

Volunteering Together

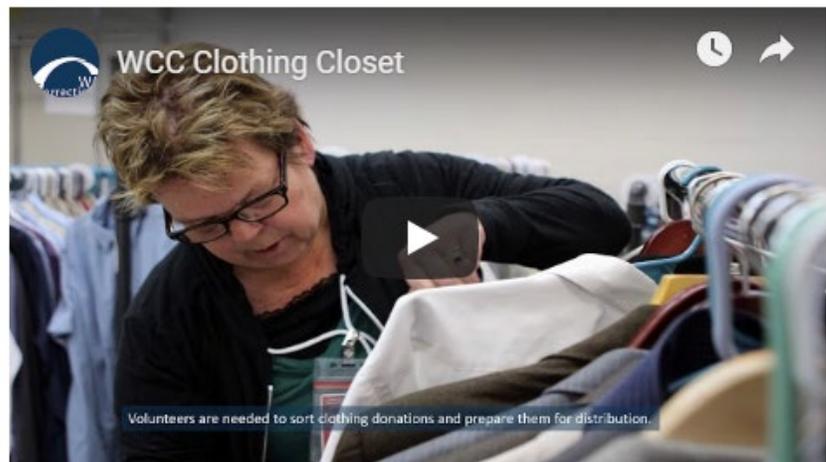
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By [Rachel Friederich](#)

DOC Communications

SHELTON – Pamela Deacon-Joyner sorts through piles of men’s shirts, pants, and shoes at [Washington Corrections Center \(WCC\)](#) in Shelton, Washington. She inspects and inventories the apparel Tuesday afternoons for the facility's clothing closet program. The program gives donated clothes to those who are releasing from prison and returning to their communities.

“Volunteering is a passion I need to fill,” the 71-year-old says. “Like when you’re hungry and you get something to eat.”



(Rachel Friederich, DOC Communications)

See video at <https://youtu.be/9B2IUXEpfWw>

Pamela is one of the [Department of Corrections’](#) more than 3,600 volunteers. The department has [volunteer programs](#) in correctional facilities, work releases, and field offices statewide. Pamela has volunteered at three facilities since 2011 and currently volunteers three days a week. On Thursdays, Pamela volunteers with Bridges to Life. Bridges to Life is a restorative justice program where crime victims meet with inmates to share experiences and talk about how crime affected their lives.

