

Corrections  
WORKBOOK

# Corrections WORKBOOK

This workbook is service material, reflecting A.A. experience shared at the General Service Office. A.A. workbooks are compiled from the practical experience of A.A. members in the various service areas. They also reflect guidance given through the Twelve Traditions and the General Service Conference (U.S. & Canada).

Copyright © 1995 by  
Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.  
Grand Central Station, Box 459, New York, NY 10163

[www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)



## Contents

Introduction	4
How to Do Corrections Work	4
Tools and Ideas for Doing Corrections Work	6
The 4-Step Process for Starting or Restarting A.A. Meetings in Correctional Facilities	9
How to Conduct a Sharing Session	12
Carrying the Message Into Youth Detention Centers and Short-term Facilities	13
Overview of Area 10	15
Ways Committees Fund Literature	17
A.A. Bulletins	19
Samples of Telephone Contacts, Guide Letters and Letters of Credential	20
Survey of A.A. Program Activities in Correctional Facilities	27
Prerelease A.A. Contacts	28
Prerelease Contacts Program (For Inmates)	32
Prerelease Contacts Program (For A.A. Members)	34
Corrections Correspondence Service	37
Presentations	39
Press Release	44
Cooperation Among P.I., C.P.C., T.F. and Corrections Committees	46
Non-A.A. Resources	48
Literature Guide	49
Other Useful Material	50

## Introduction

This Corrections Workbook is designed to help A.A.s who are involved in corrections work to form effective corrections committees in their areas. If your area already has a functioning committee, this Workbook may provide new ideas or new ways of implementing old ideas.

The Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous was in its seventh year when a pioneering warden at San Quentin asked nearby A.A.s to carry the message to alcoholics in the prison. The year was 1942—the warden was Clinton Duffy. He was heard to say, “If the A.A. program will help just one man, I want to start it.” Today there are hundreds of A.A. groups behind the walls, as well as corrections committees serving them.

In 1977, the General Service Conference recommended that the Institutions Committee be dissolved and two new committees—one dealing with Corrections, and one with Treatment Facilities—be formed. The 1983 General Service Conference recommended that a Corrections Workbook be developed for carrying the A.A. message into correctional facilities.

## How to Do Corrections Work

### *Why A.A.s Carry the Message Behind the Walls*

Many A.A. members are unaware of the important work being carried out by corrections committees. To those involved, however, corrections work is an opportunity to carry the A.A. message to the confined alcoholic who wants to live sober, one day at a time. Through a corrections committee working with corrections personnel, alcoholics are reached who might never otherwise find the A.A. program.

An active corrections committee is a vital link to prisons and jails, providing professionals and other workers in correctional facilities with information about A.A., literature, and guidelines for setting up A.A. groups on the inside.

The aim of this Workbook is to provide information about the corrections process—from the formation of a corrections committee to the functions such a committee can perform. It also contains suggested ways in which A.A. members can best do corrections work, as well as suggested activities for local committees.

The needs and experiences of your own area will determine what your committee should decide to do. The suggestions in this Workbook are just that—suggestions—to spark your thinking on how to form a corrections committee and cooperate with correctional facilities people.

### *A Mini-History*

The first Correctional Facilities Committee was formed in 1977 when the Institutions Committee of the General Service Conference was dissolved and two committees were

formed: Correctional Facilities and Treatment Facilities. Local corrections committees have been established throughout the years, most of them working in collaboration with local intergroups or central offices, and within the organizational structure of local institutions committees.

### *Singleness of Purpose*

Some professionals refer to alcoholism and drug addiction as “substance abuse” or “chemical dependency.” Nonalcoholics are, therefore, sometimes introduced to A.A. and encouraged to attend A.A. meetings. Anyone may attend *open* A.A. meetings, but only those with a *drinking* problem may attend *closed* meetings.

### *Working Within the Traditions*

The guiding principles of the A.A. Fellowship are contained in the Twelve Traditions. The responsibility for preserving the Traditions rests with A.A.s alone; in order for A.A.s to preserve these Traditions, we must comprehend them. We can’t expect non-A.A.s to understand and observe them unless we are well informed about them.

Sometimes corrections personnel are eager to use A.A. as a resource, but they don’t understand our Traditions and unwittingly cause problems for A.A.s—both those who carry the message behind the walls and inmates. Experienced corrections workers learn the vital importance of understanding and explaining the Traditions to corrections personnel. Thoughtful reading of A.A. literature (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and the pamphlets “A.A. Tradition—How It Developed” and “The Twelve Traditions Illustrated”) is essential for anyone who works with non-A.A.s.

Of course, all the Traditions are important in this Twelfth Step work; and Traditions Five, Six, Eleven, and Twelve are directly related to it.

***Tradition Five:*** “Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.” This tradition further states: “...better do one thing supremely well than many badly.” (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, p. 150)

Singleness of purpose is central to the survival of A.A. Inmates faced with no programs to address problems other than alcohol (i.e., drugs, overeating, etc.) often find their way to A.A. meetings. A.A.s not wishing to exclude such individuals from meetings can do so only with a firm understanding of A.A.’s singleness of purpose.

***Tradition Six:*** “An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.”

Toward corrections personnel, like those of any other agency, the A.A. policy is “cooperation but not affiliation.” We should make it clear that A.A. is available as a resource to sponsor A.A. groups in correctional facilities, but is not affiliated with the facility, or any other fellowship.

***Tradition Eleven:*** “Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films [television and videotape].”

A.A. is not a secret society, and we carry the message to whomever we can. If a suffering alcoholic never meets an A.A., how is he or she going to find us? But we must be ever aware to remain anonymous in speaking *personally* for A.A. at the public level; we

must try to give corrections personnel an accurate picture of the A.A. Fellowship as a whole.

*Tradition Twelve:* “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.”

A.A.s who carry the message into correctional facilities have found it helpful to remember and to emphasize to corrections personnel that A.A. is a fellowship of peers, and that A.A.s learn to help other alcoholics without taking credit or reward for our own or others’ recovery.

### *Forming a Corrections Committee*

The A.A. Guidelines on Corrections Committees, together with the other materials found in this Workbook, are the most complete resource for forming a corrections committee. The A.A. Guidelines are compiled from the experience of A.A. members in the various service areas. They also reflect guidance given through the Twelve Traditions and the General Service Conference of the U.S. and Canada.

*One thought to keep in mind—Easy Does It!* Once you decide to get started with the formation of a committee, it is a good idea to take it easy at first until you know just what the needs are and how many people are available to get the job done.

The 1993 Conference Correctional Facilities Committee suggested that local correctional facilities committees obtain a permanent mailing address or post office box so that inmates can be given this information to use for some of their A.A. needs, i.e., literature, prerelease contacts, “outside” speakers, etc.

## **Tools and Ideas for Doing Corrections Work**

### *Ideas to Stimulate Corrections Twelfth Step Work Within A.A.*

- Utilize the video *Carrying the Message Behind the Walls*.
- Show the DVD “A.A. in Correctional Facilities” in a workshop to share the professional’s viewpoint on the value of A.A. as a resource in correctional facilities.
- Create Power Point presentations about A.A. corrections service, including photos and discussion topics.
- Host A.A. round-ups inside correctional facilities similar to those previously shared about in *Box 4-5-9*.
- Send sharing on local corrections workshops and events to G.S.O.
- Discuss ideas in areas and districts regarding ways to collect contributions from groups and members to purchase literature for local correctional facilities.
- Include local corrections events on area Web sites.
- Introduce someone to corrections service by bringing them to corrections events and/or A.A. meetings on the inside.
- List Corrections, H&I, and Bridging the Gap Committee chairs with G.S.O. so they receive useful corrections-related material and communications.
- Share about corrections service experience with excitement and enthusiasm.

- Encourage ex-inmate A.A. members to get involved in all aspects of corrections service.
- Create a calendar of corrections events around U.S. and Canada.
- Encourage sharing regarding what might be “trends” in corrections, and how might A.A. respond to growing needs? Send the sharing to G.S.O. for possible dissemination in Activity Updates, etc.

### *Guidelines for A.A. Presentations to Corrections Personnel*

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide suggestions for A.A. members on introducing Alcoholics Anonymous to those who work—or plan to work—in the corrections/criminal justice field. The audience for such workshops would be: all levels of corrections personnel in local, state, provincial and federal prisons, jails and detention centers, and students attending corrections/criminal justice training academies as part of their preparation for, or continuing education in the corrections/criminal fields.

Like many endeavors in A.A., all it takes is a few dedicated A.A. members willing to launch these types of C.P.C./P.I. efforts. Which A.A. committee or group handles this work is less important than keeping lines of communications open to avoid misunderstandings. It is helpful to hold some sharing sessions for interested members of intergroup/central offices, as well as H&I, Corrections, Cooperation With the Professional Community, Treatment Facilities, and Public Information Committees. (See service piece “How to Conduct a Sharing Session” SMF-111, p.10)

The relationship of the corrections committee to the rest of the A.A. service structure in a given area or district is best left to local autonomy.

*Preliminary considerations:* Many states and provinces have training academies for corrections personnel. A corrections committee member may send an introductory letter to an official at the facility, to be followed by a telephone call. It is important to find out who in the facility handles A.A. volunteers. It may be an activities coordinator, a chaplain, psychologist, volunteers coordinator, or a security director. The inclusion of pertinent A.A. literature and perhaps a copy of the DVD “A.A. in Correctional Facilities” offering the experience of other corrections professionals with A.A. as a resource may be helpful. A.A. members scheduling these sessions find it important to remain sensitive to the schedules and working conditions of the training facility.

Often local colleges and universities also provide criminal justice courses for those in the corrections field. Contacts might be made with faculty members, who often welcome guest speakers.

*Presentations:* The presentations often include a panel on which some presenters may be A.A. members who are former inmates and are well-versed on what A.A. does and does not do. As appropriate, food and coffee may be offered, along with a display of A.A. literature. A question and answer or ask-it basket opportunity is generally welcome, as is the option to sign up for *About A.A.*, G.S.O.’s newsletter to professionals. Most important, offer to take attendees to an open A.A. meeting.

*Format:* Depending on the time available and the specific needs of the audience, the following points may be covered:

1. Introduce yourself and explain why you are there—to carry the message of



Alcoholics Anonymous, what it is and what it is not. Remember, we are not corrections professionals; we can share only our A.A. experience.

2. Describe how A.A. members who carry a meeting inside are selected, which is that they are usually recruited by an A.A. member who has been doing corrections service for some time, meets a minimum sobriety requirement, has passed a background check (if required by the facility), and is a sober, productive member of society. It is also important that A.A. speakers at meetings are on time, well groomed, and courteous.
3. You may choose to show the DVD “A.A. in Correctional Facilities” offering the experience of other corrections professionals with A.A. as a resource, or another video such as “It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell,” available from the General Service Office.
4. Read and explain the A.A. Preamble.
5. Briefly mention and explain the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.
6. Describe the various types of meetings: open, closed, speaker, discussion, beginners, Step, etc.
7. Explain and show A.A. meeting lists. Provide the phone number of your local intergroup/central office or A.A. answering service.
8. Explain A.A. meetings on the inside.
9. Describe the Corrections Correspondence Service (C.C.S.) and, if possible, distribute C.C.S. flyers.
10. Explain Prerelease Contacts and Bridging the Gap Programs.
11. Talk about sponsorship.
12. Distribute A.A. literature, such as “Information on A.A.” (F-2) and “A Message to Corrections Professionals” (P-20). Present information on the aa.org Web site.
13. Mention that A.A. is a way of life; it is not a class that someone graduates from or a self-help program. Many members remain active in A.A. for a lifetime.
14. In closing, express your gratitude for the opportunity to share about Alcoholics Anonymous.
15. It is nice to send a thank you note to those in attendance. Keep a copy of both the presentation and any correspondence to pass on to the next person who takes this service position.

