

AA CONCEPTS

Northern Illinois Area, Ltd. Area 20 Service Letter



Winter 2015

Hello

For those who may not know me, I would like to introduce myself. My name is Kelly L. and I am currently serving you as our Panel 64 Northern Illinois Area 20 Alternate Delegate. I got sober in District 40 and still reside in the same district. After getting all the legal stuff out of the way I started my service work in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous. Back then we had smoking meetings with very dirty ashtrays which I had my turn at cleaning quite a bit. I was also the coffee maker which meant I had to get the key and open the meeting. I have been chairman and treasure of a few meetings as well. In 2000 I went to a district meeting to find out where our money was going, and I ended up becoming the General Service Representative (GSR) of that meeting. After attending the district meeting for some time I was interested in the display our district Grapevine representative had and I, as maybe most alcoholics thought, "I could expand on the display and make it better." So I stood for the District Grapevine Chair. I don't remember going to Area assemblies when I was a GSR, but I did start attending as the District Grapevine Chair. It was neat to meet so many other members who really enjoyed service work and who wanted to help carry the message to the still suffering alcoholic. I got new ideas from the other district Grapevine chairs in the Grapevine breakout meetings that are held at the

assemblies. There are breakout sessions for all the Committee Chairs at the assemblies with the corresponding Area Committee chair leading the session. I then became the District Secretary, the Grapevine representative again, then the District Committee Member (DCM). Now I was really involved at the Area level, working my way down the triangle. I did not have an easy run as the DCM for our District for reasons that are not very important today. I was at the same point where I have heard other members say. "I think I will take a break from this kind of service work." I have been on committees at a few spring conferences, assemblies, district Christmas parties and picnics. But a funny thing happened at the Area elections during the 2009 fall assembly. My husband raised his hand to stand for an Area position. Anyone who knows me knows that I am very competitive in just about everything. I am guessing I needed that as survivor skills when I was younger. When his hand went up I knew that I too had to stand for a position. I did, and I became the Area Treatment chair because my name was pulled from the hat. So now my new journey down the triangle commenced. I then became the Area Chairman and then Alternate Delegate serving you as an officer.

Now I am Northern Illinois Area 20 Panel 66 Delegate elect to the General Service Conference. I have always felt it is a privilege to be able to serve in any capacity for Alcoholics Anonymous but, it is truly an honor and a privilege to

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Concepts is published quarterly by the Northern Illinois Area of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is intended as a service letter to keep Northern IL Area, districts, and GSRs informed of service opportunities, events, and experience relevant to carrying the AA message. Subscription is free but generally limited to A.A. members within the NIA geographical area. All publication costs are paid by A.A. members through their contributions to NIA. Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the thinking of Alcoholics Anonymous, NIA or the Editor. Comments, suggestions and subscription requests plus shares of experience, strength and hope, should be directed to the editor:

Concepts@aa-nia.org

All A.A. members are encouraged to see Concepts on-line at:
<http://www.aa-nia.org>

If your NIA Treasurer Envelope says St. Charles, Barrington, or Bourbonnais, it's Old. Throw it away!

The current address is
NIA Treasurer
Northern Illinois Area, Ltd.,
P.O. Box 51,
Lake Bluff, IL 60044.

CONCEPTS is a confidential document. It contains names and phone numbers. Please do not take it to jails, treatment centers, etc. It is meant for use in the Area 20 AA community only.

From the editor

Hello Ladies and Gentlemen.

This month there was not as much material submitted. There was a submission from our Delegate elect and a poem from Gordon. So I decided to theme the issue. Corrections is one of my favorite themes as an editor. People are often not aware that there are opportunities to serve corrections without entering a jail. I personally get more than the inmates at the jail meeting I attend, but some cannot enter the correctional system for a variety of reasons. Since a themed issue was not a plan I need to mention that another way to serve corrections is through Bridging the Gap. People who attend a meeting in their first 48 hours out are 80% less likely to return, according to those active in Bridge the Gap. I really should have had an article from Bridging the Gap, but as I said I did not plan to make this a corrections issue it just worked out that way. If you want to serve corrections outside the institution please contact the Bridging the Gap Area Chair.

