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Inmate Advocates support Province's Responsible Reintegration Initiative

The John Howard Society of Manitoba and the Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba are throwing their support behind a new program announced Tuesday by Manitoba Justice Minister Heather Stefanson. The Responsible Reintegration Initiative grants low-risk inmates a “temporary absence” from jail and provides them with community supervision and assistance with housing, employment, education, and addictions treatment.

“This is a smart way to go,” said John Hutton, executive director of John Howard Society of Manitoba of Minister Stefanson’s decision. “We have promoted this kind of approach to reduce the numbers in custody for several years and are pleased to see Manitoba Justice move forward with it,” he said.

“There is loads of evidence to show that community supervision is twice as likely as continued incarceration to help individuals turn their lives around and contribute to society,” said Hutton.

According to media reports, the new initiative aims to have 100 inmates per year take part in the temporary absences.

“This is a really good start, but much more is needed,” said Hutton. In Manitoba, on any given day approximately 2,500 people are in custody in facilities that only have a capacity for 2,000.

“There is an urgent need for decarceration and community reintegration,” he said.

The John Howard Society currently partners with Manitoba Justice to supervise men on bail living in the community and to provide reintegration services. This includes assist-

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ing men leaving jail find housing and providing them with courses on anger management, substance abuse, and parenting for dads.

“We look forward to playing an important role in the success of this new provincial initiative,” said Jyoti Singh, Executive Director of The Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba. “While we have the capacity and the relationships in place to assist with reintegration, our resources are very limited. This is an opportunity for the province to put back funding taken away earlier in return for additional outcomes,” she said.

The John Howard Society of Manitoba and The Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba each have six decades of experience working with incarcerated men and women.

“Through our experience we have learned what people in jail need when they get out, and more importantly, what they need in order to stay out,” said Hutton.

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The John Howard Society of Manitoba supports men in conflict with the law before, during and after incarceration. There are chapters in more than 60 communities across Canada.

The Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba Inc. (EFSM) is an independent non-profit organization which exists to address the unique needs of women in the provincial and federal justice system. There are 25 member societies of Elizabeth Fry across Canada.

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