

A.A.[®] Guidelines

Corrections Committees

from G.S.O., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

A.A. Guidelines are compiled from the shared experience of A.A. members in various service areas. They also reflect guidance given through the Twelve Traditions and the General Service Conference (U.S. and Canada). In keeping with our Tradition of autonomy, except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole, most decisions are made by the group conscience of the members involved. The purpose of these Guidelines is to assist in reaching an *informed* group conscience.

HOW A.A.s CARRY THE MESSAGE TO ALCOHOLICS IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

The material in these Guidelines has come from the experience and growing pains of A.A. corrections committees. We are privileged to share it with A.A.s throughout the United States and Canada who are carrying our message behind the walls.

PURPOSE

The purpose of a corrections committee is to coordinate the work of individual A.A. members and groups who are interested in carrying our message of recovery to alcoholics behind the walls, and to set up means of smoothing the way from the facility to the larger A.A. community through prerelease contacts.

A corrections committee may function within the structure of a General Service Conference area committee or a central office (intergroup). In A.A.'s early years, prison Twelfth Step work was usually done by an individual group or an individual member. As A.A. has grown, however, it seems that a committee formed within the A.A. service structure works more effectively.

Prior to 1977, services to correctional and treatment facilities were provided under the umbrella of the Institutions Committee. Because of rapid growth, the 1977 General Service Conference voted to dissolve its Institutions Committee and two new committees, one on corrections and one on treatment facilities, were formed. This division was created to provide better service to groups and meetings in both kinds of facilities.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Perhaps the first step would be to contact your general service area committee or local intergroup (central office) and, if there is an existing corrections committee, they will connect you to the committee chairperson. Local A.A. groups and members should be given the opportunity of sharing in and doing corrections Twelfth Step work. It has proved a good idea to have members from many groups serve on this committee. If a corrections committee does not exist in your area, then you may wish to form one. Thus, a chairperson is elected, and plans are worked out so that each correctional facility group and correctional facility in the area will be assured of A.A. help. The chairperson of the corrections committee often participates within the area general service committee or intergroup steering committee. These committees convene every month to make assignments and handle other related business.

The chairperson relays information from meetings of the Conference Committee on Corrections, held during the annual General Service Conference, and shares Conference thinking and experience on A.A. in corrections service work.

If you are a new committee, the next step would be to list your corrections committee with the General Service Office in New York. Your chairperson will be put on a mailing list and receive a Corrections Workbook and other service literature and material.

The Corrections Workbook is a good basic tool. It contains information on how to do corrections work, background information, guide letters, and a selection of pamphlets, leaflets, etc. If your area already has a functioning committee, the workbook may provide new ideas or new ways of implementing old ideas. If your committee is just getting off the ground, the workbook will help you find effective ways of getting organized.

RELATIONSHIP TO A.A. IN THE AREA OR DISTRICT

As in all A.A. activity, communication of needs and progress is all important. Such communication can be maintained through group representatives at intergroup/central office or general service area meetings, through area or intergroup newsletters, and by direct contact by committee members at regular A.A. meetings.

Communication also takes place at special dinners where corrections committees invite others to attend; regular corrections workshops at area conferences (in a few areas, inmates are allowed to attend these conferences with their group advisers) and during monthly meetings of these committees (often rotated within an area) to which all A.A.s are invited.

BASIC FUNCTIONS OF CORRECTIONS COMMITTEES

The basic functions of corrections committees are elaborated on in the Corrections Workbook. However, here are highlights of major headings.

Corrections committees, when allowed to do so, take A.A. meetings into facilities within their area. They encourage "outside" group participation in this kind of Twelfth Step work. In some areas, each group has a group corrections representative. The committee provides a liaison between the correctional facilities groups and meetings and groups on the outside, and also coordinates prerelease contact.

