

# **AI-Anon's Future,** *Our Responsibility*

**Tenth International  
AI-Anon General Services Meeting**



**October 4-7, 2000**

*Holiday Inn Essen City Centre  
Essen, Germany*

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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

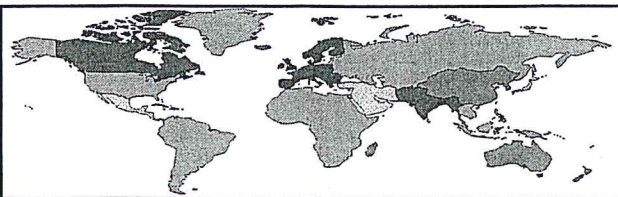
The following structures were represented at the 2000 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting:

<b>Argentina</b>	Rosalía F. Haydée R.	<b>Switzerland</b> (German)	Alice R.
<b>Australia</b>	Jenny A. Frances C.	<b>Switzerland</b> (French)	Nicolas M. Barbara A.
<b>Belgium</b> (Flemish)	Lutgart S. Linda S.	<b>UK and Eire</b>	Anne R. Ann W.
<b>Belgium</b> (French)	Liliane B.	<b>US and Canada</b>	Helen R. Catherine J.
<b>Brazil</b>	Ivone I. María M.		
<b>Finland</b>	Paula O. Pirjo K.	<b>International Coordination Committee</b>	
<b>France</b>	Jacqueline C.	Mary C.	
<b>Germany</b>	Gesine W. Hans P.	Peggy S.	
<b>Iceland</b>	Ása Á. Runa G.	Jennie H.	
<b>Italy</b>	Mariella S.	Ric B.	
<b>Netherlands</b>	Ria H. Loes van L.	Mary Ann K.	
<b>New Zealand</b>	Helen A. Kay S.	Marsha W.	
<b>Norway</b>	Siri Å. Solveig M.		
<b>Poland</b>	Elzbieta W. Zofia S.		
<b>South Africa</b>	Andrea K. Lindsay S.		
<b>Spain</b>	Conchita N. Margarita G.		

The following structures were not able to send representation:

Colombia  
El Salvador  
Korea  
Sweden  
Costa Rica  
Guatemala  
Mexico  
Uruguay  
Denmark  
Japan  
Paraguay  
Venezuela





## OPENING SESSION

Thirty-four delegates from twenty countries and six members of the International Coordination Committee (ICC) attended the Tenth International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM).

### Opening Remarks

Mary C., ICC Chair, opened the meeting with a warm greeting and stated that she was a "very, very, very grateful member of Al-Anon worldwide." She then asked all to join her in the Serenity Prayer.

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#### The Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity  
To accept the things I cannot change,  
Courage to change the things I can,  
And wisdom to know the difference.

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### Keynote Speaker

Siri Å., Norway

#### Al-Anon's Future, Our Responsibility

The Al-Anon logo was the first thing that came to my mind as I heard the topic for this IAGSM. I was thinking about the serenity, confidence, trust, and hope that I have found in our triangle in times of stress. To me the triangle holds both the past, the present, and the future.

The symbols in the logo have always been a tool for me – in my personal recovery and as I relate to my family, my friends, my job, the community, and Al-Anon. The triangle appears very clearly as our legacy; one side formed by the Twelve Steps, one side by the Twelve Traditions, and one side by the Twelve Concepts. As emphasized by so many, it truly is comparable to a stool; it must have three legs to be safe to sit on.

To me, the floating circle in the triangle symbolizes our growing fellowship and our message of love. I have been through dark days in my own recovery, and I have faced challenges in Al-Anon – but no matter how dark my days have seemed, I have been able to feel the white and comforting light in the Al-Anon circle.

The circle is very much alive, while the triangle surrounding us keeps us safe. We know that we will be safe as long as we use the triangle – our legacies – as our guides to help us stay within our comfort zone.

The legacies were handed down to us by our founders – our responsibility is to administer the legacies, to make sure that the value is increasing. Every single Al-Anon member is responsible for making sure that the circle of the fellowship is kept within the triangle as a loving and living circle, that is being nourished with compassion, kept alive so

that it can grow. As we take that responsibility, we are making a safe investment. The profit is evident the minute we feel the responsibility. What we give is very little compared to what we get. That is one of the many aspects of the Al-Anon spirit.

The value will be increasing as we grow with the legacies as our guides. We are safe as long as we keep the circle floating within the triangle.

By using the Twelve Steps, I am learning to be responsible for myself, by using the Twelve Traditions I am becoming responsible for my group and for my relationship with family and friends, and by using the Twelve Concepts I am becoming responsible for Al-Anon as a whole and the community surrounding me. Each side of the triangle becomes increasingly solid and each day I experience a growing awareness of the gift that the legacies truly hold. We have been handed down a true gift with potential for growth at many levels.

While addressing the future it is good to keep in mind that our program is a spiritual program and our language is a language of love. As I have been working the Steps and made the legacies the most important part of my life, I have noticed that both spirituality and love has a need to express itself. I will always have the potential to grow, but spirituality and love will never outgrow itself nor me, the fellowship, or our changing world.

Our language of love will never be outdated. As long as we take responsibility and act according to all of the thirty-six parts of our legacy – and the love expressed in each part – we are safe. And by working with one of the parts, we will see how each of the thirty-six parts grows simultaneously in



value and meaning.

To me the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts hold the past, the present, as well as the future. It is amazing how we – with our legacies – always find the help we need whether it is on our personal paths to recovery and growth or when searching for solutions to any problem within the fellowship, our relationships, and surroundings.

The world has been through a lot of changes since the early days of AA and Al-Anon. Changes for better and for worse. One of the important changes in our history is the way we communicate. With the Internet we have been – and still are – facing new opportunities for passing on our message. Challenges often grow along with changes. We may — for instance – face challenges as to how we can seize the opportunities while maintaining our legacies.

The changes we have faced regarding the Internet are a very good example of how our trusted servants and WSO has taken responsibility for the fellowship as a whole. It is also an example of how the legacies have room for changes nobody could foresee when our fellowship was formed. Some of the challenges may have seemed overwhelming at times, but as times grow into perspective, I rest assured that what we have experienced in the past and face in the present will be valued as an investment in the future.

The reality we are facing today is more than anyone could have imagined fifty years ago. We often hear that everything is changing except change. Another constant has been the legacies of our fellowship.

How do we address the future? We have to use

forethought. We have to make plans. We have to be alert to changes. Every new development in the way the world communicates will affect Al-Anon since communication is a tool we need to address our primary purpose. We have to face the changing world with an open mind. And above all, let us remember our legacy whenever we plan to make changes to seize new opportunities. Let us remember that we are making safe investments when changes are being made within the thirty-six parts of our legacy.

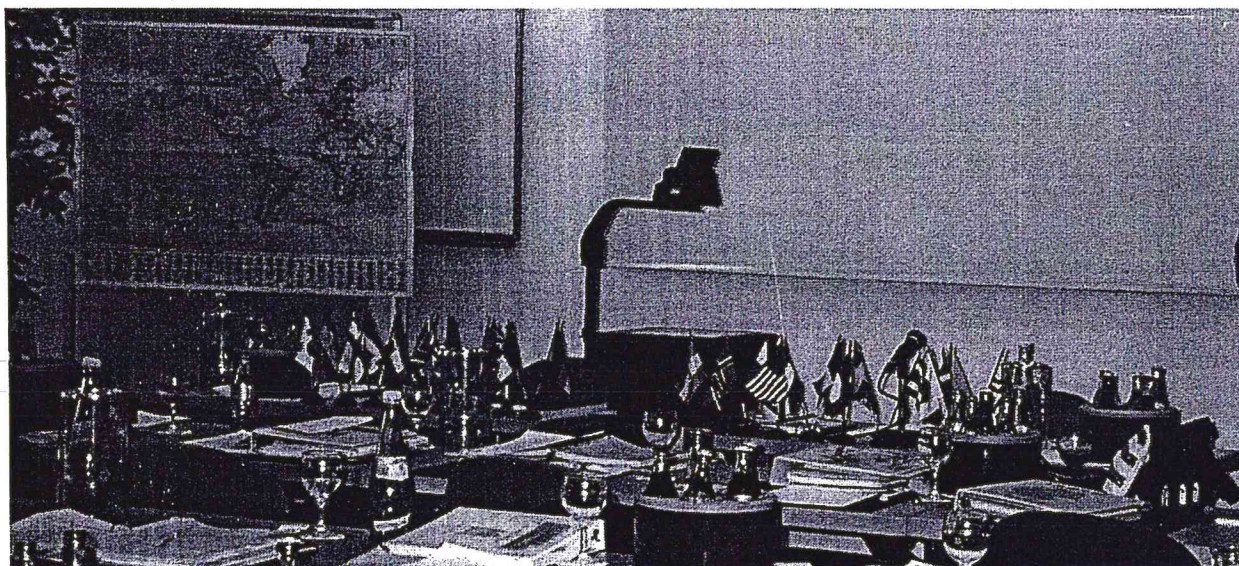
Al-Anon's future is our responsibility. Yours and mine. Years with opportunities to serve our fellowship have taught me that responsibility is a gift, not a burden. Whenever I have been trusted as responsible for opening our doors or serving as a delegate, I have grown and I have felt a growing sense of belonging to the fellowship.

Growth is a choice I make in my own recovery. I choose to grow with all the aspects of the Al-Anon triangle as my guide. I am responsible for my own growth. Growth is a choice we make for Al-Anon as well. The choice is ours and the responsibility is ours. Yours and mine.

## Roll Call and Flag Ceremony

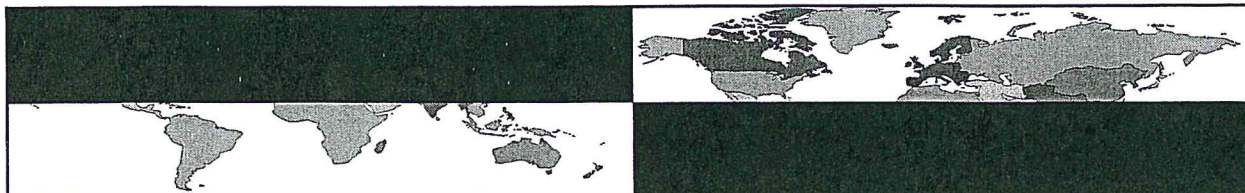
Mary C., International Coordination Meeting

Illustrating the worldwide yet united span of Al-Anon Family Groups, the delegates of each country introduced themselves, placed the flag of their country on the chairperson's table, and marked their GSO's location on the world map.



*World map with GSOs indicated and representative flags.*





## GENERAL SESSION

The sessions were chaired by Mary C., who put the Delegates at ease with her humor and relaxing manner as she skillfully guided participants through the agenda. She kept everyone focused which created a friendly and open atmosphere that was inviting to all participants.

All topics for discussion were submitted by the General Service Offices and/or their delegate representation. Following each presentation, the participants in the meeting were invited to share their experiences, strength, and hope during an open discussion.

Each General Session had a true international feeling as each was closed with the Serenity Prayer by one of the Delegates in his/her own language. This part in the program is a highlight for many.

The Delegates voted to have closed balloting. A two-thirds majority was accepted as the established substantial unanimity.

It was explained that motions would be presented in a written format, read by the chairperson, and the floor would be open for discussion.

### Admissions Committee Reportback

The Admissions Committee did not meet during this IAGSM as there were no new structures to admit.

### Internet – Staying Ahead of the Wave

Ivone I., Brazil

I wonder what Lois and the old veterans would think if they could see what Al-Anon has accomplished in fifty years. From the very first file in a shoe box we now have computer files and the Internet all around the world! A great number of General Service Offices and the World Service Office can communicate with each other in seconds. Through the Internet our message of love reaches the public and our friends, the professionals, in several languages all over the world.

The communication between the World Service Office and the General Service Offices is very important because it helps to maintain unity in our fellowship. The accurate translation of literature is also very important to maintain unity in the program as a whole. Without this unity we would not have Al-Anon working in about one hundred countries. The program would be fragmented, diluted, and lost among philosophies, religions, and sects in different parts of the world. There are some differences in the structure of service among countries; but the principles are the same, and this maintains the unity around our primary purpose of helping families and friends of alcoholics through our recovery program.

The Internet permits quick communication among our General Service Offices, with the World Service Office, and, within our structures, with the

service branches. Last year Argentina and Brazil organized the First Iberoamerican Al-Anon Service Meeting, that was held in October in Buenos Aires with delegates from most Latin American countries and Spain. All the organization was made through e-mail. We did not speak by phone or use regular mail. Ideas, questions, answers, and suggestions went in and out almost daily. It was as if Argentines and Brazilians were working in the same office. And very important: all this at a negligible cost!

