

2023 Remote Communities Communicator: Fulfilling Our Primary Spiritual Purpose with Remote Communities!!

Greetings to the members of the 73rd General Service Conference!!

The theme for the 2023 Pre-Conference Remote Communities Meeting held before the 73rd General Service Conference opens is Fulfilling Our Primary Spiritual Purpose with Remote Communities!!

This non-Conference event is an opportunity to learn how A.A. members across the U.S. and Canada transcend the barriers of geography, language, culture, and life conditions to carry our message to all who seek it. *Each area determines how to apply this definition to its specific circumstances.* Remote Communities can be found in most, if not all, areas in North America.

Requests for articles for this newsletter and the opportunity to be a presenter at the meeting were sent out in mid-February. We appreciate all of the responses we received.

We asked three presenters to give their experiences, strength, and hope regarding the following questions:

1. How to foster a thriving Third Legacy Culture with a Cultural Community?
2. How to foster a thriving Third Legacy Culture with a Geographic Community?
3. How to foster a thriving Third Legacy Culture with a Linguistic Community?

We encouraged each Area to submit an article of between 500 - 600 words. Articles can include anything that can help those involved with remote communities and might address such topics as the history of an area's Remote Communities efforts, the types of perils areas face, solutions that have proven effective, literature that has been used to carry the message, and plans for future involvement.

Thank you to all the areas which contributed to this year's Remote Communities Communicator Newsletter —09 – Mid-Southern California; 29 –Maryland; 69 –Utah; 78 – Alberta/ NWT; 79 – British Columbia/ Yukon; 80 – Manitoba; and 91 – Saskatchewan.

We want to thank our three presenters at the meeting, Mitchell B. (Panel 72, Area 09); Lori R. (Panel 73, Area 91) and Richard Mc. (Panel 72, Area 80). We also want to thank Misha Q. for her help and the staff at G.S.O. for their assistance in organizing this year's meeting and newsletter.

It has been a genuine honor for all of us to prepare and serve as Co-Chairs for this wonderful event. We hope everyone who attended the meeting left feeling more informed about the Remote Communities and will learn even more by reading the articles found here. ■

In Love and Service,

Janet F., *Panel 72/Area 23 Delegate (Southern Indiana);*

Richard Mc. *Panel 72/Area 80 Delegate (Manitoba);*

Tami L., *Panel 72/Area 78 Delegate (Alberta/NWT).*

CONTENTS

- 1 A Brief History of the Pre-Conference Remote Communities Meeting
- 2 Map of Delegate Areas
- 3 List of Article Submissions by Area, Delegate and Author
- 4 Announcements

► A Brief History of the Pre-Conference Remote Communities Meeting

This is a brief re-cap of the history leading up to the start of the Pre-Conference Remote Communities meeting. 1970's: The need for the special attention to Remote Communities efforts was identified back in the 70's or perhaps maybe even before that.

July 1993: An informal meeting concerning remote communities was held in Toronto, during the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of A.A. in Canada. Not much happened other than the fact that the need was expressed that something had to be done and members were encouraged to do what they were already doing in their areas.

February 1996: At the Western Canada Regional Forum in Calgary, the then Trustee-at-Large Canada organized a breakfast meeting with delegates, trustees and the G.S.O. Manager to discuss creating a Canadian committee that would deal with some perceived remote communities' issues. Outcome of meeting: needed to create a committee, needed to get support to set up a luncheon at the upcoming General Service Conference and work towards holding a special conference geared toward establishing a working committee consisting of 14 Canadian Areas and Alaska.

April 1996: Met over lunch at the 46th General Service Conference with some delegates, some G.S.O. staff and Board members to discuss the movement and to move ahead. A staff member was assigned to help coordinate efforts.

July 1996: In Toronto, the first Remote Communities Conference was held with all 15 Delegates. Several areas reported on the history of remote communities' work. It was determined that a remote community was any community to which it was difficult to carry the message because of language, culture, or geography. It was also determined from that meeting that we needed to continue to meet, and the most effective time would be prior to the yearly General Service Conferences.

