

Newsletter Area 69

Pre-Conference Assembly

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Would Including Central Offices/Intergroups as a Part of the Area Service Structure Improve Communication? (PRAASA Presentation)

Renaë H., Delegate Area 69 Utah, Panel 65

When I received this panel topic, at first blush my impression was, “of course this kind of inclusion would improve communication. Every effort made to strengthen our links in the chain of communication is definitely worthwhile, right?” After pondering on what I’m being asked to present, I found that this topic is subject to a wide variety of opinions. So, rather than share my views, I decided to take a middle of the road approach, and focus on the practical nature and benefits that come from cooperating with Central Office/ Intergroups and the vital A.A. services they provide. Then I will ask you to determine for yourselves the answer to the topic question, and invite you to share at the microphone (today) what practices and relationships your areas have in place that enables clear and/or improved communication with C.O./Intergroups between your Area Assembly and general service structure. Let’s take a look at A.A.’s past for a moment.

“In the beginning there was the Central Committee in Cleveland, Ohio, where by October 1939—little more than four years after Bill and Dr. Bob had their historical first meeting—a group of seven was meeting once a month, among other things to coordinate efforts regarding hospitalizations and sponsorship. Dr. Bob was not only a supporter but an active participant, according to fellow Akron member Dan K. “Doc used to play an important part in the Central Committee,” Dan reported, and the going could get rough: “During the meeting, sometimes, the words would fly like you were in a barroom.” One time, he related, “Dr. Bob stood up, hushed the crowd

and said, ‘Gentlemen, please. We’re still members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Let’s carry the principles of A.A. into these business meetings. You are servants of your group, here to take the ideas formulated by the committee. Let one man talk at a time, and let us conduct this business meeting as a service to the Lord and a service to our fellow members...’ After that there were no more brawls when Dr. Bob was around.” (Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers, p. 288-89)

“Back in 1946 when only a handful of intergroup/central offices were fully operative—A.A. cofounder Bill W. observed in the June issue of the Grapevine, “Heaven has surely reserved a special place for every one of them.” Both Bill and his fellow A.A. cofounder Dr. Bob early saw that “to save whole areas from turmoil, small offices had to be set up, telephones installed, and a few full-time secretaries hired.... If they weren’t, the man coming in the door couldn’t get a break.” (Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 161) ...

“By the time the first General Service Conference was held in April 1951, at least 16 intergroup/central offices were serving local groups. Since they predated the formation of the General Service structure and performed a different function, they were not a part of the A.A. structure (except in Chicago, where the Area Service Office and Area Committee are essentially one). Thanks to shared experience and improved communication, in many places intergroups and General Service have come to work hand-in-glove...” (Excerpts from Box 459, Vol. 53, No.4 / August-September 2007 Issue “Intergroup/Central Offices: A.A.’s Front Line”)

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While preparing for this presentation, I spoke with several A.A. members, inquiring of their experience, strength and hope. I learned that many areas are just as autonomous as groups are, when cooperating with, and the inclusion and participation of C.O./Intergroups at area general service events. I learned that the C.O./Intergroup member that participates at these events has a voice, and some also have a vote. Our Area is currently discussing a motion to create an Area C.O./Intergroup Liaison position along with some suggested responsibilities intended to strengthen our level of communication and cooperation with local C.O. /Intergroups.

It is apparent that there was a great need born from within the fellowship for central service centers as a “front line” in communicating with A.A. groups and the still suffering alcoholic seeking help. Looking back at the broad topic of this panel-*“Good Communication: Vital In Our Changing World”*, when we become familiar with what our current resources and services are and how they relate one with another, and then look at how we may improve upon these, is the very process that our annual General Service Conference Agenda items originate or are “born” from. The 65th GSC Committee on Report and Charter has been asked to “consider a request to include a flow chart similar to that on page S37 in the section “Working with Local

Intergroups and Central Offices” on pages S41-S42 in the *“A.A. Service Manual Combined With Twelve Concepts for World Services”*, that will visually orient the relationship C.O./Intergroups have within A.A.s general service structure.

Personal experiences with local C.O. / Intergroups over the years while being involved in area general service, seem to have had ebbs and flows from good, communicative and cooperative relationships, to hardly none at all. I can only speculate that other areas have experienced similar highs and lows. I am pretty sure that sometimes we have unintentionally and clumsily “stepped on the toes of our fellows” when only trying to make the show come off even better! So in closing, the question is, how can we do *better* in affecting more positive relationships and communication between our own area service structures and our local C.O./Intergroup A.A. service centers? An additional question that I’ve heard raised in consideration of the sub-topic---Would including C.O./Intergroups as a part of the Area Service Assembly improve Communication---is, *do* our C.O./Intergroups have a desire to participate in the area general service structure?



