



UNESCO Chair in
Applied Research for
Education in Prison

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Newsletter

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A Word From the Team

The beginning of 2026 was marked by significant and transformative efforts in mobilization, outreach, and networking for the future of the Chair.

The Chair's team helped organize the first [Semaine de la criminologie du Québec](#). In addition to providing a [stimulating and enriching experience](#) for the Cégep Marie-Victorin community, our participation in this week allowed us to forge important connections with several individuals and institutions involved, directly or indirectly, in supporting and assisting incarcerated individuals. We will certainly be there for future editions!

In terms of mobilization, it is unfortunately some bad news that has generated unprecedented momentum for the issue of education in prison in mainstream media. As many already know, Correctional Services Canada (CSC) has decided not to renew its agreement with Cégep Marie-Victorin, which provided college-level courses at the Joliette and Cowansville penitentiaries. This news was met with surprise and dismay, but the shock quickly gave way to mobilization.

Indeed, numerous articles, editorials, and media interviews have served both to condemn CSC's decision and to reaffirm the fundamental role of education in the social rehabilitation of individuals in conflict with the law—a process that lies at the heart of the correctional service's mission. To our knowledge, no significant or credible voice in the public debate has emerged to criticize the use of public funds to grant “privileges” to incarcerated individuals. A retired correctional officer even went on the record to explain [the importance of education in prison while denouncing the cuts on a local radio station in Quebec City](#). That speaks to the extent of the consensus on the issue!

The response from the media and the public reinforces our conviction that education in prison, at all levels and in all its forms, remains an effective, relevant, and socially acceptable measure to contribute to social reintegration and rehabilitation. We sincerely hope that CSC will reconsider its decision, and we remain on the lookout for a sustainable solution to protect the rights of incarcerated individuals.

Of course, we are aware that this kind of uncertainty affects all communities involved in education within the correctional system and that nothing can be taken for granted. The climate of economic and political uncertainty currently affecting all societies, in the North as well as in the South, is impacting and will continue to impact both research and practice communities for the foreseeable future, and we must remain vigilant.

We hope you find the following pages inspiring!

Community of Interests

Chair's Activities

*Participation in the first
Semaine québécoise de la criminologie*

Stories of Reintegration: Between Documentary Accounts and criminological Perspectives

On March 18, as part of the first [Semaine québécoise de la criminologie](#), the Chair held an awareness-raising event focused on the realities and challenges of social reintegration following a prison sentence. Held at Cégep Marie-Victorin, the event brought together students and staff to watch the documentary [De prisons en prisons](#) by documentary filmmaker [Steve Patry](#).

The event was structured around excerpts from the film, following the unique social reintegration journeys of Yves, Jean-François, and Julie-Chantale. This format facilitated an in-depth discussion between the audience, the director, and [Nancy Poirier](#), a criminologist and former president of the Société de criminologie du Québec. Several human and social dimensions were addressed, including desistance, reintegration processes, and pre- and post-incarceration support and intervention practices.

Participants showed keen interest, asking numerous questions about the nature of lasting change, the limitations of the correctional system, and how to build trust with subjects in a documentary project. The event was warmly received, highlighting the value of combining cinematic and criminological perspectives to better understand reintegration journeys.



Histoires de réinsertion : entre regard documentaire et analyse criminologique

À partir d'extraits du documentaire [De prisons en prisons](#), découvrez le parcours de réinsertion sociale de Julie-Chantale, Yves et Jean-François, à travers un dialogue entre le cinéaste [Steve Patry](#) et la criminologue [Nancy Poirier](#), présidente de la Société de criminologie du Québec.

Une rencontre dynamique où témoignages et histoire de vie se croisent pour mieux comprendre les défis du retour en communauté après l'incarcération.

Photo credit: Marc-André Lacelle
Photos from the screening of Steve Patry's film "De prisons en prisons" on March 18, 2026, at Cégep Marie-Victorin.



Comments from the audience:

"The last testimony (Yves) was particularly poignant. The relapse into drug addiction, despite all the good will, effort, and progress, was striking. It made me think about the role that the structured prison routine plays in their lives; it can be very difficult to readjust to life on the outside once released. The need for support after incarceration is all the more urgent."

"I found this very insightful. It offers a behind-the-scenes look and a new perspective on a former inmate. The experts' different viewpoints allow us to learn more about the issues at hand without dehumanizing the people sharing their stories."

Semaine de la recherche Cégep Marie-Victorin

As part of Research Week 2026, the Cégep Marie-Victorin community was invited to explore projects that highlight the role of college research as a driver of social, educational, and community transformation, under the theme of transitions (ecological, social, and academic). The UNESCO Chair in Applied Research for Education in Prison participated by presenting work carried out as part of the student research certification program by research assistants Serine Nedjadi, Angelina Machalani, and Kahina Mekhelef, who explored the methodological and ethical challenges of research in prison settings. Their posters focused on the “school-to-prison pipeline,” the role of spirituality and religion in the engagement and learning of incarcerated individuals, as well as reading and access to libraries as educational and emancipatory tools in detention. I chose to participate in the Student Research Certification Program because I enjoyed the research experiences I had throughout my academic career, but I wanted to do even more. More specifically, I wanted to participate in this program with the UNESCO Chair in Applied Research for Education in Prison because I had already been interested in the history of prisons, but I knew little about the current situation. After my immersion in a research environment, I feel that this experience allowed me to refine my research skills and gain a better understanding of correctional facilities.



Credit: Camille Trembley
Research Week Panel
6 April 2026, Cégep Marie-Victorin

La géographie carcérale

LA STIGMATISATION TERRITORIALE VÉCUE PAR LES JEUNES DE RIVIÈRE-DES-
PRAIRIES-POINTE-AUX-TREMBLES DANS LE CADRE DU DISPOSITIF PÉNAL
KAHINA MEKHELEF - CHAIRE DE L'UNESCO DE RECHERCHE APPLIQUÉE POUR L'ÉDUCATION EN PRISON

INTRODUCTION

Dans le cadre du Programme de certification à la recherche étudiante au sein de la Chaire de l'Unesco de recherche appliquée pour l'éducation en prison je me suis intéressé à la stigmatisation territoriale vécue par les jeunes de Rivière-des-Prairies-Pointe-aux-Trembles dans le cadre du dispositif pénal.

