

Co-operation between Alcoholics Anonymous, Probation Services and Criminal Justice Services

(The attention of AA members is drawn to Guideline 13, which covers this area of service, and a copy should be found in the AA Service Handbook for Great Britain. It can also be obtained from GSO or the other Service Offices.)

The main objective in liaising with the Probation Services (in England and Wales) and the Criminal Justice Services (in Scotland) is to carry the message that AA exists and that its members are freely available to help those who have got into trouble under the Criminal Justice System because of their drinking. A significant number of cases coming before the courts involve some element of alcohol abuse, and that many of those appearing in such cases have a history of sentences for re-offending. It is hoped that engagement with AA will provide an opportunity to help reduce this. AA welcomes the opportunity for Probation Officers and Criminal Justice Services workers to consider asking the Fellowship to provide information and help where possible.

AA literature is available for these professionals to inform them of what the Fellowship can and cannot do. AA literature brings together experience which can inform the design of Criminal Justice System policies relating to alcohol abuse. AA will co-operate in Probation Officers' and Criminal Justice Services workers' training. AA members are willing to give presentations and literature not only to Probation and Criminal Justice Services, but also to magistrates, judges, courts officials, lawyers' groups and the police. The AA 'contact card' giving the Helpline number is made widely available to those in contact with offenders.

Experience has shown that offenders who come to AA Groups and keep coming have often changed the direction and quality of their lives. This in turn can also have a considerable impact upon other offenders and Officers when they subsequently share their experiences with them.

AA NATIONAL HELPLINE: 0845 769 7555

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Some examples of areas of co-operation.

Members of AA have established working relations with their local Probation or CJS offices. They have provided literature, posters and DVDs to inform professionals and clients that AA exists, how it works, what it can and cannot do, and that it is free. The professionals have invited AA members to talk to their own staff as part of formal team meetings. Some offices have nominated a professional to act as their Liaison Officer.

Clients, mainly those who are assessed by Probation/CJS as being dependent on alcohol, or using it dangerously, have been advised by their case officers that AA exists and might be able to help. The information provided by AA enables the person to make contact by telephone with the local AA. Its members will then visit the caller (known as a 'Twelfth Step Call') and offer to arrange for them to be

taken to an AA meeting. It is hoped that this will be the first of many meetings that they will attend.

If a professional wishes to be assured that a person is attending AA meetings a 'Confirmation of Attendance' ('chit') may be provided at the person's request, to be handed to the case manager. (Not all AA Groups have this system in place, but alternative arrangements can usually be made in such cases.) This may be useful if the client is subject to an Alcohol Treatment Requirement or similar directive.

AA members, including some with first-hand experience of being on probation or being in jail, can be particularly effective when taking part in Alcohol Awareness, Alcohol Abuse and other courses run by Probation/CJS, where they share their experience of alcoholism and the changes made possible when they turned to a different way of life. Experience has shown that clients willing to listen to the AA message *can* stop drinking, transform their lives, and have no future troubles with the Criminal Justice System. Not all are as fortunate, and there is no guarantee that AA will work for all individuals. However, often those who *really* want to stop drinking *have* found a way out from their cycle of alcohol and crime.

In some Probation Areas like the Thames Valley Area sophisticated systems have been built out of this co-operation. AA has been asked to co-operate in the provision of training courses for Probation staff. Elsewhere there are as yet less formal but still effective links, like contributing sessions to Alcohol Awareness Courses, and more will develop in time.

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At a more general level, AA has enjoyed attending and providing speakers for conferences on alcohol-related topics, at events organised at Parliamentary and Ministry levels, and has been invited to submit comments to policymaking bodies. A group of AA and National Offender Management Service (NOMS) officers hold regular meetings to discuss shared interests in Probation and Prisons.

As the role of Probation/CJS has expanded to include prisoners released from custody, so AA has worked to improve the links and effective working relations between its members serving in liaison with Probation/CJS and those members working with Prisons, to provide for some continuity of care, particularly when prisoners are released, perhaps on licence. Such prisoners who have found their way to AA *via* prison meetings will usually find guidance and support from AA on their release.

Who can be involved in AA Liaison service?

Members of AA who get involved in Probation/CJS Liaison come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some have themselves been on probation or in prison. Others have other experience in many jobs and professions. The officers will normally have at least two years' sobriety, but many members of the Fellowship contribute to this service without holding formal posts. An AA member who is interested in Probation Liaison work should contact his or her local Liaison Officer, who will sponsor the member into the service. The only requirements are continuing sobriety and a wish to carry the message to others.

How AA Organises its Probation/CJS Liaison.

Each individual local AA Group is part of an Intergroup, and the Intergroup is part of a Region. Each Region and Intergroup should have a post entitled Probation/Criminal Justice Services Liaison Officer. These officers may well have small teams of AA members helping them.

Liaison Officers work to bring AA to the notice of Probation Officers and CJS officers, magistrates, officers of the Courts, lawyers, police and others involved in the Criminal Justice System in their area. They distribute AA literature, give talks and co-operate with training and development. They work with other AA Officers, in particular those concerned with Prison Liaison, Health Liaison, Employment Liaison and the AA telephone service.

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Individual AA Groups are encouraged to make arrangements to ensure that they can give some confirmation of attendance at their meeting to those who ask for it. Group members are also asked to help with sharing their experience with those encountering the Criminal Justice System, and to participate in liaison team activities.

There is also a national Sub-Committee of AA's General Service Board which has the task of encouraging liaison across the country and with providing information and support to AA members and professionals.

The several ways of contacting Liaison Officers and also members of the Sub-Committee are given below.

Further Information and Resources.

The AA Web site <http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/> contains information about Alcoholics Anonymous and will help people to consider their drinking, and the effect that it is having on their lives.

The Web site has a section dedicated to Probation/CJS Liaison: part of this section is for AA members and will give access to the Liaison Handbook and other material. There is also a part for the use of Probation and other professionals, with details of what AA can offer, and the contact information for Liaison Officers across the UK, as well as for members of the Sub-Committee. AA literature, posters and contact cards can be ordered through the Web site or from the AA's General Service Office.

General Service Office (GSO) and the Northern and Southern Service Offices can also help to put professionals in touch with their local liaison officers. GSO's address is PO Box 1, 10 Toft Green, York YO1 7NJ, tel. 01904 644026. The Southern Service Office is in London (tel. 020 7833 0022) and the Northern Service Office is in Glasgow (tel. 0141 226 2214)

Intergroups and Regions may well have their own contact lists, and have been given copies of The AA Probation Liaison Handbook, which is a detailed practical guide to this area of service for Liaison Officers.

The AA National Helpline (24 hours) should be used if someone who has problems with their drinking wants the help of Alcoholics Anonymous.

AA NATIONAL HELPLINE: 0845 769 7555

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