



**19th IAGSM**

**INTERNATIONAL  
AL-ANON  
GENERAL SERVICES MEETING**

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**Leading by Example:**  
Structures Supporting Structures

October 3-6, 2018



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## TWELVE CONCEPTS OF SERVICE

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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

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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

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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 2018 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting:

## Australia

Barbara C.  
Jenny A.

## Denmark

Ann W.

## Finland

Rauni O.  
Eila L.

## France

Paul G.

## Germany

Edith H.

## Guatemala

Mirna M.

## Iceland

Maria O.  
Margrét S.

## India

Ranjana M.  
Sarita S.

## Mexico

Rosa M.

## New Zealand

Sally-ann M.  
Chris H.

## Poland

Renia A.

## South Africa

Nan G.  
Terry H.

## Spain

Miriam L.

## Switzerland

Pierrette P.

## UK & Eire

Miriam MacG.

## US & Canada

Debbie G.  
Gail G.

## ICC

Rosie M.  
John McL.  
Kerri K.  
Marsha W.  
Vali F.



## OPENING SESSION

### Welcome from the International Coordination Committee

The 19<sup>th</sup> International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM) opened on Wednesday, October 3, 2018 at the Holiday Inn in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Representatives from 16 structures were welcomed warmly by Rosie M., Chairperson of the World Service Office (WSO) International Coordination Committee (ICC). She began by saying, “Our common bond, described in our Third Tradition, reflects that we are affected by someone else’s drinking. Al-Anon is a unique fellowship that unites members of different backgrounds, races, and walks of life in an inspiring endeavor. We may speak different languages, but we are united by that common bond, and, therefore, we are connected from the heart.”

She went on to say, “The ICC and Board of Trustees recognize how essential these meetings are to Al-Anon’s growth and future.” This year the theme was *Leading by Example: Structures Supporting Structures*. The Chairperson continued, “Throughout the planning process we consistently worked on incorporating the theme into our agenda. Many Delegates were willing to assume new roles to support new structures. This contributed to the successful planning of the IAGSM. The members of the ICC have engaged in new roles designed to directly provide support to emerging leaders in this international community. Many of the agenda topics were created specifically to introduce structures that had experienced certain challenges to structures that are currently confronting the same challenges. We hope that because of this effort, you will gain insight, a feeling of support, and a sense of what it means for structures, including the WSO, to support each other.”

The Chairperson closed with a quote from page 167 of *Lois Remembers* (B-7): “We get something at these huge, unique gatherings that cannot be gained in any other way. The combined emotional impact of so many people believing and striving for the same ideals is felt by everyone and brings a rich kind of joy.”

The night before the meeting began, International Delegates and their guests gathered for dinner. The ICC Chairperson, Rosie M., introduced Vali F., the WSO Executive Director. The Executive Director then welcomed Delegates and guests. “Like many of you,” she

began, “I am participating in my first IAGSM and am thrilled by the diversity of topics, presentations, and discussions we can look forward to. We have so much to learn from each other.

“Having had the opportunity to visit Al-Anon members and organizations in several countries, I saw structures reach out to other structures after crises and be rewarded with strong support. I saw fledgling organizations reach out for help from those with more experience once they were reminded that we do not need to do anything alone. I came to understand that our International General Service Offices (GSOs) are facing many of the same challenges and opportunities as we are within the World Service Conference (WSC) Structure. Whether we are talking about how to best use social media, overcome declining participation in service, apply spiritual principles in money matters—particularly if member contributions are declining—or attract younger members through public outreach, all will benefit from this opportunity to enjoy structures supporting structures through collaboration, shared experiences, and commitment.

“As a trusted servant of the WSO, I recognize our challenge as a clearinghouse is to ensure we listen for the ways in which we, as the voice for International Al-Anon organizations within the WSC, can ensure WSC conversations consider and address the needs of the worldwide fellowship.

“Thank you for the commitment you have all demonstrated by making the journey to this 19th IAGSM.”

Following the meal, the ICC Co-Chairperson, John McL., led the group in an icebreaker to help the Delegates introduce themselves.

The next morning, prior to the official opening of the IAGSM, the ICC Chairperson introduced the keynote speaker, Vali F. She shared her thoughts and ideas on the IAGSM theme, offering a perspective of the GSOs and the WSO as “partnership groups,” and weaving the Traditions and Concepts of Service throughout her address. See page 6.

During this three-day IAGSM, each session opened and closed with a Delegate reciting the Serenity Prayer in his or her chosen language. This gave everyone a greater understanding of the worldwide unity and diversity of Al-Anon.

Debbie G., Chairperson of the WSO Board of Trustees, welcomed Delegates to Virginia Beach, Virginia, the current home of the WSO.

## Roll Call and Flag Ceremony

Roll call included a flag ceremony. The Chairperson invited each country's Delegate(s) to place their flag in its holder on a special table, and to place a pin marking the geographic location of their country's GSO on a world map. A row of flags set on the other side of the table represented those GSOs that could not be in attendance but were with us in spirit.

The Chairperson then read a communication from the GSO Board of Al-Anon France, who spoke about the challenges the Structure has faced since the 2016 IAGSM—having to resolve office-staffing and financial difficulties, having to relocate the GSO, and having to look for ways to bring younger members to Al-Anon.

The Associate Director—International Services read letters from Structures in Italy, Brazil, and Australia that sent loving thoughts and hope for stimulating discussions.

## Voting Procedures

Discussion and voting procedures to be used at the meeting were reviewed and explained. By consensus, members agreed that voting would be either by a show of hands or by written ballot, depending on the motion. The next order of business was to decide whether a simple majority or a two-thirds majority would be accepted as substantial unanimity. It was agreed that majority would be substantial unanimity. The procedure for submitting motions was then explained. Motions would be published in written format, then the Co-Chairperson would read the motions aloud, and the floor would be opened for discussion. There was consensus to allow still photos; however, still photos would not be permitted while meetings were in progress and would only be allowed if permission was given by the person being photographed. Posting these still photos on social media would only be permitted if the person in the picture was aware of this posting and the photo did not associate Al-Anon with a particular person.

## Keynote Speaker

### Leading by Example: Structures Supporting Structures

*Vali F., Executive Director, World Service Office*

Good morning, everyone. My name is Vali F., and I'm a grateful member of the worldwide fellowship of Al-Anon, the Executive Director of Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., and the Sustaining Trustee on the Board. As some of you know from our "bingo game" last night or our conversations, I live in two places: my family farm in Northern Virginia, and my apartment near the WSO in Virginia Beach. Consequently, I have two home groups.

When I was reflecting on the IAGSM theme, it struck me that, from the vantage point of the WSO, the two parts—"leading by example" and "structures supporting structures"—are complementary, not exclusively consequential. This is partly because, as the clearinghouse for the worldwide fellowship of Al-Anon Family Groups, we are always responsible for supporting structures while, more and more, we are called upon to focus on leading by example.

Fortunately, Concept Nine reminds us that "a fine plan or idea can come from anyone, anywhere." Recently we were graced to experience others leading by example, helping us achieve things that we could never have accomplished without their immediate experience. One such example arose in the area of social media meetings, when trusted servants of an online Facebook group, having identified the challenges to our Legacies inherent in social media platforms, had the courage to find a new way of accomplishing their goal—to provide an electronic format for meetings that is inviting to today's young, busy people—while maintaining our Al-Anon spiritual principles. Their leadership in this area opened up a new way of thinking for Volunteers and Staff alike at the WSO, and we recognized registering their meetings aligns with Al-Anon's policies.

All that was required of us was the humility to listen with an open heart to their intent and the courage to overcome our fear of change.

That sounds simple but, of course, we know that it is not. As a speaker so eloquently expressed at the 2018 International Convention: "Al-Anons love progress but don't like change." While I wouldn't say Al-Anon members have cornered the market on those feelings, I

certainly appreciate the truth in that statement. In my experience, the family disease is always inviting me to force solutions that, sadly, return me to the same stagnant situations and behaviors that feel comfortable but reflect limited growth.

This particular example of the social media meetings was also a good reminder that leading by example takes time and, if we use prayer and meditation to stay out of the way until we are nudged, always occurs at the right time through the grace of our Higher Power. In my estimation, much of leadership resides in navigating that delicate balance of timing: the patience to wait in the hall for our Higher Power's direction while not succumbing to the paralysis of fear. Like many examples in Al-Anon, the choice by the WSO, as suggested in Concept Nine, not to "seize the immediate benefits and forget the harmful precedents or consequences," provided trusted servants the time they needed to apply the Legacies and reach a conclusion that we had not even imagined.

All of this, of course, I learned by applying the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts of the program to my life, to my service at and beyond the group level, and to my professional career. Certainly when I came into this program, I knew nothing about leading by example—I was too busy trying to stay afloat and deceive everyone around me into thinking that my life was just fine, thank you very much. I could never have understood the concept of structures supporting structures because I didn't know how to ask for help, and most of the time was convinced no one could give me help even if I asked. On those rare occasions when I did ask for help, I chose not to listen to the answers people gave me.

When I came into this program, desperate to stop the pain created by my bad behavior (which I later realized I had developed as a defense against the many difficulties I faced as the child of many generations of alcoholics), I was not a leader, but a chameleon. My goal in life was to adapt to my surroundings in a desperate effort to belong: to fill the big hole within me. At the time I was trying to fill it with relationships, but I have since learned that it can only be filled by the God of my understanding. I could not lead because I was not my own person; I was always following someone else's example of how to find happiness.

My family did not have any tools to lead me out of my despair. They, too, were crippled by the family disease of alcoholism. Given that foundation, the whole

process of working the Steps, for me, was about learning to lead by example, first as an example to myself and later to my family and work colleagues and even supervisors.


In my initial journey through the Steps, I learned that I could have a God of my understanding who would support me regardless of whether I was succeeding or floundering. And as my story reveals, I have done plenty of both, even in the program.

I learned that I could stand "long-continued criticism." My mother to this day does not understand or accept my reliance upon the Al-Anon program or any form of spirituality. But, in Al-Anon, I learned that I could forgive the "unforgiveable" and accept people for who they were. This has led not only to peace and serenity in my life; it has also created a bridge for me to reconcile with my father—despite violence in my childhood—and to connect to my brother—with whom I had had a strained relationship for many years—and my other siblings who also suffer from the disease.

By studying the Concepts, I truly learned about the two components of this IAGSM's theme: first, the idea of asking for help, and second, the idea of accepting support when offered, preferably without resistance or an attitude. I readily admit this knowledge did not come easily for me. Of course, I recognize today this had a great deal to do with my lack of willingness. Principles underlying the Concepts such as delegation had never occurred to me, given my childhood. My history suggested that delegation led to inevitable disappointment and, occasionally, to danger.

But as I moved into group service and beyond, I began to realize the power of the statement under Concept Two: "but it was evident that, in order to get effective action, the groups must delegate." The lesson was hard earned. Working a full-time job while acting as the Chairperson of the Area Assembly, I nonetheless remained steadfast in my belief that I could "do it all." I could prepare the agenda, run technology at the Assembly, facilitate the meeting, participate on the task forces, and manage the complex personalities that tend to exist in Al-Anon service—all by myself and with less-than-regular calls to my Sponsor. Although I will give myself credit for helping to lead the Area during that time, I fell short of the ideal of "statesman" as described in Concept Nine.

My experience as a Delegate was what, ultimately, taught me the true humility of leadership. Like my



Service Sponsor before me, I remain faithful to learning the hard way to the last. During my second year as a Delegate I was asked to chair a task force. As was typical for me, I attempted to drive the process through sheer power of will and late-night effort. This time, though, fortunately, my will power and determination were not enough; I realized that I had to delegate “in order to get effective action.” The grace of my fellow task force members in accepting my surrender was one of the greatest gifts I have ever received. When I became willing to practice Concept Four and invite participation, magical results happened, and our task force presentation was a success.

Although today I’m not anywhere close to perfection in my efforts to delegate, I am much quicker to recognize my defect of self-reliance and to begin the sometimes-challenging process of finding solutions in partnership with those who share responsibility with me for the results.

Partnership, of course, is often difficult because it involves other fallible human beings affected by their own fears and defects and potentially charged with slightly different objectives. But here I have found the Traditions come to the rescue. In the context of the Traditions, the partnership becomes the “group” and for the “partnership group,” our common welfare should come first. Our first responsibility in forming a partnership is ensuring that we understand our common welfare. When we look at partnership between structures within the worldwide fellowship of Al-Anon, our common welfare must reside in our continued ability to serve our primary purpose: to offer help to the families and friends of alcoholics.

With that foundation firmly established, we can begin the process of estimating the future based on past and present experience, experimenting with different options for addressing our challenges, and evaluating the longtime effect of our choices. In this process, we can recognize and acknowledge that each member of the partnership of structures supporting structures can take action to achieve their own slightly different objectives, as long as they don’t affect the partnership, Al-Anon as a whole, or A.A., in accordance with Tradition Four.

In a partnership of structures supporting structures, we can also consider the principles behind Tradition Seven differently. For in the context of the partnership as the group, self supporting does not apply to

any individual structure. This was the realization I came to personally when I applied the Traditions to my marriage.

As someone who had been irresponsible with money herself under the influence of the family disease, and who had been in relationships with individuals who were equally irresponsible, I was fearful about combining my accounts and finances with another person. That said, I was deeply uncomfortable with the idea of imbalance. I built up so much resentment over time because, financially, my husband and I were not being equally “self-supporting” in our relationship. But when I started to think about my marriage as a group in the context of the Traditions, I realized that measuring individual earning powers and contributions and expecting individual self-support did not align with the intent of Tradition Seven. Nor did it align with the principle of unity underlying Tradition One. If our marriage was truly a group with a common purpose—which I believed it was—then it was our marriage unit itself that needed to be self-supporting. This realization allowed my husband and I to conclude that combining our finances did support our primary purpose, by simplifying our accounting and enabling us to create mutual financial goals.

Ironically this recognition of our marriage as a unit ultimately led me to conclude that one of my husband’s financial behaviors was unacceptable to me within the context of Traditions Seven and Six, as he was supporting an outside entity and impacting our finances. Through prayer and meditation with my Higher Power and conversations with my Sponsor, I ultimately gathered the courage to let my husband know that, while I was not asking him to change, I could not continue to participate in our marriage if the behavior continued. That boundary was the hardest one I have ever invoked. I did not want to end my marriage. I did not want to stop being with the man I loved. I had simply concluded that despite the genuine virtuousness of his action—supporting this outside entity could be seen positively from an outside perspective—our marriage’s unity and even its survival was dependent on adherence to these principles. So I set a deadline and prayed.

I’m relieved to tell you that although my husband did not meet my original deadline, his principled action toward the mutual goal of ending that behavior allowed us not only to stay together but to grow in our ability to communicate, in mutual respect and in trust. Today,



my husband and I do not contribute equally financially to our marriage unit; however, I no longer harbor any resentment because doing so is not necessary for us to maintain our common purpose.

As we look forward in the agenda, particularly to the Business Meeting on Saturday with its various topics, this perspective of structures supporting structures including all GSOs and the WSO as “partnership groups,” and the applicability of the Traditions within this context, may be helpful in expanding our perspectives and generating ideas for how to address our challenges.

In this time of enormous change in our environment—the influx and influence of technology upon our daily lives and relationships—change is inevitable. Stagnation is not an option. Our ability to adjust our perspectives may become paramount to our ability to continue to fulfill our primary purpose as a worldwide fellowship.

My experience suggests change requires support that can only be offered and accepted in a culture of trust. Trust in ourselves—our creative ideas, our vision, our ability to make estimates about the future. Trust in each other, such that we can ask for help and experiment together while we presume goodwill, offer constructive criticism, and encourage each other’s efforts. Ultimately, trust in our Higher Power, knowing that support will be received.

I believe that, this week, we have the opportunity to strengthen the relationships of trust between our structures that are necessary for us to overcome current challenges, and to use the opportunities that lay ahead for our individual structures and for Al-Anon as a whole. In my experience, trust offers us the freedom and confidence to be vulnerable with each other. It allows us to address our fears and to work as one, creatively exploring how we can use our combined experience, strength, hope, and other resources to continue to meet Al-Anon’s primary purpose well into the future.

All of this leads us back to the purpose of this and every IAGSM meeting: “The sharing of our collective expression of experience, strength, and hope, to seek the best way to carry Al-Anon’s message of recovery and represent an expression of the Worldwide Group Conscience, whilst maintaining unity.” The wisdom of this objective is inspiring.

So let us seek, through the grace of our Higher Powers, to lead by example—by sharing knowledge and creating tentative ideas to support each other and the worldwide fellowship of structures, from fledgling organizations to the fellow IAGSM members who are unable to attend this meeting.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this gathering and thank you for listening to my thoughts and ideas with love and patience.



## GENERAL SESSIONS

### Incorporating Spiritual Principles into Business and Policy Discussions

Miriam MacG., UK & Eire

“Each member of the fellowship is a significant part of a great circle of hope. While respecting each other’s individuality, our common welfare must come first. Our recovery depends on our mutual need and an atmosphere of trust.” (Declaration of Unity, WSC 1984; UK & Eire 1998.)

This declaration reminds us of what Al-Anon is. We are a fellowship that, in gratitude for the recovery each of us has been gifted with, and for the hope we have been given, reaches out to those who are still suffering, isolated, and in pain because of alcoholism in a family member or friend.

While Al-Anon has now reached over 130 countries, the simplicity of the message and the spiritual principles remain at the heart of both the fellowship and the organization.

In 1951 after the A.A. General Service Conference, Lois W. invited the wives of Delegates to Stepping Stones for lunch. For some time, Lois had been considering opening an Al-Anon service office to unify and serve the fledgling fellowship. After the meeting, which we recognize as a group conscience, the Clearing House was opened in Stepping Stones. Sometime after, it moved to the West 24<sup>th</sup> Street Clubhouse. At these two locations, the foundation of an organization to serve the fellowship was laid.

Following this meeting in May 1951, Lois wrote to all groups in existence worldwide. She sought agreement on the purpose of Al-Anon and the establishment of a Clearing House to support the emerging fellowship. The purpose of the Clearing House would be to provide a place to register groups, provide literature to members, and to assist the fellowship in becoming more unified. It was also to be a place where those who were affected by alcoholism in a family member or friend could reach out for help.

The emerging Service Structure and organization, guided by the spiritual principles of the Legacies, adopted the primary purpose of serving the fellowship. This ensured that the doors of Al-Anon would stay open for anyone who is affected by the family disease of

alcoholism and who reaches out for help. As a fellowship, our challenge is to pass on the wealth of wisdom and spirituality that the program offers to each member in each group.

Al-Anon’s logo is a circle surrounded by a triangle. The three sides of the triangle symbolize our recovery through the Steps, unity through the Traditions, and service through the Concepts. The triangle needs the three sides to stand strong, unified, and balanced. Without that unity and balance, the triangle is weakened and so too is Al-Anon. While many members may be familiar with the Steps and Traditions, the Concepts have been referred to as Al-Anon’s best-kept secret. Unlike the Steps and Traditions, which were directly adapted from A.A., the Concepts were drafted by Al-Anon members.

The Concepts help us conduct the business of our worldwide fellowship using the same principles found in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. They show how Al-Anon can apply the spiritual principles to the workings of the Service Structure. When Lois introduced the Concepts, she did so conscious of the fact that, “As new service needs and problems arise in the future, and new generations of world servants see a need for improvements, the Concepts are a frame within which needed changes can be made.” (*Many Voices, One Journey* [B-31], page 160). Using the Concepts, we can, as Lois so wisely pointed out, address issues as they arise, listen to each other’s differing ideas and opinions and, with the guidance of our Higher Power, reach constructive decisions.

Concept Twelve contains the General Warranties, which are rooted in the “Al-Anon World Service Conference Charter.” They reiterate the principles of the Traditions and the Concepts and offer guidance on how to use the spiritual principles in business and policy discussions.

**Concept Twelve:** “*The spiritual foundation for Al-Anon’s world services is contained in the General Warranties of the Conference, Article 12 of the Charter.*”

Concept Twelve refers to the C5unference Charter, which recognizes the primary spiritual aim of Al-Anon Family Groups in all our activities. This foundation guides the fellowship in all its activities, both traditional and organizational. Concept Twelve helps ensure that

wealth, power, and prestige do not hinder the fellowship or dilute the program. This Concept contains the five General Warranties, which give Conference and the service arms the guidance to ensure that Al-Anon remains faithful to its primary purpose.

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

While Al-Anon is guided by its spiritual principles, practical activities must also be carried out. Prudence guides all our discussions and decisions regarding finances. We need an ample reserve to cover our needs and to allow Al-Anon to plan for the future. In our discussions, we try to achieve a balance between excessive spending and hoarding. Conscious that a Higher Power will provide for our needs, we also seek to fulfill our obligation in achieving this balance. Bill W. reminds us, “As individuals and 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.” (UK & Eire Service Manual, page 156)

**Warranty Two: That no Conference member shall be placed in unqualified authority over other members.**

Warranty Two very clearly tells us that Al-Anon does not need any one person to hold absolute authority. This links with Tradition Two, which recognizes that there is only one authority in Al-Anon—“a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience.” It is also connected to Concept One, which places ultimate responsibility and authority for Al-Anon services in the Al-Anon groups. By participating in service with humility, we offer our skills and talents to the wider fellowship, seeking neither power nor prestige: We focus only on the greater good of Al-Anon.

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

This Warranty fosters a spirit of inclusiveness in all our discussions. Participation, as described in Concept Four, is the key to harmony and respecting every person’s contribution to the deliberation. It is crucial that all facts pertinent to the issue are available and that openness and transparency permeate the conversation. Concept Five acknowledges the rights of minorities to be heard. So often in deliberations a minority opinion,

while not dominating, can significantly inform our conclusions. As individuals we may need to let go of our own personal ideas so that, with the guidance of a Higher Power, a majority decision that is for the greater good of Al-Anon can be reached. It is then important to humbly support the decisions. Prudence has taught us that it is often best to bring new policies in on a trial basis and to subsequently review their operation.

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

Like Warranty Three, this Warranty recognizes the freedom of the individual. Lois reminds us that “Al-Anon derives its strength from concentrating... principles on that one problem. It holds together by means of a loving understanding among its members. Al-Anon is united...by its members’ willingness to be obedient to the unenforceable.” (*Al-Anon Family Groups—Classic Edition* [B-5], page 165)

In following spiritual principles, there is no room for punitive or negative actions against a member. Neither is it healthy for Al-Anon to engage in a public controversy that is at variance with “the understanding, love, and peace of the program” that the Suggested Closing offers. Tradition Ten also addresses the need to avoid opinions on outside issues that may involve public controversy. If a criticism appears to be well-founded, then it is more appropriate to keep the focus on ourselves, taking our own inventories rather than responding in anger and defensiveness.

**Warranty Five: That though the Conference serves Al-Anon it will 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.**

Warranty Five encourages Al-Anon to be democratic in all its deliberations and actions. This Warranty is directly linked to other Concepts and Traditions because it recognizes that there is no government in Al-Anon and that all authority and responsibility ultimately rests with the groups (Concept One). Both as a fellowship and an organization, Al-Anon looks to the common welfare first (Tradition One), and encourages participation by all members in a fellowship of equals (Concept Four) by respecting the rights of minorities (Concept Five) and placing “principles above personalities” (Tradition Twelve).

In examining Concept Two, we come the recognition that, in a worldwide fellowship, it is not realistic to expect that every group can be consulted individually on every issue. In the spirit of trust and democracy, administrative and operational decisions are delegated to the Conference and its service arms. The spiritual element of accountability to the groups underpins all decisions.

The Conference is delegated authority and responsibility by the groups. In Concept Six, the Conference then delegates administrative authority to the Trustees. This ensures that the fellowship has shared leadership. Concept Seven clearly defines that, while the Conference has traditional rights, the Board of Trustees carries legal rights. In turn, Concept Eight suggests the Board of Trustees delegate oversight of day-to-day functions of the WSO and GSOs to their respective Executive Committees. These Executive Committees, in turn, report to their Boards of Trustees.

Al-Anon gives many who have suffered a loss of self-esteem and confidence a safe environment in which to re-establish these qualities and gain leadership skills. Concept Nine recognizes that traits such as responsibility, tolerance, judgement, wisdom, and vision are inherent in leadership. As we grow in Al-Anon, we are encouraged to develop our skills through service. No matter how enthusiastic a member may be, Concept Ten guards against double-headed management (in which two people do the same job). Concept Ten suggests that this can lead to poor communication and personality clashes. Avoiding this issue prevents the waste of scarce resources.

