

# Highlights from A.A.W.S.

November 1, 2019

The A.A. World Services Board met on Friday, November 1, 2019, at the Hilton Westchester Hotel in Rye, NY. Chair of the A.A.W.S. Board, Cathy B., welcomed all in attendance and opened the meeting with a moment of silence.

## General Manager's Report

General Manager Greg T. provided the following report:

*Administration* – The highest organization-wide priority is the operation and maintenance of the new NetSuite enterprise system, which went live Monday, August 5. Overall the system is functioning, but there are gaps and shortcomings along the way. Assessment of the processes and governance of the system implementation is ongoing, with more work and focus required from all internal teams, as well as the vendor and consultants.

The 2020 International Convention is also a top G.S.O. priority, with registration and housing underway, as of Monday, September 9.

The new Communication Services Department will be implemented on Monday, November 11. The current Staff assignment known as Communication Services will transition to a department as the next step in the fulfillment of the strategic communications initiatives of the General Service Board.

Major progress is being made on the new office space (5,000 square feet) on the 8th floor at 475 Riverside Drive.

*Administrative Services* – The Records department is processing a backlog of GSR, DCM, DCMC and New Group kits. Staff assistants and support services assistants are beginning preparations for the 2020 Conference.

*Archives* – Archives staff has continued digitizing background materials, correspondence and other related items that exist largely in paper format from activities of the Conference and Trustees' Committees. Between July and August, staff completed scanning materials for 2009 through 2017, covering approximately 3,500 digitized documents.

*Human Resources* – Five new temporary contributions clerks have been hired through January. to assist with the backlog in contributions processing and assist with the transition to the new system. Two current employees have been appointed for the next six months to lead an inter-departmental team to focus on enterprise resource planning (ERP) implementation from the user perspective. The team will assist with the evaluation and review of practices, procedures and processes as it relates to the ERP.

*Information Technology Services* – In addition to administration of the ERP implementation, the IT Services team continues to improve the connectivity to G.S.O.'s hosted servers as

well as reducing the number of active servers needed. As a result of the IT Audit, computers and laptops are being upgraded to add hard drive encryption and additional memory as needed.

### August-October Travel:

August 16-18: West Central Regional Forum, Grand Forks, ND

September 5-7: 23rd National A.A. Archives Workshop, Detroit, MI

September 20-22: Area 78 September Election Assembly, Alberta, Canada

September 27-29: 34th Annual Intergroup/Central Office Seminar, Mesa, AZ

October 11-13: Southwest Regional Forum, Houston, TX

October 18-20: 20th European Service Meeting, York, England, UK

## Staff Report

*Accessibilities/LIM* – The assignment is currently collecting stories submitted by the Fellowship to update the pamphlet "A.A. for the Older Alcoholic"; developing audio interviews with the military in A.A.; and coordinating announcement of the new American Sign Language (ASL) translation of the Big Book with the Public Information desk and the Publishing Department.

*Communication Services* – The assignment continues to develop a new website design, the Meeting Guide app, YouTube channel and exploration and implementation of additional Google products. Shortly after posting the Meeting Guide in the Apple and Google Play stores, support protocols were established and the Meeting Guide Information and privacy policy pages were posted to aa.org.

*Conference* – The Conference *Final Report* was distributed in August 2019 in English, French and Spanish, in both printed and digital (anonymity-protected) versions. Fall election assemblies are taking place across the U.S. and Canada for Panel 70 rotation and election forms are being submitted. Processing of Proposed Agenda Items is underway as the submission deadline for the 70th General Service Conference of December 15, 2019 approaches.

*C.P.C./Treatment* – The service piece "Memo on

Participation of A.A. Members in Research and other Non A.A. Surveys” is being updated. On the Treatment side, a steady flow of calls continues from people who are looking for inpatient treatment resources.

*Corrections* – The assignment has received more than 400 letters a month over this last quarter. A new service piece, “The Role of Prerelease and Bridging the Gap (BTG) Temporary Contact Volunteers” letter, along with a draft service piece “Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for new Corrections Committee Chairperson” were translated into French and Spanish and sent via E-Blast to 1,096 Corrections trusted servants across the U.S. and Canada.

*Group Services* – The coordinator was part of the team from A.A.W.S. and Grapevine attending the 34th Annual Central Office/Intergroup/AAWS/AAGV Seminar in Mesa, Arizona. There were excellent workshops, though frustration was expressed over A.A.W.S. pricing which offers non-A.A. entities the same discounts as IGCs, some of whom fear they will have to close their doors. Concerns were also raised about the impact on IGCs of meeting-finder capability on aa.org. The Seminar elected new representatives for their Communication Committee and that group will be making a proposal about quarterly calls with A.A.W.S. in the future.

*International* – The 21st REDELA was held September 28-October 3 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The assignment recently received news that Zimbabwe has made progress in carrying the message into correctional prisons, with meetings started in two prisons, one long-term and one short-term facility.