The relationship with prison authorities is discussed in the workbook to ensure a positive reciprocal working relationship with

administrators and staff. A.A. members wishing to carry our message to alcoholics behind the walls of correctional facilities should understand that we always do so within the regulations of such facilities. Corrections Committees and Hospital and Institutions (H&I) Committees are encouraged to thoroughly review and understand all procedures of institutions with whom they cooperate, and to share this information with all A.A. members who bring A.A. meetings inside. Some committees make available copies of regulations and forms that must be completed, so that A.A. members new to this service work can review the materials prior to making their decision. Some committees share this information with A.A. members new to corrections service through regular workshops, information sheets, and volunteer packets developed by local trusted servants.

The workbook also goes into detail about prison A.A. meetings. It suggests different ways to shoulder responsibility for meetings and speakers.

Most committees find that adequate literature supplies are essential in a correctional facility group or meeting. Supplies are financed and obtained in several ways: Donated by local intergroup or general service committee; donated by members of the committee; purchased with individual contributions; provided by groups through their corrections representatives.

Special funds: Buck of the Month Club, where members contribute, and funds are used for corrections literature; special meetings or dinners, at which a collection is taken; special cans at regular meetings, marked "For Corrections Literature."

NOTE: Corrections Discount Packages are available from G.S.O.

PRERELEASE/BRIDGING THE GAP/ TEMPORARY CONTACTS, ETC.

Experience suggests that even though an inmate may have been participating in a group or meeting in a correctional facility, there is often anxiety about the transition to a regular A.A. group on the outside. With the constant reminder that A.A. has only sobriety to offer, many committees do try to provide some additional personal contact, so this transition period can be made easier.

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 service is known by a variety of names in the A.A. Fellowship, such as "Bridging the Gap," "Prerelease," "Contact Upon Release," "Temporary Contact," etc., but all committees do essentially the same type of Twelfth Step service.

This A.A. service is a way for outside A.A.s to meet up with inside

A.A.s getting released from prison/jail and trying to find their way to local A.A. meetings after their release. A.A. members on the outside agree to meet ex-inmate A.A.s to accompany them to their first few local meetings, This is essentially an extended Twelfth Step call. It is not intended to become a long-term A.A. relationship, but simply to help ease the newly-released member's transition to outside A.A. and to help get them started on the road to sobriety in their home community.

More information and guidelines about this sort of service are available in the Corrections Workbook. Local committees often arrange contacts for inmates being released locally, while G.S.O. can help with referrals of inmates being released to other areas.

NEWSLETTER

Sharing From Behind the Walls is a one-page newsletter for A.A. members on the inside. It reflects anonymous sharing from inmate letters sent to G.S.O. This newsletter is published quarterly and included in letters sent out by G.S.O. to inmates. It is available upon request for use in A.A. correctional service, and can also be printed from the Corrections section of G.S.O.'s A.A. Web site www.aa.org.

RELATIONSHIP TO AL-ANON

Many areas report it is extremely helpful to cooperate with Al-Anon Family Groups, in order that the family of the inmate may gain a better understanding of our Fellowship. For information, contact Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., 1600 Corporate Landing Parkway, Virginia Beach, VA 23454-5617. Tel: (888) 425-2666.

RELATIONSHIP TO G.S.O.

G.S.O. lists corrections chairpersons (U.S. and Canada). The people on this mailing list are sent the following material:

1. *Box 4-5-9*— quarterly.
2. Corrections Workbook.
3. Activity update from the G.S.O. Corrections desk.

CORRESPONDENCE SERVICE

The Corrections Correspondence Service, coordinated through G.S.O., offers an opportunity for A.A.s on the "outside" to share experience, strength, and hope through letters with fellow members. Helpful guidelines for this service are provided to both "inside" and "outside" A.A.s. You may write to G.S.O. to become a part of this service.

An attractive flyer (F-26) describing this service is available from G.S.O. to place in group literature racks. It can also be printed from the Corrections section of G.S.O.'s A.A. Web site www.aa.org.

Please keep in touch with us, so that we may share your activities in *Box 4-5-9* and add your experience to our files, to help others who are involved in this rewarding area of service.