



March 2012

Alcoholics Anonymous Australia

Newsletter for Professionals

A call for help - Australian women respond

In July 2011, our National Office Manager attended the Alcoholics Anonymous Asia/Oceania Service Meeting in Chandigarh, India. The meeting attended by members from India, Japan, New Zealand, Japan, Thailand, Singapore, Bhutan, Kuwait, Dubai, Russia (Siberia), Sri Lanka, Hong Kong and Nepal. This is a biennial meeting which, amongst other things, encourages the planning of sound structures suited to the needs of the individual countries, and the expansion of AA services to reach the alcoholic through the spoken word, literature and institutions work.

During the meeting our Office Manager was approached by a Trustee of the General Service Board of India. It was explained that one of the greatest challenges facing AA in India is the social stigma surrounding alcoholism and the concept of woman alcoholics. Due to changing social conditions there is a marked increase in the number of women alcoholics in India. Women from all walks of life are suffering from alcoholism.

Although AA has existed in India since 1957 and has a healthy number of male members, for various reasons they have been unable to reach female alcoholics. In a country of over 1 billion people, there are only 13 female members in India. It was felt that the only way the message of recovery could be carried to women in India was by other women, and Australia was asked to help.

Earlier this year a flyer was distributed to all members, asking female members to form a contingent to visit India for a two week period in January 2013. The response to this request has been staggering, with over 130 women currently registered to attend. Women from all States of Australia have responded. It is expected that this number will grow considerably, as registrations do not close until 31st May 2012. The women will be visiting the cities of Mumbai, Pune, Mysore, Delhi and Calcutta. Ages of the women attending range from 19 to 73. A report on the visit will be published in the March 2013 newsletter.

AA establishes national 1300 helpline number

The new National AA Helpline Telephone Number is now in service.

The final testing of the new number **1300 22 22 22** was completed during August of last year and this number can now be listed as the Australia-wide access telephone number for people wanting to contact Alcoholics Anonymous for help.

Calls to this number will typically be directed to the nearest local AA helpline. This could be a participating Central Service Office, district or area-based number.

For example, if someone in Toowoomba, Queensland calls the national number, they will be automatically put through to the Brisbane CSO helpline. If someone in Forster, NSW calls it, they will automatically be put through to the Newcastle District Office helpline.

This initiative has been completed in accordance with the Australian General Service Conference's Advisory Action 085/2009.

Corrections Correspondence - a special kind of AA service

I know how important our Twelfth Step work is and I enjoy writing to men who are locked up. It is one of the tools that I use to keep me sober. I myself found AA in prison almost 20 years ago. And it hasn't been necessary for me to return to prison since I was released in 1979. —Outside Correspondent.

The Corrections Correspondence Service is a Twelfth Step opportunity which links A.A. members on the "outside" with AA members in correctional facilities to provide a source of experience as it relates to problems with alcohol. Members in correctional facilities can write to the PO Box National Office has acquired and their letter will be forwarded on to an AA member so that correspondence can take place strengthening the sobriety of both. People who get involved say that it's a wonderful experience.

Impressive list of speakers for Melbourne Convention

The National Convention will this year be held at the Melbourne Convention Centre 5—9 April. Media Professional Mike Munro will address the Convention and recount his personal experiences with alcoholism in his family. Widely respected medical practitioners Dr Neville O'Connor and Professor Greg Whelan will also speak on their professional experience treating alcoholics. AUSLAN interpreters will be at the Opening Ceremony for the hearing impaired. Please visit www.melbourne2012.org



Newsletter for Professionals is a twice yearly publication. If you would like it to be delivered to your inbox please email national.office@aa.org.au with "subscribe" in the subject line

Introducing Dr Neville O'Connor Class A Trustee of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous Australia

Many people may not know that AA invites non-alcoholics to sit on the General Service Board of AA Australia in order to offer experience and expertise that may be of benefit to AA. Such people are called 'Class A' Non-Alcoholic Trustees. Dr Neville O'Connor, a medical professional from Toowoomba is an appointed Trustee board member. His responsibilities as Trustee are varied, including speaking at national conferences, attending two weekend national meetings a year, the four-day National Conference and responding to requests for information or action from various Groups and Areas. Dr Neville is also called upon to give professional advice at times. "I'm a medical doctor as well as having experience with alcoholics so they do look to me for information." He is, not to put too

fine a point on it, well qualified for the job. He was previously the Medical Director of an Alcoholic and Drug Unit at the Toowoomba Base Hospital, running a program that started in 1982 that continued until it was dissolved by the Queensland government in 2000. Local AA members were closely involved in Dr Neville's program and this helped convince Dr Neville of the benefits of AA to suffering alcoholics. "Alcoholism is not just about stopping drinking," he says. "The program in AA helps people unlearn a lot of the bad habits that take place. It takes a good

period of time to get back to a reasonable state of mind." As a medical doctor he has no qualms about the disease concept of alcoholism. "I don't think there's any doubt that's what it should be called. Diseases are diagnosed by symptoms and signs, whether physical or biochemical or whatever it may be. And they have a known course where certain outcomes become likely depending on whether it is treated or untreated. This is a disease that's got certain symptoms and signs. People develop these symptoms and signs and the outcome is well known," he says. Asked if the disease view of alcoholism is widely accepted in the medical community, Dr Neville says misunderstanding still runs rife. "I don't think it's widely understood, that's the difficulty. Medical schools don't tend to focus on it or see it as a major problem, yet it is. A well-known doctor wrote about alcoholism as a disease back in the 1900s. He wrote a very knowledgeable book and did a lot of research into the area and because of that the disease concept became more widely ac-

cepted. Since then most of the research has dried up except for studies conducted by other professional people such as psychologists, who tend to view it not so much as a disease but as a learnt process."

Although Dr Neville would like to see more focus on alcoholism he is a firm supporter of the traditions of AA and their wisdom. "Sometimes I've heard other professional people criticise AA for not allowing its members to be studied, but I think that's the great thing about

AA. It's completely independent. They have the program and don't allow any outside influence or support. It's supporting and gets on with the job. As soon as you allow outside influence the whole thing can become corrupted." Nevertheless, he acknowledges that AA's openness to working with professionals is critical to helping the suffering alcoholic. "Probably something we need a lot more of is to communicate with doctors and psychologists and try to help them to understand the disease of alcoholism and what can be done. It's an area I'm going to have to do more on," he says. His motivation for giving time and energy to an organization he is not

even a member of comes from seeing first hand that AA works.

"I've seen AA work so well. The results we had at the hospital were exceptional. We had a six-week program there that involved AA closely and we followed people up for two or three years after and the sobriety rate was 40-50%, which was an excellent result." Dr Neville says that seeing this proof in the pudding is what he finds most rewarding about doing service in AA.

"Seeing people that you've known in the past as pretty hopeless to have become such good human beings. Alcoholism turns people into liars and cheats, yet once

you see them sober you see them well and valuable in the community. They develop a maturity they probably by-passed while drinking." "AA is so valuable because the program really does give people back a life," he says. "Unfortunately, the majority of Alcoholics don't end up in AA"

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 National Office of AA
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