*International Convention* – Online registration opened on G.S.O.’s A.A. website September 9, 2019, and surpassed 10,000 registrants on the first day. As of October 7, 2019 over 21,000 people had registered for the Convention.

*Literature* – Production for the update of the video “Your G.S.O., Grapevine and General Service Structure” is ongoing, including content and script development, scheduling for space, talent and actual filming at G.S.O. and Grapevine, some of which took place over the last month.

*Nominating* – The assignment has sent notifications to the delegates regarding rotation in 2020 of regional trustees in the West Central and Western Canada Regions requesting resumes for their nominees.

*Public Information* – At the request of the trustees’ committee on Public Information, a survey professional from Duke University has been hired to review the current A.A. Membership Survey methodology. The P.I. assignment has facilitated distribution of a press release to media and other professionals about the new ASL DVD of the Big Book. An ASL version of the press release is embedded so that members and the public who may be Deaf can have access to it.

*Regional Forums* – The Southwest Regional Forum took place October 11-13 in Houston, Texas, marking the final regional forum for 2019. Work continues on the 2020 and 2021 Regional Forums including, but not limited to, overhaul of PowerPoint presentations and development of workshops. Additionally, the Regional Forum Video project is in final production.

## Finance

For the nine months ended September 30, 2019 revenues were 2.59% higher than budgeted and 3.76% higher than the nine months ended September 30, 2018. Operating expenses were 4.53% greater than budgeted and 9.94% more than last year.

In total, unit book and booklet sales have decreased from 2018 by 33,920 pieces or (2.66%). This large variance includes a decrease of 9,727 of *Daily Reflections* books and a decrease of 10,270 of the Big Book Pocket Edition. In addition, 21,910 units sold (English) of the new book, *Our Great Responsibility*.

Actual contributions for the nine months ended September 30, 2019 were \$6,197,296, 6.29% higher than budget and 6.29% higher than the nine months ended September 30, 2018. Online contributions for the first nine months of 2019 amounted to \$664,860. This compared with \$571,165 in 2018, \$521,348 in 2017, 364,854 in 2016, and \$268,455 in 2015. The first nine months of 2019 online contributions accounts for 10.73% of our total contributions.

The following variances were noted for the six months:

For the nine months, the Salary line was \$5,766,070 (1.48%) less than budget and \$259,799 (4.72%) more than the nine months ended September 30, 2018. Professional fees are \$194,629 (63.55%) higher than budget and \$98,225 (24.39%) higher than 2018. These variances are mainly caused by contract reviews being over budget by \$119,192 for the first nine months of the year. There are also additional lawyer fees (general counsel) that amount to \$132,915 higher than budget. Contracted Services are over budget by \$714,846 (71.48%) and also \$816,466 (90.88%) over last year. This variance is caused by ERP costs amounting to \$433,912 over budget. Travel, Meetings and Accommodations are \$148,850 (14.59%) higher than budget and \$189,570 compared to last year. Total 2019 GSC expenses are close to budget.

Ad hoc Self-Support Committee: the committee met two times and discussed a number of items brought forward by the Conference Finance Committee. Suggestions were made for updating the self-support card and G.S.O.’s guidelines on finance. Additional discussion addressed electronic contributions and the impact of recurring contributions, the Conference delegate fee and ideas for a Seventh Tradition video.

2020 International Convention: The Talley Management Group provided an update on planning for the 2020 International Convention. Registration, which opened in early September, is currently tracking 3,500 attendees lower than 2015 at this time; housing is tracking at the same rate as 2015. Most of the service contracts are in place, with a few still being negotiated and reviewed. The next site visit will take place in early November and will cover topics including transportation and security, Detroit InterGroup participation, and operations issues with key downtown hotels and vendors. There will also be a first meeting with the full Detroit Welcome Committee.

## Publishing

*Gross sales:* September gross sales are below budget with actual gross sales at \$1,176,380, which is a \$56,886 or a 4.61%

negative variance against budget of \$1,233,266.

*Web sales:* Total web sales (A.A.W.S. Online Bookstores) for September stand at \$530,987.36, which accounts for about 45.64% of total sales for the company. Sales on the B2B online store (primarily Intergroup/Central Offices and other bulk orders) for September are \$323,465 and B2C sales (individual customers) stand at \$207,522.

*Digital books:* Total ebook gross sales through September 2019 stand at \$143,146, with 36,942 units distributed.

*Quick Reader (QR) Codes:* In response to a great volume of requests, QR codes will be added, which will link to our items on aa.org. QR codes will be added as items are up for reprint, similar to how bar codes have been implemented. (There is no additional cost to be incurred for this addition.)

