

**FINAL REPORT**  
**WESTERN CANADA “ADDITIONAL”**  
**REGIONAL FORUM**  
**SEPTEMBER 11-13, 2015**  
**WHITEHORSE, YUKON**

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Western Canada Regional Forum, which will take place in Kamloops, British Columbia, August 26-28, 2016 at The Calvary Community Church.

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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 2015 Western Canada “Additional” Regional Forum was held in Whitehorse, Yukon. Registration for the Forum was **170**. This included **97** members attending their very first Forum—many were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening.

## ASK-IT BASKET QUESTIONS

(Not answered onsite)

- Q. My sponsor is 25 years sober and still puts \$1.00 or \$2.00 in the basket. She sponsors a lot of women who see this. I've spoken to her about this but it falls on deaf ears. Any suggestions?
- R. Sharing information on what our 7<sup>th</sup> Traditions donations make possible is a great place to start. G.S.O.'s A.A. website [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org) can offer you some helpful information. If you search “Your Seventh Tradition Contributions,” you can find a new service piece on how the 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition helps carry the message.
- Q. Would it be possible to make the World Service Meeting Reports more readily available to A.A. members? (There are, after all, made possible because of our 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition contributions)
- R. It is possible to make the Worlds Service Meeting reports more available to the Fellowship. G.S.O. and the General Service Board would welcome any suggestions on how this could be accomplished. Please send your suggestions to the International Assignment at G.S.O.

## FULL FORUM WORKSHOP

SEPTEMBER 12, 2015

3:30-5:00 p.m.

**“REMOTE COMMUNITIES”** (*Moderator: Jade F-H. / Reporter: Dave F.*) Linda L., Remote Communities chairperson for Area 79, presented issues and advances in carrying the message to remote communities in the area. The purpose of the Remote Communities Committee is to foster unity within the fellowship of Area 79 by creating an awareness of the needs of alcoholics in remote communities. This committee seeks to assist those who are unable to make it to regular face-to-face meetings on a consistent basis. Members may be faced with travel or geographic challenges or may face barriers such as language, cultural considerations and/or anything else that could separate a person who needs A.A. from our program of recovery. For more information, and for a better understanding, the Remote Communities Workbook and information about a Remote Communities Kit is available at the Area 79 website.

Question 1: *What is and what is not working with professionals?*

All First Nations have funded health care workers, as well as teachers, court workers, and legal professionals that travel to these locations. More education for them, perhaps using TeleHealth,

is needed. All these professionals have conferences, if we get on their agenda, perhaps G.S.O. can come into facilitate. Maintaining anonymity in small communities is problematic, so some suggested bringing in outside members to carry the message.

Question 2: *How can we best utilize technology?* Some suggestions were to use a “Secret Facebook page,” teleconferences, expanding into video conferencing using “Zoom,” to reach up to 25 people per week. [Offering both cloud meeting and webinar software, Zoom is most known for Zoom Cloud Meetings, also referred to as “Zoom” by users, which combines video conferencing, online meetings, and mobile collaboration into one platform]. Used to reach the Northwest Territories, the TeleHealth network is running in 14 communities. It is used in the Northern Reserves in Manitoba, as well as for eight years in Yukon. Sometimes it has resulted in the creation of local meetings. Other suggestions were to set up roaming /travelling meetings and to utilize TeleHealth so that CPC can educate professionals. It was pointed out that some remote communities have slow internet connections, so suggestions were made to use audio instead of video to prevent network lag. A final suggestion was offered — if A.A. members are planning to go to remote communities or travel to camps up north, give them information on teleconferences.

## WORKSHOP REPORTS

**“The Twelve Traditions”** (*Moderator: Roger C. / Reporter: Tannis F.*) The workshop attendees discussed how following the tenets of the Traditions in their groups (and in their personal lives) solved or alleviated problems or issues. First, the group brought up Tradition One, in which our common welfare comes first and our personal progress depends upon it. How meetings were run was discussed, and a question was raised: “Is there a standard method for running a meeting?” Members shared that, as stated in Tradition Four, groups are autonomous, therefore, no. When encountering problems in a group, such as changing words in the Big Book to reflect atheism, or fighting between groups, one member shared that closer study and practice of Tradition Four was helpful — that “Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.” Other workshop attendees cited examples of problems that may arise in meetings, such as much discussion of personal problems. Discussion of Steps and Traditions were thought to bring the meeting more in line with recovery, as newcomers need solutions. Another attendee cited that we have a primary purpose, and we carry A.A.’s message, not our own. Members shared elements of the Traditions that worked when applied to group problems, such as “a right to be wrong” and the requirements of membership, as stated in Tradition Four. Another workshop attendee stated that “Experience has taught us that . . . our common welfare comes first” and in their group they “kept the stuff that worked.” Another shared that, in studying the long forms of the Traditions, their group focused on anonymity, as in Tradition Twelve. Practicing principles before personality and sublimating personal preferences has brought about harmony.

Some members shared that they use the tenets of the Traditions in their life and relationships. Members practiced non-judgment, patience, and found serenity to be the result. One member shared that, as a result of using the Traditions in her family, there was greater unity. Another member used Tradition Two, accepting a loving God as the ultimate authority. Finally, one member shared his gratitude that the Traditions state that it is a “suggested” program. He shared that the absence of dogma enabled him to stomach A.A. He said that the Traditions made it “more palatable and bearable—who am I to say there is no God?”

**“Maintaining Unity”** (*Moderator: Marilyn B. / Reporter: Alison*) The workshop members discussed what they perceived as the greatest threats to A.A.’s unity. Members shared ideas on topics such as “How should we handle outside issues in meetings?” and “How should we address issues of safety and/or bullying?”

In response to methods of handling outside issues, workshop attendees shared numerous solutions and guides, such as: handling outside issues with love, tolerance, kindness and respect, as well as with singleness of purpose in mind; handling outside issues with a focus on attraction and inclusiveness; with more information and sharing of guidelines; and, finally, using gentle guidance when engaging in one-on-one conversations with members who share extensively about outside issues.

