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

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**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 insure that they be heard.
6. The Conference acknowledges the primary administrative responsibility of the Trustees.
7. The Trustees have legal rights while the rights of the Conference are traditional.
8. The Board of Trustees delegates full authority for routine management of Al-Anon Headquarters to its executive committees.
9. Good personal leadership at all service levels is a necessity. In the field of world service the Board of Trustees assumes the primary leadership.
10. Service responsibility is balanced by carefully defined service authority and double-headed management is avoided.
11. The World Service Office is composed of selected committees, executives and staff members.
12. The spiritual foundation for Al-Anon’s world services is contained in the General Warranties of the Conference, Article 12 of the Charter.

## GENERAL WARRANTIES OF THE CONFERENCE

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.

# ATTENDANCE

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.

## Denmark

Dorte P.

## Finland

Paivi K.  
Pirjo K.

## Germany

Hartmut G.  
Inga V.

## Iceland

Bergljot J.  
Sigurlin G.

## Germany

Hartmut G.  
Inga V.

## Iceland

Bergljot J.  
Sigurlin G.

## Mexico

María del Carmen R.  
Nydia Julia M.

## New Zealand

Helen A.  
Jenny H.

## Norway

Siri A.

## 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

Belgium (French-speaking)

Colombia

Costa Rica

France

Guatemala

Italy

Japan

Korea

Nicaragua

Netherlands

Paraguay

Peru

Portugal

Spain

Switzerland (French-speaking)

Sweden

Uruguay

Venezuela

# OPENING SESSION

## ROLL CALL AND FLAG CEREMONY

*Doreen D., Chairperson, International Coordination Committee (ICC)*

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.

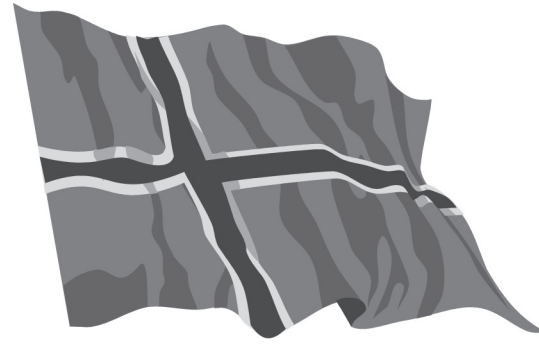
Doreen explained that subsequent motions would be pre-

sented 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.



## 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.

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.

It is my responsibility to use my experiences as I commit to the Twelfth Step and actively participate to fulfill our main purpose, “to seek the best way to carry the Al-Anon message of recovery to families and friends of alcoholics.” There is a wise and logical sequence in the Twelve Steps – going from the powerlessness in Step One to the spiritual awakening in Step Twelve when we are finally ready to carry the message to others.

I cannot give away anything that I do not have. To gain and express trust, I have to trust.

Step Two invited me to develop trust in a Higher Power and I learned to trust the process as my Higher Power guided me through the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts of Service.

When I came to Al-Anon, I had a visual dysfunction. I saw everything in shades of dark gray. My Monday Al-Anon meetings were my eye medicine. I could sense a red radiance

of love glowing from the member chairing my third meeting. At the next meeting I could see the Group Representative colored in green and another member in bright yellow. They all had something to give me.

I was colored in dark gray until I realized that even the dark gray color was something I had created myself. I had used so many crayons, pens, and pencils painting myself, one layer on top of the other, until the mixture became a mess of gray and black. I had to scratch off layer by layer as I was working the Steps, and finally I was able to find a rainbow glowing underneath my surface. I was developing.

When the rainbow started appearing, I was able to trust myself. I now know I had the colors I needed to continue my journey. I had my spiritual awakening as promised in Step Twelve and I was ready to give away what I had been given. I developed trust in myself and soon I had the first experience of being trusted by others.

I became a trusted servant. What a wonderful expression that is! I was given the opportunity to see that I am even more than a co-creator of my own life. I am also a part of my relationships and a part of the Al-Anon fellowship. I make a difference.

I participated in my group and in my district. Later I became a Trustee and my perspective was growing and adding new colors to my rainbow. 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 come forward 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.



# GENERAL SESSIONS

## LEADERSHIP AND FORWARD THINKING

Jenny H., New Zealand

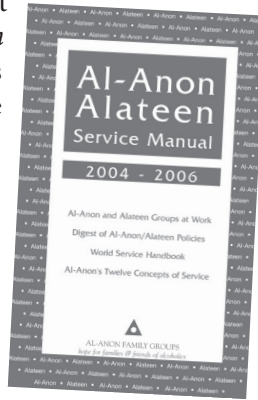
When I first read the topic of this presentation, I immediately thought of the slightly modified essay, "Leadership," written by Bill W. and found in the text of Concept Nine, *2004-2006 Al-Anon Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27). This essay is so informative and helpful. The Concepts of Service really 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' experience 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 disturbed 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 all incoming personnel, and the best possible relations 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, vision, and special skills make them capable of dealing with every assignment, 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 introduced. 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 Concept a month for the topic 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 responsi-

bility 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. Then, I went to the 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 slowly been implemented.

Again, in the text 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" (page 173). I have found it necessary to consult the full Board about all matters before we made decisions. This I thought would create unity and give me a clear conscience.

"Nothing, however, can be more hampering to good leadership than opposition for opposition's sake alone. 'Let's have it our way or no way at all' is often powered by visionless pride or a gripe" (page 174). Unresolved issues can create gripes and affect working relationships in personal lives and in Al-Anon. "Give and take" is very important in relationships with everyone. Compromise is hard, but it can be beneficial in what appears to be the right direction. We cannot always compromise and it maybe necessary to stick firm to our own convictions. Discrimination and timing are needed in all situations.

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 take time for clarity to come. 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 had not 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 another; 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 now 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 Committee 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. This 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 Chairperson. 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 Office Manager, as the office 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



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 committees. "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!

