

THE INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE FUND

As the A.A. message has spread around the world — sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly — the need for A.A. literature and materials in a multiplicity of languages has steadily increased. To meet this growing need, in 1990, the 11th World Service Meeting (W.S.M.) recommended that all participating countries be contacted for “the specific purpose of seeking cooperation in the task of raising funds for the current problem of providing start-up literature for those countries unable to finance their own translations and acquisitions.”

Out of this effort, an international fund was established, managed by A.A. World Services, Inc. (A.A.W.S.), the publishing arm of the U.S./Canada General Service Board, whereby those countries who were interested and able could make monetary contributions to help defray the costs of producing literature aimed specifically at carrying the message around the world. This fund is known now as the International Literature Fund.

In 1992, the Literature/Publishing Committee of the W.S.M. suggested that A.A.W.S. use the proceeds of the International Literature Fund to offset their expenditures for foreign literature assistance as well as to reimburse other overseas A.A. offices or boards for similar expenses. The committee stated that: “A.A.W.S. should have the latitude to prioritize the use of these monies based on the need as expressed by each G.S.O. and World Service delegate.” The committee also requested that A.A.W.S. provide World Service Meetings with an accounting of the receipts and disbursements of these monies at each W.S.M.

To provide some help in establishing initial projects and priorities, the committee also recommended that the secretary of the World Service Meeting write to each General Service Office and World Service delegate requesting sharing on what their countries were doing in carrying the message to neighboring countries; what literature translations had been done within and outside their countries; what other languages were needed within their countries and whether or not they needed monetary help from the International Literature Fund to accomplish this. This effort was helpful in establishing some initial projects and priorities.

Over the years since its inception, nearly two million dollars has been contributed to the fund by 25 different countries, helping to provide literature to A.A.s in places such as Albania, Bolivia, Macedonia, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Trinidad, Uganda and Uruguay, and to make translations available in more than 102 languages, among them Visayan, Arabic, Tagalog, Thai, Georgian and Serbian.

Literature Carries the Message

With an A.A. presence in over 180 countries, a steady surge in requests is being made each year to license translations of A.A. literature, from pamphlets and booklets to *Alcoholics Anonymous* and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. These requests are directed to the translations and licensing department of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., which holds more than 1,300 copyrights for various A.A. writings, videos, audios, and the like. The requests generally come from a literature committee or General Service Board and at any given time, around the world, translations or re-translations of the Big Book and other A.A. materials are underway.

In 2015, the Big Book was published in Twi (Ghana) and Rarotongan (Cook Islands) after a long period of translation and evaluation, and is now available in 70 approved translations (71 languages total, including the original English). Thirty-three languages are printed and distributed by A.A.W.S., Inc., and 37 languages are licensed by local entities abroad (with 22 printed by both A.A.W.S., Inc. and international A.A. entities). Recently, the Big Book was made available to members in the U.S. and Canada in Punjabi, with *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* available in both Punjabi and Hindi. The Arabic Big Book includes local personal stories curated by the members of the Middle East Regional Committee for Alcoholics Anonymous (M.E.R.C.A.A.). With momentum established, additional projects are getting started for Arabic-speaking countries, including new translations of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and *Living Sober*. Additionally, after a number of fits and starts, translation projects in Haitian Creole are underway.

Overcoming Challenges

The challenges for different countries in developing A.A. literature are many. Translations of the Big Book, for example, can present particular cultural questions for each country, such as how to address the concept of God or a Higher Power. Translation is an art, not a science, so sensitivity to maintaining the integrity of the original English as well as the vernacular of the local Fellowship must be bridged. Some creative approaches have provided solutions for many countries: the Fellowship of Goa, India, has done work on a version of the Big Book in the style of a drama, which is the traditional form for communicating material of spiritual depth in the Konkani language. A Zulu audio version of the Big Book has been licensed. And in meetings in Jerusalem, A.A.s of three faiths come together to read the Big Book in one and the same meeting in Hebrew, Arabic and English.

Another creative solution to a more technical problem was described in this excerpt from *Box 4-5-9*, the newsletter of the U.S./Canada General Service Office:

With the Twi Big Book, the process had its genesis in 2006, when a Ghanaian woman visited the U.S. and observed the use of A.A. literature in meetings and among the Fellowship. When she returned home, she set about undertaking a Twi translation of the Big Book....By 2014, the text translation of the Twi Big Book was complete — the original 164 pages, fully translated and approved. In 2015, 1,200 copies of the book were printed locally in Ghana. But they needed book covers. What to do? Sewing circles of women in Ghana formed to hand sew leather covers on each book — and these hand-crafted books were, at last, distributed to A.A. meetings throughout the region in early 2015.

Another excerpt from *Box 4-5-9* articulates the power of literature to expand the reach of the Fellowship:

A.A. has been growing in the East African country of Uganda — with a translation of the Big Book into Luganda, one of the main local languages, just on the horizon. Meetings have been established in Kampala, the capital city, on every day of the week (except Monday), with other meetings taking root around the country as well. In addition, a meeting was recently started in a treatment facility in Kampala, where local members are trying to encourage use of the Twelve Steps as part of the treatment program.

Many Ugandans have embraced the program and their enthusiasm has spurred interest in translating A.A. materials into the additional languages of Luo, Ateso and Runyonkole-Rukiga. Along with Luganda, these languages would cover most of the country.

How Countries Contribute

Contributions to the International Literature Fund are provided by a growing number of participating service structures around the world. Many have a set amount that they contribute on an annual basis, while others contribute as they can, based on their individual financial circumstances. Within the U.S./Canada structure, some A.A.s have asked about making contributions designated specifically for the ILF. However, while the General Service Office appreciates the caring that prompts such requests it cannot accept contributions earmarked for specific projects or purposes of any kind. Thus, members who simply contribute to the service structure are thereby participating in the development and distribution of A.A. literature around the world.

Conclusion

In 1968, A.A. co-founder Bill W. wrote about the importance of the preparation of a standard literature, beginning with the Big Book. "This volume, plus the other books and many pamphlets since written," he said, "made A.A. available all over the globe. In consequence, the A.A. message could not be garbled. Thus, we began our first effort to cement A.A.'s unity and functional effectiveness."

With consistent and "ungarbled" literature as the basis for A.A. members and meetings around the world, individual countries have often worked effectively in carrying the message internationally through country-to-country sponsorship. As one World Service delegate from the U.S./Canada put it, "In all A.A. service, we offer other alcoholics the same opportunity for hope that has led us to the miracles in our own lives... It is in this same spirit of service that one country looks to the needs of the suffering alcoholics in another country."

If you would like additional information about the International Literature Fund or the international activities of the General Service Board and the General Service Office of U.S./Canada, please contact: General Service Office, P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163, Tel. (212) 870-3400, international@aa.org, www.aa.org.

Additionally, for more information about Country-to-Country sponsorship, see the service piece "Country-to-Country Sponsorship" (F-168). You can also visit G.S.O.'s website at www.aa.org and the webpage "A.A. Around the World": https://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/aa-around-the-world.