

NORTHEAST REGIONAL FORUM

FINAL REPORT*

June 2-4, 2023

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

Dear A.A. Friends,

We will reach out to you with the dates and location of the 2025 Northeast Regional Forum that will be held in Rhode Island. Please contact regionalforums@aa.org with any questions.

HOW TO CONTACT US:

A.A. World Services, Inc.
c/o General Service Office
P.O. Box 459
Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163
(212) 870-3120
Fax: (212) 870-3003
E-mail: regionalforums@aa.org
G.S.O.'s A.A. Web site: www.aa.org

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INTRODUCTION

The 2023 Northeast Regional Forum was held on June 2-4, 2023. Registration for the Forum was **267**. This included **197** members attending their very first Forum.

UNANSWERED ASK-IT BASKET QUESTIONS

Q. Please share about how the G.S.O prepares the media outreach letter - Which Tradition do you use? Is this an annual event/ effort? Why or why not?

A. The Public Information Coordinator who is on staff at the General Service Office performs an Annual Anonymity Letter to the Media each January. The letter is posted on our website [aa.org](https://www.aa.org/anonymity-letter-to-media) at the following link: <https://www.aa.org/anonymity-letter-to-media>. The goal of the letter is to perform outreach to our friends in the media to thank them for helping us observe our long-standing tradition (Tradition Eleven) of anonymity for members of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The Annual Anonymity Letter to the Media was professionally distributed to 30,000+ media. This annual process also includes outreach to each of our 93 Area Delegates regarding a suggested process for handling any anonymity breaks that may occur in their areas.

Q. Why didn't we have T-shirts?

A. A.A.W.S. does not produce T-shirts for sale.

Q. Why wasn't there a hospitality suite?

A. This is a local Volunteer Committee decision; GSO does not provide hospitality suites.

Q. Will any/all of the power point presentations be available to members of A.A.?

A. Many attendees requested this information at the event and received the material. Please email: regionalforumssa@aa.org to make your request.

Q. How many months is the reserve fund currently?

A. As of March 31, the assets in the reserve fund total \$13,059,850. After subtracting the \$573,12 Grapevine subscription liability, the reserve fund balance is \$12,486,838. This balance represents 7.08 months of 2023 budgeted G.S.O., Grapevine, and La Vina operating expenses of \$21,152,365.

Please note that there is a Conference Finance Committee Consideration regarding the wording of statements about the reserve fund balance, so please copy the previous sentence verbatim in your response to the member who asked the question.

Q. This event is the hardest I've been to (in 30 years) to obtain a program! Why is it a secret?

A. Please accept our 10th Step for not providing this information prior to the event.

Q. Will A.A.W.S. consider transferring A.A.'s pension liabilities and assets to a third party?

A. To consider transferring AA's pension liabilities and assets to a third party, it would most likely be a recommendation of the AAWS/GV Employees Retirement Committee to both corporate boards and the General Service Board.

Key factors would include:

1. Number of active employees still accruing benefits
2. Funded status of the plan
3. Impact on the relationship with retirees, current staff and the fellowship

Strictly from a financial perspective, as the plan "ages" it will make sense to move the portfolio slowly away from long-dates assets like stocks and more to bonds and cash. This will reduce portfolio volatility/risk over time. Also, as the plan is frozen for new employees, the total amount of obligations will also slowly decrease over time. In this respect, the largest de-risking of this plan has already occurred.

A Conference Advisory Action is always a possibility but is usually not the avenue for operational decisions such as this.

Q. Please will you consider clarifying this section on the contribution page so that it reads "The Birthday Plan" instead of what it currently reads, which is "A.A. Birthday/Anniversary"?

A. We will pass on this information to the Trustees Finance Committee for consideration.

Q. Please will you also consider, in future financial reports the amount brought in through "The Birthday Plan and Memorials"?

A The amount brought in through birthday plans and memorials is included in the Final Conference Report. Including this information in other financial reports would be a matter for the Self-Support Subcommittee to discuss and recommend to the AAWS Board.

DELEGATE PRESENTATIONS

Who's in the Doorway? --- Kurt W., Area 29, Maryland

Frequently at meetings in my area, during the preliminaries the Secretary will ask the question, "Is this anybody's first AA meeting or first time at this meeting? If so, please raise your hand (either real or virtual these days) so we can get to know you." They'll then ask the newcomers to introduce themselves. I think this is great practice. But could we be doing more?

When I get asked to lead or chair a meeting and the Secretary asks about newcomers, oftentimes I'll open with something like, "I love it when we ask about newcomers, but I have another question. Is this anyone's last AA meeting? Anybody out there thinking we are full of crap, who just came in to get some coffee and cookies, and plan on having a few drinks afterward...maybe end up killing themselves or someone else?" This usually draws laughter. But one time someone actually raised their hand. You see, they were in the doorway, going. But no one knew...until we asked.

The good news is that in this instance after the meeting a bunch of other alcoholics in attendance surrounded the person who'd raised their hand, good old-fashioned 12th Step work at its best. And it turned out to not be their last meeting.

Getting alcoholics, even ones that want help, to come to AA willingly is hard work. Not only do we have to let them know we exist and where to find us, but there are many misconceptions that have to be countered. All out there doing Public Information and Cooperation with the Professional Community work and carrying our message of recovery into hospitals and institutions, have my deepest gratitude. You are on the front lines, trying to get suffering alcoholics to come to our fellowship. But all of us play a part when it comes to keeping such people from going. Are we as individuals and groups attractive enough to keep people from leaving once they get a small taste of AA?

Last October we conducted a membership survey, for the first time since 2014. The results will soon be published in a pamphlet, with additional details on a webpage. I was privy to some of the preliminary data shared at our General Service Conference about 5 weeks ago. And I spent some time comparing the 2022 results to 2014. Numbers can be boring, but they tell a story. In 2014 the average age of our members was 50. It's now 52. We as a fellowship have gotten older. And it's not just that we are living longer. In 2014, 12% of our members were 30 or younger. It's now 9.2%. We are either not attracting as many younger members, or they aren't sticking around. In 2014, over half of our members had 5 years sobriety or less. That number is now down to 43%. Meanwhile the percentage with 20+ years has climbed from 22% to 28%. It seems that fewer people are going than coming.

4% of our members were Black, African American or African Canadian in 2014. In October of 2018 a report entitled "Reaching Out to African American Alcoholics" was published, as it was recognized more could be done to help suffering alcoholics within the African American community. By 2022 the number had dropped to 3.6%. Clearly many members of the Black, African American and African Canadian communities are not coming into our fellowship. Or they are coming and then going. Comparing other numbers between 2014

and 2022 indicates there have been successes. Membership amongst the Latino and Hispanic community has increased from 3% to 7.3%, a notable increase in 8 years. And amongst the Native American and Indigenous communities' membership has nearly tripled. Amongst these communities more seem to be coming than going. Back in 2014 the ratio of men to women in AA was 62% to 38%. The numbers for 2022 were 64% to 35%. The disparity seems to have increased. Are men affected by alcoholism more than women? Our membership survey also asked, "What got you here?" The most frequent response was 'AA Member'. And that number increased significantly from 32% to 39%. Other responses getting significant numbers were 'On My Own', 'Treatment Facility' and 'Family'. Way down the list were such choices as 'AA Literature', 'Old Media' and 'Internet or Social Media'.

What does this mean? My interpretation, based on the numbers I've seen so far, is that the most effective method of getting sick and suffering alcoholics to come to our program, and then not go back out the door, is still good old-fashioned 12 Step work. One on one contact, sharing our experience, strength, and hope. This may be with someone we know or encounter outside our fellowship. Talking to that new person at a meeting, making them feel welcome even if they seem different to us on the outside, may encourage them not to go out the door. And it never hurts to ask another alcoholic if they feel like drinking. But how can we reach out more effectively to young people and underserved communities? It seems to me that the membership survey data may provide some potential answers.

Our literature got 2% of our members here. Can we make it more accessible in terms of availability and comprehension? 2% of our members found our fellowship in correctional facilities. Can we do more there? 1% of our members found AA through the Internet or social media. Can we reach more young people using these technologies? In this presentation I asked a lot of questions, not all of which I have answers for. Of course, if I had the answers the problems would be fixed. But I hope that when the membership survey data becomes more widely available, we'll all take a good look at it. And when we're sitting in a meeting, we'll ask ourselves two questions, "Who's not in the room?" and "Who might be thinking of going out the door?"

How the Conference Works --- Peter B., Area 28, Maine

The Conference starts on Sunday, so the GSB pays for Saturday night. But you might want to get there in time to spend Friday night in the hotel, so as not to be rushed. Maybe your Area will pay for it. If you are far enough away METS (Meeting, Events and Travel Services) will pay. They did it for me, coming from the Down east coast of Maine. The important thing is to make it to the Remote Communities meeting, at 4 pm on Saturday. I love to listen about AA among indigenous peoples of the Arctic, because I live in a very rural state. But all Areas have remote communities; isolation can be cultural as well as geographic.

Sunday morning, Conference begins with roll call. Everyone is dressed up. If you are there to say "present," your Alternate is off the hook. Now comes a meeting where we decide how we are going to decide. Well, really, we are mostly told how we're going to do it, by the Conference Chair, a position that toggles between the Board Chair and the General Manager. Delegates who think urgent subjects are insufficiently addressed can try to tweak discussion in that direction. This is a little insurrectional and generally doesn't

work; the weight of tradition and schedule goes against it. But it's worth a try, and I admired Delegates adept enough to do it. Next comes the onset of Committee meetings.

