

Making A.A. Accessible To the Alcoholic With Special Needs

In St. Louis, Missouri, a disabled young newcomer uses her coded meeting book to find an A.A. meeting with wheelchair access. In Venice, California, a hearing-impaired alcoholic uses his T.D.D. (teletype machine for the deaf) to call the central office for help. And in Melbourne, Florida, a confined member smiles as three A.A. friends arrive for their weekly meeting in her bedroom.

Once rare, such scenarios are becoming commonplace as areas across America redouble their efforts to assure that A.A. is available to all who need us. "In North Florida," says Brian S., "we think of it as being 'accessible' to any alcoholic with special needs—such as the visually- and hearing-impaired, the bedridden, and those with learning disorders."

The chairperson of his area's Accessibilities Committee, Brian explains that "the term is open-ended. Basically it refers to any person, place or thing that helps the alcoholic get to a meeting; or, conversely, that helps get a meeting to the alcoholic."

The five-year-old Accessibilities Committee successfully employs illustrations, captioned both in English and Spanish, to raise the consciousness of A.A.s. Explains Brian: "One illustration shows a fellow lying in bed, with the caption 'Help me stay sober.' Another

shows a person at a meeting, saying, 'Please look at me . . . because I read your lips.'" Additionally, the committee is producing a meeting list in Braille and working toward an ambitious goal: to make one A.A. meeting a week available in every nursing home in the area.

Across the U.S., the Southern California Area Literature Committee is currently concentrating its efforts on reaching the hearing-impaired alcoholic. Says alternate chairperson Bill W., who also serves as chairperson of the Deaf Communications Subcommittee: "For deaf persons who use American Sign Language (A.S.L.), English is a second language. In addition, idioms and colloquialisms are difficult to sign; and some phrases used in A.A., such as 'Rarely have we seen a person fail,' do not have comparable signs. So, in a real sense, working with the deaf community is similar to working with minorities such as Hispanics or Native Americans—that is, with a group that has a separate language and culture."

What can the Fellowship do to help? Bill reports that requests most frequently made by hearing-impaired A.A.s include: videotapes of the entire Big Book in A.S.L. (only Chapter Five is now available); simplified reading material with easier vocabulary and smaller words; more A.A. meetings with skilled interpreters; and help



Birthday Contribution Envelopes

We are happy to share the two enclosed Birthday Contribution envelopes with you. Your General Service Office welcomes your participation in the "birthday plan" as an expression of gratitude for your sobriety. Whatever you choose to send will be greatly appreciated.

Donations to Pink Cans Provide 'Meetings in Print'

Alcoholics confined in correctional facilities usually have just one A.A. meeting a week available to them, if they're lucky. A sizeable number are on waiting lists and go to none at all. But there's another way to carry the message to these people: provide them with meetings-in-print through A.A.'s Big Book, pamphlets, audiovisual material and the Grapevine. The only stumbling block is money.

Enter the pink cans. "When the need for literature was seen many years ago," says Will N., Northern California Hospitals & Institutions Committee liaison to the General Service Office, we decided to ask our area groups to collect spare change in labeled containers. To keep printing costs down, the printer utilized leftover pink paper for the cans' labels, and our new literature fund raiser was born."

According to Will, the original one-quart paint cans have given way to plastic containers with a screw-on, slotted top. The circling label is still pink. "Initially," he says, "some members feared that donations to the pink cans would have a shrinking effect on group contributions, but this has not happened. Providing clear information probably has a lot to do with it. Every year, the H&I committee sends each group a flyer explaining what the cans are for. Before the basket is passed at a meeting, the committee suggests that the secretary might emphasize the importance of contributing to group expenses and commitments to the A.A. support system first. When possible, information also is printed in local A.A. newsletters."

In 1990, Will reports, "more than \$248,000—mostly in nickels, dimes, quarters and pennies—was plunked into our modest pink cans. These funds were contributed by A.A.s for A.A.s in the spirit of our Tradition of self-support."

