issues she may need to consider. How can she remain realistic in her perspective and goals of parenting?

If she is in the institution encourage her to discuss her hopes and fears with other inmates and staff. If she is outside the institution, make her aware of the opportunities and supports around parenting, (i.e. support groups, peer supports, parenting courses, family counselling). It is important for the woman to know that she is not alone in her struggles and that they are quite normal, she should understand that help is available.

Sexual Identity

It is important to respect the sexual identity of others whether they are heterosexual, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or define their sexuality in other ways. Women who do not identify as heterosexual will have faced countless **ignorance, threats, and in some situations, even violence** before prison, in prison, and likely, after prison. While our society has evolved considerably on same sex and transgender acceptance, a woman, based on her sexual and gender identity, (if not "female" and "straight") will face barriers obtaining housing, employment and parenting support. Her struggles here are not a reflection on her skills and willingness, but on our society which often discriminates.

A woman may be confused about her sexuality. Although increasing your education on issues of sexuality is a positive thing, it's not helpful to ask her questions about her sexuality. LGBT folks are constantly asked questions about their sexuality and it's not their job to be teachers. If you want to learn more about LGBT issues, look online, get a book, or call the OUTline.

The woman needs to be supported by her Circle to help sort through her feelings/issues. **Providing resources or referrals may be helpful.** If you are uncomfortable, don't pretend that you aren't. Name it. You can say that this topic is not comfortable for you because you haven't had much experience with it, but that you very much want to support her with her feelings and decision making.



Drugs/Alcohol

Drugs and alcohol are unfortunately readily available in prison. If the woman is in recovery and struggling to stay sober, you may need to **help her by talking her through it**. Ask her, how long she has been sober and acknowledge her accomplishment. Get her to “play the tape” all the way through, meaning, ask her questions like; “if you were to use then what would happen.... then what then what...” until she can remember/see the long-term consequences of using drugs verses short-term relief.

A woman may be receiving pressure to use drugs or alcohol when in the community. She will need lots of support from her circle while she is receiving these pressures. Listen to her concerns. Ask her to identify what she is risking by using drugs or alcohol. Ask her to identify her options, have her outline ways she can say “no” or possible ways in which she can solicit support from her circle to strengthen her saying “no”. She also has the option of seeking help from community supports like support groups, counselors etc.

Check into see if her Addiction Support is helpful to her recovery work. Ask her if she feels safe at AA/NA. Does she feel that her counselor understands her? Are the tools that she is being given to help her helping? Sometimes it takes “shopping around” to find the right ‘fit’ for support. She may feel pressure to say that things are going really well when in fact they are not. There are almost always alternative programs to try.

Trashing the System

Blaming and putting the responsibility outside the self can behaviour of some inmates. Women experience lots of frustrations with prison life, due to insufficient resources and discrimination.

While there is a need for a place where women can dump their inevitable and often valid frustrations about “the System”, it is important not to allow this to be their only focus. Supporting the woman to look at changing the things they have control over verses complaining about what can’t be changed is important. It is a skill that needs to be constantly reinforced among a population who is disenfranchised and doesn’t understand where their power is in the world. **Helping her to reframe her situation** and to set up personal strategies for change, is empowering and essential for women who truly want change in their lives.

My Circle sees the good in me and they believe in me and my future. They don't judge me based on what I've done or where I'm coming from and they don't take advantage of any of my vulnerabilities, but rather respect them and help me however they can.

Creating a Stride Circle

At first, I had no friends and very little support, so my Circle took that role and gave me a very high level of support. Now I have other people in my life, and the Circle doesn't need to play that role anymore. I was strongly in need of it at first. Invaluable help from them!

– Valtchanov & Arai, 2013

Being clear on the objectives of a Circle, having well trained, supervised and supported volunteers, as well as a Circle woman who is committed to the work that it takes to build and sustain relationships are the ingredients for putting together a Circle in that will move into the community. The following section outline how Stride facilitates Circle building including being clear on the objectives of a Circle, the Nuts and Bolts of facilitating Circle building, training volunteers, assessing a woman’s readiness to participate in Circles and supporting the Circles with issues as they arise.

