

THE DISTRICT VOICE



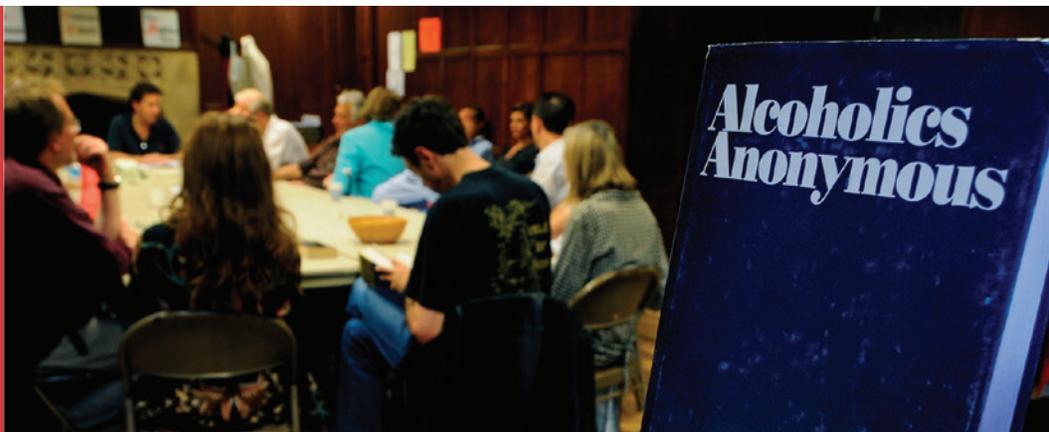
Submit your Article
for Spring, 2018

Topic: Sponsorship

Deadline: April 15th, 2018

Please email submissions to
news@johnstownaa.com

Issue #1, Winter 2018
Serving Area 60, District 41
and our neighboring
districts.



ISSUE #1, WINTER 2018 **THE HOMEGROUP**

Welcome to the first issue of The District Voice! Our goal is to focus on one question or topic in each issue and have a wide array of responses from AA members in and around our district. Everything in these pages is written by local AA members with the hope that sharing our experiences with the topic might help newcomers to the program.

For our first issue we selected the topic of “the Home Group”. It is so common to hear people ask a newcomer if they have a home group, or to hear the secretary of a group announce that anyone wanting to join the home group can speak to them after the meeting... but what is the home group? What are the benefits? How do I pick one? Can I switch later? What do you actually do in a home group? Do you have a home group?

We hope that this issue will shed some light on the subject for everyone reading it, whether you are new to AA or have been around for a while sober but home(group)less.

Our next issue will focus on Sponsorship, so please get your submissions in by the deadline listed. Thanks so much for reading, and for everyone who submitted their experience, strength, and hope.

↳ Jon M., Editor ▲

Traditionally, most A.A. members through the years have found it important to belong to one group that they call their “home group.” This is the group where they accept service responsibilities and try to sustain friendships. And although all A.A. members are usually welcome at all groups and feel at home at any of these meetings, the concept of the home group has still remained the strongest bond between the A.A. member and the Fellowship. (Source: Pamphlet P-16, “The Group”)

FINDING THE MIDDLE

↳ by Mike M.

When I first came into A.A. my thinking was skewed and I was only able to see the world through my own eyes. I really didn't know how to live life. I drank like an alcoholic from a young age, until it no longer had the same effect and my life became unbearable. My drinking continued through my adult life and for the life of me I couldn't find a way out and I surely would have drunk to my death. After being through multiple hospitalizations, psych hospitals and countless vain attempts I had nowhere else to turn and my future seemed to be hopeless. Lucky for me A.A. had planted a seed in my mind that has changed the course of my life and given me a new hope and promises of freedom from alcohol and the bondage of self.

I had tried A.A. in the past and would frequently show up to meetings drunk, carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders and they told me to keep coming back. Sobering up for a period of time helped clear up some of the fog, and I was able to see I was never fully able to be honest with myself and on my own couldn't comprehend the severity of my alcoholic condition. So I took the advice of some people in the fellowship and got a sponsor and joined a homegroup. This was unlike me since I always had the willpower to just not pick up the first drink and I didn't need to take advice from other people living the program but being unsure I could stay sober this time, I went through with it. I didn't know it then but joining a homegroup would help save my life.

