

# AREA 72 PRE-CONFERENCE ASSEMBLY FOR THE 2020 GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE

## PRE-CONFERENCE MATERIALS PACKAGE

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*\* This is interestingly sort of like a discussion topic at the Conference level*

## PURPOSE AND NOTES

The purpose of the preconference is to provide information about the above topics to GSRs so that GSRs may have a fruitful conversation with their homegroups.

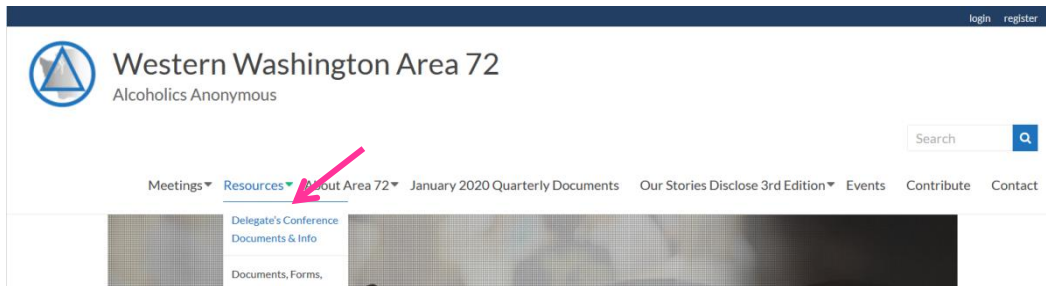
GSRs – please share freely your thoughts about these items. Please do **not** simply say if you are personally for or against. Please **do** express why you may have an opinion, what underlies it, what questions you would ask, etc. By expressing your full thinking you will help other GSRs broaden their own, which is in the interest of our homegroups.

We are here to learn from each other, not render decisions.

Be open-minded, willing to listen, and willing to participate. You are here for your homegroup.

Each of the items below is followed by a blank lined sheet for you to take notes on to assist your discussions at your homegroups.

Additional notes will be taken at each pre- conference and posted on the website, [area72aa.org](http://area72aa.org), along with full background information if you are interested.



Please email me your group's thoughts by April 15 at [delegate@area72aa.org](mailto:delegate@area72aa.org). Some districts may have their DCM collect all responses and send combined. Either is fine.

It is more helpful for me to know **why** and **what** your group thinks rather than simply a yes/no.

**Service Material from the General Service Office**

**THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS**

(SHORT FORM)

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

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**ITEM ONE**

Submitted by: Area 11 CPC Committee, Connecticut

***“Consider a request to create a pamphlet for mental health professionals.”***

Letter from submission:

*“Greetings from Area 11 Connecticut! The Area 11 Cooperation with the Professional Community Committee would like to formally make a recommendation for an item to be added to the 70th General Service Conference agenda.*

*Recommendation*

*To create a pamphlet geared towards mental health professionals specifically that would educate them about AA with the hope that they may be better qualified to help a person who has a desire to stop drinking.*

*Necessity*

*The concept of making a pamphlet that targets a specific professional is far from new as is demonstrated by our current array of CPC literature. One of the ideas behind this pamphlet is to have a piece of literature that will spark the interest of a mental health professional and encourage them take time out of their busy day to read about what we do. In our existing literature medical professionals are addressed but there is nothing that speaks directly and specifically to the mental health professional. Having a title specifically targeted at them would increase the chance of them reading about what we offer. Most of these professionals have busy schedules and having something in front of them which is specifically relevant to them would go a long way. This idea came from the realization that many professionals who work in the mental health field have little knowledge of our program.”*

Additional notes from submission:

*“Here are some ideas that have been discussed as possible content for the Mental health professional pamphlet. These ideas have all come directly from either our C.P.C. committee meetings or from a member of the committee:*

- *Discuss the fact that A.A. is not the same as psychotherapy. Many of our members choose to attend therapy and certainly do get a lot out of it, but if a person is a real alcoholic as described in the big book they may very well require a spiritual awakening.*

- *Present the idea that A.A. is a spiritual program, not a religious one. These professionals may be under the wrong impression about that aspect of our program and that can be a very make or break subject for people who are on the fence about whether A.A. could work for them or not.*
- *Let them know that Medications they may prescribe (if that is their job) do not interfere with the principles of our program. A.A. has no opinion on anyone taking medication prescribed by a doctor. Our program doesn't offer a medical solution.*
- *A.A. does not offer financial help to those in need, nor does it provide housing or other social services. We are not aligned with any government agencies and we don't offer job placement to those who need help getting back on their feet.*
- *We do not require any payment from our members or from anyone who is interested in attending a meeting.*
- *Let the professional know that just because a patient of theirs has a problem with sex, drugs, gambling, or overeating, does not qualify them for membership in Alcoholics Anonymous nor does it disqualify them. The only requirement for membership in our program is the desire to stop drinking. Anyone can attend an open meeting but only a person with a desire to stop drinking may attend a closed meeting. (explain the difference)*
- *A.A. is not affiliated with any other 12 step fellowships.*
- *Describe what makes a person Alcoholic. Disease/Craving/Obsession.*
- *Make them aware of our website, and smartphone app.*
- *Let them know that a person from any walk of life can be an alcoholic.*
- *Tell them in a brief way about our policy of anonymity and how that may make it a little easier for someone to attend their first meeting.*
- *Suggest that they attend an open meeting.*
- *Suggest that they be in contact with our C.P.C. committee.*
- *(Maybe) Let them know that our members, all the way back to our founders, have suffered from mental illness so it is likely that they will come across an Alcoholic in their professional life that could benefit from our program."*

