Fall 2021

The Newsletter for Alcoholics Anonymous - Area 86

Focus

A.A. Service and Our Primary Purpose

WHATEVER IT TAKES –JAMIE & CARLA

Jamie J's Backstory

On March 16, 2019, I returned to Canada due to Covid 19, after my husband and I had attempted our first year as snow birds. Within days, A.A. meetings started to close their doors. At 12 years sober and attending 4-5 meetings a week, I started to get a little worried. How was the A.A. I knew going to continue during a pandemic? It was a scary time for this alcoholic. I prayed, as I always do, when I'm at a loss. Then came the email on April 8th, 2019 from the District telling me about a 12 step call for a lady in Tillsonburg. At this point online meetings were just getting up and running, I just knew that working with a newcomer was the ticket to continue growing in my program.

I called Carla that day, and we went to our first A.A. online meeting out of Acton, ON., chaired by a sponsee of mine, Marco. I told Carla going forward she would call me everyday. Carla cried throughout the meeting. I knew her pain and I hoped she would stick with it.

Carla M's Backstory

CM - Day 1 - What made me call A.A. on April 8th? My mom and husband urged me to call A.A. as a final straw, or my house would be up for sale and my husband would leave me. I had no choice. My drinking had become a daily, all-day occurrence and my life was unmanageable in so many ways. I called the Woodstock number and talked to someone at the London District call center. By the afternoon I had talked to my now sponsor, Jamie, and that evening I went to my first online meeting that was located in Acton. I couldn't figure out how to make my computer camera face me, so the others in attendance only saw what was behind my computer on my desk. I felt like such an idiot. A sponsee of Jamie's was chairing that meeting and we are still in contact.

JJ - Day 2 - I contacted my sponsor, Pat, who had access to Big Books and other A.A. literature. The church where her weekly meeting was held allowed her to go into their meeting room and pick up a few books, one of which was brought by Pat to Carla's doorstep that day. Pat told the Pastor at the church about

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Carla. He said he'd pray for her with one of the prayer groups.

CM -Day 2 - My doorbell rang and because of social distancing rules, I did not answer, especially to a stranger. A few minutes later, I opened to find a Big Book, a Grapevine, and some A.A. pamphlets.

JJ - Week 1 - Carla called me everyday at 4:00pm as per her instructions. I had a good feeling about her as she was eager to do whatever she was told to do, no excuses. Carla asked so many questions, such a good sign. She made me think. We began the process of going through the Big Book, Covid style.

CM - Week 1 - I was told by Jamie to call her every single day at 4:00 pm. Every day, she gave me a list of things to read out of the Big Book. Between the sweats and shakes, I thought, "My God, this is a fulltime job." I remember having to read the Doctor's Opinion and being a bit lost. Jamie followed up asking if I thought it was AMAZING. I thought it was alright, but now realize that my brain was having a hard time processing new information. Looking back, I now see that I was completely numb. I had no actual feelings or conscience. All I knew at the time was that I was a failure and that a nice girl like me shouldn't be in A.A. It was a shameful place to be.

A.A. Step 12

"Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

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JJ - Week 1 thru 12 - Carla continued to read and do exactly what I told her to. In these early weeks, she went above and beyond in so many cases. Carla started attending many virtual meetings and getting lots of phone numbers.

I told her to get in the middle of the herd, and she certainly did this. Carla dropped around my house one day with a spreadsheet document with all the virtual meetings, times, where they were from and group names. She even gave out my phone number to a few new gals (something I explained was not the norm). One of those referrals I'm still sponsoring today. She wanted everyone to have sobriety. We talked so often and Carla started to change and to laugh. It was a tough time for her, but it was the beginning of the miracle I get to watch every time I sponsor a newcomer like Carla.

CM - Week 1 thru 12 - I immersed myself in online meetings and reading literature. Every phone number I could get was added to my list. Many days I attended 3 online meetings. I was

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sweating, shaking. and confused but made online meetings my constant between phone calls and emails for work. Prior to this I had alcohol as my constant, especially when we were going through a stay-at-home order. A large part of my career is traveling and meeting clients. That stopped immediately and the world didn't know what was and was not allowed. It was such a scary time, so having the online meetings was a solid base for me and the program gave me something to really think about.

CM - 3 months - My first face-to-face meeting was a Monday night in June 2020. All of the people there looked at me like I was some alien that they couldn't understand. Very few, if any of the people there, had ever attended a meeting online. The idea that people were LOOKING at me was new and weird and uncomfortable.

My sponsor was with me which was a Godsend because I needed her support.

JJ - 3 months - Carla, myself, my sponsor Pat and another sponsee, Cathy, attended a face-to-face meeting in Norwich. Carla was uncomfortable to be in a face-to-face meeting because up to now it had all been online.

At this point Carla and her husband had been to my house for coffee and met with another couple of A.A. friends. I think it was a bit overwhelming to be in a room with 15 recovering alcoholics - in masks - talking about how they got sober. Carla got through it though and we would attend a handful of other face-to-face meetings. I was happy to be back in my comfort zone of face-to-face meetings. This was to be short lived however, as Covid was not over by a long stretch.

CM - 4 months - Stay-at-home orders were reinstated. Back to online meetings only. I was ok with that because not only was I familiar with them, I could log on and attend one any time I needed to refill my cup of A.A. stability. I was starting to learn that I didn't need to drink. I could do everything I ever wanted to do. Just not drink. Working from home was getting easier as this was the "new normal" and my daily craving for alcohol was magically lifted. I was starting to really see the Promises come true.

J.J. - 4 months - Carla and I are attending a regular schedule of A.A. meetings and I'm watching Carla listening to the old timers and working on her program. Carla, at this point, has a circle of people she has become friends with. She's now started writing down all the little catch phrases and important comments she hears at the meetings, writing them down on sticky notes and posting them around her computer and on the walls of her office. This becomes a "thing" at our meetings.

