

Guideline No.11 AA in Prisons

Our Fellowship has long recognised our responsibility for carrying the message of AA to the suffering alcoholic in prisons in Great Britain. It is recommended that AA Groups should be established in all prisons and young offenders establishments.

Introduction

Responsibility for sponsorship of prison groups has been placed by Conference with the Intergroup and is exercised through the Intergroup Prison Liaison Officer. As a member of Alcoholics Anonymous you are there by permission of the Governor and staff and it must be remembered that every Governor, although working within a national framework, has the right of decision in his or her own institution.

Familiarity with prisons in the local area and a thorough knowledge of the *AA Service Handbook for Great Britain* are vital before accepting the role of Prison Liaison Officer.

Prison Groups

Prison group sponsors are appointed according to the Intergroup conscience. It is recommended that sponsors have a minimum of three years' continuous sobriety. Security clearance is invariably necessary. Wherever possible, a team of AA sponsors should be maintained so that inmates will gain a broader view of how AA works.

As with all meetings, it is desirable that prison groups discuss the whole of the AA programme of recovery using every opportunity to introduce the Steps and Traditions and referring to the Big Book. In this way, it is possible to make the inmate member aware that he or she can live the AA way of life prior to release.

Prison group members should, wherever possible, be encouraged to take an active part in their Group in accordance with AA Traditions and, whenever possible, prison sponsors should adopt only a supporting role.

AA members who are invited to speak at a prison Group meeting may also require security clearance.

Communication

- Prison group sponsors should pass on reports to their Intergroup Prison Liaison Officer on a regular basis, outlining what is occurring within their establishment.
- Prior to release prisoners should be encouraged to make contact with the Fellowship within their local area through the relevant Service Offices. Members who wish to correspond with prisoners should only do so through the correspondence scheme operated by the General Service Office.
- Where no AA Group exists at a prison, the local Intergroup should make every attempt to form one. Permission to establish a new prison group has to be obtained from the Governor and the initial approach should be made by the Intergroup Prison Liaison Officer.
- Participation of prison group sponsors in meetings at national Conventions and in Regional Prison Sponsor meetings is useful in sharing and extending our experience in this form of service.

Literature

Every effort should be made to ensure that the prisoner induction pack, together with sufficient literature, is available to prison AA members. Additional AA publications, eg *SHARE* and *Roundabout* (with contact details removed), can be provided by the local Intergroup.

Code of Conduct

Abide by the laws governing visitors to prisons. These are very clear and very strict. Check with the particular establishment you will be visiting.

As a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, you are there by permission of the Governor and staff. Act accordingly. From their point of view, you will be AA's representative and their respect and esteem for the Fellowship as a whole will depend on your conduct.

- Act always with courtesy and diplomacy.
- Your appearance, language, manner and conduct will affect everyone's opinion of AA.
- Failure to observe prison rules is a criminal offence and could cause AA to be banned, so do not be tempted to do favours for prison group members and give them cigarettes that are forbidden, or carry in or take out a card, letter, money etc. The message is all we take in, and we take nothing out.
- Obey smoking regulations. If inmates can't smoke, AA visitors shouldn't either.
- In accordance with our Preamble, we have no authority to discuss medication, theories on alcoholism, professionally prescribed treatments or obtaining parole. We are there only to carry the AA message.
- AA does not participate in meetings which are the responsibility of another agency in the field of alcoholism. If other agencies also have meetings within the establishment, the authorities should be informed that we are not affiliated.
- Be punctual and observe the establishment visiting times.

The personal example of the prison sponsor is our greatest asset with prison authorities and in carrying the message to prisons.

WHO YOU SEE THERE
WHAT YOU HEAR THERE
LET US STAY THERE