

Our Primary Purpose

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

New Website Launched!



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Answering calls kept me sober



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Five years old and growing stronger Covid-19 helps Ottawa's secular sobriety movement

Little did Michel D know when he started Ottawa's first secular AA group, in early March 2016, that five years later there would be three weekly secular meetings on the calendar. And that a global pandemic might be helping to encourage both newcomers and old-timers alike to try a new and different Alcoholics Anonymous experience.

When Covid-19 shuttered doors to the rooms of AA, members started going online. And some have decided to take advantage of the opportunity to explore new approaches like secularism.

What is Secular AA? It's a movement that seeks to widen our view so that *all* who suffer may discover long-term sobriety in AA regardless of their belief or lack of belief in a God.

"I already had 30 years of sobriety when I started that first secular meeting and it was still scary to go against the flow, and to try doing something outside the AA mainstream," said Michel.

But as Ottawa's secular movement celebrates its 5th anniversary, Michel can take pride in the idea that he and others are truly part of a growing global effort pushing AA to become an ever more inclusive fellowship, one that welcomes the suffering alcoholic no matter what their religious affiliation or belief system might be.

"With over 500 fellowships world-wide using the 12 Steps as a framework for recovery, there's no denying the impact that AA founders Bill W and Dr. Bob have already had. And just as these far-reaching fellowships have reinterpreted the 12 Steps, AA must continue to do the same if it's going

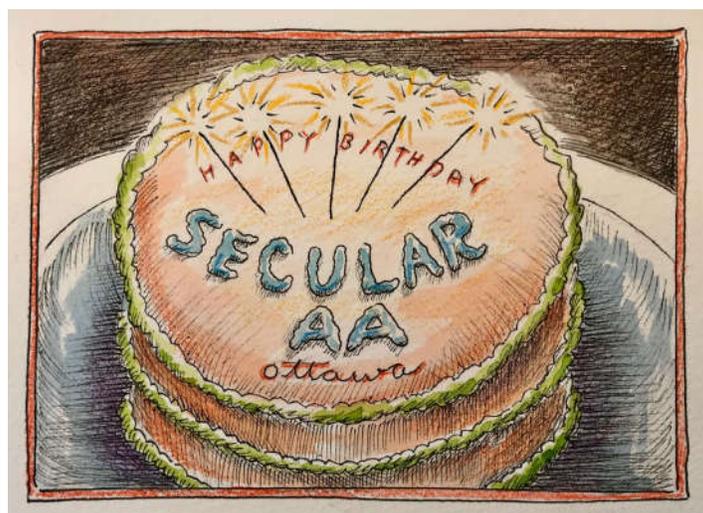


Illustration by Ron M

There's evidence the AA tent is growing bigger. Bill W would no doubt approve.

to survive and stay relevant," said Michel.

Like other so-called "special purpose groups" under the AA umbrella, secularism can be, for some, a polarizing notion, pitting believer against non-believer. But it doesn't have to be that way.

"Our goal here in Ottawa is to be as open-minded as possible, so that anyone, no matter how they approach their sobriety, can feel at home in our midst. Our secular credo gives everyone the ability to freely express themselves, while asking that they offer the same courtesy to others in the discussion," said Michel.

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Editorial – Believe it or not



Not to make light of our recovery journey... because, as we all know, it keeps many of us relatively sane, and others, alive.

But we CAN try to keep it simple, keep it fun, and keep the glass half full.

Basically, what we're talking about here is helping each other and getting along with each other. On any given day, at any given meeting, it means: laughing with each other, crying with each other, or hugging each other (ok, that one will have to wait a while).

Can we pretend to be kids again and think about what it was like playing in the sandbox...if you treat your buddies with dignity and respect then they are much more likely to let you play with their toys.

As adults, we had to learn that when first introduced to someone it was wise not to talk about politics, personal finances, or religion. Did we say religion?

Here's where it gets a little tricky for us in AA. We've heard it said...by some of those so-called "normies" (people who can drink responsibly), and even others with a drinking problem, but who are looking for an excuse not to do anything about it... that AA is a religious cult. Now and again, social media, and conspiracy theorists, like to fan the flames, and twist the truth.

Of course, we know better. We know about the true magic that is AA.

BUT, and this can sometimes be a BIG "but" ... we also know that there are those who do see the program as an extension of their religious beliefs, and there's an even smaller subset of us who may use the program to amplify a belief in God or a Higher Power.

The thing we ALL need to remember is that every one of us who comes into the rooms – virtual or otherwise – has a right to continue believing what they have always believed.

