Al-Anon Family Groups Worldwide: Creating a Universal Culture of Trust

Thirteenth International Al-Anon General Services Meeting

October 4-7, 2006, Ramada Inn Plaza, Virginia Beach, Virginia
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**TWELVE CONCEPTS OF SERVICE**

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

**GENERAL WARRANTIES OF THE CONFERENCE**

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

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

**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The purpose of the International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM) is to share the experience of Al-Anon national services around the world through its Delegates. It will attempt to encourage the growth of a sound service structure while maintaining worldwide unity through the application of Al-Anon Traditions. It can also represent an expression of a worldwide group conscience.

Ultimately, this leads to the primary purpose of Al-Anon as a whole – to seek the best way to carry the Al-Anon message of recovery to families and friends of alcoholics amidst cultural and language differences.
The following structures were represented at the 2006 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting:

**Australia**
Helen G.
Lorraine S.

**Belgium (Flemish)**
Patricia R.
Rosa W.

**Brazil**
Nilce R.

**Iceland**
Berglöt J.

**Ireland**
Dorte P.

**Finland**
Paivi K.
Pirjo K.

**Germany**
Hartmut G.
Inga V.

**South Africa**
Gillian G.

**Switzerland (German)**
Maria M.
Liselotte R.

**UK & Eire**
Miriam M.

**USA & Canada**
Judy P.
Claudette D.

**International Coordination Committee**
Doreen D.
Mirta S.
Ric B.
Mary Ann K.
Marsha W.

The following structures were not able to send representation:

**Argentina**

**Japan**

**Korea**

**Spain**

**Switzerland (French-speaking)**

**Sweden**

**Nicaragua**

**Paraguay**

**Venezuela**

Doreen D., Chairperson of the IAGSM, welcomed all with her warm words and guidance. The Chairperson, who said she was now able to put faces to the many names she has heard and seen, called the meeting to order promptly at 9:00 a.m. She concluded with the comment that when we go back to our structures with energy to continue the work of Al-Anon, we will all carry the message of Al-Anon, no matter what language or culture.

The Delegate from England led the group in the Serenity Prayer. A motion, one regarding the taking of still photographs during the Conference Meeting, was allowed. There was no discussion on the issue.

Roll was called and there were 23 representatives from 14 structures at this year’s meeting. Since some structures were able to send more than one representative, each Delegate came forward when the country name was announced and presented the country’s flag to the body. They also placed a stickpin on a world map showing the geographical location of their General Service Office. The flags from the structures that were unable to send representatives were also honored with each country’s flag prominently displayed on the front table. The display reinforced the words “worldwide fellowship.”

**VOTING PROCEDURES**

The participants decided to vote by open ballot, using a show of hands, with a two-thirds majority needed to establish substantial unanimity. It was also explained that if requested, a vote could be made using closed ballots.

Doreen explained that subsequent motions would be presented in a written format, read by the Chairperson, and the floor would be open for discussion. Following discussion, the motion then would be reread by the motion recorder, and the vote would be taken.
“Creating a universal culture of trust.” I love the sound of these words. Few things give me more joy than being able to actively participate in the present and the future of Al-Anon, and I love to be reminded that I am a part of a universal fellowship.

Trust is a major concept in our fellowship. “Our entire Al-Anon program rests squarely on the principle of mutual trust. We trust God, we trust Al-Anon, and we trust one another.”


Trust was an issue for me even when I came to Al-Anon for the first time. I suffered from lack of trust at that time. I did not trust God and I did not trust anyone, including myself. Everything was happening to me and around me.

Very early in my Al-Anon journey, I realized that I had turned my life upside down. It was hard to swallow the fact that I had to take responsibility for my own life. I had to stop trusting. We trust God, we trust Al-Anon, and we trust one another. Al-Anon is trustworthy and as an Al-Anon member I share the responsibility of making sure the fellowship stays trust-worthy in the future.

Those are the elements that attracted me as a newcomer. Al-Anon is trustworthy and as an Al-Anon member I share the responsibility of making sure the fellowship stays trustworthy in the future.

Keynote Speaker
Siri A., Norway

reflects the Al-Anon principles. We are able to recognize Al-Anon literature in 131 countries and in over 30 different languages. CAL is universal. In Al-Anon I am not asked to participate in discussions about politics, religion, or other matters. Al-Anon has no strings attached. The whole fellowship is self-supporting.

- The principle of anonymity has several aspects of trust. I felt safe from the moment I entered the doors to my first meeting. In Al-Anon we are focusing on who we are, not what we do for a living, how much money we have, or the size of the house we are living in. There is no individual status involved. We all share the responsibilities and our trusted servants are rotated on a regular basis.

- Every decision made by the WSC, or any entity in the fellowship, is made by a group conscience guided by our principles, our experience, and a Higher Power.

The members did not try to sell me any quick fixes. They shared their experience straight from the heart and gave me hope. I recognized their stories and had no problem believing or understanding what they said.

I came to trust that there was a meeting every Monday in my hometown, even if Monday was a holiday, even if the weather conditions were extreme. I participated in my group and in my district. Later I became a trusted servant. What a wonderful expression that I have held many positions in my business career, but nothing will ever compare to what I felt when I was trusted to represent the Norwegian Al-Anon structure at my first International Al-Anon General Service Meeting (IAGSM). I was trusted to share a part of myself.

Every IAGSM Delegate, every Group Representative, and every member sharing at an Al-Anon meeting is, in fact, participating and making a difference in the worldwide fellowship. Al-Anon would not be Al-Anon if it were not for you, me, and every single member in every group all over the world. We are all co-creators of the fellowship, radiating rainbows.

As a trusted servant, I am asked to carry the message I have received to others and to practice the Al-Anon principles in all my affairs. Whenever I reach out a hand for a newcomer, it is important for me to remember that I trusted you when I came to Al-Anon for the first time.

When we reach out to a newcomer, we are able to open the doors to our wonderful fellowship. As in any other home, we have to be actively involved in keeping our house nice and clean. It is our responsibility to make sure that the fellowship is trustworthy.

Al-Anon is as actual and modern today as it was 55 years ago. It has proven to be universal and it seems to be timeless. Our universal culture is safe, it is familiar; and it is firm. The challenge with a culture like this might be that it feels so comfortable that it loses its flexibility and becomes difficult to change. Our challenge is to change as time changes without compromising our principles and remembering that the trust that took us a long time to build may be destroyed in no time at all.

One of the workshop topics at this IAGSM is “Where Have All The Volunteers Gone?” This is a familiar and reappearing issue in the Norwegian structure, and it seems to be an issue in our society in general. It seems to be a tendency in the fellowship that we want more and are prepared to do less to receive much. I feel very privileged having experienced the principle in Al-Anon that receiving is dependent on giving. The more I give, the more I will receive and I find that I always receive far more than I will ever be able to give.

Lois W. once wrote: “Al-Anon is united – without organization, without management, without a chain of command or a set of rules – by its members’ willingness to be obedient to the unenforceable.”

In creating a universal culture of trust, it is important to be willing and creative. We have to remember that taking care of old-timers is as important as reaching out a hand to newcomers. As I have to take care of myself to be able to care for others, we have to take care of our fellowship to fulfill our main purpose. We have to be creative in finding volunteers. We have to remind new members that nobody comes to Al-Anon with the skill of being a Group Representative. Trusted servants are developed in Al-Anon. Inside of us we all have the red color needed to chair a meeting. It is waiting to be used in every newcomer and it is our responsibility to make sure that we will always have volunteers.

This is a program of attraction. Attraction creates inspiration; inspiration creates willingness; willingness creates volunteers; and these are among the elements, which result in a trustworthy fellowship.

Thirteenth International Al-Anon General Services Meeting
Opening Session

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When I first read the topic of this presentation, I immediately thought of the slightly modified essay, "Leadership," written by Bill W. and found in the text of Concept Nine, 2004-2006 Al-Anon Alateen Service Manual (P-24/27). This essay is so informative and helpful. The Concepts of Service really are a blueprint for recovery, and I say that because they are reliable guidelines and a foundation for service work. I heard at the 2004 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM), and I agree, that the Concepts are numbered and do follow from one to the other as do the Steps and Traditions. I have been studying the Twelve Concepts of Service again in the Service Manual and regret not doing a more thorough study from the beginning to end when I first became a member of the Board six years ago. That would have made my last three years as Board Chairperson easier, I'm sure. I was pleased and comforted to read, "No leader is perfect." I can admit I've made mistakes which have been learning opportunities.

I want to quote a portion of the Introduction to the Concepts of Service (found on page 153 in the 2004-2006 Al-Anon Alateen Service Manual) and speak to "The Rights" presented there.

"The Right of Decision gives our service leaders proper discretion and latitude." In personal recovery this gives power and the right to make decisions and not be dependent on others. It is okay to ask questions and discuss matters with our Higher Power and others before making a decision.

"The Right of Participation gives each world servant voting status commensurate with his responsibility and guarantees that each service board and committee will always possess the elements and talents that ensure effective functioning." This tells me to participate and not be afraid when I am in the minority and do not agree with others. I do have talents and skills. My opinions do count. It also tells me that the members on the Board need to have the skills required to be effective.

"The Right of Appeal protects and encourages minority opinion." This encourages me to speak up, even if my opinion is a minority. In my personal life and as a member of the Board, I do this. Everyone has the right to be heard.

The Right of Petition makes certain that grievances will be heard and properly acted upon. I believe in this, as a rule, but experience has shown me that this does not always happen, even in Al-Anon. It also says in our meeting closing, "Talk to each other, reason things out with someone else, but let there be no gossip or criticism of one another. Instead let the understanding, love and peace of the program grow in you one day at a time." When I was sent a grievance from a General Service Office (GSO) volunteer, I dealt with it appropriately and as soon as possible. Unfortunately, we lost that member to service. Dominance is definitely a killer for attraction to service.

In Concept Nine, it says, "Good leadership never passes the buck." . . . To me this means that even large majorities, when badly distorted or uninformed, can be dead wrong. "When such an occasion arises with vital matters at stake, it is the duty of leadership to take a stand against the storm, using its every ability of authority and persuasion to effect a change." (page 174) A leader has a responsibility to do his or her job. Speaking up and explaining the disadvantage of the majority decision, when they are wrong, is vital to the welfare of Al-Anon as a whole. This, too, works in private lives.