QUELQUES DÉFINITIONS

La géographie carcérale:
En bref, c'est la géographie appliquée au monde carcéral pour comprendre comment l'espace produit des effets sociaux, psychologiques et politiques.

Dispositif pénal:
Désigne l'ensemble des mesures, règlements et procédures mis en place pour prévenir, constater, poursuivre et sanctionner les comportements illicites. Il inclut la législation (dispositions pénales), la police, les tribunaux et les services correctionnels pour assurer l'ordre public et la réponse à la criminalité.

RÉSULTATS

- **Disparités spatiales**
Il existe d'importantes inégalités au sein même de l'arrondissement. On y observe, par exemple, la coexistence de grandes maisons et d'habitations à loyer modique (HLM). Cette juxtaposition crée des frontières sociospaciales qui alimentent un sentiment d'exclusion, constituant ainsi un facteur de risque de délinquance pour les jeunes issus de communautés marginalisées.
- **Territorialisation de la discrimination**
L'institution pénale adopte parfois des pratiques discriminatoires selon les quartiers. Les interventions répressives, souvent ciblées sur certaines populations (notamment les personnes racisées) contribuent à reproduire une vision limitée de leurs opportunités et renforcent les inégalités déjà présentes.
- **Imaginaire de la délinquance**
La représentation médiatique et politique du quartier joue un rôle important dans la stigmatisation territoriale. Les jeunes racisés provenant de secteurs souvent associés à la violence ont à la délinquance dans les médias se retrouvent rapidement étiquetés, ce qui renforce les préjugés à leur égard.
- **Manque d'accès aux infrastructures**
On observe une mise à l'écart et une discrimination envers les jeunes racisés. Il existe un manque d'accès aux infrastructures permettant aux jeunes de se rassembler et, lorsqu'ils le font, on constate une différence de traitement entre les groupes, par exemple entre les jeunes d'origine italienne et ceux d'origine haïtienne.
- **Ségrégation scolaire**
L'organisation des classes des écoles secondaires sépare les élèves selon l'espoir que le système a envers les élèves. Donc lorsque les classes régulières de ces quartiers sont majoritairement fréquentées par des jeunes noirs, on crée un sentiment d'infériorité chez ces jeunes. Les jeunes issues de classes défavorisées sont considérées comme sans avenir.

CONCLUSION

La discrimination territoriale est un phénomène structurel, profondément ancré dans les pratiques institutionnelles, les représentations sociales et l'histoire politique de Montréal. Elle produit un dispositif pénal diffus qui se dématérialise et se retrouve dans l'ensemble du tissu social, ce qui limite les opportunités des jeunes. Ce dispositif pénal représente un facteur de risque pour les jeunes racisés et exige une transformation profonde des analyses et des politiques publiques.

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Angelina Machalani's experience of immersion

I chose to participate in the Student Research Certification Program because I enjoyed the research experiences I had throughout my academic career, but I wanted to do even more. More specifically, I wanted to participate in this program with the UNESCO Chair in Applied Research for Education in Prison because I had already been interested in the history of prisons, but I knew little about the current situation. After my immersion in a research environment, I feel that this experience allowed me to refine my research skills and gain a better understanding of correctional facilities.

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Les bibliothèques en prison: un échantillon de liberté

Angelina Machalani

Cégep Marie-Victorin – Chaire UNESCO de recherche appliquée pour l'éducation en prison



1. Introduction

Une bibliothèque symbolise la communauté, la culture et la démocratisation de l'information. Un des fondements de celle-ci est l'état d'accessibilité pour tous, ce qui explique partiellement la présence des bibliothèques dans les établissements de détention. Les bibliothèques en prison ont la particularité d'offrir aux détenus une opportunité de sortir du contexte habituel du milieu carcéral. Il y a plusieurs raisons d'offrir ce service aux prisonniers, mais il y a aussi des obstacles pour assurer un fonctionnement adéquat des bibliothèques dans les établissements de détention. L'élément précis qui intéresse cette recherche sur les bibliothèques en prison est la possibilité pour les détenus de retrouver une portion de liberté dans un contexte où celle-ci est particulièrement restreinte.

2. Méthodologie

- Discussions préliminaires avec: Camille Tremblay, Frédérick Armstrong et Marc-André Lacelle.
- Analyse d'articles scientifiques sur le sujet des bibliothèques en prison.
- Entrevue avec Romy Otayek qui a travaillé sur un portrait des bibliothèques dans les établissements de détention au Québec.

3. Résultats

3.1. Pourquoi avoir des bibliothèques en prison?

- « C'est un espace foisonnant de possibilités qui se prêtent toutes à un emploi constructif de ce dont les prisonniers disposent tous : de temps. »²
 - Réintégration sociale à travers la réhabilitation et la socialisation.⁴
 - Renforcement de la relation des détenus avec l'extérieur.
 - Alphabétisation
 - Besoin d'information (principalement légale)³
 - Loisirs³
- #### 3.2. Quels sont les obstacles?
- Aménagement recommandé rarement respectés³
 - Ressources dépassées⁴
 - Manque de financement
 - Manque de personnel qualifié
 - Manque de livres pour le nombre de détenus (très variable entre différentes prisons)

3.3. La liberté

- Une opportunité de choix pour les prisonniers
 - Choix du livre
 - Choix d'apprentissage
 - Choix de la manière qu'ils dépensent leur temps
- La lecture et l'autonomie¹
 - Exercice de réflexion sur soi-même
 - Possibilité de sortir figurativement de la réalité difficile de la prison

4. Conclusion

En conclusion, une bibliothèque est une ressource importante dans les établissements de détention et il y a, actuellement, plusieurs obstacles pour que les bibliothèques en prison puissent atteindre une meilleure qualité. Une partie cruciale de l'idée d'une prison est la restriction du droit à la liberté des détenus, mais les bibliothèques peuvent leur offrir un échantillon d'autonomie qui est rare dans leurs circonstances habituelles. De plus, l'activité de la lecture offre une possibilité d'évasion psychologique de la vie ardue qui est celle d'un prisonnier.

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L'ÂME INCARCÉRÉE : religion et spiritualité en prison

Serine Nedjadi - Chaire UNESCO de recherche appliquée pour l'éducation en prison

1. Résumé

Dans le cadre du programme de certification à la recherche, j'ai exploré le thème de la spiritualité et de la religion dans un contexte carcéral à travers une analyse de la littérature et des discussions avec les membres de la Chaire.

