

Panel 65
Area 17 Chair
Pacific Regional Forum Report

I'm Coleen and I'm an alcoholic. Because I currently serve as Hawaii Area 17 Chair for Panel 65, one of my responsibilities was to attend the 2016 Pacific Regional Forum. It was held this past September 30th - October 4th, in Kona on the island of Hawaii at the Hilton Waikoloa Village. I spent the weekend learning what our contributions are used for and how those contributions make it possible to share the AA message with the world. Our contributions also helped to make the Pacific Regional Forum possible, and allowed any AA member to attend at not cost to them. What stood out to me was the number of AA members from Hawaii that were there. When I've travel to Service assemblies in other states, Hawaii was doing pretty good if 30 of our members were there. I don't know the breakdown, but out of 449 attendees, many more than 30 were from Hawaii Area 17.

For an embarrassingly long time when new to AA, I was uninformed and misinformed, and maybe you are too, so I want to share a little of what our contributions to AAWS helps to make possible.

At one of our past assemblies, Rod B., the Pacific Region Trustee at the time explained, as AA members, you and I own two corporations that publish our AA message and communicate with the world: We own Alcoholics Anonymous World Service, Inc. and Alcoholics Anonymous Grapevine, Inc. We support these two corporations with our contributions, and with the sale of the literature and service material. We don't sell advertising. We don't accept contributions from people who are not members of Alcoholics Anonymous. That's right, AA basically says, "Thanks, but no thanks" to outside resources and financial help. We pay our own way.

The idea of reaching out showed up early in AA's history. In 1939, when the Big Book was first published, the "vision for us" if you will, is shared on page 153 of the Big Book. It says, "Our hope is that when this chip of a book is launched on the world tide of alcoholism, defeated drinkers will seize upon it, to follow its suggestions. They will approach still other sick ones and fellowships of Alcoholics Anonymous may spring up in each city and hamlet, havens for those who must find a way out."

GSO staff and volunteers brought a lot of literature with them, so I was able to check the current Final Conference Report to find out the cost of doing AA business at the worldwide level. Per person, the cost to fully fund the General Service Office in 2015 was \$7.14 per member per year. That year contributions from Hawaii Area 17 averaged \$7.37 per member. Hawaii contributed a total of \$40,295.63. By the way, those pennies are both spiritually and financially as important as the dollar bills we contributed. You and I both know that not every member or group can or wants to contribute, nor are any of us required to. In Hawaii, 51.2% of groups were either able or willing to contribute to GSO.

Our 7th tradition suggests we ought to be fully self-supporting, and lets us all know there are no dues or fees for AA membership. We have a saying that the basket is where money and spirituality mix. AA never demands money from any of us. It is one of the many ways we share our aloha, gratitude and desire for AA to exist throughout the world.

Our AA World Services and AA Grapevine hold four forums a year, each in a different region in the United States and Canada. Forums are opportunities for AA members to meet our GSO staff and volunteers who serve AA at the General Service office and through the General Service structure. These weekends are spent listening to presentations, and participating in sharing session and workshops. Greg T., our General Manager put it this way, “ I have two million bosses.” That is us, we are the bosses. The Pacific Regional Forums gave us the opportunity to listen and share.

Terry B., a non-alcoholic trustees shared, “The essence of AA is not the General Service Office, it is in our hearts. Our resources are vast and often unrecognized.” He also said, “AA offers a record of successful treatment of alcoholism.” We all know the Big Book is written in English. Did you know the Big Book is printed in 70 languages, and there are 58 translation project in the works?

Before the Forum started, I had time to check out the literature displayed and shared with us. On a round banquet sized table, they displayed several translations of Alcoholics Anonymous. Seeing those translations was a moving experience, and immediately brought tears to my eyes. I took a video of those books, so see me during one of the breaks if you'd like to see them too.

Here is an example of how vital translated literature is: One Hispanic member from California shared at the microphone that he recently contacted the General Service Office, told them that a drunk who spoke only Chinese showed up at their Spanish speaking meeting. Then he asked, “What do we do?” GSO shipped a Chinese translation of the Big Book over night, and the next time that man came to their AA meeting, the Spanish speaking group gave him that Chinese language Big Book.

If you or your group ever sent contributions to GSO, you helped put that Chinese language Big Book in the hands of that newcomer. Because we have a General Service Office, we have the ability to send any of our English language literature, and any of our translated literature anywhere in the world. Our contributions make it possible for the General Service Office to do that for us and for the still suffering alcoholic.

