

2020 ASSEMBLY – DISCUSSION TOPICS

DISCUSSION TOPICS – EXCERPTS FROM THE JULY AREA QUARTERLY INCLUDED AS A STARTING POINT FOR THESE DISCUSSIONS. THIS IS A TIME FOR YOU AND YOUR GROUPS TO SHARE YOUR IDEAS! LET’S HEAR ‘EM!

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1

How can we improve spiritual parity between the different language communities within our area?

REPORT FROM AREA LANGUAGE STEERING COMMITTEE:

Mission of Language Steering Committee: The purpose of the Language Steering committee is to gather information, provide assistance and guidance to groups, districts and the Area in regards to complications stemming from language barriers.

The Language Steering committee aims to increase inclusion and unity within the Area by raising awareness and sharing solutions to eliminate or limit language hurdles to increase participation from Non-English-speaking groups, districts and their representatives.

Function of Language Steering Committee: For those who may be unsure, the Language Steering Committee manages and coordinates all language translation and interpretation needs for the Area Committee. Per the Area handbook, the composition of the Language Steering Committee is: Appointed Area Language Chair, ASL interpreter coordinator, Spanish interpreter coordinator, ASL calendar coordinator and the Accessibility Chair. A couple of those positions aren’t currently filled and since they are primarily task oriented, I have expanded the member composition to include current members of the Area committee to serve as more of a genuine steering committee, or advisory board, rather than a group of people just completing monthly tasks.

Update from Mission of Language Steering Committee: So far this rotation, the Language Steering Committee has discussed ways to encourage participation in both English and Spanish language events. This discussion initially came from the January 2020 Quarterly where the discussion about using the Area interpretation/sound equipment arose. As a group, we decided on some guidance and a process to lend out the Area equipment to be used for language interpretation and events other than Area business events. I have done an inventory of all our equipment for lending.

While I was at PRAASA, I was fascinated by the sound proof translation booth they had there. I talked with them and discovered that we only needed one more cord to do this ourselves. We went ahead and bought the cord and then COVID happened and we did not need a sound booth. I will be sure to pass along all of the information I gathered on this to the next Language Coordinator.

In addition to the use of the hardware that can be used for interpretation, the LSC also discussed the future potential impacts of motion 17.3 (which created the position of Language Chair and Language Steering Committee). These impacts have not been realized yet, but the current motion only provides interpretation into Spanish and ASL for a member of the Area Committee, and for select events. After much discussion with the Language Steering Committee and personal discussions current and past Treasurers and Alternate Treasurers as well as other elected servants, it was clear that there is not a need for a change in the motion yet. This line of discussion served as a catalyst to connect with Courtney, our Area Alternate Treasurer and dive deeply into the Language Committee budget to see how efficiently we are using the money we had

budgeted for us. It's also a reminder that the budget is not guaranteed and that we rely on group and member contributions to continue to do this valuable work.

What are your groups doing when there is a foreign language request? Does your group know if there are any other language groups in your district? Who do you reach out to when there is a foreign language request? What are you guys doing and what more can we do to really be a bilingual Area? Our bilingual PowerPoint today is a good example of us and us instead of us and them. Consider this a personal challenge, by the Assembly do one more thing to include a non-English speaking person or group.

EXCERPTS FROM THE DISCUSSION AT JULY AREA QUARTERLY:

