

# TELEPHONE SERVICE NEWSLETTER

## MARCH 2020

Welcome to the Spring edition of the Newsletter from the National Telephone Sub-Committee (NTSC) which serves the needs of the Fellowship with respect to telephone service. Although there is some specific information for TLOs and RTLOs, in general the content of this newsletter is meant to be for everyone who does telephone service. We would like to reach as many responders as possible, so please do read and pass it on. If anyone would like a paper copy, please email the editor at [telephones3.sc@aamail.org](mailto:telephones3.sc@aamail.org) or text 07813 515423 with your name and address and this will be sent in the post.

### Accepting Calls if you are on a 12 Step List

It has become quite common practice for people not to accept calls on their mobile if the caller is not in their Contacts. However, if you are on the 12 Step List, we would ask you to be willing to accept ALL calls in case it is a Helpline Responder letting you know about a newcomer. The same applies to Responders when answering calls on the Helpline. While you're on phone duty, please be willing to take the call whatever the origin - be it from an individual, an outside agency, or another Regional Helpline office. Thank you.

### TELEPHONE SEMINAR

**Saturday 15th August 2020 in York 9.00am to 4.00pm**

RTLOS and TLOs are warmly invited to this Seminar (note different date to that on previous newsletter) at the Park Inn by Radisson Hotel in York. Many people will need to travel the evening before and, if you are coming from far away, you may consider staying the Saturday night as well. The plan is to hold the annual RTLO meeting on Friday evening (likely 4.30pm start), before the all-day seminar on Saturday. Allie F, your liaison contact on the NTSC, has recently emailed you all about this and a letter will be coming out from GSO in May. If you are a new TLO, please check you have sent a registration form to GSO so that you receive a letter.

These seminars only happen every four years, so it is a great opportunity to come and spend time with other TLOs around the country and to share experience, ideas and good practice. Regarding expenses: TLOs please apply to your Intergroup for all expenses, i.e. hotel/meals and travel. RTLOs, your hotel/meals will be covered by GSO and you should apply to Region for travel. Train fares are released 12 weeks in advance and we would normally suggest booking early. However, due to the coronavirus outbreak, people may wish to hold back until the position is clearer, nearer August. Please keep a watch on your inbox for updates.



### HELPLINE UPDATES

Welcome to Responders on the Berlin Helpline, which is nearly ready to go live! Their TLO is Emilia on [emicarlevaro@gmail.com](mailto:emicarlevaro@gmail.com)

The Scottish Helpline, which was previously made up of three regions, has now combined into one, with a single local helpline number 0131 225 2727.

The NE Surrey Helpline Number has been cancelled. All 12-Steps to be passed via the Mid Surrey Number on 01252 521133

## CALLS FROM PRISONS

The Devon and Cornwall Helpline has recently reported a spate of calls from prisoners. On investigation, it appears that inmates at Exeter Prison are now allowed personal phones in their cells for limited outgoing, but not incoming, calls. Given that the Fellowship runs a free 0800 number, this makes it attractive to call us to chat and a couple of prisoners have called several times a day. This is not an easy situation for responders to be presented with, particularly if the caller is distressed.

The general line of advice is as follows:

- Keep the call short, in line with the principles of being a responder on a helpline rather than a chat line;
- Ask if the caller is attending AA meetings within the prison and if not, then suggest they ask their keyworker if they could be put on the list. NB it appears that not every prisoner is suitable to attend meetings (the line between prison and secure mental health unit can be blurred). We need to be careful how we respond, in order to manage expectations.
- Log the caller details and pass to your Prison Liaison Officer. If the caller is soon coming out of prison and has worries about this, support can be arranged on their release. Your Prison Liaison Officer contact details should be listed on the Useful Numbers page in your Responder pack and he or she may also share relevant information with the Probation Officer if appropriate;
- Suggest telling the caller about the prison postal sponsor scheme and if they are interested, they can apply to GSO directly from prison to arrange this;
- Encourage the caller to ask their keyworker if there is any literature to read eg Big Book, Roundabout and Share magazines.
- If you receive persistent, nuisance calls from a prisoner (as was recently the case by an inmate who sounded drunk), please pass the information on to your Prison Liaison Officer who can report this back to the Prison.

Does your own Helpline receive calls directly from prisoners? We know there are different protocols in prisons across the country. If so, could any of you share experience of how such calls are dealt with in your area so that we can share guidance and good practice across the UK. Please email any feedback on this topic to the editor on [telephones3.sc@aamail.org](mailto:telephones3.sc@aamail.org) for inclusion in the next Newsletter.

