

International Presentation - A.A. Around the World

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The staff member on the International assignment has the unique opportunity to witness how the basics of our home group - recovery, unity and service - assist in A.A.'s growth around the world. The International desk receives requests for help from the still-suffering alcoholic and from A.A. groups, and requests for literature. We also receive letters from professionals asking for information on how A.A. works and requests for shared experience from members staffing overseas general offices that are struggling to stay afloat.

The story of A.A. Around the World begins always with the sick and suffering alcoholic. In whatever faraway land someone finds A.A., that person needs another alcoholic in order to stay sober. When a second alcoholic is found, an A.A. group is born. Historically, the A.A. message has been carried in a myriad of ways - perhaps in a magazine article, or a visit from traveling A.A.s, professionals or members of the Armed Forces. When the magic of one alcoholic sharing with another happens, it is important that A.A.s stay together, and that unity is supported by A.A.'s Twelve Traditions. As more A.A. groups come into being, A.A. members realize that they must work together to carry the A.A. message of recovery. I would like to highlight some events that illustrate how A.A. members overseas are sharing the responsibility of carrying the A.A. message:

- In February 2005, in Croatia, after several years of planning and discussion, A.A. Split, the new central office, held its first business meeting. It was reported that the meeting began with a reading of the pamphlet "Problems Other Than Alcohol," the Third, Fourth and Sixth Traditions, and the "A.A. Guidelines on Central or Intergroup Offices." The A.A. group representatives elected a steering committee and chose a "special worker" for the central office. Representatives from A.A. Switzerland attended the meeting to gather information on how their board and members might support the A.A. groups in Croatia.
- During the Fifth Asia-Oceania Service Meeting in 2003, Japan assumed the responsibility of sponsoring and sharing experience, strength and hope with the Mongolian A.A. Board. Subsequently, Noriaki N., general manager of the Japan Service Office (JSO) in Tokyo and Isamu S., JSO International staff member, attended with trustee-at-large/Canada Murray McI. and Greg M. G.S.O.'s general manager, the First National Convention in Mongolia. At this historic event, using the Third Legacy procedure, the beginning of a service structure of A.A. in Mongolia was created. Mongolia plans to attend the Sixth Asia-Oceania Service Meeting to be held later this year.
- Following the devastating tsunami in Asia-Oceania we received inquiries from A.A. groups asking what they could do to help in the relief efforts on behalf of Alcoholics Anonymous. We shared that we expressed our loving concern to the local offices in that region. We also offered to provide literature assistance to the General Service Offices in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and India. In the January/March 2005 issue of the

"Easy Does It," newsletter of the Thailand Intergroup, Chris W. reported: "This has been a strange and trying time. It has been a time of increased fellowship. The Patong meeting room was turned into a morgue, so island A.A.S converged upon the Sunday and Wednesday night meetings at Mission Hospital and the Friday night meeting at Bangkok Hospital. On January 4, a convoy of three vehicles went to Khao-Lak and carried a meeting to a fellow A.A. member. We chose the topic 'acceptance and it is safe to say that each of us gained some comfort from the group and from the strange notion that 'acceptance is the answer to all of our problems today.' The A.A. groups in Asia-Oceania know that they can rely on the General Service Offices in that region and those offices know that literature assistance is available through the A.A. World Services Literature Fund, if and when it is needed. As the General Service Board of Mexico has taken over the primary responsibility of helping A.A. in Cuba, the General Service Boards in Asia-Oceania have assumed responsibility for those countries in need of A.A. services in that part of the world."

In recent years, a big support in the growth and health of A.A. in other countries has been the utilization of non-alcoholics, or friends of A.A. Non-alcoholic trustees or friends of A.A. - free of the A.A. member's need to maintain anonymity at the public level - often serve as links between A.A. and the professional community. Through professionals, alcoholics may be reached who might otherwise never find the program. In large and small countries alike, informed nonalcoholic professionals have helped many still-suffering alcoholics find A.A. a little sooner. Cooperation with our professional friends has often been instrumental in helping the A.A. Fellowship reach alcoholics around the world. Also, our nonalcoholic professional friends can open doors that will allow A.A. members the opportunity to carry the A.A. message. Last year, a door was opened when A.A. groups in Singapore were invited to send members to voluntarily staff A.A. literature tables and chair A.A. meetings at the First Asia Pacific Institute on Addiction. This landmark event brought together faculty members from eight nations and over 400 professionals from 23 nations and five continents.

In Ghana, over 60 professionals from psychiatric hospitals, prisons, the clergy, military, health care agencies and news organization gathered to learn how A.A. can be a resource for the professional who may be in contact with still-suffering alcoholics. Elaine McD., chair of the General Service Board, gave an excellent presentation, and a fruitful question and answer session followed. A.A. literature packets containing "This is A.A.," "44 Questions," "A.A. As a Resource for the Health Care Professional" and "Information on A.A." were distributed and flyers with local A.A. information were made available, as well as a contact list for A.A. in Africa. At the end of the day, the prison chaplain was asked to close the meeting with a brief prayer, which she ended by asking that "all present become ambassadors for A.A."

Serving on the International assignment has given me the opportunity to observe first hand how A.A. has crossed racial, cultural and language barriers. It has also been a privilege to see Bill's vision become a reality. In a memo published in the October 1969 A.A. Grapevine he wrote: "Surely the time will come when our overseas A.A. population may well exceed that of the United States and Canada. In The Third Legacy Manual and

in other writings, the principle has already been enunciated that the General Service Office in New York should one day become the 'senior service center' among a number of national and zonal offices around the globe."

Today there is an A.A. presence in more than 180 countries and there are 58 General Service Offices. I firmly believe that A.A. will continue to grow as long as we share the basics of our home group - Recovery, Unity and Service.