The Conference has Delegate committees that mirror Trustee committees and receive a vast workload of items to chew through. Delegates are assigned randomly to committees around the first of the year; there is no presumption of knowledge of the subject. I certainly knew nothing about Finance. The committee has an experienced staff from GSO and can call on GSO/GSB personnel to ask questions. This power of inquiry is absolute. This year my committee interviewed the General Manager, GSB Chair and AAWS Chair—all at once. Each committee meets about three times: Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. There has been a preliminary meeting on Zoom, with review of committee scope and procedure (about which you can mostly do nothing), when you can go to the bathroom and how to vote. My committee picked 2/3 as the prevailing vote, though all decisions were unanimous. The committee process is a marvel to behold. This is where all the agenda items get processed, and some are voluminous and tricky. Delegates may commence discussion with an axe to grind, but a group conscience evolves, and quickly or slowly, everyone yields to it. An able, unselfish Chair facilitates this evolution. At least this was my experience. But, I think, generally, Delegates rise to the demands and opportunities for unity. The committee may take no action on items or make recommendations for Board consideration in the year to come or propose advisory actions which are policies for AA service.

The GSO staffer translates these decisions into Conference-ese as the discussion proceeds, creating the all-important report, which must be submitted by 6 PM, before dinner on Tuesday. My committee worked on Tuesday from 7:30 AM – 4 PM, eating lunch in the committee room. The Trustees committee, which had fraught issues to ponder, submitted their report at 5:45 PM. We were all supposed to tour the GSO on Tuesday afternoon, but many of us missed it. Now comes the actual Conference, Wednesday through Friday. Each committee reports its decisions. The advisory actions are voted on, sometimes with extensive debate. Amendments are pondered, questions are called, votes are taken, minority opinion is heard, issues are reconsidered. And, sometimes, actions just sail through. The committee is questioned on its thinking: why it did not take action on some things and kicked others down the road. There are quite a few committees, and this process consumes all of the three days available. At the beginning of Conference sessions, floor actions are submitted for vote. These are issues not on the pre-determined Conference agenda. Sometimes they are frivolous, and sometimes they are crushingly, profoundly urgent. After all the Committee reports are done and voted on (listed on the schedule as 3 PM Friday, but this actually occurs well after supper) these floor actions surface. Some of them would require extensive debate. Everyone is fried. They know that after this is over, and before they go to bed, 46 or so Delegates will line up at the mic for good-byes—at 2 minutes each. Most floor actions are met with a motion to decline to consider, which prevails. They are shot down. But some, vitally important issues, crucial to the health and effectiveness of the AA service structure, are debated at midnight by an exhausted Conference. It was heartbreaking for me as a Delegate to see these issues relegated to such a fate. But the Conference itself is a miracle of complexity, goodwill, decisiveness, forbearance, and unity.

Leadership in A.A. – Servant Leadership --- Denise M., Area 50, Western New York

A huge thank you to Area 30 for hosting this regional forum and allowing us to see service come alive for some of our current and future AA leaders as they see and feel the A.A. general service structure at work among us this weekend.

After consultation with our former regional trustee, I volunteered to speak on the topic “Leadership in A.A. – Servant Leadership.” Several weeks later, as I sat down to compose my presentation, I was filled with fear as I do not possess any formal education or training in Servant Leadership. Oh wait, no, I was actually full of fear because self-reliance had failed me, once again. I asked God at once to remove my fear, not out of any virtue or flawless adherence to the clear-cut directions in “the Big Book” (*Alcoholics Anonymous*), but because my screen was still completely blank, and I faced a stack of AA literature in which the answer to “what is servant leadership?” surely must reside. If God can solve the age-old riddle of Alcoholism, why can’t He help here?

Servant Leadership is defined as a non-traditional leadership policy, under which the leader places the primary emphasis on the well-being of those being served. In A.A., there is always another member who is the beneficiary of the service we do – no matter how large or small that service may seem. If it is a necessary service, and Bill W. tells us in the Introduction to the Concepts, that we are tasked with asking ourselves “Is this service really needed?”, then it should be for the well-being of those being served. But if we take it one step further, aren’t we really tending to the well-being of those whom we have not yet met?

I have a 1936 Webster’s Dictionary. It’s huge and requires two volumes. Now, 1936 is before service may have even been mentioned in A.A., but nonetheless, 1936 was a good year in AA history. In the second volume, one definition of servant is “an expression of civility used often by equals.” When we use the phrase “trusted servant” in A.A., about ourselves or others, are we thinking of our service as a journey among equals that we experience “shoulder to shoulder” as *Alcoholics Anonymous* tells us? Or are we hoping, consciously or unconsciously, that our servitude will provide us with some level of power or prestige, that we need or maybe even just want? Are we serving to become drunk with power and prestige?

Now backtracking to the first volume of that 1936 dictionary, one finds a definition, albeit five deep of leader as “in mining, a small vein that leads to a rich lode.” As leaders in A.A., are we exercising our skills in vision, prudence, tolerance, and flexibility to allow those we serve, who may be our next leaders, to acquire mining skills to unleash the limitless lode of joy in release from a lifetime of frustration for themselves, and for still others? Are we as leaders, insisting on giving away the entirety of the products of our service for the well-being and benefit of those we serve? Or are we, even in some small way, deriving arrogant ownership over the results of our service? When we can’t claim ownership of the results for ourselves, do we as leaders still “get behind” and support the group conscience? Do we remember that servant leadership in A.A. isn’t just about us providing for the well-being of others; that we’re only agents of the Higher Power, who is the ultimate provider of well-being for those we serve.

“The Sense of the Conference” essay from the Final Report of the Fifth General Service Conference of A.A. (1955) referenced the unanimous adoption of a permanent Charter for the Conference structure, in a way that I believe sums up Servant Leadership in A.A. very powerfully:

...action without awareness can be meaningless. Action for the sake of prestige, or merely as a flexing of intellectual muscles, could be dangerous to men who are bound together by strange catalysts --- humility and the need to serve.

And three paragraphs later...

In 1951 the Delegates met in the first Conference in an atmosphere of promise and eagerness to serve. The implied promise was that the recovered alcoholics of the world would one day write a social contract with the future, a contract binding them never to forget their obligations to the problem drinkers who might one day turn to them.

Now that we have that social contract, how can our collective service best fulfill its promise and obligation to problem drinkers?

I thank you for your Servant Leadership in A.A. and thank you for your vision, prudence, flexibility, and your tolerance of me as I hammered out some Servant Leadership of my own on the anvils of experience. May we always remember to place our hand in that of our Heavenly Father's and may we allow the well-being of those we serve to be our guiding principle.

Responsibility in Service --- Marcheta B., Area 44, Northern New Jersey

My Name is Marcheta B., and I am an alcoholic; I have the honor and privilege of serving Area 44 as the Panel 73 Delegate. My sobriety date is November 29, 2005, and my home group is Booze U loose in Plainfield, NJ.

When we speak of responsibility in service, the task of attracting members to embrace and pass on the torch of service contains several layers. Today, I want to share with you some simple yet impactful ideas that have been passed down and have helped me. These strategies are Reflection, Identification, Opportunity, Action, Experience, Unity, and Gratitude.

I heard the word “service” very early in my recovery journey. Like many things in the winter of 2005, I did not fully understand what it meant, or that it was an action word. However, having a sponsor who did understand that and so much more, I was promptly assigned to be the head coffee pot cleaner in my home group. I remember thinking to myself, “well the last coffee pot cleaner was probably not up to the task”. When my sponsor tried to explain “the spirit of rotation”, I promptly dismissed it and figured that it was something that probably occurs during a séance.

Yes, I am intentionally evoking humor and my own limitations. Why? Because when we talk about responsibility in service, I understand how daunting it appears to consider and even more difficult to put into practice. **Reflection:** When I walked into my first meeting, my only wish was to stop shaking and to stop covering my apartment windows with black

garbage bags (this was to prevent the sun from streaming in. When I had approximately 6 (long) months of sobriety, my first sponsor shared these words from Bill W: *"To be helpful is our only aim. We know the dark despair and suffering of alcoholism. We were driven to AA by a deep desire to provide a more effective answer than we had found."* On that day, long ago

- I believed I found the "effective answer" – Service.

However, service work is not one size fits all. Service takes many forms within our fellowship. It can be as simple as making coffee for a meeting, setting up chairs, or greeting newcomers with a warm smile. These seemingly small acts are far from insignificant. They create an atmosphere of welcome and support, making it easier for newcomers to feel a sense of belonging and find the courage to embark on their journey of recovery. While building this relationship, we are offered the first opportunity to plant the seeds of service.

We nurture these seeds and watch them take root. Once this occurs, we must be prepared to share information about the different service opportunities throughout the entire structure of A.A.

In the words of Bill W., "Practical experience shows that nothing will so much ensure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics." **Identification:** This statement reflects the profound truth that service is a vital component of our own sobriety. I am not sure how others defined "intensive" work, but I have often questioned my ability, my time and willingness. Honestly, my service journey has been like other aspects of my recovery, filled with small moments of dread and uncertainty, but also profound gratitude for being included, seen, and allowed to do service.

