Breakout 5 — Giving Back (A Spirit of Service) — Service Keeps What Recovery Gave

One sentence for the board: What was freely given to us becomes truly ours when we freely give it away.

Purpose	Help clients discover service as a strength of recovery — gratitude put into action, purpose rebuilt by usefulness, and community restored one act at a time — with healthy boundaries that protect early recovery.
Who chooses this group	Curriculum groups meet separately for men and for women. Breakout groups are coed unless otherwise specified. Placement for participants who do not fit a men/women split follows the participant's stated preference, confirmed with staff for safety and privacy. Nothing about a participant's placement is disclosed to the group. Any participant. Participants very early in recovery focus on small, structured acts inside the program community; larger commitments wait until their own foundation is steady. The stated preference stands unless a stated safety reason requires a private conversation. Safety and privacy are the only criteria.
Length	60 minutes
Materials	Paper and pens for every client, whiteboard or flip chart and markers, and the topic resources named in this outline

Time	Segment	What happens
0–5 min	Welcome	Ground rules.
5–30 min	Teaching	Why service strengthens recovery, forms it can take, and its boundaries.

30–45 min	Discussion	Prompts below.
45–55 min	Practice — my next act of service	Each client chooses and schedules one concrete act for this week.
55–60 min	Close	Acts named by volunteers.

Teaching points

- Service turns gratitude into action. Most clients arrived carried by other people's effort — staff, family, strangers, a neighbor, a donor they will never meet. Giving back answers that honestly, and gratitude practiced out loud protects against the resentment and self-pity that feed relapse.
- Service rebuilds identity. Addiction narrowed life to getting and using. Usefulness widens it again: I am a person who helps, who shows up, who is needed. That identity — a person who helps and shows up — is something no craving can argue with for long.
- Service connects. Isolation is dangerous ground. Serving alongside others — in this community or the wider community — builds the relationships and accountability that hold a person on hard days.
- Start where you stand: set up chairs, welcome a newcomer, make the coffee, clean what you did not dirty, write the thank-you note, sit with the person sitting alone. Small, finished, and unannounced beats grand, promised, and performed.
- Boundaries keep service healthy. Serve in measure: your own groups, sleep, family duties, and stability come first, because service that burns a person out serves no one for long. Never lend money as “service,” never carry another client's disclosures or errands outside program structure, and never serve for applause, status, or control. If it needs an audience, it is not service.
- Service is offered, never owed as penance. No client earns forgiveness, standing in this program by serving. Facilitators keep that order straight.

Discussion prompts

- “Who carried you at your lowest — and have you ever thanked them in a way they actually received?”
- “What is something you know how to do — a trade, a skill, a kindness — that this community could use this week?”
- “Where is the line for you between serving and overextending? How will you know when you are near it?”

Practice — my next act of service (10 minutes)

1. Write one act of service: specific, small enough to finish, inside your boundaries. Name what, where, and for whom.

2. Put it on a day this week. Tell the group if you want to — stating it aloud is the commitment step, and passing is complete. Volunteers name their acts at the close.
3. Note what you will not do: the boundary that keeps this act healthy for you and for the person receiving it.
4. If your act involves another person or program area, confirm it with staff before promising it.

Facilitator boundaries — Giving Back

- Never assign service as punishment or as a condition of standing, and never present service hours in this group as meeting any outside obligation.
- Route offers of skilled work, driving, money, or help outside the program through staff first. Good intentions still travel through structure.
- **Warrior close:** Close in gratitude: "You were carried here. This week, carry somebody a few steps — quietly, completely, and without keeping score. That is the spirit of this house."

Sources & Evidence

Clinical evidence: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration — peer recovery support and recovery-community frameworks, in which helping others and community participation are core dimensions of recovery support. This outline applies that framework as group education; it makes no outcome claim.

Recovery-support evidence: Alcoholics Anonymous, Twelve Steps — Step Twelve carries the message and practices the principles as a recovery tradition. Cited here as recovery-support tradition, clearly distinct from clinical evidence, and presented as background — this group is not a Twelve Step meeting.

Note: No outcome is promised for any group in this packet.