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population where temptations from former companions could lead to trouble.

Joseph E. Ragen, warden, and parole board members, solidly back AA. As penalogists they find it successful in rehabilitating men for release. As an aid to discipline within the walls, it has proved invaluable. AA members get into far less trouble than the general run of prison population.

#### Experiment Justified

Highly successful reports have come in from men released into the

world. While all of these men have not made the grade, the number who have is large enough to more than justify the experiment. Other prisons in downstate Illinois are taking up the Stateville plan in cooperation with downstate members.

Sporadic contacts have been made over the years in the Bridewell (city) and county jails, but these have never crystalized into an organized effort. A small group of women, however, has worked steadily and quietly for several years among women alcoholics in the County jail and notable results have been achieved.

## THE CENTRAL OFFICE

123 W. Madison St., Chicago  
central headquarters, where  
new prospects make first  
contact with AA, Center of  
all service facilities in area



COMMON need, common interest, common aim— these spell AA unity. Each group's single primary purpose (Tradition 5) is to carry the message. Similarly, Metropolitan Chicago's central office has one shining, valid reason for existence: to serve the message-bearers.

Selflessly, without fanfare, having no executive authority and wanting none, this service center fits snugly its assigned place in AA life. Busy as an ant colony, quiet as your heart-beat, it just goes on pumping helpfulness to the 5,000 members of 200 odd groups in its teeming, far-flung area.

Those of the fellowship who marvel that sprawling Chicago achieved and maintains consistent unity, down through the years, will mark well the adhesive power of a

small, well-trained central office staff functioning economically but efficiently for all. Get the picture.

A seedy, miserable little man turns unsteady steps into an unpretentious structure at 123 West Madison Street in downtown Chicago. Leaving an elevator at Floor 11 he stands timidly in the corridor, fighting to focus watery eyes and to keep his skin on.

An erratic surge of energy carries him to a door marked "1101." Desperation, rather than courage, propels him into the reception room of a modern, well-appointed, four-room suite.

He shifts nervously, drops his hat, picks it up, mops his brow spots Ruth at her desk, prepares to break for the door. Ruth is on the phone but smiles at him and points to a chair. He lurches over





**A prospect explains his problem to a secretary in the Chicago central office and is promised contact in his neighborhood**

and sits.

Like three sister-employees, Ruth is an alcoholic whose disease AA has happily arrested. Just now, performing a prime office function, she is relaying an SOS from one judged ripe for picking to the secretary of a South Side group in whose territory the caller resides. This chore is complete only when plans for the Twelfth Step contact have been perfected.

In a room nearby another staffer, Helen, is closeted with a West Side graybeard and his wife, who knows as much AA as he does. Wives are in frequent touch with the office, supplying invaluable liaison service.

Mr. Graybeard, as it happens,

wants to clarify a policy matter. As stated, the central office makes no policy; but it prepares and files policy committee minutes, as well as myriad other records; and inspection of a certain file resolves the old-timer's confusion.

While there, he also examines the finance committee's current statement and budget estimate. In round figures, which are good enough for him, he learns that \$20,000 of a \$30,000 yearly budget covers the full administrative expense. He notes with pleasure that all services rendered, including some to remote points, cost each member an average 33 1/3 cents a month.

"Today you can't buy one shot

for that," he grins at his wife, "and who wants one shot anyway?"

In room No. 3, a large chamber often used by committees, Margie is consoling a distraught wife whose sodden mate hasn't yet felt that essential urge to reach for AAs help.

Gently Marge counsels patience, suggests little things the wife may do, warns mildly about the futility of needling and coercion. Gradually a blessed transition from despair to hope is accomplished.

"Hope" is a key word of Dorothy, secretary of the Metropolitan Chicago Group and manager of the central office. It's in her mind, now, as she pops out of her little office and greets Jittery Joe in the re-

ception room. He's been waiting exactly four minutes, which have seemed like four hours.

She bundles little Mr. Hungover into her cubbyhole and gets two things done swiftly. First she determines expertly that he's a real stiffy, down, out, sincere, desperate. Then she convinces him that she's an alky, too, and has actually survived the perils of sobriety. This done, they begin to click.

And in ten minutes he's marching out armed with (a) literature; (b) a basic knowledge of AA; (c) a date for tonight in his North Side home with a couple of fellow alkies; and (d) a smile reflecting the first glimmer of hope he has dared to entertain in years.

**Chicago central office secretary in charge of all service facilities for the Chicago group**