Being clear on the purpose of a Circle is something that Stride works hard to build an understanding of. A Circle cannot replace the importance to access to formal systems such as housing, income and health care. What it can do, is listed below:

Objectives of Stride Circles

- To provide consistent yet flexible support that will change and evolve according to changing Circle dynamics and needs.
- To encourage the discovery and development of personal strengths and resources.
- To encourage the exploration of community supports and opportunities.
- To augment support provided by professionals.
- To help facilitate positive problem solving and decision making.
- To seek information and help develop awareness of available options.
- To help facilitate crisis management.
- To provide a reasonable level of practical support (e.g. transportation, moving, accompanying to appointments).
- To offer social support.

Guiding principles

- Stride Circles recognize that women have the inherent ability to address their own needs, to learn, and to make their own decisions.
- Stride Circles are based on principles of mutual responsibility, respect, and recognition of humanity.



- Stride Circles provide emotional and practical support in ways that enhance self-esteem and capacity and enable people to recognize their skills and strengths.
- Stride Circles assist women as they explore all aspects of their lives (spiritual, emotional, physical, social, and intellectual).
- Stride Circles help foster safe, healthy, and caring communities that are welcoming and free from judgment.

See Appendix C for Stride’s Circle Movie, which tells the story of how Circle volunteers social supports impacted a woman’s life after prison

The strength of a Stride Circle comes from the naturalness of its members and their ability to be open and share.

The Nuts and Bolts of Facilitating Circle Building

Facilitating Circle building takes time and strong relationships. Image A, below, illustrates the work of the work of the Circle Coordinator to get to know, prepare and support the volunteers and incarcerated women before bringing them together in a Circle. Truly, being able to build relationships with a diverse group of people is a necessary skill for a Circle Coordinator.

Introducing a Woman to a Circle

Before women can choose a Stride Circle for support, they must be aware of its existence and have enough information upon which to make an informed decision. The volunteer must also have the knowledge about the Circles program.

Information is disseminated through the following ways:

- Pamphlets
- Communication during Stride Night
- Messages on the Teledon at the prison
- Regular e-mails and pamphlets to prison staff
- Word of mouth