It was my sponsor who helped me get involved and choose a homegroup, I had no idea what a homegroup was and the importance they have on A.A. as a whole. I used to think A.A. was for me and that was all, joining a homegroup helped me to see that I was not the only person in the world and that we keep the doors open for the still suffering alcoholic. A.A. went from being a support group to something a whole lot bigger than me, and I started to see the bigger picture. I took on a small position helping to open the meeting

meeting and learned how to make coffee. When I attended my first group conscience meeting I was really able to open up, ask questions and learn about some of the different responsibilities of an A.A. group. It was surprising, the amount of participation involved in keeping the doors open; someone had to pay rent, buy supplies, open the doors, and report information from our meeting to the district. I was able to see A.A. from a different perspective from that point on.

A few months later, I was able to recognize that by being a part of a homegroup; attending regularly, coming to meetings early and staying after for the group conscience that I had become apart of A.A. and finally had a purpose in life, I was an active member of Alcoholics Anonymous. Someone had asked me if I'd like to be apart of the next district meeting, which also, I had no idea what that was, but I said yes. The fellowship grew for me yet again, and I was able to take on a position at the district level and became a voting member. I started to get pretty close to other members at this point in my recovery which was something I was not capable of doing before. I did something different and new for a change and it payed off. I was able to stop thinking about myself and started thinking about how I could be of service and help others. Without much effort on my part, my thinking started to change and I didn't even know it was happening. Joining a homegroup opened up the world of A.A. to me, I couldn't stay sober without A.A. and now with the whole world of A.A. by my side I've tapped into an unlimited source of power that I had never known existed. ▲

Come Early, Stay Late.

Many A.A. members report that their circle of A.A. friends has widened greatly as the result of coffee and conversation before and after meetings. Most groups depend upon their members to prepare for each meeting, serve the refreshments, and clean up afterward. You often hear A.A. members say that they first "felt like members" when they began making coffee, helping with the chairs, or cleaning the coffee pot. Some newcomers find that such activity relieves their shyness and makes it easier to meet and talk to other members. ▲

(Source: Pamphlet P-16 "The Group")

A RETREAT FROM UNCERTAINTY

↳ by Jack F.

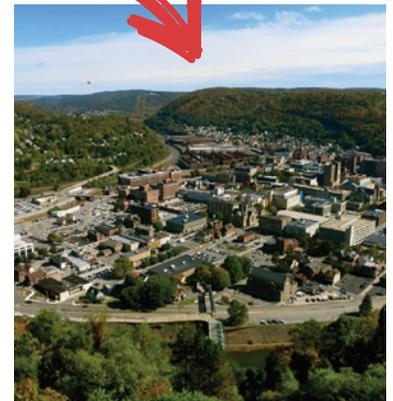
Hi, my name is Jack, and I'm an alcoholic. If one thing can be said about the home group, it is that it has acted as a pole to which I have stayed tethered throughout my sober journey. Having gotten sober in Johnstown, Pennsylvania I found a home in the Monday Night Twelve and Twelve group at Mt. Calvary church. The group featured a more open style of discussion that resonated with me and made me feel at ease. Many of my closest friends are still members of that group.

With membership comes the right to vote on issues that might affect the group and might also affect A.A. as a whole — a process that forms the very cornerstone of A.A.'s service structure. As with all group conscience matters, each A.A. member has one vote; and this, ideally, is voiced through the home group.

Pamphlet P-16
“The Group”



“ I think of my home groups in New York and Johnstown as homes away from home. ”



I have since moved out of Pennsylvania to New York and I made sure that the first thing I did was find a new home group. My new home group is the Potpourri group that meets at 6 PM Monday-Friday in the East Village neighborhood of New York. Our schedules, and on a greater scale our lives, are ever-changing, but becoming active in a home group can provide a retreat from this uncertainty. More and more I think of my home groups in New York and Johnstown as homes away from home. ▲

The Responsibility Declaration

“I am responsible ...when anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that I am responsible.” In short, when newcomers walk into our meeting rooms, we want A.A. to be there for them as it was for us — something we can do continuously only if we function as a group. But, for a group to keep going, all kinds of service must be done. ▲

(Source: Pamphlet P-16 “The Group”)

GETTING THROUGH THE WAVES

↳ by Joe B.

My name is Joe. Only having 1 year in the program I am still learning just how much more there is to AA than just showing up to a meeting. Here's a few things that bothered me in the beginning and found to be normal during my sobriety.