When Carla hears something, she writes it down, and then she'll say, "You made the board". So many members are supporting her, and she is right in the middle of the herd. At this point Carla and I have gone through the Steps (I have never taken a sponsee through the Steps as quickly as I did Carla). She's joined a group, she's chairing meetings, and she's getting active in virtual A.A.. If she is challenged by a member to do something, like look for the Promises in the reading, she does it. Carla is doing so well.

CM - 6 months to 1 year - I was now a part of a home group that was online meetings only. I started chairing some of those meetings as part of a rotation. As part of my service, I am now the secretary for this group. I really enjoy learning the meaning of "group conscience" and how no one is left out. I heard a good friend of mine in the program say to a newcomer, "You don't need to figure anything out. We'll work it out together". What a wonderful concept. I was starting to really accept that this program and this way of living were going to be a lifelong commitment. My home life was calmer and my sleeping was better.

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JJ - 6 months - 1 year - The ups and downs of the pandemic have been really difficult for so many of us, but online meetings have been a Godsend. Carla continues to work hard on her recovery and the benefits of sobriety are apparent in her life. Carla and I talk about her family often and how happy she is now. She has changed so much. She doesn't cry at meetings anymore and she laughs from the bottom of her feet. I am so happy to have her in my life. Our phone calls are about life and recovery but also about two friends just chatting about everyday things. She has started to reach out to newcomers she has met in the meetings by doing 12 Step work, dropping off Big Books, and texting them to remind them of meetings. Carla just wants to spread the joy of recovery around.

She and her husband face some tough days. Her father-in-law passes during this time and one of their beloved cats dies, but she just continues to work her program and reach out to the Fellowship. Now she gets to see how we support each other. She is amazed how much support is there for those who really want this program. Carla's 1 year birthday is well-attended by so many she has become friends with. I am privileged to hand her her 1-year coin in a parking lot of a Tim Horton's (Covid style) with a number of other members in the Fellowship. Although we are living through a pandemic, we still find a way to work our programs even if it means celebrations in parking lots, parks and backyards. She's become a wonderful member of A.A., and so loved by so many.

CM - 1 year to the present - I am unable to count the things that have changed in my life because every single aspect of my life is now better. My sleep is better, and I now share a bedroom with my husband. My marriage is better in general as we now communicate and have found a deeper respect for one another. My career is blossoming and successful. I am able to concentrate on all tasks for work which used to frustrate me. Because of this, I am able to be a better employee and colleague and my sales are better than ever, even in a global pandemic. I actually have friends! I have met so many genuinely caring and giving people that I didn't know existed. This group of drunks is my strength, my reason for wanting me to better myself, and my inspiration to help anyone who reaches out for help. I have found a Higher Power who is actually a part of my daily life. It is still something that I'm working on, but I am shifting to allow the God of my understanding to be a part of all actions and decisions, big or small. This is a challenge for me and I'm enjoying the opportunity to work on this aspect of my life. My mom and I are actually friends.

Moms are always proud of their kids, but I can tell that she is deeply proud of the changes I have made in my life. She had no idea that my drinking was as bad as it was. I lied to her for years, so when she found out the truth, when my life was crumbling like dried up leaves in the fall, she helped me by believing that I could get through the darkness. I owe all of the happiness in my life to my sponsor, the Fellowship, the Big Book and my Higher Power. Thank you for the best year of my life.

JJ - 1 year to present - Carla is our group secretary now. She still chairs meetings and she is

Area Officers

Area Delegate: Sandi W.

Area Alternate Delegate: Jeff S.

Area Chair: Janice F.

Interim Area Treasurer: Dan D.

Interim Area Secretary/Registrar: Tammy S.

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very active with 12 Step work. We have started attending one face-to-face meeting a week and still go to several virtual meetings a week. Carla has friends across Canada because of A.A. and online meetings. She's open and honest about her feelings. She is supported by a wonderful family and employer. We are still unable to return to the A.A. I knew when I got sober, but to those who are willing to go to any length, A.A. is working. Carla is a testament to that. Carla has a routine in sobriety and she has a trusted, loving Fellowship beside her. She still asks questions and she still does what she is told to do because she still wants to learn. I have told Carla many times that she has done so much more for me than I ever did for her, and I still stick with that. Carla helped to keep this alcoholic sober during a very scary time. I have learned so much from her and I'm grateful for her presence in my recovery everyday.

Carla M. and Jamie J. District 1 & 4, Area 86

SERVICE WORK SPOTLIGHT

I am a recovering alcoholic from Kitchener, Ontario and my name is David N. I heard about the 'Service Work' spotlight for the Area 86 Newsletter and got excited about it because I have had a very unique experience with recent service work and wanted to share this experience. As many know, the last few years have been very difficult with Covid-19 causing many shifts in our A.A. program. At the turn of 2019, I stood and was given the honour of serving as Archives Chair for District 2. Covid restrictions caused all sorts of difficulties, but I have done my best to serve in this capacity and have been rewarded greatly by it. Although I would like to share my experience as Archives Chair, the truth is I have something else to share.

As many of us in Area 86 know, our Area Assembly for the last two years has been very different, normally taking place at the Crown Plaza in Kitchener. However, due to Covid that was made impossible. At first this was disastrous. Like many, I enjoy the fellowship, spending time together and hearing the reports and speakers in the flesh. I couldn't see how it would work out any other way. However, it was decided to try using a virtual format for our Area Assembly, and as a result, there was a need for people to help manage the meetings. So A.A. Virtual Format Techs became a thing, and though my experience with virtual meetings was limited, I volunteered in hopes that I could help out even in small ways. My experience as an Area 86 Virtual Tech was fantastic. Although it was at times challenging, the leader on the initiative had his ducks in a row and he led the group well. I learned a lot from Dave and enjoyed the experience. At the next Area Assembly I volunteered again for the same position and having even more experience, I was able to help out in even more ways.

