

Our Primary Purpose

Stories, news and information from our fellowship in the National Capital Region

Stay connected: how to get to an online meeting



Page 4

Coping with COVID-19: AA best practices



Page 9

More self-care: finding relevant AA literature



Page 11

COVID-19 changes everything

Ottawa Area Intergroup quickly helps members stay connected



Illustration by Ron M

See How COVID-19 changed AA, Page 6

Ottawa Intergroup Office

211 Bronson Avenue, Suite 108
Ottawa, Ontario, K1R 6H5
Office Hours: 10 am – 4 pm,
Monday-Friday and
1 pm – 4 pm Saturday
Telephone: (613) 237-6000
Email: info@ottawaaa.org

Newsletter Editor

newsletter@ottawaaa.org

Article submission deadline is
the 20th day of the month
preceding publication date

Ottawa Area Intergroup

Chair – Harry B

Vice-Chair – Frank O

Secretary – Charlene R

Treasurer – Sandy C

Website – Carolyn O

Telephone Answering – Al L

Literature – Doris M

12-Step Coordinator-Natalie L

Spring Conference – Cindy E-M

Eastern Ontario Conference-Richard C

Newsletter – Jeff F

chair@ottawaaa.org

vice@ottawaaa.org

secretary@ottawaaa.org

treasurer@ottawaaa.org

webmaster@ottawaaa.org

tas@ottawaaa.org

literature@ottawaaa.org

12step@ottawaaa.org

spring@ottawaaa.org

eoc@ottawaaa.org

newsletter@ottawaaa.org

Ottawa General Service Districts and Committees

District 54 – Ottawa East – Jo Anne D

District 58 – Ottawa Centre – Kim B

District 62 – Ottawa West – Trevor F

Cooperation with Professionals

Public Information/Media Contact

Corrections Facilities & Treatment – Mike B

Archives – Sue B

district54@ottawaaa.org

district58@ottawaaa.org

district62@ottawaaa.org

cpc@ottawaaa.org

pi@ottawaaa.org

cft@ottawaaa.org

archives@ottawaaa.org

Editorial – What an opportunity!

Sadly, during this Covid-19 public health crisis, many of us are no doubt waking up with that sinking feeling. We simply wouldn't be human if we weren't asking ourselves, "when will this be over? how much longer do I have to stay at home? when I will get my life back?"



Talk about hitting a bottom. It's as though our entire world is being forced to surrender and acknowledge it has been in a relative state of denial about the potential impacts of globalization – especially as it relates to the spread of infectious disease.

It's at times like this, as rare as an all-consuming global pandemic might be, we are reminded that "recovery" doesn't guarantee us a better life; it's a better way to deal with life.

Getting sober opens the floodgates to a real mixed bag of thoughts, feelings and behaviors. On the one hand, a pity party for the fact that everyone else can still drink but we cannot. On the other, a sense of pride and hope that maybe, just maybe, we can do this, and find the peace and serenity that has eluded us for so long.

At first, we were still egocentric enough to want it all TODAY. We needed it to happen NOW. It took a while to discover that recovery is like life. It unfolds

slowly, and outcomes are determined by countless factors over which we have absolutely NO control.

Whether or not we believe in a Higher Power, we all agree that we simply cannot get sober on our own. We need help. It comes to us in many different ways: through faith, through meetings and connections, through the 12-Step program, through sponsorship, and through service to AA and the community at large.

But before any of this can happen we need to accept who we are, and we have to make a fundamental decision to "let go" and entrust our will and our lives to either a Higher Power, or the collective wisdom of those who are already ahead of us on this journey.

If there's one thing this current global public health emergency is teaching us; it's a huge lesson in acceptance and letting go.

What we've been handed is an incredible opportunity for personal growth and humility. Confined to our homes we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reflect more deeply on how committed we are to turning it over. This pandemic is beyond any one person's control. Perhaps we can now grasp what it means to plug into a universal life force that sustains the planet.

Ponder this:

*"We don't see things as they are;
we see them as we are"*

Anais Nin (French-Cuban author, 1903-1977)

If we can accept who we are, knowing in our hearts that we cannot control the outcome, then we can get through this calamity together.

We are who we are, one suffering alcoholic helping another.

AA Online Meeting Rookies get Savvy!

“Don’t drink”, “go to meetings” and “keep coming back!” These are the things we say to each other in church basements and community centres in between handshakes and hugs.