Feelings of hopelessness and loneliness- I was as lost in this world as it gets. Then I went to a meeting and said "Hello I'm Joe and I'm an Alcoholic". Everyone said welcome and I didn't think anything of it till after that meeting. People came to me and talked to me.

Telling me "Keep coming back it gets better" and "Here's my number call if you need anything". It hit me these people care about me. I'm not alone.

The Fog and Anxiety- Sitting in my first few meetings I remember, Racing thoughts, Sweating hands, Lack of memory and many other things. All normal. It gets easier.

Fear- What will these people think of me? Why should I open up to others? Real men don't talk about their problems and if I do they will think I'm weak. The truth is that people in AA have all thought this way in the beginning and that way of thinking will change when you start building real, and healthy relationships with other alcoholics. There are many other things but this is just a glimpse of the beginning.

Ok so I'm coming to meetings and meeting people. Great but then I received a suggestion. Find a sponsor and work the steps. 12 simple steps. First thing is after talking with people find someone that has what you want. Hint Sobriety and Fellowship.

Everyone works the steps at their own pace with their sponsor. Read and study the big book and follow the steps. I found it easier to listen to and follow along with him as we read. I'm not the best reader but I can understand the material if I listen. They can point out the importance of what is being read. Take suggestions and give it everything you got. It's ok to miss things just do the best you can. During this process you will start seeing the rewards of sobriety.

I now hold a position as a GSR (General Service Representative) for my Home Group, and help communicate between the group and the district. Wait, What? Yes AA has structure and organization. It's more than meetings. I need to help the newcomers.

Just me writing this will hopefully help people relate and give some hope to any that can admit they are powerless over alcohol as I did. ▲

Over the years, the very essence of A.A. strength has remained with our home group, which, for many members, becomes our extended family. Once isolated by our drinking, we find in the home group a solid, continuing support system, friends and, very often, a sponsor. We also learn firsthand, through the group's workings, how to place "principles before personalities" in the interest of carrying the A.A. message.

Pamphlet P-16
"The Group"

HELP WANTED A GROUP OF ONE

↳ by Jim R.

I would like to take a minute and talk about being a part of a home group, and a little about my self. I moved to Johnstown about 5 years ago with a little under 3 years sober from the Annapolis Maryland area, where there are about 500 meetings a week to choose from. Before the move I met with my sponsor to talk and he reminded me of the important facts of moving in AA: I needed to get a new sponsor in the new city, a new support group, and a new home group. He reminded me of what it was like when I had just a few months sober, and that this would be the same thing. That I needed to be a part of something, to feel involved, important, to have a service job, to be a part of. It didn't matter what the job was – helping open the meeting, setting up chairs, coffee, cleaning. A lot happens behind the scenes as no one person is in charge.

I've now lived in Johnstown for a few years and have adapted to my new home. With the smaller number of AA groups, roughly 12, it has become even more important for me to be a part of my home group and to be sure I am there every week.

My home group is the Saturday Night Live group that meets at 8pm on Saturday's in Westmont, and we need more home group members.

As of right now I am the only active member, and that is a big problem.

For a group to stay useful, it must have a group that can meet regularly and look over the meeting – to ensure the message is being carried, that funds are being used appropriately, that no one person is carrying the load.

Right now I am that one person, and if no one else is willing to step up, this meeting might end up closing down. While I would hate to see that happen, I have learned along the way that there is always hope, and right now I hope some people reading this will come help us out Saturday night, to keep carrying the message. ▲

History of the 'Home Group'

In many parts of the U.S. in the 1940s, you were lucky if there was any A.A. group meeting in your own town at all. That group would frequently meet only once a week, and that was your 'Home Group'. Then people would get together in small groups in someone's automobile and go to visit A.A. meetings in other nearby towns on some of the other nights of the week. Two or three of the visitors were often asked to stand up and give short (five or ten minute) mini-leads at the meeting they were visiting. ▲

(Source: Glenn C., *The Factory Owner & the Convict*, 1996)

SOMETHING STRONG TO LEAN ON

↳ by Paul L.

