

Guide for becoming a General Service Office

Purpose: To meet the service responsibilities of Al-Anon on a day-to day basis.

Our experience has indicated that to head the operation of a General Service Office, the Board should appoint a general secretary or manager. This person should be an Al-Anon member and a Board member. It is recommended that the general secretary or manager be paid for his services, which is quite in keeping with our Traditions. The performance of this type of job by volunteers has not proved successful elsewhere for any great length of time.

The general secretary **or manager** may receive assistance from Board members, committee members and from other Al-Anon members. The general secretary **or manager** may require help to perform secretarial, mailing or other work utilizing paid workers, volunteers or both.

The duties of a General Service Office may include the following:

- 1) To act as a clearinghouse for inquiries from those in the country who wish help or information about Al-Anon.
- 2) To accumulate Al-Anon experience about and answer inquiries from Al-Anon groups or individual members with respect to the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.
- 3) To handle the work involved in the publication and distribution of Al-Anon Conference-Approved Literature.
- 4) To publish a periodic information bulletin for distribution to all Al-Anon groups in the country.
- 5) To publish and distribute, annually, lists or a directory of all groups in the area served.

As a Al-Anon Information Service, you may have had a Service Board who's representation included members from the groups served in the District or Area. As your structure evolves to a General Service Office, it may be time to form a Board of Trustees. To help with the understanding of this service role the WSO experience is shared below.

Traditionally, Al-Anon as such, never ought to be organized, but Service Boards or Committees can be established which are directly responsible to those they serve. These Al-Anon service agencies never attempt to govern the conduct of Al-Anon groups or of individual members. As stated in Tradition Two, "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."

The principles which have guided the development of Al-Anon's World Service Office in the U.S. and Canada and its World Service Conference may be helpful in meeting the needs of other countries.

The first move toward the creation of a service structure for Al-Anon was the formation, in 1951, of a Volunteer Advisory Committee. They chose the name, Family Group Clearing House for the modest office space acquired in New York City. This office inaugurated and maintained those special services for Al-Anon as a whole that could not be performed well by single groups or regions. In 1954, to protect the sale of our first book, *The Al-Anon Family Groups, A Guide for the Families of Problem Drinkers*, the Clearing House was incorporated as a non-profit unit under the name Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc.

Now that the Al-Anon Information Service has been functioning for some time, these further suggested steps are recommended as the structure evolves.

How to Start

- 1) The creation of a Service Committee composed of Al-Anon members, to serve until a permanent Board can be formed.
- 3) An office could then be set up under the supervision of the Committee with volunteer workers to handle all inquiries and distribution of literature as it is developed. As soon as possible, to insure continuity and efficiency, a paid staff which does not rotate should be installed.
- 4) The next step would be the formation of a General Service Board, with committees responsible for it, to work on policy, public **outreach**, finances, literature and other needs as they arise.
- 5) Finally, would come the establishment of a General Service Conference, where elected Delegates would meet annually with the Board, its Committees and personnel of the Service Office to establish a strong link between the Service Office, the Board and Al-Anon membership.

Origin of Conference

The Trustees knew that the time would come when there would be matters of policy upon which the World Service Board would need direct guidance from the groups themselves. In keeping with our Traditions Nine which states that such Boards are directly responsible to those they serve, the Al-Anon World Service Conference was created as an advisory body of elected Delegates from the US and Canada. These Delegates meet with the Trustees and other members of the World Service Office on an annual basis to provide guidance to the World Service Board and to be the link between it and the groups it serves. Provision was also made to include representatives from other countries.

The Conference now represents, insofar as such a body can, the group conscience of Al-Anon.

Since these service developments have worked out satisfactorily in providing protection, unity and continuity for Al-Anon so that families of alcoholics seeking our help can always find it, we think that other countries can satisfactorily adapt this same type of service structure to meet most of their needs.

The General Service Board

When the Service Committee decides that the time has come to form a General Service Board, a Nominating Committee should be appointed, consisting of members of the Service Committee itself. Nominees for Board membership should for the most part be selected from the Service Committee volunteers who have proved their reliability and dedication. Although this procedure may appear to be self-appointive, experience has shown the practicality of electing an available and knowledgeable Board. It is the responsibility of the functioning Service Committee to elect such Board Members. As the Board grows in time and experience, and when a Conference has been added, the slate for annual elections should then be submitted to the Delegates, who represent the groups, for their approval before final election by the Board takes place.

