

MARGENSER

Fostering Unity and Carrying the A A Message in Area 29 MARYLAND GENERAL SERVICE

Portrait of a Delegate

Linda J., Area 29 Delegate

I did not come into the program as a young person, however over the course of my sobriety, I have sponsored numerous young women through the Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service. The interview below was conducted with a young woman in an urban area, who came to the program in her late 20s and has been sober 22 months. She gave her permission for the information to be used for this article.

Question: What was your first acquaintance with alcoholics or AA?

Answer: I always pictured AA as being for people that fit the societal stereotype of a “drunk.” The picture in my head was someone homeless who couldn’t keep a job and had been arrested or in jail several times. I did not realize that AA is made up of all kinds of people from all walks of life. I have found that no matter your background there is a place in AA for everyone.

Question: What was the format of the first meeting you attended?

Answer: The format of the first meeting I attended was a speaker and discussion meeting. At first those types of meetings were my favorite because I could listen to someone’s story about how they got into the rooms and what lead them to join AA. It helped me just learn a little bit about what Alcoholics Anonymous was really like, and what changes working a program could bring me.

Question: How’d it make you feel?

Answer: It started to open my eyes against the stereotype I once believed about alcoholics. There were people that looked

and sounded like me, talking about how alcohol kept them trapped in a life of misery. This was a new thought for me. I didn’t know that alcohol could actually be the real problem and not all the typical life events I was experiencing. I started not to feel so alone, as if there were other people that might actually understand me for the first time in my life.

Question: What made you come back?

Answer: The laughter, joy, and community I saw at meetings were the reasons I kept coming back initially. These people seemed to actually enjoy their lives. They had no shame admitting they had a problem with alcohol, or were having a hard time. They were comfortable in their own skin, something I had NEVER felt before in my entire life. There was a strong sense of community almost like family. All I knew was that for the first time in as long as I could remember, I felt OK when I was in a meeting.

Question: Were you court ordered, family encouraged or just sick and tired?

Answer: I was just sick and tired, actually exhausted, beat down, and hopeless was more like it.

Question: How long did it take to get a Sponsor?

Answer: It took me a few months to get a Sponsor. However, that was because I was working another sister program for a little while and was fighting the belief I had an alcohol problem. When I got sick and tired enough, I was willing to do anything. That included getting a sponsor the next opportunity I got.

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MARGENSER STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Area 29 MARGENSER newsletter is published to foster unity and facilitate communication among AA members, groups, districts, and intergroups within the Maryland General Service Area. The MARGENSER aims to be instrumental in carrying the AA message. This quarterly newsletter seeks to publish AA-related material, including personal stories of experience, strength, and hope. Material will be reviewed by the MARGENSER committee chairperson or by a member of the committee. Nothing published in the MARGENSER should be thought of as a statement of Area 29 or AA policy. Finally, publication shall not constitute endorsement by the newsletter itself, Area 29, intergroups, districts, local groups, or AA as a whole.

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Question: When did you begin working the Steps?

Answer: I started working the Steps within a week of getting my first Sponsor. I wanted to know the answers, and how to get out of my dark painful hole. I was told the Steps would show me the way, so I jumped right in and began working. Best decision I ever made!!

Question: Have you changed Sponsors? If so, Why??

Answer: I got a new Sponsor about 8 months into my recovery. I found that as I continued to really work the program my first Sponsor and I kind of drifted apart. I started to feel stagnant in my Steps and progress. After talking with my first Sponsor, it seemed like in order for my recovery to continue to progress I needed to find someone new to work with. Although the decision was hard, it was the right thing for my recovery. My new Sponsor started me over again at the beginning at Step 1.

Question: Are you active in your recovery? If yes, how?

Answer: I find the more active I am in my recovery the happier I am. I attend between 5-6 meetings a week usually. Not because I feel as though I am required to, but because I get something out of them. I leave feeling more centered and at peace. I also talk to another alcoholic every day in some capacity. Keeping in contact with my Sponsor and AA support network has shown to be essential for my recovery. I have a home group I attend each week, as well as service position. I enjoy attending fellowship events such as camping trips or retreats. Alcoholics

Anonymous has really become a social network for me. I have true friends in AA and feel the most comfortable while being around other alcoholics. I raise my hand to make myself available to the next suffering alcoholic as that is what my Sponsor has suggested. Recently I changed home groups and have been elected the new G.S.R. My Sponsor is active in Area service and is teaching me the "ropes".

Question: What type of meetings do you get the most out of? Why?