I suppose I could have themed the issue on the elections that just passed. I didn't think of it and I would prefer to print introductions from the person being introduced. I will ask our new trusted servants to introduce themselves for the next issue. The motion before the next Assembly on corrections was the inspiration for the issue. I hope the motion article will enlighten and inform.

My Co-Editor, Mike, has been elected to a committee chair. Congratulation Mike. Concepts needs a co-editor. The most significant responsibility of the co-editor is the mailing list. The job does take a little bit of experience with excel. If you are interested please contact me or Marilyn, the incoming Area Chair.

**Submissions for the next issue will
be due March 5, 2016.**

**Thank you for your submissions.
Heather S. Concepts Editor**

represent NIA 20 at the General Service Conference. I have truly been rocketed into the fourth dimension.

There were many members in service before me that I admired, watched, asked question of and learned from. I am always asking questions when I am unsure or just don't know. I have already asked many of our Area's past and present Delegates about what is in store for me the next two years. It is like the saying goes, "you are never alone in Alcoholics Anonymous."

Thank you for letting me be of service, Kelly L.

Alternate Delegate/Panel 66 Delegate Elect

Rule 62

Things you shouldn't say to a police officer:

1. I can't reach my license unless you hold my beer.
2. Sorry, Officer, I didn't realize my radar detector wasn't plugged in.
3. Aren't you the guy from the Village People?
4. Hey, you must've been doin' about 125 mph to keep up with me. Good job!
5. Are you Andy or Barney?
6. I thought you had to be in relatively good physical condition to be a police officer.
7. You're not gonna check the trunk, are you?
8. I pay your salary!
9. Gee, Officer! That's terrific. The last officer only gave me a warning too!
10. Do you know why you pulled me over? Okay, just so one of us does.
11. I was trying to keep up with traffic. Yes, I know there are no other cars around. That's how far ahead of me they are!
12. When the Officer says, "Gee Son....Your eyes look red, have you been drinking?" You probably shouldn't respond with "Gee Officer your eyes look glazed, have you been eating doughnuts?"



At a recent A.A. meeting one member remarked that it had always been his habit to use a drink to steady his nerves. Another remarked, "Yeah, me too, but after a while I began to overdo it and sometimes my nerves became so steady I couldn't even move!"

Utah State Prison Group. From Grapevine.org



Corrections Correspondence

At seven years sober, I suffered a major spinal injury and was briefly paralyzed. Then serving as a librarian for the Hospitals and Institutions committee, I was looking through some treatment literature. As I put the pamphlets away, I noticed one called "Corrections Correspondence." I had read through the pile many times, and I had never seen this one before.

As I read, I began to cry, and the crying alternated with goose bumps. I will never forget the surges of emotion that overcame me late that night. I sat in this state for a long time, and then I began filling out the form. Afterward, I sent it off to the Correctional Facilities assignment at the General Service Office.

I soon received the address of my now good friend, Bill S., an inmate on the East Coast. Bill and I have corresponded for about six years now and through three different prisons.

Bill was the first of many inmates with whom I have corresponded. Some originated from the GSO Correctional Facilities assignment, and others came from other sources. I never judge the alcoholic by the offense, whatever it might be. I am taught to just carry the message that reached me in prison so many years ago.

As I sit here typing, Jenny, our Central Office manager, just called to see if I would reply to an inmate letter she has received. This is the miracle of AA in action. I have never told Jenny

about my correspondence work; she picked up the phone and called me out of the blue, just as I was in the middle of writing this piece.

New letters arrive all the time, some following up after release, others from a new institution. One AA inmate was released and then shot by the police during an arrest and is now writing from a different institution with a shot-up hand.

Corrections Correspondence is a wonderful service. The need for correspondents is tremendous and the rewards are great. I use my personal post office box and have never felt threatened for a moment. Whenever I am feeling restless and irritable, a letter will surely arrive stamped "Mailed from a State Prison," and I begin to shift gears and get very grateful.

This wonderful service needs to be more widely recognized within the Fellowship, as the letters often pile up at the Correctional Facilities desk and many are not replied to. During early sobriety, I was an inmate at a correctional facility in Soledad, which is where I got sober. The AA panels there saved my life. I only wish that someone from the outside had cared enough to write to me way back then.

