

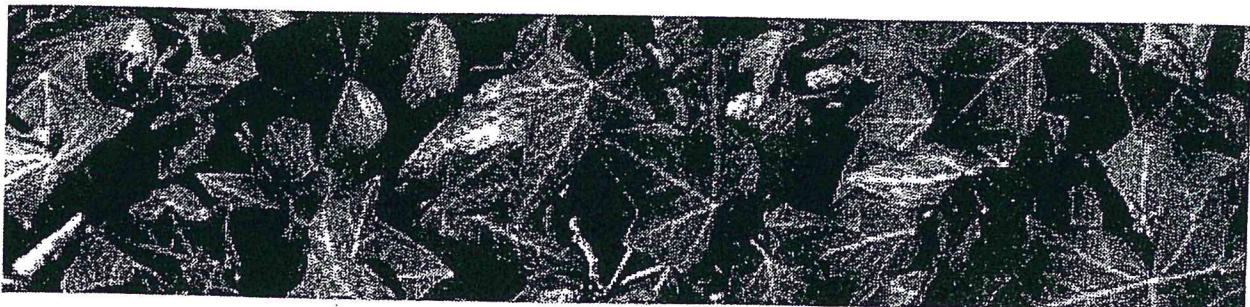
Growing

in Experience, Understanding and Love

Ninth International
Al-Anon General Services Meeting



October 16-19, 1997
Virginia Beach Resort and Conference Center
Virginia Beach, Virginia



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TWELVE CONCEPTS OF SERVICE

1. The ultimate responsibility and authority for Al-Anon world services belongs to the Al-Anon groups.
2. The Al-Anon Family Groups have delegated complete administrative and operational authority to their Conference and its service arms.
3. The Right of Decision makes effective leadership possible.
4. Participation is the key to harmony.
5. The Rights of Appeal and Petition protect minorities and assure 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 the 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 standing committees, executives and staff members.
12. The spiritual foundation for Al-Anon's world service is contained in the General Warranties of the Conference, Article 12 of the Charter.

GENERAL WARRANTIES

In all its 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 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 1997 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting:

Argentina	Marita B. P. Maria Graciela C.		Malgorzata Malczewska D.
Australia	Frances C. Jenny A.	South Africa	Helene L. Myrna T.
Belgium (Flemish)	Marleen W. Bettina S	Spain	Conchi Neyra G. Rosa Maria Tugues M.
Belgium (French)	Hélène D.	Switzerland (French)	Adriana J. S. Nicolus P. M.
Brazil	Maria das Gracas M. Ivone Moraes de I.	Switzerland (German)	Ursula P. Rita P.
Finland	Pirjo S. Satu S.	UK & Eire	Anne R. Sheila A.
France	Renée G.	US & Canada	Helen R. Margaret W. M.
Germany	Petra Kleine-H.		
Iceland	Gunnhildur O. Guðrún A.	Internatinal Coordination Committee	
Italy	Josephine B. Simone Drum B.		Margaret G. Mary C. Ric B. Mary Ann K. Jennie H. Marsha W.
Japan	Kazuko M. Kaori M.		
Korea	Sang Sook P.		
Mexico	Berthaluz M. América P.	Structures Unable to Attend	
Netherlands	Vieveke Heffernan-W. Ria H.		Colombia Costa Rica Denmark El Salvador Guatemala Paraguay Sweden Uruguay Venezuela
New Zealand	Joan W. Judy C.		
Norway	Siri Å. Eli Marie Ø.		
Poland	Olga (Anna) F.		



OPENING SESSION

Introductions

Margaret G.,
International Coordination Chairperson

The International Al-Anon General Services Meeting opened on Friday morning, October 17, 1997 at the Virginia Beach Resort Hotel and Conference Center in Virginia Beach, Virginia. The site city is the new home of Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters Inc. and representatives were welcomed warmly.

To begin the three-day international meeting, Mary Ann K., WSO, delivered the invocation, "God, we are grateful to be here. Why we are the ones chosen to have this unique experience to serve in Al-Anon is not clear to us. We know You are always available if we call on You. Help us to be open to each other so that our ideas, discussions and actions will be Your will for Al-Anon. We especially ask for help this weekend for our Al-Anon members in Russia who are meeting at their first trial Conference. Join them to us in spirit, bring peace to those still suffering, as we once did, from the effects of alcoholism in a loved one, and help us to make Al-Anon grow."

The meeting opened during breakfast as Margaret G., International Coordination Committee Chairperson, shared, "I can understand everyone's problem of alcoholism. I am the mother, daughter, granddaughter, wife, and grandmother of an alcoholic. With six great-grandchildren, I will probably be the great-grandmother of an alcoholic, too. When I first came to Al-Anon, I let my husband drink again after treatment, and I was afraid you were going to kick me out. We went around the room and everyone shared their name, I thought I would forget mine. Now, here I am standing here in front of you. I have friends around the world."

Margaret asked each member in attendance to introduce themselves. It was immediately apparent that worldwide Al-Anon was represented in that room as countries and structures from around the globe shared their thoughts at being there.

The delegate from Norway closed the early session by reciting the Serenity Prayer in her native language. During the course of the IAGSM, representatives would open and close each session in similar fashion which brought everyone closer to

the realization that the worldwide unity of Al-Anon has no barriers.

Roll call for the 1997 International General Services Meeting was done in a very unique way. A flag ceremony took place, as a country's name was read. The delegate or delegates walked to the podium and placed their country's flag in the front of the room, then proceeded to place a pin in a map of the world marking their geographic location. A circle of flags at the end of the podium table represented those GSO's that could not be in attendance. Margaret commented, "We wanted to feel them with us in spirit."

Mary C., International Coordination Committee Co-Chair, explained the voting procedures to be used at this international meeting. By a show of hands, the members provided a consensus to use written ballots for all motions presented during this meeting.

The next order of business was to decide whether a simple majority or a two-thirds majority would determine the vote. Once again, by a show of hands, the members agreed to use a two-thirds majority. Rounding out the voting procedures, Mary explained that abstentions would not be counted as a vote, the Chairperson may request that a motion be re-worded, and anyone may ask for a motion to be tabled for additional discussion at a later time.

The first motion was presented by the Admissions Committee which met and proposed that the Ninth IAGSM admit for the first time the Delegates from Korea and French-speaking Switzerland who have met the criteria as set out in the guidelines. The motion carried.

Keynote Speaker

Rita P., Switzerland

I accepted this speaking request with mixed feelings, I hope you understand my thoughts. At first I was very happy after my wedding day. I didn't know he had an alcohol problem. We had three children within three years so I had a lot of work to do. I didn't realize that I looked after my husband as well as the children. From year to year my life became unmanageable and I was nervous and ill. I thought he only drinks too much spirits. Drinking

wine and beer was quite normal, like everybody else. We discussed this and we decided to throw away all spirits kept in the house. Then I thought everything would go better and we marked the occasion with a bottle of good wine. Several depressions followed. I was alarmed to take my husband to the clinic. I felt very bad and helpless. Finally, I wasn't able to manage my family in the way I thought it would be the right way for a family to live. Then, one day, I was so tired in the evening, like I was every day, that I went to bed at about 8:00p.m. I slept very deeply. My husband watched TV and did not hide his drinking. At midnight, I woke up and just then he told me that he had an alcohol problem. It was Whitsaturday, and I am sure our Higher Power was with us. Speaking about this problem made it easier to accept at this first moment. The same night he called an AA friend and on Whitmonday he attended his first AA meeting. From this beginning he has been in the AA program and on his own recovery.

I thought now everything would go better because he is sober. There was something wrong with me because he attended his meetings regularly and was sober, but I was feeling bad. So I tried very hard to change something without knowing in which direction. I took a Bible course, helped with the church activities and I read all the AA literature which my husband brought home. There wasn't a big change in my feelings. After a few years I was looking for new possibilities. Finally I found Al-Anon through a big convention attended by three German-speaking countries in our city. Immediately, I knew this was the right program for me. From this time on I went to the weekly meeting in our city.

I like my group very much and I knew deep in my heart — this is my way. A year had not passed when I took my first service as a group representative in Al-Anon. I was so grateful to find such a marvelous program I wanted to do service for my recovery in Al-Anon. At my first Conference, they couldn't find any member to take over as treasurer since she was seriously ill. There was nobody ready to do this service, I couldn't understand it. I asked myself, why did it happen to our Conference based on the Al-Anon program. I remembered, there are difficult periods to find members who are ready to do service. I reflected on my situation. I could do this service at home as I had the ability to do my professional work as a bookkeeper in the same house as I live. In this way, the children didn't have to stay alone. My husband, as an AA

member, would give me his support. I decided to be an example. I applied for this service and I was elected at the next Conference. I began to read more CAL and tried to incorporate it into my life. I realized that most of my problems could be solved with our literature. I could use this program for my home group, for my service meetings and for my personal life too. The deeper the problems became the more I read in our Traditions and policies. As treasurer, then as a member of the board, I learned to understand our spiritual program more and more. I realized how important and helpful service is for me and for Al-Anon as a whole family. I worked hard on my relationship with my Higher Power which gave me a very open and honest connection with myself and the God of my understanding. With time I often found the right way to do service with love, patience and understanding, but sometimes I had difficulties. I always have to learn. We all are on our way to change our shortcomings, every day, every twenty-four hours, in our private lives as well as in our service work in Al-Anon.

I am responsible for the spirit of rotation which helps prevent a member in service from feeling she or he knows exactly how a job has to be done. Each person gets to do the same job differently. If one member does the same service too long, others might think this member will always do it and you get used to the situation. If the spirit of rotation goes well, you wouldn't get tired of doing service. As you change your job you will change also your service meeting and you get to know a lot of new Al-Anon friends better. Your time in service is very interesting and satisfying. I think it's very important to do only one service at a time. I made the mistake of doing two things at the same time. I wouldn't do this anymore. That's simply too much. At the conference, you have only one voice and vote. So another member could be in service, to take responsibility and to grow in the program.

I am responsible for our fellowship. I am still a member of a small group in my hometown. It's up to me to help keep its doors open, to be there for a newcomer, for all members of our group, for Al-Anon as a whole and for me too. In my mind, first of all, it's really necessary to attend my meeting regularly, then, for my own recovery it is important to do service. It doesn't matter what kind of service I do. I can't always take the positive things out of the Al-Anon shelves and never fill them up with some new things. In every shop there is a staff to fill up the different shelves. Then the customer

takes the necessary things he wants to buy. In Al-Anon, we are staff and customer together. It means we share and do service. As the fourth Concept states, "Participation is the key to harmony."

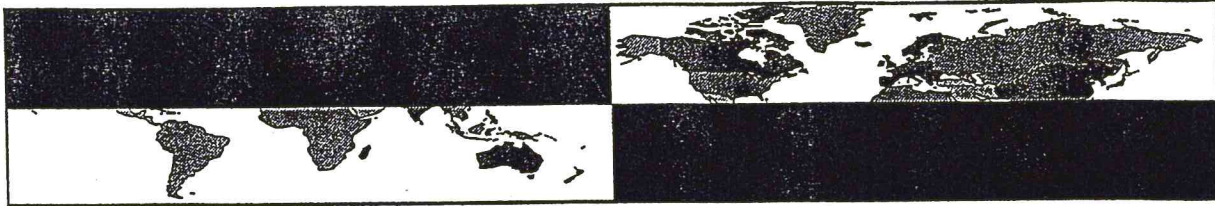
I am responsible for the unity not only in my group, but also in my service work. For example at the Conference they had to make a very important decision, but the members of our structure weren't ready to see that, so we had to accept another way. It's not always the wrong way, it just could be a longer way but a learning way. I think there can be a structure like a child and after ten, twenty or even fifty years it will become a structure like an adult. If there are some fighting members in service, the structure would have a very long way to an adult structure. Who is the structure in my country? Al-Anon members, we are all part of our structure, members of the group as well as members who do service. I already mentioned we all have our shortcomings and for all that we are on our way to recovery, like the structure is on its way. We are all together a chain, so everyone is a small link within the chain. With this picture in my mind, I feel the

humility of our wonderful program.

Now I am an IAGSM delegate from the German part of Switzerland. It's the first time I have been in the USA and I can hardly believe it. By the way, this is my second IAGSM and I am really privileged to stay here in Virginia Beach.

I didn't speak much at my first IAGSM in Brussels, Belgium, but I listened very carefully, and took the opportunity to receive a lot of different experiences from several countries. I learned so much for me as an ordinary Al-Anon member, and of course, for doing my service within the fellowship.

I feel the responsibility to our Conference and structure. I will try to bring the fruits, full of spirit and love from this meeting back to Switzerland. I know that the way of each structure in the different countries will profit every delegate who attended this meeting. So the way of the fellowship as a whole will go on and take the courage to change the things it can and accept the things it cannot with the help of our Higher Power the same as we do with our home groups.



GENERAL SESSION

Finding Answers in the Twelve Concepts of Service

Ivone L., Brazil

It is a bit of a miracle that Al-Anon could survive and develop from 1951 to 1970 without the Twelve Concepts as guidelines for service to show us how to do Twelfth Step work on a broad scale. So broad indeed, that it reached us who live in other countries, perhaps thousands of mile away, speak other languages, have different cultures, but nonetheless, have the same problems with a loved one that suffers the disease of alcoholism. Thanks to Lois, Anne, the other pioneers, and for the grace of our Higher Power, the message traveled very far and today we too have the opportunity to share our experience, strength and hope within the frame of Al-Anon principles.

Thanks to the Concepts, we gather here to discuss problems that affect Al-Anon as a whole and not to defend interests of any particular structure. I am here because the Delegates of the Brazilian General Service Conference chose me to represent them and thus, all Brazilian Al-Anon and Alateen groups that, through Concepts One and Two, have recognized their responsibility and delegated their authority to our Conference. Each one of us delegates is a trusted servant of Al-Anon and we have the right, and the obligation, to decide on all matters according to the opinion of our groups. This is Concept Three and the Right of Decision in action. The fact that we are here puts in evidence Concept Four that ensures us the Right of Participation. I could go on and on easily because when you speak of service in Al-Anon you are always applying the Concepts, sometimes, without even noticing it. Instead, I would like to take this opportunity to tell you a little about the Brazilian experience in Finding Answers in the Twelve Concepts of Service.

