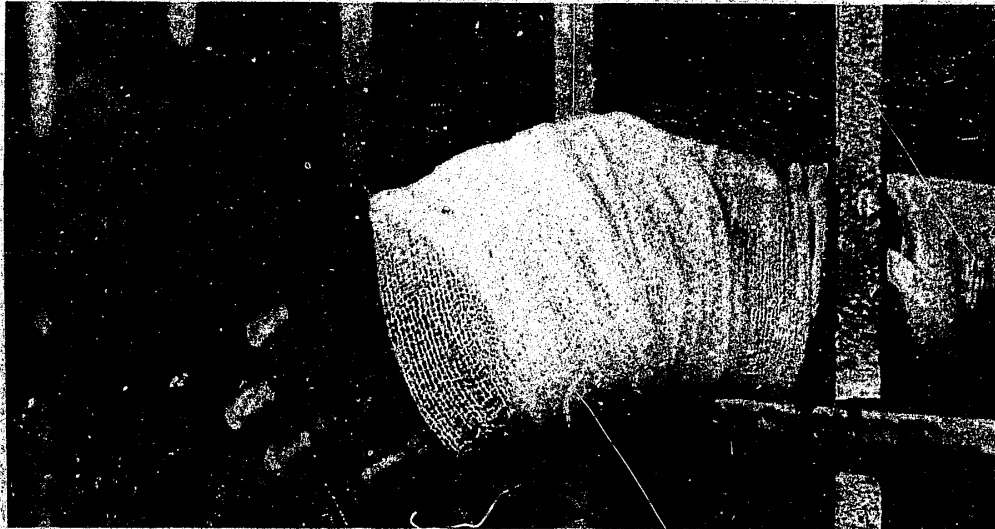


The use of volunteers in jails



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ACQUISITIONS

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Volunteers have performed essential functions in American life since earliest colonial times; e.g. our first firefighters, policemen, soldiers and charitable workers were, for the most part, volunteers. Even though government has now assumed many of these responsibilities, the opportunity to utilize citizen volunteers remains as viable as ever.

A volunteer is a person who offers or performs a service without valuable consideration or legal obligation. A national survey, *Americans Volunteer 1974*, showed that nearly one of four American adults was actively involved in volunteer work and that the typical volunteer was a married, white woman between ages 25 - 44, who held a college degree and was in the upper income bracket. The survey also indicated that, among the unemployed, 17% do volunteer work, as do 12% of persons from families with an average yearly income of less than \$4,000. The overall use of volunteers increased by 33% from 1965 to 1974. This increase is strong evidence that volunteers represent a valuable resource which can be utilized to provide needed services in many communities.

The maximum benefit from the use of volunteers has yet to be realized in the jail, although *The Nation's Jails*, a report based on the 1972 Survey of Inmates of Local Jails prepared by the Bureau of the Census, states that community volunteers were the mainstays of social and rehabilitative programs and services in jails of all sizes. In the fall of 1976, the AMA surveyed recent graduates of the National Sheriffs' Institute, sponsored by the National Sheriffs'

Association. Nearly one-third of the responding sheriffs indicated that they were currently using volunteers to provide services in the jails. The program services areas were:

1. Education
2. Recreation and Exercise
3. Chaplaincy
4. Counselling
5. Supplementary security

None of these volunteers were paid by the jail although over half were paid by other agencies, such as county health departments and public libraries.

In many more instances, private non-profit community groups provide voluntary services to jails: the Salvation Army, Alcoholics Anonymous, Volunteers of America, Voluntary Action Centers, as well as other religious, philanthropic and civic organizations.

In 1976, half of the sheriffs and jail administrators participating in the AMA Program to Improve Medical Care and Health Services in Jails stated that they did not feel they had sufficient correctional officer coverage to ensure the health and safety of their jails' inmates. Analysis of the jail staffing patterns in the thirty pilot jails confirmed that fifteen of the jails did, indeed, fall below the staffing ratio recommended by the 1973 National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals. When officials responsible for jails cannot convince local funding bodies to employ sufficient jailers, it is unlikely that these same funding bodies

would be willing and/or able to provide funds for less obvious needs of jail populations.

