



**Fifteenth International
Al-Anon
General Services Meeting**

**Many Structures,
Many Languages,
One Purpose**

October 6-9, 2010
The Wyndham Virginia Beach Oceanfront
Virginia Beach, Virginia

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Twelve Concepts of Service

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

General Warranties of the Conference

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

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| 1. that only sufficient operating funds, including an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle; | 4. that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy; |
| 2. that no Conference member shall be placed in unqualified authority over other members; | 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. |
| 3. that all decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and whenever possible, by unanimity; | |

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 2010 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting:

Australia

Cheryl C.
Lois A.

Italy

Nadia M.
Luigi B.

UK & Eire

Ann-Marie W.
Maureen M.

Brazil

Nilce T.
Maria B.d.S.

New Zealand

Peter A.
Arnold H.

USA & Canada

Mary Ann R.
Roger C.

Denmark

Anja E. F.

Poland

Izabela B.

Finland

Mirja M.
Eija M.

South Africa

Pamela C.
Andrea B.

International Coordination Committee

Judy A.
Penny R.
Ric B.
Barbara O.
Marsha W.

Germany

Sebastian M.
Silke S.

Spain

Alejandra A.
Ma. Rosario R.

Iceland

Sigrídur T.
Johanna E.

Switzerland (German)

Madeleine B.
Theresa S.

The following structures were not able to send representation:

Argentina	Guatemala	Peru
Austria	Japan	Portugal
Belgium (Flemish-speaking)	Korea	Switzerland (French-speaking)
Belgium (French-Speaking)	Mexico	Sweden
Colombia	Nicaragua	Uruguay
Costa Rica	Netherlands	Venezuela
France	Paraguay	

Opening Session

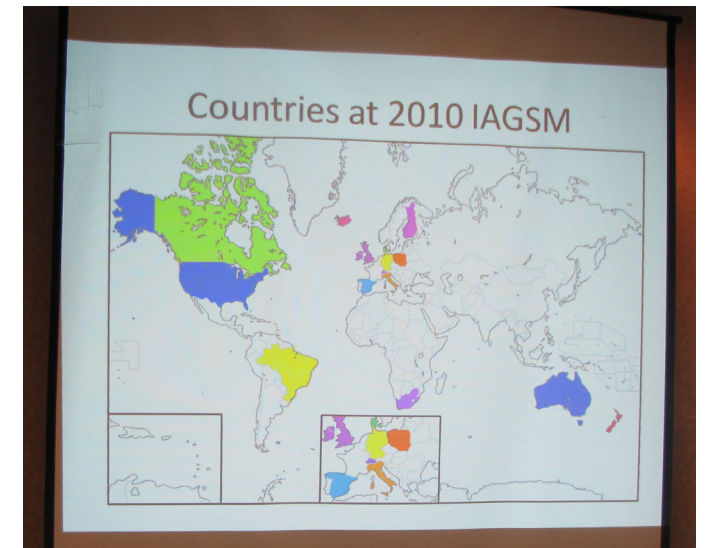
The 15th International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM) opened on Thursday, October 6, 2010 at the Wyndham Hotel in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Representatives from 14 structures were welcomed warmly by Judy A., Chairperson of the World Service Office (WSO) International Coordination Committee (ICC), saying, "We are here today in order to share from many structures, many languages, but with one purpose."

The night before the meeting began, International Representatives gathered for dinner. After the meal, the ICC Chairperson asked the Delegates to introduce themselves. It was immediately apparent that worldwide Al-Anon was represented in the room as the various Delegates shared their thoughts about being there as well as a few facts about their structures.

On the following morning, the ICC Chairperson introduced the keynote speaker, Nadia M. from Italy, who shared a moving message on the IAGSM theme that emphasized unity and diversity.

Throughout this three day IAGSM, each session opened and closed with a representative reciting the Serenity Prayer in the language of their country. This brought everyone a greater sense of the reality that the worldwide unity of Al-Anon is diverse and has no barriers.

Mary Ann R., Chairperson of the WSO Board of Trustees, welcomed Delegates on behalf of the Board of Trustees (BOT) to the city where the World Service Office



(WSO) is located. She remembered the warmth she felt at her first IAGSM in Finland and hoped the Delegates would find that same warmth here. She said, "I realized in the sharings at the meeting last night how comfortable we all were. There are commonalities we all face. While we are each different and have different names, the issues are similar. Many structures look like the US and Canada did 30-40 years ago – evolving structures with no literature and struggling." Among our commonalities, she said, are that "people care, we all have one purpose, and we have all learned to work together."

Roll Call and Flag Ceremony

Roll call at the 2010 IAGSM included a flag ceremony. The Chairperson invited each country's Delegates to place their flag in its holder on the dais and to place a pin on a worldwide map marking the geographic location of their country's GSO. A row of flags set on the other side of the podium represented those GSOs that could not be in attendance but were with us in spirit.



Voting Procedures

Discussion and voting procedures to be used at this meeting were explained. By consensus members decided that voting would be either by a show of hands or by written ballot depending on the motion. The next order of business was to decide whether a simple majority or a

two-thirds majority would constitute substantial unanimity. It was determined that two-thirds majority would be substantial unanimity. The procedure for submitting motions was then explained.

Keynote Speaker

Many Structures, Many Languages, One Purpose

Nadia M., Italy

My dear Al-Anon friends, when meditating for guidance to prepare my talk on this topic, two words came to my mind: “diversity” and “unity” along with two questions.

The first question was: “What did ‘diversity’ mean in alcoholism, my family’s disease? When did I start to feel different?”

Diversity surprised me very early in my childhood, when my brother’s and my struggles and questions could not find answers from our parents who, coming from alcoholic homes, had serious difficulties with open communication and with sharing feelings. Even if we spoke the same idioms, our language was different and alcoholic attitudes divided us from the beginning. I felt different. Different meant wrong and I did not understand why.

When a young dear person, very close to my heart, was discovered to be attracted to people of the same sex, the shock was absolute. We tightened in a desperate hug, while he was sent to a psychiatric center to become “normal.” At that time, I discovered that by being different you can easily turn out to be a non-person and that diversity is punished.

Later, alcoholism exploded in my life with its disruptive capacity of separating. Feeling different became for me a defense weapon to justify my solitude and emptiness. It was then “someone’s difference” took on the meaning of “my feeling distant,” while I was struggling inside to reconnect. It was the same wrong feeling I experienced with diversity in my family’s active disease of alcoholism.

Now, I am asking myself, “How can diversity become, in Al-Anon/Alateen, an essential tool of our unity?” Since the beginning, in my home group, I have been sitting close to and sharing with totally different people. I felt safe. The desire to get what they had cancelled the perception of our visible differences while I was appreciating the absolute similarity of our feelings. As we “shared as equals,” this aspect of anonymity was helping me in the beginning to accept and love others as they are.

Later, the principles embodied in our Traditions, such as “common welfare” and the invitation to let “a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience,” sustained me in starting to work with others, with the purpose of carrying the Al-Anon message.

In service work differences not only surface, but they



are welcomed, as we want to “tap the abundant resources of Al-Anon Family Groups.” But if in our meetings the old alcoholic attitude of “we versus them” persists, unity can hardly be preserved. Like in the alcoholic home, when diversity becomes a threat, fear arises, and soon the refusal of different opinions switches to the refusal of the person who carries the idea. Here I understand that we need to practice personally a continuous personal Tenth Step and regular and thorough group inventories to agree that “different” doesn’t mean “divided.”

What protects me best at this stage are the Twelve Concepts of Service, enhancing the value of diversity in the principles of delegated responsibility and authority, awareness of roles, leadership, and rights of decision, petition and appeal, while unity is underlined by principles such as trust, ultimate responsibility and authority, participation, unanimity, and prudence. In Al-Anon we understand that diversity and unity can exist together and be a great opportunity, if we honor our three Legacies and if we work for the same purpose first.

It is especially as an IAGSM Delegate that I can appreciate what “Many Structures, Many Languages, One Purpose” really means. I was frightened at my first task in 2008 at the 2nd European Talk (a service meeting for countries in Europe) and immediately after at the 14th IAGSM in Finland. I thought that we had so few similarities with such different and distant cultures, but I was definitely wrong! Only by participating, did I understand that our cofounder’s dream was there in front of me - the expression of a worldwide fellowship, alive and in action. At an IAGSM presentation meeting in Italy one question was, “What problems do you discuss at the IAGSM? What is Italy’s position in regard to other structures?” I understood the question because this was my attitude before,

but now I can reply that at the IAGSM we do not discuss problems. We share solutions and tools and Italy is one of the many existing structures in the world without any ranking.

In April 2009, I participated with the 67 Delegates from across the US and Canada, the World Service Office (WSO) Board of Trustees, the Executive Committee, our WSO staff, and other International Representatives at the 49th World Service Conference (WSC). Even with significant differences due to geographical and cultural origins, a common purpose and the comprehension of the different roles and responsibilities toward our worldwide fellowship tied us together and made our days powerful and smooth at the same time. At the WSC I saw the Concepts at work. It is now easier for me to understand how we can build shared leadership and what we can achieve through a conscious learning process. The sessions on “Anonymity”; “Member Contributions”; “Conflict Resolution”; and others are now an asset that the structure I belong to can also utilize. Something has already been done and it was at our Conference this year with the presentation on “Responsibility.”

The visit to our WSO was very touching and a spiritual high. When looking at the two rows of WSO Volunteers welcoming each of us with a hug at the entrance, I couldn’t imagine that they spoke the words that I’ll never forget. The words were “Welcome Home!” Al-Anon is home for anybody who wants this program, no matter what structure or language, but with the same purpose.

The European Zonal Meeting is the place where all the European organizations, even those just born or emerging, are looking for room to share and to grow. Last year in Essen, Germany the 15 attending countries, with the help of our WSO International Coordination Committee, developed an enthusiastic and alive meeting from which new cooperation and ideas are arising. It has been delightful for our National Conference to have our Slovenian friends with us, as well as for the Italian IAGSM Delegates being hosted by the Spanish Conference. Our languages are different, but we all speak “Al-Anonese.” It is our common language especially because we **want** to speak and to understand it.

Where language really makes the difference is when translating Conference Approved Literature (CAL). Our WSO publishes each piece of literature in English, Spanish, and French; I feel mostly grateful when I realize that we can

spread our message also in languages like Farsi, Chinese, Zulu, and many others. In Italy we dedicate a huge amount of time and effort to translations. We are proud of having translated most of our publications and all this was and is possible thanks to generous and very dedicated Al-Anon volunteers. Our Literature Committee is continuously looking for responsible, accurate, and adequate translations with the objective of offering our members the best and of avoiding that our unique message becomes confused, weakened, or diluted. A glossary for translators and revisers has been created to guarantee continuity and guidance. During our Committee meetings we spend much time sharing about doubtful or controversial terms and this is not only productive for the end result but also for unity and for our personal growth.

Al-Anon is worldwide, united through literature and service. As an IAGSM Delegate, an important contribution is to spend much effort and time in translating international materials, therefore giving others in my structure the opportunity to stay in touch and updated with our global culture and experience. Special attention is given to the translation of the WSO *Service Manual*, which was adopted by our National Conference in 1998, although there are differences between ours and that of the World Service Conference.

Maybe that was a premature decision, especially because the study of the Twelve Concepts of Service is only a very recent story in our groups. Almost every year the proposal for a national service manual is presented to the Conference. For the time being, the Conference’s decision is that we believe in this *Service Manual*, as it expresses the widest and oldest Al-Anon/Alateen’s group conscience in the world. Maybe not all the aspects or the issues described are familiar to us yet, but we prefer the benefit of a tool that gives us the most advanced insight, vision, and perspective.

If we provide ourselves with the right tools for communication and for comprehension and if we presume goodwill, trust each other and a loving God, differences are not so important and we can work together to reach the one purpose which is the same for all at this IAGSM: “...seek the best way to carry the Al-Anon message of recovery to families and friends of alcoholics amidst cultural and language differences.”

I thank God, the structure I belong to, and you all for the honor of being here today.

General Sessions

Preparation for Strategic Planning

Nilce R., Brazil

First of all, I would like to thank God, the World Service Office (WSO), and Brazil's Board of Trustees for having confidence in me and giving me the opportunity to be here. Now, I would like to talk about our concept of strategic planning. A strategic plan represents the organization of the work. It is also the organization of actions based on a vision and mission, in our case Tradition Five, taking into consideration some important items:

- Goals. (what we want to do)
- Time to achieve goals. (short term, middle term, and long term)
- Why we want to do it?
- Who will do it? (the involvement of leaders and members)
- Evaluation of results. (adjustment of goals and time)

Brazil can be compared to a continent for its size, as well as for its cultural and information diversity. Al-Anon's service structure in Brazil started officially in 1973, but only in 1979 did the first Conference take place. We needed to organize the service office structure, because we needed to liaise with the WSO, and also take care of the translation of Al-Anon literature.

We have today a Board of Trustees with nine members, including the General Secretary. The Board of Trustees has four acting committees connected to the management. They are the Executive, Finance, Nominating, and Policy Committees. Brazil also has seven committees related to the Al-Anon program, which are Alateen, Conference, Outreach [Public Information (PI), Cooperating with the Professional Community (CPC), and Institutions], International, Literature, Regional Service Seminars, and Group Service Committees. Our office publishes a quarterly journal with information on service, as well as motivational pieces with regard to service work.

Brazil's GSO has had its own headquarters since 1996. It employs six people; two of them are members of the program, and four are administrative employees. The General Secretary is also a paid employee, who is appointed every year at the Board of Trustees' Annual Meeting. Our GSO also has three contractors for accounting, data processing, and cleaning/maintenance services.

The implementation of a strategic plan in Brazil was a long process. In 2006, when the 13th IAGSM took place in the United States, the theme "Al-Anon Family Groups

Worldwide: Creating a Universal Culture of Trust" was discussed. After the report from this meeting was shared by the IAGSM Delegate, some things started to change within our service structure. After that, in 2008, during the 14th IAGSM, the presentation on the topic "Strategic Planning" was extensively discussed during the meetings of our Board of Trustees.

For the 2009 Ibero-American meeting (service meeting for countries in South America), Brazil suggested the topic "Strategic Planning" and did the presentation during that meeting. Our Board continued many discussions on this topic until one of the Trustees decided to take this matter to the GSO management.

During our 32nd General Service Conference, the Board of Trustees decided that all the committees should be involved with the Board in the preparation of a strategic plan. It was established that the strategic plan for Brazil would involve all Areas. Its goal would be the strengthening of Al-Anon and Alateen in Brazil, where groups keep decreasing every year. Involving the groups through the Area leadership would mean involving them in the association's business management. After some studies, it was found that, in spite of some extensive outreach efforts, the groups were not as welcoming to newcomers as they should be. Outreach efforts were carried out by the groups and their members, and by the GSO through the General Secretary, as well as through the Internet.

After a quick survey, the first stage of Brazil's strategic plan was sent to the Areas' leadership. They were asked to think the plan over, use the tools available in the program, and perform their leadership role in their respective Areas. We detected the following challenges:

- Team awareness: At first, there was great difficulty in understanding a strategic plan as the basis for the association's business management.
- Difficult personalities of alcoholic family members when their character defects surface.
- Constant change in leadership and insistence of members in keeping their service positions.
- Time availability of members to get involved in Al-Anon's management.

The benefits are still under study, but in the short run we can state that the team awareness is improving as far as managing Al-Anon's business using the tools of the

program are concerned. As a consequence, the time availability of members for managing Al-Anon's business has improved in its overall quality. Integration in managing literature and Tradition Seven involving the Trustees, Committee Coordinators, and employees has increased.

At the moment, we are still waiting for a response from 21 Areas and six Al-Anon Information Services in Brazil. The preparation of a strategic plan targeted at the association's business and service management demands that the program be thoroughly practiced. Our Three Legacies can be used to make Al-Anon grow on a steady basis, thus promoting the personal growth of friends and families of alcoholics.

The preparation of a strategic plan requires determination. The establishment of such a plan also demands a lot of courage to face challenges and accept differences in the leadership. It also demands a commitment to develop, to share achievements and issues. The value of the preparation of a strategic plan for the development of Al-Anon services can be assessed in an honest and serious way, and we must gather the courage to conceive and implement it.

Our Traditions, in particular, should serve as our guides for this journey. They should not be seen as walls to isolate us from the world we live in. Today technology, information, and knowledge are at our disposal in a fast and easy way. However, the Al-Anon service structure in Brazil is getting weaker because we are afraid of risking new paths. Proof of that is that the number of service members has been decreasing as a consequence of a considerable number of groups that are closing, and poor attendance at Al-Anon meetings.

We could also mention a number of other factors; however, the most important is the lack of willingness to consider our greatest treasure – the three Legacies – with honesty and serenity. A strategic plan will always have the value we allow it to have. As long as the results of our common goal: "to reach the largest number of alcoholic friends and family members that suffer" remains true, we will always be able to spread the message of strength and hope that is part of the Al-Anon program.

It does not matter which leaders start, follow, or implement the plan. What really matters is that we all did it together, because together we can do it, and no one of us can be as good alone as we are when we are all together.

Discussion

IAGSM Delegates shared their structural experience on the topic of strategic planning.

One Delegate explained "We are having discussions at our national conference of how to improve our public outreach. This presentation shows that we can begin and we can practice working together. I love the conclusion that it doesn't matter who does the leading, following, or implementing; we all do it together."

Another Delegate shared that the term strategic planning is not being used in the structure. "We read about it—we even translated the 2008 IAGSM "Strategic Planning" presentation. It is a valuable idea just waiting for us to give it new life. It is because of suspicion of the words themselves, "planning, and long-term planning." A strategic plan doesn't seem new. The truth is that we need a strategic plan to build team awareness in order to overcome some of our difficulties. Our Board meetings are often tense and emotional and there is a lack of coordination and concerted development. Strategic planning could bring a certain balance and harmony."

A Delegate advised "We have discussed this planning after 2008. It is very difficult for our members to think about long-term planning beyond one year. This presentation is going to be used in the discussions in our Work Group as we prepare to start."

Another Delegate explained "As a GSO, we ran around fixing things and facing burn out by our leaders. Last year we got an outside person to come and help us. After two days, we came away with the outline of a plan. We identified areas that needed focus, how we could measure progress, and we created short, medium, and long-term goals. We put these ideas for a framework into a visual of a house within the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts. The Board of Trustees and the GSO are the foundation. The house has two main pillars, Public Outreach and Member Services, with three other portfolios, Policy and Procedures, Finance, and Literature identified as support portfolios which enable the other two to achieve their objectives. They will not have new projects as such but will continue the maintenance functions of their portfolios to support the fellowship and strengthen and grow through Public Outreach and Member Services. They are the two arms of the Al-Anon structure who need to regularly strategize new projects to grow and strengthen the fellowship. Our vision and mission are at the top of the house, the roof, for focus.

"With our vision and mission at the top to focus us in our planning sessions, the strategic questions: what, why, who, which resources, how, and when were asked and answered concerning Public Outreach and Member



Services. We identified the following as the primary projects in need of immediate attention in order to grow and strengthen Al-Anon: Public Outreach has the responsibility to gain NEW 'customers' for Al-Anon. However, we must never forget that our primary purpose is to provide help for those who reach out for it. Public Outreach has three main areas of approach to gain new members, i.e. everyone, everywhere who reaches out for help; families and friends of A.A. members; those we reach through partnerships in the professional rehab community; and families and friends of non-A.A. members."

"Member Services has the responsibility to serve the new members and to keep them in the fellowship as well as meet the needs of the existing members. We must always remember that our primary purpose is to provide recovery for those who come to meetings keeping in mind that we must not burden members early in recovery with demands to participate in service—service comes out in a full heart and as a response to gratitude, not out of obligation. Member Services Committees will debate the 'how.' The questions they will be asked are: what do we want to do? And how and what do we need to accomplish it? They will look at the shifting social environment; and then complete the project. It has worked for us at the GSO level. The next step is to introduce it to Areas and groups. It will take time."

Another Delegate explained the strategic planning process was applied by working on proposed amendments to their guidelines and their *Service Manual*. First, they gathered ideas over one year and then formed a committee that again checked the necessity and usefulness of the amendments. The amendments then went back to the groups with a two-year time frame to work with the new structure. Then the GSO's Conference approved the amendments which are now ready to put up on their Web site to be downloaded as a resource for members.

