

## **The 'Correspondence Outreach to Institutions' (COI) for Adult Children who are Incarcerated or Institutionalized.**

A unique opportunity for ACA Service.

In ACA, we carry the message of hope to adult children across the world. Join us in carrying ACA's message of hope into prisons, treatment centers, or mental health care facilities.

Adult children are sent to prison every day for harming themselves or others. Still others have psychiatric problems so severe that they require hospitalization. Many prisoners and psychiatric patients are adult children and deserve to hear ACA's message.

With our new correspondence initiative, ACA members from the outside can help carry the message to the adult child in these settings. Adult children in these facilities are grateful for the outside support. Our program is mature enough and our members are strong enough to do this.

As ACA members trying to help another person, we know what ACA recovery can do. ACA offers another way to live for the person wanting to live differently.

Our promise is this: Any adult child seeking help from the effects of growing up in a dysfunctional home can find a different way to live, with acceptance, honesty, and self-love.

Our new Correspondence Outreach to Institutions provides an additional opportunity for ACA members to practice Step 12 and carry the message to those who still suffer.

Correspondence Outreach member quote:

"Once my fear and anxiety about corresponding with ACA members who are incarcerated lessened, I came to a different level of clarity. I started to see that many of them were incarcerated for the same behaviors I had before recovery, and the main difference was they had legal consequences for their behavior, and I didn't. I am amazed at the level of recovery that some of our incarcerated ACA members have. They are motivated and appreciative of the support I have offered. I find this a rewarding way to give my experience, strength, and hope and to continue my spiritual journey while doing ACA service. " – Rich R

## **Guidelines for Correspondence with People in Institutions.**

We typically carry the message to people who want it and not to people who need it. We all need acceptance from others when we cannot accept ourselves. People who have reached out to ACAWSO will be matched with a Fellow Traveler/penpal to offer their experience, strength and hope.

It is recommended that ACA members carrying the message into one of these facilities have a clear understanding of the ACA program and understand the concepts of boundaries and reparenting. Having prison experience is not a prerequisite, having emotional sobriety and a loving parent onboard is.

In the spirit of cooperating with correctional facility requirements for correspondence and mail, here are some suggested guidelines drawn from shared experience to help you when writing to adult children in an institutional setting.

- Volunteers introduce themselves by briefly sharing their ACA story in an opening letter.
- Volunteers let the adult child know that writing, like all forms of sharing, will help them.
- Volunteers let the adult child know that they are not alone.
- Volunteers encourage incarcerated ACA members to form their own ACA 'yard' meetings amongst themselves and to see volunteers as mentors in personal recovery and as mentors who help guide them with the Traditions.
- Volunteers should not give incarcerated ACA members any personal information such as their address, phone number, employment information, and income. It is strongly recommended that volunteers do not become emotionally or romantically involved with incarcerated ACA members. To that end, we ask that you not work with incarcerated members to whom you may be romantically inclined.
- Volunteers share recovery and recovery only. In the spirit of the Twelfth Tradition, volunteers respect the anonymity of their correspondents.
- Volunteers should encourage incarcerated ACA members to notify the World Service Office prior to their release, so that the WSO can set up a point of contact with an ACA member in the incarcerated member's home community.
- We always encourage self-care first. As the ACA Bill of Rights suggests; "I have the right to change my mind." If the contact with an incarcerated ACA member gets uncomfortable, the volunteer can end the relationship.
- These guidelines will be sent to both individuals who are corresponding.

**There are two ways volunteers can be in contact with institutionalized ACA members.**

1) To maintain the anonymity of volunteers, the ACA WSO central office in Signal Hill, California will be the relay for mail between volunteers and incarcerated ACA members. The central office will not share any of the volunteers personal information. The central office will also match up correspondents from different Regions. Therefore, all correspondence from volunteers to incarcerated ACA members should be sent to the ACA WSO office in Signal Hill. The office will then re-envelope your letter without reading it, and send it to the incarcerated ACA member. They will follow the same process with the incarcerated ACA members letter back to the volunteer.

2) Or the volunteer can choose direct contact with the incarcerated ACA member. In this case both parties will communicate directly with each other. It is suggested that you don't use your last name in your return address and observe all the "guidelines" listed above.

Thank you for your willingness to share in this most important work. If we honor these guidelines and practice the principles of the program, we will help ourselves and the adult child within these facilities. Welcome to one of the most rewarding and rarely mentioned forms of Twelfth Step work.

We are happy to know there are A.C.A. members like you, willing to help make it possible for the A.C.A. message to be carried to adult children in an institutional setting.

You can use this online form to submit your volunteer information or email [hichair@adultchildren.org](mailto:hichair@adultchildren.org) to volunteer.

Thank You!!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Your ACA Start Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your City, State, Country \_\_\_\_\_

Have you completed the ACA 12 Steps (Yellow Workbook)? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have someone to go to for support and guidance while doing this service work? \_\_\_\_\_