

SECTION 6:

MAGNIFYING HOPE:  
SHRINKING HOPELESSNESS

SUBMISSION TO  
THE COMMISSION ON FIRST NATIONS AND  
METIS PEOPLES AND JUSTICE REFORM

SUBMITTED BY  
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*Let me light my lamp and never debate  
whether it will remove all the darkness.*  
Tagore in Fireflies

## AN ACT OF HOPE

To hope is to search. To hope is to notice the gaps between where we are and where we want to be, and to ask of ourselves, “How might the futures we face be more hopeful?” The Commission on First Nations and Metis Peoples and Justice Reform is an act of hope.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am an internationally recognized scholar in the area of hope studies and am co-founder of the only center in the world dedicated to the study and enhancement of hope. The views presented in this document are based on more than two decades of clinical observations while working with persons in contexts of adversity and/or hopelessness, interventions developed for the purpose of influencing hope, and research with persons in situations often associated with hopelessness. A short version of my vitae is attached to this submission.

The views expressed in this document reflect the views of the author and are not public statements of any of the organizations with which I am associated, including but not limited to the University of Alberta, the Hope Foundation of Alberta, and Corrections Canada.

I am not well informed about corporate or large scale organized or gang crime. In this document I see myself commenting on hope more as it relates to the kind of injustices that have motivated this commission.

## ABOUT MY APPROACH

You will find this report relatively free of jargon. For years people have entered my office without referring to *human agency, self efficacy* or even less psychological words similar to those I see in correction plans such as *dynamic and static factors*. People talk about surviving, even thriving, because they didn't give up, because they had hope - not because everything turned out the way they wanted. Hope is *their* word and they interpret it very personally, not as some depersonalized reference to goals or expectations. Hope is *not* about naive or excessive optimism. It is *not* solely about achievement. It *is* about not losing sight of the goodness of life even when it is not visible.

I think of hope simply as a small voice in the heart of each of us that yearns to say “yes” to life. If nurtured and strengthened it invites, encourages, pulls, pushes, cajoles, and seduces us to go forward. Whether viewed as a human need, a biological life force, a mental perspective, or an external pull to a transcendent self, hope is capable of changing individual lives. *It enables individuals to envision a future in which they are willing to participate.* We each have something I call the *hoping self*. It is a voice that can give voice to our hopes and dreams. If this voice is silenced or assaulted, hope dies or gets misdirected.

This report is organized primarily around a series of common sense questions. The initial questions provide background to the issues of hope, the core questions address questions related to hope and justice and the third section addresses understandings necessary to consider change in the system. A series of *questions for reflection* and *recommendations* conclude the report. The appendices include two written descriptions of programs using hope with young people.

You will also find minimal referencing of material which would substantiate my viewpoint. The Hope Foundation of Alberta has an extensive Resource Center with hard copy of such material should someone be inclined to want to pursue this knowledge more specifically.

## BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

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### WHY CONSIDER HOPE?

- a) Offenders and an unknown percentage of those employed in the justice system are often depleted in terms of hope and welcome the replenishing of it. The future they envision is not a welcoming one.
- b) When persons are without hope and without hope for hope, they are more willing to do desperate things.
- c) Most professionals enter their work with a belief they will make a difference. Being fair, caring, and promoting coping are often in and of themselves effective ways of doing so. However if the clientele they work with sees no future, they do not respond to the offered supportive interventions. In the absence of reinforcement, staff hope may suffer until their defenses include *not caring, not hoping and not being fair*. Behaviours on their part may become congruent with hopelessness.
- d) Hope is a known therapeutic factor. A substantive, solid body of evidence is now available to support the importance of the experience of hope. There is an established benefit to mental, physical and spiritual health.
- e) Hope is logically a major factor in lowering recidivism.
- f) A body of knowledge related to hope focused practice and intervention is now developing. It is part of a new field referred to as positive psychology.

We have a choice of how to look at situations. We might call the choice we make the lens we use. To choose the lens of hope is to declare potential in the context of what may look hopeless. It is to consider possibility despite probabilities that are not encouraging. Using the lens of hope implores us to understand that things not possible at one time may be possible at another; things that cannot be done by one person may be accomplished by another; things that can't be done one way may be done another way.

### ARE YOU OPEN TO THINKING ABOUT HOPE?

As I understand the commission, it is to identify potentially *efficient, effective and financially responsible reforms*. To identify the intentional use of hope as one of those reforms implies a recognition of the value and potential power of hope as an actual intervention. In addressing that potential I believe three things need to be kept in mind, without which this document will fall on blind eyes.

***First, without hope, you die.*** It is that simple. There are many ways to die, but without hope, minimally you die on the inside. Many are taking their own lives. In Alberta, if you are male, over the age of 23 and under 84, you are more likely to die by your own hand than in a car accident. Members of the First Nations are disproportionately represented among those taking their own lives.

***Secondly, there is an ethical obligation to be concerned about hope.*** The human and financial costs of hopelessness are immeasurable. In addition, sufficient understanding about hope now exists that it can be used as an intervention itself. That body of knowledge is magnifying daily and is the focus of a whole new field of research. Not to use hope is, in some way, a withholding of treatment.

***Thirdly, we cannot give what we have not got.*** Our actions are not neutral. Every human communication has the potential to influence hope, positively or negatively. Only those with their own hope well grounded are truly able to acknowledge another's hopelessness without fearing that their own well-being is at risk. When we are afraid of being with people who have high levels of hopelessness we

construct personal and institutional structures to protect ourselves from a sense of powerlessness. At the personal level, this threat often manifests itself in the abuse of power, the avoidance of direct contact with offenders, and/or arrogance thinly disguised as expertise. At the institutional level the threat often reveals itself as structural rigidity.

## ISN'T HOPE JUST SETTING GOALS?

Hope is a specific phenomenon and although it is related to other concepts, it is indeed different than coping, optimism, expectancy, resilience, faith and other positive constructs. One of the distinguishing features is its 'goodness factor'. One can be resilient or a good coper without being motivated by decency, integrity and social conscience.

As well hopelessness is not synonymous to depression. One can be hopeless and not depressed, depressed and not without hope. This document however is not intended to discern among the hope/hopelessness related concepts.

Hoping is not denying the present situation. It is searching for future possibility in light of the reality of the situation. The kind of hope addressed in this document is a blend of *goal* and *soul*. The goal part is not unrealistic wishing however. The soul part is the internal capacity to keep looking for possibilities in the midst of adversity, whether the adversity is self or socially inflicted or both.

## WHAT ABOUT FALSE HOPE?

There is a common concern that if we use the lens of hope we will be encouraging hope where it cannot happen, that we will promote hope by neglecting risks.

No one wants to place the public at risk. The lens of hope allows for what hope theory calls "reality surveillance". In other words it takes into account the facts of a situation. Recent literature in hope studies no longer uses the language of "false hope". Rather it uses the idea of "disputed hope". That is, it recognizes people will have different views about the situation, different hopes and different beliefs about what may be possible. It recognizes the future has not yet arrived and that *sometimes things do turn out better than we might have expected*.

## WHAT ABOUT FALSE DESPAIR?

People who have 'false hope' at least looks to the future with hope. People with false despair fail to even look. They are sure the situation has no potential to be different. People with false despair fail to see possibility where it may exist because it is not easily identifiable. They have not learned "possibility thinking". Their view of situations and people is probabilities derived from past, not on possibilities derived from looking to the future with fresh eyes. Although a person may have similarities to a group which was used to develop predications, the group template is indeed never accurate when placed over the individual. False despair is the result of the mental activity of stereotyping.

## HOW ARE HOPE AND CHANGE RELATED?

By engaging in the process of this Commission, it is not possible to know which seeds of hope may find fertile ground. It is my experience that hope not uncommonly takes circuitous routes to engender change. If we search for immediate or concrete results, hope may remain hidden for some time as it germinates. Positive change does not occur without hope and hope grows with evidence of positive change, no less so for systems than for individuals. This is my way of saying that a major paradigm shift takes time, yet it must start somewhere.

