

CLUBS

This Guideline originated with AA World Services, New York. Reprinted with permission.

GROWTH OF CLUBS

From AA's beginning, the Group has been the mainspring in carrying out the primary purpose of AA:

" . . . to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers."

It is in the Group that we recover, learn to live together in unity and grow spiritually through service. Nevertheless, many members have felt the need for a permanent meeting place - a home, so to speak - and during the past 40 years the club idea has become a part of AA experience. It has become apparent that some members would like to extend fellowship beyond the Group; typically, new members often wish to talk with more experienced members on a one-to-one basis, away from the more formal environment of a meeting. As well, many members have wanted a place to go for coffee and conversation, where they could rest for an hour, a place where they could gather socially. Thus, the idea of the club was born.

In 1947, Bill W wrote a *Grapevine* article on clubs that became part of our pamphlet "*AA Tradition - How it Developed*". The title carried the question "*Clubs in AA - Are They With Us to Stay?*" Today, the answer to that question is undoubtedly "Yes" - members who wanted clubs were prepared to do whatever was required and they brought the idea into reality. From there, the willingness of club-minded members to make them work, to enable them to function effectively and serve a useful purpose for those who find such an environment helpful and satisfying, was the basis on which clubs have been founded and from which they have flourished.

So, how can those interested in starting a club today establish one that will be both a pleasant place to gather and asset to AA in the community?

OUT OF EXPERIENCE

Here are some suggestions that come from the experience of established clubs:

1. There is no such entity as an 'AA Club', nor can there be; that is, the AA logo and the name "Alcoholics Anonymous" cannot be used in the context of clubs. Nevertheless, it is regarded as essential that club rules and conduct be kept in line with the principles implicit in our *Twelve Traditions*.
2. So, while the club may be known by a name that does not involve AA, in keeping with *Tradition Seven*, the club should not accept funds from outside the AA membership. Naturally, this includes any kind of fund-raising that might involve the public. Members' dues and contributions should keep the club going, plus rent money received from any AA Groups that may hold their meetings in the club. Everyone in the club should be aware of the value of *Tradition Seven*, the self-support tradition - it is not always easy to assume all your financial responsibilities, but it is always more satisfying.

3. It is necessary to define the purpose of the club and look for space that will meet the needs. Determine the amount of money needed for such an operation and work out a budget that will cover getting started, rent, utilities and utensils, custodial care and similar expenses.
4. Call a meeting of all interested Groups and members separate from any AA Group meeting. Inform them of your plans and the financial needs and determine what real support you can count on from the beginning. As well, ask local Groups if they would be interested in renting space from the club for AA meetings and if so, what rent they would consider reasonable. Sometimes, charter members of the club are willing to pay a little more in the beginning to help get the club off the ground. It is better that all participate in the financing than for one or two wealthier members to assume the responsibility. Let everyone participate who wants to - it is more fun that way. Monthly dues will vary depending on type and need of club and the number of members who support it.

MEMBERSHIP & DIRECTORS

An inaugural meeting might discuss qualifications for club membership. Most clubs state that any member of AA is eligible for membership. Some require 30 days of sobriety, while some specify 90 days, although new AAs may use the club facilities as guests until they qualify for club membership. It is also wise to consider the case of the AA member who has a relapse - under what conditions is he/she to be readmitted to club membership? All dues-paying members would normally be eligible to hold office and to vote at the club business meetings.

An inaugural meeting might also consider the appointment of directors, how many, their duties, their qualifications and personal qualities. The directors' responsibilities will include all the club's affairs but the business and financial aspects are the most important. Clubs sometimes require some three years' sobriety for directors, but it must be borne in mind that length of sobriety alone is not a qualification.

If an inaugural meeting indicates that the proposed club has the support needed for its establishment, it is time to consult a lawyer and have the club incorporated as a non-profit business organisation under the rules of the State in which it will function. Usually, a lawyer who is an AA member can be found to advise on this subject and it should not be a very complicated or expensive project. Incorporation is in accordance with *Tradition Six*, which implies that property to be used by members of AA should be separately incorporated and managed separately from AA itself, ". . . lest problems of money, property and prestige . . ." divert AA from its primary purpose. Needless to say, a club so incorporated should not have "AA" or "Alcoholics Anonymous" in its name. If bank loans are necessary, they should be taken out by directors of the corporation and payments should be made from club funds. Caution is suggested in committing future members to obligations they may not wish to assume - it is better to start small and enlarge as growth and finances warrant.