The WSO explained the World Service Office started

the strategic planning process in 2004 and met with a consultant. At a work weekend away from the WSO, four themes were developed which were sufficient for the Board of Trustees. Goals related to each theme were determined with measurable objectives and a timeline for reaching them. The objectives had to be accomplished in one year. A goal could take longer and span up to five years. "We are now told that long range (beyond three years) is not feasible any more. So, the WSO now does three-year goals. Our strategic plan is not set in stone but an evolving process. The Board of Trustees works on it quarterly during a planning day before the Board meeting. There are Work Groups for each theme. They work on a goal and its objectives. These sometimes need to be revised because they are not working. A strategic plan changes to meet needs. Experience suggests that the best results are to start with one goal and one or two objectives. The goal is kept over time but new objectives are added. We must be flexible in how we reach out to members. We need to be progressive and patient with members. A strategic plan can cause tension and we need to be patient to bring people along. It is a learning process. If you try to force acceptance when members are not ready, they will not cooperate. It is a process and will take time. In small structures, the Board would do the work. If there is a staff, they should be brought along with you. The Board would do the thinking and the staff would do the implementing."

Another Delegate shared their Board is now reconsidering working with a consultant after trying to work on a strategic plan for the last 18 months. "We are experts on living with alcoholism but not on strategic planning. We can not ask members to do this if we have not done it ourselves. We need a professional to tell us what we have right. We were all nurtured into service and we need to build on nurturing newcomers. It is good to hear how long it takes and gradually over time I think we will get over our fear of trying new things."

An ICC member shared that many in the fellowship view strategic planning with suspicion. Telling them we're working on a strategic plan is not helpful because they respond that it is not Al-Anon. Lois and the pioneers did a lot of it, but it was thought of as "thinking ahead." The WSO plan is a Board of Trustees plan so we do not try to sell it to fellowship. The Board kicks ideas around until it is clear that there is something they want to implement before rolling a project out to the fellowship."

One Delegate stated their structure is learning to talk about money. They have been thinking about it but were not able to talk about it and this created anxiety. "We think shortage so we do not do anything. With a strategic plan, we can work toward our goals and learn to talk in our structure about money and business."

Another Delegate shared that their Board is having a general conversation. A workshop is held during Board weekends to start working on a strategic plan. "Lois was not attached to any particular way of doing things but kept an eye on the goal. It would be valuable to develop a process for evaluating a strategic plan to see if the Board is achieving its goal and whether committees are working."

From another perspective a Delegate stated that planning helps the process of becoming clear on a particular issue and people feel less compelled to quarrel or become emotional. "Planning, properly handled and applied, could help us solve the crisis of personalities in our General Service Office. The idea of a plan is not a solution to all problems but helps on two fronts; the planning issue and the problems issue."

Finally a Delegate shared that strategic planning is non-existent for their structure. We have a mission, and we are clear on what we are about so some part of a plan is already in place. Strategic planning can become a means in itself by getting caught up in planning with no operational plan or implementation as the result. Planning is important, but a framework, a house that you move in and "know the roof is red," strengthens the foundation. We need a framework for our work. We need a strategic plan to secure that everyone in the fellowship has the same mission and vision – a necessity in our structure.

Although some members believe strategic planning is putting Al-Anon in a business light, strategic planning has created successful projects and activities such as an updated Web site, planning our 35th anniversary, and increased public outreach in our structure. Everything is strongly supported by the Board and Conference. Our plan is not framed in a real strategic plan way but our members have resources that make the plan become real. Activities in some Areas are alive while in other Areas they are not. The reason may be that they have ideas but when discussing plans, members start arguing and principles and purpose are forgotten."

Sharing Structure Successes or Challenges

Mirja M., Finland

Communication: Our Key to Understanding

I would like to begin with a brief description of the Finnish service structure. The first Al-Anon group started in Finland in 1953, fifty-seven years ago. The service structure, if there was any, was simple. After a modest start, activities and the number of groups grew quickly. In 1983 our own Handbook was created and a year later our structure experienced a vital change when the annual service meeting decided to adapt the WSO service model. The country was divided into Districts and service functions were united into one service body—a Board of Trustees elected by District Representatives at the General Service Conference. Our present structure is based on this model.

At the top are the groups, about 140 Al-Anon groups and two Alateen groups at the moment. Each group elects a Group Representative and an Alternate to take part in the District meetings.

Our country is divided into 15 Districts. We do not have Areas at all. The District meetings are held four times a year. The biggest Districts also have district committees. The annual District Meeting elects service officers and two District Representatives to represent their District in the annual General Service Conference. There is a two-day General Service Conference once a year that is held during a weekend in March.

The first day of Conference is dedicated to workshops. The General Service Conference elects ten Trustees from among the candidates proposed by the Districts and nominated by the Board of Trustees. Since there are 15 Districts and only ten Trustees, two Districts elect one candidate in order to get one candidate nominated to the Board. Each District gets its candidate onto the Board of Trustees in turn. Our Board of Trustees called Keskuspalvelu ry (General Service Association) is a registered association and the ten Trustees are legally members of the Association. The Executive Committee consisting of the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Secretary, and members are legally the Board of the Association.

The Board of Trustees is formed by the four members of the Executive Committee, the Chairpersons of all standing committees: Literature, Public Information, Alateen, and Magazine Editorial, and the two international coordinators i.e. IAGSM Delegate and Alternate

IAGSM Delegate. All Trustees are regional except the IAGSM Delegates who are Trustees at-Large. The General Secretary is the only paid full-time employee in our General Service Office. She participates in all Executive Committee and Board meetings and in the General Service Conference where she has a vote. The service term for all levels is two to four years.

Challenges

Since the huge change in the structure at the beginning of the 1980's there have been no other significant alterations. At the beginning of 2000, the Board of Trustees was faced with a communication problem. The new service people started to be discontented with the Board and the meetings. They did not know what they were supposed to do or what they were expected to do. It was also obvious that communication with the Districts and groups was bad or non-existent and that they did not know what the Board was doing.

In a search of solutions, the Board of Trustees nominated a Work Group to find ways to:

- Get District Representatives and Board members to know each other better
- Improve communication between the Board, Districts, and groups
- Help new people in service understand the service structure and their own service functions
- Improve Board meeting procedures

The Work Group held a "Development Day" as a result of which many new ideas and improvements were taken into use. We consider that this was a great success for our structure.

Results of the Development Day and benefits experienced

Based on the Work Group's proposal, the Board decided to arrange the General Service Conference separately from the National Convention which takes place with A.A. It was made into a compact two-day weekend Conference where the Board members and District Representatives got to know each other and had time to discuss problems in workshops. This created a feeling of solidarity, integrity and tightened connections with our DRs.

Another improvement and a new form of activity for us, is to organize a "get-acquainted" seminar for new servants. This weekend seminar is held in April after the General Service Conference with participation by all members of the Board of Trustees, both newly appointed and those leaving their post, the General Secretary, and chairpersons of committees. The goal of this seminar is to

share experience and knowledge from the senior servants to the new ones, and to guide and support the successors in their tasks so that everyone knows what their task is and what is expected from them and that the senior servant will be there as Service Sponsor whenever needed. Guidelines for all service functions are also available in our newly revised *Service Manual*.

Many efforts have been taken to make communication between the Board and Districts better and to support the District Representatives (DRs). In addition, District sponsorship was introduced. Board members were nominated as Sponsors of certain Districts with an obligation to keep contact with the DRs and visit the District meetings. A yearly DR "autumn seminar" was also started to widen interactive communication, to discuss matters, and plan the future.

The monthly magazine *Tietoavain* was also used for adding communication from the Board to groups and Districts by publishing the Chairperson's column in every issue and a column, "Now it is time to" informing members of deadlines or what is going on and what is recommended by committee chairs or other Board members. This is also an attempt to give direction to group activities.

One of the most criticized items was the course of the Board meetings. Board members came to meetings unprepared, the attachments were not delivered until the meeting so that decisions could not be made and were postponed to the next meeting. Time schedules were exceeded. The meetings are now disciplined and run smoothly within the timetable. Attachments are delivered two weeks before and a proposal for decision is required for each item needing a decision. Board meetings are usually held four times a year. If necessary, e-mail meetings can be held for urgent matters or matters of importance. Due to great distances in our country, travel costs eat a great deal of our budget so that an e-mail meeting is very handy sometimes. Use of Intranet which this spring was opened to all in service work and even to all members interested in additional information, has turned out to be an excellent communication tool.

Development—a continuous challenge

This success story is not quite what it looks like. All ideas for change or improvement were not born during one day. Many of them had been "in the air" for years, but there had not been courage enough to bring them through and the time was not yet mature for such large-scale changes.

These changes were a challenge to the Board, as our financial resources were short. The reformed General Service Conference and the two new seminars needed

more money and therefore also met with resistance. To our blessing the Board had a clear vision in the matter and the changes were approved. The strategy was to make an extra input to activities and growth instead of keeping the status quo which might have led to a fading of our fellowship.

Simultaneously with the "Development Day," the *Service Manual* was revised and the service terms were changed. The service term of the Executive Committee members (Board of the Association) is now three years. Other service terms are mainly two years but the Chairperson of a Selected Committee can be elected for one extra year.

Encouraged by the good results of the "Development Day" the General Service Conference this year decided that the second "Development Day" will be arranged in 2011 and nominated the work group. Challenges and problems still exist. In spite of the efforts made to improve communication to and from the Districts, there are still some Districts not responding to these efforts. Our economic situation also needs to be brought to a more stable level which means major changes in the financing system.

From our experience, the continuous development of the structure has been and is still most vital to Finnish Al-Anon. Therefore, the General Service Conference also made a brave decision to invest in public outreach in spite of our tight financial situation. We know that there are a lot of relatives and friends of alcoholics needing help, especially in the prevailing economic recession with increasing unemployment. We want to reach out to them as much as we can to do the job of the Twelfth Step.

Discussion

A Delegate shared some of the successes in their structure. The Delegate explained their structure uses the WSO as a model and where there are now workshops with the Board of Trustees out in the field. The synergy that has been created between the GSO and the membership is hugely successful. "We take the IAGSM to the fellowship in presentations. We tell them what is happening and about our strategic planning. They are amazed at how worldwide the fellowship is." An initiative from the Public Outreach Committee developed a generic calendar. This calendar has a monthly focus and a list of literature that can be purchased to prepare for that month's focus. "Looking at our strategic plan, we realize we are already implementing a lot and what can be done with no money. We now have a new indigenous pamphlet which took eight years to develop but we are now communicating with the right terminology. A new generation is coming with new ideas, and technology. As we continue opening our minds to new things, our structure is chang-

ing and it is marvellous to see."

Another Delegate advised that their GSO put together a pamphlet on its new structure in order to help the membership understand the structure.

"Successes in our structure are not carried on to new servants because of a problem with our system of communication between committees and the groups. Our Board of Trustees is taking on the challenge and trying to find solutions. One solution is for the Board to meet with Area Delegates once or twice a year for discussions and to build a common culture. Another action is the possibility for outgoing Coordinators to serve another year alongside the new Coordinators. Defining the mission and vision for Committees in order to establish their goal and the suggestion from one GSO to establish a development day to pair new servants with experienced ones to help them in their new service positions are ideas I heard here. Development of a checklist of procedures and guidelines for committees is planned for the future."

Another Delegate shared, "I have been a member for decades in a country with a good structure. Our potential was great and we worked on the structure and followed the *Service Manual* all we could. I came back 20 years later to the annual General Service meeting and they were voting to accept the "Big Book" as Conference Approved Literature with the idea that it would then be exported to the rest of the world. This motion failed by just one vote. That made me realize our structure has been deteriorating for quite some time. Our committees are filled with strong personalities that have not yet learned that it is about principles not personalities. The *Service Manual* is a magic book that gives us the possibility to make right what we did wrong—it is a path back and I am hoping we can take the path back to where we once were."

An ICC member shared some WSO and general Al-Anon successes. "One major thing we have done to eliminate the idea of 'us' and 'them' is to schedule a two to three hour World Service Conference orientation session for new Conference members where there is discussion on the questions: "What is the role of each person at the WSC? What does each do and why it is important?" In talking with the Delegates, we stress that we want everyone at the Conference to be successful and our goal is to give members the tools to make that happen. With this better understanding of roles and responsibilities, the WSC stays focused on the business at hand, but if a discussion gets off topic, Delegates now come to the microphone to remind everyone that we all want them to be a success. This is now reaching into the Areas where discussions are happening at Assemblies. GRs are hearing that we want them and everyone in service to be successful and they are discussing what that means.

“Sponsorship is something we had almost stopped talking about. Sponsorship is now being talked in terms of what sponsorship is, not negatively in the sense finger-pointing and not about what is wrong with pyramid or chains of sponsorship which can create a culture of fear. The WSO created a bookmark, *Sponsorship—Working Together to Recover* (M-78), to help groups talk about sponsorship in meetings. Some Areas hold workshops about sponsorship five to seven times a year and are seeing success with Sponsors understanding what is appropriate for a Sponsor to do and what isn’t.”

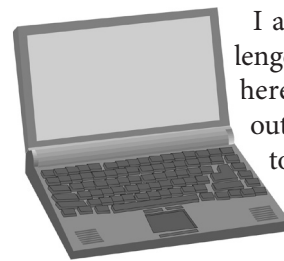
“Successes take care of themselves, but problems seem to be mounting in our structure.” One Delegate pointed out that this concern was expressed in order to get perspectives from other structures that have had similar issues. “We need to borrow tools and procedures from other structures’ experience, especially, who is responsible for what and why, in order to try to help people listen. There is confusion within our structure over the roles and responsibilities between the formal or legal part, as it pertains to the laws of the country, and the traditional part, that applies to the Al-Anon service structure. The legal entity has its own set of rules and statutes. It seems as though there is Al-Anon within Al-Anon. The Board members of the legal entity are experienced, longtime Al-Anon members who have worked for 20 years as volunteers and are very serious about the Legacies—especially the Traditions. The structure is not as familiar with the Concepts. They believe the Traditional entity has no authority. Some Board members are unwilling to listen to new ideas. Unless we are serious about change, we can lose what we have in the way of enthusiasm. We should be wise enough to change our mind. It is an important and delicate moment in our fellowship not to lose what we have achieved.”

Another Delegate reported that the structure’s adopting the WSO *Service Manual* was a premature choice. It was explained that the principles of the Concepts and Tradition Nine are still not clear to their members. Members are just recently beginning to study them. “The concepts of the ‘traditional’ and ‘legal’ are difficult to understand. It is critical to help members understand that organization in the groups has to be simple and service is an opportunity, but not everyone can discuss an issue because not everyone has full information. The idea of trusted servants still has to be understood and empowered in my structure. We continue to work on this.”

Finally a Delegate shared, “In our Conference we hold an open session to listen to issues in groups and service groups. Then at the next Conference we listen to what Areas are doing to solve their problems. The challenge is just listening and paying attention—that is our job.”

Technology in Iceland’s Service Structure

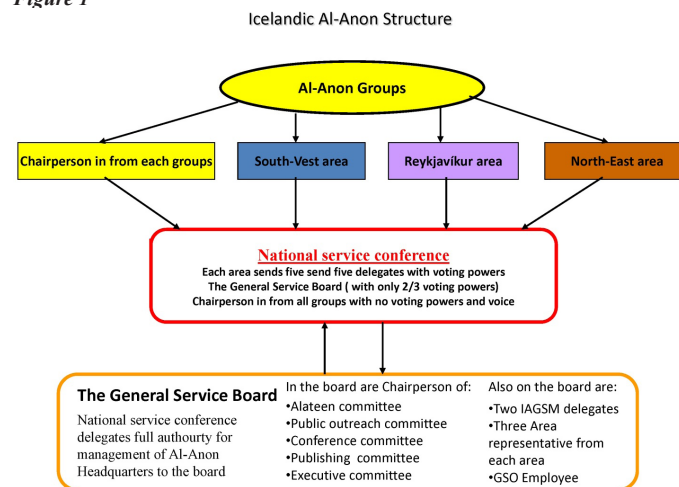
Sigríður T., Iceland



I am seriously technologically-challenged so I feel a bit awkward standing here. The person who prepared the outline of this presentation is not here today and I am supposed to put the meat on the bone. We’ll see!

I would like to start by giving you a brief description of Iceland’s service structure (see Figure 1). The Al-Anon groups are on the top because they are the members’ voice. Each group has its business meeting where group members discuss matters about the group and topics the group wants to send for discussion at the Area meeting. Each group has a Group Representative. Area meetings are held twice a year. One meeting is in the autumn, a few weeks after the National Service Conference, where the meeting discusses any motion passed at the Conference and other Conference topics that were discussed. A second meeting is held in the spring. At this meeting, five Delegates are elected to represent the Area in the National Service Conference. Topics and motions the groups want discussed at the next National Service Conference are decided.

Figure 1



The General Service Board is composed of ten volunteer members and one staff member (see Figure 1) and the National Service Conference Delegates give full authority for management of Al-Anon Headquarters to the Board.

GSO’s goal for using technology

Al-Anon is part of an ever-changing world. The General Service Office (GSO) goal is to use the newest

technology available with a low cost and in accordance with Al-Anon’s three Legacies—Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts of Service. It takes time to estimate and the technology has to meet our goal, be efficient, have cost benefits for the GSO, and be in accordance with the Traditions.

Benefits and challenges encountered

In 2008, we began to construct a new Web site that was launched in June 2009. The Web site is divided into three main areas (see Figure 2): Al-Anon, Alateen, and “Hlekkurinn,” our equivalent of *The Forum*. The Web site uses opportunities offered by the Internet. It helps us to reach out to the public and to professionals with general information about Al-Anon in Iceland. With the new Web site, the visits to it have increased. One of the big factors is that members can subscribe to it when new material is added. Another new feature is that members can order literature on-line. This has made it easier for members to obtain Al-Anon literature. One of the possibilities the GSO is working on now is to have a members’ area of the Web site where they can download guidelines and other important Al-Anon material to their computers. They

can subscribe to news from the fellowship. We are in the early stages of development of an e-Community as well.

E-mail may be the most important, unique method for communicating and developing relationships since the telephone. First of all, it is easy to use. People also find it familiar and safe because it is similar in many respects to writing letters. E-mail is an important means of communication in Iceland. A lot of our communication goes via e-mail which saves time in getting information to committee members and the general Al-Anon membership. A problem with e-mail in Iceland is that members are using their work e-mail address instead of creating their own personal e-mail address that they can use instead. The use of work e-mail addresses is truly questionable. Another downside we found was at the Board level. When members read, hear about, or are on a list that gets Board information, they sometimes e-mail countless others without knowing full information and it becomes chaotic.

Chat rooms or meetings listed on-line have never been inspected by the General Service Board. It refrains from that because of its risk. We do not use Skype. Hacking is so easy that if they can hack into large systems, they can hack into it in Iceland.

Figure 2



Discussion

Several structures have had requests from members to put Al-Anon on social networking sites. Delegates indicate there are concerns about how to protect anonymity. One structure has begun a Thought Force to consider the problem of anonymity. An ICC member advised the WSO has formed a Thought Force and the discussions are just beginning.

The World Service Office shared that the Policy Committee and World Service Conference addressed the issue of e-mail work addresses and this is in the “Digest of Al-Anon/Alateen Policies” section of the latest edition of the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*. While some employers allow this, caution is suggested. The issue is that if another member’s e-mail comes to your e-mail

address, it could violate anonymity. There are now a number of vendors who offer free e-mail accounts for personal use so it is suggested that members create their own. It is not a violation to be given one for that purpose but it could not be used for the IAGSM or by GSOs because that would be a business purpose.

The following are things the WSO is doing with technology and its experience of how easily some of them can be done.

Blogs and podcasts—Currently there are blogs on-line for the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts of Service. There are free programs that can be used, but someone who is technologically savvy is needed to set it up so it does not look generic. Once the program is set up, one staff member can do the posting. Postings can be done in

advance and scheduled to be seen on a certain date. Some of the WSO blogs (Traditions and Concepts) are on the Members' Web site with password protection.

Also the WSO now has podcasts on the Steps in English, French, and Spanish. A WSO staff person organizes the participants, usually three to four members, on a conference call. It was explained that special software is used to edit the sharings. The podcast is then posted on the WSO Web site. The series of podcasts available on the Public Outreach Web site can also be subscribed to through iTunes. Podcasts are not Conference Approved Literature (CAL).