When physical togetherness had to be paused, we started saying these things to each other through microphones, and we replaced the handshakes and hugs with smiles and nods through cameras hiding inside laptops, tablets and phones. It all started very quickly when members with some experience created online meetings and encouraged video rookies to give it a try.

This new way to connect began taking off and through trial, error and – for some - unfortunate encounters with disruptive intruders who prey on inexperience, we started to get savvy.

We now have an extensive list of online meetings you can join with a simple click of a mouse or the press of a finger on a link found on the meetings

page of the Ottawa Area Intergroup website at <https://ottawaaa.org>.

Using tips for safer online meetings published on the net and the sharing of lessons learned before they were fully followed, our now savvy hosts and co-hosts work together to close vulnerabilities in the meeting settings before virtual rooms are opened and to monitor activity throughout the meeting to keep us safe.

Attending an AA meeting for the first time, for most of us, was a scary thing. Newcomers may be reluctant to join an online meeting so our Telephone Answering Service is still a wonderful place for them to start by calling **613-237-6000** or emailing tas@ottawaaa.org. Requests for 12-step support can be made through the same number or by emailing 12step@ottawaaa.org.

Please send changes or additions to the online meeting list to webmaster@ottawaaa.org

The Digital Basket



Contributions to Ottawa Area Intergroup *and* to Home Groups (if they submit a link)

Visit <https://interactive.ottawaaa.org/online-7th-tradition-contributions/> to make a personal or group contribution via credit card to Ottawa Area Intergroup. Your contributions support the Intergroup office and the services it provides such as telephone answering, literature sales, meeting directories, conferences and this website.

For online contribution ideas for Home Groups, we also have a document posted to the same webpage with tips on how to get started. Intergroup can help provide easy access to contribution links created by Home Groups by posting them on the website. We also post Group email addresses that are set up to receive automatic Interac e-transfers.

How am I doing through all this?

A member shares...

I turned on my phone and connected with the outside world for the first time in 12 days on the morning of March 13. I had just completed the family program in Elliot Lake. My connection to my heart and higher power were beaming; I felt excited to get back to life, meetings, service and my recovery friends and family. As I read the news and began to reconnect on the drive back to Ottawa, I realized that I was returning to a world in crisis.

For the last 8 years balance, structure, regular meeting attendance, service work and social connection have laid the foundation for my recovery. I have grown to accept uncertainty and pain as a part of life, but I still find most comfort with familiarity and safety. With each passing day another one of my familiar safe places shuts down and I felt so scared. First the gym, and finally, the most difficult to accept, the AA meetings. All I kept hearing was, "no groups, no close contact, no meeting others, the pandemic is spreading, and we have to flatten the curve before it's too late." My heart sank in my chest.

When I think about AA it reminds me of a tiny beam of light reaching a dark corner from a source that can't be explained. It gives me hope and I remember feeling it at my first meeting. I also felt that power last week when only hours after the meetings were cancelled, I received invites to daily video and telephone meetings. I also began to receive messages from fellow alcoholics asking if I was alright or if I needed anything, and I began to do the same for others.

I called my sponsor and she shared with me the things she was doing to get through each day. I began to feel a sense of community and emotional connection again despite the need for physical distance. No one knows how long this is going to last and everything is uncertain right now, but I believe I can face this one day at a time.



I've settled into a new routine beginning my day more consciously than ever with my daily reflections, language of letting go, a daily meditation book, and prayer. I feel most positive and connected with my higher power when I am active outdoors, so I am making sure that I get out every single day to exercise. My recovery basics, of proper nutrition and rest, are vital to my physical and emotional health right now.

I also need to live in gratitude more than ever. From morning to night there are stories of the disease spreading, potential collapse of our healthcare system, impending economic crisis and every other nightmare imaginable. My alcoholic brain could feed on all of that negativity and put me in a depressed state of mind. I need to fight against that state of mind and gratitude is my biggest weapon. Even through all of this, there is so much to be grateful for and I can't lose sight of that.

Lastly, I attend a video meeting daily. Initially it felt uncomfortable but now I look forward to seeing my brave fellow alcoholics inspire me with their experience, strength and hope every day on my computer screen.

We are never alone; we don't have to go through anything alone ever again and the loving spirit of Alcoholics Anonymous continues to prove this to me.

