

PROBATION/SOCIAL SERVICES

Guideline 13

Draft agreed by Regional PLOs and Board Member for Probation and revised by the Literature Sub-Committee

The term Probation/Social Services is used in this document to indicate Probation for England and Wales, Social Services for Scotland.

Experience has shown that positive results can follow when Groups, Intergroups and Regions co-operate with the Probation Service/Social Services with a view to helping the still suffering alcoholic.

INTRODUCTION

In our pamphlet *How AA Members Co-operate*, the following appears:

“We cannot discriminate against any prospective AA members, even if he or she comes to us under pressure from a court, an employer, or any other agency.

Although the strength of our programme lies in the voluntary nature of membership in AA, many of us first attend meetings because we were forced to, either by someone else or by our inner discomfort. But continual exposure to AA educated us to the true nature of our illness. Who made the referral to AA is not what AA is interested in. It is the problem drinker who is our concern. We cannot predict who will recover, nor have we the authority to decide how recovery should be sought by any other alcoholic”.

A good working relationship between AA and the Probation Service/Social Services often takes many months and sometimes years to build. Experience shows that, as in many areas of service, setting up a system of co-operation between AA and the Probation Service/Social Service is most likely to prove successful if patience and perseverance is practised.

A plan of action could be:

INTERGROUPS

(Refer to Guideline 4 INTERGROUPS)

- The election of an Intergroup Probation/Social Services Liaison Officer who should have an established period of sobriety, ideally not less than two years. It is recommended she/he serves for a maximum of three years.
- The person elected will be responsible for establishing links with the Probation Service in England and Wales or with Social Service departments in Scotland. Liaison with the Probation Service/Social Services often leads directly to contact with magistrates who will need to be informed about AA in a similar manner.
- The officer should familiarise him or herself with the 12 Traditions, the *AA Service Handbook for Great Britain* and the *AA Service Handbook on Public Information*.
- A report should be made to each Intergroup meeting by the officer to keep Intergroup informed on a regular basis.

- The officer should send a copy of the report to the Regional Probation Liaison Officer and keep him/her informed of developments in the Intergroup.

INTERGROUP PROBATION LIAISON OFFICERS

Some Intergroups have a flourishing relationship with their local Probation/Social Services department. In others there will have been little contact. It is for each officer to decide the best way of taking the role forward. Some suggested methods are as follows:

- The officer might set up a committee or team to assist in the work and to Twelfth-Step any probationers.
- Establishing a named contact with each Probation/Social Services office in the area.
- Distribution of AA approved literature and posters for display in the Probation/ Social Services offices and to be given to offenders, including, where appropriate, use of the stories in the new Prison Induction Pack.
- Attending meetings with the Probation/Social Services to inform them of how AA works and what it does and does not do.
- Take other opportunities to carry the message, for example he or she may be asked to provide a speaker for a “drink drivers” or “domestic violence” group or other sections of the criminal justice system such as bail hostels, magistrates etc.
- Keep accurate records of Probation/Social Services officers' contact names and addresses, details of meetings with Probation/Social Services, and of the Twelfth Step list so that in the event of someone having to take over at short notice, all ground gained would not be lost.

GROUPS

Tradition 5 tells us that *“Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers”*.

Sometimes the way in which a person enters AA may seem unorthodox, controversial or even in breach of our Traditions; however, a closer look will show us that AA is not interested in how a person comes to us but simply in how we can help in that person’s release from alcoholism. Each group is autonomous and how it chooses to co-operate (if at all) with Probation/Social Services is for the group conscience to decide.

REGION

REGIONAL PROBATION/SOCIAL SERVICES LIAISON OFFICERS

(Refer to Guideline 5 REGIONS)

It is recommended that officers should have at least three years’ continuous sobriety. Consideration should be given to their experience or interest.

It is recommended that the officers should serve for a maximum of three years and be confirmed annually.

It is through the Regional Assembly that the Regional Probation/Social Services Liaison Officer is elected, ideally, though not essentially, being a member with some experience at Intergroup level.

The task of the Regional Probation/Social Services Liaison Officer is:

- To communicate with, and to collate information from, the Intergroup Probation/Social Services Liaison Officers within the Region. This information is passed on to Region in the form of a report, given at each Regional Assembly. A copy of each report should be sent to the Board Trustee looking after Probation/Social Services matters.
- Another function is often to encourage Intergroups where activity is slow or non-existent.
- To support Intergroup Probation/Social Services Liaison Officers, especially if they are newly elected or are being elected to a post which has been previously vacant.
- To liaise with the Probation/Social Services at senior management level, as frequently a Probation/Social Services area will cover several Intergroups.
- To send an annual report on the Region's Probation/Social Services liaison activities to the annual meeting of Regional Probation/Social Services Liaison Officers, if possible to attend that meeting, and to report to Region relevant items from the annual meeting.

Experience has shown the following activities to be helpful:

- Holding probation workshops, perhaps under the umbrella of a regional 'combined external services' workshop where all Liaison Officers and helpers are invited to share their experience and to encourage others into service.
- Intergroups needing help, assistance and guidance on probation/social services liaison may invite visits by officers and helpers from other Intergroups where AA and the Probation Service/Social Services already co-operate. Visits may be directed to Intergroup meetings and individual groups, or perhaps to the Probation/ Social Services by accompanying the local AA Liaison Officer to lend support.
- Holding meetings of Intergroup Probation/Social Services Liaison Officers between Regional Assemblies, in order to share experience.

SETTING UP A CONFIRMATION OF ATTENDANCE/CHIT SYSTEM

Sometimes Courts or the Probation Service/Social Services ask for confirmation of attendance at AA meetings. The reporting of attendance is not part of AA procedure. Each attendee reports on him or herself, at the request of the referring agency.

Each Group, Intergroup or Region is autonomous and free to use any method it sees appropriate. It is suggested that the following method of setting up a system could be used:

- Intergroup considers setting up such a system in their area. A workshop or presentation from the Regional PLO or someone who has operated the system in their own area may be of assistance in understanding how it works and answering any questions.
- Each Group considers if they want to operate such a system. The Probation/Social Services Liaison Officer may be invited to a group conscience meeting to explain the system.

- Systems of confirming attendance may vary. Some areas distribute pre-printed “attendance notes” to each meeting which can be signed by the Secretary or GSR and given to anyone requesting them. Other areas hand out a sealed envelope containing a card which identifies the Group by number or code and which has the date written across the envelope by the Secretary.
- Conference 1987 recommended that arrangements allowing members to self-report attendance to an outside body are within the Traditions.

EXPENSES

(Refer to Guideline 12 FINANCE)

The payment of expenses depends upon the group conscience of the Region or Intergroup, always bearing in mind our Tradition of self-support.

- Service is defined as that which makes the Twelfth Step possible.
- It is agreed that no expenses should be claimed for individual “face to face” Twelfth Step work.

In principle, any member who is qualified to carry out a particular task in our service should not be prevented from doing so for financial reasons, and should be offered expenses.

When carrying out an Intergroup or Region function, duly authorised service workers should be offered expenses.

For a variety of reasons Regions and Intergroups will probably differ in their approach to this question, and there may be no uniformity, but there need be no controversy if decisions are taken in the spirit of AA and with common sense.