## CALLS FROM NORTHERN IRELAND

**(AA In Ireland is completely separate from AAGB)**

*We seem to be having an increase in these calls since the beginning of the year, so please see below for updated information. If you receive a call from any suffering alcoholic in Northern Ireland, please:*

- *Be your usual friendly, helpful self*
- *Treat the call like a normal 12-Step and take down the caller's name, telephone number, location and nearest big town*
- *Offer the Ireland AA website address where there's a full list of meetings;*  
[gso@alcoholicsanonymous.ie](mailto:gso@alcoholicsanonymous.ie)

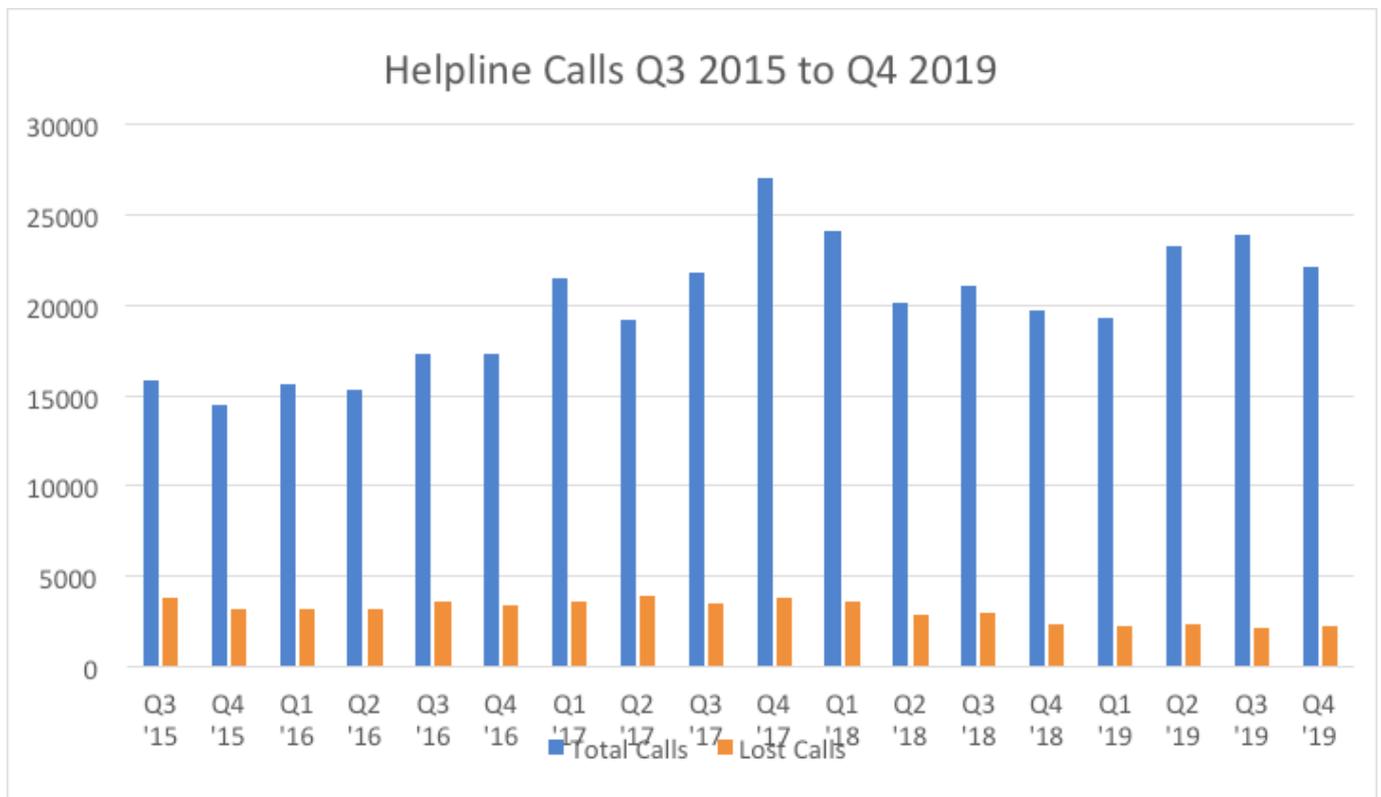
*You can then pass on the 12-Step to the Central Service Office in Belfast where it will be immediately dealt with during office hours Monday-Friday by either emailing the details to them on [gso@alcoholicsanonymous.ie](mailto:gso@alcoholicsanonymous.ie) (best to use this evenings and weekends) or by telephone to 0289 035 1222.*