Al-Anon was started by a group of pioneers who, with vision and courage, gifted the fellowship with Legacies that ensure spiritual principles form the bedrock of the Al-Anon Family Groups. In all their discussions and decisions, our forerunners demonstrated to us that, by using these principles and following our Higher Powers' guidance, we can reach decisions that contribute to the greater good of our organization.

Change is something that is difficult for many of us. Al-Anon is no different. We can regret that things are no longer as they used to be or we can embrace the challenges presented. We can trust that a Higher Power will guide us in addressing these challenges or we can remain in the past and become irrelevant. "Life is all about change. It is about our willingness to be open to this change—to use the opportunities for growth and

to fall back on the Steps, Traditions and Concepts of Service to keep the program in check." (*Many Voices, One Journey* [B-31], page 385)

The decision to purchase the property here in Virginia Beach comes to mind. After a period of research and discussion in January 1994, the Relocation Committee recommended that a Board motion be drafted to purchase property for a trial period. This motion was brought to the 1994 WSC for approval. While there were many differing opinions and concerns for the fellowship, the discussion was guided by the belief that, "The decision can only be reached by allowing our Higher Power to speak through our trusted servants." Following the long probing discussion, many expressed the love, trust, and confidence they felt in the room. "Members relayed their awe at the process being followed; they would never forget what went on during the night of reflection, sharing, and decision-making... Our Higher Power influenced each one of us during the decision-making process in doing what was best for Al-Anon." (*1994 WSC Summary*)

This experience shows that when a decision is approached with honesty, commitment to the greater good, and absolute trust, our Higher Power will guide the outcome.

Let us return now to the Al-Anon logo. We see a circle within the triangle. *Paths to Recovery* (B-24), page xi, tells us, "In this simple symbol we find represented the spiritual principles that unite us in our common bond." While these spiritual principles guide each of us in our recovery, they also work in tandem with the guidance of our Higher Power and are at the heart of the discussions and decisions that secure the future of the fellowship.

"I believe in the spiritual movement of both A.A. and Al-Anon and I think the world needs it terrifically. As long as we feel we have a spiritual mission it will keep growing." (*Lois W. & the Pioneers* [AV-24])

### **Discussion:**

IAGSM Delegates shared their experience on the topic of using spiritual principles in conducting the business of Al-Anon.

"By incorporating spiritual principles into all of my business affairs, I found how important it was. In her welcome to the 1983 World Service Conference, Lois said, 'Al-Anon is a program of love, and love is the primary motive in all our activities.' (*1983 WSC Summary*,

page 2) We wonder why members don't come back and don't want to be involved in service.

"I attended my first Assembly in 1980 and what I felt and saw in that room made me never want to go back; I stayed away from service for a long time after that. I was new to service and I was not comfortable with conflict and with the negative feelings. Some time later, when I came back, I fell in love with it. I started to hear things. The whole tone was different. I thought to myself, *God wants you to be here and to presume goodwill*. We can have differences, but adhere to spiritual principles. We can have discussions with a loving attitude. Annie S. met the wife of an alcoholic at the door, and said, 'Come in dear. You are with friends now, friends who understand.' I try to keep this in mind because we are all at a business meeting and we want the best for Al-Anon.

"I am learning that what our Higher Power is doing is beginning to have a vision for what we have to do in my Structure. Being at the IAGSM and listening to such a good explanation of what the Concepts mean makes me excited to take this new information home and translate it for our members.

"A main point for me is the three sides of the triangle. What we have not been dealing with in my home group are the Concepts. We are lacking members who are active in service."

The Delegate wondered if discussing the Concepts of Service would encourage group members to participate in service.

"The Concepts are our best-kept secrets. We rarely talk about them. Every 18 months we organize a meeting where people talk about two Concepts. Now I realize we need to talk about the Warranties. I realize how much we can grow when talking about service."

### **Incorporating Spiritual Principles**

One Delegate said, "I discovered a lack of spirituality in what we were hearing. If we are trying to attract members to service, the worst things that can happen in a business group meeting are negative comments and looks that imply 'I don't like what you said.' When we were not open to others' sharings and ideas, they experienced a negative atmosphere, not spirituality. I also saw an 'insiders only' attitude in my Area and was uncomfortable going to Area Assemblies. Over time, the atmosphere in my Area has improved: Now it's fantastic. We share experiences in service with one another.

We focus on trying to extend this feeling that we must have spirituality in the business of Al-Anon; without that, it just doesn't work."

Another Delegate shared that, "When we are having negativity in a discussion, we break the meeting and come back to restart it. I ask myself, what is my motive in attending the meeting; why am I here? This helps connect me with my Higher Power and creates a spiritual meeting."

"I found how important it is to listen. Now, discussion opens up my frame of mind. I get information, input, and ideas I couldn't have come up with by myself. Listening is a spiritual principle: Everyone deserves to be heard. And I must place 'principles above personalities.' I have to listen to the message in spite of the messenger and love that person in a special way."

"Groups concentrate on the Steps and Traditions for unity, but the Concepts are a secret nobody talks about. Our pioneers worked hard to make sure we incorporated spiritual principles into our discussions. Initially, though, we didn't use any Al-Anon principles to resolve conflict. Slowly we are now using the Concepts at our Regional Service Seminars and workshops. We make sure we bring in workshops on the Concepts so our Group Representatives (GRs) have an idea of how important the Concepts are, in addition to the Steps and Traditions."

"At home, our groups rarely read the Concepts, let alone study them. Now I realize how important they are to our structure. It was helpful to see that our three Legacies are complimentary. We must have all three legs intact, or we fall over. A Representative who went to the WSC brought back the Knowledge-Based Decision Making (KBDM) process and questions. These ask us to look at spiritual principles before making decisions. We have a complicated structure and the WSO idea of using spiritual goals that pertain to how we are going to behave and presume goodwill have helped us in our meetings. Now we agree we will show up, do our best and remember our Higher Power is involved in every discussion and decision. We vote on adhering to spiritual goals. We have adopted this practice in Area Assemblies and it is slowly filtering down to the groups."

"We are looking for answers to what we are doing wrong. I am glad the session began with 'back to basics.' At every tier of our Structure, we try to sit as a group. We are a country of different cultures and languages.

We talk about how we are different and we are finding insight into the way we navigate.”

### The US & Canada Delegate shared the revised WSC goals:

“Fifteen years ago, the Board of Trustees decided personalities were overpowering principles at the WSC and creating disunity. A suggestion to ‘presume goodwill’ was introduced. From there, we moved on to cultivating a spiritual tone.”

- **Goal One:** The spiritual tone of the Conference will prevail by the demonstration of Al-Anon’s core principles in action.
- **Goal Two:** The Conference will provide guidance to Al-Anon’s Board of Trustees and the WSO on services to the fellowship and guardianship of Al-Anon’s Twelve Traditions.
- **Goal Three:** Conference members will understand the purpose of the Conference, relationships within the Structure, and be able to articulate Conference discussions and decisions.

## Global Participation through Remote Access

*Terry H., South Africa*

Through our ongoing conversations with structures across the world and within our own Structure, we know that many service boards are challenged to find members who are qualified and have the time and enthusiasm to serve. Some Structures have shown a willingness to experiment—to combine new technology with new thinking—to enable remote participation for Al-Anon members in service.

### Geographical View of Al-Anon South Africa

South Africa is a large country with three Area Service Offices—Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban. The head office is in Cape Town (and shares its space with the Cape Area office). It is located 1,397 km (868 miles) from the Johannesburg office and 1,635 km (1,062 miles) from the Durban office. Our General Service Board (GSB) meets three times a year with two face-to-face meetings. The March meeting, for a number of years, has been an electronic meeting via web conferencing (initially using Skype, but more recently using Zoom).

Our General Service Committee (GSC) currently meets every second month with the GSB and Delegates. With the members being almost 1,500 km apart, we had to find a solution to a problem of dropped web conference calls. We have a three-day annual Conference in June and then a mini-Conference for a weekend in November. Costs of flying the GSB and out-of-town members to Cape Town, as well as costs of accommodations, had been escalating; we needed to find an alternative.

### Reasons for Using Remote Access

It became increasingly difficult to use Skype for our GSC/GSB meetings, as the versions were constantly upgrading and everyone found that they had to reload when they could not connect. Sometimes it would take us hours to get a meeting started. We were constantly having someone drop in or out or lose connectivity, and it was frustrating. Members would connect from their homes and the connections became problematic. Skype addresses changed or people were logging in from different addresses, so it became complicated.

We researched alternative methods. Zoom was chosen. We have found it easy to start and join a meeting and we can have multiple participants join a meeting. It offers an option to record meetings to the cloud and also has an option to mute parties when required. It is available on computer, laptop, tablet, or cellphone, making it unnecessary for all to have a computer.

### Zoom: How It Works

The “driver,” who will open the meeting, first sends out an email or WhatsApp meeting ID to all participants. They join the meeting using this ID number. This ensures privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. We experienced a few technical problems that needed ironing out initially with respect to bandwidth—participants must have enough data and bandwidth, and a good WiFi speed, or they drop out of the meeting. Each person has to know how to set up their computer or phone camera and sound so that they can be seen and heard. It is good to have a technical person on standby to get everyone connected visually and audibly initially and to help with driving the process. Members may join using video or not. The ability to mute participants, unmute them to speak, and mute the entire meeting and split participants off into separate “rooms” makes it very suitable for breakaway discussions. Sound has

been good and can be enhanced with conference-style microphones so that all members around the table can be heard. There are many types available.

We found that we prefer to have groups of members at the (three) different Areas instead of many individual members; this allows “in-house” discussion between the Area members to take place, and ensures that a collective voice is brought to the meeting instead of many individual voices, which can be lengthy and disruptive. The Zoom Pro account allows for up to 90 different participants.

We discovered the necessity of having a room webcam set up on both sides of larger group meetings and focused on the participants’ table. This allows all participants to get the benefit of expression and body language, which are fundamental to good communication and relations. Otherwise, the “driver” of the meeting can see the participants on screen, but the rest of the meeting cannot. For smaller meetings, the members’ faces are visible on the screens but can be obscured by not using the video if desired.

The meeting etiquette needed to be resolved and agreed upon. A meeting “driver” needed to be designated as well. The “driver” should not be the meeting Chairperson, ideally, but should be seated next to the Chairperson in order to communicate when someone wants to speak or give other input. We use the “hand-raised” Zoom feature when someone wants to respond or ask questions. Each meeting venue needs a Chairperson through whom requests are made so that everyone doesn’t speak at once or at inappropriate times.

The meeting can also be recorded in audio and video for accurate minute-taking later. Although minutes can be typed during the meeting on the same computer, this can be complicated; the notetaker may lose sight of the participants or the document being discussed. Voting during our electronic Conference has been conducted using WhatsApp. Using this tool, “anonymous” voting is possible and can be facilitated by a non-voting member in Cape Town (for example, the person driving the meeting technology).

### Zoom: Positives

The Zoom.us app is free for everyone to download for shorter meetings of up to 40 minutes and at a small cost per month for longer meetings. We have used the free version for short meetings but when having a longer meeting (a whole day at times) we upgraded to Pro

and paid for the month. We unsubscribe each time between big meetings as it is not necessary to pay when not using it.

- **Cost-Saving:** Technology is a fraction of the cost of flights and hotels for the out-of-town members for conferences. We are able to have video-conference meetings and see all participants. It offers an option to communicate audibly with members if the visual communication drops.
- **Time-Saving:** It is simple for the members to drive to the local office hosting the meeting. This does not have to be an AI-Anon office: For example, we have previously used the premises of corporate contacts.
- **Collaborative:** Zoom has a screen-sharing feature and a host of collaborative features. We are able to share documents, which enables all to participate in thought force teams. It is possible to use this document-sharing tool for workshops, education, polls, and webinars.

### Zoom: Negatives

With time and practice we have been able to eliminate most of the negatives. Users have to be fairly “tech savvy.” It is necessary to have someone who can “drive” the meeting and isn’t required to participate, as it can be difficult to “drive” and participate at the same time. We used it for our electronic Conference this year for the first time. Our General Service Board flew into Cape Town for the face-to-face meeting. Delegates and Alternates attended in their own Area and this allowed invitations to be extended to selected service members in the Area to attend Conference with no voice and no vote. Costs are minimized and equalized for voting members only. However, this has proven to be an excellent training for Alternate Delegates and service members who may become Delegates in the future. We still have a face-to-face annual Conference in June every second year to ensure that we maintain relationships and fellowship and have the opportunity to meet our newer service members.

- **Dropped calls or loss of sound:** This issue is mostly dependent on quality of the WiFi in the meeting venues. Frustration is common among members if/when the sound gives high pitched feedback.

- **Cell phone interference:** This could interrupt the call and upset the frequency. The quality of the call depends on the stability of the WiFi connection. As yet, fiber is not broadly available in South Africa.

## Other Examples of Use of Technology to Enable Remote Participation

### WhatsApp Groups

WhatsApp is a secure, end-to-end-encrypted instant messaging service used extensively within all levels of Al-Anon service, as the vast majority of people have a mobile phone.

**General Groups:** Most meeting groups have their own WhatsApp groups for conversations about Al-Anon recovery as well as Al-Anon business-related matters. A challenge is to get members to refrain from using literature quotes. The groups are used by the Area Service Committees for service-related matters.

**General Service Conference Groups:** WhatsApp groups are used by the GSC as well as the GSB to discuss service matters. One disadvantage is that it is difficult to sign off on documents, resolutions, motions, nominations, etc., when we use these tools. To circumvent this issue, we make a plan and post or scan documents that need to be signed, and use couriers to transport physical documents.

**Into Africa Group:** We have a Uganda group that is managed by one of five administrators (one from the US and four dedicated Cape Town service members as the local administrative team). It has members from Kenya, Tanzania, Namibia and various Areas in South Africa. They discuss general Al-Anon recovery, not necessarily holding meetings. Occasionally they share personal stories and, from time to time, they recommend specific pieces of Conference Approved Literature. The groups in English-speaking Sub-Saharan African countries are given the option to order literature from our GSO in Cape Town, with permission from the WSO; sadly, we are the only structure in the continent. Practically, we have experience arranging for delivery of literature parcels, as the post or courier systems are unreliable or costly. We use local travelers visiting those countries. Conventions have been held in Botswana, Dar Es Salaam, and Kenya, and there is an upcoming convention in Uganda. Members from the Cape who plan on attending these conventions will take literature to them.

## WhatsApp Pros and Cons

### Pros

- Instant communication
- No cost, as most have access to WiFi
- Creates inclusivity and allows members to have their say
- Huge cost saving as it can replace Lone Member letters
- Allows sender to see who has read their message

### Cons

- If boundaries are not set, some members could overstep with inappropriate sharing (e.g., memes, jokes, or birthday messages; these are not allowed on the business group)
- If not muted, could become intrusive
- If across time zones, could be an invasion of sleep
- Religious messages are common, but not in keeping with the Legacies; they are removed, if possible, and the member is contacted privately to prevent future issues
- Many older members do not have smart phones, email, or internet due to high costs of data in South Africa

## Social Media

**Local Website:** <https://www.al-anon.org.za>

We have struggled for years to find willing members to assist with our local website. It was revamped last year thanks to the commitment of a new service member's resilience.

**Facebook:** Our Johannesburg Area started a Facebook page over two years ago and it has not been entirely successful. It is a "closed" group but was quickly "hijacked" by people wanting not just a meeting, but a place they could complain about their alcoholics (mainly their spouses/partners). They were seeking advice and received such, much of it totally against our principles and Traditions. In 2017, two members at our Area Executive Committee level took charge of it and it has changed somewhat; now it is more of an Al-Anon group meeting. However, it is not exclusive to South Africa and does not maintain anonymity. It is essential to begin with the Al-Anon Declaration (which, unfortunately, is not always adhered to). Many



of our members follow the WSO's Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram accounts and may share a post on their own service or "Into Africa" groups.

**Twitter and Instagram:** These are not projects planned for South Africa at present.

### Application of Our Spiritual Principles

Ideal best practice is a method or technique that has been generally accepted as superior to any alternatives because it produces results that are superior to those achieved by other means or because it has become a standard way of doing things.

Applying our 36 spiritual principles to this topic, we find that it is mainly Concepts One through Five and Tradition One that apply. We have found that visual communication far outweighs audio communication and certainly promotes unity. Facial expression and body language are visible and very important for clear communication. Participation via remote access has enabled far more and much superior open and transparent communication and unity between the Areas and GSO.

### Discussion:

Delegates had many questions for the presenter.

- Where can a record of the meetings be found, and are the meetings archived?  
*The Secretary in our office does the record-keeping and keeps a copy on the office computer and a backup outside the office.*
- Could someone outside the organization access that information?  
*No one has access aside from the Secretary and Archives Coordinator.*
- How do you maintain accuracy and integrity of information?  
*When we get new information, we verify the source and make sure it came from the Area. That helps with consistency of information.  
The WhatsApp group needs to be very strictly monitored. There are 400 members. We don't know if they are Al-Anon members. Five administrators manage it and are longtime service people in the Area. They apply the Al-Anon website rules: A proper Webmaster is paid to maintain it. The rules and anonymity were explained to them and they are keeping to their contract.*

- Does your Board of Trustees meet virtually? Does it meet face-to-face sometimes?

*After considering the rising costs of getting Board members to Cape Town for four meetings every year, we agreed to begin meeting virtually once every two years. We also cut down from four meetings per year to three. At first, we met virtually using Skype but made sure we still had at least one face-to-face meeting a year. For the Board meeting held during our first electronic Conference, we had people participating from Johannesburg; Cape Town; Sydney, Australia and London, England. Now, we make sure Delegates are all in one office. For motions, someone in the office has ballots and relays the count to Cape Town. Electronic meetings don't replace face-to-face meetings, though, so every two years the Delegates travel to Cape Town, where they spend time together, discussing business and sharing fellowship.*

- Who is chosen as "driver" if they are not participating?  
*There are usually five or six people attending from the Cape Town side who don't have roles that require full participation. I have been delegated that role because my service role is limited to literature and also because I work in IT and business.*

Others shared the following thoughts and experience:

"We tried Skype without a lot of success. We found we need to have good equipment, like small microphones, and training. We have started the process for a Facebook page. We are following the WSO lead and are interested in other structures' experiences."

"We need to be willing to be there remotely for a Board meeting. I got to a hotel and logged on through remote access and attended that way. For members with illness, it worked well. When leading committees, they were invited through a particular platform remotely. The platform gave them participation through their particular skill level. This gave me a physical example that Al-Anon is truly a vital fellowship. When I applied spiritual principles, I got through the fears I had. I just have to be willing to try. As we are able to do our work through online platforms, we can enhance what we are doing as a fellowship."

"We are a small country and our service meetings are complicated for travel. I survived one year in another country where language was a barrier and a culture

that does not hug. I need hugs when I go to an Al-Anon meeting. A virtual meeting has not got touch. I realize this is the future for all human contact for all cultures. Young people live in a virtual world.”

## Using the Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual (P-24/27)

John McL., International Coordination Committee  
Co-Chairperson

This topic was suggested in the evaluations completed at the 2016 IAGSM. As our ICC planned the agenda for this meeting, we agreed it would be worthwhile to have a presentation on how structures adapt and modify portions of the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual (Service Manual)* to meet their needs, and why this is beneficial. We found, however, that there were few structures that were prepared to make a presentation on this topic. Therefore, we will use this opportunity to have an open discussion on the questions of how and why structures have chosen to adapt the *Service Manual* and how they were able to accomplish this. We will also discuss how the *Service Manual* is (or is not) used by trusted servants and different levels of service.

We know that some structures would like to adapt portions of the *Service Manual* to reflect local practices and policies.

- What are some of the challenges of doing this?
- What is the experience of structures who have successfully completed this? For example, what portions were modified? How was the translation handled, if necessary?

Our literature has many examples of members using the *Service Manual*. This would suggest that it is widely known and used in our groups. Yet, our own experience at the WSO suggests that this is not so. In many groups, there are few members who are familiar enough with the *Service Manual* to suggest its use in solving problems, addressing conflicts, and answering questions about policy or how Al-Anon works.

What is the experience in your structure? Are members familiar with the *Service Manual*? Are they comfortable using it?

Are members in service roles encouraged to use it and provided any guidance on what can be found in it?

Is use of the *Service Manual* open for members to

see at your service conferences and in your newsletters/communication to your members? Why or why not?

What are the challenges to adapting portions of the *Service Manual* to reflect local practices and policies?

A number of Delegates reported that it is a challenge to get members in groups to use it. Others shared their experiences with the following challenges.

### Translation

One Delegate shared that Spain does not have Districts, so when Spanish members began reading the *Service Manual*, too many questions were raised. “In 1988 we attempted to draw up a *Service Manual*. We had so many drafts that it was shelved for a while. In 2000 we had a proposal to start talking about a national *Service Manual*. One person volunteered to draw it up based on the WSC’s version. It progressed in various stages but eventually the job was too much for one person, so we formed a committee. In 2002 it was published and approved by our Conference. An updated version is published every four years.” Every year there are suggestions from the Conference Delegates and Board for modifications or changes to portions that are unclear. This happens with every edition.

### Constant Changes/Differences between the WSC Service Manual and Their Structure’s Manual

“In New Zealand, the Literature Committee’s primary purpose is to update our *Service Manual*. It is online, in digital format, because that makes the book searchable. The constant reviews and changes required are challenging. Reviewing changes and new text is always a major part of the Conference and we did a complete rewrite two years ago. We have nine Areas now and it is challenging getting service members to use it. Quite a few amendments have been added on a ‘piecemeal’ basis, and often older portions are contradicted by new additions.

The Delegate from Mexico shared that it can be a challenge when members don’t know the difference between the WSC *Service Manual* and our national *Service Manual*, so they have to learn to use it to know the difference between them. “Our experience is that members want to find all the answers in the *Service Manual* and don’t accept new ideas. Any suggestions?”

“Members are now purchasing our *Service Manual* and, when a vote is done by a show of hands, they

raise their *Service Manuals* to show their preference. We encourage members to use it in Conference and Assemblies and do workshops on it to help members learn how to use it.”

The Delegate also reported that in Mexico, they have not done modifications to the WSO part, just added their Structure to it so legally they can be a constituted association. For example, sections on how the Assembly is formed, Structures of GSO and Assembly, procedures of each, general information of the Assembly and map of the Regions.

“In the 1990s a *Service Manual* drawn up by one Region in France led to dominance. Small cliques of people were in service on an annual basis. There was no flexibility and our meetings became very rigid. Over time, members began reading what the Traditions imply and asked to revert to the Tradition-based French version of the *Service Manual* and the Conference agreed. Some Regions are still not participating. Our Trustees are working lovingly and patiently to bring them on board.”

The Delegate from Poland reported there was much discussion about this at their last service meeting of their Structure. A task force was established for modification of the *Service Manual*. They are preparing translation and a new version for their Structure. It will be posted on the website.

- Another Delegate reported they are using the WSC *Service Manual* now. She asked if it can be downloaded and printed/copied.
- *The Service Manual can be downloaded and can be photocopied for use in groups, Districts, and Assemblies, but it cannot be published for sale.*
- One Delegate shared a personal experience. “I did not pick up the Handbook until I began serving beyond my group. I relied on what longtime members told me. A longtime member was advising a group in an Area Assembly and I knew in my gut that what she was saying was not based on Al-Anon principles, but I didn’t have the words. That experience forced me to read the *Service Manual* and I found answers and solutions. Role modeling was key to me; when I saw people in service turning up with their *Service Manuals* and sharing the spiritual principles, I became more determined to read and understand it.

## Big Question: How Can We Empower Our Members to Use Our Legacies and Policies When Seeking Solutions to Issues?

Marsha W., *International Coordination Committee*

As we consider this question, I would like to share some words from the 1982 IAGSM to help us frame our thoughts during our discussion today:

“At the heart of International Coordination lies the desire to maintain unity worldwide. Al-Anon groups are meeting today in 80 countries and our literature is in 17 languages. To get all these members from so many varied backgrounds and cultures to just agree is a small miracle, but to maintain a willing spirit to stay united is incredible. And yet that is what has been given to us in Al-Anon today by those who came before us. Those of us here today are not the originators of the fellowship, but we are expected to continue what has been started and move in a forward direction to help Al-Anon grow. We sometimes joke at the WSO saying that we have guidelines for everything, but the ultimate guidelines are our Traditions, which the International Coordination Committee (ICC) uses to answer all problem letters. Disunity in a group or service office is usually caused by the lack of knowledge of the Traditions and how they came into being. The Traditions are based on real trial and error experience. Our Concepts too guide our services.” (1982 IAGSM Summary Mary Ann K., Secretary)

Thirty-six years since these words were spoken, the Al-Anon fellowship can be found in over 115 countries and is available in 43 languages. Many of us know or have come to understand that we need to use the principles found in our Legacies even more than before, as we continue our growth in the 21st century. When those of us in leadership roles use the principles found in our Legacies as guides while responding to or interacting with other members in our fellowship, we learn to communicate the Legacies themselves. They guide all our services and practices within Al-Anon Family Groups.

