

**HISTORY  
OF THE  
JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY OF ALBERTA**

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1998**

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## INTRODUCTION

The John Howard Society of Alberta is a non-governmental, community based agency concerned with the problems of crime and crime prevention. The Society was incorporated in 1949, and today the organization consists of six separately incorporated local Societies along with the Provincial Society. The organization has, since its beginning, believed that crime control is as much the responsibility of the community as it is of government. Through involvement with the John Howard Society, as members or volunteers, people in the community play an active role in the criminal justice process by providing programs for offenders and their families, ex-offenders, young persons and the public.

## BACKGROUND

### John Howard

The organization takes its name and spirit from the 18th century humanitarian John Howard, whose name has become a symbol of humane consideration for the incarcerated individual. With his appointment in 1773 as Sheriff of Bedford, Howard would spend the next 20 years labouring to improve the terrible conditions of prisons of the day. His famous report, "On the State of Prisons in England and Wales," would, along with his subsequent writings, be instrumental in the implementation of various regulations remedying some of the more obvious evils of the prison system. The example of John Howard, an involved private citizen, embodies what has become the fundamental belief of the various John Howard Societies - that there cannot be effective treatment of crime without community participation.

"When I am dead," John Howard once said, "someone else will take up the matter and see it through," and so it was that in 1866 a Howard Association was formed to continue his work. It would, in 1921, merge with the League for Penal Reform to form the Howard League for Penal Reform. Taking up the matter in Canada were, toward the end of the 19th century, a number of prison aid groups. The first use of the name "John Howard Society" was in 1929 by the Vancouver John Howard Society, an organization incorporated under that name in 1931. Since then, other incorporations followed and there are now 56 branches across Canada.

### Formation in Alberta

The John Howard Society of Alberta was formed in 1947, largely due to the influence of the late George B. Henwood, O.B.E., Q.C., whose interest in forming the Society developed out of his previous experience as Deputy Attorney General of Alberta. With the initiative of Mr. Henwood and the organizational support of the Edmonton Council of Social Agencies, the Society was incorporated in 1949.

## Early History

At its inception the Society's goals were broad, but the variety of services actually performed was limited. Pronounced goals included encouraging legislative and prison reform, reducing conditions that contribute to crime and providing help to families of prisoners. While certainly ambitious, resources were such that not all of these objectives could be pursued. Instead, attention came to focus on helping released prisoners in their physical readjustment into society. At this point the performance of such functions was undertaken wholly by volunteers.

By the 1960s the Society's goals were more focussed, but its responsibilities had grown considerably. It was at the forefront in the development and provision of parole services, with supervision extending to 60 - 82% of all those on parole in the province. Though the ex-offender remained the primary focus, emphasis had shifted from the physical aspects of readjustment to personal counselling. Up to 80% of staff resources were being dedicated to rehabilitative services.

Though volunteer involvement remained essential, the above developments necessitated the employment of qualified staff, notably professional counsellors and backup reserve personnel. Throughout the 1960s, the Society faced a constant struggle to obtain and keep an adequate number of professional social workers on staff. The Society even began offering bursaries to social work students in order to promote increased numbers of qualified staff.

The three most recent decades witnessed an expansion of the community oriented functions of the Society. Partly due to the National Parole Board's increased assumption of parole responsibilities, the Society was, in the 1970s, able to channel more resources elsewhere. Public education projects were initiated, targeting a variety of community groups. There were, among others, programs on crime prevention for adults and programs on the criminal justice system for school children and youth groups. In addition, a wide variety of programs for offenders and ex-offenders were established, including institutional visitation, substance abuse programs, literacy programs, employment programs and programs for families of offenders. Further, the commitment to the development of community residential facilities and group homes became a reality with the establishment of several such houses owned and operated by the Society. Finally, research projects were initiated, resulting in numerous community based reform proposals being prepared and presented to the government.

## **THE JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY OF ALBERTA TODAY**

### Mission and Core Values

The mission of the John Howard Society of Alberta is “informed, collaborative, effective and humane responses to the causes and consequences of crime.” The core values of the Society are as follows:

1. People have the right to live in a safe and peaceful society, as well as a responsibility implied by this right to respect the law.

