

## Making A.A. Accessible To the Alcoholic With Special Needs

In St. Louis, Missouri, a disabled young newcomer uses her coded meeting book to find an A.A. meeting with wheelchair access. In Venice, California, a hearing-impaired alcoholic uses his T.D.D. (teletype machine for the deaf) to call the central office for help. And in Melbourne, Florida, a confined member smiles as three A.A. friends arrive for their weekly meeting in her bedroom.

Once rare, such scenarios are becoming commonplace as areas across America redouble their efforts to assure that A.A. is available to all who need us. "In North Florida," says Brian S., "we think of it as being 'accessible' to any alcoholic with special needs—such as the visually- and hearing-impaired, the bedridden, and those with learning disorders."

The chairperson of his area's Accessibilities Committee, Brian explains that "the term is open-ended. Basically it refers to any person, place or thing that helps the alcoholic get to a meeting; or, conversely, that helps get a meeting to the alcoholic."

The five-year-old Accessibilities Committee successfully employs illustrations, captioned both in English and Spanish, to raise the consciousness of A.A.s. Explains Brian: "One illustration shows a fellow lying in bed, with the caption 'Help me stay sober.' Another

shows a person at a meeting, saying, 'Please look at me . . . because I read your lips.'" Additionally, the committee is producing a meeting list in Braille and working toward an ambitious goal: to make one A.A. meeting a week available in every nursing home in the area.

Across the U.S., the Southern California Area Literature Committee is currently concentrating its efforts on reaching the hearing-impaired alcoholic. Says alternate chairperson Bill W., who also serves as chairperson of the Deaf Communications Subcommittee: "For deaf persons who use American Sign Language (A.S.L.), English is a second language. In addition, idioms and colloquialisms are difficult to sign; and some phrases used in A.A., such as 'Rarely have we seen a person fail,' do not have comparable signs. So, in a real sense, working with the deaf community is similar to working with minorities such as Hispanics or Native Americans—that is, with a group that has a separate language and culture."

What can the Fellowship do to help? Bill reports that requests most frequently made by hearing-impaired A.A.s include: videotapes of the entire Big Book in A.S.L. (only Chapter Five is now available); simplified reading material with easier vocabulary and smaller words; more A.A. meetings with skilled interpreters; and help



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in starting new all-deaf meetings.

Significantly, he notes, "some have sought sponsorship from a hearing A.A. In sponsorship or friendship, it has been found that, with a pencil and paper plus our language of the heart, the barrier of deafness quickly falls away." California A.A.s wishing to reach out to their fellow hearing-impaired members by phone, he adds, can call them on the state-provided relay system (1-800-342-5833) without incurring charges.

Communication would be greatly facilitated, suggests Lola G. of College Park, Maryland, if more A.A. members could sign. "We have our own lingo," she explains, "and many non-A.A. interpreters may not be familiar enough with it to translate accurately. For example, what if they interpret the Big Book to mean the Bible?" The point is, she stresses, that quality interpretation is not some luxury; "it is essential to many a deaf alcoholic's chance for recovery." Lola practices what she preaches. She has studied A.S.L. for eight years and devotes much of her time to signing at A.A. meetings.

In Eastern Missouri, says immediate past delegate Ginny J., "our area's Special Needs Committee has been especially active in working with the visually and hearing impaired, the physically handicapped and the elderly. We provide interpreters at major conferences and conventions; code meeting lists to flag meetings with interpreters as well as those with wheelchair access; and take people to meetings, mainly on an individual basis."

In its work with the visually impaired, she says, the committee has "relied heavily on the Braille editions of the Big Book and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. The audio cassettes available from the General Service Office and the Grapevine also have been very helpful."

Sometimes, Ginny points out, the people with special needs aren't who you think they are. She tells of a recent meeting of the Friday Night Live Group, where the speaker, who was deaf, "spoke" in sign language. "In this instance, the regular interpreter switched gears and translated for the benefit of the hearing ears," Ginny relates. "For many, it was truly a spiritual experience."

G.S.O. is happy to hear how local A.A.s are successfully responding to the challenges of members with special needs. Such sharing may be sent to the Group Services Coordinator at G.S.O.

## **Changes at G.S.O.**

Wayne P., general manager, resigned his service at our office effective August 1st. Tom J., services director, will assume the additional duties of acting general manager for the interim. Consistent with his continuing dedication to serving the Fellowship, Wayne has made himself available to Tom and the board during the transition period. The General Service Board has begun the process of filling the position of general manager on a permanent basis.

All at G.S.O. appreciate Wayne's dedication and service as our manager. Our gratitude and best wishes go with him as he returns to his family in Arkansas.

## **Oldtimers Recall How A.A. Was a Family Affair**

"Meetings when I came in were very small and attended by the whole family, if you still had one. We were a handful of people on a life raft, totally dependent upon one another for survival. We knew everything there was to know about each other—what Tim owed on his house, when Joe's probation was up, how Carol was dealing sober with her rambunctious kids. If someone missed a meeting, his phone was sure to ring off the wall."

So recalls Southern Californian Drew S., one of the oldtimers whose reminiscences keep our memories of A.A.'s beginnings green. "We didn't wait for prospects to come to us," he writes. "We carried the message to them in the dark alleys and crannies of skid row."

There were "only a few sober members of A.A. living in the Inland Empire in the early forties," Drew says. "But they didn't know about each other until public meetings were started in 1945. The first of these members was a man named Kent H. He'd been arrested for drunkenness and brought before the same judge 25 times.