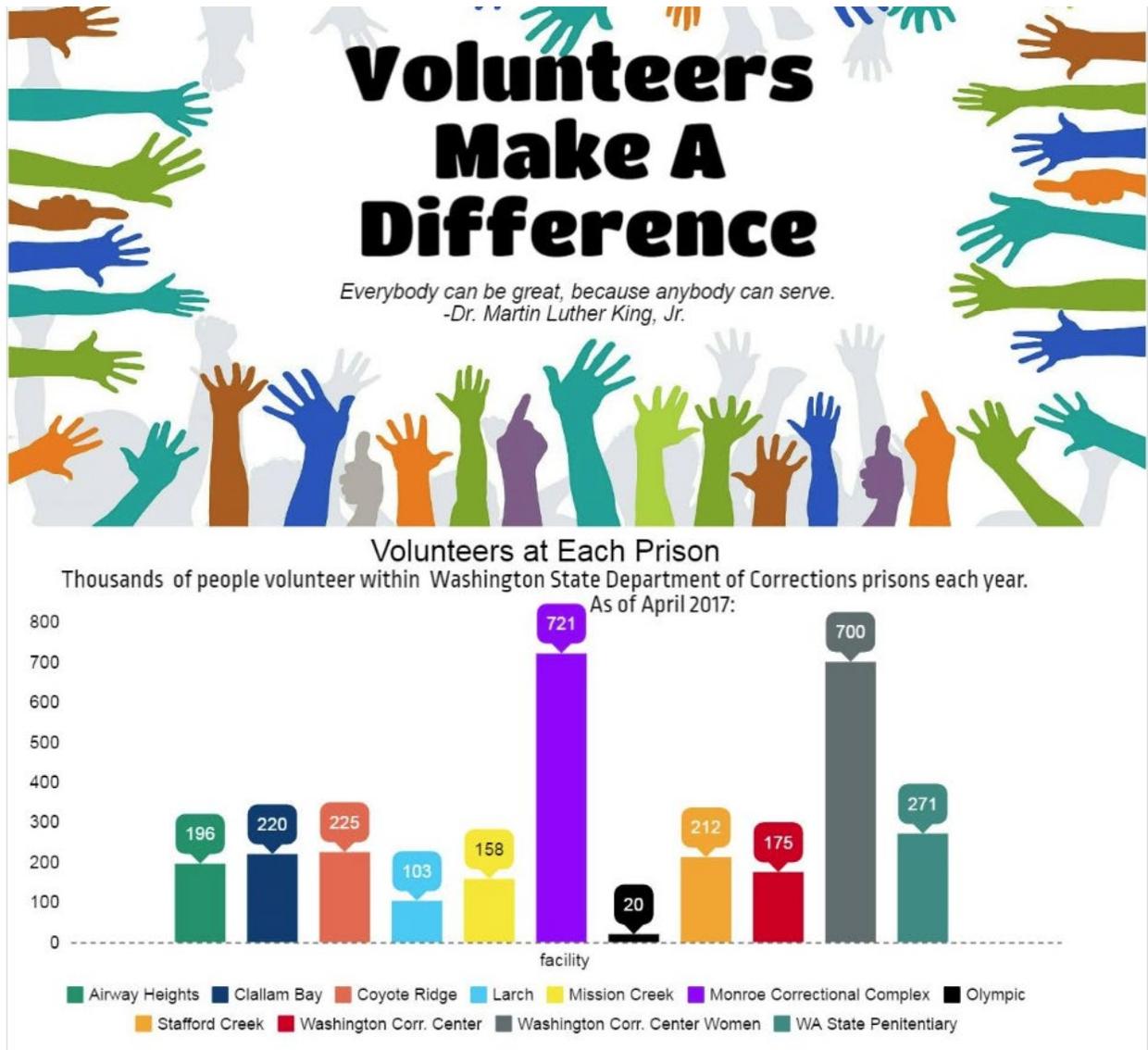
On Saturday evenings, Pamela’s husband, David Deacon-Joyner, comes with her to aid the [Living Stones Prison Congregation’s](#) pastor lead worship services.

Additionally, David, a 62-year-old retired jazz studies professor and professional musician, volunteers Tuesday nights to teach inmates music theory and how to play instruments.

Life before Volunteering

The Deacon-Joyners’ story of what led them to volunteer in state correctional facilities is one of faith, love, and perseverance.

Pamela says she has a unique perspective as a volunteer. She's been a victim of crime and also spent a brief period of time incarcerated. She often shares her story with inmates to foster trust and empathy.



Pamela was born in Tacoma. Like many that become incarcerated in the United States, Pamela experienced several [adverse childhood experiences](#).

As an adult, Pamela experienced two relationships where she became a victim of domestic violence.

After several years and attempts, Pamela ended both relationships with her violent partners. Afterwards, she was alone, drained and searching for stable employment and housing.

“My self-worth was smashed,” Pamela said. “My life was on a trajectory. I had so many things happen to me that were horrible and shameful.”

Years of physical abuse left her body weak. Pamela says she experienced chronic pain. In 1976, a neurologist told her she was suffering from minor strokes. Years later, doctors diagnosed her with multiple sclerosis, an unpredictable, painful disease of the nervous system.

Doctors prescribed Pamela medication to cope with the constant aches. It's what led to her incarceration.

She stole a prescription pad from her doctor's office and got caught trying to fill a false prescription. Police arrested Pamela, with her then-4-year-old son in tow. Pamela spent a night in the Pierce County jail before getting released on bail. The courts ordered her 18 months of probation and substance abuse treatment.



Pamela and David Deacon-Joyner at their home in Mason County. The husband-and-wife team both volunteer at the Washington Corrections Center in Mason County. (Rachel Friederich, DOC Communications)

A Spiritual Experience

Pamela said this time was one of the most difficult in her life. She turned to the church for comfort and guidance.

In 1994, she and her daughter attended a religious event featuring evangelist Kim Clement.

Clement chose Pamela and her daughter from an audience of hundreds of people and brought her onstage.