In speaking before the 1971 WSC, Lois spoke about the value of our Twelve Concepts of Service, which balance our Legacies. “The Concepts provide the groups with a blueprint by which they can conduct their affairs; they show how minorities can be heard, why no person should have responsibility without a corresponding

degree of authority, how all service arms can be balanced so no one arm, or person, sits in judgment over others, and why neither money nor power should be concentrated in one place.”

“As new service needs and problems arise in the future, and new generations of world servants see a need for improvements, the Concepts are a frame within which needed changes can be made. If unwise radical changes disregard the Concepts and result in bad blunders, the Concepts will be there to guide a safe return.

“Nearly two years were spent by a World Service Committee in interpreting and applying A.A.’s Concepts to Al-Anon. It is hoped that the Concepts will be useful in forming service centers in other countries, so they may be guided by the same high purposes. Thus our fellowship can spread indefinitely through the use of the three Legacies: The Twelve Steps, The Twelve Traditions, and the Twelve Concepts of Service.” (*Many Voices, One Journey* [B-31], page 160)

Marsha concluded the presentation by saying, “As we think about and discuss our Big Question today—**how can we empower our members to use our Legacies and policies when seeking solutions to issues?**—let us keep in mind the following questions:

- What do we need to do to help our trusted servants?
- How do we encourage others to voice their opinions?
- As a trusted servant, do I share openly by passing on my experience to others?
- How has my use of the Traditions and the Concepts improved my understanding of my role in my structure?”

### **Discussion:**

What do we need to do to help our trusted servants?

Many Delegates shared the importance of service sponsorship and role modeling, and having the necessary literature resources (the Al-Anon Guidelines and *Service Manual*) for the position:

- When I was a newcomer, spending time with members involved in service and listening to them talk, I did not know I was learning. I got in the car and went to Assemblies. I watched those people and how they handled controversy. I asked them how they got to be like that. They told me

by reading the literature. I realized there were resources there. I learned the answers were all at my fingertips if I would take the time to find them. I eventually developed those skills.

- Making sure those on committees have access to the guidelines for their jobs. They need to know what the job is and what the expectations are. Having information about a position helps people succeed.
- When there was controversy about something, I saw people with strong opinions who disagreed with one another being firm and polite with each other. At the end of the discussion, I saw them hugging each other. What I didn’t know was that Tradition Twelve states that we should place “principles above personalities.” One of those longtime members went all through the Service Structure and back to serving as a GR. She managed to teach me the principles. I try to be aware and live the three Legacies myself, and to keep Concept Nine and the idea of good personal leadership in the front of my mind.
- I needed to learn everything in Al-Anon. As a trusted servant starting in my role as International Delegate, I asked past Delegates lots of questions and trusted their support. I practice the Traditions and Concepts but I don’t know them well enough to use them in every situation that arises in our fellowship.
- I am not sure many have done the Steps; those who haven’t likely haven’t embraced even the first Legacy. I think those people will never have an interest in the Traditions or Concepts. I feel that people in meetings are the ones who are helping others start on the Steps and move on up. I can’t emphasize sponsorship integrity enough. I have to model this. I became interested in Al-Anon because I saw the result of what Sponsors had learned and what practicing Al-Anon’s Legacies could lead to. I saw it at every level.
- Working with the Concepts can make a job easier. We invite trusted servants to be close to a Sponsor in service and personal recovery. We encourage them to try to solve problems in their group. If they cannot, then we suggest that they go to their District or Area before going to the

GSO. They have to learn to serve. When they send questions to the office, we tell them where they can read about the topic.

- I was impressed and thought this was the most important thing I ever heard anyone say: “Give me your hand, come with me, I’ll show you.” I try to be inviting in the same way. Sharing with people and talking in the car is very important. It reminded me of another quote: “Living by example is the only way.”
- I try to make sure I set up systems and procedures so that all those serving can succeed. I share about literature that was helpful to me when I began serving. The pamphlets are amazing.
- If I do not want to be part of, no one can help me. I have to be willing to participate. I share the pluses and minuses and if I know my strong points, I can use them to help others.

### How do we encourage others to voice their opinions?

- When a discussion comes to an end, I ask new GRs and others who have not spoken to speak about the issue at Assembly. It is useful when moving up to the District Representative (DR) and Area levels.
- As a longtime member I have learned not to dismiss what I hear. I try to be careful “my eyebrows do not go up.” People who are new to service are practicing learning, talking, and voicing opinions at the group level. I would never have learned anything in Al-Anon if I had not been allowed to do those things.
- I could not get literature about how to apply recovery in the fellowship in my home group, so I asked the literature person why. We had a conversation about voicing an opinion at next business meeting. After the meeting, I asked her how she thought it went and she said she was ordering it now.
- My first Sponsor suggested a number of things that would be very good for me. One was that I not share at meetings until I finished my Fifth Step. I learned in Al-Anon: Does it need to be said? Now? By me?
- By actively listening, I was training myself to have patience. If someone has something to share,

it is important to listen with compassion and understanding.

### As a trusted servant, do I share openly by passing on my experience to others?

- Over the past two years I have become more aware of what I know about Al-Anon in theory and in practice. I have learned enough so that I can pass it on. In my home group I am aware of what I volunteer to do because I serve at the national level. I do volunteer to do sharings. I have come to see that I can choose topics that will help my home group get more acquainted with the Concepts—the best-kept secret in my country. I discovered that members in my home group and other groups pick it up quickly. I can, as a personal Sponsor, pass on a lot. When someone asks me about books and readings, I am grateful I have read Al-Anon literature now and can recommend some books.
- Preaching at people is not going to work if you don’t give an example. I share openly and pass on my experience. I am careful not to be taken as an “expert” because people say, “Ask her, she’s the one who knows.” It gives people the wrong impression. It is difficult to draw the line. When do I say things and when do I keep quiet? I just tell people about my experience.
- My role was modeled by my Sponsor. We begin our Board meetings with a review of our GSO’s purpose—to encourage, assist, and serve in working with the fellowship. It reminds me to try to be patient and loving. As a member, it’s important to be spiritually guided, not emotionally driven. My role is mostly role modeling.
- I share the issues I had in service. Service can sometimes create friction. I have to move toward it and embrace it and look at my part in trying to find a solution.
- I am a teacher and my students operate by example. Participation in informational meetings needs courage more than anonymity. Sharing is safe in Al-Anon because of anonymity. Al-Anon completely changed my life. I was not very open before; it made life difficult. This was my first volunteer service. I felt satisfaction helping others in a volunteer role.

## How has my use of the Traditions and Concepts improved my understanding of my role in my structure?

- It has strengthened me as a member. As Executive Director of the GSO, people think I have all the answers. When they ask me something, I ask them, “Do you have that book? Buy it and we can look together. The answer is in that book.” We just created a planning committee and studied the strengths of every Concept. We had a meeting and made a workshop about the Concepts. We are working to raise awareness of these Concepts for the members. In my opinion, the Concepts are Al-Anon’s best-kept secret. The more I saw the spiritual principles on the walls, the more I felt their truthfulness. They are a profound anchor for me. I worked the Steps with a Sponsor then began group service. I began to see a slightly bigger picture.
- By listening and inspiring others by example.
- When I began working at the WSO two years ago, my role changed. I had many volunteer positions as a trusted servant. As a paid worker I was in a different role. You have seen us applying the principles and ideals in the work we do, but it is very much the business of Al-Anon. I was used to that with my elected service roles. Working for the Office, I have gone from a person in the role of asking questions and sharing information to someone answering questions and sharing with the fellowship. It is imperative that I have an understanding of the Concepts myself. If I cannot explain them to you, then I do not understand them well enough myself. Many times I am able to do that but when I am not, I call upon others in the WSO. We have systems in place so everyone is in a position to support trusted servants. We have access to others who can provide the information.
- I have to accept the Traditions and Concepts as a map rather than a way to “roll the dice” and get an answer. They help me understand the role I have in the Service Structure.
- Since my role has changed and now I am on the Board, I don’t take other service positions. It has increased my understanding of the Traditions

and Concepts. I try to incorporate them into answers to people’s questions.

- Studying the Traditions and Concepts without demonstrating the spiritual principles is not very helpful.

## Concepts of Service in Conducting the Business of the Al-Anon Groups in the General Service Office

*Rosa M., Mexico*

Currently, Mexico’s Structure serves 3,535 groups throughout the country. Public outreach is carried out by the Areas, who are supported by the service tools that the GSO offers them. The GSO developed a plan for strengthening the groups, Districts, and Areas based on suggestions in a survey. Materials for a number of activities were given to the Delegates. The materials have been reprinted twice because of member interest in them and enthusiasm for the plan. As part of its planning, the GSO launched “National Project—Healthy Groups.” Two Trustees visit three Areas each year, presenting on topics according to the needs of the Area. The events are open to all members who want to attend. A great amount of effort has been put into generating literature that helps serve Alateen, especially in the Alateen Sponsor certification procedure and in Alateen inclusion in public outreach. Mexico will host the 2019 Ibero-American Zonal meeting in Mexico City.

Studying the Twelve Concepts reveals how our organization has evolved and how the structures have gotten their current form, and they detail the reasoning upon which our operation is based today.

The Concepts of Service, therefore, explain why our Service Structure is how it is. These Concepts also include several principles that have become traditional in our services: the Rights of Decision, Participation, Appeal and Petition; all of them necessary for the proper functioning of our services. Without the Rights of Decision and Participation, we wouldn’t have good and efficient trusted servants. Without the Right of Appeal, we would have a dictatorship of the majority. The Right of Decision gives our leaders in service appropriate prudence and freedom. The Right of Participation gives each world servant the right to vote. The Right of Appeal protects minority opinions. The Right of Petition ensures complaints will be heard.

These principles can generally be used to obtain good results in all our national and international structures.

The Concepts define working relationships that can be friendly and at the same time efficient, working relationships that circumvent the temptation for us to concentrate on money and power.

The Concepts for World Service must first be applied in the groups, because the structure of Al-Anon starts in our groups. Once practiced in the groups, the Concepts should cover the whole structure, up to the WSO.

### **The Concepts in the General Service Office**

With the Concepts, we can find a way to grow and pass on the message on a large scale. The Concepts also give us the clarity we need at the moment of making decisions for the growth of Al-Anon. When we talk about responsibility, the application of Concept One will help us balance responsibility and authority.

#### **Concept One**

The Trustees need to know that their main task is to manage human and financial resources for the successful management of the GSO. Providing periodic, accurate, and clear reports makes it easier for the groups to assume their responsibility and contribute to sustaining their Conference and its service arms, mainly its GSO. When we assume the responsibility of good administration, we need to have professional advisors who know the legal responsibilities according to the laws of our country. The GSO works as a large company, and currently has At-Large members on the Executive Committee and advisors who aren't Trustees. In addition, we count on an external business that is in charge of the accounting for the Office, and when it is required, a firm of external advisors.

#### **Concept Two**

The groups must delegate operational authority to the service representatives of their group. These representatives are entitled to speak and act on behalf of their groups. This Concept is very important because its good application strengthens the Service Structure, whose base is the Al-Anon groups. Experience in the Office has shown us that there are times when we must be firm when using this delegated authority, even to impose discipline on the employees or make recommendations to the Manager, since he has the delegated authority for staff management.

#### **Concept Three**

This tells us the Right of Decision makes possible an effective leadership. Applying this principle allows each select committee to fulfill its purpose. In this case, we respect the committee's autonomy when reviewing the work done. Likewise, the Manager and the GSO staff act under this principle, always within the framework of their attributions, allowing their contributions to enrich the plans and projects of the GSO.

#### **Concept Four**

Participation has been established throughout our Service Structure, because if all authority were given to one group and virtually all responsibility to another group, it could seriously hinder the efficiency of our functioning and our true harmony. The vision of each Trustee contributing ideas, together with the work of the employees, has been a constant challenge to maintaining clarity of the functions that correspond to each one and to achieving harmony as mentioned in this Concept.

#### **Concept Five**

“The rights of appeal and petition protect minorities and insure that they be heard.” For the management of employees, we apply the laws and regulations in force in our country. When a disciplinary correction is necessary, a procedure is followed and guarantees that all involved have the opportunity to express themselves and be heard. In matters of the services provided to the groups, all requests, questions or queries presented to the GSO must be submitted in writing. All communications are read in the meetings of the committee. A written response and a copy of the petition, question, or query are sent to the appropriate General Service Area Committee. The meetings of the Board of Trustees and the Executive Committee extend the time necessary for all its members to freely express their opinions and ideas before voting.

#### **Concept Six**

In our GSO, the General Assembly of Associates (formed by members of the National Service Conference) is legally recognized as the highest authority of our association. It receives reports on legal issues, and reports from the Manager, the Finance Committee, the Nominating Committee, the Executive Committee, and the Board of Trustees. Additionally,

it gives its approval to the formation of the Board of Trustees, the Executive Committee, and the annual budget of expenses. However, it recognizes the primary legal responsibility of our Trustees, who are responsible for guiding and supervising the activities of our association; because of this, the General Assembly of Associates also delegates specific authority to the Board of Trustees.

### **Concept Seven**

Once the General Assembly of Associates concludes, the National Service Conference begins its work. It listens to all the feedback of the selected committees that deal with traditional matters, such as Admissions and the *Service Manual*, Alateen, Archives, Adviser of Area Newsletter Coordinators, Conference, Simultaneous National Congress, Public Outreach, Delta Editorial, Policy, the “Al-Anon Spoken Here” Project, Literature, and Regional Service Seminars. It also discusses projects to improve the services of the GSO. We have recognized that we must delegate to the Trustees the practical authority that allows them to ensure that decisions based on traditional principles of the Conference are consistent with the laws of the country. To avoid conflicts for the functioning of our fellowship, we delegate according to Concept Eight.

### **Concept Eight**

In our GSO, everyday administration and details of daily work are delegated to an Executive Committee formed by a President, the chairs of the Finance and Policy Committees, an At-Large member, a volunteer of the Board of Trustees, the Manager, a legal advisor, a Secretary (staff member), and the President of the Board Trustees, who participates with voice but without vote. This Committee meets monthly and supports and supervises the activities of the 16 staff members, who work under the supervision of the Manager.

### **Concept Nine**

Good personal leadership is needed in every service level, and we are careful to design our Service Structure with principles. Although we distribute authority and responsibility, the functioning results of our structure may not be better than the personal execution of those in service. Good leadership could exist today and disappear tomorrow. Our program is made to train good leaders at all service levels, but it is up to us to make

this a reality. Although no member is perfect, many of our fellows have shown themselves to be good leaders: men and women who are dedicated and stable, who have vision and other qualities, although they are not exempt from difficulties and have not yet taken full effect to the Twelve Concepts for World Service. In Mexico the most notable example of leadership is the confidence that the fellowship has placed in both the Conference Assembly and the Board of Trustees. We have a rigorous nomination procedure for the members of the Board of Trustees. Choosing the proper candidates is fundamental to our ability to support our Service Structure. It is a continuous activity, to be able to give our administrators and employees confidence, respect, and good reasons to do their work. It is essential to achieving good results in the operation of our GSO.

### **Concept Ten**

The guarantee of harmonious and effective functioning of our Structure is in the relationship between its different parts and people, so that no one can doubt the nature of their respective responsibilities and corresponding authority. To avoid confusion, it is important to define with clarity and precision to our administrators and employees the responsibilities and tasks that have been assigned to them and to tell them that we have confidence that they will fulfill the assigned task. To achieve this, job descriptions are written for each position. At the beginning of each committee meeting, the committee’s purpose is read aloud to ensure its members’ efforts do not overlap with the job of another committee. Frequent reporting helps us to identify a need to improve the accuracy of the functions of each member of the GSO.

### **Concept Eleven**

Our GSO has 14 select committees. Three of them serve specific needs of our Service Structure, such as the Special Committee “Al-Anon Spoken Here” Project, the simultaneous National Congress, and the Area Newsletter Coordinators Advisory Committee. The daily activities are distributed among 16 staff members in three departments: Coordination of Committees, Coordination of Direct Services to the Groups, and Coordination of Operations. We recognize the need to have competent employees who are satisfied with their positions, so our workers are trained with a



motivational course to maintain a good job environment. We care about treating our employees with fairness and consideration, paying them competitive salaries, similar to those offered outside of Al-Anon, and granting more benefits than those that are established by the law. This year we are preparing training courses on civil protection and spelling and writing (approved by the Ministry of Labor). We are also taking informal Microsoft Office training, supported by tutorials published on YouTube.

### Concept Twelve

All Warranties suggest prudence in personal relationships, in matters of money, and in our contacts with the world. Prudence creates an environment of harmony, effectiveness, and consistent spiritual progress. It protects us against unnecessary errors and the natural human temptations of wealth, prestige, and power. After facing an economic crisis, the Office has been recovering. We currently have a solid financial position that allows us to have a reserve fund and to continue to meet the needs of our fellowship in an appropriate way. The rotation of service helps us maintain the sense of equality between the members of the Board of Trustees, preventing any member of the Conference from assuming a role of absolute authority. The necessary time is given so that the decisions are widely discussed before a final vote, achieving unanimity on more than 90 percent of the agreements. The Conference, the Board of Trustees, and the Policy Committee avoid punitive actions or those that may generate public controversy and we constantly remember the principles contained in our Twelve Traditions, seeking to work at all times in a democratic manner. The leaders in Al-Anon must practice the Concepts in order to effectively serve the Al-Anon fellowship.

### Discussion:

#### Personal Experience, Strength, and Hope

In my Structure, the Concepts are not Al-Anon's best-kept secret anymore. They are coming of age—coming to the grass roots of the program. Newcomers are hearing about them. Because of our literature, especially *Reaching for Personal Freedom* (P-92), the Concepts have begun to permeate our lives. In my experience, once I studied the Concepts and started using them in my personal life, they came alive for me; they weren't just words on paper anymore. I could use

the principles in my day-to-day life and in our service structure. I am part of a group that meets once a month for newcomers to study the Steps and Traditions. I think younger members will be exposed to the Concepts at a much younger age than I was.

### Process for Electing the Board of Trustees

- One Delegate shared, “In my country, the Structure must legally exist and for it to legally exist, Al-Anon must be incorporated. If the number of Trustees falls below four, it will be dissolved. Because of service issues, it is difficult to get more than four Trustees, so we have a process for appointing them (which, unfortunately, is not the best way).”
- Several Structures shared their election process experiences. Most follow a format similar to the WSO's.
- The US & Canada Delegate explained the process for the WSC Structure. A full Board of Trustees consists of 19 members. A member can submit a résumé to be considered for Trustee at Large or Regional Trustee. There are two methods for sending a résumé to the Board Nominating Committee. The *2018 WSC Summary* (P-46), page 42, explains the selection processes.
- It is difficult to have the discipline to leave a position open. Some Delegates feel it is a “rite of passage” to go on to become a Trustee. The Board is trying to find ways to educate the fellowship on what a Trustee's responsibilities are. Special events that bring together current Trustees and potential new Trustees help to achieve this goal. One example of this is in the WSC Structure is Together Empowering Al-Anon Members (TEAM) events. A Trustee, WSO Staff member, and member of the Executive Committee are always involved in the planning of a TEAM Event. Presentations during the event explain the Trustee election process and roles and responsibilities of Trustees.

## Not Fulfilling Roles

Delegates discussed the following question: Has any Structure had a Board member who did not fulfill his or her role? If yes, how did your Board apply the Concepts of Service in addressing the issue?

- We had a member who was consistently missing deadlines. For two years, we tried guiding the member and working more closely together. We looked to the *2014 WSC Summary* for solutions. In a task force report on what to do when members are not performing well (pages 65–67), we found many ideas of what to try and worked through them. Finally one of the suggestions gave me the courage to ring the person and ask, “Would you like a graceful way out?” The response was an immediate “yes.” We discussed what it would look like to the Board and fellowship and we enacted that.
- We suggested a person take time out to attend to personal problems then come back. After we looked at how our structure had evolved, we realized that it was possible that we had too many people. It was simply the process. We recognized that we were trying to please everyone. In doing that, we were being unfair to a lot of members. Now we have four Zones that do not have the same number of groups but do have the same number of Representatives. Originally it was intended as a way of being fair and equal but it boomeranged. Now we are trying to negotiate through that and not offend anyone culturally or linguistically. We reduced the number of Trustees by one.
- One of the reasons we went to the interview process in January was to get a better feel for Trustee roles and responsibilities. When we meet someone in person, it is better than just on paper. We used to ask Trustees to give a ten-minute talk and that was our only face-to-face experience with the person. A number of years ago, we added an interview to the process. Throughout the years, we have continued to refine our methods. There is no assumption that because a person has served three years on the Board, she or he will be brought back for a second term. It does not always happen. Each Trustee has to go through the process again. There is now a new

orientation process. We have Trustee mentors for new Board members as a support system for the first year. The Chairperson is responsible for the initial phone calls. At the July orientation, when the Chairperson talks with the new Trustees, it is seen as an opportunity to ask questions and share information the Chairperson thinks they need to have. Keeping an “open door” policy has helped a lot. Periodically the Chairpersons of the Board, Executive Committee, and Executive Director attend the American Society of Association Executives to gain valuable insight into strategic planning, recruiting, and onboarding new members.

- Another Delegate shared that a Trustee who had been serving on a committee suddenly became high-powered and couldn’t accept being tied down by the Concepts. The Chairperson referred her back to the *Service Manual* and the Concepts. The person submitted a resignation saying the Board would never come up to speed the way she thought. Sadly, it didn’t work for the Board or her. She became isolated and more arrogant.
- When a member becomes a Trustee in my structure, by law, the member has to sign a letter stating resignation for personal reasons. If the member fails to fulfill responsibilities of a Trustee, the Board can put a date on the letter and the term of service is ended. At my first meeting, a Delegate was elected Trustee from my Region. That person did not often attend meetings, had no justification for not fulfilling the responsibilities, was obstructive in Board meetings, and had conflicting views. When asked to step down, she refused. She was angry and told the Area and Region that she was unfairly treated. There was so much gossip between the GRs and the groups that the Board had to come to the Area to explain. They explained that it was a confidential matter between the Board and the elected Trustee. They would not discuss the details of it.
- There was a problem when we tried to fill a vacancy for a Regional Trustee. There were some doubts about the suitability of one of the candidates. He was doing a good job, but the Board shared the doubts they had in the interest of open communication. Problems can arrive, but

Concepts help us solve them. They give us the guidance we need.

- We didn't have a process before. A candidate would send in a form, then call the Office. The candidate was asked, "Do you read the *Service Manual*?" If the answer was no, the Manager said, "You are not ready to become a Trustee." It has changed now; members know the *Service Manual*. Now, each candidate is interviewed and we elect members at the Conference.

## The Challenges of Social Media in Al-Anon

Rauni O., Finland

Thank you for the opportunity to join the IAGSM meeting and to discuss with you matters that we are dealing with in our Structure.

It's almost unbelievable how things always go as they should go. I think that our Higher Power wanted to help us with social media and here we are. We have been thinking, discussing, and struggling with social media issues for a long time.

In 2014, in our strategy, we had identified a goal of creating our own social media pages that were in line with the Al-Anon Guidelines issued by the WSO. And to that end, we were persistently on the go.

Of course, it must be acknowledged that, even if a decision has been made, there is still a question about whether social media needs to be involved in our community's activities. Why? And why not?

We have also actively followed the progress of other structures in this area.

### What Has Prevented Us from Using Social Media?

Securing and applying anonymity in social media has been our biggest challenge. In Finland we are very cautious about this issue and there's also a lot of misunderstanding. Additionally, the lack of information on available technology adds to uncertainty. Perhaps that's why the safest thing has been to look at the matter a bit more deeply and wait a little longer.

Ignorance about what can be done and when and the lack of technical skills are also big challenges. (Although we had [the technology company] Nokia, we still don't know everything.)

There is also the lack of an enthusiastic person with enough applicable information. I also think that

long-term engagement with, for example, practical arrangements has been lacking. We have perhaps met the challenge too much in theory, even though "well-designed is half made" according to a Finnish proverb.

The members have expected us to have precise instructions, perhaps even a ready-made platform.

All in all, the lack of a general, community-wide intent has slowed the pace of progress. One challenge is also the change of persons in service. A certain degree of continuity is needed in order to complete the projects that require a lot of work. When discussing with some of the members of the community, we were also thinking of setting up a separate, even wholly external, working group for the development of social media in our Structure.

