

focus



The Newsletter of Alcoholics Anonymous Area 86

focus: History of Remote Communities

CONTENTS

- P2 Opinion
- P3 Tradition 4
- P4 Service...
Public Information
- P5 Tradition 5
- P6 Area officers

This year's Remote Communities Communicator editor, asked if I would write a history/introduction to the 2007 edition, and in reviewing past issues of the newsletter as well as my own Area's reports on the challenges of Remote Communities, I was struck by how much work and effort has gone into this essential Twelfth Step work over the years. I am also constantly humbled by the number and types of barriers there are in not just my own Area, but in all of the Areas in our service structure, especially when looking at the broader definition of Remote Community – "any community where it is difficult to carry the message because of language, culture or geography". I personally do not face these challenges on a daily basis, but a substantial percentage of members in my Area do. Whatever information we can share helps us all. I would like to acknowledge Area 79 (BC/Yukon) Panel 55 Delegate Connie M's assistance with the history of the pre conference meeting and Remote Communities Communicator, as well as that of Area 2 (Alaska) Panel 56 Delegate Rick H. In 1992 a meeting was held in Toronto with the 14 Canadian delegates to discuss the problem of carrying the message to remote Canadian communities and the seeds were planted. Not long after, the Canadian Delegates began to meet informally at the Conference. The Alaska delegate was invited to join them in 1996. In that same year the delegates got together informally at the conference as was their practice and then held the first Northern Remote Communities Committee Meeting in Toronto. This was attended by members of GSO and trustees. In 1997 the delegates from Utah and Arizona began to voice similar problems to the ones in the north and it was felt that the challenge of carrying the message to remote areas could be one throughout AA. And by 1998 a Remote Communities workshop/sharing session took place prior to the opening of the conference. After looking at the definition, the remote communities decided to invite all conference members to participate. The meeting in 1998 saw 41 delegates present and the meeting has continued to grow. With the current definition of a remote community - "any community where it is difficult to carry the message because of language, culture or geography" - each Area must determine how to apply the definition to their specific situation. In some cases (and you will see that reflected in this issue of "The Communicator") it would appear that the concerns could perhaps be characterized as "Special Needs" rather than "Remote Communities". Whatever the label, it has been felt that the increased interest in this kind of Twelfth Step work throughout the US/Canada service structure, and the increasing number of Delegates attending the meeting before the Conference, merits attention and reporting. It has been sug-

(Continued on page 2)

"Items of current interest or under consideration within Area 86". Opinions expressed are those of the authors and may not necessarily reflect those of AA as a whole, the Editor or the members of the Area Committee.

focus: Opinion— The opinions expressed in this article do not reflect the opinion of Area 86. If the contents of this article move you in any way I would encourage you to go to a meeting or talk with your sponsor.

Inventory vs. Group Conscience

Inventory versus Group Conscience, just exactly what is the difference? Simply put we could say that that a Group Inventory is actually a collection of past consciences that group members have agreed upon. These consciences have been hammered out on the anvil of heartache and experience no doubt, but they are our consciences nonetheless. This could be an A.A. group, District, Area or indeed Alcoholics Anonymous itself. In reality group inventories at the level of service quite often end up being our guidelines and operating procedures. Inventories are usually just the reporting of things that have happened in the past, and at my home group at

least are always subject to change.

Our co-founder Bill W., states in the preamble of our Service Manual that our Fellowship gives one basic service that is our Twelfth Step – carrying the message, this is the principle aim for existence. However Bill and the A.A. pioneers gave us some tools to carry this out. It is in the interpretation of those tools, our Steps, Traditions and Concepts that each group becomes unique and autonomous and hence the need for regular inventories. The autonomy of each group or flavor of that group is, if you will the “attraction factor”, if it were not there would only be one type of A.A. meeting and the need for membership in any particular group would disappear. It would be like the large fast food chains if you’ve been in one you’ve been in them all! **Although** we need to balance that with sticking closely to our tradition and credo of singleness of purpose so that our message can be delivered consistently just not stoically. That would never do for alcoholics who are as

