



**FINAL REPORT**  
**EASTERN CANADA REGIONAL FORUM**  
**JULY 8-10, 2016**  
**THUNDER BAY, ONTARIO, CANADA**

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Eastern Canada Regional Forum, which will take place in Victoriaville, Quebec, July 20-22, 2018 at the Hotel Le Victorin.

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**ONLY LAST NAMES OF CLASS A (NON-ALCOHOLIC) TRUSTEES**  
**AND NON-ALCOHOLIC EMPLOYEES APPEAR IN THIS REPORT**

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## INTRODUCTION

The 2016 Eastern Canada Regional Forum was held in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Registration for the Forum was 220. This included 74 members attending their very first Forum—many were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening.

## WORKSHOP REPORTS

7:00 – 8:15 p.m.

**“La Vigne” (Moderator: Michael C. / Reporter: Benoit B.)** The workshop attendees discussed how to transform our La Vigne representative into a DRLV. The consensus of the group was that there should be a workshop for the district representatives of La Vigne to explain their role; promote the group subscriptions and see that they are reviewed in a timely fashion; offer a subscription to the sponsee; choose with care the representative. It was noticed, by members, that fewer groups have a representative. The workshop attendees also discussed if the paper format should be continued. The group members agreed that it should, because tribunals and prisons need this format — it save lives. Furthermore, if discontinued in this format, it will cease to exist; it is a tool to give to newcomers; and it is a real meeting. Members suggested that young people be asked what they want in La Vigne and suggested that some English sharing be included.

**“Rotation” (Moderator: Michel B. / Reporter: Francyne T.)** The workshop attendees discussed how rotation benefits A.A.s. The group offered that it emphasizes creativity, aptitudes and humility, it brings new challenges; and not rotating can harm the well-being of the group. However, some functions that require deep knowledge could have longer terms.

**“Twelve Step Work” (Moderator: Thomas G.)** Workshop participants discussed Twelfth-Step work. Members shared that the group is responsible to the newcomer; it is a very serious role. In addition, sponsoring should generally stay with the same gender: men with men and women with women. Coffee break time is a good place to greet the newcomer, although Twelve Step work can be done everywhere. Even with a sponsor, however, the group members should take care of the newcomer. Also, since there is less activity after meetings, organizing before meetings is a good idea.

8:30 p.m. — 9:45 p.m.

**“Informed Group Conscience” (Moderator: Jean-Noël / Reporter: Linda A.)** Workshop attendees discussed an informed group conscience, and shared that to have an informed group conscience, A.A.s should refer to the Service Manual and to the Group Ethics in order to avoid controversy. Members also stated that it is important that the group greet the newcomer. Members of the workshop shared that it was a good idea to have a group conscience every two months for group members only; therefore, it is always the same members who are involved. While sometimes problems occur, they are ultimately settled by the group conscience. A.A. is a program of action and it is important to take action; as well as

have special meetings to elect new trusted servants — we must be careful that we do not become “owners” of the group.

**“Anonymity in the Digital Age” (Moderator: Lucien J./ Reporter: Yvon L.)** The workshop members shared their experience and thoughts on two questions:

1. *How do we protect our anonymity online?*
2. *What means should be used to promote anonymity?*

The general sense of members was that in order to protect anonymity online, we do not talk online — for we cannot control the answers or comments of others. Facebook is dangerous for anonymity – full names are used; we must spread the guidelines on anonymity; we must be careful, even in private groups. We can eliminate unwanted messages and advice (privately) the person whose message was eliminated; we can eliminate people from our list of friends; many prefer exchange groups by mail. Anonymity breaks can be disastrous for insurance, employers, etc. who could learn that we are alcoholics.

In order to promote anonymity, the appropriate guidelines for Internet and social media should be available to all. It is a good idea to update the Traditions: use “media” instead of cinema. Members shared ideas, such as update the anonymity card and the Preamble to mention anonymity; and write a statement for the groups. In New Brunswick, part of the Preamble has been changed to mention media. However, we must not become paranoid on this subject — generally, nothing can replace human contact.

**“Sponsorship”: (Moderator: Eric P. / Reporter: Francyne T.)** The workshop on Sponsorship addressed two questions. First, what is the importance and qualification of sponsoring members and service members? In response, A.A. members shared that it is important to look for a sponsor who fits our needs, with some experience and for the services he or she renders in a same function; he or she should carry his or her passion and knowledge for A.A. In addition, a good sponsor should adapts her/himself to progress; trust and good listening is important for a good relationship; doing it alone does not work and we must choose a sponsor who reflects who we are. Also, it is important to read the A.A. pamphlet on Sponsorship. The second idea discussed was “What are the pros and cons of sponsorship?” Members stated that a sponsor is not a therapist. One must avoid relying too much on a sponsor and having more sponsees than we can help. There are more advantages than disadvantages in sponsorship — it breaks isolation, for one thing. Finally, humor and trust in sponsoring is important.

## ENGLISH WORKSHOP REPORTS

***“Remote Communities” (Moderator: Don A. / Reporter: Joanne T.)*** Members shared about new meetings in remote communities that have begun and also shared the need to inform treatment centers about any new meetings or material. Members discussed funding for alcoholism related help, such as FEDNOR, and the desire to inform them about A.A. For instance, one member shared that there are recovery homes in Kenora. Are these recovery homes aware of new A.A. meetings/resources? Can we connect these homes, via video-conferencing, to A.A. meetings?

Another member shared the importance of being pro-active in getting A.A.’s message to remote communities. Remote communities are used to being told what to do from the outside – they can be supported and guided in how to be proactive in their own communities. In addition, when working with remote communities, members shared some guidelines, such as always asking for the approval of the Chief and Band Council before instituting any changes. In addition, more work with treatment centers must be done – it is important for the centers to see that A.A. is here and available.