A natural consequence of all this progress is the virtual groups that flourish everywhere. In Brazil, our Board still has mixed feelings about the matter. Our General Service Office is not registering the virtual groups nor recommending them yet, in spite of being pressed to do so by several members. Presently, our Board of Trustees is still unsure about the advantages and disadvantages of virtual groups, especially concerning possible dangers to anonymity and the possibility that people that do not belong to Al-Anon may break in and cause harm. Our Board of Trustees is studying the matter, and we do our best to preserve the copyrights of Conference Approved Literature by informing that the Al-Anon literature cannot be copied. Anyway, this question is only in its beginnings and I am sure that we are going to arrive at a good conclusion that will be the best to Al-Anon as a whole.



Our General Service Office has its Internet site since March 1998. We are constantly updating it, but only since January 2000 are we counting the visitors to the site. It took us long to do it, because perhaps we were afraid that nobody was visiting it and we did not want to know. But, oh, surprise! Since January 1<sup>st</sup> until August 31<sup>st</sup> (that is, eight months), our site was visited by 5,415 people. This is a very good number, considering that our site is in Portuguese, a language spoken only in Brazil, Portugal, Angola, Mozambique, and Goa. As far as we know, apart from the 1,275 groups in Brazil, Portugal has a few scattered groups and Al-Anon has not arrived yet to the other Portuguese-speaking countries. Perhaps now, through the Internet, it will.

About this, I have an interesting experience to share with you. Last year I was a speaker at our 10<sup>th</sup> Regional Service Seminar, that was held in Maranhão, which is located in the North of Brazil near the Amazon jungle. There were about eighty people at the seminar, and one woman said that her first contact with Al-Anon had been through our Internet site. How about that?

The World Service Office suggested that I tell you in a few words how was the development of our structure until we got to the Internet. Well, the Al-Anon message arrived in Brazil in 1965, and the first group was registered with the World Service Office in 1966. In 1978, Henrietta S. and Teresa M. visited our office and suggested that the Service Manual be translated into Portuguese. That brought a quick and solid growth to our structure. Our history is in the IAGSM binder, but I think that it is important to stress that we always tried to follow the World Service Office experience with the structure and the Concepts, sometimes adapting or simplifying things, but never inventing or changing the structure's framework. In 1994 we began a new phase, bringing to our General Service Office modern methods of administration, organization, and the computer era. In 1996 our 18<sup>th</sup> General Services Conference approved unanimously the purchase of a property to house our headquarters, in São Paulo, which was done in the same year.

Preparing for the third millennium, in 1994 we started to make a fearless inventory of our translated literature. We found out that due to financial limitations, in order to introduce new, updated pieces of literature, it was necessary to discontinue others that were outdated, repetitive, or with low acceptance in Brazil.

The same thing happens with service literature. The practice of service teaches us new methods to face old issues. For example, divulgation such as

was carried out in the 50s and 60s is completely different from that of today, considering that we have now modern ways of communication like cable TV and the Internet.

And here we are back to the Internet. Surveys say that in Latin America, in the year 2000 the marketing of goods and services on Internet will surpass that of cable TV and that in 2001, it will probably surpass that of the radio. The projection is that in three years Internet will have 8.8 percent of the market, against 9.4 percent of the written media. Predictions indicate that in 2003 there will be at least thirty-eight million people using Internet in Latin America. So we have a very powerful tool with low cost that can reach all and every little spot of the world. LET'S USE IT AND STAY AHEAD OF THE WAVE!

#### *Discussion*

This presentation triggered a number of questions delegates brought with them from their structures about Internet usage.

One delegate asked if the Brazilian website sold literature? The answer given was no, as the office did not have the staffing to handle on-line sales.

In addressing a question if books were available on-line to be read, WSO advised that the Board of Trustees was continuing to look at this issue. Only the list of material found on the WSO website can be used on a website without the need to ask for permission. At this time, however, on-line meetings that register with the WSO are given permission and a license to quote short excerpts at meetings. Since the WSO is registering all on-line meetings regardless of the language, members are asked not to translate any literature themselves as all translation is done through the General Service Offices.

One person stated that when a professional group asked their GSO to participate on their site, they wanted the Al-Anon name and logo included on the site as well. The attitude of many at the GSO was if they did not participate, because of our Traditions, an opportunity would be missed by the GSO to share the Al-Anon message of hope. In response WSO advised that in the US and Canada, sites have provided free space to Al-Anon Information Services, but there is no link or affiliation to the outside entity. We do not give our logo or name to an external party.

WSO explained further that links from external sites to our sites are permissible, for example for professionals/doctors/lawyers to send people to Al-Anon. In the future there will be more informa-



tion from the Policy Committee in the form of guidelines about the type of sites with which the WSO will hyperlink.

Another question asked was why there was no link from WSO to the GSO websites? WSO's response was that at this time the WSO will not hyperlink to any site except those that join the WSO international site. The WSO Policy Committee is considering this topic at an upcoming meeting as there have also been requests from Al-Anon Information Services in the US and Canada. The ideal is to link with sites that only represent the Al-Anon/Alateen message.

Several advised that their GSOs decided not to join the WSO international site as they felt the fee was too high or they did not have the manpower within their structure to maintain the site. Structures were encouraged to work within the framework of their structures and not to feel pushed but to grow at the pace that is right for that structure. It was also mentioned that it is not a good idea to have sites maintained by individual members as experience has shown some have difficulty relinquishing ownership.

Many shared the different ways their GSOs have developed their websites. It was also mentioned that having a website increases the visibility of Al-Anon/Alateen and is a good public outreach tool.

## Internet – Anonymity, Technology, and Our Traditions

Jenny A., Australia

When I was first given the opportunity to speak on this topic, I felt overwhelmed by such a complex subject. The Traditions I am familiar with and can always refer to them for more in depth reading to answer group and personal problems. Anonymity I am comfortable with; I understand its meaning and how it relates to myself and Al-Anon members at group meetings and other social events.

One aspect of technology suggests to me the degree of competency I have mastered when using a computer. Can I write letters, reports, etc.? Can I use the e-mail successfully? The answer is yes. I have the skills to complete these tasks.

To me the Internet is a source of information that my 17-year-old daughter accesses to help her with her studies. It is a new wave of communication that connects us with each other worldwide, providing rapid knowledge never experienced before.

Until recently I have never entertained the idea of attending an Al-Anon meeting on the Internet.

I live in Melbourne, Australia in a District which has seven meetings each week. There are four evening meetings and two daytime meetings only ten minutes' drive from my home. I began investigating this topic by looking closely at the Traditions which I felt influenced on-line meetings.

**Tradition One** "Our common welfare comes first; personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity," looks at two issues. The first, *welfare*, which for Al-Anon members means familiarity with our primary purpose – to help families and friends of alcoholics. It means participating in meetings which follow the Steps, Traditions, say the Serenity Prayer, and use Conference Approved Literature.

The second issue concerns *unity*. Tradition One calls on us to be unified in a common purpose. To share openly and equally at meetings where we feel comfortable and find common ground. How will meetings on the Internet provide unity? If the Steps, Traditions, and Conference Approved Literature is used, then I believe unity will be maintained. The Al-Anon message of hope will be available to a large number of people who require additional meetings or who would otherwise not have access to meetings.

Guidelines regarding the use of Al-Anon/Alateen Literature and meeting formats are available on the *Fact Sheet for AL-ANON ON-LINE MEETINGS*.

**Tradition Three** "The relatives of alcoholics, when gathered together for mutual aid, may call themselves an Al-Anon Family Group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation. The only requirement for membership is that there be a problem of alcoholism in a relative or friend." This emphasizes the basic qualification to be a member of an Al-Anon group.

"A group can be formed whenever two or more persons get together to use the Al-Anon principles to help themselves." <sup>1</sup>

"Regardless of personal creed, economic status, sexual orientation, or religious background, anyone who has been affected by another's alcoholism is welcome in our fellowship. There is no other requirement for membership." <sup>2</sup>

The focus remains on Al-Anon as long as no outside organizations or interests are promoted or advertised, and our experience, strength, and hope in dealing with alcoholism is shared. Tradition Three speaks of members getting together. Could this be on the Internet?

We must be aware, however that on-line meetings "are in reality 'open' to anyone with access to the Internet or a computer on-line service. There is



no way of ascertaining or guaranteeing that all participants are Al-Anon members or specifically interested in our program as the relative or friend of a problem drinker.”<sup>3</sup>

**Tradition Five** “Each Al-Anon Family Group has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps of AA ourselves, by encouraging and understanding our alcoholic relatives, and by welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics.” These words define Al-Anon’s primary purpose, which is helping families of alcoholics.

“...practicing our own Twelve Step program, encouraging and understanding our alcoholic loved ones, and comforting people affected by another person’s alcoholism.”<sup>4</sup>

Tradition Five states that the Al-Anon message should be available to the community.

“As groups and individuals, we support these services with donations and volunteer hours to assure that someone is there to pick up the phone and direct the person to the nearest meeting.”<sup>5</sup>

Our literature, posters, and public service announcements provide information to those who have been affected by alcoholism. Surely the Internet with chat rooms and on-line meetings which follow the guidelines and don’t give advice are fulfilling Tradition Five.

Information services in our districts and areas, the WSO, and all GSOs around the world need to be able to reach out to those who ask for Al-Anon’s comfort and message of hope.

**Tradition Seven** “Every group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.” This poses a number of questions for on-line meetings.

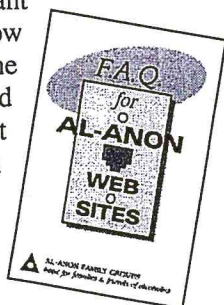
Will members support their district, area, the WSO, and other GSO services by taking part in on-line meetings?

Will the group be part of the larger group conscience by sending a GR with voice and vote to district or area level?

Can the group register with WSO?

Do members volunteer for service positions?

*The Fact Sheet for AL-ANON ON-LINE MEETINGS* states that it is important for on-line meetings to follow the Seventh Tradition. “The meetings may need to send contributions for rent (list server) as well as to Al-Anon service arms.”<sup>6</sup>



The following suggestions are made:

- Members may mail contributions to an elected treasurer.
- Request contributions by mail at the beginning of the topic for that week, if applicable.
- Members may send contributions, which are clearly identified with on-line meeting identification number, directly to WSO.
- Members are encouraged to make birthday gift donations to WSO.

**Tradition Twelve** says that “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities.”

My feeling is that a member’s personal anonymity cannot be guaranteed when participating in an on-line meeting. At a face-to-face meeting new comers are assured and other members are reminded, “Whom you see here, What you see here, When you leave here, Let it stay here.” Personal recovery and safety can be found within the four walls of a meeting room. The lack of boundaries on the Internet make personal anonymity questionable.

“On-line meetings are particularly vulnerable to the inability to enforce the unenforceable. If you have a need for anonymity, you may want to discuss it with your service provider.”<sup>7</sup>

Of course as we grow in the program we begin to realize that it is not whether we know one another’s last name that is important, but that we practice “principles above personalities.” In Al-Anon, members enjoy a status of equality – none of us is more important than another. This Tradition ensures that we can all sit in a meeting room and have the freedom to speak, regardless of our material assets or educational standards. Looked at from this point of view, perhaps on-line meetings provide anonymity as no personal judgments can be made in reference to looks, mannerisms, or the way we dress.

To summarize, I feel that technology has an important part to play in spreading Al-Anon’s message of hope and recovery. There is a place for use of the Internet to contact Al-Anon members. We should use what is available to us just as Lois and Anne did in the early days of Al-Anon. Al-Anon should embrace the existing need and get involved with the technology from the start and not get left behind. The Internet can bring the worldwide fellowship together by introducing new ideas from all parts of the globe.

On-line meetings were on a three-year trial basis 1996-1998. In January 1999, the trial period was extended for an additional three years.



In my opinion slow and monitored progress is wise. It is important to realize that Internet meetings are a supplement to face-to-face meetings.

"...it is essential that we learn to interact with other people in a healthy way..."<sup>8</sup>

Al-Anon face-to-face meetings provide us with some of the greatest gifts:

- The comfort received by a hug or the nod of a head,
- The acceptance we are given, even though we are not perfect and will never be, and
- The opportunity to participate in service which provides growth in the form of increased self esteem and knowledge.

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1. Paths to Recovery: Al-Anon's Steps, Traditions and Concepts, page 154.
2. How Al-Anon Works for Families and Friends of Alcoholics, page 111.
3. Fact sheet for AL-ANON ON-LINE MEETINGS.
4. Paths to Recovery: Al-Anon's Steps, Traditions and Concepts, page 175.
5. Paths to Recovery: Al-Anon's Steps, Traditions and Concepts, page 177.
6. Fact sheet for AL-ANON ON-LINE MEETINGS.
7. Fact sheet for AL-ANON ON-LINE MEETINGS.
8. How Al-Anon Works for Families & Friends of Alcoholics, page 109.

