

## WORLD SERVICE CONFERENCE 2015

Hello everyone. It was my pleasure to represent all of you as the Delegate from Rhode Island at the 2015 World Service Conference in Virginia Beach, April 19<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup>.

As I was struggling with how to condense 40+ hours of meetings at Conference into a one-hour presentation, I decided that in addition to my presentation at Assembly, I also wanted to distribute the information in multiple ways so that it reaches as many Al-Anon and Alateen members as possible. It is my hope that by doing so, we can engage in an on-going conversation about what is best for Al-Anon both here in Rhode Island and worldwide, now and in the future. Therefore, in addition to the report that I presented at the Spring Assembly, I am posting my report on the Area website and will be sending periodic short “Notes from the Delegate” on the announcements listserv. This is my written report to the Area.

I can't think of a better way to start this report than by sharing the following with you from the April 2015 Chairperson of the Board, Paula B's, letter to the Delegates.

“Dear Conference Members,

“The 2015 World Service Conference theme of *Living Our Spiritual Principles: Expanding Our Vision* encouraged us to dream expansively while being guided by our spiritual principles. We were successful. There were many discussions and decisions that were balanced by what is best for Al-Anon Family Groups worldwide—now and in the future—that demonstrated compassion, generosity and understanding.

“Throughout the week we had opportunities to look at the future of Al-Anon, which includes Alateen. The Board *big question* to Conference members was ‘How do we envision responsible service leadership in Al-Anon—a vision that inspires today’s members to be tomorrow’s leaders who are motivated by spiritual principles?’ ”

To address this question Conference members worked in 6 separate break-out sessions where the following sub-topics were discussed:

1. Relying on the ideas in Concept Nine, especially the "Essay on Leadership" as a guide, what can Areas do to inspire members to grow and develop as future leaders?
2. What is our vision of a World Service Conference embodying spiritual principles that meets the needs of all Conference members?
3. What skills, talents, and abilities will the World Service Office need of its administrative staff leaders in the future?
4. How can service leaders use technology to link members together at all levels of service, strengthening communication and inspiring spiritual connections within the service structure?
5. What is our vision of an attractive and dynamic Alateen program that would meet the needs of today's young people affected by someone's drinking?
6. How can we as leaders encourage individual Al-Anon members to personally expand public outreach efforts?

“In keeping with Concept Nine, the Board wanted to hear from Conference members as we continue succession planning for the Executive Director, Director of Business Services, and to assist the Executive Director as he plans for the future vacancies as staff retires.”

The Chairperson of Board posed the following question to me and you: “What does your Area do to prepare your leaders of tomorrow?”

“During the Conference and open Board meeting, there were conversations about the current model of Alateen and whether this is the best model for the future of both Al-Anon and Alateen. The focus was on finding ways to encourage more attendance and participation by teens to ensure the future of Alateen.”

In her letter, the Chairperson then asks the following question of the Delegates and the Areas: "What is your Area doing to offer comfort and support to our younger members?"

"The Finance presentation asked us to dream, and then presented a process to help Areas build a plan to make their dreams come true. It is not surprising that a third of the break-out groups had the dream of healthy, thriving groups that welcome and retain newcomers and actively give back in gratitude through service. This complimented a Task Force presentation on practices that demonstrate a healthy, thriving group."

Again, the Chairperson posed a question to all of us: "What is your Area doing, or planning to do, to encourage and support the building of healthy groups?"

"As the Conference dreamed about the future, needs of the fellowship, and services provided by the World Service Office, a deficit budget was approved. Conference members recognized that continuing to rely on the Reserve Fund and sales of literature cannot fully support these services. Concept One reinforces that the groups have a responsibility to support Al-Anon world services. A Thought Force presented strategies that show the importance of abundance and spirituality in money discussions."

The Chairperson's concluded her letter by saying "In my welcome to Conference members, I encouraged everyone to reach inward to spiritually expand outward. For me, this is about sensing my truth, responding without fear or limits, changing the conversation, and saying I'm worth my dreams. In Bill W's essay on leadership, he wrote that 'God has endowed human beings with considerable capability for foresight and evidently expects us to use it.' It is with true humility that we recognize the source of this courage and strength. Let's make our dreams happen as we continue on this journey."