In love, health and gratitude,
Becky B

How COVID-19 changed AA—in a heartbeat!, from Page 1

Most of us realize the true litmus test for our AA fellowship is an ability to be there – with arms wide open – for the newcomer.

How, in the face of a pandemic and mandatory social distancing, were we to welcome the newcomer when forced to shutter the doors of churches, and community centers where our face to face meetings take place? And where we hold hands while pledging to help each other stay sober.

Many have called this our generation's World War, and without doubt Covid-19 is helping us all to see what it's like to be part of a war effort. For AAs it meant finding a quick and effective substitute for in-person meetings – the lifeblood of our program.

Ottawa Area Intergroup stepped up. Within days of the curtain coming down on home groups across the region, members were able to go to our Ottawaaa.org website, and click through to a "virtual" online meeting.

Would it work? Would we change old habits? Our Primary Purpose decided to find out. And what we discovered was a rich tapestry of new AA energy and innovation. What do we say? "Change we must." Well, change we have, and quickly.

The vulnerable

Simon S was barely a week out of treatment when the world changed, and an AA fellowship he was just getting to know was seemingly disbanding.



"I was worried because one of the issues I had battled in addiction was the need to isolate. And now here I was, finished my treatment program, with a plan and a focus, and I'm told to stay home. I didn't think my chances of staying sober were going to be very good."

Just released from a 30-day program, the 22-year-old was well armed with recovery resources: a relapse prevention councilor, an addiction specialist, and a psychologist. The song-sheet everyone was singing from, "don't drink, and go to meetings."

"I had been to four or five meetings. I could feel the momentum building. And then it all came to a sudden halt. And I was scared to go online."

Simon ultimately decided he had no choice but to give virtual AA a try. He reached out to the Tuesday Secular Sobriety meeting. It was an intimate group of about nine faces that greeted him on his screen. He summoned the courage to share, and instantly felt welcomed.

"Right away I felt like people cared, and wanted to help me, seeing that I was in the very early days of recovery. I can't wait for real meetings to begin again, but in the meantime I'm more confident that virtual meetings can and will help me to stay sober."

The Covid effect

Katherine E admits the last couple of years have been a real struggle. She's relapsed numerous times and found it difficult to put together more than two months of sobriety.

But as fate would have it, she found a new sponsor only days before the Covid-19 tsunami washed away her home group.

“It sure makes you realize there’s so much going on that’s beyond our control. And in a crazy kind of way what’s happening right now is giving me renewed faith in the fellowship, and hope in mankind. Having access to meetings online is definitely helping me to stay focused from one day to the next.”

Her home group is giving her a daily online reprieve, and it’s one that’s badly needed.

“Much of my extended family is back in Italy where the pandemic has hit very hard. Many loved ones are struggling financially and running out of essentials. And they’re not being compensated for staying at home.”

Katherine, with only weeks of sobriety, has found purpose in reaching out to her extended family in Europe.

“I’m doing what little I can to comfort my loved ones, and I think in some small way it’s helping to keep me sober. But I also need what AA can offer me right now, and online meetings have been a big part of that.”



Focusing on what works

Jay M is very much a glass half full when it comes to his recovery journey. And the corona virus has only strengthened his resolve to stay positive.

“At times like this, we all – in recovery or not – have a choice to make. We can throw up our hands and say NO I can’t do this. Or, we can see it as an opportunity to re-invigorate ourselves and be the best we can be.”

Jay has a simple three-point plan for staying on track with his sobriety. And he’s already convinced that it’s Covid-ready.



“First of all, I do what people who know more than I know tell me to do. It’s worked well for me in recovery and works well in the midst of this crisis. So, when public health officials tell me stay at home, wash my hands, don’t touch my face, or stay two meters from others, that’s what I do.

Second, I live life to the fullest. Now, during this pandemic, I could choose to live in fear. Or I can choose to be kind to myself and be kind to others – whatever that might entail. Maybe it’s delivering groceries to someone who is self-isolating.

Third, I leave the rest up to my Higher Power, and trust in my journey, wherever it’s taking me. If I can do that, knowing that I’m already handling points one and two, then I know I’m doing everything I can.”

By the way, Jay just celebrated two years of sobriety online with his home group.

“I truly appreciate these online meetings. And I loved my virtual 2nd anniversary celebration as well. If we think positively about what is going on right now in the world, and in AA, then we are going to do just fine.”

