

# Our Primary Purpose

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

**\*New\*** Check out the  
OPP's creative corner



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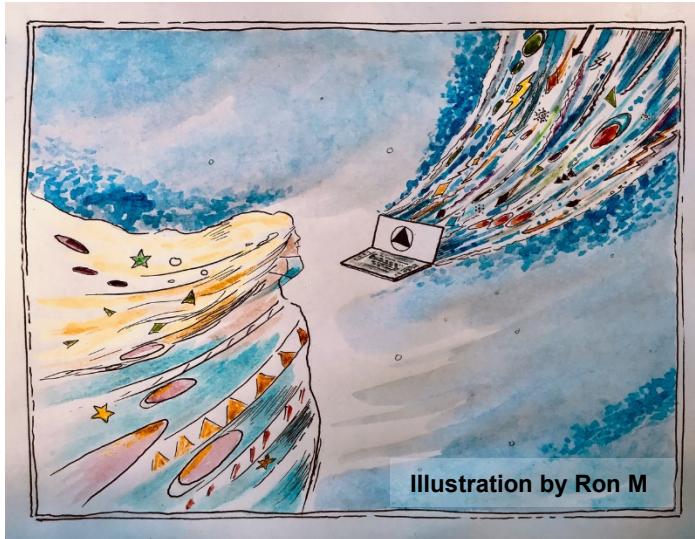
Our AA history: A look  
back at the 1990 Int'l  
Convention



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## Are you on the way up or down? Covid-19 has us taking stock of our recovery journey

Two months into the pandemic, with its strict physical distancing measures, most of us have now established a new AA routine. It usually involves online meetings, supplemented by various other video and phone interactions.



Covid-19 is giving some of us pause to dig deeper into the meaning of recovery

With much uncertainty around a return to some kind of normalcy – which in our case would hopefully include in-person meetings – we find

ourselves with extra time to contemplate our recovery journey.

Most would agree that, ordinarily, our own ability to deal with adversity is determined by the quality of our sobriety. An active 12-Step program, accompanied by reasonable emotional balance, gives us a fighting chance to deal with most everything life throws our way.

But, with Covid-19, we're in uncharted water. Some facing job loss and unprecedented economic hardship; others dealing with the illness of an elderly relative, for example.

*Our Primary Purpose* decided to find out how the current situation is impacting efforts to stay sober.

### Avoiding calamity

For Melanie D, Covid-19 will long be remembered for its power to inspire hope and resolve – all of which she recently rediscovered through her connection to Alcoholics Anonymous.

Troubles began about a year ago when she moved from Montreal to the National Capital Region and drifted away from the program. The situation intensified with a one-day slip in January.

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

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# Editorial – Same problem, new challenge

You're familiar with that definition of insanity – doing the same things over and over again and expecting a different result. It's probably not a bad starting point, as many of us continue to measure and manage our relative state of sanity during this pandemic.

Here we are now fully ensconced in one of the strangest situations anyone of us could ever have imagined. And, as we try to come to terms with our so-called "new" normal...which we all know is going to be ever (albeit very slowly) evolving over the next one to two years...it's the perfect storm for some of us to get lost in, and do what we do best.

That is: deny there's a problem...one that we need help in solving.

Let's, for a moment at least, step away from that wall we've been banging our heads against for the past few weeks, months, or maybe even years. Let's examine the one problem that afflicts so many of us, on a micro or macro scale.

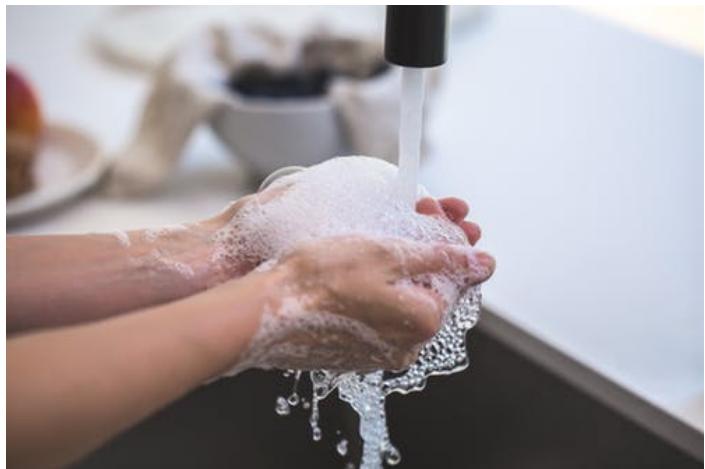
## ASKING FOR HELP.

