

Chapter Seven: AA in Prisons

Our Fellowship has long recognised our responsibility for carrying the message to the suffering alcoholic in prisons and young offenders institutions in Great Britain. It is our intention to set up groups in all of these establishments.

Responsibility for sponsorship of prison groups has been placed by Conference with the intergroup and is exercised through the intergroup ~~p~~Prison ~~I~~liaison ~~o~~Officer (PLO).

~~M~~As ~~a~~ ~~m~~embers of Alcoholics Anonymous ~~you~~ are there by permission of the ~~g~~Governor and staff and it must be remembered that every ~~g~~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 and Structure Handbooks¹ for Great Britain are vital before accepting the role of ~~PLO~~Prison Liaison Officer.

7:1 Prison Liaison Officers (PLOs)

~~Prison Liaison Officers~~PLOs are appointed by the ~~i~~ntergroup. They organise schedules for prison visits as well as facilitating communication with the relevant prison. They are the intergroup focal point for all prison matters within their area.

Prison ~~g~~Group ~~f~~acilitators/~~s~~Sponsors share reports with their intergroup ~~Prison Liaison Officer (PLO)~~PLO on a regular basis, outlining what is occurring within the prison(s) for which they are serving ~~at~~.

The PLO provides a report to intergroup detailing how the meetings are running and also highlighting any issues. This report should also be sent to region.

Prior to their release, prison members ~~are encouraged to make~~should be assisted in making contact with the Fellowship within their local area ~~through the relevant Service Office~~. AA ~~m~~embers who wish to correspond with prisoners should do so only through the prison correspondence programme operated through the General Service Office (GSO)- as detailed inSee 7:3.

Where no AA group exists ~~at~~in ~~a~~ prison, the local intergroup is encouraged to make every attempt to form one. Permission to establish a new prison group must be obtained from the ~~g~~Governor. The initial approach should be made by the ~~i~~ntergroup ~~Prison Liaison Officer~~PLO.

Experience shows that participation of prison group sponsors ~~in meetings~~ at national conventions and in regional prison sponsor meetings can be useful in raising awareness of prison service within the Fellowship ~~and expanding member service~~.

Please also see the free pamphlet 'AA Service in ~~P~~prisons' available from GSO.

7:2 Prison groups

Prison ~~g~~Group ~~f~~acilitators/~~s~~Sponsors are appointed ~~according to the~~by intergroup ~~conscience~~. ~~These~~ ~~Facilitators/Sponsors~~They facilitate prison meetings and visit the prison on a regular basis. It is recommended that ~~Facilitators/Sponsors~~they have a minimum of three years' continuous sobriety.

Security clearance is necessary to become a regular visitor to prison. The security clearance is arranged by and funded by the prison where the meetings are to take place.

As each prison is autonomous, the security clearance is only valid for the prison which arranged it. In Scotland the clearance is known as Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG).

Some prisons offer key training to members who run regular meetings in a prison allowing them to draw keys. They are then given access to fingerprint-access key boxes, or sometimes access the key box with a PIN. This allows such members to very efficiently and quickly enter the establishment quickly, efficiently and securely whilst still being monitored by the prison. in a manner that is secure, and monitored by the prison. Without such provisions members would need to rely on guest passes, which are sometimes lost, or limited to only a few per year (sometimes across the whole prison estate).¹

Keyholder status entails tremendous responsibility, and as such should be taken with the utmost seriousness. Some prisons will require a clean criminal record, others may not. As with most prison service, details of keyholder responsibilities are subject to decision making of individual prison governors.

Wherever possible, a team of AA ~~p~~Prison ~~g~~Group ~~f~~Facilitators/~~s~~Sponsors should be maintained so that prison members will gain a broader view of how AA works. At least one of the facilitators/sponsors should be of the same gender as the prison population they are visiting.

~~So far as the Fellowship is concerned, female members may be included in the panel of agreed Facilitators/Sponsors for male prisons, provided they are accompanied by a male AA member or male AA members on the panel for female prisons, and provided they are accompanied by a female AA member, subject to the approval of the Governor.~~

AA members may be invited to speak at a prison group meeting at the discretion of the ~~f~~Facilitators/~~s~~Sponsors. ~~It is recommended that Such any such speakers should~~ have a minimum of one year's continuous sobriety. They need to be aware that they ~~will~~ need photographic ID and to provide their full name and DOB to the prison to gain entry.