Please note that the above bullet points are the thoughts of the submitter. If this agenda item passes at the conference, the CPC Trustee Committee will be responsible for directing the shape of its contents, which may or may not include any of the above suggestions.

For consideration:

- This topic is not new; the CPC Trustee Committee has placed it on possible inclusion for future pamphlets in 2015.
- We have a pamphlet for A.A.s (and their sponsors) with mental health issues. Pamphlet P-87
- We have a pamphlet for health care professionals (in general). Pamphlet P-23



## ITEM TWO

Submitted by: Area 29, Maryland

***“Consider revising the A.A. Preamble to use gender neutral pronouns.”***

*Original (emphasis added for ease of locating)*

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of ***men and women*** who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

*Edit (emphasis added for ease of locating)*

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of ***people*** who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

For consideration:

- GSO has received several similar requests
- The Grapevine owns the preamble copyright

### BIG BOOK

The literature committee received a similar request to pronoun edit the first 164 as well as update text in some chapters which is suggested as being out context with modern times.



### ITEM THREE

Submitted by: Previous committee item, 2017, 2018

***“Consider a request for A.A. Grapevine to establish an Instagram account in line with the twelve traditions.”***

#### Background

This item came from the 2017 Grapevine Conference Committee (and subsequently 2018), which asked the Grapevine to research possible social media plans, and return a plan to the conference for consideration.

Strategy: Use Instagram as an extension of Grapevine’s graphics, video, and audio content.

Objective: Expose more people to A.A. and A.A. Grapevine by sharing out inspirational content, information, and resources to support recovery from alcoholism.

From the Grapevine Board:

*“In our recent Strategic Planning efforts, the Grapevine Board prioritized, “creating a stronger digital presence, to serve the A.A. community wherever they may be, on whatever computer or mobile device.” In carrying out this goal we have:*

- *Undertaken large scale website upgrade and redesign*
- *Built out a variety of new content for YouTube*
- *Integrated an updated store*
- *Developed more robust monthly digital reports*
- *Begun to explore new options for a digital magazine experience*

*As we continue to grow our content library and opportunities for digital growth, we looked back through the history of options and ultimately feel that Instagram is the next avenue we would recommend adding to the tools in our toolbox.*

*Our goal with Instagram would initially just include the use of existing content we already make for the magazine, website and YouTube page... Over time we could start to solicit new content... In keeping with our mission, posts would be primarily directed at alcoholics, inside and outside our rooms... As with all of our work, all of the twelve traditions and twelve concepts will surely guide our Instagram communications.”*



**ITEM FOUR**

Submitted by: various areas

***Consider several Big Book related items related to accessibility and relatability***

This item is a compilation of several items on the Conference Agenda this year.

- a. Create a new translation of the Big Book, into Plain Language?
- b. Create a Big Book workbook or study guide?

These types of requests, such as the above, have been steadily arriving at GSO, with greater numbers in recent years, in various forms and phrasing. There have **been so many**, in fact, that the Trustee Literature Committee formed a sub-committee last year to investigate them. The answers to the above questions will be taken as inputs into this committee's research and eventual recommendation.

The Committee investigating this issue has phrased the overall requests as this:

*"Consider if proposed agenda items for plain language, simplified language, accessible Translations and large print versions of the book Alcoholics Anonymous, as well as workbooks to help study the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, can be addressed with a common solution.*

*The trustees' Literature Committee's initial summary of multiple requests for translations to Plain Language, modern languages, workbooks, etc. as essentially driving at two identified needs of: (1) **accessibility, and, (2) relatability.**"*

**Should the Trustees' Literature Committee explore possible solutions that could help make our message more available? If so, are the above questions A and B reasonable suggestions?**

#### Item Four Background regarding Plain Language

A letter from GSB Chair, Michele G. concerning the topic.

