

**THE AUSTRALIAN AA
SERVICE MANUAL**

SECTION TEN

**THE GENERAL
SERVICE
OFFICE**

of

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AUSTRALIA



A Tour of General Service Office - "GSO"

What gets done at General Service Office?

How General Service Office is structured

AA as a Publisher

How General Service Office is supported

The Australian General Service Office of AA is located in Sydney, as it has been since its commencement in 1972.

Here you will find a small staff of employed AAs busily coping with the needs of AA Service Offices, Groups and individual members. It operates as an efficient business office and service centre.

A TOUR OF GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE

A trip to General Service Office is recommended for every AA who is visiting Sydney. Be sure to phone first to set a suitable time to drop by ! For those who can't, here is a kind of 'guided tour':

The General Service Office is divided into two Areas, one is the office Area, the other a working Area. The staff members desks are located in the office Area, together with computers, filing cabinets, and telephones, all essential in maintaining contact with both local and world-wide AA activities. The working Area houses the literature and this is where literature orders are packed ready for despatch.

From the desk of the Office Manager upstairs, day to day direction of the office is conducted. All staff are AA members and are responsible for the efficient running of General Service Office.

The staff members are known by sight to many who have talked with them and heard them speak at meetings, and by name to many who have written, phoned or emailed in about difficult situations to receive helpful answers. These members deal with all kinds of AA services and AA problems, in this clearinghouse for matters affecting the unity and growth of the movement.

The records section is kept busy continually updating of the records of Groups, Conference delegates, Conference committee members, Areas, Districts and GSRs. Since communication plays such an important part in keeping our far-flung Groups in touch with General Service Office and with each other, the value of records cannot be overstated. Yet this vital work must rely on Groups to keep General Service Office informed on changes in their statistics. (*This is done by the Group sending in its Group Registration Form, which is obtained through the Group Secretary, whenever a change takes place in Group status.*)

You will also find at General Service Office a treasury of Australian AA history, early Conference programs and reports, and many other records of the Fellowship's beginnings in Australia.

The quarterly newsletter "AA Around Australia", including supplements, "PI Around Australia" and the "Treatment and Correctional Facilities Newsletter" , is produced in General Service Office for circulation to members and Groups. This publication is freely circulated to all Groups who have registered their postal address with General Service Office. Extra copies are available to individual members on subscription.

In the working Area, you will find a variety of activities taking place - printing, folding, addressing and filling envelopes, packing literature orders prior to shipment, preparing material and folders for Conference. During the course of a year, it would be true to say that some hundreds of thousands of items would pass through this section and be distributed Australia-wide.

Here every registered AA Group in Australia is listed in the computer database, as well as every GSR, Area Committee member and Delegate.

So ends our brief tour. It is a quick one, but there is more information to come.

WHAT GETS DONE AT GSO ?

Much more interesting, however, is **what** is done rather than **how** it is done. In an abbreviated form, here are the services that General Service Office provides day by day and throughout the year.

1. **Conference-approved books and pamphlets**

AA literature has been the lifeblood of the movement. Editing, publishing and distributing Conference-approved literature remains among the most vital of General Service Office services.

2. **Help with Group problems**

The main lines of communication are telephone, fax, email, correspondence, AA website and the publications "*AA Around Australia*" (AAAA), *T&CF Newsletter* and "*PI Around Australia*", which share Group problems and solutions and communicate information to the Fellowship.

3. **Special help to new Groups**

New Groups are encouraged through correspondence, complimentary literature packages, including the "*Australian AA Group Handbook*".

4. **AA overseas**

World-wide AA moves ahead rapidly in spite of the differences in language and customs. Conference-approved literature in languages other than English helps. So do special bulletins and, most of all, correspondence. General Service Office provides the communication link by which other countries can share experience with us.

5. **Relations with alcoholism agencies**

The field of alcoholism is crowded with activity today. AA needs to keep informed and to relate itself to other work in the field in ways that will not violate its Traditions. General Service Office provides a communication link on a national level with many of these agencies and maintains a national website through which information about AA can be obtained by outside professional bodies.

6. **Public information**

Relations with the media are as important to AA today as they were in the early days. General Service Office takes the responsibility for contact on national levels. To meet local needs, information is exchanged through the bulletin "*PI Around Australia*" and the "*PI Workbook*" with local Public Information Committees, with Area Committees and with Central Service Offices.

7. **General Service Conference**

This is a year-round activity, co-ordinating the program and arrangements for the annual meeting in November, gathering ideas and solutions from Conference committees, helping delegates to keep their Areas informed. A full and detailed Report of each Conference is available for sale at cost to every AA member who wants one. General Service Office is also responsible for the actual implementation of many of the Conference Advisory Actions.

8. **General Service Board**

Just as General Service Office is a mainstay of Conference, it is also the support system for the Board, organising and coordinating three Board meetings per year, coordinating Board committees, taking or recording and writing up minutes, reporting Board activities to the Fellowship, helping with communications in every direction, providing information, facilitating the Board's services to Conference, informally educating (especially Class A) Trustees and much more.

9. **Self-support**

As AA grows and as new services are added, regular financial support is needed, for General Service Office, Service Committees, Districts and for Central Service Offices. General Service Office encourages Groups and individuals to keep AA self-supporting, ensuring a safe future.

10. **Idea exchange for Central Service Offices**

General Service Office letters help to keep Central Service Offices in touch with what other offices are doing, so that common problems and solutions can be shared. A regular page is made available in “AA Around Australia” through which Central Service Offices may share their experience Australia-wide.

