Quarterly Report from G.S.O.



Activities of the General Service Board Including A.A. World Services, Inc., AA Grapevine, Inc.

This is a confidential bulletin, for use only within A.A.

November 2020

General Service Board Meeting

The General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, Inc. held its quarterly meeting via videoconference on Monday, November 2, 2020. Michele Grinberg, chair of the General Service Board, warmly welcomed all present.

All committees met during the weekend. Highlights of committee reports appear below:

Archives

The committee recommended a revision to the Public Information Policy on the Co-Founders' Posthumous Anonymity to include the following text: "An anonymity-protected image of the co-founders may be provided to news media upon request, when appropriate, from the G.S.O. Public Information desk."

Conference

The committee recommended that the 71st General Service Conference be conducted during the scheduled period of April 18-24, 2021 via remote meeting technology, with sessions of the 71st Conference to be conducted on a digital platform.

Cooperation with the Professional Community/ Treatment and Accessibilities

Cooperation with the Professional Community: The committee reviewed the draft language of the pamphlet, "A.A. in Your Community" and offered suggestions. The committee asked the staff secretary to bring back a draft to the committee at the January 2021 meeting. The committee also reviewed the audio samples and noted their usefulness in communicating with modern professionals. The committee discussed the concept of audio service material and agreed to forward the samples and background to A.A.W.S. for further development.

Treatment and Accessibilities: The committee discussed the update of the pamphlet, "A.A. for the Older Alcoholic." The progress report provided by the staff secretary noted that seven stories have been received to date and the committee agreed with the staff request to explore additional avenues for requesting shared experience between now and December 15, 2020.

Corrections

An update was provided that for A.A.W.S. and AAGV to be involved in digital distribution into correctional institutions across the U.S./Canada footprint, it has been determined that multiple contracts will be necessary. AAGV has signed a contract with the vendor serving the Maine Department of Corrections and A.A.W.S. and AAGV anticipate adding additional contracts 2021. The committee discussed alternatives to the word "inmate," noting that consideration should always be given to who the audience is for each communication when considering what terms to use.

Finance

Defined Benefit Plan and Retiree Medical Benefits: As of June 30, 2020, the market value of the Retirement Trust was \$33,748,167 which compares with the plan assets of \$37,240,252 as of June 30, 2020. There were no planned contributions to the Defined Benefit Plan in 2020 and all expenses will be paid from the fund itself so the balance will decrease over the next year.

2020 International Convention Update: All refunds have been completed with the exception of some credit card refunds that were not processed due to expiration of the cards. The Finance department at G.S.O. will handle these refunds. Cancellation of registration fees that have been donated are \$40,324 and the insurance proceeds are \$2,152,134. An advance of \$971,092 was received initially, with the balance of \$1,181,042 now in hand as well.

Ad Hoc Committee Progress Report — Google Grants and the Seventh Tradition: The subcommittee met twice in October, brainstorming regarding financial obligations, if any, in receiving and signing contracts with Google, what is being provided to Google and what is the difference between receiving in-kind services versus in-kind donations. The subcommittee wants to review policies and procedures that fall under this topic as well as reference any Conference advisory actions that speak to discounts, with the goal of reporting out the purpose of Google Grants for nonprofits and understanding how they are to be reported on our financial statements.

Reserve Fund Drawdown: The trustees' Finance Committee recommended that G.S.O. be authorized to draw down up to \$1.5 million from the Reserve Fund in the 4th quarter of 2020.

G.S.O. Financial Results

The committee reviewed G.S.O. financial results for the first nine months of 2020. Gross Sales for the first nine months of 2020 of \$7,156,475 were \$3,928,753 lower than 2019. Gross Profit from literature was \$5,326,244 and represented a 76.00% Gross Profit Percentage.

Contributions for 2020 of \$7,169,609 were \$972,313 greater than 2019. The committee expressed its gratitude to the Fellowship for the continuing Seventh Tradition support.

Total Revenue (gross profit from literature plus contributions) was \$12,677,330 and \$811,954 less than 2019.