### *Discussion*

Many were able to share their experience regarding on-line meetings and how these meetings can be of benefit to Al-Anon. One shared that to her surprise when she attended an e-mail meeting she found the sharings no different then being in a face-to-face meeting. Another shared that anonymity in on-line meetings can be protected. It was suggested to use one of the free e-mail companies where the individual can select what, if any, personal data he or she wants to reveal.

Another indicated that the on-line meeting she attends has service positions available, has a business meeting, and holds group conscious meetings. A designated day of each week is an open topic for the meeting. The second topic of each week is on the Steps and the Traditions. She also advised that when she is unable to attend her face-to-face meetings for various reasons, her on-line meeting helps her to stay connected to Al-Anon.

A member stated there are three types of on-line meetings: list, e-mail, and chat meetings. During the discussion one participant encouraged all to be open to the idea that people will find Al-Anon on-line and may not go to face-to-face meetings. It

was suggested we can all be assured they will find the peace and love that comes through the program. Attending on-line meetings can support the feeling that we are truly an international fellowship.

## **Communication Between Structures**

Rosalía F., Argentina

My name is Rosalía, and I'm the delegate from Argentina. I am also a member of the Board of Trustees and chairperson of our Nominating Committee.

Thanks to our program I began to learn a different way of communicating: first with myself (basically by listening to others), then with my Higher Power, a new relationship in my life.

It is in the diversity of outlooks, points of view, and shared experiences that I found the guidance of my Higher Power for change. This holds true not only in my private life but, very much so, in service.

Change, growth, and enrichment require some way of getting together with others, to communicate, which basically means interchange. We show similarities, we exchange differences. And this is what happened at Al-Anon's first Iberoamerican Service Meeting.

When Graciela (who was unable to participate at this IAGSM) and Marita (the outgoing delegate), who went to Virginia Beach in 1997, heard about how structures improved their local communication, and about a meeting called Francophonie, held every two years by the European French-speaking countries (French-speaking Belgium, France, and French-speaking Switzerland), they thought it would be a great idea to do the same among Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries.

At the same time we had our own experience of getting together:

- a) Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay have been sending representatives to their National Service Conferences.
- b) In 1997, the Brazilian Delegate to our Conference had the first brief meeting with our General Secretary, Alberto. Later that year, Ivone, also from Brazil, and Alberto started making plans for a meeting among Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking structures.

Our first Iberoamerican Al-Anon Service Meeting (IASM) was born out of these ideas over two years later. It took place between October 22<sup>nd</sup> and October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1999, in Buenos Aires. Representatives from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia,



Costa Rica, México, Perú, Spain, Uruguay, Venezuela (altogether representing over 6,000 groups), and one representative from WSO, got together in some cases for the first time, to share once again love expressed through service.

The guidelines were outlined during the Iberoamerican Al-Anon Service Meeting (IASM), and they announced that the Iberoamerican Al-Anon Service Meeting (IASM) will be held every two years in order to:

- Exchange service experiences.
- Promote integration between Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries through participation, cooperation, and sponsorship.
- Create the chance to exchange service experiences, needs, and projects.
- Provide more and better help to families and friends of alcoholics.

#### **Who can participate in the Iberoamerican Al-Anon Service Meeting (IASM)?**

The Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries that are not part of the WSO or vote in the WSC that:

- Have a Board of Trustees and an incorporated Service Office.
- Have an Al-Anon Information Service and some way of administration.
- Have a number of groups, though not organized in a structure.
- Two representatives from the WSO with voice but without vote.
- Every country can send two delegates but just one vote per country.
- The structures will pay for the expenses of their delegates.

#### **What were the topics we discussed?**

1. Purpose and future of the Iberoamerican Al-Anon Service Meeting (IASM). Brazil
2. Purpose of the IAGSM and reportback. Argentina
3. Modern means of communication. Colombia & Brazil
4. Translations. México & Perú
5. Re-printings. Argentina & México
6. Carrying the message. Perú & Venezuela
7. Structure of the General Service Offices. Colombia & Brazil
8. Volunteers. Venezuela & Spain
9. Relationship between the WSO and General Service Offices. Colombia & Brazil

10. Communication between countries. Uruguay & México

11. Alateen. Spain & Uruguay

12. Difficulties in groups. Costa Rica & Argentina

The reasons why these topics were selected are:

Spanish translations do not contemplate local expressions, causing difficulties, in many cases end up being a confusing paragraph that doesn't show the spirit of Al-Anon.

There is great need for more literature translated into Spanish. The reasons for this unfulfilled need might be a lack of staff working at the WSO and the few Spanish-speaking groups in USA, that make the decision of having more titles in Spanish uneconomical.

The possibility of lowering costs by means of joint printing between countries and importing or exporting literature.

Communication between countries and the WSO need to be more fluent and faster. The directory needs to be updated and mail must be improved.

The increasing number of problem members in the groups or districts looking for attention instead of recovery.

For two and a half days we all discussed the topics and produced nine motions:

- The next IASM will take place in México in 2001.
- The tentative guidelines were modified to allow two members from the WSO to attend the meeting with voice but without vote and allow the Spanish and Portuguese countries with or without a structure to participate.
- Each structure will send a quarterly report of its activities to the next host country (México).
- An Admissions Committee of three members was organized.
- Literature:

The three most urgent books were voted to be translated into Spanish by the WSO:

*From Survival to Recovery*

*The Fourth Step in Alateen*

*As We Understood . . .*

There is a problem in getting new literature translated into Spanish, possibly because it is the WSO that has to do the translation, having so many other things to do. Argentina has been studying the possibility of importing literature from México in order to lower expenses, since prices are much more convenient there. We compared fees and were informed on legal requirements to import. Though we have all this information available, we



have postponed the project for a while and are reprinting locally the ODAT and *The Dilemma of an Alcoholic Marriage*.

- Communication:

Request the WSO to send literature by airmail instead of ship.

E-mails and faxes were thought of an improvement in speed and efficiency in communication. However, we have new problems. E-mails sometimes take three weeks to be answered and faxes hardly ever reach the right person.

- Countries sponsoring countries:

Venezuela and México would sponsor Panamá, Cuba, and Dominican Republic; Costa Rica to Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador; Colombia and Perú to Ecuador; Argentina and Uruguay to Perú, Bolivia, Chile, and Paraguay; Brazil and Spain to Portugal.

We have tried to contact Paraguay in order to start our sponsorship, but we haven't succeeded at it. But this is just the way things are up to now.

Communication opens thousands of doors and we want to walk through them, because we want to stick together, as a large community to be there wherever there is a family of an alcoholic that needs us.

### Discussion

This presentation created an interesting discussion which raised concerns beyond the Spanish-speaking countries to a wider look at the international face-to-face meetings presently in our structure, such as the International Al-Anon General Services Meeting, and the immediate and long term impact of creating new meetings similar in nature.

Several delegates shared the concern that this Spanish-speaking meeting with its formal structure seemed to be the development of another IAGSM and attendance at such events would be a financial hardship if all were of equal importance. Another delegate shared that this type of meeting did not fit in anywhere in their structure and so it was decided not to attend these same language meetings.

While gathering together and speaking the same language was considered a valuable experience for several who attended the Iberoamerican Meeting, this raised the question about the possibility of simultaneously translating the IAGSM as a way to overcome the barrier of language. While WSO did not have the cost figures available, their experience at International Conventions indicated that this expense could raise the cost of the Equalized Expense for each structure and perhaps prohibit some structures from participating.

In small roundtable discussions later on in the meeting the topics raised during the delegate's presentation specifically about the Spanish structures' relationship with the WSO were discussed further by some of the Spanish-speaking delegates and the members of the International Coordination Committee.

In concluding this discussion one person commented that listening is very valuable and stated not everyone needs to speak up. We learn much by listening to give it back to others at home. For new delegates attending the IAGSM, there are always first times. "I do not understand everything, but I feel it."

## Communication from the Structure

Runa G., Iceland

I would like to start by thanking you for the invitation to give this presentation. It has given me the opportunity to rethink some Al-Anon issues and the topic I was asked to speak about has helped me see things from a new perspective. In the following I will share these thoughts with you.

<sup>1</sup> By definition *communication* requires at least two parties, and in considering "Communication from the structure" I identified three ways of communication. First, communication from the structure to the groups and the members. Second, the communication from one structure to another structure (i.e., Al-Anon Iceland communicates with Al-Anon Norway). And third, communication from the structure to the WSO.<sup>2</sup> As I name these three forms of communication I think of the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts and the way they can help us establish and continue healthy communication. I believe that these three legacies must be in place and alive within Al-Anon in order for healthy communication to take place. In this presentation I will only address the first issue: communication from the structure to the groups and members.

Concept Four says that "Participation is the Key to Harmony." This is my favorite Concept and seems to apply in most situations. In our groups we participate in group conscience decisions. Our group will be harmonious if our group conscience is an informed one, with active participation from the members. Our groups participate in the district, area, and world service decisions through elected representatives. We delegate authority to these members and because we are a part of the process, we trust that they will fulfill their duties in our groups' best interests. Communication needs to be active at all levels in order for the flow of informa-



tion to be effective. And there needs to be two sides to the communication – giving of ourselves and receiving from others.

Communication is a complicated process and difficult to cover in a short talk. Take, for example, my own communication with my family. When I joined Al-Anon nine years ago, I was not very good at communicating. I believed the purpose of communication was to win a debate and to have the last word. To have the power over the other person. As soon as I joined Al-Anon I was handed a tool I could use to improve my communication as well as my actions. This tool is the Serenity Prayer which I can always use along with the Steps, the Traditions, and the Concepts. By making these a part of my everyday life, my communication has steadily improved both within my family and in other areas of life. I no longer consider communication as a debate I have to win but as a mutual process where I have the opportunity to receive more than I give. The same applies to communication from our structure. The structure needs to be in a two-way communication: it needs to give and receive.

These reflections, inspired by the topic of this talk, have helped me review and rethink the communication from the Icelandic structure. I have been a part of the Icelandic service structure for the past six years. During this time, I have believed we were doing the right thing. Now, however, I have come to view our actions from a new perspective which has given me another understanding of our communication.

As I see it now, I feel that we in Iceland have forgotten to use our most important tools in a productive way. Instead of using the Serenity Prayer to have courage to change the things we can, we have used it to accept the things we cannot change, and in that way, didn't have the wisdom to know the difference. That is, we have been so afraid that we would make the groups dependent on us that we have not established active two-way communication between the structure on the one hand and the groups/group representatives and the members around the country on the other. Thus, there has been a lack of leadership and support for the groups. We have believed that our annual conference was enough to keep the active communication going between the structure and the members.

After having critically reviewed our actions, my conclusion is that I have not been using the Serenity Prayer in my service as effectively as I have been using it in my own recovery. Instead of realizing in what way the structure could support Al-Anon members across the country in their

recovery and introducing them to the program, I have been passive and expected them to discover Al-Anon on their own. In this context it is important to mention that there is very little Al-Anon literature available in Icelandic. This means that there is limited material accessible for the groups in our own language. What is maybe most important is that the literature outlining the structure of Al-Anon, the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*, is not available to the members in Icelandic. Thus, instead of being passive as has been the case in the past, the structure in Iceland needs to be more active in communicating the spirit of Al-Anon to the groups and the members.

Our re-thinking has led us to new ideas for communication from the structure. Instead of being passive we want to be active. There are three main things we would like to do to improve communication.

First, we plan to support the groups through regular meetings that will be held in different parts of the country (RSS). The goal of these meetings is to increase knowledge, communication, and participation within the fellowship on all levels. By moving the structure closer to the members we want to increase their awareness that they are a part of a worldwide fellowship. This closeness will also make it easier for the members to feel a part of the structure and communicate with it.

The second part of this improved communication from the structure is a newsletter that goes out to all the groups, and the groups are encouraged to give the newsletter to all its members. The members are encouraged to send information and other materials for publication in the newsletter.

Third, we need to establish a Lone Member Service. Iceland is a large country with a small population and many isolated areas. Thus, we have an unusually large proportion of Lone Members which we have not served. Most of them are living in small towns in rural areas. I would like to see us provide active Lone Member Service, for example through the Internet (Iceland has one the highest rate of Internet use in the world, so this should be a good medium to use).

Preparing this talk has given me the opportunity to reconsider our service in Iceland. It has led me to believe that it is my responsibility to be supportive and ready to reach out. Not just wait for members to ask for assistance. It is the responsibility of the structure to actively communicate to the members and encourage them to take part in the service. The Al-Anon declaration does not only apply to individual members, it also applies to the structure.