"The judge's patience had worn thin, and he was about to give Kent some serious time. Meanwhile, Kent's wife, Audrey, desperate to help him, had read the famous Jack Alexander article about A.A. in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Through it, she learned of a fledgling A.A. group in Los Angeles, about 50 miles away, and went into action.

"Kent was soggy as usual that sunny day in May 1941, but with the help of a friend, Audrey got him dressed and bundled into the car. Then she headed determinedly



In response to a growing need for simplified literature, the 1991 General Service Conference approved the "Twelve Steps Illustrated" pamphlet. The actual Step appears at the top of the page, with an easy-to-read interpretation beneath the illustration. Now available from G.S.O., (P-55).

for L.A. and the meeting.

"It seemed to take hold. Kent was almost his old self for the next few days. But one afternoon the obsession struck. He left his tire shop in downtown San Bernardino and took off to fetch a bottle. Loping down the street, he glanced back, and there was his wife's face framed in the window, eyes wide and lips pressed together. Kent stopped dead in his tracks and turned around, never to touch another drop of booze the rest of his life.

"The first woman in our area to stay sober the rest of her life was Evelyn E., sobriety date 1945. The same woman who found me in June 1947 sprawled on a lot behind Joe's Bar, now called Tut's. I haven't found it necessary to pick up a drink since."

## Rotation Time at G.S.O.: An Adventure in Letting Go

Every two years, A.A. staff members at the General Service Office engage in the A.A. phenomenon called rotation. They take hearts and hands off their current assignments, pack up their personal effects, and move on to other offices, other responsibilities.

Is rotation easy? No, say those who have done it. Is it essential to the A.A. way of life? Yes, says the collective voice of A.A. experience. Along with the Anonymity Tradition, it is one way we have of avoiding power, prestige and personal recognition from distorting our best intentions. Also, since the process of rotation in all service positions—from the group level to the board of

trustees—limits the length of individual service, it does away with popularity contests and keeps "principles above personalities."

"While A.A. is important to the existence of the individual," our first (nonalcoholic) trustee chairperson Bernard Smith cautioned back in 1956, "no individual must be vital to the existence of A.A." With that, he acted upon his conviction and voluntarily stepped out of office.

Traditionally, as *The A.A. Service Manual* points out, rotation keeps staffers from becoming "frozen in their offices." No one person is likely to be taken advantage of, since tasks are shared over the long run. Additionally, as one A.A. member observed with a grin, "Rotation limits the time some of us trusted servants have to mess things up!"

At G.S.O., every staff assignment has expanded in scope with the rapid growth of the Fellowship which, as of now, has a worldwide membership of more than two million recovering alcoholics. Since 1968, membership has tripled in the U.S. and Canada alone, with the greatest numerical increase occurring during the 1980s. Yet only a handful of staff and support positions have been added to handle the extra workload—unless you count the hard-driving, nonrotating computer system.

The changing of the guard occurs like clockwork every other fall, and the transition is generally smooth. For those relinquishing assignments they have come to love, there's a consolation. They're probably not saying good-bye, just *au revoir*.

**NOTE:** G.S.O.'s new Staff Assignment Sheet is enclosed with this issue.

## ***Birthday Contribution Envelopes***

We are happy to share the two enclosed Birthday Contribution envelopes with you. Your General Service Office welcomes your participation in the "birthday plan" as an expression of gratitude for your sobriety. Whatever you choose to send will be greatly appreciated.

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## **Donations to Pink Cans Provide 'Meetings in Print'**

Alcoholics confined in correctional facilities usually have just one A.A. meeting a week available to them, if they're lucky. A sizeable number are on waiting lists and go to none at all. But there's another way to carry the message to these people: provide them with meetings-in-print through A.A.'s Big Book, pamphlets, audiovisual material and the Grapevine. The only stumbling block is money.

Enter the pink cans. "When the need for literature was seen many years ago," says Will N., Northern California Hospitals & Institutions Committee liaison to the General Service Office, we decided to ask our area groups to collect spare change in labeled containers. To keep printing costs down, the printer utilized leftover pink paper for the cans' labels, and our new literature fund raiser was born."

According to Will, the original one-quart paint cans have given way to plastic containers with a screw-on, slotted top. The circling label is still pink. "Initially," he says, "some members feared that donations to the pink cans would have a shrinking effect on group contributions, but this has not happened. Providing clear information probably has a lot to do with it. Every year, the H&I committee sends each group a flyer explaining what the cans are for. Before the basket is passed at a meeting, the committee suggests that the secretary might emphasize the importance of contributing to group expenses and commitments to the A.A. support system first. When possible, information also is printed in local A.A. newsletters."

In 1990, Will reports, "more than \$248,000—mostly in nickels, dimes, quarters and pennies—was plunked into our modest pink cans. These funds were contributed by A.A.s for A.A.s in the spirit of our Tradition of self-support."

He notes that "variations on the pink can have been popping up at meetings across the country. Not long ago, in fact, I saw some green cans at meetings in Southern California's San Diego/Imperial Area. The labels, telling where to send the contributions, were printed in two languages—Spanish on one side and



English on the other. That's A.A. sharing for you. I went down there all set to share our terrific experience in Northern California, only to return with a great idea of theirs."

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## ***Viewpoint*** **When Power Becomes A Three-Letter Word**

Look up *power* in Webster's Dictionary and you'll find a long, sometimes conflicting list of definitions. Working for good, it can be "a source or means of supplying energy"; however, when power becomes synonymous with *ego*, look out!

"When we become a part of A.A.," says Jim M., coordinator of the California Northern Interior Area (CNIA) Archives Center at Stockton, "we acknowledge in Steps One and Two that we are powerless over alcohol, but that we believe a 'Power greater than ourselves' can restore us to sanity. Moreover, the Big Book eloquently speaks about our old ego-centric values, about how we've insisted on having things our own way. But that's behind us now—or is it?"

