

## Background to the Board's Action

In her overview of the background to the Board's decision, the Chairperson noted that the Board had been looking at the issue of Alateen safety and discussing it with the Delegates for many years. Two years ago, in a "Talking with the Delegates" session at the World Service Conference, the Board asked, "What do you, as Delegates, think is the most important issue facing Al-Anon in the future?" In the Delegates' responses, the topic of Alateen safety was of such high priority that at the following year's Conference, Alateen safety was the entire focus of the "Talking with the Delegates" discussion.

Time was devoted to this topic at Board, Policy Committee, and Group Services Committee meetings. The Board reviewed all information ever recorded about Alateen from the WSO Archives. "We were buried in the papers. We did not take this lightly," she said. Conference members were shown the three-inch-thick stack of papers the Board studied.

As more areas created their own Alateen requirements, it became very obvious that the WSO had nothing in place to support these areas. Because guidelines were perceived as optional suggestions, if a potential Sponsor failed to meet the guidelines of the area, this person could still register the Alateen group at the WSO and sponsor it. Nothing could be done if this member refused to step down.

The Board, recognizing its responsibility to protect the legal rights of the organization, was unanimous in its decision that the time had come to take action. It began a process of setting down basic requirements which would need to be adhered to by the fellowship as a whole in order to maintain the right to use the Al-Anon or Alateen name. After the resolution was finalized and approved in December 2003, it was immediately sent to all Delegates. It requires implementation by the areas no later than December 31, 2004.

Some members of the fellowship did not agree that this action was necessary. Citing Concept Five, they voiced their minority view by petitioning the Board to reconsider its actions. The Board thoroughly reviewed all correspondence received and, after careful consideration and much discussion, denied the appeals.

Addressing concerns that the Conference should have been consulted before making its decision, the Chairperson replied that the

Board has been consulting the Conference for years on this matter, and that they were finally ready to take action. To those who question the Board's right to take such action, she shared that Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. is a corporation, and that the Trustees are entrusted with the legal rights of the corporation. While the Trustees are entrusted with legal responsibility, Alateen safety is the moral and ethical responsibility of every member.

Concept One states that, "The ultimate responsibility and authority for Al-Anon world services belongs to the Al-Anon groups." As one reads the remaining eleven Concepts, however, it becomes clear that they are a series of delegated trusts. "Without that trust," she said, "none of us have anything to work with."

Next, the Chairperson read a series of quotes from the 2002-2004 *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27) which support the Board's actions. They are as follows:

- "In managing the affairs of the corporation, the Board is authorized to: . . . take whatever measures are prudent and effective in carrying out the purpose of our fellowship." (Pages 116-117.)
- "Except in great emergency the Board of Trustees ought never take action liable to affect Al-Anon as a whole greatly without consulting the Conference. However, it is understood that the Board shall reserve the right to decide which of its decisions may require referral to the Conference." (Page 146.)
- "Hence, the principle of delegated authority and responsibility to our trusted servants must be implicit from the top to the bottom of our active service structure." (Page 156.)
- "Within the framework of their general responsibilities, whether these be defined by charter, resolution, or custom, it should be traditional for all world service boards, committees, and executives to decide which matters they may properly dispose of and upon which they will report, consult, or ask specific directions. Our world servants should be trusted with these discretions, otherwise no effective leadership is possible." (Pages 157-158.)

- “This provides that our responsible leaders be trusted to decide, within the framework of their duties, how to interpret and apply their authority and responsibility to each problem or situation as it arises. This sort of leadership discretion is the essence of the Right of Decision. We need have no misgivings about granting this privilege at every level of world service.” (Page 159.)
- “But for so long as our world services function reasonably well, then “trust” must be our watchword, otherwise we shall wind up leaderless.” (Page 160.)
- “Similarly the World Service Board of Trustees (operating of course within the provisions of its own ByLaws) should have the right, at all times, to decide when it will act fully on its own responsibility and when it will ask the Conference for guidance, approval of a recommendation, or actual direction.” (Page 160.)
- “Our entire Al-Anon program rests squarely on the principle of mutual trust. We trust God, we trust Al-Anon, and we trust one another. Therefore we cannot do less than trust our leaders in service. The Right of Decision we offer them is the practical means by which they may act and lead effectively; it also is the symbol of our implicit confidence.” (Page 160.)
- “We trust our servants, knowing that in the unusual event that they fail in their responsibilities, we still have ample opportunity to recall and replace them. As trusted servants, our Al-Anon leaders must always be in readiness to do for the groups what the groups obviously cannot do for themselves. Consequently our servants are bound to use their own information and judgment, sometimes to the point of disagreeing with uninformed or biased group opinion.” (Page 164.)
- “The Trustees have legal rights while the rights of the Conference are traditional.” (Page 167.)

