

As Al-Anon continued to grow, the desire to maintain a grass roots contact prompted the 1979 World Service Conference to establish Regional Service Seminars (RSSs), to be hosted by the six Al-Anon Regions of the U.S. and Canada. The first was held in the Fall of 1980 and semiannually thereafter. In 1989, the U.S. and Canada divided into nine Al-Anon Regions. RSSs were replaced in 2009 by TEAM (Together Empowering Al-Anon Members) events, which are collaborative efforts between the World Service Office and Areas.

On July 7, 1980 in New Orleans, Al-Anon reached another milestone. Delegates and observers from 16 General Service Offices met with the WSO International Coordination Committee for an historic one-day meeting, with one purpose in mind—to further unify Al-Anon worldwide. The first permanent International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM) took place September 12-16, 1986, and has been held every two years since then.

## Al-Anon: then and now \_\_\_\_\_

Al-Anon has also grown through the diversification of its membership. First, there was the transition from the original A.A. wives' "coffee and cake" groups to those family members and friends still living with active alcoholism. Gradually, others became part of the Al-Anon fellowship, including husbands, partners, parents, and those who grew up with alcoholism. Alateen also expanded through an increased number of preteen family members. Some Al-Anon and Alateen members identify themselves as having several relationships with alcoholics, or acknowledge that alcoholism is multi-generational in their families.

Today, Al-Anon serves many thousands of groups in over 130 countries. The Al-Anon World Service Office prints many Conference approved books, booklets, pamphlets, and assorted Al-Anon service tools, many of which are available in other languages.

In keeping with its single purpose, Al-Anon remains available as a mutual support group for the families and friends of alcoholics. It constantly seeks to welcome newcomers whose lives have been impacted by alcoholism. The legacy of Al-Anon's early members and cofounders lives on.

### For additional Al-Anon history:

*Al-Anon's Cofounders: The Extraordinary Work of Two Ordinary Women (P-87)*

*The Al-Anon Family Groups—  
Classic Edition (B-5)*

*Lois Remembers (B-7)*

*How Al-Anon Works for Families &  
Friends of Alcoholics (B-22)*

*Many Voices, One Journey (B-31)*

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# AL-ANON: THEN & NOW a brief history

## Before Al-Anon

As Bill W. and Dr. Bob met and began to build a foundation for recovering alcoholics, it was Annie S., wife of Dr. Bob, who comforted the grief-stricken wife when she said, "Come in my dear. You're with friends now—friends who understand." Perhaps Annie was the first to recognize the significance of the Twelve Steps of A.A. as a way of life for the family member as well.

As early as 1939, families and friends attended A.A. meetings with the alcoholic. As families shared with each other, they discovered the benefits of living by A.A.'s Twelve Steps, and how this improved their relationships, which often remained difficult even after the alcoholic became sober. Eventually, the relatives and friends began meeting on their own.

In 1950, after visiting A.A. groups throughout the United States and Canada, Bill reported that many family groups had formed. He suggested to his wife, Lois, that she open an office to provide service for these groups.



## Al-Anon is founded

At the close of the 1951 A.A. General Service Conference, Lois invited the A.A. Delegates' wives to lunch at her home, Stepping Stones, along with local family group members. She then decided to open an office there, with a close friend and neighbor, Anne B. They received a list from the A.A. Foundation of 87 nonalcoholic individuals or family groups from the U.S., Canada, Australia, South Africa, and Ireland, that had requested registration with A.A.



Because these were not groups of alcoholics, A.A. could not register them. Therefore, Lois and Anne's first service project was to write to these individuals and groups. In May 1951, they sent a questionnaire with the intention of unifying the family groups. As a result of this questionnaire, the name Al-Anon Family Groups was chosen. With A.A.'s permission, they adopted the Twelve Steps, and later the Twelve Traditions, as guiding principles.

As the family group movement grew, A.A. offered Lois and Anne the use of a studio at the 24th Street A.A. Clubhouse in New York City. They called themselves the Clearing House Committee, and volunteers were recruited from local groups. Soon the movement came to public attention. In March 1952, the groups were asked to voluntarily support a world service office. In January 1954, Henrietta S., one of the volunteers, became the first part-time, paid staff member. She subsequently became the first General Secretary/Executive Director. The Clearing House was incorporated in October of that year as a nonprofit organization under the name Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc.

## Literature carries the message

The first pieces of literature published by the Clearing House included *Purpose and Suggestions* and *One Wife's Story*. The first hardcover book, *The Al-Anon Family Groups*, was published in 1955.

## Alateen begins

Concern for the problems of the children surfaced as early as 1955 at the A.A. International Convention in St. Louis, where several Al-Anon talks were presented on "Children of Alcoholics." However, it wasn't until 1957 that the first Alateen group was registered. It was started in California by a teenage son of A.A./Al-Anon parents. This same year the pamphlet, *Youth and the Alcoholic Parent*, was published.

## Al-Anon's group conscience

The Al-Anon World Service Conference (WSC) was first held on a trial basis in 1961. (The WSC is representative of the Al-Anon membership in reaching a "wider group conscience" as expressed in Tradition Two.) The experiment continued for two more years and in 1963 was voted a permanent part of the Al-Anon structure, beginning in 1964. Today, the Conference meets annually and is comprised of Area Delegates from the U.S., Canada, Puerto Rico, and Bermuda; as well as the Board of Trustees, the Executive Committee, and certain staff members of the World Service Office.

## The word spreads

In February 1978, the International Coordination Committee was established to maintain contact and worldwide unity with the Al-Anon groups that form in countries outside the World Service Conference structure. They total over 130 to date, many of which have established national offices.