

Our Primary Purpose

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

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Vancouver 2025

AAs are gathering in person But formal meetings will take time and patience

It may have only been a handful of people sitting on their fold-up chairs, tucked away in a quiet corner of a nearly deserted shopping mall parking lot, but for Lynley P, just five days sober, it was a quite a milestone.

The Friday, July 24, evening gathering was her first-ever face to face AA meeting. To date, all of Lynley's AA interactions had been virtual.

In fact, it wasn't really billed as a meeting, but more of a social gathering. It was a chance for members of the Kanata home group, Remember When, to come together, physically, for the first time since mid-March when Covid-19 shuttered the doors to all AA meetings across the region.

"It means a lot to me to actually be with other recovering alcoholics, even if there isn't a great deal of structure here tonight. It's still helping me to get more connected to the program," said Lynley.

Keeping it real

For at least some of the core members of Remember When, the parking lot, meet-up, was more of an experiment to see if people would come out.

"I posted it on AA friends just to see if some of the regulars might like to try something a little different," said Lyssa R, the meeting's Intergroup Representative.

About a dozen people responded to the invitation.



AAs are gathering, often outside, often informally, trying to get back that feeling of real connection.

"It's so great to see some familiar faces, even if we have to wear a mask and remain physically distant from each other. We really needed to get reconnected after all this time apart."

See **Reopening will take patience**, Page 4

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Editorial – One thing's for sure



Ok, let's face it...there's one thing we can't deny...well maybe two...the sun will continue to rise in the east...AND, AA is going to change as a result of Covid-19.

Of course, the big question is: how will it change? How will meetings look in six months, or in a year, or when the vaccine finally arrives?

There are a growing number of members who are very happy with virtual meetings, now available to them with the click of a mouse on their computer.

They don't have to run to their car if it's raining. They don't have to worry about finding a parking spot, or waiting for the bus when it's cold. They can discretely eat their dinner while others are sharing. They don't have to find a babysitter...the list of conveniences goes on and on.

So, it seems certain, during these times of uncertainty, that AA online is here to stay. Members will vote with their feet, which means some may rarely, if ever, go in person, to another meeting.

Others, with compromised immune systems or aging loved ones, may feel uncomfortable going to a meeting until we have a vaccine that's been proven effective...which might take two or three years, or more, or never happen.

Does this mean we are going to have two AA fellowships? One in-person, and one online? Or a hybrid thereof? Perhaps.

If you're a glass half full, you can look at what's going on right now and say to yourself, "this is exciting and interesting, and we may just end up with a newer and better fellowship that serves the needs of a wider group of suffering alcoholics."

Another way of looking at it is, "why can't we flip a switch and get back to the way things always were?"

Or, why can't we just return to the church basement or community centre, as long as we wear a mask and physically distance ourselves?"

What sometimes get lost in all of the angst about what we no longer have at the moment...which is a cozy little meeting where everyone can shake hands and hug...is that neither the Steps nor the Traditions have changed; nor has the need for sponsorship, or to be of service to your fellow members.

Our primary purpose, as the masthead states, is to help the suffering alcoholic. We all know there are many many different ways to do that.

There's absolutely no harm in talking to your landlord about the possibility of getting back into your old venue or striking a committee to look into all of the requirements for safely reopening your home group.

But we all know how difficult it can be to find someone to make coffee, let alone someone to disinfect all the surfaces in your room, or be the greeter at the door who has to inform someone that the room is already full and no one else can enter.

Let's think and plan for the future, BUT let's not lose sight of today's raison d'être, which is to help the newcomer, or the one coming back.

AA – in whatever form it exists today or at any time in the future – is here to help those who are powerless over alcohol and for whom life has become unmanageable.

In our haste to preserve the past, let's not create un-needed headaches for ourselves. Let's continue to do what we came here to do.

Let's help each other stay sober.

Reopening will take patience from Page 1

A unique journey for every AA group

Remember When – an open speaker meeting with a 43-year history – did not go virtual right away when the pandemic hit some five months ago.

“Most of us ended up going to other zoom meetings for the first couple of months,” said Ross L, the group’s General Service Representative.

“We didn’t hold our first meeting online until the beginning of June. And when we did, we just kept it simple by picking a theme and having a little talk-a-thon.”