Our member publication began to appear in electronic form a few years ago. It was also initially taken with caution. Some of us were afraid that the electronic magazine would override the paper. However, this hasn't happened. Now, by subscribing to the magazine, members also have access to an electronic journal. However, there are only about 20 subscribers for the electronic version; I think this is due to our reluctance for new things. It's also necessary to take into account the aging of the membership and its possible effects.

The subscription volume for the magazine has increased this year. At present, the situation has changed slightly in Finland and we have made progress in many steps. We now have *Social Media Guidelines for Areas and General Service Offices* available and it has already been partly translated into Finnish for our own use. Right now we are thinking about what social media should look like and what shouldn't be there. How is it managed and who is responsible for the content of the pages?

### Information

Providing information is one of our most important tasks. Social media is well suited for this. I would imagine that we would best reach the young people we are currently lacking in our membership by using this tool.

We were delighted to meet with a WSO Trustee and Staff members in Finland in August. It was rewarding to discuss and exchange experiences. During the conversation, the member sitting next to me asked, "Isn't Facebook already so last season?"

So, that's how it might be. At least for Facebook, users in Finland are representing the older population. Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp—these are closer to the life of young people. The forms of communication are changing so fast that it's challenging to keep up with them. But we should be able to bring information to those close to alcoholics who are still suffering and reach as many people as possible in need of assistance.

We discussed social media at the European Zonal Meeting in Essen, Germany last year. We got a lot of practical experience and knowledge from England and Ireland. These experiences are in the forefront of our minds now, as we launch Facebook pages.

We also considered what social media can do in general, taking into account our spiritual principles and what should be put on web pages. Who will have a right to comment on them and who will control which comments are visible? Weren't those social media tools originally created for commercial purposes, to get people's profiles and to advertise goods and services?

Some groups use the WhatsApp application. For example, the Member Publication Committee and a poster artist use the app in their conversations about making the magazine. It would be interesting to know if this application is in use in other countries and what kind of experiences you have with it.

### **Social Media Strategy**

The Social Media Work Group has been established and our Information Commission has recently made a strategy on PowerPoint. The goal is to get as many people as possible to know about the existence of Al-Anon, and a Facebook page could act as a news channel for sharing information and news. The appearance and content of web pages have also been considered. The social media strategy will be presented in the fall at a meeting of Regional Representatives. The decision will be made at a service meeting in the spring.

I have also wondered if this is just a new thing to confuse us. Are we afraid of disclosure? I live in a small rural community and realize that there's a need for information. I wonder how to share information. Even though I'm in the group and appear there anonymously, in a small community anonymity can't be fully guaranteed. Fortunately, we have an active Area Assembly meeting and I could take my questions there. I got help there and now nurses specializing in substance abuse

work get a brief letter with Al-Anon brochures, explaining the necessary contacts and people. Together we did it—we resolved the problem and so I believe we will go now, on our way to social media.

### **Delegates spoke about creative ways in which people are using these tools in Alateen:**

“Some of the tools groups in Northern Virginia use to expand Alateen are text and WhatsApp, which help them connect with the parents of Alateens. The group sends out reminders of when the Alateen meeting will meet and they get parents to communicate about whether their Alateen will attend. They found that teens like to attend if there are other teens there.”

“Members use these tools to connect remote Alateens and groups. For example, Alaska connected with an Area on the East Coast. Alaska Alateens participated in the Alateen Conference happening on the East Coast. We can continue to grow by using new forms of social media.”

“My home group has a phone list they provide to people who want to call between meetings. A member of the group said if she doesn't recognize the name or phone number on her land line or cell phone, she won't answer. This gave me a different perspective, especially on newcomers. On the phone list, beside my name and phone number, I write, “Please text first.” I helped myself move more into technology and I am embracing it.”

### **Attracting Young People through Social Media**

An ICC member shared that the WSO has Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter for Alateen. A pitfall of the way we are organized is that we can't attract members directly. We don't ask how newcomers hear about Al-Anon, so there is no way of knowing if it is working other than monitoring visits to the sites. We know the demographic remains older, and we know that some Facebook groups are not registered with the WSO. Their membership is much younger, in the 35–45-year range. We get many questions about Facebook groups who are using the Al-Anon name, but are not connected to the WSO. We are looking at this to find our way through. We are encouraged, though.

Another Delegate shared that they have a Facebook page. It is a page for information and in that country people break anonymity by putting in the name of another person for comment. The Delegate asked, “How do you control anonymity?”

## **Discussion:**

An ICC member shared that the WSO Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages are monitored by Staff. Until this year, comments were not allowed on the WSO page. “We didn’t want comments because we worried about challenges to anonymity. We suggest designing your pages so that initially you are the only people who can post on them. This year, the WSO, with Board approval, decided to allow comments. We monitor before publishing them to be sure the person can’t be identified as a member. The Associate Director—Digital Strategy and his team are creating a document of suggestions to provide guidance about how to protect anonymity at the social media level.”

A Delegate whose structure does not have a Facebook page yet and is not sure they will have one anytime soon shared that, “Every time we want to make the effort, we have to start with the purpose—who do we want to reach? Teens don’t use Facebook; they use Snapchat. We also ask, ‘What do we want to use it for?’ Having a Facebook page would give us a presence. People could ‘like’ it but not comment. I like this way of informing and distributing information that raises awareness of our fellowship. It makes no sense to do it before we have a new website, though. We made our strategy first. We looked at what could we do with the resources we presently have. The conversation has evolved now to getting feedback from members in groups about how far along it is. They are beginning to take ownership. I can see Twitter. We have tech savvy people in my country. We took a look at what the country is as a society, to find out, outside of Al-Anon, what we can do—we look at our competitors.”

“I personally learned that I only use what I am comfortable with. Fear of the unknown holds me back. When I put myself out there, I break the fear. We talk about social media at the Board level. If I want to learn, I look to my grandchildren for help. I joined the Al-Anon Facebook page, which has 13,000 members. I asked them how to do it. It opens a teaching tool venue when I go personally and now it is another option. While traveling I can join a meeting. My horizon has expanded. I can communicate with others, even when I’m not near my home group. What are your tools? How do you use them? Alateen numbers in face-to-face meetings are dwindling. They want social media only. We have to get on board quickly and learn how to communicate with a younger generation. They want text. We are losing physical communication with that group. What can we do to bring them back in?”

## **Delegates shared their personal experiences:**

“I was fired by a sponsee because he only wanted to attend Al-Anon phone meetings. There is a huge cultural change taking place. How should you change for people who want to live on a keyboard? Al-Anon has to be physical when it can be. There are few meetings in my country. It is a necessity for distant communication but it is not ideal. The opportunity with social media for me is one of public outreach.”

“I am sponsoring a young woman who attends phone meetings. She was encouraged by these members to go to face-to-face meetings and found me. She has found face-to-face meetings give her the other support she was looking for. I am learning to recognize that people will come to Al-Anon through whichever ways they are able to connect. If I am willing to go to those communities myself, we are able to share our experience. There were concerns about websites in 1996. We recognized that we could become a platform where members would want to have a virtual community. We asked, ‘What would happen to meetings?’ We found that some meetings have grown larger and stronger, understanding our common purpose and why they are together. As a member, I am more comfortable supporting opportunities for different platforms to come up. We can explore and go to them and learn how to support the members that way, and also share that they can find other places for Al-Anon.”

“I attend an online meeting and it is functioning. Longtime members started it. I use it as a supplement to face-to-face meetings. When newcomers come, longtime members see it as service to encourage them. I see more virtual meetings, but we should have a conversation about what they are, what we can do to keep the balance. At conventions I hear members sharing very positively. They have book studies and other specialized meetings. They are knowledgeable about the literature—so far, it seems like that balance is being maintained. Our Higher Power has a way of using technology and finding out what we can offer.”

## **Delegates shared their concerns about confidentiality:**

“I have some concerns about sharing intimate, profound feelings on a digital medium—I don’t know how long it is going to be there. At my home group meeting, I trust that when people go out the door they will never repeat anything. There are things out there in the virtual world I am ignorant of.”

“With social media, I recognize that I am a commodity; Facebook is making money from me. In May, the European Union (EU) issued a law laying down rules for global conglomerates like Facebook regarding security and protections for users’ personal information. Now I have a right to go to Facebook and say I want to know what they have on me. I can say I don’t want that on the cloud and they have to delete it. I am not sure how they will enforce it. Until now I had no say in what stayed there and what people said. I have a responsibility to be prudent about what I post, such as images of other people.”

“The US does not have anything close to the protection of personal data that Europe has. It is prudent to assume your information is out there and will be until we run out of space on the web. This calls for personal responsibility. Be conscious. Even in face-to-face meetings, I may not want to share everything I would share with a Sponsor. I am similarly cautious about social media.”

#### **Delegates shared their thoughts on attraction:**

“We have an increasing number of young people. I never heard a newcomer tell us they found out about us from social media. They found us from A.A. or family members or friends. Young people (ages 20–30) don’t seem to be picking up on us from social media. When I was in Alateen, we teens stopped doing Facebook as soon as our parents started. It is, however, useful as a communication device between existing members.”

“We have done very well by the WSO. I think of them as a parent group worldwide. They have 49,218 ‘likes’ on the WSO Facebook page. The costs would be large for my country if we were to do this. Instead of trying to replicate or compete, our resources are going to improve our website. I don’t think we could have the same name recognition and credibility on social media that the WSO has. Their sharings on Facebook are helpful visual resources but we are using them for in-reach, not outreach.”

“We use non-personalized email addresses to preserve the anonymity of members in service. We have the Guidelines and a personal story on our website to help people get connected to the program. Because of regional languages, we are slowly coming up with local websites. Most Regional committees are functioning through website groups. If it were not for technology, I wouldn’t be at this IAGSM or have a close connection to

the WSO. For every fear there is a solution. Sometimes sharings I get through Facebook are very helpful and just what I needed to hear. We don’t have many younger people coming to our group and when they do, they don’t stick to Al-Anon.”

“Tradition Eleven reminds us that ‘we need guard with special care the anonymity of all AA members.’ There are a whole lot of issues around A.A. members. It matters to me.

I met a participant at an Area Assembly face-to-face who was a member of the Steering Committee of one of these online groups. She felt online meetings saved her life; online meetings were the only meetings she could attend. Her meetings focus on solutions. She said her group has been studying the *Service Manual*, trying to make sure they are adhering to the principles of the program. She believes Facebook groups themselves won’t be necessary as a public outreach tool once we are supporting electronic social media meetings.”

“Facebook users needed a way to find electronic meetings that protected anonymity. They found recovery in Facebook meetings. We need to take pains in making sure we have a lot of regular Al-Anon meetings that also protect anonymity. Some members are only in online meetings because they can’t find healthy face-to-face meetings. It is exciting to see the principles in action.”

## **Using Social Media in Public Outreach While Practicing the Legacies**

*Debbie G., US & Canada*

*Gail G., US & Canada*

The WSO is currently connected to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and LinkedIn as a means of public outreach. The al-anon.org website allows visitors to connect to social media platforms by clicking on the social media icons located at the bottom of the home page. While use of these social media platforms is relatively new, the discussions about breaching personal anonymity and demonstrating an appearance of affiliation or promotion within our public outreach activities have been with us since our early days.

In 2013, the WSC approved revisions to the “Public Outreach” section of the “Digest of Al-Anon and Alateen Policies” portion of the *Service Manual*. The section titled “The Philosophy and Spiritual Principles of Al-Anon’s Public Outreach,” on page 118, outlines

five spiritual principles that can assist members when questions arise in their public outreach efforts and within the use of innovative forms of communication. The revisions to the “Public Outreach” section give credence to the wisdom of the 1966 WSC Statement on Public Relations and the 1971 WSC reaffirmation (*Service Manual*, pages 117–118) of the vital importance of public outreach to the future of our fellowship.

## Background

In July 2010, the Policy Committee began a discussion about the opportunity for the WSO to use Facebook and other social networking sites such as YouTube and LinkedIn for the purpose of public outreach. The discussions included how members could use these platforms without breaking their anonymity, members’ misunderstandings about affiliation, the overall purpose of using social networking sites for public outreach, and whether linkage to these sites from the al-anon.org website presented concerns with affiliation.

The Committee’s consensus was that the use of social media has some advantages, though it raised some issues that would need to be resolved. A thought force was appointed to create a “pros and cons” list and make a recommendation to the Policy Committee about whether or not the WSO should establish a presence on one or more social networking sites.

At the October 2010 Policy Committee meeting, the Committee reviewed the initial work of the thought force. While the discussions centered on protecting members’ anonymity and avoiding the appearance of affiliation, the thought force was not ready to make a recommendation.

At the January 2011 Policy Committee meeting, it was agreed that the WSO would create a presence on one or more social networking sites. In addition to concerns about protecting members’ anonymity, there were other considerations such as logo, trademark, and the definition of a passive site. The Policy Committee agreed on the use of a passive site. This means the site is used to publish information only, but not receive feedback. It allows members to “like” or “follow” a page but does not imply membership. At the same time, a task force was formed and charged with reorganizing the Policy Digest to include the spiritual principles used in performing public outreach.

## April 2013

Acknowledging the challenges of maintaining anonymity in the multimedia environment of the internet, the WSC updated Al-Anon’s policies on anonymity and public outreach. Using the text completed by the Policy Committee, the Policy Digest of the *Service Manual* was updated to include a section titled “The Philosophy and Spiritual Principles of Al-Anon’s Public Outreach.”

Currently, the WSO is active on the following social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. All platforms are passive sites, meaning the WSO controls the content and that the sites are for viewing, sharing, and “liking.” The WSO monitors personal comments and will remove them when membership is implied or stated. The Al-Anon WSO Facebook page currently has 49,172 likes. Twitter and Instagram have 7,482 followers.

While the WSO-managed social media platforms consistently uphold our spiritual principle of anonymity, our members continue to struggle with issues of affiliation and promotion. Members’ excitement at using social media to spread the message of hope to families and friends of alcoholics has presented some challenges.

There are currently hundreds of Facebook pages that use the name Al-Anon. Most are not private or secret groups and most, possibly without member’s knowledge, demonstrate affiliation and membership, which breaks anonymity at the public level. In an effort to work with our members to broaden the way they carry the message through the use of social media, while also maintaining our Legacies, the WSO has reached out to some of the Facebook pages. After these conversations, some of the Facebook pages have become private rather than public and some groups have moved their online meeting and member information to secret pages. The communication between the WSO and these Facebook members is a demonstration of how cooperation, communication, and presuming goodwill strengthens our ability to carry the message.

## Digital Strategy

In 2016, the Board of Trustees made the decision to create a Digital Strategy Team within the WSO.

The Digital Strategy Team is responsible for managing our presence on social media platforms. These platforms are a critical component of the WSO’s public outreach strategy. By maintaining a consistent presence on social media, in search engines and through

the Al-Anon website, the WSO is generating awareness in those who have not yet heard of Al-Anon Family Groups, as well as ensuring that our spiritual principles are upheld.

The WSO social media footprint has grown over the past year, through the addition of Instagram and a presence on the Spanish and French social media scene. Members and non-members alike are very active in carrying Al-Anon's message of help and hope by sharing posts and tweets. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have over 386 million users in the US and Canada, which makes these and other social media platforms important large-scale vehicles for carrying the Al-Anon message. In 2017, over 14 million users (4.6 percent of the potential audience) were reached in 125 countries across six continents. Combined, the users spoke a total of 98 different languages.

The Digital Strategy Team participated in the 2018 International Convention in Baltimore. They prepared for the International Convention by creating several new features such as a digital lounge, video podcast, and a mobile app.

- The digital lounge served as dedicated space where members could learn about how Al-Anon is using new technology, such as the online meeting search tool and social media. They also received guidance in navigating the International Convention mobile app. This digital lounge space at the Convention was also made available for members who wanted to learn more about technology and how to apply what they learned to Al-Anon. Additionally, the lounge contained space for members of online meetings to gather and get to know each other face-to-face.
- Video podcasts were made by conducting a series of one-on-one interviews with members who shared on various topics; their anonymity was protected during the interviews. The interviews will be used on the Al-Anon website and on social media to help potential newcomers decide for themselves if Al-Anon could help them. While over 500 members of the fellowship volunteered to participate in the interviews, time allowances restricted the interviews to 35 members in three languages.
- This was the first International Convention to have a mobile app. The app listed the session

schedule and included an interactive map that made it easier to locate meeting rooms. It contained local information from the area tourism organization and documents needed for volunteers. The mobile app also provided a social media stream for attendees. The app was available only to Convention attendees; this allowed them to share without concern of breaking anonymity at the level of press, radio, film, TV, or internet. The app will remain open through the coming months. It continues to be a source of reflection from the Convention as well as outreach to fellow members.

As outlined on page 118 of the *Service Manual*, “Our public outreach is based on following spiritual principles that promote unity and clarity within the fellowship as well as awareness and hope outside the fellowship.” We need to continue offering clarity and hope to our members while seeking opportunities for continued growth by talking with each other and reasoning this out. Only in this way can we ensure that our Legacies are not lost in the quest to move forward.

### Discussion:

- Who are the members of the Digital Strategy Team and how much is the Board involved in the work of this Team?

*WSO: The Team is evolving and changing. Currently it includes the Associate Director—Digital Strategy, who participates in the Policy Committee with voice related to digital strategy. He is seated at the WSC so that he can listen to Conference discussions and have voice as it relates to digital strategy. This role in the organization is not a voting Conference member. The Webmaster's job used to be strictly technical. However, changes were recently made to add Public Outreach responsibilities. The Webmaster is a member. He looks at the content and what is needed to improve our member's experience. There is a Social Media Specialist whose primary focus is extracting quotes from our literature and posting them on our social media sites. She also helps the Team find graphics for future posts. The Programs Department and Executive Director review all postings before they are published. The Social Media Specialist also addresses comments that come in. When a question*



is difficult and requires a member's perspective, she reaches out to the Programs Department. The WSO also employs a Senior Communications Specialist, who is responsible for coordinating with the media and facilitating development of the WSO digital newsletter In the Loop.

We currently have engaged a third party "search specialist" on a trial basis with the goal of ensuring that when people search key words on Google, Al-Anon comes up on the first page of results.

- We would like to have a digital archive. Is that something you have looked at?

WSO: We have begun transferring our archives into digital format. We have decided to consult an outside entity to be sure we have the most up-to-date approach. There will be more discussions about this in the future. We have consulted with the A.A. GSO on this topic. The Executive Director spent a day with their General Service Manager and staff members responsible for archives and publications. The GSO has a scanning machine built just for them. They are scanning their archives and have three temperature-controlled warehouses to store items. They are taking preservation of their archives seriously. We are learning from them.

### **Other Comments:**

"We are working hard to update our website. We look to the WSO for inspiration and information. We asked how our spiritual principles could help us in discussing a social media platform logo. Once we have it, can we link to the WSO website and use logos? We discussed this in light of the spiritual principles of Tradition Three and affiliation, Tradition Five and our purpose, Tradition Six and diversion from our primary spiritual aim, and Tradition Twelve for solutions."

One Delegate shared that unauthorized websites in her structure were set up by some well-meaning individuals. The Delegate said, "The website is authorized in Spanish only. Some members in the structure were using the same format to create websites in different languages. This was violating copyright and not within the Traditions. The members were tactfully contacted and informed that the GSO was responsible for all national information and the members were invited to take their sites down; they did so. The members were

then invited to help the GSO develop public outreach material that is in keeping with within the Traditions. We have four official languages in our country. We put the Legacies into practice and hopefully can eliminate problems in future."

"I see people taking pictures of a page in a book and posting it on Facebook and also on Skype meetings. Then when we are reading the Steps, someone says, 'I don't have the Steps, can you send them to me?' Perhaps we could print a statement on each page of our books that the material is copyrighted and not to be posted anywhere online; this might help clarify the issue for the fellowship."

## **Alateen**

*Jenny A., Australia*

Al-Anon Family Groups Australia was happy to be invited by the ICC to contribute to the general session topics for the 2018 IAGSM. The invitation included the following:

"Rather than mimicking the frequently repeated themes, such as how to attract more Sponsors or how to get more teens to attend meetings, this is an opportunity for a new conversation to emerge. The new conversation should focus on strategies for creating a supportive culture where Alateen can thrive."

Initially I composed a letter to the GSB members, Australian Service Delegates and Area Alateen Coordinators explaining the task and asking them for feedback. At the 2018 Australian Service Conference in May there were opportunities to speak to participants, a number of whom were Alateen Sponsors.

**The first question to ask was, "What makes an Alateen meeting successful?"**

The Alateen story is more successful in Areas where there is more cooperation between Al-Anon and A.A. When Al-Anon and A.A. have good cooperation, there are more opportunities to get young people to Alateen. Alateens love camps (weekend get-togethers in tents or cabins at a country location) and rallies. Often these are the only times that Alateens attend meetings. In South Australia, camps are extremely popular with Alateens, who join other family members attending Al-Anon and A.A. In the early years of Al-Anon, meetings were often held at the same time and venue as A.A. meetings.

- **Committed parent groups:** The Al-Anon group responsible for the Alateen group (called a

“parent” group in Australia) is so important for a healthy Alateen group. Members of the Al-Anon group take responsibility for the Alateens, ensuring a positive environment. My own home group became willing to be the parent group for a new Alateen meeting. The Sponsors were members of the group, so, when needed, they were able to attend the Alateen meeting. The group also made a decision to pay the rent for the Alateen group until they were able to become self-supporting. The benefit for parents of the Alateens was that they were able to attend to their own recovery meetings at the same time.

- **Staying “Alateen Ready”:** One Area’s strategy to support Alateen was to have the room and the Sponsors available every week, so that when Alateens arrived, the meeting could go ahead. Of course, this requires a decision by the parent group to support this situation financially.
- **Keeping the meetings open:** Don’t give up too soon. Just as when an Al-Anon group opens, it may take time for numbers to increase. Al-Anon members need to be willing to attend each week for at least 3 months while making sure that public information for the group is provided in the local community and at A.A./Al-Anon meetings in the Area.  
Young people from families affected by alcoholism need attention and support. The family disease of alcoholism robs children of their self-esteem in the same way it does for Al-Anon members. Good Alateen meetings happen when teens are welcomed and given comfort. Positive attention and support encourages teens to take on a service role in the group and to feel good about themselves.
- **Sponsors** who are working their Al-Anon program help Alateens keep the focus on themselves. Young Sponsors closer to the age of the Alateens are, of course, ideal. Alateen needs to be fun, so Sponsors who are fun-loving, patient, and good listeners are popular with Alateen members. The role of the Sponsor is to make suggestions, not tell the teens what to do, while ensuring that acceptable behavior from all members is expected.

- **Links of service:** Communication between Sponsors, the Alateen Coordinator, the District, and the Area Committees needs to be kept open so that Sponsors feel supported. If a problem arises, the most positive option (having the opportunity to speak with another member) is always available to the Alateens.
- **The number** of teens attending often fluctuates but, hopefully, longer-term members will share with new members how they have used the Alateen program and tools and will help them identify with each other.
- **After school meetings** in a school room that is familiar and comfortable, anonymous, and safe, have been successful if there are more than two Alateens present at a school.

### Successful ideas to use in a meeting:

- Start on time.
- Choose a topic to focus on.
- Prepare activities, readings, etc. before the meeting starts.
- Ensure only one member shares at a time. A ‘talking stick’ is one idea. Only the Alateen holding the stick is allowed to speak. Anyone not holding the stick needs to listen.
- Provide a range of different activities (e.g., readings, Step Four inventory, writing/drawing tasks). Alateens cannot concentrate for long periods of time.
- Start and finish with a set routine (e.g., read the Opening, read the Preamble, read the Steps, and finish with the Closing and the Serenity Prayer).

The Sponsors in one group have been extremely encouraged by the open and sometimes deep sharing by the teens in the trusting, respectful environment. The following tools have been successful :

- topics that have ranged from bullying at school, anger, anxiety, and worry, to detachment
- Good Week/Bad Week/Good Week is the most popular activity to open up communication; it is often followed by readings on a topic
- a choice of games, including a slogan memory card game, celebrity heads slogan game, tossing

game with questions to answer, paper nice (where positive comments are written anonymously on each person's paper), an A to Z verbal gratitude list, and crayon drawings

- ensuring Alateens have *Chairing a Group Meeting. How to Start an Alateen Meeting in Australia* is also useful.
- Alateens making their set of 'rules' (or Code of Conduct) for their meetings
- ensuring parents and Alateens are aware of, "What you say here, what you hear here, when you leave here, let it stay here."
- Alateen members having a room quite separate from the Al-Anon or A.A. meeting room, so they feel safe in sharing
- Skype meetings, with an Alateen group meeting in a different town, have been tried. Sponsors are present with the group of Alateens. If there is only one member at another venue there is no need for Sponsors to be present. I remain hopeful for all those Alateens who need this life-changing program, fellowship, and recovery.