It says in the 2004-2006 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual, page 153, that, "Great emphasis is placed on the need for a high order of personal leadership, careful induction methods for appointing personnel inevitably responsible for decisions among those who work in our services." In New Zealand, the process has been to discuss the applicant's profile and then vote. Very rarely has there been an interview. As a Board we need to seek out members whose dedication, stability, unique experience and special abilities are a valuable asset for dealing with all assignments and trust them to serve. Not doing this in New Zealand has created disunity in the Board. A proposal has been put forward for an induction process to be implemented. More discussion, of course, needs to happen over this issue.

The Concepts in the Paths to Recovery—Al-Anon's Steps, Traditions, and Concepts (B-24) are very useful for both Al-Anon service and personal lives, as each one has a question or questions for our own recovery. Some groups have a Concepts Committee month for the total month and questions are worked on and shared. The Concepts also portray important relationships that unite the Board into working harmoniously with the Executive Committee and the selected committees of the General Service Office. Clarity on personal responsibilities has been needed. The need to study and apply these Concepts is necessary.

My term as Board Chairperson ended in July (2006) and IAGSM Delegate is currently the sole position I hold. The first year, I was feeling my way and allowed myself to be dominated. I have been 2004 IAGSM in Brazil where I was very eager to learn all I could. I was like a thirsty sponge for information, very much like when I first began attending Al-Anon meetings. There, I realized I hadn't been such a good leader. However, I did gain courage, knowledge, enthusiasm, and support to change my ways and I believe my leadership has improved. I finally realized that I do have the skills that make me capable of dealing with every assignment given. I needed and received support from the majority of the other Board members. Immediately after the (2004) IAGSM, I wrote a detailed report for the Board from which many ideas have already been implemented.

Again, in the concept of Concept Nine, it says, "A good leader originates plans and policies for the improvement of our fellowship. In new and important matters, he nevertheless consults widely before making decisions. Good leadership knows that a fine plan or idea can come from anyone, anywhere. Consequently, good leadership often discards its own cherished plans for those that are better, giving credit to the source." (page173). I have found it necessary to consult the full Board about all matters before we make decisions. This I think will create a more open and clear atmosphere.

"Talk to each other, reason things out with someone else, but let the understanding, love and peace of the program grow in you one day at a time." (page 174) A leader has a responsibility to do his or her job. Speaking up and explaining the disadvantage of the majority decision, when they are wrong, is vital to the welfare of Al-Anon as a whole. This, too, works in private lives. I can admit I've made mistakes which have been learning opportunities.

When someone has criticisms, it is important to do a personal inventory. I've had to do this often. I check out what I've heard, pray about it, read the Manual, speak to my service sponsor, and seek for clarity to understand. I can apologize when I'm wrong, if I believe I'm correct, then I can either talk to that person or forget about it.

Due to not having a Policy Committee, the Board spent a lot of time creating basic policies and legal documents, which the concept existed. This hindered time allowed for our forward-thinking and planning.

Public Outreach has been a top priority for our structure. Our 2005 Conference goal was a "Public Outreach person in all groups and all levels." I believe the responsibilities of each member of the Board of Trustees, as seen through the Concepts of Service, are to be supportive and tolerant of one to be flexible and honest; to participate; and to trust each other. The Board of Trustees' responsibilities to the Chairperson are: to support him or her; be honest and open; participate when asked; respond to e-mails when asked; and allow the Chairperson to do his or her job. This prevents double-headed management.

The responsibilities of the Board of Trustees to the fellowship are: to be prudent; be good leaders (do their job); be responsible and accountable; be committed and dedicated; have vision; and to have Al-Anon's common welfare paramount.

Currently, our structure consists of 86 Al-Anon Family Groups and two Alateen groups. Our membership is slowly dropping. Available members for service at the Board level are scarce. The Board, which meets every three months, consists of Treasurer, Chairperson, three Regional Trustees, and Chairpersons of all selected committees. The Executive/Budget Committee Chairperson attends with voice and no vote. The Executive/Budget Committee, which meets every six weeks (on a trial basis, previously it met monthly), presently consists of three members, due to the lack of experienced members available. They communicate and make decisions via e-mail more so now. The selected committees we have are Conference, Literature, Editorial, and Public Outreach. We also have an Archivist, not a committee but one competent member. Our service conference is held in July, which consists of all Area Delegates and all Board members. The Executive/Budget and GSO are not represented.

Since February, our GSO has been open only three days a week, from 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. We had a non-Al-Anon member as Office Manager, due to no suitable applications from Al-Anon members for the position of General Secretary. My current position currently does not have voice or vote at the Board or Executive/Budget Committee meetings and attends these meetings as a minute-taker. In addition the Office Manager presents a report for each meeting and has close, regular contact with the Executive/Budget Committee and the Board. A proposal has been put forward that the Office Manager have a voice at both the Executive/Budget Committee and Board meetings. This will be discussed at our September Board meeting. We are now without an Executive Officer. I believe we did not provide enough work and the Manager resigned.

We now realize there is a disadvantage of having a non-Al-Anon member working as the Office Manager. This person was not a voting member of the Board and Executive/Budget Committee meetings, which meant not attending Conference. Therefore, the GSO was not represented at Conference. In every other way, having a non-Al-Anon General Sessions Leadership and Forward Thinking Jenny H., New Zealand
member working in the GSO as Office Manager, in this particular instance, was beneficial because of her efficiency, ability to learn our policies and structure quickly, her competency, professionalism, understanding of our program, and working well with the Al-Anon volunteers. This may not always be the case.

To summarize, I'm saying how very important it is for all leaders to follow our Twelve Concepts of Service, in particular the Board of Trustees and the Executive/Budget Committee. The Twelve Concepts are just as useful in our personal lives as are the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions.

Discussion

After the presentation, the floor was opened for members to discuss the current status of their structure and to share any positive or informative information.

One Delegate advised their structure has five full-time office employees, one of which is a member of the Executive Committee, the Board, and serves on Conference committeess. "She is like the center, the hub." They also have volunteers. Others indicated they have part-time employees, and some indicate they use volunteers only. One structure has volunteers who commit to work in the office on the same day and time each week, for two weeks. Some were blessed with members who have contributed many years of service, and when they retire, still volunteer on a regular basis. It was advised that at the 2006 World Service Conference (WSC), a lot of time was spent talking about the different groups that make up that structure (Board of Trustees, Executive Committee, WSO staff, and Delegates) and their roles. The Board has been accountable for leadership and they don't take their responsibility lightly.

All agreed that it is important for continued oversight of financial matters. One structure had hired someone who used the office accountant as his personal accountant. They are now struggling with how to handle the situation.

Someone suggested that it was important to be realistic about financial compensation and office hours for employees. One structure changed the office hours to something that was considered unrealistic. Their current employee works only three mornings a week and is unable to get the work done. Within one structure it was advised they wanted to be sure that the salary offered is comparable to those working elsewhere, in order to get workers who are skilled. One structure has an office administrator, because they can't afford a full-time person. They also share, on a percentage basis, the salary of that person and office space expense.

It was suggested that there be a careful induction process for incoming volunteers for the Board of Trustees. One structure has a Nominating Committee that uses a tally system, so when someone puts his or her name in, they are subjected to a tally from 1 to 10. It was suggested that consideration needs to be given to leaving the position vacant rather than just putting someone there just for the sake of filling the position. Past experience has taught that each position needs the right person with the right skills to fill it. Be sure to outline the expectations of the position and develop a job description that will fulfill those expectations. Be flexible, as things change over the years. One thing to look for is compatibility and efficiency. These are valuable assets. Be sure the qualifications of the person match the expectations outlined in the job description.

Good business balances with spirituality. The Board of Trustees of World Service Conference had a "conversation with the Delegates" at one of its recent Conferences. Several new ideas and concerns were voiced. Those ideas and concerns have been the topic of many discussions regarding the future of Al-Anon. A new process for electing Trustees is in a trial period. Details are available in the 2006 Conference Summary. In addition to the new election process, more time is being spent developing Trustees. New board members are given a six hour orientation, during which current members share what it's like to be on the Board and what will be expected of the new member.

It was concluded that once in service, it is important to provide continuing support. Be nice to each other and don't create problems, such as giving someone more than they are able to accomplish. Be eager to share and talk about new issues and projects, but don't leave all the work for someone else to do. Keep the lines of communication open!

Thirteenth International Al-Anon General Services Meeting

General Sessions

Anonymity

Hartmut G., Germany

Anonymity is a topic with many mysteries. What does it mean? What do the people want to say when using it? How do we, as members of an Al-Anon Family Group, see the task or understand the obligation of the term?

Quite often, we reach an extreme understanding. Members of our fellowship believe that anonymity is a ban to announcing our whole name. We should know each other only by our first names. Recently, the question came up as to whether we are allowed to take photos of Al-Anon members.

As we all know, 55 years ago our name arose from the development of growth of the wives of the founders of the Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) and was adopted from this A.A. name. We are the Family Groups, grown from the groups of A.A. and, therefore, we should take a look at the development of the name.

The founders, or perhaps better called the pioneers, of the A.A. fellowship named their first empirical report published as a book "Alcoholics Anonymous." This title became the name of the fellowship. Being afraid of social proscription and to avoid being subjected to the stigma of alcoholism, nobody wanted to use his or her whole name. They met anonymously, even though it shouldn't have made any difference who or what they were or whether they had succeeded professionally or socially. Only the desire not to drink any more was the solid individual connection to the group.

These initial reasons to remain anonymous were the same reasons that helped me talk freely the first time about the oppressive situation at home. Nobody asked me for names, titles, or profession. I could be who I am, I did not have to play a role. All agreed I have to show a "good picture." I was not judged or evaluated, I could not lose my face. I simply was a family member with the same concerns and fears as all the people who met there.

This protection is an essential part of what I connect with the term anonymity. Keeping everything that is said in a meeting or face-to-face confidential, we feel free to say what is in our minds and hearts, thus we help one another in Al-Anon. Because we know how important this protection is, we promise ourselves mutually, again and again, that we do not tell anybody who attended the meeting and what we shared together.

None of our Steps and none of our Traditions contest this principle. From my point of view, it is not necessary, because we all know that we can only speak about the really difficult things if we are sure about this protection.

Anonymity is first mentioned in Tradition Eleven, when we describe (our group) relationship to the media. The Eleventh Tradition reminds us that we always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, and TV (also the Internet). And we need to guard with special care the anonymity of all A.A. members. If we remember the Twelfth Tradition, we place principles above personalities. Therefore, I am totally aware that it's not just about my anonymity, but also about the anonymity of the others, because the Steps are for me, for my own recovery.

From my point of view, the Steps are stepping stones on the way to myself and, at this point, anonymity doesn't help. First, I have to come out of my anonymity. That's why I have to take the courage to talk to others about my life situation and me. Otherwise, I'll stay imprisoned on the merry-go-round named denial, nothing will/could change. To be able to speak, I need a trusting environment.