Helpful information can also be found in the A.A. Guidelines for Corrections Committees and the Workbooks for Cooperation With the Professional Community, Public Information and Treatment Facilities.

## **The Four Step Process Approach to Starting or Restarting A.A. Meetings in Correctional Facilities**

### *Some Suggestions for Using the 4-Step Process*

Some states have successfully used the 4-step process for starting or restarting A.A. meetings in a correctional facility. These are the suggested steps of the 4-step process:

1. Meet with the warden (or designee) to learn about the facility.
2. Meet with A.A.s to develop the A.A. program.
3. Send the A.A. program document to the warden (or designee) for his or her approval.
4. On approval, implement the program.

In facilities where the process has been used, the A.A. program seems to function more smoothly, A.A. Corrections Committee, H&I Committee, or other committee representatives are treated with respect, and it generally has been easier to find A.A.s to participate in the program. Also, it has been the experience of many who have used the 4-step process that the warden (or designee) is grateful to receive a documented description of the program to be used in the facility.

The process may be initiated by identifying a correctional facility that does not currently have an A.A. program, and an A.A. member willing to be the outside sponsor or carry meetings into the correctional facility. The district or area corrections chair, or H&I representative might send an invitation letter to the warden (or designee). (For how to obtain a sample letter see page 10.) In your letter indicate your availability by phone or offer to call at a time convenient to the warden (or designee).

Whenever possible it has been most effective to work directly with the warden of a facility (or designee) as his or her support of the A.A. program goes a long way to insure support from other correctional professionals at the facility. A designee might be the chaplain, a counselor, program director or an assistant warden. If you succeed in making contact your goal is to set up a meeting at the facility. During your conversation to schedule the meeting, explain the purpose is to learn about the facility so that the best A.A. program possible can be designed for the facility. The meeting can be scheduled for one hour.

If there is no response to the letter, it is best to move on to another facility. If there is not enough interest from the warden (or designee) to respond, it will likely be an uphill battle to establish a successful A.A. program.

It is suggested to have at least three A.A.s at the meeting, including whoever made the first contact and the A.A. who will be identified as being the outside sponsor. The warden (or designee) is likely to have staff responsible for programs, staff responsible for volunteers, and perhaps security at the meeting. Bring along the Correctional Facility Fact Sheet (See NOTE page 10) to help keep the conversation on track and to insure you get the information needed to develop the A.A. program. The meeting usually starts by going around the room and introducing the attendees.

It is suggested that you begin the conversation by asking permission to take notes and offering to have them copied for those in attendance. Following that you might state the purpose of the meeting—to become familiar with the needs and requirements of the facility—and give a brief, five minute, explanation of what A.A. is and is not. The

Preamble describes A.A. very well, and can be talked about slowly. You can ask the warden (or designee) the questions on the Correctional Facility Fact sheet or you could say “tell us about your facility” and simply take notes. As the warden (or designee) speaks, fill in the fact sheet. Check your progress. If something is missed ask specifically about it. Continue down the fact sheet. You may want an A.A. to fill in the fact sheet while you lead the discussion. Resist the temptation to make commitments about what A.A. will do, while at the same time noting any requests that are made.

Following the meeting with the warden (or designee), schedule a separate meeting with Corrections, H&I, or other Committee representative to develop the A.A. program. Talk through what you can and can’t do. Remember that it is better to start out small and simple, and build over time. You want to be able to deliver on any commitment that is made to the facility in the A.A. program document. In one situation, a minimum-security facility, an open speaker meeting once a month was started. A few months later, a closed meeting was started weekly for the other weeks of the month and slowly built in attendance. The open meeting acts as the “attraction rather than promotion” part of the program and allows the inmates to decide if they want to attend the closed meetings.

Write up the A.A. program in a document and sign two originals and send to the warden (or designee) within two weeks of your initial meeting. The warden (or designee) can sign both, keep one for the facility files, and return the other to A.A. (A couple of sample program plans are also available).

Once the signed program document is received, begin the implementation.

NOTE: A sample letter, sample Correctional Facility Fact Sheet, and sample A.A. Program Plans are available from G.S.O.’s Corrections Desk upon request.

### ***Guidelines for A.A. presentations to inmates, remembering to Keep It Simple***

1. First impressions are very important, so look your best and be on time.
2. Using the A.A. Preamble as your frame of reference, you should begin by stating what A.A. is and is not.
3. Most inmates will want to know, why you? Briefly, talk about the way things were (e.g., your last drunk) and what things are like now that you are a member of A.A. (This portion of your talk should not be more than 15 minutes.)
4. Next, describe the format of the A.A. meetings you will be bringing into the facility; how often meetings will be held and how they may participate. (Be certain to obtain information on the proper procedure for inmate participation from the facility staff.)
5. You may want to distribute and briefly describe the following pamphlets: “This is A.A.”; “Is A.A. For You?”; “A Newcomer Asks”; “44 Questions”; “It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell” and “Memo to an Inmate.” (Add any other pamphlets you think appropriate.)
6. It is very important to pace yourself so that there is ample time to answer as many inmate questions as possible. Suggested length of presentation—one hour.

Remember, having once been an inmate is not a requirement. A.A.s wishing to

carry the message into correctional facilities are encouraged to attend corrections committee meetings.

**Workshops:** Many corrections committees have found that workshops—taking a hard look at local needs, opportunities, and attitudes as well as the service structure, Traditions, and Concepts—are fine tools for exploring ideas and settling on methods for doing corrections work.

A typical workshop might begin with the Serenity Prayer, followed by a reading of the Twelve Concepts. The Fifth Tradition could be read and related to the First Concept. (The Fifth Tradition says that each group has one primary purpose—to carry the message; the First Concept states that ultimate responsibility and authority belong to the groups.) The videocassettes “It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell” and “Carrying the Message Behind These Walls” could be shown.

Tapes of the corrections workshops at the recent International Convention could be played. Other kinds of brief presentations on corrections could serve the same purpose, for example, excerpts from the A.A. Guidelines or material from this Workbook.

A discussion period, in which the entire group breaks up into smaller groups, could focus on the following topics (or topics of your own choosing):

1. What is the best way to form a corrections committee? How do we form a working plan?
2. What is the best way to reach corrections personnel?
3. How can we attract A.A. members to corrections work?
4. How can we bridge the gap between corrections personnel and A.A.? What type of presentations are appropriate?
5. What are the best A.A. attitudes toward corrections personnel?
6. How can we make contacts with corrections personnel?
7. What A.A. literature is best, and to whom should it be delivered?

Hold Corrections Workshops and/or a Unity Day—where A.A. members already involved in service work share about the rewards of this kind of service. Forms could be developed giving A.A. members a choice regarding the kinds of corrections service work they want to do...i.e., speaking at A.A. meetings inside correctional facilities; corresponding with members who are incarcerated through the Corrections Correspondence Service; participating in a prerelease A.A. contact program or a program to help prisoners in Bridging the Gap.

**Open Meetings and/or Special Breakfast Meetings:** Hold Open Meetings and/or Special Breakfast Meetings at A.A. conventions using incarcerated A.A. members as speakers who can demonstrate the positive results of carrying the message into correctional facilities. This is done in areas and/or provinces where the prison system allows some prisoners out on pass for this purpose.

**Group Sponsorship of a Correctional Facility Meeting:** In some areas A.A. groups accept responsibility for A.A. meetings in a single facility for one month a year. This has been done through G.S.R.s and also through intergroup service structures. This is more easily done in states and provinces that do not have extremely complicated clearance procedures for those visiting prisons.

*Exploring the Need for a Newsletter:* Perhaps you can investigate the need for a correctional facilities newsletter in your area. This newsletter could be circulated to correctional facilities and individual A.A.s involved in corrections work. It could serve as a resource and information tool and a welcome communication aid.

*Working With Other Corrections Committees:* Today there is a definite need for improved communication between corrections committees within states and within geographic regions. One tool for implementing communication is to hold state or regional conventions for those interested and involved in corrections work, both A.A.s and non-A.A.s. Local corrections committees could work together in setting up such an event.

*Understanding the Role of the Corrections Representative:* The group corrections representative is a “messenger” for his or her A.A. group, bringing information to and from correctional facilities. They inform the group of openings for speakers and chairpersons in correctional facilities meetings, help volunteers make contact with the corrections committees and report on the needs and activities of the A.A. groups on the inside.

*Regional and Special Forums:* For A.A.s who attend Regional and/or Special Forums, it is suggested that they request and attend corrections workshops.

## **How To Conduct a Sharing Session**

(The following is a service piece, available from G.S.O.)

The purpose of a Sharing Session is to fill a need for improved communication among area committees, districts, and groups, thereby strengthening services in A.A. through cooperation. These sessions are called for a specific purpose requiring shared experience and ideas, in order to best serve Alcoholics Anonymous. Sharing Sessions are not designed to reach a conclusion as, say, at a regular A.A. business meeting. They are usually held where a problem has reached difficult proportions at the service level involved, and options to surmount the challenge need to be thought about.

The usual Sharing Session format provides for a “chairperson” who presents the problem to be discussed, and then asks for comments. Participants respond, usually going around the room, speaking for no longer than a specific time agreed upon ahead of time by everyone present (perhaps 1 or 2 minutes), after which a bell is rung to indicate “time up.” A participant may speak again on the same topic *only* after all others have shared once. He or she may then speak again, in turn. The sharing continues until all have said what they need to say on each go around the room. Remember, no one need ever be ashamed of his or her opinion.

While the sharing is taking place, a volunteer “secretary” takes down the essence of what is shared. This write-up should be both brief and informal. Since sharing on a specific topic may take an hour or more before it is exhausted, it is usually better to plan on having only one topic per Sharing Session. Again, no individual should attempt to sum up or draw conclusions at the end of a Sharing Session. Each participant will have received “food for thought.” However, often it will be found that a group conscience has emerged.

To be effective, Sharing Sessions should include no more than 30 participants (larger

groups can be broken into two sessions). These sessions may also be built into regular area, district or group meetings. Area committees may find that Sharing Sessions foster greater interest and willingness on the part of G.S.R.s to participate. Districts and groups may find Sharing Sessions a preferred way to discuss issues that are particularly sensitive or thorny.

Your General Service Office is glad to hear from you on how your Sharing Sessions turns out.

## **Carrying the Message Into Youth Detention Centers and Short-term Facilities**

Although the basics of carrying A.A.'s message into youth detention centers and short-term facilities are no different than carrying the message into any other correctional facility, many Area Corrections Committees felt there was an expressed need to include some information in this Workbook regarding what they viewed as added challenges to service work in these two areas and, based on their experiences, some suggestions on leading meetings in these institutions.

Experience shows that there is often a rapid turnover of inmates in both youth detention centers and short-term facilities. Frequently, attendance at A.A. meetings in these institutions may not be voluntary. It is prudent to be aware that, like many A.A. members in the beginning, some inmates may not believe they have a problem with alcohol and resent attending an A.A. meeting. It is important to remember that A.A. is there to offer a message of hope. You may not be able to see immediate results, but a seed may be planted.

### ***Suggested Ways of Conducting A.A. Meetings in Youth Detention Centers and Short-Term Facilities***

1. Use a beginners meeting format, focusing on the first three Steps and providing information about the basic tools an A.A. member might use to stay away from the first drink.
2. Give an informational presentation that might include a Q&A session. The free one-page service piece available from the General Service Office, "Information on A.A.," is useful in telling newcomers what A.A. does and does not do.
3. Explain and emphasize the importance of sponsorship.
4. Lead a topic meeting. A topic that has worked well at meetings in short-term facilities in one major city is, "What are you going to do *differently* this time?"
5. Where sharing is limited, an anonymous Ask-It-Basket has worked well.
6. The use of cassettes, videos and illustrated pamphlets are especially helpful to both younger and older inmates.