Isn't it odd? Here we are in the midst of a once-in-a-lifetime, planet-altering, public health crisis, where people the world over are dealing with unprecedented stress, hardship, and, most of all, uncertainty. Asking for help seems almost redundant. It's just so apparent, and explicit.

Many of us find ourselves doing things for others we never would have imagined or contemplated before. Like reaching out to that quiet, unassuming neighbor we never got to know, and for whom we are now offering to pick up groceries or medication.

It seems like everyone is in RESCUE mode. Make no mistake, there are countless in need of our help. Like never before. But isn't it so very convenient for those of us – with our codependent tendencies – to be rushing to put the needs of others ahead of our own.

Helping our loved ones, or our neighbors, makes us feel good, at least for the moment. But what we've



discovered is that Covid-19 is giving us a wealth of moments to sit back and reflect on what we might be doing for ourselves.

Let's consider a couple of elephants who continue to sleep in the corners of "the rooms of AA."

How many among us are without a sponsor? Or, have a sponsor we haven't talked to for quite some time. We seem to pride ourselves on being low maintenance. Our sponsor, we rationalize, is busy supporting the newcomer who needs the help more than we do.

Or, how many of us, in all honesty, have kind of skipped across the 12-Step dance floor without really taking the time to listen to the genre of music we were moving to? Was it swing, or ballroom? Was it rock n' roll, or the macarena?

Many of you who are reading this will say, "I've got a sponsor, I've done the steps, I've got this, all good here." But you probably know a few members who haven't. While it's not your place to tell them what to do, there's nothing stopping you from sharing your experience, strength and hope. And in doing so, you might even realize what you yourself could be doing more of to make this journey a bit richer or deeper.

Now is the perfect time to re-evaluate our recovery journey, and the quality of our sobriety.

Maybe this new challenge we are all facing can give some of us pause to rethink an old problem.

# What happens when there are no more AA meetings? A member shares ...

Before coronavirus became a pandemic, I was going to three AA meetings a week. Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Getting in my car at 7:30 p.m., picking up my coffee at Tim's, and off I'd go.

This has been my routine for years. I look forward to my meetings, being with people, my peers, seeing newcomers, celebrating birthdays, sharing our challenges in recovery. But most important, my meetings kept me from isolating.

Now, with government stay at home orders in place, I am forced to isolate and all of a sudden there were no more meetings to go to. What was I supposed to do? If you're anything like me, I suffer from anxiety and I'm worried about getting sick, worried about getting my groceries, worried about work, I'm just worried and it's overwhelming.

I have a few phone numbers, but I don't call, I'm used to talking face to face not on the phone.

Then I get an email. Monday's meeting is going online. Download Zoom it says. Ok so I download this software onto my laptop and make myself a coffee, then go to the AA website and click on the link for Monday night and all of a sudden there we are. Familiar faces popping up on the screen and everybody is chatting excitedly and saying hello just as if we were in the church basement. Then the meeting starts, and the format is the same: How it works, 12 Steps, 12 traditions, announcements, etc. It's somehow different though because this format allows me to see everyone's face when someone shares. Usually I can only see the backs of heads, so I don't get a chance to see expressions.

Wednesday comes along and the same thing. Thirty-five guys at the men's group. Impressive.

All of a sudden, my anxiety is diminishing. My program is in place. My friends are still out there, and we are all going through it together.

As I discover this new model of meeting, I decide to go outside my bubble. So, I visit the AA International web site and look for Zoom meetings in other countries. Hmm, 9:00 at night my time. I can catch a lunch meeting in Australia where it's already tomorrow. I connect and I'm in a room full of strangers in a strange land listening to their stories of recovery and hope, and when it's my turn to share, they are overjoyed at having a fellow from Canada visiting.

