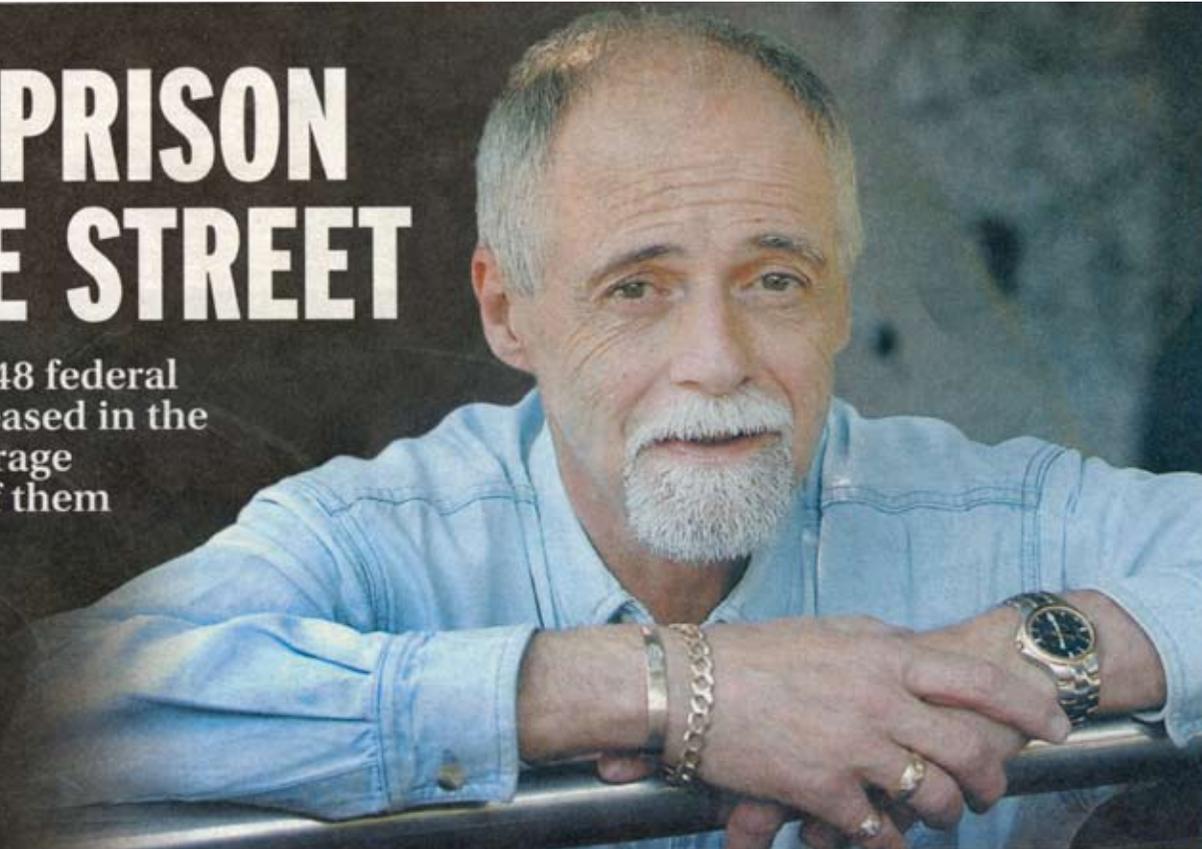


## FROM PRISON TO THE STREET

**FRASER VALLEY:** 48 federal inmates are released in the Valley in an average month, many of them with nowhere to go. Local groups are trying to do something to help

**NEWS A3**



Ex-convict Glenn Flett sees many newly released prisoners looking for help to re-enter society. He and other community leaders are trying to respond. JON MURRAY FILE PHOTO — THE PROVINCE

**Glenda Luymes**  
Fraser Valley Reporter

In the space of a day, home went from being a prison cell to a cardboard box.

Released from a Fraser Valley prison last week, a former inmate was homeless for two days before finding a room at a cheap motel in Mission.

“All he had was a little plastic bag of belongings and \$190,” said Glenn Flett, a former convict who helps other ex-cons make the transition to life outside prison.

“He had no plan, but he did have a good jacket.”

Flett, founder of the LINC Society -- Long-term Inmates Now in the Community -- sees

dozens of newly released prisoners looking for help each year.

With about 3,400 men and women incarcerated in federal and provincial jails in the Fraser Valley, a steady number of ex-cons are constantly re-entering society.

Correctional Service of Canada statistics show an average of 48 inmates are released from the Fraser Valley’s federal prisons each month, for a total of 964 since the beginning of 2007.

Local service groups believe a significant number remain in the area.

“Most of them are required to have a plan [by a parole or probation officer], but there are some that stay in prison until the end of their sentence,” said Flett. “When their time is up, they’re out.”

While most of the convicts receive help in signing up for social assistance, some still find themselves homeless upon release, with nothing but a few boxes of belongings and a couple hundred dollars.

It’s a reality that has community groups and city planners in at least one Fraser Valley city looking at ways to help.

A strategic planning meeting is set for next Friday in Abbotsford, home to four prisons, to explore the needs of inmates rejoining the community.

Organizer Stacey Corriveau said housing is a priority.

“People need housing before they can even think about employment,” she said. “Low-income housing is in short supply, so landlords can afford to be choosy. Why would they choose a guy who’s just come from jail?”

Corriveau, manager of community economic development for Community Futures South Fraser, said she was “very pleased” when Abbotsford’s Affordable Housing Working Group listened to her “little rant” about inmate housing and decided to hold a meeting to discuss it.

“Inmates are the group nobody ever wants to talk about, but this is something that affects the whole community,” she said.

Corriveau said young ex-cons who have served less time tend to go to Vancouver when they are released. The older cons who have done more time tend to settle in the Fraser Valley.

While many are “looking for a quiet life,” they are sometimes out of touch with society and don’t have current employment skills. They’ve lost contact with family and friends.

Corriveau said private home placements, where families “adopt” an ex-con and allow him to live at their home while he tries to find a job, work very well.

“There’s a huge misunderstanding [about ex-cons] out there,” she said. “If you can help someone who’s just come out of prison get back on his feet and find a job, it’s going to benefit everyone in a community.”

Mission Community Services shelter support director Hope Fraser said recently released convicts with no parole or probation conditions sometimes end up on the streets.

“We try to help them,” she said. “We do what we would do with any homeless person.”

Mission, home to two prisons, will soon expand its homeless housing from four beds to 30 with funding from B.C. Housing.

Maple Ridge spokesman Gary Manson said the city doesn’t look after inmate housing, leaving it in the hands of Corrections.

Maple Ridge is home to two prisons.

Chilliwack RCMP Const. Tara Harrington said a lack of affordable housing is a concern in Chilliwack, with the recent closure of a downtown hotel causing an even greater shortage.

Chilliwack is home to one prison. Nearby Agassiz has two prisons.