GSOs are encouraged not to copy podcasts of public service announcements from the WSO Public Outreach Web site but instead set up a link from their site to the WSO site. This way, if for some reason a podcast needs to be updated, because information in it has changed, the GSO does not have to take it down. GSOs can also link to the WSO Web site to obtain the English public service announcement (PSA) if they want it for their Web site.

In response to this information a Delegate asked, "What can members do themselves that is pertinent to their culture?" WSO responded that members within the service structure could organize a podcast by writing a sharing and then share it with members who would type the sharing into a blog. It was further explained there would be little cost and it would take three or four hours a month to organize the podcast.

e-Community—Currently GSOs and IAGSM Delegates have e-Community for communication which includes correspondence for the IAGSM and general correspondence for the GSOs. Next year the WSO will activate a bulletin board feature for GSOs and IAGSM Delegates which will be an opportunity to keep communication going through discussions supported by themes or questions posted by the WSO.

On-line literature—The WSO is continuing to explore ways to put literature on-line in a way that will allow people to subscribe and buy it while protecting the copyright. Some of the questions being discussed concern the impact on Literature Distribution Centers and Al-Anon Information Services that sell literature because they would have a revenue loss. The issue that literature may not be the source of income for Al-Anon in the future and what the source might be, is being looked at by the Board. There is an impact on Al-Anon worldwide. For example, if the US is selling literature in English, the impact for Australia, South Africa, and the UK must be considered since it will impact their revenue.

Alateen chat—The WSO Web Architect found a software program and customized it to meet the WSO's needs. It created a "moderator room" for Alateen Sponsors to communicate. Finland was invited to test it and the test went well. In June 2010, it was offered to US and Canadian Areas. There are currently ten chat rooms open but there has not been much use of them so far.

Alateen chat is only permissible on the WSO site. GSOs can have Alateen chat rooms at no cost in their language on the WSO site. Alateens will have permission to enter but if they try to post personal information on the chat room, it goes into a cue and a Sponsor will pull it out before it goes up on the main site. Alateens and Sponsors cannot use inappropriate or suggestive language or go private. There is a transcript of all communication in every session so if a Sponsor does something inappropriate, the WSO can review it but it would not be available to other people. (For further information see "Unanswered Questions" section)

Board use of technology—The US Delegate shared some examples of how the Board is using technology to make their work more efficient. On e-Communities there is a Board agenda file, including attachments for the upcoming quarterly meetings. The WSO is no longer expected to print material for Board members' use during meetings. Board members can now download from e-Communities all information to their computers. This saves the cost of paper and staff time. The Chairperson of the Board posts a letter with highlights on the Members' Web site after each quarterly Board meeting. This does not include information about discussions that are in progress. The Board no longer brings Committee members to the WSO for meetings. An at-large member can be from anywhere in the US and Canada as some committees now are using Skype to do committee work. This opens the possibility of including far more members. The WSO is trying to move ahead and use technology in many ways.

One Delegate shared that technology has been a great help to speed up communication at the General Service level. Their Web site is getting richer for members and services—special places on the Web site have been created for communication for different parts of the service structure. Their Convention Committee used electronic technology to communicate over the course of two years. There is now a "forum" for service members. The Delegate asked about how to get started with on-line meetings for members within their structure and elsewhere. In response the WSO explained *Al-Anon Electronic Meeting (G-39)* is available in English on the Members' Web site and is a good resource.

WSO further explained that electronic meetings are not registered through the GSOs but only through the WSO. "If people are interested in starting an electronic meeting, there would need to be a decision made whether the meeting would be a bulletin board or chat meeting and then they would get an electronic address." Once the meeting registers the WSO sends the application for a license allowing the meeting to use the literature available through the GSO as the members of the meeting cannot translate Conference Approved Literature. A listing of all registered electronic meetings can be obtained from the WSO.

A Delegate shared that their structure has two Web sites. One is dedicated to members and one to professionals. The Board now communicates through a dedicated GSO e-mail address. The GSO is in the process of establishing dedicated e-mail addresses for the 15 Areas that the GSO sends communication. Their Board of Trustees is also starting to use Skype which is very useful.

Another Delegate reported that the structure's home page is being updated. They are in the process of getting a new server and there will be a place to post a list of face-to-face meetings. Until recently they had an on-line forum to post written sharings on a topic but members could not comment on the sharing. The home page committee plans to make it possible for GRs to have on-line access to meeting topics, create a Web page from the slogan "One Day at a Time" where information for newcomers will be in one place, add links for relevant Al-Anon pages, and add articles about Al-Anon from newspapers.

The Delegate from Brazil reported that they have a Web site and a line for professionals which are good services for them. There are two on-line discussion groups between members and the Board. Members send documents on meetings and issues for the Board. Literature is sold on-line only to Brazilian territories. They wondered if they can sell literature in Portuguese to Portuguese-speaking members in Japan. A WSO representative responded, "That the current licensing agreement does not allow literature to be sold outside of the country. WSO will be exploring some ways this can be extended. At this time a member in Japan would have to come to Brazil to purchase literature in Portuguese." It was explained as an example that it is possible for a member in Brazil to purchase the literature and send it to the member in Japan.

Big Question

Roger C., US and Canada

"How can we strengthen our Al-Anon and Alateen groups so that we can meet our one purpose of helping families and friends of alcoholics?"

In this session we will discuss ways to help our Al-Anon and Alateen groups in their primary purpose of helping families and friends of alcoholics. Even though our individual structures are very different and our countries have different languages and cultures, we all share a single purpose as stated in this year's theme: "Many Structures, Many Languages, One Purpose." Each structure faces many different challenges but ultimately we are all seeking ways to more effectively carry our message of hope and to help those who have been affected by someone else's drinking.



The big question, "How can we strengthen our Al-Anon and Alateen groups so that we can meet our one purpose of helping families and friends of alcoholics?" is intended to be so broad and universally applicable that all attendees can contribute to the discussion. We can learn from one another and develop ideas so that we will all have something new to take home and use in our own structures. The intent is that we bring our own experience and opinions to the discussion and everyone leaves with more than we brought with us.

We will use the Knowledge-Based Decision-Making (KBDM) process to collect information for this discussion and so, in addition to answering the big question, we will also provide a real demonstration of how this process can be used. KBDM is focused on collecting information and sharing that information with all parties involved before we even think about making a decision.

The questions used ensure that we consider other factors (needs, resources, changes that are happening inside and outside the fellowship, the pros and cons, ethics, and knowledge gaps) before we make a decision. In other words, the process brings us to an informed group conscience and allows us to make a decision that is consistent with our spiritual principles.

The five KBDM questions are as follows:

- What do we know about our members' or prospective members' needs that is relevant to this discussion?
- What do we know about the resources and our vision for the organization that is relevant to this discussion?

- What do we know about the current realities and evolving dynamics of the world and our fellowship that is relevant to this discussion? What are the pros and cons?
- What are the ethical implications of our choices? In other words; will our decision be consistent with our spiritual principles?
- What do we wish we knew, but don't?

Each Delegate was encouraged to consider these questions in relation to the big question and bring their responses to the IAGSM. During this session we will discuss the questions in small groups and use the results as a basis for brainstorming ideas to strengthen our groups. We will concentrate on what we, as national structures, can do to help our groups.

We use the five KBDM questions to collect knowledge. The technique is adaptable, not a rigid set of rules. Brainstorming stimulates creativity and produces a list of possible solutions. Ground rules for brainstorming were explained. They included suspending judgement; writing down all ideas; encouraging spontaneity to come up with over-the-top ideas; and building on the ideas.

Five charts were placed on each side of the room with a question about strengthening the groups on each. After the process was discussed, participants broke into small groups of three or four. Each group went to a chart, discussed the question and wrote their ideas on the chart, then moved to the next question. It was recognized that different structures have different problems and experiences and that would be reflected on the chart. This continued until all five questions were answered by each group. Below are the questions and the collective responses for each.

Question 1: What do we know about our members' or prospective members' needs that is relevant to this discussion?

- We know that they don't know what they need—we offer hope! We offer our Legacies!
- Hear recovery, not problems. Newcomers want to feel comfortable, want to be sure we aren't a cult or sect, need to feel we know the subject, want to identify, longtime recovery is shared.
- Share our experience, strength, and hope with them, we don't need to know anything about them.
- Newcomers need support, patience, understanding, encouragement. Simple tools to help them make life happier.
- Feel welcomed; understand the newcomer's confusion, remember how you felt as a newcomer.
- The members' focus to remain on recovery during the meeting and not business, members want to hear Al-Anon at a meeting.

- Public Outreach —anonymity is not—to be invisible—meeting location nearby, suitable meeting times (variety of times), literature available.
- Have more meetings available—everywhere.
- Have free literature at meetings; sponsorship available.
- Better understanding of value of service.
- That the newcomer be understood as a newcomer for a long period of time, keeping privacy needs in mind.

Question 2: What do we know about the resources and our vision for the organization that is relevant to this discussion?

- We have our Traditions.
- There are groups all over the world in every community, country, etc.
- Members—skills, talents, experience, sponsorship/mentoring.
- There are service structures including GSOs, Al-Anon Information Services, and the WSO.
- Conference Approved Literature.
- Members' Web site—podcasts and/blogs.
- There are service workers.
- Communicate our message. Service is a part of recovery. Need a plan to utilize what we have.
- Have a willingness to implement the plan.
- Tap into the abundant resources within the fellowship by starting a conversation with members.
- Better define Regional Service Seminars in our structure.
- Engage the newcomer in small group service. Explore any legitimate financial advantages.
- GRs (not all groups have them); newcomer package; written resources (service manual); development of sponsorship.
- Qualifications of members to do the job; use of technology for service meetings; set aside status such as education, profession, etc.
- Twenty-four hour telephone service, seven days a week; European Zonal Meeting; IAGSM.
- Lack of Seventh Tradition knowledge; Worldwide Web available; on-line meetings.

Question 3: What do we know about the current realities and evolving dynamics of the world and our fellowship that is relevant to this discussion? What are the pros and cons?

- Pro**
- Communication tools
 - International communication easier now

- International travel cheaper and easier
- We reach more people
- Worldwide Web makes Al-Anon available
- New ways to engage younger people—iPhone
- The enthusiasm of some members infects others positively
- The professional community is available if we ask
- The structural issues across the world are the same Sponsorship, Seventh Tradition, etc.
- How people communicate is different

Con

- Cultural attitude—"me now"
- More members come in with dual addictions in a family member
- Environment of meeting suits middle-aged people not diverse membership today
- Language—old fashioned
- Lack of Volunteers
- Possibility of breaking Traditions
- Current reality: Fewer groups, less members, less donations, age of members→ too old
- The generational differences in expressing spirituality

Pro and Con

- Financial crisis
- Different languages/harder to communicate

Question 4: What are the ethical implications of our choices?

- Be sure decisions don't harm others.
- By acting within our Legacies we are secure that our choices are ethical.
- We need to better define how to build the relationship with our groups. We need to understand the lines of communication within our fellowship.
- We use our experience of history to avoid problems. The Board of Trustees is accountable for the legal and financial aspects. Groups need to be aware of the implications of bypassing processes.
- We need to take enough time to weigh our decisions—not rush past ethics. Background complete/legal considerations, consulting widely.
- We could consider leaving out "Christian" aspects of our meeting i.e. Serenity Prayer, God equals he in our text.
- With the Steps, Traditions, Concepts for example Tradition Eleventh attraction rather than promotion.

- Weakening the principles by modernizing the language.
- Those members maintain their spiritual roots by being united with the Al-Anon principles.
- Use Steps, Traditions, and Concepts in their entirety, do not take out of context.

Question 5: What do we wish we knew, but don't?

- Good statistics; e-communication, on-line meeting (concerns, risks?), why people don't stay?
- Safety for Alateen, guidelines for Sponsors (personal and service).
- How to create interest in members to learn about the principles of Al-Anon—Traditions and Concepts.
- Preserve the gentle spirit of the program.
- What is the best way to reach people?
- What behaviors of ours turn people away?
- How to break through information glut?
- Who is going to leave the organization \$25 million?
- How do we reach younger members and how can we keep them coming back?
- How can we attract more males?
- How can we survey people who don't stay?
- Having scientific evidence for the effectiveness of the Al-Anon program.
- Good ideas at the service level—do they reach the group? Why? Why not?
- How can we encourage our members to share about Al-Anon?
- How to strengthen the groups? How to attract new Alateen members?
- What is the requirement for Al-Anon and Alateen?

The group was then asked to brainstorm ideas on the question, "What can national structures do to help our groups," using the same ground rules as with the small group session. Ideas included:

- Raise the profile of service by changing the *Service Manual* so that before the announcements, group officers would be asked to introduce themselves and say a few words.
- Add something to the role of the GR to inform the groups that the GSO is part of their group services and not an outside organization and that financial contributions to the GSO are not going to an outside charity. They stay within the program. Have a meeting each month on a Tradition to personalize the Tradition. Send out a personal invitation from the GSO to half a dozen groups to come see us.
- Have more flexibility about shared leadership—GRs, three-year term is a deterrent. More use of Alternates.

- Every group, every member, everywhere will read newsletters from the GSO and spread the word.
- Have more discussions on what anonymity is and what it is not.
- Have a recreational vehicle “road show.” Take it around the US and Canada and distribute literature.
- Have a worldwide Al-Anon Day.
- Educate! Educate! Educate! Each primary school would have a class on alcoholism, the family disease as part of the curriculum.
- Think of new places for Al-Anon meetings so we’re not always in churches. Perhaps an early morning meeting in coffee shop.
- Put a “thought for the day” with meeting information on the neon signs that rotate at shopping malls and on billboards.
- A well known company in my country that is good with social policies allows immigrants to congregate in their public areas—we could have meetings there!
- Put Al-Anon literature (20 questions) in desk drawers in hotel rooms, hotel and restaurant information racks, in taxis, and have *One Day at a Time* (B-6) open in every hotel room.
- Create questions with a focus other than marriage similar to those in *The Dilemma of the Alcoholic Marriage* (B-4) to shift thinking to something new.
- Place a set of questions, brochures, and schedules in cubicles/stalls of public restrooms.
- Use the “sandwich board” concept.
- Use a slogan when talking outside of Al-Anon and then explain where you learned it.
- Provide every group with scientific evidence of the effectiveness of Al-Anon so they will know it is not a cult. In Denmark there is a week when the Health Ministry has a focus on alcoholism and Al-Anon does public outreach with doctors, libraries, etc.
- Create “sponsorship on the go.” Log on-line and post your question to your virtual Sponsor and volunteers would answer the question without giving advice. Al-Anon Sponsors could “tweet” something like, “get over it,” or “go to a meeting.”
- Work with our strengths—Al-Anon members are generally in their 50s or older—invite college freshmen to meetings to link up with missing family members. For example, “Missing grandma?”
- Weekly video cast that would allow remote groups to join a video feed to listen to a speaker or a topic being discussed as a way to let remote groups know that they are part of a worldwide fellowship of groups and structure.

- Buddy groups—could be international buddy groups. It is easier to grasp that Al-Anon is worldwide.
- Big groups adopting little groups.
- Develop international contacts to strengthen the feeling of belonging to a greater whole and allow easier bilingual contacts for travellers.
- Go back to the idea of adopting a newcomer and nurturing them. Stay flexible in meetings when a newcomer is present.
- 2010 IAGSM Delegates buddy up!

The Moderator explained that the next step in the brainstorming process is to review ideas—eliminate some ideas, and combine some. Also, provide an opportunity for explanations. Then prioritize the remaining ideas and use KBDM questions to test each idea. Then work on a few ideas and do them well. A Task Force can be created to implement a strategy for that idea.

PROCESS DISCUSSION

Participants did a walk from chart to chart (gallery walk) to read ideas of the other groups. Participants shared that when discussing questions in small groups, some of them were not always sure they understood the question and reviewing other group’s responses made them feel involved. Delegates new to the KBDM process commented:

- “I have learned much more because I was involved and had to contribute— maybe a small contribution, but I contributed.”
- “It was really a new process because I had already judged the ideas in my mind.”
- “It was much more than just sitting and listening to other people.”
- “I got joy out of it because ideas were unlimited. It was fun.”

Delegates whose structures had implemented KBDM shared that:

- “We have used this in our meetings and changed our preparation meeting for the General Service meeting into Work Groups. In the past nobody dared to say anything, having Work Groups like brainstorming, removes the shyness.”
- “KBDM gets rid of ‘them’ and ‘us’ and builds a culture of trust. Everyone has full information and no one has power over us. Knowledge gives us the strength.”
- “We moved from discussions on strengthening groups to Public Information to bringing new members in. It has allowed us to go everywhere with it. We didn’t always stick to the original question.”



The session Moderator closed by saying, “If everyone got one idea to take home to use in their structure, it will make this a huge success.”

Discussion

In response to a Delegate’s request for clarification about scientific evidence, the World Service Office shared with Delegates about some things the WSO and Board of Trustees are doing and that GSOs can do. The WSO has agreed to cooperate with a researcher who has a grant from the Federal government to study whether or not Al-Anon helps newcomers. In the coming weeks, the WSO will send a letter to groups asking if they would like to participate. For the next several months, if a newcomer comes to a participating group they will be given a link to an on-line questionnaire asking why they came, what they were looking for, if they found what they wanted, and what they found that they didn’t want. These are things the WSO always wanted to know but had no scientific way to know it. When the WSO gets the data, it will be shared with the scientific community and with the GSOs. The WSO does a membership survey every three years that is posted. The WSO has the questions they used and is willing to share them with GSOs if they want to do a survey. The WSO will also share its process. With the latest survey, the WSO used software that allows them to conduct spot surveys. Not only does it protect anonymity because the WSO does not know who answered the questions, but it can be set up so that no one

can answer a question more than once. The WSO is using this process for a number of things to give the Board what it needs to know about members’ wants, needs, and preferences. These surveys used to be very expensive but they are greatly reduced by using an independent researcher to gather results and issue a report. This is a way to get membership feedback that is within the Traditions and does not violate principles.

In response to a question asking how demographically representative the research is of the fellowship, it was pointed out that data can be used or misused at any time. “The audience for the results is the professional community. Scientists at national and health organizations can see that this is data reported from newcomers and documented by a scientific organization that we (WSO) have no control over. Our Board believes that if we are going to create a universal understanding of family recovery, we have to open the process. It is not the answer to everyone’s problems nor will it fix issues.” The WSO did a survey on another topic and got demographic data that was very representative. This was from a membership survey that every member in the US and Canada could go on-line to complete. Surprisingly, the demographic data closely matched the proportion of groups in the US and Canada. The survey showed that the average age is now 59. This is not representative of Al-Anon worldwide, so we do not look at this data as representative of Al-Anon worldwide which is significantly more diverse and with younger members.

The General Warranties of the Conference

Izabela D., Poland

The service structure of Al-Anon Poland

There are 360 groups working the Al-Anon/Alateen program in our country populated by 38 million. The membership consists largely of middle-aged and older women living in the larger cities.

There are 12 Al-Anon Areas with 10 to 60 groups per Area. Some Areas have Presidents. There are only seven smaller units—districts within some Areas.

An Al-Anon group conscience can take place at the Area (Area Meeting), and the Conference levels, the last one being the level of making decisions by vote. Area Delegates participate in the Area Meeting and in the Conference with the right to vote. Area Representatives also participate in the Area Meeting and the Conference but do not vote. The members of the executive and operational General Service Office (GSO) arms take part in the group conscience process leading voting on the Conference decisions.

The national service structure, i.e. the General Service Office with its administrative and operational responsibilities, consists of two distinct parts, the one which is guided by the “traditional” (Traditions and Concepts), and the other, which is regulated by the provisions of the statutory law.

The “traditional” part of the GSO consists of the Council of Trustees (the Head of the Council being the head of the whole service structure), the Executive Committee, the Policy Committee, and the Finance Committee. There are also Selected Committees for Alateen, Archives, Public Information, Cooperation with Professionals and Institutions, and Literature with their Area structures approved for a three-year trial period. The operations of the “traditional” part of the GSO have for the most part been “de-centralized” and its activities have been linked mainly with its scheduled meetings.

The Association of Al-Anon Service forms the “official” part of the GSO. Its goals and responsibilities, its status as an institute for public welfare, and its statutory organs are defined by the laws of the Republic of Poland. A substantial part of the administrative and operational GSO functions are performed by the Association Board and its embers, all of whom have been Al-Anon members for many years. There are no full-time employees. An accountant and two local members of the Association are part-time workers in the office in Poznań.

