



Our mission: “create safer communities by providing ex-offenders the opportunity to transform their lives through mentoring, resources, and community partnerships.”

Volunteer Mentor Handbook

TABLE OF CONTENT

Page 1: CMNRP Fact Sheet
Page 2: Who is a Volunteer Mentor?
Page 3: Characteristics of a Volunteer Mentor
Page 4: Volunteer Mentor Position
Page 5: Volunteer Mentor Rules & Guidelines
Page 6: Mentoring Timeline/Activities
Page 7: Mentor Training Session Agenda
Page 8: Volunteer Code of Ethics

Preface

As an interested volunteer mentor, this handbook will give you all the information that will help you decide if being a mentor to an ex-offender is right for you. It is important to understand what are the characteristics of a volunteer mentor and the time commitment. Not all of those who are reentering society after incarceration are willing to change. Those who are and have a desire to reshape their lives have a very hard time adjusting and being accepted in society. As a mentor you can play an important roll in helping in their transition to become a good and productive citizen.

Thank you for your interest.

Korey Sufka, Mentor Program Coordinator

Central MN Re-Entry Project Fact Sheet

CMNRP is a Minnesota 501(c) (3) no-profit organization building positive and constructive relationships between inmates, ex-offenders and the community. Through innovative programming, CMNRP helps ex-offenders reshape their lives, reach their goals, and make successful transition from prison into community life. Public education initiatives and partnerships with community groups help shape public opinion and create a climate where inmates and ex-offenders are empowered to change and grow.

Mission & Vision

CMNRP partners with inmates, volunteers and communities to build successful lives and stronger communities through programs that:

- Are person-centered and responsive to the needs of the individual.
- Promote inner growth and change through caring one-to-one relationships and group experiences
- Add to inmates competencies and skills to enable them to live independent, positive, and self-sufficient lives
- Educate the public about ex-offenders, counter negative stereotypes, and share successes
- Partner with communities to reintegrate inmates, heal family relationships and communities in a spirit of restorative justice
- Partner with government, other agencies, and community groups to maximize resources and opportunities for ex-offenders building new lives
- Are relevant to community needs and worthy of community support

PROGRAMS

MENTORSHIP matches trained volunteers with motivated individuals to provide friendship and mentoring. By offering visits and friendship, volunteers help these individuals feel cared about, develop trust, and gain a new outlook.

RE-ENTRY provides referral services that help individuals plan for their release and offers much-needed assistance in searching for jobs, housing, clothing, family services, etc.

The Need for CMNRP Programs

The fact that about 40% of Minnesota's inmates that are released return to prison within a year indicates that incarceration alone is not adequate. CMNRP programs are based on three principles: (1) People can and do change, (2) spending time with caring and positive people promotes change, and (3) connection to community deters crime. Each success means that a former criminal on the streets has been replaced with a positive community

member who's working, drug-free, and involved in family and community activities.

1

WHO IS A VOLUNTEER MENTOR?

A mentor is an individual who:

- **Is 21 years or older**
- **Chooses to undertake a service of activity: someone who is not coerced or compelled to do this activity**
- **Is not a paid employee of the agency or faith group they represent**
- **Is trained, supported and supervised by the collaborating community agency**
- **Will be treated with respect by program staff, other volunteers, and ex-offenders**
- **Understands his/her role is not to counsel but to befriend; to "walk with"**
- **Serves as a bridge back to community and is a role Model**
- **Is at least two years off paper if he/she is an ex-offender**
- **If chemically dependent, has two years of sobriety**
- **Shares a faith journey appropriately**
- **Assists ex-offenders in finding community faith resources that fit the individuals needs and beliefs**

Characteristics of a Volunteer Mentor

A Well-Balanced Temperament

If you have too many problems yourself, you may have trouble helping others. Don't add to the anxiety of the mentee/friend by working out your own problems through them.

Dependability

If you have taken on a particular commitment, follow through. Remember that your friend has been let down too many times already.

Trust

This is a sensitive and important issue to remember when relating to your friend. Your effectiveness depends upon an honest relationship. Do all you can within the boundaries of the mentor program to build a trusting relationship with your friend.