## 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 or 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 part, and I did not 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 means to have 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 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 well-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 public outreach for my group, I cannot remain anonymous. Otherwise, the editorial staff of the magazine or the TV or radio station could not call me





back or reach me. Pointing out the meaning of our Eleventh Tradition to the magazine or station, we ask that they be careful with the information they have. I can take care of the anonymity of my family, as far as they want.

To me, our Twelfth Tradition gives the most important aspects of anonymity. "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities." This means to me that nobody is allowed to get an advantage at our fellowship's expense, to push oneself to the front, or to do business in the name of Al-Anon to his own purpose. We become members of the worldwide fellowship of Al-Anon. We strive for recovery, completely unconcerned about what we do outside of Al-Anon or what other members may do. We share a common problem — alcoholism. That is the important issue. By keeping the focus on the program, no one person can ever become the voice of Al-Anon. If they have forceful personalities or all the prestige in the world, that doesn't matter in Al-Anon. However, this principle only works if we understand the meaning of placing principles above personalities. The suggestions in *Paths to Recovery--Al-Anon's Steps, Traditions, and Concepts of Service* (B-24) on how to work with the Twelfth Tradition, was a great help to me. Actually, it always is the same: We share experiences and try to find out, with an inventory of ourselves, how to do this.

I really wonder if I am able to listen impartially. Do I disregard anyone for not sharing my opinion? Do I place a group member on a pedestal; or do I place myself above others, because I have been in Al-Anon such a long time?

Or, do I use Al-Anon in order to announce my own plans, to offer or to bring products or my service to market or even put forth my ideologies or religion? How do we inform the group members about our principle of anonymity and are we doing this regularly?

After all, it is important always to remember that we are human beings with defects of character. We need to ask, again and again, am I sticking to myself in my sharings, am I trying to turn others in a particular direction, am I a know-it-all, or do I think I am ahead of the others with my special experiences or abilities? Am I willing to sustain the decision of the group conscience?

For all intents and purposes, anonymity is a spiritual basic position. It is humility and willingness to commit myself to serving a purpose without reward. By living this spiritual principle, we can support our fellowship, understand the comprehensive gift of our spiritual basis, and be able to experience serenity, for sure.

## Discussion:

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 children, 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 given 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 even 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."

## SPONSORSHIP

Maria del Carman R., Mexico

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 is 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 umbilical cord 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 significance.

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 up the fruit and, of course, I was included in this 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 he did not tell me this with words, but he did show it to me with actions. The love I discovered for myself has per-



Sponsorship is a confidential relationship between two Al-Anon members who benefit from sharing experience, strength, and hope. The intimate details exchanged strengthen the bonds of compassion, acceptance, and understanding. This private relationship is focused on the Al-Anon principles. Making a commitment to this special relationship, or letting go of the relationship, is a personal choice.

Sponsorship is:

- A relationship built on equality, anonymity, and trust
- An opportunity for growth — for both the Sponsee and the Sponsor
- A benefit at any stage of recovery
- A commitment to practice healthy communication — not based on intimidation or demands
- An agreement to recover and grow together; not to struggle in isolation
- An opportunity for self-discovery; not a teacher-pupil relationship
- An experience based on unconditional love, not shame or judgment
- A spiritual relationship with no strings attached
- A one-to-one relationship; not an exclusive club

- Trying to freely give time to the relationship
- Continuing to work on their own recovery
- Comfortable to be with; encouraging, not pushy
- Open minded listeners
- Equal partners in recovery
- Able to listen without giving advice
- A recovery resource for learning how to use the Al-Anon principles.

It is important to recognize that relationships sometimes change as we grow in Al-Anon. In order to continue growing, it may become necessary to change Sponsors. Sponsorship is not a lifelong commitment; letting go is not a sign of failure. Additional information on sponsorship can be found in *Sponsorship: What It's All About* (P-31) and *Service Sponsorship—Working Smarter, Not Harder* (P-88).

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mitted 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 university professors of such international renown as Rigoberta Menchu; a Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1992; the former President from Panama, Mireya Moscoso, and others who were all sharing their experiences of life. Just the feeling of equality and courage that I have learned in Al-Anon made it possible to live my life in a very special way.

Nowadays, when I try to apply what I have learned in Al-Anon, I am given the opportunity to cross horizons that I never thought I could achieve: giving national service, having the courage to share these values with other people; representing our country at three World Service Conferences; having the opportunity to visit Lois’ home in April of last year; touching the first desk on which our fellowship was born 55 years ago. All of this I owe to God and to the love our co-founders poured out so generously while nurturing our fellowship. As Benjamin Franklin said, “If you would be loved, love, and be loveable,” (*Courage to Change* [B-16], page 194).

Thank you very much for permitting me this participation, which I will keep so deep in my heart forever.

## Discussion

After the speaker shared how she had been sponsored in different ways in her life before coming to Al-Anon it was agreed there are many types of sponsorship. A Sponsor can be appointed to support individual Delegates to the World Service Conference. Trustees are also given a Sponsor. Alateen groups need Group Sponsors. Districts can sponsor other districts. Groups can sponsor other groups. As individuals or as a group, we can sponsor a professional. You can invite them to a speaker or open meeting or provide them with literature and schedules of meetings. One member shared that, when her Sponsor went to service meetings, she would say, “could you pick me up at whatever time and

bring along some biscuits.” Her Sponsor also nominated her for some service positions, to which she said, “Okay, I can do it.”

Two questions that each Al-Anon member should ask himself or herself are, “How many can I sponsor?” Am I worried about what they will feel if I say no?”

As a Sponsor, communication is important; stay connected in some way, by phone, e-mail, letters, etc. Encourage sponsees to take on simple service jobs at first, such as making coffee or setting up chairs. One member said, “Every job I’ve had in service I was pushed into. I didn’t think I could do it.” It is important to let the sponsee 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.