And let's be perfectly clear: beliefs come and go, or change, or evolve, and sometimes circle back to what they were.

Whether we be Christian, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, or part of any religious order...OR whether we be an atheist, an agnostic, or somewhere in between...OR don't really know what we are...it doesn't or shouldn't matter.

What matters is that we want to get sober and stay sober.

AND, most of us have fairly quickly come to the realization that what we really need is some kind of help in order to do this.

Where the help comes from, or what we call that help...a 12-Step program, a sponsor, a Higher Power, or God...is totally up to us. We will naturally gravitate towards those in AA who "have what we want" and chances are that will include a belief system we both already share.

Let's keep it simple. Let's respect other peoples' personal views and beliefs. We can still hold true to our own while not judging others. Let's meet newcomers, those coming back, and those struggling, where they are on their journey and try to help them the best way we can.

Let's celebrate our similarities and our differences.

Let's celebrate the fact we found AA!

New AA Website Launched!

Meetings Online Orders 7th Tradition



TAKE THE FIRST STEPS TO RECOVERY

Intergroup is pleased to launch a new responsive website that is viewable on Desktop, Tablet or Mobile devices. We previously had a separate more minimal mobile site.

Subscriptions to announcements, events, etc. have been carried over.

We welcome your feedback! Please feel free to leave a reply in the comments box on the ottawaaa.org website.

Action required for groups in District 58

It's been my pleasure to serve as District Committee Member for District 58 these past two years. And wonderful to work with the GSRs who came to our meetings. Unfortunately, we simply do not have the level of participation needed to sustain the District as a stand-alone unit. We've been relying on Districts 54 and 62 to continue the important work of the Ottawa committees: Corrections Facilities and Treatment, Cooperation with Professionals/Public Information, and Archives. And, we've had very few groups come to the Area 83 meetings. Currently, we do not have enough people to fill all the positions required to fully operate a District. As such, the participating GSRs have asked me to pose this question: ***Do we keep District 58 going? Or do we ask the home groups that have a GSR to join either District 54 or 62?*** With only about 20 percent of the groups in District 58 represented by a GSR we felt the need to get input from meetings without a voice at the District table. Please email your group conscience, or questions, on this very important matter to: kbcqa@hotmail.com.

Yours in service,

Kim B

The Covid factor from Page 1

Andy Mc had almost 40 years of sobriety when he discovered Secular AA, and he's convinced the pandemic played a role in opening the door to a whole new chapter of his recovery journey. If not by design, then perhaps by the grace of a Higher Power.

Last spring, Andy, who is retired and spends his time between Bracebridge and London, Ontario, was focused on trying to help his home group transition to virtual meetings. Unfortunately, his group did not survive the move online, so he went searching for alternatives.

"I wasn't necessarily looking for a secular option when I googled AA meetings online. But a group in Florida, called OMAGOD - Our Mostly Agnostic Group of Drunks, caught my eye, so I decided to check it out. I really liked their approach, and after the novelty of going to a Florida-based meeting wore off, I decided to look for secular groups closer to home."

That's when he discovered Ottawa's Secular Sobriety Group which meets Sunday night, online, at 7:30 pm. Now, almost a year into the pandemic, Andy is attending upwards of five secular meetings a week, mostly based out of Eastern Ontario. He also attends Ottawa's Beyond Belief Secular Group, Thursday night, 7 pm.

"I've learned to tone it down over the years; at one time I could get into a pretty heated discussion with some members of the fellowship who I thought were a bit too rigid in their thinking. I just couldn't let others try to tell me that I would only stay sober if I believed in God."

Andy said what keeps him coming back to secular meetings is the free-thinking; he's convinced that more and more members are taking advantage of online platforms to kick the tires on Secular AA.

"No doubt in my mind, Covid-19 and the endless list of online meetings all over the country, and the world, has cemented the 'secular' movement within AA. And I think that's great. It's given people like me who were feeling restless and disenfranchised a way to stay more engaged and connected to this amazing program."

The AA tent is getting bigger

As recent as 2000, there were no more than 50 secular AA meetings across the globe. By the time the pandemic hit there were around 600. Now, a year later, there are easily more than 1,000 such meetings worldwide.

"It's been most encouraging to see how quickly AA adapted to the new normal after Covid19 arrived"

"It's been most encouraging to see how quickly AA adapted to the new normal after Covid-19 arrived," said Joe C, a leader in the Toronto secular movement, and a founder of the group Beyond Belief Agnostics & Freethinkers.

"We are seeing our numbers swell. Our Saturday discussion group is now attracting more than 100 participants. And it's not only agnostics and atheists who are showing up. We have plenty of so-called believers who are also joining us. Some of them had simply walked away from AA. They weren't mad, just fatigued, and simply looking for something new and different to fill the void."