First of all, I must say that although Al-Anon began in Brazil in 1965, the big step toward the development of Al-Anon and Alateen in our country happened after the visit of two members of the WSO, Henrietta S. and Teresa M., came to our office in 1978 when they suggested that the *Service Manuals* be translated into Portuguese and pub-

lished. We took this suggestion very seriously. In 1979, our first General Service Conference took place and in 1980 the *Manuals* were published, which brought quick and solid growth of Al-Anon in Brazil.

Through the Twelve Concepts of Service we learned about the experience of the World Service Office and tried to make good use of it, knowing that it was the product of many trials and errors, hits and misses. We did not try to get out of this track and create another kind of structure because the one that the WSO was sharing with us through the Concepts applied perfectly well to our needs. The political division of Brazil in states is very similar to that of the United States. This made it easy for us to divide our structure in regions, areas and districts and follow the WSO model. Of course, we are several times smaller in number, and had to adapt many things to our size and financial capacity, but the essence remains the same. We are glad we did it this way, because nowadays, while we grow, we do not need to change anything. Thus, through the Concepts we organized our Conference, our Board of Trustees, our Executive Committee, and our General Service Office and its by-laws. Through Concept Eleven we organized our committees.

All these years we have made use of the Concepts to help us solve problems. It was a moment of great emotion, joy and dramatic applause, when our 18th Conference held in April 1996, after long and deep discussions, approved the purchase of a property to house Groups Familiares Al-Anon do Brasil Headquarters, in Sao Paulo. The Board of Trustees were battered by the delegates with all kinds of questions as you can imagine. The answers must have been adequate, because the motion was approved unanimously. In this great occasion Concept Nine and leadership were the basis of the decision, looking to the future though the vision of the trusted servants of Al-Anon in Brazil.

One individual member that had a few followers, although he was not engaged in Al-Anon service, was against the purchase of property by our General Service Office (and, by the way, the World Service Office) and sent a long letter to the Board

of Trustees using his Right of Appeal ensured by Concept Five. His letter was read to the Conference, every item of it was discussed and answered, and the Chairperson of the Board asked the assembly if anybody wanted to add anything or to discuss the matter further. Nobody wanted to add or discuss anything, and the matter was closed.

We applied Warranty One of Concept Twelve, when we decided that our reserve fund should be good enough for our GSO to survive for at least one year in the case that group contributions, due to financial depression, should go down to none.

Lately, our Board of Trustees, recognizing its primary administrative responsibility through Concept Six, and feeling the danger of becoming weak in this matter, decided to modify the candidates' resumé form, in a way that enables us to choose members who combine the Al-Anon wisdom with some administrative and financial knowledge. This shall enable us to preserve the Board's balance and will ensure an efficient administration.

Concept Ten enables us to restate our whole structure. I will not do it here, but only comment on our experience. The balance between responsibility and authority is not always well understood by all members of Al-Anon. Some feel that the trusted servants should have responsibility, but no authority. This is a big misunderstanding that permeates our structure. Perhaps it could have been a mistake of translation of a key word somewhere that we still did not detect. Or maybe it could be only that people that feel this way are still very sick and unable to understand our perfectly democratic system.

I read somewhere "that to speak to the wind, words are enough, but to speak to men actions are necessary." Action, together with vision, are requirements of good leadership. In the last years, our leadership is taking giant steps towards the achievement of an up-to-date Al-Anon that is able to reach people everywhere in our country and, at the same time, to cope with the needs of the world today. In doing so, we surely are not mistaken when looking for answers, we use the Twelve Concepts of Service.

Discussion

IAGSM delegates shared their personal and structural experience growing in Al-Anon through the Twelve Concepts of Service.

One member explained that it was not easy to read the Concepts in the groups. In 1996, the

National Service Conference members were asked to speak about the Concepts. This helped the delegates participate in the meeting and was reported to the districts and then to the groups.

A structure's representative shared that a few years ago an effort was made to read the Concepts as well as the Steps and Traditions at the start of meetings since they are the 36 principles of Al-Anon. There was some opposition because they are wordy. People were reminded that when they first came to Al-Anon, the Steps were wordy and through repetition they became more meaningful. There are now groups that study the Concepts, and more people are becoming familiar. When we apply the Concepts to our family life, it makes things simple.

When you deny a problem, you can't look for solutions. The Concepts give us solutions to problems we never dreamed existed. They are a journey to awareness, and help to develop a sixth sense for problems.

Another delegate told the members that her structure had problems understanding the Concepts. They had an old translation and recently did a new one. Even the trustees had trouble understanding. In 1995, Ric B., attended their Conference and Board meeting, and members started to look at the Concepts at a deeper level. The trustees started to realize that the structure was not according to the Concepts, and the idea to change the structure was taken to the membership. This was a big deal because the structure existed successfully for 15 years. Not many people realized there were problems. Trying to change took hard work. Some committees did what they wanted to do and not what the Conference wanted. They felt the structure didn't need to look like America. They didn't accept leadership in Al-Anon. They said we are all equal and didn't accept someone telling them what to do. At our last Conference, it was finally decided to change the structure according to the Concepts. Lots of letters were sent to WSO to try to understand.

A delegate shared that the structure has had problems with the 1986 IAGSM motion that the text of the Concepts not be altered by an structure. For members to get interested and involved in the Concepts, they can't identify. For instance, the use of the World Service Office. For the average member, they are only interested in their own structure and their own GSO. They learned how invaluable the Concepts were when the structure went through difficult and painful experience. Some members

were trying to bring down the Board and the dismissal of the General Secretary. Use of the Concepts helped. They have wonderful descriptive text, but it's difficult getting the average member to study something they don't identify with.

One structure tries to implement different Concepts. There are people who have difficulty accepting leadership and authority. They have back-to-basics seminars and have learned that communication brings harmony. The leaders need to help others communicate.

In one member's experience, almost every problem that comes from a structure has an answer in the spirit of the Concepts. The spirit or the principle is what will answer the problem. If we let people change the Concepts, changes could be made to solve a particular problem at a particular time in a particular place.

Identifying with the terms, "World Service Office" and "World Service Conference" were problems for one country. In new translations, they use footnotes to clarify what they do in their country. People say they are beginning to understand.

One member explained that when she wants to explain the Concepts to groups and members not in service, she uses a three-legged stool. If you stand on the stool with only one leg, you're wobbly. A second leg makes it sturdier, but you need a third leg to rest firmly. If your program is wobbly, perhaps you are just standing on one leg. We need effective business practices to carry the message of hope around the world. The Concepts are how we use the Steps and Traditions in business. We try to keep it simple and bring it down to a personal level. The Steps protect me from me, the Traditions protect the group from me, and the Concepts protect Al-Anon for the future.

A delegate involved in updating her structure's manual, thanked the members for their suggestions, particularly about adding footnotes. This will help members who are opposed to using the Concepts.

Recently, a structure had a big push to get members to understand the Concepts and have seen good growth through every service level. The encouragement started with the Board. At the last two Conferences, there were many workshops. The District Representatives took the workshops, repeated them in the districts, and advised the Group Representatives to bring the Concepts into the groups. The Concepts can be applied to your personal life and can make you feel new and alive.

A group that called themselves the Triangle

Group studied the Steps, Traditions and Concepts. When they got to the Concepts, the majority of the members were not active at the world service level and didn't know about Conference, WSO finances, etc. We talked about putting the Concepts to work in our personal lives. Try to take the Concepts and get them out of the business idea and bring them down to daily life. Don't let the minority or majority keep us stuck. Leadership and right of decision is with the family. When members tried to make all the decisions, there is chaos. We had to trust in a Higher Power who was the ultimate authority if we let Him in. Minority opinions were not allowed, they were banished. The Concepts give each of us the right to voice our opinion, but not the right to win others over to that opinion.

When one member was asked to be the delegate at the IAGSM, her service sponsor told her that she must know the Concepts because she will be asked about them. She studied them and even had her husband quiz her. Now they give her answers to problems.

A group had Twelve and Twelve meetings, and had strange meetings once a month on the Concepts that no one understood. They were boring and very few people came. Even taking them to their personal lives, they struggled for over a year. Gradually they started to understand and use them. As a result lots of people are in service because they now know what the structure is about.

Thanks were given to the WSO for the help and support given to one structure for helping them set up according to the Concepts. They still have difficulties, and thanks to everyone for sharing their difficulties. This gives hope and courage to all since we seem to have the same problems. I can see my structure in your sharing. Sometimes we get lost, and again, you have shown the way.

Internet

Helen R., US/Canada

Lois and Anne began the history of Al-Anon in 1951 keeping track of groups on note cards, corresponding with members by typewriter, and using a mimeograph machine to duplicate messages. In October 1996, the history of Al-Anon expanded to include a worldwide web site. Did you ever think about the fact that what is happening with Al-Anon today is part of our history? With this web site, Al-Anon entered



into the electronic era with a worldwide communication vehicle to carry the message of hope to families and friends of alcoholics. This site is a gateway to our future, and in the spirit of our program we are taking it one step at a time.

How does the web site reach out to families and friends of alcoholics, Al-Anon's primary purpose? When a professional, a member, or a potential newcomer "hits" or visits the web site, they are truly anonymous. Once they have made contact, the reader has access to listings of available literature and Information Services Offices around the world. We are in the process of including more information to our Spanish page and adding French to the page is the next project. Our Conference-Approved Literature catalog is featured with order forms that can be downloaded (printed out) and mailed or faxed to the WSO. Three recovery stories and the calendar from *The Forum* are all attractively presented each month, encouraging recovery through our "voice of the fellowship." Information for public outreach is available, including the Fact Sheet for Professionals.

An on-line tour of the site for IAGSM members highlighted the literature section where new pieces of material are graphically displayed, and articles from *The Forum*, complete with a color photo of the cover, were shown. By pointing and clicking the mouse, visitors can visit the various pages. Brand new in the professional section of the Home Page is an electronic post card. Professionals can visit the site, fill out a card to request more information and send it back to the WSO on-line. Projects for the future include a WSO e-mail address and capability to order literature on-line.

Al-Anon's web site is truly international in scope. Within the first full month of operation, the site was visited by individuals from 21 countries outside of the U.S. and Canada, including Sweden, Mexico, the U.K. and Austria. To date, the site has been visited by people in 36 countries, including Germany, Norway, Belgium and Korea. A show of hands illustrated the number of people in the room who have accessed the Al-Anon Home Page on the web. Several GSOs have informed the WSO they are in the process of setting up their own web sites.

Technology is rapidly opening new doors for our fellowship. Even though we want to stay up-to-date on our methods of reaching out to those who still suffer, we need the wisdom and experience of our members, our leaders and the World Service Conference. We are moving ahead slowly with input from our Internet ad hoc committee which

reports to the Executive Committee and the Policy Committee. It is our hope and prayer for those who find Al-Anon on-line that they also will find the "understanding, love and peace of the program, in a "face-to-face" meeting anywhere worldwide.

If you have access to the Internet and the World Wide Web at home, through a friend or your public library, you may browse the WSO's first steps into electronic technology by using the address www.al-anon.alateen.org

Discussion

The cost of establishing and maintaining the Home Page at WSO was discussed. There was an initial set up cost, and maintenance charges of \$150.00 per month for the server which includes five telephone lines available to contact the Internet site. \$100.00 a month has been budgeted to update the Home Page for items such as *The Forum*, and "Getting in Touch". Three thousand dollars was set aside for upgrades, including the "Alateen Talks" newsletter. Spanish and French sections are underway. Members of the WSO staff have been sent to training classes so the Home Page updates can be done in-house.

A question was raised on whether a structure could have its own site or whether it would have to join an international page. Members shared their personal and their structure's opinion on this issue. One suggestion was that all GSOs unite on one address to allow each one to be represented. Due to costs and varying degrees of computer literacy, those who want to be active in setting up and maintaining the site could; while those who prefer not to, can still be represented on the site. This would allow the structures to cooperate like never before. A committee could be established including one trustee from each structure that wants active participation, as well as the WSO. Each GSO could present material, including a meeting list in their own language to carry the message of recovery.

If a GSO decides to have a Home Page it would create a committee ideally with one Board member and that committee would be responsible to the Board. This is in accord with Al-Anon's Concepts.

Another suggestion was to join the WSO Home Page. This would be less expensive for each GSO, provide a consistent format for each structure, and have the presentation of official Al-Anon/Alateen material on the web. IAGSM structures could contribute to the design, via e-mail and would give those interested countries cost-effective web space.

Another member shared that she has traveled on-line quite a bit and was amazed to see the number of sites, but they are not always good. They discussed it at their board meeting and decided that they must do their own site in a hurry. Others are coming before us and putting things on there that are not true, but we don't have control. The only thing we can do is make a good page that people would prefer. A delegate asked if we are making it more difficult for people to reach out to us if every GSO has its own Page. The suggestion was shared to just have one Page for the entire fellowship. There are so many sites with "Al-Anon" in their name, it's difficult to tell which one is genuine.

All GSOs who have created Home Pages are encouraged to hyperlink (connect) to the Al-Anon/Alateen Home Page. WSO will do additional research and make some suggestions to GSOs on costs and the logistics of integrating all these countries into one site.

One delegate shared the concern of her structure that an Al-Anon member is going on the worldwide web with his own address. Organizing all the GSOs would help problems like this.

E-mail was encouraged by one delegate for the WSO and for everyone. In the past, the only way to write was using a typewriter. When a person wrote a letter to the WSO, you would have to go to the post office, and may put it off for days. With the computer you can do it right away. Using e-mail, sponsorship takes on new meaning.

The WSO staff members explained that the office is taking this technology one step at a time. The present computer system is new and has suffered from every problem that could happen. The WSO doesn't have the staff available to handle the influx of electronic mail that would result from an immediate e-mail address. The hope is that e-mail will happen in the near future. Although a wonderful vehicle for communicating, the WSO has made a commitment that correspondence received through e-mail will not be treated any differently, or answered faster, than regular mail. There must be a balance so all members get the same services.

Other delegates shared their excitement over this new tool, but cautioned that guidelines need to be developed to safe-guard our Traditions, and our anonymity. The web is a place to get in touch, and we need to avoid making big mistakes.

It was explained that the name of Al-Anon's Home Page is protected. We can suggest that individuals not use the name "Al-Anon" or "Alateen" in their web address.

A question was asked on what literature can be reproduced on a web site. The WSO Internet ad hoc committee created a listing of literature for the web that was distributed to each IAGSM member. Conference Approved Literature is not available for on-line use at this time.

