

TELEPHONE SERVICE NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2019

NTSC Introduction

There are six members on the national telephone sub-committee (NTSC) and we thought we would take it in turn to introduce ourselves. Last time it was our Trustee, Jonathan P, and this time it is me, Lisella W. I have responsibility for coordinating the content for this newsletter, which is made up partly with issues concerning the telephone service but also partly with contributions from responders, whether giving their experiences with this service, and/or sharing good practice. I admit that I did not leap into telephone service when this was first suggested, but the person concerned was persistent, for which I am grateful, as I have been involved with the Helpline for about 15 years. As well as being there for the newcomer/their families/agencies, we support each other and the Responder network is fantastic. In the early days shifts used to be very busy but with the advent of Chat Now and other on-line links to help the newcomer, calls have reduced considerably. If I am on duty and no one calls, it can seem disheartening, but then I remember the AA Pledge: "When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there. And for that I am responsible" and then it's okay, because I have made myself available in case anyone calls.



The General Service Office (GSO) in York has an open-door policy and welcomes AA members Monday to Friday. So do drop in if you are in York. This is where the Telephone Sub-Committee meets four times a year.

Please aim to keep incoming calls to five minutes max when possible. This is partly to keep the line free for others calling and partly because the 0800 freephone number means it is more costly to the Fellowship.

RTLOs - Reminder that the next Regional Telephone Liaison Officers' Forum will be held in York on Friday 9th and Saturday 10th August 2019.

GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION

To comply with GDPR TLOs should tell their responders that they are keeping a record of their personal data for the purposes of telephone service and will do so until they are told otherwise. This also applies to 12 step lists, so please pass this information on to your 12 step list coordinators. GSO requests that we use generic email addresses rather than personal ones. This is partly so continuity is maintained when one person rotates out and another takes over and partly to aid GDPR. You can request your AA email through the Helpdesk on the AA website: <https://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/>

NEW TELECOMMS PROVIDERS & SYSTEMS

As described in various previous communications, the current BT technology will be phased out by 2025. We advise that you take the initiative and start researching and moving to alternatives as soon as possible. We are finding that as BT update their infrastructure some helplines are being cut off without notice.

BT will offer a transfer to their Cloud Voice System. Around 17 helplines have transferred to this and are positive about the benefits of the new system. It is much cheaper being about £42 per month with no further call charges. It is also easier to use. Darren V, TLO Northdown has produced an excellent guide to setting up and using this system and you can find it in the Filestore or contact Darren direct on telephones. northdown@aamail.org

Other systems being used are:

Tamar Communications

<https://www.tamartelecommunications.co.uk>

(Maureen TLO NLIG & DiG)

Switchboard Free:

<https://www.switchboardfree.co.uk>

(Ian TLO Hull & East Riding of Yorkshire, Gillian TLO South Yorkshire & North East Derbyshire, Chris TLO Sunderland & District).

People speak highly of these and again they are much cheaper and easier to use than the current BT service. You can find more information about all these on our discussion forum:

<http://telephonehelplines.freeforums.net>

Ann M NTSC

Online Confidential Directory

If you are a TLO or RTLO, you will be able to see details of other Intergroup TLOs and Region TLOs around the UK and Channel Islands. To gain access to the Directory, follow this link on the AA website:

<https://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/search/confidential%20directory>

If you are accessing for the first time, you will be asked to request a log-in code from GSO.

DEALING WITH OUT OF AREA CALLS

Calls to the national 0800 number from mobiles are diverted to the first open helpline the system finds, so local helpline responders are dealing with an increasing number of out of area calls. Responders need to use their discretion as to the best method for each call bearing in mind that the objective is to put the caller in touch with a local 12 stepper as fast as possible. Here is our advice for dealing with these:

