

# ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS GROUP HANDBOOK



## **Alcoholics Anonymous Preamble**

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women 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, organisation 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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This booklet is produced by the Australasia General Service Office trading as The Australian Conference of Central Service Offices. ACCSO's function is guided by the group conscience of its affiliated groups.

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## INTRODUCTION

This group handbook has been produced by the South East Australasia General Service Office trading as The Australian Conference of Central Service Offices (ACCSO) under the instructions of the affiliated Australian groups.

The content of this handbook has been based on the collective wisdom of past productions of both the USA and Australian Group Handbooks combined with relevant present Australian AA experience. The information contained within this booklet is built from the simple principles of Alcoholics Anonymous that have provided hope and sobriety over decades to thousands of members who have gone before us. AA's message remains the same but necessary content has been added to meet present culture and circumstances in AA Australia.

Over time, many Australian members felt that somehow AA's spiritual focus and purpose had been lost in the Australian general service structure with an over emphasis on structure, legalism and other matters rather than AA's primary purpose.

As a result of this Delegate Bodies in Australia resolved to start ACCSO to serve those members, service entities and groups in and around Australia who were being denied participation in AA Australia and felt alienated and excluded from the wider fellowship.

ACCSO is united in its desire to be an effective, responsible and accountable AA service entity in carrying the AA message with the sole focus on AA's primary purpose: to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

These pages reflect the collective wisdom of past members and groups in Australia and USA combined with relevant present Australian AA experience.

ACCSO hopes that this information offers support and fellowship in its guidance to newcomers, members and groups finding their way through the AA experience in Australia.

## WHAT IS THIS BOOKLET ABOUT?

Usually a handbook is something connected with really organised societies and tells about codes of laws, rules and regulations, and cut-and-dried ways of doing things.

But AA has almost none of these: no central authority, practically no structural organisation, and only a handful of Traditions instead of laws. AA works primarily through local groups and each group is independent; this is known as autonomy in AA.

Much of AA's essential group work is done by volunteers. Each of us in AA is entitled, and expected, to do our AA job our own way, in the way we think best within the spirit of AA's Twelve Traditions. The AA idea has always been to keep things as simple and uncomplicated as we can - while helping each other as much as we can.

As AA grows and is called upon more and more to help alcoholics, we try to find ways of doing whatever has to be done without getting AA tightly organised.

This booklet tries to help. It does not tell anyone what to do, but for new members, new office bearers and other interested AA's it shows many of the good, proved-by-experience ways other members have used in their groups to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

Rarely, nowadays, does a group use written by-laws, although in early AA days they were sometimes considered desirable. Often, the more written rules and laws a group passed, the more problems it created; so most of the old by-laws have gradually given way to customary procedures.

Over and over, however, one group idea from those early days has proved right: the better informed group members are, the more they participate in decisions, the healthier and happier the group usually is, and the fewer differences, criticisms and problems arise.

This is a handbook of suggestions drawn from AA experience all over the world to help group members keep well informed. It does not begin with "how an AA group starts," because most AA members' first join an existing group and first want to know how that home group functions. Usually, it is only after belonging to an already growing group that an

AA member gets involved in starting a new group.

Traditionally, any two alcoholics meeting together for purposes of sobriety may consider themselves an AA group, provided that, as a group, they are self-supporting and have no outside affiliation.

## **HOW THINGS GET DONE IN YOUR AA GROUP**

### ***1. Why do groups have “office bearers”?***

All sorts of jobs have to be done to keep an AA group going - or to start one. Most of us agree, “AA, as such, ought never be organised; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve” (Tradition 9).

It is through the work of group members in AA that people struggling with drinking problems in the community learn that AA is available and how to find it. Calls for help are answered. A meeting place is provided, made ready, and cleaned up after meetings. Programs are arranged for meetings. AA literature is on hand and refreshments are served. Necessary money is collected and properly spent. Group problems get solved. Necessary contact is made with the rest of AA – locally through AA Central Service Offices and where applicable an area general service committee, otherwise through the local General Service Office.

It takes people to get these jobs done. In AA groups they are called “office bearers” or “trusted servants” but our Second Tradition reminds us, ‘Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.’ They are usually chosen by the group for limited terms of service and the jobs they do have titles. However, in AA titles do not bring authority or honour; they describe services and responsibilities. They are ways of carrying the message. They are forms of Twelfth Step work AA members do, primarily to help themselves recover. It is said that learning to accept responsibility in the group is a privilege. Handled properly it can be helpful in recovery. Many AA members have found group duties an excellent way to strengthen their own sobriety.

### ***2. What office bearers do we need?***

Individual groups have many ways of making sure the necessary services are performed with a minimum of organisation. For example, a typical group may have the following workers: Steering committee members, Group secretary, Group treasurer, Central service representative (Delegate), General service representative (G.S.R.), Literature officer or some combination of these varying from time to time and place to

place. The important thing is - the jobs get done not who does them.

### **3. *Why have a group steering committee/group conscience?***

Questions about what a group should do and how it addresses these matters sometimes arise. The steering committee is one way of getting those questions handled for the group. As an experienced cross section of the group membership, it can handle day-to-day operations for the group. Anywhere from three to five members may be the right-sized steering committee for a small group. For larger ones, 12 or so members provide a better cross-section and share the work load in a fairer way. In many groups the group officers are automatically the steering committee. Sometimes, former officers make good members because of their experience. These steering committees are frequently now referred to as “group consciences.”

### **4. *What do secretaries do?***

Like other group servants, they should have been sober for a while - probably a year. They should have had other group service experience before tackling this job. At least, that’s what most groups have found works best.

They co-ordinate group activities, trying to prevent confusion and misunderstandings in group affairs. They may substitute for other group officers occasionally. They probably call steering committee/group conscience meetings and chair them. They may open all regular group meetings, then turn them over to other members who are Chairpersons for that one session only.

Secretaries have the final responsibility for the smooth functioning of groups. Actually, it does not seem to matter which group officer does which job, as long as all jobs get done without confusion or conflict. It is very important for everybody to understand who is to do what.

Secretaries are often responsible for maintaining good relations between groups and their neighbouring communities. For example, if the group meets on church property, what the minister and church members think of AA depends mostly on the behaviour of the group members. If AA members are pleasant, our work is respected and sick alcoholics are encouraged to contact us. If we are found to be troublesome, the word that gets around does not attract sick alcoholics to us. The same goes for local doctors, police, social workers and others who encounter sick alcoholics. Usually, the better informed that

members are about AA, the better they function in their roles. If they keep Tradition One in mind and help their groups keep aware of all the Traditions, they will probably find their own welfare flourishing with that of the groups they serve. Secretaries need to be good all-round group servants. Unless other officers have some of these jobs to do, the following may be typical responsibilities of a secretary:

- Opening the meeting, seeing that AA literature is on hand at all times. (This could be the role of the Literature officer if the group has one.) Central Service Office has literature readily available for your group)
- Making special announcements about important AA activities as circulated by neighbouring groups or the Central Service Office
- Keeping an up to date strictly confidential file of contact details of group members (subject to each member's approval) and knowing which ones are available for Twelfth Step calls (and ensuring that the Central Service Office has those details)
- Accepting and assigning calls for Twelfth Step help (unless there is a Twelfth Step officer for this particular duty- many fill in this detail when registering or updating the group information with Central Service Office); many individual members pass on their own details to Central Service Office as well
- Making sure the rent is paid on the group's post office box (groups have found this an efficient mailing address for the group)
- Ensuring the group's rent is paid to the landlord for hall hire
- Keeping a file on the group's anniversary if the group wishes and notifying Central Service Office
- Helping the treasurer count and keep a record of each meeting's collection and co- signing the group's cheques (if a cheque account exists) Surplus funds contributed to Central Service Offices are often done by EFT these days; it is important to remember to reference your group name in any of these transactions so your central office can acknowledge receipt
- Maintaining an effective communication between group members and Central Service Office for advising the group's AA Event,

anniversary, announcements

- Sharing with the group members communication from other groups and the central office, unless the central office representative (delegate) does this
- Providing safe-keeping for group financial records (archival records such as completed AA meeting registers are often sent to Central Office for retaining in the AA Archives)
- Making sure that the Central Service Office know of any changes of address, meeting-place, new officer bearers, etc. (the central service representative (delegate) may do this, but the secretary can make sure it is being done.)
- Doing whatever else needs to be done. These tasks are performed by various officers in some groups. But as we have mentioned before: it does not seem to matter which officers do which jobs, as long as all the necessary jobs get done and it is understood who is to do what. Like any other group officer, the secretary has special responsibility for seeing that newcomers get help. Some groups use an alternate or assistant secretary to share the work load (and prepare to replace the outgoing secretary.)

