



Al-Anon Family Groups

Help and hope for families and friends of alcoholics

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July 2024 Chairperson of the Board Letter

Dear Al-Anon and Alateen members,

The purpose of this Chairperson of the Board (COB) letter is to share with you some of the highlights from the July 2024 Board week. You will also find updates from our Policy Chairperson, a finance update from our Treasurer, and a Conference Leadership Team (CLT) update.

The July 2024 Board meeting was held in Virginia Beach. Board and At-Large Executive Committee members were traveling on Sunday, July 21, which you may recall was two days after the CrowdStrike incident. Unfortunately, it did affect travel for some of our Volunteers. But I am happy to report that, with flexibility and patience, we were all there for the start of the Board Meeting on July 23. Board members were excited to be at the World Service Office (WSO), especially our new members, who were there for the very first time. Board members had a meet-and-greet with the WSO Staff, where the WSO Volunteers and Staff had an opportunity to introduce themselves. Volunteers and Staff were given an opportunity after introductions to interact informally with each other.

Board Development

Refreshing Our Spirituality during Board Week

Following a longstanding practice of the World Service Conference (WSC), two Al-Anon meetings were added to this July's Board week schedule. All WSO Volunteers and Staff who are members of Al-Anon were invited to attend and share leadership in chairing the meetings. It was a wonderful opportunity to start our days on a spiritual plane.

Additionally, Trustees and Staff were invited to watch a new WSO Archives asset: an interview of a 100-year-old Al-Anon member. The family joined the member in answering questions about Al-Anon during her time in the program. The film was inspiring and uplifting, reminding us of the power of service to the worldwide fellowship.

Documenting Hidden Norms of Behavior

Since July 2023, the Board has been working to identify "hidden norms" of behavior for Trustees that were understood but undocumented. At each Board meeting, the Board continues its review, discussion, and identification of specific actions needed for each hidden norm. Many have been incorporated into the WSO Volunteer Handbook, the Board of Trustees Governance Handbook, or the WSO Volunteers orientation materials. Documentation of behavior norms represents one of the actions the Board is taking to translate its commitment of inclusion into action.

Welcoming and Developing Leadership

The orientation for new WSO Volunteers (Trustees and At-Large Executive Committee members) happens in two phases. The first occurs online in May, and the second part happens before the Board meeting in July. This year, a concerted effort was made to update the orientation to reflect the items uncovered during sessions on hidden norms, which also led to the development of a new "Tips for Volunteer Mentors" document. This effort resulted in development of a "Key Resources" guide for WSO Volunteers, which includes an updated WSO Volunteer Handbook, Board Governance Handbook, and the Bylaws of Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters and Headquarters (Canada), Inc. Returning and new Volunteers were invited to attend and participate in the orientation.

Completing Annual AMIAS training

The annual WSO Al-Anon Members Involved in Alateen Service (AMIAS) training was held for the WSO Volunteers and Staff by the Associate Director—Group Services. AMIAS training is provided to protect the Alateens and the Sponsors. As part of the training, we read through the 2003 Alateen Motion from the Board of Trustees in the *2022-2025 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27) on pages 232-234. Rereading that original motion helped many to remember the origins of the Alateen Safety and Behavioral Requirements.

Clarifying the Board Evaluation

The Board continues to use a Board Evaluation survey to help improve its quarterly meetings. The survey is based on current American Society of Association Executives' best practices, updated for our needs. The results of the April Board meeting showed the Board is doing well, as there were no outlying ratings. The consistency of responses left us to consider whether we were all aligned on what we were rating.

Since we have four new Trustees this year, the Board took the time to review each question to gain alignment. We were able to review the first two sections of questions out of five and will continue the review in October.

Board Financial Matters

Reserve Fund and WSO's One Year's Operating Expense

Thank you to all those WSC members who submitted ideas for using the funds calculated to be in surplus of the WSO's One Year's Operating Expense as of December 31, 2023. The Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) reviewed the Conference member suggestions, added a few of their own, and presented a blend of these ideas to the Board of Trustees for consideration. The Board approved four smaller expense items for immediate action, including purchasing a new mail-scanning system, and decided on two other ideas to prioritize for further investigation. The SLT was assigned responsibility for investigation and will present the ideas at the October Board Meeting.

Revised 2024 WSO Budget

The Board approved the Revised 2024 WSO Budget. Literature sales were below budget in June, leading to a reduction in projected sales for July and August. Increased income from investments helped offset the impact on revenue. The occupancy expense was increased by ECRPM to support necessary building maintenance projects, postage has increased to allow additional mailings to the fellowship and accommodate increased postage rates for Canada, and necessary technological improvements were approved. Even with those line items increased, overall WSO expenses in the Revised Budget decreased by approximately \$81,000. The Revised 2024 Budget is projecting a \$197,860 surplus.

Equalized Expense for WSC

The Finance Committee presented to the Board of Trustees a recommendation for the Equalized Expense and the Full Cost for Delegates to attend the 2025 World Service Conference in New York. The Equalized Expense will be \$2,532.00 and the Full Cost will be \$3,617.71, due to the higher hotel, food, and travel costs in the New York area versus Virginia Beach. These amounts include the cost for Delegates to visit Stepping Stones on the day following the WSC.

World Service Conference Planning

Four-Day Conference Week Trial

The Board gathered information from the WSC members at the 2024 Conference to help evaluate the effectiveness of the four-day WSC week three-year trial. While a few benefits were expressed, Conference members generally described the increased demand placed on participants by the shorter Conference week, with tightly packed workdays providing less time for fellowship and discussions during sessions. Conference members also generally felt that, despite the intention to increase accessibility for working and younger Al-Anon members, in practice scheduling Conference over the weekend required similar amounts of time off from work. (More details will be available in the *2024 WSC Summary* once posted.)