2. Question de recherche

La religion/spiritualité peut-elle aider à mieux vivre l'expérience carcérale ?

Les bouleversements inhérents à l'incarcération ont le potentiel de remettre en question de manière radicale, voire anéantit, les cadres de pensée/de sens ainsi que les représentations du monde et de soi des personnes incarcérées. La religion étant une ressource que plusieurs mobilisent lors de périodes difficiles, je me suis demandé comment et pourquoi elle était utilisée, quels étaient ses effets, et si elle jouait un rôle éducatif.

3. Résultats

♥ Sens

La religion peut offrir des outils d'interprétation et de la guidance à ceux qui souhaitent donner un sens à la souffrance causée par la perte de liberté, l'isolement social et l'incertitude en l'inscrivant dans un dessein plus vaste. La religion offre un métarécit ; un cadre d'interprétation universel et englobant.

♥ Identité

Les conceptions antérieures de soi sont menacées et ont besoin d'être reconstruites. Cela est particulièrement vrai pour ceux qui, n'ayant jamais eu de démêlés avec la justice auparavant, se retrouvent soudainement confrontés à la responsabilité d'un acte étranger à l'identité qu'ils ont construite tout au long de leur vie. Dans de telles circonstances, la réceptivité aux cadres religieux s'accroît, permettant de réinterpréter son histoire personnelle, de reconstruire son identité et de se fixer de nouveaux objectifs. Pour ceux qui entretiennent des liens avec la criminalité depuis longtemps et la considèrent comme partie intégrante de leur identité, ces outils peuvent favoriser un processus de désistance criminelle.

♥ Communauté

Appartenance, soutien communautaire et identité commune : la religion offre dignité individuelle et collective. Les liens créés perdurent souvent au-delà des murs, aidant à la réinsertion sociale.



4. Conclusion

La religion est une ressource qui peut être considérée comme éducative en termes de gestion de la douleur, de construction de la subjectivité et de comportements prosociaux.

Il est toutefois important de noter que la frontière entre soutien et endoctrinement n'est pas toujours claire ; certains prosélytes (personnes cherchant à rallier d'autres personnes à une idéologie, souvent religieuse) peuvent exploiter la vulnérabilité des détenus, et ceux-ci peuvent à leur tour être vecteurs ou victimes de contrôle/pression communautaire.

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Chaire Award – 2026

For the 10th consecutive year, the UNESCO Chair, in collaboration with the Rivière-du-Nord School Services Centre and the Mille-Îles School Services Centre, presented the UNESCO Chair Award. This award recognizes an innovative project, resource or teaching strategy in a prison setting. It was presented during the annual event for prison education services, *l'École de printemps*, which took place this year on 22 April in Saint-Hyacinthe. The Chair's Award aims to highlight and recognize the exceptional work carried out on a daily basis by teachers in Quebec's federal prisons as well as in detention centers under provincial jurisdiction.

A number of inspiring projects, from both the provincial and federal networks, were assessed by a panel of judges according to the following criteria:

- The innovative nature of the program
- The innovative nature of the programl
- Its transferability
- Its direct impact on students' academic progress

The award was presented in person by Marc-André Lacelle, Camille Trembley and Frédérick Armstrong during the event.

At provincial level, the winning project was *Le cœur en 4 temps: se raconter pour se reconstruire* by Émilie Gagnon, an art teacher at the Trois-Rivières Detention Centre. This project takes the form of an introspective artistic process. It involved around twenty inmates in the creation of four hearts representing different stages of life (childhood, adolescence, adulthood), drawing on memories, emotions, symbols and personal experiences. The project unfolded in several stages, ranging from an introduction to graphite shading techniques through to the creation of the artworks, followed by their presentation and collective appreciation in class.

At provincial level, the winning project was *Le cœur en 4 temps: se raconter pour se reconstruire* by Émilie Gagnon, an art teacher at the Trois-Rivières Detention Centre. This project takes the form of an introspective artistic process. It involved around twenty inmates in the creation of four hearts representing different

stages of life (childhood, adolescence, adulthood), drawing on memories, emotions, symbols and personal experiences. The project unfolded in several stages, ranging from an introduction to graphite shading techniques through to the creation of the artworks, followed by their presentation and collective appreciation in class.



Image taken from the educational project "le coeur en 4 temps"



Émilie Gagnon award winner

Chair's Activities

At federal level, the award was presented to le Jardin communautaire project by Lucia Alicandro, Natalie Loiselle and Ahmed Layouni at the Federal Training Centre (Laval). This community gardening initiative enabled participants to grow and tend vegetables as a team, in a practical, rewarding and community-beneficial endeavor. Run from March to October 2025, it involved around 15 to 20 students in sowing seeds, preparing the ground, daily maintenance, weeding and harvesting, with the produce then donated to a community organization, La Maison des Familles de Saint-Vincent de Paul, which supports 40 families in the area.

This project fostered learning about gardening, teamwork, mutual support, communication, responsibility and perseverance. It also had a positive effect on school attendance and engagement, giving participants a sense of purpose, pride and belonging. Its innovative nature lies in its ability to transform an outdoor space into an environment for learning, rehabilitation and solidarity, whilst offering a project that can be adapted to other prison facilities depending on the available space, both indoors and outdoors.



Image taken from the educational project “Le Jardin Communautaire”



The CFF 600 team, winners of the award

Keeping track of past winners: Development and progress

In this section, we highlight the progress made by a previous project that won the Chair's award.

Mon papa, une histoire — Chair Award 2023



Launched in 2019 by Relais Famille to strengthen family ties, the Mon papa, une histoire programme helps men in prison to (re) discover the meaning of their role as a parent and to maintain a bond with their child.

Until 2025, the John Howard Society of Quebec supported its roll-out in Donnacona and Port-Cartier.

With the support of teaching staff at these institutions, participants were guided through every stage of the process: selecting a book suitable for their child, preparing the reading, and recording it. Relais Famille then ensures that the books are sent out along with the MP3 files containing the recordings for the children.

To date, 67 men in prison have taken part in the project, enabling 95 children aged 0 to 16 to receive a parcel.

“The program really helps me get closer to my daughter. It makes me feel good to know that, even though I’m far away, I can still do something for her. She’s happy to hear my voice, and she listens to me whenever she feels like it, which is really fun, because I don’t often get the chance to call home.”