Despite the financial difficulties one structure is experiencing, they decided it was worth the investment to have their own Page as a public information tool. More and more professionals are looking for information on Al-Anon, and they are looking on the Internet.

The topic of on-line meetings was brought up, and it was explained that meetings can exist in "chat rooms" which are live, instantaneous discussions, or through e-mail. One member shared that she has attended on-line meetings, and like face-to-face meetings, some are good and some are bad. Most of the meetings encourage members to attend regular in-person meetings. It does work when you have a strong group. Just like face-to-face meetings, members choose not to attend the bad ones.

The World Service Office explained that its position has been not to do for others what they can and want to do for themselves. There are some international sites that are not connected to the WSO. Some of the languages and the sections do not use approved translations of the Steps or Traditions, and they don't follow the group conscience of the structures. Not all structures can afford to create and maintain a web site right now. The question is what serves the greatest good for the greatest number. The WSO will investigate whether an International Page could be created where GSOs could participate and have the same address. It would then be left to each structure to decide to participate or not. The primary purpose of the Internet Home Page was and continues to be to reach out to newcomers and professionals.

Gratitude Forever, My Recovery Thanks to Our Seventh Tradition

Bertha Luz M., Mexico

I am an alcoholic's wife. I come from Mexico City. I came to Al-Anon like most all of us. A month before my first meeting my sponsor loaned me a book, "Living with an Alcoholic." I didn't read it, I devoured it.

My start in the program during the first five years was only recovery. I got all the Conference Approved Literature I could acquire. Unfortunately, it took a painful bottom to get to service

which started with serving the group as GR, then the district which had 22 groups. I had satisfaction with service. My main motivation was always service, the literature and the Seventh Tradition. I came to the area and even proposed myself for some services. My Higher Power had reserved for me a special service, treasurer. The area had a lot of needs and few contributions. Ten days after I came to the area, our dear Lois died.

With all the support from the committee and the DRs, we obtained all that the area needed, and I left a prudent reserve at the end of my service. Naturally, it happened in answer to the Seventh Tradition through contributions by the 202 groups that formed the area.

Some mates suggested me for service at the GSO, but I always answered them, "This is not my time for this office." Nevertheless I offered myself to the Budget Committee two times. No one considered my offer. One more time, needing to work, I brought my curriculum to the manager. God, who cares for me, carried me where I never imagined — without my looking and without my asking — the Board called me to be a manager to the GSO. I couldn't believe it, but it was true. He had taken me there because I have an alcoholic relative. He helped me know Al-Anon, enjoy its marvelous principles and take pleasure from an emotional detachment which I never thought could give me joy.

Well, here I am the Executive Director of national Al-Anon — 2,500 groups, 30 structured areas, seven permanent committees and twelve employees on staff.

When I saw the bank accounts, the situation was terrible: debts you can't imagine: insufficient funds not enough for the payroll, and rent of the office building. We started the work — the Board of Trustees, Budget Committee, Executive Committee and staff — to motivate the groups, to create a service center, printing and distribution of new literature pieces, 5+5 campaign, love envelope, quarterly contributions, personal and birthday contributions to the GSO and the WSO — all were included in our annual calendar.

They were hard months, but our Higher Power always was with us and of course, Lois, beside Him, staying awake because Al-Anon in Mexico had to survive. We had to give life to our Seventh Tradition, the most spiritual of our Traditions because without it we can't go on passing the message. The answer came very soon. The conscience and the Conference was given to our beloved GSO.

As of this date, we had covered all our debts, we have enough resources that permitted us to print all the Conference Approved Literature. We are on time in all our legal and working affairs. We maintain an excellent relationship with the WSO. This year it was financially possible to have a Representative at the World Service Conference and two delegates at this IAGSM.

Already set for us in Al-Anon, is a table and we only need to stretch the hand and take all that love that Al-Anon gives us because through the service, we can give it to somebody who is still suffering.

I love you all and thank you because without your work, the message of hope couldn't continue.

Discussion

As the discussion began, a delegate asked whether a structure could purchase property for their GSO. Members shared that each structure is autonomous and has to operate within their own by-laws. Two years ago in Brazil, the office was very old and they were afraid they would have to close. They looked for new places to rent, but they were so expensive. The GSO took the matter to their Conference in 1996, and the members voted unanimously to purchase an office. The Conference followed the same format as the World Service Conference — the members participated in a moment of silence and then voted on a motion based on the 1994 WSC motion. There were a few members within the fellowship who disagreed, and the GSO tried to answer all their questions. After hearing their opinions, it was time to move on. The GSO now focuses on rebuilding their reserve fund.

The World Service Office shared their experience with the purchase of property. One barrier was the interpretation of Tradition Six. There were large numbers of groups and delegates opposed to purchasing property. In 1994, the World Service Conference did not vote to own property, the members voted to own property on a 15 year trial basis. Our Concepts say that change should be experimental. The motion contained a number of safeguards. For instance, the Conference has the authority to terminate ownership, and the money from a sale cannot be used for any other purpose but future occupancy. Before the vote, the World Service Conference had a moment of silence. The vote was not unanimous, but over three-quarters of the members approved the motion. The Conference also established a separate committee to manage the property independent of the Board, to

ensure that we are not diverted from our primary purpose. Although the purchase of property is up to each structure, it was suggested that a structure consider the WSC motion. The WSO found that when the fellowship saw the principles of the motion, and the willingness to ensure that not one Step, Tradition or Concept is ever broken, they felt more comfortable.

Another member from a small structure shared that her structure makes literature packages and sells them for \$15.00 to hospitals, doctors and other places. So far they have raised \$2,200 in income.

Another shared that many regions were in the red for finances. The mark-up on literature was 35% due to the exchange rates, and the cost to run the GSO was very high. They went to the groups and explained that money was needed for Al-Anon to survive. Once they understood, the money came rolling in. The GSO established specialized funds. Within 18 months, 20,000 rand was raised for a literature fund. All the money raised with literature sales goes back into this fund. Another fund for printing was set up and they are trying to raise 30,000 rand to ensure that once translations are done the material can be printed and available to the membership.

Another member felt that the Seventh Tradition is where spirituality and business come together.

One new structure shared that their structure has been very fortunate to have no financial problems. They have no office, just a mail box, and they don't have to print their own material since they buy from the WSO. They recommended to their groups that they make three contributions — one in February/March to the GSO, one in April to the Intergroup for the convention, and one in November for the WSO.

Members shared their experiences with participation at various AA conferences and conventions where the hat is passed and AA keeps all the money despite the costs to Al-Anon for the organizing committee and other expenses. Delegates explained how they have been able to overcome the situation. One structure has divided the money at the end of the meeting where AA gets two-thirds and Al-Anon, one-third. This has worked well to keep the relations positive. Another established ground rules up front on the contributions received. Some participants felt that AA violated their own Seventh Tradition. One structure shared that they now organize their own convention and hold it at the same time as AA, but each handles their

expenses and contributions separately. Unity can exist in all our Traditions.

A GSO is having problems with funds generated by the sale of literature. The funds are administered by the Literature Committee and not integrated into the GSO finances. Another structure is having problems where AA will not sell their literature to Al-Anon members.

Alateen Sponsorship in a Changing World

Sheila A., U.K. & Eire

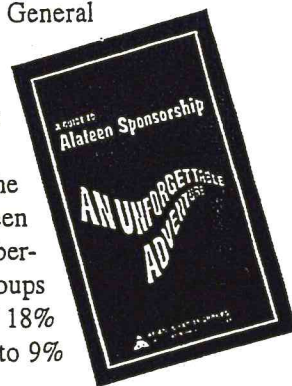
The first Al-Anon group in the U.K. & Eire registered with the World Service Office in 1952, but it was 1964 before the first Alateen group was formed. Sadly it did not last very long, but that is the nature of Alateen groups. As the years went by, the number of Al-Anon groups grew, and it was in 1970 that we became a General Service Structure; we incorporated, opened our General Service Office, and held our first Conference.

As with all structures, the number of registered Alateen groups fluctuates as the membership changes. Alateen groups have ranged from a peak of 18% of Al-Anon groups in 1986, to 9% in 1996.

There have been many, many Al-Anon members who, over the years, have served loyally and enthusiastically as Alateen sponsors, but we also have experience with Al-Anon members volunteering to be sponsors who, for various reasons, are not suitable.

We first became aware in 1987 of some more serious problems in respect of behaviour at a convention and discussed with our solicitors the legal responsibility of Al-Anon Family Groups U.K. & Eire for Alateen members. In our country, the way in which we obtain such advice is to brief a solicitor who will then approach a more senior lawyer called Counsel. The Counsel will then produce an opinion based upon his knowledge of the law in general and previous case law. As a result of the advice we received in 1987, we produced a Responsibility Statement based upon that of the WSO.

In the U.K. & Eire, our policy sometimes differs from that agreed by the World Service Conference. We discuss the policy amendments from the WSC



at our Conference, and occasionally make changes. This happened with the policies concerning Alateen sponsors. In the U.K. & Eire, AA members are no longer involved in Alateen groups. Dual members do not sponsor Alateen groups nor may AA members assist with Alateen groups.

These policies evolved over the years. However, in the recent past, the AA GSO in our country asked us to remove any mention of AA involvement in Alateen from our Manual. They felt that Alateen was Al-Anon's responsibility and had nothing to do with AA. We had much discussion on this at our Conference and agreed.

Another policy decision taken in 1994 was that the term of service for an Alateen sponsor be three years. At the 1996 U.K. & Eire Conference, two policy amendments were made — that there should be two Alateen sponsors present at all times at Alateen meetings, and it was reaffirmed that the age range for Alateen members was between 12 and 20.

The Area Highlights meeting held at the 1994 U.K. & Eire Service Conference requested that the General Service Board "seek legal advice in relation to our current U.K. & Eire policy which allows any Al-Anon member who is not also a member of AA to appoint themselves to the position of an Alateen sponsor." This recommendation came at a time when many members were questioning the responsibilities of sponsors and asking for guidelines on methods of selecting sponsors.

As a result of the delegates' request, in 1995, the General Service Board formed a working party to prepare another brief for our solicitor who then obtained a counsel's opinion. One section of his advice was that it was necessary to take greater care over the appointment of sponsors. The action of accepting their names at the GSO made Al-Anon Family Groups U.K. & Eire responsible for them.

There were many meetings of the working party to study the counsel's opinion and to prepare a document outlining Al-Anon's responsibility for Alateen. After much heart searching and deliberation of our understanding of the Traditions and Concepts, the General Service Board presented to our Conference in 1996 a document outlining procedures for the appointment of Alateen sponsors and the registration of Alateen groups. Conference members were asked to discuss this document with all Al-Anon and Alateen groups in their areas, and to send to the GSO any additions and amendments for consideration. There was a great response from individual members, districts and areas that result-

ed in many amendments to the original document.

There were some adverse comments such as: no member will be willing to go through a screening process; this will kill-off Alateen, and why make any changes when nothing has happened, don't fix it if it isn't broken. After extensive debate we accepted that we had no option other than to take some action.

Also at the 1996 Conference, the Chairman of the General Service Board read out a letter that made allegations of abuse by sponsors. It was claimed that the abuse had taken place over many years at Alateen residential events. We investigated, but could not find any evidence to support these allegations.

We have sought the help of those members who are working in the field of child care, as well as those involved in working with children who are victims of abuse. We have also taken advice to try to find ways to protect the Alateen sponsor from malicious or false allegations.

It is not fear of litigation that has taken us down this path, although that has to be considered, it is the awareness of our responsibilities to try to protect Alateen members from inappropriate sponsors. We live in a society where there is a changing attitude toward the care of young people. It is expected that organisations such as ours will have strict codes of practice for the selection of the adults who care for children, in fact, the government is preparing legislation to this effect.

There is another problem for the trustees. Because of the way in which our pioneers set up the incorporation of the fellowship in the U.K. & Eire, the trustees cannot take out indemnity insurance to protect either their personal assets or those of Al-Anon Family Groups U.K. & Eire from possible litigation in respect of these or other allegations. I am currently working with the Charity Commissioners, the government group who works with not-for-profit organisations, to try to change this situation, but there is no guarantee these negotiations will be successful.

It has been a very difficult period for all those involved in this situation. The result is that, in September 1997, the U.K. & Eire Service Conference approved the introduction of a procedure for screening all existing and any prospective Alateen sponsors, and to keep a register of screened sponsors at the General Service Office. **A new Alateen group cannot be registered at GSO, if it does not have two screened sponsors present at every meeting.**

We have evolved a procedure for this purpose that consists of a sponsor or prospective sponsor being nominated by his or her Al-Anon group; by completing an application form; by providing the names of two people able to verify his/her identity which is important in our anonymous fellowship; by being introduced at the next district meeting; by attending an interview held by the delegate and one other service member, and by being prepared to be scrutinised against the police register of sex offenders.

It is a simple procedure, but it satisfies those in authority that we are taking proper care to ensure that only those fit to do so may serve as Alateen sponsors. If we encourage children under 12 to attend Alateen meetings then our procedures would have to be even more stringent as the duty of care owed to younger children is much greater.

The positive side of this situation is that many members have intimated that they would be willing to come forward for screening. In the past, they had felt that their position would be vulnerable and, therefore, could not make a commitment to service as an Alateen sponsor.

We feel that after an initial setback when this system is first implemented, the number of Alateen groups will grow again. Those involved in the caring professions will once again recommend Alateen as a resource for young people living with the effects of someone else's problem-drinking as they will not do so now unless there is a code of good practice in place.

We firmly believe that Alateen and all those members involved in Alateen will go from strength to strength. Teenagers who have yet to find the help waiting for them in our programme will find a secure and safe place in Alateen meetings.

Discussion

The meeting participants shared similar experiences and ideas to help solve this vital issue. One member explained that they were shocked with all the abuse of children. In the past, members who wanted to be sponsors to Alateen came to the district and everyone said yes. Some fear that if you ask too many questions, they won't want to be sponsors. A few trustees have asked for resumes, but others focus on anonymity. There was even a situation where a child was at risk to be kidnapped. When we asked about it, no one would tell. We did a Fourth Step, created a meeting for sponsors, and have a committee meeting for Alateen at our ser-

vice conference. Alateen is a part of Al-Anon and must follow our program. We cannot have double winners as sponsors.