Jails are, and always have been, places of enforced idleness. The fewer the staff engaged in security activities, the greater the proportion of time jailers need to spend actually guarding inmates; thus, in the main, correctional officer time is not available for the supervision of inmates in productive activities to alleviate the constant boredom experienced by inmates. Bored and idle inmates, seeking to break the monotony of jail life, contribute heavily to property and equipment damage and often come into direct conflict with the correctional officers. It seems fair to assume that inmate idleness represents a threat to jail security.

Inmates often participate in any program available to them in order to relieve their boredom. Many view the jail medical services program as one such "activity." Inmates with no discernible health problems constitute a large percentage of sick call lines across the country, draining costly medical resources. This phenomenon causes some jail health care providers to devalue their role, in some instances resulting in negative attitudes which then compound the problem.

Various health providers report that they end up serving as counselors to some inmates or are approached by inmates for non-medical problems, mainly personal/social, which, if handled by others, would free medical people to attend to inmates in real need of medical attention.

In each of the situations just described, volunteers can

provide realistic and workable solutions. When inmates are allowed to be constructively occupied in organized educational or exercise/recreational activities, they have less desire to use medical services as a way to alleviate boredom.

Volunteer counsellors have demonstrated that they can, in many cases, function as effectively as paid professional staff, as they bring with them contacts and experiences from the mainstream of community life and, in some instances, are able to develop effective working relationships with certain inmates who distrust the "establishment."

Designing a Successful Program

The basic ingredients of a successful volunteer program are the same as those of a successful program involving paid staff. The proposed activity must meet a specific need of the inmate-participants and the volunteer, like the paid staff person, must be properly screened, oriented, trained and supervised.

Planning for a volunteer program ideally involves the jail's administration and line staff, as well as inmates. The advantages of a joint planning process are threefold:

1. Inmates will accept the program because they have had a say in its design;
2. Line staff will be assured that the volunteers are not being used to undercut the roles of paid staff; and,
3. The morale of staff and inmates will be improved because the administration will be viewed as seeking their cooperation in remedying problems which they have helped to identify.

Two basic approaches can be taken regarding volunteer programs. The jail administrator, through a volunteer-coordinator, can develop job descriptions for volunteers and recruit, screen, orient, train and supervise all volunteers. Or, the jail can contact existing volunteer groups in the community and arrange for them to extend their volunteer programs to jail inmates if the existing programs will meet needs identified by the jail's planning process. Certainly a combination of these two basic approaches can also be used to successfully implement a volunteer program.

When the volunteer program of an existing agency is transported into a jail, the major responsibilities for the volunteers and their work may properly remain with the agency. However, even in such instances, a member of the jail staff should be named as program coordinator. The responsibilities of the volunteer coordinator could include orienting the volunteers to the rules of the jail, orienting jail personnel to the role(s) of the volunteers, providing on-site supervision and support to the volunteers, and liaison between the jail and the agency or group operating the volunteer program. The role of the jail program coordinator need not become a full-time job when a reliable community organization is directing the daily operation of the volunteer program.

In some instances, the jail may wish to institute a volunteer program completely on its own. This will, of course, require considerably more time and effort on the part of the program coordinator.

Recruitment, Screening and Selection of Volunteers

Recruitment of volunteers can be approached in many ways. If volunteers with specific skills are desired (e.g., teachers or nurses), the community associations for active or retired members of these professions can be approached. If general volunteers are needed, religious, student and civic organizations can probably provide the total volunteers needed.

Screening of potential volunteers should be done with the same care as that given paid jail staff. An interview with the potential volunteer should cover the nature of the volunteer assignment, the amount of time expected to be contributed per week or per month and the minimum length of service the jail expects of its volunteers. An application can then be presented to the potential volunteer (which may be the same, or a modified version of, the application for employment used by the jail) with the request that the application be returned at a later date. This approach has the advantage of allowing volunteers to screen themselves out graciously, either because they are not interested in the type of assignment and time commitment needed by the jail, or because they realize that quality is being sought and they do not believe they will measure up. Character investigations, including police records checks, should be conducted in the same manner used for paid staff positions, as a final phase of screening.