Another courageous and continuing part of being responsible is I must lead by example. **Action:** By embodying the spirit of service, we become living proof of its transformative power. Of course, and unfortunately – so is the opposite, if I grumble, complain, or act like I rescued A.A., instead of A.A. rescuing me, it can have the effect of producing complacency and detachment from service. Once that sets in it is difficult to reverse. So, no matter how long the business meeting is, no matter how magnetic the mic is at Area Assemblies, we allow others the dignity of their own experience.

Another effective way to encourage others is through sharing. **Experience:** When I moved from NY to NJ, I went to my first Grapefest. Grapefest is one of two workshops that help Area 44's Grapevine and La Viña committee carry the message. It is informative, interactive, and fun. I walked in and the first thing I did was walk over to a table with back issues of the Grapevine and La Viña. The sign said, "find the month and year that you got sober". What a great icebreaker for this newcomer, who just moved from NY to NJ.

My home group was over 30 years old, but at that time they were not connected to a District. The act of finding our area office led to me being introduced to all of our amazing Standing Committees and the 12-step work the committee members do. Over the next few years, I nudged, pushed, patted, and led many people to that event. Ultimately, I became the Areas Grapevine Chair. From that table, like many others, service and responsibility was on full display.

I would be remiss if I did not address that responsibility in service, is not without some unique challenges. **Opportunity:** Not just newcomers, but also long-standing members in

A.A. who feel that service stops at the home group, and or that the highway is not as roomy or inviting to all. I often walk and navigate spaces, with people that might not look like me or sound like me, not just in the fellowship, but also at work, school – different spaces and places. I made a conscious decision to forge ahead, face forward and feel a part of. This allowed me to be helpful in widening the highway for others. **Unity:** Next, I had to find ways of sharing unity in service. This was one by taking an active role in workshops or meetings dedicated to the topic of service. I have found that these specific touch points could serve as platforms for discussions of inclusivity and accessibility, sharing insights, and even answering questions. Hearing from members and identifying with their experiences can provide valuable healing and encouragement for those who are considering taking their first service steps or returning to service.

Responsibility in service is conveying to those who are “service curious”, or “service ready” that internal applause and inner accolades can be so loud that they are not usually heard by a large ordinary or the ego. It is that special ovation and acclaim, when you are a part of group of members that finish conference business at 12:22am on Friday! It is not a special skill magically bestowed upon a select few, anyone with a loving and open heart can step outside of their comfort zone and firmly grasp an outstretch hand.

We are all a testament that Service is the lifeblood of our fellowship. **Gratitude:** One of the fundamental tenets of A.A. is that we can only keep what we have by giving it away. Service is equally selfish and selfless. We recognize that we are part of something greater than ourselves—a fellowship that spans the globe and transcends individual differences. In service, we discover the true meaning of unity. Moreover, service reminds us of the fragility of our own recovery.

In closing, a lot of what I am sharing might appear obvious to those attending a NERF, but it is my hope that by exchanging information and ideas, we might leave with one additional tool, thought or idea on how to encourage others to actively participate in all levels of service. Challenging but not impossible, let us all continue to be a responsible beacon of hope and support, guiding others towards a life of service and sobriety.

Taking Personal Inventory in Service --- Pete B., Area 59, Eastern Pennsylvania

Hello, my name is Pete, and I am an alcoholic, currently serving Eastern Pennsylvania, Area 59, as their Panel 73 Delegate.

My personal experience has taught me that providing services well requires unity, and unity requires that I act like I am only as important as the people around me, a tall order. A committee is a brilliant way to coordinate and perform large-scale services. When we're on the same page, we really can accomplish some impressive things. When we don't work together, committee life can be nothing short of genuine miracle growth for character defects. The desire to stand out, to shine, to get all the attaboys and so on. The only time I have ever needed to prove myself is when I'm afraid. That's right fear; the thing that my big book warned me about. Somehow it even makes its way into my service work. I thought I was here to help other people. Woof.

Early in sobriety, I was pressured to join the host committee for the Pennsylvania State Conference of Young People in A.A. (PENNSCYPAA). It was to be hosted by a neighboring county. Pressure was required because I knew nothing about committees or service or even basic human interaction really. Two months after I joined the committee,

we hosted that conference. I had an experience that changed the way I felt about A.A. In those two months I went from grudgingly attending meetings and working with my sponsor, to screaming from the rooftops about the power of Alcoholics Anonymous and my higher power. I saw how the conference had impacted the lives of others as well. It inspired new people to stay sober and dive in with both feet, it energized those with more time to return home and sponsor crazy new guys like me. It had a wide reaching, echoing impact.

This young people's conference travels around our state on an annual basis going to cities or counties that bid to host it. It had just been hosted in a neighboring county, so I returned home to my local A.A.'s urging them to join me to have this experience in our own hometown. Our committee was born, and I was elected its chairperson, our not so fearless leader. There were people on our committee who had been sober much longer than I. Some of them had been involved with service work much longer than I. Surely, they would notice my inexperience and speak of it in private, often. Fear drove a need to cover my inexperience rather than ask for help. I studied our Traditions. I studied our Concepts. I actually read books on parliamentary procedure. While it is true that knowledge is power, it is also true that power is just about the worst thing for an alcoholic.

I went about chairing the committee for a while and I found that they *were* talking about me in private. They had made memes about me with a police hat drawn on my head. "Officer PENNSCYPAA Pete here to enforce the traditions", they said. I was hurt, seemingly without provocation, but I invariably found that at some time in the past I had made decisions based on self which later placed me in a position to be hurt. I didn't do my research to be more useful to the committee. I had used my new knowledge to look down on the less informed. From everything that I studied, I gravitated only to the parts that got me what I wanted and fostered my control of situations. This realization didn't come immediately. It came after an honest inventory and a desire to grow in usefulness to my colleagues and those we were serving. It took time to make it right, but we worked so much better when I opened my ears and played my small part.

I've since spent years in service on many different committees large and small, district and area, YPAA and everything in between. I have had experiences at different intervals where a personal inventory has revealed the truth about a situation which looked very different at first take. This is an interweaving of our legacies. Personal inventory is at the heart of Recovery, and it is essential for Unity. There is no Service that we can't perform poorly when these first two legacies are ignored.

Some tools that I have found useful:

- Our big book of course and its brilliant directions on steps 3, 4, 10, 11, and all the other ones too.
- Bill's essay on "leadership in A.A.: Ever a vital need" found in the A.A. Service Manual.
- The Traditions Checklist from the A.A. Grapevine
- Friends who tell me when I'm wrong.

Questions to ask oneself:

- Why am I in service?

- Do I ask for help if I cannot fulfill my duties?
- Do I procrastinate when it comes to fulfilling my duties?
- Do I accept criticism with an open mind?
- Do I accept the group conscience? Do I stand by the group conscience, or do I fight it to push my point of view?
- Are my offers of help a disguise for controlling?

Earlier I said that a committee is a brilliant way to coordinate and perform large-scale services, services that can mean life or death for an alcoholic. I want to strive to be a small part of the whole, listening to others as if my mind is not already made up. The suffering alcoholic needs the services that our united action can provide more than I need a pat on the back. All of this requires that I be active in my recovery. Service is great, but it is not Recovery.

New Item Agenda Item Submission Process --- Jon C., Area 60, Western Pennsylvania

Hello everyone. My name is Jon C., a recovered alcoholic. I currently have the privilege of serving as the Panel 73 Delegate for Area 60, Western PA. I am here to talk today about how an idea becomes change through becoming an agenda item at the General Service Conference.

The General Service Conference considers matters of policy for AA as a whole, and a good idea can come from anyone and anywhere. For example, say you come up with the brilliant idea for Taco Tuesday. Every AA group in the US and Canada that meets on Tuesdays should serve tacos. So, what's the next thing you should do? Probably call your sponsor. I have had a lot of "good ideas" over the years, that once I talked with a sponsor, they pointed out the errors of my thinking. But after that, take the idea to your group's business meeting to see if they support the idea. If the group supports the idea, the GSR of your group should take the idea to the district meeting. If the district supports the idea, the

DCM should take the idea to the area meeting. And finally, if the Area supports the idea, the delegate can submit the idea via the standardized General Service Conference Proposed Agenda Item Submission Form. The current deadline for submissions is September 15th.

Now as I mentioned, a good idea can come from anyone and anywhere. If you take your idea for Taco Tuesday to your group, district, or area, and they do not support the idea (i.e., it doesn't get substantial unanimity), you can still use the standardized GSC proposed agenda item submission form. That being said, the form should not be used as a complaint box, but as a way to implement policy for all AA for the betterment of all of AA. All the forms, whether from an AA member, an Area, or any other part of the upside-down triangle go to the Conference Coordinator at the General Service Office. A form won't get thrown out just because it comes from a member. However, an idea that goes through the process of going through multiple levels of the service structure can become more polished. It shows more consideration has been given to the idea. More dissenting opinions have been heard, and a large representation of people have given it substantial unanimity.

So once the conference coordinator receives the idea, it is forwarded to the appropriate trustees committee. So, the idea for Taco Tuesday would be forwarded to the Food and Awesome Ideas committee. That isn't an actual Trustee's committee. The Trustee's Committees mirror what most of us may have at the district or area level, with Corrections, Public Information, etc. with some differences such as a nominating committee. Maybe your district or area has a nominating committee, but I have never been part of one that does.