1997: The Remote Communities Committee met prior to the opening of the 47th General Service Conference. In attendance were the original 15 delegates a few invited delegates from the U.S. areas that experienced some of the same concerns, several trustees and G.S.O. staff members. The 'remote communities' definition was reviewed and recommitted to, as was the purpose of the committee. The only action taken at this meeting was to open up the membership to the whole conference. It was determined that after 1997 the committee should have 4 co-chairs, one each from Western and Eastern Canada and one each from each side of the Mississippi in the U.S. A newsletter was also to be developed to assist in reporting what was happening in this vital area of 12th step work.

Present: The Pre-Conference Remote Communities meeting continues with 2-3 Co-Chairs and a staff member who provides support and assistance to the chairs of this committee as well the newsletter (Remote Communities Communicator). ■

Map of AA Areas with articles submitted from various Areas



This report is a confidential A.A. document for members only. This usage, to facilitate communication within the fellowship, was approved by the 1975 conference. Placement of this material in a location accessible to the public, including aspects of the internet, such as web sites available to the public, may breach confidentiality of the material and anonymity of members.

List of Article Submissions by Area, Delegate and Author

	Author		Author
Area 80 – Delegate is Richard Mc. (Panel 72)	John C.	Area 78 – Delegate is Tami L. (Panel 72)	Dayna J.
Area 09 – Delegate is Mitchell B. (Panel 72)	Maryka d.	Area 79 – Delegate is Rio-Layna D. (Panel 73)	Shan-non
Area 29 – Delegate is Kurt W. (Panel 72)	T.K.	Area 91 – Delegate is Lori R. (Panel 73)	Ray Mc
Area 69 – Delegate is Dave R. (Panel 73)	Teresa M.		

John C.
Area 80 — Manitoba

The Area 80 Remote Communities Working Group was formed after a meeting in 2000 at Misty Lake Lodge with other Remote Communities Working Groups.

At that meeting it was proposed that we focus on carrying the message to remote communities where language AND culture AND location made it difficult for people to access the message of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The group was formed and it was decided that we would carry the message to remote communities once in the winter and once in the summer.

To further communications, Manitoba Telehealth, a provincial secure high-speed video link used by medical specialists to connect with patients in remote communities, was contacted and permission was given to the working group for a Thursday evening meeting at 8 p.m.

The first Thursday of the month was a speaker meeting and the other nights were discussion meetings where the chair was passed between communities. This was a vital link to remote communities where this was the only A.A. meeting available. Over time, up to forty remote communities were involved.

Area 80 agreed to shoulder the responsibility of funding these two trips with a proviso that, due to the high cost of travelling to the north, if funds were needed prior to a trip that they would be made available and receipts would be later produced.

Many of our trips to the remote northern communities were made in the winter as the only access to them was by the ice roads. Many of these communities were on Telehealth and their kindness in billeting and feeding us was sincerely appreciated.

Over the twelve years I was involved with the Remote Communities, we had success where only with the use of this communication system did some of the community members sober up and some hit milestones in their recovery.

When we in Area 80 made the trip to the north, there were six to eight people involved in the trip. I am positive that each and every one enhanced their sobriety by making the trip.



Yes, a bunch of recovering alcoholics jammed into a van talking and carrying the message to the still suffering was reward enough for the week we spent travelling in the north country.

If you want to find out how life is in the remote communities: take a trip. And I don't mean a ten-minute drive.

We in the committee wish to express our gratitude to the people of the north for letting us see what obstacles they faced and how they tried to practice their program under adverse conditions.

May the people coming behind us try to carry the message to the still suffering alcoholic who live in Remote Communities where language and location and culture make it difficult to carry the message.

John C, Past Chair

Maryka D.
Area 09 — California

The Remote Communities Committee of Area 09 is relatively new.

It was formed to directly answer to the recovery needs of marginalized communities for whom barriers may exist in receiving the message of Alcoholics Anonymous. The Area 09 Remote Communities Committee, in their guidelines, expanded the definition of a Remote Community to include the unhoused, those who are financially vulnerable, the mentally ill and the LGBTQ/trans communities.

In our Area there are pockets where for these individuals it is very difficult to be truly included in the Fellowship and spirit of A.A.

This last year (2022) we worked very hard to launch a "Boots on the Ground" initiative focusing on the community of Long Beach, CA. Long Beach is extremely diverse and there are many potential alcoholics for whom receiving the message directly is very challenging due to a variety of adverse circumstances they may be in.

