

District 16B Corrections History

District 16 B has taken AA meetings into correctional institutions somewhere every week for 40 years. Many hands carried the AA message into county farms as they evolved into work camps, and then into correctional institutions with state prisoners. They carried it into county jails. Some of the AA volunteers, by no means all, are mentioned below. Two prison groups were registered in 1974, but are now inactive. One, Recovery on the Hill, has met regularly for 17 years.

In 1972, (the late) Billy B. got sober at the Athens Biscayne Room, and immediately formed Breezy Knob in his hometown of Commerce. Soon, he was also meeting with inmates at the Jackson County work camp.

It was a time – the 1970s – when AA was really beginning to take hold in Georgia and a lot of meetings were getting started. Jimmie D. remembers after getting sober in 1971, he went with his sponsor Andy B., and Bob B., and his father-in-law Ed L. to work camp meetings in Putnam County and Hall County. He began going to Clarke County meetings around 1978 at the work farm off Lexington road.

“Meetings were held in a small outside building ... just a room with chairs, away from the dorms,” Jimmie D. recalls. “Usually about four people from AA would go together, and they had to be there on time, because the gates were opened only once at a certain time.” There was no registration or background check, and when Jimmie and South B. started attending meetings there, they usually took their wives. Jim R. also attended.

At this time there was a strong corrections support person on the state level, Maynard Y. He advised volunteers their purpose was to *carry* the message, not take anything into the jail or carry messages outside for inmates. The number one policy for AA members to remember was “You’re THEIR guest.” AAs came when invited, and left when asked to leave.

They should not say things like “I should be here with you because of all the things I did while drinking.” Jimmie said that was a quick way to lose inmates’ attention, making it seem like you were a step above because you got away with it. It was important to watch the men and see things they related to and not be drawn into discussions about bum raps or beefs against the authorities, but to stay focused on recovery ... a place where AAs could make a difference.

“It was hard to pass the job on to someone else,” South B. said. “I think I finally just quit going (in the 1980s). In 1989 or early 1990, recalls Bix W., “I had about 5 months sober when Doug R. and another guy came up to me at the Cobb House and gave me two packs of cigarettes. They told me to give them to the guys when I went in for a meeting at the prison (CI). They just roped me into going there.

“I kept going for about 2½ years on Wednesdays at 7 p.m. They had coffee and could smoke. Sometimes I had others who went with me – Tom __ and Jimmy P. It kept me sober and I felt I was doing my best to help other people out. I took one guy home when he got out, met his family. He stayed sober for a while.”

In the 1990s, Clarke County CI meetings were revived by Eric M., David K., Bill C. and others. In 2006, the men attending AA were released, and no new men came. In 2011, Jim T. took literature for the library cart and asked if AA could restart the meeting. The administration said if there were interest, they would call.

However, Jim met an official there who invited him to start a meeting at the new Athens Clarke County Diversion Center. AA volunteers have taken a meeting every week since the facility opened in May 2012. "God's sometimes tricky the way He does stuff," Jim said.

Jim T. got sober in August 2007. In the spring of 2008, Darrell C., who was taking the men's meeting to the Clarke County Jail, asked if he would like to help. In 2009, he convinced jail personnel to let him go with Roy S. to a weekly meeting in the jail's recovery pod. He also goes with Roy to Jackson County CI and has been district and state corrections rep.

"I absolutely adore it," Jim said. "It's probably the most meaningful thing I have ever done in my life. It lights me up. The jail is good, but it's so transient you really don't get a chance to get to know the inmates. What I especially love is the prison meetings. You develop relationships and even friendships, because they are there week after week.

Jackson County CI

Doug R. began going with Billy Bolton to meetings at the Jackson County work farm in 1977 and continued sporadically until he finally took his last drink in 1984. In 1985, he began 7 years of carrying the message to Jackson CCI, with a break in the middle. He stopped going around 1994.

"I got burned out. It's not easy, not like just going to an AA meeting. You're kind of on the spot because you're from outside and these guys are all there, and you don't know what their agendas are, you don't know what they are expecting. It can be anxiety producing. But once you get over it ... When I was carrying it for a long period of time, I loved having my once a week meetings there. Where I started getting burned out, if I couldn't go one Wednesday, they wouldn't have a meeting, and I started feeling guilty.

Meetings resumed twice a month in 1997, with T.C. __ and Paul __ taking them. Shortly after this, Roy S. moved to Athens from Ohio.

When Roy shared he had done prison time and would be willing to take meetings "behind the walls," (the late) Eric M. (corrections rep) and Conoly H. took him to meet Warden Joe Dalton.

"I told the warden I wanted to come every week, and if I could, I would like to do it twice a week," Roy recalled. "And he said, 'You really must be devoted to want to come twice a week.' I told him, 'This saved my life.' And he just kind of rolled the red carpet out."

Roy was approved without a records check, and began bringing meetings and inviting other AAs to attend. He wrote New York for a starter kit, and contacted the Georgia State office in Macon. The group was registered as Recovery on the Hill on Oct. 17, 1997. The first GSR was Ronnie B.

"We used the rotation format we had in my home group up north," Roy said. "The 1st week would be a speaker meeting; the 2nd a Big Book study, the 3rd was the 12 Steps, and the 4th, the 12 traditions. If there was a 5th week, we generally had open discussion. It is still going on to this day. We celebrate anniversaries once a year, usually in July or early August," he added. Roy brings in a cake for anniversary meetings.