- Now that you are going to loan out the translation equipment, will you have training workshops?
 - I will certainly explain and show how to use it to whomever is borrowing the equipment and have step by step directions included. It is not too difficult to use. I had not thought of holding workshops.
- There is a need for other languages. We are looking for a Russian speaking member to help someone coming out of treatment. We do have a Russian speaking group in Vancouver and there will be more Russian soon.
 - It would be nice to have a resource to find other language speakers. We are working toward this.
- The Spanish community is very grateful for all of the effort Lupita and the Area have put into making information available in Spanish. I would like more Spanish speaking GSRs to come to Quarterlies but we are not always very tech savvy and have trouble being motivated. But we are learning and are trying in the future to be more connected.
- Spiritual parity also includes English speakers participating in Spanish speaking events. We ask them to come to our events and we also need to participate in their events. We are one Area and we want to participate as much as possible.
- We can go to meetings where other languages are spoken. Just being there and letting the language of the heart create a trust that is unachievable any other way. How can we get started in reaching out to communities made remote by language barriers? In Arizona, the Area PI Committee worked with Navajo leaders to reach out to native speakers by translating the AA Preamble and 12 Steps into Navajo for public service announcements to let them know that meetings were available. We have Spanish communities and Native American communities that we could reach out to through their radio stations with similar public service announcements.
- I know that some Areas do not pay for interpretation and use volunteers exclusively and that we spend up to \$30,000 in a year for interpretation. I don't know the answer but we need to talk about this. I have a question for Alan or one of the Past Delegates. The Conference in New York is in English, French, and Spanish, not any other languages. Why does the Conference not translate into Russian? How do they make the determination?
 - Right now, it's determined by the language spoken by Delegates. At this last Conference a lot of it was not in Spanish because there was not a Spanish speaking Delegate but it was in English and French. Last year we did have all three languages because we had Delegates who spoke French and Spanish as well as English. Historically, that has been what has been requested and the Conference has evolved in to being trilingual in that way. If there was a Russian speaking Delegate at some point then that bridge would be crossed. I believe that if that were to happen, Russian would be supported at the Conference.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2

COVID-19/Coronavirus – what are we as an Area, Districts & Groups doing to support alcoholics in our communities? What more can we be doing?

EXCERPTS FROM THE DISCUSSION AT JULY AREA QUARTERLY:

A lot of groups have Zoom meetings but do not share their info/password with other groups or the district. This is disturbing as it does not reach out to the newcomer who does not have access to the password. Our meeting has a waiting room and everyone is welcome in unless they abuse the meeting. We have online group meetings that attract newcomers and we don't let them leave without having contact with someone.

Some groups are opening up. I like Heather's quote, "You can be in trouble with the government or you can have alcoholics mad at you. I know which one I prefer." As we move forward, as trusted servants and leaders we need to ask, "What is our responsibility to keep AA safe?" When groups are opening up in a careless fashion is that part of their autonomy or does that affect other groups and/or AA as a whole?

We have been able to get all of the Zoom meetings up and posted. AA is a cross section of people and we have a lot of people who refuse to stop meeting face to face and who refuse to wear face masks. As a DCM, it is frustrating for me but I am not the police. Thankfully, those meetings are staying very small. As we are opening up some group are keeping their Zoom meeting too - not as a hybrid but a concurrent smaller meeting. We have some meetings that never went to Zoom and have pretty much disbanded. Our district meeting attendance has dropped off because of this. Because the groups are not meeting, the GSRs feel that they don't have a job.

We are in process of creating a technology committee. We are looking into QR codes (similar to bar codes), how to do a hybrid meeting and be a resource for that, how to have a schedule that can accommodate online and in person meetings and stay current as we reopen. We're still in process but to it's a place where we can discuss, gather information, and have some group conscience around all of the sudden changes in technology.

Our veterans group went to Zoom and we started getting military people from all over the country. We have slowly started reopening with a hybrid format (Zoom and in person) and we still can have someone on the east coast in our meeting! We have one group that is exclusively online and they have expressed that even after COVID they will continue online. Our district now has a GSR from that group.

Basically, we run on fear. When our group started out on Zoom, people could only get the meeting info from the meeting secretary, then we allowed members to share the Zoom info, and now we are willing to post it on the Area 72 website and at intergroup. We heard all of the awful stories about Zoom bombers and we got scared and tried to limit attendance and now we're trying to reverse it. When you are part of a group, you do what the group wants to do.

Our group greeters became our Zoom group "troll patrol" to kick off Zoom bombers.

At our district we had an hour long sharing session about reopening using the Traditions, guidelines from the CDC, and information from different Areas.

Meeting IDs and passwords are on our district website and that is helpful for reaching alcoholics.