Sharing his own experience, Jim recalls what happened at a recent inventory meeting of his home group. "When a couple of members found my great ideas less than wonderful," he observes, "I had to be aware every minute that the purpose was not to have the group do things my way but rather to bring up matters for discussion, explore the issues, and let the group do it

our way—the way of an informed group conscience.”

Writing in the CNIA newsletter *Area Accents*, he notes that, “particularly when we A.A.s get into service, we tend to take little power trips. We want to delegate responsibility to our fellow members, but not the commensurate authority. This urge has been experienced across the board over and over again, first by our co-founders and then by participants of our General Service Conference, our groups, service committees and intergroups.

“Bill W. clearly spells out the problem, and the solution, in his introduction to *Twelve Concepts for World Service*: ‘Well knowing our own propensities for power driving, it is natural and even imperative that our service concepts be based on the system of checks and balances. We have had to face the fact that we usually try to enlarge our own authority and prestige when we are in the saddle. But when we are not, we strenuously resist a heavy-handed management wherein someone else holds the reins. I’m the more sure of this because I possess these traits myself.’ ”

It would be nice, Jim reflects, “to say that if I’m living the Twelve Steps on a daily basis, my ‘self-will run riot’ will never again rear its ugly head. But the reality is that I must constantly examine my motives when I want to ‘set the record straight.’ Am I doing good or am I just feeding the old ego?”

“I invite you to think about the latest or worst conflict in A.A. that you can recall. Chances are that you won’t have to dig far to find the mischief-maker: power for ego’s sake. That and neglecting to ‘place principles before personalities.’ ”

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## Gratitude in Action Is One Drunk Helping Another

“Gratitude should go forward rather than backward,” A.A. co-founder Bill W. wrote in 1959. “If you carry the message to others, you will be making the best possible repayment for the help given to you.”

More than 30 years later, as A.A.s celebrate Gratitude Month (October in Canada, November in the U.S.) with special contributions to G.S.O. for A.A. services worldwide, Bill’s words convey a sense of purpose and direction to a membership on the move.

Grateful for the sobriety they’ve been given and eager to pass it on, A.A.s are busier than ever on Twelfth Stepping and service. They are reaching out in greater numbers to Loners, people with special needs, members of minority groups and previously unreached alcoholics. And they are sharing their gratitude from every point of view, in every imaginable language of the heart.

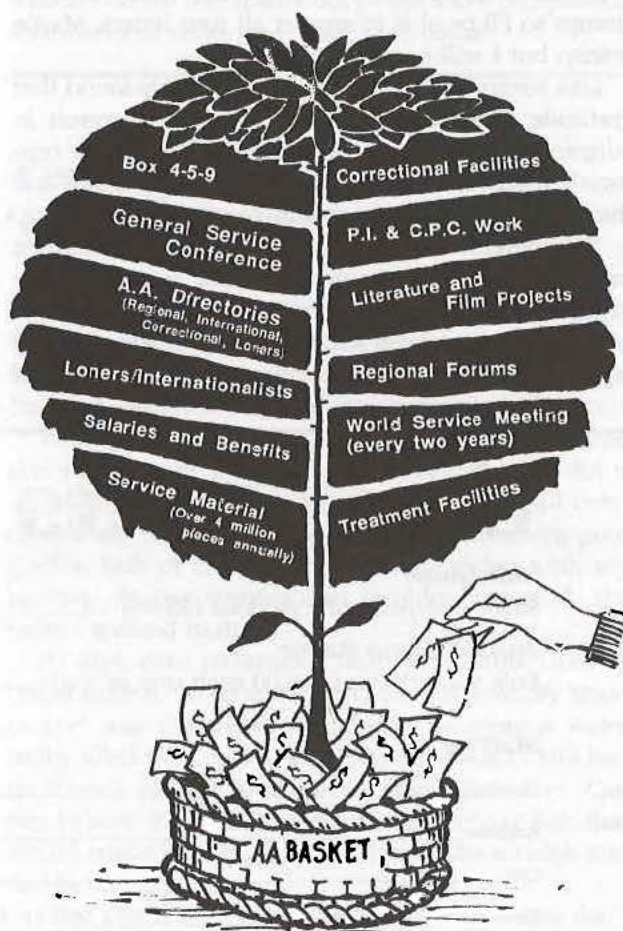
Writes Don LeC. from Stockton, California: “I am

pleased to inform the General Service Office of my continued sobriety—110 days and counting. One of my sponsors pointed out to me that A.A. was started by newcomers, which shows just how vital a part of A.A. all newcomers really are.

“I have accepted this program into my life with much the same vigor that A.A. first accepted me as a hurting, confused newcomer. Now on my first journey through the Twelve Steps, I am doing my best to absorb every caring, feeling, enlightening moment. Please accept the enclosed feather as a small token of my appreciation. It comes from a Yellow-headed Amazon—a parrot like the one Long John Silver had in *Treasure Island*.”

Last April, John S. of West Orange, New Jersey, rotated out of his service position as Class B (alcoholic) Northeast U.S. regional trustee. At the closing brunch of the General Service Conference, he said, “Because of what A.A. has done for me and my family, I will go to any lengths to carry the message. I don’t believe that 18 years ago, when I got my 90-day sobriety pin in the South Orange Group, there was anybody who predicted, ‘This guy will be a trustee some day!’ ”

Is there service life after rotation? Indeed there is, John affirmed. “My home group told me that since I’ve been a freeloader for the past four years, I have the



honor of making the coffee for a month. They may not know it, but they're doing this alcoholic a big favor."