BUSINESS DECISIONS

After the directors have been appointed and the club is incorporated, the members should meet to establish the basic parameters of the club - its aims and objectives, the way it should be run, etc, if this was not done at the inaugural meeting. Such a meeting may then require the board, or perhaps a director, to write the By-laws of the club, to be submitted to the membership for approval. After approval, of course, By-laws may be amended in the light of experience and as the By-laws themselves permit.

A most important facet of a club's activities is gambling: Much thought should be given to prohibiting gambling altogether. Time and again difficulties have been caused in existing clubs over the years because of gambling and in some cases there has been publicity and notoriety harmful to AA's image in the community. This kind of thing not only gives the club a bad name, it is also damaging to AA's primary purpose. Card games, pool, darts, table tennis, TV and the like are activities that club members enjoy as long as they are played for the fun of it, not for money.

Experience shows that Local/Central Service Office and other AA services should be separate from clubs - physically separate and separate as far as administration is concerned - although the reasons are not clear. AA members should take a good look at *Tradition Nine* and remember that a Service Office is responsible to all AA Groups and members, while a club is responsible chiefly to its dues-paying members. Nevertheless, a Service Office may operate from club premises and still maintain its separate identity and integrity if the staff, paid or voluntary, are aware of the need for them to remain separate.

AA GROUPS MEETING IN CLUBS

It is important that each Group maintains its autonomy and identity separate from the club in which it meets. The Group's responsibility is to the suffering alcoholic and to the Fellowship as a whole, not to the club. In order to fulfil this primary purpose it is emphasised that

1. Each Group uses a name different from that of the club;
2. Each Group is self-supporting through its own contributions. This includes paying a fair rent for use of the facilities, maintaining a separate treasury, and making its own contributions (based on a *Group Donation Plan* such as the 60-30-10, 50-30-10-10 etc if it so wishes) directly to the local Local/Central Service Office (if there is one), General Service Office, District and Area;
3. Each Group, and therefore its meetings, is available to any alcoholic, club member or not, since the only requirement for Group membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. In other words, even though the Group meets in a club that may be composed exclusively of AA members, and many members of the Group may be club members too, the relationship of the AA Group itself to the club *should be the same as it would be to a church, hospital, school or the like in which it might rent space for its meetings.*
5. In the event of Al-Anon wishing to use club facilities for meetings, it is suggested that rent be charged, as with any Group using club facilities for its meetings.

CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS (NORTH AMERICA)

An expression of opinion on clubs for AA members followed a discussion on this subject at the 1967 General Service Conference. It states: "The discussion on clubs noted that although there is no such thing as an AA club, many clubs have been identified with AA because they are organised and directed by AA members and membership of the club is limited to members of AA. Clubs where meetings are held and which are maintained for *Twelfth Step* work as well as social purposes can avoid difficulties by abiding by AA Traditions. They should not use the AA name, and should be organised apart from AA. They should not accept money from outside sources, being supported by membership dues and individual contributions from AA members only. The question of a paid membership in AA does not arise, since AA meetings held in clubs are open to all members of AA. The Conference voiced recognition of the fact that clubs should operate with the AA Traditions and abide by them to the fullest."

Further guidance was given by the 1972 (North American) General Service Conference, which advised that their General Service Office (our General Service Office equivalent in New York) should no longer accept contributions from clubs; this decision was based on returns from a questionnaire sent to all clubs. The answers indicated that the differences in club operating procedures were too great for GSO to be able to decide whether or not money received from a particular club was contributed by AA members only. (Of course, as implied above, GSO does accept contributions from AA Groups that meet on club premises.) In 1981, the General Service Conference recommended; ". . . that clubs not receive the AA literature discount." By reserving the discount privilege for AA Groups and their Local/Central Service Office, the Conference once more indicated the status of clubs as separate organisations - the way they function best.

Note: In Australia General Service Office does not give discounts to Groups, only to CSOs; and, in the case of Areas and Districts, for particular PI/PA initiatives.