

# A Comprehensive Service and Needs Analysis Report

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Individuals leaving correctional institutions in Bruce and Grey Counties face an array of systemic barriers that hinder successful reintegration. These include fragmented discharge processes, severe housing shortages, limited transportation, and widespread stigma. While community organizations are making significant efforts to fill these gaps, structural reforms are urgently needed.

A coordinated, adequately funded, and trauma-informed system is essential to reduce recidivism and promote community well-being. This report provides a foundation for such reforms and invites further dialogue and action among policymakers, practitioners, and community stakeholders.

**Key Recommendations for systemic change and action:**

- 1. Standardize Discharge Planning**
- 2. Establish a Personal Property Retrieval Protocol**
- 3. Expand Access to Inpatient Recovery Services**
- 4. Extend Hours or Establish After-Hours Response Capacity**
- 5. Centralized Resource Hub**
- 6. Expand Housing Models**
- 7. Enhance Transportation Infrastructure**
- 8. Advance Trauma-Informed, Person-Centered Care**
- 9. Improve Data Sharing and Inter-Agency Coordination**
- 10. Conduct Public Education Campaigns**
- 11. Increase Core Funding for Social Services**

# **Mapping Discharge Pathways from Correctional Institutions in Bruce Grey:**

## **A Comprehensive Service and Needs Analysis Report**

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### **Introduction**

The process of reintegration following release from a correctional institution poses substantial challenges, particularly in rural regions like Bruce and Grey Counties in Ontario. This report investigates the systemic gaps in discharge planning, service coordination, and post-release support for individuals leaving the Central North Correctional Centre (CNCC). Drawing from qualitative data collected through interviews with staff from specific community agencies in Bruce and Grey County, the analysis identifies persistent barriers to reintegration.

These include the absence of standardized discharge planning, lack of affordable and supportive housing, limited access to government-issued ID and transportation, and structural challenges stemming from underfunding and institutional silos. The report aims to provide actionable recommendations to improve coordination and outcomes for individuals transitioning from incarceration to community life.

Having a clear plan in place to support people as they are released from jail is essential to helping them successfully reintegrate into society. Without coordinated access to housing, employment, mental health care, and community support, individuals are far more likely to fall into the same circumstances that led to incarceration—contributing to high rates of recidivism and ongoing strain on the justice system. Proactive planning reduces this cycle and promotes long-term stability and community safety.

## Methodology

This report is based on thematic analysis of qualitative interviews with staff from community mental health agencies, housing services, social assistance programs, Indigenous organizations, and legal clinics within Bruce and Grey Counties.

Agencies represented include:

- Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Grey Bruce,
- Safe 'N Sound,
- M'Wikwedong Indigenous Friendship Centre,
- Grey County Housing,
- Ontario Works (OW) operated by Bruce County and Grey County Social Services,
- Grey Bruce Community Legal Clinic,
- YMCA Owen Sound Grey Bruce,
- United Way Bruce Grey and the Poverty Task Force,
- Life Directions,
- Supportive Outreach Services (SOS)
- Brightshores Wellness and Recovery Centre,
- Owen Sound Police Service,
- and people with lived experience navigating the corrections system.

Participants shared their experiences and insights related to supporting individuals released from CNCC. All names and personal identifiers have been anonymized to maintain confidentiality. Thematic coding was used to extract patterns in barriers, service delivery gaps, and opportunities for improvement.

## Commendations and Promising Practices

While this report focuses on identifying systemic barriers and service gaps, it is equally important to recognize the considerable efforts and innovative practices demonstrated by local organizations. Despite chronic underfunding and structural limitations, community agencies in Bruce and Grey Counties exhibit an unwavering commitment to supporting individuals transitioning from incarceration.

The **Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Grey Bruce** offers a robust suite of mental health and addiction supports, including harm-reduction-focused housing programs and court support services. Their flexible, client-centered approaches enable individuals to access care without unnecessary preconditions, focusing on trust and engagement.

**Safe 'N Sound** plays a critical role in emergency response and outreach, often serving as a first point of contact for individuals released without notice or resources. Their frontline staff have demonstrated remarkable resilience and creativity in navigating funding challenges while meeting acute community needs.

The **Supportive Outreach Services (SOS)** program has been instrumental in delivering flexible, mobile, and trauma-informed supports to individuals with complex needs. Their commitment to harm reduction, cultural humility, and client advocacy ensures that services reach some of the most vulnerable and underserved members of the community. The SOS team's deep knowledge of the regional landscape and responsiveness in crisis situations have earned them widespread respect among service partners.