-- Bob C
Vista, California,
From grapevine.org

Upcoming @ the Assembly

Motion: The Corrections Committee moves to allocate funds from the NIA 20 treasury to provide needed literature to SIA 21. This literature will be used by the SIA 21 Corrections Committee. The literature will go to Jails, Prisons, and Penitentiaries that they currently take meetings into.

Activity: Provide Literature for SIA 20 Corrections Committee

Description, expected outcome and execution guidelines: 25 – Cases of Soft Cover Big Books 25 – Cases of Inmate to Inmate 4 – Cases of Spanish Soft Cover Big Books

Example expenses: NIA 20 Corrections Committee will order the literature and have NIA 20 Treasurer pay for the order

Reimbursement Guidelines: NIA 20 Treasurer upon approval from the NIA 20 Assembly

Projected cost: \$ 5,529.40

Background material for motion: The Southern IL Area 21 Corrections Chair, David G, has reached out to NIA 20 for assistance with literature for correctional facilities. After speaking at length with David it was determined that there is a desperate need in his area. SIA 21 currently takes meetings into 22 county jails and state prisons, and into 3 federal penitentiaries.

He is asking for help to provide a minimum of one case of Big Books and one case of Inmate to Inmate for each facility. He has also asked for some Spanish Big Books. David explained that SIA 21 is lucky to be able to provide one case of Big Books for half of the facilities each year because of the scarce financial resources of SIA 21. The order would be shipped directly to David for distribution to each location. In 2014 NIA 20 assisted SIA 21 with literature. NIA 20 is fortunate enough to have the financial resources and should continue to use it to help other areas in Illinois.

Breakdown 25 – Cases of Big Books \$ 3730.00 04 – Cases of Spanish Big Books \$ 774.40 25 – Cases of Inmate to Inmate - \$ 1025.00 TOTAL -\$ 5529.40

There was also an approved floor motion from 2014 for buying books for the prisons in Southern IL. That motion was included in the agenda background material but doesn't appear here. If you would like to view that material please go to NIA.org. So I attended the 2014 Assembly in which this motion was approved. There were two arguments. One was procedural and has to do with informing the groups. The motion to spend approximately \$4500 did not go through the usual process where in it is presented to the DCMs to take to their groups. The groups and districts had not had a chance to review and discuss this expenditure. Sometimes these objections seem

overly picky. But AA works because the groups are to be consulted on any issue before a District, Area, or General Service Conference (National). To skip the step of the DCM taking the item back to the groups circumvents, or skips, an important part of process. I was one of the people who agreed that we should hear the motion and the Assembly should vote on its merits at that time. I agree the motions process is necessary for AA to function. But I felt this is the work that AA does. I was exercising my right of decision, knowing I might have to justify the action to my group. As a trusted servant I felt the groups would approve this expenditure as it was a direct outreach to the still suffering alcoholics in prisons. But for AA to function this type of action should not be a regular happening. The authors of the current motion have made it possible for AA to function effectively through the process developed from experience.

The second argument was about self-support. Why should Area 20 support a function of Area 21? To me the answer was straight forward: because they asked. If anyone anywhere reaches out for the hand of AA, I want that hand to be there, and for that I am responsible. If a group of alcoholics ask for books to help still suffering alcoholics then I support that because I am responsible.

Apparently it wasn't as clear cut for some people. The point was made that most of the prisons in Illinois are in Southern IL. Therefore if NIA is being self-supporting we must support the Northern IL residents currently incarcerated in Southern IL. Also it was noted that there are approximately 400 registered meetings in Southern IL. There are approximately 1200 registered meetings in Northern IL. NIA obviously have more resources.

I find these arguments about self-support when it comes to funding an AA outreach in another AA entity to be tiresome. Yes, the Tradition says "fully self-supporting declining outside contributions". But when did a district in Northern IL Area 20 become an outside entity? When did another Area become an outside entity? I must have missed that memo.

The second leg of the triangle is unity. We are all just garden variety alcoholics. Following the first Tradition of hanging together to stay sober is important. If literature is denied simply because the alcoholic doesn't live in the right place then there is a problem.

As editor I get to tell it how I see it. If you have another opinion I invite you to share it. The group conscience only works if people speak up.