In concluding the opening session of the Alateen discussion, the Chairperson said, “I do see our actions as a legal matter. . . . I am confident that the Board has made the right decision. I know there are those of you who disagree, but I believe you have elected good leaders. I do not believe that the Board would have been led to make a mistake when we were in such agreement that it was the time to do something and that what we did was the thing to do.”

### Delegate Feedback

The Chairperson began the second session by reading the Board’s motion. (See Appendix I, page 80.) Then Conference members were invited to give feedback on the Board’s action and their reaction to it. This opportunity for members to share their feelings was introduced as a “Clearing the Air” session on this specific topic.

Almost all of the Delegates spoke to the issue. The majority of those who expressed themselves were grateful that the Board had exercised its authority and responsibility in creating the minimum requirements. Others stated that while they understood the need for Alateen safety to be addressed, they did not agree with the approach taken by the Board. A few Delegates were concerned about what would happen if these requirements were implemented.

One Delegate said, “Our area was the first to pass the guidelines that required background checks. There was discussion and not a lot of unanimity for a lot of years. The

WSO helped us. They were instrumental in getting us to where we are today.” Another said, “I would hate to see Al-Anon involved in a legal controversy. We can’t stop 100 percent of the problems, but I think this motion will help.” A Canadian Delegate shared that in Canada, groups that work with youth are required to have criminal records checks. She said, “Because of this, we were not able to rent a facility. We really do need requirements; guidelines are no longer acceptable.” Another Delegate shared, “We had to ask an Alateen Sponsor to step down, so we are in favor of these requirements.” One member said, “We have had guidelines for Alateen groups, but some ignored them. We had no way to enforce them. We now have ways to protect the children. We can’t do everything, but we can try.” Another shared that some members of his area felt like they were being dictated to—that there were no “warm fuzzies.” He said, “This issue is not warm and fuzzy. There are no warm fuzzies when it

comes to protecting our children. Whenever something can impact our fellowship, we need to look to Tradition One.” From another Delegate came, “I recognize that this is a legal responsibility of the Board. I am sure it was difficult and I appreciate the work that was done.”

The minority voice was also heard. One member shared feelings that these requirements were totally outside the goals and objectives of Al-Anon, citing Tradition Five. She felt that Al-Anon was getting into child protection and police work and that it was not appropriate. Another member felt Tradition Six was being violated because problems of money and property were separating us from our primary spiritual aim. One member said, “There is a big difference between guidelines and requirements. This is heading us in a direction that is not best for the fellowship.” Others felt that the Board was trying to tell the fellowship what they could think, and were troubled because they did not feel the groups and areas were given the opportunity to discuss the Board’s motion, but were rather given a directive. “The Board didn’t consult the Conference before making the requirements, but they had the discretion to do so.”

Other Delegates felt that there have been

many years of discussion and that they had been included in those discussions. One Delegate said, “From 1995 to 1998, we heard we needed to have guidelines in place.” Another stated, “We’ve ignored this for too long. If we had been more receptive when it was brought up before, there wouldn’t have been a need for this. We have to protect all of our kids.” Addressing concerns about the Sixth Tradition, a member said, “My area appreciates the Board’s support. This protects our name and our fellowship, not just our assets.” The Board was clear in its directive that all groups need to comply with the area requirements in order to have a registered Alateen group.

The Chairperson concluded this portion of the discussion with a quote from Bill W.’s essay on leadership, as found on page 174 of the *2002-2004 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*:

“Leadership is often called upon to face heavy and sometimes long-continued criticism—an acid test. There are always constructive critics, our friends indeed. We ought never fail to give them a careful hearing. We should be willing to let them modify our opinions or change them completely. Often, too, we shall have to disagree and then stand fast without losing their friendship.”

### Area Implementation

The third segment focused on how the areas planned to implement the motion. Before opening the floor, the Chairperson informed the Conference that the topic of one of the Chosen Agenda Items selected was “Alateen Background Checks.” She suggested that members with questions or comments about background checks could address them during that time period, leaving this session open to address other implementation concerns. At this point, many Delegates had concerns and questions regarding how their area would follow through. Members were encouraged to share solutions as well as their questions. Those Delegates whose areas had already developed and implemented requirements were able to provide valuable insight into the process and answered many of the questions that arose.

One Delegate began by addressing perfectionism. “We put together requirements that we will vote on at our assembly. As the years go by we will probably make

changes to them. We wanted to do them perfectly the first time, but we finally decided to put them in place and continue to work on them.” Another Delegate shared that, “We are going to start visiting each district and doing Alateen orientation meetings for anyone interested in Alateen, both kids and Sponsors, and show the do’s and don’ts of sponsoring.” Someone else said, “We do not have Alateen District Coordinators, just an Area Coordinator. We want the District Representatives to take on the responsibility of visiting the groups. They are our first line of defense. They should know who the Sponsors are. If there is a problem, they can bring it back to the meeting.”

