

## **PANEL 1 - AA Underserved Communities Workshop Notes / 18 September 2021**

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### **Panel 1: LGBTQ+ Community**

Nic is speaking on his personal issues before joining the transgender community and after.  
My early days were in "Straight AA". Like all of us I had questions and personal issues.

Some of the issues are all of ours as Alcoholics. Some of them are transgender/personal issues. Some meetings are not interested in these issues and will tell the person who shared that it's an outside issue, hence against the traditions. (Tradition 10) My life [as it relates to alcohol and recovery](#) is not an outside issue.

Is this prejudice? Fear?

I've been told [by AA members that I need to get right with god, \(specifically, their god\), because I am transgender. I've been told that if I work the program better I wouldn't be transgender anymore.](#)

Nic is an atheist. He doesn't want to be told how to deal with his HP.

Finding a sponsor may be difficult. [Sponsors don't need to be the same sex or transgender. Some people don't want to sponsor transgender people because they feel they are unqualified to sponsor transgender people. But sponsors are mentors for others working the AA program. As long as sponsors are affirming, and non-judgemental, that's enough.](#)

Respect the sex a person identifies as.

When a newcomer, a transgender person, comes in, one of the group members, perhaps all of the group members, may feel self-conscious about greeting that person. They are afraid of offending them. They feel awkward about not knowing what pronoun to use or just what to say. Some of the "regulars" may willingly or unwillingly project the energy of unwelcomeness.

What about the bathrooms? Even in my safe space at AA meeting I avoid using bathrooms because of judgements.

I want to focus on alcohol and alcohol recovery. My issues are not outside issues. [when I'm talking about why I drank, my personal story, or how I work my program on a daily basis whilst living my life.](#)

I'm transgender but I don't speak for transgenders, just as I am an American. I am not America.

Service work. Sometimes we are not asked to do service work. It sometimes seems difficult for people to choose transgender people. We all need to feel a part of, to feel welcome at the "after meeting" meetings.

Q: what about negative talk at meetings?

A: Confrontation should wait until later, after the person it was directed at leaves. But please do not let negative language get by without calling attention to it.

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Ray began as saying that gender is not an outside issue. We all bleed but some of us bleed more than others. I came out as gay when I was 12. I was teased and beat up. I ended up here in these rooms. I have done straight AA I believe fully that people can transcend this bias and enhance community. We all share life. Instead of focusing on our differences why can't we see how we are alike? I'm working on trying to trust other people.

### **Q+A**

How can someone like myself (a straight guy) gain the trust of a person from a minority group like LGBTQ+?

Nic: Come up and say hi. If I'm a newcomer and no one in the meeting looks like me I'm probably not going to

approach someone new. It can be scary for a transgender person.

I've heard, " Did you see that freak show over there?"

Ray: How are you with empathy? How did you want to be greeted at your first meeting? Just tell yourself I'm going to approach that person with empathy.

Q: Is there something we can do as potential sponsors to increase our understanding and sensitivity to LGBTQ+ issues?

Nic: I want a sponsor that is going to affirm me in my journey. I don't think there are any special tools needed to sponsor.

Ray – many AA members believe gender and sexual orientation are an outside issue, but they are not. The primary purpose of Alcoholics Anonymous is to carry the message of AA to the other suffering alcoholics. Outside issues are things such as telling other AA members what "god" you must believe in and choose. I grew up in my family in the closet, I kept my sexual orientation a secret. I was bullied by my brothers. I came out in foster care when I was 14 years old. I was picked on and bullied and other people insulted me or ostracized me. I used alcohol and drugs as an escape and relief outlet. I thought that was ok until I spiraled out of control. I arrived to AA meetings in San Diego, and I feel fortunate because many AA meetings in SD are very accepting. Who I love, how I identify in the world is not why I am in AA meetings. It is because I am an alcoholic. My life experiences being bullied and ostracized have led me to believe I cannot trust people, they will hurt me. Coming into AA fellowship it is paramount that I feel welcome, because I need to know that I am welcome as an alcoholic, that I will be included and I will be accepted, that my experience matters in the rooms of AA and I can carry the message of recovery to others. We must welcome all alcoholics in our rooms, not just those that "fit our comfort zone". I am working on learning to trust other people. Our prejudices are only thoughts and ideas in our heads. We have the capacity to change our thoughts, to examine our prejudices and to become open and welcome.