At this point, the item is placed on the General Service Conference Agenda under the appropriate Conference Committee. Once again, the conference committees match what a lot of districts or areas would have. For example, I serve on the Treatment and Accessibilities Committee. At this point any additional background information is gathered that wasn't submitted with the form. And all the ideas are sent up the triangle to get the fellowship's voice. Most areas will have a Pre-Conference Sharing session or something similar for groups and districts to express their opinions about the ideas, so their Area Delegate can take their voice to the General Service Conference. Maybe the Delegate hears that members are vegetarian so they don't like tacos, or they would prefer burrito Wednesday to Taco Tuesday. Maybe the groups are concerned about how we pay for Taco Tuesday, because we are often concerned about finances. But this happens all over the US and Canada, 93 different areas, in probably 93 slightly different ways. But this is a very important process. Concept One states that the "Final responsibility and ultimate authority for AA world service should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship."

Ninety-three delegates armed with their area's collective conscience plus trustees, staff, and directors meet annually at the General Service Conference. This is Concept Two, "The General Service Conference of AA has become, for nearly every practical purpose, the active voice and the effective conscience of our whole Society in its world affairs." The delegates first meet on their respective conference committees. So, the Food and Awesome Idea committee discusses the idea of Taco Tuesday. Maybe they will tweak the idea a little to explain where the funding would come from, having a vegetarian option, and any other feedback that their areas have expressed. The committee will talk about each of the agenda items for a lengthy period. Using this committee structure, a lot more business can get done because there are 11 committees meeting simultaneously.

If the conference committee approves of the idea, it is sent before the entire General Service Conference. The full body will discuss the idea further and finally take a vote. If the idea obtains substantial unanimity, it will become an advisory action. The General Service Board customarily approves all conference advisory actions on the Saturday board meeting following the conference. And thus, the action becomes binding.

And that is how a good idea gets turned into change. I was using an example of Taco Tuesday, but nearly all of the changes in AA go through this process from creating a new pamphlet, to starting a Grapevine Instagram account, or creating a 5th edition of the Big Book. An idea might not pass the first time, and oftentimes the work will take many conferences to complete. For example, the 5th edition of the Big Book was proposed at the 69th General Service Conference, passed at the 71st GSC, and completion will probably

be at the 75th General Service Conference or possibly later. Change often occurs rather slowly in Alcoholics Anonymous.

I hope you will take the information heard today to go back and inform your groups. Let them know that their voice matters. And that a good idea can come from anywhere. For more information, you can reference the service manual, particularly Appendix U for this process. Your area's delegate is another great resource. I personally know all the Northeast Regional Delegates, and they are a fantastic bunch. We are a lucky region here. And finally, if you do not have a sponsor who is familiar with all three legacies, get yourself a service sponsor to supplement those other sides of the triangle. When I work on all three sides of the triangle, it is easy for me to remain happy, joyous, and free.

Thank you for listening, and I hope to have Taco Tuesday implemented soon.

Importance of Personal Recovery in Service, Suzanne S. Area 30 Eastern MA

My name is Suzanne, and I am an alcoholic. I am the Panel 73 Delegate for Area 30 – Eastern Massachusetts. I also belong to the Tuesday night Allston -Brighton Group and I am grateful to be here today and to have this opportunity to share with you. I would like to thank all those members of the General Service Office and Area 30 for the work they did to put on this event.

During the early stages of my sobriety, I found myself immersed in drama, eagerly involving myself in various situations. Holding strong opinions about what others should or shouldn't do, I stubbornly clung to my beliefs. My mind was closed, and I struggled to see beyond my own perspective. However, as the years passed and I embraced the principles of the 12-step recovery program, I noticed a significant shift. Drama gradually lost its grip on me, becoming less important and something I actively try to avoid.

To maintain this positive change, I've learned to consistently apply the 10th, 11th, and 12th steps in all areas of my life, with a particular emphasis on service. Reminding myself of the primary reason I love being of service—the gratification of helping those still suffering from alcoholism—keeps me focused. Consistency is key in my journey. I recognize that, like anyone else, I am fallible, and it can be tempting to slip back into old patterns. However, I've become adept at recognizing when I'm veering off track and correcting my course. Additionally, I'm fortunate to have supportive individuals in my life who are willing to point out any missteps, serving as valuable guides on my path.

Today, I strive to practice the principles of the 10th, 11th, and 12th steps in all aspects of my life. By doing so, I continue to grow and maintain a healthier approach to conflicts and drama.

Each morning, I prioritize a few minutes of quiet time to engage in reflection after reading a daily passage. The sources of these readings vary, some being conference-approved while others are not. Following my reading, I engage in prayer to connect with the God of my understanding. Afterwards, I take just five minutes to sit and contemplate the reading, considering how its lessons can be applied to the day ahead. I particularly appreciate the guidance provided by the 11th step in the Big Book, where I pray for my thinking to be directed by a higher power throughout the day. It is crucial for me to request that self-seeking motives, selfishness, and self-pity do not influence my thoughts and actions. Checking my motives in everything I do has become an essential practice, one that I find

important to discuss with either my sponsor or someone I trust. After years of incorporating these practices into my routine, I now start each day with confidence, knowing that I will be okay. If I encounter challenges during the day, I can pause and ask my God for help in bringing clarity. Opening this channel can lead to amazing outcomes. Sometimes, a simple thought can provide the clarity I need in a given situation.

At night, I rarely go to sleep without conducting an honest evaluation of my day. During this time, I invite God into my reflections, and once again, remarkable things can occur. The first question I ask myself each night is whether there is a need for me to apologize for something I did during the day. I used to feel anger towards myself when realizing the need for an apology. However, I have learned to accept it as a teaching moment and an opportunity for personal growth. If I have made a mistake, I ask for forgiveness and strive to make it right the following day. Generally, I avoid repeating the actions that caused turmoil. Today, many of these instances are caught throughout the day with the application of Step 10. One of the greatest gifts I have received in my recovery is awareness. Often, this awareness is positive, but it can also reveal negative aspects of my actions during the day. The practice of these principles is closely tied to service in several ways. Firstly, without learning how to apply these principles in my own life, I would not be equipped to effectively serve others, especially in a setting like a conference. Just imagine a room filled with 135 people who are sober but lack a program of recovery, attempting to make decisions that would impact Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole. It would likely be a challenging and ineffective environment.

Reflecting on my experiences at conferences, one aspect that stood out to me was my newfound ability to genuinely listen to everyone's perspectives, even if they differed from my own. It no longer required a minority opinion for me to consider changing my mind. When I look back at my 25-year-old self, who had just embarked on an intense journey through the 12 steps, I realize that my mind was not yet open enough to fully grasp the 12 traditions and concepts. I was still primarily focused on myself and my own needs.

By applying the principles of recovery, such as humility, open-mindedness, and consideration for others, I have been able to broaden my perspective and become more effective in service. It has allowed me to approach situations with a willingness to hear diverse viewpoints and work collaboratively towards decisions that benefit Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole.

Thank you for being here.

Embracing Technology to Help the Newcomer--- Tammie E., Area 48, Northeast New York

Hello Friends in fellowship and service. My name is Tammie, and I am an alcoholic. I am grateful and blessed to serve Area 48, Northeast New York as their Panel 72 Delegate.

When I was sent a list of possible topics to share, my eyes immediately fell on *Embracing Technology to Help the Newcomer*. I don't consider myself technologically inclined, but I'm also not afraid of exploring and learning new ways, especially when it comes to carrying the message, and over the past several years, I have certainly learned a lot about technology. I began to think about all the ways the Fellowship and specifically Area 48, has embraced

technology prior to, during, and now following the pandemic. We have definitely grown by leaps and bounds.

Virtual Newcomer Packets:

I reached out to some groups and found that at the group level, in Area 48 and all around the US/Canada, virtual meetings have put together virtual newcomer packets. When a newcomer attends a virtual meeting, a link is shared with them in the chat window, that they can click on, download, and save for later perusing. The three shown here are screenshots of random packets I found by a quick google search. Credit goes to District 70 in Area 51, Asheville, NC, Area 36, Southern MN, and District 18, Area 83, Cambridge, Ontario, Canada.

QR Codes:

In Area 48 we have two pieces of tangible literature with QR Codes that link directly to the Area 48 Meeting Finder page.

The first is a tri-fold handout that replaced our printed meeting list that was quickly becoming obsolete as soon as it came off the press due to the fluctuation of meetings opening, closing, switching from in-person to virtual, or virtual to in-person. The old meeting schedules were around 68 pages and listed every meeting, by district in the Area. Groups and districts ordered and paid for them in advance at a cost of about 50 cents each, plus shipping. These new tri-fold handouts are much less expensive to produce, allowing us to provide them as a service. We print 20,000 at a cost of about \$2,500 each year and make them available, free of charge, to all groups, districts, treatment facilities, halfway houses, and anyone else interested in keeping a supply on hand. We also provide a downloadable version on the website so they can be reprinted throughout the year by anyone who needs more.

The second is a postcard sized handout produced by our PI Committee this year, as an outreach tool. The first printing was 2000 and we're gearing up for a second printing soon. These are being provided to all districts and committees and can be left anywhere - doctor's offices, hotel lobbies, libraries, mental health clinics, and laundromats to name a few. Currently, our Area 48 website is mostly service oriented, but the future agenda of the tech committee includes creating some space for the recovery side of the triangle, at which time more QR codes will be available to take an interested party right to that portion of the site.

