



18th IAGSM

International Al-Anon General Services Meeting

Sharing Worldwide Diversity:
Strengthening Our Growth

October 5 - 8, 2016
Rome, Italy

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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 2016 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting:

Australia

Lois A.
Gillian B.

Belgium (French speaking)

Veronique G.

Brazil

Nilce T.

Denmark

Ann W.

Finland

Minna K.
Rauni O.

France

Philippe D.

Germany

Susanne A.
Edith H.

Guatemala

Mirna M.
Morena R.

Iceland

Asdís I.
Maria O.

India

Avrinder (Pinky) S.
Sarita S.

Italy

Laura C.

Mexico

Lourdes (Lulu) C.
Maria de Jesus O.

New Zealand

Joan G.
SallyAnn M.

Paraguay

Malena G.
Sonia C.C.

Poland

Malgorzata (Malgosia) D.K.

South Africa

Marlene N.
Jenny P.

Spain

Miriam M.

Sweden

AnnKristin H.

Switzerland (French Speaking)

Pierrette PS.

UK & Éire

Maureen M.

US & Canada

Debbie G.
Thérèse S.

International Coordination

Committee

Mary G.
Kerri K.
Marilyn M.
Karen W.P.
Marsha W.

The following structures were not able to send representation:

Austria

Belgium (Flemish Speaking)

Colombia

Costa Rica

Japan

Korea

Netherlands

Norway

Portugal

Switzerland (German Speaking)

Uruguay

Venezuela

OPENING SESSION

Welcome from the International Coordination Committee

The 18th International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM) opened with the Serenity Prayer on Thursday, October 6, 2016 at the Hotel Abitart in Rome, Italy. Representatives from 21 structures were warmly welcomed by Marilyn M., Chairperson of the International Coordination Committee (ICC). Opening remarks focused the audience's attention on our common bond of the family disease of alcoholism and how we can support each other during our time together at the meeting. Events such as the IAGSM are an opportunity for members to demonstrate acceptance and sharing as we grow together in our own structures and collectively, as a worldwide fellowship.

Throughout the week, sessions were closed with the Serenity Prayer spoken in the language of the member's country. By the end of the week, attendees had heard the prayer in Danish, English, Finnish, French, German, Hindi, Icelandic, Italian, Polish, and Spanish. This produced the effect of making all feel welcome and included.

Roll Call and Flag Ceremony

Following the Chairperson's opening remarks, attendees participated in a flag ceremony. Delegates stepped forward as the roll was called and placed flags of their countries in front a display of a world map. They also placed pins in the map to mark the location of their General Service Offices (GSOs).

Voting Procedures

After roll call and the flag ceremony were complete, members of the ICC reviewed voting procedure with the assembled Delegates. There was a time for questions and clarifications of terminology before asking the group to approve a procedure. It was agreed that recommended motions would be submitted in writing and read aloud by the recorder before beginning discussion. It was also agreed that a two thirds majority would constitute substantial unanimity on any vote taken.

Keynote Speaker

Sharing Worldwide Diversity: Strengthening Our Growth

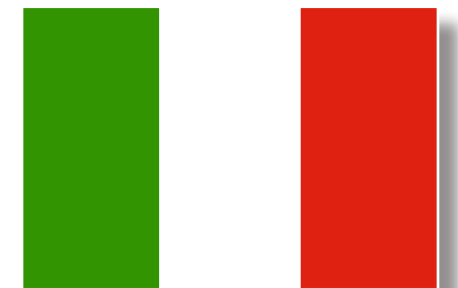
Laura C., Italy



Good morning to everyone. I'm Laura, an Al-Anon member and now I am also the IAGSM Delegate and Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of Al-Anon/Alateen Italy. My home group is called "Awakening," in a town near Milan.

First of all, I would like to bring greetings from the Board of Trustees and a warm welcome from all of our Al-Anon and Alateen members. We have been immensely happy and grateful since we were told the IAGSM would be held in Rome.

This upcoming discussion does not happen by chance. When I read the title, I thought about what happened here in Al-Anon some months ago. During Italy's last Service Conference, the whole Board of Trustees and most of the Coordinators resigned and we were suddenly without anyone to act as our trusted servants.



Our statutes declare that at least two legal representatives must be elected. Therefore, I was elected with another Al-Anon member until an Extraordinary Conference could be held in June. This was important

because it allowed Al-Anon/Alateen to continue their activities. During the Extraordinary Conference, a new Board of Trustees was elected and now there are six of us. This situation, which was followed by anger and discontent, led me to reflect deeply. All of this might never have happened if there had been more sharing and if we had been more willing to listen to each other. Our difficulty in accepting different opinions brought our fellowship to a breaking point which became totally irreconcilable.

Throughout this period, I tried to understand everyone's opinions, even when they were different from mine. I continued to do a personal inventory and tried to put into practice the Twelve Traditions. I tried to remember that, in Al-Anon, there is only one entity that should guide us—the Higher Power. I listened to the other members and I accepted the group conscience, even when the principles were not respected.

I have often found myself among the minority, but I never tried to dominate or to impose my will. I do the same thing in my family. I have a partner who has two children from a previous relationship and when we have to make a decision that involves all family members and it is not linked to our responsibility as adults, we compare our thoughts. I like to hear the opinions of all, even the smallest member, who is 9 years old. I am the daughter of two alcoholics and it is very important that all family members feel involved. When I was growing up in my house, I was always excluded and was not asked about my thoughts on anything, which made me suffer a lot. In Al-Anon, I learned that even if someone behaves in a certain way with me, I can remember what happened to me and try to change my attitude to avoid making someone else feel as I felt.

Everyone is different, by nature. All people have a special and unique heritage, with complex and varied natures, such as: gender, race, age, religion, sexual orientation, physical and mental skills, culture, and profession. The word “diversity” has a positive or negative meaning, depending on the value that each of us, in different situations and over time, gives to this term; it often allows the comparison with “the other” and the mutual enrichment and becomes resource.

In Al-Anon literature, “diversity” has had a different approach methods over the years:

- In 1952, “diversity” could be going to the groups by different relations other than the wives of

alcoholics; which permitted more understanding of how the principles of Al-Anon can be applied to all, regardless of the level of relationship with the alcoholic.

- A different kind of members, such as male groups in California, has developed over the years.

When does diversity become a resource?

- When we treat others as we would like to be treated.
- When we participate according to our availability.
- When we encourage others to join in.
- When we understand others.

When everyone can join in with speech and vote in group, District, Area, and Conference, keeping the mind open and respecting our principles, the opposition and the conflict decreases and we can feel harmony, which allow others to become a resource.

Diversity is transformed into a resource when our pain, that comes from the impotence and limits, feeling shameless to our own and others' eyes, becomes a prize, to see the world and to be there.

It allows us to have respect for our needs and to be ourselves, without any confirmations from others; it enriches the groups we attend, giving them the peculiarities respecting our Legacies. Our growth may occur through sharing, a deep analysis, the unity of the group, accepting ourselves, and accepting others.

I am trying to do this new service by listening to the opinions of everyone without judging. I do not know if I will be able to accept the diversity of opinions of everyone, but the experience of our structure will help me to remember that I should do my best, always, in order to find a solution that could satisfy everyone. It is not easy, but, in Al-Anon, I am not alone and I can share my service with other Al-Anon members. I can read our literature and entrust myself to the Higher Power, who is wiser than me. In this moment, I feel the love and the assistance of the Al-Anon members who are service with me. Thank you all for giving me the opportunity to participate at this meeting and for having listened to my deposition.

I pray that the Higher Power will guide us during this meeting.

GENERAL SESSIONS

How Structures are Developing and Implementing Strategic Plans

Debbie G., US & Canada

A strategic plan is the blueprint or road map which connects us to our spiritual journey. It takes us from where we are today to where we want to be in the future. In Concept Nine, Bill W's essay on leadership, we learn that the “all important attribute” of leadership is vision. He also says that “...as a fellowship, we shall surely suffer if we cast the job of planning for tomorrow onto a fatuous idea of Providence. God has endowed human beings with considerable capability for foresight and evidently expects us to use it” (2014 – 2017 *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*, p. 201).

Our leaders have long demonstrated foresight. From our earliest beginnings, Al-Anon's cofounder Lois W. saw a need for the families and friend of alcoholics to have a place of their own. In 1951, Lois wrote a memorandum to the first General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous where she described what she viewed as the value of family groups. In May of that same year, Lois and Anne sent out 87 letters to unite and give purpose to the Family Groups that had already started to form around the US, Canada, Australia, South Africa, and Ireland. A worldwide fellowship grew out of an initial vision, a dream. Lois and Anne soon realized they alone could not manage the influx of letters and requests that were a result of their initial work. They formed committees to handle the communications between the Clearing House and the ever growing numbers of groups. Slowly, changes were made and our pioneers began to recognize the benefit of offering the opportunity for an exchange of ideas rather than a perspective of two. The value of developing a plan for the future became evident. They developed a road map, one that began as a single lane road and has since developed into a worldwide interstate.

In 1982, Hank G., then Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, realized a need for the Board of Trustees to reassess how the WSO was managed. The Board realized they had become problem solvers, not visionaries. They were reacting to what was happening around them, not planning for the future. The Board realized they needed to start looking at long range plans rather than short

term goals. The Board realized they needed to develop plans that would ensure the WSO would be able to respond in an effective manner to the increased needs of a growing worldwide fellowship and to a constantly changing world. “The Committee said that ‘as individuals and as a fellowship we suffer if we neglect the job of planning for tomorrow’” (*Many Voices, One Journey*, p. 220). It was during this period of time that the Board developed a Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) charged with developing plans for the future and presenting those recommendations to the Board.

In 2001, the Board determined the Long Range Plan needed to become the responsibility of the entire Board since the Board's responsibility is to plan for the future. The LRPC Chair facilitated sessions during which the Board developed Vision and Mission Statements. They identified that long term planning was not just a small part of the Board's work. It *was* the Board's work. By February 2004, the Board of Trustees had transitioned from long range planning to the development of a Strategic Plan with goals and objectives and fully developed Vision and Mission Statements.

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.

Within the process of developing the initial Strategic Plan, the Board considered all aspects of Al-Anon's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The perspective gained by the Board through this process was that many of their answers were the same and many of the identified strengths were also perceived as weaknesses and opportunities. All could be considered threats or strengths depending on how they were viewed.

The initial Strategic Plan of Al-Anon Family

Groups Headquarters, Inc. was introduced to the 2005 World Service Conference (WSC). Some Areas within the WSC structure have adopted the Board's Vision and Mission Statements while others have developed their own and others have chosen to not adopt

such statements. Today, each member of the Board of Trustees continues to participate in the development of Al-Anon's plan. A Strategic Plan Oversight Work Group (composed of Trustee members) was put into place to assist in the continued development of Al-Anon Family Groups, Inc. Strategic Plan. The SPO Work Group is charged with guiding the Board in executing the planning, implementation, and review of the Strategic Plan's priorities, goals and objectives. The SPO Work Group guides the Board of Trustees in designing, revising, or redeveloping Strategic Plan priorities. With the assistance of the Executive committee, this includes monitoring the goals and objectives of World Service Office (WSO) staff.

During quarterly presentations to the Board of Trustees, the SPO Work Group provides information and opportunities for full participation by all members of the Board in developing and implementing forward-looking strategic plans. Working with the Chairperson of the Board, the Chairperson of Executive Committee, the Executive Director, and other Trustees, the SPO Work Group provides appropriate levels of information about current Strategic Plan priorities to all members through various print and electronic formats. The Work Group cooperates with the Board to ensure consistent understanding and use of Strategic Planning terms. Priorities begin to answer the question "How will we go about accomplishing our Vision and Mission?" Priorities describe a general idea; they don't describe specific activities or projects.

Goals are broad statements of what the Board of Trustees hopes to achieve in furthering its priorities. Goals set the stage for defining specific objectives.

Objectives describe, specifically, how we will achieve goals. Objectives can define who will be responsible and give timelines for completion.

Evaluation is an annual review by the Board of Trustees to assess the actual performance in comparison to planned outcomes. This evaluation assists the Board of Trustees in determining if the Strategic Plan priorities, goals, and objectives are furthering the Board of Trustees' Vision and Mission.

The plan is reviewed every year and updated as necessary. An orientation session is held each July with the full Board. This helps bring newly elected Trustees "on board" and serves as a refresher for the Board as a whole. A separate orientation for all new Trustees is also given by the Chairperson of the Board prior to

each July Board meeting. The Strategic Plan establishes priorities for WSO staff, Committees, and the Board itself. The following is the overlying statement to the three priorities:

Strategic Plan Priorities

Al-Anon's spiritual principles permeate our policies and practices; we apply emerging technology and communication options:

- to increase the visibility of Al-Anon so that it is recognized as the number one resource throughout the world for helping friends and families of alcoholics,
- to empower the Al-Anon fellowship to be vibrant, inclusive and flexible,
- to achieve a viable future for Al-Anon Family Groups. In this, the Board will be adaptive and strategic in its use of talents, skills, and abilities.

In 2015, the Board of Trustees formulated a goal and three objectives under the third priority of the Strategic Plan.

The Goal: *The AFG, Inc. Board of Trustees will raise the fellowship's awareness of the Trustees' relationship to the Al-Anon groups and WSO, while articulating and expressing the "why" of the Board's work.*

The Objectives:

1. To empower Trustees to use existing tools to articulate the "why" of the Board (blogs, skits, webinars)
2. Increase members' understanding that Trustees are Al-Anon members
3. Increase the *personal connection* of Trustees with the fellowship to increase Trustees' role education, i.e. demystifying the role, explaining why Board meetings are not open, etc.

At the January 2016 Board meeting, the Board voted to begin work on Objective 1 and formulated a plan for a one year series of articles in *The Forum*, to be written by Trustees, appearing under the heading "Serving from the Heart." The first of these articles will appear in October 2016.

The Board has charged itself with spending 80 percent of face to face meeting time in forward thinking and strategic work and 20 percent in evaluation and oversight. In July 2016, the WSO Administrative Team

joined Board and Executive Committee members in a Board development activity related to the Board's Duty of Foresight, i.e. looking continuously toward the future. We had the opportunity to consider ways we can change our thinking, how to remain focused on forward thinking while the world around us is constantly in change, why foresight is vital and critical to our future, and what societal transformations confront Al-Anon at this time and how these transformations necessitate foresight. This was only the beginning of the Board and WSO staff considering how we can work together in developing a clear eyed and focused discipline on our future. A strategic planning session followed, with the Board and WSO staff working together in clarifying the future direction of the WSO. The conversation is ongoing with a focus on clarifying how current work is meeting Strategic Plan priorities.

As we move forward, we ask ourselves whether our activities are strategic in thinking or if they represent old thinking. Does our thinking support our Mission and Vision Statements and do our actions accurately communicate this message to the members of the fellowship and those still suffering who have yet to find us? A Strategic Plan is a tool that provides guidance in fulfilling a mission with maximum efficiency and impact. The plan should fully articulate specific goals and describe the steps and the resources needed to attain them. In the past, most strategic plans have been adjusted every 35 years. However, in today's changing world, most are reviewed biennially or even annually.

As shared in the opening, a strategic plan is the blueprint or road map which connects us to our spiritual journey. As with any road, it requires review and maintenance to ensure the potholes are filled, possible detours are avoided, or, in some cases, detours are put in place while new construction is underway. Road maps become useless if not regularly updated. Roads change, environments change, construction can cause delays or perhaps an opportunity to take a route less traveled, one that no one ever considered or even dreamed possible. The key is to keep the road visible. Framed posters outlining the Board's Mission and Vision Statements and Strategic Plan priorities are placed in the Board Room and each conference room at the WSO. This assures that meaningful improvements are within reach and up to date.

Discussion

One Delegate stated that she was encouraged to see how long it took the World Service Office Board of Trustees to get to this point and that she believed this presentation was a demonstration of the planning and work it takes to achieve a vision. Others agreed and the discussion continued with most sharing examples of how their service boards and/or committees established a vision or goals. Some shared their approach towards developing a plan.

Another Delegate advised because strategic thinking was new for many in her structure, they started by developing their mission and vision statements. She shared she believed that starting this process slowly is what helped those in her structure – that participated in the process – to eventually understand the value of having a strategic plan.

Another shared after she became aware of the WSO having a Strategic Plan, "I told our Board of Trustees that we should do this too. We held a meeting on strategic planning to include all our areas of interest – literature, economics, how to reach out. We were very excited that suddenly we have the possibility to do something to change."

Most described forming plans that focused on Public Outreach activities as a key way to raise awareness about Al-Anon/Alateen within their respective communities. Once their goals were established many agreed that their next hurdle faced was how to finance the project(s).

For example, one representative shared that a plan their structure started seven years previously took a backseat when their finances fell short. The member went on to say, "when we were ready to surface our idea again, at least we had a plan." Another Delegate emphasized "that we can do what we can, but sometimes we need to accept the fact that plans can and will change."



There was agreement from most that flexibility is important in strategic planning.

Another Delegate shared, “a few years ago during our Conference while listening to a topic discussion about developing a strategic plan, I remember thinking that it was a ‘grown-up word’ and didn’t feel like Al-Anon. But we did a workshop using a ‘gallery walk’ format which we found encouraged our delegates to participate in this process. All seemed excited to be involved! We let them know that we took their comments and incorporated them in our plan.”

A different point of view was shared when another Delegate shared “we have a problem getting people involved in service; in fact, to help with this our Board of Trustees has developed a theme: ‘Involving People’. This is how we are working towards growth in our structure.”

Another advised their structure did not have a formal plan. Their current priority was to make their Board better known to all areas within their structure. It was explained they planned to do service seminars and to do more Public Outreach within the professional community.

Finally, a member shared because of the vastness of their country, they still haven’t been able to reach out to various regions. This Delegate summarized the discussion by stating “our strategic plan at present is to go out to places within our communities where there is no Al-Anon to raise awareness about our presence.”

Purpose and Responsibilities of a General Service Office

Minna K., Finland

How do we define the General Service Office (GSO)? According to the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* it means “a national service structure in a country outside of the World Service Conference structure.” A Board of Trustees and other elected Al-Anon members are included and they are responsible for Al-Anon service-related activities. GSOs are guided by the decisions of the World Service Conference.

Service structure in Finland

We have 14 Districts and no Area level. Each District has their activities organized in their own way. Our service manual suggests four meetings a year at the District level. Some of the Districts have relatively few people doing service. The groups choose freely

their service tasks in suitable combinations. The number of groups at the moment is about 112.

Our Conference is a two day event. We call it Service Meeting. Two Delegates are invited from each District. Members are also welcome to participate in the Conference. In the preparatory meeting the visiting members can speak freely, but in the Service Meeting they can only listen.

In the office, we have a paid worker, who is called our General Secretary in the international context. She is invited to the Board of Trustees and Executive Committee meetings, but is not a member of either. The Board of Trustees consists of the four members of Executive Committee, the chairs of four standing committees and two international coordinators. The committees are for Alateen, Literature, Public Information and our monthly magazine *Tietoavain*.

The GSO as a national service provider to the community and the outside world

Being a clearinghouse and a collecting service link was recognized among our members as the single most important task of the GSO. It is simple to have a steady, credible contact point for any needs of the community. Also, official contact with printing houses, meeting places, etc., has happened through the office. Using the office address, email and telephone number guarantees anonymity and is easy to deliver. Having a GSO means that we are also firmly linked to the World Service Office (WSO) and qualified to send Delegates to international meetings.

Communication between membership and the Board is a great advantage of having a GSO because any answer can be directed through the office. This includes organizing the Service Meetings and the yearly workshop for District Representatives. Like everywhere, the arrangements with new groups and yearly confirmation of group continuity belong on the office list of tasks. We have a starting package for new groups and help is given from the office. New groups are added to the internet list of meetings. We help new groups and answer their questions.