Pamela says she felt re-energized and more determined than ever to succeed in her life, her career and reengage with her children's lives after hearing Clement's words.

Getting Back on Track

That same year, Pamela got a job as an administrative assistant in [Pacific Lutheran University's \(PLU\)](#) music department. This allowed her to take college classes. Pamela graduated in 1999 at the age of 51 with a bachelor's degree in religion and a minor in sociology.

Pamela worked at PLU until retiring in 2011. Her 18-year career at PLU spanned several positions. She spent nine years as a performance and outreach manager, coordinating and overseeing on-



Inmates sing during a Living Stones Prison Congregation worship. The Deacon-Joyners volunteer to help during Living Stones services. (Rachel Friederich, DOC Communications)

campus music performances. She managed student groups traveling abroad for music performances. She also spent some time as an academic and career advisor and as a mediator.

Pamela's daily commute took her past [Washington Corrections Center for Women \(WCCW\)](#) in Gig Harbor, Washington. Each time Pamela saw the wire-topped fences, she remembered the obstacles she overcame and thought about the women who lived there.

"I was just drawn to it and I prayed for them," Pamela

said. "I knew I would volunteer when I retired."

Giving Back

Soon after retirement, Pamela approached a woman at her church who volunteered at WCCW to see how she too could volunteer.

Pamela began volunteering with Living Longer, Living Stronger. The program teaches inmates skills to manage chronic health issues on a daily basis. Pamela used her experience with her own self-care with multiple sclerosis to teach people in the program. She started volunteering with Sunday worship services in the prison chapel. That led to volunteering with family visit weekend activities. Soon she started volunteering for similar activities at the other women's prison, [Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women \(MCCCW\)](#).

Pamela says she enjoyed interacting with incarcerated women because she said they felt they related to her after hearing her story of surviving domestic violence.

"It was like a kinship," Pamela said. "It helps them become more human if they can talk to someone who has lived it."

The [National Research Center on Justice-Involved Women \(NRCJIW\)](#) compiled [research](#) on trauma histories of incarcerated women. It cited some studies that found about half of all justice-involved women report having experienced some type of physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime. Some studies estimated the percentage was as high as 98 percent.

A church group invited the Deacon-Joyners to observe one of the lively weekly services of the Living Stones Prison Congregation at WCC. A band of about a dozen inmates plays instruments, claps, and

sings. Volunteers greet incarcerated attendees and shake their hands. A pastor engages in conversations with the inmates and quotes Scripture.

The Deacon-Joyners enjoyed the experience so much, they decided to make Living Stones their regular congregation and volunteer.

“We were embracing the church and they embraced us at the same time,” Pamela said. “We became regular fixtures there.”

When David retired from PLU in 2017, the two decided to move to a waterfront home in rural Mason County so they could be closer to WCC.

‘Working on You’

The Deacon-Joyners say what they enjoy most about volunteerism is impacting the inmates’ lives.

Pamela recalls one of the Living Stones members told her he found out his grandmother passed away. He told Pamela his grandmother was the only person in his family with whom he still had a good relationship during his incarceration.

“No matter what I did, she accepted me and never, ever got angry,” he said.

When Pamela visited the inmate, she offered to pray with him.

“We prayed for his grandmother and for her spirit to be with him and that he never forget those memories,” Pamela said. “These guys have parents, wives and children and they can’t be with them. They’ve come to expect us every Saturday and we’ve become a ‘mom’ and ‘dad’ to so many.”

David had a similar experience with a man in his music theory class. One day he taught the inmate a few easy music chords. He says the simple act of teaching a skill to someone can give them something for which they can strive.

The Deacon-Joyners know the people they serve in prison have committed a variety of crimes. But they also know that the vast majority will complete their sentences and return to their communities. The Deacon-Joyners hope their many hours of service will teach incarcerated individuals there is hope for them after they leave prison.

“They want to be kind and caring, but don’t know how yet. They’ve not been shown how. If they don’t know how when they reenter society, they’ll be doomed to come back,” Pamela said. “I tell them God picked you up and placed you here (in prison). Now you’ve got time to start changing your ways and start finding your spiritual self. You can move past crimes and live joyfully. You just have to start working on you.”