*Translations summary:* The Lesotho translation of *Alcoholics Anonymous* is in a final review stage by the Lesotho fellowship prior to licensing them to print and distribute. Members of Zimbabwe A.A. formed a translation committee and a Shona translation of the Big Book is underway there. Paraguay plans to form a translation committee to begin new translations and approve existing translations for submission in the Guarani language. Other recent activity is taking place in Hungary, Ukraine, India and Czech Republic.

*American Sign Language Update – Big Book and “Twelve and Twelve” DVDs:* A November 4, 2019 release date is set for the Big Book, to be accompanied by a press release announcing its availability. The press release will itself be available in ASL. The “Twelve and Twelve” is scheduled for a similar release in early 2020.

The Young People’s Video is now titled “Young and Sober in A.A.: From Drinking to Recovery” – Subtitles for the English, French and Spanish versions are complete and approved but due to concerns of insuring anonymity the release has been delayed as solutions are being implemented to address this issue.

The Board approved the following recommendations brought forward by the Publishing Committee:

- That the regular and large print versions of the following pamphlets be priced accordingly, in English, French and Spanish: “The A.A. Group,” at \$0.45 per unit; “Questions and Answers on Sponsorship,” at \$0.25 per unit; “Access to A.A.,” at \$0.50 per unit.

- That the regular and large print versions of the following booklets be priced accordingly, in English, French and Spanish: *As Bill Sees It*, at \$8.60 per unit; *Came to Believe*, at \$5.25 per unit; *A.A. in Prison – Inmate to Inmate*, at \$2.50 per unit.

## Technology/Communication/Services (TCS)

The committee reviewed the minutes of G.S.O.’s Website Committee, along with progress reports and updates on G.S.O.’s A.A. website analytics and visitor’s activity reports.

The committee reviewed the TCS Composition, Scope and Procedure and approved it as updated.

Reports were provided by the director of IT Services and the Group Services assignment. The director of IT Services

noted some of the obstacles in the transition to NetSuite that are currently being addressed. Additionally, upgrades are being made to all computers and laptops for Windows v10, with encryption, solid state drives and increased memory to be installed.

The staff member on the Group Services assignment shared some reflections on the Intergroup/Central Office/A.A.W.S./AAGV Seminar, noting how valuable a gathering it is for all involved, providing a mechanism for direct communication between Intergroup/Central Offices themselves and with A.A.W.S./GV and the GSB. A number of topics were discussed at the seminar, with dissatisfaction expressed by some regarding the perceived diminishment of the role of IGCOs as a consequence of the new Meeting Guide app on G.S.O.’s website and the meeting finder technology that supports it. It was also noted that there is an ongoing urgency to the discussions regarding discounts and other sales/shipping/pricing issues, as many Intergroup/Central Offices are struggling with finances in order to continue their important work of carrying the message at the local level.

A progress report was provided by the Communication Services coordinator summarizing website design and app progress over the last few months. The committee reviewed and discussed a YouTube progress report and a LegitScript/Google Ads progress report.

The Board approved the following recommendations brought forward by the TCS Committee:

- That the 2019 Third Quarter reports on G.S.O.’s A.A. website activities and analytics from July through September 2019 be forwarded to the trustees’ Committee on Public Information as presented, with an explanation of the omitted September analytics.

- That the Meeting Guide app Frequently Asked Questions be approved and posted.

- That the implementation of a LinkedIn page be approved.

## Internal Audit

The committee received and reviewed management’s response to a number of recommendations made by Marks Paneth from the 2018 Financial and IT Audit. The committee also discussed a method for committee review and action on audit recommendations in the future. It was agreed that receiving the auditor’s report along with management’s response for the June A.A.W.S. meeting would be ideal, with any pending items to be completed on an ongoing basis.

The committee reviewed the overall privacy policy for A.A.W.S., AA Grapevine and the General Service Board that has gone through legal review and will be implemented by G.S.O.

The committee discussed the A.A.W.S. Emergency Response-Business Continuity Plan, noting that RFPs will be sent out soon for a vendor to assist in development of this plan, with responses available for the December meeting.

The committee discussed vendor management topics and the new partnership management has undertaken with a contract management platform, noting that continued

discussion would also be helpful in terms of determining a matrix of criteria that could provide guidance for which contracts would warrant ongoing legal review and which might not.

## Additional Activities

*Joint Shopping Cart (A.A.W.S./AA Grapevine):* Both boards came together for a presentation regarding the possibilities of developing an online store that would include materials for both corporations under one system. No decisions were expected but the presentation provided both boards with an ongoing framework for such a proposition that will be more fully

discussed both individually and collectively as the new aa.org website moves toward completion.

*Pricing, Discounts and Distribution Committee (DELTA Project):* The committee has met three times over the last few months, considering development of a grid of past recommendations coming from the committee, pending implementation, that will be reviewed and brought back to the boards for consideration and possible vote.

*Safety service piece:* The board reviewed an updated draft of a proposed service piece on safety being developed by G.S.O. staff. The work is ongoing and additional input was requested to help inform subsequent drafts.