Since my first Virtual Tech experience, I have helped run my District's virtual meetings as well. I am now volunteering as a Virtual Tech permanently for District 2 along with my role as Archives Chair. I have been greatly blessed in this position, meeting new people, experiencing more at the assemblies, and enjoying the act of giving with no expectation of anything in return. If I am able to help A.A., why wouldn't I volunteer? I have the honour of serving at the upcoming August Area Committee Meeting which I am looking forward to as well. My experience with service work in the last fourteen years has looked different. I never would have guessed I would be acting as a Virtual Tech for my Area and District. I know that when I am willing to serve, I gain so much insight, experience, and gratitude. I am sober today as a result of my willingness to serve in A.A., even in unexpected ways.

David N. District 2, Area 86

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OUR PRIMARY PURPOSE: CARRYING THE MESSAGE

After a weekend blackout in May 1982 and feeling disgusted with myself and not being able to look at myself in the mirror without shame and hate, I knew I needed to do something about my drinking. I was desperate when I went to work and didn't feel I was going to make it. The salesman I drank with regularly came in and asked if I wanted to go for lunch and I said out loud that I needed to do something about my drinking. However, I said I would meet him. During that liquid lunch, we talked all afternoon (no I didn't go back to work) about how I could get help. He told me about A.A. because he had tried it. I laughed and said my uncles had too, and it didn't work for them either. He then told me about a 28 day recovery program that might help. He gave me the information on where to call and when I got home safely, after one more time of drunk driving, I called. The message had been carried.

I went through this program and while there attended the A.A. meetings. My memory of those meetings is skewed, but what I did there was go to meetings, read the Big Book, get a sponsor, and work the Steps. The message got through this muddled brain.

As a requirement to return for follow-up, I had to agree to go to an A.A. meeting. The night before my appointment, I went to a meeting. I was greeted with smiles and welcomes but crossed my arms and sat at the back of the room. This was a 12 and 12 study group. As people spoke, I realized I could do this and I bought the Big Book. The message was carried even though I had no plans of returning. I would do these Steps by myself. I went to follow-up and bragged about attending an A.A. meeting and one of the women asked if I would take her. There went my intention of not going back. I took her to her first meeting of A.A. not knowing that I had carried the message.

We were inseparable after that and eventually went to more meetings. I listened to people sharing the message of hope and recovery through working the 12 steps. The message was getting clearer. Six months passed. I stayed sober, found laughter at the meetings and was enjoying the meetings even though I still hadn't gotten a sponsor and continued to work the Steps on my own.

I received a phone call from a former drinking buddy and employee who asked me how I had gotten happy. I told her I was in A.A. She asked if I would take her to a meeting and I said I would. We went, and she jumped in with both feet. The message had been carried!

At about this same time, I was "voluntold" by my group at a business meeting that I needed to get active, so I became the Intergroup Rep. It was such an honour but terrifying, too. I became active by ensuring that help was in place for carrying the message. This included voting my group conscience, volunteering on the answering service, taking 12 Step calls at any time during the day or night, and sitting on committees. I didn't know this was carrying the message until much later in my sobriety.

As my one year approached, I invited my drinking buddy salesman to come. He did and after that started going to meetings because as he said, "If you can get sober so can I." The message had been carried full circle.

I have sponsored women over the years and some stayed sober and some didn't, but what did happen was I stayed sober. Through sharing my experience, strength, and hope, the message was carried.

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Currently virtual meetings, in person meetings, 12 Step calls, sponsorship, and one-on-one conversations while walking on the beach or in a coffee shop are ways this gal continues to carry the message as my primary purpose.

This divinely inspired program of recovery grows around the world and reaches all people who want it. "When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. to always be there and for that I am responsible." Carrying the Message: Our Primary Purpose continues. Thanks for this opportunity.

Carol P. District 6, Area 86
Port Stanley Lakeview Group

Newsletter Committee Members Wanted

Currently Seeking:

- Closet writers, proof-readers, editors
- Photography, design and technology buffs
- Recruiters, enthusiasts, and cheerleaders
- Team players and mavericks

Must have a passion for Alcoholics Anonymous, a desire to be of service, and a sense of humour.

Contact the Newsletter Chairperson at Www.Area86AA.org/area-86-newsletter-focus

I AM AN ALCOHOLIC AND MY NAME IS MELISSA

I had an amazing experience joining A.A. and it involved MANY people who were active in service for Alcoholics Anonymous.

It was recommended to me that I attend a meeting after I hit my chosen bottom. This person was bugging me to just call the number on the website. After a couple of attempts of brushing them off, I ended up giving that number a call. At first there was no answer on that Saturday, so I left a voicemail. They called me back the next morning.

The person who phoned me was very friendly, sounded young like me and opened me up to the idea of (what I thought was so crazy) going to a meeting THAT night. I didn't think a meeting would be available that quickly as I didn't know anything about A.A.. The person on the phone said that she knew a lady who would likely be going to that Sunday night meeting and would have her meet me there. Well then, I felt totally obligated to go because I didn't want this lady to wait there with no one showing up. And they had my number, so I thought they would call me back asking questions and chasing me down. Yup, total alcoholic thinking.

I took a car service to this meeting at a retirement home where I met the lady, who was very friendly. I was very thankful that she was there because there were a lot of older people at the meeting and I don't know if I would have stayed, feeling like I didn't belong. My usual, initial naive and judgmental thinking. However, I can honestly say that every single person in that room mentioned something that I could relate to. I picked up my 24 hour chip and cried a lot. Everyone made me feel welcome with no judgement.