One day at a time

The gang from Remember When are typical of many groups across the region who are in a state of flux. Online meetings are still fairly well attended but members are definitely missing the vibe that comes from true, in-person, fellowship.

“I think it’s fair to say that AAs are getting a bit restless. There is zoom fatigue and members are really looking for ways and opportunities to gather in person,” said Harry B, chair of Ottawa Area Intergroup.

Area 83 brainstorms solutions for reopening

Dozens of members from across Area 83 gathered online to discuss challenges and possible solutions facing AA groups intent on trying to reopen their doors.

Members have taken time to have frank discussions about all of the precautions needed to be considered when trying to meet public health guidelines. Truly a daunting administrative burden faces groups wanting to reopen and do it in a responsible manner.

Home groups have some serious thinking to do ahead of time about whether they have enough people to take on all of the extra service work that will be required. Greeters, for example, will need to gather contact tracing information, make sure that masks are being worn, and communicate expectations about physical distancing.

“It’s great to see efforts being made to plan and stimulate thinking about how we might begin to

reopen some of our regular meetings, but we do need to be vigilant and mindful of our Traditions. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.” said Jo Anne D, District Committee Member for District 54.

“We simply can’t rush to reopen at the expense of critical issues like contact tracing. It simply isn’t fair to other groups or AA as a whole if we fail to take necessary precautions and an outbreak occurs through our negligence. No one wants to see that kind of headline in the media.”

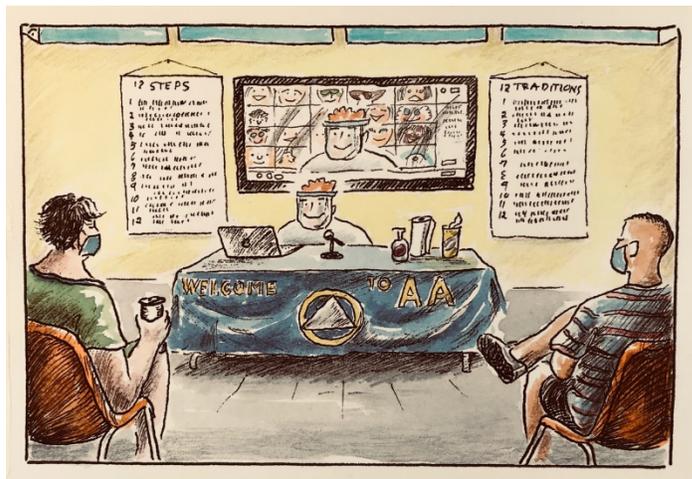


Illustration by Ron M

Hybrid meetings are destined to become commonplace as we attempt to satisfy our Traditions and make sure our common welfare comes first.

Our primary purpose

Back in the corner of the parking lot, seated two meters apart, with masks on, the crew from Remember When are enjoying the simple pleasures of AA fellowship. There are no Big Books on display, no prayers are being recited, but there’s a feeling of togetherness that is simply serene.

“The hand of AA should always be there,” said Lyssa.

“It doesn’t matter whether it’s by phone, or text, or zoom, or face to face. People just need to know they’re being valued and that someone cares.”

Reopening “reality check”

Challenges and solutions to meeting in person

Area 83 has hosted two round tables to discuss some of the challenges posed when groups attempt to reopen their in-person meetings. Organizers caution that points raised in these discussions are not to be viewed as directives, nor should they supersede recommendations from public health or medical professionals. Full transcripts of the meeting summaries can be found at Area83aa.org

1. Communicating expectations

- share meeting requirements in advance by phone, text, email or online
- ask members to screen themselves for symptoms and stay home if ill
- remind members to physically distance and be vigilant about hand hygiene
- self-monitor for symptoms after meetings and isolate if appropriate

2. Contact tracing

- the province of Ontario strongly urges groups to collect contact information
- have at least 2 to 4 people waiting outside the door to inform and request contact information
- attendance logs should be maintained by a designated group contact for at least 2 to 3 weeks
- have a group email/phone list so that members can be informed quickly of possible active cases

3. Cleaning meeting spaces

- before meeting assess cleanliness of the space, and whether it needs to be sanitized
- instead of shaking hands, greeters can welcome members with a dollop of hand sanitizer
- all touch-surfaces in all rooms (washrooms/kitchens) must be cleaned, including: chairs, tables, etc
- volunteers needed to clean up after meeting

