

The Coffee Creek Quilters Program

A Guide for Starting Quilting Classes in Correctional Facilities

Thank you for your interest in Coffee Creek Quilters (CCQ). Our organization teaches quilting classes in Oregon's Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (CCCF). Our mission is to provide a positive "hands on" program for women at CCCF to learn and practice a variety of life-enhancing skills, such as perseverance, patience and problem solving. Our program gives students the opportunity through quilting to explore personal creativity and to give back to the community. CCQ's goal is to nurture students' self-confidence and self-esteem to enhance their success at living in the community after release from prison.

We developed this document to serve as a guide for other groups that might want to offer similar programs in other correctional facilities. It covers the following topics:

- CCQ's history
- Working in a correctional facility
- Volunteer qualifications
- Class structure
- Classroom equipment
- Quilt kits and patterns
- Fabrics: donations, purchase, storage
- Release kits
- Donating quilts
- Display and photography of student quilts
- Organizational details
 - Non-profit status
 - Volunteer meetings
 - Organizational structure
 - Program administrator
- Public relations
- Finances and fundraising
- Documentation
- Final thoughts
- Photographs

If you have any questions about our program, we encourage you to contact us by email, ccq2@comcast.net

CCQ's history

Before Oregon's Coffee Creek Correctional Facility opened, Joan Palmateer, the first superintendent, conducted a series of outreach sessions to inform the local community about the prison's construction, safety procedures, and rehabilitation programs. She spoke of a philosophy of tough love and a passion to help women work toward a better life when they reenter society.

Koko Sutton heard Joan's presentation and had the idea that quilting classes could help the new prison achieve its goals. After presenting her idea to Joan, Koko founded Coffee Creek Quilters and started recruiting volunteers.

In April 2002 we began offering two weekly classes; at that time we had two instructors and six sewing stations for each class of twelve students. Initially, a church was the primary funding source. The program was an immediate success and we soon realized there was a need for more classes. So, getting additional instructors, equipment and supplies and becoming a non-profit corporation were next on the agenda. We received donations to acquire additional equipment and supplies to increase the class size. Today we have four different weekly classes, each with five to six instructors and twenty students.

Each student in the program makes three quilts in weekly two-hour classes. The first two quilts are donated to a variety of charities that serve seniors in nursing homes, hospitalized children, terminally ill adults, and foster children. Approximately 150 quilts are donated to these charities annually. Students may keep the third quilt or give it to a loved one. The opportunity to give back to the community and to loved ones is extremely important to the students.

Working in a correctional facility

Oregon's Department of Corrections (DOC) has an extensive volunteer program that's designed to minimize the recidivism rate among released prisoners. The DOC has established the following requirements for all volunteers:

- 18 years of age or older
- Good role model
- Desire to make a difference
- Interview with department staff
- Submit an application
- Pass a background check
- Complete a training program
- Attend a two hour facility orientation
- Fingerprinting/picture ID

The DOC organizes its volunteer programs into a variety of functional units:

- 12-Step Programs
- Life Skills
- Education
- Re-Entry
- Student Interns
- Religious Services

CCQ operates through the Life Skills unit. A CCCF Life Skills Coordinator is assigned to serve as liaison with CCQ. Training for new volunteers is arranged by the Coordinator. Women interested in taking the class sign up through the Coordinator who maintains a class roster.

In addition to the training program that all volunteers must complete, DOC requires that one CCQ volunteer per class be certified with “key” and “escort” training. Key trained volunteers are entrusted with keys to the classroom, restrooms, and locked cabinets. Escort trained volunteers are permitted to accompany classroom visitors who have not received full volunteer training.

The DOC imposes security requirements for all volunteers who enter their correctional facilities. These include:

- Blue jeans, blue slacks or shirts and lime green shirts prohibited because inmates wear these colors
Purses, underwire bras, and metal objects prohibited. Volunteers must pass through metal detector before entering classroom.
- A single car key can be taken into the classroom if it is in the volunteer's pocket at all times. Jackets and keys can be secured in a locker prior to entering the classroom.
- Quilt bags and materials are examined by correctional officer.
- Volunteers are advised to avoid sharing identifying personal information with inmates.