*"I have spent a long time thinking about the agenda items that continue to pop up about translating the Big Book into contemporary or simpler language, and the idea of a workbook. Each year, it seems like there is not enough background for a fully-informed discussion beyond the anecdotes. People, both at the trustee level and at Conference, are forced into taking hard stands that the agenda item is either yes or no. It seems to me that the decisions are based on emotions rather than a fully-informed decision.*

*I would like to request this trustees' Literature Committee think more in terms of gathering objective information and engaging in a dialog with the Conference committee. Below are the current agenda items and items from January 2019 which were tabled in committee. I would ask the committee to undertake the following tasks:*

- *Identify and define the problem(s) that these agenda items are trying to solve.*
- *Group these agenda items in some way that makes sense to you so that information gathering, discussions and recommendations can evolve in a unified manner:*
  - *Workbooks*
  - *Plain language Big Book*
  - *Modern language Big Book*
  - *Simple language Big Book*
  - *Large-print Big Book*
- *Identify what further information your trustees committee and the Conference*
- *Literature Committee might need in order to decide on a recommended agenda item(s) that is/are best for the suffering alcoholics out there, based on a fully-informed background.*
- *Decide on a plan to capture and document a full spectrum of relevant thinking on this topic, and how to frame it for a broader discussion both at the Board level and the conference level.*
- *Decide how to share your plan and what input you would seek from the conference literature committee and if appropriate the Conference as a whole.*

*I do not see any hurry here. I am not asking you to come up with agenda items. I am looking to you for a plan to engage the Conference in thoughtful and more fully-informed sharing. My hope is you might ask the Conference for their input to be sent back to next year's Literature Committee.*

*In the course of your plan development, I'd like some consideration about what we might do about the existing agenda items rather than simply sending them along for a "yes or no" vote at Conference.*

**Notes:**

#### Submissions currently pending

- 1) *Consider translating the book, Alcoholics Anonymous into plain language – at a fifth grade or similar reading level. (Submitted by Area 08 San Diego Imperial)*
- 2) *Consider creating an individualized workbook to accompany the Big Book. (Submitted by Area 14 North Florida)*

#### Additional item to possibly include on this list (this was originally tabled in Jan 19)

- 3) *Consider the development of a contemporary and comprehensive new workbook to study the Twelve Steps, Traditions, and Concepts. (Submitted by Area 71 Virginia)"*

Excerpt from November 2, 2019 Trustee Literature Committee Meeting Report:

*“The committee reviewed a request from the General Service Board chair to consider if proposed agenda items for plain language, simplified language, accessible translations and large print versions of the book, Alcoholics Anonymous, as well as workbooks to help study the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, can be addressed with a common solution.*

*The committee discussed this request along with the 2019 proposed agenda item regarding the development of a fifth-grade level translation of the book, Alcoholics Anonymous, and the 2019 proposed agenda item requesting the development of a workbook to accompany the book, Alcoholics Anonymous.*

*The chair appointed a subcommittee to review previously submitted requests for literature development related to the items included in the Board chair’s request in order assess the problems and needs being addressed in the related requests and possible common solutions. The subcommittee will begin by first assessing this series of requests in aggregate to explore at a deeper level any common themes or problems to be addressed. These findings and approach to exploring these to be brought to Conference in order to generate a larger discussion with the membership about the underlying needs or problems driving these requests.”*

Request for “Plain Language” Translation from the San Diego-Imperial Area Assembly:

*“On September 15, 2018, the San Diego-Imperial Area Assembly voted in substantial unanimity to support the submission of the agenda item... In our area this item has significant meaning for several segments of the population including, but not limited to, Young People, Remote Communities Members, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community, Prison Communities, and our members with learning disabilities...*

*There is interest in a version of or translation of the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, that can be adjusted to the reading level of someone who struggles to understand the language, the vocabulary and the context of this valuable piece of literature, is still warranted.*

*Mind you, this is not a request to change the Big Book in any way. It would simply be a companion book to the Big Book, a translation if you will, that is written at about a 5 grade reading level. There are many books available that are abridged versions of the original publication so that less capable readers can handle them and our groups feel that for some of our members, the Big Book is one of those books.*

*In the San Diego and Imperial Area we have a large portion of Spanish-speaking members who attend meetings and participate in General Service. I know that, for most of them, they are grateful to have the translation of the Big Book into Spanish because, though many speak English fairly well, they find the translation to be more understandable and easier to use. It just makes sense that someone who speaks English well but does not read or write in English well, such as second language learners, or someone with severe learning disabilities, the Plain Language Big Book translation is the answer.”*

## Examples of a Plain Language translation

**ORIGINAL:** Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault; they seem to have been born that way. They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty. Their chances are less than average. There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest.

**PLAIN LANGUAGE:** It's rare for someone to fail if they follow this path. Those who don't get better either can't or won't commit to this simple program. They truly don't have the ability to be honest with themselves. We know such people exist. It's not their fault. Perhaps they were born this way. As a result, they just can't grasp the idea of living a life of total honesty. Without total honesty, their chance of recovery is low. Also, some people really do suffer from severe emotional and mental disorders, but many of them recover if they are honest with themselves and with others.