Some meetings opening up. One meeting is outside and that's ok because they can social distance. Most churches are not allowing us to meet. I don't want to see the headline COVID OUTBREAK AT AA MEETING

We have had higher attendance at our district meeting since going virtual. Many of our meetings have attendees from other cities including a lot of newcomers. We get newcomer info and send them a Big Book.

Create a group email list so you can have a “password checker” service position and also sign attendance slips.

Will YP Chair: We created a group based out of the Pacific Region running regular workshop panels and creating helpful documents and guidelines for reopening, virtual, and hybrid meeting formats. I ran a virtual group inventory with the new modified questions. One of the biggest things is how to get newcomers involved in a virtual format, creating new service positions (like troll patrol).

Are you all seeing contract tracing? I don't see it being done with the meetings that are opening up in my district despite CDC guidelines.

Most incoming calls are for Zoom passwords.

This pandemic has forced AA to soften its views on anonymity on video. This is an opportunity to talk and grow with new technology in AA.

We have not had a drop off in service. People are stepping up to be GSR. Our treatment meeting has been able resume using Zoom and we are able to provide a phone list until Bridging the Gap can resume.

We are doing a gradual reopening. Our landlord has protocols we must follow that include: contact tracing list held by group, 7th Tradition collected in one spot, social distancing, face masks, no coffee, no passing literature. Contact tracing does not ask for group affiliation so is anonymous as far as AA is concerned.

It is important to stay in touch with the people who have dropped off since meetings have gone virtual.

NYC intergroup has a website with excellent reopening guidance.

Some landlords want comprehensive liability insurance because of COVID.

Our group took a group conscience on reopening: up number of greeters – one doing no contact temperature readings, one doing contact tracing, one to supply a face mask for those who show up without one. We have assigned members to ask people who have removed masks to put them back on and if they refuse they will be escorted out. Our church purchased a large screen TV and we can use it for hybrid meetings as well as UV lights to help with cleaning. We will not have coffee. We decided on a phase when we will open up and measured the church to make sure we can have people seated 6' apart. We will only be able to have 13 people at a time in the building.

People wanting to volunteer are struggling to get the ID numbers for the standing committee meetings.

GSRs are have a lot of questions about Zoom and reopening. It would be great if we DCMs could communicate more outside of Quarterlies. Meet regularly to tell each other what has worked and what not.

Outdoor meetings can become problematic because of Traditions 2 and 3. Attracting random, not necessarily healthy, people and not having any way to prevent trouble.

What are our communication plans? What is the endgame if we have a sick person attend, does the meeting close again? Go back to Zoom? Who keeps the newcomer informed of the changing parameters?

Keeping the Area and intergroups updated on the status of meetings is incredibly important. We get so many questions about whether a meeting is happening or asking for a password. We don't want the sick alcoholic going to a meeting that is not happening or to which they cannot get in.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 3

How can Area 72 incorporate online only meetings, those without a physical address, and provide homegroup members of online only meetings a voice in the AA Service Structure while supporting and ensuring that online only meetings are able to carry out our primary purpose?

EXPLANATION OF THIS DISCUSSION TOPIC PRESENTED BY LISA, ALT DCM DISTRICT 17.

The issue we are concerned with is that there are over 50 new online only meetings in Area 72, created during the pandemic, and online only meetings are not currently able to participate in the General Service Structure.

- Physical meetings can send a GSR to their local district meeting; *online only meetings are not attached to any district. They have no physical meeting placement that aligns them into a District. Therefore, it is not possible, currently, for online-only meetings to have a GSR, and thus these meetings cannot participate in the General Service Structure.*

We would like to think about how to include online-only meetings in the General Service Structure.

- Online meetings include the elderly, the permanently ill, or otherwise remote members who are unable to maintain a physical homegroup. They carry the message, include sponsorship, and can function as a real homegroup. They are here to stay. But, again, there is not an avenue for them to have a GSR. We all have a voice in Alcoholics Anonymous. Each member can vote or express their opinion on topics or motions that could change the future of AA. But *only* if those groups participate in the General Service Structure.
- Since the pandemic hit, 23% of all area 72 meetings have gone online. In addition, 52 meetings that do not have physical locations were created.
- Online only meetings will continue after the pandemic. Some in-person meetings currently meeting online are considering transitioning to online only meetings because they can financially stay afloat with only a \$15 monthly overhead for Zoom.
- The A.A. Online Intergroup (which is not part of the General Service Structure) said that before the pandemic they listed less than 175 groups in their directory in all 5 formats: email, discussion forums, text-based chats, phone, and zoom/skype. Now they are at roughly 1700 virtual meetings.