Nowadays, when a newcomer is asked where she/he got the information on our community, internet is always mentioned. Most people in Finland have a computer and those who do not can use it in the public library. Internet pages have been a functional way to present our purpose both generally and in detail.

Putting up the internet pages was once a huge effort of many wonderful members. In addition to that, our paid worker has developed a lot of good practices and refinements to the web pages.

Literature sales have been run from the office both for groups and individual customers. Material can be ordered via our website and selling is organized for different occasions. Recording payments from literature purchase and group contributions has also been an important task of our office caretaker. Some members have gotten used to not giving any reference numbers etc., since the caretaker knows them by name, but the detective work has actually taken a lot of time away from other work.

Office reports are discussed in the Executive Committee meetings and the general trends presented to the Board of Trustees. In our Service Meeting, we give the membership the annual report with the financial statement and the action plan. The budget decisions of the meeting guide the Executive Committee for the next year and financial monitoring is carried out regularly.

The office also is an outcome of our goodwill outside the fellowship. The GSO cannot be replaced in public outreach. As we make ourselves known to the public, we must be able to guarantee a response to those who want to contact us.

Challenges encountered in keeping up the service level with limited resources have we put too many eggs in one basket?

Recently, our declining income has put us in front of the question: what kind of GSO are we able to maintain? We also must define what part of it should be managed with paid personnel and what can be done with voluntary service positions.

The first Al-Anon office was registered in Helsinki in 1968 with voluntary workers. Then a part time worker was hired and the office had its own telephone number. When Al-Anon expanded in Finland, we had resources to maintain a full time worker. This has been continuing for decades and a lot of work has been centralized to become the responsibility of the office over the years. This has, little by little, also made the paid workload heavier and the volunteer input lighter.

The challenges with the office culminate with the yearly budget. We have had savings from past years and we have used it to cover the deficit of several years, but that cannot go on forever. In the Service Meeting,

there are a lot of discussions about how to resolve the situation.

Recently, we wanted to keep the budget in balance and started to evaluate our services. We increase voluntary work and some tasks had to be diminished. We classified the office routines in three priority categories. Fewer hours had to be put in detail areas and, instead, build a focus on the essential activities. Outsourcing the accounting will give us some savings and is independent from the renovation processes. Many tasks have been moved to be done by the standing committees. For example, the Literary committee has taken a bigger role in publishing the books. That means contact with the printing houses and other service companies. We have been asking for more volunteers to the committees. The remote location of the office does not allow us to organize more volunteering in the office quarters except the magazine posting and occasional Executive Committee work. In the virtual world, there would be a lot of room for innovative ways to add participation in service.

Challenges encountered in using the service manual as a resource

We have a national service manual, where the service posts and meetings are described in a quite detailed level. This can cause problems because the service manual is a suggestion for how to organize things in a situation where resources are ideal. Sometimes we try to fulfill too many of these details instead of considering which are the essential tasks in each situation.

Altering roles is never easy and the role of the office worker in Finnish Al-Anon has been somewhat vague. In Finnish associations, usually two roles have been common: either the worker is an executive director/ manager or an office secretary. The same problem has encountered us when comparing the situation to the WSO.

In Al-Anon, we have called the post the office caretaker and it has features of management and secretarial duties. Most of the tasks are office routines, but sometimes it has also been practical to let the office worker arrange some functions independently. In our own service manual, there is also a definition of policy that the office caretaker is the treasurer of the community. This has led to constant discussions about the position and rights of our office caretaker – and if we should call the position General Secretary. The treasurer should be

a role that is free from conflicts of interest. In many cases, the decisions of the community also concern the financial interest of the office worker.

We also use the WSO *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* when it comes to policies and Concepts of Service. However, investigating details can lead us to confusion. Comparisons with the WSO staff are difficult because of the diversity of roles and possibility that several WSO roles are done by one person in Finland. We have been looking for ways to connect fairness, the right of participation and good communication to handle the changes we facing. This has not always been easy and has led to disagreements and sorrow.

There is also a part of our membership who has been criticizing the service structure as a whole. It is said to be too complicated for a small country and that the many service posts and big meetings are too demanding on resources. They would like to go back to the days when Al-Anon had a Service Meeting in an AA convention and not very much action of its own. The problem is the critical members do not want to come to District meetings or Service Meetings to discuss. The major part of our community has been supportive and we are going to make changes in our service manual in the next conference to respond to the current situation.

Benefits to our service structure gained from these experiences

There were a lot of practical challenges encountered in running the office. The Trustees, who were temporarily keeping the office on a voluntary basis, did not know how to get access to the computer, how to utilize the answering machine, where to find the necessary documents, etc. Office routines should have been fully documented to keep things going through the changes. Historically, we have paid a lot of attention to passing on knowledge related to the service posts, in general, but we found the office was poorly documented with relation to its high importance. Now we have learned our lesson and corrected the arrangements.

The thinking in the countries of Nordic Europe has been that if an individual pays his/her taxes, it is possible to be free from worrying about how things get done. But Al-Anon is not the same as our society, in general, and we must take steps to learn how to take more responsibility. The office is not only a room and a person who works there, but a service entity. Going through the office services has given us a better understanding

of the importance of the office and the importance of the responsibility of each of us. Let it begin with me!

As the 2014 IAGSM suggested, our legacy should be considered as a whole. Our problems give us a wonderful possibility to regard the Steps, Traditions and Concepts of Service and how they can be put into work. This has also showed itself occasionally like sun peeking through the clouds. Our Board meetings have had a calm and understanding atmosphere; after a stormy Service Meeting, we had a relieving group meeting where we laughed and cried together. Tradition Five says, in part, "Each Al-Anon Family Group has but one purpose: to help families alcoholics." According to Tradition One, "Our common welfare should come first..." Each of us has a path to recovery.

Discussion

At the beginning of this discussion one Delegate advised that one idea she is sharing with her structure about this presentation is that "procedures should be documented." Another followed up by stating "that in our structure, we try to put together standard norms so there is continuity and we can pick up where a predecessor left off."

A member shared their structure hired a consultant to help with an internal evaluation of procedures and staffing. Based on recommendations from the consultant, there were changes made to better support and maintain services within the structure more efficiently.

A statement was made that many offices rely heavily on volunteers to do the work of paid staff. However, this was a problem because to find volunteers that are willing to provide this important and much needed service, is becoming more and more difficult.

Another Delegate advised their structure did a survey that indicated many of the members within their structure responded they are willing to do service work on behalf of the GSO. It was further explained that this exciting feedback prompted the GSO to make the fellowship aware of their needs.

Another member explained that their structure did not have a physical office space, but virtual. "We do have an Al-Anon telephone line with a telephone committee roster; this is a service opportunity we are happy to have members participate." It was also explained – as a part of their virtual office services - that those involved in other service work on behalf of the GSO, hold regular face-to-face meetings to split the work to

insure no one person is over loaded. It was shared that they have online business meetings so when they do get together (face-to-face), they can use this time more productively. A Delegate asked, since there is no physical office - regarding the storage of literature- how this GSO handled storage. The Delegate explained that the GSO has an agreement with their printers who store the literature in their warehouse.

Another member shared they have had similar challenges maintaining a volunteer base as office workers. For this structure, the Delegate advised many of their dedicated volunteers have grown older and can no longer come to the office. It was further stated that younger members were not an option as they work during the day. The solution for this structure is to offer paying jobs when they have the financial resources.

Some advised that their Board of Trustees and Executive Committees in addition to their committee roles and responsibilities are tasked with maintaining office services. Because of these added duties, some of the office workload – when possible – has been delegated to other links of service.

Service and Recovery – How to Encourage Group Members in Service

Jenny P., South Africa

When I received the invitation to do an IAGSM presentation on the topic of "Service and Recovery How to encourage group members in Service," I have to admit I was a little dismayed. My initial thought was to wonder how I was ever going to find something useful to add to a subject frequently discussed at Al-Anon service meetings with little success. At second glance though, I realized, that the focus of the presentation was more on leadership and encouraging those group members already "in" service.

I was amazed at the appropriateness of this presentation – here was the Higher Power at work. At the time of receiving the invitation, I was greatly concerned about how some of our Area service members may have been feeling. We had held our Biennial Executive National Service meeting the weekend just past. Toward the end of the meeting, an unexpected issue had arisen. This particular issue created an outcry of consternation and discord. I was concerned how this upset may have affected the attending Area Service members. How to go about supporting and reassuring them had been the fo-

cus of my thoughts after the meeting. This, along with the presentation topic, led me to think in greater detail about how important it is to encourage and support service members at all levels of service, throughout the structure.

A brief overview of the Al-Anon service structure in South Africa

Al-Anon South Africa Service Structure Areas

Al-Anon South Africa has three Areas:

Cape Area, Gauteng & Districts Area, and KwaZulu Natal Area

Each Area has its own Al-Anon Service Office (ASO). The Cape Area ASO is situated in Cape Town. The Gauteng & Districts Area ASO is in Johannesburg. KwaZulu Natal ASO is located in Durban.

Districts

The Cape Area has three Districts while the Gauteng & Districts and KwaZulu Natal Areas have four Districts each.

Area Al-Anon Service Committees

Each Area has an Al-Anon Service Committee (ASC) consisting of an Area Chairperson, Area Trustee, Area Delegates (each Area may elect up to three Delegates) and the various portfolio positions such as Member Services, Finance, Policy and Planning, Literature, Public Outreach and Archives. These meet regularly, either monthly or every second month.

Area Assembly meetings are held either monthly or every second month, attended by Group Representatives, District Representatives, and Service Committee members. Elections are held in August at the August Election Assembly.

General Service Committee (National Executive Committee)

This currently meets every second month in Cape Town, with the out of towners taking part by Skype or other electronic conference means. With the advent of electronic means of communication, such as Skype, Committee members may now reside throughout the country with the exception of the Committee Chairperson and the Finance Chairperson who must be able to have direct contact with the General Service Office. A full Executive meeting (General Service Committee

members plus the Trustees) is held in November each year. This meeting is held in conjunction with the annual National Policy and Planning meeting.

The General Service Committee consists of:

The National Chairperson of the Committee; the National Chairpersons for Finance, Literature, Public Outreach, Members & Group Services, Policy and Planning, Trust Trustee, Members at Large, Area Trustees, National Archivist and National Webmaster.

General Service Office (GSO)

The GSO, situated in Cape Town, has one paid Office Administrator. It is financed by literature sales, fundraising and donations from the Areas. It is responsible to the Board of Trustees.

Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees, which must consist of not less than five and not more than ten members, currently has seven members. The position of Chairperson of the Board rotates annually, generally in alphabetical order.

The Board positions are:

Executive Trustee for Trust Finances; Executive Trustee for Policy & Planning; Area Trustees for Cape Area, Gauteng & Districts, and KwaZulu Natal Area; Trustee at Large – National GSC Chairperson; Trustee at Large – no portfolio.

The Board of Trustees meets formally three times per year and functions as the Nominating Committee. In between formal meetings, the Board continues to meet as necessary using Skype or other similar electronic conference means.

Our National Al-Anon Conference is held every second year with a smaller general meeting, the Biennial Executive meeting, held in the interim years.

Differences and Similarities

In South Africa, as a country, we have a great deal of diversity in cultures and language, ethnicity, education, social and economic status, and challenges associated with unemployment and places to live. Safety and security are daily concerns for all of us. Attitudes toward others who are not the same create an undercurrent of resentment, mistrust, fear and anger which pervade the makeup of our country.

In Al-Anon South Africa, diversity is reflected in the composition of members at our Al-Anon Area Assem-

bly meetings. Each Area shows a different predominance of one or another culture and ethnicity. In our group meetings and at service meetings, we are seeing members who are more open about their sexual gender preference. Attitudes of acceptance or rejection of the “God” aspects of Al-Anon are more freely expressed.

Yet, regardless, on an Al-Anon level, where the focus is on Al-Anon matters, these differences are put aside. At events and Area meetings, members greet each other with warmth and openness, reflecting the understanding that we are all there with one common similarity – our purpose to carry the message of hope and recovery to those who, like us, are family or friends of alcoholics.

Service, leadership and encouragement of new leaders

When I look at the Al-Anon structure and see how service positions are key to our success, it becomes clear how important it is to encourage members at all levels of service. From the group member giving service within the group, to Group Representatives to Area Trustee and Board positions. All are ordinary Al-Anon members who, with greater or lesser degrees of responsibility in service, are our leaders.

When I think back to when I first came into Al-Anon and began attending group meetings, entirely caught up with my own problems, I did not give any thought to the possibility of a bigger picture of an Al-Anon structure outside of those meetings. I remember attending my first Area Assembly meetings with trepidation, amazed to discover that there was so much to learn and experience. I recall at times feeling quite overwhelmed and at others uncomfortable when differences of opinion were strongly expressed. I was rather timid in those days. In time, I began to enjoy and feel more confident and accepted amongst the camaraderie of growing relationships.

When members do accept service positions, we want them to stay and succeed. We certainly don't want to lose them. A group member who agrees to take on a service position usually finds him or herself faced with a seemingly formidable amount of Al-Anon information – with policies and procedures and structure that are confusing and daunting. It is important, therefore, to support the member with encouragement and understanding and gentle guidance along the way, allowing time to become accustomed to the dynamics of an Al-Anon Assembly

meeting. A well structured Area Assembly meeting goes a long way toward maintaining a feeling of being in a “safe place” where one is accepted regardless of differences of opinion, ability and level of service.

At a recent Area meeting, the Area Chairperson used the set agenda to systematically work through the items for discussion. A member raised a concern regarding something that had transpired at a recent event. The member felt strongly that the Area Chairperson had provided incorrect advice and this had created confusion. The Area Chairperson responded calmly and, after some discussion to further clarify the detail of the concern, admitted that possibly her advice may have been taken out of context. She apologized, saying this had not been her intention. While the discussion went back and forth between the two, one could feel and see anxiety and discomfort in some of the attendees. However, everyone sat quietly listening, not commenting or interjecting. The matter was closed and the Area Chairperson moved on to the next item on the agenda. This Chairperson showed good leadership skills in her handling of the situation. It is good for service members to see that when conflict arises, differences of opinion are allowed and both parties are permitted to have their views listened to, acknowledged, and addressed without raised voices.

Good personal leadership at all service levels is a necessity – Concept 9

While it is one thing to say to group members that it is important to elect a Group Representative who is the best candidate, these days, in most instances, the Group Representative will be someone whose only initial qualification is a willingness and ability to attend the Area Assembly meetings on a regular basis. Often, the person elected might well be someone who has not been long in Al-Anon.

At Area Assembly, workshops may be held to provide the Group Representative with the knowledge required to fulfil the position. After a time, the Group or District Representative can be eased into becoming more involved through a role such as Area Literature or Area Archives and, in this way, begin to understand how our structure works and gain greater knowledge, experience and confidence.

It is at this level that individuals can start to be assessed and considered for more responsible leadership. Promising candidates could be moved on to positions

such as Area Member & Group Services, Area Policy and Planning or Area Public Outreach. This exposes the individual to even greater learning on how the structure works and one's role within it, as well as the policies and planning relating to one's specific portfolio. As the member begins to grow and prove himself/herself, the member might be approached to consider a nomination when Delegate positions become available.

It is at this point, that the true emphasis on leadership becomes evident. The Delegate will begin to face far more exacting challenges. Prior to attending my first Conference as Delegate, I remember some members approaching me to discuss what I should and should not vote for. When I explained that at Conference, while taking my Area's needs and thoughts into consideration, I am expected to vote according to my conscience based on the full facts and discussions put forward at Conference, the wry response was “Well, then what is the point of you going?”

Delegates, on returning from Conference, could be faced with reporting on decisions which may or may not have met the expectations of the Area Committee or Assembly. I sometimes found it difficult as a Delegate, coming back from Conference enthusiastic and upbeat after having attended a stimulating and exciting event where so much was discussed and decided on, to find my Area Committee or Assembly not quite as enthused with the information. I experienced conflicting feelings when I was seemingly now categorized as a part of a group called “they.” As in, “‘they’ decided this” and “what did ‘they’ think ‘they’ were doing?” Yet before I had left for Conference, I was part of a group called “we” – as in “‘we, in this Area need or want this.” Now, faced with the sometimes heated discussions about the decisions that were made and, somehow, while still understanding my Area's point of view, I tried to justify and explain the reasoning behind the decisions. I often felt disheartened that I had somehow failed the Area.

As an Area Trustee, I experienced similar feelings. Taking part in a General Service Committee meeting or Board of Trustee meeting, I had to separate my sense of responsibility to the expectations of my Area from my role as Trustee on the Board. As a Trustee, I had primary administrative and legal responsibilities and was to consider the needs of Al-Anon South Africa as a whole. These are the experiences that allow one to grow and gain confidence through service.

Challenges encountered by the Al-Anon South Africa structure with supporting Group members in service

While it is wonderful that members are willing to offer their services for short projects such as Convention Committees, Area Rallies or Public Outreach events, this does not assist with the bigger issue of filling the more demanding service positions. At a fellowship level, group members receive regular email copies of the minutes of their Area's Assembly meetings. While this practice is a great advantage in keeping the groups informed, it may contribute to a decreased feeling of a group to motivate a member to attend an Area Assembly meeting, as someone would have had to do in the past, to receive the information.

At Area level, some service positions may stand open for a time. Sometimes Area Delegates may be elected sooner than is preferable – when they really needed more time to gain knowledge and experience. At the level of Area Delegates, Area Trustees, General Service Committee and Board of Trustees, the terms of office have been extended from three years to four years. It was felt at the time of making this decision, that this would be of benefit as one is often only becoming fully familiar and confident in a service role by the end of the third year. However, the small number of members stepping forward or being ready to be nominated has compounded the problem. Service members are sometimes elected for a second term of four years. With little rotation, there is the possibility of burnout.

Benefits the Al-Anon service structure may have gained from this experience

A definite benefit that has come from having members in longer service positions is the knowledge and experience gained of the history of decisions and actions taken in those positions during these extended terms of office. Service members also get to know and understand one another so much better. Longer terms of office also help at the level of the General Service Committee and Board of Trustees where we are faced with increasing legal requirements in our country. Having to change signing powers at banks and on legal documents frequently would, for example, be a difficulty.

“...In the field of world service the Board of Trustees assumes the primary leadership” (Concept Nine)

At the beginning of my presentation, I referred to how strange the Higher Power works and how amaz-

ing it was to receive the topic of the presentation just at a time when supporting those in service had been utmost on my mind. We were getting to the closing stages of our Biennial Meeting, when an unexpected matter was raised. The nature of the issue caused an upset and was one which could be said to fall within a minority's right to be heard. To hold over discussion to a later date was not wise, but with high feelings all round, we felt rushed in addressing the issue.

I am sad to say that, unlike the Area Assembly meeting where a conflict was dealt with smoothly and with maturity, we, the Trustees and General Service Committee, fell back to old habits of reacting emotionally, feeling offended and demoralized, and all trying to talk at the same time. The issue related to a Board of Trustee decision and was one which was the Board's responsibility to make. All the information behind the decision was communicated to the Areas. It transpired that a group member was not satisfied with the decision, despite Area service members meeting personally with this person. It was implied that our integrity in arriving at the decision was being questioned and that we were not “trusted” servants. A way to address the situation was proposed and it was the only decision of the whole Biennial Meeting where there was not total consensus.

The Trustees sent many text messages back and forth among ourselves after the event, trying to put our feelings and the episode into perspective. This showed me that no matter how long we may have been in Al-Anon service as leaders, our sensitive feelings are often sitting just below the surface. I sent an email to the Area Service members to say “Don't be disheartened when it seems we're being unfairly or rudely attacked. These ‘curve balls’ happen in Al-Anon from time to time. Remember, we and members, in general, often come from a background where our trust in people and situations is lost. Do as Al-Anon has taught us, talk it out amongst one another, see what can be done about the situation, then Let go and let God, and move on. We can't force others to like or trust us, we can only do what we do.”

