

BEHIND THE WALLS IN VERMONT

AREA 70 CORRECTIONS COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER
June 21, 2009



More Payday

"I decided to start going into the jails because that is where I got sober. The fellows coming in were the only contact I had with A.A., because the other guys that attended the A.A. meeting were scattered throughout our facility. It's easy to say "just talk to another alcoholic" except when there aren't any A.A.s around. Every time I go into a jail, it is like looking in a mirror. There is a phrase in A.A. - the alcoholic is the loneliest person in the world. Sorry, you have no idea!"

"As meetings wind down, I look forward to the announcements. Then I speak up about the need for volunteers to bring meetings into our local jail. I also mention Jailboxes. A gal came up to me after a homegroup meeting and excitedly asked for a Jailbox for her homegroup, which I promised to bring next week. Sure enough, she showed up a week later, but I forgot the Jailbox. I promised not to forget next week, but again I forgot. As I was profusely apologizing for the second week in a row, another correction volunteer bailed me out. She said she had a Jailbox in her car she brought from the Convention. I may have short, medium, and long term memory loss, but thank goodness for other service workers."

"I heard about going into jails, but frankly, and in hindsight, I was just intimidated. I had never spent a day in my life in a jail. I wondered what I would say. How could they identify with me if I couldn't identify with them? Then at a district meeting, I heard a ex-con, having spent 15 years behind the walls for manslaughter, talk about getting sober in jail and the dire need for A.A.s to do this 12 Step work. He gave us two pieces of advice. One, don't try to out tough them, with macho and profanity, as you'll always lose, and your insincerity will show. Two, you are the "after" and that is what many of them are trying to be, and will appreciate most. That is the identification between two alkie trying to stay sober. That was in 1992. I've been going into jails ever since. Haven't had a drink either. Hmmm."

"We constantly hear about the need for A.A. Correspondents to write to fellows in jail. The women cover the women's commitments, but the A.A. men don't keep up with the need for male correspondents. That's why I take this writing stuff seriously. I got a name from GSO of an inmate in Texas, and wrote him an introductory letter. A reply came very quickly from him. I put it aside before reading it. Now I can't find it. Interestingly, an inmate in Texas I've never met is inducing me to write a "tenth step letter", apologizing for my forgetfulness. Service work pumps me up, but can also bring a true sense of humility."

"Last week, I was out of town and couldn't get to the regular Sunday night meeting, so the guys went without a meeting for a over a week. That Tuesday, I brought a new volunteer into the jail for his first time. The A.A.s behind the walls evidently weren't expecting us, as only two fellows showed up for the meeting. I was concerned that the new volunteer would be put off by the poor attendance. Instead we read a GrapeVine story and talked about how wonderful it was to have an informal meeting like this, where we could talk like one alcoholic to another. It wasn't your typical A.A. meeting. We let them know that our commitment to drive 30 minutes each way, spend an hour plus there, is worth it, even if there was only one of them there. That is what we do - show up!"

Do you have an A.A correction story to share with us? About getting sober behind the walls, going into jails, writing a fellow member, meeting someone coming out of jail, pushing a Jailbox or Jailcan. Please write and share your correction experiences with us..

The Spring Corrections Workshop in Northern Vermont

The Workshop was held in St. Michael's School in Montpelier on Saturday, June 6th. Besides our regular presentations (and we don't mean to minimize the importance of these ongoing efforts) on the Prerelease Program, the Correspondence Service, and Jailboxes and Jailcans, we had a number of unique topics.

DF spoke of the challenges faced in the St. Albans facility that was transformed from a men's facility into a women's facility. The previous volunteers continued to bring in a weekly meeting, but now to a new membership. Conforming to the rules of the State of Vermont Corrections System meant a change in how A.A.s on the inside and the outside conducted themselves. Consistency remains a problem with the various meetings. She emphasized our realization that we are guests of these facilities, and we must conform to their rules.

Our current Panel 58 Delegate and past Correction Chair, also shared on our responsibilities as guests of the system. The film "A.A. In Correctional Facilities" was shown. Dick P. gave us a perspective of the Correction Professionals and their involvement with A.A. It is always fascinating to hear someone talk about "us" in our own workshop.

Two fellows spoke of getting sober in jail, and the importance of an A.A. presence on a consistent basis. There is a whole group of young passionate A.A.s in District 2 who are committed, because many of them have been there.

Another volunteer spoke of working with the very young people in the corrections system, and the whole range of situations that must be faced in the Woodside facility. He offered to help us become new volunteers in that facility, and some took him up on his offer.

Our current Area Secretary was a member of the newly formed aavt.org Website Guidelines Committee in the late '90s. She spoke of the need then, and our need now, to maintain strict anonymity and observance of our Traditions. We then spoke of our efforts to carry the message and provide info and opportunities to continue our 12 step work online.

During our Business Meeting we decided to have Volunteer Contact Cards (see June Corrections Report), send \$50 to the school for use of the facility, and have...

The Fall Correction Workshop In Southern Vermont At The Marble Valley Correctional Facility, Rutland VT

We polled our fellowship at the Convention and it was unanimous. At our Business Meeting we again agreed unanimously to have our next workshop "Behind The Walls." It will be held on a Saturday, and start at 4:00 pm with A.A.s on the Inside and Outside, along with Correction Professionals. At 5:45, the A.A.s behind the walls must leave and we'll have refreshments with the Correction Professionals, who will also stay with us until 7:30 or 8:00 pm. Attendees will be required to "sign up", simply providing their names, addresses, etc. This will give some an opportunity to go behind the walls for a first time, and share with sober inmates and concerned correction personnel. We will be setting a date with the Volunteer Coordinator at Marble Valley, John Cassarino. We'll have a formal Agenda soon, too. Please remember, attendance is limited, so sign up early when the dates are set.

More Volunteers Needed:

Some districts and geographical areas do a great job in starting and keeping meetings going in their local correction facilities. Yet, other facilities are poorly served by A.A. We've heard the cynical question: "Is it ignorance or apathy?" And the equally cynical answer: "I don't know and I don't care!" The Corrections Committee will continue to appeal to our membership to carry the message. We also need those who have been successful to share their experiences and encouragement as to why it is working. What are you doing that works so well? Help.

For a copy or pdf of this newsletter, past issues, and Committee Reports, please mail or email the Corrections Chair: PO Box 32, Bomoseen, VT 05732, Email: area70corrections@yahoo.com
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