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Instant Gratification.

Pete G., Assembly/Agenda Chair, Panel 65

When asked if the Conference process is too slow of a process to continue to be useful in our world today, I am reminded that a wise delegate once told me that a knee-jerk reaction in AA takes up to five years to complete. The saying illustrates the time it takes to come up with an idea, take it to the District, then take it to the Area – then submit it to the Conference to have it sent to committee for further review before it is presented as a Conference Agenda Item to have it presented to the Areas to take to the Districts for the Groups to review. Then the item is discussed at the Area and voted upon, or at least voted upon to get a sense of the meeting so the Delegate can take their Area conscience to the General Service Conference where the item may be sent to committee or voted upon forthwith. Even writing down the process is tedious, at best. It is no wonder that the latest saying is that instant coffee in AA takes about five years to brew.

Why is it that AA uses this maddeningly-slow process, especially in this day and age? After all, we can check the scores, make payments, order pizza and tweet the sweetie sitting across the table from us in an AA meeting – all in the bat of an eye. Shouldn't we adopt a better and faster way to conduct this business of running AA?

I believe the answer to this is a resounding 'No'!

It took over four years for the Traditions to be discussed and adopted. This time-consuming process allowed many members to listen and learn about the proposed Traditions a number of times and contribute their ideas or thoughts to the Traditions. Evidently instant gratification was not invented by our generation as the long form of the Traditions gave way to the short

form that we read in almost every AA meeting today.

The process that we use does seem tedious and it is certainly very deliberate. In today's world of light-speed communications, can we really afford to wait 5 years for some of these ideas to bear fruit?

The genius of the process is that we do not wait at all. When useful items or important information is brought to the groups in the form of Conference Agenda topics, ideas are almost certainly put to use by the groups – helping alcoholics that need the information – regardless of how long it takes to evolve through the Conference level. Put in that perspective, the Language of the Heart can and does travel much faster than the language of the tweets, it reaches its target audience and has much better security and seemingly unlimited bandwidth. At no cost to the sender or those who receive it.

Take, for instance, the proposed remake or update of the pamphlet 'AA for the Gay and Lesbian Alcoholic'. This pamphlet certainly requires an update, as the last update took place in 1986. That is a long time, even by AA standards.

Even at breakneck speeds, an update may come to fruition by 2016. This is 30 years after the last update! Fortunately, our Conference process actually allows all alcoholics to reap the benefits of new information immediately – the speed of the Language of the Heart. By placing this on the docket to be considered; we listen, learn and begin to understand the obstacles that transsexual alcoholics face when attending meetings. Simply by discussing it, Area 69 has begun to solve these issues. We have a wealth

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of fresh, pertinent information regarding how to make meetings more LGBT friendly. We do not have to wait 3 to 5 years before these ideas begin to help people.

This is true for most all topics and ideas that are discussed in Assemblies, Workshops or District meetings. These topics include alcoholics with special needs, with accessibility issues, incarcerated alcoholics, treatment issues, Bridging the Gap requirements, new Public Service announcements plus new ways to distribute PSAs, new methods of sharing our 7th Step contributions to GSO and to the Area – we could increase this list ad infinitum.

These ideas travel at the speed of General Service. When presented with new ways of helping alcoholics, our trusted servants

immediately apply that information where it is effective – in the Groups. Long before our Delegate votes at the General Service Conference on these important issues, our DCMs, GSRs and all the other trusted servants will have already begun using this information to help other alcoholics.

Is the Conference process too slow? I think not – it travels at the speed of the heart.

Slips Seem More Acceptable Today Than in Early A.A.

How Are We Encouraging Members to Stay Sober? (PRAASA Presentation)

Wade J., Alternate Delegate Area 69 Utah, Panel 65

The mystery of slips is not as deep as it may appear. While it does seem odd that an alcoholic who has restored himself to a dignified place among his fellowmen and continues dry for years, should suddenly throw all his happiness overboard and find himself in moral peril of drowning liquor, often the reason is simple. People are inclined to say there is something peculiar about alcoholics. They seem to be well, yet at any moment they can turn back to their old ways, you can never be sure.

The alcoholic is a sick person, under technique of Alcoholics Anonymous he gets well, that is to say the disease is arrested. There is nothing unpredictable about him any more than there is

anything weird about a person who has arrested diabetes.