A member cautioned that in smaller areas, some AA schedules list Alateen groups. When checking meeting lists for registered groups we need to cooperate with them. One assembly put a moratorium on registration of Alateen groups until their requirements were in place. Another is considering connecting

requirements to an annual training session. A Delegate shared, "Our Alateen Sponsors don't get their way paid to area functions. We are looking at how we can support our Alateen Sponsors. They want workshops, training, and guidelines."

A number of Delegates had questions about cost, and wondered how the area would afford to pay for legal counsel. One Delegate responded, "When we incorporated, we found places that do pro bono work. So, to be self-supporting, we were willing to give them a library of literature." Another member shared that Al-Anon can accept free services, provided they are given to all not-for-profits and an exception is not being made for Al-Anon.

Several areas require signed permission slips from the parents of Alateens in order for the Alateens to attend all events, including Alateen meetings. "If the Alateen gets hurt at the meeting, we need to know how to get in touch with someone." Also, the Alateens need to know there are consequences if they break the rules. One area has all their panel members attend at least one Alateen confer-

ence during the term. They also have all permission forms notarized.

One area Delegate shared that in her area Alateen members must be pre-registered for any function. No walk-in registrations are accepted, and a Sponsor must accompany the Alateens without exception. "We need to take care of our own members and not feel guilty if we turn someone away," she said. On that point, a WSO staff member elaborated on a recent conversation with the WSO's attorney regarding Alateens over the age of 18 and their status as adults. The WSO was advised that they are adults, but if they register at a function as an Alateen, they can be required to abide by the Alateen requirements. There is no difference in required behavior regardless of age.

Although not all of the questions were answered in this one session, a dialogue was opened and those who were in a position to do so availed themselves for further discussion later. Answers to some of the questions became clearer after the next session, when the WSO staff addressed how they plan to process information.

### WSO Process for Implementation

The Director of Member Services emphasized at the beginning of this session that the World Service Office wants to be a partner with the areas in implementing the new Alateen safety and behavioral requirements. The staff has developed a WSO process that can enhance communication and provide support to the areas as they develop and implement their processes.

The Associate Director of Member Services/Alateen presented information on this process. Each Conference member was given a folder with information and the new Alateen forms. The new forms included the Alateen Group Records Registration/Change form, the Al-Anon Member Involved in Alateen Service form (this will replace the Alateen Group Sponsor Questionnaire form), and the Area Process Notification form. While introducing each form, she explained its purpose and gave general instructions on its use. The presentation stressed that the WSO was looking forward to working with the areas in whatever way possible to ensure a smooth transition for all.

Each area is asked to designate an "Area Alateen Process Person." This person will

receive information from the WSO to distribute within the area according to the area processes. A timeframe for WSO distribution of processed and unprocessed information was given. The Area Alateen Process Person will also receive the annual certification list from the WSO. A sample was included in the packet.

Areas are encouraged to share information with the WSO as they begin developing their area registration and certification processes so that that information can be shared with other areas through the Alateen Coordinator mailings.

The Al-Anon Member Involved in Alateen Service form was discussed. A revision was made in response to a Delegate request regarding the wording preceding the Area Authorized Signature line. It was noted that the Area Authorized Signator can be any service position that the area determines in its process. The person authorized to sign the form is not guaranteeing the behavior of the Al-Anon member involved in Alateen service. The signator is verifying that to the best of his/her knowledge, the member does meet the area Alateen safety and behavioral

requirements.

The Associate Director of Group Services then introduced the new Alateen Group Records Registration/Change form. The form will be used only for Alateen groups and includes spaces for new information such as Sponsor name and Sponsor WSO number.

Questions and answers followed the presentation. December 31, 2004 is the date for area Alateen requirements and registration and certification processes to be in effect. A member determined to be ineligible to be of service to Alateen in one area would also be ineligible in other areas. Several questions concerned who needs to complete the Al-Anon Member Involved in Alateen Service form. The definition of an Al-Anon member involved in Alateen service was described as any Al-Anon member who is directly responsible for Alateens while being of service to Alateen. Each area would more clearly define what roles that involves. Another question concerned multi-area Alateen Conferences and how to comply with the requirements. Areas with Alateen conferences were encouraged to provide feedback to the WSO on this matter, as no final decisions have been made by the Board. A Delegate asked whether accepting free background checks violates the Traditions. If free background checks are offered to all not-for-profit organizations,

then Al-Anon can accept them. If they are offering them only to Al-Anon, then accepting them would violate the Traditions.

