



# NEW MEXICO CORRECTIONS DEPARTMENT

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## VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

### CONDUCT AT THE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY:

#### **Know your facility staff**

- The facility chaplain, or designated staff member serves as the liaison between you and/or your group and the Deputy Warden. The facility chaplain, or designated staff member is responsible for scheduling volunteer activities, generating clearance memos, setting up, providing training and the facility deputy warden is responsible for approving individuals to be volunteers.
- The Coordinator of Volunteer and Faith-based Services serves as the liaison between the Facility Deputy Warden and the correctional administration. This Coordinator is the individual appointed by the correctional administration to oversee all aspects of the community volunteer programs for offenders in all eleven (11) correctional facilities and Probation & Parole facilities.
- The working relationship between your group's coordinator, the facility chaplain, or designated staff member, Deputy Warden and the Coordinator of Volunteer and Faith-based Services is vital to the successful implementation of your service. Communication should always be between the group coordinator and the facility chaplain, or designated staff member. This single point of contact model allows for clear communication and eliminates the problems associated with trying to coordinate the same activity through several different people. The facility chaplain, or designated staff member already works with dozens of different group leaders. Communicating with many members of the same group can lead to confusion, miscommunication, and unnecessary tension. Let your group coordinator work with the facility chaplain, or designated staff member, and then your group coordinator can relay information to all members of the group.

#### **Entering the facility and security clearance checks**

- To maintain a safe and secure environment for offenders, staff, and the public, you must have your facility issued ID badge to be viewed and your keys will be held by the facility. You may be asked to clear a metal detector as well as anything you bring may be searched as well

## Plan ahead

- Prior to traveling to the facility, contact your facility to verify that the facility isn't on lock down status. Lock down status means that you will not be allowed to enter the facility to conduct your volunteer services. If your group must make changes to its schedule, please notify the facility chaplain, or designated staff member as far ahead of time as possible. The facility chaplain, or designated staff member will need to review existing schedules, generate new clearance memos, and advise offenders.

## Know your schedule

- Do not try to gain access into the correctional facility when you are not scheduled to be there. Correctional facilities have very rigid daily schedules. Most must use the same space to provide many different programs. Trying to squeeze in additional un-scheduled activities on short notice without prior approval is not possible.

## Be on time

- Be there a minimum of fifteen (15) minutes prior to the time you are scheduled to start your program.
- Remember it takes time to be checked into the facility and get to the program area. Facilities frequently must hold staff on overtime to oversee activities. If you arrive to the facility more than fifteen (15) minutes past your scheduled time you may not be allowed to enter the facility and your volunteer program will be cancelled for that day. Time is important to offenders, as they have been assigned to a specific activity within a specific time frame. If the volunteer is late or does not come at all, the offender loses out on an activity to which they were probably looking forward to with much anticipation. Come as a group if you volunteer with a group. The facility may not have the staff resources to keep admitting those volunteers who haven't arrived with their group.
- Building and maintaining a stable level of trust with correctional staff and offenders is crucial to the success of your program.

## What to bring and not to bring

- Bring only the materials approved by the correctional facility for the program, because it is a **felony** to bring contraband into a facility whether in your vehicle or on your person. Do not bring in your wallet and/or purse.
- If you must bring prescribed medication, only bring the quantity you need to take while at the facility. Be sure to check with your facility chaplain, or designated staff member and find out if you will be able to have the prescription on your person while on the correctional grounds.
- No swords, knives or belt tools (Leatherman or similar).
- No guns, ammunition and/or weapons of any kind.
- Tobacco items of any kind, matches, or lighters, electronic cigarette or any device, object or substance whether animate or inanimate that is capable of causing injury or fear of injury.
- No alcohol, controlled substances, illegal substances, keys, gifts or packages of any kind.
- No more than two rings, one watch and/or one necklace.
- If you're not sure, consult with your facility chaplain or designated staff member or designated staff member.
- Pagers, cell-phones, any electronic device not associated with an immediate medical health condition, are not permitted inside the correctional facility (secure them in your vehicle).