### **5. What do treasurers do?**

AA groups are self-supporting (Tradition 7), accepting money only from members and, in most cases, only enough to carry the message and to maintain the communications and other services necessary to keep AA available for those who want it. Usually, passing the basket at meetings takes care of the group's money needs, plus something left over so the group can do its fair share of supporting the central service office and an active area committee.

But it helps if treasurers report to their group conscience meetings regularly, showing what the money is needed for. There is no formal obligation for any member to contribute, but most do. Those who can are generally willing to put in a bit extra to make up for those unable to give at present. Group funds usually go for such services as : Rent, light, heat, refreshments, coffee and the like. Other group expenses may include AA signs, cups, etc., AA literature (Books and pamphlets and the State monthly AA magazines such as NSW "The Reviver" and Victoria's "The News", meeting lists (usually obtained from the central

office), running the Central Service Office.

The South East Australasia General Service Office (SEAGSO) is primarily a clearing house for AA literature to distribute to the participating Central Service Offices (CSO's); its income is derived from the CSO's literature purchases - there is a marginal mark-up on pricing to cover overheads etc. for literature storage.

Treasurers usually keep good, simple records. They keep their groups informed about how much is taken in and how it is spent by making brief monthly or quarterly reports to their group consciences. Problems can be avoided by keeping funds in a separate group bank account which requires two signatures on cheques or some similar arrangement. Experience has shown that two members authorised to withdraw AA funds are preferred to one. Having said that nowadays EFT transactions are common and an accepted form of practice. Bank statements are encouraged to be readily accessible for the group conscience.

There are other ways of doing this job and any other AA task, of course (no pamphlet can spell them all out). However, the methods suggested here have proved to eliminate troubles later. Most groups now find it makes good sense to budget all expenses in advance, setting aside sums from each collection in order to meet all their responsibilities.

AA experience clearly shows that it is not a good idea for a group to accumulate large funds beyond its regular needs and a prudent reserve. Group troubles may also arise if extra-large donations in money, goods or services are accepted from one member.

Group treasuries are used for all group expenses but not for members' expenses in individual Twelfth Step work.

Most groups want AA to endure and to be readily available to any alcoholic who comes along needing help. Many make this possible by sending regular contributions to CSO.

### ***6. What do general service representatives (GSR's) do?***

Working via the district and area committees, the GSR is the group's link with the General Service Conference, through which the Australian groups share experience and voice AA's collective conscience. GSR's receive and share with their groups all communications from GSO including reports on the annual Conference. They keep fellow members informed about local area general service activities. Each represents

his or her group at area service assemblies, sharing experience with neighbouring GSR's, and helping choose the area's Conference delegate.

Good office bearers, particularly group representatives of a decision making capacity, need to use the spirit of AA's Twelve Traditions and it is favourable that they are familiar with our Third Legacy and our spiritual responsibility to give service freely. They can be a part of their group's inventory to self-assess, solve problems and avoid foolish mistakes. They can draw on all the facilities of central office, where the staff and trusted servants are ready to relay helpful AA experience from collective experience over the decades in the groups State. GSO is another avenue to assist with experience over the decades from other cultures around the world.

### ***7. What do central office representatives (Delegates) do?***

Each group usually elects a representative who meets with other such representatives several times a year; these group representatives are often referred to as Delegates. If this is your job, you represent your group in tasks undertaken jointly with other groups in your community and try to keep your groups well informed on the jobs the central office is doing.

One of the ways in which you can be most valuable is in sharing experiences with representatives from other groups. Often, you find, one of them can tell you how his or her group has already solved a problem now facing your own group.

They keep fellow members informed about local central service activities and initiatives. Each represents his or her group at quarterly Delegates meetings, sharing experience with neighbouring Delegates. Good central service representatives, as with other service officers, really use the spirit of our Twelve Traditions and it is favourable that they are familiar with our Third Legacy and our spiritual responsibility to give service freely. They can be a part of their group's inventory to self-assess, solve problems and avoid foolish mistakes. They can draw on all the facilities of central office, where the staff and trusted servants are ready to relay helpful AA experience from collective experience over the decades in the groups State.

### ***8. How about AA in institutions?***

The most successful groups in institutions usually follow as closely as possible the procedures of other AA groups, adapting them as necessary,

but trying to use the same principles. Groups outside institutions usually feel a special responsibility to incarcerated alcoholics and can be of great help to them. In fact, in some cases, AA may be the only source of hope and help for these people. Whenever AA members have taken the attitude, both toward institutionalised alcoholics and toward the staff of institutions of “How can we be of service?” the AAs have been able to help many alcoholics in prisons, clinics, hospitals and rest-homes. But an AA attitude of “We are the experts” can cause institutional personnel to feel unfriendly toward AA and this can deprive some sick alcoholics of their chance at the AA recovery program. It has proved important always for AA members to show respect for all institutional rules and regulations. After all, we are guests in such places and should be on our best behaviour to attract alcoholics to our way of life. Attraction, not promotion, is best for AA. Here are some of the ways groups have helped alcoholics who are confined in institutions:

- Choosing an institutions representative (sometimes central service delegates perform this role) who reminds other members periodically of the need for twelfth-stepping in institutions.
- Providing members to assist on rosters to the institutions organised by the members of Central Service Office or a local AA group (coordinators contact details are usually listed at the Central Service Office, regional Group or active general service area committee in the absence of a CSO)
- Providing AA literature for alcoholics in institutions (AA pamphlets and books) either directly through the correctional facility coordinators or through the Central Service Office. (Some CSO’s have a dedicated Prison Literature Fund that your group may wish to contribute to - this is a fund set up to provide AA literature to prisons)
- Supplying speakers, literature and refreshments for AA meetings in institutions through the correctional facility coordinators of AA groups or Central Office
- Furnishing AA speakers and literature for the staff of institutions as well.
- Attending AA meetings in institutions.
- Making sure that those who join AA behind the walls have AA sponsors and support upon release
- Welcoming newcomers from treatment centres - keeping in mind

that they usually are already sober and have been given some introduction to the AA program.

### ***9. How are group officers elected?***

**The spirit of rotation is important for all office bearers in AA.**

Group workers are generally chosen by the group for limited terms of service. (The term may be six months or a year, it varies.) In some groups a steering committee (the group conscience) simply names the new group officers periodically. In others, regular elections are held. A steering committee may suggest who might make good officers. For a non-nominating, non-politicking election procedure, the group might want to use the Third Legacy procedure described later in this booklet.

### ***10. What are some good qualifications for group office bearers?***

Most groups make sure that their officers have some continuous sobriety behind them and are available and willing to give dependable service. It has generally been found that giving members jobs solely to help them stay sober does not work; instead, the group's welfare is of primary concern in choosing officers. A review of Traditions 1 and 2 helps at election time. Most group officers realise that giving service to a group, like staying sober, may sometimes involve doing tasks whether they want to, feel like it, or not. More and more, group trusted servants have found that knowledge of all Three Legacies of AA service helps them to do a better job. A thorough familiarity with all AA publications is a good way to begin.

### ***11. Why are some AA jobs more popular than others?***

It takes a certain type of courage to do some AA jobs like the job of central service representative (delegate) and secretary to name a couple. Standing up before your friends month after month, to remind the group of its responsibilities to other AA groups and to alcoholics in other areas, is not always fun or an easy road to popularity. As almost anyone who has done these jobs can tell you, about the third time someone reminds the group that "the central office is low on funds," or that "we still do not have enough speakers for rosters at the office" you'll hear complaints.

The ones who complain about your trying to do your job may make the most noise, but you can generally count on the group conscience to be quietly on your side. Most AA members are happy to contribute to the service of other alcoholics and appreciate being reminded of the

need and having AA's needs explained with the solution on what they can do about it.