With the group's protection, I can share about everything, just for me. I can rely on all other members of the group not to gossip; then I can dare to talk to others about the very difficult or embarrassing things. So far, the anonymity I am talking about always is the anonymity of other people, not my own. If all of us protect the anonymity of others and keep everything we hear, beyond the first names of the friends in the meeting or elsewhere, to ourselves, we don't have to be concerned about our own anonymity. And so, it is more than understandable when we say anonymity is outside. Naturally, we know each other in the name of Al-Anon. As we say, it is a question of personal decision, how anonymous every one of us would like to be within the fellowship.

I don't focus on my own anonymity until the realm of the group is affected and with that the fellowship as well. So, the recommendation of the Eleventh Tradition is to pay attention to my personal anonymity in public outreach.

How should anybody take our promise seriously to protect anonymity if we are not able to protect our own anonymity or if a member of Al-Anon appears in the press or on TV with his or her full name and visible photo? That makes it impossible to protect anyone's anonymity, especially that of the alcoholic or other family members. Actually, the Eleventh Tradition reminds us to guard with special care the anonymity of all members of A.A. But, of course, when I do outreach for my group, I can't remain anonymous. Otherwise, the editorial staff of the magazine or the TV or radio station could not call me.
The Twelfth Tradition says, “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions and that means we need to be anonymous at the level of press, radio, films, TV, and Internet. The press has trouble understanding anonymity and it is our obligation to be clear about what is said to them. Some think the phrase “public level,” means hotel lobby, health fair, doctor, talking to a group of professionals. None of these is a violation of anonymity. The members of our group are anonymous, but the fellowship of Al-Anon is not anonymous and members need to be sure the fellowship is not invisible. It is the members who inform the public that Al-Anon is there for families and friends who still suffer from the effects of alcoholism. One member said that when he is approached and asked to identify the alcoholic in his family, he responds, “There would be too many to name.”

At the group level, anonymity is a personal decision. Each of us has the freedom to use our full name, our first name, or a fictitious name. There is a difference between anonymity and confidentiality. Meetings offer confidentiality, but we don’t have to be anonymous. What is said in a meeting needs to be kept in the meeting. If the specifics of someone’s sharing are repeated, anonymity of the individual may or may not have been violated. But, confidentiality was violated and by violating confidentiality, enough information may have been released to identify that person. This is especially important with A.A. members who know members of the family.

Anonymity is not secrecy. Secrecy can cause more harm to Al-Anon than taking the risk of saying or doing something, but we need to be careful what we say.

Anonymity can be taken to extremes. One member had an incident where she was coordinating a conference and had to give the hotel the names of the attendees. One person would not give her last initial, so she was asked if she wanted to be “Smith” or “Jones.”

There is also a connection between anonymity and trust. Anonymity is the foundation of trust. “Because of anonymity, I was able to talk at my first meeting,” one member shared. In small or rural areas — where everyone knows everyone — anonymity is very important, because there can be gossip.

In one area, there are now several non-English speaking groups, because of anonymity. One member shared, “The beauty of Al-Anon is that we can share whatever we like and participate to whatever degree we want. You can volunteer at the GSO and you don’t have to show your face. Anonymity is very important, it’s my foundation, and that’s for the good of Al-Anon.”

I have to thank God for letting me be here, at this International Meeting for the third occasion I feel a huge happiness. My name is Maria del Carmen and I am an alcoholic’s wife.

“Ironically, the only real way to keep the riches we receive to give them away,” says the book, How Al-Anon Works for Families & Friends of Alcoholics (B-22, page 103, “Putting Love Into Action”).

Some decades ago, I had the privilege to be the second one of seven children from an exceptional woman. I threw away my childish comb on the Durango State’s mountain and a little after that my mother had to leave to Sonora State, since my father let her down before I was born. I lived in Sonora, a childhood with plenty of needs, but I have a special memory that has marked my life. We used to harvest cotton in all the fields that were between San Luis Rio Colorado in Sonora and Mexicali City in Baja, California. My mother hung a huge sack of cotton to our waists and took us to harvest cotton from sunrise to sunset. I remember that my fingers were bleeding, since the cotton’s flower is too hard and it really hurts the skin, especially when you are only five years old. When we finished our work day, she would ask for special permission for us to eat the ripened fruits on the ground that had fallen from the trees in the orchards close to the fields. There were higos, dátiles, and orange trees. Everything was only happiness for me, since the material things had no importance. The real thing I appreciated was to be with my brothers and sisters. It didn’t matter that each one was from a different father. I never thought this fact was of any importance. How could it be?

So, the time progressed until my mother got sick with tuberculosis and she had to leave to Guadalajara to recover her health and left each one of her children with different families to take care of us. I stayed with a family that sent me to an all day long basic school, but in exchange for this, when I returned home, they asked me to wash the clothes of their five children. I was only ten years old.

During the two years I was separated from Mom, she wrote me beautiful letters. Through her letters she showed me all the love she felt for me, and I imagined she was at my side, close to me. She met in Guadalajara “an angel from heaven,” who supported her while she was in a special hospital for people suffering tuberculosis and leprosy. My mom begged so much for the priest, who was the director of that hospital, to let her have her children in the same place close to her. He agreed and she brought us one by one. Thank God I was the first one. To help feed the people at the hospital, the people from the market gave the priest the spoiled fruits, which nobody wanted to buy. To cover their expenses, some of the sick people went to pick the fruit and, of course, I was included in that team.

When I was fifteen, my mom died and I stayed with the priest at the hospital as an adopted and beloved daughter. I discovered in that place that God is a God of love, not a frightening God. Who could imagine that in this place, with plenty of pain and sickness, I would meet the man who is now my beloved husband? It seemed at the time a fairy tale. I got married when I was sixteen and it was exciting. By that time, I was in communication with my biological father, who lived in Chicago, Illinois, and I asked if he would like to come to my wedding. He accepted. I was so glad to know the human being who had given me life.

After our marriage, the magic lasted just a little while as I began to notice the alcoholic problem my husband suffered. By now, I already had a family and I had a great need to have my own place for my family where I could find safety and love.

We began to work heartily and established a store. God had given me the privilege of being the mother of four incredible kids, who were the essential engine in my life. When, one special day, however, I saw the pain and fear reflected in my kids’ little faces, the same feelings they saw on me everyday, their pain and fear made me look for help.

Since the first day I made the decision to attend this fellowship, I realized I had arrived at the proper place, a place I had been looking for a long time ago.

Emerson wrote, people that “Did not learn life’s lessons (were) those who did not conquer some fear everyday.” By attending Al-Anon, I found the love of God, that Divine love, which gave me back my joy for life. I also found the love of my children that had driven me to be a better mother every day and a love for my husband that had given me the strength to feel his support in every moment. Even though I often disagreed with words, but he did show me to work with me. The love I discovered for myself has per-
mitten me to realize that I am not on this earth by chance. I am here for a reason and this reason is to grow into and become a mountain and not to shrink into a small pile of sand. I am here to continue improving every day, and working on the fears and insecurities I had been carrying in that sack of cotton I told you about at the beginning with which I harvested the cotton in my childhood.

Today, when I look back and remember that portion of my life, I am sure it has been worth it, to have all the obstructions I had conquered. My tenacity is what, today, lets me realize that only one thing can change a dream into an impossibility: "the fear of failure," as Paulo Coelho says.

Al-Anon, indeed, has the formula, but we must use it. Approximately two months ago, I had the privilege to be in a "Leader Ladies" Meeting from Latino America. There, I learned to appreciate all I have learned in this beautiful fellowship. I was with these intelligent personalities and unity: "the fear of failure," as Paulo Coelho says.

I learned to appreciate all I have learned in this beautiful fellowship. I was with these intelligent personalities and unity: "the fear of failure," as Paulo Coelho says.

It is important to let the spoon develop at his or her own pace. Advice should be avoided. Instead, ask questions, such as "What do you want? What are you going to do about it?" Help them to identify their skills and talents and get in touch with their feelings. Help them work through the Steps. Another member shared, "My Higher Power has opened up more doors for me through service work. When you trust your Higher Power, He will show you where to go with your service, He will put you in the service job right for you." Remember that whenever you are asked to do something in Al-Anon remember it’s your Higher Power telling you to do something. Another shared, "I never thought I was a good Sponsor, but I’m a good ‘nudger.’" Sponsors can provide great support at meetings, between meetings, and sometimes even socially. Some serve as service Sponsors, members who have held the position before and are willing to share their experience, strength, and hope. Some serve as personal Sponsors for recovery.

One member came to Al-Anon because a counselor told her to. In her culture, sponsorship was not talked about. The counselor told her to look for a Sponsor she said it was free and that gave her the courage to go to her group and get a Sponsor, which she still has today.

One member shared that she would not forget her first personal Sponsor and how she found her. She had purchased One Day at a Time in Al-Anon (B-6) at a meeting and all the members had put their names and phone number in the back of the book. When she finally picked up the telephone to call, she found her Sponsor.

There are also problems with sponsorship and the problem is international. There are members who believe that sponsorship is a pupil/teacher relationship. Their Sponsors are concerned with the individual and that helps everyone to be more credible. Their idea is that you must do this or I won’t sponsor you. In an issue of The Forum, the monthly magazine published by the World Service Office (WSO) there was an article entitled, "I Felt Abandoned." It was written by a member who shared how she was treated, including that when she shared her Fourth Step with her Sponsor, her Sponsor shared it with her group. When her Sponsor was out of town, she was told to call her Sponsor’s Sponsor. They gave advice on what to put in the Seventh Tradition basket, what to wear, who to date. One thing that is helping to spread this type of sponsorship is the Internet. To read more about it and what several have lived through, go to www.al-anon.org/members and put in the name of your group followed by AFG. Also, there are sections in the 2005 and 2006 Conference Summary, which give more details.

In the Al-Anon spirit, the WSO will continue to talk about this type of sponsorship, so that members can be informed. This is also an ongoing topic in The Forum. It was advised at the WSO, the Group Services department is creating a bookmark about sponsorship, which will list both the positive and some of the negatives. It is important to continue talking about this. If it’s kept a secret, then it becomes a greater problem.

**SELF-SUPPORT**

_Bergtjó J., Iceland_

Greetings to you all! My name is Njola and I am the International Al-Anon General Service Meeting (IAGSM) Delegate from Iceland.

I was invited to share with you my understanding of self-support within Al-Anon and my experience of being a volunteer at the Icelandic General Service Office and later a staff member. I would like to start this talk with my understanding of what self-support means to me on an individual level and within the Al-Anon fellowship.