### *Additional Challenges in Carrying the Message Into Youth Detention Facilities*

1. In youth detention centers, there is often a marked age difference between the juveniles and most incoming A.A.s. Many of those under the age of 18 do not have a long drinking history. They may have difficulty identifying with the stories of older A.A.s. Many of the “yets” that older members have experienced may seem unbelievable.
2. There are often stricter rules governing access and confidentiality.
3. A juvenile’s fear of appearing “weak” to his or her peers might hinder attendance at or participation in an A.A. meeting.
4. On the other hand, there may be peer pressure to appear “tough,” which may lead to behavioral problems during a meeting.
5. The required presence of staff at A.A. meetings in these facilities is generally the rule.
6. Experience shows that the attention span of many youths during meetings may be short.
7. Some areas have encouraged *young* A.A. members on the “outside” to share their stories and sponsor meetings at youth detention centers.

### *Common Sense*

As with any A.A. service commitment in a correctional facility, common sense, as well as cooperation with and guidance from the youth facilities’ staff, are essentials to the success of this kind of Twelfth Step service.

### *The Transition to A.A. On the “Outside” for Juveniles*

Often, because the average age of A.A. members is generally older, newly released juveniles may have a hard time settling into an “outside” group and finding new friends and new activities to support their first tentative steps toward recovery. Welcoming and treating juveniles as equals as they join the Fellowship are important ingredients to making them feel a part of any group—everyone may not be the same age, but all are recovering through the same Twelve Steps of A.A., one day at a time.

---

*Note:* Based on the responses to the 1996 questionnaire from Corrections Committee chairpersons, the subcommittee on developing the copy for the Corrections Workbook recommended to the trustees’ Committee on Corrections that, although problems *other* than alcohol might be significantly different in women’s facilities, no additional material on carrying the A.A. message into these facilities was needed for the Workbook.

## Overview of Area 10 (Colorado) Corrections Committee Structure

The only purpose of the Area Corrections Committee is to carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous to the alcoholic who is confined. The activities of this committee are based on and governed by the Twelve Traditions of A.A. Since our public relations policy is one of attraction rather than promotion, we serve any correctional facility at the invitation of the administration, ever conscious of the admonition “cooperation not affiliation.” The purpose of this committee is fulfilled in two ways: 1. Taking A.A. meetings into correctional facilities, and 2. Providing G.S.O. Conference-approved A.A. literature to inmates with monies collected by the “pink cans.”

The Area Corrections chairman is appointed to serve a two-year term by the Area chairman and is ratified by the Area committee. The Area Corrections chairman coordinates all Area 10 correctional activities, and appoints people to serve for two years in the following trusted servant positions:

*Secretary*—records and distributes minutes of all meetings.

*Treasurer*—receives all contributions made through the “pink can” program and other sources such as assembly funding and Conference funds.

*Librarian*—orders literature from G.S.O., maintains an inventory and distributes literature to A.A. facility contacts for all correctional facilities.

*Archives*—compiles historical records of all A.A. correctional facilities.

*Conference chairman*—conducts the annual Area Corrections Conference, which serves both as an educational tool and as an exchange of information between A.A. members and corrections-related professionals.

*Corresponding/Prerelease Contact chairman*—provides outside A.A. contacts to correspond with inmates and coordinates efforts to pair inmates being released with outside A.A. volunteers.

*Regional chairman*—serves as a link between the district corrections committee and the area corrections committee.

The Area Corrections Committee is a clearinghouse for all corrections activities in the Area. It is administrative in nature. The work is done at the local level by A.A. members through the District structure.

### *Overview of Area 10 (Colorado) District Structure*

*District Chairman*—is appointed for a two-year term at the district committee meeting. Responsibilities include coordinating all corrections activities in the district. Appoints/approves A.A. facility contacts for each facility in the district. Works closely with the regional chairman to keep the area corrections committee informed on corrections activities in the district.

*A.A. Facility Contacts*—appointed/approved by the district corrections chairman. Coordinates all A.A. activities at the specified facility. Appoints A.A. meeting contacts to ensure all meetings behind the walls are covered.

*A.A. Meeting Contacts*—appointed/approved by the A.A. Facility Contact. Coordinates volunteers to cover A.A. meetings at the designated facility at the specified day and time.



### *Area 10 (Colorado) Seventh Tradition Support*

*General Funding:* Area Corrections Committee receives funding from the area assembly to cover expenses of printing, phone, postage, and supplies (envelopes, etc.). The Corrections Conference is self-supporting through a registration fee and raffle, and the district structure is self-supporting through the Seventh Tradition and workshops.

*Pink Can:* This idea was “borrowed” from northern California. It began in that area in 1985. The only purpose of the pink can is to provide G.S.O. Conference-approved literature to those confined behind the walls.

Groups decide by their group conscience if they want to support corrections work in this way. If so, these cans are available through the Area Corrections Committee. Usually the can sits by the coffee pot or is passed after the regular Seventh Tradition at meetings. Those that wish to contribute may do so by putting in pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters. The money is then sent to the Area Corrections treasurer for deposit into a “pink can” account. Checks and/or money orders are made payable to the Colorado Corrections Committee and marked for “pink can.” Checks are then issued to G.S.O. for literature. When a correctional facility needs literature, the A.A. Facility Contact places an order with the Area Corrections literature chairman. The literature chairman then fills the order and ships to the contact for distribution in the facility. In 1990, we were able to ship over \$18,000 worth of literature or over 15,000 pieces of literature (including 2,323 Big Books) to three federal C.F., four juvenile C.F., 17 state facilities, and 26 county jails.

## Ways Committees Fund Literature for Inmates

Alcoholics confined in correctional facilities usually have just one A.A. meeting a week available to them, if they are lucky. A sizable number are on waiting lists and go to none at all. But, there's another way to carry the message to these people: provide them with meetings in print through A.A.'s Big Book, pamphlets and the Grapevine. The only stumbling block is money.

How are local corrections committees funded? How do they accumulate literature for inside meetings? These questions have become a frequent refrain at all levels of service, including the General Service Office, where more than 90% of the letters that cross the Corrections desk contain requests for free literature. In the spirit of A.A.'s Seventh Tradition, the search is on for financing approaches that make practical as well as spiritual sense.

We have received some wonderful sharing on what some areas have done and hope this is helpful.

In New Hampshire, for example, the area assembly has allocated funds for the purchase of literature by the institutions committee. Additionally, book donations are received from groups throughout the area.

Libraries in some Texas area prison units are well stocked and maintained by a District Corrections Committee and individual A.A.s also contribute books, pamphlets and Grapevines.

In Kansas, it is reported that they have a yearly sum of approximately \$1,000 that is allocated for literature. Although this is the biggest item in their budget, it is still a meager sum and a short while ago they started placing contribution cans at their meetings. As they tell all their members, even the smallest contribution helps.

In the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, a D.C.M. asked at an intergroup meeting if any groups would be interested in doing group Twelfth Step work by contributing money to buy literature for the correctional facilities in that area. The intergroup reps went back to their home groups and within two weeks, the representatives had received checks to buy over a case of portable soft-cover Big Books.

One group in Jacksonville, Florida, through a group conscience decision, sponsors a prison group. The outside A.A.s buy literature and contribute back issues of Grapevines, which they purchase in lots from the Grapevine office. Another district in Florida shares that any inmate who wants pamphlets has only to contact the corrections committee, and if he or she wants to buy books, the corrections committee will pay half the cost.

Area 44, Northern New Jersey, implemented the idea of having jail boxes in home groups throughout their area. While the idea is not new to the Fellowship, it is new to their area and one individual who established three jail boxes within his district was so successful that he was able to provide the A.A. meetings at his county jail with a three-month supply of literature. Then, an A.A. volunteered to design the jail boxes so that there would be some uniformity to them. Each month, more and more of these boxes were being established and the committee felt that a letter of introduction describing the purpose and need should be written. These boxes allow individual A.A. members to take a more active role in carrying the message to the alcoholic behind the walls. Nickels, dimes and quarters quickly add up to dollars and it takes only a few dollars to purchase

any of A.A.'s books. Several A.A.s in this area have purchased literature and written the address of their home group on the inside cover of the book.

The Northern California H&I Committee, which started the "pink can" idea many years ago, reiterates the idea that providing clear information is important.

In Northeast Ohio, the area committee makes their groups aware of the need through periodic appeals to "dig deeper," and they respond generously, knowing that "but for the Grace of God, there go I."

A speaker at an area convention once inquired, "How many of you have ever been in prison?" About 100 people raised their hands. The speaker looked around. "How many of you should have been in prison," he asked, and everyone in the crowded room stood up. "That," says a member, "should say what our commitment is all about."

### ***How a New Correctional Facilities Group is Listed at G.S.O.***

Group listing assumes that the new group has the cooperation of the Correctional Facilities administration.

1. Complete the New Correctional Facilities Group Information Form.
2. Upon receipt of the completed New Correctional Facilities Group Information Form, the General Service Office will send a Correctional Facilities Group Handbook, a complimentary package of literature which includes a copy of the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, for use in the group, and information regarding the Corrections Correspondence Service.
3. The General Service Office will assign a Corrections Group Service Number. This number is to be used when corresponding with the General Service Office or in ordering literature.

### ***Suggested Ways to Use the Soft-cover Big Book to Carry the Message***

1. It could be used as part of an initial contact with prison agencies when forming a new group, or discussing a group already formed within the facility.
2. The soft-cover Big Book and an order form might be included as part of a literature display at corrections committee meetings.
3. When appropriate, encourage "outside" group participation as a kind of Twelfth Step work by suggesting that groups purchase one or more soft-cover Big Books to be given to members in correctional facilities.
4. The A.A. member could perhaps give a copy of the soft-cover Big Book as a sponsorship gift, or as a gift for the inmate's A.A. anniversary.
5. For easy reference while attending meetings on the "outside," the A.A. member might present the soft-cover edition to the inmate upon release from prison.
6. The outside A.A. contact could initiate a new project in the area to place a soft-cover Big Book in the hands of each inmate member, and when possible, coordinate this effort with the local intergroup, central office, district committee, and area committee.

### *Suggested Ways to Use Audiovisual Material to Carry the Message*

1. Audiovisual material could be used as part of an initial contact with prison agencies when forming a new group, or discussing a group already formed within the facility.
2. Audiovisual material and order forms could be used as part of a table top display at Corrections Committee meetings, Regional Forums, area assemblies, and local conventions.
3. A.A. members could give tapes to correctional facilities' libraries or individuals as a gift for an inmate's A.A. anniversary. These tapes could encourage participation in A.A. meetings and program for inmates with literacy problems.

*Please note:* Complimentary copies of videocassettes are available for correctional facilities groups and Correctional Facilities libraries from G.S.O.

A list of audiovisual material is on page 48.

### *General Service Conference Committee on Corrections— History and Highlights of Actions*

These are enclosed in the pocket of your Corrections Kit.

### **A.A. Bulletins**

*Box 4-5-9*, A.A.'s bimonthly newsletter, often contains a section on corrections. A copy of a recent *Box 4-5-9* is in the pocket of the Corrections Kit.

The bulletin *Sharing from Behind the Walls* contains excerpts from inmate letters received at G.S.O., and is distributed by local corrections committees to A.A. groups behind the walls. Also, many A.A. groups in correctional facilities put out their own newsletter.

## Samples of Telephone Contacts, Guide Letters, and Letters of Credential

### *Introduction*

For many corrections committees, initial contact with prison officials is made by telephone and letter, usually with a follow-up visit. The personal approach is the best.

In this section you will find a sample telephone contact and sample letters used by corrections committees. The most effective telephone calls and letters include some or all of the following elements:

*Information About A.A.*—The A.A. Preamble can be quoted, or a few sentences can describe what A.A. is and what it can and cannot do. Many letters include literature such as “A.A. At a Glance,” “Information on Alcoholics Anonymous,” “If You Are a Professional,” and “A.A. in Your Community.”

