

SPRING ASSEMBLY

JUNE 14-16TH, 2024

DORT COLLEGE-SIOUX CENTER, IA

Welcome everyone to our Spring Assembly of 2024! I am Becky Vodraska, your Area Delegate- Panel 63. I want to thank all of you that are here in person, and you enjoyed the beautiful drive **ALL THE WAY** up north to my part of this great state of Iowa. Thank you also to those that are taking time to be here virtually. We have come a long way in our ability to make our Assemblies available to everyone everywhere! Technology can be a good thing!

Today, I am here to share with you some of the topics that were discussed at the World Service Conference in April. I was grateful to have the opportunity to represent all the groups in Iowa while I was there, and I received many cards of encouragement, prayers, and some good laughs. THANK YOU FOR THINKING OF ME!

I hope today I will be able to help you become more aware of how WSO (World Service Office) helps our groups here in Iowa as well as the many groups worldwide.

Before we get started with my report, I would like to share with you quickly regarding my luck getting to Virginia Beach this year. You may remember, last year I was planning to arrive a day early for the conference. Well, I tried to have that same plan this year. Guess what.... yup, that did not happen this year either. When I got on the plane at 5:30 am Tuesday this is what my window seat looked like. Yes, I was nervous, but I just wanted to get to Virginia Beach! As we all sat on the plane patiently, we listened to the pilot come on four times to apologize for the delays. When the captain came on for the 5th time to tell us they were not able to fix the problem immediately and we were asked to deplane. I realized then, I just needed to slow my boat down, thank my HP for keeping me safe and it would be best to just spend another day in South Dakota. I was able to get a room, calm

myself down from the disappointment I was experiencing, and also get a flight out for the next day. It really was the best thing that all this happen, as I was able to travel with 2 other conference members the next morning who I did not know were flying out that day and we had a great time together! Another reason for me to remember, I don't have to do anything alone! So, with that being said.....

Welcome again to the Founders Inn in Virginia Beach! It really is a relaxing, peaceful place to stay!

Welcome to my meeting room for the next 4 days! The 64th World Service Conference. This is where we all came to share our ideas, experience, strength and hope for the World Wide Fellowship of Al-Anon.

The theme for this 64th World Service Conference is **“Our Path toward Grace, Unity and Understanding.”** It truly was an honor “filled with Grace” to be there this year. I was able to experience reconnections with members from Panel 62, my Panel of Delegates on Panel 63 and welcoming the new Delegates on Panel 64 from all over the United States and Canada and the “Unity” with each of us bringing ourselves, or recovery and our love of the program. To hear the different discussions and conversations opened my mind on how areas do things the same and differently and yet our shared experiences and leadership support each other and increase our “Understanding” of Al-Anon. I hope this presentation will convey some of that to you today.

At the opening of the conference, we reviewed the importance of Concept Six “The Conference acknowledges the primary administrative responsibility of the Trustees.” Key spiritual principles include **Mutual Trust, Mutual Respect, Authority, Freedom, Equality, Participation, Goodwill, Open Mind.** Our conversations and discussions were respectful and thoughtful discussing this concept.

Since the retirement of Tom C., Carol C. has become the Associate Director-Literature. Carol shared our newest piece of CAL (Conference Approved Literature) which was Tom's final project titled “Healing within Our Alcoholic Relationships-A collection of Insights from Our Shared Journey” (P-95). This captures the essence of the Al-Anon program in a 48-page booklet of brief but

powerful messages of timeless wisdom. The booklet is currently being designed and translated, it will be available this fall in English, French and Spanish for \$4.

Carol also shared the framing of the conceptual idea of a financial recovery booklet. This discussion created many opinions and some of them are as follows:

1. Finances are sometimes a “danger” topic. It can be as touchy as discussing “intimacy” in some of our material.
2. Having such material available would help show members how to be healthy by/when discussing finances.
3. Comments on how emotional this topic can be for families of alcoholics and to include the spiritual principles of finances as it can be a very emotional topic.
4. This type of material could also be helpful for Alateens and how talking about money is part of life.

Even though the Blueprint to Progress covers this topic of finances, having more material on this topic could be another reference to help members. If you feel the urge to share your experience, strength and hope regarding finances please submit your sharing with WSO!

Our next topic was Chosen Agenda Items

Each Conference the Delegates submit topics for discussion called Chosen Agenda Items. This topic was chosen **Membership and Unity of Purpose.**

When is something diverting us from our primary spiritual aim?

This idea arose from comments regarding keeping the focus on Al-Anon and Al-Anon principles as we expand our membership to include individuals with a wide range of life experiences and perspectives.