Corrections & Bridging the Gap:

JPay is a privately held information technology and financial services provider serving the United States prison system. There are a few other private providers as well, but JPay seems to be the most popular and is now available in at least 38 states, including New York. A friend or relative can purchase a tablet for their incarcerated loved one, which can then be loaded with appropriate materials, including recovery literature. This has opened up a whole new world for many suffering alcoholics behind the walls.

In Area 48, Saratoga County jail allowed virtual meetings during the pandemic, which was a phenomenal breakthrough within the correctional system. Herkimer County is now considering the same option and our corrections chair is working closely with them in hopes of getting it up and running.

Bridging the Gap is an important part of reaching prospective members through the pre-release forms. We've added the QR Code on those forms that links directly to the online pre-release form. A prospective member can fill out the online form and click submit. The information goes directly to the BTG committee, where the initial connection can be made to get them to a meeting as soon as they are released. This has helped tremendously, as previous to the online option we had to rely on the mail system and often by the time the release form got into the right hands, the client had already been released and the connection was missed.

We are currently working on getting a google voicemail set up as well, which will allow a person to leave a voicemail message about making a connection. The message will go directly to the BTG chair who can then act on it as quickly as possible, in hopes of not missing that connection.

Treatment & Accessibilities:

During the pandemic, our Treatment Committee was invited to bring a virtual speaker meeting into the Never Alone rehab center in Hurley, NY. Due to HIPPA laws, the clients could see the speakers, but the speakers could not see the clients. It has now since opened back up to in-person meetings.

Our website features an online "zoom tutorial" for anyone that is unfamiliar with the platform. And if a member is not tech savvy at all, our Accessibilities team is ready to provide one-on-one, brief instruction on how to access virtual meetings and the meeting guide app. I also want to talk a bit on welcoming the newcomer to service and how technology has expanded the options available for that.

GSR Cheat Sheet:

District 65, in Area 22 Northern Indiana created a GSR Cheat Sheet that outlines some of the GSR responsibilities. It's been widely shared, and we have it on our website as well.

GSR Virtual Forum & Forum Webpage:

Since the pandemic began, we have initiated a monthly GSR Virtual Meeting Forum. It's an informal meeting hosted by the Area Chair where GSRs new and old can come together and share their experiences, ask questions, and receive suggestions on how best to serve their group. It's held on the first Sunday of each month at 7pm. It's not specific to Area 48 GSRs, anyone is welcome to attend.

Our website also includes a GSR Forum webpage that provides links to pertinent literature, and an online form to fill in where new GSRs can register and change their group meeting information. When a GSR submits a registration or change form, the information is automatically sent to the Area Registrar, who then disseminates it to the District Registrar and to GSO, so it's essentially a one click submission process for the member.

Area Events:

As we now have a virtual district as part of our service structure, all of our area events provide a hybrid option, which has become a popular option for many of our GSRs, who may not be funded by their groups to attend. Newcomers to service are recognized, whether they attend in person or online and service manuals are made available at no charge for anyone who wants one.

Technology is the wave of the future for the Fellowship, and although we need to be cautious about staying within the parameters of our Traditions, it has certainly opened up a whole new world of possibilities to connect and help the alcoholic who still suffers.

I am interested in hearing about some of the ways your areas, districts, and groups are using technology to reach the newcomer.

Thank you for allowing me to be of service today.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

A.A. for the Native American

Moderator: Gerry R., ACM Trustees' Literature Committee

Gerry was appointed to the trustees' Literature Committee to chair a working group to update the pamphlet A.A. for the Native North American. He has been tasked with the objective of putting together a 7-9 person working group in response to the Advisory Action of the 2021 General Service Conference, in that it was approved that the pamphlet would be updated to include language that is both respectful and inclusive of all indigenous peoples. The pamphlet had meant a lot to Gerry as he grew up in Northern Cheyenne in Southeast Montana, and it gave him hope when was twelfth stepped in 2022. Creation of the pamphlet was approved at the General Service Conference in 1985 and was first published in 1989. The content and the cover were subsequently revised in 2006 and then just the cover again in 2019.

From the 2022 AA Membership Survey, indigenous population has increased from 1% of AA members in 2014 to 2.8% in 2022. This translates to 44,000 indigenous members in AA in 2022. However, we need to do a lot more work to carry the message to indigenous people as it is estimated that about 12% of the indigenous population in the US and Canada is estimated to be alcoholic. This would be ~ 1.3 million indigenous alcoholics, far more than the 44,000 currently represented in the rooms of AA.

The following tribes have been or are represented on the working group: Apache, Comanche, Chippawa, Cree, Ojibwe, First Nations, Native Hawaiian, Omaha. The working group currently has a need and a desire to replace the First Nations and Omaha members.

The working group wants to encourage indigenous/First Nations people to share their stories for updating this pamphlet. Next steps are to develop a method of outreach to foster significant amounts of material to use, and then to develop a process for vetting received stories, with efforts toward development of a respectful language and an inclusive title.

The trustees' Literature Committee has set out the following objectives for the pamphlet:

- New updated stories to reflect the diversity of AA experience within the indigenous community.
- Stories that speak to today's fellowship in language that is accessible to modern day readers.
- Stories should not shy away from the difficulties faced by indigenous AA Members attending AA meetings and other AA special events.

The working group has suggested the following topics, but it is not limited to these:

- Experience, Strength and Hope
- Steps, Traditions and Concepts
- Sponsorship
- Other Mental Health Issues
- AA Service
- Safety and Racism

- Using AA Principles
- Cultural Trauma
- Professional Interventions
- Atheist/Agnostic
- Ethnic, cultural, gender and LGBTQ diversity
- Military
- YPAA/Elders
- Indigenous AA Meetings
- Diversity of social status
- Diverse Abilities
- Traditional Parallels

Writing Story Descriptors:

Find the heart of your story and describe: the setting, what did you say, what were you thinking, what were the other characters' reactions, what were you feeling, what did you do? It is within this conflict that you really get to the heart of the story. But, make sure that it is clear that you are an alcoholic, and an AA member who was a problem drinker.

You will need to sign a copyright waiver. If you are submitting the story through aa.org, the copyright waiver is automatic on agreeing to the terms of service and allows AA to edit.

Format is typed 500-1000 words, double-spaced and 12-point font. If you are handwriting, then this is about 5-6 pages. Stories will be accepted in English, French or Spanish. Include the word "pamphlet" on the first page. Can submit to: pamphletstories@aa.org, remembering to put A.A. for the Indigenous Alcoholic. Submission date is October 31, 2023. For more information, navigate to: aa.org/submit-aa-indigenous-alcoholic-English-pamphlet, or email Gerry R. at Always2Bthere@gmail.com.

Grapevine and La Viña Apps

Moderator: Chris C., A.A. Grapevine Publisher

We have good channels of communication to members involved in service, to let them know of new apps from Grapevine and La Viña, but how do we reach further out to the hundreds of thousands of group members whose service comes at the group level?

Make editorial more attractive

- A better reflection of not only the great spirit of the program, but also of the trials and struggles that members go through.
- More hard-core stories, more moving stories reflecting that this is a life-or-death disease.

Incentives

- For the App, first month free. Sign up, no charge for first 30 days, cancel any time.

App instructions

- How to write an article in the magazine. QR code in magazine to facilitate sign up.
- YouTube how-to video on how to use the app.

Recruiting help

- Sharing sessions with Grapevine and La Viña area chairs.
 - What's new, what's working, what's not working.
 - How to help members find and use the app.

Members recruiting members

- Being able to share stories with fellow members to attract them to the app.
- Recruiting bonuses, free month for every two or three members you sign up for app.

Gift Certificates

- Groups can give at anniversaries and other events.
- Sponsors can give to sponsees.
- Carry the message program for the app too.

Getting People Excited About Service in AA

Moderator: Lynette D., Area 13, District of Columbia **Reporter:** Alison H., Area 61, Rhode Island

Excitement about service results in other members being more likely to join you - impassioned, enthusiastic. Different levels of excitement. Lynette's first service role was secretary, and she was excited and hyper-prepared. She is excited about today's workshop.

With excitement comes commitment. When was the last time you were excited about service? Members in the room shared:

- Excited about AA and sobriety.
- Attending this Forum is exciting, it is something new. Seeing other people's enthusiasm.
- Working with others is where I thrived and grew and gained excitement.
- Going through tough times and other members motivated me to serve.
- Enthusiasm with or without Robert and His Rules. - Seeing God in service is exciting.
- Most excited when making the coffee in early sobriety. It was fun.
- Most exciting thing is bringing others to meetings - all the car meeting time before & after the meeting. Also shared by others-fellowship and shared experience around events.
- Accessibility efforts are exciting - excited last time I made myself available for new service role.

Other input:

- Easy to do service when there is nothing else to do (Covid).
- Be a power of example of service. Keep showing up - there is a reason.
- Learn the lessons, such as not being responsible for fixing committees, districts, meetings.
- Service work has kept me sober during tough times. It keeps me busy.

- Meetings like the Forum are reenergizing - I get relief when helping others.

Step 11 - How to Improve Prayer and Meditation

Moderator: Michael K., Area 70, Vermont

Benefits of prayer and meditation include a sense of connection, peace of mind, and emotional stability. Meditation is also a form of self-forgetting. People achieve this through science, nature, art or helping others – there are many paths. People shared their experience... renewing practice after a long break – challenges. Finding peace in middle age and later in life – rewards. Being given AA fellowship support through blindness and surgery – hope.