Heather Shannon, Concepts Editor

Corrections Correspondence

—a special kind of A.A. Service

I know how important our Twelfth Step work is and I enjoy writing to men who are locked up. It is one of the tools that I use to keep me sober. I myself found A.A. in prison almost 20 years ago. And it hasn't been necessary for me to return to prison since I was released in 1979. —Outside Correspondent

We are in need of A.A. members on the "outside" to correspond with A.A. members in correctional facilities. It is suggested that men correspond with men and women with women. Most of the inmates who want an outside correspondent are men, so we are appealing to men on the outside. If you would like to share your experience, strength and hope with A.A.s who are confined, please mail the tear-off form to G.S.O.'s Corrections Desk, or e-mail the information on the form to corrections@aa.org, or e-mail the information on the form to corrections@aa.org. The name of an inmate will be sent to you from your General Service Office and you will make the initial contact through the mail. Those who have participated in this service have found sharing with inmates a very gratifying form of Twelfth Step work. We are happy to know there are A.A. members like you willing to help make it possible for the A.A. message to be carried to those on the "inside."

Guidelines for Corrections Correspondence Service

Welcome to one of the most rewarding and rarely mentioned forms of Twelfth Step work.

In addition to observing the rules in Correctional Facilities regarding mail and correspondence, the following are suggested guidelines drawn from shared experience to help you when writing to A.A. members on the "inside:" To begin, remember that when writing to an inmate, you must use your last name on the envelope or it will not be

accepted by most institutions. The G.S.O. does not forward CCS mail.

1. We introduce ourselves by qualifying briefly in our opening letter.
 2. We try to let the inmate know that writing, like all forms of sharing, helps us as much as it helps him or her.
 3. We let the inmate know that he or she is not alone.
 4. Most correspondents use their home address, since we match up correspondents from different regions. Some correspondents ask permission of their A.A. group or intergroup/central office to use the office P.O. Box for receiving mail.
 5. We share sobriety and sobriety only.
 6. We have found it best for all concerned if no emotional or romantic involvements develop.
 7. If there is a desire to send a gift for a special occasion, we make it an A.A. book, A.A. literature, or Grapevine material. (Before sending literature, see if the facility will allow it. Many Correctional Facilities will permit inmates to receive only literature sent directly from the publishers.) Also, some facilities do not allow inmates to receive stamps or preaddressed, stamped envelopes.
 8. In the spirit of the Twelfth Tradition, we respect the anonymity of our correspondents.
 9. We encourage "inside" A.A. group activity and stress that first meeting the day the inmate leaves confinement.
 10. We encourage "inside" correspondents to notify G.S.O. prior to their release so that G.S.O. can set up a prerelease contact from their home community.
- Thank you for your willingness to share in this most important work.

Corrections Desk, General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163 Direct: (212) 870-3085 Email: corrections@aa.org Fax: (212) 870-3003 Website: www.aa.org

From pamphlet F-26 available at aa.org as a pdf

CORRESPONDENCE FORM —
for Outside A.A. Members Only

PLEASE PRINT - Return to
address below

I am a MALE FEMALE
(please circle one)

How many inmates are you able to
write to?: _____

Name(first and last):

Phone (office use only):

Address (P.O. Box or Street
Address, City, State or Province,
Postal or Zip Code):

Email (office use only):

Corrections Desk, General Service
Office, Box 459, Grand Central
Station, New York, NY 10163

Direct: (212) 870-3085

Email: corrections@aa.org

Fax: (212) 870-3003

Website: www.aa.org

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Sharing about A.A. in a correctional setting

“After being arrested and knowing I was going away for a long time I prayed a lot and read the Bible. How could I have allowed myself to come to prison? Oh God, what now? Will my family ever forgive me? Can I forgive myself? Every day the same thing, same people, same problems. I prayed that the days go by fast but they didn’t.” – Anonymous

“I think it is so important to bring the message of A.A. to jails because so many do not know that they do not have to keep winding up in jails, institutions or even die drinking! I’ve had the joy of both giving and receiving the hope that A.A. brings to such hopeless places. I have been on both sides.” – Kelly R.

