

21st IAGSM

INTERNATIONAL AL-ANON

GENERAL SERVICES MEETING

Connecting Hearts and Minds around the World

October 12-15, 2022
London, England

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TWELVE CONCEPTS OF SERVICE

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

GENERAL WARRANTIES OF THE CONFERENCE

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

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

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of the International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM) is to share the experience of Al-Anon national services around the world through its Delegates. It will attempt to encourage the growth of a sound service structure while maintaining worldwide unity through the application of Al-Anon Traditions. It can also represent an expression of a worldwide group conscience. Ultimately, this leads to the fulfillment of the Core Purpose of Al-Anon as a whole: to help families and friends of alcoholics find hope and encouragement to live joyful, serene lives amidst cultural and language differences.

ATTENDANCE

The following structures were represented at the 2022 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting:

Name	Service Structure	Name	Service Structure
Helen G.	Australia	Agnieszka S.	Poland
Tanya J.	Australia	Simeona R.	Slovenia
Anne L.	Denmark	Katja S.	Slovenia
Mariana C.	Ecuador	Madelein O'B.	South Africa
Sanna R.	Finland	Uthica A.	South Africa
Aino S.	Finland	Anders J.	Sweden
Rayanne D.	France	Blanca G.	Switzerland
Johane M.	France	Samia O.	Switzerland
Heidrun F.	Germany	Miriam M.	UK & Eire
Una S.	Iceland	Lynette K.	US/Canada
Dagný D.	Iceland	Debbie P.	US/Canada
Mario B.	Italy	Kathi M.	International Coordination Committee
Maria R.	Mexico	Diane B.	International Coordination Committee
Martha Á.	Mexico	Vali F.	International Coordination Committee
Liz A-S.	New Zealand	Sarah S.	International Coordination Committee
Julie W.	New Zealand	Jennifer U.	International Coordination Committee
		Marsha W.	International Coordination Committee

OPENING SESSION

Welcome from the International Coordination Committee

Kathi M., Chairperson of the 2022 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM), opened the meeting with a reflection on the IAGSM theme: “Connecting Hearts and Minds around the World.” She welcomed international participants to the ongoing conversation among the worldwide fellowship of Al-Anon, quoting Lois’ idea that “it takes only one person to start something, but many others to carry it out,” and encouraged Delegates to carry the message by taking the knowledge and connections gained during their IAGSM experience back to their home countries, structures, and groups.

After the opening messages, the WSO Executive Director, Vali F., introduced herself and shared her excitement for this year’s IAGSM. Delegates participated in a meet-and-greet icebreaker activity in which they introduced themselves with a fun fact.

Roll Call and Flag Ceremony

Delegates stepped forward as roll was called and placed their country’s flag on a table in front of the event Chairpersons. A row of flags set on the other side of the table represented those General Service Offices (GSOs) that could not be in attendance. The Delegates also placed pins in the world map display to mark the location of their GSOs.

The ceremony ended with a chance for attendees to photograph the map filled with pins representing the GSOs all over the world.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Connecting Hearts and Minds around the World

*Diane B., Co-Chairperson,
International Coordination Committee*

Welcome to all of you. This week, we have the opportunity to fulfill the purpose of the 2022 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM) by sharing the experience of Al-Anon General Service Offices (GSOs) from around the world through all of you. You are the Delegates, who pass your recommendations through to the International Coordination Committee (ICC) and the Board of Trustees (BOT). As trusted servants, we have the awesome opportunity to share our combined experiences and knowledge and connect with each other on the worldwide stage of Al-Anon. I am overwhelmed to be here and to be a part of “Connecting Hearts and Minds around the World.”

My heart is bursting with gratitude to be in the room with those of you who represent this wonderful worldwide fellowship of Al-Anon and Alateen. I first want to

thank the Committee, for asking me to give this keynote address, and Marsha, for telling me I could do this and that she believed in me. The hospitality has been warm, this place is amazing, and London is a beautiful city.

This international meeting would not be possible without the support of some pretty incredible behind-the-scenes Staff members. I think we are all blessed to have such a talented and selfless group of members of the World Service Office (WSO) as well as all of you. Without you, we would have no reason to be here.

I’m so fortunate to be with you this evening. I am also humbled that I get to be in this room with people from all over the world with all your generosity, your smiles, and your love. My fellow Trustees and WSO Staff have been busy these past two weeks, and I know they are tired. But they have been welcomed and loved up with good old-fashioned Al-Anon. They are still beaming with joy from everything that they have experienced. Thank you to everyone who made that possible.

I never dreamed that I would be able to do something like this. But thankfully, my Higher Power has bigger dreams for me than I do for myself. Even though my heart is swollen with love and gratitude, my mind is trying to figure what time zone I'm in, and my body thinks that I should be sleeping when I'm awake and awake when I'm sleeping. It's all good! I'll get through, just as all of you will—because some of you are dealing with longer time zones and travel times than I am.

As I said, I'm from Texas, USA. That's where we have rattlesnakes, armadillos, and people who call everybody "darling"; where some people have two names like Mary Jane and Peggy Sue; where we dance to the "Cotton Eyed Joe," we two-step, and we boogie-woogie. We go to the beach on the Gulf Coast, we go into the Piney Woods, we go to the panhandle and ski, and we go to the West Texas desert and look at cacti. We might talk a little funny, have only two seasons (hot and hotter), drink lots of sweet tea, and eat anything that doesn't move.

At home, I have a loving husband of 28 years and a son who has given me a beautiful daughter-in-law and three handsome, brilliant grandsons. My husband gave me two sons by marriage, their partners, and five grandchildren who are equally beautiful and brilliant. I entered the rooms of Al-Anon 37 years ago. My service journey includes serving at the group level as Group Representative (GR), Treasurer, and Secretary; at the District level as District Representative (DR) and Treasurer; at the Area Information Service/Literature Distribution Center (AIS/LDC) level as Board Member, Board Chairperson, Treasurer, and office volunteer; at the Area level as Treasurer and Chairperson; and at the WSO level as South Central Regional Trustee (RT). Along the way, I have served on a variety of committees, thought forces, task forces, and work groups and done anything else I was told to do.

Our stories and our journey may be different, but the one thing that is not different and that is known everywhere worldwide is the disease of alcoholism. My experiences are no different than yours. I was lost until I found myself in the rooms of people I didn't know, who had different color skin, different color hair and eyes, different ways to talk, who lived in different types of homes and neighborhoods. But what connected us was that we had been affected by the disease of alcoholism.

Those folks in those first meetings told me to sit down, "Keep Coming Back," and I would be filled with

serenity, joy, gratitude, hope, and forgiveness. I was filled with anger, resentment, pity for myself, and the belief that everyone else had done something to me. My response was that I needed to control this situation, and that meant that I needed to change all those people and let them know how they should act and how they should treat me. Then I would be happy.

