



Our mission is to assist inmates and ex-offenders to build healthier lives and become more responsible citizens

## **Volunteer Mentor Handbook**

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### 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 inmate or 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.

Joe Gibbons Executive Director

## **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 inmates to provide friendship and mentoring. By offering visits and friendship, volunteers help inmates feel cared about, develop trust, and gain a new outlook.

**RE-ENTRY** provides referral services that help inmates 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.

## **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 her/his role is not to counsel but to befriend; to "walk with"**
- **Serves as a bridge back to community and is a role model**
- **Is a 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 inmate/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. Inmates generally have learned to be suspicious of everyone. 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 inmate, 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 Volunteer Coordinator.

# VOLUNTEER MENTOR POSITION

Purpose of Position: to provide a caring, supportive, and competent mentoring relationship to inmates and 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
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. For 3-4 months before friend's release, minimum of 8-10, one to one visits (minimum of two times per month) to institution is recommended
2. For first 72 hours upon release, be willing to assist your friend as needed
3. For 3-4 months after release, meet or have contact with your friend on an average once a week or more as necessary

## **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 Reentry 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 inmate. 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 case-worker, county attorney, or others. Regardless of the request, your role is that of supportive person from the community, not as the inmate'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 Volunteer 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, "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](http://www.amicususa.org)**

## MENTORING TIMELINE/ACTIVITIES

Through community volunteers, the project provides comprehensive transition services to male and female inmates approximately 120 days prior to release and continuing up to 240 days 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 inmates in the institution to build trusting relationships, collect information and prepared individualized transition plan;

- 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)
- 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 4-8 times (twice a month) in the institution during the pre-release period.

Mentor is willing to meet friend at the gate (if necessary) and assist with pre-arranged pieces of the plan for the first 72 hours after release i.e. meeting with parole officer, and accompany to resource appointments as necessary.

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.

CMNRP Form 0010-06 (Revised and used with permission of AMICUS [www.amicususa.org](http://www.amicususa.org))

# **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**

### **Session One:**

#### **Topics:**

- **Registration**
- **Introduction to Training**
- **Paradigms Exercise**
- **Circle of Introduction**
- **Boundaries**
- **Volunteer Application Process**
- **Closing**

### **Session Two:**

#### **Topics:**

- **Registration**
- **Panel of Ex-Offenders**
- **Building blocks of Support**
- **Spirituality/Connections**
- **Closing**

### **Session Three:**

#### **Topics:**

- **Registration and Dinner**
- **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 offenders 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 offenders 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 the inmate 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

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