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2014 ANNUAL
GATHERING
HIGHLIGHTS

CARITAS
FOOD FOR ALL
CAMPAIGN

AMERICORPS
GRANTS FOR
SERVING VETERANS

IN THE
SHADOWS OF
LIFE

PROTECTING HUMAN LIFE
& DIGNITY



BUILDING COMMUNITY AROUND EX-OFFENDERS

Prisoner Re-entry Programs, Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of Dubuque

Coming out of prison gives former offenders an opportunity to start anew, but one-third to one-half re-offend and return to prison within three years of their release. Part of the problem is their lack of connection with their community.

“When people get out of prison, they feel they have this mark on them, that the community has rejected them. They have no feeling of belonging,” said Deacon Bill Hickson, director of the prison ministry and re-entry programs of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Dubuque, IA. “Only when we reach out do they feel a part of the community.”

Reaching out to ex-offenders is at the heart of the agency’s two re-entry programs, the Mentoring Program and Circles of Support and Accountability. The mentoring program matches ex-offenders with a volunteer mentor, who meets with the ex-offender weekly to provide encouragement and support and build a friendship that promotes constructive attitudes and law-abiding behavior.

From there, ex-offenders can move on to Circles of Support and Accountability, where a group of volunteers work with an ex-offender for several months, helping him or her achieve goals, learn new ways of interacting, and resolve the problems that resulted in prison in the first place.

Circles of Support and Accountability is based on the concept of restorative justice, which looks at the crime as a violation of people and relationships and seeks to repair as much as possible the damage done. Bringing togeth-

er community members, offenders, and victims (if the victims agree) fosters dialogue, understanding, and healing.

“The Circles model really does provide an opportunity for restoring and teaching,” said Hickson. “The ex-offenders learn they are valued, which brings about such a transformation. Their confidence grows as well as their ability to listen and express themselves.”

That transformation occurs because the volunteers treat the ex-offenders equally, as sisters and brothers, without judgment.

“When we involve the community in reaching out to involve ex-offenders in a constructive way, they are less likely to return to jail, which is good for them and the community,” Hickson. “If we can reduce crime and harm done, it is a respect for life. If we make a safer community, we raise the quality of life for everyone.” ■

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Prison Ministry

Many Catholic Charities agencies run prison ministry programs in the prisons and jails in their dioceses. Dedicated clergy, religious, and lay volunteers visit these detention facilities regularly to provide Catholic worship services, religious education, sacramental preparation, pastoral counseling, and reading and prayer materials to Catholic inmates and others. These ministries help Catholic inmates feel connected to their faith and the church, a meaningful service when they feel forgotten and cut off from their families and communities. Some ministries reach out to the families of inmates as well as crime victims to provide support and foster reconciliation.

Residential Services for Delinquent Youth

The Mitchell Program of St. Gabriel's System, an agency of Catholic Social Service of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, is an intensive 120-day program for court adjudicated delinquent youth. Focused on restorative justice and skill building, the program helps youth learn empathy, responsibility, and life skills. A significant feature of the program is the opportunity to work on a small farm, where the youth learn trust and responsibility by caring for plants and animals. Participants grow and harvest organic vegetables, flowers, and herbs, which they sell at farmer's markets, earning money to help pay their restitution balances. The youth also participate in community service opportunities, such as the Crime Repair Crew, where they assist Philadelphia citizens repair their homes damaged by crime while learning basic carpentry and home repair skills.

Counseling for Sex Offenders

Several Catholic Charities agencies offer treatment programs or counseling to help sex offenders avoid committing further sex crimes, thereby reducing victimization and ensuring safer communities. The Sex Offender Treatment Program of Catholic Charities in Syracuse, NY, provides counseling and cognitive restructuring for convicted child sex abusers. Marygrove, an agency of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, provides a residential treatment program for juvenile sex offenders ages 12 to 21. While not condoning sexual crimes, these programs also recognize and respond to the challenges sex offenders face in re-integrating into society.

Victim Assistance

Catholic Charities in Denver, CO, provides assistance to victims of crime, who often experience emotional and physical wounds, as well as financial difficulties. They often need help affording a safe place to live, locating counseling services, gaining financial stability, and replacing stolen items. The victim assistance program helps victims by providing financial assistance, but also supportive counseling, crisis intervention, encouragement, and referral to other services. ■