Discussion

A member started out by sharing that there are many positive benefits for participating in service. She stated “service - is an opportunity to enhance individual growth.” Another member concurred stating that participating in service in her opinion - raises awareness and the opportunity for different experiences. It was

also mentioned that sometimes because of those experiences, there may be conflict. It was shared that *Using Al-Anon Principles to Resolve Conflicts Kit (K-70)*, was a great resource for starting discussions around this topic. This service tool is available in English, French and Spanish.

A Delegate advised her structure had a meeting on how to attract people into service. She stated that she understood that it “starts with me, that I can share my experience.” It was shared further because of this meeting, there is a better understanding about the benefits of service work on behalf of the structure. “Groups are now including this topic on their business meeting agenda each month!”

To help equip members involved in service it was mentioned that having workshops on the topic of “Conflict Resolution” is an opportunity to help members develop conflict resolution skills, encourage positive thinking and to develop listening skills when interacting with one another.

It was also shared that information and awareness are vital for new members involved in service. In one structure, each group was encouraged to have a service manual available for the group as the service manual is “seen” as a resource for clear information about service roles within that structure.

Another Delegate said what made meetings run smoothly in their structure – and helped members feel more a part of their discussions – was to use the Knowledge-Based Decision Making (KDBM) process. It was stated by one Delegate that in the experience of her structure “this process helps all to participate in an organized manner without rushing to make a decision. The key for the participants is it helps to give them the permission and understanding that it's okay to take the time to find out more and to participate in an informed group conscious!”

In addressing rotation of leadership, a Delegate shared “we've seen that it's very important that we who come to the end of our terms learn to step aside to make room for new thoughts and opportunities. We must let the newcomers do it their way, while sharing the workload with them for a while, so that they gain confidence.”

Finally looking around at the group one member said, “we are here because we were nurtured. It starts in the group. I always got encouragement. They believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. The trick is to en-

courage them when they are new, to give them a sense of belonging; being a part of something bigger. I ask newcomers to help me set up the literature, the chairs – I start them off like that. I see service as not optional; for me it's the third leg of our Legacies.”

Carrying Al-Anon's message to the General Public in the Most Effective but also Spiritual Way

Nilce T., Brazil

The Al-Anon Family Groups in Brazil have their headquarters in the city of São Paulo. São Paulo has the largest number of Al-Anon and Alateen groups in Brazil. In 2015, a 50th anniversary celebration gathered 270 members from across the country to participate in a commemorative meeting.

The political and economic difficulties that have affected our country in recent years have also hit Al-Anon in Brazil. Our reserve fund reached minimum level. One of the most unfortunate outcomes of those problems was the lack of financial resources to reprint some pieces of literature. Since 2015, we have been unable to reprint three important books: *Paths to Recovery – Al-Anon's Steps, Traditions and Concepts* (B-24); *Al-Anon's Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions* (B-8); and *...In All Our Affairs: Making Crises Work for You* (B-15). In order to solve this particular issue, the 38th General Service Conference approved a motion to launch a campaign to raise funds to reprint these three books.

The Brazilian structure currently has three administrative committees: Executive, Policy, and Strategic Planning. The Finance and Nominating committees do their work during the Board of Trustees meetings. The Strategic Planning Committee is composed of three members who get in touch with each other regularly through modern means of communication, such as email, WhatsApp and phone calls. We also have four committees aligned with elements of the World Service Conference structure.

- Conference Committee – organizes the Conferences
- Public Outreach Committee – includes service in the areas of Public Information, Cooperation with the Professional Community and Institutions
- International Committee
- Groups Services – includes the Alateen Committee and serves existing Alateen Groups, Lone Members, and Lone Groups

The General Service Office has seven paid employees (including the General Secretary) and contracts with four companies to provide Internet and website services, accounting services, cleaning services, and administration and maintenance of electronic devices.

The General Service Office – through the General Secretary and the Public Outreach Committee – interacts closely with 480 professionals and 80 institutions. Other professionals and institutions who wish to know the Al-Anon/Alateen program have at their disposal many ways to find and get in touch with us:

- The Brazil GSO website contains a specific link for professionals who want to know about the Al-Anon program. A professional can send his/her doubts by private message through this link. We answer the professional by mail. At the same time, we send some pieces of literature to the professional. We believe this can help him/her to become more familiar with the program. In our answer, we invite the professional to make contact with us. We also send the professional's name and address to an Area contact person where he/she lives. With this information, group members can get in touch with the professional to perform their task in the work of Cooperation with the Professional Community and Institutions. The Public Outreach Committee follows this work through reports made annually by the Areas and sent to the Conference.
- Some clinics for the chemically dependent refer relatives of their patients to Al-Anon meetings. Some clinics even offer regular meetings between family members and Al-Anon members. When a family member comes to a meeting, we give him/her an attendance certificate and take the opportunity to invite him/her to engage into the program.
- Once a year we send a letter and a piece of literature to all professionals registered in our files. The letters and books are sent in November, with Season's Greetings, and updated information about Al-Anon. By doing this, we hope to strengthen our bond with those professionals. The response to this initiative is very positive. People write back to us to say "thank you" and to acknowledge Al-Anon as a great resource to family and friends of alcoholics.

- Al-Anon and Alateen groups invite professionals who support our program to open meetings, organized to give general information to the public, and to special event meetings.
- Institutional videos, recorded by professionals and available on YouTube, explain to a greater number of people the importance of Al-Anon as a recovery program to family and friends of alcoholics.
- Whenever possible, the General Secretary accepts invitations to speak about Al-Anon in TV programs.
- We have a campaign called "Sponsor an Institution." The number of members interested in doing this sort of work is increasing slowly.

The challenges in working with the professional community were much more intense within the fellowship than with the professionals themselves. The majority of professionals acknowledge Al-Anon as a great resource to family and friends of alcoholics. Al-Anon members, on the other hand, are very reluctant about working with professionals and institutions. They claim this is a hard and complex work. They also argue that, in doing this work, they are exposing themselves and risking their personal anonymity.

As we show our faces, sharing our experiences in living with alcoholism, we make Al-Anon stronger – within the fellowship and to the public in general. Members who believe in the program's benefits show good will and disposition. They are also their own leaders and help shy or unmotivated members to be more active and confident.

Public outreach work in Brazil has benefitted greatly by all the new communication tools of our era. To make sure everybody finds us on the Internet, our letterhead paper and our *National Informative Newsletter* display our electronic addresses. We also have three email addresses available to internal and external communication. To carry our message to all kinds of public audiences, our structure makes use of many contemporary ways of communication:

- Official Website of Al-Anon in Brazil – This site has a modern layout, with the list of all groups all over the country. It offers instructions on how to find a group. There is also a link that allows Internet users to speak with members of Al-Anon.

During this conversation, members may refer the Internet users to a group. If this is the case, they may also invite them to enter into the program as Lone Members. Four volunteer members take turns to speak with Internet users by the website. It's also possible to buy literature directly from the website. We send orders to anyone in Brazil – and only in Brazil – without charging for the postal expenses.

- Our greatest challenge is to keep all data about the groups updated. Some groups close or change their timetables without notifying us. We are very sorry when a person chooses a group from our list and finds the door closed.
- Official Al-Anon in Brazil Facebook Page – After studying the matter carefully, the Board of Trustees decided to create the Official Al-Anon in Brazil Facebook page. One of the reasons to do it was the fact that members and groups were creating their own pages on Facebook. Those pages infringed on the Traditions and violated the Conference Approved Literature copyrights. People were posting photos and excerpts of our books on their Facebook pages. The Official Facebook Page posts a short message once a week. This message can be shared, but we don't encourage comments on our posts. Three volunteer members and the General Secretary monitor and analyze the comments, excluding them whenever necessary. The Facebook page also allows a private exchange of messages and that resource is largely used by the public. All messages are answered. The Board of Trustees receives a weekly report about the popularity of the posts and also some information about the exchange of private messages. With this data, the Board can evaluate the degree of success of the Official Page. The main questions are:
 1. Have we been able to catch people's attention?
 2. How many people enjoy our posts?
 3. Who are these people?
 4. Where do they come from?
 5. What kind of posts are most welcome by them?
- Our greatest challenge with Facebook is to explain to members that the Official Page does not infringe on the Traditions, particularly Tradi-

tion 11. Another challenge is to explain that a member who publishes photos or excerpts of pieces of literature is violating its copyrights and promoting Al-Anon. Immersed in a culture of prompt marketing, the members have difficulties in understanding those issues. Attracting people to Al-Anon has to do with encouraging them to know the program. We believe it is possible to do that by acting sensibly and consistently.

- WhatsApp – This is a very flexible and fast social media. Unfortunately, our experience with WhatsApp has been very complicated. Al-Anon groups on WhatsApp are not permitted because that could discourage people to attend face to face meetings. A large number of people can get in touch with each other very easily through WhatsApp. This is very beneficial, but it also can lead to laziness and even dishonesty. We are very concerned about it. We keep sending letters to the Areas' Leaders asking them to help us fight against Al-Anon groups meetings being performed through WhatsApp. We explain to them that our only goal is to preserve and strengthen our association. Some people accuse us of being responsible for the gradual death of Al-Anon. They argue that we are outdated and inflexible. We just explain our reasons again and again. We explain and discuss. Members and Board need an open and transparent debate to find a way to accommodate the principles of Al-Anon to the new era of electronic communication. We are not against WhatsApp. We see it as a great way of communication and we use it as a working tool. We have to keep in mind that Al-Anon groups meeting through WhatsApp creates an obstacle for Tradition 7. Collecting donated money and selling Literature through WhatsApp can be very complicated. We can give you an example of the problems we have been facing with WhatsApp lately – one of these days, during an Al-Anon group meeting, a member was invited to read a passage of the B-16. The member said, in a cheerful tone, "Not read; let's listen to it!" The book pages were being recorded, daily, in a professional sound studio. The recorded audios were sent to a list of people. The list included AA members. The Board became aware of this fact and sent a letter

to the Area where those recordings were being made. The letter explained that such recordings should stop immediately because they were a threat to Literature copyrights in Brazil. In Brazil, and certainly in all over the world, we fear that electronic sharing of partial or integral pieces of Literature may pose a risk to the much needed financial gains obtained by the sale of Literature.

- YouTube – This is another great way to improve public outreach. We hired a specialist company to record some institutional videos. Twenty topics were approached in those videos. The General Secretary was in charge of presenting the videos and conducting the topics covered by them. Several members participated in the videos: wives, teenage and adult children of alcoholics, brothers and sisters, men, professionals and AA members. In spite of the press insistence on showing member's faces, their anonymity was preserved. There is a special video all about our Literature. These videos have been used in various ways:

1. As an instructive resource to members in general
2. As public outreach material in institutions and for the general public
3. As encouraging material during Al-Anon events
4. As a resource for those who want to know Al-Anon (including people outside Brazil)
5. As supporting material for professionals

The greatest challenge concerning YouTube was to maintain the project. Unfortunately, it had to be suspended because we couldn't afford its financial costs. The project was initiated in September 2014 and ended in April 2015. Nonetheless, the videos are still available at YouTube and they have been used and shared.

Our most important public outreach projects right now are:

- Road Traffic and Alcoholism – The piece we use for this campaign is *Road Sign* (M-76). The pieces are sold with a subsidy of 50% to projects created by a member, a District, an Area or by an Al-Anon Information Service.
- Disseminating Al-Anon Among AA members – We regularly provide Al-Anon supporting material to AA so that they may understand how

Al-Anon helps families and friends of alcoholics. Explaining to AA members what is Al-Anon and how it works might help a lot of people who live in an alcoholic environment.

There are many ways and resources to carry the Al-Anon/Alateen message of hope. The message must be carried with enthusiasm to attract people who are often devastated when they meet us for the first time. We must use all available means of communication to carry our message, but we must do it sensibly and reasonably. Al-Anon taught us to try to act with sense and serenity. Alcoholism is an old disease, but the message of hope for families and friends of alcoholics must be modern and simple to captivate them. As a friend of mine said once during an IAGSM, "Our Traditions must not serve as walls to isolate us from the rest of the world" (Ric B.)

Our actions must be guided by the General Warranties of the Conference:

- Prudence – knowing and looking for information. "Think"
- Authority – must be achieved by knowledge and not imposed by power. We must never forget that authority is necessary. "Let it Begin with Me"
- Discussion – everybody must have a voice in all discussions. "Keep an Open Mind"
- Actions consistent with our beliefs and our way of living; we must preserve our Traditions. "Keep it Simple"
- Democracy in our thinking and actions – we must be very patient and sympathetic with other people who face their own challenges with an alcoholic relative or friend. "Principles Above Personalities"

Discussion

Members thanked the presenter for her PowerPoint presentation. There were general sharings on local Public Outreach projects within various communities. Some also shared they were using resources such as pamphlets and leaflets as simple ways to pass the message of hope to professionals in education, health, and religious communities.

Pricing of Literature in Maintaining Self Support

Gillian B., Australia

The Structure of Our GSO

The Australian General Service Office (AGSO) serves more than 400 groups, 25 of these are Alateen, in nine Areas. It also serves over 80 Lone Members (those members who are unable to attend meetings because of illness or distance).

Our structure is modelled on the World Service Conference structure, as outlined in Concept Eleven, "The World Service Office is composed of selected committees, executives and staff members."

- The Australian Service Conference is held every year in Melbourne, Victoria. The Conference provides guidance to the GSO in service matters brought to its attention and is representative of the Al-Anon membership in reaching a wider group conscience as expressed in Tradition Two, which states, "For our group purpose there is but one authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants—they do not govern."
- The Conference is attended by Delegates from the nine Areas, members of the General Service Board, the Executive Committee (which includes chairpersons of all Selected Committees) and GSO administrative staff. The voting members of the Conference are the 9 Area Delegates plus 4 General Service Board members.
- The GSO employs 6 people (part time) and relies, with gratitude, on the willing service of 10 – 12 regular volunteer members.
- Our General Service Board consists of 8 members (6 from Melbourne and 2 from anywhere in Australia).
- Our Executive Committee is the administrator of the AGSO and meets monthly. Executive Committee members include the General Secretary, Deputy General Secretary, *AustraLink* Editor, Treasurer, chairperson of each Selected Committee and up to two additional volunteers.
- The General Service Board, together with the Executive Committee, directs the business operations of the AGSO, observing the ByLaws of Al-Anon Family Groups (Australia) Pty Ltd., under which we operate in Australia.



- There are nine Areas. Each Area has a Delegate who is the link between the Area, the Australian Service Conference, and the AGSO. Delegates are elected, at Area Assembly, to serve a three year term.
- Each Area is made up of a number of Districts.
- Each District has a District Representative (DR) who is the link between the District and the Area.
- There are approximately 400 Al-Anon Family Groups in Australia; each group has a Group Representative (GR) who is the link between the group and the District, and between group and the Area Assembly.

A Brief History of Purchasing, Shipping, Reprinting and Printing Literature

It has been 65 years since the first Al-Anon Family Group meeting opened in 1951 in Australia. By 1960, 37 groups had registered with the World Service Office (WSO). Over the next decade, five Australian States had formed Central Service Councils or Committees and had opened a Central Service Office from which literature, purchased from WSO, was distributed.

In 1971, application was made to the WSO for permission to reprint a number of pieces of Conference Approved Literature (CAL), predominantly pamphlets. Permission was then extended to New South Wales Central Service Committee to reprint the book *One Day at a Time* (ODAT) with the understanding that this right be relinquished to the Australian General Service body as soon as it was established.

Purchasing

Until the mid 1960s, Australian groups purchased all CAL from the WSO. Prior to the formation of our GSO, individual groups around the country would order their literature directly from the WSO. Orders would take many weeks, sometimes months, to arrive. The Central Service Offices in each state then ordered some items of CAL in bulk from the WSO and supplied their local groups.

When the AGSO was established in 1977, it assumed responsibility for ordering literature from the WSO and for distributing it to Areas and members. Our AGSO faced many challenges in those early days: communication with the WSO was via telephone, fax and mail; orders were sent via airmail, together with an International Bank Draft in US dollars. It was often difficult to determine the exact rate of currency exchange and there were numerous adjustments in debits and credits and frequent recalculations with each order placed.

Shipping

Once the orders had been processed and correctly calculated, they were shipped to Australia. There were many incidences of goods being held at the docks – not able to be released until relevant paperwork was completed and customs taxes duly paid. The WSO subsidised our freight costs in those early days, but gradually shipping costs were raised and WSO encouraged us to be “self supporting.” This resulted in a dramatic increase for us in the cost of buying literature from the WSO.

Australian Customs fees had to be paid on any shipment from the WSO. A new Goods and Services Tax (GST) was introduced by the Australian Government in 2000. Although some small orders avoided attracting the tax, any orders over AUD\$1,000 would attract 10% GST plus customs and other government charges. This tax was calculated including the WSO’s shipping charges as well as the cost of the literature. The taxes and fees had to be paid to the customs agent prior to the release of goods.

Reprinting

In 1977, New South Wales complied with the agreement to relinquish the printing of ODAT to the newly formed AGSO, which assumed responsibility for reprinting CAL in Australia. Extra funds were needed for this. In the initial funding, Al-Anon and Alateen groups responded generously to an appeal to purchase

and reprint CAL and financial support came from Central Service Committees (which changed to Areas) across Australia.

From 1977 on, the AGSO took responsibility for reprinting *One Day at a Time* and other CAL items in Australia. The decision to reprint ODAT was the first step in the ongoing journey of print production of CAL here in Australia. It was an arduous task back then when there were no such things as photocopiers, scanners, emails, attachments, etc. The manual typing of each individual page took time. The text was typed onto a special paper that would then be applied to a block. Members would gather around a table and proofread each printed page to ensure the copy was errorfree before it was finally posted back to the printer, in another state, for production.

The “Permission to Reprint Agreement” between the WSO and the AGSO, allowing us to reprint items of CAL, only allows for sales and distribution within Australia. We cannot sell to other structures, but we are able to donate literature in certain cases, e.g. newly formed Al-Anon groups in neighbouring Pacific Island countries.

In the 45 years since that first reprinting of ODAT in Australia we have seen great advances in technology. As such, the process to reprint CAL has been made far less labour intensive. Insistence from the fellowship that literature be made as affordable as possible keeps us vigilant when establishing the markup we add to the books and pamphlets we reprint. This has to be balanced with the need for our structure to receive at least 25% of our revenue from the sale of literature.

Current Status of Reprinting and Printing Literature

Reprinting Conference Approved Literature

When we make a decision to reprint, it is done with thought and due consideration. We determine, with each new book released, whether to reprint here in Australia or to order it from WSO. The Literature Committee gives its recommendation to the Board on whether to reprint an item; the Budget Committee is included in each decision as to whether the large cost of printing has been included in the budget. The Board makes the final decision. Once we have decided if we want to print, when we want to print and how many to print, we obtain a quote from our printer for the printing and

binding of the book (including soft or hard cover). This will help us establish how we price each item.

Deciding on the price of each book is a decision made by the General Service Board with recommendations from the Literature Committee, the Budget Committee, and the Executive Committee. When we began reprinting literature, advice from the WSO suggested that we charge four or five times the cost of printing per unit. We no longer have a specific formula or percentage that we apply to all our reprinted books. We do, however, consider:

- The cost of printing against the probable income from sales.
- The value of printing large quantities of those items that are popular with members, to reduce our cost and increase our profit.
- Items for newcomers and for Public Information are priced as low as possible to just cover costs.
- That new books sell well and can be priced so that a moderate profit can be made.
- The principle of being self supporting – as a fellowship and as individuals.

