

PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY

*STORIES OF IMPACT & STRENGTH: BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES THROUGH
LIVED EXPERIENCE*

Beyond the Numbers: Storytelling as a pathway to justice and belonging

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Land Acknowledgement

As a provincial umbrella association, AMSSA acknowledges that B.C. is on the unceded homelands of First Nations who have stewarded this land since time immemorial. We recognize the privilege that we have as settlers on this land and acknowledge that AMSSA's operations is on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkwəy̅əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl̓ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. As an organization, AMSSA is committed to creating a safe space for indigenous voices.

Why This Collaboration Began

- CSC–BC approached AMSSA to help address the **overrepresentation of Black men in the justice system**.
- Officers, parole, and corrections staff sought to **understand systemic barriers** better and **build relationships** with Black communities.
- The goal: **to co-create understanding, reduce harm, and improve reintegration outcomes**.



CSC came to us not for a product, but for perspective, to understand the humanity behind the data.

Systemic Barriers in the Justice System



- **Black individuals** are **overrepresented** in **incarceration rates** across Canada.
- Persistent **racial profiling**, **bias in policing**, and **disparities in sentencing**.
- These outcomes reflect **structural inequities**, not isolated experiences.

The statistics are not new, but how we respond to them can be.

From Consultation to Storytelling

- Traditional consultations **collect information**; storytelling **builds relationships**.
- Grounded in **decolonized practices** learned through AMSSA's Indigenous partnerships.
- **Centering lived experience as expertise**, not anecdote.



If we want to talk about systems change, we must begin by centering the voices most affected.

Creating a Safe and Relational Space



- **Dialogue Session** held February 27, 2025.
- Brought together **CSC staff, community leaders, Elders, and formerly incarcerated Black men.**
- Purpose: **Humanize**, not tokenize. **Listen**, not label.

Our goal wasn't to fix people; it was to fix the distance between people.

Voices from Inside

Themes from Interviews with Incarcerated Black Men (CSC Pacific Region)

1. Lack of Representation & Cultural Competency

- Few Black correctional staff or volunteers.
- Limited understanding of Black social history.
- Few culturally relevant programs or spaces.

2. Basic Needs & Institutional Barriers

- Inconsistent access to hygiene and food items.
- Lack of culturally appropriate food and personal care products.

3. Barriers to Reintegration

- Racism and discrimination post-release.
- Few culturally responsive halfway houses or supports.
- Transfers to unfamiliar communities.



These are the stories that sit between the lines of policy, everyday realities that reveal how systems often fail to see the full person.

What Participants Suggested



Community-Informed Solutions

- Recruit more **Black staff, mentors, and volunteers** across CSC.
- **Train CSC staff on Black social history and anti-racism.**
- **Expand Black-led programs and peer supports.**
- **Provide culturally appropriate food and hygiene items.**
- **Create Black-specific CRFs and strengthen post-release networks.**

These weren't policy recommendations; they were calls for dignity.

Why Storytelling Worked

Transformative Power of Narrative

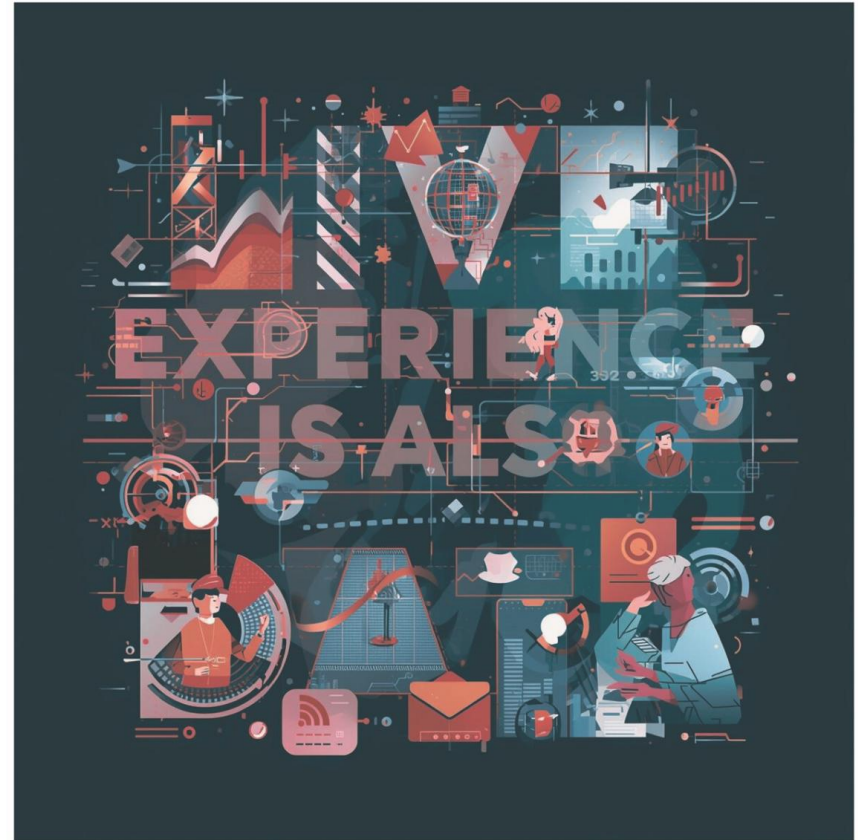
- Created **safety** and **trust**.
- Fostered **empathy** and **awareness** among officers.
- Allowed participants to **reclaim voice** and **agency**.

Storytelling turned the project into a mirror, one that allowed both CSC and community members to see each other differently.



- **Lived experience** is data with a heartbeat.
- Systems change begins with **humility** and **curiosity**.
- Equity grows from **relationships**, not reports.

The more we make space for story, the more just our systems become.





With deep thanks to:

- **Incarcerated men** who shared their truth.
- **CSC–BC leadership** for openness to learning.
- **Black community leaders, Elders, and mentors.**
- **AMSSA's Team**
- **DIVERSEcity** for the partnership for our session

May we continue to move beyond the numbers, toward stories that remind us of our shared humanity.

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