I made a lot of bad choices, especially with relationships. I had a lot of alcoholism in my family: in my brothers, my mother, and many others in my family tree. But what you told me was that although I could not change all of those people, I could change myself. There was joy in these rooms, and there was a Power greater than myself that could restore me to sanity. And what you told me was that there was hope and that I had a chance to recover from a disease that I did not understand. Step One was that simple for me, although it was the hardest thing I have ever done.

Now, it took a lot of years before I had anything other than a safe place to go and air my troubles. Eventually, I had a little hope; a little further down the road, I had a little gratitude; and a long way down the road, I felt joy and happiness. Step Two was a little more challenging, but I eventually came to believe in a Power greater than myself. With Step Three, I made the decision to give myself to this Power greater than myself, and I felt freedom for the first time in my life.

Step Four gave me the gift of looking at myself and realizing that it was not all of them out there that had done the most harm to me, but that I had participated in doing harm to myself. I learned that I had some goodness in me as well as some things that needed to be improved.

So as time went on, I learned the art of forgiveness. I forgave my mother, those two ex-husbands, and I forgave myself. And I became a person people wanted to be in the same room with and whom they could trust. Step Five guided me to look at the exact nature of my wrongs. I learned how to be trustworthy and could be honest. The old me would tell you something, then make an excuse to do something else. I would make a date with you and not show up. I always had an excuse. But because I practice the principles of Al-Anon, I am responsible and accountable.

A few years ago, I would have been terrified to do what I'm doing right now, and I would have made all kinds of excuses to not do this. I would have blamed you, because it was your fault for making me feel that

way. Step Six removed this defect of character. I was on my way to being a grown-up and to being whole.

But today, I can stand here in front of you and have that absolute love of Al-Anon. You know, sometimes the committee starts meeting in my head. It says that I don't have time to do my daily meditation, my daily readings, I don't need to go to that meeting, I don't need to call my Sponsor—I can figure it out myself. It says it's ok if I get a little angry and throw a temper tantrum, it's okay if I get a little resentful. But you know what? When I step into rooms like this and get around people like you, I feel unworthy. I feel less than if I am acting out like that. Step Seven gave me the humility to ask that these shortcomings be removed. That Step renewed my hope, you renew my recovery, and you get me back on the right track.

I was thinking about “connecting our hearts and minds.” We do this in so many ways without even knowing it. Our actions and our interactions create this network of experiences and encounters that make us one. We speak the same language of Al-Anon without knowing what the words are. We can show each other compassion and courtesy by just being with each other. When I need you, there you are. So many times in my life, you have been there. Through the losses of friends and family members, through sickness and in health, you are there. My son had a life-threatening health episode during a time when COVID-19 prevented us from being with him in the hospital, but you were there with me. The connections that I have with all of you have given me the peace and acceptance that I needed when I felt totally alone and in fear. And now, with electronic meetings, I can share with you no matter where you live. I think that has been the unlikely gift of the pandemic. We can connect with each other without travel, passports, or customs.

As a Regional Trustee, I have been in the presence of people who are absolutely some of the most spiritually blessed people that I have ever known. They have shown me every day what I am capable of and what I want to be when I grow up in this program. They give me grace, and above all, they give me hope. I know I'm not perfect, and Step Eight allows me to look at my actions and whom I have harmed and shows me that I can be willing to make amends to them. With Step Nine, I was given the gift of cleaning up my side of the street. I could make it right. And with Step Ten, this is a routine of my day: continue to take a personal inventory

and when wrong promptly admit it. Now, this week, we have the opportunity to get to know each other in a way we may never have had if not for the program of Al-Anon and Alateen.

Thank goodness we've come through the worst of the worst times that I have seen in my lifetime due to a virus called COVID-19, and we are able to be here together. We can exchange our smiles, our hugs, and our love for one another. Step Eleven is a beautiful way to stay connected and in conscious contact with the God of my understanding. I pray every day for the knowledge of His will and the power to carry that out.

So, take it all in, sit all the way down, and recognize the gift that you have been given by being here. I know it wasn't easy for most of you to get here. And I know that some of you are a little bit scared or apprehensive of what the week's going to be, especially if you have never traveled internationally, like me—Mexico is as far as I had ever been before now.

In my little town of about 400 residents, they certainly would not expect me to be in London tonight. Man, have I got some experience, strength, and hope to share when I get back to my home group—which is, by the way, made up of three to four members. We are small, but these folks are my family. We have other groups with more than that, but my home group and my alternate home group are where I get to be myself. I can be the greeter at the door, put out the literature, lead the meeting when it's my turn, and be loved in a way that still amazes me to this day.

Again, I am so blessed, so absolutely excited to know what is going to come next. Please, please be part of my life. Because my family depends on that. My family depends on me coming home a better Al-Anon member than when I left. They expect me to be a better wife, sister, mother, friend. That's what they have learned about Al-Anon: that I can be better than I used to be. This is Step Twelve in action: carrying the message wherever I go and practicing the principles in all my affairs. Service has been my saving grace. I can stay out of the business of others by doing something for others. Staying in service keeps me out of self, and that's a good thing.

So, my love and gratitude to each of you. If there is anything I can do to help you out this week, please let me know. I don't have all the answers, but I do know people who know people, and together we can love our way through this week. If you are looking for me, you know where to find me. I'll be sitting all the way down,

and I'm going to be listening and taking it all in, so you won't have a hard time finding me. My prayer for each and every one of you is that this is the best experience of your life, but it won't be the best experience of the rest of your life, because there will be others that will be even better than this. That's hard to imagine, but there will be. So, I wish I could say thank you in all your different languages, but I am not able to do that. So, I will say it the way we say it in Texas: Bless all of you, you have tickled my fancy, and I love each and every one of you till the sun goes down and the cows come home each and every day.

Thank y'all for letting me be part of "Connecting Hearts and Minds around the World." We will forever be in each other's hearts and minds, because we have a program of recovery that is worldwide and allows us to love each other unconditionally. "Keep Coming Back" and keep connecting.

GENERAL SESSIONS

Let's Talk About Finance

Madelein O. and Uthica A., South Africa

Two Delegates led this presentation on the responsibility of members in service at the national level to discuss finances within their structures. Using the South Africa GSO as an example, they laid out the financial details of a self-supporting Al-Anon structure to educate Delegates on the relevant financial issues and as an example of a financial report that Delegates might give to their own structures.