I found these words to be a true reflection of the spiritual and loving atmosphere that was present throughout the week not only in the General Sessions, but also in the breakout sessions, the Open Board Meeting, the Open Policy Committee meeting, and over our shared meals in the dining room. I felt enormously blessed to play a part in the ongoing process that Lois W. and Anne B. put in place years ago to ensure that this life saving program would continue to be here for those yet to come.

### Motions

There were 95 voting participants at the Conference comprised of 67 delegates, 18 trustees, 4 at-large executive committee members, and 6 WSO staff directors and associate directors. All the voting participants are Al-Anon members. A total of 9 motions were presented and voted on. All motions were passed with substantial unanimity.

Motion 1 was to allow 7 WSO staff, 3 international representatives, and the Executive Committee for Real Property Management chair to be seated at the conference with no voting privileges.

Motions 2, 3, and 4, were for the approval of the audit report, the 2015 budget, and the 2014 annual report. These 3 items were provided in advance of the Conference. I distributed them to the District Representatives to share with the GRs and the groups for comments, questions, and feedback which I could relay to the WSO before I went to Conference.

Motion 5 was presented by the Delegate from Oklahoma to give permission for the conversion of *Lois's Story* and *Lois & the Pioneers* to DVD copy protected. Currently, these 2 videos are available for rent from the WSO in VHS format. However, given that DVD is the current video standard, it is important to transfer these irreplaceable pieces of Al-Anon's history to DVD to preserve them and have them available for viewing by Al-Anon members now and in the future.

Motion 6 was to give conceptual approval to develop a piece of Conference Approved Literature based on member sharing's published in past issues of *The Forum*. The Forum Editorial Advisory Committee believes that *The Forum*

regularly publishes important and thoughtful sharings that represent the diversity of the fellowship today. These sharings have insight into Al-Anon recovery that is not currently available elsewhere in Al-Anon's literature. *Forum Favorites*, 4 previous books featuring *Forum* sharings – the last of which was printed in 1993 – are now out of print.

Motion 7 was to amend the descriptive text of Concept Eight in the *Service Manual*. The descriptive text of Concept Eight was amended to add language regarding the Executive Committee for Real Property Management (ECRPM) in terms of who comprises this committee and their oversight responsibility.

Motion 8 was presented by the Delegate from Ontario North to request that the WSO send out the AFG Connects announcements, as soon as technically possible, to any Al-Anon member who subscribes. I will provide more information on AFG Connects later on in my report.

Motion 9 was to adopt the following definition of Universal Understanding of Family Recovery to be used in outreach to professionals:

*Family recovery is a process of healing and growth for family members affected by someone's drinking. This process helps these individuals make healthier life choices and develop relationships that are more positive and supportive.*

The discussion of the need for a definition of Universal Understanding of Family Recovery started in 2008. The process of developing a definition included 5 membership surveys between 2009 and 2013 and 2 professionals' surveys in 2011 and 2013.

### Budget

As the Chairperson mentioned in her letter, the Conference approved a deficit budget. The estimated revenues for the year are \$5,065,000 and the estimated expenses are \$5,117,000, giving a deficit of \$52,000. The 2015 expenses are estimated to increase by \$70,000 over the previous year, mostly due to an expected increase in labor costs for new staff positions.

Literature sales continues to be the primary source of revenue. The projection of \$3,050,000 for 2015 is \$10,000 less than the literature revenue for the past year. 2015 *Forum* subscriptions is expected to rise slightly from \$242,117 last year to \$250,000 this year. Contributions for 2015 are estimated at \$1,700,000, an increase of approximately 8% over last year's contributions which were \$1,521,388. Since we have experienced lower increase in the value of the Reserve Fund, the Finance Committee decided to reduce the amount transferred in 2015 to 1.1% which is \$65,000.