Reading Level:

Original: 10.83 (11<sup>th</sup> grade)

Plain Language: 6.65 (7<sup>th</sup> grade)

**ORIGINAL:** At some of these we balked. We thought we could find an easier, softer way. But we could not. With all the earnestness at our command we beg of you to be fearless and thorough from the very start. Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely. Remember that we deal with alcohol – cunning, baffling, powerful! Without help it is too much for us. But there is One who has all power – that One is God. May you find Him now. Half measures availed us nothing. We stood at the turning point. We asked His protection and care with complete abandon.

**PLAIN LANGUAGE:** We tried to hide from some of these ideas. We thought we could find an easier. But we could not. With all sincerity, please be brave right from the beginning. Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas, but nothing in our lives improved until we let go completely. Don't forget: We are dealing with alcohol and it's sneaky, confusing, and very powerful! Few of us can do this without help. But there is a higher power to help you, and you can find your higher power now. Half-hearted efforts did nothing to make our lives better. We were at a crossroads. So we asked for protection and care from our higher power, and we gave up the idea of control.

Reading Level:

Original: 6.31 (6<sup>th</sup> grade)

Plain Language: 4.045 (4<sup>th</sup> grade)

The Akron Papers: These historical pamphlets were written by Evan W. at the request of Dr. Bob. He felt that the newly written Big Book was too difficult for blue-collar workers to read. Evan wrote "A Manual for Alcoholics Anonymous" and "A Second Reader for Alcoholics Anonymous".

An excerpt from a presentation on remote communities at the 2015 International Convention

Another problem is the concept of plain English, when cultures and languages differ from our western culture and the usual standard of spoken English. Many residents of our remote northern communities are functionally illiterate. So they get almost nothing out of listening to speaker recordings from AA conventions and so on. Also the language of the Big Book of AA is way above them. Very many community members have very little formal education, and also many suffer from severe FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder) which makes an adequate level of understanding even more challenging. Very few potential members are interested in buying a Big Book, because they simply can't understand the complex English.

For example, I spent many hours with an inmate that I sponsored at the NSCC in Yellowknife who was trying to understand the first three steps of our program. Let's call him Jack. Although Jack had virtually no formal basic education and was functionally illiterate, he was very intelligent. He could repair any engine or snow machine, and he knew hunting and trapping from a very young age.

This leads me to a final plea. I want to see, sometime in the near future, a plain English language translation of the Big Book. The AA Book has been translated into about 79 languages worldwide. To me there is no difference between taking the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the Big Book and translating it into a foreign language, and taking that same book and translating it into plain language, plain English. Bill and Bob were fairly sophisticated and well-educated individuals, in an era where a high level of literacy was prized and respected, whether you were a low bottom drunk, or not! Such a translation into plain language would be very valuable to our AA members in remote communities, and to people coming into our western countries who only know English as a Second Language. I have recommended this at our Area 78 meetings, and many GSRs from Northern Alberta have supported this idea as being important for their communities as well as for Arctic communities.