11. **Anonymity breaks**

When General Service Office learns that an AA member’s anonymity has been broken in the public media, this information is given to the Delegate in the Area where the break occurred. Either the Delegate or the General Service Office normally will write to remind the member of our Tradition of anonymity at the media level. Usually, the Tradition has been violated just through carelessness or ignorance, and the reminder heads off further breaks. An annual letter explaining our Tradition of Anonymity is also sent to the media outlets in the major cities.

12. **Conventions and Forums**

General Service Office helps by exchanging programming ideas. Frequently, AA Staff members and Trustees are invited as speakers at Area Conventions, Regional Forums and similar, and General Service Office usually has a display at the National Convention. NOAA keeps a database of positive and negative experience and suggestions from each Convention, available to new Host Committees.

13. **Guidelines**

AA’s experience with police and court activities, Treatment and Correctional facilities, Public Information and Co-operation with the Professional Community activities etc, now spreads over many years. It is being made available in the form of Guidelines and useful Literature items such as workbooks to any Group, Central Service Office, Area Committee or District requesting them.

14. **AA archives**

Early correspondence, directories, Conference data - all are being kept as part of AA’s living history. These Archives of our Australian Fellowship are housed at the General Service Office.

A National Archivist attends the GSO on a regular basis, to preserving and organise records of AA history already to hand and also with seeking out further material of archival value.

15. **Loners Internationalists - Australia**

General Service Office works in close contact with the editor of the Australian *LIM*, the Loners and Internationalist Meeting-by-Mail. This important service provides AA contact for those members who, by reason of disability or distance, cannot avail themselves of regular AA meetings.

HOW GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE IS STRUCTURED

The Board of Trustees is responsible for General Service Office and, through the Management Group, takes care of its administrative duties, handling of general services and publishing of pamphlets and books. Members of this Group are, among others, the two General Service Trustees and the General Service Office Manager.

While the Board does not interfere with the daily operations of General Service Office it recognises its own ultimate responsibility for seeing that it operates in the best interests of the Fellowship as a whole.

AA AS A PUBLISHER

Very early, AA made the decision to be its own publisher, a decision that has meant a great deal to the unity and growth and general good health of the Fellowship. By acting as its own publisher, AA can be sure that its highly successful recovery program is not tampered with by those who may be well-meaning but overzealous. The program and the Traditions go on unchanged - in essence and in presentation.

AA publishes all its own books and pamphlets and its own magazine, much of this being based in New York. Many of these items, however, are printed by our General Service Office here in Australia, with reprint permission from GSO in New York, rather than being imported, while several items are written and published here for specific Australian purposes, e.g., the *Australian AA Service Manual*, the *Public Information Workbook*.

Following the recommendations from the World Service Meeting and in the light of our AA Tradition, only AA Conference-approved literature, the AA Grapevine and AA Service Literature are made available by the General Service Office.

The first four AA books were written by Bill W. Since then, all literature has been written by AAs who have taken great pains to gather their material from all over the Fellowship, from the first draft to the last (there have been as many as seven). Committee and staff members, and frequently a broadly representative special panel, are free to criticise and to suggest, underlining what they feel will best express the AA point of view.

A full explanation and description of how AA Literature is written and produced, of its copyrights and legal requirements can be found in this Manual's Section 11: "AA Literature".

This role as a publisher is a major function of our General Service Office, which has the responsibility of filling the literature needs and maintaining the supply for the whole Australian Fellowship.

In addition, in our Asia-Oceania Zone, it assists many Groups and Loners in smaller neighbouring countries with their literature needs.

HOW GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE IS SUPPORTED

In *theory*, AA Groups contribute enough to support their General Service Office. In *practice*, they do not quite make it. Where does the rest come from? A foundation? A government grant? AAs know that *Tradition Seven* insists our Fellowship be fully self-supporting, a Tradition that has made AA a very special and much-admired kind of society.

Tradition Seven says: “**Every AA Group ought to be fully self-supporting declining outside contributions.**” The General Service Office carries this a step further and implements a ceiling on individual AA contributions, which is CPI-linked, and accepts contributions only from AA members. From November 2015, this limit is \$15,000.

The number and extent of services have increased over the years, but the cost of service per Group has decreased consistently. So, even allowing for higher living costs and decreased dollar value, the need for support of General Service Office remains almost the same. However, not all Groups contribute. More than half do not. This places a heavier burden on the Groups that do, on AA publishing and quite often on the Prudent Reserve Fund.

The suggested method of Group contribution is the division of the Group's surplus, after the Group's expenses have been covered, into three or four amounts in a *Group Contributions Plan* agreed upon by the Group's Conscience, eg 60:30:10, 50:30:10:10, depending on that Group's particular situation. These amounts are contributed to the AA services relevant to that Group and include, where there is one, a Central Service Office or answering service, General Service Office, Area and District.

Additionally, members are encouraged to make personal contributions:

- The **AA Birthday Club** is one method. On their AA anniversaries each year, members make a contribution to General Service Office based on \$2 for each year of sobriety and in return receive an attractive Birthday Card.
- Another method is the **Action Club**. Members of this Club forward \$10 per month to General Service Office to assist it in its many tasks. (General Service Office will forward details of the *Birthday Club* and *Action Club* on request).
- Bequests from AA members, not to exceed the limit set by the General Service Board, are also accepted, but only during the year following their death. From November 2015, the limit set by the General Service Board is \$25,000.

All receipted contributions to the General Service Board of AA by individual members are tax deductible.