As with all meetings, it is desirable that prison groups ~~discuss share their experiences of drinking and recovery, making reference to the the whole of the Steps and Traditions where possible. 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 for prison members to learn that they can live the AA way of life now and on release.

Prison group members should, wherever possible, be encouraged to take an active part in their group in accordance with AA Traditions. Whenever possible, ~~p~~Prison ~~g~~Group ~~f~~Facilitators/~~s~~Sponsors should adopt only a supporting role.

Any foreign language speakers wishing to start non English-speaking meetings in prisons should first contact their local ~~Intergroup Prison Liaison Officer~~PLO before approaching the prison authorities. The PLO will be able to facilitate contact with the prison authorities and ensure that the message is carried to as many members as possible in the prison regardless of their native language.

7:3 Prison Postal Service

The ~~PPS~~ prison postal service is a facility for AA members to write regularly to an AA prison member. To become a ~~p~~Prison ~~p~~Postal ~~s~~Sponsor (~~PPS~~) you need two years continuous sobriety and a support letter from either your home group, ~~Intergroup~~ or

rRegion. Firstly, contact GSO and express your wishesinterest. You are then matched to an AA member in prison. The letters all go through GSO so there is no exchanging of personal information.

The aim is to offer additional support to the still suffering alcoholic. The facilitator/sponsor of the pPrison meeting can suggest that this might be a help to their recovery. An AA member in prison can contact GSO and request a prison postal sponsorPPS. Remember not to share any personal/family information and that the same Fellowship safeguarding guidelines should be adhered to.

7:4 Literature

Every effort should be made to ensure that sufficient literature, is available to prison AA members. Additional AA publications e.g. SHAREShare and Roundabout (with contact details removed) can also be provided by the local intergroup.

Use of literature

Below is a list of literature which you can access from www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk These will help to ensure the smooth running of meetings. Any purchases made for literature should be met by the sponsoring intergroup or region. Only AA approved literature should be used, for example:-

- The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous
- Living Sober
- Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions
- Daily Reflections ~~and any other AA approved books~~
- Inside Stories
- Prison and Alcohol
- 12th Step Starter Pack complete in wallet. (It is suggested that we give each new member a set of these).
- Serenity Prayer
- Yellow Card
- A monthly subscription to Share and Roundabout magazines, funded by intergroup or rRegion. Ask your intergroup or rRegion for any old copies they could donate to the prison. January editions are especially useful.

Free leaflets that can be acquired by phoning the literature department at the General Service Office(GSO).

- Carrying the message inside the walls
- How did I get here?
- Where do I go from here?
- When drink stops working
- Contact AA Prison poster

If you wish to take literature into the prison this **must** be checked by security. Check with your prison contact for the best person to ask.

There is a quarterly newsletter, Beyond the Bars, which is sent to PLOs but can also be accessed in the members area document library.

7:5 Safety/Safeguarding

~~You should never facilitate an AA prison meeting alone and at least one of you should be the same gender as the prison population. Wherever possible you should not go into a prison alone and you need to be taking active steps to recruit a support team. At least one of you should be the same gender as the prison population.~~

- Please be aware of your surroundings. Remember you are in a prison.
- Never do any favours for the prisoners such as taking a message or letter from them.
- Never divulge any personal information. The only thing you should take into and out of the prison is yourself.
- No ~~e~~lectronic devices including mobile phones and smart watches together with smoking materials, should be worn/taken in. These will need to be left behind at the gate lodge.
- In line with prison procedures, any unusual activity should be reported to an officer at the first opportunity.
- Any thoughts of self harm and suicide should also be promptly reported.

7:6 Code of conduct

As a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, you are there by permission of the ~~g~~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 policies and procedures is a criminal offence and could cause AA to be banned.

In accordance with our Preamble, we have no authority to discuss education, 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.

Always follow prison guidelines.

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