Today we reprint:

- *How Al-Anon Works* (soft cover)
- *Paths to Recovery*
- *One Day at a Time*
- *Courage to Change*
- *Hope for Today*
- *Opening Our Hearts, Transforming Our Losses*
- *Discovering Choices*
- *Many Voices, One Journey*
- 28 pamphlets
- *Forum* reprints

The process of reprinting CAL today is so much easier. It takes the simple download of a file containing the book or pamphlet for reprint that is attached to an email from WSO. The only changes we make are the imprint page in the beginning of each book to reflect Australian information, and publishing and contact reference on the back of each pamphlet is changed to reflect Australian details.

Benefits to Our Structure of Reprinting Cal

The benefits of reprinting CAL are enormous and far outweigh the challenges. They include:

- Being able to respond immediately when orders are placed.
- Being able to offer CAL to the fellowship and also have an extra revenue source.
- CAL sales are a vital source of income – approximately 25% of our income comes from these sales.
- Not having to pay as much to outside entities i.e. customs agents, government departments.
- Using the profit we make from the sale of CAL to benefit the fellowship.
- We are able to offer an extensive selection of CQAL.
- Because we only reprint in English, there are no issues with translation.
- We get better prices and service by having an ongoing relationship with local printers.

Challenges We Face Reprinting Literature In Australia

- We still face a number of challenges, particularly with storage. Our literature department has limited space and, as such, the quantity of literature we are able to store is limited.
- Making a decision about the number of books to print is a challenge. We need to estimate the demand accurately and not be tempted to print large numbers because of the reduced cost per piece of printing a larger quantity.
- There have been a few instances where we have wrongly estimated the demand and have been left with excess stock that makes storage difficult. Creative ways to move excess stock by offering “special prices” has helped. Holding excess stock means that money is not available to be used for other purposes.
- It is a very complex and time consuming task to ensure that the printer’s proofs are 100% accurate for each item. The publishing details, reprint permission, edition number, book or pamphlet code, etc. must all be checked for accuracy.

Printing Our Own Literature

Having established a good relationship with a reliable printing company, we have a little more leverage to negotiate printing prices and to call on their expertise when we are unsure of specifications, layout, paper quality, etc. This has been especially helpful in the process of printing new literature. We are guided by their professional expertise.

The first pamphlet we printed, unique to Australia, was *Al-Anon Family Groups Welcome Australian Indigenous People* (X20). We recognized the need to develop a pamphlet that would be specific to our own Aboriginal/Indigenous people. It was a challenging exercise and a long process to “get it right” and needed much consultation with Indigenous people. The Australian Indigenous people’s understanding of spirituality is quite different and difficult to interpret. It took more than three years to develop this piece of literature, as it was difficult to find Indigenous members willing to contribute their stories. This is a free piece of literature.

The 2013 Conference decided to create a publication that could be used for Public Information that would include articles from members willing to share their personal stories. *Families Facing Alcoholism* is a booklet produced inhouse with covers printed by a local company. It is sold for a small fee to Area Offices who distribute it to their Public Information Coordinators for use in the community.

The *National Journal of Al-Anon Family Groups in Australia* is published once a month. *AustraLink* is posted to subscribers with free copies being sent to other GSOs, Area Delegates, every Australian Group and Lone Members. The cost of an annual subscription is \$20 for 12 hard copy issues. Recently, an electronic version was made available at the cost of \$10 a year for 12 issues.

A decision by Conference in 2012 to publish the collection of *AustraLink* editorials from 1990 – 2009 resulted in the production of a beautiful book we called *Sharing from the Heart*. Members offered their time and talent in retyping, copying, formatting, designing and proofreading this precious piece of literature. Two thousand copies of *Sharing from the Heart* were printed in 2015. The cost to print them was just under \$10.00 each and they are available for purchase at \$20.00 plus GST (10%). It has been a very popular publication and loved by all of those who preordered them and those who continue to buy copies. We hope you enjoy read-

ing your copy of *Sharing from the Heart*, a gift of love from Al-Anon Australia to all those attending the 2016 IAGSM.

In Closing:

The ultimate survival of Al-Anon Family Groups Australia relies on the continuing and regular sales of literature. We believe voluntary contributions would not be enough to sustain our fellowship. The cost of literature distribution continues to rise, as does the cost of reprinting and printing. To avoid applying the 50% surcharge on orders placed with WSO, which currently prevents us from lowering our prices any further, our intention is to ultimately be 100% self supporting, declining outside contributions.

Our *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 2014/2017*, page 219, discusses this exact topic and responds clearly to the question posed: “Should our books and other literature be sold at cost so that hard pressed members could purchase them more easily; or sold for less to encourage the general public to buy them?”

The pricing of literature in maintaining selfsupport applies to our fellowship, as a whole, but also to the continuing recovery of members when they practice Tradition Seven. We place a value on our own recovery when we purchase CAL. We are supporting the Al-Anon fellowship and our GSO which, in turn, provides support to our many members and to those still seeking Al-Anon recovery.

“Every group ought to be fully self supporting, declining outside contributions.” (Tradition Seven)

Some Al-Anon members think that being fully self supporting applies only to financial matters. The principle behind Tradition Seven, however, encourages us to be self supporting in all areas of our lives. Many affected by the disease of alcoholism have been financially, emotionally, physically and spiritually dependent on others. This dependence may have contributed to our low self esteem, distrust in decision making, or fear of abandonment. Becoming self supporting gives us the opportunity to gain freedom from the unhealthy dependence on others by establishing our own boundaries and goals for our lives.

Tradition Seven also reminds us that we can rob others of their dignity and self respect if we allow them to develop an unhealthy dependence on us. Allowing

others the right to pursue their goals with their own resources leads to healthier relationships with family members and friends. Practicing Tradition Seven gives us added opportunity to live healthier lives without fear, insecurity or anxiety.

Reaching for Personal Freedom (P-92), p. 95.

Discussion

This discussion covered several different topics related to Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature (CAL).

An initial question started with a Delegate asking whether it was a good business practice to price CAL lower than costs of the literature sold by the WSO. Most concurred that underpricing literature is not a good business practice.

The WSO shared that the Finance Committee sets prices at five times the cost of printing most recovery literature, this includes pamphlets and hardcover books; profit is turned back into supporting other services. This discussion also included questions directed to the WSO about the procedure for reprinting CAL. The following was advised:

- The World Service Office provides a PDF of the required piece of literature and a license to translate and print or to reprint.
- It was also explained that although the license gives a country permission to reprint the literature, it does not give a country ownership of the copyright; WSO maintains this ownership.
- There is no cost charged by WSO to send a PDF.

Translation

A question was asked whether others could share their experience in translating and printing CAL in other native languages/dialects within countries where multiple languages are spoken. One Delegate shared in their country it was hard to tell if the native literature was well received or not because the pamphlet in question was available in English. The Delegate explained further that the “youngsters (that spoke the native language), preferred the English version”. The member shared that some years earlier they had a project to print *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon* (B-6) in a native language, but the membership determined that this would not be the best use of their finance resources as the targeted audience could in fact read and speak English.

Another member shared they had contact with an

area in their structure where indigenous settlements were located. Older members advised the GSO that isolated communities love anything they receive! However, the Delegate shared that those representing indigenous populations within the targeted cities were insulted when the GSO produced a CAL item specifically for that culture. This was not the reaction they expected.

Another stated, “we too have a linguistic minority population in our country who speak three dialects. We were asked by A.A. what Al-Anon had done to serve this minority, however we advised them we did not have the finances to support such a project.”

Electronic Literature

One Delegate shared, because printing costs are so high, they have experimented with having an electronic version of their monthly magazine for a couple of years although they continue to produce a hardcopy version. The Delegate advised that the electronic version did not bring in extra revenue. “We are hoping young people will prefer this version as the price is lower and it can be read anywhere. We are interested to hear if there is any increase of revenue with electronic literature made available through the WSO”. In addressing the topic WSO explained, that the electronic publications currently available, are not sold directly by the WSO, but through an outside vendor. It was also shared that because of this, revenue from this format is not a high profit. The literature currently available electronically:

- *The Forum*
- *Alateen – Hope for Children of Alcoholics* (eB-3)
- *Courage to Change: One Day at a Time in Al-Anon II* (eB-16)
- *Having Had a Spiritual Awakening...* (eB-25)
- *How Al-Anon Works for Families & Friends of Alcoholics* (eB-22)

It was also explained that although the names of electronic media providers can be found on the WSO online store Web site, we include the following disclaimer... *This announcement is information only, and not an endorsement of any electronic media provider, reader, or other products sold by electronic media providers.*

As a final note, the WSO is the only service entity that has the authorization to have CAL published electronically for purchase. The current license agreement provided to countries authorizes translating and print-

ing or reprinting, and does not give authorization to produce CAL in an electronic format.

Approval of a first-time Translation from the WSO

Regarding the permission process for a first-time translation WSO advised, we rely on members (located in the United States) who speak and read languages other than French or Spanish to be volunteer Reviewers. The process for a review and feedback can take up to three months for a pamphlet and up to six months for a book. It was shared that if a GSO is anxious to do a first-time translation and printing of a specific project, to contact the Associate Director – International for further details.

Selling outside of your country

WSO explained that the “Permission to Reprint” and the “Permission to Translate and Print” forms only authorizes countries to sell literature within their borders.

Use of the Al-Anon Logo

A Delegate advised her structure was unclear regarding the use of the Al-Anon logo and when it can or can't be used (e.g. on pamphlets for Public Outreach produced by our GSO, on business cards?) It was also asked if the use of the logo has to be approved by the WSO?

After giving a general explanation, WSO referred all to pages 103-105 of the *2014 – 2017 Al-Anon /Alateen Service Manual*. For symbols/logos it was advised as a national Service Office they have permission to use the symbols illustrated on page 107. No additional graphics should be added to any of the trademarks.

Miscellaneous

One Delegate advised that they had “lots of emails from visually-impaired or blind persons”. The question was asked, “How could literature to accommodate these disabilities be produced by a structure?” The WSO explained in the U.S. there are services available in some states, e.g. If a person is blind and wants the literature in Braille: it is the individual who initiates it with a company in the state and WSO collaborates with that company to set up the parameters. The individual bears the costs. It was suggested a similar model could be followed by the GSO. For more details or questions, it was suggested to contact the WSO.

Inspiring and Supporting Group Members to Participate in Public Information/Outreach

Maureen M., UK & Éire

Background to the Uk & Éire Service Structure

History, Location, and Service Areas

The UK & Éire structure is made up of Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. This structure was formed in 1951, and was the first structure to be set up outside of the US. The company Family Groups Ltd. became a registered charity in 1973.

Our General Service Office (GSO) is located in London. Our old office was located in what was formerly a church. It was old and no longer fit for purpose. It needed a lot of money to be spent on repairs. Also, the lease was due to be renewed; an action that would have resulted in an increase in rent.

Following much discussion, the 2009 Conference approved a motion to purchase office space for our GSO. However, implementation had to be put on hold until our finances improved. Three years ago, in 2013, the new office space was purchased. The space is smaller than our previous office, but it is modern and adequate to meet our current needs. The mortgage payments are similar to the rent paid on the old office.

The GSO is operated by three full time staff, a small number of part time staff and volunteers. The structure covers an area with a population in excess of 67 million. We operate within five different legal jurisdictions as well as in two separate currencies – Sterling and Euro.

Structure

When our structure was formed, it was based on the WSO model. With some adjustments, we still use this model. This is fortunate, as it means we did not have to “reinvent the wheel.”

Our GSO services about 800 groups. These groups are formed into Districts and then Areas. Our structure is made up of thirty Areas, each Area being represented at Conference by its Area Delegate. Areas are further grouped into Regions.

The service structure is led by the General Service Board (GSB) which has twelve Trustees. One Trustee is selected and elected from each of the six Regions to

serve on the General Service Board. This ensures diversity on the Board. These Trustees are called Regional Trustees. There are also Committee Chairmen, called Trustees at Large. Sometimes a Regional Trustee can also act as chairman of a Standing Committee. The GSB meets three times a year. Our annual Conference is held in September.

Additional details of the makeup of our structure can be found in the *UK & Éire Service Manual* which is on our website www.alanonuk.org.uk/members

Inspiring and Supporting Group Members to Participate in Public Information/Outreach

At the 1987 World Service Conference Lois W. said, “Anybody can start something, but carrying it out is the real challenge.....”

Today the world is quite different than what it was back in 1987, but this challenge is as relevant now as it was back then. Al-Anon continues to meet this challenge through the willingness of its members.

Advances in technological communication could not have been envisioned by our founders. However, the Al-Anon message stays the same. It remains constant and consistent, even though methods of communication have changed dramatically.

Our structure supports our group members in many ways. For example, our website www.alanonuk.org.uk/membersresources provides wide ranging information for members, including a Public Information section. Our Helpline is also an important resource and it provides service 365 days a year. Until a year ago, the greatest number of referrals came from Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.). Last year, for the first time, visits to the website prompted a greater number of calls to the Helpline. A.A. is now the second largest source of referrals.

Our Helpline is operated by volunteers. Volunteers operate the Helpline from the GSO during office hours. After office hours, volunteers operate the Helpline from their homes so that the service is available from 10am to 10pm seven days a week. Training is provided by experienced volunteers to incoming operators of the Helpline.

Of course, there are challenges. One of our biggest service undertakings is coordinating the roster of volunteers to operate the Helpline service. A lot of time and effort needs to be spent to ensure that the Helpline is “manned” without interruption. Without this commitment by members, who willingly volunteer their

time, this service could not function. Recruiting volunteers continues to pose the greatest challenge. Without the support from group members this service could not continue to provide help for those in need.

Our GSO has a Public Information (PI) Desk to deal with queries from professionals. It also works in tandem with the PI Committee. Some of the services provided to inspire and encourage group members to participate in PI activities include:

- Podcasts on our website
 - Public Information Guidelines Booklet called *Carrying the Message*
 - A quarterly newsletter which is sent from GSO to all groups
 - A PI Monthly Focus calendar website which makes suggestions to members to do something new each month. For example,
 - ◇ May/June encouraged cooperating with AA
 - ◇ July/August encouraged contacting emergency services
 - ◇ September/October encouraged contact with political representatives
 - A PI video for use by members. Available on our website, we also provide letter templates designed for caring professionals and other agencies
 - The PI magazine called *Families Surviving Alcoholism*, produced in 2015. This was available to assist members in carrying the message to professionals.
- Ongoing initiatives include:
- A Members’ Survey (in the planning stages)
 - A new edition of the PI magazine *Families Surviving Alcoholism*
 - An Information Day for Area PI Coordinators held at the GSO
 - Participation, for the first time, in the annual Alcohol Concern Conference held during Alcoholic Awareness Week
 - A stand at a number of Annual Conferences of medical professionals
 - A Task Force on developing Social Media

The information and support provided by our GSO is an important starting point for group members to get inspiration and encouragement to carry the message at the local level. The person most qualified to carry the Al-Anon message is a willing Al-Anon member. We have a saying in our structure: Public Information means Personal Involvement. This personal involvement can lead to spiritual abundance for members.

In keeping with Step Twelve, we each have a responsibility to share our spiritual abundance by putting our experience, strength and hope to work to carry the Al-Anon message of hope. There are many different ways in which experienced members can lead by example to inspire and support group members to give personal involvement to Public Information. Service Sponsorship is a vital support tool, so “Let It Begin with Me.”

To ensure that the unified message of Al-Anon is carried at the public level without dilution and without distortion, is of great importance. Each of us has a unique story to tell. We need to encourage and support members who speak in public to keep the Al-Anon message simple. It is important, too, to remember that we never get a second chance to create a first impression.

Over the past sixty five years, Al-Anon has expanded through the efforts of many, many members like you and me, who have served this fellowship tirelessly. Each of us has equal responsibility for ensuring that Al-Anon continues to grow, and that the same unified message is carried across our diverse cultures.

By the time we found Al-Anon we were physically, emotionally and spiritually drained. We had nothing left to give. Alcoholism had taken its toll. In Al-Anon, we found understanding and we found hope. We started out alone without a lot of anything, but with a belief, a change of attitude, and a trust in the God of our understanding, We slowly began to absorb a spiritual abundance.

The idea of abundance is a spiritual concept that gives us the ability to move forward. With a little effort, each one of us can enthuse, enable and empower others to preserve the Al-Anon program and strengthen our growth and unity worldwide.

Each of us has a responsibility to continue to carry the message of our spiritual principles with patience, understanding, enthusiasm, commitment, love, and a bit of good humor, to ensure that the Al-Anon fellowship will continue to expand. We are not perfect, but we are excellent!

Each one of us found our way to Al-Anon because somebody had done some PI work. If everybody does a little a lot will get done.

Thank you for listening.

Discussion

Members shared what they did within their various structures. One member shared there’s a fear about Public Outreach and I think it doesn’t have to do with anonymity but with confidence and knowing what to do. Another shared that one way to start with Public Outreach is to approach medical professionals. “They want to be able to hand pamphlets to their patients and not just to give a telephone number. Sometimes family members need more help than the alcoholic.”

Members shared their familiar and unique experiences with Public Outreach:

- One Delegate advised “our structure decided to reach out to women working in the ‘red light’ area. Many were unwilling to do this but our fellowship is a fellowship of equals: the sex workers have the same pain we have and I found myself face to face with them.”
- Another Delegate stated we visited jails. “There we found many women convicted of crimes, had alcoholism in the in family – e.g. one stabbed her husband who was an alcoholic and abused her.”
- Another Delegate shared how the GSO created a flyer that contains ideas that members can do for Public Outreach. This flyer is included four times a year in a monthly newsletter.

Other Ideas include:

- Produce a perpetual Public Outreach calendar.
- Participate in classes for medical personnel to give brief presentations of Al-Anon and its history.
- Hold Public Outreach breakfasts for professionals in collaboration with AA.
- Hold Public Outreach meetings in a different place every year, and invite professionals i.e. psychologists and psychiatrists.

To the question posed do you have any ideas on how to get members in your group to participate in Public Outreach? Delegates responded:

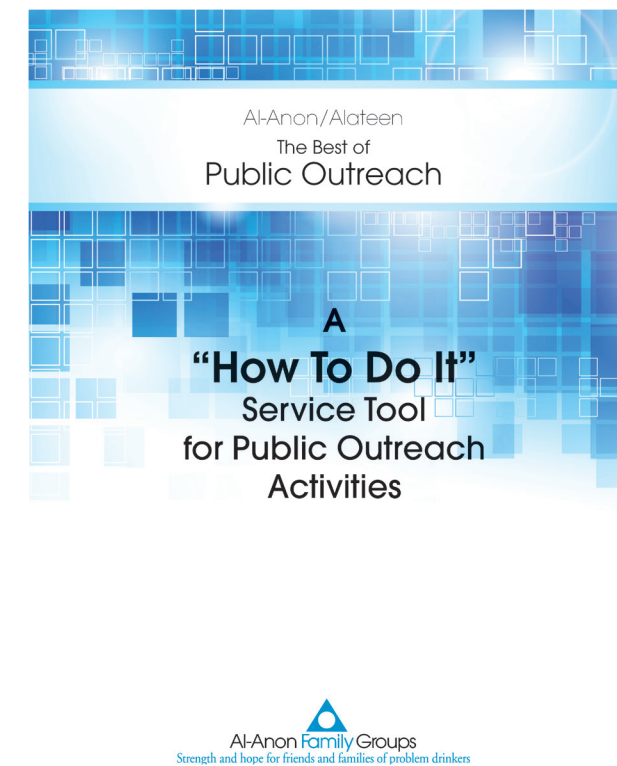
“One of our areas had an idea to do it on area-wide

basis and the Area Committee decided each District Representative would take a bundle of Al-Anon pamphlets and business cards and give it to the Group Representative. Each group received a package of literature that they could pass to their local community: doctors’ offices, police stations etc. They would just write on a sheet of paper where they were taking the pamphlets. The Area paid for the material used.”

