

SERO4 Ltd

VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT HANDBOOK

Supporting Women with Justice Involvement



2 0 2 6 E D I T I O N

Reintegration. Restoration. Rehumanisation.

Contents

00	A Note to Organisations	3
01	Understanding Dehumanisation & Rehumanisation	4
02	The Five Domains of Rehumanising Practice	6
03	Preparing Your Organisation	7
04	The Induction Process	8
05	Policies, Rules & Boundaries	9
06	Day-to-Day Rehumanising Practice	10
07	Wellbeing for Staff & Supervisors	12
08	Quick Reference Guide	13

A practical, dignity-centred guide for organisations engaging women with justice experience as volunteers.

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00 A NOTE TO ORGANISATIONS

Why This Handbook Exists

Every woman who walks through your door carrying a history of justice involvement has already navigated systems that diminished, controlled, and often stripped away her sense of self. Before she volunteered with you, she endured processes of dehumanisation — in custody, in courts, in the labels placed upon her.

Your organisation has the opportunity to be something different. Not just a workplace. Not just a placement. A site of Rehumanisation — where her full humanity is recognised, her story honoured, and her potential genuinely invested in.

“Rehumanisation is not a program. It is a posture. It is the daily, deliberate choice to see the whole person standing in front of you.”

— **Rehumanisation Model of Practice, SERO4 Ltd**

This handbook is a practical resource grounded in the Rehumanisation Model of Practice and Relational-Cultural Theory. It is designed to help your team create conditions where women with justice involvement can thrive as volunteers — bringing their strengths, building new skills, and experiencing genuine connection.

How to Use This Handbook

This handbook is designed for any organisation that engages women with justice experience as volunteers. It covers:

- ◆ The theory underpinning dignity-centred volunteer engagement
- ◆ Practical induction frameworks and tools
- ◆ Day-to-day practices that build safety, trust, and belonging
- ◆ Checklists, conversation guides, and templates

Each section can be used independently or as part of a structured onboarding process.

01 UNDERSTANDING DEHUMANISATION & REHUMANISATION

The Theoretical Foundation

To support women with justice involvement well, organisations must understand what they have often experienced: systemic and interpersonal dehumanisation.



What Is Dehumanisation?

Dehumanisation refers to processes — social, institutional, and interpersonal — that deny a person’s full humanity. For women in the justice system, these processes are pervasive and compound over time. They generally take two forms:

STRUCTURAL DEHUMANISATION	RELATIONAL DEHUMANISATION
Labelled and managed as a ‘risk’	Spoken about as a ‘case’
Loss of autonomy and privacy	Interactions that communicate shame
Constant surveillance and control	No warmth, eye contact or curiosity
Separation from children and family	Defined by offence history alone
Economic exclusion and barriers	Dismissal of grief and trauma

What Is Rehumanisation?

Rehumanisation is the active, relational process of restoring a person’s sense of dignity, worth, and agency. It is not a program or a procedure — it is a way of being in relationship. Drawing on Relational-Cultural Theory and feminist strengths-based practice, it works through six interconnected principles:

THE SIX PRINCIPLES OF REHUMANISATION



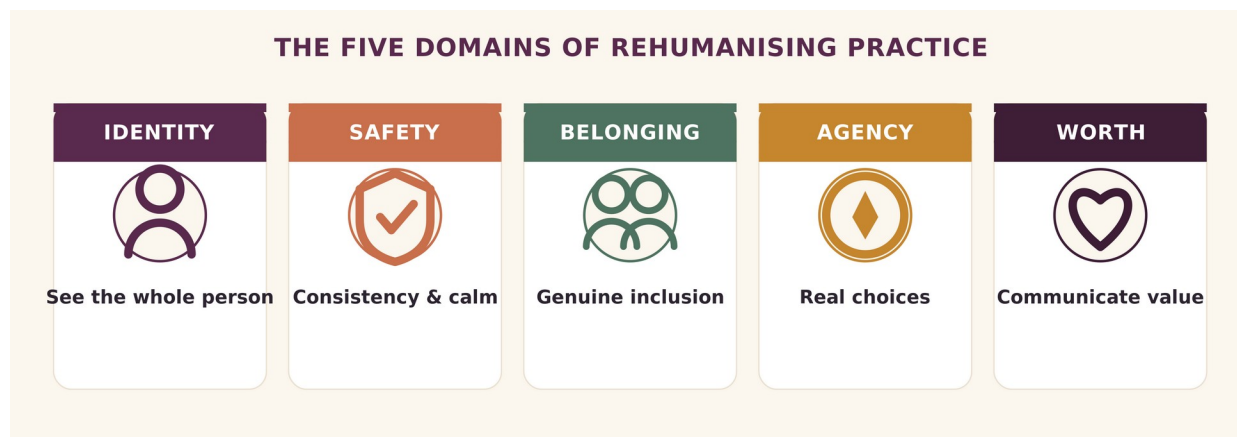
“Growth-fostering relationships are those in which both people feel seen, respected, and more able to act in the world. This is the work of Rehumanisation.”