Relais Famille is continuing to roll out this program across Quebec so that as many children as possible can maintain a precious bond with their fathers.

in Quebec

[Ending the college education program in prisons: concerns and campaigning](#)

On 13 February, *Le Devoir* published [an editorial by Louise Maude Soucy](#) on Correctional Service Canada’s decision not to renew the college-level education program offered in federal institutions. This announcement provoked a strong reaction within the research and education communities, given its implications for the social reintegration of prisoners.

The editorial draws on the study [“Sens et effets de l’éducation en prison”](#) (Armstrong and Bisson, 2024), conducted in collaboration with the UNESCO Chair in Applied Research for Education in Prison and Cégep Marie Victoirin. In it, the researchers demonstrate that education in a prison setting acts as a concrete lever for transformation: it promotes sustainable rehabilitation, supports social reintegration and helps to reduce tensions associated with incarceration.

Following this decision, numerous stakeholders from the college network, the community sector and the research community rallied to defend the continuation of these programs, highlighting their essential role in building a reintegration pathway that fosters meaning and dignity. More than a hundred concerned individuals co-signed an open letter published by *Le Devoir* on 10 February. [Idées | Pour le maintien de la formation collégiale dans les établissements de détention du Québec | Le Devoir.](#)

See also: [Opinion: Canada’s cuts are undermining prison education—and public safety—Montreal Gazette](#)

[“How can I show you I’m doing better if there’s nothing good for me to do?”](#), Ellen Lurie, *The Tribune*

[An inspiring example in Nova Scotia](#)

Meanwhile, the Limitless program at **Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC)** demonstrates that providing college-level education in prison is not only viable but highly effective—and at the same cost as regular programmes. The [CBC News article](#) (2024) highlights testimonials from former inmates who have obtained their college diplomas, emphasizing the tangible impacts on their professional and social reintegration. This provincial model proves that it is possible to balance education, security and cost effectiveness.

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In Ottawa

Social Rehabilitation Week

To mark the Social Rehabilitation Week, from 13 to 17 October 2025, the Criminology Intervention Techniques programme at Collège La Cité presents *Au bout de ma peine* (At the End of My Sentence), a podcast launched at the Gala Réhab, organized by the organization Réhabex.

This podcast gives a voice to people who have experienced the justice system—individuals who share, with authenticity and courage, their journeys, their mistakes, and their path to rehabilitation.

Each episode explores themes such as redemption, marginalization, identity, abuse and the impact on victims.

A new episode was released every Friday from 17 October 2025 (6 episodes in total).

At Collège La Cité, this podcast will now serve as an educational resource within the Criminology Intervention Techniques programme, enabling students to enrich their training with real, human testimonies—a practical way to learn to understand and support others in a different way.

Find out more about the programme:

<https://www.collegelacite.ca/programmes/51067>

Discover the podcast:

<http://bit.ly/4hfQt45>

In Nigeria

Nigeria: Inauguration of modern classrooms for prison education in Lagos

On 19 February 2026, the Nigerian Correctional Service inaugurated a complex comprising four fully equipped classrooms at Kirikiri Apapa Medium Security Prison (Lagos). These modern facilities are dedicated to educational programmes for prisoners, including employability courses and higher education programmes in partnership with the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

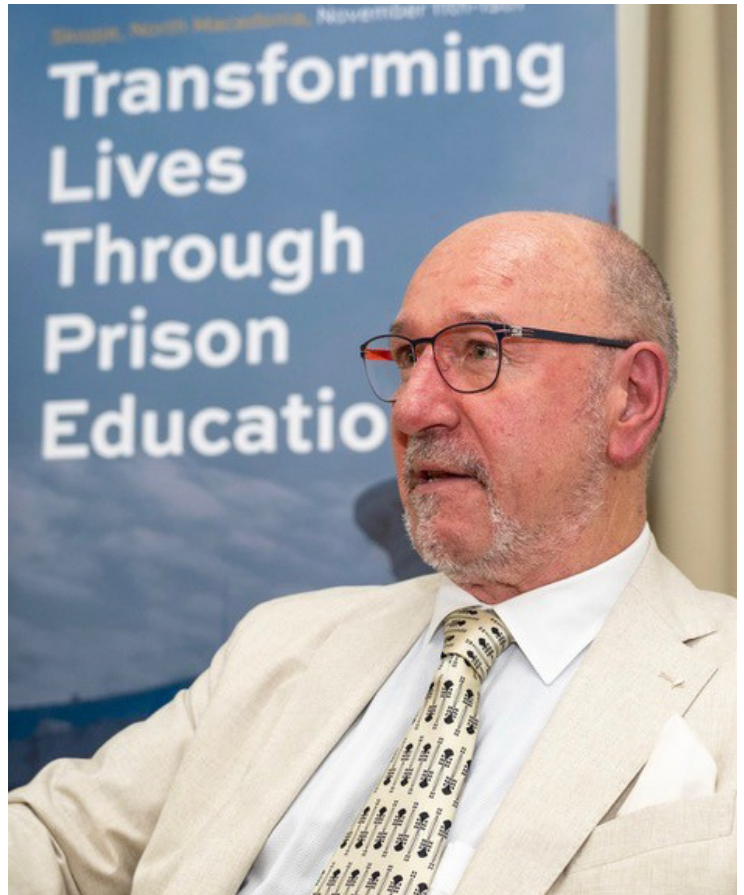
The premises will also be used for the continuing professional development of prison officers, demonstrating an integrated approach to rehabilitation. According to Daramola George, the project manager, “this project reinforces our shared belief that true reintegration must necessarily incorporate learning, skills development and opportunities for personal transformation” (free translation).

This Nigerian model illustrates how appropriate educational infrastructure can transform prisons into spaces for human development, offering a concrete example for current debates on access to education in prisons in Quebec.

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Portrait of a Researcher



Interview with

Thomas Wüthrich

[Chair of the EPEA](#)

Prison Education Association

Could you tell us a bit about your background?

I hold a Master's degree in History, Ethnology and History of the Spanish Literature from the University of Zurich. During my career, I also obtained an Executive Master's degree in Non-Profit Management. Finally, I have a National Diploma as a teacher at vocational training schools. My year-long field research in a Mexican peasant's village proved invaluable both in my personal and professional life. I learnt a great deal about interacting with people and mutual respect, as well as about socio-economic issues, about economic dependencies and the inequality between the so-called First World and the Third World, and the issue of migration.

