INSIDE VISITING SPONSORSHIP SERVICE

~ Electronic Option ~

A service of the Northern CA Hospital & Institution Committee of Alcoholics Anonymous

MISSION STATEMENT: To Provide a system to connect prisoners (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 basis. Volunteers for the Sponsorship Service have electronic access via tablet, phone & text to inside members, and may also opt to visit in person.
By operating under the auspices of the NorCal H&I (Hospital & Institution) 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 CDCR and Title 15 of the CA Civil Code. As one of the oldest and largest service committees in Alcoholics Anonymous, we can provide accountability to the institutions we serve. Volunteer anonymity is protected through the use of anonymous technology, a dedicated P.O. Box, and with the assistance of the prison administration.

BACKGROUND: Since 1942 at the behest of Warden Clinton Duffy at San Quentin SP, the NorCal H&I Committee of Alcoholics Anonymous has worked in cooperation with the CDCR to provide AA meetings and AA literature to inmates confined in the CA prison system. However, a vital element of recovery on the outside (in addition to meetings and literature) is one-on-one sponsorship, wherein one member with successful recovery works with another member to transmit the principles of the AA program. Due to CA Department of Corrections regulations regarding “overfamiliarity”, volunteers who bring meetings into our institutions are ineligible to provide this kind of service to inside members.

DEMONSTRATED NEED: Almost anyone with continuous long-term sobriety in AA will confirm that success at sobriety is rarely achieved without taking the Steps of AA with a sponsor. While we understand that inside members often sponsor each other, we have heard time and again that many on the inside are reluctant to reveal all their history due to the possible repercussions of the wrong information getting out on the yard. Providing AA sponsors from the outside assures inside members that their disclosures are confidential.

PROGRESS: While only having been operational since 2019, as of September 2026 we have approximately 300 incarcerated members in the CA prison system who are availing themselves of outside sponsorship. While AA has a policy of not keeping data on members’ recovery, we have anecdotal information that many of these members have completed all 12 steps of the AA recovery program, and several have been released and continue their sober journey on the outside.

VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS:

- Minimum 5 years’ continuous sobriety
- Solid sponsorship experience
- Knowledge & practice of AA’s Steps and Traditions
- Willingness to anonymously text, receive voice & video calls and exchange letters; in-person visiting is also available at some institutions

PROCESS:

- Interested volunteers complete a brief online questionnaire.
- Qualified volunteers receive orientation and training on setting up their anonymous phone system.
- Outside volunteers are matched with same gender inside members who request sponsorship.

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