

## CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

## Supporting Transition from Structured Intervention Units (SIUs) to Mainstream Populations in Complex Cases

**Research Highlight:** Social environments promoting “readiness for change,” combined with post-SIU interventions to manage setbacks, can facilitate sustained institutional integration among complex SIU cases.

### Why we did this study

Structured Intervention Units (SIUs) were incorporated into the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019. As per the [Corrections and Conditional Release Act \(CCRA\)](#), such units are intended to provide intervention-based accommodation to individuals whose placement in a mainstream unit would interfere with institutional security, personal safety, or the integrity of an investigation. SIUs are to serve as short-term and intervention-based units that address the proximal factors impeding mainstream placement. Previous research has demonstrated that timely departure from the SIU is precluded by both individual factors (e.g., preference for SIU accommodation) as well as structural factors (e.g., population management factors limiting placement options; Biro et al., 2025). Barriers to timely and sustained transfer out of SIUs remain important considerations within the service delivery model of SIUs.

### What we did

The goal of the present research was to discern the factors associated with successful integration among complex SIU cases. In this research, complex cases refer to cases marked by prior periods of prolonged difficulties in maintaining mainstream status, as evidenced by a high frequency of returns to SIUs and/or extended durations in SIUs. Successful institutional integration was broadly defined as a sustained period within a mainstream unit (e.g., four months or longer) coinciding with relative improvement. Drawing on this criteria, 20 cases were purposively selected for in-depth review to identify key case management and service delivery approaches (during and following the SIU stay) that may have contributed to sustained institutional integration. Results are intended to identify emerging best practices in supporting sustained institutional integration rather than trends or generalizations.

### What we found

Despite differences in case circumstances, a prevailing theme was the importance of cognitive shifts, i.e., a marked pivot from prior dispositions and thinking patterns towards a stance of intrinsic motivation for change. Correctional literature refers to this cognitive orientation in terms of “*readiness for change*,” identified as an integral ingredient of effective service delivery in corrections (Ward et al., 2004). Service providers can assist in facilitating a social environment conducive to a shift in mindset, including through developing “hooks” for cognitive transformation, alongside “blueprints” for change (Calverley, 2019). As evidenced in the cases at hand, SIU staff (along with other key actors) can facilitate environments conducive to readiness for change through:

- service delivery approaches that are responsive, goal-oriented and based on support and accountability, marked by continuity, consistency and an integrated approach;
- establishing “blueprints” for change via clearly-articulated, realistic and time-bound goals tied to larger case objectives;
- mental health stabilization;
- cultivating engagement through opportunities for meaningful roles and pro-social activities (e.g., artistic, educational, peer-based);
- facilitating complementary social supports (including with community supports, peers, family members and mentors) that have a reinforcing positive impact;
- structured institutional integration planning to promote transition to the new environment; and
- follow-up and “after care” to promote positive adaptation in the post-SIU setting.



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Progress was often not linear (both within the SIU environment and post-SIU context). A key aspect of sustained integration is managing setbacks and proactively intervening to avoid returns to the SIU and maintain progress. This includes both ongoing supportive structures, as well as ad hoc diversion efforts to manage setbacks and avoid returns to the SIU (e.g., behavioural management plans, conflict mediation, enhanced cultural support, etc.).

## What it means

Overall, these findings highlight that successful practices within the SIU aimed at supporting transitions out of the SIU reflect evidence-based principles established in the correctional literature, particularly those pertaining to effective service delivery and strategies that promote positive change and cognitive transformation. These approaches, however, are resource-intensive and necessitate a coordinated and integrated approach across case management, program, cultural, spiritual, educational and health care staff. As a model intended to equip offenders with the skills and abilities necessary to adapt to the institutional environment, the focus on addressing the elements tied to “readiness for change” is conceptually congruent with the aims and purpose of SIUs; at the same time, post-SIU support structures are integral to sustaining positive outcomes.

## References

- Biro, S., McKendy, L., Boon, D., Stewart, M., Woodard, A. & Lundy, J. (2025). *Barriers to timely transfer out of structured intervention units, RIB-25-03*. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service Canada.
- Calverley, A. (2019). Exploring the processes of desistance by ethnic status: The confluence of community, familial and individual processes. In Farrall, S. (Ed). *The Architecture of Desistance*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ward, T., Day, A., Howells, K., & Birgden, A. (2004). The multifactor offender readiness model. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 9*(6), 645-673.

## For more information

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