— Adapted from Jean Baker Miller, Relational-Cultural Theory

02 THE FIVE DOMAINS OF REHUMANISING PRACTICE

A Framework for Organisations

The Rehumanisation Model of Practice identifies five key domains in which dehumanising forces operate — and in which organisations can mount deliberate responses.



Each domain pairs a common dehumanising force with a deliberate rehumanising response:

DOMAIN	DEHUMANISING FORCE	REHUMANISING RESPONSE	WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE
Identity	Being defined by offence history only	See and name the whole person	Use first names always. Ask about interests, skills, aspirations. Avoid referencing the justice system publicly.
Safety	Unpredictable, high-surveillance environments	Create consistency and calm	Brief the volunteer on routines, introduce people, provide a quiet check-in space.
Belonging	Exclusion, othering, group shame	Build genuine inclusion	Introduce her as a valued team member. Create rituals that include everyone.
Agency	Constant oversight and lack of choice	Offer real choices	Let her choose tasks where possible. Invite input into how work is done.
Worth	Shame-based messaging, dismissal	Actively communicate value	Regular, specific positive feedback. Celebrate contributions publicly.

KEY PRINCIPLE

- ☑ Organisations do not need to know a woman's full history to support her well.
- ☑ What matters is creating an environment in which any person — regardless of background — feels safe, valued, and able to contribute.
- ☑ The five domains provide a map. Your daily interactions are the territory.

03 PREPARING YOUR ORGANISATION

Before She Arrives

The most powerful work happens before the volunteer walks in the door. Organisations that prepare thoughtfully signal — through structure, culture, and environment — that they are ready to receive her.

Readiness Checklist for Leadership

COMPLETE BEFORE COMMENCEMENT

- ☒ Leadership has been briefed on trauma-informed and rehumanising approaches
- ☒ All staff who will interact with the volunteer have completed a basic orientation
- ☒ Confidentiality obligations are clear — only need-to-know information is shared
- ☒ A dedicated Volunteer Liaison point of contact has been assigned
- ☒ A private, comfortable space is available for check-ins and conversations
- ☒ Workplace policies have been reviewed for othering or stigmatising language
- ☒ An emergency/wellbeing contact protocol is in place and understood by all staff
- ☒ Clear agreements with any referring organisation are documented

Preparing Your Team

Your team's attitude will shape the volunteer's experience more than any policy.

WHAT STAFF NEED TO KNOW	WHAT STAFF DO NOT NEED TO KNOW
Basic facts about barriers women face post-release	The details of the volunteer's offence history
Why confidentiality about background is essential	Specific sentence length or release conditions
What trauma-informed looks like in everyday interactions	Medical or mental health history (unless directly relevant)
How to introduce the volunteer to others	Details from the referral organisation's case file
Who to speak to if they have questions or concerns	Whether she is on parole or supervised orders

Setting Up the Physical Environment

- ◆ Are there signs or posters that communicate belonging and diversity?
- ◆ Is there a comfortable, private space she can access if overwhelmed?
- ◆ Are access codes, badges, and systems explained clearly from day one?
- ◆ Is the bathroom easily accessible and not shared uncomfortably?
- ◆ Are there visible cues of warmth — plants, natural light, art?

04 THE INDUCTION PROCESS

Welcoming Her Into Your Workplace

Induction is not simply orientation to policies and systems. For women with justice involvement, it is often the first time in years they have been genuinely welcomed into a civilian workplace. Your induction process should communicate dignity, safety, and belonging from the very first moment.

Suggested Induction Schedule

WHEN	CONTENT	APPROACH
Day 1 - First 2 hours	Tour, introductions, morning tea with the team	Relational and warm. No paperwork yet. Focus entirely on human connection.
Day 1 - After lunch	Role overview, her tasks for the week, who she reports to	Conversational. Invite questions. Keep it to what she needs for her first week.
Day 1	Safety and emergency procedures, confidentiality, workplace behaviour	Frame as “how we keep everyone safe together” — not rules to police her.
Weeks 1-2	Policies relevant to her role (privacy, communications, boundaries)	Read through together. Check for questions. Provide a plain-language summary.
End of Week 2	Reflective check-in: How is she settling in? What support does she need?	Private, non-evaluative conversation. Listen more than speak.