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 1)

gested by some that remote communities should be a standing conference committee. It should be noted that the remote communities is not a conference committee. This is an ad hoc committee of sorts and the General Service Office has supported our efforts over the years in order for all of us to meet our twelfth step challenge in remote areas. The focus of this meeting has always been with the areas and the groups working in the field and it remains so. This pre conference meeting is simply where our efforts are reported and where we can share experience. It is noteworthy that both the summer of 2007 and the summer of 2006 saw a gathering in Ontario of AA members from throughout the Canada/US service structure to further discuss these efforts, and another meeting in planned for 2008. Last year’s format incorporated two oral presentations, followed by two simultaneous round-tables. One table was for discussion about challenges faced by language, culture and geography, the other table discussed challenges of language and culture (without geography). It was a format that worked well, and one that this

focus: Remote Communities

year’s committee has expanded upon, planning to have three roundtables and report-backs from those tables. We feel it will allow a better opportunity for an exchange of ideas. We remember that a good idea can

come from anywhere and we have attempted to stay focused on solutions. At the same time we felt it was important to keep the “Remote Communities Communicator” newsletter, which has been produced since 1999. This continues to allow a forum for sharing from the delegates. We have remained committed to identifying the absent in the gradual broadening of the Remote Community focus and to strive to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers, regardless of language, culture or geography. Here today we hopefully will see who is here but more importantly, continue to recognize who is still not here. Thank you in advance for your participation, and thank you to all of the contributors to this year’s newsletter.

Trish L Chair, Remote Communities 57/79

“Items of current interest or under consideration within Area 86”. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and may not necessarily reflect those of AA as a whole, the Editor or the members of the Area Committee.

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

Tradition Four (short form) reads simply: “Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.” This is O.K. for conducting meetings or to get a general idea of what the Tradition is trying to say. To more fully understand what all our Traditions or Concepts mean – the Long Form (of both) should be studied until the language of them is understood and then we can proceed with essays as outlined in the book Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions and The Concepts for World Service as contained in our Service Manual.

Tradition Four (long form) tells us: “With respect to its own affairs, each A.A. group should be responsible to no other authority than its own conscience. But when its plans concern the welfare of neighbouring groups also, those groups ought to be consulted. And no group, regional committee, or individual should ever take any action that might greatly affect A.A. as a whole without conferring with the trustees of the General Service Board. On such issues our common welfare is paramount.” The second last line in this tradition may as well be written in another language since most group members are only concerned with the door being open, the coffee being ready and if the chairs are set up. And that’s O.K. because it should be up to those service oriented alcoholics to understand what that second to last line alludes to and provide the means by which the ordinary alcoholic can open the doors, put the coffee on and set up the meeting.

Area 86 Focus

Published twice a year by Western Ontario General Service.

<http://www.area86aa.org>

Editor:

Newsletter Chair Jim C..

Contributors:

Martin A., Percy G, Sandra M, Dean T, Trish L, John C

Contact the focus: Please send submissions for consideration to

j.camero@rogers.com

The key point to focus on here is the group conscience. As individualistic as we are as alcoholics, collectively we become the group conscience of our home group. Always bearing in mind our “Singleness of Purpose” and our “Primary Purpose” (the next tradition) as a group we have a fair amount of latitude to operate in and around with respect to putting on meetings. Therefore, we need to be aware of what is going on around us and use some common sense rendering our group conscience decisions. A couple examples could be as follows: A number of groups use the same meeting facility; one of the groups becomes negligent in that their not keeping up with their rent. This could jeopardize the use of the facility by the other groups or taint the name of Alcoholics Anonymous. The negligent group could approach the other groups or the other way around and state or determine how to solve the situation before it gets too far out of hand. Another situation could be that a fledgling group is in need of support due to lack of attendance; a well established group is reaping the benefits of being a solid self supporting group and decides to put on another meeting and pick the same night and time as the fledgling group. Here again the groups could get together.

From the long form of Tradition Three: “Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group provided that as group they have no other affiliation.” Once the group is formed there are Guidelines and Traditions we need to address (not rules)! The only rule we need to follow

100% is Rule 62: “Don’t take yourself too damn seriously.” After all, we have the right to be wrong. My focus or examples center on the group, however, the group can be a Group, District, Area, Region or Conference.

There must a communication link at all levels of service in both directions to keep ourselves in check and make sure our Twelfth Step work is possible. It is the groups that provide this work – the other levels of service make this work possible.

The bottom line here is to make sure that as a group we keep the doors open for that newcomer or suffering alcoholic to hear the message of Alcoholics Anonymous and that through the Twelve Steps - we have a solution.

Dean T.— Alternate Delegate Area 86

“Items of current interest or under consideration within Area 86”. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and may not necessarily reflect those of AA as a whole, the Editor or the members of the Area Committee.

focus: Service in the words of a DCM

I am definitely one alcoholic who has greatly benefited by getting involved in service to Alcoholics Anonymous. When I was out there practicing I was never a joiner unless it was to play a sport that involved going to a bar after the game. I was never comfortable speaking to any more than one person at a time. I can remember that even in high school if I had to give any kind of a report in front of the class that was my day to play hooky, even if it meant getting a failing grade.

When I came into Alcoholics Anonymous, I heard early on that if I wanted what you had, I had better get into the middle of A.A. and not just hang around the edges. In my first year I became an Alternate GSR for my group and was comfortable with that since an alternate doesn't have to do anything but show up and listen. Little did I know that that was to be just the beginning of my long journey into service.