In one country, the Board of Education asked that Al-Anon be the "official" program for the children in the schools. They have 15 Alateen meetings during the school hours. This lifts the responsibility from the Alateen sponsor since the counselor is always there. In our meeting lists, the groups are listed as Alateen - Limited Access. This has worked very well for us.

One problem being dealt with is the guidelines that state that a sponsor cannot repeat what they hear at a meeting, not even to the police. Children tell things to the sponsor in confidence, and the sponsor can only do the Steps and encourage the child to go to the Police. A psychiatrist called the GSO and said they he had seven children to recommend to Alateen, but asked for a guarantee that nothing will happen to the children. We couldn't make such a guarantee, and he didn't send the children.

The *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* states that an AA member may assist with an Alateen group but may not sponsor the group. If an AA member is also a member of Al-Anon, he/she may serve as the sponsor. Each member needs to know the laws of their country and work within them. Each state in the United States and each province in Canada has different laws. A sponsor needs to know the laws of their state and adhere to them.

One structure is experiencing older Alateen members becoming sponsors to fill the void. They are already in the meeting and know the people. The problem is that some of them are not going to Al-Anon meetings, they think Alateen is enough. Another issue is a legal one and related to Alateen conferences. Parents sign a form for legal responsibility of the child, but the laws may say different. A child has rights that not even a parent can sign away. It is becoming harder and harder to help our sponsors and keep the kids safe.

The question was raised on what the word "assistance" means for AA members participating in Alateen groups. What exactly can they do? They help Alateen understand the disease of alcoholism and how it operates in the mind of an alcoholic. This can show those living with active alcoholism that there is hope. Many Alateen sponsors are desperate for assistance in the meetings, and AA members bring their children into Alateen to make amends. AA members can help with anniversary celebrations, transportation and other functions.

Many times, AA members share their personal experiences and the meeting changes focus. One structure is considering changing the wording in their manual to clarify.

Another shared that Alateen sponsors need sponsors. In one structure, someone phones the sponsors frequently, to see how they are doing with transportation for the teens, finances and emotionally for themselves.

A delegate shared that a very good speaker travelled all over the country, but it was discovered that he was abusing girls and boys. The GSO Board felt it should be kept secret because it would be very hard on the fellowship. This member is still invited everywhere and participates in many meetings. Many children have come from homes where there was abuse. We have a responsibility to offer them a better world. They must recover to have confidence in the older people in their lives. We have to select sponsors very carefully. That is our responsibility for the future of Al-Anon.

We know from Lois' writings that AA's have been more supportive of Alateen than we have been. That is something we have to work to change. The World Service Office has formed an ad hoc committee to look at this problem. There are three areas where there is serious vulnerability in Alateen: the Alateen members, the sponsor who could be accused even when it's not true, and the Al-Anon name. The ad hoc committee recommended to the Board, and they agreed, that we would try to raise the awareness of the fellowship in all our newsletters and communications, rather than keeping it quiet. Some fear that bringing the issue out in the open may destroy Alateen, but we need to look at our First Step and do what is good for the greatest number of people. The Alateen Advisory Committee at WSO is developing guidelines for safety which will be sent to the GSOs when approved. We are moving in the direction of protection.

Al-Anon and AA and Our Relationship to Tradition Six

Pirjo S, Finland

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

When we talk about the beginning of Al-Anon in

Finland, we cannot neglect AA because they started at the same time in the 1940's. Mother Olander convened the first group of alcoholics, their wives and friends. She was a wife of an alcoholic herself whose spouse had gotten rid of alcohol by religious awakening. The families gathered at the home of the Olanders. They thought that men wouldn't drink so much if they had lots of interesting hobbies and good family life.

On the basis of these thoughts they later established a "Homeclub" for the families suffering from alcoholism. The members engaged in spare-time activities, made trips and talked about forgiving, how to treat the members of the family, etc. Later, they had a chairperson and decided the topic beforehand.

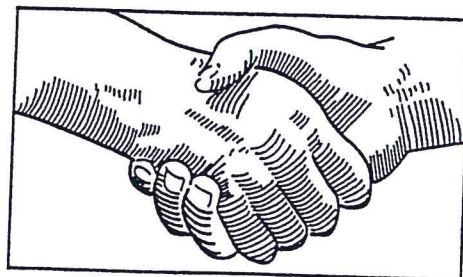
In 1946, there was an article about AA in the U.S. in the *Readers' Digest*. The writing aroused the interest of the Finns working with the alcoholics and they decided to write to America. They received some AA material, and so they had more basis for their work.

In the 1950's, the wives of alcoholics were the coffee-makers of the groups. They kept in touch by phone, visiting each other and by reading AA literature. AA had established a newsletter and published the first Finnish article on or about Al-Anon in 1952, where they mentioned the Al-Anon Headquarters which had been established in New York. Later in the AA newsletters they wrote about the Steps and Traditions with its own headline "AA Family Groups". Translations from *The Forum* were also published.

The Union of the Finnish AA Clubs started to print Al-Anon literature, "Alcoholism the Family Disease," and "For the Wives of Alcoholics," among other things.

The Al-Anons spoke at the information events, but the mates wrote the texts. Al-Anons gave money to AA and so we got more literature, "A Guide for the Family of an Alcoholic."

The members of AA recommended the Al-Anons have their own meetings in the annual meetings, but wives listened to their spouses rather than each



other. However, little by little, the Al-Anons started to translate, duplicate and distribute English articles. In 1958, women had their own meeting in the AA Conference and new groups were founded.

In the 1960's, the Al-Anons started to think about detaching from AA and establishing service of their own. The members of AA supported these efforts. The Al-Anons sent a letter with this kind of agenda: supporting the Family Groups, choosing a group representative, the fund, cooperation with AA, publishing public information, communicating to America, and collecting stories. The AA Publishing, Inc., published "Forslag till program for alkoholistens familjer" and in the first Group List of AA, 23 Al-Anon groups were mentioned.

In 1966, the Al-Anon General Service Office was established with a post box. One member had given her telephone number for use and we collected money for literature and especially for the first book *Living with an Alcoholic*. Our own newsletter, *Tiedote*, started to be published. We also decided to establish the "Al-Anon Publishing, Inc." Six group representatives signed the establishment agreement and we had the same rules as the AA Publishing, Inc. We rented a little room in the basement and bought a used typewriter. Later we employed a permanent clerk, bought a telephone and printed our own newsletter. The Al-Anon Publishing, Inc., printed the book, booklets and Al-Anon greeting cards.

In the year 1970, we published a new book, *One Day at a Time*, and we sent our first official delegate to AA's 35th Anniversary at Miami Beach.

The AA's telephone service, where Al-Anon members also share the Twelve Step work, has increased the number of the groups. In 1978, Finland's Al-Anon celebrated its 25th anniversary in Helsinki. Finland's AA gave us a crystal bowl with 25 roses. The next day, the beautiful bowl was broken, so the roses lasted longer than the bowl.

Today, we have about 180 Al-Anon groups. Although we are completely separate and unaffiliated with AA, we owe a debt of gratitude to the program from which we adopted the Twelve Steps. We cooperate with AA in a variety of ways. For example, we might offer our Al-Anon experience, strength and hope by serving as speakers at special AA meetings and conferences. Or we might share convention facilities or joint Al-Anon and AA information offices. The point is to graciously support the AA program when we can while maintaining our own identity.

Discussion

One member shared that her structure would like to hear of experiences regarding cooperating with AA on public information work, and whether it's better to do it together or separate. Another issue they are dealing with is AA members who are separated or divorced getting involved with Al-Anons.

Personalizing the Traditions helps one delegate who feels she should always cooperate with her husband who is the alcoholic in her life.

A structure had problems during AA assemblies when they expected the Al-Anons to do the dishes and prepare the meals. The problem was overcome by getting members to participate on committees and getting to know each other.

A large percent of AA members are adult children of alcoholics. At Al-Anon conventions, one structure has adult children workshops. The AA members flock to the meeting, but don't stay in the groups. They focus on adult children issues and their differences not their similarities.

Open meetings between AA and Al-Anon have helped the relationship. The U.K. & Eire representative explained that they have very good cooperation and exchange information between the AA and Al-Anon Boards and GSO's. AA celebrated its 50th Anniversary this year and their Board invited a member of the Al-Anon General Service Board to be a part of the convention committee. The General Secretary was also invited to join their celebration. In South Africa, Al-Anon always participates at AA conventions and they work well as a team. They have separate agendas, badges, etc. Everyone is there as a unit and a family, and cooperate to bring recovery to those who need it.

Some members felt that Al-Anon, with its Sixth Tradition, does more to protect AA than the AA members do to protect Al-Anon. Cooperation is usually good at the higher levels of service, but may be more complex between the members and groups.

The delegate from Argentina shared that during the last few years, double winners started joint AA/Al-Anon meetings and read literature from both fellowships. After some friendly talk, the members were asked not to use the name Al-Anon on their invitations. Groups are registered either AA or Al-Anon. They understood this, and decided to have their own name and continue the meetings.

In this age of technology, Japan explained that their home page links to AA's page.

International Convention

Mary Ann K., WSO Convention Coordinator

The only requirement for participation in this presentation was a vivid imagination as the first-ever Al-Anon International Convention was brought to the members of the IAGSM through a multi-media presentation. Slides of the convention site were displayed during the session as the imagined power of television provided the back-drop for a lively and fun update.

Live from Virginia Beach, news of the unique convention was shared. Salt Lake City is a beautiful place surrounded by mountains. Al-Anon will be renting the entire city for this historic occasion. Members from around the world are needed in order to make this an International Convention.

To provide members with a more realistic sense of what is to come, a TV news report was the basis of sharing. Reporters, stationed throughout various venues of the convention city, told of upcoming events.

The first reporter, with marching music blaring, shouted, "Strike up the band!" The Delta Center, usually the home of the Utah Jazz basketball team, will be transformed for our opening parade. On Friday, July 3rd, 400 members wearing the costumes of their countries, provinces or states will join together to celebrate Al-Anon's largest meeting. Be there in costume, or just come as part of the audience.

Another reporter from the ballroom of the convention center shared Lois's dream. You could almost hear her saying, "Anyone can start something, but it takes many to carry it out." In 1991, we had a dream to have Al-Anon's first convention. Our pioneers will tell you that it takes each of us doing our part to make this dream a reality. On July 4, a Pioneer Luncheon will take place where over 2,000 members will come together to look to the past to protect the future.

Experiencing technical difficulties, our Convention Reporter told the crowd not to be alarmed, it is not an invasion, it is only the largest Alateen meeting in the world. The only thing the convention center can't contain is the enthusiasm. The game plan is to strengthen the bond between Al-Anon and Alateen.

With sound of helicopters whirling overhead, the Window of Hope chopper was scouring the country-side looking for Al-Anon speakers to share with the serenity seekers. These speakers for the big meeting can only be selected after members have

sent in their registration form. The meeting will be real big, big enough to leap tall resentments. Don't miss this meeting of shared recovery. It will be fun, humorous, and we'll share laughter and tears. Be prepared to celebrate recovery with thousands of other Al-Anon members.

The weather prediction for this convention is full of clear spiritual skies with inspirations from at least 18 countries. During this interactive weather report, delegates were asked if they planned on going. One by one, members shouted their enthusiastic affirmative responses.

The financial reporter explained that registrants should not wait too long or there will be an increased rate. With early registrations we can hold blocks of rooms and prepare the program.

At the close of the presentations, members were assured that the Al-Anon Convention would be a lot more organized than this news broadcast. Registration forms were passed out. Those structures who would like to hold special sessions can work with the WSO to make their dream become reality. Simultaneous translations of the meetings through headsets may be available, but it is very expensive and will depend on the number of registrants.

Al-Anon's 50th Anniversary

Mary Ann K., WSO Director Membership Outreach

Al-Anon will celebrate its 50th Anniversary in the year 2001. The World Service Conference decided to celebrate the milestone as locally as possible, rather than holding an international meeting, to ensure that as many members as possible can be involved. An ad hoc committee is working on a plan for the celebration, and would like to receive ideas from all over the world. In January 1998, the team hopes to finalize the plan for worldwide acknowledgement of the occasion and present it to the Board. The celebratory plan will also be presented at the 1998 World Service Conference and will appear in the Summary. "We paid a high price to get into this fellowship and now need to be ambassadors of joy. We are celebrating hope."



The Spirit of Al-Anon in Leadership

Margaret M., U.S. & Canada

I can't tell you how honoured I feel to be participating in this 1997 IAGSM. When I look back over my life it seems unbelievable that my living experiences would bring me to this point. You told me I am where I am meant to be, and I truly have come not only to believe that, but to feel it in my heart.

I was born and raised in Scotland, the eldest of three children. In my formative years, my attitudes and behaviour were most definitely influenced by my father's excessive use of alcohol, but even more so by my mother's. Attempts to control his drinking without any understanding of alcoholism being a disease despite the fact that I vowed to myself not to make the mistake my mother did — you know how that goes — alcoholism surfaced as a problem in my marriage. I struggled and progressed in my part of the family disease for several years until, depleted emotionally spiritually and physically, I found myself at the doors of Al-Anon.

My problem was his drinking. If he didn't drink, I wouldn't have a problem. I am very grateful that I kept coming for the alcoholic, long enough to come to the realization that I needed to stay for myself.

I've been asked to share about the spirit of Al-Anon in leadership. What is the spirit of Al-Anon to me? First thing that comes to mind is reaching out to others. I learned about reaching out at meetings. With the patience, understanding and encouragement I was given at the group, bit by bit the walls around me came down and you gave me security. I felt secure enough to reach out, first in the group and then by telephone, then to a sponsor. Reaching out and finding a God of my understanding was a great gift. Leadership begins with reaching out.

By your leadership example, I now know how to reach out to other newcomers to share with them the hope and love that was shared with me. Thinking about the spirit of Al-Anon in preparation for this talk got me thinking about tolerance, responsibility, flexibility, stability, dedication, and vision.

Tolerance - In leadership as I see it, tolerance and freeing others to be themselves is essential. My ability to be tolerant certainly diminished over the years without help. But trying to accept people as they are and wanting others to accept me has given

me an appreciation of a tolerant attitude.

Responsibility - When I got to you I felt responsible for everything including my husband's drinking. I was sure that I alone had caused it, that I alone could cure it, and that I was responsible to control it. Over the years, you have helped me to sort out what are my responsibilities and that I was not responsible for my husband's cure. In leadership, it is essential that I share my opinions and comments, however, I must also be responsible enough to listen to yours.