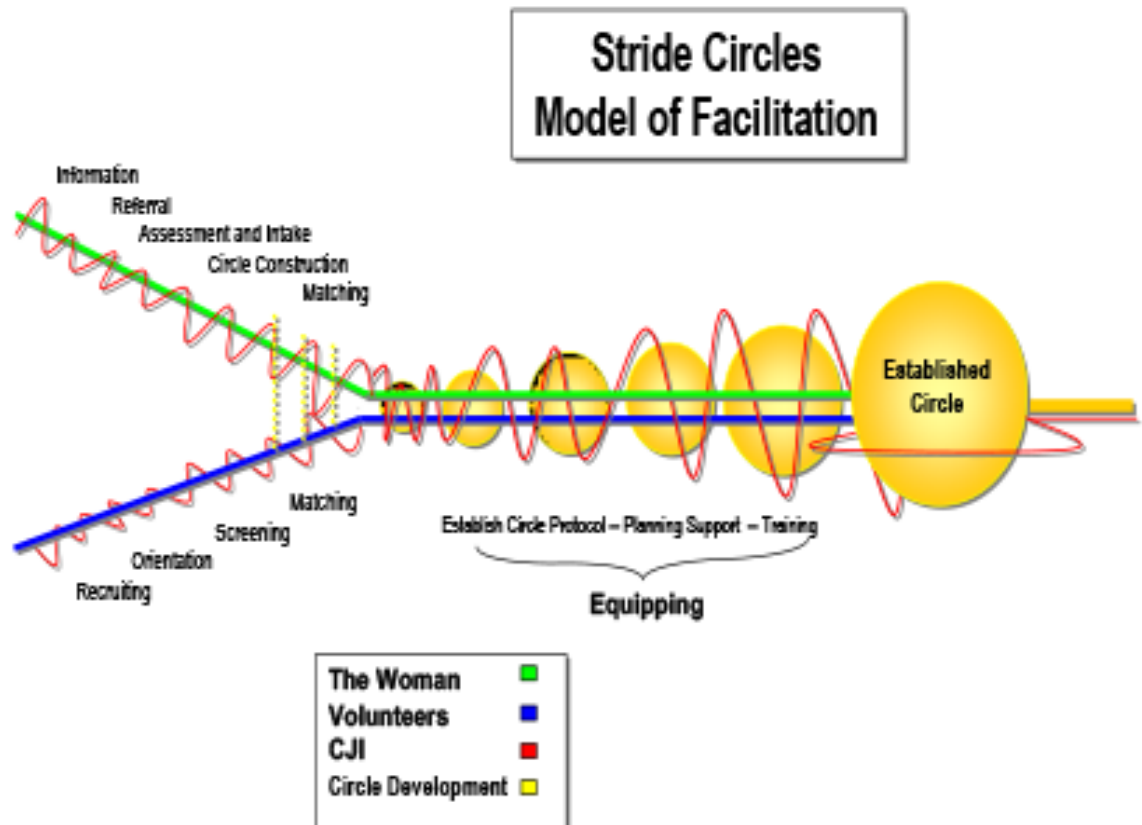
Referral

A woman can verbally refer herself to Stride Circles. This process would simply entail her letting a Stride staff person know that she would like to have a Circle. Stride staff will meet with a woman within two weeks of the request to complete an initial assessment.

Assessment

An assessment will cover:

- information about Stride Circles
- what kind of support a woman is seeking from a Circle
- Stride Circle eligibility criteria (see below)





To be eligible for a Circle a woman should:

- > be planning to move to an area where a Circle can be supported)
- > be seeking support for purposes of a healthy reintegration
- > agree to produce her copy of her Correctional Plan and other related documentation for verification of personal history
- > agree to be part of the Circle development process (i.e., attend meetings, set and follow basic ground rules)
- > be assessed at mid or low risk
- > agree to maintain treatment for mental health or addiction issues if required
- > ideally be a minimum of 4 months from her release date, however, this is not required

Intake

Once it has been established that a woman wants a Circle and that she meets the criteria, the intake can proceed. Three things are achieved through intake:

1. Information is gathered from the woman relating to the creation of her Circle, including:

- the community to which she wishes to live upon her release
- her general discharge plans; housing, employment, treatment and other goals
- her specific needs and issues
- the potential make-up of her Circle (i.e. how many volunteers, age, backgrounds, interests, life circumstances, etc.)
- a review of her current supports
- her skills
- her vulnerability to the barriers of reintegrating successfully

Form 14s can be signed to allow Stride staff to exchange relevant information with professionals (e.g., institutional and community parole officers and the halfway house).

Informal Consent is facilitated, providing the woman with information about how her information is stored, viewed and reported on.

2. Verification of criminal history is done

Stride staff informs all women at the beginning of intake that their Correctional Plan and other relevant correctional documents must be viewed to verify information provided verbally. Women are asked to bring copies of the following documents to one of the meetings:

- Correctional Plan (completed within 90 days)
- Risk Assessment (for Schedule 1 offences and repeat history)
- Intake assessment (within 60 days)
- A for D for Parole (any release)

3. An orientation to Stride Circles is conducted

Women are given a Stride Circles Orientation Package and ongoing meetings are arranged to prepare her to be a member of a Circle. Discussions at these meetings focus on:

- what she can expect from a Stride Circle
- her roles and responsibilities
- what should be disclosed to her Circle (e.g., criminal history, family situation, issues around addiction, and plans for the future)
- What strengths she brings to the Circle
- Issues relating to self-awareness

It is important that trust develops between the Stride Circle Coordinator and women wanting Circles. This trust helps set the stage for trust to also be developed within the Circle.

They accept me for who I am and they genuinely like me. We also do positive things together, which helps everyone involved.

I have never met anyone like my Circle members whom I choose to call my friends today.

– Stride Circle Participant

Introducing Volunteers to the Circle

Matching

Ideally, a woman can choose volunteers for her Circle who she has gotten to know at Stride Night. However, in situations where women seeking Circles have not had the opportunity to bond with volunteers, CJI staff may help to facilitate connections. Such connections do not always lead to a match for Circles so it is important to present people with the opportunity to opt out of being part of a Circle when the match does not feel right.



Developing the Circle

The Stride Circle Coordinator will take a leadership role in initiating the Circles' development. They will use their judgement, based on the skills and dynamics present in the Circle, to determine how to best facilitate its development. Some Circles may need more structure than others in the initial stages. However, all Circles are encouraged to get to the point where they can guide their own process.

Circles members will need to spend time nurturing relationships and making a personal investment to the group. Bonding is an integral part of Circle development. If relationships are not established, the Circle is unlikely to persevere in the face of conflicts and challenges. Eventually the Coordinator's role will be minimal and offer support primarily when the need for it is identified or required by Circle members.

