

National Telephone Sub Committee

N.T.S.C. News October 2016

"Each day, somewhere in the world, recovery begins when one alcoholic talks with another alcoholic, sharing experience, strength, and hope."



Welcome to the October issue of our News Letter. The Seminar, which was held in August, was very well supported. I understand that around 80 people attended. The feedback we received from the evaluation forms, emails and subsequent telephone calls was extremely positive and encouraging. Many asking that it be repeated every three to four years! There was considerable enthusiasm for the News Letter and much support for operating a 24hr service nation-wide.

It was interesting to note that **'calls to AA's national helpline made between 10pm in the evening and 10am in the morning make up 25.5% of the call volume (over a quarter of calls)'**.

A rough guide is that just under 20,000 calls per year are made between 10pm and 10am out of a total volume of just under 75,000 calls.

Copies of the CD containing information regarding our Telephone Service are now available from GSO on request.

The NTSC are, sadly, losing two members, due to rotation. They have worked extremely hard during their term on this committee. Bob, our Statistician and Davie our Treasurer have provided us with interesting and informative reports during the last four years which have helped to improve our understanding of our Telephone Service. Their support and encouragement has been invaluable.

Thank you to those who have contributed to this edition. We have received several interesting and enthusiastic articles from Telephone Liaison Officers and Responders – some of these have been retained for later use.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Judy F. Trustee.

The closing date for articles in the January, 2017 issue is 20th December, 2016.

***When sending contributions to the News letter
or Regional and Intergroup reports, please send to:***

telephonesubcom@aaemail.org

The News Letters may be found on the AA web site:

www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

***"I am Responsible. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help,
I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible."***

The following news report is from our Statisticians, Bob and Jonathon.

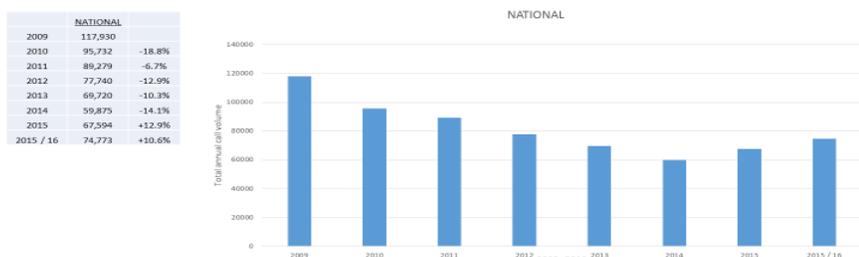
Statistics

The NTSC September 2016 newsletter is pleased to provide a summary of the impact of our new 0800 free phone help line on the number of calls received in its first year. The new number (0800 9177 650) was introduced to the fellowship on 1st July 2015. Since that time, calls have been made to both the free phone number and the former 0845 help line number (0845 7697 555). A call cost was incurred by the 0845 number callers. Please see below a summary of the number of answered calls by year since 2009:

National Statistics 2009 – 2016:

Total annual call volumes to the national AA helpline number 2009 - 2016

NATIONAL NUMBERS – ALL REGIONS



Nearly 50% of the 2009 call volume lost by 2014 (-58,055 calls). 2015 / 16 increase on 2014 is 14,898 calls (+24.9%)

During the 2009 – 2014 period, most of the calls were made from landline phones. In 2014, 59% of calls came from landline phones and 41% from mobiles. During the first year of the new free phone service, 51% of calls were from mobiles. It is felt that mobile users trust the new 0800 number more than the 0845 number. This makes the fellowship more accessible to all callers.

Q3 2016:

Call volumes continued to increase during the summer period but at the slower rate of +6.4% during the July to September 2016 period (Q3) compared to the same period last year:

Calls	Q3 2015	Q3 2016	%
0800 9177 650	12,843	16,199	+26.1%
08457 697555	3,011	1,132	- 62.4%
Total answered	15,854	17,331	+9.3%
Ineffective	3,769	3,554	-5.7%
Total calls	19,623	20,885	+6.4%
Landline	10,447	7,633	-26.9%
Mobile	9,056	13,026	+43.8%
Other	120	226	+88.3%
Total calls	19,623	20,885	+6.4%

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The most significant change was the continued switch from 0845 to 0800 calls (with 26.1% growth recorded in 0800 calls and a 62.4% decline in 0845 calls). There was also a significant switch from landline to mobile calls, with landline calls declining by 26.9% in volume and mobile calls increasing by 43.8%. Of the 20,885 calls received on AA's national help line during the summer period (July to September), 36.5% originated from a landline number and 62.4% of our calls were from mobiles.

EASTERN REGION.

