



Gravenhurst volunteer honoured nationally for dedication to Beaver Creek inmates

For more than 20 years, Darryl McCullough has dedicated his time to help rehabilitate offenders

[Kristyn Anthony](#)

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The very nature of volunteering is to give to someone or something other than yourself and that is exactly why Darryl McCullough started showing up at Beaver Creek Institution over 20 years ago.

“It was only by God’s grace that I wasn’t in prison myself,” he said over the phone from his Gravenhurst home.

The only difference he sees between he and the 700 inmates at the federal prison is that, “their sins are a matter of public record.”

Even as the recipient of the 2019 Taylor Award, from Correctional Service Canada (CSC), McCullough shuns the spotlight and stresses his late wife, Janice, is who deserves the credit for supporting him in his efforts to support inmates.

The Taylor Award is named after Dr. Charles and Charlotte Taylor of Wolfville, N.S. for their dedication to faith-based counselling with offenders, and is given annually to an outstanding CSC volunteer who has shown exceptional dedication to the service.

In 1997, Darryl and Janice left the GTA for a quieter life in Muskoka. "I had a bit of a spiritual awakening in my life," he said of that time and over coffee with his friend, former warden Charles Stickel, asked how he could be of service.

"I went in scared to death," he said of that first day nearly 23 years ago.

What he found on the inside were countless men in need of support: someone to listen, to see past their crimes and to their humanity, and to believe in their rehabilitation.

"That's really driven me all these years," McCullough said.

Today, he is an avid believer in the community's role in assisting offenders, while they are in prison and especially upon release

"Today's inmates are tomorrow's neighbours," he said. "How do we want them back?"

At Beaver Creek, McCullough has provided one-on-one spiritual and faith counselling and mentorship, escorted offenders on temporary absences into the community, developed a work release volunteer driver schedule, recruiting others to share their time, and as a result, increased the number of companies partnering with the prison.

"Unless the community is involved in the rehabilitation process, these guys are isolated," he said, and at a high risk of reoffending. "They get out, their families are gone, their friends are gone. They're out there trying to start a new life."

Released offenders lacking support is what bothers him most, and leaves him with goals more than two decades on in this work.

Volunteers are highly regarded by the inmates, said Michelle Lucas, assistant warden management services at Beaver Creek.

Particularly McCullough, she said, who has continually shown up for them providing support in a number of different roles.

"The inmates are humbled by the fact that someone from the community cares and wants to support their rehabilitation," said Lucas.

McCullough talks to them about what kind of man or father they want to be, helps support a different frame of thinking and development for them and the inmates respond to that, she said. "He's such a treasure. We're so lucky to have him."

"It's wonderful, she said, "for CSC to see what we've been seeing in Darryl for years."