Alcoholics Anonymous World Services knows this is an issue. Last week the previous AAWS Director forwarded the current AAWS Chair an email I sent to the Online Intergroup about the inability to bridge online meetings into the general service structure. In fact, mine was only one of 20-30 emails with a similar inquiry sent to the Online Intergroup.

On Thursday, the AAWS Chair reported to our Area Delegate that the AAWS Technology Committee has already been talking about this issue. Their so far informal discussions have touched on two ideas:

1. Have virtual groups geographically anchored and send GSRs to local district meetings, thus folding those groups into the current service structure
2. Create a virtual area for the US/Canada region that would conduct all business virtually and send one delegate in person to the annual General Service Conference.

The AAWS Chair also said that they would like to hear our thoughts on this.

- This impacts not just Area 72, but our entire conference area.

- District 17 has talked about how a virtual district could be a solution for anyone unable to access a physical meeting. This would allow others to become homegroup members of an online only meeting and still have a voice in the Area.

District 17 would like to ask the Area Committee to consider this issue, and to respond to the request from the AAWS Chair to hear our Area's perspective and ideas.

- We would like to hear if this is something other districts view as a problem and if so, what are some possible solutions. We want to know if this is *not* a problem in other parts of our Area.

Bill W wrote in the November 1960 edition of the AA Grapevine: *"A vast communications net now covers the earth, even to its remotest reaches [...] Nothing matters more to AA's future welfare than the manner in which we use the colossus of modern communication. Used unselfishly and well, it can produce results surpassing our present imagination."*

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THIS DISCUSSION TOPIC PRESENTED BY KAREN, DCM DISTRICT 17.

- The AA General Service Structure as described in the Service Manual is geographically based and does not allow online only meetings to participate in the General Service Structure.
- "A change in the General Service Conference structure [in] U.S./Canada would need to be discussed and approved by the Conference
- "Bringing your idea to your district meeting is certainly where this ought to be discussed. If there is agreement, it might go to the Area for wider discussion and possibly a proposal for a Conference agenda item."
- What suffering alcoholics are we trying to serve and provide AA meetings for? People who are:
 - Physically unable to attend in-person meetings, including vulnerable from COVID-16
 - Those over 60 years old (28% of our membership from GSO's 2014 membership survey)
 - At home with an illness
 - Not quite ready to go to an in-person meeting, but want to check out AA
 - Unable to attend a meeting due to lack of childcare, transportation, or other requirements needed to attend in person
 - Want to continue online and not lose people from AA when AA land-based meetings cease online
- In addition to GSO, we talked with several webmasters, Intergroups and Central Service Offices, past Delegates in multiple areas, Area 72 Archivist and Delegate, Online Intergroup of AA (OIAA), Technology in AA, and learned:
 - Pre-COVID-19, Area 72 had NO online only meetings.
 - Pre-COVID-19, 3,553 meetings were listed on the Area website. 28% of those groups formed online meetings – 1000 groups. (new numbers from Eddy today)
 - In Area 72 at least 52 new online only meetings do not have a physical location.
 - The Online Intergroup of AA began 25 years ago and had 175 groups. Since the pandemic began, OIAA has roughly 1700 virtual meetings. This is a 10-fold increase in four months.
 - With the COVID-10 pandemic raging, nearly 1/3 of our membership is vulnerable and over age 60 years and unable to return to in-person meetings for some time.

QUESTIONS FOR DCMs AND GROUPS TO FURTHER DISCUSS:

1. Are we willing to lose 1/3 of our elders/vulnerable members' participation in our General Service Structure since their home groups are not land based?

