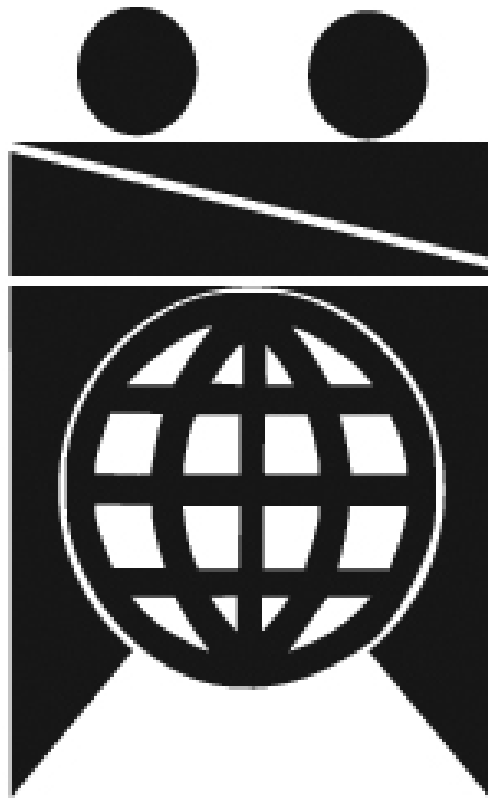


International Al-Anon General Services Meeting

Living Our Spiritual Principles

17th IAGSM



October 15 - 19, 2014
Virginia Beach, Virginia

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Twelve Concepts of Service

1. The ultimate responsibility and authority for Al-Anon world services belongs to the Al-Anon groups.
2. The Al-Anon Family Groups have delegated complete administrative and operational authority to their Conference and its service arms.
3. The right of decision makes effective leadership possible.
4. Participation is the key to harmony.
5. The rights of appeal and petition protect minorities and insure that they be heard.
6. The Conference acknowledges the primary administrative responsibility of the Trustees.
7. The Trustees have legal rights while the rights of the Conference are traditional.
8. The Board of Trustees delegates full authority for routine management of Al-Anon Headquarters to its executive committees.
9. Good personal leadership at all service levels is a necessity. In the field of world service the Board of Trustees assumes the primary leadership.
10. Service responsibility is balanced by carefully defined service authority and double-headed management is avoided.
11. The World Service Office is composed of selected committees, executives and staff members.
12. The spiritual foundation for Al-Anon's world services is contained in the General Warranties of the Conference, Article 12 of the Charter.

General Warranties of the Conference

In all proceedings the World Service Conference of Al-Anon shall observe the spirit of the Traditions:

1. that only sufficient operating funds, including an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle;
2. that no Conference member shall be placed in unqualified authority over other members;
3. that all decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and whenever possible, by unanimity;
4. that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy;
5. that though the Conference serves Al-Anon it shall never perform any act of government; and that like the fellowship of Al-Anon Family Groups which it serves, it shall always remain democratic in thought and action.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM) is to share the experience of Al-Anon national services around the world through its delegates. It will attempt to encourage the growth of a sound service structure while maintaining worldwide unity through the application of Al-Anon Traditions. It can also represent an expression of a worldwide group conscience.

Ultimately, this leads to the primary purpose of Al-Anon as a whole – to seek the best way to carry the Al-Anon message of recovery to families and friends of alcoholics amidst cultural and language differences.

Attendance

The following structures were represented at the 2014 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting:

Argentina

Silvina Hebe C.

Italy

Marcella G.

Switzerland (German-speaking)

Theri S.-B.

Australia

Rosalind M.
Gillian B.

Mexico

Catalina C.
Lourdes C.

UK & EIRE

Maureen M.

Finland

Kira S.
Minna K.

New Zealand

Paula B.
Joan G.

U.S. and Canada

Paula B.
Marilyn M.

France

Philippe D.

Poland

Malgorzata D.

International Coordination Committee (ICC)

Connie H.
Debbie G.
Ric B.
Barbara O.
Marsha W.

Germany

Uschi von E.
Susanne A.

South Africa

Gillian G.
Charles C.

The following structures were not able to send representation:

Austria

Guatemala

Peru

Belgium (Flemish-speaking)

Iceland

Portugal

Belgium (French-Speaking)

India

Spain

Brazil

Japan

Sweden

Colombia

Korea

Switzerland (French-speaking)

Costa Rica

Netherlands

Uruguay

Denmark

Norway

Venezuela

El Salvador

Paraguay

Opening Session

Introductions

The 17th International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM) opened on Thursday, October 16, 2014 at the Wyndham Hotel in Virginia Beach, Virginia with the Serenity Prayer. Representatives from 13 structures were warmly welcomed by Connie H., Chairperson of the World Service Office (WSO) International Coordination Committee (ICC).

The evening before the meeting began, International Representatives gathered for dinner. After the meal, the ICC Chairperson asked Delegates to introduce themselves and to “tell us something you would like us to know about you. Our spiritual principles know no boundaries within our worldwide fellowship.” The Co-Chairperson, Debbie G. roamed the room with a microphone as everyone present shared a bit about themselves.

The following morning, the ICC Chairperson introduced the keynote speaker, Gillian G., from South Africa, who shared a moving message on the IAGSM theme that emphasized Al-Anon’s spiritual principles. This was followed by the reading of the Twelve Traditions by the Delegate representing Argentina.

Throughout this three-day IAGSM, each session opened and closed with a representative reciting the Serenity Prayer in the language of their country. This brought everyone a greater sense of the diversity of our fellowship and that we are a worldwide family.

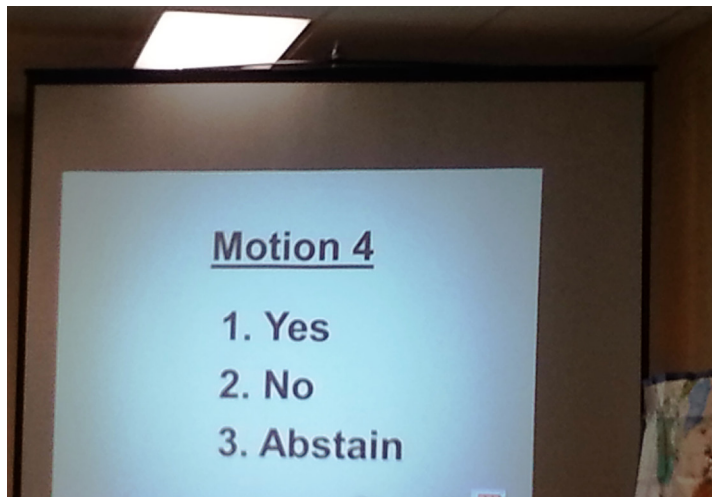


Roll Call and Flag Ceremony

Roll call at the 2014 IAGSM included a flag ceremony. The Chairperson invited each country’s Delegate(s) to introduce themselves, and place their national flag in its’ holder on the dais, and place a pin on a worldwide map marking the geographic location of their structure’s General Service Office (GSO). A row of flags that remained on the other side of the podium represented the GSOs that could not attend but were with us in spirit.

Voting Procedures

Electronic voting procedures were explained and use of the electronic devices was demonstrated. It was unanimously decided that a two-thirds majority would constitute substantial unanimity. The procedure for submitting a Motion was explained: Motions would be submitted in written format and read by the ICC Co-Chairperson; then the floor would be opened for discussion.



Keynote Speaker

Living Our Spiritual Principles

Gillian G., South Africa

I bring you greetings from the Service Structure in South Africa. Many of you experienced IAGSM in Cape Town in 2012; it still remains a warm and fuzzy memory and highlight for our membership.

While preparing for this sharing on the theme of “Living the Spiritual Principles,” I thought so much about the purpose of this IAGSM meeting and the significance of each and every word;

“The sharing of our collective expression of experience, strength, and hope; to seek the best way to carry Al-Anon’s message of recovery and represent an expression of the Worldwide Group Conscience, while maintaining unity.”

What a far cry those words, their tone, and their meaning are from the spirit of my family of origin. Reactions and actions had created road blocks in growth for me. I know that when I married, I brought that baggage into the marriage with me. I was miserable, mean, at times unlovable, immature, fearful, lonely, without much hope, and experienced little joy in my perception of “living.” In my opinion I had failed in the quest, my grand plan, to get my husband sober. A.A. did that with great success, and my ego was very bruised. I felt abandoned in my marriage as A.A. meetings, events, sponsorship, and fellowship visits gripped my husband’s time and attention. With great enthusiasm he plunged himself into recovery and I was, by my own choosing, not a part of that adventure. In the insanity of my own disease, after a year of unhappiness and a deteriorating, disconnected relationship, I reacted and retreated *to seek comfort with my still practicing alcoholic family of origin.*

God surely had a sense of humor, and when the penny finally dropped about and I realized the insanity of this decision, I returned to my sober husband and home. Within 24 hours I attended my first Al-Anon meeting, much to the astonishment of my husband. I did not realize then that I would find relief from my “dis-ease” and unhappiness. However I did not go with an open mind or with humility, as I had a high and mighty attitude, I had to be right and I was doing this my way.

God’s timing is perfect and great things do come to pass with His grace and the wisdom of the program. The whole process of change was and continues to be guided spiritually by my Higher Power. I was fortunate to land in a meeting well-grounded in Al-Anon’s 36 spiritual principles. So began my journey of working and accepting the principles



and that meant I had to sacrifice something—the denial that had been the shock absorber for my soul. It was all about change and for that I needed a willingness to surrender. This meant some discomfort and a fair amount of resistance on my part.

As suggested by my first Sponsor, I took action and prayed. She taught me to do an honest check on my motivation for change—did I want to punish another by my action? Or was it a genuine desire for a changed behavior or attitude on my part? Fortunately for me my dear Sponsor had a past like my own, yet had a serenity and joy of life that I really wanted. She encouraged me to write my own life story, my own *time-line*, and encouraged me to pray to my God for courage and strength to cope with my daily life. No longer shamed by secrets, I came to understand my own emotions. I had many unexpressed feelings to face. Those feelings gave me information about myself and I liked the fact that there was no need to confront everything at once—no need to race to the finish line. I listened to the wisdom of the shared experience, not only at the meetings, but expressed so beautifully in our Conference Approved Literature. This was an awakening when I realized that the sharing in our literature connected me to a *worldwide community* where I no longer felt isolated.

I discovered that it was okay for me to *not be in control* of everything at all times - to “Let Go and Let God.” I could trust God and this allowed me real freedom to work on myself while not controlling the universe. As a result, I had a great deal more time to uncover my own truths, to come to know myself, and to be honest about my limitations rather than trying to be perfect. The meetings taught me to share appropriately in an atmosphere of trust and the loving example of serenity of my fellow members restored my faith in the possibility of healthy relationships. Our short and crisp Slogans helped me when I was searching for solutions.

When I finally surrendered, the benefits were tangible – I received the gift of new feelings of serenity. It was essential to replace that denial with something better—these were new attitudes of faith, hope, courage, willingness, integrity, humility, and awareness. There was no quick fix, but a slow and gradual journey with many slips and slides along the way. There was a glimmer of hope about the possibility of change and a different future. Relationships with those I loved were fragile and required a great deal of attention and restoration. With my program tools, I could navigate through difficult situations. It became my passport to a better way of life.

My experience of this *language of the heart* in the meetings and literature brought a revelation of honesty, love, and truth. I have so much gratitude to my God for persevering with me again and again, for the gift of this program and the spirit in which it was given to me so freely, for the non-judgmental and unconditional love that I received at each meeting, for each encounter with my Al-Anon family at rallies, convention, and in service, and for the shared experience contained in our CAL literature.

The guiding lights of the Twelve Traditions aided the next step in my journey of growth. Instead of the “pity-pot party” I had been attending for years, I now felt buoyant and grateful for each encounter in the fellowship rooms. The unity of our common welfare, and progress toward greater love and tolerance for one another as expressed in the rooms, were key to restoring my relationships. I came to understand and uncover the unconditional love I had for the alcoholics in my life. My father developed alcoholic dementia and I am so grateful that I was able to express this love toward him in my thoughts, prayers, actions, and deeds until his death. The healthy communication at home with my husband and children began by using the newly learned habits of respect, patience, courtesy, and compassion. I learned to listen and to create a nonjudgmental space for those around me. We no longer walked on egg shells as a family.

I began to laugh at myself often and experienced authentic joy in the moment. Those wise words of my Sponsor continue to echo in my mind – “You are 100 percent responsible for your communication.” The undeserved surprises of joy, laughter, serenity, peace dabbed with a sense of humor, and enthusiasm are my greatest recovery gifts!

Miracles do happen, and as I was gently edged into service God helped me to experience miracles in my own life. The fellowship exposed me to a greater demonstration of the love of one human being for another. I saw that the more one gives, the more one has to give, and there have been many moments when the wonder and beauty of the fellowship have filled me to overflowing with love.

Responsibility, authority, accountability, and mutual trust are some of the qualities which were misplaced, misguided, and misunderstood in my family of origin. I used to fear authority figures. I rejected and did not appreciate, respect, or listen to my family members. When I realized

the leadership qualities and eloquent wisdom that were often expressed by my father, husband, and brothers, I was then inspired. It had been life threatening for me to make decisions, but with each new service exploit, that’s getting easier! I was encouraged to develop leadership qualities from the examples of those that have gone before me, who demonstrated that abundant vision for the future – they wanted me to succeed.

Service has helped me to enlarge my spiritual warehouse. While I will never be perfect, I will try to realize my full potential, sometimes very gradually, but other times in big bursts of enlightenment, like the experience of being here with you today. I remember so well, when first attending Area Assembly meetings as a Group Representative, experiencing the enthusiasm of a previous IAGSM delegate – she had me hanging on her every word for the year prior to and after her attending IAGSM sixteen years ago. I love the sharing in CAL about *bringing our mind to where our bodies are*. I would not have imagined in my wildest dreams that I would be here for the second time in Virginia Beach sharing with you. I want to really live in this moment, breath it in deeply, let it settle in my soul, and cherish it forever.

Al-Anon service forces me to have a program – it is too hard to *not* work the program while interacting with so many different people in service. I have come to practice mutual respect and take responsibility to learn from my mistakes. I want the best for our fellowship regardless of the many differences of opinion we each may hold. To achieve that goal, I must co-operate without forfeiting my integrity, without getting distracted from our commonality. In living the program, I have experienced that everything we need to complete our service is available in abundance and that I shouldn’t be limited in my thinking. With humility, I must ask for help and keep my focus on what unites us. This I have come to know intimately—that it is God’s abundant plan given to us through the Twelve Traditions and Concepts.

Being in service is not for reward or recognition. I understand that it is about giving back that which was so freely given. I feel immense gratitude each day for the opportunity to serve, as fear had often dictated my behavior. I love the little well-quoted, and very appropriate story of the turtle, “A turtle cannot walk, it cannot move forward, until it sticks its neck out.” Being in service takes courage; the courage to leave home, family, work life, country and travel afar to represent my structure and express my structure’s ideas in the worldwide group conscience.

Service leaves space for love, understanding, and harmony. In my undertakings in service, I have understood the principle of listening and learning, respecting another’s opinion, acting as I would like others to act toward me, and to always be courteous to others. Service responsibility encouraged me to practice restraint in what I say, how I say things, and be judicious in what I write. Does it need to be said, does it need to be said by me, or does it need to be

said at all? It has reminded me that I must remain teachable. There are always new ideas to embrace, new challenges to overcome, new technology to embrace in our ever changing world, the rising price of literature and shipping, fewer groups, and consequently diminishing contributions.

I know, without a shadow of a doubt that Al-Anon still carries the most valuable message of hope that is expressed in these precious 36 principles, and I am sure, that over the next few days we will learn much more from one another. These next few days of our IAGSM will inspire us to find solutions to these challenges, and with the assistance of the WSO's store of wealth and experience, we will come away with more ideas and opportunities than we ever thought possible. The collective voice and conscience, when bound together through IAGSM, forms a strong and enduring international fellowship, secure and moving forward well into the future.

The Twelve Concepts of Service are sound principles that have opened my mind to hearing the opinions of others, balancing my service role, and leaving room for growth for all. I am continually comforted that we can still have our own interpretation of those Concepts, while reminding me I am no longer alone. Our differing opinions and perceptions have value and there is often a constructive exchange of new ideas at Conference, Board, or similar services meetings. So I continue to learn to participate, listen, consider the various opinions, trust myself and others, delegate tasks, work in an atmosphere of harmony and co-operation, and not be ruled by my emotions. The Concepts help me set and keep boundaries, protect me from extremes, find the freedom to live with courage and joy, find the middle ground, and have a deep respect for the expression of democracy and freedom in our fellowship. If I make mistakes or seem short tempered or tired I have learned to forgive myself first and then

others. It is worth the effort and much spiritual goodness comes from the process of forgiveness. I now have a spiritual life with much deeper understanding and happiness.

What a privilege it is to be here among you—the International Coordinating Committee, the International Delegates, your families and friends—knowing that we are striving daily in our journey to practice these spiritual principles of Al-Anon in all our affairs. This could not be without our Higher Power's guidance and love as He empowers us in this living program of recovery. We need to nurture one another's growth in the group sharing this week through our love and support. Those of us struggling for answers personally, or for our structure, will find the strength and encouragement to continue. We are exactly where we are meant to be and the answers will be revealed at the right moment.

May you carry the spiritual guidance of our 36 principles with you each moment of IAGSM, may you laugh and experience joy, love, and peace, and may the God of your understanding continue to guide you in the valuable service work that you are courageously undertaking on behalf of your structure.

So let this sharing of our collective expression of experience, strength, and hope seek to find the best way to carry Al-Anon's message of recovery and represent an expression of the Worldwide Group Conscience, while maintaining unity.

May the God of your understanding bless you abundantly in every moment of this IAGSM.

General Session

Communication in the Links of Service and Concepts One, Two and Three

Rosalind M., Australia

The Australian General Service Office (AGSO) opened in Melbourne in 1977, after a representative attended the World Service Conference (WSC) in 1975 to investigate the World Service structure. She encouraged us to use the World Service Office (WSO) model as outlined in Concept Eleven. The first permanent Australian Service Conference (Conference) was held with Delegates elected from nine Areas. The Conference agreed to accept WSO policy “in total.” This decision has proven to be a great success for the Australian fellowship. It meant that we did not need a Policy Committee in our AGSO structure.

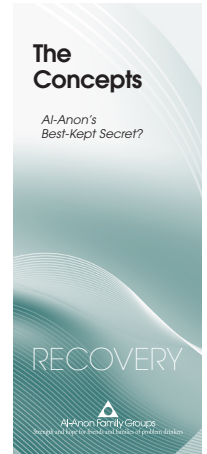
The AGSO is made up of the General Service Board (GSB), the Executive Committee, staff and volunteers. The GSB consists of eight members, two sustaining Trustees being the General Secretary and the *Austra-Link* Editor, five In-Town Trustees and one Out-of-Town-Trustee. The GSB meets quarterly. The Executive Committee is the administrator of the AGSO and meets monthly. It is made up of the General Secretary, the Deputy General Secretary, the Editor of *Austra-Link*, the Treasurer, the Selected Committee Chairpersons, and up to two other volunteers who are not members of the GSB. The GSB, together with the Executive Committee, directs the business operations of the AGSO, observing the By-Laws of Al-Anon Family Groups (Australia) Pty Ltd., under which we operate in Australia. Except in great emergency, the GSB would not take any action liable to greatly affect Al-Anon in Australia as a whole without consulting the Conference. However it is understood that the GSB shall reserve the right to decide which of its decisions may require referral to the Conference.

The Conference is made up of the nine Area Delegates plus AGSO members. The voting members are the nine Area Delegates, and four GSB members. Therefore the voting ratio is set at two-thirds elected Delegates to one-third AGSO. Each of the nine Areas is divided into districts and the groups are linked within these districts.

Concepts One, Two, Three, and Communication

The first three Concepts say that, “the ultimate responsibility and authority for Al-Anon world services belongs to the Al-Anon groups;” that the groups have then “delegated complete administrative and operational authority to their Conference and its service arms,” and that the members of these service arms have the right of decision which “makes effective leadership possible.” The Al-Anon symbol is a triangle enclosing a circle. The triangle is a self-supporting

structure and our Al-Anon structure is based on many triangles. The first two Concepts describe an upside down triangle with the groups at the base and the Conference at the point. Concept Three allows the business to be done by giving all world service Boards, committees, and executives the right to decide which matters they may properly dispose of, and on which they will report, consult, or ask specific directions. It is trust that makes the Al-Anon triangles self-supporting. With the groups delegating their administrative and operational authority to the Conference and its service arms, and trusting them to make the right decisions, Al-Anon can pursue its primary purpose, as described in Tradition Five, to help families of alcoholics.



What Were the Challenges Australian Al-Anon Encountered in Relation to Communication in the Links of Service?

Even though the question posed for us to answer in this paper was “what *were* the challenges,” there are quite a number of current challenges which we still need to work on in relation to communication in the links of service in Australia. We know that God will remove them in His time, while we continue doing what footwork we can.

Service Positions

With modern day challenges it seems to be getting more difficult to find members who are willing to take up service positions as Group Representatives (GRs) and District Representatives (DRs) among others. One characteristic of the fellowship in Australia is the large number of small groups with less than five members. This means there is a greater proportion of the fellowship needed to be in service at the group level. Roles can at times be filled by members who are not right for the job, in that they may not have enough Al-Anon knowledge or experience, making it difficult for them to be able to convey the information accurately. Recently the AGSO received an e-mail from a member asking if it was correct when her GR came back from a District meeting saying that groups were not to hold group conscience meetings any more. This GR had got the conversation held at District confused. They had been saying that regular business meetings were not called group

conscience meetings and to not use that term for a business meeting. Al-Anon Australia has a guideline *Group Conscience Meeting* (GX2) where the term “group conscience meeting” is reserved for the time when a meeting is held to try to resolve a very serious problem which has arisen in a group such as theft of group funds or inappropriate behavior of members. [This is an Australian interpretation and is not used by the WSO.]

Being able to pass on a service role and communicate the job responsibilities to the next person is vital in the continuation of the roles. Proper handovers can be an issue where retiring members have had a difficult time in their role and just want to leave the position. We need to encourage members to have Service Sponsors.

We need service members who have a passion and love of the program, who love to be with people, and who are willing to share this with others. Service needs to be fun. Sometimes it may be better to leave a position vacant than to have it filled by the wrong person.

Membership Misunderstanding about the Structure and How Al-Anon Works

Concept Two says, “The groups have delegated complete authority to their Conference.” The Conference doesn’t govern the fellowship, however there are some who believe AGSO is making decisions for the fellowship so they won’t do anything they think “those” people at AGSO decided. These members don’t understand that it was the Conference, the voice of their groups, not AGSO that made the decisions. There are also members who don’t understand why the Conference and AGSO *aren’t* directing the groups. There are also groups that feel that they can instruct their DR or Delegate to vote a certain way. They don’t understand that the members in these positions are trusted servants who according to Concept Three, have the right of decision to vote based on information provided at the decision-making meeting. These misunderstandings lead to confusion and inaction which in turn affects the communication in the links of service.