Orientation of Volunteers

Volunteers need to become familiar with "who" is in jail and

"what goes on" in the jail. The American Medical Association monograph, "Orienting New Health Providers to the Jail Field," should be very helpful in this regard (and can be obtained upon request from the AMA).

Rules of the jail applicable to staff need to be given to volunteers, even though all of them may not apply. The volunteers must be impressed with security precautions, to avoid the possibility of being manipulated by the inmate population.

While orientation materials for volunteers working in the jails/criminal justice field (i.e., *A Handbook For The Volunteer*, Department of Corrections, Bucks County, Doylestown, Pennsylvania, 18901) can and should be reviewed for guidance, the best orientation will naturally come from local jail administration and staff, including the health care providers.

If administration treats volunteers as staff, including their involvement in staff meetings, where some orientation can be accomplished, this aspect of the job will not be difficult.

Problems arise when volunteers are treated differently from staff and, hence feel different. In short, avoid the "we" and "they" caste system which works against developing a team approach. Volunteers are either insiders or outsiders and if treated as the latter, the program will not succeed. They must feel welcomed as staff.

Training of Volunteers

Volunteers should receive training, whether on-the-job or in

training sessions, regarding the volunteer assignment they are expected to fulfill. In addition to teaching the practical skills a volunteer will need for a specific assignment, discussions concerning the area of ethics may prove to be of value.

Ethics in volunteers should not be taken for granted, but should be discussed early and reinforced regularly. Inmates too often see themselves as "victims" of a double standard and are quick to notice the double standard in operation. Volunteers must be made aware of the fact that inmates will scrutinize their behavior, statements and attitudes for evidence of the double standard. The fact is that if the volunteer represents a double standard to the inmate, that volunteer will not only fail to contribute to positive change within the inmate but could actually delay the possibility of such change, perhaps even placing the volunteer in danger and contributing to an entire program's failure.

The volunteer must learn in training that many people who are in trouble with the law also have trouble coping with responsibility. Thus, the volunteer must counteract this by exhibiting responsibility regarding all facets of the volunteer assignment. Volunteers who talk about the sincerity of their commitment at the beginning of an assignment but who lose interest after a few weeks actually hurt more than help. The volunteer who persists, especially when no positive gains are evident, can be the deciding factor regarding the program's success. Perhaps the most prevalent common denominator among inmates is their feeling of rejection. If the community volunteer also rejects the inmate, the in-

mate may well settle for acceptance where it is more easily found — the ranks of those engaging in anti-social and criminal behavior.

Supervision of Volunteers

Volunteer programs depend on the quality of direction/support/encouragement which they get—more commonly known as supervision. As indicated earlier, this does not mean there must be a paid supervisor over the “line” volunteers. It does mean someone from administration or the supervisory ranks must direct and be responsible for volunteer supervision.

Good supervision of staff means that both problems and positives are discussed and handled on an equal importance basis. Volunteers, likewise, need to know where they stand. Since they do not get paid, something needs to be substituted and generally that is well taken care of through recognition of the “good” which they accomplish. This recognition may take the form of personal comments, written communications, awards (possibly presented at a recognition luncheon or dinner) and/or media publicity. A combination of these approaches is suggested.

Liability Regarding Volunteers

As far as it can be determined by a literature search, there have been no law suits over the use of volunteers in the criminal justice field. In the health care field, where there have been a few suits, courts have not ruled against

volunteers or administrators where volunteers did what the job description called for and gross negligence was not involved. Supervision, therefore, is the key factor, as outlined previously.

However, jail administrators should still protect volunteers and themselves from liability damages and from the costs of legal expenses in defending a law suit. Some jurisdictions legally define a volunteer as an employee (agent) even though not paid a salary. This, however, provides a base for paying expenses. Budgeting one dollar per volunteer yearly for salary, thus making them employees, may be the easiest solution in some jurisdictions.