CCQ classes are open to women in minimum security who have attained the highest incentive level of behavior. CCCF requires strict adherence to procedures involving tools including rotary cutters, scissors, screw drivers, needles, and pins. All tools are counted before and at the end of class. Each class has an inmate who is not a student in the class assigned to serve as tool clerk.

While there are no correctional officers present in the classroom during the class, there is an officer present in the adjacent control booth who can see into the classroom via video camera. At the end of each class the lead instructor calls a correctional officer to the classroom to verify that all of the tools have been returned to the locked cabinet and to “pat out” the students.

Volunteer qualifications

There are various ways volunteers can participate in CCQ:

- Classroom instructors
- Quilt kit assemblers
- Fundraisers
- Fabric inventory managers
- Administrative assistant

When a potential volunteer expresses interest in being a classroom instructor, one of our members interviews that person to look for these skills and personality traits:

- Basic quilting skills
- A mix of expertise and interests
- Patience and willingness to teach and be creative in approaches
- Attitude more important than skill level
- Non-judgmental approach toward working with our students

- Ability to work harmoniously with inmates, prison staff, and other volunteers
- Commitment to show up every week
- Able to pass DOC security and background checks

New volunteers come to CCQ in a variety of ways:

- Word of mouth
- Table displays at quilt shows
- Speaker presentations at quilt guild and community meetings
- Craigslist postings
- Our Web Page

Class structure

There can be as many as 20 students in each of the four classes. We add new students to the class when other students complete their three quilts and leave the class. (Students don't all start and end the class at the same time.) Usually, we add new students at the first class of the month. That way, we have several new students starting at the same time and go over the basics in small groups.

In a student's first two classes, we cover a variety of topics:

- Administrative procedures
- Safe use of tools
- Overview of quilt construction
- Cutting techniques
- Sewing machine threading, bobbin winding, etc.
- Practice sewing quarter inch seams
- Pressing

Each student is given a large pizza box at the first class with the student's name printed on the outside. Pizza boxes hold several items:

- The book *Start Quilting with Alex Anderson*
- Two-pocket folder for patterns and notes
- Pincushion
- One neutral color spool of thread and bobbin
- Student's current quilt project

Each student is also provided a "pin sheet" that holds 20 straight pins placed in rows on an 8 ½ x 11 fabric/cardboard frame structure. (See photo at the end of this document.) Students check out a pin sheet from the tool clerk. Pins are closely controlled and students are responsible for making sure all pins are returned to the pin sheets at the end of class. If even one pin is missing, the class is required to stay until it is found. We have found that the flat "flower" shaped pins don't roll as far when dropped.

After the orientation, students are assigned to work with specific instructors. We aim for a 1:4 instructor to student ratio. Instructors are responsible for making sure their assigned students have the patterns, materials, and supplies needed for the three quilts. We have learned the importance of having instructors work with the same students. This allows instructors to identify any learning challenges and build trust. From the student's perspective, this is often the first time someone has consistently "shown

up” for them. Recently we have added a sixth instructor to each class, whose primary responsibility is to “float” and become acquainted with all the students. This has provided needed flexibility when an instructor is absent, either planned or at the last minute. When an absence is planned, instructors email an update on their students and what they will need during her absence. Typically, the “floater” is assigned to work with those students.

One instructor in each class is designated as lead instructor and serves as liaison with prison officials for the class. That instructor has received key and escort training described above. The lead instructor also wears a plastic pouch with extra rotary cutter blades, machine and hand sewing needles, and band aids in case they're needed during class. If a student takes a hand sewing needle, her identification badge is kept in the pouch until the needle is returned.