2. Every person has intrinsic worth and the right to be treated with dignity, equity, fairness and compassion without discrimination when involved in the criminal justice process.
3. All people have the potential to become responsible citizens.
4. All people have the right and responsibility to be informed about and involved in the criminal justice process.
5. Justice is best served through measures that resolve conflicts, repair harm and restore peaceful relations in society.
6. Independent, non-government, voluntary organizations have a vital role in the criminal justice process.

### **Services**

Guided by the aforementioned core values, the various Societies play an active role in the criminal justice process by providing a variety of programs. Programs offered by the local Societies include community residential facilities, group homes for young offenders, parole supervision, emergency assistance, employment assistance, literacy programs, substance abuse programs, personal counselling, referral services, victim offender reconciliation, victim's services and criminal justice education. The Provincial Society carries out research and promotes education of the general public with respect to crime and the treatment of offenders. In addition, the Provincial Society promotes improved corrections policies and techniques by responding to government consultations on law and criminal justice system reform. Provincial Society also coordinates and acts as an administrative support for the local Societies.

### **Structure and Funding**

The John Howard Society of Alberta is essentially a federation of the six separately incorporated local Societies of Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat and Red Deer. Separate incorporation of the local Societies began in 1983 when a new set of by-laws was passed which, among other things, provided for the separate incorporation of the various local Societies. Prior to that point, the structure of the Society was much more centralized, with the Provincial Office acting in a supervisory capacity to the local offices and being largely in control of administration.

The local Societies now being autonomous, each operates whatever programs it feels are required in its area. Further, each secures its own funding through combinations of yearly contributions from the United Way, fee-for-services work, memberships and donations, fund raising projects and any special funding, as, for example, from a foundation for a demonstration project. There is no centralized funding, though the Provincial Society may collect and distribute funds on behalf of the local Societies if required.

Previously, the Provincial Society Board of Directors was composed of two representatives from each local Society, a president, a past president and six members-at-large. An organizational review took place in 1993-94 which resulted in a considerable downsizing of the Board to ensure that the local Societies had a strong role to play in the governance of the Provincial Society and to allow the smaller Board to meet more frequently. The Provincial Board was reduced to a president, a past president, one Board member nominated by each local Society Board of Directors, a treasurer and the Provincial Executive Director. In 1996, the John Howard Society of Alberta adopted the Carver Model of Governance. This model ensures that the Provincial Board is concerned with developing the policies, plans, priorities and results (Ends) to be achieved by the Provincial Society. The Executive Director is responsible for meeting the Ends of the Society within the policies and limitations set by the Board. In keeping with the Carver model, the treasurer position was eliminated. The past president and Provincial Executive Director are ex-officio, non-voting members of the Board. Whereas previously the Board met two times per year, it now meets four times per year.

The Board's working arm consists of the Executive Director and the Provincial Office. Obviously, the administrative functions of the Provincial Society have, since 1983 and the aforementioned separate incorporation of the local Societies, been greatly reduced. The Provincial Society carries out research, promotes education of the general public with respect to crime and the treatment of offenders and encourages improved corrections policies and techniques by responding to government consultations on law and criminal justice system reform. It employs three full-time permanent staff members and is funded by a combination of federal and provincial contracts and annual membership dues from the local Societies.

A final matter with respect to the Provincial Society is its relationship with the national organization. The John Howard Society of Canada is an organization of provincial and territorial Societies comprised of and governed by people whose goal is to understand and respond to problems of crime and the criminal justice system. The national Society engages in research, advocacy, communication with member Societies, coalition building and resource development initiatives. Each of the eleven provincial/territorial member Societies nominates a Board member for the John Howard Society of Canada Board. The Board of Directors of the John Howard Society of Canada is comprised of a president, a past president and 11 Board members nominated by member Societies. The national Board meets three times a year: usually twice in Ontario and once in a member province.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the John Howard Society Alberta is today a federation of the six separately incorporated local Societies of Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat and Red Deer. Our history dates back to 1947 and our philosophy to the 18th century and John Howard. Throughout our history a number of services have been performed and a number of objectives pursued but consistent throughout has been commitment to crime prevention through community involvement.