

This report is made possible through a joint contribution by Public Safety Canada and the Aboriginal Initiatives Branch of Correctional Service of Canada.

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Waseskun Healing Center
A Successful Therapeutic
Healing Community
APC 28 CA (2008)

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Cat. No.: PS4-62/2008

ISBN No.: 978-0-662-05831-1

The History, Lessons And Observations
Of Waseskun Healing Center, A Successful Therapeutic Healing
Community

Author: Shawn Bell

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Waseskun Healing Center, established in 1988, is a non-profit private Healing Lodge contracting with Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) for the rehabilitation of Aboriginal men from penitentiaries and from communities.

Waseskun has been working for twenty years to perfect its' approach to healing. Today Waseskun uses the teachings of the medicine wheel to address all aspects of an individual – the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual – in order to provide balance in an individual's life so he can successfully re-integrate into his community or society.

In addition to the primary healing done through programs and one-on-one work with the Elder and Helpers, Waseskun provides cultural and spiritual teachings intended to enhance an individual's healing and help with re-integration back into communities.

This study of the Waseskun Healing Center, encouraged by CSC's recent attempts to translate the Healing Lodge's principles and teachings into the mainstream penitentiary system, set out to examine the workings of Waseskun in order to determine what makes a successful therapeutic healing community.

During the five months spent researching Waseskun, over 40 personal interviews were done with staff, residents, former residents, visiting Elders and CSC employees. These interviews were complemented by numerous informal conversations with staff and residents, as well as personal observations of life at Waseskun.

Waseskun is a successful therapeutic healing community. Every interview spoke of the positive benefits Waseskun is able to provide for residents and every interview implied that it is a good place for an individual to learn how to heal himself, if that individual is ready to do so.

This is the first, and most important, requirement that Waseskun asks of residents – that they are willing, ready to heal themselves, and to look deeply at their own life to determine the issues that

need to be addressed. If someone is ready, then Waseskun has many tools to make this step on their healing path successful.

Waseskun is a safe, tranquil environment which is an important consideration in a resident's de-institutionalization. The feelings of safety, as well as the dedication and sincerity of the staff, allow for trust to be built between residents and staff, especially among the Elder and Helpers who work with the residents. That trust helps to create a sense of community, the feeling that everyone who is here, staff and residents alike, are working together towards a common goal – rehabilitation of the resident for re-integration into his own community.

With those things in place, Waseskun's Elder and Helpers are able to go deeper into healing each individual through programs done in a holistic, Aboriginal way, and one-on-one sessions with every individual. The work that each person does in programs and one-on-one sessions is complemented by the community of Waseskun, where other residents are working on their own issues and living in a good way, free from violence, aggression and substance abuse.

As Waseskun's goal is the eventual re-integration of offenders into their communities, or society in general, the spiritual and cultural teachings are equally important to healing. Spirituality at Waseskun means the connection of each individual to his or her own spirit. It does not matter which religious beliefs a person has, the importance is in that connection to spirit. Cultural teachings complement that spirituality by showing residents the importance of an Aboriginal worldview. These teachings help to instill a sense of self-confidence in each individual, and when that self-confidence is combined with the spiritual goals of striving to be a better person each day, the resident can leave with the knowledge of how to live a better life and the confidence to use that knowledge in society.

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INTRODUCTION

The first person that you meet when you come to Waseskun is a man known as the gatekeeper. He is in charge of opening the gate when somebody wants to come in and closing the gate after somebody leaves. That is his job, he is the gatekeeper.

This man was not always the gatekeeper. When he came to Waseskun he was an ordinary resident, known more as being a trouble maker than anything else. He was always doing something to push the rules with one petty act after another. It got so bad that the Healing Council was going to extract him. The Council does not like to extract people but they will if necessary, and for a time, it was believed that this resident's extraction was necessary. When the Healing Council sat down to decide, they realized what this man's problem was. He craved attention and he would do anything to get it including, and especially, breaking the rules.

Instead of giving him reflection or a time-out, which was not working, or just giving up and sending him back to CSC, the Council decided on a creative punishment. They would appoint him gatekeeper and his job would be to man the gate.

Recently the gatekeeper celebrated his two-year anniversary at Waseskun. If you ask any staff member about this man, they will tell you that the improvements seen in him, from his personality to his interaction with other residents and staff, are astonishing. He smiles now. They say he'll talk to you and he'll look you in the eyes. He's not trying to pick fights with other residents. He's not doing silly little things to break the rules. He has his place as a part of the community. He understands his role and that he is an important person in the operation of Waseskun.

I mention this individual because, in my eyes, he exemplifies much of what is special about Waseskun. Foremost, he is an example of the staff's belief that everyone can change. There are no lost souls and there are no hopeless cases. Every individual is good at his or her core, and everyone can come back to being the good person that they are. Everyone has their own issues to deal with, but if they are willing to work on those issues, then anyone can change.

Waseskun also has a belief in the importance of a unique approach to healing for each resident. This is something seen in programs, where groups are dependent upon the contributions of each individual who sits in the circle, and one-on-one work with the Elder or a Helper is crucial to successful healing. It is seen in terms of discipline, where the freedom exists to discipline guys according to their own needs. It is seen in the interactions between staff and residents, where everyone is addressed by first names. Everyone is treated with respect, and everyone is considered equally important to the success of Waseskun.

The gatekeeper also exemplifies Waseskun's belief in the importance of community. All residents are expected to be a part of the community whether that means they mentor for other residents, clear the snow in the winter, mop floors or wash dishes, every resident is a part of the community and has a role in keeping the community operating smoothly.

This is in keeping with Waseskun's mission, that is, to rehabilitate men in order to assist their reintegration back into their communities or society in general. By teaching men how to interact as part of a community while retaining their individuality, it is hoped that they will take those lessons with them when they leave Waseskun, and they will go out into the world to be productive members of society.

As you read through this document you will see that the healing work done at Waseskun goes much deeper than this. But it is these key points, exemplified by the gatekeeper and the belief that everyone can change, together with the individual healing approach for each person, the sense of community, and the mission to rehabilitate for reintegration that provide the context in which Waseskun operates as a successful therapeutic healing community.

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH

1.1 Background

In the past five years there has been an increased attempt by Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) to address the Aboriginal experience in the justice system according to three CSC employees interviewed during this study. CSC now operates a “continuum of care” model that provides Aboriginal offenders with a culturally-sensitive approach, if they are interested, starting with their incarceration.

It is clearly important to attend to the needs of Aboriginal offenders given the large proportion of Aboriginal people inside the Canadian correctional system. Although Aboriginal people make up 2.5% of the Canadian population, 17.8% of Canadian federal inmates were Aboriginal offenders. This is a number that has doubled since 1987.

CSC’s continuum of care works with the offender throughout his or her incarceration, encouraging offenders to focus on their healing plans, work with Elders, and learn more about their culture and tradition. CSC has also established Pathways Units, which are units in all levels of secure institutions, where Aboriginal inmates can live in a culturally sensitive healing environment and work to get down to minimum security so that they can be accepted at a Healing Lodge.

The work that CSC is doing is intended to lead those Aboriginal offenders into a Healing Lodge to finish serving their sentence. Healing Lodges, according to the CSC website, “offer services and programs that reflect Aboriginal culture in a space that incorporates Aboriginal peoples’ traditions and beliefs. In the Healing Lodge, the needs of Aboriginal offenders serving federal sentences are addressed through Aboriginal teachings and ceremonies, contact with Elders, and interaction with nature. A holistic philosophy governs the approach, whereby individualized programming is delivered within a context of community interaction, with a focus on preparing for release.”

The statistical reports of Healing Lodges show at least an equal level of success as other minimum-security institutions and in some cases, a higher level of success. Other facts lead to the belief that the Healing Lodges have much to offer. Specifically, almost all of the Healing Lodges in Canada are operating near, or at, capacity because offenders are choosing to go to Healing Lodges and stay once they get there.

CSC has recognized that they need to look at the Healing Lodge approach in order to effectively attend to the needs of Aboriginal offenders. That recognition has led to the establishment of four Aboriginal-controlled Healing Lodges and an increased understanding of the work that the Healing Lodges do and, consequently, an increase in the number of men and women heading from prison to the Healing Lodges.

However, long before CSC understood the Healing Lodge approach to healing, long before that approach was recognized as effective, and certainly long before CSC began modeling their own strategies on that approach; private Healing Lodges were operating in Canada. They overcame obstacles and skepticism to the belief that an Aboriginal approach to healing was the proper and effective way to rehabilitate Aboriginal men in order to help them reintegrate into their communities.

Waseskun Healing Center, the only Healing Lodge east of Manitoba, is one such private organization. For twenty years the staff has worked to build their own healing approach based on the medicine wheel, Aboriginal culture, and spirituality. For twenty years it has slowly grown into the successful healing community that it is today. The ideas that Waseskun has advanced over the past twenty years have gained prominence in the mainstream justice system. It is important to reflect on what Waseskun does and why, as a model for a successful therapeutic healing community.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine Waseskun Healing Center as a model of a successful Healing Lodge, identify the core values, beliefs and structures that a successful Healing Lodge

is based upon, and determine what makes Waseskun a successful therapeutic healing community. The study also attempts to document what life is like for the people at a healing center, both residents and staff. Additionally, the study sets out to gather and record the history of Waseskun Healing Center.

1.3 Research Methodology

In examining Waseskun Healing Center, a qualitative research approach was used as this was considered the most effective approach for a variety of reasons. Foremost, this type of approach is better suited to the Aboriginal worldview that is such an important element of Waseskun. The healing model used at Waseskun is not one of statistics and cognition, it is a model that examines emotions and works with the heart. It was important to be a part of the Waseskun community in order to do this research and examine a healing approach where the individual is most important.

The healing journey for each resident, and each staff member for that matter, is an individual journey. It was important to keep this in mind throughout the study. For that reason every interview was different. At Waseskun, healing depends on the energies that are circulating that day, where the individual is at with their own healing, the energy of the Helper and the environment at the time. Therefore, interviews and conversations were always subjective and a result of many different factors. Often an interview would begin with one subject and switch direction. This is similar to the teachings in programs and circles at Waseskun and is an important factor to keep in mind for this study.

In reflecting on methodology, the sections of the report must be divided into two distinct areas: first, the history of Waseskun; and second, the case study examination of what makes a Healing Center and what makes Waseskun a successful healing community.

For the history of Waseskun, an oral history approach to interviewing was used. Key informants were identified in consultation with Waseskun's Director, Stan Cudek. They were chosen for their involvement with Waseskun in the early days. Due to time restrictions,

however, only a limited number of those could be contacted. Nine interviews were done regarding the history of Waseskun: four in person, four on the phone and one via e-mail. The e-mail interview was more heavily structured around specific questions while the others were around memories of the time when he or she was involved with Waseskun. Questions were kept to a minimum and the interviewee was informed well in advance that I wished to hear about Waseskun from their earliest involvement. Generally, during the interview I listened and questions were asked only when necessary to facilitate continued conversation. The story of Waseskun's history appears as Chapter Three.

The case study section of this project (Chapter Two, Chapter Four, Chapter Five, Chapter Six and Chapter Seven) utilized three different research approaches: structured research interviews, informal interviews/conversations and personal observations.

Formal interviews were done with fifteen members of the Waseskun staff, and complemented with many informal conversations with residents and staff. The information gathered during this period was added to personal observations of life at Waseskun,. From all of this came the introduction to the core values of Waseskun and Waseskun as a healing center today.

The second task, once I had a better understanding of Waseskun, was to determine what it is that makes it a successful healing community. From the initial interviews, my own observations, and informal conversations with residents it was clear that the vast majority of people viewed Waseskun as a very good place for healing. Why is Waseskun successful and how does the staff create an environment that is conducive to healing?

Thirty-two formal, one-on-one interviews were compiled. Fifteen interviews were completed with staff; six with residents, two with former residents; three with members of the Waseskun Board of Directors, two with visiting Elders, and four with CSC employees. The interviews had a loose structure around the key question – “Is Waseskun a successful healing community and if so, what makes it successful?” The interviews were kept informal enough to follow whatever direction the interviewee wished to take. Interviews ranged from ten minutes to three hours in length and were tape-recorded.

The content of these interviews compose the bulk of the data for the study. This information was complemented by personal observations and frequent, informal interviews and conversations that indirectly contributed to the data analysis. The information gained from these conversations with Waseskun staff and residents often served to corroborate the information from the structured interviews and provided important contextual and verifying perspectives.

1.4 Transcript preparation and Data Analysis

Tape-recorded interviews were transcribed immediately following the interview and a transcription and a first edit done for each. This edit was used to correct typographical errors, insert necessary punctuation and correct minor grammatical errors. All interviews were done in English, however not all interviewees speak English as a first language. For this reason, tenses and grammatical errors were corrected in order to clarify meaning. The goal of editing the transcripts was to ease the reader's comprehension of the topics discussed but not to change the views of those interviewed.

Personal observations were advanced from field notes to full written observations as soon as possible after an event. Conversations with staff or residents that contained interesting and relevant information were later turned into an observation report from memory or field notes.

Following the data-collection period, the transcripts and observation reports were reviewed. The data from this review composed the bulk of this report and through repeated reviewing of transcripts and observation reports, key themes emerged. Themes were organized in three sections: staff, residents and outside interviews. Key themes were cross-referenced between the groups and, if a theme was prevalent in at least two groups, that theme was used to organize the information.

During the writing process quotations would leap about in memory as a key theme was being written. These are the quotations found in Chapter Five and Chapter Seven. As discussed above, the quotations were edited to add clarity only and in no instance was the content of the

quotation distorted through this editing process.

CHAPTER TWO – INTRODUCTION TO WASESKUN HEALING CENTER

2.1 Introduction

Waseskun Healing Center is a place for Aboriginal men to get the cultural teachings they need to heal themselves. Waseskun, the only Aboriginal Healing Center east of Manitoba, brings together men of many nations from the correctional systems and from communities. It attempts to get these men, and the staff who work with them, to form a community of people who are walking the healing path together.

The goal of Waseskun Healing Center is to rehabilitate individuals in order to help them re-integrate into their own communities. Through the work of Elders and Helpers, Waseskun offers programs and one-on-one therapy for individuals to deal with the issues that resulted in their past criminal behavior. Waseskun combines those teachings with cultural and spiritual lessons and ceremonies to help individuals connect to the world around them.

In addition, Waseskun teaches residents to be a part of a community while retaining their individuality. Residents at Waseskun are expected to participate in the community by doing chores, chopping wood, sharing in circles and simply living in a positive way, free from anger and violence. In this way they help each other walk in the right way on the healing path.

Waseskun is located on a four-acre property in the foothills of the Laurentians in Quebec. The property borders a pine forest and a lake, providing residents the opportunity to hike, swim, look for medicines, chop wood and learn to identify plants and animals in their natural habitat. These things are all part of teaching skills pertaining to life on the land that are so important in an Aboriginal world view, while enhancing personal healing with a connection to the natural world.

2.2 Core Values

Waseskun Healing Center is based on the belief that all human beings are good; that we are born pure and healthy and in balance with the universe. Through every experience in our lives we learn how to interact with others, how to deal with situations and how to react to stimuli. All of our experiences condition us and teach us how to live and react to situations that arise in the present. So when we make a decision, that decision is based on our past experiences. When we make mistakes, those mistakes are based on the conditioning we have received throughout our lives.

As one can learn bad behaviors that lead to bad decisions, one can also learn good ways and be taught to make good decisions. As one is conditioned by negative experiences and actions, the same is true of positive experiences and actions. There is a story on a poster on a wall at Waseskun. The story is called “The Two Wolves Within. “

One evening an old man told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, “My son, the battle is between two wolves inside us all. One is Evil. It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority and ego. The other is good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith.” The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: “Which wolf wins?” The old man quietly replied, “The one you feed.”

At Waseskun they are teaching men how to feed the good wolf within. There is no better way to explain it. When you feed the good, you will be better. When you feed the bad, you will be worse. The choice is always yours.

Healing at Waseskun is based on individuality. Each person is unique. Every moment of our life, every interaction, every thought, has shaped the person we are today. With that individuality comes the responsibility that each one of us has to take care of ourselves. No one can do it for us because healing is a personal journey. The Elders and Helpers can show a

person the path but the Elders and Helpers cannot walk it. Every step of one's journey must be taken on one's own.

For that reason the first requirement for anyone coming to Waseskun is to have a sincere desire to change. Realizing and accepting this is the first step on the healing path. Once an individual has taken that step all that came before is left behind. He is no longer a criminal. Now, he is just a human being; a human being who has come to heal and a human being who is open to change.

Waseskun understands that there is no point when an individual is "healed". Waseskun can show someone how to walk on the healing path and give them the tools to heal themselves but their journey will take them back out to the world, because healing is a journey that lasts a lifetime. So Waseskun teaches that healing is being aware, and being in control, of every thought and every action. Healing is living in a good way. Healing is being alert and always ready for battle. That's the two wolves within.

2.3 Holistic Healing and the Medicine Wheel

Holistic healing is treating all aspects of an individual and not merely treating a disease. At Waseskun, a holistic healing model is used to address the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual sides of a person. When someone comes to Waseskun with an issue to work on, that issue gets examined from every possible angle. When you examine the issue you realize that it is tied into all aspects of your life from your childhood, your upbringing, to the person you are today. Each aspect of your life must be examined and when you do this, you see that the issue has a cause and effect that spread across your entire being. Perhaps you find that the problem actually comes from a deeper emotional issue that must be healed because if you do not get to the root of the problem and address the issues there, you can never heal the problem itself. This imbalance can cause unhealthy mental reactions which results in a deterioration of the physical body and this must be mended as it is a direct result of a disconnect between your mind, body and spirit. So healing can not be viewed as a simple thing.

As Waseskun is a multi-national community, the Waseskun interpretation of the medicine wheel takes ideas from different nations. The basis of that interpretation is that everyone has their own medicine wheel inside. An individual on his healing path moves around the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of the medicine wheel. As he does this the understanding of his own medicine wheel comes. It speaks of being in balance. If a person is off-balance in their life they are not in harmony with themselves and the world around them. The medicine wheel re-establishes that balance because it looks at all aspects of an individual – the physical, the emotional, the mental and the spiritual.

Healing at Waseskun is not taught from a textbook. It does not follow a specific formula. When a Helper begins working at Waseskun, he or she is told to “do it in a way that you teach”. The Elder and Helpers share the teachings that they’ve picked up on their own journeys so there is no one path of healing to follow. It depends on the Helper, the residents, and the energy in the group on a specific day, as well as where each individual is at on their own healing journey. This is very different from a cognitive behavioural approach where a group is told “this is what you will learn today” and the next time the group meets they move on in a logical procession of lessons. At Waseskun the teachings are given in a way that reflects how teachings are given in an Indigenous world. No one teaching is ever the same. If you’re listening to the same teaching for the twentieth time, it will be twenty different ways that the teaching is shared. In this way the residents get to look at that teaching in many different ways and they are able to link it to the teachings they have had previously in their lives.

2.4 Culture and Spirituality

One of Waseskun’s key teachings is the separation of culture and spirituality. Both are important for successful healing, but they are very different things.

Cultural teachings at Waseskun are intended to re-enforce an Aboriginal identity for residents, some of whom have strong ties to their own cultural background while others have little or no knowledge of their roots. As Waseskun is a multi-national community, cultural practices and

teachings are taken from many different First Nations. Ceremonies like sweat lodges, drumming and fire teachings help residents understand what it means to be an Aboriginal person and that, it is believed, provides roots to enhance the healing process.

Spirituality is not an Aboriginal teaching. Spirituality is universal. There is only human spirituality. It does not matter if you are Mohawk or Samoan, Buddhist or Christian; spirituality is simply the connection between your mind, body and spirit. Everything in the world has a spirit. It is the connection to our spirit that allows us to understand that we are equal to everything else. We recognize that we are an important part of Creation and that each and every life is sacred including our own.

Waseskun attempts to connect each resident with his own spirit. By empowering the individual spirit, Waseskun brings the resident to the point where he is healing himself. But equally important, in the long term, is that the resident acquires a belief in the inter-connection of all Creation and his individual place within that Creation. Combined with the cultural teachings that re-enforce his important place as an Aboriginal person, he will have the strength and faith to carry him through the tough times on the healing path and help him to live in a good way.

CHAPTER THREE – HISTORY OF WASESKUN HEALING CENTER

3.1 Twenty years of healing

To see Waseskun today you'd be surprised to know that it is classified as a minimum-security prison. The sun shines through the pine trees and two residents are out front enjoying the early warmth of spring. There are no chain-link fences or guard towers in sight. You can hear the birds and the breeze through the trees and it is quiet, tranquil and peaceful.