To me self-support on a personal level is, in essence, the ability to take care of oneself and take responsibility for one’s actions. On the group level, when a newcomer comes to Al-Anon, the group welcomes her or him. The group is like a nest and we feed the newcomer with our love and Conference Approved Literature, and we are there when he or she needs us. But the group cannot be a good nesting ground if the newcomer does not work along with the newcomer to Al-Anon, the group welcomes her or him. The group is like a nest and we feed the newcomer with our love and Conference Approved Literature, and we are there when he or she needs us. But the group cannot be a good nesting ground if the newcomer does not work along.

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In the autumn of 2000, I became seriously ill and had to review my life. I had taught English at the Reykjavik High School and I am now living on an invalid pension. During this dif-
ficult time, I had long discussions with my Higher Power and promised to take a more active part in Iceland's service structure if she would see me through this illness.

To begin with, I was a member of the Literature Committee, translating Conference Approved Literature (CAL) from English to Icelandic. Then I became a volun-
teer at the General Service Office in Reykjavik. My task was to sell literature, inform about meeting hours of Al-Anon groups, and answer Twelfth Step letters and phone calls. If people complained, it was easy to say, I don't really know much about this and refer it to the members of the staff. On the other hand, I think one expected the member of staff to know everything. And, we used to have a member of staff that seemed to know everything and was always gentle and unremitting in explaining things as a volunteer. Just I took

responsibility for my work and had no idea, really, how complex a staff member's job was. I was quite happy being a volunteer. But, as time went on and I was recruited into the Iceland Al-Anon Service Committee and started running an office on a very low budget. Then I started helping the members of staff in supervising the other volunteers. It was a rude awakening. Some of the volunteers were sticklers for perfection like me, turning up on time and doing what they were asked to. Others just wanted to play computer games, showed up late or not at all. Some even “borrowed” things, feeling that they were not getting paid, so it was all right to reimburse themselves with some perks. The members of staff and I were ever so understanding and tried to explain things gently to the offenders and gave them a second, third, and fourth chance. Looking back, it is easy to see that we were, in fact, enabling some bad behavior instead of taking a firm stand. But, how do you fire a volunteer?

Our Board of Trustees had to compose a set of guidelines on how volunteers and standing committees that hold their meetings at the General Service Office should behave at the office, regarding the use of the computer, reading material, meetings at the General Service Office should behave at the

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Our Board of Trustees had to compose a set of guidelines on how volunteers and standing committees that hold their meetings at the General Service Office should behave at the office, regarding the use of the computer, reading material, and the archives. You have to bear in mind that in Iceland our service structure is, like Lois said, “ Al-Anon’s best kept secret”. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity. This ties in with the Seventh Tradition on unity.
regularly and leaving the membership the same.

One structure is having problems with volunteers to chair committees. They have adopted, on a trial basis, rotating the chairperson on a monthly basis. Try to focus, not only on the words of the Concepts, but also on the spiritual principle. One group or committee cannot do all the work. Delegation of responsibility helps ease the load for everyone. Be sure to clearly define the job you expect done and, when they do it, give them the respect of listening to their report. That’s part of the communication we haven’t clearly made that’s in the Concepts.

There are several committees referenced in the Concepts, but not all structures need all committees. Create only those committees that are needed. One member said, "The spiritual concept of Concept Eleven is that many people are needed to do the work. Al-Anon can grow with more hands, not closed hands. We don’t have to hold control, we can share control. Committees can provide guidance and feedback but they don’t have to do everything." The principle is we can share the work. Committees can be the overseers. Allow the committees to exercise judgment so they can have the feeling of accomplishment, that they have done something important. Provide the framework, but allow them to do the work. But, most of all, keep fun in service work.

CREATING A CULTURE OF TRUST/KNOWLEDGE-BASED DECISION-MAKING

Judy P., U.S. & Canada

At the 2006 IAGSM Meeting, the topic of Knowledge Based Decision Making (KBDM) was introduced. KBDM is currently used by the WSO Board of Trustees as a process to share information and come to an informed group conscience as a result of thorough discussions and participation by all. This process gives all the opportunity to talk and listen until each is satisfied and believes he or she can make an informed decision.

Following the presentation there was a discussion on the idea of having Zonal Meetings in Al-Anon Family Groups using KBDM process.

1) What do we know about the World Service Office, General Service Offices and evolving structures’ need, wants and preferences that is relevant to the idea of creating Regional Zonal Meetings?
   • We need contact with others within our zones to better understand that we have the same environment
   • The knowledge of what others are doing
   • Opportunity to come together and to be of service to each other
   • Ideas/ways to do public outreach better in our respective communities by participating with professionals in the community

2) What do we know about the current realities and evolving dynamics of our fellowship and the respective environment of the World Service Office, General Service Offices and evolving structures that is relevant to the idea of creating Regional Zonal Meetings?
   • There is a need for something that is more practical than IAGSM
   • Build more relationships between countries and structures
   • Involve more members
   • Larger countries can sponsor smaller countries
   • Provide help to evolving structures
   • World has less barriers allowing for easier gathering
   • Zonal meeting may be easier travel
   • Foster better communication
   • Easier means of communication between countries
   • Keep up the spirit, enthusiasm, knowledge of others, a way of carrying the spiritual principles back to others

Con
   • Possibly end the IAGSM

3) What do we know about the capacity and strategic positions of the World Service Office, the individual General Service offices, and the evolving structures of Al-Anon Family Groups that is relevant to the creation of Regional Zonal Meetings?
   • This is a forward thinking idea
   • Zonal might foster a limited way of thinking rather than worldwide thinking
   • Help to make Al-Anon grow worldwide
   • Groups, National Groups, International Groups – Equality of voice
   • Easier to share cultural experiences of neighboring countries
   • Tradition Nine — keep in mind to link meeting to the structures they serve
   • Smaller structures can learn from large structures – learning from each other regardless of size

4) What are the ethical, legal and fairness issues or implications that we need to consider in making the decision to create Regional Zonal Meetings?
   • Have a meeting on a trial basis

These questions and ideas are the beginning of the conversation. The Delegates were told at the end of this session that at the 2008 IAGSM the discussion on Zonal meetings would continue and to take the information back to their service structures for further discussion.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A.A. AND AL-ANON IN SWITZERLAND (GERMAN-SPEAKING)

Liselotte R.

Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.), Al-Anon, and Alateen are live communities, organizations, and organizations. In common cooperation, the same Steps are practiced as in the individual A.A., Al-Anon, and Alateen groups. If A.A. and Al-Anon have confidence in each other, they dare to take new steps in general cooperation. If they cooperate in the regions, they can concentrate their forces on the most important things. A common cooperation strengthens A.A., Al-Anon, and Alateen as a whole.

A.A. in Switzerland is larger than Al-Anon. There are two-thirds A.A. groups to one-third Al-Anon groups. Al-Anon Switzerland, German-speaking, is autonomous. A.A. Switzerland, German-speaking, is an Intergroup of A.A. Germany. We are working together in different ways — common activities, and public information.

Meetings

Al-Anon Switzerland, German-speaking, has 40 Al-Anon groups, two Alateen groups, and one group of Al-Anon adult children. A.A. has 125 groups. In our district, we have four Al-Anon groups and 13 A.A. groups. Three Al-Anon groups take place in the same house and have meetings at the same time as A.A. In former times, our group met with A.A. after the meeting in a restaurant. Since the restaurant was closed, our contact became smaller. Now we meet outside under a tree in front of the meeting house and have a palaver like African people.
Earlier in our group, we had common meetings with A.A. Later, the desire faded. It seemed different positions existed. Some members also wanted this type of meeting to continue. In our district, A.A. and Al-Anon took the opportunity to organize some events over the year. All Al-Anon members take part. Each year, one group organizes a little walking tour. All groups are invited to this event. A beautiful area will be selected for the participants to enjoy. At noon and later in the afternoon, common gatherings happen with food, coffee-drinking, and sharing.

In December, a holiday celebration takes place within our district. It is an informal gathering for little children, Alateen, Al-Anon, and A.A. meet in a forest cottage. There are gifts for the small ones, which were supplied by the adults. At this festive occasion, prejudices and fear seem to diminish between A.A. and Al-Anon.

We pay the expenses for our rent, but cooperate by forming living communities with A.A.. We respect each other's fellowship. “We made sure that the press knew we behaved in that fashion. “ In some structures, A.A. pays as one member said, “We are the invited participants and we respect ourselves. Today, there is a life with A.A. or Al-Anon member will answer the telephone calls. We have two numbers: 0848 848 885 for A.A. and 0848 848 843 for Al-Anon. The call numbers are interconnected. An A.A. or Al-Anon member will answer the telephone calls. The hotline works 24 hours. Thirty-one A.A. and Al-Anon members are sharing this service. Without the participation of Al-Anon, the hotline wouldn’t be working around the clock.

GDK - Service Conference (Al-Anon) and Chairman Conference (A.A.) (Twice a year)

A.A. specifies the place and the date of the conference. The spring conference is the first Saturday in June and the conference in autumn is the first Saturday in November. The location changes periodically from district to district. The place must be centrally located with public transportation so each participant can arrive timely. The meeting of A.A. and Al-Anon takes place at the same time and usually in the same building. Al-Anon is autonomous, also financially. We pay the expenses for our rent, but cooperate by forming driving communities with A.A..

Thirteenth International Al-Anon General Services Meeting

General Service Office (GSO)

The cooperation between the GSO and Intergroup Office of A.A. is good. We communicate from time to time about the Twelve Concepts of Service and share our experiences. The beginning is always on Friday evening and the end is on Sunday noon. For the first time, an A.A. friend organized an A.A. service seminar at the same place in October. He shared, “My experience was always very satisfied from an Al-Anon service seminar. I would like to have the same experience. Therefore, I organize the first A.A. service seminar now.” We see this as learning by Al-Anon example.

Public Outreach

At the national public information meeting, the teams meet themselves to discuss common projects. A.A. and Al-Anon members from the district public information team jointly share hospitals, schools, youth centers, and clinics. They are in contact with prisons. A.A. is a leader in this work and makes the connections. Information about alcoholism is shared in magazines, on the radio, or by television during the day. It seems that the radio, newspapers, magazines, and the Internet are the ideal medium for public relations. The cooperation between A.A. and Al-Anon is good.