To help carry message, members noted that there is a need for literature (pamphlets in Ojibwa and Cree would be helpful), communication, a need for members to make contacts within the remote communities, there is a need for fiber optics to be brought into remote communities to increase online/tele. meetings. Members noted that a better understanding of remote communities and how to share A.A.s message of recovery was needed — A.A. member Bob P. was an excellent resource. Another member shared that there was an app for learning Ojibwa. We must communicate with each other for a sense of continuity and a better chance of carrying the message. In addition, extending invitations to professionals to learn about A.A. continues to be an effective way to carry A.A.’s message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

***“Safety and Respect in A.A.” (Moderator: Michael D. / Reporter: Terry M.)*** Workshop members approached the question about how to deal with angry A.A. members who bully other members at service meetings. For instance, what to do when A.A.s become forceful and arrogant when decisions that are made upset them. Workshop members generally agreed that the best thing to do in these situations was to walk away or ignore the offending person. Other ideas were to have the member’s sponsor intervene and discuss appropriate behavior; read a group conscience statement at the beginning of the meeting regarding acceptable behavior at the meeting and what consequences are for not abiding. Box 4-5-9 contains good information for holding workshops to inform and communicate with group members. In addition, ask for help. If a member’s behavior is threatening, contact police—request an order give a warning. Finally, invite your delegate to attend and give guidance.

In addition, workshop attendees shared their experience, strength and hope regarding what to do when an A.A. group member observes predatory behavior. Some solutions were to: be in tune with what is happening — sponsors should talk with sponsees regarding acceptable behavior. Approach the person with the questionable behavior (gently and with love and tolerance) and address the behavior (cautiously and wisely). It is a good idea for women to surround other women, as well as rallying old-timers to protect both male and female newcomers.

**“Seventh Tradition” (Moderator: Fredy M./Reporter: Colleen H.)** Workshop attendees discussed A.A.’s Seventh Tradition and shared their experience regarding two questions:

1. How do we come to an informed group conscience regarding the 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition?
  - In response to coming to an informed group conscience, we can get members informed by holding business meetings to discuss and agree on group policies regarding how to split the Seventh Tradition collections.
  - Sponsorship — one remote area shared about the difficulty of funding services. It was suggested that workshops be held to attract people into service. When we go to service meetings, we hear great stories. These stories need to be shared with the Fellowship. We all have the same goal — that of helping the suffering alcoholic. We must stress the First Tradition.
  - Group, district, and area inventories: These inventories are fact-finding and promote sharing, as well as get A.A. members involved. As a result, groups grow and become more self-supporting.
  - A.A. group members should be informed regarding where the 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition money goes and how the money is used. If this information is shared as part of the meeting format, the group will be better informed.
  - Suggestions were made to read the “green card” at group meeting. Educate members about the costs of service.
  
2. Why not lift the ban on selling “drunk junk” like medallions? Why are we resource restrained?
  - In response to this question, members reiterated the importance of A.A. Traditions and the need to adhere to them. We have no opinion on outside issues.
  - Furthermore, selling “drunk junk” opens the issue of profit, and A.A. is not profit-making business. Importantly, we adhere to principle. Members shared that we are self-supporting through our own contributions.
  - Members expressed fear that if we sell “other” things, we will become distracted from our primary purpose. It was shared that it is an individual responsibility to support A.A. and to be aware of the need for self-support.
  - Members shared that they expressed their gratitude for A.A. by contributing to the Seventh Tradition.
  - Some members voiced a concern that money would make us disconnected. We can stay focused on our primary purpose if we do not sell “drunk junk.”
  - Finally, members shared that if we continue to stay open, honest, and willing, the rest will fall into place.

**8:30 p.m. – 9:45 p.m.**

**“Supporting Grapevine: From Your Story to Service”** (Moderator and GV Executive Editor/Publisher: Ami B. / Reporter: Rhonda) Workshop attendees shared their responses to a question posed by the Grapevine’s Executive Editor/Publisher (EEP). She asked group members to tell the group what story they would write for Grapevine. Additional discussion covered topics such as the Grapevine app for iPhone, the Grapevine online, “Grow your Grapevine,” the Carry the Message project, how to submit a story, and the story selection process for publication in the magazine. Workshop members raised other questions, such as why Canadians are charged more for electronic editions. The EEP responded that the General Service Board would discuss the question. Finally, a request was made to consider the possibility of using recycling materials for the day planner.

**“Corrections Correspondence Service in Canada (C.C.S.)”** (Moderator: Jeff W.) The first question discussed was: “How do we make Canadian inmates aware that C.C.S. exists and how do we make it attractive to them?” ACM Robert Mc. said that he had an email explaining C.C.S. to area chairs and district chairs, and the Corrections Desk at G.S.O resent that same email. However, the message doesn’t seem to be getting through the service structure to the people actually bringing meetings into the prisons. There were also concerns that First Nations people, who make up a large part of the prison population, would be less likely to embrace the service unless it was presented by First Nations members. One suggestion was to target a single district or facility in order to create a success story that could then be leveraged.

The second question raised asked about what work had been done, at the government level, with Correctional Service Canada? A workshop member, Robert, informed other members that another member, David T., has been working with a government employee but has not yet been able to get it on Correctional Service Canada’s agenda. Often, members found that as soon as you make progress with one administrator, a new one takes over and you have to start all over. Another Area Corrections Chair from New Brunswick has also made presentations to inmates in five institutions, has had contact with wardens, but has not had success with Corrections Correspondence. It seems like a perfect fit in his opinion — doesn’t cost anything and doesn’t create any safety issues. The group suggested that we inundate Corrections Canada with mail to get them to pay attention to C.C.S. and its benefits. Others shared their experience that it just takes time and we need to keep reaffirming the value of A.A.

All workshop members agreed that there was tremendous value in having so many people working on this in the same room together and face-to-face. All vowed to keep working.