A few structures do not use the word sponsorship, because it sounds too financial. One uses the word guidance instead.

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 pioneers and that somehow that gives them more credibility. 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](http://www.al-anon.org/members) and put in the name of your group followed by AFG. Also, there are sections in the 2005

## SELF-SUPPORT

Bergljot J., Iceland

Greetings to you all! My name is Njóra 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 for the newcomer and long-time member as well, unless there is unity and the birds in the nest take care of the nest. This we do by following the Seventh Tradition, as well as all the other Traditions. The Seventh Tradition does not deal with just the idea of financial sovereignty of the group. It also deals with the Al-Anon organization. It encompasses the very idea that our contribution is not for just the group, but for all levels of activities that deal with self-support.

On page 106 in the book, *How Al-Anon Works for Families & Friends of Alcoholics* (B-22), it says, “The Traditions are a set of guidelines that hold our program together.” Furthermore, that the Traditions “suggest ways to make group decisions that are in the best interest of all concerned and provide a structure that is based on spiritual principles.” The Twelve Steps are for our personal growth. The Traditions are meant to keep the groups healthy and united so they can be a place of healing; they are also a necessary part of our personal recovery.

Two years ago I took part in putting together a workshop in our area about the Traditions. Those of us who were in the preparation group decided to rely on what is written

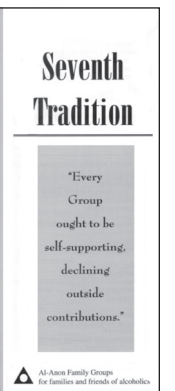
and 2006 *Conference Summary*, which give more details. In the Al-Anon spirit, the WSO will continue to talk about this type of sponsorship, so that members can be informed. This is also an ongoing topic in *The Forum*. It was advised at the WSO, the Group Services department is creating a bookmark about 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.

about the Traditions in *Paths to Recovery—Al-Anon’s Steps, Traditions, and Concepts of Service* (B-24) and the pamphlet called *Al-Anon’s Twelve Traditions Illustrated* (P-60). We read through it and then finally realized that you can apply the Traditions to all kinds of groups, one among them the very foundation in human society, the family.

This was a big revelation to me for, though I had worked with the Traditions before on group, area, and committee levels within the Al-Anon organization in Iceland, I had not applied their wisdom outside the program. Learning to use the Traditions within my family and in my circle of friends opened a new path of understanding and growth. I deeply recommend this approach to all of you who would like to explore new possibilities in healing and growth in the Al-Anon program.

The Seventh Tradition is exactly about that idea. It refers to the group taking responsibility for its financial support and, furthermore, for the financial support of the organization as a whole. In order for the group to be the community of healing and support that we get to know and rely on in Al-Anon, it has to be able, as a community, to take care of itself and have a firm foundation. In short, the group, whether an Al-Anon group, the family, or circle of friends, needs to be self-supporting, financially, emotionally, and spiritually.

In order for me to be fully able to share my experience as a volunteer and staff member at the Icelandic General Service Office, I feel I need to explain a little of my Al-Anon service history. I joined Al-Anon in the year of 1995. Early on, I became active within my own home group by preparing meetings, welcoming newcomers, and going to the local alcoholic rehabilitation center with Al-Anon introductory programs. In 1997, I became an Alateen Sponsor and served as such for one year. Apart from my stint as an Alateen Sponsor, I was mainly concerned with the service work





originating from my home group. It wasn't until I became a Group Representative in the year 2000 that I actually started to be aware of Al-Anon's service structure. Of course, there was the General Service Office, but how it was run had not concerned me a lot.

In the autumn of 2000, I became seriously ill and had to review my life. I had to give up my work as a school teacher and I am now living on an invalid pension. During this difficult 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 took part, and I still do, in our Literature Committee, translating Conference Approved Literature (CAL) from English to Icelandic. Then I became a volunteer 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 unrelenting in explaining things. As a volunteer, I just 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 Executive Committee, I realized the complexities of 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, and the archives. You have to bear in mind that in Iceland we do not have a well-established tradition of volunteering. Those organizations that get most volunteers are the humanitarian ones. For some reason, then, we have trouble getting volunteers to take part both within the groups and the service structure. I know about at least one Al-Anon group that folded this year because no one was prepared to do the basic things that are needed to keep a group going.

When we tried to use volunteers in the GSO, the Executive Committee soon realized that the organizing and guiding of volunteers needed more administration than they had expected. When I became a member of staff, I was formally appointed the role of supervising the volunteers. At that time, the volunteers manned the opening hours twice a week and I and the other member of staff, a former IAGSM Delegate, took care of other administrative duties at the GSO.

We learned many lessons from using volunteers in the office for day-to-day operations. We found volunteers needed much more management than the Executive Committee had realized. Before working in the office a volunteer really does have to have a working knowledge and a good understanding of the Twelve Traditions; otherwise, they are not able to answer letters, e-mails, and phone calls in the right Al-Anon spirit. In our experience they have to be supervised on a regular basis, and encouraged to find a Service Sponsor.

In the summer of 2004, I became the other paid staff member at the Icelandic GSO. As a staff member, I quickly encountered new challenges, one being that a lot of committee members have a lot of expectations and demands on the members of staff. So, I was trying to serve not only the Al-Anon groups on a national level, but also members of the service structure itself. For some reason, the staff member is supposed to know everything! It is a situation where it is really easy to revert to old personal patterns of over-managing. I learned a lot about both the Icelandic and the World Service Office service structure.

I was a member of staff for only eight months. The other member wanted to quit the job and I did not want to take on the entire position, bearing in mind that now I am an invalid with only a 50 percent work capacity. Also, at that time, I had become the Chairman of our Board of Trustees and the Chairman of our Literature Committee. My sponsor said jokingly that it was okay to promise my Higher Power that I would take part in our service structure, but not to do all the work. So I had to choose and decided that I would learn more being a Chairman of the Board of Trustees than being a staff member.