### The second question to ask is, "What contributes to the demise of an Alateen meeting?"

- **The cycle of years** means that members of Alateen today will no longer be members in five years' time. They leave school and they leave Alateen; new Alateen members are constantly needed to replace the ones who leave. Lack of new members when there are one or two members remaining in the group (especially if the two are siblings) means that the group may struggle. A significant age gap between members can often mean that younger members cannot fully understand what is happening.
- **When Sponsors are unwell** or on holidays, or when they resign or leave for any reason, there is instability in the group. Having three or four members who are registered as Sponsors and familiar with the Alateens is desirable.
- **Time restraints** mean that Alateen members divide their time between sports, music, and various other interests after school and on weekends.

- **Dominance of one member** prevents the other members from sharing their experiences and ideas.
- **No plan at a meeting** can mean that the discussion goes off the topic; members get distracted and lose focus.

The presenter concluded with five strategies for creating a supportive culture where Alateen can thrive:

1. Cooperation between Al-Anon and A.A.
2. Supportive "parent" (Al-Anon) group responsible for Alateen
3. Loving interchange between Sponsors and Alateens
4. Structured and planned meetings with a variety of activities
5. Commitment to sharing the Alateen message of hope and encouragement.

### Discussion:

Delegates shared the following experience and suggestions:

- Let's focus on what we *can* do. In my District, Alateen folded. We are now down to one Alateen meeting. We have Sponsors, location, just not the kids. GRs got together and contacted all the nearby high schools and middle schools and talked to school counselors, asking if they would like information. They made a package to take to schools and tried to put them in hands of counselors, not just leave them at the front desk. We *can* put information out there.
- Recently we had a tent card made. We needed to be very clear—just a bit of information—and we made it colorful. We added a "word find" that would appeal to children in our newsletter. Al-Anon and A.A. are working together to plan a convention.
- We used to have the largest number of groups in our Area. Now they are dwindling. We've tried public outreach. Our public outreach person was willing to work with us and invited us to a full-day workshop she had with school counselors. Townships are where alcoholism thrives, but meetings are only in cities. We had someone come in to talk with our Board. He suggested

setting up an app that Alateens could use. If teens can't get to a meeting, perhaps they could access one through the app. Is the WSO thinking about that?

*The WSO has been considering different ways of creating an Alateen chat app. We are still looking at options from the broadest digital perspective. We want to make the right platform decisions for that type of thing.*

- We have an Al-Anon and Alateen committee. Mexico has 486 Alateen groups. We are making changes to the Alateen guidelines. We are encouraging the groups to get certified so Al-Anon members will get certified in workshops. They don't sponsor the groups, so it is a problem. There are a few people who attend to help the Alateen groups. We do not have many volunteers. How do you cooperate with A.A. in Alateen service?  
*In Australia, people are talking about conventions, get-togethers, weekends with Al-Anon and A.A. meetings. These are the meetings and occasions Alateens are likely to attend. Al-Anon and A.A. provide a room at these events and make sure there are Sponsors there.*
- What did you do so that Alateens could have Al-Anon members as Sponsors?  
*In Australia, each state has different regulations, but they also have to abide by the national laws and the Alateen requirements. According to the law, Alateen Sponsors must be over 20 and in Al-Anon for three years. In Victoria, they cannot go from Alateen to sponsoring. They have to have time in Al-Anon first. We are fairly strict and it is one of the issues that explains why the numbers are dwindling. A Sponsor misses his/her own meetings or rotation. It is a disadvantage. Sponsors renew yearly and have a background check. It is a simple process and easy to obtain if there is no criminal record.*

The Associate Director—International shared the following background about why this topic was on the agenda: When she was at the Central American Zonal meeting in 2017, some Delegates shared about a difficulty they had. Some Al-Anon members do not support the idea of Alateen. They don't necessarily want their children to go to Alateen. I think it is important

to address those feelings. It may be hard for a parent to share that one hour he or she has to be away from the disease. It is a difficult thing. We must still provide understanding and comfort to the Al-Anon member who is not yet ready or willing to support Alateen.

One of the Delegates shared a personal experience: "In their late teens, my two sons stopped going to Alateen. Even now, after five years, I see them working their program. Perhaps they got there earlier because of Alateen. An extremely enthusiastic Alateen wanted to become a Sponsor but when I told her she needed two years in Al-Anon, she dropped out after two meetings, saying her personal life took precedence. We have Al-Anon Members Involved in Alateen Service (AMIASs) available, but there is no consistency in the number of Alateen members attending meetings. Our Alateens discovered a game they appreciate—at each meeting, they share one bad thing, one good thing, and one thing they were proud of during the current week. But we need parents who are willing to commit to bringing them. Alateen meetings are held concurrent with the Al-Anon meeting. They are no longer being held concurrent with A.A. meetings, and that could be a problem."

The UK & Eire Delegate shared that they are facing a difficult problem at the moment: "We cannot legally guarantee Alateens confidentiality in any of our Districts in Ireland. We have had to suspend Alateen in Ireland and suspend Alateen attendance at Al-Anon meetings until we can come into compliance with the law. Al-Anon cannot have young persons 18 and under in Al-Anon meetings without a parent or guardian. Now that child abuse laws have been tightened, Irish law says every adult in the room becomes legally responsible for follow-up actions if a young person declares he or she is being abused."

"The US and Canada are also bound by the laws of our states and provinces when it comes to reporting abuse. In school systems, teachers have to report it. That hasn't been a barrier in terms of meetings. If there are no Alateen meetings available, a teen can go to a meeting with a parent or guardian; we don't, however, say that that group has to take care of the child. If a child mentions abuse, we are bound by the law as well. Regarding AMIAS certification: Each state has to have its own AMIAS process in place and provide its process to the WSO. Each certification process must meet minimum requirements and be submitted annually.

The WSO sets a deadline and reviews the submissions to ensure compliance. An Area will be notified to stop using the Alateen name if requirements are not submitted or are not in compliance with the minimum requirements. WSO Staff provides support to Alateen Coordinators to help ensure that they send in the paperwork on time. We invest in special resources that aid new trusted servants.”

The ICC Chairperson shared her Area’s experience: “I went through the process to recertify. The Alateen Coordinator does the training in my Area. The Alateen Coordinator showed a 30-minute video that was put out by the state Attorney General. The educational film described different scenarios to us so that we could recognize when those scenarios presented themselves and know the type of action to take. There is a line on the AMIAS application stating that no one is above the law. We do a background check for a minimal fee to protect the Alateens. We have an Alateen Liaison so that the perspectives of our younger members are represented in the Area. The Alateen Liaison came about because it was created at the WSO level. We have one at our Area so we can work together with ideas and motivate the Alateen Liaison in service work. We are looking for solutions because our Alateen groups are dwindling. We have more AMIASs than Alateens, but Alateens are thriving in service work in my Area.”

**Alateens in the State of South Australia celebrated 60 years of Alateen worldwide by spending the day with other teens and Al-Anon members. Here are some of their thoughts about**



### **Alateen:**

- I’m surprised that Alateen is real.
- I feel nervous about starting something new.
- It makes me happy to know that, finally, I’m not alone.
- I’m excited to start something new and make new friends.
- When I started, I was scared that people wouldn’t like me and would bully me.
- I’m just happy that I can share my feelings.

### **How has Alateen helped me?**

- Getting past my fears and sores and troubles; it helps me a lot.
- It helped me get through tough times with my family.
- It helps me to learn to be myself and not care what people think about me.
- It helped me to share my feelings, get loose, and feel proud of my family. It has made me feel proud of myself and my struggles.

### **Service Sponsorship**

*Sally-ann M., New Zealand (Aotearoa)*

New Zealand is an island country in the southwestern Pacific Ocean situated some 1,500 kilometres east of Australia across the Tasman Sea. New Zealand geographically comprises two main landmasses—the North Island, and the South Island—and around 600 smaller islands. In our indigenous culture, New Zealand is identified as “Aotearoa” (the land of the long white cloud), the North Island as “Te Ika-a-Māui” (Maui’s fish) and the South Island as “Te Waipounamu” (water and greenstone) or “Te Waka a Māui” (Maui’s canoe or vessel).

New Zealand’s geographic isolation for 80 million years and its island biogeography has influenced the evolution of the country’s fauna. The endemic flightless bird, the kiwi, is a national icon. New Zealanders themselves are affectionately known as Kiwis.

Because of its remoteness, New Zealand was one of the last lands to be settled by humans. You might think that this remoteness means that the Al-Anon Family Groups took a long time to reach us too—but, luckily, in 1958 the very first meeting of AFG was held in New

Zealand. This was thanks to the wife of a local alcoholic who wrote to Lois in America, purchased some pamphlets and the first book (*Al-Anon Family Groups—Classic Edition*), and asked for help.

Today New Zealand has a relatively small population of approximately 4,700,000 people. The latest round of group registrations in 2017 led us to understand that we have a total of only 89 groups and 671 members. What we lack in numbers, however, we make up for in commitment to service.

Our literature is always a great place to begin any journey in Al-Anon Family Groups. Our *Service Manual* explains what a Service Sponsor is. On page 48 it reads: “Service Sponsorship is a special relationship where one member shares his/her service experience with another member. This type of sponsorship can be a onetime situation, such as an outgoing trusted servant supporting his/her replacement, or an ongoing relationship. Service sponsorship helps both the Service Sponsor and the sponsee acquire new skills while being an example of personal growth through service. Al-Anon Family Groups worldwide benefits when members are enthusiastic about service.”

On page 74 the *Service Manual* also explains that a Service Sponsor “...guides a member in applying the Traditions and Concepts of Service, and shares experience, strength, and hope from giving service to Al-Anon.”

In order to present you with an honest and fact-based paper on service sponsorship, I asked our Trustees and Delegates to help canvas some meetings across New Zealand. I was interested in knowing the facts about members in service and if those members had Service Sponsors. Initial results validated my personal observation that, in New Zealand, most members in service have a Service Sponsor but, unfortunately, later results demonstrated that there are some small areas where this is not the case.

At one meeting, out of 17 members present, ten were active in service, and six of those ten had a Service Sponsor. At a meeting in a different area, all seven of the members involved in service had a Service Sponsor. In another small area, there were many members active in service, yet not one member that was active in service had a Service Sponsor.

From my perspective, one of the strengths of our Structure in New Zealand is that we have had, and continue to have, many committed and fully participating

longtime members who keep coming back and continue to serve and inspire our fellowship. Those longtime members and their example are crucial for recovery to not only survive but for it to thrive. It is my experience that coming into contact with longtime members who are active in service beyond the group level and loving, knowledgeable, and strict about following our Guidelines; reading our *Service Manual* and Handbook; and living the Legacies is the very key to overcoming our defects of character and living a happy, joyous, and free life.

Without the guidance of a Service Sponsor, I would have become disillusioned with service as conflicts arose, and I would have not been able to find spiritual solutions that lead me to serenity.

Visiting and serving Areas without active service sponsorship and seeing first-hand the confusion, the broken Traditions, the Guidelines being ignored, and the blurred boundaries has highlighted the importance of a Service Sponsor.

It is clear to me from the results of the service sponsorship survey that past confusion about service roles and responsibilities has been a recurring theme in an Area with an absence of service sponsorship. Similarly, in the alcoholic home, roles in the family became distorted and boundaries of responsibility and authority were unclear.

The chapter on Concept Two in *Paths to Recovery* makes it clear that being a Service Sponsor is all about action. On page 257, it says, “A Service Sponsor is someone who has had experience in service work and can help us understand the Twelve Concepts of Service, the links of the service arms and the *Service Manual*... In service the principle of giving back that which you have been given comes to life. Many a Service Sponsor has been known to say as they make plans to attend a District or Area function ‘Get in the car and come with us to see how Al-Anon works.’”

Trust plays a big part in service sponsorship. By living our three Legacies in Al-Anon, we gradually learn how to trust ourselves again and how to start trusting others. Through work with my personal Sponsor I learned to let go of my own distorted thinking and to trust in the experience, strength, and hope offered to me by my Sponsor. The same was true when I got into active service beyond my group and got myself a Service Sponsor. I recognized that my Service Sponsor knew a great deal more about service than I did and that

he could help me grow in the role I had just agreed to take on. I knew almost nothing about the role but had the willingness to try. I made (and continue to make) many mistakes in service, but my Service Sponsor is always there to guide me back to the Legacies and the mutual trust found in the Concepts of Service.

Here are some other Kiwi members' experiences of having a Service Sponsor:

- Service sponsorship has been essential.
- Having a Service Sponsor helps me to realise I don't have to reinvent the wheel.
- My Service Sponsor helped guide and encourage me through service as Chairperson.
- When I reach out to my Service Sponsor, she gives me the clarity and guidance I need to do the next right thing.
- My Service Sponsor saw in me what I could not see in myself at the time, and was always there with loving, guiding words and a belief in me that I could do it, when I did not believe in myself.
- Having a Service Sponsor led me to a better understanding of the role I had been elected to fulfil and ensured that I was competent at the role quickly; it helped me as a trusted servant of the fellowship.
- I was not made to feel stupid if I asked a question more than once. I was encouraged to learn more than I needed, and this enabled me to fulfil the duties of my service role.
- My Service Sponsor and I sat together and went over the Guidelines before I entered into a service position, to be sure I was committed to my role and that I understood what it entailed. She would be first to pull me up if I slipped up, knowing that we had already discussed most points.
- The way my Service Sponsor corrected me was by sticking to the facts and ignoring any emotions or excuses I tried to pull. She knew me well and did it with tact and humour. Many times, we would end up laughing.
- My Service Sponsor knew the Al-Anon literature well, and my many "why do we have to do it that way" questions were answered with references to the *Service Manual* or the Guidelines, which she would often times put in my hand.

- My Service Sponsor acts like a sports coach when she shares with me her experience of service and the three Legacies. Much like a sports coach would, she helps me spot my weaknesses. We talk about how I can grow and what I need to work on to excel in my service role. Best of all, my Service Sponsor is always there, cheering me on from the sidelines.
- My Service Sponsor sees my growth and reminds me of it when I am struggling.
- My Service Sponsor easily shares her experiences with personalities in service roles and how they helped develop the strengths she needed to do the role effectively. One saying she used was "don't throw away the baby with the bath water."
- When I began working with my Service Sponsor, my recovery accelerated; I was able to grow when she shared her knowledge and experience.
- My Service Sponsor shares her vulnerability and her courage with me. I am reminded that I am not alone, that I am not unique, and that there is a spiritual solution to every service issue.
- It was the trust and respect that I had for my Service Sponsor throughout our time together that made our relationship safe and accepting.
- My Service Sponsor would check in to see if I had been regularly attending meetings and refer me to a Step I needed to do in relation to a service query I had brought up.

Our Cofounder, Lois W., first applied the term "obedience to the unenforceable" to the Traditions in 1966, when she included a chapter about them for a revision of our first book, *The Al-Anon Family Groups*. There she wrote that Al-Anon is "based on a set of principles which its members use in solving problems related to alcoholism. Al-Anon derives its strength from *concentrating those principles on that one problem*. It holds together by means of a loving understanding among its members. Al-Anon is united...by its members' willingness to be obedient to the unenforceable...Willingly they apply the Twelve Traditions to the affairs of the groups. Nobody compels them. They are learning to overcome self-will, false pride, resentment and self-pity by recognizing that principles are more important

than personalities and by accepting a program on which they know they can depend for help.” (*The Al-Anon Family Groups—Classic Edition*, pages 166-167)

A Service Sponsor guides me toward this “loving understanding” of my place in the group, the Area, and in Al-Anon as a whole. As I grow in understanding, my Service Sponsor teaches me how to apply the principles of the three Legacies to my problems and guides me to do the next right thing.

In service I learn principles that are unfamiliar to me because of the effects of alcoholism in my life. Principles like mutual trust, delegation, respect, dignity, freedom, cooperation, humility, leadership, and purpose. Having a Service Sponsor to guide me through their application and to demonstrate these principles to me through their behavior helped bring about my spiritual awakening.

Serving at the national level of AFG in New Zealand and now, internationally, has given me experience, understanding, and perspectives that make me attractive to others as a Service Sponsor. I now get the chance to support, encourage, and assist others to step up into service. Being a Service Sponsor is a gift. I learn something myself with each interaction I have with a sponsee. When I reach out to carry the message of our Guidelines, our Conference Approved Literature, and our principles, it is always a timely reminder for me, too. I am learning to apply the Concepts of Service to help me find the balance between leadership, democracy, and qualified authority. I am applying the spiritual principals of abundance and trust. I remind myself to stay teachable, and I remind myself that I don’t yet know everything there is to know. I make mistakes and work hard not to repeat them. I share my mistakes and what I’ve learned from them. These attitudes mean that I am still learning how to best be a responsible leader through my roles in service and as a Service Sponsor. Calling my own Service Sponsor, reasoning things out, and reading Conference Approved Literature always leads me to a solution based on our principles. I see this same behavior working for others that I sponsor in service.

Here are some ways in which being a Service Sponsor has benefitted some other Kiwi members:

- Being a Service Sponsor is valuable to my recovery. It gives me balance and allows me to share my experience, strength, and hope.

- When I act as a Service Sponsor, selfishly, I get a lot of personal growth in my own recovery. I also learn to enhance the leadership skills and the people skills that I have.
- I have seen the growth in members I have sponsored through service sponsorship.
- When I am a Service Sponsor to a member, I like to use Concept Nine, especially Bill W.’s essay on leadership from our *Service Manual*.
- As a Service Sponsor, I get to offer guidance, support, and fellowship to a member, and together we apply the Concepts and the *Service Manual* to any issues.
- It has been my privilege as a Service Sponsor to witness a large amount of personal growth and recovery in my sponsees. Their journey in service continues to aid their recovery.
- As a Service Sponsor I ask my sponsees if they want to continue to be emotionally driven or if they want to be spiritually guided? Together we look for spiritual solutions.
- With my sponsees in service I make doubly sure I guide them back to the Concepts and the literature for answers. I’ve seen others set themselves up as “Mrs. Al-Anon”; that was a great example for me of what not to do.
- I share my successes and joys with my service sponsees, along with my challenges and my mistakes, which are plentiful. I share the solutions I’ve found. I get to experience compassion for the old me when I am patient and loving to my sponsees in the present.
- With the help of my Service Sponsor, I got to understand the “whys” and “what-nots” of our program; those experiences in service positions and meetings with like-minded members have led me to a more serene and meaningful life.
- One of my favorite realizations in service is, “It’s not old behavior if I’m still doing it.” This awareness helped me with many defects of character, like procrastination, justification, creating alibis, and blaming. This is a tool I share often with service sponsees.
- I once heard at an IAGSM to “remain teachable.” This attitude helps me remember that I don’t



know all the answers and that I still have things to learn in Al-Anon. This humility makes me a better Service Sponsor and a better service sponsee, because my ears are open.

- Being a Service Sponsor has helped improve my relationships. I feel more connected to others.
- Through serving as a Service Sponsor, I have learned that I have a contribution to make. I am of value and my experience in service in Al-Anon is valued.

On page 264 in *Paths to Recovery*, you can find the following quote: “When matters of great importance need to be decided, it is wise to consult others as well as Al-Anon literature to get the best possible solutions on the table before a final decision is reached. Many a Service Sponsor has said that, with research and prayer, almost all of the answers are already in our literature and are more than likely found in the wisdom of our *Service Manual*—we just have to look.”

It is clear to me that service sponsorship is the very backbone of our Service Structure in New Zealand. Without the wise experience, strength, and hope shared from our Service Sponsors we would be weaker as a Structure. On my worst days, my Service Sponsor lends me his courage to get me through the next service challenge. He reminds me to seek a spiritual solution and to look for the “facts of the matter,” not to be distracted or disheartened by my feelings. His calm and consistent example in service shows me how to apply the Concepts in my daily life.

And so it goes that, in turn, I get to lend my courage (now based on my own experiences) to newer members in service. This continuous exchange of knowledge is a valuable resource in recovery. If people, time, and energy are valuable resources in recovery, having a Service Sponsor helps make the best use of these resources. Being able to tap into the wisdom of a Service Sponsor prevents a newer member from reinventing the wheel, wasting time and energy on unnecessary tasks. It provides clarity when there is confusion and reminds me that I am not alone in service. Service sponsorship helps our structures maintain their forward momentum; it helps us to keep evolving and strengthening our learning and to be the vital, forward-reaching fellowship that we envision ourselves to be.

My experience of service sponsorship is that when

I step up to service, I am standing on the shoulders of giants. I can tell you the view from here is grand. Come up and see for yourself.

Whāia te iti kahurangi ki te tūohu koe me he maunga teitei.

*Seek the treasure you value most dearly: if you bow your head, let it be to a lofty mountain.*

### **Discussion:**

The moderator posed several questions for reflection:

- Do I have a Service Sponsor? If not, do I know someone I can ask?
- Do I use my Service Sponsor?
- What service characteristics do others have that I want?
- Has my Service Sponsor ever volunteered at the same level of service at which I am currently serving?
- How do I find answers to questions I have about service?
- In what ways has having a Service Sponsor changed my life?
- What happens when I disagree with someone in service?
- Am I willing to be a Service Sponsor? Why/Why not?
- What has being a Service Sponsor taught me about myself/my recovery?
- What actions do I take when I feel confused or unsure in service?

### **In what ways has having a Service Sponsor changed my life?**

I have renewed enthusiasm to go back and share. I get weighed down with committee work and forget to ask those who served in the position before. Then I remember—“Why don’t I ask them what they did in this situation? Maybe they can direct me.” This will be a very valuable discussion for the Board, the Executive Committee, and other committees. We need to start thinking about this again.

I would not be here without a Sponsor. I talked with a longtime member from the 1980s. It was nice to hear what type of experience she had back then. Her experience meant a lot to me. My Sponsor gave me so much

help on issues, so I am helping others now as I sponsor them. Having someone to personally help you is even better.

### **Am I willing to be a Service Sponsor? Why? Why not?**

October 6 in *Courage to Change* (B-16) is a good reminder. As a new Trustee, I was asked to take on the role of IAGSM Delegate. It was scary. I could not afford to take on too much. But an answer came from my Higher Power: “I won’t protect you, I will guide you.” I found that supportive; I knew then that I didn’t have to be afraid. I never volunteered voluntarily. I have always been nurtured into it. That is what is important to me—to nurture members as Lois did. Lois was a role model who taught us to go further and not be fearful. It is our responsibility to give that same lesson to others.

### **Has my Service Sponsor ever volunteered at the same level of service at which I am currently serving?**

We talk about Service Sponsors often; I’ve repeatedly heard that everyone in service should have one. When I was first in Area-level service, I went to someone I respected enormously who had been Delegate and Area Chairperson. I asked if she would be willing to be my Service Sponsor. She said, “Let’s go talk about that.” She said that, in her experience, most issues that arise in service come back to a member’s personal recovery. She was happy to support me by sharing about specific experiences she’d had at the level where I was. It’s important to ensure that a Service Sponsor will be someone who has already served where you are.

### **In what ways has having a Service Sponsor changed my life?**

Talking about this at the IAGSM changed my life and Al-Anon experience. Where I come from this is on a par with the Concepts—a lost, well-kept secret. I have had a Service Sponsor without knowing the name for the position. She is a wonderful lady in service in several places. She was never a GR but has so much service because she is in the GSO as volunteer and has lots of experience in the Conference. She gave me a little push (encouragement) to read the *Service Manual*. I was in Al-Anon a few months when she asked me to translate the *Service Manual*, so I had to read it. It got me going. I read all the Guidelines. In those days we mostly went by

the Guidelines. She changed my life. I had just sat at recovery meetings and never done anything for Al-Anon. I was lucky to be involved in getting my Area organized. I was the first Delegate. I didn’t even know what an Area was at the time. Throughout all that service, that started because of her encouragement, she helped me. The rest of her life, she helped me. Many help me today. I phone them for information but none are formally my Service Sponsor. I have tried to encourage people myself. I say, “Take my hand and come with me.” It is so important. For a time, there was no GR in my group. The previous three GRs hadn’t given a positive image of the position—they just complained all the time about the work. I was trying to encourage a person who finally offered herself as a candidate and was chosen as GR. Her growth over time has been spectacular. She has learned to apply Traditions and readings. A Sponsor should help take the fear away and offer encouragement.

