

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

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Correctional Officer Onboarding Program and On-the-Job Training

While outcomes appear comparable between the Onboarding Program and On-the-Job Training, support and guidance from mentors was seen by new Correctional Officers from Kent Institution as integral to their success.

Why we did this study

Implemented in September 2019 at Kent Institution, the Onboarding Program is intended to support the transition of new Correctional Officers (COs) from Correctional Service Canada's (CSC) Training Academy to the correctional environment. Mentor support and structured shadowing are available during the first year of a CO's employment, providing guidance from senior employees intended to emphasize values and ethics. The current research surveyed new COs at Kent Institution participating in the Onboarding Program and at three control group sites (Atlantic Institution, Edmonton Institution, and Port-Cartier Institution) participating in traditional On-the-Job Training (OJT). This research is a collaboration between the Research Branch and the Learning and Development Branch of CSC.

What we did

A total of 115 COs completed two online questionnaires, 80 from Kent Institution (September 2019 to April 2024) and 35 from the three control group sites (January 2023 to April 2024). Invitations for the initial questionnaire were sent to coincide with the Onboarding Program's roster integration at 6 weeks for Kent Institution and at the end of the 3-week OJT for control group sites. The invitations for the follow-up questionnaire were sent at the 6-month employment mark for both groups.¹

Questions focused on the nature and effectiveness of the training, transfer of skills, values and ethics, stress and safety, organizational commitment, work relationships, as well as the culture amongst COs. Descriptive analyses were conducted on quantitative data, and thematic analyses were performed on open-ended responses.

What we found

Onboarding Program participants expressed positive views of the team of mentors and the support they provide. The vast majority found the support of their mentor to be useful (94.7%) and agreed that their mentor was approachable when they needed to discuss something (93.6%). Many COs from Kent named mentors as the most useful aspect

of the Onboarding Program, describing them as friendly, professional, and informative. In general, Onboarding participants considered their work relationships more positively than OJT participants, in terms of good communication (77.5% and 58.8%, respectively) and trust (80.0% and 50.0%, respectively) amongst fellow officers.

Participants from Kent Institution and control group sites had comparable responses on values and ethics, stress and safety, and organizational commitment. For example, respondents felt like they were capable of identifying ethical dilemmas (94.3% and 96.2%, respectively). Sixty-two percent of respondents from Kent and 58.8% from control group sites found it difficult to get mental relief from their working environment. Furthermore, most respondents reported they were willing to put in a great deal of effort to help their institution be successful (92.1% and 88.2%, respectively).

Both Onboarding Program and OJT participants agreed that skills learned during training would assist in the adjustment to the correctional work environment (85.2% and 92.3%, respectively). A strong request from respondents from both groups was for more thorough training on posts and guidance with administrative duties. Both groups found that the Onboarding Program/OJT encouraged meaningful and constructive interactions between incarcerated individuals and staff (73.6% and 79.2%, respectively).

What it means

Though limited by its sample size, the available results suggest that outcomes are comparable between the Onboarding Program and the OJT that is currently standard. While COs in both programs generally expressed a desire to receive more extensive and diverse training on posts, the strength of the Onboarding Program lies in the profound impact that mentors have on new COs.

For more information

Please e-mail the [Research Branch](#). You can also visit the [Research Publications](#) section for a full list of reports and one-page summaries.

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¹ While COs were invited to participate in both questionnaires, only 14 COs from Kent and 10 COs from the control group sites completed both.