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## 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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### Discussion

After the talk the comment was made that “many of our talks and discussion seem to come back to our theme Al-Anon’s Future is Our Responsibility.” Our structure is like Iceland’s. The last couple of years we contacted the groups and regions to talk about our structure. It has to be communication from both sides. In our structure it’s working slowly... but it’s progressing.

Another person commented from the last IAGSM in 1997 our delegates brought home the idea of “Open House.” Now on the last Friday of each month we have a different Standing Committee charged with hosting a workshop and there is an Open House at the GSO. This has brought a positive change! Another stated the open house idea has been a way to “open” the structure, and members feel the structure is accessible.

Many shared that workshops, magazines, and newsletters were also a way to involve the membership with the structure and ensure the lines of communication remain open as they are asked to participate in these type of projects. One commented that we thought the groups did not read the publications. But we had many people giving feedback, which was a stunning experience for the GSO. It was also stated through publications, they are able to share minutes and information that is happening locally, nationally, and internationally within the fellowship.

## Our Evolving Structure

Mariella S., Italy

My name is Mariella and I am a relative of an alcoholic. First of all, I would like to extend to you all the greetings, friendship, and love of the Italian Al-Anon Board of Trustees, GSO, Committees, and all the 400 groups. It is the first time for me to be here and I am grateful to my Higher Power for giving me this opportunity.

When I first came to Al-Anon in February 1983, my physical and psychological conditions were really bad. Thanks to Al-Anon I started my recovery and I am now a serene person. It wasn’t an easy task, though. At the beginning I complained about everything and I have to say that my Al-Anon

friends were really patient with me. Then, thank God, I started working on the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts and didn’t stop being involved in the service work. At the moment, I am serving as IAGSM Delegate and Trustee-at-Large, a very demanding service, but I know it will help my growth.

In Italy we have gone through many growing pains but slowly and surely we are getting there. The first Al-Anon group started in 1976 in Rome. Then, three years later, a second group was started. In 1982, an Italian delegate was sent to the WSO in New York, so that we could draw more from their experience. From there, the structure started to slowly grow. Different standing committees were formed which were greatly needed. In 1988, our magazine *Incontro* (Meeting) was published.

As more groups started popping out, there was more need to follow the Twelve Traditions and the Twelve Concepts. So in 1990, a Structure Committee was formed to study new by-laws and a new structure.

In 1993, the Structure Committee sent our new information to the groups and then was discussed in the district meetings, and discussed, and discussed, and finally discussed! While this was happening, the General Service Office was moved from Rome to Milan, a telephone service was installed for



Banner designed for this meeting.



Twelve Step calls, and a member was hired to run and coordinate our General Service Office.

In May 1995, we had our first Conference. It took us fourteen years to get to our first Conference! There again there was much discussion and discussion and discussion!

Finally at the 4<sup>th</sup> General Service Conference, the motion was passed to adopt as a whole the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*. This was a giant step for us to become more in line with the Twelve Traditions, Twelve Concepts, and Al-Anon as a whole.

Our PI Committee has grown and is continually doing PI calls at hospitals, schools, media, and radio and has recently been in touch with Italy's three most important Unions. Areas are also displaying CAL at the post office and pharmacies. We are also part of the Al-Anon's World Web site.

At the last IAGSM, a Structure Committee shared about their experience with Alateen Sponsors and how important their responsibility is. Their experience has helped us try to make a resume for the Alateen sponsors which has been made available to the groups. Hopefully this will help us to protect our Alateens and our Alateen Sponsors.

This year, at our 6<sup>th</sup> General Service Conference, it was passed that the Board of Trustees look over our by-laws so that they will be closer to the Twelve Traditions, Twelve Concepts, and Al-Anon worldwide. This will be presented at our next Conference and will be voted on. At the moment, our General Service Conference is not only traditional but also has legal powers in accordance with the current laws. We are studying the issue with the professionals in order to find a way in which our Conference could be only "traditional" in accordance with our Concepts of Service.

Our structure has now the following committees: Alateen, Budget, Executive, Policy, Conference, *Incontro*, Public Information, Literature, Regional Service Seminars, Institutions, and Nominating. This year we also have one ad hoc committee for Internet and one on the telephone help line.

Finally, in the year 2001 we will be celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary "Together we can make it"! For this great occasion it was decided to take place in the southern part of Italy where there are very few groups. It will be a big commitment financially and service-wise. But it is our commitment to try to reach out to those who are still suffering from the effects of this disease.

Since the last IAGSM, we have written and talked to many of you at your GSOs and to the WSO. Thank you so much for your experience,

strength, and hope. It has made it easier for us to become closer to the worldwide fellowship. Not just sharing the effects of alcoholism, but also the recovery, which is what Al-Anon is all about—helping each other.

Thank you for your attention and if you have a chance, come to see us!!

### *Discussion*

One person advised in their structure, the trustees were also financially responsible for the structure. However, now they have indemnity insurance that also covers their Alateen sponsors.

Another stated in their by-laws, there is an article that states that their trustees are not financially responsible for the debts of the corporation.

When a question was asked were there any structures that have a conference, which is not traditional? WSO responded that a GSO would have to adopt the structure to the laws in that country.

In the WSO structure the Executive Committee is empowered to do the day-to-day operation. However, only the Board of Trustees can make legal decisions for the organization. The Board of Trustees adopts the decisions of the Executive Committee quarterly. A suggestion was made that the structure, if it is permissible, may consider the idea that the Conference can delegate the legal authority to the Board of Trustees when the Conference is not meeting and allow the Board of Trustees to act appropriately and have the Conference only affirm the actions of the Board of Trustees. It was also stated that "you don't need a lawyer on the Board of Trustees. If you have a lawyer on the Board, this person would not provide legal advice. The Board should obtain legal advice from an outside source as this would serve the membership the best."

### **Concept Eleven in Our Structure**

Conchita N., Spain

When I received the letter asking me to be a speaker, I was very excited. When I read the topic I got scared. It wasn't a topic where I could let my thoughts fly and talk about the many miracles of the Al-Anon program. I kept turning the topic over in my mind, but somehow I couldn't get started. It was such an arid theme! However, the more I thought about it and after asking my Higher Power for guidance, my initial fears began to disappear. I began to realize that it was indeed an important theme. It is perfect for an IAGSM Meeting where



we come together to share about our structures, discuss our problems, and strive to accomplish our common goal. To ensure that Al-Anon continues to grow worldwide so we can better reach all those families who are suffering the consequences of living with an alcoholic.

In *Paths to Recovery* Concept Eleven says "it shows how the various parts of Al-Anon's structure fit together, the organizational principles that make service accessible to all and how we can use the WSO as a model for organization and unity in our groups, districts, areas." I think this last part is very important. This is my third IAGSM and I have found, through listening to the Delegates share about their structures, that those structures that have the least problems are those that have best adhered to the model set by the WSO in Concept Eleven. And here again we touch the concept of unity.

When I was a child I used to love parables. Many times I have found that parables have helped me explain my experiences within the Al-Anon program. I would like to use a parable and compare Al-Anon to a giant tree that spreads its branches to give protection and shade to many, many people. The different structures are the branches of this tree. No two branches are alike. They vary in shape and grow in different ways and directions; however, as part of the same tree, they all have the same leaves, flowers, fruit, etc. If part of the tree gets sick or weakens, the whole tree suffers.

The Spanish GSO is a small structure. We have tried to follow the guidelines stated in Concept Eleven as much as possible, but we have had to wait a long time for our branch to grow and flower, and so our structure has grown to serve the needs of Al-Anon in Spain. It is no good to rush things or to start building the house from the roof. We have tried to take things one step at a time.

Many years have gone by since the first Al-Anon group was founded in the Canary Islands in 1963.

Like the beginnings of the WSO in the old days of the "clearinghouse," our structure began in a very small office in the city of Barcelona with only volunteers and the bare essentials. It was enough at that time as there were only forty groups. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of our trusted servants and the help of our Higher Power, our structure grew and the need for a paid employee arose. It was discussed and approved at the National Assembly in 1985.

Between 1985 and 1988, contact with the different groups in Spain was established and three National Assemblies took place.

In 1988, Spain celebrated its first General Service

Conference during which the framework for the committees was established according to the needs of the newly founded GSO. The first committee to be formed was Public Information, closely followed by Archives, Alateen, Publications, Literature, Institutions, and Translations.

In 1990, the Executive Committee was created. An Executive Director, who is a paid employee of the GSO, and three other members formed it. The last committee to be formed was the Policy Committee. The Chairman of this committee is also a member of the Executive Committee.

Delegates were included to work with the different committees at the 1999 Conference, and guidelines were created for this purpose. These committees met for the first time before the General Service Conference of the year 2000.

The Conference of the year 2000 was our 13<sup>th</sup> General Service Conference.

At the moment there are 270 groups in Spain and eighteen areas. We celebrate Regional Service Seminars. We also publish a magazine called *Serenidad*.

We are still a small structure and continue in the original minute office but have been given other rooms for meetings and storage.

As the tree of Al-Anon continues to grow, our structure is at all times careful to keep our branch healthy so it can grow in harmony together with all the other structures worldwide.

To end, I would like to quote the last paragraph of *Paths to Recovery*:

"No organizational structure can ensure absolute harmony and protection from the conflicts that are inevitable wherever a large number of people work together. No amount of organization can substitute for competence and cooperation among the people involved. Only sustained practice of all our spiritual principles can accomplish this and create harmonious cooperation among the people involved. Only sustained practice of all our spiritual principles can accomplish this and create harmonious cooperation in Al-Anon. Honesty, fairness, respect, and willingness to keep spiritual principles uppermost in our minds is our best guarantee of continued friendly efficient service in Al-Anon and in our lives."

### *Discussion*

One structure stated they try to follow the text in the *Service Manual* on Concept Eleven almost perfectly. They were concerned about the internal changes in the WSO and clarification on these changes was requested.



WSO responded there will be a few changes in the text to Concept Eleven to reflect structural internal changes. However, the changes will not appear in print for another two years. We had a three-year trial period on this topic, and it was decided that not all uncertainties were cleared so we are now in the second trial period.

As far as Concept Eleven, many of the changes that are being made at the WSO are modeled after what many of the GSOs are already doing. The WSO experienced problems of overlap between various committees and is trying to streamline the structure. There were four departments created:

1. **Group Services** services groups, areas, Information Services, and Lone Member Services.
2. **Fellowship Communication** oversees all written materials including literature and our newsletters: *Inside Al-Anon Xtra*, *The Forum*, *Alateen Talk*, and *Area Highlights*.
3. **Public Outreach** includes all activities of reaching out to the public whether professional or individual.
4. **Membership Outreach** which does the planning of all external meetings, organizing and providing support to the structures.

Institutions, Cooperating with the Professional Community (CPC), and Public Information have been blended into two committees instead of three committees. Most other changes will not have much impact on the GSOs.

WSO has created Advisory Committees which were formerly Standing Committees for Alateen and CPC. The only difference now is the number of times these committees meet per year. It appears the GSOs already determined this differently to meet individual needs within the structures. The WSO does not indicate that these committees meet four times a year in the *Service Manual*, so it would not make any difference to other structures how this works.

The only difference the structures may notice is that by creating a Group Services Committee, made up of delegates from the Conference with no at-large members, we gave the Conference direct voice into the office on how WSO can best serve the groups. The Archives and Alateen Committees, which are now Advisory Committees, are also now under this delegate committee, and their participation supports the idea that Alateen is a part of Al-Anon and must be served by the groups.

WSO also advised that many of the committees that are familiar have not changed. The Conference Committee, Policy Committee, Executive Committee, and Board of Trustees

remain the same. WSO created two Literature Committees because of the volume of work. *The Forum* and Admissions Handbook Committee – all are unchanged. Three committees in Public Information, CPC, and Institutions were combined into two committees – one called Public Outreach which has the goal of carrying the message to the outside general public and carrying the message to the groups in their efforts to do this work. The second committee, the Advisory Committee to the Professionals, has the purpose of carrying the message to all professionals.

WSO stated Institutions work has not been clearly defined. However, this again should not affect the GSOs. The confusion within the WSO was brought about when these groups were put with Group Services and the professionals with Public Outreach. As a result, it appears that the Institution groups were inadvertently left out. The WSO is in the process of analyzing internally to determine if this oversight is a result of the structure or a problem within the office and what do we need to do to solve the problem.

WSO would like all structures to use the Concepts as their guide and take the WSO model and adapt it for their use. The WSO model should not to be taken as literal as a structure may be servicing 200 groups, however remember the WSO services over 18,000.

A member wondered if unity would be kept by having a more or less identical structure? The concern was expressed that if we have internal structures too different then we may lose unity.