Classes are held in CCCF's dining room. (See photos at the end of this document.) Each class lasts two hours. When students arrive for class, they sign in on a class attendance sheet used by CCQ. Students are expected to let us know if they are unable to attend class. If a student has three unexcused absences, she can be removed from the program. An additional facility attendance sheet is completed by the lead instructor and given to CCCF administration.

After signing in, students check out the tools they need for their projects out of the cabinets. Dining tables are moved to facilitate the work to be done. For example, students move tables next to electric outlets to power the sewing machines and irons. Class stops ten minutes early so students can store their equipment and move the furniture back for dining room use.

Students work at their own pace. Those who come to the class with no sewing experience might need more time and help than students with some sewing experience. For some students, drawing the quarter inch seam allowance on the fabric is very helpful, especially at first. Occasionally a student with quilting experience joins the class and works very independently.

Classroom equipment

Classroom equipment is stored in the CCCF dining room, but is the property of CCQ. We have two storage cabinets which are unlocked only during class time. (See photos at the end of this document.) Security of items in the cabinets is of utmost importance.

Cabinet #1 holds student project boxes (pizza boxes).

Cabinet # 2 holds:

- Sewing machines
- Irons and ironing boards
- Surge protectors/extension cords
- Rulers in a variety of sizes
- Thread, bobbins, tape, pencils, gloves, tape measures
- Reference books, sewing machine manuals
- Cutting mats don't fit inside (and are not controlled items), so are stored on top of the cabinet

Each class has an inmate who is not a student in the class assigned to serve as tool clerk. If a student needs to use a rotary cutter, seam ripper, scissors, or screw driver, she checks it out. All controlled tools are numbered; they are hung on the doors of the cabinet and their shapes are outlined. The tool clerk

also controls the binder of pin sheets. At the end of class, all tools that have been checked out must be returned and checked back in. A correctional officer verifies that all tools are accounted for prior to locking the cabinets and “patting out” the students..

Some quilting tools and supplies, such as thread, are not controlled by the tool clerk, so students can take them as needed. An instructor inventories the rulers at the beginning and end of class to ensure that none have been inadvertently left in a pizza box.

In addition to the tools in the cabinet, some items are stored with the correctional officer in the control booth adjacent to the classroom. The lead instructor requests these items before class and returns them at the end of class:

- Pin sheet binder
- Pouch with extra rotary cutter blades, machine and hand needles

When a rotary cutter blade or needle is replaced during class, an instructor covers it with masking tape for safety and gives it to the correctional officer in the control booth for disposal. A box with extra rotary blades and machine needles is kept in the control booth to replace items removed from the pouch.

Although we started the program with donated sewing machines, we are now able to replace them with new machines. When we purchase new machines, some features we look for are:

- Sturdy and reliable
- Walking foot
- Quarter inch foot
- Free motion quilting option
- A few decorative stitches
- Speed control
- Needle down feature

Once a month we clean all of the sewing machines. This responsibility is rotated through the four classes.

Quilt kits and patterns

Each student makes three quilts in the class. Instructors assemble kits consisting of a pattern and an appropriate selection and quantity of fabric to complete the quilt. Instructors bring the completed kits to class on the student’s first day.

First quilt kits - general guidelines:

- Quilts measure approximately 40” x 40”
- Patterns typically use squares and rectangles on a straight set
- All long pieces (sashings and borders) are joined with diagonal seams
- All sashings and borders are measured before sewing
- Quilt can be either hand tied or machine quilted
- Must have a binding
- Binding is sewn on the front by machine and finished on back by hand

Second quilt kits - general guidelines:

- Quilts measure approximately 40" x 40" or 40" x 60".
- Students given some say in choice of fabric/pattern
- Patterns more complicated to add new skills
- Machine quilting recommended

Third quilts – general guidelines:

- CCCF rules specify that the quilt can be a maximum of 60"x80" or a total of 280 linear inches on perimeter.
- Students choose their pattern and their color and theme preferences are taken into consideration when selecting their fabric for them.
- Quilting can be done by student or professionally quilted by local long arm quilters.
- Students sew on binding after the quilt is returned from long arm quilter.