Les F., of Hornbrook, California, writes that the date of his "last drink and drunk" was January 1, 1945. "I am so grateful," he says, "to have seen the great growth of A.A., to have been a part of its joy and love over all these years." And seagoing member Jerry T. of New Orleans writes, after traversing the waterways of Alaska, that "we had A.A. meetings nightly for 'Friends of Bill W.' I cried openly in gratitude for this God-given program—and several of the people there were astounded by such an emotional display from an A.A. in the program nearly 18 years."

Expressing appreciation for his sobriety and for copies of *Loners-Internationalists Meeting (LIM)*, a bi-monthly meeting-in-print published by G.S.O., Jerome McC. shares his story. "I became a paraplegic in 1975 and never adjusted," he explains. "But A.A. kept coming at me. My counselor, other A.A.s and the Big Book all said that, if you work the program with enough effort, you not only will stop drinking but your whole life will be changed.

"It happened for me as they said it would. I still can't walk but dare I say, 'I don't care'? I'm full of life again and I thank A.A. and my Higher Power. I hope to correspond with some Loners and a few of you who have the time. Tomorrow I'm going to get two books of stamps so I'll be able to answer all your letters. Maybe briefly, but I will answer."

Like Jerome, our co-founder Bill W. early found that gratitude dispels despair and "must surely result in outgoing love" . . . . And he shared a method he constantly used "to hold fast to the truth that a full and thankful heart cannot entertain great conceits."

"Whenever I fall under acute pressures, I lengthen my daily walks and slowly repeat our Serenity Prayer in rhythm to my steps and breathing. If I feel that my pain has in part been occasioned by others, I try to repeat, 'God grant me the serenity to love their best and

never fear their worst.' This benign healing process of repetition, sometimes necessary to persist with for days, has seldom failed to restore me to at least a workable emotional balance and perspective." (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 271-72.)

## What Makes a Newcomer Keep Coming Back?

"About 50 percent of those coming to A.A. for the first time remain less than 90 days. We often say that few get to A.A. by accident, so the fact that in a brief time we lose half of those who begin our program may mean that we lose a great number of alcoholics who desperately need sobriety."

This quote, from the 1989 triennial survey of A.A. members, goes on to point out that it is of small comfort to suggest that many who leave return later, because their numbers have already been factored in. Since the 1983 Membership Survey, which reported that about 60 percent remained after three months (sober or not), there appears to have been a slow but steady attrition during the crucial first year. "This," the survey suggests, "may be a challenge to the membership to change the things we can."

Why have so many newcomers come and gone? It's a little late to tabulate their reasons for departure, but there's room for conjecture. For one thing, a number of newcomers are mandated to A.A. meetings by the courts and treatment facilities. These agencies hope that exposure to A.A. will encourage the newcomer to accept A.A. help for their alcoholism. However, some are not ready for A.A. help.

Also, the survey shows, some 42 percent of newcomers to A.A. have a problem with addiction to drugs *in addition to their alcoholism*. Some of these new people

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eventually find their drinking was minimal, and that their primary problem was addiction to drugs, which leads them to another twelve-step program more appropriate to their needs.

The list of possibilities goes on and on, but of greater urgency is the question: What can we do to make the alcoholic newcomer keep coming back? This is especially critical today when groups are apt to be larger and a confused newcomer can easily fall through the cracks or be unnoticed altogether—especially if fresh out of rehab, “dry” and looking good. Following are a few ways for groups and individual A.A.s to carry the message, as suggested at Regional Forums, workshops and conferences:

- Station greeters at the A.A. meeting room door.
- At large meetings, ask those present who have attended fewer than three meetings (or those in their first week or month of sobriety) to identify themselves—“not to embarrass you but so we can get to know you.”
- Break up a large meeting into smaller groups, at least for part of the meeting.
- Offer newcomers your phone number and let them know you’d welcome their call.
- If newcomers turn out to have a problem other than alcohol, explain A.A.’s singleness of purpose and offer to take them to a meeting of a twelve-step program with which they can identify.
- If you go out for coffee, cake and sharing after the meeting, include a newcomer. It may be his or her first opportunity to socialize sober.
- Stress the importance of the Twelve Steps and sponsorship as vital to sobriety, and be willing to share these tools as lifelines to recovery in A.A.
- Be aware that every day of sobriety counts. The 1989 survey notes that about 40 percent of members sober less than a year will remain sober and active in A.A. for at least another 12 months—and that figure jumps to approximately 90 percent after five years.

Carrying the A.A. message to the newcomers who need our help is a top priority. By leading a beginner meeting, regularly participating in our home groups and *greeting each newcomer with A.A. love*, we A.A.s are passing along what was freely given to us.

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## **WANTED: For A.A. History Book, Now in Preparation**

The General Service Office would like to interview three generations in the same family—parent, child and grandchild—all sober in the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Please send your name, address and phone number to: Literature Coordinator, G.S.O., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

## **A Prayer from India**

During the 1990 International Convention, Connecticut’s John N. “had a special encounter with a student at the University of Washington who had been drifting in and out of A.A. Of Jewish faith, she had difficulty with the Lord’s Prayer used in closing many A.A. meetings. Hoping it would remove her last barrier toward acceptance of the A.A. program, I gave the woman a card printed with the closing prayer used by the Our Home and Mamaskar groups in Bombay, India.

“Originated by alcoholics for alcoholics, the prayer is nonsectarian. It was brought back from India by our delegate Bob F. and printed in card form by our Area Service Committee. I am grateful to Bob and the committee for the opportunity to share the prayer with many.”