Delegates’ Reports from Conference

In the past we have faced challenges of Delegates finding it difficult to prepare and deliver their reports from Conference. Delegates found it difficult to determine what to report and what were the main issues that came out of Conference. This could have been due to lack of understanding, or due to the difficulty of condensing so much information into a report in a manner that would convey the correct messages to the fellowship. Busy lives can also affect how this report comes together. Another challenge in relation to the Delegates’ reports was the lack of time some Area Assemblies would allow a Delegate to present their report. As a result, there were groups that didn’t hear much about Conference.

Distance

This can be quite a challenge for communication within the links of service. Most of our Areas are very large geographically. Members in North Queensland will travel five hours or more to attend Area Committee Meetings—though they do say they enjoy the meetings in the car on the way. It is not only the time needed to travel but also the money required that can be a challenge. It is often difficult to get members willing to commit to District Representative positions because of this. The Northern NSW Area Committee holds their meetings over a weekend once every three months in a different part of their vast Area. This enables the members of that local district to come to meet the Area Committee members. They will hold the district meeting at some time over that weekend as well. Technology is providing one solution with regular e-mail communication and video conferencing being used for district and Area meetings.

Technology

This did initially present challenges in communication in the links of service. Al-Anon members and groups are often not open to change, and it took a while for Areas and districts to accept e-mail as a means of communicating with each other. Most committees require members to have an “e-mail buddy” if they don’t have access to a computer themselves. One Area that does not have an office secretary still has difficulty finding someone who will take responsibility for managing and dealing with the Area e-mail.

Overcoming These Challenges

These challenges in communication in the links of service can cause conflict in the fellowship at all levels. These conflicts can then affect our communication with each other—a merry-go-round! What these conflicts do, of course, is erode our ability to undertake our primary purpose of helping families of alcoholics.

Communication at General Service Board and Executive Committee Level

The lines of communication work really well at the GSB and Executive Committee level. The Executive Committee meets monthly and several of its members are in the office on a weekly basis, so we can talk about things together between meetings. One reason we changed our GSB composition back to two sustaining Trustees was so that our General Secretary had another GSB member in the office to be able to discuss issues with on a regular basis.

The GSB will make decisions after e-mail conversations, if need be, between meetings. Our Deputy General Secretary (DGS) will ensure we have everything we need well before the GSB meeting so that we can all come prepared, leaving us with more time to devise our Strategic Plan which includes improving communication in the links of service. The DGS summarizes the GSB discussions for each of us to e-mail to our Area Delegate buddies. This enables them

to feel part of the bigger picture all year around and allows them to get to know what the GSB is working on and how it is going between Conferences.

Area Delegates' Report From Conference— What We Are Doing

In 2006, the Conference agreed to send the General Secretary to the World Service Conference (WSC) in 2007. We were able to implement a few of the tools the WSC used at the Australian Service Conference. One of these was the “buddy system” for Delegates. Place cards with a list of “How to make the best of your Conference” dot points on the back facing the Delegate has helped make the Conference more effective. We have also suggested Delegates use the format for the verbal presentation of their reports that is used in the *WSC Summaries*. This format suggests Area Delegates share successes, new ideas/projects, concerns, and important lessons learned in the previous 12 months. Many of the Delegates use this format for their written reports as well.

Another idea was the “Hot Topic” sheet. This sheet helps Delegates outline the information they need to put in their reports to their Areas. In recent years we have also helped the Delegates by providing them with a succinct summary of Conference within days of them returning home, that they can use as the “skeleton” for their reports to their Area. The result of all this is that we are hoping to ensure the Delegates are receiving and reporting the correct message. In 2013, the Conference agreed, in principle, to sending an AGSO representative to the WSC at more frequent intervals. Before 2007, the last time we had sent a member to the WSC was 1975 (32 years before). It was felt that the wording of this Motion gave us the freedom to send someone again sometime before 2039!

Hearing the Voice of the Fellowship

Area Committees can submit groups' concerns to the Conference Committee as an agenda item. The Conference Committee decides whether to deal with it as an agenda item or put it in the Ask-it-Basket section at the end of the Conference. The Delegates can also bring up concerns or suggestions in General Business. Sometimes the concerns brought up by the Delegates before the Conference are assessed as better for a workshop that is held during the Conference.

An Agenda Item that was brought to the 2013 Australian Service Conference was about how to differentiate between “crosstalk” and “loving interchange” in group meetings. The Conference decided to alter our Guideline by removing the dot point that included the term “crosstalk” and insert another dot point saying that we do share what worked for us and so we have loving interchange in the meetings. The Guideline notes that “if we don't have loving interchange, what is the purpose of the meetings?”

In General Business at the 2014 Australian Service Conference, a Delegate raised the issue about keeping

the Al-Anon focus in the sharing at our meetings. The Conference decided to ask the GSB to review the last sentence in our opening statement which says that “this group asks members of other anonymous fellowships to remain anonymous and focus on the Al-Anon program.” It was thought that it may not be strong enough.

Improving Fellowship and Unity on an Ongoing Basis

Members of the AGSO Executive Committee and the GSB have attended Area Assemblies around the country regularly. This has helped dissipate the perception of “those” people at AGSO and shown that we are ordinary Al-Anon members. From reading the *World Service Conference Summaries*, the GSB is aware of the Together Empowering Al-Anon Members (TEAM) Events. These visits are not quite the same as a TEAM Event, however, we do have our Australian Service Seminars (ASS) which have been held every five years. Our last ASS was hosted by the South Queensland Area in October 2012. The numbers were lower than they had been at the previous one, but there was lots of fellowship and fun. The expense and distance members need to travel to come together at a national Australian event is the main reason numbers were lower.

The Friday night of Conference is open to the general membership. The program for that night includes a couple of Delegates and an AGSO member sharing their service stories, a returning Delegate sharing how he/she presented his/her previous year's Conference Report at the Area Assembly, and a PowerPoint presentation of the Australian Al-Anon structure.

One of the benefits of introducing an Out-of-Town Trustee (OTT) is the experience the outgoing OTT gets to take back to their Area. The OTT can only serve one three-year term on the GSB, as opposed to two three-year terms for the In-Town Trustees. Because the OTT serves for only one term, more Areas will benefit from their experience in a shorter time frame. The OTT does not represent their Area when they are on the GSB, they represent Al-Anon Australia, but the Area benefits when that person goes back and serves in their Area.

Our *Austra-Link* magazine has introduced a number of new sections in relation to the fellowship in the last few years. During 2014, each month's edition refers to a Tradition as a tool for healing conflict. Every month has a page on “News and Views from AGSO” and the Public Information (PI) calendar's monthly event is reproduced. The “Mythbusters” section has certainly shown us that members do read *Austra-Link* going by the responses we receive in the office. A discussion on the following myths has been published in recent times:

- A Group Chairperson cannot share or comment in a meeting.
- Are there rules in Al-Anon?
- Al-Anon is anonymous.

- Al-Anon cannot use social media on the Internet.
- My Al-Anon Sponsor dictates the way I do my Steps.

We had a session at Conference this year showcasing our Web site and showing the Delegates what is up there and how to find everything. Conference decided in 2011 to pay for a professionally developed Web site. The AGSO can post our Public Information. *Spread the Word* quarterly newsletter, the *Alateen News*, *Alateen Link-Up*, and shortly our *Conference Summary*. Each Area has a section on the Web site where they can post their newsletters, literature order forms, group update forms, meeting lists, and upcoming events. Slowly, the membership is beginning to use it. In the future, the Web site will be the first place members will look for all the information they need.

In 2013, we were honored to have the Executive Director of the World Service Office (WSO) visit Australia. This visit was arranged in conjunction with Al-Anon New Zealand. He spent about three weeks with us visiting all of the major cities before going on to New Zealand. He shared his personal story with us and talked about service. There were discussions on the Concepts and a workshop on conflict resolution using the new tools for conflict resolution. He outlined Al-Anon's spiritual principles which inform our recovery and help us live out Concept Nine on a daily basis, hopefully encouraging others into service.

A number of Areas, districts, and groups have followed up after the WSO Executive Director's visit with workshop days on Conflict Resolution; Public Information; Service; Sharing Experience, Strength, and Hope, and Al-Anon Sponsorship.

The links of service continue with Al-Anon Australia's regular attendance at the International Al-Anon General Service Meeting (IAGSM). We believe sending Delegates to the IAGSM is a vital link to world services. Like at an Al-Anon meeting, we hear others' experience, strength, and hope, and share ours. Being a part of the worldwide unity means our triangle is intact and we are self-supporting. Past IAGSM Delegates have been a great resource to our fellowship.

Benefits the GSO Has Experienced by Discussing This Topic

With all of these events and our continuing conversations, members are aware of how the structure works and accept that the responsibility and authority for Al-Anon belongs to the groups. A momentum has been growing since we came back from the 2012 IAGSM. Excitement grew after seeing the "Hope in a Bottle Campaign" that South Africa did. The workshop held at the Australian Service Conference in May 2013 was "Our Vision for Al-Anon" which was done as a "gallery walk." The ideas that came from the workshop are being looked at in the development of our Strategic Plan. Planning was done at that Conference in relation to the WSO Executive Director's visit in August 2013. Al-Anon Australia had received a bequest from a member, and we were using some of that money to pay for his visit. Discussion was held at the 2012 Conference on Warranty One and the balance between prudence and hoarding. With AGSO showing by example and spending some of our Reserve Fund on his visit, Areas have begun to forward money held in their Reserve Funds to AGSO. In 2013, our donations increased by 40 percent from the previous year. The AGSO Reserve Fund was still only 66 percent of annual operating expenses after we received the bequest, but the GSB decided, despite this, to use some of the bequest money to do something positive for Al-Anon. The inspiration the members felt listening to the WSO Executive Director has continued to be reflected in increased donations.

The Conference Committee and the GSB are quite pleased with how well the Conference is working and how well the Delegates' reports to their Assemblies are being received. We often share how certain Conference decisions and discussions are beginning to take shape in our groups quite soon after Conference.

Always coming back to the spiritual principles of Concepts One, Two, and Three helps us sort out the practical issues of what is our responsibility at the GSB. The spiritual principle of service is built into Concept Two. The GSB and AGSO Committees are directly responsible to those they serve—the groups. The GSB is conscious of this, and discussions around how can we strengthen our groups always come from the point of view of encouragement, not direction. Discussing the fellowship as a whole, the links of service, and what it is we can do always brings us back to humbleness and the honor we feel to be serving the fellowship.

Discussion

Following the presentation, IAGSM members shared how their structures are working to overcome challenges in communication. For many structures, Skype has become a useful tool for some of their Board and committee meetings to meet the challenges of distance and time.

The idea of “Hot Topics” is helping Delegates prepare reports. Workshops and presentations about finances are increasing understanding of Concepts One, Two, and Three.

TEAM Events have helped communications as well. Delegates reported that many of their successes came as a benefit of attending the IAGSM.

A Delegate shared that the growth of our Alateen groups was brought about from our last IAGSM in South Africa through Alateen Members Involved in Alateen Service (AMIAS) information. We also now have TEAM Events. The idea was embraced quickly and it is working well in a short space of time. Areas bid for the Board to come to an Area. A list of what topics are wanted is covered. In a PowerPoint we talked about finance because groups in the Area were not sending to the GSO. We are also using “Hot Topics” sheets at our Conference. To increase transparency, we now e-mail a Delegates newsletter after each Board meeting with events allowing Delegates to share in their Areas.

Another Delegate reported that we recognized that we needed to empower our groups as we see them as our future trusted servants. Time was set aside at the Area Assembly to present a short talk on a “hot topic.” We did a Tradition, then discussed the “hot topic” such as Sponsorship, Service Sponsorship, Anonymity, and Public Outreach Within the Group. It has made groups come to Assembly. We encourage them to come and to present, and bring a “team” with them. This has helped create participation above group level. We also have a roster for lunch at Assembly. Every group takes turns providing lunch for a day. A different group is invited each day. They come bringing a team and their pots to warm up the lunch.

Another Delegate shared, “We have communication challenges with technology. The Board holds meetings using Skype. Our GSO office has a ‘dead spot’ so we have to crowd into a small space to hold meetings with our Areas because they are widely separated. We also found that technology can break down, and it takes time to work.”

The Delegate from New Zealand advised, “We used Skype when our south island was snowed in during our Conference, which allowed the Board meeting to continue. Another instance when it was beneficial was when two Board members were ill and not able to attend, so we held the Board meetings via Skype. This allowed them to be able to attend two-thirds of the meetings. Skype has allowed Conference Committee meetings to be richer.”

Another Delegate shared, “Communication problems are better with our Board and services. We focus on achievements. At our GSO meetings we are studying the Traditions

and Concepts. We have created games acting out Traditions, and members guess which one it is.”

A Delegate responded, “Communication has its challenges with distance. There are islands in my country with a number of groups. Each has a Conference. How do structures balance the composition of their Conference representation?”

A Delegate shared, “Our structure has 18 districts with one Delegate per district. Members without a district have voice but no vote. Delegates come to office meetings to discuss topics of the fellowship. We use our magazine to send information to the fellowship.”

In sharing ways they have strengthened communications within their structure, a Delegate commented, “We have problems with the communication links in our structure. When someone is talking, we only hear the message we are open to. Delegates need experience in how the structure works. We have changed the way our Conference works. Now it is possible for every Delegate to participate in all three workshops so they get the full message of the Conference. This helps in their job as Delegate. They also asked us not to direct people but to give them the opportunity to grow through guidelines. Delegates also asked to be involved in development of workshops so now we are trying to include them in this process. People feel included now. RTs are holding meetings where several Areas meet to discuss what is happening at the Area level, GSO, and Board. This has helped in communication, but there are problems between members not keeping to Traditions. Trustees were invited to attend to support them in discussions of the problems. Executive Committee meetings are Skyped. Having a five member committee helps reduce costs and meetings are shorter and more frequent now.”

A Delegate explained, “In the U.S. and Canada structure there is a wide variation in group and district sizes. Areas can split, but may have only one Delegate from each Area. The WSC was asked to look at their Area structure and ways to improve representation, communication, and voice. So far, no one has come back with a better plan. Areas are broken out by state and can separate if there are over 400 groups.

“The WSO sends an electronic newsletter to the groups within the U.S. and Canada, its service structure. DRs are encouraged to bring it to the groups. It has information on what is happening at the WSO or about a survey in process. To encourage communication between Committees, there are Discussion Boards on e-Communities. Members of a Committee can throw out a question for discussion and ask that it go out in the Areas. After each quarterly Board meeting, there is a letter from the Chairperson of the Board that goes out to Delegates about what the Board of Trustees is discussing or a decision it has made. Trustees then call Delegates two weeks later to follow up and answer questions

or clarify any miscommunication. A new communication tool on a three-year trial is called 'Meet the Board.' This is an opportunity for the Board to go to an Area and spend the day talking to members in the Area. This helps members better understand what the Board of Trustees and Executive Committee do, and is a way, in a face-to-face meeting, for the Board and Executive Committee to hear about big, forward-thinking topics. The Board likes to look at things the Areas are concerned about in terms of Al-Anon in the future.

"The roles of Conference members are reviewed at each World Service Conference. This helps Delegates better understand WSC or staff decisions. The Chairperson of the Board's letter to all WSC members is on the Members Web site and is available in English, Spanish, and French. The links of service do sometimes break down, so this gives every member who wants information, access. Open Board and Open Policy meetings during the WSC give Delegates the opportunity to sit and watch and see how they happen and hear topic discussions. Delegates get to see the depth and completeness of discussions. Prior to WSC, Delegates get together, with the Board and Executive Committee as alliances, to hear what is going on (concerns and successes) in the Areas. At Board meetings the Board gets to sit in on Executive Committee meetings so it helps the Board under-

stand discussions in the Executive Committee because the Board has to vote to approve new Executive Committee decisions."

A Delegate commented, "There are many groups with small numbers in my structure. I do not recognize my structure in what was said. We need to better understand structure and how it works. The four Trustees are now greatly involved in Executive matters but do not see a separation between them. There is one paid employee, and one who spends one day a week to be responsible for the GSO. We are far from strategic planning. We are a top down country. We need to encourage group members to be involved at the group level. There is a need to create relationships with communities and the media. Our Regions/Areas work well. Regional committees meet every three months. They share experience with groups and interact with the national level. Public outreach is a priority for us. We need to devise a strategy for this. Right now this service is coordinated at the regional level as much as possible. Trustees are involved in everything. There are 25 Delegates to the Conference and 12 service members. The length of the Conference is at the conclusion of Conference. We identify topics from the regions and put the best ones for discussion the next year on the board."

Attracting Volunteers As It Ties to the Spiritual Principles in Concepts Four and Ten

Uschi von E., Germany

The German structure is quite similar to the U.S. and Canada structure except in size. We have about 650 groups. Our General Service Office (GSO) at Essen works with two employees-- one working full-time and one part-time. Our full-time employee functions as the At-Large Trustee. Our Board of Trustees consists of ten Al-Anon members and meets three times a year. Several Committees support the work of the Board of Trustees. Our Conference meets on a yearly basis and includes the Trustees, Area Delegates, Chairs of Committees, and some others.

Attracting volunteers can be a challenge in all levels of service. Some positions might be easier to fill than others. In my experience it often depends on the amount of responsibility involved—the more responsibility, the fewer volunteers. Some of the reasons are: missing knowledge of what is expected of the person who is supposed to fill a specific service position, fear of not being good enough, unwillingness to commit the time and effort, and many more.

How do we use the spiritual principles in Concepts Four and Ten in our German structure?

Concept Four states that, *“Participation is the key to harmony.”*

This is true in all areas of service. Participating by speaking or listening at a meeting, making coffee, or arranging chairs can help the newcomer feel he or she belongs to the group. The right to vote gives the Group Representative (GR) at the district meeting or Area Assembly, or the Delegate at the Conference, the feeling of being wanted and needed because we invite them to participate at this level as well.

This is important because the family disease of alcoholism often shows the symptoms of isolation and mistrust. When being invited to participate in service, our members cannot feel isolated (at least we make it pretty difficult for them). They also learn that we trust them. My first service experience was wonderful. Nobody told me how I should do it unless I asked and nobody told me I wasn't good enough. All I got was praise and encouragement—and this from a group of people that I thought didn't know me all that well (was I wrong!). The unconditional love and trust expressed by Al-Anon members motivated me to try other service positions.

Also, whenever a group conscience is called for, regardless of whether it is at the group level or at a meeting of the Board of Trustees, we all have a vote as the extended voice of our Higher Power. This way we cannot mistrust the group, because we all have a say in the group's decisions. This does attract volunteers.

We do have problems getting enough volunteers for the position of what would be the Area Delegate in the U.S.

and Canada structure. Part of the problem is that whenever the Delegates feel left out of decisions, conflict arises at the German Service Conference between Delegates and the Board of Trustees. Even though there is enough room for discussion and questions at the Conference, financial matters and the need for control by some members of the Conference causes problems. To give the Delegates insight in the work of the Policy Committee and the Board of Trustees, those meetings are held directly before the Conference and they are open for visitors. A limited number of Al-Anon members may also visit the Conference. Those guests may not speak or vote, but they are allowed to get a first-hand view of the fact that, even in those meetings, there are only Al-Anon friends doing their best to help Al-Anon as a whole to function and grow. The offer to attend (if not entirely to participate in) those meetings is made in the spirit of unity and participation in Al-Anon. We also hope to attract volunteers for the position as Delegate, for chairing a Committee, and becoming an IAGSM Delegate, or even a Trustee.

The Board of Trustees and the Policy Committee also encourage service sponsorship as an important tool especially in service positions which include a lot of responsibilities. At the Conference, new members are automatically given a Sponsor to show them around the venue and explain the proceedings of the Conference. The knowledge of directly available help alleviates fears of the unknown and makes the newcomer feel welcome. A good service experience shared by one Al-Anon friend at this level may encourage others to become a Delegate.

Any Al-Anon member may participate on any service level, if he or she wishes. Some service positions come with more responsibilities than others, but none are more or less important than others. All have in common that they need clearly defined job descriptions to avoid conflict. It is important to let people know what is expected of them, if they are volunteering for a service position.

This is one of the reasons, why Concept Ten states that, *“Service responsibility is balanced by carefully defined service authority and double-headed management is avoided.”*

This Concept implies that responsibility and authority go together. The right of decision makes good performance in service positions possible. If we don't want to make puppets out of our Al-Anon members in service, we need to give them the freedom to decide for themselves when to get help (or a group conscience) and when and how to go ahead. Being allowed to make their own mistakes and learn from them, being trusted to do their best, and being allowed to do things their way as long as it does not hurt the group

or Al-Anon as a whole, encourages our members to exceed their abilities and to grow through service. In an atmosphere of trust and well-defined service responsibilities, unnecessary conflict is avoided which makes it easier or even desirable to take on a service position. This is important on the level of group services and in the Areas.

It is absolutely vital in the Committees and in the Board of Trustees. They could not function if they were not allowed to make decisions. Our whole structure would not work. A simple example is the Executive Committee in the German structure. This Committee helps our staff to make decisions like buying new computers. If they had to wait for approval of the Board of Trustees or even the Conference, our office might not be able to work for many weeks or even months. This is absolutely unacceptable. Thus, the Committee's responsibility—deciding day-to-day expenses for the German service office—comes with the authority to do so. The members of the Committee make their decisions based on the information they get from our staff and report to the Board of Trustees. The approval or correction of decisions by the Board helps the members of the Executive Committee to grow in and into their service position and to develop self-esteem.

Our structure is still developing. We allow ourselves the luxury of rotation of service. This means, we get newcomers at every Conference, and here I go back to the conflicts between Delegates and the Board of Trustees. Our service positions are clearly defined which helps a lot in avoiding conflict and is a big step towards clarity. Unfortunately, not every newcomer (Delegate, Trustee or other) is aware of this fact or understands the job to which he or she is assigned. Maybe this is also lucky, as we need to review and re-discuss

Discussion

Delegates shared their structure's experiences attracting volunteers using the spiritual principles in Concepts Four and Ten.

"During our last Conference we did a workshop with the help of an outside facilitator. Participants were asked to break into small groups and to do an 'appreciative interview' on someone they didn't know. We had to discover and appreciate our own 'highlight.' We were told not to be modest, and to say what we were good at to the person we hadn't worked with before. We were to share with them the basic service experience—the 'highlight' was what we had achieved or what we could possibly achieve. The facilitator reminded us not to be modest, that it is more about dreaming. We were asked to evaluate ourselves. This is what makes our work lively in service, and that's why we were successful in our service jobs. From this 'change interview' we came away with a different demeanor because we shared our highlights. It was

responsibilities and authority each year. But our clarity is based on the fact that, about twenty years ago, the German Conference decided to follow the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27) of the U.S. and Canada structure as far as possible. This was done in the spirit of Concept Ten, as our friends at the time felt they wanted clarity to avoid conflict between those who thought we needed to do structure "our" way, and those who wanted to follow the *Service Manual* and the experience of the WSO service structure. The German structure is still different from the one in North America. It has to be, due to legal and cultural differences, but we do rely on the experiences written in the *Service Manual*. After having solved this problem, we are now able to work and function as a whole, and we do have a lot less conflict than before because we have clearly defined jobs and guidelines in our structure.

