The OA C.A.R.E.S. correspondence program was created to establish a network of support for compulsive eaters who are incarcerated. By describing how OA has affected your life, you can help deliver OA’s Twelve Step program of recovery directly to those in need. Thank you for volunteering to share the very essence of our program—one compulsive overeater reaching out to another.

These guidelines have been developed to help facilitate your correspondence by suggesting ways to adhere to OA Principles and comply with special requirements established by the participating institutions. Please adhere to these guidelines in all your correspondence.

Your letter should share your experience, strength, and hope about the problems associated with compulsive eating. When discussing your experience, remember to focus on the solutions you found by working the OA program. The hope of our program lies in the recovery we have found through the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. The program can work no matter what our life circumstances.

Keep Your Focus On OA

You may be in other Twelve Step programs, but you have been selected as a volunteer for the OA C.A.R.E.S. program because you are a compulsive overeater. Keep it simple.

Participants will be assigned to individuals of the same sex. The inmate you are corresponding with may discuss issues seemingly unrelated to compulsive overeating, such as their convictions, legal matters, or medical problems. Keep in mind that we cannot solve these problems and should never give advice on any of these subjects. Your response should address these issues, if at all, only in the context of working our Twelve Step program.

The following are some useful suggestions for OA C.A.R.E.S. volunteers:

Remember
OA members in correctional facilities are compulsive eaters simply looking for the hope of recovery.

- Use your sense of humor. Be lighthearted.
- Be courteous. Respond to letters within two weeks.
- Write legibly.
- Be mindful of Traditions Six, Eight, and Twelve.*
- Tell your story (what you were like, what happened, and what you are like now).
- Relate your experience. Describe how you work through your problems thanks largely to the growth you have experienced in the OA Twelve Step program.

Keep The Following Cautions In Mind

You are embarking on a Twelfth Step relationship with a person whom you have not met, who may be unwell in several areas, and who may be using this relationship for motives unrelated to recovery. It is important that you be cautious and alert. We would like to hear from you about your experience so we can help others.

For your protection, all correspondence between the inmate and you will be handled by the Member Services Department at the OA World Service Office (WSO). The Member Services Department will not personally identify you to the inmate. You will write to the inmate and mail the letter to the WSO. Letters should be signed only with your initials. Do not reveal your name or any other personal information, such as where you live, your marital status, or the names of family members. Use universal identifiers, such as “my relative,” “my friend,” or other general descriptions. In sharing your experience, strength, and hope, avoid sharing details that might be too identifiable. While you are anonymous to the
correctional facility, OA is not. OA received clearance
to communicate with the inmate, so it is essential that
you not do anything that could reveal your identity
or jeopardize OA’s clearance. Member Services will
forward your letter to the inmate, and any response
from the inmate will be sent to you in care of the
WSO. Never communicate with an inmate without
going through the WSO.

Certainly, you will want to avoid being used for
purposes other than Twelve Step work. To offer
to carry messages to anyone or to contact family
members, a third party, or the prison administration
on the inmate’s behalf might hinder rather than help
the inmate’s recovery or might breach the institution’s
regulations. Doing so might compromise you and
the good reputation of OA. Breaches of institutional
regulations may result in discipline, or even criminal
penalties. Never send anything, such as food, money,
gifts, or cigarettes, to the inmate. We suggest that you
stick to the program of recovery. That is, after all, the
only thing you can provide: the message of recovery
through the Twelve Steps of Overeaters Anonymous.

* Tradition Six: An OA group ought never endorse,
finance or lend the OA name to any related facility or
outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property
and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

* Tradition Eight: Overeaters Anonymous should
remain forever non-professional, but our service cen-
ters may employ special workers.

* Tradition Twelve: Anonymity is the spiritual
foundation of all these Traditions, ever reminding us
to place principles before personalities.

OA Responsibility Pledge
Always to extend the hand and heart of OA
to all who share my compulsion;
for this I am responsible.