Flexibility - It was always my way or the highway because I knew what was best for everybody. If plans were made and changed, I felt like it was such a major thing. Today, making plans but not being devastated when they have to be changed doesn't deplete my serenity. Flexibility in leadership is having an open mind and being willing to accept group conscience.

Stability - When I came to Al-Anon, I had no emotional stability. I was up and down like a yo-yo on somebody else's string. Today, I'm aware of others and I try to be in tune with them, but I know my responsibilities and knowing that has brought stability to my life. Leadership calls for emotional stability, to be approachable, open-minded, but not to go off on tangents. Being involved in service is also teaching me stability. I learn constantly from those trusted servants I come in contact with.

Dedication - Before Al-Anon, my idea of dedication was to be a martyr or a doormat, accepting the unacceptable. As a trusted servant I am dedicated to do what I can for Al-Anon. To accept challenges that come my way. That's why I'm here today sharing my experience, strength and hope with you. I need to be dedicated enough to meet my responsibilities. I also am dedicated to my own recovery first and foremost - as long as I continue to be dedicated - I'll stay reasonably sane and healthy.

Vision - The last thing I wanted to mention is vision. I knew nothing about vision when I got here. I couldn't see that my life would ever be any different than the pit of despair I was in. You've taught me so much about vision. I know now, as I said before, that I am where I'm meant to be at this time. That I am on a journey of recovery, growth and service. I don't see myself as a visionary, but I'm able now to look to the future and feel very positive about it. As Al-Anon heads into the 21st century, I know we will be challenged, but I also know the spirit of Al-Anon in leadership will guarantee our meeting those challenges together.

Discussion

The IAGSM members shared personal stories of leadership and growth in Al-Anon.

When I came into the program, I wasn't sure I had any gifts Al-Anon wanted. Al-Anon members overlooked the defects and focused on my assets. I could put forward any idea, even if it wasn't accepted. When I do this, I look at my group, the area or try to envision something even bigger. The future is ours, and let it begin with me. We need to think of what we can do to carry this message. This IAGSM and all of you feed me. You sharpen me and give me new ideas. This room is one of the largest group consciences of Al-Anon. Thank you for your vision. I have felt God at work here through all of you.

The spirit of Al-Anon is the rejuvenating force. We have to look for our higher self. Leadership is in the Steps, Traditions and Concepts.

When I came to Al-Anon I didn't think I was worth anything. I could do nothing right, I had no mind to think, and I depended on others for everything. In Al-Anon, a door opened up and I had the tools to improve. Not long after, another door opened, and I realized that people listened whether my ideas were good or bad. As delegate at my first Conference, I saw the spirit of Al-Anon in leadership, and saw people do things with vision working toward Al-Anon as a whole.

The Al-Anon program taught me that I had one or two faults which was a bit of a shock. There are no leaders in Al-Anon, we are all equal. I was told to stick with the winners, those who don't just talk the talk. We have to stick with the positive people if we want to get better. We need to also give this program away if we want to keep it. Miracles happen.

I am standing here because of my Higher Power. When I heard that a requirement to be delegate was leadership, I looked around for those people. If we don't have vision, we don't know where we were and where we are going. I don't know what my next vision is, but I need to be ready and willing to take risks, to be more generous with my opinions and sharing.

I can feel the spirit of Al-Anon here at the IAGSM. The motions make us aware of the unity; all delegates and the WSO are responsible.

Al-Anon in Poland has grown and developed. The delegate explained that her first service job was carrying the message to others. She encouraged members to start groups. In 1980, the first group registered with the WSO. Now Al-Anon in

Poland has survived the solidarity revolution and can work more freely. In June of 1997, the first national service meeting was held and a Board of Trustees was chosen. Leadership means trusted servants. I am grateful that I've had the opportunity to do service work and give others what I have gained.

We need to have courage to take action, to have the wisdom and vision to see our mistakes and let our hearts talk to each other.

Site Selection for Year 2000

Petra H., Germany

In 1988, the members of the IAGSM decided to rotate the site of our meeting in order to solidify the worldwide fellowship. I would like to invite you to come to Germany in the beginning of the new era. I am so happy that my structure, and our General Service Conference, gave approval to present you with our invitation.

Good old Germany, the country of old castles, middle-aged villages, ancient history, "Schloos Neuschwanstein," Bavarian beer, sauerkraut, black forest cake, cuckoo clocks, and wonderful German bread. What we offer to you is a modern country with an excellent transportation system and all conveniences. You will have easy access to other European cultures; altogether more than 20 countries.

The site of the IAGSM will be Essen, a town of 640,000 inhabitants in the northwest of Germany, an area called the Ruhrgebiet. Once the industrial heart of Germany, Ruhrgebiet has lots of attractions: well-known musicals, parks, leisure centres, great recreation areas, and last but not least, a beautiful landscape. The famous fair, Expo 2000, will also take place in Hanover which is about two hours from Essen.

In Essen, our General Service Office is situated where the members will offer you a warm welcome. Both the conference hotel and the GSO are in the center of the town with easy access to the central station. It's only about 20 minutes by train to the international airport of Dusseldorf, and only a three hour trip to Frankfurt airport.

In Essen there are many Al-Anon groups nearby. There is almost one meeting each day, so that there are many members who already offered their helping hand. There are 950 Al-Anon/Alateen groups in Germany, including Al-Anon Adult Children. You will also have the chance to visit that place where the very first Al-Anon group of Germany

was founded in 1967. You can even have a meeting there! This year, Al-Anon Germany is celebrating its 30th birthday, and our General Service Conference met for the tenth time.

The Balance Hotel (isn't that an adequate name for our purpose), the hotel for Business and Living, offers us all required meeting rooms as well as other facilities — sauna, solarium, underground car parking, shuttle service, international and regional cuisine, air conditioning, phone, fax, TV/video, and so on. It is placed in the centre of the city where there are all shopping facilities.

I know that costs play an important role in our decision. So remember, nearly two-thirds of the attending structures are from Europe, so their costs are "like travelling just around the corner."

Our structure wants to show our gratitude to our worldwide fellowship of Al-Anon. We are a part of this entity, and want to pay back what we received. We would be glad to share with you our experience in organizing such an event. Welcome to Germany!

The IAGSM members were treated with a color slide show illustrating the beautiful city of Essen, Germany with contrasting architecture — industrial areas, modern buildings and ancient castles — depicting the truly diverse nature of the city.

A motion was made, seconded and carried to recommend that the IAGSM to be held in Germany in the Year 2000, and in the event of an emergency that the IAGSM be held in the U.S. (46 Yes, 0 No, 1 Abstention)

The delegate from Germany thanked the members for their trust and hoped everyone would be there in the Year 2000.

Delegates' Choice

Mary C., Co-Chair,
International Coordination Committee
Ric B., WSO Executive Director

This part of the agenda is dedicated to those topics and issues which had not been discussed earlier that the delegates would like brought to the floor of the meeting.

Representation at the WSC

One member, on behalf of her structure, presented a proposal for IAGSM consideration: to have all the IAGSM delegates participate in the Al-Anon World Service Conference with voice and vote. Members of this structure feel the time is right to have all structures seated. Many wonder why only the U.S. and Canada are seated at the WSC, while

the IAGSM is composed of all structures. Since the Conference is to represent worldwide Al-Anon, the proposal would ensure that everyone is heard and part of the worldwide decision-making process.

Some participants felt delegates at the World Service Conference should be elected from all over the world to represent all Al-Anon members.

Another explained that there was lots of discussion on this question in their structure since the idea was circulated before the meeting. When new literature is approved, or new changes, delegates from around the world should be involved. Even if only five structures out of thirty structures could come. It would show that all structures were accepted in Al-Anon as a whole as equal partners.

There was discussion on using the word "world" in World Service Conference since it only has representatives from the U.S. and Canada. Perhaps one solution would be to not use the word "world."

Others felt that the structures are so different from each other as well as WSO. They are organized differently, and some don't know the Concepts yet, so you don't have an informed group. It would be impractical to put all the people together to make decisions based on the Concepts.

Other members explained that the IAGSM is the place for world structures to gather to share and let the decisions be left to each General Service Conference. Al-Anon is growing around the world, problems are discussed and solutions will be found. If each country sent a delegate to the World Service Conference, there would be no need for the IAGSM. The sharing done at the IAGSM needs to continue, to develop, and to grow.

Another structure felt that the IAGSM is too young, and not developed enough to send a delegate to the Conference. We can trust the WSC to discuss the idea and leave the IAGSM to develop its leaders. The focus of the IAGSM should be on the future outreach and strengthen what structures we have. Another shared that distances are very long and far, and many structures are not prepared financially to share in WSC expenses. The time may come when this is possible and some believed in Concept Nine, that the leadership and process would evolve, if needed.

Several expressed the idea we have to trust that world Al-Anon will be guided correctly. Others felt that the problem was not with the name of the Conference or the Al-Anon office. They represent the world, and make decisions for the world. They do not think they are the world, they are not that

arrogant. We delegated authority to them. We have the group conscience that the U.S. and Canada are the principle support of the worldwide office. We thank the U.S. and Canada for their leadership. The world is changing, many structures have grown and have their own problems. We need the opportunity to talk about each problem more directly here at the IAGSM. We should focus on ways of getting to our objective, but it will not happen overnight.

Two IAGSM delegates who attended past World Service Conferences shared their thoughts and experiences. The first representative felt that the name of the Conference was not important. The important element was what happened. The delegate was particularly grateful for the experience because it showed her the working of a conference as a conference should be in Al-Anon. She saw the decision-making for the purchase of property of the new WSO. She knew there were frictions, heard delegates discussing, heard the voting, and felt our Higher Power with everyone. It was a privilege to see the Concepts at work. Every IAGSM delegate would benefit from just attending the World Service Conference, but other structures should not vote since some issues effect only the U.S. and Canada.

One observation was that all motions are prepared and delegates are advised before in great detail on all topics, such as the funds, the budget and the problems to give them time to discuss in the area, only then does the delegate vote. The IAGSM delegate shared very personal feelings from her heart. She will never forget the love and understanding she received. When she returned home, members were able to organize a new structure with the help of the WSO. They had their first National Service conference then and are now having their third. They are growing in the right direction.

Another delegate shared that when she went back home, the result was a reshaping of the Conference in her country. Even though she had voice at the WSC, but no vote at the WSC, she didn't speak because she didn't feel it was her place to speak on the kind of issues that the Conference voted on for the US/Canada. She continued, "All the delegates from the U.S. and Canada represent about 80% of the groups of the world. It's not the whole world, but it is the greater part of the world." For her, the situation has not changed. It would be too difficult to put all these beautiful worldwide delegates together and come to conclusions. We can

exchange experiences and use these experiences, but to solve specific problems by a vote is different. It would be too hard to come to solutions agreeable and beneficial for all.

This topic has not been discussed by the U.S. and Canada structure at this point. The World Service Office connects all the groups around the world. This worldwide sharing with the WSO allows for sharing with other structures, and helps everyone grow as well. Many countries that have no structure rely on the WSO for this connection to Al-Anon worldwide. Al-Anon is in 112 countries but only 30 countries are structured. The WSO Board of Trustees receives feedback from members around the world through the International Coordination Committee which keeps the lines of worldwide communication open. The International Coordination Committee carries the ideas to the Board and to the WSC. The Board takes this responsibility for worldwide Al-Anon very seriously.

The idea of having other countries represented at the WSC through elected representation from the IAGSM was also discussed at the last IAGSM. The conclusion then was that there would be great difficulty communicating back to all the structures around the world.*

Service Structures

A small structure shared they have a level of service missing — "the area level." This caused many problems and the districts are struggling. It seems that introducing an area level would be helpful so that members could serve Al-Anon better.

The U.K. & Eire shared that they started exactly the same way. They thought they were different from the WSO and too small to have areas. As the groups grew, the Conference attendance grew and they had no way to manage its size welcoming all districts. They needed to create areas to manage the Conference size. Following the 1986 IAGSM, they prepared a report on the basic structure that the WSO used. At one time, the WSO had 100 groups, and had areas and districts. If it could work for them back then, it could work in the U.K. In 1988, it was presented to the U.K. Conference, but no one expected it to pass. The Conference approved it unanimously. Implementation was not easy. They had to rename the districts as areas, and insert a district below it. We learned that the members relied on the Conference delegates to keep them informed and explain.

The member from Iceland told the IAGSM that

their structure went through the same situation. The GRs go to the district meetings. The district has four meetings each year and the area has one meeting per year. Each area has only one district, and the area's only function is to elect delegates to attend the Conference. Many do not understand why the structure works this way.

The structure in France has areas, but no districts. The assembly had over 100 GRs and it became unmanageable. They decided that they must be smaller. Some areas have an assembly now and some do not, but there is no national assembly.

Italy explained that they experienced the same. Over 300 GRs were voting at the national assembly. They contacted the WSO and worked on their structure and *Service Manual*. They were able to create areas and they worried over how many areas should exist. After many ups and downs they arrived at a structure. Italy had their third Conference, each delegate represents an area, and they have twelve areas.

Lone Members

One structure asked the members their thoughts on the Lone Member Service. They have 135 groups and are not sure they need a Lone Member Service where the geography is so small.

The WSO shared that the goal of a lone member service is to get as many groups as possible formed by getting the lone member to create a group. If an area or structure is small enough and the member can find a group there may be no need for the service. No matter where a person lives there is always someone nearby who needs this program. However, many homebound people have no other option but to rely on a lone member service.

In another structure, they are a small country with a lone members for various reasons — disability and inaccessibility. We ask our areas to stay in touch with these members, and have a member who writes to the loners every few months.

A delegate shared that in her country they still have a need to have a Loner Member Coordinator. They are now asking for coordinators in different areas to keep in touch to make the people feel they are not alone. In their country of vast spaces, people cannot travel, especially at night. This need is very real.