LANGUAGE MATTERS

- ☑ Use her first name, always. Never refer to her as a “client”, “parolee”, “offender”, or “participant”.
- ☑ When introducing her: “This is [Name], she’s joining our team as a volunteer in [area]” — nothing more.
- ☑ Avoid questions that presuppose a troubled history. “Have you worked anywhere like this before?” is better than “Have you ever had a proper job?”

05 POLICIES, RULES & BOUNDARIES

Frameworks That Build Safety

Policies and rules can feel threatening or confusing for women who have experienced the justice system — where rules were enforced punitively, arbitrarily, and without explanation. Your role is to present the workplace’s framework in a way that feels protective rather than policing.

The Rehumanising Way to Introduce Policies

THREE-PART FRAMING FOR EVERY POLICY

- ☑ 1. WHY it exists — what it protects, who it keeps safe, why the organisation cares about it
- ☑ 2. WHAT it requires — stated plainly, without jargon or legalese
- ☑ 3. WHAT SUPPORT LOOKS LIKE if she finds it hard to navigate — who to talk to, no judgment

Key Policy Areas

POLICY AREA	HOW TO FRAME IT
Privacy & Confidentiality	Frame as mutual protection: “We protect everyone’s information here — including yours. No one outside this team will know anything about you that you haven’t chosen to share.”
Code of Conduct & Behaviour Standards	Frame as relational norms, not punitive rules. Walk through real examples of what respectful interaction looks like.
Boundaries with Service Recipients	Acknowledge that women with lived experience may feel a strong pull to help others with similar backgrounds. Name this as a strength, but explain the professional boundary clearly.
Social Media & Communications	Be aware that she may have legal obligations regarding her own online presence. Approach this without assumption.
Mandatory Reporting Obligations	Be transparent and direct. Explain clearly what triggers a mandatory report and reassure her that this policy exists to protect everyone — including her.

When She Makes a Mistake

- ◆ Respond privately, calmly, and specifically — focus on the action, not the person.
- ◆ Acknowledge what she did right before addressing what needs to change.
- ◆ Ask rather than tell: “What do you think happened there? What would you do differently?”
- ◆ Never use words like “disappointing”, “failed”, or comparisons to other volunteers.
- ◆ Treat it as a learning moment — model that mistakes are survivable and she is still valued.

06 DAY-TO-DAY REHUMANISING PRACTICE

How You Show Up Matters Most

The most powerful rehumanising moments do not happen in workshops or policy documents. They happen in corridors, over cups of tea, in the way a supervisor greets someone on Monday morning.

SIX PRACTICES OF DAILY REHUMANISATION

 Greet by name A warm hello, every day	 Check in, not up Curiosity, not surveillance	 Acknowledge progress Specific, genuine praise
 Invite her voice Ask — and mean it	 Hold the door open Create real pathways	 Notice strengths Name what you see

Navigating Difficult Moments

IF SHE SEEMS WITHDRAWN OR DISTRESSED

- ☒ Do not ignore it or pretend not to notice — this communicates that her feelings are unwelcome.
- ☒ Approach gently and privately: “I noticed you seem a bit quiet today — I just wanted to check in.”
- ☒ Do not pressure her to disclose. Offer space and availability.
- ☒ Follow your organisation’s wellbeing protocol. Know your referral pathways.

IF SHE IS TRIGGERED BY SOMETHING IN THE ENVIRONMENT

- ☒ Stay calm. Your regulated state regulates hers.
- ☒ Offer a break and a private space. Do not explain or justify what triggered her.
- ☒ Debrief gently afterwards — when she is ready, not when you need resolution.
- ☒ Review your environment to see if the trigger can be removed or reduced.

IF SHE DISCLOSES PAST EXPERIENCES

- ☒ Receive the disclosure with calm and warmth. Do not react with shock, horror, or excessive sympathy.
- ☒ Thank her for trusting you: “Thank you for telling me that — I’m glad you felt you could.”

- ☑ Do not probe for more detail than she has offered. Let her lead.
- ☑ Know your confidentiality limits and be honest about them.