I had been bitten by the "Service Bug". My sponsor told me that everyone in A.A. has to find their niche where they are comfortable and feel that they belong. General Service was mine. For the first time in my life I felt that I really did belong!

Over time I served on all the sub-committees except corrections. In our District the Correction Facility does not allow women to go in, so that let me out of that one. I have served as District Secretary, Alternate DCM and DCM as well as a term as Area Grapevine Chairperson. Through these positions I have learned so much about how Alcoholics Anonymous came to be, and how much work needs to be done still, to keep it operating for those still to come.

I also have been involved in the fun side of service. One year I thought I would test the waters so to speak with our Blossom Time Convention. I thought maybe I could try for Greeter. It's funny sometimes what our Higher Power has planned for us. I ended up being elected as Registration Chair. What a job, but you know what? I loved every minute of it. Ditto for being Treasurer of the Annual Spring Round-up. In both positions you get to meet everyone that comes to the event.

You make special friendships in Service. I can go anywhere in Area 86 and run into a friend. I know that my sobriety has been enriched.

When you get into Service you really learn to put principles before personalities and it helps if you develop a thicker skin!

When I share, I usually say that Service is not for everyone, but you should give it a try. You may just surprise yourself and like it. I did! Today I can get up in front of a crowd and actually speak. I still get nervous, but with the help of my Higher Power and all the people in Service who have encouraged me I get through it all one day at a time.

Sandra M.
DCM District 13

I am definitely one alcoholic who has greatly benefited by getting involved in service to Alcoholics Anonymous. When I was out there practicing I was never a joiner unless it was to play a

Re: Public
Information Activity Up-
date - Local *Shared Ex-
perience Requested*

focus: Public Information

Dear P.I. Friends,

Warm greetings from the Public Information desk at G.S.O.! Welcome to any new P.I. chairs and hello again to all seasoned P.I. trusted servants. Here is the latest from the P.I. assignment here at G.S.O.

A.A. Videos for Young People - we are still accepting video submissions

As you may remember, the deadline to accept video submissions was extended to September 1, 2008. What you may not know is that the trustees' P.I. Committee reviewed the project at their August meeting and decided to continue to accept video submissions on an ongoing basis after this deadline. The trustees' P.I. Committee will review and update the project guidelines at their November meeting.

I would like to extend a sincere thank you to all who participated - or will participate! - in this project. We will keep you posted on the progress of the DVD project as the months go by. Please remember that I am happy to answer any and all questions members have about this project.

Anonymity memo to taping companies that display or sell A.A. talks

"Items of current interest or under consideration within Area 86". Opinions expressed are those of the authors and may not necessarily reflect those of AA as a whole, the Editor or the members of the Area Committee.

TRADITION 5—DO WE NEED TO CHANGE IT?

focus: Tradition Five—Each group has but one primary purpose...

To truly understand all of the traditions, I believe that they must be read in the form in which they were written, **THE LONG FORM**.

Although all the traditions have been truncated, the adoption of the traditions was in the long form at the International Conference at Cleveland Ohio in 1950. The truncation took place after this date and would appear to have been done for ease of reference. Tradition 5 states--“Each Alcoholic Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity having but one primary purpose—that of carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers”.

Although I believe that the core of AA has remained the same, we are hearing today that the groups have to change to allow people who have other additions entry even though they do not have any need or desire for recovery from alcoholism. Does AA need to change the Primary Purpose?

It is a fact that after the publication of the Jack Alexander story in 1941, membership increased. However, by the mid 1940’s the groups were becoming splintered and membership was decreasing. It is recorded that it was at this stage that Bill W looked for means to help groups and in fact AA as a whole to survive. It was also at this stage that history records him as becoming aware of a group referred to as the Washingtonians who were established on April 2nd, 1840. Does History have an answer for us?

The Washingtonians commenced with a group of six drunks who got together for the sole purpose of staying sober. The Primary Purpose of the Washingtonians was to help drunks to stay sober (The term alcoholic was not used at this time). Within 5 years the Washingtonian increased from a group of six meeting at a bar in Baltimore to a membership from 100,000 to 300,000. The numbers varied depending on the source but none record membership as less than 100,000. This compares to AA having less than 5,000 members in the first five years when communication was much speedier in 1935-1940 than it was in 1840-1845.