### **Prayer for Today**

God, bless all the alcoholics, wherever they may be. Bless those unfortunates who are in most need of sobriety. Look upon them with compassion and mercy, and lead them on to this wonderful Fellowship, that only through You, it may help them as it has helped me and thousands of others.

Bless those who are sober today. Give grace to those who are on the way; but, God, please show compassion and mercy to those who may never come.

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## **Teenager Asks: ‘Could I Be an Alcoholic?’**

“My name is Sara. I’m 13 years old and I *think* I might be an alcoholic, but I’m not sure. Can you be an alcoholic if you’re really young and don’t get drunk? If you can’t, I’m in the clear. If you can, I’m in trouble.”

Writing to G.S.O. from the Southeast, Sara says: “The first thing I ever drank was plum brandy. Oh, did it ever taste bad—but it made me feel warm all over, calmed my nerves and helped me forget about my poor grades, lack of friends, and constant fights with my parents. As my worries and troubles worsened, the more I wanted to drink.”

At first, Sara recounted, “I’d take a drink (usually vodka since it has no smell) just before school. My ‘great escape’ was too short, so I started carrying a water bottle filled with vodka. That helped, though I still had no friends and my grades were worse than ever. Can you believe it? It used to be that something like that would make me cry, but now I just take a drink and feel better.

“You know, the funny thing is that my parents don’t

even notice anything's missing from their liquor cabinet. I could never talk to them about this. They'd think I was making it up and transfer me to a different school or something. The reason I didn't go to my counselor is because I didn't know if I had a problem or not and since you're the experts I figured you could tell me. I do take a drink before I go to sleep and I had one before I wrote this and I hope you'll please answer."

"Yes, Sara, you could be an alcoholic, but only you can decide that you are," a G.S.O. staff member responded in part. "To help you, we are enclosing several A.A. pamphlets in which young people like you share their own experience: 'Too Young?,' 'Young People and A.A.,' and 'Do You Think You're Different?'"

"Be aware that alcoholism is an illness; and like most other illnesses, it strikes people of any age—even 13 and younger. So, if your life seems topsy-turvy and you think drinking might have something to do with it, I suggest that you look up Alcoholics Anonymous in your phone book and call (if you have difficulty connecting, consult your school counselor). Sharing with an A.A. member usually makes it easier to understand the nature of the illness, and to realize that help is available to you if you want it."

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## Correctional Facilities

### 'Strength in Numbers' Takes on New Meaning

"It's been a long time since I felt like I mattered somewhere besides here in prison," writes Perry L. from Red Creek, New York. "But then came the gifts from the General Service Office—the Big Book, Twelve and Twelve, and some pamphlets—and the wonderful letter that helped me believe someone out there is concerned about my life."

"Reading those words 'I am an alcoholic' and 'I understand' took a great weight from my spirit. I thank everyone in A.A. who has brought about this change of heart that I could not make by myself. I understand now what the phrase 'There is strength in numbers' really means."

Like Perry, two members of the Way Out Group in the prerelease program of a Thornton, Pennsylvania correctional facility have written G.S.O. to express gratitude for sobriety in A.A. that "has surpassed our wildest dreams."

Explain Phil P. and Cliff M.: "Though out of the

prison of active alcoholism, we continue to seek the fellowship of A.A. With sober thinking comes a desire for a better way of life. Being incarcerated does remind us daily of our active pasts; but with the help of friends, today is much brighter. We know that, no matter where or when, a new way of living a sober, happy life is possible."

### Will you help?

The Corrections Correspondence Service (CCS) at the General Service Office has a waiting list of many prison inmates who want to correspond with A.A. members. If you are willing to be a part of carrying our message to a person in prison, please write to: Correctional Facilities Desk, G.S.O., Box 459, Grand Central Station, NY 10163.

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## C.P.C.

### C.P.C.s Seek Ways to Reach Out to Our Friends

The Southern New Jersey Area C.P.C. Committee recently had the opportunity to connect with more than 500 professionals who are in daily contact with alcoholics and their problems.

The occasion was the Annual Conference of the New Jersey Association for the Prevention and Treatment of Substance Abuse, in Atlantic City. Reports Paul P., co-chairperson of the C.P.C. committee: "The exhibit hall also served as a banquet facility for the association's luncheons with its featured speakers, a setup that afforded exhibitors like us maximum exposure."

He notes that "a number of personnel from the criminal justice system were present. Some people we spoke with were unaware of what A.A. is about—and a few mistook us for paid sales and marketing people. Several, however, turned out to be friends of Bill W. Our 12 volunteers took turns staffing the table-top exhibit; we handed out several hundred literature packets, more than 100 meeting lists and other assorted A.A. literature."

Where appropriate, Paul says, "we explained our Tradition of self-support and the role every active member of A.A. plays in carrying the message of sobriety. For me, witnessing the positive way in which my fellow A.A.s shared their experience, strength and knowledge of recovery in the Fellowship was a tremendous experience."



From up north in Michigan comes a letter from oldtimer Claude M., who gently differs with *Box 4-5-9's* story (August/September 1990, p. 10) calling a recent workshop on substance-abuse problems of Alaska's native population "the first of its kind." A past Alaska delegate who only recently moved to Waterford, Michigan, Claude claims it "really was the second. The first was held in Sitka in 1962."

Providing some interesting history, Claude writes that "among A.A.s present at the workshop were the late nonalcoholic trustee emeritus John L. Norris, M.D. ('Dr. Jack') and the late Marty M., one of the first women to achieve lasting sobriety in A.A. I too was there and led the first open A.A. meeting ever held in Alaska to demonstrate to professionals how the Fellowship works.