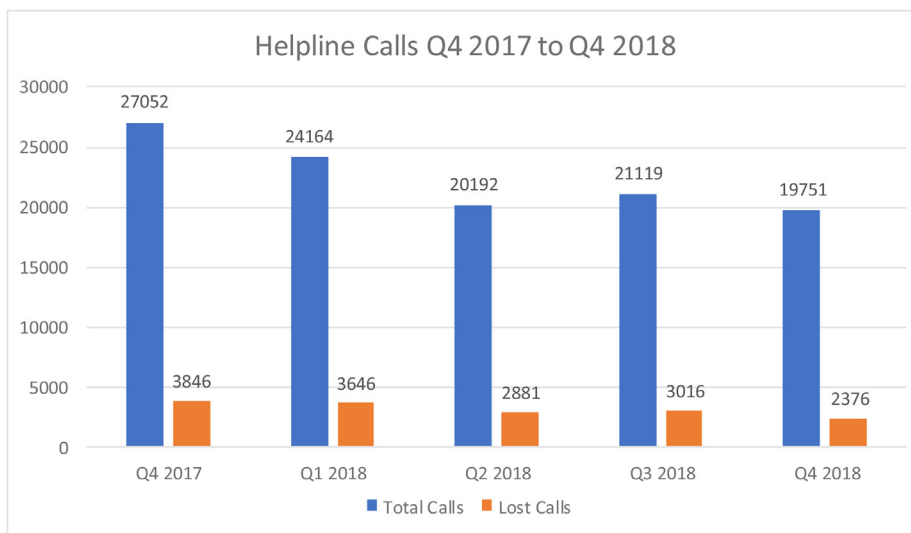
- 1.** Get the caller's permission to pass on their contact details to a 12 stepper in the normal way. Explain that you will get someone local to them to call them. Call the local helpline and pass on the details to the local responder who will in turn pass it on to a local 12 stepper. If you are unable to contact the local helpline pass on the caller's details to your TLO, or RTLO if the TLO post is vacant. They will then contact the local TLO using the confidential directory.

- 2.** Tell the caller the local helpline number and suggest they call that number directly. This may be the best option if the caller is reluctant to give their contact details but generally it is best if the caller's details are passed to the local helpline as the caller may lose motivation if they have to make another call which is not free.

STATISTICS UPDATE

The Helpline depends on the tens of RTLOs, the scores of TLOs, the hundreds of Telephone Responders, and the thousands of Twelve Steppers. The Service they all provide is essential, valuable, rewarding and is always in need of more people coming forward to be involved at all levels. We are all responsible for passing the message to the suffering alcoholic.

It would seem calls to the Helpline peaked last year. Looking at Q4 2017 compared with Q4 2018 we can see that there has been a 27% decline. However, looking at the last three quarters the call volume is much the same. So, after year on year increases since the 0800 number was introduced, Helpline calls are levelling out.



At the same time lost calls, including Ring Tone No Reply (RTNR) calls (a caller phoning and no one picking up the phone) have declined. It is worth pointing out that the majority of the RTNR calls were under 10 seconds giving little time for the responder to pick up.

The number of calls to the 0845-number reduced to such a low level that the decision was taken to disconnect it. If anyone comes across the 0845 number still being displayed, please remove/delete it.

Jonathan P
Trustee, NTSC

RESOURCES

An online discussion Forum has been set up to share details, help and guidance on telephone service issues. We would encourage everyone involved with telephone service to visit.

<http://telephonehelplines.freeforums.net/>

It will be a big help if you can post about what is happening with your helpline and the BT service, and about any discussions you have with alternative providers and the outcome.

Visit *Filestore* on the AA website for telephone service documents.

Here is the link: <https://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/Members/Logons/Filestore>

If you haven't previously visited this site, you will need to register. The steps are straightforward, but there is also a User Guide under the ECSC section in the Document Library.

Here is the link: <https://www.alcoholicsanonymous.org.uk/download/1/Library/Documents/ECSC/Filestore%20registration.pdf>

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM TLOS AROUND THE COUNTRY

Thank you to Sid, David and Brian for sending these in

David

Hello, I'm David and a recovering alcoholic. It was about a year ago that I had a remarkable experience whilst doing a telephone monitoring shift. I was not particularly well at the time and this perked me up no end. I got a call from an elderly lady, if I remember correctly she said she was 84. She had called the helpline a few weeks previously and had been 12 stepped and introduced to AA. She was just phoning to thank me personally, although it was not me who took her original call, for the helpline existing and for introducing her to the fellowship where she was hoping to spend many more happy years being sober, and wishes she had done it years earlier.