**“The Twelve Traditions”** (Moderator: Jennie H. / Reporter: Natalie H.) Workshop attendees freely shared experience, strength, and hope with others attending the workshop. Group members related that the shared knowledge made it easier to put the Traditions into perspective — and therefore made easier to apply them in a practical manner. Members acknowledged that understanding the importance of the Traditions and their use keeps A.A. groups healthy and A.A.’s message clear. Others found that using the Traditions could help us in our relationships. Among other benefits, one member said that it reminded her to keep in mind: “What is the next right thing do? God’s will is my path.”

## PRESENTATIONS

**The Spiritual Value of the A.A. Dollar**—Diane P., Delegate Panel 65, Area 89 Northeast Quebec

The Seventh Tradition in its entirety says:

*The A.A. groups themselves ought to be fully supported by the voluntary contributions of their own members.*

*We think that each group should soon achieve this ideal; that any public solicitation of funds using the name of Alcoholics Anonymous is highly dangerous, whether by groups, clubs, hospitals, or other outside agencies; that acceptance of large gifts from any source, or of contributions carrying any obligation whatever, is unwise.*

*Then, too, we view with much concern those A.A. treasuries which continue, beyond prudent reserves, to accumulate funds for no stated A.A. purpose. Experience has often warned us that nothing can so surely destroy our spiritual heritage as futile disputes over property, money, and authority.*

Treasurers are often asked: “Why do you always talk about money as it is a spiritual program?”

Although our program is spiritual, there are very down-to-earth realities that we face. We cannot sit waiting for everything to be done by itself. If I kneel myself in two feet of snow, praying for it to leave, I do not think it will be very effective. But, if I take a shovel and I start to work, in a short time my yard becomes usable again.

This is also true for our program: if we sit in a chair and give nothing, neither group nor structure will survive.

We are no longer in those days when meetings started in some living room and everyone provided coffee. We are far away from that now. So as we need places to meet, there is now a rental cost to pay. It takes a coffeemaker, coffee, and here we are, our group works and is ready to welcome the newcomer and others, of course!

We could make solicitations, as Bill tried to do with Rockefeller at A.A.’s inception. Yet the best thing he did was his refusal to give us money and tell us that we have to be self-supporting, and to be independent, autonomous, and master of our decisions for our future. He had unwittingly laid the premises of our Seventh Tradition.

In this regard, Bill wrote in 1957: “Our spiritual way of life will be saved for future generations if, as association, we know to resist temptation to accept money from outside. But, this decision entails a responsibility that all AA members should understand: we cannot skimp when the treasurer of the group passes the hat. Our groups, areas and the entire Movement will not work if we lack services or if we do not bear the cost.”

On page 233 in *Language of the Heart*, he adds: “Faced with the temptation of accepting large sums of money in donations when we resist, we are cautious. By cons, when we are generous at the collect time, we show our gratitude for the benefits received and our desire to share



what we have discovered with those who still suffer.”

However, given the alarming decline in contributions over recent years, could we become tempted by the solicitation (in good faith however), trying to save our association? I hope not!

I often hear, “As long as my group is open, I have coffee, and I welcome the newcomer, there is no problem.” Nothing is less true.

Let’s take a look at this scenario. Suppose my group keeps its money for its needs and does not contribute to any instance. I open the meeting, make coffee, place the chairs, and prepare myself to welcome members. Pending, why not read the Big Book. Oops . . . we helped no other level and probably other groups did the same, because I do not have a Big Book on the table. It doesn’t matter; I’ll read the *Daily Reflections* instead. Oops again . . . no contribution, no book. Don’t worry; I’ll take a pamphlet. Yet another oops—there are none in the display. So instead, members will come and we’ll talk.

Some members show up. Things are going well. Time to present the newcomer kit. I didn’t create any, because I don’t have any pamphlets to put in it. So let’s at least give him a list of meetings! I cannot . . . for I do not know where the other groups are or if they are still open! What do you want me to do? All I can give him is my phone number and tell him to come back next week.

How long will this group survive? In my humble opinion, not very long. In each meeting, members of other groups and people from outside come to attend. However, if I don’t add my group anywhere, there will be only our members that attend our meetings. And for how long?

Hence the importance of the distribution of our contributions. We also hear often that districts, areas, and G.S.O. spend lots of money. Who takes care of producing literature for all groups? Who ensures that no matter where in the world an alcoholic may be reaching for help, he will receive it? Who collaborates with professionals so that they know of us? Who cares that inmates receive hope?

What would we have done if we had no literature in our language when we arrived? Would our recovery have been the same?

In pamphlet “Where Money and Spirituality Mix,” we find this: “Twelfth Step work is the lifeblood of Alcoholics Anonymous — carrying the message to the next suffering alcoholic. Without it, the Fellowship would wither and die. Yet, even at its simplest level this vital contact between one alcoholic and another involves an investment of time and money.”

Bill wrote in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*:

*Let’s start with my sponsor Ebby. When he learned how much I was drinking, he decided to come see me. He was in New York, I was in Brooklyn. His decision was not enough, he had to take action and spend money.*

*He phoned me and took the subway. Total: ten cents. By the combination of the phone call and the metro ticket, spirituality and money began to mingle. One without the other would have given nothing.*

*From that moment, Ebby established the principle that AA Movement in action*

*demands the sacrifice of plenty of time and little money.*

In all our discussions when it comes to the subject of money, we become chilly. Some suggest putting the price of a beer or a Tim Horton's coffee in the basket, and others are told that no one can tell anyone how much he needs to put into it. Regarding our gratitude to this movement that saved our lives, how much does it figure? If our founders and their contemporaries had not provided any contribution, we would not be here today. The movement would not have survived. If the newcomer and the less rich cannot give as much as they would like, the wealthier members should make a difference. Contributions are on a voluntary basis, but we need help. We have a responsibility to give back and make sure that A.A. will be there for future generations.

What amount of money should we keep? It is suggested a prudent reserve of three months of operation costs for groups, or of twelve months' costs for the other levels. With respect to groups, financial insecurity often means that we are keeping a coarse woolen stocking. Experience shows that too much sleeping money is no use for anyone and can cause conflicts or controversies in the group.