## How to dress

- Your appearance will determine how facility staff, offenders, and peers ultimately receive you.
- All volunteers must be appropriately attired in accordance with this policy before entering any New Mexico Correctional Department Facility or Privately Operated Facility.
- When attire is deemed not in accordance with this policy by the Front Reception Officer, the matter shall be brought to the attention of the Shift Supervisor.
- Volunteers may not be allowed into the institution if their clothing would make it difficult to distinguish the visitor from an offender.
- Volunteers are subject to denial of visiting privilege for that day if their attire is not in accordance with policy

### ✓ **Male Visitors:**

- Trousers and a shirt with sleeves must be worn at all times. Plain white undershirts or muscle, "A" shirts are not allowed when used as an outer garment.
- Restricted clothing colors will depend on the facility offender uniform code.
- Shorts, beach-type shorts or cut-offs will not be worn.
- Tank-Tops are not allowed.
- Undergarments shall be worn, but not visible through outer clothing.
- Footwear must be worn at all times. Open toed shoes (Beach type thongs and flip-flops), slippers, and steel-toed boots/shoes are not permitted.
- No hats, scarves, bandanas or other types of headbands will be brought into the institution or worn in the Visiting Room.
- Sweat clothes or athletic (warm-up) clothes may be worn, with the exception of shorts. Skintight clothing or spandex is not permitted.

### ✓ **Female Visitors:**

- Dresses, skirts or pants must be worn.
- Skirts or dresses with a slit higher than mid-thigh are not acceptable.
- Skirts or dresses that are more than three inches above the knee are not acceptable.
- Shorts, cut-offs and beach-type shorts are not acceptable.
- Sweat clothes or athletic (warm-up) clothes may be worn, with the exception of shorts.
- Skintight clothing or spandex is not permitted.
- Undergarments must be worn, including brassieres, but must not be visible through outer clothing.
- Tank top blouses, spaghetti straps, tube tops, halter-tops, or spandex or spandex like pants are not acceptable, nor is any type of see-through clothing.
- Clothing must not be see-through, expose cleavage, the midriff, shoulders or any part of the breast or upper thigh.
- Footwear must be worn at all times. Open toed shoes (Beach type thongs and flip-flops), slippers, and steel-toed boots/shoes are not permitted.
- No hats, scarves, bandanas or other types of headbands will be brought into the institution or permitted in the Visiting Room.
- No bathing suits will be worn as an outer garment.

## **Obey facility staff**

- Facility staff will provide periodic monitoring of your program. Even the best-run facilities have problems from time to time. A situation may occur that requires the facility to be locked down. If during your program a staff member comes and advises you to end your program, you must leave and follow the directions of the staff member. Immediately obey them. Don't argue. Do whatever the staff instructs you to do. Your safety and the safety of others may depend on your quick compliance.

## **Accountability**

- Be accountable for your behavior at all times.
- Fulfill the obligation of your program only.
- Be professional, respectful, and courteous to correctional staff, offenders and other volunteers and their programs always.
- Don't come to the correctional facility if you have been consuming alcohol, illegal controlled substances and/or medicinal marijuana.

## **DEALING WITH OFFENDERS:**

Many persons who are incarcerated have had more than their share of frustrations in their lives. Most have experienced repeated failure and are, at least on the outset, suspicious of any offer of assistance or guidance from others whom they do not know.

Working with offenders can be challenging at times. The following two guidelines provide a frame of reference for the volunteer in relating to the offender.

- Following the rules will help you gain the offender's respect and at the same time provide a solid foundation for a positive relationship.
- Failure to follow the rules puts you on the list of those in their past who could not be trusted and have added to their share of frustrations.

## **Be yourself**

- There is no need to establish a façade or to create some kind of special status for you in relationship to the offender.
- Express your feelings genuinely.
- An honest and unmasked expression of feelings is one important way for the volunteer to show concern.

## **Set boundaries early in the relationship**

- Set the parameters or boundaries of the relationship from the beginning.
- Identify what you will and will not do.
- Make clear what is appropriate and what is not appropriate and will not be tolerated.
- Make sure both you and the offender are clear regarding these boundaries and stick to them. Offenders will test these boundaries on a regular basis. Don't be surprised when you are asked to do something that clearly violates these boundaries. When this happens, immediately repeat the boundaries with the offender. If you do not, the offender will know they can manipulate you.

