

Chapter Eight: Probation/ Community Justice Social Work Services (CJS)

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1. Introduction
2. Groups
3. Probation/CJS Liaison officers (& Chit System)
 - 3.1 General points
 - 3.2 Setting up a Confirmation of Attendance or 'Chit' system
 - 3.3 Intergroup Probation/CJS Liaison Officers
 - 3.4 Regional Probation/CJS Liaison Officers
4. The General Service Board's Probation/CJS Sub-Committee

Co-operation with the probation service, social work services, approved premises, courts, police forces and legal professionals are included in the remit of probation/community justice services liaison officers.

8:1 Introduction

Experience has shown that positive results can follow when groups, intergroups and regions co-operate with the community justice services with a view to helping the still suffering alcoholic.

In our pamphlet 'AA as a resource for Criminal Justice Professionals the following appears:

'Where links between an individual's offending, and/or reoffending and drinking have been identified, case officers can ensure that these people are made aware that AA exists and that we might be able to help them. This starts the offender's recovery journey. Some do not engage with our solution immediately, but many eventually return after that first contact.'

A good working relationship between AA and community justice 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 is most likely to prove successful if patience and perseverance are practised.

8:2 Groups

(Refer to section 'The Group' of 'The AA Structure Handbook for Great Britain & Continental Europe'.)

Tradition Five 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 recovery from alcoholism. Each group is autonomous and how it chooses to co-operate (if at all) with community justice services is for the group conscience to decide. One method could be the participation of the group in the confirmation of attendance or ‘chit’ system, the details of which may be found in Section 8:3.2 below.

8:3 Probation/CJS Liaison Officers

8:3.1 General points

Resources

It is hoped that each liaison officer will be sponsored into service and passed relevant information by the person who is rotating out of office. To support liaison officers AA has prepared a liaison officers pack: Probation/CJS available from GSO and in the AA (GB) website’s Documents Library.

All liaison officers should familiarise themselves with:

- The Twelve Traditions
- ‘The AA Service Handbook for Great Britain & Continental Europe’ and ‘The AA Structure Handbook for Great Britain & Continental Europe’.
- ‘Liaison officers Pack: Probation/CJS’
- The leaflet ‘AA as a resource for Criminal Justice Professionals’. This leaflet is included in the ‘website Documents Library and can be purchased as AA literature.
- AA website and what it has to offer those involved in this area of service.

The AA (GB) website www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk has a section to assist liaison officers, in the Members’ Area//Service//Disciplines. The section ‘Probation/Community Justice Services’ carries background information, news about recent and forthcoming events, and links to resources such as the liaison officers pack and stories from members, the website will be updated in the event of significant changes within the probation/criminal justice systems. The website also has a section carrying information for professionals in the Legal/ Community Justice area.

Co-operation across AA

It is suggested that the liaison officers work closely with their AA colleagues in other service areas, particularly those in Prison Liaison and Public Information. They may also need to co-operate across intergroup and regional boundaries, as a community justice service may cover an area which includes more than one AA intergroup, or region.

A number of intergroups and regions have found it valuable to encourage the setting up of small teams to assist liaison officers and to provide local contacts across the larger community justice services areas.

Budgets and expenses

(Refer to section ‘AA Money’ in ‘The AA Structure Handbook for Great Britain & Continental Europe.)

It is suggested that liaison officers should prepare annual budgets for their service activities. These should be prepared according to the established procedures of each individual intergroup or region. They might include sums for travel to regional assemblies, the purchase of AA literature for placing in community justice services premises and courts’ offices and other places, travel to national events like the regional officers meeting or a Probation/CJS Seminar, and any projects planned for the following year.

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 members 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.

8:3.2 Setting up a Confirmation of Attendance or 'Chit' System

The confirmation of attendance system, often called 'the chit system' is simply a scheme to let people have a document to show that they have attended a particular meeting. That person can then give the confirmation to community justice managers, social services, an employer, or any other body. Groups and their members do not need to know why a person is requesting a chit.

The system was endorsed by Conference 1987 as being within the Traditions and operates without compromising anyone's anonymity. It is up to the person requesting the chits to report on themselves to whoever is supervising them.

In other words, the use of 'chits' is AA's well-established system of self-reporting. Chits do not guarantee sobriety, they just confirm attendance at an AA meeting, and no one is forced to attend an AA meeting either.

The intergroup probation/CJ Liaison Officer can be invited to attend any meeting to explain the chit system. Each group that agrees to participate tells their Intergroup so, and the P/CJ Liaison Officer would add that group's details to the list of participating groups prepared for the local Community Justice service. It is recommended that the Intergroup secretary also keeps a record of the groups participating to ensure continuity of service.

Any safeguarding concerns are best addressed through the Group Conscience and guidance sought from the AAGB website and current Structure Handbook. Where there is a Safeguarding representative appointed and /or Probation/CJS officer they can be consulted.

Some intergroups now choose to keep supplies of blank chits for groups.

Blank chits are available free of charge from GSO and can be requested by any group, intergroup or regional officer. They are printed with anti-counterfeit ink and use the group's number as a 'signature' thereby ensuring the anonymity of the member filling them out. They will only be posted out to a group, intergroup or regional officer's address already registered with GSO, so before requesting any please ensure that your contact and the group's registration details are up to date. via 'The Group Information Registration and Update Meeting Form'.

Details of setting up and running a confirmation of attendance/chit system are given in AA's 'Liaison officers Pack: Probation/CJS' available from GSO and on the AA (GB) website's Probation / Community justice section and the Documents Library

8:3.3 Intergroup Probation/CJS Liaison Officer

(Refer to section 'The Intergroup' of 'The AA Structure Handbook for Great Britain & Continental Europe'.) It is through the intergroup that the liaison officer is elected.