Total expenses for the nine months of 2020 were \$11,882,137. This is \$2,232,874 less than 2019. The decrease in expenses compared to 2019 was in large part due to a reduction in travel caused by the cancellation of events because of COVID-19. This reduction in travel also reflects that the G.S.B., A.A.W.S. and AAGV board meetings are now held virtually. The Travel, Meals and Accommodations line is \$977,238 lower than this time last year. Professional fees are \$704,354 for the period ending September 30, 2020 compared to \$500,888 in 2019, a variance of \$203,466. Contracted Services were \$1,310,842 for the period ending September 30, 2020 which is \$404,004 less than this time last year. The increase in professional fees is mainly due to expense for consultants hired for the reorganization of the Finance department.

The combination of the above revenues and expenses resulted in G.S.O. reporting a gain of \$795,192 for the first nine months of 2020. This compares to a loss of \$736,587 in 2019. The reclassification of prepaid items and undeposited funds is still pending.

General Service Board support of the La Viña service activity was \$252,080 compared with a budgeted amount of \$237,768 and an actual of \$110,499 in 2019.

G.S.O. 2021 Preliminary Budget Highlights

Contributions are being forecast at \$850,000 monthly which totals \$10,200,000. Gross sales are budgeted at \$9,450,000 for the year. Total projected revenue is \$16,467,050 and expenses are projected at \$14,514,010. Bottom line is a net income of \$1,953,040 and the goal is to be able to replenish the Reserve Fund with any profits.

Grapevine Financial Results

For the first nine months of 2020, average paid circulation of the Grapevine magazine was 65,115. This compared with a budget of 67,802 and 2019 actual of 66,618. Online and GV Subscription app circulation are 5,612 in 2020 compared to a budget of 4,046 and actual of 5,093 in 2019.

Gross profit on the magazine of \$817,471 was \$89,763 less than budgeted. Gross profit on other content-related materials of \$202,192 was \$390,197 lower than budgeted and \$215,922 less than 2019.

Total gross profit for the nine months was \$1,042,163 and \$479,961 lower than budgeted and \$379,205 less than the \$1,421,367 achieved in 2019.

Total costs and expenses of the magazine for the year were \$1,349,458, which were \$135,068 lower than budgeted and \$233,714 less than the \$1,583,173 in 2019.

After adding interest earned, there was a shortfall for the first nine months of 2020 of \$307,296 compared with a net loss of \$161,805 in 2019 and a budgeted net profit of \$37,597 for 2020.

Grapevine 2020 Preliminary Budget

Grapevine will have a 2021 preliminary budget ready for the January 2021 meeting.

La Viña Results

For the nine months ended September 30, 2020, average paid subscriptions for La Viña were 7,722 compared to 10,100 budgeted and 10,177 for 2019. Income from magazine sales for the first nine months of 2020 was \$58,136, compared with a budget of \$87,425. Other publishing income added \$23,892 to the revenue stream. After deducting the costs and expenses of \$277,680, a shortfall between revenue and expenses of \$252,080 resulted for this service activity. This compares with a budgeted shortfall of \$237,768 for 2020 and a shortfall of \$110,499 for 2019. The shortfall for the La Viña service activity is funded by a transfer from the General Fund of the G.S.B.

General Sharing Session

Regional trustee Mark E. warmly welcomed everyone to the quarterly General Sharing Session. The topic: "Anonymity — Meeting the Challenges in Unique Situations."

Grapevine director Ino F. began by presenting on the subtopic, "Anonymity in Non-Traditional Meetings." Anonymity was very important to Ino when he first arrived in A.A. "As a newcomer, I felt the safeguard of being anonymous before really understanding the spiritual principle. My heart lived it before my brain fully realized it." Anonymity helped him keep coming back because he understood that the people in the meeting were there to stay sober "and all they want is to help me no matter who I am."

Ino vividly described what his home group went through in the early days of the pandemic. "Our comfortable place, our home, our traditional way of meeting was gone." His group accepted that they needed to move to a digital alternative, but "in the back of our minds, a whisper, a breath, a reminder... Anonymity." They created a digital flyer, contacted their local intergroup office, and drafted a statement to read at the beginning of each meeting "letting everybody know about anonymity before anything else."

As a member, Ino has embraced several practices. "I never use my full name. I use a picture on my profile that is not a selfie... I understand that it is my responsibility to get acquainted with the privacy settings of the digital applications I use." He has experienced firsthand that virtual meetings are carrying the message of A.A., and has chosen to "show my face and share like it was a traditional meeting."