I first started working in the correctional system a good 25 years ago. For 10 years, I was the director of a foundation which, on behalf of the local Department of Justice, ran a halfway house, a residential home for people released from prison, and provided workplaces where community service orders could be carried out and fines worked off.

It was during this time that I became involved in international projects. Together with an NGO of which I am now the Chair, we exported our model for fulfilling sanctions through community service to Romania, where I supervised the project as an expert for 10 years. Later, I was directly involved in projects in Georgia and Moldova, and I remain involved in the latter to this day.

In 2011, I began working in education within the prison system, a role I held until my retirement in 2023. My main task was to implement basic education in prisons across Eastern Switzerland. When I started, two prisons with a total of three teachers were involved; by the end, basic education had been implemented in ten prisons with a total of 16 teachers. In doing so, I coached the teachers, visited their classes and was thus also responsible for quality management.

In Switzerland, basic education within the prison system is provided neither by the Ministry of Education nor the Ministry of Justice, but by the Swiss Centre of Expertise in Prison and Probation. This means that in prisons, teachers are "external" staff who are integrated into internal procedures to varying degrees. For this reason, basic education has always depended—and continues to depend—on the goodwill and willingness of prison management and staff to cooperate effectively. Particularly in the early years, we observed that education was viewed as a disruption to the existing prison organization. Only gradually did it become clear what a positive influence education has on everyday prison life and what synergies can be generated in the process of reintegrating inmates into society.

During my time as a Regional Head of basic education, I became increasingly aware that the world inside prison is a mirror image of the conditions and challenges found outside its walls. Looking at educational attainment, we can see that the majority of prisoners have never been or are only marginally integrated into society. Education, however, is the key to inclusion, to active citizenship, and to participation in social and political life. If we take the concept of inclusion seriously, we must invest significantly more in education—both inside and outside prison. The Swiss professor of criminology, Ueli Hostettler, has calculated that the costs of deviance in Switzerland amount to around 6 billion Swiss francs (security apparatus, prison system, courts, victim support, economic damage). If we were to invest an additional 600 million francs in education, the costs of deviance would fall by 20–40%. I do not know whether the reverse conclusion is valid, namely that those who cut back on education must accept higher costs of deviance...

Portrait of a Researcher

In prison, we have a limited environment and a relatively small group of people. And that is why education in prison is a field of social and educational innovation. Here, the impact of educational and social interventions is immediately visible and measurable. Education is the key factor in the successful (re) integration of prisoners. It is therefore important to focus primarily on opportunities rather than solely on risks. Education must be the central aspect of every rehabilitation plan and every integration process.



Why education in prison is today a field of social and pedagogical innovation?

Working alongside my colleagues at our office, I was responsible for implementing an educational monitoring system. This database records anonymised personal data, participants’ educational background on joining the classes and the length of time they remained in the classes. This provided us with valuable information about our target group.

Over the years, the proportion of participants without a Swiss passport has consistently remained well over

70%. Around 5 per cent of our learners had never attended school, around 17 per cent had attended primary school for a maximum of six years, and a further third had completed a maximum of nine years of schooling. This starting point led to seven teachers, under my leadership, developing a crash course in German and French tailored to everyday life in prison, so that we could meet the first learning objective in our curriculum: “Coping independently with everyday life in prison”.

This shows that education, whether in prison or outside, must do everything in its power to support the most vulnerable members of society in order to strengthen social cohesion and maintain a functioning community.



Innovative Practices in Prison Education

Here at EPEA, we have a good idea of just how many innovative approaches to education within the prison system are being developed by teachers across Europe. EPEA is regularly asked to partner on Erasmus+ projects to ensure the dissemination of project results. We do this through our newsletter, webinars and the biennial EPEA conference.

However, it is also a fact that many project results are forgotten, as the relevant project website only needs to be maintained for three years after the project ends. This meant that the new findings were ultimately only available to the project partners.

EPEA members from various countries have therefore created a database as part of an Erasmus+ project, where the results of a project or research can be permanently stored. This Prison Education Wiki can be viewed on the EPEA website, and the results of new projects can be uploaded there. The EPEA hopes that this will help ensure that all these innovative educational approaches are widely accessible in future (<https://epea.org/wiki/>).

During my time working in Switzerland, I opted for a less resource-intensive format of an Erasmus+ project, known as job shadowing. Given that we operate in a virtual monopoly within the field of prison education, I felt that international exchange was crucial to the further development of our own organization. Job shadowing involves a reciprocal visit lasting a few days, during which various prisons and their educational facilities are visited and explained. I organized job shadowing visits for our teachers with colleagues in Belgium, Spain, Austria and Greece. And I found that this exchange was inspiring for everyone involved and boosted confidence in our own work. Despite all the country-specific differences, teachers faced (and still face) the same challenges, so there is always something to be learnt from one another.

Appropriately, the latest EPEA conference was entitled “Let’s talk”. And it was impressive to see and experience the wealth of expertise, experience and innovation brought together by teachers, researchers and education leaders in Skopje, North Macedonia. Feedback from conference participants was consistently positive; everyone was impressed by the diversity of approaches to fulfilling the educational and, consequently, reintegration mandate.



The conference also provides the ideal platform for expanding one’s own network. The EPEA has already been informed that, as a result of the meetings at the conference, reciprocal visits have been arranged. A call for proposals to organize the next conference in 2027 is currently open <https://epea.org/call-for-the-2027-conference>

See the official video of the conference on [epeatube](https://epea.org/epeatube)

The conference, as well as our webinars, demonstrate just how essential it is for teachers in particular to exchange ideas. To ensure that our “clients”—the learners—receive the best possible “service”, we who work in prison education must support one another, learn from one another and continuously develop our skills. The EPEA is committed to promoting this exchange and is currently developing a professional development programme for teachers. This programme is supposed to focus less on the transfer of specific teaching methods and more on promoting attitudes and approaches at a meta-level.

Learner Profiles

A questionnaire provided by the UNESCO Chair in Applied Research for Education in Prison—interview conducted by Thieni HAMA, PhD candidate in Sociology at Joseph KI-ZERBO University (Burkina Faso).

The interview was conducted on 19 November 2025 at the National Museum in Ouagadougou with a 30-year-old learner, a driver by profession, who wished to remain anonymous. The text has been edited but retains the oral nature of the interview.

What made you decide to enroll on a course or training program?

