



Here's an interesting way to think about it:

A prison is a community of people living together under very challenging circumstances; it is a **NEIGHBORHOOD** where none of us would be eager to live.

Three groups of people have to coexist in a prison neighborhood:

- ◆ residents serving their sentences,
- ◆ Corrections Officers and staff (like caseworkers) who provide for what is referred to as “custody, care, and control” of the resident population, and
- ◆ administrators (like wardens) who are tasked with making overwhelmingly difficult decisions daily in an effort to effectively and efficiently run the facility.

Let's take a quick look at the unique types of challenges each group must handle daily.

The residents face

- lack of privacy,
- fear for their safety,
- lack of purpose,
- loneliness,
- shame about their crime,
- insufficient funds for overpriced commissary purchases and phone time,
- bitterness about their sentence,
- intense boredom, and
- a frightening sense that they have been forgotten.

In most facilities, they are referred to as “inmates,” or “offenders,” recognized as unique by only their Dept. of Corrections number, and thus experience a sense of the loss of personhood, what many call “dehumanization.”

The Corrections Officers face

- long hours,
- endless situations that call for discernment and split-second decision-making,
- danger,
- a negatively-charged work environment.

They are often poorly trained and underpaid. They are typically distrusted and disliked by the residents, and live in a continuous state of hyper-arousal on the job. Many exhibit symptoms of PTSD after repeated exposure to violence, and it is the rare environment on the outside in which they are praised for the work they do on the inside.

The prison administrators face

- a never-ending set of conflicting priorities as they
- try to provide for residents, while
- also maintaining security, meeting staff needs,
- AND staying under budget.

Many wardens go into the career with a deep desire to make a difference, to facilitate rehabilitation in the lives of people who have committed serious crimes, but the never-ending list of tasks they must complete to simply maintain their facility, stomp fires, and “clear count” (accounting for every resident’s whereabouts twice each day) leaves little energy for innovation.

People on the outside rarely think about these neighborhoods behind the razor wire. Corrections Officers, administrators, and prison inmates alike are often forgotten or invisible people-groups.

This out-of-sight, out-of-mind relationship does damage to EVERYONE in the prison neighborhood.

We can do better.

While most people have a general sense of prisons as difficult places to live or work, many have no substantive understanding of the daily challenges or the simple ways in which outside support can help.

PrisonCare, Inc. provides an ever-expanding library of FREE PDF curriculum at prisoncare.org, and shares the stories of people behind the walls, suggesting evidenced-based practices for offering support, and connecting compassionate people with one another, both virtually and in real life, to share ideas as they seek to offer prison care to their chosen facilities.