Overcoming Barriers to Participation

Moderator: Michael B., Area 31, Western Massachusetts

Members Sharing:

- I Sponsor a man with hearing aids - member must scout the room for background noises. Conversations online can be problematic.
- As Accessibility Chair explored the possibility of voice to text equipment.
- Cart services were used at the Full Mass State Convention.
- Rural area, one ASL meeting in the area must have ASL at round up. \$1500 for Asl.
- No Boston meeting listed as deaf. Deaf members go to meetings not Mass rehab. Difficult to get on list could have an issue other than alcohol. Area 31 has not had issues with ASL translators.
- A sponsee with amputated leg and foot, needing to access meetings. Sober houses are not set up for handicapped access. How do we help members with serious physical disabilities?
- Married to quadriplegic meetings that claim to be handicap accessible often are not. Round up was held at ski area? Difficult to access.
- Embracing tech has left a lot of people behind. Four GSRs called from a land line, they do not have smartphones, computers, or internet. Had to mail into the GSRs. Another individual became isolated during COVID and could not find meetings afterward due to lack of tech.
- Picked up a bunch of people with online meetings but lost another group of people due to lack of tech. If someone has a need, they should speak up so that they can be helped. NERF 2023 had an ASL Big Book, and someone asked with they just don't read it. Area 59 is about to print its first meeting list post pandemic.
- Delicate conversation. Performed survey for area inventory and faced resistance to providing paper copies but did it anyway and the paper surveys were returned. The sponsor had tech but didn't know how to use it. Reached out to those who might need help.
- Thank God for virtual meetings, couldn't attend due to medical issues. My friend wasn't attending due to social anxiety, she started coming on virtual platform. Humility means asking for and accepting help. Ask for rides in Aruba. Important to
- Maintains Area 31 meeting guide list and can be printed in PDF. PDF can also be displayed on smartphones without internet. Mass Commission for the Deaf and

hard of hearing would list of meetings they supported.

- Salem has rides available, "Ride" shows up late or not at all. Woman would wait for an hour in 9-degree temps.
- Resources for disabilities, Massmatch.org/resources. All services without charge offer deaf and hard of hearing services.
- Caution putting, the disabled on the Accessibility committee. Members develop resentments.
- Had numerous operations, but always got to meetings. Always had help getting into meetings places. Would love to see all meetings accessible but know they cannot afford it. If you want a meeting, make a call.
- 93-year-old member home bound, developed a list of people that are willing to make home calls. Accessibility issues are enormous, so much to learn but comes back to what we are willing to do as members. Not that hard to do.
- Had meetings that survived COVID pandemic. Give Big Books to homebound members and have a meeting.

Service: The Heart of A.A.

Moderator: Christopher M., Area 47, Central New York

- 31% went to A.A. on their own. That means 69% of people got to A.A. as a result of the service.
- What have you gotten out of service?
- Continuous sobriety. Getting involved in service keeps me close to the center of A.A., which strengthens my recovery.
- Being involved in service has taught me how to handle difficult people. This helped me a great deal professionally.
- Service took me from being at A.A. to being in A.A. It let me meet people who are dedicated to A.A.
- Service taught me to be more concerned with other people in every area of my life.
- Service and members who did service carried me through tough times.
- Service is an extension of my recovery, "fit myself to be of maximum service to God and fellows."
- Service work is the result of recovery and spiritual awakening.
- What have you found to be effective to encourage people to be involved in service?
- Leadership; sets a good example.
- Give people Jobs to Feel a part of.
- Having fun, or appearance of fun, makes service work seem attractive.
- I don't have to do these things; I get to these things.

Online Groups

Moderator: Mary E-K., Area 11, Connecticut **Reporter:** Ryan R., Area 11, Connecticut, Treasurer

Moderator shared experience as a member of an online homegroup. One of the major decisions for the group was where to be "located" for listing purposes since the group does not have a physical location, the group choose a district in Area 11 that meets using a hybrid format so online groups can be involved in the service structure.

The guest speaker shared experience of conducting a survey of online groups and provided a summary of the feedback received. Shared that it is important to have communication between online and in person groups so we can understand the needs of all members.

The two questions discussed were:

1. What is your Area/ District doing to encourage participation by online/virtual groups at meetings/assemblies?

2. Are we, as a Fellowship, doing enough to carry the message to and through online/virtual groups? What can we be doing better?

Discussion:

One thing that was mentioned multiple times is that the Ad Hoc committee exploring how to best serve online groups needs to be held accountable to their charge. This includes taking the time to speak with and visit many online groups to ask what their needs are so the Fellowship understands how online groups can best be served.

Many participants indicated that their Area Assemblies and/or Committee meetings have either explored a hybrid option or use a hybrid approach in order to be inclusive to both in person and online groups. One member shared that their Area Assembly has a specific area of the in-person location that members can be off camera if they prefer.

A participant shared experience about how important online special interest groups is in connecting people from around the US/Canada and with others around the world. This member shared specifically about their experience with online LGBTQ meetings and how the meetings allowed members to feel more included and connect with others across the world.

Someone shared about how their online group has a newcomer liaison and made a website for their group. The group contributes to the local service structure and the General Service Board as well as the Online Intergruop of Alcoholics Anonymous (OIAA).

Multiple participants shared about there being some growing pains with hybrid and online safety, setup and logistics. It was pointed out that this is just part of the process when finding our way through something new. The best way forward is to keep an open mind and ask for help/shared experience when needed so we can serve our members in the best way possible.

Most participants indicated that online groups are just as effective as in person groups. Some shared that one perception is that members that attend online groups are lazy or not paying attention but pointed out that this happens at in person meetings also. Whether or not someone is engaged in a meeting is up to the member, not the group.

It was pointed out that other 12 step fellowships have virtual Areas. Many people in the workshop are in favor of a virtual Area to meet the needs of the online groups and allow for them to participate fully in the AA service structure if they choose to.

Connecting Home Groups to the Conference Throughout the Year

Moderator: Jo Ann M., Area 49, Southeast New York **Reporter:** Moh H., DCM District

Continuity needed since A.A. is year-round not one week.

Question - 1. What are you angry about? - Communication from the bottom-up is poor.

Question 2. Why should the newcomer care about the conference? - To keep doors, open. Newcomer's lives depend on knowledge of the conference - Analogy of the stool - three legs.

Question 3. How do you get to the area to talk about the agenda items sooner?

- Timing on the release of items and receive background information sooner.
- more participation from DCMs/GSRs/Groups
- person to person outreach - compared to fellowship survey- best way to carry information(message).
- New GSR orientation at the beginning of rotation to gett them up to speed before conference.
- Fragmented responses from groups; no cohesion.
- Suggested googling group with delegate to share information and feedback.
- Perception that voices are not heard, and delegates don't vote their area's conscience.
- Important to get people to read the final report and understand what happened so they are informed.
- Communication between Delegate and area must be constant - sharing background information with members.

The Warranties

Moderator: Sally T., Area 12, Delaware **Reporter:** Fran P., Registrar for Area 12

The session began with the moderator reviewing the six warranties found in Concept XII.

Then participants were asked:

1. Share experience/ examples of how our Concept 12 is currently practiced at the Group, Intergroup, district, area, and regional levels.
2. Recommend ways to further apply the six warranties throughout our fellowship.
3. How are these warranties connected to our 12 Traditions?

Sharing included examples of how these principles were studied and practiced at the District and Area level, but comments consistently were made that Home Groups rarely discussed the Concepts in dept. It was agreed that the "spirit of rotation" was necessary to give new generations of members the opportunity to practice the warranties in the being of service. Recommendations to increase awareness centered on Three Legacy Sponsorship, Home Group inventories, and workshops. The problem of "time" surfaced in this discussion and the

frustrations felt trying to communicate proposed agenda items each spring with only weeks' time. Discussing conference business in the areas all year long was one solution suggested. The workshop ended with several comments on personal responsibilities.

PAST TRUSTEES SHARING

Francis G., past trustee, 2019-2023

In the beginning of my time as trustee, the pandemic came along, and everything was upside down and different. In addition to having two virtual forums — which we have never done before, so many behind-the-scenes things were occurring. We came together and answered questions, figuring things out as we went along. It wasn't anything I expected. It felt special to do those kind things and respond to people's questions and concerns. I just wanted to be a behind-the-scenes kind of person and, of course, to be here today with you. To a certain extent, there is some unsettledness. One of the Class As told me, if you go to the Service Manual, it talks about checks and balances. Technically, it is in the introduction to the Twelve Concepts. It does mention checks and balances, but it doesn't tell "us" and "them." It's hard to say the word "never," but I have never felt that it is "us" and "them." I have never felt that way. At the last General Service Conference, at the end of the meeting, there were a couple of us hanging around; everyone else had gone. It was late and we were through. There were about five of us gathered in the front of the room, as we do. We just weren't done. We wanted to spend time together and talk about what the Conference was about, what it meant, and how we were going to report it back to our areas. When did I become an "us?" Or a "them?" I always felt it was just "us." The spirit of rotation reminds me — it's just taking time and placing A.A. first.

I was there when resumes came in, I was there when we did the interviews, and I was there for the whole first year. I served as secretary to the General Service Board and had many conversations on the side about many things. I think, as much as anyone, I knew how people thought and felt and what was on their minds and in their hearts. If you knew what I knew, your heart would break into a thousand pieces. I know mine did.

