

# Inside A.A.

Understanding  
the Fellowship and  
its Services



*ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS*<sup>®</sup> is a fellowship of people who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes.

Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

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Box 459, Grand Central Station,  
New York, NY 10163

[www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)

## Inside A.A.

Since the Fellowship of A.A. was founded in 1935 it has grown from two members to over 2,000,000. With more than 118,000 groups located in over 180 countries, a broad range of services have developed to help support and guide alcoholics in recovery. Service centers have been established around the world, handling inquiries from suffering alcoholics and those interested in helping them. More than 35 million copies of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, the basic text from which the Fellowship got its name, have been published and distributed, and a diverse body of literature is produced in more than 90 languages to reach those who may not yet know about our program of hope and recovery.

As A.A. has grown, so have its service needs. Members and committees have recognized the need to carry our message to professionals who work with alcoholics on a regular basis — doctors, judges, clergy and many others; underrepresented populations need information about our program; diverse technologies have opened new opportunities to reach young people and those who face different challenges of accessibility.

All of this requires some measure of organization — organization inspired by A.A.'s Responsibility Declaration, which states, "When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible."



## **Service and the A.A. member**

In A.A., everything starts with the group — it is the basic building block of the entire Fellowship and the place where recovery begins for most alcoholics. But, for a group to keep going, all kinds of service must be done. It is through the combined efforts and ongoing commitment of group members that:

- A meeting place is readily available and maintained.
- Programs are arranged for the benefit of the alcoholics in attendance.
- Calls for help are answered.
- Voluntary contributions are collected to keep the group and the Fellowship going financially.
- Literature is provided for all members and lists of local group meetings are made available.
- Continuing contact is sustained with the rest of A.A.

While it is noted in A.A.'s Ninth Tradition that each A.A. group needs the least possible organization, “the aim of our services is to bring sobriety within reach of all who want it.” This starts with the A.A. group.

## **A GSR represents your group**

Within a group, there are many service positions to help it fulfill its primary purpose of carrying the A.A. message to the alcoholic who still suffers. One important aspect of an A.A. group, no matter how remote it may be, is continuing contact with the rest of A.A. In order to stay connected, groups often elect a general

service representative (GSR) to represent it within the wider A.A. service structure. GSRs are a group's link with the A.A. world beyond the group and help to carry the group's voice and collective conscience to other groups and to A.A. as a whole. Usually elected to serve two-year terms, they:

- Keep group members informed about general service activities and opportunities in their local areas.
- Represent the group at district meetings and area assemblies.
- Receive and share with their groups all mail from the General Service Office (GSO).

In serving their groups, they can draw on all the services offered by GSO and also may assist their groups in solving a variety of problems, especially those related to the Traditions.

Additionally, in the many locations where an intergroup (or central office association) has been formed, groups usually elect an intergroup representative, who tries to keep the group well informed about what the local intergroup is doing, such as coordinating local Twelfth Step calls, providing meeting lists, and in some places furnishing public information speakers for non-A.A. groups and for A.A. meetings in institutions.

## **Service beyond the group**

As a community is made up of all of its members, each group is part of a larger whole, and its GSR usually participates along with the GSRs of other local groups in monthly or quarterly district meetings, where plans are discussed and decisions are made on how to best serve the needs of the local fellowship and to learn more about A.A.'s world services. A district committee member (DCM) passes on the district's thinking to area committees and service workers and carries information back to local GSRs, who in turn keep their group members informed on various A.A. issues.

Many groups, districts and areas carry the message into treatment settings and correctional

institutions in an effort to ensure that the A.A. message reaches those who may be the most in need. Often organized by A.A. service committees, this kind of service work can involve working with members of the professional community and other non-A.A. members. Groups often provide speakers to go into these institutions and can also provide contacts for A.A. members who are released from these institutions, helping them to make contact with A.A. in their communities when they get out.

### **Area assemblies, delegates and the General Service Conference**

Periodically, all GSRs and DCMs from a given area get together in an area assembly to discuss matters of interest to the Fellowship as a whole and to elect an area delegate to attend A.A.'s annual General Service Conference, which serves as "the actual voice and the effective conscience for our whole Society." Often considered A.A.'s annual business meeting, the Conference comes closer to "government" than anything else in A.A., but as A.A. co-founder Bill W. put it, "The Conference represents us, but cannot rule us."

