

CONFERENCE QUESTIONS 2018

COMMITTEE 1

1. Would Conference discuss:

- a) whether the Fellowship's use of the terminology "closed" and "open" to describe AA meeting attendance restrictions confuses newcomers and thereby detracts from our primary purpose, and
- b) if required, recommend a better solution?

Background

Some newcomers see an AA meeting listed as "closed" meeting, and think that it is shut, or closed down, and therefore may not attend the meeting. If this situation occurs, we may be failing to uphold Tradition 5: each group has but one primary purpose to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

Even though the meaning of the words "closed" and "open" is usually explained in the meeting's listing footnotes (reproduced below) as well as in our literature, the wording may still provide an initial source of misunderstanding to newcomers unfamiliar with our terminology.

<http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/AA-Meetings/About-AA-Meetings>

EXCEPT WHERE INDICATED ALL MEETINGS ARE CLOSED

Definition of Open and Closed Meetings: The Closed Meeting; is intended for alcoholics and for those with an alcohol problem who have a desire to stop dinking. The Open Meeting; is intended for alcoholics and non-alcoholics e.g. family, friends and anyone interested in AA.

Note: This question only concerns the use of the terminology "closed" and "open" to describe different meetings, and not the actual intention of restricting attendance at meetings.

References:

- Meeting guide footnotes on the AA website
- The AA Group (AA pamphlet)
- 2009 Conference recommendation C4 Q1
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2. Review chapter 4 of the AA Service Handbook for Great Britain 2017 "For AA members Employed in the Alcoholism Field".

COMMITTEE 2

1. Would Conference please discuss and share its experience about Tradition 7 monies being collected electronically?

Background Traditions 4, 7, 12

Rents are rising in many meetings across GB. With many members no longer carrying cash, some meetings have asked intergroup and region for guidance around the use of contactless card readers being used to collect Tradition 7 contributions. Several meetings have adopted this method to make it easier for members to contribute, with initial reports of increases in Tradition 7 takings.

While every AA group is free to make its own decisions around how it collects Tradition 7, there are questions being asked which would benefit from guidance from the collective Fellowship.

- is the use of card payments and the paper trail accompanying this compromising to members anonymity?

- is agreeing to the fees charged by card reader companies (usually 1.75%) diverting money away from our primary purpose/against the spirit of Tradition 7?

- give the inevitability of a societal transition away from cash, especially in urban areas, how can we protect our Fellowship's income from contributions?

2. Would Conference discuss, consider and make recommendations on whether "speaker tapes"- audio files and /or podcasts of AA members sharing their experience, strength and hope- could be incorporated into the AA website www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk?

Background

There are many good examples of AA shares available on the internet, and the success of the Young Persons' short animated video shows that the AA GB website can itself be an effective medium in carrying AA's message of recovery and not just about buying literature and finding meetings.

With 19% of people finding AA via the internet (AA 2015 Membership Survey), a selection of short audio shares by a cross-section of AA members (male, female, old, young, etc) accessible via the website could be great starting point to enable newcomers to identify with the malady and provide them with a clear message about sponsorship and AA's Twelve Steps. See also:

Step 12 - having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to the alcoholics (...)

Tradition 5 - Each group has but one primary purpose - to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

COMMITTEE 3

1. Would Conference discuss the idea of adding a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) AA Helpline service to the AA GB website?

Background

Newcomers and members can contact AA via our National Helpline 0800 9177 650 and our new email address help@aamail.org in addition, in 2015 Conference welcomed the idea of a "chat now" facility on the AA website as a n additional way for the still suffering alcoholic to contact the Fellowship. At Conference 2016, "Pure Chat" technology was approved and in 2017 is now successfully integrated on the AA GB Website in the Newcomers area.

There is now the opportunity to utilise further advances in communications technology, such as Broadband Internet access and smartphones, and also provide an AA Helpline over the Internet using a methodology called Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP).

VoIP can easily be used on smartphones, laptops, and tablets, with voice calls made through 3G/4G or Wi-Fi. Many free instant messaging and/or social media services such as Skype, Google Hangout, Facebook Messenger and WhatasApp already use VoIP extensively.

In addition to providing a more up-to-date service, a VoIP AA Helpline would also allow the Fellowship to meet the currently underserved needs of both English-speaking suffering -alcoholics and AA members who have difficulty calling the National Helpline (GB) in particular.

1. Ex-pats and/or travellers living in Europe, as they may incur high international-call charges(there is currently no Europe-wide AA Helpline).
2. Visitors to Great Britain from abroad, as they may incur high mobile roaming charges.
3. Younger and more tech savvy generations who are now using smartphones with "data only" plans do not make voice calls to landline and/or mobile numbers.

A VoIP feature could be added to the Pure Chat service, or it could be a stand-alone voice call feature on the AA GB website. It could also function in much the same way as the current National Helpline service, and in fact could be incorporated to avoid any duplication of service efforts.

A feasibility study could determine the technological requirements, including potential use of "virtual numbers" and further identify the risks and benefits as well as costs.

References: 2015 Conference Question, Committee 3 Question 1
 2015 Conference Recommendation, Committee 3 Question 1
 2016 Final Conference Report, pp18-19
 WWW.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/About-AA/Newcomers

2. Would the Fellowship discuss, share experience and make recommendations on how we are able to introduce telephone and internet banking at all levels of service, being ever mindful of our current practice of requiring 2 signatories on each cheque issued?