We put together Love and Service Recovery Bags and hit the streets with the help of various organizations to distribute these bags. Each bag contained everything one would need to begin their journey of recovery. Included were the Big Book, Daily



Reflections, Living Sober, Came to Believe and a Gratitude journal. We also added three-ply masks, a copy of the Grapevine and pencil cases containing Sharpie pens, highlighters and inspirational postcards to use as bookmarks. Communities covered directly were the unhoused, the mentally ill and/or challenged and the LGBTQ and Trans communities.

Also, Area 09's Remote Communities Committee took out a Google number and generic email address so we can be reached 24/7 by those needing immediate assistance.

In 2023, we are concentrating on serving the Hispanic women of our Area. Apart from language, there are aspects of Hispanic culture that might make it difficult for some Spanish-speaking women to achieve and maintain sobriety. Some feel marginalized by men in their communities. Our Remote Communities Committee hopes to give these women hope, support and resources. Bags containing similar items in Spanish will be distributed where most needed. Area 09 is vast and our approach was to embark on various "Boots on the Ground" initiatives sub district by sub district until eventually we are able to reach out to as much of Area 09 as possible.

Future projects include the military, indigenous populations of our desert areas, Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese communities. We are working diligently step by step to carry a message of experience, strength and hope to those for whom this vital service may be highly difficult or next to impossible to receive unless reached directly. Area 09 is proud and grateful to have had the body approve a Remote Communities Committee and will continue to work tirelessly to serve all communities regardless of geography, language, culture, gender and socioeconomic challenges.

Thank you for allowing me to share our work and commitment with you.

In Love, Service and Gratitude,

Maryka D.

T.K.

Area 29 — Maryland

In terms of geography, Maryland has a beautiful landscape of both the ocean, many bays and inlets, expansive farming fields, mountain terrains and more. It takes six hours with no traffic to travel the length of Maryland. In Area 29 Maryland, the Cooperation with Elder Community, Language and Culture Barriers, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Military and Veterans,



and much more falls to the Accessibilities Committee, and all are considered remote communities due to the barriers they face accessing A.A. meetings, service opportunities, home group membership, sponsorship, and A.A. literature.

Area 29 has 34 Districts and as of 2020, a membership of 16,726 people and 1,110 groups. There are 9,000 A.A. members registered with the Baltimore Intergroup, which serves Baltimore, Howard, parts of Anne Arundel Counties and Baltimore City.

Area 29 is home to ten intergroups housed in strategic regions to serve the alcoholic. In 2022, the first Hispanic Intergroup in Area 29 celebrated one year of service! We now have nine Spanish-speaking groups within Area 29, and the Baltimore Hispanic Intergroup is growing stronger every day.

The Spanish speaking A.A. members in Baltimore came to the Area 29 Assembly in March of 2022 and advocated for inclusion within all functions of Area 29. This effectively paved the path for a Linguistic District in Area 29, and we await an election of a Spanish-speaking DCM.

The Hispanic community also supported the Area 29, 50th State Convention, our first ever convention interpreted in Spanish. We had four workshops in Spanish, two interpreters, and we had borrowed interpretation equipment from our neighbor Area 13. We set up a welcome table where the equipment was signed in and out, and our convention signs and banners were translated in Spanish. We are finding communication is still a barrier as the Spanish speaking A.A. community's primary mode of communication is WhatsApp and the English-speaking A.A.s still rely on email.

While the Convention was successful in terms of Spanish registrations, we learned that in-person attendance was far less than those who registered. We were told that this is a custom at even exclusively Spanish conventions. The registered Hispanic members do expect that the agenda, lanyards, mugs, or swag be given to a home group representative to carry back to the Intergroup. Our registration table was not prepared for this but, now that we know, we plan to accommodate this and set those materials aside in advance. We would prefer to see an integration of

our programs, but we know that we need to continue to extend a welcoming hand and, in time, as we offer more inclusion and participation, that there will be an increased attraction to unify the Maryland State Convention for all.

We are looking forward to the 51st Annual Convention August 4-6, 2023, which will be held in Hunt Valley, Maryland. We have four Spanish-language workshops planned again this year, and our Friday night speaker will be our first Hispanic speaker in the main ballroom. We also have scheduled two Spanish speakers from the Baltimore Area planned to speak at the Alcathon that will run outside of the main speaking events. Area 29 has purchased its own Interpretation equipment, so we are fully self-supporting thanks to our Audio Committee and Area 29 contributions. We are looking forward to multi-lingual participation with an eye towards full representation on our committees. Thank you for allowing us to report back!