Before I went to prison, I was a chorister at church. I often wrote music as well. So I had no trouble joining the choir in prison. I was a psalmist, I wrote songs, and I also led the choristers on certain religious hymns. I had the approval of some of the warders there. Well, I didn't have any formal training in prison, but there were choirs from outside who came in and I learnt from them. They showed us a few little nuances: how to project the voice, how to shape it, things like that. Apart from that, I didn't have any training.

Could you tell me a bit about your life before prison: your job, family and background?

Before I went to prison, I was a drug user. I used it a lot, and my addiction led me to steal from home, because my allowance often wasn't enough. I no longer had access to my family's money, so I started stealing. And that's when I got caught. That led to my first incarceration at the Ouagadougou Detention and Correctional Facility (MACO).

What was your relationship with school like before incarceration? Did you complete your education? Did you have positive or negative experiences?

What were the reasons for dropping out, if applicable?

I've been in and out of MACO several times. The first time, I was still a minor. That was in 2010. During that incarceration, I was released during the trial so I could take my exams. And thank God, I was able to pass the Brevet d'Études de Premier Cycle (BEPC) at the national level with a very good grade point average. After that, I made my life together a bit, but in 2020, I relapsed into drug use. I started spiralling downward and fell into the cycle of addiction. I was sent back to MACO for theft. I served six months there. In December 2022, during the annual sentence reviews, I received a sentence reduction. I had negotiated to be placed on day release so I could get out, but the prison administration refused. After that, I was able to get out.

What types of courses or programs were taken in prison (literacy, general education, vocational training, etc.)?

The prison education program, as I was saying, involved me being a choir member. I already knew what the choir directors were teaching me. I used to teach that to the kids at church myself. There was nothing new to me. But what struck me the most was life inside the prison. It was organized in a certain way; even though it was a bit chaotic, it was well organized.

What struck you most about life in prison?

There are inmates who prefer to be in prison because they have food to eat, a place to sleep, and they can get clothes—even soap. All of this is thanks to charitable organizations. People come to make donations, and that helps a lot in coping with life in detention. What do we do with these people once they've served their sentences? Yet they have potential too. Once these people are released, they have no bearings. Often this means that either their families have already abandoned them, or they've been in prison so long that they've lost touch with reality [the realities of life on the outside]. What do we do with these cases?

How has participating in educational activities affected your daily life in prison?

Yeah, I've learned to cope. Because over there [in prison], when they give you the bare minimum of food, it's only for a set amount of time. So, it's true that there will be people who come to freeload you off, asking for handouts. If you don't know how to manage, your mom will come—maybe she'll send you some supplies—but before she sends them, she'll give you a hard time about certain things. And to avoid that, you must get organized. That's how you learn, too. At least, when you get out, you'll be able to what you call it? You'll at least be able to get your act together; at least if they give you something, you'll be able to manage for a certain amount of time and you'll be able to fend for yourself when you leave. So, when Mom sent me stuff, I handled it, naturally. Often, she'd even come ask me

if there was anything I wanted or that she should send me. I'd tell her no, I can wait another week. And that surely made her happy. You see, at least it gives a kind of motivation; it motivates the parents too; it also gives them hope in a way.

And money—well, it's true that there are family expenses, but expenses in prison are real too. Parents often send money, when they can. I've become more organized in prison than I was at home. It's true that we did certain chores at home—for example, ever since I was little, my mom made us wash the dishes—but it wasn't a regular thing. Over there, in prison, there are certain chores that are mandatory in the cells. For example, we take turns cleaning the cell. There are also toilets to clean. It's mandatory, on a rotating basis, unless you're the cell leader. Then you have certain privileges. And then there's the way the inmates are arranged. Once you enter the cell, you realize it's a whole different world. Because there are times when it's not easy. Because a cell is designed to hold 15 people, but it can end up holding as many as 23. So imagine how we sleep in there? Basically, we sleep like sardines in a can. One head here, another head there. It was in that context that I learned to apply myself to my tasks, that I got used to it. And cooking... Thank God, I had visitors regularly, so they'd send me raw vegetables, and I'd cook them. That's where [in prison] I learned to cook, for example. Life in prison really shaped me, too. Even though I'm on my own now, I can manage in the kitchen without any trouble [...].

Did these experiences affect how you view your sentence or your relationships with others (inmates, teachers, staff)?

Well, for me, music calms me down. It helps me a lot. When I'm learning something, I don't even pay attention to what's in front of me. Like when I got out of prison, I wasn't ashamed. Because, well, obviously, people in my neighborhood will know I was in prison. But my friends in the neighborhood know me. They know I don't dwell on my time in prison. If you realize that to err is human and that anyone can slip up. It fades quickly [the stigma of prison]. If you change, people will forget what you did yesterday. That's what matters. For example, I never had any problems with the prison guards. Well, no problems, let's say. I never had any trouble with the guards, and they never reprimanded me; on the contrary, things went well. It's as if God had given me that ability, that gift, anyway.

Did studying have an impact on your self-confidence, motivation, or the way you think about your life path?

Well, maybe the one positive thing I can mention is when it's my turn to sing at Sunday Mass. When I express myself through song, you can't help but listen closely. Yes, that's how it is. I always give people goosebumps when I sing in the choir. And that makes me happy because I know it makes others happy too. And it also helps people get deeply into their prayers. So that was my joy, and it gave me hope for the future. I drew my satisfaction from that.

After graduation, was there a desire or an opportunity to continue your education or training?

When I got home, nobody really paid me any mind. It was just business as usual. But I told myself I couldn't go back there—to prison—without my family's support this time. I wondered if it wasn't time for me to change course. Because if things kept going the way they were, it wasn't going to end well. Besides, I also want to have a family: a wife, kids. I want to make my dad proud. If he still has the means to pay for all my mistakes, I have to get my act together; I need to pull myself together. When I got out of prison, I was still using drugs. How do I stop that now? That was my first goal, my first battle. My mom has always supported me. When I have problems, she's always been there for me. She's always believed in me. She knew I could quit [drugs].

In 2016, I got my license and earned a heavy equipment operator's certificate. I've loved machines ever since I was a kid. I thought to myself, why not talk to my old man [Dad]? So, I told him, and he signed me up. I completed the training and got my certificate. I operate two machines: the excavator and the loader. Now, after that, to get the hang of it, you need a practical internship. So, it's after the practical internship that they hire you. If you do it at a good company, at least—and they took you on for an internship, that means there's a good chance of getting hired. [...] When I finished my one-year internship, they hired me right away. And that's when I started my contract [...].

