PRAASA Report Back

March 4-6, 2016

Coleen A., Chair for Area 17

Aloha. Thank you for allowing me to attend the Pacific Region Alcoholics Anonymous Service Assembly for Area 17. Rod, our Immediate Past Pacific Region Trustee compared what happens after PRAASA to rippling circles that travel outward after a rock is thrown into a lake. We all come together and share on various topics. We go home, pass on our PRAASA experiences, and work to create more and better ways to reach the still suffering alcoholic.

The purpose of PRAASA is to develop greater unity among the members, groups and areas of the Pacific Region, to encourage the exchange of ideas and experiences and to provide an opportunity for members to discuss pertinent aspects of AA. The hope always is to foster the Recovery, Unity and Service legacies of AA.

The theme this year was “Our Spiritual Way of Life: Steps, Tradition and Concepts.” It is impossible to write every thought from all three days, so I’ll share what spoke to my heart - hopefully in an even keeled way. The panels were recorded and many districts and people in Hawaii Area 17 purchased those recordings. If you want to hear more on a specific panel or all of PRAASA, my guess is someone will be glad to lend you the recordings. You’ll probably hear ideas that I did not catch, but are important to you.

What I saw, heard and felt…

There are a lot of sober caring alcoholics in the Pacific Region. Every year, attendees want there to be to a representative sample of the many kinds of people, groups and districts we serve. One change I noticed, in the six PRAASAs I’ve attended - there was a strong Hispanic presence and the voice for Hispanic men was heard. This PRAASA was the first time in my memory that an Hispanic woman came up to the mic, not as an interpreter/translator but as an A.A. member with something to share. She also shared there was going to be a steps and traditions workshop for Hispanic women in her area.

Although we are improving in diversity in our representation, there still is room for improvement. Between panels someone said to me, “You are from Hawaii right? I hope I don’t sound prejudice or rude, but how come there are no Hawaiian looking people from your area here?” I replied that our area has more diversity than she is seeing, and this is the way representation at PRAASA unfolded for us this year. I also let her know, if she comes to the Pacific Forum, or to our Annual Hawaii Convention, she will meet lots more Hawaiian looking people. Although we are all alcoholics first, maybe next year you can help improve diversity at PRAASA.

The Friday evening panels were about connecting with the newcomer, with each other and with A. A. as a whole.

Would a plain language translation of the Big Book be easier for newcomers to understand? This would not be a new version or replacement Big Book. Whenever the Big Book is translated, the intent is to translate the words and also the spirit of our original book.

Do we look for newcomers just in our home groups, or do we make an effort to find them other places such as hospitals, correctional facilities or treatment centers? Are we welcoming to all who come through our doors? Do our home groups need to do inventories on how we reach out to newcomers? Although the willingness to get sober has to come from them, the opportunities to create a life better than the way they are living comes from us. One person said, “I respond more to the carrot than the stick.” We can all pass on our program of recovery, and create a “culture of service” in our home groups so all feel welcome.

We also heard from the next generation of A.A.’s. The next generation wants to know they are welcome in A.A. They want a sense of fun… because many “would rather die than be boring.” Young people feel talked down to when they hear comments like, “I spilled more than… You’re so lucky … You’ve been spared years of…” They come to A.A. miserable and desperate, and **have** had enough to drink. The next generation wants a fair chance, and to be respected and treated as equals.

What else? Many rely on phones or devices to communicate and seek information. We need to continue to improve the anonymity component while maintaining and improving A.A.s presence on the internet. Many young people want to primarily communicate with their devices. I talked with a long timer about sponsoring the text savvy. She said, “I needs to hear a voice. Texts can be unintentionally deceiving. Texts won’t tell me if your voice is quivering or you are about to lose it.” We don’t want to short change the next generation. It may take time and practice trusting the process, before they become willing to receive help in all the ways we effectively and lovingly pass A.A. on. One long timer put it this way, “ My style of sponsoring doesn’t seem to be trending right now.” Nevertheless, we all receive and pass A.A. on in the various ways that worked best for us.