T.K., Past Chair

**Theresa M.
Area 69 — Utah**

I am happy to share my perspectives on how we are working to expand communication within the community of Alcoholics Anonymous for and among members who live in remote communities in the Utah Area 69 and who come from different cultures, ethnicities, genders, places, and languages.

All these individual characteristics intersect in the alcoholic person. They are differences that make us unique and that at the same time us alcoholics all share. My sponsor used to tell me that "A.A.s are the same in that we all feel different. We must find each other's (our mutual) experiences, strengths and hopes through group meetings, group unity and organized services."

For more than ten years in Utah, the goodwill of area servants and Hispanic A.A. groups have worked together to form and sustain the Hispanic Linguistic District #12. In the Area guidelines, one of the Alternate Delegate functions is to connect with linguistic districts, specifically taking care of language

interpretation needs and expanding communications between the Spanish and English-speaking communities.

Today, I see that the spirit of unity and service of the program is required at all levels of our inverted pyramid of authority and service, so that our differences do not become barriers to keep the A.A. message alive and we can reach the alcoholic person who still suffers without knowing or understanding the solution that we have found in A.A. to free us from this vicious disease, whether in the big city or in the remote village. We can start with our own attitude and the service committees of each group, districts, areas and intergroups.

It is important that all A.A.s realize the need to convey the message one to one, through personal practice of the 12 steps. This program has grown among social minorities because an A.A. member was willing to reach out and help someone they perceived as different at the time, and still were willing to help. Many alcoholics are communication bridges for others. The program has grown in the world because one person has followed the big book guide to work with others.

I know many A.A.s who have neglected to practice these program suggestions, and I include myself at some times in my recovery process. Translations of the big book, the 12 and 12, and other brochures and digital communication services have extended our ability to get the message across. A lot is also accomplished with La Viña and the Grapevine workshops and websites. However, I feel that many A.A.s still let our character flaws dominate us and are unwilling to change. We continue to believe that the gift that was given to us is ours only, and not to be shared any other way than "our way." We want to fix our personal affairs, perhaps those of our family, and maybe, those of our group. We may recognize the importance of one-on-one contact in person, but we rule out the other important media channels to pass the A.A. message on.

It is therefore also fundamental that we strengthen our general service structures, beginning with each of our groups. General Service, established since the early 1950s, has played a central role in continuing to deliver the message. La Viña and the Grapevine magazines, podcasts and websites serve to enter remote places in any cultural, geographical or gender aspect. Communications by electronic means are certainly faster, and it is important that they continue to expand following the traditions of anonymity and pri-



mary purpose, because neither the world is an isolated place (different places have ways of connecting with each other), nor all the people who live in a geographical area speak the same language or have the same beliefs (different linguistic resources and cultures are found in one place). A.A. members don't need to break their anonymity, but A.A. needs all kinds of means to get the message out to whoever needs it.

Teresa M., Alternate Delegate, panel 73

Dayna J.

Area 78 — Alberta

My name is Dayna J. and I am the alcoholic Remote Communities Chair for Area 78, Panel 72.

Area 78 covers all of Alberta, the NWT, Western Nunavut, NE and SE corners of BC, and Maidstone SK. We are now into the second year of our panel, and it feels as though we are just getting our feet under us. I am told that is typical for any A.A. service job, and I have found it to be true in any service position I've taken on up to this point.

I must confess, I am a Remote Communities Chair who lives in the big city of Calgary, and I feel very much disconnected from the remote communities of my Area. Fortunately, I have a wonderful committee, most of whom do in fact live in Remote Communities. Our committee has tried to see where to be of service, and I was reminded that the definition of Remote Communities includes cultural, language and geographical.

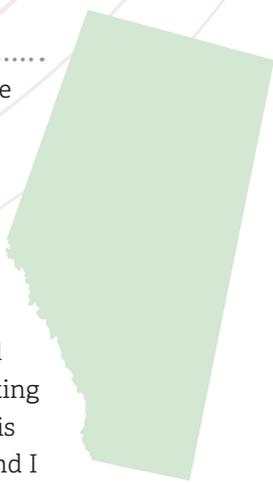
I have read articles in the Remote Communicator, and in Area 79's Remote Communities Workbook, and been inspired by stories of road trips to distant places in the area. I have tried to duplicate this experience and really "make things happen," and we know how it goes when I take over! I am learning that I must trust and rely on the group conscience of the committee and keep my ears open to what members are telling me when they approach me as the Remote Chair. I cannot fish for invitations which simply are not forthcoming, or foist myself on those who have not asked for help. That being said, what I have heard from the Remote Committee and those I have spoken with at assemblies and other service events, is that the communities in the North are in desperate need of support

and literature. We are in the process of updating Area 78's pamphlet for Remote Communities. This has also come straight out of the committee conscience, as it was brought to the attention of the committee that the pamphlet was seriously out of date. So, we do what is in front of us.