The General Service Conference (U.S. and Canada) is the link between A.A. groups and the General Service Office and Board. About 134 Conference members — area delegates, trustees, directors, GSO and Grapevine staffs — are active in Conference matters throughout the year, providing a forum for sharing A.A. experience and expressing the group conscience of the Fellowship.





## Conference sessions

Conference members meet annually in New York for six days, reviewing reports on activities of GSO, Grapevine and the General Service Board, hearing presentations on a wide range of A.A. topics and reflecting on service needs all over the world. They also review significant trends and developments in A.A. Each Conference member is encouraged to act as a representative of A.A. as a whole and not just as a representative of one particular area.

Elected for two-year terms, delegates serve as a continuing link between the areas and the General Service Office and Board by:

- Reporting to the area on GSO and General Service Board activities.
- Relaying area opinion to GSO and the trustees.
- Developing area support for world service.

At the Conference, delegates work within the committee system to address the many agenda items that come from the Fellowship for consideration. Most items suggested for the Conference agenda are assigned to a committee, where each one can be discussed in a small group before being forwarded for discussion to the full Conference. Without committees, it is doubtful that any Conference would be able to function effectively.



## **General Service Board (the Trustees)**

Traditionally composed of nonalcoholics as well as A.A. members, the General Service Board was the first movement-wide service unit in A.A. It is responsible for safeguarding A.A. tradition and A.A.'s service funds. It oversees the General Service Office and the two operating service arms of A.A. World Services, Inc. and AA Grapevine, Inc.

The board is comprised of 21 trustees, seven of whom are known as Class A (nonalcoholic) trustees who are selected principally for their business or professional backgrounds. The other 14, known as Class B (alcoholic) trustees, are a mix of regional, general service and at-large trustees who bring varying talents and backgrounds to their service responsibilities.

The General Service Board is the chief service arm of the Conference and is essentially custodial in nature.

## **General Service Office (GSO)**

GSO, in New York City, under the guidance of A.A. World Services, Inc., serves all A.A. groups in the United States and Canada, and also offers services to A.A. overseas, especially in countries where there is no service structure. While many other countries have their own GSOs, the U.S./Canada General Service Office, the earliest to be established, is generally regarded as the "senior" office.

Working closely with committees of A.A.'s



General Service Board and the General Service Conference (U.S. and Canada), GSO has broad responsibilities to its member groups, including the following:

- To collect, organize and pass along to A.A. groups and members throughout the U.S. and Canada the shared experiences on group challenges and solutions, when asked.
- To work with alcoholics overseas, as well as A.A.s living in areas with no meetings, housebound members, seagoing A.A.s, A.A.s in the armed forces and A.A.s in treatment and correctional facilities.
- To answer numerous letters requesting information about A.A. and the help it provides for alcoholics.
- To publish the A.A. newsletter, *Box 4-5-9*, and other bulletins; distribute A.A. books and pamphlets approved by the General Service Conference; and provide complimentary literature and service materials to each new group.
- To disseminate public information at the national and international levels for A.A. as a whole — cooperating with the print and electronic media as well as with organizations concerned with the treatment of alcoholism.
- To coordinate and support the work of General Service Conference committees.
- To maintain A.A. Archives.
- To operate and maintain the General Service Office A.A. website.



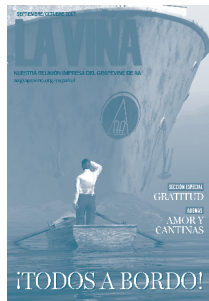
## AA Grapevine, Inc.



Grapevine is incorporated as one of the two independent arms of A.A.'s General Service Board, with its own corporate board, staff, and financial operation separate from that of the General Service Office. Grapevine is responsible for publishing the print magazines

Grapevine and La Viña, and has its own unique website, books, audio and other products to carry the A.A. message. Grapevine mirrors the Fellowship by publishing members' stories of recovery from alcoholism in print, audio and online. *The Language of the Heart*, containing all of the Grapevine writings of co-founder Bill W., covers a broad spectrum of A.A. history and the development of A.A.'s core principles.