In addition to my regular groups I have now done meetings in the UK, The United States, New Zealand, and Germany.

I'm also able to have Zoom connections with sponsees and continue working the steps.

I'm finding that I'm spending more time on the phone talking with other members. This is something I hadn't done much of in the past.

And I'm not feeling isolated anymore.

As a matter of fact, I feel more connected to AA than I ever have in the past. I was used to waiting two or three days before sharing, not anymore. I'm seeing something else happen also. People are helping others get connected to the technology and reaching out more. Even though we can't meet at the coffee shop anymore, we can still go to the drive through and have a parking lot visit. As long as we stay in our cars and park two metres from each other.

During times of crisis AA always comes through. There is always a way of staying connected. Virtual or otherwise. We need each other, and our brothers and sisters are always there no matter where you are in the world.

Thank you for my sobriety.

Paul L

# ZOOM online meeting security

## Passwords protect you from random crashers

Passwords protect against malicious users who use “war-dialing” (automated software that scans random meeting numbers) to attempt to join and disrupt your meeting. Publishing your password on the meeting list allows newcomers to find you.

## Assign Co-host(s)

Co-host(s) can take responsibility for admitting participants while the host chairs the meeting. They can mute participants (and not allow them to unmute themselves). They can also turn off a participant’s video and remove them if needed.

## Use the waiting room

Admitting participants one-by-one alerts you to participants you don’t recognize. Add a custom

note asking participants to set their name so they don’t join as “iphone” or “galaxy tablet”.

Participants can be moved back to the waiting room or be removed from the meeting by the host or co-host any time. Adjust your settings not to allow removed participants to rejoin.

## Allow chat and screen sharing by host only and turn off annotations

In the case someone is admitted with the intent to disrupt they are extremely limited in what they can do.

## Lock the meeting

Once the meeting is underway, you can decide to lock the virtual door. No further participants can join once it is locked but the host or co-host(s) can unlock it at any time.

# Online 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition



Contributions by Individual Members or Groups can be made via credit card, Paypal account or online banking.

Intergroup contributions can be made by clicking the contribution button for credit card or Paypal and e-Transfers through online banking can be sent to [treasurer@ottawaaa.org](mailto:treasurer@ottawaaa.org). Contributions will be deposited automatically and receipts will be issued.

Some Home Groups have also sent contribution buttons or group email addresses for posting to the Intergroup website.

Follow the Online 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition links on the main page of our website at <https://ottawaaa.org> if you want to make a contribution.

# TAS Participation is up – *Thank you!*

The Intergroup volunteer list has grown over recent weeks with more and more members pitching in to take Remote Telephone Answering shifts. There are time slots still open for the taking and you can view them on the monthly calendar found at <https://interactive.ottawaaa.org/tas>

A step-by-step video and printable training guides are available in the volunteer area of the website. Contact [tas@ottawaaa.org](mailto:tas@ottawaaa.org) to join the TAS team.

## Taking stock, from Page 1

Her life took a much a darker turn three months later when a relationship ended abruptly, and a week following, the pandemic forced her lay-off from work.

"Single, all of a sudden, and isolated at home, I quickly spiraled into deep depression and anxiety. It was one of my lowest points in a long time. I knew I was at a crossroads, and that my sobriety was hanging by a thread."

Melanie had fully surrendered to her alcoholism in a treatment program four years ago and left behind were strong instincts for survival and recovery.

"Deep down I knew that if I could get back into the rooms of AA, I could save myself and turn things around."

She managed to get to a few meetings before Covid-19 changed the world of AA. She broke down in tears the first time she shared online. And then along came the humanity of our program.

"A woman from that very first online meeting reached out to me right away, and she has since become my sponsor. This pandemic has indeed become a turning point for me."

Melanie admits the pink clouds come and go, and with no real end in sight to our social distancing reality, she has plenty of incentive to dig deeper into the 12 Steps.

"No question, Covid-19 was giving me an added reason to drink. But AA has been there for me and renewed my faith in both a Higher Power and the human spirit."

### Building a new resiliency

Bill M, like many, has enjoyed a checkered recovery history; but he's convinced that Covid-19 is in some way inspiring him to consolidate the quality of his current sobriety.

