

SPECIAL NEEDS/ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEES

Reaching Out to Those with Special Needs: Deaf \* Hearing- Impaired  
Wheelchair-Bound \* Blind \* Housebound \* Disabled \* Non-English  
Speaking \* Seniors

This material is the collected experience from several General Service Conference areas, central offices, intergroup offices, and districts where Special Needs Committees or Accessibility Committees have been formed. This service material is available to the Fellowship for those who wish shared experience.

FORMING SPECIAL NEEDS/ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEES

A Committee on Special Needs will be guided by the following principles:

"To carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers."

"There are no special A.A. members, only members with special needs."

Definition and Purpose of Special Needs/Accessibility Committees:

To help make A.A. accessible to everyone who desires it; to help alcoholics with special needs either to get to meetings or have meetings brought to them.

To establish and maintain subcommittees charged with addressing particular needs.

To explore, develop, and encourage avenues of participation for all A.A. members and newcomers, regardless of their special need.

A. A. for the Disabled Recognizes that:

Sponsorship into Alcoholics Anonymous of people with disabilities by other people with similar disabilities helps with initial identification.

A.A. members with disabilities wish to have the same privileges and responsibilities with regards to Twelfth Step work, sponsorship and speaking at A.A. and non-A.A. meetings, as other A.A.s.

A.A. members with disabilities wish to be treated as A.A. members and not set apart in a manner that highlights their differences.

1) PHYSICALLY DISABLED

Whereas, many sober A.A. members utilize crutches, walkers or wheel chairs and are, therefore, restricted from participating at many A.A. meetings, a subcommittee for access is charged to:

a) Establish and maintain a list of wheelchair-accessible meetings;

- b) Encourage the use of wheelchair-accessible facilities for A.A. purposes;
- c) Explore and develop avenues of participation for sober A.A. members who utilize crutches, walkers or wheelchairs.

#### Needs Perceived by Alcoholics Anonymous

More efforts need to be made to make alcoholics who have disabilities aware of their opportunity to recover in A.A.

All listings in directories ought to identify all meetings that are wheelchair-accessible.

Articles in local A.A. newsletters can help to inform A.A. members in the community of more information on those with a physical disability.

#### Materials Available for Disabled Members

"Homers' Service" for housebound A.A. members.' This is a way of staying in touch with G.S.O. and others by mail. The home bound member receives the Loners/Internationalists Meeting by Mail ("LIM").

The first 164 pages of the Big Book on computer disc.

Listing of electronic bulletin board on-line computer meetings.

A service list of tapes and tapers is exchanged by the physically disabled. Grapevine also has tapes.

Most intergroup offices/central offices now carry listings of wheelchair-accessible meetings.

## 2) DEAF AND HEARING-IMPAIRED

Whereas, many sober A.A. members are deaf or hearing-impaired and, therefore, cut off from hearing communication, a subcommittee for the deaf alcoholic is charged to:

- a) Encourage the use of American Sign Language ("ASL") interpreters at open and closed A.A. meetings;
- b) Compile and maintain a list of A.A. meetings using hearing/signing interpreters;
- c) Compile and maintain a list of bilingual hearing/signing interpreters willing to sign at A.A. functions/conventions;
- d) Explore, develop and encourage other means of participation for deaf sober A.A. members;
- e) Use Guidelines for "Carrying the Message to the Deaf Alcoholic," available from G.S.O.

#### Needs Perceived by Alcoholics Anonymous

More efforts need to be made to make deaf alcoholics aware of their opportunity to recover in A.A.

All listings and directories should identify all meetings that are sign-language interpreted.

Intergroups/central offices/answering services need to have T D D machines.

All A.A. resource listings should provide a means of identifying members who have special characteristics, helpful in working with alcoholics with special needs.

Information on A.A. and A.A.'s efforts to provide A S L interpreters should be made available to professional agencies serving deaf persons, as well as to treatment centers and halfway houses. Efforts should be made to help start more deaf groups. Use "Big Book" Alcoholics Anonymous in ASL and Guidelines for "Carrying the Message to the Hearing-Impaired Alcoholic" - both available from G. S. O.

### Materials Available for Deaf Members

List of Intergroup/Central Offices (some have T D D machines) for times and locations of local meetings.

"A Deaf Newcomer Asks"

"How It Works" in American Sign Language

"Translation of the Twelve Steps" for Signing Purposes

"Translation of the Twelve Traditions" for Signing Purposes

"Is A.A. for You?" for Signing Purposes

"A Brief Guide to Alcoholics Anonymous"

Alcoholics Anonymous Video in American Sign Language; A.A. Guidelines: "Carrying the A.A. Message to the Deaf Alcoholic"

List of Contacts for Deaf and Hearing-Impaired Alcoholics

### 3) BLIND AND VISUALLY-IMPAIRED

The definition of a "visually impaired" person is one who is legally blind or suffering vision loss that is not correctable by medical measures. More efforts need to be made to make persons with a visual impairment aware of their opportunity to recover in A.A.