### **Mean what you say**

- Never make a promise. The offender will test you, call your bluff, and see if you will deliver. This is an important part of an offender's process of learning to trust you, which will come slowly in any case.
- It may be useful and wise to talk to your facility chaplain, or designated staff member - before you mention the idea to the offender or agree to do anything for them

### **Respect**

- Respect is the key toward developing a positive and rewarding relationship with the offender. They will not be open with you until they respect or trust you. Conversely, you must respect the offender's individuality and basic rights as a human being. There is no room for narrow prejudices or feelings of superiority. Respond to the offenders needs and interests, not your own. Your volunteer service is to provide encouragement to those in corrections who appreciate the positive influence of outside friends and not vice-versa.

### **Be supportive, encouraging, and friendly, but firm**

- It is part of your job to be honest and objective, disapproving, as well as praising, supporting, and encouraging when that is warranted.

### **Win respect for yourself**

- The offender will never respect you until it is clear that you cannot be conned or manipulated. The offender's manipulations may be expressed in requests for you to influence others, bring contraband in, take something out, or pass a message. Never be shy about saying "NO" to a request you really do not want to grant or you know is clearly against the rules. The request may be for something that is borderline, and may seem insignificant. Tell the offender you will check to see if it's all right, and then ask for guidance from the appropriate official. **(Remember those boundaries. Stick with them.)**

### **Do not use personal physical contact**

- Volunteers should refrain from physical contact with offenders other than a brief handshake at beginning and end of sessions. Though personal contact such as a hug may be a seemingly harmless gesture, offenders frequently misunderstand the meaning of the contact and may interpret the gesture as affection.
  - ✓ No Hugging, Kissing, and/or touching of any kind other than brief handshake.
  - ✓ Do not be alone with an offender of the opposite sex. Stay with your group and/or have a minimum of two (2) volunteers and/or staff present when meeting with offenders.

### **Do not ask an offender why he or she is incarcerated**

- Let the offender tell you in their own time about the offense committed, the family left behind, or any other personal matters.
- Be forewarned, some day the offender may talk about their crimes and past. Do you really want to know? Will what they tell you change your opinion of them?

### **Accept the offender**

- Accept the offender as an individual who is no better and no worse than anyone else. To pigeonhole or categorize a person is, in a way, to dehumanize a person.

### **Be patient**

- Don't expect overnight miracles. When things have been going wrong for years and years for a person, things cannot be corrected in a few weeks or months. The positive effects of your relationship with the offender may not have a decisive effect until long after you've stopped working with the person.

### **Expect Hostility**

- There will be a time when an offender, overwhelmed by troubles, will confront you with hostility. At such times, do not force conversation upon the person and above all do not respond in a hostile, sarcastic, or anxious manner. Do not act shocked. Retain your composure. Ignore the hostility or withdraw for a while, and chances are that person will regain their composure.

### **Don't expect thanks**

- You may not receive thanks or any expression of gratitude from the offender. They may feel it, but may not know how to express gratitude. They may actually feel embarrassed by it. You may never hear "thank you", but in the long run your efforts will be appreciated, probably more than you or anyone else will ever know. Enjoy knowing this person. Don't be inhibited about laughing and having fun with the offender. They need this, and it can be one of the real pleasures of your volunteer work.

### **Don't be misled by flattery**

- Sometimes the supposed gratitude, "you're the only person that will listen to me" is the first step towards getting you to do something that you should not do.

### **Don't make assumptions**

- Just because it may sound reasonable, doesn't mean it is. If you're not sure, "check it out" with your group coordinator or the staff person in charge of supervising your program.

### **Do not get involved in facility/ department internal affairs by becoming an advocate for the offender**

- An offender may want to tell you how the correctional staff is abusing them, or how they are being deprived of some item or privilege. Offenders will frequently voice complaints, either real or imagined to anyone they think might be able to assist them get what they want. There are many internal avenues of relief for an offender who believes they are being abused or mistreated. The offender needs to use the internal avenues at the correctional and bring the problem to light by going through the appropriate channels.
- The best course of action would be to listen to the offender and then remind them of the purpose of your program. Reestablish boundaries and recommend that they consider using the offender grievance system.
- As a volunteer you are there to provide a specific service. It will not be helpful if you become an advocate for the offender and become involved in the day-to-day affairs of the correctional facility. Check with your program leader and the facility chaplain or designated staff member if you are not sure about how to deal with the situation.