A few of us stayed and talked after the meeting and the lady who met me there even offered me a ride home. I felt bad for having her do that, but she seemed very willing to drive me.

After that meeting, she let me know about other meetings that happened in the area. I went to a couple other meetings in person, and then all of a sudden, the world stopped. There were no more in person meetings. It would have been very easy for me to pick up a drink using the excuse of no meetings to go to, but I didn't want to. I was in a lot of trouble still and I knew that picking up a drink would only make things worse for me. I had two phone numbers from people from the meetings that I went to.

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That lady made sure I called her EVERY DAY, and let me know about the Meeting Guide app where I could find a meeting everyday anytime. I constantly wondered why this lady was so willing to be there for me and help me so much. She never expected anything in return. When the meetings moved online, I started attending every single night as was recommended. I connected with people online and became friends virtually with many different A.A. members. I listened and joined in online as I would in person. I had no distractions and willingly participated in discussions.

I had no home group, but I knew I could reach out to any of those friends if I needed something. Soon after, I started working the Steps with the lady who met me at that Sunday night meeting. She agreed to sponsor me. What an amazing experience! After completing the 12 Steps for the first time, we began studying the Traditions. Upon working on Tradition 8, I had an opportunity to connect with that person who picked up the phone and directed me to that first Sunday night meeting. We talked about her role in volunteer service at the district level answering the phone on Sunday mornings and we cried a little at how amazing this program really is. Everything had happened according to a plan that my Higher Power had set out for me. I will eternally be grateful that I was connected with a person who had a lot in common with me and today, we have formed not just a Sponsor-Sponsee relationship but a beautiful and real friendship. I can't know if things would be different if that lady hadn't been there to call me back, or if she hadn't connected me with my current sponsor, but it doesn't matter. It happened the way it was meant to.

This month I will be celebrating 18 months of continuous sobriety. I am now sponsoring two ladies and am the GSR of my home group.

I don't think I will ever be able to give back enough compared to what A.A. has given to me - from my sponsor, from everyone setting up meetings online so that I could keep coming back, from everyone attending meetings, from everyone who listened and heard me and allowed me to listen to them from that very first phone call and the lady who picked up that phone and directed me to a meeting. All of them acted in service for me and continue to every day that I join a meeting. Service is a big part of my story which is why I will continue to be there for the next struggling alcoholic. I want more people to have experiences like I did, and to have the opportunity to keep coming back. Thank you.

Melissa C. District 25, Area 86

"I came to AA in order to stop drinking; what I received in return was my life."
- Alcoholics Anonymous page 327. Reprinted with permission from A.A. World Services.

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BRIDGING THE GAP

Our Primary Purpose is to help the still suffering alcoholic. We can do this by being of service and helping Bridge the Gap between a Treatment or Correctional setting and a temporary contact on the outside to get the member to a meeting as soon as possible.

As you may know one of the more "slippery" places in the journey to sobriety is between the door of the facility and the nearest A.A. group or meeting. Some of us can tell you that, even though we heard of A.A. in Treatment, we were too fearful to go. (A.A. Pamphlet P. 49, Bridging the Gap Between treatment and A.A. through contact programs. Page 1 Paragraph 2). Temporary contacts are formed in each district through either a Bridging the Gap, Treatment, or Corrections committee. These contacts are willing to take new members to a few meetings and introduce them to other members. Making the transition into Alcoholics Anonymous a little easier is vital 12th Step work, and the hand of A.A. is there when someone reaches out for help.

It is important to keep the lines of communication open between the facilities, districts and the Area Sub-Committee Chairperson to bridge those asking for help. Not all districts have a treatment or correctional setting, and some are in other areas all together. In my time as Area 86 Sub-Committee Chair, I have been fortunate to bridge members in and out of our Area mostly between Area 86 and Area 83, but also from Panama to Ontario and from Ontario to Alberta. Without members willing to be of service in this capacity and getting members to where they need to be in the shortest amount of time possible, the chance of relapse increases.

Maintaining updated contact lists is important for our districts to bridge between each other and go through the Area Chair for out of Area bridges. Sometimes I get asked from districts why they never receive any bridges. Area 86 is a rather large Area and we never know who will be in a treatment setting, where they are from or where they will be heading. This is why it is important to have a committee set up just in case someone is heading your way. As long as you're willing to be of service when the time comes and you have volunteers ready to help the new member make the transition to meetings on the outside, we are prepared and ready to be of service so no one is left out. Just because some districts don't receive any bridges, it would be a shame if they didn't have a plan of action in place in case someone is headed in their direction.

Attending meetings on a regular basis is vital for our success in staying sober. Attending meetings in Treatment or Corrections is a start to a new life that needs to be continued once on the outside, and this is where Bridging the Gap plays a significant role in achieving that success. With the lines of communication open and a list of temporary contacts available to meet the newcomer and introduce the person to meetings and fellow members, the slippery slope becomes less slippery and the chances of staying sober increases.

There have been many joys in my time in A.A., but one of the most rewarding is a newcomer reaching out and saying thank you for helping get them to a meeting by setting them up with a volunteer member who aided in their transition to life on the outside. Bridging the Gap works. When you put the time in to be there for the newcomer, it's worth every second. There was someone there for me when I walked through the doors of A.A., and it's a small price to pay to be there for someone else and give back what was so freely given to me.