My brother tells a story about these martial artists in a small sect. They break their bones on purpose so that they heal a certain way. At the end of it they are like iron. The places where the bones heal are stronger than before. I wouldn't wish that on anybody. I hope you caught that. I would really like to think that I could patch this thing up and I wish I could just patch myself up, but I think we will do it together. I believe that I really do, because I remember those kind and thoughtful acts that people did and the things that people felt in their hearts for one another.

I am thankful for the people who came before; I think that is what the spirit of rotation is about. It has been my privilege to witness this Fellowship in action, to be part of it and to know that the service we did will continue on with those who are assembled today. Thank you.

John K., past trustee, 2001-2005

Bill talked about bleeding deacons and elder statesmen. That's always been too binary for me — I prefer to think of myself as a lamenting romantic. There has got to be some middle ground someplace. When I first came into A.A., I was told that alcoholism was a hearing disorder. My body was telling me things and I wasn't listening. It was telling me, "You can't continue to use and abuse alcohol, listen to me." My friends, my colleagues, my family and

my workmates, were all saying, "John, we are concerned about you." But I didn't hear them. Finally, I did. Hearing is the first order of business, but if there is still denial and dishonesty, it doesn't go anyplace.

Sometimes, there's a perception in relationships and in organizations that it's all a problem of communication. But sometimes there are deeper problems that have to be addressed, too. I'm fond of quoting. Well, I hate people quoting at me but I am very fond when I am doing it. William James, a favorite author of many of the founding members, said in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*:

"A survey of history shows us that, as a rule, religious geniuses attract disciples, and produce groups of sympathizers. When these groups get strong enough to 'organize' themselves, they become ecclesiastical institutions with corporate ambitions of their own. The spirit of politics and the lust of dogmatic rule are then apt to enter and to contaminate the originally innocent thing . . ."

And that is something that I have always kept in mind in service because I know that the newcomers pay a lot of attention to that sort of thing. As we are near 100 years, I think we have to watch that we are not getting too dogmatic, over-organized and too over-structured, because the spirit of A.A., according to the Ninth Tradition, is not to be organized at all. I want to quote myself: 20 years ago I made a presentation to the Board that was later memorialized in Box 4-5-9 (April-May 2004). I suggested then that all of the corporate board should do an inventory. And that started a round of inventories. This was about 20 years ago; I am not talking about recent events. I concluded that, "I hope our vision includes an A.A. where organizational words like "speed" and "convenience" do not replace the basic service structure and the language of the heart which often takes a long time and a good deal of effort both to express and to hear. In short, I hope our vision of A.A.'s future includes a willingness to engage in a continuous moral inventory of our collective behavior and to include as many of our members in that process as we possibly can."

After that, I sat through the Grapevine inventory, and I doubt that a lot of the things that eventually developed could have been anticipated. I think sometimes it is hard for organizations to have inventories, but nonetheless it is a very good exercise to undertake. When the General Service Board inventory came up, I had already rotated, but one of our leading emeriti, Jim Estelle (nonalcoholic), was going to participate as an emeritus and he

wrote to me. He said, "John, what questions would you ask if you were going to be there?" Not being shy, I said, "One of the things that I would talk about is the G.S.B. and the Conference. The Conference was intended to be a board of inquiry in relation to the G.S.B. and the corporate boards. My comment is that in any organization based on a system of checks and balances, the center of gravity will shift a bit, from time to time. Is the system balanced now? And if not, where and why is it out of balance?"

And that to me would have raised a lot of the following questions: Without unnecessarily provoking dissension or disunity, is the G.S.B. open to legitimate inquiries of the Conference? Is there a tendency on the part of the G.S.B. (conscious or unconscious) to divert the Conference's attention away from difficult or troublesome issues. Is the Conference inundated with pre-Conference information? Such that each delegate vicariously sits on every committee and the committee system has been effectively displaced altogether. Is there a cure for this? What is G.S.B.'s leadership responsibility to rectify this? Bill W. said, "Noisy minorities are useful." Does the G.S.B. still feel that way? Really? Is the

Conference now so finely choreographed from a preparation and scheduling standpoint that delegates feel they are being deliberately prevented from getting to the bottom of things — whether or not that is, in fact, the case? And finally, would it help if the Conference week was less structured? If there was any way to experiment with some change, without prompting a revolution?”

Those were questions posed 20 years ago, and they reflect some of the things that were addressed here this morning. That means that this continuous ongoing moral inventory is essential, because unless we continue to take that inventory, we'll fall back into the same patterns and create the same mistakes, over and over again.

I once talked about power. It was at an archives conference up here in Massachusetts about 15 years ago. Power in A.A. gets a bad name. We are powerless under the First Step, there is no question about that. But organizationally, there is always power, unquestionably. I served in the military and there is power in there: There's one that is on the chain of command and there is the other one that no one pays attention to. Bill W. somehow intuited this when he got to the Concepts. He wanted to make sure, whether we call it jurisdiction, rights, or control, it is about *power*. Let me talk about what I think the things to watch out for are:

There is the power of office. Those who hold positions speak with some authority — whether or not they know what they are talking about. We defer to them and give them some power. Those who control history have power — no question about it. When an old-timer says this is whatever, people listen (whether or not it was actually the case or if he or she remembers correctly). There is control of information, and this is extremely important, because it goes to a lot of the things that are being discussed under the code of conduct and confidentiality policy. In my mind, this has only something to do with the right to speak freely and so forth. It has a lot to do with power.

I was told by my sponsor early on, “John, there are two kinds of deception. One is fabrication and the other is concealment.” So, the power to fabricate, to outright lie, I was too afraid to do. But conceal? Man, I could conceal. I used to eat dinner in Manhattan near a movie star. I could convince the people in my office (I was drinking then) that I had had lunch or dinner with this guy, and we'd really never had two words. But what I said and didn't say — I'm a master at concealment. The obvious question is when the code of conduct conflicts with the Traditions and Concepts, what takes precedence and who makes that decision? There are lots of things that do not violate New York law and do not violate best practices. I happen to be a New York lawyer and in nonprofits, transparency is the gold standard — save for personnel items and things that are done on the advice of counsel and so on. Everything else is sooner or later going to leak out whether you like it or not, it just is. We talk to one another, and we are going to continue to do that.

There is also control of the agenda, there is control of the knowledge of procedures — that is power, and there is the power of the purse (and that is something that there is great concern about, and appropriately so, it is specifically mentioned in our Concepts). There is control of our airtime, as our general manager has said, “I've got control of the microphone and you don't.” How many times have you been to a meeting, and someone goes on and on and on? That's power — they are exercising it and you are subjected to it. Also, there is the power of ideas: some of them are bright and shiny and we are attracted to that. Bill noted this: we are attracted to them; we want to run off and we don't count the cost or consider the

consequences. If it is bright and shiny, we want it as soon as possible. In addition, there is the power of personality and that is difficult to measure. There is the power of example — good and bad.

Finally, Bill W. said, when faced with criticism, this is how he handled it: He said try to explain your position, don't be defensive, and never, ever, counterattack.

Thank you.

George D., past trustee, 1978-1982, past G.S.O. general manager

I've been to quite a few regional forums over the years, and some of them were quite memorable. I remember a forum in western Massachusetts that I attended as general manager. The great Margaret C. was a presenter and there were quite a few past trustees on the program. She ran out of time, so they rang the bell on her. She just looked at the timer and said, "Forget it, honey." And kept right on talking. Everyone cheered. Well, I'm not Margaret C.

In one sense, I am disappointed in this forum. We arrived Friday afternoon and it was a beautiful warm day. I saw all the conversation pits outside the house. People were setting out, smoking, and having a good time gossiping and taking inventories. I thought, oh boy, I am going to have fun! I will probably catch pneumonia the couple of times I've been out there. It's great fun for me at a forum, particularly at this stage of my life, sitting out there, with the cigar smokers and meeting friends I didn't know I had, just talking. But I didn't have too much of a chance to do that, though I have enjoyed talking to people over the course of the forum. I find it encouraging; I particularly enjoy talking to younger people. With some of the participants in this year's conference, I have hope and confidence that we are going to be alright. I am pleased to understand that staff members are now really encouraged to exercise their right of participation at the Conference. That has not always been the case in recent years. There is a spirit that I think things are going to change and get better.

I am 96 years old, and I still have a very, very full life. I have generally limited my participation in service to a couple of PRAASA events on the west coast where I was a regional trustee. It's a reunion: I see old friends and get up and try to pass along some words of so-called wisdom on Sunday morning. This is my third event since January 29th. In my book, it is a day that will live in infamy in A.A. history and it has created a stain that will be hard to remove. But it can be removed. It could be the catalyst for a whole new spirit in A.A. general services.

I've been listening to and reading and hearing about reports from members of this year's Conference. I've got a transcript from a delegate that I've never met or talked to, and he commented that during the Conference, there was a certain element that thought people like me, John, and the future Francis, as past trustees and past delegates, should keep our mouths shut. Let the people who have got the job now do the job. Please do not comment at all. He did not agree with that position. Very good guy. Bill did not agree with it either, he talked about the value of the voice of old-timers and goes way farther than I would go, in terms of the need for us to participate and be listened to. In fact, I have been very quiet, not paying an awful lot of attention to what has been going on in general service until recently.

