

“AL-ANON has grown so fast and so far, it takes my breath away! The more it grows, the greater the contrast between the early days and now.” These words were written by Al-Anon’s cofounder Lois W. in 1979. Looking back at the early days of our fellowship provides some background that will help us to understand and to apply Concept One today.

In the early days of A.A., numerous family groups developed around the United States through the efforts of A.A. members’ wives. In 1951, the A.A. office turned the names of 87 of these groups over to Lois and her Al-Anon cofounder, Anne B., who began the project of registering them. Al-Anon’s first office, the Clearing House, was soon opened with 50 registered groups. By polling the groups, the name, purpose, and method of support for the fellowship were determined. Modified versions of A.A.’s Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions were also adopted by this method.

This procedure worked well in the early years when the quantity of groups was small and manageable. By 1960, there were more than 1500 groups (today there are thousands of groups worldwide), and many did not respond to polls. Our founders realized keeping close connection with the groups was essential to our fellowship. Something needed to be done to see that the group conscience accurately reflected our membership and was available to all those who served us. In 1961, the Al-Anon World Service Conference (WSC) was begun on a trial basis. In 1963, it became a permanent annual feature of Al-Anon’s. With participation from 67 Area Delegates, 18 Trustees, members of the Executive Committee and staff, it is the largest group conscience of our fellowship.

Al-Anon’s structure is often described as an upside-down triangle, with the Al-Anon groups at the top. Members volunteer service and act as representatives from the groups to our districts and Areas and from the Areas to the WSC. At the narrow point at the bot-

Concept One

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tom of the triangle are our Trustees and staff at the World Service Office (WSO). Many people marvel that this structure—a volunteer organization with a few paid workers—could work at all.

We do not depend solely on our own wisdom. Tradition Two reminds us, “For our group purpose there is but one authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.” Our leaders are there to serve us. In our groups, a Higher Power guides our group conscience. Concept One tells us that this group conscience has the ultimate authority for Al-Anon world services. Thus we follow the guidance of a Higher Power at every level of Al-Anon. In offering guidance to our service arms, our groups have ultimate responsibility.

What does “Al-Anon World Services” mean? These are the services provided to groups all over the world by the Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters WSO, and by General Service Offices (GSO) outside the United States and Canada. Services are channeled through the Area World Service Committees (AWSCs), and the general service committees in other countries. Thus our “links of service”: Group Representatives (GRs) represent their groups at district meetings and Area Assemblies; District Representatives (DRs) represent the groups in their districts at AWSC meetings; Area Delegates represent the groups in their Assembly Areas at the annual WSC.

No organization can survive without clear definitions of responsibility and authority to decide policies and procedures and to act on decision once they are made. Ultimately, the primary unit of Al-Anon—the group—is responsible for becoming informed, discussing the matters at hand, and relaying its decisions through its representatives. An informed group conscience is essential. As members of a group, we participate by becoming informed ourselves, listening to others, and adding our voice and vote to the matters

being considered. Together the groups, through their representatives, decide matters that affect their district, Area, and the fellowship as a whole. Together the groups share responsibility for the survival of Al-Anon. They contribute their experience, strength, and hope as well as their time, effort, and money.

Concept One is about ultimate responsibility and authority—the right to have the final say. There are two types of authority and responsibility explained in the Concepts—ultimate and delegated. The other Eleven Concepts address delegated responsibility and authority. The groups exercise their ultimate authority by wisely electing people to speak for them, keeping these representatives informed through the group conscience, and then trusting them to do their jobs. In Al-Anon ultimate responsibility is exercised with loving care and wisdom.

Members Share Experience, Strength, and Hope

RECENTLY I visited an Al-Anon group while on vacation. This group was reviewing the results of their written group inventory. One member shared that some things were going on in the meeting that he didn't like. He kept looking around for the person in charge so he could complain to the authorities, but there didn't seem to be such a person. He eventually figured out that if he had a problem, it was his own responsibility to explain his opinion to the group. When he did this, the group discussed the issue and resolved it in a way he couldn't have imagined, and he could accept the decision. This experience illustrated to me how many of us find the God of our understanding—through discussion among ourselves, by listening to others, by making a decision only after the discussion is complete, and by accepting the group's informed decision.

This Concept reminds me that it is the respon-

WHERE THE
RESPONSIBILITY
LIES

sibility of my group to let the public know where and when we meet. We can place information in the local newspaper or allocate funds to list a local phone number in the phone book. We can provide speakers at various events, perhaps at a health fair or at school health classes. We can provide literature to our employers' human resources departments or speak to our physicians about the recovery we receive from Al-Anon.

The groups are responsible to Al-Anon as a whole and have the ultimate authority for Al-Anon's world service. How my group attracts the newcomer, welcomes the newcomer, and acts to keep the newcomer coming back are very important factors in the growth of Al-Anon as a whole as well as the growth of my group. Without the constant infusion of newcomers, the program can become stale and repetitious. This may cause regular members to abandon the group and possibly Al-Anon altogether.

Consider the group that ignores the newcomer who walks in the door. Would I have come back if no one welcomed me? As a newcomer I prefer not to be the focus of the meeting. But I can say that the welcome I received as I entered helped me to realize the effect that alcoholism had on my own life.

Where is the middle ground? A group that establishes a policy on how to greet a newcomer, how not to let the focus of the meeting be on answering all the newcomer's questions as though this is the person's only contact with Al-Anon, is one that will gain the most serenity. When the group reaches out, the members find help for themselves, even if the newcomer does not return.

Concept One shows me where my responsibility is. It is mine to take. No Intergroup, Information Service, district, Area, or WSO suggestion or directive can take the place of my responsibility as a member of my group or of the authority of my group in relationship to its conduct.

I LOVE Al-Anon, owe my life and health to Al-Anon, and want it to be there for those still suffering. Therefore, I selfishly serve Al-Anon. My service is important, but I could never do all that needs to be done to protect and assure Al-Anon's continued availability. I can't write the books alone. I can't answer all the calls. I can't send out all the information needed. But I can take responsibility for the pages I can write, the calls I can take, and the literature and information I can pass on. I am also responsible and have the authority to join with others in my small little corner of the world to see that jobs are done by those able to do that.

I AM
RESPONSIBLE
FOR MY LIFE

Personally, I interpret this Concept as an additional tool for my recovery. It reaffirms that I am responsible for my life. I can't expect others to do for me what I can do for myself, nor do I assume responsibility for them. I have responsibility for my life and can choose when to welcome others into it. We share together, work together, and grow individually.

Working Concept One

The ultimate responsibility and authority for Al-Anon world services belongs to the Al-Anon groups.

- What does Al-Anon world service do for us?
- Does my group take responsibility for supporting Al-Anon world services? In what ways?
- Do we support our district? Area? WSO?
- Do we participate in district and Assembly meetings? How?
- How do we keep ourselves informed?
- Does information from the Delegate get passed on to the District Representative? Group Representative? Group?

- * Do I trust in the process?
- * How well do I accept decisions of my district? My Area Assembly? The World Service Conference?
- * Do we hold regular business meetings?
- * Do we welcome newcomers?
- * For what part of my life am I ultimately responsible? What responsibilities might I share or delegate?
- * How do I contribute to the group conscience?
- * Referring to Tradition Two and Concept One, can I accept and support the group conscience when I don't agree with the outcome?
- * Do I express my gratitude for service work?