One of our projects has been to call First Nation offices in Alberta, to let them know we are here for them if they need meeting support, literature, or help chairing a meeting. As my service sponsor reminded me, it's important I ask them *if* people are asking them for help. An issue has come up with this. The First Nation offices and health centers we are calling do not necessarily know of A.A. members who could start meetings, even if we provided the info and literature for meetings. Will there be members willing to start these meetings? Area 78 has a virtual meeting called the Spirit of the North, which has been going since 2014. There are three meetings a week. It is hoped that this meeting can serve communities in the North. However, people often do not have WIFI.

I have on occasion received inquiries for Remote Communities inside the city. One request came in for a member who spoke Arabic. There is such a vast definition for Remote Communities, I don't know where to start. I respond to requests made to me as the chair and rely on my committee and those I speak with at A.A. events to get an idea of how I may be of service. It is a daunting task to reach all alcoholics who may be left behind. I try to inform myself as much as possible, by attending the many workshops offered virtually on anything that has to do with remote communities and accessibilities. This includes anything from language and culture, the deaf and hard of hearing. As an Area, it is extremely important that we have Remote Communities chairs in our Districts. This is a way to keep our ear to the ground and our eyes open to those suffering who have barriers of culture, language and geography in our vast area.

With the recent pandemic and surge of virtual meetings which followed, there has been much discussion amongst committee members about what may become of our virtual Spirit of the North meeting. There is another group conscience on this matter, and that is of those who consider it to be their home group. These are exciting and unprecedented times! The conversation comes up often and does not go away. This has brought on pondering of virtual districts, virtual meetings belonging to geographical districts, etc. Can the



Spirit of the North meeting be a group, even though it belongs to Remote Communities of Area 78?

I am little more than halfway through this panel, and who knows what God has in store or how I may be of service in this position. I may have envisioned adventures in the North, but other things have taken on the attention of the committee. Like a wide-open world of virtual workshops on everything ranging from security from “bombers” of virtual meetings, the deaf and hard of hearing community, A.A. in the military, etc. It is on-going work, but we can take it one step at a time. I am so thankful to those who are willing to be of service, and whose passion which drives the work forward. I am grateful to have this chance to be of service and look forward to seeing what the next year has in store.

Yours Truly,

*Dayna J., Remote Communities Chair,
Area 78, Panel 72*

Sha-nnon H

Area 79 — British Columbia BC/Yukon

Hello, my name is Shan-non and I'm an alcoholic. I currently have the privilege of serving Area 79, BC/Yukon, as their Panel 73 Remote Communities and Grassroots Chair. Remote Communities have been a huge passion of mine for several years now. When the pandemic closed the world down, I was serving as the District 42, North Surrey/North Delta, Remote Communities Chair. I felt like I was in exactly the right place, at exactly the right time.

I had already been attending virtual meetings, in an attempt to learn how to access them, so it was a natural transition to learn how to use the Zoom platform and simply pivot with the rest of Alcoholics Anonymous. I was so proud of A.A. for its quick and relatively seamless adoption of online platforms to continue to carry the message to the still suffering alcoholic. I was grateful to be one of those messengers!

At this time, I was already a remote sponsor for an incredible Tlingit woman, who had moved back to her home in Atlin, BC, the year prior. We shared and carried the message to each other, exclusively on the phone, when she was at home, or within a cell service area, when we could occasionally Facetime. The virtual platforms dynamically changed remote spon-

sorship for us, so long as the WIFI was in good shape. It was and is incredibly heart-filling to be able to see one another's faces while we laugh and cry our way through the work of the Twelve Steps. I cannot stress enough the importance, value, and spiritual satisfaction I get from remote sponsorship. Anyone can do it!