This is the home of over 35 residents who have come from correctional facilities or their own individual communities. They have left gray walls and a bleak outlook behind them and are moving ahead with their own lives and working on their own healing.

This is the Waseskun Healing Center. To see it today is to see the power of a dream. The dream was to provide a place where Aboriginal people could heal in their own way and where people could have another chance to live their lives in the best possible way. Today the dream has become a reality. This reality, however, was not always so tangible. The dream of Waseskun has overcome innumerable hardships, immense skepticism from people in power, and many setbacks to get to the point of preparing to celebrate Waseskun's twentieth anniversary.

To think back to a time before Waseskun, when there was very little belief in a problem with the justice system's approach to dealing with Aboriginal people, is to think of a time when even the idea of Waseskun was visionary. Nothing like this place existed in Eastern Canada. Very few people were thinking that Aboriginal people needed help and fewer still thought Aboriginal people would be able to help themselves.

But in the 1980's a group of people came together, founded on the belief that Aboriginal people could best address the problems facing Aboriginal people, and decided that they were going to do something for Aboriginal people leaving prison on their way back to their

communities. These people found other like-minded individuals and support in the Aboriginal communities. These individuals were the first Waseskun committee. They were the ones who formed the first Board of Directors who took Waseskun from being an idea to being the first Aboriginal halfway house in Quebec and then to being the only Aboriginal healing center east of Manitoba.

That journey was not easy, the work done by these first people, and the people who joined Waseskun later, was extraordinary. To understand Waseskun, its' history must be known and to understand Waseskun's history, one must start by looking at the people who formed the idea and made that idea a reality.

3.2 Pre-Waseskun

Stan Cudek, of Ojibway heritage, knows first hand the harsh realities of the prison system. He also knows that a person can change and that anyone can grow and learn to live in a positive way. Stan joined Waseskun after working as Assistant Director of Les Services Parajudiciaires Autochones du Quebec (SPAQ), where he set up Aboriginal Courtworker offices in communities across Quebec and the Aboriginal Liaison Officers (ALO) inside the prisons. At SPAQ, Stan also researched the feasibility of setting up an Aboriginal halfway house but, in 1984, the number of Aboriginal federal inmates did not warrant further development. Later, when Lylie Otter-Williams approached him with the idea of an Aboriginal Halfway House, Stan got involved and with his extensive knowledge of the Canadian prison system, Stan became the driving force behind the development of Waseskun, first as Waseskun's President of the Board and later as Waseskun's first and only Executive Director.

Barbara Malloch, of Mohawk heritage, was raised in Montreal. Barbara joined Waseskun after years of being involved with Montreal's Native Friendship Center where at one time she was President. Previous to her involvement in Waseskun, Barbara was also involved in Friendship in Time, a group that went into the prisons to speak to Aboriginal men inside, and the Anglican Church in Montreal. As a child and young woman Barbara harbored a curiosity about her Aboriginal roots but, as she grew up in the city and had no Aboriginal language, she felt

alienated from those roots. Yet after being pressured by her friend, Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, to join the Aboriginal Friendship Center in the 1970's, Barbara realized that she had much to offer, and learn, from the Aboriginal community. Her work with Waseskun's Board of Directors for the past twenty years has been a fulfillment of that realization.

Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, of Chippewa heritage, joined Waseskun along with Barbara Malloch at the invitation of Stan Cudek, and was a member of the original committee and first Board of Directors. Gail was raised on a reserve in Wisconsin, and eventually ended up in Montreal as a Professor of Native Studies and later Department Head of Communication Studies and Dean of the Arts and Science faculty at Concordia University. In Montreal, Gail was instrumental in the early days of the Native Friendship Center. She joined Friendship in Time when that group was going into the prisons in the early 1980's, and was influential in Waseskun's early development and later vision. She served on the Board of Directors for nearly twenty years.

Joe Mell, an Irish-Canadian who grew up in Montreal, helped formulate the original idea of Waseskun together with John Corston. He also joined Waseskun's original committee and original Board of Directors. Joe came to Waseskun with first-hand knowledge of the hard work necessary to open a halfway house. He served on the St. Leonard's Society Board of Directors in the early 1970's and was involved in establishing Cross Roads, an Anglophone halfway house in Montreal. Joe ran Cross Roads for twelve years and, in that time, saw the drastic differences in success rates between Anglophone and Aboriginal men. He estimated that there was a seventy-five per cent successful rehabilitation rate with Anglophone men as compared to ten per cent for Aboriginal men. In the mid-1980's, while head of Good Sheppard's Men's' Hostel, Joe made an arrangement to provide employment opportunities for Aboriginal men on parole. This would be a crucial first step in the formation of the idea of Waseskun.

John Corston, of Ojibway and Cree descent, was inspired by his volunteer work with Aboriginal men on parole to find work for them and later, in consultation with Joe Mell, came up with the idea of starting an Aboriginal halfway house in Montreal. At the time, John was working as a cleaner for Joe Mell at Good Sheppard's. One day, while praying in the chapel,

John heard a voice telling him to pray for Aboriginal people. So John went to volunteer at the Native Friendship Center and soon, Aboriginal men on parole were coming to John for advice and assistance. John took them back to Joe Mell at Good Sheppard's where they were given odd jobs to do. As more men started coming, John and Joe started talking about the need for an Aboriginal halfway house. This idea would grow into Waseskun.

Lylie Otter-Williams, of Mohawk descent, was the first person John and Joe approached with the idea for an Aboriginal halfway house. At the time she was Quebec's first Aboriginal Liaison officer (ALO) and her work in the prisons helping Aboriginal men prepare for release had shown her that there was a void in the services. She saw that there was no specific Aboriginal program-centered halfway house and no place for Aboriginal people to get the unique assistance that they needed on leaving prison. So Lylie joined the original Waseskun committee, and would later join the first Board of Directors. Lylie would also be the person to approach Stan Cudek, her boss at SPAQ, and convince him to join the Waseskun committee.

These seven people had one thing in common. They were each involved in the community of Montreal before they were involved with Waseskun. That community, centered on the Aboriginal community of Montreal and the surrounding reserves, paved the way for Waseskun's formation in the 1970's and 1980's.

The importance of the work done to address the Aboriginal experience with the justice system before Waseskun came to be cannot be understated. The Aboriginal community in Montreal took care of the initial problems faced by Aboriginal people after they got arrested such as finding a lawyer, going to court, sentencing, time in prison and release plans from prison. Because these services were already in place, the need for an Aboriginal halfway house took root again and grew as a logical extension of those previous efforts when the idea resurfaced in 1987.

The crux of the community support came from Montreal's Native Friendship Center (NFCM) which was formed in 1974 as an Aboriginal student drop-in center. The NFCM grew over the years and provided a place for Aboriginal people to discuss problems and brainstorm solutions

to the issues surrounding Aboriginal people in the urban environment. The support of the Director of the NFCM, Margaret Horn, was crucial in Waseskun's early development.

Growing out of the NFCM was Friendship in Time (FIT), a group of people who made trips to the penitentiaries around the Kingston area to provide support for the Aboriginal men inside. Barbara Malloch, Gail Guthrie Valaskakis and Margaret Horn were all involved with FIT and, during their travels to prisons, the three women learned some of the issues facing Aboriginal men in the prison system. They realized that the reality prisons were preparing men to go back to was not an Aboriginal reality. Rather than getting help for the issues they faced, the men were acquiring contacts for drugs and other illegal activities that they would take back to the Aboriginal communities.

The women also met with Elders who went to the prisons to meet and help the men inside. The Elders shared with the women some of their difficulties and the lack of respect they faced on these visits to the prisons. The Elders were searched and questioned. Their medicine bundles were opened and the medicines inside were handled and examined by guards. It was very different than the treatment Christian priests received. The lessons that Friendship in Time took from their prison visits were shared at the Native Friendship Center and influenced the later work that the Center undertook.

Friendship in Time ended operations after three years with the establishment of Les Services Parajudiciaires Autochones du Quebec (SPAQ), which was an organization dedicated to improving Aboriginal peoples' dealings with the legal system. SPAQ, with Stan Cudek as Assistant Director, set up Aboriginal Court worker offices in eighteen regions across Quebec. Court workers assisted the accused with the first steps through the legal system and included finding and working with a lawyer, going to court and sentencing.

SPAQ established an Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO) program and placed individuals inside prisons to assist Aboriginal inmates with Parole Boards, release plans and everything else dealing with their re-integration back into society. Lylie Otter-Williams was the first ALO in Quebec.

At that time there was nothing specifically geared to helping Aboriginal people re-integrate into society so the next logical step was to create an Aboriginal halfway house. In 1984 Stan Cudek, through SPAQ, began reviewing the feasibility of establishing this service for Aboriginal offenders. CSC's data indicated that there were only nine Aboriginal inmates in Quebec federal penitentiaries at that time. Which probably reflected the fact that there were no advantages or programs for "Aboriginals" in prison, offenders were simply not identifying as Aboriginal.

Due to these low numbers, the proposal for an Aboriginal halfway house was taken off the SPAQ agenda. It took an independent committee, years later, operating as the Waseskun committee to bring the idea back to the Montreal Aboriginal community.

3.3 The vision of Waseskun

The idea of Waseskun as a transition house originated with John Corston and Joe Mell as they talked about the problem of having too many Aboriginal men on parole and not enough work for them to do. This was in 1987 at The Good Sheppard's Men's Hostel in Montreal. John Corston was working for Joe Mell there and was also volunteering at the Native Friendship Center of Montreal in his spare time.

Through the NFCM John had been contacted by various Aboriginal men on parole who were looking for part-time work. John would bring them down to Good Sheppard's where Joe would find them odd jobs. More men came to John and eventually they reached a saturation point and there were not enough jobs for the men who came. They also saw that many of the men needed additional help besides employment. This got John and Joe talking again about setting up an Aboriginal halfway house.

The idea at the time, as Joe Mell explained "was more or less to get Aboriginal men together in a setting that would be respectful to their traditions and their separate needs. The plan was just to get a place going, and a contract, that would get recognition from the government that Aboriginal people are the better people to handle things themselves."

Joe knew, from his past experience with Cross Roads, that a new halfway house would need strong community support if it was to be successful. John, realizing Aboriginal people needed to be involved in the organization of such an operation, went down to the SPAQ office. He had heard about the Aboriginal Liaison Officers (ALO's) from some of the men he was working with. At SPAQ John met the first ALO in the province of Quebec, Lylie Otter-Williams. Lylie agreed to join because she knew that an Aboriginal halfway house would be a great benefit to the men she worked with in prison. She also recruited a few others from the SPAQ office.

This original group met to discuss the idea. At this first meeting, after committing to the work, the group decided on their name which they wanted to be a symbol of hope and resurrection. "A new day rising" was the original idea. When you translate that idea into Cree you get "Waseskun" which means "the time just after a storm, when the dark clouds begin to part, the blue sky appears, and the first rays of sunlight shine through".

The first group tried to take a proposal to CSC for a feasibility study to determine if an Aboriginal halfway house was needed but CSC replied that they did not deal with committees. With that reply, Lylie Otter-Williams went to her boss at SPAQ, Stan Cudek. Stan had dealt with CCS in the past, in the process of setting up the Aboriginal Liaison Workers agreement. Lylie wanted some advice on how to proceed. What she got was much better. Stan agreed to join the Waseskun committee and take the feasibility study proposal to CSC himself.

Stan also took the idea of Waseskun to the Native Friendship Center where he recruited Barbara Malloch and Gail Guthrie Valaskakis to the Waseskun committee. Both women, besides their contacts in the Friendship Center, brought extensive networks of outside contacts: Barbara's from the Anglican Church and Gail's from Concordia University in Montreal.

With the addition of Stan, Barbara and Gail, the original Waseskun committee was formed. This was the group that would later become the first Waseskun Board of Directors. They are also the people who would be instrumental in taking Waseskun through the hardships of the early days to the success that comes much later.

3.4 Turning the vision into reality

The Waseskun committee knew that a halfway house had to be accredited by CSC before it could accept residents. Their proposal for a feasibility study, the one that was rejected and got Stan Cudek on board, was the first step in getting that accreditation. If they could prove that there were enough Aboriginal offenders in federal penitentiaries to warrant an Aboriginal halfway house, so the logic went, then CSC would have no choice but to accredit and fund Waseskun.

As he said he would, Stan took the Waseskun feasibility study proposal to CSC and this time it was successful. Stan told CSC that he would supervise the feasibility study in his role as Assistant Director at SPAQ. For that reason, CSC gave SPAQ \$25,000 to complete the study.

Michelle LeDuke and Dana Williams, supervised by Stan, began going into the federal institutions around Quebec in late 1987. They spent that winter going from institution to institution and identifying the number of Aboriginal inmates in those Federal penitentiaries. When finished, the feasibility study counted over 150 federal Aboriginal inmates in Quebec.

Even though the feasibility study clearly identified the need for an Aboriginal halfway house in the Montreal region, CSC was not prepared to enter into a contract at that time. The message was clear, if Waseskun was going to succeed, it would have to succeed on its' own.

The Waseskun committee decided that they would go it alone. They knew an Aboriginal halfway house was needed and they also knew the Aboriginal community would support them. The first step was to incorporate as a non-profit organization but to do this they would need money. The Anglican Church made a donation and each member of the committee chipped in \$50 and by February 1988 Waseskun had \$500. They took that money and filed the incorporation papers.

Meanwhile Joe Mell was working on finding Waseskun a home. At the time he was involved with Decision House, a provincial Anglophone halfway house that operated the top two floors

of a four-story old school building in the Point St Charles district of Montreal. Through Decision House he worked out a deal that when Waseskun got up and running, it could use the first floor in the same building for a rent of one dollar per year. Decision House would provide the night security for both halfway houses.

On July 12, 1988, the incorporation papers came back signed. Waseskun was now an official non-profit organization with a Board of Directors made up of the original committee. Stan Cudek became the first President of the Board. In his role as President of the Board, Stan wrote up the rules and regulations for the halfway house, created the policies and procedures, and designed the structure of the Board and the organization for future staff. Waseskun began to take shape.

In late 1988, Waseskun was ready to begin operations without support from CSC. The Board met and decided that, in his role as President of the Board, Stan Cudek would also act as the Executive Director on a voluntary basis until funds were available to staff the position. He became Waseskun's first Executive Director and, twenty years later, Stan is still in the position as the only Executive Director Waseskun has ever had.

There was an organization in Quebec called Aboriginal Employment Services (AES) that gave money to Aboriginal organizations for hiring and training employees. At that time, as Waseskun began to look at hiring its' first employees, AES was able to provide financial support and, through their support, Waseskun hired four additional employees.

With its' new employees, Waseskun moved to rue LaPrairie. The staff went out into the community to recruit volunteers to help with renovations. Walls were painted and second-hand office equipment was set up. Beds, bedding and used furniture were donated. Waseskun was beginning to look like a real halfway house.

3.5 Waseskun's first years

In the spring of 1989, the Waseskun Board and staff prepared to hold their Grand Opening celebration. They invited community members, government representatives, CSC employees, media people and the Aboriginal communities. It would be a celebration and it would also be an announcement – Quebec's first Aboriginal halfway house was open and ready for business.

Two days before the Grand Opening an old couch that had been left for garbage pickup underneath Waseskun's first floor landing caught fire. A resident of Decision House dropped a cigarette on it during the night and by morning the entire building, inside and out, was covered in smoke.

"I was called on the phone," said Barbara Malloch, "at about 7:00 in the morning by our secretary, Deena Sky, and she said 'you better come down right away, the place is covered in smoke. I don't know what we were going to do.' When I went down, it was just dreadful. Smoke from a fire like that is very greasy. It clings to everything; the walls, the windows, and the furniture. I thought we'll never be able to open in time. But we had already sent out invitations to people, important people. So Stan got on the phone and he rounded up everybody he could think of. So did I, I called people from the Friendship Center, other Aboriginal organizations, Kahnawake, and other places around, to say 'can you come and help us?'"

During the following days the Waseskun staff saw the community support that they had. A brigade of people showed up with brooms, brushes, buckets and paint. For two days this brigade worked. The furniture was cleared out, loaded up and carted away. The curtains were stripped from the windows and thrown out. The walls were scrubbed, floors mopped, windows wiped. The cloud of smoke was blown out and the building was re-painted from top to bottom. Barbara and Stan went down to the local Salvation Army. They bought every piece of usable furniture in the place. Volunteers came down with pickup trucks and all the furniture was loaded, brought back to LaPrairie and assembled. The mismatch of couches, chairs, desks and beds fit perfectly. In two days Waseskun was ready for the Grand Opening Celebration.

On the day of the Grand Opening a funny thing happened. Some said it was a sign. A troupe of Aboriginal hoop dancers just happened to be passing through Montreal. They were on their way from Alberta to Europe for a performance tour. That day Stan received a call from the dance troupe.

“We heard Waseskun is having a Grand Opening Celebration today,” they said.

“Yeah.”

“We’ve got the day free. Would you like us to come and perform?”

“Sure,” said Stan.

So the Grand Opening was a celebration. “Wow,” the guests exclaimed, “look at the caliber of your dancers.” The Catholic Bishop Crowley was there, dancing the hoop dance and participating in the cleansing ceremony. Prayers were given and speeches were made and there were presentations and a feast. The media came, as did representatives from CSC and the Kahnawake courts. Everyone was very impressed. It was now official - Waseskun was the first Aboriginal halfway house, not only in Quebec, but in all of Eastern Canada.

All halfway houses in Quebec go through an accreditation process before CSC will contract with them. Waseskun’s founding members had known all along that their strength lay in the Aboriginal community so Stan began going to the Aboriginal communities in Quebec to recruit private residents whose treatment would be paid for by the Band Councils. He also went to Kahnawake where the Mohawks have their own court system. The Mohawks were unconcerned that CSC did not recognize Waseskun because they understood that Aboriginal people would better serve Aboriginal people.

It began with two residents. Mike Diablo, Justice of the Peace at Kahnawake, sent the offenders over with the Mohawk Peacekeepers. The two men had their pick of four beds.

Soon more beds were donated and the Kahnawake Mohawk judges sent more offenders to fill them. They would call Waseskun in the middle of sentencing to ask if Waseskun wanted the man on the docket and, if Stan agreed, the judge would send the man over under the care of the Mohawk Peacekeepers.

Residents also started coming in from other communities. Those clients were preferred because the Band Councils would pay for their therapy.

As there was no contract signed until April 1, 1991, money was scarce. Even when rent was only one dollar per year, it costs money to run a halfway house. There were bills to pay, renovations to do and residents to feed. When winter arrived, life at LaPrairie got a little harder. The heating system wasn't very good and the doors and windows didn't shut tight. On cold winter nights the water in the toilet bowl would freeze.

Regardless of the difficulties, residents kept coming and Waseskun would have up to fifteen residents at a time. Volunteers kept coming and some were skilled at running programs, like Alcoholics Anonymous and with those new resources Waseskun began offering additional services. On top of all of this, the staff worked countless hours to do all the things necessary to run a halfway house.

The key to all of this extra hard work was the Executive Director, Stan Cudek. Stan has always been the link between the day-to-day operations of Waseskun and the Board of Directors. He was the link between making sure that things run smoothly and planning the direction for the future.

In the early days at Waseskun, Stan was much more than this. Since there were so few employees the job of Executive Director was hands-on. He was part visionary, part therapist, part security guard and part handyman. When money needed to be raised, Stan found a way to raise it. When renovations needed to be done, Stan did them. At Christmas, he took the residents to dinner and a movie.

“I used to work at my paid job at SPAQ during the day,” said Stan Cudek, “and then go in the evening, or on the weekend, and do a shift. You had to get it started somehow.”

“We couldn't have done it without Stan,” said Barbara Malloch. “He's the heart and soul of the place. You certainly need a good Executive Director, one who works overtime and is totally committed. I can remember an incident,” she continued. “One of the residents didn't come in on time or something. There

was a question of whether he might have to be sent back because he'd overstepped the bounds in some way. He hadn't come back and Stan was very worried about where he might be. So he literally went out looking for him in bars up and down St Catherine Street until he found him and brought him back, which strictly speaking, might not have been part of the deal; and maybe somewhat illegal. But anyway, he brought him back. He tried very hard not to have to send anybody back."

It is this belief in people and that people can change that motivates the employees of Waseskun to go above and beyond the expectations of their jobs. This belief has always come from the top down. Stan Cudek has a sincere belief in the power of human beings to change their lives, to take all of their anger and pain and use it to drive them towards doing good for others. In that way they can make amends for the bad things they've done in the past. More than anything else, it is this belief that has driven Stan Cudek, and consequently driven Waseskun, to do the healing work it has done right from day one.