*A Request to Cooperate With Corrections Professionals in Establishing an A.A. Meeting in the Facility*—An A.A. contact can be suggested, giving the local or area corrections committee mailing address, or that of an intergroup/central office. (Many letters explain that outside speakers are available and interested in helping to start an A.A. meeting on the inside.) You might work with local C.P.C. committees.

*Information About the Traditions, Making Clear What A.A. Does and Does Not Do*—Clarifications of the Traditions is particularly important when being asked to provide letters of reference to parole boards, lawyers, court officials, etc. With permission from local prisons, corrections committees can invite inmates to conventions and roundups.

*Reminder:* The following material is presented as guide material only. These form letters (and the telephone contact) are just samples intended to give you a “jumping-off” point; they may be modified to suit the needs of your own area.

Guide Letters are available from G.S.O. electronically upon request. E-mail corrections@aa.org.

### *Sample Telephone Contact* *(To: Warden/Sheriff/Chief of Police)*

*Corrections Committee Member:* Hello Warden \_\_\_\_\_? My name is \_\_\_\_\_ . I’m a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. As you may know, A.A. is a fellowship of men and women who, by sharing their experience, strength and hope, are able to recover from the disease of alcoholism. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help others to recover from alcoholism.

*Warden:* I am somewhat familiar with A.A.; I am aware of A.A. in my community and in my work.

*Corrections Committee Member:* Well, good. I’m calling to explore with you the possibility of setting up an A.A. group in your prison.

*Warden:* Please go on.

*Corrections Committee Member:* Okay. First, as you probably know, recent statistics show that over \_\_\_\_ percent of inmates were either drunk or had been drinking just prior to committing the crime. The rate of recidivism, however, for inmates who have joined A.A. in prison and continued to stay sober in A.A. when released, drops by \_\_\_\_ percent.

*Warden:* Some of my colleagues have told me about the success of A.A.

*Corrections Committee Member:* So, it's an asset to a correctional facility to have an A.A. group. May I send you some A.A. literature; and after you have had a chance to look at it, meet and talk further about setting up an A.A. group?

*Warden:* Fine. I'll call you or you can call me in a few weeks, and we'll set a date.

*Corrections Committee Member:* Thanks. I'll look forward to meeting with you.

*Note:* If you encounter any resistance from the corrections officer, do not press him or her further. Courteously end the conversation, and then follow up with a letter, enclosing A.A. literature.

*Sample Letter to Warden/Sheriff/Chief of Police.  
About Starting an A.A. Group in a Prison, Jail,  
or Youth Detention Center*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

We of the \_\_\_\_\_ Area/District/C.O./Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous request your permission to bring the A.A. message of recovery to inmates who are interested in overcoming their drinking problems.

Briefly, this would entail your allowing one or two A.A. members to visit your facility on a regular basis and meet with these inmates in a group setting. We can, of course, provide complete details for you if you are willing to talk further with us.

Alcoholics Anonymous has been active for many years in most state correctional facilities, as well as in county and metropolitan jails and detention centers. Many members of A.A. were once inmates of correctional facilities, often on a repeat basis; today they are useful, productive citizens.

Alcoholics Anonymous is not affiliated with any other organization or institution.

We will be calling you shortly to ask for an appointment to talk with you further about this matter.

Sincerely yours,

Telephone No(s).

*Sample Letter Inviting Prison Officials  
to a Corrections Workshop*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

The \_\_\_\_\_ Area/District/C.O./Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous will hold a corrections workshop for A.A. members who are interested in helping A.A. inmates maintain sobriety through the A.A. program of recovery from alcoholism.

We would be delighted if you agree to take part in a panel discussion on the subject of \_\_\_\_\_. This panel will be held from \_\_\_\_\_ p.m. to \_\_\_\_\_ p.m. on \_\_\_\_\_. Some of the other panelists will be \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. A preliminary program for this workshop is enclosed.

As you know, because of the cooperation of so many corrections personnel, A.A. is now carrying its message of recovery to A.A. members who are confined in more than 2,527 correctional facilities throughout the United States and Canada. A.A. is not affiliated with any other organization or institution.

The \_\_\_\_\_ panel of our workshop would be greatly enhanced by the addition of your insight and professional experience with the inmate population. Please let us know by \_\_\_\_\_ if you will join us.

Sincerely yours,

Enc.: Preliminary program

*Sample Letter to a Prison Administrator  
From an A.A. Member Who Wishes to Visit an Inmate*

Dear (Prison Administrator):

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a recovered alcoholic and a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. For the past \_\_\_\_\_, I have been corresponding with \_\_\_\_\_, number \_\_\_\_\_, sharing information about my sobriety through A.A.

With your permission, I would like to visit (him/her) on a (weekly/ monthly) basis. The purpose of such visits would be to share my experience, strength and hope regarding the A.A. program of recovery from alcoholism. (A.A. is not affiliated with any other organization or institution.)

Of course, I understand that if you grant me visitation rights, I will fully comply with all the rules of your facility.

I look forward to hearing from you. In the meantime, if you need any further information, please let us know.

Sincerely yours,

Telephone No(s).



*Sample Letter Inviting Key Prison Officials to Correctional Facilities  
A.A. Group Anniversary Celebration*

Dear (Administrator/Key Official):

The honor of your presence is requested at the 4th Anniversary Celebration of the \_\_\_\_\_ Correctional Facility A.A. Group, which, as you know, will take place on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ p.m.

We would be delighted to have you come and join us for the festivities.

Sincerely yours,

R.S.V.P.

*Note:* Follow up the event with a letter of appreciation for participation, or a letter of regret and sharing news of the event.

## *Sample Letters of Credential*

Following are two sample “Letters of Credential” written by a non-A.A. prison administrator. If you need to enlist the help of a local A.A. prison official, a letter *along these lines* may be helpful.

Dear Director:

I’m writing this letter from two vantage points. First, as one of your coworkers in corrections; and second, as a nonalcoholic member of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, Inc.

Nearly every one of us is trying to find ways to cope with the ever-increasing numbers of people coming to prison, and as we struggle to implement creative and innovative alternatives and diversions from prison, I am convinced we can make more effective use of some of the long-standing programs which may get overlooked or forgotten with the current pressures. One of these programs, of course, is Alcoholics Anonymous. This usually involves volunteer members of A.A. visiting frequently at our prisons, and I’m sure you, as I, have experienced varying degrees of success with volunteers. Most of you already have ongoing A.A. programs in your institutions, but for those of you who don’t, I would encourage you to examine the feasibility of instituting groups. There have been occasions where groups have been started in prisons and, either by a lack of outside sponsor support or some untoward incident, the program has been terminated. Knowing the potential impact for good that Alcoholics Anonymous represents, I would encourage you to reinstitute the program if that is the case.

The General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, Inc. will be glad to assist you and your staff in providing information, literature, and establishing contact with local A.A. groups for sponsorship of prison groups. Just contact the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, Inc., P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, N.Y. 10163, (212) 870-3400. I am taking the liberty of enclosing a pamphlet which can give you some basic insight into the program.

There is a genuine effort on the part of outside sponsors today to understand that you and your wardens, as administrators, have the responsibility for running the prisons. All they want is an opportunity to bring the message of sobriety to those inmates who are interested in coming to grips with the problem of alcoholism. I have seen it work too many times to deny that it is an effective way of keeping the alcoholic inmate out of prison.

Very truly yours,

Dear Sheriff:

I'm writing to you from two different, but closely allied, standpoints. First, as a co-worker in the criminal justice system and second, as a nonalcoholic member of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, Inc.

You know better than I how many of your jail inmates are there as a result of alcoholism time after time. Many of you have already enlisted the support of local A.A. groups to help some of your inmates find their way to sobriety. Admittedly, it is not for every afflicted alcoholic, but the program has had too long a track record of success to ignore it as one way to help reduce the ever-rising jail population.

If you don't have A.A. programs in your jail now, I would encourage you to give it a try. There are responsible sober members of Alcoholics Anonymous in your community who are willing to act as sponsors for the program in your jail. The General Service Board staff will be more than willing to furnish you with information and literature, and put you in contact with local groups if you are interested in initiating the program in your jail. Just contact the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, Inc., P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, N.Y. 10163, (212) 870-3400. I am taking the liberty of enclosing a pamphlet which can give you some basic insight into the program.

I hope this letter has not been too presumptuous on my part, but after 30 years of working in corrections, I have become more and more convinced that we need to reexamine some of the older programs with a track record of success, even as we institute new ones in our effort to reduce crime in cost-effective ways, and this program will not cost you any money.

Very truly yours,

## Survey of A.A. Program Activities in Correctional Facilities

### *Survey Summary*

In 1982, the trustees' Committee on Correctional Facilities suggested a survey of A.A. program activities in correctional facilities throughout the United States and Canada. A slightly more comprehensive questionnaire than the 1982 questionnaire was done in 1990, and some of the key findings of this survey are as follows:

- Most correctional facilities committees appear to have sufficient books (the Big Book, the Twelve and Twelve). They also have adequate numbers of the booklet *Living Sober* and of old and new Grapevines, but they are not well stocked with the booklet *Came to Believe*.
- When asked specifically about the ease or difficulty of enlisting outside speakers to share behind the walls, the respondents appeared to be evenly divided. However, throughout the questionnaire, when asked to list concerns of specific urgency, obtaining outside speakers was high on many respondents' list of priorities—as it was in the 1982 survey.
- In those prisons where there is professional prerelease counseling, A.A. appears to be discussed at more than half of the institutions. By contrast, however, A.A. is not discussed at all in county jails. The prison figure would seem to indicate a definite rise in referrals to A.A. over the 1982 findings. Again, however, in other segments of the questionnaire, respondents stressed over and over the need to inform prison officials in general of A.A.
- When asked about the one or two major issues that facility sponsors or inmates find most troublesome, the major problems were: prison security checks and clearance procedures, the requirement of different I.D.s for each facility, lack of staff cooperation, getting outside members to commit firmly to correctional facilities service and coping with inmate denial.
- Only 50 percent of the respondents reported having a list of A.A.s willing to act as interim sponsors to soon-to-be-released inmates. Not surprisingly, 75 percent of the corrections committees reported that they would welcome G.S.O.'s preparing a list of corrections release contacts in major cities. Others implied they would welcome such a list, but doubted it could be kept up-to-date.
- As to what actions they take to maintain contact with the newly released inmate, most committees cited: arrange local sponsor, take inmates to meetings, give them contact names and telephone numbers, introduce them to A.A.s at local meetings. When the inmate is destined for a distant city, there is a drop in providing contact names and telephone numbers, although many committees reported written correspondence follow-up, as well as telephone contact with the ex-inmate.
- More than half of the local corrections committees conduct orientation sessions or workshops for A.A. members interested in doing corrections work. While this represents an increase over the findings in the last survey, it would still appear that special programs could be developed to increase the incidence of these activities.
- Most prison groups get established because of the continuous and persistent per-

sonal contact made by dedicated A.A. members with prison officials, top state officials, judges, and governors.

- Sixty percent of the committees reported that the correctional facilities allowed the use of A.A. Conference-approved films/videocassettes in meetings and in facility libraries. More than two-thirds of the groups reported that inmates were permitted to play A.A. and Grapevine tapes, usually on their own cassettes. Nearly half of the groups reported that the facility had its own equipment (VCR, cassette player) on which inmates play videos and tapes at meetings. Frequently, when no such equipment is available, A.A.s provide their own for use at meetings. A.A.s also loan tapes to facility libraries.
- Finally, correctional facilities A.A. members think that G.S.O. is doing a great support job, but would like to receive more free literature and to have more information about correctional facilities A.A. success stories. They would like to have G.S.O. alert more A.A.s to the need for correctional facilities service. Where possible, they would like more information sent to prison officials.