Q&A: Because of your past experiences with the "straight community" your trust is not complete. How can AA members who identify as straight gain LGBTQ+ AA members trust? How can we help you feel welcome in AA?

A: (Nic) Extend a hand and say hello. There are LGBTQ+ AA members who have their guard up, so it helps if others in the meetings break the ice and reach out to those AA members who are trying to overcome past experiences of being shunned or turned away from AA meetings. It can be frightening for some transgender people to be approached by others who are trying to welcome them, because of trauma. Do not use mean and derogatory descriptions about LGBTQ+ persons, for example I have heard AA members after a meeting say "Did you see that freakshow?" We hear those comments, those are hurtful and that pushes us away from AA meetings and AA members.

A: Ray – Have you ever been a newcomer at a meeting or first-timer at a meeting and felt that everyone knew everyone else, that you were an "outsider"? We have the same feelings when we walk into a new meeting, so if you can remember how it felt when you were welcomed into a meeting, please do the same with any LGBTQ+ people who arrive to your meetings.

Q: Should there be more resources available to welcome LGBTQ+ people to our meetings, pamphlets, or workshops that would help AA members better understand sponsorship and welcoming?

A: Nic – I would say general suggestions for sponsoring AA members are the same across the board. I would say more importantly, individual meetings could benefit from understanding LGBTQ+ AA members. For example,

there was a women's meeting in SD that would not allow a transgender woman to attend that AA meeting. Please accept transgender AA members' sexual identity as they say it is. If a transgender woman wants to be treated as a woman, then treat that AA member as a woman. Affirmation of each individual's identity goes a long way. I would like to work with a sponsor who is affirming in my identity and in my journey in recovery. I want a sponsor who treats me as a recovering alcoholic, not a sponsor who continually tells me that if I work the Steps I will feel differently about my identity. NO, my identity is who I am. Sponsor me in AA on my disease of alcoholism and recovery.

## **PANEL 2 - Prisons and Institutions:**

**Ernest:** Sober for almost 15 years.

I've been taking the message to H&I since early recovery because my sponsor was so involved. "Thank you very much for coming into the prisons. We are the forgotten ones." Gaining access to a facility may take up to 6 months. So what? What is your purpose? To carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

Calipatria – level 4 prison with a lot of dangerous individuals within those walls.

But I have never felt safer than when I talk to those men. Because of their level of recovery. I realize my HP is giving me an opportunity to be of service. Once you go through those doors you feel your purpose.

Its time consuming. Leave central office at 5 am and get home at 7 pm. Exhausted but high as a kite.

I came in a broken man – a Humpty Dumpty.

Balboa Naval and Miramar.

Overcoming challenges? Talk to your sponsor. What is the 12th step about? As for guidance from your HP, pray to overcome your fears. Go with another person who has experience. Get involved. There is such a hunger for a message. These commitments are about being of service, not about my convenience. If I continue to work for the rest of my life I can never repay what AA has given to me. It gave me my life back.

**Amber: 08/01/2010 sobriety date.** The day she got arrested. The CA prison system could use a revamp! Our H&I ambassadors are our guides. Prison was initially like living in the DMV. She was transferred to a place near Bakersfield for treatment. Recovery meetings were every week. Sharing was only available twice a month when a certain woman from H+I brought in a meeting. When Amber shared she felt better. Later, at 45 days sober, she was taken to a woman's meeting outside in the world. Because she has a "record" she is not permitted to take meetings into prisons and jails. AA has been the solution. How often do we build up walls that separates us? And when people hear certain statements that are judgmental or show bias they will not return.

When I got out I didn't know how to behave. It was my "defrost" period. The only men I knew at that time were prison guards and such. (Amber's cell mate was pregnant by one of those guards.)