Perseverance

If your meetings are not going too well, don't quit. It sometimes takes a while for trusting relationships to form. If difficulties arise don't be afraid to ask for help.

Understanding

Try to be generally understanding, but don't be naive. Appreciate a problem but don't make it your own. This process is about empowerment of the individual, not dependency.

Communication

Listen, share, laugh, talk, and act as you would with a friend. If you have difficulties relating to your friend or if communication problems arise, please consult your Mentor Program Coordinator.

VOLUNTEER MENTOR POSITION

Purpose of Position: to provide a caring, supportive, and competent mentoring relationship to ex-offenders as they make the transition from jail/prison to the community.

Responsibilities:

1. Participate in a training and orientation session
2. Be a partner in developing an honest, accepting and respectful relationship
3. Be a positive link to the community
4. Adhere to the policies and regulations of CMNRP, County Corrections and the Department of Corrections
5. Report to CMNRP staff or mentor contact person as appropriate, especially any concerns regarding interactions with your friend
6. Participate in reporting and evaluation procedures as requested by CMNRP or correction facility
7. Attend community support meeting with your friend when possible
8. Provide transportation to key appointments for your friend in the community whenever possible
9. Be prepared to be an advocate for your friend when he/she is interacting with agency staff in regards to medical., housing, economic assistance or other crucial resource appointments
10. Help your friend to make connections with faith community for support, spiritual care and community connections when appropriate

Qualifications:

1. Able to maintain healthy boundaries in relationships
2. Able to hear others without telling them what's best for them and without making decisions for them
3. Able to maintain confidentiality
4. Reliable in keeping appointments and participating with your friend during the specific period of transition for them from incarceration to the community and or if they have already been released and live within the community.
5. Must be 21 years or older and have access to reliable transportation
6. Must have a valid MN picture ID or current drivers license
7. If an ex-offender, must be two years off paper
8. If chemically dependent, must be sober for at least 2 years
9. Be able to provide CMNRP with personal and professional references

Time Requirement:

1. Volunteer mentor will visit with their assigned mentee 2 to 3 times per month, whether they are currently incarcerated or if they have been released and are now living within the community.
2. Volunteer can write or send letters of encouragement in between visits to their mentee.
3. Each visit with the mentee should last between 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Rules and Guidelines for Volunteer Mentor

CMNRP volunteers will not give or lend money to their CMNRP friends, either/after in prison and once the inmate is released . . . It will destroy the friendship. Numerous resources are available to the inmate upon release, including CMNRP Re-Entry program. Lending money sets up inequalities in the relationship, or may cause the friend to feel discomfort if he/she can't pay back the debt. CMNRP can refer to agencies that can provide resources such as housing, job assistance, food and transportation.

CMNRP volunteers will not take any other visitors to the prison to see their friend including family members of either party.

The CMNRP assignment is made between the volunteer and the mentee. The volunteer is trained in the subtleties of the relationship. The volunteer has been placed on the visitors list by the state correction facility/county jail facility as a representative of CMNRP. Other visitors would disrupt this representation. In addition, others can change the dynamics of the one-to-one friendship and dilute the relationship.

CMNRP volunteers will not in any way try to affect the decisions and policies of corrections agencies or personnel regarding such issues including release date, institutional transfer, and disciplinary actions.

Your friend may request that you write letters or make calls to his/her caseworker, county attorney, or others. Regardless of the request, your role is that of supportive person from the community, not as the mentee's advocate in the criminal justice system. If your friend asks for advocacy, please call the CMNRP office for help.

CMNRP volunteers may not be present at any hearing involving the inmate.

Even if your intent is to attend a hearing only to provide moral support, you cannot control how others may perceive your presence. You could easily be "put on the spot" by a hearing officer or the media. Again, as a friend, you are not in a position to participate in the criminal justice system's decision-making process.

Don't say "yes" to the request of your friend without checking first with the CMNRP Mentor Program Coordinator.

If your friend asks for something, no matter how seemingly minor, tell him/her you need to check with the CMNRP office first. You'll need to consider whether it's against corrections rules or policies, how this might affect the friendship, or the precedent that a decision may set. It's easier to say "no" first, then later change the response to, "Yes".