## WHAT IN THE SYSTEM IS ALREADY HOPEFUL?

My task is not to identify those pockets of existing hope already present in the system, those mature individuals whose depth of understanding looks beyond the crime, those programs designed to enhance not only survival but humanness among justice workers, offenders and families of victims of crime. The pockets of hope in the system acknowledge the need and the right for all concerned to be treated as a human, not as an object. Further *understanding those pockets, whether they be policies, persons or programs may be key to enhancing hope in the system.* It is in these pockets of hope that the essential foundations of crafting a different future may lie. Taking note of those pockets is a key task. Such movements as restorative justice are examples of such efforts. It is a worthy task, likely already addressed, to ask, "How might those seeds of hope be expanded?"

## HOW DOES HOPE IN OTHER SITUATIONS COMPARE TO HOPE IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM?

This might seem like an unlikely question but has caught my attention many times. It started in 1992. I was studying hope. On Thursday evening I interviewed breast cancer patients. On Friday morning, female offenders risked talking to me about hope. Their views were so remarkably similar I wrote a common piece and both breast cancer patients and women in remand confirmed their views were accurately expressed in the following:

**No one is a voluntary inmate here.** They are here for various reasons. Some committed crimes over the years for which they are now paying with their lives. [cancer patients often feel they caused their cancer] Others are confused that they are here. They didn't think anything they were doing was that wrong. Others are here because someone else committed a crime and they were just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Most believed they would never be caught.

**No one here will be granted her individuality.** While they are here they will wear our uniforms, have little control over their choice of food and turn their light out when ordered to. They will urinate on request. They will be asked to consent to invasive, often painful/offensive treatment, sometimes with questionable consent. They will have few or no formal advocates. Efforts to exert influence may be patronized but are rarely effective.

**Every one who works here has power.** They can choose to direct that power with various intents. Some feel a deep sense of mission. Some use it to feed their need for power. Many are doing their jobs because they need work. They potentially have a profound influence on the experience on those held captive. They can make the time tolerable, even transformational or a stay in hell.

**There are differential sentences given here.** A few will get a reprieve. Some will get parole. They will be released and return to us routinely to undergo inquiries about their day to day regimes. At some point, most often around five years they may be granted *their freedom - a clean slate.* Your chances of doing well in the system are better if you are submissive. As many as one third of them will be haunted by their encounter with the system. As many as half of them will be back to spend more time.

**Life on the outside is forever changed.** Outside they will face limitations in their work options, reductions in their liberties, and a good deal of social rejection. They will cease to be invited to dinner



parties. People will talk with them about anything except what they have been through. A few will feel a need to eventually help those who have just been sentenced. Still fewer will attend to those with life sentences.

I am not sure how meaningful this is for readers without an awareness of the cancer experience. However, assuming the cancer patients and the offenders both told the truth about their experience of feeling held captive, how is that "Cancer can be beaten" evokes national compassion and entices millions to donate time, energy and dollars to lower the frequency and consequences of a condition that claims the life and lifestyles of thousands of Canadians each year. In twenty years the life expectancy of a breast cancer patient has been only minimally enhanced yet slogan after slogan encourages hope.

In contrast, the person who is accused or who has offended is not the target of widespread hope. The concentration of resources are not aimed at eradicating the injustices they experience. Further, if a high percentage of cancer patients were of one culture, a flurry of questions would drive research and interventions. No such evidence of concern is being expressed about the fact that First Nations and Metis people are substantively overrepresented in the prison population in Canada. No such hope is being visibly touted as inevitably successful.

## HOW ARE HOPE AND JUSTICE RELATED?

First, the relationship between hope and justice simply has not been studied. A few studies related to the relationship between hope and ethical behavior may be setting the groundwork for such inquiry. One such study has been done by A. Webster who now works for Corrections Canada. To oversimplify his results, he found hope was a substantive factor in enhancing ethical behavior. Rather than studying high risk behavior, he chose to ask the question, "What correlates with behavior that is ethical (behavior that does not put person or society at risk)?"

If we think of hope as an outcome, people can be hoping for different outcomes relative to the commission of a crime. The commission of a crime may even be a misdirected hope or evidence of immature hope. Once sentenced, some would hope that punishment would act as a deterrent, that it will 'solve' the problem. Minimally the hope for retribution is to be fulfilled. When that does not happen victim impact is deepened. In the discussion of criminal justice from the perspective of those being incarcerated, we don't know what their hopes are. We simply do not know. The obvious answer is "to get out" yet as I listen and observe female offenders there are many other hopes that are unfulfilled. A female offender put it bluntly when she said, "Treat us like human beings."

Michael Ignatieff in *The Needs of Strangers* notes

The administrative good conscience of our time seems to consist in respecting individuals' rights while demeaning them as persons. In the best of our prisons and psychiatric hospitals, for example, inmates are fed, clothed and housed in adequate fashion; the visits of lawyers and relatives are not stopped; the cuffs and clubs are kept in the guardhouse. Those needs which can be specified in rights are more or less respected. Yet every waking hour, inmates may still feel the silent contempt of authority in a glance, gesture or procedure. (p. 12)

On a daily basis offenders are exposed to other offenders and justice workers (from lawyers to guards to those working in the rehabilitative components of the system). We cannot assume that those responsible for confinement and efforts at change, regardless of discipline, are models of humanness. Ignatieff goes on to say "Being human is an accomplishment like playing an instrument. It takes practice. The keys must be mastered. The old scores must be committed to memory. It is a skill we can forget." (p.141) The system in which people work must convey its value of the practice if it is to be honed.

If experiences in the justice system render a person feeling less human, the hopes of society will not be in the foreground upon release. The benefit to everyone of an offender becoming more human seems obvious. To be

human is to hope. It has been said that 'hope is to the soul as breath is to the lungs'. The justice system unquestionably has the right and obligation to protect society and to punish through incarceration. It must wrestle with whether it has an obligation to restore and/or repair hope, not only for the benefit of the offender, but for the benefit of society. Towards what hope of society is it willing to direct itself. Is the hope for safety well served if hope is not addressed?

Serving time or attaining freedom does not ensure more humanness. "In the end, a theory of human needs has to be premised on some set of choices about what humans need in order to be human: not what they need to be happy or free." (Michael Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers*, p. 12)

This perspective on humanness applies when we consider the issues of social justice. The disproportionate representation of offenders from the First Nations populations speaks to conditions of hopelessness that engender crime. Before or at least concurrently to working on hope, the efforts to shrink hopelessness have to be addressed. The insidious erosion of humanness is a major factor in hopelessness. Many of these are cultural and systemic factors. What we do know is that anytime a person or a collective of persons are silenced, one of two things happens. They get angry and/or despairing, both of which are understandable responses to a life situation that has foreclosed on possibility. Seldom does the average person see a face on poverty.

For the average citizen, the person in need is someone else, somewhere else, even if that person/family is just down the street. It is therefore possible for those with some access to fulfilling their hopes to put out of awareness the conditions to which they themselves do not want to succumb. Both the person who is the victim of social injustice and the person who knows, but does not want to acknowledge it, feel powerless. M. Seligman's concept of 'learned helplessness' applies equally to the victim and passive observer of social injustice.

Many people are working from many different perspectives to address issues of social justice? Poverty, drug use, alienation, illiteracy, to name only a few, are highly correlated with crime. Efforts to address them are statements of hope. These often under-funded initiatives can make major differences in the lives of individuals and communities with subsequent reductions in crime.

## **HOW CAN HOPE BE ADDRESSED BY PARTIES WITH DIVERSE, IF NOT DIVERGENT HOPES?**

When diverse groups of people can form a community of concern and can sufficiently agree on hopeful outcomes, people will work together. They may not have identical goals but they share a common hope and are willing to work together on their separate goals. Goals may be a step in fulfilling a hope but do not constitute the hope itself. The question arises, "What do we need to do to align the hopes of different parties?" We would have to know the hopes of each party participating. How might those be identified? How might the common hopeful thread be acknowledged by each invested party rather than be touted as competing visions?

## **WHAT PART DOES THE MEDIA PLAY IN HOPE AND JUSTICE?**

The media plays a hefty role in making hope, hopelessness, justice and injustice visible to the community. We are fed crime and punishment in 45 seconds clips. The offenses of the majority of offenders are not news worthy and we are left to generalize from the minority who receive media coverage about the larger population of offenders. We are often not informed of the contextual/cultural information. The counterbalance is that on occasion, it is the media that brings injustices, including social injustices, to the foreground. Several questions arise. How might the media be an even more central member of a community of concern? What would happen if the media profiled hopeful stories related to justice? How might the average citizen hear about the people who were able to turn their lives around? How might the media draw attention to that potential?