## Items which address literacy challenges:

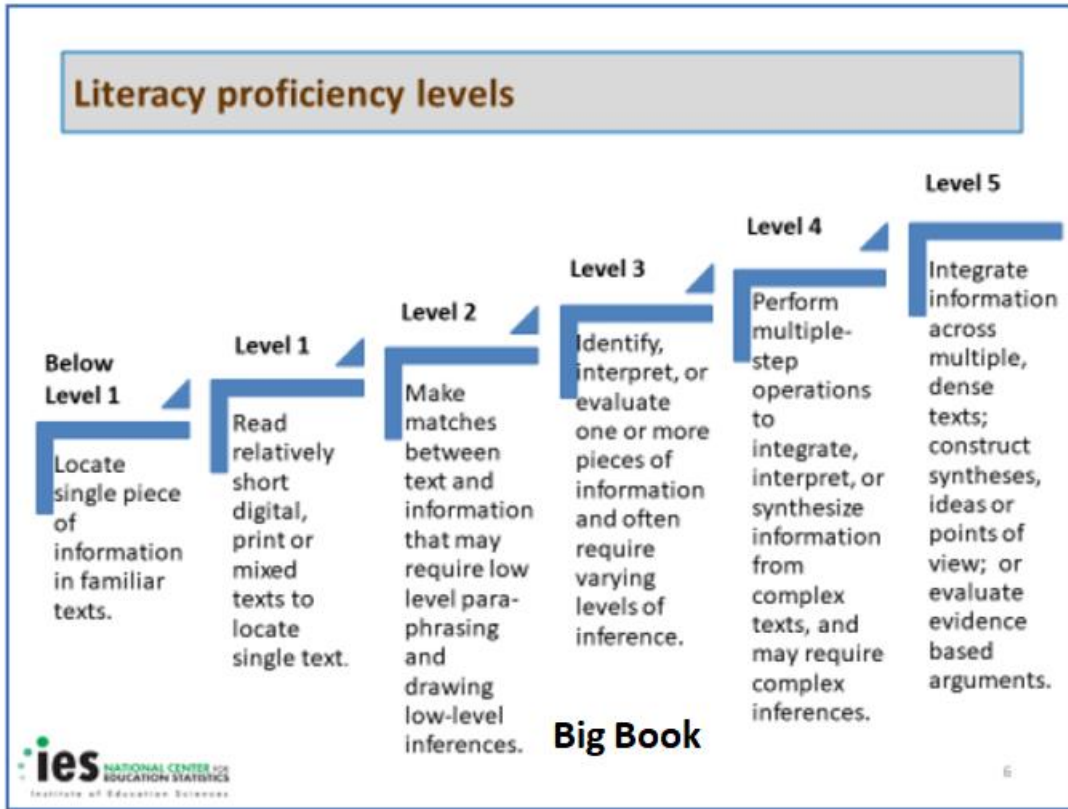
- It Happened to Alice (easy-to-read “comic book” style)
- Too Young? (Cartoon pamphlet with 6 young people’s stories)
- Twelve Concepts Illustrated Pamphlet (Brief, easy-to-read text and clever illustrations make the Twelve Concepts for World Service clear and understandable.)
- Twelve Steps Illustrated Pamphlet (An easy-to-read version of A.A.’s Twelve Steps. Step appears at top of each page with simplified text under illustration.)
- Twelve Traditions Illustrated Pamphlet (Based on a Grapevine series; presents both the spirit and the practical application of our 12 Traditions.)
- What Happened to Joe (Dramatic story of a young construction worker and his drinking problem, told in brightly colored “comic book” style.)

**Some history and actions pertaining to simplified, easy-to-read literature:**

- 1974** Trustees’ Literature Committee reported that “Is A.A. for You?--Short and Simple” was available.
- 1975** Conference Literature Committee Advisory Action recommended that the original “Is A.A. for You?” pamphlet be dropped and the simplified version be used.
- 1987** Trustees’ Literature Committee recommended that a sample of an illustrated and simplified “Is A.A. for You?” be presented for Conference approval. The committee also recommended that along with this first illustrated sample that the other two recovery pamphlets, “A Newcomer Asks” and “This Is A.A.,” be considered for future illustrated, easy-to-read literature.
- 1987** Conference Literature Committee Advisory Action recommended that the trustees’ Literature Committee further explore the need for simplified material for those with limited vocabularies and report its findings to the 1988 Conference.
- 1988** Trustees’ Literature Committee recommended there be illustrated samples of “Is A.A. for You?” prepared for consideration be the Conference Literature Committee. It was further recommended that the committee consider other illustrated literature to include “This is A.A.” and “The Twelve Steps.”
- 1988** Conference Literature Committee Advisory Action recommended that a more simplified draft of an easy-to-read, illustrated pamphlet “Is A.A. for You?” be prepared for consideration by the 1989 Conference.
- 1989** Trustees’ Literature Committee - “Is A.A. for You?”– easy-to-read version: Following review of material, the committee recommended to the General Service Board that a manuscript for an easy-to-read illustrated version of this pamphlet be forwarded to the Conference Literature Committee for approval; the working title to be “Is A.A. for Me?”

- 1989** Conference Literature Committee Advisory Action recommended that work continue on an easy-to-read, illustrated Twelve Steps pamphlet suitable for people with very limited reading skills.
- 1989** Conference Literature Committee Advisory Action recommended that an illustrated, easy-to-read manuscript entitled "Is A.A. for Me?" be approved to help carry the message to people with limited reading skills.
- 1990** Trustees' Literature Committee studied a request from a member of the San Diego-Imperial Area's literature committee that consideration be given to adapting a portion of Chapter Five ("How It Works") in *Alcoholics Anonymous* into an easy-to-read style for those lacking reading capability.
- 1990** Conference Literature Committee Advisory Action recommended that the text and illustrations for the proposed pamphlet "Twelve Steps Illustrated" be referred to the trustees' Literature Committee for rewriting of the easy-to-read text, with the recommendation that this language be further simplified and shortened into simple statements that would direct attention to the illustrations, without attempting to rewrite the Steps; and bring the text back to the 1991 General Service Conference for approval.
- 1991** Conference Committee on Literature Advisory Action recommended that the questionnaires in seven Conference-approved pamphlets not be standardized as the questions in each are targeted to specific populations. ("Is A.A. for You?," "Memo to an Inmate," "Message to Teenagers," "Too Young?," "A.A. for the Woman," "Young People and A.A." and "A.A. and the Gay/Lesbian Alcoholic")
- 1991** Conference Literature Committee Advisory Action recommended that the proposed pamphlet "Twelve Steps Illustrated" be published, in response to an expressed need for simplified literature. Estimated cost: \$7,000.
- 1993** Conference Literature Committee discussed a request for a simplified version of the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous* and determined that there is not sufficient expressed need.
- 1996** Trustees' Literature Committee discussed and declined the proposal to eliminate or combine "Is A.A. for You?" and "Is A.A. for Me?"
- 2008** Trustees' Literature Committee discussed and took no action on an area proposal that "a new booklet (similar in size of *Living Sober*) be developed using an up to date style of writing with simple basic language to explain the principles in the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and the Big Book" to reach "pre-teens, teens, mentally challenged, those with literacy problems, those with English as a second language and more simply those in early sobriety."