3.6 Waseskun's first government contract

In 1990, the Oka Crisis erupted at Kanehsatake, a Mohawk community lying fifty kilometers east of Montreal. The mayor of Oka tried to lease a portion of the reserve to a private developer to build a nine-hole golf course and luxury homes. The land to be leased, a grove of pine trees, was the site of a Mohawk burial ground. The people of Kanehsatake, assisted by other Aboriginal communities, resisted and they barricaded themselves onto the land.

On July 11, 1990 the Sûreté du Québec (Quebec provincial police), with over 100 officers, stormed the protest site. The Mohawks resisted, gunfire was exchanged and a police officer was killed. On September 28, 1990, after seventy-eight days of blockade, the Oka crisis ended when forty Mohawks left the barricades and surrendered. Over seventy Aboriginal protesters were sent to trial and more than thirty of them were convicted of various offenses. The Oka Crisis seemed to make governments realize that an Aboriginal halfway house was needed. The timing of this worked well with the on-going negotiations among Waseskun, CSC and Quebec.

In the autumn of 1990, Waseskun signed their first contract with CSC as an officially recognized halfway house. The contract, effective April 1, 1991, provided Waseskun with money for ten bed spaces but brought its own problems.

A halfway house lives and dies by the numbers. At the end of the month it bills the government based on the number of residents and the number of days each resident was there. A halfway house needs at least 15 residents to make enough money to operate because staff has to be kept on regardless of the number of clients. For that reason, CSC generally signed agreements for a minimum of fifteen bed spaces with any new halfway house.

A halfway house, when it begins operations, has overhead and start-up costs and residents have to be recruited. Since a bill for services provided was not sent to CSC until the end of the first month of operations there was a period when the new halfway house had no money. The usual practice was for CSC to extend an opening grant to cover these costs and the first few months of operation. Waseskun's first contract was devoid of this concession.

CSC signed a contract with St. Leonard's halfway house in Montreal that included Waseskun as its annex. By calling Waseskun an annex, it was not considered a new halfway house and CSC would not have to provide for any start-up costs. This agreement only contracted Waseskun for ten residents based on a per-diem that included St. Leonard's residents. As a result funding to Waseskun was much lower than if it had been a separate facility. Some have questioned whether Waseskun was set up for failure and whether anyone believed it would succeed.

3.7 Waseskun as an accredited halfway house

The first year under the new agreement was difficult for Waseskun as money was scarce and everything operated on a month-to-month basis. When a cheque arrived Stan paid his staff, although sometimes they had to almost volunteer. They had to wait to get paid until there was money to do so.

Waseskun scraped by largely due to the staffs' hard work. Near the end of 1990, Stan and his staff went looking for clients. They traveled to all the prisons in Quebec and spoke to the Aboriginal men inside about the opportunity to come to a halfway house for Aboriginal people. Stan also continued the practice of traveling to Aboriginal communities around Quebec to recruit residents directly from the Band Councils. These efforts began to pay off and by the end of 1991; Waseskun filled the ten beds from the CSC agreement and had another four residents from communities.

Also in 1991, Stan began to meet with representatives from the Government of Quebec to discuss Waseskun's operations during the two years before a provincial agreement was finally signed. Following those meetings Quebec gave Waseskun funding for the residents housed during that initial period.

With this money Waseskun increased the staff to ten members. Many of these new employees, who began as volunteers, were qualified to run programs and Waseskun implemented a number of basic programs, including relapse prevention and addictions. Waseskun was moving beyond the definition of a halfway house towards a true healing community. But it wasn't until the June 1991 conference, *Communities in Crisis: Healing Ourselves*, that Waseskun defined its' goal to rehabilitate the residents in preparation for their re-integration into communities.

This conference, a first for Waseskun, brought over 400 people including Elders, front-line workers, and CSC employees from across North America to the Loyola Campus at Concordia University in Montreal. Over the next four days, the problems surrounding Aboriginal communities were debated, presentations were given and speeches were made. The conference clarified one important thing: Aboriginal communities in North America had many problems and most of the people in these communities were unable to be the primary healers for the men and women who lived there.

By the end of the conference, Waseskun realized that it was not enough to simply provide shelter and basic programming for men returning to their communities. If, as they were told at

the conference, communities were full of problems then Waseskun could not assume that men would get the necessary help they needed when they went back. To help both the men and the communities Waseskun would have to focus on healing the men before sending them home. Left behind was the belief that an Aboriginal halfway house was sufficient and in its place the concept of an Aboriginal Healing Center began to form.

The employees that had been hired took some of the day-to-day work off of Stan Cudek and he was able to dedicate more time to develop the vision of Waseskun as a centre for healing. That vision focused on rehabilitation for re-integration and rehabilitation as the first priority, would employ a holistic model of healing. Programming and teachings would address all four aspects of a person, using the medicine wheel, to help each individual fully examine their issues and heal what needed to be healed. Waseskun would use cultural teachings to provide their clients with a sense of identity and spirituality to enhance the knowledge that everyone is an important part of the world.

“Stan was gradually devising the different programs we would be able to offer,” said Barbara Malloch. “He did that by talking to Corrections and talking to the residents themselves.”

These ideas involved more intensive, therapeutic programs that looked at violence and abuse issues. The building at Rue LaPrairie, however, was not fit for community circles or effective programming. Waseskun was outgrowing its’ first home and in 1992 Waseskun began searching for a new location.

3.8 Waseskun’s Garda Security stage

The Board of Directors found Waseskun’s new home in the St Henri district of Montreal. Before the end of 1992, Waseskun packed up everything from the LaPrairie facility and moved across the city to the top floor of the Garda Security building. It was a large 6,000 square foot space with room for 21 residents, offices and, most important, a separate area for doing programs and holding circles. In this space Waseskun could move closer to their goal of rehabilitation for re-integration.

“We flourished in those premises,” says Barbara Malloch, who continued in her role as President of the Board. “The area was larger. We had a large room at the far end which would be a common room so residents could get together and have drumming sessions, and we had Elders coming in to talk to them.”

CSC was pleased that Waseskun moved from the LaPrairie facility and with the direction Waseskun was heading in terms of Aboriginal-specific programming. As a result they increased the agreement from ten to fifteen residents in 1993. More importantly, CSC recognized that Waseskun was an annex of St. Leonard’s in name only and signed a separate agreement with Waseskun.

At this time Waseskun started having Elders come in, a few hours at a time, to speak to the residents. Programs evolved to include violence, sexual abuse and addictions and ceremonies became more important as a means of showing the men how spirituality could affect their lives in a positive way and enhance their healing.

Waseskun lived in the Garda Security building for five years where it continued to thrive. The number of residents rose to capacity with fifteen federal and six community residents filling all the beds. During this time Stan dreamed of moving Waseskun out of Montreal and away from the distractions and temptations of the city.

The first step towards realizing Stan’s dream of a place in the country came in 1995 when Waseskun rented a summer camp in the foothills of the Laurentians. The camp was an old Catholic Community Services camp in St. Gabriel-de-Brandon. It was a large place in the woods with a mile and a half of lakefront but it was in disrepair and in need of renovations. Being creative, Waseskun worked out a deal with Montreal Aboriginal organizations to provide intensive training and wellness sessions to their employees in exchange for renovation monies. This proved successful and the Kahnawake Survival School construction program undertook the renovation project.

Every second week during the summer, Waseskun would move all the residents and staff up to the camp. There was a lot of space for residents to be on the land and Waseskun was able to invite Elders to come for the week. The residents were able to participate in the ceremonies that they had talked about in Montreal. Waseskun also began family therapy at the summer camp. Families were invited to stay and go through therapy with the residents.

In addition, the summer camp allowed Waseskun to hold intensive workshops with the RCMP, the SQ and the Mohawk Peacekeepers. Waseskun invited representatives from all three policing services to spend six days at a time in facilitated workshops and discussions that were designed to break down the barriers, misconceptions and anger left over from the Oka Crisis. Waseskun understood that this was a necessary process in supporting the healing work being done.

The summer camp, as the employees who worked there at the time fondly remember, was the highlight of everyone's experience. The success that Waseskun had at the camp served as motivation for finding their own place in the country.

Previously, Waseskun's agreements dealt with provincial inmates, who were sentenced to less than two years, or federal inmates who were on conditional release. In 1997, Waseskun approached CSC to see if they could extend that agreement to federal inmates in minimum security institutions under Section 81 of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*. CSC responded positively but made one thing clear: as long as Waseskun was located in downtown Montreal, they were less likely to send minimum-security inmates to the Centre. CSC's reaction proved to be the final push and Waseskun made the decision to move out of Montreal. All that was left to do was find a proper location.

3.9 Waseskun's home in the country

The Waseskun Board of Directors first looked at a property in Quebec's Eastern Townships but that didn't work out. Through a contact made in the Townships, however, Waseskun

learned about another property that sounded interesting. The land was situated up north in the foothills of the Laurentians.

This property was a former addictions center that had been seized by the Laurentian Bank. It had four acres of land with five buildings and was located in the small country town of St. Alphonse-Rodriguez.

“When we went to look at the Laurentians property we were very impressed,” said Barbara Malloch.

“The place was worth 1.1 million dollars,” said Joe Mell, “and we finally negotiated them down to \$250 000 plus \$35 000 for the furniture and fixtures. The total price was only \$285 000.”

“\$285 000,” added Barbara, “is not much for a property with four acres, a big main building, and four other buildings surrounded by woods and bordering on a lake, with all the furniture and even a tractor. So we decided it was now or never.”

In September 1998, Waseskun signed a mortgage for \$219,000 on their new home. Five years later, on September 17, 2003, the mortgage was paid in full.

Stan Cudek’s dream of Waseskun’s country home had finally come to fruition but it was another six months before Waseskun could officially move out of Montreal. You cannot just pick up and move a healing center. For one thing you’ve got to deal with the parole boards, get permission to move clients and write reports. For another, you have to make sure the town where you are moving to understands whom you are, what you are doing and that they will accept you in their area.

While Waseskun took control of their new home in St. Alphonse-Rodriguez in September 1998, it took until February 1999 for the move to be completed. The townspeople of St Alphonse-Rodriguez were accommodating. When the Waseskun Board met with town residents they seemed happy to have the buildings occupied although there was some hesitation because most of the people didn’t understand the Aboriginal experience or what a healing center was all about. There were, however, no major issues raised by the town’s residents.

They eventually came to realize that Waseskun is serious about the work it does and the residents who come to Waseskun are serious about their own healing.

Waseskun staff had become proficient at moving a week at a time through their summer camp experience. They followed the same pattern from September 1998 to the actual moving date in February. Every other week they had to go back to Montreal which allowed time to get all the necessary permits and approvals done while making use of the new facilities and outdoor bush environment the St. Alphonse-Rodriguez site provided. The weekly rotation between St. Alphonse-Rodriguez and Montreal continued for six months. In February 1999, all accreditations and permissions were received and Waseskun packed up the Garda Security building one final time and said farewell to Montreal. The real vision of a therapeutic healing community was coming to life. Staff members were available twenty-four hours a day. A tipi was built on site and they dug a fire pit that was available at any time.

Residents were now leaving prison and coming to live in a more natural environment and that environment was drastically different than the Garda Security building in Montreal. There was a lake and a forest a short walk away where residents could go to swim, hike, and learn to identify and pick medicines, chop wood and harvest plants and trees in a sustainable way.

“First time I went there we went to take a walk in the bush,” said Tekanerahtatase, a former Waseskun resident. “It was 15 years since I was in the bush. I went in there and smelled the grass and the leaves and everything and I said holy, that smells good. I had forgotten all about that, you know,”

Following major renovations each resident had his own room. In addition, instead of being crammed together on one floor of a building the residents had the space to go off on their own, sit under a tree and get a breath of fresh air with the permission of staff.

Staff now lived on-site twenty-four hours a day. Elders were invited in for full days or weeks to do ceremonies and circles with the residents. Additional Helpers were added to the healing

team and Waseskun was able to start working deeper with emotional healing, in a holistic way, by holding sweat lodge ceremonies, fasts and other traditional ceremonies.

3.10 Waseskun in the present

During the first two years at St. Alphonse-Rodriguez, Waseskun opened their new home to the outside world. In 1999, they hosted a weeklong spiritual gathering with Elders and traditional healers from across North America. The next year Waseskun organized the first National training session for Aboriginal Liaison Officers and another weeklong gathering for all Aboriginal workers inside correctional facilities. This was the first such gathering of its kind in Canada,

In 2001, Waseskun signed their first Section 81 agreement with CSC. Section 81 agreements allow for the transfer of minimum-security federal inmates to care in the community. The Section 81 agreement allowed for 15 inmates to be sent to Waseskun as well as up to six inmates on conditional release. Those clients, combined with ten provincial inmates, gave Waseskun funding for 31 residents and, with the space available at St. Alphonse-Rodriguez, it could still accommodate up to three community referrals.

To deal with the security issues that Section 81 residents brought, the staff built a wood fence around the perimeter. They were also eventually forced to implement an eleven p.m. curfew. Up until then, Waseskun had no curfew so anyone wanting to have a coffee, or build a small fire in the middle of night, was free to do so. One night two residents jumped the fence and went to the local bar and that effectively ended the “good old days”. A curfew was imposed and residents had to be in their buildings at 11:00 p.m. and alarm systems were put on the doors in the residents’ buildings.

Those changes posed some limitations on residents’ freedom but did not alter the benefits and advantages that holistic healing opportunities provided. Sweat Lodges were happening weekly, a prayer circle was built for outdoor ceremonies, four-day fasts were held every spring,

and the tipi remained a mainstay of the Waseskun environment. Elders and their Helpers, with their medicine bundles and knowledge, were living on-site.

Kahnawake Elder Sonny Mayo and his wife, Glenda Mayo joined the growing number of supporters coming to Waseskun.

“We first started coming to Waseskun one day a month,” said Glenda, “to meet and talk with the guys. Then we were coming once a week. Then it was twice a week, and three times a week, and now we’re here full-time four days a week. We just fell in love with the place.”

Sonny and Glenda first started doing one-on-one sessions with the residents who needed it most. Then, when they were coming once a week, they would do a circle with all the residents in the morning to talk about spirituality. In the afternoons they would have one-on-one sessions with clients. Eventually Sonny and Glenda were staying at Waseskun full-time.

Sonny and Glenda, over the past nine years, have been very influential in defining Waseskun’s approach to healing. As another current Helper, Tioneh who also comes from Kahnawake, explained much of Waseskun’s approach to healing today is the approach Sonny Mayo was using in his own community.

“Our Elder here, Sonny Mayo, is a very respected person in my community and he’s helped a lot of people help themselves,” said Tioneh. “That’s the approach I took when I decided to work on myself. That’s the approach that we’re using here now. It’s the same thing that he does back home. This is the way that he does healing. It all comes down to logic and common sense. But how does one get to logic and common sense? There are a lot of things that are entailed behind logic and common sense. What’s behind right and wrong? You can go really deep. That’s the approach that Waseskun uses right now, what Sonny used back home, trying to get guys to utilize this thing called logic and common sense.”

The approach to healing used at Waseskun is working and people are realizing that they can heal themselves. As they acquire the tools to heal themselves they take that knowledge with them when they go out into the world. There, in the communities, these teachings can spread.

Waseskun's vision of rehabilitation in order to re-integrate people into their communities is becoming a reality.



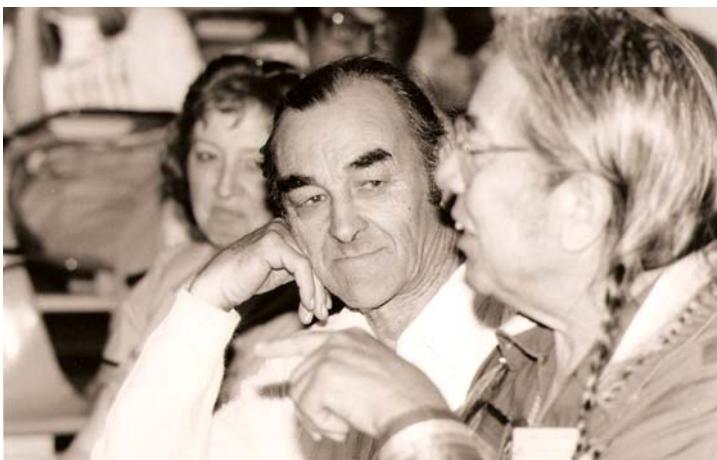
Waseskun's first home on Rue LaPrarie in Montreal (this photo taken 2008).



The Waseskun house band.



The Alberta Hoop Dancers at Waseskun's Grand Opening.



Art Solomon and Ernie Benedict, two Elders who were important in Waseskun's early days.



Waseskun's second home, the top floor of the Garda Security Building in Montreal.



The Camp Waseskun sign (1995).



Camp Waseskun in the winter (Stan Cudek sitting back left).



Signing for Waseskun's new home in St. Alphonse-Rodriguez (from left: Caroline Oblin, representatives from the Laurentian Bank (standing and sitting), Barbara Malloch, Joanne Stacey, Joe Mell).



Waseskun's new home in St. Alphonse-Rodriguez (view from front gate).



Dining Room



Group Room



Back buildings



Sweat lodge in back lot



The spiritual gathering in 1999.



Drumming in celebration of the Section 81 agreement signing.



Dancers at the spiritual gathering.



Costumed performers at the gala for the Waseskun Network.



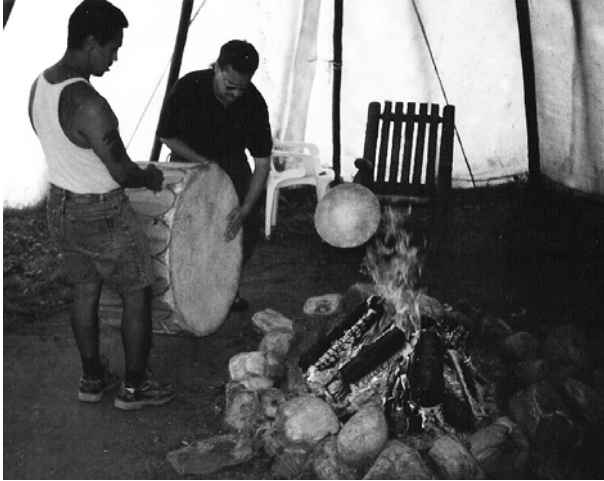
In the woods that border Waseskun.



Lac Rouge, on the border of Waseskun.



Building the arbor for community circles.



Building the drum for the group room.



The Elder, Sonny Mayo helps to build the arbor.



Stan Cudek, Barbara Malloch, Charlie Hill and Guylaine Durocher speak at the Waseskun celebration for the signing of the Section 81 agreement in 2001.



Sunlight falls on medicines in the group room.



Waseskun residents learning to butcher buffalo.



Winter at Waseskun in St. Alphonse-Rodriguez.

CHAPTER FOUR – OPERATIONS OF WASESKUN HEALING CENTER

4.1 Physical Location

Waseskun is located in the town of St. Alphonse-Rodriguez which rests in the foothills of the Laurentians in the Lanaudiere region of Quebec. Housed on four-acres of land and surrounded by pine forests and bordering on Lac Rouge, Waseskun is a secluded and natural environment.

The fence around the premises is striking for those used to correctional facilities. There is no chain-link or barbed wire, only a wood fence about five-feet high. At one time, so the story goes, the fence was falling down in places but various residents have spent time and effort rebuilding it and today the fence completely circles the premises.

There are four buildings. The main building houses the entrance/security station where visitors and staff check in each day. The main building also houses the kitchen, the dining room where the walls are covered in murals painted by former residents, and the group room with couches lining the walls where community circles are held and visitors are welcomed.

The other three buildings form a line near the back of the property. One of the buildings houses the staff offices, Warrior room and program room, this building is secure. The other two are resident buildings and each resident has a single room with a window, single bed, desk and reading chair. Two or three single rooms will share a bathroom. Residents can have a TV, computer or video game console in their room.

The grounds have wide open grass fields, hills and stands of cedar. Around the fence are forests of pine trees which makes it feel like one is in the woods. A tipi and a sweat lodge stand year round beside the fire pit.

4.2 Staff and Board of Directors

Waseskun operates with a complement of 30 staff. When new staff members are hired, it is imperative that they have an open mind and believe that their clients can truly change. The Waseskun hiring committee also considers if a person is flexible, versatile and willing to be a team player. At Waseskun, the job is not just eight hours. As one Helper at Waseskun said,

“If you look at it like a ball, no matter how you turn it, and which side you try to look at, you see that it all works very closely and very tightly-knit together to make it happen. It doesn't just sit with the ones who run program; it sits with the one who is in the kitchen and who prepares the food. The one who prepares the food is reflected on the food that is being prepared, because if one's heart is not into it, that food is really not going to taste good. And often times we hear the residents say “I've never ate so good; it's so nice to have good food.” So you see, nobody is excluded, and that's what makes a therapeutic community happen. It takes everybody, on all levels, to make this a living entity, a living, healing force.”