When selecting fabrics, we strive for equity among students. At the same time, we try to select fabrics that give the students pleasure. We encourage them to be involved in the selection of color themes and patterns.

When a quilt top is finished, the quilt sandwich must be "set" in one class period. Sometimes several students/instructors will help with the basting. If the basting can't be completed in one class, we use blue masking tape to make sure the three layers won't shift when folded for return to the cabinet. Pins cannot be left in the quilt.

Students sew labels on each of the three quilts. Generic "Made by Coffee Creek Quilters" labels are used for the first two quilts. Personalized labels are made for third quilts.

We recently began offering our long arm quilters \$40 for each third quilt and asking that it be completed within 30 days. Initially, all of our long arm quilters donated their services, and we couldn't have done it without them. Then, as our budget improved, we began paying them a small amount each year to cover the cost of thread. However, a consistent issue was the widely varying lengths of time a third quilt would be out. Some students got their quilt back in a few weeks and others waited months. This sometimes posed a problem for a student nearing her release date, and resulted in a sense of unfairness among students. It was a major decision for us to begin paying our quilters and asking them to return it in 30 days. We have made the new budget item a focus for grant applications. Please note, this evolved over 10 years.

Fabric donation, purchase, and storage

Most of the fabric used in the quilt tops is donated. We have learned to be specific about requesting 100% cotton quilting-weight fabrics, however, we accept all fabric. A committee sorts donations and passes along donations to other groups if they are not suitable for our use. Fabrics are washed and ironed before being stored.

Fabric donors learn about CCQ in a variety of ways:

- Our website that directs people to the "Donation Coordinator"
- Presentations at quilt shops, guilds, civic meetings, churches, quilt shows/exhibitions, etc.
- Our brochure

We have also solicited manufacturer samples, and occasionally fabric stores have donated entire bolts. The donated fabric stash is supplemented by purchasing bolts of fabrics, typically ‘blender’ fabrics, at wholesale or at special sales. All batting is purchased by the bolt. One member is designated with the authority to make these large purchases within a specified annual budget.

Initially, all fabric was stored in a member’s garage that was close to the prison. Early on, any space you can find that is accessible to everyone should work. Over time we found that more space was needed. Our solution was to work with a local church to add closet space to an unattached building on their property. We have two large walk-in closets with metal shelves on either side where fabric is stored more or less by color family. Pieces larger than a yard are folded like bolts and laid on the shelves. Smaller pieces are stored by color in plastic tubs that are stored on one of three large rolling storage units that fit into the closets. Other supplies such as thread, bobbins, and quilting books are also stored in these closets. (See photos at the end of this document.)

Release kits

CCQ students who have completed all three quilts and are released from prison are eligible to receive a release kit that includes:

- Donated and serviced sewing machine (we have an agreement with a sewing center that services all donated machines at a fixed rate)
- Basic sewing supplies: pins, needles, seam ripper, scissors, tape measure, and a mat, ruler and rotary cutter set
- Quilt kit with pattern, batting, and back
- Quilting books and magazines (from donated supply)
- List of local quilt stores, guilds, and other opportunities to continue sewing

After a student is released from the facility and has established a stable living situation, she may call our CCQ phone number to request a release kit. The student’s instructor returns her call and makes arrangements to meet the student in a public location to give her the release kit. We do not meet students at their homes or have them come to our homes.

We have just initiated a program that asks quilt guilds and shops to provide the contents of a release kit. The flyer is available on our web page.

