



## **The Failure of Creating Choices: CAEFS Response to the Office of the Correctional Investigator's 2020-2021 Annual Report**

**(Ottawa, Ontario) February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022:** April 2020 marked the 30-year anniversary of *Creating Choices*, the report that was to serve as the blueprint for “women’s corrections” in Canada. Today, the Office of the Correctional Investigator (OCI) released their annual report, which includes a review of “women’s corrections” in Canada. *Creating Choices* identified nine key issues, which the OCI revisits in this report in the context of today’s federal prisons designated for women. The OCI report makes clear that not only have these nine key issues not been addressed, but the conditions experienced by federally incarcerated women and gender-diverse people have gotten much worse.

The OCI’s report confirms what the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) – and anyone who has been incarcerated in a federal prison designated for women - has long known: the principles of *Creating Choices* were never fully implemented, at least not in practice. The philosophy of the document was undermined by a shift to punitive responses.

What exists now is a system in crisis, plagued by structural racism, services that fall short and produce harm, an incarcerated population comprised of many of Canada’s most disadvantaged populations, and an approach that amounts to torture, as OCI reports continue to demonstrate.

Since *Creating Choices*, there have been no shortage of reviews, reports, and commissions that have aimed at trying to solve the host of issues facing federally incarcerated women and gender-diverse people. That these initiatives continue, with few positive results, points us to an obvious conclusion: prisons are inherently inhumane. There are bodies of evidence that demonstrate that every attempt to add therapeutic interventions in prison settings fail. An inhumane place cannot be a place for healing. We can no longer spend our energy looking for more effective programs in prison. Three decades ago, *Creating Choices* recognized the social causes of incarceration, and its principles were intended to create community-centered responses that provided meaningful opportunity to resolve the economic and social determinants of incarceration and criminalization. This has not been realized for the thousands of women and gender-diverse people who have been federally incarcerated since *Creating Choices* – we have failed them.

*“First and foremost, CAEFS advocates against the incarceration and criminalization of women and gender-diverse people. We also advocate for the rights and fair treatment of people in prisons, while recognizing the limitations of this approach: that any intervention attempted within the prison system runs the risk of being coopted, eroded, and used to harm. Nowhere, perhaps, is this more obvious than in the failure of Creating Choices.”* - Emilie Coyle, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies



As one of the co-chairs of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, which led to *Creating Choices*, CAEFS wishes to thank the Office of the Correctional Investigator for highlighting the critical issues facing federally incarcerated women and gender-diverse people.

We invite you to read our supplemental perspective on the 30 years since *Creating Choices*, which will be released in the coming days.

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For comment

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