

Al-Anon Oregon Area Assembly - Group Service Workshop – July 17, 2021
Notes for Slide Show

SLIDE 1:

At our last Area World Service Committee meeting, the subject of “dark groups” came up, districts that were not represented at AWSC or Assembly meetings. We discussed ways we can increase participation by groups at AWSC and Assembly meetings. This led, of course, to discussions of service in general, a topic which is brought up frequently at groups, usually in the context of, “How can we get more members to participate?”

This workshop comes out of that discussion. Today, Roxanne and I hope to give you some information that may help you in approaching the subject of service in your groups, and we’ll lead off with the question, “How important is it?.”

SLIDE 2:

Service in Al-Anon and Alateen is reaching out to others in the most basic sense, because it carries the message of recovery to those who still suffer. Without the service done by countless thousands of Al-Anons throughout the world, Al-Anon and Alateen would not have grown to be the programs that they are today. Al-Anon’s *Fact Sheet for Professionals* reports that “Currently, there are over 24,000 Al-Anon groups and nearly 1,500 Alateen groups meeting in 118 countries.” (“Information about Al-Anon & Alateen,” <https://al-anon.org/pdf/S37E.pdf>).

So, how important is it? Our Al-Anon Declaration says:

“Let It Begin with Me”

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help,
Let the hand of Al-Anon and Alateen
Always be there, and—*Let It Begin with Me.*

Service allows Al-Anon and Alateen members everywhere to keep that pledge. So how do we get started in service? Service in Al-Anon/Alateen starts in our groups. So let’s take a look at the Group Structure.

SLIDE 3:

When a newcomer arrives at an Al-Anon or Alateen meeting for the first time, someone has opened the door to the meeting room, someone greets them and welcomes them to the meeting. When they look around, they may see literature that has been displayed and beverages that have been set out. During the meeting, someone will start the meeting and others may take part by reading selections from the meeting format. During the meeting, members may share their experience, strength, and hope and may provide a donation to the group’s 7th Tradition. ALL THIS IS SERVICE.

When decisions need to be made, someone will request that the meeting take a “group conscience.” This is service, too. This is how the membership does service together.

Group leaders are elected for positions to take care that their meeting is ready for members and newcomers to participate. A Chairperson may be the one to open the meeting, a Treasurer may pass the basket, a Literature Chairperson may set out literature. Each group is autonomous, and these elections may be for 3 months, 6 months, or any other time period that the group decides via their group conscience. Small groups have fewer positions, larger groups have more. Having alternates for each position makes it easier to commit to doing service in a group. Your *AI-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* gives more information.

Groups in one geographical area form a District and may have a Literature Depot, or AI-Anon Information Service (AIS). Group Reps and District Reps are the bridge between each group and the Oregon Area, which guides AI-Anon/Alateen throughout the state and participates in the World Service Conference through an elected delegate.

SLIDE 4:

I had been attending AI-Anon for a few months when it was brought up that it was time for our treasurer to pass those duties on to someone else. A long-time member, who had done much service over the years, encouraged me to take the position. I guess you could say she was my service sponsor, as she was always available if I had questions. I have held several positions at the group level.

I eventually served as Group Representative on Panel 56. We needed a representative as our GR had become our District Representative. As GR, I represented our group at District and Area meetings, and I appreciated having the DR at the table when attending assemblies. Now I am the Alternative GR for our group.

There are many things I learned from service in AI-Anon. I really enjoyed meeting with so many AI-Anons and Alateens from around the state at assemblies. It's been wonderful to see the program at work, as we bring our varied ideas and backgrounds into a meeting to come together for a shared purpose.

Three years ago, I submitted a book report to the Assembly. It was on a booklet entitled, *When I Got Busy, I Got Better*. I highly recommend this booklet for you and your sponsees. I will refer to it again in this workshop.

The 12 Steps are essential, and Step 12 is about carrying the message. The 12 Traditions are also essential. Step 7 is not just about money – it is all about service. We also have 12 Concepts to help guide us in service, and these will be read at our assemblies. These concepts are how we got here, and why we have these links of service.

- I liked Concept 1 because it reminds us that it's all about the groups, IT ALL STARTS WITH THE GROUPS. I'm here to vote as a representative for my group. I have been given the authority through our group conscience. and taken the responsibility to do so.

