

For more than a century, Volunteers of America has served the families of the nation's most vulnerable individuals, supporting them in the achievement of self-sufficiency and self-determination, improving the lives of children and bolstering community support networks for families. In more than 400 communities across the nation, the affiliates of Volunteers of America, a national non-profit, faith-based organization, reach 2 million people, including at-risk youth, ex-offenders, families in poverty and victims of domestic violence. "We are dedicated to using innovative and effective approaches to comprehensively meet the diverse needs of our families," says Charles W. Gould, president and CEO of Volunteers of America. "By strengthening families, we are strengthening the future success of our most vulnerable children."



VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND

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Award-winning program: Transition and Reunification Program

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CHILDREN DO WELL WHEN THEIR FAMILIES
DO WELL, AND FAMILIES DO BETTER WHEN
THEY LIVE IN SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

2007 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

BEYOND \$50 AND A BUS TICKET

Traditionally, when former offenders are released from Maine prisons, they receive little more than \$50 and a bus ticket back home, leaving them ill-prepared for re-entering society and reuniting with their families. For women, the arrest rate has increased 61 percent over the last decade, placing growing demands on families, community resources and state systems. “We knew something had to be done to turn the tide for women offenders – including many mothers – so they could get their lives and families back on track,” says Betty Fortuin, who directs the re-entry program for Volunteers of America Northern New England. The result: Volunteers of America created the Community Corrections Transition and Reunification Program four years ago.

Volunteers of America works with offenders inside the Maine Correctional Center Women’s Unit. Through a partnership with the Maine Re-entry Network, Volunteers of America works intimately with offenders, starting six months before their release and extending six months after release as they rejoin their families.



WE HELP WOMEN LEAVING PRISON CARE
FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR CHILDREN IN A
HEALTHY, POSITIVE WAY. AND BEING SELF-SUFFI-
CIENT IS THE FIRST STEP TO STRENGTHENING
THEIR FAMILIES.

—Betty Fortuin, director of the Transition and Reunification Program, Volunteers of America Northern New England

PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

Volunteers of America helps offenders create comprehensive plans to resolve major re-entry concerns, including housing, employment, education, reuniting with children and health care. “If they need food stamps, housing vouchers or other services, we get all those applications completed and connect them to community resources before they even leave prison,” Fortuin says. “We build bridges so women are fully integrated into the community and know where to turn for support.”

While parents are in prison, Volunteers of America teaches parenting skills, literacy, job readiness and financial management to better ensure self-sufficiency upon release. The transition program began offering Family Development Accounts this year, so inmates with income-producing jobs could build savings and receive matched donations. Volunteers of America also partners with Maine Department of Labor career centers, nonprofit Women Unlimited and other employers to help women obtain jobs after prison. To enhance women’s marketable skills, the program soon will include carpentry training.

The program’s family-centric, community-building nature is a dramatically successful national model for re-entry programs. More than 280 women have received support through the Transition and Reunification Program, and the 20-percent recidivism rate of participants is three times lower than the national average. The program now also serves 100 male offenders. “Reducing the number of repeat offenders helps to reduce the generational aspect of incarceration,” Fortuin says. “Our goal is to help parents achieve economic success and become role models for their children.”

FAMILIES COUNT FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

Through a joint venture of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Volunteers of America, the **FAMILIES COUNT Family Strengthening Awards** recognize Volunteers of America affiliates with outstanding programs that work to give children what they need most—strong, capable and economically successful families. Responding to the varied needs of the families they serve, these organizations improve the economic prospects of working men and women and create the services and networks of support that all families need to realize their aspirations for themselves and their children.