In short, I loved being a volunteer at the office, but, looking back, I have mixed feelings about being a member of staff. It was challenging, often difficult, and the demands on the staff member were not always fair. I really think staff members need a member on the Executive Committee who could serve as a service sponsor to lean on.

But now to self-support in the service structure. Those of us who have worked on the service structure level know that we, in all matters, refer to the Traditions and the Concepts of Service. All Al-Anon members know the Twelve Steps and, after some years, they begin to understand and know the Traditions on the group level, at least in Iceland. But, the

Concepts of Service are, like Lois said, "Al-Anon's best kept secret". I know that all of you here today are actively serving within your service structures. But how many of you have actively worked through each of the Concepts with another Al-Anon member like you work through the Steps? I mean reading them, discussing them, answering the questions in *Paths to Recovery--Al-Anon's Steps, Traditions, and Concepts of Service* (B-24), and trying to see how they apply to your service structure. If you haven't done it, then I urge you to do so. The other Delegate from Iceland and I have spent the last year doing so and, believe me, it was a journey of discovery. Again and again, we sighed and said, if only we had known!

Yes, if only we had known and understood the Concepts earlier on our service participation, a lot of issues that had occurred in our service structure might have been resolved differently and with less anxiety, anger, friction, and rather with love in Al-Anon.

I think one of the reasons we are having communication problems in some of our committees is that the members are not taking responsibility. Maybe, if committee members and others working within our service structure were more willing to apply the Concepts and the Traditions, there would be less friction. Maybe, if each committee member would take responsibility for his or her own actions and not expect the member of staff or even another committee to take the slack, there would be less friction. In reality, we have some Al-Anon members within our structure that end up with too much responsibility and too many roles. In some committees, there is only one person that actually keeps the committee going. They burn out and leave Al-Anon. Fortunately, there are also committees that work together in harmony and where each person's role is defined. One of our handicaps is that, apart from the role of Chairperson, the roles within the committees have not been clearly defined and, therefore, it often leaves the Chairperson with the whole responsibility. We're remedying this in Iceland by putting forward a motion at our next National Service Conference asking that the roles of Chairman, Vice Chairman, and Secretary in our committees be more clearly defined.

Some will say, why do you have to put it down on paper, things that seem so obvious? I know that in Al-Anon we try not to burden ourselves with rules and regulations, but still, it is necessary to have good working guidelines. On one hand, we must avoid the pitfall of some members taking on too much responsibility and burning out. On the other hand, we must somehow be able to make it clear to those serving in committees and within the service structure as a whole that they need to actually take responsibility for their service work.

Our First Tradition says, "Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity." This ties in with the Seventh Tradition

about self-support. I believe that we cannot be truly self-supporting unless we bear in mind that our common welfare should come first and by taking responsibility for our actions on the personal, group, and service level, we ensure that our unity prevails.

## Discussion

One member quoted from the *2004-2006 Al-Anon Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27). She said, "Warranty One tells us, 'Our attitude toward giving of time, compared with giving money, presents an interesting contrast. We give much time to Al-Anon activities for the sake of our groups, our Areas, and Al-Anon activities as a whole, as well as for our own protection and growth. We often take time from home duties or business to do Twelfth Step work. We do not think these sacrifices are unusual. We remember that people once gave their time to us as we struggled for understanding.'" For her, this Warranty teaches that self-support means self-care as well as leadership, that as we grow in knowledge of the service structure, we gain self-confidence and the ability to share it with others. Reading the literature helps explain how the structure works financially as well as spiritually.

Self-supporting usually refers to finances. But, as the discussion continued, there were some that shared that it also meant the "freedom to be me, freedom to know I can spend time doing Al-Anon work. . . . It is in giving that I have received. I think that is the message we are not giving to our members." Self-supporting also includes giving of time, such as doing the outreach work. Many members don't feel they have the time to give, with children, family, job, and home responsibilities. It doesn't have to be done alone, however.

As a Sponsor, invite someone to go with you to Al-Anon functions. They can go and listen and learn. Emphasize rotation on committees. That provides variety so members do not lose interest. Make it meaningful. Do an inventory of the current committees and their structures. Are they getting the job done? If not, consider creating work groups, task forces that focus on a specific purpose, and/or think tanks. Some members prefer to work from home. Use a telephone conference call whenever possible to eliminate travel expenses and save time. Shorten the commitment time for committee work. Some members are unable to make long-term commitments. Be certain to view any changes in light of the Concepts of Service, to be sure they are followed. This also helps familiarize members with the third Legacy of our program. Advertise on the Internet for the services you need. Use the skills of your members, such as teaching computer basics or learning another language, to encourage volunteers to serve. Using this, one member said, "We have become closer to each other." If members feel comfortable with one committee, consider rotating the chairperson

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,

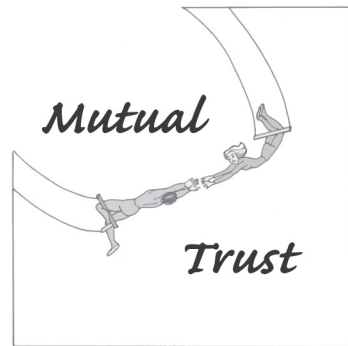
but not all structures need all committees. Create only those committees that are needed. One member said, "The spiritual concept of Concept Eleven is that many people are needed to do the work. Al-Anon can grow with more hands, not closed hands. We don't have to hold control, we can share control. Committees 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.



What would the meeting format look like? Possible topics that could be on the agenda

- History of each structure within the zone
- Statistics on alcoholism within each structure
- How to start a meeting/types of special focus
- Service Manual
- How to do different service activities
- Sponsor - workshops

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?