Several insurance companies will insure volunteers on a group basis. For example, one charges \$100 for the base policy covering the first 67 volunteers, and \$1.50 for each additional volunteer.

Miscellaneous Information

There are many excellent resources available to persons interested in organizing volunteer programs. Two reference documents of particular value are:

Guidelines and Standards For The Use of Volunteers in Correctional Programs, which is available from:

Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, DC 20402
Stock Number 2700-00236

Liability in Correctional Volunteer Programs, which is available from:

**American Bar Association
Commission on Correctional Facilities and
Services
1800 "M" Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036**

Both provide background as well as practical information regarding the use of volunteers in correctional settings.

Also, a good deal may be learned by contacting successful volunteer programs in operation. The following on-going volunteer corrections programs may be of interest:

- **Volunteers in Corrections. Missouri Association for Social Welfare, Jefferson City, Missouri 65101. Volunteers are being used as counsellors and visitors to inmates; also in a probation/parole program.**
- **Bucks County Association for Corrections and Rehabilitation. Bucks County Prison, 138 South Pine Street, Doylestown, Pennsylvania 18901. Volunteers are used to provide a variety of services to inmates, including educational and tutorial services, vocational testing, organizing and coaching inmates' athletic teams, recreational and entertainment programs, religious counselling and aiding the families of inmates on an emergency basis.**
- **Thresholds Correctional Solutions Foundation, Inc., 22 Ellsworth Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139. The program is a series of group and indi-**

vidual teaching/counselling sessions designed to develop the decision-making and planning skills of jail inmates. Jails which have instituted the volunteer Thresholds program include:

