

VOLUNTEERS ARE OUR PARTNERS

As partners we work together to reach our common goals – safe, secure facilities and opportunities for offender rehabilitation.

Volunteerism in the 21st Century

by Leo Brown, Agency Chaplain & Volunteer Coordinator

Like a lot of things in work and society, volunteerism has changed a great deal over the last 50 years. Life is busier, people are delaying retirement (a time when historically many become more involved in volunteer work) and there are more things to do with your free time. In order to best utilize and retain volunteers, volunteer administrators are finding the following principles important:

Understand Your Volunteers

What motivates them? What are their interests or passions? If you can identify what motivates your volunteers you can begin to connect it to

needs have at your facility. By helping them connect a volunteer opportunity with their interest or passion, it helps them think outside the box and consider other ways they can make a difference.

Treat Volunteers as Partners

Oklahoma Department of Corrections operating procedures state that our agency's relationship with volunteers is to be a "positive partnership." In a partnership, each side understands the roles and contributions each partner makes. Volunteers are not staff, they have a different role, different motivation and different level of training. Volunteers are our

partners and as partners we work together to reach common goals—safe, secure facilities and opportunities for offender rehabilitation.

Recognize Your Volunteers

Volunteer recognition is important to maintaining a volunteer's interest and commitment to service. Most volunteers want to know that the service they are providing is making a difference. By recognizing them—whether it is in the form of an annual banquet, a thank you card or just a pat on the back – we let them know that they are making a difference.

Utilize Technology Whenever Possible

Recently, a new volunteer management software system was implemented by the Oklahoma Department of Corrections (ODOC) that provides technological advantages, such as:

- An online application process that shortens the time it takes to process applications.
- Email blasts can be sent to groups of volunteers with important information, such as, when a facility goes on lockdown and volunteer activities are canceled.
- Statewide posting of volunteer needs and opportunities to serve with a search engine so volunteers, or prospective volunteers, can search for opportunities by distance, type of service or facility.
- Greatly enhanced reporting and tracking capabilities so we can better document the positive impact made by volunteers and their programs.

Volunteer Search/Sign In and Donation Needs

Volunteerism with our agency is always connected to the service the volunteer provides. By clicking on the "Volunteer Opportunities" link below, you can search for places to serve throughout our agency. When you find an activity you would like take part in, click the sign-up button.

If you are already a volunteer registered in this system, you will be asked to sign in and will be contacted by email regarding the volunteer opportunity. If you have not yet registered, you will be able to do so. After you have registered, you will be contacted by email regarding the next steps. All volunteers must be approved and complete volunteer training before they can begin to serve.

If you are a registered volunteer and would like to access your account to update information, submit a survey or contact us, click below to sign in.

[Sign In](#)

Volunteer Opportunities

If you are interested in making a donation to support volunteer programs or faith-based activities within the ODOC, please click the "Donation Needs" link below. You will see a list of needs throughout the agency.

Donation Needs

SOME MIGHT ASK "WHY BECOME A VOLUNTEER?" AND "WHAT ARE THE PERSONAL REWARDS FOR BEING A VOLUNTEER?"

Make a Difference in the Community

Volunteers can assist in readying incarcerated individuals to return to the community and become productive citizens.

Feel a Sense of Purpose

New Experiences & Opportunities

Personal Satisfaction

Become a positive influence in the life of another and experience the reward of giving back!

Helping Someone Who Needs Help

Opportunity to Practice or Sharpen Skills, & to Obtain Noteworthy Experience

Training & Experience

Gain direct training and experience working with a diverse offender population. Reference letters, certificates and/or other forms of recognition can be provided to document experience, service, training and duties.

Volunteering in the incarceration field can have many positive and personal rewards.



Volunteer of the Year

Virginia Lee Brendle

by Leo Brown, Agency Chaplain & Volunteer Coordinator

Virginia Brendle first became involved in prison ministry in 2000 when she became a volunteer at Central Oklahoma Correctional Facility (COCF), serving as a volunteer chaplain. When COCF became Mabel Bassett Correctional Center (MBCC), she continued her service and over the years expanded into other areas. Virginia now serves as the volunteer program leader for G.I.F.T.S. (Giving Incarcerated Females Truth and Support) which is a faith-based mentoring program for female offenders. She also provides Seventh Day Adventist religious services, and she has been a member of the MBCC Citizens Advisory Board since 2009.

Under Virginia's leadership GIFTS, with the help of Memorial Road Church of Christ and approximately 40 other organizations, began distributing holiday packages to offenders. She coordinates the annual distribution consisting of full-sized hygiene products. Each year they distribute approximately 1,200 packages to the offender population.

Virginia played a vital role in the new chapel building project at MBCC. She was the first volunteer to become involved in the project and took a leadership role – coordinating fundraising events, meeting with potential donors, reaching out to community leaders, raising awareness and support for the project. When time came for the “barn raising” event - a two to three week intense effort in which volunteers from all over the country come and complete the initial phase of construction –Virginia coordinated the provision of meals and housing for more than 100 volunteers.

Virginia is a businesswoman who owns and manages a furniture store in Shawnee, Oklahoma. She earned a degree in social work and served as a supervisor for the Oklahoma Department of Human Services for four years. Over 30 years ago her husband encouraged her to help him open their own business and they worked side by side until he passed away. She now continues to run the business herself and still finds time to volunteer a great deal of her time to her church, her community and to MBCC. Virginia brings joy, commitment and compassion to everything she does.



Volunteer Organization of the Year

Battle Buddies

by Leo Brown, Agency Chaplain & Volunteer Coordinator

Over 1,200 veterans are incarcerated in ODOC. Battle Buddies, a program envisioned by Oklahoma's Veterans Affairs Secretary, General Rita Aragon in 2012, is a volunteer-led organization open to all American Veterans. Their purpose is to establish a relationship with offenders that are approximately one year from discharge or parole consideration. They visit facilities across the state helping offenders with housing offers, employment opportunities, filing or refiling for benefits, mentoring and transportation.

One component of the program is to connect incarcerated veterans with veterans in the community to provide mentorship upon their release. More than 160 veterans have signed up to serve as mentors. A small group, led by Ron Pandos, J. Pandos and Gary Hendrick, go into facilities to establish the program and work with veterans prior to release. Their message, one initially voiced by General Aragon, is that *"Whatever got you into this place does not negate the service you rendered, offering up your own life to defend freedom for the rest of us."* The program helps restore a sense of pride, self-worth and responsibility in the incarcerated veterans. To date more over 50 program participants have been released.

Battle Buddies began as a pilot program at James Crabtree Correctional Center, which nominated them for Volunteer Organization of the Year. The program has now spread to many facilities throughout the agency.