



VOLUNTEER TODAY

SEPTEMBER 2000

[Volunteering Is Priceless](#)

[Volunteerism: A Global Celebration](#)

[Staff and Inmates Volunteer Around the Nation - Female Offenders are Daily Points of Light: Federal Prison Camp - Bryan, Texas](#)

[Federal Medical Center Carswell - Ft. Worth, Texas](#)

[Staff Take Affirmative Action](#)

[Brooklyn Hosts Youth Empowerment Conference](#)

VOLUNTEERING IS PRICELESS

Sal Seanez, Assistant Director, Community Corrections and Detention Division

Recently, a publication produced by the Independent Sector featured some of the best reasons to volunteer. Among them were:

Volunteering makes you feel needed.

Volunteering can lead to learning new skills.

Volunteering helps you meet new people and breaks down barriers of misunderstanding, mistrust and fear.

Volunteers were asked a series of questions about the reasons they volunteered. The findings confirm what is already well known: volunteering provides a variety of personal benefits and satisfaction, in addition to the benefits received by the non-profit organizations and society as a whole. The most important reasons cited were:

Feeling compassion for those in need (86%);

Having an interest in the activity or work (72%);

Gaining a new perspective on things (70%); and

Contributing to a cause or activity that is important to people the volunteer respects (63%).

As a component of the Department of Justice (DOJ) which places a strong emphasis on volunteering, the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) recognizes the significance of volunteerism in the communities in which our institutions and offices are located. It is the policy of the BOP to encourage and support employee volunteerism, while recognizing that working for the BOP is itself one of the highest forms of public service. We encourage BOP employees to further strive to strengthen their communities by supporting the Attorney General's vision of having all DOJ employees set a personal goal of performing at least 50 hours per year of pro bono legal and volunteer service.

The BOP also encourages inmates to volunteer in community service projects. These projects give inmates an opportunity to provide service and valuable skills to non-profit charitable organizations, while at the same time helping them to prepare for successful reentry to society.

BOP Institution Volunteer Coordinators and Regional Volunteer Administrators are entrusted with promoting staff and inmate volunteer programs. Our staff and inmates have found that volunteer service, along with an enthusiastic spirit, is a priceless gift.

VOLUNTEERISM: A GLOBAL CELEBRATION

Alice DavisJohnson, Assistant Administrator, Community Corrections and Volunteer Management Branch

During the next four months, several national and international events will call attention to the importance of sharing time and resources with worthwhile causes.

The Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) is the annual fund- raising drive conducted by federal employees in their workplace each fall. Federal employees and military personnel raise millions of dollars through the CFC to benefit thousands of non- profit charities. Public servants not only contribute to the campaign, but also assume leadership roles to ensure its success. In 1999, \$218 million was collected.

In addition to CFC, the fourth Saturday in October marks the nation's largest day of helping others. On that day, millions of Americans will reach out to help others by observing the 10th Annual Make A Difference Day. In the words of Entertainer Naomi Judd, "Make a Difference Day ...is a national pulling together, something for the entire country to celebrate, something to help us understand our humanness and how connected we actually are." In the past, Make A Difference Day has offered our staff an opportunity to channel energies into a single cause to represent our concern and willingness to reach out to the community at large around us.

The millennium year will end by ushering in 2001 as "The International Year of the Volunteer (IYV 2001)." Why IYV 2001? A first objective of IYV 2001 is to increase recognition of the

efforts of individuals and groups engaged in volunteering. The second is to facilitate volunteerism by encouraging volunteer service, and addressing obstacles which inhibit volunteer service. The third is to enhance networking whereby volunteer achievements can be disseminated and shared. The final objective is to increase requests for the deployment of volunteers and offers of volunteer service from even more individuals.

The premise underlying the designation of an IYV by the United Nations General Assembly is to establish a favorable environment for the growth and more strategic use of volunteer contributions.

Each of the efforts mentioned demonstrates the value and appreciation of volunteers throughout the world.

STAFF AND INMATES VOLUNTEER AROUND THE NATION

Female Offenders Are Daily Points of Light

Federal Prison Camp - Bryan, Texas

When Janie M. Velasquez, Director of Volunteer Services, and Leon Bawcom, Executive Director of the Mental Health and Mental Retardation Authority (MHMRA) of Brazos Valley, conceived the idea of developing an inmate volunteer program, they saw many possibilities for their agency, their clients, and the inmates. Their plan involved utilizing minimum security female prisoners housed at the Federal Prison Camp (FPC) in Bryan, Texas. Detailed responses to potential problems arising from having the inmates work with MHMRA clients had to be in place before the program could be presented to prison officials.

Ms. Velasquez, Mr. Bawcom, and the rest of the staff at the MHMRA did their homework. In May, 1990, the first six inmates arrived to begin work at MHMRA.

The volunteers from FPC Bryan serve in a variety of MHMRA programs. They assist with typing, transcribing, accounting, filing, data input, telephone crisis hotlines, switchboard operation, publication and design, producing circulars, taking inventory, and directing clients to their appointments.