Remember, too, that new AA members come in all the time and do not know of these things which seem elementary to the rest of us. Therefore, many of us pray for the courage to change ignorance into enlightenment. We try to remember that principles should be placed before personalities in AA, as our Twelfth Tradition says. In planning your reports to the group, it also helps to remember that most of us respond better to calm, factual talk (maybe spiked with humour - use your imagination!) than we do to demands or preaching.

### ***12. Is rotation important?***

Traditionally, rotation keeps AA volunteers from becoming frozen in their offices. This is also a strong sentiment for paid roles in AA too. Volunteer AA roles, like almost everything else in AA, get passed around for all to share. After one term in any office, most members move on to other kinds of AA service. (Many groups have alternate or assistant officers who can step into the officers' jobs they have been trained for and new members can take the alternate slots just vacated.) This way problems based on personalities are prevented; no power or prestige gets built up; no individual gets taken advantage of or imposed upon; and the blessings of giving service are shared by more and more members.

To step out of an AA service role you love can be hard. If you have been doing a good job, if you honestly do not see anyone else around willing, qualified, or with the time to do it, and if your friends agree, it is especially tough. But it can be a real step forward in growth; a step into the humility that is, for some people, the spiritual essence of anonymity. Among other things, anonymity in AA means that we forgo personal prestige for any AA work we do to help other alcoholics (see Tradition 12).

Rotation helps bring us spiritual rewards far more enduring than any fame. With no AA status at stake, we have complete freedom to serve as we are needed, and we do not have to compete for any titles or praise. We can always step into another AA job, such as being an always dependable twelfth-stepper or a volunteer at the AA central office. AA jobs are not arranged upward like rungs on a ladder; they are all on the same level, the base of service to others which seems

to be the foundation of recovery under God's will as we understand it.

### ***13. What kinds of meeting programs can a group have?***

Every AA group is autonomous, our Fourth Tradition says, "except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole." So a group can hold practically any type of meeting it chooses. Some common types are:

- Closed. For alcoholics only (in institutions sometimes restricted to patients or inmates only). Any format can be used such as meetings on the Twelve Steps, the Twelve Traditions, the Big Book, topics, speaker or discussion.
- Open. Anyone interested may attend open speaker meetings. These usually consist of a few members, selected beforehand (often from another group) who tell, in a general way, what they were like, what happened and what they are like now, as the Big Book describes "sharing." Usually at meetings like this, groups prefer that the member has a little time of continuous sobriety (say, at least three months) before making a "talk". Often at "identification" meetings, where a dozen or so members are asked to speak, no one asks how long a speaker has been sober. Some groups feel it is important to "balance" the meeting program, making sure both men and women are heard, both newer members and older ones. In some localities an announcement about the importance of anonymity in the public media is read aloud.
- Open discussion meetings are held in many places. At these, non-alcoholics may take part in the discussion with the approval of the group conscience.
- Public meetings. These are speaker-type meetings with emphasis on informing the non-alcoholic public about AA. Doctors, members of the clergy and public officials are invited. Often a prominent guest speaker is heard in addition to AA members. The Public Information Packs from Central Offices provides a plethora of AA pamphlets and information that can complement such a meeting.
- Beginners. These can be smaller, more intimate meetings with an opportunity for question-and-answer sessions to help newcomers. A guide for Leading Beginners' Meetings is available from CSO
- Steps Meetings. Since the Steps are the basis of our recovery, some groups study each Step in rotation, or perhaps two or three at a

time. The leader shares a bit of his or her story or talks on the Step briefly, then throws the meeting open for discussion, each member having an opportunity to share their experience on the step.

### **14. *What is the usual meeting procedure?***

Experience shows rotation of Chairpersons is important. Choosing Chairpersons on a rotating basis is a proven method; rotating between male and female acknowledging a good cross section of the membership is also good. Generally, it is customary for the group secretary to select the Chairperson for an AA meeting.

No one type or format is “the best” for an AA meeting, but some work better than others. The group secretary or chairperson usually opens the meeting with a few remarks before introducing the speaker, anonymously, of course. If AA speakers wish to use their full names that is their privilege, but no one has the right to reveal any other member’s full name or identity, even at an AA meeting. Most chairpersons open the meeting by reading the Preamble, which appears inside the front cover of this handbook. Others call for a moment of silence to quietly reflect on our primary purpose. Some have a reading of part of Chapter 3 (“More About Alcoholism”) or Chapter 5 (“How It Works”) from the book “Alcoholics Anonymous” (usually referred to as The Big Book. In other places the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are read. Having different members perform these tasks at different times helps people get acquainted and feel they are sharing in group life. Most meetings come to a close by members repeating the Serenity Prayer in unison.

Obviously, no one meeting can contain all these formalities and have much time left for anything else. Experience shows that meetings too loaded with ritualistic readings get dull and members stay away. (But what is ‘too much’ for one group may not be enough for another.) A group’s customs can help it develop solidarity and can provide a reassuring feeling of continuity for troubled people. But just a little bit of ceremony seems to go a long, long way in AA. Variety and change can always bring a fresh look to the same principles. Informed guest speakers, such as doctors, psychiatrists, members of the clergy, alcoholism workers, public officials, Al-Anon Family Groups and Alateen members, often give helpful new insights and knowledge. Some groups like to play DVD’s. Audio of AA talks are sometimes played, especially in areas that need a wide variety of speakers. Most AA members are glad to be kept informed and inspired by variety in meeting formats.

### ***15. What about ‘the second half of the meeting’? A ‘cuppa’ and Fellowship***

Many AA members report they get almost as much good out of coffee and conversation after or before the meeting as they do out of the meeting itself. An Australian colloquialism that was fairly common (before the days of disposal cups in AA meetings) in AA meetings, “I got sober on the end of a tea towel.” It is customary for members to share in a ‘cuppa’ and Fellowship after an AA meeting.

Group finances and personal choice seem to be the best guide on what to serve. Most groups depend on members to do these tasks as a voluntary service. You often hear AA members say they first felt they belonged when they began helping with the chairs, setting up a meeting or cleaning up after a meeting. Many of us are shy and are grateful to be asked. Some newcomers find such activity relieves their shyness and makes it easier to meet and talk to other members. For many of us, this experience is our contribution to AA service. It is only fair, of course, that such jobs get passed around so no one begins to feel in charge.

### ***16. What is public information for?***

The heart of AA is one drunk carrying the message to another drunk. This is still a good, basic, down-to-earth AA way of staying away from the first drink. Sometimes, the one drunk has used a third person to get the message to the other drunk. One member, our co-founder, Dr Bob, used a non-alcoholic physician, Dr Silkworth, and a hospital to find other alcoholics to keep himself sober.

The Big Book, now in many languages, carries the message as does all AA literature. The message has also been carried to many other drunks by newspaper and magazine articles, the internet, radio and TV shows and AA public information committees. PI committees have carried the message to alcoholics in both treatment and correctional facilities and continue to do so through their Central Service Office or active area committee. Most groups realise now that no alcoholics can come to ask for help until they know where AA is. To tell them, many methods are used by groups.

Sometimes a small sign saying “AA Meeting Tonight” outside the door of a meeting place points the way. From AAs earliest days, small newspaper notices and radio announcements of meetings have been used effectively. They work.

An AA listing in the telephone directory as well as visible internet presence of the Central Service Office can help groups to reach the alcoholic wanting our help; it has proved a life saver for many.

Public meetings also frequently carry the message, especially when a group is interested in attracting new members, in saying thank you to old community friends, and in helping alcoholics generally, in or out of AA. As long as these methods of carrying the message demonstrate recovery, give information about the AA program (not about alcoholism) and do not boast about AA, they seem to be well within the spirit of Tradition II. Many groups regularly invite to their open or public meetings ministers, doctors, hospital and law-enforcement officials, employers, welfare workers and others who deal with alcoholics. Furnishing speakers for non-AA meetings of various organisations in the community also carries the message. Contact your Central Service Office for a helpful pamphlet entitled, "Speaking at Non-AA Meetings".

Central offices often perform some of these services for the group, but there is much the individual group can do to help. Brainstorm with the members at your Central Service Office to develop more ideas to carry the message.

