

HEALTH AND PRISON BRIEFING

Pilot project for safe tattooing practices at Cowansville Institution

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Under the framework of a pilot project for safe tattooing practices, Cowansville Institution officially opened the first tattoo parlor within a Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) facility on 1 August 2005. This project, which is a CSC partnership component under the Federal Initiative to address HIV/AIDS in Canada, will run for a year in six penitentiaries across the country. Cowansville Institution was selected as the pilot site in the Quebec Region.

Since tattooing is a fact of prison life, unsafe tattooing practices increase the number of infections among inmates, which puts the entire population at risk. CSC is committed to reducing the transmission of infectious diseases within the inmate population and throughout the community by offering inmates this measure to reduce harm. It is first and foremost a public-health issue. CSC must take into consideration all measures that could minimize the harm related to the transmission of infectious diseases and reduce the risk of infectious diseases.

In December 2004, National Headquarters announced the safe tattooing practices initiative. Following this announcement, construction work began at the institution to set up a location conforming to project guidelines. In addition, staff awareness sessions were organized and the required training provided to the Social Program Officer and to the inmate tattoo artist. Technical Services, Security, Health Services, Management Services, and Correctional Programs were all involved in bringing about this major project that culminated in the opening of CSC's first tattoo parlor in August 2005.

The pilot project lets inmates be tattooed in a strictly monitored setting, which enhances security for both the institution and those who work there. The inmate response was immediate, with a spate of inmates applying within a short time. Their comments about the project, which were very positive, touched on a number of topics, including being able to get tattooed without running the risk of infection. Tattooing is a part of prison culture and CSC is maintaining health within the institutions and the community by educating inmates

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Figure 1. Louis Mirandette, inmate tattoo artist and an inmate getting tattooed.

about infections and providing them with the opportunity to reduce the risk of infection and transmission of infectious diseases.

CSC intends to assess the pilot project throughout the entire test period using staff and inmate surveys, site visits, interviews, analysis of statistical data, and determining best practices. This will make it possible to measure achievements and outcomes against the initiative's goals and objectives.

In its first 6 months of operation, the parlor has produced nearly 40 tattoos, requiring a total of 155 sessions. Interest has remained constant and the demand high, as evidenced by the 140 requests on the waiting list.