Scott H., a trustee at large from Canada shared about the origin of AA World services. In the 1940's Bill W. was invited to other countries. We can read about Bill W.'s and AA's early experiences and growth in Language of the Heart, Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age, Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers, and other books we publish through AAWS.

From the early years, AA has been willing to step outside our comfort zone, and respond to requests from countries where English is not necessarily spoken. There are no borders to alcoholism. Through translations and meetings with other countries, we hope to create a world where there are no borders to our AA message as well. AA World Services helps make this possible by holding meetings with delegates from other countries. In other countries, people will spend 4, 5, ...7 days on a bus to get to these weekend meetings where as many as 1,500 attend. At one such weekend, the Delegate from Russia sat next to the Delegate from Ukraine. We may have different flags but may we never have borders around the AA message. Eva S., the person at GSO who is responsible for GSO Staff assignments shared, "AA has a presence in 176 countries. It is thrilling to see AA growing around the world."

These meetings help us expand AA services and reach the still suffering alcoholic. For example, Honduras now has 14,000 AA members but only 50 are women. Uganda has a population of 35 million people. 50 are sober alcoholics and they have formed 4 AA groups. Steve H., a trustee at large from Canada shared, "Things happen because we go places, make connections and form personal relationships." The job is not done. There is more work to do.

Greg T., our General Manager said, "We do our best to share AA's collective experience." Whether it's a video, a corrections correspondence, a Public Information or Corrections Workbook, AA pamphlet, book, or AA's presence on the internet through aa.org, our AA literature, guidelines, services and publications reflect the collective experiences of AA members in the US and Canada. Our archives department received 13,000 inquiries this year. Although we are behind the times when it comes to technology, we are on the right track. Our website had more that 12 million visits.

Linda B., our Grapevine Director shared that the AA Grapevine and La Viña are great 12th step tools, and a place for AA members to share experience, strength and hope. There is a Grapevine app set up for automatic renewal. Or, we can initiate or continue subscriptions the old fashioned way. Raymundo L. shared what a blessing it has been to serve as a GV/LV Representative. We are able to sponsor subscriptions to/for those who are incarcerated. In a letter to GSO, one inmate shared that GV helped him know he is not the only alcoholic in the universe. Amy B., also on the GV staff shared that, although it is a valuable tool, GV subscriptions are down. Although, it is evident that this service is helpful for the still suffering alcoholic, the number of GV subscriptions decreased in 2015. AA doesn't sell advertising in our magazines. So, if we really want to keep our magazines circulating, it is up to us to increase the number of subscriptions.

I hope by now, you've come to the conclusion our trusted servants and paid employees at GSO lead - but do not govern. They make decision where to go in the world. And they freely share our message and our experience. Someone at the mic said, "I can't use the line it's got to be this way because GSO says so, although if I said that I'm sure they would believe me."

You and I are the one who decide what the AA message is. As we provide the funding, GSO acts for us and disseminates and shares that message with the world and with us.

On the last morning of the Pacific Regional Forum, three past trustees shared. Ken B. from West Central region said as we serve and give back - things will happen. Stand forward and keep AA on track. Greg M., a past General Office Manager who got sober in Kihei in 1967 reminded us our purpose is to bring AA in reach to all those who want it. And Julian, a Past Pacific Regional Trustee talked about our upside down triangle service structure and shared his concern for the future of AA. Who will lead? Who will answer the hard questions? Who will weather the storm and handle the mail? Who will manage the collective conscience of the entire fellowship? AA has become a fellowship of equals and the highest rank any of us can have is "sober."

I shared that Hawaii Area 17 contributed \$7.37 per member in 2015. Some areas give more than we do, but many give less. So we can't pat ourselves on the back just yet. In AA as a whole, membership is flat and contributions are flat as well. And if we continue to "be flat," GSO will need to implement plans to cut back or do less for the world and for us. Do we really want to do less for the still suffering alcoholics, or will we, as we have in the past, step up to the plate? It is up to us to decide and take action.

On personal note, at this Forum in particular, I saw some of the people I'd heard or talked with at Regional events such as PRAASA. I recalled what I had learned from them, and how their sharing had influenced how I am in AA, and how I serve Hawaii Area 17 and AA as a whole.

Thanks you for listening, thank you for my life, and thank you for letting me be of service.

Coleen A.
Area 17 Chair
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