While each Circle develops differently, a consistent observation is that the longer Circle members have to get to know each other before a woman is released from GVI, the stronger the relationships are among members.

The Stride Circle Coordinator is working to achieve the following three main goals during the Circle development process:

1. To support the woman in dealing with on-going issues related to her release
2. To assist members of the Circle as they gain comfort and skills associated with group processes
3. To support relationship development between members of the Circle.

The first several meetings that are facilitated with Circle members are typically structured as follows:

1st meeting:

- introductions
- identification of members' hopes and expectations for the group
- identification of the strengths that each individual brings to the group

2nd meeting:

- a review of what was discussed at the previous meeting
- establishing ground rules for the group (this may take two meetings)

3rd meeting:

- revisiting and adding to ground rules
- providing structure for future meetings; where, when, who and how

Creating and Maintaining a Healthy Circle

Circle Guidelines

Circle guidelines will, for the most part, be explored and defined by the Circle itself. They should be documented for future reference and to enable new members to gain awareness of previously established guidelines. The Circle Coordinator, if asked, can assist the Circle with thinking these guidelines through.

Before entering a Circle, ask yourself, what is important to you in a new relationship?

1. When and how often and by what means do you prefer for people to contact you?
2. What time frame do you want people to return your calls?
3. What process do you want to see regarding bringing new people into the Circle?
4. How will you best deal with conflict in a group?
5. When, if at all, will you introduce your family to your Circle?
6. How much of your own history of trauma will you share in your Circle?

*See Appendix B for the Circle Guidelines that you will complete with your Circle

Time spent together as a Circle may include:

- listening and sharing
- engaging in a leisure activity and exploring new hobbies
- socializing
- talking about concerns
- celebrating special occasions, milestones, etc.
- goal setting and planning
- crisis problem solving
- non crisis problem solving
- going to appointments and various community activities
- going on a hike
- attending CJI events
- volunteering together

A balance between individual and group activity is key to establishing a strong and healthy group process. Adequate communication between all individuals within the group is needed to achieve this balance. Relationship building and trust can be jeopardized by too much time spent together as a group and not enough time spent with each other



an individual basis. However, too much individual interaction may undermine the purpose and function of the group.

Locations that are ideal for spending time together are those that are private, safe, and accessible to all group members, and minimize the possibility of being interrupted.

Establishing Ground Rules

Although some ground rules, such as confidentiality, are already established, it is important for the Circle to discuss in detail what the existing ground rules mean and establish other ground rules specific to the individual needs within each Circle. This process ensures that everyone in the Circle has the same understanding of one another's limits and expectations. Maintained, it establishes a structure through which Circle members can build a foundation of trust and co-operation.

Ground rules need to be established around the following issues:

Confidentiality - what is it and what happens if it is violated?

Meeting structure - when and where to meet, what happens if members miss meetings, the process for calling an emergency meeting

Daily contact schedule - if and when to exchange home phone numbers, how support can be provided during the night, and what happens when a person is not available?

Alcohol – how to deal with issues around alcohol consumption

Violation of parole -- how should it be handled?

New members – agree to a process for inviting and training new members to join the Circle

Conflict resolution/decision making – does the Circle want all decisions to be made on consensus?

Transportation/Personal liability – who has the proper insurance to be providing transportation?

Process of addressing concerns within the group – how this happens and whose responsibility it is

Inviting guests – if, when and how professionals and family are invited to meetings

Violation of Circle ground rules - what to do if a member repeatedly breaks the ground rules

Information sharing – with whom information is shared with and how this occurs

Accountability – how to establish mutual expectations, open and honest communication, trust, and commitment to legal obligations

Manipulation

Using manipulation to having one's needs met is a concern regardless of who in the Circle is doing the manipulating. When people twist words or remember differently from the group, it may be a sign that they lack any other tools to get the outcome that they are seeking. If Circle members suspect manipulation is happening, it is best to talk about it as a whole and to take notes of the agreed upon resolution.

Confidentiality

Both legal and personal confidentiality within a Circle must be respected at all times. This means that any discussion that takes place within the Circle will not be discussed outside of the Circle unless previously agreed upon by members.

A person who suspects that a crime is occurring does not have to report it however if the persons suspicions are confirmed because they have witnessed the crime or have been told that the crime has occurred, and by not reporting this crime to the police or other designated agency the person is in some way aiding or abetting the crime to take place, they may be liable under section 22 of the Criminal Code. (Rare).