4. Personal protective equipment

- non-medical masks must be worn during all indoor meetings, and communicated to members at the door
- groups may or may not decide to provide masks for those without
- groups may consider clear face shields for those who are “speaking” to prevent muffling or to help those who rely on lip reading

5. Physical distancing

- traffic must be coordinated for members entering meetings to ensure proper 2-meter distancing protocols are maintained
- printable signage is available from government websites to remind members of distancing requirements
- greeters greet with hand sanitizer, not shaking hands, and reminding members to socially distance themselves from others

Reopening “reality check” (cont’d)

6. Covid-19 in your meeting space

- members who develop covid-related symptoms or test positive must contact their group immediately
- ill members should immediately share contact details for their group with local public health authorities so that proper “contact tracing” protocols can be put in place and monitored effectively
- anticipate that public health authorities will seek contact information from the designated person representing the group
- designated person should call all members attending meetings to notify them if an individual has become ill, and to let them know that public health authorities may be calling them as well

7. 7th Tradition

- in-person meetings will have new expenses to cover cleaning supplies and PPE
- offer touchless options for making contributions: etransfer/pay pal or square app for physically tapping of debit/credit card
- accept cash by placing basket on a table, but no passing of basket should be allowed in the meeting

8. Chips, anniversaries or birthdays

- keep celebrations simple, with no overcrowding or standing close
- medallions/chips should be placed on a table for sponsee or newcomer to pick up themselves
- hands should be sanitized before and after handling chips and medallions
- no physical anniversary or birthday cards should be circulated during meetings, use electronic boards, such as kudoboard.com

9. Coffee and snacks

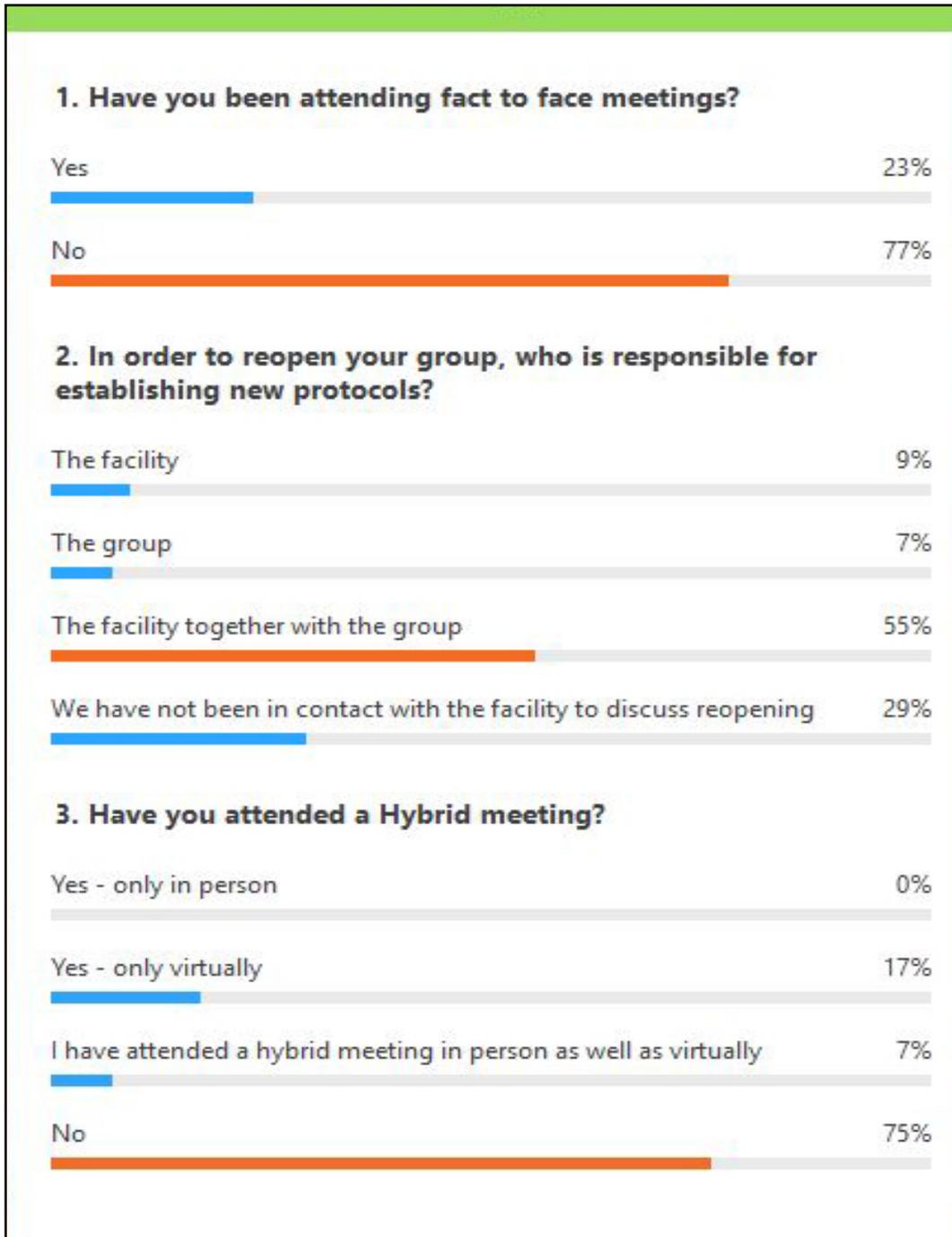
- consider discontinuing all coffee and snacks at meetings
- ask members to bring their own beverage
- ask members to ensure that they remove their own garbage
- cigarette butts should be carefully extinguished and removed from premises