We all come for different reasons but we stay for the message of Hope. Having a 2 year gap in my resume. Not wanting to explain that.

## **Q+A**

Q: When will the prisons open again? (No answer. We don't know.)

Q: Please say more about the defrost period.

A: There's a schedule for inmates. When you get out there is not. I was lucky to get into a recovery program after prison and stay there for 8 months. Then sober living for 6 months.

So many extra hurdles from the wreckage. That's why the recidivism rate is so high.

Q: Are there resources for people who get out?

A: (Diane, chair of H+I) AA has Contact on Release. What we do is match the individual with someone in the area where she/he is going. They get support for getting into recovery. The person has to ask for it.

**Next H&I Orientation - Oct 17, 12 noon, Machinists Union on Kearny Mesa, also on Zoom, check the [sdhandi.org](http://sdhandi.org) website [SDIAIC - Alcoholics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, Service Work, Aa \(sdhandi.org\)](http://SDIAIC - Alcoholics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, Service Work, Aa (sdhandi.org))**  
Amber added, Can H+I bring that info to the prisons? I never heard of that.

### **PANEL 3 - Seniors in AA Community – Cooperation with the Elder Community Committee**

Jean – (email contact: [cecchair@aasandiego.org](mailto:cecchair@aasandiego.org)) Cooperation with the Elderly Community Committee's purpose is to inform communities who care for and service the elder community what Alcoholics Anonymous is, and help connect these resources with AA so it is available for any elderly people who may need or are interested in attending AA.

Our committee members attend various City, County and Senior Health Fair events. We provide flyers and literature to senior communities, caregiver conventions, and AARP conventions. There are many businesses and organizations that serve elder members of our society. We set up a booth and provide information about the AA program and resources to attendees at these events. We share AA information that is published in Non-AA publications, newsletters that describe alcohol use / abuse in the over 65 y/o community. We are not "Seniors in Sobriety" which focuses on seniors who are sober. The CEC reaches out to communities and senior people who may need help with their drinking, who want information about alcoholism and recovery through AA. We are reaching out to the still suffering alcoholic who has not yet found AA.

At a recent Caregivers Convention the fee was \$500 per table, so we were unable to set up a table. What we did was we attended the convention with our clipboards and information and we walked around and spoke with caregiver presenters who had tables at this event. Almost every presenter in attendance wanted flyers and handouts about AA with our contact information.

Very interestingly, almost every administrative office and their personnel who administer at senior care giving / senior living facilities deny there is a problem amongst their residence with alcohol abuse in their facilities. HOWEVER, the caregivers and nurses who work one on one with the senior people in these facilities are welcome and excited to have our information and contact. These personal caregivers and nurses providing care experience how alcohol abuse is harming their clients.

Elder Care magazine has been contacted to request the CEC flyer be printed in this magazine. Flyers go into libraries. Area 05 had a slide show for senior communities and we borrowed some of their slide presentation.

Kenny – Hard copies of CEC flyers are available at the workshop. CEC purpose is to get the message of AA out to the still suffering alcoholic. What is a senior? Medicare at 65, Social Security at 62, AARP requests membership at 50, you can get special perks at businesses if you are 55 or older. So pick your senior definition. The story of the carpet slippers man in the Big Book is about a man who was in his mid'50's and who died from alcoholism at 59 ½. "Senior" often begins when one retires. Big life changes, more isolation, less purpose, age related health

conditions may require medication which, when mixed with alcohol, I may have a synergistic effect and result in increased abuse of alcohol. The electronic CEC flyer has allowed a wider range of distribution and Areas that currently do not have a CEC committee are interested in establishing one.

The largest aging population in US is now the “Baby Boomer” generation. The Covid 19 pandemic and quarantine has compounded alcohol abuse amongst elderly community. I attended AA meeting in the senior community in which my mother lived. The director of that facility was an AA member. After my mom passed away, I continued to attend that AA meeting and became secretary. I decided to continue doing AA outreach to the senior community. After attending a convention in Los Angeles I met Jean, she had a CEC table at the convention. I found a passion in AA service through the CEC that engaged me. My motto is “Never Too Late” because it is never too late to put the cork in the bottle and join the AA fellowship and recovery. Helping senior AA members with connecting to AA online via Zoom or other platforms the fellowship is meeting through is a great, easy service to provide to an elder member of our fellowship.