The Statute of the Association does not define a Trustee, but the Trustees become members of the statutory bod-

ies of the Association on Al-Anon traditional grounds. Therefore the obligations of Trustees are, on the one hand, traditional and on the other, formal. For practical purposes these functions may be integrated on moral grounds.



Development

In the early 70s a therapy group of wives of alcoholics in Poznań began to work the Al-Anon program. In 1980 the first Al-Anon Family Group was registered with the World Service Office (WSO). From the mid-80s, the number of Al-Anon and Alateen groups grew rapidly. Two-thirds of the present Areas had already come into existence as Intergroups by the mid-90s and the remaining one-third by 2006.

The development of the service structure in Al-Anon Poland was in 1991. The Al-Anon Service Conference was called and Trustees were selected for the first time in 1997. The Statute of the Association of Al-Anon Service was registered by the Court in 1999. Since then the Conference has been called regularly, the 13th one in May 2010. The fellowship relied for its administration and operation solely on its members’ voluntary work until 2000.

Conference Approved Literature (CAL) in Polish was initially hard to get. The WSO permission to publish our first item was obtained in 1988. Since 1995 eleven books and pamphlets relating to the Al-Anon/Alateen program and service have been published with the total print runs of approximately 50,000. The Al-Anon Poland brochure on our service structure was published in 2006. The goals and responsibilities, especially delegated responsibilities, and the composition of the service arms and positions still remain to be defined to produce a good operational structure and avoid double-headed management. Also, well defined means of interacting and deciding are indispensable.

The goal relating to the Concepts of Service

The goal for understanding and applying the Concepts of Service has not been explicitly stated but the necessity to study, understand, and apply them has been recognized just as it was with the Steps and Traditions in the 70s. Regular

contact of our trusted servants with Al-Anon abroad since the mid-90s and the reading of *Al-Anon’s Twelve Concepts of Service* (P-26) published in Polish, as the pamphlet became available, (1,300 copies over the following ten years), helped our trusted servants understand the Concepts well enough to develop a national service structure.

The reception of the Concepts themselves, the pamphlet (P-26), and the Al-Anon World Service Conference Charter with the General Warranties of the conference at the group level has been lengthy and difficult. The Traditions, with their experience of service seemed to satisfy every need of those seeking personal recovery and growth. The spiritual principles of GSO administration and operation were much less understood and accepted. Another relevant pamphlet, *The Concepts—Al-Anon’s Best-Kept Secret?* (P-57), appeared in Polish in 2009. Moreover, every issue of our bulletin *RAZEM* contained some texts relating to the Concepts. They were also discussed at the workshops held at the Area and GSO levels, as well as at an RSS.

Understanding and applying the General Warranties of the Conference in Concept Twelve

How did our service structure meet the challenges encountered as it relates to understanding and applying the Concepts which includes the General Warranties of the Conference in Concept Twelve?

Warranty One: *That only sufficient operating funds, including an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle.* Respecting the principles of self-support, prudence, and balance both in some areas of current operation and in managing different kinds of resources were the challenges encountered by our service structure relating to understanding and applying the principles expressed in Warranty One. Specific challenges are:

- Finance: The challenge of mobilizing members’ resources by other means than the Seventh Tradition collection or the one percent personal income tax scheme. We have not addressed ourselves to that task yet.
- Information: The challenge of mobilizing human and financial resources to make more CAL titles available in translation into Polish. The challenge of publishing the book *Paths to Recovery—Al-Anon’s Steps, Traditions and Concepts* (B-24) also remains to be faced.
- Communication channels: The challenge of making internal communication of our service structure more democratic and effective, particularly by electronic means.

- Valuable service experience: The challenge of preventing loss in the valuable service experience of the former trusted servants whose service comes to an end and of the trusted servants whose service has been discontinued.

Warranty Two: *That no Conference member shall be placed in unqualified authority over other members.* Placing principles above personalities, maintaining balance between service authority and service responsibility, and seeking harmony and unity were the challenges encountered by our service structure relating to understanding and applying the principles expressed by Warranty Two.

The interaction of different parts of our service structure often involved disagreement and conflict. The attitudes were often critical and aggressive and the language expressed anger rather than respect. Even the Conference was home to debates and fighting. Although the attitudes indicated the existence of some unresolved problems related to seeking power and prestige, they stemmed in the first place from the failure of our service structure to resolve the problems of someone acting beyond their scope of authority by violating others rights to act.

Warranty Three: *That all decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and whenever possible, by unanimity.* Forming our mutual relations on respect and trust, seeking clear understanding of what our common welfare requires us to do, making decisions by discussion, vote, and seeking unanimity were challenges encountered by our service structure relating to understanding and applying the principles expressed in Warranty Three.

The main challenge was related to the failure of the group conscience process. Although groups and Intergroups/Areas have resorted to that process for a long time, it rarely passed through all the stages—from group members to trusted servants and to the Conference. Voting was often substituted for the group conscience process. Uneven development of the district structure prevented groups in some Areas from participating in that process on an equal basis. The insufficient level of our self-awareness and identification of our assets and weaknesses prevented us from seeking possible solutions to our problems because our discussion on the issues of our service structure and responsibilities of its different parts were not sufficiently knowledge-based or informed. The Conference reports, good as they are, were substituted for the Conference summaries aimed at spiritual interpretation of the Conference decisions.

Warranty Four: *That no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy.* Guiding ourselves by the principles of love, mutual trust,

and respect, as well as of being alert to our own thoughts, behaviors, and deeds were the challenges encountered by our service structure relating to understanding and applying the principles expressed by Warranty Four.

Disagreement sometimes occurred when our trust failed and there was no clear understanding of what would serve our cause and our common welfare best. The criticism relating to the ultimate or delegated responsibilities of some service arms or to their operation seemed to be justified in rational terms, but anger and resentment often had a sharp personal edge.

Warranty Five: *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.* Keeping principles above personalities; acting without anger, haste, and control, with firmness and kindness; setting a personal example rather than using authority; granting the same dignity to others' ideas as we do to our own; willingly giving trusted servants our trust; seeking mutual respect and consensus; ensuring democratic representation and procedures; and providing for the equality of rights and opportunities were the challenges encountered by our service structure relating to understanding and applying the principles expressed in Warranty Five.

One challenge is the proportion of Area Delegates and GSO trusted servants representing the administrative and operational arms need to be changed to increase the proportion of Delegates. Delegates need more information and greater support. The Concepts of Service should help us attain well-defined relationships between the different service arms, improve cooperation between trusted servants, make knowledge-based decisions and let our interactions be guided by the spirit of the Traditions.

The greatest challenge encountered by our service structure was with carrying the spirituality of the group sharings to our business interactions of our trusted servants acting as members of the different service arms. Although the General Warranties of the Conference in the Twelfth Concept have verbally been accepted as our spiritual guidelines, they were too rarely treated as the standards against which our working relations could be checked.

What benefits has our GSO experienced by applying the principles expressed in the General Warranties of the Conference in Concept Twelve?

Benefits of applying the principles of prudence, self-support, and balance are:

- Economic health: The needs at every service level were systematically reported and satisfied. Finances

were analyzed and planned, the reserve fund maintained, all the operations were supervised and controlled. General economic health of the fellowship was maintained and no risk of accumulating excessive resources has occurred. Balance in external relations. Public controversy and external conflict as well as outside associations were avoided. Increasing availability and access to our information resources: A national system of producing and distributing literature and the bulletin RAZEM were built. The opportunities offered by electronic means of communication have been exploited by introducing the Al-Anon Poland Web site, the service forum, and a system of e-mail communication.

Benefits of applying the principle of participation are:

- Growth in democratic practice: Out of 79% of Al-Anon members who responded to an Al-Anon statistical inquiry in 2009 who said they participated in service, 16% said they served beyond a group level. The development of local committee service structures gave their members more opportunities for personal recovery and a better chance of participation in the decision-making process relating to the Twelfth Step work.

Benefits of applying the principles of trust, mutual respect, and unity are:

- Growth in awareness of the threat to unity and of the need for change: As most of us kept trusting but one authority—a loving God of our understanding, and remained capable of trusting each other, even if our ability to respect each other failed us—we were able to keep together, continue our work, and cooperate with A.A.
- It also allowed us to realize that we were in need of solutions to our internal problems.
- The key element to consider is the Warranties and the means of applying them.
- The title for our next Conference gives us some hint and hope, “The language of love in recovery and service.”

Discussion

The Delegate from Poland shared that “in preparing this presentation, part of the homework for me was not only to tackle the problems but to ask questions using KBDM at the Service Board; this made everyone think a little. It may be a contribution to thinking in common to identify some issues. To many, the Warranties were discovered.”

Another Delegate shared that it showed in a real way



how we can tackle problems. “We are going to photocopy the paper and give it to our Board.”

One of the things that struck another Delegate was the challenge of how to keep from losing those who have provided valuable service when their terms end. In her Area those members have no voice and no vote so the only way they can voice comments is one-to-one outside Assemblies, or in the Area newsletter. “They are such valuable resources.”

An ICC member shared the WSO calls on past Trustees and past Delegates to be part of Task Forces. Sometimes they are invited to put in a résumé for the Executive Committee. “More Board members are younger and are out in the world working and are familiar with what is happening in the external environment. They have their own way of doing things like the ability to multi-task and to think broadly and globally.”

A Delegate shared that although their structure has been in existence for some time, “our structure has found the Concepts and Warranties quite recently and we have begun to use these in our structure during the last six or seven years. I think that has changed the spirit in our Conference work. I can see that younger, new people are interested in serving and taking responsibility as District Representatives and they want to come to our service Conference because the spirit is different and all who come get more to take with them. I think it is due to the understanding of the Concepts and Warranties.”

Another ICC member commented, “This paper is a good framework of what structures could use in taking

a personal inventory of the impact of what we are doing in terms of our own interaction. We know the Steps and Traditions are spiritual. We learned over the years to stop looking at the words and look at what is intended. For example, why is autonomy important except in matters involving A.A. as a whole? There is a rule but it is a spiritual rule. The Concepts are viewed as something legal and confusing and for ‘those’ people. From listening and reading the history of the World Service Conference, in the early days Lois and others got the ideas put forth in the Concepts but did not really talk about them at the World Service Conference on a regular basis. It has only been in recent years in our structure and in others that people have started talking about the spiritual basis of the Concepts and Warranties. The Warranties counsel about balance. There is no decision that is all right or all wrong. There are pros and cons in every decision. Diversity can have both. The Warranties are spiritual; they challenge us to think beyond the usual. Some see the Warranties as a rule as well as a value; that throughout our fellowship we have to worry about excessive money. That is not what Warranty One says. We should have ample money—enough to do what we need. We worry about how we are going to get enough money to do what we need. Then when we get it, we worry about how we can hold onto it. It is a spiritual, prudent financial principle that money flows. It is not a means or an objective. Money is a tool we use to do other things. It is an instrument, a piece of how we accomplish something. It is not the solution but a step to a solution. “My understanding of the Warranties continues to expand because all of you keep talking about it. Keep studying and

expanding, because we can all have a bigger and broader understanding if we keep talking about it. We can see the Warranties as spiritual guideposts as opposed to rules.”

Another Delegate shared, “Warranty Three has given us difficulties in our structure because we have a bad political example in our country. This example prevents us from freely discussing and going deeply into the subjects. It gives us the idea that if one wins, the other wins next time. In Al-Anon we have tools to respect different ideas and opinions. If Al-Anon members could understand this difference we would not have any more fights.”

Another Delegate stated, “The Warranties bring balance. We need not fear money because an ample reserve assures that we have money for the present and what is to come. Our structure does fundraising and has unity in just breaking bread and being together.”

One Delegate commented, “This is a reminder that we need to do more work studying the Concepts and Warranties. I guarantee if you ask about Warranty One, the talk in my structure will be about a prudent reserve. This Warranty is about abundance. We need to broaden our minds.”

Another Delegate shared a personal experience with the Warranties. He was put off when he first read the Concepts and Warranties. After listening to a speaker tape on the Warranties, “I was so excited and realized how wonderful they are. I decided to study them because I was in service and they introduced me to the spiritual underlying principles. I realized the principles apply to my own life to make me a better servant. The principles of balance and prudence are clearly defined roles and offer clarity.”

In some countries, a percentage of each citizen’s taxes goes to non-profit organizations or public welfare. A Delegate shared that, “In my country there is a mandatory one percent tax. Taxpayers decide which division of public welfare they want to receive their one percent. It is transferred by the authorities. I am trying to think about how we could implement this in my Area.”

Another Delegate shared that five percent per 1,000 Euros of their taxes can be assigned to one association. “Our members have not been comfortable with this because of the Seventh Tradition. Al-Anon is on a list of associations and if someone is designating us without giving their name, this amount is re-distributed to all the other associations. We decided to write to the public institutions complaining that this was not right. Instead we thought it was a better idea to write to the WSO to look for another solution. We decided to write a declaration stipulating ‘I am giving this money to Al-Anon.’ we still have discussions because unfortunately, not all members have written the declaration and there are still those concerned that we have voted to give the OK to do this.”

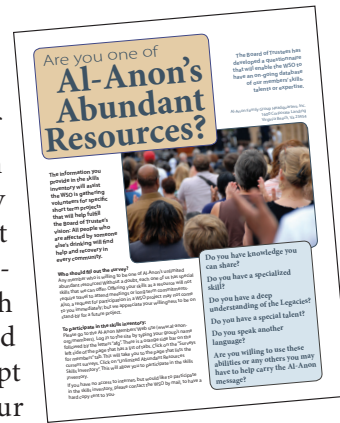
Abundant Resources

Ann-Marie W., United Kingdom & Eire (Ireland)

I have been asked to lead off this session by sharing the experiences of the UK and Eire around the topic of abundant resources, a term we are now becoming very familiar with. When we first seek out Al-Anon, our concept of abundance is much distorted. Only with time and gentle education do we accept that abundance exists in our lives. I am sure that the majority of us think “finance” when we hear the term “abundant resources.” We have to re-educate our perceptions of abundance. So it is with our structure in serving our membership and carrying the message so clearly stated in Step Twelve. We have to re-educate the way in which we harness our abundant resources.

In the last two years the UK & Eire General Service Board of Trustees has had to deal with several interesting and exacting projects. The development of a new Web site in 2007-2009 was no easy task. The Trustees and the Executive Committee were in consultation throughout to ensure the new site met our needs. One Trustee and a member of the staff, together with our General Secretary, took on the bulk of the work. In them, we had an abundance of technical knowledge that was not realized until this project began. We had confidence in their abilities and in their understanding of our principles. Trusted servants were exactly how they were treated. We believed in them and we knew they would do a good job. They enjoyed and endured all the highs and lows of such a project, dealing directly with the Web designers.

When this project was near completion, the Trustee concerned presented a preview of the Web pages to the Conference. She received a rousing ovation. Again, Conference Delegates showed how appreciative they were of their trusted servant. This new Web site has provided us with the tools to reach not only the general public, but also our members in much greater numbers. With our dedicated “Members Section” we have been able to put out requests for extra volunteer help for our General Service Office (GSO), keep members informed of General Service Board (GSB) decisions, Trustee vacancies, financial reports, conventions, and links to structures worldwide, together with some social events. We regularly remind our members of our Web site to bring in those talents we clearly need.



In 2008 we embarked on the biggest ever Public Information (PI) project that was to culminate in action by our membership in January/February 2009. Throughout 2008, information was given to PI coordinators, Delegates, PI team leaders, small groups, and individuals in the form of “to do” count-down documents. Each document contained information on targets to achieve and the tools needed. Of course, the biggest asset to this project was an abundant resource of willing members. There were times in this year when we had to recognize that not all members were behind this project. We progressed though, again with an informed Trustee and the combined work of the national PI Committee and our (GSO). The outcome was that more than ten million members of the general public had access to our information through newspaper articles, advertising in public places and radio interviews. We have no statistics to prove how effective this campaign was. We don’t need any. With the knowledge that people need exposure to information at least six times before they act on it on average, we did a great job. We are now looking to mount a large campaign again in 2011, our 60th anniversary in the UK & Eire.

In 2010, we have finally taken the plunge and invested in a technically much more advanced telephone system. This will enable us to handle more calls and improve systems in our GSO. The main advantage and reason we needed to proceed with this was that we were very aware that we were not reaching the distressed caller quickly or efficiently enough. Our old system missed hundreds of calls and this was upsetting our volunteers and staff.

This time none of our Trustees or staff had any technical knowledge. To go out to the membership for their help on this would have proved lengthy and we needed to move forward at a quicker pace; Step Twelve very much in action. What we do have is a team of over 75 dedicated and willing telephone volunteers who work from their own homes when the offices are closed. They stuck with us during this process which was not without its problems. We had to trust that our service provider would understand our needs and the delicacy of the job. Now, after five months, we appear to have what we initially asked for. We are now dealing with three times more calls than previously. An abundance of patience and goodwill has made itself evident.

Our focus is now directed toward finding a home for Al-Anon in the UK & Eire. We need to relocate our offices to a more suitable building for many reasons. Do we purchase office space or an actual building? After the Trustees discussed the proposal, it was decided that we needed not only our Conference to be a part of this process, but every member in the UK. We canvassed opinions from the whole of the structure and during Conference

2009 this project was given considerable discussion. The result was that Conference Delegates voted to give the General Service Board of Trustees their blessing to investigate the possibilities of a property purchase. We have come to a stage where, once again, we need the membership to support us. They have been kept up-to-date throughout the year of progress on this project and we now need to establish their financial commitment to this.

In 1996 we started what was to become the new Alateen format for the UK & Eire. This has proved to be a mammoth task because of the ever-changing laws of the four countries involved in our structure. Child protection worldwide is of such great importance and we have our part to play in fulfilling our duty of care. Again, we had to seek professional advice to start us off, but as time has gone on we now have a Trustee who is extremely dedicated to making every detail as clear as possible. This Trustee has a wide knowledge of relevant government policy. This is an ongoing process again requiring an abundance of patience and trust.

Service at every level is never boring. We have a phrase you may be familiar with—“talent spotting” which would be number one in a “Trustee Handbook” if we had one. To find and engage willing, enthusiastic, loyal, visionary, dedicated members to work side-by-side provides us with an abundance of joy and hope. When we alter our thinking and believe anything is possible, financial abundance comes much lower on our list of priorities. We have more than enough to move forward with a confident attitude.

Discussion

One Delegate advised the GSO is working to articulate to members that it is a part of recovery to give our personal resources other than financial to Al-Anon. “We are trying to put together a database of members who have skills and also technical abilities. We already have the database designed, but unfortunately the number of applications is very low and we are deciding what the best strategy would be to communicate with the fellowship to fill the database. A second issue is connected with a possible purchase of our office because it is very expensive to rent. We have been thinking about purchase of the office for many years. Our members are suspicious of that decision because there is a traditional thinking, “We don’t have the funds. We are studying to find a financial way to sustain a purchase. The Board is trying to be creative and is using consultants to help us understand what kind of financial operation will be better and more sustainable for us.”

“Abundant resources are a new tune for us,” said another Delegate. “We were introduced to it from the



World Service Conference. As we hear new information, we become aware of new possibilities. Previously it was all about money. We went to the fellowship and asked for what was sufficient to keep going and they responded. We are now thinking about skill sets in the fellowship for Thought and Task Forces. We are also looking for ways to retain those who have gone out of office. Thought and Task forces are one idea. We invite past service members to meet after Conference to share where we are going by putting relevant information before them. We know we have lots of good talents. We need to encourage them. We are also trying to make our Web site look more interactive.”

Another Delegate shared tapping resources makes them more abundant. “We see the possibility of generating more resources by consciously working on existing conflicts. Many are discouraged by the situation and will be encouraged by the change. This is another way of thinking and acting for us. The other is experience. We need to look for language skills because we need translation resources for literature. This is not an abundant resource. We do not want to lose people by discouraging them because their skills are not good enough. There is a potential for existing skills to be developed by working with what is already developed. At our Convention, we planned to have English, Russian, and Polish through whisper translation but there were so many people needing translation assistance that we had to use equipment. Need is the mother of invention. The Convention was successful.”

Some of the Delegates shared their personal experiences of abundance. One Delegate shared, “I am on the Board and it takes a lot of time. Income loss is the thinking of lack since I cannot work full-time, have a family, and do service. The reality is that I could not work at all

when I came to Al-Anon. Service gives me my abundance and I try to convey that to others.”

Another Delegate shared, “When I think about my personal resources, it was because I wanted to give back in service. I am looking for my next service when my term ends. If everyone would think like that...”

