

WHAT IS AN

INSIDE VISITING SPONSORSHIP SERVICE?

A service to connect A.A. members "behind the prison walls" with outside sponsorship.



In A.A. we are not alone. At its core the Fellowship remains simple and personal - one alcoholic working with another alcoholic, sharing experience, strength, and hope.

WE NEED SPONSORSHIP VOLUNTEERS

PURPOSE

To provide a system to connect alcoholics confined in State Prisons (with at least a year remaining inside) who wish to avail themselves of outside sponsorship with outside volunteers willing to perform that service on a continuing, monthly basis. Volunteers for the Inside Sponsorship Service are classified for entry into the prison as Visitors, not as Program Volunteers, and do NOT also go into the prison as regular meeting volunteers.

By operating under the auspices of an established Corrections Committee, the goal is to provide the vital service of sponsorship to AA members on the inside, while avoiding conflicts with the rules and regulations of the prison and State Civil Codes. **Most prison systems through-out the country mandate that cleared Program Volunteers are not allowed to enter the prison as "visitors".**

Volunteer anonymity is protected through the use of a dedicated P.O. Box, and through cooperation on the part of the prison administration. The program is currently intended for use in State Prisons but could be expanded to include other facilities where the population is confined for a relatively long-term period.

WHY?

Current methods have been unable to provide the widespread, consistent sponsorship to alcoholics behind the walls that we consistently provide on the outside. To newcomers on the outside, we often recommend: 1) go to meetings, 2) get a Big Book, 3) find a sponsor to work the steps.

For close to eighty years, Corrections Committees have been bringing in meetings, and bringing in literature, yet we haven't been able to provide that third necessary component of sobriety: sponsorship. We need only ask ourselves "Would I be sober today if I didn't have a sponsor?" to understand the vital need.

In some cases, cleared meeting volunteers have sponsored members on the inside, but that creates conflicts with the rules and regs of the prison – conflicts that could endanger our committees as a whole. In many cases, sponsorship is achieved through our Corrections Correspondence Service, which is highly successful, but all prison mail is subject to monitoring and the face-to-face intimacy of in-person sponsorship is lacking. Inside members sponsor each other, again an excellent method, however we've heard repeatedly that many on the inside are reluctant to disclose certain information to other members on the yard due to the consequences which could occur if disclosures were revealed. And finally, local meetings have attempted to provide sponsorship, but it's neither dependably sustainable over the long-term, nor does it provide the institutions with the accountability that established Corrections Committees do.

BENEFITS

Establishing an Inside Visiting Sponsorship Service *under the auspices of the Area Corrections Committees* - entirely separate from the normal Program Meeting Volunteer system - provides the following benefits:

- Visitors are not required to abide by STAFF rules and regulations, as are regular Program Volunteers; they comply simply with prison rules for visitors.
- Clearance as a visitor requires only a simple 1-page clearance application, not the 25 page applications required of Program Volunteers
- Visitors aren't required to get TB tests or to sign PREA agreements
- Visitors can speak one-to-one without being monitored
- Disclosure of intimate details to an outside member avoids the possibilities of members' sensitive information getting out on the yard
- Enables many more outside AA members to volunteer for service without onerous clearance requirements, thus strengthening our Corrections Committees and AA as a whole.
- Potentially better outcomes at parole hearings for inside members who can demonstrate their experience with our program of recovery through our twelve steps.
- Potentially reduced recidivism of sponsored members
- Volunteer's anonymity is protected for common welfare
- Prison has accountability when service is provided by established Corrections Committee

HOW IT WORKS

Because our purpose is to provide a service to alcoholics desiring sponsorship and not to simply provide visitors to people confined in prison, we direct our efforts to members attending inside meetings in the following manner:

- Corrections meeting volunteers bring a program brochure to the inside meetings they conduct and distribute them to interested members.
- Brochures also include the prison form to request an official visitor.
- The inside member completes the application, signs the request for a visitor and sends them to the PO Box listed in the brochure.
- The PO Box is monitored regularly by the Sponsorship Institution Coordinator (all prisons should have a separate coordinator)
- Incoming requests are matched with outside volunteers. The matched volunteer completes the 1-page request for visitation and submits it to the prison and begins writing letters to the sponsee.
- Once the notice of clearance is received, the volunteer/sponsor can begin in-person visits with the inside member/sponsee.
- WE DO NOT MANAGE SPONSORSHIP. We have no AA authorities, no gurus – every volunteer/sponsor is free to sponsor as they see fit.
- Once the initial visits have been completed and the sponsee and sponsor have agreed to work together, the match is complete. As on the outside, both sponsor and sponsee are free to end the relationship at any time, and another tentative match can be arranged.
- The Sponsorship Institution Coordinator continues to forward mail between sponsee and sponsor.

SERVICE POSITIONS

As initially stated, this service should be organized as entirely separate from the meeting services the committee provides. The following committee positions are suggested:

- Sponsorship Committee Chair for the sponsorship service – oversees all service efforts, selects Institution Coordinators
- Sponsorship Institution Coordinator for the service at each institution – recruits volunteers; with Sponsorship Committee Chair establishes relationship with institution administration; organizes and tracks all necessary paperwork; conducts orientations (all volunteers should be oriented prior to assignment with sponsee)
- Sponsorship Volunteer – engages in sponsorship with inside member; visits in-person at minimum frequency established by committee; communicates via letter to supplement visitation; uses other communication as approved by committee for security (i.e.: video visitation, anonymous phone system).
- Sponsorship Liaisons – communicates with other local service committees & assists in recruiting volunteers.