## IS IT IMPORTANT TO THINK ABOUT HOPE IN EVERY INSTANCE?

Hope is one of many variables involved in the complex criminal justice system. It's role is going to vary across situations. It would be easy to generate a litany of 'yes, but not with regard to this situation or that person'. The focus of this document is the need to attend to the issue in the obvious contexts where it is an issue, where hopelessness is a contributing factor and/or an outcome of the crime. The less obvious situations where it might play a role or be of benefit if considered could be reviewed later.

## CORE QUESTIONS

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### WHAT ARE THE INDICATORS OF HOPE?

Hopeful people are not passive people. They want to learn, to grow, to see things happen that will create a better future. Hopeful people want more, are willing to work for more and will resist being demeaned, even if they must pay dearly for it. We must think seriously if we label *adaptation* to the injustices and/or indignities of poverty or prison environment as an indicator of hope or health.

*Hope* is a gatekeeper to help people access their capacities. It might be described as a foundational developmental capacity. Without hope, learning is inhibited, communication is disturbed, behavior is altered. Hope influences our behavior, permitting some actions, inhibiting others. When people anticipate a good future, they try things, they take risks. When people see a future in which they are active participants, they make efforts to make things happen. On the other hand, without hope, they feel at the whim of circumstance and believe they have little to lose. This appears true of adults as well as of children.

Hopeful people achieve more, are happier, have better mental and physical health, including higher energy. They are able to generate possibilities under difficult circumstances and they are able to delay gratification. Hopeful people take risks while respecting the rights and personhood of others.

### DO WE WANT INCARCERATED PERSONS HOPEFUL?

If you had hopeful prisoners how would prisons be different and how would it affect the people who maintain order? If more hopelessness than presently exists develops, what is the likely aftermath?

The system could sincerely point to effort suggesting it wants people to be hopeful. On close examination though the template of the offered hope may be perceived as one *we* have for *their* lives. Offenders have referred to what they call "an illusion of choice. It isn't *our* correction or release plan it's *theirs*. Our only choice is whether to agree to it." Ignatieff warns us that "There are few presumptions in human relations more dangerous than the idea that one knows what another human being needs better than they do themselves (p.11)".

We can agree or not agree. However, this speaks to what persons in hope retreats and counseling have said to us over and over. That is, one of the most sought after hopes is to be who we are in our heart of hearts. If we come from a philosophical position that most offenders are 'bad' people, we would not want them to be who they are. If however we believe that behavior is not synonymous to personhood, we could assume they too would like a future in which they actually chose and that they may have insight into their own needs.

On the surface this philosophy may seem radical. In practice it is not. It is simply the absence of coercion, however well meaning and the respect for individual needs. Years of working with persons with low hope have demonstrated to us that these people are not without understandings of their own hope and their own needs. They are weary of everyone having an idea about how they have to be different. They are also quite amazingly resistant to change when it is imposed.

Hopeful people have something to lose. To lose one's future is a terrible price to pay for behaviour. To lose one's identity is a greater loss.

## WHAT THREATENS HOPE?

Kay Herth in a chapter being published soon in an *Anthology of Hope* lists threats to the hope of ill persons. Extrapolating from her work we might consider the validity of the threats to hope for persons accused of or convicted of crime:

- Hopelessness in others
- Depleted energy (fatigue)
- Isolation (physical and/or emotional)
- Poorly controlled symptom management
- Concurrent losses
- Spiritual distress (lack of meaning)
- Devaluation of personhood
- Abandonment and isolation
- Lack of information

It does not take sophisticated training to examine that list and conclude that social injustice, and incarceration potentially influence hope negatively. This list generates a series of reflections.

### *Hopelessness in others*

Who in this person's world has any hope for them?

### *Depleted energy (fatigue)*

How physically active is this person? In the justice system, one rarely sees the quickness of step that suggests this person is getting on with their life. The need to have controlled movement reaches a point where normal body function is suppressed increasing the likelihood of depression.

### *Isolation (physical and/or emotional) Abandonment and isolation*

How isolated was this person before the commission of the crime and during incarceration?

Isolation/loneliness is *the* highest correlate of hopelessness. In light of that correlation, how might the experiences involved in being arrested, sentenced and serving time influence isolation?

Joan Martel's study "Solitude and Cold Storage: Women's Journeys of Endurance in Segregation" draws attention to the experience of segregation for women. She describes segregation as a *taken-for-granted experience of indignity, forced boredom and forced isolation*. How might this *ritual of deprivation* be reviewed in light of hope while respecting the need for a 'safe' alternative during times of threat to self or others.

### *Poorly controlled symptom management*

Depression, anxiety and anger are common occurrences in persons struggling to hang on to hope. How accurately are these symptoms diagnosed? Beyond present efforts, how can mental health issues be identified and addressed as part of crime and relapse prevention? Obviously anger is an unwelcome behavior in the best of situations. Many contexts of the justice system generate intense feelings yet consciously or accidentally require suppression of them. It was Thomas Aquinas who suggested that the sisters of hope are love and faith, but the daughters of hope were anger and courage. The person who has anger still has hope. How might that be used to everyone's advantage?

### *Concurrent losses*

Concurrent losses are the norm. In many cases, prior to the commission of a crime, a person may already have experienced multiple losses. In prison the losses are magnified. Hopelessness is a sense of the loss of one's future. Hope plays a huge part in grief counselling and healthy reengagement in life.

### *Spiritual distress (lack of meaning)*

The challenge of finding meaning in a prison culture is like looking for sunlight in a coal mine. There are a few lamps pointing a direction. Forced boredom results even when programs or internal work are available. Most offenders are not skilled at creating meaning internally although remarkably some develop the capacity.

### *Devaluation of personhood*

Likely the commission has heard many accounts of the devaluation of personhood. Devaluing someone as a person constitutes what we might call 'moral injustice'.

## WHAT ENHANCES HOPE?

- Uplifting memories
- Positive relationships
- Meaning
- Goals and aims
- Spiritual practices
- Cognitive strategies
- Refocused time
- Lightheartedness
- Hope objects
- Hope rituals

In examining these briefly it is not too hard to see that social injustice, a life of crime and an experience of incarceration are not likely to be particularly hope enhancing. If hope is to be rekindled there must be opportunities to draw from past good memories (which may be minimal), to create new ones, to develop healthy relationships, to explore the potential for meaning, to set goals and pathways for achieving them, to develop one's spirituality and to examine one's belief system. Within the justice system there are some opportunities for doing so. One of the challenges is that it takes hope to engage in the programs that are designed to address these issues.

It is also important to acknowledge that we know very little about the hope of persons accused of crime or incarcerated because of crime. Without further information about the nature of their hope including its source and the outcomes for which they hope, the system is limited in accurately targeting that which would enhance hope.

## WHAT ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE?

In my view one of the most promising areas of the application of what we know about hope is with youth. The Hope Foundation of Alberta has been working with youth, teachers and schools. Two people very active in this work have been so kind as to write brief reports on their hope work with youth which I have included in this document. Young people are more than capable of turning their lives around. Curriculum has now been developed to assist teachers with these programs. We have a good deal more to learn about youth and hope but

have learned enough to see it as a very promising area. Rick Snyder of the University of Kansas has conducted numerous studies in the area of hope and youth providing substantial evidence of the value of hope to young people.

Imagine if every child had learned the skill of getting up, brushing their teeth and brushing their hope daily? That's the goal. Young people are drawn to goodness. They will work towards it. They hunger for meaning and connection. And they learn hope more quickly than adults. How might hope be introduced more systematically with youth at risk for crime? How might hope be introduced more systematically with youth who have offended?