Waseskun's Board of Directors is a policy board responsible for the Executive Director. Their job is to set policies and approves programs. When a position opens on the Waseskun Board, the rest of the Board has an internal discussion where names of people who would fit are debated. When it is decided that someone would be a good fit, one member of the Board will approach that person and ask if they would be interested in joining.

The role of the Executive Director is three-fold. First, the Executive Director must manage the finances and all the external agreements with CSC, Quebec and other government departments. Second, he reports to the Board, serving as the link between the board and the day-to-day operations of Waseskun. Third, he ensures the smooth daily operation of the healing community. All staff report to him and he finalizes all decisions as the responsibility for all action at Waseskun rests on the Executive Director.

The Executive Director has limited interaction with the residents. He is accessible but he is not with them that often, which is useful, as he serves as the disciplinarian. If an intervention is done the Executive Director facilitates and, if someone needs to be removed from the

Waseskun community, the Executive Director makes that decision with the Healing Council members.

The Elder is the spiritual head of Waseskun. He is also chiefly responsible for each residents' healing. The Elder lives on-site four days a week and, during that time, he is available for any resident or staff who wishes to speak with him. The Elder also leads some group programs, does one-on-one sessions with approximately eight to twelve residents, assists in community circles, participates in Healing Council and does whatever else is needed to support the Executive Director.

There are currently three Helpers at Waseskun who are responsible for eight to twelve residents. This involves doing one-on-one therapy sessions once a week, twice a month or once a month, depending on the status of the resident. There is an open-door policy where a resident can also go and talk to his Helper at any time. Each Helper also facilitates two or three programs per week, participates in Healing Council, assists community circles, and generally does whatever is needed to ensure the smooth operation of Waseskun.

The case management team is the link between Waseskun, CSC National Headquarters, and the Quebec Regional office. They write the reports and ensure that Waseskun is meeting the criteria of their contribution agreement. The case managers are responsible for assessing the risk for each resident's potential release. The first step in the assessment process is to meet, along with the Helpers, all new residents to create a healing plan in conjunction with conditions imposed by CSC, the results of an initial client assessment and what the resident wants to work on. From there, throughout the resident's stay at Waseskun, the case manager gathers all the information about the individual to assess the progress being made and the risk that they represent for the different types of release. With this information the case managers are able to inform the resident what he still needs to do to meet the goals of the healing plan and move closer to release.

The liaison officer is the connection between Waseskun and the outside institutions that the residents come from. He or she receives and responds to letters from applicants, keeps in

touch with parole officers and native liaison officers, and reports to the Healing Council on applications and potential candidates.

A team of five employees is responsible for the administrative tasks at Waseskun.

Administration staff take care of the front office including dealing with all resident requests, scheduling staff and acting as liaisons between residents, security and cooks up front, as well as working with the healing team, case managers and the Executive Director in the back offices. Administration also assists with hiring new staff, creating the monthly newsletters, organizing visits from outside organizations (CSC, CSQ, conferences, visiting Elders, etc.) and community activities.

Security is responsible for ensuring that all rules and regulations are followed. There are two security officers working at all times. Security work eight hour shifts during the week and twelve hour shifts on the weekends and do nine resident counts throughout the day. This involves walking the site and finding all residents, whether they are outside, in their room or in the common areas. At night they check each room once an hour, opening every door to ensure the resident is inside.

There are two cooks at Waseskun who are responsible for preparing approximately forty lunch and dinner servings for residents and staff each day. The cooks plan lunch and dinner menus about a month ahead of time and give grocery lists to the administration weekly. The cooks have a resident in the kitchen whose job it is to help to prepare meals. This is a teaching component to the cook's job as some of the residents who come into the kitchen have no kitchen experience. Other residents have chores to do in the kitchen such as dishwashing, cleaning the grill, and cleaning the fridge so there is quite a lot of interaction between the residents and the cooks.

4.3 Healing Council

Waseskun's Healing Council is the decision-making body for the healing center. It consists of the Elder, Helpers, the case management team, liaison officer, administrators, the Executive

Assistant, and the Executive Director. The Healing Council has two main objectives. First, it is responsible for the smooth operation of the healing center as it relates to the residents. Second, the Council works to make each individual resident's stay at Waseskun as successful as possible.

The Healing Council meets weekly and lasts until all necessary topics have been discussed. It operates by consensus with no hierarchy in speaking or decision-making. Each person at Healing Council is given as much time as necessary to speak his or her thoughts on every issue. When a decision needs to be made, the group goes around the circle allowing everyone to share their opinions. A decision is made when a consensus is reached. If a person doesn't agree with the consensus, he or she has every opportunity to say why. Finally, if the person cannot agree with the Council, he or she decides either to let it pass and join the consensus or declare a dissenting opinion.

A loose agenda is followed for Healing Council meetings that begin with a prayer. After the opening the Council follows up on discussions or decisions made the week before that need an update. An example may be that a resident needed a certain report for his weekend pass to be approved. The follow-up will confirm that the report was completed and he will get his weekend pass on a certain date.

Next, the liaison officer gives his presentation about recruitment which, for most weeks, is a quick update. For example, "Two new applications came in. These guys can be crossed off the list because their parole applications were rejected." Decisions regarding recruitment are discussed, debated and decided at these meetings.

The discussion turns to the individual residents. The Elder and each of the Helpers have their own group and the Healing Council goes through one of those groups each week. Each resident comes up before Healing Council once per month. The Elder or Helper will give a brief explanation of how the resident is doing. They discuss the programs and one-on-one session that the resident has done over the past month and they give personal opinions about the resident's progress. Others on Healing Council speak to any incidents or interactions

they've witnessed involving the resident and if there are observation reports about the resident, they are read to Council. Any requests that the resident has made to Council are debated and a decision made. Finally, any special items that came up during the past week are discussed. The Healing Council is finished when decisions have been made about all issues. A prayer closes the circle.

4.4 Community Circle

Community Circles are Waseskun's way of bringing the entire community, all residents and staff, together to discuss any issues that affect the community. Community Circles are used to announce new initiatives, address any complaints from either staff or residents, make everyone aware of decisions and rules and resolve any problems before they turn into major issues.

The following is an example of one community circle:

The entire community of Waseskun, residents and staff, gathered in the group room on a circle of couches. The community circle began with a prayer and a smudge. Everyone stood and, after the smudge, one resident was asked to give a prayer. He said "I pray that we have a good circle even though I don't know what it is about."

There were items that came from Healing Council earlier in the week that needed to be addressed at the community circle. It was pointed out that Waseskun has zero tolerance for violence. Since Waseskun is at capacity the staff wanted to remind everyone that there is to be no horsing around, no violence and no aggressive behaviour.

Then the floor was opened and residents were allowed to speak. A few people would raise their hands. The facilitator would acknowledge whomever she or he saw first. That person would talk about whatever issue was on his mind and everyone else would listen. Anyone else who wished to speak on that issue had the opportunity once the resident was finished. In this way issues are brought up, discussed and a decision is made if needed. When the issue is finished then another resident may speak to another issue. When all residents' concerns had been talked over and decided upon the meeting was closed with a prayer by a different resident.

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4.5 Residents

Waseskun is currently at full capacity with 35 residents with a waiting list of several others. Waseskun recruits men from federal institutions in Ontario, Quebec, Nunavut and the Maritime provinces, from Provincial institutions in Quebec and from communities across eastern Canada. Recruitment is based on providing information about Waseskun into the prisons, institutions, courts, probation offices and communities so that candidates can decide for themselves, based on accurate information, if Waseskun is the proper place for them to continue their healing journeys.

There is a coordinated recruitment strategy. A key element of that strategy is the Waseskun booklet which describes Waseskun, the programs offered and its philosophy about holistic healing. The booklet is distributed to all the federal and provincial institutions, parole and probation offices and community centers.

There is also a monthly newsletter with articles about the programs, interviews with residents, quotes from the Elder and other articles related to events at Waseskun. This newsletter goes out to institutions where interested inmates can pick up a copy. Recently a ten minute video was created to visually describe Waseskun. This video is now part of the promotional package and will be distributed to institutions and parole offices.

The Waseskun website (www.waseskun.net) was recently updated. The website now has a description of Waseskun and holistic healing, along with the information booklet in .pdf format and the video available in streaming video. All application forms and contact information can be found on the website.

The Liaison Officer plays a large role in recruiting. He or she maintains contact with the Parole Officers and Native Liaison Officers to keep Waseskun and its services fresh in the mind of people who can pass that information on to potential applicants.

Finally, the recruitment strategy culminates in a once- or twice-a-year recruitment drive where Federal and Provincial institutions in Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes are visited. In institutions meetings take place with Parole Officers, Native Liaison Officers and any interested inmates to answer questions, hand out booklets, show the video and explain the programs available at Waseskun. These recruitment trips will usually include the Elder, Helpers and case managers.

Residents must be eighteen years of age or older and the current residents range from twenty to over sixty years in age. Residents come from many different First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities and occasionally a non-Aboriginal person will be accepted. There are no cultural requirements for acceptance to Waseskun. However, the candidate must understand holistic healing and spirituality and accept that this is the way healing is done at Waseskun. The most important requirement is that a candidate has a sincere motivation to change his life. He must be willing to accept a long-term treatment plan, for a minimum of six months, and accept that Waseskun is a violence, alcohol and drug free community.

Residents from federal penitentiaries who come under a Section 81 agreement are still, by fact, inmates, which means that they are detained the same as they would be inside prison. Inmates under Section 81 agreements have come from Ontario, Quebec and the Maritime provinces.

For a Section 81 transfer to take place, the client must have a minimum-security classification. Although these residents were either sentenced to short terms, or for a first offense, Waseskun

has accepted clients who have cascaded through institutional security levels through good behaviour and has accepted a number of clients serving life sentences.

A number of other residents are released to Waseskun under a conditional release, which could include day parole, full parole or on statutory supervision with a residency condition.

Conditional release residents come to Waseskun from Ontario, Quebec and the Maritime provinces. These clients do not have to come from minimum security institutions when they are released. As they have been granted conditional release, their previous security level no longer matters.

Residents serving provincial sentences, which is less than two years, come from provincial institutions in Quebec or directly from the courts.. Currently, Waseskun does not have an agreement with any province other than Quebec to accept provincial residents.

Residents who come to Waseskun on referral from their communities have the same application process and go through the same therapeutic healing as other residents. The only difference is that private referrals have to find their own payment for therapy, either through their community's band office, social services, or Health Canada.

There are a number of reasons why a potential resident is excluded after he has made application to Waseskun. These include being affiliated with a gang or organized crime, requiring constant medical or psychological care, being designated as a dangerous offender, or requiring constant supervision.

The first step in a candidate's application process is to write a letter of intention which shows the applicant's motivation to come to Waseskun. In it he explains his background, what he is in prison for, the problems he has to work on and the reasons why he wants to come to Waseskun to work on those problems.

Waseskun's Liaison Officer receives this letter, and assuming the individual fits the criteria the Liaison Officer will respond and ask the candidate to send Waseskun an application form and a

consent form. The application form goes into more detail on the candidate's background. The consent form gives Waseskun permission to access the candidate's files. When those forms are received, the Waseskun Healing Council will evaluate the candidate's letter, application form and personal file, and make a decision whether he is accepted to Waseskun.

4.6 Resident's Daily Routine

The morning routine begins at 9:30am with prayers in the group room. Anyone can attend. When everyone is assembled one resident goes to the center of the room to light the sacred herbs, a mixture of cedar, sage and sweet grass, for the smudge. The resident then makes his way around the room, starting with the Elder and Helpers and going around the circle, offering the smudge to each person.

Another resident is asked to say the prayer. The eagle feather is handed to him and with the feather in his hand he says whatever prayer comes to mind such as, "Thank you Creator for this day, please help us to do good and be nice to each other." After the morning prayer is over the day's work begins.

Programs are scheduled on a weekly basis. For instance, the sexuality program is held for three hours on Tuesday afternoons. In between programs, each resident schedules one-on-one sessions with their Helpers, and any additional work they might be doing for themselves or with other residents. Each resident focuses on two or more programs at a time, each of which can run up to sixteen weeks.

It is expected that each resident commit 40 hours per week to mandatory programs and one-on-one therapy. If a resident misses three sessions, he can be placed into "reflection" to re-focus. In extreme cases he could be suspended or have his residency revoked.

For meals, one resident lays out a cold breakfast of cereal and bagels for 8:00 am each day. The cooks prepare lunch and dinner with assistance from one resident who is on kitchen duty that week. For both lunch, which is served at noon, and dinner, which is served at 5:00 p.m.,

the food is laid out in the kitchen. Residents line up at the kitchen door and take their turn to get their food. All residents, and whatever staff choose to eat with them, eat in the dining room.

Each Waseskun resident is responsible for one chore. Chores are either permanent or rotational. Permanent chores are given to residents with the most seniority. A new resident will cycle through the rotational chores in the kitchen first and be responsible for dishes, table washing or collecting garbage. Once he has been at Waseskun longer, the resident may be able to acquire a permanent job like sweeping or mopping the halls or laying out breakfast in the morning. Most chores are done twice per day.

At 11:00 pm all residents must be in their buildings. The alarms are put on at this time and no resident is allowed out until 7:00 am the next morning. Residents do not have to be in their rooms but they must be inside the building. Security checks are done once an hour all night, starting at 11:00 pm, to ensure all residents are inside the buildings.

At Waseskun, programs are said to run 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There are group programs which provide some information but are more focused on dealing with the individuals' emotions. There are one-on-one sessions with the Elders and Helpers to deal with the resident's issues that he brings to Waseskun or issues that arise while he is here. There is also a community side of programs just by being around the community of Waseskun and participating in daily life. This includes talking to the mentors, the other residents, and living the healing lifestyle that Waseskun promotes. Healing is a change in lifestyle. It is identifying the things in your life that need to be changed and living those changes everyday. For this reason, the community of Waseskun is just as important as programs on the individual healing path.

Waseskun's programs are done in three-month blocks of time. At the beginning of the three-month period, the program committee meets to develop the program schedule. At the program meeting, the first step is to look through the program schedule from last block to decide which programs will be carried over. The program committee then looks at the schedule and decides

which programs to run and when to run them for the upcoming block. If possible, they like to leave current programs in their existing time slots. This makes the transition easier for the residents. Each Elder and Helper is required to facilitate two programs but most of them facilitate at least three. Following this meeting the case managers and the Helpers decide which programs each resident will take.

Group programs at Waseskun, while providing some information for the residents, are not strictly based on cognitive skills programs like those in institutions. At Waseskun, programs primarily work on emotions. Programs are held in circles; four to twelve residents would gather in a circle that includes the Helper or Elder. Issues are brought up for discussion and the Helper is there to guide the discussion and bring out things they may have overlooked.

Each resident has a Helper or Elder to work with on a one-on-one basis. These individual therapy sessions take place once a week. They are specific sessions intended to work closely on the resident's problems and whatever issues are triggered in-group programs or through living in the community.

Programs at Waseskun are not just confined to group or one-on-one sessions. Just living, day to day, is a part of the Waseskun program. Residents can do one-on-one sessions with mentors at any time and they also spend a lot of time talking to each other. Although they may not realize it, they are working on their healing while they do this because healing is a change in lifestyle. It is recognized that seeing and talking to other people, who are working on their healing, is very therapeutic. Even in their dreams they are working and often Helpers say residents will come to them to discuss what has been happening in their dreams.

There are rules and structures at Waseskun that keep the community, the residents and the staff safe. Key among these rules is no-violence and no alcohol or drugs. There are many other rules that seem minor in comparison but serve to keep Waseskun operating smoothly and safely. When someone breaks the rules they must be dealt with accordingly in order to ensure the continued safety of the community of Waseskun and to set examples for the rest of the

community. Most importantly action is necessary to provide support for the offender if he has fallen down in his healing.

When a rule is broken or an offence is committed, the community usually rallies behind the perpetrator. At Waseskun they understand that everybody falls sometimes and often the times that we fall are the times that we learn, and heal, the most. With that said, the first consideration when an offense occurs is what is the best way to respond to this for the resident and for the community? Residents are aware, however, that Waseskun will not hesitate to send a resident back to a correctional facility for violating the rules if he poses a threat to the stability or safety of the community.

The first step in the discipline process is to hold an intervention with the offender. The intervention consists of a session with the offender, the Director, Elder, Helper, and any other staff that want to be present. The Director, Elder and Helper question the offender regarding his actions, behaviors and reasons for being at Waseskun. The intervention is used to find out the offender's side of the story and determine the offender's attitudes regarding the problem situation. A decision is made about what future actions that must be made to solve the problem. A decision can be made to send the resident back to an institution, give another form of discipline, or let him off with a warning.

If, following an intervention, Waseskun decides to keep the resident rather than sending him back to a correctional facility, refocusing is usually the punishment of choice.

Refocusing is allowing the resident to stay in his room but the resident's TV, video games, and other entertainment items are taken away. He must spend the time in reflection reflecting upon the offence committed and the reasons behind the offence. He is given a journal and must write his reflections in it. The journal is submitted to Waseskun staff at the end of the reflection period.

Besides re-focusing, other forms of discipline are used for residents who break the rules at Waseskun. A common punishment for minor offences is extra chores, like a week of washing

dishes and other sanctions are given on a case-by-case basis. One interesting example was a resident who committed many major offenses, in order to get attention. The resident had very poor social skills so the Healing Council decided that, instead of sending him back to prison or putting him in re-focusing, they'd give him a job watching the front gate. He spent his days opening and closing the gate, which keeps him out of trouble while allowing him to get much needed social skills and feel like an essential part of the community.

4.9 Cultural Activities

A large part of therapy at Waseskun is the cultural activities that teach and reinforce traditional culture and heritage. Waseskun encourages resident participation in these activities as they help form the cultural learning which enhances the Waseskun experience. By helping residents re-connect or connect for the first time to traditional culture, Waseskun reinforces the belief that each resident is a part of something bigger than himself. The knowledge that you fit into a bigger picture is very powerful for keeping people focused on their healing path.

The sweat lodge is one of the most important traditional spiritual activities. At Waseskun, the sweat lodge is always set up. Sweat lodge ceremonies are led by an Elder or Helper, and done once a week for interested residents. In the winter, a large chaptain, or tent, is built around the sweat lodge to ensure that even in the coldest of days the sweat lodge is available to be used.

After dinner residents take a weekly art class, which is taught by a staff member on a volunteer basis. While some participants have real talent, others have no experience but they expressed an interest in art. Most residents paint landscape scenes or animals while other residents wander in and out to see what their peers are working on.

The dining room walls are covered with murals painted by residents. They are beautiful scenes of sunsets and eagles, a winter scene, and two coyotes that serve to backdrop the class with inspiration. The murals seem to say that others before have succeeded so stay focused and others too can achieve their goals.

The Okiweh ceremony is an October celebration for the Ancestors. While Okiweh is a ceremony practiced in many different traditional cultures and can take different forms, Waseskun's Okiweh is celebrated in a general way to accommodate all different belief systems. The ceremony involves meeting in a circle and offering prayers and thanks up to the Creator for the blessings of the ancestors. Although Okiweh is usually celebrated over a number of consecutive days, it is celebrated in one night at Waseskun. Residents are allowed to stay up until the early morning to give prayers and thanks to the Ancestors.

In the summer Waseskun takes interested residents on a one-day trip to the Kahnawake Powwow which is a very popular event. In the summer of 2007, three van loads of residents and staff traveled to Kahnawake and for many residents who attended the Powwow, it was their first time being out in a very long time. Also, for many of them, it was the first Powwow they had ever attended. They really look forward to the Powwow and make it a point to be on their best behavior. The Powwow, as one staff member who accompanied the residents said, is a place where residents can witness the connection to their culture and a place where one can realize how important that connection is to healing.

Christmas is generally a difficult time for Waseskun residents as the holidays serve as a reminder of family, friends and the outside world. Many residents go through periods of depression during the holidays. Most programs, one-on-one therapy sessions, sweat lodges and ceremonies cease, or become irregular at Waseskun during the holidays in order to give staff time off. Consequently, residents have more free time during the Christmas holidays than they normally do. To compensate, Waseskun organizes many activities to take place over the Christmas holiday period of three weeks. A Christmas committee is created in early December and meet once a week before the holidays. Last year the committee was composed of five staff members and eight residents and these 13 people were asked to create a schedule of activities to fill the three-week period. Activities were varied, from fun things like bingo nights, road-hockey tournaments, chess tournaments and karaoke, to instructional activities like carving classes and how to build an igloo, to spiritual events like a Christmas eve prayer, caroling and residents-only healing circles.

