

THE WELCOME DIRECTORY

FAITH COMMUNITIES WELCOMING PEOPLE LEAVING PRISON



OVERVIEW

The Welcome Directory encourages, equips and enables faith communities to welcome and support people leaving prison.

At the heart of the Welcome Directory is a three session awareness raising programme that we believe will both inspire and challenge. It will enable you as a faith community to examine your beliefs together and through discussion and practical encounter get to know the people who live in, work in and who will eventually be released from our prisons.

The Welcome Directory is a growing national movement of faith communities who have committed themselves to play a positive role in the resettlement of people leaving prison and who will welcome all who seek community with them regardless of their past.

We hope that your faith community will become a part of the Welcome Directory.

[2016 VERSION](#)

[START HERE](#)

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The Welcome Directory has a simple yet powerful vision: to help faith communities become places where people who leave prison find acceptance. A place to belong that not only nurtures faith but also offers appropriate practical support.

People are at the very heart of this work. If nothing else, we hope that these three awareness raising sessions will help you to understand that in a deeper way; that those leaving prison have a name, a story as well as hopes and dreams for their lives beyond the prison gate. The sessions exist within a larger set of resources that provide the information and tools, stories and opportunities to get involved in this work with a growing confidence.

You are embarking on a challenging journey that has the promise to make a real difference to people's lives. It is a journey that will lead you inward, to examine your own attitudes. It will take you into a prison to meet chaplains and prisoners and celebrate your faith communities. It will hopefully lead you out the other side with new found insights and a real desire to play a part, large or small, to help those who are leaving prison to make a new beginning – a difficult journey in its own right. In a sense, there is no real end to this work, it is ongoing, expanding, ever deepening and will only end when the last prisoner is resettled.

The journey is made easier because it is made with others; people from your own community as well as those from others. The thing in common is our faith and belief, whatever faith or belief tradition that might be. We believe strongly that faith and conviction at its core can inspire and encourage compassion for others. We hope that what you discover in these three sessions will make a real and lasting difference for those leaving prison and also for you personally and for your community too.

Fear is often caused by the unknown; these sessions aim to introduce you to people who have left prison or who are going to leave in the near future. The sessions will provide stories as well as facts that we hope will bring understanding, quickly followed by compassion, mixed with a healthy dose of wisdom and street sense. The Welcome Directory is a community led initiative which helps positive relationships to be formed with prisons as well as those who have a responsibility for resettlement in your region.

Practical arrangements

The three orientation sessions last up to ninety minutes each and are designed for small groups to work through together. You do not need much to get started; for session one and three you need someone who will act as a facilitator and perhaps someone who will provide some refreshments. You will also need to print off the worksheet that accompanies each session. These files are freely available online at www.freechurches.org.uk/welcomedirectory

The second session will be held in your local resettlement prison and you will be able to sign up for that session by liaising with the Welcome Directory Volunteer based there. You will be given thorough instructions concerning your visit and a short leaflet to read beforehand so that you can get the most out of the session.

Facilitator notes

Each session has two sets of information. The first is a detailed guide for the facilitator of the session to use in their own style. The second is a worksheet that should be given to each participant. The most important outcome of each session is that the group is presented with good, clear factual information which makes room for healthy conversations. The timings and questions are simply included as a guide, but the material should be approached in a way that helps your community to explore the subject and decide for yourselves what you will do in response to all that you hear and experience.

Worksheets

Each participant will need a copy of the worksheet for each session. The worksheets include space for note taking as well as questions for each activity. There is also relevant information included to inform your conversations. The worksheet for the second session will be provided by the prison chaplaincy team.

Session one: beyond the prison gates

Unless you have experienced it for yourself then it is hard to understand the consequences of a prison sentence. The first session will introduce you to themes, ideas and information that will hopefully lead you to a greater understanding of the issues surrounding imprisonment and release.

Something to read between session one and two

There is a short information leaflet that will help you to get the most out of session two.

Session two: faith in prison

The second session is based in a resettlement prison and will be hosted by the chaplaincy team and some of the prisoners who belong to a faith community there. The session will provide opportunities to get to know one another and to celebrate your faith communities.

Session three: what now?

The third session will explore some of the ways in which changing attitudes can lead to changing behaviour and it will help you to imagine what kind of support your own faith community might offer. You will also be invited to think about how you can join with other faith communities and supportive agencies in your area to share resources and to encourage one another as you work together for the good of the world.

Hope

We hope that you will find the sessions stimulating, challenging and fun. We also hope that it will lead to stories of changed lives, healed communities and people who find a new home in a community of faith - your faith community!