

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

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Waseskun Healing Centre: Experiences and Perspectives

Waseskun offers a culturally responsive approach and therapeutic environment for healing.**Why we are doing this study**

Waseskun Healing Centre is a men's Section 81 facility located in St-Alphonse-Rodriguez, Quebec.¹ The goal of the current study is to provide a holistic understanding of the Healing Lodge through the experiences and perspectives of residents, Elders, Elder's Helpers, and staff. In collaboration with the Indigenous Initiatives Sector of Correctional Service Canada (CSC), this research also aims to explore the opportunities offered to residents at Waseskun, as well as the challenges that are currently facing the operation of the site.

What we are doing

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 9 residents and 9 Elders, Elder's Helpers, and staff at the Healing Lodge in July 2023. Interviews were conducted by two members of the research team, each taking approximately an hour to complete. Utilizing a culturally sensitive approach, interviews focused on the participants' experiences, involvements, and observations at the Healing Lodge. As part of a larger study, data will later be combined to examine all men's Section 81 facilities.

What we have found so far

From the perspectives of residents, Elders, Elder's Helpers, and staff, Waseskun fosters a sense of community, purpose, and stability. Elders and Elder's Helpers are respected and viewed as integral by the residents in helping them with a range of issues (e.g., emotion management, addictions, grief) through teachings, ceremonies, programs, and one-on-one support. Relationships between residents are positive and supportive, with the majority indicating that other residents had helped them progress in their healing. Given that Waseskun houses residents whose first languages are English, French, and various Indigenous languages, language barriers were identified as a challenge, notwithstanding attempts to overcome this challenge by attempting to translate for speakers in group settings.

Participants underscored that there is relatively little unstructured time at Waseskun, with residents being offered and expected to participate in the various

ceremonies, cultural activities/traditions, and land-based healing. In line with the eligibility criteria, all residents had previous involvement in culture prior to transfer to the Healing Lodge, either pre-incarceration or at previous institutions (e.g., working with an Elder, Pathways participation). The cultural focus of Waseskun was highlighted as crucial in helping strengthen a resident's cultural identity and commitment to their healing journey.

While other opportunities are available at Waseskun (e.g., correctional programs, addictions treatment), the emphasis is placed on healing. Waseskun is unique amongst men's Section 81 facilities in offering educational programs on site, but from the perspectives of residents, additional employment and vocational training opportunities would be beneficial. While the rural location creates an atmosphere for cultural engagement and connection to land, the distance from urban centres emerged as a barrier to gradual reintegration opportunities (e.g., temporary absences, visits from family/prosocial supports).

Consistent with other Healing Lodges, Waseskun has experienced challenges in reaching capacity. Residents reported hearing about Waseskun from various methods (e.g., pamphlets, visiting Elders) suggesting that the Healing Lodge is utilizing various outreach efforts for potential residents. A common challenge cited was long wait times to be transferred from correctional institutions once accepted by the Healing Lodge.

What it means

Participant experiences reveal a unique environment at Waseskun that encourages connection to Indigenous cultures and the strengthening of cultural identity. Through an Indigenous lens, the interventions and opportunities offered at Waseskun support the healing journeys of their residents. While the emphasis is on healing, strengthened reintegration planning (e.g., housing, employment, resources) may benefit residents upon release.

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 Through an agreement with CSC under Section 81 of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*.