He is not naïve about the new challenges A.A. members

face. "The evolution of the Internet, artificial intelligence and the importance of data make things more complicated when it comes to anonymity...Our personal information is out there and has made us vulnerable to manipulations on a level we have never seen before." But he is comforted knowing that, "The threads of A.A. are woven into a fabric of great strength and resilience. Our General Service Structure is aware of all things that are occurring. The groups are not only conscious about this matter of anonymity on social networks, but they also respond with wisdom."

Class A (nonalcoholic) Trustee Leslie Backus presented next, on the subtopic, "Pandemics — Can Anonymity Survive?" Even before all our lives were interrupted by a worldwide pandemic, Leslie recalled engaging in lively discussions about anonymity on media platforms. Now those discussions are more important than ever. Teaching members about ways to protect their anonymity, from naming conventions to settings and safeguards is a critical step. "The pandemic has brought about many changes and we cannot turn back the clock. So forward we must go."

Leslie shared her experience as a treatment provider during the pandemic. "How do we provide confidential services via telemedicine? We actually use Zoom. I know with the safeguards that I can protect a client's identity. It only works if I am willing to act in an ethical manner. So, as with the Twelfth Tradition, it is up to the individual to follow the principle." In addition to the challenges presented by online meetings she also shared about the opportunities, telling the story of a client currently at her treatment center who only speaks Vietnamese. Not only were they able to get him a Big Book in his native language, but he is able to attend an online meeting that originates in Vietnam.

Mark thanked both presenters and invited attendees to raise their "virtual" hands and share. Perhaps because the topic was anonymity and humility it took a few moments for someone to jump in and speak. A Class A trustee shared how anonymity breaks by celebrities and others can bring A.A. to the forefront but in ways that are ego-driven rather than helpful. While she is powerless over what celebrities do, she wondered what all of us can do to bring the spiritual aspect of anonymity to the forefront. Another Class A trustee reflected on how humility is at the heart of anonymity and that it's not easy giving up power, letting go, but that's the story of A.A. Another trustee shared that it was her sponsor who taught her that anonymity was about much more than not revealing your last name, that it was about humility. She continues this tradition, feeling that it is her responsibility to help newcomers understand the full meaning of anonymity. She finds Grapevine articles are often helpful, especially with those who are new to A.A. and new to online meetings.

A Grapevine director recalled that back in 2002, members felt that online meetings couldn't keep an alcoholic sober. However, right now they're the only way many of us can get a meeting. She observed that alcoholics do not like change, especially when it's thrust upon us, but that we do

end up changing so much in sobriety. How we respond teaches us a lot about ourselves. A trustee shared that in discussions about anonymity and modern technology he appreciates nuance, that Traditions are really interesting around the edges. He hears, "If A.A. is not the way it was back when my sponsor got sober it's wrong, it can't work." But what about the early members who were absolutely sure that A.A. had to be face to face, and were proven wrong by the Big Book? He feels that Zoom can be a private means of communication just like the telephone. For him, the much bigger question is how we'll incorporate electronic meetings into our service structure that is currently based in geography.

A Class A trustee shared that while anonymity doesn't apply to him personally he understands the emotional stress and difficulties these challenging times are causing members. For him, the pandemic has opened the door to connecting with friends of A.A. all over the world. Lastly, a regional trustee shared that working one on one with another alcoholic is how he makes a connection with his Higher Power. Even though he and his circle of friends can no longer bring meetings into treatment centers, they maintain contact, letting them know they are available for help. They do the same with halfway houses in their community. He also regularly reminds those he knows in Al-Anon that they can send problem drinkers his way. He feels he has a spiritual obligation to carry the message and "can't just wait for them to come to me."

International

The committee noted that two Class A trustees have collaborated on a draft letter to international G.S.O.'s for linking G.S.B. Class A trustee professionals (U.S./Canada) with non-AA professionals who serve on G.S.B.s in other countries. Additionally, Class A (nonalcoholic) Trustee Nancy McCarthy reported that the Facebook private group established as the platform for Class A professionals serving G.S.B.s in other countries currently has twenty-six members and is also open to past Class A professionals.