Exceptions to guidelines around confidentiality occur when¹:

- all suspicions of child abuse or neglect must be reported²
- Reporting abuse is mandatory when the victim lives in a long-term care home or a retirement home
- If you have a Professional obligation to report a crime

The above information must be reported to the appropriate authorities (such as the parole officer, Family and Children Services, etc.) as well as Stride Staff. Women should be encouraged to take responsibility for the reporting, with support, whenever possible. To avoid any confusion, Circle members should discuss the meaning of harm upfront so everyone is clear about its definition.

Adult protection laws have been introduced through private members bills but have yet to be adopted. The one exception is in nursing homes, wherein a person must report to the Director of Nursing Homes if they suspect that a resident has suffered or may suffer harm as a result of unlawful conduct, improper or incompetent treatment or care or neglect.

¹ These are the exceptions for the Province of Ontario.

² The Childhood Sexual abuse of an adult is not legally required to be reported, however if this offender presently has unsupervised access to children, it may cause you to suspect abuse and therefore it should be reported.



While reporting abuse should not be delayed, the Circle Coordinator is available, even off hours, to support you in your decision-making. They may have information to help you make, or not make, your report. If a volunteer has any questions about what and how to make a report, they should contact their supervisor as soon as possible.

Growing the Circle

Once the Circle is established and meeting regularly, consider and discuss who else might support the woman. Perhaps her Sponsor, someone from her religious community, or her neighbour could become included in Circle activities and discussions.

Boundaries

A boundary refers to how one **presents, protects and preserves** oneself. Types of boundaries include:

1. **Physical boundaries** (example: an individual is not touched unless asked and permission has been given)
2. **Social boundaries** (example: friends do not call after certain times unless there is an emergency)
3. **Professional boundaries** (example: a professional does not disclose their home address or phone number to clients)

Since some boundaries are individual in nature, they need to be negotiated between Circle members. Any questions and or concerns around boundaries should be brought to the Circle for discussion and clarification. Boundaries are designed to serve each individual involved in the Circle. We communicate boundaries in different ways such as verbally or with body language. However, many people do not pick up on messages sent through body language and so Stride recommends that volunteers discuss their boundaries with their Circle.

There is often a need to renegotiate boundaries as one's relationships with people evolves. It is important to note that people who come from dysfunctional or abusive families may lack a clear understanding of boundaries. Their boundaries may not be too rigid or too loose and/or they may feel upset by other's boundaries. A circle can be a place to model positive methods of dealing with boundary violations.

Boundary issues that may be encountered within a Circle include:

Engaging in behavior that is enabling - Enabling behaviour is that which is usually intended to support or protect an individual but instead results in supporting unhealthy conduct. An example of

behavior that is enabling would be covering for individuals who have breached their parole instead of supporting them to take responsibility.

DEVELOPING UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS - THE AIM OF THE CIRCLE IS TO CREATE A NETWORK OF MEANINGFUL, SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS THAT POTENTIALLY DEVELOP INTO FRIENDSHIPS. THERE IS, HOWEVER, THE RISK OF DEVELOPING UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE CIRCLE.

An unhealthy relationship is characterized as one which:

- conflict is not addressed
- enables unhealthy and/or criminal behaviour
- removes the focus from the business of the Circle
- takes advantage of a power differential within the Circle
- creates conflict and bad feelings between Circle members
- fosters dependence on one member

It is up to members of the Circle as a whole to hold each other accountable when it comes to avoiding unhealthy relationships. Any relationship issues that arise should be brought forth within the Circle to find a resolution. Stride staff may be brought in as a resource as required.

Offering financial support - Since financial support can become an issue of power, control, and manipulation, it is not something that should occur within a Circle. An exception might occur when the Circle has discussed a crisis situation and identified that the only reasonable way to deal with the crisis is for a member (or some members) to help out financially. In this case, a contract will be drawn up detailing the terms of the support, including agreement as to when the sum of money will be repaid. A contract helps ensure that everyone understands the agreement and limits any potential miscommunication. If financial crisis becomes a pattern, the Circle should work together to define some more long-term financial solutions.