Our common purpose is to help families of alcoholics and to grow ourselves through the steps, traditions, and concepts. Ways to keep Al-Anon focused included chairing meetings on Al-Anon tools, the importance of sponsorship, and avoiding outside influences.

Is Al-Anon able to fulfill its primary purpose going forward?

The world changed due to the pandemic, and Al-Anon has, too. The disease of alcoholism is stronger than ever.

Is Al-Anon's current spiritually strong enough to meet the needs of members and newcomers going forward?

Has unity eroded? Has isolation increased?

How will our future trusted servants learn the skills they need to lead in this new world?

What spiritual principles must Al-Anon strengthen or even rediscover to fulfill its primary purpose?

Here a few more questions that came about through this Chosen Agenda Idea and perhaps you could consider discussing these at your next meeting.

- How do we look to our Past to Protect our Future
- How are we welcoming the newcomers?
- Are we meeting our members where they are?
- Are we Understanding, Respect and Kind?
- click
- Do we think outside the box and ask members what they need?
- Do we protect and encourage the group conscience?
- Are we supporting our service structure that supports us?

Delegate Participation on CLT (Conference Leadership Team)

At the 2023 conference, a group of Delegates presented a motion from the floor with a KBDM to form a task force to add Delegates to the Conference Leadership Team (CLT). The motion did not pass at that time because of the agenda schedule, so the members involved with the KBDM asked to be added to the 2024 agenda. This year the Delegates were asked to come prepared to discuss the topic. Some

delegates have expressed concern about their ability to help decide what will be on the agenda of the WSC (World Service Conference). The primary purpose of the Conference Leadership Team (CLT) is to prepare a WSC agenda that facilitates the active voice and effective group conscience of the fellowship. The KBDM committee felt having Delegates serve and actively participate on the Conference Leadership Team encourages more conversation with the groups thus creating more awareness with all members. The committee feels through awareness and conversation, there is more inclusivity, connection, being part of Al-Anon as a whole. At the end of the Conference, the WSC was asked if we have any additional direction related to the discussions. A motion was made on the last day of the conference and approved to form a task force to add 3 delegates to the CLT.

Finances

Here we go, into the money part! This year WSO contracted with a new audit firm, Brown Edwards LLP. The audit was conducted in January and received a clean opinion meaning it was satisfactory.

This statement of activities shows the revenues and expenses comparing 2022 and 2023. The surplus for the year 2023 stemmed from the unexpectedly high excitement generated by the new book *A Little Time for Myself* (B-34)! Additional sales of \$940,000 were greater than originally budgeted—without it, no surplus would have occurred.

Our new reader sold almost 1 million dollars in the first 6 months. A record for any piece of Al-Anon Literature.

Overall positive performance for 2023 is consistent with literature sales in a year that a new book is introduced. The following year, sales tend to reset.

Consistency in contributions and literature sales is still needed to maintain operations and provide support. Due to favorable market conditions during the year, the organization experienced a gain of \$1,089,174.

Yearly investment performance increases or decreases the Reserve Fund.

Overall total contributions have exceeded pre-pandemic levels.

Our \$1 donation worth has changed over the years. In the 50's a dollar was a dollar and to achieve the worth of that dollar by today's standard it would be \$11.58. I am aware, that not all members can afford this amount of donation, however we still need to donate what we can when we can.

WSO projects the cost of services to each group of \$330.09 for this year. If your group can donate this amount, that is fantastic, if you cannot, that is okay too. Your WSO services will not be denied! It is as with our groups; we give what we can when can.

Policy on Choosing a Group's Name

WSO receives many phone calls from individuals inquiring about attending certain groups due to the name of the meeting they would like to attend. According to registration group guidelines of Al-Anon, ANYONE may go to ANY meeting even though your topic may be specialized, and it is included in your group name, our groups are there to help **anyone** that has been affected by alcoholism.

If you are opening or developing a new group, it is important to choose an appropriate name. The policy and guidelines for this process are being simplified and will be available soon. Here are a couple of suggestions for your new group name:

- Is the name welcoming and clear to the newcomer?
- Does the name exclude certain members or new members? Does it discourage someone from attending?

Your group name is important to think about. It is just like picking out a good book to read, is it inviting, and would you like to go there?

International Coordination Committee (ICC)

The World Service Conference Charter charges the WSC to be the senior structure to the international communities, which means the decisions the WSC makes affect members worldwide. It is important that we gather these members' input. Our view is greatly expanded when we seek out input from members outside of our structure. As stated in Tradition One "Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity." and this is not just unity for WSC. Our fellowship is bigger than that. To ensure common welfare for all members, it is imperative to communicate with all international structures worldwide.