**M'Wikwedong Indigenous Friendship Centre** provides culturally grounded services that recognize the unique challenges faced by Indigenous individuals reintegrating into society. Their commitment to trauma-informed, inclusive care ensures that cultural identity remains central to healing and support.

**Bruce and Grey County's Ontario Works** staff have advocated strongly for the removal of administrative barriers that prevent access to basic needs. Their proactive efforts to bridge the digital divide and navigate bureaucratic complexities on behalf of clients are commendable.

**Grey Bruce Community Legal Clinic (GBCLC)** leads the way in addressing systemic discrimination within housing and legal systems. They have demonstrated a strong commitment to advocating for policy change and supporting clients in navigating complex legal matters, particularly those related to social assistance and tenant law. Their efforts are crucial in ensuring access to justice and preventing housing loss for vulnerable individuals.

The **YMCA's Rural Housing & Homelessness Outreach** staff work to prevent, address and reduce homelessness throughout Bruce County. The team provides direct support to isolated encampments, delivering basic supplies such as food and water, safety supplies, clothing, tents and sleeping bags and sanitation supplies. Their key function is the provision of Emergency Shelter, assisting people in need of a safe place to stay, available 24/7 through 211 and all Police Services located in Bruce County. Working with individuals and families to create and implement Housing Action Plans to secure long-term and sustainable housing that meets their needs. The Outreach team also works to keep people housed, with eviction prevention programming and support, along with Utility Arrears payment and assistance with the costs of getting set up in a new living environment

**YMCA Community Initiatives and Employment Services** offers services throughout Grey and Bruce Counties, providing extensive wrap-around supports and resources for job seekers and employers alike. Close alignment with Emergency Shelter providers and Ontario Works providers assist thousands of residents each year.

The **United Way of Bruce Grey** and its **Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force** contribute valuable policy advocacy, research, and regional coordination efforts that amplify local voices and push for systemic reform. The United Way of Bruce Grey, through its staff, board members and affiliate organizations, plays a key role in advocating for policy improvements and supporting community-based initiatives.

**Life Directions** provides targeted employment supports to individuals facing barriers to reintegration, helping clients identify skills, pursue opportunities, and navigate pathways to sustainable work. This organization plays an essential role in bringing attention to the broader social determinants of reintegration.

**Grey County Housing** plays an important role in addressing housing needs in Grey County. Their ongoing coordination with other community partners helps streamline access to short term shelter, transitional, and long-term housing for individuals.

**Local municipal and regional police services** have demonstrated a willingness to collaborate with community agencies to promote safer and more dignified reintegration outcomes. Their engagement in proactive discussions and referral processes highlights a commitment to community-based alternatives and public safety.

The **Brightshores Wellness and Recovery Centre** provides critical inpatient support for individuals seeking recovery from substance use and mental health challenges. Despite facing long waitlists and high demand, the centre delivers essential services in a structured, supportive environment. Their commitment to stabilization and recovery contributes meaningfully to the regional continuum of care and offers a vital option for individuals requiring intensive treatment post-release.

Collectively, these agencies represent a deeply committed network of service providers who often operate beyond the limits of their mandates to ensure no individual is left behind. Their dedication provides a strong foundation upon which to build a more cohesive, well-resourced, and equitable reintegration system.

## Thematic Findings

### 1. Discharge Planning and Communication from CNCC

Participants across all service sectors reported challenges related to discharge planning and communication from the Central North Correctional Centre (CNCC). Community-based service providers are rarely informed of discharge dates in advance, and many individuals report being released without government-issued identification, access to personal belongings, or a reliable process for retrieving medical records. These gaps pose significant barriers to continuity of care and successful reintegration.

While CNCC has internal procedures for providing short-term medications and forwarding prescriptions to community pharmacies, communication with external providers is reportedly often inconsistent or delayed. This can result in critical service interruptions, including lapses in mental health and addiction care, increasing the risk of relapse or overdose. For medications outside of Drug Replacement Therapy (DRT), CNCC typically dispenses a three-day supply at discharge and faxes a 30-day prescription to the individual's chosen pharmacy. In DRT cases, a single dose is administered upon release, and CNCC's medical team is expected to notify the client's community provider. However, community partners report that the scope and reliability of these communications remain unclear, often leaving them unaware of when or how to coordinate follow-up care.

Importantly, CNCC discharge planning is based on the needs and goals that are self-identified by the individual. Discharge planners are available to assist, but only in response to specific requests made by the inmate. As a result, the responsibility for initiating and guiding the discharge process falls largely on the individual—many of whom may be navigating complex barriers such as mental health, substance use disorder, limited access to a phone, transportation, or support networks.