Donating quilts

There are endless possibilities for donating student quilts. The recipients of our quilts change over time depending on local needs and opportunities. Sometimes we receive a request for a certain number of quilts for a children’s camp or other charity. We maintain a list of charities with their contact information and any preferences regarding size and style. One person is responsible for tracking where and how many quilts are donated each year. Examples of where our quilts have been donated include:

- Hospice
- Children’s hospital
- Hospitals for passage/end of life quilts
- Special needs children’s camps
- Hurricane Katrina

- Teen parenting program
- Nursing homes

Display and photography of students' quilts

When first and second quilts are finished, they are hung in the classroom. The classroom/dining room also serves as the visitor room on the weekends and students have the opportunity to show their work to visitors. After that time the quilts are removed, photographed, and distributed to designated recipient organizations. Two prints are made of each photograph – one for our files and one for the student who made the quilt.

When a third quilt is finished, a photograph is taken by the CCCF Life Skills Coordinator. This photograph is incorporated into a prison quilt authorization form that is signed by prison authorities before the quilt can be taken to the student's housing unit. The student must have the form with the quilt any time she takes it out of the dorm. CCQ keeps the second copy of the quilt authorization form.

Organizational details

Non-profit status. CCQ was registered as a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization within the first year with the help of donated legal services. The organization then established by-laws, a board of directors, and a physical address. Our current physical address is a secure PO Box. We have recently revised our by-laws and expanded the number of board directors. The current board has quarterly scheduled meetings.

Volunteer meetings. A two-hour meeting is held one Saturday of the month for all teachers and volunteers at the church where our fabric is stored. This makes it convenient to hold work parties afterwards to sort fabric or make quilt kits. An initial agenda is electronically circulated by the program administrator and additions can be offered by the membership. The purpose of the meeting is to address items of interest or concern to our students, our organization, or the correctional facility. Several times a year speakers are invited to cover topics identified by the membership or when there have been changes in prison policies or procedures.

Organizational structure. For many years, the organization functioned without a defined structure. Our founder, Koko Sutton, was a dynamo who took care of almost everything. When she became ill, we developed an organizational structure that made sense to us and asked all of our teachers and volunteers to take on the activities that most suited their skills and wishes. Now, the work of the organization is distributed across the membership with shared responsibility and accountability. Each main organizational group has clearly defined responsibilities, an identified contact and is responsible for creating an annual budget. These groups are:

- Policies and Procedures (develops policies and procedures that meet the needs and requirements of prison, volunteers and students)
- Equipment and Supplies (responsible for all purchases and inventory)
- Fabric and Student Quilts (responsible for fabric donations, storage and everything related to the construction, photography, and distribution of student quilts)
- Raffle Quilt (responsible for design and construction of raffle quilt in years it is done)
- Public Relations/Fundraising (responsible for web site, brochure, speaking engagements, fundraising, and selling raffle quilt tickets)
- Volunteer Recruiter (coordinates all new volunteer activities and shepherds volunteers through

application, visiting, and training process)

Program administrator. We have found it important to have a ‘point person’ for the organization. Thus, we have a volunteer program administrator, selected by the group for a one year term. She facilitates the monthly meetings, is the prison and church liaison, monitors the PO Box, and coordinates the day-to-day activities with Board assistance as appropriate. We also have a program secretary who monitors our email, takes minutes at monthly meeting, and maintains the membership roster. Another volunteer monitors our phone messages and forwards them to the appropriate person/group.

Public relations

This activity is vital to the fiscal health of the organization. Having a brochure, web site, email account, P.O. Box, and phone number are essential first steps. Even a simple flyer is a good start. A web site is an excellent way to provide the public with information about the program and solicit volunteers and donations. A year ago, a grant was written and funded to update our web page. The budget included hiring a professional photographer.

The public relations group responds to and seeks opportunities to conduct presentations about CCQ. An annual record is maintained of all presentations, including contact information, number of hours required for the event and revenues raised. A list of donors is maintained and thank-you / tax donation letters are sent to all contributors. A record of student and teacher testimonials is kept to use in presentations and grant applications. Press releases are sent out whenever we experience a landmark event, such as when we won the Thimbleberry Challenge and posted on our web page.

