



# VOLUNTEER TODAY

## DECEMBER 2000

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## A SEASON OF GIVING

Sal Seanez, Assistant Director, Community Corrections and Detention Division

As we enter 2001, International Year of Volunteers, we are ready to face new challenges and implement new ideas. Much of what we have accomplished was possible through the use of volunteers.

Many times, we do not recognize the impact of volunteerism on our daily lives. We find volunteers in all walks of life. If we reflect on volunteerism from a seasonal perspective, we note that it was the efforts of volunteers which helped us maintain the thousands of litter-free miles of state and federal highways during the summer. Here in Washington, DC, each year during the winter, it is volunteers who lend their assistance with four-wheel drive vehicles by providing transportation for hospital staff and stranded motorists on snow-packed streets, roads, and highways. In shopping malls across America, volunteers wrapped thousands of gifts for anxious holiday shoppers.

Volunteers are most often the first to arrive or respond at the scene of a traffic accident and have provided assistance during some of our nation's greatest tragedies.

In the Federal Bureau of Prisons, it is for worthwhile charitable and humanitarian causes that inmates produce crafts, participate in community-based programs, and often gain a new sense of self-esteem and purpose. Likewise, staff in our agency demonstrate care and concern for the communities in which they work and live by mentoring students, facilitating programs for the aged and economically disadvantaged, and providing assistance in many other areas.

As we engage in the global celebration of volunteerism during 2001, let us all remember how much our lives have been enriched by volunteers and by volunteering.

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## **VOLUNTEERS DO JUSTICE**

Alice DavisJohnson, Administrator, Volunteer Management Branch

As an Administrator of volunteer programs in a criminal justice environment, I am constantly reminded and grateful for the diversity and contributions of men and women who have chosen crime prevention and working with offenders as a focal point of their volunteer activity.

It was not until reading an article written by Susan J. Ellis, President of Energize, Inc., a Philadelphia-based training, consulting and publishing firm specializing in volunteerism, that I really paused to take a brief inventory of not just how many ways volunteers impact our work in the Bureau of Prisons but how they also make a significant difference with other law enforcement/public safety areas. Here are a few of the areas which Ms. Ellis chose to highlight:

Citizens police their own communities in "neighborhood watches" for mutual protection, and provide safe houses for children along school routes. Volunteers directly support police departments by handling non-emergency police functions such as supporting juvenile diversion activities, assisting at parades and public ceremonies, and traffic control. They staff police reserve units and auxiliaries; gather and analyze statistics. "Crimesolvers" projects encourage witnesses to provide clues that can lead to the apprehension of criminals. Volunteers also help in searches for missing persons. Finally, citizen review boards monitor police department practices to ensure compliance with legal standards and human rights protections.

In cases where crime could not be prevented, volunteers are on hand to help the courts and the correctional system. They handle a variety of assignments -- serving as court watchers, probation and parole mentors, temporary foster parents, counselors and recreation aides. Teen juries of youthful volunteers help in reaching dispositions for juvenile offenders, while adult volunteers staff arbitration boards. Volunteers assist victims of crime as they go through the legal process and give similar aid to crime witnesses who agree to testify. Finally, the various bar associations -- national, state and local -- consider it a professional obligation to coordinate pro bono legal services to indigent clients.

In so many ways, our agencies and other law enforcement components depend on the contribution of volunteers. An inspiring word, a clear strategy, a candid assessment, an occupational trade have each been contributions by volunteers to offenders which have made a difference in their ability to remain free and productive in society upon release.

While there is a national dollar value placed upon the hourly contribution of volunteers, we

have no statistics or method to accurately assess the true worth of persons who volunteer in our facilities. Your services are invaluable.

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## **VOLUNTEERISM AROUND THE NATION**

### **The Spirit of Christmas**

#### **Federal Correctional Institution (FCI), Marianna, Florida**

On December 18, 2000, in keeping with the spirit of the holidays, FCI Marianna staff and the Affirmative Action Program sponsored a Christmas party for the children of Hope School.

Hope School is an educational facility for physically and mentally challenged children in the Marianna area. Over 100 children from the school participated in the party. In keeping with the commitment of being a good neighbor, FCI Marianna staff decorated the FCI Training Center as the North Pole, Santa's Headquarters. In addition, they prepared and served cookies, punch, and entertained the children and staff of the school.