In presenting the proposed deficit budget to the Conference, the Board of Trustees posed the question: "Do you want to increase projected contributions to cover the projected deficit, increase the amount drawn from the Reserve Fund to cover the deficit, or leave the projected deficit at \$52,000?" Our discussion focused primarily on ways to increase contributions. Here are some facts about the 2014 Contributions:

- In 2014 there were a total of 15,496 Al-Anon/Alateen groups
- 9,461 groups (or 61%) of those groups contributed an average of \$119 each
- Those group contributions totaled \$1,125,859
- In addition, individual and service arms contributions totaled \$395,529

From our discussion we came up with several ideas to consider including the following:

- If 100% of the groups contributed an average of \$119, group contributions would total \$1,844,024.
- If each of the 9,461 groups that contributed last year increased their contribution by \$25, and individual and service arms contributions stayed the same as in 2014, contributions would total \$1,752,000, thus covering the projected deficit.

In the end, the Conference approved the deficit budget with the understanding that we would take this information back to our Areas and groups and encourage all groups to increase their contributions to WSO.

To complete the picture, here are Rhode Island's contributions for 2014.

- 37 groups (or 63.8%) contributed an average of \$99.97 for a total of \$3,699
- Individual contributions totaled \$1,166

My question for you is what can Rhode Island Al-Anon Family Groups do to help eliminate the budget deficit?

### Meet the Board Event

There was a Board presentation on the *Meet the Board* event that is currently in a three-year trial. The purpose of the *Meet the Board* event is to provide an opportunity for Al-Anon members, the Board of Trustees, and Executive Committee members to interact and to share information about how the WSO serves the fellowship. 33 Areas submitted applications to host the initial 2014 inaugural *Meet the Board* event. Given the number of applications, the Board decided the only fair way to choose where to have the event was to draw an Area from a hat.

The first *Meet the Board* event was held last July in St. John's Newfoundland. 90 members attended and the feedback was positive. There were presentations and personal talks round-table discussions, opportunity to talk during lunch, and a gallery walk of WSO committees. Feedback from the first event included a better understanding of the work of the WSO, realizing the similarities between members and the Trustees, learning about service, and recognizing the benefits of service. Suggestions from members who attended the first *Meet the Board* event included making the event longer, planning an even more interactive agenda, including the executive director on the agenda, and include personal sharing.

The July 25<sup>th</sup> 2015 Meet the Board event will be in Edmonton, Alberta (again selected by drawing from a hat).

At the Assembly on June 6<sup>th</sup>, I asked the GRs if we should "toss our name into the hat" to host the 2016 *Meet the Board* event, and I am pleased to report that the GRs present voted unanimously to submit a request form. If selected, it will be a wonderful opportunity for our members, as well as members from nearby areas, to meet and interact with the Trustees and Executive Committee members; to discuss items of importance to the fellowship and to the organization of Al-Anon; and to realize that we are all Al-Anon members, working in different capacities, for the good of the fellowship. What makes this event ideal for Rhode Island is that WSO does most of the work. All we have to do is:

- recommend several area hotels that meet the criteria for hosting the event.
- publicize the event If we are selected
- provide transportation between the hotel and airport if there is no free hotel shuttle
- collect the nominal registration fee for participants (\$5-\$10) and forward it to WSO.

The 2016 *Meet the Board* event will be held in October – probably October 29. I am currently collecting recommendations for hotels and will be putting together our request form and sending it in to WSO by the September 15, 2015 deadline.

### AFG Connects

*AFG Connects* was announced during the World Service Conference. This communication system will replace e-Communities (an online communication tool used by WSO to relay information to the Areas and AWSC). WSO staff, including the Executive Director, are just as frustrated as many of us are with the current version of e-Communities. They have attempted numerous fixes and other adjustments to try and resolve issues based on

comments they have received, but in the end they decided it was better to go with a new software vendor. *AFG Connects* is more user friendly, will have a search feature, and will allow users to create their own login and password as well as post and respond to threads of conversations in their email. The Announcements will have the documents attached as well as in the proper folder in the resource library. *AFG Connect* will work with iphones and ipads. They are looking for an October roll-out which will include on-line videos to help us learn the new system.