Clearly defined service positions make for more volunteers, as our fellow friends in Al-Anon know what is expected of them. Working in the spirit of Concept Ten is giving them the freedom to decide how and when to do their job alone and when to get help. One good experience in service encourages our members to try different service positions and maybe take on a little more responsibility.

My personal responsibility in attracting volunteers is to share my experiences in service, my growth, my understanding of our structure, and the program. In addition, I have received love and understanding in every single service position I have held. When I made mistakes, I learned from them, and I was supported whenever I asked for help. In Al-Anon I am never alone and I am part of a very big "we." When I share the joy of service, others may want the same, and start to do service.

positive reinforcement of the principle of attraction. Praise and encouragement attracts. This has led to new conversation, ideas, and thoughts. It was all about the position we were in when we got into service. We are now doing this in Areas and RSS workshops as a way to start the conversation and to start a positive way of thinking about service. People support what they create. Sponsorship helps guide us through service."

"There are several successes in our structure. Our Conference Committee developed job descriptions for the Conference so people know what is expected before commit-



ting, The GSO offered short-term tasks, or a specific task, which the members liked. We use scribes and proof readers at Conference. The Task Forces have an outcome and descriptions. Knowledge-Based Decision-Making to Reach an Informed Group Conscience (KBDM) helps shorten the length of Board meetings. Sometimes we talk about sponsorship, service to the group, and the joy in service. We use food as part of their public outreach projects, providing an opportunity for people to talk while socializing. Joyfulness, remembering to say thank you in a heartfelt manner for a job well done, and thanking the Chair of the meeting for doing the job, promote attraction.”

“We began two years ago with a DR meeting reviewing our structure. We had challenges in getting people involved in participation. At our last Conference, the Board tried to increase transparency and show that it was not just the Board making decisions. It is challenging to get people to say their opinion. They are afraid and want to be perfect so we must go slowly.”

“We have held open meetings with people in service to share their experience of service—the joys, growth, and understanding of things in the program. Members are able to ask questions and get details. From the IAGSM, we decided that Board meetings could be open and Delegates can participate without vote. Mistrust is diminishing and there is less ‘we and they’ between the Board and Conference. This has been helpful in attracting volunteers to service. At the end of Conference, Delegates share what service meant to them during their term, which has created enthusiasm.”

“Part of the job description of a Board member is to encourage others and be on the lookout for someone to guide into service, especially for standing committees. The Literature Selected Committee Chairperson position was vacant for years. We were job-sharing literature distribution in shipping literature orders. Young adult volunteers have jobs so it is difficult finding day volunteers. To attract new

volunteers, we invited sharings of less than 25 words on the benefits of service that we include in our newsletter. We also put the job descriptions of jobs available in our monthly magazine.”

“People are willing to take service positions in the group where they feel comfortable. We take newcomers along to service meetings at the regional Assembly. One region volunteered to organize our national Conference. They held nineteen meetings over a year-and a half. There were nineteen new volunteers! We observed unconditional love at work. There were members with fewer than six months in the program and long-timers. They said they were delighted to do their job welcoming people. From that, many decided to take positions with greater responsibility. There was a climate of love. It made people feel happy, comfortable, and supported. We stressed qualities. Ideas were discussed and many were taken.”

“At the national level we have conflicts between service Committees and the Board of Trustees. There is a lack of job descriptions. Committees are supposed to be advisory Committees but they feel they are not consulted by the Board. We also need rotation. Long-time members have criticized the Board on numerous occasions about what is going on ‘up there.’ They use Concept Five to criticize. First we have to create a climate of trust and unconditional love. There must be a constructive, loving atmosphere rather than tension. It is a responsibility at all levels to keep a safe atmosphere. We can express opinions and have open debates, but not nasty behaviors and criticism.”

A Delegate commented, “We are a worldwide fellowship. We all have the same issues, concerns, and successes. We can focus more on explaining what a role is and what it is not. There is always concern about enough time to give. Take the mystery out of a service role and get more volunteers by saying, ‘I will be with you; pick up the phone; ask questions. We can do it together.’”

How Do We Use Our Spiritual Principles to Deal with Conflict?

Theri S., German-speaking Switzerland

When I received the topic to present at the 17th International Al-Anon General Service Meeting (IAGSM) in Virginia Beach, I asked myself, do we really encounter significant conflicts in our very small structure in German-speaking Switzerland? Our Area consists of six districts and currently a total of only 34 groups. Well, I think it doesn't matter if we are big or small, conflicts can arise everywhere. Usually a conflict begins with a tiny, unspectacular, inconspicuous incident.

Generally a conflict occurs when one person or thing is not satisfactory. Generally, the situation or person:

- is hurting somebody.
- is mentally strained.
- is not informed enough.
- is misunderstood.

To sum up, conflict is not in keeping with our Legacies.

First, a brief history of our German-speaking structure of Switzerland.

1964: Exactly 50 years ago, five women started the first Al-Anon group near Basel, without guidelines and literature.

1967: The first contact with the World Service Office (WSO) and Henrietta in New York was made.

1984: Twenty years later there were already 42 Al-Anon and four Alateen groups. Literature and Public Outreach Committees were formed.

1985: Al-Anon Family Groups was incorporated and became a registered association as a non-profit organization in order to qualify for tax exemption on money received from group contributions, literature sales, and subscriptions to our monthly magazine "M+F" (Miteinander+Füreinander) which means with each other and for each other.

1989: A General Service Office (GSO) was opened in Olten and the structure was basically formed as it is today by dividing into seven districts. Two paid secretaries managed the office work. There was a great deal of bookkeeping involved with the monthly magazine having 2,300 subscribers.

1997: Our structure reached its highest number of Al-Anon groups and members: 50 Al-Anon Groups, two Al-Anon Adult Children groups, and one Alateen group.

2001: This was the celebration of Al-Anon's 50th Anniversary worldwide. The international German-speaking Convention (AA+Al-Anon) took place in Basel, and we were happy to welcome the Executive Director from the World Service Office (WSO). Also, since July 2001 we are connected to the worldwide Web, and we correspond by e-mail (alanon@bluewin.ch) and have an Internet Web site www.al-anon.ch.

2005: A 24-hour hotline was installed in partnership with our French-speaking structure in Switzerland.

2010: An online-forum called "Dandelion" was installed. The Al-Anon message shall be spread in the world, like the seeds of the dandelion when blown away. Swiss, Germans, and Austrians participate.

The new social media brought us different service tools and more possibilities in our communication and support. On the other hand, might this be the reason why our face-to-face meetings have decreased? Do not doors get closed and new ones open again from time to time?

Nowadays, the groups have decreased to a total of 34:

- 28 Al-Anon groups
- Three Alateen groups
- Three English Al-Anon-groups

Nevertheless, we are still carrying on with enthusiasm and with some extra activities during our jubilee year. We hope that the name of Al-Anon receives more and more attention by the public, so that our groups will grow again.

An overview of our service structure

The General Service Conference (GSC) is the highest service entity in our Area to discuss, resolve, and vote. It is held twice a year. The groups feel responsible and take an active part in the business activities. All Group Representatives (GRs) attend.

The Committee or Assembly is the preparatory and executive service entity for the General Service Conference and meets twice a year also. It consists of:

- Chairperson
- Secretary for the minutes
- Executive Committee—Five Trustees (one for Finance)
- Representatives of the six districts
- IAGSM Delegates
- Public Outreach Committee which includes Webmasters and Hotline team

The General Service Office (GSO) transmits all Al-Anon affairs in German/Switzerland. The GSO is responsible for information within the fellowship and outside and to the WSO. We employ one secretary; she is paid for one day a week. She handles all the correspondence, the bookkeeping, the literature which we get from Germany, and organizes the Assembly and Conference. She is also in charge of the archives. When the Trustees meet, she takes the minutes for this meeting, which is a volunteer service.

The Executive Committee is the legal entity responsible for the administration of Al-Anon funds and services and makes administrative decisions. It consists of five Trustees, three of whom are the legal deputies of the Al-Anon association. It is responsible for the General Service Office, deter-

mines the topics of the GSC, and informs all the groups. The Finance Chairperson makes a financial report at the end of the year, which is sent to all groups.

District Representatives (DRs) visit all the groups within their district once or twice a year. When there are problems, the DRs try to resolve them according to Al-Anon principles.

The two IAGSM Delegates, who are also European Zonal Meeting (EZM) Delegates, are part of the Committee and must have good knowledge of our General Service Structure and of the Al-Anon program.

The Public Outreach Committee works closely with Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) in the Area and in the districts.

Every year, in August, one of our six districts organizes a two-day "Friendship Convention" together with A.A. and Alateen. This gathering is always fairly well attended, and members from Germany and Austria also participate.

Our Service Seminars are held in rotation every one and a half years over a long weekend in one of the six districts. Members who have service experience at the group, district, and Area levels share how their service role has affected them. Usually two Concepts are on the program. These workshops have proved to be very motivating and helpful in problem-solving. Through sharing our problems and following the Al-Anon principles, we learn to help ourselves and find contentment and serenity in our lives. This service seminar is also an opportunity to report on the IAGSM and European Zonal Meetings. Unfortunately this year, it conflicts with the IAGSM.

Examples of conflict our structure encountered:

District

Currently, a District Representative (DR) has severe problems in working together with A.A. (and also with some other Al-Anon members) concerning public outreach projects or organizing the mutual Assemblies and the annual Convention. The reason for this is that a small group of A.A.s and Al-Anons dominate the tasks. They do not accept other opinions, and refuse certain members. It seems that nobody can stop their behavior. A normal discussion to clarify the situation has not been possible. Due to this occurrence some members have left the fellowship. Our desperate DR told us this story at the last Committee Assembly. After letting go of all his frustration, he felt much better. The speaker of the Committee, who already heard previously of this situation, reminded the DR that things take time and to go back to Step One.

If a conflict like this is going on and on, it is best to "lay on the couch," think about it thoroughly, and make use of our great resource: the spiritual principles. We can make use of the small wallet card, *Loving Interchange to Resolve Conflict (S-71)*, which was recently translated in German. Let us not forget to repeat the Serenity Prayer. We can also make use of the Knowledge-Based Decision-Making to Reach an Informed Group Conscience (KBDM) process, which I heard about for the first time at the last IAGSM.

Area

A couple of years ago an enthusiastic Al-Anon member posted an Al-Anon site on Facebook, unfortunately indicating her name and her business address. She put a picture and a sentence about our Conference Approved Literature on it. She is convinced that the message of Al-Anon must go around the world through this new media. Unfortunately, it happened that an A.A. member, a public figure, clicked the button "like it." Thus his name and face appeared. Apparently this man got very upset and an A.A. service member immediately wrote a sharp e-mail to Al-Anon and to the Al-Anon person that this site must be deleted because she misused anonymity. An Al-Anon Trustee, as well as the Chair of the Public Information Committee, got in touch with this person, telling her to stick to our principles. The name of Al-Anon and the logo are copyright protected. After many phone calls and letters, the Al-Anon member changed the site, but she was not ready to delete it completely. Maybe somebody will get curious and look up the name Al-Anon and get to our home page. This story fits our slogan, "Let Go and Let God!"

Public Outreach

In a Public Outreach team meeting a few years ago, we were looking for a Public Outreach speaker for the Area. Nobody was ready to take over this important service. Finally a woman member who is a fairly good speaker volunteered for this job. Everybody in the convention was happy and she was elected for three years. Living with alcoholism distorts our sense of responsibility and many of us in Al-Anon feel that we are the persons responsible in every situation. We can hardly say "no." This happened here. The person noticed herself that through this task she became overburdened. Thus it happened that a team meeting turned out to be a disaster. The members of the Committee were complaining. The Board of Trustees decided that the Speaker should finish her service as it was her last year, and two Trustees should assist at the last meeting. It turned out well. The Public Outreach Speaker could frankly admit that it was too much for her and apologized. The good thing in Al-Anon is that we are allowed to make mistakes (Step Nine: "...made direct amends to..."). We can grow and go a step further in our recovery. What went wrong? In Concept Ten, it says: "*Service responsibility is balanced by carefully defined service authority...*" We learn to choose our service leaders by studying and applying Concept Nine: "*Good personal leadership at all service levels is a necessity.*"

Conference

When a certain problem cannot be solved, and discussions never find an end, then it is best to adjourn and put the topic on the next meeting agenda (see Concept Five). We were always successful with this process. We recognize by using our principles there is enough time to discuss and find an appropriate answer.

I feel very honored to have the opportunity to share with you our experience involving this interesting theme.

Discussion

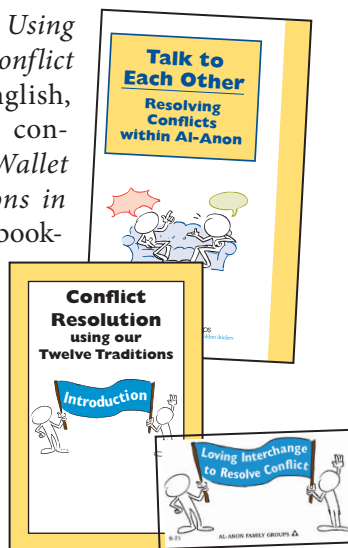
An ICC member began the discussion. “Using spiritual principles to resolve conflict is difficult because as Al-Anon members we forget there are 36 spiritual principles and we forget they do not exist in isolation. Each one is not separate from others. There is a unity of thought that goes forward like the Steps which fall in order as a process for our recovery. We don’t always understand that Step Twelve is linked to Tradition One and Tradition Twelve, anonymity, leads to Concept One which says that the ultimate authority is the groups. It does not stop there, but goes through those links to the Warranties.

“People often want to use one principle as a weapon to justify what they want to do so they take it out of context. For example, carrying the message to others so I don’t have to be anonymous (I can do whatever I want). Another example is when those things are taken out of context. Minority appeal is a right to be heard not the right to be right. It is nagging if we say something over and over trying to force our way on others. We understand this in the program, but we forget it when we are in service. As leaders and trusted servants we are supposed to demonstrate in all our affairs. We need to remember not to fall into that trap ourselves so that we are not using one principle as the reason to do something, and to make sure we are not going to violate one principle in order to justify using another one.

“The difference between the spiritual and legal principle is that spiritual principles could be carrying the message, but the legal is that you don’t have authority to use the content to carry the message. For example, an individual sometimes uses CAL on their Web site to carry the message but they have no legal right to do so. Sometimes individuals try to do so with the anonymity of Step Twelve. A structure can do so with a license from WSO to the structure. If the structure wanted to use literature to carry the message it would contact the WSO, but no individual member has the right to do this. Going through the Legacies can help sort out whether it is a spiritual or legal issue. We can’t change something just because we don’t like it.”

It was announced that a kit, *Using Al-Anon Principles to Resolve Conflict* (K-70), is now available in English, Spanish, and French. This kit contains the *Conflict Resolution Wallet Card* (S-71), *Using the Traditions in Conflict Resolution* (S-72) and a booklet, *Talk to Each Other Resolving Conflicts within Al-Anon* (S-73).

Delegates then described the conflicts they were experiencing in their structures and how they use our spiritual principles to deal with them:



“A Board conflict arose when we made a decision without enough discussion. We couldn’t solve it alone so we held a special group conscience meeting. Conflicts are difficult to solve alone because members are involved in the situation. We used the *Conflict Resolution Wallet Card* (S-71); this was a very useful service tool for us.”

“I see the 36 Legacies as one piece that goes hand-in-hand. We have some long-time members who used to be on the Board when it worked differently from what it does now. They created conflict every chance they got. I try to remember that each of us is at our own point in our recovery, so I remain respectful, but it is not okay to force conflict on others. We are making informed group conscience decisions, but it is our Higher Power taking care of that. That is the main spiritual principle. It is not me or us, it is a Higher Power.”

“My structure profited a lot from previous IAGSMs and we try using different principles. What works with the Board is taking an inventory. We adopted workshops about conflict and repeated them several times. Conflict happens every day and we need to be prepared to resolve it. Adopting the spiritual principles at all levels has been pretty helpful. Using the Serenity Prayer in heated discussion helps.”

“For the U.S. and Canada structure, Knowledge-Based Decision-Making to Reach an Informed Group Conscience (KBDM) is a useful tool and a benefit. When we are uninformed, there is confusion. Conflict is the result. KBDM helps. With KBDM we are not trying to enlist sides. A Higher Power is important. At Board meetings we ask for hand-raising if we want to speak or if something is confusing. This helps everyone understand. The spiritual goals of the WSC were adopted at our Board meeting. At the end of Board meetings, the Chairperson asks each member to consider: ‘Was I kind? Was I helpful? Did I contribute? Is there anything I could have done better?’”

An ICC representative shared that conflict occurs when something is not satisfactory, not informed, or misunderstood. “We try not to attribute motives. If there is a conflict, we try to find common ground or understanding. Spiritual principles come into play. We set ground rules and demonstrate mutual respect. If the conflict is not resolved it keeps coming back. If needed, we say the Serenity Prayer. Focus on unity when looking at the spiritual principles and ask, ‘What is good for Al-Anon?’ Sometimes it is stepping out of the way, or putting it behind and moving forward. Agree to disagree. In Policy discussions when they are looking at text revisions, the Chairperson asks a set of questions: ‘Is it accurate? Does it provide clarity? Is it clear? Can you live with it?’”

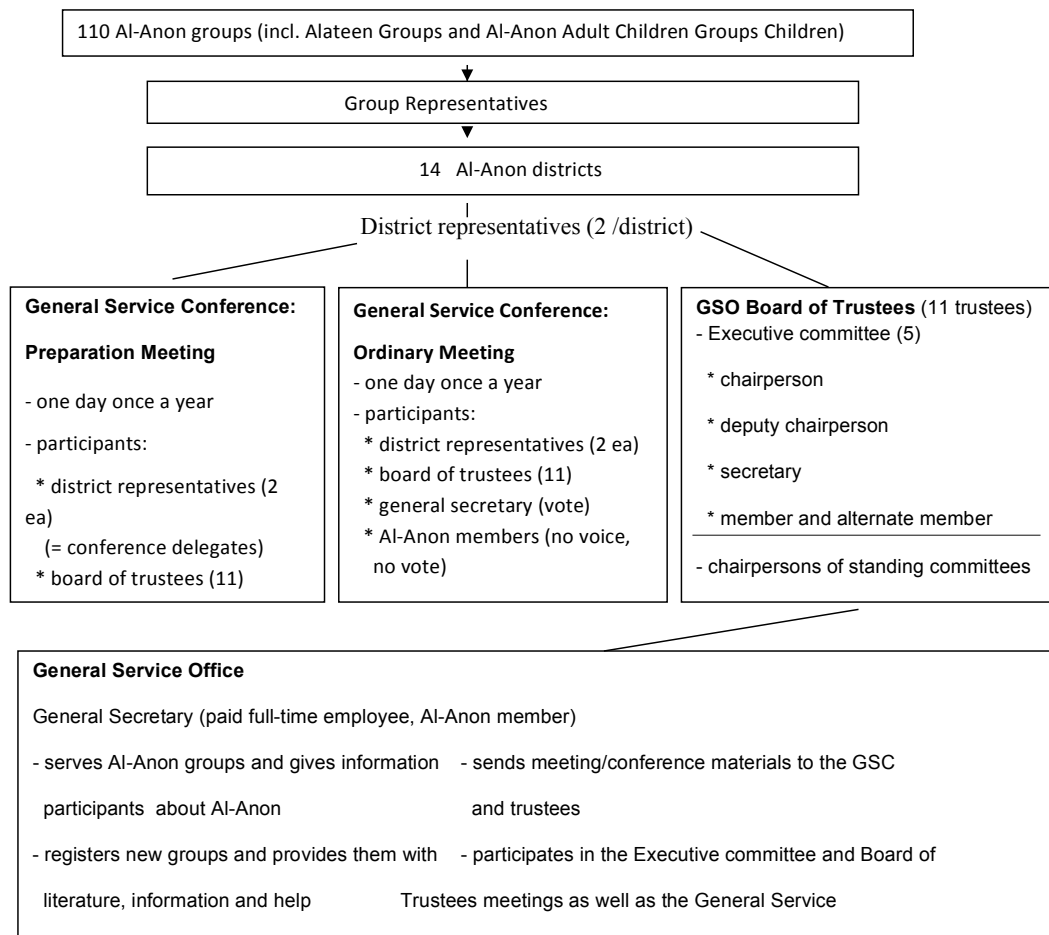
An ICC representative shared what the WSO does when they get the “lobbying” effort. “We have organized minori-

ties. Because of electronic communication it is easier to organize and ‘blast’ things. For example, 25 people will ask the same question in just a slightly different way thinking we will have to talk about it again. When the Board perceives that this is an invitation to a fight, the best way to address this is to ‘drop the rope.’ So we come up with one answer, and if we get 100 different people asking the same question, we send one answer. We may send it 100 times, but it is the same answer to the same issue so there is no agonizing about the detail to our response. That stops that kind of behavior. If we do not take the bait, the game can’t go on. Sometimes it is okay to simply say we’re going to agree to disagree. I once begged a member of the Board to stay. It was a mistake. If the member is leaving, thank the member and let them go, don’t try to change them, otherwise we are not going by our spiritual principles.”

How Do We Maintain the Spiritual Principle of Anonymity When Using Technology?

Kira S. Finland

First of all, I want to thank the International Coordination Committee (ICC) for giving me the opportunity to be one of the General Session presenters. I feel it is my Higher Power that gave me this topic specifically. When I started as International Coordinator, this was the topic about which I learned the most. My first task was in Leeds, at the European Zonal Meeting (EZM). I can imagine the look on my face when I heard about things which have been done in England. I was sure that anonymity was violated. Soon, however, I learned otherwise and I am grateful for that and for all the lessons I have learned in Al-Anon. They have given me a lot and brought me to the situations about which I never could dream.



I will present our structure, which is 61-years old. Our service structure is simpler than in big countries.

- The districts are heterogeneous. Some are geographically large and the distances between the groups are far. Only in some cities is there more than one group. The activity in different districts varies significantly.
- There is often one or two districts not participating. We try to encourage and keep contact with them. Our Conference is held during a weekend in late March.
- The Finnish By-Laws require that a registered association has a Board. Our Board is called “Al-Anon Keskuspalvelu ry” and it is responsible for the management of Al-Anon services in Finland. It is a registered association with its legal obligations and rights in Finnish society and it can make legal commitments.

The eleven members of the Board of Trustees are the only members of the association.

- The Chairperson of the Executive Committee has a role as the supervisor of the General Secretary.
- The Board of Trustees has four meetings annually.
- The Executive Committee meets monthly and usually via Skype. If needed, the Committee members also make decisions by e-mail.
- The Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, and Secretary of the Executive Committee hold the same positions also on the Board.
- The Standing Committees work independently in the framework of their plan which is accepted by the Service Conference.
- The length of service at all levels is two years.

What were the challenges our structure encountered as it relates to this topic?

Anonymity vs. technology is a big question. Or is it? Why is anonymity important? It is important because it is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions (Tradition Twelve). Each member has freedom to determine their own level of anonymity. It is also important to understand that we have three approaches to anonymity: personal, within Al-Anon, and outside of Al-Anon. There is a lot of confusion about anonymity in Finland. We interpret anonymity very strictly.