This was a wake-up call for me. I have a personal Sponsor from an English-speaking meeting that is not connected to the service structure or the Area. So all I knew was the group level. I didn’t know I was able to do anything beyond that level. When I asked, a Service Sponsor said, “I will be there.” She kept sending me invitations to a Regional meeting; one time she even sent one with a smiley face. Eventually, I went. I got into service at the Area but had no specific Service Sponsor. This gave me confidence, skills, and tools to use professionally. When I was Chairperson, I learned to listen and consider other aspects of a topic. My sponsee is now involved in service. I am learning I can do better and I work with the literature as a Service Sponsor.

In my group no one was available for service. GR was a big step for me. It went well and I got to be Area Delegate because no one else stood. I wondered, “What am I doing here? I have no qualifications.” I looked for a person with knowledge of this service position and she helped me. That gave me confidence. I was afraid to take a service position because I had no time. My experience is that God gives us the time we need; I have to trust in that now. The links of service are connected. I must maintain this chain. So I got a Service Sponsor who had done the job and now I help others learn.

Service Sponsors changed my life. I would not be here without them. I learned a lot about myself and service. I had to learn it is not dangerous to disagree. I can think differently than my Service Sponsor and discuss it and be okay. We have conversations and she suggests

a book. I sit down and calm down. I look for answers on my own first, then call my Service Sponsor.

I fell into a home group of members involved in service. They invited me to go along with them even though I didn't know what they were doing or where we were going. The longer I am in recovery, the more important the little things become to my recovery. Leadership can often be isolating and lonely because we have to make tough decisions. Sometimes it is just between me and my Higher Power. I do have a Service Sponsor who has also been my personal Sponsor for a long time. She taught me how to segment those conversations and what was going on. At the Board level, I had to get a Service Sponsor who had been there, as no one else can understand. Now my old Sponsor is just my personal Sponsor. My feelings can get me into trouble because sometimes I take things personally, but now I can go to my Service Sponsor or go to my personal Sponsor and talk about how I'm feeling. It usually comes down to Traditions One and Twelve. The essay in Concept Nine is the most profound I have ever read. The last three paragraphs on page 197 of the *Service Manual* teach me one more time to look at me. I am a much better person today because of it and have a greater understanding of how to help that person move forward because I am of service.

### **What happens when I disagree with someone in service?**

I have a Service Sponsor and I always look for someone I want to Sponsor. There are spiritual principles in all actions. I try to inspire, be an example. My Service Sponsor has changed my life. I no longer make mistakes. Feeling confident makes service easier. When I can't do something alone, I ask my Higher Power and my Sponsor. When I don't agree with someone in service, I give my point of view. If that person is right, I accept her point and invite her to talk. Being a Sponsor has taught me to search the literature and talk with people with more Al-Anon experience before I take an action.

Service sponsorship is one of Al-Anon's best-kept secrets. I learned about service sponsorship when I was at the IAGSM in Rome. I knew I wanted to experience more in the program than just the Steps. Sadly in my structure very few apply the Traditions and Concepts. They are just buried, not even a secret. This is because the *Service Manual* has been forgotten. I am learning to see the consequences when things happen. At this meeting I got to

learn about a lot of things that were happening in my structure. Now we are dealing with the consequences of spending more than 10 years in Al-Anon without focusing on the *Service Manual*. I am hopeful and positive because I see our Higher Power working in our structure and groups. I have a Service Sponsor now, and she takes me through a study of Traditions and Concepts. She is doing service in the US and Canada. In the past, members on the GSB did not come to me. Now, I bring to our GSB meetings topics from what I have learned through my Service Sponsor. They are appreciating and they are learning again. My Higher Power is showing me where to direct them for answers. I can see how my recovery has accelerated by leaps and bounds. It starts with me. I like how the Al-Anon program is flexible. Members ask for help in the groups so members can be encouraged to take on positions and told they are not alone now. I have a personal Sponsor and, with the help of my Service Sponsor, I can sponsor others. I encourage sponsees to ask for help and tell them, "You can do this and I will help you and stand beside you." I am not coming to the Service Board naked and alone because I have a Service Sponsor with experience at that level and a personal Sponsor. I get to go to international meetings and hear experience, strength, and hope that I can bring home and share. At the WSC, a Delegate from Canada invited members to come to service meetings with no voice or vote. They embraced that in my country. We are almost done updating and translating the Concepts. I am looking forward to studying and sharing them.

When the God of my understanding provided an opportunity for service, He always provided the people to help and guide me. My group decided I would be a good GR. When I agreed, DRs from many Districts guided me. When I would call them, they would say, "Look in the *Manual*." I was introduced to service sponsorship by talking to people who preceded me. Past Delegates are always there to help me. When I was Area Chairperson, I got help from the people preceding me. I always reached out to those who came before me and now I encourage others to get into service. The first time I went to an Area meeting, I walked into room of strangers and found it was full of welcoming people. Service sponsorship changed me. I learned to trust and to accept that not everyone thinks like me, and I gained self-esteem, confidence, and patience.

# BUSINESS MEETING

## 2020 IAGSM Bid Presentation

One Structure presented a bid for the 2020 IAGSM. In 1998, the UK & Eire was the site of the first IAGSM hosted outside of the US. Through a visual presentation, the Delegate from the UK & Eire GSO introduced IAGSM members to the area of London that had been proposed for the meeting on October 8–10, 2020. The proposed site is the Royal Foundation of St. Katherine, founded in 1147 in the East End of London. The retreat and conference center is located one mile from the original site and is an oasis in the heart of this bustling city. The room rate is £162 per night for full board. This rate includes the use of the conference room. The room rate of for the three nights prior and after the meeting is £80 per night for bed and breakfast. Guests only pay for meals taken.

Following the presentation, a motion was made to accept the enthusiastic bid presented by the UK & Eire to hold the 2020 IAGSM in the London area or, in the event of emergency, in the United States. It passed unanimously.

## Equalized Expense Background

Until 1990, the WSO supported 75 percent of the cost of the IAGSM and GSOs supported 25 percent. At that time, a conversation was initiated with IAGSM Delegates about changing the formula, because the WSO was having financial difficulty. IAGSM Delegates stressed that they wanted to be self-supporting. It was agreed that the percentage GSOs' pay would increase by 5 percent until the IAGSM became self-supporting. An inventory was taken at the 2012 meeting and continued at the 2014 meeting (see 2012 IAGSM *Summary*, page 26 and 2014 IAGSM *Summary*, page 32). There was discussion about the first meeting in 1980. At that time there were 14 structures. In 2014 there were 36 structures but only 16 attended. The ICC explored the reasons for the decline in attendance. They thought perhaps finances provided an explanation. The IAGSM, through the ICC, asked the Board of Trustees to temporarily suspend the increases and to look into creative solutions. The Board looked at where they could go from there and conducted an inventory. They had discussions and offered financial support/scholarships on

a trial basis. The time period for these ended in 2016 and, with this IAGSM, the WSO reinstated the agreement to increase the Equalized Expense by 5 percent. Now, the GSOs pay 90 percent of the Delegates' costs and the WSO pays 10 percent. We have never had a discussion with the Delegates about the effectiveness of the solutions we tried. Were they satisfactory? The number of structures attending continues to decline. Is it finances or the quality of the meeting? The ICC asked for input from the Delegates.

## What can we do to bring more structures into this meeting and Al-Anon globally?

### Discussion:

A Delegate reported that her structure understands the purpose and what the structure gets out of the meeting. They see the benefits, so there is no resistance, but they would have to look at the finances to know if they could send two Delegates.

Some Delegates voiced that the European Zonal Meeting (EZM) was good for sending two people, but for different reasons. It informs the Delegates and demonstrates doing service work together and both Delegates support structures by sharing their experience.

An ICC member clarified that the consistent body for sharing information is the GSO, not the Delegates, due to the short-term nature of the Delegates' tenure. The GSBs choose how Delegates are selected and this information is shared with the WSO. The GSOs receive much of the planning information. Structures may want to discuss how information is shared between the GSO, the GSB, and their Delegates.

A Delegate shared that her experience as a Delegate in Rome meant that she had heard the struggles of other structures and was able to discuss with her structure that two Delegates are better than one. "This led to a discussion of why we are going. We use the same calculation for the Equalized Expense for our own Conference so our national structure has an understanding of that. They understand how it works at the worldwide level."

Another Delegate shared that his structure was originally enthusiastic to participate. Then they had a period of withdrawal. They have now come out of that attitude and renewed contact with the IAGSM. He shared,

“In a conversation at the EZM with a WSO representative, I explained that the structure is coming out of financial problems and had not been sending a gratitude contribution to the WSO. It was suggested that because the money was sitting in a separate pot, we use it to send a Delegate to the IAGSM. We took it to the Board members and that is why I am here. Our Conference is having financial difficulties, but this had no financial impact because it comes out of a separate pot. Sending a contribution from structures not sending a Delegate is perhaps why they are not coming. This should not be about money.”

A Delegate summarized the benefits to her structure: “We had discussions of problems that are technical, such as the internet and the *Service Manual*. I go back with actual information and contact points with real answers to the real problems my structure has. I know where the answers are and what is on the WSO website in my language.”

Delegates shared their thoughts on language, interpretation, and translations:

Delegates for several structures shared that they were at the IAGSM because there was nobody else available who speaks English. They stressed that it is more important for a Trustee to attend because Trustees know what is happening at the Board level, which is critical information to have. One explained that, “Translating is not an amateur game. It is a learned skill. It is valuable that translation be available. It may encourage structures to send a Delegate.”

Language and money are two major obstacles in India. The Delegate shared that there are a lot of people doing good work who don't have the financial or linguistic ability to come. She shared, “I was offered an interpreter but I didn't want to let anyone know I don't speak English well, so I don't ask. I will try to translate into eight languages in my report.”

### **Delegates discussed finances:**

“Money is important, but, in Al-Anon, we learn how to obtain what we need. We need to have abundance in mind. If I think that I have poverty, I will have poverty. The reason my structure wants to be here is to share experience and take other's experience to our structure. We made a great economic effort to be here. We are here because of help from our manager. I would like two Trustees to be here because they would take more experience and encouragement to keep coming to this

meeting back to our country. I want to be here to share and grow. If we look for another way to make it easier for other structures to be here, they will be here. We need to help, because they need our experience and we need theirs. We believe in this meeting, in our hearts; that is why we are here.”

“Money was budgeted at our Conference for one person to attend but we needed to spend money to update the slow and outdated computer and printer for the office. About 50 members at a Service Seminar had a special collection for the GSO. When they counted the money, there was more than enough to cover the IT equipment and they made the decision to send me to the IAGSM, although some questioned the purpose and advantage of having someone come. If finances are a problem, scholarships need to be studied a bit more.

### **Delegates shared the benefits they feel the IAGSM offers:**

Another Delegate shared that, “The IAGSM not only strengthens my participation, it strengthens my structure. Many members think we only come to be tourists. Our structure was not financially fit to send a Delegate to Rome. I firmly believe in this meeting; I believe that hearing other structures' ideas is important. I take the information shared here in the group conscience and share with my structure.”

After reading the 2014 IAGSM *Summary*, a Delegate prepared a report of what they did at the IAGSM and the topics discussed in a very brief way and reported to our Board. “I pointed out that many of them were attending in spite of money and language and as a result, I have learned from them. My structure has contributed by public outreach. We have done public outreach to sex workers. We are not only giving back, we are gaining some knowledge by being part of a worldwide fellowship. We are giving and I am taking back to my country what I have learned from you.”

A Delegate shared about her recovery in money matters, especially with respect to Tradition Seven. “I was going to pay my own way even though I would have had to put myself in debt for the fellowship. I was told by members in my structure I was not to pay, because the fellowship was sending me. I thought I was doing my best to be self-supporting. I heard I had to let go. For me money is the last thing I will turn over to my Higher Power. I learned that by having the spiritual *intention* of being self-supporting, it is okay to have the

fellowship send me, because this is for the benefit of the fellowship.”

A Delegate reported, “We are saving monthly a certain amount in a special account for the IAGSM trips. Some are skeptical of the purpose behind this. There are other strong people in service who could explain it. We send Delegates so we can offer the same program and support to the families and friends of alcoholics all over the world.”

A Delegate summed up saying, “We are here to share and grow. If we look for another way to make it easier for other Structures to participate, they will be here. We need to help them because they need our experience and we need theirs. The Al-Anon program spreads to many places throughout the world.”

Due to time constraints, Delegates were asked to send their further thoughts and suggestions to the Associate Director—International, who would pass them on to the ICC.

## Al-Anon France Proposal for the 2018 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting

The following proposal was introduced by an IAGSM Delegate:

As we approach 70 years of existence, with over 9,000 international groups among the worldwide total of 24,000, it is appropriate to consider how we can evolve while respecting our legal obligations in the US. We need to initiate a discussion on how to adjust our historical organization so as to give voice and vote and the appropriate “weight” at the WSC to international groups. This would align group rights across our worldwide fellowship; fully integrate the experience, strength, and hope of the fellowship; and correct significant anomalies in the application of the Legacies.

The *Service Manual* says that the IAGSM is not a decision-making body and that it passes recommendations through the ICC. The ICC was formed as an avenue of communication; it acts as an advisory committee to the Board of Trustees. The Conference Charter relies on traditional, not legal, authority. The WSO and the Board of Trustees of AFG, Inc. both have legal rights and obligations whereas the WSC has no such legal relationships, only traditional ones. The *Service Manual* mentions that representatives from outside the structure may attend with voice but no vote. What impact does that have on the Legacies? What

international meeting numbers were included in the membership survey that was carried out in the 1990s?

The Delegate submitted a motion to clarify the inconsistency between the spiritual principles of the Legacies and the absence of voting rights at the WSC for international groups.

### Discussion of the Motion:

Regarding the “process to review and recommend solutions” in the motion, an ICC member shared that, in the WSC Structure and globally, Al-Anon has moved to a KBDM and thought/task force process and asked the Delegates if they would consider using that process to continue the discussion.

One of the US & Canada Delegates shared the following: “We use the KBDM process to reach a group conscience in the WSC Structure. The process usually consists of asking four exploratory questions to learn more information about a subject. She suggested that each IAGSM structure complete the questions and post responses on AFG Connects. From there, the responses would be shared with the ICC and the AFG, Inc. Board of Trustees. We could compile all of those and put them in one document and send it out. Then we could have a discussion about what to do. The ICC is not a decision-making body.”

“I had the opportunity and experience of attending a WSC and the yearly Service Conference in Denmark, which is the business meeting for the Danish Structure. The WSC is the business meeting for the WSC Structure (Canada and the US), which has nothing to do with Denmark. The WSC Areas send a Delegate to the WSC. I can see a ‘gap’ if a policy is discussed and international groups have no vote. I can maybe see a democratic stamp in that, but in all other business matters, no. What would be the point if the WSO sent a Delegate to our Conference in Denmark?”

“We don’t know the consequences, because the motion is not clear. We need to have more information about everything.”

“Motions at the WSC impact us worldwide. For example: The Alateen Sponsors, and behavioral and safety requirements. We all have to abide by that and adhere to the laws of our land and structure. The policy was made [by the AFG, Inc. Board of Trustees], and it affects us.” The Delegate asked for additional information about the history of the World Service Conference and international representation there.

An ICC member provided background. “Historically, Lois named the WSC as such because she wanted it to be different from A.A.’s meeting, which is named the General Service Conference. We are named the WSO because she wanted it to be different from what you call yourselves, GSOs. Her vision was that the WSC would encompass the world. So much so that, in the beginning, England thought to set itself up as part of the WSC. Looking more closely at the costs involved, though, she recognized that it would be unaffordable for Delegates coming from different parts of the world. Conversations continued. She recognized the costs, cultures, and needs of countries would be different and that each would have their own laws and regulations to comply with. The reality would not have matched her vision at that time.

“Instead, the IAGSM was created to establish a forum for structures with varying levels of experience to gather with one another. In Al-Anon, a lot of the experience we have is based on A.A. experience. This meeting is based on that as well. This is how we evolved. We never intended to leave voices out, so we formed the ICC to ensure your voices are heard. Your questions come to the Associate Director—International. The ICC reports all its work to the Board of Trustees. Here at the IAGSM, we make recommendations to the

ICC, which passes them on to Board.”

Another ICC member shared, “This contains a big idea, but it also contains a lot of emotion. It seems early in the process to me. The IAGSM can also represent the expression of the worldwide group conscience. To do that, the IAGSM Delegates need to provide insight about what the structures want, and your members need to address concerns about a perceived ‘democracy gap.’ The WSC and ICC are not the people to get to that conclusion. The KBDM questions referred to earlier ask about ‘needs and wants’—knowing about the structures’ needs and wants would provide us with the necessary information to make a thoughtful recommendation to the ICC. Also, we have been talking about a motion rather than considering many perspectives. For example, do you want this? How would it work for taking care of WSC Structure business? Those conversations would be fantastic to be part of. We can have that conversation here so we could understand and make an informed group conscience.”

The motion was withdrawn following discussion because it was clear that Delegates need to go to their structures and talk about the topic.

There was a consensus to continue this process through the structures and communicate on AFG Connects with questions for clarity.

## SPIRITUAL SPEAKER

*Sarita S., India*

This is indeed a spiritual experience for me, standing in front of you, sharing my recovery in the Al-Anon program at the 19th IAGSM in Virginia Beach, some 8,500 miles away from my home. I feel blessed and privileged to be here with you all as a Delegate from India. Thank you for giving me this opportunity. I can only tell my Higher Power, “Together We Can Make It”!

Well, like each one of you, I too have a story—a story of love, hate, betrayal, and reconciliation.

My journey in the Al-Anon program began some 13 years back, “One Day at a Time,” at the insistence of the psychiatrist treating my loved one’s alcoholism. And then over the years, my life unfolded in ways I could never fathom.

Let me begin with my early days as a child: I was born as the third child in a family of six siblings; I am

told that I was always a sickly child, overweight and slow. I assume my mother must not have been very happy, since I was the third girl child and in India, at that time, a boy child was a must to carry on the family name. The seed of not being good enough was sown in my tender mind. But my grandma often told me that I brought good luck to the family and that I was born on the most auspicious day of the year—the one dedicated to the Goddess of Wealth. (This consolation, later on, helped me many times when my alcoholic husband abused me, saying that I was unlucky for him.)

I grew up in an overprotective home. My father was a silent man; he seldom spoke. My mother was the doer; her opinion mattered and she held the reins. I later learned that my father was an adult child of an alcoholic and my mother came from a dysfunctional family (her father was a theatre artist and toured the country for days at a time, and the entire responsibility

of the family was shouldered by her mother). So I was a product of dysfunctionality and so were my siblings. My parents were not at fault. They did the best that they could do at that time, not realizing that they were carrying within them the disease of dysfunctionality.

I remember the numerous fights my mom had with grandma because both were trying to change each other. Besides this, I also remember the good times when, every Sunday, the whole family watched a movie and then dined out. I experienced a pattern of an unbalanced life and a roller coaster ride of mixed emotions.

My mom always dressed all of us very well. Even our school uniforms were better than the other students', and my grandpa often dropped me to school in his royal Mercedes. So I learned at an early age to pretend and to brush under the carpet anything that was unappealing or embarrassing.

By the time I entered college, my father's business collapsed, and the worst financial crisis hit the family. There was this constant effort by my mom to make both ends meet while my dad was a mute spectator. I experienced a sense of defeat seeing their struggle, and wanted to be their savior. I shared a better rapport with my dad than with my mom. I now understand that financial bankruptcy and spiritual bankruptcy go hand in hand.

I had overheard my parents' conversations about our pathetic financial condition and how important it was for us, the first three daughters, to complete our education and take up jobs so as to loosen the financial burden. That "financial security was of utmost importance and other things could wait" was what I experienced and believed in.

Insecurity and unworthiness gripped me tightly. To escape these feelings, I tried getting into relationships. They never blossomed, because my expectations were overrated and my secretive and doubtful nature was not liked. An unhealthy pattern of substituting love with manipulation was being drawn, although I was not aware of it at the time.

Finally, I passed engineering with flying colors, because by that time it was firmly implanted in me that I had to perform if I didn't want to perish. A few weeks later at the age of 21, I landed a government job with a salary four times more than what was expected. I am sure my Higher Power had a plan then...and once again financial insecurity was replaced with material wealth.

Life was getting better; our financial conditions were

improving with the other two siblings also working. But then after the marriage of my second sister, we lost our dad. My mom was in terrible shock, my elder sister refused to take over and, unknowingly, I was dragged into shouldering the responsibility of the family along with my fourth sister. My mom continued with her religious fanaticism, yet there was not a trace of spirituality in our lives. We believed in a punishing God—one that made life miserable.

During this time, I met my would-be husband, who was the brother of my sister's husband. I was too afraid to seek a relationship outside an unknown terrain. It takes courage to step beyond what is comfortable, predictable, and known, and I lacked that courage.

We courted for nearly seven years before tying the knot. He was a successful man—a moneyed guy—and he lived a carefree, adventurous life, which attracted me. Here was me, living a dull life with no excitement.

In these seven years, I came to know a lot of his character traits. I also learned that he drank but I decided to marry him, thinking, "I will change him; with all the love that I am going to shower upon him, he will stop drinking." (I often share with young girls at meetings that such thinking is a myth.) My "do-gooder" role often masked a martyr.

Today I realize being more genuine allows me to have real relationships, real communication, and real happiness. Today I can risk being myself: I don't have to live up to anyone's image.

I moved to Mumbai with my husband and it was a pretty exciting life after marriage. Travels, parties, film premieres, dinners, etc. But this honeymoon period was short lived.

With marriage came responsibilities. Two dysfunctional people coming together is catastrophic; no one can fulfill the other's commitment. Like my initial Sponsor said, it was a collision of two directionless comets.

I soon realized my husband's drinking was something abnormal and that he was not the same person after he'd been drinking. His character changed drastically with the drinks. And there was no way that I could stop his drinking. I tried religion, astrology, and medical science. I threatened, I pleaded, but nothing worked. The more I nagged him, the more he drank.

Then a tragedy struck. I lost my first-born son at 11 months to a fatal disease. I was shattered. My world crumbled under my feet. Today, even after 22 years,



the pain is the same, but my way of dealing with it has changed.

This was the turning point of my life—*our* life—I should say. I came back to Goa and rejoined my office. My husband followed me, and his drinking got worse. He drank the whole day, from early morning till late night. Many times, this led to verbal and sometimes physical violence. I suffered silently not knowing where to go. I felt robbed of loving companionship; I felt betrayed.

I could clearly see what alcoholism was doing to my loved one; it was stripping him of his finances, his physical health, his self respect, and many more things. But I could never see what it was doing to *me*. I had lost it all and was living the life of a recluse, isolated from my family and friends. There was shame. There was guilt, resentment, fear, and insecurity, all bundled into one. Alcoholism had spread its tentacles and, in spite of this, I went ahead to give birth to my second son. I thought this would stop my husband's drinking. If this was not insanity, then what was it? I am grateful to God for the gift of our son and I love him more dearly because I know what it is to feel rejection. Our son has seen a lot of his father's alcoholism, but with the help of the Alateen program he has sailed through and shares a healthy relationship with both of us.

When my son was in the first grade, his teacher asked me, "Is there a problem at home?" and I denied.

When we moved to a new home, the local pastor came visiting and inquired, "Is there a problem at home?" and again I denied.

Alcoholism is a disease of denial. I was not ready to accept that I was affected by my loved one's alcoholism. How could I? I had solutions for everybody's problems. I was the competent one who kept the family together from a young age. I was financially independent and capable of taking charge of my life. Although I was living in chaos, full of self doubt and depleted spiritually, emotionally, and physically, I pretended that everything was just fine.

Until my husband had to be hospitalized and was declared a chronic alcoholic in the medical case papers. That was the day I surrendered to an unknown power. Today I call Him my loving Higher Power.

After a lot of struggle and hitting rock bottom, my husband got into A.A. and I entered Al-Anon. There has been no looking back since then. Together we attended meetings and conventions and shared a mutual

give-and-take relationship as equal partners, thanks to our Twelve-Step recovery programs.

The loving support of members, the Conference Approved Literature, sponsorship, and sharings at meetings have all aided in my recovery. Slowly I began to open up and share without inhibition. I began to "surf the net" for anything related to Al-Anon. I read and reread the daily readings and began practicing the Steps.

The first three Steps prepared me for a new life through a change in my own thinking and a reliance on a Power greater than myself.

Through Steps Four, Five, Six, and Seven, I could assess my assets and liabilities. What once served as tools to cope with alcoholism were no longer needed and had to be unlearned. I could see humility entering my life. Secrets no longer thrived in my life.

Steps Eight, Nine, and Ten are liberating Steps with an emphasis on letting go of regret and guilt with love and gentleness. They allow me to be aware of when I start sliding back into faulty thinking.