The speakers described the various forms of income supporting the South Africa GSO, which included literature sales, contributions from Areas, rental income, and grants from the trust formed by a significant bequest to the structure in 2005. Because of financial challenges caused by low literature sales and the decrease in face-to-face meetings and events during COVID-19 lockdown, the GSO increased their focus on financial discussions among Areas and groups. Trusted servants were asked to prepare financial reports to ensure contributions were being directed first toward group expenses, then their Area Service Office, then the GSO and WSO. Monthly financial statements from the Areas and annual budget reviews ensure that expenditures are aligned with the GSO's budget and Delegates are informed about the GSO's budget and finances.

After the presentation, Delegates were divided into three breakout groups to discuss the following questions:

Group One:

- ◆ Do I understand my group's legal financial obligations as being separate from our spiritual ones?
- ◆ Can I support the idea of "distribution of group funds" rather than just paying the group's expenses?

Group Two:

- ◆ Is my group/Area and GSO practicing self-support, according to what we know or what I've learned today?
- ◆ Do I understand the relationship between the Area and GSO?

Group Three:

- ◆ Do I understand that our structure has options and limited autonomy (Tradition Four) to decide what we will do?
- ◆ How does this affect financial contributions?
- ◆ Is limited autonomy different than what I thought it was?

The discussion began with an acknowledgment of the Seventh Tradition: "Every group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions." Delegates shared their ideas for ways structures can practice self-support, including registering GSOs as charities, employing volunteers rather than paid staff, creating and maintaining a sufficient prudent reserve, stressing the importance of literature sales, and investigating new ways for members to contribute.

Delegates also discussed ways to increase financial transparency and discourage overspending by Areas and groups. The presenters shared that the South Africa GSO emails a monthly report to all Areas and Trustees of the Board. Other ideas included using a group inventory to inform members about their structure's finances and encouraging trusted servants to track and claim all expenses to prevent financial barriers to service. Delegates stressed the importance of clear and open discussions about finances among all members.

Another discussion concerned the importance of literature sales to GSO budgets and how to encourage members to purchase Conference Approved Literature (CAL) from their local service arms. One Delegate shared their GSO's challenges with trusted servants over-purchasing literature, leading to budget deficits when inventory production costs increased and books sold too slowly to recoup expenses.

Several Delegates raised the question of whether ebook sales from the WSO Online Bookstore have prevented international members from purchasing literature locally. The Executive Director shared WSO data on ebook sales outside the WSC Structure which indicated relatively low sales volumes per country. The WSO also found that ebook sales have not historically prevented purchases of physical books, but that literature sales in general have decreased since 2020 and have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels.

The financial implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and the introduction of electronic meetings were also discussed, with many members reporting decreased contributions along with decreased expenses due to the elimination of building and transportation costs. Some Delegates shared that their structures have had a surplus budget since the pandemic, allowing for increased spending on member services and public outreach.

Filling Service Roles

Blanca G., Switzerland

This presentation began with an overview of the history of service roles within the Al-Anon Swiss Romansh and Italian (SRI) Structure. The SRI Structure consists of 14 French- and Italian-speaking groups and two English-speaking groups within Switzerland, with about 100 members in total. The Structure originally had an eight-member Conseil d'Administration (CA), which was later reduced to three members and the responsibilities delegated to Literature, External Relations, Internal Communication, and Alateen Committees.

The Delegate described how SRI has had trouble filling leadership roles for the External Relations and Alateen Committees, leading to the Committees becoming inactive. SRI service members have also expressed concern about double-headed management, using the Traditions and Concepts as a guide when such issues arise.

The Delegate also discussed positive results of the SRI service structure changes, including an increase in transparency, openness, and honest discussion among trusted servants. The service structure has put focus on improving the relationships among and between existing groups, rather than expanding the number of groups in the structure without addressing issues.

During discussion, many Delegates confirmed that difficulty filling service roles was common among international structures. Members discussed strategies for improving service participation, such as increasing transparency around service roles and responsibilities, encouraging the use of Service Sponsors, creating structure-specific service tools, and modeling the benefits of service through communication, respect, and humility. Some shared about the financial aspects of service in their structures, describing how Areas share the costs of Conferences and other service events and how financial assistance from GSOs can increase participation in Areas with fewer resources. One Delegate brought up the issue of service burnout and the importance of balancing service work with self-preservation in personal recovery.

Delegates affirmed the importance of service work to their recovery and personal growth through the three Legacies and encouraged members to share the benefits of their own service experiences with others to increase participation among underserved groups.

Rejuvenating Public Outreach after the COVID-19 Pandemic

Una S., Iceland

The Delegate from Iceland described the experience of her service structure over the course of the pandemic, which saw an increase in the total number of Al-Anon meetings based in Iceland. Because Iceland, an island nation, is more geographically isolated than most service structures, members had already been accustomed to using videoconference technology and meeting electronically. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Iceland Structure has added ten electronic and seven hybrid meetings per week, increasing overall participation as well as access for members living in rural areas or abroad.

However, one negative effect of the increase in electronic meetings was a decline in Alateen participation. To combat this, the GSO has budgeted to provide newcomer CAL packages to all new Alateen members, and the service structure encourages current Alateen members to bring interested friends to meetings.

Delegates shared about their own public outreach efforts since the onset of the pandemic. One GSO ran a professional radio ad in one Area in their structure, which proved so successful in bringing members into meetings that the Area renewed the license for another placement, and many other Areas and international structures have begun their own radio outreach work as well.

Other Delegates discussed their success in working with Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) on public outreach projects, including webinars and radio interviews. Many also found emphasizing public outreach to professionals to be a successful strategy. One Delegate described their structure's efforts to hold meetings for families in rehabilitation centers and represent Al-Anon in community wellness events; others mentioned the difficulty of reaching locations, such as schools and hospitals, that have begun limiting visitors since the beginning of the pandemic.

Delegates expressed their optimism about the public outreach ideas discussed in the presentation and about returning public outreach to pre-pandemic levels. One representative shared that their structure's once-dormant National Outreach Committee had recently become active, adding ten new members, and agreed that many members were beginning to successfully revitalize public outreach efforts.

Two Views on Delivering the Services of a GSO

*Helen G. and Tanya J., Australia;
Julie W. and Liz A-S., New Zealand*

This two-part presentation began with an overview of the structure and workings of the Australian GSO, presented by the Delegates from Australia. The Australian GSO's policy is to follow World Service Conference (WSC) policy wherever possible, and its service structure is divided into Districts and Areas in accordance with WSO guidance. The structure currently consists of nine Areas with about 390 Al-Anon/Alateen groups in total. An Australian Service Conference is held yearly, and Area Assemblies take place one to two times per year; service positions generally consist of three-year terms.

Following policies put in place by the WSC, the Australian GSO accepts global electronic meetings into its service structure, registers and renews Al-Anon Members Involved in Alateen Service (AMIAS), and conducts national membership surveys based on the triennial WSO survey.

