

## **Circle of Support and Accountability (COSA) Volunteers**

A fellow church member and I are serving on a COSA, a Circle of Support and Accountability. A COSA is a support group that helps a furloughed individual transition back into society. And transitioning back into society is no easy task, especially for furloughed individuals who have no family or friends to provide support and who are not eligible for Dismas House.

Some furloughed individuals who are released in Rutland are limited in where they might live. Knowing that, landlords charge them above market rents.

Needless to say, earning enough money to pay the rent is an overwhelming concern for furloughed individuals, because if they lose housing, they will be returned to prison for violating a condition of release. Earning enough money in this economy is a tough proposition, even for someone who has skills and is a hard worker.

Initially, our individual secured employment with the promise of enough hours that would provide sufficient wages to pay his rent. Despite his hard work, the promised hours did not materialize, because the restaurant wasn't busy enough. With the support of the COSA members, the individual intensified his search for better employment. He found a better situation and through his hard work and skills he is working his way up from prep cook to line cook.

In addition to being a sounding board and a vehicle for the furloughed individual to vent, the COSA members have helped our individual with clothing, furnishings and access to a food pantry. Some of the COSA members are certified recovery coaches, who provide additional support.

Because of the support of the COSA members and his own work, our individual is becoming a transformed man. He has been out of prison for just over two months, and he can now actually see a future for himself, which is great for him and for society.

There are opportunities to volunteer to serve on a COSA throughout Vermont.

For more information, please contact me. --Jeanne Zammataro ([jzammataro@aol.com](mailto:jzammataro@aol.com)), Chair, Prison Justice Committee Vermont Conference, United Church of Christ