International Conventions/Regional Forums

International Conventions: The committee considered the report and management recommendation regarding selection of a consultant for the 2025 International Convention and supported management's recommendation to engage Talley Management Group as consultant to the 2025 International Convention.

Regional Forums: The committee reviewed the preliminary 2021 Regional Forum budget and agreed to forward it to the trustees' Finance and Budgetary Committee.

Literature

The committee reviewed its Composition, Scope and Procedure, considering the recently acknowledged and accepted A.A. World Services "Policy on Publication of Literature: Updating Pamphlets and Other A.A. Materials," and recommended that item number three in the Scope

section be changed to read, "Reviewing or suggesting recommendations for revisions to or discontinuance of existing literature."

Nominating

The committee created a short list of 14 Class A (nonal-coholic) trustee applicants to interview before the January 2021 General Service Board weekend. The committee recommended the following appointments to begin after the April 2021 General Service Conference: Deborah K. as general service trustee and trustee director on the A.A.W.S. Corporate Board; Vera F. as nontrustee director on the A.A. World Services Corporate Board; John W. as nontrustee director on the A.A. World Services Corporate Board; Irma V. as trustee director for two years on the A.A. World Services Corporate Board; Tommi H. as general service trustee and trustee director on the AA Grapevine Corporate Board; Coree H. as nontrustee director on the AA Grapevine Corporate Board; Mike L. as trustee director for two years on the AA Grapevine Corporate Board.

Public Information

The committee discussed a number of issues related to the Comprehensive Media Plan; public information platforms such as the A.A.W.S. YouTube channel, Google AdWords/Grants, the A.A.W.S. Meeting Guide app; anonymity on social media; PSAs; P.I. pamphlets; and the A.A. membership survey. The committee recommended that the following language be added to the G.S.O. P.I. Policy on the Co-Founders' Posthumous Anonymity: An anonymity protected image of the co-founders may be provided to news media upon request, when appropriate, from the G.S.O. Public Information desk.

A.A. World Services

Since its July 31, 2020 meeting, the A.A. World Services (A.A.W.S.) Corporate Board met twice: September 11-12 as a Strategic Planning Session and October 30. During this same period, the A.A.W.S. Finance, Publishing, Technology/Communication/Services and Internal Audit committees each met twice. The A.A.W.S. Nominating committee met once.

Administration

The office has continued functioning on an entirely remote basis. Technical and HR support has been continuous. Contributions have begun to rebound, thanks to a strong commitment of the groups to support the work of the office and a number of communications regarding self-support have been initiated regularly with the Fellowship in the U.S. and Canada.

A recently instituted finance advisory team, led by CFO Paul Konigstein (nonalcoholic), will begin meeting on a regular basis to share information and feedback and to facilitate ongoing communication and transparency about finances.

Information is being gathered on the defined benefit pension plan, with the intention of bringing forward a proposal to the General Service Board, with discussion to continue through the fourth quarter and into 2021.

A recommendation will be forthcoming from the general manager that the General Service Board embark on a General Service Office relocation study to be initiated in 2021.

Administrative Services

Regarding a workforce return to the office, there is no firm return date as yet, with ongoing evaluation of options and continued input from employees, medical professionals and governmental regulations. Any return will be voluntary and will not take place at least until January 1, 2021.

Archives

The department continues responding to inquiries from the Fellowship on a myriad of topics on A.A. history, as well as sharing collected experience and providing resources to local A.A. archivists. Archives staff participated in a number of virtual service events both nationally (National A.A. Archives Workshop), in Canada (Area 79 Archives Committee event) and locally (SENY Archives Committee Workshop).

Human Resources

Recent new hires: Paul Konigstein has joined the organization as CFO; Sandra W. has been promoted to the position of the Director of Staff Services; Malini Singh (nonalcoholic) has been promoted to the position of the Director of Operations.

Technology Services

The Technology Services Department continues to support an entirely-remote G.S.O. and the technical complexities associated with that. The ERP project launched two new websites (Contributions and the Webstore) in September.

Services Summary

Accessibilities/LIM: Accessibilities staff and the Communications Services Department have created a working draft of the Remote Communities Service page on aa.org. The desk is also working with the Publishing and Communications Services departments on a military audio project.

Conference: The Conference assignment has been addressing early preparations for the 71st General Service Conference as well wrap-up of the 70th, including a focus on delegate chair orientation and fall election assemblies for the Panel 71 rotation.