Joe points to the many and diverse AA special interest groups that have started over the past few decades. Groups for women, African Americans, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered people, young people, seniors, professionals, special needs people, Indigenous peoples, and many more.

"In the end, those who have moved away from the mainstream are simply doing what Bill W had wished for. He called it pioneering, and he insisted that AAs had to continue to go through the same pioneering efforts in order to keep the fellowship vital and relevant."



“WHEN WE LOOK BACK”



AA Spring Conference

Saturday April 17, 2021

NO COST FOR TICKETS - Details to follow

When we look back, we realize that the things which came to us when we put ourselves in God's hands were better than anything we could have planned.

“WHEN WE LOOK BACK”



When we look back, we realize that the things which came to us when we put ourselves in God's hands were better than anything we could have planned.
BIG BOOK PG. 100

Spring Conference 2021

“When we look back”

There is a passage in the Big Book that just chokes me up every time I read it, and I believe it is one of the many promises we get in AA.

closer to the event. **Mark your calendars for Saturday, April 17th, 2021.**

The Big Book page 100 says: ***“Both you and the new man must walk day by day in the path of spiritual progress. If you persist, remarkable things will happen. When we look back, we realize that the things which came to us when we put ourselves in God’s hands were better than anything we could have planned. Follow the dictates of a Higher Power and you will presently live in a new and wonderful world, no matter what your present circumstance.”***

“Both you and the new man must walk day by day in the path of spiritual progress.”
Big Book p. 100

It is a New Year and with that comes new experiences and opportunities. It was with great sadness that we had to cancel our 2020 Spring Conference. As the Chair of that conference I was discouraged because we had such an amazing committee, working so hard to bring a wonderful event to our AA community.

Instead we had to go one day at a time into the days ahead unsure of what would come next.

As we have moved through these uncertain times and our current circumstance, I am in awe of how Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole has come together to not only stay sober but to continue to help one another. In this spirit of unity and service, it has been suggested that we hold a virtual Spring Conference for 2021. I am excited to be the Chair for this event alongside my Vice-Chair Dick G. In the coming weeks we will be planning this event and details will soon follow.

I did not want to stay with the same theme, only because there were so many wonderful things attached to it and so we have a new theme.

The theme chosen for our 2021 Spring Conference is: “When we look back...”. I love this passage because I have learned over the years sober that it is only when I look back, can I truly see God’s hand over my life and my recovery, when I place myself in his care and protection. I have also seen over these many months that when I look back, regardless of my present circumstance, my life and relationships have changed and grown, and I have no doubt yours have as well. I believe that although God may not be for all things, He is certainly in all things and that nothing is ever wasted.

We are looking for volunteers to help out – mainly 2 volunteer coordinators. We would love for you to attend and be a part of our committee. To get the zoom link information for our committee meetings (which will be held every Saturday at 1:30pm) or to volunteer in some other way, please email me at: spring@ottawaaa.org

In love and service,
Cindy E-M

I look forward to being your Chair and we will continue to update you with information as we move

A member shares...

New Year Reflections

My sobriety date is in January and at the start of every new year I reflect back on the journey into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous.

I started out as a binge drinker and had periods when I would not drink at all. Even after a binge I would justify it as something everyone did to blow off steam, cope with life, celebrate, or any number of rationalizations. Drinking made it so much easier to run away from the parts of daily life that I did not want to deal with.

Things changed rapidly during the final years of my drinking. Drinking in isolation most of the time, I thought I was good at hiding it, however its grip on me tightened and my drinking problem became more and more exposed to others.

I tried many things to stop drinking before walking through the doors of AA. None of them worked, of course. Having promised others I would do something about my drinking problem, I went to my first meeting. I knew right away that I belonged there even if I didn't want to be there.

I soon found a couple of meetings where I became a regular and started to do service work. But that was it. I hadn't grasped the concept of "half measures availed us nothing." I didn't get a sponsor, I didn't do Step work, I had no connection to a Higher Power or any sort of spiritual program. And...I relapsed many times during my first 18 months.

However, I still kept coming to meetings because I was afraid of what might happen to me if I didn't and I knew it wouldn't be good.

It was late fall and I had relapsed yet again. I kept telling myself that I was going to quit by Christmas, then by New Year's and then it was mid-January and I still hadn't quit. The idea of not drinking for the rest of my life really frightened me.

