

PRAASA 2016
Special Needs Roundtable

This Roundtable was on Friday night. It was solely focused on Special Needs-Accessibilities.

3 AA members present: Darryl, Roberta and Jon

Each member shared their story regarding Special Needs-Accessibilities.

Jon – A deaf member had access to an interpreter at Kaiser Permanente Chemical Dependency Recovery Program (CDRP) meetings because Kaiser paid for the interpreter. The member and interpreter (also an AA member) went to a regular AA meeting in the CDRP facility. That member asked the General Secretary of that group, a local District Committee Member (DCM), for help in starting other interpreted meetings. The DCM brought the idea to the local Area committee, hoping to copy Area 08 (San Diego/Imperial Counties) method. The Area committee did not accept that idea. The DCM started an independent, 9th Tradition service committee. That committee initially focused on providing information resources to all with Special Needs questions. Currently, it focuses on facilitating interpreting for the deaf at AA meetings. Local deaf members are in the process of picking out interpreted meetings they would like to attend regularly. They have tentatively picked one group and the committee will soon ask their General Secretary about speaking to the business meeting of that group. It is a large group that meets many times per week. The idea is for one interpreted meeting per week to be there and for it to be paid for in some way by the group.

Q: Are you doing the same rotation as the rest of General Service (two years)? A: We are past due for rotation, trying to find a new Chairperson.

Darryl – I knew Bruce who was deaf. His sister could sign. She had to move away. At conventions we had an interpreter for him. San Diego seems to be miles ahead of everyone else. That was the first roundtable I had been to that was totally Special Needs-Accessibilities. They had two interpreters. There was one to sign into American Sign Language (ASL) and another one to speak ASL into English.

Roberta – I sent emails soliciting ideas for the committee and waited for replies. It took awhile so I took two things that were near to my heart. I'm 35 miles from the nearest meeting. Cowboys were bringing dogs to meetings. They would have dogs with the service jackets. I got the ADA Guidelines. What is a service animal? What you are allowed to ask about the service animal? What to do when it is not really a service animal? There are two service animals. The first is a dog and the second is a miniature horse. You can only ask two questions: what is the dog trained to do and something else I can't remember. You can't ask a person what their disability is. I go to all district meetings since we are so spread out. If the dog is out of control, you can ask him to leave. Or if the dog is not house broken, you can ask him to leave.

Q: What about comfort dogs? A: They are not recognized by the ADA.

Roberta – I want to go to the VA in Reno and talk to them about AA. In 4 or 5 years time they will start showing up in meetings after getting arrested. I want to give them information on how to contact AA.

Roberta – my other thing is places that have meetings with accessibility issues. People said buildings are grandfathered in and meet the requirements. Where in the Big Book does it say we stop at what the law requires? We should go further and make the meeting accessible. I took the information provided by the University of South Carolina. Any state law can be enforced by the states as long as it meets or exceeds the ADA requirements. I got a sketch on how to set up a meeting room when people with wheelchairs are coming. A club in Reno asked me for regulations. They asked if they could enlarge the bathroom to make it accessible. People that do not have a disability do not get it. I only give some information at one time. If you go to some rural districts, they might go to sleep. Usually at end of presentation, I show the 12 Steps in Sign Language. There are also stories in Sign Language. Some groups like it. Other groups don't feel they need it. But they might need it in the future. We have 13 districts. I visited 6 districts so far. I visited 15 signers for the SWACYPA in Reno in June.

Darryl – Our local community college teaches ASL. The instructor owns an ASL agency. I hoped to get some student volunteers to help out that were proficient enough. If someone is court-ordered you have to have a professional signer. If they have an amateur they can claim the interpreter gave me wrong information. In CA, if someone is court-ordered, the court is required to pay for the interpreter. Las Vegas has mental health court now. That is welcome to me. You might want to ask the CPC Chair. In Reno, they have a judges college. We have a meeting with the mayor's liaison once a month. It's called the Faith Initiative. They have other 12-step programs. We've been trying to liaise with the religious community. Not one minister went to our table. We're going to have approach them. Some are open. They are in 12-Step programs. Others think they have a spiritual license and they look at us as competition. I'd like to see a mental health convention. If they don't approach us, then we don't get there. I'd like to approach them and have us in there.

Regarding nursing homes, I have volunteers from the hotline to take meetings into homebound people. The Sunshine Committee takes meetings to people in hospitals or physical rehab.

Northern Nevada Intergroup has almost the same committees that we have. I started inviting people from that Intergroup to speak at General Service. I'm trying to get the Chairs to cooperate. It's working out well in Reno. The Intergroup does not have a Special Needs Committee.

Darryl – our intergroup/central office is pretty good. I started out as Alternate for half a year and I took over. I've got all DVDs that are subtitled available. The CDs on Big Book and Twelve and Twelve are in all library systems now. We have a state library and I haven't got to them yet. Our local PBS has a resource for hearing

impaired people and blind people. That stuff is in those resource centers. I have ASL DVDs as well. That was my big accomplishment in the first year. Now I'm trying to get my first meeting going. I'm working with a person. She can read my lips. Our first meeting will be this coming Tuesday. I'm committed to it for three months. That's how long it takes to get the meeting in the schedule. We have a website. Few people understand what Accessibilities/Special Needs is all about. It was a recovery industry convention. Sometimes we double with Al-Anon. Part of our mission is to get the message out to the AA community.

Jon – I view our Special Needs committee as being similar to Bridging the Gap (BTG). We are trying to coordinate direct services. BTG coordinates someone going to their first meeting out of corrections or treatment with someone else. We are trying to coordinate having ASL interpreters at hearing meetings. Also, I think Special Needs has Public Information (PI) and Cooperation with the Professional Community (CPC) aspects. We need to inform deaf members of the coming service, deaf alcoholics of the availability of an interpreted meeting, agencies that work with the deaf about the meeting, and the general, local AA fellowship itself about this service. In my experience it's best to build committee members and provided services gradually and at the same time. I've seen from when the deaf member went through Kaiser CDRP that people will come to an interpreted meeting once it is known.

You can grow a committee. There are a lot of H&I people now. From 1990 with 6 people there are over 30 now. You have a Co-Chair and you break them in so they don't have to reinvent the wheel.

It's hard to get people to do Special Needs. I think they are afraid of the unknown. I think if they don't have a special need they don't know how to relate to it.