Of course, the challenges vary from people to people. It is also affected by which level of structure her/his service position is. Also the age of the membership in Al-Anon has an effect in understanding anonymity. I took a chronological approach to technology, because it has affected us differently, and gave us different kinds of challenges.

In the past, and still, people are unequal when it comes to technology. I mean by geographical location, by incomes, and by access. In the past, everybody didn't have a land-line telephone. So many families used the same telephone, or people had to go to the post office to call. There wasn't much privacy or anonymity! You certainly had to have a tongue in the middle of the mouth, so you wouldn't violate others' anonymity. So it was easier to meet face-to-face. Today it is easier because almost everyone has their own cell phones. Of course the numbers must be stored in such a way that you do not disclose another person to be a member of Al-Anon.

Traditional media has caused many challenges. When we had only printed media it was easier to protect anonymity. About radio, we have had and still have many opinions. Somebody thinks that no one can recognize your voice. If anonymity meant that another member could not recognize the voice, it would exclude both radio and television. Even though most people know that is not the case, this was discussed last year when we took part in a radio program series. Television is even more challenging; the voice and some parts of people's profile are shown. Professionals don't always understand why we ask them to protect our anonymity. We have challenges to get people involved in public outreach, because we misconstrue or we interpret anonymity so tightly. In South Africa and in Russia I have seen media campaigns on TV, but it seems that in Finland we aren't ready for that. People have many fears and we have had many discussions about what is attraction and what is promotion. Discussion will continue.

E-mails have been in many discussions—what kind of e-mail addresses we can have and what we can write in the subject line. It has been recommended that an e-mail address should not have a member's full name, and we can't use our business e-mail in Al-Anon affairs. Last year, our Board of Trustees had a discussion about what should be written as the sender when the GSO sends e-mails to the

members. As a result of discussions, we concluded that the format of the name will not be changed. So the name of the sender is our formal name "Al-Anon Keskuspalvelu."

Communication within the fellowship has been challenging because of anonymity and even more if we dare give information outside to the professional community. We have found some solutions for this. We have discussed anonymity and what it actually means and what it doesn't mean. Two tools have been very useful to us, the WSO's PowerPoint presentation on "Anonymity" and the skit about anonymity. They have been translated to Finnish and everybody can find those from Finland's Members' Web site. We have reminders of these tools in meetings to District Representatives (DRs) and in our monthly magazines. The GSO has different types of lists for people in different levels of service for information that is always sent from the GSO. This guarantees that only those people who need the information get it. Some groups and districts have created their own e-mail addresses so anonymity will not be violated, but we can cooperate. Some of the groups/districts have their own Public Outreach Coordinators.

Our own Web site was started in 2000. In fact, there was a great deal of resistance. Many were worried what information will be there. Only information from the GSO is shown on the public site. Some years after that, we decided to have the intranet (member site) which has different levels of information. Some of the information is available for all members, some for Standing Committees, and all information is for the Board of Trustees and the Executive Committee. Each level has its own login and password. In the trial period, only a few districts tested it and they found it to be a helpful tool. The trial became permanent, and all districts are in the system now. Members can find a lot of information from the intranet site: news, posts to the groups, Service Conference, *Service Manual*, finances, Al-Anon tools, public outreach material, history, information about the structure, etc. The latest new thing on the intranet is a Feedback Form, which can be sent anonymously, and forums for Committees and the Board of Trustees. Members don't have to have their own e-mail because they can send their sharing through this intranet site to the Editorial Committee of our monthly magazine.

Different types of communication tools (Skype, messenger, and Al-Anon). The question has been both about anonymity and technical issues. Who and how somebody can be added to lists? What kind or type can your username be? Do we break anonymity? Can we do closed meetings? Fear and lack of technical know-how have affected these communication tools. We have waited for a new guideline for electronic meetings. After updating, we might take some new steps forward. Kolo-chat, the chat room for Alateens, has been a little easier case because it is a closed chat-room with login, password, and Al-Anon members as moderators and Sponsors.

Social media (Facebook, Twitter etc.) have been in discussion lately in every district meeting and Conference. It is understandable that people are eager to start and want to share their experience and help others or give information to people who are possible future Al-Anon members. People are willing and eager to start meetings in social media, so they have a lot of questions. Most of those questions are about anonymity and what can be done. For example, if I “like” something which is related to Al-Anon on Facebook, do I break my own or someone else’s anonymity? Can I announce the establishment of an Al-Anon group on social media? Can the name of the group be something with Al-Anon? Also there are many questions surrounding various technical possibilities. Maybe we should learn something from the business world and adapt the ideas with our three legacies (Steps, Traditions and Concepts) as our foundation.

What benefits has the GSO experienced by discussing this topic?

Our General Secretary is an Al-Anon member and a full-time employee. Our General Secretary is, and can be, our face to the public outside of Al-Anon, because in her position she doesn’t say that she is a member.

One benefit I already pointed out is when we send e-mail. We decided that the name GSO will be written in the subject line. By doing this we believe we protect members’ anonymity.

Some years ago we got feedback from members that their anonymity had been broken because on envelopes was written *Tietoavain* (our magazine). So we decided to change the

post address on the envelope to “AFG Suomi.” The same change was also made with the return address for packages sent from the GSO.

It is easier to get members involved to do public outreach in the health fairs and the schools/care centers.

Members can give feedback to the structure through the GSO. This allows for neutrality and equality in the process of the deliberations.

Some general challenges

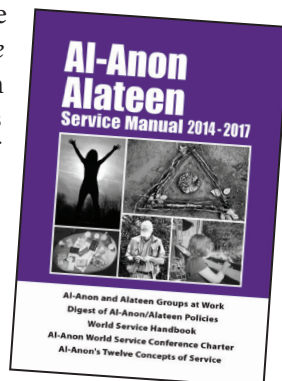
Some challenges are connected to many levels of technology and many kinds of needs. For the members, the safe and familiar is easier to deal with than the new and unknown. I feel that we need more time and opportunities to discuss possibilities and threats. We have started it by doing a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of our “products,” and it is a very good beginning.

When our structure was created in the 1980s, it met our needs. Nowadays needs are different, but our structure hasn’t changed much. One challenge is that we don’t have a standard way of what to do with new things because we don’t have a Policy Committee who could take care of such things. We’ll try our best, but our Board of Trustees has so many duties that it can’t be effective enough when we are talking about policies for new things. Of course, some can just be translated from WSO publications, but our Literature Committee has more than enough to do. Finally, I want to say that there will always be challenges, but I am sure that we can manage them step-by-step and find the answers that we need.

Discussion

A Delegate commented: “Now that the WSO has a page on Facebook, I have a lot of questions. How do you use the ‘like’ button? Is it recommended to use it or not? Do you warn about anonymity? Do you use ‘QR codes’ (these are like bar codes but you get directly to Internet pages)? Is there any data on how many members might be attracted through these sites? We have legal issues so we are not sure if it is useful to be out there, although we do see many people get their Al-Anon information from social media.”

An ICC representative responded to the questions. “The section on “Anonymity” in the *2014-2017 Al-Anon/ Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27) on page 109 in the “Public Outreach” section goes through the spiritual principles of public outreach and how we can do public outreach at all levels through using different tools including posters, flyers, outreach publications, Area public outreach messages, attraction versus promotion, ano-



nymity etc. It took over two years for the Policy Committee to bring a draft of the section on ‘Media, Internet, and Social Networking’ (page 116) to the World Service Conference (WSC). The Conference debated every word, and it passed overwhelmingly when the Conference was asked whether they could live with it. The Policy has been in effect for two or three years.

“At the WSO, ‘liking’ a page is only an indication that a person likes it. This is true of the WSO Facebook page. If you ‘like’ something, it says nothing about being a member. If a person is worried about anonymity at the public level, they probably won’t ‘like’ the page. How do we use it within the principles of program? We post things with a disclaimer that if you forward this, it must not include any comment that would break anonymity or violate the Traditions. A person can forward messages about Al-Anon without giving their family history or a personal story.

“The WSO Public Outreach department was asked to write up criteria for how the WSO uses Facebook. It is not available yet. In the next few months there will be information available on how to set up a page, how to manage it,

what the WSO uses to post on the page, what is suitable, and what is not. The WSO mostly uses short quotes from our literature. If the quote does not have Al-Anon in the quote, we put Al-Anon in it. We do not allow anyone to post on the WSO page. We can break our personal anonymity within Al-Anon and within the community, but not at the level of press, radio, films, TV, or the Internet. We do not post pictures on social media because it is too easy to hack.

“The WSO is using, ‘QR codes’ with *Al-Anon Faces Alcoholism*. The ‘QR code’ is on the back and you can scan it to be taken to the WSO Public Outreach site. You have to buy, or at least register, to get them. The WSO has a separate QR code for its Spanish and French sites.

“Regarding statistics, the WSO has data available. When someone looks at our Facebook page, they are often referred back to the Public Outreach site and a specific link to go to an article. We have data on the number of ‘click backs.’”

“The WSO statistics show that the number one reason that people go to our Facebook site is to find a meeting. Right now they have to click five to nine times to find a meeting on our Web site. We are studying how to organize meeting information on the Public Outreach site that is newcomer friendly. The primary goal of a public site is to get newcomers to go to a meeting and provide information for professionals. The Member site posts Chairperson of the Board letters and the *Service Manual*. We partnered with other entities to sell electronic books but the royalties we pay vendors is high— 30-50 percent per book. We also did some audio books but royalties to vendors were also high.

A Delegate shared, “We see Facebook as a tool for those who don’t know about Al-Anon, to contact professionals, and be in contact with our membership. Our conclusion was that we thought Facebook is only to carry the message to the public and professionals.

“We have received ten messages from people and have had contact from five professionals. Few professionals contact us to cooperate. We had to explain anonymity and cooperation to them. Clicking ‘like’ does not say I am a member of Al-Anon. Our GSO has a Web site with a part for professionals and public outreach and a part for members.”

Another Delegate commented, “As the archivist, I decided to put together a 60th birthday book. We gathered pictures. At our Board of Trustees meeting someone suggested add-

ing a separate CD to the book. The WSO said it would not be right. These sites are hacked by people so it is impossible to remain anonymous. It would take a long time to work out a policy because there are so many loopholes and links that anonymity is bound to be broken. We have to use the technology, but it is not easy to resolve anonymity.”

A Delegate shared a personal experience with having her anonymity broken: “My family name was disclosed without permission. We need to ask ourselves if it is necessary before using Facebook. Non-disclosure of my identity has not stopped me from doing service.”

Another Delegate shared “The Area added sections about anonymity based on ‘Anonymity and the Media,’ (page 91), ‘Electronic Communication Outside of Al-Anon,’ (page 92), and ‘Anonymity at Open Meetings and Al-Anon/Alateen Events,’ (page 93) of the 2014-2017 *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*. Under the heading ‘Service Communication’ it says not to use a business address because it could appear as affiliation. If we are e-mailing something as links of service, we assume the e-mail is going to that person and not being seen by other people. Creating awareness will help members not to unknowingly break their anonymity.”

A member from the ICC shared that “The Policy Committee decided we could use symbols for Facebook and YouTube on the WSO Public Outreach Web site with a disclaimer that we are not endorsing these entities. The links are provided so that it will take you directly to the Al-Anon Twitter, Al-Anon WSO Facebook, or Al-Anon YouTube channel. As an aside, WSO will pursue non-registered groups and non-affiliated individuals that use the Al-Anon name. The Al-Anon name can only be used by service structures. Groups may be in service structures but if they are not registered, they are not recognized.”

The WSO Executive Director reminded Delegates, “Technology changes so fast that it will probably be discussed again. As structures are going in new directions, they don’t have to do it alone. Structures can contact the Associate Director—International at the WSO with questions they are pondering to see if we know of other structures doing/pondering the same issue. It is the role of the WSO to be a clearing house for information. We learn from each other.”

Finance, Accountability, and Oversight

Charles C., South Africa

A Brief Overview about the AFG SA Service Structure

Al-Anon Family Groups S.A. is comprised of the National General Service Office (GSO) in Cape Town and three geographical Area offices: the Gauteng Area (Central S.A.), Kwa-Zulu Natal Area (South East S.A.), and the Cape Area (South West S.A.). To comply with South Africa's legal requirements, the General Service and the Gauteng Area Offices are both registered for business operations as a Public Benefit Organization (PBO) (like a non-profit organization). A founding document was created setting out the goals and objectives of the organization. The National Executive Committee (NEC) is the operating arm of the Conference. As the Areas are autonomous, the other two Areas are currently registered as an Association (similar to a church) with a legal founding document, and the association members are the GRs and the Public Officer is the Area Chairperson.

The General Service Office (GSO) and National Executive Committee (NEC)

The NEC consists of ten members: the Chairperson, Chairs of the five Committee portfolios, an archivist and three members-at-large. The National Executive Committee, responsible for GSO operations, is led by the National Chairperson, who is a volunteer. There is one paid worker and an Executive Business Officer (EBO). The members-at-large contribute professional experience and expertise in their specific fields. The Committee meets monthly. The portfolio Committees vary in make-up led by the portfolio Chairpersons. They recruit volunteers to assist on their Committees. For example, the National Finance Committee is chaired by the Financial Chairperson and is supported by the NEC Chair and EBO. The Conference Committee is made up of a volunteer Chairperson, the NEC Chair, a Conference Secretary, a Conference Administrator and an Area Coordinator. Task Force and ad hoc Committees are formed to handle other specific items as they arise.

The AFG Service Board of Trustees and S.A. Al-Anon Family Group Trust

The Service Board of Trustees and the S.A. Al-Anon Family Group Trust have a somewhat unique history worth briefly summarizing. In 2005, we were blessed with a generous bequest. The letter of original notification from the solicitors indicated that Al-Anon Family Groups S.A. was one of approximately twenty named residual beneficiaries of a deceased estate. The AFG Service Board at the time indicated acceptance of the proceeds to the Executors, once they had established that the deceased was indeed an Al-Anon member and that there were no conditions to the bequest. At that point there had been no indication of the amount involved; only that a property was to be sold and the proceeds would be distributed between the nominated

beneficiaries. Approximately 18 months later, when the first interest payment was received, the magnitude of the bequest was realized. The Service Board held an emergency meeting and took the following immediate action.

- The mission and vision statements were clarified and ratified as follows:
VISION STATEMENT - All people affected by someone else's drinking will find help and recovery in every community.

MISSION STATEMENT - Anticipate the future and Al-Anon's place in it and ensure that the necessary resources are available.

- The S.A. structure did not have a "bequest policy" and this was a challenge which gladly has now been resolved. This was a valuable lesson learned about policy and planning which we have expanded into many other areas of our portfolio operations.
- Guidance came from the wisdom of shared experiences from World Service Office (WSO), our long-timers, and the *Service Handbook*.
- We opened an appropriate banking account to hold the funds in "trust" until knowledge-based decisions could be made by the Conference.
- Much time was spent exploring the country's financial, legal, and taxation requirements while respecting and considering Al-Anon's Traditions and Concepts.
- In order to be compliant within the law, it was clear that the best method of registration was to form a Trust, a legal entity, to manage the funds with transparency and accountability, while keeping our membership informed of the progress.
- The South African Al-Anon Family Group Trust S.A. AFG Trust was then registered as a legal entity and a Public Benefit Organization (PBO).
- South African Revenue Services (SARS) permitted us Value Added Tax status exemption as long as our business was "not for profit or considered as welfare activities." Legally the Trust was/is prohibited from executing any business undertaking or trading activities. For that reason the Trust appoints the AFG General Service Office to carry out its operational activities.
- The Board of Trustees of the S.A. Al-Anon Family Group Trust was formally registered when the Trust deed was lodged with the High Court. This Trust deed was written complementing the laws of South Africa with Al-Anon principles at the forefront, and outlining the structure and function of the Board.





- The Board is made up of a minimum of five and a maximum of ten members. Provision is made for two ex-officio Trustees; namely the Chairpersons of the National Policy and Planning and National Finance Committees and the three Area Trustees. Trustees at Large may be appointed to add specific skills as and when required.
- Trustees at Large now include the National Executive Committee Chairperson and a Trustee with expert financial acumen who is appointed as the Public Officer of the Trust. As this is a legal requirement, this Trustee is required to prepare annual financial accounts which are submitted to an independent accounting firm for auditing.
- For day-to-day operational practicality, records of all financial transactions, monthly accounts, and property management are managed by our Executive Business Officer at the GSO office.
- S.A. Conference 2006 advised the Board to invest the funds wisely in risk-protected investments. The Conference also instructed the Board to purchase property to house our national office which was done. Ownership is in the name of S.A. AFG Trust.
- The spirit and intent of the founding Board of Trustees and of Conference has since continued: “that the funds would be invested to secure South Africa Al-Anon Family Groups future and that only the interest would be prudently used for special projects.”

Area Trustees are elected by a two-thirds majority at their respective Area Assembly elections following nomination from the outgoing Trustee. The Chairperson of the Board serves for a period of two years and this position is rotated alphabetically from the pool of Trustees. Trustees serve for a term of four years, and may serve two consecutive terms should they be re-elected.

As the Cape Area Trustee, I am currently serving my second term and also serve on the NEC as the National Archivist. This is not an elected position and has no prescribed period of tenure.

Financial Oversight of the Trust

The Board of Trustees strives for unanimity in all affairs regarding financial oversight of the trust funds. Each Trustee approves any expense made from the trust fund and agrees to any investment decisions. This includes the consideration of formal “Special Projects” applications which are presented at Board meetings and approved or rejected with the decision being recorded in the meeting minutes.

The Board of the S.A. AFG Trust today:

- Carries out its fiduciary responsibility as custodians of a legal trust.
- Provides financial support for the operation of the General Service Office.
- Routinely reviews management of property.
- Monitors investment performance and returns.
- Provides financial management of income and expenditures and long-term planning.
- Formulates strategy and is involved in long-term planning.
- Ensures legal compliance within South African law.
- Maintains adherence to our Alateen Safety and Behavioral Policy.

The final decision-making body is the South African National Service Conference, who always takes into consideration the policies and decisions of the WSO. A three-quarter majority vote at Conference can always re-organize or dismiss the Board and the NEC if necessary.

Challenges

Our most current challenge is that we have been without an NEC Finance Chairperson for some time. Fortunately we have a Finance Policy & Procedure operating manual. The finance portfolio position requires a person with special skills and experience which is proving difficult to find. It seems to be the most onerous portfolio and volunteers tend to be reluctant to commit to this service. Knowledge of the fellowship by the incumbent is preferable. Ideally we would like to have volunteers handling our finances with both accounting skills and knowledge of the Al-Anon principles. Currently in the Cape Area we lack members with the right skills and knowledge, so this is an ongoing challenge.

In the long period of not having a financial Chairperson, the financial experience of our current NEC Chair has enabled the continued operations of this portfolio. This was achieved through keeping it simple, employing sound accounting principles, and using the assistance of an outside accounting firm. The Executive Business Officer, with her own experience and that of the combined expertise of members on the NEC, the Area financial portfolio coordinators,

and the Trustee-at-Large has helped to manage the day-to-day operations. It has truly been Concept Four in action.

There are processes and procedures relating to how finances are captured which are specific to Al-Anon. We are now outsourcing the GSO accounts to an accounting service. They, at times, have battled with the internal knowledge of how Al-Anon works as a non-profit and self-supporting organization. This is not an ideal situation.

An additional challenge is that the operating knowledge of an accounting software program by volunteers and our EBO is not always possible. This results in our attempting to maintain a hybrid of accounting practices using a software program and a manual set of books. This is not always a sound principle and has attendant risks.

A further challenge is the lack of regular contributions from our groups. Our financial contributions from the small South African fellowship are minimal. This is due to our political history and mass poverty. The majority of our members are from the lower to middle income brackets. In one Area, the average contributions come from only 51 per cent and there are just 44 groups.

When the Finance Committee functions well, it allows other serving Committees to concentrate on Al-Anon's future and the vision "that all people affected by someone else's drinking will find help and recovery in every community" is achievable.

Discussion

Discussion began with Delegate questions about accounting procedures and management of the General Service Office, organizing volunteer work, and the WSO Policy on donations. An ICC representative provided answers.

Q: Are we required to have financials audited if we are non-profit? Do structures outsource accounting and does it still require an audit? Do other structures own property?

The ICC member explained how the World Service Office (WSO) finances are structured:

A: Audits: An outside audit firm gave us an unqualified audit this year and made suggestions that we will look at to see if some procedures in the Office can be done differently. The Audit is brought to the World Service Conference.

Taxes: The WSO files as a not-for-profit organization. The Finance Committee reviews the forms before submitting to the Board of Trustees (BOT). The BOT reviews them in its oversight responsibility. The Finance Committee Chair is overtly a Trustee with accounting experience. The Director of Business Services is a Certified Public Accountant (CPA), and Chair of the Board, Executive Director, and Policy Committees comprise this Committee. Financial statements are submitted

Successes

There are always blessings to be grateful for, and some notable financial successes in our structure are:

- Investigated and initiated a trust fund.
- Purchased and managed our own GSO property.
- Registered both entities successfully as PBOs.
- Engaged Fund Managers who give advice with investments that yield maximum benefits as well as guidance with the changing tax laws in our country.
- Invested the funds prudently with an acknowledged Fund Management Company spread across a range of risk-protected investments.
- In the face of a global economic crisis, endeavored and almost achieved retaining the capital amount.
- Achieved current tax clearance certification.
- All annual audits, for both NEC and the Trust, were unqualified.
- The Trust was able to provide special project funding for public outreach events, membership tools, and office equipment and technology.

So in conclusion, the lessons learned through the challenges and successes we experienced continue to help us grow and move forward. By following sound operating policy, and established business practices and procedures, we ensure that the necessary resources are available to achieve our mission and vision. Being able to access experience and accumulated knowledge at IAGSM, through the WSO, and from our past Trustees is invaluable in attaining these goals.

monthly. The Committee looks at proposals. If they are financially feasible, it recommends them to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee reviews and decides whether to accept and approve the proposals. The WSO budget is created by the Finance Committee. It compares department budgets year-to-year. When the budget is approved by the Board, it goes to the WSC, where additional approval is given. We are trying to encourage recognition that if the Conference approves the budget, it needs to fund it, because these are the Conference goals that they want to have the WSO accomplish.

Property Ownership: We have an Executive Committee for Real Property Management (ECRPM). The Chairperson of the Finance Committee and the Director of Business Services serve on this Committee. It is kept separate. If there are issues when the ECRPM inspects the building, the Director of Business Services is responsible to work with the Business Manager to see that it is taken care of.

Q: "Our accounting program does the General Service Tax. We accept the WSO policy in total. Our one per cent turnover of personal donations was changed. It was increased to a lump sum of \$100,000. We were offered that amount

but the member wanted a time limit or earmark. What is the policy on donations to WSO or other GSOs? Donations are increasing and we are doing visioning with Delegates through a 'gallery walk' with them. The Appeal letter outlining the budget is working."

A: Annual contributions can be up to one percent of the total revenue of the WSO General Fund as identified in the previous year's audit. This is placed in the General Fund. Bequests are a one-time unlimited contribution, provided its use is not restricted by the donor. If a family member is not a member of Al-Anon, and an Al-Anon member passes away, the family cannot make a contribution to Al-Anon. It is very important for Al-Anon members to put it in their will to make a contribution, so it is clear that it is coming from an Al-Anon member.