The Australian GSO also produces its own Australian Service Handbook, the monthly magazine *Austra-Link*, an electronic newsletter, and an Australia-specific public outreach pamphlet and newsletter. The office receives revenue from sales of locally printed Conference Approved Literature (CAL) and imports any CAL not printed within the region.

A seven-person volunteer General Service Board oversees the Australian GSO, and the General Service Office in Melbourne employs six paid staff and many volunteers. Australia has its own Strategic Plan modeled on the WSO Strategic Plan. Al-Anon members and trusted servants in Australia have also supported the formation of groups in neighboring locations such as Samoa, Sri Lanka, and Fiji.

The New Zealand GSO represents a smaller population, with a total of 87 meetings in nine Areas. Its operations are managed by an Executive Budget Committee, and the General Service Office acts as a clearinghouse for Al-Anon information, group registrations, literature imports and sales, and other services. The Committee and General Secretary positions are volunteer-based, and the GSO also employs a paid office manager. This organizational structure was created in 2012 as a result of financial difficulties with the New

Zealand GSO's Reserve Fund; the structure is currently self-supporting.

New Zealand's office publishes a newsletter and maintains a toll-free meeting line and website specific to Al-Anon in New Zealand; the GSO also provides translations of the website text as well as the Serenity Prayer in Te Reo Māori, the indigenous language of New Zealand. The primary responsibility of the New Zealand GSO is ensuring the prudent management of New Zealand Al-Anon's operations and funds.

Trademark Issues/ Sharing and Reprints

Debbie P. and Lynette K., WSC Structure IAGSM Delegates

Delegates from the WSC Structure led this presentation providing information and guidance on Al-Anon trademarks in relation to the use of Conference Approved Literature (CAL). Copyright refers to the legal protection for authors of original works such as books, films, music, or art, while trademarks protect the use of an organization's mark, such as a word, phrase, slogan, symbol, or logo. The World Service Office (WSO) holds the copyright and trademark for all Conference Approved Literature and for the use of the Al-Anon name and logo. Unauthorized use or modification of the Al-Anon logo, sale or modification of CAL, and public posts using CAL (including video/audio recordings) all constitute violations of the Al-Anon copyright or trademark.

While the WSO holds the copyright for CAL, some uses of copyrighted materials by registered Al-Anon groups are permissible without authorization from the WSO, and many international service structures have been granted reprint permissions for CAL in translation or in its original form. The *2022-2025 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27) provides information on the reprinting and translation of CAL and use of Al-Anon trademarks. Permissible use of CAL and trademarks by registered groups includes the use of the Suggested Welcome, Suggested Closing, Suggested Preambles to the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts of Service at meetings without alteration or modification; use of Al-Anon's trademark and logo without modification for the purpose of public outreach; and screenshots or printouts of CAL for use during meetings, accompanied by copyright acknowledgment and not distributed or used outside of

the meeting. Enforcement of these copyright rules is required to preserve the WSO's copyright ownership, especially in the case of potential legal challenges to the copyright.

In keeping with these copyright requirements, the WSO is launching pilot efforts to expand the availability and legal use of CAL globally. These efforts are intended to increase opportunities for international structures to receive revenue from CAL sales and for international members to purchase CAL at reasonable prices. Issues prioritized in these pilot efforts include allocating costs, setting pricing, and granting translation permissions to multiple countries.

During discussion, international Delegates confirmed that sale and translation between international structures and accessibility of CAL were significant issues faced by their structures. Some structures described their own efforts to discourage unauthorized use of WSO copyright, and some had questions about the process of reapplying for reprint permissions in the case of outdated copyright agreements.

The 2022 WSO Board of Trustees's decision to release CAL in ebook format and its impact on international structures was another topic of discussion, as was confusion around the legality of translation and modification of WSO English-language social media posts. Following the discussion, WSO Staff and Trustees expressed a commitment to pause sales of new ebooks until the impacts and options could be evaluated and to investigate the feasibility of expanding social media image availability.

CAL Reprint/Translation Permission Process

Sarah S., Member, International Coordination Committee

Before describing the updates to CAL reprint processes, the ICC shared some reminders and information about reprinting CAL internationally. Al-Anon Family Groups Headquarters, Inc. has been granted authority by the World Service Conference to be the sole publisher of CAL in English, French, and Spanish. Permission to reprint CAL or translate CAL in languages other than English, French, and Spanish can be granted by AFG, Inc. to structures outside the WSC Structure. Separate permissions are required for all formats of CAL (such as physical books, ebooks, and audiobooks). All translations of CAL must be reviewed

Revising and Implementing New Alateen Safety Requirements

Johane M., France

and approved by the WSO for adherence to the spirit and meaning of the original work.

The ICC introduced several updates on CAL reprint and translation, including the new requirement for unique ISBN numbers on all pieces of translated CAL. The WSO is currently working with international structures to identify all translated CAL requiring an ISBN number before registering and providing the numbers to structures for inclusion on all new reprints of translated CAL.

Another update concerned the current Print Translation Request Form (A-17), which is being split into two separate parts: Translation Request (A-17a) and Translation Publication Request (A-17b). The Translation Request Form is required for GSOs translating CAL in new languages, publishing their first pamphlet or book in translation, or changing the translation process significantly. The WSO has been updating this process and the forms to include improvements to secure vital CAL manuscripts such as providing structures a PDF link rather than emailing documents for translation purposes.

The Translation Publication Request Form is required for any new printings of previously translated materials. Completion of this form allows the WSO to assign all translated material a new, unique ISBN number, as well as a unique catalog prefix for the language of the translated CAL.

Finally, the ICC provided an update on the independent review process required for new translations of CAL. The process is being updated to identify the names of members on the team responsible for the translation.

During discussion, members raised the issue of the WSO guidelines for CAL pricing, which disallow international structures from setting prices of CAL lower than the US price. Exchange rates and international taxes can lead to CAL being unaffordable for most members in certain structures, which also affects the finances of structures that rely on CAL for revenue. WSO Staff explained that pricing requirements are intended to prevent competition for book sales between structures and expressed their intention to collaborate with international structures to find a solution for potential problems caused by these guidelines.

The Delegate from France framed the presentation with an overview of the history of Alateen in France. Though Alateen has existed in the French Structure for 60 years, the National Alateen Committee was suspended in 2018 due to lack of activity. In 2019, the Committee was revived and began making efforts to increase Alateen's presence within the structure, which was interrupted again by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. During this time, one Alateen group began an online meeting that grew to include Alateen members from other regions as well. That group currently has 14 active members and continues to meet weekly over a private Zoom link. Attendees are screened by registered Alateen Group Sponsors, and the GSO has 13 current Sponsors who meet regularly to discuss meeting issues.

