

TELEPHONE SERVICE NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2019



NTSC INTRODUCTION

There are six members on the national telephone sub-committee (NTSC) who meet four times a year to carry out the wishes of the Fellowship with respect to the Telephone service. We've been taking it in turn to introduce ourselves: I'm Bill B, statistician for the sub-committee, for my sins, and it's my turn to make a contribution. When I first came into the Fellowship it was impressed upon me about doing service and as I came in via a phone call for help, I decided that this could be an area where I might be of use. Seven and a bit years later I still haven't regretted that initial decision and would urge anyone to take the plunge (service works) and we individually get such a benefit from it.

Yours in Fellowship
Bill B

Welcome to the Autumn edition of the Telephone Service newsletter. As well as serving Responders, this issue wishes to pay tribute to all those on the 12 Step Lists across the country and to thank you for being the vital link for the telephone service. Without 12 Steppers, the call from the newcomer can go nowhere. We would like the newsletter to reach as many 12 Steppers as possible. If you have an email address for your 12 Step coordinator, could you forward to them and ask for it to be cascaded on to as many people as possible on the list. Printed copies can be obtained from the newsletter editor on telephones3.sc@aamail.org

POINTS TO NOTE

Please remember to disable any personal answerphone message before going on phone duty for a national Helpline, so that there is no danger of a caller getting 'Hi this is Babs/Fred etc...' It is better to get an engaged tone than a confusing personal greeting when they are expecting AA to answer.

As telephone receptionists of AA, please try to keep incoming calls to the shortest time possible – how long you would have been happy to wait if you were ringing in for the first time? Five to ten minutes usually provides time in which to offer reassurance and hope, and direct the call onwards to the best place.

Are you on the 12 Step List?

Have you changed your phone number in the last year? If so, don't forget to let your Coordinator know. Also, are you happy to provide your email address so that we can keep you updated?

DISCUSSION ON SAFEGUARDING AT THE RTLO MEETING AUGUST 2019

There was a wide ranging discussion on issues concerned with the recruitment and retention of responders and 12 steppers to the Telephone Service. It is clear that custom and practice varies widely amongst Intergroups and Regions.

The Chair of the Board of Trustees informed us that a committee of the Board is currently working on a response to Conference 2019's request regarding safeguarding (see right). The discussions so far indicate that AA is vulnerable to potential issues and criticism in a number of areas. Robust safeguarding policies and procedures are a protection for both the vulnerable adult and AA as an organisation. *All alcoholic members of AA (sober or not) may be classed as vulnerable persons for safeguarding purposes.*

With regard to the Telephone Service, issues to address might include:

- Adequate procedures and records to show that we know who our responders and 12 steppers are, how they are recruited/recommended for service and that reasonable steps have been taken to ensure that they do not present a risk to the newcomer.
- That lists are reviewed regularly.
- That there are clear records and procedures for 12 steppers in meeting with newcomers. While the blue card (Hints & Suggestions for 12 Steppers) is well known, there is a feeling that it is due for revision. The recommendation that 12 steppers visit potential new members in their homes is at odds with the growing opinion that meetings with the newcomer should take place in a public place. It was also mentioned that while it is recommended that there be two 12 steppers at the first meeting (preferably a man and a woman), the second member does not need to have 12 months sobriety or be a designated 12 stepper.

There will probably be more, but these were the main issues that arose in the discussion. These things are necessary to protect all members of the telephone service, AA as a whole and the still-suffering alcoholic. We await the outcomes of the review but meanwhile should be mindful of these issues and continue the discussions at all levels of AA; Groups, Intergroups and Regions. If there are immediate, obvious actions to be taken, we should do these.

Committee 6 (Conference 2019)

Would the Fellowship share experience and make recommendations on how individual groups could include within its Group Conscience a strategy to deal with safeguarding issues should they arise?

The Committee recommends consideration of the following:

- a. Workshops to enable groups to share experience and to develop and implement their own safeguarding strategies;
- b. Ask that the General Service Board collate relevant materials, together with feedback from the Fellowship, to produce a Safeguarding Guidelines document for the whole Fellowship, to be presented at Conference, preferably in 2020, which groups may adopt.
- c. Ask that the Board review the 'Sponsors' section within the 'Safeguarding Standards in AA Fellowship: June 2018' document prepared for the Charity Commission.

The Committee unanimously agreed with the recommendation.

Background to question:
[Safeguarding Standards in AA Fellowship: June 2018.pdf](#)

NOTICES AND RESOURCES

Update on New Telecomms Providers & Systems

Helplines across the country are continuing to move across to a new system in advance of BT phasing out the current technology. BT Cloud Voice remains the most popular choice at present. If your Helpline is moving to BT Cloud Voice, then Darren V, TLO for Northdown Intergroup, has produced an excellent guide and video to setting up and using this system and you can find it in the Filestore.