Answer: I find I get a lot out of literature meetings where we read stories in the Big Book, or the Steps and Traditions. Those types of meetings are structured around the actual program of Alcoholics Anonymous. The black and white reasons of "How it Works". I have never walked out of a Step meeting and not gotten something from it. Usually, whatever we read that day can be applied to my own life in that very moment. Literature meetings teach me the answers ~ how to stay sober while living a happy joyous and free life.

Question: Did you find it difficult or not to compare into the program in your locality?

Answer: At first I did, only because that was my default thought process, "how can I prove I am not one of these people?" There were many young people in the program when I came in, many women as well. But I told myself, "well I never got a DUI or arrested, I have a job and own a house, so I'm not like them." But then I started to meet people who hadn't had those things happen to them either. And I started LISTENING to what people were sharing about. What was going on inside

their heads was the exact same thing going on inside of mine! That idea started to become comforting, because these people understood.

Other thoughts to share that may encourage a young person to come into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous and stick???

Alcoholics Anonymous will truly give you a life beyond your wildest dreams, IF you sincerely want it, get a Sponsor and begin to do the work. Honestly, what do you have to lose? You are not reading this because your life is so wonderful you can't imagine it getting any better. You are reading this because somewhere deep down, you are in pain, real soul crushing fear driven pain. You do not have to live that way anymore. Ever again!! There is a way out, and we want to help you find it. Just try coming back for a little while. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. When you go to a meeting, raise your hand and introduce yourself when they ask if there are any newcomers. It has truly changed my life.

Thank you for letting me share.

Reminder: Please encourage young members in your local meetings to write their personal stories for possible inclusion in the revised pamphlet, "Young People and A.A." The Trustees Literature Committee is soliciting stories which reflect "in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now." The deadline for submissions is December 30, 2016. Please contact me for additional information or assistance in writing and/or editing your submission.
Yours in service,
Linda J., Area 29 Delegate

A Willingness to Grow

Don B., Area 29 Chairperson

Last month I attended a large young people's group I had never visited before. There were over a hundred people in the room, but less than a dozen over the age of fifty. I recognized a handful of those present from other meetings I had attended, but most of those there that night were unfamiliar faces. There were

only two members there (both of them GSRs) whom I had met at Area 29 or local intergroup service meetings. The intensity in the room was palpable, not only from the evening's speaker, a woman in her thirties with fifteen years of sobriety, but also from each of those who had shared, including several in their forties who

had gotten sober in their teens or twenties. I left quite impressed with the quality of recovery in the room and the effective manner in which the message of Alcoholic Anonymous had been transmitted.

It was only after I got in my car and drove away, that I began to

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wonder why so very few of those younger members had become active in service beyond the group level. Then I started to remember how overwhelming it had seemed to me when I had first embarked upon this journey of sobriety at the age of 32. I wasn't interested in the Steps; I wanted to have fun and fellowship and excitement – sober and crazy. Everything was new and challenging – how to get through a day without a drink, how to pray, trying to figure out what bizarre language these people in meetings were speaking, what to say when someone invited me to happy hour, what to do when I was upset or angry or worried or scared or agitated -- which seemed like just about all the time. My poor sponsor! He had told me to call him anytime I felt like drinking, so I called him an average of six times a day and sometimes kept him on the phone for hours at a time. His wife finally asked him why I didn't just go work on my marriage instead of wasting so much time and energy complaining about it.

So I can recognize that early sobriety is not easy, the last thing a typical case of self will run riot like me

wanted to do was go help somebody else. Yet that ultimately turned out to be my only saving grace. By the time I was four and a half years sober I had finally gone through the 12 Steps a few times, had served in some group service positions, and had gotten involved in general and intergroup service. I was also getting divorced, and was struggling through a period when I was not permitted to see my two daughters. My powerlessness over the situation felt to me more like helplessness; my seething anger took the form of self-pity. My Area Chairperson at the time, Sandi C., recognized trouble brewing, and summarily appointed me chair for the annual Area Gratitude Breakfast.

"But I can't do that!" I protested. "I'm already too busy. And I'm getting divorced!"

"Service keeps you sober," Sandi admonished me. "That's what they told me when I was getting divorced, and that's what I'm telling you. You'll take the position as chair for the Gratitude Breakfast and get to work, starting now!"

Sandi was right. Following her suggestions (or, to put it more accurately, doing what I was "volun-

told") got me out of myself and into the welfare of others, and thereby into the grace of my Higher Power. Not only did I stay sober, but I really enjoyed working on that committee. I admit that I got frustrated when I got back to my room after a full day of work and an evening chock-full of recovery meetings and fellowship, only to find that a dozen and a half people had left messages on my answering machine asking how they could buy last minute tickets to the breakfast, but it did help me to stop feeling sorry for myself when I focused on finding others who still had tickets to sell them. I became willing to follow a few suggestions, and in the process I began to grow.