*Please note: If the Office Administrator is on the phone (think they only have one line), any incoming calls go straight to voicemail. As yet, there is no voicemail available evenings and weekends but they're working on it.*

## STATISTICS UPDATE

As you can see from the graph below, there continues to be an upward trend in the number of calls to the Helpline since the advent of the 0800 number. The blue bar represents total calls and the yellow bar the lost calls. While total calls have increased, lost calls are showing a satisfying decrease. The Helpline depends on the dedication and hard work of RTLOs, 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. Of course, not every call to the Helpline is from a still-suffering alcoholic. There are calls from family and friends. Calls requesting meeting information. Calls from professionals wanting to know more about AA.

It has been some time since we conducted a nationwide survey to get a better idea about the type of calls we get and this is something the NTSC is looking into.



### AAGB WEBSITE - LOCAL HELPLINE NUMBERS

The local helpline numbers are not as easy to find on the website as we would like. This appears to have resulted from an error by the website developers. The ECSC (Electronic Communications Sub-Committee) are dealing with this. We are also aware that there are some errors and omissions. If you have access to the website, do look and see if your group has a local line showing. Meanwhile, you can put your helpline number in the box marked Other Info on the registration form and hopefully that will follow to your records. We also recommend that TLOs ask their ECLOs to amend each microsite to reflect the local helpline number.

### CONFIDENTIAL DIRECTORY

All RTLOs and TLOs can make use of the online Confidential Directory. You will first need endorsement from someone in your Intergroup or Region with an aamail.org address. You will then be sent a link and password to access. It also means that you can check your own entry is correct.

## CONTRIBUTIONS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

### *Gerry K – Scotland*

'A matter of life or death'- a somewhat dramatic statement regarding the existence and use of the Helpline for the suffering alcoholic; but not overstated in my experience. The helpline was my introduction to AA and thousands of others too. In a desperate attempt to do something to stop drinking, this seemed like a convenient, anonymous option that still gave me the control ie I could slam down the phone! But what I received was empathy not sympathy, identification and practical short term advice before a local 12 stepper made contact. Haven't felt the need to drink since that day; my life got better as they said it would. In time, I took on the role of TLO at intergroup and attended helpline committee meetings. Then suddenly I was ushered in as RTLO for East Scotland. I couldn't help think that they'd made a mistake and mistaken me for someone more knowledgeable! However, I soon found my feet and got on with it. My involvement in the helpline has been rewarding - we are lucky to have good people willing to give back freely what was given to them.

We've had big changes in Scotland in the last year- an attempt to improve the service, bearing in mind our primary purpose and also being mindful of the traditions and the welfare of AA.

All the effort is worthwhile and our priority must always be the suffering alcoholic- it really is a matter of life or death.

### *Allie F – Eastern Region*

My name is Allie and I'm an alcoholic. My early introduction to the Telephone Service was going on 12-Step visits with my sponsor and other members of my local groups. One year sober brought a call from the TLO and this nervous newbie found herself on Sunday morning phone duty! Since then, I have always been in service at Group, Intergroup, Region and as a Conference Delegate, finally, to my complete surprise, having the honour to serve our Fellowship on the NTSC, but still a Responder – now on Monday afternoons.

I can't put into words what service has done for me except that I believe truly that "Service is Gratitude in Action" – getting involved has enhanced my life in more ways than I could ever have imagined and the friends made along the way have taught me so much. Thank you all.

### *Tim L – SW Region*

I phoned the AA helpline in May 2014 after I was forced to leave work with a violent bout of the shakes. I felt completely hopeless and utterly afraid, but I knew I didn't want to drink anymore. I realised then that I faced either a life without alcohol or doom. The first option seemed impossible, but the fear was great enough to get me to admit defeat and reach out for help. The man I spoke to on the phone was the first person who had ever understood my drinking. He talked of his own alcoholism and filled me with hope. The next night I attended my first AA meeting and I felt at home. Following his example, I eventually did what he had suggested and I got well.

That's the wonderful chance that we all have by doing telephone service. I went on to be a regular telephone service responder at the Southern Service Office in London, always trying to remember what we are here for — making ourselves available as a channel for God, although the results are out of my control. And some shifts I found frustrating, when I had few calls or felt I hadn't helped anyone. But I believe it is worth it even if, through all our efforts, we only ever help one person get sober. Even if no one we help gets sober, we should remember we are still doing God's will by trying. If we do that, one person at least will be sober — me — and any others are a gift beyond our wildest dreams when we were drinking!