Yours in Love and Service,
Stephen H. Bridging the Gap Sub-Committee Chair, Area 86 Panel 70

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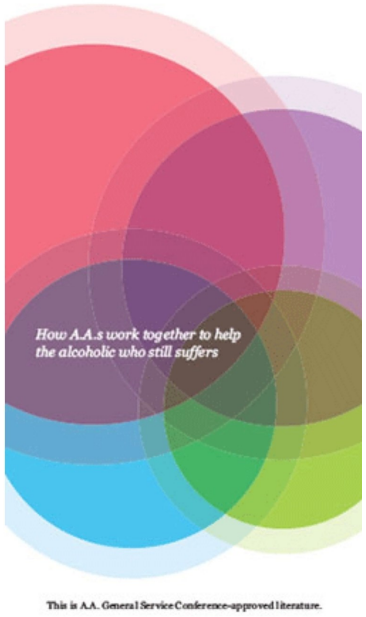

P-45
https://aa.org/assets/en_US/aa-literature/p-45-circles-of-love-and-service

BEYOND GRATEFUL

Looking in the mirror I saw what I thought was me. What happened to that very shy kid who stuttered, a good child, always obeying my parents? That all seemed to change the first time I drank at the age of 12. The shyness left and I could talk to girls without stuttering. The biggest miracle in my life came from that bottle of alcohol.

Leaving home at an early age, with a grade 8 education, drinking was pretty much a daily thing from age 16 until 40. Everything I did - work, sports, friends and family functions- had to include drinking. I was always ready to help people with projects only if alcohol was included.

Found my wife #1 at a discotheque in Vernon B.C. close to where I grew up. A few short months later, we were living together and eventually married. I put that woman through hell with my drinking, never staying in one place for very long.

The day our daughter was born I remember saying to myself I am going to slow down or quit drinking, so I can be a better father. That promise lasted until I stepped outside the hospital doors and a thought came across my mind that I needed to go tell my friends the good news. It was 2 days later when I saw my daughter again and the shame and guilt was too much to handle. The merry-go-round continued.

Before I quit drinking for the last time, I had my driving privilege taken away 4 times, many overnight stays in jails, loss of jobs, two broken marriages, and my daughter did not want any contact with me at all.

All the time I was abusing alcohol, I did not know there was a God looking after me. I just thought I was crazy and my drinking was not affecting anyone but me.

I am not sure if I had ever heard of Alcoholics Anonymous. The thought never came across that drinking was the real problem. It was my surroundings or the people I hung out with. You would drink too if you had my job, wife, kid, and my bad luck.

After my second marriage ended up in divorce, I was in another relationship with a lady who was in Al-Anon. With her being in that program, I made it to my first A.A. meeting.

The first meeting I went to I was not completely sober. I had to calm my nerves because I was shaking so bad. I don't remember much of that meeting. All I knew is that I felt some hope as I left that meeting with a Big Book the group gave me. Still, I continued to drink till I could not drink enough to kill the guilt and shame.

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My whole life was in the bottom of the empty bottle.

For 3 years, my journey in A.A. consisted of quite a few relapses and many visits to detox. What was wrong with me? Was I that guy that was incapable of getting sober? Could this A.A. thing work for me?

I am not too sure what happened on April 10, 1996. I believe that I turned my will and life over to a Higher Power and I have not found it necessary to pick up a drink since then.

My Higher Power has put a lot of amazing people in my life. The men showed me how to have fun in sobriety, taking me to roundups and conventions all over Ontario. I was able to serve on a few of these committees later on in sobriety. These same men also showed me that to keep this sobriety, you have to give it away. I had lots to learn and was willing to go to any length for my sobriety. I was taught early that our primary purpose was to stay sober and to carry the A.A. message to the still-suffering alcoholic.

I joined a small group in my first year in A.A.. I loved getting there early to make coffee and set up, so I could shake hands as members showed up. The best part of A.A. for me was the ½ hour of conversation before and after the meeting. I was learning how to be a grateful member.

I heard people talk about service and I wanted to know more about how A.A. worked. I attended District meetings and was fascinated about how the A.A. structure made sure the same message was being spoken worldwide with the 12 Steps, Traditions, and Concepts. I traveled to some regional forums to hear the message from our GSO staff. I was hooked.

I began my journey in service as Alternate GSR, followed by GSR, Intergroup Rep., Public Information Rep., and DCM. However, the most rewarding experience was being the Corrections Chair for 4 years. I carried our message to our members in correctional facilities where I had the absolute privilege of attending those meetings. I remember my first meeting. I was going to change their lives forever, and it had the exact opposite effect, they changed *my* life. How grateful I am to be in the greatest Fellowship on the planet.

I am not sure why some members do not want to be part of this service structure because they are missing the best part of A.A. and the Fellowship.

Absolutely everything that I have in my life is because of A.A.. I will never ever be able to pay back what A.A. has given me.

I married a wonderful lady after being sober for a couple years. I retired 5 years ago from being a dedicated employee that showed up for work. I have had the privilege of sponsoring men and seeing them change. Who would want to miss out on having a front row seat and being witness to the miracle?

Beyond Grateful.
Dennis G. District 6, Area 86
Port Stanley Lakeview Group

"Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us."

-Alcoholics Anonymous page 77, Reprinted with permission from AA World Services

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PUBLIC INFORMATION: AN ANALOGY

Imagine you're a spectator at a hockey game. There are people from all over around you. Everyone is different. They have different backgrounds, jobs, gender, orientation, religion. You name it. Everyone is just trying to watch the hockey game. For lots of people, this is really easy to do – they're excited, happy to be there. Some people have friends with them or family members and are having a great time. There are some others that don't know much about hockey but have seen a game here and there or know someone who does. Most people see a hockey game or can take it or leave it. Many people are really big fans and used to really enjoy it but now, it's not the same. It used to be so much fun- the celebrations and commiserations, the ups and downs. Maybe their sight has gone or they were dealt a bad seat, but suddenly, the puck is gone. It's impossible to follow along anymore. Everyone else seems normal. They can see it still. What's different about them?