To ensure that the protocols for the online Alateen meeting are in line with national law and provide maximal protection for members, the France GSO is in the process of retaining a legal expert to review the procedures and guidelines for Alateen. In the future, the GSO hopes to register this group with the WSO as the first official Francophone online Alateen meeting.

The international Delegates discussed the different restrictions and policies surrounding electronic Alateen groups, which many expressed were desired by Alateens in their structure. Given the different laws in different countries around groups involving minors, Delegates described how they were dealing with specific restrictions in their own Alateen policies, balancing the need to abide by national laws and limit liability for the structure and Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. with awareness of the impact of Alateen and the desire to make Al-Anon available to young people within their structures who are struggling.

THE BIG QUESTION

Marsha W., International Coordination Committee

Framing:

In many countries, service is provided by a national General Service Office (GSO) which is linked to the World Service Office through the International Coordination Committee. The World Service Office sees the General Service Offices as our partners, as each of us is responsible for the day-to-day work to support our respective service structures. Our theme for 2022, “Connecting Hearts and Minds around the World,” reminds us of the importance of this cooperation.

In our changing world, as various topics arise that may have an impact on Al-Anon as a whole, how can we as service structures use the principles found in the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts of Service to assist us in supporting our worldwide fellowship?

Discussion:

Delegates discussed the unique challenges faced by service structures in different countries, and many agreed that opportunities for international cooperation such as the European Zonal Meeting were effective in working out issues and sharing experience, strength, and hope. Strategies for improving communication with underrepresented structures, such as expanding Zonal meetings to Asia-Pacific, and bringing more countries into the IAGSM, such as making use of technology, were also discussed.

Some members spoke about the importance of the Legacies in solving problems within structures and internationally, as they lead members to approach issues with the principles of unity, trust, and understanding. Other methods for effective problem-solving included looking to the *Service Manual* for answers, reasoning things out with other members, reading CAL, speaking with Sponsors, and spending time in meditation with a Higher Power.

WORKSHOP REPORTBACKS

Welcoming and Supporting Al-Anon Family Groups Meeting Electronically

Topic: Is your service structure having the conversation about welcoming and supporting groups that meet electronically?

Delegates in this workshop agreed that while electronic meetings come with both positives (such as increased availability to underrepresented areas and a greater feeling of equality within structures) and negatives (such as the issue of members who struggle with technology and a perceived lack of intimacy within meetings), virtual meetings have become widespread and will continue to grow. Members discussed issues like enabling Seventh Tradition contributions through online meetings and potential monetary costs to structures created by supporting electronic groups,

emphasizing the importance of flexibility and adapting to change. Delegates also talked about issues around hybrid and temporarily electronic meetings, many of which are facing the choice between remaining online and returning to face-to-face formats, and the costs and benefits of electronic groups registering within their GSOs or in the Global Electronic Area.

Service Structure: Supporting New Members and/or Groups

Topic: In what ways is your service structure carrying the message to attract new membership and/or new groups?

Delegates shared many ideas for expanding public outreach and informing those both in and out of the program about participation and service in Al-Anon. Some spoke about widening the scope and location

of meetings, adding more electronic meetings in their structure, holding dedicated newcomer meetings, holding Al-Anon meetings in the same locations as A.A. meetings, encouraging longtime members to attend newer and less-established meetings, and having established groups “sponsor” and support newer meetings. Some appointed dedicated Public Outreach volunteer positions or held specific weeklong events in which members were asked to do public outreach service, spread the word by attending A.A. conventions and other community wellness events or speaking at local universities and hospitals, and increased the accessibility of local Al-Anon information through website updates, meeting helplines, social media, and local contacts.

Trusted Servants: Delegates Connecting between Meetings

Topic: What does it mean to be a trusted servant?

Delegates shared the tools that have been most important during their service experiences, especially the 2022-2025 *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27), Service Sponsors, and the three Legacies. Some discussed the ways service has contributed to their recovery and their understanding of the program principles, as well as strategies for avoiding burnout and not overstepping the bounds of one’s service responsibilities. Open and honest communication between trusted servants was emphasized, including in the international context, and some Delegates from smaller structures expressed their struggle to stay as easily informed as those from larger structures. Connecting between meetings reinforced the importance of this communication and cooperation with other structures for the benefit of the fellowship.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

The Unanswered Questions session provided an opportunity for IAGSM Delegates to pose questions to the International Coordination Committee and WSO Staff.

Alateen

International structures know the 2021 WSC Motion only recognized electronic Al-Anon meetings as Al-Anon Family Groups, but we were given permission to continue to hold Alateen meetings temporarily online.

Since the WSO is doing a pilot with online Alateen meetings, where does that leave us in terms of the status of our online Alateen meetings? Can we now register them now within our structure?

Structures will not be able to register electronic Alateen meetings until the conclusion of the pilot project. If your structure is hosting an electronic Alateen meeting, the WSO would ask you to send us that information so we can include you in the pilot process and we can all learn together.

Gender-Neutral Language

Our GSO’s Handbook has shifted to use more gender-neutral pronouns; will the next edition of the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27) include gender-neutral language?

We have brought that discussion to the Policy Committee, and at that time the WSO decided not to make any changes. If international structures believe this is something the Committee needs to revisit, then the topic can be raised to the Policy Committee again.

IAGSM Travel

How does the WSO handle cancellations of international travel? Travel has changed since the pandemic; what are the procedures if a representative can’t attend IAGSM due to illness?

Typically, illness happens very close to the event. As a result, the WSO does not refund payments, because payments have already been made to the facility, for non-refundable travel, and for meals. However, it is absolutely up to your structure to choose an alternate to represent you at the IAGSM, and we would welcome another representative.

What were the reasons the WSO chose to book flights through Egencia, which may not always be the cheapest option for international structures?

The WSO organized booking through Egencia to help us administer our responsibility to pay for all travel, which is funded by the equalized expense payments received. This approach also allowed structures to book travel at lower rates, even if they didn’t have the payment ready at

the time of registration. The WSO is open to considering issues related to this approach at future IAGSMs.

Public Outreach

Can we translate a flyer from another structure about the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions into another language?

Yes, public outreach pieces are considered service tools, so they can be shared between structures. The WSO is also looking into making public outreach materials easier to adapt and translate for international structures.

One staff member in a hospital where our structure does public outreach asked about whether to refer clients who are adult children of alcoholics to Al-Anon; what resources could I give her?

Yes, she is encouraged to refer her clients to Al-Anon. Also, we have literature available specifically for adult children of alcoholics, such as Hope for Today (B-27).

Al-Anon Terms

I've heard that "codependent" is not an Al-Anon word; is that true?