### **Q+A**

Q: Are there AA meetings going into senior community centers:

A: The CEC does not host meetings, such as “Meetings To Go” Committee. CEC focus is to raise awareness that AA is available in senior services communities and fairs. To inform elder service providers and health care providers what AA is or is not and how to access AA in the community. Education and awareness and collaboration with senior community facilities, senior focused fairs, etc., is the CEC purpose and mission.

Q: Since you are an adhoc committee with in the Area, you do not have a budget with area 08?

A. Actually as an adhoc committee we do have a budget with Area 08, and District 19 provided CEC with a box of Big Books, some of which we still have. Due to Covid 19 restrictions, we have not had many expenses because so many live events and fairs have either been canceled or have transitioned to Zoom or other online formats.

### **PANEL 4 – Deaf and Mobility Challenges to Accessing AA**

Bryan – (contact information: *My cell is 831.247.0071 or email [bryanh.sandiego@gmail.com](mailto:bryanh.sandiego@gmail.com)*) deaf member of AA. I have experienced a wonderful purposeful life in AA. Before AA I was angry. Home town of Santa Cruz did not have ASL interpreters in meetings. The Central Office there directed me to other towns such as Oakland or San Francisco where there were ASL interpreters in meetings. Accessibility to AA was not there in Santa Cruz. In 2017 I attended a recovery program in Santa Cruz, but I was not interested. I went to an inpatient program but it did not last and I relapsed. I came to San Diego to a program called “Signs of Life” for deaf alcoholics, there were people from all over the nation in that program. They made us attend AA meetings, which I did, and I found many meetings that had ASL interpreters in the San Diego meetings. I was overwhelmed and so happy. I still had lots of anger the first few months of my journey here in SD at Signs of Life. Then one time I attended a speaker meeting and I heard that person share about spiritual damage done in childhood. I realized that was my experience too. That opened me up to the idea of finding a sponsor. I found a sponsor, a hearing AA member. I had counselors at the treatment center, but I was not ready to open up to them. So I worked with my sponsor 1 on 1 each week. We used an app to communicate, he would talk into his phone and it would interpret to ASL, and vice versa. I began to understand the program and I began to get connected. I found a home group “No Barriers” in San Diego. I took service position, I helped in meetings and I began to share in meetings. In some meetings some of

the ASL interpreters would not show up, or the interpreters were not qualified in the language of AA for the meetings. I contacted the Accessibilities Committee and I connected with interpreters who were qualified. I began attending the 4<sup>th</sup> Dimension meeting weekly too. I began to attend the Accessibilities Committee each month and I would listen to the meetings through an interpreter. After a few months the service position for ASL Interpreter Coordinator opened up with the Accessibilities Committee. The Committee members encouraged me to accept that service position and I did. That was 3 years ago. I have learned so much about service at Area level, about communicating with AA members, about service structure of AA. I began attending Area events. It was challenging, but I learned and it was a good experience. It gave me the motivation to find interpreters for deaf AA members at different meetings and events. The deaf AA members and community began to pull together. I discovered some of the favorite interpreters for meetings were not qualified in AA because they did not understand the AA language. The message of hope was not being translated accurately. I began trying to find more interpreters who did understand AA language. One of the biggest challenges is funding ASL interpretation at meetings and AA events. Some AA members complain about money, however many are very supportive. The ASL Gold Can is passed at many meetings and the funds from the Gold Can are contributed toward ASL interpretation and this is helpful. Then Covid 19 hit and meetings shut down and we transitioned to Zoom. And wow!! No Barriers continued to meet every Tuesday, then we made it a daily meeting. More and more deaf members from around the nation, Canada and outside North America began attending. The meeting attendance kept growing, eventually we had to split the meeting into two separate meetings because of the large number of attendees. Tuesdays is “No Barriers” meeting day and the daily meeting is “Rule 62”. Zoom is one of the best things that happened for deaf members in AA because access to AA meetings was limitless. Deaf members can communicate before and after the meeting, we zoom in from all over the world. Zoom has been a door of opportunity for us.

