



Thresholds in Delaware County

A Community of Volunteers Teaching Decision Making Skills

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One Day in the Life of a New Thresholds Volunteer.¹

The big day has arrived. You have gone through training, security has blessed you as a person worthy of access to the prison. You are past the barbed wire and the metal detector. An unusually friendly corrections officer has validated you as a Thresholds volunteer and you are now in the cavernous visitation room. It is almost empty.

You have been assigned a client by the Thresholds program coordinator. His name is Ivan D. Shukhov. You are thinking, what an unusual name. You sit there, nervously fiddling with your guide book. Within a few minutes a lanky African-American young man approaches your table. You introduce yourself and launch into the questionnaire. It was explained to you that it was the best way to break the ice.

Ivan is not particularly forthcoming. When you get to the part about the reason for his incarceration you get a deluge of answers. He is really not guilty. Should not be in jail and he is there only because the corrupt cop lied about the events. Within a short period of time it becomes clear to you that Ivan clearly doesn't trust you. He can't figure out what your angle is. Why on earth would this "civilian" come to see him to teach "decision" making skills if he/she didn't have an ulterior motive?

You persist with the lesson plan and within a few days you notice a change in Ivan. He may even ask, "Why are you really doing this?" Be prepared for this question. We all have different answers. This is usually a positive turning point. Your client may have finally decided that you have information that could be useful for him.

While an experience like the one described above is fairly typical, there is by no means any assurance that your client will behave that way. You will encounter a wide variety of characters and personalities. Be aware of the charmer who will praise you every move and then will ask you to do things for him. Don't do anything a client asks unless you check with the program coordinator first. For us, this type is the most dangerous.

¹ Characters loosely based on the novel One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich by Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

Always, if you have any questions, there are more experienced volunteers or the program coordinator you can discuss your issues with.

Your volunteer experience will be challenging, interesting and influential. You will change people's lives. Just like you always remember your first love, you always remember your first Thresholds client.

Elek A. Fenyes, Esq, (Retired)

President, Thresholds Board of Directors.