10. Literature

- if a literature table is deemed appropriate, have it supervised by members wearing gloves and masks
- have hand sanitizer at the table
- request that items not be picked up unless being taken or purchased
- another option is to have signage about how to access literature from Ottawaaa.org

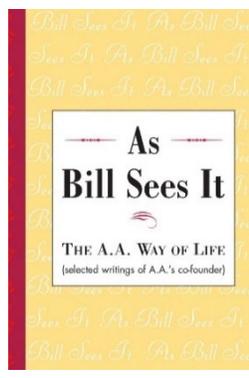
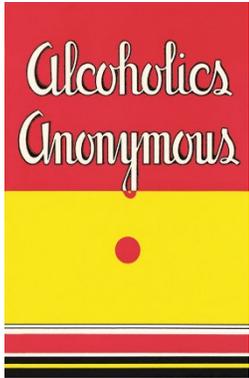
Survey says...

Area 83 polled the nearly 100 participants attending an online discussion forum about reopening meetings.

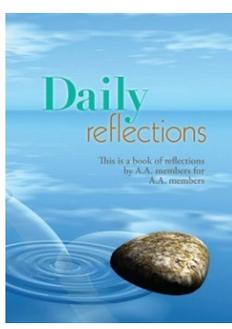
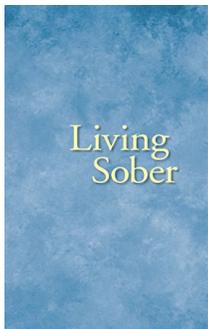


From the Literature Coordinator

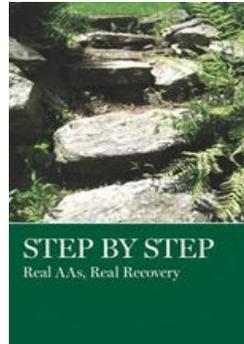
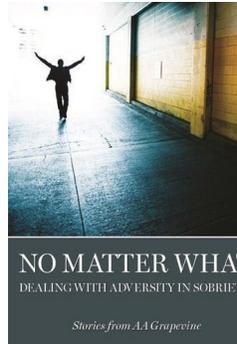
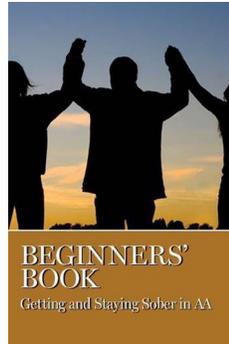
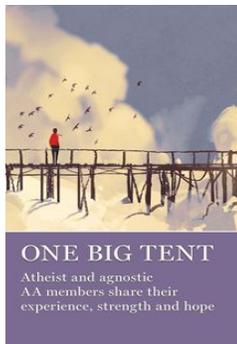
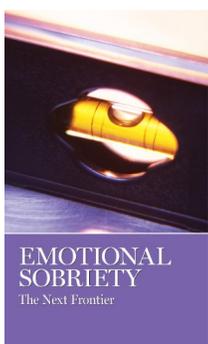
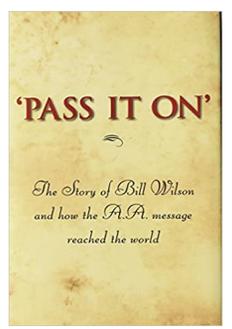
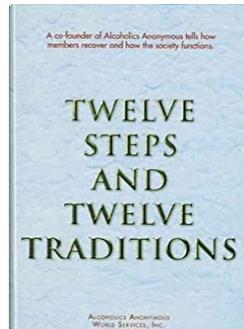
To place an order for Literature or Merchandise, go to Ottawaaa.org, and use the “online orders” link in the upper left of the welcome screen. Follow the instructions, complete your credit card information, and receive a receipt.