Another shared, “I was looking at all the info we now have at our fingertips. Previously you would have to go somewhere to get it. We have a plethora, so much that sometimes we don’t know what to do with it. I am here in Rome today because someone took me to a meeting. I didn’t want anyone to know I didn’t know anything... but I got into a car and everything changed. So, it’s our responsibility to start by saying to someone: “Get in the car!”

When I started as national Public Outreach officer, I asked myself how to do things easy. I shared my idea for signs with tear-off tabs with cell numbers. Something like that can go up in supermarkets. For example, during a meeting we hand-snipped the tabs on the signs. This is something anyone can do. Keep it simple.”

Finally a Delegate advised “One way to inspire is to speak of our gratitude. One of our members was spending money on psychiatrist and he started coming to Al-Anon meetings and saved himself money. At our meetings we should spend time saying what Al-Anon gave us, how it saved us and how grateful we are. We should speak of gratitude because this not only helps us, but is inspiring to others. There are people who are afraid to speak, so we must sit by their side and prompt them. This is how I was encouraged to do Public Outreach work.”



Keeping Al-Anon “Al-Anon” – Dealing with Outside Influence

Susanne A., Germany

A Brief Description of Germany’s Service Structure

The first Al-Anon Group in Germany was registered at the WSO in 1967. In 1970, the first central contact center was set up. In the beginning, there was no formal structure. In 1972, the first formal structure was initiated. Intergroups were formed and the official registration of Al-Anon as a nonprofit association took place. In 1997, the current structure was formed, which modeled itself after the structure of the WSO. The structure consists of the Board of Trustees, Executive Committee, Policy Committee, Financial Committee, Literature Committee, Alateen Committee, Conference Committee, Public Outreach Committee and Internet Committee.

The legal foundation of the fellowship is represented by members of the Board of Trustees which includes the First Chairman, Second Chairman (Treasurer) and seven Intergroup Trustees. Every permanent committee consists of a chairperson and volunteers, who are chosen by the chairperson. One exception is made for the Financial Committee because of the small size of our structure. Most duties of the Financial Committee are integrated in the work of the Executive Committee. Only the presentation of the budget and the annual financial report at the General Service Conference are presented by the members of the Financial Committee.

The groups in Germany are organized into seven Intergroups (similar to Regions in the WSO structure) and divided in 35 Regions (similar to Areas in the WSO structure). The Group Representatives meet three to four times a year at Region Meetings to transfer and exchange information and to vote for a Delegate to the General Service Conference.

Each Region sends a Regional Speaker to the Intergroup Meeting, occurring three or four times a year, to exchange information and to discuss topics. Qualified members of the Intergroup can apply for a position on the Board of Trustees. The applications are approved by the Board and Nominating Committee at the General Service Conference. The nominated applicants are elected by the Trustees.

How Business and Spirituality Mix

To understand and to apply our Legacies better and better, for example, we always seek to enhance our General Service Meeting. To hear about the concerns and needs of all the Conference participants, every Delegate has the chance to fill out a feedback sheet. Feedback is analyzed by the Conference Committee and used to plan and organize the next Conference. Our common welfare, as it is mentioned in the First Tradition, is the central concern during the General Service Conference. “I look for a solution that is good for everyone when I seek common welfare. I try to find the balance between what I want or need, and what is good for the whole” (*Reaching for Personal Freedom*, p. 68). That requires participation like it says in our Fourth Concept of Service, “Participation is the key to harmony.” In 2015, we received 33 feedback sheets out of 52 participants. In 2016, we received 21 responses.

Other changes have taken place regarding the committees at the General Service Meeting. For many years, the participants were assigned to workshops dedicated to the different committees at the General Service Conference. Every Delegate was part of the same committee over the whole period of service. The Conference agenda always included time to give reports on the workshops.

For the last few years we have used a process of rotating workshops. There are usually two to three workshops offered at the Conference. So that every member of the Conference has the chance to participate in all of them, participant groups are formed before the Conference and every group rotates to each workshop. In the beginning, this change caused some displeasure to some of the members of the Conference who wished to return to the old organization of the workshops.

However, the feedback that was provided indicated the majority of members were in favor of the new process and wanted to continue that way. The change needed time and was discussed over three Conferences. There was a recognition that active involvement in all workshops provides the possibility to deepen our understanding of our Legacies. Going back to the old way of organizing the workshops would not have been possible because a lot of our committees are not staffed at the moment.

“Concept Eleven reminds us that there are enough people—with a diverse range of viewpoints and an abundance of skills and talents—to share the burden

of most difficult tasks” (*Reaching for Personal Freedom*, p. 164). To some extent, the willingness to be part of a committee is missing and one single person is not enough to establish a committee. For these reasons, at this time there are no committees for Public Outreach or Alateen.

Some group members demand the Board of Trustees provide committees, for example a Public Outreach Committee. However, in the last few years no Al-Anon member has been willing to serve as Committee Speaker. A reasonable balance between delegation and responsibility, as it is suggested in Concepts One through Ten, is difficult to realize. For other committees, there are currently no work assignments. Thus, the Literature and Internet Committees are on hold.

The Policy Committee, which consists of the Speaker, the Trustees, all the Committee Speakers, the at large member of the Executive Committee, and the IAGSM Delegate, is not at full capacity because there are five unfilled Committee Speaker positions. This means there are five fewer voting members of this committee and a less diverse mix of opinions exchanged during discussions.

The question could be asked, how can the content of Concept Eleven (“The World Service Office is composed of selected committees, executives and staff members.”) be put into effect? Page 164 of *Reaching for Personal Freedom* states “It would be shortsighted for us to work alone, when working with others would be both easier and more effective.” At this time, we are in the process of seeking solutions for our structure and our administration, to address the problem of a shrinking number of members. From our point of view, it makes no sense to establish committees and pay for all the travel expenses to attend business meetings when there are no tasks to be completed. Economical thinking and the spiritual content of our program should nourish each other. It demands courage to make such decisions.

The prevailing emphasis of the Board of Trustees is to work on a strategic plan to adapt our structure with respect to money and manpower resources without leaving the suggested format of the WSO. At the moment, task forces are formed to address current topics. This saves us money and enables us to work effectively, which leads to good results. One task force, which evolved from a thought force, is responsible for developing an *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* and a

guideline for service in Germany. The Board of Trustees authorized a task force using the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 2014 – 2017* as a foundation. The *Service Manual* was the topic at one of the workshops at the General Service Conference. This gave Delegates a chance to participate and bring their ideas.

In other cases, we made the decision to invest money, instead of saving in the wrong places. After some serious problems with our website, which was created by someone in the fellowship, the Board of Trustees decided in 2015 to turn the support over to professional hands. The Twelfth Concept of Service states “The spiritual foundation for Al-Anon’s world services is contained in the General Warranties of the Conference, Article 12 of the Charter.” Warranty One goes on to say “That only sufficient operating funds, including an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle.” A prudent housekeeping presumes a balanced relationship between the spiritual contents of our program and economical thinking.

What Challenges do Outside Influences Present and How Are we Dealing With Them?

One example of a challenge is friends of A.A. who are also relatives and members of Al-Anon. For some of these friends, it is difficult to differentiate in the meeting between Al-Anon topics and alcoholic topics. In this case, it could be helpful to work with the pamphlet *Al-Anon Spoken Here*.

In Germany, we also work together with other authorized organizations – and, of course, not just A.A. It is important when doing this to always keep Tradition Six in mind. “Cooperation means working together for our mutual benefit. In this spirit of teamwork we can have loving, supportive relationships, and still exercise our independence.” (*Reaching for Personal Freedom*, p. 91).

Every year a member of Al-Anon takes part in the meetings of the DHS (Deutsche Hilfestelle für Suchtfragen), but Al-Anon is not a member of this organization (even though they would like us to be). Our cooperation is restricted to participation at the annual meeting, to visit workshops and presentations, and to share experience and thoughts. Of course, it is important for us that professionals know about Al-Anon and the DHS is an organization for professionals.

Another example is cooperation based on projects. Recently, the federal government’s Department for Health put out information to tender a research assign-

ment, for which universities in Germany could apply. The topic was “How could the families from homes with addicts be helped?” During the application process, different universities contacted us and asked for our willingness and cooperation. We stated our willingness to cooperate with the declaration that Al-Anon, as an organization, could not participate. We said that individual Al-Anon members could participate and share their way of recovery, but this decision would be on a voluntary basis for each single member.

We consistently experience difficulty explaining our structure, our principle of anonymity, and our independence from other organizations. Our request that we, as an organization, not be affiliated with or be shown to support the project was ignored by the university who got the research assignment. On the homepage of the university, Al-Anon was officially announced for this project (AnNet Projekt Al-Anon group Peine). This could have given the impression that Al-Anon officially sponsored it. Also, the friends of the local Al-Anon group needed the reassurance that we, as Al-Anon, never join with any other organization, but as single members they could participate in the research assignment.

It is a challenge to remain true to our Traditions, especially Tradition Six which states, in part, “Our Family Groups ought never endorse, finance or lend our name to any outside enterprise...” and still make use of such projects, so that Al-Anon is better known, reaches a higher awareness level and people are more interested in Al-Anon in Germany. For many years, Al-Anon was thought of as an appendix of A.A. It is useful if social workers and therapists send relatives of alcoholics into meetings because they know about and stand behind selfhelp groups. Because universities are connected, we received inquiries through this research assignment, to introduce Al-Anon at a medical university.

We are always seeking balance. What does “support” mean in the sense of our Twelve Traditions? Inside the GSO, this project forced us to confront the question “are we free to do that?” In the fellowship, there were many different point of views about providing this kind of support. Some members interpret our principles very, very strictly and have the opinion that Al-Anon is by no means supposed to support something like this. Others connect the ideas of “support” and “endorsement” in the Sixth Tradition only with economic corporations. For example, if Coke would advertise that Al-Anon members also drink Coke and would use this

to improve their turnover or to look better in society. In the research assignment, subsidies were not used to maximize turnover, or to make the university more popular. Subsidies were used to finance the project – how relatives and families of addicts can be helped.

Another example is the cooperation with NACOA. In this organization, there are a few Al-Anon members who are engaged and registered. They support this organization as volunteers, not as the organization “Al-Anon Germany.” They exchange information and use Al-Anon literature, but the name of Al-Anon is not brought into connection with organization.

This is our experience with the influence and the challenges we encountered the last several years.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Discussion

After this presentation, various experiences were shared by many.

“We decided a new website was needed and a member, who was a Website Designer, helped us. After some time we became aware that the website was linked to the company the person was working for and, in the meantime, the person left the country and the GSO could not get in touch with him. It took the GSO about three years before we got the official name of Al-Anon back. We hadn’t realized all the legal aspects surrounding allowing someone to connect a website to an outside entity.”

Another Delegate advised, “we have a policy for cooperating with researchers. They submit their proposals and our staff decides if these are appropriate. The proposals are sent to a subcommittee for the final decision. Al-Anon can cooperate with researchers but cannot endorse what is done. One and a half years ago we had a proposal from a researcher who wanted to study co-dependency a word that isn’t in our literature. The proposal was reviewed and it was decided using the term co-dependency was too controversial. We have lengthy discussions, sometimes we say yes, sometimes no.”

A Delegate stated, “when people come to Al-Anon seeking our help, we have to be clear with them that our focus is to help the families and friends affected by someone else’s drinking. In some countries people have no other place to go and so seek Al-Anon’s help. Some of these people are advised by their therapist to come to Al-Anon because it could help. In this case,

the individual has to identify with the program, but we have to be clear about our purpose. We have to educate others about who we are and what we talk about during our meetings and we can support them to move on to the best organization for which may not be Al-Anon.”

A Delegate explained we have a saying that “sooner or later everyone comes to Al-Anon because there’s recovery to be had here. In my country we have a meeting on Saturdays at noon attended by people from various groups. So we have to hold on tight to the Traditions: we speak Al-Anon, we remind them it’s not a quick fix! One day at a time, one step at a time. This is what we can do: encourage, hold tight to the Traditions and keep on track. Only the person themselves can decide if Al-Anon is the right place for them.”

“In our GSO we get calls from family members, especially parents of people who have drug- addiction problems; professional people refer them to Al-Anon because there aren’t many other Twelve Step programs in my country. I speak to them and tell them that a lot of the effects other addictions have on the family are similar to alcohol addiction so they are welcome to come; but they must be prepared that the emphasis is on alcoholism. That said, if they find that the group helps them they are welcomed. Our GSO has received requests from researchers to use Al-Anon members; we don’t have a dedicated committee like WSO has, however if a researcher approaches us, we tell them we cannot disclose contact details for Al-Anon members. Sometimes we suggest that they go to an Al-Anon meeting to help them understand the dynamics of our program. Our groups have the right to refuse entry to an outside person, but most groups are happy when outsiders ask to attend because it helps spread the Al-Anon message of hope and recovery. We also ask that they submit their research findings to us because we don’t want them to spread incorrect information about Al-Anon.”

“I’d like to comment on dual membership. One member has told us that AA gave him his life back but Al-Anon taught him how to love. The effect of drugs etc. on the family is the same. In the group we speak about alcohol and it is up to the newcomer to decide whether the group is for them or not. It’s important to avoid cliques and make all our members feel loved and protected.”

“We have many attend our meetings that indicate they are not affected by the disease of alcoholism but other issues. We were afraid their attendance could

cause us problems if they brought in outside issues not in line with our purpose. To help the groups, there is a suggested message read which indicates ‘in this meeting, we share from our experience in dealing with the disease of alcoholism in a family member or a friend.’ It is our responsibility that we help others understand the purpose of our group.” It was mentioned after this sharing *Al-Anon Focus* (P-55), and *Al-Anon is Spoken Here* (P-53) are great resources to use dealing with this topic.

Practicing Sound Al-Anon Service Using Our Principles – A Good Business Practice

Joan G., New Zealand

The New Zealand (NZ) Al-Anon General Services Board is comprised of a Board Chair, Treasurer, General Secretary, Northern Regional Board Member, Southern Regional Board Member, and Central Region Board Member, IAGSM Delegate, and Conference Chair. The Executive Committee Chair is a member with voice, but no vote. There are nine Area Delegates, 83 Groups and three Alateen Groups.

At the September 2012 meeting of the NZ Al-Anon General Service Board, concerns were expressed by the Board members regarding the financial position of the General Service Office (GSO). The ample reserve that was normally \$35,000NZD had reduced to \$17,000NZD without adequate explanation.

The Board considered its options and decided it was time to review all the actives of the GSO. A decision was made to set up a Transformation Task Force to review and report back on possible changes that would need to be made. The vision of the Task Force was to find a way to:

- Rebuild the ample reserve
- Increase the reserve fund by \$5,000NZD in the first year.
- Ensure that we live within our financial means
- See that the office structure meets the needs of the fellowship.
- Ensure that there was a communication system that met the needs of the fellowship.

Discussion was also held on doing an inventory of the GSO and the need for clarification around the purpose of the GSO. At the time, the office was staffed by the

General Secretary and one other part time paid person.

The Transformation Task Force met and investigated the following options:

1. Close the GSO. This was not viable as it conflicts with our primary purpose and does not leave support for the Al-Anon/Alateen groups in New Zealand.
2. Staff the GSO with volunteers who operate out of someone's house. This was determined to conflict with Tradition 7.
3. Continue to have a paid General Secretary position, but have that person operate out of someone's house. The function of the GSO is to support the Al-Anon Family Groups' primary purpose, so having the GSO in an employee's house would conflict with our primary purpose.
4. Separate the administrative tasks from the literature, archive and warehouse functions. A paid secretary could work out of his/her home and the literature and archives could be put into inexpensive, accessible rented storage. The function of the GSO is to support the Al-Anon Family Groups' primary purpose, so putting the GSO in an employee's home would conflict with our primary purpose.
5. Relocate the GSO to more less expensive premises. This solution presented only a temporary fix and not a long term, sustainable solution.
6. Stop selling literature from the GSO. The primary drawback is that this reduces the income for the GSO.
7. Stop providing the monthly magazine *The Messenger*. This also only reduces the income for the GSO.
8. Switch to electronic distribution of monthly correspondence. This would include *The Messenger* and all other communications. This option was workable.
9. Continue as is, do nothing. This option met none of the goals of the Task Force.
10. Reduce the GSO hours. This option was likely to only make the current situation more difficult.
11. Transform the GSO to a different employment model that required fewer paid hours per week.

The Task force recommended Option #11 to the Board. This option provided the greatest chance of providing a long term, sustainable solution; it was also in keeping with the Strategic Plan, and our primary purpose of helping families and friends of alcoholics. All other options would have caused delays and possible problems with communications. The recommendation was also made to update the accounting software and pay someone to upgrade the existing program. The Task Force further recommended that Option #8 be part of the transformation as it augments Option #11 nicely. These recommendations were accepted by the Board.

Review and peer review of draft proposals of the Transformation of GSO.

The Board asked the previous Board Chair and Treasurer for suggestions and input. Another ExTreasurer was also asked for comment and feedback.

The three primary objectives of the Transformation committee were that:

1. We live within our financial means.
2. The GSO structure meets the current needs of the fellowship.
3. Communication meets the needs of the fellowship.

Staff

In January/February 2013, as a result of the Board's decision to restructure the GSO, the existing positions (General Secretary and Office Assistant) were eliminated and a new position (Office Manager) requiring a greater skill level was created. This new position is 15 hours a week. At the same time, the General Secretary position was made voluntary.

The staff were advised regularly and given the opportunity to respond. The Board took legal advice and consulted with a human resources (HR) consultant. All communication with the staff was given in writing and counselling was offered to them as well. It was important that the staff were treated fairly and, in keeping with our employment law in New Zealand, the Board was to act in "good faith." It was also important that we acted in the spirit of Concept Eleven. No resignations were received from staff and the Board affirmed its decision to restructure GSO. This was done with the help of the HR Consultant, who was not a member of the fellowship.

Job descriptions were developed for the Office Manager and also the General Secretary roles. The position of Office Manager was advertised using an online job advertising agency and also throughout the fellowship. A short list of applicants was drawn up and the Executive Chair, Board Chair and HR consultant interviewed applicants. A new Office Manager was appointed to the position.

While this was happening, all office procedures and functions were reviewed with a view to making them more efficient and to save money. The initial findings showed there was room for savings on wages from between \$4,200NZD per year to \$8,100 per year. It was also possible to achieve savings on phone charges and printing – up to \$2,640NZD per year over one to two years. Procedural changes were made that meant the office became more efficient and, thus, saved time.

In June 2013, the full Transformation Task Force paper and summary was presented to the NZ Al-Anon Conference for their information and comment. In June 2014 and again in June 2015, Conference members were updated on the progress of the restructuring of the GSO through reports presented in the Knowledge Based Decision Making (KBDM) format.

What risks did our structure face?

There was the risk of us all becoming complacent when things were going well and that this problem could occur again. We realized that the GSO needed to be accountable and transparent in its actions. The Board passed the following motion in 2014:

That the Executive/Budget Committee establish an annual inventory of the NZ GSO and report to the General Service Board in September each year (this coincides with the Board Strategic Planning meeting)

The inventory questions are:

- Does the office structure continue to meet the needs of the fellowship?
- Are the needs of the volunteers and fellowship being met?
- Is the ample reserve continuing to be rebuilt?
- Has the office manager had a satisfactory annual review?
- Are there any issues/recommendations arising from the above questions?

- Are all decisions and agreements being made with our sustained willingness to practice spiritual principles in all our affairs?