A.A. and Al-Anon Hotline, 24 hours

For 18 months, our hotline has been a reality. The hotline is a connection between A.A. and Al-Anon. The experiences are good. In the first year, over 3,000 calls were registered. We have two numbers: 0848 848 885 for A.A. and 0848 848 843 for Al-Anon. The call numbers are interconnected. An A.A. or Al-Anon member will answer the telephone calls. The hotline works 24 hours. Thirty-one A.A. and Al-Anon members are sharing this service. Without the participation of Al-Anon, the hotline wouldn’t be working around the clock.

Friendship meeting

In Switzerland, German-speaking, we have six districts. Each year, one district has the mission to organize the friendship meeting at a beautiful, safe place, where 300 persons can stay overnight, meet, sleep, eat, and drink. Mostly, the meetings take place on Saturday noon with the opening and finish with the closing meeting on Sunday noon. All meetings are open. Are A.A., Al-Anon, and Alateen meetings. The topics are determined before in the district. A.A., Al-Anon, and Alateen members lead the large meetings at the beginning and at the conclusion. On Sunday morning, there is one spiritual meeting.

In August, we had this meeting in our district. There were 250 A.A. and Al-Anon members and 13 Alateen members in attendance. A.A. specifies the place and the venue. Al-Anon and Alateen cooperates in the organization committee. For these meetings and other services, Al-Anon developed a manual, which outlines our needs.

Service Seminar

Every two years, Al-Anon arranges a service seminar only for Al-Anon members. We learned a lot and spoke about the Twelve Concepts of Service and share our experiences. The beginning is always on Friday evening and the end is on Sunday noon. For the first time, an A.A. friend organized an A.A. service seminar at the same place in October. He shared, “My experience was always very satisfied from an Al-Anon service seminar. I would like to have the same experience. Therefore, I organize the first A.A. service seminar now.” We see this as learning by Al-Anon example.

Personally

At many Twelve Step seminars and other meetings, I learned much about A.A. and Al-Anon. We were always a mixed group and worked in the program. By my participation in these seminars and meetings, my behavior changed. I became open. Mutually, we learned from each other. We respected ourselves. Today, there is a life with Al-Anon and A.A. At the seminars and at the meetings, I can learn so much. We share experience, strength, and hope. I find a new quality of gratitude, recovery and vitality.

Discussion

Many of the structures have working and cordial relationships with A.A. There is cooperation at conferences, and as one member said, “We are the invited participants and we respect ourselves. Today, there is a life with A.A.”

For 18 months, our hotline has been a reality. The hotline is a connection between A.A. and Al-Anon. The experiences are good. In the first year, over 3,000 calls were registered. We have two numbers: 0848 848 885 for A.A. and 0848 848 843 for Al-Anon. The call numbers are interconnected. An A.A. or Al-Anon member will answer the telephone calls. The hotline works 24 hours. Thirty-one A.A. and Al-Anon members are sharing this service. Without the participation of Al-Anon, the hotline wouldn’t be working around the clock.

Tradition Six says we may cooperate. At open A.A. meetings, Al-Anon members can speak as a guest, but only if A.A. invites them to participate. It is important that our behavior matches what is said in terms of being a guest. In an open Al-Anon meeting, it is not appropriate for a dual member to identify himself or herself as a member of A.A. unless they have been invited as an A.A. member to share and, in that case, they should share only as an A.A. member.

One representative reported that, to show the level of cooperation between A.A. and Al-Anon in the Al-Anon service structure, there are three meetings a year. As a result of those meetings and staying in contact, staff members have had the opportunity to travel to other countries, at A.A. invitation, which allowed A.A. and Al-Anon to do public outreach work together. On one such trip, there was a scheduled press conference. Each representative was very respectful of the other's fellowship. “We made sure that the press knew we were separate—we cooperate, but we’re separate.” Personal stories were shared and differences explained. The relationship between the two offices is very good.

The WSQ was also invited to China in 2002. As a result of that invitation, A.A. GSO invited Al-Anon to travel to Africa. When A.A. goes to a new country, it is usually the family members who come to the meeting. They want to know how to get the alcoholic sober. A.A. has learned that sometimes they can get the people in the right place earlier if they invite Al-Anon. A.A. went to India two years ago. When they came back, their GSO called the WSQ and said “the members are waiting for you.” Al-Anon has had a presence in India for 40 years and this year the members decided to create a national service structure on a trial basis.

Another Delegate advised in their country, conventions are held in schools because schools are inexpensive to rent. It is an older tradition in this country that those without money can come and sleep on the floor. No sleeping materials are provided. At schools, there are showers, coffee, and food and it’s easy for everyone to come. At the same time, at national conventions, A.A. has large open meetings, called the “evening of the brother.” That’s when Al-Anon members can attend. There has been talk about keeping Al-Anon’s conference separate from A.A. There is more participation when A.A. is not there. In some areas, they do regional events together.

In the early days of Al-Anon in another country it was advised there was good cooperation between A.A. and Al-Anon. It’s not clear when they started to drift apart. In the past, there were meetings with A.A.’s general service committee and it was easier because they could cross-register for the Al-Anon conventions and sell its literature. Alateen has been mentioned, because it’s for their children, too, and some A.A.’s bring their children to Alateen and then sit in on the Al-Anon meetings.

One of the problems cited in another structure is that invitations to A.A. functions don’t always come through the GSO. A.A.’s northern area has in their guidelines that they need to invite Al-Anon. Southern areas are autonomous and they choose not to. Sometimes invitations are gained by an A.A. inviting his/her spouse to come along. A.A. has guidelines for Al-Anon participation at A.A. conventions.

Another problem encountered in one country is Al-Anon members not wanting to pay the registration fee for their participation in an A.A. convention. They believe they don’t need to pay a fee. One member shared that the GSO and Al-Anon’s service structure, “I don’t put money in their basket and vice versa. It’s a principle that they are self-supporting.” The GSO has stressed that Al-Anon needs to be self-supporting as A.A. shares a portion of the registration fee with the Al-Anon GSO.

There were several that voiced a concern about payment of registration fees at conventions and also Seventh Tradition donations to the basket at meetings. An ICC member pointed out that on page 77 of the 2004-2006 Al-Anon Alateen Service Manual, (F 24/27) under the subheading “Outside Contributions,” it says, “Al-Anon and
Hello to all my old friends and new friends, I am Patricia from Belgium (Flemish speaking).

I knew I could expect to do something at this International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM) and when I received the e-mail from the World Service Office, after reading it, I was sad and thrilled at the same time. I was sad because I read that Jean Louis was ill and couldn’t come and thrilled that I had been asked to do the topic in his place.

After reading it, I immediately sent an e-mail to a former District Representative to help us with the translations, so they get some idea about what is going on and about the work.

It is sometimes difficult to follow up all the things we would like to do and change, so it is better to spread it over two or three years. The task we have is extremely important. I remember when the Chair of our Board of Trustees said, approximately five years ago, that this was the first time she had heard and learned so much at the IAGSM, as never before. It was money well-spent. We even need to make the people in service enthusiastic in the way we talk about the IAGSM.

In our structure, we share our experiences from the IAGSM at the Board meeting or at the PW, which is our meeting with the District Representatives, the Trustees, and the Chairs of all the committees. After that, we visit each District (Province). After that visit and with the market, we were happy to welcome a new member in service, as a District Representative.

The first district meeting where I went alone to talk about the IAGSM, I made a mistake. I was only reading my text and they, luckily, told me it was not so nice. So I learned to make sure, when I do things like this, to show the members how much I learned and my enthusiasm. I need to remember to share the spirit of the IAGSM in my mind and from my heart.

**Discussion**

One Delegate said, “What struck me when the Delegates came back was not what they said but how they said it. I wanted to go [to the IAGSM] because of their enthusiasm.”

Many of the Delegates had the same experience. One shared, “Wherever I went, I dressed up. I wore stuff from all the places I had been.” She went back with enthusiasm. She did workshops, went to three assemblies and an “RSS” (equiva-)

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BY Patricia R., Belgium (Flemish speaking)
Another Delegate shared that there has been a strain between certain areas in within her structure. When she returned from Brazil, she offered to travel to those areas if she could be reimbursed for her expenses. She was invited to give a report and it was good. It created unity. They were so hospitable. I stayed with members in their homes with lots of sharing. She also made a presentation to the Board of her structure.

“The reason I’m here is to share experience, strength, and hope with as many structures as can participate and it’s my responsibility to report that. We can talk about the wonderful time as well, but if we don’t talk about the importance of the IAGSM and the links between us, it could just be thought of as a good time and some type of reward for service. I feel like a sponge and want to take back everything I can. Talk about the importance of the links and the common problems and solutions.”

“...There have been many benefits. It has made our structure much smoother. Now we have something that is working.”

“I have experienced in these three days how much we were missing without the link. I need to carry the message that we are still part of the worldwide fellowship. When we get in trouble, the WSO gets bombarded with our e-mail. If we had been able to participate [in the past], we may have been better able to handle the problem.”

One of the things that can be of great benefit to any structure is harmony between the structure’s staff and its Board members. That allows each person to move without so much friction. When a decision has been made, it needs to be communicated as a group and not be undermined. It goes back to the same idea, talk to each other, reason things out, but let there be no criticism of one another. At the WSC, the Delegates are encouraged to “assume good will. When someone is out of sync with you, assume his or her good will.”

Questions asked prior to the discussion were:

- What does it mean to be a clearing house?
- What services does the office provide to the groups?
- What is the role of the office within the service structure?

- What is a GSO? A GSO supports the groups with all the tools Al-Anon has to give, such as literature and information. It can make arrangements for such things as a meeting room, food, and lodging for policy meetings, executive meetings, and board meetings. It can provide leadership to educate its membership to understand what service means. Some structures have paid staff, some have paid staff and volunteers, and some only work with volunteers. Some GSOs are open the whole week; others can provide service only when volunteers are available. “You can hardly believe that the work can be done by using only volunteers.”

- What is the WSO? Members of this workshop were curious about the WSO and asked many questions. One of those questions was “What are the tasks of the WSO?” Many members believed the WSO gave guidelines to all the subsequent structures and told them what they have to do. The WSO is not an authority. It gathers the experiences from Al-Anon worldwide and shares it with the other structures. The WSO is available to help and give support. One member said, “It was good to hear that the WSO was not an authority. It’s nice to know that the WSO is there if we need them.”

- What is the IAGSM? An IAGSM is a meeting of all the GSOs worldwide. It is held every two years. It gives the delegates from these structures an opportunity to share their experiences, accomplishments, trials, and network with other delegates. During the floor discussion, one member shared that the GSO in her country was having difficulty with the fellowship thinking that the IAGSM was a “chit-chat” place and not doing anything productive, an event that took the General Secretary away from work.

