

March 5, 2016

NERAASA 2016 Report

**From: Karen Mc.
Area 47 Assembly Chairperson**

NERAASA was great! Excellent experience to meet with others who hold some type of General Service position in AA. Besides being an attendee, I was also on one of the presentation panels. Both Pete B and I were on the same PI panel.

There were also two Area Chair Roundtable sessions on Friday and Saturday nights which I was able to attend. As my panel presentation was Sat afternoon, I was pretty exhausted by the end of Saturday night.

I've been able to follow up on some conversations with the other Chairs of NY - Area 48, 49 and 50.

Below is a copy of my PI panel session and the Area Chair Roundtable Report Back.

It was a blessing to represent Area 47 at NERAASA this year and I thank you for the opportunity.

Public Information Panel 6 – Saturday February 27, 2016 12:45-2:00 PM

Second speaker – Karen Mc.

Topic "recommendation to develop a guideline on "Carrying the AA Message Online & in Social Media"

Hi I'm Karen M. and I'm an alcoholic and your present Area 47 Central New York Assembly Chairperson.

I also work in technology marketing and love the Internet and Social Media. I couldn't do my job without it. So my panel topic today of "recommendation to develop a guideline on "Carrying the AA Message Online & in Social Media" would seem like a perfect fit.

There is some great information in the General Service Conference background materials on pages 680-694 on this topic.

AA online and in Social Media has been discussed quite a bit over the last 4+ years. We're certainly beyond the "Tipping Point". We absolutely need some guidelines to make sure we – and by "we" I mean GSO, Areas, Central/Intergroup offices, committees and AA members – are clear about how best to present ourselves and still honor and respect our Traditions – especially anonymity when online or in social media.

From the 66th General Service Conference background materials, I'd like to highlight the results of a recent survey of roughly 179.7M social media users. Believe many of us would consider Social Media to be the domain of the "young". Well – guess what – based on the survey results we are all "young".

Ages 18-34 63.6M users

Ages 35-64 75.8 M users

Plus when we add the 14.6M users over 65 to the last grouping - We get **90.4M users between the ages of 35-65+** who use Social Media!

Currently, there are over 50 different social media platforms. The main ones such as Facebook, YouTube, Google, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, etc. are broken out in the background materials. I strongly agree there should be accurate information about What AA Is and Is Not on these key platforms.

- ... *“the platforms themselves in no way infringe on our principles of anonymity or any other Traditions. It is the actions of the individual that may cause harm to themselves, to others, or to AA as a whole. For that we are, each of us, individually responsible to our fellowship, ourselves and to our personal higher powers.”*

I'd like to share my own experience with two of these platforms.

On Facebook – I have AA members, non-members plus work colleagues on my Facebook contact list. I also belong to an AA only Facebook group. Honestly, I've wondered if I should create a separate Facebook account for just my AA contacts. Some folks are very open about their sobriety – posting anniversary dates or other AA related activities.

I have my privacy settings set at close friends so only they will receive my postings but anyone in that listing can access my friends contact list and view my Facebook page. I protect my anonymity.

Gratefully, many who post photos that I've been tagged in do not mention the event is an AA or sober event.

YouTube videos – I spoke with Rich Purtell, our Northeast Regional Trustee last week and he mentioned how powerful he thought the video “Unspoken Truths: Young People in Recovery” is. It was created and shown at the AA International Convention and is now posted on YouTube. He mentioned the video has received over 1.6M hits! Phenomenal!

BUT what I found unsettling was in the comments section under the video, some people broke their anonymity in identifying themselves as an AA member in their comments plus in some cases, their personal photo and full name would appear.

Is this the same as someone in the rooms letting their employer or other non-members know they're in the program? But with social media the response and amplification is magnified 1000 times with the possibility of breaking someone else's anonymity.

When I did a search for other Alcoholics Anonymous videos on YouTube, I was surprised at some of the video titles that showed up on the first page of results.