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>

Responder and 12 Stepper Recruitment suggestions:

· *One to one approach can be more positive than asking around the room in Business*

· *Encouragement of sponsees into this service as they turn a year sober*

· *Having a telephone stand at Conventions and catching people as they queue for coffee and lunch!*

Any other suggestions would be welcome for future use in the Newsletter.

Coming Soon: There has been an increase in calls from out of area. To assist with this, there is a move to list Local Helpline numbers on the AA Website – it is hoped that this will be up and running by the time of next Newsletter, with details of how and where to search.

Filestore: TLOs can visit Filestore on the AA website for telephone service documents. [Click here for the link.](#) The Filestore was apparently compromised in early August, so even if you have previously registered, you will need to re-register (if you haven't already) – it's very straightforward.

Advance Notice: We are hoping to hold a Telephone Liaison Officers' Forum in York in 2020 and are awaiting confirmation from the Board. Further details will be included in the next Newsletter. A provisional date would be 7th-8th August.

Online Confidential Directory TLOs and RTLOs will be able to see details of other Intergroup and Region liaison officers around the UK and Channel Islands. To gain access to the Directory, follow [this link](#) to the AA website. If you are accessing for the first time, you will need to request a password from GSO.

Forum: We would encourage RTLOs and TLOs to visit the online discussion Forum at telephonehelplines.freeforums.net/ to share details, help and guidance on telephone service issues and also thoughts on 12-Step recruitment and best practice. Thoughts from responders and 12 step coordinators are welcome via their TLO, but at present the site is not accessible to all.

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

Thank you to Sean, Graham and Carolyn for sending these in
*Editor's Note – apologies to those whose contributions have had to be shortened in order to fit or omitted.
These will be included in future editions.*

Sean

My name is Sean. I am an alcoholic. The telephone answering service saved my life. I called the AA helpline on 1st April 2014, a broken man. The man I spoke to got me to my first meeting. I know now he got me to see there was a flicker of hope in a sea of all consuming darkness, although that is only with hindsight. At the time I was frightened, vulnerable and desperate. When I turned exactly one year sober, I took my first shift on the telephone answering service for Glasgow South. One of the great gifts my sobriety has given me was the privilege to become a friend of the man who spoke to me that Tuesday in April. As the TLO for Glasgow South, it was an honour to allocate the Tuesday morning shift to the same man.

I am a responder as well as the TLO. I have also had the privilege, and that is exactly what it is, a privilege, to meet some of the people I have spoken to while on shift. Take them to meetings, show them what I had to do to save my life. Offer them the same hope that this man did with me. Our responders are our best asset at promoting the telephone answering service. They are at the forefront of saving lives. I speak from experience. I am proof.

Sean M, Glasgow

Carolyn

Telephone and 12-Step Service Gratitude: I knew I was drinking too much but was not prepared to acknowledge this. A prompt from my middle son over Christmas made me realise that I had to do something. On the Friday of New Year 2015, I called the AA Helpline. I was terrified, as I had realized I needed help. I spoke to a lovely lady who instantly made me feel no longer alone and that I was not unusual. They arranged for someone to come out to me on the Saturday and assured me I had made the right decision. On the Saturday morning there was a knock on the door and there were two ladies standing in the rain (I had totally forgotten they were coming!). They were so lovely and understanding, I didn't feel ashamed any more. If it wasn't for this telephone service I would probably still be drinking. I am now three and half years sober and I am one very grateful 70 year old alcoholic and I can't thank this service enough. If only I had called sooner. A big THANK YOU to all you wonderful people.

Carolyn G, Northdown Fellowship

Graham

My name is Graham, I'm an alcoholic and the RTLO for Wales & Borders. I was first introduced to AA in 2005 via the Telephone Service and wanted to give something back. It was also suggested that the service would do me good! At that time, I spoke to a lady who said that someone would be in contact to have a chat. I now know that this person is called a 12th stepper. A man duly phoned and, after making sure that I wasn't too drunk, made arrangements to meet me and took me to my first meeting.

Having been part of the telephone team for a year, I know this: we need more 12th steppers, especially ladies. This is such an important part of what AA offers. After all, how is the still suffering alcoholic going to know what AA is all about? When a responder takes a call they need the support of local 12th steppers.

How do we get more people involved? I guess it's just communication really. Group Secretaries and GSRs: speak to your Intergroup TLOs. We know that little response comes from asking for volunteers, so active recruitment is needed! It's a great way to get sponsees with a year's sobriety into supervised service and often they are the ones with more recent and relative experience. I was once reminded there are 12 steps. We just need to spread the word!

Yours in fellowship, Graham S