Let's get it clear once and for all, (**alcoholics are human beings**). Then we can safeguard ourselves intelligently against most slips. In both professional and lay circles there is a tendency to label everything that an alcoholic may do as "alcoholic behavior", the truth is it is simple human behavior.

It is very wrong to consider any of the personality traits observed in liquor addicts as peculiar to the alcoholic. Emotional and mental quirks are classified as symptoms of alcoholism merely because alcoholics have them, yet those same quirks can be found among non alcoholics

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too. **Actually they are symptoms of mankind.** Any of the symptoms and much of the behavior of alcoholism are closely paralleled and even duplicated in other diseases.

It happens this way, the tubercular patient recovers sufficiently to be released from the sanitarium, the doctor gives him careful instructions for the way he is to live when he gets home. He must drink plenty of milk, he must refrain from smoking, and he must obey other stringent rules.

For the first several months maybe even years he feels he is fully recovered, he becomes slack. There comes a night when he stays up late, after doing this he notices that nothing happened, soon he starts smoking once in awhile and not drinking as much milk as in the beginning, eventually he relapses.

The same tragedy can be found with the heart attack victim, after the heart attack he is put on a strict rest schedule. Frightened he naturally follows directions obediently for a long time. He too goes to bed early to get plenty of rest, strenuous exercise, quits smoking and drinking and lives a Spartan life. There comes a day after feeling real good for months or maybe even years when he feels he has recovered from his fright that if the elevator is broke he will climb stories of stairs, he decides to go to a party and smoke a little and have a few drinks. If no serious affects follow the first departure from the schedule prescribed he may try it again, until he suffers another attack.

In both the cardiac and tubercular cases wrong thinking preceded the acts that led to the relapses. The patient in each case rationalized himself out of a sense of his own perilous reality. He decided he didn't have to follow directions. That is precisely what happens with the alcoholic, he starts thinking wrong before

he actually embarks on the course that leads to the slip. **(The patient simply didn't follow directions).**

As I researched this topic and talked with lots of my friends about it, I am not sure it is more acceptable today than it was in the early years of A.A. I can only talk from my own experience of slipping in the past once after 16 months the second after 18 months, I am so grateful that there weren't members of A.A. adding shame and guilt to the ones I already had. I know in lots of treatment centers in the Utah Area they claim that relapse is part of recovery, as for me I don't think it has to be part of any ones recovery but it was part of mine.

HOW ARE WE ENCOURAGING MEMBERS TO STAY SOBER?

For the alcoholic, A.A. offers directions a vital factor, or ingredient of the preventive, especially for the alcoholic, is sustained emotion. Rules and regulations irk almost everyone, because they are restraining, prohibitive, and negative. The philosophy of A.A. however is positive, and provides ample sustained emotion, a sustained desire to follow directions voluntarily.

As I shared earlier the only thing I have is my own experience and how I was encouraged to stay sober. In the early years of my sobriety there was a man who today is still a very big part of my life, who took me by the hand and worked with me on the A.A. program and also helped me in my everyday life, doing the steps, going to meetings with me introducing me to other members, teaching me how to be a better son, father, brother and friend, I thank God for this man each and every day of my sober life. There were lots of wonderful people along my early journey who knew I was new to their meeting and invited me to dinner after

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meetings, football parties at their houses, watching WWF Wrestling with them. They introduced me to service inside and outside of the meeting, I started as a Alt- GSR and went to District Meetings with them. I also became a volunteer at a youth correction facility where I really started to see how A.A. works and being around such loving and amazing people it gave me the desire to stay sober and try to be just a little bit like each one of them and you.

I believe the best way we can encourage new and old members is to share this amazing life A.A. has giving to us not just inside the meetings but to share the life we have been giving outside of A.A. let them see and feel the wonderful life we have thanks to the program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Thanks for allowing me to be of Service

PRAASA 2015 Final Report

Monte S., PRAASA 2015 Chair

Planning for PRAASA 2015 began in 2009/10 when the Utah Area put forward bids to host. We were awarded the bid in 2011 during Panel 61 General Service Conference. Our first planning meeting as a committee was held on November 3, 2012 in Bountiful, Utah. Our committee met approximately 10 times before PRAASA and once during a wrap up meeting following PRAASA 2015. We had as many as 35 people on the committee and sub committees, including Aaron R., who will forever live in our hearts. We asked for help from two Spanish translators, one from New York City, one from San Diego to translate all of our documents. Some committee members were part of the original bid committee dating back over 5 years.