At the top were paid video ad placement by Partnership for Drug-free kids

- How to Talk about Drugs – Ad by Partnership for Drug-free kids 10,142 views
- OR
- Keep Your Medicine Secure with 30,781 views

Alcoholics Anonymous – Steps 1, 2 and 3 – Back to Basics AA100011 4 years ago 342,683 views – SPEAKER identifies himself as a recovery alcoholic

Adam T – AA Speaker – by Odomtology 12-Step Recovery Media 2 years ago – 189,904 views (NO visual – only audio)

Top Ten Reasons to Run from Alcoholics Anonymous Godlesspanther 8 years ago 230,722 views

Alcoholics Anonymous – Big Book Study by Joe and Charlie AA100011 3 years ago 177,913 views

AA Destroying the Social Lives of Thousands of Once Fun Americans The Onion 5 years ago – 369,506 views - The Video is a satire so there are many comments in comment section. Again, some identified themselves as being in AA with personal photos and sometimes their full names are appearing.

I'll just close with this -- AA is alive online and in social media with some really good information out there but there's quite a bit of misinformation too.

We have some very smart people on the PI committees. I believe we should develop – sooner rather than later - an effective guideline on “Carrying the AA message online and in Social Media”.

Thank you

2016 NERAASA - Area Chair Roundtable Report Back

- We had 20 Area Chairs and Alt Chairs in attendance (along with representation from two Canadian Provinces)
- On Friday night we first went around the room and talked about each person's basic responsibilities in their area.
- We then developed 3 different topics for discussion and here are the questions that were asked and I will highlight one response to each question:
 - **How do you address decreases in area participation/engagement?**
 - “Effectively communicate job descriptions and help people better understand what each job is and what it does - Honor people's time and make them feel respected.”
 - **How do you work with Intergroups?**
 - We have only 1 intergroup in our Area and we cooperate closely with them. Our Area and our Intergroup have seven (7) common committees that meet regularly with no “affiliation” issues.
 - **How do you “sell” service in general?**
 - Try to give GSR's more meaningful information to take back to their groups. We try to do a better job of training our GSRs which excites them and encourages **THEM** to help **US** sell service on our behalf. In our Area, all GSRs have to be members of a standing committee.
- On Saturday night, our roundtable chairperson, Cookie S., *opened the meeting by reading the first paragraph of the job description of the Area Chairperson from the A.A. Service Manual and opened discussion for the group by posing the question – “Do you do it – yes or no?”*
- Chairs and Alt. Chairs in attendance started answering the question, and for the remainder of the roundtable, it seemed that “one thing led to another” and instead of trying to provide an overview of what was said, I think it would be most beneficial to you as you head back to YOUR Area to just share with you some of the actual quotes & best

practices that came from these amazing trusted servants:

- “There are times when we will send business items back to the groups for their input before we take a vote and develop an area conscience. Communications with the Districts and groups is an integral part of what I do.”
- “My experience has been that it is good to align service positions with people’s ability to perform the job effectively. Key positions require people that you can depend on and in some cases we may need to teach them.”
- “We maintain a service office in the southern part of the state and we have 16 districts so we have a monthly meeting at the service office and it can be hard for folks to make it to the monthly meetings. We do have 4 assemblies that Districts host which is moved around the Area to not only help with engagement, but to make it accessible to people who otherwise might not participate. We do the same thing with the convention in moving it around the Area.”
- “We don’t wait to get invited to visit Districts, we invite ourselves.”
- “Remote communities” for us is not geographical – ours is linguistic. It was suggested in our Area to not use the phrase “dark districts” due to the possible racial implications, rather to use the phrases “**inactive districts**” or “**under-represented districts**” instead. We are trying to have more bi-lingual DCMs to help eradicate some of the language barriers. “
- “We have strong participation from incarcerated AA members who actually do service for our Area (one is even our Grapevine rep).”
- “Our area is going through a real turmoil with perception issues and in-fighting. We recently did an area inventory and through the inventory we have started to smooth out and are getting back to the work of the Area.”
- “In our Area, we go “out to bid” to our Districts to solicit the hosting of future assemblies and we are currently booked up through 2018.”
- “We have begun to address geographical issues by using freeconferencecall.com to conduct conference calls for our members”
- “I believe that if we want to see our Districts change, we need to be that change ourselves.”