### Pros

- 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

1) What do we know about the World Service Office, General Service Offices and evolving structures' needs, 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

### 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

- Could piggyback on the learned experience of A.A. in our structures to see how Zonal meetings have worked within their service structure
- Could use the Iberoamerican meeting, started in the Latin countries, as a model
- Could expand the IAGSM to allow for zonal sharing
- Can share reports from Zonal meeting. An opportunity for more common sharing that World be continuous

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)

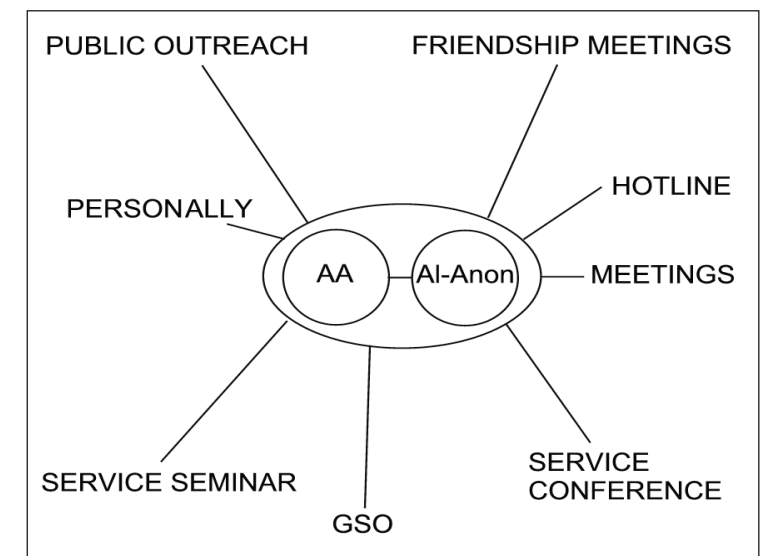
*Liselotte R.*

Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.), Al-Anon, and Alateen are live communities, organisms, 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 take 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.

An Al-Anon friend told me, I couldn't speak with my husband. But at this meeting, it was possible to speak with A.A. members.

In August, an A.A. group from another district invited us to a meeting, "Community between A.A. and Al-Anon." It was interesting again to notice that we can learn from each other. We work and share the same program and know nothing about each other. This A.A. group would like to deepen its contact with Al-Anon and will offer further activities. There is no Al-Anon group around this A.A. group. At a common meeting, our group suggested the following topic, which was supported by A.A.: "What do I know about A.A.? What do I know about Al-Anon?" Only a little knowledge exists about Al-Anon. We wanted to change this. The meeting was very informative. An A.A. member sent an article to the A.A. magazine, "Irgendwo" (Somewhere), about the cooperation with Al-Anon. Something came into motion. We now have a good situation between A.A. and Al-Anon.

### **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..

### **General Service Office (GSO)**

The cooperation between the GSO and Intergroup Office of A.A. in Zurich is good. We get minutes from the Chairman of their conference, receive information about activities and the Intergroup meetings. Once a year, the Intergroup Leader receives an invitation to our committee meeting held during the spring.

### **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 year. 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 begin on Saturday noon with the opening and finish with the closing meeting on Sunday at noon. All meetings are open. There are A.A., Al-Anon, and Alateen meetings. The topics are determined before in the district. A.A., Al-Anon, and Alateen members lead together 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 district and the venue. Al-Anon and Alateen cooperate in the organizing 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. We learn and speak 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 wife returned 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 was changing. 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 behave in that fashion." In some structures, A.A. pays for everything and all registration money goes to A.A. At times, they make a donation to Al-Anon in proportion to its participation. Education is very important when it comes to cooperation between the fellowships.

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.'s GSO and 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.'s 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 WSO 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 WSO 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, but it was strained. Now, Al-Anon can have presentations at A.A. 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 meeting.

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, "When I go to A.A. meetings, 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*, (P-24/27) under the sub-heading "Outside Contributions," it says, "Al-Anon and



Alateen groups do not accept contributions from outside the Al-Anon membership in order to adhere to the Seventh Tradition of full self-support.” Also, on page 76, regarding A.A. Conferences/Conventions, it says, “Contributions received from A.A. conferences/conventions that are offered to Al-Anon as acknowledgment of its participation in these functions may be accepted by the WSO or its service arms.” If A.A. offers to contribute to the WSO based on Al-Anon’s participation in an event, Al-Anon can accept. Otherwise, it cannot. Reference was made to guideline G-3, which is being rewritten because of the language around Alateen. It was suggested that a discussion about money should take place before the convention.

The WSO meets periodically with the A.A.’s GSO in New

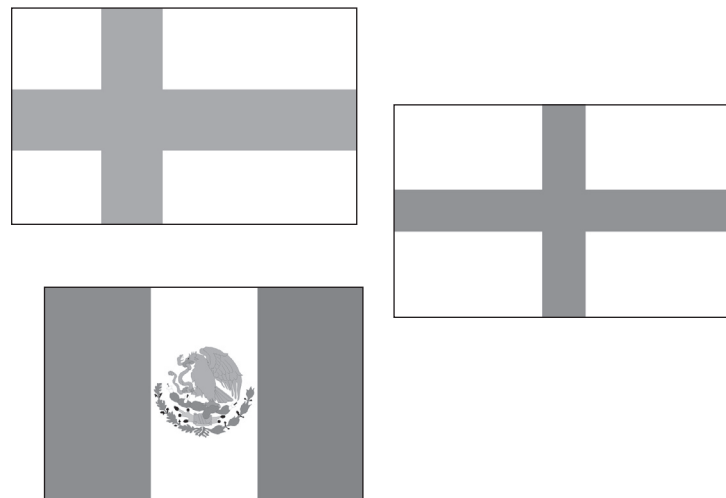
York. Recently a group met over guideline G-3. One item of discussion recently was the confusion in both fellowships about joint meetings. There are no joint meetings in Al-Anon or A.A.. There are open Al-Anon meetings or open A.A. meetings with participation, but there are no couples meetings, there are no joint ventures, there are no combined groups. Neither A.A. nor Al-Anon will register entities that try to register in that format. If they register, they must register with Al-Anon as an Al-Anon meeting or with A.A. as an A.A. meeting. Also, the officers of the meeting must be either A.A. or Al-Anon. There cannot be joint officers. Each fellowship has its own individual primary purpose. It was intended from the beginning that A.A. and Al-Anon always be separate.