The International Coordination Committee (ICC) carries the voices of the international structures.

Unlike service arms within the WSC Structure, International Structures have autonomy to define the composition and links of service that best supports their individual structure. All international structures are different and vary in size, knowledge, resources, membership.

In February 2022, the International Team began communicating regularly with structures with regular structured meetings via multiple platforms – email, WhatsApp, etc... Regular Structure Meetings are meetings between WSO Staff and individual structures held on a regular scheduled basis. Structures often send questions in advance to allow the International Team to prepare for productive interchanges. In 2023, the WSO held a total of 112 Regular Structure Meetings with over 60 countries. These meetings continue to be very well received and trusted servants globally often share their gratitude for the commitment to continuing this practice.

As you can imagine, 112 RSMs took considerable time and effort. The WSO recognized this volume was not sustainable long-term, so they reduced the frequency of RSMs per country from four to two per year—except when there is a specific need—and introduced the concept of a Global Gathering.

Global Gatherings offer a new method for collaborating with all international structures. Meetings are held every two months on a specific topic. Structures are encouraged to send in topics for consideration as well as questions on the next

scheduled topic. To date, the International Team has held three Global Gatherings.

On average, over 100 members and 40 International Structures are represented at the Global Gatherings

Another significant responsibility of the ICC is to consider requests from international structures to translate and print literature. Internationally, even a single group registered with the WSO can request to translate literature into a new language provided no other service structure exists in their country. More typically though, new language translation requests are made by AISs. This year the Board has granted first-time translation and reprint permissions to Bulgaria, Latvia, Mongolia, Romania, and Thailand. Paraguay was also granted first-time reprint permission as they are a Spanish-speaking country, so translation permission was not required.

If granted permission, the group or AIS becomes the only legal distributor of the translated CAL in their country, and they may only sell this literature within their country boundaries. The WSO usually grants permission once the group or AIS has built adequate membership to financially sustain the translation and publication processes.

Have you ever wondered how many languages we have translated Conference Approved Literature into?

(Answer:) 37 unique languages

As of March 2024, the WSO supports:

40 General Service Offices (GSO) aka National Structures

1 Evolving Structure

14 Al-Anon Information Services (AIS)

12 Groups – Individual or Collective

In the years between International Al-Anon General Services Meetings or IAGSMs, international structures in all stages of developments—from groups to Al-Anon Information Services to evolving structures to General Service Offices—connect through Zonal Meetings. These meetings are formed by structures across a geographic area, although some extend beyond one geography based on language. Each Zonal Meeting has a unique flavor or approach, but at all these

meetings, structures discuss common issues; share experience, strength, and hope; and offer each other mutual aid.

There are currently only three zones: Europe, South America, and Central America although the idea of forming a fourth zone in the Asia-Pacific area has been and may again be discussed.

In 2023, all three Zonal meetings were held and the WSO was invited as a valued guest to share information, listen to concerns, and continue building strong relationships with our international partners who are equally responsible for ensuring the Al-Anon message of hope is available when anyone, anywhere reaches out for help.

(for more information regarding IAFSM you may enjoy speaking with Jean L. our Regional Trustee)

Stepping Stones

Before I went to conference, I shared these questions with everyone and at our AWSC where we reviewed these two questions. I am bringing them to you again to think about once again. A WSO task force has been created with current Delegates and WSO staff and volunteers to see if visiting Stepping Stones will continue once every 3 years for the future delegates attending the World Service Conference.

Here are the questions that were posed:

- Do the groups in your area believe it is important for the Delegates to visit Stepping Stones?
- If so, how does it Benefit your Area?

There was discussion regarding the cost of having the WSC in the New York/Connecticut area. Once all the comments from the Areas are assessed by WSO, more will be revealed on this issue.

The 2025 World Service Conference will be held at the Marriott Hartford/Windsor Airport Hotel, 28 Day Hill Road, Windsor, CT 06095. Delegates are scheduled to arrive April 23; Conference takes place April 24 – 27, 2025; and the Stepping

Stones Visit will occur Monday, April 28. This will be my last World Service Conference as your Iowa Delegate.

New things going on

I am curious how many of you here today have tried to locate a meeting on the WSO website. Has it been difficult to find a meeting?

How many have used the mobile app?

The AFG Mobile App has over 190,000 users. We are on track to have over 6 million sessions on the website since we reached 1 million by February 25th.

WSO has been using G|Translate -a subsidiary of Google Translate to help resolve the translation issues with certain objects, such as the attendees filter buttons. GEMS (Global Electronic Meetings Search) is quite a complex tool involving multiple backend software solutions, which at times is like finding a needle in a haystack.

