

## **Volunteer of the Week**

### **Sharyl Green**

“Volunteering is a two-way street,” says Sharyl Green of Burlington, referring to the give-and-take she has experienced as a mentor with the Vermont Women's Mentoring Program (VWMP) through Mercy Connections. This unique program matches volunteer mentors with women who are transitioning back into the community after having served time in prison.

The desire to work with formerly incarcerated women formed in Green's mind during her teaching years, when she had students in her class whose mothers were in prison. She made it a goal for after retirement, or “graduation” as she calls it, and has kept her promise to herself.

Green said she doesn't have a sense that she is doing something nice for someone, the way volunteerism is often perceived. Rather, she sees that she and her mentee have each chosen this path—this relationship—to strengthen their respective lives, that her mentee is every bit as much of a volunteer in the process as Green, and that she herself, as mentor, has benefited.

Green explained that while mentors are asked to commit for a year, mentees are also there on a volunteer basis, essentially committing to the relationship with a mentor, which is meant to be judgment free and unconditional. It's been over three years since Green first met her mentee, and the friendship has weathered life's ups and downs as the two women remain committed to their special relationship.

They get together on a fairly regular basis and stay in touch by phone or email in between those times. Whether meeting for tea or a meal or a walk or a swim, the talk is plentiful. “We're great conversationalists together,” says Green. The women also write together, and Green's mentee has offered much support and essential critique on one of her writing projects.

In addition to their own fun, the two friends also partake in many of the Mercy Connections—sponsored events such as potlucks, picnics and sailing opportunities. They have told their story as presenters at several mentor training sessions and have written letters together as part of funding requests on behalf of VWMP.

Green said that what is particularly special to her is the absolute unconditional and nonjudgmental nature of the relationship, which allows the two women to reach out to each other respectfully. She also shared her sense of gratitude at having had the wonderful opportunity to forge this friendship, an opportunity that she may not otherwise have had.