The Washingtonians were having such great success with getting drunkards sober that they decided to help drug addicts, got involved in the temperance movement and some got involved in politics. The groups splintered and became fragmented. By the mid 1850’s the Washingtonians were no more and the majority of their membership ultimately died drunk. One of the reasons for the downfall of the Washingtonians was attributed to the change from a primary purpose of just helping drunks to lets help all who need help notwithstanding

focus: Public Information

At their August meeting, the trustees’ P.I. Committee discussed the anonymity of A.A. members at the public level as it pertains to (audio-)taped A.A. talks. The following is an excerpt from their report:

The committee considered asking for the cooperation of taping companies regarding the anonymity of A.A. speakers, similar to how we ask for cooperation from media professionals regarding anonymity at the public level. The committee agreed that this would be a valuable communication and asked the staff secretary to send a memo to taping companies that distribute and/or sell A.A. speaker talks, whether by catalog, on site at conventions, or on the Internet. The staff secretary will include a copy of this memo in the next P.I. Activity Report to P.I. Chairs in the U.S. and Canada.

The committee encourages A.A. groups to discuss our Eleventh Tradition and how it may apply to A.A. speaker talks, including speaker talks posted and/or sold online. The committee agreed that the ultimate responsibility for maintaining anonymity at the public level resides with each A.A. member.

We have enclosed a copy of the memo that was mailed to taping companies on August 27, for your information. You may wish to use this memo as a starting point at your home group, P.I. committee, district or area, should you wish to discuss the importance of A.A.’s Eleventh and Twelfth Traditions.

“Items of current interest or under consideration within Area 86”. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and may not necessarily reflect those of AA as a whole, the Editor or the members of the Area Committee.

focus: Opinion

(Continued from page 2)

diverse as any group of people could possibly be. So why the need for a group conscience?

In my experience quite often we mix inventories and group consciences up. In the not so distant past a service body that I was a part of ran into some problems, as sometimes happens, with personalities. There was a call for a group inventory and arrangements were made to ask someone who was not part of that body to chair this meeting so that impartiality could be assured to all concerned. However it unfortunately missed the mark, by quite a long way too. As the appointed Chair gathered together the information for a group inventory he assembled the things that this body were doing well and focused on them, as all group inventories should do. He arrived at the conclusion, and let the body know, that they were doing a good job and seemed to be carrying out their mandate quite well. This was a well run and researched inventory and the Chair done exactly what was asked of him and followed up with a report giving his experience and hoped it may be used to assist this group to further our basic aim.

However if he had been asked to conduct a group conscience it would have been quite a different matter I am sure. It would have only been directed to the issue or issues that seemed to be causing the friction within the group and have been centered on those issues. The group could then have "had the cards on the table" if you will. The air could have been cleared and the people involved could have come to some type of compromise or solution that suited their particular group. The people and the service body also, would then have added the experience to their inventory. It is at; in my experience at least, group conscience meetings that the real need for leadership arises. We in Alcoholics Anonymous are fortunate indeed; God as he expresses Himself in our Group Conscience delivers that leadership when we need it most. The leadership usually comes not in one person but in the group as a whole. When we have conflicting personalities creating fissures of discontent in our Fellowship no one person ever seems strong enough in themselves to stop it, but stop it does. This happens when the whole conscience is awoken not just those of the clashing personalities, when this conscience utters the word "enough". It usually is enough for all concerned to take notice to stop and ponder their role in this. For me when I am involved in a group conscience I have always followed it up by examining my own, I can assure you sometimes I don't like those results. I know when involved in this unfortunate facet of my personality I

can always take heart from the man who did indeed chair that meeting that day when he said, "It is my experience that everyone in this room loves our Fellowship, right now they just have different ideas."

In conclusion, it seems to me that maybe we forget or lose direction sometimes. It seems that a regular Group Inventory is a great beacon for us to strive towards, and in between these times we can use our Group Consciences as the compass to keep us on course. We are here to do God's will, not ours. So when His Conscience is expressed through our groups let us try and carry that out, even if it means leaving our own thoughts and feelings behind. In the long run it has always come to pass that He knows what He is doing, and we are so fortunate He has chosen us to do it.

In Love and Service

Martin A - Panel 58 Area 86 Delegate

Focus: Tradition Five

ing that there may be no association with alcohol.

I truly believe that Bill W says it all on page 150 of the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions when he writes, "'Shoemaker, stick to thy last' ... better to do one thing supremely well than many badly. That is the central theme of this tradition. Around it our Society gathers in unity. The very life of our fellowship requires the preservation of this principle."

Therefore, if we wish to have AA available for our grandchildren and their grandchildren, let us "stick to thy last".

Yours in love and service

Percy G

AREA OFFICERS

Area Delegate:

Martin A.

Area Alternate Delegate:

Dean T.

Area Chair:

Carol G.

Area Treasurer:

Anil G.

Area Secretary/Registrar

Percy G.

Comments, feedback or articles contact

j.camero@rogers.com

www.area86aa.org

"Items of current interest or under consideration within Area 86". Opinions expressed are those of the authors and may not necessarily reflect those of AA as a whole, the Editor or the members of the Area Committee.