Life is like hockey and A.A. is like that puck. Hockey is there for anyone to watch, following the puck around the rink. But when the puck isn't visible anymore, Public Information is the glowing red orb that follows the puck around the rink to help you see the game again.

Without Public Information, alcoholics or their friends and family can really miss out on what A.A. can provide. There is so much valuable information available at any time to anyone who wants or needs it, but without someone to show the way, the message is missed. A.A. members who are involved in Public Information help to bring the message to the public in several ways such as through public service announcements or by providing talks or literature. They carry the message by getting in touch with and responding to the media, schools, industries, and other organizations, and share with them, the nature and purpose of A.A. and how it helps the still suffering alcoholic.

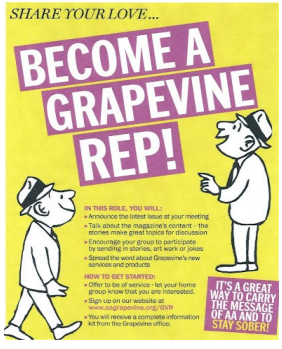
For information on AA for members, see https://aa.org/pages/en_US/information-for-aa-members.

For more on what Public Information does, see https://aa.org/pages/en_US/public-information-committees.

Joanne L. Public Information Sub-Committee Chairperson, Area 86, Panel 70

MY GRAPEVINE EXPERIENCE

Back in 1995 when I got sober, I used to read back orders of the Grapevine at my homegroup.



I began to subscribe monthly and found it to be a beautiful addition to my personal recovery.

Each month would cover all of the 12 Steps. The humour was great and Victor E. was the cartoon character who would stay sober and walk away from that first drink! I

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thought that if Victor E. could stay sober, so could I.

I remember the need for the Fellowship to support the Grapevine. That meant not just buying an issue at a meeting or subscribing directly but also contributing directly by sending letters to the editor, photo shots of the home groups, or personal stories of how A.A. had changed their lives.

I started to attend Intergroup meetings and found out that the Grapevine was very active there as well and commonly known as *Our Meeting in Print*. I was well on my way to discovering that this little magazine was the bright spot in the daily lives of many alcoholics.

As I started to develop confidence, I was introduced to service at the district level. And as God would see it, I was nominated for the position of Grapevine Sub-Committee Chair for my district and I served a two-year term. Part of my duties involved delivering the magazine subscriptions to the various home groups. It was at this point that I was able to get other members involved with Grapevine materials. As time went on, I found myself serving in a variety of positions for my homegroup and the district, including GSR and DCM.

When my term was done at the district, I was then eligible to let my name stand for all positions in the Area. I was elected for Grapevine Chair for Area 86 and discovered that the Grapevine had an extensive array of materials such as Pocket Planners, Calendars, CDs, slogan cards and various other publications. I was also to learn that stories from members that do not make it into the current magazine are archived for future use.

My service journey was to branch out in ways that I would have never imagined. I had opportunities to set up Grapevine displays at our Assemblies. I was also invited to various round-ups and conventions to display Grapevine material. I was enjoying it so much I would wear purple outfits to match my display! My homelife became more like a Grapevine warehouse as I would stock enough material to fill orders that districts within Area 86 requested. The local post office must have thought I was some type of special collector given all the postmarked deliveries that were sent to my address!

Just when I started to get the hang of things, in the spirit of rotation, my term came to an end. I believe in the importance of rotation. I will be forever grateful to the Grapevine issues that have helped me through tough times and more recently, through our Covid time, as they provided me with a meeting when I couldn't get to one. To this day, I still read the Grapevine and look forward to the daily quotes I receive electronically.

I thank all members of Area 86 for allowing me to continue to be of service as it has always been a wonderful addition to my sobriety. It has enabled me to give back what has been freely given to me, to feel more a part of our Fellowship, and to learn more about our incredible service structure. I encourage all of you to get involved and not miss out on such a beautiful opportunity!

YIS
Janice F. Chairperson, Area 86, Panel 70

"AA is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven't been given the truth may die."-As Bill Sees It, page 13, Reprinted with permission from AA World Services

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HOW ARCHIVES HELPS THE STILL SUFFERING ALCOHOLIC

Hello there! I am an alcoholic and my name is Kim O. How are A.A. Archives beneficial in delivering our message of hope to the still suffering alcoholic in and out of the program? Because without our historical documents and our experience from the past, it's possible our program as we know it may not be here.

When I was a foggy newcomer, I heard an announcement about a breakfast with an Archives panel and thought that must be a group of A.A. old fogies – Archives who were going to speak!! At 34, I certainly wasn't an old fogie (although I might qualify today) and my alcoholic mind decided Archives had nothing to do with me and my recovery. Today I can laugh at my self-centered skewed perception.

With chat bubbles on district websites and meetings, literature, and online speakers available at the touch of a button, why are old papers and pictures relevant in helping reach the still suffering alcoholic today? Because our program has a history of recovery that has been documented and continues to be documented. As Linda W. always said, 'A.A. isn't the only way to sobriety, but it's the only way with a track record!'. A sick and suffering alcoholic, someone who has reached the jumping off point, or is close to it may think - "Hey this thing has been around and chronicled for almost 100 years – it might just help me".

When I hit bottom and slunk into my first meeting, I was relieved to discover there was an established program I could follow. I didn't have to invent my recovery. I was too sick to retain much of what was said in my first meetings, but I would read bits of the stories preserved in the Big Book and identify with the writers. The errors and successes of the early days were already talked about in the Traditions. I didn't have to rely on the committee in my brain to decide what to do when problems arose at meetings. Our Tradition Three, forged from a history of mistakes, tells us who can be a member. Thank goodness the early members decided to let in crackpots because I qualified!!

I was 5 years sober and feeling somewhat better when I finally experienced my first Archives breakfast and was lucky enough to hear the Archivist from Akron. I had two newcomers with me and introduced them to the Fellowship. I wondered how this Archivist had so much inside information about the people I read about in the Big Book. Where had the photographs come from and how did she know so much about Sister Ignatia? Simple answer –we as a fellowship had written down and preserved our history.

In 2009, my husband and I visited Akron and it was there that the Big Book truly came alive!! We arrived at the door of the Mayflower and what a coincidence. There was a group of sober drunks about to start a tour led by an A.A. Akron Archives volunteer!! What a spiritual experience to stand, as many of us have, in the same lobby where Bill made his decision not to go into the bar. We visited the Gatehouse at the Seiberling Estate and I knelt down and said the Third Step prayer with other sober drunks at Dr. Bob's home. Then we moved on to King School where early Wednesday night meetings were held and one particular member, we were told, sat and smoked in the rain gutter. As a recovering drunk, I could relate to sitting in gutters. The King School group still meets today - currently online.

That personal experience of our history allows me to share with a hurting newcomer that this is no fleeting program. We have historical sites and records of life-saving events. It has worked for past drunks, it has worked for me, and it will work for them if they want it and work for it. Thank goodness our founders preserved the stories and wrote down their experiences.

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The Archival work housed in Akron, at GSO, and the interest and work done in Archives by districts and Areas all over the world are basic 12 Step work. Work that preserves our message of hope and recovery to everyone who wants it or is interested in our Fellowship for any reason. Stepping Stones, the historic home of Bill and Lois, houses about 100,000 documents and photographs and 10,000 three dimensional objects. Virtual tours on their website are free for anyone who visits.

I did not grow up in a home of alcoholics. I had not seen much alcohol in my immediate or extended family. My parents might have had a glass of wine on a Sunday and then the bottle went back in the cupboard. However, my Dad recently told me his grandparents lived apart because his grandfather drank. That was in the 1930s, long before A.A. arrived in Ontario. I often sit in a meeting and experience compassion for my great-grandfather who didn't have the opportunity for sobriety as I have had. When I arrived in the rooms, A.A. already had a 50 year documented history of recovery stories. The trusted servants involved in Archives today ensure this program will be here if someday a great grandchild of mine needs this program.

2023 will be the anniversary of 80 years of Alcoholics Anonymous in Ontario. It is exciting and fitting that the 2023 National A.A. Archives Workshop is scheduled to be held in Sudbury. Dedicated service volunteers are already meeting to plan that weekend where Archivists and A.A. members from across North America interested in preserving our history will meet (God willing) to learn and grow in their recovery.

What part of Archives helps a still suffering alcoholic today? All of it.

For if we hadn't preserved our past stories of recovery, we may not be saving lives today.

God bless and have a great 24 hours.

Yours in love and service,

Kim O. Archives Sub-Committee Chair, Area 86, Panel 70
Program of Action Group, District 25

Download your copy of the AA Service Manual combined with the Twelve Concepts for World Service.

Newsletter Committee 2020-2021

As the Newsletter/Website Sub-Committee Chairperson for Area 86, I have been charged with the privilege of putting together the Focus, our Area newsletter, for the past 2 years. I couldn't have done it without the passionate and dedicated assistance of four wonderful women, who have put as much effort into the newsletters as have I. I would like to thank each of them. They are:
Kathy H., member of New Beginnings in St. Thomas, On.
Karen F., **GSR** of Milton Wednesday Night Discussion Group in Milton, On, District 25
Jean P., member of Flying Blind in District 3, and
Heidi P., member of Paris Breakfast Group, Paris, On.

Area Website 2020-2021

Our Area 86 website can be found at www.Area86aa.org . I couldn't have managed to keep the website going without the help of **Wim D.,** member of Milton Wednesday Night Discussion, Alt DCM, District 25, as well as that of **Pam F.,** member of the Watford Group in District 14 and current Area 86 Grapevine Chairperson.