- What is the World Service Conference (WSC)? Many members mix the WSC up with the IAGSM. Lois W., the co-founder of Al-Anon, chose the name for the WSC. She first wanted to call it the General Service Conference, but this name was already in use by Alcoholics Anonymous. So, she decided to call it the World Service Conference, never expecting that Al-Anon would become as big as it is today. The WSC is the service conference for the US and Canada. Other countries with national service structures are invited to send a representative, at the structure’s expense, to the WSC as guests with voice and no vote as they vote in their own structures.

Discussion

One delegate shared his experience of attending a meeting of the World Health Organization (WHO). He was asked to attend, by the World Service Office, to talk about alcoholism and its effects on the family. He said, “I think all countries have difficult health problems to discuss. One of the world health problems is alcoholism. Years ago, there was a paper done where all problems were listed. After a couple of years, they had to report on what had been done to this point. We met together to speak about it and have a chance to put it on the next agenda. I met with members who were mostly men, mostly non-governmental professionals. I did meet with a woman from Malaysia. She was a professional and had never heard of Al-Anon. She had heard of A.A. We sat side-by-side and when she heard there was an organization for families of alcoholics, she began to talk about her daughter. She was grateful to know about the WSO and how to get information so she could tell her daughter about it. Her daughter’s husband was the drinker. It was unbelievable that a doctor working in world health, had never heard of Al-Anon. Other professionals said they had heard of Al-Anon. GSOs with strictly volunteers should insure those selected to speak to professionals are qualified. We need to see that GSOs are there to make it possible for the professionals to contact. It’s very important for public outreach. We must make friends who are able to do this work. We were the only organization represented that had a program for children. The others indicated they have tried everything. They have asked me to come to do a workshop to share about Alateen.”

Other comments shared from the floor included one from a structure that has an office manager that was not a member of the board. “This has helped, because that per-
son is able to work outside the GSO meetings. The pre-
vious office manager did Twelfth-Step calls in the office
and it was difficult. Those calls are now referred to another
number.
It was shared by one Delegate they have two specific vol-
unteers to take Twelfth-Step calls. Professional calls are
directed to a specific person. They do welcome drop-ins at
the office for coffee or conversation. They are having prob-
lems getting volunteers because they are an aging popula-
tion. Seniors get free travel in the city, where the GSO is
located, so those are the ones who volunteer.

Another Delegate stated, their GSO is also a Literature
Distribution Center. They have volunteers who do paper
work on Thursday. They don’t have drop-ins. One way to
network is to share via email. “We don’t need leaders in
Al-Anon, but we need leadership.”

ALATEEN
Facilitator: Sigulín B., Iceland
Reporter: Pauline S., New Zealand

“The Al-Anon/Alateen fellowship has enjoyed accelerated
growth in many different cultures and languages around
the world. From its humble beginnings, the Al-Anon fel-
lowship is recognized as a primary resource of those who
have been affected by alcoholism in a loved one. Although
Al-Anon grew from a need expressed by families of mem-
bers of Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon and Alateen now
offer help and hope for families and friends of alcoholics
whether the alcoholic is still drinking or not.” 2004-2006 Al-
Anon Alateen Service Manual.

What ways are we able to attract teens to meetings?
Are we at the national level still supporting the family group
idea?
The United Kingdom/Eire first brought the topic of
background checks for Alateen Group Sponsors to the Inter-
national Al-Anon General Service Meeting (IAGSM)
in 1997. At that time, they were thinking about doing back-
ground checks. Two years later, Australia found it necessary
to require those checks. Since then, the Board of Trustees
of the World Service Office (WSO) has been having dis-
cussions together with the Delegates to the World Service
Conference (WSC) about the long-term viability of Alateen
and the problem of “no Sponsors but kids” and “Sponsors
but no kids.”

After much discussion at several WSCs, the WSO finally
created what it considers minimum requirements for Alateen
Group Sponsors in the U.S. and Canada. These require-
ments are not meant to be a mandate for other structures, but
a template from which other structures could create their
own guidelines. All of the areas in the U.S. and Canada have
passed minimum guidelines for Alateen Group Sponsors.

Requirements:
- Alateen Group Sponsors must have two Al-Anon
  members who have been members for at least two years
  at the time of application.
- The Alateen Group Sponsor must have a Service
  Coordinator.
- The Alateen Group Sponsor must have a Service
  Coordinator who is either an Al-Anon member or non-
  member.

Implementation of the minimum requirements for Alateen
Group Sponsors by the WSO is one of the ways our mem-
bers can be ensured of safety. In addition to the minimum
requirements and the background checks, some other safety
guidelines were shared:
- Two Al-Anon members who have been members for at
  least two years at every meeting.
- Providing a meeting venue in a safe place.
- Creating an Alateen Group Sponsor committee.
- When attending conventions, parents must sign a
  safety and confirmation form allowing the Alateen
to attend.

Different countries have different rules and laws. Al-Anon
is not above the law and must comply with it. One structure
is looking in 2023 at the Sponsors and meetings in case
something should happen, such as damage to buildings or
possible physical damage. Laws do change and procedures
need to be created and adjusted continually to conform to
those changes.

In one structure, the application process starts at the
group level with approval of the whole group being neces-
sary before the applicant’s application can be forwarded on
to the next step. If approval is gained, the application moves
on to the Area for approval, which requires a unanimous
vote. If one person disapproves then the profile does not
go ahead. If, at any time, something changes, it has to be
brought to the attention of the Delegate who takes it to the
Area Committee.

The minimum requirements for Alateen group sponsor-
ship submitted to the Areas by the WSO do not include
mandatory reporting. Mandatory reporting means that
those who work on certain jobs are required by law to report
incidents of abuse if they witness them or are informed of
them by a minor or otherwise disadvantaged person. In
those Areas requiring mandatory reporting, the Alateen
Group Sponsors would report as an individual citizen, not
as an Al-Anon Group Sponsor. Alateens who are experi-
encing abuse are encouraged to speak to a trusted adult. In
one structure, the law requires that child abuse be reported,
so it is important to talk to the child before the meeting to let
him or her know this will happen.

What has our structure done to encourage Alateen
sponsors?
One structure has its Sponsors meet twice a year to share
experience, strength, and hope. They have a separate meet-
ing just for Alateens once a year. They also do fundraising
to provide literature for Alateen groups within the area. It
was suggested that all Alateen Group Sponsors have a Service
Sponsor. One structure has no Alateen groups, but it does
have an Alateen Committee to educate the groups regard-
ing Alateen. They have an Alateen contact person in every
structure who communicates with the Alateen Committee.
The contact number for the Alateen contact member is given to
any teens that inquire. Alateen literature has been updated to
reflect the new guidelines and Area Alateen Coordinators
are given support from the GSO. [The WSO has a trial
Alateen on-line meeting, monitored by Alateen Sponsors.]
One-on-one telephone calls are arranged with Coordinators
so they can support the Sponsors.

What ways are we able to attract teens to meetings?
It was suggested that the schools be contacted and that
updated literature, aimed more toward the Alateens, be
available for handing out. Another consideration was meet-
ting time. Maybe evening meetings are the wrong time. The
school meetings seem to be a better idea. Having a Web site
for Alateens, sending letters to religious leaders and schools,
pasting meeting information in community gathering places
or where kids tend to gather are other ideas. Hold an open
Alateen meeting to show teens what it’s all about. In one
structure, it is impossible to talk about Alateen due to poli-

discussion.

When the floor was opened for discussion, more informa-
tion was provided. A representative from the ICC shared
experience from structures that were unable to attend. Two
of those structures have stopped having Alateen meetings
because of the lack of teens. Some structures are looking into
doing background checks.

Many Delegates indicated that the number of groups had
decreased significantly since the implementation of the
guidelines. However, the number of Sponsors did not, so
they are hopeful that the number of groups will increase as
the guidelines are put into place and those fears that may
have arisen are dispelled. Government agencies and per-
sonnel that choose to disregard regulations challenge some
structures. One structure has tapped into those agencies
they feel will provide them with the safest information. They
find out how the agency protects children and that has been most
helpful. Those agencies have much stricter policies.

One GSO has a large population of lone Alateen members,
who are happy to get lone member literature. The literature
is distributed monthly, but at least they are getting some-
thing. The Seventh Tradition is encouraged and the GSO
often receives stamps so the member and the GSO can keep
in touch.

One structure has two “adult groups,” with ages range from
18 to 25 and their sharing focuses on parents, not spouses.
They are very social and do fundraising to buy books. The
GSO has supplied literature that they must raffle to raise
funds. They are required to accept members as young as
16.
PUBLIC OUTREACH-COOPERATION BETWEEN PROFESSIONALS AND AL-ANON

"Al-Anon is attracting when it tells people why we are, what we are, what we do, and how; we let them know that we are available ‘fit’ and ’when’ help is needed. We state the facts, which are communicated via the press, radio, films, and TV always stressing anonymity at the public level.

Al-Anon is cooperating when it works with others, rather than alone. In working with others, our scope and contacts are broadened and we reach many more of those in need.” 2004-2006 Al-Anon Alateen Service Manual (P24/27), page 90.

What ways has your structure worked with the professional community?
What can your structure do (or has your structure done) to help Al-Anon become a known resource within the professional community?
Is it necessary to provide the membership any training to reach out to professionals?
Public Outreach work is not the same as Twelfth-Step work and guidelines were recommended. When sharing with professionals, no drunk-a-logs and keep the personal sharing to no more than five to seven minutes. Be professional: make an appointment, arrive early, leave early, keep it simple, and provide one telephone number and one contact name. Leave referral pads. Train under the guidance of a Service Sponsor and educate yourself about what’s required. A thorough understanding of the Traditions and Concepts of Service is really important in Public Outreach work.

In the workshop, the group also felt that emphasis on use of the full name tells the public who we are and what we are: “Al-Anon Family Groups and Alateen for our younger members.” This description provides clarity and avoids misunderstanding. Here are some other suggestions given by different structures on how to work with the professional community:

• Get involved in staff meetings at schools and companies; network with social development and/or government agencies; provide information about Al-Anon as a resource for their data base
• Provide information to schools for wellness awareness and curriculum content on alcohol awareness
• Use medical referral pads during an information session with medical students using their terminology
• Use the magazine Al-Anon Faces Alcoholism as a tool and obtain permission to translate the professional articles
• Use clear presentation material, such as PowerPoint and keep it simple so that any member can give the presentation
• Focus on serious health concerns and the impact on family
• Make the Public Outreach Committee available to share at civic organizations
• Redesign, upgrade, and/or modernize your Web site
• E-mail similar professional individuals with details of a chosen book to promote sales and, hopefully, understanding
• Cooperate with A.A. positively
• Celebrate what Public Outreach achievements have been made
• Break jobs down into small, more manageable tasks
• Allocate one Trustee to the Public Outreach Committee as support
• Split the Public Outreach work into action committees, such as hospitals and institutions, cooperating with the professional community; public information
• Study the Traditions, Concepts of Service, and guidelines. Develop and use a list of questions and answers for professionals
• Talk at a police academy, state parliament, and winter school medical conference
• Donate books to libraries and drug foundations
• Attend forum with other community support groups.