In June 2023, we launched the ability to display electronic groups alongside physical groups on the Geographic Meeting Search – you can distinguish the groups by the different pins, and when website visitors select one, they get the pop-up that clearly identifies the meeting as an electronic group.

WSO still has a way to go to get the data fields necessary to easily identify hybrid groups on the map, but, recognizing that we have hybrid groups, we have updated the message on the Geographic Meeting Search page to direct members to the location details of hybrid meetings.

The addition of “Hybrid” requires little additional work due to space limitations and would provide those seeking a meeting clarity on meeting location options. The plan to include “hybrid” in group names was shared with the Policy Committee at its January 2024 meeting.

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As an outcome of creating the combined Geographic Meeting Search, Staff has heard many members ask the question,

“Why can’t groups in geographic Areas be listed on both the Geographic and Global Electronic Meeting Searches?”

WSO wants to provide the newcomer or member seeking a meeting on al-anon.org with the ability to find help easily. They considered the principle of attraction rather than promotion contained in the 1966 WSC Statement on Public Outreach. The Statement defined these terms as:

“to attract: ... to invite; to draw to; to cause to approach.

“to promote: to push forward; to further advance ...”

In other words, they focused the approach on inviting members rather than advancing any group interests. This principle is vital to maintaining unity.

To achieve this goal, they knew they would need to meet newcomers and members where they are. And where do they seem to be? They are already aware of whether they are looking for “local” or “electronic” meetings. Thus, the availability of the two searches—one centered around a map and the other centered around platforms—facilitates them in most easily finding help.

Hopefully, that makes sense, but the question members are really asking is “why not both?”

If they were to do otherwise, members from around the world might unknowingly join groups who had decided to participate in local service. When these members decide to begin practicing Al-Anon’s Third Legacy of service, they might be unable to participate fully because of geography. Instead of creating unity, listing on both searches might then cause harm and confusion.

So, to support members finding a home group where their voice and vote is equal to everyone in the group and where they have a clear path toward service, the WSO lists each group on only one meeting search. In this way, we respect the meeting's group conscience decision about whether they want to participate in geographic or global service. Our approach ensures double-headed management is avoided.

We are excited to report that nearly 84 percent of our WSC Structure's geographic Areas are now supporting electronic groups. The remaining 9 Areas appear to be in progress on developing their procedures so they too can welcome electronic groups.

Thankfully, the WSO has NOT heard one single Area state their groups have voted against supporting electronic Areas.

... the Next Generation AFG Records project.

Nearly every aspect of World Service Office business is tracked, managed, or connected to our current association management system known as iMIS. Group and member records, Area World Service Committee records, international structure records, AFG Connects login authentication, our online store transactions, the Global and Geographic Meeting Searches, and even our inventory are all recorded in or facilitated by iMIS.

The good news is that just as Al-Anon Family Groups have grown and evolved since we implemented our iMIS system many years ago, so has association management technology evolved dramatically. The WSO has the financial abundance in capital to select a quality system. The future looks promising. It is estimated that it will take two years or more to make the transition to the next generation group workflow.

Implementing a new software solution offers an opportunity for change and evolution.

Area Group Records Coordinators and District Reps across all 68 Areas will be delighted to hear that WSO Staff are actively working on combined reports and searches to make it easier to use the current system. I hope our Area Group Records Coordinator is excited about this. It would be nice to enter something into the system once rather than multiple times! Stay tuned!

Road Trip!!

Road Trip You and Your Board Connect. is an opportunity for members, WSO Volunteers, and WSO Staff to connect through fellowship and share leadership skills required for trusted servants in a creative and engaging manner. Current members of the Board and At-Large Members of the Executive Committee travel to a new Area each October for Board Week and host a day full of fellowship, engaging activities, lively table topics, interactive presentations, and a delicious lunch.

South Carolina was selected and will be hosting Road Trip in 2024. Registration starts in September so get it on your calendar!

AA convention

AA is celebrating 90 years "Language of the Heart" in Vancouver Canada in July 2025. Al-Anon will have a program also. How many of you are planning to go?

We do not know yet where the next Al-Anon International will be in 2028. What we know is that 14 bids were submitted, 400 volunteers are requested, soon all the bids will be reviewed. In May, three cities will be selected and visited in June. In October, the Board will make a selection and an announcement will be made at the 2025 World Service Conference or before!!

Does it work?

From time to time, the WSO is also approached by outside researchers who are requesting assistance in their research on friends and families of alcoholics. The WSO cooperates with professionals, sharing survey data to validate the Al-Anon program and raise awareness.