2. Wondering whether Area72 needs to establish a Remote Communities Committee? RC is the likely committee to research, discuss and bring this issue to the General Service Conference.
3. Do we want to consider piloting a Virtual District in Area 72 for the approximately 52 existing groups to address the unique challenges AND allow them to elect GSRs and a DCM and participate in the Area and GSC and share what we learn?
4. Can we create an Ad Hoc Committee to further research this issue?

EXCERPTS FROM THE DISCUSSION AT JULY AREA QUARTERLY:

- It's up to groups, each group is autonomous. They can register at www.aa.org and be part of any district they want to be and let us know. Most online groups want to be a part of the Area where they are mostly located.
- It would be nice to know which online meetings have a physical homegroup they are attached to and which are online only. To help the still suffering alcoholic.
- We have allowed online meetings that are not necessarily in our geographical area to be listed on our website.
- Online format helps address our primary purpose, there is a need. It's worth exploring how to get their voice into the General Service Structure. We've already addressed this a little bit with our linguistic districts that are not strictly geographically bound. It feels important.
- We could have an online district similar to how we have linguistic districts that are not bound by geography. If they want representation, it is our job to help them participate.
- Online meetings joining a geographic district is great and we can support that. But what about 5 years from now? That same group could elect a GSR out of the geographic region and we would need to go to hybrid business meetings.
- The older population may be stuck with online only and we need to give them a voice.
- It's too soon to know how this will pan out. Is it possible that online will overtake in person meetings? Online meetings don't necessarily want to be a part of the General Service Structure. There is an online meeting in our district that is supported by an outside entity, allowing them to use the Zoom account for a number of meetings. This is a Legacy/Traditions issue. How are we going to pass on our Legacy of service if this is the wild, wild, west and anyone can use any entity to start a meeting?! You don't need the district because the group is just the deal.
- This is a new frontier. It is a wonderful possible expansion for accessibility. Elders who could no longer attend now can have a voice again. Newcomers who may be intimidated by an in-person meeting could attend online. We will have new challenges – like court slips. The Tradition will accommodate this. What is the difference between a new group forming and a new online group forming?
- This is a great topic. We have been talking about this in our district for a while. We have a member in our district who is a shut in. She serves as our phones coordinator. She has not been able to attend district meetings until now that we are on Zoom.
- This is a great idea. There are a lot of different facets to be aware of i.e., will we now hold hybrid Assemblies? This is something that needs to happen whether it is a virtual Area or joining our Area.
- Prison meetings sometimes have GSRs and when it comes to the Assembly there is a bridge person for that GSR to participate at the Assembly. Perhaps this would work with online only meetings.
- Everyone across the country is talking about this. GSO is working on this as well. Remote communities and other various online based meetings will continue to exist even after social distancing. How AA looks in the

future will be very different. Area 72 is not alone in this and to continue to reach out and talk about this with other Areas is great.

- AA Loners International has meet online for years. How have they addressed this issue?
- The idea that Areas are geographically based is not 100% true. They are what's called a "Delegate Area". They are based on how many people and how much space they think one Delegate can easily cover. How many members can one Delegate serve? If we allow a bunch of online meetings across the country to join our Area, how many can our Delegate cover? Delegates receive a lot of regional support. If an online Delegate position were created, which region would support that Delegate? A lot of thinking and discussing to do.
- GSO is not currently accepting online group change forms - you need an address. I will keep you updated as things change.
- BC Yukon has an online intergroup because they have a large remote community. There is already a lot of stuff built for the online community. We've been doing this a long time. We ought to create an ad hoc committee for this.
- I am part of an online only group. Our group got involved with the online intergroup and learned that there is not voice for online groups. The online intergroup has gone from 175 groups for many years to like 1700 plus and there are new groups forming every day. They have 6 people working there and they need help. There is not a lot of GSO news going to the online groups.
- Been involved with online meeting since March. We have email list to keep folks informed. Welcoming in new people all the time. People are so grateful because they are not quite ready for in person meetings again. Many people want to continue to do it. Virtual groups fill a huge hole.
- An ad hoc committee was created with Alt DCM 17 Lisa chairing it.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 4

How can we continue to use technology to reach still suffering alcoholics?