## **Prerelease A.A. Contacts**

### *Introduction*

Past experience has shown that attending an A.A. meeting on the outside on the day of release from prison is one of the most effective tools for an inmate in making a sober transition and maintaining continued sobriety in the free world. It is strongly recommended that an inmate who is an A.A. member have an A.A. contact on the outside (preferably with at least one year's sobriety and of the same sex) who contacts the inmate and arranges to meet him or her on the day of release to help in "Bridging the Gap" between the institution and A.A. on the outside.

This section of the Workbook deals with guidelines for A.A. members who want to participate in this type of service, sometimes referred to as "Prerelease" programs and sometimes as "Bridging the Gap" programs.

### *Guidelines for Prerelease A.A. Contacts*

The following guidelines for A.A. contacts have been drawn from the past experience of many A.A. members who are involved in this rewarding form of Twelfth Step work.

1. As in all types of sponsorship in A.A., prerelease contacts share their experience, strength and hope with soon-to-be-released inmates.
2. We have found that it is better for men to work with men and for women to work with women.
3. If possible, an A.A. contact should be a member of an A.A. group located in the vicinity of the inmate's residence when he or she is released.
4. As in all Twelfth Step work, it is suggested that two A.A. members meet the inmate upon release.

### *How Prerelease A.A. Contact Works*

A.A. contact is of utmost importance in corrections work. Many corrections committees find it helpful to compile a list of contacts. When an inmate is to be released, most

corrections committees attempt to locate an A.A. member and link the inmate to his or her hometown A.A. group. However, when an inmate's point of destination is a distant city, sometimes there is slippage in contact and follow-up.

Some corrections committees link homebound inmates by:

- Arranging for a local contact
- Giving the inmate contact names and telephone numbers
- Providing the inmate with a meeting list
- Helping the inmate to contact A.A. in his or her hometown through the local inter-group or central office

Following are examples of what local corrections committees have done to arrange prerelease A.A. contacts or interim sponsorship.

*EXAMPLE 1*

One General Service Area Committee has worked it out with a local corrections center that the social worker or counselor at the center writes the following letter to the institutions committee every three months:

Dear (Institutions or Corrections Committee Chairperson):

The following inmates from \_\_\_\_\_ are willing to have their names placed on your list to obtain outside A.A. contacts. The information includes their names, numbers, probable parole/release dates, and points of destination.

Name of Inmate	Number	Date of Release/Parole	Destination
John Brown	#123456	October 1992	Harrah, OK
Martin Jones	#234567	January 1993	Austin, TX
Rafael James	#345678	August 1992	Portland, OR

The information above is given with the permission of the inmates, and it should remain confidential. All inmates are residents of \_\_\_\_\_ at this time. Thank you for your assistance in obtaining contacts.

Yours truly,  
(Prison social worker or counselor)

*EXAMPLE 2*

The following is a volunteer information form designed for local A.A. members who wish to serve as prerelease A.A. contacts (one year sobriety suggested):

I would like to be a prerelease contact for an inmate.

*(Please Print)*

Full Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Home Group Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

MAIL TO: (Local Corrections Committee, Institutions Committee, Area Committee, or Intergroup)

*EXAMPLE 3*

When an inmate due for release writes G.S.O. for help, the staff member contacts the nearest area corrections committee chairperson as well as supplying a list of central offices/intergroups. Copies of the letter are then forwarded to these local service entities for follow-up.

Date:

Name/Address:

Dear:

Thank you for informing us of your approximate release date (\_\_\_\_\_) and the location where you will be upon release (\_\_\_\_\_)

We have forwarded your request for a pre-release contact to the Area Correctional Facilities chairperson in or near the town in which you will be living upon your release. Hopefully, he or she will get someone locally to contact you about A.A. meetings.

I am enclosing a copy of our Intergroup/Central Office directory. If you do not hear from an individual, please contact the nearest office to where you will be living for a local meeting directory. As you may know, one of the more slippery places in the journey to sobriety is between the door to the facility and the nearest A.A. meeting or group. So, please make contact with A.A. as soon as you are released.

Good luck and best wishes.

In fellowship,  
Corrections Coordinator

Enclosures: Intergroup/Central Office Directory; Questions & Answers on Sponsorship;  
Grapevine: Stories From AAs Behind Bars

*EXAMPLE 4*

Below is a sample of a response to an inmate from the local corrections committee/institutions committee, central office, or group G.S.R.:

Dear (Inmate):

We received your name from the General Service Office in New York City. We are enclosing a directory of the (local) A.A. meetings.

The A.A. members in this area wish you well and look forward to seeing you at our meetings. Please contact me when you arrive (telephone) for any further information you may need. We will be very happy to take you to a meeting.

Sincerely,

Corrections Committee Member

Telephone No.

**Information Letter About Prerelease A.A. Contact**

Dear (Prison Official/Parole Officer/Social Worker):

I would like to take a minute of your time to tell you about A.A.'s program of prerelease A.A. contacts, which is in effect in many correctional facilities throughout the United States and Canada.

Briefly, an A.A. member on the outside corresponds with an inmate who is soon to be released. A one-to-one supportive relationship is established as the outside A.A. member guides the inmate through days of prerelease.

On the day of release, the inmate is met by the contact at his or her point of destination, and the A.A. member takes the inmate to an A.A. meeting on the outside. In this way, the inmate is helped to make a sober transition to the outside world.

This program has proved beneficial; experience has shown that an inmate who makes A.A. contact on the outside prior to release is less likely to become a "repeater" in the prison system.

If you would like more information about this or any other aspect of Alcoholics Anonymous, please call me and I will be happy to talk with you.

Sincerely yours,

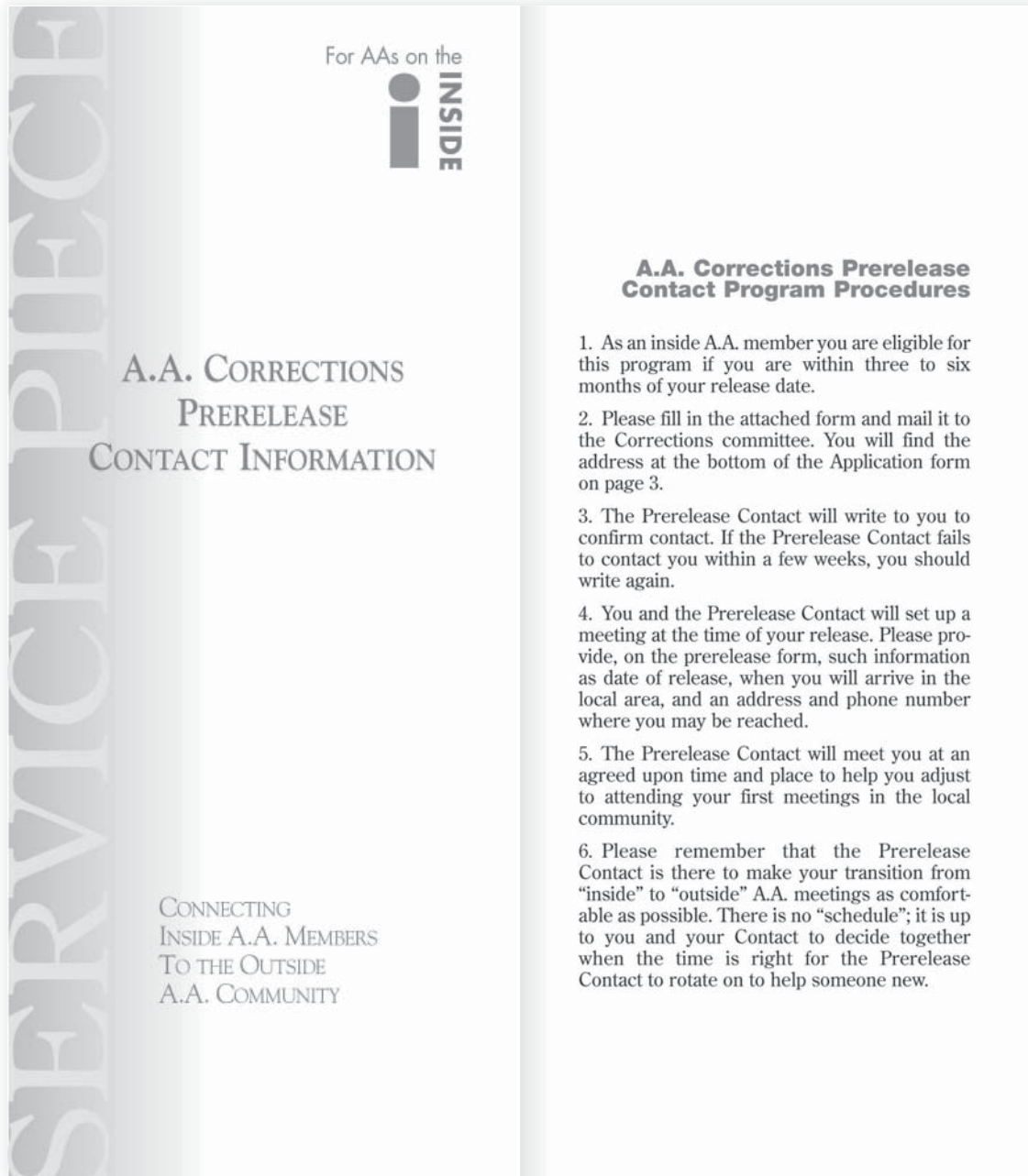
Corrections Committee Member

Telephone No(s).



## Corrections Prerelease Contact Program

The following prerelease contact forms can be scanned, and blank space is open on each for personalization with your return address. Electronic copies (via e-mail) are available from G.S.O. upon request.



The image shows a two-page brochure. The left page has a vertical title 'SERVICES PROVIDED' on the left edge. At the top right, it says 'For AAs on the INSIDE' with a logo consisting of a vertical bar and a circle. The main title is 'A.A. CORRECTIONS PRERELEASE CONTACT INFORMATION'. At the bottom, it says 'CONNECTING INSIDE A.A. MEMBERS TO THE OUTSIDE A.A. COMMUNITY'. The right page has a title 'A.A. Corrections Prerelease Contact Program Procedures' and a numbered list of six steps.

For AAs on the  
**i** **INSIDE**

**A.A. CORRECTIONS  
PRERELEASE  
CONTACT INFORMATION**

CONNECTING  
INSIDE A.A. MEMBERS  
TO THE OUTSIDE  
A.A. COMMUNITY

**A.A. Corrections Prerelease  
Contact Program Procedures**

1. As an inside A.A. member you are eligible for this program if you are within three to six months of your release date.
2. Please fill in the attached form and mail it to the Corrections committee. You will find the address at the bottom of the Application form on page 3.
3. The Prerelease Contact will write to you to confirm contact. If the Prerelease Contact fails to contact you within a few weeks, you should write again.
4. You and the Prerelease Contact will set up a meeting at the time of your release. Please provide, on the prerelease form, such information as date of release, when you will arrive in the local area, and an address and phone number where you may be reached.
5. The Prerelease Contact will meet you at an agreed upon time and place to help you adjust to attending your first meetings in the local community.
6. Please remember that the Prerelease Contact is there to make your transition from "inside" to "outside" A.A. meetings as comfortable as possible. There is no "schedule"; it is up to you and your Contact to decide together when the time is right for the Prerelease Contact to rotate on to help someone new.

Dear A.A. Members,

In your area A.A. can arrange a Prerelease Contact for those soon to be released. If you are interested you can be matched upon release to an A.A. member in your home community.

This A.A. member will take you to A.A. meetings, introduce you around, and help you get acquainted and comfortable in A.A.

Your Prerelease Contact is temporary only. They are there to support you, answer questions, and explain the A.A. program of recovery. They will not provide housing, food, clothing, jobs, money, or other such services. You will hear suggestions for sobriety and will be introduced to basic recovery tools—like sponsorship, a day at a time, A.A. literature and A.A.'s Twelve Steps.