Mid-April, he celebrated a year sober, and now finds that forced isolation is giving him pause to reflect more profoundly about what his recovery is truly based upon.

"For a long time, I had convinced myself that I wasn't an alcoholic, and that mental health challenges

accounted for my troubles. And that seemed to give me license to drink and drug."

For certain periods, Bill had been able to measure his consumption of drugs and alcohol, but he was still miserable and anxious. That began to change when he ultimately re-committed to the program.

And now recent events are pushing him to dig deeper into his psyche, and with the help of AA, he's optimistic about building a much stronger recovery, and sense of self.

"I needed to have more regular contact with a sponsor. I needed to be more accountable. I also needed to be more mindful. I'm using the extra time each day to really build my mindfulness practice."

Bill is self-employed and had to apply for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit. There was a point during the process where he had to call back over a thousand times; he actually counted. He was "on hold" for hours at a time.

"If I wasn't sober right now, with all of this financial uncertainty, I would have been a basket case for sure. I would have had an easy excuse to drink."

Bill is regularly attending online meetings, talking to his sponsor, working the 12 Steps, reading, meditating, and getting exercise as he walks his two dogs. He's limiting the time he spends listening to media reports about the pandemic and trying to focus on more positive subjects.

"The collective energy, in society at large, is so heavy right now. We are very fortunate to have meetings to go to, and to be able to keep our emotions in check."

Bill believes that Covid-19 is forcing some people to put more effort into their recovery, but he also thinks that most of us can, when forced to, dig deep enough to find that resolve.

"In normal times, if you lived in an area with poor bus service, you would still find a way to get to a meeting. One may not be too tech savvy these days, but we find a way to get online and attend a meeting."

## \*NEW\* The OPP Creative Corner

Covid-19 is giving us gifts. We have more time to reflect and to create. Our new "Creative Corner" is going to be a place where we can share what AA members are doing with extra time on their hands during the pandemic. ***Send us your poetry, or your paintings, or your photographs.*** You can reach us at: [newsletter@ottawaaa.org](mailto:newsletter@ottawaaa.org)

### This Precious Gift

Rick R

They say four billion years ago life showed its face on earth.

And as it happened, man became, the product of that birth

Then grapes appeared upon the vine, eight thousand years just past.

Their juice, when crushed, seemed harmless, when enjoyed with repast.

But like most things that seem so fine, and too good to be true,

A darker side revealed the lure that many came to rue.

When smitten by this patient foe the bearers have no shield,

And when the choice is yea or nay, the stricken always yield.

So shameful was this malady, a moral thing they said.

Their families kept their secret safe, long after they were dead.

Centuries have come and gone, since first it got its grip,

And one in ten would pay the price, when venturing one sip.

Then God saw fit to intervene and offer up a choice,

And Bill and Bob were listening and heard his loving voice.

How fortunate we are today, to be among the first,

to have been chosen, at this time, to quell that deadly thirst.

The wisdom of eight thousand years is laid there at our feet.

I'm blessed to have it waiting, when I stumbled in defeat.

When pondering the suffering crossed, that vast expanse of time,

I would not waste one moment of, His precious gift sublime.

## From the AA archives...

### How the Chips Came to Ottawa

AA Ottawa hasn't always had the chip system as one of its many tools. Ghislaine L, a dedicated and enthusiastic member, with more than 44 years of sobriety, remembers how the chips came to Ottawa.

"I lived in Ottawa all my life, and in 1974 transferred to Montreal to work for the same firm. It was an excuse to leave all my drinking friends behind. I was indeed very sick when I made that decision.

"I spent 14 months in Montreal. It was the worst part of my life; I drank the most, I got sick the most, I was hospitalized three times and I eventually I left my job. I lived in total despair. I attended a few AA meetings but was still drinking.