On Christmas Day one of the Helpers dressed up as Santa Claus and each resident was given a small gift that the staff had purchased earlier in the month. Later in the day there was a feast of turkey and in the evening, a concert was put on by a group of residents who formed a band.

CHAPTER FIVE – WASESKUN: A SUCCESSFUL THERAPEUTIC HEALING COMMUNITY

5.1 Introduction

“Near the end of my time at Waseskun two Elders came to visit. They had come four years ago for the first time and since then they came once or twice a year. For this visit they stayed three weeks to spend time with the residents, do ceremonies, one on ones, and just be a part of Waseskun.

During their stay I realized the appreciation that the residents had for these two people who took three weeks to spend with them. I also saw the appreciation that these two Elders have for the men who are at Waseskun. For me, the interaction between the two visiting Elders and the residents summed up what is so special about Waseskun: there is a mutual respect between staff and residents. There is also a genuine care and for the well being of each resident, which is shown by staff and especially the Elders and Helpers who work there. That genuine care is something the residents’ feed off of, something they feel and something that gives them strength.

When I had the opportunity to sit down with the visitors they confirmed what I was feeling. They had been a little nervous when they first came to Waseskun because they didn’t know what to expect. Their only frame of reference was the prison setting so they assumed this place would be like that. This is similar to what many residents speak of when they talk about Waseskun. Then they get to the wood gate and there is no chain link, no barbed wire, no guard towers, no machine guns, and immediately they feel the peaceful nature of the place. I always, first, when I go into a place, scope it out, feel it out, and here at Waseskun there was no negative energy. There was only positive energy.”
(Shawn Bell)

When the Elders arrived first time it took the residents a few days to get used to them and to feel comfortable approaching them. This is similar to the new resident’s experience at Waseskun; it takes time to build up trust and to open up to the staff and other residents. As one of the Elders said,

“There was only positive energy and a little bit of, not fear, but apprehension about us from the guys. So the guys were very far from us at first. And also people have a little bit of fear about medicine people, like we can make them disappear or something. So it was a few days of coming here and it was just five of us, ourselves and Sonny and Glenda and Stan, chatting there, and the residents would be twenty feet away. After a while they started coming up but

they were closed. Then they started to open up and now we can't get rid of them. They stay around us all the time. So something was given to them by us coming here."

These two Elders say that what they feel here is that the guys have good hearts. The Elders are not here to hear about their crime but are here to help them heal from their crime. And that healing comes from the heart. You have to go deep in there. That is what the Waseskun healing is all about. Going deep into the core of the problem and healing the pain that results in behaviour that led to crime. As one Elder noted,

"When we come here, I do not look at these guys and think, oh, what was his crime? I look and I see a friend that I found. And these guys come up and share with me, and not only am I helping them but I am learning from them."

It is the give and take between staff and residents and the feeling that everyone is working together, combined with the belief that everyone can heal, that makes Waseskun a successful therapeutic healing community. As the two visiting Elders said, there should be more of these places.

"There should be one across every province. There are lots of brothers inside prison who could use this place, who could use another chance." For that is what Waseskun gives - another chance."

5.2 Desire for change

The healing path that Waseskun shows the residents is an individual healing journey, staff is there to help but staff cannot walk the healing path for any resident. The resident must do their own healing work and for this reason the first step on any healing journey is to have a sincere desire to change.

All staff and residents who were interviewed identified having that desire to change as the most important step. Healing can not happen if you do not take that first step. If you are not willing to look deeply at yourself, at the issues you have inside and work to address those issues, healing cannot take place. As one resident said,

“Understand that here, everybody’s got a special, unique story to tell. But it all relates to the same problem, which is not dealing with your unresolved issues, it could be anger, resentment, abuse, neglect. Whatever the case may be. It’s just to come here, and to understand that one needs to face the truth in order to start being honest with yourself. It can never work if you don’t take that step. Never.”

When someone has decided that they are ready to work on themselves, and identified Waseskun as the place to do that, they must submit a letter of application describing their issues and why they want to come to Waseskun. This application process, according to three-quarters of the staff interviews, plays an important role in the success of Waseskun.

One reason and this was addressed by two residents as well as during the staff interviews, is that Waseskun does not get the “hard-core” from the correctional system. The men who come here have already done some work on themselves during their time in correctional facilities. They have decided that they want to better themselves and come to Waseskun ready to do the work necessary to accomplish their goals. As one staff members noted,

“These guys have done some work on themselves before they even get here. They’ve got to want to change before they come here. They’ve got to write that letter. They’ve got to make us think that they want to change before they come here. Because every new person we put in the community changes the face of the community.”

Another reason this application process helps to make Waseskun successful is that, by submitting a letter and application form, a potential resident agrees to abide by the rules and accept the conditions of Waseskun such as no violence or aggression and no drugs or alcohol. Having a new resident agree to these conditions before he comes to Waseskun ensures his future compliance while making the threat of Waseskun’s withdrawal of support real and effective.

While most interviews discussed the effectiveness of the application process, one former resident stated that the application process was not intensive enough. In his opinion, anyone can write a letter and that doesn’t necessarily mean they are ready to do the work at Waseskun. He said that, “when a guy comes who is not ready for Waseskun that guy can disrupt the people who are really working on themselves,” so the Waseskun application process should

involve personal interviews with every potential acceptance. In this way Waseskun could filter out the guys before they came, which would avoid problems later on.

However ideal that process would be, it could potentially become very time intensive and expensive considering that applications come from all across the Quebec, Ontario, Maritime Provinces, Northern Quebec and Nunavut. Every staff member who mentioned the application process spoke of it in a positive manner and that argues against changing it.

5.3 De-institutionalization

Each resident who comes to Waseskun brings his own “baggage”, his own issues to deal with. Each individual is unique. One thing they almost all have in common is that guys who come to Waseskun have spent time in prison. Some spend much longer than others and, generally speaking, the longer one spends in prison as part of the “prison subculture,” the more institutionalized one becomes. As a CSC employee explained, normally when an offender is inside a penitentiary, he will start to become institutionalized.

Inside correctional institutions there is very little you have to do for yourself. Your laundry is done, your meals are provided, and money is given to you for tobacco. There is also a way of interacting based on violence and intimidation and learning to survive. So the immediate challenge facing any Healing Lodge is to de-institutionalize the resident before any other work can be done. Institutionalized residents, and the Healing Lodge’s challenge of de-institutionalizing them, were discussed by every member of CSC who was interviewed. CSC staff seemed to view the residents as inmates who had to be brought back to a human level.

All Waseskun staff mentioned benefits like a pleasant atmosphere, resident-to-resident interaction, and the residents’ learning to do things for themselves, as ways to de-institutionalize residents. The staff believed, first and foremost however, that thinking of the residents not as inmates to bring back to humanity, but as human beings was most important. This attitude is a reflection of the core values of Waseskun Healing Center that every human

being is basically good and is only conditioned by the experiences in his or her life to make bad choices.

Roughly half of the residents interviewed mentioned de-institutionalization as one of their personal goals and one of the things Waseskun is doing for them. Notably, those residents who mentioned de-institutionalization were either serving life sentences or residents who had been in prison for an extended period of time. As one resident said,

“For me personally, Waseskun acts as a de-institutionalization. I just spent more than a couple of decades on the other side, in prison actually, behind bars or fence. We all know, through studies, that taking somebody from maximum security and dropping them out on the street does not work. We all know this by now. So for me personally, I’m doing life and this is like a stepping stone.”

When residents first arrive at Waseskun it is a very different atmosphere than what they were used to. The simple reality of expecting barbed wire fences and armed guards but only seeing a five-foot high wood fence and another resident opening the gate has a positive effect. As identified by residents, staff and CSC employees alike, the atmosphere is an important early step in de-institutionalizing former inmates. It is a tranquil environment. The north side borders a pine forest and a lake. You can see and smell the trees, listen to the birds and breathe fresh air. On the south side is the town of St. Alphonse-Rodriguez where, over the fence, you can see the backs of houses, a supermarket and a road. Both of these views help residents re-adjust to life outside of cement walls and chain-link fences. All residents interviewed spoke of the “pleasant” atmosphere of Waseskun as being a good place for healing.

“Your stress and anxiety levels drop,” one resident said, “as soon as I came through the gate I could feel that right away.” Many interviewees spoke of being able to go for walks, or sit under the trees, and listen to the birds, as being very therapeutic.

It is not only the outdoor atmosphere of Waseskun that helps with the de-institutionalization process. Residents spoke of the comfortable standard of living inside Waseskun that helped them leave the prison world, and the prison mentality, behind. Having an individual, private room was identified by a quarter of the residents as important because they could always get

away if they needed to be alone; it is more of a regular room, with a regular bed and a window.

As one resident said,

“This is not a prison setting. I see the level of comfort in my room, I’ve got a huge bed. I’ve got a great big window with blinds, if I don’t like the sunshine or whatever. This is like a real room, the way a real room is supposed to be. I’ve got cable, if I want to watch television. These are things that we don’t normally find in an institutional setting.”

Another method of de-institutionalizing the residents is to have them take care of the day-to-day aspects of living. In prison most things are done for you. At Waseskun, you are expected to take care of things for yourself. Residents do their own laundry, clean their own rooms and budget their own money. These activities serve as stepping-stones, from the prison, taking them to the world outside the gates. As one staff member said,

“Some of these guys come in and they don’t know how to do their own laundry, they don’t know how to clean up after themselves. We have to teach them right from the bottom up. Men leave here a different person, taking care of themselves emotionally, physically.”

At Waseskun, residents are addressed by their first names. There are no intercoms, no standing head counts and no bells. These examples were specifically addressed by a couple of resident interviews. Indirectly, every resident interviewed spoke to this difference. In prison, you are treated as a number, whereas at Waseskun, you are treated like a human being. Typical responses from residents included,

“One of the biggest things here is that you’re treated like a human being. That’s not something you get back in the system. The system is very cold, it has no heart, no conscience. Whereas here, you’re dealing with individuals who have warm hearts. They feel for you, they know what you’re going through. You can tell they empathize with you.”

The main way Waseskun accomplishes this is to hire a staff that truly believes that these men can be healed and that every one can change if they want to. The belief in the power of this caring therapy is evident throughout Waseskun. Even the CSC officials interviewed identified this belief in the possibility of change as being a key component of Waseskun.

“The Elders sincerely believe in the changes that men can make in their lives,” said one CSC employee, “and this helps the men gain the confidence they need to develop their own self confidence.”

This attitude is reflected by all the staff of Waseskun. They spoke of the fact that, if an individual wants to change, he can change. If someone fails at Waseskun it is not because they cannot change, rather it is because they were not ready to commit themselves to that change. They have to have a sincere desire to change their life, and in the end, it is this attitude of staff that these men are not criminals but are human beings who have to come to heal themselves which is the most important factor in the de-institutionalization of the residents.

5.4 Safety

An essential component of healing is being in a safe environment. Safety, and Waseskun’s ability to maintain a safe environment, was addressed in one form or another by almost every interview done with residents, staff and CSC employees. Although they looked at safety from different angles, nearly every individual expressed the fact that Waseskun’s safe environment was a prerequisite for the healing that occurs here.

From the residents’ point of view, almost every interview spoke of the difference in safety between the prison system and Waseskun. On one level, they addressed the day to day living at Waseskun and not having to live in fear of fights, aggression and violence. This is very important for the resident’s trust and comfort, both of which play important roles in rehabilitation and re-integration. On another level, the residents described their perceived safety from intimidation, threats and insults, which is important for individuals to open up their own hearts and minds in programs and group circles. It was important for residents to really examine their own issues without fear of repercussion. As one resident said,

“Here, you can go to a program and when you leave the program you don’t got to worry about nobody trying to target you, or make fun of you, because you were talking about something real. You can be real here. Whereas back in the pen, if you break down and cry in a program, when you leave that program that night at 4:00, some idiot that was in the program is telling all his buddies - this guy said he was a sex offender or this guy said this. Then you become a target.

In the pen, you can't be honest in your programs if you want to survive. Whereas here, that whole aura of the violence and the intimidation is gone."

As with Waseskun staff, the Helpers mirrored the same views about safety as the residents. At Waseskun the Helpers work with the residents and get them to open up and when they leave their program or one-on-one counseling session, the resident doesn't have to put "his mask" back on to go out to the general prison population. Instead, the resident who opened up can go out into the Waseskun community and feel comfortable to be working on his issues and can even get assistance from other residents who are also working on similar things.

Other staff mentioned a different aspect of safety. Staff feels secure from threats or intimidation because are very involved in the community of Waseskun. They eat with residents, do ceremonies with residents and spend a lot of time talking to residents on an individual level. These staff-resident interactions help to form a therapeutic healing community and are very beneficial to the resident's rehabilitation. Therefore, this concept of security is essential to the health and well being of the community. It was noted that,

"I was curious about the perceptions of the women staff at Waseskun. Did they ever feel uncomfortable, or was it a concern to be working and interacting with the all-male residents? The interviews with the female staff of Waseskun dispelled any doubts I harboured. With the one exception, a woman who was winked at by a resident and it made her feel uncomfortable, they said that there had never been an incident, never did they feel unsafe at Waseskun."

Waseskun is a violence free community. But prisons are also supposed to be "violence and aggression free." Yet, as the residents said in prison there is not the same sense of safety. One resident said,

"Here (at Waseskun), there's zero tolerance for violence. Which is good because it makes you feel like you're in a safe environment. You don't have to worry about somebody picking up a shank and stabbing you, or hitting you on the head with a weightlifting bar. These are things that you are very aware, on the inside, that its very real and this could happen at any time."

As that resident said, there is zero-tolerance for violence at Waseskun. One slight act of aggression, where one resident bumped his shoulder into another as he passed him in the lunch

line resulted in one month of re-focusing. Any act of aggression more serious would result in the offender's immediate removal from Waseskun.

This lack of hesitation to extract a problem resident is the key to Waseskun's safety. The offenders who come to Waseskun want to be here. They have to show their sincerity towards their own healing, through the letter of intent, before they are accepted. So the threat of extraction is a serious threat and, because residents do not want to leave, they are willing to abide by the rules and live in a violence-free way.

The safe environment is a result of being able to discipline and extract problem residents and is effective because of the monitoring systems Waseskun has in place. At Waseskun everyone is encouraged to be a responsible member of the community; staff watches the residents and the staff alike and in turn the residents watch staff and other residents. The staff calls it the fishbowl and in the fishbowl, while it can be uncomfortable being watched all the time, it creates the safe environment that is prerequisite for the healing work at Waseskun. As one Waseskun Helper said,

“Residents can't get away from the fishbowl here. It's like you're being watched, twenty-four hours a day. It can be uncomfortable. But it's also good too because when you fall, and everybody falls sometimes, we surround him or her with support. If they don't want it, we've had people who've left, it doesn't work for them, or they're not ready for this step. But if they are, relapse is part of recovery. We help them to use that. Some of the best work some of these guys have done is after they've done something wrong here and been surrounded, and met with the Healing Council, and been given a time out to reflect, and talking with some of the other guys. It really gives them something to work on.”

5.5 Introduction to Community

In all of the interviews with staff and residents, the view of Waseskun as a community was mentioned. Everyone identified a community as a beneficial place for healing and Waseskun, as a form of community, provides a place for residents to heal and learn to be a part of something more than just themselves.

The feeling that someone is a part of something bigger than himself is very important in the Waseskun healing model. At Waseskun, individuals are taught to be a part of the whole while retaining their individuality. A former resident, who is now living in a halfway house, brought up an interesting point. "At Waseskun," he said, "It is a brotherhood. Everyone is looking out for each other." He continued to explain that it was very different at the halfway house, where everyone looked out only for himself or herself. Other Waseskun residents echoed his view that everyone knows everyone else at Waseskun and everyone talks to everyone.

The belief that residents look out for each other was also identified by most staff as a positive element of Waseskun; it is exemplified by the resident's reactions to a new resident. One Helper said,

"When the guys see new residents come into this community, they're not "rookies" anymore. They know the rules, they know what it takes to be living in Waseskun. So when they see new people come in, a lot of these guys offer assistance. They tell the new guys the rules, what's expected. They try to make them feel comfortable. They don't just let them swim on their own; they help them out."

But it is not just the residents who make up the community. Staff members are an essential part of the community and are equally as conscientious of new residents at Waseskun. As one staff member said,

"The community looks after the well-being of the community. Whether it's the staff, the residents, we all care for the new person coming in, we all observe the new person coming in. There's a support system geared to each individual person in here. A sense of respect, a sense of identity, and genuine care, above everything else as well."

When a new resident arrives, he is welcomed with a community circle. He is given time to settle in, to meet the other residents and to begin to feel comfortable at Waseskun. As a part of the de-institutionalization process, residents are expected to begin to take care of themselves. When a new resident becomes a part of the Waseskun community, he is now expected to take care of himself while also contributing to the care of the community. This is deeper conditioning to leave the effects of institutionalization behind and it is also preparation for the eventual release of the resident into his own community.

The next step in his involvement in the community is to begin doing chores. Every resident at Waseskun is responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the community. Every resident has a daily chore to do. If a resident has specific skills those skills are put to use. For example, a mechanic spent time as a Waseskun resident and, during his stay he was responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the Waseskun vehicles. Other residents are good at talking and listening and they can become mentors. Those who are good at working out-of-doors keep the grounds of Waseskun looking clean. As one resident said,

“You have chores to do, and that is to prepare yourself for the outside. Outside you have dishes to do, you have to take out the garbage, you have to do laundry, and you have to wash the floor. Stuff like that. If you don’t do that outside, that means you don’t complete the circle. That means something is wrong in your life, in the physical world, the emotional or mental. There’s a part missing. So Waseskun kind of teaches us the real deal. Everything has to be in balance. The chores are there not to piss you off, it’s to train yourself that there is stuff to do.”

For new residents at Waseskun, these approaches to retain your individuality while becoming a part of the larger community are the first steps to opening up and getting deeply involved in their own healing journeys.

5.6 Trust

A resident will not go deep into his healing path until he can trust and respect the people he is working with. Trust is an idea discussed by all of the Waseskun Helpers and a few other staff members as well. It was also identified by the visiting Elder and Helper as the most important component of healing at Waseskun.

The residents did not specifically address trust as an important factor, but through their examples, they indirectly identified their trust of the staff in every interview.

As the Waseskun healing approach is based on group healing circles, where men speak of their issues to the other members of the group, and one-on-one sessions with an Elder or Helper, a resident will not progress until he can trust the people around him. Building this trust takes time and nearly every staff interview addressed the length of time that Waseskun has to work

with these men as a key factor in Waseskun's success. They said it generally took six months. As one Helper said,

“you cannot change somebody's life in six weeks. You just can't. It takes us that long to build the relationship where we are actually seeing the real person.”

Throughout their lives, and throughout their time in prison, many of these men learned not to trust anyone. It is difficult to ask them to trust an Elder or a Helper, along with the other residents of the groups they are involved in, enough to share their deepest secrets, fears and desires.

It is also essential to show these men that there are people they can trust and that life is not only composed of people out to hurt them. It is equally important to get these men to open up enough that the Elder and Helpers can help them work on the real, deep issues they have and not just the surface issues that they have learned to talk about in prison.

The prime assets Waseskun has in earning trust are time and patience. As many staff mentioned, healing is a process that takes a lot of time. With a minimum of at least six months to work with residents, Waseskun can afford to let each individual move at his own pace. The Helpers don't have to push anyone.

Another point that both residents and staff brought out was that Waseskun's Elders and Helpers are Aboriginal people. Many of the staff said this was an important benefit for healing as Aboriginal people know the realities that these men have come from and know the reality they will be going back into. As one Helper said,

“Every reserve is different, but they're basically the same. So we understand, where they're from, what they've been through, and where they're going to go if they don't change. I think that's why it's important to have Natives helping Natives. I think we understand ourselves better.”

The majority of residents also mentioned Aboriginal people helping Aboriginal People as a very important factor in Waseskun's success. The residents understand that the Elder and Helpers understand where they are coming from, as one resident explained,

“Here it is Natives teaching Natives. (Residents) are primarily going back into our own communities, so there is a vested interest in just how deep (the Elder and Helpers) are going to go with somebody.”

The first and perhaps most important factor in building resident trust is the sincerity of the staff. Each resident spoke at length about the staff of Waseskun. Their words and feelings expressed the genuine care that they felt the staff had for the residents. Each one of the former residents said that the staff, especially the Elder and Helpers, were essential in their success at Waseskun. Two current residents who were close to leaving said that, when they leave, they will greatly miss the Elder and Helpers.