Questions on Registration Policy at WSO

A structure proposed that the WSO adopt a new group registration system. In their country, some

English-speaking groups are acting without keeping unity. They do not register with the General Service Office and appear in public as Al-Anon groups. They started their own office a few years ago, they made a group listing with a map, and have other groups registering within their office. One leaflet on addiction carried their address as an Al-Anon office. This is causing great confusion where other Al-Anon groups now think there are two General Service Offices. There is only one GSO registered with the World Service Office, but newcomers do not understand. Others think there is double-headed management or that Al-Anon is not unified. Many people are leaving the groups. The Al-Anon members try to talk to them to explain, but they do not understand. In January, Board members asked them to register with the GSO or to change their name and not use Al-Anon. They are still using the name and insisted that they are legitimate since they registered with the World Service Office. The structure believes that all groups, bilingual or English-speaking should register with the GSO. All groups registered with the GSO are sent to the WSO once a year. The structure proposes that the WSO not register a group. They should be directed to the GSO for registration and then the GSO will submit the names to the WSO.

The World Service Office explained that when bi-lingual or English groups write to the office for registration, they are registered with the WSO and then notification is sent to the country where the group resides so they can note this. Many English-speaking or bilingual groups do not know of the existence of the GSO and cannot communicate because of language differences. There is concern that Al-Anon could lose contact with this group if they were to be passed on to the GSO without registering. There have been many occasions where a local area or structure has not registered a group for various reasons. The ideal is that the group would be registered in both places.

Another question was raised regarding the registration of an Area Information Service. Many have registered with the WSO, but do not exist. Their intention was to receive the mailings for AIS's from the WSO. The WSO does not communicate with AISs in other countries. We list them for travellers. All changes come to WSO about AISs through GSOs. "Getting In Touch with Al-Anon" is sent every six months from the WSO to ensure all information stays current.

The representative from the U.K. & Eire ex-

plained that their GSO acts as the AIS for all English-speaking groups in Europe. When they are contacted, the GSO encourages the group to register with their home country. They see their role as the keeper of the list and keeper of information.

Other members shared that no matter where the group registers, no one can prevent them from opening an office. Another shared that they had a situation where Alateen thought they were running their own business and had their own address. Staff of the World Service Office stated that only one GSO per structure is registered. The WSO has had long discussions on how to support the GSO in this situation where a second GSO has begun. The ideas were communicated to the registered GSO.

Border countries shared that between two countries members are closer to groups in the neighboring country. They can go to two different Conferences and, theoretically, could vote twice. We would hope that while it is possible this would not happen.

Carrying the message of Al-Anon recovery remains our primary purpose. We should let people know where groups are available whenever they are travelling.

Workshops

The next matter brought to the floor revolved around the topics assigned to workshops during this IAGSM. Some members shared that they were disappointed with the level of questions raised in the workshops. They felt that the questions were too basic and elementary, the same topics were discussed over and over, and that we are not moving forward. The information shared at the IAGSM must carry everyone for another three years. The workshop topics and business at the IAGSM has to be at a trustee level. Other things can be handled at the area and district level.

Some meeting participants felt that we must remember we have newcomers at the IAGSM meetings, and many of the topics are important and need to be talked over. We come here to learn about what everyone else thinks, and amazing things were heard from others answering the same questions at the workshops. Structures are at different stages of their development, and things cannot always be discussed at the same level. Others said that we sometimes don't repeat ourselves enough, and we need to listen to each other during these discussions to share experience, strength and hope.

IAGSM delegates work closely with their Board

of Trustees. Issues and topics can be obtained from the Boards as well and sent to the IAGSM Committee. Members of the meeting have the opportunity to send topics to the WSO for inclusion on the agenda of the IAGSM.

A suggestion was that perhaps the disappointment was not over the topics, but in the manner they were presented. Questions were supplied with each topic to guide members during the discussion. Maybe, in the future, providing a topic is enough to allow the conversation to flow. This can be a discussion for the International Coordination Committee. Members were encouraged to provide suggestions on the meeting evaluation form for future use. A second evaluation form will also be sent in six months for further feedback and ideas.

Communication Between GSO's

The final topic for group discussion centered around increasing and improving communication among the GSO's and the structures to share ideas, problems and successes. One thought was to address these topics in Area Highlights and share them with the other structures. Calendar items of interest can also be included for those members who are travelling and able to attend. Exchanging conference reports, meeting schedules, using facsimile machines and e-mail were other suggestions.

The World Service Office suggested that they put one structure in touch with another who may have had a similar issue.

The delegate from Brazil shared that they invite all Latin-America structures to their annual convention. They hope someday to have a meeting for all Latin America. A member from Argentina explained that they are like a sponsor to Uruguay, and next year, Uruguay will have their first national Conference and Argentina is invited to attend. Mexico celebrated their 25th National Conference, and members from Cuba were with them. Next November, Cuba will hold their first Al-Anon meeting on the island. Structures in Finland are cooperating to help members in Estonia create a structure. They only have one typewriter. They are so poor and little by little we have been able to help them.

Gratitude was extended to all members for participating in this open forum to exchange ideas and support for the growth of Al-Anon worldwide. A lot of problems can be resolved by sharing in this way. The only barrier we have is language, the issues are all the same.

Unfinished Business / Unanswered Questions

Margaret G., Chairperson of IAGSM

This final topic of the 1997 International General Services Meeting provides the delegates with the opportunity to ask the questions that have yet to be answered or discuss those topics that have yet to be raised.

The first topic raised was one that had been discussed during an earlier session at the IAGSM. On behalf of one structure, the request was made to have IAGSM participation at the Al-Anon World Service Conference. The structure would like to have international involvement on issues that affect the worldwide structures. The worldwide representatives are the real world service conference because we represent all the structures and should have more participation on international concerns.

One member questioned the content of the WSC agenda and its international impact with topics such as literature, public information, internet, and policy. We say that the largest group conscience is the World Service Conference. The group conscience should be represented by all of us and not just part of us.

Others explained that their structures felt that we must be practical on this issue. The WSC meets on an annual basis and to get members all over the world together is far more difficult. The issue of economics must be considered. Further, communication between structures has been viewed by many as an obstacle.

We need to appreciate that we come here, and must rely on people at the WSO to speak for us. The WSO tends to the problems of the GSO's and

is working for us. When we equally support the WSO, then we have voice and vote in a worldwide Conference.

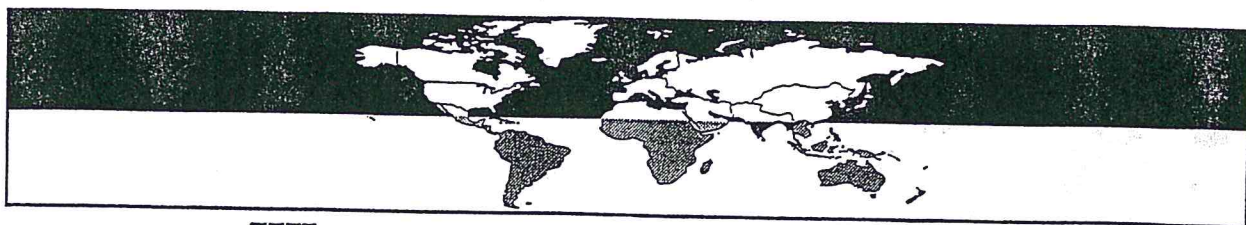
One member was concerned that this issue had already been discussed, and wondered if the issue was the same it was previously raised. Members felt that the topic from the prior IAGSM was to have one representative from the IAGSM attend the WSC with voice and vote. The topic now suggests that all structures be represented at the WSC. One day this may come, but whenever we have an idea we should think about how we could really implement it. We can't do it all in one day.

The international structure of Al-Anon is represented annually at the World Service Conference through the International Coordination Committee and other voting members of the WSC. Any view expressed at the IAGSM is taken into account with every issue and every vote at the Conference.

Moving to another topic, one member suggested that a map or diagram be displayed at the next IAGSM depicting each of the structures.

A question was asked about why delegates need to attend two IAGSM meetings, or whether the point is to expose more people to this international meeting. Members responded that the *Service Manual* recommends that delegates come to the meeting twice. Experience is gained over the two meetings that can be passed on to new delegates. A delegate may be far more effective participating in the meeting the second time. Sometimes a newcomer may feel somewhat intimidated by the IAGSM and is more confident during the second meeting.

With no further discussion, the session was closed.



WORKSHOP REPORTBACKS

There were two sessions of workshops during the 1997 IAGSM where members shared their thoughts and experiences on various topics of interest to all.

Anonymity: Within and Outside the Fellowship

Gunnhildur O., Iceland, Leader
Joan W., New Zealand, Reporter

The first workshop topic had to do with public outreach work. Members explained that not everyone has to be visible with PI. The suggestion was made if we are worried about anonymity, let someone else do the Public Information work. To guard a partner's anonymity, we can do the initial contact by phone and turn it over to someone else for follow up or, we can work in Public Information in another town. When doing public information work in pairs, one member can share their story, and one can give general information. As a group we build up trust within the fellowship so people will feel safe, but outside the meetings it is up to the individual to be careful about what is said. Within the meetings we learn who you see here, what you hear here, let it stay here, and trust in your Higher Power. We are not a secret society but must always be careful to guard our tongue in public.

The *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* is very clear on this issue. It is very important at the group level to explain the spiritual concept of anonymity within the fellowship. We do not have to reveal who the alcoholic is in our life. Keep the focus on the programme and the disease, and not on the person who brought us to Al-Anon. I can decide for myself to break my anonymity outside the fellowship, it is my responsibility. We are all equals in Al-Anon so my anonymity within the group is important.

Discussion

Members shared personal stories regarding anonymity. One person recalled a situation where a member gave their story at an Al-Anon convention, and days later an alcoholic was talking about it at the hospital. During emergency situations,

anonymity can pose a problem. One member told of being in a car accident with other Al-Anon members. When they arrived at the hospital, the personnel asked the member's name. All they could respond with was her first name, and it turned out to not be her real name. In one instance, a woman at a meeting was sharing her painful experiences. Her husband learned of this and abused her. We must take care not to share what we hear with others.

A question was asked about clarification on having sign language interpreters at closed meetings. Members explained that it is up to the group conscience and if one is agreed upon, the meeting could then be changed to an open meeting.

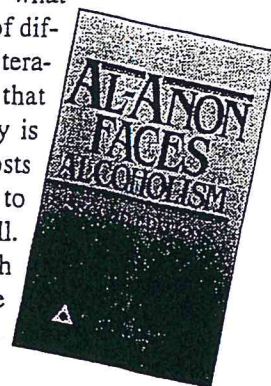
Literature: Unity Through CAL

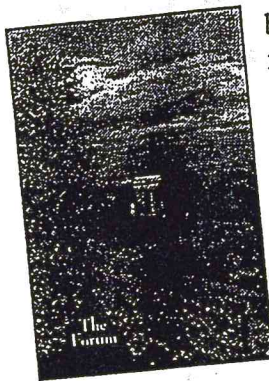
Frances C., Australia, leader
Conchi G., Spain, Reporter

The first issue addressed whether our literature is meeting the needs of members, and giving us a strong basis for Al-Anon principles. Members' opinions varied. Some felt that there is a great lack of literature, specifically for adult children. Others explained that all literature is valid for recovery, and it is the spirit that counts. It is up to us to reach out to the members. It is more enriching when experiences come from different members — wives, husbands, children or parents.

One delegate wanted to know what the criteria was regarding the use of different covers when reprinting literature. The WSO answered that although the need to respect unity is foremost, sometimes the high costs of printing make it necessary to change covers and colors as well. Everyone was urged to share with the WSO ideas for change. The WSO committed to inform the GSO's of any changes that may occur in the literature even if they are minor.

Another topic asked was about the book, *Al-Anon Faces Alcoholism*, and was it adequate for professionals? The WSO stated that this book is now considered outdated for the professionals in our country and doesn't sell well to the members. Notice





been given to the Conference from the Board of Trustees that WSO will discontinue printing it after one year. However, this does not mean that other structures need to discontinue it. If it is still a viable resource then they should consider keeping it.

How does CAL (Conference Approved Literature) contribute to unity? Delegates shared that it keeps the focus on Al-Anon. Our family groups can use the same tools everywhere, and this gives us a sense of unity, not only within the groups, but worldwide. CAL is the basis for unity. It is written for the Al-Anon program by Al-Anon members.

Comments were shared on whether CAL encourages Al-Anon to be inclusive and unified. Many times the newcomers tend to try to use non-CAL literature. In CAL we share the experiences of many members and the Conference Approval process ensures that many longtime members will review it. In Japan, they have carefully translated CAL literature in order to preserve the spirit of Al-Anon. However, it is hard for members to relate to the sharings due to differences of culture, customs and language.

The final question for this workshop was whether the GSO and their committees can use small parts of CAL in their work, and to inform the media. One structure commented that they use the 20 Questions and the bookmark when dealing with the media. A question was asked whether structures may print a whole paragraph of CAL. The WSO responded that if someone would like to print parts of CAL, they should fax the WSO the paragraph in question explaining in order to get permission and protect our copyright. The WSO protects the literature very carefully, and members were urged to put things in their own words, to paraphrase. In writing it ourselves, we also have the opportunity to grow. Conference Approved Literature may not be changed without the World Service Conference's authorization. While each issue of *The Forum* is not Conference Approved because the process is too long to put each issue through it, the concept of the magazine is Conference Approved and *The Forum* is used at meetings. Magazines produced by the different structures can be used at the group level in the same way as *The Forum*.

Discussion

A question was asked on what literature printed from WSO is not CAL. Service material that each structure can print and adapt for their own needs, such as guidelines and public outreach pieces are not CAL. While the Policy Digest is changed by World Service Conference, laws within a structure may require policy to be changed locally. CAL is basically literature that contains personal sharings and that suggests how working the program can achieve recovery. Individual members may create tools for their personal use.

Another delegate explained that literature directed at special focus groups can create controversial issues. The gay/lesbian piece was used as an example. This piece goes through the Literature Committee and the Policy Committee as do all CAL pieces. Most members thought the content was brilliant, but had trouble with the title. Perhaps, a standard title could be used for these pieces, such as, "Al-Anon Focus On..." and then the name of the focus group.

Pieces that include sharings on alcohol mixed with drugs also causes confusion. People come to the meetings and focus on drug addiction. When we tell them our purpose, they point to excerpts in the literature. Members are not always sure whether to ask the people to leave or encourage them to stay. Another shared that they encourage the members to stay and find out for themselves whether Al-Anon is for them. One structure has researched the way to get in touch with other twelve step groups for drugs, violence, abuse, and tells people about these programs when they call the Al-Anon General Service Office.