The Board has oversight. Currently, the Board is undergoing training on understanding finances so Board members can respond to fellowship questions. The Reserve Fund can fund special projects.

A Delegate asked:

"What financial decisions is the Board of Trustees responsible for in other service structures?" She shared, "We have one full-time office worker. We have had a deficit for several years. Our reserve is at an alarmingly low level. We may not be able to keep the office open full-time. We are looking at how to use more volunteers. Outsourcing accounting has been discussed. How do others organize volunteer work at the office? Has any structure decreased the paid worker's salary, and how?"

Delegates responded:

"Our GSO contracts with an external firm. The accountant comes to the office once or twice a month and balances our accounts. The Chairperson of the Executive Committee, Trustee at Large, and Finance Committee meet monthly before the Executive Committee meeting. The function of the Finance Committee is to control how money is spent and on what projects."

"Our General Secretary works four days a week and we have two volunteer bookkeepers. The General Secretary and bookkeepers manage the daily accounting and payment of bills. They are authorized to use a basic cash flow accounting program but not the balance sheet. So they don't need to do or know accounting procedures. The Treasurer is nominated every year at our service meeting and is a Board member serving for one year. The Treasurer goes to the Executive Committee to give a report. The profit and loss and balance sheet is done by the auditor. We are now printing more literature and our cash outlay in printing is increasing yearly. We are spending more, and having more stock creates more work and makes it more difficult for volunteers to understand. Cash flow accounting is fine for volunteers to use. It is not necessary to have more knowledge."



"When our Board of Trustees became aware that there was less than four months reserve, it took action. The Board formed a Task Force to review all aspects of the GSO income and expenses, staff hours, and office procedures to make sure procedures were as they should be. The Task Force recommended changes to the Board. We told the membership we were reviewing GSO processes and needed their help to get finances back in line again. Contributions came in. The Task Force was thorough in its review to be sure we were not in that position again. We reviewed staff roles and employed a new office manager with a higher skill base. Trustees now work fewer hours because of staff competency. We got an accounting software package which is reviewed on a monthly basis. The Conference decided we needed to have the General Secretary in a volunteer position. We eliminated the Temporary General Secretary position. It was hard to pick up the pieces. We reported all of this in our *Conference Summary*. We did a follow-up report the next year. The membership is happy that the Board is disclosing what it is doing. We are building up the Reserve Fund and getting to a healthy place financially."

A Delegate gained new insight into Concept One: "After attending a WSC, and hearing about groups within the WSO service structure having budgets, most of our groups now have budgets. They give treasurer's reports and know what their breakeven point is (rent, coffee, chocolate, biscuits, and a monthly contribution to the GSO). It is important to have financial responsibility and education at the group level. Groups are healthier. We are responsible for our own. We have to be transparent, prudent, and show the fellowship how we, as a GSO, cut back. We need to report back to the groups."

"Our financial laws are very changeable and difficult. We need a professional person as Treasurer because of changes annually. The Treasurer is paid and professional. We are thinking about how to find the next person. The Treasurer



prepares a budget with detailed plans of spending and income. The Conference gets a chance to do oversight, and the Chairperson of the Finance Committee decides whether we are able to finance projects suggested by Committees. The Finance Committee oversees contributions and income from the sale of books, which is a large part of our income. Our emphasis is on translation and printing. Books are very popular. Printing a new one each year helps us to survive. We have some reserve funds. Last year there was a decline in contributions from the fellowship. We have problems financing everything we want to do. We divided funds and created a special one for the IAGSM Delegate, 35th anniversary, and contributions to the WSO. We hold workshops connected with finances for Area Treasurers. We receive gratitude donations.”

A Delegate advised that in their structure they need a paid professional accountant involved in their finances in order to retain their non-professional status. “Our finances need to be reviewed every three years. Our Finance Committee is three people: the General Secretary, Treasurer, and the Chairperson of the Board. The Executive Committee has five members. The budget is discussed at Conference. This becomes controversial. Delegates are allowed to see the information at Conference so they can ask questions of the Treasurer. Most Delegates are not able to read a balance sheet. There is no professional audit. Tax authorities approve our accounting.”

Another Delegate advised that their financial situation is finally secure. “We used to ask for money routinely which was making members feel uncomfortable. Management of our structure and finance lies with the Chairperson of the Board and Treasurer. The Finance Committee met twice last year on a conference call to prepare a questionnaire for the

Conference about purchasing property, to study feedback from the questionnaires, and review our financial situation. We have used simple accounting software that produces the profit and loss statement, and bookkeeping operations and balance sheets for three years. We use an external audit firm. Our financial situation is increasing income; contributions by Areas and the sale of literature are profitable. We sell literature at our conventions. We have a full-time paid employee. Our Reserve Fund is in a savings account. All 22 Areas send accounts on time at year end. Out of 177 groups, we received 160 contributions. Foreign language groups are not reporting to the GSO. We use finances as a means of staying in touch with isolated groups annually.”

“We are a non-profit association. Groups respond to our budget because the Finance Committee Coordinator has three meetings with the Treasurers of the districts. Districts have budgets. Devaluation in the country is hurting the budget. We were unable to send two Delegates to IAGSM. Looking at the future, we try to be transparent in the Conference and with treasurers of the districts. Our country situation is critical and uncertain.”

An ICC representative shared that the WSO provides membership services. “Our members asked for e-books and an improved Web site. They want improvement and to catch up to the corporate world. If they want services, they are responsible for AFG (Concept One). We suggest to them that, rather than focusing on cutting the budget and lowering WSO staff which increases the load on remaining staff, the membership has a responsibility to respond with funds if they want these services.”

The UK & Eire Delegate shared, “In 2009, our property purchase was approved. We got a professional to carry out a review of the GSO in order to operate more efficiently and effectively. We decided to lead by example by reducing Conference Night and Board meetings. This made for longer days but produced a saving. We informed the fellowship and recommended that we purchase property because of lease costs. The Appeal response was great! Members knew it was something tangible they were contributing to. They were not wondering where it was going. In 2013, we moved into our new office with a mortgage and have established a Property Management Committee. This was part of the Motion. A recommendation from the review also included a full-time bookkeeper, but there was not enough work for that position. Last year we outsourced the bookkeeping and have saved money. We do audits annually. Outsourcing is online. The Treasurer can pull it up during Conference so there is transparency, and this is very satisfactory.”

“In doing work for the service arms, I had to find out about non-profit status. I spoke to the revenue agency because we received donations all year long and found it was only non-taxable if we kept two-three months reserve. Once we keep too much, we can’t use our non-profit status

so we would have to give money to the tax department that is actually the groups' money."

"Al-Anon pays five percent in fees to the state that can be given back to Al-Anon (as a non-profit). We present a budget and advisory prior to Conference that can approve for three months. The Treasurer sends a letter to groups reminding them to contribute to the GSO."

An ICC representative summarized the discussion with the experience of the WSO:

- Each structure has to exist within the laws of its country. This is determined by national law. As a not-for-profit, some are tax-exempt from VAT, and GSTs; others are not. This varies from country to country and each structure needs to explore to see whether these apply or not. The *2014-2017 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*, page 95, "Financial Matters" section, details different ways members in our structure can contribute to the WSO for those who use U.S. policies. For others, they may not be of use to you. Most important about these policies is the conversation. The Conference has to talk about what this means, what it would mean for your structure.
- Our experience is that earmarked money is a form of control and is more of a problem than help.
- There are combined-giving campaigns which are government programs allowing a portion of taxes to go back to a not-for-profit organization in some countries.
- The idea of sending an Appeal letter on a regular basis and telling people what you plan to do with the money is very important. It is in the holding on to money that we restrict the flow of money. When we hold on, money can't flow. Talk with the fellowship from the point of abundance—open hands help it to flow. Money is a tool to be able to reach out and bring more members into the fellowship and support the members we have. Think

in a sense of abundance. *The Forum* (Nov 2014 issue), page 12, talks about the idea of finding new energy, new thinking, and an abundant outlook from a personal basis. This can be translated and communicated to members to help them see a different way of looking at money. If we can talk about money in a different way, it takes away the fear, and money no longer controls us. The spiritual principles expressed in the *Service Manual* found in Concept Twelve and Warranty One (pages 217-219) answer all the complaints and issues the fellowship has about Reserve Funds, sale of books, etc.

- The WSO is having conversations with the Conference about "How can we use what we have to have more?" Having conversations with your structures can help to support you. The goal is not to have money but to reach out, revitalize, and re-grow groups.
- A useful tool is the guideline on "Reserve Funds" (G-41). There is a section on Area, district, and groups having a Reserve Fund. There is no recovery in a bank account. What would they need and how long would they need to continue if no one came to the group anymore? How long would you have to pay rent if no one is coming? Everyone needs to have that conversation. [graphic of the G-41 Reserve Fund guideline]
- The Finance Committee did a very successful workshop at the World Service Conference showing how to do a budget. It gives a sense of personal responsibility. It is available from the WSO.

As a final thought, the WSO Executive Director shared with Delegates a thought from a previous WSO Treasurer: "The importance I place on something is directly proportional to what I spend on it or how I spend my resources. I say Al-Anon is important so I have to think about how much I put in the basket each week in relation to how much I spend on cigarettes or coffee."

Inventory

Connie H., ICC Chairperson

At the end of the Inventory General Session-Part Two, during the 2012 IAGSM, it was decided to have the discussion continue by putting the question on a Discussion Board on the GSO and IAGSM e-Communities, so that all structures (even those that could not attend) could have an opportunity to give input and be part of the future of the IAGSM. (2012 IAGSM Report, page 26). There was not much participation on e-Communities, so the ICC decided to bring the question back this year to be certain that all topics had been thoroughly covered. All of those responding indicated that the IAGSM is a valuable resource for their service structures.

In looking at the future of the IAGSM, what does your structure see as the next steps for this discussion?

Discussion

Delegates expressed concerns and raised questions about the declining number of structures attending. Delegates agreed that structures benefit from participation in the IAGSM, that it is a valuable resource. Service, finances, and technology were discussed very briefly at the 2012 session and they were more fully explored this year.

Background for discussion about the declining attendance of structures at the IAGSM was provided by ICC members.

A Motion made by the IAGSM in 1990 for submission to the Al-Anon Board of Trustees for approval states: "In keeping with the principles of the Seventh Tradition that the IAGSM supports the WSOs plan to make this meeting more self-supporting by gradually increasing the Delegates' equalized expense over the years with the ultimate goal of self-support." (Item #3 in 1990 IAGSM Summary of Motions section) In sharing the history it was advised by an ICC member that the Motion was brought at a time when the WSO was "bleeding" money with deficits in range of \$250,000.00-\$350,000.00 annually. The WSO was still located in New York paying over \$800,000.00 in annual rent. The Board had a series of conversations in those years (see WSC Summaries found on the WSO Members Web site al-anon.org/members) about what could be done to save our services. Some of those ideas might be helpful to structures struggling today. We at the WSO have been operating under that Motion. Initially the cost arrangement was that each structure would pay 50 percent of the Delegate's cost and the WSO pay 50 percent. Currently, each structure pays 85 percent of the cost with an option to pay the full amount. It would be this body (IAGSM) that would have to decide, if we continue in this fashion. The equalized expense will be 90 percent of the cost in two years. For the 2012 meeting, the WSO offered grants to structures that had not attended for several years to attend the 2012 meeting in South Africa.

The Executive Director suggested that if this body thinks that the equalized expense is part of the problem and were to decide to make some reasonable proposal, the WSO Board of Trustees may consider that we do not have to continue toward 100 percent of the costs paid by the structures unless this body feels that is direction it wants to go. He continued, "It may not

be feasible to continue having this meeting with only eight to twelve structures attending. As part of the Inventory, this is a topic we need to address because it is important that structures come. This body does not make decisions but can make recommendations to the WSO. We need to share with each other to do what is best for Al-Anon worldwide."

Other Delegates shared their thoughts:

"The podium with the flags bears testament to who is missing here. I want to see these countries. I know how much we benefit from each other being here. There is a wealth of experience for our structure and our membership to tap into. How many of these countries are not here because of financial reasons and how many because they do not have structural support yet?"

"My responsibility as Delegate is to let my structure know the value and carry it to the European Zonal Meeting (EZM) so other structures not attending are able to see the tremendous value of this meeting. I have learned so much and I am bursting with ideas I want to take home and communicate. Part of the Delegate's job is to transmit the information, and it is worth every cent."

"In Poland, our structure decided that the IAGSM is important for us and we have a special fund allocated for sending one Delegate. We give great priority to this event because, thanks to our participation in previous meetings, it has profited our service structure. All of our questions were answered. We value highly the personal contact and feel this atmosphere of Al-Anon working together. I am concerned about the number of countries not here too."

"We don't have the luxury of zonal meetings. Two Trustees at our inventory meeting thought we should not send anyone. They thought it was a holiday. They think we spend our vacations and money to come here. This goes hand-in-hand with fear of not enough. They forget that nothing is free or greater for the soul than coming out the other side. I suggest we brainstorm to come up with a Motion later."

Another Delegate shared, "We have fewer groups, and the sale of literature and contributions are down. However our attendance to IAGSM was already budgeted to send one Delegate from my small structure."



An ICC member indicated that “In 2012, the Board voted to offer grants to structures that had not attended in a while. Four structures accepted the grants. The equalized expense was 80 percent in 2012. It was suggested that service positions, time, and work may also be problems. Are translators a problem? Do structures have difficulty getting representatives here to speak as translators? Is it better to have a translator here to help them out? In structures potentially able to afford the cost of coming, I would still like to hear from them. Based on the Inventory response, is there benefit to them to post on the Discussion Board?”

“There is benefit for every structure to be here at the IAGSM. It is a different experience than the EZM.”

There was a suggestion to Skype the meeting or alternating it every two years with the face-to-face meeting since all structures have computers.

The Delegate from South Africa shared their experience and cautioned about using Skype. “Our structure couldn’t afford to have a conference yearly so they combined the Executive Committee with the Board meetings. They had a biannual conference and invited Delegates to participate by Skype and vote that way. They found the idea fraught with problems. They found they needed an extremely good and fast Internet where the Board was meeting. There is a dead spot over their board room table, so the meeting had to be moved to a much smaller room in order for Skype to pick up their voices. They experienced dropped lines. Delegates didn’t feel like they were participating. To save on costs, only out-of-town members stayed overnight. They found that it saved a bit, but in-town Delegates were exhausted traveling back and forth and attending to family. They also found that Delegates in outer Areas were not committed. They couldn’t participate in workshops etc. They didn’t feel a part of.

“South Africa didn’t attend IAGSM for a period because they didn’t understand the Equalized Expense. So their Board made a decision not to attend the IAGSM. The WSO Executive Director came to South Africa and explained. Now we have so much regret that we lost out in the structure. Despite working with the WSO *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*, we lagged behind. Our participation is okay now, but we definitely missed out during that period.”

To try to gain information on the reasons for lack of participation, a Delegate proposed that to make an informed decision about how to help others want to attend the IAGSM, each structure should contact another and ask them their reasons. Then in two years Delegates can decide if a Motion about how we can help is appropriate.

A suggestion was made to set up a “buddy system” to try to have a full conversation with missing structures and share everything the Delegates shared here. Delegates could

let them know that there are lots of ways to do buddies if you come next time.

An ICC member reminded everyone about the ideas expressed in the “Introduction to the Concepts of Service” in the *2014-2107 Al-Anon Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27) on page 180. “We forget that the pioneers gave us the opportunity for change. We can try a variety of things on a trial basis. We are not limited to one or two ideas; for instance the ‘buddy’ idea discussed in S.A. The structures that can attend the Ibero-American (a Spanish-speaking zonal meeting) used the ‘buddy system,’ however this did not seem to help solve the problem of a lack of participation. So it is not just the language. This year at the World Service Conference, we told structures that if you are coming and don’t speak English, we ask you to bring a translator (at your cost) so you can get to hear and participate when appropriate in the meeting. This body originally decided the IAGSM is an English-speaking meeting. That might be an issue for Latin American countries, for other structures it may be a combination of language and money.”

“My structure has a lot of benefits. The financial situation in Latin America is critical with so many poor people. I tried to share at our zonal meeting (Ibero-American) the experience of the IAGSM in South Africa. If structures can’t pay to attend what is near, they can’t come here. Language is difficult. For example, in my country young people in Al-Anon speak English, but they do not have the experience of working at the GSO level. We are working to bring them along so we can have Delegates in four to six years who are knowledgeable about Al-Anon. This meeting is the conclusion of my Board term. The IAGSM is very helpful for the future.”

An ICC member suggested that any changes or suggestions be labeled as a trial, or even freeze it as a trial, if we want to do something with a “buddy system” as a trial, something with translation and language as a trial. If this group says yes, it could happen. True abundance doesn’t limit, if we explore the possibilities the money will come.

“We could send an e-mail to those structures asking, ‘Where were you? We missed you. How can we help you to be here? This is what you missed.’”

“When there is no consistency and people leave office with no procedure in place, new people don’t know and the leadership may not see this as a higher priority. With rotation of leadership in GSOs, we try to impress on people the value and try to help them understand the roots and history of the IAGSM. We can’t make people do that. Long-time members know the value. I like the idea of sharing one-on-one with those who are not here.”

The Chairperson asked Delegates to think about whether they needed more information to make a Motion. (See Motion #4, 2014 IAGSM Report.)

Using Our Principles Expressed in Concepts Six, Seven, Ten, and Eleven, What Is the Relationship of the Board with the Conference and Committees?

Marilyn M., U.S. and Canada

Each of our structures is different in its formation, but the important thing is that we all understand the wisdom of the spiritual principles embodied in Al-Anon's Three Legacies in our work for Al-Anon Family Groups and ultimately for those families who suffer from the effects of alcoholism. Today I would like to give you an overview of our service structure at the World Service Office (WSO) level. Then I have an example of how we used Concepts Six, Seven, Ten, and Eleven to solve an ongoing problem with our structure. Lastly, we will see how using the principles found in the Concepts gave us clarity within our roles. I hope this will lead to more investigation into the principles of our Concepts to help solve any problems you are having.

From the humble beginnings of wives meeting in the kitchens beside Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, we have grown and stretched to respond to the needs of a growing fellowship. There have been many changes and developments...growing pains included! I believe one development that has allowed us to grow into a world-wide fellowship was the formation of the World Service Conference (WSC).

The Conference, which was formed by the groups in 1961, is now comprised of Delegates from 67 Areas in the United States of America, Canada, Bermuda, and Puerto Rico. The World Service Conference is the traditional working body which gives direction to the World Service Office in Virginia Beach. Decisions are made that affect the groups in our Conference structure as well as having an impact on world-wide Al-Anon. The Conference membership is currently made up of these approximately 97 *equal* members: the Delegates of the 67 Areas, plus the 19 members of the Board of Trustees of AFG Inc., which includes the WSO's Executive Director as a sustaining member. Also, included in World Service Conference membership are the Executive Committee members and key administrative staff (Directors and Associate Directors) who work at the WSO. All these members have equal voice and vote at our World Service Conference.

Selection of the Delegates from each of the 67 Areas is by democratic election by the groups of each Area, thus expressing the ultimate authority of the groups in Concept One at the World Service Conference. The 67 Area Delegates' votes are balanced by the votes of the approximately 30 non-Delegate members (the Board of Trustees, Executive Committee members, and WSO Staff members.) The Area Delegate votes will always be at least two-thirds majority of the WSC makeup. This assures that the voice of the groups will always be heard (See page 142, *2014-2017 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*.)

The Conference, which is described in our Conference Charter, is *traditional* in nature. The Conference has delegated many important functions that are *legal* in nature,

which it cannot perform because it is not a legal entity, to the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees' primary role is oversight of the WSO and that requires more time than the Board has so the Board, in turn, has given full authority for routine management of World Service Office and its staff to its Executive Committee (Concept Eight). Like our Trustees, they consist of volunteer Al-Anon members. The only exception is the sustaining Trustee, who is paid in his role as the Executive Director of AFG, Inc.

The Conference also delegates legal responsibility and legal authority for AFG, Inc. to the Board of Trustees. Working within the By-Laws, the Board guards the legal rights of the Al-Anon fellowship. It guards the Traditions by protecting our principles from distortion by those who would try to profit from our program. It acts as the chief service arm of the World Service Conference and carries out other administrative functions that the groups cannot possibly do on their own. In other words, the Board of Trustees is charged with the good management and the safeguarding of Al-Anon into the future. Again, the Board of Trustees is responsible for the *legal* entity AFG, Inc. and the Conference, which is a *traditional* entity, has given them these responsibilities.

The Board of Trustees is self-electing; however, traditional approval for Trustee nominees is sought from the WSC for all Trustee candidates. In this way, the Board of Trustees is always seeking the input of the groups, who are the ultimate authority, through the Delegates, to be sure the most qualified Trustees are selected. The legal election of Trustee candidates is carried out by the Board of Trustees itself.

The relationship of Al-Anon to the WSO is guided by the Al-Anon World Service Conference Charter which is found on page 171 of the *2014-2017 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*. This explains that the rights of the Conference are traditional, not legal. The Conference is a guardian of world services and its Twelve Traditions, and is a service body, not a government. This is an informal agreement, because neither the Conference nor the groups are incorporated—they are not legal entities.

While the Trustees have been given the legal rights and responsibilities for Al-Anon by the Conference, their role is not just Al-Anon's legal guardian, or just an equal voting member at Conference. In its leadership role, the Board of Trustees also listens to, and takes notice of the wishes of the Conference. It is the role of the Board of Trustees to carry out the directives of the Conference in their direction of the WSO. Trustees do not have the role of deciding on our own what is good or best for Al-Anon. In actuality, Trustees are servants of the groups. The Board of Trustees is charged with the responsibility of making sure that the future of

Al-Anon is secure. If a Conference action is deemed to have a detrimental effect on Al-Anon, the Trustees would likely petition the Conference for a reconsideration of the matter. The Conference has charged, handed over, or assigned to the Board with this responsibility and the Conference trusts the Trustees to do what is correct in the eyes of the law and to uphold our Traditions.

The equal participation, voice and vote of the Delegates, Board, Executive Committee, and WSO staff ensures a balanced look at the many aspects of the work of the Conference.

What challenges has our structure encountered as it relates to the principles expressed in Concepts Six, Seven, Ten, and Eleven? How do we use them to solve a problem in our structure?

At some points in our growing as a structure, there has been a feeling or suspicion among some Area Delegates and some Al-Anon members that the Board of Trustees was operating without their input or even in opposition to what the Areas wanted. This divisiveness was damaging and generally hurt the unity of the WSC. Undertones of mistrust and misunderstanding of who was responsible to do what compromised the stability of the Conference. Recently, the members of the Board identified this lack of trust and set out to clarify the roles of each of the types of members of the Conference. This is a short summary of how each of the four Concepts helped us.