"Nurses, doctors and social workers from all over the relatively new state came together at the workshop. It was successful beyond our dreams and marked the first step into the public information field of A.A. in Alaska. I am proud to have been a part of the movement to bring attention to the alcoholic problems of not only the white person but of the native Alaskan as well."

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## P.I.

### New California PSAs Are a Tribute to Inter-Area Cooperation

Six new public service announcements, soon to be aired throughout Southern California, show what exciting things can happen when several areas brainstorm and cooperate with each other.

It all started in 1989 when KABC-TV, looking to fill a need for PSAs directed to inner city pre-teens and seniors, phoned district P.I. committee member John O. in Mid-Southern California. Because the station covers the whole bottom half of California, the call had an immediate and wide ripple effect.

The delegates of the areas concerned—Southern, Mid-Southern and San Diego/Imperial—formed an ad hoc Tri-Area P.I. Committee to study the feasibility of producing the PSAs, take a recommendation to their respective areas and pursue the project if approved. As it turned out, the committee would meet many times over the next two years.

"Held in all three areas on a rotating basis, our meetings have been relatively peaceful since the beginning," observes Mid-Southern area delegate P.J. D., adding that "each area was allowed four voting members, including the delegate and P.I. chairperson." After

some months, P.J. relates, the committee enlisted the help of Bill M., a Southern California area officer who knows his way around film; Bill jumped in with zest.

The theme of the PSAs is deceptively simple. As Bill explains, "You see portions of people's faces—eyes, noses, cheeks, mouths representing various races and nationalities—up close and constantly dissolving into one another." On one 30-second spot targeting both the young and the old, for example an announcer says, "Alcoholism—it doesn't care who you are." Then, as the facial features flash and fade, they "speak" matter-of-factly for themselves: "Alcohol doesn't care how young I am" . . . "Alcohol doesn't care how old I am" . . . "It doesn't care what I look like" . . . "It doesn't care where I came from" . . . "It doesn't care how much money I have" . . . "And it doesn't even care what language I speak."

"Neither do we," says the announcer as a graphic appears. Written in white letters on Big Book blue are several lines of words—"Alcoholics Anonymous/One Alcoholic helping another/No dues or fees/Anonymous and confidential." In closing, the announcer suggests, "If you think you have a drinking problem, call us. We've been there. You don't have to do it alone. Look us up in the phone book."

There are three 30-second and three 10-second PSAs produced in both English and Spanish, with closed captions for the hearing-impaired. KABC-TV is expected to start airing them by the end of the year.

San Diego/Imperial Area delegate Bobbie C. notes that the cost of producing the PSAs was under \$6,000. "KABC offered to provide its studio and equipment," she says, "and at first we were concerned lest this might constitute affiliation with an outside organization. But after much discussion, both with G.S.O. and our areas, we decided all systems were 'go,' since the same service was offered to other nonprofit groups, all with no strings attached. And we hold the copyright free and clear."

Importantly, the final scripts for the PSAs were reviewed and approved with unanimity by all three areas. In the case of two—Southern and Mid-Southern—funds were provided directly by the area assemblies. In the San Diego/Imperial Area, where P.I. functions as part of the intergroup structure, Bobbie reports, funding was jointly handled by the intergroups and the area assembly. "This project," she says, "has increased our area's awareness of the importance of public information and brought everyone much closer."

Jackie J., delegate for the Southern California Area, echoes the sentiments expressed by her fellow committee members when she says, "Working together has been extraordinarily beneficial. Our areas, while overlapping, have some very different needs and problems, but this experience underscores our commonality of purpose. Hopefully, it is the first of other cooperative ventures to come."

The committee would welcome the opportunity to share the new PSAs with other areas. Copies of the spots, now on one-inch video tapes, can be made to accommodate just about any format. If you are interested, please contact: Public Information Desk, G.S.O., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

## Treatment Facilities

### Why Treatment Facilities Turn to A.A.

A.A.s in service frequently encourage professionals to read our literature, attend an open meeting and try to see the Fellowship as we do. But for us, looking from the outside in is sometimes a good exercise, too. To see ourselves as others do can sharpen our perceptions (and our gratitude) and help us to carry the A.A. message a little bit better.

Such an opportunity occurred at the International Convention last year, when Vivian L. Smith, M.S.W., deputy director of the government Office for Substance Abuse Prevention (ADAMHA), in Washington, D.C., discussed why many treatment facilities refer clients to A.A.—and also why some do not.

Noting that A.A. has existed several decades longer than treatment as we know it today, Ms. Smith said, "It is generally acknowledged that A.A. has had the most experience, and success, in dealing with alcohol dependence and alcohol-related problems." In fact, she pointed out, "some treatment providers refer patients to A.A. because they consider regular attendance at meetings a yardstick for successful recovery." Conversely, "If patients attend A.A. irregularly, they are considered at risk for relapse."

If treatment facilities are turning increasingly to A.A., she said, it is "because it works." And she set forth some of the reasons as follows:

- "The Fellowship offers a microcosm of a nondrinking society where social norms and mores promote abstinence. This is perhaps the most complex and rich aspect of A.A. The program helps to break the social isolation that is characteristic of many alcoholics; members are always willing to help each other and are always available.

- "The opportunity to bond with a group is considered by many to be integral to the entire recovery process. Group cohesiveness offers a number of beneficial curative factors including universality (not being

alone in pain); reliving family experiences correctively; and venting pent-up emotions.

- "Sponsorship is another A.A. staple. Because they have lived the pain firsthand, sponsors can pass practical, focused, grounded traditions on to a recovering alcoholic when treatment has failed or ended.