The inventory requires quantitative answers or examples of how tangible items have been measured or demonstrated. It has proven to be very effective and gives us the opportunity to address issues sooner rather than later. In addition, all GSO processes and procedures are reviewed annually and changes are made as necessary.

What challenge has our structure encountered?

The General Secretary resigned shortly after the reorganization started. The Board decided not to immediately advertise for the position. With Conference approval, we ran a 12 month trial to see if we really needed someone in the role. Over the course of that time, we noticed that our communication with the fellowship was not as good as it had been. There were a number of tasks that the General Secretary performed and, because there was no one in the role, they got forgotten. In 2014, the Board presented the results of a KBDM discussion to Conference showing the need for a volunteer General Secretary. The Board circulated a job description among the fellowship. Profiles were received and discussed by the Board. They appointed a General Secretary who is eligible to serve for two three-year terms; a total of six years. This was implemented on a trial basis and will be reviewed in 2020. The General Secretary is a Board member with voice and vote and works closely via email, phone and Skype with the GSO staff and others.

What benefits has our structure gained?

The GSO runs smoothly and efficiently now with a minimum of problems. There are regular reviews of the office and its functions to ensure we are still on track. This gives our fellowship a sense of security and trust in our ability to maintain good business and fellowship contact.

The Board is acutely aware of the need to communicate regularly with the fellowship and this is done via a Board Newsletter which comes out after each Board meeting. It is circulated to Area Delegates who, in turn, send the newsletter on to the Group Representatives.

Our ample reserve is now \$65,000NZD.

Going forward, we can now concentrate on bringing the Al-Anon Family Groups message to people whose lives have been affected by someone else's drinking.

Discussion

One Delegate asked “was it any help to have the professionals you hired initially? Also is it possible to get these posts on a voluntary basis, instead of paid basis.”

The presenter shared the benefits of using a Human Resources consultant, “we wanted someone impartial and our consultant used to work for a non profit organisation and we found it was worth it. The voluntary role of General Secretary is working well for us. We had a job description but we’ll assess in a couple of years if it’s effective. So far it is.”

Another Delegate stated, “that our structure is not as big as the WSO so we don’t need a fancy, complicated data base for our records. We have outgrown the previous system of having a card in alphabetical order in a box which is still however, the quickest way! We have a ‘technologist’ who tells us to get rid of it, but it’s quicker to pull out the card: there are advantages and disadvantages. The problem is entering in the information in different places! We started off with an Excel spreadsheet and a lot of our areas use it. Our records are too big for Excel. We have a retired computer geek who is our technology info consultant so we are using Microsoft as a temporary step until we have a specific program designed for us so that we only have to insert the data in one spot and it will automatically change mailing lists, web information etc. However, if you don’t have many groups, an Excel spreadsheet does it all.”

Another Delegate stated when their GSO was established, “we had 400 groups and it was a great challenge to keep a record of these groups. We made a very simple data base with the following details: name, group location/time of meetings, telephone numbers of two contacts, meeting and mailing address. The GSO is now responsible for taking the information from the groups and recording details and changes.”

WSO advised “in keeping with the Board’s Mission Statement – Anticipate the future and Al-Anon’s place in it and ensure that the necessary resources are available – the Board realized it was necessary to see what current office needs were as many staff members would be nearing retirement age. Two Task Forces were set up for evaluation of jobs and developing new job descriptions. The Board used independent consultants familiar with working with nonprofit organizations, compensation, benefits and culture. Our aim was to keep and attract talent. In accordance with good business practices we needed to look at finances, and cut costs without

hurting staff and their pay. So what could we cut? We realized that the copy of *The Forum* that we were giving free to every group cost \$ 100,000 a year to provide; we were doing so because we thought it would increase subscription, but it didn’t, the subscription went down. The good thing is since making this decision as of July, we had a 43% increase of subscriptions. Also last year the Finance Committee did a presentation so Delegates could take the information back to their areas. We’ll repeat this again this year.”

Another Delegate “stated, I’d like to share a situation in our structure as pertains to finances. Some Delegates got suspicious that the money was being ill-spent. After the conference there was some discussion, members of the board were contacted and they decided to organize a September session with questions and answers on finances. The questions were both simple and complicated and addressed issues such as how much the two paid staff members earn, how many foreign trips had been taken during the last five years etc. It was a two-hour long session: initially there was tension but step-by-step every question was answered and I felt that the huge tension was dispelled and a big conflict averted. Transparency on financial matters is very important, no matter how little a member contributes, they want the money to be used well.”

Another shared “we’ve had similar strategy ideas awaiting implementation. One thing we’ve noticed is that if we ask for special contributions, literature sales go down. In the end the final result is the same, instead of contributing through books, they do so through contributions.”

It was pointed out that re-educating the fellowship is important. It was also shared, in one area a group took a group conscious and voted not to support the area. “Although they voted not to send a contribution, they continued to buy literature. We decided to visit and gave the group an informal presentation about what we do with the contributions. We believe this was educational for the newer or younger member who were only concerned with the recovery aspects of the program; they were not aware of service work and could not see the big picture beyond their group. Our insight from this experience was, educating our members is very important.”

Another Delegate shared, “our structure is very small. In 2008 we had a financial crisis as the currency in our country was weak. We finally completed the translation of a piece of Al-Anon literature that took us

20 years to complete! Now we had to pay for the printing. So we made the hard decision not to send anyone to the 2008 IAGSM in Virginia Beach, we relocated our office to cheaper quarters, downsized our hours at the office and terminated the services of an employee we could no longer afford. Since that experience, we now have learned to communicate more with the fellowship about our financial needs, our book sales have increased and we were able to send representation to the 2016 IAGSM!”

Understanding Spiritual Principles in my Service Role as an IAGSM Delegate

Malgosia D. K., Poland

My name is Malgosia and I am the IAGSM Delegate from Poland.

In my country, we have the Conference which is held once a year, usually in May or June. Our Board of Trustees consists of up to 13 Trustees (including 2 honourable Trustees who were the first founders of our structure). The IAGSM Delegate and the President of the Association of Services of Al-Anon Family Groups take part in the work of the Board with the right to speak, but without the right to vote. The Board meets four times a year or sometimes five or six times a year, if it is necessary. The President of the Board represents Al-Anon in Poland in contacts with external institutions.

We also have the Association of Services of Al-Anon Family Groups, which plays the role of the General Service Office (GSO) and can also represent the Al-Anon structure and fellowship in contacts with external organizations and individual people. In Al-Anon in Poland, we have a number of committees: the Policy Committee, the Literature Committee, the Archives Committee, the Public Information Committee, the Committee for Cooperation with Institutions, the Alateen Committee, the Finance Committee, the Nominating Committee, the Conference Committee, Regional Seminars of Service, and the *Razem* Editing Committee (*Razem* is our bimonthly publication about the Al-Anon fellowship and Al-Anon program in Poland). In Al-Anon in Poland, we have 13 areas and 2 districts. All of them have regular regional meetings four to six times a year depending on their current needs.

In my role as the IAGSM Delegate, I have encountered numerous challenges. The first big challenge was

my decision to become the alternate IAGSM Delegate. The previous President of the Board came to one meeting of my group and during the break she encouraged



me to agree to become the alternate IAGSM Delegate. It came as a big surprise for me and I was very doubtful of my ability to serve in this sort of service, but my Al-Anon friend convinced me that I had enough skills and talents for this service and that she and other service members would help me with this challenge. She promised to introduce me to the “mysteries” of this role and said that I was really needed for Al-Anon in this service. It was the first time that I had trusted my Al-Anon friend so much and in such an important matter. Even if I was not confident enough and not sure of my abilities, I believed that my older and more experienced Al-Anon friend had enough wisdom and experience to know that I was able to serve well as the alternate IAGSM Delegate. So, finally I agreed to start this service even if I had big emotions about it. Later, I carefully read all information about the responsibilities and rights of the IAGSM Delegate and had numerous contacts with my service members about my IAGSM service.

In the service of the alternate IAGSM Delegate I encountered a lot of challenges, too. I did not have enough information about my structure, about the achieve-

ments and problems of Al-Anon in Poland or about my practical duties during the IAGSM meetings, but I was given a lot of support by my Al-Anon friend Iza, who was the IAGSM Delegate at this time. I learned to ask others for help, to exchange information, to study Al-Anon materials called “Our structures” (that give all possible information about the structure and services of Al-Anon in Poland), to cooperate with other Al-Anon trusted servants, to find information on the WSO website for IAGSM Delegates and to listen carefully to what our trusted servants speak about at GSO meetings.

Soon I was asked to write my first report from the European Zonal Meeting (EZM) in Leeds, England for the Board of Trustees and I managed to do that pretty well. Next month I was on a team of interpreters to communicate with our (World Service Office guests in Cracow – it was a big challenge as I was doing it for the first time and I somehow managed to help all of us communicate translating on the spot conversations in service. Soon my Al-Anon friend Iza started to suffer from some health problems and I was supposed to write my first presentation of the IAGSM Delegate for the Conference.

My Al-Anon Conferences were a difficult thing for me at this time as they resembled the Polish or Italian Parliament with a lot of angry arguments, plenty of chaos and really bad emotions and conflicts. During my first Conference, it was extremely difficult for me to stand this atmosphere and understand everything that was going on. That is why later I was making efforts to help the Conference Committee to improve the organization of the Conference.

My IAGSM meetings were a great highlight to me. I noticed that all over the world people have the same problems with their family or friends drinking and Al-Anon groups exist almost everywhere and everywhere families and friends of alcoholics recover thanks to the same wonderful Al-Anon program of Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts of Service. Also, even if we do not speak the same language, we do understand each other and feel empathy for each other and are emotionally close as we are one family.

My service made it possible for me to overcome my fears and internal blocks, my shyness and lack of self-confidence. I have learned to analyze different materials, to synthesize them, to write effective and informative reports, to find answers to numerous questions from my services in Poland, to work independently

and to cooperate with others when it was necessary. I have learned to present my views to the public, even to defend my opposing opinion with arguments in front of others holding different opinions and to be confident and appreciate myself and my work. I have also recently learned to finish my service when the time comes and to pass on my experience to my alternate IAGSM Delegate.

I met a lot of fantastic people who shared with me their personal recovery and life experience, their service experience and the effective and creative solutions in their structures. I personally learned a lot from these meetings and recovered faster. Thanks to IAGSM sharing, I clearly felt that also many problems in my structure could be solved faster and easier without the necessity to “reinvent the wheel.” I saw during IAGSM meetings how we shared our achievements with each other and, thanks to that, how my structure could move forward faster and more effectively.

During the time of my service as the IAGSM Delegate, the Board of Trustees in Polish Al-Anon started to work more effectively and Trustees started to go to area meetings to share their experience inspired by IAGSM ideas. In all kinds of service we started to learn to discuss different topics using rational arguments and not only emotions. We as trusted servants understood that although we often have different views, we all want the best for our structure and this gave us more chances to accept and respect each other. Obviously, the situation is better but not ideal. We are still learning these skills.

Numerous things were done in the field of public information and carrying the Al-Anon message thanks to IAGSM inspiration. Many books and pamphlets were translated, as suggested by IAGSM. All our committees developed a lot, taking inspiration from IAGSM materials (especially the Alateen Committee, the Nominating Committee, the Conference Committee, the Public Information Committee). The Policy Committee started to deal more with strategic aspects. The Conference started to be a better organized and less emotional event with more workshops for the groups and better atmosphere for cooperation or even exchanging opposing views. We all started to be more careful with finances and now our structure is working on settling better financial matters in Polish Al-Anon.

Also, services started to support our groups better (there are more workshops and seminars for them throughout the year but we are still working on that).

Our awareness of the role of the Al-Anon program in our lives and service increased and the role of Al-Anon spiritual principles, especially the need for service people to recover personally was stressed – with a sponsor and with their regular attendance at the meetings. Communication between trusted servants and with groups improved, but it is not perfect yet and the tendency for everyone to find the “successor” – the next person – and to pass on the service experience to a new person was emphasized more. Generally, Polish Al-Anon trusted servants try harder to share their service experience with other Al-Anon members to encourage them to take over new services. All of this happened mostly thanks to IAGSM materials that I have presented in the form of reports and answered questions. However, honestly speaking, there is still a lot to be done in Polish Al-Anon structure and fellowship, so my present alternate Delegate, Renia, will have something to do as well.

In my service, there were some moments of great spiritual awakening. One was when I came to Cape Town, South Africa. At the IAGSM conference room I was given a small bottle with the inscription inside saying: “What was your weakness in the past is going to be your strength now?” During this IAGSM meeting I realized that the fact that I had a husband who is an alcoholic was a great dishonor for me in the past. But later it gave me the chance to join an Al-Anon group and work on the Al-Anon program and be in a lot of service meetings and share my experience and help other Al-Anon members or families of alcoholics. I also had a chance to become an IAGSM Delegate, which was a real blessing for me. All of this gave me such great strength, satisfaction, courage, joy of life and the feeling of solidarity with many other people that nothing else could give me. I am so grateful to my Higher Power for all the experiences that I have had.

During my service as the alternate IAGSM Delegate and the IAGSM Delegate, I participated in service meetings in my structure and I learned to answer the questions of people in service and find solutions to their problems in the form of written workshops or seminars with questions and answers from service members. Actually, the fact that Al-Anon members and Al-Anon trusted servants asked me to find answers to their questions, that they relied on me and on my active participation in the IAGSM meeting, was the highlight of my service as the IAGSM Delegate. I felt

and I feel so honored to represent Al-Anon structure in Poland and the needs and problems of our groups that I was and I am doing everything and my best to find and then achieve effective solutions for the Polish Al-Anon structure and the groups.

I have written quite a few materials for my structure because I felt they were needed and will be useful for Al-Anon services and/or average members. I have always used the materials from IAGSM meetings and private discussions with IAGSM Delegates from other countries. Here are a few examples:

1. “The history of Al-Anon in Poland” – Materials for Polish and foreign Al-Anon trusted servants as well as for non Al-Anon professionals or institutions to present what Al-Anon fellowship and structure in Poland is and what its brief history, achievements and current contacts are. I feel that history is very important and we should appreciate and value it and those who were our Al-Anon groups’ first founders. This material was used for Al-Anon guests at anniversaries of our Al-Anon fellowship in Poland.
2. “Conflicts and their resolutions” – I prepared materials for workshops at different service levels which started to be very useful and popular and contributed to the improvement of atmosphere and cooperation at different service levels as well as at the Conference and helped to resolve some conflicts. Here I used IAGSM materials as well as the Steps, Traditions and Concepts of Service to make us see how it is possible to tackle conflicts wisely. I have stressed the value of open and peaceful exchange of views and arguments for or against, about the inevitability of conflicts in our life and their dynamic power for our development or at least their value for understanding the other side’s arguments. All of this I have passed on to my other Al-Anon trusted servants and to Al-Anon members at the area levels. This workshop is repeated regularly at area levels.
3. “The spiritual principles in Al-Anon services and General Guarantees of the Conference” – I wrote this workshop on the basis of IAGSM materials and presented it before the Conference to make trusted servants realize that they are obliged by the Al-Anon program to follow

some spiritual principles at every service level. The workshop effects were partly achieved but at least the discussions at the Conference were less offensive and more focused on real arguments and gave us a chance to respect each other more and communicate and find solutions beneficial for all the Al-Anon fellowship.

4. “Anonymity” – This was the workshop which I prepared for the areas at their request and I went to some area meetings to present it. Here I realized the double meaning of anonymity: 1) preserving the secret of who said what and 2) achieving humility to appreciate what everyone shares at the meeting no matter who the person is – the old and experienced member or a freshman. This workshop appeared very useful and was well understood by many Al-Anon trusted servants and newer Al-Anon members.
5. “Sponsoring in Al-Anon” – I wrote this short, but effective workshop showing the safe spiritual principles of how to be a sponsor or to be sponsored in Al-Anon and the role of sponsoring. Thanks to IAGSM meetings, I realized how important sponsoring is and how fast people can recover thanks to it. My workshop encouraged some Al-Anon members to start being sponsors and others to be sponsored, so now there is a positive tendency for Al-Anon members and people in service to find a sponsor and work on the Al-Anon program with her or him.
6. “Reaching maturity and emotional, mental and spiritual balance in service” – I have written this workshop on the basis of information and experience of Al-Anon services from IAGSM meetings and it is going to be used for our service members to make them realize what mature and balanced ways of behaving and problem solving in services are and what behaviors should be avoided. This is a new and fresh material to be used at our General Service meeting in September 2016.

I have also written some articles for our bimonthly *Razem* about the role of my Higher Power in my life and service or about my experiences at the time of IAGSM meetings. Apart from this I have participated in the creation of the Polish Al-Anon Information Booklet in

the electronic form, which covered the topic of international contacts of Polish Al-Anon with other Al-Anon structures, a long article presenting my IAGSM and EZM meetings and their topics – especially in context of our needs in Poland and then my personal experience and feelings from meetings with Al-Anon trusted servants from all over the world.

Obviously, I cannot deny that I encountered some problems with finding time to write longer reports for the Conference (I always did it during my winter break from my grammar school where I work). I had problems with getting a leave from school in October; I had to overcome many organizational obstacles with coming to General Service meetings and to the Conference, but I mostly managed to cope with all of that. I sometimes suffered from big emotions in heated discussions or had swollen legs after hours of sedentary Conference lifestyle, but I do not regret anything. It was also a great challenge to get the invitation to write this presentation for the IAGSM as late as at the end of August when I was really busy with solving my health problems and then in September with my professional activities. But I really wanted to share my “Understanding of Spiritual principles in my service role as an IAGSM Delegate,” so I did my best to write it, even if it was done late at night.

I developed necessary skills in traveling and transportation, collecting information and sharing it, and persuading my boss to give me the leave I needed. I gained the invaluable service experience that was useful for my structure and Polish Al-Anon groups as well as for my faster personal recovery and development. That is why I would like to thank Al-Anon in Poland and all over the world and all of you and my Higher Power for this exceptional time of being the IAGSM Delegate and I wish all of you, especially new IAGSM Delegates, similar highlights and rich experience useful for you and your structures.

Discussion

After this presentation IAGSM Delegates shared a number of experiences pertaining to their current service roles.

“As a new IAGSM Delegate your presentation was an eye-opener to me on how to communicate my experience from attending this meeting when I get back home! I too hope to organize workshops. In our structure we don’t have many meetings, when we do it’s more about service than structure.”

“You laid bare the hard work that goes into being an IAGSM Delegate. This is my first time out of my country: the Higher Power gets us to places where we never think we’ll go! The Virginia Beach meeting I opted out of as I didn’t think I could do it. Now I’ve allowed my Higher Power to lead me. It’s a challenge for our respective structures to get us here. It’s a balancing act. We have to get the finances, but it’s so important and beneficial to be here. IAGSM does live on!”

“I was approached by the Board of Trustees several times to take over the IAGSM service. I said I didn’t have the time because I wanted to focus on my relationship. I became aware I hadn’t realized that Al-Anon means doing stuff in favour of others. It’s good to have the international feeling you get here. I’ll go back with good ideas and inspiration.”

“Becoming a Trustee has changed my life. In my area we talked a lot about spirituality, but not about spiritual principles.”

“My experience is that when I was elected on the Board of Trustees, I was asked to be the IAGSM Delegate. I answered that I had just started as a Trustee, but I was told there was no one else. I was nervous about the responsibility, having to read up about lots of stuff. This meeting has been a fantastic experience of seeing how enthusiastic and effective the meetings are. Even if they’re little things: ‘give me your hand and come with me’ that’s what it’s about: encouraging people to embark on a spiritual journey that can last all their lives.”