The WSO Staffs rule of thumb is that if you don't find it in the index, then it's not Al-Anon language. All the language in Conference Approved Literature goes through the CAL process, but "codependent" is not one of the words in the CAL index. Since Al-Anon is a self-help program, not a professional program, Al-Anon language is not always the same as therapeutic language.

Our structure has service tools dealing with "cross-talk," and I would like some more clarity on what exactly that term refers to within an Al-Anon meeting.

The purpose of a meeting is to allow everyone to share, so answering or following up after another member's share rather than addressing questions one-on-one after a meeting has been described as "crosstalk." "Crosstalk" is not an Al-Anon term but reflects the practice of Al-Anon etiquette that applies the Traditions to maintain unity during the meeting.

From Hope for Today (B-27): "During meetings we take turns sharing, giving everyone a chance to speak, and thanking one another for doing so. We refrain from advising, criticizing, arguing, or judging. We let one another's words hover in the meeting room without contest, waiting for whoever needs them to absorb them. We give each other time to learn difficult lessons. We respect one other and thus ourselves."

Supporting Evolving Structures

How do we make this incredible event available to more structures, to evolving structures, to anyone, even lone representatives in a far-flung country who want to carry the voice of Al-Anon? Not all structures can attend the IAGSM, but it's a wealth of practical information and experience that could help all Al-Anon members around the world.

Many of those struggling structures are not GSOs so would not qualify to attend the IAGSM, but we are all here to support them, as well as our own structure. Zonal meetings are one way evolving structures can be supported, and online resources such as the IAGSM Summaries and AFG Connects can also be a way to spread information, for Delegates to help one another, and to reach the WSO.

Can we share the presentations from this IAGSM with evolving structures?

The presentations will be posted with the IAGSM Summary, so they can be shared with other structures as well.

AFG Connects

Sometimes questions on AFG Connects don't receive many replies; is there a way to improve communication between structures on that platform?

One way to share the excitement and energy of the IAGSM would be to communicate what you learned on the AFG Connects community for your Zonal area and spread the information with other structures. The WSO is also looking for solutions to improve communication with structures that aren't part of a Zonal area.

IAGSM Attendance

How many structures are in attendance at the IAGSM this year?

Seventeen countries attended the IAGSM with a total of 27 Delegates. An additional seven WSO Staff members and Volunteers were present.

Outside Issues

If a group wants to bring an outside element such as a song into a meeting, is there a guideline we can point to that explains why it's an outside issue and not appropriate for Al-Anon?

The pamphlet Al-Anon Spoken Here (P-53) is one resource that explains what is and is not Al-Anon. In my own experience, it's important to address issues and talk

to members one-on-one about avoiding outside issues without turning anyone away. This practice keeps the focus on Al-Anon for the benefit of the group members' recovery.

With drug abuse increasing in some countries, should we look to Nar-Anon as a resource? How available is that program in other countries?

Nar-Anon is available in the United States, but there are fewer meetings and it's not always as accessible as Al-Anon, so people do come to Al-Anon because of a loved one's drug use if Nar-Anon isn't available to them. In my home group, we welcome anyone coming into a meeting while also letting them know that the focus in Al-Anon is on alcoholism, and those who choose to stay can share from the Al-Anon perspective as well.

eBook Sales Globally

Although the volume of ebook sales per international country represent a small percentage compared with the WSC Structure ebook volumes, for some structures these volumes seem quite significant. In making its decision to release all books in ebook format on platforms which sell internationally, did the WSC Structure Board of Trustees consider the potential impacts on international structures' ability to be fully self-supporting in keeping with Tradition Seven?

Thank you for raising the concern. The WSO now realizes that the ebooks decision did not fully consider the potential of what appeared to be small volumes for our structure having significant impacts on international structures. We offer amends for not having discussed the plan in advance of our decision and commit not to release any additional books in ebook format until the impacts and options are thoughtfully considered and discussed with the international structures.

Marsha's Service Journey with the International Community

Can Marsha share a few words about her many years in Al-Anon?

With my service mostly being in the international community, the diverse group of faces and cultures and experiences that I've had over the past 26 years have made me more aware of who I am as an individual and also of how so much of what you do matters.

The work that you each do on whatever level you're doing it at is phenomenal. We could never make it work,

the work that our Board does, without you. Working for the World Service Office has shown me the Concepts of Service in action. You all help me to understand and to respect the principles of our fellowship, the Steps and Traditions, and the Concepts. We have literature that includes sharings from members, but the principles of the program are really all we ever have, and so, you know those countries that are starting out with nothing? They have a lot. I think back to when I went on my first trip and this young woman came over to us and said, in a Southern accent, "Where are y'all from?" I said we were from the United States, and she said, "I'm from Russia. But I learned my English in Texas!" She had a friend come down every week for eight hours on the train to that one meeting, because that was the only meeting she could get to in Russia and there wasn't any internet available. And for that I have a lot of respect—that you want recovery so bad that you would go to any lengths to get it. You have opened me up in ways that I didn't know that I could ever otherwise experience.

I am so grateful for the rotation of leadership that occurs on all levels. If those of us who came 26 years ago wouldn't leave, if we just got in our positions and said, "We're the only way, this is the only way it can be," the fellowship would never grow. To be able to participate and see it grow and then leave it to another generation of people coming behind is one of the greatest gifts. I feel like we're all soaring at this moment in time because we all get a chance to be a part of something big. And I've always said to people that I cannot explain it, they must experience coming to an international meeting to really feel it.

I've gotten so much hope from talking to members and being at this 21st IAGSM. In 2020, knowing that my retirement was planned, I was upset that we weren't able to come to London for the IAGSM because of the pandemic, and I thought, "Well, I guess I won't get to go." And God saw it differently, and He made an opportunity for me to be here with you. People have asked me what I am going to do in retirement. I don't really know; I know of things I want to do, but I know God has plans. I know that each of us will take back and be able to pass on what is necessary for our service structures. And I know that things will continue to grow and work out as they have. Al-Anon has a viable future. I'm grateful today because I know I don't have to do any of this alone. All of you are with me always, and I know I'm with you. So, thank you for asking me to share.

REFLECTIONS

Before the closing of the meeting, Delegates had an opportunity to share about their experiences during the IAGSM.

“I am a second-year Delegate, so I was part of the 2020 IAGSM that was held on AFG Connects, and although that experience was nice, it is certainly not what I have experienced here the last couple of days. I am so grateful to be part of a group and a fellowship of people who are so kind and so loving. This experience here in the last couple of days is beyond what I could have ever thought would happen to me in my life. When I came to Al-Anon, probably like many of you, I was broken. I was sad, I was crying all the time, I was hopeless. And I don't know how it happened that I ended up here at this meeting with people from all over the world who have the same passion that I do for Al-Anon. I'm truly grateful to my Higher Power, because not everybody gets this, so I feel really privileged to be here with all of you. I am truly humbled to be here, and I take a piece of all of you right here in my heart. I will take that home with me and share that with my group and my Al-Anon friends.”