A Delegate stated, “When I came to Al-Anon, I had an abundance of time and love in my life but I was deprived. By doing service I got to know the other members better and I slowly learned there is space for everything in my life. We have to think that way at the national level as well. We have an abundance of everything. Everything out in society, we have in Al-Anon as well. We have to recognize the gifts we receive in service as well.”

Another Delegate shared, “In our structure, younger people have talent but not the time so we have talented older people who rotate through service positions. We have to rely each year on them. We have to make changes and that will take time but we will make them.”

A Delegate shared that one of the GSO’s greatest resources is the WSO. When they are thinking of a project they can contact the WSO for a bit of history. “It is in service that we get the larger part of our recovery. We have to nurture our younger members and share the gifts we have received. We do not need to make it look like a chore; though it requires dedication and commitment. The message of abundance has to come from the grass roots. We need to look at what we have, not what we do not have. The WSO created a framework from which our GSO can work and that is a great gift.”

Another Delegate gained new insight into abundance sharing that, “It is not a pocketful of money and an empty heart. It is the other way around. If I have spiritual fulfill-

ment then I have overflowing pockets. Part of living is taking a risk and the abundance is there if I have a belief that what I give will always be less than what I receive doing service.”

A WSO representative shared that, “When the Board of Trustees first began strategic planning, and I was in a group of people who were supposed to come up with a big idea. At some point the idea of unlimited, abundant resources came up. In typical Al-Anon fashion, we thought ‘that can’t be, we don’t have enough money.’ We came to realize that people are a resource and there is an abundance of solutions. We have choices. Working with a Sponsor, we learn to move beyond that and to try something new. When we reach this service level, we fall back into ‘yes but.’ The idea of Thought Forces and Task Forces came from the idea that doing committee work in the same way for past 50 years was not working anymore. No one wanted to make commitments. Groups did not realize the difference it makes to the group if they have a Group Representative who brings their voice each time there is an Assembly. Does it have to be a three-year commitment because it has always been? It is at this IAGSM that I get wild ideas from listening to all of you. This group is one of Al-Anon’s abundant resources. When I saw the ‘unhappy house’ bookmark that South Africa is doing, we came back and did it. We have given out over one million bookmarks of the ‘unhappy house.’ Al-Anon gave me the opportunity to find choices and we need to keep looking for solutions that open up new choices and the freedom from what we always did to find new choices.”

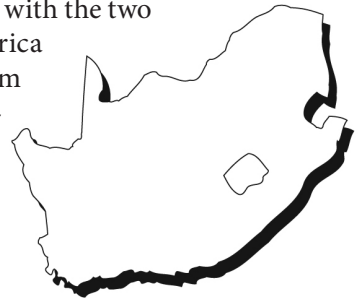
The WSO representative further explained, “After my first IAGSM, I was blown away with ideas I heard here and the way other countries are doing things. I took back ideas especially about how meetings and workshops are done and some public outreach pieces. Over the last two years, we have added and changed things in our Conference to attract people’s interest. I am seeing people blossom when we are giving people something new to do. We now have been given permission to use the Danish poster with people on it for a public outreach folder.”

Another Delegate stated that important ideas come from the IAGSM, but it takes time to implement them. Since the last one, two years ago, the Delegate advised their structure is now using visual presentations, and they have begun talking about abundant resources and shared leadership. “This could have taken years to get but sharing our worldwide experience and exchanging ideas freely on the Internet has proved productive and appreciated. We must look at people and ideas as though they are abundant resources, otherwise it is an obstacle to success which slows our growth.”

2012 IAGSM Bid

The Associate Director of Member Services—International explained the bidding and voting processes. This year was unique in the history of the IAGSM in that just one structure submitted a bid for the 2012 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting.

The bid presentation opened with the two Delegates from the South Africa GSO marching to the podium waving the flag of their country and sounding a colorful “vuvuzella.” The Delegates introduced IAGSM members to the Cape Town area through a visual presentation showing Cape Town surrounded by mountains, beaches, and other tourist attractions. Cape Town is renowned for its restaurants, spectacular scenery, lovely beaches, and Mediterranean climate. Its lure lies in its spectacular setting and rich cultural diversity. It is a safe city, with six districts. Travel cost estimates were based on those of countries that participated at the 2008 IAGSM in Finland. The proposed site for the 2012 IAGSM is the Lagoon Beach Hotel with direct access to beach. It is seven kilometers from the center of Cape Town and 20 kilometers from the airport. There is an adequate bus system. The presentation closed with the South Africa Delegates sharing their tradition of “ubuntu”—the essence of being human. “It means that one can not exist as a human being in isolation. You can not be human by yourself and when you have this quality you have ‘ubuntu.’ We exist because of all others.”



Discussion

Delegates took into consideration the benefits shared by the Delegates representing the hosting structure. Financial concerns about equalized expense which is the maximum cost to a structure were expressed. While South Africa is a remote area, members go to remote areas all the time for RSSs and Assemblies. One participant pointed out that unless the IAGSM is going to be confined to the United States and Europe, there will be a fluctuation of costs if we go outside that model because of the small number of structures outside it, so costs may be slightly higher. Delegates from countries that have hosted the IAGSM in the past shared that the benefits of hosting the meeting energized their structures and attracted volunteers to service work. Delegates were asked “If we’re thinking about abundant resources how do we see Al-Anon in the world in the future?” What is best for Al-Anon? Countries that can attend have to have a

national service structure. We are expected to agree here in principle. If we make a decision and something drastic happens in the world, the WSO has the option to stop the process and have it in the United States.

The ICC Chairperson asked that the lights be turned down. Members said the Serenity Prayer. After a short break, there was consensus that everyone was ready to entertain a Motion. There was consensus that the vote would be by ballot. A Motion to hold the 2012 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting in Cape Town, South Africa and that in the event of an emergency, the IAGSM will be held in the United States passed with substantial unanimity.



Concept Eleven

Cheryl C., Australia

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

Brief History of the Australian Service Structure

The earliest record of Al-Anon meetings in Australia was 1945. In 1952, the *World Directory* of Al-Anon had one registered listing in Glebe, Australia. In 1960, there were 37 Australian groups registered and, as the number grew, five of the states established a service structure to unify their groups; to provide services which the groups could not provide for themselves, i.e. having a roster of members to answer calls for help; providing literature

9 Australian Areas



The national office of Al-Anon Family Groups, Australia (A.G.S.O.) is situated in Melbourne

more easily and cheaply than if individual groups ordered from America and waiting months for its arrival; establishing means of communication between the groups, through newsletters, service meetings of representatives sharing experience, and informing the public of the existence of Al-Anon as a support for families of alcoholics.

During that decade most States established a Central Service Office. This was usually only a small, single room, but rent had to be paid, office equipment bought or “scrounged” (an Australian term for finding items in creative ways!), telephone, heating, and lighting costs covered, and volunteer workers sought to carry out all the tasks.

The supply of literature to the groups was improved when two State Central Service Committees were given reprint permission by the World Service Office to produce some pamphlets and later, the daily reader, *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon*, (B-6). The funds raised became an important part of funding our service structure in Australia.

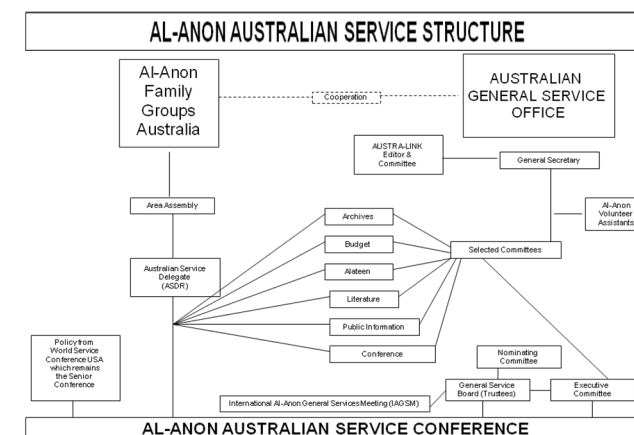
Australian General Service Office Goals for Understanding and Using Concept Eleven as a Model

At a workshop in Adelaide in 1969, discussion began on unifying the Australian Al-Anon fellowship. In 1975 an Australian representative attended the World Service Conference (WSC) in the United States as there was confusion in trying to establish a service structure alongside the existing State structures. After visiting the World Service Office (WSO), Canada, and UK & Eire in 1977, our representative returned with a clear idea of how our General Service Office (GSO) would need to function. She encouraged us to use the WSO model as outlined in Concept Eleven. We had seven trial Conferences and in 1976 it was agreed that a GSO be opened in Melbourne the following year. At first there were ten Areas but this was reduced very early and at present we have nine Delegates representing the nine Areas in Australia. In 1977 the first permanent Australian Service Conference was held with Delegates elected from the nine Areas.

The Australian Service Conference agreed to accept WSO policy “in total.” This decision has proven to be a great success for the Australian fellowship. It also meant that we did not need a Policy Committee in our GSO committee structure.

In 1980 Al-Anon Family Groups (Australia) Propriety Ltd. was incorporated as a non-profit company. An Australian Service Handbook (ASH) was approved by the Conference and the first edition printed. Two Australian Delegates attended the first International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM) in New Orleans.

The General Service Board consists of seven members including the General Secretary who is the only Sustaining Trustee. This is a recent change—we had two Sustaining Trustees until 2009.



Board meetings are held quarterly. We encourage each Board member to act as a member of a Selected Committee. Each Board member is also assigned an Area Delegate to liaise with using the “buddy system.” The Board member communicates with the Delegate throughout the year and, where possible, sits with them at the Conference. One of the Board members acts as Chairperson for the Nominating Committee which includes all Board members.

The 2008 Australian Service Conference decided to appoint one Out-of-Town Trustee on a three-year trial basis. Formerly all Trustees had to live within 200km. of Melbourne. Our first Out-of-Town Trustee was appointed after the 2009 Conference.

Austra-Link, Our National Magazine

A monthly journal is produced by the GSO with articles by Al-Anon and Alateen members. One copy is given free to every group and subscriptions are accepted from individuals and groups.

The Executive Committee

This meets monthly and is the administrator of the Australian General Service Office, with legal authority granted by the General Service Board to conduct its daily affairs. Its members, who are appointed by the General Service Board, include the General Secretary, the Editor of *Austra-Link*, the Chairpersons of the Selected Committees, and possibly two other volunteers who are preferably not members of the General Service Board. One member of the Executive Committee is appointed as its Chair. [Quoted from the *Australian Service Handbook*]

The Executive Committee shall meet at such times as the General Service Board may direct and shall have the power to act on behalf of the Board in the intervals between meetings of the Board. The Executive Committee shall report all its major actions to the Board no later than the next ensuing meeting of the Board. The Board shall, on the recommendation of the Executive Committee, designate one member of the Executive Committee as Chairperson of the Committee. [Quoted from the By-laws of Al-Anon Family Groups (Australia) Pty. Ltd.]

Selected Committees

Our General Secretary (CEO) and the Chairperson of the Board are ex-officio members of all the Selected Committees. Each of these committees use Thought Groups and Task Forces for specific purposes as required.

Conference Committee (including Admissions/ Handbook sub-committee)

The Conference Committee is responsible for organizing the annual Australian Service Conference at which the nine Area Delegates, Selected Committee Chairpersons and Board members come together. This is a highlight of our year. Another responsibility of the committee is the periodic amendment and reprinting of the *Australian Service Handbook*.

Treasurer and Budget Committee

Australia adapted the model of the WSO Finance Committee when establishing our Budget Committee. The Budget Committee is chaired by the Treasurer, and this committee studies the monthly cash flow, calls annually for estimates from Selected Committee Chairpersons, the *Austra-Link* editor, and the Literature Officer, to help prepare a budget for the ensuing year. Accounts are audited professionally in March of each year.

Literature Committee

- Imports literature from the WSO and arranges reprinting of literature in Australia.
- Adapts WSO Guidelines to suit our own needs, using Australian terminology.
- Distributes literature (CAL) in translation as well as in English.
- Reviews all activities of the Literature Department.
- The Literature Officer oversees all functions of the Literature Department. All literature is stored and dispatched from the Australian General Service Office (AGSO) in Melbourne.
- Stock records, accounts, and dispatch are all handled by the Literature Officer who is a member of the Literature Committee and also an Administrative staff member who is assisted by volunteers.

Alateen Committee

- Assists unity and growth of Alateen throughout Australia.
- Offers encouragement to the Area Alateen Coordinators.
- Produces the *Alateen Link-Up* magazine for Australian distribution.
- The GSO is responsible for maintaining records of registered Al-Anon Members Involved in Alateen Service. All Al-Anon members, those responsible for Alateen members, such as group Sponsors, emergency Sponsors, etc., must be certified through their

Area process abiding by any legal requirements such as police checks.

Archives Committee

Archives is concerned with preserving and organizing historical Australian Al-Anon/Alateen material. The Archives Committee produced *A Brief History of Australian Al-Anon and Alateen*.

Public Information also handles Institutions and CPC

In Australia, Cooperating with the Professional Community (CPC) is a function of the Public Information Committee, and includes the responsibility to generate goodwill and facilitate the exchange of information between the Australian General Service Office, the Al-Anon/Alateen groups and among professional organizations, government agencies and others with whom we must have contact to carry the Al-Anon message of hope.

Carrying the message of Al-Anon and Alateen to institutions is also a responsibility of the Public Information Committee.

Because most of the material used in Public Information work is generated at the World Service Office, in Australia we do not need to have quite as much emphasis on commercial expertise and professional skills. But good Al-Anon sense and knowledge of the Traditions is essential for members of this committee.

On a national level, the Australian General Service office has:

- Prepared radio spots on CD for radio stations, also Community Service Announcements (CSAs) for TV.
- Arranged electronic transmission of the TV announcements to networks and copies in tape format to smaller regional stations.
- Added a colorful Alateen poster to the wallet card we had previously developed for Public Information work with teenagers.
- Developed table cards for members that give ideas on how to conduct ourselves at Conference.
- Produced an Al-Anon wallet card giving local contact details.
- Produced a Public Information calendar for groups to give suggestions each month of ways of informing the community about Al-Anon and Alateen.
- Prepared a Media Pack which gives information on how to make more use of various forms of media to inform the community of Al-Anon and Alateen's presence which is indispensable to our District

Representatives and they are encouraged to use it in working with Group Representatives.

- Produced a new literature item, *Al-Anon Welcomes Australian Indigenous People*, was produced this year.

Other Volunteers and Staff

- Office Assistant which is a paid position.
- Lone Members' Coordinator.
- *Austra-Link*, Volunteers to edit and collate the magazine.
- Bookkeeping staff.
- Office volunteers to help with group records, Alateen records, preparing items for mailing, e.g. *Appeal Letters*, *Conference Summaries*, etc.

Our Selection Process for Board Members

Nomination to the General Service Board (GSB) is open to all suitably qualified service members. Each year at the Conference, Delegates are reminded that nominations can be forwarded to the GSO by November each year. Usually there have been few candidates and the usual process has been for members to be nominated by existing GSB members. The decision as to the suitability of any Board member has always been based on "who is the best person for the position?" With the inclusion of an Out-of-Town Trustee, a new selection process was developed based on the World Service Structure's model for both Regional Trustees and Trustees at Large. This process allows for some Area Delegate input in an advisory capacity similar to the World Service process. Several Delegates are chosen to rank candidates in order of preference, but final selection is made by the Board members themselves as they know what particular qualifications and expertise are needed by the Board at the time.

Challenges Our Structure Encountered in Developing a General Service Office

When we first formed it, there was a lack of understanding between Areas and State Central Service Committees—some people had become so used to their State organizations that they referred to their State Office as "Head Office," and were very reluctant to consider the need for a national structure that united us all and ensured that we all operated under one policy.

Becoming incorporated as a non-profit organization was a lengthy process and involved more or less teaching legal people that we had to operate according to our *Australian Service Handbook*.

In early Trial Conferences observers were allowed to attend, but it was found some people were trying to direct their Delegates how to vote, and it led to the formation of "cliques" of people with differing views who did much gossiping and back-stabbing behind the scenes. Thus the Conference was designated as a closed meeting. However we welcome observers from other countries' service structures at any time.

Finances—many felt that our small Al-Anon population of groups and members would not be able to support the expenses needed to set up a national structure. This fear proved to be unfounded.

Benefits of Using Concept Eleven

In making the decision to follow WSO policy and adapting the structure outlined in Concept Eleven to fit the Australian GSO requirements, Australia has a strong structure which members can depend on for direction, support, and unity.

The benefits are:

- Unity throughout Australia.
- National insurance coverage—public liability insurance policy covers all groups and Area committees.
- A united professional image to the professional community.
- Legal and financial safety for our Trustees.
- Ability to print literature with WSO permission.
- Avoidance of problems as WSO's experience had ironed out many problems as they occurred.

As the Australian fellowship moves forward we have taken WSO's lead to encourage Areas to invite GSO members to attend their Assemblies. This has further strengthened the fellowship and helped demolish myths that grew between Areas and the GSO. We have, from the beginning in 1980, attended the IAGSM with our Conference voting to send two representatives. This has been invaluable to our structure and helped us further strengthen our vision for Al-Anon in Australia.

We are grateful to our early members who strove to achieve their vision for Al-Anon Australia with little funds and few members. Carrying the message was their primary focus and the need to be unified by a national structure became a natural progression. We, who enjoy the benefits gained from the efforts of our pioneers, give thanks to those committed members, and to our Higher Power who helped them along the way.

Discussion:

A Delegate shared, “We all live within our structures and it is motivating to listen to someone describe their structure’s activity.” Delegates shared their experience of communicating from their Board to the Areas.

One Delegate stated, “Through letters and the Web site, Areas are encouraged to invite Board members to come to Area meetings to talk about what the Board does. We are having problems with that. We then introduced the idea at Conference and encouraged Delegates to take it back. The Board offered themselves as a support network willing to do workshops. More people are now using the resource.”

Another Delegate explained, “We have made forums where two or three Board members go to an Area and do workshops. They are open to all and anyone can offer agenda items. This has been good. Sometimes an Area invites the Board because there are problems. Sometimes we go to do a workshop because nothing is happening and we go to see, talk. A forum is a good venue to talk about and resolve problems and to be of service. It is our way to help the discussion to flow.”

A Delegate shared, “We have put together a work group that is working to develop our structure. Coming here, to the IAGSM, I realize this is a resource to learn how other structures work. Also the WSO can connect me with other resources and structures. I am reading and learning that we can use the Concepts which were not something we had thought of, so this is really valuable.”

The WSO addressed the question by stating the traditional is the spiritual, anonymous face and the legal is the public face of Al-Anon. Lois and Anne started with two people in a house. They wrote the first letters which took months typing with carbon paper. “Like now, some groups responded while others did not. It really took ten years from the beginning of what we know as the Clearing House before they developed a Conference and structure. The *World Service Handbook* was Lois’s plan for how to organize below the national level. The idea of Areas and districts and how to set up a Conference was the plan. That was in 1960. In 1954, Lois created the Board of Trustees. There was no other structure other than the groups and groups cannot elect a Board. The idea was that the legal must be separate from the spiritual. So the WSO Board of Trustees is always self-electing. Legal responsibility is always with the Board of Trustees. It is only in the last seven or eight years that the Board has become comfortable to say it is self-electing and makes the decisions who are the right members while still cooperating with the traditional.

“The World Service Conference is spiritual, not legal. It does not get into the legal documents. In legal documents, the Board of Trustees is ‘the people,’ the so-called

‘membership’ and elects itself. In 1967, when the spiritual arm began operating, a way was needed to say that the spiritual would have power over the legal. That is called the World Service Conference Charter. People misunderstand that this is not part of the *World Service Handbook*. The World Service Conference Charter is a spiritual document that describes the spiritual relationship (Conference) with the legal (Board of Trustees). While the Board has ultimate authority, the World Service Conference, in its spiritual authority, can dissolve the Board of Trustees. The agreement was that if the World Service Conference said, ‘We are fed up with the Board,’ the Board agreed that they would vote themselves out of office and the last act they would perform would be to elect the new Board that the Conference selected. If the Conference does this, then the Board would make it legal. This is found in the Concepts of Service. Concepts Six and Seven outline the relationship.

