

Al-Anon groups grow and flourish

The number of family groups continued to grow, as people noticed the positive changes occurring in members of Al-Anon family groups. Al-Anon membership also became more diverse, including more men, and more who were parents, siblings, children, or other family members besides spouses of alcoholics. As word of Al-Anon spread, Al-Anon also began to include more members whose loved ones were still drinking. Al-Anon members helped the A.A. prison groups by talking about alcoholism to the families of inmates.

As membership grew, committees were developed to oversee Al-Anon services. Local Al-Anon Information Service offices were established to help disseminate meeting and other information.

A request for Family Groups to support the work of the Al-Anon central office financially was initially met with mixed response. Donations came in, and the office was able to purchase needed supplies and develop additional literature. Henrietta S. in New York became Al-Anon's first paid worker in 1953, and later served as Al-Anon's first General Secretary.

In 1954, the Al-Anon clearinghouse was (for business purposes) incorporated under the name, Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. An Advisory Committee, which had been instituted about a year prior to incorporation, appointed a Board of Directors. Tax exempt 501 (c) (3) status was applied for and received.

The Al-Anon movement came to public attention and Al-Anon began to receive publicity from mainstream media. Lois spoke on a nationally broadcast television show (without identifying herself or showing her face,) the radio program "Second Chance" presented a program about Al-Anon, and articles about Al-Anon were written in the Christian Herald, Life Romances, Life Today, and the Saturday Evening Post. Publicity from other well-known print media, television and radio shows followed. In 1962 columnist Ann Landers wrote the first of many items about Al-Anon in her advice column, which generated thousands of responses to Al-Anon headquarters. As word spread, Al-Anon Family groups continued to multiply.

Concern for the problems of the children surfaced as early as 1955 at the A.A. International Convention in St. Louis, where several Al-Anon talks were presented on "Children of Alcoholics." In 1957 the first Alateen group was started in Pasadena, California, by a teenage son of A.A./Al-Anon parents (please see the section on Alateen for more information.)



There was an increasing demand for literature about Al-Anon. The first official Al-Anon pamphlets were "One Wife's Story" and "Purposes and Suggestions for Al-Anon Family Groups." A third pamphlet, "The Family

Groups" (written by an A.A. member) soon followed. Al-Anon's first World Directory was published in March 1952, with meetings listed in 36 states, seven Canadian provinces, and three additional countries. Al-Anon's first hard copy book, "Al-Anon Family Groups," was published in 1955; it had taken two years to write. Some of the early Al-Anon literature was written by non-members, and Lois and Anne developed a "recommended reading list" that often included literature from non-Al-Anon sources. This was recognized as a potential problem, as some literature was written from a political or religious perspective that was not consistent with Al-Anon's Traditions. In 1963, a "conference approved" process for approving Al-Anon literature was adopted for ensuring all Al-Anon literature is consistent with Al-Anon principles. In the 1960's Al-Anon literature began to be translated into other languages. "One Day At A Time In Al-Anon" was written in 1968 by Alice B, then chair of Al-Anon's literature committee (and has since sold around five million copies.) Today, Al-Anon books and pamphlets are compiled by Al-Anon's Literature Service from the experiences and thoughts of Al-Anon members, and a large variety of pamphlets and literature describing the Al-Anon program and its various aspects are available.

Al-Anon evolved with the leadership providing ideas and choices but with the membership making decisions. Questionnaires were sent to groups to solicit their input on important decisions about the growing fellowship. Al-Anon realized from A.A.'s experiences that guidelines for maintaining unity would be necessary. The Al-Anon Twelve Traditions were approved for adoption by the A.A. General Service Conference in 1955, and were subsequently accepted at Al-Anon's first World Service Conference in 1961.

Al-Anon began participating in A.A. International Conventions in 1955. Al-Anon and Alateen workshops and speakers meetings were part of those events for the next 30 years. Al-Anon members present at the 1960 A.A. International Convention in California voted to have an annual conference for Al-Anon delegates that would be similar to A.A.'s. Al-Anon groups later affirmed this decision, and Al-Anon's first World Service Conference was held in New York City in 1961. It was attended by twelve delegates, the Headquarters staff, and the Board of Trustees. More delegates attended World Service Conferences held in each of the next two years, and in 1963 it was voted to make the Conference a permanent part of Al-Anon's structure. Today, the Conference meets annually and comprises Area Delegates from the U.S.A. and Canada; and the Al-Anon Board of Trustees, Executive Committee, Committee Chairpersons and World Services Office staff.

In February, 1978, the International Coordination Committee was established to maintain contact and worldwide unity with the Al-Anon groups that form in countries other than the U.S.A. and Canada. To help maintain "grass roots" connections within Al-Anon, the 1979 World Service Conference established Regional Service Seminars (RSS's) to be hosted by the six Al-Anon regions of the U.S. and Canada. The first was held in the fall of 1980 and semiannually thereafter. In 1989, the U.S. and Canada divided into nine Al-Anon regions. RSS's are now held three times a year.

On July 7, 1980 in New Orleans, Al-Anon delegates and observers from 16 General Service Offices met with the World Service Office International Coordination Committee for a one-day meeting intended to promote unity in Al-Anon worldwide. The first permanent International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM) took place in September 1986, and has been held every two years since then.



There are three "Legacies," adapted from Alcoholics Anonymous, that serve as guiding principles in Al-Anon. These legacies include: 1) Recovery through the Twelve Steps, which encourage individual members to carry the Al-Anon message to others. 2) Unity through the Twelve Traditions, which protect the Al-Anon groups from influences that might distract or disrupt them from their common purpose. 3) Service through the Twelve Concepts of Service, which provide a guide for broad-scale service within the Al-Anon program. In 1968 the Al-Anon World Service Conference unanimously decided to develop its own Concepts of Service, and in 1970 the Twelve Concepts of Service were approved by the World Service Conference. In 1984 the Twelve Concepts were accorded the same status as the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

In 1996, the Al-Anon World Service Office moved from New York to Virginia Beach, Virginia, where it remains today. From 48 individuals and groups in 1951, Al-Anon grew to 1,500 groups in 1963 and over 24,000 Al-Anon/Alateen groups in 115 countries in 2007. Today the Al-Anon World Service Office has a budget in the millions and a large, salaried staff that includes members and non-members. Al-Anon's structure is set up to allow communication and direction to trickle up from the members, to the group, to the district, to the area, to the World Service Conference and World Service Office, and back down to the members through this same communication pathway. Al-Anon has grown and changed since its inception in 1951, but its purpose remains the same; to help those who are affected by another person's drinking. Al-Anon remains available as a support for the families and friends of alcoholics, and welcomes more newcomers to its meeting rooms every day. Al-Anon's co-founders and early pioneer members left a legacy that carries on today and into the future.