Values and beliefs inappropriately influencing decisions - It is important that members of Circles are aware of their values and beliefs and establish boundaries around what is and what is not appropriate to be brought into the Circle. While member's opinions are vital to Circle development, they should not undermine a healthy decision making process. In other words, women should not be pressured or shamed into doing what other Circle members deem to be the 'right' thing to do. The following scenarios depict situations where



values and beliefs may inappropriately influence how decisions within a Circle are made:

- a) *A woman is pregnant and is seeking support from her Circle to obtain an abortion.*
- b) *A woman is struggling with her sexual identity and her Circle member is uncomfortable with this topic believing that same sex relationships are immoral. She discourages the woman from reaching out to LGBT supports.*
- c) *A woman wants to stay in a relationship which her Circle members think is abusive.*
- d) *A woman decides to supplement her income through working in the sex trade.*
- e) *A woman decides not to work toward obtaining the custody of her children. She is no longer interested in parenting.*

Voicing one's own values may undermine a woman's decision making process.

The strength of a Stride Circle comes from the authenticity of its members and their ability to be open and share. Circle volunteers are all encouraged to share some of their personal struggles, vulnerabilities and past mistakes as appropriate. This sharing helps women who are reintegrating to understand that fear, insecurity and other emotions are part of the human condition. Sharing among Circle members also helps women reframe experiences, develop coping strategies, and expand options that can lead to real change.

Responsibility of all Stride Circle Members:

- Share their individual needs and limits with the Circle
- Respect other Circle members by following the ground rules that have been agreed upon
- Both share and listen,
- Be open to receiving feedback
- Participate in the process of developing the Circle

Responsibilities of the Stride Circle Coordinator:

The Stride Circle Coordinator is to coach and mentor the Stride Circle in its initial stages of development, gradually stepping back to enable relationships within the Circle to grow and shift. She will meet with the woman to discuss the Circles program, review her Correctional paperwork (see p. 20) and invite potential volunteers to join her Circle. She will assist in the more formal aspects of the Circle such as:

- inviting volunteers into the Circle
- communicating with GVI, parole, and the halfway house as appropriate
- creating venues to start to meet, and
- checking in with all persons' involved to ensure that all involved feel positive and well supported.

As the Circle evolves, the Stride staff's presence will diminish. As her role in the Circle shrinks, she will continue to support the Circle through phone call check ins, Circle Peer Support, Crisis Management support, Volunteer Supervision, and Volunteer Training.

An Established Circle

Once a Circle is established it becomes much more autonomous. CJJ staff members are available for on-going support and remain in contact for purposes of evaluation but they place a much less instrumental role.

The following captures what is happening as a Circle becomes established:

- There is regular Circle activity including group and individual meetings during which there is a commitment to working through challenges together and a commitment to the process
- Relationships strengthen and grow between members of the Circle that are characterized by natural, informal interaction and mutual accountability and commitment
- The Circle becomes increasingly autonomous and is guided and driven by its members
- Circle members might come to define one another as friends

Sometimes a woman will want to give back to Stride. While she may not be able to volunteer in the prison for Stride Night, we would welcome her to share her "Stride Story" with our new volunteers and the greater community. We could also include her in Circle Training allowing her to participate in a new Circle, but this time as a volunteer. These decisions would be evaluated case by case, however the goal of not keeping anyone in their role as "victim" or "offender" is an important working principle of CJJ.

Sometimes after a great experience being in a Stride Circle, a woman will want to close the door on her contact with Stride. It is important to respect this decision and let her move forward in her life as she chooses.



CJI staff provides on-going Circle support through regular telephone and/or email contact with Circle members, by facilitating Peer Support Meetings, Supervisions, Stride on the Outside³ and by providing on-going training to Circle members.

When A Circle Doesn't Work Out

Not all Circles last for years, and not all end in feelings of friendship. A Circle typically dissolves for the following reasons:

1. The woman does not attend the Circle meetings scheduled at GVI
2. The woman does not provide the required CSC paperwork
3. The Circle was developed to close to her release date and when the woman was released, ongoing contact was difficult, or felt unnatural
4. The woman relapses
5. There are un resolved unhealthy feelings of jealousy between Circle members
6. The woman stops returning phone calls
7. The woman reoffends

Stride staff can support volunteers by arranging a meeting to resolve any conflict and create a plan for moving forward. However, sometimes despite the best efforts of volunteers and staff, a woman makes it clear by not returning calls, or by continually breaching guidelines, that she is not able to participate in a Circle. After some effort to resolve disputes, Stride staff, in consultation with Circle members, will dissolve the Circle.