“I came to Al-Anon full of rage and fear and anxiety, but I didn't have those words. I just knew that life was over. And it took me a long time after coming to Al-Anon to discover that what I found here was hope. This experience for these last few days has been very similar. I could never have imagined coming from that place of despair and hopelessness in my first meeting to where I am now in my personal recovery, and I think the same is true for my service journey. I struggle with the idea of accepting that I truly am here because I'm supposed to be here, but I think what Al-Anon has shown me is that I need to just trust. There are obviously a very limited number of structures that are represented here, but each has the same passion, the same desire for Al-Anon to grow, and the same gratitude for what you have received. It makes the world bigger for me. But it also makes it smaller, which is huge coming from the disease of isolation and the disease of fear. I have come to understand that fear is just part of what happens in my life, and it is a God-given emotion and feeling. To go beyond this fear, you feel the fear and go beyond and through it. And I know that I'm not alone.”

“Preparing to come here, my Service Sponsor wanted me to work through one of my defects, which is not

asking for help. I started that, and since then, I've had all these experiences. I think it's that I've just been willing to do something different and change my behaviour. That's really all you have to do. And she said to me, 'You're about to come to this place where there are 25 or 30 other people who are just as passionate about service.' And I kind of believed it a little bit, and then I come here, and I see all of you. I've been moved by seeing you all, of hearing you share. Seeing that you're just like me too. I love that, and I'm very grateful.”

“The message I got from my first Al-Anon meeting was one of hope and that things could be different in my life, and I got that same message coming here. Everyone wants the very best for Al-Anon and to fulfill our primary purpose. There's no way that I ever thought I would be here representing my country. I think my first piece of service was picking up tea towels in the kitchen, because I like to be that person who hangs back. Leadership freaks me out; I just like to be the backup person. So, when I got the phone call from the Board asking if I could be the IAGSM Delegate in London, I sort of panicked, but I was also very excited. I'm just so grateful for the way we have all connected our hearts and minds to make this such a successful event. I feel really encouraged by the things that have been shared. I have great hope for the future of Al-Anon worldwide.”

“At my first Al-Anon meeting, I was so afraid. The group I attended had all the Legacies and all the pamphlets set up, and they were meeting every day. And at this first meeting, they were talking about international service, the IAGSM, and I said, 'Oh, I want to go there!' I said my dream to my Higher Power that day with a lot of faith, a lot of conviction, and now here I am. I'm so grateful that I came to London. The gift is that I take you with me and this happiness, and I know all the new members will flourish more. Keep coming for others, because this is how Al-Anon functions and why we serve.”

“What has touched me most is the humility of those who serve around me. You teach me to stay grounded. You remind me that we are all equals in this room. I never once felt intimidated by any one of you, and that is a tremendous achievement for somebody in leadership. I know that Al-Anon is in good hands. We are all equal and we all learn together, and we teach together side by side.”

“In my home group, a member talked to me after the meeting and said something that I recognized here as well. She said, ‘It’s so amazing that you all have these open eyes filled with joy and open faces.’ She never saw that anywhere else and neither have I, and this is a result, I think, of our open minds and our open hearts. And I can say that the only place I ever really felt at home is Al-Anon. And you just gave me that on a new level. That’s what I get from Al-Anon, and the IAGSM is just an even bigger gift. Like others have said, I don’t have the words to express my gratitude. I’m filled with love and with hope and with strength.”

“I try to bring a very good welcome to the newcomers in my home group. I hear so many things here that will help them come back and stay longer. I tell them that Al-Anon is worldwide and it helps anyone who wants assistance, but that was just stories in the books. I am very grateful to my Higher Power for this opportunity to be here. Now I can say it’s not just stories, because I witnessed it, and I realize it is true.”

“I’m so grateful because the Twelve Steps have taught me how to live, relate to other people, and have attentive and healthy relationships. And today my life does have a lot of healthy relationships. The Concepts have helped me learn how to serve and to be of service. Al-Anon really is the first place that I ever felt I belonged, and I still do. Wherever I go, I am part of the Al-Anon family, as we all are. And now I’m so grateful because I feel like I have a whole new room of friends, not just family. I feel like every single one of you is a friend now, and what a privilege for somebody who’s spent a long time trying to be invisible. ‘Let It Begin with Me.’ It’s amazing what we can do when we’re all together. So, I’m just so grateful to every single one of you for being here and for sharing so honestly and humbly and passionately about your own journeys in recovery and service.”

SPIRITUAL SPEAKER

Miriam MacG., IAGSM Delegate—UK & Eire

I am the eldest of a family of seven. I came from a home where my father was the alcoholic. I have lovely memories of my early childhood. The sun seemed to always shine, and I was always out playing. At this stage, my father did not drink. We had a normal, happy home.

When I was seven, my dad was promoted, and we moved to Dublin. He started to drink for social reasons. However, because he was an alcoholic, once he started to drink, the disease began to show and progress. During this time, as a result of a further change in his career, we moved back to our hometown.

The disease progressed, and his drinking became obvious. Our home changed completely. It was no longer a happy and open place. At first, I was totally confused and did not know what was happening. I became a very fearful child. I was afraid of the rows between my parents, afraid that Dad would lose his job or kill someone on the road. These and many other fears dominated my thoughts. I prayed to God for help. I told Him what needed to be done to help our family. God did not seem to understand or care, as I never got the answers I wanted. I lost faith in Him.

Dad’s progression into alcoholism was very rapid. Within a few years, he reached his rock bottom, coming to the realisation that unless he got help, this disease that was destroying our family had the potential to kill him. He looked for help and was hospitalised.

He then joined Alcoholic Anonymous (A.A.). My mother joined Al-Anon. I remember my mother explaining what A.A. is and why Dad joined the fellowship. I didn’t really understand, and I didn’t care as long as Dad stopped drinking and our home became normal again. Their relationship improved, and our home became happier. However, my life continued to be unmanageable, and I was still a lonely, resentful child. Alcoholism is a family disease, and I began to realise that I needed help. I joined Alateen and, later, Al-Anon. I found people who had lived with the same problems as I had. The circumstances may be different, but our reactions and attitudes are similar. They accept me without judgement and are with me through the good and difficult days of my life.

Step One opened my eyes to the reality of my own powerlessness. I learnt that I was powerless over the alcoholic’s drinking, and I didn’t cause the disease, I couldn’t control it, and I can’t cure it. This was a great

relief. That left me focusing on myself, my own life, and my challenges. This was not easy, as I was too used to looking at others, their problems, their character defects, and how they were affecting my life. My default position was to seek out someone to blame for anything that went wrong in my life. The alcoholic and my mother were always the first in the line of blame.