There is a sense at Waseskun that staff and residents are working together towards a common goal which is the rehabilitation of the residents. This sense is enhanced by three main factors addressed by most of the residents. The first is that the Elder and Helpers live on site at Waseskun four or five days a week. One resident said,

“The fact that there’s people who work here, who are here twenty-four hours a day. That says a lot to me. As soon as I found that out, that speaks volumes to me. And that makes it easier to let your guard down, and trust that much faster. You know, yeah they’re getting paid for eight hours a day. They’re here for twenty-four. They’re spending sixteen hours a day here that they’re not even paid for, to sit there and try to help us. That tells me how much their heart is involved. This is not just a job for these people.”

The second factor in building a sense of working together is that the staff eats and does ceremonies with residents. A resident noted,

“The staff here don’t make us feel like they’re better than us. They don’t belittle us. Here, staff will come and sit right at our table and each lunch with us. To me, that’s looking at you on an even basis. They eat the same food as us. They do ceremonies with us.”

The third factor, and perhaps the most important, is that the Elder and Helpers have been through the same things that they are helping the residents deal with. These are Aboriginal people who have walked their own healing paths, dealt with their issues and live their lives today in a good way. As two informants said,

“In the pens you go to a psychologist, and the psychologist don’t know. They just read your file and what you did. But they never been through, say the addictions, they never been addicted to anything. They don’t have the knowledge of what you did, the knowledge that you can get better in yourself.”

“We’re not better than them and we don’t act like it either. When (a Helper) shares with addictions, here’s a guy who was a drunk, and he shares with them. It’s kind of like saying, if I can do it, you can do it too.”

There is another component of trust that makes the Waseskun experience successful. The staff trusts each other and also trusts that an Aboriginal approach to healing will work. That staff members trust each other was identified as essential, for if there are divisions within the staff the residents will see those divisions as an opportunity for exploitation. It is very important that staff members work together, as a team, and that residents know that all staff abide by the rules and all staff back each other up. As one Helper said,

“Here we make decisions as a team. We bring things to the healing council, we give our input on how we feel. And everybody has an equal voice. I think it runs very well, because the guys are so used to the vibe in prison. It’s a whole different way of living, a whole different mentality. They’re used to, if you don’t get what you want from one person go to the next person and play them off each other. They learn that they can’t do that here. They learn pretty quickly that we’re a team, and decisions are decisions and we all follow the rules.”

The Executive Director trusts the Elders and Helpers and believes that their way of teaching is an effective way of healing. As a visiting Elder explained, there is always outside pressure from various sources telling a Healing Lodge or, for that matter anyone who works with people, how it should operate and the procedures it should follow. The Elder continued to say that if you do not trust the approach that you use you will follow many different suggestions and you will end up confused. The fact that the Executive Director trusts the Elder and Helpers that work at Waseskun is essential to successful healing.

5.7 Beginning Programming

Programs inside the prisons are very different than programs at Waseskun because the philosophy behind the two approaches to programming is fundamentally different. As a CSC

employee explained, programs inside institutions are primarily designed to look at contributing factors. If an offender has a history of alcohol abuse and was drunk when he committed his crime, then alcohol abuse would be a contributing factor. The programs inside institutions deal with those contributing factors. CSC, therefore, would expect the Healing Lodges to provide some maintenance programs to reinforce what the residents already learned inside.

On one hand, the Waseskun staff seemed to agree with this concept. One Helper mentioned that when a resident comes to Waseskun he's already taken numerous institutional programs and, through those programs, developed tools to deal with his issues. His job at Waseskun is to put those tools to use.

It is recognized, however, that Waseskun's programs go deeper than anything offered inside correctional facilities. Institutional programs are cognitive-based, giving inmates information, while programs at Waseskun deal with emotions. This approach helps residents identify their behavioral triggers and help them break their negative reactions to those triggers. As one resident said,

"I didn't really recognize what most of my emotions were. Anything that happened I thought I was mad. Everything went to anger. But it could have been frustration, it could have been humiliation, it could have been anything. But right away I connected to anger in my mind. And the only thing I've learned throughout my life is that when you're angry, you get violent. It's like you go on automatic pilot and you go right to angry. You could have been scared. Your child runs out on the middle of the road and you get a good scare, and you get mad and you yell at that child. You get angry but really you're not angry. You're mistaking that emotion that you felt, for anger, but it's not anger, it was fear. That's what you were really feeling. Here, they've taught me how to recognize the different emotions. And how to look at each emotion and decipher what the response should be for that. That's something that in the pen they don't have time to do that."

There are also differences in approaches. In correctional facilities, programs are generally set up like a classroom with inmates sitting in rows while the program facilitator is at the front talking to the inmates. At Waseskun, programs are done in circles, where the Helper or Elder is a part of the circle and the residents are talking to each other.

These differences are recognized by Waseskun staff, CSC employees and residents alike. Residents were almost unanimous in saying that programs in Waseskun were far more effective than programs inside. One resident said that he learned tools inside and learned to apply those tools at Waseskun.

A big part of the success of Waseskun programs is trust. The more trust a resident has for the facilitators and other program members, the more open each resident will be and the deeper the group will be able to go in healing. When that trust is there the programs are able to discuss things that would never come out in an institutional setting.

When residents first start programs at Waseskun they are used to institutional programs and the frankness and openness of people in Waseskun's programs comes as a surprise. As one resident said,

“As for programming, I just assumed it was going to be the same old programming that we had at Corrections Canada. You know, in a group of say 45 people, “You over in the corner, what do you think about drugs?” Of course the answer is “well, they’re wrong, you’re right, I don’t know man, you’re tough but you set me straight.” And you get a good mark on your paper. You’re there on time but you haven’t really done anything. When I got here, after about a month, and I heard some of the different stories from the residents, I realized that yeah, some of the people are doing something with the cold hard truth about their lives. They are just saying it, in plain old English or plain old French, they are saying what their lives are really like. It kind of shocked me, but it didn’t deter me. I said fine, there is room here for me too.”

The realization that other residents are really working on their issues is one of the major influences on the healing community. New residents need time to build their trust and comfort levels as well as time to figure out what Waseskun is all about. But as they see other people open up about their issues, the new residents realize that they are not the only ones who feel this way and other people are going through the same things. When the other residents seem to be improving, and seem to be happy that they have opened up the new residents begin to want those feelings too. As a Waseskun helper noted,

“A lot of the circles that we have, they’re community circles, with these guys just sharing, and they turn into a healing circle. That’s where a lot of things come out, just by these guys sharing. They don’t know whom they’re helping. A lot of these guys feel like they’re alone, and they haven’t spoken about what

they feel is troubling them, and then they hear someone else talking about something similar. That gives them hope. These circles, I think they're so important, because it's like a forum. It gives them that chance to try, and they are encouraged, because of the fact that they see somebody else heal themselves."

An important aspect about Waseskun's programs and the entire Waseskun operation, in general, is that residents are taught that they always have a choice. They can participate in programs and they can choose to open up. There is always a choice and that choice always has a consequence. When an individual realizes that the consequences in his life are a result of his own choices, he has made progress on his healing. As a former resident said,

"The Waseskun staff always let us know that we had choices, all the time. And that, if we were going to fake, or put on a front, then we could go ahead and do that but it's not going to achieve anything. The only one that we're really fooling is ourselves. I was one of the lucky ones who got that message and believe in it. Some guys go there thinking it is just part of a penitentiary program that they can do, and sit around and do the program and do nothing. But in the end, the truth of the individual comes out, whether they get sent back (to prison) or they end up going back anyways. But the ones that truly understand what type of opportunities are out there, they go and they reach and they succeed in life."

Giving residents the choice to heal themselves if ready, combined with an atmosphere where the vast majority of people are really working on themselves, creates a place where men decide for themselves that they want to work on healing, rather than be told. Since healing is an individual process, the fact that men make the decision to heal goes a long way towards their progress. One Helper estimated that at the time of these interviews, seventy per cent of the community was really working on healing. The rest were "just fooling around". One could not say the same about inmates in correctional facilities.

5.8 Learning Culture

Waseskun is a multi-national community. Residents come from across Canada, from different communities within different First Nations as well as from Métis, Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities. It is a sad truth that in today's world many Aboriginal people know very little about their culture and heritage. Often the cultural teachings have been lost or are no longer

practiced in community. A growing number of Aboriginal people are not raised among their own people but grow up in urban settings or foster homes and institutions.

For many of Waseskun's residents, they received their first cultural teachings when they were inside the prison system. However, as both staff and residents of Waseskun discussed, prison is not a good place to be learning culture. As one former resident noted,

“Before I went in the pen, I knew I was Native but that was all. In the pen they called me, they asked me if I wanted to take part in a Native group. I was curious so I said ok, I'll go. But at that time we were doing beading, stuff like that, arts and crafts. But nothing that I needed to do. I wanted to know more about my roots, Native spirituality. How to make beading and stuff like that, I'm not really into it.”

Consequently, a part of Waseskun's mission is to provide a culturally relevant environment in which men can heal. This involves many facets but the most important consideration is that all expressions of culture are encouraged and supported. The diversity of cultures was identified as a challenge by some of the staff, and a positive benefit by others. On one hand it is difficult to incorporate different beliefs into a common method of cultural teaching. There are also biases, as the Elder comes from one nation and Helpers come from other nations. The question becomes: where do the residents look to for teaching about their own culture.

On the other hand, the diversity allows for sharing and acceptance of different ideas. By using a pan-Aboriginal approach to teachings stereotypes are broken down and individuals are able to accept other people as people. As one Waseskun helper said,

“It's a constant learning experience, because of the diversity, the different cultures here. That's what makes it interesting. Some guys come in and they share what different communities do, in terms of healing. How their communities try to do things. And they give us ideas, too.”

Waseskun attempts to include different cultures into general teachings that promote an Aboriginal worldview. An example of this is the use of circles and consensus decision making. These are evident in staff meetings, in Healing Councils; residents' meetings, in programs; and for the entire community by community circles. All interviews with staff and residents identified these circles as positive benefits for everyone in the community. In every circle

people are treated with respect and consideration. There is no hierarchy and every individual is allowed to speak his or her mind, without interruption, while all others in the circle listen attentively.

Another example is the feather-teaching. This teaching, which is practiced in different ways by different cultures, is a way of solving disputes between individuals. If someone does something you do not like you take a feather to him and tell him what the problem is. While you hold the feather he must listen to what you say. When you are finished talking you pass the feather and he has the chance to speak his mind. Then the problem is resolved and does not build into a bigger issue. Other nations have different versions of this teaching. For example, some Nations use a stick while the Inuit use a rock. The premise is the same, however, and the feather-teaching is a good example of a cultural teaching that transcends individual nations.

The most important cultural activity at Waseskun is the sweat lodge. The sweat lodge is crucial to Waseskun and sweats are held once a week for any resident who wishes to attend. The sweat lodge is a combination of cultural and spiritual teaching because the sweat lodge is a sacred place to speak to the Creator and connect to your spirit. It is method of healing because the sweat lodge is a place to talk about your pains and troubles and leave them with the Creator. For those reasons the sweat lodge is very important to Waseskun. Fittingly, every staff and resident interview identified the sweat lodge as a key component of Waseskun and of their own healing journeys. As one resident said,

“The sweat lodge, I never did that before I went to Bath (institution). At Bath they invited me into the sweat and I went and the first time I sat through two rounds. The next time I felt really good. Then when I came to Waseskun I missed maybe four or five sweats in two years. I really like the sweats. You take everything, all that’s built inside, all that’s right inside of you and you take it right to the grandfathers and let them have it. It’s a very good feeling. And you can yell in there, get everything out, all of what’s built up inside. Yell, and let it out. That’s something I’m going to miss when I leave.”

5.9 Spirituality

All Waseskun staff and residents interviewed identified spirituality as an important part of Waseskun’s teachings. The Executive Director, Helpers, the Elder and others, take this idea

even farther and believe that spirituality is the base from which all healing grows. It grounds the individual and is the connection to one's spirit. When a person realizes that he or she has a spirit, and that everyone and everything else in the universe also has a spirit, then he or she can begin to understand that we are all a part of the world and that we are all equally important. Having this belief in the importance of the individual, as a part of the entire world, is what makes healing successful and sustainable through the challenges that arise on the healing path. One former resident said,

“I knew of spirituality, but not the depth of what Waseskun taught me. I knew that spirituality had to do with my culture, right, but there's another part of spirituality that was given to me through myself through the help of Waseskun, and that's becoming who I am today and being that individual, striving to be that better person everyday.”

The Elder at Waseskun calls it Spirit-duality. There is you, and there is your spirit. It is the reconnection of the two that enables healing to happen. One Waseskun helper noted,

“You empower people. That's healing. Every person can heal themselves, if they want to. Some just need to feel empowered to do it. That's why Waseskun is successful, because we're working with the individual spirit. We're empowering that person to heal himself.”

The Waseskun philosophy clearly separates culture and spirituality which, they believe is very important in helping residents realize their own spirituality. A few residents talked about how before they came to Waseskun, they associated spirituality with being Aboriginal. The teachings they had received in their communities about their culture and history were interpreted to be spirituality. At Waseskun they realized that spirituality is not culture, and there is no Aboriginal spirituality. Spirituality is universal and there is only human spirituality. One helper and a former resident noted,

“I can remember the first times when we'd come here once a week and we'd do a circle with the guys. The first thing the Elder would tell them, he'd say 'Don't ask me about culture. What do you want me to do, turn you all into a bunch of Mohawks? You've got your own culture. Go ask your Elders. Let's talk about Spirituality. Spirit duality. The relationship between you and your spirit.’”

“I was very involved with the native community before Waseskun. But it wasn't doing me any good because the people that were teaching me had no clue how to teach me spirituality, especially my own spirituality. There's a culture part, to being native, and there's a spiritual part to being a person. I

didn't know the difference until I hit Waseskun. I thought the culture was the spirituality. The culture is just part of my heritage. The spirituality is who I am."

Waseskun embraces all belief systems and all religions and has the conviction that it is important to reconnect to one's spirit and have a belief in some higher power. The Executive Director explained that all religions are accepted at Waseskun. If someone is a Christian, or a Buddhist, that is fine. Priests are invited in to talk to the residents if the need is there. Residents can have Bible study if they want it. Some residents even bring their Bible into the sweat lodge. As Stan Cudek said,

"The idea is for the guys to have a belief in something. It does not matter what they believe in but that they have a belief in something."

Spirituality at Waseskun starts with having an on-site Elder for four days a week. CSC employees, Waseskun staff, and residents alike identify this as very important to Waseskun's success. The Elder is the spiritual teacher and he is always available to talk to the residents. One staff member noted,

"The Elder and Helpers are living here, and are very accessible. Many a night while we're over there (in the Elder's apartment) the residents come banging on the door, and they make time to go sit with them at night and talk to them. So the residents know that the Elder and Helpers are accessible to them. It would be different if the Elder was just coming here once a week and they were all trying to fit time in with him. He's here, they know him, he's part of the community."

As a visiting Elder explained, Waseskun is a good place to work because the Grandfathers can come in here from the four directions. In the prison, he continued, the Grandfathers will not come in because of the bars and the walls and the cameras and the guns. But at Waseskun, because there are none of those things and the atmosphere has positive energy, the Grandfathers will come in. Without the Grandfathers, he said, the medicine men have nothing. So it is very important to have an atmosphere where the Grandfathers will come in.

The Elder and Helpers, and some of the other staff, are spiritual people and walk with the medicines of their people which helps teach residents about their own spirituality. It also

provides role models for them. They can see staff living in a good way and model their own behaviour on what they have seen. One helper noted,

“Everybody around here is a role model, in one way or another. A lot of the residents are looking at the staff as role models. Our actions speak too. What they see, they become. They follow. So we have to take care, and try to be as responsible as possible, as facilitators, as Helpers, as Elders, as medicine people.”

The Elder is also available to staff who wish to work on themselves including staff that are non-Aboriginal and live in local communities. Part of what Waseskun offers is cultural and spiritual teachings to the staff as well as the residents. These teachings then go out into the communities and get passed from the staff to their families and friends. Some of the staff spoke of this as a gradual breaking down of barriers as many people in the non-Aboriginal community around Waseskun do not know much about Aboriginal culture. Waseskun staff end up being sources of information and serve to correct some of the false or negative impressions of Aboriginal people that still persist.

Spirituality at Waseskun goes beyond the Elder and Helper’s teachings. Spirituality is a way of life at Waseskun for both staff and residents. Every day begins with a morning prayer, every Healing Council is opened and closed with a prayer, and every community circle is opened and closed with a prayer. Staff and residents alike are living as spiritual people while they are at Waseskun. It is hoped that these lessons will stick with the residents when they leave and that they will continue to be spiritual people when they are back out in the world. As a Waseskun helper said,

“Everybody has a different opinion of what spirituality is. It’s not all about ceremonies and beating a drum. It’s how you conduct yourself as an individual. What I mean by that, if you’re a person that shows a lot of respect and you’re sincere to other people’s needs, and you’re aware that other people are healing, people can tell that. If you’re spiritual, you can understand other people when they’re working on themselves. In that sense, it is just being able to understand somebody. If you’re going to consider yourself a spiritual person, it’s not all about ceremony it’s about showing your openness to another person so you can help. And it’s showing respect for yourself, too.”

5.10 Building Confidence

Many men who come to Waseskun have no self-confidence. They do not take care of themselves physically, mentally, emotionally or spiritually. A large part of the Waseskun healing model for some individuals, therefore, is to improve or build a level of self-confidence.

Self-confidence is important when a resident leaves Waseskun. Even if he knows a proper way to live, if he doesn't have the confidence in himself to live properly than the tools he carries will not be put to use. The lack of self-confidence also opens a resident to manipulation and pressure from negative influences. As one resident said,

“It is quite obvious that some people really, really need this type of thing. They have some residents here with zero self-esteem. They just don't care about themselves at all. They hate themselves. They hate everything. They really do need this type of place.”

Waseskun builds confidence primarily by encouraging interaction between residents and between residents and staff. In community circles residents are encouraged to speak in front of the entire community. At lunch and dinner residents and staff eat together around circle tables in groups of four so there is quite a lot of interaction over meals. In programs, residents have the opportunity to speak about the issues on their minds. One helper noted,

“The residents themselves are helping each other, continuously. And if they're not, they're in the process of learning how to reach out, and learning how to pick up one's self esteem, and say you know what, I know some stuff. That starts happening. You see that guy who walks along the wall, and who wants to disappear in the earth, and his self esteem is dragging light-years behind him; all of a sudden he's sharing, all of a sudden he's doing things. So you can see the medicine that happens in a therapeutic community is very effective, and also very gentle.”

Special events like the art class or cultural activities allow residents to forget their troubles for a while and just focus on doing something else. The art class instructor noted,

“What the art class accomplishes the most is in terms of their self-confidence. That's where I saw the biggest impact. When they realize what they can do, or what talent they have, what they can accomplish. Many of them when they come here, think that they are useless. They're shameful, they have regrets, remorse, and that consumes them. In the art class they forget about that, and

they surprise themselves with what they can do. It just adds to that self-confidence.”

All of these things, combined with the sense of being a part of the Waseskun community and learning to be a part of the greater Aboriginal community, help residents build their self-confidence. That self-confidence then helps them to go deeper in their healing path while preparing them to face their chance to be outside in society again.

5.11 Re-integration step by step

Waseskun sets out to rehabilitate residents in order to reintegrate them into society, whether into an Aboriginal or mainstream community. Some residents are already on parole and come to take part in the programs with the purpose of successful re-integration. Other residents come as minimum-security inmates and for those residents rehabilitation is the priority. Eventually, every resident who is successful at Waseskun will return to a community and it is very important to have a procedure in place for re-integration. A visiting Elder noted,

“We first started coming here four years ago. Today there are only three guys here who were here then. Sure, some guys went back to prison, but that’s only ten percent. The others are all out there. So they are getting something from this place. And the guys who are here now know that their chance will come too, when they will be out.”

Waseskun re-integrates men back into the world in a gradual way. For residents who have been in prison for a long time it is very intimidating to get close to full release. As one resident said,

“At Waseskun, the stress-level goes way down. I been in this position before, where they’re telling me we’re going to send you to a closed transition house in Sherbrooke. And I end up OD’ing. My stress level, I’m thinking ok I’m getting out, so my stress level went right through the roof, I end up partying, then I’m OD’ing.”

