

AA CO-OPERATION IN RESEARCH AND NON-AA SURVEY PROJECTS

As alcoholism has become a prime concern and target, more and more agencies, from top government echelons to local community organisations, have sought AA co-operation in conducting surveys and other research projects. The subject has been discussed in some detail by the North American Trustees' committee on *Co-operation with the Professional Community*, and on the suggestion of that committee we offer this memorandum to share AA experience on this subject.

First, a letter that Bill wrote to a researcher in 1968 sheds some light on the subject:

"Thanks for your letter which outlines your research project. Whether such a project could succeed in any useful or meaningful way is a question that, in my view, can't be answered at all until soundings are made where the operation will take place. Therefore, I suggest that you inquire how feasible the project would be in the eyes of at least a few of the prospective participants (local AAs).

"There are plenty of AAs who believe in collaboration with researchers, but it is probable that many AAs couldn't care less about scientific or sociological evaluations; hence there is seeming indifference and hostility. This is the experience of some past researchers, particularly those who required the gathering of statistics, personal interviews in depth, and the like.

"I am sure you will have to work with specially interested AAs as individuals. Even they will want to know who will make the value judgments of research reports, what will be done with them, etc.

"If you are able to proceed with your plans, I would like very much to know the results."

The following points offer AA experience and perspective:

1. AA is not opposed to research and most of our members are grateful for the interest and dedicated efforts of those outside our Fellowship.
2. Any individual AA member is free to participate in any project he or she chooses.
3. AA meetings traditionally are devoted exclusively to the AA programme.
4. Most AA Groups have not distributed questionnaires or arranged for interviews during a meeting; however, some Groups have done when the meeting has ended.
5. Frequently, CSOs can put researchers in touch with AA members who are willing and interested in participating in such projects, eg:
 - a) in large communities, perhaps a committee or sub-committee, made up of AA members who are interested in these projects, could take the responsibility for finding others who share this interest;

- b) in smaller communities, the Group officers or steering committee may be able to perform the same function.
- 6. Most AAs would like to find a way of co-operating which would be both within the AA Traditions and technically feasible for a researcher.
- 7. Decisions about such projects should be made by the local AA Groups in the area where they occur, after careful scrutiny of the project, as the requests might become pandemic.

One final quotation from Bill W, from "As Bill Sees It" (page 45):

"Today, the vast majority of us welcome any new light that can be thrown on the alcoholic's mysterious and baffling malady. We welcome new and valuable knowledge, whether it issues from a test tube, from a psychiatrist's couch, or from revealing social studies. We are glad of any kind of education that accurately informs the public and helps to change its age-old attitude toward the drunk.

"We welcome additional information from Groups and members with experience to share."