With Steps Eleven and Twelve, prayer and meditation entered my life. Prayer is a way of addressing my issues to my Higher Power and meditation is the answer to my issues. Al-Anon has taught me to live life on life's terms and not on my terms. I find that sharing my experience, strength, and hope with others, as an equal, is one of Al-Anon's greatest gifts. My overall recovery began when I started practicing these principles in all my affairs.

At the same time, my journey in service began. I volunteered to get the groups in our Region registered with WSO and that was my first contact with the Office. I remember calling up the WSO through ISD calling and speaking so nervously, fearing the hefty telephone bill that I would have to pay later on. A kind voice on the other side said, "It's ok. Relax. Can you please speak more slowly?" I muttered my queries and soon our groups were registered, and every group got the starter kit from WSO. How accomplished I felt that day, no words can describe. I learned to value myself.

That was my first taste of service. I plunged into service head on because that, to me, was better than interfering in my husband's sobriety. I set the chairs at the weekly home group meeting, volunteered to chair the meeting, and with the help of other members, formed the first Al-Anon Intergroup in Goa. As in most of the countries, there were fewer members in service at that

time, and many times the positions at the Al-Anon Information Service (AIS) were filled by selection. I served as the AIS Secretary and later, when I was asked to continue, I realized I was filling vacant positions because nobody was taking them. So I stepped back and, miraculously, some member would take the service position. That, to me, was an example of the slogan “Let Go and Let God.”

The Trial National Service Committee was being formed and a member who was already in structure service spotted me and offered to be my Service Sponsor. I can never forget that day because it gave me a whole new perspective on my life. My Service Sponsor lived in a state miles away from me and we could only communicate through phone calls and email. During this time I wrote a couple of sharings that were later published in *The Forum*.

Later on, when the GSC was being formed, I was selected as the Trustee from the West Zone. I would successfully complete the two terms serving as the Public Information Chairperson and a brief period of one year as the Chairperson of the GSC in India. In 2016,

the Board of Trustees was kind enough to nominate me as the IAGSM Delegate. It was an enriching experience for me and for our Structure, since that was the year our Structure was admitted in the IAGSM for the first time.

Service helped me replace self-pity with self-esteem. Al-Anon is the only thing in my life that I’ve been dedicated to, the only thing that I’ve ever felt consistently good about. I am not doing Al-Anon a favor; Al-Anon is doing me one. It actually thrills me to remember that I’m allowed to take part.

I believe in every step of my life, my Higher Power is guiding me and walking the path with me. I have been able to attend this IAGSM only because of the loving intervention of my Higher Power, right from the election process to the picking up of my name from the hat, to the kind and affectionate words of my Co-Delegate, who was here last time, to the visa process where the WSO Staff extended all the help.

Last but not the least, I am thankful to my husband and my son for their unconditional support and encouragement. A warm hug to you all.

## WORKSHOP REPORTBACKS

### A Sense of Humor Is a Business Asset

*Nan G., South Africa, Chairperson*

Those of us involved with Al-Anon, the business, have an opportunity to openly practice the spiritual principles of Al-Anon, the recovery program, in our work. We often talk about them in our Board meetings, our Conferences and in day-to-day office life, but how often do we include humor in our list of spiritual principles? Humor is closely related to our personal spiritual goals of flexibility, open-mindedness, humility, trust, and authenticity.

Humor can help to diffuse tension, ease the discomfort of conflict, and enable us to be our authentic selves. It can build trust, help us to change our perspectives and think more creatively, and it can be a safe way to release stress or anxiety. In other words, humor improves our communication. Improved communication leads to better problem-solving and better decision-making. With all

of these characteristics, it’s easy to see how having a sense of humor can be a business asset.

The Workshop Chairperson opened the session by noting that when she first started attending Al-Anon meetings, she just needed recovery. Later, she realized that there is a business side to Al-Anon and became involved in service after a year. She noted that in Al-Anon business, we use spiritual principles to guide our discussions. Humor in business encourages growth, trust, humility, and open-mindedness.

The Chairperson shared about an article that she found on the internet regarding using humor in the workplace. Some points from the article included: humor helps people to enjoy working with others and to relax; it provides a common ground and puts others at ease; it stimulates creativity and builds trust and morale; and it helps make people more approachable.

Following the Chairperson’s introduction, the members in the session responded to questions on four themes.

## Theme One: Using Humor to Deal with Difficult People

Can I recall a situation where I was able to use humor to deal with a difficult person or situation in my Al-Anon work?

- As a way to overcome my fears and to relax, I trust in God. Al-Anon helps me think of something humorous to say.
- There is a delicate line between smiling and not having people think that I am making fun of them.
- We have different personalities on the Board. Sometimes I am the different one. Sometimes, by accident, I will divert a topic. A humorous comment will take the wind out of the sails of my ego, and then I can get back on track. We can joke, even when we disagree. We are able to laugh about things without trying to change the other person's mind because our laughter is full of love. I encourage a sense of humor by giving a ribbon to the person who made the most humorous comment of the day. The next time, someone else will get the ribbon and the ribbon will move about.
- I used to use humor to deflect my feelings. Now, I use it in a more positive way. I have learned to sense when it is okay to use humor. When I make a mistake, I use humor to help show that I do not have to be perfect.
- Al-Anon has given me back a sense of humor; I never used to laugh at television shows. Now, I use humor to laugh at myself. "How Important Is It?" I ask myself. Little jokes help to lighten the situation; it is nice to laugh.
- I do laugh more now because I have learned to be more relaxed.
- I inject humor into everything, including road trips with Al-Anon members. In service, whenever I can laugh, it portrays a different perspective to the audience and lightens up business. If service was always humdrum and serious, no one would want to serve.
- Humor was not funny in my upbringing; it was destructive. I laughed at everything so no one would know when I was hurt. Then I got into

Al-Anon recovery, and we laughed about the chaos of alcoholism. It helped newcomers see that maybe if they kept coming, they would be able to laugh, too. It worked; we are laughing with them now. I gave people in my Area permission to laugh at me. A year ago, we had a TEAM Event. Some saw jokes between Board members as exclusionary. Others said, "You look like you enjoy one another. I would like to join you!" If service is not enjoyable, why do it?

## Theme Two: When Humor Opens the Door to a Solution

Can I recall a situation where humor or laughter led to a breakthrough in my thinking, a new solution, or a burst of creativity?

- In our Area, we have Regional Service Seminars. We try to encourage members to come into service by making the weekend fun. We do conduct business, but we have fun, too. For some members, a Regional Service Seminar may be the only time they can relax and let their hair down. Being in service is not serious all the time.
- My first Al-Anon meeting was so much fun, but when I went to other groups, I rarely had as good of a time. I always wanted the meeting to go longer or to go out after the meeting because I was having so much fun. At one of our service conferences, the Chair was scolding us; it is not good to get scolded in service. We have a new Board now, and the meetings are much better.
- I was fearful of money, and I did not want to go into service. God has a sense of humor because I became responsible for the money. It happened a few times. God is helping me overcome my fear of money.
- At my first conference, a woman very quietly told me to take that look off my face when another woman was speaking. That quiet joke in my ear helped me be accepting and tolerant; it helped me "Keep an Open Mind."
- I was on a committee with A.A. and one person behaved poorly toward me. My feelings were hurt, and it reminded me of being a newcomer. The next morning, I was driving to a meeting and realized I was gripping the steering wheel very

tightly. A song came on the radio, and there was a line that said, “When you find a way to let go, just let go.” I let go a little, and I laughed. Even letting go a little helped me to stop the obsession.

- I did not want to go to Al-Anon because I saw those women in the rooms. The people in A.A. seemed to have more fun, so I went to meetings with my husband. His Sponsor finally said I could not go anymore because I was not an alcoholic. So, my solution was to become an alcoholic. When I realized the insanity of my behavior, I was able to let go and even laugh at myself a little. Humor is a gift.
- We include skits at Conference on serious topics like control. We had a TEAM Event where we did skits. Al-Anon shows that we can have fun without drinking.
- Generally, a sense of humor does foster creativity and re-energize people.
- Everyone in my family found recovery before me. I took my kids to Alateen, and I would wait outside for them. Finally, I realized how much fun the Al-Anon members were having, and I went to the meeting to find out what they were doing. Humor pulled me in.

### Theme Three: Using Humor to Achieve a New Perspective

Can I recall a situation where humor helped me gain a different perspective on something that was troubling me in my Al-Anon work?

- In service, there are always people who criticize and find fault. My Sponsor is humorous. Sometimes someone says something at a meeting, and although it was not said directly to me, I think it was directed at me. My Sponsor reminds me to focus on myself. I do not allow what other people think to define me. I am doing the best that I can. I’m trying not to take things so seriously.
- I am vibrant, simplistic, and I say what I think. In Al-Anon service, I am more careful with sponsees. I help them see that they can let it roll right off. Al-Anon has helped raise my self-esteem. I believe in myself and I am always smiling.
- We have just lost a member with a lot of service

experience because of a situation that could have been solved with a little humor, but there is no going back. It is sad because we no longer have this person involved in service. Maybe it would have helped if we had included a sense of humor earlier.

- Humor helps me see that I have accepted something as historical, not as hysterical. Humor allows me to not take things personally. I do the best job possible. There is always that one person who finds fault, but humor allows me to place the focus on me, not the other person.
- Perfectionism used to be like a straitjacket for me. When I started to let go, I realized that I could do service and that my best is good enough. I get to decide what my best is. We have all been new to service meetings at one point in time. One time, there was a Delegate who was reading the Steps at her first service meeting. In Step Eleven, she read, “Sought through prayer and *medication...*” That reminded me that I do not have to kill myself to do service perfectly. When I do make mistakes, I know that my Higher Power is reminding me that I am human and that is okay.
- When I worked from home, we had two cars. I learned in Al-Anon when I needed to get out of there for a while. Once, when I was angry with a family member and decided to leave the house, I backed up my car into the second car at the end of the driveway. I wanted to blame my family member for my mistake. I laughed when I recognized how insane it was to blame her. Service is a great way to learn how to accept criticism. I find it helpful to say to myself, “How high of a value do I place on another person’s opinion?”
- When I need to concentrate, I think again and again that I just need to relax and laugh. Then, the stress lessens, and I get my concentration back.
- I worked as a bookkeeping teacher. Once, while trying to reconcile the accounts, the bookkeepers were looking all over for one cent. They were short by one cent, and they could not find it. Finally, I pulled one cent out of my pocket, and I gave it to them. The humor showed them that we were not sending people to moon, and one cent

did not matter. We do not have to make ourselves miserable looking for one cent.

#### Theme Four: Laughing *with* Each Other, Not *at* Each Other

If I examine the kind of laughter I engage in, am I laughing with others or at them? Is this different in my personal life and my work life?

- We laugh *with* people, not *at* them. Al-Anon gives me everything I need; I do not need other self-help books. I enjoy my social groups. We have fun because we accept each other for who we are.
- In my home group, we explain to newcomers that we are not laughing at them. In my workplace, I use humor. My boss has a corner in his office where he has me write a humorous quote every day. We are more productive when we keep things light. There is a time and place for humor, too. Humor is soothing and cleansing.
- Newcomers hear us laughing, and it is attractive. I helped with the 2012 IAGSM in Cape Town, South Africa. We gave rides on the free day. One Delegate kept talking about how her husband “touched his bottom.” We could not figure it out, but we listened carefully as she spoke; after several references to “touching his bottom” we realized that her husband had “reached his rock bottom”! We laughed at finally reaching a common understanding.
- Humor helps me accept my good points and bad points. I am a lot like my mom, who was the alcoholic. I am amazed at how I inherited different traits from her. When I started in my service position, there was no role description. When I did something that others wanted me to do differently, I asked what they wanted. I have learned to be lighthearted. Sometimes, I still have trouble with QTIP—quit taking it personally. Sometimes, I am not sure if it is personal or not.
- I heard the members in A.A. laughing. I was afraid that the Al-Anon members would say I could not stay there. One lady at the meeting had 13 kids, and she had just gotten a new van big enough for the whole family. She shared that her husband got drunk and drove the van through a

bar. The members in the group laughed. People were laughing with her. I have learned to trust in God and do what is in front of me.

- Laughter is healing. I can laugh at a situation, and it helps me heal. Sometimes I am laughing because I see myself in the reflection and that it is something I have probably done. I see myself, and I see my progress. It is an example of laughing at the principle, not the person. That is a gift—I keep the focus on me. I was attracted to the laughter. Part of my spiritual awakening was getting close to a Higher Power and realizing that my Higher Power has a huge sense of fun.
- My laughter and humor have gone in a circle. I did not laugh at anything in the past. Now, I have people in my life with whom I can laugh because we are open like that and that is what we do. That is so freeing. To be able to laugh through other people and with them.
- Humor has changed my perspective. I used to be irritated and scared often. There was a person, and he was so relaxed—he had humor. I thought, how does he do it? I would like to be like him or think like him. Now, I am so relaxed, and when I see someone stressed, it does not make me feel stressed.
- Al-Anon has helped me with my rage. I have a 28-year-old daughter and two other kids who are eight and nine. When my older daughter broke something when she was younger, I would rage. It was too much. Last week, one of my younger kids was doing her chores, and she dropped four bowls that smashed to the floor. I laughed! These are just normal bowls—I saw the humor in the situation.
- Before Al-Anon, I laughed at people, not with people. This was part of the isolation of alcoholism in my life. I have worked hard to change that. I wanted to become a part of the group, and I got involved in service. When funny things happened, we laughed. I learned that through example. Then I could pass it on. My personal life is a little different; we used sarcasm as a weapon in our family. My sister is in A.A., and she had a sobriety date. After a few years, she admitted she needed to change it to a date two days later. For many years after that, we wished her a “happy liar’s day” on

the day of her original sobriety date. Now my attitude has changed, and I don't use humor to try to hurt people or hold them down.

## Spirituality in Money Discussions

Barb C., Australia, Chairperson

Since 2015, the WSC has made an effort to incorporate spirituality into financial discussions at all levels of service. For example, the 2015 *WSC Summary* (pages 73–75) included a thought force report on the importance of abundance and spirituality in money discussions and the 2017 *WSC Summary* (pages 41–44) included three task force reports on spirituality in money discussions at the group, District, and Area levels. The ICC felt that this was a conversation from which other structures would benefit.

A sharing was read aloud from *Courage to Change*, January 26. An article titled “Can We Talk about the Spirituality of Al-Anon” from the 2006 issue of *The Forum* was read aloud. The presenter posed additional questions for the workshop participants to ponder, such as: Is Al-Anon still a spiritual fellowship, or are we a nonprofit business? How do we address the changes in the program while staying true to the Concepts? How can we reassure our members during these periods of change? What regular spiritual principles are used in our ongoing business?

If we maintain the three Legacies, it will lead to good business management. Every activity can have a spiritual motivation.

### Discussion:

- These topics are hard to combine. One thing that came up is that we have brains to use that create a solid foundation for weighing risks. When I have done all that I can, I must let go. People want to be financially secure. People don't like risk because it comes along with fear. I can “Let Go and Let God” be in charge.

Text concerning the spiritual principle of being self-supporting on page 101 of the *Service Manual* was read aloud.

- A newcomer to Al-Anon sees the basket going around at meetings and doesn't understand what it is for. People don't understand how we survive

without outside donations. We can spread the money around. Some groups want to have two years of money in the bank. This is not in line with Al-Anon thinking.

- I choose to “Keep an Open Mind” and ask for guidance from my Higher Power. I grew up in a family with mixed messages about financial matters and this continued throughout my adult life. Fear of not having enough is important and so is fear of not making perfect financial decisions. It is about trusting that a Higher Power will give you and the fellowship what is needed. Lois tells a story about Bill meeting with the Trustees and having a fundraising dinner with wealthy men. He thought, okay, we are in. This is going to work. However, in the end, they were denied. I remember reading that. It was wise for the wealthy men not to donate because they felt it would impair the program. It gives the members ownership of the organization since we do not accept outside donations. It is important to keep that in mind. The General Warranties advise us to put in place an ample reserve. The members remind others how much money must be spent on the fellowship. What makes sense now and in the future is important. Being financially prudent is necessary for us to be open and guided by a Higher Power. It is His fellowship. It is about stewardship.
- Al-Anon has a responsibility to manage its money well. We all come from insecurities. There is never enough money to pay bills at home. We should recognize our responsibility to handle the money. Good checks and balances are important at the group level when it comes to money.
- The further organizations get from the founders and their principles, the greater difficulty the organization has. When they can retain their primary spiritual purpose, then abundance will follow. We need to marry the Concepts and Traditions to the real world. Reflecting on how I grew up as a child, there was no discussion about money. Everything was provided for us. Spiritual energy is what we need to find.
- We have a generation of Al-Anon members with no Sponsors becoming closed within themselves. If you are abundant and generous, the financial

spiritual principles will exist.

- People need to know what we spend their money on. It is important to tell them, and it is important how we tell them.
- At my new home group, newcomers were asked not to contribute to the basket. Since this seemed to violate our Traditions, I added it to the list for our next group conscience meeting. Then I reviewed the *Service Manual* and the WSC Summary and got ready to go and speak. When the topic was discussed, the GR at that meeting read the section of the *Service Manual* on the Seventh Tradition and the group agreed to remove the language about newcomers from the meeting format. God was in charge.
- We are having legal difficulties in Ireland regarding the charity status of Al-Anon. However, these issues are in the process of being resolved. If this problem had not been addressed, there would be legal issues surrounding sending contributions to the GSO in London.
- I am from a country where there is little discussion about money. My parents were balanced about money. There was always money but never really any money. God will provide. I did not think I could afford to attend the IAGSM. I got a bonus from work and then I was able to travel to the meeting. It continues to happen—when I need the money, it is there. We hosted a conference in my country that helped raise funds. I am constantly surprised how often this works. I also wanted to get out of finance when I was serving. I don't know why my Higher Power is always pushing me toward that. Next year, we will have to pay a huge tax levy. Trust laws in my country were different. So, all my experience in finance proved important. I was able to get the right people in place to help me out and sorted it out over two months.
- Equalizing is a challenge. We got a group together to discuss equalization. Equalization got voted in at the last conference. People will pay different amounts going forward. Not sure how this will play out at the next conference.

A member read aloud from the *Service Manual*

about thinking abundantly. Tradition Seven—Gratitude in Action.

- When first coming into Al-Anon, my finances were in bad shape. I began to hear about being responsible for my own actions. I started to participate more in the financial aspects. It took years to straighten things out. Without any insight on the Seventh Tradition, we would still be in bad shape. It gives us the power to help ourselves. I was grateful to the Seventh Tradition for bringing that awareness. Abundance is important as well. When you are poor, you tend to hold on to things. If you use the money for what you need, it will be there the next time. When I let go of the money, it finds a way to come back to me. If you think abundantly, it is there. It is thinking and the believing and having the faith.
- So much of what I have heard and what I think has worked is shifting focus. Nothing we talk about in the program should be centered around money. Money is not the primary focus. Are we finding ways to get the message out there and can people find a program? It is easy to focus on the money, but we should shift the focus to what our Higher Power would guide us to do. When I think about it this way, it changes my focus to doing what is right for the program and everything else is taken care of.
- People get bits and pieces of information about how much money the GSO has. That is not always helpful. It is about educating people and explaining where the money comes from. We are not a bank. We need funds to cover costs.
- If people really want to know information, it is important that they ask questions. People at times are ill-informed and don't understand. This leads to gossip.
- There is a view that Al-Anon is terminally unique. We are not unique. There are a lot of associations that have very similar characteristics to Al-Anon. Our membership in some of these has been very helpful. Other organizations face challenges and issues that are very similar to the ones we face. It is reassuring to know other organizations have the same challenges.

- For us as a fellowship, there was a lot of tension about money because we had to withdraw from the prudent reserve. It seemed like a bad secret. People had a very bad attitude about it. Groups needed to understand why we had to withdraw from the reserve. Since then, it has calmed down. It is most often uninformed people who do not participate in the group meetings who are critical. It is about information and not making a secret about it. It is in the newsletter and our Conference *Summary*, which helps to prevent rumors. Groups need to see that there is saving going on. I learned from Sponsors to save, but I must also give it away.
- We have a lot of associations in Denmark. What is unique about Al-Anon is the service aspect, which does not necessitate having a consumer mindset. Our program allows for self-ownership. It prevents a business mindset. How we apply spiritual principles in all our affairs is very special, and it is positive. We must share abundance and generosity. What is generosity? It is not just money; it is also my time and my skills.
- We (the WSO) allow bequests and ownership of property. A monetary limit is in place to prevent someone from donating a large sum of money to gain influence. Some countries have had their own building. It cannot interfere with the normal operations. Bequests must be from a member.
- We have but one purpose. If at least one dollar is made, and we reach out to families with the one dollar, then we are balancing this out. It costs money to run a nonprofit business.
- A spiritual program of recovery and nonprofit business. It is possible to stay true to principles that are laid out to us and to also run a successful business.
- It is interesting that so many of the pieces that were read aloud were about us becoming a nonprofit. Is the focus of the organization changing? Is it focused on the money or the primary focus? We can't do what we need to do without running a successful business.
- Several members had a discussion on the pay structures of the GSOs. Some have paid employees, and some have volunteers. Either way, the

compensation is not large. There is a change coming. It doesn't have to always be about the money: "Let Go and Let God" can apply to one's personal and financial lives.

- Does this conversation come up at all with your Sponsor? Have a conversation with your Sponsor about money.
- The 2017 WSC *Summary* includes a good amount of valuable financial information; you can refer to it when questions come up in your groups. Please take a look at it.
- The Australian fellowship has flourished since the last time the WSO visited. The WSO made the financial presentation more user friendly at Conference so the Delegates could have a better understanding of the material. The Delegates were able to take the information back out to their Areas. It's important for Delegates to understand that they can talk about financial matters; it helps a great deal.
- The breakout workshops were great at the WSC. We can help our GRs coming to the service conference, and the financial committee could help by providing three or four highlights for them to take back home.

The members recited the Serenity Prayer aloud together to close the meeting.

## Overcoming the Barriers to Public Outreach: Focusing on What Can Be Done

*Renia A., Poland, Chairperson*

There is limited policy guidance for GSOs regarding how to conduct outreach to the public and professionals. The current Policy Digest in the *Service Manual* states, "An Al-Anon general service structure outside the United States and Canada that has received permission from the WSO to print Conference Approved Literature may reprint WSO public outreach materials. The general service structure is not limited in the number of public outreach pieces produced. The WSO reserves the right to review such items before publication."

Many structures do not have a coherent



public outreach policy or an active Public Outreach Committee. In this workshop, Delegates will identify some of the current barriers to national public outreach and try to identify solutions to these problems and to determine what can be done.

The session opened with a moment of silence followed by the Serenity Prayer. The Workshop Chair introduced the topic and provided the following framing: “Discussions tend to focus on the problems. Today, we will look at the barriers, but I invite you to think big. Look for answers and find inspiration in our material.”

Text was read aloud from the *Service Manual* on the five tools of public outreach.

A quote from Lois W. was also read aloud: “In Al-Anon, we focus on what we can do, and we do with all our heart.”

The framing continued. The Workshop Chair planned to implement the Design Thinking Method in seeking new solutions. The process consists of five stages. A handout detailing the method was distributed.

The first stage is empathizing: What does the final user expect? Who is the final user?

### **Discussion:**

- Professionals
- Young newcomers
- Existing members
- People with problems
- The general public, because we want everyone to know about the message of Al-Anon
- It is very helpful for Human Resources personnel to be aware of Al-Anon and suggest it to employees in addition to mental health resources.
- In India, the program is getting connected with the police to assist families in cases of domestic violence where alcohol is involved. Additional, non-judgmental support for the family is needed.

In short, final users are:

1. Al-Anon potential members
2. Professionals

What are their expectations? What type of information and channels are available? Empathizing is wearing another person’s shoes and understanding their

position. If we don’t know what is expected, we can’t manage effective ways to meet expectations.

### **Discussion:**

- Finding resources: WSO or GSO
- My shyness used to prevent me from seeking help. What encouraged me to attend a meeting was a family member accompanying me.
- To me, the barrier was the information I didn’t have. Therefore, the professional should be able to deliver pertinent information to the newcomer.
- I would want to know if it’s accessible. Is it safe? What is the purpose? These are the things we need to convey in the materials we are creating.

Now that we have defined our final users of public outreach expectations, let’s define barriers.