## Public Outreach to the Professionals

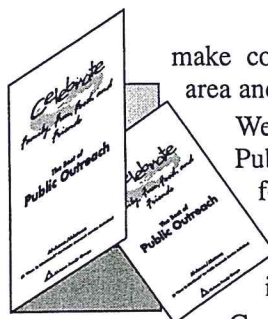
Helen R., US/Canada

Where do we begin? At the World Service Office, we began reaching out to the professionals and encouraging our members to do the same through our committee structure on a trial basis in 1981, and with a permanent committee, Cooperating with the Professional Community, in 1983. We now have an Outreach to the Professional Advisory Committee that meets in January and July and is comprised of Al-Anon members, some of whom are also professionals, from the US and Canada as well as a Trustee Chairperson and a staff member. The broad objective of this committee is to make Al-Anon better known to professionals, organizations, and associations, nationally and internationally as a resource for families and friends of alcoholics. It is often the professional or the agency who is the first to be con-



sulted or to recognize the pain of the relative or friend of the alcoholic. The professional who is familiar with Al-Anon is in a position to guide a troubled person to our program at a time when he may be most receptive. We need to develop and improve communication with professionals in medicine, religion, law, and education, and with employers, governments, courts, prisons, mental hospitals, and other enterprises in the field of alcoholism. This may seem like an overwhelming task, but with the help of our membership, we can reach out and make the name Al-Anon the best known resource for professionals in these fields. Our hope is to improve cooperation between Al-Anon and the professional community by providing information about who we are, what we are, and where we are, what we cannot do, and what we can do. The WSO has evolved into the programs and opportunities that we have in 2000, just as your structures are evolving also. I will take this time to give you a brief overview of some of the ways in which we are reaching out today and then would like to encourage you to share with us some of the ideas that your GSOs are developing.

We are utilizing our website for outreach to professionals – in fact, we have a page devoted to professionals. There is a copy of our newsletter for professionals, *Al-Anon Speaks Out*, which gives them information about the benefits of Al-Anon. We have recently added a summary of the 1999 Membership Survey pamphlet which is valuable information for all professionals showing Al-Anon's demographics. There is also a website pressroom with a Media Kit, Permission to Reprint form, and four press releases as well as an electronic card that professionals can send to the WSO requesting information. We now find that almost one-half of our professional inquiries are coming to us through e-mail from the electronic postcards on our website. In spite of technological advances, the value of human connectivity is still a worthwhile pursuit and a good use of Al-Anon's staff, finances, and volunteers. This personal touch shows respect for organizational efforts, a willingness to partner in a cooperative spirit, and it enables us to utilize each other as resources. In order to implement this personal outreach, the staff is establishing one trip in the USA per quarter as a goal for outreach to treatment facilities and associations. Planning for a similar effort is underway in Canada also. Because of changing staff in facilities and associations, we have found it important to continue to place our name in front of them. We also keep in touch with the Public Outreach Coordinators in each area with a biannual mailing which gives them ideas and support for ongoing projects. We encourage the membership to



make contact with professionals at the area and local levels.

We have a "How to Workbook" for Public Outreach Service Activities for the membership. Some of the ideas for outreach projects for groups, districts, or areas include:

- Contact family courts.
- Take pamphlets to police stations and/or write letters to sheriffs and police chiefs.
- Invite local police to an open meeting.
- Contact local alcoholism councils to provide meeting schedules, literature, contact names, and telephone numbers.
- Write letters to local clergy, doctors, counselors, lawyers, judges, and teachers.
- Contact human resources departments of local industries and talk to employee assistance personnel.

At our World Service Conference this year, we had a workshop that focused on public outreach. Many ideas for professional outreach were considered and much enthusiasm for service was generated.

*Al-Anon Speaks Out*, our newsletter for professionals, is a tool that we use to retain connectivity to professionals. The articles are reflective of current concerns and questions that some of them have voiced. It is a way of giving professionals information regarding Al-Anon and how we can provide ongoing non-professional support for their clients.

We have obtained free directories, both printed and website addresses of treatment centers from a government agency. This list is a resource for identification of national facilities, their regional headquarters, and centers with family programs. We are able to contact them via letter, e-mail, and phone, and we also pass on their addresses to the local areas for personal contact. A list of USA and Canadian national health and alcohol related associations was compiled and divided into geographic locations by state/province (area) along with their e-mail addresses. This list is being used to prioritize and coordinate the Associate Director's contacts with government and non-profit organizations. One of our primary ways of reaching these professionals is through their meetings and events. We have a freestanding as well as a tabletop display which can be mailed to these events and manned by local Al-Anons. In looking for events through the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, we found meetings listed in The Netherlands, Sicily, India, and Australia!



We have been working on a USA Military Outreach Project, taking information regarding Al-Anon to military bases. Various military websites giving contact information for health and social services were located as resources for area Cooperating with Professional Community and Institutions Coordinators.

Contacting military chaplains might also be beneficial because of the likelihood that the family member will seek the confidentiality of the chaplain. There is also the possibility of contacting military hospitals which would make Al-Anon a resource for family members of patients. We are planning to request that areas form focus groups to discuss outreach to the military, either active duty or retirees, which will give a broader base of ideas and generate more interest on a local level where this contact is so important.

A few years ago we instituted a corporate outreach project. We have discovered through this work that the best contact in large corporations is the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or Human Resources Manager. A major airline requested our services, and we were able to give a presentation for employees by coordinating this event with an Area Coordinator, and as a follow-up, we provided literature for peer counselor training. We were also included in an employee health fair at another major airline by sending our literature display and coordinating our efforts with that area's outreach coordinator. We have identified the EAPs on the *Al-Anon Speaks Out* subscribers list so they can be surveyed if necessary. Several years ago I was employed as an EAP in the legal field for our State Bar Association, working with alcoholic lawyers and judges. I found as I networked with other EAPs that many of them did not have any background or understanding of the family disease of alcoholism. I was able to give them information, share my own experience, and put our area's coordinator in touch with them. Our links of service enable us to carry the message to the greatest number and also to reach out with personal contact. We have a new service tool in the works in this area – a pamphlet whose target audience will be professionals who work in the judicial system. In my personal experience, this special outreach to judges and other court-related professionals is much needed.

There is an excellent resource for Al-Anon to be listed as a contact with the United Way. You can access their website at [www.unitedwayinternational.org](http://www.unitedwayinternational.org), and then go to UWI Around the World for information on how to contact them in your country. They have affiliates in Australia, Belgium, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ireland, Japan, Korea, México, New

Zealand, Poland, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and Venezuela. The WSO's phone number is listed with their crisis/hotline self-help referral numbers. Local information service numbers or answering services can be provided to them also.

We have found that professionals are interested in knowing about our membership – what does the impact of living with an alcoholic have on their health and well-being and what changes do we see in this after someone has been coming to Al-Anon. They are also interested in anonymity/confidentiality, and they want to know that Al-Anon is open to all people who have been affected by the family disease of alcoholism.

Our monthly magazine, *The Forum*, plays an important role in professional outreach. From time to time we have special offers of 100 back issues for \$10.00 which are used by groups, districts, and areas to distribute to facilities and professionals. We also encourage members to give gift subscriptions to professionals such as doctors, therapists, dentists, hospitals, crisis/abuse facilities, and EAP providers. I personally realized this past year that I had never given my daughter-



in-law a subscription to our monthly magazine, and she is a physician! Often what seems the simplest and easiest idea for outreach can be overlooked – I had certainly overlooked this one. My awareness of this project and the fact that I could personally utilize it made me realize that I need to continue to carry the message of the many opportunities for reaching out to professionals.

In summation I would say – utilize technology as well as continuing the personal relationship with professionals to carry Al-Anon's message of hope! Be an encouragement and support to the fellowship and practice the slogan, "Let It Begin With Me." If you have any questions, I would be glad to answer them, but I am most interested in hearing what you are doing in your country to reach out to professionals.

### Discussion

Many advised how this topic's discussion would be useful in helping them carry ideas back to their structures.

Delegates shared how their individual structures are able to carry the message to the professionals within their communities. Some structures work with schools, companies, judges, lawyers, hospitals, and universities. The delegate from Norway



stated how difficult it is to talk about Al-Anon in public in a country where it is still the attitude that alcoholism is a sin.

Some indicated their structures have put Al-Anon/Alateen information on public transportation such as trams and buses. Also shelters for women, hospitals, phone books, police, and ministers were also suggested as professional resources.

One structure indicated they give press kits and books to libraries as a way of reaching the professional community. Small folding cards were printed, with the GSO phone number outside; it ended up in public toilets and supermarkets, etc., and was distributed very widely.

The delegate from Germany stated that in 2001 the structure is planning an information week with groups having open meetings. There are also plans to have an article written to be published in a magazine. As a reminder it was stressed by the WSO Executive Director at open meetings, as a way of educating the press, it is a good idea to read the anonymity statement found in the *Service Manual*.

Because Poland is a smaller structure, the delegate indicated that service is done more on the group level as they have no Public Information Committee. Individual group members speak about Al-Anon and newspapers are sent sharings of personal stories.

During the discussion, some members began brainstorming and giving suggestions of how to pass along the message. One unique idea was to create a map coloring all countries that have Al-Anon structures, showing all telephone numbers.

Some others shared how their structures plan to celebrate Al-Anon's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration. The delegate from Brazil advised on May 31, 2000 8pm (BRA time) they are suggesting every member to say the Serenity Prayer and remember Lois. Also each area is asked to take a picture of their planned activity and send it to the GSO for a celebration wall at the GSO.

The delegate from UK & Eire indicated they have a press release scheduled for March 2001, for all newspapers, local and national. They also produced a new Public Information leaflet as part of their celebration efforts.

## **Public Outreach to the Groups**

Anne R., UK & Eire

I am Anne Raill and I am one of the two delegates from the UK & Eire. I have been asked to do

a short talk on Public Outreach to the groups or areas, and I feel that what I have been asked to do is to describe our vehicle for communicating with the groups or areas and the encouragement of Public Information projects to be undertaken by the groups.

I found myself at my first Al-Anon meeting in the spring of 1972 via an open AA meeting, where I met a lady who, having recently moved to the area, wanted to start an Al-Anon group. In those days we did not have many groups, so my introduction to the fellowship immediately included attending the quarterly district (now area) meetings which allowed me to observe and later take part in the changes which have occurred in our structure over many years.

The important milestones in our structure are included in the brochure, so I feel that it would be of use if I concentrated on changes which occurred when, following an IAGSM in the mid-eighties, work was started on changing our structure to include a further service layer.

Our structure consists of the United Kingdom, that is England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and of Eire (The Republic of Ireland). When the UK & Eire structure was formed, it was thought that we were too small to adopt the WSO structure, so we opted to have just one service layer, which we termed district.

A district would consist of a number of groups and would send a representative to our annual service conference which was made up of the district representatives, the Regional Trustees, Chairmen of the Standing Committees and, following the introduction of the post in 1983, the General Secretary.

As Al-Anon grew, our districts started to divide, and soon we had thirty-three districts. This trend, if allowed to carry on unchecked, threatened with an extremely unwieldy and immensely expensive Service Conference.

Our structure was finally changed in 1988 to conform to the World Service Structure of group, district, and area. This change involved the re-naming of our district to area and the introduction of a new service layer called district, which allowed for expansion at the new district level without increasing the size of the conference.

As we all know, like does not run smoothly, and neither did this change; we still encounter problems where some districts function as mini-areas rather than serving as an information/encouragement link between the local groups and the area, creating some degree of duplicity.



**The General Service Board is now made up of the following posts:**

- The General Secretary, who does not vote at GSB Meetings, is a member of all GSB committees.
- The Secretary to the GSB who has voice but no vote.
- Six Regional Trustees, one of each for Eire, Northern Ireland, and Scotland, and three covering England and Wales.
- Seven Trustees at Large, including the Chairman of the General Service Board and the two IAGSM Delegates (Standing Committee Chairmen again became Trustees in 1995).
- The Executive Committee is the primary committee to the GSB, responsible for routine administration of Al-Anon in the UK & Eire. Members of this committee are all serving Trustees or past Trustees. The Chairman also serves as Vice Chairman to the GSB.

**Our current Standing Committees are:**

- The Finance Committee, chaired by the Treasurer.
- The Conference Committee (the Chairman of the Conference is chosen from among 3<sup>rd</sup> year Conference members, and is not necessarily a member of the committee).
- The Public Information Committee (responsible for Public Outreach). This committee is served by a staff member, responsible for all PI work at the General Service Office.
- The Editorial Committee produces the monthly magazine, *News and Views*.
- The Literature Committee is responsible for anglicizing where appropriate and is always one of three approval committees.
- The Alateen Committee has been suspended, and we are working hard at trying to get the Alateen groups to take an active part in the general structure of the fellowship, rather than being on the sidelines as a special case.
- The RSS and the GSB Nominating Committees both meet three times a year at the GSB Meetings.