Offshore lifeline

For Mary N, in her 70’s, rendered immune compromised by a heart condition, and now stranded in the Bahamas, access to AA online is truly a lifeline.

“Ottawa’s Lunch With Bill was the first ever online meeting I’ve attended, and believe me it felt great to see faces from the Ottawa AA community.

Mary and her husband have, for a number of years, been spending half of their time on Grand Bahama island. Under normal circumstances they would have been coming home to Ottawa in early May, but then the world changed.

“We tried desperately to get home sooner, but it quickly became clear that I was going to be potentially exposing myself to the virus as I jumped from flight to flight and transited through a number of busy airports. My locally-based physician thought I was lowering my risk by staying put.”

Not long after the pandemic was declared, the Nassau-based airport closed, along with the seaports, and that has made getting off the islands, by any regular means, next to impossible.

“Isolation like this is never easy, but being trapped in a different country, with an already less than adequate health care system, is pretty scary and extreme. I’ve got my meditation, and my books, but online meetings are a blessing.”

A service opportunity

Bill B normally sees upwards of 40 to 50 people attending his Barrhaven Tuesday night home group. He and his closer circle who make up the Barrhaven business meeting knew they needed to provide a substitute when Covid-19 pushed everyone behind closed doors.

“One of the elders of our group, who also happens to be my sponsor, suggested maybe I should look into it. And we all know, of course, that when our sponsor suggests something then there’s a little extra incentive to comply.”

Bill happens to have an IT background, so looking into a videoconference platform, like Zoom, wasn’t too big a stretch. An impromptu business meeting was then convened online, and everyone agreed they were ready to throw it open to their Tuesday members.



You know “You know there was an interesting energy to our first online meeting. It was kind of like going back



in time, and being ‘in the rooms’ for your first AA meeting. But it didn’t take long for hands to start going up. As soon as people started hearing things they could relate to we quickly

found a comfort level with our new way of gathering.”

Intergroup Heroism

As soon as it became clear that social distancing was becoming more than just a recommendation, but an urgent public health necessity, AA meetings across the Ottawa Area began to close.

The Webmaster for Ottawa Area Intergroup, Carolyn O, saw her inbox explode as announcements started to flood in from home groups right across the region.

“We saw the operations of our Ottawa AA fellowship change in a very short time, and it quickly became clear that we were going to have to focus our attention on the Ottawa meeting list, and by extension the smartphone app called Meeting Guide.”

What a lot of members don’t appreciate is the digital infrastructure that’s required to provide up-to-date content for both the Ottawaaa.org website, but also parallel content being accessed from the mobile platform on members’ smartphones. Additional programming is also needed to help update the Meeting Guide app.

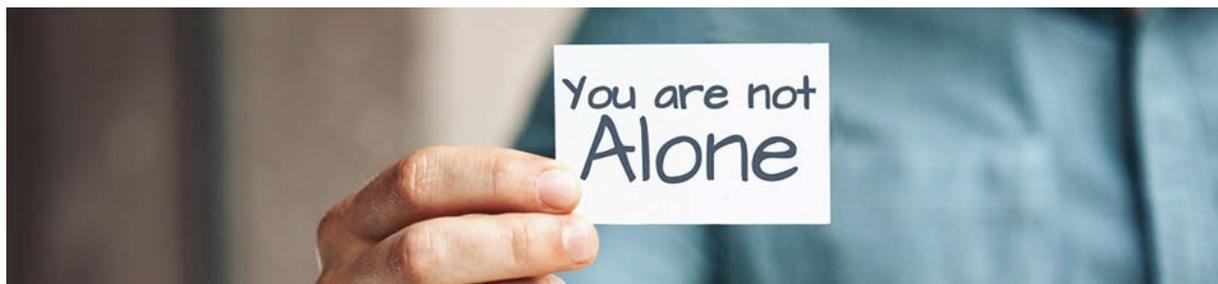
During the last two weeks of March, Carolyn dedicated dozens of extra hours in her tireless efforts to maintain timely and accurate information about meeting closures and newly arriving links to an ever-growing list of online meetings.

“Our goal was to be able to inform our membership, as efficiently as possible, of where and when they could access what was rapidly becoming a longer and longer list of online meetings. And I’m very proud of the leadership role that Intergroup was able to take to help as many as possible stay connected to the fellowship.”

Thanks to Carolyn’s personal sacrifice, members now have more than 100 online meetings to choose from.