" . . . committees directly responsible to those they serve." (Tradition 9)

A Responder of about 3 years' experience, I was co-opted onto my Intergroup Telephone Service Committee and in what seemed a very short time, became the next TLO (the only eligible committee member!). My experience of working as part of a Service Committee has given me a firm belief in their value, especially to the

Telephone Service. Being Intergroup TLO is very hands on as barely a week passes without something cropping up and the support of a dedicated Committee to shoulder some of the jobs is a real help.

Our Committee comprised 6 or so Responders (each from a different part of our large rural Intergroup area), the Intergroup Treasurer, the previous TLO (for 1st year of incoming TLO as advisor), and the TLO. We met centrally 2 - 3 times a year to plan workshops, co-ordinate updates and any new information for Responders not covered in the quarterly Newsletter.

The main role of the Committee members was the training of incoming Responders and as an additional contact for Responders' queries. They promoted the Telephone Service at their local meetings and were the sponsoring body for the next TLO (ratified in post by Intergroup). They sponsored me into the service, shared their experience, gave me the strength and hope to serve to the best of my ability and became my valued friends. To any Intergroup TLOs reading this who do not yet have this support and are thinking about it, why not? You have nothing to lose, and, maybe, everything to gain.

Allie F (Eastern Region)

REPORT FROM WALES AND BORDERS

DO YOU CARY A SMILE OF GRATITUDE WITHIN YOUR VOICE, Then the phone line in Wales needs you!

Wales And Borders Regional is represented by 7 intergroups, yet has only 3 active T.L.O.'s. With some help from the existing T.L.O.'s , I am required to cover those vacant positions over and above my own duties. Considering the loss of regular responders and extra cover needed during this summer holiday period, this I think, will not be sustainable for long. I am intending to go with a little recruiting/display stand to those conventions held in Wales. This worked well at the Wales National Convention in Llandrindod Wells.

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I am also going to contact those intergroups that currently do not have a T.L.O. with the view to be invited to their meeting. The idea behind this, is not only to inspire someone to take on the vital role of T.L.O, but also to equip and motivate the group to update the twelve steppers list and other phone related issues they may have in their area.

OTHER MATTERS: Another issue we face from time to time is the difficulty of getting hold of a 12th stepper during the duration of our shift, and when we do get through, it feels like we have interrupted them in the same way as an unexpected salesman might come knocking at your door. Therefore, I am considering to look at a way of improving our service by obtaining times of availability for each 12th stepper. What I am proposing to do: to distribute a form to existing Intergroups, who then in turn can pass on the form to the G.S.R's. The idea is that each group then can submit new and existing 12 steppers to be added to a revised 12 steppers list.

York Telephone Workshop: Sam, Stuart and myself attended the workshop in York, and it is safe to say that we had a very productive day. The subjects for discussion were communication, recruitment, training and 24 hour service. It was interesting to learn how other areas operate and tackle similar issues like ours. 12 step list updates being one of them. Some good tools to have; like the "yellow" log sheet that is used in the London call centers, the use of the file store for information sharing and the Manchester training pack. We also had a look at the value of the service, sharing between intergroups, workshops, training and social days to improve both, the service and team spirit.

FINALLY: Although it is much more work than anticipated, I know that this service post is good for me, and It is still a joy to be able to spread my wings across Wales and find like-minded people who have a real love for the fellowship and are committed to giving something back.

Yours in fellowship, *Nico. RTLO – Wales and Borders Region.*

Which of these is the greater gift: Knowing people in our lives who have never seen us drunk or have people in our lives who have seen a changed man or woman?

S.C.E.N.E (Scotland, Central, East & North East)

The Scene Helpline covers the east of Scotland from the borders up to the Banff area. It is operated by two Regions: Scotia and East of Scotland and covers nine Intergroup areas. We operate a 24 hour, 365-day service.

The Monitor shifts are as follows:

1. Midnight till 7am
2. 7am till 12.30pm
3. 12.30pm till 6.30pm
4. 6.30pm till midnight

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We issue monitors with a pack which lists:

- Committee members' phone numbers
- 12th Steppers
- Meetings
- A guide for answering different types of calls
- Useful telephone numbers such as NHS 24, Samaritans, Al-Anon, Narcotics Anonymous, etc.
- Other useful information

The pack is updated each month to try and keep our 12th Stepper and meeting lists as accurate as possible.

We also provide monitors with a Local Numbers Directory which lists towns in alphabetical order alongside the appropriate local helpline number. Although this directory is very thorough, it does not include every single town in the UK.

At the time of writing we have 75 active monitors. As well as this we maintain a list of monitors who have been postponed for various reasons such as holidays, illness, moving home, etc. The rota is made up each month by the same committee member. Other members carry out jobs such as training, maintaining the database of monitors contact details, pack maintenance, sending out the rota and pack, Secretary, Treasurer, etc. We used to post out pack amendments and the rota to monitors every month but we decided to offer monitors the opportunity to have this emailed to them instead. This has been very successful but some monitors still prefer to receive a printed pack and amendments. We're quite happy to send out whichever type the prefer.