Ever mindful of our financial situation, the Trustees often cover more than one position on the GSB at the same time. The IAGSM delegates cover as many different positions as possible during their term of office in order that they may be as well versed in our service structure as at all possible.

Our General Service Office is situated in London and has three full-time and five part-time staff members, assisted by daily volunteers who, among

other duties, man the Telephone Helpline which is open during normal office hours. We also have a team of volunteers who come in to pack *News & Views* for dispatch every month.

Our General Service Office is very busy and acts as a clearinghouse for all communication between the GSB, the groups, and the various service arms.

The area delegates take information from the annual service conference back to the area assemblies. The district and group representatives take information from the assembly to the groups.

It is important to remember that the people we elect to carry out service work in Al-Anon are indeed trusted servants; they do not govern, but should be allowed to get on with the job in hand without undue criticism and interference.

A few years ago, the GSB Chairman introduced a newsletter which is sent to all delegates following each GSB Meeting keeping them abreast of developments. This has been a most valuable public outreach tool to the areas.

Our Public Information Committee does of course have an important role to play in encouraging the groups and areas to undertake Public Information projects.

The PI Committee is currently busy organizing and suggesting a national outreach effort to coincide with fifty years of Al-Anon in the UK & Eire in the year 2001. It is the task of the Chairman of the PI Committee to sell the idea to the delegates who in turn need to encourage the GRs and PI Coordinators to get the groups to undertake Public Information or outreach work at the local level.

Communication and openness at and to all levels in Al-Anon is indeed our most important tool and, if used wisely, will aid recovery and stability.

The theme of this IAGSM is "Al-Anon's Future – Our Responsibility," which immediately reminds me that it is my responsibility as well as that of every other member serving Al-Anon, be it at GSB, area, district, or group level, to try to make sure that the correct information is communicated.

This then really tells me that public outreach to the groups or areas is the responsibility of all of us, and that if we carry out that responsibility to the best of our ability, then perhaps we are helping to ensure Al-Anon's future and that of the many who are yet to find help and recovery in Al-Anon.

*Discussion*

All participants agreed that sharing information with the groups helps the groups to have an informed group conscience.



One delegate indicated the structure has a leaflet for the 50<sup>th</sup>. The GSO is selling these to individuals and groups. Prior to producing the leaflet the GSO received WSO approval.

A newsletter was cited by one delegate as a good idea for Public Information to the groups. Minutes from the meetings held at GSO are included in this publication. Another delegate reported their Regional Trustees digest the Board of Trustee minutes, and these publications enable them to pass the information to the groups.

One delegate from the US/Canada indicated the Chairperson of the Board's letter is sent to the groups through the delegates. The Trustees communicate quarterly by phone to random delegates, in order to foster feedback and to create the feeling that the trustees are representative of all of Al-Anon, not just their region.

## Delegates' Choice

*This agenda topic gives the delegates the opportunity to get answers to specific questions and discuss any concerns.*

For those representing the European structures there were questions regarding whether the structure would be required to renew the trademark registration now that the WSO has registered the trademark that covers all countries in the European Union.

WSO advised there was no action required of the European Union countries when their current trademark registration expires. WSO will investigate with the copyright attorney to determine if the Channel Islands and Isle of Man are covered under the European Union agreement. When EU registration needs to be renewed, WSO would appreciate financial contributions.

One participant raised the fact that in all publications the trademark character has always included the symbol of a little "c" in a circle on copyright material – the question was asked if there was any reason why this was left off recent literature? WSO replied that the little "c" in the circle was accidentally left out after the move to Virginia Beach. This will be corrected on future publications.

One delegate sought clarity on behalf of her structure on the WSO policy for shipping defective material back to the WSO. WSO replied the general rule for the handling of defective material, as recently books were shipped to the GSO with loose bindings. Prior to the move to Virginia Beach, the GSO was requested to send an example of the

defect and told to destroy the rest. Since the move to Virginia Beach the GSO is now being requested to send back the whole shipment and the GSO believes this is an additional cost of shipping that is wasting Al-Anon money. WSO replied this will be reviewed with Business Services to develop some type of uniform procedure.

On-line meetings: There seems a difference between groups and meetings, what is the WSO policy? In addressing this question WSO clarified that on-line Al-Anon Information Services do not exist at this time. Individuals who call themselves OLA-IS asked the WSO to register them as an Information Service. The Policy Committee concluded that an Information Service must be supported by groups; as long as it is not decided how on-line meetings fit into the Al-Anon structure they are regarded as meetings, not as groups, so at the moment OLA-IS cannot be an Al-Anon Information Service. WSO asked OLA-IS to consider themselves as a local PI committee. WSO spoke to one of their members; they are now looking for long time Al-Anon members with deep enough service experience to work with the WSO process.

One structure asked for feedback on how to help Regional Trustees understand their focus is not only on their individual region, but they have a responsibility for Al-Anon as a whole. One structure indicated once their Trustees have been elected, they have the understanding that they are to let go of the region as they are now a part of the Board of Trustees.

The WSO indicated they provide an allocation in the budget for Regional Trustees to travel within their area. However, it was stressed that if in a country the Board of Trustees is the legal entity for Al-Anon, then it should only speak with one voice. So, a trustee would not speak on behalf of his or her region, for example, once the Board makes a decision on an issue.

One delegate indicated that regions in her structure seem to feel they only need to put forward one candidate, then their job is done. Many responded it is better to nominate as many qualified candidates as possible to support a healthier selection process.

In one structure the delegate indicated the region actually performs the selection and the Board of Trustees makes the traditional approval. Also the Board of Trustees makes the choice for Trustees at Large. Another delegate indicated within that structure the candidates' selection is by the Board of Trustees, and the election is decided by the Conference. WSO advised the idea is that the Board



of Trustees nominate candidates for Trustees at Large with the input of a Conference Committee on Trustees which are contacted throughout the year. The delegates within a region would nominate a candidate for Regional Trustee. All trustee candidates are presented to the Conference for traditional approval and finally, the Board of Trustees legally elects them.

One of the smaller structures asked where Regional Trustees come from and where are they mentioned in the *Service Manual*? WSO advised that Regional Trustees were added to the WSO structure when it was believed that too many trustees were elected from one region (then: New York); the election process began around 1977. (The background information can be found in the Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. Regional Trustee Plan that is included in the IAGSM notebook under the "Reports" section.) WSO stressed this is only relevant for larger structures; smaller ones do not necessarily need this.

One structure's representative described they have a Nominating Committee that nominates the trustees, which are then selected in the region and elected to the Board of Trustees. The structure is deciding to make a change so that the Conference has a role in the process. WSO responded that after the nomination of all candidates (Regional Trustees and Trustees at large), all names are presented to the Conference, which gives yes or no affirmation for each candidate. This is what is meant by traditional approval. The Board of Trustees has the final vote since the board is a self-electing board.

Alateens were another topic for discussion during Delegate's Choice. One structure stated that in their country Alateens are normally 12-20. This number was adopted from the WSO model. However through readings from the United States, it has been noted that Alateens may start at the age of 5. There is confusion for the structure regarding the age discrepancy as the Guidelines and practices do not seem to coincide. WSO advised that as per page 61 in the *Service Manual*, "It is within the autonomy of each Alateen group to lower the age limit or divide into groups according to age." A delegate from Belgium (Flemish-speaking) indicated there were no problems in Belgium with younger members attending Alateen; the youngest in her group is ten. All seem to work well with each other. A delegate from South Africa advised that structure has large Alateen

groups and they also work well with all ages.

Italy asked for an explanation of why non-panel delegates have no voting right (we have two areas, and do not know yet when the third area will be formed)? WSO replied this happened in the US/Canada structure when they started, and new areas were formed. It was not until the 3<sup>rd</sup> year when the area was elected as a permanent part of the Conference. The delegate from Brazil shared her structure's experience on the issue. In some cases, if an area is not yet structured, then we do not name them delegates, but area representatives; they come to the conference, but have no vote. They are responsible for all costs to attend the Conference. We will always probably have non-panel representatives. WSO added these types of representatives in the WSO structure were called "observers" at the conference. Iceland advised they have this problem: There are six areas; often there are no delegates from two to three areas. As a result, they have given a vote to these area representatives.

When questioned, the WSO advised it was not a break in the Traditions for the General Secretary to appear full-faced in a TV interview as an Al-Anon employee. As stated on page 67 in the *Service Manual*, "when speaking or writing as an Al-Anon/Alateen member at the level of press, radio, TV or films, use only first names or pseudonyms. In photographs for publication and in TV appearances, faces should not be recognizable." In this instance, she did not identify herself as an Al-Anon member. However, the WSO Executive Director would not appear full face nor would any WSO staff at the request of the World Service Conference.

The question was posed by one delegate, "has anyone a quick and nice way of getting rid of a trusted servant who has held an office much longer than three years?"

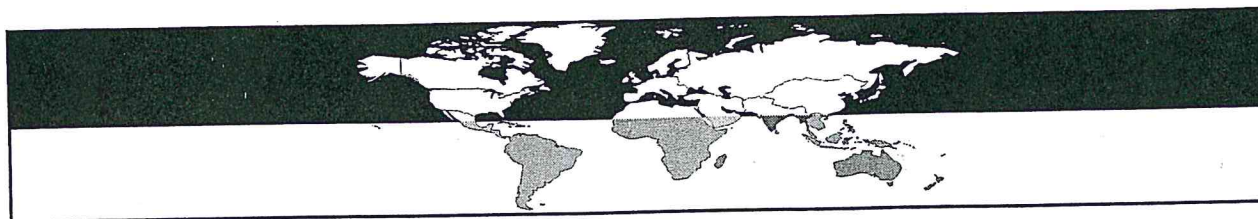
One delegate responded her structure had a similar experience with a disgruntled board member. The Board of Trustees tried very hard to work with her. After their attempts proved unsuccessful she was then asked to resign. The Board also decided to bring the issue to the Conference, which agreed with their decision. WSO responded this issue comes to the WSO on a regular basis. The WSO - suggested response is as follows:

We can remind them of the spiritual principal of rotation. If we continue, we are depriving another person of growth.

Align power with authority: we could have a general change to the Conference procedures, e.g. that officers cannot serve for more than three years.







## WORKSHOP REPORTBACKS

Six work groups composed of delegates and International Coordination Committee members were given the opportunity to choose their preferred work group. The following topics and questions were discussed in each workshop.

### Leadership Challenges

Facilitator: Ria H., Netherlands

Reporter: Barbara A., Switzerland (French-speaking)

- Good leaders never forget they are trusted servants.
- Good leaders are always open to new ideas and ways to pass on the message.
- Good leaders are open to new ideas and solutions, not manipulation.
- A good leader is consistently renewing his or her role and relationship with those that follow.
- Good leaders in stable structures are familiar with the Concepts and use them.

#### *How do you find members in your structure with leadership qualities?*

To be willing to do service doesn't make the best leaders, so it is important to get people that have leadership qualities.

Some structures send volunteer sheets to the groups and indicate what they need and ask them to apply for vacancies. In a small structure they know each other and can also ask directly.

Other structures have small descriptions of the job contents.

While others look in the area if there are delegates finishing their term and who would be ready to go to the GSO.

One structure has a National Committee which searches for people to fill the positions.

Outgoing service members can sponsor the new service person.

#### *What specific training is available for our leadership?*

During conventions, there are often sessions for delegates on the Concepts.

No specific training is given, but having good guidelines for each level of responsibility is important.

Share with others the basic principles of what

service has done for you so that people can feel comfortable.

Find several people to make small pieces of a job and let them get small successes!

To have an orientation/introduction meeting for delegates before a conference and GRs at assemblies is a practice in many places.

Let people know that service is a joy, not a burden.

Everything you do, even Serenity Prayer, is already a service, because you do something for relatives or parents of alcoholics.

#### *How can we support a new leader?*

All members are encouraged to participate in the structure.

We have to attract by taking new members with us. At all levels, we have the responsibility to look around and pick up members who might have leadership qualities.

Have projects that need a lot of volunteers and they can be involved.

If you give the opportunity to a member to find the right place, their leadership skills will blossom.

At the national level, we have to be patient, to give time for members to become ready.

Give small responsibilities and see if there is interest.

We have to provide a lot of different roads to let members find their own way to come to service.

In the Board of Trustees, there is also training done by a specific person, we also do a board inventory.

Hold a leadership workshop at each Conference. Creativity can stimulate members.

Service is serious business, but you can make it fun.

You can ask after the Conference what the delegates would like to have known to feel comfortable.