- "The Twelve Steps provide an easy way to understand spirituality. The First Step is to admit powerlessness over alcohol. Recognizing one's own imperfections is a basic step in creating any kind of spiritual life. Yet A.A. does not advocate self-condemnation. Instead, it facilitates seeing a greater purpose to one's life through attesting to a higher power. This belief manifests itself in the way A.A. members support each other—a practice of altruistic behavior through which the members help others . . . and themselves.

- "A.A. is free. It does not require a licensed/certified professional staff or an accredited faculty in treatment. It is there for an individual once the insurance has run out."

On the down side, Ms. Smith suggests that "treatment providers who do not turn to A.A. stress that its efficacy is impossible to evaluate because there are no scientific criteria for success." Additionally, "some providers believe that for certain groups with overwhelming social and economic problems, A.A.'s promise of sobriety is not enough. This is especially true of some minority groups."

But on balance, she concludes, "treatment cannot compete with A.A. for the all-round intensity of experience. Indeed, some consider treatment the pre-race pep talk—and A.A. the life-long support system."

*With a growing number of areas attempting to "bridge the gap" between treatment and A.A. by forming temporary contact programs, this pamphlet was designed for A.A. members interested in this type of Twelfth Step work. Included are guidelines for temporary contacts and points to remember. (P-49) 25¢ per copy; 20% discount applies.*



# BOX 4|5|9 BULLETIN BOARD

Items and Ideas on Area Gatherings for A.A.s — Via G.S.O.

OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 1991

## Calendar of Events

Events listed here are presented solely as a service to readers, not as an endorsement by the General Service Office. For any additional information, please use the addresses provided.

### October

- 4-6 — *Burley, Idaho*. Idaho Area Fall Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 427, Paul, ID 83347
- 4-6 — *Rapid City, South Dakota*. Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 2953, Rapid City, SD 57709
- 4-6 — *Clarksburg, West Virginia*. Jackson's Mill Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 825, Clarksburg, WV 26302-0825
- 4-6 — *Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada*. Regina Roundup '91. Write: Ch., 236-408 Broad St., Regina, SK S4R 1X3
- 5-6 — *Crescent City, California*. Fifth Annual Rally. Write: Ch., Box 1067, Crescent City, CA 95531
- 10-13 — *Las Vegas, Nevada*. First Annual National/International Native American Conv. Write: Ch., Box 30335, North Las Vegas, NV 89030-0335
- 11-13 — *Santa Barbara, California*. First Annual Sober Unity Conv. Write: Ch., Box 238, Santa Barbara, CA 93102
- 11-13 — *Sioux City, Iowa*. Iowa Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 5246, Sioux City, IA 51102
- 11-13 — *Ft. Mitchell, Kentucky*. Fifth Annual KCYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 1022, Newport, KY 41071
- 11-13 — *Lafayette, Louisiana*. Eighth Annual Cajun Country Conf. Write: Ch., 220 Westpointe Circle, #306, Lafayette, LA 70506
- 11-13 — *Grenada, Mississippi*. 16th Annual North Mississippi Roundup. Write: Ch., Route 1, Box 219A, Pittsboro, MS 38951
- 11-13 — *Lincoln, Nebraska*. Big Red Roundup II. Write: Ch., 2840 S. 70th, Suite 127, Lincoln, NE 68506
- 11-13 — *Columbus, Ohio*. East Central Regional Forum. Write: Sec., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
- 11-13 — *Wooster, Ohio*. Fourth Annual Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 284, Wooster, OH 44691
- 11-13 — *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia Freedom Roundup (sponsored by gay and lesbian members). Write: Ch., Box 15978, Philadelphia, PA 19103
- 11-13 — *San Antonio, Texas*. 41st Annual Southwest Texas Area Conf. Write: Ch., Box 680982, San Antonio, TX 78268-0982
- 11-13 — *Ogden, Utah*. Sixth Annual Rocky Mountain Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 9152, Ogden, UT 84409
- 11-13 — *Hope, British Columbia, Canada*. 15th Annual Thanksgiving Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 391, Hope, BC VOX 1L0
- 11-13 — *Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada*. 15th Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 2012, Station "R," Kelowna, BC V2A 6K9
- 11-13 — *Prince George, British Columbia, Canada*. 35th Annual Northern Lights Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1257, Prince George, BC V2L 2Y3
- 11-13 — *Orillia, Ontario, Canada*. 26th Georgian Bay Dist. Conv. Write: Ch., Box 515, Orillia, ON L3V 6K2
- 11-13 — *Toronto, Ontario, Canada*. Gratitude '91 (sponsored by gay & lesbian members). Write: Ch., Box 74, Toronto, ON M4Y 1H0
- 11-13 — *Montego Bay, Jamaica, West Indies*. 10th Annual Discovery Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 138, Reading P.O., St. James, West Indies
- 11-19 — *Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada*. Area Assembly & Roundup. Write: Ch., 255 Dominion St., Moncton, NB E1C 6H4
- 18-20 — *Redding, California*. NCCAA 44th Annual Fall Conf. Write: Tr., 1046 Irving St., San Francisco, CA 94122-2290
- 18-20 — *Decatur, Illinois*. Eighth Annual Midstates Woman-to-Woman Conf. Write: Ch., 1365 West Decatur, Decatur, IL 62522
- 18-20 — *Des Moines, Iowa*. Raccoon River Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 752, Des Moines, IA 50303
- 18-20 — *Rochester, Minnesota*. Hiawathaland Get-Together. Write: Ch., Box 5792, Rochester, MN 55903
- 18-20 — *St. Cloud, Minnesota*. St. Cloud Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 125, St. Cloud, MN 56302
- 18-20 — *Fallon, Nevada*. Sobriety Harvest. Write: Ch., Box 2274, Fallon, NV 89406
- 18-20 — *Waterville Valley, New Hampshire*. Northeast Regional Conv. Write: Ch., 321 Lincoln St., Rm. 204, Manchester, NH 03103
- 18-20 — *Greensburg, Pennsylvania*. 36th Laurel Highlands Conf. Write: Ch., 1169

## Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted.