Background

The banks have indicated that cheques will be phased out and replaced by telephone and internet banking.

Some banks have indicated that it is not possible to carry out internet banking using our current system of requiring 2 signatures from 3.

Other banks have suggested that this is possible and treasurers at various levels of service appear to be using internet banking.

this raises several questions:

1. If we decide that we endorse internet banking, will this exclude members who are not computer literate or do not have access to a computer from standing as group treasurers?
2. The only reference to telephone or internet banking in "The AA Structure Handbook for Great Britain 2017" occurs on page 95 under "Region Money". However, it also quite clearly indicates that this should be only used where payments and transfers still require authorisation by 2 signatories.

In order to ensure that the membership feels that AA money continues to be well managed, it is important that any suggested practices are being carried out.

If both telephone and internet banking are discussed and approved by Conference for introduction at all levels of service, then surely reference to them should appear in the literature.

COMMITTEE 4

1. Inventory Questions

a) Is AA still carrying the message of recovery effectively, i.e. sharing experience, strength and hope, offering sponsorship, talking about the twelve Traditions?

b) Would Conference share its experience on how AA can do this more effectively?

Background

AA survey 2015 - Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions

2. review new addition "Chat Now Service" to be added to Chapter 3 of the AA Service Handbook for Great Britain 2017

Background Draft "Chat Now Service"

COMMITTEE 5

1. Inventory Question

a) Would Conference share experience and knowledge of the problems surrounding attracting members into Service at their Group and how to encourage Service at Intergroup, especially in rural areas.

b) Would Conference review the resources available to Intergroups and make recommendations on how best they are used to attract representation at Intergroup by Groups in their area?

Background

The AA Service Handbook for Great Britain 2017: Introduction.

- Chapters 1.5 "A Step Further" and 1.6 "Service within the intergroup"
- Chapters 1.8 and 1.9 "The Loner" and "The Housebound Member"
- Chapter 1.10 "The Older Member"

The problem exists in both directions:

- Many groups are not represented at Intergroup. This may lead to a potentially uninformed Group Conscience. Consequently, the AA message is not being taken to the suffering alcoholic in that area.
- Finding people to attend Intergroup is becoming increasingly difficult. Many service posts within Intergroups are not filled and therefore the message is not being taken to the community effectively.

Our Intergroup covers a huge rural area of over 2000 square miles. We appreciate that the best method of recruiting is a personal visit but with thirty plus groups in such a wide area this is not practical. The Intergroup does not have access to contact addresses for these groups so it is not possible to write to the group directly. GSO is not in a position to help with sending out these letters either.

We would like to hear how other Intergroups around the country in similar rural areas approach and solve this problem and would appreciate the experience and wisdom of the Fellowship in solving this issue.

This is not just recruitment of new members to Intergroup, but also how we can get older members to encourage and mentor new recruits to Intergroup, making their Service that much more fulfilling.

2. Would Conference consider how the Fellowship's social media presence can be improved to enhance AA's ability to carry the message?

Background

Ideas that Conference might want to consider could include, but should not be restricted to:

- a) Allowance given on the website and any approved social media in (b) below to posting links to interesting articles and events, e.g. Alcohol Awareness Week, articles about AA on TV and the press, etc. (providing this can be done without suggesting affiliation to outside organisations);
- b) Social media presence on sites such as (but not necessarily restricted to) Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Sound Cloud, YouTube, providing of course this can be done without compromising Traditions 11 and 12.

COMMITTEE 6

Would Conference share their experiences and make recommendations on:

- a. What can be done when a Group has no named Officers and/or the contact no longer attends?**
- b. Is there any way in which the local Intergroup can assist, given that we do not govern but are trusted servants?**
- c. Could GSO be asked to carry out an annual review/renewal process for Pink Form details for each Group to remain on the internet listings, Where to Find etc., and also inform the appropriate Intergroup of any significant changes?**

Background

Every AA Group treasures its autonomy under Tradition 2 and 4, but sometimes Groups can run into difficulties. Many Groups are prompt in informing GSO, Share etc., of changes to venues, times etc. but this is less successful when Officers have changed or left the Fellowship. Such a group may have completed a Pink Form with GSO in order to continue to appear on the Internet listings and Where to Find etc.

Tradition 2 - short form, Tradition 4 Long form, The AA Group - AA pamphlet 3270
The AA Structure Handbook for Great Britain (2017) pp 74-86

2. Would the Fellowship share experience of money in AA bank accounts being inaccessible due to signatories having left the group and make recommendations as to how the Fellowship may make access to our funds possible?

Background

Our local Intergroup has £400 to £500 stuck in a bank account for a previous convention fund. The Treasurer left the area without arranging new signatories for the account. The bank won't release the funds.

A local Friday group old timer reports that the group has £200 stuck in a bank account. Despite repeated requests for our money, the bank won't discuss the account with anyone but the treasurer who relapsed and left the group.

If these situations are replicated throughout the UK, it may be that many thousands of pounds are locked in accounts. This is money that belongs to the AA Fellowship.

The 21st General Service Conference strongly recommended that all groups, Intergroups and Regions have a bank account.