“In Concept Six, the Conference acknowledges that the Board has primary administrative responsibility. So the Conference gives up its power to administrate to the Board. In Concept Seven, the Board has legal responsibility under the law. The Conference has spiritual responsibility. While the Board can act independently and veto actions of the Conference, ultimately, the Conference can eliminate the Board. The World Service Conference has been in existence since 1960 and it has taken us 50 years to understand that. Luckily Lois did understand and did this for us. You did not always have someone at your level who knew to call the WSO to ask what to tell the lawyers. The WSO offers to speak to lawyers for you. It shares with them a way they can do it, meet the needs of your country, and still keep the spiritual program. Al-Anon has the option to change and we do not have to do it quickly. There is time to have the discussions and it does not have to be done the way the WSO does it but in the way that meets the needs of your structure. It is the combined wisdom of the fellowship as a whole that is helpful so use the mistakes and use the wisdom of our mistakes. The IAGSM is important because we can talk to each other and learn from each other. Delegates can go back to their structures, tell about this conversation and, through discussions, it is less intimidating and they may come to conclusions on their own.”

In one structure, the Delegate explained, the original eight members of the Board are the members in the eyes of the law. These members of the Board give their full names, addresses, and other details. The Board is the shareholders and directors of the company but also the traditional. It is not breaking the Traditions. The Board makes sure to provide a financial report and looks after members by complying with the legal.

Another Delegate shared, mistrust of the Board in the structure created a problem. “Study and discussion of the Concepts of Service helped the Conference and the Board to understand their roles and responsibilities.”

Another Delegate advised that, “A discussion with the Conference led to clarity and support for the Board on an issue.”

Another Delegate stated, “That their structure has the problem of two Boards. One is the legal arm of the association with one sustaining Trustee. The other body of Trustees is traditional and oversees the work of the office comprised of volunteers and several part-time paid members. These people are not specialists but are learning about the program and they can make decisions which lead to power issues. Decisions made by the traditional Board are not always implemented by the legal part so the interplay between entities is a problem.”

Another Delegate shared that trying to find the spiritual principle in each Concept was hard but Concept Eleven was the most difficult. It was described as “like saying a car has a steering wheel, doors, and tires. What is spiritual about that? I studied page 200 of the *Service Manual* regarding staff. It says it is important that all be treated fairly. In our Al-Anon structure, we treat our employees as part of the team. Early on, there was thinking that because the General Secretary was working for a good cause, we did not really have to pay a fair wage. Today, our workers are paid a fair rate based on the pay in other organizations. This has created harmony.”

“Participation of non-member paid workers can create a situation of ‘us’ and ‘them’ within the office.” This was a description expressed by one Delegate, “Like a back yard at home where I wanted to dig a big hole. I could do it but instead I paid someone to do it. In the past, I would hire a student and tell him to dig a hole, but after I studied the Concept, I involved him in the project. I shared why I was digging the hole and what I was planning to build. It made such a difference in his involvement and enthusiasm.”

How to Deal with Conflict

Mary Ann R., US & Canada

I’d like to begin this session on “How to Deal with Conflict” by giving you a brief description of the Al-Anon service structure here in the US & Canada. It helps to know the structure and to know where the responsibility for making certain decisions lies in order to ensure cooperation at all levels of service. We begin with the group which is the basic unit in which members meet to share their experience, strength, and hope. It is good for us to be reminded that the Al-Anon/Alateen fellowship structure exists for the purpose of helping groups to help members.



Each group has a Group Representative who represents the group at district meetings and Area Assemblies. Each Area has districts that are geographical segments containing a number of groups located close to each other. Each district has a District Representative who is selected from among the Group Representatives. The District Representatives will attend Area World Service Committee meetings (AWSC) and bring the news from the groups to the Area. The Area World Service Committee (AWSC) conducts the ongoing business for the Area and plans the agenda for the Area Assembly. Area Assemblies are held at least annually and are attended by the Group Representatives (GRs). At Assemblies, the GRs hear reports from Area Coordinators along with the Delegate’s report from the annual World Service Conference (WSC). GRs have the voting authority at Assemblies and vote on such items as the Area budget and, every three years, they vote to elect a new Delegate.

I realize that not everyone has districts and/or Areas, but whichever label you use, it helps to identify a group of members that provide a link from the groups which ultimately ends in representation at the national level.

There are many Coordinators in service representing Alateen, Archives, Conventions, *The Forum*, Group Records, Literature, Public Outreach, and others. These Coordinators carry information from the WSO to districts, the Information Services, and the groups—a circle of information.

We look to our world services provided to groups all over the world by the World Service Office (WSO) and the General Service Offices (GSOs) outside the US and Canada. The WSO is the direct service office for 25,161 groups worldwide. To keep communications open between the WSO and the GSOs, the International

Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM) has become part of our structure—our system to communicate around the world.

Those of us who are here as Delegates bring a perspective on various matters of concern to our respective countries that affect the fellowship of Al-Anon and Alateen as a whole. We are each a part of a whole.

Why are we talking about conflict and how to resolve it? Because whatever the size of our structure with all of the different groups of people involved, conflict is likely to occur. We have conflict in our personal lives and within the Al-Anon fellowship. As Al-Anon members learn, living with alcoholism leads to conflict and uncertainty. The alcoholic acts and we react. We often react without careful thought—at times this accelerates the conflict. We often forget how to express our needs, ideas, and feelings and we may stop communicating altogether. We may get into the habit of not listening to others.

How do we resolve this dilemma?

Guess what? You already know how to do this because we have the Al-Anon program. In Al-Anon we learn to embrace conflict and accept our differences. We don't have to like your opinion but we accept it. We look at our part in the controversy. We allow others the right to feel their own feelings.

We come to know that there may not be a resolution to a situation. Can we just let it be? Can we focus on our common problems and solutions? Can we come to that point where we allow our diversity to strengthen us even when we disagree? These are challenging questions we have to answer when faced with conflict. Today we will learn techniques that reinforce the knowledge you already have and that will help us identify and deal with conflict constructively. Let us begin with the dictionary definition of conflict which is: a fight or battle, a sharp disagreement, or to be in opposition.

Conflict can be positive or negative. In negative terms, conflict causes pain that leads to unhappiness or disappointment, so we live in the negative. In positive terms, it tells us when something needs to be changed, corrected, or better understood. Pain causes us to grow.

What happens when we voluntarily agree to resolve conflict?

When we agree to try to resolve a conflict, we give ourselves permission to choose. We gain strength and regain control over our behavior and develop a sense of responsibility to at least be willing to try to resolve a conflict. When the conflict is decided for us by someone else

(like a judge), we lose our choices. Once the conflict is resolved, there is growth in those involved and a stronger bond is built. It is our response to conflict that determines whether the outcome is positive or negative. We can develop the ability to exercise control over how we respond to or resolve conflict with the Al-Anon principles found in our Legacies. We can use the *Service Manual* to help solve the conflict. Here are two examples of conflict and the principles to resolve them.

- Delegates that attend the World Service Conference (WSC) today receive a good deal of information before the Conference. This was not the case when I was a Delegate, so I was very mistrusting. I did not apply Tradition Two that states: "For our group purpose there is but one authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants—they do not govern." Likewise as Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, if I do not consider the Board members' opinions and allow the Board to make the decisions, then they will have no reason to trust me.
- I am a new Delegate to the IAGSM. There is an item on the agenda that is coming up for a vote that I am not familiar with so I decide to talk it over with some Board members. After a little discussion, several of the members tell me to vote a certain way. I do not think it would be the best thing for Al-Anon, but I want to wait until I get to the meeting to hear more discussion. This is Concept Three "*The right of decision makes effective leadership possible.*"
- The IAGSM members were invited to share a conflict and how it was solved. A Delegate stated that she had inner conflict during a meeting. "Something disturbed me and I thought it was important but the other members did not see it that way. The conflict did not become visible because it was inner. I was afraid to voice it because there was someone on the committee who was a strong personality. I decided to tell them what I thought and after discussion, they agreed with me and that was a very important experience for me and I realized that in the future, it is more important for me to say what I think even though I am afraid of authority."

The Delegate continued her presentation with three basic approaches to conflict resolution.

- Avoidance/Denial: We pretend there is no problem. We harbor the hurts, anger, and resentments so the conflict remains alive and unresolved.
- Confrontation: We fight or argue to win. If a person is in a position of power, they may try to use that

power to confront. This is not usually an effective method. Often, feelings are unexpressed and left to grow and the situation becomes more intense.

- Problem Solving: Talk about the conflict. Who is right or wrong is not important. The goal is to come to terms with the issue and look to a friendly resolution.

Begin to resolve the conflict by active listening

- Stop talking! When we stop talking we can hear what the other person is saying.
- What are the issues surrounding the situation? Understand the facts and feelings—what the other person is saying. Imagine the other person's viewpoint. What if you were the other person?
- Look at the person; look, act, and be interested.
- Concentrate. Be fully engaged in the conversation and concentrate on what the other person has to say.
- Observe non-verbal behavior, eye movement, finger pointing, or crossed arms.
- Don't interrupt. Listen between the lines for those feelings that may not be expressed.
- Ask questions. Re-phrase to ensure understanding and repeat back to be sure.
- Assure the person that you have heard them. Once you acknowledge a person's feelings, they will usually calm down.
- Use "I" messages. "I want to be clear so I am going to restate what I think I heard you say." Again, the first thing we need to do is stop talking!
- "Seek first to understand, then to be understood."

The Delegates were then asked how you would solve the following conflict.

Some Board members wanted to be managers of the paid employees. Literature was not ordered because one person thought there was no money. The Board was trying to run the office.

Members shared their ideas on how to resolve the conflict. Suggestions were to:

- Consult with the employee to get their view of the situation.
- Find out the facts. What is the actual financial situation?
- Review the roles and responsibilities of the staff and Board.
- Start with the basics. Set ground rules for the meeting. Provide food. Meet face-to-face rather than by e-mail. People were complaining with each other instead of addressing the issue.

- Decide who should arrange the meeting? Who is the responsible party? e.g. Chairperson of the Board. Does the Chairperson have the right skills to lead the meeting? Is the Chairperson neutral or should an outside person come in?

The Delegate then continued with ways to resolve the conflict:

- Plan a meeting for both parties.
- Define goal(s), consistent with the purpose and within the mission.
- Develop a list of questions or issues to be answered or addressed.
- What do we need to know to clarify the issue?
- Ask whatever questions you need to get clarity from the other party.
- Do we need more information that pertains to the issue?
- Determine the preferred outcome. Would we like a win-win situation where every party comes out a winner?
- Focus on peaceful means. Here is where we can get into old patterns, trying to predetermine the solution or solve the situation.

Set the Stage

- Separate the people from the problem. Agree to focus on the issues—principles above personalities. Stick to the facts.
- Take time to build a relationship. Where are they coming from? It may be they have incomplete information. Talk to each other reason things out.
- Talk about our reasons for coming to Al-Anon. Why does Al-Anon work? Can we use the tools of the program in this situation?
- Admit previous history; has the group had similar issues before? Do members have their own agendas? Presume goodwill—don't blame one another. Presume that we all came into the situation assuming we knew what the best solution was.
- What is best for Al-Anon? Make a verbal commitment to seek success. Are all members willing to try to reach an agreement? Can we agree to disagree? Look for harmony. Be at peace.

The process used to resolve the conflict

- Include all members that need to be included. Concept Four: "*Participation is the key to harmony.*" Reach an informed group conscience.

- Listen, hear, and acknowledge. Use Tradition Twelve: “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities.”
- Set ground rules for balance and participation. Have a time limit on each sharing so everyone has a chance to speak. No yelling. Stick to the issue, stay on track! Refer to Traditions One, Two, and Six.
- Suspend judgment, do not take sides. Leave any biases you might have outside the meeting.
- Let people ventilate within their time frame. Ground rules apply here. Hear all sides. Everyone that wants to be heard will be.
- Share knowledge. Be specific; stick to the subject. Words like: “they, everyone, all the time, always, and never” are not accurate.
- Identify “key” points. What are we really talking about? What is the issue? Give references to the *Service Manual* when applicable.
- Take a break if the group needs it.
- Face any hostility. Discuss, do not attack. Keep your voice low and pleasant. Acknowledge that you have heard and understand what the other person has said.
- Accept responsibility for one’s own words and actions. Take a Tenth Step and acknowledge my part.
- Be patient. Many people need time to think about things.
- Do you need to schedule another meeting? Is there an agreement to change anything?
- Complete the process by summarizing the shared understandings and agree to what has been said. Identify points where you agree to disagree. Suggest a trial period to see if any proposed changes are going to work.
- Finally, celebrate your success.

The Delegate continued “When we look at the way structures are laid out, we can tell where potential conflict can happen. Dealing with complex structures can be difficult. We have talked about conflict and how to approach it.” The Delegate invited the body to put on their “solving hats” to solve the following hypothetical problem with the tools learned in this session.

“An Area has a problem keeping a Delegate full term. The Area Committee is dominant and they are members of the Assembly. With the exception of the Alternate Delegate, the whole Committee has resigned. Currently there is no functioning Area Committee and no Delegate. Using the conflict resolution tools, suggestions were to:

- Establish if the parties are willing to meet and begin dialog.

- Gather members of the Assembly and have conversation on how to move forward.
- Consider what words we can say as we invite people to the meeting.
- Board could write a letter that they are available to assist.
- Three groups of people are necessary for this discussion: the committee that resigned; the group that has the dominance issue; the rest of the members.
- Announce that we are going to articulate the issues but not try to solve anything initially.
- Allow each group to be heard—say why it is upset because all three groups need to be heard, and then get the groups together to decide what the next step is.
- Decide who starts the ball rolling if the Assembly collapses? Who begins the process? Alternate Delegate? GSO? Board? Offer to help work with the Alternate to resolve the problem.
- Try working to solve one little point to begin with. Then work toward solving another point, gradually work up to the big points.

Zonal Meetings Reportback

European Zonal Meeting

Sebastian M., Germany

In August 2009 the 3rd European Zonal Meeting (EZM) took place in Essen, Germany. Thirty Delegates from 16 countries and two members from the World Service Office participated in the meeting. The Delegates represented the Netherlands, U.K. & Eire, Belgium, Finland, Switzerland, Poland, Austria, Denmark, Sweden, Lithuania, Spain, Italy, France, and Slovenia.



The European Zonal Meeting is intended to be an addition to the IAGSM for all the structures and countries that have not evolved to the point of participation at the IAGSM.

At the 2007 meeting, a vision statement was developed, “That every European country evolves to having a GSO and attend the IAGSM.” A mission statement, “To improve the cooperation between European structures in order to support the growth of Al-Anon and Alateen in Europe” was also developed.

At this meeting, a framework for unity was worked out clarifying how structures will work together in the EZM. The framework clarifies the questions:

- Why we meet (see mission and vision)?
- Who will come to the meetings?
- When will we meet (every two years between the IAGSM)?
- Where we will meet (next meeting will be in Leeds, UK in 2011)?
- What we will do (reports back from the IAGSM, workshops...)?

Between the meetings, contact will be via e-mail like we do with the list from the IAGSM. The EZM should help to build better contact between the several GSOs in Europe and to help smaller structures set up their own GSO. The idea behind the Zonal meeting is that direct personal contact will ensure a stronger sense of community, giving support to evolving structures experiencing organizational and financial problems.

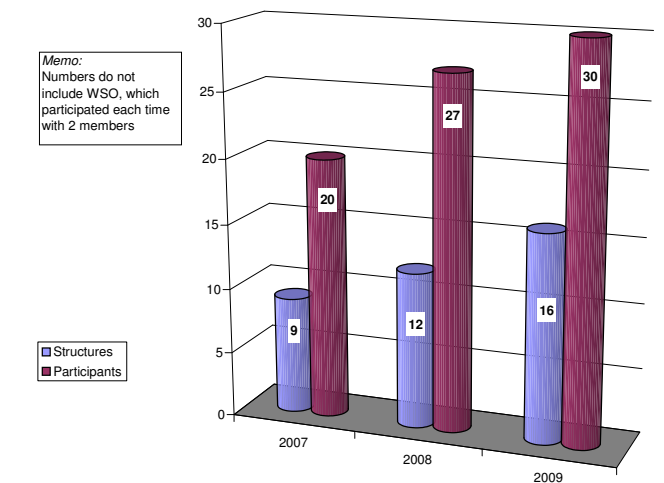
German participants shared the following highlights of the meeting for them.

The Literature Committee Chairperson shared that “for me, the most valuable part of the three-day meeting

was the literature workshop. I had not known that the WSO translates every new book into French and Spanish right away; nor did I know that Germany is, in Europe at least, the biggest translator of Al-Anon literature having translated just about every book and a large portion of the leaflets. It was interesting to hear what other countries do and what they have. I learned that the copyright of the Twelve Steps lies with A.A. The most fascinating of it all was everything that I heard about the *Service Manual*. I learned that the *Service Manual* is printed every three years! In Germany it is still widely regarded as a sort of “bible,” of which every word has to be adhered to. Some older editions of the WSO *Service Manual* have been in circulation within our service structure for a very long time. For about the same length of time, a discussion has been going on about how we absolutely must change our structure into what is described in the *Service Manual*, while another faction argues to keep what has proved to work in our country for decades. I also learned that quite a few countries have developed and printed their own *Service Manual*. I now look forward to helping to print a new translation of the newest edition of the WSO *Service Manual* and then, maybe, develop our own!”

The highlights for a former IAGSM Delegate were “achieving agreement on a framework which turns our three-year European Talk pilot into a permanent biennial EZM.”

European Talk Annual Meeting Participation



The participation has grown steadily as more structures have been included. This can be seen from the chart. In continuous support of EZM, an on-line group is being used, where the membership mailing list is also increasing steadily with 49 members from 27 structures. They are both fully developed structures with a GSO and a growing number of developing structures and the WSO.

Evidence of the enhanced networking between structures in Europe is the fact that in 2005, at the 25th anniversary of Al-Anon in Poland, guests from two structures attended. Five years later, at the 30th anniversary, members from more than 12 structures including developing structures participated.”

Another former IAGSM Delegate shared that “attending the ‘EZM’ reminded me of my very first A.A. convention in Switzerland many years ago. Just to see so many people affected by the family disease of alcoholism in one place together, listening to all their experiences, and seeing that it is still possible to live a good life—that was such a wonderful gift. Meeting people, sharing strength and hope was the most important thing for me in this EZM, as everyone who has participated in an IAGSM understands. Giving structures, who cannot attend the IAGSM yet, the chance for this experience is such a wonderful thing.”

Ibero-American Meeting Reportback

Nilce T., Brazil

The Fifth Ibero-American Meeting took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina on October 8-9, 2009. It was opened with the Serenity Prayer, after which all participants gave presentations and talked about their structures. The sharing of experiences was done in both Spanish and Portuguese.

The following structures reported the number of groups:

- Argentina reported that at this time the structure has 296 groups and 20 Districts.
- Bolivia reported that their structure has approximately 25 groups.
- Brazil reported that their structure has approximately 870 groups and 32 Alateen groups.
- Colombia reported the structure has 171 groups.
- Spain reported 255 groups at this time.
- World Service Office reported that the structure comprising the US and Canada has approximately 14,000 groups, 1,000 Alateen groups which includes 700 Spanish-speaking groups.
- Paraguay reported that their structure counted approximately 18 groups.
- Peru reported that the structure counted 82 Al-Anon groups, 13 Alateen groups, 4 adult children groups, and one English-speaking group.



- Uruguay reported the structure has 80 Al-Anon groups, two are adult children groups.

A meeting was held on October 6-8, 2009, at the headquarters of the General Services Office in Argentina, between the Executive Director of the World Service Office (WSO) and the General Secretaries of Argentina, Spain, Paraguay, and Brazil. The meeting was requested by the WSO Executive Director in order to provide an exchange of experiences among General Secretaries. The meeting turned out to be both a personal report about the job of the General Secretary, and an exchange of experiences among the servants holding this office.

Subjects discussed

The WSO Executive Director gave a presentation on the evolution of Al-Anon’s general structure. The WSO was established with the aim of providing support to the organization of the groups. As Al-Anon started to grow, Lois imagined that every country should have its structure with districts and groups. The Trustee presented a brief overview about the development of the World Service Office up until 2005 when, through a better understanding of Concept Eleven, changes to the committee structure were implemented and the Board commenced using Thought Forces and Task Forces. These groups were used in developing the strategic plan. They do not make decisions. Their role is to find solutions to problems and make recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

The General Secretary for Brazil presented the topic of “The value of a strategic plan for Brazil” by asking and answering the following questions:

- Who are we? We are our structure and our groups.
- How did we get here? We got here by working Tradition Five.
- What do we do? We share experiences.
- Who do we represent? As leaders, we represent Al-Anon voices worldwide.
- Why are we here? It is important to learn about each other. We apply Steps Two, Six, and Seven to answer this question.
- What is a strategic plan? It is a way for Al-Anon to take action.
- Who prepares the strategic plan? Concept Nine provides the answer.
- Why do we need a strategic plan? A strategic plan allows us to work in unity.