I had heard the phrase "one day at a time" hundreds of times in the rooms but hadn't really taken it in. For some reason, it resonated with me this time



and I thought, "okay, just for today, I am not going to drink." That worked for that day and I tried it again, managing to string together days and then weeks of sobriety. But I knew that I couldn't stay sober without doing ALL the work – the things that were suggested to me at meetings.

I did get a sponsor...well, actually she approached me first and I will always be grateful for that. We started to do the Steps and gradually life changed. I realized that I didn't have to do this alone and if I faltered, the doors of AA would not close on me. The members who kept telling me "to just keep coming back" regardless of how many white chips I picked up, gave me the courage to not give up. They made me realize that I always have a place to go to in the good times and bad.

My program changes over the years as I change and grow as a person. It has its ebbs and flows but I always get what I need when I am working my Program to the best of my ability, one day at a time.

Pat B

Telephone Answering Service: How Answering Calls Kept Me Sober Amidst COVID-19

“Good afternoon, Alcoholics Anonymous, this is Carolyn,” I nervously said for the first time, as I answered a phone call during my Telephone Answering Service (TAS) shift in July. I did not know what to expect from taking calls from still-suffering alcoholics, and I wondered if this was the right thing for me to do. What I did not know was that these calls would potentially save lives, while keeping me sober during one of the most uncertain times of my life.

Several months into my sobriety, I knew I wanted to work towards being able to answer phone calls. I did not come into AA through TAS, but rather as a “helper and advocate”, as my friends call me. I wanted to do what I could to answer questions about our Program. I decided that one day, when I was ready, that I would volunteer my time with TAS and be on the phone lines. That day eventually came, when we were months into the COVID-19 Pandemic. I was 18 months sober, and healing from heartbreak.

I knew that if I did not find some way to serve, while working my steps, that the end would not be good. The combination of grieving the end of an unhealthy relationship, the closure of in-person meetings, and needing to stay home, all brought me to a point in my recovery where I chose to move forward. That was when I reached out to the TAS Coordinator and began my volunteer work, answering calls.

Through the summer, my life



remained unpredictable and tumultuous – even at one point being diagnosed with a concussion! I continued to answer phones when I could, though my capacity became limited. As I began to feel more level-headed and my condition improved, I signed up for more shifts.

Through the summer, fall, and winter, I know that answering the phones has been a huge factor in my continuous sobriety. Through the fluctuations that come with being physically and emotionally injured and unwell, I have learned that sometimes the key to my feeling better is to step outside myself. Once I did that and took a break from the spiral of self-pity and despair that tried to consume me, I was able to stay sober for just one more

24hrs. I knew my Creator helped me set aside my selfishness, and gave me the right words to help the person on the other end of the line.

I have since been acclaimed as the new TAS Coordinator and I am so excited to work alongside other volunteers and to help carry the message to other alcoholics. I look forward to learning from you as I go. I can step into this role knowing that answering the phones has helped me just as much as it has helped the callers themselves. Whether you came into AA through TAS, word of mouth, or an internet search, we all have one thing in common – that this simple program works and has changed our lives. We have found recovery and serenity through connection, Step work and service. Being a TAS volunteer and answering phones gives us a chance to not only practice Step 12, but to LIVE it!

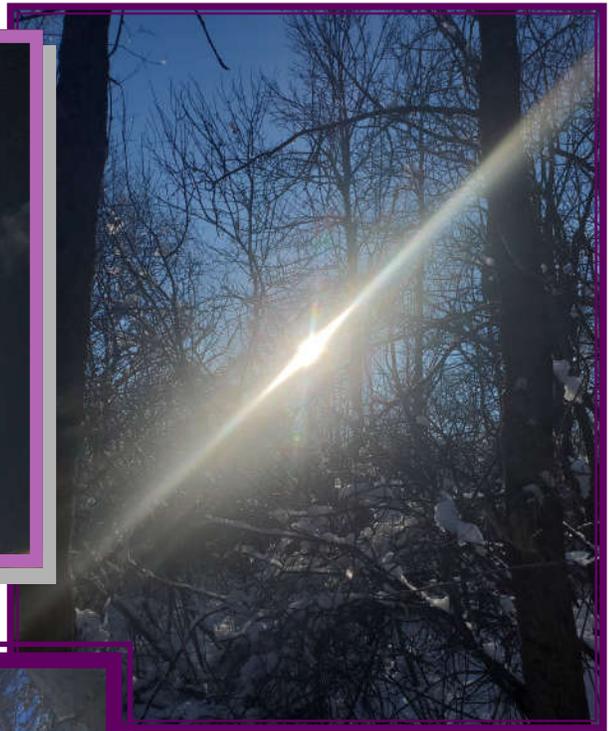
To be a TAS volunteer, the suggested sobriety requirement is 1 year. If you are ready and willing to be of service as a TAS volunteer, I excitedly welcome you! TAS is a vital service for the still-suffering alcoholic, as well as for those with long-term sobriety who may just have questions. To sign up for training and/or shifts, email tas@ottawaaa.org. Let's start this year by journeying and working together!