- Concept 3 reminds me that I am a “trusted servant” and that my group has placed its trust in me as their GR to cast votes, “according to the dictates of [my] own judgment and conscience, as guided by my group.
- Concept 4 tells us that strong participation leads to strong groups and that “in the participatory method of doing business, there are no superiors and no inferiors.”
TO HAVE HARMONY, WE NEED PARTICIPATION.

SLIDE 5:

The AL-ANON/ALATEEN GROUP is the first link of service. Each group needs people willing to provide the services that keep the meeting room open. Someone will open the meeting, someone will chair the meeting, someone will keep track of the funds. There are many activities that keep a meeting open, available, and functioning.

Every group can elect a GROUP REPRESENTATIVE (GR) who normally services for three years. During that time, they attend District meetings and three Area Assembly meetings each year. It’s a good idea to also have an ALTERNATE GR, who can back up the Group Rep. If there is a problem or concern in a group, a member may take it to the GR.

The GRs in a district will elect a DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVE (DR) who serves the same three years. In addition to chairing the local District meetings, the DR attends the Area Assembly meetings and Area World Service Committee (AWSC) meetings that meet the month prior. It’s also a good idea to have an ALTERNATE DR, who can back up the District Rep. Group and District issues can be discussed at the district level or taken to the AWSC.

At the AREA WORLD SERVICE COMMITTEE, the area coordinators, officers, and district reps gather to set the agenda for the upcoming assembly. The DRs can learn much at these meetings and take information back to the GRs and the groups.

The OREGON AREA ASSEMBLY meets every March, July, and November. All AWSC members and GRs are expected to attend the Assembly. The Group Representatives are the ones who have the authority to vote in representation of their groups. GRs also have the responsibility to share information from the Assembly with their groups.

The Assembly also elects a DELEGATE who represents the Area at the WORLD SERVICE CONFERENCE. This annual meeting is where decisions are made that affect Al-Anon and Alateen as a whole. The Delegate brings back information to the Area, which is what Katie did a few minutes ago.

The WORLD SERVICE OFFICE carries out the day-to-day business and facilitates communication to the groups.

Al-Anon and Alateen members are what this organization is about. EVERYTHING BEGINS AND ENDS WITH GROUP MEMBERS.

Most of you in attendance today have already stepped into service positions after some time in the program. It's not something most of us rushed into at our first meetings. It is good to remember the slogan: EASY DOES IT!

SLIDE 6:

This overview is probably a lot to take in, and every aspect of this is explained thoroughly in the *Service Manual*. But, to simplify, each of these service bodies has one goal in mind: To gather the experience, strength, and hope of members for the greater good of Al-Anon/Alateen.

People may not feel that they have a lot to give when they first come to Al-Anon and Alateen. Eventually, though, they become stronger in recovery and want to give back. Eventually, they see that Al-Anon is not just the Twelve Steps, but has Traditions and Concepts that keep our groups strong.

By watching group officers provide service and easing in to group service themselves, members gradually get a broader view of how much they can do and what it takes to keep Al-Anon and Alateen available.

“As members of a worldwide fellowship, we eventually discover how vast our community really is and how important the services are that we sometimes take for granted. The groups are the foundation of Al-Anon and have the final say in the fellowship, but a **group can have no say unless it participates and sends a voice through an elected Group Representative.**” *Paths to Recovery*, pp. 193-94

SLIDE 7:

As members, Al-Anons and Alateens are constantly balancing between taking care of ourselves in recovery and being in service at the same time. These are not mutually exclusive. Our *Service Manual* says that “The important qualification for every member is participation. To ensure our own growth, we should welcome opportunities to be useful to the group.” Members may be more inclined to welcome this service, if we can show them the value to themselves of doing service and make participation easier for them to do.

Do Group officers rotate regularly? **Rotation** gives all members the privilege of serving. Officers and leaders are trusted servants; they do not govern the group. Are alternates elected for each group position? **Alternates** can share the responsibilities of the position and be there when the leader cannot. Does the group have members who will **support** the newly-elected officers? **Service sponsors** can guide newer sponsees. Does the group study **literature** about service? Reading from this literature at meetings can help to strengthen the group.

These types of group activities reinforce for members a group's commitment to the value of service. Roxanne will talk more about this.

SLIDE 8:

There is a section in *When I Got Busy, I Got Better* entitled "Facing our Fears," which addresses issues that may prevent us from reaching out to others in service. It reminds us that we don't have to be perfect (just willing), that help is always available from others and from our Higher Power, and that we can succeed with humility and let go for others to carry on when our task is complete.

