



Volunteer's Frequently Asked Questions

What is On Your Feet?

On Your Feet! (OYF) is a restorative justice program of the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC), in collaboration with the Veteran Justice Corps of AmeriCorps. This program enhances public safety by providing support to veterans who have served their court-ordered prison term and are being released to the community. This support has been shown to reduce recidivism. On Your Feet creates circles of support where each veteran meets with 4-6 community members once a week for the first year after release.

Whom does OYF support?

Participants are military veterans who have been convicted of a felony. They are known as Core Members. Core Members must be veterans incarcerated with the Minnesota Department of Corrections and be scheduled for release in either Ramsey or Hennepin County. Core Members choose to participate.

How many people in prison are veterans?

The most recent study from the Bureau of Justice in 2004 found that 10% of state prisoners reported prior service in the U.S. Armed forces, with an estimated 140,000 veterans being held in the Nation's prisons.

How are Core Members selected to be part of OYF?

To be eligible, participants must meet the following criteria.

- Core Members must be scheduled for release within 2-6 months in Hennepin or Ramsey County
- Core members must be veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces
- Core members must want to participate
- Core members could have served in either peacetime or combat time periods

Once a pool is created of veterans who meet all the criteria, the core member is selected randomly.

Are volunteers safe?

Volunteer and community safety is the **utmost priority** of OYF. Volunteer training will address techniques, practices, and appropriate boundaries designed to enhance volunteer safety within the Circle as well as in their personal lives. Volunteers will always be accompanied by a Minnesota Department of Corrections staff member when inside facilities. There has never been an incident with any other DOC Circles of Support & Accountability program, including OYF.

How much will the Core Member know about volunteers?

Only what volunteers choose to share. Training will provide some guidelines, but ultimately volunteers can share as much or as little as they are comfortable with. Volunteers may decide to share additional information as the Circle progresses, but there is never an obligation to reveal anything of a personal nature.

Where are Circle meetings held?

The Circle will begin in a DOC prison facility for about one month (transportation will be provided), and then transition out to an agreed upon public place in the community when the Core Member is released. OYF staff can assist with deciding on community meeting locations.

When do Circle Members meet the Core Member?

Upon completion of training, volunteers will meet the Core Member in prison. Prior to the first meeting, they will receive a brief and basic history of the Core Member and the criminal offense. The Circle will meet with the Core Member 3-5 times prior to release. During this Circle-building process, a covenant will be developed that establishes guidelines to be followed by everyone after the Core Member is released.

What is training like?

Training consists of five sessions that cover different topics, including: the criminal justice system, boundaries and safety, circle process, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), military history/culture, traumatic brain injury (TBI), and victim impact. Each session varies in the amount of interaction/experiential learning practices and lecture. Many sessions include topic speakers, including individuals convicted of offenses and abuse survivors. Advanced training is available upon request by the Circle or as assessed by OYF staff.

Who are the other Circle Members?

Circle Members range in age, professions, and interests. Some volunteers know each other because they are from faith communities, neighborhood organizations, and professional affiliations; others have never met. Some volunteers are veterans themselves and others have no military experience. The application process includes a criminal background check, interview and training. This process helps the volunteer and staff make a decision about the suitability of participation in OYF for each Circle Member

What if a training session is missed?

Since training is a key element to Circle success, applicants are asked to commit to attending all sessions. Applicants who cannot attend a session are asked to inform OYF staff as soon as possible to schedule a make-up session or to participate in the next training cycle.

Who supports the Circle?

The Inner Circle (volunteers and core member) is supported by an Outer Circle comprised of DOC staff and a variety of professionals. These may include community supervision agents, law enforcement, mental health professionals, health care providers and others, such as the Veterans Administration staff, depending on the needs of the Core Member and the Circle.



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