

Prisoner Outreach

SERVICE OPPORTUNITY—WRITING TO PRISONERS

Welcome to the ISO Prisoner Outreach correspondence program!

The purpose of this outreach effort is to make the SAA message of recovery available to the sex addict who is incarcerated. Writing to prisoners, who request information and help from SAA, is an excellent opportunity to venture into service beyond local meetings. Any member of SAA can participate in the prisoner correspondence program, but, it is important to recognize that writing to prisoners is different from any other kind of correspondence.

The letter writing program is not designed to simply provide a pen pal for the prisoner, but to encourage incarcerated addicts to work the Twelve Steps and to assist them in working an effective program of recovery despite the obstacles and distractions encountered in prison.

Recommended experience and sobriety

Because working the SAA program of recovery by correspondence with a prisoner is more challenging than simple letter writing, the ISO recommends the following minimum guidelines for letter writers:

- Has a minimum of one year in the SAA fellowship.
- Has a minimum of six months of continuous personal sexual sobriety.
- Is actively working the Twelve Steps with a sponsor.
- Is committed to carrying the SAA message of recovery to the addict who still suffers.
- Has served as a sponsor at least once.

Exceptions may be allowed. If a prospective letter writer shows unusual commitment and maturity in working his/her own program and his/her sponsor is agreeable, an exception may be made upon request to and at the discretion of the chair of the Prisoner Outreach Committee or the ISO Coordinator of Prisoner Outreach.

Recommended process

1. The ISO has developed the following process to facilitate writing to prisoners and, at the same time, give the letter writer maximum assurance of anonymity and security:
2. Get approval of your sponsor, who should make sure that you are far enough along in your own recovery to be of assistance to another addict.
3. Complete the prisoner outreach writer application form on the ISO service website and submit it to the ISO office. You may print, scan, and email it to info@saa-recovery.org. Or you may send it to the office at ISO, PO Box 70949, Houston, TX 77270.
4. The information you provide will be entered into the prisoner outreach database, and you will be matched with a request from a prisoner for someone to write.
5. Establishing appropriate boundaries with a prisoner is important for assuring proper and safe communication.
 - a. Many prisons will not accept and deliver letters that have only an initial for the last name, you may choose to use your full name or nickname, or you may use

an alias. Do not, however, give a prisoner your home address, work location, or any other information that would allow a prisoner or his family to contact you outside of the prisoner correspondence program.

- b. Using the ISO PO box as the return address on all correspondence with a prisoner adds another level of anonymity and security.
6. Send your letter directly to the prisoner with the ISO as the return address. The ISO does not need to inspect your letter or mail it for you.
7. Any correspondence received from the prisoner will be forward to the letter writer in a plain brown envelope without any reference to SAA on the outside.
8. Recognize that some inmates are con-artists, and they may try to convince you to help them in ways other than working the SAA program of recovery.
9. Do not send money, stamps, or any other items for personal use by the prisoner and make it clear that your relationship with the prisoner is limited to sharing the benefits of the SAA program of recovery and helping him or her achieve recovery.
10. The ISO office will send the prisoner some of our literature, including a pocket version of the Green Book.
11. Telephone calls with prisoners are discouraged, as they would likely compromise the writer's personal anonymity and security.
12. Be aware that correspondence to and from prisoners is subject to review and search by prison officials, and any such correspondence can become part of that prisoner's permanent record.
13. If no response is received within six-to-eight weeks from a prisoner, notify the ISO office, and the prisoner will be placed on "inactive" status.

Additional helpful hints

A prospective letter writer should consider the following additional points, if he or she agrees to serve as a sponsor-by-correspondence for a prisoner:

1. Develop a game plan for sponsorship by correspondence, assigning highly specific written exercises for completion by the next exchange of letters.
2. Remember that the primary purpose of sponsorship is to assist another addict in working the Twelve Steps—nothing more; nothing less.
3. Ask a more experienced member of your local group for guidance, if needed.
4. If questions or concerns about the sponsorship process arise, ask the ISO office for assistance in identifying a member of the fellowship who has more experience working with prisoners.
5. In sharing with a prisoner, suggest that the prisoner not admit to any actions that have not been adjudicated and that he use general language rather than specifics when working Steps One, Four, Five, and Eight by correspondence.
6. Use a no-rush, no-stress, progress-not-perfection approach to working with prisoners, many of whom have lots of free time to think about program assignments and to pray and meditate but are often subject to many distractions and even harassment.
7. In responding to a prisoner's questions or answers from a prisoner to specific questions, repeating or paraphrasing may be used to remind the prisoner of the previous correspondence.

8. Remember to encourage continuing in the program, even when progress seems painfully slow.
9. Remember at all times that a prisoner—like any one of us—must have a desire to stop addictive sexual behavior, and he must be willing to take the actions necessary to achieve recovery.

Writing to prisoners and sponsoring by correspondence can be greatly rewarding for both the prisoner and the letter writer, and it is a good way to provide a needed service that reaches beyond the local group. How gratifying it would be to realize that any one of us in the SAA fellowship could be instrumental in bringing hope of a new way of life to an inmate, who is struggling with addictive sexual behavior.

Sign up today to write to a prisoner, who has expressed a desire to communicate with a member of SAA and to learn more about our program of recovery!

Please respond to ohiovalleysaa@gmail.com if you are interested in helping.

Prisoner Outreach Letter Writer Signup Form

Please fill in the following form so that we can match you with an inmate to whom you can write.

The Prisoner Outreach Committee has suggested a set of minimum requirements for being a letter writer. Please let us know that you meet these minimums.

1. I have a minimum of one year in the program
2. I have a minimum of six months continuous sobriety
3. I have worked the Twelve Steps with a sponsor
4. I am committed to bringing the message of experience, strength and hope to those desiring to recover from sex addiction

Please answer the following questions so we can match you with a inmate. The ISO will use this information to contact you, to forward prisoner mail to you, and to connect you with an inmate who is a good match. This information will not be made available to an inmate or anyone else.

First name: _____ Last name/ Initial: _____
Email Address: _____ Phone: _____
Street Address: _____ City: _____
State/Province: _____ Postal Code: _____
Country: _____ Gender: (Optional) _____ Sexuality: (Optional)

Prefers to write to (check all that apply) (Optional):

Male Female Hetero Gay Lesbian Bi Trans

Can correspond to inmate via email

Please note: If you click "Can correspond to inmate via email" you will need to sign up for an online program to write to inmates. This will result in the loss of some anonymity. Some prisons will not accept mail from someone using only a first name and last initial. To avoid using their last name and to protect their anonymity, many letter writers have chosen to use an alias. (Example: John Jones, who would be known in the program as John J, might use the alias John Jay)

Alias: (Optional) _____

You may print, scan, and email it to info@saa-recovery.org.

Or you may send it to the office at ISO, PO Box 70949, Houston, TX 77270.

Please also return a copy to the Ohio Valley Intergroup through your meeting rep, by mail, or email (see Ohio Valley Intergroup Website for details)