## WHAT MORE DO WE NEED TO KNOW?

Every report written by an academic probably includes, "This needs to be researched." Well, *this does need to be researched*. We presently do not know

- The levels of hope and hopelessness in persons at risk for the commission of a crime
- The levels of hope and hopelessness of those who are incarcerated and how those levels vary with offences, sentences, gender, culture and so forth
- The levels of hope and hopelessness of persons responsible for offenders and how those levels vary with their tasks within the system, their education, their gender, their personal beliefs and so forth
- The influence of incarceration on hope and hopelessness
- The trajectory of hope in the first few months following release
- The influence on entrance into and completion of programming depending on the levels of hope and hopelessness (One study "Hope as predictor of entering substance abuse treatment" in *Addictive Behaviors* 28 (2003) 13-28 is the only study that has looked at this.) Increased levels of hope were associated with a lower probability of entering into treatment. Higher hope though is related to successful treatment completion. It is also noted in that article that high hope persons may be much better at generating effective alternative strategies.
- The influence of various programs on the experience of hope
- The influence of various factors on hope – for example, spirituality, a hopeful person in their lives, addictive substances...the list is endless

## HOW LIKELY IS RESEARCH ON HOPE TO HAPPEN THROUGH FORMAL CHANNELS?

For hope research to be taken seriously the role of hope and hopelessness in criminal behavior and rehabilitation would have to be taken seriously. A research proposal submitted to Corrections Canada was recently returned with comments which included, "I don't really understand why the researcher thinks 'hope' is a powerful construct in corrections" and "I think the researcher is going to find that participants have trouble understanding what is meant by 'hope'." (Just for clarification, I was not the researcher to whom I refer).

These statements speak volumes. First, of the lack of awareness of the power of hope and of hopelessness and secondly, the judgment that incarcerated women would not be able to speak to the issue of hope. Let me assure you that the only people who say "what is your operational definition of hope?" are people with lots of letters behind their names. Ask a cancer patient, an impoverished mother, a person in prison and they have NO difficulty speaking about hope.



To understand the human condition it is necessary to access people's feelings and thoughts. This is a particular expertise and is not dependent on large numbers of people in a study nor on statistical measures. If this kind of study is to be done, people with expertise in reviewing the proposals for studies of this nature must be on the review committees. Only multiple approaches to understanding hope and hopelessness will ensure the depth of knowledge necessary to address the complexity of the struggles of the justice system and those who live and work within it. Limiting the kind of research done will limit the kind of knowledge gained.

## NECESSARY UNDERSTANDINGS

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### AS YOU MAKE SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW AND UNDERSTAND ABOUT HOPE?

#### 1. Hope is a crucial therapeutic factor.

The jury is in. There is no longer any serious question that hope is a positive therapeutic factor. *Hope work*, as this kind of intervention is now being called, is based on an assumption that hope is a critical factor in recovery from and adjustment to many difficult life circumstances. Hope is capable of changing lives. Having hope enables people to envision a future in which they are potentially active participants. Research is also confirming the importance of the helper's hope in treatment. For example, J. Talley (1992) reports in *The Predictors of Successful Very Brief Psychotherapy* (for anxiety and depression) that the most unexpected finding was that the single item that best predicted satisfaction with treatment was, "the counsellor encouraged me to believe that I could improve my situation, and this item accounted for 68% of the variance." One might interpret this as the client reclaiming hope about the situation. What would happen if every person believed the system could be better?

Perhaps the words of one female offender serving a very long sentence can attest to the value of hope more so than a litany of correlational studies which are available from non-correctional settings.

It was May 6th, 1990 and I found myself locked up in a dark damp cell in what I was convinced was the very bowels of existence.

I was at my breaking point or so it seemed at that time and I found myself contemplating taking life itself. One phrase kept running through my mind that I feared giving time and thought to.

On the grey cement wall, directly facing me, written in my own blood were the words, "Is the answer to life to be found in death? Take the plunge and the answer will be yours!"

Over and over those words kept going through my weakening mind. There was a truth somewhere in those words that I found somewhat compelling. A kind of power that struck a fear into my very being.

I realized that I was lost to myself and that I was at a critical crossroads in my life. I also know that the next minute, hour or even seconds could very well dictate what future, if any, I would have in this lifetime.

Looking around, trying to change my mindset, I noticed some small scratches that someone had taken the time to carve into the far corner of the cell that I was trapped alone in. Moving closer, I squinted to make out what it was this person was trying to convey. Slowly I made out the words and found that I was completely unprepared for their meaning.

Scatched, barely legible in the corner were the words "WHERE THERE'S LIFE, THERE'S HOPE." That's all it said, nothing more and nothing less. No explanation, no other words of enlightenment,



simply “where there’s life, there’s hope.” Five words, five words with enough impact that they felt like a slap on my face. A wake up call, a message maybe even divine in its simplicity. The impact that those five words had on me, so many years ago, while locked away in the dungeon of my own mind still ring loudly inside the recesses of my mind today.

*Where there’s life, there’s hope.* There I was, contemplating the very depths of darkness and five little words lifted me into the light where I swore light could not exist...

Slowly I lifted myself to a standing position and ever so gently I began to place one foot in front of the other. I began taking baby steps towards the life and hope that I had lost.

I’ve fallen many times and I’ve managed to pick myself up each of these times. Every time I thought I couldn’t pick myself up or that I was too tired and didn’t want to get back up, those five words keep running through my thoughts in a never ending ticker tape – where there’s life, there’s hope – where there’s life, there’s hope – where there’s life, there will always be hope.

S.A. Kavanaugh

(release signed in writing for use in this document)

*A firm belief in the power of hope and the need to protect and nourish it, would increase the likelihood that it will be considered in policy and program decisions.*

## **2. To be hopeful requires a consistent vision.**

Hopeful people have a vision of how life might be better even when that life is not available at the moment. They envision a life in which they are willing to participate, even if that life is hard. The vision is often larger than just about them. The dream must be based on what is possible, not necessarily what is visible at the moment or calculated on the basis of the past. Effective leaders have an encompassing vision. They have big hopes and take small steps. It has been said, “*You can’t put a big hope in a little soul.*” Without visionary leadership change is slow to occur.

Author Maltie Babcock suggests if one has a passion, one “can expect three things: to be absurdly happy, entirely fearless and always in trouble.” Hopeful leaders are not only the quiet leaders kneeling at the altar of policy and working through channels that are endless in bureaucracy. Those leaders are to be admired for their work. However, also needed are leaders relentless in their passion for change and able to articulate the hope they hold for the people they serve and the future that has not yet unfolded. It is no easy task to balance challenging unhelpful policies, procedures and personal behaviour with maintaining respect for process and with creating collaborative communities of concern.

Leaders facilitating change in an established system need to have mechanisms and supports in their own lives such that the hope does not waver. Without adequate support in their own lives and workplaces the capacity to be mentors of hope fades over time.

*A well articulated vision of what a hopeful justice system would include sets the stage for long and short terms goals. It brings together a community of concern with a shared hope. This requires various kinds of leaders and a willingness to dream together.*

## **3. Hope is not visible early in the change process.**

The trend today is to have performance criteria for goals. The challenge with hope is that it is not always visible early in the process of change. In a PhD dissertation (which I supervised and which won a national award), Joanne Keen sought insight into the question “What is the experience and meaning of hope for people who

have made profound change?" The people whom she came to know during that study were those who had lost hope, completely lost hope and in whom others had lost hope. Somehow they had gotten their lives back and we wanted to understand the role that hope played in them getting their lives back. In a nutshell a number of shifts were involved.

First they shifted from *giving up on life* to *saying "yes" to life*. Secondly, they shifted from believing *change is impossible* to *becoming open to the possibility of change*. Thirdly, there was a shift from a perception of *being powerless* to *becoming aware of ones' strengths and potential*. Fourthly, there was a shift from an attitude of *reacting negatively* to *finding the positive*. Last but not least there was a shift from feeling *disconnected and alone* to feeling connected to others by *developing an understanding of the purpose and meaning of life*.

Over the whole process hope moved from some kind of instinctual desire to live to a conscious way of life. Only in the later stages of the process did people report actually thinking about hope yet in retrospect they could articulate how the seeds of hope were being sown in the earlier stages of change. As I reread the study I am struck by the responsibility to understand that hope is at work long before the evidence is visible. This is a compelling argument for preparing anyone who has contact with offenders, or persons at risk for offending, to work on the assumption that they can and will make a contribution to substantive change even if there is no apparent evidence of hope in the person's life. A theorist by the name of Prochaska identifies five stages of change: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance. Using this framework, again, hope is not visible until stage four when we begin to see the action that a person is taking.

