

Remote Communities Workshop
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Aloha Kakou. This translates to 'May there be friendship or love between us.' My name is Cheryl and I am an alcoholic. I am truly honored to be serving as the Panel 65 Delegate for Area 17, Hawaii. I serve on the Corrections committee and the committee on International Conventions/Regional Forums. When I received the email requesting volunteers to present at this workshop, I eagerly volunteered. I wanted to share with all of you how Hawaii deals with the remote communities' issues. Not only is Hawaii one of the most remote island chains in the world, our islands are separated by hundreds of miles of ocean. According to Google, Hawaii is the most isolated population center on the face of the earth. Hawaii is 2,390 miles from California; 3,850 miles from Japan; 4,900 miles from China; 5,280 miles from the Philippines and 5,700 miles from Australia. Hawaii includes 14 districts located on the Hawaiian Islands of Oahu, Kauai, Maui, Lanai, Molokai and the Big Island of Hawaii. Seven of our districts are on Oahu, home of Pearl Harbor and Honolulu, three on the Big Island and three on Maui, including Tri-Island district which includes the islands of Molokai and Lanai as well as West Maui. The entire island of Kauai is one district. We hold three weekend-long assemblies in odd years and four in even years. One-day committee meetings are held between assemblies. Each of our 14 districts take turns hosting these gatherings, thus providing an opportunity for trusted servants to attend some assemblies and committee meetings without having to fly between islands. The practice of rotation facilitates neighbor island participation and Twelfth Step work to all the districts and over 300 groups, fostering unity. Travel costs are significant with roundtrip interisland flights ranging from a low of \$225 to well over \$350. We do offer homestay to reduce the overall expenses.

We have considered several options to reduce travel costs. One would be to hold all events on Oahu since half the districts and roughly 70% of Hawaii's total population live on Oahu. AA started on Oahu so naturally the assemblies were all held on Oahu in the beginning. In the early 90's a trusted servant from Maui proposed that an assembly be held on Maui. There was a lot of excitement and support from the area so the first 'neighbor island' assembly became a reality. Over the next several years, the practice evolved to the one we have now. One major concern with changing back to holding all assemblies and committee meetings on Oahu is the impact it would have on unity. As Tradition One states, 'Our common welfare should come first. Personal recovery depends on AA unity.' And to continue quoting from the *12 Steps and 12 Traditions*, 'The unity of Alcoholics Anonymous is the most cherished quality our Society has.'

Another option to reduce travel costs would be videoconferencing. I know that some areas on the mainland use it with considerable success. Our assemblies and committee meetings are held in parks, churches, school gymnasiums and other venues without internet access, and some areas of the state have no Internet reception. In speaking with our local tech guru, he started talking about band width, audio and video equipment required in a minimum of five locations and the training required for running the equipment. This would require venues such as hotels, universities, rented conference areas – all of which are very costly in Hawaii. With the limitations I've mentioned and the strong sentiment that the spiritual connection from face to face interaction is a vital aspect of our sharing the solutions and message among trusted servants, there has not been significant support among the fellowship.

Around 2007 some of the AAs in West Maui formalized what is called 'The Crossing' as an effort to reach out to the even more remote islands of Molokai and Lanai. Every few months they travel to Lanai or Molokai for a weekend filled with camping, AA meetings, hiking, snorkeling and, of course fellowship. Their experience, strength and hope helps bring some fresh ideas and 'new blood' for the island meetings. There are limited meetings on both Lanai and Molokai – 6 meetings a week on Molokai and 5 meetings a week on Lanai. On my trip to Molokai last fall, we were welcomed with open arms and extended island hospitality. For me, it was truly a 'bucket list' experience, and probably my last experience with tent camping, but that's a story for another day. A recent 'Crossing' to Lanai had over 100 participants.

And finally, how does, and I quote, 'the most isolated population center on the face of the earth' stay connected to Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole? Active participation with our yearly PRAASA, Pacific Region Alcoholics Anonymous Service Assembly, and alternate year Pacific Regional Forum help provide unity with AA as a whole. Many groups and districts fund, or help fund, travel for their GSRs or DCMs to attend PRAASA and the Regional Forum. Hawaii Area hosted PRAASA on Oahu in 2011 and we have the honor of hosting the Pacific Regional Forum Sept 30 – October 2, 2016 in Waikoloa on the Big Island. Many AA members and trusted servants vacation in Hawaii and carry their experience, strength and hope to us from the mainland and worldwide. That's a definite advantage to living in paradise!!!

Mahalo palena 'ole (gratitude beyond measure) to you and Alcoholics Anonymous for my life today that's filled with light, love and laughter.