

Career Profile

Paula Smith, Correctional Officer

[Watch Paula talk about her career as a Correctional Officer](#)



Paula Smith came to Wilfrid Laurier University as a mature student after spending a year and a half at Lambton College in Sarnia, studying general arts. While at Laurier, Paula majored in psychology with a minor in cultural anthropology and women's studies. As a mature student, Paula participated in the Mature Student Association on campus which allowed her to gain the help and support she needed while studying at Laurier. Throughout her studies at Laurier, Paula worked as a hairdresser, which further solidified her interest in pursuing a career that involved working directly with people but in an even more hands-on, helping capacity.

After becoming employed with Corrections Canada, Paula has continued to remain involved outside her regular work duties. Paula is a member of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) within Corrections Canada. EAP training allows Paula to offer assistance to other employees if there is a crisis within the institution. The training includes crisis intervention and trauma training to deal with the effects of a crisis.

Paula describes a typical day on the job as very busy and stressful. Correctional Officers work a minimum of 12 hours a day and they work closely with other team members. Teamwork is one work requirement that Paula stressed as very important. It is important that prospective employees understand that teamwork is critical to the success of the job. Experience with teamwork can be achieved through involvement on sports teams and through other clubs and activities.

Paula is in charge of maintaining security within the prison. Paula greets everyone who enters the institution and ensures that only security-cleared people are coming through the gate. Paula also ensures that the people who enter the institution are not entering with any contraband items such as weapons, tobacco or illegal drugs. This is done through a variety of security scanning processes such as metal detectors and ion scans.

Corrections Canada demands an immense amount of interpersonal skills from their employees. Paula stressed that multiculturalism plays a big role in the relationships that are formed within the institution. Successful employees must demonstrate an understanding of the broader picture of the inmate's rehabilitation. Correctional officers often work daily with inmates who suffer from a wide range of interpersonal problems. When working with disenfranchised people, it is important to maintain an open mind about the different situations that may arise.

As a result of working with a diverse group of people on a daily basis, Paula says that the rewards she receives from her job come intrinsically. She says that you have to love what you do in order to find the rewards within the job. Paula had a first-hand example of this when an inmate refused to say hi to anyone for months. Paula continued to say hi to the woman week after week and eventually got a response from her. At this moment, Paula understood that (although it may seem small), it was a strong indication that

she had broken down some emotionally-intense barriers with an inmate and was able to make a connection with someone who had struggled with human connection her whole life.

Paula described the best-suited personality for corrections as one that is full of compassion. She also says that students interested in this position need to possess healthy boundaries and a true sense of self awareness. Both of these skills can be gained through volunteer and work opportunities. While at Laurier, Paula worked at the Kitchener-Waterloo Rehabilitation Centre and at Kitchener-Waterloo Social Services. Both work opportunities provided her with transferable work experience that is in demand within Corrections Canada.



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