### **Confidentiality of information**

- What you talk about with the offender is between you and the offender. You may be able to overlook what the offender has done in his or her past, but others in your group may not. Keeping confidentiality boundaries can be a way of gaining the offender's trust and respect.

- Confidentiality has its limits. If an offender tells you something that leads you to believe the life and or safety of another is in jeopardy, you have an obligation to report it to your facility chaplain, or designated staff member or designated staff member, Deputy Warden and/or the Warden as soon as possible. In a correctional setting, offenders will tell you about pending violence or dangerous activities hoping you will tell the administration. By going through volunteers, family, or others they avoid potential problems of becoming a “snitch” in other offenders’ eyes because they themselves did not tell the administration.

### **SECURITY AND SAFETY ISSUES:**

- Information is power to the offenders. Offenders will try to learn personal things about you starting through very subtle and innocent methods. Some may generally want to know you as a person, but others are seeking information and looking for an angle to exploit or manipulate you or your family, or even threaten you if you don’t do what they want.
- Con games start out very subtle and innocent. They just want someone to write to when they are feeling down. The letters or cards will be innocent at first, asking for nothing. Then one day they may ask you to buy them something simple like maybe some greeting cards so they can write you. If you give in to their requests, they have you. The requests will get bigger and will eventually become demands. When you try to back out they will threaten to inform on you and tell you how much trouble you’re going to be in.
- The best thing you can do is not to give personal information to them. This applies to both working with the offender in incarcerated and after release.

**Do not bring in anything to the facility that has not been approved.**

**Do not bring in weapons (guns, ammo, knives, etc.). Bringing any contraband into a prison facility is a felony.**

**Do not pass along, notes, letters, conversations, etc. for offenders.**

**Don’t take anything out or bring in anything for offenders.**

- There are rules, procedures and processes for everything. Offenders know them better than most staff. If they are asking you to circumvent the system, it probably means they are up to something and you had better beware.

**The safety zone—more do’s and don’ts**

- Respect these safeguards and the likelihood of problems will be minimal.
  - Do not provide the offender with your home address or phone number.
  - Do not advise an offender of your place of work, address, or phone number.
  - Do not give names or addresses of family or friends.
  - Do not discuss personal or family life or problems with the offender.
- The offender should know as little about you as possible. This personal information is not needed to fulfill the mission of your program. You are not supposed to be “On call” to the offender. If they don’t know where you live or work they can’t seek you out.

### **What to do if the offender gets your personal information**

- Reaffirm your boundaries.
- Don't accept collect calls from within the correctional. If you get them, note the date and time you received the call, then call the correctional. NMCD can block the phone calls.
- If the offender does call, refuse the call or hang up during the recorded warning.
- Be firm in your conviction to follow the correctional rules governing volunteer conduct.
- Advise your program leader and the facility chaplain, or designated staff member.
- You cannot be accused of any wrongdoing if everything you do is in the open.

### **Report on others that break the rules**

- If a member of your volunteer team violates the volunteer program rules, the two of you should report it to your team leader, who will then work with the facility chaplain, or designated staff member, Deputy Warden and Coordinator of Volunteer and Faith-based Services to take whatever remedial action is necessary.
- Volunteers who do not follow the rules discredit the program. They could also be placing themselves in a situation where they may actually be harming themselves and the offenders they thought they were trying to help.
- Volunteers understand that if they are arrested for or convicted of any offense they must provide written notice no later than seventy-two (72) hours after the arrest or conviction to the Deputy Warden of the facility they primarily volunteer at. This written notice would constitute grounds for disqualification as a volunteer.
- Since this is a voluntary position, either NMCD or the volunteer, may discontinue this relationship at any time, for any reason, or for no reason at all as either party sees fit or deems necessary.

**Thank you for your service to the men and women of the New Mexico Corrections Department.**

**No one is more cherished in this world than someone who lightens the burden of another. Thank you.**

**Author Unknown**