



AA Deaf Intergroup of Central Texas

The **AA Deaf Intergroup Digest** *News and Actions*

October 2020

Greetings from Norma A., Manager for the Alcoholics Anonymous Deaf Intergroup of Texas! Much has happened to all of AA in the last many months, presenting both challenges and changes that have created new avenues for growth and opportunities to find ways to reach out to newcomers.

AADI Interpreted Meeting Updates

Currently, there are no Face to Face meetings for local Deaf AA members, for many reasons. One, is the same reason most of AA faces, the need to be safe and distanced, and to keep those we love safe as well. Two, interpreters immediately expressed that they were not comfortable doing in-person meetings. Like most of AA, we were forced to go to virtual platforms.

This offered many opportunities. While 99% of our local AA groups went to on-line meetings, and interpretation resumed on a virtual basis, we quickly got requests from our Deaf AA members to have other meetings, out of our Central Texas area, interpreted. We voted, yes, if the request came from a Deaf AA member here, we would provide an interpreter. Soon, Deaf AA members found more virtual meetings, and a calendar was put together from AA members all over the United States for all kinds of meetings available on various types of video conferencing, including both interpreted meetings and meetings in American Sign Language, all organized by time zones.

Reports came in that for the first time, Deaf AA members were able to have meetings all the time, at no cost. Many good things came from this! More connections were made, and more experiences shared, and more participation for all. It was truly amazing.

AADI OUTREACH

Another change, due to the virtual platforms, was the amount of service workshops that AADI board members participated in. Service workshops were popping up everywhere, on topics related to our three legacies, on Traditions, Concepts, Service

positions, and there were several on Accessibilities as well. Others there found out about our Deaf Intergroup and took an interest in how we were serving the fellowship. Afterwards, two Board members, our interpreter Liaison, Ash S. and myself-the Intergroup Manager Norma A.- teamed together to share at a Service Workshop hosted by past trustee Bill N. Soon more invitations to share came. An Area Accessibility Committee in Colorado, a Chicago Area Service Sharing session, in New York at the request of the DCM there, and inquiries came in from the Bay Area, Massachusetts, Florida, Louisiana, New York, and Atlanta, Georgia and even London, England. People want to know how we got started, how to find interpreters, how to get the information out there, whether ASL the only type of sign language, (actually, there are more than 135 different sign languages) and more. The last workshop presented was on “Carrying the Message to the Underserved AA Member” and was given at the 35th Annual Intergroup (Virtual) Seminar in Des Moines, Iowa, at the invitation of the Intergroup Convention Chair.

What this resulted in this was to open more doors for more Deaf AA members in other parts of the country to gain accessibility, and it helped create a network of those who are working together in accessibilities service.

It’s also worth mentioning, that like other AA entities, our contributions were slightly down from AA groups, but our individual contributions rose, in part due to those who heard of our experience at these service workshops.

Virtual Experiences for Deaf AA members

Adjusting to a new platform has been a learning curve for us all, but many have come to understand that for the Deaf AA member, again, there are even more differences. Looking at small boxes containing tiny faces makes it impossible to read lips or see expressions or view the interpreter. In addition, 70% of American Sign Language comes from the facial expressions so it is imperative that the face of the interpreter (or the Deaf AA member sharing) is visible. Some education for those wishing to make meetings accessible to AA members has been necessary, such as understanding that screen sharing changes the view for Deaf AA members, if the interpreter view disappears. Technological solutions have included captioning (for those that know English), “pinning” the interpreter so Deaf AA don’t have to scroll through pages finding them, or spotlighting speakers and interpreters at the same time for better visibility. Other options discovered were having separate virtual rooms, one for Deaf and one for hearing AA members. Break out rooms were less popular. We are happy to report that things are continuing to improve, as more of these virtual platforms companies are adding better accessibility features.

AADI Board meetings

Our AA Deaf Intergroup Board members continue to have both hearing and Deaf , with newer members and more experienced members, a mix of those who have been with us for a while and those who have joined more recently. We rotate positions, have elections every annually, and work together now on the same virtual platforms that host our AA meetings. We frequently have interested visitors, such as the Accessibility chair of the District, or Deaf AA members from the local fellowship.

We are currently working on reviewing our guidelines, pamphlets and other materials to make sure they are put up date and reflect changes from the last couple of transitional years. We created a new position of Co-Treasurer so that when Kimberly S., our current treasurer, rolls off, the new treasurer, Amy Z., will be fully informed of procedures. Our current Interpreter Liaison Lee Godbold, a professional who we have known for years, is leaving us soon, so we are looking to fill her position. Mellini T., our Chairperson, Michael B., our secretary, Ash S., our Interpreter Co-ordinator, and myself continue in our service positions.

Our latest exciting project is a Unity Event called the Language of the Heart, in which a hearing AA member and a Deaf AA members speak for 30 minutes each, every month, virtually! This is to allow hearing AA members to have the experience, strength, and hope of our Deaf AA members, and vice versa, with the emphasis on our similarities as recovered alcoholics in AA, not or differences in language or culture.

We began with a subcommittee to organize this Unity Event, with Norma A. as Event Coordinator, Rosi S. as Co-Coordinator, Ash S. and Chandra M. to obtain Deaf or hearing speakers, respectively, Kimberly S. as Treasurer, and Mark. K to be the Media Coordinator.

Our first virtual speaker meeting, which will be interpreted for ASL, will be Saturday, October 24th, 2020 at 7:00 pm Central Time. A flyer has been sent out with all the pertinent information, and if the first Language of the Heart Unity Event seems well attended and well received , we will continue on! We are excited and hopeful that this will be the beginning of a worthy project on which we can all work together on. As Bill W. said, "Because of our kinship in suffering, our channels of contact have always been charged with the language of the heart." This seems to be true, no matter what language we use, when it is one alcoholic sharing with another, we can communicate the experience which can save lives.

In love and Service,
Norma A.,
AA Deaf Intergroup Manager