I recall interviewing a First Nation's woman who worked for E. Fry. I was gathering information on how veteran and effective workers could sustain their hope in the absence of evidence of change. I smile as I recall how she held up her palms and said "See, no nail holes. I am not the Savior. Hope is a chain. My job is not to break the chain. I am only a link. It may be a long ways down the chain before they change but I must not break the link." It is this capacity to believe in each person and to accept responsibility for contributing to a continuity of positive experiences from people in helping roles that cannot be over emphasized.

*The seeds of hope are worth planting. Although it is satisfying to people who need the language of accountability to see indicators of hope early in the process, time is a factor in the growth of hope. Interventions aimed at outcomes that are evidence based on the short term may be premature and may risk being short lived in their impact. Projects aimed at longer processes need funding and support.*

#### **4. Hope is a complex, multi-dimensional experience.**

Hope presents us with particular challenges when we want to talk about it. It has unique meaning for each of us. It can't be prescribed. It can't be injected. It can't be x-rayed. We suspect there is a biology of hope; how large a role it plays we don't know.

I think it was Churchill who said, "For every complex problem there is a simple and wrong solution". Understanding hope simply as belief or an emotion, a physical attribute or as a behavior is erroneously narrowing its nature to fit our need for simplicity. It is not to be equated to goals and outcomes. There is a much deeper understanding. Hopeful people set goals but goals don't necessarily make people hopeful.

An understanding of hope as a complex experience lays the foundation for accepting the many factors that come into play. Hope is about outcome *and* process; about heart *and* mind; about mental *and* emotional. Programs focusing on coping and on behavior change alone may indeed influence behavior yet might fall drastically short of nurturing hope back to the substantive levels necessary to sustain the change in behavior.

Coping is what is necessary for survival, what makes it possible to get through the day. Hoping is what makes it possible to think tomorrow might be different. What that includes however is unique to each person. It is not always related to goals in the sense of setting goals for the future. People who are low on hope are reluctant to see and work towards goals. This symptom is a clue that goals may be premature. The repair of hope may need

attention first. When little hope is evident, hope facilitators need to develop a language which focuses on the future without focusing on goals.

*Accepting hope as complex and multidimensional would go a long way to developing policies and programs respectful of that complexity. Simple solutions don't work for complex situations. Hope must not be simplified into a series of goals or expectations that are to be accomplished. Rather hope might be thought of more a developmentally maturing through programming and relationships.*

## 5. Hope is developmental.

Trust is crucial to the experience of hope. Eric Erickson, a psychologist suggests that having a relationship of trust (with a primary caregiver) is the first developmental task of life and that the outcome of having such a relationship is the experience of hope. Persons who have repetitively had trust violated appear to have more difficulty sustaining hope. The earlier the violation, the more severe the developmental delay of hope. Without the experience of hope, people do not feel safe in the context of uncertainty and will do what they need to do to feel some level of control over their own life.

Life experiences contribute to the depth and quality of hope that we experience. Few studies to date have explored the developmental nature of hope. There have been studies of hope in homeless children, adolescents with cancer, Tanzanian young people, Newfoundland young women, children with cancer and the recovery of hope in sexually abused young children. More are needed.

The sum of the persons, events and experiences that occur in a person's development becomes what we refer to as a **hoping self**. The encounters with hope and hopelessness are different for each person. In other words our hope histories are unique. Each person has a personal and unique DNA of hope which we call *the hoping self*.

The hoping self is that part of the self which gives rise to hope. In relationship to the self, it can be viewed as the inner, central core. The hoping self is difficult to describe or explain, but has been referred to as an "inner strength," a life-oriented source or a "state of mind".

C. Nekolaichuk, *Learning to live with uncertainty*, 1990. p. 64

Often in a helping relationship it is the "problem-self" or simply "the problem" or even simply one's behaviours that is assessed and explored. There has been less emphasis on uncovering the inherent strengths of a person which may be tapped in this new situation. The hoping self of each person will be uniquely configured and embedded in their life story.

A trusting and caring dimension to relationships is core to hope work. The hoping self will be more visible in a relationship where respect and safety make it possible to explore one's, past, present and future. How could the need for physical safety for all persons in incarcerated situations be balanced with respect and dignity which are the foundation of trust. Indeed justice workers may be more safe if they have the capacity to consistently convey a respectful stance.

*Hope is developmental. It is enhanced in situations where the integrity and trustworthiness of a person is predictable.*

## 6. Hope is an embodied experience.

The body is often the barometer of hope. One can feel ill but still feel hopeful. It is not a matter of the physical wellness but a deeper sense of the future that the body seems to hold. Events that are interpreted as hopeful or hopeless are registered in the body by the senses. Although little is written about the embodied nature of hope, we are increasingly aware that people 'know' if they are hopeful through their senses - image, sound (including tone of voice), texture, smell and so forth. It seems that it is in the body that hope is *lived* despite the condition of the body. One might think of it as housing the spirit. The body also seems to sense an uplifting of spirit

when there is a *living* hope developed between two or more people. If there is an interaction that is respectful, the body actually feels more hopeful.

*Hopeful environments have the capacity to enhance hope. An incarcerated person is to be deprived of their freedom. If hope was to be evident in the environment, what might that mean for the physical places where they are housed? What might it mean for the contexts which breed or encourage crime? How might the incarcerated person assist in the creating of a hopeful environment?*

## **7. Patterns of hopelessness can be counterbalanced with hopeful patterns.**

In addition to the factors identified as contributing to hopelessness, four patterns of the coming together of those factors has been noted. They can be referred to in very ordinary language as the *skidding effect*, *bruising effect*, *alien effect* and the *boomerang effect*. These almost self explanatory patterns include feeling out of control, being hit in the same place over and over, feeling like no one is listening and feeling like someone one thought was resolved is back again. The capacity to sustain hope in those situations is patterns of hope that act as counterbalances. Developing control helps the sense of skidding. Healing is needed for the bruising. Connecting is the counterbalance to feeling alien, connecting with others and with community, Being able to generate additional possibilities is necessary to offset the boomerang effect. It is worthwhile noting that the choice of counterbalance is important. For example, using increased control as the counterbalance to bruising is not as effective as the pursuit of healing.

*Understanding patterns of hopelessness assists in being more selective about patterns of hopefulness that might have maximum effect.*

## **8. Hope can be accessed and enhanced through creative activity.**

Hope does not necessarily reflect logic or problem solving processes. Rather it often involves creative symbolic processes. First Nation and Metis cultures are well situated to promote the role of symbol, creativity and ritual in hope. Many of the cultural and spiritual practices already incorporate these dimensions.

The long accepted practices of First Nations peoples' throughout the world are recently the focus of many studies which confirm that the experiences of expressing one's self and culture through forms of creativity, sacred symbols and rituals are profound contributions to well being on all levels. The power of story and music and dance are taken for granted in First Nations' cultures yet are not the focus of many of the opportunities offered to inmates.

A small experiment in which I am involved is directed at the potential for writing to be therapeutic. Other settings have been using writing with offenders. This fall a film is being released about the impact of inmate writing and Dialogue House (New York) has a major contract with the Bureau of Prisons in the United States to train persons to teach journaling to incarcerated persons.