Concept Six provided clarity for us that the Conference acknowledges the primary administrative responsibility of the Trustees. In all cases, the Board does not work as an authority, but widely consults to ensure the actions of the Board are carrying out the wishes of the groups through the Conference. Just as groups entrust their Delegates with the primary traditional authority, so the Delegates to the Conference must entrust the Board of Trustees, the corporate body of Al-Anon, with the legal aspects of our fellowship so that Al-Anon continues to thrive. Remember that the groups have the ultimate responsibility to supply the very best candidates for Trustee positions. Because of this, at the Conference they are in a position to approve candidates for Trustee that they know are excellent leaders with whom they can trust the safeguarding of the fellowship. Without this trust, our unity will be constantly in jeopardy. Concept Six also shows us that if we all do our own part, each of our skills and talents can be put together to achieve a superior result.

Another important focus to help secure the unity of the Conference is to be sure that all Conference members understand the principle of Concept Seven in which the Conference gives over the legal responsibility to the Board of Trustees. The Conference, with its traditional rights, will always be the final authority, but they have given the responsibility to the Trustees to be sure not only that all actions are within the law, but also that they will adhere to the Traditions and follow policies that have been developed and approved by the Conference. When all members of the Conference understand that they are working in mutual trust and balance with

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a common goal, we go forth in a spirit of harmony to achieve that common goal. This is Step Twelve in action.

Through our discussion of Concepts Six and Seven, we notice the importance of principles such as trust, balance, acceptance, and harmony. If we can use Concepts Six and Seven to identify our roles, we can gain more clarity by examining Concept Ten which explains that without defining those roles very clearly, we will obviously run into more difficulties. Situations where members want to do the jobs of others, members want to control others, or members do not want to give authority to those with the responsibility are examples of such problems. Communication about who does what seems like common sense, but often problems arise simply because we do not know the exact extent of our responsibility, authority, or to whom we are accountable. We can define each member's role to avoid problems of double-headed management. Concept Ten helps us to apply Tradition Two in our service roles, to understand that the groups have the final authority but they delegate that authority to their trusted servants within each of their own roles. The groups can do this because both the groups and the servants have mutual respect and trust for each other. No one would want to be asked to do a job and then not have the authority to carry it out or to be constantly questioned about it. We are reminded here that our Higher Power is the authority.

Now in Concept Eleven, principles such as responsibility, trust, and accountability mentioned in previous Concepts are further clarified. It does not matter how your structure is organized, whether you have paid staff or not, nor whether you currently even have a Board of Trustees or a Conference. What is important here is that the underlying principles are considered when we select our leaders and build our structures. Honesty, flexibility, understanding, patience, balance, mutual trust, mutual respect, and humility are just some of the principles that must be put to work if we are to be successful.

All the qualities of good leaders referred to in Concept Nine are required in the leadership roles described in Concept Eleven. An example of how the Concepts are threaded together is this quote from Concept Nine which relates to the importance of good leaders: "...*Good leadership cannot function well in a poorly designed structure. Weak leadership can hardly function at all, even in the best of structures*" (2014-2017 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual, page 249) These principles of leadership apply not just to volunteers such as the Board of Trustees, but to paid staff as well.

The need for fairness is also a principle that is explained in Concept Eleven. Service roles need to be clearly defined so that all of us know for what we are responsible and the limits of our authority. We also need to know to whom we are accountable. We also understand what is not our role so we can work together harmoniously. All types of service roles must be treated fairly, in salaries for work performed and in appreciation of work. All paid Staff Conference members are considered equal in voice and vote to volunteer Conference members. We depend on them and their dedi-

cation to their work that can “...make or break our structure of service.” (2014-2017 *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*, page 258.) The fact that they depend on compensation must never be held over their right to express their views or to vote. Without fairness, can we have harmony? No.

To experience our Conference today is to watch the spiritual principles in action. All members can feel free to express themselves as we work with each other with mutual respect. We walk out together at the end of the day as friends and as partners in our primary spiritual aim.

We have learned that if our service arms are to work harmoniously with the groups, both within the Conference and outside it, we must give more than lip service to the Concepts. We know from our early beginnings that many hands make light work. There is much wisdom in sharing the load with

our many capable members, but all service jobs need clear definitions of responsibility, authority, and accountability. Using the principles embodied in the Concepts and Traditions such as humility and honesty, we can make a clear path for our progress. It is proven that without the basic principles of mutual trust and respect, many problems can arise. Just as we learn to root out our fears in working our Steps so that we can repair our relationships, we must also learn that if we do not, those same fears will arise in mistrust, resentment, and fear in our service relationships.

I respect each of you for all the work you do for Al-Anon Family Groups. I trust that you are working towards the same spiritual purpose as I am. I ask for that same respect and trust as I do my best to keep Al-Anon Family Groups harmonious and thriving into the future.

Discussion

Delegates shared:

“We do a workshop at Conference on Tradition Seven as a means of trying to educate Delegates and members of Conference about their relationship. We are now writing processes and procedures in the GSO. We are formalizing volunteer roles and functions into procedures so there is no double-headed management. The night before Conference, we show a PowerPoint with a diagram of what our structure looks like. This is a means of informing the membership that attends. This is taken to Assemblies as well.”

“Establishing boundaries is a good way of understanding the parameters of a service role. It is part of the ongoing recommendations and restructuring of our GSO. The General Service Board has compiled a resource packet for our Delegates to help them more clearly understand their role and responsibility so clarity gets back to the districts and Areas.”

“We have a Board election package. We tried to introduce a Delegate induction night before the Conference because Delegates need help with clarity between the traditional and legal arms.

“We need to keep repeating these things because of rotation of service. We cannot assume everyone at Conference is aware of these principles. We want to help Delegates to take the message back. This starts with thinking about what is our role as members of the Conference.”

“A presentation on Concepts Six and Seven helped to clarify to members of our Board the difference between legal and traditional authority. They report to the Delegates on the action of the Board. This is working well with committees. We have a new General Secretary. It was good to work with the Concepts in defining his role.”

“The Board used Concepts Seven and Ten at their quarterly Board meetings when it discussed whether it has given over too much to the Executive Committee (Concept Eleven) for routine review. When Board members read the Executive Committee Minutes, they are giving oversight. The Board

assigns review of reports going to the WSC to the Executive Committee. So the Board doesn't take time to review things unless there is a big change. This has freed up Board time to look at other things. The Executive Director attends Finance, Policy, Board, and Executive Committee meetings. His role is to take information back to the Office for implementation. The Board does not need to be in double-headed management of what is happening in the office (Concept Ten). The Board has a Handbook of Responsibilities based on the shared experience of people who have been in that experience. It is a living document, constantly evolving, improving, and changing. This helps so we don't get into somebody else's business.”

An ICC member summarized the issue reminding everyone that this is a common error in Al-Anon. “We create rules, handouts, handbooks, procedures, and policies. We keep throwing paper at problems and we forget to have the conversation. Rather than just giving another piece of paper, the key is to have the conversation about the piece of paper. When we have orientation/training for new Delegates, it is important to have a piece of paper but also to have dialog asking what the paper means to them, what do they need at Conference to be successful in this process, and what they need from the Board. The Board does not act legally at the Conference. Its members are voting as part of the fellowship—otherwise we are not equal. As members at the Conference, Board members are all in the traditional role. After the Conference the Board goes into its legal role. If we put too heavy an emphasis on the Board being legal, the Conference will hear that the Board is different than “us.” In the Conference, the Board is the same as “us.”

The discussion was summarized by a Delegate who stated, “I like the visual of holding hands and coming out of the Conference in harmony that the presenter shared. Concept Nine tells us that the Board is responsible for world services and in a GSO service structure, a Board exercises primary leadership at the General Service level. We are all equals in that.”

Incorporation

Paula B., U.S. and Canada

Reasons That Structures Incorporate

1. Incorporation limits individual liability of the members providing service since lawsuits are against the corporation. Incorporation provides protection. For example, for injuries that occur at a function or breach of contract, etc.
2. Incorporation provides continuity of the “entity.” This occurs with rotation of service and planned/unplanned discontinuation of service. Entities could be districts, Areas, GSOs, AISs, and LDCs.
3. Incorporation provides banks an entity to assess income taxes against dividends, interest income, etc. We have to abide by our country’s laws.
4. Incorporation provides employees with an entity for whom to work and not a group of individuals. If we have an office, they know who their boss is rather than trying to report to a group of people.
5. Incorporation allows an entity to take legal action to protect trademarks and copyrights. Only the national structures of the entity may take this action. This provides a legal shield and prevents the individual member of the Board from violating our Traditions by breaking anonymity when entering into a lawsuit for trademark/copyright protection. Registering the trademark/copyright prevents individuals from using these for personal gain. The legal shield refers to an incorporated entity. They are protected from a lawsuit out of negligence. They maintain our name and always diligent in protecting it.
 - It is important for national structures to register the Al-Anon and Alateen logo in their structure.
 - The World Service Office (WSO) is the owner of the trademark/copyright.
 - The European Union (EU) is already registered by the WSO.
 - The WSO does not use our incorporation status to shield or protect groups, districts, Al-Anon Information Services (AISs), Literature Distribution Centers (LDCs), Areas or other countries as the WSO incorporation does not extend to these service entities.

Description of Al-Anon Family Groups and Reasons for Incorporation

Members come together to form an Al-Anon Family Group. Since groups do not maintain membership lists and adhere to the Traditions, as they ought never to be organized, groups do not incorporate.

Al-Anon Family Groups make up geographic districts. Since there are elected officers of the district, districts may choose to incorporate due to reasons 1, 2, and 3 above.

Districts make up Areas that may be identified by state line(s). Since there are elected officers of the Area who serve on the Area World Service Committee (AWSC), Areas may choose to incorporate due to reasons 1, 2, and 3 above. The AWSC is a part of the traditional arm so it is not incorporated, yet it can serve as an advisory committee to the Board of the Corporation.

Al-Anon Information Services (AISs) and/or Literature Distribution Centers (LDCs) are managed by a governing body and may choose to incorporate due to reasons 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Description of Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. and Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters (Canada), Inc.

- Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. is referred to as the World Service Office (WSO). The WSO is located in Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA. The WSO is incorporated and managed by an Executive Director. There are three Directors (Director of Business Services, Director of Member Services, and Director of Communications). There are six Associate Directors and a Controller. The WSO has approximately 45 employees.

There is a Board of Trustees that is composed of 18 volunteers from the U.S and Canada and one sustaining Trustee (the Executive Director). The Chairperson of the Executive Committee sits on the Board of Trustees with voice, but not vote. There are three at-large members on the Executive Committee and four members by virtue of their positions: the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees; the Treasurer, the Chairperson of the Finance Committee; the Chairperson of the Policy Committee; and the Executive Director, all of whom have voice. The Chairperson of the Board of Trustees does not vote.

- Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters (Canada) Inc. maintains a “virtual office” with an address in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. This office is incorporated, but there are no employees. Services are provided by the WSO.

Challenges Related to Incorporation

- The misunderstanding of a district, Area, AIS, and LDC on incorporating the *traditional* structure (the voice of the Group Representatives [GRs] to give spiritual approval) with legal transaction of business (the responsibility of the elected officers to give legal approval). The spiritual and legal approval according to their roles is given to budgets, By-Laws, etc.
- The lack of knowledge on the reasons why a district, Area, AIS, or LDC may or may not need to be incorporated.
- Areas that are developing By-Laws for incorporation may use incorporation By-Laws from another Area as

a template. Unfortunately, these By-Laws for incorporation may not be accurately written to separate the traditional arm from the legal as identified in Concept Seven.

- The legal fees associated with drawing up Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws are usually more than districts, Areas, Al-Anon Information Services and/or Literature Distribution Centers have budgeted. An Al-Anon member or a friend of the fellowship may donate legal services or charge a reduced fee, if this same service is offered to other not-for-profits.
- The definition of “member” in a district, Area, AIS, or LDC is difficult due to lack of membership lists and the spiritual principle of anonymity.

Discussion

The WSO responded to Delegates’ questions:

Q: National structures are important. Does it affect our need to register the logo nationally? What does “EU registered” mean?

A: The WSO explained that members of the European Union (EU) countries agreed to honor treaties and registrations and legal entities of other EU countries so they are now protected under one registration. Trademarks are the names “Al-Anon” and “Alateen” and the triangle with a circle. A structure needs to be sure the trademarks are registered. Copyright refers to the literature. Check with your structure to see what you need to register in terms of copyright. Original documents are produced by the WSO and we license a structure to print and sell, but we do the translation in Spanish and French. If you do translation, we license you to translate, print, and sell within your structure. You are not licensed to sell outside your structure. Sometimes a group will speak your language outside your structure. You could sell your literature to that country to sell to the group or you could sell to the group directly. The groups in your country belong to your structure. It does not matter what language they speak. The WSO tells all groups that they must cooperate with the national structure where the group is located. Language is irrelevant. This is a spiritual contract, not a language contract. It is important for the WSO to have contracts with structures for permission to print on file. The fact that a structure is licensed by the WSO and the structure prints and sells makes this an important legal document for the WSO to have on file. While Al-Anon, the fellowship, and groups operate in a spiritual environment, it is still the world, and we need to operate in the legal sense.

Q: We have to pay individual fees to register all three. Would our structure be covered under the Madrid Protocol? Renewal is expensive. Are we protected under it?

- The “membership” meetings in Canada are composed of the Directors—also known as Trustees. This is not to be confused with the Directors in the office who are not Trustees.
- There is a specific number of members and thus able to establish a quorum for voting.

Suggestions for Incorporation

If possible, utilize a member who is an attorney and is familiar with the Concepts of Service when drawing up Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws. The Executive Director of the WSO is willing to review Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws prior to submitting to the membership for *traditional* approval and affirmation.

A: The WSO responded that New Zealand is party to the Madrid Protocol. If we can file a single registration to obtain the trademark, it will go on e-Communities. If it will work, we will get an application pending and notify the structures when it is completed. The Madrid Protocol impacts 91 countries. The Executive Director will investigate it with our attorneys. If we can register the trademarks using that Protocol, it will protect another group of countries.

Q: The sale of Conference Approved Literature (CAL) is important for the finance of our structure. There are concerns that members or groups purchase literature on the WSO Web site. Is there something the WSO does when it receives direct orders from another country? The price is less when purchased on the WSO Web site than through our structure.

A: The WSO clarified that as a result of the U.S. not-for-profit laws, it is required to sell to anyone who wishes to purchase our materials. It is hard to believe it is cheaper for a member to buy from the WSO than their own structure because the WSO has penalties on the size of the orders to discourage this. There is a minimum shipping charge (a large penalty) and they have to order a minimum of \$500 USD to receive any benefit. The shipping charge for foreign shipping is 50 percent. We do this because the U.S. and Canada groups were subsidizing the literature costs for the rest of the world. The WSO is not supposed to be a Literature Distribution Center (LDC) for the world. It just evolved over time that some structures had that luxury of speaking English, French, or Spanish.

We suggest having a structure conversation about how much literature do we need and what can we afford and still stay within our means? We forget to tell members why the cost of literature at the local level is higher than the cost from the WSO. We also forget to tell members

what the services are that the literature funds. If we don't have money to fund it, where are the services going to come from? We need to have this conversation at the national meeting, Assemblies, and groups. Self-support means supporting all entities. We, the members, have to pay for it. Those are the conversations that give the membership ownership and they can see what we are doing.

In the U.S. and Canada we have groups and members who still want to order from the WSO. We send a notice with orders asking members to please support your local AIS/LDC. The structure is holding stock for you, insuring shipping etc.

Q: When I see someone misusing the Al-Anon name, I forward an e-mail to the WSO Executive Director. How does that work for the rest of the world?

A: When groups are using the Al-Anon name outside the structure and putting ads in newspapers to go to their meeting, and they are not using our literature, it gives the wrong impression of Al-Anon. We lose our integrity. It is important for each structure to do their part to protect the Al-Anon name.

Q: I don't understand about incorporating Areas and districts. Our GSO has insurance for damage to property etc.

A: The WSO explained that this presentation was not designed to say everyone must incorporate. We are not saying districts and Areas must incorporate. If you have these issues in your structure, these are reasons to incorporate. If there is confusion, we can always go back to the Concepts, start with the groups who can't do everything so they give delegated power to Conference to do these things for them. The Conference does what the groups can't do for themselves—the spiritual, not business. Why would you need to incorporate? The fellowship gets confused. The Conference wanted things (offices, etc.) which they couldn't do on the national level so they delegated that to the Board of Trustees.

There is nothing in the Concepts that gives the national structure control over the groups. It can't sign contracts for the groups. When we incorporate an Area, we actually have two Area entities. The spiritual structure or traditional structure with GRs makes decisions about setting budgets etc. for the Areas. A smaller entity that is a legal, incorporated entity for the Area does for the Area what it can't do for itself. Without incorporation, GRs would have to sign the contract as individu-

als, which would put them on the line financially. So the corporation, as a legal entity does the legal things for the spiritual arm that it can't do for itself. There is a list of guidelines about how the Assembly operates, what coordinators do, what a member is, and what a group is. They are the spiritual contracts of the traditional arm. The corporation only spells out its purposes to provide services to this group but does not have power over the traditional. When we mix them (incorporate GRs into structure), some laws require Areas to disclose names of all the members of the organization of the legal entity. The traditional arm does not elect Trustees because that makes them legal.

A Delegate with insurance experience stated: "It is a principle worldwide to know who has an insurable interest. On an insurance document, incorporation does not extend to Areas. A policy would have to extend to every Area named in the policy document, which is a much higher cost.

"My GSO is incorporated. The Board of Trustees is an entity of a non-profit association. By-Laws define what is the group and district, but the incorporation is for the Board of Trustees to protect the name of Al-Anon for the WSO. Our By-Laws were redone to incorporate more members. On our Internet domain, the fellowship knows we write with the permission of the WSO."

Another Delegate shared, "My structure is not incorporated. We have a situation now where two people are acting as personal guarantors for the lease on our GSO. A sticking point for not incorporating is that we needed 15 people to sign the incorporation document and those people would be legally liable. There is a lot of indecision now, but this will come back to the table."

A Delegate shared an example of why this conversation is helpful for future discussions. "When we incorporated, we passed By-Laws that incorporated the traditional and legal entities. We had a non-member attorney review it and he did not understand our Traditions. The way we incorporated gave legal authority to the Group Representatives (GRs). Now the Area World Service Committee (AWSC) officers and coordinators cannot make any decisions without going back to the GRs, and they meet twice a year. The WSO Executive Director told us we had incorporated the traditional *and* legal. We were given the Concepts to take to our Assembly to explain what happened. Now the GRs do not want to give up their authority to the Area, but we will continue our conversations."

2016 IAGSM Bids

Debbie G., Co-Chairperson

The Associate Director of Member Services—International explained the bidding and voting processes. This year, two structures submitted bids for the 2016 International Al-Anon General Service Meeting. Names were drawn for the order in which bids from the two structures would be presented.

The Delegate representing Italy presented the first bid for consideration. She gave a history of Al-Anon in Italy. In 2016, Italy will celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Al-Anon in Italy. After presenting information about the city, hotel, and transportation, she concluded by saying that, “Holding the 2016 IAGSM in Italy will help promote a sense of belonging and solidarity within the fellowship.”

Poland will be celebrating their 35th anniversary in 2015. The Delegate presented a history of Al-Anon in Poland and pointed out that Polish immigrants from Canada started Al-Anon in Poland. After presenting information about the city, hotel, and transportation, the Delegate concluded by saying that, “There has been steady development of groups, and holding the 2016 IAGSM in Poland will help them with their organizational skills for the IAGSM.”

Discussion

It was pointed out that neither structure had hosted an IAGSM. They are two of the younger Al-Anon structures, so it will be an exciting event for both of the structures. Delegates from structures that have hosted the IAGSM in the past shared that the benefits of hosting the meeting energized their structures and attracted volunteers to service work. There was discussion about the estimated Equalized Expense. It was explained that it was calculated based on the 2012 IAGSM attendance in South Africa and that the financial costs for a structure to attend averaged out to be

nearly the same for both bids. Availability of Wi-Fi was an important consideration. It is helpful for Delegates to maintain contact with their structures and family. Since both bids were from the same geographic area of the world, it is hoped that there may be more participation from national structures located in Europe.

Following discussion, the Delegates voted electronically to hold the 2016 IAGSM in the vicinity of Rome, Italy (see Motion #1 of the 2014 IAGSM Report). The Chairperson of the ICC thanked both Delegates for their bid presentations.



Zonal Meeting Reportbacks

European Zonal Meeting (EZM)

Ushi von E., Germany

The European Zonal Meeting (EZM) was held in Essen, Germany on August 23-25, 2013.

Countries that attended this meeting were Belgium (Flemish), Belgium (French), Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland (French), Switzerland (German), UK & Eire, and Ukraine. The World Service Office sent two representatives.

A primary goal of the EZM is to support evolving European structures by sharing information, problems, and solutions.

Agenda Items included:

- Review of the Framework Document
- Where the next EZM would be held
- Who attends the meeting
- How communication would take place
- A discussion on the topic of “Modern Communication”

There were workshops on the following topics.

- Finance and law
- How to help evolving structures
- 2012 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM) Report



Agenda items for the next EZM include:

- Time for structures to exchange what they have done since the last Zonal meeting
- A discussion about the next Chairperson as the contact for e-Communities or about the next hosting structures that would take on this responsibility
- Bids for the 2019 EZM

The next meeting is scheduled to take place in 2015 in Belgium.

Ibero-American Meeting

Silvina A., Argentina

The RIASA (Al-Anon Service Ibero-American Meeting in English) was held in Montevideo, Uruguay, in October 2013. Paraguay, Uruguay, Ecuador, and Argentina attended. The primary goal was to restart the RIASA and share information between the structures.

Ecuador reported they have 40 groups (20 Al-Anon and 20 Adult Children and Alateen). They have financial problems and for this reason they were not able to attend the IAGSM. They held a Conference in February 2014. The General Service Office (GSO) is in Quito and was registered as a corporation; it was a mistake because they now have to pay taxes.

Uruguay has approximately 60 groups. The GSO is located in Montevideo with a personal staff of one. The Administrative Secretary is not an Al-Anon member. They have been working in Public Outreach and they have been successful. In keeping with Tradition Seven, they held three events.

Paraguay has 25 groups (four Alateen and one Adult Children). They celebrated their Sixth Conference. Their goal is to form a GSO.



Argentina's groups have decreased (280) and they have organized "Volver a las bases" (Return to the Basics) to support the groups. The GSO has a "Facebook page called "Alcoholismo Grupos de Familia Al-Anon." This is used only to give the message to professionals and potential members of Al-Anon.

Topics discussed at the meeting were:

- Public Outreach
- Sponsorship of emergent structures
- IAGSM Report
- Leadership

The next RIASA will be held in 2015 in Paraguay or Ecuador. The structures decided to invite the other Latin American structures.

Central American Meeting

Marsha W., ICC Committee

The RECACSA (Central America Meeting) was held in Siguatepeque, Honduras, on November 4-6, 2013. Countries that attended this meeting were El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Panama. The World Service Office (WSO) sent two representatives. The primary goal of this meeting was to report public outreach activities.

Highlights

The representative reporting on behalf of the Costa Rica structure advised that the General Service Office determined that reprinting literature in their country was more cost-effective than buying directly from the WSO. As a result of a decision by the Board of Trustees, they reprinted *Reaching for Personal Freedom—Living the Legacies* (SP-92), *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon* (SB-6) and *Courage to Change—One Day at a Time in Al-Anon II* (SB-16). Currently they have 150 Al-Anon meetings and seven Alateen meetings.