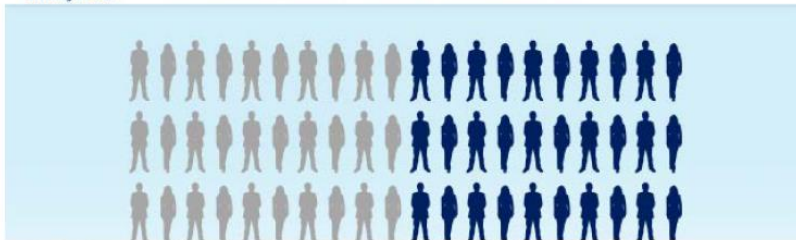
Excerpt images from the sub-committee progress report



Now, let's look at how the population performs, and consider who we are missing:

Alcoholics Anonymous®

Literacy at level 3 or above, general US: 48%



About half of the adults in the US could read and comprehend the BB.

Item Four Background regarding a Big Book Workbook / Study Guide

**Consider an individualized workbook to accompany the Big Book.**

Excerpts from Area 14's submitting of this request:

*"I join my fellow members who believe that we should never alter the first 164 pages of the Big Book. However, as a retired teacher, I have wondered why AA does not consider an individualized workbook to accompany the Big Book. A few years back, this was discussed at an Area 14 Assembly I attended dealing solely with step 4. When I brought the idea back to my home group, most were in favor of the idea provided it was consistent with the Big Book. I believe a workbook on all the steps could be developed in such a way that the words written in the Big Book are safeguarded. A workbook that contained brief sharings from members on their experience with a passage and space for sponsor's suggestions on taking a step would make our message more accessible to the uneducated, illiterate and the loner. It could be tailor suited for each individual working with a sponsor. It could allow a sponsor to do their job in their own way and at the newcomer's pace."*

Excerpts from a 1977 General Service Board Committee which investigated requests for A.A. study guides, either produced by our own Publishing or outside entities.

*"Increasing numbers of requests are coming to the A.A. World Services Board of Directors for permission to reprint the Twelve Steps and other portions of the Big Book in "study guides" and other interpretive material. Some of these requests are from alcoholism treatment centers which try to give some instruction or experience in the A.A. program of recovery to their patients. Other requests originate within A.A. itself.*

*The members of the committee were unanimous in their recommendations that permission should not be granted to reprint portions of basic A.A. recovery literature in study guides or interpretive material, and that if such guides are necessary, A.A. should publish them itself. Some of their individual thinking provides illuminating and thought-provoking background.*

*One trustee-director wrote:*

*'The individual A.A. member does not need another person or institution to think for him or her – in fact, this could be a very bad thing. Part of the beauty and magic of A.A. is that persons from all walks of life with varied backgrounds may benefit from the Big Book, the Steps, the Traditions, the Concepts, from their own points of view. Placing guidelines on paper seems to say, 'This is the way – the only way.' 'The authors of this priceless material knew what they were doing. Their words require study, not interpretation.'*

*Another trustee-director enlarged on this line of thinking as follows:*

*'Second, as to the question should we prepare interpretive or study guides ourselves, I am of the opinion we should not: Starting with what I understand as accepted wisdom that Alcoholism is a self-diagnosed disease, it follows for me that recovery in A.A. is a program of self-action. The thrust of our literature, our program, the Steps, the Groups and the meetings are all designed, and effectively so, to facilitate self-diagnosis and self-action within the A.A. environment. I see our literature, particularly the books, as*

*being study guides. It's all there. I see the meetings, particularly the closed meetings, as the interpretive workshops. Often comments at meetings have gotten me back to the source documents for further study or have shed additional light on the printed word. I almost have the feeling that the words are living, changing, words. I almost have the feeling that the words are living, changing, growing. I know this isn't so as they are the same and only I change and grow. But this phenomena takes place because the words are the words; they are unlayered, uninterpreted standing on their own. One of our slogans is "keep it simple." I believe our books are just simple enough to stand as they are and just complex enough to live and grow.'*