At the International Conference of Young People in Alcoholics Anonymous (ICYPAA), "young" has been defined as "a willingness to grow." In order to demonstrate that, I need to get out of my comfort zone and do something different. Maybe it's time now to invite a few younger members to accompany me to some Area 29 meetings so we can all demonstrate "a willingness to grow." Otherwise our A.A. Fellowship may die of old age. 🌱

Circle of Life

Bill H.

My name is Bill H and my sobriety date is June 4, 1983. I have held many service positions, not only in the home group and local intergroup but also in Maryland General Services and New York General Services.

I think the most beautiful and powerful outcome of my services over the years is the pleasure of watching new people come into the program, grow, blossom, and eventually take on the responsibilities of various service positions in the Area.

I have noticed that most people involved in service usually have the following attributes or factors in their sobriety. They have a good understanding of to best hold on to their own sobriety. They possess true humility, and they have a good and knowledgeable sponsor or service sponsor to guide and support them. This process usually has its beginnings in the home group as a greeter, coffee maker, set up or clean up crew member, an Institution Rep, GSR, or

Intergroup Rep. Once the newcomer goes through his or her baptism of fire, and the fire is still burning bright, they usually venture off into General Service work.

I have seen many a new comer get started as part of a Convention Committee. Once they give up a day a month for 9 months and perform the task they were asked to do, they have the satisfaction and deep sense of success. And they realize that they

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were a small but vital part of this important, major, and significant accomplishment that benefited others.

Most of the people in Maryland General Services who are in positions that demand leadership qualities have come in after me and have filled these positions proudly and successfully.

Remember all positions of service in AA are important whether you be a delegate or a butt can cleaner upper.

Also, and very important to remember, is that it is not about you. It's the 12th step and taking the actions required to help consolidate and continue on your own personal journey in sobriety.

Carrying the message to the suffering alcoholic is our legacy. This is not a check list process. You do not become a GSR and then check that position off your list and go on to Intergroup and check that off the list. Service is a continuous process; no matter how

much sobriety you have, there should always be some position that you hold and perform that benefits AA as a whole. And, guess what, it doesn't always have to be a position that draws attention to you.

I firmly believe that there are service positions for everyone in AA, regardless of age, or background, or any other factor. Just remember for whom we work – each other – and why we work – for our lives. ♣

SEND YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS TO...

In accordance with the 7th Tradition and abiding by the group conscience of your home group, you may send contributions in support of Area 29 to:

Maryland General Service, Inc.
P.O. Box 2651
Westminster, MD 21158

MARYLAND GENERAL SERVICE AREA 29 2016 CALENDAR

Saturday December 3, 2016 8:30 am-Registration 9:00am- Start	Area Assembly	Severna Park United Methodist 731 Benfield Road Severna Park, MD 21146
Friday December 2, 2016 6:00pm-10:00pm	District 9 Winter Banquet	St. John's Catholic Church 43 Monroe St. Westminster MD, 21157
Saturday February 4, 2017	12 Tradition Workshop	St. John's Episcopal Church 101 S. Prospect St. Hagerstown, MD 21740

Greetings From Your Area Registrar

Mike S., Area 29 Registrar

Just a quick hi to all and a thank you for all of the hard work our DCMs and GSRs are doing to keep me up to date with the latest contact info for our groups. Without all of you we could not keep all this vital information current.

Remember that when submitting your group information, I need a complete postal address or I cannot enter a contact in the Fellowship New Vision (FNV) database. An email as well as a postal address will cost the area less money to send out information. To keep your group active in the database, you need at least a primary contact listed for your group. Even though this is generally the GSR, the primary contact does not have to be a GSR. A primary contact is needed so we can keep the group up to date on what is going on in AA as a whole. Once it begins receiving information, the group may decide it needs a GSR to give the group a voice and a vote in Maryland General Service and the General Service Conference structure. Everything, not only in FNV, but in AA as a whole – decisions, changes, money, ideas, and service workers -- starts with the group.