My district holds an annual service event called, Heart to Heart: For the Love of Service, where homegroups host panels on different topics throughout the day and the District Committee Chairs of our District have tables where they encourage and inspire folks to get involved in service and join in the loving work of the committees. Each year, the Remote Communities committee would put a sign-up sheet on their table, inviting people to volunteer to be remote sponsors. We have a huge list of willing people.

The continuing challenge, both in my District and in my Area, is finding and connecting with people who need and want our help. Being at the beginning of this panel, our Area 79 Remote Communities committee, is brainstorming ways for us to support and access, with sensitivity and compassion, the still-suffering alcoholics who find themselves in remote situations. We meet monthly to support one another in this life-saving work. We are also seeking to work with our fellow Area Committee Chairs, as we will find people in remote communities within every other committee.

I am also serving as the Secretary for the Inter-Area Remote Communities Committee Workgroup. This is a monthly meeting, open to all interested in furthering the work of Remote Communities work throughout the Can/U.S. service structure. If you are interested in attending, or know someone who is, please contact me at: interarearc@gmail.com and we will send you an invite!

As a person with invisible barriers, this work is quite personal for me. The biggest gift of covid-19, in my opinion, was the spotlight suddenly cast upon Remote Communities. We all became a remote community in our own way. The mission of the Area 79 Remote Communities committee is to create awareness of the needs and barriers that people face in accessing the fellowship and the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, be they cultural, geographical, language, or any other obstacle. This awareness begins in our own respective homegroups and districts. Who aren't we seeing and why? Who is missing? How can we reach them and how would they like to be approached?

In peace and loving service,

Sha-nnon H

Racy Mc.

Area 91 — Saskatchewan

"I had little doubt that a mighty purpose and rhythm underlay all," what a statement from one of our co-founders Bill W. What this asks me is how can we question the existence of a Spirit of the Universe and the Twelfth Step in the rhythm of our lives? "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

This fellowship is a way of life we gain as recovered alcoholics. I think I can best explain by giving you a bit of my own story on the discovery of my Higher Power and as a result a way of life that is full of blessings that have made me truly grateful.

I am part of the Indian Affairs' "60s Scoop;" forced to be raised in different foster homes, not knowing why, never told of family or why I was placed there. I was raised Roman Catholic, but as I grew older began to question this God, why would He allow the things that happened to me happen. I knew I didn't belong to the families I was placed with, as I was indigenous, and they weren't. I was also abused by a priest as a child. No wonder I questioned the existence of a loving God when I entered the doors of A.A. I was taught of a punishing God, you'll go to hell if you do that.

As I grew older, I figured I was going to hell anyway, I might as well make a good job of it. I began drinking at the age of 12 and finally found a friend and craved that feeling I felt after that first drink for the rest of my drinking career. It became all about poor me and alcohol was my fixer. Alcohol was my life and as a result caused me a troubled life, towards the end, trying to commit suicide as a solution to all my troubles. Losing my employment and facing criminal charges as a result of my last drinking binge, I reached out to A.A.

A person I worked with was in the program and I asked him for help, he took me to my first meeting and later became my sponsor. I struggled with the steps and the concept of God, was told to use It as Good Orderly Direction or Group of Drunks. The fellowship was my Higher Power the first couple of years. My home group in the beginning was one and a half hours,

one step was read a meeting followed by one tradition a week. Still, I couldn't do them. Finally, my sponsor suggested that I do a step series. I figured I would do them to the best of my ability as I didn't want to have to do them again, and I didn't want to share my past with anyone. I was very fortunate in the person I did my step five with, I handed him my step four and he set it on his desk, and we talked. He was able to open me up in a way I didn't know was possible. He drew things out of me that I hadn't even put in my step four. At the end he asked if I wanted my step four back, I said no, and he placed it in the fireplace and said, "It's in God's Hands now."

It's hard to explain the feeling I had as I drove home that evening. Living on an acreage, my eyes were opened to the wildlife and the awesome sky of our Creator's creation. The baggage I'd been carrying around for years was gone. What an unbelievable and unexplainable feeling. I came to believe in a Higher Power whom I chose to call my Creator who was loving and forgiving, not the punishing God I was raised with. Acceptance of the program became easier to comprehend and to do the simple things suggested. I was able to finish the step series and thus began my new way of life.