Our recovery requires that an alcoholic talk to another alcoholic. Our unit goes through a G.S.R., D.C.M., or delegate talking to a fellow. This is what makes us strong. We cannot meet all alcoholics at once to make decisions. At the 2015 International Convention in Atlanta, we totaled 56,000 members. Think about it for a while. How could you hold a meeting and get consensus with so many people? Mission impossible!

However, our founders established a structure that allows it. By delegated authority from one level to another, ending with Conference, we can come together to assess if what we did was good or needs to be improved and if we have new things to put on. Our world is changing and we must adapt ourselves to it. We must find solutions to new problems, and make sure that the message is transmitted well, according to the A.A. Traditions. Then we meet to make the best possible decisions, with greatest possible consensus, for what may be the best for Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole.

I will end with two quotes from the pamphlet "Where Money and Spirituality Mix":

*The paradox of A.A. is that financial independence and the support of our Fellowship by alcoholics and alcoholics alone not only enhances A.A.'s importance to each of us, but stimulates our engagement in our own recovery . . . A.A. is "our thing," from our group's treasury to the balance sheets at the General Service Office.*

*Now that we are sober in A.A., the word "support" has to do with sharing, people, self-respect, gratitude, and what we are privileged to give — not take — in material terms.*

And our Declaration of Unity:

*This we owe to A.A.'s future:  
To place our common welfare first;  
To keep our fellowship united.  
For on A.A. unity depend our lives,  
And the lives of those to come.*

## **How to Attract People in Service**—Joyce S., Delegate Panel 65, Area 83 Eastern Ontario

Good morning, everyone. I am an alcoholic and my name is Joyce. It is my honor and privilege to serve the Fellowship as the Panel 65 Delegate for Area 83 Eastern Ontario International. It is also my distinct pleasure to share some thoughts regarding “How to Attract People in Service.”

On page S1 in *The A.A. Service Manual*, under “A.A.’s Legacy of Service” by Bill W., it partly reads: “Our Twelfth Step—carrying the message—is the basic service that the A.A. Fellowship gives; this is our principal aim and the main reason for our existence. Therefore, A.A. is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven’t been given the truth may die. Hence, an A.A. service is anything whatever that helps us to reach a fellow sufferer—ranging all the way from the Twelfth Step itself to a ten-cent phone call and a cup of coffee, and to A.A.’s General Service Office for national and international action. The sum total of all these services is our Third Legacy of Service.”

I often hear the phrase “being active in service has saved my life.” Service is fun, rewarding, and a fundamental part of our association. Not to mention, one can meet wonderful members from all over the world while in service. Being active in service has taken me to places I have never heard of and introduced me to people whom I most likely would never have met. I will never have to be alone, ever again.

When I think of my first service position at my first home group, it makes me smile. After going back out, yet again, and ending up in the psychiatric ward at a local hospital, I returned to my home group ready to do anything I was told to do. I was ready to listen, learn, and become a useful member not only of Alcoholics Anonymous, but of society as well. The wise members of the group thought it would be a good idea to get me active by telling me that I would become the group secretary. (Imagine this with one month of sobriety!) For someone with no self-esteem or feelings of self-worth, this prospect was very daunting. However, I was willing to do anything to stay sober, so I did exactly what I was told, not knowing how much it would enhance my sobriety.

It has been my experience that the best way to attract people into service is to be enthusiastic, encouraging, and an example. I also have to remember that service comes in many forms, and not all members are able to perform service outside the group level for various reasons. It is not for me to judge or tell someone that if they do not get active in general service then they will not be able to stay sober. Groups usually have members greet at the door. This is a terrific way for newcomers to become active. Not only is it my responsibility to encourage newcomers, I can be an example by standing right next to them at the door and greet as well. To not do as I say, but do as I do and walk the talk, is a great policy for me to have.

Being a service sponsor is another way to keep and get members into service. It is my responsibility to share my service journey, experience, and knowledge with them, thus allowing them to follow their own path, wherever their Higher Power will lead them. When I share my experience I share how difficult it was for me to get out of my comfort zone. Another thing I mention is that if this alcoholic can do it, then they can as well. Through sponsorship, we need to encourage those to follow in our footsteps, to carry the message of A.A.’s Three

Legacies of Recovery, Unity, and Service—not just Recovery. New members should be encouraged to participate in group business meetings, in district meetings, and in area assemblies. We should stress the importance of participating in our service structure and what that work has done for us. It is by doing this that we keep the future members informed about what is happening in A.A.

Another recollection I have from early sobriety is when I was told that I would become the alternate general service representative for my first home group. Yes, in those early days, newcomers were rarely asked. The general service representative at the time, in my mind, was a cranky old man; someone who rarely talked to anyone or even smiled.

It was my observation after some time that this person was changing and seemed to be more outgoing. One night before our business meeting I brazenly asked him what brought on this change. He shared with me that since he was elected the general service rep, his thoughts on the program and service made him realize that there was more to this A.A. thing than going to meetings and not picking up that first drink. He was the first member to tell me that being active in service had enhanced his sobriety. Although I did not understand what he was talking about at the time, I said to him that I wanted what he had. When I told him that, he said, “Great! I need an alternate and I am going to elect you tonight!” Looking back, if I thought he was a cranky old man, it was me who was miserable, lonely, and suffering. This is exactly what I needed to get out of myself and to start giving back what was so freely given to me. I have been active and interested in service ever since then.

At the 66th General Service Conference this past April, I heard someone say, “I can pretend to care, but I can’t pretend to show up.” Another overheard saying was, “All it takes to get into service is a little bit of ego, but it takes a lot of humility to stay.”

In closing, I will say again that being active in service has enhanced my sobriety and I am so grateful that I have the willingness to follow where my Higher Power is directing me. May you continue to have many more blessings as you continue your journey.

Thank you for being here and for being of service.