It can be disappointing for volunteers to have this experience. It is not the experience that most volunteers are seeking when they volunteer with Stride Circles. Not having closure, or a healthy discussion about dissolving the Circle it not a comfortable feeling for many. Stride staff want to support volunteers through this experience and you can contact us to reflect on the experience and support any feelings one might have around this Circle.

³ Stride on the Outside is a program currently in development. More to come later!



Appendices

Appendix A: Women's Formal, Informal and Emotional Needs After Incarceration

Formal Needs	Informal Needs	Emotional Needs
<p>What: clear, concrete needs</p> <p>When: should begin as soon as women come into the institution since addressing formal needs often involves long processes and waiting lists.</p> <p>Who: a Circle can support a woman in identifying her needs and developing possible solutions which link her to appropriate professional services.</p>	<p>What: needs which enhance quality of life</p> <p>When: informal needs often get identified closer to release or when women enter community.</p> <p>How: addressing these needs often requires quick problem solving and usually does not involve professional services.</p>	<p>What: need for comfort, security, belonging, safety, friendship</p> <p>When: often becomes intensified as a woman approaches her release date and/or after she enters community.</p> <p>Who/How: By the Circle being there for her, calling, visiting, asking questions. Linking to community supports.</p>
<p>Formal needs include, but are not limited to the need for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • housing • identification (i.e. health card, birth certificate) • education • jobs/ career counseling • professional counseling • daycare • immigration services • legal services • medication (i.e. methadone, antidepressants) – prescriptions – family doctor • prerequisites to be met for treatment programs • family doctor • social assistance • reunification of family 	<p>Informal needs include but are not limited to the need for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clothing • furniture • orientation to the community, (i.e. learning how to use the transit system) • transportation – getting to court, going to the grocery store, picking up belongings • baby sitting • ETA/UTAs 	<p>Emotional needs include but are not limited to the need for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positive development around self-identity and sense of belonging • support for reintegration into community, family and the workplace • support for healthy decision making and problem solving • recognizing and celebrating of achievements • managing crisis • support around parenting • developing strategies to increase one's sense of safety and containment • minimizing boredom, and enhancing quality of life



Appendix B – Circle Guidelines:



Circle Guidelines

Circle Facilitator: _____

Circle Members: _____

Date: _____

Confidentiality/Information Sharing What will we tell other people about our Circle? What won't we share? Are there exceptions? What about information shared within the Circle?

Meetings How often will we meet as a Circle? How will we spend our time together?

Daily Contact Schedule What method(s) of communication will we use: texting, emails, phone calls? When is it not okay to call?

Alcohol/Smoking Is consuming alcohol a risk? When is it appropriate, if at all? Is anyone sensitive to the smell of cigarettes?

Violation of Parole Are there any stipulations the Circle should know about? How should the Circle proceed if any of the parole violations are not followed?

New Members/Inviting Guests Should other people be allowed to come to Circle meetings? If so, who and for what purpose? How should guests be introduced to Circle? Should anyone else be added to the Circle at this time?



Conflict Resolution/Decision Making How should concerns within the Circle be dealt with? Who should take the lead? How will important decisions that affect the Circle be made? When should the Circle Coordinator be brought in for support?

Transportation/Personal Liability Are any of the Circle members able to provide transportation if needed? Do you have appropriate insurance? When will transportation be needed? What about driving non-Circle members?

Violation of Circle Ground Rules How should the Circle proceed if any of the ground rules are broken? Who should take the lead? What are some of the potential outcomes?

Accountability What can we expect from each other? What if a Circle member is not doing their part? How should the Circle proceed?

Safety Issues Does anyone in the Circle have people in their lives who could present a danger to the other Circle members? What would be the next step? Is there anything the Circle should know about before beginning to meet in the community?

Other Concerns Is there anything else, that was not covered, that would make you feel better about moving forward as a Circle?