Remember we do not have an opinion on outside issues but we can provide information about the effects of alcoholism on the family members
• Translate the relevant outreach material and make it available on the Web site
• Involve the right people for the job, such as younger members for Internet committee
• Get back to basics and provide members with the structure to carry out Public Outreach work, such as a calendar of suggested plans and a focus each month
• Have kits ready with literature packs and hints for best distribution guides
• Maintain a professional image
• Use our greatest Public Outreach resource — our members
• Spread the load newsletter to aid and guide members

Workshop Reportbacks

Discussion

It was shared that it is important to use the full name, “Al-Anon Family Groups.” When archival research was done for the World Service Conference, it was learned that, in the past, the full name was used. If you say Al-Anon Family Groups, it has a huge impact. It helps to distinguish us from Alcoholics Anonymous for women.

One member shared that newspapers are a good way to do Public Outreach work. “Wherever you are, put an ad in your newspaper. It will help people in your country and also those who travel to your country.” Draft an article for publication in the health section to reach the professionals.

University freshman week seems to be the beginning of alcoholic behavior in those communities. Contact the universities for ways to do Public Outreach work.

One structure was translating materials and some of the members felt that they needed to take out the word “family.” The question was raised, “How can I be here if I don’t live with an alcoholic?” Many of those asking that question have no connection to Alcoholics Anonymous. “The family connection is becoming more difficult.” In response, a WSO staff member said, “We are going back to our roots. We can use what we have on our letterhead, families and friends of alcoholics. It is for friends as well. Most groups are for family members, whether estranged or otherwise. We are still a family at the meeting. You get the feeling of family at the meeting and we want you to recover and we care about you. Sometimes a good friend becomes just like family. It will add to the understanding of what the program is as a whole.”

SELECTED COMMITTEES

“The World Service Office is composed of selected committees, executives and staff members.” (Concept Eleven)

What is the purpose?
What is the relationship to the Board?
Who participates?
Why are they necessary?

Concept Eleven reads “The World Service Office is composed of selected committees, executives and staff members.” One of the Delegates from the US and Canada was asked to explain why the word “standing” was changed to “selected.” She explained that, three years ago, the World Service Conference voted to return to the original wording of the Concepts of Service. After much research in the WSO archives, it was determined that somewhere, sometime, someone changed the word “selected” to “standing.”

Delegates at this International Al-Anon General Service Meeting were reminded that a structure cannot change the wording of the Concept itself, but they can use a footnote if more explanation is necessary. They do have the authority to change the descriptive text but no one has the authority to change the Concepts themselves without approval of three-fourths of the groups worldwide.

This group discussed the purpose of Concept Eleven and how it applied to structures in general. It was pointed out that not all structures need or want all the selected committees identified in Concept Eleven. Each structure is free to create whatever committees it needs and those of its membership.

The Delegates were asked to share some of their thoughts on Concept Eleven and its purpose, and how they used selected committees in their structures. “Concept Ten helps us understand the need to work together.” Selected committees help to accomplish that goal. Here are some of the ideas
It is not possible for everyone to do service, but those who are in service made a decision to “go into service,” to participate. Members who had a smile and were happy, I realized that the structure. “It is how I approach a person that’s important.” It has to be an enjoyable experience. “Skits are always fun.” “One can use the analogy of the tree to explain service fun. It has to be an enjoyable experience.” “Each Al-Anon Family Group has one purpose: to help families and friends of alcoholics.”

**Where have all the volunteers gone?**

Facilitator: Paivi K, Finland  
Reporter: Miriam M., UK and Eire

"Service, a vital purpose of Al-Anon, is action. Members strive to do as well as to be."  

What ways can we encourage membership to become involved in service?  
Does the membership see us as a ‘top down’ organization?  
What ways can we convey that Al-Anon is the responsibility of all?  
Is it necessary to find members with specific leadership qualities?

The following quotes came from the workshop and the discussion thereafter and give an idea of how the Al-Anon fellowship is changing. “We find that the volunteers are getting older.” “We have different generations now and they have different wants and needs.” “Our office is staffed with volunteers who are all of retirement age.” “Some people have a time problem.”

In the workshop, the focus was on the positive aspects of service and generated ideas on how to make it more inviting for volunteers. “One way to ‘attract volunteers’ is to make service fun. It has to be an enjoyable experience.” “Skits are always fun.” “One can use the analogy of the tree to explain the structure.” “It is how I approach a person that’s important. It’s my attitude that attracts.” “When I was new, those members who had a smile and were happy, I realized that they were members who were doing service.” Most members in service made a decision to “go into service,” to participate. It is not possible for everyone to do service, but those who can should be encouraged and then live and let live for those who can’t. A “taste of service” is a good way to introduce a newcomer to service, especially if time is problem. Sharing experience, service, whether serious or humorous, with groups and at area meetings makes service more inviting. When members hear that the lives of those who volunteer for service positions have changed, it gives them hope and a vision of what they can become. Al-Anon gives us the tools to solve problems and doing service gives us an opportunity to use those tools. There are ways of solving problems, differences and errors. It doesn’t matter how long you have been in the fellowship, you can always do something small. If we ask someone to fill a position, we need to explain to him or her what is expected. Start with small tasks.

Reading the stories in Conference Approved Literature can encourage newcomers. The booklet When I Got Busy, I Got Better (P-78) is a good aid. Studying this book at group meetings could result in filling vacant posts. Regional Service Seminars also provide a good opportunity to talk about service and explain the structure. A good topic might be relationships in service, learning how to relate with co-workers, which also helps in family relationships. Personal Sponsors can ease people into service, and those who have completed their term in a position could give support to the newly elected person for sometime afterwards.

Making group members aware of the responsibilities of any service position helps generate interest and the group should nurture that person, especially when it is the first bit of Al-Anon service. The essay on leadership in Concept Nine suggests that each group member should be aware of people with skills and ask them to take on a service position. New members often lack confidence. If they are told, “you can do it,” they might be more willing to make themselves available. The Internet can be a great tool for posting bulletins of committee work or information letters.

Committees can be an easy way to gently steer someone into volunteering. Encourage retiring Conference Delegates to apply for committee positions. Does the membership see Al-Anon as “a top-down” organization? The general consensus of the attendees was that members of the fellowship do see Al-Anon as “a top-down” organization. As a result, there does not seem to be any interest in taking on jobs. It is important that our leaders, from Group Representative to Board members, show themselves as trusted servants, doing a job. When group members are able to meet with and talk to members in service, and see that they are Al-Anon members who are giving of their time and talent for the good of Al-Anon as a whole, it helps dissolve the “us and them” syndrome.

**What ways can we convey that Al-Anon is the responsibility of all?**

Al-Anon has helped many of its members to recover from the effects of alcoholism, and in return they show their willingness to give something back by doing service. Tradition Seven is about service as well as financial donations and should be a topic at meetings. In that meeting, it can be explained how excess funds go to the area and the GSO. In Iceland, the dual members are encouraged to read the literature, buy books, and, hopefully, change their thinking, leaving the Big Book outside the room and becoming more involved with Al-Anon thinking.

Is it necessary to find members with specific leadership qualities?

Sometimes members feel they can’t do the job as well as the previous person but they can be shown that there is a learning curve and that service jobs are stepping stones to leadership. Service helps with growth and development of skills and qualities that had not yet been uncovered. Each job requires different skills. A nominating committee can help in selecting the right candidate at the group or area level. The phrase “anyone will do” no longer applies. Not just anyone will do. Be aware of those who show leadership skills and sponsor them. Then, allow them to “shadow” the incumbent member who holds a service position so they can learn by example.

**Discussion**

One member shared, “We need to be more flexible to attract more people to service. I was attracted to people who talked about service, because they had what I wanted. I knew that service was part of the formula.” Some saw skills in me that I didn’t recognize in myself. Be honest with people and let them know what they are getting into and keep it simple.”

**Al-Anon Worldwide**

**Creating a Universal Culture of Trust**

Facilitator: Rosa W., Belgium (Flemish speaking)  
Reporter: Pirjo K., Finland

"Each Al-Anon Family Group has one purpose: to help families and friends of alcoholics."  
2004-2006 Al-Anon Alateen Service Manual (P24/27), page 47

How can we create a culture of trust in Al-Anon?  
What does the Al-Anon name mean to you?  
What responsibilities do we have as individuals?  
What are ways, within our service structure, that we can support/model this idea?

How can we create a culture of trust in Al-Anon?

The members of this workshop at the International Al-Anon General Service Meeting (IAGSM) were very enthused about Al-Anon and the idea of a “culture of trust.” They shared that working the program, doing a job in service, using and following guidelines, and communicating with courtesy can create trust. It all starts at the home group.

They changed their focus somewhat to “universal” and shared the following thoughts on how to create a culture of trust:

- Have confidence in your partners
- Know your role; keep from “sticking my nose where it does not belong”
- Agree on how to measure the project
- Ask, “What did you hear?”

Be transparent; give financial figures, think how useful the information is to people

Thirteenth International Al-Anon General Services Meeting

Workshop Reportbacks
There was discussion about the "us and them" thinking and what can be done to overcome it. Some suggestions were:

- Travel to meet each other and get to know each other
- Talk to each other on the telephone after reports have been sent
- Share resource information to help others find the answers
- Develop the relationships between Delegates and Trustees to create unity
- Take the time for personal sharings

When asked, “What does the Al-Anon name mean to you?” the members responded:

- Trust
- Al-Anon's Steps, Traditions, and Concepts of Service
- Comfort zone
- Safety
- New life
- Hope
- Sanity

As individuals, members have the responsibility to carry the message, speak up about the program to newcomers, and to give back by doing service. Accept responsibility, but do not take responsibility away from others. This is a world-wide fellowship and when given an opportunity to speak, such as at this IAGSM, it is important to do so.

What are ways within our service structure that we can support and/or model this idea?

