



September 2013

Alcoholics Anonymous Australia

Newsletter for Professionals

Professionals in remote situations we need you!

Over the past two years Alcoholics Anonymous has been endeavouring to increase our services to those isolated by geographic location or barriers of disability or culture. As part of this initiative a number of members have visited areas in outback Queensland in an endeavour to contact professionals in these communities and gain their assistance in setting up AA groups.

Some of these centres such as Longreach, Barcaldine and Alpha have had very active groups in the past but the members have moved on and unfortunately there are no groups operating in any of these areas. Since its beginnings AA has had a history of cooperation with professionals who are treating men and women suffering from alcohol problems. Happily 75 years on, this history of cooperation still exists. Recent talks with professional bodies in the far west Queensland have made us aware of difficulties and added strain put due to cuts in government spending and reduction of services in. AA can assist in providing a cost free service to clients if we can set up meetings in some of these areas.

AA now has a phone number, 1300 22 22 22, where we can be reached from any area in Australia. We also have a National web site www.aa.org.au where information about AA can be obtained. Should an individual, whether a client or professional body, contact us we can assist by supplying literature, DVD's and CD's with information about our services and about alcoholism and how it affects the individual. In many cases we will endeavour to give an individual one to one contact and advice on how to start a group in the area.

It is our policy never to issue medical advice or to interfere in any way with any medical treatment, and this includes psychiatric treatment, that the individual may be receiving. Before we can be of any assistance to those in remote areas we need to be able to contact them and possibly the only way we can do that at present is through professional bodies working in these areas so in the spirit of cooperation I am asking please help us.

AA in the mainstream media

A study of the behavioural changes arising from being a member of AA found that the Fellowship most helps its members in two ways:

1. it brings together people to support each other in sobriety; and,
2. it increases their confidence to survive social situations without a drink.

To tease out how AA works, the study simultaneously looked at the relative importance of various mechanisms such as: changes in social networks; maintaining motivation; confidence in the ability to cope with the demands of recovery; decreased depression symptoms; and, increased spirituality.

Apart from the key results listed above, the study also found that:

“greater participation in AA during the first three months of the study period was independently associated with more successful recovery over the following year.”

A spokesperson for the study team, John F. Kelly, said: *“The results suggest that social context factors are key; the people who associate with individuals attempting to begin recovery can be crucial to their likelihood of success. AA appears adept at facilitating and supporting those social changes.”*

John F Kelly is director of the Addiction Recovery Management Service at Massachusetts General

Hospital in Boston, and also Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School.

More than 1,700 people in nine centres in the USA participated in the study. Attendance at AA was voluntary and two other alternatives were offered.

Source: Sue McGreevey: *What makes AA work?* Harvard Gazette 12 September 2011

<http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2011/09/what-makes-aa-work/>

In an interview broadcast on ABC Radio National's Health Report on 5 August 2013, John F Kelly added that the participants were followed for up to three years.

He noted different results for men and women. The study found that AA seemed to offer men a social network of sober friends so they could remove themselves from their drinking buddies. AA also gave men confidence to cope in high risk drinking situations.

The same was true of women, but only to about half the amount as men. However, women benefited more from AA improving their confidence to cope with things like depression, anxiety and anger without having to drink.

Source: Radio National Health Report Monday 5 August 2013

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/healthreport/alcoholism-and-alcoholics-anonymous/4865338#transcript>

Got a smartphone? Scan the image below to be taken to the relevant webpage



Report from an addictions counsellor on their experiences of AA visiting...

I work for a service that provides counselling and other support for people experiencing difficulties related to their drug and alcohol use. We were recently visited by two people who attend AA meetings in Sydney. They both have a history of alcohol dependency and willingly shared their stories and discussed how they benefited from Alcoholics Anonymous.

The purpose of the in-service was for the staff to become more familiar with the processes of AA, and to have an opportunity to ask questions of people who have personal experience of alcohol addiction and AA. The visit met these purposes well, but it was effective well beyond this. People who access support unfortunately often report a sense of an 'us and them' sentiment. I agree that this divide exists, and it's present in many contexts, most strongly in those services with a traditional base – medicine, law enforcement, and psychiatry. Fortunately, it is well recognised these days as being counter-productive / counter-therapeutic to reinforce this divide, and good practitioners will use a collaborative way of working where possible. Viewed from the perspective of the service provider, this division often means that services are undereducated on the practical goings-on of fellow services.

The arrangement, which saw these two people give their time and share with us their experience and knowledge, was done in the vein of collaboration. We were afforded an insider's view of an AA meeting, not as staff from another service, but through the eyes of people who had a substantial

experience of Alcoholics Anonymous. They took us on a guided virtual tour of what someone going to a meeting might experience. They shared with us their own insights about the AA process, which would have been impossible for us to get from attending a meeting ourselves.

Another aspect, which provided value beyond that of a standard information session, came from the fact that we were speaking with people who were at the more empowered end of their relationship with addiction. As is the nature of the role, staff members of a support service are much more likely to come in contact with people who, while possibly at one of a myriad of stages, are in the throes of addiction, cycling in the confusion of how to proceed, and quickly growing tired.

Often staff of support services will comment that they hope a particular episode of care assisted in

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“planting the seed”. In other words, there has been such little visible value in the interaction that it's best just to hope that some time into the future, a kernel of what was spoken about will expand to be more helpful than it seems currently.

Being able to listen to people who have doubtless been a party in one or more of these interactions at a time when their addiction outweighed their ability to change, be it with well-meaning family or friends, a service like the one I work for or imposed by Her Majesty, opened an opportunity to consider what has indeed worked for someone.

The evidence was in front of us – neither of these people described having had a *slight* problem with substances of addiction; they openly recounted times that could have left them without the opportunity to share their experiences. And they described the personal process of recovery that has led to their undeniably healthy position now.

So while this occasion could have been another information session it certainly wasn't. Through the simple genuine sharing of people's experience we were able to grow our understanding of a valuable program, and deepen our appreciation for those who commit to it. Thank you.



How Can A.A. Help You?

Would you be interested in having an A.A. presentation at one of your professional gatherings? Or would you like information about recovery from alcoholism in A.A.? If so, please contact

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