*And a third trustee-director agreed, in his own words:*

*'My knowledge of recovery has been received in the Fellowship through the experience of one drunk sharing with another drunk and it was not received on an instructive basis or in a classroom atmosphere. I believe that we in A.A. communicate with each other in a language of the heart, and this type of communication would be extremely difficult with the use of study guides...'*

*Upon receiving the recommendation of the study committee, the Board adopted the following policy statement:*

*'The Board recognizes, however, that A.A. is a program of self-diagnosis, self-motivation and self-action - and that the use of study guides, courses, classes or interpretations is therefore not generally appropriate. The program is spiritual rather than academic. There are no authorities in A.A. and even a self-appointed 'teacher' has feet of clay. Hence, it is preferable that the individual member or prospect interpret the literature according to his own point of view. For these reasons, the Board does not plan to publish study guides or interpretations of A.A. literature at this time.'"*



## ITEM FIVE

Submitted by: Area 58, Oregon

### **“Consider updating the pamphlet ‘A.A. for the Black and African- American Alcoholic.’”**

This item was submitted as a floor action at the 2019 General Service Conference by Vera, Delegate from Oregon Area 58. The Conference voted with substantial unanimity to recommit the motion. For us, a recommitment effectively instructs the Literature Trustee Committee to place the item on the following years Conference Agenda.

#### Background information

*November 2, 2019 email from CPC assignment regarding request to update the pamphlet “A.A. for the Black and African-American Alcoholic”*

This year, I visited several C.P.C. exhibits: American Society of Addictions Medicine, Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice, American Society of Addiction Medicine, and The American Corrections Association. I also attended The Bridging the Gap Weekend Workshop in Sacramento, CA. I took the opportunity to ask people their thoughts on if updating this pamphlet would be helpful. The answer was yes:

- Professionals familiar with the pamphlet felt it was long overdue, and asked for strong examples of successfully staying sober in A.A. One professional said that anything we can do to give hope. A.A. does come to a facility, but most of them are white but most of the people in my facility are not.
- An A.A. member, also an African-American, who volunteered at a C.P.C. exhibit said that we are not pushed out, but not welcomed in either, and new stories sharing how to get through all that would be great. I retired here and know what I have to do to stay sober, but what about the new guy or gal?
- One C.P.C. chair shared that new stories would be a great opportunity for participation. She told me that she **wanted** to ask African-Americans in her district, (following the Box 459 article) but could not find anyone in the area to talk to. Instead she had to go to N.A. meetings in her district, and there were many African-American and Hispanic people. She learned that most African-Americans felt they were Alcoholics, but were going mostly to N.A. because people were friendlier and helpful.

In my experience on the C.P.C./TF assignment, I believe that the heart of A.A. is in our handshake. I share this pamphlet with the professional community. This one is woe-fully out of date, and could send a mixed message to professionals from underserved communities.

Excerpts from: Final Report “Reaching Out to African-American Alcoholics” October 28, 2018

**Background:**

On two separate occasions in two separate locations, Rich P., Northeast regional trustee and Carole B., general service trustee, were approached by A.A. members asking that the General Service Board do something to help suffering African-American alcoholics. (The most recent 2014 Membership Survey estimates that only 4% of A.A. members are black, while white membership is estimated at 89%.) Rich and Carole discussed their separate conversations and decided to conduct a conference call with a number of African-American members within the service structure, reaching out to black members currently serving as delegates, G.S.O. staff, trustees, past trustees, and including Ed and Mac, the members who approached Rich and Carole. Conference calls were held on June 12, June 24 and July 22, 2018.

Some of the findings of this group dovetail with the G.S.B. Strategic Plan. Within this report, the group suggests actions that will help reach African-American alcoholics. When these actions are in line with actions outlined in the G.S.B. Strategic Plan (“Strategic Plan”), it is so noted. The actions of the Strategic Plan that are related to this work are listed at the end of this document.

[Item P1.2 of the Strategic Plan relating to contacting Area delegates to identify underrepresented sectors of the A.A. population in their Areas was exercised relative to the African-American A.A. community by the formation of this informal work group.]

**Within the Fellowship:**

In some places, meetings are segregated. In others, there are very few black members in meetings. Comments from the group covered a number of perspectives:

- “In many meetings, including service events, I’m the only black person in the room.”
- “I got sober in an all-white group.”
- “We focus on white professionals and don’t consider black professionals.”
- “The G.S.B. membership reflects what the fellowship looks like.”
- “There have only been eight black trustees in A.A.’s 80 years.”
- “I was so happy to meet Elaine McD. when she was chair. I went home and told my home group that a black woman was chair of the General Service Board. I was so excited.”
- “I was shocked that my area elected a black person as their delegate.”
- “As a black area delegate, I have not been invited to districts to give my report because of my color.”