What were the main obstacles, or, conversely, the factors that helped you persevere?

My mother has played an important role in my life. Because of my hardships, she started an organization that fights drug trafficking and works to protect children. They offer training sessions to raise awareness about the negative consequences of drugs, for example. Especially since I went through that experience myself and managed to get out of it. So, I helped by helping other users get out of it, by sharing my story with them. It was mostly young girls that I was able to help, with their parents' support, to get out of drug use or trafficking. In fact, in the neighborhood, drug users are afraid of me now. They know I help the police, I pass on information to them, and most importantly, I'm not involved in that anymore. I don't use drugs anymore.

Has this educational journey influenced the way you see yourself or envision your future?

The freedom to breathe fresh air and be healthy [by cutting back on my use] is a blessing. There's nothing quite like it. And now, when I see someone using it, I feel compassion; I want them to stop. Now, I'm taking better care of myself, too. I don't ask for anything at home anymore. I think the future holds good things for me. I have a list of projects, too. The organization is also very important to me. The relationship between young people and drugs right now worries me. So many of my friends have died, and others have ruined their lives with drugs. They were smart, hardworking people. But once you've tasted that pleasure, it can ruin your whole life.

In your experience, what improvements should be made to the educational programs offered in prisons?

If only we could increase the number of training workshops a little... Sure, there's carpentry, mechanics, weaving, and sewing, but not everyone has access to those activities. There are a lot of people who have potential but don't have access to training programs. To get access, you need connections—"pull," as they say. In prison, you need connections to access certain things like the workshops. If we could at least expand that to allow other people to benefit from it, it would help with reintegration. But still, there are some who go there [to prison] and are happy; honestly, there are even some who prefer it there to life on the outside.

Research and Practices Overview

Articles

A mixed methods systematic review of the psychosocial and rehabilitative impact of prison technology with recommendations for practice

Tilt, S., Bowe, M., Gardner, S. & Blagden, N. (2026). A mixed methods systematic review of the psychosocial and rehabilitative impact of prison technology with recommendations for practice. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 0(0), 1-34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2025.2598281>

This article presents a mixed-methods systematic review of the psychosocial and rehabilitative impact of technology in prison settings, with a focus on its effects on education in prison. It shows that supervised access to digital tools (training platforms, secure communications, targeted internet access) increases inmates' participation in educational activities, boosts their motivation, sense of autonomy,

and readiness for reintegration, while developing digital skills essential for the job market. The authors emphasize, however, the need to balance security and education, recommending clear technology policies, individualized educational support, and staff training to transform technology into a lever for equity and continuity between incarceration and life outside prison.

Being a Learner in Prison: Identity Positioning of Students in Detention

Ligorio, M. B., De Leo, A., Risola, R., Grattagliano, I., & Crescenzo, P. (2026). Being a learner in prison: Identity positioning of students in detention. *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/10720537.2026.2619056>

In this article, the authors explore the Italian context of university education in prisons, based on Article 27 of the Constitution, which advocates for the rehabilitation of inmates through initiatives such as the CNUPP. This network, established in Italy in 2018, coordinates activities across 47 universities (1,837 incarcerated students in 2025 across 120 prisons), despite implementation challenges. The qualitative method is based on a 12-question questionnaire designed according to the theory of the dialogical self (Hermans' DST), completed by 16 male inmates aged 32 to 70 in three prisons in Puglia. A thematic analysis then examines their responses to identify their multiple identities ("student-self" versus "past self"), the quality of their inner reflections, and their emotions related to their studies. The results show that inmate-

students primarily view themselves as positive learners ("student self"), who engage in dialogue with their past (e.g., "former student self") to transform or repair their identity. This experience, driven by a desire for inner change, to mentally escape prison, and to reintegrate into society, generates positive emotions thanks to the support of mentors and the prison community, even though the future remains unclear and difficult to anticipate. The study emphasizes the transformative potential of education to reshape prosocial identity and reduce recidivism, and advocates for reform: prioritizing education, training support staff, and adopting a rehabilitative approach.

Research and Practices Overview

Teaching and learning math in prison: A systematic review

De Rocco, G., Emili, E. A., Miragliotta, E., Santi, G. R. P., & Muratori, A. (2026). Teaching and learning math in prison: A systematic review. *Journal of Prison Education Research*, 10(1), 2. <https://doi.org/10.25771/p1g8-cw96>

A research team from four Italian universities presents a systematic review of the literature on mathematics education in prisons in the latest issue of the *Journal of Prison Education Research*. Based on an analysis of three dimensions—cognition, or how learners engage with mathematical knowledge; emotions, or learners' attitudes toward learning mathematics; and inclusivity, or how the learning environment can provide individuals with the opportunity to express their cognitive profiles and aspirations—the research team paints a rich and stimulating picture of the literature. Several elements may inspire those who teach mathematics in prisons. First, it appears that mathematics is more appreciated, less anxiety-inducing, and better able to contribute to the empowerment of incarcerated individuals when taught in a relational manner—that is, when learners can experience mathematics as a tool for self-efficacy, identity reconstruction, and preparation for life after prison. For example, the principles of geometry and proportions can be taught by applying them to construction trades or by comparing the prices of two given quantities of a commodity. In this way, learners are given concrete examples of how mathematics can help them better understand the world and their own experiences. In other words, mathematics instruction in prison must be contextualized and go beyond the mere learning of mathematical rules. Those who teach

mathematics must also be sensitive to the learners' life stories and recognize that many incarcerated individuals have a very complex, even conflicted, relationship with mathematics, which triggers numerous negative emotions. Finally, the literature review reveals that there is very little research on best practices for addressing diversity within the prison system. The team concludes that while it is likely necessary to adapt mathematics instruction to accommodate this diversity, further research is needed to determine the educational support needs and circumstances of incarcerated individuals.