But I feel, after January 29th, compelled to report my feelings about it. I am the senior past *everything*. I was a trustee some 40-odd years ago. General manager 23 years ago. It doesn't give me any authority, but I certainly have a lot of experience. I don't know whether it gives me power or not, it is not a word I am very comfortable with in Alcoholics Anonymous. But there comes a time when I feel I have a responsibility to share my feelings about what has been going on, and I would just assume not to do that. I would rather, if I get the opportunity to speak, particularly in the Pacific Region, where I have so many old friends, I just like to tell old war stories, not comment on what is going on today.

But today, I feel, like it or not, I have to do it. This delegate that I have never met also commented that he felt that the Conference did not achieve everything that he hoped it would. He was in the minority on the critical votes regarding the board's actions. He felt, though, that there was a sort of feeling that a message had been sent. In that change, particularly with respect to transparency, he was encouraged by the Conference, although his own personal views did not prevail. We have to keep it up. The delegates need to understand that the Conference is not something where they are just given little tasks by the board and G.S.O., to do their committee work and have their kumbaya moments and enjoy the pomp and circumstance that surrounds the Conference and then go home and tell everyone they had a spiritual experience. It's a lot more than that. Delegates must understand that they speak as the voice of the members of A.A. A.A. is not organized and the board and office cannot tell any A.A. member or group what to do or give any orders at all. But the members can give us orders, and they do. We have active roles in general service. They send delegates who have that responsibility. I think the delegates seem to be waking up a little bit to the fact that the Conference is the boss — they give the orders. It is *not* the other way around and if you are serving as a delegate, you vote your own conscience, whether it agrees with your area or not — they trust you to vote your own A.A. conscience based on what you've learned from other people.

It's been a little time for my own background. My first Conference was in 1975. Bill W. had been dead for 4 years, but he was still present. His spirit was still in that room. Most of the people in that room had met him. I had met him once and spent 5 minutes with him at the International Convention in Long Beach in 1960. It didn't help — I was drunk a month later. My sponsor, who had arranged the introduction, was very disgusted with me after he had bailed me out of the San Pedro, L.A. waterfront harbor jail. He said, "I give up on you. Even Bill can't keep you sober." 'Course he didn't give up on me. I had my last drink in 1961.

Those early Conferences — I'm going to tell you a silly story about the early Conferences — were much different than today. They were more casual and more informal, and everyone was much more outspoken. I think it was the sixth or seventh Conference, it was before my time, but I had heard plenty of stories about it. The office had failed to get the Roosevelt Hotel and they realized it at the last minute, so the only thing they could find was the Prince George Hotel which was an old hotel and not in a particularly good part of town at the time. It had certainly seen better days. During the sharing session, delegates were going to the mic saying, "What have they got us in this dump for? Why are we having the Conference in this flop house?" The early delegates were sort of the founders of A.A. in the communities they came from. And they were not shy about speaking their opinions. This went on for quite some time. Archibald Roosevelt (the son of President Theodore Roosevelt) was a Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee, and his feelings were hurt. He went to the mic and said he didn't know why people were complaining about the hotel. He said his daddy (he always referred

to President Roosevelt as “my daddy”) used it as his campaign headquarters when he ran for Governor of New York in 1895. Finally, Herb M., who was a tough old drunk and the general manager, finally got mad and said, “Flop house! flop house? The problem with you guys is you don’t even know what a flop house is. Come with me tonight and I’ll show you what a flop house is because I’ve been in every g-ddamn one!” With that, he walked out of the Conference. Bernard Smith (class A, nonalcoholic), who was chair of the board, had to take over and he told Dennis, “Get me a glass of scotch — no ice, no water, no seltzer, just scotch.” And he sat there, and he chaired that Conference with a glass of scotch next to him. Finally, Herb walked around town for a little bit, came back, took the Tenth Step and apologized. And the Conference went on. This was drunks in action. This is us.

Forty years ago, as we were getting ready to rotate, we sat down with other board members who were close to rotating. Two were general service trustees, very heavy dudes in their personal life, and two regional trustees. We expressed concern that A.A. was losing its humility and we were taking ourselves too seriously. That we were expressing too much pride and talking too much about how great we were. We weren’t letting other people praise us. That was 40 years ago and, if anything, I think we’ve gotten a little worse. Particularly in the service structure. There is such a reluctance to admit that we blew something. What’s wrong with that? John K. talks about inventory. In my opinion, an inventory kind of came out of a delegate’s report that I read, about practicing the Steps collectively just as we do personally. If we are going to take an inventory, it’s not an operations inventory, it’s not a five-year planning session, it’s an inventory where we talk about ourselves what we’ve done, search our hearts, see our mistakes if we decide that maybe we have to take a look at why we’ve made these mistakes so that we don’t do it again, and then we make amends.

Publicly. Just as we try to do in our personal recoveries. That’s what I believe and this delegate believes that we should do collectively, as a board, and as a Conference.

I talked to a very fine woman this weekend, a past delegate from this region, and she said that for the first time this year, post January 29th, that she really feared for the future of Alcoholics Anonymous. That we would be destroyed, not from without, but from within. I have to admit that I have the same anxiety. But mine is not general. It is very personal. My father was a decorated World War I Air Force pilot. He was wounded with bullet holes in both legs. And he was alcoholic, and he knew it. He sought help from religion; he was a spiritual guy. He sought help from medicine. He even sought help from a psychiatrist, although there wasn’t much of that in those days. So, he died at the age of 39 in 1936, in Chicago. Now, as if he had lasted another year or two, a guy named Earl brought A.A. to Chicago. But it was not there, and my dad died. Twenty years later, I’m a World War II and a Korean War veteran — not with decorations, but I am a veteran. I am in the same trouble.

But A.A. was there and I got help. At that point, I didn’t even think I would live as long as my dad did, and I probably would not have — if not for A.A. Sixty-one years later, I’ve had a great life. I love that old-fashioned blurb that we used to put in obituaries of very old people: “Passed away after a life well-lived.” Well, I think I have had a life well-lived, but it is due entirely to the program and the people of Alcoholics Anonymous. Now I’m in the fourth generation of a whole bunch of families, and I have a deep personal concern that A.A. will be there for the members of those much younger generations who will probably find themselves in the same place that my father and I did. Ultimately, I have faith that it will be, but we are going to have to work on it. It is an obligation, a duty, and a responsibility. Thank you very much.

CLOSING REMARKS

Mike L., Interim General Service Board Chair, (current)

I am reminded about organizational development stuff that I'd worked on over the years. I've thrown out most of the textbook stuff but there was one concept that stuck with me because of A.A. It comes from the Blackfoot Nation. They call it the Breath of Life.

Academically, it is referred to as cultural perpetuity and it is the understanding that we are here temporarily, but our principles and our culture have to survive. And that is what Alcoholics Anonymous is. Years from now, they are going to forget all of our names, but there are going to be alcoholics that need the spiritual principles that saved our lives. That is our role; we have to keep it here for them. I've got nieces and nephews that are going to need this. I hope that if they get to the point where they need it, there are people like you, like us, who are there to carry it to them. Please channel that enthusiasm and make yourself available for service.

The one question my sponsor asked me, when I asked if he would help me, was, "What are you willing to do to stay sober?" I said, "Anything." He said, "Good. I am going to hold you to that." He has. Thank you for your participation, comments and input. I look forward to our paths crossing here in the future.

Bob W., G.S.O. General Manager, 2021-present

Thank you all for your service. I was thinking this weekend about all the information that was brought out, much of it through presentations, but a lot through questions and inquiries. I heard a lot of people talking about how they didn't understand one thing but now they do. I have three favorite quotes that hang on the wall of my office. One is the spiritual axiom: *Whenever I am disturbed, there is something wrong with me.* I have always contemplated that and when I look at it, I am reminded of the famous quote by Victor Frankl, "Between the stimulus and response, there is a space. And in that space lies our freedom and power to choose our responses. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." So, in that spiritual axiom there is that pause. It feeds directly into another quote on my wall, which is from Appendix II in the Big Book, about contempt prior to investigation, by Herbert Spencer. I am reminded in that pause to try to gather the facts. It made me think that that is what we do here.

I am always so taken with how many new folks are here at these forums. I think at this one there is 80 or 90%. This is at every forum. But if those 80 or 90% come back to the next forum then that number will change, and it will grow, and more people will understand.

Please don't forget what you have learned here, such as not having contempt prior to investigation and finding out all the facts.

I feel your spirit. We have talked about the supercharge we get—I get—from these forums and this forum did not disappoint.

Your participation is a great assurance to not drinking but remember that ultimate assurance against drinking is working with another alcoholic and remembering how our service can bring us into that actual task.

Thank you for a wonderful weekend. If you are ever in New York, please stop up in the office. We'd love to have you.

Ken T., Northeast Regional trustee (current), 2023-present

Twenty-three years ago, a broken man walked into these halls, and you welcomed him. I thank you all for being here. I look forward to working with the regional delegates and all of you for the next four years and I will try to keep you as well-informed as possible and help you do your jobs to keep your areas and districts and home groups as well-informed as possible. I know my job is to communicate, communicate, communicate. But I know there is a lot of gravity in the air, so I want to leave you with the following thought: Every year, hippopotamuses kill more people than sharks. I keep wondering, how does a hippopotamus kill a shark?

***Rev 3_2024**

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