A member of the World Service Office staff explained that WSO has used the ideas developed in other countries and that is why sharing is so essential. In the early 1980's South Africa produced a video to be used for public outreach. Not until 1986 did WSO produce a video. Venezuela produced a public service announcement (PSA) that the WSO used with minor changes and produced it as our PSA which is in use today in the U.S. and Canada. A WSO representative pointed out, "You are the leaders of your country." WSO is grateful when we can use the creativity of your members in public outreach initiatives.

Regarding the production of reprints, a member said that they produced so many reprints that they couldn't sell them. Reprints can be used for topics that are timely to get the message of recovery out to the membership or professionals quickly. A

reprint on domestic violence was used as a public outreach piece when this was a popular media topic.

A delegate shared that they are having a problem translating the vast amount of material which arrives from the WSO, and the IAGSM delegate is becoming a translation agent only. The IAGSM delegate may be on the translating team, but they often need help translating all the information during the year sent by WSO. Another shared that their structure resolved this by doing an inventory of all their literature. When a piece is not serving its purpose, it doesn't get published any more. The Literature Committee decides which pieces are outdated. It's a long process to discontinue a piece, but new ones are available to replace it.

The World Service Office is in the process of doing an inventory of all Al-Anon's literature to determine whether the pieces are out-dated and meet the needs of our fellowship. If a country wishes to share in this inventory they should write WSO, but each structure can do its own literature inventory. It was pointed out at this time sharings from worldwide members are needed for the book to be launched at the 1998 International Convention. Encourage the members to write in their own language, and the GSO staff members are asked to help translate sharings so they can be printed in the souvenir book. Sharings for an adult children reader are needed to reflect the worldwide membership.

A motion was made to propose that the IAGSM decide to allow each structure to produce original recovery material within the four requirements set down by the World Service Office in 1994.

Many of the issues facing Al-Anon members today are different due to cultural or other differences. AA in Italy produces a Big Book in which they translate the first portion on recovery and the rest of the book deals with personal stories from members in Italy. One member shared that their Conference feels that unity in CAL is important to the unity of the fellowship. Our Traditions are our most important tool to preserve our program. Members from around the world have been asked on many occasions to share their stories with the WSO for inclusion in Al-Anons books and pamphlets.

The delegate from Japan explained that after World War II, there was difficulty accepting any religion or god or higher power. A strong effort was made to bring Al-Anon to Japan. CAL was useful and members had the opportunity to recov-

ery spiritually. If the structure could produce their own material, they would be able to give the people an understanding of Al-Anon more simply and more directly. No matter how this motion is voted, Al-Anon in Japan will continue to use CAL.

Concern was expressed that this issue was raised at the last IAGSM and it was defeated because of the unity issue. It is important that Al-Anon is there for our children and our grandchildren. We need to be unified throughout the world. If sharings are all from America, we need to change that — let it begin with me. We have to do more if we want the program to work.

Others felt that producing our own material would divide us. Every structure has the same problem of getting members to write sharings. "If we go in this direction, where would we put the boundaries, what would be next? We need to ensure that members travelling throughout the world will always find the same Al-Anon program everywhere."

Another view expressed the feelings that members in different countries have different problems compounded by the cultural and language differences. This would allow the General Service Offices to meet the unique needs of their members. Our members are reaching out for help and we should try to fulfill their needs. If a structure produces recovery material they want it to be approved by their conference.

The GSO's have a responsibility to guard the Traditions, and guard the unity of Al-Anon Family Groups. We may not always relate to the specific customs when reading sharings, but the problem of alcoholism and the suffering it brings the family is the same; the recovery is the same. We share our own customs through our own national magazines. We need to encourage our members to write their stories and send them to the WSO so our literature reflects the worldwide membership. This is not a question of trust, but a question of self support and of unity. If we share in unity, we all speak the same language.

One country has seven regions, each with its own dialect. The individualism is remarkable, but they use the same literature for the whole country to keep the unity of our program. In our program we identify with feelings not with intellect. Our heart, our spirit is the same all over the world.

Delegates pondered whether they were considering Al-Anon members as a whole. The strength of the Al-Anon message may be diminished, the significance of a word may be lost. We may have non-

CAL literature in our meetings. We should understand and sympathize with the cultural and language differences, but should still look for similarities.

Another member shared the issue at a personal level. When she first came to Al-Anon she thought she was different. It was so hard the first year even to find a sponsor, someone who could understand. Al-Anon members kept saying unity of the program, and focus on the similarities.

Following this in-depth, thoughtful discussion, the IAGSM members voted on the motion *to decide that each structure may produce original recovery material within the four requirements set down by the WSO board in 1994*. The motion did not carry.

Adult Children: Is the Fellowship Becoming More Inclusive?

Marita P., Argentina, Leader

Simone D.B., Italy, Reporter

Members shared that adult children want what Al-Anon has to offer and more, they want to be accepted as full partners. Many attend not only Al-Anon Adult Children groups, but just as importantly, Al-Anon groups. In general, the groups that do not use the Al-Anon principles go off into other directions or risk closing. Every Al-Anon Adult Children group is open to any Al-Anon member.

The second topic the participants addressed was why there are special groups for adult children within Al-Anon. In some structures, there has been an increase in these groups forming. Some adult children have the need to share among other adult children, their experiences in the past and present.

Is the fellowship attracting adult children? Yes, but there must be more encouragement, support, and acceptance. Most of the Al-Anon adult children are lacking sponsors and need Al-Anon members to make themselves available for individual sponsorship. There are books which have adult children sharings, and it is recommended that all members to read them. One suggestion was to work on three important points: fellowship, relationship with newcomers, and spiritual growth.

The final topic was to discuss if Adult Children groups were taking an active part in the fellowship

at different service levels. The members felt that some structures have Al-Anon Adult Children Conventions, ad hoc committees, workshops, and they are participating at different service levels within Al-Anon.

Discussion

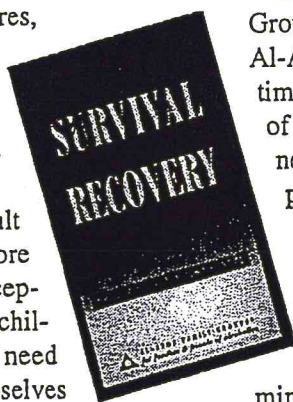
One member new to the term ACOA, asked about it as they have five adult children groups using the name. It was explained that Adult Children of Alcoholics is a separate organization. They are not Al-Anon and use materials other than CAL. It is important to separate this organization and groups from Al-Anon Adult Children groups. These groups agree to abide by Al-Anon's Traditions to become a part of Al-Anon. Another member shared that they have no Al-Anon Adult Children Groups, however some ACOA groups do exist. Members stressed that all groups are Al-Anon Family Groups provided they have no other affiliation. The meetings should be open to everyone as the only requirement for membership is the alcoholism in a loved one.

A delegate explained that they have 163 Adult Children Groups and many do not include wives or mothers in their meetings. Other groups are closing their doors to members who are not like them. This is causing many problems within the structure and diminishing unity. Our job is to ensure these groups understand the Traditions and share our recovery with them.

Issues have developed where no Adult Children Groups exist, as these members attend the regular Al-Anon meeting with their parents, and sometimes hear things they didn't know. The feelings of a child are not the same as a spouse or a partner. On the other side, one member shared her personal story of coming into Al-Anon as an adult children before these groups existed. She recovered in Al-Anon with her family.

Controversy surround a Men's Group when a member visited and was told that women were not allowed. She stayed and sat for 20 minutes while everyone stared at each other. Twenty years later, they still will not open the meeting if there is a women present. The suggestion was made that all we can do is pray for them.

One structure explained that older Alateen members did not feel comfortable in the Al-Anon group, and took over the Alateen meetings. Younger members were no longer welcomed to the meeting. Adult children needs was a topic at their National



Conference where they tried to develop solutions. The solutions are always the same, unity, looking at similarities, sharing experiences from all sides of the table, and learning to appreciate differences. Slowly, they are growing. Clarifying the groups' name helped to settle the dust. There are now 18 Al-Anon Adult Children Groups, and something wonderful started to happen. These members began to come to Al-Anon meetings. If we close our arms, we don't receive anyone — open arms is the Al-Anon message. Our connection is Al-Anon, that is our recovery.

Another delegate shared that they had a long hard struggle to get their Conference to accept the needs of adult children groups. In their country, most group names are designated by geography. A few years ago, it was agreed that these groups could register so long as they were by geographic location.

Volunteers: Lack of Volunteers at the Service Level- How can this be Solved?

Siri Å., Norway, Leader

Eli Marie O., Norway, Reporter

The workshop members shared ideas on solving this issue which included: using the Year of Renewal tool to spark volunteerism, sharing personal experiences as a part of rotation, do whatever is necessary to get new members into service rather than rotating the same individuals into different jobs. Some structures have to pay for volunteer work while others have paid staff. The WSO has organized Volunteer Saturdays where members help put together packets, etc. Alateen members are willing to serve after school hours and can be a wonderful resource.

Reminding members that service is a part of recovery was a topic for the workshop. The members felt that Al-Anons don't always realize this, and we are all responsible for changing their thinking. Regional Service Seminars have been used to encourage service. One structure explained that they asked RSS participants how they got involved in service as a means of sharing ideas for reaching out for volunteers. A delegate shared that if a newcomer wasn't involved in service within three years, they may never be involved. This is the stage where we need to reach out. Another explained that they have a service seminar every year to encourage and excite members into service.

In response to the question on whether we are attracting members into service, the workshop participants shared that Al-Anon is service and love. Each of us needs to make it our responsibility to share experiences and we will attract others. By communicating to members the need for volunteers for a specific job, we can attract more people. When a specific need is known, someone usually comes forward.

Members discussed the question, are long-time members familiar with the Concepts, particularly Concept One? Many agreed that a major step has been taken with the new book, Paths to Recovery. Delegates shared that they became familiar with the Concepts after getting into service. Meetings where the Concepts are discussed can be invaluable to increasing awareness.

Discussion

The leaflet, Year of Renewal, was discussed as a wonderful tool to reach out and attract volunteers. Using the wealth of information and experience of our older service members is another valuable resource. It's also very important for these members to feel needed. Sponsoring someone into service works.

In Brazil, the Regional Service Seminars are important to get people in service. It is a real spiritual awakening. One country has been doing this for seven years, and it became very expensive. They came up with the idea to make the RSS self-supporting. The groups agreed and are now supporting the seminars.

By making members feel that every level of service belongs to them, people are more receptive to the idea of service. In South Africa, they try to bring the GSO to the people, they talk it up, and refer to it as "our GSO".

Using the Five Year Plan, the United Kingdom & Eire has focused on every service level from the role of the Chairman of the Board through every district, group and member to renew their commitment.

Others shared that service work is putting our program into practice, and is a way to continue growth in Al-Anon. Sponsoring a friend in service gives us another opportunity to give away what we have received.

Understanding the worldwide structure has helped many countries develop and attract members into service. Broadening the structures to create new positions for volunteers creates an aware-

ness that we are all a part of a much bigger world.

The key words are joy and fun. Some members become focused only on their group. They want to share personal experiences only and don't want to hear anything about service. One structure's delegates try to visit the groups and expand their thinking. Encouraging members to read their newsletters to understand the different levels of service may help encourage them to get involved.

Newer members to Al-Anon don't always think they can handle service. Their minds are on personal recovery and need encouragement to realize that service means growth and recovery. A member explained that when she gives service to her groups, little by little, confusion disappears. She involves people in all her service jobs including whatever is needed for the IAGSM. This helps them to understand all levels of service and gives them excitement to become involved. We need to share our happy moments in service. God will put the special words in our mouths to motivate people to take our place here someday.

Al-Anon Information Service: AIS Benefits for Newcomers and Volunteers

Hélène D., Belgium (Flemish speaking), Leader
Helene L., South Africa, Reporter

The workshop leader asked the members to hold hands and say the Serenity Prayer in their native language. It was described as the rarest moment in one's Al-Anon life. The members of the workshop felt that this session was a wonderful example of the flexibility, diversity and autonomy that the structures have, while still remaining within the perimeters of our Traditions and Concepts of Service.

An AIS is a sum of groups (even as few as three groups) located geographically together and of the same language which can work together and serve each other to their mutual benefit.

The benefits include: sharing a telephone

answering machine, producing meeting lists, communicating information through newsletters, having a literature depot and an office, and possibly doing P.I. work.

Each member of the workshop shared their country's structure relative to an Information Service, and drew diagrams of how it works. Some countries do not have an AIS as they are so near the GSO which serves their needs. Most countries that do have an AIS reported that they were very small. Their AIS may handle Twelve Step calls or be responsible for literature within their small geographical area or be the focal point for public outreach services.

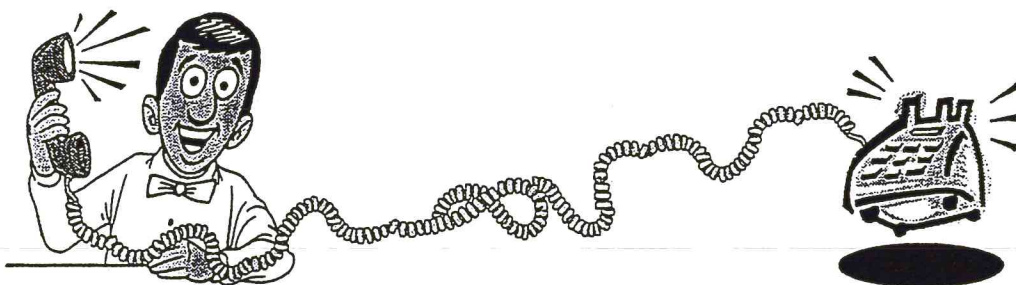
Everyone agreed that the important thing was, however you do it, to share the message, that is a good solution!

During the report back, by a show of hands, it was indicated that seven structures present do not have Information Services. The Brazil delegate shared that to carry the message a member takes a boat up the Amazon river and distributes pamphlets to the Indian people who greet her boat as she travels to distant villages carrying the message of Al-Anon recovery.

Public Information: Carrying the Message to the Public and Professionals

Anne R., UK & Eire, Leader
Jennie A., Australia, Reporter

The workshop discussed what Al-Anon's participation should be in professional events. Speaking when invited is a valuable way to share with the professional community. It is good for Al-Anon members to see how professionals work, to ask questions, as a way to develop an understanding for our outreach work. We need to take as many opportunities as we can to make Al-Anon known to the professional world. Maintaining good relationships is encouraged as many members are referred to Al-Anon. One structure has had lunches for pro-



professionals where Al-Anon members speak.