Cooperation with the Professional Community/Treatment: The CPC desk has been focused on updates to the pamphlet "A.A. in Your Community" and is working with the Communication Services department to record low-cost, 15-minute audio samples of nonalcoholic trustees describing the pamphlet's contents for modern professional settings.

Corrections: The summer and fall 2020 issues of Sharing From Behind the Walls are available on aa.org. As many committees are not going into facilities during the pandemic, committee members have developed lists of inmates and

have been writing to those inmates in their local area.

Group Services: The desk is serving on the My Portal Task Force, helping prepare a survey to area registrars, reviewing it with the past registrars on the Task Force, and analyzing the results.

International: The assignment is involved in preparations for the 26th World Service Meeting, to be held virtually November 28-30.

Literature: Subtitled versions in Spanish and French of the updated video, "Your General Service Office, Grapevine Office and the General Service Structure," are completed, with distribution efforts ongoing.

Public Information: The assignment has been in touch with a number of national media outlets to provide helpful information about A.A.

Board Committees

Finance: For details on A.A.W.S. Finance, see the report of the trustees' Finance Committee on page 1 of this report and the summary of unaudited financial results on the last page of this report for the nine months ended September 30, 2020.

Publishing: September gross sales are at \$883,549. Total web sales (A.A.W.S. Online Bookstores) for September stand at \$533,080 which accounts for about 61.53% of total sales for the company. Total ebook gross sales for January through September 2020 stand at \$194,848, with 51,396 units distributed.

Publishing director David R. and webstore operations manager Jasmine Delarosa (nonalcoholic) presented and attended workshops at the annual Intergroup/Central Office Seminar, held virtually September 17-20.

The Fall *Box 4-5-9* issue was printed and mailed to subscribers and posted online. A special online supplement of *Box 4-5-9* highlighting office employees and G.S.O./GV retirements was completed and posted to "What's new on aa.org."

The revised publication date of the souvenir book, A Visual History of Alcoholics Anonymous: An Archival Journey, has been set for February 2021. All printing of this book will be billed in fiscal year 2021.

The Big Book Special Offer was in effect from July 1 through September 30, 2020, and three additional special offers are being rolled out to help our literature distribution efforts and spur revenue during the holiday gift-giving season. *Our Great Responsibility* will be converted and distributed as an eBook in English, French and Spanish in 2021.

Technology/Communication/Services (TCS): The committee heard reports from Technology Services, Group Services and the Communications Services Department: the director of Technology Services described progress on the implementation of My Portal, noting feedback from area registrars; the Group Services coordinator shared a summary of the 35th annual GSO/AAGV/AAWS ICOAA Seminar, highlighting its focus on unity and common purpose; the senior manager of the Communication Services depart-

ment noted the ongoing growth of the department, discovering and filling gaps in staffing and experience while setting a realistic course for the future.

The committee reviewed a progress report on Website design and Meeting Guide app, noting that Version 3.5.4 of Meeting Guide launched on September 23, 2020 for iOS and Android users. The committee also reviewed a progress report on the YouTube channel and Google-For-Non-Profits projects. Currenly, there are 113 A.A.W.S. videos posted to YouTube (some in English only, others in English, Spanish and French) and as of October 2020, the channel has over 5,100 subscribers. The A.A.W.S. Google Ads have been live for 29 days, with a total Grant spend for this period of \$1,001. Within the account are two ad groups: "Find a Meeting" and "Get Help."

The committee also discussed a 2020 committee consideration from the Conference Committee on Public Information for a proposed A.A. service app, with further discussion to follow.

Internal Audit Committee (IAC): The committee reviewed recommendations outstanding from the 2018/2019 External Audits, with management responses, noting that a lot of the outstanding 2018 matters pertain to things that have since been addressed through the technology plan of the Technology Services director. The committee also reviewed the Finance RACI Matrix and are identifying the board accountabilities, such as tax filings that will happen later in the month of November.

AA Grapevine

The AA Grapevine Board of Directors met via teleconference nine times since the July 31, 2020 quarterly board meeting: a Strategic Planning meeting on September 11; a board meeting on September 12; a Special Meeting on September 20; an A.A. Meeting, quarterly meeting and Executive Session on October 30; nontrustee director interviews on September 22, October 8 and 9.