As I mentioned earlier, the Conference approved a motion to allow Al-Anon members to sign up to receive *AFG Connects* general announcements such as *Area Highlights* and *E-news* as soon as technically possible.

#### Alateen Chat Rooms

The WSO recently purchased software that will allow Alateens to access the Alateen Chat Room on their cell phones. It is hoped that this added capability will be available this summer.

#### Interactive Website Application

Another major project that has been undertaken by WSO is to have an interactive application on the Al-Anon website to allow you to find a meeting near you from the data that is in the WSO meetings database where the information is automatically updated when the Area's Group Records Coordinator submits changes. This capability is already in existence in the interactive voice recognition system that is utilized when the WSO receives a call after hours. Eventually, areas will be able to link to the WSO website from their websites and/or be able to download from the WSO database.

#### Membership Survey Results

The results of the 2015 Membership Survey were presented at Conference.

- They had the largest participation ever with 8,517 members responding to the survey.
- 79% of the respondents said they heard about the survey through their GR, their group, or the survey flyer
- The average age of the respondents is 59.8
- 83% of the respondents are female and 61% are married
- The average number of years in the program is 13 years
- 71% of the respondents said they have a sponsor and 44% said they are a sponsor
- 54% said they are now involved in service
- 40% joined due to a drug problem, and 85% of them later discovered a drinking problem
- 92% said their life has been impacted very positively by Al-Anon

#### Memorial Gifts

In recent years, surviving family members, whose deceased relatives were members of the fellowship, have attempted to make memorial contributions to Al-Anon. Current policy does not allow the WSO to accept contributions from anyone who is not a member. At the 2011 Conference a Thought Force made a presentation on identifying a Guideline on Memorial Contributions. Conference members were asked, "In the spirit of our Traditions and our principle of unlimited, abundant resources, in what ways can Al-Anon Family Groups support a non-member's request to honor a deceased member of Al-Anon?" The Conference requested that a Thought Force be appointed to study this idea further in terms of family non-member gifts.

At the 2013 Conference, the Thought Force made its presentation and after much discussion, the Conference asked for clarification on several issues:

- Definition of a “member of Al-Anon”
- Definition of “family”
- Safeguards to ensure no outside influence
- Should the dollar amount of a contribution be limited and, if so, maximum amount

At the 2014 Conference those issues were discussed, members shared their opinions, and it was decided to continue the discussion at the next Conference.

As the conversation continued at the 2015 Conference, many of the participants emphasized Tradition 5 and, in particular “...giving comfort to families of alcoholics”. The final result was that the Conference asked the Policy Committee to prepare a revision to the policy to be presented at the 2016 Conference which will allow non-members to make one-time memorial donations. This revised policy will state that these donations will go into the operating fund and it will specify a limit on the maximum size of the donation.

### *Al-Anon Faces Alcoholism*

*Al-Anon Faces Alcoholism* is our public outreach magazine. It is published annually, offering hope, understanding, and compassion to those still suffering from the family disease. In 2001 13,000 copies were distributed. In 2014 347,000 copies were distributed.

In her letter, the Chairperson says: “As we look to the 2016 World Service Conference, you may want to plan ahead as we celebrate 65 years of recovery. To aid the Conference Leadership Team in scheduling, please share your response to the following question when your Trustee contacts you ‘What topic would you like to see on the 2016 agenda?’ ”

I invite each of you to use the spiritual principles of compassion, generosity, and understanding to think about what is best for Al-Anon – now and in the future – and what each of us, as individuals and as a group, can do to keep the Al-Anon Declaration alive.

Let It Begin with Me. When anyone anywhere reaches out for help, let the hand of Al-Anon and Alateen always be there, and – Let It Begin with Me.

Thank you for letting me serve as your Delegate.

Phyllis H.  
Delegate, Panel 55  
Rhode Island