Racism exists within the meetings of A.A. When it is brought up, people often say it is an outside issue; yet members being mistreated, called names based on their skin color, is an inside, not outside, issue.

**A.A. Literature:**

As part of the current initiative to ensure that A.A.W.S. Conference-approved literature is accessible to all (i.e., those with visual, auditory and learning challenges), G.S.O. staff is looking at how our literature could be more inclusive. For example, the pamphlet “A.A. for the Black and African-American Alcoholic” has not been revised since it was originally published in 2001. Additionally, a number of CPC, PI, and other pamphlets could be updated to be more inclusive.

It was also discussed that the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, is in part disconcerting to many black people. (Some use the Akron Central Office pamphlet “A Guide to the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous” rather than the Big Book.)

**Spotlighting the Topic of Diversity and Inclusivity within the Fellowship:**

Use *Box 4-5-9* and *AA Grapevine* to include ongoing columns on diversity and inclusivity, specifically stating that this is not an outside issue and affects us reaching the still-suffering alcoholic. Racism, gender identification, sexism, religion and related barriers are outside issues except as they relate to Twelfth Step work.

*AA Grapevine* has run stories from African-American members, some of which do speak of issues of fitting in or inclusion. In the last few years, *Grapevine* has run at least two special issues dealing specifically with diversity which included African-American members. The editors are very conscious that African-American members be pictured as often as possible in photos and illustrations. (Item P1.7 of the Strategic Plan)

Another action step would be to ask for presentations or workshops at the General Service Conference to discuss the topic of inclusivity.

Additionally, text could be added within the pamphlet “The A.A. Group” to discuss how groups could be more inclusive (i.e., add to suggested questions under group inventory).

For consideration:

The General Service Board Strategic Plan:

- The G.S.B. will bring an inclusivity focus to all aspects of our services. The G.S.B. will suggest each service committee and the two affiliate boards will first undertake an inventory of its materials and services with an eye toward inclusion and acceptance.
- The G.S.B. will contact Area delegates to identify underrepresented sectors of the A.A. population in their Areas.
- The G.S.B. will suggest to the General Service Conference that they utilize Conference time to focus on how the fellowship can engage in sustained outreach with diverse populations as part of doing service.



## ITEM SIX

Submitted by: Area 49

### **“Consider a request to develop a plan to create an A.A. podcast.”**

Background information from the submitter.

- A podcast is a digital form of radio. It is essentially a recording that you can listen to through the Internet or on an app.
- There are many podcasts that are about AA, but not by AA World Services or the General Service Board.
- This is a media we are not currently using to reach the alcoholic.
  - This podcast could cover a variety of sobriety and service topics, including:
    - Experience with Steps/Traditions/Concepts
    - The Service Manual
    - Experience/strength/hope from current and past trustees and delegates
    - Our different pieces of literature
    - The Grapevine and La Vina
- It is suggested that the General Service Board consider utilizing class A trustees as our communications audit has found that our class A trustees are under utilized. This would eliminate any concern about breaking of anonymity as class A trustees are not alcoholic. The podcast could address the issue that “communication is inconsistent throughout the conference structure” (communications audit) and can help to bridge the information gap created by the varieties of people within the service structure with varying communication skills, which leads to inconsistencies in the information being provided to individual A.A. members.
- Within the summary of the communications audit facilitated by the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous are the following findings:
  - “most of the technology in place is ineffectual, unattractive, and underutilized”
  - In most cases, GSO and AAWS are not using communication platforms that are relevant for the external audiences they are trying to reach and engage”
- That we have an “attachment to paper/manual processes vs. leveraging technology to accelerate and streamline” and that this was found to limit our ability to communicate.
- On pages 14-15 of the General Service Conference report from the 2019 General Service Conference there is a note within the section titled “A.A.W.S Audio/Video Strategy on the popularity of “snack sized content”. Podcasts were listed among this type of media as a popular means of communicating. Based on reading this section a fair assumption that a podcast would be in line with action A.A.W.S. is already looking to take in the upcoming year.

**Background notes:**

2015 Advisory Action

*In light of the potential for continuing to improve the relevance and usefulness of the aa.org website on a timely basis, the A.A.W.S. Board be authorized to produce and post audio/video service material on the aa.org website provided the following conditions are met:*

- *Audio/video service material produced via this process provides information already available on aa.org;*
- *Proposed audio/video service material is for posting on aa.org only (audio/video items produced for distribution beyond the aa.org website will continue to require Conference review and approval);*
- *Proposed audio/video service material is reviewed for content by an appropriate trustees' committee prior to posting - with the prerogative to request input from the appropriate Conference committee prior to forwarding to the A.A.W.S. Board;*
- *Proposed audio/video service material is reviewed and approved for posting by the A.A.W.S. Board – with the prerogative to request input from the appropriate Conference committee prior to posting.*



