

The Deputy Chairman: The files are prepared by various people on the staff?

Mr. Street: Yes, and the reports are there so they know ahead of time.

The Deputy Chairman: Now, they have the man in front of them, they have read the information which has been compiled by various people, and they make an instant decision as to what type of an individual he is.

Mr. Street: I would think it would not take very long to ascertain what kind of a person you are dealing with. Perhaps you would like to comment on this, Mr. Stevenson.

Mr. Stevenson: There are usually four persons in the room, two members of the Board, a classification officer and one parole officer. We discuss the case first, asking the classification officer to give us a summary of the institutional report. We then ask the parole officer to summarize his report. Although we have these reports in full detail we like to be brought up to date. The inmate then enters and we discuss his case with him. The interview will last perhaps 15 minutes, half an hour, maybe one hour. The inmate then leaves and we discuss the case further, arrive at a decision, ask the man to return and give him that decision.

Mr. Street: I might say that Mr. Stevenson was our regional representative in Vancouver before his appointment to the Board. He was also a classification officer in the British Columbia penitentiary for some years prior to that.

The Deputy Chairman: In other words, Mr. Stevenson has had experience first as a classification officer, then as a parole officer and now as a member of the Board.

Senator Hastings: You used the term "a classification officer" again. Is it the man's individual classification officer?

Mr. Stevenson: That is right. Sometimes the classification officer states that he does not know the applicant very well. I know from my own experience that with a case load of 150 to 200 inmates he may have seen an individual only once or twice since his admission. He may, as I did when I was a classification officer, have seen the man on admittance to the institution and again at the time of his application for parole. This is perhaps seven or eight months after his admission. That is the type of individual attention that is possible.

The Deputy Chairman: For a classification officer?

Mr. Stevenson: Yes, in most cases.

Senator Hastings: You said sometimes and now you say in most cases. Which is it?

Mr. Stevenson: In most cases.

Senator Hastings: For that reason the classification officer hardly knows the man he represents?

Mr. Stevenson: That is right. He has the background information and so on, but very few are involved in an intensive counselling process.

Senator Hastings: Is this because of lack of staff?

Mr. Stevenson: Yes.

Senator Hastings: So the man is really very much alone.

Senator Williams: Mr. Stevenson, in the area of Vancouver and new Westminster there is an institution in which I understand there are a fair number of our people. In your experience with those who apply for parole, did you find that their educational standards were very, very low, putting them at a disadvantage in expressing themselves to people of very high standards?

I have heard this morning that those acting on the part of the establishment, if I may use that word, hold master's degrees. In view of this it is difficult for the Indian or Métis inmate to receive a full or understandable picture. In view of that, how do you reach them?

Mr. Stevenson: I agree that it is very difficult with any member of a minority group who comes before us to persuade him to speak freely. We do our level best. Sometimes we know they are nervous and ask observers who might be in the room to leave so that there are just three of us together. We try to phrase our questions as simply as possible. We try to get over to him that we are interested in helping him through parole. That is the main thing.

Senator Williams: If he is fortunate and gets across to you or other people in your category, and he has been a transient possibly for a number of years—he could have come from any part of Canada and ended up in Vancouver or New Westminster—if he is qualified for parole, where does he go? Then comes the question of community acceptance. Is he shipped back to his reservation, whether it be in Manitoba or in the Yukon? He may have been a foreigner to his own people for perhaps the past decade. What happens?

Mr. Stevenson: We have to arrive at some decision. If, from the plan that he presents to us, it is considered not to be in his best interest for him to return to the very environment that brought him into prison, we might come up with another one of these terrible "reserve decisions", and try to get someone to work out a new plan with him rather than say no at the time. We may think that he needs a chance and that he can do well on parole, if the environment is correct. So a "reserve decision" is the only fair way at that point, and to have somebody work with him to develop a new plan.

Senator Williams: This terrible "reserve decision" leaves him hanging in suspense until possibly the next year?

Mr. Stevenson: Yes.

Senator Hastings: Do you not agree that in western Canada, where our Indian prison inmate population runs from 38 to 46 per cent, these boys are at a great disadvantage, as they are throughout life?

Mr. Stevenson: I agree, and I am very happy to go out on panels to the west with Mr. Maccagno who is able to speak some Cree, because the minute he says a few words of Cree to an Indian inmate it helps relax the whole atmosphere.