Regarding personal property, CNCC does have a process for property retrieval, coordinated through an Inmate Property Coordinator. However, access to this service is limited to a small number of approved agencies (including CMHA, Probation and Parole, an Indigenous-serving organization, and Grey County OW) and is contingent on client consent and strict procedural compliance. While individuals discharged directly from CNCC at sentence completion usually receive their belongings, significant service gaps remain for those released directly from court following a CNCC transfer. In these cases, individuals are often released without personal identification, clothing, or cell phones, as these remain in custody at CNCC.

The absence of a broadly accessible and well-communicated retrieval protocol can result in individuals being discharged without even basic necessities—such as appropriate footwear, as they are often released in institutional “jail shoes” unsuitable for the weather—severely limiting their ability to access shelter, healthcare, or transportation services.

A more coordinated and inclusive discharge process—integrating CNCC, court services, and local agencies—is needed to ensure all individuals, regardless of their release pathway, can reclaim their property and access essential services in a timely, dignified manner.

## **2. Limited Capacity of Services**

In Bruce and Grey Counties, the short-term shelter programs provide 24/7 access to shelter; but these programs are frequently at capacity, leading to people being turned away, especially in the warmer months.

This presents a recurring challenge across Bruce and Grey Counties. Clients who are released from CNCC and arrive in the region after 5:00 PM—particularly on Fridays—and are often left without immediate access to critical services such as shelter, food, government-issued ID support, or intake assessments. With most services closed over the weekend, this delay can leave individuals without essential supports for multiple days, increasing their vulnerability to homelessness, substance use, or criminal activity. The lack of 24/7 or evening support options is a critical service gap that undermines timely reintegration.

## **3. Housing Instability and Lack of Options**

Grey and Bruce County suffer from a critical shortage of both harm reduction and abstinence-based housing. While the short-term shelter program operates as a low-barrier system, there is an additional need for a low-barrier brick-and-mortar shelter(s) with beds and sleeping accommodations for the region. Transitional housing programs often require engagement or prior ties to the community in Grey County. Even individuals who complete structured programs, such as those offered by CMHA or local treatment centres, face relapse due to the insufficient availability of long-term sober living arrangements. Concurrently, individuals not ready for abstinence are excluded from many programs, as harm reduction housing options remain limited and under-resourced.



#### **4. Transportation Barriers**

While transportation support is available for individuals seeking Employment Services across Grey-Bruce, and YMCA Employment Services can provide funding for travel to work from rural areas, the vast geographic scale of Bruce and Grey Counties—comparable to the Greater Toronto area in size—lacks adequate public transportation infrastructure. This absence of affordable and accessible transit severely impedes recently released individuals from accessing essential services such as healthcare, employment support, or social assistance. Although the Central North Correctional Centre (CNCC) utilizes a combination of public, private, and taxi services to facilitate release transportation, existing community-based transportation programs are underfunded and often exhaust their annual budgets by early spring. These limitations effectively isolate individuals in need from critical reintegration support services.

#### **5. Systemic Underfunding and Workforce Challenges**

Participants across sectors cited chronic underfunding as a barrier to adequate service provision. Mental health, addiction programs, and social services have received minimal base funding increases over the past decade, despite rising inflation and demand. Organizations are frequently forced to leave staff positions vacant, reduce services, or make short-term decisions based on unpredictable funding cycles. This financial precarity also impacts staff retention and morale, with many care providers experiencing burnout, and compassion fatigue due to futility of complex work.

#### **6. Government-issued ID and Banking Access**

Release without personal government-issued identification remains a pervasive issue. Letters of Incarceration are inconsistently recognized by banks and Service Ontario branches, despite official guidelines. As a result, individuals are unable to access their bank accounts, apply for social assistance, or replace essential documents. Service providers expend significant effort advocating for their clients through calls and written letters, often to no avail. This administrative barrier creates a cascading effect that delays or prevents stabilization.

#### **7. Stigma, Discrimination, and Punitive Practices**

Reintegration is further complicated by pervasive stigma. Employers frequently refuse to hire individuals with criminal records. Discrimination based on race, gender identity, or housing status was also reported in interactions with healthcare, housing, and legal institutions. Service models rooted in punitive logic, such as behavior contracts or

abstinence-only requirements, were described as out of touch with trauma-informed care principles. These practices deter engagement and risk re-traumatization.

## **8. Eligibility Restrictions and Bureaucratic Intake Systems**

Many programs impose restrictive eligibility criteria. For instance, CMHA's Court Support program is only available to individuals who express any form of mental health or addictions concerns—regardless of whether a formal diagnosis is present or confirmed. Services are inclusive of individuals with minor concerns, such as anxiety about attending court, as well as those who wish to address substance use. While the program also supports individuals with diagnosed mental health disorders, a diagnosis is not a requirement for eligibility. However, a mental health or addictions concern must be expressed for the client to be eligible.