On another note, my final year is coming up as your Registrar, so I am looking for a Registrar Co-Chair candidate to assist me and to learn the Registrar position. Here is a list of suggested requirements:

Area Registrar Committee

The purpose of the Registrar Committee is to assist new and existing groups to update their group information and to maintain a current mailing list of all group GSRs, DCMs, Area Officers, Area Committee Chairpersons, and Past Delegates

Duties and Responsibilities of the Area Registrar

—Appointed by the Area Chairperson for a term of two years, beginning in January of the even-numbered years

- Attends the Area Assembly and Area Committee meetings
- Assists new or existing groups to prepare Group Change or New Group Information forms
- Enters all Group Information into GSO's Fellowship New Vision database
- Receives copies of Group Change forms from GSO through the Area Delegate to update Area records
- Maintains a current mailing list of all group GSRs, DCMs, Area Officers, Area Committee Chairpersons, and Past Delegates
- Distributes meeting notifications provided by the Area Chairperson to all Area Committee and Area Assembly members by email or U. S. Postal mail delivery systems, as necessary

- Prepares the annual Registrar budget request to be submitted to the Finance Committee in the fall of each year and is prepared with supporting documentation to answer any questions which may be asked during the budget approval process
- May attend service functions or events as listed on page 53 of his Handbook and request reimbursement as provided in the Area 29 Budget for this committee and approved by the Area Assembly each year
- As requested, attends Group, Intergroup, District or other Area A.A. events to share information and knowledge of the A.A. fellowship
- Is encouraged to write and submit service related articles for the quarterly Maryland General Service newsletter, the MARGENSER
- Forms a working committee of A.A. members to assist in carrying out the performance of these responsibilities

In addition to these requirements, a good working knowledge of computers, database entry, Microsoft Office (especially Excel), and attention to detail, are important assets.

Thanks for all of your support and the privilege to serve! 🙏

THE MARGENSER IS YOUR NEWSLETTER

The MARGENSER Committee welcomes submissions. We are here to serve you. Submissions should be no more than 750 words and about service or recovery. Please include your first name, last initial and home group. Email all correspondence to Margenser@marylandAA.org or mail to Maryland General Services, PO Box 2651, Westminster, MD 21158. The submission deadline for the next issue is January 20, 2017.

Sponsorship

Tom M.

How often have we heard the mantra “Get sponsor, and a service position. Pray and go to meetings?”

Yet, what does getting a sponsor mean? Does it mean asking someone to be your sponsor, because you need one, but not really following up with them? Or does it mean engaging with a sponsor and taking an active role in your own recovery? Long time members will testify to the effect that being a sponsor has had on their own sobriety.

That it has enriched their recovery and helped them understand the twelve steps and twelve traditions even better than they had at the beginning. And those benefits accrue to the sponsor regardless of the success of the sponsee. And the benefit is far larger for all when both members benefit from the relationship, growing together in their mutual understanding of the challenges they share, coming to grips with the causes

and conditions that underlie alcoholism itself.

Sometimes it seems that a sponsee wants to be able to say “I have a sponsor” as a means of heading off any further discussion of how they are doing in pursuit of their own recovery. The fact is that having a sponsor doesn’t help if there is no communication. The dialogue between them must be open, honest, frequent, fundamental, and meaningful if it is to be effective. Talking once a week, especially during the early phases of recovery, may not be sufficient. Early on, we are prone to wide swings of emotion from day to day and sometimes from hour to hour. If during one of those periods, taking a drink seems like a good idea, and we do not discuss the inevitable consequences with someone who has our best interests at heart, we may head down a path from which there is no guaranteed recovery –

we might pass the point of no return. It is easier to stay sober than to get sober.

The AA pamphlet on Sponsorship has many good tips on what a sponsor can do, and what he or she cannot do, to foster recovery. Read it and reflect on the lessons it contains. Sponsorship is at the heart of the AA program but it can be effective only if both communicate. No sponsor wants to get the call that his sponsee has been admitted to the hospital, again, yet it often happens. Analyzing what happened and why often indicates that communication broke down somewhere along the way, that the sponsee felt again alone and unsupported, and so reverted to “alcoholic thinking.” It need not be so. Take a strong role in your own recovery, talk with your sponsor, and above all pray for your Higher Power to give you the strength and guidance to lead a happy, joyous and free life. ♣

Never Alone

Parker T., GSR, Summit Avenue Group

When I volunteered for my first service position, coffee-maker at my home group, I would be lying if I said I wasn’t nervous. How many scoops? How much water? When do I get there? Will I be voted out if I get it wrong? My alcoholic brain began envisioning horrible scenarios of scalding hot coffee being spit out by the long-timer in the front row out of disgust, surely causing an uproar in which I was voted out of the AA club. I had no idea how to make a carafe of coffee, but the whispers of long-timers and perhaps Bill W. himself were in my head with their methodical chanting “Get a service position!”. I had agreed to go to any lengths, and maybe they would finally learn how useless I was and give me a get-out-of-service-free card. A man can dream, right?