Intergroup is also making information available on its website to help home groups collect 7th tradition funds in order to meet their financial obligations

10 AA best practices: relapse prevention during COVID-19



1. Attend meetings online, if need be, use the time before and after the meeting to engage with either the host, or other members, if additional support is required.
2. Keep in regular contact with your sponsor, having more frequent check-ins to maintain a vital sense of connection to your own personal recovery program.
3. Maintain contact with at least two or three other trusted members of the AA fellowship, in order to fill in the gaps between conversations with your sponsor.
4. Try to build some form of a daily mindfulness practice, which may include activities like meditation, or reading, or listening to audio books, or music. Explore mindfulness options online such as “guided” meditation using a specific app. Yoga or walks outside can also be meditative.
5. Daily journaling is a powerful tool to help explore and chronicle thoughts, and feelings related to your recovery and your efforts to deal with the current crisis.
6. On a daily basis, identify at least one other person to call, and say hello to, from your home group or other meetings regularly attended...simply in the spirit of fellowship.
7. Write a gratitude list.
8. Volunteer to cover a shift with our AA Telephone Answering Service (TAS) by contacting the TAS coordinator: tas@ottawaaa.org
9. Consider putting your name on the 12-step call list and be willing to reach out to a newcomer who needs support. Email: 12step@ottawaaa.org
10. Volunteer to host an online meeting for your home group by speaking to one of your current hosts, or email: info@ottawaaa.org

More tips for coping with the challenge of isolation

1. **Stick to a routine.** Go to sleep and wake up at a reasonable time, write a schedule that is varied and includes time for work as well as self-care.
2. **Get outside at least once a day**, for at least thirty minutes. If you are concerned about contact, try first thing in the morning, or later in the evening, and try less traveled streets and avenues.
3. **Stay hydrated and eat well.** This one may seem obvious, but stress and eating often don't mix well, and we find ourselves over-indulging, forgetting to eat, and avoiding food. Drink plenty of water, eat good and nutritious foods. Challenge yourself to learn how to cook something new!
4. **Spend extra time playing with children.** Children rarely talk how they are feeling but will often make a bid for attention and communication through play. Don't be surprised to see therapeutic themes of illness, doctor visits, and isolation come out during play time. Play is helpful for children—it is how they process their world and problem solve, and there's a lot coming at them at this time.
5. **Give everyone the benefit of the doubt**, and a wide berth. A lot of cooped up time can bring out the worst in everyone. Each person will have moments when they will not be at their best. It is important to move with grace through blow-ups, to not show up to every argument you are invited to, and to not hold grudges and continue disagreements.
6. **Lower expectations and practice radical self-acceptance.** Fear and stress may dictact much of our behaviour. Grant yourself "radical self-acceptance": accepting everything about yourself, your current situation, and your life without question, blame, or pushback.
7. **Limit social media and COVID conversation**, especially around children. One can find tons of information on COVID-19 to consume, and it changes minute to minute. The information is often sensationalized, negatively skewed, and alarmist.
8. **Notice the good in the world**, the helpers. There is a lot of scary, negative, and overwhelming information to take in regarding this pandemic. There are also a ton of stories of people sacrificing, donating, and supporting one another in miraculous ways. It is important to counter-balance the heavy information with the hopeful information.
9. **Help others.** Find ways, big and small, to give back to others. Support restaurants, offer to grocery shop, check in with elderly neighbors, write psychological wellness tips for others—helping others gives us a sense of purpose when things seem out of control.
10. **Find a long-term project to dive into.** Now is the time to learn how to play the piano, put together a huge jigsaw puzzle, start a 15 hour game of Risk, paint a picture, read the Harry Potter series, binge watch an 8-season show, crochet a blanket, solve a Rubik's cube, or develop a new town in Animal Crossing.
11. **Find lightness and humor in each day.** There is a lot to be worried about, and with good reason. Counterbalance this heaviness with something funny each day: cat videos on YouTube, a stand-up show on Netflix, a funny movie—we all need a little comedic relief in our day, every day.

From the Literature Coordinator



The International Journal of Alcoholics Anonymous

Free online

Due to the current changing health situation, many AA meetings across the U.S. and Canada are finding it safer to close. To help members during this time, AA Grapevine is giving everyone **free access** to all of its 2020 Grapevine and La Viña issues. (The audio to Grapevine's stories will be available as well, so people can listen to the stories if they like.) Please share with other members.