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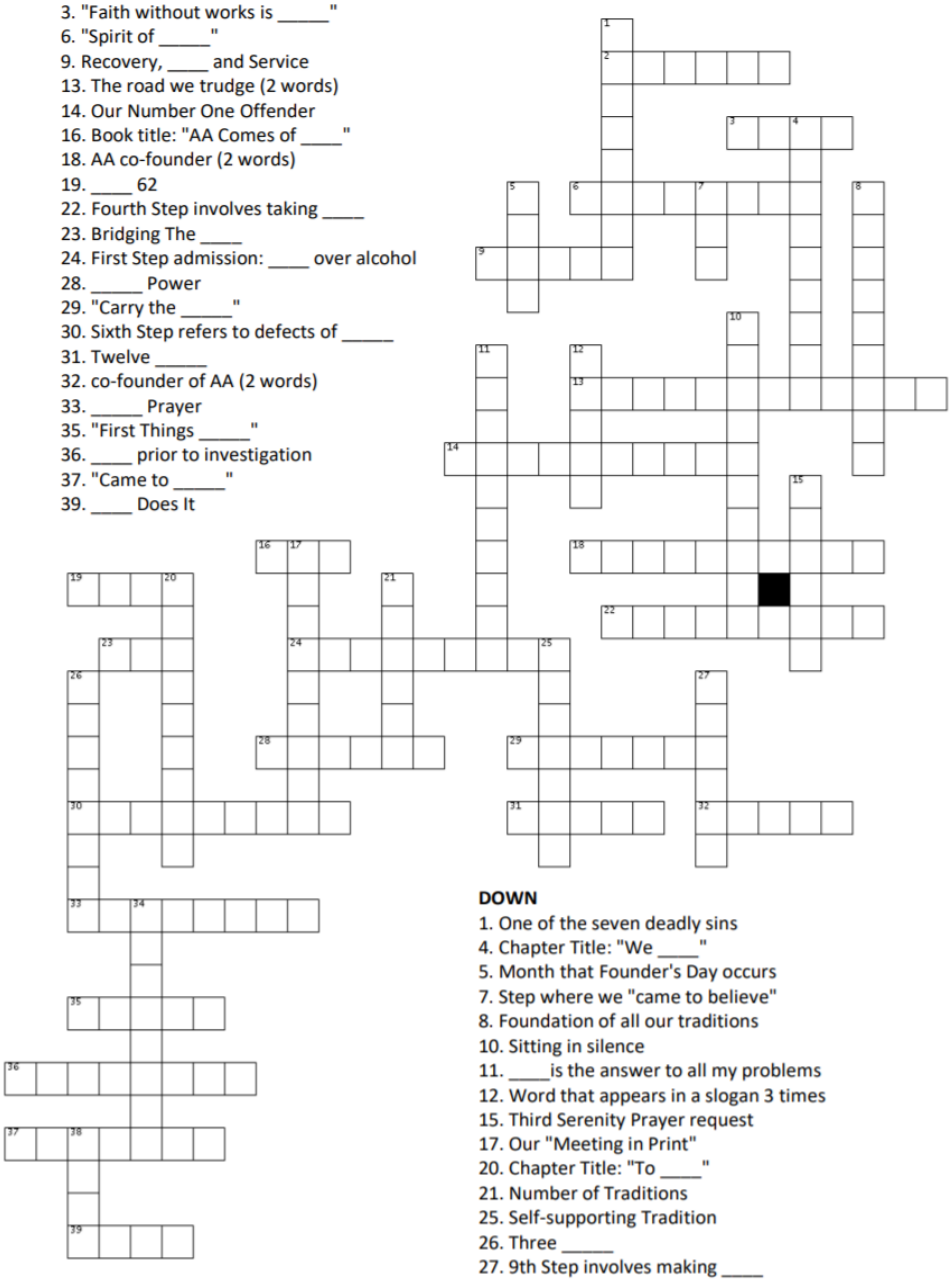
Crossword

ACROSS

2. Spanish version of Grapevine (2 words)
3. "Faith without works is _____"
6. "Spirit of _____"
9. Recovery, ____ and Service
13. The road we trudge (2 words)
14. Our Number One Offender
16. Book title: "AA Comes of ____"
18. AA co-founder (2 words)
19. ____ 62
22. Fourth Step involves taking ____
23. Bridging The ____
24. First Step admission: ____ over alcohol
28. _____ Power
29. "Carry the _____"
30. Sixth Step refers to defects of _____
31. Twelve _____
32. co-founder of AA (2 words)
33. _____ Prayer
35. "First Things _____"
36. ____ prior to investigation
37. "Came to _____"
39. ____ Does It



DOWN

1. One of the seven deadly sins
4. Chapter Title: "We ____"
5. Month that Founder's Day occurs
7. Step where we "came to believe"
8. Foundation of all our traditions
10. Sitting in silence
11. ____is the answer to all my problems
12. Word that appears in a slogan 3 times
15. Third Serenity Prayer request
17. Our "Meeting in Print"
20. Chapter Title: "To ____"
21. Number of Traditions
25. Self-supporting Tradition
26. Three _____
27. 9th Step involves making ____
34. What we have is a "Daily _____"
38. "Live and Let _____"

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Upcoming Events

Area Committee Meeting - December 4, 2021 *Election for Sub-Committee Chairs*.
Virtual platform. Contact your DCM for login info.

Area Committee Meeting - January 15, 2022.
Time and place TBD

Ontario Delegates Committee Meeting - March 4 to 6, 2022.
Holiday Inn Burlington Hotel & Conference Center.

Eastern Canada Regional Forum - May 13-to 15, 2022.
Delta House Hotel Charlottetown, PEI.

C.E.RA.A.S.A. - February 24-26, 2023
Canadian Eastern Regional Alcoholics Anonymous Service Assembly. Details TBD.

Service 2022 Woo-Hoo!

As anyone who has been involved in service can attest, you get a whole lot more back than what you put in. Yes, service can be frustrating. Working with other alcoholics can be a challenge at times, but we have to remember why we give back in A.A. We give back in order to stay sober ourselves. We give back, out of gratitude for those who were there in our darkest times. We give back, to make sure that the hand of A.A. will always be there.

Service in A.A., is anything we do that helps to keep our home groups running. This includes looking after literature purchases, paying the rent, keeping track of expenses, putting the coffee on, greeting at the door, chairing tables, and making sure the newcomer feels welcome, It also includes making a commitment to serve the group as a GSR (General Service Representative). The GSR attends the monthly District meeting and keep's their group informed of issues being discussed at the District. The GSR also carries the voice of the group to the District Forum.

In addition to being a GSR, there are several more positions needing to be filled in one's District. If there is a Treatment Center or Correctional Facility in one's District (and sometimes in a neighboring District), volunteers are usually needed to go into those facilities and carry the message of A.A. to the still suffering alcoholic in the center. Volunteers are usually needed to man the District's phone service and/or to go out on 12 step calls when someone reaches out within our District.

Members are needed for other positions within most Districts. Often there is a need for people to serve as "Bridging the Gap" members, Dance or Social Committee members, Service Workshop volunteers, and on and on. Ask around your District. See who is looking for volunteers and say, "YES, count me in". Be the hand of A.A. For that, I am responsible.

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