

About AA

Survey Profiles Today's A.A. Member

One of the questions most often asked by professionals about A.A. is "How effective is A.A.?" A.A. does not keep track of individual members or do case studies, and its members remain anonymous, making that question a difficult one. While many outside of A.A. have conducted research into that question, the only statistical information available from A.A. about itself are anonymous surveys of the A.A. Fellowship, which have been conducted by its General Service Office every three years since 1968. These surveys offer an overview of current trends in membership characteristics, with the purposes of sharing information about A.A. membership with professionals and giving A.A. more information about itself so that members can better help suffering alcoholics.

Results of the 2004 random membership survey were recently published and provide a snapshot of the A.A. Fellowship. The 2004 questionnaires were distributed last summer to 714 A.A. groups in the U.S. and Canada. More than 7,500 members, old and young, participated in the survey. A full 50% of respondents had been sober more than five years (up from 48% in '01); 24%, 1-5 years; and 26%, less than one year.

Over 8% of the respondents were under 30 years old, with 1.5% under 20; 4.8% of the membership is over 70 years of age. The average member is 48 years old, has been sober more than eight years, and attends about two meetings a week.

Findings reveal that professionals play a key role in steering active alcoholics to A.A.: 39% of the respondents said they had been referred by a health-care professional. Additionally, 64% said that before joining the program, they had received some type of treatment or counseling—e.g., medical, psychological, spiritual; and 74% of those same members said it had played an important part in guiding them to A.A. Moreover, some 65% said they had received some type of treatment or counseling after coming to A.A.; and 84% of those same members said it played an important role in their recoveries.

In citing the factors most responsible for their coming to A.A., members cited: a treatment facility, 31%; an A.A. member, 31%; family influence, 23%; court order, 11%; counseling agency, 8%; and health-care provider, 8%.

Other survey results confirm the staying power of some positive and interesting trends tracked over the past decade: The percentage of women in A.A., which climbed sharply from 22% in 1968 to 35% in '89, then dipped to 33% in '96, has held steady in the mid-30 percentile and presently stands at 35% of the membership.

Members' occupations continue to cover a broad spectrum and reflect statistically insignificant changes from the last survey: retired, 14%; self-employed/other, 11%; manager/administrator, 10%; professional/technical, 10%; skilled trade, 9%; laborer, 6%; health professional, 6%; sales worker, 5%; service worker, educator, clerical worker, student, all 3%; homemaker and transporta-

tion workers, each 2%; craft worker, 1%; and disabled (not working) and unemployed, both 6%.

Published findings of the 2004 Membership Survey are available online in the A.A. Fact File at www.aa.org, and in an updated version of the leaflet "Alcoholics Anonymous Membership Survey" (M-13). To order, write to the General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

New Board Chair Looks To the Future of A.A.

Canadian Leonard M. Blumenthal, LL.D., for the past five years a Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee of A.A., is the new chairman of A.A.'s General Service Board. "There is a real emergence of A.A. in the rest of the world," he says. "In many places it is at the stage of development A.A. in the U.S. was 70 years ago—just one alcoholic helping another to stay sober, and then two alcoholics looking for two more and so on, until there was a worldwide Fellowship of more than two million sober alcoholics. We need to help these young groups and service structures, and we do. At the same time, they have a lot to teach us—to remind us of where we were, how far we have come and how important it is to stay with the spiritual principles that have made A.A. strong."

In the spirit of rotation that distinguishes the role of trusted servant at every level of A.A.'s service structure, Blumenthal succeeds Class A trustee Elaine McDowell, Ph. D., of Baltimore, a member of the board since 1992 and chair since 2001. Like his predecessor, Blumenthal believes in A.A.'s unwavering adherence to its Three Legacies—Recovery, Unity and Service. "In tandem," he says, "they work for the recovery of the alcoholic."

Long before he became a Class A trustee, Len knew the workings of A.A. almost inside out. He had attended A.A. in Edmonton, Alberta, as a visitor, for over 35 years. "What I saw again and again," Len says, "was that A.A. works and works well. I realized that if I did nothing more than bring alcoholics



looking for recovery to this Fellowship, I'd come a long way."

Blumenthal early found a vocation in the alcoholism field. He earned a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Alberta in 1963 and was headed, he thought, for a lifelong career in education, first as an English and physical education teacher, then as a vice principal. But in fall 1966 he took a leave of absence to serve as "a rookie alcoholism counselor" with the government of the Province of Alberta, and his priorities began to change.