After a thoughtful discussion at the Board Meeting, the Board voted to end the four-day WSC week trial and return to hosting the WSC across five days, beginning with the 2026 WSC, while continuing to seek opportunities to hold appropriate sessions virtually so gaps are available for fellowship and breaks. In addition, the Board voted to

end the trial of holding the WSC over a weekend and return to scheduling the Conference agenda to occur during the week starting with the 2026 WSC, with the flexibility to shift onto one weekend day if necessary to accommodate holidays while ensuring the WSC occurs during the month of April.

Triannual Visit to Stepping Stones in New York

After hearing discussion at the 2024 WSC, the Board held a generative discussion from the perspective of Al-Anon Family Groups as a whole on whether a visit to Stepping Stones needs to be incorporated as part of Conference activities once every three years. Following the discussion, the Board approved holding the WSC in the New York area for a six-year trial starting after 2025 to allow for the Conference members to attend Stepping Stones once during their panel.

Next Steps from 2024 WSC Thought and Task Forces

The Board acknowledged the Delegates' thoughtful efforts in creating the WSC thought and task force presentations. After discussion, the Board agreed no further action was needed in relation to the 2024 Personal and Service Sponsorship Task Force or the 2024 Revitalizing Alateen Task Force beyond any assigned to WSO Staff.

The Board reviewed the work of the Eliminating Regional Trustees Thought Force and feedback from Conference members. The Thought Force was not asked to make recommendations; however, the Board recognized more work was required, as it continues to be faced with few or no Regional Trustee resumes from each Region. The Board decided to form a thought force to define strategies for overcoming the barriers to applying to become a Regional Trustee.

Noting that another big concern expressed by Conference members was that eliminating Regional Trustees could possibly lead to loss of Regional representation (even though Regional Trustees do *not* represent their region), the Board agreed to form a task force to develop ideas to discuss with the WSC about a process for creating a Board consisting only of Trustees at Large that:

- Identifies criteria that would address the concerns about representation of diverse perspectives of members from across all the WSC Structure (e.g. Canadian representation, representation of primarily rural communities, etc.); and
- Ensures Area input on candidates is considered.

Strategic Planning

Envisioned Future Work Group (EFWG)

The EFWG is a work group of the Board charged with bringing forward-looking generative discussion on strategic topics. The topic this time was "How Do We Grow Future Leaders?" The Board held a robust and enlightening discussion that generated many different ideas, thoughts, and suggestions about the possibilities for moving forward with this topic.

eBooks Globally Strategy

The SLT presented information about options it had been exploring to satisfy the Board's request to create a strategy that would allow the WSO to publish its current catalog of Spanish-, English-, and French-language Conference Approved Literature (CAL) books while being considerate of the impact ebook sales have on international structures that also rely on CAL sales to fulfill the Seventh Tradition. The Board accepted the SLT's recommended approach and approved pursuing the strategy, which includes creating legal agreements with the international structures that reprint in these languages to share net revenue.

Artificial Intelligence (AI): The Cautionary Tale

The Executive Director shared important guidance regarding Artificial Intelligence (AI). WSO Staff and Volunteers were asked not to use any AI tools unless licensed by AFG, Inc., which includes transcription features for web conference meetings. This approach is designed to protect personally identifiable information and the confidential nature of Board and other Committee discussions. As it was described, when we use free AI, "we are the product!" While offering this caution, the Executive Director assured the Board that Staff understand and appreciate that AI is here to stay, much like the internet, so Staff will continue its investigation into how to safely utilize the technology to improve efficiency at the WSO while protecting our fellowship from harm.

Road Trip!

Mark your calendars for October 26, 2024! Come meet your Board of Trustees, the Executive Committee, and several WSO Staff members. We will be in Columbia, South Carolina from 8 am to 5 pm for Road Trip! You and Your Board Connect. This is an opportunity to meet the WSO Volunteers who have oversight of AFG, Inc., understand the committees on which they serve and how the WSC Structure works, and learn how they are just members, too! There will be personal shares, panels, interactive sessions, lunch, and snacks, all for the low registration fee of \$30 US! Attendees will be responsible for travel to and from the event and any hotel rooms reserved. Come join us for a day full of fun, food, and fellowship!

Committee Work

Public Outreach Committee

The Public Outreach Committee (POC) is made up of Delegates, At-Large members, and Staff. They have formed several work groups to address all the work that needs to get done. They meet quarterly and report their progress to the Board. This past quarter, the Public Outreach Toolkit Work Group reviewed six toolkit submissions. They also improved their process for addressing missing information or lack of clarity, which they anticipate will speed up the publication process. The Equitable and Unbiased Work Group developed a new pamphlet, which will be evaluated for possible submission to the Executive Committee for approval, and is reviewing other Welcome Series pamphlets to ensure the language is inclusive and relevant. The POC also created a new Open Letter Work Group to draft a generalized letter of introduction to professionals for Staff consideration and Executive Committee approval.

Nominating Committee At-Large Executive Committee Member Role

The Nominating Committee is now working on the Board of Trustees' request that it create an At-Large Executive Committee Member role description similar to what exists for the Trustee role. The Committee plans to bring a draft for review at the October Board meeting. The Board has asked the Committee to develop an At-Large Executive Committee member application to replace the current resume when they finish the role description.

In gratitude,

Katherine M.

Kathi M.

Chairperson, Board of Trustees

Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc