

Today's World – Demonstrating Integrity, Anonymity, and Service

- **How does the service structure support local efforts to carry the A.A. Message**

I'm Debbie and I am an alcoholic. I would like to thank the committee for asking me to speak today. As always, every time I have the opportunity to participate in a panel, I learn more about the program and my recovery becomes stronger.

In order to answer the question of how the service structure supports local efforts to carry the A.A. message, I thought about how the A.A. message is carried. One alcoholic talking to another alcoholic is how the message is carried. But how do we get the message to those who have not yet found us? Our message needs to be in the air where the alcoholic who is still suffering can find it whether or not, he is looking for it. In order to do that we need sound policies and local committees that put those policies into action. We need books and other literature which need constant updating as the way people communicate changes, for that we need a publishing department since groups can't publish a Big Book or any other literature alone. We need local literature committees to make sure our literature gets where it's needed. Professionals who see the suffering everyday need to know where to send those who seek help, local jails and prisons need to have the message taken in, treatment facilities need to know what A.A. does and what A.A. doesn't do. What barriers do your meeting have that is preventing those with disabilities to hear the message? Need a solution? Try contacting G.S.O., they will share the experiences of other groups to help you find the solution. The Grapevine/LaVina is our meeting in print, one group cannot possibly publish this monthly.

Our survival at the local level depends on the service structure. Without it there would not be a consistent message to carry. The service structure idea developed over time with much trial and error:

"Once upon a time, all A.A. meetings were held in homes. There weren't any committees, and nobody put up a cent. We hadn't even a name and founders were unheard of. It was that simple". . . *Language of the Heart page 131*

"By and by meetings got big. Our front parlors couldn't hold them. . . by 1937 some of us realized that A.A. needed a standard literature. There would have to be a book. Our word-of-mouth program could be garbled, we might be destroyed by dissension over basic principles, and then our public relations would surely go to pot. We'd fall flat on our obligation to the alcoholic who hadn't yet heard unless we put our knowledge on paper . . . It began to dawn upon A.A. that group responsibility would have to reach much further than the meeting hall doorstep on Tuesday and Thursday nights only. Otherwise the new man approaching our door might miss his chance, might lose his life." *Language of the Heart page 131-133*

Two thousand books were circulated in 1951, scattering our message worldwide. Without a doubt, that Book is the backbone of our unity and assures the local message is THE message of Alcoholics Anonymous as it was practiced by our founders.

Early attempts to secure funds for the publication of a book, lead to the formation of the Alcoholic Foundation (later changed to the General Service Board of A.A.). The General Service Board was formed to be responsible for our affairs. Concept I states, "***Final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship***".

Keeping a balance between ultimate authority and responsibility and the day-to-day functioning of world services means there must be constant **communication** among all elements of the structure. Since old timers couldn't live forever, newer trustees would be virtually unknown to A.A. groups. The service structure is the **communication** link that connects local A.A.'s with the trustees in New York and the means to have our voice heard at the conference. Without direct linkage to A.A., future trustees couldn't possibly function alone.

Group – Communication starts with the group which lets its group conscience be known to the **GSR** (general service representative). The GSR is responsible for making sure that group members are informed about what went on at the Conference and made aware of the full range of Advisory Actions.

GSR – makes sure the group's wishes are heard and fully considered at the district and area levels, and that they are part of the delegate's thinking at the Conference.

District - Elects a DCM (district committee member)

Area – At the area assembly, a delegate is elected to represent the area at the annual Conference meeting.

The Conference and the Delegate – At the annual Conference meeting, matters of importance to the Fellowship as a whole are considered and discussed by one of the standing Conference committees, then brought to full Conference in the form of committee recommendations. All Conference members then have the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the recommendations before they are voted on. After the Conference the delegate reports back to the area.

In the pamphlet "Twelve Concepts Illustrated" Concept I states "the General Service Board was created to perform services that groups could not do for themselves – uniform literature, uniform Public Information, helping new groups get started, sharing experiences of established groups, handling pleas for help, publishing a national magazine, carrying the message in other languages & countries."

Then in Concept II the groups delegate complete authority for the active maintenance of our world services to the Conference making it the actual voice and effective conscience for our whole Society **AA Service Manual page S15**

These world services include:

- Literature – assures the newcomer is receiving THE message not a watered-down version, translates our literature into other languages.
- Loners/Internationalists – A.A. meeting by mail for those who can't physically attend, mailed bimonthly.
- Public Information – If you find the A.A. message being carried on T.V. or radio chances are that G.S.O. helped to supply information. Provides A.A. facts for media, inquiries from the general public. Gets the A.A. name in the air to the still suffering alcoholic.
- Cooperation with the professional community – Makes sure professionals are aware of services offered by A.A. and can refer those in need.
- Corrections – gets the message inside our prisons & jails and provides a bridge from institution to A.A. so the recently released inmates can make contact with A.A. right away.
- Treatment – takes the message about what A.A. is and isn't into the treatment facilities and provides bridge from facility to A.A.
- Grapevine – our meeting in print.
- Accessibilities – removes the barriers to our message.

These services enable A.A. to function as a whole. They guard our Traditions; they issue our literature, they watch over our public relations and so relate us rightly to the outside world, they mediate our difficulties, they guide our policy. These indispensable services are A.A.'s principal lifelines to the still suffering alcoholic who has not yet found us. These services cannot be performed by local groups by themselves. On the other hand, these services are nothing without local members taking action. We are alcoholics in action, these services ensure Unity that the message that is carried locally is THE message of Alcoholics Anonymous not MY message, not YOUR message but THE message.