If you are concerned about your anonymity, you can do other behind-the-scenes public information work. Educating school counselors and principals can be done without giving your last name.

Giving away books and literature can become expensive for some countries, therefore, personal contact is very important. TV talk programs can be a valuable outlet for public outreach. Having a person or committee controlling these invitations can result in the best job being done. Write to organizations and ask to display Al-Anon literature or participate in a professional event. WSO staff members frequently attend professional events to spread our message. By getting Al-Anon's name on professional mailing lists, we can become aware of events and further our public outreach work. The Fact Sheet for Professionals is available, but may need to be modified for individual structures.

Focusing on the question of whether we can rely on CAL as the only resource when doing public outreach work, members felt that we are able to use other material as well. Public information pieces and videos which structures create themselves are valuable tools for this service work. Others felt that CAL and personal experience are the best resources.

Discussion

A structure shared that although they use locally produced service material when doing PI work, all the material has been approved by their Conference. Another delegate explained that they encountered a problem when they shared Al-Anon literature with the government social workers. They thought Al-Anon was a cult or sect because "God" was mentioned. The members tried to explain, but had a very difficult time. Newcomers can also have trouble understanding the Higher Power because of religious differences or non-belief. Using the word "spiritual" can help, but this is when we need to get personally involved to explain our program.

A delegate shared experiences with PI work at the government level. Two GSO members met with their country's prime minister who was

relieved to talk to two people who were not looking for money. Al-Anon members who work in the government are good resources for carrying the message.

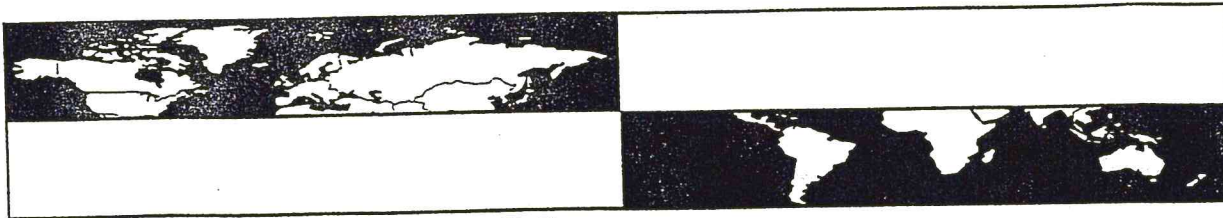
A member asked the meeting participants about producing video tapes for public outreach work. The WSO shared that several structures have developed wonderful videos for service work. Developing 30 second public service announcements (PSAs) for television and radio may also be good resources. This audio/video tools can become very expensive to produce. The World Service Office used a video created by one of the structures, and changed portions to adapt it to the U.S. and Canada. There is a lot of creativity around the world, and we can borrow from each other.

In the United States and Canada, television and radio stations are required by law to set aside time for public service announcements. New PSAs have been created, and the Board has approved airing them during all twelve months of the year. The WSO will track the air time for the radio and TV spots, and the number of persons who have been reached this way.

The South African government is in favor of and has agreed to do little flashes on TV and radio as a service around the holiday seasons.

New Zealand's General Service Office wrote and asked for copies of the PSAs from the WSO. They spent some time and money putting their own voice over the PSAs and now use them regularly. Other countries can do this as well to meet the needs within their structure. The videos can now be produced with the voice and video separate to make it easier to dub other languages into the audio portion. The Internet was also mentioned as a newer vehicle for doing public outreach work.

In Italy, one of the government TV stations gave Al-Anon a movie they dubbed and use in schools. They use it before the Al-Anon members come to the schools as an introduction. Their country does not have public service time on television, so they look for alternate ways to do this work. They made a commercial to be aired on television, and started with small stations. Volunteers are needed to handle the volume of phone calls.



MOTIONS

1997 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting

MOTION #1

The Admissions committee recommends that the Ninth International Al-Anon General Services Meeting admit the representatives from Korea and French-speaking Switzerland who have met the criteria in our guidelines. (44 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstentions) — CARRIED

MOTION #2

The IAGSM recommends to the Board of Trustees to decide that each structure may produce original recovery material within the four requirements set down by the WSO Board in 1994. (6 Yes, 42 No, 0 Abstentions) — NOT CARRIED

MOTION #3

The IAGSM recommends that the IAGSM be held in Germany in the year 2000, and in the event of an emergency the IAGSM be held in the U.S. (46 Yes, 0 No, 1 Abstention) — CARRIED



SPIRITUAL MEETINGS

The Eleventh Step, "God, As We Understand Him"

Marleen W., Belgium (Finnish)

I never was a great believer. I had no alliance with a God when I grew up, but my Higher Power had an alliance with me. I realize this now. Maybe He was letting me know this by sending all the alcoholics in my life. Even as a child I thought I could move the world. Only the alcoholics stood in my way. Now I'm very grateful they were in my way. My Higher Power provided for me regardless of my own attitude. What would become of me when there wasn't anyone to stop me? I probably became pretentious, conceited, and an obstinate person. As a child I had a resentment against my father because he left us when I was five years old. I was the oldest of three children. He didn't even see my youngest sister because my mother was pregnant when he left. I thought I could do everything the way I wanted because I was hiding behind his behavior. My Higher Power was very careful with all this. I suppose He first led me to Al-Anon. He knew the healing power of the program of Al-Anon would work, and after my resentment went away I took my family, and even my mother to visit my father. We didn't have contact before and I was taught what comes will come. We had to travel for 24 hours with three little children, but I had the courage to meet him. All those years he was waiting for his children. Away went resentment, I was seeing a very sensitive, suffering father. He was in AA for 19 years and was very aware of the mistakes he made. I realized then that I forgave him and I enjoyed every moment with him. The year later he came to visit us in Belgium and met my brother and sister, I was very happy for this family reunion. I never could have done this without the program of Al-Anon and without the help of my Higher Power.

Sometimes I just wonder how certain things change in my life. Before I met my husband, I had a boyfriend who was drinking too much. I stopped the relationship, and a month later I met my husband. He was drinking too, but I thought I could control it. A few years later I saw the other boy. He didn't have a drinking problem at all. I'm sure

my Higher Power let me make the right choice.

When I went to my first Al-Anon meeting I was furious. I was saying to myself, how do I explain everything about him. I will find the solution to stop him, and let him live the life I planned for him. It was a very warm evening in June and I got a fly in both eyes. I was riding my bike completely blind, but I got where I needed to be. It was a little house, I threw the door open and was in the middle of the meeting. I thought the people around the table would be angry because of the noise I made, but they were very friendly. They just asked me to have a cup of coffee and asked me to sit down. I was astonished. There came a very calm feeling over me and I felt for the first time there was somebody with me. I wasn't alone and since then I never lost that feeling.

At the birth of my first child I stopped working. Twenty-two years later I started working again. The first contact with my boss was very strange. The minute I met her I knew there was an alcohol problem. I asked, "God, where are you taking me?" Now I have a very good relationship with her even when she sometimes drinks very badly. On a day before she went to a rehab clinic her husband asked me if I knew she was drinking. I told him I knew it the moment I presented myself for the job. He didn't believe it because he only knew it the day before. I told him about Al-Anon. We never spoke about this again, and I let go and let God. A few weeks later he said he always knew I wasn't only there for the job.

One of my sons is retarded, and has hearing and speaking problems. I don't want to say that he has a handicap because he has much more than we have. It is really a child sent by the God of my understanding. It took a lot of training, troubles and surgery, but all was worth it. He grew up and succeeded in many things he couldn't have dreamed of.

I also have a son who has a drinking problem. He was even in jail and had two terrible car accidents, but still I'm very grateful for this boy. He gives me a lot of joy, and I know our Higher Power is taking care of him. I only have to love him, that is all I have to do, and everything will run the way it has to run.

We have a dog, a white Labrador. I didn't want a dog. It was giving me too much work. I had to feed and brush him. We have him now for six years. I walk with him at least one hour. At first I growled against this walking, but now I ask myself "who is walking who?" I only have to go across the street and I am in the middle of beautiful woods. I mostly take my ODAT with me. I sit on a tree stump and read or meditate. I feel the peace, I find myself again, come to reason again and get in contact with nature. It is a blessing for me that the dog needs to walk.

I really have to say thank you to all the alcoholics in my life. They brought me to my Higher Power.

Closing

Marsha W., WSO Associate Director

During this closing session, each member of the International General Services Meeting, one by one, shared their thoughts and feelings about this worldwide sharing with one word or thought. Marsha opened the meeting by sharing, "This is a wonderful experience for me. One of the things that attracted me was the spiritual part of our program and I am so excited to be chairing this session."

I was born into an addicted family. No one believed in God or a Higher Power. My road was through Al-Anon. I am grateful for this meeting. I came with lots of questions, people back home are starving for what I am going to bring back.

If I'm asked to say one word about this meeting, it would be unity. Representatives from 23 countries, talking the same language, unity in Al-Anon is what I treasure most.

The one word that comes to me is the unity that is community. I was so scared and anxious to come here. I thought I could come and if I was a failure, I could reimburse my country. My sponsor reminded me that my Higher Power decides for me. Anxiety is the price I pay for playing God.

I know I am getting healthy when I can laugh again. I remember growing up and the nuns would tell me that God loves you. I thought if He's so crazy about me why is my house the way it is. I needed proof. When I came to Al-Anon, He was proving it. I am going to take all of you back home with me.

I am grateful to be here to share so much love with you all. I am taking a little piece of experience, strength and hope of each of you.

We are all different people, but have equal feel-

ings.

The one thing I will take home with me is the joy that each of us is sharing with newcomers in your structures. Lois and Anne taught us that they didn't do service alone. Nothing works without you.

I am taking home a better understanding of my Higher Power. On the flight here, we went from a jumbo jet to an airbus to a propeller plane. One of the propellers wasn't working. We thought that God couldn't allow us to come this far and not do our job.

I was overwhelmed with the quality of the people and your experience. It's wonderful to know that so many countries are trying to do the same things that we are.

I thought my Higher Power forgot about me, there were so many things wrong in my life. A few years ago something happened that allowed me to believe. My Higher Power hasn't forgotten me and forgives me for my mistakes. He allows me to see the bright side of the things in my life.

I've met the faces I wanted to meet. I felt love and acceptance and had fun. All my life I had a voice say to me that I was inadequate. Here I felt adequate. If I could survive this, I don't ever have to feel inadequate again.

I know I have grown. My Higher Power knew what I needed most and sent me to Al-Anon. I learned to understand the meaning of love. The mere fact that I am standing here today is most amazing. We are a fellowship, a worldwide fellowship, and I love you all.

I worried about so many things before I came here. My English is not so good, our structure has serious problems. At this meeting I met wonderful friends, and felt so much love. I thank my Higher Power for this opportunity.

My Higher Power moved my life in such a way that I am here.

We are all so far away and yet so close. I am new to this service commitment and have highs and lows. One more time I found solutions among you through sharing experience, strength and hope. This is a much wider vision.

I am in awe of you all. You have no idea how courageous you are. I take inspiration and courage from you. This meeting was to be a meeting of sharing and that's what happened. People got to share their thoughts.

Where else could I go to get friends and fellowship around the world. This is a unique fellowship where miracles do happen — we're proof of that.

I came with the help of a Higher Power I didn't

know I had. I work the Twelve Steps spiritually and take back enthusiasm in abundance. I felt total acceptance and so equal.

I am here because my Higher Power wants me to be here. I have the privilege to get experience, understanding and your love in my heart. Now I will try to share it with my country.

The word Al-Anon means hope. When I was a child I wanted to work in a worldwide organization as a diplomat or something. My dream is here all these years later. I am working in an organization without boundaries, we have the language of love and sharing.

I can feel the spirit of our Higher Power in this room.

I thank Al-Anon for a loving Higher Power and a new world family.

Before I came this week, I was feeling like when I first came to Al-Anon — unwanted, unloved and alone. I wasn't afraid that I wouldn't understand you, we're all alike and we speak the language of Al-Anon. If my Higher Power has it in store for me, I will see you again.

I spoke with my Higher Power and asked for the strength to continue the work I've been asked to do.

I deserted God or He deserted me. I had Al-Anon as my Higher Power and then my grandfather, and later, God.

My husband said I should thank him for being here. Humor has been my best friend through my Al-Anon work.

I was scared of all of you. On the trip over, the pilot was listening to a ball game. Every few minutes, over the microphone, he would give the results of the game. He then told us his wife left him because he had a drinking problem, and he was feeling suicidal. I am grateful just to be here. Coming here I was on a small plane and during the landing I was very sick. My stomach landed before

me. I went to the ladies room at the airport and saw a hole in my mouth. I lost my teeth bridge in one of the air sick bags! I went to different office, told my story and smiled. One gentleman who gave us our luggage very gingerly handed me a small bag. Now I don't have a hole in my mouth. I go home with a suitcase full of answers. I felt insecure. With your love and acceptance I feel just as big. I now have a special relationship with my Higher Power. You showed me that my Higher Power is a wonderful thing who gives me gifts every day.

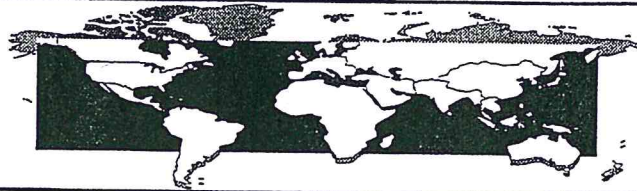
On the flight over, I read an Al-Anon newsletter, and on the cover it said, all we can do is our best. This has been wonderful to talk openly about the problems in our structures.

I always believed in God and felt His guidance through my whole life. There were so many moments He was there, but I didn't always notice. I am very grateful and sure it was my Higher Power who guided me to Al-Anon. It is overwhelming to be here to feel the love.

I have a strong feeling that we are unanimous about worldwide unity.

As a child I thought life was not worth living. Today I have friends in the whole world and I am not lonely any more. I feel your love and acceptance. I pray I will find the right words and love to share our opinions and feelings to my structure.

This closing session was a reflection of the three prior days where the unity of Al-Anon was strengthened through sharing hope, love, and a few tears. The 1997 International General Services Meeting was closed with members joining hands in a worldwide circle of hope and reciting the Al-Anon Declaration, "Let it begin with me. When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, let the hand of Al-Anon and Alateen always be there and let it begin with me."



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