Below is a statement I wrote that guides my own belief in this work

*Writing will fill your heart if you will let it.*

*Judy Cameron: The Right to Write*

*I have a dream. That every person in this institution, offender or employee, would write a piece that they feel good about. That every person would come to know they can 'author' their own life despite circumstances. That every woman would experiment with writing, would come to understand that it is not about good spelling and grammar. It is about knowing and believing in ourselves. It is about building community in a*

*culture of pain and punishment. I have a dream that the pain could go on paper rather than be carved into her own flesh, or numbed by medication, legal or illegal. I have a dream we would find a way of speaking our truth to ourselves, to those we hurt and those who hurt us; and to those who imprison us, including ourselves.*

*I have a dream each woman writer will recognize the longing of another and gently encourage her to also find her voice and that we will become a collective voice, not of rebellion and advocacy but of change at its deepest level. That with your writings whether they be vignettes, or poetry, or starter novels- that you can craft a community of concern with your writing such that every women has at least a chance to someday say I can 'Be here, Be myself and Be hopeful'.*

*I have a dream that every woman released from this institution will know her life story and have learned from it. That she will feel equipped to write her next chapter, that she will choose her co-authors well. That those responsible for custody will write to develop themselves as characters who are instruments of humanity.*

*I know that when I leave here, you cannot. Yet, I know of many situations where incarcerated people found a way of not only surviving but found ways of finding meaning while held in captivity, fairly or unfairly.*

*Inspired by the EIFW Writing Group  
Ronna Fay Jacqueline Jevne  
August, 2003*

*Hope is often best expressed in an art form. Encouraging expressions of hope at this level may assist in preparing people for more cognitive interventions aimed at more 'practical' skills. Art, music, drama are powerful pathways to replenishing, reigniting hope.*

## **9. Hope is about possibility, not probability. Unlike optimism the power of hope lies in the potential of the future rather than the pattern of the past.**

On the basis of history we attempt to predict the future. We speak of 'relapse prevention' and assume we can establish predictors on the basis of the past. Often these predictions are relatively accurate. If those predictions are going to be brought into question, new possibilities must be generated. If only the old possibilities are available, the pattern will be similar.

Incarcerated persons often feel their options are very limited, that the expectations for them are unrealistic and that they have little hope of opening doors that were already closed and now will be more firmly restricted due to their incarceration. As well they are not accustomed to generating possibilities.

*Learning to generate possibilities is a key competency of a hopeful person. Many possibilities require the aid of others. The possibility of meaningful employment requires the opportunity for education, the possibility for healthy relationships may mean relocating geographically and so forth. Creative approaches to generating possibility and the funds to enact the ones with potential would assist in breaking of old patterns which if continued will predictably lead to failure, hopelessness and re-offending.*

## **10. Hope can be inhibited, enhanced and learned.**

Hope can be *intentionally* learned, strengthened and repaired. Numerous studies have attempted to articulate what it is that others can do that enhance hope. To date there has not been a study of what can be done to enhance hope in people in the justice system, offender or worker. One study of ill patients has suggested that caregivers are more often named as people who dash hope than people who strengthen it. It would not be surprising to find similar results in the justice system.



Trauma, chronic conditions and life challenges all assault hope. One way of eventually coping is to stop hoping. With “intentionality” hope can be practiced and reawakened. A mindfulness is necessary in order to make hope a habit. At the risk of redundancy, there is a *doing* and a *being* to hope. It combines the best of *goal* and *soul*, of *will* and *way*. Hope is about more than outcomes; it is also about process.

The benefits of present programming aimed coping are short lived if the person feels there is little or no probability of a future. Their willingness to respond to caring or enact coping strategies will be low. Only over time, the challenge is to learn to ask in difficult circumstances, “What would a hopeful person do?”

*It is important to build a wall between hope and hopelessness. People can learn to take charge of their own hope and not be as vulnerable to hope sucking people or circumstances.*

## **11. Respect in relationships is key to fostering hope.**

Communication that conveys hope begins with respect. Even small insensitivities erode the trust which is the foundation of hope. A brusque word, a broken promise, a tactlessly communicated directive, an uninvited intrusion - all erode hope. It seems indiscriminate language in particular is lethal to hope. In this day and age, we worry about lethal doses of medication. It is now time to be concerned with lethal doses of language. Without having respect modeled, it will not be learned. The respect must not only be felt but conveyed.

Let people recognize clearly that every time they threaten someone or humiliate or hurt unnecessarily or dominate or reject another human being, they become forces for the creation of psychopathology, even if these be small forces. Let them recognize that every man[person] who is kind, helpful, decent, psychologically democratic, affectionate, and warm, is a psychotherapeutic force even though a small one.

Abraham Maslow

What would it mean in the course of a day’s work to convey respect? The internalizing of respect is no easy task. Discussion of such issues takes us to the realm of moral justice or moral rights. The most satisfying perspective I have found that speaks to this is the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists, the document expressing the principles to which I am asked to aspire as a psychologist. Below are the essential thoughts drawn from that document:

- The belief that each person should be treated primarily as a person or an end in him/herself, not as an object or as a means to an end. In so doing [psychologists] acknowledge that all persons have a right to have their innate worth as human beings appreciated and that this worth is not enhanced or reduced by culture....[etc]
- Adherence to the concept of moral rights is an essential component of respect for the dignity of persons. Rights to privacy, self-determination, personal liberty, and natural justice are of particular importance...
- As individual rights exist within the context of the rights of others and of responsible caring there may be circumstances which may disallow some aspects of the rights. However [psychologists] still have a responsibility to respect the rights of the person(s) involved to the greatest extent possible under the circumstances

*A serious commitment to respectful relationships is not easy. It is however key to engendering hope. Having employed persons internalize this is a mammoth challenge. Without this increases in systemic hope will be thwarted or at least limited.*

## 12. The hope of every justice worker is important.

Hope is very difficult to fake. The hope of the people with whom the accused or the offender comes in contact with is unquestionably a factor in the issue of hope. While professionals assess the condition and dilemmas of these people, they are simultaneously assessing those with whom they come in contact. Justice workers could ask some of the following questions: Will I even listen to their hopes or do I have my own agenda? Do I believe in the work that I do? Do I think I can influence the world in some small way? Do I believe the people I am responsible for are worthy of my time? Am I demonstrating a valuing of them in my behaviour? Do my colleagues convey respect to each other and to offenders?

If a work setting is not hopeful, it is difficult to be the sentinel of hope in the desert. The justice worker is more likely to be able to offer hope if s/he feels it in his/her own life. If s/he has adopted an attitude that things can't be different, that people don't change, that my job does not require caring or respect, he/she is likely to also suffer from a vision of the future that is not sustaining health. People with a personal vision of their work, who accept that despite limitations that they can make a difference are more likely to be healthy and hopeful.

*The hope of every person in direct contact with the justice system and in the community related to the system is an important component of effective hope work. Effective helping involves many skills. Sustaining our own hope and the hope of those who are challenged is often not on the conventional lists of competencies. Yet, in its absence work is not rewarding.*

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR EFFICIENT, EFFECTIVE AND FINANCIALLY RESPONSIBLE REFORM

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The criteria of *efficient, effective and financially responsible* are admirable. We can however do things efficiently and be doing the wrong things. We can be doing things effectively and the cost be exorbitant. We can *appear* financially responsible and be achieving little. In generating questions for consideration and recommendations, I have chosen not to address the resources. I do however believe substantive things can be done.

Hope is a necessity for survival. In the same way that food, water and shelter would not be denied, hope is key to the survival of our 'humanness'. People need to be seen for who they may be, not only for who they presently are.

### QUESTIONS:

#### Key players

- Who is willing to work toward a hopeful outcome?
- For change to occur who has to be convinced that hope makes a difference?
- What would I be doing if I was living as if this situation was hopeful?
- Who are the hopeful leaders and what support do they need?
- About what hopes might all parties agree or nearly agree?
- What could I personally look at differently?
- What do each of us need to sustain our hope until hope for the system becomes visible from our efforts?
- What change in circumstance would give you (others) the greatest hope?

#### Current state of hope

- Who hopes for what?
- What is threatening hope in the justice system?
- How do you account for that fact the system is as hopeful as it is?
- What do various people/groups of people believe/do/feel that is **threatening** hope relative to the justice system?
- What do various people/groups of people believe/do/feel that is **enhancing** hope relative to the justice system?
- Having considered beliefs, behaviours and feelings, where are the pockets of hope within and outside of the system?
- What could happen that would make things even worse, even less hopeful? How might those forces be addressed?
- What symbols of hope presently exist? What symbols could be developed?
- What could be celebrated?
- For what could we be grateful?



## Future hope

- What could be more hopeful in the short run?
- What could be more hopeful in the long run?
- What are the three most hopeful things that can be implemented by
  - Individuals
  - Institutions
  - Policy makers
- What is the smallest step that can be taken? By each vested interest?
- If something unexpected and positive could happen, what might it be?
- What experiments would be worthy efforts at hope?
- How might creative activities/solutions play a part in the solutions?
- How would we know if there was more hope in the system?
- How will the story of this commission's influence be told 1 year, 5 years and 15 years from now?