Renea – Thank you to District 6 and District 19 for hosting this event. For those of you who do not know, I am in a wheelchair. I caught polio when I was 1 year old. I came into AA because I caught a DUI. I make fun of that because you can get a DUI in a wheelchair, but I was driving a car. San Diego is full of hills, and it can be challenging rolling around from place to place in a wheelchair. My first years of AA my home group was “Dignity Unlimited”. Access to AA meeting locations is very challenging. The bus stops were too far from the meetings or the meetings were held in locations where there are stairs without wheelchair access ramps or elevators. I want to share an experience. At a meeting with stairs, the AA members carried me up the stairs with my wheelchair, so I could attend. Later that group took a group conscience and decided to move the meeting to the first floor so the room was wheelchair accessible. There are many meetings that are willing to either assist me in getting into the meetings or agree to change the meeting location to a wheelchair accessible room.

Part of the reason Bryan and I wanted to attend via Zoom is to show you that we have ability to be of service to AA. Zoom creates an easier way to attend meetings. Area Committee Meetings, Area Assemblies, monthly committee meetings, AA meetings. Zoom has allowed me and Bryan to be of even more service to AA because we are able to attend more meetings. I would not be sober if not for AA, and so I enjoy giving back through service to AA and AA members. Here is a link from aa.org with suggestions meetings can take of accessible friendly actions that meetings can take to create more accessible meeting spaces - [MG-16 - A.A. Guidelines on Accessibility for All Alcoholics \(aa.org\)](#). There are a lot of AA members in wheelchairs here in San Diego, we just do not show up at meetings so much because of the challenges that exist in traveling to meetings and accessing meeting rooms. If you are in a wheelchair, please be comfortable with AA friends and ask for help with catching rides and allow others to offer a hand so we can be of service. Renea Read a page from Language of the Heart

page 258, paragraph 8, line 4. I need my glasses to read. So it says, Let us not ever fear needed change. Certainly we have to discriminate between changes for worse and changes for better. But once the need becomes clearly apparent in an individual or group, or in AA as a whole, it has long since found out that we cannot stand still and look the other way. The essence of all growth is a willingness to change for the better, and an unremitting willingness to shoulder whatever the responsibility.

***Accessibilities Committee Meeting 4th Tuesday each month Zoom - 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM Meeting ID: 934 3736 7974 Passcode: AccessAA***

### **Q+A**

Q: If a group is looking to add ASL Interpretation to its meetings, what is the cost? Does the cost come out of the Gold Can? Or is it based on the amount of money that meeting can afford for ASL Interpretation? How can I get information about Gold Can?

A: ASL interpretation is currently \$50/hour. If meeting is 1 ½ hours the fee is \$75/hour. If the meeting cannot afford the full cost of an ASL Interpreter, the Accessibilities Committee will use Gold Can funds and split the cost of ASL Interpretation with the meeting. The Accessibilities Committee encourages meetings to fund as much as reasonable to support ASL Interpretation. Our meeting may not be able to afford ASL Interpretation, but we may be able to pass Gold Can funds to another meeting that could use those funds to support ASL Interpretation.

Sponsorship for deaf members – contact Accessibilities Committee for more information.

Accessibilities Committee provides services for all types of disabilities. For example there is an AA member in San Diego who is blind and we have been able to find a way for this member to be of service. Accessibilities Committee is always searching for solutions to challenges that some AA members face in their ability to attend meetings or be of service in meetings or at the AA general service level.

Q: What about childcare for AA members?

A: From Amber - There is an open meeting on Thursday night in Mission Bay that is child friendly. Listed on AAsandiego.org website as a meeting. Open mixed meeting with babysitting. We are getting the listing updated!  
<https://aasandiego.org/meetings/burning-desire/>

Q: Is there a list of AA meetings with ASL Interpretation?

A: I think there is a link on a website that I cannot remember right now.