Finances and fundraising

It has consistently cost us \$100/student per year. This includes supplies other than donated fabric, such as replacement rotary blades, batting, release kits and administrative costs such as insurance and rent for storage space. It does *not* include major purchases such as sewing machines. Thus, we have budgets for both our general operating expenses and for designated purchases such as sewing machines.

The importance of becoming a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization cannot be over emphasized. This allows donors to receive a tax benefit and is a requirement for most foundation grant applications. Our donor base includes individuals, churches, civic organizations, quilt guilds, businesses, and corporations. We have applied for and received foundation funding for general operating expenses and equipment including sewing machines and a computer. We have also received matching grants from corporations and corporate donations based on employee volunteer participation.

A raffle quilt made by instructors has consistently brought in about \$2,000 annually. Selling raffle quilt tickets at quilt shows, churches, libraries, businesses, civic meetings, etc., has the added benefit of bringing visibility to the organization and recruiting new volunteers. However, it can be a very time consuming and labor intensive activity. We have also sold quilts made by our teachers at these events.

We have two new fundraising activities that we are marketing to quilt shops, guilds, and the public. The first is the opportunity to “Sponsor a Quilt Student,” which asks for \$100 donation to sponsor a student for a year. The second is the opportunity to put together “Release Kits.” Flyers for both initiatives can be found on our web site.

Documentation

Keeping careful records is essential. Knowing how many students you have and how many quilts are given to charity become vital information when giving presentations and asking for donations. We have a teacher's manual that covers policies and procedures and answers to the many who, what, and how questions of our day-to-day activities. A list of sewing machines and serial numbers is maintained for depreciation records. Every state department of corrections and individual prison will also have its requirements for documentation.

Final thoughts

Thanks to the vision of our founder, Koko Sutton, we have created this guide with the hope that you will be inspired to found a similar quilting outreach program in your community. We hope it has been helpful to you and wish you success in starting your own prison quilting program. Please contact us by email CCQ2@comcast.net if you have questions.

*“Do not go where the path may lead.
Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”
Ralph Waldo Emerson*

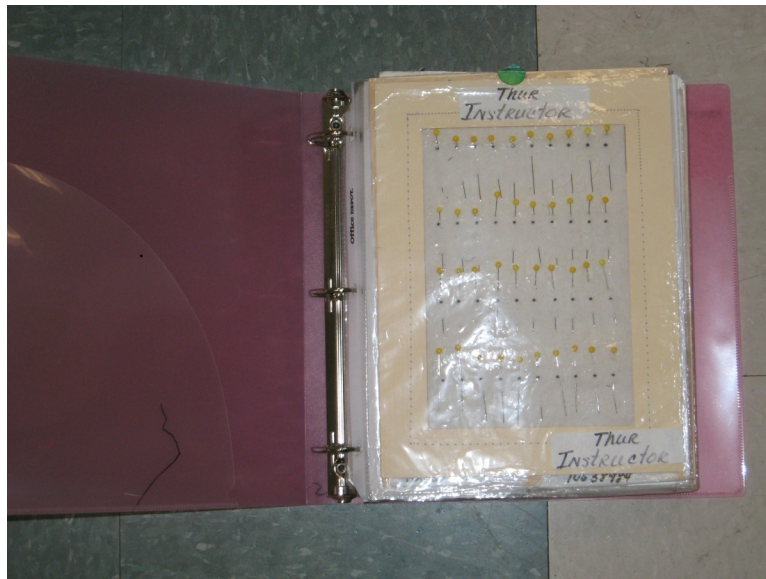
Thank you, Koko!

Photographs

Classes are held in the prison dining room.



Each student is assigned a pin sheet.



Student quilt projects are stored in pizza boxes in a locked cabinet in the prison dining room.



Sewing machines, irons, cutting tools, and other tools and supplies are stored in a locked cabinet in the prison dining room.



The fabric stash is stored at a church near the prison.