It is recommended that intergroup liaison officers should have ideally at least two years' continuous sobriety when elected, and should serve for a maximum of three years.

The main tasks of the intergroup liaison officer are:

- Asking their intergroup to register their appointment with GSC and use their allocated email account.
- Obtaining and reading the 'Liaison officers Pack: Probation/CJS' and using it as the liaison officer feels appropriate, and using the AA website's section on Probation/ CJS Liaison for information and resource material
- to establish/maintain links in the intergroup area with:
 - Community justice services dealing with non-custodial sentences
 - Approved premises (APs) and probation delivery units (PDUs)
 - Magistrates, local courts and court officers
 - Police forces
 - Solicitors' organisations
 - Other professionals having regular contact with offenders
- Report to each intergroup meeting by the liaison officer to keep intergroup informed on a regular basis. A copy of each intergroup report should be sent to the regional probation/CJS liaison officer, who should be kept informed of developments in the intergroup.
- Maintaining records of local service initiatives & professional & fellowship contacts, to ensure continuity of service at rotation.
- Attending regional workshops when available, and keeping in contact with the regional liaison officer
- Attending AA's national probation/ community justice seminars when these are arranged

Some intergroups have a flourishing relationship with their local community justice service departments. In others there will have been little contact. It is for each liaison officer to decide the best way of taking the role forward. Some suggested methods are as follows:

- Setting up a committee or team to assist in the work and to twelfth step any people who are on probation in England or Wales, or involved with community justice services in Scotland.
- Establishing a named contact in each local community justice service office in the area, and with the courts service, police and other organisations
- Distributing approved AA literature and posters for display in community justice service offices, approved premises, court offices and police stations, and to be given by them to offenders. Material given to offenders might include stories from AA members who have encountered similar problems, which are available from the AA website and AA members involved in prisons service.
- Attending meetings with individuals and teams in the community justice services to inform them of how AA works and what it does and does not do.
- Attending similar meetings with courts staff, solicitors, the police etc.
- Arranging to provide speakers for information sessions, perhaps with the help of members who have experienced aspects of the community justice system. The message from previous offenders who have changed the direction of their lives after finding AA and stopping drinking is a very powerful one. (Note: some sites have enhanced security restrictions that may prevent members with certain or recent offences from visiting)
- Asking the subcommittee for help when there is no regional liaison officer in place.

8:3.4 Regional Probation/CJS Liaison Officer

(Refer to section 'The Region' in 'The AA Structure Handbook for Great Britain & Continental Europe'.)

It is through the regional assembly that the regional Probation/CJS Liaison Officer is elected, ideally though not essentially being a member with some experience at intergroup level.

It is recommended that officer should have at least three years' continuous sobriety at the time of election, that the officer should serve for a maximum of three years and be confirmed in post annually. Consideration should be given to their personal experience.

The main tasks of the regional liaison officer are to:

- Attend regional assembly meetings with report
- Attend the annual regional liaison officers meeting in York
- Obtain and read the 'Liaison officers Pack: Probation/CJS' and use the AA website section on Probation/CJS Liaison for information and resource material
- Communicate with intergroup liaison officers within the region and to collate information from them into a report to be given at each regional assembly
- Send a copy of each such report to aainformation@gsogb.org.uk
- Encourage intergroups where liaison activity is slow or non-existent to seek members to undertake service in this area
- Offer support and encouragement to intergroup liaison officers especially those new to the role and those taking up previously vacant positions
- Communicate with the designated member of the Board's Probation/CJS Sub- Committee
- Liaise with community justice services at a senior level, as frequently the services will have responsibility for an area which will include several intergroups
- Liaise with other regions in co-ordinating approaches to community justice services whose areas extend across regional boundaries
- Attend AA's national Probation/CJS Seminars when these occur

Experience has shown the following activities to be helpful:

- Holding Probation/CJS workshops at regional level, where all the liaison officers and those with an interest are invited to share their experience, and to encourage others into service
- Visiting intergroups and groups when requested for help, assistance or guidance
- Supporting intergroups in attempts to set up contact and co-operation with their local offender management service
- Setting up effective links between intergroup and regional liaison officers to share experience and offer mutual encouragement and support between regional assemblies and workshops, and also establishing links with the designated member of the Board's Probation/CJS Sub-Committee.

8:4 The General Service Board's Probation/CJS Sub-Committee

The Probation/CJS Sub-Committee is chaired by the Trustee for Probation/ CJS and has up to seven other members.

The main purpose of the Probation / CJS subcommittee is to assist the GSB in supporting the fellowships structure in its service work. This includes raising awareness of Alcoholics Anonymous and its services through cooperation with Probation/ CJS agencies at a national level.

Its objectives include:

- Developing and maintaining resources for liaison officer
- Disseminating information on Probation/CJS through the Fellowship
- Offering advice, support and encouragement to regional liaison officers; organising such meetings of regional and intergroup liaison officers as may be necessary.
- Developing and maintaining appropriate resources for liaison officers, including those contained in the Probation/Community Justice Services sections of the AA (GB) website.
- Working with the prison sub-committee to ensure that the message of AA is available across the entire community justice system and where possible meet in person at the same time as the Prison sub-committee.

- Assist in the implementation of Conference recommendations.
- Each member has been asked to work closely with a particular group of regions, and contact details are sent out to regions. Regional liaison officers are encouraged to contact members of the Sub-Committee for suggestions, advice, support and guidance, and intergroups in regions without a regional liaison officer should not hesitate to make direct contact with members.

The Sub-Committee's email address is: infoprobation.sc@aamail.org

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