Past experience has shown that attending an A.A. meeting as soon as possible after release is key to making a sober transition to life outside prison. Many of us have been where you are and know that the program of A.A. and its fellowship can do for you what it has done for us and countless others.

Complete the attached Prerelease form and mail it to the address indicated. Please do this three to six months prior to your release. The Corrections committee will then match you up with an A.A. Prerelease Contact in the community where you will be living. That person will write to you with information on how to contact him or her once you are released.

### Prerelease Request

I am within six months of my release date. I am requesting an A.A. Contact who will provide a link for me to the A.A. community through transportation to meetings and introductions to other A.A.s.

Inmate Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex:  M  F

Doc Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Doc Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Releasing to: (Town or Area): \_\_\_\_\_


Date of Release: \_\_\_\_\_

Address after release: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone No. : \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail to:

For AAs on the **OUTSIDE**



**A.A. CORRECTIONS  
PRERELEASE  
CONTACT INFORMATION**

CONNECTING  
INSIDE A.A. MEMBERS  
TO THE OUTSIDE  
A.A. COMMUNITY

Dear A.A. member,

The A.A. Corrections Prerelease Contact Program connects the A.A. member being released from prison with Alcoholics Anonymous in their community.

When the soon-to-be-released A.A. inmate writes us, we match that person to a Prerelease Contact in their community. If you are interested in this form of service, we will call you, get the okay, and then send you the name of a contact.

Many A.A.s involved in this service stress the importance of getting the former inmate to a meeting as soon as possible, usually within the first 48 hours after release.

During this time, you help them get acquainted, get phone numbers, perhaps locate a sponsor or home group, and become connected to the local A.A. community. You introduce the newly released inmate to others in A.A. so they have a broad, healthy base.

An A.A. member who is part of a correctional facilities volunteer program needs to be familiar with, and adhere to, rules that correctional facilities have regarding a volunteer's contact with inmates, both while they are in the facility and after they are released.

If you are willing to be the hand of A.A. when an inmate reaches out for help, complete the attached A.A. Corrections Contact Form and mail it to the address given.

### **Suggestions for the Prerelease Contact**

1. Contact the inside A.A. member by letter within two weeks of being matched and remain in touch with them as their release date approaches.
2. Try to take the former inmate to an A.A. meeting within 24 to 48 hours of their release.
3. It is suggested that the first meeting be viewed as a regular Twelfth Step call and that you take another A.A. member with you.
4. Share your experience, strength and hope with the newly released A.A., just as you would with any other person new to A.A. in your community.
5. Review the A.A. Correction Prerelease Contact Information with the former inmate so that there are no misunderstandings.
6. Your job is finished after a sponsor has been found, or when you and the inmate feel that the A.A. inmate is secure enough for you to move on.
7. Make sure the newly released A.A. receives meeting schedules, phone numbers, and A.A. literature.
8. Encourage the newly released A.A. to attend meetings as often as possible, to find a home group and, most important, to get a sponsor as soon as possible. Let them know that even a temporary sponsor who has time for them now would be acceptable.

### **A.A. Corrections Prerelease Contact Procedures**

1. Inside A.A. members (those held in correctional facilities) are eligible for this program if they have less than six months to serve on their sentence.
2. The inmate fills out the form and mails it to the Corrections Committee, which is responsible for processing and coordinating all Prerelease Contacts.
3. The outside A.A. writes to the inside A.A. member within two weeks. If the Prerelease Contact fails to make contact, the inside A.A. member should inform the Corrections committee. (Prerelease Contacts may, if they wish, use as their return address that of a local A.A. office.)
4. The inside A.A. member and the outside contact set up a meeting at the time of the inmate's release. The inside A.A. provides such information as their date of release, arrival time in the local area, and an address and phone number.
5. The Prerelease Contact will meet the newly released A.A. at an agreed upon time and place to help them adjust to attending their first meetings in the local community.
6. The Prerelease Contact and the newly released A.A. will, by working together, know when they both feel the time has come for the Prerelease Contact to move on to someone new.

**A.A. Corrections  
Contact Form**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex:  M  F

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Nighttime Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Group: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail to:

© 2004 A.A. World Services, Inc.

[www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)

F-162

5M - 6/07 (PS)

**Remember that:**

- It is important that former inmates attend their first A.A. meeting as soon as they are released.
- Our primary purpose is to carry the A.A. message.
- You are not responsible for the member's attitude or actions in or out of meetings.
- It is suggested that you do not loan money or anything of value, or become a personal taxi service.
- Introduce the former inmate to other A.A. members, just as you would any newcomer.
- We are not to act in any reporting or communication capacity regarding the A.A. member and the justice system.

**Suggested Reading**

"Carrying the Message into Correctional Facilities"

"Where Do I Go From Here?"

*A.A. in Prison: Inmate to Inmate*

"A.A. in Correctional Facilities"

"It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell"

"Memo to an Inmate Who May be an Alcoholic"

"A Message to Corrections Administrators"

## Corrections Correspondence Service

### *Introduction and Description*

The Corrections Correspondence Service has been one of the most productive ways for individual A.A. members to carry the message to inmates who are confined. The G.S.O. staff member on the Corrections assignment receives approximately 35 letters a day from inmates who wish to receive A.A. literature, A.A. contacts, interim sponsorship, and correspondence with A.A.s on the outside.

It is difficult for an A.A. member behind the walls to participate in ongoing individual sharing about the A.A. program of recovery, particularly in large prisons. The Corrections Correspondence Service allows inmates to correspond with outside A.A.s on an individual basis.

Approximately 5,000 A.A. members active in local groups are currently writing to inmates. G.S.O. sends the name and address of the inmate who wants correspondence to the outside A.A. member.

The outside A.A. member then makes the first contact.

Some outside A.A. members use a home group post office box number for correspondence. Some A.A. groups are A.A. contacts for many inmates.

It is suggested that men correspond with men, and women with women.

Sometimes, correspondence is the only opportunity an inmate has to share experience, strength and hope with another A.A. inmate who is in protective custody or solitary confinement and cannot attend regular meetings; other inmate A.A.s are on a facility waiting list to attend A.A. meetings inside.

The 1993 Conference Correctional Facilities Committee discussed this service at great length and agreed it is an important one. However they recognized the difficulty G.S.O. has in obtaining “outside” A.A.s to correspond with inmates and agreed that perhaps it is now time for areas to become more involved in this Twelfth Step work. Corrections committee members might remember to encourage A.A. groups and members to participate in this service.

Any A.A. member who would like to carry the message in this way can download a sign-up form from our website at [http://www.aa.org/en\\_pdfs/en\\_f-26correctcorrespondence.pdf](http://www.aa.org/en_pdfs/en_f-26correctcorrespondence.pdf) or they can contact the Corrections Assignment Desk, P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

### *Guidelines on Corrections Correspondence Service*

In addition to observing the rules in institutions regarding mail and correspondence, the following are some suggested guidelines drawn from shared experience to help you when writing to members inside the walls:

1. We introduce ourselves by qualifying briefly in our opening letter.
2. We try to let the inmate know that writing, like all forms of sharing, helps us as much as it helps her or him.
3. We let the inmate know that he or she is not alone.

4. Some correspondents prefer to use their group P.O. box for receiving mail, rather than their home address. (We usually match up correspondents from different states.)
5. We share sobriety and sobriety only.
6. We have found it best for all concerned if no emotional or romantic involvements develop.
7. If there is a desire to send a gift for a special occasion we make it an A.A. book, A.A. literature, or Grapevine material. (Before sending literature, see if the facility will allow it. Many correctional facilities will permit inmates to receive only literature sent directly from the publishers.) Also, some facilities do not allow inmates to receive stamps or preaddressed, stamped envelopes.
8. In the spirit of the Twelfth Tradition, we respect the anonymity of our correspondents.
9. We encourage “inside” A.A. group activity and stress that first meeting THE DAY the inmate leaves confinement.
10. We encourage “inside” correspondents to notify G.S.O. prior to their release so that G.S.O. can set up a prerelease contact from their home community.
11. Thank you for your willingness to share in this most important work.

Corrections Committee

## Presentations

Through the years, many informative Presentations on A.A. in Correctional Facilities have been given at A.A.'s annual General Service Conference. They are still timely and we reprint three of them here.

### A.A. in Institutions *W. J. Estelle, Jr., Class A trustee*

**THE EARLY YEARS** — The Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, founded in 1935, was into its seventh year with a growing membership of more than 8,000 when a progressive warden at San Quentin asked for nearby members of A.A. to carry the message to alcoholics behind the walls. The year was 1942, and the warden who defied many skeptics was the now-legendary Clinton Duffy. He said, "If the program will help just one man, I want to start it."

The first meeting had 20 inmates and several free-world guests in attendance. Warden Duffy recognized the importance of the free-world visitation to the growth of that new A.A. group of imprisoned alcoholics. Others, both inmates and Duffy's peers alike, remained skeptical until the return rate for alcoholic parolees dropped from 80% to 20% and stayed there. What Warden Duffy called "a tool to help us rebuild lives" began to give hope to alcoholics behind bars.

**INTO MATURITY** — By 1944, the first A.A. group in a federal penitentiary was formed, in Atlanta. By March 1958, there were active groups in 18 federal institutions. In a survey conducted by the federal prison director, James V. Bennet, favorable comments from all wardens praised the accomplishments of the program. Mr. Bennet recognized the value of A.A. in prisons, not only to arrest alcoholism, but also to deal with many living problems that facilitate a criminal life-style.

By 1960 there were 356 prison groups with a total membership of 15,547 members. A.A. in prison had gone international, with seven groups in Finland and two in Holland. Correctional officials nationwide continued to encourage those whose crimes were alcohol-related or admitted alcoholics to join A.A. in prison. Men like Lee Henslee of Arkansas, Gus Harrison of Michigan, and Alfred Dowd of Indiana lauded Alcoholics Anonymous as a "20th-century miracle" that often made the difference in the transition to freedom. More importantly, immediate membership upon release from prison contributed to a more meaningful life with one's family. Success in the community by men who found A.A. while in prison continued to give renewed hope to those who were still inside.

**THE TEXAS EXPERIENCE** — A.A. in the Texas Prison System had its beginning in 1948, when the first meeting was held at the "Walls" (on the yard near where the present-day chapel stands), with five inmates attending.

Records indicate that the first alcoholic inmate in the Texas Prison System was taken to a state A.A. convention in Tyler in 1951. Free-world interest increased soon after, and in 1953, Howard Sublett, then with the Classification Committee, became the first departmental sponsor for A.A. From the records Mr. Sublett kept, we know that only 5% of inmates who had six months or more of A.A. while in prison later returned.

By the end of 1960, there were 15 A.A. groups in existence. Today, there are 20 groups



in the Texas Department of Corrections [by 1990, there were 47 groups], each with weekly meetings still supported by free-world visitors. Approximately four times a year, selected inmates representing all the “A.A.s in white” are allowed to attend free-world A.A. conventions. Free-world visitation continues to be vital to the success of every alcoholic in white who will not return to T.D.C.

Today a 1974 correctional facility survey by the General Service Office revealed the following:

1. The average number of groups per institution is 1.25.
2. Attendance at A.A. meetings is voluntary in 90% of the prisons.
3. 50% of all inmates were sentenced for crimes in which alcohol abuse was a significant factor.
4. 96% of the respondents believed an inmate’s chance of making it on the outside is improved by participating in the A.A. program. It is also believed that only 10% of the inmates estimated to be in prison for alcohol-related crimes throughout America attend A.A. meetings.

Today, A.A. estimates that groups in prisons and jails number in excess of 1,100 [2,527 in 2006], with a membership in excess of 43,000 [over 65,000 in 2006].

THE ENDURING LEGACY — In an article written for a special issue of the Grapevine commemorating the 25th anniversary of A.A., Warden Duffy, who by then was a member of the California Parole Board, said the following of Alcoholics Anonymous in prisons.

