

How to start a Deaf Access Committee from the Deaf Access Committee, Austin Texas

1. Form a committee

It worked well to have a Deaf Access committee with Deaf AA members, Hearing AA members, and those with long term sobriety and experience with traditions and service as well as newer AA members willing to serve. Having this combination of AA members will help immensely. Experienced AA members who know traditions can help other AA members understand why AA should support Deaf Access and Deaf AA members can share their experiences, good and bad, to help others relate and identify.

OUR EXPERIENCE: Unity within the Deaf Access Committee was found when the focus was not on Deaf vs hearing , but on AA: we are all alcoholics, we have that in common, we are equals within the fellowship, our goals for the committee was to give each member the same opportunity: access to the message of AA, because WE get sober , we all need each other. We need to share our experiences as alcoholics, our connection with AA, our common welfare-recovery.

Find interpreters

Interpreters can be found through the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf .AA members may know of sources as well.

OUR EXPERIENCE

We had no money at all when we started, and had to raise money to pay interpreters. We needed an interpreter for our business meeting- a monthly meeting that was exactly one hour long-that's all we could afford. At first we couldn't even afford that, but some helped us out by volunteering their services until we could pay them.

Our interpreter liaison and interpreter coordinator came up with a contract that outlines the pay we could offer, time limitations, code of conduct expected, cancellation procedures, etc. We use certified, professional interpreters who follow a code of ethics, binding them to keep confidential anything they see or hear. Someone who knows sign language does not qualify as an interpreter. Interpreters complete many years of training.. not only in language, but also ethics, culture and vocabulary. AA concepts and terminology are difficult to interpret. In keeping with the 7th tradition, stating that AA pays its own way, we hire special works, pay them through 7th tradition funds.

3. Decide how to operate:An Accessibility committee can be part of the District, Intergroup, Area, or stand alone.AA Guidelines Carrying the Message to Deaf Alcoholics and Guidelines for Serving the Alcoholic with Special Needs Alcoholics(both free off the AA website) share that this is within the traditions and within our AA experience to do.

OUR EXPERIENCE We were an AA committee, not connected to anything else. A lot of people questioned whether we were really a part of AA, because we were standing outside the service structure. We decided to become a part of the District or Intergroup, so we could be viewed as a legitimate service entity, Intergroup had been very helpful and supportive to us, and we felt like we served a similar service-basically providing information about meetings- so we asked Intergroup if we could be a part of them, as a standing, permanent committee. They voted yes, under certain conditions we all agreed upon. It meant sacrificing some independence, and compromising, but it has worked well.

It would have been an option to be part of the District as well. The District has a Treatment Facilities Committee, and part of the Treatment Facilities is Special Needs/Accessibility.. Initially, Our committee initially came out of the District Treatment and Special

Needs/Accessibility. When we began collecting money for interpreters, we asked the District to hold our money in a special account until we could get our own bank account. We did this by registering as an incorporated entity with the state, only because this allowed us access to banking privileges. We are no longer incorporated now.

Being part of the District or Intergroup has several advantages. We are viewed as part of AA; you have access to the fellowship through e-mail groups, newsletters, flyers, various communication resources. We received money from both the District and Intergroup initially which helped us until we become more able to support ourselves.

Bylaws-Committee and committee positions

Decide how your committee operates and what roles are necessary. Generally speaking, most committees are going to want a chairperson to facilitate the committee, a secretary to record minutes, and a treasurer if money is involved. Other members to participate in the group conscience process, decision making, and other necessary tasks, such as making flyers, communicating with the AA fellowship, helping organize workshops or other things that may or may not come out of the business at hand.

OUR EXPERIENCE: We created by-laws that define who and what we are, why we exist, what our goals are, and what our committee consists of. These can be viewed on our website at www.austindac.org We have a chairperson, who facilitates the business meeting, a secretary to record minutes, a treasurer to make financial reports, an interpreter liaison who communicates with the interpreters, an interpreter coordinator, who schedules the interpreted AA meetings and makes sure there is an

interpreter there, and then various other “members at large. We ask anyone who wants to visit our meeting to give advance notice if they want to present something for committee business, or if they want to be a part of the committee, to read all the information on the website first, so as not to ask questions that could have been answered already, through available information.

4. Finances:

As AA pays its own way, it is a process to begin getting 7th tradition contributions. You might begin by coming up with a plan of action: goal setting, minimum budget needs, for example, supporting one meeting a week, and one business meeting a month, and what would that cost? Ask for help from the District, Area, Intergroup or AA groups to make a beginning as you also begin to communicate your purpose out to all AA groups in your District.

OUR EXPERIENCE: We started with an event to bring money in: a silent auction and open mike music. The auction brought in people who liked to shop (all items were donated) and the music and brought in another crowd. The event and the music was interpreted by three interpreters who volunteered their services. It was a fun event, we raised \$500.00 and were able to begin. The Intergroup manager was impressed with our efforts thus far, and asked the board to help us. The Intergroup board gave us \$3,000 seed money!! That was an immense help, (we wept for gratitude) and allowed us to begin. We were able to pay our interpreter for the business meeting, set up one interpreted meeting a week, and start going to groups to ask for 7th Tradition contributions. We now have many groups and individuals that contribute regularly, and continue to get regular support from the District and Intergroup as well.