Carolyn S

TAS Coordinator

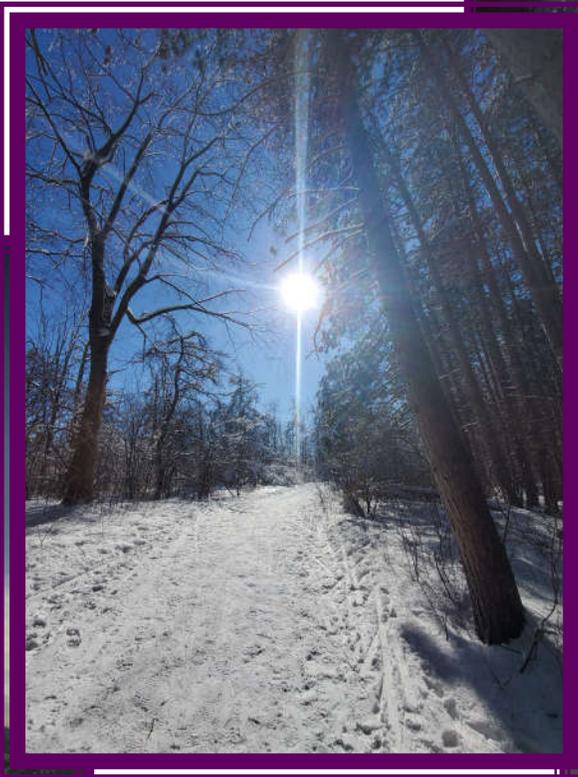
The OPP Creative Corner

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



LIGHT

**PHOTOS BY
CARA W**



From AA archives... Co-Founders Group Founded: May 1988

The earliest meeting recorded is from the Ottawa Area Intergroup listings dated May 1988 – 1990, on Wednesdays, at St Paul's Anglican Church, located at 20 Young Road, Kanata. The Group registered with the General Service Office (GSO) on February 5, 1991. They moved to the Trinity Presbyterian Church, 110 McCurdy, in 1992.

The last move the group made was around 2006, to the newly built Glen Cairn United Church, at 140 Abbey Hill Dr. and Old Colony. The group is still there now.

Co-founders Group of Kanata is normally a closed discussion meeting; we use the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions textbook as our reference. We usually have about 20 people attending and split into two rooms. One room is for new people focusing on steps one, two and three; the other room continues to go through the steps in sequence and does a Tradition on the last Wednesday of each month.

The Co-Founders Group of Kanata has approximately 7 core members. The group contributes financially to the GSO, Area 83, District

62 and Ottawa Area Intergroup, twice per year. Members are quite active in service, sending volunteers to the Alkathon as well as the Spring and Fall Conferences. We have had commitments with the Ottawa Withdrawal Management Centre (also known as detox), the Newgate 180 recovery facility, and the Telephone Answering Service (TAS). We have representation at District and Intergroup. Considering the group's size, we are spread thin, but our sobriety is second to none.

We welcome any visitors or newcomers with the same enthusiasm! So drop in for a meeting and have your choice of decaf or regular coffee, fellowship and sobriety.



SERVICE CALENDAR

Online meeting logistics are shown for committees that have provided it.

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)

([ZOOM Meeting ID 824 3878 6359 Passcode OAIG2020](#))

DISTRICT 54 MEETING..... First Thursday (6:30 pm)

([ZOOM Meeting ID 834 9953 9650 Passcode 141892](#))

DISTRICT 58 MEETING..... First Monday (7:00 pm)

(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue-Room 213-in-person meetings suspended)

DISTRICT 62 MEETING..... Second Monday (7:30 pm)

([ZOOM Meeting ID 638 5623 068 Passcode 016224](#))

CORRECTIONS FACILITIES AND TREATMENT..... Fourth Tuesday (6:30 pm)

(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue-Room 108-in-person meetings suspended)

PUBLIC INFORMATION/ COOPERATION WITH PROFESSIONALS..... Third Monday (6:30 pm)

([ZOOM Meeting ID 815 4385 6025 Passcode PICPC](#))

OTTAWA ARCHIVES..... Third Wednesday (7:00 pm)

(Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Avenue-Room 108-in-person meetings suspended)

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.