**Should an AA group advertise?** Some groups do, but for only one reason, to let the community know of the availability of help through the recovery program. Such small-space advertising, usually in local newspapers, on community notice boards in the vicinity of the meeting place is designed exclusively to let people know how to get in touch with the fellowship, if they so desire. Remember, AA is based on attraction rather than promotion. However, AA is not a secret society and unlike individual identities in AA, *the Fellowship itself* is not anonymous. A typical advertisement might look like this:

**FACED WITH A DRINKING PROBLEM?** *Perhaps Alcoholics Anonymous Can Help. Please call 1300AAHOPE for immediate and reliable help or visit [www.accso.org.au](http://www.accso.org.au) to get in touch with your nearest AA office. A comment stating that the local AA meeting is open to the public and is held weekly on (DAY) at (TIME) at (LOCATION).*

### ***17. How can newcomers be reached and helped?***

Naturally, no alcoholics can be helped by AA unless they know AA exists and where to find it. So it is a good idea for a group to have printed a flyer of its name, meeting place and time with a telephone contact. Pl cards and Posters are usually available from your Central Service Office

with room to write your local meeting details on them.

These flyers/PI cards/PI posters can be given to places like police stations, rehab facilities, hospitals or clinics, doctors, clergy and churches, social, health and welfare agencies and community centres in the community. Let sick alcoholics know where you are.

In large urban areas, the meeting lists/books/AA monthly magazines showing all groups can be used, with the central office contact details. Along with the notices, it is a good idea to also distribute the AA pamphlets such as “Is AA For You?”, “AA at a Glance”, “A Brief Guide to AA”. Some groups keep lists of members available to do Twelfth Step work. Some groups have greeters (many times the secretary’s role) to make sure no new member, inquiring prospect, or visitor goes unwelcomed, unanswered or unwanted. Many groups hold special beginners’ meetings. Some groups give each new person a copy of the Big Book and a meetings book/list and perhaps a sponsor’s wallet/beginners pack/starters pack readily available from central office. Or they let the newcomer buy the Big Book. Sponsors normally take responsibility for helping newcomers’ find their way in AA, their own way, not the sponsor’s way.

Through our collective experience, we are convinced: The best way to keep sobriety is to give it away. Much help can be found in the AA pamphlet “Questions and Answers on Sponsorship.”

### ***18. How do group problems get solved?***

Sometimes it is hard to tell the difference between a group problem and a group blessing. Each has a way of turning into the other as time passes, depending on who is looking at it. Group problems are usually a sign that the group is meeting the experience of life and growing. They are often evidence of a healthy, desirable diversity of opinion among members. They give us a chance to learn how to practise these principles in all our affairs. Concerns have often been the springboard from which the best AA growth has come. Three factors seem to lead to this growth, namely;

- unity within the group
- harmony between the group and its neighbours, both other AA groups and the rest of the community
- an open door for everybody - wholehearted practice of Traditions 2 & 3

By the term ‘group problems’ we mean such common AA questions

as:

- (1) What should the group do about those who slip/bust or relapse?
- (2) How can we boost attendance at meetings?
- (3) How can we get more people to help with the group tasks?
- (4) How can we dig up more money for literature?
- (5) How can we get out from under the old-timers who insist they know what's best for the group?
- (6) How do we deal with the new member who is ruffling feathers in the group as the aggressive know-it-all?
- (7) How can we get some long-timers to share their experience to help solve group problems?
- (8) Should we celebrate individuals' anniversaries publicly?
- (9) What can be done about dirty jokes and profanity at meetings?
- (10) Why don't newcomers stay in our group?
- (11) A church or a clinic want to give us a free meeting space: should we take it?
- (12) Is group loyalty a good thing or not?
- (13) What can be done about an anonymity-breaker? An AA profiteer? Thirteenthstepping? Predatory behaviour? etc

Over the years many groups have had to overcome some of the tangled knots AA groups have faced. You will not find the answers here, but most AA groups have got out of situations like these and worse. The story of how they did it is to be found in our Twelve Traditions and other records of AA experience such as AA pamphlets, the books *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, and in group experience compiled in the archives of Central Service Office. All you have to do is read, speak to those members experienced in AA and who have faced similar challenges, and contact your service offices to gain some knowledge from our collective experience.

Often group problems are simply misunderstandings easily brought out in discussion. Or they may involve members trying to change other members' behaviour or opinions. Maybe two people mean different things by the same word. Or maybe members agree on a goal but simply

have varied opinions on how to reach it. Sometimes group problems concern honest disagreement between two sincere, well-meaning sets of members. They may be of equally good hearts and intentions but differ over which crowd performs certain AA services better, or which methods to use, or which bunch has the stronger 'right' to perform the jobs. In most cases, AA's Traditions and past experiences have guided the way to harmony in such matters and the result can be even better services.

No problem has led to drastic trouble for any group, since AA experience shows that goodwill, honesty, selflessness and a spirit of love and service prevail against group difficulties, if we make an honest effort to place principles before personalities (Tradition 12). A good sense of humour, cooling-off periods, patience, courtesy, willingness to listen and wait, a sense of fairness and trust in a Power greater than ourselves have been found far more useful than legalistic arguments or personal accusations. In recent years, several groups have found that they can apply in their groups some of the ideas in Bill W.'s Twelve Concepts for World Service.

### ***19. How do groups get started?***

Practically every AA group started when one or a handful of hardworking members set up a series of meetings, sometimes in somebody's home, and did the tasks necessary to keep it going. This often involved breaking off from an older, larger group or taking speakers into an institution where there were alcoholics, or filling some other needs at a certain place and time for a particular kind of sharing experience, strength and hope.

AA experience shows that our own interests and those of other alcoholics yet to come to AA are best served if we do not let personality factors, the stigma attached by ignorant people to our illness, minor discomforts in available meeting sites, or other elements keep us from starting new groups when the time is right for such action.

Continuing to carry the message of AA to other alcoholics who need and want help is the primary way we strengthen our own sobriety. The more healthy, message carrying groups there are in more places, the better we can help others and ourselves. Reluctance to start a new group where it could prove helpful reduces our chances of reaching someone to whom AA could mean the difference between life and death. Groups have not flourished, however, solely because handsome

meeting quarters were available, or because a few members wanted them to. Only if the group provides needed service for alcoholics, it seems, and uses the suggestions in our Traditions, does it attract and receive the support it needs to grow and prosper.

**How can you know whether there is a need for a group?**

**Tradition 4: Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other AA groups or AA as a whole.**

Ask yourself whether there are alcoholics in your neighbourhood who could benefit from AA presence. Find out whether there are some who may not understand it even if they do know of it. Believe it or not, many people have not heard of AA and many misunderstand it. This includes many alcoholics.\

In each community, certain people seem to be more familiar with the alcoholic situation than others. They know if there are alcoholics who need help and can even point out some who are ready for it. These people are often AA's natural allies and are usually very helpful in getting an AA group going. They include members of the clergy, doctors, hospital workers, police, employers, welfare workers, probation and parole officers, psychological counsellors, even some bartenders and, of course, people in hospitals, education programs and information centres. It is usually helpful to talk to some of these people to explain what AA is and especially what it is not, and why you want to start a group. Giving them the AA books and some pamphlets sometimes works wonders. It is particularly helpful to talk to the local media, not to ask for favours, but to let them know AA exists and can benefit those concerned with drinking problems. Remember, let neighbouring groups and your central office know if you start a new group. Much support and help can come from these sources.

If you are involved in helping a new group, you will find that the following three recommendations from the collective experience of AA members can help the group avoid vexing problems.

- 1) The primary purpose of any AA group is to carry the message to alcoholics. Experience with alcohol is one thing all AA members have in common. It is misleading to hint or give the impression that AA solves marital problems or knows what to do about addiction to heroin or other drugs. Drug addicts and

non-alcoholic family members are, like everybody else, free to attend any open AA meeting. However, the one requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking, and there is no way we in AA can turn non-alcoholics into alcoholics and thus enable them to qualify for AA membership. (Contact your Central Service Office for a copy of the pamphlet *Problems Other Than Alcohol*.) So most groups have found it necessary to elect members identifying as a member of AA to group service roles.

