

Portland Partners Re-entry Initiative (PPRI)

Frequently Asked Questions about the Mentor Program

1. What is a Mentor?

A mentor is a volunteer who has a sincere interest in helping adults who have been incarcerated transition back into our community. Mentors are advocates, friends, and positive role models. Mentors are not therapists, parents, bosses, social workers, case workers, sponsors, employers, or money lenders. For details on eligibility requirements please see the **Volunteer Mentor Position Description**, or contact the volunteer coordinator at (971) 634-2110 or bgrooms@seworks.org.

2. Why should I be a mentor?

Being a mentor provides the opportunity to learn and share experiences, and to contribute to helping an individual mature, progress, and achieve goals. Mentors also contribute positively to the safety and success of their communities. Mentors are provided with initial training, structured activities and continued education for mentors and participants, and ongoing support and collaboration from staff and other volunteers. Mentors have the opportunity to become acquainted with issues facing the re-entry community and have the chance to give input and help shape our program as it evolves.

3. Who are the participants?

To be eligible for PPRI a participant must be at least 18 years old, have never been convicted of a sexual offense, current crime of conviction is non-violent, have not been convicted of a violent crime for 7 years and have undergone treatment. Most crimes of conviction are drug, alcohol, identity theft, or property crimes.

Participants are as varied as any other person who has not been incarcerated. They have hobbies, interests, goals, experience, responsibilities, families, friends, significant others, education, and aspirations for the future. What they often lack are resources, support systems, and a clear vision of how to break the cycle of poverty and dependence.

4. What would I do with a participant?

Activities vary broadly based on an individual's needs and interests, but may include assisting a participant in practicing life skills such as communication, attending college, navigating public transportation, and grocery shopping. Mentors can help a participant practice for a job interview or learn to use a computer. Mentors and participants can also enjoy recreational activities, take workshops or classes, or volunteer together. PPRI will provide structured activities and workshops in neutral locations.

5. What if I don't know where to go for resources or how to teach a skill?

No need to worry! You don't need any special experience or areas of knowledge in order to be a mentor. Each participant has a PPRI case manager who assists them in accessing resources, gaining skills, training, education, and employment. It is not a mentor's responsibility to find housing, healthcare, or education, or to provide financial support. Mentors are positive role models and listening ears and help to reinforce a participant's self confidence and sense of support as they transition into a new life.

6. **What will the program do to support me?**

We will provide training to acquaint you with the program as well as the issues facing people as they transition from incarceration to the community, and to provide you with some of the skills and information necessary to provide support. We will offer ongoing training sessions and events which allow the volunteers and participants to delve deeper into issues, receive specialized training, and engage in social activities.

We will also provide ongoing education, support groups, workshops and structured activities for mentors and participants in neutral, supervised settings. The volunteer coordinator will check in consistently with mentors and other volunteers and PPRI staff are always available for advice, support, and emergency assistance.

7. **What will the first meeting with a participant be like?**

The first meeting will be in a neutral location such as the PPRI office building and will be attended by at least one staff member. Structured discussion topics and communication skills will be covered in the volunteer mentor training.

8. **What do I do to become a mentor?**

There are several steps to becoming a mentor. The volunteer coordinator can walk you through the process. Briefly, the steps are: fill out and return the application, interview with the volunteer coordinator, attend training, undergo a background check, meet with a participant, and approve the match.

9. **How are the mentor/participant matches made?**

PPRI staff make decisions for matches based on the following criteria: information you provide for us about your preferences, information the participant has provided on his/her preferences, gender, age, career interests, personality characteristics, hobbies and interests, motivation for participation, geographic proximity, and the potential for positive chemistry. The decision is made after volunteers have completed training and all prior requirements. If no appropriate match is available immediately, PPRI staff will keep you informed of progress and the status of your application.

10. **Are there other volunteer opportunities available?**

Yes! You may consider another volunteer opportunity if you are not sure that you want to be a one-to-one mentor, if you have limited time but want to get involved, if you do not meet the eligibility requirements, while you are waiting for a match to be made, or if you would like to work with us in other capacities as well as being a mentor. Ask the volunteer coordinator for descriptions. Briefly, opportunities include: workshop or activity facilitator, group mentor facilitator, and specialized mentor positions. Previous experience in a special area is not necessary. PPRI staff will provide training to prepare you for these positions. If you have a special interest or skill you'd like to share, such as arts and crafts, financial planning, parenting skills, computer literacy, etc, please contact the volunteer coordinator for an application.