Curbside pick-up Saturday afternoons 2:00-4:00 pm



Come to the **SIDE DOOR** on the **LISGAR STREET** side of the Bronson Centre (the door that's furthest from Bronson) phone **613-237-6000** to let the volunteers know you're there



A member shares...

I'm looking over a bridge, wondering if it's far enough down, if the water's deep enough, if the current would be fast enough. Anything to stop feeling like this.

Life had gotten more and more painful when I was drinking. So I finally quit, with my roommate for moral support, after months of nagging by an annoying shrink. But not drinking did *not* feel better!

On a *good* day I was anxious, irritated, and too embarrassed to let anyone see inside me. On a bad day, I was terrified, furious and ashamed. Six weeks without my anesthetic and all I had left were bad days.

So my shrink says this is what my life always felt like; "*You've just been drowning the feelings with booze.*" Great, like that helps.

But I started to understand that drinking for 15 years hadn't made life better at all; it just distracted me from my problems long enough for them to get worse. I had gone to the shrink to begin with because my drinking life sucked. My relationship (now over), my dream job (who cares anymore), the bank (wouldn't leave me alone), everything sucked.

My roomie went back to drinking. A lot. I kept coming to the shrink more and more distraught --how was I ever going to be able to deal with life again. He talked about AA. I thought he wasn't listening.

Here I am angry, scared, lonely and he thinks it'll help to go listen to a bunch of drunks. The next week, I was still trying to get him to fix my problems and he brought up AA again. Again!

I blew up: I'm not thirsty dammit; I'm angry and afraid and lonely! He said *Go to AA; that's what they talk about: how to deal with being angry and afraid and lonely.*

Yeah, right.



But I had to do something. I knew I could not take this much longer.

I just couldn't go back to the 14 years of being the frightened, angry, isolated little kid I was before drinking helped push that away. And I could now see that drinking had just numbed me while life got worse. And clearly I could not go on now *without* drinking. It would be better to

feel nothing.

So I'm looking over a bridge, inching slowly toward a realization, a decision, freedom from all this. Is it far enough down, deep enough, fast enough?

Then I realize I'm not far from the AA meeting my shrink told me about. Just a few blocks away and it starts in about 10 minutes. (Big sigh!)

Okay, fine! If that doesn't help, the bridge will still be here.

I tiptoe into a room with a dozen people around the table – all looking at me. I know this won't help; it's got nothing to do with me. I have no connection with these people. Whatever. It puts off the bridge for an hour.

The meeting is a topic discussion so the chairperson asks for three suggestions. The guy beside me says Fear. Somebody across the table says Anger. And someone else says Loneliness. I thought my shrink had called ahead.

By the end, the people talking about fear have drawn courage from what they've read or heard or learned from doing something called the steps. The angry are laughing about what made somebody else angry. The lonely have traded hugs and are heading out for coffee to talk it through.

I'm stunned. This is me: Angry and scared and lonely.

I can't wait to see my shrink. Someone's gotta tell him about this place.

Dan L

The OPP Creative Corner

Covid-19 is giving us gifts. We have more time to reflect and to create. Our new "Creative Corner" is 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



Photographs taken by Yvonne P

From the AA archives...

