

THE MANITOBA
HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSION



LA COMMISSION DES
DROITS DE LA PERSONNE
DU MANITOBA

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For immediate Release

EFFECTIVE MEDIATION CONCLUDES HUMAN RIGHTS COMPLAINTS

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**Manitoba Justice and Elizabeth Fry Society
Agree to Improved Conditions for Incarcerated Women**

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission is pleased that a settlement has been reached to resolve two complaints filed by the Elizabeth Fry Society against the Government of Manitoba about the treatment of women incarcerated at the Portage Correctional Centre (PCC). The resolution of the issues was facilitated by the Commission. The Elizabeth Fry Society is a community-based organization that works with and for women and girls in the justice system

Janet Baldwin, Chairperson of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission said, “The parties have achieved a good working relationship through the Commission’s mediation process. The agreement reveals a commitment by both to work towards the goal of accommodating the special needs of incarcerated women.”

The EFS and Manitoba Justice settlement focused on programs that meet the needs of women, including facilitating contact between incarcerated women and their children, and which meet the special needs of Aboriginal women, women with disabilities and pregnant women.

A summary of the settlement is included with this release.

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The Manitoba Human Rights Commission Settlement between
The Elizabeth Fry Society and the Government of Manitoba

SUMMARY

EFS and Manitoba Justice agreement focused on:

- The provision of programs that meet the needs of women;
- Facilitating contact with children and families;
- Meeting the special needs of Aboriginal women;
- Meeting the special needs of women with disabilities, both physical and mental;
and
- Meeting the physical, mental, nutritional and counseling needs of pregnant women.

Both parties agreed to a series of principles acknowledging that the needs of women in the corrections system differ from the needs of men, and that these differences have significant implications for the delivery of services.

Significant progress and positive changes that have been made at the Portage Correctional Centre since the start of the process include improved access to computers, one-on-one counseling, free telephone access for dealing with lawyers, the addition of a new cultural worker and enhanced spiritual services. The facility has also improved guidelines and policies relating to the use of sage and sweetgrass, assistance for physically disabled inmates and visitors, photographs and possessions and community visits for mothers and children, along with other improvements aimed at adding to the quality of inmates' lives.

A number of future initiatives have been identified, including addressing the increased demand for Aboriginal spiritual and cultural services, abuse and trauma counseling opportunities, library and recreation enhancements, regular reviews of standing orders, improvements in dealing with mental and physical disabilities, and further staff training in responding to women who harm themselves. Manitoba Justice will work with the

Manitoba Human Rights Commission to develop and deliver human rights training and material for Correctional staff and inmates.

A Women's Program Advisory Committee will be established to provide input and support in the interest of developing a program and service strategy for current and proposed facilities. The committee will consider women-centered and culturally appropriate interventions, academic needs, health and wellness issues and education programming for women involved with the criminal justice system.

The committee will be co-chaired by the Elizabeth Fry Society and Manitoba Justice, with members drawn from the community. It will be able to provide valuable advice and perspective from individuals and groups who are experts in working with, advocating for and providing services to women, including those who are in conflict with the law.

The parties have achieved a good working relationship through the Commission's mediation process and acknowledge the demonstrated concern and commitment from those within EFS and Manitoba Justice. The genuine commitment to work towards an increased accommodation of the needs of incarcerated women and their substantive equality is a mutual goal of both Manitoba Justice and EFS.

The parties hope that the working relationship can continue beyond this process and toward a future of enhanced collaboration and cooperation.