The short-term shelter programs in the Counties require proof of local ties before someone is granted access to the program. Additionally, centralized and digitized intake processes—such as mandatory online Ontario Works applications through the call centre located in Toronto—create barriers for those without phones or internet access. Although clients can use the kiosks at any OW office, this digital divide disproportionately affects those most in need of immediate support.

## **Discussion: Systemic Challenges to Reintegration**

The themes reveal a system that, while composed of dedicated professionals and innovative programs, remains fragmented and under-resourced. The absence of a coordinated discharge strategy from CNCC exacerbates downstream challenges, placing overwhelming pressure on community agencies and the individuals themselves. Without ID, housing, reliable access to medication, or transportation, individuals are often released into "nothingness"—a term echoed by several interviewees. The system's inability to accommodate both harm reduction and abstinence pathways leaves many with no viable housing options. Meanwhile, the continued reliance on punitive, abstinence-only approaches reflects institutional lag in adopting trauma-informed, evidence-based practices.

## Recommendations

1. **Standardize Discharge Planning:** Implement a comprehensive, institutionalized discharge planning protocol at CNCC that includes pre-release coordination with community partners, advance notice of release dates, and the secure transfer of personal ID, medical information, and direct medical referrals.
2. **Establish a Personal Property Retrieval Protocol:** Develop and implement a streamlined, region-specific protocol to enable clients from Bruce and Grey Counties to retrieve their personal property from CNCC efficiently and reliably. This protocol should ensure that individuals are discharged with essential items such as government-issued ID, clothing, and personal effects, which are critical for accessing services and achieving stabilization post-release.
3. **Expand Access to Inpatient Recovery Services:** Support and enhance the capacity of regional inpatient treatment programs, such as the Brightshores Wellness and Recovery Centre, to meet the complex needs of individuals transitioning from correctional settings. This includes addressing waitlists, improving continuity of care post-discharge, and increasing funding to expand program availability.
4. **Extend Hours or Establish After-Hours Response Capacity:** Expand operational hours or create an integrated after-hours service model to provide essential support to individuals arriving in the community outside regular business hours. This may include rotating agency coverage, on-call crisis navigation, or a central intake line available evenings and weekends. Ensuring connections to harm reduction, shelter services, transportation, and case management support during these vulnerable hours is essential to effective reintegration.
5. **Centralized Resource Hub:** Implement an interagency single-point intake process that co-locates services such as housing, social assistance, employment, and mental health support, reducing the burden of navigation for individuals post-release.
6. **Expand Housing Models:** Invest in a spectrum of housing options that include both abstinence-based and harm reduction models. These should include emergency shelters, transitional housing, and long-term supportive residences tailored to various stages of recovery.



7. **Enhance Transportation Infrastructure:** Establish and increase core funding verses project-based provincial and federal investment in rural transit systems and expand subsidized community transportation options to ensure affordability.
8. **Advance Trauma-Informed, Person-Centered Care:** Provide cross-sector training on trauma-informed care, eliminate punitive intake practices, and include individuals with lived experience in program design and evaluation.
9. **Improve Data Sharing and Inter-Agency Coordination:** Develop a secure digital platform to facilitate information sharing between agencies with proper consent protocols, allowing for coordinated case management.
10. **Conduct Public Education Campaigns:** Address stigma by educating employers, banks, and public service providers about the validity of incarceration documents and the rights of returning citizens.
11. **Increase Core Funding for Social Services:** Secure multi-year, predictable funding for core programs to enable long-term planning, staffing stability, and program continuity.

## Gratitude and Closing Reflection

As we conclude this report, it is essential to pause and extend heartfelt gratitude to the many individuals and organizations who continue to show up—day after day—in an overburdened and under-resourced system. Their commitment, compassion, and ingenuity ensure that even within systemic limitations, people are met with dignity, respect, and real opportunities for a better future.

To those working on the front lines, navigating fractured pathways and chronic resource shortages, we see you. Your perseverance in the face of these challenges is not only commendable—it is vital. Your efforts form the bedrock of community resilience and embody the principle that no one is beyond help, no one is disposable.

We also affirm, unequivocally, that every human life holds inherent value—regardless of incarceration status, past mistakes, or histories of criminal involvement. Reintegration is not a privilege; it is a human right. The measure of a just society is not in how it treats the most fortunate but in how it supports the most marginalized.

May this report serve as both a call to action and a recognition of the extraordinary work already being done. Together, we can continue to build pathways of possibility, hope, and belonging for all.

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