A network of Grapevine and La Viña representatives (GVRs and RLVs) help to carry the message of Grapevine throughout the Fellowship.



## Service — our Third Legacy

As noted by Bill W., “Our Twelfth Step — carrying the message — is the basic service that the A.A. Fellowship gives; this is our principal aim and the main reason for our existence. Therefore, A.A. is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven’t been given the truth may die.

“Hence, an A.A. service is anything whatever that helps us to reach a fellow sufferer — ranging all the way from the Twelfth Step itself to a ten-cent phone call and a cup of coffee, and to A.A.’s General Service Office for national and international action. The sum total of all these services is our Third Legacy of Service.

“Services include meeting places, hospital cooperation, and intergroup offices; they mean pamphlets, books, and good publicity of almost every description. They call for committees, delegates, trustees, and conferences. And, not to be forgotten, they need voluntary money contributions from within the Fellowship.

“These services, whether performed by individuals, groups, areas, or A.A. as a whole, are utterly vital to our existence and growth.”

## **Additional Resources**

For more information on the topic of service in A.A. and how our Fellowship operates, a number of additional resources are available:

“The A.A. Group”

“GSR: Your group’s link to A.A. as a whole”

“Your DCM”

“Circles of Love and Service”

“Your A.A. General Service Office”

“A.A.’s Legacy of Service”

*The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service*

“AA Grapevine and La Viña:

Our Meetings in Print and Other Media”

GVR Workbook/Handbook

### **For more information, contact:**

General Service Office

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Grand Central Station

New York, NY 10163

212-870-3400

[www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)

### **To contact Grapevine:**

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New York, NY 10115

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[www.aagrapevine.org](http://www.aagrapevine.org)

## THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

## THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.

2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority — a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.

12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

## THE TWELVE CONCEPTS FOR WORLD SERVICE

I. Final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.

II. The General Service Conference of A.A. has become, for nearly every practical purpose, the active voice and the effective conscience of our whole Society in its world affairs.

III. To insure effective leadership, we should endow each element of A.A. — the Conference, the General Service Board and its service corporations, staffs, committees, and executives — with a traditional “Right of Decision.”

IV. At all responsible levels, we ought to maintain a traditional “Right of Participation,” allowing a voting representation in reasonable proportion to the responsibility that each must discharge.

V. Throughout our structure, a traditional “Right of Appeal” ought to prevail, so that minority opinion will be heard and personal grievances receive careful consideration.

VI. The Conference recognizes that the chief initiative and active responsibility in most world service matters should be exercised by the trustee members of the Conference acting as the General Service Board.

VII. The Charter and Bylaws of the General Service Board are legal instruments, empowering the trustees to manage and conduct world service affairs. The Conference Charter is not a legal document; it relies upon tradition and the A.A. purse for final effectiveness.

VIII. The trustees are the principal planners and administrators of overall policy and finance. They have custodial oversight of the separately incorporated and constantly active services, exercising this through their ability to elect all the directors of these entities.

IX. Good service leadership at all levels is indispensable for our future functioning and safety. Primary world service leadership, once exercised by the founders, must necessarily be assumed by the trustees.

X. Every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority, with the scope of such authority well defined.

XI. The trustees should always have the best possible committees, corporate service directors, executives, staffs, and consultants. Composition, qualifications, induction procedures, and rights and duties will always be matters of serious concern.

XII. The Conference shall observe the spirit of A.A. tradition, taking care that it never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds and reserve be its prudent financial principle; that it place none of its members in a position of unqualified authority over others; that it reach all important decisions by discussion, vote, and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that its actions never be personally punitive nor an incitement to public controversy; that it never perform acts of government, and that, like the Society it serves, it will always remain democratic in thought and action.

