

On July 7, 1980 in New Orleans, LA, Al-Anon reached another milestone. Delegates and observers from 16 general service offices met with the WSO International Coordination Committee for a one-day historic meeting, with one purpose in mind—to strive for unity in Al-Anon worldwide. The first permanent International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM) took place September 12-16, 1986 and has been held every two years since then.

### *Al-Anon: Then and Now*

Al-Anon has also grown through the diversification of its membership. First there was the transition from the original AA wives' "coffee and cake" groups to those still living with active alcoholism. Gradually the Al-Anon membership expanded to include men, parents, dual members (Al-Anon members also recovering in AA), adult children, gays/lesbians, brothers/sisters, divorced men and women, widows and widowers, all became part of the Al-Anon fellowship. Alateen too expanded through an increased number of preteen family members. Some Al-Anon and Alateen members identify themselves as having several relationships with alcoholics or acknowledge that alcoholism is multi-generational in their families.

Al-Anon's history has been one of steady and constant growth. The needs and the variety of relationships members have to problem drinkers continues to make Al-Anon vital to its members for recovery from the family disease of alcoholism.

Today, Al-Anon serves over 26,500 groups in 115 countries. Al-Anon membership worldwide is estimated at 600,000. The Al-Anon World Service Office employs a staff of 56 people. It prints 17 books, over 70 pamphlets, and assorted Al-Anon Conference Approved and service

literature, many of which are printed in other languages.

In keeping with its single purpose, Al-Anon remains available as a mutual support group for the families and friends of alcoholics and constantly seeks to welcome more newcomers whose lives have been impacted by alcoholism, into its meeting rooms. The legacy of Al-Anon's early members and cofounders lives on.



#### **For additional Al-Anon History:**

*Lois Remembers* (B-7)

*Al-Anon's Cofounders: The Extraordinary Work of Two Ordinary Women* (P-87)

*How Al-Anon Works for Families & Friends of Alcoholics* (B-22)

*The Al-Anon Family Groups*  
— *Classic Edition* (B-5)



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# Al-Anon: Then and Now a brief history



## Before Al-Anon

As Bill W. and Dr. Bob met and began to build a foundation for recovering alcoholics, it was Annie S., wife of Dr. Bob, who comforted the grief-stricken wife when she said, "Come in my dear, you're with friends now—friends who understand." Perhaps Annie was given the first insight into the significance of the Twelve Steps of AA as a way of life for the family member as well.



Family groups started as early as 1935 when close relatives of alcoholics accompanied them to AA meetings. As families shared with each other, they discovered the benefits of living by AA's

Twelve Steps, and how this improved family relationships which often remained difficult even after the alcoholic became sober.

In 1950, when Bill returned home after visiting AA groups throughout the United States and Canada, he reported many family groups had sprung up and suggested to Lois that she open an office to provide service for these groups.

## Al-Anon Forms

At the close of the 1951 AA General Service Conference, Lois invited the AA Delegates' wives to lunch at her home, Stepping Stones, along with local family group members. She then decided to open an office there, with a close friend and neighbor, Anne B. They received a list from the AA Foundation of 87 nonalcoholic individuals or family groups from the U.S., Canada, Australia, South Africa and Ireland, who requested registration with AA.

Since AA could not comply, Lois and Anne's first service project was to write these individuals or groups. In a questionnaire dated May 1951, they stated their purpose; to unify family groups, to select a name and to adopt the Twelve Steps of AA. As a result of this questionnaire, the name Al-Anon Family Groups was chosen. With AA's permission they adopted the Twelve Steps and later the Twelve Traditions, as guiding principles.

As the family group movement grew, AA offered Lois and Anne the use of a studio at the 24th Street AA Clubhouse in New York City. They called themselves the Clearinghouse Committee and vol-



unteers were recruited from local groups. Soon the movement came to public attention. In March 1952, the groups were asked to voluntarily support a world service office. In January 1954, Henrietta S., one of

the volunteers, became the first part-time paid staff member who subsequently became the first General Secretary/Executive Director. The Clearinghouse was incorporated later that year in May, as a non-profit organization under the name Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc.

## Literature Carries The Message

The first pieces of literature included *Purposes and Suggestions*, *One Wife's Story*, and *Freedom From Despair*. The hard-cover book, *The Al-Anon Family Groups* took two years to write.



## Alateen Begins

Concern for the problems of the children surfaced as early as 1955 at the AA International Convention in St. Louis where several Al-Anon talks were presented on "Children of Alcoholics." But it wasn't until 1957 that an Alateen group was started in California by a teenage son of AA/Al-Anon parents. This same year the pamphlet, *Youth and the Alcoholic Parent* was published.

## Al-Anon's Group Conscience

The Al-Anon World Service Conference (WSC) was first held on a trial basis in 1961. (The WSC is representative of the Al-Anon membership in reaching a "wider group conscience" as expressed in Tradition Two.) The experiment continued for two more years and in 1963 was voted a permanent part of the Al-Anon structure, beginning in 1964. Today, the Conference meets annually and comprises area delegates from the U.S. and Canada, Board of Trustees, Executive Committee, committee chairpersons and World Service Office staff.

## The Word Spreads

In February 1978, the International Coordination Committee was established to maintain contact and worldwide unity with the Al-Anon groups that form in countries other than the U.S. and Canada, totaling 115 to date, 30 of which have established national offices.

As Al-Anon continued to grow, the desire to maintain a grass roots contact prompted the 1979 World Service Conference to establish Regional Service Seminars (RSSs) to be hosted by the six Al-Anon regions of the U.S. and Canada. The first was held in the Fall of 1980 and semiannually thereafter. In 1989, the U.S. and Canada divided into nine Al-Anon regions. RSSs are now held three times a year.