Finally, I had a moment – June 22, 1975. I was sitting on the floor of my apartment, crying, and I thought 'I need help'. At that very moment that I felt something like a miracle or a spiritual awakening, and I was led to empty the contents of my bottles and stopped taking my pills. A day and a half later, I was very ill and used the last of my money to take a taxi to the Montreal Intergroup office where I met a little woman named Terry, also known as Terry the terror. She gave me her phone number and told me to call her any time, day or night, as long as I was sober. I did contact her, and, with her help, was hospitalized due to the DTs and convulsions. She took me to Maple Leaf Farm in Vermont, a three-week detox/recovery program. I came back to Ottawa shortly thereafter. That was the best part of my life because it was the beginning of my journey to sobriety.

"Terry had taken me to a meeting in Montreal and had given me a desire chip. In Montreal at that



time, the sponsor gave chips to sponsees and you received a medallion after two years.;

"In Ottawa, I joined the Centennial Group; it became my home group for about 15 years. There was no chip system in Ottawa at that time, and when I had been sober for three months, Terry invited me back to Montreal so she could give me my three-month chip.

"As the months went on, Terry would call and I would go to Montreal, bring my chips back to Ottawa and show them to my sponsor and some other members of the Centennial group. They were so impressed with this chip system that they decided to adopt it for our group. It took no time to set it up. Someone came in one Saturday with poker chips and the rest was history.

"Later I joined Young Circle which included members from Montreal who had brought their chips with them. They went to other meetings, and I went to other meetings, and that's basically how the chips came to Ottawa.

"I was grateful to be able to do this because the chips were so important to me. They kept me alive and they motivated me not to drink. That was the first thing that those chips did for me – they gave me hope. I remember that Terry looked at me very intently when she gave me that first chip and told me I would make it – she gave me hope."

Ghislaine L

# On the road to Detroit 2020: New Orleans 1990

Local AA historian, Mike B, has written series of stories that were leading up to the 15<sup>th</sup> International Convention, in Detroit, in July of this year. Due to the pandemic, the event was cancelled. But *OPP* continues to bring you Mike's insightful and informative glimpses of conventions past. Thanks Mike.

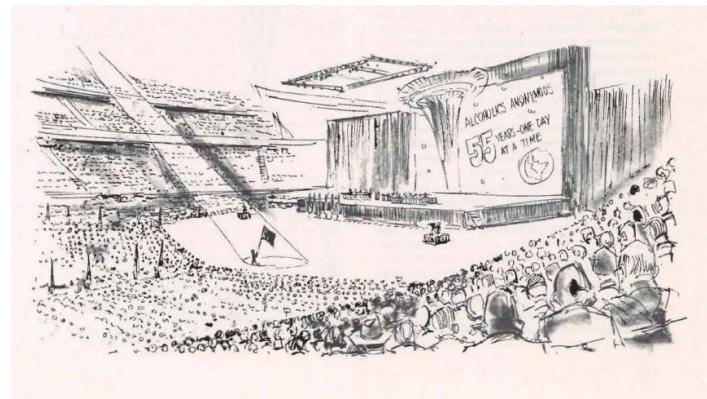
The ninth AA International Convention was held in Seattle, Washington, July 5 – 8, 1990. The theme was, '55 Years – One Day At A Time'. An estimated 48,000 attended, however, the story goes that about 5,000 more unregistered, happy sober drunks were going to the open meetings and wandering the streets of Seattle. At one point the fire marshal considered closing the exhibit hall where registration was being held. It was bursting at the seams with not only the preregistered – there to pick up their Convention kits – but with an unprecedented 15,000 who registered on-site.

At midnight on Thursday, a marathon candle – to light the way for the still-suffering alcoholic – had been lit by a mother and son; Sunday morning it was brought to the podium and extinguished by a father, sober 18 years, and his daughter, sober two years.

The convention began, as had become the custom, with the Friday night flag ceremony. Nell Wing, Bill's secretary and later AA archivist, wrote that, "The hall really let go when the Soviet, Bulgarian, and Romanian flags were carried to the front of the platform." (The Soviet Union was later dissolved in 1991).

Over 250 meetings and workshops, on a variety of topics, were held around the city, at hotels, and in the various buildings at Seattle Center. And, as always, to standing room only. But the most important sharing and fellowship may have been at the informal meetings that cropped up everywhere; under a tree on the lawn at Seattle Center, where a sign read "Meeting Tree"; in the back of a bus waiting to leave the Kingdome after the Friday evening meeting; in the many hospitality suites throughout the city. Even Seattle's local AA meetings were packed to capacity.