The national service for El Salvador has been dormant for seven years due to financial problems and changes in leadership. A new Service Board was elected in the spring of 2012 and has been functioning well since that time. The three attendees for El Salvador to this meeting were all part of the Board of Trustees. They indicated that although the groups struggled financially, they continued to meet regularly to ensure that Al-Anon is available in the community. They are currently doing small outreach projects (participating in health fairs, placing posters in public places) to bring awareness and to re-establish the benefits of Al-Anon in their communities. There are 34 Al-Anon meetings and one Alateen meeting.

In Nicaragua, the Al-Anon Information Service (AIS) continues to do well and receives financial and volunteer support from their groups. The AIS is not a Literature Distribution Center (LDC), however, they do purchase literature from the World Service Office to make sure they have



some literature on hand for members. They now have an office and a part-time worker. There are 43 Al-Anon meetings and one Alateen meeting.

Honduras has an AIS that registered with the WSO in 2012. It was reported that hosting the Zonal meeting energized many members to be involved in service. They want to continue capitalizing on the energy by trying to plan some future public outreach activities. They have 48 Al-Anon meetings and four Alateen meetings.

In Guatemala the GSO has a paid General Secretary. The Board of Trustees is discussing the financial benefits of printing Al-Anon/Alateen literature in Guatemala instead of buying directly from the WSO since shipping and importing costs have increased tremendously. They have 24 Al-Anon meetings and three Alateen meetings.

The representative reported the groups in Panama are experiencing a high turnover of members involved in service and continues to discuss how to solve this problem. They are finding it challenging to find qualified members to take on service responsibilities. The current representative advised she has remained in her service role for five years as the representative for the Zonal meeting. They have 17 Al-Anon meetings and one Alateen meeting.

The next meeting is scheduled for 2015 in Nicaragua.

Workshop Reportbacks

Clarity of the General Service Office (GSOs) Purpose and Mission

Kira S., Finland—Facilitator

Malgorzata D-K., Poland—Reporter

Delegates shared the purpose and mission of their GSOs:

- It is to increase the unity of the structure, to buy literature, and to be a unified body in its interaction with the government and its agencies. Doing public outreach unifies the groups before the Conference.
- One GSO advised they have one paid employee who uses her name and face to take care of financial matters and accounting on behalf of their service structure.
- It is a clearinghouse for literature, and a source of public outreach. The mission is to make Al-Anon accessible for the society, support members, provide services, and to support the structure in international contacts.
- The GSO helps friends and families of alcoholics, distributes literature, organizes Al-Anon events, and cooperates with goal-related programs.
- It has to act in accordance with the wishes of the Conference, supports Al-Anon groups in understanding of the Al-Anon program, stays in touch with the fellowship, handles Conference Approved Literature (CAL) and guidelines, answers any inquiries of groups and members, complies with regulations, does public outreach, and informs society using the Internet Web site.
- The GSO, an extension of Al-Anon Family Groups, the spiritual arm, is connected with literature, archives, finances, Board meetings and legal decisions. It maintains group records, prepares materials, encourages groups and Al-Anon services, improves communication, and supports Conference members.
- GSO's purpose and mission is to support the Al-Anon groups, to reflect the wishes of the groups, and do for them what they can't do for themselves.
- The GSO creates the unity of Al-Anon groups, creates tools, conveys the Al-Anon message, and signs contracts. The Conference is the voice of the groups and it tells the GSO what to do. The office is directed by the Trustees.

- The GSO's mission is to constantly be scanning the world and looking for new opportunities and ways to carry the Al-Anon message.
- It has delegated authority and responsibility. Groups gave delegated authority to the Conference and the Conference gave delegated authority to the Board and the Board gave part of its authority to the GSO.
- A national office can do useful service for the groups. For example, the U.S. and Canada structure publishes the public outreach magazine *Al-Anon Faces Alcoholism* and provides it to the groups within the service structure for the cost of printing/shipping. This gives the groups an opportunity to use this publication for public outreach.
- The WSO has legally registered the logo and Al-Anon/Alateen names. The WSO supports the international structures in their efforts to protect the Al-Anon logo/trademark and the Al-Anon and Alateen names.
- As a way to assist the fellowship, if there are recurring questions posed to the WSO, the WSO includes the question as a frequently asked question and posts the question and the WSO response on e-Communities.
- GSO answers inquiries from Al-Anon groups or individuals with respect to the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions; it uses the spiritual principles as a resource to decide to accept something or not.
- At one GSO, the responses to questions are written collaboratively, read, and then the feedback is sent to the groups that are interested.

Balance Between Tradition Four and Six: Cooperation Between Al-Anon and Alcoholics Anonymous

Susanne A., Germany—Facilitator

Gillian B., Australia—Reporter

Tradition Four: *Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting another group or Al-Anon or AA as a whole.*

- Benefits Al-Anon or Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) as a whole.
- Working on conventions together gives both fellowships the chance to work together.
- Public outreach—working together to share our programs at schools and institutions—works well when we work and cooperate together.
- Anyone in A.A. who has a relative may be more comfortable to refer them to Al-Anon when we maintain open relationships.
- Alateens speaking at A.A. meetings is an opportunity for A.A.'s to hear about the family disease.
- Some Areas have a strained relationship locally with the A.A. fellowship. Many find that communication on a national level is easier; Al-Anon GSO to A.A.GSO.
- When there are families involved in both fellowships, keeping the lines of communication open can help with modeling cooperation between the two fellowships.
- Maintaining our principle of being self-supporting and upholding our boundaries—particularly financial—and when linking ourselves to A.A. for public outreach purposes, is important.

Tradition Six: *Our Al-Anon Family Groups ought to never endorse, finance or lend our name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary spiritual aim. Although a separate entity, we should always co-operate with Alcoholics Anonymous.*

- Observing our affiliation and cooperation as opposed to autonomy.
- Caution in enabling—our participation in conventions needs to be seen as cooperation *not* affiliation.
- Establishing financial responsibilities according to our Traditions. We gain healthy self-respect by not asking A.A. to do for us what we can do for ourselves. Beware of the power of the “purse” strings.
- Maintaining contact with A.A. to ensure they have up-to-date details and clear communication from Al-Anon when cooperating on projects.
- Clearly defined lines of what Al-Anon's role is when invited to participate (not childcare) in a function or activity.

- Education of the respective Al-Anon and A.A. members' roles when we are invited to participate in joint activities.
- Service structure—members of A.A. who do Al-Anon service. Understanding that the service structures are separate and our members who also attend A.A. are welcomed and accepted when participating in Al-Anon service.
- Remember that A.A. is an outside enterprise.
- A new tent card has been designed that hopefully can be easily understood by A.A. members who also attend Al-Anon.
- Identifying what service positions A.A. members who also attend Al-Anon can hold keeps the focus on the Al-Anon program.
- As Al-Anon members, we can speak quietly to an A.A. member attending Al-Anon to remind them that Al-Anon is spoken here when the A.A. member is off topic during a meeting.
- The table cards used during the meeting can be a reminder for A.A. members attending Al-Anon meetings, that the Al-Anon “experience” is the language of the meeting.
- Remembering to leave *all* labels outside the room.

Clearly defined roles when cooperating on outreach projects, and participating in A.A. Conventions, help define the role of Al-Anon's participation.

- Outreach opportunities at A.A. conventions are considered when accepting the invitation.
- When participating at an A.A. convention/meeting (if it is not our meeting convention) we should remember that, as Al-Anon members, we are guests. We need to be respectful during their conventions/meetings.
- To practice cooperation we can schedule planned contact with A.A. Communicate and establish what's appropriate and what's not.
- We should relate and maintain good public relations as a support for both fellowships.
- Sometimes it is not easy to get along with various personalities on A.A. committees. When there is no contact with A.A. at all, this can cause interference with the harmony of future communications.



- When A.A. plans to invite an Al-Anon speaker to a public meeting, it is always a good idea to establish with A.A. that the speaker is in fact an active member in Al-Anon.
- In one structure the fellowships share a hotline. A.A. coordinates the line for two months and Al-Anon coordinates the line for two months.
- Tradition Seven states we are all self-supporting. We need to remember that if we were to depend on an outside source for service workers/volunteers, we would be at risk of being dominated or controlled. There could also be a conflict of interest.
- We gain healthy self-worth and self-respect by being independent, self-reliant, and self-supporting in all manner or aspect.

Summary

We do cooperate with A.A. and rely on the mutual cooperation between Al-Anon and A.A.

We benefit from participating with A.A., but remember they are an outside enterprise.

How Do We, As IAGSM Delegates, Live the Principles?

Gillian G., South Africa—Facilitator

Minna K., Finland—Reporter

The Statements:

- What it means to be a trusted servant
- Service Sponsors
- Balancing my recovery and my service work

The Principles:

- The Twelve Steps; from “I” to “me”
- The Twelve Traditions; from “me” to “we”
- The Twelve Concepts of Service; from “we” to “our”

This is a summary of the sharing during this discussion:

- The role as a Delegate includes using the Twelve Steps.
- Delegates should attend Al-Anon meetings for their own individual growth. (It may be also useful to attend open A.A. meetings to learn more about the disease.) The balance in recovery and service comes from being a member of the group and not as just a servant of the group.
- IAGSM Delegates report to their respective Board of Trustees. To share one’s experience of the world-wide fellowship.
- For those structures that send two IAGSM Delegates, they work in pairs sharing the responsibility for translation of all information about the IAGSM.
- A returning Delegate shares, and sponsors the incoming Delegate.
- Remember that the Higher Power is helping when there are crises and changes in structure.
- We remember the responsibility that comes with this service position. Our recovery comes before the recovery of others—otherwise you can’t lead. We need a strong understanding about our principles to give us structure. Be an example of better leadership. Our business is being in control; our principles help in doing it in a better way.
- We sponsor by example. Live a fantastic life. Use the principles to balance your needs with other people’s needs.
- Adult children expect the effect of actions will happen immediately. The Steps help with achieving patience with others.
- There are difficulties in becoming a leader. Sponsors are needed in all service levels. Responsibility comes with a service role. As Area Chair, I learned to allow people to do what they do well. Areas can be damaged by personalities.

- Al-Anon is not to be forced on others or you will alienate them. Balance is being able to see two sides to everything. Growing up, everything was black and white. If you accept the principles, the program will come independently of culture. Lois and Anne had very little material.
- Lead by example. I needed to be attracted to service. I had no self-esteem. Somebody had to say, “Would you come with us?” Now I’m one of those people. But sometimes you stand alone with the Higher Power. Management skills are needed in balancing service with a home group and family. It’s a learning process.
- I did not like people. I had no place on earth. I needed to involve the Twelve Steps before the Traditions and Concepts. Without the Steps, I’d be an angry controller. Al-Anon loved me in spite of rejection. I learned I could love and be a leader with passion.
- We each have dignity. Most people want to do the right thing—give them the opportunity.
- We tend to immerse ourselves in anything we do and lose our health. You can’t do it all. Now I don’t feel I’m missing anything. I’m balancing family decisions about saying “no,” reconnecting with groups, and reading literature.
- From “I to me,” keep on in my recovery in my own home group. I’m no good to anybody if “me” is angry. From “we” to “our” saved my marriage and family relations.
- Leadership is subject to criticism. Do not go back saying “we are wrong.” Share slowly about the possibilities, changing from a follower to a leader. Be humble, but acknowledge your skills.
- With controlling people, you need an open mind. Also accept the compliments. You have to have a pure heart and soul.
- The program can be used in every aspect of life. I’m grateful for those that have come before. I’m coming out of my comfort zone.
- With principles, I am never working alone.
- The program is very wise and gives us the elements to guide our way in service. My idea is to be obedient, humble, and considerate towards others.

General Warranties: What Do They Mean

Paula B., New Zealand—Facilitator

Paula B., U.S. and Canada—Reporter

Warranty One: *that only sufficient operating funds, including an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle*

- A discussion at Conference began as an ongoing conversation about group funds, reserve funds, etc. If the GSO was short of funds, it may no longer exist and provide services. There was a review of *Reserve Fund* Guideline (G-41). There was a suggestion for Areas to have a six-month reserve.
- One GSO advised they have less than one year's reserve (approximately six months) due to legal restrictions. They use funds for public outreach projects such as providing literature for nursing schools. The discussion on a reserve is limited at one-half year even though there are additional funds for the projects. Their Strategic Plan focuses on strengthening the group because a strong group practices Tradition Seven.
- Many groups hold funds and are having conversations about what is needed. It is based on fear by both those with and without money. Clarification that this Warranty One is about an ample reserve and not prudence. This is where we understand abundance as a spiritual principle. A structure can earmark funds to fund projects (purchase property, travel to Zonal meetings, and special projects).
- Have bank accounts for ten-12 months' time, if necessary. The GSO determines if the flow of money is sufficient. Areas (in this structure) do not save money for multiple projects—they are mainly for conventions and events.

Warranty Two: *that no Conference member shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over members*

- Conference member's perception is that there are some with more authority and there are discussions about whether Board members should have a vote at the Conference. It is a perception of unequal balance. This was resolved when there was a reference to "what is good for Al-Anon as a whole." There can be different opinions but members have equal vote.
- There are Board members who are knowledgeable and try to influence other Board members. It would be helpful to discuss this Warranty so that they can see the equality of all voices.

- Warranties are the protection against excess. When we study them, we find the spiritual side. We learn limits are important. We deal with issues maturely, without aggression or personal holdings.
- This is tied to Concept Four regarding the Right of Participation—that some will try to limit the participation of others. This is usually based on fear. If multiple people agree with one person then they see that person as having too much authority. No one can have your power unless you give it to them. People give authority to others based on their position and then become fearful and want to limit power.

Warranty Three: *that all decisions be reached by discussion, vote and, whenever possible, by unanimity*

- What do we give our Delegates that would involve them in the decision? It was helpful to have workshops that they can take back to groups. Currently the Board is making most decisions and these are retrieved by Conference members. Discussion is important, along with answering questions.
- It is important that all are involved in the discussion and the decision. Use of Knowledge-Based Decision-Making to Reach an Informed Group Conscience (KBDM)—some read more and/or talk with Service Sponsors. Now all people have equal information, hear, and discuss information. We come prepared, are kind, and presume goodwill at Conference. We have a two-day Board meeting with a template on topics, meetings, Strategic Plan, and succession planning. The Board assigns projects based on Conference discussions.
- There is much discussion at Conference/Board meetings. This may be because everyone thinks differently and sometimes discussions are tabled to be discussed at another time.
- Divergent thinking emerged in ideas for a strategic plan. This information was considered, and key ideas were identified and then grouped by commonality and narrowed down to three. This helped achieve unanimity while hearing all voices. Have Delegates prepare this information for the Conference; then Delegates are prepared for the discussion.
- Not a lot of discussion at Board, but some at Conference. The Conference gives more direction to the Board. The Board is beginning to develop a Strategic Plan.

Warranty Four: *that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy*

- Controversy arose on the Board when a Board member forgot to lock up the meeting room. The member was no longer allowed to have a key.
- Controversy arose related to funds that a member took from the treasury. Members are not above the law. The same standard must be used for all members based on principle and not personality. It is the behavior that is the problem—not the person. Notify authorities if it is a legal issue. Then the legal authority takes the action. If a member is not abiding by Al-Anon principles, they do not call the group Al-Anon.
- We rejected the Charter of the Conference. A vote to dismiss the President of the Board was not passed, but the motion came from members of the Board.
- Succession planning from Vice Chair to Chair was resolved by having one-to-one discussion when it was determined that the Vice Chair would not move up.

Warranty Five: *that though the Conference serves Al-Anon, it shall never perform any act of government; and that, like the fellowship of Al-Anon Family Groups which it serves, it shall always remain democratic in thought and action.*

- There is confusion in this Warranty because it allows decisions to be made. If a legally binding decision is needed, this is made by the Board. This Warranty is about balance, respect, and love, and not taken in anger or haste. These are the principles about prudence.
- Board and Conference are there to serve. Normally the Conference gives the Board two or three items per year to achieve. This is serving, directing, and supporting.

What Is the Service Structure Best Suited For Us, and What Do We Do As It Grows? What Committees Do We Need?

Silvina H. C., Facilitator—Argentina

Joan G., New Zealand—Reporter

Delegates in this workshop described the structure they currently have.

Finland reported:

- Board is composed of 11 people.
- Executive Committee has five people.
- Executive Committee needs experienced people. One member is learning about the Committee, and one Alternate.
- Four standing Committees: Alateen, Literature, Public Outreach, and the monthly magazine.
- Two Internal Coordinators.
- Our structure was formed in the 1980s. Sometimes it's hard for public outreach ideas to fit in the meetings.
- We are developing a Strategic Plan.
- There is no Alateen but we are working on a chatroom.
- Public Outreach position is vacant.
- 114 Districts with regional members. We want to restructure Public Outreach with a goal of smaller ones so it is easier to fill the position.

To do: Gain a better understanding of Knowledge-Based Decision-Making to Reach an Informed Group Conscience (KBDM) process to capture the voice of the members.

U.S. and Canada Committee structure reported:

- Board
- Finance Committee
- Audit
- Compensation
- Policy
- Public Outreach
- International Coordination Committee
- Literature Committee
- Board Liaison to Committees
- *Forum*
- Alateen
- WSO Conference
- Strategic Planning WSO
- Surveys on WSO Web site: Twelve Steps, Newcomers
- Feedback from the fellowship, districts, and Areas
- Area Delegates go to World Service Conference (WSC)
- Use KBDM to make decisions based on integration of facts
- Task Force has information to make Motions/recommendations



- Used a Task Force to develop KBDM around e-mail use
- For communication between meetings, a Task Force may use conference calls/e-mail and “Go To Meetings.” They also meet face-to-face at Conference.
- The next year (after the charge was given), present information to Conference for review or referral to the Executive Committee
- The charge must be clear to the people working with it
- Task/Thought Force work is confidential to prevent confusion

Australia follows the WSO structure and reported:

- Committees—Alateen, Budget, Literature, Public Outreach, and *AustraLink*. Technology Committee being developed.
- Other service structures IAGSM and RSS.
- Feedback from the Members’ Survey was given to the Area Assembly.
- KBDM informs people before taking action.
- Thought Forces report to Conference, then form a task force, and report to Conference the next year.

To Do: Using KBDM, a Task Force is investigating purchase of a building.

Mexico reported:

- See committees in *Service Manual*
- Conference is in March each year
- Five Regional Trustees
- Twenty-two Areas. Have two monthly seminars in different Areas.
- Not all Areas have a structure

- Office sends the topic to Areas to work on. Congress is Saturday/Sunday with 25 groups in each Area
- Total of 3,000 groups in Mexico. 300 Alateen (Area A, 25 groups, Area B, 20 groups, and Area C, 255 groups)

To Do: Seminars and workshops in groups and at RSSs

New Zealand uses WSC guidelines in most things and reported:

- Standing Committees—Conference, Literature, Finance, Budget, Editorial, Public Outreach and IAGSM.
- Implement KBDM for our Board and Conference use.
- We utilize Task Forces.
- Ninety groups in nine Areas.
- Volunteers help at the GSO.
- General Secretary in the South Island; GSO in the North Island.
- Board and Committees communicate using Skype and e-mail.

To Do: Investigate Webinars

Argentina reported:

- Print their own literature.
- Public Outreach.
- Cooperating with the Professional Community Committee—no Chairperson, Conference, Executive, Policy, Alateen, Interior Committee. A lot of groups are isolated and unable to go to district meetings.
- Have to pay for PSA.
- Task Force for Web site. Conclusions presented on Facebook.
- Used *WSC Summary* for information.
- Conference good with KBDM.
- Problem with making decisions.
- Conference supports us.
- Executive Committee is prudent and the money exchange rate affects us.
- We sell literature cheaply to groups and members.
- Membership has fallen from 500 to 300 groups.
- We have a big structure with not as many groups. We have Delegates and District Representatives.
- Latin America (Uruguay and Paraguay) come to our Conference.
- Conference approves projects and allocates people.
- Three Regional Trustees confirmed at Conference.

Other information shared:

- KBDM was introduced at IAGSM as a tool to help to make informed decisions.
- IAGSM Conference Summaries are on WSO Members' Web site. It's good to read them to get a background.

My Role As An IAGSM Delegate in Relation To My Structure

Maureen McA., UK and Eire—Facilitator

Philippe D., France—Reporter

1. What is the election process in your structure to become an IAGSM Delegate?

- Selected among the Board of Trustees, no big process, a short moment during Board meeting, no need for the candidate to present him or herself.
- In the absence of candidates, invitation by the Board of Trustees and the Executive Committee of one long-time trusted servant, with the commitment to help her/him with her/his current service position.
- The Chairman of the Board of Trustees is one Delegate, and another Trustee from the other country (within the service structure) is invited to be the other one. (Response from a Delegate who's structure serves two countries)
- Board of Trustees and Executive Committee members are eligible. Considering previous service of some of them as Delegates, the possible candidates are narrowed to three. The Chairman of the Board did not run as a candidate. The Executive Committee member in charge of Finance was elected at a Board meeting together with one Trustee. The latter was then represented by her substitute/alternate.
- One has to apply—no need to be a Trustee. Experience in service, length of time in the fellowship, and personal recovery matter most. Invitation and election is by the Board of Trustees.
- Service Conference motion to invite candidates for participation in the next IAGSM. Then the invitation appears in a monthly newsletter sent to each group, with the qualifications. The qualified candidates (members) make themselves known to their Group Representatives and are invited to present themselves to the Area Assembly, which holds a proper vote regarding their election. Area Delegates inform the Board of Trustees, which invites the elected candidates to present themselves to the Service Conference which holds a proper vote regarding their election. If time lacks, the Board elects the Delegate without waiting for the next Conference to be held. In short, it is not a requirement to be a Trustee or a General Service Office (GSO) member to become an International Delegate for this structure.
- The Board selects a candidate from among the Trustees. For earlier IAGSMs, there were two Delegates, but no longer, for financial reasons. A long experience in service at an “upper” level in the structure is a desired qualification.

2. What opportunities are given by the structure for you to report back about the 2014 IAGSM?

- Detailed report (10 pages) goes to the GSO, which sends it well in advance to the Board for their next meeting. Then it is communicated to the wider fellowship at the next Conference in the form of a 20-minute PowerPoint presentation, along with handouts.
- Before the end of November 2014, an article is sent to the GSO/Board for publication in the December 2014 monthly newsletter, which goes to all groups. On 27th November, the Delegate presents a verbal report and hands over a written report to the Board of Trustees during their meeting. Early April 2015, the Delegate reports back about the IAGSM to the Conference.
- Write long and short articles in their magazine, which is sent to every group, hence there is a direct feedback to the fellowship. Write articles and messages on the Internet blog. Report to the Board at their next meeting. Report to the Conference at about the same time.
- Delegates write a report for the first Board Meeting in February 2015. Both Delegates attend Conference in June 2015 and submit a summary. The two Delegates report back to all three Areas at their General Service Seminars (one Delegate at each seminar) as long as there are two Delegates.
- Brief article for publication in *The Forum* magazine. Then complete summary is drafted and reviewed before posting on the Members' Web site in PDF format before the end of December. In parallel, the International Coordination Committee (ICC) Chairperson prepares a different summary for submission to the Board of Trustees, of which the ICC is a sub-committee. The ICC will do an IAGSM presentation at the World Service Conference (WSC).
- Verbal report to the Board of Trustees scheduled for December 2014. In April 2015, a PowerPoint presentation to the Conference so that the Delegates are fully informed.