PI/CPC

Public Information-within the fellowship and outside the fellowship(communication with professional community)

Begin getting the word out about the access committee, why it exists, and how to support it. Communicate with AA groups and entities, and also with Deaf organizations that might come in contact with alcoholics needing help. Decide how to inform AA of available interpreted meetings as well

OUR EXPERIENCE: There are several reasons the DAC is successful.

- 1) We are a part of AA through Intergroup, not viewed as a separate organization with separate purposes.
- 2) A variety of AA members participating on the committee-so, again, as to be viewed as representative of all of AA and having a balance of experienced members and newer members, in years of recovery, with service on all levels, and with Special needs accessibility , personal or otherwise. The District Treatment chair in our District did workshops on Special Needs alcoholics and invited Deaf, blind, handicapped, wheelchair bound members to share their experiences, good and bad, with the rest of the fellowship. AA members attending were informed through listening to personal experiences about things they were unaware of: lack of accessibility, desperation, commitment to stay sober, and the love of AA . It became clear that it is fairly easy for all alcoholics to get the help they need from the home group, with the exception of the Deaf alcoholics. That's when the District Chair and another Deaf AA member realized we need to have a committee and worked together to help make accessibility possible.
- 3) Constant contact with the fellowship, informing them of the need for accessibility, through various means:

1. visiting the Intergroup board meetings, and/or Intergroup Representatives meetings
2. visiting the District meetings
3. visiting group consciences of every AA group in your District
4. having a table at AA conferences ,workshops, or events to share information
5. Writing articles about the committee and its activities and purposes for the District newsletters, Intergroup newsletters, Grapevine, any AA newsletter you can that can be a form of communication
6. Posting information about your committee and its needs wherever you can-AA bulletin boards, Intergroup website, your DAC website if you have one, (ours is through Intergroup but if you are a part of District, it can be under Treatment/Special needs) making flyers,etc.
7. We made cards to hand out to everyone about our committee, and it has the website, contact info, etc. on it . I give it to anyone who may come in contact with a Deaf alcoholic, and I give it to new Deaf people I may see, when I go to treatment centers or AA meetings.
8. Our meetings were posted on the Intergroup website with other AA meetings, but under a special section so it was easy to find.

9. Know the AA literature, use the AA literature

AA has developed guidelines for both special needs alcoholics, (which includes Deaf alcoholics) and guidelines for Deaf Alcoholics. These guidelines were developed from AA members and groups that sent information to GSO about their experiences with such things. This will help back up committee goals to do has already been approved by AA as a whole. Use this as a resource to share information.

Special needs DVD-a very useful tool, aside from personal experience, is a new DVD out, in ASL but English captioned and with voice, which has stories of various special needs alcoholics, including Deaf. Each story is 5 or 6 minutes long. It really helps

to carry the message and make people more aware of the need for accessibility. We strongly advise you to view it and use it. You might show it on a laptop, it's better if you have a projector to use attached to the laptop. Test your equipment before you use it, set it up early. (this is where our techie friends help!!) There is a print version of this DVD we hand out too, called Special Needs Alcoholics.

10. Get word out to any professional who may come in contact with a Deaf alcoholic-treatment centers, Deaf churches, Deaf schools, put an ad in the newspaper, post it on Deaf websites, etc.

9. Always go together to give information-hearing AA members, and Deaf AA members. Again-this is an AA committee and an AA cause. It is directly related to OUR primary purpose. We use an information sheet on what we share and some questions that generally come up, that any committee member can take with them to use as a guideline of what to share on.

Communication and Cooperation:

In a pamphlet called, "The AA Group, Where it all begins", there is a description of how to solve group problems. It is through the process of an informed group conscience, which is where we go to address the problem of lack of accessibility. Our pamphlet says that almost every group problem can be solved through sharing information, using the traditions, and spiritual principles. Bringing in people who have experience with traditions and have experience with service is helpful. The pamphlet reads "For all involved, a good sense of humor, cooling of periods, patience, courtesy, willingness to listen and wait, plus a sense of fairness and trust in a Power greater than ourselves, have been found far more effective than legalistic arguments or personal accusations." The AA Group, Where it all Begins, p. 30-31

The Big book says we have ceased fighting anything and anyone. the approach described above has worked for us. Experienced AA

members sharing information about why Deaf Access is needed, connected to our primary purpose, and within our traditions, Deaf AA members sharing why AA is important to them and how much we need and want sobriety and recovery, answering questions, then leaving and letting the group conscience decide. Every AA group is a spiritual entity, and the AA fellowship is a spiritual fellowship-not an organization. Trusting the God of your understanding and praying, every step of the way, has been a part of our journey.

There are Access Committees, Deaf Access Committees, Special Needs Committees interpreted AA meetings, stories of sober Deaf Alcoholics published in the Grapevine and Box 459, and on the group, District, or Area level, accessibility is being supported all over the country. It can be done. We hope these guidelines might assist you in your efforts to carry the message to all alcoholics.

This we owe to AA's future: to place our common welfare first, to keep our fellowship unites, for on AA unity depend our lives, and the lives of those who come.

Norma A.
Deaf Access Committee

Chairperson 2016