



## Diverse Needs

## Unique Responses

## People of Faith, Volunteerism and Restorative Justice

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE  
canada.ca/correctional-service

Virtually all of the world's religions share the view that we must treat others as we would wish to be treated ourselves. How would this apply if we were victims of a crime? How would this apply if we had committed a crime?

Restorative justice is about repairing the harm caused by crime. Rooted in Aboriginal and other spiritual traditions, it is non-adversarial. It is inclusive—it involves victims, offenders and communities. The framework is one of healing rather than punishment. With offenders, this means helping them take responsibility for their actions and to work to repair the harm they have caused. For victims, it means helping them to be heard and understanding their needs. For communities, it means supporting victims, offenders and young people who may be at risk of committing a crime, as each tries to move forward in his/her own way.

“ I don't know that I was expecting to be transformed but that has clearly been my experience. Volunteering has given me an opportunity to make my faith much more alive in my life. I can now wrestle with spiritual questions with people of many faiths. ”

— **Meredith Egan**, Mission, British Columbia (has volunteered in numerous penitentiaries in Western Canada)

### How volunteers help

How do volunteering and restorative justice relate to treating others as we would wish to be treated? By spending time with people in need, by listening attentively, by setting aside prejudices and approaching others with respect and a sense of welcome, volunteers throughout Canada empower people to make positive changes in their lives.

“ The years I have spent volunteering at Grand Valley Institution for Women have opened my eyes and heart to the importance of respect and support for all people, without judgement. Residents of Grand Valley and other penitentiaries need to be recognized as women and men of worth, and not just labelled as criminals. ”

— **Eva Rucki**, volunteer with Community Justice Initiatives, Kitchener, Ontario

### What are your volunteer options?

People with a wide range of skills can volunteer. Often, there is training available that can expand your abilities and knowledge. In the correctional system, you can work in penitentiaries or with community organizations.

### Volunteering in correctional institutions

Restorative justice can only begin for offenders when they are prepared to acknowledge the truth about their crime. Volunteers in institutions can help offenders move to a place where acknowledging and accepting responsibility for what they've done is both possible and desirable. One way of doing this is by helping offenders to deepen their faith. This can involve facilitating study groups and services, escorting offenders to services in the community, and participating in one-on-one conversations.

Restorative justice within penitentiary walls also looks beyond those walls. Volunteers often teach offenders skills and offer mentoring that will help them cope with the often-difficult transition back into the community. This can occur on a one-on-one basis or in a support circle with other volunteers.

“ You've got to take action, to be part of things... to help facilitate change, to make the world a different place. ”

— **Philip Maier**, Goderich, Ontario (victim-offender mediator for both adults and youth).

### Volunteering in your community

There are many ways that both faith groups and individuals can get involved.

Some options:

- **Volunteer support circles**—These circles can begin when an offender is incarcerated and they often continue after his/her release. Other times, offenders will recognize the benefit of these circles once they've been released and request to be part of one. The volunteer circle is a place for offenders to receive practical advice about issues like housing and finding work, as well as being a safe environment to work through doubts and fears.
- **Support to victims of crime**—Victims of crime are often in need of support. There are community organizations where you can volunteer that offer helpful services to victims to address their varying needs in the aftermath of crime.
- **Specialized support circles**—These exist across the country and focus on people who have been convicted of sex-related offences. These groups, called Circles of Support and Accountability or CoSA, boast an impressive success rate and have become models for other countries.

“ I volunteer at the Centre de services de justice réparatrice... this work has allowed me to see what is human in each and every one of us. It has also confirmed how precious human beings are and how respect for each other's value is a potent way of rebuilding what is broken. ”

— **Awa Dembele-Yeno**, Montreal, Quebec (serves as secretary of the board and finance committee member)

- **Support as a faith community**—Isolation can be a huge obstacle to overcome for people leaving a penitentiary. Faith communities like yours that are interested in welcoming someone who has paid their debt to society can play a vital role in helping that person to not reoffend.
- **Support to family members of offenders**—Families play a role in helping loved ones to make different choices once they are released, but these families are often under strain. Supporting families in coming to terms with the aftermath of crime is another important role that you can play as a volunteer.

Empowering others and building safer communities is what volunteering and restorative justice in Canada is all about. To get started and learn more about what you can do, please visit [canada.ca/correctional-service](http://canada.ca/correctional-service)