EXPLANATION OF THIS DISCUSSION TOPIC PRESENTED BY THOMAS, DCM DISTRICT 8.

Due to the pandemic, we have had to make many decisions quickly and decisively, and as our groups start to re-open, I think we shouldn't lose sight of how technology has helped us in these unprecedented times. Even though I desperately miss my home group and the feeling it brings when I walk through the doors, I recognize the importance that online formats have had in keeping us together and broadening my ideas on how to reach out to other alcoholics. I'm probably not the only one who was ambivalent about zoom meetings when this all started, but what I've watched transpire is people finding us, getting sober, and becoming involved in Alcoholics Anonymous. In fact, a few weeks ago a woman attended my home group for the first time and she had about 12 days sober and was fresh out of detox. She also lived in Birmingham, AL. I have absolutely no idea how she found us but she did, and what I saw was AA in action: she not only received numbers from folks and a list of other meetings, she even fellowshipped a bit after the meeting.

If we automatically stop having online meetings when everything settles down (which at some point it will), I do believe it will impact our availability and effectiveness in providing new people a way to find us. There are multiple ways technology can further our 12 step efforts, and my thoughts are that it not only makes us more accessible but it can also broaden the avenues for how we engage with each other and AA as a whole.

The long form of the third tradition states that any 2 or 3 alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an AA group provided they have no other affiliation. So who's to say that an online meeting isn't really an AA meeting? Or that they wouldn't be able to participate within our service structure? The Guidelines put out by GSO regarding our use of the internet states that "the ease of new technology should not detract from the one-on-one sharing that has been so essential to our Fellowship and our recovery from alcoholism. It is helpful to remember that there is no need to let the speed of technology dictate the speed of our actions." At the end of the day, AA will and always will be one alcoholic sharing their experience, strength, and hope with another. Due to recent circumstances, the thing that has impacted our Society the most is about the format and how we communicate with one another. In my opinion, it would be extremely prudent for us to have a deliberate conversation about how we can continue to use some of the new technology moving forward.

EXCERPTS FROM THE DISCUSSION AT JULY AREA QUARTERLY:

- This is a great opportunity for us to reach out to professionals who deal with alcoholics. It can be very difficult to get lawyers, doctors, clergy, judges together in person to talk about AA. The Zoom panels we have been able to do over the last few months with the clergy have been vital in getting the message out to the still suffering alcoholic.
- I attended a conference where a prison inmate was "Zoomed" in to read How It Works and it was incredibly powerful.
- We can't take meetings into the jails right now and that is a problem. This could be a new way to get meetings into correctional facilities even in the future after social distancing. Corrections Chairs across the country are all looking into this technology for bringing meetings to alcoholics in prison.
- This is a great topic. We need to consider all tech means and not just Zoom. What do remote communities need? They may not have internet access. Are there ways we can use different technologies to reach the

still suffering alcoholic with accessibility issues? We need to bring them into the conversation to understand their needs.

- Great lesson in empathy for those who cannot/will not come to in person meetings. What more as a fellowship can we do?
- We need find a way to let people know we are still here. How do we reach people who don't have internet? The low bottom drunks who don't have a phone? We need to keep on reaching out to facilities in person – go down with some books. When talking about virtual meetings, let's not forget.
- There are newcomers who have only ever been to online meetings. The message is still being carried via virtual meetings.
- Brick and mortar meetings could be a thing of the past. Many businesses have moved online. We have found a new venue and it could be a new trend. Maybe, like YPAA, we could have online meetings and then in person conferences.
- Sometimes it is the simplest tech that needs to be used – the phone. I was answering phones and took a 12 step call from an alcoholic that could not use Zoom. We need to meet the alcoholics where they are at.
- Online formats are imperative for disseminating information.
- In the future, we will likely continue to have online business as well as in person because we're not always able to meet everyone face to face. I could see online panels, workshops, an online pre-assembly and Delegate's report.
- We can no longer pick up fliers at our meetings. We need to email information, get it on the website, and get it translated. People can't come to virtual meetings, pre-assemblies, panels, workshops etc. if they don't know that they are happening.