Attitudinal exceptionalism? Norwegian prison officer students' views towards prisoners and punishment

Pape, H. & Johnsen, B. (2026). Attitudinal exceptionalism? Norwegian prison officer students' views towards prisoners and punishment. *European Journal of Criminology*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14773708251412617>

At the Chair, we believe that all forms of education within the prison system deserve attention. This article by Pape and Johnsen caught our attention because it addresses a topic that is not often discussed in the field of prison education: the training of correctional officers. The research duo from the University College of the Norwegian Correctional Service (UCNCS) aimed to assess the alignment between Norway's official criminal justice policies and students' responses across three dimensions: their academic motivations, their attitudes toward prisoners, and their views on punishment. Norway is often described as an exception for its prison and criminal justice policies, which emphasize rehabilitation and the humane treatment of incarcerated individuals. Moreover, the training of its correctional officers is equally exceptional, as those who train for this role enter a two-year post-secondary training program following a rigorous selection process that includes semi-structured interviews designed to identify individuals who appear capable of maintaining a healthy balance between compassion and empathy, on the one hand, and control and authority, on the other.

The results of Pape and Johnsen's survey show that many respondents enroll in the training program with the desire to help others (96%) and that a very small minority do so to exercise authority (7%). However, all these individuals also stated that they wanted to help others. As for their attitudes toward incarcerated individuals, they are generally favorable or positive.

Furthermore, 99% of respondents disagreed—to varying degrees—with the idea that rehabilitation efforts are futile. Finally, nearly all respondents (99%) said that the primary goal of incarceration was rehabilitation, while all but one of those who considered punishment itself to be important also said that rehabilitation was important.

In other words, those training to become correctional officers in Norway share the values and mission of the Norwegian correctional system. Unfortunately, there is no comparable data from other contexts that would allow us to compare and determine whether these individuals are “exceptional.” It is a safe bet, however, that the rigorous training and the values it instills must contribute to the success of the Norwegian correctional system. While research teams around the world would undoubtedly need to replicate Pape and Johnsen's study in their own contexts to help us better understand the links between correctional officers' attitudes and their practice, those who administer correctional systems should also draw inspiration from Norwegian practices regarding workforce training.

Research and Practices Overview

Libraries behind bars: Strategies for information literacy and social reintegration in correctional facilities

Olímpia do VALE et Carlos Guardado da SILVA, “Libraries behind bars: Strategies for information literacy and social reintegration in correctional facilities”, Alexandria, 18 septembre 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09557490251378731>.

[Summary by Angelina Machalani, a student of history and civilization at Cégep Marie-Victorin]

This article is a literature review that explores the importance of prison libraries, the need for greater discussion on this topic, and the impact of literacy programs on society.

Prison libraries are important for the rehabilitation of inmates, which has positive consequences for society, such as reduced crime, the development of skills that are valuable in the job market, financial independence, and a sense of civic responsibility. Despite progress such as the Nelson Mandela Rules, disparities in prison libraries persist regarding the lack of consideration for prisoners’ perspectives and the significant contrast between different nations. The study categorizes the typical prisoner as single, adult, poorly educated, professionally unstable, and underqualified. This can often create obstacles for these individuals, which could lead to criminal behavior and reinforce stereotypes. An inmate’s social environment is a key factor in socialization, identity formation, skill development, and adaptability. This underscores the need for social support during incarceration and after release. The study identifies the principles of prison libraries:

- Education
- Recreation
- Rehabilitation

These principles can be achieved by ensuring free access to library services, adhering to the same standards as public libraries, providing a space that is physically separate from the rest of the prison, and considering the diversity of the prison population. Prison libraries offer several benefits related to

inmates’ mental health and social reintegration:

- Activities that help participants better manage their emotions
- The need for information (primarily legal)
- Knowledge related to health and hygiene
- Social and financial support
- Technical, educational, and spiritual development
- Literacy programs
- Self-esteem
- A sense of freedom
- A more positive view of prisoners by society

Furthermore, a library in a correctional facility can serve to recreate a normal social environment outside of prison. The fact that an inmate can choose what to read provides a measure of freedom that can help them develop an identity separate from criminality. Additionally, reading is an opportunity for self-reflection and a vehicle for social equality. The article notes that social reintegration is possible when the inmate is determined to change, which positively influences addiction treatment and employability. Furthermore, relationships in general—but family relationships in particular—greatly aid social reintegration, as they serve as a motivator for the inmate to achieve this goal. The study notes that reintegration is more successful among inmates with higher levels of education, which affects their recidivism rates. There are several challenges in libraries within correctional facilities:

- Organizational inefficiencies
- Shortage of qualified personnel
- Censorship
- Lack of activities

The study concludes by noting that the main obstacles facing prison libraries are their failure to adapt to the needs of the prison population and a lack of qualified staff. This can be explained by the lack of funding.

which becomes more severe during economic crises, as society often becomes increasingly reluctant to fund services for prisoners. As a result, the effectiveness of these services declines, leading to several very negative consequences for society, such as higher recidivism rates and an increase in the prison population, which in turn imposes significant costs on public finances.

Tablets behind bars: Evidence from a staggered adoption difference-in-differences study of prison misconduct

Peterson, B. E., Kim, K., Shukla, R. & Aukamp, S. (2026). Tablets behind bars: Evidence from a staggered adoption difference-in-differences study of prison misconduct. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-026-09745-5>

In this article, Peterson, Kim, Shukla, and Aukamp report the results of a study on the implementation of tablets in correctional facilities operated by the Washington Department of Corrections (WADOC) in the state of Washington. The objective of the study was to assess the impact of tablets on four security-related indicators—1) monthly incident rate; 2) rate of major incidents (homicides, assaults, escapes, possession or manufacture of weapons, seizures of drugs or cell phones, etc.); 3) rate of drug-related offences; 4) rate of cell phone-related offences—by measuring the effect of introducing tablets on these various indicators. Following their statistical analysis, the research team found no evidence suggesting that tablets increased offences of any kind in WADOC facilities. However, the team also does not report any statistically significant improvements across the various types of offences, even though the data suggest a modest or significant improvement for all indicators studied (an average reduction of 19.5% in total offences, 52.6% in serious offences, 32.3% of drug-related incidents, and 67.6% of cell phone-

related offences following the deployment of tablets). Obviously, the impact of tablets is difficult to assess, given the volatile nature of correctional facilities, especially since the study was conducted during the pandemic. However, the team concludes that their results at least help identify the plausible effects of deploying tablets in correctional settings, insofar as they did not observe a marked and systematic increase in offences following implementation. The study thus contributes to improving empirical knowledge on the issue, helps alleviate certain concerns while demonstrating that tablets are not a silver bullet. It also highlights the value of measuring the impact of tablets on other factors, such as inmates' ability to communicate with their loved ones, their daily well-being, and access to educational and therapeutic resources that can contribute to the process of social and community reintegration.



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