Board Committees

The following committees met via teleconference: Strategic Planning met on September 21, 28, October 5, 12 and 19; Nominating and Governance met on August 13 and October 15, 20 and 22.

Update

Grapevine is facing some challenges, with the continuation of a downturn in book sales and the decline of La Viña subscriptions due to the ongoing effect of COVID-19. As a result of the decline in income, approximately \$250,000 has been withdrawn from Grapevine's subscription liability fund. Additionally, Grapevine's Publisher is currently on a medical leave of absence. Board chair Kathi F. has been attending weekly Grapevine staff meetings and keeping in regular contact with Grapevine's operations manager. The board forwarded a nontrustee director candidate, a general service trustee candidate and a regional trustee candidate to the trustees' Nominating Committee for approval.

Financial

For details on Grapevine Finance, see the report of the trustees' Finance Committee on page 2 of this report and the summary of unaudited financial results on the last page of this report for the period ended September 30, 2020.

Board Actions

September 12, 2020: Approved the minutes of the June 6, 2020 board meeting. Approved and accepted the AA Grapevine treasurer's report. Approved and accepted the La Viña treasurer's report. Additionally:

- Agreed to accept the proposed 2021 subscription pricing changes with corrections;
- Recommended that the AAGVB accept the Bylaws as amended and forward to the G.S.B. for approval.

October 30, 2020: Approved the minutes of the July 31, 2020 board meeting. Approved and accepted the AA Grapevine treasurer's report. Approved and accepted the La Viña treasurer's report. Additionally:

- Approved translation licenses for: Chile (*Lo mejor de Bill*); Finland (*Best of Bill*) and Iran (*Best of Bill-Farsi*);
- Approved 990 tax return;
- Agreed to rescind the 2017 AAGV, Inc. Licensing policy.
 The chair noted that the committee will review the A.A.W.S. Licensing policy for possible adoption by AAGV, Inc. and report back in December.

Circulation, Development and Outreach — Highlights

- Audio Project stories are now being uploaded to YouTube;
- GV workbook has been revised;

- Ongoing communications and planning with Market Partners and associates regarding GV book distribution project;
- Announcement of new La Viña website launch;
- La Viña Daily Quote began September 1;
- Carry the Message effort will continue into 2021.

Editorial Advisory Board (EAB): Grapevine and La Viña

The Grapevine EAB met on September 24, 2020 and the La Viña EAB will meet in November 2020.

Editorial Report: Grapevine

Recent issues of the Grapevine have included: September (Young & Sober); October (Money & Sobriety); November (Our Twelve Traditions).

Editorial Report: La Viña

Recent issues of La Viña have included: November/ December 2020 (Accessibility & Remote Communities).

Grapevine Web Report

The Web Coordinator reported monthly web traffic in the 3rd quarter averaged at 78,255 unique visitors and 359,928 page views.

Publishing Update

Spring of 2021, La Viña will publish a book for Hispanic Women and Grapevine will publish a Prison Book, entitled "Free on the Inside." In January, subscription packages for the magazines will be adjusted and La Viña pricing will increase to be in parity with Grapevine.

Staff Travel

None due to COVID-19 pandemic.

G.S.O.	2020 Budget	2020 Actual	2019 Actual
Contributions from A.A. groups and members	\$10,173,870	\$ 7,351,086	\$ 6,197,296
Sales less cost of production and shipping	6,202,068	5,326,244	7,291,987
Interest Income	0	0	0
Total Income	16,375,938	12,677,330	13,489,283
Total G.S.O. expenses:	16,713,065	11,882,137	14,115,011
Net Operating Income (expense)	(337,127)	795,193	(625,728)
AA GRAPEVINE, INC.			
Sales less costs of products	\$ 1,499,623	\$ 1,019,663	\$ 1,397,949
Interest earned — Reserve Fund	22,500	22,500	23,418
Total Income	1,522,123	1,042,163	1,421,367
Expenses	1,484,526	1,349,458	1,583,173
Income (loss) from operations	37,597	(307,295)	(161,806)
General Service Board Support of La Viña shortfall	(237,768)	(252,080)	(110,499)

For comments or questions write to: Staff Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

F-14 11/20 – Digital