## 2008 IAGSM BIDS

### Site Selection for 2008

Before the presentations and voting, the Associate Director of Member Services – International shared generally about the bids given to participants before the meeting. A list of countries, outside of the US, that have hosted an IAGSM was also distributed, UK & Eire, Belgium (Flemish-speaking), Germany, and Brazil.

The 2008 presentations were colorful and well done. All gave extensive information to show that their countries could host the event. Three structures made presentations: Finland, Mexico, and UK & Eire. A closed ballot was taken and by substantial unanimity it was determined that Finland would receive the bid. The WSO is the backup site in the event of an emergency.



## BRINGING HOME THE BENEFITS OF THE IAGSM

*Patricia R., Belgium (Flemish speaking)*

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 Delegate, who brought me everything from the last IAGSM. It was still early, so I sent her a text message at 7:45 A.M., because I was so thrilled, I had to talk to someone. She was

still sleeping, so I talked with her after some time. We talked about the things we brought back from the IAGSM.

At the annual conference for A.A., that is always inviting us together with Alateen, we had some kind of information exchange market about service work. At that “market,” we had two reports about the IAGSM, one small report with only the most important issues for the group member and one full report for the members who were seriously interested. Also, at each region, we have a file with information of what each service task is in our structure. From that file we made a very short skit, and several members took that with them to share in their groups.

We did this again at the beginning of this year, but the response was not as good compared to last year. We learned that the location to do something like this is very important. In 2005, everybody who listened to the speakers had to pass this “market.” This year that was not the case. There was no place next to the room where the speakers were, so not many people came to check out the “market,” although it was mentioned in the program.

Our Alateen group, connected to my home group, is organizing the annual Alateen day and as a result of the talks about fund-raising, the Alateen sponsor from our group asked at the meeting whether it would be possible for some group members to bake a cake. The cake was cut in pieces and sold at the meeting. We did this for several weeks and the money was used for the lunch at the Alateen day. The Alateens decided they wanted to have spaghetti for their lunch.

Also, in 2004, Alateen let loose balloons with cards to inform people about the existence of Alateen; with the national telephone number, address, their first name, age and the line: Problems because of someone else’s drinking? Alateen can help!

Another side of fundraising we did in 2005, we brought some special souvenirs from Brazil, and also part of the love gifts from the 2004 IAGSM and previous IAGSMs. We sold them to the members in service and at the district level when we went to visit them to tell them about the IAGSM. The members really appreciated this. Now, some of them also have something special from the IAGSM and the love gifts, which we brought to you this year, were also sold to our members as an extra way of fundraising.

One of the greatest achievements of the IAGSM for our structure and I think also for the structure of the Netherlands, is the cooperation between our two structures. For several years, we have a meeting every year concerning the literature, the printing of it and the translating. Our understanding and cooperation is getting better with every year and meeting. For example, first when we wanted to print a book we would only print 300 pieces. Now, we talk about this and we can print 600 books. We buy from each other the books and pamphlets, so we can print more and the cost will not increase. We also keep records of what is sold each year, and we try to keep stock for a maximum period of five years.

At the last IAGSM, we received from the Netherlands all the general sessions translated into Dutch, which is like Flemish. We translated the workshops and gave that to them. This year when we had our literature meeting, they also requested that we share what we received from the IAGSM, and we promised we would do that.

We are also planning to ask the alternate IAGSM 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 IPW, 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 tell 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” (equivalent), and did a PowerPoint presentation. Many of the ideas she got from the IAGSM are being implemented slowly.



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 that 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.”

## WORKSHOP REPORTBACKS

### WHAT IN THE WORLD IS A GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE/WORLD SERVICE OFFICE AND WHY DOES IT EXIST?

“Each structure organizes the groups according to the needs of the structure.”

*2004-2006 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual [P-24/27] page 56*

#### 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 previous 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 volunteers to take Twelfth-Step calls. Professional calls are diverted 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 population. 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: Siguolin 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 fellowship 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 members 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.*

### Questions asked prior to the discussion were:

What are we doing to insure the safety of our members?

What has our structure done to encourage Alateen sponsors?

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 International Al-Anon General Service Meeting (IAGSM) in 1997. At that time, they were thinking about doing background 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 discussions 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 requirements 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.

Included in some of the Area's guidelines are the recommendations that the background of each applicant be checked and that only one or two people at the Area level have access to the report information. The report information is limited to “pass or fail,” with no other information provided, and it is not discussed at the Area level. The report finally rests with the Alateen Coordinator or other person designated by the Area. If the applicant receives a “fail,” he or she can choose to contest it by filing an appeal with the appropriate person. The applicant may provide additional background information to clear up any mistakes in the report. If the applicant is still not satisfied with the result, then he or she can take the information to the Area Assembly; but in doing so, he or she must disclose the information contained in the original application for a background check. Then, it is not Al-Anon disclosing the information, but the member. Those who wish to continue as Alateen Group Sponsors are recertified each year by the Area. Those who do not wish to continue are removed from the Area's list. Anyone who is in service to Alateen has to go through the Area's certification process. The Area is responsible for certification, not the WSO. Anyone convicted of a felony is not eligible to serve as an Alateen Group Sponsor.

Alateen is for teens to share their experience, strength, and hope, not to solve all the problems of their life. Alateen provides tools and allows them to make choices.

In the breakout session, there were three questions posed to the members who attended this workshop.