Waseskun’s solution to the sense of impending panic in residents is to take things slowly. There is no rush since Waseskun has most residents for long periods of time. The first step in reintegration is to have residents able to see over the gates to the outside world. The next step is to give a resident an Escorted Temporary Absence (ETA) to do their errands such as going to

the doctor's office or getting a new health card. These ETA's allow the resident to see the outside world which, in many cases, is very different than the world they used to know before they entered prison. As one staff member and a resident said,

“They have an ETA program to go to AA. Going to AA helps them to prepare a new social network. Some of the guys here are basically alone. Not all the residents come from a reserve, some of them have lived their whole lives on the street. It's not like it was 20 years ago, or 40 years ago. Life changes, and here, we change and follow life. There is an evolution.”

“There's no other way of getting around this, there's no shortcut, I'm actually going to have to go out on codes. We start small. I'm going to go up the street to get a pair of glasses. They're going to drive me up the street to do that. There's also AA meetings and now I can go to these too. When I've got this down perfect, there's no stress, the anxiety level is normal, then I go back in front of the parole board and I will ask them, I don't need an escort anymore, I can do these things just fine. Then you go a little bit more, probably six months or a year or so. Then I do more.”

If a resident is given permission to leave Waseskun, he will start by being given an hour per day but with strict instructions to be back on time. This is enough time to go out to the grocery store and come back or go for a walk in the town. These activities allow resident to have some basic interaction with regular people outside the Healing Centre and later talk about the experience with his Helper or Elder. If there are anxieties about being out, he has the opportunity to deal with them before he is given full release.

The curfew gradually gets extended until the resident may be able to go out in the late afternoons and early evenings. Eventually, with good behaviour, residents can be granted Unescorted Temporary Absences (UTA's) where they leave Waseskun to visit family or their home community for a short period of time. One staff member noted,

“When we work for reintegration and re-socialization of a resident, that really shows them what is out there. We do it by steps, one step at a time. One hour at a time. I think this is really a key for the reintegration process for the residents. They go out for one hour at a time, and it's increased, and that shows them what the real world is all about. If they have difficulties out there, at least they'll come back here, which is like a safe place, and then they'll speak to their Helpers about it. Residents often go home for a couple of days, once a month, and that is showing them, slowly, what the real world is all about. And at the

same time, the fact that they go there and then they come back here, it permits them to talk about their community.”

The gradual reintegration allows the healing team at Waseskun to truly gauge how the resident reacts to being out in society. They can help him deal with issues that arise in his own community when he comes back after a short trip home and, in this way, make the transition back into the communities easier.

5.12 Programs in the Community

In any therapeutic healing community, programs are essential to healing. As noted earlier, programs at Waseskun differ in content, approach and effect from institutional programs. However, as Waseskun’s programs were identified as such a large part of its success as a therapeutic healing community, it is important to identify why they work so well.

Waseskun allows residents to choose, for themselves, how much effort they’d put into their healing. This choice is important for the programs at Waseskun go very deep and if a resident is not ready to examine the issues that are buried deep inside, his time at Waseskun will be very difficult. Waseskun is a very good place if a resident is ready to work on himself but it is not a good place to come and do time. One cannot just do time. The healing team pushes residents to work on themselves and when residents see others doing work on themselves they want to do that as well. A former resident noted,

“If you want to better yourself, Waseskun is a nice place to be. But if you want to do time, it’s going to the worst place because they are going to make you work on yourself. When you see everyone working on themselves, you want to do it. But if you don’t want to do it, and you’re going to deal with stuff that comes out that you don’t want to deal with, then you’re not ready for it and it’s going to be hell. But when you’re ready to deal with your stuff in there, then all right, bring it on. Then you’ve got all the tools.”

Healing is not an easy thing to do. Digging up past hurts and reliving those hurts in order to get past them is difficult. It takes a brave person to go back and face one’s demons. Residents agreed that if you are willing to do it, Waseskun would help you deal with those issues and move past them. One resident told his experience as,

“I’ll give you an example from my life. I was molested, by family members. That creates, to a four and five year old child, a feeling of betrayal and violation. These are the people who are supposed to love you and support you and protect you. But when they hurt you, you feel violated. And over these years, anytime I’ve ever felt violated in the slightest way by a loved one, it hurt ten times as bad as if a stranger lied to me because of the fact that it was a loved one again. You don’t even realize it is that inner child in you that’s upset again, because of the fact he’s been violated again. Because you put your love and your trust in somebody again, and that loved one went and hurt you just like the other loved ones did when you were four years old. This is all stuff that I’ve realized since I’ve come here. How these things are connected. You don’t even realize how its connected until you get here and start going through the programs.”

However, while programs at Waseskun may be difficult, they are persistent and structured around the way traditional lessons are given. Elders and Helpers share lessons they have learned during their own journeys. There is no set format to follow and no textbook lessons. Programs depend on the Helper and each resident who is a part of the circle. On some days a program will start on one topic and switch directions. At Waseskun there is the freedom to let each circle find its own way. One Helper said it this way,

“I start by sharing whatever teachings that I’ve come across in my journey. It is nice to see that there’s no one particular way that we’re going to follow. And really, part of it is working where energies are at with the guys on that particular day. As for how it goes, it really depends on the energies that are flowing, and how the guys are going to come across in their sharing, and what they’re pursuing in their healing. So that becomes really great when you see that you’re not stuck in one area, you’re not stuck in trying to get the most out of a particular approach to things. It’s wide open.”

Also, because teachings in the programs are given in a traditional Aboriginal way, they are similar to teachings the residents may have heard in their own lives from their parents or community Elders. The residents are able to link the lessons from programs to the lessons they have heard before. A Helper involved with treatment said,

“It reflects how teachings are given in our world. When I say our world, I mean our world as Indigenous peoples. Not one teaching has ever been the same. The way each teaching is given, or is shared; if you’re listening to the same message for the twentieth time, for example, it will be 20 different ways that that lesson is shared. Again, it’s to help the ones that are participating in that particular group. They get to look at it in so many different ways and then they can link it, you see. And that’s the important part - the linkages that go on with

their particular teachings. They're listening to, once again, another angle at what they've been working on for a good part of their life, may it be anger or loneliness. Whatever it was that became quite an issue in their life. So they'll hear the teachings that go around it and they understand it."

Group programs are able to look at these issues, discuss them and help to trigger the residents to open up. The key to Waseskun's programming as the Helpers and Elder and half of the residents stated, is the one-on-one sessions each resident does with his Elder or Helper. The one-on-one sessions are just about the resident and dealing with his own issues in privacy. They are able to go deeper than the group programs as one resident mentioned,

"It had more to do with the one-on-one programs. Anybody can do a one-on-one session, right, but Waseskun, and the Elders that they had, really understood what the one-on-one session was about. The programs were fine, being in a group helped. But I definitely have to say that the one-on-one session really helped me gain ground. With the native Elders, they have this passion, they have a different technique. They thrive off the sincerity of the individual."

An important point made by the Elder and other staff is that Waseskun's programs are twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. There are group programs, there are one-on-one sessions and there is living in a community of other people who are also healing. This has to do with community. Because everyone is healing, everyone is living in a good way. As one Helper noted,

"You can put a mask on for an hour, two hours, three hours a day. But you can't keep it on 24 hours a day. It's all taken into account. Even in their dreams, they come and tell us about their dreams they're even working when they're dreaming. They do one-on-one's with each other, too. They'll get to talking; they don't realize it but they're doing their healing."

Finally there are the mentors. Mentors are Waseskun residents who have come a long way in their own healing and now are available to talk to the residents and help them along their paths. Mentors are available all the time and show other residents that there are people at Waseskun who are making progress in their healing journey. They can talk to residents about what they have gone through and, in that way, help other residents to look at issues they are facing from another perspective. As one former Waseskun resident said,

"I was a mentor and my door was always open. Sometimes at night somebody was knocking at my door just to talk. All right, come in. What I did before, I can share that with my brothers so they won't go that path. That's what I think

a mentor is. To help and share with the others what you have been through. It helped, that's for sure.”

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week programming, with teachings done in a traditional Aboriginal way, help residents really look deep at their own issues and heal the wounds that they have long covered up. This is what the Waseskun programming is all about and it is a major factor in Waseskun's success as a true therapeutic healing community.

5.13 Decision making in community

Waseskun is a community of individuals, staff and residents alike, who are working and living together in the spirit of healing. Community is identified by everyone as an important part of Waseskun's success. Since it is a community, residents can learn how to live among others in a healthy way and how to be an integral part of a community without sacrificing their individuality.

The structure of Waseskun creates a sense of community but this community aspect goes deeper than just having residents take care of the place and encouraging staff and resident interaction. The community of Waseskun is a real thing that permeates all aspects of the organization. The best example of this is the community circles.

Nearly all staff and residents discussed the importance of community circles at Waseskun. The only criticism for community circles came from some of the residents who suggested that community circles should be held more often. From time to time tension would build up in the community and there would be a vague sense that something was not right. And then, when a community circle was held and everyone had a chance to speak their mind and get their own issues with the community off of their chests, the tension was released and the feeling was that the atmosphere of the community was light and loose again.

The community circle is a forum for the entire community to get together and discuss community issues and needs. It can be a tool for staff to introduce new rules and regulations to

the residents. It can be used to introduce new residents to the community. It can simply be used to let the residents speak to the staff about whatever is on their mind.

The community circle shows everyone that the community is truly made up of both residents and staff. All people sit in a circle and there is no separation of staff from residents. Anyone can speak their mind so long as they do so with respect. In one case a resident criticized a staff member for showing a bad attitude and that staff member ended up apologizing to the entire community for the behaviour.

In addition, community circles can be used to get the community's opinions on punishment or decisions that affect everyone. For example, there was an occasion where a few residents brought drugs into the community. Since this concerned everyone, a community circle was called and the rest of the residents were asked what should be done with the guys. One resident recalled that incident and said,

“These guys were pretty new, they thought that it was only the staff that was upset with them. The whole community, all the residents, gave them a blast. ‘You think you can bring drugs in here? You think it’s only them you have to hide from? This is where I live. I’m here for real, for the help that I need. I’m counting on these medicines that we use here, to help me, and you’re coming here and tarnishing them.’ It insulted all of us, not just the staff. A lot of guys stood up and said the same thing. ‘Send them back. We don’t want them here with us.’ We told them, this is not all of us against the staff. This is you, the drug users, against us. And us and the staff are all on the same side here. And that’s something you’d never get in the pen. You’re coming in here, and you’re new to this community, and we’re more than willing to welcome you in. But don’t come in here and try to hurt us.”

Consensus decision-making is not only seen at the community circle level. The staff's Healing Council operates on the same principles where all decisions are made by consensus. The Council sits in a circle and everyone is given an opportunity to speak his or her mind. The idea is to develop a common front and to have all staff on the same page. As Stan Cudek noted,

“When you have a true therapeutic community, your healing council should be a healing team. It’s all together, a common front, and there are no side deals going on. What you learn, if the team hasn’t stuck together, the guys will manipulate that and turn around and use that.”

The staff also uses this approach to healing residents. When a resident first arrives both the case managers and the Elder and Helpers meet him in order to come up with a healing plan. Throughout his stay at Waseskun these same people meet to discuss his progress. Then when he is preparing to leave the entire healing team and the case managers meet again to discuss how to proceed regarding this individual. Stan Cudek said it this way,

“Ideally, the process is that everybody has an opinion, everybody has a say in decisions. Generally speaking, you all bring your expertise, your opinion. You bring that balance of criminology. That whole concept of assessment and risk has to be balanced with healing.”

Finally, the ideas of community and consensus decision making also permeate upwards to the Board of Directors. All decisions of the Board are made with a consensus and, in that way the Board ensures that everyone is working together and that everyone is in agreement so that they will have a common front to present to the outside world. One Board member mentioned,

“The Waseskun board meetings go on until everyone has said everything they’re going to say. The decisions that are taken are taken by consensus. It’s not a question of fifty percent of the votes plus one. Everybody has to agree. This is what we call speaking with one voice. Because if you can speak with one voice and you’re lobbying on behalf of something, you’re speaking for all the people behind you. And the person you’re talking to knows that. He’s not about to go in and try to divide the people the way you could with a corporation. With an organization like this nobody can really do that. So this is a strength that we have.”

All aspects of Waseskun operate with consensus decision making and are doing so because they feel it is best for the operation of the Healing Center. But indirectly, the atmosphere that is created by these approaches is one of community. Residents and staff alike see that the entire structure of Waseskun is set up like a community. Through interacting in this community, residents learn skills of how to interact in their own communities and they can take that with them when they leave.

5.14 Staff

As one CSC employee explained, the key reason for the success of any Healing Lodge is the integrity of the entire operation and that integrity comes from the top down. The top person in

any organization sets the tone for the entire place. Every employee must act with integrity and employees will follow the leadership of the person in charge. As one CSC official noted,

“Inmates watch everything about staff, how they operate and how they do business, and they know more than anyone if the system is lacking integrity.”

At Waseskun, the top guy is the Executive Director, Stan Cudek, who is the heart and soul of Waseskun. Staff members have a great deal of respect for this man and that shows in the way they interact with each other and the residents. The residents also respect the Executive Director who knows what they want since he understands the prison atmosphere and prison mentality, and he understands what it takes to change your life and walk in a good way. As one resident commented,

“Stan, we all know he had a past, before he came here. I think that helps a lot. Stan knows what we need and what is required to make you feel like somebody cares.”

The residents, for the most part, also expressed a great deal of admiration for the entire staff of Waseskun. Residents often talk about how staff members make them feel like human beings. There is a sincere desire to help the residents and this sincerity shows in the day-to-day interactions of everyone at Waseskun. As a staff member noted,

“If the employees are happy being here and the residents feel comfortable here than we have a nice environment and that’s a good step towards healing. Healing is not, for me, just for the residents sitting in with the Helper one-on-one. That’s part of it, but besides that they have to feel comfortable. This has to be like a home for them.”

There were a couple of residents who expressed some criticism of the staff at Waseskun for not being more a part of the community. One past resident said that in his time at Waseskun he saw it change, from a time when staff–resident interaction was very prevalent to a time when certain staff were never seen. In this resident’s opinion, that is a very negative thing, for a large part of the healing success of Waseskun is that staff and residents form one large community.

Other than a couple small criticisms, the talk of residents about the staff was extremely positive. One resident summed up what many people had mentioned in one word – sincerity.

Staff at Waseskun are sincere and those who are healing thrive off the sincerity of individuals.

One resident said,

“I think whoever did the hiring here, they’re very selective in who they hire. And by doing that, that’s what makes Waseskun what it is. Out of 30 people who may be qualified, there may be only 1 or 2 who want to be here. So they know what to look for in people. And I think that makes up a big part of Waseskun. The reason it is so beneficial to residents now, is because of the people here.”

The staff, and specifically the Elder and Helpers, sincerely believe that they are not responsible for the healing that a resident does. As they all explained, the healing work that an individual undergoes is a result of the work that the individual has, and is, doing. The Helpers are only there to assist,

“We try to empower them; it’s all about them. Who are we to take credit for somebody helping themselves? You can’t do that. You can’t sit there and say ‘I healed this person.’ That’s arrogant. You have to give credit where credit is due. That person helped himself. He only did that because he allowed himself, he had the power inside himself to do that. That’s where we, as Helpers, feel good. When we see a person do that for themselves, and see them change.”

Staff dynamics play a large part in Waseskun’s success. The staff is a team where everyone supports each other and everyone helps each other to grow and learn and improve,

“We work as a team. We know that we have strength and weakness, and we work together to give the best to the guy. For myself, I know that I am not perfect and I’m willing to change. And I’m also ready to be sorry if I do something wrong, I’m prepared to modify it. So you always progress when you do that.”

The most important thing about the staff, and something very telling about the attitudes of the entire organization, is that staff considers their role at Waseskun to be much more than just a job. Very few people work their eight hours and then go home. Everyone does little things on top of their regular jobs to help make Waseskun successful. For example, one staff member teaches an art class for the residents on her own time. Other staff members volunteer their weekends to take residents to the pow wow. The Elders and Helpers, who live on-site, are always available to talk to residents. There’s a security guard who lives on-site who, besides his job, does whatever anyone needs him to do to make the community run smoothly. As one staff member noted,

“I think everybody here, all the staff, will go the extra mile. The art class is an example, but there are lots of other examples too. Shopping at night, going to pick up wood, there are lots of things and everybody will do that, nobody clocks time. As a staff here you feel more of the family sense, rather than it being a job. Everybody pulls their weight, and if people don’t want to go the extra mile, and think of it as more than a job, they don’t really fit in here.”

To a great extent, it is this extra work that shows the residents that everyone here is really a part of the community. It also shows the residents what real life expects of people. No matter where you live, you will have responsibilities. This is not purely a benevolent relationship for staff. Waseskun is a tough place to work and asks a lot from staff; but it also gives a lot back. Staff members have the opportunity to work with the Elder and they can also practice their own beliefs in their own way while they are here.

Staff members are in a position to learn a lot from the residents they work with. It is not just the residents who benefit from the learning environment of Waseskun as the staff are constantly learning and growing as people too. That is part of their own healing journey and their own spirituality where they strive to be a better person everyday. As one Helper commented,

“I can’t speak for the other Helpers, but for myself, the way I’ve been working with these guys, I’ve seen improvements. So it’s not just the residents that change, but the staff, myself too. You’re learning new skills everyday.”

Staff members also get a lot of job satisfaction from working with the residents and seeing the residents change and improve their lives. Often, past residents will phone to talk and share how they are doing. Or they will call to ask for advice. One staff member said,

“It’s so nice when you receive, from an old resident, they call or they give you news when things go well, and they say, oh it was a good thing I went there because you give me a chance. So we say, ok, good, we did something good. And the other side, sometimes a past resident have problems and they even call to get advice.”

This means a lot to staff, for it shows that the lessons the resident learned at Waseskun are still being applied, that they are still working on healing and still working on being as good of a person he can be. That is the goal, since healing is a lifetime journey, to get men to realize that everyday they must work to be the good person that they are.

5.15 Development of Waseskun

An important consideration in the success of Waseskun is recognizing where Waseskun has come from. If Waseskun did not have strong roots and had not survived all the hardships of its early history it would not have become a true healing community.

Three key elements of the Waseskun development were identified as important to its success. The first is that Waseskun started as a volunteer organization. The second is that it has always grown slowly. The third is that it has always had a degree of stability in the Board of Directors and the Executive Director.

Waseskun started as basically a volunteer organization because the people who were involved believed that this type of place was needed. This shows the dedication of the people who have been involved since the early days. Such dedication starts at the top and filters through the entire organization, and the residents are the beneficiaries. It was a resident who made the point that, because he realized the Executive Director and some Board members were originally volunteers, he was more willing to respect those people and trust them and made him realize that their hearts are in the right place,

“The people they have working here are here for the right reasons. Their heart is here. I don’t think it matters what the salaries are. This is the type of place, when Waseskun started, it was all volunteer. So these are the type of people that are involved here, they were willing to do this for nothing, just because they had a strong desire in their heart. And these same people are still involved, the same board members. You look at Stan, and other board members also. These people, their heart is here.”

Waseskun has always grown slowly, step by step. The number of residents has grown gradually. This gradual growth, according to a long serving Board member, is a major part of Waseskun’s success,

“When I look at these stories of other places starting up, at one point the whole thing begins to fall apart. I don’t know exactly how this happens, or why ours’ worked, except that it was very slow to develop. A little bit at a time, a few people at a time, and asking for funds a bit at a time. So that year by year it began to increase.”

Finally, Waseskun has had stability in the key positions of Executive Director, President and Vice-President. The same people have occupied those positions for the past twenty years. This stability results in continuity and growth. These people know where Waseskun came from and are therefore able to see where Waseskun is going. They are dedicated and sincere, and that shows through the entire organization. The stability has also created an effective relationship with CSC and CSC Quebec Region. They understand that what Waseskun says it will do, it will do. This relationship has been built over twenty years with the same people, The relationship works well and has allowed Waseskun the freedom and support to advance healing in its' own way.

5.16 Relationship with CSC

Waseskun's relationship with CSC and its Quebec Region has been built over the past twenty years and today that relationship is strong. This helps Waseskun do the work they need to do without undue interference.

When Waseskun first started operations, there was a great deal of skepticism within CSC about the need for a place like Waseskun and the potential for it to succeed. As the years progressed that skepticism has faded as Waseskun's success and the success of Healing Lodges in general, has been proven.

