Report of Workshop at St. Louis Missouri, April 9, 2005
"Accessibility for Everyone"

Co-Sponsored by Districts 2 and 3

The workshop opened with the Serenity Prayer.

Terry L. gave some introductory remarks and thanked everyone for coming and gave an overview of service work in AA. He emphasized that we are to give back what was given to us. He encouraged all to take a chance and give it a try. He explained that the purpose of this work special needs committees do is to make meetings more accessible and carry the message to peoples who cannot attend.

Tanya T. "temporarily disabled" willing attendees by passing out goggles and earplugs to four people and sitting one person in a wheelchair to allow them to experience those disabilities for the first half of the meeting.

A video was shown of How it Works in American Sign Language.

Speakers:

Ian S.: Talked about how and why to fill district special needs/accessibility committee chair positions. He told how he filled the Special Needs position in District 4. This was followed by a position as Area Chair for Special Needs. Spoke of the Responsibility Statement- we are responsible to ALL AA's. We need to be responsive to physical needs of our members. District Chairs coordinate with each other via the Area Chairperson. It is important to fill chair positions. He also spoke about structural accessibility and the guidelines for meeting designations. In the past HF was hard to decipher so the designation was split up to MA & FA. MA means you can get in and out of the meeting by wheelchair but not necessarily be able to use the restroom. FA means you can get in and out and also us the restrooms. He pointed out that the guidelines for determining whether a meeting site is MA or FA is available on the EAMO website. Meetings are to be listed as MA or FA in the where and when. Special Needs can send out persons or contact groups for this information. Districts and Areas need to follow-up. We need to access the message as well as the meeting. AA literature is available in large print and Braille and other languages. There are videotapes and CDs with sign language for the deaf. At the meetings there are signers for the deaf and quiet rooms. Adequate lighting for visually impaired is also important. It is important that meeting designations are correct in the directory. There is a lending library located in Central Service. The contents are published on the EAMO website. The Alano Board has accepted a proposal to have materials available to deposit/lend at Central Service. Loners International has a Newsletter for AA's who are unable to get to face to face meetings either because of location in a foreign country or being homebound, etc. The GSO has the address of LI.
Currently SN plans to add a list of accessible MA/FA meeting places for large events to help with planning.

Shirley H. (SN Chair for Dist. 3) spoke about providing accessibility to deaf AA's. Carry

the message to the deaf alcoholic. She has been interpreting for 15 years in her district. She is also trained in Braille. She also spoke about making meetings accessible to deaf and blind alcoholics. She has obtained a manual from the Western Area for special needs. Accessibility is for all, including those with seizure disorders, head injuries, and the visually impaired. Accessibility means more than providing interpreters. She suggested networking with the group.
She asked if our Central Service Offices are wheel chair accessible. There was discussion among attendees about this. She encouraged all to check out the "Friday Night Live" meeting in District 3 for an example of the most handicapped accessible meeting. Look for the details= are there obstructions to using the threshold. Become aware of obstructions then pick up a phone and call special needs.

Jimmy F.: Spoke about what it is like to be a Hispanic and visually impaired AA, and providing accessibility to visually impaired AAs. Special Needs started here in St. Louis. There has been much Special Needs work done in the past by Meredith B. and Ian S. Seven years ago the first Spanish Meeting started in St. Louis and is still in existence.

Sean B.: Spoke about what it is like to be a handicapped AA, how the message reached him, providing accessibility to the head injured AA, and the challenges of re-entering the world. He felt that any took advantage of him. He had to learn to let go of the past and follow the program. Physical challenges for him have been: always feeling tired, lethargy to overcome. He is working on moving forward with rehab. Head injured AAs need assistance from others to get to meetings. Many head injured folks lose the ability to converse normally.

Sharing Session: Led by Chris F.; members who had been "temporarily disabled" shared.

- Pat had worn goggles. He said his hearing was intensified to peripheral noises and it was harder to concentrate on the speakers.
- Pat had worn earplugs. He said it diminished the message received. If he had been deaf he might have left the meeting if there was no one there to help him.
- Gary also wore earplugs. He said he learned from the experience not to take his hearing for granted.
- Shirley shared that the meeting room had been hard for someone in a wheelchair to enter. Asked members to consider that an electric wheel chair cannot go over high thresholds.
- When asked if any of the participants had felt separate, all stated that they felt a part of the meeting today.
- Chris asked the question: How can your home group provide accessibility to AA and Special Needs?
- Someone suggested that when a group member is ill or in the hospital, we should take a meeting to the member. Also, educate group members about Special Needs. Make sure your meeting is listed as MA or FA in the Where and When.
- Another attendee suggested making the meetings and Intergroup Office non-smoking to accommodate people with respiratory problems. Encourage able-bodied people not to park in handicapped spaces. Housebound AA's need

meetings and many phone calls.

The meeting was adjourned with the Lord's Prayer.

Notes and thanks:

- Approximately 33 AAs attended this workshop.
- Handouts of special needs literature and guidelines for determining meeting place accessibility were given each attendee.
- Coffee and Tea and snacks were available for all to enjoy.
- The day was blessed with good fellowship and all reported they enjoyed the meeting and learned much to carry to their respective groups.
- Thanks to all the workers and speakers who contributed to the preparation and delivery of the workshop.
- All thanks for any success to God who made it possible for this workshop to take place.
- Thanks to Marge D. for being our secretary the day of the meeting.

Respectfully, Penny S.