“The A.A. volunteers at Jerome Combs would all tell you they have been blessed for their efforts. I know that some of these inmates are not going for all the right reasons, but how many of us first went to A.A. for all the right reasons? It is great 12th step work, and it has been an honor and privilege to be a part of it. I also started corresponding with Joe in Texas through A.A.’s Corrections Correspondence. After five years of corresponding, Joe calls me his brother and doing this strengthened my sober life!” - Steve K.

“Bringing the message to inmates in a correctional setting has been going on in AA for a long time. If one person decides he or she wants what we have the miracle can begin. It takes a little extra effort to bring AA to the inmates but it isn’t much when you consider it is what we as a whole should do. I will offer any help I can. By sharing the message and doing the work, that means service, I get to stay sober. That’s a good deal.” – Mike B.

Free on the Inside

Although he’s serving a life sentence, the Steps help him to continue to grow and be useful.

When I was 3, I had my first taste of liquor. By the age of 11, my alcoholic stepfather and I were getting drunk together. Although I was an alcoholic, I still lived a productive life. I have three children, a wife and my own tattoo business. My studio was always filled with alcoholics. I was getting drunk on the job and spiraling out of control, but I never knew why. The thought of getting help never occurred to me.

But on June 5, 2009, I had a spiritual awakening. I was shot twice by police officers and charged with aggravated assault of a public servant with a deadly weapon. I was drunk and high the day I was shot, and I came within seconds of dying. Looking back, I’ve come to believe a power greater than myself was looking over me. My Higher Power gave me a second chance.

A few weeks later, on July 29, I went to my very first AA meeting, by myself, in the county jail. It was there I met other alcoholics who were also seeking help. I learned to reach out, and I got a sponsor through AA World Services. With my new sponsor I made a searching and fearless moral inventory of myself, so he and I could see my path of destruction and I began to see my path to staying sober.

I've been corresponding with my AA sponsor Pat for four years now. He recently celebrated 27 years of sobriety. He took me through the Steps and has taught me many tools to stay sober. Through Step work, I learned things about myself I never knew, as well as my defects of character. I also learned to renew myself and gain a deeper understanding about myself. I've been granted the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Pat also introduced me to the best little magazine, called Grapevine. It's so encouraging to read it because it's filled with stories about people just like me.

I've been in here since June 5, 2009, and even though I have a life sentence, I am finally free on the inside. I now reach out to other alcoholics and share my experience to help others overcome this terrible disease of alcoholism, which I was once blind to. That is my message.

I've been sober for more than five years. That's the longest I've ever had since I was 9. My wife has also started going to AA meetings. Together we walk one day at a time through prayer and meditation. For both of us, our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics achieve sobriety.

—C.A., Rosharon, Texas
From Grapevine.org

We refer to alcohol as a subtle foe but how subtle is it really? It's presence is everywhere in our society it's in our face wherever we go. So it got me thinking.

"My not-so-subtle foe"

*I see you on the billboards...
On silver screens and magazines.
You're in the shops and grocery stores...
You stalk me in my dreams.*

*You reek like cheap perfume...
Your stench will fill the air.
You fill a room with gloom and doom...
I'm well aware when you are there.*

*My not-so-subtle foe...
I see you everywhere.
I watch you come and go...
You reap darkness and despair.*

*You rest inside a shimmering bottle...
As you tempt while on display.
With you I mustn't coddle...
Or fall victim to your prey*

*With you there is no give-and-take...
There is no ebb and flow.
You're on this earth to desecrate...
My not-so-subtle foe.*

By Gordon R.

Announcement

Alcoholics Anonymous: www.aa.org

NIA 20: www.aa-nia.org

Hinkley 19th Anniversary Porkchop Dinner Hinkley, IL January 30, 2016

E.C.R. Conf. of Delegates Past/Present Milwaukee, WI Feb. 12-14, 2016

NIA Spring Conference and Assembly (English) (Español) Rock Island, IL April 1-3, 2016

66th General Service Conference April 17-23 New York, New York

Illinois State Conference St. Charles, IL August 12-14, 2016

2016 NIA Spring Conference & Assembly

Hosted by Northern Illinois Area 20
Districts 90 & 91

April 1-3, 2016

Holiday Inn Rock Island
226 17th Street
Rock Island, IL 61201

THE STEPS WE TOOK



SAVE THE DATE!