He notes that "variations on the pink can have been popping up at meetings across the country. Not long ago, in fact, I saw some green cans at meetings in Southern California's San Diego/Imperial Area. The labels, telling where to send the contributions, were printed in two languages—Spanish on one side and



English on the other. That's A.A. sharing for you. I went down there all set to share our terrific experience in Northern California, only to return with a great idea of theirs."

Viewpoint **When Power Becomes A Three-Letter Word**

Look up *power* in Webster's Dictionary and you'll find a long, sometimes conflicting list of definitions. Working for good, it can be "a source or means of supplying energy"; however, when power becomes synonymous with ego, look out!

"When we become a part of A.A.," says Jim M., coordinator of the California Northern Interior Area (CNIA) Archives Center at Stockton, "we acknowledge in Steps One and Two that we are powerless over alcohol, but that we believe a 'Power greater than ourselves' can restore us to sanity. Moreover, the Big Book eloquently speaks about our old ego-centric values, about how we've insisted on having things our own way. But that's behind us now—or is it?"

Sharing his own experience, Jim recalls what happened at a recent inventory meeting of his home group. "When a couple of members found my great ideas less than wonderful," he observes, "I had to be aware every minute that the purpose was not to have the group do things my way but rather to bring up matters for discussion, explore the issues, and let the group do it

■ Hurricane Katrina — One Year Later

A year after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, A.A. groups are recovering in ways that reflect how the region in general is shaking off the effects of the storm. Some A.A. groups rebounded quickly. For others, it's been slower. Some meeting places were destroyed, some damaged to the point where they are still not available.

Attendance at A.A. meetings in New Orleans is down due to the drop in the city's population. Some groups have merged and some are sharing meeting places. At some meetings, according to A.A. members in the region, people still talk about little other than the fallout from the storm. At other meetings, it's back to A.A. as usual—though that may be relative.

"Lots down here is back to a state of normal, though now we've got a new definition of normal. We are learning to live in this world," says Howard L., Southeast Regional trustee.

In the aftermath of the storm, which hit Aug. 29, a group called the Little Yellow House, in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, met in the parking lot outside its normal meeting hall, which lost its roof in the storm. "Since there was no cover from the shade, the group's noon-time meeting was cancelled. So was its 8 p.m. meeting, because of the curfew," says Howard. Now that group is back in its original meeting place with its previous meeting schedule.

Along the Gulf Coast of Mississippi, says Howard, "a lot of areas that looked devastated in December look good now. But where they have to, people are making compromises, they're adjusting, adapting."

Glenn H., the delegate from Mississippi, says "the devastation was so widespread, cut such a wide swath, that it was beyond belief. There were towns along the coast, like Waveland, that were essentially wiped out. A storm surge of 26 feet or so came in and took everything.

"It's all going to come back, but it will take time. And A.A. will be there."

He notes that the Gratitude Round-Up, which is the main event for the South Mississippi Intergroup, came off as planned at the Long Beach Clubhouse the weekend after Thanksgiving last year. "There was surprisingly good attendance, something like 100 [down from the usual 600-700]. I applaud the people for their efforts. I'm not sure I would have been able to do it so soon after the storm."

New Orleans had a population of half a million people when the storm hit. That dropped to 100,000 in the storm's aftermath, and now is back to something over 200,000. Three of the city's five parishes sustained major damage and recovery has been slowed by the dimensions of the rebuilding effort.

"Something as simple as roof shingles have been in short supply, not to mention roofers," says Don M., the delegate from Louisiana, who was able to move back into his house only last April.

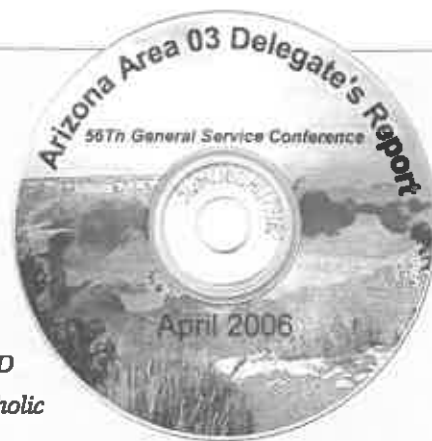
"As people came back, the groups came back, but a lot of places were destroyed," says Don, "and some areas are still in bad shape. Our Monday night group is still not back; the church where we met got pretty banged up."

