

## HISTORY OF BRIDGING THE GAP

*(This is a Summary taken from Terry L., at the Bridging the Gap Workshop Weekend 2010 held in Bloomington MN)*

The Bridging the Gap 12<sup>th</sup> Step work as it presently is organized developed from the Worldwide Temporary Contact Program (WWTCP) and the Bridging the Gap Weekend (BTGWW) and resource library.

Although members of Alcoholics Anonymous were taking meetings into Institutions since 1942. It was not until the mid seventies that AA members were gaining an increasing awareness that many alcoholics were leaving treatment programs and not making it to AA and usually not staying sober. A number of AA members began to do 12<sup>th</sup> Step work to try to improve the situation. Some of the members started programs in their areas or geographic areas specifically focused on this work.

It would appear from the articles that some of the first work to be shared in print within the Fellowship of AA was work that was being done in Correctional Institutions in Canada and in Treatment Facilities in Oklahoma.

These programs included regular visits to facilities by AA Volunteers, talking to patients and inmates about AA and making an offer for a contact or "Temporary Contact" to these alcoholics to help them become a part of AA when they were to leave the facility. These Bridging the Gap (BTG) or Temporary Contact Programs (TCP) efforts were well received by both the alcoholics and the staff of the facilities and were generally considered successful and valuable.

Through correspondence with GSO and with articles in the Grapevine, Box 459 and AA Newsletters these BTG efforts began in many more parts of Canada and the US.

In 1987 a section describing "Temporary Contact Programs" was added to the AA Treatment Facilities Committee Workbook. This workbook is published by AAWS and is designed to help AA members working on service committees who are focused on how AA can help alcoholics who are in and coming out of Alcoholism Treatment Programs.

Presentations and Workshops on BTG and TCP began to be included in many AA forums and in many Areas and Regional Service Meetings. Cheryl Ann B. then the GSO staff coordinator for Treatment Facilities presented information on this topic in the Treatment Facilities Workshop at the 1987 Forum in Fargo, North Dakota.

By 1980 the tremendous value of an efficient, committed network of AA "Contact Points" had become clearly obvious to many. I was with great fortune that the Southern Minnesota Treatment Facilities Chair was asked to participate along with Oklahoma and New Mexico AA's in a panel on BTG and TCP at the 1990 International Convention in Seattle.

With hundreds of interested AA's in the audience the notion of a "Worldwide Temporary Contact Program" - a network of "contact points" was presented. Every AA with interest was invited to provide information on how to contact them when the opportunity for a contact came up in their location. Over 60 AA's signed up indicating they would help and that they wanted to be kept apprised of developments that was the beginning of the WWTCP. The list was put together and all who offered to be "Contact Points" were given a copy of the list so everyone could pass contact request as needed.

Out of the 1991 Missouri annual "Institutions Weekend" spawned the idea for a "Workshop Weekend" for everyone, everywhere to attend focused on sharing experiences in BTG and TCP now known as the BTGWW. This name was given to the weekend after the summer of 1991 when an ad hoc committee convened. Included in the ad hoc committee were a couple of General Service Area Treatment Facilities Committee Chairs, a General Service Conference Delegate, an appoint member of the Trustees Treatment Facilities Committee and couple of active members experienced in putting on workshops and conferences.

Also in 1990/1991 much work was done at the directions of the General Service Conference to develop a pamphlet on "Bridging the Gap", the need for such a pamphlet was deemed significant and once developed it was published in record time. The 1991 Conference approved it and it was available in the summer of 1991.

In addition to the numerous presentations that are made during the BTGWW, lot of helpful materials are shared among the participants and all participants are asked to bring materials that they use with them. Many participants have local flyers, pamphlets, forms, cards and other tools specifically describing their programs for the benefit of AA's, patients, inmates and staffs. This exchange of printed information established the ``**BTG Resource Library**``. The coordinator develops a list, which includes ``cover the cost`` voluntary contribution pricing and provides copies AA's requesting information.

In 1991 after the BTGWW it was proposed to the Trustees Treatment Facilities Committee the GSO Staff pick up the responsibility of maintaining and distributing the WWCP Contact Points list and that the General Service Conference, through their committee system, take over responsibility for coordination of the BTGWW annual event. It was the committee's consensus that such a proposal should come through the General Service Structure.

In the winter of 1991/1992 the Southern Minnesota Area Committee drafted, approved and submitted two proposals suggesting this resolution. In the spring of 1992 at the annual General Service Conference the Delegates Treatment Facilities Committee considered and did not approve either proposal. The proposals were also discussed and not approved on the conference floor. Since that time the coordinating body for WWTCP and BTGWW has been independent, self supporting,

Ad Hoc Committee of AA Members, all of whom are participating in AA Bridging the Gap 12<sup>th</sup> Step work in a variety of capacities, mostly past or current General Service Committee members. As AA Members all efforts of the committee are always guided by the 12 Traditions of AA.

Since 1993 the *General Service Office* has sent either the staff member who holds the Treatment assignment of the Corrections assignment to the BTGWW.

**Some things are still the same:** in trying to set up a contact from one geographic location to another, one can still make multiple phone calls before successfully connecting with an AA willing to do the job of acting as a TEMPORARY Contact for an alcoholic coming their way from treatment or correctional facility. We are still hampered by continued confusion on the part of well intended, but uninformed AA Members about who Bridge the Gappers are and what we do.

**Some things are different:** Treatment facilities are down sizing, shortening stays and increasing the out patient programs making fast response and regular involvement more important than ever. Some programs have added business professionals in an effort to retain or restore profitability  
And often these new people are not as familiar with AA, creating new temporary or even permanent obstacles to our participation with their clients. More Correctional Facilities are adding treatment programs with the facility which sometimes requires changes in our contact procedures and possibly our committee structures. Some of our AA Members are less willing to be contact volunteers for Corrections than they have been for Treatment.

July 2012