- 2) No matter how noble the activity or how worthy the institution, experience has taught AA groups to carefully avoid any affiliation with or endorsement of any enterprise outside AA. Even the appearance of being linked to any professional or lay organisation, club, political or religious persuasion, or institution needs to be avoided. Therefore, an AA group which meets in a correctional or treatment facility or a church can take care not to use the institution's name, but to call itself something quite different. This makes clear that the AA group is not affiliated with the hospital, church, prison, drop in centre, club, rehabilitation centre, or whatever, but simply uses space there for meetings
- 3) It has also been strongly recommended by the collective AA experience that no AA group be named after any actual person, living or dead, AA or non-AA. That is one way we can place principles before personalities (in the words of Tradition 12.)

### ***20. How do you become a group member?***

We usually say that anyone is a member of AA if he or she says so. Tradition 3 says, the only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking, and none of us can pretend to judge the desire in another's heart.

Generally a group member is a member of that particular group if he or she says so. Most groups have long ago given up such things as any formal procedure or ceremony for joining although, sometimes a list of group members is kept discreetly in order to communicate between each other, most groups will keep the names of members of the group confidential.

Collective experience has shown that it is good to advise Central Service Office as soon as office bearers are appointed to ensure the group is notified, through its office bearers, of special AA meetings or other events/anniversaries.

### **21. The AA Home Group**

The Home Group Experience has shown that for most AA members, membership in an AA group, known as a Home Group, is vital in maintaining sobriety in Alcoholics Anonymous.

In the early days of the Fellowship, AA members actually met in the homes of fellow members and shared their experience, strength and hope with one another. From this Home Group they went on to help newcomers seeking sobriety through AA. The concept of the Home Group has now expanded into hundreds of thousands of AA groups that members call their 'home'. Through the years, the very essence of AA strength has remained with the traditional AA Home Group. This is true especially where isolated alcoholics have found sobriety, fellowship, service work and the true joy of good living through their own AA group. Traditionally, most AA members have found it important to belong to one group which they call their Home Group. It is in this group that they accept responsibilities and try to sustain friendships. Although all AA members are welcome at all group meetings and feel at home at any of them, the concept of the Home Group has still remained the strongest bond between the AA member and the Fellowship.

*This Home Group concept affords the AA member the privilege and right to vote upon issues which might affect AA as a whole and is the very basis of our service structure where, in Concept I, Bill W. writes: The ultimate responsibility and final authority for World Services resides with the group...rather than with the trustees of the General Service Board or the General Service Office in New York. Obviously, as with all group conscience matters, AA members have one vote, and this, ideally would be through their Home Group.*

### **22. Getting started in a small regional community**

There may be problems for those of you who are starting an AA group in a small town, but these can be overcome if there is a willingness to make oneself known to the community as an AA member. Since many people will already be aware of your problem and will probably

be only too glad to know of the possibility of recovery, if they are given adequate information about the AA program. There should be no difficulty in letting key members of the community, such as doctors and law enforcement officials, know of the availability of AA and our willingness to help any alcoholic who is willing to accept help. If you feel comfortable revealing your AA membership, you could consider help from our friends in the community like clergy and community centres who may be able to help you to get started. It will likely be necessary to work through a non-alcoholic, if there is no nearby group or member to help. Other suggestions for a start include:

- (1) Connect with your State Central Service Office and its networks including social media, meetings directory, digital newsletters; CSO contains valuable information and may know someone in your vicinity in a similar position
- (2) Run a contact telephone number in the local newspaper;
- (3) Place a listing in the local phone book;
- (3) Put notices of availability of AA help in community bulletins;
- (4) Arrange to have some information or story about AA placed in the local paper (Central offices have special material available for the media).

Usually a group in a small town is comparably small. What often happens is that the

AA members come to a group meeting once a week and share their alcoholic experience. Over familiarity with these experiences can take the life out of a group.

So here are some suggestions to keep it alive:

- Two meetings a week could be scheduled, one closed and one open where the family and other community members may attend the open meeting. If an Al-Anon group is started, meetings can be held on the same night as the closed AA meeting.
- Step meetings could be planned, rotating the study of each Step at the closed meeting until all twelve have been covered.
- If geographically possible, exchange meetings could be planned with groups in nearby towns - you visit them, they visit you.

- Invite the general secretary or a member of the central service committee to talk at a meeting occasionally, so that the group may be informed of its part in the central service structure. You could also invite a member of an active area committee that could inform you of what's happening in the general service structure.
- If the group is too far away from other groups to allow for visiting groups and speakers, try for a meeting or two devoted to listening to MP3's or CD's or watching a DVD.
- It may be prudent to be a part of online Australian AA groups.
- Some closed meetings could be devoted to a study of a portion of the Big Book, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions or As Bill Sees It, asking each member of the group to take a turns as chairperson.
- As soon as a group has achieved a reasonable length of sobriety and solidity, a public meeting for the community might be planned, at which local dignitaries such as council, police, doctors and community centre staff could be invited to participate, along with one or two group members who would talk about the AA program and its availability locally and worldwide.
- Other suggestions might include making contact by telephone with the nearest groups or members to get a feeling of wider AA participation than is available through the group itself
- Keeping stock of all available AA pamphlets and books and see that the group contacts CSO to receive the monthly magazine.

Once a start has been made, it is very important to provide continuity for the meeting time and to see to it that at least one individual is at the meeting place every night on the day and before the hour designated, even if it may be a long time before another alcoholic shows up. Enthusiasm and happiness about our own sobriety in AA can do a lot to make the group work and be understood and accepted in the community.

### ***23. When is identifying myself as an AA member not an anonymity break?***

When you tell your story to a sick newcomer who has asked for AA help, is that an anonymity break? When you stand before AA groups and

say, “My name is Joe and I am an alcoholic,” is that an anonymity break? When you take Step 9? Generally, no is the answer. But getting your name, picture and AA story printed or broadcast may be in violation of our Tradition 1. Then there are the difficult borderline cases. Each one is different. AA makes no judgements of wrong or right in such matters. Nevertheless, our collective group experience suggests some guidelines:

- The word anonymous in our name is a promise of privacy. Most of us do not want to cater to the cruel stigma unjustly attached by ignorant people to the condition of alcoholism. But we have to face the fact that the stigma exists and that people suffer from it. Therefore, to those who have trouble with their drinking, who feel ashamed and guilty about it, who are afraid people will find out, we say, “Come on in. We understand, because we have been there. We’ll try to help and we promise you the private refuge of anonymity. “
- At the level of the media, social media, radio, TV and films, we do not reveal last names or any other identifying facts about any AA member
- We do not put “AA” on envelopes sent through the mail to members’ private addresses. In material to be posted on AA bulletin boards and printed AA programs that the general public might see, we omit last names and identifying titles of all members.
- Television shows and news photographs do not show members’ faces if they are identified as AAs. In news stories, we are identified by first names and last initials only. And we usually use first names only when speaking as AA members at non-AA meetings.
- We do not think it is a good idea to drum up business for AA with testimonials from celebrities. Occasionally, someone asks, “Don’t big, spectacular anonymity breaks help carry the message and encourage people to come into AA?” They may, but they also keep people out. Some stay out for fear their anonymity will be broken too. Others hear that anonymity-breaker’s story and say, “I am not that bad.” Others may not like the sober life or brand of AA exhibited by the celebrity and, of course, if the celebrity later gets drunk, how does it make AA look?

People in AA who maintain personal anonymity at the media level far outnumber those who do not. Hundreds of thousands, both famous and obscure, work actively, unashamedly, and privately, in AA.