Join a home group” was a common piece of sober advice that I heard early in recovery. During rehab, we were told to start going to AA meetings outside of the ones we attended in the rehab facility. I was definitely willing to follow advice when I came into recovery, because I had been hopeless and helpless when I hit my bottom. So I went to my first outside meeting a few weeks into recovery and that particular meeting became my home group. At that time, the meeting had “greeters” and so I was welcomed when I walked up the steps to the church meeting room. I hadn’t expected that. Of course, I was scared to go to an outside meeting and didn’t know what to expect. The greeter asked me how long I had been sober, and then came back with a 24 hour medallion/chip. That small gesture meant a lot to me. I am a goal oriented person, and receiving a chip every month became a motivating factor to keep working in recovery.

I kept coming back every week to my home group meeting, and when each month of recovery came along I’d proudly walked up to receive my chip. At the meeting where I received my one year chip, I noticed that the chair person was the AA member who had been the greeter a year before and had showed me that AA was a fellowship of people helping each other. I saw that AA works since he was still sober and I had been sober for an entire year, a goal that seem unattainable when I was sitting in the detox unit a year before. It felt good to be doing something I could be proud of, as opposed to all my drinking years when I acted poorly. When my home group members saw that I was making an effort to follow the program of AA, these members became fellow travelers as we trudge the Road of Happy Destiny and I have leaned on them through the ups and downs of life in recovery. ▲

FINDING THE MIDDLE

↳ by Jeff W.

I started going to AA meetings two years ago. At first it was a very intimidating experience. I did not know many people and was unfamiliar with the whole AA recovery program. After 6 months, I thought about where my recovery was going and I knew I should be willing “to go to any length to get it”

I decided to join a Home Group and volunteer for some service work. It was a very positive step for me. Instead of feeling as a participant in AA (outside looking in), I started to feel I was a part of AA. It helped me strengthen my commitment and improve my recovery.

I started to feel I was a part of AA

I met new people and got to know others in the home group in a deeper way. It made me feel good about contributing, even in the smallest way....clean the coffee pot after the meeting. I never felt pressure to do anything and everyone was friendly and supportive.

As I understand more than I did two years ago, I try not to take for granted the miracle I have experienced through AA. Without my meetings and those who help with them, I do not know where I would be...

My growth has never been a few big steps but rather many small steps. Joining a Home Group was an easy small step that has paid off in a big way. ▲

Find a meeting online

Visit www.WPAarea60.org to find a meeting anywhere in Western Pennsylvania. ▲



SO IT TURNS OUT IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT ME.

↳ by Mike F.

Alcoholics Anonymous has given me an opportunity to live a new life and to stay sober. Upon my arrival it was suggested that I ask someone to sponsor me and to get into the steps. It was also suggested to pick a home group and to do service work in AA.

A home group is a meeting that I can make a commitment to attend and help. At my home group we help each other set up the meeting and clean up together afterwards. Once a month we have a group conscience after the meeting where all of our home group members discuss finances, changes, and any other subject a member wants to discuss. We each have a voice and vote on everything. There's a secretary, treasurer, chair person, and general service representative. The experience of having a home group has helped me understand more about how meetings work behind the scenes. It has also helped me make new friends and take on some responsibility. Service work in AA is very important for my sobriety.

The more involved I get in AA, the more likely I am to remember I'm alcoholic and stay sober.

Making coffee, helping set up or clean up meetings, sharing my experience, listening, or simply giving someone a ride home after a meeting helps me get out of myself and focus on others. I also have the medallion position for our district. Service gives me an opportunity to give back to AA. It also helps me make new friends and also to learn how to live life without alcohol. ▲

Talking about her own group, a member says: "Part of my commitment is to show up at my home group meetings, greet newcomers at the door, and be available to them — not only for them but for me. My fellow group members are the people who know me, listen to me, and steer me straight when I am off in left field. They give me their experience, strength and A.A. love, enabling me to 'pass it on' to the alcoholic who still suffers."

-Pamphlet P-16
"The Group"

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE... SPONSORSHIP

Sponsorship is a cornerstone of recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous. Without it, we would be left to wander through the steps on our own, and almost universally this has been a proven path to relapse.

WE NEED YOUR VOICE.

For the Spring issue, please share one or some of your experiences with sponsorship - being sponsored, sponsoring others, being your own sponsor -- whatever you'd like to share.

As with all issues, the hope is that this newsletter can get into the hands of newcomers at meetings, helping to answer their questions and ease their fears with your simple and real experiences.

Email your submissions to Jon M. at news@johnstownaa.com.
by April 15th, 2018.

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