

ARMED SERVICES

FOR GROUPS IN THE ARMED SERVICES - BASED ON MATERIAL RECEIVED FROM ACTIVE GROUPS

Some of the steps that active groups have followed:

- 1 Contact commanding officers, medical officers, and chaplains and let them know of AA and that it can be made available on the base, or that there are nearby off-base Groups;
- 2 Show them a list of other AA Groups in the armed services (available from National Office);
- 3 Provide them with AA literature, eg *"A Brief Guide to AA"*, *"AA and the Armed Services"*, *"AA as a Resource for the Health Care Worker"*, *"If you are a Professional"*;
- 4 If there is a nearby AA Group off-base, make use of this Group and ask interested alcoholics to attend the off-base Group. When this is possible, it has proved the most satisfactory answer to service-based personnel, as it enables the man or woman to attend a Group similar to the majority of AA groups, where they can mingle with alcoholics of every type and not feel that they are special. To quote directly from a Group that holds meetings off-base: *"The present arrangement provides civilian accommodation close to the base (but out of military jurisdiction) where civilians and service people get the joint benefits of variety in thinking, continuity of AA program, a place away from the service atmosphere to relax, and the opportunity to meet people who provide a social outlet locally. Since most service canteens, clubs and messes are 'wet', this is a distinct advantage in getting away from the alcoholic atmosphere."*
- 5 Rank can be a problem; it has been partially solved in some Groups by the use of first names only, by attending meetings in civilian clothes, and by the expressed desire of the Group members to mingle on an informal basis. A quote from an armed services Group on this question: *"The absence of consideration of rank in AA is firmly stressed on the initial call. Over the entrance to our meeting place is a sign which reads, "Abandon rank, all ye who enter here"* This has been successfully observed without detrimental effect to military discipline, and our membership includes commissioned officers, NCOs, other ranks and civilians. From another Group on the same subject: *"In our meetings, rank, just as is profession, social or financial standing, religion, politics, etc, is forgotten. First names are the rule, and whether you are a sergeant or a colonel (and we've had both) or anywhere in between, makes no difference. Our common problem, alcohol, and our common purpose, to attain sobriety and help others do the same, are stressed and take care very well of our differences, including rank."* Another solution: two groups, one for officers and one for enlisted personnel.
- 6 Place a notice on bulletin boards, in the base news-letter or paper, advising personnel of the availability of AA and the time and place of meetings.
- 7 Most groups get their referrals from the medical officer or chaplain, so again it is stressed that there are no ranks in AA. It's a good idea to see that such officers are thoroughly familiar with AA and understand its aims and purposes. If the Group is on base, co-operation is most important, since those in command must provide a meeting place and approve attendance at meetings.

- 8 There are differences of opinion about Groups on the base. A chaplain had this to say: *"Why have a Group on the military installation itself when an existing organisation can usually be found in the neighbouring community and a member is as close as the telephone? Because the service persons too often hesitate to join civilian Groups lest their presence and their problem be a reflection upon their branch of the military service. To be with their own kind in an endeavour to overcome a problem seems to make it an easier decision to reach."* The conclusion stated, that off-base Groups are preferable, is the result of a questionnaire that was sent to existing armed services Groups and reflects the majority opinion of those Groups. But the decision on whether or not to form a Group on the base itself must be made in relation to local needs and problems. Both on-base and off-base Groups have been successful.