**A.A. PUBLICATIONS** Below is a partial listing of A.A. publications. Complete order forms are available from the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163. Telephone: (212) 870-3400. Website: [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)

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**BOOKS**

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS  
TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS  
DAILY REFLECTIONS  
AS BILL SEES IT  
OUR GREAT RESPONSIBILITY  
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS COMES OF AGE  
DR. BOB AND THE GOOD OLDTIMERS  
'PASS IT ON'

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**BOOKLETS**

LIVING SOBER  
CAME TO BELIEVE  
A.A. IN PRISON: A MESSAGE OF HOPE

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**PAMPHLETS**

**Experience, Strength and Hope:**

WOMEN IN A.A.  
A.A. FOR THE BLACK AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN ALCOHOLIC  
A.A. FOR THE NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN  
YOUNG PEOPLE IN A.A.  
A.A. FOR THE OLDER ALCOHOLIC — NEVER TOO LATE  
LGBTQ ALCOHOLICS IN A.A.  
THE "GOD" WORD: AGNOSTIC AND ATHEIST MEMBERS IN A.A.  
A.A. FOR ALCOHOLICS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES —  
AND THEIR SPONSORS  
ACCESS TO A.A.: MEMBERS SHARE ON OVERCOMING BARRIERS  
A.A. AND THE ARMED SERVICES  
DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?  
MANY PATHS TO SPIRITUALITY  
HISPANIC WOMEN IN A.A.  
BEHIND THE WALLS: A MESSAGE OF HOPE  
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL  
(An illustrated pamphlet for those in custody)

**About A.A.:**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT A.A.  
IS A.A. FOR ME?  
IS A.A. FOR YOU?  
A NEWCOMER ASKS  
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN YOUR LIFE?  
THIS IS A.A.  
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SPONSORSHIP  
THE A.A. GROUP  
PROBLEMS OTHER THAN ALCOHOL  
THE A.A. MEMBER—MEDICATIONS AND OTHER DRUGS  
SELF-SUPPORT: WHERE MONEY AND SPIRITUALITY MIX  
EXPERIENCE HAS TAUGHT US:  
AN INTRODUCTION TO OUR TWELVE TRADITIONS  
THE TWELVE STEPS ILLUSTRATED  
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS ILLUSTRATED  
THE TWELVE TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATED  
HOW A.A. MEMBERS COOPERATE WITH PROFESSIONALS  
A.A. IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES  
A.A. IN TREATMENT SETTINGS  
BRIDGING THE GAP  
A.A. TRADITION—HOW IT DEVELOPED  
LET'S BE FRIENDLY WITH OUR FRIENDS  
UNDERSTANDING ANONYMITY

**For Professionals:**

A.A. IN YOUR COMMUNITY  
A BRIEF GUIDE TO A.A.  
IF YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL  
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AS A RESOURCE  
FOR THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL  
A MESSAGE TO CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS  
IS THERE A PROBLEM DRINKER IN THE WORKPLACE?  
FAITH LEADERS ASK ABOUT A.A.  
A.A. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY  
A MEMBER'S-EYE VIEW OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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**VIDEOS** (available on [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org))

A.A. VIDEOS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE  
HOPE: ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS  
A NEW FREEDOM  
CARRYING THE MESSAGE BEHIND THESE WALLS

**For Professionals:**

A.A. VIDEO FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS  
A.A. VIDEO FOR LEGAL AND CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS  
A.A. VIDEO FOR EMPLOYMENT/HUMAN RESOURCES PROFESSIONALS

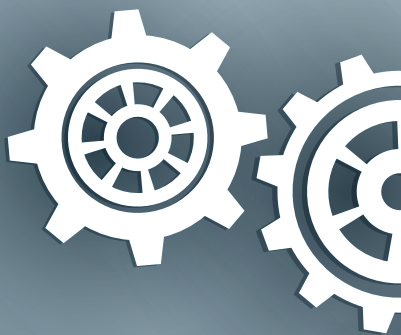
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**PERIODICALS**

AA GRAPEVINE (monthly, [www.aagrapevine.org](http://www.aagrapevine.org))  
LA VIÑA (bimonthly, in Spanish, [www.aalavina.org](http://www.aalavina.org))

## A DECLARATION OF UNITY

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



I am responsible...

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there.

And for that: **I am responsible.**

This is A.A. General Service  
Conference-approved literature.

