

Immigration Detention Visitation Specific Supplement

The LIRS Volunteer Manager's Toolkit lists some of the reasons people volunteer and methods of speaking about volunteerism that touch upon those interests. To engage a greater number of volunteers, it is important to think through some of the motivations that drive individuals to become volunteer visitors. Even just a moment reflecting on this draws out the many reasons people volunteer.

Immigration detention visitation is one way to volunteer and give hope to immigrants in detention. The United States detains more than 34,000 individuals facing deportation, including asylum seekers, refugees, torture survivors, and victims of human trafficking in over 250 detention facilities nationwide. Immigration detention visitation may not provide opportunities for professional development or recognition for everyone, but it can certainly foster relationships, make a difference, and provide a tangible encounter for people who are passionate about immigration issues. These are the areas that should be emphasized when asking people to become volunteers for your immigration detention visitation program.

People to Ask

Churches are great places to recruit visitation volunteers. Read the Outreach section in Chapter II to learn more about church outreach strategies. You might also find committed volunteers at organizations that work with migrants in other contexts, such as refugee service organizations, local advocates, and ESL (English as a second language) tutors.

How to Ask

If you are proposing visitation to people who are unfamiliar with immigration issues, consider organizing an educational event, such as a movie screening. Hold a discussion afterwards and end with a call to action to become a volunteer visitor. LIRS offers several different short documentaries, movies, and discussion guides. We also can provide PowerPoints and talking points for presentations. Email visitation@lirs.org for any of these materials.

Emphasize

Perhaps the most compelling aspects of visitation are the human connections and the impact of a visit on the detainee. When explaining visitation, emphasize those qualities. Give details about how life-changing the experience can be for the detainee. The best visitors are naturally compassionate people. You'll inspire other compassionate individuals to join the mission by telling them about the indignity of immigration detention and the power of visitation.

Great Bible Verses

Note that different denominations use different Bible translations. It might be a good idea to look up their preferred translation before presenting at the church. But don't worry—no one expects you to be an expert on Christianity, and if you're going to talk about the faith component, be genuine! If you don't feel comfortable talking about Christianity, invite a volunteer who is confident speaking about their faith to be a co-speaker alongside you.

“This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. **Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner**, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.” Jeremiah 22:3, NIV

“So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and **deprive the foreigners among you of justice**, but do not fear me,’ says the Lord Almighty.” Malachi, 3:5 NIV

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, **I was a stranger and you invited me in**, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, **I was in prison and you came to visit me.**” Matthew 25:35-36, NIV

“**Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers**, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.” Hebrews 13:2-3, NIV