## The lens of hope

- What, if any, obligation does the criminal justice system have with regard to social and moral justice?
- How can patterns of hopelessness (skidding, alienation/isolation, bruising, & boomerang effects) be addressed. In other words how can control, community/collaboration, healing and possibility generation be addressed?
- What is the skill set/the necessary competencies for being a hopeful justice worker?
- How might the face of injustice be personalized? Not just the victims of a crime, but the victims of social and moral injustice?
- What must we further understand in order to understand hope and hopelessness in the situation?
- If HOPE could speak what might it be saying?

You might ask yourself, which of these questions most stimulates my thinking about hope?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Taking a Hopeful Stance

- Recognize that attitudes takes time to influence. The shifting of a value system involves influencing deeply rooted biases based on partial information. Any intervention aimed at shifting attitudes is a long term investment, well worth the resources but not necessarily immediately visible. Roger Lewin in *Complexity: Life at the edge of chaos* suggests that in biological evolution, experience of the past is compressed in the genetic message encoded in DNA. In the case of the human species our institutions are a kind of cultural DNA. It will take a long time to select out the unhealthy dimensions.
- Think of hope at three levels: Hopefully all interventions aimed at helping have as their intent, to maximize the possibility of a **hopeful outcome**. At this level, one tries to do things that help but does not necessarily think consciously or intentionally about hope. A **hopeful framework** would be characterized by the using hope as a lens through which to consider the situation. A **hope focused** intervention is one in which hope is addressed directly both by all parties.
- Develop a committee whose mission is to further explore the potential for hope for First Nations and Metis Justice.

### Identifying and Magnifying Existing Hope

- If not already done, undertake an accurate understanding of pockets of hope in the present system in order to assess their potential for expansion.
- Brainstorm for ways of reinforcing hopeful people and programs in the system.
- Include in the hiring interview protocols means by which to assess the hope levels of the applicants. These might be written and/or interview assessments.
- Include assessments of hope and hopelessness in the standard assessments of offenders. Don't rely on depression scales as predictors of hopelessness. These instruments are presently available and not costly. For example, there is software that can analyze speech of less than 200 words and identify levels of hope and hopelessness. It could for example also analyze a report such as this for those dimensions.

### Increasing Public Awareness

- Hold an event (symposium), the intent of which is to influence the media to more often report hopeful justice related events.
- Sponsor a conference on Hope for First Nations and Metis People & Justice.
- Ensure the public is informed about those who are able to make meaning in difficult circumstances and have turned their lives around.

### Introducing Hope into Training and Programming

- Create several pilot projects in which hope focused approaches can be tried out with different groups. For example, groups of youth at risk to offend, first time youth offenders, incarcerated persons, drug users. Partner with researchers who can ensure the findings are controlled and be sure that qualitative data as well as quantitative data is collected.

- Introduce the concept of hope in training for police officers, social workers, probation officers and other appropriate personnel. For example, training in the use of hope for social workers in the Ministry of Children in Alberta has been received very favorably.
- Include hope as a concept and eventually as an intervention in existing program modules presently offered to offenders.
- Initiate one or more local pilot projects including inmates, staff and community with the mandate develop a more 'hopeful culture' in the justice system. Perhaps include the media.
- Develop criteria for assessing policies for their impact on hope.

## Influencing Young People

- Create a *coordinated blueprint* intended to maximize the opportunity for exposure to hope for First Nations and Metis
- If it doesn't already exist,, create a First Nations and Metis Leadership School.
- Establish a mentorship program for First Nations and Metis youth.
- Create a mechanism by which to recognize youth who exemplify hope.
- Create a First Nations and Metis Youth and Hope Action Committee.
- Develop culturally appropriate curriculum modules related to hope.
- Create a Youth and Hope Arts Award. This competition would request young people to submit representations of hope in various art forms (painting, drawing, bead work, photography, song dance).
- Sponsor First Nations and Metis Youth to experiences likely to develop leadership competencies in a hopeful context. In Alberta an example of such a program would be the Co-op Camps put on by the Rural Education Development Association and held at Gold Eye Lake.
- Create opportunities for non- First Nations young to have experiences with First Nations and Metis youth in the First Nations and Metis communities.
- Enhance programs intended to encourage First Nations and Metis youth to complete and extend their education.

## Pursuing Further Understanding

- Do a qualitative study followed by a survey of *incarcerated persons* to find out what offenders have experienced as hopeful in the system.
- Do a qualitative study followed by a survey of justice system *workers* to find out what offenders have experienced as hopeful in the system.
- Develop indicators of hope, not to be confused as synonymous with outcome measures of 'success' in various levels of the system. This would require identifying people with the expertise to pursue this more subtle task.
- Ensure that persons with different views of research are included on research review committees.

*When someone faints, we call for water, eau de Cologne, smelling salts; but when someone wants to despair, then the word is: Get possibility, get possibility...for without possibility a person seems unable to breath.*

Kierkegaard, S. (1990 translation). *The Sickness unto Death* (1848).

## APPENDICES

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### YOUTH HOPE PROJECT

By Joan Fouts, School Principal

“Hope, a vision or dream that becomes reality through honesty, effort and perseverance.” Grade 8 Class at Eastwood 1998

The work on hope began for me when I worked at Eastwood School, an inner city school with a very high risk, high needs population that was 70% aboriginal. The aggressive behavior, very limited success in school and no apparent desire for change caused me to look for a different way to reach these students and to create a community of hope. The success with the students at Eastwood was exciting and extraordinary. In tracking a few of the students in the original hope group at that school, a large percent have gone on to complete high school this past year. The Grade 8 class at Eastwood wrote the quote at the beginning of this paper after working together to discover what it would mean to live their lives with intentional hope.

I want to share a story of hope, which is one of many that could be shared with the hope work in our school. My first encounter with David, a grade 8 student, was in the fall when I was called to the gym because this student was out of control, threatening, screaming and swearing at other students and staff in the gym. I kept my distance hoping that David would respond to my voice and come with me. He responded by picking up a large metal garbage can and throwing it at me. Immediately, he ran from the gym, slammed his hand into a glass and broke it on his way out of the school. David was a high risk student who was having a great struggle with depression and was at times suicidal which was evident in his appearance, self abusive actions, words and in the sadness that he carried in his eyes and his countenance. As with all the Junior High students, David was a part of the hope project for his Grade 8 and 9 years, at our school (this process will be discussed later). This fall, 2003, two years later, David shows up in the office in September asking to see me before he moves to another province with his family. I was in a meeting and had asked that I not be disturbed, but David would not take no for an answer. He insisted that he knew I would want to be interrupted to see him and he was right. What a different young man presented himself that morning. He was well dressed, clean, hair combed and a smile from ear to ear as I greeted him. He shared that he was leaving on Sunday and wanted to be sure to let me know that he was going to do really well in his new school. He proudly shared his dream of finishing high school so he could go on to a trade. “I know I will do really well in my new school and you will be proud of me,” he confidently stated as he left. David is a success. A student who was failing and did not even want to face another day two years previously had discovered his value and meaning through the hope project. While this is a dramatic case, there are many other students who have expressed that the hope class and the character education focus in the school has given them the meaning and purpose they needed to believe in themselves, the courage to risk dreaming and the hope that motivates, sustains and energizes the achievement of their dreams.

The Hope Project Process –

The hope work begins with students thinking about about hope. What is hope? What does it mean to be a person of hope? How would we recognize hope? We begin our thinking and dialogue about hope through a number of activities one such being to create an acronym out of the word hope. The second step in the exploration of hope and how we can live each day intentionally with hope, is to reflect on behavior that exemplifies hope. Students increase their awareness of actions and choices that they make to increase the hope energy in themselves and in the school as well as to name the actions and choices that deplete hope. Through our journey, we share stories to help us define hope filled behavior. To extend and deepen the understanding, we then begin to share personal stories of how hope is nurtured or drained from our days. The third phase is to begin work with symbols, music, art or pictures of hope. Each student creates a hope journal and a hope kit, which has significant items or symbols that are representative of hope. These are very personal and precious

items that the students share with the group as they choose. According to the students, each story that is shared fills them with hope through increased understanding, through the connections made to the stories of others, through the caring that is offered and through the appreciation that grows for similarities and maybe even more importantly through the awareness of the richness that there is in diversity. Finally, the students participate in creating a project that will conceptualize their beliefs in being a person of hope. The works are represented in color, symbol, words and stories shared. There are many significant signs of growth and success as the school community members manifest a more caring, responsible and respectful attitude and behavior.