- Within AA itself, where no stigma is attached to our common illness, we freely exchange our full names. We can keep in touch with, and help, one another.
- In personal, private and face-to-face relationships with non-alcoholics, we are not ashamed to say we are recovered, or recovering, alcoholics. Besides, this often helps carry the message to others. This in no way violates our Tradition about anonymity at the public level. When you tell the facts about yourself privately, it is not an anonymity break if it is your choice. Many of us feel that passing on our experience, strength and hope to other alcoholics is too important to let any fear of discovery or stigma stand in our way. If our cofounders, Bill W and Dr Bob, had said, “People would not understand,” and had not passed the message on, where would we all be?
- We do not hide our alcoholism in guilty secrecy out of fear and shame. That would actually strengthen even further the cruel stigma that unfortunately surrounds the victims of our illness. We remain anonymous at the media level for two reasons: (1) our promise of privacy to the still suffering alcoholic and his or her family; (2) a spiritual reason, summed up in Tradition 12 or in the word humility.
- With anonymity, we renounce personal prestige for our AA recovery and work to placing the emphasis on our principles, the Power that really heals us, not our personal selves. That is why Dr Bob, discouraging plans for a massive AA memorial mausoleum, said, “I want to just get buried like anybody else.” That is why Bill turned down the dream of his life, an honour from one of the world’s mightiest, proudest universities. Those two men set the example for all of us. For the good of AA as a whole, then, and for all alcoholics in it (or on their way to it), we probably need to keep thinking deeply and spiritually about anonymity for a long time to come. (See also the pamphlet *Understanding Anonymity*.)

### ***24. What is the difference between a meeting and a group?***

The group conscience of AA seems to have agreed upon six points that suggest an AA group:

- All members of a group are alcoholics and all alcoholics are eligible for membership.
- As a group, they are fully self-supporting.
- A group's primary purpose is to help alcoholics recover through the Twelve Steps.
- As a group, they have no outside affiliation.
- As a group, they have no opinion on outside issues.
- As a group, their public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion, and they maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV and films.

Regularly scheduled meetings, of course, are the chief activity of any AA group. Some degree of structure is needed to keep these meetings dependable and effective. So the members of the group usually elect officers and some members are asked or volunteer to handle housekeeping, chores and refreshments. Outside meeting hours, the group continues to exist, ready to offer help when needed. Other activities may include Twelfth Step calls, institutions work and public information work. In small communities, the group may handle such responsibilities entirely on its own. In metropolitan areas, a plea from an alcoholic may be relayed to the group by a central office and group members may be called upon to assist a local Public Information initiative. As this booklet has already noted, the group should also keep in touch with AA by asking to be listed at the Central Service Office and electing a central service delegate, in order to link itself with the vital central service structure - the Twelfth Step hub.

There is generally a primary service hub in each State. This does not minimise the service work of smaller central offices or other service entities such as the local area general service committee.

Some AAs, however, also attend meetings that are not a function of any established AA group. Here are two characteristics that may distinguish such a meeting from a group:

- 1) Some of those who participate regularly in the meeting may not be alcoholics. For example, meetings in this category might include

both AA's and their non-alcoholic spouses or other relatives, who gather together to share experience.

- 2) The meeting is concerned partly with another problem that those attending have in common, in addition to their alcoholism. A meeting of this type might consist of people who suffer from dual addiction to alcohol and pills. Often, such people find it helpful to give equal time to discussion of drugs or other problems, a practice not normally followed by AA groups. In some instances, the distinction between a meeting and a group may be narrow. For example, some AA's come together as specialised groups, for men, women, young people, doctors, gays, emergency services and others. If the members are all alcoholics, and if they open the door to all alcoholics who seek help, regardless of profession, gender or other distinction and meet all the other aspects defining an AA group, they may call themselves a group. On the other hand, if they meet most of the criteria defining an AA group but, for example, give equal time to discussing matters other than living in recovery from alcoholism, then they are holding specialised meetings that do not characterise a group. Gatherings such as these are attended by some AA's, as an adjunct to, but not a substitute for, regular meetings held by AA groups.

### **25. *How is a group inventory taken?***

The group conscience could ask these questions:

- Is the group attracting only a certain kind of alcoholic, or are we getting a good- cross section of our community?
- Do new members stick with us, or does turn over seem excessive?
- How effective is our sponsorship? How can it be improved?
- Has everything possible been done to provide an attractive meeting place?
- Has enough effort been made to explain to all members the need and value of kitchen and housekeeping work and other services to the group?
- Is adequate opportunity given to all members to speak and participate in other group activities?
- Are group officers picked with care and consideration on the basis that officers bear a great responsibility and opportunity

for Twelfth Step work?

- Does the group carry its fair share of the job of helping central service?
- Does the group help out other groups and institutions?
- Do we give all members their fair chance of keeping informed about the whole of AA, Recovery, Unity and Service?

You will probably want to add questions of your own to discuss.

### ***26. Can we get help from other groups?***

Groups in some communities have found that carrying the message is done better and faster if they pool their efforts, especially in projects that affect more than one group. That is why and how a central office gets started. There is also a way your group can share the experience of the thousands of other groups throughout the world. Contact the SEAGSO for more information.

## **HOW THINGS GET DONE IN YOUR CENTRAL SERVICE OFFICE**

### ***27. How do such offices start?***

How can we find out where and when nearby groups meet? How can we exchange speakers with other groups, or hold joint meetings or social gatherings with them occasionally? If we had one central place where prospective members could telephone, or come, could we not put them in touch with the group right in their own neighbourhood and thus get help to them quicker? If the groups pooled efforts, could we not do a better job of carrying the message to institutions? Or helping sick alcoholics in hospitals? When questions like these come up, neighbouring groups usually develop a system for working together. Earlier in this booklet, we mentioned, "All sorts of jobs have to get done." Central service offices get going simply as the easiest, most efficient way of getting AA jobs done well, providing services for alcoholics with a minimum of organisation (see Traditions 8 and 9). Experience shows that such offices can perform many jobs better (with more groups communication, less groups confusion) than many individual groups can in different, uncoordinated, separate ways.

### ***28. What are they needed for?***

Home Groups are often described as the heartbeat of AA. Similarly,

Central Service Offices are as important to Alcoholics Anonymous in Australia. CSO's may have one or more paid workers and a number of volunteers handling such responsibilities as:

- The public face of AA - accountability, credibility and responsibility for the Fellowship in its State/locale
- The first contact point for sick and suffering alcoholics
- The communications link particularly with the reliable 24 hour helplines/websites
- Maintaining AA listings in local telephone books, online, handling telephone and mail inquiries and directing them to local groups, thus distributing Twelfth Step work on a geographical basis so sick alcoholics get help.
- Serving as a communications centre for groups, often using social media, website and other electronic communications, regular newsletters or bulletins to keep groups informed about one another, distributing up- to-date lists of all meetings, notifying of group anniversaries/events etc.
- Arranging systems for groups to exchange speakers, such as multiple group round- ups, program exchanges, etc.
- Sponsoring and arranging any joint social occasions the groups may want.
- Keeping institutions work going through rosters
- Helping arrange sponsorship for hospitalised or institutionalised alcoholics - playing the role of 'bridge' linking the sick alcoholic to the AA groups
- Link and lifeline for members who may be having a battle
- A safe and secure place for walk-ins to receive immediate help
- Handling requests for information about AA from local news media, arranging local radio or TV programs about AA and furnishing speakers for non-AA organisations.
- Assisting/underwriting significant PI events and publications for the State/locale
- Maintaining contact and building relationships with other organisations partially or wholly in the field of alcoholism including detoxification centres, rehabilitation centres, correctional facilities, community centres and the like

- Distributing complimentary material to both external organisations and newcomers on behalf of the groups
- Sourcing, managing and providing AA and other literature for the States/locales groups and members
- Holding AA business meetings at the office and/or arranging for those meetings to occur elsewhere including Delegates, Central Service Committee, participation in ACCSO (SE GSO) meetings
- Competent office administration ensuring AA meets all legal requirements
- Managing and displaying archives material accumulated by the Fellowship over the decades dating back to fledgling days of AA existence in Australia
- Connecting with members and newcomers who are reluctant to attend regular open AA meetings; the office sometimes arranges for onsite/off site AA meetings for those not wishing to be in the public eye for whatever reason.
- Answering many letters/emails asking for help for alcoholics (these are referred to local groups when possible).
- Publishing and circulating the monthly meeting in print - the AA magazines, such as Victoria's The News and NSW The Reviver
- Distributing the AA books and pamphlets
- Providing free material to assist groups, especially new groups and newcomers
- Acting as the hub that links groups so that the "left foot knows what the right foot" is doing
- Producing and distributing public information kits for local group PI service
- Handling public information (at the State level) for AA - being the public face of AA this includes newspapers, magazines, radio and TV networks, film producers, social media, websites etc., along with other AOD organisations or those organisations wanting information about Alcoholics Anonymous and/or State based programmes.