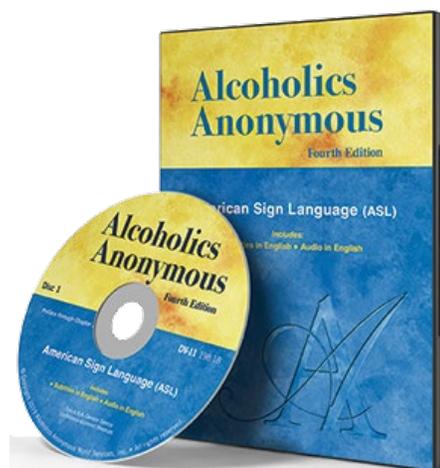
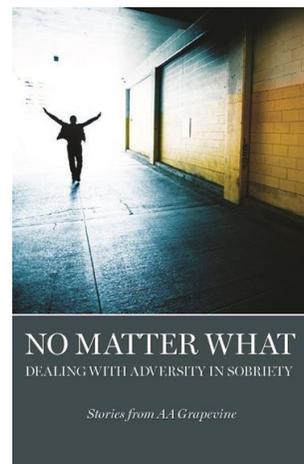
AAGrapevine has also included a link to its **YouTube** channel with some original audio stories as well as other important information.

To enter, visit:

www.aagrapevine.org/we-are-here-to-help

All recovering alcoholics have had to deal with adversity throughout sobriety...a serious illness, an ugly divorce, the death of a child, the loss of a house to fire or to the bank. Despite the fear, pain or self-pity we are in when these tragedies strike, drinking is not an option. The stories in this book show how AA members use the tools of the program and embrace the Fellowship to deal with tough issues.

While our office is closed, this book can be ordered directly from aagrapevine.org store



A New ASL Big Book Arrives

The General Service Office (GSO) has produced a new translation of the Big Book and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions into American Sign Language (ASL) to keep them up to date.

Published on DVD, (the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions will follow soon) the new ASL Big Book includes subtitles and an audio track and can be viewed on aa.org as well as A.A.W.S.'s **YouTube** channel. (from Box 459).

SERVICE CALENDAR

Individual committees may organize their own online meetings.

No matter how much sobriety you have, you can help and be part of the greater whole. All AA members are welcome to attend any of the following committees:

OTTAWA INTERGROUP MONTHLY MEETING..... Second Wednesday (7:00 pm)
(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue – Nepean Room)

DISTRICT 54 MEETING..... First Thursday (7:30 pm)
(Overbrook Community Centre, 33 Quill Street)

DISTRICT 58 MEETING..... First Monday (7:00 pm)
(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue - Room 213)

DISTRICT 62 MEETING..... Second Monday (7:30 pm)
(All Saints Church, 347 Richmond Road - rear entrance)

CORRECTIONS FACILITIES AND TREATMENT..... Fourth Tuesday (6:30 pm)
(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue - Room 108)

PUBLIC INFORMATION/ COOPERATION WITH PROFESSIONALS...Third Monday (6:30 pm)
(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue - Room 108)

OTTAWA ARCHIVES..... Third Wednesday (7:00 pm)
(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue - Room 108)

Is your AA Group's meeting information correct on ottawaaa.org? Please send all updates as well as temporary closures to Ottawa Intergroup at info@ottawaaa.org.

Do you have a question for the Intergroup board? Please email us with your question and you can also request an invitation to meet with us at our monthly board meeting. Send your email to chair@ottawaaa.org.

If your group needs insurance, please contact Ottawa Intergroup at info@ottawaaa.org to discuss.

“Our Primary Purpose” publishes articles reflecting the full diversity of experience and opinion found within the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. In determining content, the editor relies on the principles of the Twelve Traditions. “Our Primary Purpose” values the shared experience of individual AA members working the AA program and applying the principles of the Twelve Steps. Seeking neither to gloss over difficult issues, nor to present such issues in a harmful or contentious manner, “Our Primary Purpose” tries to embody the widest possible view of the AA Fellowship.

The editor of “Our Primary Purpose” reserves the right to accept or reject material for publication, based on the AA traditions. Note: this policy is consistent with that of the AA Grapevine.

Articles are not intended to be statements of AA policy, nor does publication of any article constitute endorsement by either Alcoholics Anonymous or Ottawa Area Intergroup. Submissions are always welcome.