**Home Group and Service**—Jim C., Delegate Panel 66, Area 84 Northeast Ontario

My name is Jim and I am an alcoholic. My home group is the First Step Group, which meets every Friday night at the Church of the Epiphany. The format is an open speaker meeting. Our group has been keeping the doors open since April 14, 1958, and is now the oldest group within a city of 170,000 people. It is a downtown group that has managed to stay open for many years. Our meeting hall burned down in April 1987, but our A.A. banner survived the fire and it still adorns our chairperson’s table every Friday night. We are a generally a blue-collar group of men and women. Our numbers have fluctuated since a treatment center across the street closed down two years ago and the nearby men’s recovery home is attracting more members from another fellowship. People come and go (as is often the case) but once in a while a new member will stay.

My first recollection of attending this group was around 1985. At that time, there was a core group of old-timers sitting around having coffee before the start of the meeting. One of our last-remaining members of these folks passed away a few years ago. He was one of the pillars of our group and really played a big part in why we are still open to this day. He had forty-nine years of sobriety when he died. He was sober one year when he met Bill Wilson in 1965 at a convention in Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto, Ontario, when A.A. introduced in Canada our responsibility pledge, "I am responsible . . . When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible." We have adopted our A.A. service pledge and we say it after every one of our business meetings. We purchased the large cardboard placard with the pledge on it to help our members with the words during closing, and it sits up high on the piano at the front of the room as a reminder to the members in the meeting.

I recall that over the years, as I came and went, the older fellas were always trying to instill a sense of belonging and were humbly doing their best to have regular business meetings, sign up speakers, and encourage others to join the group. I rarely stayed, because I was afraid of having to make a commitment. I finally did one day, and I have never left since.

Today, our group is a very active and revived group and we are still managing to attract new members. A big part of this is the consistency of having regular monthly business meetings, which we laugh about when we state that we provide free training for newcomers. We have a set agenda, a G.S.R., an I.G.R., and a monthly group commitment to the Grapevine. In fact, any Grapevine monthly issues we do not distribute are combined into a free newcomer's package, along with our local meeting directory and other A.A. pamphlets. We also have a dedicated treasurer and secretary, and we rotate all of our service positions when we have the members to do so. We even have a member we call our associate member. He is always there to help us set up and give his minority opinion, which we respect. Lately it seems that we are having more difficulty finding members to speak, or members saying they will but then don't show up.

Our literature table is always full of both old and new A.A. materials, including hard- and soft-covered Big Books. Our group runs the full gamut of literature and we joke amongst ourselves that we have the best literature table north of the French River. The last Friday of each month we have a Big Book draw, and for those who may have won lately will often ask if there is anyone new who needs a Big Book.

We are a very traditional group and have always stuck to our primary purpose. There have been some tough instances over the years, including lately where a speaker will try to wrap up their sharing by doing some drumming or playing a guitar, or even in one instance asking for questions from the floor. When it first started years back we were caught off guard and did not shut it down, but today we are more vigilant and explain that this behavior is not part of our Steps and Traditions. There really is no good or bad way to handle it, but if we don't remind others that it is an outside issue, where does it end? Sometimes good, other times not so good.

Our business meetings are held on the last Friday of each month before the regular meeting, and they are very inclusive. We encourage and invite any A.A. members visiting our group to stay and listen to our business meetings. Our group commitments also include participating

in chairing and showing an A.A. video at a local mental health facility. Greeting at the door is something we always make sure of. We are trying out a new meeting format, which involves having two speakers. The first speaker will be a newcomer who is given about ten minutes to share, followed by an old-timer's experience for the remainder of the meeting. We hope that this blend of speakers will continue our journey as a group to attract newer members, in addition to reconnecting old-timers with a younger generation of alcoholics (and vice versa). The feedback from our first meeting using this format was very positive. Several A.A. members said they really liked what they heard, and that they are going to spread the word and will be coming back.

As I think about the continuation of the group over so many years and our new blend of speakers, I believe the hand of God is in there. The newcomer/old-timer speaker idea was presented to us this past May by an old-timer with more than fifty-three years of sobriety while we were attending a One Day Beginners roundup in a nearby city. It was a group format that was working extremely well, and it came as a result of attendance at our area convention in Sudbury back in the 1960s, when the speaker was describing his home group.

**SELF-SUPPORT**—Michael D., Delegate Panel 66, Area 81 New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island

As we all know, group contributions to A.A.W.S. have been flat or decreasing in the last few years, while operational costs continue to rise. This is not a new problem: In 1947 Bill reported that only about 40 percent of groups contributed to G.S.O., which is very similar to today. (*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*)

This presentation deals with self-support, especially in regards to group contributions. It does not cover other types of contributions, nor with expenses—which one would hope A.A.W.S. is looking at carefully.

Despite years of attempts to increase group contributions, success has been very little and sporadic. The traditional way to try to increase contributions has been to ask group members to put more money into the basket. All attempts, including discussion of inflation (e.g., what a beer costs now compared to thirty years ago, etc.), have failed to significantly improve the 40 percent. And some (many?) members who are not flush with cash are offended and/or embarrassed by such “lectures.” And really, why should 40 percent of the groups be subsidizing the 60 percent that don't contribute? We know there are some groups that just can't afford to contribute, but my guess is that those are few and far between, and certainly do not amass to 60 percent.

Another method involving the education of members on Tradition Seven from G.S.O. “up” is also not working; in many cases, the message is not getting any further than the area, the D.C.M., or the G.S.R. All levels of service need to find a way to directly and personally **connect with the members**. Most of what I'll mention here deals with the delegate, but applies to everyone in A.A.'s service structure.

How to do it?

What is “G.S.O.”? Simply an address to send contributions and an office where the work of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services Inc. is done? Use the full A.A.W.S. name to convey

the world and North America aspects of our program; members need to think of their group as part of the bigger picture, not just as “my home group.” And if you can get this idea across, you probably won’t have to talk much about money.