The A.A. program is presented in a humble and human manner, without high-pressure frills. This is the approach necessary to reach the man who has developed a highly suspicious nature. It helps him to face the truth and reality, without self-pity or dodging of responsibility. It rids him of fears, hates, jealousies, and suspicions that have been his for so long. He learns to eliminate his drinking—to fight the urge, the desire—to get help and fellowship from his A.A. friends.

In prison, not all alcoholics will admit they are powerless over alcohol. But as the years roll on and they see the effect of A.A. on others, the die-hards gradually come around. They see their lives have become unmanageable. They are getting a bit closer to “wanting to want to.”\*

---

\* W. J. (Jim) Estelle, Jr., former director, Texas Department of Corrections, was named a nonalcoholic trustee to the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous in April 1977 and rotated from the board in 1986. He began his career in corrections in 1952. He then spent two years as warden of Montana State Prison. In 1993 Jim became chairman of the General Service Board; he rotated from that position in 1997.

## Carrying the Message into a Women's Prison *Panel 31 delegate (Southeastern Texas)*

I suspect that I was no different than many others when first approached concerning getting clearance to go to A.A. meetings at Goree, which was the State Prison for Women at the time. I consistently said, "No." In hindsight, I realize it was a "no" based on fear. Not fear of the ladies in white, but fear of being laughed out of the hall once I got there, fear of lack of identification—all the fears we came to know. I could imagine them saying, "So she spent one night in jail and it made a believer out of her. So what?" Well, of course, nothing like that happened; they welcomed me very warmly.

On my first visit to Goree, during a cigarette break at the meeting, I had my first opportunity to visit one-on-one with one of the ladies in white. I was astounded to have her tell me my story, but with a very important difference. We had both been in black-outs; we had both been driving with not a thought to where we were or where we were going; we both rear-ended another car. And then the difference: The man she hit died, and the lady I hit lived, and she was serving 30 months. On that first trip to Goree, I learned exactly who was doing my time for me, and almost instantly the fear changed to an indescribable gratitude. I think those of us attending A.A. meetings "inside" have the opportunity to learn of gratitude at a level that nothing else would teach us.

Too often, free-world A.A. members visiting Goree for the first time would dress sloppily and color their language with profanities, trying to get the inmates to identify with them. We don't have to change who and what we are in carrying the message inside. Most of those ladies know all the jive street talk—that's not why they come to A.A. meetings. One of the reasons they come, I believe, is to see women who have come back from the brink of disaster and are now happy and productive citizens. They really want to hear our experience on how we made the trip back and how they can make it back. They want to talk about what we talk about at free-world meetings, not what's going on inside with the system, or what they did to be sent to prison. They learn very early in our program that identification must be in feeling, not actions or deeds.

I found that they loved me because of who I am and what I am, not what I've done, or whether or not I've done time. They taught me not only about gratitude, but unqualified love. There's no material thing an A.A. woman can do for the A.A. inmate, so you know that all love and interest expressed is, indeed, a true expression of love.

The ladies in white at Goree so very much wanted their meetings to be exactly like free-world meetings. They want to approach the Steps in exactly the same way as their free-world A.A. sisters have approached them.

They want the difference in residence to be the only difference. They ask the same questions anyone on the outside who was new in our Fellowship would ask, and they express all the same feelings. There is an urgency, I feel, within the inmate A.A. member that we don't always see outside. An urgency to make that 180-degree turn before discharge if they are to succeed outside.

In the free world, we may agonize verbally about getting around to the Fourth Step—then you visit A.A. in a correctional facility and learn of their very real fears about having a written inventory lying about, and you find your own Fourth Step a bit easier to do.

Hearing these ladies talk of the Ninth Step of our program is a real testimonial to

their faith and growth. Generally, their amends must be made by mail, and, again, the free-world visitors will usually find their own amends a little easier to make with the choices of time, location, and manner available to them. In every turn, I was aware of what they were doing for me, never what I was doing for them.

One thing the inmate A.A. member has difficulty understanding in the beginning is why anyone “outside” would spend their Sundays going “inside.” Gradually, some learn more of the Twelfth Step of our program, and they begin to understand that just possibly we receive much more than we give on these trips inside. It is this realization, I believe, that instills in some of them the need to return to the unit once they have established themselves within the A.A. community on the outside.

Certainly, no one carries a stronger A.A. message than those who receive the first message of A.A. as inmates, were discharged, embarked on a productive life within our Fellowship, and were returned to their A.A. beginnings to share with others.

In 1980, when rumors started circulating that the Texas Department of Corrections would be moving all the ladies from Goree to a location in the north central portion of the state, I was quite disturbed. My sponsor assured me that if this came about, then surely God had something else planned for me. Indeed He did. In October of 1980, I was elected to serve my area as delegate, and as you know, that has a way of changing your time schedule.

I convinced myself that I would be happy in any committee assignment, but can you imagine my pleasure when I learned that I had been assigned to the Corrections Committee? So, in a small way, I’m still able to be involved in correctional-facility A.A.

My direction is here, but my heart is still at the meetings inside the walls.

### Experiences With A.A. From Inside and Outside Prison Walls *Panel 31 delegate*

A.A. found me in the Colorado State Penitentiary, my third. At the time, neither myself nor anyone else had any idea that alcoholism was my problem, although now, with my current understanding of the disease, it is obvious that I was in my first prison at age 19 as a direct result of alcoholism: I was 23 days A.W.O.L. on a spree while my unit was moved to a war zone.

To become a member of the A New Life Group in the Colorado state pen, there was one requirement beyond a desire to stop drinking. The group met each Friday night, and outsiders, “real people,” were allowed to attend. To go to this meeting, the new inmate or new member had to attend a five-week “Twelve Steps Study School.” Each Saturday and Sunday afternoon, we gave up our movie and went to A.A., where sponsors read to us from the Big Book, guided us through the Steps, and shared their experience in recovery with us. I was carried through the Steps the first time, then given my first Twelfth Step job. I was to sponsor the next group. Thank God for the Big Book to read, and the experience of the Steps I had just had.

Our group had about 90 men in it, and possibly ten meant business. I stayed close to these men, but I learned a lot from the “phonies” and “politicians.” They had to quote from the Big Book in order to have anything to say. I learned that though only a few

were serious, the only one I needed to be concerned about was me. Was I serious?

I hear A.A. members say they don't want to go to prison meetings because they have never been to prison, so they feel they have nothing to relate. Let me please change that feeling. I know how to live in prison. What I did not know was how to live successfully on the outside. My peers did not know, either, so the person I needed most to hear from and learn from was the free-world member who had not been locked away, who knew how to live in the free world. And please remember—they would not let me out to see you.

I hear A.A. members say they don't like going to prison meetings because they don't relate to the "criminal mind." I lived with a criminal mind for years. A.A. led me to a spiritual awakening that did for me what is promised: a huge emotional displacement and rearrangement. Ideas, emotions, and attitudes were cast aside, and new conceptions and motives began to dominate me. I was changed, by God's grace. I did not treat my drug problem. I did not treat my criminal problem. I did, through the Twelve Steps, deal with my alcoholism. The other problems ceased to exist. For those who apply the principles of A.A. to their lives, this change seems to take place. But even if our message only caused a drunken thief to become a sober thief, I am inclined to think we have done what we are asked to do—carry the message of sobriety to another alcoholic. Our job is not to rehabilitate criminals. Our job is to carry A.A.'s message to alcoholics, so all we need to understand is ourselves. The Big Book reminds me that, properly armed with facts about ourselves, we can often gain the entire confidence of a new person and so help him onto the road to recovery.

Working with inmates can be tiring and frustrating. Sometimes we drive miles to a prison meeting to find that it has been cancelled. Sometimes we establish a relationship with an inmate and are not allowed to correspond. Our friends may be transferred, or become discouraged and stop coming. One of my early sponsors "quit" A.A. about every three months.

Inmates do and will use us, if we allow it. I have found some firm guidelines for me. I will not carry messages in or out; there are other legitimate channels. I will not bring anything—cigarettes, candy, etc.—in; there are other legitimate channels. I simply share myself, what I found, and how I found it. As time goes on, I will sometimes help someone I have come to know work out a parole plan, and even commit to temporary sponsorship. But the caution in the Big Book guides me—we should not put *our* work on a service plane—this makes it possible for our prospect to use us for money, contacts, etc., and may jeopardize his chance at recovery.

I have learned that while there will always be some things that the administration does that I do not agree with, it is none of my business. I am not to tell them how to run their institution, only to carry the A.A. message to the alcoholics in custody.

Sometimes I must submit to indignities such as searches, fingerprinting, photo ID cards, security checks, and even deliberate rudeness and sabotage by the type of prison personnel that does not understand. Most often, we are welcomed with open arms. Each institution is, by its nature, run by security, and I must respect this or not go, and to not go could mean someone does not get the message.

To be effective in institutional work calls for commitment and continuity. It was important to me to see the same faces show up on a regular basis. I knew these people were there for other than a one-shot ego trip. It took me a while to trust anyone. I began to

know and trust people like Reed and Sparky. I asked Reed the week before I was released how I would be accepted. He said, "Come and see." Reed told me if I would make an A.A. meeting my first night out, I would probably never have to go back. He told me if I would show up at the club, someone I know would be there to meet me. Reed was at the top of the stairs when I got there.

Reliability is important to the inmate groups. We have a unit that allows A.A. meetings, but if no outside members show up, there is no meeting. We have a county jail that insists that one group commits to hosting the meeting for six months at a time, or no meeting. Sadly, there have been times when there was no meeting.

Returning inmates talked about "hanging their A.A. on the gate." This can be avoided if there is an A.A. contact the first day out.

When I was paroled, my inside sponsor said to me, "I wish they were not letting you go. You are not ready. You don't know how to live in the free world." He saved my life, because I knew he was right. With this knowledge and Reed's personal invitation, I made A.A. my first stop, and it worked. I was welcomed, of course, but of most importance to someone as scared as I was, I was welcomed by someone I already knew and trusted from his long attendance at our prison meeting.

I believe it is vital for a person being released to have in mind a place and a person for that first night out—not just the admonition to "go to A.A." A newly released prisoner is at best nervous and scared and feeling alienated.

Because someone cared enough to show regularly, to share honestly, and to be there my first night out, Reed's promise to me is a reality: I have not had to go back. The parole man gave me six days at the outside, based on my past record. It has been 12<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> years free and 14 years sober now.

My loyalty to my prison group is best shown by my never again being an active member of the A New Life Group in the Colorado state pen, but by remaining an outside member, one of the "real people," staying sober and living free.

## **Press Release**

Local corrections committees might want to send a press release to local newspapers or organizations. Here are sample press releases:

### **A.A. Works Behind Prison Walls**

The first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) ever to take place in a prison setting was at notorious San Quentin, a maximum-risk facility, in 1942. Pioneering Warden Clinton T. Duffy overcame the objections of penologists who wrote A.A. off as "just a useless fad," declaring that hardboiled methods were the only way to rehabilitate the alcoholic inmates.

At the first meeting, and others that followed, there was only one guard stationed outside the meeting room, and he was on hand mainly to care for the needs of A.A. visitors from the outside. Skeptics still scoffed... until parole figures on the alcoholic inmates attending A.A. meetings suddenly dropped from the usual 80 percent returning

to prison down to an incredible 20 percent—and held that way.

More than 1,800 programs have since been established behind prison walls, from Maine to Texas, where the first A.A. meeting took place when five alcoholic men met together in the Huntsville Prison Unit in 1948. Five years later, the A.A. program became an official part of the rehabilitation services of the Texas Department of Corrections.

Some people, however, have continued to misunderstand the goals of A.A. in prisons. It is not a religious or temperance movement, social-service organization, employment agency, or cure-all. Nor is it interested in soliciting money or favors. A.A. in fact accepts no contributions from anyone outside its membership. It is simply a way to help men and women stay sober, both in and out of prison, and to help them redirect their lives in positive ways.