### What are we doing to ensure the safety of our members?

Implementation of the minimum requirements for Alateen Group Sponsors by the WSO is one of the ways our members 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 at insurance for the Sponsors and meetings in case something should happen, such as damage to buildings or possibly 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 necessary 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 sponsorship submitted to the Areas by the WSO do not include mandatory reporting. Mandatory reporting means that those who work in 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 Alateen Group Sponsor. Alateens who are experiencing 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 meeting 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 regarding Alateen. They have an Alateen contact person in every group 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 meeting 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, posting 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 politics.

### Discussion

When the floor was opened for discussion, more information 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 personnel 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 something. 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 ‘if’ 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:

- Target a field of professionals once a year
- Have two open meetings per year
- Use a Web site
- Translate the “open letters” and send them
- Host a luncheon for professional and/or governmental heads with an outside guest professional speaker
- Make a short presentation and provide food; talk during the meal
- Meet with the guest speaker beforehand so he or she can be fully informed about Al-Anon; suggest asking certain questions to elicit potential problem of alcoholism
- Put together credible local research on the effects of alcoholism on family members
- Have an “evening with [a professional].” Send out invitations. Show video (AV-31) available from WSO

- 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

## 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 meet its 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

generated from the discussion. Selected committees:

- bring ideas and voices from a wide area
- can serve as an advisor to the board
- are partners of and a resource to the board
- stimulate fellowship through involvement of others
- generate ideas, filter them, and present them
- are not executive in nature
- do the work of volunteers
- make recommendations to the board

What is the relationship? They can:

- report to the board
- be attended by board members
- go to general service conferences

- report to the board via minutes
- work between meetings or only at meetings
- be assigned a task by the board.

Who participates? Structures all vary; some have all of their board at every committee meeting; some have one board member at each committee meeting. Some of the participants are identified as Trustees, volunteers, Delegates, staff, General Secretary, Chair of the Board, and assembly officers.

Why are selected committees necessary? They provide a forum for talking and listening, stimulate broader participation, keep in contact with group members, and can set the agenda for General Service Conferences. With more rotation, more ideas are generated and more volunteers are enlisted.

## 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.”

*2004-2006 Al-Anon Alateen Service Manual (P-24/27), page 13*

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 old.” “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

that can’t. A “taste of service” is a good way to introduce a newcomer to service, especially if time is problem. Sharing experience in 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

## 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

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.”

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



- Provide access to common critical information to allow informed decisions
- Be dependable
- Remember the purpose of Al-Anon and the role as a trusted servants at all levels
- Trust in a Higher Power
- Be a “role model”; it is a special responsibility
- Participate and create unity

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
- A new family of choice; not alone anymore

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 worldwide 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.

## DELEGATE’S CHOICE

Moderators – Claudette D. and Ric B., International Coordination Committee members

### WORLD SERVICE CONFERENCE

This topic generated an interesting discussion when one Delegate read two questions she received from members:

1. Why is the World Service Conference not represented by the world?
2. Why does Canada not have a General Service Office?

It was explained that history reveals the name World Service Office (WSO) and World Service Conference (WSC) were chosen by our cofounder Lois W. to differentiate Al-Anon from Alcoholics Anonymous’ General Service Conference and A.A. General Service Office.

The World Service Conference is the senior Conference. It is the oldest Conference and is the largest Conference with 97 participants. Many of the structures accept the actions of the WSC as group conscience for their structures. Many outside the US and Canada use the *WSO Service Manual* as a guide. Other structures have their own Conferences and their own *Service Manuals*. Structures outside the U.S. and Canada can come to the WSC with voice but not vote. The reason for this is that under the Al-Anon structure each group has one vote. To allow a group to vote in more than one structure would give it multiple votes.

The IAGSM is an opportunity for structures to meet and discuss with each other. However, no decisions are made at the IAGSM that are binding on the individual structures, as the IAGSM is not a governing body. Additionally, the WSC is not considered the governing body for worldwide Al-Anon. The only decision that the WSC makes that has an absolute impact on the world is what Conference Approved Literature will be produced. In the past, on two occasions, a discussion on the creation of literature within the structures took place at the IAGSM. Both discussions ended with the recommendation that structures would not produce original literature, as the majority of Delegates agreed they wanted the literature to remain uniform throughout the world. The World Service Conference holds the copyright for Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature and approves translation and reprint permission in other countries.

Canada does not have a General Service Office as Canada is a part of the WSC and therefore is under the World Service Office structure.

# SPIRITUAL SPEAKER

Lorraine S., Australia

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.

Mum got married again the next year and my 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 us in until it was over.

I met my sister's partner's cousin. I had heard about him. He lived the high life, drove a MG sports car, and was very out-going. I had never met anyone like him. Something I found out was that, during a drinking bout, he had climbed into the big Melbourne jail on a dare. The guards thought he was trying to stage a breakout. His only claim to fame was a full front-page story in the morning newspaper.

Anyway, we started going out and a month before I turned 18 we were married. I can remember thinking that he just needed someone to love him and all would be well. With my missionary attitude, I was the one that could do it. He had come from a broken home; his mother had married again to a good man. He had one brother who was very nice, but got killed when he was 29. His little sister died as a baby.

For the next ten years, things went from bad to worse. Even in the early days of our marriage he used to go out with his mates. There was never enough money; we had no possessions, lots of car crashes. Hotels closed at 10 o'clock, so he was never home. By then we had four daughters. I was very lonely and over that time my confidence and self-esteem diminished. For the first seven years, I didn't react; I just lost myself. The last three years, before I found Al-Anon,

I changed. I became aggressive, I argued and reacted, and things got worse very quickly. The only prayer I prayed to God was, "Please don't let me be pregnant." (Not a good way of contraception!)

I still went to church, and one day, desperate, I talked to the minister and he said every man drinks two bottles of beer each night, so that was no help. The church at that time did not give me the support and love that I needed. I had the girls christened because I thought that was the thing to do.

I came to Al-Anon in 1970, where my life changed and I got a new direction. For the next seven years, I changed, 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 so depressed and wanted to die; I had never felt so low even in the drinking days.