Get yourself invited: visit business meetings in every district and spend time with as many groups as possible; teach D.C.M.s and G.S.R.s how to set up a prudent reserve. Any extra money outside monthly expenses and reserve **should be contributed** to district, area, and G.S.O. in whatever proportion the group agrees upon.

Gather e-mails from every member you meet. Make e-mail lists of trusted servants of the area, groups, and districts, plus (and this is very important) a list of general members.

Do a simple, concise, and no-frills monthly e-mail newsletter, stressing the Seventh Tradition from time to time. Always mention something current that Alcoholics Anonymous World Services is doing.

Emphasize self-support and members’ contributions as a spiritual part of the program, especially mentioning members’ **right to know** what is happening to the money they put in the basket.

Many members don’t go to business meetings (some groups don’t even have them!), but many members will go to workshops where they will have a chance to give their opinions at some length. Hold workshops at “unusual” events that gather lots of “ordinary” members—BBQs, cornballs, etc.

Keep paper to a minimum. A.A. produces a plethora of paper, most of which goes to individual members as well as the other A.A. entities. But this hasn’t changed anything contribution-wise. Personal contact is more important.

**Carrying the Message in a Diverse and Changing World**--Michael C., Delegate Panel 66, Area 90

“Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to other alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.” —*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* In this day and age carrying the A.A. message would appear, for some, a complex and surely difficult task. Some seem to believe that the Twelfth Step tools of yesterday and today no longer serve to reach the alcoholic who is still suffering. Perhaps there is some truth here. It is true that the world of today is much more diverse and is constantly mutating. Our ways to communicate, transmit, and receive information are always evolving. We need not look too far to see the impacts of subscription cuts and losses of some (if not most) of the publishing media, including newspapers, magazines, and journals, that only yesterday were part of our daily lives.

On the other hand, I believe A.A. is very fortunate and somewhat unique in that there are many levels at our disposal to carry the message. We have our members, our groups, our districts, our areas, and our two corporations, A.A.W.S. and Grapevine.

Our most simplified way of communicating our message is an alcoholic sharing with another alcoholic, our basic legacy, dating back to the time when Ebby T. shared his spiritual experience with Bill in 1934, which Bill then did with Dr. Bob in 1935.

In an article that Bill W. wrote and published in the Grapevine of July 1948, he emphasizes that, "Almost entirely unorganized and completely nonprofessional, this mighty spiritual current is now flowing from alcoholics who are well to those who are sick. One alcoholic talking to another; that's all."

To this day, person-to-person sharing remains one of the best ways to carry the message of hope to the still-suffering alcoholic.

As for our groups, carrying the message may not require us to reinvent the wheel, but perhaps to make small improvements. These changes or enhancements can themselves be simple: possibly starting with a group inventory so that the group can assess whether it is fulfilling our primary purpose, to "carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers."

Nowadays, the newcomer, with whom we try to reach out to, is perhaps not native to this country and may even have a slightly different culture and background than ours. Of course, the A.A. message, regardless of language or culture, is the same, but are we members willing and able to respond to this diversification?

Also, there's the other newcomer, who perhaps comes in saying that he is "special," he perhaps has problems other than alcohol, but he also seeks to recover. Do we take the time to listen and offer him a message of hope? As group members, do we practice tolerance and patience with all those who wish to recover?

Do our areas and districts have active public information, treatment/accessibility, or cooperation with the professional community committees? If yes, do we carry the message in schools, ethnic or other cultural centers, hospitals, and to the press? Do we have the latest tools from G.S.O. to help us carry the message to those who still suffer and to the professionals we have always considered friends of A.A.? We are attractions for these organizations?

Without forgetting the responsibility at the level of the groups, do we have active members who support the district committees on public information, treatment/accessibility, or any other committee?

This year, the 66th General Service Conference made headway so that A.A. can convey its message through social media. A proposal for implementing a Google-for-Non-Profits account and Twitter account for carrying the A.A. message to the public will be developed and brought back to the 2017 Conference Public Information Committee for review.

The video public service announcement "Doors" was distributed to approximately 65,000 TV stations or other media sources. Since its release it has been estimated to have been viewed more than 432 million times in English and 15 million times in Spanish. It is evident that with the services work from our various Conference committees, either via social media, P.S.A. messages, videos for professionals (C.P.C.), and all other forms of information that are



intended to carry the message, we have a great potential to reach many who suffer from this disease called alcoholism.

We can have the best of these video public service announcements and the ability to disseminate it twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week via television, radio, and print media, but carrying the message in a diverse and changing world depends on all A.A. members.

Of course, technology can play a big part in making it easier to distribute the message of hope around the world. On the other hand, our Twelfth Step cannot be the sole responsibility of the district committees, the areas, and G.S.O. They already take an active part in the local, regional, national, and world broadcasting to inform people seeking help through A.A., but the group members and the sponsors, through their attraction, their patience, and their tolerance, can best carry the message of sobriety of Alcoholics Anonymous, the language of the heart. One page S1 of *The AA Service Manual*, Bill wrote: "Our Twelfth Step—carrying the message—is the basic service that the A.A. Fellowship gives; this is our principal aim and the main reason for our existence. Therefore, A.A. is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven't been given the truth may die."

Now let's talk about sponsorship. Since its first form in 1934, when Ebby T. carried the message to Bill W., Ebby essentially became Bill's sponsor of sorts. As we know, sponsorship takes on several forms, either one member with another, or a trusted servant who is sponsoring a service committee, or a delegate who sponsors another delegate during the Conference, or our sponsors of service.

We also have sponsorship between countries. In Service document F-168, "Country to Country Sponsorship: Carrying the A.A. Message Worldwide," which can be found on the [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org) Website, it is quoted that, "Reflecting on A.A.'s growth, it is apparent that A.A. began spreading to other countries, not as a result of a decision by some faceless executive in a headquarters office, but rather by concerned and caring alcoholics, sober in A.A., reaching out to help suffering alcoholics elsewhere in the world." Sponsorship is a commitment that constantly reverberates, starting over without ever ending.