I learned a lesson that day that has held true without exception for me thus far. As long as I was willing to do the legwork and ask for help, there would be a long-timer there to help guide me. Someone stayed after with me that meeting and walked me through the process. With something as important as coffee in the balance, I was sure to have the entire system down before I left that day. I will be forever grateful for not just that long-timer, but the many others that have helped me transition to chairing a meeting, chairing an intergroup committee, and being GSR of my home group.

When I arrived in AA, with all the grace of a burning jet approaching a mountain, I had no idea how to deal

with people. I was a lone drunk, preferring the company that doesn’t get between me and my bottle or ask me to share. By the way, trees and white walls are perfect companions if those are your only criterion for friends. Service has taught me how to operate in a social environment. In AA, no one is going to permanently disown a young new-comer for committing a faux pas, and there are no waiting crucifixes or stocks for punishment. Trust me, I have looked. What I did find was an entire host of good-hearted people that span from Ocean City to Deep Creek Lake that are willing to coach and guide me into being a contributing member of our society.

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Getting involved in the service structure at any level helped me feel a sense of belonging at first. I finally began to count myself a member that first day I brewed the coffee. Over time and

continued service, that sense of membership transformed into a sense of ownership and responsibility. I came to realize, through the council and guidance of others, that the burden of AA's future could belong to me, if I would have it. I

did, after all, agree to go to any lengths. Didn't I? I would add something to that agreement though, because it's through service that I learned that I did agree to go to any lengths, but I'll never have to go there alone. ☺

Young and in Service

Shannan C, MarGenSer Chair

I got sober at 24 years old, anxious and afraid and much younger than many of the people in AA where I lived. I know that I was at the jumping off point, I didn't care anymore whether I had friends my age to hang out with, I just wanted to stop drinking, and was willing to do whatever it took, even if that meant hanging out with people 20-30 years older than me on a regular basis. I started my journey into AA and did what people told me to do; I got a Sponsor, began working the steps and I got a homegroup. Very early on I felt passionate about giving back what was so freely given to me, I began my journey into service the first year of my sobriety by giving people rides to meetings and becoming the coffee maker at my homegroup. After my first year of sobriety I attended a district meeting and got roped into being the co-chair for our districts' alcahthon, I was hooked! I loved feeling a part of AA in a whole different way than just through my homegroup and immediately feel in love with service.

The Big Book says "God will help you create the fellowship you crave", this was definitely true for me. By just

doing the next right thing and by being willing to be of service, young people had begun to enter my life in AA and stay sober. Some of these people were involved in Area service and encouraged me to tag along. At first, I felt intimidated by all the people in AA with many years of sobriety, but than just like district service, I feel in love. I would sit in the Area assemblies and committee meetings and soak up the "process of AA."

I started on the Literature Committee, to later be the chair of that committee, onto the chair for the Grapevine Committee and now currently the chair of the MarGenSer Committee. Through Area service I have learned so much more about AA and myself, than I would have otherwise. I have been given the privilege to have a front row seat to the inner workings of AA. I have forged invaluable relationships with amazing people all across the state of Maryland, that I otherwise would not have met. These relationships have helped me to grow in my recovery as I learn lessons from people whom gone before me. At first I was scared that I would not be able to

fulfill my commitments due to inexperience, but I soon found out that AA was more concerned with my "availability" rather than my "ability". I was shown the way of service by the amazing people I met.

Many days I would look around an Area assembly and notice that I was probably the youngest in the room, but I was never made to feel less than, I was made to feel valued and loved. No one cared that I was young, they were grateful I was there. As I grow in age and sobriety, I am not always the youngest around anymore and I hope I can make young people feel as welcome in service as I did. I encourage girls that I work with to get involved with me, some have and some have stayed, because they too feel in love with service. I am so grateful that I did not let my fears on inadequacy keep me away; service has been a vital part of my sobriety. Without the lessons I have learned, and the relationships god created I know I would not be where I am today. The moral of the story? Don't let your age keep you away from service, you may be missing out on one of the best experiences of your sobriety. ☺

REACHING OUT TO THE "DARK DISTRICTS"

Many of our neighbors do not actively participate in Area 29, nor are their voices heard within AA as a whole. We encourage you to reach out to those districts without active GSRs or DCMs, sharing your experience of service beyond the home group and carrying the message one-on-one. Area 29 welcomes your ideas on how we can best do this and offers our support.

MARGENSER

P.O. Box 2651
Westminster, MD 21158



Return Service Requested

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mail to Maryland General Services, P.O. Box 2651
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