Blessings started to happen, because of my alcoholism my first marriage failed, and I remarried to a beautiful woman. She and her family accepted me as who I was, I didn't have to pretend I was someone I wasn't. Twenty-four years ago, we had a family reunion with my siblings who I didn't even know existed. I learned of my family history and why we ended up part of the 60s scoop. All the questions I had as a youth and all the misplaced blame I had placed on my mother for ending up in foster care were revealed. How well we bonded as a family was astonishing. Every long weekend in August we now have a family pow wow at our acreage.

Let me tell you of some of the God winks I have experienced. I had open-heart surgery with eight bypasses. Before the surgery, while in the hospital being kept alive by a pump, I noticed people standing at the end of my bed. Other faces appeared amongst them — just faces, no bodies. Right before surgery, when the doc was explaining the risks, I left and was surrounded by an awesome bright light so warm and comfortable it's hard to explain. It felt like the warmest hug of love I had ever received. I wanted to go into it but was then back on the operating table being stretched out with the doc still talking to me. I now have cancer and have had a few operations and treat-

ments, chemo put me in intensive care a couple of times, but a calmness comes over me knowing I'll be ok. I was given less than a year a couple of years ago, but the new treatment immunotherapy has stopped the cancer. It's still there but not growing. The lymph nodes that were infected have shrunk. God winks.

Service work in this awesome fellowship has given me many blessings also. Service work in my home group, GSR all the way to the humble position of serving as Delegate for Area 91 Panel 69, then becoming Delegate Chair of the 70th conference is an experience I wish for everyone.

While in New York at my first conference a feeling of, "What am I doing here? Who am I? Just an Indian from northern Saskatchewan!" Here I was representing the fellowship of Saskatchewan in NY. I was shaking. I had to leave and get some fresh air. I walked outside. Across the street was a church I hadn't noticed it before, with its doors open. I went in. A blast from

the past - the old catholic church statues all around, candles burning, pews with the kneelers. I entered a pew. I never went to catholic churches since my youth. I knelt, said a prayer, and that calmness came over me that everything would be ok. On my way back to the Conference I met Scott, the Canadian Trustee At Large. He asked me how it was going, I told him. He asked me to walk with him. What a wonderful sharing experience we had. That evening I became Delegate Chair, name pulled from a hat the same way I became delegate of Area 91. The Creator keeps blessing me in this amazing program.

I'd like to leave you with a quote from Herbert Spence, "There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments, and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance—that principle is contempt prior to investigation."

In Love and Service

Ray Mc, Past Delegate Area 91 Panel 69

Area 78

Our International Connections and our North/South Connections



Coming as I do from BC/Yukon Area 79, where there are enormous geographic challenges, the continued growth and attention being paid to Remote Communities is inspiring to witness. And now, looking at it from the perspective of a soon-to-rotate Trustee at Large (Canada), it is even more humbling to have seen the hand of A.A. reach from the far north of Canada to the far south of Argentina and Chile in two remarkable events during my term.

I have always felt there is a strong bond between the international work that we do, and the remote communities work. First and foremost, both are of course about reaching the alcoholic who still suffers. And both are about removing barriers to serve those people. I know, as a Trustee at Large, that the International reports on the work that other countries are doing inspire and excite people. I also know just how vital connecting with those challenges of geography, culture and language in our own backyard is — and it is equally as inspiring and exciting.

It is with that perspective that North/South Connections was born. This remarkable project, bringing together three service structures, four countries,

three languages, members from home groups separated by thousands of miles and kilometers of distance, crossing geographic and cultural borders, has an equally remarkable history.

When, in 2020, the General Service Board, AAWS and the General Service Office of A.A. took a deep breath and took a leap of faith into holding its annual Conference using a virtual platform, there was an international ripple effect. Other service structures, which had also been holding their collective breaths in terms of how to conduct the business of A.A. in a pandemic, took heart, and began to hold their own Conferences virtually. One of the structures was Argentina. The GSB of Argentina generously invited the Trustees at Large from our service structure to attend their Conference, which we were honored to do.