Although SCENE covers nine Intergroups, we currently only have six Intergroup Telephone Liaison Officers. Maintaining accurate meeting lists and 12th Stepper lists for the three vacant areas is therefore quite difficult.

ARTICLE FOR TELEPHONE SERVICE NEWS

I arrived at AA through the telephone service – I called when I was in blackout and apparently agreed to go to a meeting. When the person who took the call rang back to remind me I was too embarrassed to say that I couldn't remember ever talking to him so I went to the meeting where my recovery story began.

The telephone service also stopped me picking up a drink when I was 5 days sober. It was a Saturday night and I felt everyone in the world was out having a good time. I was still sweating and shaking and had spent the day in tears. I went to a meeting but everyone except me, seemed to be "happy joyous and free" and when I got home I was desperate to drink. Fortunately, I rang the helpline instead and the person who answered helped to keep me sober for another day.

Fast forward and I was back at the first meeting I ever went to picking up my one year chip. The person who had taken my telephone call initially was by now the TLO for the Intergroup and immediately after the meeting he came up to me and said "it's payback time". That was how I became involved with the telephone service. I have done telephone service off and on ever since. A few months ago I was asked if I would take over Telephone Liaison which I was happy to do. As a result, I was invited to attend the Telephone Service Seminar and Workshop at York on Saturday 13th August 2016. This was held at the Park Inn Hotel which I have not stayed at for some years. Since my last visit it has been refurbished and is now an excellent venue and conference centre.

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The Seminar was very well organised. On arrival we were allocated to a group for the workshops and given a very useful information pack. There were four Groups and mine was a real cross section. There were people from all over the Country, some did a 24 hour service, some worked out of an office and it was useful to be able to share experience strength and hope with such a variety of experience.

After a welcome introduction from Judy, the Board Member and people from the telephone committee we broke into our groups for the workshops. During the day there were three workshops on Communications, Recruitment and Training and 24 hour Telephone Service. Each was very well led by Yolande from the London Office and I got some excellent ideas to take back to my own Intergroup.

I returned after the Seminar with new enthusiasm for the TLO role and some very useful ideas some of which I have already put in to practice. The main ones are as follows:

- Setting up a stand at the Intergroup mini convention to recruit more volunteers. I also plan to set up a table outside some of our larger meetings to do this
- Produce a flyer to circulate round to the Groups seeking volunteers
- Text blasting 12th Steppers which means that rather than telephone them individually, text a number of them asking them to respond. I have already tried this and it worked wonderfully.
- Give GSRs a form AND a stamped addressed envelope for them to update 12th Step (or as someone described it "the drunk or dead") list.
- Look at putting on a social function for telephone responders so they can feel part of a team rather than working in isolation

The day ended with humour when a couple of members of the subcommittee acted out a sketch of a call to the helpline. The board trustee thanked everyone for attending the seminar. The whole day was an interesting and worthwhile experience and I would like to thank all those who worked so hard to make it so successful.

Jane. TLO Chiltern and Thames Intergroup.

GRATEFUL NIGHT SHIFT RESPONDER

Just wanted to share with you and the 'night shifters' a lovely experience. I took a call at about 4.30 this morning from an existing member who had rung the helpline as a last resort and was surprised that somebody actually answered. His sponsor was on holiday, everybody else was asleep, and he found himself wide awake, full of fear and anxiety due to some life events. We chatted for about 30 minutes about recovery, prayer, program, fear and emotions, and the call ended with laughter and gratitude on both sides. I was thinking, THIS is the reason we fight to keep the night shift isn't it.

Some people think that only drunks and timewasters call in the small hours, but the longer I do this service, the more of these experiences I have, and I value them so much more than any call I've taken during the day. It's so, so important that we continue to 'be there' during the night for such occasions and today I feel very grateful and blessed for my recovery and my service.

Have a great day.

LIF Laura H. , Black Country.