Saturday morning panels focused on Anonymity, Safety in A.A. and Going to Any Length. Anonymity with each other is always a personal decision. But I repeatedly heard “at the mic”, if we go in the hospital, there are a lot of folks that want to be able to visit, so consider sharing your last name with the people you are close to! Tradition XI and XII point to the spiritual significance of 100% anonymity at the public level, but many are looking for wiggle room and have varying interpretations of what anonymity at the public level looks like, especially when using social media. Asking the question, “Is your home group picture online?” Andrea from Kihei Morning Serenity researched this topic and gave a thoughtful presentation. We are not anonymous at the public level if we post full face photos and full names or if we identify ourselves as A.A. members. The use of privacy setting isn’t as helpful as we may think if we truly want to practice the principle of anonymity online. The internet is a great outreach tool. But, it is the actions of individual that may cause harm to themselves, to others, and to A.A. For an excellent example of how we can provide the most information about A.A. while maintaining 100% anonymity online, please visit [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)

While practicing anonymity to gain humility and protect A.A. from our egos, what are we doing to protect newcomers? What can we do when we experience or witness an uncomfortable or illegal situation? Our General Service Office is not there to set policy or provide protection. It is up to groups and individual members to address these problems should they arise. Many who come to A.A. for help are being harmed or damaged, so it is not OK to look the other way or act as if predatory behavior doesn’t have a negative impact on members… and A.A. as a whole for that matter.

With so many coming to A.A. with problems other than alcohol, their need for A.A. is not always easy to discern. Because it can take some a while to figure out if they need A.A., we need to give time time, practice patience and keep an open mind.

Joel, our current Pacific Region Trustee gave his report. He reiterated that the intention of any A.A. service is to make sure that “The hand of A.A. is there.” Joel showed us a series of maps that illustrated AA’s expanding presence in the world through the years. These maps showed us the countries where people who are literate can read our message in their language, and this brought tears to my eyes. Through translations, we have carried the message and provide access to our message to more and more alcoholics throughout the world. Although we haven’t completed this task of carrying the message all over the world, I saw clearly that we are close. The next generation of sober A.A.s may be the group of drunks that accomplishes this. It takes our contributions to make this happen. As long as individuals and groups continue to support this work, GSO will not need to cut back services and efforts to do so.

Joel also talked about paying attention to the spiritual component of giving to A.A. Yes, it takes our contributions to make it happen. Is my contribution an expression of gratitude and service or am I doing it out of habit? The money allows us to do the work. If I am mindful, and take the time to know what the work is and is not, it becomes a spiritual opportunity that I benefit from. He asked us to become aware of the services we provide and the hand of A.A. extended because of those services. This information is provided in meetings like this, the Delegate Report back, GSO’s quarterly newsletter Box 459, The Final Conference Report and the other correspondence from GSO. Yes it is important to financially support all levels of service. It is also important to know how our contributions are used to reach the still suffering alcoholic.

Last year, do you remember Hawaii Area 17 agreed with the request for a pamphlet for the LGBT community, and the request for a pamphlet regarding those with mental health concerns? An all call went out to all A.A.s in North America. A.A. members sent in more than 50 submissions for the LGBT pamphlet and more than150 submissions for the pamphlet for those with mental health concerns.

The three Sunday morning panels were: “What’s on Your Mind?” Which allowed any participant to share their thoughts with us, Past Trustees sharing their thought on “If A.A. could only…” and The Current Delegate’s Panel answering “ask it basket” questions. The Delegate panel is lovingly referred to as “Stump the Delegate.”

During most of the Past Trustees Panel, I either cried or felt like crying. The best suggestion I can give you is to borrow the CD and listen to this panel in its entirety. There is too much wisdom, experience, strength and A.A. history to sum it up in one paragraph. There are no few thoughts that stood out. Past Trustees are all quite human, and in very different ways, each one loves A.A. and continues to gives her/his best. They expressed gratitude for A.A. and faith in the group conscience.

Thanks for listening/reading. And thank you for allowing me to be of service.