Finally, group members shared thoughts and experience on how to best address issues of safety or instances of bullying. When approaching such issues or instances, it was best to do so with love and acceptance, and not exclude people who need help. However, it was pointed out that safety and security is a matter of our common welfare. Members should speak up and/or act if they see bullying or if they are bullied themselves. Sharing more information and any guidelines as published by the General Service Office were also mentioned as an avenue to maintain our unity.

**“A.A. and the Internet”** (*Moderator: Lori W. /Reporter: Vicki W.*) The attendees at this workshop discussed literature and the Internet: Some members shared that they still like a good book and agreed that it is important to purchase the material — whether by hard copy or giving eBooks as gifts. Members agreed that A.A. literature, the Internet, and electronic formats are still evolving. Most A.A. literature is available for personal tablet devices, and it varies on how the message is best carried.

Members at the workshop also discussed anonymity and the Internet. Some thoughts by attendees were:

- We need to use it, and we also need to revamp our use. We need to safeguard ourselves.
- It is important to remember all our Traditions on the Internet.
- Facebook, Twitter, etc. are advertisement-driven. Therefore, A.A. may be inadvertently seen to be affiliated because of advertising.
- Go safely and slowly but do not be afraid.
- Bill W. suggested keeping up with new technology and using the tools available to us.
- Regarding anonymity and the Internet, we must lead by example, so we must make sure our own use does not violate the principle of anonymity.

**“Newcomers and How to Get Them Involved in Service:”** (*Moderator: Arnie G. / Reporter: Joe W.*) The workshop attendees discussed two questions regarding how to get newcomers involved in service. First, the group was asked, “What service positions are good to start newcomers on and how can we keep them involved?” Members responded that newcomers could start with a coffee commitment or serve as a greeter. It is generally a good idea to get people started in service by steering them, nominating them, or suggesting positions they could hold. Always share with the newcomer how service positions have been helpful to your own sobriety. Finally, it was suggested that A.A. members take a newcomer to an area assembly or a district meeting.

Workshop attendees also focused on the role of a sponsor in getting newcomers involved in service. Sharing around the room netted such ideas as: Encourage newcomers to get a service sponsor, bring along the newcomer to service events (and other events), have sponsor suggest service positions, and share the importance that service in Alcoholics Anonymous has played in their own sobriety.

**“Carrying the Message in a Changing World”** (*Moderator: Lyn P. / Reporter: Deborah D.*) A.A.s attending this workshop were asked to share about how to carry the message in our ever-changing world. Regarding anonymity, the sense of the workshop meeting was that at the public level, anonymity is to protect A.A. It also comes into play regarding personal protection — we do not aggrandize self. Members shared that we need less grey area when it comes to social media. A.A. is not anonymous – the members are, and we need especially to protect the anonymity of newcomers. Some members suggested that we could first share with a newcomer that we had a drinking problem and we found a solution, instead of immediately leading with our membership in A.A.

How do we adapt ourselves to this changing world regarding spirituality and anonymity? Members shared that A.A.’s principles are still relevant today. It was generally agreed that A.A. should be “out there more” and acknowledged that the world today is “more public.” The future is the young people, and many with a dual addiction come to A.A., so perhaps we should not be so rigid and unaccepting of other addictions? Some pointed out that even older people are dually addicted. Other workshop members brought up A.A.’s singleness of purpose. Are we being helpful or are we hurting people? A.A. vs. N.A. was briefly discussed, as was A.A.’s primary purpose. Members shared that it was important not to shame people, or over-discuss the differences between A.A. vs. N.A. We practice the principles in all our affairs and we reach out to our friends.

**“Grapevine: The Grapevine Rep and More—Bringing our Message of Hope to Alcoholics”** (*Moderator: Ami B., A.A. Grapevine, Inc., Executive Editor/Publisher/ Reporter: Rio D.*) The workshop attendees discussed several topics regarding the A.A. Grapevine Magazine. First, the Grapevine’s Executive Editor presented the importance of awareness and promotion (in regard to the GV) and the role of GV representatives. Introduction and discussion of the elements required to produce the magazine followed. Writing and contributing stories to the magazine was discussed. Then, the group performed an exercise to find out what topic their story would be (i.e. service, gratitude). Following this exercise, a brief tutorial on how to make audio recordings was shared. The group investigated several ideas on how to use the Grapevine, such as: using the GV for a meeting topic; participating in the subscription challenge for the 70<sup>th</sup> Grapevine anniversary; gift subscriptions; using an issue as a sobriety birthday card; mailing out to remote communities via reserve addition workers; have Grapevine area chairs utilize conference calls; promotion kits; and finally, workshops. The workshop session concluded with information about the successes enjoyed by the magazine as well as the challenges facing the Grapevine. The magazine is currently facing a subscription decline. In order to alleviate this, importance is placed on digital awareness, getting the word out, and finally promoting the magazine *without* soliciting sales.

**“What Can It Do to Carry the Message: The 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition”** (Moderator: Jeff C. /Reporter: Cyndi V.) Should groups be fully self-supporting through group members? Tradition Seven states that group members only should support the group. Within the workshop, attendees were divided in the discussion. Contributions should be by only A.A. members and group members should be self-supporting with time, as well. It is important to meet our obligation at all levels of service. Putting in the basket is giving back to A.A. It is important to educate that running a meeting costs money. In addition, all levels of service need money. Don't think of putting money in the basket but think of where the money goes---to carry the message.

How do you make groups aware of financial needs outside the groups? (e.g. district activities, DCM travel) One member stated, “Our district informs by word of mouth.” Others thought that it was quite obvious — the green card states where the money goes. Suggest reading the green card at your meeting. Others suggested having a strong chair read the green card to keep the room quiet so that members are better able to listen to be informed.