PRAASA 2015 printed 22,904 documents in both English & Spanish and created 10 Large Print Programs. We purchased a liability insurance policy that included a 'Terrorism Clause'.

PRAASA 2015 sold 933 meals - consumed 220 gallons of coffee and ate 265 ice cream bars. Our guests purchased over \$6,800.00 in

additional concessions from grab and go stations.

1,243 people registered (341 from Utah). There were 159 people signed up as volunteers. We checked out all of the 130 Spanish translation headsets we had on hand and recommended new translation equipment be purchased. We had one person needing ASL - there was a volunteer who interpreted for that person. We did provide a stipend for the ASL translation service.

Attendance at a glance: 286 GSR, RSG, Alt GSR - 252 DCMC, DCM, MCD, Alt DCM – 12 Past Trustees and 67 Al-Anon were registered. Approximately 800 people pre-registered and another 400 or so registered on site. We held 22 different roundtable discussions.

A new experience for PRAASA attendees was the Friday night Fellowship dinner initiated to help offset our meeting space charges. Also, the Program Committee adopted a new format for Delegates. 1st year Delegates gave their respective Area Highlights as is customary. 2nd

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year Delegates were asked to give a talk on Leadership, which was a change from the past practice of 2nd year Delegates sharing their Area Highlights.

Our committee put forth a motion to allow future PRAASA committees to have the option of using email as one of the two mailing requirements for PRAASA notifications. That PRAASA Guideline amendment was adopted.

We asked the Davis Convention and Visitors Bureau to furnish lanyards, registration bags and other supplies which they did, in spite of closing their doors December 2013.

The Davis Conference Center in Layton, Utah was host facility for PRAASA 2015. Except for the Saturday night banquet, the Davis Conference Center worked well for our needs. We asked for a refund on the service charges for the Saturday night banquet as food quality and service were poor. The Davis Conference Center granted us 50% refund on the service charge which became part of the money we forwarded to future PRAASA's.

Anonymity in Action

Treesa J., Secretary, Panel 65

Anonymity is defined as “lack of outstanding, individual, or unusual features; unacknowledged”. Service work to me literally is anonymity in action. I am not an outstanding member of Alcoholics Anonymous and I am not acknowledged for something I have said or done. Service work has taught me I am part of something bigger than me. Essentially one slice of the pie that with all of you other slices makes a whole. Remember the 3-legged stool. It can't stand on one leg or even two legs. I do not stand on my own. Dr. Bob and Bill W. agreed that when they passed away they would “be buried just like other folks”. Bill W. wrote about Dr. Bob in *A.A. Comes of Age*, pp. 136-137 saying “Dr. Bob was essentially a far more humble person than I. In some ways he was a sort of spiritual *natural*, and this anonymity business came rather easily to him.”

When I arrived on the doorstep of Alcoholics Anonymous, I felt forgotten by society and very

alone. No one understood what I felt or what I had survived. Service work offered me the opportunity to feel connected and a part of something greater than myself. Service work has given me the ability to get out of myself and focus on 12th Step Work. I no longer feel the need to worry about my daily frustrations. It has helped me see a light at the end of the tunnel and think positively. The glass isn't half empty or half full, the fact is that today I have a glass. I fill mine with Diet Mt. Dew.

Service work has shown me the Steps, Traditions and Concepts in action. It has shown me that Alcoholics Anonymous is more than just my home group. It is even bigger than my district or area. Alcoholics Anonymous is a worldwide fellowship. I can travel anywhere and find Alcoholics Anonymous. There are meetings everywhere. The greatest gift for me is my sobriety but it is only part of working my

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program. I need recovery, unity and service to keep me grounded.

I am forever humbled by the experiences service work has provided with me. I have been given the opportunity to travel to places I never dreamed of, meet people from lots places and learned things I didn't even know existed.

While at PRAASA a member shared with me they had never heard of the 12 Concepts.

Jokingly I said, "When you are through learning those, you can start on the 12 Warranties". The

response was, "What are those?". More will be revealed, sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly but always if I am willing to work for them.

Thank you Alcoholics Anonymous for a life beyond my wildest dreams.

In service and gratitude.