I quickly learnt that this is a spiritual program. I saw people who thoroughly followed the program and reaped the benefits. I wanted what they had in terms of serenity, spirituality, and wholeness. I hungered for the relationship they had with their Higher Power. The tools to form a relationship with my Higher Power were there for me, but first, I had to let go of the small god to find God. Letting go of God was difficult because, like with many other “letting go’s” in my life, I feared a void. As I grew, so too did my hunger to find a God of my understanding and to allow God to be God.

Step Two gently introduced me to a Higher Power and the serenity that restoring sanity to my life brings. *How Al-Anon Works* (B-22), page 48, tells me, “What has been impossible for us on our own becomes possible because we have placed ourselves in the presence of something that surpasses our individual human capacity.” The process of restoring the wonder and beauty and fun of my early childhood began. In Step Three, I realised I needed to let go of control and put my will and my life in the hands of the God of my understanding if I wanted the serenity I saw in others. For me, this was scary and wonderful. I was relieved to shed responsibility for my will and life but scared of what the Higher Power might ask of me.

I began to believe that I was where my Higher Power wanted me to be and that as I follow His will for me, He will provide everything I need when I need it. This relationship with my Higher Power became the foundation of my recovery. I no longer had to be in control of everything. I became willing to listen and be guided and to work with His will in my life instead of insisting on mine.

Step Four enabled me to find the truth about myself. It helped me to really look at myself and learn about my strengths and shortcomings. It was one thing to explore my character strengths and weaknesses, but admitting them to God and another person was different. In doing Step Five, I discovered that God loved me unconditionally and none of what I thought were terrible defects fazed my Sponsor. She too loved me

without judgement. It was a real light bulb moment when she pointed out that many of my past errors were symptoms of a character defect. Many of my character defects served as defence mechanisms in the alcoholic home. Their usefulness had passed, and it was time to work on letting them go. With humility, I needed to learn to let them go and to let go of the baggage I carried for too long.

Step Six urged me to be ready to have God remove my defects of character. The gentleness of the program didn’t ask me to jump from identifying my defects to asking God to remove them. Step Six gave me the time and space to look at what I wanted to do and the change it would bring to my life.

When I was ready and had spent time becoming ready with my Higher Power, I moved on to Step Seven. The trust I built up from Step Three made unconditional readiness possible. I became able to look to change with a sense of anticipation. Step Seven was a humbling experience. I didn’t have the ability or power to remove my shortcomings. I needed the humility to ask my Higher Power for the help I needed to transform my life—to find the peace and serenity I yearned for as a constant in my daily life. While I asked my Higher Power to remove my shortcomings, my Sponsor reminded me that I needed to do my part in changing my attitudes and finding new responses to replace old behaviours.

Steps Eight and Nine gave me the tools to rebuild the bridges I had burnt. In taking Step Eight, I needed to make an honest list (my Sponsor reminded me to include myself). “Step Eight provides an opportunity to learn the difference between what is and is not our responsibility and to take a more realistic look at the effects of our actions.” —*How Al-Anon Works*, page 58.

Step Nine was difficult for me, because it required humility and a willingness to admit wrongs with the understanding that I was making amends, not asking for forgiveness. My ego needed to accept that someone might not forgive me, and that was okay. Making amends has gotten easier as I grow in the program. Today, I have no desire to carry baggage.

Step Ten recognises that I am not perfect—I am a human. I will do good things, but I will also make mistakes. Doing Step Ten on a daily basis helps me to keep the balance of recognising the good and responding promptly to my wrongs.

“Completing Steps Four through Nine does not insure that our lives will now be totally serene and free of problems....Working Step Ten helps us keep our bad times fewer and farther between. Continuing to take personal inventory keeps our slates clean and maintains our spiritual, emotional, and physical health to better deal with the rough times that occur in everyday life.” –*Paths to Recovery* (B-24), page 104.

Working through the Steps, my confidence has grown, and my relationship with the Higher Power has deepened. This work prepared me for Step Eleven.

I practise Step Eleven every day. In the early days, I struggled with identifying what prayer is and what meditation is. Today, I am growing in my understanding of both. Each morning, I spend time in prayer and meditation. As I practise Step Eleven, I turn my day over to my Higher Power. We work as a partnership: the Higher Power is in charge, and I get on with my part in the day at peace with the world.

Having grown up in an inland county, I spent 40 years living by the sea. Walking on the beach became a very precious time for prayer and meditation. I developed a pattern of praying as I walked down the beach and meditating as I returned. As I pray, I talk to my Higher Power about all the bits and pieces of my life, my joys, worries, and challenges. I can smile as I talk to Him in a way that as a child I would never have dreamed of. I no longer pray for my answer or what I thought was the right answer. I have confidence that God knows what I need and will provide the answer when the time is right. I pray to deepen my relationship with God and to understand what I can learn from what is happening in my life. I don't turn until I have finished praying and am ready to listen. On the return walk, I usually find that having let go of the bits and pieces of my life, I am now at peace and willing to listen and to be guided.

The Higher Power always lets me know His will in a way that I can understand. Meditation gives me the opportunity to listen and focus on the unconditional love and wisdom of my Higher Power.

Following the program has given me a road map to peace and serenity. This program has transformed me and my life. “My newfound spiritual awareness changed my perceptions, giving me new glasses that allowed me to see love where once there was only resentment and embarrassment.” –*From Survival to Recovery* (B-21), page 249.

Spiritual awakenings have been gifted to me as I practise the program and grow closer to my Higher Power. Some are profound, others are gentle reminders. In my early days in the program, it took me time to realise that trying to recruit members because I thought they needed Al-Anon was not carrying the message. I needed the experience, strength, and hope that comes from working the program to offer to a newcomer. Today, I willingly share the message that was shared with me and practise attraction rather than promotion. Al-Anon has given me the opportunity to serve the fellowship in different roles. Service is part of my recovery. It is my expression of my love for myself and is given, without conditions or payment, in gratitude to Al-Anon. Today, I know I must grow, or I will regress. Balance lies between stretching too far or languishing in a comfort zone. The principles of Al-Anon are the code of living that enrich my way of life.

Today, I live in hope: hope that I can live a serene life “One Day at a Time,” close to my Higher Power, at peace with my world, and willing to serve the fellowship that has given me the tools to live that life.

“Hope is not optimism, which expects things to turn out well, but something rooted in the conviction that there is good worth working for.” –Seamus Heaney

CLOSING

Kathi M., IAGSM Chairperson

The Chairperson shared her observations about the 2022 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting, offering her gratitude and appreciation for all the Delegates who prepared and shared their experience, strength, and hope; the UK & Eire Structure for holding the event; and the WSO Staff who facilitated the logistics.