CSC employees described CSC's understanding of the Aboriginal experience as having changed. One of Waseskun's board members mentioned the same thing. CSC's attitudes have improved greatly since the days when they used to search an Elder's medicine bundle. Now, CSC is making an effort to understand the Aboriginal experience and provide more Aboriginal-specific programming inside penitentiaries. This improvement in CSC's approach surely will bode well for Healing Lodges in general and Waseskun specifically in the future. As one CSC official noted,

“I think that we are progressing at a pretty rapid rate right now. And there is a lot of new initiatives that are coming down the pipe, that are making huge differences. From programming to increased Elder services to the pathways units, certainly opportunities are going to be available. I think the work that we

do inside, the good quality work that we do with Aboriginal offenders, will make a huge difference for Healing Lodges. Because we're preparing those offenders and you're not getting them just cold. They've actually gotten some experience with programs, already working with the Elder, that kind of thing."

The skepticism towards Waseskun has decreased and one of the reasons for this has to do with the work that Waseskun is doing. The main reason for this change in attitudes, and consequent change in relationship, is due to the fact that the men who come to Waseskun stay and do not run away. Another reason for the decreased skepticism is that Waseskun sends residents back to CSC if they are not working at Waseskun. According to CSC officials,

"One of the greatest concerns that CSC has is protecting the public while at the same time providing successful reintegration programs for men. In the case of Waseskun, the programming is difficult to describe in usual CSC jargon. So the level of confidence developed over time when the men who went there stayed and didn't run away. So even though people at CSC didn't understand the program they felt it must be doing a good job as the men were not causing problems and they didn't escape."

"There were a number of cases where men were not completing their part of the agreement and these men were sent back to the institution. Although the number of men sent back was very low, it was enough to signal to CSC that Waseskun was doing their job. At the same time is signaled to the men that Waseskun wasn't a free ride."

The relationship between CSC and Waseskun is now based on a high level of confidence. The Section 81 agreement, which was first signed in 2001 was renewed in 2006. This agreement, sending long-term minimum-security inmates to Waseskun, was a large risk. There was originally a high level of skepticism within CSC as to what service Waseskun could provide for inmates. Those opinions have changed and now there is a high level of confidence within CSC that the work Waseskun is doing is of a great benefit to the men,

"I believe that Waseskun and the offenders have convinced CSC of the value of their programming and approach and that the simple fact that these men are willing to stay at Waseskun and work through their issues, then they are worth the investment of the time which it takes to do that."

5.17 Leaving Waseskun

The goal of Waseskun is to have these men leave the Healing Centre and become productive members of their communities and society in general. Not all men succeed but many do. Those who have succeeded leave Waseskun with very good memories and tools that they can use on their own healing journeys in the outside world. As one resident commented,

“I see this place, this Waseskun, that’s going to be good memories I’m going to walk with. I know we’ve all got our own direction. And this is the best place I’ve been to get the true help that I needed; to find myself, who I am.”

Past residents talk about how it was hard to leave Waseskun. They also knew, however, that when they left they were ready to go out in the world and work for themselves on their own issues. Granted these were success stories and not everyone who leaves Waseskun succeeds. But as CSC employees expressed, recidivism rates for people leaving Healing Lodges are very low.

For those who are leaving, their challenges wait for them outside the gates. Waseskun, as many residents discussed, is a safe place, without drugs, alcohol, women or violence. The real world is not this safe so it is imperative, if they are going to succeed, that these men have the tools and the knowledge to use them. An advantage that Waseskun has over a regular transition house is that these men are learning more than just how to deal with their primary issues. They are learning how to interact in a community, how to appreciate and find strength in their Aboriginal heritage and to respect their important place in creation. They are learning that they must work every day to be the best person they can be. They are learning ceremonies and lessons that they can share when they get back to their communities. And most important, they are leaving with the knowledge that they were a part of a special place, that they are useful individuals and that they have things to offer and also things to learn. This is what makes leaving Waseskun a positive experience and gives them the belief that they are likely to succeed in the real world. As one former resident said,

“When I left from there, I left my community. I left my brothers, my sisters. I left a lot there. To help, what Waseskun put into me, I want to give it back.”

The residents also know that when they leave Waseskun they can always contact the Waseskun staff to get advice or assistance. Former residents identified their relationships with the Elder and Helpers at Waseskun as positive and it was important to them to realize that those

relationships changed but still continued after they left Waseskun. This relationship also gives satisfaction to the staff of Waseskun. They enjoy hearing from past residents for that means the resident is still working on his healing. They are still using the tools taught at Waseskun and it also gives staff a chance to continue helping former residents if that help is needed.

The relationships that remain after residents have left Waseskun exemplify how special this place is. Bonds are formed that transcend the prisoner-jailer relationship. These are people dealing with people and that attitude allows for relationships to exist after the residents' time at Waseskun is over.

An interesting observation is that over three-quarters of the residents stated that they are going to be teachers at some point after they leave. The residents said that the lessons they have learned at Waseskun are needed in their own communities and each of them, in his own way, expressed that he would be able to give those teachings when his time came. As two residents noted,

“I know I’m going to become a good teacher, one day, to help people out. Talk to them, tell them what I went through. Tell them where I got help. The healing didn’t start when I walked through Waseskun’s doors. It started when I opened the door to my own heart.”

“This place has changed my life. It really has. It’s not just I’m changed when I’m here. I can go out and teach all these young people coming up, all these teenagers in my community. I can teach them how to change themselves. I can change myself at anytime in my life now. If I start having troubles in ten years time, and things start to go downhill, I have the knowledge and the tools to take myself and change myself.”

5.18 Conclusion

Though reasons varied there was the common belief that Waseskun is a good place for healing because the focus of Waseskun is on the residents. While not every resident succeeds there, those who are ready to work on themselves have all of the tools for the betterment of the individual, for rehabilitation and eventual re-integration.

All of the reasons discussed in this paper contribute to the success of Waseskun as a therapeutic healing community. Waseskun is a safe environment where a sense of trust pervades the community, and exists between residents, residents and staff and among staff. Each resident, besides the primary healing done in programs and one-on-one sessions while living in the community, also has the opportunity to learn Aboriginal culture and spirituality. Residents are able to improve their communication skills and build confidence while being a unique part of a community. These all contribute to creating balance in a person's life. That balance allows the individual to walk out of Waseskun with a clearer understanding of who he is as a human being and, consequently, have a chance to continue walking the healing path while in his own community.

CHAPTER SIX – THE FUTURE OF WASESKUN HEALING CENTER

This study has clearly demonstrated that Waseskun is a successful healing community with lessons to share throughout Canada. While it is important to look back at Waseskun, and recognize that it does not have to fundamentally change its approach, it is equally important to look ahead to see where Waseskun may go. As one Board member and Helper said,

“It’s not just looking back, it’s being in a position to look ahead and realize that it’s just going to go up and it’s going to expand. It’s a nice point in time in that there is another building being built and more needs, hopefully, are going to be addressed.”

“To me, in my personal opinion, Waseskun works. We’ve already got the recipe, and it works. So why would we throw it out and start over? We could add things to the recipe, or we could learn how to multiply the recipe, to be better and serve more people. Fine tuning in different areas, for sure, but Waseskun works.”

6.1 Challenges as Waseskun moves towards the future

One of Waseskun’s strengths is the stability of the organization, especially in the key positions of the President of the Board, Barbara Malloch, Vice-President of the Board, Joe Mell, and the Executive Director, Stan Cudek. These people have been involved since Waseskun’s inception and have a clear vision of where Waseskun has come from and where it can go from here. Stability is also evident with the Elder and his Helper. Sonny and Glenda Mayo have been involved with Waseskun for over nine years and, in that time they have helped to define the organization and healing methods used at Waseskun.

Looking forward, there will come a time when these key people will not always be at Waseskun. In the past year Waseskun’s Board of Directors lost Gail Guthrie Valaskakis along with her insightful vision of the future. In the near future it is possible that the other two Board members mentioned previously will retire. When this happens there will be big shoes to fill on Waseskun’s Board of Directors for, as another Board member explained, these people give so

much time and hard work to the Waseskun Board of Directors and go well beyond the normal expectations of a volunteer board member.

While it was acknowledged that these people can never be replaced, the structure is strong enough to deal with the loss of these key people. The Board includes Waseskun's Executive Director so the flow of information between Waseskun's operations and the Board of Directors is well established. The challenge will be to find people who can dedicate the amount of time and energy that the current Board members do. An option put forward by one Board member was that the Waseskun Board becomes more administrative and overseeing as Waseskun evolves and becomes stronger.

Stan, Sonny and Glenda all contribute many things to Waseskun, including how current programs and the operation of the Healing Centre can be improved to their visions of the future. They will be hard to replace but each one recognizes that they will be replaced eventually. It is a matter of finding new people who will bring their hearts to Waseskun, who will treat this place with the respect and treat their jobs as something much more than just a job. As one visiting Elder pointed out,

“This place will keep going on. Stan, Sonny and Glenda, they will not be here for fifty, sixty years. They will stay as long as the Creator lets them stay. But then other people will come with good hearts, and the work will go on. It will be the same, because the people who are here have good hearts.”

It is important that all staff members are a part of the Waseskun community. Staff interaction in the community is recognized by all as a positive element of Waseskun. However, as the number of residents rise, and the staff's workload increases, it is easy to overlook the inclusion of peripheral staff in the elements of community. When a staff member is part of the community of Waseskun, no matter if they are security, or a Helper, or administration, it was recognized by many individuals that they should be involved in all matters of the community. This includes the morning prayer, community circles, lunch in the dining room and to some extent, cultural teachings. The more understanding a staff member has about an Aboriginal world view, cultural practices and spirituality, the more that staff member will feel a part of the

community and the more willing that staff member will be to go above and beyond the job in order to help the community.

By including other staff in the community the team mentality extends to all staff and not just those on the Healing Council. This strengthens the operation and prevents residents exploiting the staff that they feel they can take advantage of. Stan Cudek noted,

“With a therapeutic community, you have all your peripheral staff, your security, cooks, etc. For a while there we were pulling them in, offering sweat lodge and different ceremonies to involve them more. Now there are so many residents we don’t have the time. But again, you have to pull your peripheral staff in. That’s your whole team. If (residents) find weak links out there, they exploit them.”

Finally, by including those other staff in cultural activities and teachings, the prejudices and misunderstanding that may be prevalent in the surrounding, non-Aboriginal communities can be affected. The staff members who live in these communities would become ambassadors for Waseskun. The lessons that they learn at work will be disseminated into the communities through their families and friends.

Waseskun is a very difficult place to work and requires the full attention and efforts of the healing team. With up to ten or eleven residents to work with on an individual basis, along with two or three programs to run every week, the Elder and Helpers are pressed for time and energy. It is also crucial that these people keep themselves healthy. A visiting Elder explained that an Elder will often push him or herself too hard because he or she doesn’t want the healing to stop. But if an Elder is not taking care of his or her own health, he or she cannot teach others to take care of themselves.

The financial structure limits the number of employees a Healing Lodge can have. However, if governments are serious about helping men heal themselves, it would be a good idea to increase funding to allow Healing Lodges to bring their resident to Helper ratio down.

The morning prayer is a time for everyone in the community to give thanks and ask for strength for the day. It should be encouraged that everyone, staff and residents alike, attend

morning prayers. A few residents mentioned a change in sincerity of the community toward morning prayers. They suggested that there are times when morning prayers are considered very important in the community, and is consequently well attended. There are other times when that significance decreases and, consequently, so do the number of attendees. On some days, there would be only ten people at morning prayer, including two or three staff.

The morning prayer not only sets the tone for the day; the morning prayer also sets the tone for all circles and interaction in the community. Since spirituality is considered a building block of healing, and a key component of Waseskun's approach to healing, the morning prayer can be an acknowledgement of the importance of spirituality. As one staff member noted,

“The prayer in the morning, I find that important. Again, it's a community effort. It's to unite people. Every morning. It's important for me too; it's a moment of silence. Some mornings are quite hectic, but it's like too bad, I leave everything, and I go there, and I say for me it's going to be a time of peace. It's a form of respect, as well; respect for the people who are here. It's not all that much, it's only a five minute prayer, but it brings people together. And really, that's one of the major achievements of Waseskun, is to bring in the people and create a community.”

Waseskun's mission is to rehabilitate offenders in order to re-integrate them into their communities. As two of the long-standing Board members explained, Waseskun is working more on the re-integration aspect now that rehabilitation strategies have been implemented. It has taken almost twenty years to get the rehabilitation side to where it is at today and it will possibly take the same amount of time to perfect the re-integration aspect of the mission.

A major element of the re-integration process has to do with the communities. The communities have to accept that a person who committed a crime in a small, often closed community is coming back. There has to be a level of forgiveness in the community in order that everyone involved can move on. This requires education of the communities and it will take time to show the communities that residents are leaving Waseskun and want to become productive members of society. They should also be made aware that the residents are leaving Waseskun with good lessons that communities can learn from.

The Internet-based Waseskun Network was created almost ten years ago. This was an online community, using chat rooms, intended to connect the Aboriginal communities and provide a place for people to discuss healing issues across a vast geographical area. The project did not succeed then because, as one CSC employee stated, “the Waseskun network was five years ahead of its time.” At that time the Aboriginal communities did not have widespread Internet access, but today communities have more access through the Internet. For that reason a renewed Waseskun Network might be considered as an option for educating the communities in order to help with re-integration.

Another issue to deal with in terms of re-integration is employment. At various times Waseskun has considered what to do to provide employment experience for residents. There was once Waseskun Movers, a moving company in Montreal, which provided employment for residents moving furniture. That project did not work because the residents were required to spend their time on their programs and healing. Discussions about possible on-site employment programs, like t-shirt making, or furniture-making; programs that will teach residents marketable skills that they can use when they go back to the communities, have taken place

This idea of providing skills to help residents find employment can also be extending to teaching residents skills that will help them in daily living. Waseskun’s Literacy and Learning Center intends to improve the literacy rates of residents in order to assist all aspects of the re-integration process. A former resident had another interesting suggestion regarding life–skills. He suggested that Waseskun have Aboriginal herbalists teach traditional medicine using plants. This way, residents could learn practical skills to take with them into their communities. He said,

“There is so much stuff to do there. One Helper knows a lot about medicines, plants and stuff like that. So why not start a school, how to prepare plants? There are programs outside where they teach that. Start a school on plants and working with them, to share knowledge. Then the guy will go back in his community with some background. He can say, ‘hey I learned how to prepare a cream for exema,’ or stuff like that. Over there in the Res, they’re so busy drinking and stuff like this, they don’t even think about it anymore. So when a young kid, twenty-three years old, goes back to his community, and he shows that, the other young kids there will see this guy doing something good, they’ll

say 'holy, I want to be like him.' That's going to be like a ball, rolling and rolling. There is so much stuff to do; the only limit is your imagination."

6.2 Future Growth of Waseskun Healing Center

An important plan for the future is the expansion of Waseskun into women's programming. Currently there is only one Healing Lodge in Canada for federally sentenced women and Waseskun's Executive Director and Board are considering developing a women's Healing Lodge minutes away from the present center. This satellite centre would operate with the same principles, core values and approaches to healing as the present lodge for men.

Groundbreaking for Waseskun's new Spiritual and Program Center will take place in 2008. This Center will house a Literacy and Learning wing, the "In Search of Your Warrior" and "Waseya Holistic Healing" program units and a meeting room for National Parole Board meetings. The building will also have accommodations for visiting Elders and offices for staff.

In honour of Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, the Gail Guthrie Literacy and Learning Center wing will be added to the new Spiritual and Program Center. The wing will house programs to improve language and computer literacy using both peer mentor and traditional teaching methods. This is an important addition to Waseskun because literacy skills are imperative for integration into today's world.

The family therapy program, where the resident's significant others come to stay at Waseskun for an extended period of time near the end of the resident's stay, will be expanded following the construction of the Spiritual and Program Center. Family Therapy programming will take over the old office building and will allow a resident's family to come to Waseskun for up to nine weeks. During that time the family can participate in programming to deal with their issues related to the resident's crime and will be able to see the work that the resident has done on himself and help to make the resident's release plan in conjunction with the family goals.

Family Therapy is very important to re-integration. The family is the support system that the resident has when he goes back to his community. If that support system is healthy the chances of re-offending decrease significantly.

CHAPTER SEVEN – CONCLUSION

Waseskun Healing Center has come a long way in twenty years. The work done today at Waseskun on rehabilitating Aboriginal men with a focus on re-integration is fit to be a model for CSC and other Healing Lodges in Canada.

The key to this work is using the medicine wheel to address all aspects of a person – the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual – in order to create balance in an individual's life. This is holistic healing. At Waseskun holistic healing is led by the Elder and Helpers who work with residents in group programs and one-on-one sessions to help each individual identify the causes of the pain that leads to criminal behaviour.

Creating a community of individuals compliments Waseskun's healing work. Staff and residents all live in a good way, free from violence and aggression. The community teaches residents how to be an important part of a group while retaining their individuality. These are teachings that will assist in the resident's re-integration back into his own community. The community also helps with healing residents as they know that they are surrounded and supported by each other.

Cultural and spiritual teachings are an important part of Waseskun. They accentuate the lessons learned in community and help ground an individual to advance in his own healing path. Cultural teachings at Waseskun are intended to help residents connect to their Aboriginal roots and feel pride in being an Aboriginal person. Spiritual teachings lead to a connection to one's spirit and the knowledge that everyone has a spirit and everyone is an important part of creation. Both cultural and spiritual teachings help residents regain their feelings of self-worth and leads to improved self-confidence which is necessary to succeed on the healing path.

Waseskun has grown from a dream, twenty years ago, to being the only Healing Lodge in eastern Canada and a true therapeutic healing community. This is due to the dedication and sincerity of the people who come to Waseskun, from the original people who knew a place like this was needed and were willing to put in the hard work, to the staff who have come and gone

along the way, to all the residents who have spent time learning at Waseskun and then gone out into the world with those teachings. All of these people, while they were at the Healing Centre, opened their hearts and gave what energy they could to Waseskun. As long as the people who come in the future do the same and as long as they open their hearts and treat their own healing with sincerity and respect, then Waseskun will continue to be the successful therapeutic healing community it is today.

The ten years since moving to St. Alphonse-Rodriguez has been a time of gradual growth and stability for Waseskun. As preparations are underway to celebrate Waseskun's 20th anniversary in the summer of 2008, reflection of the last twenty years shows the incredible changes that have taken place.

“We started with \$500, twenty years ago, and now we have this place in St. Alphonse that's worth over a million dollars,” said Barbara Malloch. “In a way it's like a miracle. It's an amazing thing to see something grow from something so small to something so large.”

For all those who have been involved since the beginning, and all of those who have given something of themselves to Waseskun over the years, the twentieth anniversary is a testament to the hard work, passion and dedication of the human spirit.

“I'm proud to have been a part of it,” said Joe Mell. “And it's not just looking back, it's being in a position to look ahead and realize that it's just going to go up and it's going to expand.”

Stan Cudek, Waseskun's first Executive Director, is still the director today. Barbara Malloch and Joe Mell are still members of the board and Gail Valaskakis remained on the board until her passing in 2007.

Employees and residents have come and gone. They gave what they could during their time at Waseskun and, no matter who they were, all of them took something from Waseskun out into the world. It is this give and take that Barbara feels might be Waseskun's biggest contribution of all.

“At Waseskun people can be accepted,” said Barbara. “The people that are here have something to contribute. They’ve learned something on the outside that they want to bring in, or they want to come and learn something here that they’re going to take back outside. It’s a filter for this kind of experience. And I think that is one of the major pluses that we’ve been able to give.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the guidance and assistance that Stan Cudek provided throughout the course of this project. From day one he has been very helpful, from brainstorming ideas to providing information to editing the final draft. He has taught me much about Waseskun and, more importantly, about life, the chance to work with and learn from this man has been truly a gift.

I must also acknowledge the support of Cyndy Bell, whose encouragement and ideas, not to mention editing, played a major role in the completion and success of this project.

Ed Buller, Director of Aboriginal Corrections Policy, Public Safety Canada, must be acknowledged for recognizing the need for a study about Waseskun Healing Center and encouraging the idea from the ground up.

The staff of Waseskun has been very helpful in providing their time and knowledge in interviews, and in making me feel comfortable at Waseskun right from the beginning. To Sonny and Glenda Mayo, thank you for all of the lessons I took from seeing how you live and work at Waseskun. Acknowledgements are also due to my office mates, who were always there to talk if I needed to brainstorm or just put work aside for a moment.

To the CSC employees who took time to share their extensive knowledge of Healing Lodges, and Waseskun in particular, thanks are in order.

To the residents of Waseskun, past and present, who sat down to talk about their experiences at Waseskun and healing, I am very grateful. You taught me much about life and people and gave me a glimpse of the courage that is in all of us. For your words and time and the knowledge you shared, thank you.

To the community of Waseskun -all the staff and residents- thank you for allowing me to become a part of your community, for sharing in circles, and for always having a smile and kind words.

Shawn Bell