In 2003 there were staff changes at the prison and the open door policy ended. Soon, IDs were required. "Today, (2013) it's just me and Jim T," Roy said. "Jim T. has

been going out a couple or three years. By the time we leave the (Clarke) county jail at 6:30, we never get there at 7. We get there about 7:15 or 7:20 and (the men) have already read all the readings, opened the meeting with prayer, and have coffee all ready for us. If we didn't show up, they would still have their meeting.

"Some have been coming for as long as 5 or 6 years," Roy said. "One man, my shining star in AA, was Aaron O. (We called him O.B.). He is still sober and moved from Georgia back to Ohio. He has come to speak at my birthday. And he got involved in his district, and invited me to correctional workshops in Buford. That's the kind of stuff you like to be a part of.

"The highlight of it is that of the nearly 16 years going out there, six men are still sober. Some of them have double-digit years. That is just a blessing, to know six men who are still sober. I hear from them periodically."

Clarke County Jail

When Doug R. was recruiting men to go to Jackson County CI in the early 90s, there was no prison outreach to women. AA women approached Clarke County Jail.

To avoid discrimination, they were told they must offer meetings to both men and women. Meetings began in January 1993, and have continued since that time. In 2013, times are 5:30 p.m. for women and 7 p.m. for men. AA meetings are taken in on 1st, 3rd and 5th Mondays, with Narcotics Anonymous meetings on 2nd and 4th Mondays.

"We signed up about 12 women and 12 men," Conoly H. recalled. She'd heard about jail meeting burnout, and began rotating people into the meetings, telling women no one would be scheduled more than once a month.

After about 5 years, Mary D. began to schedule women. She was followed by Joan B., Ginger G. and Pam W. Some of the first women to take meetings in were: Sara P., Paula S., Valerie W., Kathleen G., Janine S., Kay B., Kathy T., Georgia P., Bobbie R., and Jane B. Inmate attendance is usually 15 to 20 women.

"I did not have much luck rotating men," Conoly said. One or two men would attend every meeting until he/they burned out. The first men were Trey W., Tim J. and Eric M. Eric was newly sober, homeless and jobless – he said he needed the discipline of "showing up, no matter what," and he totally committed to the jail meeting, and his home group, Happy Hour.

After Eric died sober in 1997, men from Happy Hour Group carried the meeting for some time. They included John B., David P., David C. and Walter C. Zack G. began scheduling men's meetings in 2012. A Thursday night men's meeting began in 2009 in the "recovery pod," conducted by Roy S. and Jim T.

"In the county jail the men are coming and going," Roy said. "I see the men from the Clarke County jail in meetings outside, but no continuous sobriety. How long do most of them stay – don't have a clue. The most important fact is that the seed has been planted and whenever they make up their mind that's what they are going to do, they'll do it. And that's all we can do."

Expanding Programs

Eric M. was District 16B corrections committee representative from the mid-1990s until his death in 1997. He was followed by Conoly H. from 1997 to 1999. Roy S. served from about 2000 until 2010, when he was elected alternate DCM.

Jim T. became district corrections rep in January 2010. A year later he became co-chair of the state (area) corrections and suggested Ginger G. to finish his rotation. "I knew she would do a great job," he said. "Because she was committed. I think corrections is different than any other form of service. If I'm going into a jail, and I can't make it and I don't call and let them know that, and they move inmates unnecessarily, that reflects badly not only on me but on AA as a whole.

It takes awhile to get a state ID badge, and that can be frustrating. The good side of that is it really sorts out the people who are committed. The same applies to the jail. People who are unwilling to wait to get a badge, aren't going to be willing to show up every time."

Ginger G. began in corrections in the mid 1990's, as so many volunteers do, through the county jail meeting. She was approached after an AA meeting and invited to go. "I was early in sobriety (sobriety date 1/29/1992) and afraid and still looking for a comfortable seat 'in the middle of the boat.' I was approved and put on the list of volunteers and started helping take in meetings," she said.

"I have never left a jail or prison meeting wanting to drink and I always leave knowing that I do not have any problems. I've found it to be the best cure for depression.

"I started doing meetings in correctional facilities solely with the motive of wanting it to help me be sober. And while I still know it will help keep me sober, I more and more want to be of use to God by carrying the AA message of hope and recovery to these women. Sometimes it is heartbreaking, but the program does provide a seed of hope."

During their district rotations, Jim and Ginger expanded the corrections program to include Coins for Cons and printed "chip cards." In 2 ½ years spare change put into the pink CforC cans bought 835 Big Books, 84 12 & 12s, 430 other AA books, and 1,150 pamphlets. Most have been put directly into inmates' hands

They also approached other counties in the district about starting jail meetings.

Barrow continues to say they are not ready for AA. Members take literature for the library cart, and keep checking back. "We show them our consistency and our continued desire to carry the message," Jim said. "Because sometimes that's what it takes. We are asking them to disrupt their routine. We have to prove ourselves to them."

Jackson County's problem is not having a meeting room they can gather interested inmates in. "The sheriff is very enthusiastic," Jim said. "But she is not comfortable with us going into the pod."

Oconee County became part of District 16B in Sept. 2011, and the first men's meeting was taken in by Zack G. and Jim T. on November 26. Two weeks later, Meera N. and Ginger G. held a women's meeting. Men's and women's meetings are held every other Saturday at 10:30 a.m. in the pods, unless there are no inmates wanting one. AA members take meetings into the three men's pods and one women's pod, if inmates are interested.

District 16B also carries the message to Lee Arrendale Women's Prison in Alto, GA. Ginger has attended meetings there for 2½ years, and has recruited Sally M., Meera N., Lisa H. and Stephanie C.