

Lancaster County AA Prison Volunteer FAQ

How much sobriety time do I need to volunteer for prison service?

We ask that you have a minimum of one year of sobriety, but there is some flexibility to consider individuals with less time on a case-by-case basis.

Can I volunteer if I have a criminal history?

Yes. The prison administration considers volunteer applications on a case-by-case basis. The amount of time required from when you completed your last sentence will vary based on the type of offense and the circumstances of the case.

Why do I need a Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Certification?

Although you will not be working with children, the Child Abuse History Certification is required by the prison administration as an additional layer of background checking.

What if I already have a Child Abuse History Certification for another purpose?

Depending on when you received the certification, you may not need to be recertified. Simply include a copy of your current certification with your prison access application.

How long does it take to get approved as a volunteer?

The entire process to be approved as a volunteer can take several months or more. The prison administration needs to vet your application and schedule you for fingerprinting and training.

What does the training involve?

The training for prison service volunteers is a four-hour session conducted by prison officials. It covers basic safety topics, such proper attire, restricted personal items and guidelines for interacting with inmates, as well as a general overview of the operation of the prison and its mission. The training sessions are held on an irregular schedule, so you may have to wait to a month or more to get on the schedule.

How many volunteers are there for each meeting?

We go into the prison in teams of two. As a new volunteer, you will be paired with an experienced member. The prison doesn't have a rule for how many volunteers are needed to conduct a meeting, so we have held meetings with just one volunteer in a pinch, but this will only happen with an experienced volunteer and only in rare circumstances.

How many inmates show up for the meetings?

This varies, of course, but we typically have anywhere from 6 to 12 inmates for each of the men's meetings and 15 or more for the women's meetings.

How are the meetings conducted?

The meetings are much the same as any AA meeting on the outside. They last one hour and are literature based. We have a format we follow that keeps the meetings consistent and orderly.

Is there any personal risk involved?

There's very little risk to our prison volunteers. Corrections officers (guards) are always close by, and the inmate populations we serve are not doing time for serious violent crimes. There may be occasional disturbances in the blocks that require responses from corrections officers, but we have never had an experience where one of our volunteers felt threatened.