

DOVIA Mississippi Presents

Ideas for People in Correctional Facilities

We recognize that some facilities allow residents to work on projects together while others do not, so we have included both group and individual activities. Below are participation ideas that can be tailored to your community.

Individual Activities

- Write a thank-you note to a staff member who went out of his or her way to help you.
- Draw bookmarks with kind sayings on them for the library to copy and hand out.
- Pass on personal books, newspapers, or magazines to another inmate.
- Refrain from judging others or harassing them because they may be different or because of their crime.
- Send money to a utility company to pay a bill for a family member or friend.
- Forgive a debt.
- Become a tutor. Help someone write a letter or learn something new.
- Put notes of encouragement in library books for someone else to find.
- If you are in a self-change group, initiate positive affirmations to be given out to one another. To make sure everyone gets one, make a master copy of names of group members, then copy it for each member. Suggest that each member write at least three positive statements – qualities that they admire about the person — for everyone on the list. An example of a positive statement would be: “You have made great progress in your communications skills.”
- On the outside of an envelope to a loved one, write: “This letter is being sent to an angel!”
- Send a kindness story or poem to a friend or family member.
- Refrain from telling “war stories” about drugs or criminality.
- If someone lets you use a radio, return it with new batteries.
- Give a birthday card to a friend on his or her birthday.
- Send your children candy or other goodies from the canteen.
- Do not talk behind anyone’s back or spread rumors.
- Send positive letters to a juvenile detention facility.
- Have your family donate something of yours anonymously to a charity.
- Assume that everyone has gone through pain and heartaches, just as you have, and treat them with the same kindness and respect that you would like to be given.

Group Activities

- Learn how to repair used eyeglasses, toys, etc. (donated by the community), for distribution to homeless or low income people.

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- If you have a print shop, make flyers, posters, bulletins, and newsletters for faith organizations, schools, or charities.
- Hold a read-a-thon for a worthy cause. Find sponsors from the staff who will pay money per book read by an inmate, and donate the proceeds to a charity such as child abuse causes. Also, consider holding walk-a-thons or “lift-a-thons” (using barbells) inside the yards.
- Perform paralegal services or research for the elderly or for low income people. Most adult correctional facilities have fairly comprehensive law libraries.
- Repair computers, VCRs, furniture, etc., for schools or faith organizations.
- Run a recycling center for the community.
- Make quilts, baby clothes, dolls, etc., for low income people.
- Establish a community volunteer program inside the institution to help with outside community volunteer activities. Meet with community organizers to determine what jobs (e.g., writing, collating, design work) could be done by inmates.
- Begin an assembly program to assist with houses being built for lower-income people. Assemble parts of housing structures or cabinetry for use in the community. Most adult correctional facilities have wood shops or vocational programs.
- Bring in a crafts person to teach papermaking, bookmaking, or other crafts. Use the skills to create thank-you gifts for family, community members, social workers, or benefactors.
- Make frames to display the artwork of students in hallways, libraries, airports, etc. If the institution has a good wood shop, make park benches or trash receptacles for the community at cost (to cover materials).
- At the end of a youth class or group gathering, do a “validation chain.” One student begins by sharing a respectful, appreciative remark to another person. This is passed on and on until everyone has been included. In a living situation that can be demoralizing, the participants leave feeling good about one another.
- Present a special event – a Poetry and Inspirational Reading evening — at juvenile hall. Incarcerated youth read original and selected poetry and inspirational material, focusing on tolerance or another positive trait. Invite parents, institutional staff, supervisors, district leaders, and the press. This gives the students a chance to engage in a cooperative, kind, respectful activity with staff as well as to develop self-esteem.
- A high-security correctional facility in Colorado has had success with its knitting program. Inmates use knitting machines to create caps, teddy bears, scarves, mittens, and dolls for homeless or poor children throughout the state. Inmates earn the right to enter this program through good behavior.

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