#### Needs Perceived by Alcoholics Anonymous

Communications which are currently available for persons with a visual impairment (such as radio-talking book) could be used as PSAs about A.A.

Twelfth Step lists should have codes to identify A.A. members who are available to give persons who are blind rides to meetings, as transportation is of utmost importance.

Information on Alcoholics Anonymous, Braille publications, and other services should be made available to those with visual impairments.

#### Materials Available for Blind and Visually Impaired Members

Numerous books, booklets and pamphlets are available on tape. Service material listing these items is available from G.S.O.

Alcoholics Anonymous and Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are available in Braille and in large-print editions.

#### 4) LANGUAGE BARRIER

Whereas many potential alcoholics or A.A. members speak another language besides English, alcoholic individuals seeking help should be informed of Spanish, French, Native North American and other literature available through the Fellowship.

##### Needs Perceived by Alcoholics Anonymous

Contacts should set up in area service offices of A.A.s who speak a language other than English. Have these names available for Twelfth Step calls.

Sponsor those speaking another language.

Increase C.P.C. and P.I. efforts to notify agencies and the public that A.A. is available around the world. Advise of the literature available in many languages.

Hold service meetings in an area where population needs more information on A.A., i.e., recent Special Forums in Whitehorse, Yukon, and Yellowknife, Northwest Territories.

Start A.A. groups in heavily populated areas where specific languages are spoken, i.e., the Chinatowns in New York City and San Francisco.

##### Materials Available for Members With a Language Barrier

See Catalog of Conference-Approved Literature for materials available in languages other than English.

#### 5) SENIORS

In view of increasing alcoholism among older adults, attention should be given to means of reaching this segment of the population.

##### Needs Perceived by Alcoholics Anonymous

Start meetings/groups in nursing and retirement homes.

Encourage listening to tapes (e.g., Grapevine tapes).

Share about the "Meeting-by-Mail" for Loners and Homers.

Bring a sponsee to visit a senior and give some A.A. tools for hope.

Start Accessibility Committee to help the alcoholic get to a meeting or to bring a meeting to homebound. (Area 14, North Florida, has a whole booklet on this subject.)

Offer rides to meetings, help with transportation.

Offer to read A.A. material to seniors.

Offer help to family members (AI-Anon).

Form a "Sober Over Sixty" subcommittee.

##### Materials Available for Seniors

"Time to Start Living" (Large-Print Edition)  
Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (Large-Print Edition)  
Alcoholics Anonymous (Large-Print Edition)

#### OTHER AFFLICTIONS AND SPECIAL NEEDS

Some areas indicated the following under "Special Needs": women and men who need childcare in order to get to meetings; A.A.s who are HIV-positive; adolescents; hidden and learning disabilities; or others with dual diagnoses.

Special thanks for sending a lot of information to help compile this information in this document go to:

Eastern Area Missouri; Nevada Area Committee #42; California Northern Coastal Area; Vermont Area; North Florida Area #14 Accessibility Committee; Area #65 - District 6; S.E.N.Y. Special Needs Committee; Member from Orange, California; Chicago Area Service Office - Special Needs Committee; Southern Area of Minnesota; Oregon Area; South Florida Area; and the General Service Board.

In April 1992, Mike Alexander, Chairman, General Service Board, submitted to all Conference members six reports on "methods that are effective in carrying the A.A. message to alcoholics who are sometimes hard to reach." These reports were:

- a) Report on Carrying the Message to the the Aged.
- b) Report on Carrying the Message to Persons with Disabilities.
- c) Report on Carrying the Message to African-American Alcoholics.
- d) Report on Carrying the Message to Native North Americans.
- e) Report on Carrying the Message to Hispanics, Asians.
- f) Report on Carrying the Message to Women.

(The above-listed reports are available from G.S.O.'s Service Files.)

One area that has an Accessibility Committee printed a booklet to assist those who work with the blind, deaf, bedridden and learning disordered alcoholic. This booklet is available from G.S.O. Another area has submitted a comprehensive report to G.S.O. which included the following specific needs groups: Physically Disabled; Hearing-Impaired; Visually Impaired; African-American; American Indian/Native North American; Hispanic; Gay and Lesbian; Senior Citizens. (It should be noted that other groups may surface as A.A. members become more aware of needs within their A.A. communities.)

Other areas have also collected experience to share for those getting started.

A couple of additional thoughts for A.A. conferences and conventions: Designate space on the registration form to indicate a special need and invite these members to write the host committee to learn what services and conveniences are available for their particular need. Have a Special Needs Committee for conferences and conventions.