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THE HELPLINE OFFERING 24 HOUR COVER

My feelings on the helpline being a 24-hour service are clear, it should be! I've been a responder myself for over 5 years and the telephone coordinator for West Yorks, North Yorks and West Riding for just over a year. I do an overnight shift, 11pm until 8am, so I can appreciate first hand why I believe it is so important. As a responder, I always imagine myself as the person making the call. I can remember those days of drinking, the despair, the self-hatred, saying I'm going to do something and then not. Trying again and failing, feeling as though I'm failing at everything I do. All I wanted to do was drink like a 'normal' person. I can therefore appreciate the caller finally plucking up the courage to make that dreaded call. So, I can understand when they do make that call in the early hours that they are surprised, amazed and taken aback that there was someone there at all. When they realize that we are volunteers and we are doing this because it helps ourselves to stay sober, in my mind it cuts through any doubts as to why they rang. My family and friends can be amazing and empathize, but in my mind, only an alcoholic understands. There is a kinship that is silent, words don't need to be spoken for us to recognize it and it's amazing how quickly the caller confides in you and starts telling you their fears. That is why I feel it's so important that, when that caller rings and is hoping for an answer, they hear a voice - not an answer phone or the phone to ring out. We do not want them to say they tried but no one was there, that 'they' weren't there for me.

We are! Wow! We cared. We spoke to them, gave them hope. That is the goal for me, that we give them/the callers hope. Hope that there is a future, happiness, a life that they can enjoy, a fulfilling life without alcohol – all those things I too imagined impossible when still drinking. Not only to do that when its 'easy', from 10-10. To be there anytime. As I do an overnight shift on a Friday night not all the calls I receive are from sober alcoholics. On a personal level I will talk to a drunk caller. I remembered very odd things whilst drinking but I remembered when people were kind. I always try to be kind. They can be frustrating and call numerous times, say offensive things, yet I will still talk to them. They are sick. It's the alcohol. I try to be kind because whatever hell they are in on a personal level if they remember that AA were there and that we were kind then the seed has been planted.

When dealing with a 'phone call "We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us". (Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th edition, page 83).

People are using the internet more and emailing as I believe it's easier, you aren't making that personal connection that you do with a phone call. I was at the AA service workshop in York recently where it was stated the helpline costs us around £16,000 a year. That's a bargain, a bargain still at double that price. We are fully self-supporting and what can be more important than being there for the still suffering alcoholic? I don't feel as though we can take the 'easy' option, my alcoholism certainly didn't start and cease at certain times of the day. At the end, it was 24 hours of hell 7 days a week. It isn't easy providing a 24 hour service. Is it worth it? Hell, yes, and for that I am responsible.....

'Where anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there, and for that, I am responsible'. Being a responder can seem a daunting task, but in nearly 12 years of sobriety I haven't found a service position anywhere near as rewarding. *Greg E. Skipton Friday*

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“SLENDER THREADS...”

One of those "slender threads" of which we speak is the phone call made by Bill Wilson in the Mayflower Hotel; the telephone service of Alcoholics Anonymous is today a legacy of that call. The Dorset and Somerset telephone service operates 24/7. All responders have experienced times when we have taken no calls; it matters not. What does matter is we are providing a vital resource to the alcoholic looking for some hope and a solution. We must never forget the hopelessness each of us has experienced prior to finding the solution in A.A.

If it had not been for the friendly voice and the encouragement I received when some years ago I called the helpline doubtless I would have found myself volunteering for more misery, more chaos and ultimately a lonely death. This was my own "slender thread".

Our telephone service is often the first contact an alcoholic has with Alcoholics Anonymous. We must ensure that first contact is a positive one. When answering the phone we might employ a device used by radio broadcasters - smile. That smile would inform our words. We need to offer encouragement and be compassionate but we need to keep the exchange brief. We need to be painstaking about any information we are given and ensure the accuracy of the information passed to 12th Steppers should a 12th Step call be indicated.

Service is a vital part of my recovery; I do the steps to get sober and to remain that way and got sober to be of maximum service to others. It was announced earlier this year at our Region only 8% of our fellowship do service. If you are one of the 92% might I graciously suggest you are cheating yourself, depriving yourself of the great joys of service.

There are, of course, the concomitant difficulties and frustrations of working with we alcoholics. Someone once opined trying to organise alcoholics is akin to trying to herd wild cats but any challenges I have encountered have proved to be opportunities for yet more personal growth for this 'work in progress'. The 12th Step programme offers the possibility of infinite spiritual growth and my role initially as a telephone responder and latterly as a T.L.O. have afforded many opportunities for personal growth.

Our telephone service is run for the benefit of the alcoholic who still suffers and not for the convenience of we who facilitate it. The Pledge is clear; I have yet to find an adjunct to the Pledge which says, "except, of course, when it's inconvenient to Dave W". Furthermore, as an ego driven individualist the telephone service is a splendid service for me since most of the work I do is behind the scenes and, by definition, low profile.

The telephone service is a conduit between the alcoholic who still suffers and the Fellowship and to provide any information when sought. Should you feel Home Responding for the telephone service might be for you, I would suggest you contact the T.L.O. of your Intergroup. You will be sponsored into the role and given all the help and support you might require. It is an enormous privilege and it is fun.

Dave W (BOURNEMOUTH INTERGROUP T.L.O.)

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