The activities ranged from the grand entry of Santa and Mrs. Claus, to picture sessions, games, face painting, movies, storytelling, and much more. Each child received a stocking filled with presents appropriate for their age and specialized needs. In addition, teachers who assisted received a hand-made gift and were able to enjoy the activities and refreshments.

In the words of the staff of Hope School, "...This was by far the best Christmas party ever given for the children..." The staff and Affirmative Action Program at FCI Marianna renewed their commitment to continue to support and be involved with the children of Hope School.

### **Volunteerism In Action:**

#### **FCC Coleman Satellite Camp Guide Dogs Program**

Most often when we think of volunteers, images are conjured of people from the community volunteering their time and services to those less fortunate or incarcerated. Inmates and staff of the Federal Correctional Complex (FCC) Coleman, Florida are reversing these images through their voluntary efforts to train guide dogs for the blind.

The program "Inmates Practicing Animal Care and Training" (I.M.P.A.C.T) started in January 1999, and is a joint project between the Bureau of Prisons and Southeastern Guide Dogs Incorporated. The purpose of the program is to assist Southeastern Guide Dogs Incorporated with the socialization and obedience training of guide dog puppies while providing training and certification to female inmates. Their work with these dogs will enable them to seek employment in the animal care field upon release from prison.

Camp inmates are carefully selected for this program. Participants must meet certain criteria, some of which are:

Release date within 12-24 months;  
Financial Responsibility Plan complete or participating;  
Clear conduct for the past three years with good institutional adjustment;  
GED completion; and  
No history of sexual assault/abuse, violence charges or escape attempts.

Selections for the program are made by the Warden and Camp Administrator.

After the final selection, inmates are matched with an eight to ten week-old puppy for which they are responsible. Initial training is provided to the inmates by Southeastern Guide Dogs Incorporated. Guide dog staff visit the complex three times per week to train inmates and staff in animal care. Using the skills they have learned, inmates are expected to conduct dog obedience training. The guide dogs must also learn "intelligent disobedience", which means that guide dogs must know how to refuse a command that puts the blind master and dog in danger.

Inmates are also instructed in a curriculum based training program in which they learn Hill's Pet Nutrition and first aid. With this training, inmates are eligible to pursue a certificate in veterinary assistance.

Inmates find this program to be very rewarding as they feel they are given the opportunity to give something positive back to the community and society while learning a trade and improving their social skills. Guide dogs are the eyes and ears of blind people. With the aid of a guide dog, blind people are able to shop, make their way to work, and do many of the things a person with vision can do.

One of the many benefits of I.M.P.A.C.T is that inmates are able to meet the blind person who will receive the guide dog they have helped to train. Blind citizens are not the only ones who are receiving the benefits of these dogs. Guide dogs, handlers and staff escorts often make routine visits to local nursing homes where the dogs are able to provide emotional therapy for elderly and disabled citizens. The dogs also make visits to local shopping malls and other populated areas where they become acclimated to different sights and sounds. To date, the program has been highly successful.

**Mock Job Fairs**  
**Inmate Job Placement Branch**  
**Federal Bureau of Prisons Central Office, Washington, DC**

Many federal prisons participate in a program which provides an individual, meaningful experience for inmates in job interview skills and completing job applications. Employers who volunteer to participate in these mock job fairs at federal prisons provide an opportunity to smooth the transition between incarceration and life "outside" for thousands of offenders.

Each job fair consists of three elements: an introduction to the facility, a structured interview schedule, and the opportunity to critique each interview. These steps provide each prospective employer with an understanding of the process.

Representatives from state, federal and local agencies along with community colleges and universities, volunteer to participate and provide information about their services, job training, and related educational opportunities.

Workshops are also scheduled to address small business opportunities, how to access community services, family reintegration, and other post release issues.

The Inmate Placement Branch hopes to conduct research in the future to evaluate the impact of "mock" job fairs on lowering recidivism. If a direct correlation can be determined, employment intervention efforts will translate into lower incarceration costs and lower crime rates.

Participating in mock job fairs or hiring an ex-offender provides a positive community service, reduces the strain on public resources, and is a sound financial decision.