How do we prepare the strategic plan? The following key issues were covered:

- Team awareness—Step Two
- Mission definition—Tradition Three

- Strategic diagnosis—Step Four
- Goal definition—Tradition Five
- Strategy elaboration—Concepts One, Five, and Nine
- Action plans—Concept Ten
- Follow-up or control—Step Ten

Creating a plan and making it work is not an easy task. Some of the servants in Brazil’s structure have been discussing this matter for some time. However, the lack of knowledge of how, and the simplicity of such a process, prevents it from being implemented in an effective manner.

Presentation of Peru’s structure was the theme, “An effective Executive Committee.” This presentation stated that at this time, there is no Executive Committee. The Board meets every ten days and does this job together with the General Secretary who works part-time.

A report on the General Secretaries meeting was given. The WSO’s representative’s presentation took a while because the structures wanted to clarify their doubts. In sum, it was stated that the role of a General Secretary is very delicate, because all the issues and documents of the association pass through them.

Uruguay’s presentation was on “Improving communication with leadership vision.” They started talking about a change in the means of communication. The Internet, for example, enables the rapid sharing among all structures and the WSO.

Spain presented a report on the 2008 IAGSM. They talked about Spain’s participation and presented a summary on the themes covered in that meeting.

The merit of the Ibero-American and European Zonal meetings were discussed in comparison with the IAGSM. A main component for each is the financial aspect and, as far as the IAGSM is concerned, the difficulty in finding an English-speaking service member who knows the association. The participation of the countries to the IAGSM is strongly encouraged. At first, we were happy to see that Peru was planning to come to this IAGSM. Then we were disappointed because their Delegate could not receive the authorization necessary to travel.

Brazil suggested that a study—a strategic plan—be carried out via e-mail on a common subject such as the strengthening of groups, so that we would arrive at the 6th Ibero-American meeting with something relevant to share.

There was voting on the following three proposals:

- The Ibero-American meeting be financed by equalized expense. This was unanimously rejected.
- That the Ibero-American meeting be held every four years. Rejected unanimously.

- Who would host the next Ibero-American meeting? Peru volunteered and was accepted unanimously.

The assumption that leaders are born as such is mistaken because it is understood that a leader is the one who shows the ability to lead. When alcoholic family members arrive at the group meetings and hear that leadership is necessary at all service levels, they believe this subject is familiar. After all, they have spent their entire lives leading the family, their business, and the lives of others, among other things. However, as their recovery starts to take place, the concept of leadership begins to be viewed closer to reality. To lead means to motivate people to work with enthusiasm and spread Al-Anon’s message of strength and hope which represents our primary spiritual goal. The whole service structure is focused on this objective at all service levels.

Our great challenge is to shape or help recover the vision, flexibility, tolerance, and responsibility that characterize healthy leadership. It is essential to foster detachment, humility, and patience as desirable qualities in our leaders, as well as their respect for other servant’s abilities. We must bear in mind that we share other family members’ way toward progress, not perfection.

In spite of everything, Al-Anon service grants us the opportunity to develop an unconditional love for all the leaders who helped us to be where we are; those who have come and gone; and those who lead us today as well as the ones who will lead us in the future.

Workshop Reportbacks

The Concepts

Lois A., Australia—Facilitator
Johanna K. E., Iceland—Reporter

Goal—To identify how the Concepts are a resource for all service related concerns.

Background

Al-Anon's third Legacy—service through the Concepts—is vital to the continued growth of our groups and our General Service Office. “The New Zealand Al-Anon GSO exists to serve our groups. We can only do this as our groups assume authority and responsibility for our existence.” (1992 IAGSM “The Concepts: Bringing Harmony into Service” Margaret W., New Zealand).

“In Norway, the Concepts were a secret until we got the book *Paths to Recovery* (B-24). It was published in Norwegian in 1997. Prior to that, we had the Concepts as they were explained in the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27). But in the new book, the Concepts are described in a way that can easily be understood and used by all members.” (2002 IAGSM “What Is the Big Deal about the Concepts?”)

How are the Concepts used in your service structure to solve conflicts? Share examples.

One service structure has a long-standing tradition of offering a service weekend of workshops on the Concepts. Two Concepts are selected for discussion. Members who attend are grateful for the opportunity to study the Concepts. The workshops are attended by members in service and members with no service experience. The workshops have proved motivating and helpful in problem-solving. When problems arise, it is suggested that they be looked at in light of the Concepts.

In another structure, there is a heightened awareness at the Board level and an increased willingness to use the Concepts for conflict resolution.

They are a “well-kept secret,” remarked another participant. “Workshops on the Concepts have to be disguised to secure attendance. They are used at the Board level to resolve conflicts and if they are applied, a solution is found. The structure has tried to educate members on the spiritual principles contained in them and encourages groups to use them for conflict resolution before going to the GSO.”

“Trust the process,” said another workshop participant whose structure has offered workshops on the Concepts

at Regional Service Seminars that have encouraged young people to go into service. The Concepts are not solely used on the Board level.

By concentrating on the principles (Concepts), conflicts are reduced advised another workshop participant. The GSO trusted servants are asked to visit groups and Areas in order to facilitate a better understanding of the Concepts.

The Concepts provide solutions to problems. The *Service Manual* is used for that purpose by another structure whose members have limited understanding of the Concepts.

The WSO advised that groups and Areas frequently request workshops on the Concepts in the US and Canada. The requests come to both Trustees and WSO staff. The principles in the Concepts apply to local services as well as to the WSO. More education is needed on how to apply the Concepts to problem-solving. Lack of sufficient understanding of the Concepts can lead to further problems instead of solving them.

“Lack of knowledge and understanding of an issue can contribute to disagreements. Delegates at Conferences often have information that is not available to group members and group members may disagree with Conference decisions. For example, our Conference approved the principle of buying property and groups objected to the decision.”

“Active service is the key to understanding and applying the Concepts,” advised a workshop participant. The Concepts are mainly used at the Board level and in the Policy Committee in this participant's GSO.

One workshop participant gave this final statement, “The Concepts are like a secret diamond hidden in the ground.”

What resources on the Concepts have been useful for your service structure and why?

The workshop discussed the resources on the Concepts that are available to the fellowship. There was agreement on the usefulness of the book *Paths to Recovery* (B-24). Another resource mentioned is the pamphlet *The Concepts, Al-Anon's Best-Kept Secret?* (P-51). The WSO reported that the latest edition of the book, *How Al-Anon Works* (B-22), contains an additional chapter on the Concepts. The *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P24/27), is an important source as well as some older illustrated booklets on the Concepts.

Knowledge-Based Decision-Making

Peter A., New Zealand—Facilitator
Maureen McA., U.K. & Eire—Reporter

Goal—Discuss how your service structure arrives at an informed group conscience.

Background

“At the 2006 IAGSM, the topic of Knowledge-Based Decision-Making was introduced. It 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 discussion and participation by all. This process gives everyone the opportunity to talk and listen until each is satisfied and believes he or she can make an informed decision.” (See pages 18 – 19 in the *2006 IAGSM Summary*).

At the 2008 IAGSM, the four questions used to frame the discussion during the 2006 presentation, were adapted to frame the workshop discussions on the topics “Reaching Out to Diverse Communities” and “Understanding the Role of Committees in Supporting Service Work.” (See pages 36 and 38 in the 2008 IAGSM Summary).

Workshop participants were asked to share on the following questions.

1. **What process does your General Service Office, Board of Trustees, or Service Board use to discuss topics or ideas?**
2. **Does your current process help facilitate the discussion to insure that all thoughts, ideas, and questions of those involved in the discussion are expressed?**
3. **What is a significant strength(s) that you can identify as a result of using your structure's current process to arrive at an informed group conscience?**

Some of the ideas that emerged from discussion of the questions were:

In structures where KBDM is not used, the existing process was found to be less than satisfactory as decisions could be made quickly and without full discussion, particularly in instances where dominant personalities were involved.

Some structures had been using part of the KBDM process without actually identifying it as such.

Structures using KBDM are uniformly finding the process to be very successful. Implementing the KBDM process means decisions would not be reached until all

information is provided and the issue is thoroughly discussed. This can take time, but the benefit is that when each voice is heard, it helps quiet any dissenting voices and in many situations where there is an informed group conscience, there is substantial unanimity on an otherwise sensitive or divisive issue.

KBDM works well in communications between the Board and the Delegates at the Conference. However, sometimes Delegates can face resistance in their Areas when they bring back what is perceived to be “new” terminology.

It is important to have an orderly process to come to an informed decision. The following points, suggested by workshop participants, help define the process.

- Look at resources available to deal with the issue.
- Examine the pros and cons.
- Bring issue back and forth from the Board to the fellowship to get a feel of the wider group conscience.
- Dissect the issues.
- Give everyone a chance to have input before a decision is reached.
- Find balance—ask the quieter members for their opinions. This can change the dynamics of a situation.
- In some structures, the Board sends a letter to groups after their meeting to keep the groups informed of the Board's activities.
- Good communication is the key to better understanding.

Shared Leadership

Madeleine B., Switzerland (German)—Facilitator
Arnold H., New Zealand—Reporter

Goal—Participants exchange ideas of the benefits of shared leadership within your service structure as it pertains to leadership roles on a national level.

Background

Many of our service structures are different sizes and have different needs. However, we each need leadership to move our fellowship forward in different ways.

“The spirit of Al-Anon is the rejuvenating force. We have to look for our higher self. Leadership is in the Steps, Traditions and Concepts.” (1997 IAGSM, “The Spirit of Al-Anon Leadership” Margaret M., US & Canada).

“Action, together with vision, is the requirement of good leadership. In the last years, our leadership is taking giant steps towards the achievement of an up-to-date Al-Anon that is able to reach people everywhere in our country and, at the same time, to cope with the needs of the world today.” (1997 IAGSM, “Finding Answers in the Twelve Concepts of Service,” Ivone I., Brazil).

In this workshop share your leadership experience using the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts as your foundation and discuss how using these principles helped you and/or your service structure achieve any or all of the following:

- Tolerance
- Responsibility
- Flexibility
- Stability
- Dedication
- Vision

Goal—Participants exchange ideas of the benefits of shared leadership within your service structure as it pertains to leadership roles on a national level.

Initially as in all new group meetings, people were a little unsure of how to speak on this topic so most shared their personal experiences and views on leadership. Ultimately a common thread seemed to emerge that sharing tasks was effective as all become leaders in a shared vision/activity.

The session was chaired by a member who opened the forum by mentioning Tradition Two, Concept Three, and

Warranty Five as some guides to leadership. She then indicated when first attending Al-Anon a lady in her group did everything so she thought this is how it works in Al-Anon. Eventually the lady left and she took on the role, but by attending a business meeting she learned that roles should be rotated or shared. She was happy with this and put it into practice in her group.

One Delegate mentioned that the term leader was not one easily spoken about since it is a lost word because “Führer” means leadership and no one wants that memory again. That he had experienced Policy/Board meetings and the time was a “nice time” but not very productive.

Another Delegate spoke of attending her first Board meeting and felt it was a dictatorship rather than a “shared” meeting of minds. Strong personalities dominated. The meetings were a marathon running for three days and long into the nights. Change has occurred and meetings are one and half days now. More consensus is evident and meetings more pleasant.

The next Delegate shared about Thought and Task Forces, in the WSO service structure, which are made up of Trustees, staff members and Delegates. Previously, these roles seemed to be defined by their service position, i.e. Trustee became Chair, WSO staff, the secretary. But now, anyone could take up these roles. Anyone can be any position. Conference calls now make all equally responsible for information sharing. Leadership is shared. Also, the new TEAM events (replacing RSSs) have encouraged greater participation from Areas that want a meeting where both the WSO and Areas partner to prepare the “agenda” and equally share responsibilities. Again, shared vision with all participating equals shared leadership.

A Delegate spoke of “silo” type mentality on her Board. No one knew what the others did, particularly in Selected Committees, and people would make requests of others without understanding the time and effort put into getting a result. Change has been encouraged by inviting Trustees and Committee Chairs to attend other meetings to understand each other’s roles. This has led to greater shared responsibilities.

Another Delegate talked about coming back to the Board, that meetings were short and only superficial issues were dealt with. Anything “controversial” was ignored. There has been an attempt to unify the Board by holding a weekend retreat where barriers could be broken. Now people have tasks and individuals at this level need to be responsible. Personalities are at issue if a member is absent at a meeting when something is discussed and the outcome is not in line with their thinking. There have been attempts to revisit the idea and have it reversed at the next meeting.

The next Delegate spoke of refusing leadership roles

because she was not comfortable or she believed herself not capable. Eventually she took on roles and found she could do them and became comfortable and grew more. Shared leadership was not an easy thing, but she is a work in progress.

A Delegate shared that leaders can be anyone, for a particular event, at any time. That processes may be given to one person to lead but, with modern technology, all were part of the end product. They are responsible to each other to check and clarify things. This process allowed others to stand in for “the leader” should the leader fall ill or be unable to attend the final event. This shared responsibility allows everyone to experience new ideas and grow into roles by being part of the process. Sponsorship is service.

The next Delegate spoke of a similar experience. A recent weather problem made it impossible for some members to attend an event and, because it had been shared leadership during the preparation, those that did make it could do the presentations for those that could not attend. Also, Board meetings had been marathons and nothing productive came out of them; several members put this up as an issue and they have returned to more manageable ideas.

Sharing the load was discussed. A job/task that is worked on together is a shared effort and by definition, shared leadership. Delegation of jobs/tasks is important to the leader (Chair) of any organization.

The next Delegate spoke of members going from Conference back to their Areas, sharing the knowledge they gained with a few members who then assisted them in sharing the information with the fellowship. Our disease has us believing we can do everything, but we need to share, then life becomes easier. Change on a Board can take time when members have previously left all the work to the paid General Secretary. Everyone needs to be responsible for Al-Anon’s growth.

Roles on the Board, having Alternates, and sponsoring their replacements into the role before leaving the Board are important forms of shared leadership. At Board meetings, everyone works together with a shared vision and checks in at each meeting about where they were personally which sets up good feelings that allows the Board meeting to flow more smoothly.

A Delegate mentioned that KBDM was a process that took several years. As with anything new, there were reactions. Now it is an accepted practice. Change takes time and with consistent caring messages it does work.

A Delegate spoke of doing it alone. The position is paid staff and the Board just dumped all the work on the staff person’s shoulders. The staff encouraged them to take a more shared role but was having difficulty. The Delegate advised that it is an on-going process.

Translation

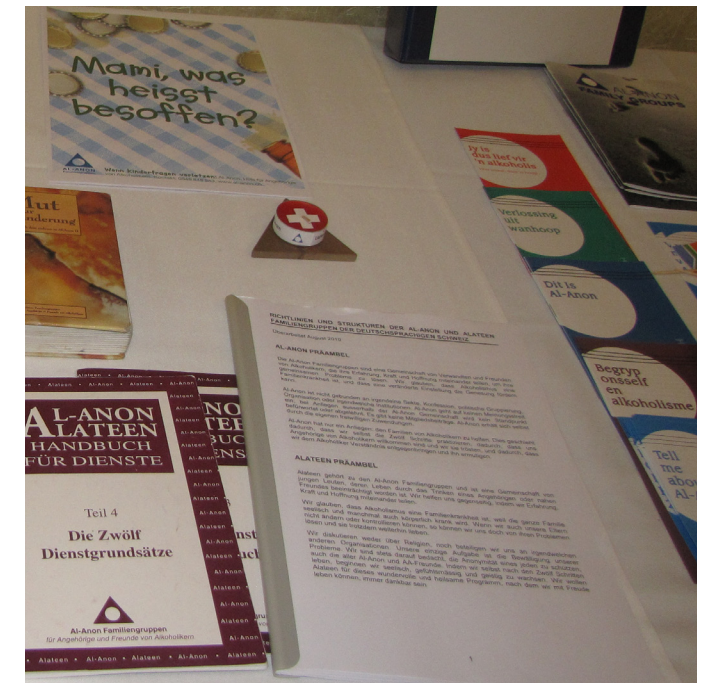
Silke S., Germany—Facilitator
Eija M., Finland—Reporter

Goal—To share how your structure manages the selection and translation of Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature.

Background

For service structures that are not English-French-or Spanish-speaking, the national service structures in those countries have the responsibility of translation and printing Al-Anon and Alateen Conference Approved Literature (CAL).

“In Japan, they have carefully translated CAL literature in order to preserve the spirit of Al-Anon.” (1997 IAGSM “Literature: Unity through CAL,” workshop report back Frances C., Australia, and Conchi G., Spain).



Workshop participants discussed the following questions.

1. **How are the decisions made to prioritize and translate Al-Anon or Alateen Conference Approved Literature in your service structure?**
2. **How are translation projects financed in your service structure?**
3. **Who has the responsibility of managing translation projects in your service structure and, if it is an individual, how are they selected?**
4. **If there is a committee that does the work, what is the name of the committee and how are the members selected?**

Literature Committees have an important role in selecting and prioritizing the Al-Anon literature translated and published in their structures. The Board and the service conference can influence the decision and discuss it. If the structure is simple, or still evolving, the role of the Literature Committee is very important. Some structures asked members from their structure their opinion on the needs concerning the translation of literature.

In all structures, the translating process is a “low-cost activity” as one of the Delegates expressed it. None of the structures represented in this workshop placed the responsibility of managing the translation process on one individual’s shoulders. In some structures, it is the shared responsibility of the Literature Committee and its Coordinator together and the Board, Finance Committee, and the service conference have the responsibility to estimate when printing is economically feasible.

In every structure there is a Literature Committee. In many, the Coordinator or the Chairperson of the Committee is nominated by the Board or service conference. The Committees try to find new members to rotate the membership. This is not always easy. In most structures, the members of the Committee translate and revise the texts but it can also be a coordinating committee which makes the decisions and does the management.

When prioritizing the books to translate and when there are questions concerning translating idioms and other language-specific things, the committees can consult with the WSO and the Associate Director of Member Services—International.

Translating is a matter of communication.



Finance 1

Alejandra A., Spain—Facilitator
Anja E.F., Denmark—Reporter

Goal—Participants will share the basics on finances as it pertains to the operational expenses for their national service structure.

Background

The importance of prudent financial planning and management is reflected in Warranty One of the Twelve Concepts of Service. “Sufficient operating funds, including an ample reserve, be its [The World Service Conference] prudent financial principle.” (See 1984 IAGSM, Exchange of Ideas, Finances).

- **How is the General Service Office primarily supported?**
- **How is the fellowship made aware of this support?**
- **What ideas have proven useful to the General Service Office to encourage contributions?**

Spain is trying to make it clear to the Delegates in the national conference as to what things cost. Some structures have discussions about voluntary contributions and duties.

According to the WSO most of the income is from the sale of literature. Communication about how to contribute is not always very clear. We need to make it easy to contribute to the WSO for the members. We are concerned that we could look like professional fund raisers, e.g., the Quarterly Appeal Letters and contributions at the World Service Conference. Financial statements are published in the *Conference Summary* and on the Members’ Web site. The WSO continues to explore ways to explain to the membership how their contributions are being used. Appeal Letters are another source of contributions. Appeal Letters are sent out four times a year from the WSO. At the World Service Conference, the Finance Committee gives a presentation on why members’ contributions are important.

Contributions in Brazil are going well but literature is a very important source of income. The GSO gives away books as public outreach but is reconsidering whether this is too much. A “forget campaign” (leaving pamphlets in public places) was successful. They are working on developing a “gratitude campaign.” The GSO balances its own and the Area’s accounts monthly.

In Australia, the sale of literature is 60 percent and member contributions are 40 percent of income. Contributions are also received through Appeal Letters. In their experience, the wording of these is very important. In the

Appeal Letters, it is helpful to indirectly give an example of a purpose while keeping in mind the principle of non-profit organizations. Members are reminded in the letters that they are an important part of funding the GSO.