**“Leadership in A.A.”** (Moderator: Jan M. / Reporter: Viki E.) Two issues/questions for discussion in this workshop were selected:

1. *Leadership transitions*
2. *What makes a good leader?*

Participants shared on both topics and made the following points:

- Leaders within A.A. are important to newcomers.
- For some groups, rotation is difficult for many reasons. There is a lack of interest in service and difficulty getting new members to take positions. In addition, some don't fully understand the need for rotation and may hold on to a position.
- Good leaders lead by example. There is attraction through passion and clear message. We emphasize the value of service and introduce newer people to the options in service.
- A good leader has a personal responsibility to the Fellowship and is available to the person rotating on. He or she thinks about the next leader and how to help or develop the position. Predecessors who share their mistakes help the new person.
- It is okay to take on jobs without knowledge. We train on the job and become team players. Transition involves learning from both good and bad.
- “Leadership is the art of influencing human behavior” (power of example).
- Leaders are people in service who have worked the Steps, have a sponsor and seek to have calming influence.
- Good sponsorship is important in being a good leader and for making leadership transitions well. We seek to be listening and kind, imparting information — not our opinion. By remaining a member of the group, transitions are made easy.

**“Unity is not Conformity”** (Moderator: Larry M. / Reporter: Becky P.) Workshop participants discussed the topic: “Unity is Not Conformity,” and attendees were forthcoming with comments expressing the topic. Among the thoughts and comments were the following:

- United we stand, divided we fall.
- We all work the program our own way; when I stop trying to conform, I find unity.
- All areas have diversity and commonality.
- We allow everyone the dignity of their own experience.

- Reading the long form of Traditions is a good way to find solutions. It is not always needed to identify ourselves. We learn to conform in our own way.
- We all do things differently, but with a common intent.
- We are people who normally would not mix, but we are here due to attraction, not promotion
- We are united by our differences. We absolutely have the right to be wrong.
- We use loving tolerance to suggest what's needed to get well and sober
- Practicing the Traditions and the Concepts brings us unity.
- Nobody tells me I "have" to do it, but if I want what you have, I may take suggestions. We have a "big hoop" to go through
- It is difficult to have recovery without some kind of conformity.
- If we leave non-conformity alone, it will take care of itself.

**“Supporting District Committees”** (*Moderator: Gail P. / Reporter: Jean E.*) The workshop addressed two questions regarding the support of district committees. First, how can groups support our PI/CPC committee? Some ideas shared by workshop members were:

- Perform a district inventory and/or request help from intergroup or area PI/CPC chair.
- Try breaking down the district's initiatives into "tasks" and assign them to people rather than asking them to form a committee. Then, guide and support them. Find a committee "buddy."
- Let chairs know they can ask for help.
- Have PI or CPC use the area newsletter "Intercom."

The second question discussed by workshop attendees was "How do we get more GSRs involved in service?" Some ideas included:

- DCMs attend group meetings and/or business meetings and discuss service opportunities. Helpful for DCMs to bring pamphlets and other informational devices.
- Share service stories and service experience whenever possible.
- Have the incoming GSR attend the voting assembly.
- Use sponsorship to encourage service work.
- Hold a workshop to ignite service sparks.
- Encourage all newcomers to service to get a service sponsor.

## PRESENTATIONS

**Be Informed:** Michelle D., Delegate Panel 64, Area 78, Alberta/NT

Hello, Whitehorse, Yukon! My name is Michelle D. I am the Panel 64 Delegate for Area 78, AB/NT. I feel so grateful and privileged to be with all of you, along with the dedicated staff members from G.S.O. and our trustees, who willingly come to these forums in order to inform us, involve us, and inspire us to be of service! Thank you, Scott and Clay, for this invitation to serve.

I currently live at the lowest, most southwest corner of Alberta, in the beautiful Crowsnest Pass. I feel like I am at home in Whitehorse, as the scenery is spectacular and very similar to my backyard. Whitehorse hospitality is inviting, and it's very inspiring to see the enthusiastic volunteers greet and love us. In order for any service event in A.A. to take place at this magnitude, all attendees need to be informed, and this happens only when our members get involved. "Faith without works is dead."

My alcoholism brought me to my knees in Calgary. I was on the verge of losing my seven-year-old son, Kelly, to social services, and possibly my job at the Calgary Police Service. I was given a glimmer of hope when I was introduced to the Service's alcohol coordinator, who asked me to answer the twenty questions as honestly as I could—seventeen of which I answered with a "yes." He informed me about Alcoholics Anonymous—including the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions—and he encouraged me to go to A.A. meetings. After being informed of my disease I was incredibly relieved, and for the first time I felt inside that I was on the right track. I suffered from a disease called alcoholism. Answering these questions and going to meetings informed me of my life's unmanageability, and showed me the devastation that alcoholism created in my life.

In *A.A. Comes of Age*, Bill talks about our Third Legacy, Service. "Action is the magic word." Action is the heart of our Third Legacy of Service. So when I came into the Fellowship, I found a sponsor who liked to read, and she suggested that I might want to read the recovery books she bought for me: the *Big Book*, *Living Sober*, *Came to Believe*, and *Daily Reflections*. I started to understand the program, and gained confidence. I started to heal spiritually, and I sought out my understanding of a Higher Power, whom I call Jesus. I bought myself a copy of the Twelve and Twelve, which my home group (Choir Boys) read and discussed weekly. I started my journey of being informed. As I grew in recovery, I took on more responsibilities by getting involved in the service structure; first as an intergroup representative, then as corrections chair, and then as the G.S.R. for the group Sailor Bill's. At the Calgary General Service Committee meetings, I became informed about *The A.A. Service Manual*, our Twelve Concepts, and the business side of A.A.