Another Delegate asked when medical and permission slips were necessary. This issue must be addressed in accordance with local laws. Some Delegates shared that their areas also require medical forms for meetings. "What if Alateen groups don't comply with the area requirements?" The response was to talk to the group—to try and reason things out at the group level first. If the group refuses to comply, then it is up to the area to notify the WSO to revoke that group's registration. A group will not be able to use the Alateen name if it refuses to adhere to the area group conscience.

As the four sessions evolved, a sense of unity spread throughout the Conference. In response to the Board's action, the topic of Alateen is now being thoroughly discussed on an area, district, and group level. This discussion has also brought many members to a deeper study of our Traditions, Concepts of Service, and the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27).

(See also Chosen Agenda Item #3, page 34 and WSC Motion #12, pages 55 and 57.)

## APPENDIX I

### Alateen Motion from the Board of Trustees (December 8, 2003)

#### MOTION

The Alateen Advisory Committee, the Group Services Committee, the World Service Office Policy Committee, and the Board of Trustees of Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. have studied the issues concerning the safety and behavior of Alateen members and individuals involved with Alateen service. The Board has reviewed the documents and actions of previous Conferences, previous Committees, and the World Service Office correspondence with legal counsel, individual members, Alateen Sponsors, Coordinators, as well as area and district officers.

The Board of Trustees has determined:

- Not all areas have written safety or behavioral requirements for Alateens and individuals involved with Alateen service.
- The WSO registration procedures and policies should support areas that have developed safety and behavioral requirements.
- The Al-Anon fellowship should take all necessary steps to provide a safe environment for Alateens and the Al-Anons involved with Alateen service.

As Tradition Four states, "Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting another group or Al-Anon or AA as a whole." The Board of Trustees has determined that issues of safety and behavior by Alateens and individuals involved with Alateen service do affect every group and Al-Anon as a whole.

The Board of Trustees, under Concept Seven and Warranty Four, is entrusted with the authority and responsibility to protect the Al-Anon and Alateen names and the organizational identity.

Now, therefore, the Board of Trustees resolves:

1. As soon as possible, but in any event, no later than December 31, 2004, if an area within the World Service Conference Structure uses the Al-Anon or Alateen name in conjunction with any meeting(s), group(s), convention(s), or any other gathering(s) in the area where Alateen participation is offered, the area must have safety and behavioral requirements for all Alateen members and Al-Anon members involved in Alateen service. These safety and behavioral requirements must meet the minimum requirements of Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc.
2. Al-Anon members involved in Alateen service and all Alateen members must adhere to the area's safety and behavioral requirements, or the area will notify the WSO that those members are prohibited from participating in Alateen service.
3. As soon as possible, but in any event, no later than December 31, 2004, and for each succeeding year, each area must have a process to certify, and must so certify to the WSO annually, that each Al-Anon member involved with Alateen service has met the area's safety and behavioral requirements and has agreed to abide by them.
4. The World Service Office will register only those Alateen groups whose registration it receives through the area's reg-

istration process. The WSO will remove from its registration list any Alateen group that the area determines does not comply with area safety and behavioral requirements. The area's request for removal of an Alateen group must be stated in writing to the Associate Director/Alateen. This applies to all Alateen groups, whether currently registered or not.

5. If the area states in writing to the Associate Director/Alateen that a group, meeting, convention, or gathering is failing to meet the area's safety and behavioral requirements, prior registration or interaction with the World Service Office shall not constitute any continuing right to use the Al-Anon or Alateen name.

#### Minimum Safety and Behavioral Requirements

1. Every Al-Anon member involved with Alateen service must:
  - a. be an Al-Anon member regularly attending Al-Anon meetings.
  - b. be at least 21 years old.
  - c. have at least two years in Al-Anon in addition to any time spent in Alateen.
  - d. not have been convicted of a felony, and not have been charged with child abuse or any other inappropriate sexual behavior, and not have demonstrated emotional problems which could result in harm to Alateen members.
2. There must be at least one Alateen Sponsor at every Alateen meeting.
3. The area requirements must prohibit overt or covert sexual interaction between any adult and Alateen member.
4. The area requirements must prohibit conduct contrary to applicable laws.
5. The area requirements must contain procedures for parental permission and medical care when applicable.
6. The area requirements must be reviewed by local counsel.

#### Other points for the areas to think about in developing their requirements:

- Requiring two Alateen Sponsors at every Alateen meeting.
- Having background checks.
- Considering behavior before, during, and after any Alateen meeting or activity of Alateens and adults involved with Alateen service.
- Connecting Alateen conferences to the area structure.
- Forming an Alateen meeting that meets at the same time and place as the Al-Anon meeting.
- Being gender conscious.
- Avoiding one-on-one interactions.
- Having an appropriate ratio of adults to Alateens at all times.
- Transporting Alateens to and from events.
- Educational training and awareness programs.