In Finland, literature and contributions are nearly even with literature a somewhat larger part of the income. The structure is trying to make members aware of the need for financial support and where the money goes. “At first, reception was negative. Then we worked on talking about it in a positive way. We encourage groups and regions to develop a budget.” Appeal letters go out two to three times a year reminding members of where and why the money is needed.

According to the Delegate, New Zealand is 100 percent dependent on voluntary contributions. “It purchases all of its literature from the WSO. Information campaigns to help members understand the finances, is included in newsletters to the groups. Sending this type of information helps to increase the understanding and the importance of contributions, raises awareness on how to contribute, and suggest how much to give at group meetings. The structure has received both negative and positive feedback regarding this information. Some members are thinking of the GSO as charity.”

Contributions are almost one half the amounts received from the sale of literature in the Polish structure. The cost of the GSO is low with only part-time workers. The Delegate reports that the proportions are sound “But if the staff should leave, it will be a big problem. For two years the groups had a special box for collecting money for the national convention. There is a Seventh Tradition appeal at every meeting. The country has a new amendment to the tax law that is making it possible to collect money through the income tax.” With the country in a financial crisis or economic scarcity, the Delegate is trying to use other structure’s ideas of how to encourage contributions. A regional structure has existed for the past three years but, because of the crisis, the committees have not been able to meet regularly.

The same ten or so groups out of 56 contribute to Al-Anon Denmark. Most of the money comes from literature sales. Since the IAGSM in Finland, the information committee has found out it is legal to ask for money. “We are trying to inform members of what we are spending the money on and what we need through the newsletters to the GRs and workshops at the annual service conference.”

Finance 2

Andrea B., South Africa—Facilitator
Sigridur T., Iceland—Reporter

Goal—Participants will share a more in depth discussion on finances as it pertains to the operational expenses of their national service structure.

Background

“In non-profit associations, financial resources are usually scarce. Al-Anon is no exception to the rule. Resources are necessary to help us reach our goals. Therefore, good financial management is absolutely necessary. We must always remember that the money was given to our GSO by the Al-Anon groups and members; sometimes with great sacrifice.” (See 1992 IAGSM “Looking at Finances,” Alberto S., Argentina)

- **Who has the accounting responsibility for contributions, sale of literature, and day-to-day expenses?**
- **How is financial information currently shared with groups in your service structure?**
- **Is there a Reserve Fund? If so how is this fund managed?**

The accounting responsibility for contributions, sale of literature and day-to-day expenses lies in the hands of the Executive Committee in all of the attending structures.

There was a lot of sharing on the pricing of literature; most countries mark it up.

Financial statements are made available on one structure’s Web site. The purpose of sharing financial information was to simplify and make the members aware of how their contributions are spent. In the UK & Eire, the Board of Trustees sent out a pledge letter to 600 members asking them to pay a certain amount of money each month for three years in order to raise the reserve fund after they purchase property. Two hundred members have agreed to date.

Ample reserve funds vary across the structures. Ten to twelve month’s operating funds seems to be the average.

The sale of literature comprises the bulk of every structure’s Al-Anon economy with contributions making up less than 50 percent of operating funds. Some areas hold a lot of fund raising to supplement the income. Areas do not contribute on a regular basis to the GSOs which makes financial planning difficult.

In the experience of the participants, Appeal Letters are not very effective. Reserve funds seem to be placed in savings or secured bonds.

Motion

2010 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting

MOTION #1

The IAGSM recommends that the IAGSM be held in South Africa in the year 2012, and in the event of an emergency the IAGSM be held in the United States. (28 yes 3 no)

Unanswered Questions

During informal discussions between the ICC Committee and Delegates, there were many questions about Alateen chat. The World Service Office Director of Member Services gave a visual presentation of the screens with their content so Delegates could see what Alateens see when they register for the Alateen chat. The page explains anonymity and what information is not to be given out. It also explains what they need to provide to register. Once they register and the e-mail address is verified, they end up at the original screen where they can select a meeting from the meeting schedule and chat immediately. There are no limitations on what Area they can select from. They can go into any of the rooms. So far the meetings are in English. A list of rules are published so it gives Alateens a reference of what is and is not acceptable when sharing. The meeting Moderator is an Alateen Sponsor who has been certified as an Al-Anon Member Involved in Alateen Service by their Area. Sponsors must review and accept a sharing before it is posted to the room. Sponsors control all the content of the room by screening the Alateen chat sharings quickly so that the conversation can continue.

Process for the chat room:

- Area Alateen Coordinator is the contact with the WSO. An Area signs up to have its own chat room. The Coordinator collects names of certified Al-Anon Members Involved in Alateen Service (AMIAS).
- WSO sets up a training time with the Areas that are coming on board. Chat Sponsors attend training with a WSO staff or AMIAS already trained.
- Sponsors decide on the day and time for a weekly chat meeting.
- Chat meeting is registered (Coordinator has the forms) through the Area's Alateen process.

The Sponsor registration process is that chat room Sponsors must be submitted to the WSO by the Area Alateen Coordinator and must be currently certified. The WSO then assigns a screen name and password, and registers the Sponsor with Moderator privileges in the chat room. The primary concern is safety for teens when setting up a chat room site. Only Sponsors can make personal contact with anyone else. A "private chat" is used for Sponsors to stay in touch with each other and talk with individual Alateens, if some coaching is necessary. All private chats of Alateens with Alateen Sponsors are also recorded as a safety measure.

The WSO will set up a site so GSOs can have their own domain. It will be tested with one GSO before it is offered to all GSOs. The WSO wants to be sure the paperwork and instructions are clear when it is translated. Each structure will have autonomy to decide who the member responsible for communicating with the WSO will be.

- Q: When an Alateen registers, is there a process to determine whether they are really teens?
- A: They sign a form but the WSO does not require a license or anything. The Moderator is the only one accepting sharings, so there is a low likelihood of someone who is not a teen getting through because the sharing would not be appropriate. If someone signs that they are a teen and they are not, the form is a legal document and if we find out, the WSO will prosecute.
- Q: The age for Alateen in the UK is different. Could the UK allow 12-year-olds because it would be on the WSO server?
- A: The rules posted are the minimum requirements so you can not take away from them. Federal law in the US is that young people under 13 can not participate

on the Internet without signed parental permission. For safety reasons 13 is the minimum requirement.

- Q: Currently there is a Sponsor talking with an Alateen on the Internet and calling it an Alateen chat room. Can a structure with another language start a chat?
- A: This is a question of legality. The WSO does not give permission to any structure to register any electronic meetings. There is no other option for Alateen chat meetings other than the chat room for GSOs that is coming. This member needs to know that the WSO owns the name Alateen and we are not giving a Sponsor permission to use it. As structures you are setting yourselves up for problems when you are aware of situations and do not take action. You can tell well-meaning members that, for Alateen safety and worldwide unity, if they continue to use the Alateen name the WSO will take legal action. The WSO is not permitting Alateen on-line everywhere but we are going to offer chat meetings that should be ready by the end of the year.
- Q: Are GSOs expected to certify Sponsor/Moderators and give the WSO notice of the GSO certification?
- A: The GSO is responsible according to their structure's processes that certify which people could be Alateen Sponsors/Moderators. Then we will go in and manually enter them in the system. Once an Alateen meeting is registered, it will go on the GSOs list of meetings and the GSO has control over how to publicize those meetings.
- Q: It is good to know that opening chat rooms outside this process is not allowed. Some Sponsors of Alateen are actually A.A. members and not necessarily a dual member in our structure. If they have been approved, and have a lapse, how is it handled?
- A: An Alateen meeting is an Al-Anon meeting. Our policy is that Alateen is sponsored by Al-Anon members. An A.A. member would not be eligible to sponsor an Alateen meeting unless they are a dual member. In the WSO structure, each Area has its own requirements and in almost all of them, dual members can sponsor, but some Areas require a non-dual member Sponsor too. Whatever criteria the GSO requires must be adhered to.
- Q: What happens if we give permission to be a Sponsor on-line and then we decide the person is not appropriate?
- A: The GSO grants the Sponsors access by entering the name of the Sponsor in order to enter the chat room. The GSO can remove their access at any time. Each

structure has to have a process for removing Sponsors. If a GSO does not have a process, they need to create one. The general rule is that if someone's behavior is being investigated, they are asked to step down during the investigation of any complaint. There are legal issues about protecting children, and states and governments have laws that must be followed.

Other questions of different topics were asked:

- Q: Are there any tips on how to deal with gossip?
- A: One key to success is to use the conflict resolution type of discussion. The WSO learned from direct experience when the Office moved from New York to Virginia Beach. There were 56 employees but only 14 had worked in New York. Some staff members thought the office should be run like an Al-Anon meeting where every decision is made by group conscience and "participation was the key to harmony" but instead they approached the Executive Director complaining that "some people are upset about" and proceeded to repeat office gossip. When asked who "some people" were, the reply was that it would be breaking anonymity. They were reminded that there is no anonymity among Al-Anon members and that, as a third party, they were gossiping and taking power from the person who had the issue by making it their personal responsibility to repeat it which enables inappropriate behavior. A key to success in dealing with gossip is when someone comes to you and uses the words "some members think/believe/want," we can thank them and explain that since we do not engage in gossip, the person with the complaint needs to talk with us directly whether it is a Trustee, staff, or member. Experience has been that this is very effective and keeps you from being pulled into something that is not your business and models a solution to one of the key obstacles to success in Al-Anon.
- Q: What could I say to someone who comes to me and says, "I'm having this problem but don't tell them I told you...?"
- A: This creates a triangle. We could ask ourselves what our Sponsor would say. The answer would be probably be, "Do not tell me—tell him/her." You have to have the right parties at the table. Always get the parties having the conflict together. If they will not talk, then I bring the parties together in my office and have them tell each other what the problem is. This is our reaction to alcoholism. We each have to be responsible for our own behavior.

Spiritual Speaker

Pam C., South Africa

I greet you with love in my heart. Today I stand before you a very proud and grateful member of the worldwide fellowship of Al-Anon Family Groups which includes Alateen. I thank my structure for electing me to come as a second year IAGSM Delegate. We have never done this before. I also thank the ICC for inviting me to share with you. I am honored. My purpose today is to pass on a message of hope to you. Hope was the first gift I received from Al-Anon. I thank my recovering alcoholic, my Higher Power whom I choose to call God, and my son. All of them had a bit to do with my recovery over the past 28 years. I am the youngest of seven children. I was and am very spoiled by my siblings as I came along after eight years. I had a great childhood. My second brother became an alcoholic; my dad had a drink every night. He provided for us. My mum was a housewife who was always there for us.

My journey started 36 years ago when I was 16 years old when I met my future husband at an engagement party. He was from Durban and I lived in Pietermaritzburg. He was Catholic and I a Hindu, Tamil-speaking. We were very westernized, and not an orthodox family. My dad introduced us to a cosmopolitan lifestyle from a young age. We interacted and respected all races and denominations. My family accepted him and I became a Catholic before I got married. My husband came from a very sociable family as well. His mum and dad drank together with him. They loved me very much and spoiled me. I stayed home and my son was born a year later. Now the socializing was not fun anymore. I could see how alcoholism progressed, from weekends to mid-week drinks, to drinking every day. He was a passive alcoholic who also provided for us. I now had a daughter and on her first birthday, my husband reached rock bottom. He was on a binge. I worked part-time and one night we had my husband's boss over and he did an intervention with our family. My husband admitted he needed help. He went to an outpatient program and I went for counseling. We were advised to attend A.A. meetings.

I always had faith, prayed, and went to church. We attended a meeting together and he was picked up and taken to other meetings. After three months, my husband was given a company vehicle and I went to my first Al-Anon meeting. I went back at work. I found my answer at the very first meeting. I was very young compared to others. I heard them share and I knew I was not alone. I cried at my first meeting and I was guided and sponsored by the longtime members. We attended eight meet-



ings a week, twice on Sundays. After six months, I was asked to chair the meeting. My knees knocked. I did not know how I was going to cope as the members had about 17 years in the program. I took the suitcase of literature home and read up. I looked at the serene faces when they spoke about God. I learned a lot from those pioneers and will be eternally grateful to them. I so wanted their serenity. We worked with a rehab in our area and after a year we were instrumental in opening both A.A. meetings and Al-Anon Family Groups meetings.

I started my journey in service as an Alateen Sponsor. I worked six days a week so I could not get involved at the Area level as these meetings were on a Saturday morning. I finally got a five day per week job and became a Group Representative and attended Area meetings. I used to look at the Delegates and Trustees and wondered when I would be able to do that. I read the manuals about our structure. I remember the first IAGSM Delegate from KwaZulu-Natal. We had a dinner for her before she left. There was so much excitement about fundraising. I got very involved with Alateen as the Alateen Coordinator for the Area, then Delegate, Chairperson, Area Trustee, Convention Chairperson, and National Alateen Chairperson for our GSO. Now I serve as the Policy and Planning Chairperson for South Africa. If someone had told me 28 years ago that I would be sharing at an International Al-Anon General Services Meeting, I would not have believed them. This became possible because my husband drank too much. I was a very nervous person. I could not walk to the front in church or across a room filled with people. Today, by following this wonderful God-given program, I have overcome all of that.

By practicing the 36 spiritual principles of our program in all my affairs, I was able to give and love unconditionally. The more I served, the more I was rewarded. You

sure reap what you sow! I also learned to believe in the universe and trust what the universe had to offer by working on the power of intent to achieve my many goals. I was challenged, and Al-Anon told me I had the potential to do things. I could not type when I came and I am still a two-finger typist. I was able to type programs for my meeting, agendas, and workshops. I progressed in my jobs the same way that I progressed in Al-Anon.

I was in a good space, maybe a comfort zone, after facing many challenges with sobriety, namely financial and infidelity in my marriage. Both children had finished college and were working. Then, nine years ago one fatal morning I was told that my 25 year-old son was hijacked and murdered. After 19 years of being in the fellowship, serving, and also being very instrumental in parish work, I was now on my hands and knees. I was stripped of all the teachings I had learned. I just wanted to change places with my beloved baby. I questioned my God. I have always given my precious time serving Him. I could not accept that this had happened to our family. Today, I look back and I can thank my God for healing my broken and shattered heart. I joined compassionate friends, went on counseling courses, went on every course or workshop to do with grief even went to places where angels never tread, just for help. I had to take responsibility for my life—that is what Tradition Seven is about. My fervent prayer to God was “please don’t let me go mad.” I felt as though I was an amputee and that people looked at me differently. I felt the same feelings when I lived with active alcoholism.

I had just finished my term as Area Chairperson and was earmarked by my Area as the next Trustee. I turned down the nomination but my Sponsor urged me to take the form home. On my way home I heard my son tell me, “Mom, you have such a passion for Al-Anon, do it. That’s your life.” I called my Service Sponsor that afternoon and told her I would accept the nomination. I had to learn new things and as I got busy I got better. After my first term as Trustee, I decided to step down when I was asked by my Area to please stay on for one more year. It so happened that was the year our structure changed. So I stayed on for a further term as I had the expertise. I look back now and cannot stop thanking my God for bringing me through my worst moments. I could not even live one day at a time; I had to live by minutes and moments. My life today is all about the here and now; I cannot bring my baby back. I thank Him for protecting me at all times.

These were the signs that confirmed to me that he was only meant to be with me for 25 years. I am eternally grateful to my God for allowing my son to touch my life. He taught me so many lessons and gave me so much love and good memories to live by. Today I believe very much in the “footprints,” it was always one of my favorites. Today I know it is real—if I had done it my way, I would not be here today. I would have been in a mental home. My son and I were like two peas in a pod. Today my ultimate relationship is between my God and myself. This relationship takes preference and all my other relationships flow from that—my family, fellowship, and work. Today I am consciously aware of God in whatever I do. My life is still full of challenges but I have learned to cope with them. In the past nine years I have lost a son and two brothers, in all nine close family members, one every year. Four of them were due to unnatural causes—murder.

Last year my husband was diagnosed with prostate cancer. I prayed to God and said to him once again, “I am powerless please take care of this.” My belief was so strong I was able to give my husband all my support. He had the best specialist and best treatment and is now cured as it was found in time. I kept having this little voice tell me it is going to be okay. His family could not deal with this and could not get over my coping during that trying time. Once again my family and fellowship stood by and supported us with their unconditional caring and love and emotional support.

I want to thank my family and friends and this marvelous fellowship for all your love and support during my bright and dark days. I found that my ultimate relationship with God brings joy to my life. I have learned to trust this process. I slip at times but I come out of it by reading my daily readers or getting an e-mail or a call from a friend or relative. This is my God taking care of me.

I would like to leave you with this quote from Simone Weil, “It is not my business to think about myself. My business is to think about God. It is for God to think about me.” This is very hard to practice in the real world but I try, “One Day at a Time” to let it be.

I love you all and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all your love and support, and giving me an opportunity to be generous with my past. I will always be grateful to our founders, pioneers, my past and present fellowship and Service Sponsors for their love, honesty, and guidance through my pain and joy on my journey of recovery.

Closing Remarks

In bringing the 15th International Al-Anon General Services Meeting to a close, the Chairperson remarked, “I always come away from service meetings with renewed enthusiasm and new ideas. I have been inspired by the sessions we have had this week and I am excited about the new ideas that I will now have to share from your many structures.

We have come here from many structures and have spoken many languages. What I have heard all week is the language of the heart. We focused on our one purpose as

we encouraged the growth and unity of our many structures through the three Legacies. I have felt a freedom and easiness as we supported and strengthened each other. I know we will all be together one more time in Vancouver in 2013!

The 15th International Al-Anon General Services Meeting closed with a circle of members and guests that encompassed the meeting room all reciting the Al-Anon Declaration followed by the Serenity Prayer in their own languages.

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	<i>Amistad (Friendship)</i>	1978
Australia	1952	1970	1980-2010	<i>Austra-Link</i>	1974
Austria	---	---	---	---	---
Belgium (Flemish)	1961	1982	1980-2006	<i>Keerpunt</i>	1982
Belgium (French)	1965	1981	1980-2000	<i>Sérénité</i>	1976
Brazil	1966	1979	1980-2010	<i>Boletín Al-Anon Informativo Nacional</i>	1983
Colombia	1960	1992	2002	<i>Renacimiento</i>	1981
Costa Rica	1960	1997	1980-1988, 92, 2002, 2004	<i>Compartamo</i>	1979
Denmark	1974	1985	1986, 2006, 2010	<i>Perspektiv</i>	1988
Finland	1953	1968	1980-2010	<i>Tietoavain</i>	1967
France	1962	1979	1980, 82, 86, 90-2004	<i>La Chaîne</i>	1967
Germany	1967	1986	1980-2010	<i>Intern</i>	1981
Guatemala	---	---	---	---	---
Iceland	1972	1986	1984-2010	<i>Hlekkurinn (The Link)</i>	1987
Italy	1976	1995	1986, 1992-2002, 2010	<i>Incontro (Meet Together)</i>	1988
Japan	1979	1992	1982, 84, 88, 90, 92, 97	<i>Hiroba (Inside Al-Anon)</i>	1981
Korea	1982	1980	1997	---	---
Mexico	1965	1973	1980-90, 97, 2002-2008	<i>Delta</i>	1976
Netherlands	1976	1995	1980-2004	<i>Stapsgewijs</i>	1980
New Zealand	1954	1980	1980-2010	<i>N.Z. Al-Anon Messenger</i>	1963
Norway	1960	1987	1982-2006	<i>Trim For Trinn</i>	1981
Paraguay	---	---	---	---	---
Peru	1965	2001	2004	---	1970
Portugal	---	---	---	---	---
Poland	1980	1997	1994-2000, 2006, 2010	<i>Razem</i>	1993
South Africa	1951	1963	1980, 82, 84, 88-2000, 2006-2010	<i>Unitas</i>	1967
Spain	1972	1980	1980, 88, 90-97, 2000-2010	<i>Serenidad</i>	1980
Sweden	1976	1991	1988, 92-94	<i>Al-Anon Kontakt</i>	1986
Switzerland (French)	1963	1973	1997-2004	<i>Sunray</i>	1975
Switzerland (German)	1964	1973	1982-2010	<i>M & F</i>	1969
U.K. & Eire	1952	1970	1980-2010	<i>News & Views</i>	1963
Uruguay	1974	1997	2004	---	---
Venezuela	---	---	---	---	---
US & Canada	1951	1960	1980-2010	<i>The Forum, Inside Al-Anon</i>	1978

Al-Anon meetings are held in over 130 countries. There are a total of 23,390 Al-Anon groups and 1,771 Alateen groups worldwide

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