Jayne Kenney, a PhD candidate, completed a doctoral dissertation in 2023 based on the WSO's 2018 Al-Anon Family Groups Membership Survey. They presented their findings to the Board of Trustees at the July 2023 Board Meeting.

Their work, entitled "Does It Work If You Work It?" discussed the benefits of working an Al-Anon program and how longevity in Al-Anon is a key component to better overall mental health. Additionally, they identified four therapeutic elements associated with positive change:

Attending meetings, being spiritually motivated, working with and serving as a Sponsor, and engaging in service.

Recently, Jayne utilized survey data for their research, which was presented at conferences and contributed to their doctoral dissertation...helping to raise professional awareness of the Al-Anon program.

Keep in mind our spiritual principles of unity, responsibility, willingness, service, and humility as identified in the following Traditions and Concepts:

Tradition One – Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity.

Tradition Five – Each Al-Anon Family Group has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps of AA ourselves, by encouraging and understanding our alcoholic relatives, and by welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics.

Tradition Nine - Our groups, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

Concept Four – Participation is the key to harmony.

While we in this room know that “it works if you work it” and our surveys highlight the positive impact of the program on our lives, this professional focused on specific aspects of our program that are associated with positive change.

Al-Anon Survey

Members have been participating in WSO surveys every three years since 1984. Involvement in Al-Anon surveys is considered service work and is greatly valued as we seek to reach out to those who are dealing with the effects of someone else’s alcoholism but haven’t yet found help in Al-Anon.

Raise your hand if you participated in the 2018 Membership Survey.

Raise your hand if you ever encouraged another member to complete the survey.

Raise your hand if you ever shared the 2021 Membership Survey results with a professional.

As we have heard, the research has presented four key practices that have been proven to improve the lives of Al-Anon members: meeting attendance, spirituality, service, and sponsorship.

The researcher saw these four elements as therapeutic and key to the improved mental health of Al-Anon members.

We, as members, already know this program works, and now we have professional validation of the improved life that is available to us.

So how do we confirm the professional findings?

Step Twelve asks us to carry this message and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

How do we carry these professionally validated therapeutic elements of recovery to others in all our affairs?

Am I working the same program I did when I came in, or do I show how my program continues to change and grow?

Tradition Eleven talks about attraction rather than promotion.

Are my actions attractive? Are they reflective of the increased sense of well-being I receive through continued use of the therapeutic elements?

So here are our discussion questions you could consider at your next District meeting or event.

In what ways can we convey the correlation between meeting attendance, participation in recommended activities, and increased well-being?

How can we encourage increased participation and focus on the continued growth of members who are no longer “newcomers” but may have settled into the comfort zone?

The survey opens Thursday, June 20, 2024, and runs through Wednesday, July 31, 2024. This is a great service opportunity for all members, including newcomers. Just 15-20 minutes of your time can serve Al-Anon Family Groups for many years to come, as this data provides evidence of the effectiveness of our program, which leads to more professional referrals. A flyer is available with the QR code that will take you directly to the survey. Please take the time to participate. Thank you for your service!

Alateen

Welcome to the Electronic Alateen Feasibility train, now known as Electronic Alateen Validation and Planning. This train theme has been consistent throughout this project's inception because it represents how the evolution of Electronic Alateen has been a journey that affects everyone from all over the world, which has required us to navigate and detour through many different tracks.

Question: How do you feel about the proposed conceptual process of validation & Implementation for creating electronic Alateen groups in the WSC structure and internationally? I have reviewed this topic with our Alateen Coordinator/AAPP regarding the conceptual process of Alateen and it is a confusing and very in-depth topic. Remember the discussion of having Al-Anon global meetings in Iowa? Well, this is just like that but with Alateens.

Our experience with Alateen is different in Iowa as there are not many groups interested in electronic meetings. The United States safety rules are more relaxed than many other countries. There are many things to think about when it comes to the safety of our teens.

Any AMIAS that would like to discuss this topic with me, please contact me after this assembly and I would be happy to go over it with you.

With all that being said, I would like to say Judy V. our Area Alateen Coordinator/AAPP and Area 18 has completed our Alateen Recertification Process. That is a very time-consuming process, and she did a fantastic job getting it done! Thank you, Judy, for all your hard work!!

Thank you everyone for your attention today and for allowing me to represent Iowa in Virginia Beach. I know how overwhelming this all may feel. I received all this information in 4 days and I am trying to give some of it to you in **1 hour!**

I know it will take time to digest all this information so, after our Assembly go to the Iowa website where you will be able to print my report or just review certain topics that I have just shared with you.