

Carrying the message to the hearing impaired

The ongoing problem: How to make AA accessible to the hearing impaired

An alcoholic who is hearing impaired would find it very difficult to get the message of Alcoholics Anonymous when walking into an AA meeting without a signer. The fellowship is very limited to a hearing impaired. If the person that is hearing impaired doesn't have a signer the group make efforts in finding one. Let's say the group has to decide at a group conscience what they should do. This could take days, weeks, even months. The new man or woman shouldn't have to wait to find out that what they thought was their last hope, could seem hopeless too. It's important that we get the message to them right away. How many of us would have stayed if the group had to decide what to do with us? This problem with the hearing impaired has come up in several districts in Area 20.

The solution:

This problem was discussed at the special needs committee at the NIA summer assembly on 6/12/04. This solution came partly from the AA guidelines, from GSO & Carrying the AA Message to the Hearing impaired Alcoholic; 2nd column, 1st paragraph, 1st page. *“Experience shared with GSO indicates that numerous areas have formed special needs committees and this experience seems to indicate that these committees can be a partial solution to funding the cost of signers. Groups are encouraged to contribute and designate funds for these committees. Sometimes a group will pay half of the cost for interpreters with the fund providing the other half.”*

It is the recommendation of the committee that all districts put 1% or more of their funds in a special account to be used for signers only. Groups or individual members could also contribute to the fund. When the fund reaches a certain amount, say \$100 or more, it could be capped off, and held in reserve. This amount will depend on each district's available funds. When a person that is hearing impaired goes to an AA meeting the group's GSR could contact the district and ask for funds to help pay for the signer. The group's GSR could contact the DCM or Special Needs chairperson or treasurer and get funds in a very short amount of time. This would help the alcoholic to begin recovery sooner; perhaps within even a couple of days.

Our suggestion is that the district does not pay for the entire fee. The group should be responsible for ½ of the expense. Again, the decision will be yours to make. Prices for the signers vary, there are agencies that can assist the hearing impaired members as well. The districts special needs chair and the Area 20 special needs coordinator can help locate signers. Signers can be very affordable, lets not let money stand in the way of carrying the message.

What is a person's life worth? 10 % of the world's population is hearing impaired or hard of hearing. That means that 10% of all alcoholics are the same. How many members that are hearing impaired do you know of in AA? It certainly isn't 1 in 10. Please let's help carry the message to the still suffering alcoholics that are hearing impaired in and out of AA.