I think the first time I was inspired by this Fellowship was when I attended my very first assembly. I was just over a year sober and attended with my new boyfriend (who has been my husband now for twenty-one years), who was serving as the G.S.R. of his Crowsnest Pass group. I was simply along for the ride and had no intention of learning anything at the assembly; however, God had other plans for me that weekend, as I was graced with the "spark" of service. I was truly inspired and in awe of the D.C.M. who came and gave reports from all over AB and NT. I became

informed about how the committee system worked, and how business in A.A. was conducted. I read our *A.A. Service Manual*; of course, some of it I didn't understand right away, but slowly I became more informed, especially by asking questions to longtime service members. I was inspired by the dedication of our trusted servants, as well as by their involvement, knowledge, and leadership. God's unending guidance gave me the inspiration to be the best possible version of myself by getting out of my head and getting involved in this program. I was inspired by the history of our co-founders, Bill and Dr. Bob, whose failures were our greatest assets—the Twelve Traditions—and whose wisdom developed the Twelve Concepts of A.A. Service. Their wisdom to bring aboard nonalcoholic trustees to assist us in our development, and their willingness to listen to these professional men, inspired me to take notice of to appreciate our Class A trustees, who give of themselves for no monetary fee. They serve because they believe in our Fellowship, and they don't want us to "louse it up." They are enthusiastic, selfless nonalcoholics that contribute their interest, support, time, and hard work to our problems and our affairs.

Our Fellowship was definitely God-inspired and built from the ground up by two drunks who created a strong foundation—a doctor of medicine and a stockbroker—who created a strong foundation.

Our walls, I believe, come from the tenets of Oxford Group's absolutes: absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, and absolute love. In the beginning, these attributes were hard to swallow, but I feel now that I really have a loving willingness to serve our Fellowship. I know that when I'm involved, informed, inspired, and in service I try to follow these absolutes to the best of my ability. I want to reach out, and be generous, loving, honest, and sincere with my words, actions, time, and energy. I want to "Be of Service." God has given me the wisdom to do every service position that He put before me. It was He who helped me understand by putting past servants there to guide and direct me, and then pass my experience on to others. He gave me the strength and courage to get every job done, and He opened my mind to the knowledge of our Fellowship and gave me to opportunity to listen to the suffering alcoholic. He instilled in me a healthy fear to know Him, love Him, and serve Him every day for the rest of my life. He gave me my amazing life, and my payment to Him is to serve and to be in A.A. I owe it to Him to reach out and give generously what was so freely given to me!

I can now look in a mirror and see something I never knew existed in my life—a decent human being who wants to give freely of herself. To serve and to watch newcomers grow, find hope, and learn to laugh and dream. God gives us all the right to participate, to make decisions, and to appeal those decisions if they're not in the best interest of A.A. He is centered entirely within this program, and places in us in the trust to lead the ones coming into the Fellowship. He gives me balance, and justifies service authority with service responsibility. He blesses me with the knowledge that I need, and continues to challenge me, making me grow more on a spiritual level. Have I been inspired to be an alcoholic all my life? No! But I am so grateful that God made me one so that I can experience this incredible program. Getting involved in A.A., being an example, asking newcomers to join me, being enthusiastic, showing love and tolerance, listening, giving newcomers a copy of our *A.A. Service Manual* and explaining it are ways that I can attract this program of service! Let it begin with me. If I put the newcomers' talents to work for us and for them, this will help our Fellowship grow abundantly, thus inspiring good leadership and creating wise and faithful servants for years to come.

## **Responsibility:** Jennifer K., Delegate Panel 65, Area 79, BC Yukon

Hi everyone. My name is Jennifer, and I am an alcoholic privileged to be serving as the Panel 65 Delegate for Area 79, British Columbia/Yukon. I want to thank you for the opportunity to share on the topic of responsibility.

If I break the word *responsibility* down into two parts, they would be *response* and *ability*. Previously my ability to respond was best described as reacting, and that was how I lived. I did not have the ability to respond appropriately since I was operating with uncontrolled feelings and emotions. Thanks to the program of Alcoholics Anonymous and the Fellowship I was finally able to get the courage and the strength to start a journey of self-discovery. I have since learned that responsibility is not a directive, but more of a freedom I have gained through the practice of the Fellowship's thirty-six principles found in our Steps, Traditions, and Concepts. Each of these principles has an underlying personal responsibility to help guide me to a life of freedom from bondage of self.

Through sponsorship I learned that I needed to take action and participate in my recovery. I joined a group, and I helped set up, clean up, and participate in the business meetings. There, with the help of a service sponsor, I learned about our legacies of Unity and Service, and how we are linked with A.A. as a whole; how the A.A. groups today hold ultimate responsibility and final authority for our World Services, which are made possible through our Conference Structure.

So how does a group fulfill this responsibility? Page eight of "The A.A. Group" pamphlet reads that "The entire structure of A.A. depends upon the participation and conscience of individual groups, and how each of these groups conduct its affairs has a ripple effect on A.A. everywhere. Therefore we are ever individually conscious of our responsibility for our own sobriety and as a group for carrying the A.A. message to the suffering alcoholic who reaches out to us for help."

My home group became my extended family-support system, as that's where I found friends and a sponsor. I learned that my group needed support, too. This means that all kinds of services must be done in order to keep the doors open, and to keep the group connected with A.A. as a whole. I found being of service allowed me to be a "part of," and it kept me sober. I was learning to work with others more effectively. We, together, can keep the group healthy by ensuring our members are well informed and ready when a newcomer reaches out for help so the hand of A.A. always is there. Becoming a G.S.R., I learned quickly that service positions have titles, but titles in A.A. do not bring authority or honor; they describe services and responsibilities. My responsibility was to connect our group with A.A. as a whole; one of the secretary's responsibilities was to provide the group with minutes of the business meeting—equally as important. Each of us can choose to do service in a way we think best in the spirit of the Traditions, and we have a responsibility to be the guardians of the Traditions.

From page 319 of *As Bill Sees It*: "The A.A. Traditions are neither rules, regulations, nor laws. We obey them willingly because we ought to and because we want to. Perhaps the secret of their power lies in the fact that these life-saving communications spring out of living experience and are rooted in love." We can't make members follow our Traditions; each individual member has to want to out of the love for A.A., their fellow alcoholics, and especially for the still-suffering alcoholic.