Briefly, the function of your General Service Board might be defined as follows:

- 1) To act as custodians of the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions as well as of Al-Anon's good name in your area and of such physical assets as the Board may acquire including cash, equipment and literature.
- 2) To oversee the operations of a General Service Office.
- 3) To oversee the distribution and publication of Al-Anon Conference-Approved-Literature and establish reprint permission.
- 4) To appoint committees composed of Al-Anon members to represent the Board in special interest such as public information and literature.
- 5) To hold an Annual Conference, to be attended by elected representatives of the groups, at which the Board will report to Al-Anon on its activities and plans for the future, and at which plans for future policies and activities can be discussed and determined and a General Service Board approved for the coming year.

Composition of the WSO Board of Trustees

The Bylaws of Al-Anon Family Groups Board of Trustees have been amended several times to provide for growth and changing needs. At our 1968 Conference, the Board was enlarged for the inclusion of Regional Trustees. At present there is a provision for a 7-21

member Board. Currently, it is composed of nine Regional Trustees (from throughout the US and Canada), nine Trustees-at-large, one Sustaining Trustee (the Executive Director of the WSO). Our two lifetime Trustees, Lois W. and Anne B., were considered permanent members until their deaths.

The WSO Al-Anon Trustees serve for three years and may serve for two successive three-year terms. Al-Anon members selected to serve on the Board are those who have attained a sound understanding of our program and fellowship, have good judgment and may have some special qualifications or professional background which can prove of value in guiding Board decisions.

Board of Trustees: Composition, Jurisdiction, Responsibilities

- a) The Board of Trustees of Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., is composed of qualified members of Al-Anon groups. The Board elects its own successors, with nominees subject to the approval of the Conference or a committee thereof.
- b) The Board is the chief service arm of the Conference, which is guardian of Al-Anon's Twelve Traditions. Subject to e below, the Board has responsibility to determine policy and manage the business affairs of the WSO. It may appoint suitable committees and elect member to it Executive Committee.
- c) If any subsidiary services are later formed, the Board of Trustees will be primarily responsible for their policy and financial integrity.
- d) The Bylaws of Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., and any amendments thereto are subject to recall by the Conference by a two-thirds vote of all its members. All Bylaw amendments will be presented to the first Conference to be held after their adoption by the Board of Trustees.
- e) Except in great emergency the Board of Trustees ought never take action liable to affect Al-Anon as a whole greatly without consulting the Conference. However, it is understood that the Board shall reserve the right to decide which of its decisions may require referral to the Conference.

Financing

The money to pay for the operation of the General Service office is obtained through contributions from Al-Anon groups, members and the sale of literature.

All members should be encouraged to make contributions through their groups to the office on a monthly basis, quarterly, semi-annual or annual basis. Such contributions may be considered as self-support of Al-Anon services.

We also recommend that you sell Al-Anon literature to Al-Anon groups and other interested sources at a price somewhat in excess of the price you pay or the price that it

costs you to print it. A small profit supplements group contributions in supporting the services.

Once the General Service Office has been well established with sufficient money to cover current operating expenses and some excess of income annually, it is desirable to set up a Reserve Fund. Its purpose is to set aside sufficient fund to ensure the continuation of Al-Anon's essential services in the event of a severe depression.

Reasons for Incorporation

Preferably, the General Service Board should be organized as a non-profit membership corporation. We know that we want a minimum of "organization" in Al-Anon. But we also know we need some organization – that has become apparent over the years at the group, local service and World Service levels.

Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. for instance, holds the title to the copyrights on most of our literature, including our **nineteen** books. It is the guardian of the Steps and Traditions. It is responsible for administering the monies donated by the groups.

The corporation exists to maintain title in the name of the fellowship under the direction of the World Service Board. This is not only for legal reasons but because it is felt this is the best possible way of insuring the efficiency and continuity needed to carry out the work of the World Service Office. For one thing, a corporation does not die even though Al-Anon members do. Thus, a corporation provides continuity that is vital.

The "non-profit" part of the incorporation has to do with the tax laws in this country. Any surplus shown at the end of the year for a non-profit corporation is not taxed. Surplus shown by an ordinary corporation is **taxed**. You undoubtedly have some equivalent of our non-profit corporation.

In your country, there may be difficulties in forming a non-profit corporation, but unless the difficulties are severe, we recommend that you do form one. We have found the advantages well worthwhile. One that probably should be mentioned is the objectivity of the corporation. That is, there is a greater willingness to "rotate" Trustees than there is to rotate the members of a small-personalized committee or working team.

If any questions come to mind after reading this guide, we hope you'll let us know so we can try to be of help. ***We wish you the best and look forward to working with you as you take this final step towards becoming a General Service Office.***