"I was fascinated," Len recalls, "but basically I looked upon my involvement in alcohol-drug abuse treatment as an experience that would help me chart my future work. When I wavered between education and the alcohol-abuse field, someone said, 'Maybe it's time you decided what you want to do when you grow up.' I did, and never looked back. My decision disappointed my parents, especially my father, who owned a country general store and, I'm sure, thought I would one day work my way into the family business. 'You mean to say you'd give up a principal's job in order to work with a bunch of drunkards?' he said to me once in disbelief. Yet he was the one who often helped the destitute families of alcoholics, providing them with enough groceries to get by, though he knew they'd rarely be paid for."

For almost 30 years, from 1969 to 1998, Len worked for the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) and served as chief executive officer from 1987 until 1998 when he "retired"—a euphemism, because after three days' rest he was appointed to the board of directors of the Capital Health Authority of Edmonton, which, he relates, "is responsible for the complete health care of more than a million people." He also has served the Organization of American States, "helping to map out national drug-and-alcohol plans for countries in the Americas and the Caribbean."

Blumenthal holds an honorary Doctor of Laws degree, presented to him in 2000 by Alberta's University of Lethbridge in recognition of his work in alcohol and drug addiction. He has acted as a consultant to Grant MacEwan Community College, the Department of the Attorney General and the Government of Northwest Territories, for which he conducted a series of seminars with Native and non-Native Canadians, with special reference to management and control of alcohol and alcohol-related programs. In 1993 he was presented with the Eagle Feather, the highest honor of the Nechi Institute on Addictions "for wisdom and bravery in working with Native Indian addiction problems."

The plaque reads in part: "The vision AADAC and Len had [was] in allowing us to make our mistakes. The courage to trust . . . that we would learn from our own mistakes. The balance between men and women, whites and Natives is like the feather. . . . Not every feather is equal, but the balance of the flying is maintained perfectly. If the wings are not balanced, the eagle could not fly. . . . Our eagle has been flying for 24 years with Len's support."

A.A.'s General Service Board consists of seven Class A (non-alcoholic) trustees who serve six-year terms and 14 Class B (alcoholic) trustees who serve four. "What is so incredible," Blumenthal says, "is that when the alcoholic and nonalcoholic trustees come together to serve A.A., it's impossible to tell us apart. We may hail from different places, but we're moving in the same direction. What it all comes down to is this: Will what we're doing help the suffering alcoholic?"

Looking to the future of the Fellowship, Len says, "A.A. is saving lives every day, but I think we can do even better. I would like to see more people become aware of this program and its potential

for hope and healing. There still are many professionals out there—doctors, the clergy, court officials, counselors and more, who are clueless about how A.A. can help them to help the alcoholics they see and treat."

New Class A Trustee Brings Broad Expertise in Corrections

New Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee Jeanne S. Woodford is director of the California Department of Corrections in Sacramento, California, a position she assumed in February 2004 after serving as warden of San Quentin Prison. "I am very excited about becoming an A.A. trustee," she says, "and look forward to serving in any way I can." She adds that "in my work at San Quentin over a period of 25 years, I saw that as many as 80 percent of our prisoners could be classified as alcoholics. In the future I would like to see A.A. gain even greater access to these alcoholics than it already does and hope to be a part of carrying its message."

A native Californian, Jeanne grew up in Sonoma and earned a B.A. degree in criminal justice, with emphasis on psychology and sociology, from Sonoma State University. She joined San Quentin in 1978 and held a series of positions over the years, including correctional officer, correctional counselor and associate warden. Finally, as warden, she headed a facility housing 5,800 inmates, with a work force of 1,500.

Woodford points out that "we have a critical revolving-door situation in which a high percentage of inmates, many of them alcoholics, no sooner are released than they're incarcerated again." The greater the A.A. presence in jails and prisons around the U.S. and Canada, she says, "the more we can hope to reduce the number of people behind bars now and in the years to come."

As a Class A trustee Jeanne joins a distinguished group of A.A.'s closest friends who over the years have given freely of their time, expertise and concern. Besides chairman Leonard Blumenthal and Jeanne Woodford, today's Class A trustees include: Allen L. Ault, Ed.D., dean of the College of Justice and Safety, University of Eastern Kentucky at Richmond; Texan Herbert I. Goodman, CEO of an international corporation involved with petroleum products and energy conservation; Vincent E. Keefe, of Orland Park, Illinois, who is the retired CEO of a large packaging corporation; Ward Ewing, D.D., of New York City, dean and president of the General Theological Seminary; and Bill Clark, M.D., of Woolwich, Maine, medical director of an Addiction Resource Center, and attending physician at Mid Coast Hospital, in Bath, Maine.

Let Us Hear From You . . .

Are there any specific topics you would like to see explored in *About A.A.*? Please send us your thoughts, ideas, comments, so we may better communicate with the professional community. You may e-mail the Cooperation With the Professional Community desk at: cpcc@aa.org.

This newsletter may be duplicated for distribution without obtaining permission from A.A. World Services, Inc.