

COMMUNITY CHAPLAINCY

Community Chaplaincy has worked successfully in Canada for more than a quarter of a Century, and is now being developed in Britain, with support from Churches' Criminal Justice Forum, Prison Chaplaincy, and the Salvation Army.

Local Community Chaplaincy projects are essentially partnerships between local communities, prisons and faith groups. Volunteers are mainly people of faith, recruited to work under the direction of a professional co-ordinator, or Community Chaplain, supporting prisoners in re-settling upon release. Already, it is being demonstrated that this can reduce re-offending and the fear of crime.

What?

The commitment of the volunteer begins, ideally, before the prisoner is released. The two meet to begin to establish a working relationship, and identify issues of importance. A care plan can then be produced, with other relevant agencies, identifying how best the prisoner's needs can be met. With the guidance of the Community Chaplain the volunteer will, if necessary, link the prisoner with specialist local agencies dealing with issues such as accommodation, employment and training, and substance misuse. After release, the volunteer will strive to be both mentor and friend, helping the prisoner to put down roots and establish a climate in which the risk of re-offending is reduced.

Community Chaplaincy is not an evangelistic outreach. Projects will try to support those who are on a faith journey, and link the person with a supportive church or faith community if requested, but volunteers must not actively seek to convert people to their faith.

Who?

Volunteers will not need to have relevant experience; training is provided. They will need to be people of good standing, who are willing to accept direction from the local co-ordinator and observe agreed boundaries. They must be prepared to respond in a caring and positive way to people, who because of their life experiences, may be both difficult and demanding. The volunteer must be able to accept being let down, without feeling a personal sense of failure or rejection.

How?

Eventually it is hoped that there will be a national network of Community Chaplaincy projects, which, together, will be able to offer support to a released prisoner going to any part of the country. At the time of writing there are twelve local projects which are operational, or in the final stages of development. Others are planned. It is hoped that each will work to an agreed set of core values, but each will also have its own characteristics and identity. Some will also develop responses to local situations like drop-in centres or accommodation.

Plans are being made for a national "umbrella" association which would help create a national identity, be a forum for sharing good practice, and support the development of new projects. Until that is operational it would be advisable to contact your local prison chaplain who will be able to provide details of any local community chaplaincy project operating in the area. Contact the Chaplain's Office at your local prison.

Details of local prisons can be found via the Prison Service website: www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk

QUICK GUIDE

- partnerships between local communities, prisons and faith groups
- mentoring and befriending
- helping ex-prisoner to put down roots and reduce risk of re-offending
- training provided
- under direction of local co-ordinator

NOT FOR YOU?

Try looking at:

- » Youth Justice (page 6)
- » Restorative Justice (page 8)
- » Probation (page 12)
- » Circles of Support and Accountability (page 20)