“I felt scared at the beginning but now I don’t feel so scared. I don’t know exactly what this service is, but now I know I can do better. My predecessor told me ‘Don’t worry, do your best, it’ll be enough!’ I’ve learned I need to always remember the spiritual principles because I am an Al-Anon member and I have to live the Al-Anon Traditions and Concepts in my everyday life.

“Let me tell you a story. There was a river and a kid fell into the river. Everyone shouted ‘Save the kid!’ but no one did anything. Then a man dived into the river and saved the kid. When he came out, he said: ‘Who was the person who pushed me in?’ I’ve always been pushed in. Initially I said ‘I can’t.’ Then I asked myself ‘How does God work in my life?’ I need a God who can give me hugs. You are all my Higher Power and you give me hugs. I was pushed, but with love. That is the spiritual concept we have in Al-Anon. As IAGSM Delegates no one pushed us in, we just got up and came. The barriers of languages and different countries

we come from: all of them dissolve. In a few minutes you’re friends, because the pain of living with alcoholism binds us together and this is our recovery.”

“Service is a spiritual principle and we all start out with fear and ask ourselves ‘What if I don’t get it right?’ New challenges get us out of our comfort zone. One starts as GR, then an Area Delegate and then Regional Trustee. You go around, do presentations and attend Board meetings. My Service Sponsor said: ‘I hope your expectations won’t be too high: this is Al-Anon!’. Then I became Chairman of the Board. I was supposed to be on a plane but an emergency happened to me and I ended up in hospital. My thought was ‘Will I be out in time?’ Actually I was discharged 33 days later. When I became Chairman of the Board it was suggested I also wear a second hat as an IAGSM Delegate. This is a worldwide fellowship and spiritual principles bind us together. We understand we are not alone. There is no difference from being a GR and an IAGSM Delegate.”

“A few years ago my structure had no idea what an IAGSM was. I wanted to experience it, not just read the report. In 2014 we started to discover what it was about and how to apply spiritual principles of Al-Anon while maintaining anonymity on the social media. We’ve covered so many topics in three days. I felt the presence of my Higher Power very strongly when I submitted my name to attend. Many problems relating to getting a Visa were overcome thanks to the Higher Power. I found an Al-Anon member who got me the Visa. I find my Higher Power in all of you!”



My thought was: “People will think I only became IAGSM delegate in order to go abroad”. My application to go to Virginia was rejected. But my Higher Power is teaching me to let go. And I’m also thinking that it’s going to be such hard work when I get home!

“It’s been an interesting journey for me to get to this point. I’m propelled by a spirit greater than myself and take little steps that astound me. I should trust the Higher Power more often: He sits with me all the time. I have so much self-doubt – that comes from living with alcoholism – but I realize there’s no end to this journey, no need for a certificate of completion, service is what I give back to the fellowship and share. I hear stuff coming out of my mouth and my ‘other self’ is amazed!”

“I believe that the people outside Al-Anon are no different from those in Al-Anon. They have the same desire to love and be loved. The difference is that Al-Anon provides a special space of security and to be loved where everyone can share their wounds, shortcomings and recover from alcohol hurts. We bring those who join us the help they need when they knock on the door. Traditions and Concepts are what created this special space and every action against this is violently hurting Al-Anon gossip, and domination are big threats – any such behaviour can discourage people

from engaging in service or even coming back to an Al-Anon group. Respect the courage everyone needs to get out of their comfort zone. The more I walk in Al-Anon with you, the more I think God is making me do what I’m unable to do.”

“It’s good to know when we are holding hands and saying the Serenity Prayer that it’s as if all Al-Anon were doing this with me. I know that when I leave this service, Al-Anon will still be there. When I started I was frightened and on the defensive and every time I took on new responsibilities, I pushed my limits one step at a time. I’m happy to have had this opportunity.”

This is my last IAGSM so I’m looking back at my time of service and I’m moved, you’ll all be in my heart and I believe my Higher Power will lead me everywhere. I wish you all an enjoyable service. It took me three nights to complete my presentation but I really wanted to do it... so I did it! I want to convey this message, it was important for me and gave me recovery and I wanted to pass it on to others. I did it with passion and enjoyed doing it, I was happy doing it. You need to do things with happiness, you do them your way and are creative in your own way. I passed on my experience as it will perhaps be useful. But you will learn to do it your way!”

WORKSHOP REPORTBACKS

Making Al-Anon Attractive

Marilyn M., ICC – Facilitator

Edith H., Germany – Reporter

General Discussion

- Attraction: show myself and tell my experience
- Promotion: shout in the crowd, “Come to Al-Anon!” (like on a market to sell)
- Al-Anon is not a secret society, but it is important to protect my name/face in TV or radio spots. Professional employees can do speak on camera, but they do it as employees and not as members.
- It is important to explain to the press the topic of anonymity (just a silhouette for TV spots).
- Australia, New Zealand, and the US can use for spots/clips with skits
- Free slots are available on Public Radio or TV as a nonprofit organization, but that still leaves the production cost
- Attraction can mean to place tables at seminars or fairs (health sector) with pamphlets and information. Not actively approaching, but ready to share when visitors are interested and ask questions.
- Public Information would be to inform future professionals about Al-Anon, give out pamphlets, etc. Important, too, is to give information about Al-Anon to the police, judges, social assistance. Also helpful are Public Information meetings.

Attraction on a group level:

- Keep the group attractive; group inventories can be helpful for this.
1. How are newcomers welcomed?
 2. What can I do or what can I change to make or keep the group attractive—let it begin with me!
 3. Is there too much routine?

Attraction on an individual level:

- To share personal experience is always the best way to attract.
- How do I talk about Al-Anon? Think about it!

- For public information is also important to do as Al-Anon and not as an appendix of A.A. to get more support for families and friends of alcoholics and to help us to be better seen.
- If necessary, it can also be helpful to break personal anonymity to share our experience, depending on the occasion and our own attitude.

Attraction at the public level:

- For Spanish speaking and English speaking groups there is a lot of material on the website (posters, spots, etc.). Also, countries with their websites (Spanish and English) have spots available and would be linked to single countries’ needs (addresses/contacts). It needs approval/confirmation of the country or the WSO, depending on where the material was downloaded or received (ex: alanonespana.org). Pamphlet P-19 can also be helpful.

Question:

- How about family and friends? They want to know what I am doing or how I know these people. How do I explain this engagement?

Possible answers:

- We attended spiritual groups together
- We do volunteer work together
- We are in a family group together
- Speak to those you sponsor up front about how to approach these questions to avoid baffling situations.

Retaining the Volunteer Base to Ensure the Continuation of Services

Marsha W., ICC – Facilitator

Marlene N., South Africa – Reporter

- Mexico has what they call “open house” to attract newcomers to assist in the different service positions. This is held every year for eight days in the beginning of November at their GSO. Different people take turns on different days to do presentations on the service positions. They make it a festive atmosphere so that it is attractive for people to attend.

Because it is so difficult to get people to volunteer, Areas try to get creative on how they do things.

For example:

1. Poland's accountant comes in every two weeks for two hours to do the books as it is not possible to do it on weekdays because of work pressures of the paid job.
 2. In Germany, they encourage people to stay for two terms in a position if the position requires this and to rotate off earlier from positions with less responsibility.
 3. Finland encourages people to job shadow so that it is an earlier transition into the position if the individual needs to take over. This is also good for continuity of the position. It ties in with sponsorship in service. Volunteering is spoken about in service meetings.
- Let members know what volunteer positions are required for an event and provide all the information about it (i.e. what the event is, where it is happening, etc.)
 - Put Task Forces together and get people involved in doing little pieces of work.
 - Remind people that many positions do not require a person to commit to being in the job for years.
 - Pull in young adults to assist.
 - Board of Trustees needs to show passion and energy in their positions so that they attract others to service.
 - Educate members about service by using the Service Manual. Every group should possess and use the Service Manual.
 - Share your limitations so that others can take over or assist.
 - Show passion but don't allow yourself to be forced.
 - It is also fine to allow a structure to fall as it gives people an opportunity to look and reassess their situation.

Effective Communication Using our Service Tools

*Karen W.P., ICC – Facilitator
Asdís I., Iceland – Reporter*

The moderator asked the following questions:

- What are our tools? 12 Steps, 12 Traditions and 12 Concepts of Service are the tools Al-Anon provides. Also mentioned was: literature, sponsors, and groups.
- What is conflict? A difference of opinion. This can be within oneself or a conflict with others that leaves us feeling uneasy.
- The moderator showed the group a kit to use for conflict resolution (Using Al-Anon Principles to Resolve Conflicts Kit [K70]). She picked the following question to think about and reflect on:
 4. How does the way we communicate fuel conflict?
 5. How do we improve?
 6. Am I willing to solve the conflict with a person?

Our spiritual aim as it appears in Tradition Six is our guideline.

Members of the group shared their thoughts and gave the following answers to the question:

1. We assume and think we are better or less than others.
2. We compare and have to “win” in situations and we feel we don't belong.
3. We assume others' motivations and come up with scripts of what/how they will act.
4. The answer/improvement is to make personal contact (reach out to the person) via the phone instead of email. Listen, ask questions, be aware of our own assumptions as well as our role.
5. Basically, it is up to me to improve. Stop justifying ourselves and agree to disagree.
6. “You could be right” is a good response when being accused.
7. Having expectations is often a path to disappointment; it is better to hope.
8. Calm down, give the conflict time and it can be fixed.
9. “The worst is not most likely.”

- “Expect nothing, hope for everything.”
- Have patience, stop talking, keep your voice low. The moderator asked how we can allow another person to have an opinion and respect it. Members of the group shared their thoughts and gave the following answers:

- Steps One, Two, Three, Six, Seven, and Nine help with allowing people to have differences of opinion.
- Step Ten also helps with differences of opinion; remember to ask, “What is my part?”

The moderator asked how to handle making amends when this is necessary. The members shared stories and had these suggestions:

- Just saying “I am sorry,” if accused, is a way to apologize.
- Admit your part and apologize. Then instead of feeling like a mistake was made out of weakness, you are able to learn and get stronger.
- Many experienced conflict as something bad in their youth, but had a positive experience when they saw conflict solved in Al-Anon.
- One member said it was good to realize “there are 360 ways of washing dishes...”
- In Al-Anon, it is not the end of things to have conflicts; you have our tools to solve it.

A final question for discussion was “Where do you take risks dealing with conflict?” Members provided the following responses:

- It is good to know where your “safe ground” is. We need to know when and where to make amends. The program gives us many tools to act.

The group also discussed the idea of “manipulative intentions.” If someone or you yourself have them, things can go wrong. Also, if someone has manipulative intentions toward you, you can get drawn into a conflict. The K70 Conflict Resolution Kit can be a valuable tool in both situations.

Concept One: Responsibility of Self Support

*Sonia C., Paraguay – Facilitator
Miriam M., Spain – Reporter*

The members opened the meeting with the Serenity Prayer and a reading of Tradition Seven. This is a summary of the discussion.

- Members shared that they feel better at self-support in their own lives after having gone to Al-Anon.
- When there is not enough cooperation, you sometimes have to “let go” and the group close.
- A member shared that she does not want a discount on books if all members don't have the same discount. Talking about this lets people know about selfsupport and that money is needed for the groups to be selfsufficient.
- One member shared about a chairperson who used to say her money can go places she can't. We are always struggling to get enough money for the group. In business meetings it is good to talk about the cost of things because it gives people the idea to think of giving as an opportunity.
- One country has decided to stop giving literature at a discount to evolving structures to encourage those structures to be self supporting.
- One Delegate shared that Al-Anon made her realize she must support herself and not depend on other people.
- In a group, time is given to speaking about Tradition Seven. The group pays for all the costs of people in service and all members are informed of where the money goes.
- Always decline to accept money from nonmembers at open meetings.
- One member realized the importance of selfsupport when her group didn't have a GR and they didn't get information from the Area.
- Working Tradition Seven in the group meetings encourages people to be responsible about giving when they can.
- One group keeps reserve funds for four months' rent and then sends a percentage of the rest to the GSO.

- In one place, some people wanted to print the literature cheaper than it was sold by the GSO and it had to be explained to them that they would be infringing on copyright and that literature can only be printed by the GSO.
- In some places, people bring their fears of financial difficulties and don't feel they can give.
- It's a good idea to explain what the GSO does and to make more regular contributions from GSO to WSO.
- All members of the workshop agreed it is very important to explain to group members where the money goes.
- Several ideas were given about how to encourage people to give more money at meetings (i.e. putting paper money in the basket instead of small coins).
- One structure explained to members that they needed new premises and got a great response. Explanation takes the mystery out of requesting money or time.
- The benefits of giving are spiritual. We always get back more than we give.
- One member reminded the workshop of the "custom" of giving a "birthday envelope" with one dollar (euro or pound) for each year in Al-Anon.
- Giving time and money is the spiritual demonstration of gratitude.
- With respect to being self supporting in other ways, some drawbacks of having literature in a member's house were outlined.
- One group started declining when they stopped meeting at the same time as A.A and they realized they had to start looking after themselves and they did.
- When things aren't working with finances or services, do a group inventory. It often changes people's outlook and they participate more.
- Transparency in what is done with the money contributed is essential.

Service and Recovery: Encouraging Group Members into Service

*Sallyann M., New Zealand – Facilitator
Rauni O., Finland – Reporter*

- You will grow where you do service.
- Encourage others to do things which could be good for her/him.
- Service makes you stay in the group; you become brave enough to serve.
- Ask and invite members to service.
- It is important for sponsors to encourage service.
- Don't get stuck in the same job. Give it away. It's a chance for a newcomer.
- At first, give only small responsibilities to new people to get them involved in service.
- Service helps you to grow.
- Service helps when you want to feel better.
- Be voluntary and "voluntell" others.
- Be in front of others; be an example.
- Emotional safety in the group leads to feeling prepared to take a service job.
- Service helps when nothing else can.
- Service is healing.
- Even when I am tired, doing service leads to a feeling of relaxation.
- Do not judge the fears of others; pass the torch.
- Share benefits that you get from service.
- At the Area level, organize rallies and events and create times for old and new members to work together.

Roles and Responsibilities within the General Service Office

*Lois A., Australia – Facilitator
Ann W., Denmark - Reporter*

Ideas surrounding this topic included sharing the types of resources some structures used to define their service roles and responsibilities:

- Service Manual
- Guidelines
- General Service Meetings
- Board Committees
- Conference Leadership Team
- Administrative Team

A discussion about the roles of Trusted Servants in some structures indicated:

- Board employs office staff
- Board responsible for office lease
- General Secretary/Executive Director has oversight of office staff
- Office Manager provides administrative services

The discussion about the role of the national service office revealed that many of the day to day tasks were performed by the Board of Trustees within some structures. For example:

- Editing and publishing of a national magazine
- Public Outreach
- Providing materials for Alateen Sponsor training
- Providing translation services for Literature Committees



MOTIONS

Motion #1

The Admissions Committee recommends that the 18th International Al-Anon General Services Meeting

admit the representatives from Guatemala, India, and Paraguay, who have met the criteria in our guidelines. (37 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstentions) — CARRIED

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Germany - Alateen is declining in Germany. Can anyone share their country's experience?

U.S. & Canada - Our Board of Trustees has been discussing this topic for three yrs. One hundred seventeen Alateens responded to a survey conducted this year. What we discovered – from the survey – is we were mistaken in our assumptions about what Alateens thought were important to them to attend meetings! We thought technology would be at the top of their list. The majority of those that replied indicated they want face-to-face meetings. There had been discussions about a digital chat room app but it hasn't been possible to develop this platform at this time. Only a few Alateens indicated they believed technology was something they needed to attend meetings. We are continuing to look for ways to increase the attendance of Alateen members to meetings. The 2016 Alateen Survey is available on the Members' Website.

Spain - We held a national seminar few weeks ago and so many people attended we divided them into two groups, with separate sessions for Alateens. We can send our suggestions to you as soon as they are complete if you provide an email address.

Italy - We have involved in our discussions each Alateen Sponsor who goes to each group in his/her area and Sponsors Alateen. We have a problem with Alateens that have no transportation to the meetings. Some Sponsors pick up Alateen members because they have no transportation to the meeting. However, we have no insurance for this. Does anyone have any experience to share on this subject?

WSO Chair – Regarding transporting Alateens, as a resource we would suggest the *Alateen Safety Guideline* (G-34). If your structure has not adapted and translated this guideline, we suggest that you may want to review this guideline. Insurance laws are different within the WSO service structure state to state. We

would suggest that you contact your local areas/states/provinces to determine the liability when transporting children that are in the care of someone other than a parent. This will help to determine any guidelines a structure would need to put in place for the protection of the Alateens and Sponsors.

South Africa - A stumbling block for Alateen in South Africa is the Child Protection Act which makes everyone responsible for reporting abuse in our country. Thus, the Sponsor has a responsibility to report any abuse to the proper authorities. So, the GSO had to develop a procedure to comply with this law. A mandatory requirement of the law is all adults working with children must get a police clearance/background check. Our problem is these clearance/background checks are only valid for six months. Sometimes it takes that long to receive a reply from the police and then the six months is already up! Keeping up with the background checks of those that want to be Alateen Sponsors is our biggest problem in South Africa! My question also concerns Alateen. The groups are diminishing. We have a little girl – daughter of an A.A. member – who's been sitting in our Al-Anon meetings since she was nine. Now she's eleven and has grown tremendously in her program. What do others think of an Alateen member sitting in on an Al-Anon meeting?

Australia – We encourage Alateens to sit in Al-Anon meetings if there's no Alateen meeting nearby. One of our areas encourages all groups to be Alateen-friendly groups. We suggest that each Al-Anon group should have at least two members registered as Alateen Sponsors so if Alateens do show up, they are always prepared to hold a separate Alateen meeting.

Belgium – Our experience on Alateen is that we have fewer participants. Only two groups act -when teens show up – and there isn't much demand. What happened recently to try to help to increase interest,

is that an Al-Anon group asked the GSO to organize a special Al-Anon meeting and invite Alateens and Alateen Sponsors. It was an opportunity for the Alateen members to meet with Al-Anon members and to share their stories! Although it appeared successful, it has only taken place one time.

France – We also have a decrease in our number of Alateen meetings so we are looking at ways to be welcoming to teenagers at Al-Anon meetings. We normally welcome anyone who comes to an Al-Anon meeting with their children; as long as they do not disturb the meeting, we accept them even when they are very young. The GSO recommends that Al-Anon groups welcome teenagers, especially since there are now fewer Alateen meetings.

New Zealand – One can't force an Alateen group to materialize. When the teenagers are ready to find recovery, the meeting will appear. The simple fact is that we are Al-Anon Family Groups and our principles talk about welcoming families and friends; this is our reminder that teens can attend Al-Anon.

U.K. & Eire – There is some confusion in our structure about welcoming young members into Al-Anon meetings where there were no Alateen meetings available. The GSO has shared suggestions about how to welcome them where there is no Alateen meeting available.

India – I have a question for WSO. In India we have many, many languages and it takes a lot of time to translate the literature in each language. In our country, A.A. GSO has allowed their "Big Book" to be translated in an abridged form. Can we get permission to translate and print a book in the same way?

WSO – On page 106 of the 2014/2017 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual under the subheading "Copyrights" it does indicate that the *WSO does not grant permission for substantial reprints of CAL in Area, district, or other service arm newsletters, or to outside publications, in the U.S. and Canada.* Printing excerpts from a book would be considered a substantial reprint and therefore would not be permissible. Publishing copyrighted material inappropriately, could put us in danger of losing the copyright.

Iceland – I have a question regarding Public Information, e.g. advertising events like the Al-Anon "big birthday meeting" we have in Iceland every November. What type of public outreach are we allowed to do regarding this celebration? People aren't sure what is

appropriate, for example, can members go on TV?