The Boulevard Club, a well-known meeting place, was under eight feet of water, according to Don. "It was early November before people could return to it. Then they had to shovel out a few feet of muck. I saw one volunteer wearing a full hazard suit,



This meeting space in Chalmette, Louisiana, which was home to A.A. groups like "Ladies Night" and "Arabi We Share," shows the effects of the surging waters that inundated the area in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Visible high up on the wall and the Twelve & Twelve shades—just under Step One—is a water stain line indicating the reach of the flood.

Area 3's novel approach to its delegate's report was to put it on this compact disc. Smoothly narrated by the Arizona delegate, John S., the account of his trip to the General Service Conference in New York last April contains photos, graphics, and printed headings. The 20-minute PowerPoint® presentation also makes spare use of sound effects. The aim of producing the report on a CD was to broaden the audience for it and provide a richer sense of what goes on at the annual Conference. The photos in the CD were chosen with anonymity in mind. As John says in his narration, "no alcoholic was harmed in the making of this presentation."



■ Pink Cans: Small Change Brings Big Results

A large number of inmates in correctional facilities in the U.S. and Canada are in prison because of alcohol, and the flip side is that many of these alcoholics have found the Fellowship in prison. But the quest for sobriety doesn't come easily behind the walls. Most incarcerated alcoholics have just one meeting a week available to them, and many others are on waiting lists and can get to none at all. That reality underlines the need to send literature into prisons to carry the message in print through the Big Book, other A.A. books and pamphlets, and the A.A. Grapevine.

How to raise enough money to keep a supply of literature flowing? Corrections committees throughout the service structure make raising money for literature a priority, and one idea that has become popular in some areas is having a pink can (or perhaps a blue or green one) prominently displayed on group literature tables as a way of collecting money for literature for prisons.

The concept originated (as far as we know) in the Northern California Area in 1957. The area Hospital and Institutions committee (H&I) was rapidly expanding its work in prisons, and the need for literature was increasing by leaps and bounds, to the point where it could no longer be met by individual contributions. Someone came up with the idea of passing around a can at group meetings, explaining that the pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters dropped into the can were intended for alcoholics in prisons and hospitals. How to make the cans stand out? Paint them pink. The idea caught on, and eventually groups throughout North America began displaying pink cans on their literature tables. In Northern California, the original one-quart paint cans have been replaced by plastic containers with screw-on, slotted tops. In the beginning, some members were afraid that donations to the pink cans would decrease group contributions, and mindful of that possibility, the committee has always emphasized the importance of providing clear information. They send each group a flyer explaining what the cans are for, print

information in local A.A. newsletters, and always suggest that the secretary emphasize the importance of contributing to group expenses first.

Some areas have come up with variations on the basic concept. Northern New Jersey, for example, implemented the idea of having jail boxes, and the area corrections committee sends each group a letter of introduction describing the need and the purpose.

In the Southern Minnesota area, one of many that have embraced the pink can plan, an article in the area newsletter summed it up: "The pink can is not intended to detract from your group's normal Tradition Seven contributions. We look only to collect spare change from as many groups as possible. If your group already sponsors a facility with literature, your participation in the pink can insures that literature is reaching all facilities, not just one or two. Does your group have a pink can? What a positive way to turn pocket change into the promises of the A.A. message."

Corrections

■ Corrections Personnel Rub Elbows With A.A.s at Arizona Conference

The Arizona Area Corrections Conference, which had its sixth annual meeting in January, brings together A.A. volunteers and corrections personnel from around the state. The aim is to give the two groups an opportunity to mix and get to know each other. One hundred and thirty-four attended, including 44 corrections personnel.

"It was the largest turnout of any conference we've had so far, and it came closest to doing what we have always wanted, which is to promote good relationships between corrections personnel and Alcoholics Anonymous," says Dennis W., chairman of the conference.