Educate and talk, talk, talk. Accept people just as they are, which is not always easy. Listen beyond the behavior and the words. Slow down and speak in a quiet way; that can defuse a difficult interchange. One member shared “We don’t want to destroy the culture we are trying to create.” Provide needed information and let go. There are many ways of doing the same thing. One structure gave a 57-page report; another structure, just one page. Start with small things. Be flexible. Trust in the process, the members, the Higher Power, and the group conscience. Give the responsibility back to people.

One structure had their contributions go down. The members were told, honestly, about the financial problem and now contributions have doubled. Members need to know the problem before they can help fix it. One Delegate shared that her structure already has a culture of trust. She is grateful, but is aware that it could be ruined. “God is in our group conscience, even when we don’t agree.” It can be an opportunity to learn from our own mistakes. The board needs to disclose a condensed version of the discussion of an idea or problem under consideration, not just the decisions.

**Discussion**

When the floor was opened for discussion, one Delegate shared, “We are learning to trust one another, to know that someone has looked at the information. If we don’t understand something, that’s another matter. We need to work together in a knowledge-based organization.”

Another shared that, “If I can be tolerant and respectful, we are the same, equal. I realize we may have a spiritual problem. Al-Anon is hope and help, growth and recovery, joy and confidence. Al-Anon says I can recover from alcoholism if I go to meetings. Al-Anon helps me work on the problem and to pass the message on to other people and to work in the community of Al-Anon, the group, and to change and transform the problem. I need to share and participate. I must work my own program.”

**MOTIONS**

**MOTION #1**

To vote by closed ballot to select the site for the 2008 International Al-Anon General Services meeting

Unanimous motion carried.

**MOTION #2**

It was agreed with the support of substantial unanimity (23 votes) that the International Al-Anon General Services Meeting be held in Finland in the year 2008, and in the event of an emergency, the IAGSM be held in the U.S.

Motion carried.
My background growing up was being picked up and taken to Sabbath school. I loved the stories from the Bible. When I was 13, my father died and we sold the farm in Far North Queensland and moved into town. I used to go to church with Mum and went to church youth groups where the action was, lots of boys and exciting activities.

After my next birthday and a younger sister and I went to boarding school, after I had had one term at the local high school. The boarding school was a church school; we went to church twice on Sundays and on Wednesday mornings. The nuns and staff were nice to us, and apart from being homesick, it was a good experience. I remember how emotional the minister was when he told us the Easter story and that has stayed with me.

After I left school, I worked at several jobs and, when I was 17, I moved to Melbourne to live with my oldest sister, who had moved there several years before. I continued to go to church, although I never felt good enough. I wanted to be a missionary. My sister’s partner had a drinking problem and this was my first introduction to alcoholism. I remember him coming home from work with his Gladstone bag and a bottle of wine. On the weekends, he would drink and by the end of each day, he could hardly stand up. Of course, my sister reacted and they fought a lot. I was very fearful and used to take my little 18-month-old nephew with me to my room and lock it in until it was over.

I met my sister’s partner’s ex-wife and heard about him. He lived the high life, drove a MG sports car, and was very dramatic. Anyway, we started going out and a month before I turned 18 we were married. I can remember thinking that he just needed love and attention. It ended up being a disaster.

At this time, Australian Al-Anon was going through major changes, forming Areas and districts. This is when I got involved in service work and have continued ever since. During this time I did service for different reasons, sometimes it was for my self-esteem, other times it was for helping my confidence. It helped me step out of my comfort zone and fix the problems. In my recovery, working the program to the best of my ability. I started working, got my driver’s license, and became involved in the local school. I separated, divorced, and remarried.

In 1977, I had been married for about eight months and I became very unhappy. I couldn’t understand why. I had all that I thought would make me happy: a lovely man who loved me and an automatic washing machine. I was depressed and wanted to die; I had never felt so low even in the drinking days.

My Higher Power gave me a gift. I had found it hard to accept that alcoholism was a disease and it was during this time, I felt that God said, “You have done your part and here or there you must learn to let others do it.” Filling my heart and mind with the comparison and understanding for the alcoholic. I now had a personal relationship with a God of my understanding. It’s amazing. I didn’t have a problem with God during my younger days, but found it hard to hand over my life before spiritual awakening.

My hunger for reading and learning about the God of my understanding increased each day. I started each day, handing my life, my will, and my day over to the care of the Higher Power. At the end of each day, I thanked Him for His loving care and what we had achieved for the day. I have a simple and trustful way of being spiritual and finding my way.

At this time, Australian Al-Anon was going through major changes, forming Areas and districts. This is when I got involved in service work and have continued ever since. During this time I did service for different reasons, sometimes it was for my self-esteem, other times it was for helping my confidence. It helped me step out of my comfort zone or it was time I needed a growth spurt. Today, I do service because I know the Higher Power is in charge and I am available.

Life and growth has been happening over these years, but I know, I have Al-Anon that is like a rock. I have a Higher Power who never changes. This has given me stability when everything around me was not. One of the things I always had was a job; this was due to the Higher Power’s loving care. Now, I don’t have to work and I like that too!

I have learned that I don’t have to be that formal with God. He doesn’t mind listening to me while I am doing the dishes or folding the clothes. I don’t put in a box and only have Him out when I want to, but I have a conscious awareness about His presence in all times. There are those who pray that take longer to answer — those go in my Al-Anon box. Al-Anon had always taught me the practical application to problems and putting prayers into a box is practical. To be conscious that God wants good for me gives me the confidence to leave things in God’s hands.

The emotional damage in me was the hardest to heal. When I was visiting my mother, I reverted to a child. I never felt that I did a good job and never gave myself credit. When I connected that it had stemmed from the childhood illness when Dad died and my sister and I were sent off to board school, I asked the Higher Power to heal me. That happened, I felt grown up and healed.

When I was in a lot of discomfort in the hospital a couple of years ago and I was, I asked God to help me. He gave me the answers, so I could speak to the nurses and have them fix the problems.

And Meditation to improve our conscious contact with God

You know, the hardest thing was to quiet my mind. I remember thinking I must be getting better when I could put my mind on what was being said at the Al-Anon meeting instead of thinking about my transgressions or buggering up outside. It happened in the late days. I learned a valuable lesson — when I am meditating and other things pop into my mind, I say to it, “Sit here beside me and I will deal with you later.” Meditation for me could be a page from our daily reader, a place where I feel peaceful, like a palm tree, or a sunflower. For me, it is having a quiet time, allowing the Higher Power to speak to me. This is a time for the Higher Power to give me ideas.

One of those ideas was to write to my grandson on his 21st birthday. We had not seen much of him since he was 14, as he had gone to live with his father who has a drinking problem. My daughter had not seen him for all that time. I wrote to him about making contact with his mother and restoring the family ties. He arrived at our place the day after he got the letter, and has since had contact with his mum.

When I go to the General Service Office, I go on the train. I have the Higher Power with me and I have a great awareness of the other people on the train. I ask that they would be aware of God that day. I wake up each day saying the Serenity Prayer, so then I have the conscious contact with God. As I go through my day, He is uppermost in my mind. The most powerful tool I can use at all times is the Serenity Prayer. If I can’t get to sleep, if I have a lot to do and get anxious about things, if there is a problem that keeps going around in my head, the Serenity Prayer says it all.

As we understood Him

I hear members say, “If you have a problem with God, put another o in God. ” God then says, “If you have a problem with God, take the extra “o” back out.” My understanding of God is that He is a loving God. When I feel unloved, I put my arms around myself and say, “Thank you, God, that I am valuable to you.” “Thank you, God, that you appreciate me,” “Thank you, God, that you love me.” And I feel much better.

God to me is the one I can rely on when people have let me down or disappointed me. I trust God with working out the way my life is going after I do my part by handing it over. I view God as some one who has experienced life — he understands me before he accepts me and once he has, his love is all encompassing. I hear Him speak through music and songs.

Praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out

The Serenity Prayer. This to me is asking for knowledge of His will and getting the power to carry that out. In troubled times, I have found the strength and courage to get clarity, and come up with ideas to help the situation. It certainly wouldn’t be my idea to pray for someone I felt resentful about, but I realize it is God’s will for me, and it’s hard to feel resentful when I pray for that person.

Forgiveness was another action that was foreign to me. God showed me that forgiveness was for my own good, as well as releasing the other person. At times, when I have been asked to take on a particular position, my first reaction is, “I can’t do that,” but as I start the job, God gives me the extra strength to complete it and I end up feeling happy and in charge. I have learned that, if I am willing, God supplies the power to carry things out.
Prayer model for the Eleventh Step:

1. Read from something that's meaningful.
2. Have a "thank you" list. Add one person each day or a specific thing.
3. Surrender my life and the problems I am worried about.
4. Ask God to show me His will and give me the strength to do it.
5. Add a prayer that I will be able to receive and give love.
6. Ask God for courage.
7. Simply tell God my feelings, "I feel fear, anger or sadness."
8. Visualize positive things about myself - I am serene, honest, or my house is paid for.
9. Practice gratitude, contact one person today.
10. Remember, "Doing my best is as near perfection as I ever need to get."

Prayer model for during the day:

When I am uptight or anxious, I say the Serenity Prayer, to the meditation focus.

Prayer model for in the morning:

Begin to imagine that you are in that place and that God can be there, where you feel close to God, like a beach or a mountain, and that I'm in the presence of a very wise teacher. "Visualize the meditation focus.

Prayer model for the evening:

I thank you for getting me through the day. Then I do the Tenth Step and say the Serenity Prayer.

Meditation:

If prayer is talking to God then meditation is a way of listening more deeply to Him. Some people simply ask God for His will and then listen. If my mind wanders, I have a son from my second marriage and he still lives at home. I have two sons-in-law that I get on well with, six grandsons, two granddaughters, and three great-granddaughters. I keep them all in my prayers and often have their names in my God box.

My husband is a great supporter of my service to Al-Anon and he has come with me to this International Al-Anon General Service Meeting as my guest. On the day we arrive I have four daughters, one of whom has a drug and alcohol problem. Another daughter has cut herself off from the family. One daughter is a member of Al-Anon. The other daughter is doing well. I have a son from my second marriage and he still lives at home. I have two sons-in-law that I get on well with, six grandsons, two granddaughters, and three great-granddaughters. I keep them all in my prayers and often have their names in my God box.

To me the purpose of meditation and prayer is to improve my conscious contact with God, with His wisdom, with His love, and with His will for my life. I have attended church since my spiritual awakening and, when I hear the sermon, I ask myself, how would I apply this in the Al-Anon way?

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A Summary of Al-Anon’s History

Al-Anon meetings are held in over 110 countries. There is a total of 24,641 Al-Anon groups and 1,778 Alateen groups worldwide.
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This Summary may be photocopied, translated, and distributed in your area as needed.