So to keep us connected as a whole, how can we do this? I believe one way is through stimulating interest in general service. From page S23 of *The A.A. Service Manual*: “Most A.A. members are primarily interested in their groups, in their own sobriety, and in helping other drunks one-on-one. And that is how it should be. While the work of general service has precisely the same objective—carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers—the connection is not always direct or obvious.” I believe it is up to us, the members who are willing to be involved with general service, to inform members of the importance of the “behind-the-scenes” Twelfth Step work that enables us to function as a whole. The way that we communicate is of vital importance. Are we enthusiastic? Are we showing love and tolerance? Are we being attentive listeners? Are we being supportive? Are we allowing each member to have a voice? Are we encouraging members to get involved by sharing how much we have gained through participating in service?

For me, when I am asked to facilitate a workshop I provide a short summary of the topic, always referring to our literature, but reminding myself that it’s not so much about what I have to say as it is about how many members I can get to participate. I don’t know about you, but when I participate I feel a “part of” and become more interested. It’s also about the feeling in the room—is it warm, welcoming, and full of spirit?

I really like what Dr. Jack Norris wrote: “We must remember that A.A. will continue only so long as each of us freely and happily gives it away to another person, only as each of us takes our fair share of responsibility for sponsorship of those who still suffer, for the growth and integrity of our group, or our Intergroup activities and for A.A. as a whole. It is in taking responsibility that the real freedom and enduring satisfactions of life are found. A.A. has given us the freedom to be responsible for ourselves. As we become responsible for ourselves, we are free to be responsible for our share in A.A., and unless we happily accept this responsibility we lose A.A.”

A.A. has given me the insight that’s necessary to see myself in action. Sometimes I don’t like what I see, and even when I don’t see it, I can *feel* it, and thus have an opportunity to change and grow. I need Alcoholics Anonymous, and doing a little service keeps me sober.

I am truly blessed to have found the Fellowship. It has changed my life. And when I became involved in service, it changed my sobriety—still more blessings were given to me.

We have been given the responsibility statement: “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 also been given the 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.” These two valuable tools have helped this alcoholic become a better mom, partner, sister, friend, coworker, and service worker; and to learn to be more responsible to herself and to others, rather than to react to life.

Thank you for the gift of responsibility.

## How to Light a Fire in Your Group—Clint M., Delegate Panel 64, Area 80, Manitoba

Greetings, everyone. I would like to start by thanking G.S.O. for sponsoring this forum, and Area 79 for hosting this event.

### Background

The topic that I chose to speak on today is “How to Light a Fire in Your Group,” a subject that many of us have probably thought about from time to time—especially when member attendance at meetings and member contributions reach dangerously low levels.

As far back as I can remember, my home group, the Seven Oaks Group in Winnipeg, has been involved in service, although the degree of involvement has varied over the years that I have been attending the group. The times where the group seemed to flourish the most however, were those periods when several of our members were engaged in service work at various levels within the group, district, and area.

It can be hard enough at times to get members engaged in activities within their own home groups, let alone service outside the group, but involvement in service seems to be the spark that gets the groups’ fire going. So if service work is the key element, the question becomes: how do we get members more involved in service?

### What Doesn’t Work, and What Does

It seems easy to identify some of the methods that don’t work very well. For example, telling members what they need to do. There might be a few sponsors that can make this work, but from what I have seen the outcome is usually unpredictable and might depend more on the sponsor’s experience rather than what might be best for the groups. Also, members generally want to be asked rather than told, and if you’re like me, you might tend to push back when told to, rather than step forward.

Another method is trying to stir the ashes by introducing or proposing actions that will invite controversy. It might get members engaged, but maybe not in the positive way that most of us would hope for.

And we also know that simply waiting for volunteers to step forward does not seem to work very well. It might be successful at times, but experience would say that we probably shouldn’t count on it. Many of us are reluctant to put up our hands. For me it was usually due to a fear of the unknown, and not knowing whether or not I would really be able to meet the requirements for the position. As it says in our *Big Book* regarding fear, “This short word somehow touches about every aspect of our lives.” For me, service work is no exception. Once I am able to work past the initial fear, usually with the help and support of other members who had gone before me, I start to feel more at ease and can then generally face the new challenge. I find that the support of those other members is very important to me.

I remember first becoming involved with service at my home group when another member simply asked me if I would be willing to open the door and make coffee once a week for one of our meetings. I was a little apprehensive at first, but received a comprehensive briefing on what was required and it really didn’t involve anything that I hadn’t done before in my regular life. The

coffee might have been a bit too strong for some, but otherwise everything seemed to work out fine.

After about a year or so of opening up for meetings I attended a business meeting where elections were being held for the various group service positions. There was a position open for an Intergroup rep that no one seemed interested in. An oldtimer asked me if I would be willing to let my name stand. I asked what it involved, and she was able to give me a bit of info (but not much) and explained that probably the best way to find out would be to let my name stand and, if successful, go check it out for myself.

I took the plunge and let my name stand, not sure of what I was getting myself into. I really didn't know much about the workings of our Intergroup, so I had a fair amount of fear and anxiety about what might be expected. The group elected me (by acclamation, if I remember correctly, as I was the only candidate) and so I started attending the monthly Intergroup meetings. By gaining experience my fears started to disappear.

As usual, my fear was unjustified and I was able to carry out the responsibilities for the position. It was through being willing, taking the action, and having the support of others that I was able to gain experience and eventually remove my fears.

My actions didn't really result in a fire of new service work at my home group, but as the Intergroup rep I tried to share my experience with other group members. When it came time to elect the next rep I passed on whatever knowledge I could with the next candidate in the hope that it would make their transition easier.

About fifteen years ago our group went through a very difficult period and came very close to folding due to issues resulting mostly from conflicting personalities. We lost several members during that period, didn't see many new members join our group, and really didn't have much member involvement in service outside of our group.

It got so bad that at one point we were no longer able to afford the rent and were forced to give our landlord notice. We just barely managed to survive thanks to the efforts of a couple of members who were able to find us a new home with a monthly rent that we could afford. Fortunately the personalities also moved on, and once we were established in our new space, things settled down and the group began the process of rebuilding.

