

Volunteers in prisons

The purpose of having volunteers is to help resocialize detainees and persons under probation supervision. Communication and cooperation with a volunteer increases the ties with the rest of the society and communities, changes one's perspective on themselves and the others around them. Religious volunteers, additionally, help the chaplain service to guarantee religious freedom of the detainees by allowing them to meet with representatives (i.e. clerics) of their particular denomination.

All prisons in Estonia accept volunteers:

- Tallinn Prison (adult males and females being held in custody; convicted males);
- Tartu Prison (adult males and females being held in custody; convicted adult males);
- Viru Prison (adult males being held in custody; convicted adult males and male minors).

A volunteer is a person taking part in the resocialization of detainees and the religious work at the prison besides his or her regular job and without compensation.

There are two kinds of volunteer work in the prison: individual work and group work. Individual work means regular meetings between the volunteer and the detainee. Group work can comprise of group discussions on a given topic, lecture or course, religious rite or some other religious event; or other group event that may also include prison staff or other persons. A certain time and number of people can be defined for group work.

Volunteers also participate in support person services.

Requirements for becoming a volunteer

- At least 18 years old.
- At least secondary education (may be waived by the prison).
- No criminal record (may be waived by the prison)

A religious volunteer must be a member of a church or congregation, and have a recommendation from that church or congregation and approval of the head chaplain.

A person wishing to become a volunteer has to:

- inform the prison in question or the Estonian Council of Churches (or the leader of his or her church or congregation);
- present an application, passport copy and documentation about education;
- go through training by prison staff about the prison rules and the rights and duties of a volunteer.
- A volunteer wishing to do religious work has to present to the head chaplain of the prisons a reference from the church or congregation that also includes a certificate of character of the person applying to the position of volunteer.

Based on these documents presented and an interview with a representative of the prison the leadership will decide whether the candidate is suited to work as a volunteer.

More info:

Tallinn prison: Aljona Toporkova, specialist-hobby instructor, phone 612 7668, e-mail Aljona.toporkova@just.ee [1]

Viru prison: Kelli Tihase, rapporteur, phone 663 7900, e-mail viruv.info@just.ee [2]

Tartu prison: Maila Sarap, **in the capacity of** social services organizer, phone 750 0870, e-mail maila.sarap@just.ee [3]

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Links:

[1] Aljona.toporkova@just.ee

[2] viruv.info@just.ee

[3] maila.sarap@just.ee