**Bucks County Prison
138 South Pine Street
Doylestown, Pennsylvania 18501**

**New Haven Community Correctional Center
245 Whalley Avenue
New Haven, Connecticut 06510**

**Delaware County Prison
P.O. Box 23A
Thorton, Pennsylvania 19373**

**Orleans Parish Prison
2700 Tulane Avenue
New Orleans, Louisiana 70119**

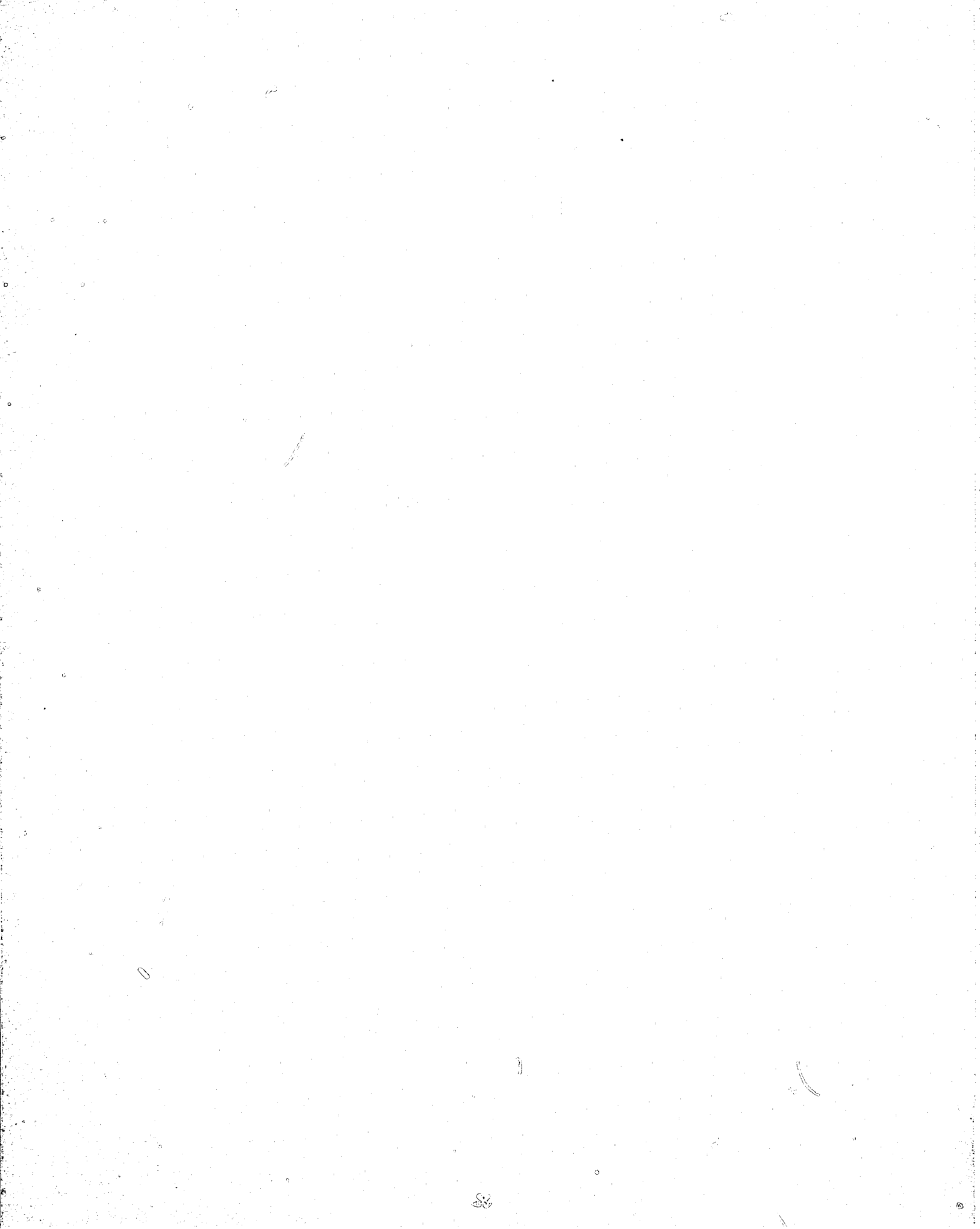
- **Harris County Jail. 301 San Jacinto, Houston, Texas 77002. Two volunteer groups (composed of business, civic and religious leaders from the community), Women In Action and Men In Action, provide a variety of counselling and educational services to female and male inmates. Women In Action also provides liaison between the women inmates and the person or agency caring for their children, as well as a counselling center for women released from**

jail. The Houston Metropolitan Chaplains provide religious counselling as well as bible study classes. In addition, student interns from the University of Houston counselling programs receive field experience at the jail by conducting special counselling programs for inmate alcoholics and drug abusers.

- Maricopa County Jail. 3225 W. Durango Street, Phoenix, Arizona 85009. Religious services and bible study sessions are provided by volunteers from congregations in the community. In addition, the jail accepts field placement students from Arizona State University, Schools of Nursing and Criminal Justice, and Glendale Community College. Students assist in providing psychological counselling, group counselling, pre-release counselling, custody and control, and programs in recreation, sports and arts and crafts.
- Franklin County Jail. 1015 N. 5th Street, Pasco, Washington 99301. A volunteer who is a retired teacher provides Graduate Equivalency Diploma training to jail inmates for two hours each day.
- Burlington County Jail. 30 Grant Street, Mount Holly, New Jersey 08060. Alcoholics Anonymous provides individual counselling and group sessions; religious organizations provide counselling and religious ser-

vices; and the Jail Committee (composed of local volunteer citizens) provide peer and supportive counselling to women inmates.

- Ingham County Jail. 639 N. Cedar Street, Mason, Michigan 48854. Volunteers recruited through the Michigan State University volunteer bureau assist professional staff in carrying out academic and tutorial programs, including psychological and educational-level testing. Volunteers from Alcoholics Anonymous provide follow-up services for inmates upon release, and a group of local churchwomen work with women inmates to provide recreation. In addition, student nurses work with the jail nurse as part of their field placement experiences.
- Los Angeles County Jail. 441 Bauchet Street, Los Angeles, California 90012. Community drug abuse, narcotics and alcohol rehabilitation programs work with professional jail staff to assist chemically dependent inmates. The Salvation Army and community religious organizations donate clothing which can be provided as needed to inmates upon release. The chaplaincy programs are provided through the joint efforts of community religious groups and jail staff.



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