In conclusion, to help us in "Carrying the Message in a Diverse and Changing World," experience retains essential key elements:

1. The use of technology, to transmit information on our publications, public information, and other committee news to all media sources.
2. Members involved in service work, carrying the message through the Conference, as well as at the area, the district, and the group levels.
3. Sponsorship, service sponsorship, and more sponsorship.
4. Last but not least, the way that still remains as effective today as yesterday: one alcoholic talking to another alcoholic.

"Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps . . ." Then we all have the responsibility to carry this message to all who wish to recover from alcoholism.

## PAST TRUSTEES' SHARING

**Marne M.**, trustee, 1998-2002

My name has stood for trustee three times. The first time, while I was waiting to hear if my name was picked as trustee, I came home and my husband asked me if I had heard anything from New York. I did not. Sixteen days later, he died suddenly. That was God's plan, though I did not like it and I did not understand it. And I did not drink. When I came home from the hospital, there were women in my backyard with trays and trays of food and coffee. Alcoholics Anonymous has saved my life so many times that I cannot count them. I let my name stand a second time, and God's plan was different. The third time I let my name stand as consideration for trustee, I was chosen. God had a plan and I served.

I served on the literature committee. I was involved in the Fourth Edition of the Big Book, and I am really grateful that I didn't end up on the committee when there were 1222 stories to look at, I got there when they were down to 98. That was enough. I cherish that book and the A.A. symbol on the front. So, as trustee for eastern Canada I served all of Eastern Canada. Alcoholics Anonymous has allowed me to be a part of this Fellowship all over eastern Canada. I have met amazing people and I cherish them. I have lost people, too. All have a piece of my heart.

I was privileged to chair the Sunday morning meeting of the 2000 International Convention in Minneapolis, and that was an honor, especially because Toronto, Canada, was getting it next. Service work is work, and we have to make sure that someone is there, living these principles and doing the right thing for the good of A.A. When we get to a Regional Forum, we realize that the "whole of A.A." isn't just your group. And then you get to your district, and your area, and you realize a little more, and you learn the group conscience. This is a gift and I hope everyone gets to share it one day, that unity, because we need to be united.

I read pages 83-88 in the Big Book on a daily basis. It says, "The spiritual life is not a theory. *We have to live it.*" Then I skip down to: "If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through." Well, I am past the halfway, and I am still amazed.

**Tom K.**, Western Canada regional trustee, 2004-2008

My first service experience, outside of an A.A. meeting, began at a Regional Forum in Regina, Saskatchewan, in 1986. I was a floater in A.A. and I was about three years sober. I didn't have a home group and I didn't have an awful lot of the things that they suggest, but I went to meetings regularly, because I had never found anything in my life that compared to what I felt when I was with you people. One late Friday afternoon, I was at work later than usual. An A.A. coworker said, "Tom, what are you doing this weekend? We are having a Regional Forum here in town and I am on the committee and we could sure use your help." If he had said, "It would be good for you," or "It will help you stay sober," I'm not sure how I would have responded. But I responded to him telling me that they could use my help. So I attended my first Regional Forum.

I don't remember a word that was said, but I remember having a sense of what I belonged to, and to what A.A. was. I remember the people at the head table and I remember how the people conducted themselves. When I walked in, with my new friends, that Saturday morning, there was a fellow sitting on the corner where the hotel was. He was panhandling, and my friend nodded to him, and said to me, "That is one of the main reasons we are here this weekend. For that individual." I never forgot that. Shortly after that, I got a home group. All of the benefits that accrue with recovery began to come. The people on the organizing committee that I met that weekend went on to become the links that led me further into Alcoholics Anonymous. My circle of fellowship started to grow.

This morning, within a stone's throw from here, there are dozens of people who are probably suffering the after-effects of alcoholism. That is why we are here this weekend. And I believe, with all my heart, that if we never lose sight of that, we will be safe from whatever perils we may face as a movement, as a Fellowship, and whatever challenges that will be presented to us. We will be safe from any harm, and we will be led to solutions that we are looking for. If we keep our eye on the ball, and remember the people standing outside the door, who haven't found the courage yet to turn that knob, we will find solutions to any problems we may encounter.

I'd like to encourage everyone, especially the new people, to buy, borrow, or somehow find a copy of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*. Read it or listen to an audio copy. It was written about 1957, when our Fellowship was about twenty years old. Read the marvelous and miraculous story of how your Fellowship came to be. How a worldwide movement and Fellowship of over two million people (today) should never have even been here—should never have survived, should never have existed, because of those challenges that those people faced in those first years and beyond. Read that wonderful story, and after you've done that, you will come to see, as I have, that this project is not ours — it has been entrusted to us by a power greater than ourselves, whose love for those suffering out there exceeds ours. It is a marvelous testimony of a power greater than ourselves working through the love and commitment of all of those people that came before us.

We didn't have literature or a codified set of Steps and Traditions in those first five to ten years. But those first A.A.s recognized two things: that they needed to continue doing what they were doing and their very survival depended on it (as does mine). I'm sure we wouldn't have heard any conversations about a flat lined membership or some of those other issues where fear creeps in. The second thing they realized was that they had a tremendous debt and duty to make sure that this answer they found stayed alive and vibrant and growing for all of those people yet to come. So, it is such a privilege to be part of a movement such as this and to be sharing here with you people this weekend. Continue to pass it on, and to invite people along. You did it for me and it has made all the difference. Bon voyage.