### **Discussion:**

- In addition to my shyness, I wasn’t sure about my safety.
- I wasn’t sure whether it was religious or simply spiritual.
- There is a question of legitimacy. In France, we even have a sect of police. Our government refused to give Al-Anon “public service entity” status, although A.A. was able to obtain it.
- In Poland, Al-Anon had a government status but it had to relinquish it because of anonymity.
- In Spain, the Basque countries imposed the Basque language on all their public information material. If both Basque and Spanish are permitted, the text in Basque must be much larger than the one in Spanish.
- What is our rating on the internet? The first resource for a young person is the internet.
- In Mexico, it’s hard to locate the meeting because the logo is not displayed. Some Areas are too remote and, in some cases, too dangerous.
- In Finland, young people find our outreach boring. Also, we have a requirement of 50 hours of training for a member of an organization to be considered an expert who is qualified to help others.

- In Switzerland, you must sign a form to work with Alateen.
- In the WSC Structure, every Area has requirements for those who want to become AMIASs.
- In Mexico, we are working hard to attract Alateen members. Young people feel more comfortable receiving the message from peers at their school.
- Maybe we need a meeting of young people by young people.
- In Mexico, they established a strategy called the “Silent Campaign”: They send a letter to groups, so that the groups can forward it to professionals. Young people also get involved; they carry the message to their schools and through social media.
- In India, they give *How Al-Anon Works* (B-32) to the libraries free of charge.

The group was divided into two: one focused on finding solutions for spreading the message effectively to professionals and the other group focused on potential Al-Anon members.

The prototyping group was asked to draw its ideas as images.

The group focusing on outreach to potential members presented the following ideas:

1. Leave leaflets in waiting rooms or other public places.
2. Share encouragement with other members doing public outreach service work.
3. Convey a message of diversity—Al-Anon is not just for wives and mothers of alcoholics.
4. Cooperate and communicate with A.A.
5. Improve search engine optimization so members can find Al-Anon online.
6. Develop a mobile answering service.
7. Advertise on buses/public transportation.

The group focusing on outreach to professionals presented the following ideas:

1. Place a banner in popular beach resorts.
2. Advertise on buses/public transportation.
3. Place the Al-Anon logo and local contact info on subway tickets.

4. Place information in women’s shelters.
5. Create education programs in collaboration with beer makers.
6. Spread the message on what Al-Anon is not (a therapy program, a religious program, or a program that focuses on helping the alcoholic stop drinking).
7. Inform politicians.
8. Provide posters, with wording on the back, to Alateen members, to support them in giving presentations and passing the message.
9. Carry out outreach during Indian religious holidays/festivals where women pray for their husbands.
10. Develop a mobile phone app.

The workshop facilitator concluded the session by thanking participants and stating that she believed the goal was met, because the group generated some solutions that Delegates could take back home.

## Social Media—Finding Solutions (Group 1)

*Maria O., Iceland, Chairperson*

Through our correspondence and conversations with members and GSO staff, we know that many people are not sure how to use social media without: disclosing personal anonymity at the public level, violating copyrights, and experiencing other problems. Some GSOs, in the face of these challenges, have chosen to avoid the use of social media. Others have made cautious advances. Others have gone forward only to quickly find themselves at the limit of their experience or understanding. In addition to these realities, some members, with and without guidance from their structures, have taken the initiative to create social media pages. Sometimes these pages do not reflect Al-Anon principles, and they may or may not have any connection to an existing structure.

The Chairperson turned to *One Day at A Time in Al-Anon* (B-6) for inspiration and guidance on how to approach this topic. Members then received a handout that included the format and framing of the workshop.

They were invited to reflect on and answer the following questions:

What do you think of when you think of “social media”? How is it different from “traditional media” such as press, radio, and television? How is it the same?

- Social media is more spontaneous. It’s easier to access than radio, press, or television. It reaches out to people in the same way, though.
- From discussions we’ve had here, I’ve learned more about new social media. It’s instant and quicker than other media formats. Younger people would rather use it. I’m getting educated on the matter.
- It seems that everyone uses it, no matter their age.
- I don’t see social media as being so useful as far as public outreach. It’s instant communication between people who are already in a relationship. I can’t conceive that someone looking for help will use a search engine and find the answer on social media. Traditional media tends to be in everyone’s face. It’s slow, but it’s consistent.
- I think social media is an existential threat to the future of human communication. The quality of how AI-Anon is delivered to a person depends on the medium, the best being person-to-person. Traditional media is produced by a third party for users while social media is produced by users for users. There are no standards of professionalism on social media. Social media does bring people together. However, it is inward looking and doesn’t look outward.
- Social media is created by common people for others. In traditional media you must present meaningful, impactful, or sensational content. The similarities are that once you publish something, it is immortal, especially online.
- Social media is nonprofessional. So many blogs have disgusted me because all they do is insult people. Printed press is more selective in its content than online press. Press, radio, and television are much more effective public outreach tools than social media because of this.
- When I think of social media I think mainly of Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. The WSO started with emailing its publications and is now

creating digital publications. Books are text on a page and pictures. To me, Facebook is an electronic version of the physical world. Younger people experience a different aspect of social media, which is different from my experience. The difference between traditional and social media is that I can choose when to look up the information when I’m using the latter.

- There are Snapchat stars in Iceland who share their lives online and become influencers of thousands of people they have never met; some of them even have a financial influence on their followers.
- People now live in their own bubble, in their own online community with people who share their beliefs.

### **What are the risks of social media for AI-Anon members? For GSOs? What are the advantages for AI-Anon members? For GSOs?**

- Losing anonymity.
- Social media is huge and complex and potentially useful, but we must prioritize our resources depending on the structure and what it possesses. In some cases, it might be more beneficial to focus on other things. If we look at the big picture and try to do too many things, we tend to freeze, panic, and do nothing.
- Our Traditions say that we must protect anonymity at the level of media. Those who don’t preserve their anonymity compromise the image of our fellowship. Social media could provide a platform for negative currents or bad humor. My fear is that some might be right about social media being the way of the future.
- My fear is the risk of young people being stuck in virtual reality and not reaching the full potential of recovery. There are much more human, spiritually valid ways of communicating than clicking on our phones.
- One of the biggest risks for GSOs are violations of copyright. Those who take on those permissions accept the responsibility to protect the copyright. Another risk of having a live page on social media is the expectation for an immediate response when someone posts a question. The challenge is

creating a structure that will be able to meet the demand.

- When I looked for Al-Anon online, I found a mix of unofficial and false information on legitimate sites. That's the biggest risk in my opinion—falling in the wrong groups. Another risk is that the name of the group would be unsuitable for public information. On the internet you have to dig and be discerning to find valuable and accurate information.
- In Spain, a couple of groups violated copyright and created their own website. The local structure used tact and applied the spiritual principles to solve the situation.

### What is the purpose of using social media?

- The WSO wanted to address challenges with social media and find solutions. I've heard that there is a consensus that we are not attracting new people through social media—it's more for fellowship communication. It's meaningful for those who are already in the program.
- Our conference decided that we must have a Facebook page, so we don't fall behind the times.
- Before social media, the fellowship used to feel the pressure to create websites. Structures don't always have the resources to invest in setting up a website, investigating the need for it, keeping it attractive, etc.
- We are talking about attracting young people on social media, but what about making our meetings attractive enough to keep them?

## Social Media—Finding Solutions (Group 2)

*Pierrette P., Switzerland (German-Speaking), Chairperson*

The ICC Assistant opened the meeting by acknowledging the social media General Session discussion that had recently taken place and the fears that attendees had expressed surrounding this new mode of connecting. The purpose of this workshop was to allow for the exchange of ideas in a smaller group setting.

The Workshop Chair then read through a list of questions to help guide the discussion:

### What do you think of when you think of “social media”? How is it different from “traditional media” such as press, radio, and television? How is it the same?

- I think of Facebook as social media and use it to stay in touch with friends and family. It has exceeded my personal expectations in terms of making new social connections; I received quite a few friend requests when I joined.
- Social media is a breach of anonymity. After a Facebook page was created for me, a member of A.A. from the community was able to find me online and view personal information. I found this upsetting.
- Social media users have a choice of what type of information they would like to share online. A user can choose not to share any personal information regarding his or her recovery.
- Several members noted WhatsApp and Viber as free social media resources that provide a way to communicate over the phone or via text internationally.
- I would describe myself as a “lurker” on social media; I look at the pages of friends and family to stay current, but I choose not to post personal information about myself and my whereabouts. Instead, I post inspirational quotes. Though technology can be scary, its place in the future is inevitable and it is best to embrace it and try to understand it.
- The members agreed that WebEx is not a social media platform.
- Several members reported having social media accounts for their professional responsibilities and not for personal use.
- I joined Facebook early on and became addicted to the technology. So I decided to make a pro/con list, and found many more cons than pros. After getting rid of my personal accounts and later being required to have accounts for my job, I took it upon myself to find out how social media can enhance, rather than overrun, my life. I prefer Twitter, because it optimizes information gathering and minimizes the sharing of personal information. LinkedIn is also good.

## What advantages or risks do you see with bringing Al-Anon into social media?

- I have professional experience using social media in the nonprofit sector. I always try to emphasize to my coworkers that anything posted online is public domain. GroupMe could be a useful social media platform. I choose not to share anything about my recovery on social media, as it is part of my personal narrative. I also think that searching on social media for other Al-Anon members I may meet at an event or convention is invasive. My experience with the Al-Anon International Convention app this year in Baltimore was less than enjoyable. The app seemed to magnify and encourage certain members' character defects in the way of dominating personalities. My own character defect of isolating has the potential to lull me into a false sense of "being social" when using social media as opposed to engaging in person with others.
- Several members feel that there is a risk in people mistakenly relying too heavily on social media to obtain quick fixes. Those searching for help may not experience the full extent of their recovery if they only look online for information on alcoholism as a family disease, rather than taking the time to work the Al-Anon program and participate in meetings.
- The point was made that we are in a transitional space where social media platforms are available, but we are not always willing to meet the youth halfway. If we can't do it, who will?
- I have seen a Twitter user with the handle @al-anon. I reported this person as impersonating and breaking copyright law. This is a danger for our brand.
- What motivated me to find Al-Anon was pain. I found my first meeting in a newspaper ad. I trust that, nowadays, the WSO has the appropriate resources to be smart and safe about how it brings Al-Anon into social media.
- New Zealand Al-Anon was awarded a Google AdWords grant that puts them at the top of the search results for certain queries such as "alcoholism."

- A member shared that she subtly tries to gauge how people find out about Al-Anon meetings by asking newcomers at meetings. Most times the response is that a friend, family, or A.A. member told them about the program and then they located meeting information online.

## How can our Legacies help us? What spiritual principles come in to play?

- Anonymity is very important.
- We could invite young people to be involved in service and use their knowledge of social media by managing a group email.
- Social media takes into consideration both attraction of newcomers and use by current members as a resource.
- Two members gave their personal sharings on how they came to try virtual meetings. The first tried a phone meeting on the Concepts in order to gain new wisdom through experience. She had a very positive experience and now supplements her in-person meetings with phone meetings. The second joined one of the email meetings posted on the WSO website. The meeting had a service structure and greeters, and its members used Conference Approved Literature during the meetings. Additionally, this made her realize that, during a low point in her recovery, she reached for podcasts and websites for support late at night. Having an online Al-Anon meeting would have been beneficial to her in these hard times. Lastly, she was pleased that the email meeting members made a point of saying that the online group should be used as a supplement to in-person meetings.
- My friend, as a new mother, was allowed to listen in to her home group meetings via telephone for a period of time. Eventually, a new member came along and pushed to have this disallowed. Ultimately, this member is sympathetic towards the beneficial power of technology but also towards the functional practices of the past. If it's not broken, why fix it?
- What permission do structures need to use Conference Approved Literature on social media platforms?

*The WSO is currently evaluating the permissions we need to extend to support the structures while protecting our copyright.*

- The members agreed that eBooks and audiobooks are Conference Approved Literature and not social media.

### **Do service workers and WSO Staff need a special skill set to be involved with social media?**

- Yes. At the WSO, the Digital Strategy Team pushes others to think differently about social media. It is healthy to approach someone who has expertise.
- Yes. Denmark has had the same experience as the WSO and chooses to seek out people with social media expertise to reach goals.
- Is placing social media buttons (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) on an Al-Anon website considered affiliation?  
*No, it is not; affiliation means that organizations are legally joined together.*

## **Social Media—Finding Solutions (Group 3)**

*Edith H., Germany, Chairperson*

The Chairperson began with the framing for the session: “Welcome to the Social Media—Finding Solutions workshop. Earlier, we discussed the different concerns we have about Al-Anon in the digital age, along with some of beneficial aspects of internet tools that may have a positive impact on our fellowship. For this session, we will be discussing the difficulties that social media presents and possible ways of preventing or resolving them.” The Delegate opened the floor for discussion after asking the following: “Is Facebook still a helpful tool? What are some of your observations on and personal experiences with social media?”

- Everyone’s on the phone all the time; we’re losing the art of face-to-face communication. The internet should be used in moderation. Additionally, when we use social media as a tool in Al-Anon, we need to understand how to maintain a safe environment for our members.
- We’re all older. We don’t have the younger perspective; we need access to the point of view of

our young members. I can’t imagine that you get the same things from an online meeting that you get from a face-to-face one: the crying, the hugs—the hugs are so important.

- Since I’d grown up in an alcoholic home, I wasn’t used to talking. When I started in Al-Anon, email meetings helped me find my voice. They let me plan out what I needed to say; they were crucial to my early recovery, and ultimately helped me find the words I would use in my face-to-face meetings. Without them, I don’t know that I would ever have learned to speak. Anything that can help anyone suffering from another person’s drinking is a positive. Even if a member only uses virtual meetings, we’re still finding a way to help them.
- Social media can be a good tool for Al-Anon, if the occasion calls for it. When I first came to meetings, I would hide and not talk to anyone. The internet meetings wouldn’t have worked for me because they would have let me hide too easily; I needed personal contact with my Sponsor to really pull me out of my shell. However, virtual meetings were still excellent alternatives when I couldn’t make it to face-to-face meetings.
- Some of the online groups we have are made by members and are not official. On WhatsApp and other groups outside of the GSO, anonymity doesn’t exist; people take members’ pictures and post them on Facebook.
- Our target should be outreach. We get lots of Facebook messages asking about meeting locations and what Al-Anon is; this is a good thing.
- In India, we also receive instant messages asking about meetings, which is a positive. I don’t like the idea of only associating social media with the younger generation; when I started in Al-Anon, there was very little access to physical literature. Sharings online and podcasts taught me the Legacies. A concern, however, is that many members share screenshots of literature. If no one buys Conference Approved Literature, which gives our GSO funding, what will happen to Al-Anon in India?
- We started out thinking our Facebook page was for people looking for Al-Anon. We realized later that many of the people using it were members.

Now we tailor our posts to both groups. On our Alateen page, we try to appeal to Alateens, their parents, and professionals, all of whom make up its audience.

- In Germany our Facebook page is monitored by the GSO so that the Al-Anon message does not get watered down. Other Regions put up their own pages, which were not how they should have been. We need one official page so there is no confusion.
- At the WSO, we define social media as media that contains a newsfeed (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.). Because WhatsApp, Skype, and email do not have feeds, it is easier to maintain anonymity with them than with social media.
- Could liking an Al-Anon Facebook page break your anonymity?  
*Simply liking a group does not necessarily make you a member of that group; you could like A.A.'s page because you support their message, but not be a member.*

The Chairperson then asked the session members to break off into two groups. When they reconvened, they discussed the following topics:

### **What are the risks of social media for Al-Anon members? For GSOs?**

- For members: Their anonymity may be broken. Also, when members put themselves out there, they can be betrayed by other people; the information posted can always be accessed, so something that you said 15 years ago can be shared or used against you by a bully. Additionally, sometimes members create controversy about what information is true.
- For GSOs: There is economic risk in staffing to manage social media; there are also legal implications. Other, non-legitimate, pages can claim to be the true Al-Anon Facebook page.

### **What are the advantages for Al-Anon members?**

- For members: They can get closer to the groups that are far away, especially rural groups that have less access to face-to-face meetings. The page also acts as a tool, teaching newcomers a little bit more about the fellowship. Members are

interested in information about literature, where the groups are, and online meetings. Many don't go to face-to-face meetings because they study and have jobs at the same time. It can be better to hear about Al-Anon online than from a book.

- For GSOs: They can get the message of the program to more people. More people at least know that we exist. GSOs can also reach people who are in jails and other facilities. They can reach young people. Social media offers our fellowship an easier and faster way of communicating.

### **What are our members' wants and needs regarding the use of social media for public outreach?**

- We want to reach people who are isolated; we want to reach people who haven't heard about us.
- We need to make sure no individual ever represents Al-Anon.
- Members like Facebook because events are announced on the page. So it could almost be called "in-reach."

### **What do you think of when you think of "social media"? How is it different from "traditional media" such as press, radio, and television? How is it the same?**

- Newspaper websites and channels might also have their own feeds, but they decide which information to push out to you. With social media, it's more of a pull; you're pulling information out of yourself—your life and daily experiences—and making it public. Social media is also more personal than traditional media, and more immediate; it spreads much more quickly.

### **What special skills do our service workers or office staff need to have if our GSO is interested in using social media for public outreach?**

- They would need technical knowledge and knowledge of the program; they would have to have a good grasp on permission for posts, copyright, and licensing, along with what is acceptable for online publication according to the Al-Anon Legacies.

## How can our Legacies help us?

- Tradition Eight could guide us in choosing special workers for social media positions.
- We have to keep our focus on our primary purpose (Tradition Five). That's the most important thing.
- Tradition Eleven guides us in protecting members' anonymity and in attracting rather than promoting. There is a fine line between those two actions when social media comes into play.

- Tradition Twelve reminds us to place “principles above personalities.” No one person can speak for all of Al-Anon.
- Warranty Four reminds us that any big changes should be decided by discussion, vote, and unanimity.

The Chairperson thanked everyone for their participation and asked the Delegate from Mexico to close the session with La Oración de la Serenidad (The Serenity Prayer).

## MOTIONS

### Motion #1—Carried (23 yes, 0 no, 0 abstentions, 0 void)

To accept the enthusiastic bid presented by the UK & Eire to hold the 2020 IAGSM in the London area and in the event of emergency the 2020 IAGSM be held in the United States.

### Motion #2—Withdrawn

To clarify the inconsistency between the spiritual principles of the Legacies and the absence of voting rights at the WSC for international groups.

## UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Before the close of this 19th IAGSM, Delegates had an opportunity to ask questions and get clarification about any of the previous sessions. Most concerned literature and the links of service.

### Literature Copyright

- Can a line be added to the bottom of our literature to preserve the copyright?  
*WSO: This is an innovative idea. We will take a look at it to see if it is feasible.*

### Audio e-books and Literature Online

- Could we improve audio quality in our e-books?  
*WSO: I've received feedback regarding the quality of the How Al-Anon Works audiobook (eA-22). The WSO Associate Director—Digital Strategy and the Publications Manager both recently attended an electronic book conference. They told us about what A.A. already understood—the narrator is the most important quality of audiobooks. The point is well taken. The challenge is that great narrators are more*

*expensive. There may be ways to improve the quality. The volume of audiobooks sales in North America is up, in direct proportion to decrease in hard copy sales.*

- Does Amazon or Audible buy from us? What does the WSO get? I have seen our literature in book stores. If online vendors are not getting our literature from the WSO, who is selling it to them?

*WSO: There are three types of sales on Amazon: print, e-books, and audiobooks. The WSO does not sell print books on Amazon; a third party is selling them. We do sell e-books on Amazon. The revenue is significantly lower than what we receive from print books. We also sell audiobooks through Amazon. The revenue is significantly less than what it would be from equivalent sales of print books.*

*Delegate: There may not be much to do about it, but it is depriving our GSO of income because we depend on the income from literature and donations. We suggest that members who choose to buy our literature that way also make a bigger donation.*



*Delegate: Books are sold by individual vendors who sell to Amazon. If it doesn't say "Prime," it is for resale on Amazon. Books are sold to resale and used book stores to make money.*

- Are meeting reports of the Board published? How does the WSO store reports?

*WSO: The WSO Board has a Staff person who takes minutes of the meeting. The Board receives an electronic copy of the minutes and the minutes are also stored in the Archives. The Chairperson of the Board (COB) Letter provides a quarterly report to the fellowship and posts the document on AFG Connects. The report includes Finance, Conference Leadership Team, and Policy Committee updates. The WSC Summary also details the work and legal decisions of the Board as part of the WSO Annual Report.*

*After a Board meeting, the Trustees meet via phone with Delegates to discuss the COB Letter. The Executive Director writes a "Board Brief" of the actions that took place at the quarterly meeting of the Board and sends it to the Staff.*

### **Al-Anon/A.A. Cooperation**

- Groups or Regions that organize A.A. meetings are also organizing Al-Anon and other Twelve-Step groups. They are not allowed to run our meetings, but may attend open Al-Anon meetings. Has any structure had experiences like this? Were there any problems with them?

*Delegate: We have problems with joint open A.A./Al-Anon meetings that have ended up as closed meetings, where people come to share on their Fourth-Step work. We have trouble convincing people to stop this practice in these meetings.*

*Delegate: We have had "Family Afterwards Meetings," which are combined A.A./Al-Anon meetings. They identified themselves to the WSO, but they are not registered because they are not Al-Anon meetings.*

*Delegate: We have had complaints from members*

*who found weekend events on a website or advertised at meetings. When they went to these events, they found they were not Al-Anon. We have put procedures in place now to verify information before it is posted on the website.*

*Delegate: Three well-meaning A.A. members were planning an event and it turned up under national events on our Al-Anon website even though it had no Al-Anon speakers. We consulted the guideline for cooperating with A.A. to figure out what to do. We talked to members of the A.A. Committee and they ended up issuing a formal invitation to our GSO to participate in the event.*

### **Literature across Borders**

- Has the WSO been trying to find a solution to third-party language translations in other countries? Is this an international copyright problem? Please clarify.

*WSO: The ICC has begun discussion about this topic and the WSO is having conversations with our attorneys about its implications. Copyright issues are in the Executive Director's area of responsibility. The primary role and responsibility of the Associate Director—International is to bring issues to the ICC. This has been an issue for a long time. The Polish Structure raised the request most recently. There are Polish-speaking groups in Germany. The Polish GSO would like to be able to sell literature in Germany, but cannot. What we know is that the world is a smaller place today than it was when our organization was founded, so this is a bigger issue now than it was 20 years ago. Maybe we have to rethink our current policy. My hope is that there is a solution. What we know is that all GSOs, to some extent, rely on literature sales to ensure operations can continue. We don't want to put any solutions in place that could create new problems, so we are taking time to study our options.*

## REFLECTIONS

Before the closing of the meeting, the GSO Delegates had an opportunity to share what they received from the meeting and what they expect to take back home with them.

“I heard answers to my questions. The presentations on the Concepts and Service Sponsorship put me back on track. I heard that many different opinions are okay. I’m also going to share with my structure that this meeting was different from the EZM. I am here by myself, so I had to exchange and talk more and get to know more of you, and I’m grateful I could do that. I will take the friendship and spirit of Al-Anon with me.”

“I checked off the WSO from my bucket list. I learned from each presentation. It has reenergized me to go home and share the benefits of this meeting so that the fellowship can learn about what the IAGSM is and why we send Delegates.”

“I thought our problems were unique to our structure, but they are not. We are truly united in a world-wide fellowship.”

“I am going home with a lot of gratitude for the willingness of everyone to answer my questions, for my visit to the WSO and getting to see the Archives, and for the information we received about social media.”

“The warm welcome at the WSO brought me to tears. The variety of topics was useful and renewed my enthusiasm and provided lots of information to share and new ways of sharing it.”

“I wish all my fellow members back home could have this experience. Before this IAGSM, I wasn’t aware of the magnitude of the WSO. Seeing all the sections of

the WSO was a wonderful experience. I never imagined one day I would be here.”

“I am going home with more experience and courage. It was stressful chairing a workshop, but I learned a lot about myself.”

“The IAGSM is a gift. Whether we are a first or third-world country, we have some of the same problems. Getting my literature questions answered by WSO Staff was great. The understanding of Delegates not speaking English was inspiring. Everyone was so passionate about Al-Anon.”

“I needed this friendship so much. I will take you all with me. The humor workshop, I will take home with me.”

“I am honored and humbled to be part of such a high-level group of Al-Anon members. The experience you bring is inspirational.”

“From our tiny corner of world, being so far away, I am finding a way to break our isolation. I have a small notebook full of ideas I’d never thought of before and suggestions of how we can move forward.”

“I am taking invaluable knowledge to the members in my structure and motivating them to continue sending Delegates to the IAGSM. I understood through the language of love and heart, because I couldn’t understand your languages.”

“All the love and spirit of Al-Anon, all the information from the presentations, a new icebreaker for my Area and, maybe, a new Service Sponsor. That is such a lot.”