3. Why does your structure believe participation in the IAGSM is important?

- It is important for the structure to learn from others worldwide through the shared experience of their service structure. The best way for a member to recover and grow is to serve. It is important for the structure to provide an opportunity for a Delegate to get new input for both the structure and his/her personal life.
- The previous Delegate brought so much knowledge, something that was so important, that the structure

realized that it would not be what it is today without participation in the past IAGSMs. Personal close links to the World Service Office (WSO) are very important and helpful.

- Everything is available if we share. We may be ahead of other structures in the journey; we may be behind and need not “reinvent the wheel.” We have a sense of belonging and feel we are “part of” rather than “apart from.” Our spirituality invites us to focus on our similarities rather than our differences.
- We need and are willing to “absorb” everything of interest and help from others. This has been the case in our individual lives and can be applied to the growth of our structure as well.
- It is the responsibility of the WSO, as the oldest group conscience and service arm respectively, to be open to the whole world. Also the Board of Trustees for the U.S. & Canada are working on a Strategic Plan. There is a tendency to think of North America only, rather than the whole world—legal, cultural, spiritual. For the U.S. and Canada, the IAGSM broadens our mind. It keeps reminding us that we are a worldwide fellowship and we have to be an inspiration for all structures. This inspiration fuels our participation.

- It comes more from the intuition and group conscience of our Conference than from the knowledge of our Trustees of what the IAGSM is about. Our spiritual program taught us that our personal recovery was largely the result of the experience that others have shared with us. Our structure similarly is a living body, which can recover and grow thanks to the experience of other structures. It also comes from the recognition of the efforts of some members who cared, in recent years, to re-establish relationships with the WSO and other structures, and to go deep into the reports from the WSC, the IAGSMs, and the European Zonal Meetings (EZMs).
- When we were newcomers, we felt lost, different, and isolated. We began to grow and feel a sense of belonging as individual members. The same path is offered to us as a structure through the IAGSM.

Motions

Motion 1:

To hold the 2016 International Al-Anon General Service Conference in the vicinity of Rome, Italy. The Motion passed with substantial unanimity.

Motion 2:

To ensure the participation of the structures, the Delegate's Equalized Expense will be returned to the 65 percent level on a trial basis for two IAGSMs/2018. The Motion did not pass.

Discussion of Motion #2

Reduction of the equalized costs to attend the IAGSM

The purpose of the Motion was to ensure the participation of all the IAGSM structures by reducing the Delegates Equalized Expense to the 65 percent level. This was the result of the Inventory General Session (see the *2014 IAGSM Report*, page XXX) where there was discussion about why more of the eligible structures are not participating in the IAGSM. The cost of the Equalized Expense was considered a possibility.

A Delegate shared that we don't know the reasons other structures are not coming but she was not sure that dropping the Equalized Expense to 65 percent is a good idea. "At this stage I need to hear more people talk. I need more statistics."

Another Delegate also thought that we should find out why they aren't coming and see if the Delegates could convince them of the benefits of coming. The Delegate shared that, "The things most dear to me are the things I struggled to achieve. I am not saying reducing it is not a good thing, but I think 65 percent is way too much. I could support 75 percent."

An ICC member asked that it be set up as a "trial" if we do look at this. Doing it as a trial would give us time to gather more information.

Another suggestion was to freeze the cost at the present level. From that Delegate's perspective, even with a special

Motion 3:

To permit the use of electronic storage devices during general sessions, discussion groups, and workshops at IAGSM meetings on a trial basis until 2018. The Motion passed with substantial unanimity.

Motion 4:

In order to encourage more structures to attend the IAGSM, we respectfully ask the WSO Board of Trustees to suspend the 1990 IAGSM Motion regarding the Equalized Expense until 2018, and to develop a plan, including a variety of options, to increase the participation and representation of all IAGSM structures. The Motion passed unanimously.

fund for sending Delegates, it is not that easy. The WSO is struggling to achieve it. Sending two people is difficult.

While many Delegates expressed that changing the Equalized Expense amount on a trial basis was a good idea, it was suggested that it may take two or three meetings to see the trend.

An ICC member offered help as the Delegates thought about this. "What caused this problem is the Motion this body passed in 1990. We have options but I am not sure if the body wants to get into micromanaging the dollars although it may be what you are trying to achieve. Other options are to step back from this Motion, or name the Board to look at the issue of Equalized Expense and issues of participation, and to have some latitude. At this point the Executive Director and Associate Director—International are required to do what this body said it wanted. The Trustees know the Executive Director has talked about this concern at ICC meetings for at least ten years. This is what this group decided and the Board didn't feel it had a lot of latitude. The Finance Committee did play with the numbers for South Africa to make them more palatable so it was not a true 80 percent, but we also started doing what the WSC does. That is, we presented what the Equalized Expense is and what the full amount is to send a Delegate to the IAGSM so structures could pay the full amount if they could afford to. If this body wants to specify a trial period, it should be included in the Motion."

Discussion of Motion #3

Use of electronic equipment in IAGSM meetings

A Delegate asked for clarification of the term “electronic storage devices.” It was explained that,

because of luggage restrictions, Delegates only have small storage spaces so it means iPad, notebook, or laptop.

A Delegate suggested that if everyone is using them all the time during General Sessions, it would be tempting to check something and become distracted from the discussion. However, it could be a good idea to use recorders during workshops.

Another Delegate explained that the intent is to allow access to *Summaries*, the *Service Manual*, and to read documents “so we don’t have to carry them with us” as they take up a lot of space and weight.

It is easier to have information stored in electronic equipment. I am concerned about what it does for focus. The European Zonal Meeting (EZM) discussed this and decided not to use them. We had the same discussion in our own structure. We want to be assured we are doing what we are supposed to be doing. That is why we are here.

Another structure does paperless meetings. They use iPads with no typing. A laptop is used for recording the proceedings.

Our World Service Conference (WSC) voted this year to allow electronic devices for note taking on a three-year trial basis. We talked about it for four years prior to that. The ICC member said, “I changed my mind when Delegates said ‘We’re asking to do this but we have to be responsible for the power, etc. Let us be responsible as individuals during the trial.’ The benefit of a trial is you are not locked into anything.”

We have a person with the physical inability to write at the WSC. Rather than limiting people and making it more difficult to communicate, we need to provide solutions. One solution to distraction is for people using devices to sit in the back of the room. In general, few Conferences use paper any more.

The Motion originator amended the Motion to add “trial period until 2018.” The Motion was seconded.

Discussion of Motion #4

Equalized Expense

A Delegate spoke in support of the Motion. “It does not impose anything on the Board and is asking for different ways of encouraging more representation and participation.”

Delegates asked for criteria to develop a culture of trust.

2005 WSC Summary, pages 27-28 lists, in the form of questions, the three principles:

- Confident in the competence of your partners. Included in this is that the quality of the decision is more important than the persons who made it.
- Clarity and consensus on what will constitute success.
- Common access of all decision-makers to common knowledge.

2002 WSC Summary, pages 23-24: What would it take for people to accept change?

- Assure people our core values will not change (primary point).
- Show that change will benefit them.
- Change is inevitable.
- Means to make the change are available.
- Change can be integrated into their other activities.

Unanswered Questions

Q: After many disagreements and discussions, we agreed to open all Board meetings and Policy meetings. They are open to anyone who wants to listen. There is a great need for everyone to go and listen. Those who come can give voice, if invited to, only by the Chairperson. What do you think about such practice? Is it OK?

Comments:

The WSO commented that there is no right or wrong practice, just whether it works for you or not. We have to go back to living our spiritual principles. Communication needs to be there if information is to go back through the Conference to the Area. I am not sure it sends a message of equality if someone has the time or money to attend a meeting when others don't—that member has access and information other members in outside areas don't have or because those other members have no money. It can create lobbying efforts for that member's own agenda based on misinformation. It is up to the structure to look at the spiritual principles, see if their decisions are consistent with the principles, and then try it. In a culture of trust, the competence of our partners and participation is the key to harmony, if you are invited to participate. Being equal does not mean having voice at every level. Think of the principles and do what is best for the structure.

In Finland, it has helped the structure that all Board meeting minutes are posted on the Members' Web site for members to read. At any time they can ask to voice concerns through the General Secretary.

Argentina's Board meetings are closed to only Trustees. The annual Assembly is held after Conference when Delegates can attend and meet the new Trustee.

The U.S. and Canada structure has closed Board and Policy Committee meetings. During the World Service Conference, some of the meetings are open. Delegates attend and can listen with no voice or vote. The benefit is that they can hear the depth of the discussion—pros and cons. This helps create a culture of trust giving them confidence in the people having the discussions that they have looked at the issue from all sides. Often we don't come to conclusions at those meetings. If members haven't attended the whole discussion this can make them feel cheated. Delegates then have the right to share the experience and discussion with their structures.

The Chairperson of the Board sends out a letter after every meeting. The Board determines what will be in it to share with fellowship. The Policy Committee submits a report to the Board and to the World Service Conference.

In Germany, the Board and Policy Committee meetings are closed but they meet before the Conference. This gives members and Delegates the opportunity to attend and hear the discussion. There is no time during the Conference to hold open meetings. It is important for the Board and Policy Committee to have the privacy to think wild thoughts and speak about anything that needs to be thought and spoken that could cause fears in the membership. It is important for the Board to function properly.



Reflections

Delegates shared their reflections on this 2014 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting:

“I am grateful and happy for the discussions of money and at same time we are thinking of our spiritual principles. I am grateful for all the information we have gotten for our structures.”

“This is the best IAGSM! The topics are so relevant to where we are today. The program flowed into all our concerns. I thank the participants for their contributions because they make my Al-Anon life more blessed and meaningful. In South Africa in 2012, I took your structures’ spirits home with me and I have brought them here with me.”

“Thank you for letting me grow within your circle. You are my family.”

“To those not here, the Board of Trustees and the WSO, I feel the great Al-Anon spirit that has been here and I am moved by everything and learned so much—not only information to take back to Poland, but the spirit of exchanging helpful information.”

“I thought I knew a bit, but you have opened my eyes to so much more and I have so much more to learn in this worldwide fellowship. Thanks to the other structures that brought Delegates here to share their knowledge. I feel part of a spiritual connection.”

“I felt loved, encouraged, and supported. Our circle says to put it back in and bring others along into the circle.”

“I am enthused and energized and will carry this back to our structures so we can empower those who are where we were. This spirit is infectious.”

“I am living in this worldwide fellowship with friends around the world from this service.”



The International Coordination Committee Chairperson concluded, “As you know, this 17th IAGSM has been living our spiritual principles. You have given us a voice no matter the language as we seek the best way to carry the message by sharing your structure’s strengths and hopes. How blessed our Higher Power has been in bringing us all together.”

The 17th International Al-Anon General Service Meeting closed with Delegates reciting the Serenity Prayer in their own language.

Spiritual Speaker

Paula B., New Zealand

I came to Al-Anon to get rid of my husband. His behavior was out of control. He was always going from bliss to misery and I was wondering where he was and why isn't he home? Then my realization of what we were dealing with—alcohol. We had three children and I thought, if he just would stop drinking, we would be able to ride off into the sunset and have no problems. After all (in my fantasy thinking), the nursery rhymes gave me that hope!

I called Al-Anon in 1983, and I was picked up and taken to my first meeting. In meetings I heard about the "Three C's:" "I didn't cause it, couldn't control it, couldn't cure it." It was also in meetings that I had my greatest revelation; he had a disease—alcoholism. I also began to understand that we, the family, had been affected. My husband "fell" into Alcoholics Anonymous soon after and the family started on a road to recovery—with the children going to Alateen and me to my meetings.

He was sober with no change in his behavior. We walked on eggshells—he was our Higher Power. Slowly I realized recovery was about me not him. My changed attitudes and perceptions led to changed behaviors in me. I had to take responsibility for myself and the children and not be responsible for him. We had to learn to even like each other again.

While working the Twelve Steps with my Sponsor, I realized that my dad (who was my idol) was an alcoholic and, of course, my mum the wife of an alcoholic. As a child growing up, everything seemed quite normal. I also had a revelation that, although I was his favorite, my dad taunted my sister; she bore the brunt of most of his jokes. He was very sarcastic and her only defense was my mum, who I believed liked her more than me. I developed an eating disorder (my control or lack of it). I know now it was my way of coping with the chaos and the family disease. My dad's drinking caused many problems in my family of origin. Although he finally did stop drinking, he had no program, but was sober for fifteen years.

After my mum passed away (due to the untreated family disease), my dad's new partner moved in six weeks later! It didn't take long before he started drinking again. He gave the excuse that the cause of his drinking was that I didn't buy his new partner a gift card for Christmas! My life was shattered again by the "ism." My dad married her and they were together for twenty years. During that time his disease progressed and he became more difficult to be around. I thought I would need to "divorce him!" I started working the Twelve Steps again to find my part in my discomfort in our relationship. The outcome was I could set boundaries for me, when I didn't feel great about going to see him. When I would call and say I'm not feeling good today, he seemed to understand and would say "see you next week." This was a boundary I set that seemed to work well for us. Sometimes

we used Skype to communicate. I learned not to pick up the call in the afternoons when I knew he had been drinking.

Four years ago, he passed away in the same country, the same town where I lived, and our family was not informed until after he had been cremated. Feelings of I'm not good enough, did I do enough surfaced, and I was devastated. To add to my devastation, our family found out later that we were disinherited. Another blow! Again there was an opportunity for me to do another necessary trip through the Twelve Steps. I found myself constantly using the phrase "just for today" to get through. I used this phrase and motivated myself to get dressed when I was depressed; but because of my devastation with the situation, I would hop back into my bed many times fully clothed! In hindsight, I was grateful to have our 36 principles to guide me through a process of recovery and a Sponsor that would listen and then share her experience, strength, and hope. She reminded me not to be mean in the process—to not focus on this path that my dad's family chose to take with us.

However, I still feel sad at times remembering that little family emigrating from England to New Zealand in 1956; and the hope on our parents' faces that they would find a better life for their family. Even with the obstacles of fear, loneliness, and alcoholism, they did succeed. As a saying found in one of the readings dear to me in *Living with Sobriety* (P-49) indicates, I honestly now know that they did their best with what they had at that time.

My Sponsor was in service, so the suggestion was that I get into service...I mean I thought you just do what Sponsor suggests! Well that's how it was for me then. Because of my Sponsor, I have held most service positions from group, district, and then at the Area level. Ultimately I was elected to the New Zealand Board of Trustees. At the New Zealand Service Conference, I was endorsed to become New Zealand's International Delegate. What an amazing journey it has been! Service is the glue for me.

I started service in the group from my first meeting! I had no trouble sharing with anyone who would listen. The ways I participated in service then were to have the willingness to trust in a Higher Power, be prepared to study the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts of Service, and to not be mean to my fellow members. I remembered to say thanks (to those in my group who had service positions), for a job well done. Even when I considered that the job was not done well, I learned to thank them anyway. Because of this fellowship, I now have a great Al-Anon family.

I now work three days a week, and I have four-day weekends. Our children (who are now all adults) have their own families. I am reminded often where they are concerned, to mind my own business. Taking this attitude allows me to enjoy my grandkids and have a healthier relationship with

my family. A lot of my time in recent years is taken up going to Al-Anon Assemblies and Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) events that have Al-Anon participation.

During the summer I just love boogie boarding at our fabulous beaches with my New Zealand-based daughter and her children. I travel frequently, when I can, to see my other daughters and grandchildren in Australia. In recent times, my husband did not choose to participate in family events; he even moved into another bedroom in our home saying “it would be better for my arthritis.” I was devastated but I made the best of it by creating my own room! I spent hours trying to force solutions with my husband by frequently suggesting we go to a movie. His answer was always “no” or he suggested that I go with a friend. I thought, “Why are we in this relationship?” I realized I was on the “merry-go-round” again.

Our youngest daughter came home for a holiday and suggested that she and I go on a road trip for a few days. Our time away was amazing. We laughed and laughed. She brought me coffee in bed every morning, and we sunk into bed every night exhausted but happy. When I returned home to my work, service commitments, my own bedroom, cooking duties, and a house that was falling into despair and disrepair, I realized I needed to work the Twelve Steps *yet again*! I learned to detach from my husband and it certainly wasn’t with love.

In October 2013 I made a decision to leave my husband... “just for today.” I communicated this to him. He thought it was a great idea as he said he was over our relationship. We both agreed that we would need to sell the property and then move on. We took advice on what we would need for us to get our property up to standard for a good sale. I used the phrase “easy does it but do it.” We had tradesmen come in to fix the house. While all this was going on, I stopped cooking for my husband and just looked after myself. By not forcing solutions, I was able to find the courage to go to the bank, meet with a lawyer, and looked at properties I could afford. I used an idea I learned in the program, “Don’t be mean, however, look after you!”

My husband then started not wanting to pay for this and that, and he stopped paying for the Internet saying, “I don’t use this kind of stuff!” This didn’t faze me. I just worked those Twelve Steps *again* not reacting and remembering to practice “do not be mean.” “Just for today” I remembered I have a Higher Power; I tried to enjoy our newly-repaired home. I could sit on one of two decks for breakfast. That Christmas I did not invite him to go with me to the beach. I told him ‘we don’t make each other very happy’ and he agreed. I have to say, I had the best Christmas break that I can remember with my little family and numerous recovery family members dropping in and staying in the tent out back. I had no anxiety, just a peaceful time.

When the holidays were over, it was back to thinking about getting the house sold and packing for the move.

While doing the Twelve Steps *again*, I took the opportunity to always look at my part in the breakdown of our marriage. I found my communication skills lacking. I also discovered that I had this sense of entitlement that I should be looked after. I realized that the skills that I learned doing Al-Anon service work could help me in my daily life. I made a budget and for the first time ever, I had a savings plan.

In late February, my husband had an accident, breaking several ribs and ending up with pneumonia from not being able to move much. I heard my Sponsor say “don’t be mean” so “just for today” I looked after him, taking him to his doctor appointments, and making sure he was looked after while I worked. I cooked and did what he couldn’t do for himself. He got better and I was back to our plan; getting our home sold and going our separate ways. Through it all I knew that I still loved him. This was a pain I realized I felt constantly.

One day out of the blue, he asked me to go out to dinner with him. I said “No.” Another time during conversation, I said, “Are we going for dinner or what?” When we did finally go, we had the worst meal I have ever had! At the end he asked, “How can we stop this negativity between us?” I said that one of the things that I wanted in our relationship was for him to hold my hand in good times and bad. I was attending an Al-Anon event that weekend and the theme was “Who Am I” using Steps Seven, Eight, and Nine. I told him that I would take my problem and work the Steps *again* and let him know if we could work out our difficulties in our marriage. When I came back home, we made the decision to stay married—“just for today.”

Since that time we have had a number of dates, he has moved back into our bedroom, and we go to fellowship functions together again. Recently I was able to share with him that I was scared about something. This time his reply to me was “Remember to take your Higher Power with you.” I was thankful because a statement like this would have created silence between us in the past; but this time we could have a discussion on the greatness of our Higher Power!

His accident, well, we both believe it wasn’t an accident (he was pushed)! We believe it was a Higher Power moment, making us each rub our noses into the Twelve Steps. Due to our working the Steps *again*, I now have a husband who wants to hold my hand. I am forever grateful to the Al-Anon program, fellowship, sponsorship, slogans, and above all, the opportunity to be of service to our wonderful fellowship. I have learned that out of giving we receive and to remember I can do anything “just for today”... and most of all remember to work those Twelve Steps, *yet again*.

I would like to thank the International Coordination Committee for giving me the opportunity to share.

A SUMMARY OF AL-ANON'S HISTORY

Structure	Year Al-Anon Started	Year of First Conference	Which Years Attended IAGSM	Name of National Newsletter	Year First Published
Argentina	1961	1985	1980, 86-2004, 2012	<i>Amistad (Friendship)</i>	1978
Australia	1952	1970	1980-2012	<i>Austra-Link</i>	1974
Austria	---	---	---	---	---
Belgium (Flemish)	1961	1982	1980-2006	<i>Keerpunt</i>	1982
Belgium (French)	1965	1981	1980-2000, 2012	<i>Sérénité</i>	1976
Brazil	1966	1979	1980-2012	<i>Boletín Al-Anon Informativo Nacional</i>	1983
Colombia	1960	1992	2002	<i>Renacimiento</i>	1981
Costa Rica	1960	1997	1980-1988, 92, 2002, 2004	<i>Compartmento</i>	1979
Denmark	1974	1985	1986, 2006-2012	<i>Perspektiv</i>	1988
Finland	1953	1968	1980-2012	<i>Tietoavain</i>	1967
France	1962	1979	1980, 82, 86, 90-2004	<i>La Chaine</i>	1967
Germany	1967	1986	1980-2012	<i>Intern</i>	1981
Guatemala	---	---	---	---	---
Iceland	1972	1986	1984-2010	<i>Hlekkurinn (The Link)</i>	1987
India					
Italy	1976	1995	1986, 1992-2002, 2008, 2010, 2012	<i>Incontro (Meet Together)</i>	1988
Japan	1979	1992	1982, 84, 88, 90, 92, 97	<i>Hiroba (Inside Al-Anon)</i>	1981
Korea	1982	1980	1997	---	---
Mexico	1965	1973	1980-90, 97, 2002-2008	<i>Delta</i>	1976
Netherlands	1976	1995	1980-2004	<i>Stapsgewijs</i>	1980
New Zealand	1954	1980	1980-2012	<i>N.Z. Al-Anon Messenger</i>	1963
Norway	1960	1987	1982-2006	<i>Trinn For Trinn</i>	1981
Paraguay	---	---	---	---	---
Peru	1965	2001	2004, 2012	---	1970
Portugal	---	---	---	---	---
Poland	1980	1997	1994-2000, 2006, 2010, 2012	<i>Razem</i>	1993
South Africa	1951	1963	1980, 82, 84, 88-2000, 2006-2012	<i>Unitas</i>	1967
Spain	1972	1980	1980, 88, 90-97, 2000-2010	<i>Serenidad</i>	1980
Sweden	1976	1991	1988, 92-94, 2012	<i>Al-Anon Kontakt</i>	1986
Switzerland (French)	1963	1973	1997-2004, 2012	<i>Sunray</i>	1975
Switzerland (German)	1964	1973	1982-2010	<i>M & F</i>	1969
U.K. & Eire	1952	1970	1980-2012	<i>News & Views</i>	1963
Uruguay	1974	1997	2004	---	---
Venezuela	---	---	---	---	---
US & Canada	1951	1960	1980-2012	<i>The FORUM, Inside Al-Anon</i>	1978

Al-Anon meetings are held in over 130 countries. There are a total of 23,390 Al-Anon groups and 1,771 Alateen groups worldwide

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