I remember some of our relatively new members getting involved with taking A.A. meetings to one of the local hospitals. They enjoyed it and invited other group members to go to meetings with them. It wasn't long before many other members of the group got involved in taking those same meetings. Eventually, we started to see newcomers from those hospital meetings show up at our regular meetings. The newcomers would learn of our group from the hospital meetings that our members were chairing, and would decide to check us out once they were discharged. For our group, the fire was started!

Our members who might have been sceptical about the value of doing work outside the group could see a direct connection between service work and the group's ability to carry its message to the still-suffering alcoholic and to attract newcomers.

We found that through the experience shared by our members who were involved in service work, other members got more and more involved and the group support for general service increased. The enthusiasm was contagious!

Where at one time we had problems finding willing members to fill the G.S.R. or Intergroup rep positions, we now had not only a G.S.R but an alternate G.S.R. as well, and both were attending area service functions as representatives of our group. Eventually we had members involved in all kinds of different service positions at the group, district, and area levels.

All of this seemed to be sparked by members performing a service, sharing their experience and enthusiasm, and inviting and supporting other members to participate with them in their service work. That seemed to be the key for lighting the fire in our group. It took a while to get the fire going, but persistence eventually seemed to pay off.

There are many other activities that our group has used to keep our members interested and to keep the fire going. Activities that have helped us in the past include things such as:

- The group inventories that we took from time to time so that we could re-examine how well we were doing at carrying our message, while also giving members the chance to put their new ideas forward.
- Sharing information at group meetings about service events like forums, conferences, assemblies, gratitude days, etc., and encouraging members to attend.
- Buying tickets to A.A. conferences and other A.A. events for newcomers, so that they would be able to attend and gain from the experience.
- Inviting guest service speakers, like an area treatment facilities chair, to a regular or special meeting, so that they could share their service experience.
- Hosting service events like an area or district workshop, or even just organizing a pool of volunteers to help out at a special event.
- Organizing a special event for your group, like an anniversary dinner, summer BBQ, or maybe even a golf day, can be a way to have fun and keep members engaged.
- Even just getting a few members together to answer phones and enjoy some fellowship over a coffee or pizza can turn into a great opportunity to share experience.

I would also like to talk for a minute on the principle of rotation. I found that, when it came to putting my name forward for a position, it was much more manageable because the term was very well defined. For me, it was much like when I was new to the program and couldn't even imagine five years without a drink, but could handle thinking about staying sober for just today. I could imagine opening the clubroom and making coffee once a week for a term of three months, but not forever.

To stay on past the end of a term may eventually take an opportunity away from another member, but it also sends a message that the term for the position really isn't as advertised, and that if you let your name stand for the position you may find yourself committed to it indefinitely. That seems to me like a recipe for disaster. So with service positions I feel it is vital that we respect the principle of rotation and move on when our term is up, even if there isn't always an obvious replacement waiting to step forward.

To close, I would like to say that there are many activities like the ones I have mentioned that help to keep the fire going, but the best way to get that fire lit, is one member inviting another to work with them, sharing their experience, and supporting that other member in their service journey.

## **Carrying the Message to the Alcoholic Who Still Suffers—How General Service Supports Our Primary Purpose:** Christopher S., Delegate Panel 65, Area 91, Saskatchewan

The topic I will be presenting on today is how general service supports our primary purpose in carrying the message to the alcoholic that still suffers. I chose this topic because it is a concern we are addressing in my area, and I will venture a guess and say it has probably come up in other areas as well.

In Area 91 we have recently begun taking a broader look at what is going on in our service structure, so that we may be better connected to and of better service to the rest of our Fellowship. We use our spring assembly to review items that are going to be addressed at the General Service Conference, and we try to connect these items with what is going on in our area. Concerns regarding how we have our own issues to deal with, how we need to focus on solving them, and how we should not worry ourselves with what's going on in New York have come up on more than one occasion. Even stronger opinions have been voiced, such as the idea that we don't need general service at all, we just need a *Big Book*, a couple of members, and a pot of coffee.

I have to admit, at my first forum I listened to several people from New York talk about our General Service Office and how the message of Alcoholics Anonymous was being taken into places where A.A. did not exist (pretty obvious Tradition Five work). It opened my eyes a bit and made me realize how fortunate I am to have at least three meetings a day to get to throughout the week. I stopped taking my situation for granted—at least for a few weeks afterward. As a District Committee Member at the time, though, the thought did cross my mind, how does this pertain or connect to the work I am doing, and better yet, how does any of the work we do in general service help the alcoholic who still suffers in my hometown (or yours), where A.A. already exists?

Now that I have a few more service positions under my belt, a few more gray hairs, a bit more wisdom (at least I hope, anyway), and some guidance from those who came before me, I think I have made that connection, and I hope I can help you make it, too. Keep in mind these are just a few examples from the countless that could be drawn from.

Some of us find the doors of A.A. by opening up the phone book, calling for help, and beginning the Twelve-Step process, while others may know a member of A.A. and call upon that person directly when they finally seek help. That may not be the case for everyone, however. Some will show such severe physical or emotional symptoms that a medical intervention is needed. If they are aware of our Fellowship, doctors may suggest that the patient attend A.A. meetings. They may also be referred to a treatment center where they are exposed to A.A. meetings for the first time. In both instances, had it not been for the work of local and area Public Information committees in educating those professionals, that member may not have found our rooms.

Others come to us through the judicial system. They are sent to us by court order, or a professional in the judicial system recognizes there may be a problem with alcohol and suggest attendance at A.A. meetings. Again, if not for our P.I. committees, those members may not have found our way of life. Perhaps the damage is too great, or the person has not quite reached their bottom, so they end up serving time. After a while, a *Big Book* or *Grapevine* magazine provided

by an area Corrections committee makes its way into that person's hand, and they attend the meeting coordinated by the Corrections committee when they are ready to receive our message. They too are free because of the work done in general service.

The General Service Representative (G.S.R.) and the home group identify a need in their community. There is a specific minority member that is having trouble connecting with the group, and the group members are not sure how to connect with the new member. I remember that, while in early recovery, I clung to the notion that I was different and that you couldn't help me. I was looking for a reason to leave and go back out. This new member is given a Conference-approved pamphlet specifically directed at their minority group, and they finally see that they are not so different and that they can connect. Not to mention, an oldtimer at that group read the same pamphlet and is able to be their sponsor. Their reason to leave has been removed, and they are now a part of.