Milestones and Recognition

- ◆ Formally welcoming her at the end of her first week with the team present.
- ◆ Marking one month, three months, and six months with acknowledgment.
- ◆ Providing a written reference after any period of volunteering.
- ◆ Including her in any team celebrations or staff events.
- ◆ Asking her to mentor or buddy future volunteers when she is ready.

07 WELLBEING FOR STAFF & SUPERVISORS

Sustaining Rehumanising Practice

Supporting women with complex histories is profoundly meaningful work. It is also work that carries weight. Organisations that engage in rehumanising practice must invest equally in the wellbeing of the staff doing that work.

“You cannot pour from an empty vessel. Rehumanisation must flow from staff who are themselves supported, seen, and sustained.”

— **Rehumanisation Model of Practice, SERO4 Ltd**

Supervision as a Rehumanising Practice

- ◆ Hold regular (fortnightly minimum) one-on-one reflective supervision sessions.
- ◆ Create space for staff to name what is hard as well as what is working.
- ◆ Actively recognise staff strengths, not just performance outcomes.
- ◆ Debrief any critical incidents or difficult interactions promptly and supportively.
- ◆ Connect staff reflection to the theory — help them name what they are navigating.

Staff Readiness Self-Check

BEFORE WORKING WITH A VOLUNTEER TODAY, ASK YOURSELF:

- ☒ Am I regulated? Can I offer genuine presence today, or do I need a moment first?
- ☒ Am I carrying any assumptions or judgements about her that I need to set aside?
- ☒ Do I know what’s happening in her life at the moment that might affect today?
- ☒ Have I prepared anything specific to acknowledge her contribution or progress?
- ☒ Is there anything I need to debrief with my supervisor before or after this interaction?

Boundaries and the Relational Self

Reflect honestly on:

- ◆ Whether you are carrying the volunteer’s experience outside work hours.
- ◆ Whether you are making exceptions for this volunteer that you would not make for others.
- ◆ Whether you have disclosed more personal information than is appropriate.
- ◆ Whether the relationship feels mutual and growth-producing — or one-directional and draining.

08 QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Tools, Checklists & Resources

First Day Checklist

DAY ONE — VOLUNTEER LIAISON CHECKLIST

- ☒ Met at the entrance and personally welcomed
- ☒ Introduced to all staff members by name and role
- ☒ Tour of the full workplace including bathroom, kitchen, exit routes
- ☒ Shown her workspace and provided any necessary equipment or materials
- ☒ Access codes, keys, or badges provided and explained
- ☒ Morning tea or coffee together — informal, unhurried conversation
- ☒ Role overview provided verbally — written summary given for her to take home
- ☒ Told clearly: who to call if she needs to be absent, who her first point of contact is
- ☒ Wellbeing check-in at end of day — brief, genuine, no performance pressure
- ☒ Date and time of next shift confirmed

Language to Use and Avoid

USE THESE WORDS AND PHRASES	AVOID THESE WORDS AND PHRASES
"Welcome — we're really glad you're here."	"Given your background..." or "People like you..."
"You bring something valuable to this team."	"We need to make sure you understand the rules."
"Is there anything you need from us today?"	"You're lucky to have this opportunity."
"That was really well done — I noticed..."	"I know this must be hard for you."
"What do you think about how we approach this?"	Any reference to custody, sentence, or offence history
"I made a mistake too — here's what I learned."	Over-explaining rules as if assuming she will break them
"Your experience gives you a perspective we really value."	"You need to prove yourself here."

Monthly Check-In Conversation Guide

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTIVE CHECK-INS

- ☒ "What's been the best part of your time here so far?"
- ☒ "Is there anything about the role you'd like to be different?"
- ☒ "What would you like to learn or try in the next month?"
- ☒ "Is there anything I can do differently to support you better?"
- ☒ "How are you finding the team? Is there anyone you'd like to get to know better?"
- ☒ "What are you most proud of since you started?"

Key References and Further Reading

- ◆ Rehumanisation Model of Practice — SERO4 Ltd (2026)
- ◆ Relational-Cultural Theory — Jean Baker Miller & Judith Jordan, Stone Center, Wellesley College
- ◆ Good Lives Model — Tony Ward & colleagues
- ◆ Desistance literature — Shadd Maruna, Fergus McNeill
- ◆ Covington's Gender-Responsive Practice Framework — Stephanie Covington
- ◆ Trauma-Informed Care in Practice — SAMHSA Guidelines
- ◆ RESEED Therapeutic Community Framework — SERO4 Ltd

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