If the friendship doesn't work and you or your friend wishes to terminate it, contact the CMNRP office first.

This is especially important while your friend is still at the institution. CMNRP staff will work with you both to provide a respectful closure to your friendship.

These guidelines help keep the relationship positive and based upon years of experience by AMICUS, www.amicususa.org

MENTORING TIMELINE/ACTIVITIES

Through community volunteers, the project provides comprehensive transition services to male and female inmates prior to release and continuing up to post-release, a total commitment of one year.

Through authentic relationships between CMNRP program staff and volunteer mentors, participants are motivated and prepared to make healthier life choices.

Pre-release: Staff and volunteer meet frequently (twice a month) with participating mentees in the institution to build trusting relationships.

- Participant enjoys regular one-to-one visits with assigned mentor
- Participant is motivated and prepared to make a successful transition
- Participant has a plan to address key reentry issues (job, housing, support) with the help of CMNRP
- Participant has a plan for family and or community healing

Post-release: Participants attend community support groups and are encouraged to give back to the community through participation in faith-based organizations and other community initiatives.

- Participants has improved confidence and self-image
- Participants follows transition plan and makes positive choices
- Participants continues to meet and spend time with mentor once released
- Participants finds ways to heal old wounds in family and give back to community

Mentor commits to visiting friend 2-4 times in the institution during the pre-release period.

Mentor and friend spend time together getting to know the resources and people that will assist in successful transition into the community. Mentor and friend work out their own plan for staying in touch. A total of one-year commitment is expected from the volunteer from the time they first meet their friend.

Mentor communicates with CMNRP support person as necessary for support, guidance, and problem solving/referral sources in post release period.

Mentor Training

Each volunteer is required to attend three sessions (total of nine hours) of extensive training by professional instructors that provide the necessary tools to successfully assist the ex-offender in his/hers transition.

Mentor Training Agenda

Topics:

- **Registration**
- **Introduction to Training**
- **Circle of Introduction**
- **Boundaries**
- **Volunteer Application Process**
- **Panel of Ex-Offenders**
- BREAK**
- **Building blocks of Support**
- **Spirituality/Connections**
- **Resources (IDs, employment, housing, transportation)**
- **Interview Matching, Visiting Process**
- **Evaluation**
- **Certificate/Celebration**

VOLUNTEER CODE OF ETHICS

CMNRP requires the highest standard of conduct from staff and volunteers. We have built a reputation of dependability with Minnesota Department of Corrections and local county corrections staff, who allow us a great deal of access to individuals inside their institutions. Every volunteer is a representative of CMNRP and is responsible for upholding that reputation. As a volunteer, you are required to comply with all rules of the institutions and CMNRP and to carry out your relationships in a mature, responsible manner. Volunteers are encouraged to ask questions of CMNRP to clarify and areas of confusion.

GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER/CORRECTIONS STAFF INTERACTION

As a CMNRP volunteer, you will come into contact with the staff at the institution, primarily correction officers. It is your responsibility to represent CMNRP in a positive manner at all times.

Corrections staff hold a wide variety of viewpoints with regards to the fair treatment of individuals who are in custody and the roles of volunteers from the community. Some correction officers will be friendly and helpful while others will see you as an intrusion or a source of extra paperwork. Some of the staff will treat your mentee with seemingly little or no respect. Regardless of corrections staff's apparent attitude or behavior, CMNRP requires volunteers to treat them with respect and courtesy at all times. For safety and security reasons, it is also imperative that volunteers follow any instructions or commands given by corrections staff immediately and without argument.

If you have questions or concerns about a corrections staff's actions or behavior, please contact a CMNRP staff person.

"Never doubt that
a small group of
thoughtful,
committed citizens
can change the
world; indeed it's
the only thing that
ever has."

-Margaret Mead

Central MN Re-Entry Project
P.O. Box 6064
St. Cloud MN 56302
320-656-9004
www.cmnrp.org

"This project was funded in part by the Initiative Foundation, a
Regional Foundation"