*The offices serve and are responsible to their affiliated groups through their committees/boards and the Delegate Bodies of groups that created them.*

### ***29. How do they function?***

Any group that wants to can belong to a central service office. Member groups ordinarily elect a central service representative, commonly known as a Delegate, to represent them in multi-group affairs. Financial support to such a service office by its member groups is usually voluntary and not a requirement for membership. Most members know, however, that they cannot expect good service unless they pay their share for it; it is unfair to expect only some of the affiliated groups to financially underwrite their office.

In locations where it may not be practical to open a service office such as remote regional locations, groups sometimes set up a responsible joint committee for joint planning and efforts and use a carefully briefed central telephone-answering service to take Twelfth Step calls. Your State CSO can advise on many of the mechanics of central office systems now working. (Incidentally, it is important to note that usually a local service system of this type works better if it is entirely separate and apart from the local area general service committee. The general service workers have their hands full with other jobs).

### ***30. How can you help?***

Since central offices answer for us the Twelfth Step calls we cannot get to, or the ones that come in while we are working, some AA members try to find other ways of performing their share of the local services. They serve on committees faithfully when asked (and thus broaden their outlook and friendship circle), and try to find other volunteer jobs they can do. A major way of helping, which none of us deny, is giving trust (see Tradition 2), support, interest and appreciation to the group's central office representative (delegate) and all the other trusted servants who labour in these particular AA offices; experience has shown central offices are essential hubs to AA's growth in Australia. Often in AA, assistance improves things where criticism will not. As has been said better elsewhere, it is more of a blessing to give our share of service than to receive it.

## **GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE**

### ***31. How did GSO start in USA?***

In North America right after the first AA members published the book

Alcoholics Anonymous they turned it over to a non-profit foundation. The Alcoholic Foundation became the focal point for questions about AA from all over the world. Therefore, it also became a sort of repository for an accumulation of worldwide AA experience and know-how and was AA's first office, the forerunner of the General Service Office (GSO) of today. The foundation is now called the General Service Board of AA USA/Canada. Its trustees, non-alcoholic and alcoholic alike, have been entrusted with the supervision of the two service agencies (AA World Services, Inc., and AA Grapevine, Inc.) and are the custodians of all funds contributed by the North American groups.

### **32. South East Australasia GSO**

In Australia, the South East Australasian General Service Office (SE GSO - ACCSO) is not the focal point for groups in the service structure. Emphasis is placed on the Central Offices and our primary purpose rather than on structure and administrative procedure. The SEAGSO is merely a necessary administrative body providing literature to central offices that require it. Reports/financials etc are readily available to all delegate bodies around Australia and elsewhere annually (following the financial year end) but available at all other times should they be required.

### **33. Who is the boss?**

*No AA committee, Board or members serving at a service office are the bosses. The structural authority of Alcoholics Anonymous is a loving God as He may express himself in group consciences of AA groups.*

The South East GSO/ACCSO is responsible to those they serve, their affiliated groups and the participating central offices. Each year, representatives from the central offices physically meet at an annual Conference. This is the opportunity to share AA business issues and/or programmes/methods deployed by each CSO to carry the message on behalf of their affiliated groups. This sharing of information is vital to collectively strengthen our endeavours to carry AA's message. Each representative reports back to the groups in his or her region at least once per year. ACCSO is responsible to ensure an assembly of group representatives is held at least once annually. This assembly provides the vehicle to pass along other interstate groups' experience and other information obtained on an international level.

### **34. How are SEAGSO/ACCSO services supported?**

Like the expenses of other AA activities, those of SEAGSO are met principally by the participating central offices. Overheads are minimal and income to meet expenses is derived from a small margin achieved on literature sales.

The function of the SEAGSO formalises the way in which our AA literature is sourced; it is the conduit between the USA and Australia.

### ***35. How can you help SEAGSO (ACCSO)?***

What gets done by SEAGSO and how it is done depends on the commitment you have to your Central Service Office. You have the final responsibility and, ultimately, the dividends. If you want AA kept as available, as simple and effective for the new member as it was for you, your help is needed morally, physically and financially at your central office. A healthy CSO ensures a healthy SEAGSO.

Keep informed and ask questions; the more AA you know, the more you can use. You can help your group choose, and use, a good central service representative (Delegate), whose job gets the respect and support of the group. The Delegate will probably be as grateful for your interest, understanding and aid as you are when somebody gives you a new AA idea. It is vital to inform CSO about any group changes, such as a new Delegate's contact details, new group name, or new group mailing address. This is the only way to keep the flow of physical and electronic group mail uninterrupted.

A form is available from most CSO's specifically designed for the purpose of changing some of the information on a group already listed or for a new group. It is readily available at the CSO and/or online at its website.

## **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT SOME AA CUSTOMS**

### ***36. What are the Three Legacies of AA?***

They are the experiences AAs earliest members have passed on and shared with the rest of us:

- (1) suggestions for Recovery: the Twelve Steps
- (2) suggestions for Unity: the Twelve Traditions
- (3) AA Service: described in various AA books and pamphlets but can be summed up simply - being of genuine use to assist AA

to execute its primary purpose

### ***37. What about drop-in centres/clubs/associations for AA members?***

Technically, there is no such thing as an AA club. They are separate organisations to AA. However, some members, acting as private individuals, not as AA members, have formed non-profit companies, entirely separate and apart from their AA groups, to maintain clubs for AA members. To avoid problems of property, money and prestige, most groups have learned to stick to their primary purpose and leave club-running to separate companies, outside AA itself. For this reason, AA does not accept contributions from clubs. For further clarification, see pp. 146-165 in the book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and pp. 78-137 in the book *AA Comes of Age*.

### ***38. Who runs detox's and rehabs?***

Medical and social services are not part of the AA program, either. As a fellowship, we claim no qualifications to render such aid. However, AA members can make valuable employees in detox's, hospitals and rehabilitation centres. Technically, again, there is no such thing as an AA detox or an AA hospital, although at some such places AA fellowship is available. AA members who help such facilities do so as private citizens, of course, never as AA members, and they are expected to make sure that neither the name of the institution nor any of its promotional literature uses the AA name or any other name (such as Twelfth Step House) that wrongly implies endorsement by AA. As long as the AA name is never involved, such centres are, of course, free to solicit public funds, though AA never does.

### ***39. Is AA affiliated with Al-Anon Family Groups***

No. AA is not affiliated with any other organisation. Our policy is cooperation but not affiliation. Among groups we cooperate with are Al-Anon Family Groups and Drug and Alcohol Authorities, Australia-wide.

## **AA's POSITION IN THE FIELD OF ALCOHOLISM**

Alcoholics Anonymous is a worldwide fellowship of recovered/recovering alcoholics who help each other to maintain sobriety and who offer to share their recovery experience freely with other men and women who may have a drinking problem. AA members are distinctive in their acceptance of all or part of the Twelve Step program designed

for personal recovery from alcoholism.

The Fellowship functions through approximately 2000 local groups in Australia. Despite millions of alcoholics achieving sobriety and recovery in AA, we recognise that AA's program is not always effective with all alcoholics and that some may require professional counselling or treatment. AA is concerned solely with the personal recovery and continued sobriety of individual alcoholics who turn to the Fellowship for help.

The Fellowship does not engage in the field of alcoholism research, medical or psychiatric treatment, education or propaganda in any form, although members may participate in such activities as private individuals. The Fellowship has adopted a policy of co-operation but not affiliation with other organisations concerned with the problem of alcoholism. Whilst individual AA's may choose anonymity at the public level, the Fellowship is not invisible so the name of Alcoholics Anonymous is very public. Care should be taken to ensure public exposure is based on attraction rather than promotion. Traditionally, Alcoholics Anonymous does not accept or seek financial support from outside sources and members preserve personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, television and films.