Appendix C – Circle Movie

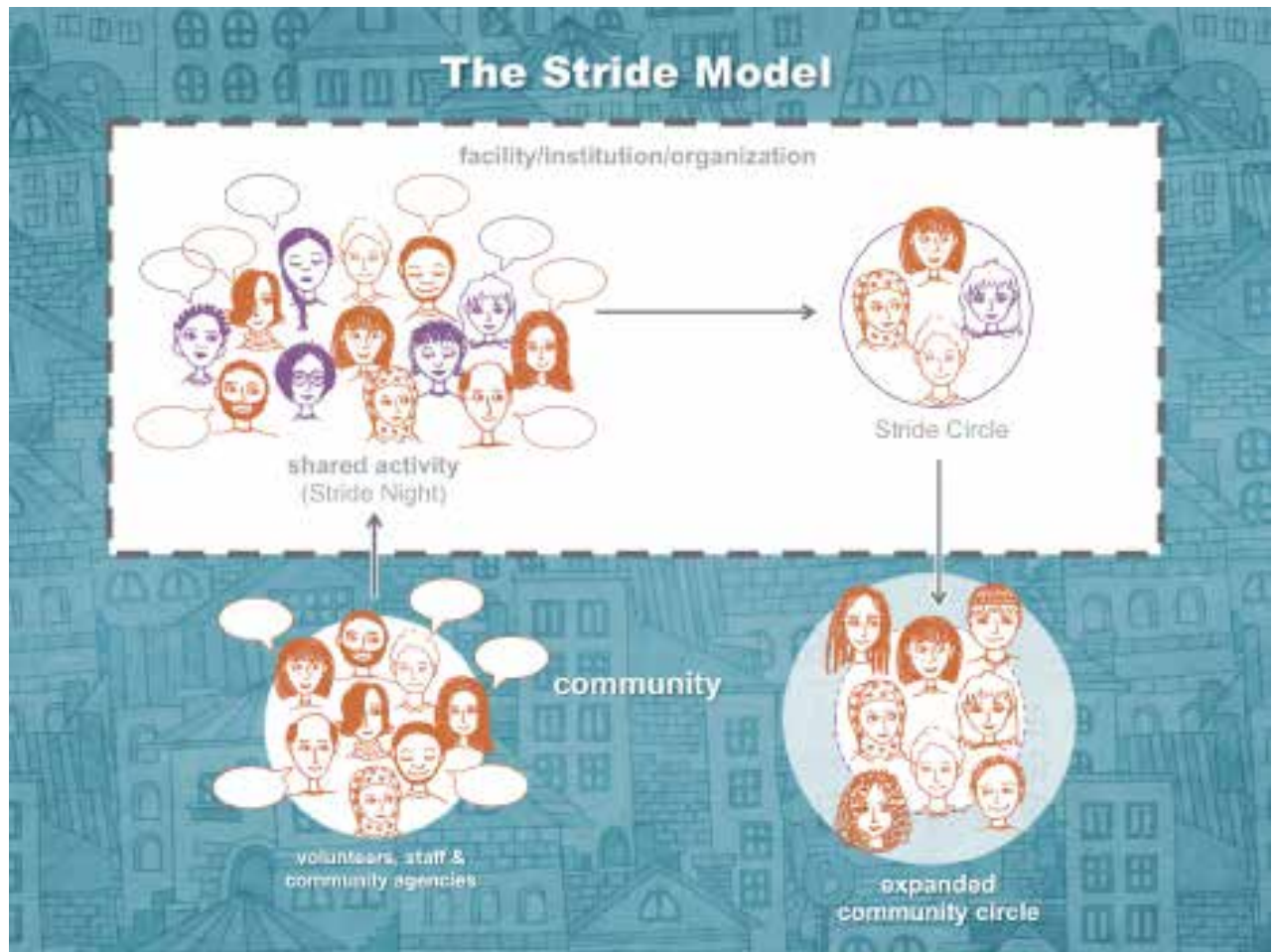
Click the link to watch a 6 minute short film about one woman's story of reintegration with the support of a Circle

<https://vimeo.com/199365334>

After watching, please consider the following questions for discussion:

- What did you hear the narrator say was difficult about leaving prison and returning home?
- What did you hear her say her Circle provided for her that helped with her reintegration?
- Federal Institutions offer a great deal of programming aimed at helping women with future decision making. Why would the additional support of Circles, therefore, be necessary?
- Paid staff, with a high level of education on the needs of women who have been incarcerated could provide a similar service. What are some of the benefits of having volunteers provide this service?
- What would need to change in our criminal justice system so that women no longer needed this kind of social support upon leaving prison?

Appendix 1 – The Stride Model



Appendix 2 – Stride Brochure



Appendix 3 – Stride participant Digital Story "Missie's Story"

http://youtu.be/WhtNhw8_6Z8



Appendix 4 – Circle Movie

<https://vimeo.com/199365334>





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