The section, entitled "In Giving, We Receive," is a compilation of stories from members who share how they have benefitted from service. One writer shares, "What I've discovered with the help of service in Al-Anon is that there is a wide range of results between perfect and ineffective, and that I can do much that brings me satisfaction and joy."

Personally, I've often thought that I have better things to do than to attend a business meeting, district meeting, or Area Assembly. But when I have attended, I have always come away with something I learned, a feeling of belonging, and spiritual growth. SERVICE IS NOT ALWAYS CONVENIENT, BUT I HAVE FOUND IT IS ALWAYS WORTHWHILE.

Take a look at *When I Got Busy, I Got Better*. The table of contents and topic index make it easy to locate readings on specific topics for personal use, sponsoring, or for a meeting. Consider studying it, or other Conference-Approved Literature (CAL) that deals with service, regularly at your meetings.

SLIDE 9:

"Taking a periodic group inventory helps to keep your group healthy and invigorated. Members can use the inventory to discuss what actions have been beneficial to group and personal growth, and what actions need to be updated, discontinued, or improved."

When was the last time your group took an inventory? Guideline #G-8a has three different types of inventories. These are the kinds of questions that are contained in the *Guidelines*. Developing a process for the group inventory and encouraging members to take their own inventories personally, will help group members find the strengths and weaknesses in their service structures.

You can find the Guidelines for inventories on the WSO website at al-anon.org by typing "guidelines" into the search box on the home page.

<https://al-anon.org/for-members/members-resources/manuals-and-guidelines/guidelines/>

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SLIDE 11:

Discussions during or following an inventory can include ideas for new service opportunities, ideas for reaching out to potential members, and resolutions for major or minor concerns before the group’s unity is disrupted.

“We took a detailed meeting inventory at the Happy Hour group. We had several weeks where members could submit index cards with items they would like to addressed by the group.

Member volunteers in our group took then collated the items on the inventories, and those that were of most concern were addressed one at a time in our business meetings or in the group. We did not agree 100% about the items, but everyone had a chance to think about the issues and voice their views and vote. Overall – it took 2 to 3 months to go through the inventories, have the discussions, and then make decisions about our meeting structure – I think this process served to strengthen our group.” (Roxanne)

“I attended a group in District 2 in Lincoln City and got to see their process for a group inventory. They actually took the inventory in a series of writing meetings, where members were asked a question and then wrote out their responses. The responses were collected and then re-distributed so that each person had some else’s writing, which they read to the group.” (Nancy)

SLIDE 12:

We’ve talked about Conference-Approved Literature and Group inventories, so now let’s consider Service Sponsorship.

“Service sponsorship is a special relationship where one member shares their service experience with another member.” This type of sponsorship can be a one-time situation, such as an outgoing trusted servant supporting their replacement, such as Roxanne described, or an ongoing relationship, like the one I had with Judy J. when I was the DR for District 2. “Service sponsorship helps both the service sponsor and the sponsee acquire new skills while being an example of personal growth through service.” (*Service Manual* p. 49)

SLIDE 13:

To sum up, it's not about "making" people do service or "getting" people to do service. It's about our groups encouraging a service "mindset" and making it easy for people to do service within the parameters of their own personal recovery. We suggest three actions that groups may take, through the regular group process, that will strengthen a group's commitment to service:

- 1) Can your group take one meeting a month or quarter to read from *When I Got Busy, I Got Better*? Or another piece of literature about service, such as the discussion of the 7th Tradition in *Paths to Recovery*? Can members share their experiences of service every other month? Can your group or district organize a service workshop for the district? Regularly exposing group members to the idea of service and how it helps us fulfill our Al-Anon pledge can bring unity to groups through participation.
- 2) Can your group take one of the group inventories regularly throughout the year or choose one at the beginning or end of the year? Can you plan one meeting to discuss the results and plan next steps?
- 3) Can your group develop a service sponsor position at the district or group level? Such a position could keep the idea of service in the forefront of people's minds by sharing at meetings, developing a workshop, or working one-on-one with new officers.

The more we expose our group members to the responsibility for and benefits of service, the more open people will be to step up for service. Service at the group level is the gateway to becoming a Group Representative and starting the path to service beyond the group level. This is where we really feel the nature of the "vast community" that we are a part of.