

Tim T. writes:

“I don’t know what percentage of inmates we work with end up staying sober, but I do know that the success rate for Jail Volunteers staying sober is close to 100%.”

Our AA Jail Volunteers talk about their experiences:

I have been volunteering to conduct AA meetings at the Brown County Jail for women for the past 8 years. (Maybe more) I went to a Corrections Conference in Oshkosh and heard from a woman share about her service in the prisons and jails. She shared that a person did not need to have been in prison or jail to be able to help the women. All they needed to do was share their experience of how they were staying sober one day at a time. I thought to myself...I could do that. So my journey as a volunteer started.

What I discovered in volunteering was that the women were no different than me. The only difference was they got caught and I didn’t. The experience in the jails has enriched my life more than I can say. I have never left the jail after a meeting without thinking “There but for the grace of God go I.” It helps me get out of myself and truly help another person. I am always so happy when I see one of the women at the meetings on the outside. I have 6 women currently who volunteer at the Brown County Jail on Curry Lane. We rotate so we only have to commit to 1 Wednesday a month. The meeting is from 6 pm – 7 pm.

Please consider sharing your experience, strength and hope. We need your help. Thanks for letting me share.

Lynn L.

I would highly recommend volunteering at the jail for anyone looking for a great way to further their recovery. It is very important service work. I had the honor of doing it for a number of years until a recent relocation for my job would no longer allow me to continue. The volunteers you work with are a great group of people and you meet some wonderful souls behind bars. It truly shows the power of addiction when you see people compromise themselves and their families to end up there time and again.

Then, one day you may see a former inmate at a meeting “on the outs,” and they tell you that they have been sober and their life is back on track. That rocks!

John R.

I got involved in this avenue of service quite by accident. I had a sponsee who found herself at the Curry Lane facility and I was fairly new at sponsorship. I wanted to show my support by helping to facilitate the jail meeting. As it turned out, she was released before I completed the training so she and I never had a jail meeting together. By then, I was far enough into the process to realize that the need for this type of volunteer was great (and it still is!).

If a person from the outside doesn't go in, these ladies do not get a meeting! They are not permitted to conduct a meeting on their own. I have been facilitating the ladies Curry Lane meeting, once a month, for a couple years now. It has become one of my most meaningful meetings I attend. The ladies are extremely appreciative and express their gratitude whole-heartedly. I am humbled with the realization that I could have easily been in their shoes without AA. I would certainly recommend looking into this gratifying avenue of service.

Marian K.

I have been volunteering to co-lead AA meetings for women incarcerated at the downtown Brown County Jail for approximately 5 years. During this time I have benefitted from these meetings as much, if not more, than the women who are incarcerated. Surprisingly, it is a pleasure to be among these women and help them to understand there is another way to live – a sober way. Most of the women want to be a good wife, mother, friend and citizen, but are limited in their knowledge of the powerful disease of alcoholism. Hopefully, with each visit and the help of the Big Book and our group discussion, we can shed some light on the topic of this cunning, powerful disease.

Judy G.

I have been volunteering to conduct AA meetings and speak at the Brown County Work Release Center downtown and the Brown County Jail on Curry Lane as well as Oshkosh Correctional for about 2 ½ years. I credit these meetings as a big part of the success to my own recovery. Typically, we will have a group of 2 to 4 volunteers that will go into these facilities at night and bring the message of AA to those that are in a very dark place in their lives. The greatest things about this for me is the connection made with these individuals at this particular time in their lives and showing them there is another way to live that does not involve drugs, alcohol and jails. We can have as many as 20+ inmates at a time at these meetings and for the most part they all are very respectful of the group and these become some of the best meetings I have been a part of. This is a great way to do service work in AA and there is nothing more rewarding than to see some of these individuals outside after they are released or even to get a call from them for support. I would encourage anyone out there that is seeking to do service work to try this. You will not regret it. At first I was a bit intimidated by the whole jail thing but we are treated with great respect by the staff and inmates for our time. If doing this brings only one person to the rooms of AA and helps them to recover it is still time that is very well spent because if these guys succeed in recovery, we all win.

Dave H.

I have been an AA jail volunteer for 10 years now. I made it my main commitment to be “useful” when I retired, because the need is great. Alcohol seems to be involved in most of the situations that land women in jail around here. I didn’t go to jail for DUI’s myself only because I just happened not to get caught, so I can identify with the inmates we AA volunteers meet. I started out doing mixed meetings with an AA man, then going alone so the women could have a separate meeting without being ogled by male inmates, then with one other woman every week, then rotating in two’s out of a group of four, now out of a group of six. We meet with 10-20 women each Tuesday night at 7:30-9 at the Huber Work Release facility downtown (and each Wednesday at the main jail on Curry Lane).

The jail gave us good training, and I’ve never felt in danger—although side conversations are a temptation for the inmates and can make a meeting feel chaotic; a few times when they’ve gotten too distracting, we’ve just ended meetings early. Except for not having coffee and giving out books rather than taking donations, we keep our Step meetings as much like the “regular” open, group discussion meetings as we can – going through the first five Steps in order every 3-4 months, with a Big Book or 12x12 reading each time. Each Tuesday is a powerful First Step experience for me. It reminds me of the insanity of our illness and of its patience in waiting to catch us in relapse. I rejoice when I see a woman at “outside” AA meetings and I think Bill W. was right when he said that Twelfth Step work keeps us sober even when our “prospects” don’t get it.

Sid B.

“But for the grace of God go I.” I am grateful every time I walk out of a jail meeting. I am grateful for my freedom from alcohol and my freedom to make useful changes today. I am grateful that God has not chosen that path for me to be incarcerated.

I try to bring God’s gifts of love, faith and hope each time I facilitate a meeting. This is what keeps me sober: gratitude and a willingness to share it.
Kathy B.