This one-of-a-kind Inmate Volunteer Program is a vocational training program which operates at virtually no cost to the taxpayer. The Inmate Volunteer Program has yielded the following benefits for the inmates:

Offers an opportunity to utilize existing skills and gain new ones;

- Promotes a high degree of motivation;
- Fosters an eagerness and willingness to learn;
- Provides for interaction with society in a work environment which can change misconceptions about inmates;
- Offers an opportunity to be productive members of the community; and
- Provides beneficial experience for seeking employment after release.

This program provides MHMRA with a group of skilled, full-time volunteers whose presence for extended periods of time is virtually assured. This alleviates a key issue with most volunteer programs - securing and keeping good volunteers. The program also results in tremendous cost savings for the community. Thus far, it has provided services in excess of \$300,000 per year.

For the past 10 years, a total of 295 full-time inmate volunteers have contributed 355,752 hours of service. This has resulted in more than \$3 million in budgetary savings for MHMRA. These substantial savings to the community and state allow the agency to provide additional services to its clients without incurring additional costs. The inmate volunteers work alongside full-time paid staff, creating a "win-win" situation for all concerned.

In the past 10 years, participation has increased from six inmate volunteers to as many as 38 at a time. Goals for the future include continuing to expand and exploring further possibilities for the program.

Federal Medical Center Carswell

The Sharing Hope About Recovery Experiences (SHARE) Program is a community outreach program based at the Federal Medical Center (FMC) Carswell in Fort Worth, Texas. Like FPC Bryan, the facility houses female offenders. Since the program's inception in the summer of 1996, the inmate presenters have spoken to more than 2,000 at-risk adolescent girls and women in the local community, usually in groups of 20 or fewer.

The offenders in the SHARE Program share information about the circumstances and behavior of women who are serving time in federal prison. The intention of the SHARE Program is not to scare the audience into avoiding prison, but to educate them about the choices that girls and women make that can place them in compromising situations.

Preventive and rehabilitative community programs designed specifically for at-risk females are rare. The SHARE Program, one of the few "female only" programs in the community, provides a unique service. The inmate presenters express themselves in an honest and compelling fashion, often eliciting strong emotional responses from audience members. When the inmates reveal their histories of childhood chaos, abuse, neglect, and other traumatic events and the subsequent choices they made, the at-risk audience members often admit that they are

experiencing similar problems in their own lives.

When the program first began in December of 1996, six inmate presenters were selected. The original group expanded to 12 presenters by the fall of 1997. In 1999, there were 15. The inmate population is now aware of the program's success, and many inmates have applied to become presenters. The number of community agencies involved in the program continues to grow as word about the inmates' abilities to reach difficult teens and women spreads.

Initially, all programs were conducted on-site at FMC Carswell. In late 1997, eligible inmate presenters were allowed to go into the community. The first group to receive an on-site presentation, teens from the Texas Youth Commission's Willoughby House, a halfway house for delinquent girls, was an enthusiastic audience. They cried for the presenters' struggles and for themselves, many of whom are from deeply troubled families.

Since the first presentation, the SHARE presenters consistently receive similar feedback from girls in dropout prevention programs, alternative schools, residential treatment facilities, the juvenile detention center, and battered women's shelters.

Both the SHARE Program at FMC Carswell and the Inmate Volunteer Program at FPC Bryan have been honored with the Daily Point of Light Award. This award recognizes those who have made a commitment to help meet critical needs in their communities.

Staff Take Affirmative Action

Twenty-one staff members of the Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury, Connecticut, have recently been certified as school mentors by the Danbury School District and Business Collaborative. The Adopt-A-School Program was initiated as an educational initiative of the institution's Affirmative Action Committee.

All mentors received specialized training that prepared them to work individually with students at all grade levels. As mentors, staff have committed to meet weekly with students and assist with homework, tutoring in all subject areas, or simply listen when students desire to share problems, goals, or dreams.

The program has been quite successful and students look forward to the weekly sessions. School reports indicate that as a result of this positive exchange, students' performance and motivation level have improved.

MDC Brooklyn Hosts Youth Empowerment Conference

On August 5, 2000, the Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC) Brooklyn sponsored a Youth Empowerment Conference. The conference, hosted by Public School 172, an institution Partner in Education, brought together youth from various sections of Metropolitan New York City. Institution staff generously provided assistance with registration, served as group monitors and facilitators, and participated in the workshops as instructors.

Conference sessions covered such topics as gang affiliation/prevention, cultural diversity, sexuality, healthy and abusive relationships, leadership skills and other global issues concerning youth. Staff were also joined by Carmen Vaz, an institution volunteer from the Brooklyn AIDS Task Force. Ms. Vaz provided helpful information to the participants. The conference was ruled a tremendous success, and the institution plans to continue to provide this type of positive guidance to the youth of surrounding communities.