## **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 practise these principles in all our affairs.

### THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA 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 AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose - to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. An AA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the AA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centres may employ special workers.
9. AA, as such, ought never be organised; 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 AA 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 TRADITIONS - THE LONG FORM

Our AA experience has taught us that:

1. Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. AA must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority - a loving God as he may express Himself in our group conscience.
3. Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought AA membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an AA group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation
4. With respect to its own affairs, each AA group should be responsible to no authority other 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 AA as a whole without conferring with the trustees of the General Service Board. On such issues our common welfare is paramount.
5. Each Alcoholics Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity having but one primary purpose - that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6. Problems of money, property, and authority may easily divert us from our primary spiritual aim. We think, therefore, that any considerable property of genuine use to AA should be separately incorporated and managed, thus dividing the material from the spiritual. An AA group, as such, should never go into business. Secondary aids to AA, such as clubs or hospitals which require much property or administration, ought to be incorporated and so set apart that, if necessary, they can be freely discarded by the groups. Hence such facilities ought not to use the AA name. Their management should be the sole responsibility of those people who financially support them. For clubs, AA managers are usually preferred. But hospitals, as well as other places of recuperation, ought to be well outside AA - and medically supervised. While an AA group may cooperate with anyone, such cooperation ought never to go so far as affiliation or endorsement, actual or implied. An AA group can bind itself to no one.
7. The AA groups themselves ought to be fully supported by the voluntary contributions of their own members. We think that each group should soon achieve this ideal; that any public solicitation of funds using the name of Alcoholic Anonymous is highly dangerous, whether by groups, clubs, hospitals, or other outside agencies; that acceptance of large gifts from any source, or of contributions carrying any obligations whatever, is unwise. Then, too, we view with much concern those AA treasuries which continue, beyond prudent reserves, to accumulate funds for no stated AA purpose. Experience has often warned us that nothing can so surely destroy our spiritual heritage as futile disputes over property, money and authority.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional. We define professionalism as the occupation of counselling alcoholics for fees or hire. But we may employ alcoholics where they are going to perform those services for which we might otherwise have to engage non-alcoholics. Such special services may be well recompensed. But our usual AA Twelfth Step work is never to be paid for.
9. Each AA group needs the least possible organisation. Rotating leadership is the best. The small group may elect its secretary, the large group its rotating committee, and the groups of a large

metropolitan area their central committee, which often employs a full-time secretary. The trustees of the General Service Board are, in effect, our AA General Service Committee. They are the custodians of our AA Tradition and the receivers of voluntary AA contributions by which we maintain our AA General Service Office. They are authorised by the groups to handle our overall public relations. All such representatives are to be guided in the spirit of service, for true leaders in AA are but trusted and experienced servants of the whole. They derive no real authority from their titles; they do not govern. Universal respect is the key to their usefulness.

10. No AA group or member should ever, in such a way as to implicate AA, express any opinion on outside controversial issues, particularly those of politics, alcohol reform, or sectarian religion. The Alcoholics Anonymous groups oppose no one. Concerning such matters they can express no views whatever.
11. Our relations with the general public should be characterised by personal anonymity. We think AA ought to avoid sensational advertising. Our names and pictures as AA members ought not be broadcast, filmed, or publicly printed. Our public relations should be guided by the principle of attraction rather than promotion. There is never need to praise ourselves. We feel it better to let our friends recommend us.
12. And finally, we of Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the principle of anonymity has an immense spiritual significance. It reminds us that we are to place principles before personalities; that we are actually to practise a genuine humility. This to the end that our great blessings may never spoil us; that we shall forever live in thankful contemplation of Him who presides over us all.

### THE TWELVE CONCEPTS FOR WORLD SERVICE USA

1. The final responsibility and the ultimate authority for AA world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship
2. When, in 1955, the AA groups confirmed the permanent charter for their General Service Conference, they thereby delegated to the Conference complete authority for the active maintenance of

our world services and thereby made the Conference - excepting for any change in the Twelve Traditions or in Article 12 of the Conference Charter - the actual voice and the effective conscience for our whole Society.

3. As a traditional means of creating and maintaining a clearly defined working relation between the groups, the Conference, the AA General Service board and its several service corporations, staffs, committees and executives, and of thus ensuring their effective leadership, it is here suggested that we endow each of these elements of world service with a traditional Right of Decision.
4. Throughout our Conference structure, we ought to maintain at all responsible levels a traditional Right of Participation, taking care that each classification or group of our world servants shall be allowed a voting representation in reasonable proportion to the responsibility that each must discharge
5. Throughout our world service structure, a traditional Right of Appeal ought to prevail, thus assuring us that minority opinion will be heard and that petitions for the redress of personal grievances will be carefully considered.
6. On behalf of AA as a whole, our General Service Conference has the principal responsibility for the maintenance of our world services, and it traditionally has the final decision respecting large matters of general policy and finance. But the Conference also recognises that the chief initiative and the active responsibility in most of these matters should be exercised primarily by the trustee members of the Conference when they act among themselves as the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous.
7. The Conference recognises that the Charter and the Bylaws of the General Service Board are legal instruments; that the trustees are thereby fully empowered to manage and conduct all of the world service affairs of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is further understood that the Conference Charter itself is not a legal document; that it relies instead upon the force of tradition and the power of the AA purse for its final effectiveness.
8. The trustees of the General Service Board act in two primary capacities: (a) With respect to the larger matters of overall policy and finance, they are the principal planners and administrators.

They and their primary committees directly manage these affairs. (b) But with respect to our separately incorporated and constantly active services, the relation of the trustees is mainly that of full stock ownership and of custodial oversight which they exercise through their ability to elect all directors of these entities.

9. Good service leaders, together with sound and appropriate methods of choosing them, are at all levels indispensable for our future functioning and safety. The primary world service leadership once exercised by the founders of AA must necessarily be assumed by the trustees of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous.
10. Every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority - the scope of such authority to be always well defined whether by tradition, by resolution, by specific job description, or by appropriate charters and bylaws.
11. While the trustees hold final responsibility for AA's world service administration, they should always have the assistance of the best possible standing committees, corporate service directors, executives, staffs and consultants. Therefore, the composition of these underlying committees and service boards, the personal qualifications of their members, the manner of their induction into service, the systems of their rotation, the way in which they are related to each other, the special rights and duties of our executives, staffs and consultants, together with a proper basis for the financial compensation of these special workers, will always be matters for serious care and concern.
12. General Warranties of the Conference: In all its proceedings, the General Service Conference shall observe the spirit of the AA Tradition, taking great care that the Conference never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds, plus an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle; that none of the Conference members shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others; that all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote and wherever possible, by substantial unanimity; that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy; that, though the Conference may act for the service of Alcoholics Anonymous, it shall never perform any acts of government; and that, like the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous which it serves,

the Conference itself will always remain democratic in thought and action.

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**THIS WE OWE TO AA'S FUTURE :**

To place our common welfare first;

To keep our Fellowship united.

For on AA unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come.

**SOME A.A. PUBLICATIONS.**

Complete List and Order Forms available from your Central Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous [www.accso.org.au](http://www.accso.org.au) for contact details

### **Some Aa Books/Booklets/Pamphlets:**

*Alcoholics Anonymous (The Big Book)*

*Twelve Steps And Twelve Traditions*

*Aa Comes Of Age*

*As Bill Sees It*

*Dr Bob And The Good Old-Timers*

*Pass It On*

*Came To Believe*

*Living Sober*

*Daily Reflections*

### **Pamphlets:**

*This Is Aa*

*Faq (44 Questions)*

*Is Aa For You?*

*Young People And Aa*

*Problems Other Than Alcohol*

*Members Eye View*

*Memo To An Inmate*

*Aa Members Medications And Other Drugs*

*A Newcomer Asks*

*Too Young*

*Do You Think You're Different?*

*Aa For The Woman*

*Questions & Answers On Sponsorship*

*Aa & The Armed Service*

*Aa & The Gay/Lesbian Alcoholic*

*The Aa Group*

*It Sure Beats Sitting In A Cell*

*If You Are A Professional*

*Aa As A Resource For The Medical Professional*

*Aa In Treatment Centres*

*Is There An Alcoholic In Your Life'?*

*Letter To A Woman Alcoholic*

*Aa Tradition - How It Developed*

..... and many more, now available from your nearest Australian Central Service Office located at [www.accso.org.au](http://www.accso.org.au)