One police officer who was walking the beat was asked, "What do you think of this whole thing?" The



officer responded with, "When you AA's started arriving, we had 150 percent of the normal force on duty. We didn't know what to expect with that many drunks in town. Now, 24 hours later, we are at about 75 percent normal. You AA's are handling all our problems with drunks, taking care of them and hauling them to your meetings, you are out in the streets helping to direct traffic, making our job easier...We Love It! Things are really quiet and peaceful!"

The convention wrapped up on Sunday with the traditional Spiritual meeting. The speakers were: Jaime H, Colombia; Eve M, Florida; and Don P, Colorado. The meeting closed with an interpretation of "Amazing Grace" by a local singer, and, in the usual manner, with the Lord's Prayer.

It has been said that the International Convention Is a great party! "Bill W's and Dr. Bob's Family Reunion" held every five years. But, until they meet again in five years, clusters of sober drunks will gather everywhere: in large groups, medium-sized gatherings, one-on-one. They will meet every hour of the day and night, around the globe – in church basements, on telephones and computers, by letters and tapes, in large regional assemblies and conferences – to celebrate the freedom of another day. And, of course, to carry AA's message.

## Sources:

Grateful to Have Been There©, by Nell Wing  
Not God©, by Ernest Kurtz  
Nancy O.-AA History Lovers.

Mike B

## From the Literature Coordinator



Our phone volunteers have been confronted with the question, "The office of Ottawa area Intergroup is closed so where do we find AA literature?"

Some members are still ordering literature for themselves and their groups and are content to wait until we re-open to come and pick up their purchases. In the meantime, until you have your own copies to study and annotate, you can go online and search "Big Book of AA", or "Step 1 of AA" (or any other step number) and it'll come up as a free .pdf document. The same goes for the book "Living Sober".

For pamphlets, go to our website (you'll need the desktop site), scroll to the bottom of the first screen. There are four pictures across the bottom. Click on the one at the left. It's the "Problem Drinking?" image. The next screen has information about AA's program of recovery and five images of pamphlets. Each of these five images of pamphlets is clickable and their information is all there, free to read.

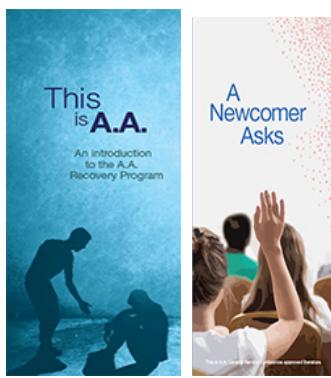
If you're wanting to introduce a newcomer to the AA program and literature, you could suggest these resources to him or her.

Some members in our local Zoom meetings have been saying that they're finding our current situation requiring us to isolate is becoming pretty hard on their emotional health. It's hard to stay tuned to the positive some days. A good laugh helps us all.

Getting sober can be painful and amazing, but it also can be pretty darn amusing. This collection of stories from the Grapevine shows how, in recovery, AAs have learned to laugh. It's full of light and humorous stories about our early mistakes, navigating drinking events, funny things sponsors say, interesting Twelve-Step calls, holiday adventures and more. They remind us to not take ourselves so seriously and to always strive to be "happy, joyous and free." Until our office reopens, this book can be ordered directly from AAGrapevine.



**HAPPY, JOYOUS  
& FREE**  
The Lighter Side of Sobriety



### Conference Approved – What it means

The term "conference approved" describes written or audiovisual material approved by the General Service Conference for publication by the General Service Office (GSO) of AA. This process assures that everything in such literature is in accord with AA principles. The term has no relation to material not published by GSO. It does *not* imply Conference disapproval of other material about AA. A great deal of literature helpful to alcoholics is published by others, and AA does not try to tell any member what he or she may or may not read.

The literature service of Ottawa Area Intergroup stocks only conference approved literature from GSO and AAGrapevine.

# 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](mailto: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](mailto:chair@ottawaaa.org).

**If your group needs insurance,** please contact Ottawa Intergroup at [info@ottawaaa.org](mailto: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.*