Carp Fellowship Group

Founded: August 1975

The Carp Fellowship Group is an open speaker meeting held Thursday 8 p.m., at the Community Hall in Carp. The hall can accommodate up to 70, with attendance typically being 15 to 30.

The group was formed in August 1975. One of the founding members interviewed was John P (known as Pub) who back then worked at the DND Bunker in Carp. Pub had a year of sobriety at the time and along with Roy I, Herb G, and Bill V, started Carp Fellowship Group.



Geographically, there was a need for a meeting to augment AA at Smiths Falls, Carleton Place, and the city of Ottawa.

In 1986 Mike G joined the Carp group. Mike recalls long-time members Gerry S, Ken S, Vince M, Daykin N, Jack M, and Ron H as being active. From 1986 to 1994 attendance fluctuated from 14 up to 28. The idea to change from an open speaker meeting to a closed discussion was considered from time to time, but group conscious voted to maintain status as a traditional open speaker meeting.

A group member volunteers as chairperson weekly and selects a speaker plus all participants. The Carp group attracts members from Kanata, Stittsville and communities like Arnprior, Almonte and Carleton Place. Carp has a reputation for service, holds active business meetings, plus elects a GSR, Intergroup rep and Treasurer. Newcomers find us a friendly bunch!

On the road to Vancouver 2025: Toronto 2005

The 12th International Convention was held in Toronto, June 30 to July 3, 2005. ***I Am Responsible*** was the theme, as AA celebrated its 70th anniversary. An estimated 43,700 attended. Toronto had already hosted the 4th convention, in 1965, so it would be the first time in AA history the event returned to any city for a second time.



Another first was when members from the People's Republic of China, and Cuba, participated in the opening flag ceremonies.

The convention officially opened Friday evening at the Rogers Centre. Preceded by bagpipers and 90 AAs, the flags of more than 75 countries appeared on stage. The title Alcoholics Anonymous, on the large Big Book model, changed to one of 52 languages. The Opening Big Meeting followed the flag ceremony.

Saturday evening's Oldtimers Meeting was chaired by Greg M, general manager of the General Service Office in New York. Twelve young people – under 20 years of age – sober from one day to four years, stormed the stage and each drew the name of an old-timer with over 40 years of sobriety to share his or her story.

At every convention human interest stories abound. Matt P, doorperson at a large hotel, with three and a half years of sobriety, is asked if he attended any of the meetings. "No, but they say whenever two or more alcoholics are together it's a meeting and if that's true I've had hundreds of them."

In 1942, Warden Clinton Duffy of San Quentin prison pioneered the first A.A. group behind prison walls. From their first prison meeting with 26

members in 1942, AA members behind the walls has grown to 2,562 prison groups boasting over 70,000 inmate members. The 25 millionth copy of the Big Book was presented to Warden Jill Brown of San Quentin.

Over 200 meetings and workshops were held – at the Convention Center and hotels around the city – on every conceivable subject an AA could think of, in: Portuguese, Finnish, German, Polish, Swedish, Farsi, French, Japanese, and Italian. Meetings were interpreted in American Sign Language. Marathon meetings, in English, French and Spanish, began at midnight, June 30 and ran until 7:00 a.m., July 3.

Everyone had their own experiences; each life changed or touched in a different way. Here are thoughts from some Ottawa members:

"One of the ladies I met had moved to Cobourg and the group she belonged to had a member who was a bus driver who rented a bus for the weekend. I took a train to Cobourg and on the Saturday morning we went to the meeting spot. There was a handful of us and along the way we picked up people in Pickering, Ajax and Oshawa and by the time we got to Toronto the bus was full. I only knew my friend, but I now had a bus load of friends, and when I walked into the convention center, I realized all these people were my friends. It was mind-blowing to realize that in AA there really are no strangers just friends we haven't met yet."

-Elaine H, Search for Serenity

"Paul P and I considered Toronto a highlight in our sobriety journeys. The moment I will never forget as long as I live is standing at the closing ceremonies with 45,000 AAs holding hands and singing along with the Good Brothers! The song was "One True Thing" and the refrain we sang over and over again went something like, 'From the moment life begins, right until the very end, one true thing we hold within, we all believe in love.' Pretty powerful."

-Deborah W, Awakening Group

Mike B

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.