

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 you. 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 directory 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 in the near future and will help to create a rehabilitative society.

2018 VERSION

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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 people leaving prison have a name, a story as well as hopes and dreams for their lives beyond the prison gates. These 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 with others. 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 together; people from your own community as well as those from others. The thing in common is our faith and beliefs, whatever faith or belief tradition that might be. We believe that faith and conviction 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, for you personally and for your faith and belief 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. Our hope is that fear will be replaced by confidence; confidence to play a part with others in creating a rehabilitative society for the good of all.

Practical arrangements

The three sessions last up to ninety minutes each and are designed for small groups of four or five 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.

The second session will be held in your local prison and you will be given thorough instructions concerning your visit. You are also encouraged to read through the material contained within the session one worksheet so that you can get the most out of the prison based 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. Reading the material out loud as it is presented will work well for those who don't feel comfortable adapting it. The second set of information is a worksheet that should be given to each participant with a pen.

The most important outcome for 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. The material should be approached in a way that helps your community to explore the subject and decide what you will do in response to all that you learn 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 your hosts in the prison.

Session one: beyond the prison gates

Unless we have experienced it for ourselves, it is hard to understand the consequences of a prison sentence and what kind of support can make a real difference. The first session will introduce you to themes, ideas and information designed to lead you to a greater understanding of the issues surrounding imprisonment and release.

As part of the session one worksheet, there is a short information sheet that will help you to get the most out of session two. We advise you read it before the second session.

Session two: faith in prison

The second session is based in a local 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 celebrate your respective faith communities.

Session three: who we are

The third session explores the connections between who faith communities are at their best and some of the themes that recent research has shown to help someone leaving prison make a new life that is free from crime.

Hope

We hope that you will find the sessions stimulating, challenging and fun and 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!

We also hope that your faith community will decide to register in The Welcome Directory.