Service sponsoring can be done by e-mails even from outside of the structure.



*Can you give specific examples of when delegation has been successful and why?*

In one structure, the Alateen Committee meets four times a year. Last year they decided to delegate the organization of three of these meetings to different areas. It has been very successful.

Delegate gifts for the IAGSM have been a great success in several structures.

One place asked local groups to make the meals during a Conference to reduce the cost. Members did it with joy and got a lot of thanks for their involvement.

In one structure, they find that for book translations they can give part of it to several members. This work goes much faster and is not such a big task for one person.

## **Executive Committees, Who What, and Why?**

Facilitator: Catherine J., US/Canada

Reporter: Hans P., Germany

- The Executive Committee is composed of Al-Anon members.
- The Executive Committee receives its legal authority from the Board.
- The Executive Committee makes financial decisions and Al-Anon procedural decisions in the name of the Board until the Board meets to approve them.
- The Executive Committee streamlines the decision-making process to help facilitate the Board Meeting.
- The Executive Committee has the day-to-day oversight by meeting more often than the Board and has in-depth discussions.
- At WSO, former Board members serve on the Executive Committee.

*When does the need arise for an Executive Committee?*

It is useful to have an Executive Committee when the work the Board has to do exceeds their time. The Executive Committee gets its authority and responsibility from the Board.

The Executive Committee members should be former Board members so they can understand the Board and also they should be experienced.

*What should the ideal relationship between the Board and the Executive Committee be?*

The Board gives authority to the Executive Committee, so it should trust the Executive Committee and let go.

Respect the wisdom in each group.

The Executive Committee carries out the policy of the Board.

The Executive Committee develops ideas that it presents to the Board.

*What is the relation between the Executive Committee and the Executive Director?*

It must be a relationship of trust since the Executive Director is the paid staff and the Executive Committee is volunteer. Monthly meetings keep the communication open.

The Executive Committee is the employer of the Executive Director.

Executive Director is a sustaining member on the Board of Trustees, under the WSO structure, with vote.

*Where does the Budget Committee fit into the picture between the Board and Executive Committee?*

Some structures only have a treasurer; some have more people and therefore are able to have a Budget Committee.

The Budget Committee advises and filters financial issues to the Board and Executive Committee. The three groups have to work together.

## **Maintaining Our Traditions in a Changing World**

Facilitator: Kay S., New Zealand

Reporter: Lindsay S., South Africa

- These guidelines are the means of promoting harmony and growth in Al-Anon groups and in the worldwide fellowship of Al-Anon as a whole.
- The world is changing, but our Traditions are constant and give us experience, strength, and hope.

*Are the Traditions timeless?*

Yes, the Traditions are timeless.

The Traditions are needed in our groups to give members stability and unity. They are spiritual principles that give us trust, responsibility, and faith.



When we apply them to our personal life we can relate with all groups such as family, work, as well as the fellowship.

We need more than ever to study the Traditions because of new technology. We want to adapt the situation to the Traditions, not the Traditions to the situations.

If you stand firm on your Traditions you cannot go wrong.



*Picturing Worldwide Unity.*

### ***Can the discussion of the Traditions change our interpretation of them?***

The principles of the Traditions don't change the interpretation.

Personalize the Traditions when talking to others in your groups.

Study of the Traditions and applying them helps you to recover and in turn your family and group stay healthy.

If we maintain our Traditions today, Al-Anon will be united in the changing world of the future.

### ***How did your structure resist the pressure to violate the Traditions in the face of financial and personal pressures?***

Most structures resisted the pressure in violating the Traditions by studying them at meetings to ensure that Al-Anon principles were adhered to in matters of outside contribution, anonymity breaks, etc.

In case of a family of drug addicts the workshop member felt that we could not turn them away as God would lead them where they belonged.

### ***Do you see the need to broaden, bend, or break Traditions?***

No, we need to broaden the explanation of them.

## **Solving the Problems Using Our Concepts**

Facilitator: Helen A., New Zealand

Reporter: Frances C., Australia

Our first responsibility regarding the Concepts is to know of their existence as a resource.

The pamphlet *The Concepts: Al-Anon's Best Kept Secret?* gives applications that are personal that may encourage further study.

Discussing the principles of the Concepts has universal application in making decisions and gives a reservoir/bank/base of wisdom.

### ***How is the text under each Concept in the Service Manual related to that Concept?***

Reading the Concepts gives understanding of the structure.

It is important to use the Concepts as they give understanding of the structure.

It is important to use the Concepts if the GSO has problems.

Text can be changed to accommodate changes to different structures. Changes need to be recorded in the back of the *Service Manual*. The principles stay the same.

In one country early translation of the Concepts was too literal. Footnotes were used to signify difference in the GSO and WSO structures.

The Concepts are not popular in some structures. It was suggested that a translation of *The Concepts: Al-Anon's Best Kept Secret?* may help to make things clearer.

*Paths to Recovery: Al-Anon's Steps, Traditions, and Concepts* is making the Concepts clearer.

One structure thinks Concept Ten doesn't apply to them; they feel it is too strict.

Maybe personal experiences in using the Concepts may make this better. Involvement in service helps the understanding of the Concepts.

Talking about the Concepts also helps. Concepts seem to work for most structures, and they can adapt the Concepts to suit each structure.



*Is our situation really different, or is it our ego that makes us different?*

We have more in common than we think. Spirituality of our programs is most important.

While resistance among the structures is apparent, the Al-Anon principles are the same all over. Feeling unique can feed our ego. Al-Anon accepts us as we are.

*How do the Concepts guide us in finding suitable service people?*

Concepts Nine and Ten can enlighten potentials about service work. We can use these as a guide when looking for suitable service people.

The Warranties also help with this. The Concepts help us know where our service begins and ends. Concepts also help with the working relationships between service members.

*The uninformed group has actually suffered a miscarriage of trust. How does this statement relate to Concept One?*

Authority causes problems with some groups. Concept One helps with this.

An uninformed group may want authority but not responsibility.

*The Concepts can give guidance on service roles and help our understanding about the interdependence of those roles. Can you share a personal experience of how you use the Concepts in your service roles?*

Sharing service experiences with the new service person is important to keep members informed.

It is important to find out why members are afraid of service work. Then we can help them overcome this fear. It helps to trust each other, both on a personal level and group level.

Concepts explain boundaries of service positions so no one person oversteps another's boundary in service.

A workshop on the Concepts can be helpful.

Talking about the Concepts with other individuals can be beneficial.

Another shared that a sharing written on the Concepts was presented during that structure's Conference. Members found this explanation beneficial and the sharing is now included in the back of the structure's *Service Manual*.

## **Alateen IS Al-Anon**

Facilitator: Gesine W., Germany

Reporter: Ann W., UK & Eire

- Alateen is under the umbrella of Al-Anon.

*Should we treat Alateen differently?*

Alateens are Al-Anon, but their situation is very different. They tend only to identify with other Alateens, but they do not want to be mothered, patronized, or treated differently.

We need to meet their needs at their level and the literature should be at their level. They share our problems and our feelings but are not always able to express them.

We have to leave the responsibility for the running and organization of their groups with them.

We should treat them as we would wish to be treated. Sharing meetings with Alateens reveals more similarities than differences and enables us to treat them as people, not as children.

Some Al-Anons will not accept that their children need Alateen. Some members admitted to feeling differently about older Alateens and being afraid to take responsibility for them.

We need to change the attitude prevalent in the fellowship that sponsoring Alateens is difficult and possibly dangerous.

*Many Al-Anon groups don't seem to recognize Alateen; why?*

Because we don't see them or have much contact with them.

Very few districts or areas have Alateens attending. Not many conventions include Alateen speakers as a part of the program.

Many Al-Anon members do not want change or disruption, and actually fear Alateens.

If a positive effort is made to include Alateens in organizing Al-Anon events, and to give them responsibilities, then Al-Anon members are able to change their attitudes.

*What has your structure done to encourage Alateen sponsors?*

Workshops for sponsors and guidelines.

Giving guidance about what to do about disclosures of abuse.

Offer support to sponsors through local groups.

The new screening procedure has created some problems because existing sponsors have refused to be screened. Many new sponsors are being screened,



and the sponsors are in one area and the Alateens in another. We have to protect our sponsors and support them.

Sponsors meeting at national conventions.

The book *A Guide to Alateen Sponsorship—An Unforgettable Adventure* offers good guidance for limited access groups. One structure printed information about Alateen sponsorship in the news bulletin.

***Is Alateen sponsorship considered as giving Al-Anon service?***

Yes, but not suitable for everyone.

We should all take up the type of service that is suitable for us. Every member who has been an Alateen sponsor gains a great deal from it.

***Are we at the national level still supporting the family group idea?***

Yes, by supporting Alateen sponsors, and producing literature for families of alcoholics, then we are supporting the family group idea.

By not preparing Al-Anon groups to receive Alateen members when they are ready to move on, we are not supporting the family group idea.

**Finances – The Seventh Tradition – Spiritual Gratitude in Action**

Facilitator: Nicolas M., Switzerland (French-speaking)

Reporter: Andrea K., South Africa

Myths that are perpetuated by members about financial support in Al-Anon:

- One should talk about money as little as possible.
- “Al-Anon is free” attitude.
- Al-Anon is not a business.
- We should not take a professional approach about finances.

***How do we encourage our members to fully support the ever increasing cost of administering Al-Anon and not continuously expect more for less?***

Start at group – inform what is needed for running costs for group/area/GSO/WSO levels.

Help members become more aware when starting to do service.

Inform groups what money is used for.

Some structures have to have financial books available for government tax purposes.

Always have transparent approach – be honest.

Ways structures/groups raise finances:

- Appeal letter
- Special letters for IAGSM and special projects
- Only “bank notes” in collection
- Call it “gratitude bag” – show gratitude
- Try to make gold (not silver coins)
- Keep group well informed of financial position and budget plan

***How do we alert the groups to know what is expected of them financially?***

Any donations help carry the message by paying rent/buying literature, etc.

Take financial information to regions.

Print a short statement in free magazine/newsletter after Board meetings.

Area Treasurer visits groups and talks about finances.

Hold a workshop on Tradition Seven.

***Do we connect Al-Anon’s Seventh Tradition with the opportunity to be free?***

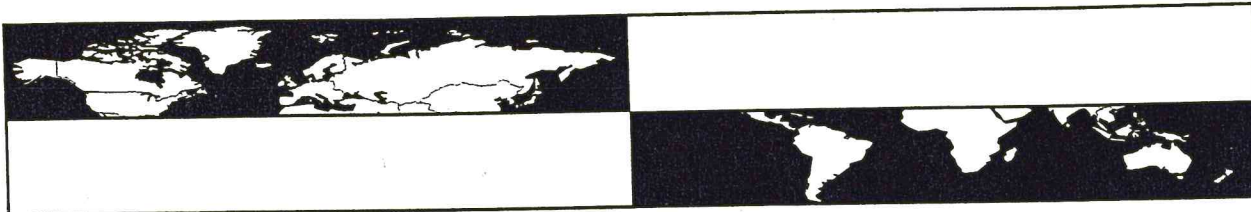
To be independent – no obligation for the structure.

Cost of living with alcoholism – putting money in bag/basket is very small compared to keeping Al-Anon alive for the still suffering makes a person feel free.

Use the Seventh Tradition leaflet.

Spiritual gratitude is giving back what we have received.