Each year, students greet me with “when do we get to do hope?” The meaning and purpose that is evident through the process as well as the ongoing determination and courage that students demonstrate as they reach for their dreams and seek to live each day as a valued member of our school community. Seeing the growth and the transformation in students has inspired staff and they have formed a hope group in the school so they too can embrace the journey. The outcomes of the work the staff has done in the hope group is having an impact personally and professionally as is expressed in these comments shared by staff from the hope group:

- With hope there is ongoing renewed meaning and purpose in my work
- Hope has opened doors to creativity and increased possibilities
- Hope helps me find ways to resolve issues
- Hope respects diversity
- Hope means I will be better tomorrow than I am today
- Hope has increased my energy and dreams for myself and my students
- Hope is the reason I went into education in the first place, I had lost that sense of valuing and cherishing each child

## OUTCOMES OF HOPE

The work with hope in our school has opened new horizons, changed the way we work together and empowered students and staff to be the best they can be. Student growth is evident in more respectful, responsible behavior, a desire to serve, goals set and achieved and improved academic success. Students become mentors for each other supporting and encouraging success as they meet the challenges of each day with hope. At the current school, students coined the phrase that they would like to be “people of honour.” Hope inspires and challenges from within empowering us to try again another day when we stumble or fall. Hope also, allows us to celebrate success with humility and an appreciation for the diversity and uniqueness of each person.

# THE POWER OF HOPE: LEARNING ALONGSIDE CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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At the Hope Foundation of Alberta, projects intended to address and enhance the hope of children and youth have been taking place for nearly a decade. We have worked with youth in a community service learning project entitled Hope Kids where youth ages 12 to 17 intentionally bring hope to those with whom they interact, in classrooms at all levels, in special projects like the hope and bullying unit and most recently in a project to infuse hope in a grade nine religion curriculum. As a result, of this ongoing work, a pedagogy of hope designed for children, is emerging. Utilizing and building on strategies for fostering personal and collective hope through developed resources like the existing grade four curriculum entitled, *Children Looking at Hope*, the Hope Kids monograph and Hope Kids Manual (Stremchuk and Gurnett, 1995; Pertman, 2001; and LeMay, 2001) helps to make hope visible and accessible.

Much of the early hope research with children and youth, like the research conducted with adult populations, centered on goal setting and attainment (Snyder, C. R., McDermott, D., Cook, W., and Rapoff, M. A., 1997). Understanding the role of agency and pathway thoughts continue to play an important role. However, other insights also contribute to our ongoing work. First, hope descriptions and discussions include the presence of a significant other (Baldwin, 1996, Danielson, 1997; Edwards, 2002; Herth, 1996; Parkins, 1995). "Just like adults, teenagers want their stories to be heard, their voices to be acknowledged and their experiences validated" (Parkins, 1997, p. 58). In a developmental study with homeless youth, hope was described as two-dimensional, with an inner center core of hope, and an outer ring of flexible directed hopes (Herth, 1996). Through acceptance of uncertainty and continuity in their lives, Newfoundland females, stated "hope is my identity" (p. 126).

Hope Kids often seek out opportunities to use hope. For the children and youth we meet in schools, participating in hope activities is a novel experience. What we have learned about children, youth, and hope in these different settings tells us that we must continue to listen and provide guidance for opportunities to delve more deeply into our understanding of hope next to what children and youth convey.

The caregiver who does not listen conveys the message, "I don't understand your hope, let's do my version of hope," (Jevne, Williamson and Stechynsky, 1999). Listening in a respectful and serious manner seems to encourage youth to voice and name their hope authentically. I think about the time I was working with grade five students writing metaphors of hope. Early in the discussion, a student stated, "Hope is like a video game." I asked him how video games gave him hope. During his explanation, it seemed he began to realize he was at a loss for how to make the connection. I told him I would let him develop his thoughts more fully on paper in a few minutes. When it was time to write, he did not compare hope to a video game, instead, he wrote, "Hope is like a tree". His comparisons included:

- gives a home
- calms the spirit
- gets rid of fear
- shows me there's more to life than just television and video games, like helping an animal in need
- brings life

I believe this youth came to see his hope as an important part of his being when he had an opportunity to reflect on his hope seriously.

By accepting what youth have to offer, as important contributions to their understanding of themselves, we



acknowledge the role of hope in our lives. We increase repertoires of hopeful strategies or ways of coping. Being aware of the hoping process can be reassuring for youth when they are feeling less hope.

When asked about hope, many Hope Kids reply, "Everything we do together is hope." Without further prompting, that would be the end of the discussion. However, because "we can know more than we can tell" (Polanyi, 1966), there has been a concerted effort to make hope visible through representations like hope trees, communities of hope, hope poems, and Hope Kits in the Hope Kids program. Photo-assisted conversations conducted in the spring of 2003 depicted explicitly how hope is visible to the photographer and viewer when a serious conversation occurs around the photographs (Edwards, 2002, Hubbard, 1990, Parkins, 1997, Ziller, 1990). Hope Kids took photographs of things they liked to do. They took pictures of dancing, being in cadets, playing the piano, and being out in nature. They talked about writing hope poems to get themselves through difficult times and helping friends to cope with difficult circumstances by sharing what they learned looking through the lens of hope. One Hope Kid talked about learning to journal as a hopeful strategy. He explained, "I can write down ideas of things I can do and I am not limited to anything." Another Hope Kid talked about playing the piano. "When I play the piano it makes me feel calmer and I think it offers hope."

Describing inner hopes and dreams through representations and reflections also encourages youth to understand more about who they are and who they are becoming. When describing a photograph of her bedroom, one Hope Kid explained, "I really enjoy my bedroom because it makes me feel almost safe. I like having the feeling of control. Because if you do not feel in control and do not know what you are doing, your self-esteem might go down and without high self-esteem you cannot have the highest level of hope."

The role of story is crucial in the creation of one's hoping self in relation to identity (McAdams, 1993, Snyder, C., McDermott, D., Cook, W., and Rapoff, M.). Hope Kids insist that one of the best things about being a Hope Kid is the opportunity for learning from the stories they share with residents. One Hope Kid describes it this way, "I like making new memories to share down the road."

In another project undertaken at the Hope Foundation of Alberta during the spring of 2003, eighty students reflected how they could use what they learned about hope to understand their role in bullying after they participated in a variety of conversations and activities about hope and bullying. Comments like, "The people being bullied need hope so I can help them by giving them hope." "If you are hopeful it can give others hope and stop bullying altogether." "I learned that I should try not to take people's hope away because it really hurts them." "I learned that bullying takes away hope and creates hurtful thoughts, depression, and sadness. So, in turn I myself will never become a bully." "I can give people hope by talking to someone that is usually quiet and away from everybody else."

At the conclusion of the hope and bullying project, one classroom of twenty or so students, along with their teacher, embarked on an additional hope project. Groups of students reflected on different hope questions and then surveyed their classmates to see how their peers felt about their particular question. Next, they reflected on the results of the class surveys next to their own feelings and thoughts. Some of the reflections included:

- where there is no hope there is no community
- when you have a sense of hope you can overcome obstacles
- with hope there comes direction

One group summarized, what I believe to be a message for all to hear and act upon.

Most people we surveyed agree that with hope we can overcome almost anything. Through this, we learn that hope is a great importance in our lives. We know because if someone is hopeless, they usually are not happy. They have less trust and that usually drives friends away. They have trouble concentrating and their grades suffer. They are most likely to be pessimistic. Suicide is a common answer in this situation; yet, life means new hope. That is how we know hope is important.

In conclusion, both Hope Kids and the youth we meet in other settings reminds us to listen and encourage an awareness of hope which is not always easy, but necessary to move forward into an uncertain future.

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