

PRISON VISITORS' CENTRES

Many prisons now have a Visitors' Centre just outside the prison. Some are run by the Prison Service, others by independent charities. At some, the Centre may be little more than a room with a drink and snack vending machine and lockers for leaving items during the visit. Others are staffed by volunteers and/or paid workers, and offer families a range of services. Visitors' Centres aim to provide a welcoming environment where visitors are treated with dignity and respect, and can obtain information, support and advice.

QUICK GUIDE

- give advice and information to visitors
- practical help with running the centre, e.g. making sandwiches and drinks
- regular, committed involvement
- times vary, but mostly daytime and may include weekends

What?

It may be that, after training, you could give advice and information to visitors regarding their entitlement to financial help for visiting, or on what they can or cannot take into a visit. You might help run the coffee bar, make sandwiches, and drinks. You might feel able to help with some of the clerical and administrative work and answer telephone queries. Alternatively you might do the most important job of all: simply be available as a friendly welcoming presence, and a reassuring smile to people feeling nervous and unsure on a first visit to a prison.

NOT FOR YOU?

Try looking at:

- » Prison Visiting (page 13)
- » Prison Chaplaincy (page 16)
- » Prisons Week (page 18)

Who?

You will need to commit to regular involvement, as it is important that centres are adequately staffed at all times when visiting is taking place. Most prisons have social visits on weekday afternoons and all day at weekends.

How?

See below

VISITS PLAY PROJECTS

Many children visit a parent in prison. It is important to provide supervision and entertainment for them to allow their parents time to talk and to make the experience as positive as possible. Play workers need to be available for visits sessions.

QUICK GUIDE

- provide supervision and entertainment for visiting children of prisoners
- experience of working with children helpful
- regular time committment

What?

Play projects provide a variety of opportunities for children to have fun and be creative. These include face painting and craft activities, slides and climbing frames, puzzles, books and games. Many children who make use of the play areas will have experienced a great deal of emotional upset and instability in their lives and may exhibit challenging behaviour.

Who?

Anyone with experience of working with children either in an educational setting or in clubs or societies and able to give time on a regular basis.

How?

Contact your nearest prison (details from www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk) and ask to speak to the Manager of the Visitors' Centre or the Voluntary Sector Co-ordinator. pact (Prison Advice and Care Trust) runs Visitors' Centres and other services at most of the prisons in London, and at several in Devon and Cornwall (see Useful Addresses p.28)

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