A.A. corrections programs extend beyond the prison walls. When released, former inmates find help from other members, who introduce them to members of local groups and steer them through the first crucial days of transition into the “real world.” In A.A., no stigma is attached to members who have been jailed; they are accepted as fellow alcoholics recovering in A.A. like anyone else, whether business person, homemaker, doctor, lawyer, nurse, student, or full-time grandma.

In most metropolitan centers, local A.A. service committees work closely with the prison (and hospital) groups. Members schedule outside speakers at meetings, share their experiences with inmates on a one-to-one basis, and follow through with practical and emotional support whenever a prisoner is released and trying to adjust to life on the outside.

As they regain their confidence, jobs, families, and friends, many of these newly rehabilitated ex-convicts turn around and offer a helping hand to those coming after them. Thus, with the continuing support of prison officials and the many dedicated outside groups and individuals who understand that alcoholism is an insidious but arrestable illness, alcoholics behind bars are getting well in A.A. and learning how to make “today the first day” of the rest of their lives.

### **“It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell”**

(A Video Designed to Help Alcoholics Behind Bars Get Back in the Mainstream of Life)

Filmed inside correctional facilities in the United States and Canada, “It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell” is about four members of Alcoholics Anonymous who were in prison because of alcohol-related crimes. In straightforward, plain language, each tells his or her story of what life used to be like, why they are in prison . . . and how it is now that they are sober.

In keeping with A.A.’s Tradition of anonymity, the faces of members of Alcoholics Anonymous are never shown, but their voices can be heard as they tell their stories.

The former inmates tell of their initial reluctance to become associated with the Fellowship of A.A. Eventually, the hopelessness of their situations and overwhelming boredom with prison life brought them to their first A.A. meeting. They recognized that A.A. might be a way out and describe in practical, useful ways how they changed their attitudes in order to face life without drinking so they could have a chance of successfully facing life on the outside.

They talk about what they did on those crucial early days when they left prison that was different from their actions of the past and discuss utilizing what they learned at A.A. meetings on the inside.

With the continuing support of prison officials and many dedicated A.A. members on the outside, alcoholics behind bars are recovering and some of these newly sober ex-convicts offer a helping hand to those coming after them.

In most metropolitan centers, local A.A. service committees work closely with prison and jail groups. Outside speakers are scheduled for meetings and share experiences with inmates on a one-to-one basis. They follow through with practical and emotional support when a prisoner is released and trying to adjust to life on the outside.

The film is available in 1½ inch VHS (VS-11) in both English and Spanish. Videos (\$15.00 each) may be ordered from the General Service Office of A.A., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, New York 10163.

## **Cooperation Among Public Information, Cooperation With the Professional Community, Treatment Facilities, and Corrections Committees**

### *Introduction*

To recapitulate the A.A. Guidelines:

- The purpose of a corrections committee is to coordinate the work of individual A.A. members and groups who are interested in carrying the A.A. message of recovery to alcoholics in correctional facilities, and to set up means of “bridging the gap” from the facility into the A.A. community.
- The purpose of the P.I. committee is to carry the A.A. message to the general public through the media (newspapers, magazines, radio, televisions, etc.), also to alcoholics through those who are in a position to help them, e.g., wife, husband, doctor, etc. Members of the P.I. committees frequently visit schools and talk to students about A.A.
- The purpose of the C.P.C. committee is to carry the message by establishing a cooperative relationship with the professional community. A.A. is considered by professional persons, almost without exception, to be the number one resource for alcoholics who want help. When there is a good working relationship between A.A. members in the community and paid alcoholism workers, the professionals give A.A. credit, A.A. members return the compliment, and the sick alcoholic is the winner—he or she gets the help needed for both.

In keeping with our Traditions, who or what committee carries the message is not important as long as the A.A. message of recovery is carried to the still-suffering alcoholics, whether they be on the outside or the inside. These committees can cooperate in many ways, as long as the job gets done by someone. Some areas have institutions committees covering both corrections and treatment facilities work; others have dissolved and re-formed as two separate committees. In other situations, committees hold joint meetings with intergroups or central offices.

It is important that there be liaison between the various committees, for example,

sharing newsletters and minutes. Each committee becomes better informed about the thinking and experience of the other committees and therefore better equipped to generate ideas for effective cooperation and enhanced communication.

### *Examples of Cooperation*

1. Occasionally, a C.P.C. committee might establish the initial contact with a correctional facility. In any case, liaison with C.P.C. can often result in more effective outreach to the legal profession and the helping professional attached to a facility—for example, the social worker or probation officer.
2. In some areas, public information committees sponsor luncheons for prison administrators and other corrections personnel. Physicians, lawyers, and other professionals, together with business leaders, are also invited to meet and share with corrections personnel.
3. Some treatment facilities committees share lists of outside sponsors who are willing to take former patients or inmates to A.A. meetings on the outside, helping them to make the transition to a local home group.

C.P.C., public information, and treatment facilities committees undoubtedly will overlap in many areas; however, too much information about A.A. is preferable to a lack of knowledge and understanding by those who are in a position to help us carry the A.A. message of hope and recovery to the still-suffering alcoholic.

### *Working Together*

A.A. pamphlets, e.g., “This is A.A.,” “How A.A. Members Cooperate,” “A Message to Corrections Professionals,” “A.A. in Correctional Facilities,” “If You Are a Professional,” could be sent by the corrections committee to prison administrators or given to the corrections committee to take with them when they visit the prison administrator to talk about setting up a new group.

Public information luncheons, which are held in some areas, invite people from the business community as well as professional people. Wardens, prison administrators, and corrections personnel can also be invited to these public information events.



## Non-A.A. Resources

Tradition Six states that Alcoholics Anonymous “ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise. . . .” In the spirit of cooperating with outside agencies, we are including the following list of Non-A.A. Resources:

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD), 244 East 58th St., 4th Floor, New York, NY 10022, Telephone (212) 269-7797, Fax (212) 269-7510 <http://www.ncadd.org>, E-mail address: [national@ncadd.org](mailto:national@ncadd.org). Hope Line: 800/NCA-CALL (24-hour affiliate referral)

Association of Halfway House Alcoholism Programs of North America, Inc., 860 N. Center Street, Mesa, AZ 85201, Telephone (480) 610-8300 or Toll Free (800) 861-0599, <http://www.ahhap.org>

World Service Office of Narcotics Anonymous, P.O. Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409, Telephone (818) 773-9999, Fax (818) 700-0700, <http://www.na.org>

Al-Anon Family Groups, 1600 Corporate Landing Parkway, Virginia Beach, VA 23454-5617, Telephone (757) 563-1600, or (800) 356-9996 (Gen. Info) or (888) 425-2666 (meeting info for U.S., Canada and Puerto Rico) <http://www.al-anon.alateen.org>

Gamblers Anonymous, International Service Office, P.O. Box 17173, Los Angeles, CA 90017, Telephone (213) 386-8789, Fax (213) 386-0030, <http://www.gamblersanonymous.org>

National Self-Help Clearinghouse (NSHC), 365 Fifth Ave., Suite 3300 New York, NY 10016, Telephone (212) 817-1822, <http://www.selfhelpweb.org>

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), Parklawn Building, Room 16-105, 5635 Fishers Lane, MSC 9304, Bethesda, MD 20892-9304, Telephone (301) 496-1993, TTD: (800) 735-2258, <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov>

American Correctional Association, 206 North Washington Street, Suite 200, Alexandria, VA 22314, (703) 224-0000, <http://www.aca.org>

American Correctional Association publishes the following directories: *2004 Directory of Adult and Juvenile Correctional Departments, Institutions, Agencies, and Probation and Parole Authorities*; *2002-2004 National Jail and Adult Detention Directory*; *2004-2007 Probation and Parole Directory*; *2003-2005 National Juvenile Detention Directory*.



## Literature Guide

The following suggests the appropriate use for various pamphlets.

### FOR INMATES

A.A. and the Gay/Lesbian Alcoholic (P-32)  
A.A. for the Native North American (P-21)  
A.A. for the Woman (P-5)  
A.A. Member—Medications and  
Other Drugs (P-11)  
A Message to Teenagers (F-9)  
A Newcomer Asks (P-24)  
Do You Think You're Different? (P-13)  
Is A.A. for Me? (P-36)  
Is A.A. for You? (P-3)  
It Happened to Alice (P-39)  
It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell (P-33)  
Memo to an Inmate (P-9)  
Problems Other Than Alcohol (P-35; F-8)  
Too Young? (P-37)  
What Happened to Joe (P-38)  
Where Do I Go From Here? (F-4)  
A.A. at a Glance (F-1)  
A.A. in Correctional Facilities (P-26)  
*A.A. in Prison: Inmate to Inmate* (B-13)

**How It Works** (P-10)  
Questions & Answers on Sponsorship  
(P-15)  
The A.A. Group (P-16)  
Twelve Traditions Illustrated (P-43)  
A.A. for the Black and African American  
Alcoholic (P-51)  
Understanding Anonymity (P-47)  
Wallet Card (M-2)

### Newsletter

*Sharing From Behind the Walls*

### Easy To Read

Is A.A. for Me? (P-36)  
Is A.A. for You? (P-3)  
It Happened to Alice (P-39)  
Twelve Steps Illustrated (P-55)  
Twelve Traditions Illustrated (P-43)  
What Happened to Joe (P-38)

### FOR YOUTH

A Message to Teenagers (F-9)  
Too Young ? (P-37)  
Young People and A.A. (P-4)  
The Twelve Steps Illustrated (P-55)  
Do You Think You're Different? (P-13)  
Is A.A. for Me? (P-36)  
Where Do I Go From Here? (F-4)

### Videotape:

Young People in A.A. (VS-8)

### From the Grapevine

*In Our Own Words* (GV-19)

## **FOR PROFESSIONAL STAFF**

A.A. in Correctional Facilities (P-26)  
A.A. in Your Community (P-31)  
Carrying the A.A. Message Into  
Correctional Facilities (F-5)  
Message to Corrections  
Professionals (P-20)

Problems Other Than Alcohol (P-35, F-8)  
The A.A. Group (P-16)  
Twelve Steps Illustrated (P-55)  
Twelve Traditions Illustrated (P-43)  
Understanding Anonymity (P-47)

## **A.A. CORRECTIONS COMMITTEE WORKERS**

A.A. in Correctional Facilities (P-26)  
Carrying the Message Into Correctional  
Facilities (F-5)

How A.A. Members Cooperate (P-29)  
Message to Corrections  
Professionals (P-20)

## **Other Useful Material**

### **Audio Tapes:**

A.A. in Prison: Inmate to Inmate (M-55)  
Voices of Our Co-Founders (M-37)  
Alcoholics Anonymous  
(The Big Book) (MB-1)  
Twelve Steps and  
Twelve Traditions (MB-2)  
Living Sober (MB-7)  
Pioneers in A.A. (MB-4)  
A Brief Guide to A.A. (M-60)

### **G.S.O. Films/Videotapes:**

It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell (VS-11 & 12)  
Hope: Alcoholics Anonymous (VS-16 & 17)  
Young People in A.A. (VS-8 & 9)  
A.A.—Rap With Us (VS-13)  
Carrying the Message Behind These Walls  
(VS-25)  
Your A.A. General Service Office, the  
Grapevine, and the General Service  
Structure (VS-24)  
A.A. in Correctional Facilities (DV-02)

### **Magazines:**

The A.A. Grapevine—monthly  
La Viña — bimonthly

### **Grapevine CDs:**

Classic Tapes Vols. 1, 2 & 3 (CD)  
(CD-02, 03, 04)  
Pathways to Spirituality (CD) (CD-01)  
Not for Newcomers Only,  
Vols. 1 & 2 (CD) (CD-05)  
Partners on the Journey (CD) (CD-06)  
For other Grapevine items see  
[www.aagrapevine.org](http://www.aagrapevine.org)