WSO – There is a Public Outreach section starting on page 109 in the *Service Manual*. There are a variety of ways this celebration could be advertised – i.e. through publications produced by the GSO such as magazines, newsletters and other platforms directed towards members. A Public Outreach press release that indicates the reason for the celebration would be appropriate as well as educating the community. There is also an electronic publication on the WSO Members' Website which is titled the *Best of Public Outreach*. This is publication can be downloaded and is a resource for ideas. Contact the WSO for further information or questions.

Finland – I have a simple and practical question: I don't understand the process for translating and printing CAL. Also how can we get the forms?

WSO – The GSO would request from the WSO the most recent printing in English of the literature piece the GSO is planning to translate. WSO will also send the necessary forms – which can be copied by the GSO to keep in your files for future use. Once the translation is complete, send a copy of the manuscript and a completed form to the WSO. The WSO will have the manuscript reviewed – for a pamphlet this can take up to two months, a book up to six months – sign the form and return all back to the GSO. The GSO keeps the signed form as this is your legal document (license) to translate and print the project. Contact the Associate Director – International for any further questions and details.

Switzerland – Three questions for WSO: (1) Does the GSO have the responsibility to protect the Al-Anon Family Groups Trademark and register every 10 years? In European Union are countries covered by one registration? (2) Regarding the new book, has the WSO received enough stories? (3) is an e-book in the pipeline for smart phones?

WSO – In response to your first question, based on our Policy, all have the responsibility of insuring that our Trademarks are not misused. Regarding registration, the WSO did register all countries that are a part of the European Union under one registration back in 1996 or 1997. This registration has since been renewed and is current. A letter explaining a request for countries (not under the European Union) was sent to all General Service Offices back in 2014 asking that all Trademarks be registered in the name of Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. 1600 Corporate Landing Parkway, Virginia Beach, Virginia 23454. Once the

registration is complete, we asked that you send a copy of the “Trademark Registration” document to the WSO for our files. If you need a copy of this letter let us know. Currently we are working with an attorney to determine the best course of action needed to protect the Trademarks in all other countries.

U.S. & Canada – Regarding your second question we do need more sharings. We have received approximately 600 sharings but we need at least three times that many. Addressing your third question, although we do currently have some pieces of CAL that are available in e-book format – see the *Al-Anon/Alateen Literature Order Form* for details - there is currently no plans to produce additional CAL in this format.

Sweden – We only found out just recently that the WSO uses the word ‘problem drinkers’ instead of ‘relatives and friends of alcoholics’...

U.S. & Canada – After working with a consultant, our tagline – used for our Public Outreach Website – was changed about eight years ago. The rationale behind this was that we (Al-Anon members), can’t define who is an “alcoholic.” We come to Al-Anon because we are affected by someone’s drinking. It was determined that “problem drinker” was a better term, rather than labeling him/her an “alcoholic”.

Spain – In Spain we believe our current website is adequate. We do not have a presence on Facebook. However, our structure is talking about it and the GSO got in touch with the WSO and requested guidelines to help us with our discussions surrounding this topic. We believe one really needs to understand our new platforms. Is Facebook worth the trouble? More and more young members think Al-Anon will disappear if you don’t keep up with new media...

U.S. & Canada – I’m going to try to answer from the perspective of how we use social media. The WSO has a Facebook page and you can “like” it. Liking it doesn’t imply you’re a member of Al-Anon. You can’t comment on the WSO Facebook page – it’s strictly a form of public outreach – you can share a post on your Facebook page which also doesn’t imply you are a member, only that you liked this post. In the *Service Manual* p.116 covers the internet, social media and social networking. There is information on how to use it as a tool for Public Outreach, p.109-116. Facebook reaches a lot of people and a lot of people find out about Al-Anon because a friend liked the page.

Brazil – Does anyone have any experience with WhatsApp? We don’t use it. We were asked to ask WSO if it’s ok.

WSO – We’ve had extensive conversations on social media at our Board meetings and we have only scratched the surface. We’ve looked at it in depth and sought legal advice. What we found out that data is gathered by apps and social media. Anonymity may or may not be secure so we have determined that we must be very careful when participating in various platforms.

South Africa – We use WhatsApp all the time in South Africa: i.e. the Board of Trustees share general and business information, though we don’t use it for Al-Anon meetings. The messaging system allows people to communicate with each other. We do agree there are challenges with protecting our principle of anonymity.

REFLECTIONS

- This service makes me nervous was my first thought! I wish to say thank you this is my last year. Information for friends from Europe , 18-20 August Essen 2017 is our next European Zonal Meeting.
- I’d like to start off by thanking the WSO staff, Italy staff and Italy GSO for putting together such a good few days. All Delegates for sharing, I’m sad to say goodbye. I thank the previous Executive Director and Associate Director - International for always listening to us with patience and love even though we were usually directed to the *Service Manual* for our answers. (laughter)
- Thanks and also thanks to the Italian GSO. Thanks to all those who prepared presentations. Italy gave us a wonderful welcome, food and accommodation.
- I came with a message from my four lady friends on the Board of Trustees in France. They are very brave, courageous and have to expedite the work of a GSO. The message in the spirit of our beautiful program. Since 2014 our monthly newsletter La Chaîne continues to be published every month. The committee now has four members, previously one person only. We warmly thank friends across Europe who sent sharings – Spain, Portugal, Germany, Ukraine structures – for our special 500 issues and we are looking forward to next year when La Chaîne will celebrate its 50th year of existence. We’re also grateful to WSO for their visit in August 2015. We can see that our choices were made with serenity and they helped us feel more comfortable when making these choices.
- Thank you for your love and warmth. GSO would not have been able to do anything without help and assistance of Al-Anon volunteers in Rome.
- When I have to leave someone I love I don’t cry, I get angry! Thanks to the people who have written the reports because it is important to our structure.
- This is a very emotional moment. Thanks to WSO and the Italians.
- I wonder why we get to do these things. We are right where we are supposed to be. That’s all I need to know. One day I had the opportunity to change and make life unimaginable. Thank you for what you do, it doesn’t go unnoticed. We know what you do every day to carry this message of hope to the families of alcoholics. You take so much time to translate everything. I don’t have to do this. I want to thank our families. Three of our husbands are here with us. We often don’t get to see each other a lot. And thanks again to Italy and the host committee.
- Thanks to the Higher Power and all the structure and to Italy our hosts. To meet all these wonderful people that you are – and I am, thanks to Al-Anon! Now we start the growing-up road in our structure and I hope this will have a positive influence on our country.
- Thanks to the Higher Power and IAGSM for making me take the big step to come here. To the host country for making us eat a lot, to all the members for sharing their rich experience. We will try to share and practice in our country all the things we learned here.

Spiritual Meeting

Thérèse S., US & Canada

I am so happy to be with you today as the delegate from Canada. I would like to thank the ICC committee for asking me to be the spiritual speaker at the 18th IAGSM meeting. I feel privileged. What I know for sure: if I am here today, it is a gift of my Higher Power. This gift has a story and it began 20 years ago, when I attended the opening of the World Service Office in Virginia Beach with an Al-Anon friend. We visited the building and two elements really impressed me. First, the archives, where I was able to see some documents handwritten by Lois W. at the very beginning of Al-Anon. The other was the International Services office where I was able to admire on the wall a map with thousands of straight pins with colored heads and here I am today at the IAGSM among all of you represented 20 years ago, by those “colored pins.” At the time, I told my Al-Anon friend, one day I would like to come back and work here. Twenty years later I was accepted to serve as a Trustee, another gift from my Higher Power. Also, about 10 years ago, our Area had the opportunity to welcome a Trustee for a visit. Her sharing touched me deeply and her presentation on “Al-Anon Leadership” made me realize that Al-Anon was the road toward spiritual principles that I admired so much in others, like respect, collaboration, openmindedness, and care of others. It gave me the incentive to follow the spiritual road that Al-Anon was teaching me through its members. This Trustee visit was an inspiration and it solidified my desire to one day maybe become a Trustee. Today I want to give back with love and enthusiasm all I have received and here I am today by the grace of our Higher Power to share with you this Spiritual path with Al-Anon.

It had a beginning. My adventure started 77 ½ years ago, when I was born the third child of a family of four, the same year as my almost twin sister. My mother got very ill when pregnant. She was full of anger and shame at being pregnant again and she fell into a deep depression after my birth and was hospitalized for a long period of time. So, my life began with rejection and abandonment wounds. I soon realized that if I wanted to have a place in my family, I had to find a way to be seen but not heard. I decided to mold myself into my almost twin sister. I always had to fight hard to have a voice and it is in Al-Anon and with professional help that I

gained a voice, my voice. This brings me to introduce you to a little girl that will always be an important part of my life and who has lived through a lot of suffering. A little girl from whom I have learned to listen — to her wounds, to love them and take care of them. I was told that I cried a lot and that they would laugh at me; it brought a wound of humiliation. The tool I experimented with at the time was adaptation instead of expressing my real feelings. Negation saved me.

Here I would like to make a point. Al-Anon invites us to seek professional help when needed. When I turned 75 I offered myself a marvelous present: a therapy to go and touch the profound wounds that were still there even after many times working Step 4 and Step 5 with Al-Anon. Wounds that still made me suffer and made me avoid people that would revive these wounds. I was wounded in difficult relationships and it is in a sane professional relationship with the help of my Higher Power that I did touch these wounds with love and tenderness. I did not completely heal, but I learned with the help of my Higher Power, some protective tools to go into relationship in a sane way. In relationships, others would become my activators and I learned to stay still and take the time to feel the wound that the present incident had touched inside me and I learned how to take care of the wound by giving myself, with the help of my Higher Power, all the love I can and also by sharing with my Sponsor who has taught me unconditional love. When hurt by someone I learned how to turn the camera toward me and look inside with love instead of turning the camera toward the other person.

At the age of 10, my parents sent my sister and I to a boarding school in the same city where we lived. We were allowed to go home once a month and often my parents, who were allowed to come and visit us, would skip the visit. I was sad, but now I know that at the time it touched the rejection and abandonment wounds.

At the age of 15, I saw my mother falling on the floor with an overdose of alcohol during a family gathering celebrating my parents’ 25th wedding anniversary. Because I was in boarding school during winter and camps in the summer, I never realized that my mother had a drinking problem. It was a shock to me and I felt so ashamed. At that time, a member of my family was holding an important responsibility in the Canadian Government so it appeared to me that everyone would learn that my mother had a drinking problem. I

still can remember that night. I stayed awake feeling a profound wound of fear, shame and guilt that remained inside me until I discovered Al-Anon. My reaction to overcome these wounds, because I did not know of any other way, was studying so hard to succeed and pretending that nothing was happening. I took control over my life and created an image of a happy and successful person. I performed. My parents could not come to my graduation because my mother had drunk too much. The wound of not being important grew inside. I had worked so hard because I wanted to be recognized and loved. I did not feel at the time that I could be loved for who I was, like Al-Anon taught me later, but I thought I had to perform to be loved.

I left Québec to complete my studies for one year in Toronto. I brought with me all the consequences of my mother’s disease. This disease took a large place in my heart, especially when I would talk with my sister once a week on the phone. She needed to share her difficulties handling the situation. I could not share with my colleagues my feelings, because I was too ashamed.

At 22 years of age, I met this wonderful man who became my husband. I projected an image of an accomplished professional and a perfectly happy woman. We left for four years in the United States. At the time, I was perfectly bilingual and I had the profound feeling I was starting a new life by getting away from this horrible family. I had decided by taking the family name of my husband (which was the custom at the time) to erase this first part of my life, like it never existed.

After four years in the United States, two children (ages 4 and 2), and pregnant with a third child, we came back to Montreal. I had a husband who had bizarre behavior and who was drinking a lot. Our third child was born and died suddenly in his sleep at three months. For many years, I carried a feeling of guilt about this. With the help of the Steps, my Sponsor and some professional help, I was able to find peace again.

The alcoholic disease progressed and I felt so lonely until one day an A.A. member, who had met my husband in a bar, brought him home. As my husband was lying on the floor, the A.A. member told me in a very candid way “It is known that a wife of an alcoholic is more affected by the disease than her husband.” So, very politely, I invited him to leave. Before he did, he handed me a piece of paper with a phone number and told me that if I called this woman, she could help me. In despair and, now, knowing that it was my Higher

Power that guided me, I called her. She told me, after I told her my horrible story, that my call had helped her probably more than it could have helped me. I thought that she was very special. She invited me to accompany her to a meeting the following day.

At the first meeting I understood that all the guilt I was carrying from my mother’s and husband’s diseases flew away because I was not responsible. I felt like somebody had taken off a cement block of a thousand pounds. I heard the first part of the first Step and it was such a relief. As for recognizing that my life was unmanageable, it was not for me. I was perfect and he was the sick one.

My Al-Anon spiritual adventure began! I accepted the suggestion that before I decided if Al-Anon was for me, I should attend at least four meetings. I did and it’s been 40 years now that I am with you and you saved my life. I asked my Higher Power, whom I call my loving God, for a Sponsor and He sent me the perfect one. She was a good listener, very available and had profound spiritual life. I must add that before I discovered Al-Anon, I had taken as my Higher Power the mother of my Higher Power. I wanted the most loving mother of all and she became my confidant, my close friend. I could not take God as my Higher Power because I was not perfect and I am of the generation where God was a punishing God.

Slowly, with the unconditional love of Al-Anon members, I was able to adopt God as my Higher Power. I would ask Him for signs of His presence and, as I had a hard time recognizing His signs, I asked Him to put them on a silver platter and to make them so evident that I would not miss them. My Higher Power helped me change Sponsors when needed, as I was growing.

After two years in Al-Anon my husband had stopped working and was drinking 24 hours a day and taking medication at the same time. His behavior was close to insanity. One day, by choking me in a pillow, he almost killed me. By the grace of our Higher Power, my oldest son walked in the room and when he saw him he regained his senses and my life was saved. Following this incident, I filed for a divorce and it is only with the help of my Higher Power and the help of Al-Anon members was I able to go through my grief and start building myself and my life again. Now I really had to “let it begin with me.”

I started with the Twelve Steps. Step One: I was happy to admit I was powerless because I had tried every-

thing. Step Two: This saved me when I integrated it. It took time to know, in my heart, that this loving God could take away my worries and my obsessions. I had a Higher Power box and when a worry came back, I could visualize putting it in the box and letting go. I have to tell you, this is my favorite Step. Step Three: I thought at first that if I tried once to turn my life over to my Higher Power, I was done forever. Oh, no. I have to start every day and sometimes many times a day. Fourth and Fifth Steps: I made them a few times as I was growing in the Program. I am still working with the help of my Higher Power Steps 6 and 7. As for Steps 8 and 9: I am letting my Higher Power choose the times and the occasions to pursue these Steps. I realize now that I just have to keep my mind open. Step 10: I try to practice it as often as I can. Steps 11 and 12: These are a daily practice for me. I love to pray and meditate every day; it has become a part of my daily life.

I have to admit that service made me go one step further in my healing. I started in the group and now I realize how my Higher Power knew me better than I did because, at the time, I was not the “service” type. I was more the “savior” type. When our Group Representative resigned, it seemed at the time that I was the only one suited for the responsibility, so I said yes. Then when our District Representative resigned, it seemed again that I was the only one suited for the responsibility, so I said yes again. At that point, my Higher Power put on my path a member who became my Al-Anon Service Sponsor and who helped me, as an adult child, grow toward an adult maturity. With love, she helped me recognize my wounds and my deficiencies. She would listen to me when I was confronted with my limits and, with unconditional love, she helped me overcome these limits. With her, I went on to serve at the Area level as Area Chair, Area Alternate Chair and as Alternate Delegate. We worked hard, but I am proud to tell you that it was pure delight to work with her and some wonderful Al-Anon members. The more I grew the more I realized how deficient I had been affectively and emotionally and how I was progressing. My self-esteem grew and humility entered my life and it brought with it an open heart and love of others with less judgment. I used my program in my professional work and in return I have been using in service for Al-Anon the expertise I gained in my work.

Service outside the group, with a service Sponsor, helped me integrate the Twelve Traditions and the

Twelve Concepts of Service and put in practice the wonderful spiritual principles of Al-Anon. These include openmindedness, tolerance, being open to others, leadership without control, and caring about the welfare of others. It is making me a better person. I read that the Twelve Steps are the Legacy that help us heal our wounds and that the Twelve Traditions and Concepts of Service give us the tools for harmony in relationships. With the integration of these two Legacies and the experimentation in service, we can all contribute to make sure that Al-Anon will never be diluted in our groups, Districts, Areas or Al-Anon as a whole. With the unconditional love of my Higher Power and from your unconditional love and these three Legacies, today I am able to give back what I have received.

What plus did I gain by having a service Sponsor? She is there to listen and to guide me and sometimes validate and encourage me in the low moments and she just gives me suggestions and the little push to continue and not to give up. How did the Sponsors appear in my life? Just by asking my Higher Power to put one on my path — it worked every time!

As a Sponsor, I have the most wonderful story. I was in Edmonton, Alberta in July 2015 as a Trustee for my first Board Meeting and for the “Meet the Board” event. After exchanging for a while with a member, she asked me to become her Sponsor. I lived in Québec; she lived in Edmonton. I told her I would think about it. She would send me emails to inquire about my decision and finally I accepted. Now it’s been a year since we have been sharing and working the Steps by Skype. This has been a gift from my Higher Power.

Why am I still here with all of you after 40 years? It is because I am convinced that with Al-Anon we never grow old and that we can continue to dare because we have a Higher Power for Whom nothing is impossible.

Thank you so much and I give you all a big loving hug! Merçi!



Eighteenth International Al-Anon General Services Meeting

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	<i>Amistad (Friendship)</i>	1978
Australia	1952	1970	1980-2006	<i>Austra-Link</i>	1974
Belgium (Flemish)	1961	1982	1980-2006	<i>Keerpunt</i>	1982
Belgium (French)	1965	1981	1980-2000	<i>Sérénité</i>	1976
Brazil	1966	1979	1980-2006	<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>Compartamo</i>	1979
Denmark	1974	1985	1986, 2006	<i>Perspektiv</i>	1988
Finland	1953	1968	1980-2006	<i>Tietoavain</i>	1967
France	1962	1979	1980, 82, 86, 90-2004	<i>La Chaîne</i>	1967
Germany	1967	1986	1980-2006	<i>Intern</i>	1981
Guatemala	---	---	---	---	---
Iceland	1972	1986	1984-2006	<i>Hlekkurim (The Link)</i>	1987
Italy	1976	1995	1986, 1992-2002	<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, 2002-2006	Delta	1976
Netherlands	1976	1995	1980-2004	Stapsgewijs	1980
New Zealand	1954	1980	1980-2006	N.Z. Al-Anon Messenger	1963
Norway	1960	1987	1982-2006	Trinn For Trinn	1981
Paraguay	---	---	---	---	---
Peru	1965	2001	2004	---	1970
Portugal	---	---	---	---	---
Poland	1980	1997	1994-2000, 2006	Razem	1993
South Africa	1951	1963	1980, 82, 84, 88-2000, 2006	Unitas	1967
Spain	1972	1980	1980, 88, 90-97, 2000-2004	Serenidad	1980
Sweden	1976	1991	1988, 92-94	Al-Anon Kontakt	1986
Switzerland (French)	1963	1973	1997-2004	Sunray	1975
Switzerland (German)	1964	1973	1982-2006	M & F	1969
U.K. & Eire	1952	1970	1980-2006	News & Views	1963
Uruguay	1974	1997	2004	---	---
Venezuela	---	---	---	---	---
US & Canada	1951	1960	1980-2006	The FORUM, Inside Al-Anon 1978	---

Al-Anon meetings are held in over 130 countries. There are a total of 24,552 Al-Anon groups and 1,843 Alateen groups worldwide

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