The District Committee Member (D.C.M.) goes to yet another group and explains the spiritual value of Tradition Seven; however, this time the message is heard and the group contributes to the General Service Office for the first time. This additional money, along with the other contributions, results in another newly formed group on the other side of the country receiving vital information, so that those who need the group in that area are not without a meeting; the newcomer has a place to go. The new group becomes connected with the rest of our Fellowship and is able to flourish as a result of people from the surrounding area attending and showing support.

The members of an area identify a need for a new piece of literature. Something is missing from what we have already, so they work together to come up with an idea for a new book or pamphlet. This pamphlet winds up sitting in a literature rack in doctor's office, and catches the eye of a woman who is watching her husband slowly die from this disease. She is finally able to understand what is happening to him, and that there is hope for him still.

Our General Service Office connects an alcoholic in need with a member traveling through a place where A.A. does not yet exist. The member traveling through gets a much-needed meeting with another alcoholic, and the native member begins A.A. in a new country. Hope is finally there for those that had none.

All of these examples ensure our Fellowship will continue to be around for as long as it is needed, and how general service is directly connected with our Fifth Tradition. Without these services, countless newcomers would not be reached, and would not have the same chance at recovery we were given.

In closing, I would like to leave you with this: One the most important ways general service carries out our primary purpose is by providing those serving a unique opportunity to further their sobriety in a way that cannot be found by working the Steps alone. The more our trusted servants give, the more they receive in return, which puts them in the best possible position to be of maximum service to God, our fellow man, and, of course, the alcoholic that still suffers.

## PAST TRUSTEES' SHARING

### Corliss Burke Class A (nonalcoholic) Trustee (past, 2009-2015)

Over the past six years, I have enjoyed the unwavering support of our highly professional and competent staff. Without them, I could not have fulfilled my responsibilities of Class A trustee. I've had the privilege of working alongside highly competent, dedicated, and loving colleagues whom I can count among my closest friends. It is hard for me to say goodbye to the general manager of G.S.O. as she retires. She gives herself untiringly to this Fellowship, and she goes way beyond the duties of her job. In addition, all A.A.s in this room and the Fellowship have coached and mentored me. You shared your experience, strength and hope with me, and you've never struggled with patience as I struggled with the complexities of understanding the Traditions, Steps and Concepts. I am proud to see the cohesive group that our board has become. We have clarified our role and vision and we've fulfilled our responsibilities in a loving and respectful manner, always guided by the Traditions, Steps, and Concepts.

As many of you know, I've spent my career administering programs and services in the field of alcoholism. Bill W., in "Language of the Heart," said "More and more we regard all who labor in the total field of alcoholism as our companions on a march from darkness into light. We see that we can accomplish together what we could never accomplish in separation and in rivalry."

My service sponsors on the board agreed to help me apply the Twelve Steps to my own life, as a nonalcoholic. It was not required, but something that I thought, with some strong encouragement, might be good for me. The person most responsible for providing the support I needed throughout my six years here is my husband, Gordon. And he will tell you that supporting Corliss is a very big job. Gordon walked alongside me on every step of this journey, taking on a very heavy load at home and with our family so that I could focus on A.A. service. He made all my travel arrangements and accompanied me on most flights, and he took over our consulting business, along with everything else in our lives, when I was away from home without him. In A.A. circles, he would introduce himself as, "Hi, I'm Gordon, currently serving as Corliss Burke's husband." That level of service is pretty demanding! I just want him to know that the principle of rotation *does not* apply in this instance.

Something on my mind today is the flattening of numbers in our Fellowship. The growth in membership is not commensurate with the growth in population. I wonder if the lack of growth in our Fellowship has to do with the sometimes-rigid application of singleness of purpose. The singleness of purpose might not be immediately clear to the newcomer. It might be sometimes forgotten, and it might be inconsistently applied. With the help of good sponsorship and loving guidance, newcomers will soon understand why it is so important and crucial to A.A. to focus on their problems with alcohol. We know that A.A. will survive, either because of or in spite of all of us. However, we also know that there are many individuals who will not survive without A.A. My hope is that we will strive to reach all alcoholics, regardless of other issues in their lives for which they may need other kinds of help, and that we will not inadvertently exclude or discourage their participation in A.A.

A submission to the Grapevine stated, "Our message to the world is not that we've ceased to drink, but that in ceasing to drink, we have succeeded in living in the world." Well, my friends, you have helped me to more happily and successfully live in the world. Together, reaching out to the still-suffering alcoholic, we can help create a better world.

## Jo-Anne L. Trustee-at-large/Canada (past, 2007-2011)

When I got here, I learned that A.A. is about storytelling and relationships — getting along with somebody. At the time, I wasn't getting along with a whole lot of people and I wasn't hearing "keep coming back" very often. At least three people said to me, "Oh, you're the 'what it was like' gal." I met a woman in Minneapolis, and I will never forget how she introduced herself in the A.A. for Women meeting. She stood up and said, "Hi. My name is Jan. I'm married to a guy named Fran from Spokane. My story is what it was like, what happened, and what I was wearing. Or not."

I had the privilege to serve as trustee-at-large/Canada from 2007 to 2011, but I also was asked to serve eastern Canada for two years and serve on the A.A.W.S. board for one year. These privileges did not come lightly to me. I got to know the ten areas of eastern Canada and we drove across the ice lake to chair the last special forum in Moosonee. It was a wonderful experience — we stayed in a place where we did all the cooking. The right hand man was supposed to take care of us, but he got drunk and he had all the money. It was an awesome experience! Then, the forum began. Usually, the trustee chairing the forum opens with remarks, and then introduces the general manager of G.S.O. I will never forget that evening, because Phyllis came to the mike with tears running down her face. It was the first forum she attended as general manager. It was a special forum—half those in attendance were First Nations people.