*October* (page 29): What is an enabler?; reaching out to all A.A.s.

*November* (page 39): Our co-founders; Step Eleven; is "promotion" really a dirty word?

- Colgate Dr., Monroeville, PA 15146
- 18-20 — *Rimini, Italy*. Italian Service Assembly. Write: Ch., Via Di Torre Rossa, 35, Pal.B — Int. 1B, Roma, Italy 00165.
- 24-27 — *Columbus, Georgia*. 38th State Pre-Paid Conv. Write: Ch., Box 6508, Columbus, GA 31907.
- 24-27 — *Hagerstown, Maryland*. MCYPAA Seventh Annual Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 19821, Baltimore, MD 21225
- 24-27 — *Memphis, Tennessee*. Memphis Bluff City Annual Conv. Write: Ch., Box 240831, Memphis, TN 38124-0831
- 25-27 — *Santa Cruz, California*. 12th Annual CCYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 1973, Monterey, CA 93940
- 25-27 — *Lakeland, Florida*. SFCYPAA Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1135, Lakeland, FL 33802-1135
- 25-27 *Peoria, Illinois*. Second Annual IF-CYPAA Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 155, Washington, IL 61571
- 25-27 — *Schenectady, New York*. 40th Annual H.M.B. Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1939, Schenectady, NY 12301-1939
- 25-27 — *Montreal, Quebec, Canada*. 32nd Montreal Bilingual Conv. Write: Ch., 5789,

## Planning a Future Event?

Please send your information on December, January or February events, two days or more, in time to reach G.S.O. by *October 10*, the calendar deadline for the Holiday issue of *Box 4-5-9*.

For your convenience and ours — please type or print the information to be listed on the Bulletin Board page, and mail to us:

Date of event: from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_, 19\_\_\_\_

Name of event: \_\_\_\_\_

Place (city, state or prov.): \_\_\_\_\_

For information, write: (exact mailing address) \_\_\_\_\_

Contact phone # (for office use only): \_\_\_\_\_

Flip up this end of page — more events listed on reverse side

## October (cont.)

- d'Iberville, Montreal, PQ H2G 2B8  
31-Nov. 3 — *Rogersville, Alabama*. Riverside Roundup VIII. Write: Ch., 7801 Benton St., Huntsville, AL 35802  
31-Nov. 3 — *Honolulu, Hawaii*. 30th Annual Hawaii Conf. Write: Ch., Box 23434, Honolulu, HI 96823-3434

## November

- 1-3 — *Loma, Linda, California*. Fourth Annual Inland Empire Conv. Write: Ch., Box 7297, Loma, Linda, CA 92354  
1-3 — *Pueblo, Colorado*. Colorado Area Winter Assembly. Write: Ch., 219 W. Cedar, Walsenburg, CO 81069  
1-3 — *Springfield, Missouri*. 1991 Western Area/Missouri Conv. Write: Tr., Box 1953, Sedalia, MO 65302  
1-3 — *Wetaskiwin, Alberta, Canada*. Ninth Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., 4118 55 St., Wetaskiwin, AB T9A 1T6

- 1-3 — *Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico*. Second International Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 435280, San Ysidro, CA 92143  
8-10 — *Okoboji, Iowa*. Eighth Annual N.W. Iowa Pre-Winter Rally. Write: Ch., Box 426, Sutherland, IA 51058  
8-10 — *Battle Creek, Michigan*. 39th State Conf. Write: Ch., 9520 Silver Creek Rd., Whitehall, MI 49461  
8-10 — *Victoria, British Columbia, Canada*. BC/Yukon Conv. '91. Write: Ch., Box 47005, 750 Goldstream Ave., Langford, BC V9B 5T2  
9-10 — *Bastrop, Texas*. Fellowship In The Pines. Write: Ch., Rt #1, Box 525, Cedar Creek, TX 78612  
22-24 — *Santa Barbara, California*. Seventh Annual Conv. Write: Ch., 1111 Chapala St., Suite 320, Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
22-24 — *Fitchburg, Massachusetts*. 28th State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 454, Leominster, MA 01453-0454  
23-24 — *Mangalore-Karnatak State, India*. Ninth General Service Conf. Write: Ch., Ninth Conf., Fatima House, Fr. Muller's Road, Mangalore - 575 002, Karnatak State, India

- 28-Dec. 1 — *Las Vegas, Nevada*. Silver Anniversary Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 43177, Las Vegas, NV 89116  
29-Dec. 1 — *Farmington, Connecticut*. CSYP-CAA. Write: Ch., Box 3424, Danbury, CT 06813-3424  
29-Dec. 1 — *Diamondhead, Mississippi*. Second Annual Thanksgiving Gratitude Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 7851, Gulfport, MS 39505  
29-Dec. 1 — *Stony Point, New York*. West/Rock Young People Conf. Write Ch., Box 582, Hasting, NY 13076  
29-Dec. 1 — *Pembroke, Bermuda*. Annual Conv. Write: Ch., Bermuda Conv., Box WK 178, Warwick, WK BX

## December

- 6-8 — *Tulsa, Oklahoma*. Southwest Regional Forum. Write: Sec., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.  
14-15 — *Great Bend, Kansas*. Kansas State Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 1773, Salina, KS 67402-1773