During their Conference, there were discussions about their Regional Forums, with particular attention being paid to their challenges with Region 6. Region 6 is the southernmost part of Argentina and includes Patagonia. It had not been truly connected to the service structure up to this point, for many reasons familiar to those of us in the Canada/U.S. service structure

who have experienced the difficulties involved with keeping our remote communities connected. A sparse population base, an even sparser A.A. membership, difficulties accessing literature, lack of infrastructure, travel barriers, language and cultural diversity — all of these are familiar to both the north and the south. And so, an idea was born: What about a Forum in support of Region 6, and one that might, thanks to virtual technology, be able to connect people in the far south of Argentina, with people in the far north of Canada? The World Service Meeting Delegate from Argentina, Alberto C., took the idea to his General Service Board. We brought the idea back to the US and Canada. And then we all together took another deep breath and once again took a leap of faith.

Argentina formed a Committee, and we (the two Trustees at Large, the Acting International Desk Coordinator Mary C.), our interpreter Hernan M. and our Technical team (Mike W. and Laura S.) were invited as full participants to their planning sessions. That grew to also include two more General Service Office desk assignments - Regional Forums and Accessibilities/Remote Communities (with International as project lead). Friday afternoons/evenings in Argentina became part of the cadence of our A.A. lives. It was inspiring to witness the care and heart that Argentina put into both the outreach to their remote communities, and the deep value they placed in the participation of those members in the conversations, and in decisions that were made. They taught us lessons in grace, and how to keep our A.A. hearts and carrying the message at the forefront of what we were doing.

That event, months in planning, was remarkable. It was consciously kept relatively small — for many people from the South American side, it was to be their first time sharing outside of their groups. The importance of work done together by our tech team and our interpretation team cannot be stressed enough. As well as using the built-in system interpretation feature, they made it possible for people who could not access the video conference platform to call in, on their phones, and be placed in an interpretation “room” where they would get the language that they needed — Spanish, French or English. Removing that barrier was brilliant.

The May 15, 2021 program format was three, two hour sessions, each with six panelists (two from each participating structure) and a moderator. The top-

ics for the sessions were: “How My Remote Group Started,” “Challenges Met, Faced and (Maybe) Overcome,” and “Our Personal Stories.” Each session was followed by a Q & A session. Videos were shown between sessions, featuring many of the communities that panelists were from.

To witness people connecting with shared experience, hope and solutions across such vast differences, to see and hear both our differences and our commonalities, no matter where we are, made this event a truly spiritual experience.

It was felt that we in the U.S./Canada service structure could reciprocate with a special, virtual Forum on remote communities, which included sharing not just on the challenges of geography (which the first event focused on), but also of culture and of language. And so, on July 16, 2022, the second North/South Connections Forum was held. There were 18 speakers, six each from the U.S./Canada, Argentina and Chile service structures, with panels on each of the three topic areas.

With 532 total U.S./Canada registrants and a peak attendance of 345 (1,722 individual log-ins), this virtual forum was a complex undertaking from a linguistic and technical point of view. Hernan M. and his team of translators rendered panelist shares into French, Spanish, and English, while American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters signed for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing community. The fact that the Forum included panels on linguistic challenges, and on hidden communities such as the Deaf community, made the effort essential for full participation.

Again, the international cross-over opportunities allowed for deep sharing and new understanding from all sides. It’s important to note how our international partners used the North/South Connections as a springboard for reaching further into communities that they hadn’t been able to approach before, using tools new and old. One of the members of the organizing committee from Argentina drove for hours to pick up some of the participants from remote areas of her country, and had them sharing from her home, because where the panelist lives doesn’t have the infrastructure to be able to support teleconferencing. Her love for A.A. and for these members was palpable.

The North/ South Connections Forums painted a picture of A.A. members engaging with others in Twelfth Step work that seeks to be inclusive, thoughtful, and far-reaching. No matter where we are, we are not alone. ■

ANNOUNCEMENTS

GSO has archival copies of some A.A. literature that was translated by local groups into a number of Native American and First Nation languages. Staff on the Treatment and Accessibilities desk are seeking input from groups about these translations and the needs of local communities. If there are members in your Area who are bilingual in English and any of the following languages, please ask them to be on the lookout for communication from the Accessibilities desk at GSO asking for help from the Fellowship. *Thank you!*

- ▶ Algonquin (Quebec)
- ▶ Cree
- ▶ Dene
- ▶ Hawaiian
- ▶ Inuit
- ▶ Inuktitut (Northern Quebec)
- ▶ Inuktitut (Labrador)
- ▶ Mi'kmaq
- ▶ Mohawk
- ▶ Montagnais-Naskapi
- ▶ Ojibway
- ▶ Oji-Cree

