

Introduction to Volunteer Supervision Guidelines

It is very likely that a new BP3 volunteer will never have been inside a prison. Their initial experience may be somewhat intimidating and emotional, so it is important that the other volunteers and, especially the Sangha Lead, provide adequate emotional support and supervision to the new volunteer. The key is open, two-way communication between the Sangha Lead and the new volunteer so that the volunteer feels comfortable asking questions and sharing concerns and so that the Lead can offer encouragement and constructive guidance. If the Sangha Lead is not able to carpool to the prison with the new volunteer, then it will be helpful to set up periodic meetings. The guidelines listed below are an example of a supervision process/timeline. The goal is to provide support to the new volunteer so that s/he can provide support to the inmates and interact constructively with prison personnel.

A volunteer will work most effectively with a prison sangha if s/he is able to commit to a schedule of regular attendance. This enables the volunteer to get to know the inmates and the inmates get to know and trust the volunteer. It will be up to the Sangha Lead and the other volunteers to determine what level of commitment they will require from their new volunteers. These guidelines are a suggestion for a process that could be implemented.

If a lead determines that a volunteer is not suited for prison work, s/he deserves to have this clearly communicated to him or her. The BP3 Board also should be notified since it is represented to CDCR as the organization that oversees the volunteers. See guideline #8. These suggested guidelines are designed to support new volunteers as they embark on the process of learning about prison, inmates, correctional officers and their fellow volunteers at the prison.