National A.A. Archive Workshop,

Janet H., Repository Archivist Standing Chair, Panel 65

For those archivist's who arrived early, there was an opportunity for two one day tours; Stepping Stones: Bill and Lois home, also a visit to GSO and the archives, plus the three days Archive Workshop. Due to limited time to give a full report back to the area, I am presenting my reports on the NAAAW to the Area Newsletter

The trip to Stepping Stones was an adventure which included 4 vans, 47 individuals plus 4 drivers. The lead van knew where he was going, the next two were unfamiliar with the route and missed the exit, the last van (which I was in) had to catch up, pass the other two vans and lead them back. Our driver Eddy had made this trip several times, so the 2 hour ride became a 3 ½ hour ride. On a positive note, we did go over the Washington Bridge, twice, and see some areas of New York City. All in all I found it exciting and fun. Stops were made for gas, and snacks, also lunch at a deli.

Ron C. from Australia, 98 years young with 60 years sobriety, was in our van. He passed around letters from Lois and pictures from

when he had visited before and kept us thrilled with stories. It was a very informative trip, sitting behind him and alongside a past-delegate from Arizona and a past-trustee from Canada.

Stepping Stones is a beautiful, peaceful and reflective place to visit. They do not allow sitting on most of the furniture, except at the kitchen table in the house, though they do encourage anyone who wants to sit and play the piano to do so, helps keep the piano in tune. We had a fellow do just that and it was wonderful, music filled the house. At Wits End the chair behind Bill's desk had been broken – from someone sitting, so it is no longer allowed to sit behind the desk. There was a leather chair which I sat in, because it did not have the string or ribbons on it as the others did, I had thought I could sit down, and was asked not to sit in it. Pictures are outside only and of Bill's desk. Ops, I thought, I could take a picture of Lois desk also and had a pleasant reminder for the picture I took of her desk, but was allowed to keep it. They also

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asked that you don't take pictures of the signs at the driveway entrance, due to requests from the neighborhood, but Treesa missed that and did wander down and took pictures. What a couple of renegades.

In the archive repository at Stepping Stones, they have a box that is opened only once a month, which they had postponed for our arrival. It contained the first edition, first printing of the first big book off the press, and Lois's family bible. Only 5 at a time could go in to view, so that took a while, but so worth it. Wits End and the home were both welcoming, and comfortable.

The yard was filled with flowers, trees, and open space to sit and contemplate.

I don't feel I have the words to express the emotion and feelings of visiting Stepping Stones; beautiful, peaceful, calming, reflective, fills the heart with gratitude. From comments the others made, each person has their own personal experience.

Pictures of the visit are in our archives for you to enjoy.

Area Repository Archivist Standing Chair position

The repository archivist is the only non-voting position, because the person may serve for unlimited succession of terms, though the position is subject to review and approval every two years at the area elections. The repository archivist collects, organizes and preserves material of historical and fellowship interest, following the suggested Archival guidelines. The archivist maintains a sample of the collection for a traveling display for Area Assemblies, also other A.A. events upon request. Thus providing an opportunity for members to view and become aware of the archives.

Service Work

Matt D., Area Chairperson, Panel 65

My name is Matt and I am an alcoholic. My service journey started a while ago. I got sober in Bountiful at the Backstreet Club after a strong suggestion from a judge. Like some of you I had a slip that needed to be signed and turned in. After calling for a meeting list I found some meetings that would fit in with my work schedule, community service and DUI classes.

Those first meetings were big book study groups, which looking back now were just what I needed. I needed to study the program not try to find the loopholes.

The meetings I attended were very small sometimes three or four people. Some weeks the chairman would not show up and the club manager would drop the box of books on the table and say here are the books if you want a meeting go ahead. Luckily this didn't happen to often and it planted a seed in me. This became my first home group.

The way service went in this group is the chairman wore many hats. They would chair for years and also be the treasure and secretary. So it's not surprising that someone might miss a

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night. After nine months, the chairman asked if I would be willing to take over. Talk about a deer in the headlights moment. I could not forget the nights when no one was there to chair the meeting for me. I made it my mission to have the doors open for that next alcoholic like me who needed a meeting to have their slip signed or wanted to study the book. That group started to grow and a member suggested that I should become their GSR. Just like in my drinking days I have a hard time saying no. After a year and a half of attending district and area meetings, a DCM position came open. I stood and was elected for the DCM of the northern part of my district. Another deer in the

headlights moment. I had to attend meetings in the north. Did I mention I'm a scared alcoholic from the bubble of Bountiful? They do things weird up north hold meetings in churches, not the same people chairing. But this helped me to have the guts to stand for an area position and by the grace of my higher power you have allowed me to serve you today as your panel 65 area 69 Chairman. I am still to this day scared to death. A man told me years ago that service work will increase my chances of staying sober. It has worked so far for me. My hope is that I can keep the doors open for the next guy.