Serving as trustee-at-large/Canada, I traveled to Mongolia. They didn't have a general service structure and there were only 25 groups in all of Mongolia. At the meeting, the trusted servants in Mongolian A.A. presented a monetary number to the groups, and said, if they wanted to participate in the structure and its events, they had to pay that amount. Otherwise, they could not. One man put up his hand and said, "My group can't afford that." They shrugged, as if too say, too bad for you. I was with another trustee-at-large and we looked at each other and said, "Oh, no!" But we couldn't interfere, because we are not there to tell them what to do! We are there to let them learn. It's like in Tradition Four—we are allowed to make mistakes and to see what happens. That night, we went back to our hotel rooms, wishing we could have said something about how contributions are voluntary. So we were sitting there, talking, when all of the sudden, there was a knocking at the door. It was the chairperson of that meeting, with his translator. He said to us, "I think I made a terrible mistake today, I think we shouldn't have done that." When he started that meeting that day, he said he could tell that everyone was excited to be there, they were leaning forward with their pencils poised, ready to do anything for A.A. But, by the time it was over, he said, "They were slumped back in their seats. The room was lost. I could tell those people were very out of sorts, kind of beside themselves." The chairperson said, "We have to do something different." And we said, "Thank God! We've been given a chance to talk to this man about Tradition Seven. We will explain how this thing actually works." The next day, he opened that meeting and said, "If we are going to shape the stones of A.A. in Mongolia, we have to learn from the Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous and we are going to start over." And they did.

After serving as trustee-at-large/Canada, I have so many stories like this in my head. I don't want to be a bleeding deacon, but maybe I can be a bright light beacon. For those rotating off, remember, there is always a job for you in Alcoholics Anonymous.

**Phyllis H.:** G.S.O. General Manager (past, 2008-2015)

I think we need more forums like this one. I feel very strong about “additional” forums. With them, we are able to reach communities and populations of A.A. that we would not be able to otherwise, and I think that is some of our most important work. We do bring and attract people into A.A. But oftentimes, we forget that once they are in, they need to stay. I know that there are those who will not stay, perhaps because they are not yet ready or for a number of other reasons. We need to ask ourselves, “Are we doing our part in keeping our hands outstretched?” I came to A.A. through the courts and through desperation. No one knew what that that desperation was and no one knew about how I needed to stay, except for just a few people who welcomed me back. And when I had problems in returning and drinking, I still had those few people who welcomed me back. If it hadn’t been for them — for you — I wouldn’t be standing here. If it hadn’t been for those few people I met along the way who encouraged me to do everything I could for Alcoholics Anonymous, I would not have had all these opportunities.

I hope we remember, always, the person who needs to be here — the person who needs an opportunity to stay sober. That opportunity always begins with the groups and through sponsorship. The longer I stay sober, the more I realize how A.A. is such a simple program. It depends on each one of us, because no one is going to do it for us. The message we give of love and of service is the basis of A.A.

I remember being a DCM when I began to get concerned about the growth of A.A. and the reach of A.A. But today, I am not as concerned about the growth of Alcoholics Anonymous. I am more concerned about all of us being here, in the A.A. rooms and at A.A. events. I am more concerned about what we are doing here in A.A. I am more concerned about carrying the message *in here*, because those who really need us are going to find us. We are here, but we need to get back to being welcoming and being ready to receive people. So, the growth will come, if we are ready to receive it and to give.

In the public eye, I think A.A. is becoming more of a secret society. There are many organizations that have sprouted up and are used as recovery sources by the public. We can no longer afford to say, “Alcoholics Anonymous has been around the longest, therefore people will know about us,” and so we rest on our laurels. I think the public needs to know about Alcoholics Anonymous. The fact that we exist and that we are a most important resource available to all, is something people don’t know any longer. We assume they know, and I found that out by being here and doing the work that I am doing.

I am grateful that we stayed true to our Traditions; I don’t think they ever have to be changed because they are broad enough and wide enough and they can accommodate anything we may come up against. I have great faith in our program of recovery. I have deep, deep love for our program and for the fellowship we share. More than that, I have a deep love for the members of A.A., for the compassion and love you show and for the work you do to make sure A.A. is here for every single alcoholic, well into the future. Direct sponsorship, unity in service, and passing this on is probably one of the most important things we do.

Like your past trustee-at-large/Canada, I also have great stories. You have given me those gifts of stories. We are, indeed, a Fellowship of storytellers. It is what we do — we share of ourselves. We don’t really have anything else — maybe we think we have a little wisdom — but really, we learn from our experience. Lastly, I am not going away, I am just moving into other areas. I am very excited to sponsoring more and working at the group level. I love you and thank you for your work and generosity and for the love you have shown me; I am grateful.

## “CLOSING REMARKS”

**Michele Grinberg**, Class A (nonalcoholic) Trustee, Vice-Chairperson in attendance for Terry Bedient, Class A (nonalcoholic) General Service Board chairperson

This weekend, the main theme I heard was that of communication. The staff of G.S.O., and Grapevine, as well as those on the General Service Board, came to communicate with you about what the G.S.O. does and what the General Service Board is about. We came to listen to your communication back to us about what’s going on and what is needed. I listened to a lot of conversations about how we communicate, and how effective and/or ineffective it is. I heard about how it could be better and how we can better reach others. I heard some questions, such as “Are we mindful of the aging of some people when we communicate?” and “How do we communicate in the face of obstacles?” These questions present challenges, but they are also opportunities for service.

I am thrilled with the communication. I heard a lot of great sharing as I went around and sat in on some workshops. There were some excellent ideas and information offered by our delegate’s sharing and the remote communities workshop. I also heard questions and sharing about how we protect anonymity, the importance of home groups (and how we convey this), and about sponsorship. Regarding CPC and PI, members asked themselves and each other, “What more can we be doing?” And, of course, there was much communication of love. And that is the basis of this wonderful Fellowship.

For me, it’s a love story, and I am happy to be in it. The substance this weekend was terrific — it came from the heart. And I hope you will be thoughtful, as I will, about our communication so that we many ensure that the hand of A.A. is always there.

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