I was suffering with depression at the time, it still haunts me at times, and I chatted to this lady for a while and it really helped me. I love this fellowship, and everyone in it and this incident just proves how rewarding it can be helping other people who may be struggling.

Sid

My name is Sid and I'm an alcoholic. My sponsor was heavily involved in service and taking me to Intergroup before I got sober, so my face got seen and known. I then belonged to North Hertfordshire Intergroup. Pam N was then the Intergroup TLO and knew my sponsor well. She kept an eye on me and TOLD me you're nearly one year sober and you're going to be a 12- stepper and phone responder; I didn't really have a choice. I was trained very well in the old system and felt very comfortable doing the service. I was on 8am to 1pm Saturday morning and had to wait 3 months for my first call, but loved the service. It wasn't long before it was time for Pam to step down as TLO and of course she told me time for you to step up, bless her. So I was voted in as TLO. At the time we shared with Bedford and I had a great working relationship with their TLO.

The job was very demanding at times; especially hard was having to remove responders who were not appropriate to that position. I loved recruiting, it was such a joy. I also loved doing everything electronically, which met some opposition, but when they saw the benefits they were very pleased. They still use that system today, although technology has improved more since then.

The fellowship still amazes me and after I moved to Derby, I had a 12 step call from someone in Plymouth for a 12 step call in Bedford, which I was able to arrange, thanks to this wonderful fellowship. When I moved to Somerset, I just happened to bump into Allie F, a good friend and wonderful AA member, who strongly suggested I should apply for the RTLO, bless her. I'm truly blessed how people have gently pushed me in the right direction.

So if you're thinking about phone service, don't think, do xx

CONTRIBUTIONS cont.

Brian H - Scotia RTLO

Where to Find

When the NTSC put out a request for contributions to the Telephone Service Newsletter it got me thinking of one particular experience I had with the Where to Find a few years ago. I remember when I was taking a turn on the Helpline, and I would call a contact in the Where to Find looking for somebody to take a 12th Step Call and I would be met with the response that they only put their number in as a Group contact. I would say "Read the Guidelines", and they would come back and say "What Guidelines"? This obviously caused a lot of frustration for Responders as a lot of AA members were still unaware of their responsibilities regarding having their name and number in the Where to Find.

Although Note 2 in the Where to Find at that time thanked members for accepting 12th Step Calls, there was no explanation of what the responsibility of entering contact details in the Where to Find entailed?

At first I sent a letter to the Literature Sub Committee and asked them if they would consider inserting the following paragraph from Page 76 of the Structure Hand Book, into the Where to Find, which states:

Members whose names appear in the Where to Find, should be prepared to take full responsibility as contacts and delegate where necessary.

This implies that such a telephone number will be freely available within the Fellowship and that the contact is prepared at any time to:

- Accept a call for help
- Give information to a professional e.g. a GSO number
- Guide a family member to the right source for help e.g. to Al-Anon
- Speak to members of the Fellowship enquiring about meetings

After some time passed I had received no reply. But I did not give up. I then raised it as a Question for Conference. GSO replied and told me that the Conference Steering Committee had referred the Question directly to the Literature Committee for consideration. Again, some time passed. But then out of the blue I received an Email from the Trustee of the Literature Committee, explaining that at the last Board meeting it was agreed that I had a valid point and Note 2 in the Where to Find would be replaced with the paragraph from page 76 of the Structure Handbook. Plus it would also be included in the Group Registration/Amendment Form, both on the Website and on paper, so that the information was available from the beginning. Even today, we sometimes get this problem, but at least now we have a point of reference to direct members to.

For access to the updated A-Z local directory, together with other resources visit <https://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/Members/Service/Disciplines/Telephones>

The next newsletter will be published in September 2019.