At this time, I had a very dramatic spiritual awakening. Up until that time I had missed Step Three in my recovery. I remember seeing things that all looked black and white, then all of a sudden there was color everywhere. This is where my spiritual journey began.

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 is a gift for you," filling my heart with compassion 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 my 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 faith and trust that works for me.

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 you 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!

## Sought through prayer:

To me, it is about communication. Some people say, "Why do I have to tell God? He knows everything anyway." You know, I have found that talking gives me clarity. When I hear myself expressing how I feel, what I need, or my disappointments, it makes more sense to me.

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 God in a box and only have Him out when I want to, but I have a conscious awareness about His presence at all times. There are those prayers that take longer to answer — those go in my God 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 with Him.

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 issues when Dad died and my sister and I were sent off to boarding 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 keep my mind on what was being said at the Al-Anon meeting instead of what might be happening outside or what was going to happen later in the day. 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, 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 prob-

lem. 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 it and call it good. Then when you can cope 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," and "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 visualize the person and keep handing him or her over until I have peace. I am often amazed the way God works things out, so much better than I could have even thought of. God speaks to me as a voice in my mind. Sometimes He says, "You are my precious child." Other times He speaks to me through people who give me a kind word or encouragement. 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 repeat the prayer over and over until I feel calmer, 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 extras to accomplish the end result. I have learned that, if I am willing, God supplies the power to carry things out.



**How I work the Eleventh Step:**

**Prayer model for in the morning:**

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, the first three Steps, and ask God to show me His will. I express gratitude many times during the day and say thank you for the life that I am living. I say thank you for my partner, for the Al-Anon program, for having a friend. I say thank you for the attitude of gratitude. I will feel more serene and grateful as I express being grateful. I listen to others instead of telling them all my troubles. I share experience, strength, and hope.

**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 pencil and paper nearby and every time something comes to mind, I just jot it down and deal with it later and come back to the meditation focus.

How each person meditates is an individual choice - what works best for each of us. But for the purpose of the exercise say, "For the purpose of this exercise, I'm going to believe that I'm in the presence of a very wise teacher." Visualize where you feel close to God, like a beach or a mountain, and begin to imagine that you are in that place and that God can meet you there.

**Taking Step Eleven:**

1. Find a place and time of day for a daily prayer time. (If this is new, share your difficulties in doing it: too busy, forgetting, or other things getting in the way.)
2. Pray that you will change, not that they will change to suit you.
3. Follow up on the insights in your prayer time; or, during the day, write down what you did or what happened to you in the process.
4. Choose a method of meditation that works for you - focus on a word or reading and reflect on it.
5. Ask God for knowledge of His will and then listen as He answers.
6. Visualization, a meeting place with God where you are healed from character defects.

**Conclusion:**

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 I would apply this in the Al-Anon way?

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.

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 in Honolulu on our way home, it will be our 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

I am happy that I asked God into my life and because of Him, my life is richer, full of peace and serenity. I am grateful for the things that have happened to me, more good things than I could ever have dreamed.

I would like to finish with the Prayer for Today from our Just for Today card:

*"Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."*

# A SUMMARY OF AL-ANON'S HISTORY

Structure	Year Al-Anon Started	Year of First Conference	Which Years Attended IAGSM	Name of National Newsletter	Year First Published
Argentina	1961	1985	1980, 86-2004	Amistad (Friendship)	1978
Australia	1952	1970	1980-2006	Austra-Link	1974
Belgium (Flemish)	1961	1982	1980-2006	Keepunt	1982
Belgium (French)	1965	1981	1980-2000	Sérénité	1976
Brazil	1966	1979	1980-2006	Boletim Al-Anon Informativo Nacional	1983
Colombia	1960	1992	2002	Renacimiento	1981
Costa Rica	1960	1997	1980-1988, 92, 2002, 2004	Compartamo	1979
Denmark	1974	1985	1986, 2006	Perspektiv	1988
Finland	1953	1968	1980-2006	Tietovain	1967
France	1962	1979	1980, 82, 86, 90-2004	La Chaine	1967
Germany	1967	1986	1980-2006	Intern	1981
Guatemala	---	---	---	---	---
Iceland	1972	1986	1984-2006	Hlekkurinn (The Link)	1987
Italy	1976	1995	1986, 1992-2002	Incontro (Meet Together)	1988
Japan	1979	1992	1982, 84, 88, 90, 92, 97	Hiroba (Inside Al-Anon)	1981
Korea	1982	1980	1997	---	---
Mexico	1965	1973	1980-90, 97, 2002-2006	Delta	1976
Netherlands	1976	1995	1980-2004	Stapsgevijs	1980
New Zealand	1954	1980	1980-2006	N.Z. Al-Anon Messenger	1963
Norway	1960	1987	1982-2006	Trinn For Trinn	1981
Paraguay	---	---	---	---	---
Peru	1965	2001	2004	---	1970
Portugal	---	---	---	---	---
Poland	1980	1997	1994-2000, 2006	Razem	1993
South Africa	1951	1963	1980, 82, 84, 88-2000, 2006	Unitas	1967
Spain	1972	1980	1980, 88, 90-97, 2000-2004	Serenidad	1980
Sweden	1976	1991	1988, 92-94	Al-Anon Kontakt	1986
Switzerland (French)	1963	1973	1997-2004	Sunray	1975
Switzerland (German)	1964	1973	1982-2006	M & F	1969
U.K. & Eire	1952	1970	1980-2006	News & Views	1963
Uruguay	1974	1997	2004	---	---
Venezuela	---	---	---	---	---
US & Canada	1951	1960	1980-2006	The Forum, Inside Al-Anon	1978

*Al-Anon meetings are held in over 130 countries. There are a total of 24,641 Al-Anon groups and 1,778 Alateen groups worldwide*

# GENERAL SERVICE OFFICES

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This Summary may be photocopied, translated, and distributed in your area as needed.