## **Murray M.**, trustee-at-large/Canada, 2003-2007

Good morning. My name is Murray and I *am* an alcoholic. That's the way I introduce myself at all the meetings I attend, and the emphasis is on "am." I need that reminder. I am the one who needs to hear it. I learned that way of introducing myself from one of the women at a group I attended. Her name was Vera. I got up the nerve to ask her why, you know how it is when you approach an old-timer. She said, "I've had so many slips, I need to know every day that I am capable of going back." So I say it, every day, so I can remember that, too. I need the Fellowship and what I've learned about the Steps and Traditions. Attending meetings is the best way to remember that. The second way is to do service. I began the ABC way, Ashtrays, Brooms, and Cups. I didn't smoke when I came in. The air was blue in the room, and I would sink lower and lower in my chair to avoid that blue layer. And then I was told I had to do the ashtrays. Resentments kill, but while I was resenting, I was cleaning ashtrays. Action is the antidote for the emotions that go on inside of me. Of course, the actions have to be right ones. Later I did cups. I didn't mix ashtrays and cups. Though there were days I wanted to!

I came up through service through intergroup and then transferred those skills. One year they had the Ontario delegates meeting here in Thunder Bay. The person they had arranged as secretary couldn't stand in, so they approached me to do it. All of the sudden, I was sitting at a table with all these delegates and alternate delegates. The same ones I had viewed from afar, but now I was sitting at the table with them. These people who knew so much and seemed able to handle things and answer questions impressed me. I admired that. I did that secretary duty. I sent out the minutes. And they were probably the longest minutes they had ever had. I had to do it the best. (Ashtrays received the same attention.) After that, I was asked to join as secretary at the area committee level.

What I found in service was a kind of fellowship that wasn't apparent at a group level. There was a kind of spirit among service workers, and in service meetings, that I didn't always find at my home group. And that spirit was one that we are here for — it has a purpose that we can talk about. And there was an agenda, and I'm used to agendas. In an A.A. meeting, the direction could go all over the place — if there is a reading, you could comment on any part of it. And I had difficulty with that, although I've grown used to it over the years. But in service work, we have an agenda, and we stick to that agenda (usually). In that, I found what I could do and give back. I was amazed that I was a year sober, then five, and then ten. How does that happen? It happens by getting a home group, getting a sponsor, reading the Big Book, going to meetings, getting active and having a sponsor in my life. In all of this, no matter what was presented, the question of taking on a service position was simply a matter of "do I have the time?" and "am I willing?"

After I was delegate, then area chair, the area asked me if I would stand as nominee for trustee-at-large/Canada. I was willing, because I knew our area had already had a trustee (Marne) and I knew that lightning never strikes in the same place twice. But it did. I went into shock. I went to tell my sister, she lived four doors down. I began by telling her the process. She interrupted me and said, "But Murray, isn't this a good thing?"

Apparently, my body language wasn't indicating that this was a good thing. I said, "Oh yes." Up in my head, it was a good thing. Inside of me, though, I was scared stiff. My sister said, "I know what it is. You are scared because your A.A. family just got so much bigger." She was

exactly right. In the course of those four years, I attended events in 13 other countries on behalf of the Fellowship in the United States and Canada. Tell me, how does a bush rat from northern Ontario gets to do that? I'll tell you: Through this Fellowship, this program, and the good grace of a Higher Power.

**JoAnn L.**, trustee-at-large/Canada, 2007-2011

I was elected as trustee-at-large/Canada in 2007 and I served until 2011. I was also privileged to serve as a Panel 52 delegate. Eastern Canada has ten areas, and someone from each area is here today -- we call that regional unity. Coming here is also a way to meet and greet our fellows in Alcoholics Anonymous.

My first Alcoholics Anonymous meeting was in Winnipeg, Manitoba. I came to Alcoholics Anonymous for the first time in 1979, and I sobered up in 1984. So I wasn't really a member of A.A. until 1984. I didn't put our materials to good use. But now I know how important and useful they are for their answers and experience that we can use and share.

I have been a member of the same group since 1984, and I have used a sponsor since 1984. She taught me how to be a strong woman. I married a man from Alcoholics Anonymous, and we have been married for 26 years. He taught me about respect. Because of Alcoholics Anonymous and what I learned, I have been able to do so much. While I was listening this weekend, I thought about the importance of unity, respect, and group conscience. When I came into A.A. I wouldn't have used those three things to describe my life. I have a mental health past, so part of my story is that I spent a whole year in a psychiatric hospital. Just a few weeks ago I was at an A.A. meeting, just maybe three hundred feet from the place where I had my shock treatments. And you voted me in as your delegate! And then you voted me in as the trustee-at-large/Canada.

I was elected trustee-at-large/Canada at the 57<sup>th</sup> General Service Conference. Murray handed off his job to me, and it was hard — it is hard to give someone else the job you had, but in A.A. we don't get to keep our jobs. We get to keep our experiences, but not our jobs. All the reports I've given as trustee-at-large/Canada I could give again, because each of those reports lives inside me. In my service experience, I have been all over Canada. Really and truly, it is all about unity.

I think if I wanted to end my talk about anything, it would be about the people I have met in Alcoholics Anonymous. I still have a sponsor. She is 87 years old and living in a home. Her memory is gone, but if I say "A.A." it comes back. If you ask her about the Twelve Steps, she knows what it is. I am honored to have that woman in my life. Watching her gave me hope. When I got elected to trustee-at-large/Canada, I phoned her and I said, "Dorothy, you are not going to believe this, but I actually got elected." She said, "Didn't we do good, JoAnn?" I want you to know that anytime I traveled as trustee-at-large/Canada, and I gave a report or met a new member, I said "I have brought everyone with me." So every time I gave out a hug, it was your hug. Every time I said "thank you" it was your thank you.

## **Closing Remarks**

(Terry Bedient, Class A (nonalcoholic) General Service Board Chairperson,  
was unable to attend this Regional Forum)

### **Closing remarks given by Richard B., Eastern Canada Regional Trustee**

The final count for this Eastern Canada Regional Forum was 220 people. There were 74 first-time attendees. This weekend we have heard a lot of information. We have heard numbers and lots of other information, but at the end of the day, I believe there is one reason we are gathered here. It is to keep carrying the message to the still suffering alcoholic. If you had told me, 27 years ago, that one day I would serve where I am, I would have strongly suggested that you go see another doctor. Thank you for your 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition – that is how we save lives.

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