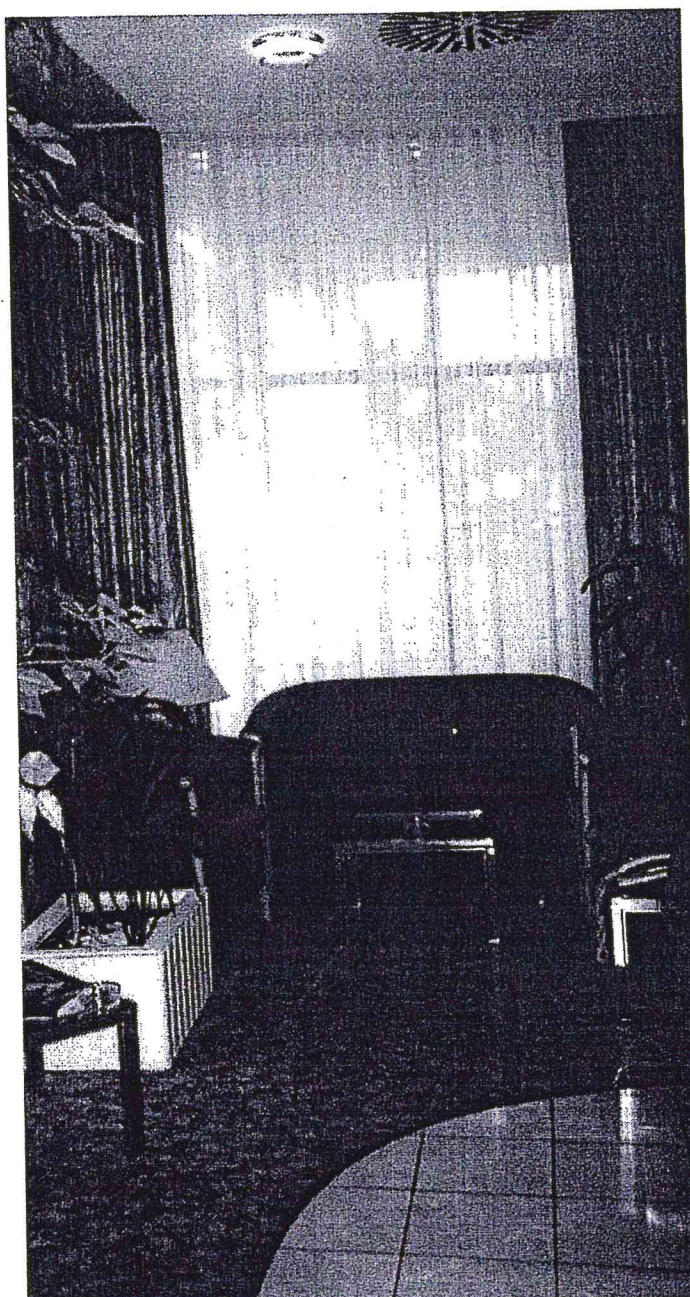


## ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS

Participants met in small informal groups and shared experience and information about their structures. International Coordination Committee members were the facilitators, and all indicated this was beneficial and an opportunity for participants to get to know each other in a smaller setting. During the Round Table many of the concerns expressed by the Spanish provided an opportunity to clarify issues face-to-face.

## MOTIONS

While there were no formal motions during the 2001 IAGSM the meeting resulted in a true reflection of the original purpose of the meeting. "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."



*Hotel gathering place for small discussions.*





## SPIRITUAL MEETING

Mary Ann K., ICC

Sharing with you today is a bittersweet privilege, because the committee's first choice of speakers was Ursula from German Switzerland and she was too ill to come. I have thought of her often as I prepared to share, and today I send her waves of love and good wishes to feel better.

I came to Al-Anon thirty-three years ago sick with worry. In fact almost to the day I came in September a month ago I felt the same terror I came to Al-Anon with. This time it was not caused by my husband's drinking, but by my son's mental illness. The terror of last month only lasted a few hours, but it was so real it was a physical feeling.

Different illness, but the same feeling! Different me too, because I had options, ideas, tools, a sponsor, a program to guide me out of the squirrel cage of fear. On this fear — filled Saturday morning back last month, I thought about this talk and what I would share about this with you this afternoon.

First, I wanted to share that the terror of seeing someone you love slowly move on to a path of destruction and not be able to stop them, can come back no matter how long we're in Al-Anon.

Second, I wanted to take from this experience what I should learn from it, because I believe, intellectually, we are to learn from our experiences good and bad.

Third, I wanted to pick some examples to share from my past that would be helpful to others in a similar terror-filled situation.

We call this a spiritual meeting, but my feelings then were far from spiritual. I kept questioning myself as to what exactly was the basis of my spirituality. I decided it was — *waiting in hopeful expectation*. I'd like to repeat this idea because it is a new thought for me — *Waiting in hopeful expectation*.

All my life until Al-Anon I waited in expectation of some negative event to happen. We have an expression — waiting for the other shoe to fall. My mother suffered from manic depression, which resembles alcoholism in the highs, that are like drinking and the lows like the hangovers. At a young age I appointed myself as her coach through the depressions, and I was always cautious about her what we termed her feeling good.

The ideas of Al-Anon were radical to me. You could be happy when someone, your mother, who you love is depressed? You should be happy when someone you love, your husband, is hung over and angry at the world? Amazing!

I met my husband in college where there were ten men to every woman. The opportunities to date many young men were there for me and I did, but I only loved one other young man. I stopped dating him because he drank too much. Years later in Al-Anon I read a page in the *One Day at a Time* which said — we are like a child calling to a child with those we choose for partners.

With his drinking I lost myself and only thought of him. I worried prior to the birth of my children about what I would tell his parents, or mine when he wasn't home to drive me to the hospital. I waited up for him every night only to jump into bed and say nothing after rehearsing for hours what I would say. I wanted to marry someone smart, because deep down I thought if you were smart you could think your way out of a depression or emotional difficulties.

Ashamed of the drinking, I told no one and smiled a lot, but inside I always wanted to cry. My brother, who was studying for the priesthood, told me about Al-Anon when I blurted out my desperation over the drinking. He asked a professor who was writing a book on marriage problems and alcoholism was a chapter. The professor told my brother to tell me about Al-Anon. Can you imagine this? Someone way back some thirty years ago contacted this professional and made the help of the program known. Whoever that Al-Anon member in service was I will never know, but I will be forever grateful. At that time gratitude was not on my list of feelings or goals; in fact, I came to Al-Anon in September and thought November meetings were redundant, and over-simplified, because at every group the talk was gratitude. I wanted more sophisticated ideas for this smart man I had married.

When I called about finding help using the number my brother gave me, the volunteer at the answering service said something I will never forget.

I kept saying, "I don't want to go to the meetings. Just tell me the right thing to do to get him sober."



She said, "If you go to the meeting, you will never have to ask what the right thing to do is. You will know from the inside." That idea has proved true for me over the years. I have come to know what to do from the inside.

At the meeting, I got the message that I should change, but what? We had a ritual where I would ask him why he drank? (This was important to me, because as a science teacher you had cause and effect, so if you eliminated the why, the cause, you eliminated the effect, the drunkenness). When we would discuss why — somehow it always came out as my fault and at the end I would say I'm sorry. Remember, I believed he was smarter, so I must be wrong. So I had three meetings behind me and decided to change that discussion. The next Saturday morning hangover time I would not ask why, and just fold laundry and watch cartoons with my children. He said, "I don't know what happened to you, don't you care if I drink?" Al-Anon worked!

At this time I had two ways to pray — "Oh God," and "Please God." This was a "Please God" time. I knew not to push him but only repeated to myself, "Please God let him read the AA pamphlet," I said, that was in my drawer. I told him too I went to Al-Anon, and that was a big relief for me to have it in the open.

Today, I pray very differently. I take a quiet twenty minutes each day and I just sit listening for God's direction, waiting for him. The idea is in *Just for Today*. It says I will take a quiet time. In those early days slowing down was very hard. I thought I had to tell God what I needed.

My oldest child was born with seizures and three months after birth an intrusive brain test was to be done. I was stumped as to how to pray. If I asked for the possibility to find something this would be a tumor and require surgery, or if they found nothing her condition would remain a mystery, and they were trying to treat it. It never occurred to me to "Let Go and Let God," and I had never left my religion. I just never prayed that way.

My husband did go into AA, and life progressed, but the marriage didn't. He refused to go places, share AA, and go for marriage counseling. I was very lonely. If you are in a marriage like this, you will understand the pain of loving him and living like this was greater than thinking of separating. I asked him to do many things, and when I asked him to move he did. It was getting so hard to love him. I knew I would eventually grow to hate him if I did not do something.

I took a leap in faith that I would be all right

alone with four children, 11, 10, 9 and 17 months. At the time I didn't think of it as a leap of faith, but rather a move to survive. I waited a year and went to the WSO to serve on the Literature Committee, because I had to go to work. They offered me a job, and I've worked there ever since. Life was good, and money was my only problem.

My world fell apart again several years later when my son had the first of many breakdowns that caused numerous hospitalizations. This time I used the program as never before. I had to translate experiences a little because it wasn't alcoholism, but the 12<sup>th</sup> Step says, "practice these principles in all our affairs," and I believed that. How can I be happy with this illness and what do I do? I made a decision to put him in the care of God, as I understand him. When I get afraid he will hurt himself, or someone else, I take him back. I try to remember he is God's child before mine. I have seen miracles for others over the years in Al-Anon; why not for me?

One of the things I must work on continually is drawing the line between detaching and trying to protect, between running away and letting go. My sponsor helps. I called her recently telling her of a former roommate of my son, who called my daughter to say how worried he was about my son. My dilemma — should I find out why and call him back. She pointed out that chasing all those details and that information was still something I couldn't change, and would just add fuel to my worrying.

Years ago I was crying about the possible brain surgery my ten-year-old daughter (she never had it as an infant) may face. A neighbor, not an Al-Anon member, came to visit and asked why I was crying. After explaining about the possible brain surgery she said, "You are looking for the strength to face that surgery today. You will not get it today, you will get it the day of the surgery."

This was just another way of saying, just for today I will not be worried or anxious. I believe I will get the strength the day I need it. So I will not worry about my son's condition before I get home, and I will enjoy the rest of the meeting and not even project on the plane what condition I will find when I get back.

Sharing with you today has given me additional strength too, and I can *wait in hopeful expectation*; I may even add to my wait hopeful and grateful expectations for whatever is to come.

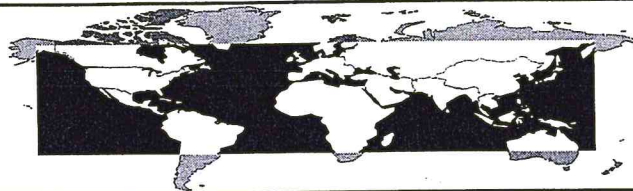


# A SUMMARY OF AL-ANON'S HISTORY

Structure	Number of Groups Al-Anon	Number of Groups Alateen	Year Al-Anon Started	Year of First Conference	Which Years Attended IAGSM	Name of National Newsletter	Year First Published
Argentina	329	43	1961	1985	1980, 86-2000	<i>Amistad (Friendship)</i>	1978
Australia	329	52	1952	1970	1980-2000	<i>Austra-Link</i>	1974
Belgium	96	14	1961	1982	1988-2000	<i>Keerpunt</i>	1981
(Flemish)							
Belgium	70	9	1965	1981	1980-97	<i>Sérénité</i>	1976
(French)							
Brazil	1192	78	1966	1979	1980-2000	<i>Boletín Al-Anon Informativo Nacional</i>	1983
Colombia	207	14	1960	1992	—	<i>Renacimiento</i>	1978
Costa Rica	268	5	1960	—	1980-92	<i>Compartamo</i>	1979
Denmark	68	2	1980	1985	1986	<i>Perspektiv</i>	1988
El Salvador	15	3	1962	1968	—	—	—
Finland	181	5	1953	1970	1980-2000	<i>Tietoavain</i>	1968
France	198	16	1960	1978	1980, 82, 86, 90-2000	<i>La Chaîne</i>	1967
Germany	901	30	1967	1986	1980-2000	<i>Intern</i>	1981
Iceland	34	—	1972	1982	1984-2000	<i>Hlekkurinn (The Link)</i>	1987
Italy	361	37	1976	—	1986, 1992-2000	<i>Incontro (Meet Together)</i>	1988
Japan	148	—	1979	1992	1982, 84, 88, 90, 92, 97	<i>Hiroba (Inside Al-Anon)</i>	1981
Korea	46	1	1984	—	1997	—	—
Mexico	1775	322	1965	1973	1980-90, 97	<i>Delta</i>	1976
Netherlands	76	7	1975	—	1980-2000	<i>Stapsgewijs</i>	1980
New Zealand	109	8	1954	1970	1980-2000	<i>N.Z. Al-Anon Messenger</i>	1963
Norway	85	—	1960	1982	1982-2000	<i>Trinn For Trinn</i>	1981
Paraguay	13	1	—	—	—	—	—
Poland	450	58	—	—	1994-2000	—	—
South Africa	141	11	1974	1976	1980, 82, 84, 88-2000	<i>Unitas</i>	1980
Spain	267	13	1972	1988	1988-2000	<i>Serenidad</i>	1987
Sweden	180	11	1970	1991	1988, 92-94	<i>Al-Anon Kontakt</i>	1975
Switzerland	29	5	1963	1973	1997-2000	<i>Sunray</i>	—
(French)							
Switzerland	44	2	1964	1973	1982-2000	<i>M &amp; F</i>	1967
(German)							
U.K. & Eire	875	58	1952	1970	1980-2000	<i>News &amp; Views</i>	1963
Uruguay	149	7	—	—	—	—	—
Venezuela	53	14	—	—	—	—	—
Guatemala	22	2	—	—	—	—	—
US & Canada	15,063	1,492	1951	1960	1980-97	<i>The FORUM, Inside Al-Anon</i>	1978

*Al-Anon meetings are held in 115 countries. There are a total of 24,163 Al-Anon groups and 2,334 Alateen groups worldwide.*





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