

FEEDBACK FROM AA MEMBERS IN RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION

‘WHAT HAS AA DONE FOR YOU THAT MADE A DIFFERENCE – THINGS THAT OTHER APPROACHERS HAVE NOT

Dr. Vanda Rounsefell, Chairman General Service Board was asked to participate in a forum conducted by the International School of Alcohol & Drug Studies last year. Vanda gathered the following feedback from AA members in Central Region and during the Southern Regional Forum held in Hobart, Tasmania, last year.

For a copy of the complete article, please contact National Office

Vanda's brief was to provide information on her understanding of how AA works, derived from her experience as Board Chairman; Comment from her background in psychotherapy & other work with alcoholics in the past; provide feedback from members of the Fellowship.

Approximately 30 alcoholics in each place were asked to write down what they found the most important things AA has done for them, especially things they experience(d) with AA that they didn't get from other approaches, including their own. All were aware of the purpose for which this information was being collected.

Individual comments

Modelled wellness (clear eyes & skin) → motivation to have that too.

Shame reduction & self-acceptance as 'ill not bad' – via identification process and freedom to talk about alcoholic behaviours without shame (trust based on confidentiality, respect, unconditional love).

Re-learned the art of communication – conversation opportunities, new friends, social opportunities, group activities.

Advice to develop interests outside AA – beneficial, enriching, affirming.

Encouragement to take care of self → self-defence course to blue belt level, confident to go out at night, led to gym & increased fitness.

AA taught me the art of letting go & recognising what I could change & what not – Serenity Prayer in action, helped let go pathological marriage & make a new start. Help with self-support – members helped me with encouragement, interim part-time work.

AA taught the art of handling resentment & 'wisely pointed out that the only person being hurt was me'.

AA says 'first things first'. Professionals may inadvertently hinder recovery by trying to get alcoholics to tackle other issues too early. I don't believe any other issues should be addressed in the first year of recovery. I had loads of 'mother issues' which changed completely after a long interval of sobriety.

Professionals can be extremely helpful in keeping alcoholics on the recovery path, especially in areas of extreme child abuse, grief, self-esteem, post traumatic stress, etc.

Although AA isn't professional, it has spiritual philosophies, with its only objective being to help alcoholics stop drinking & stay stopped.

In a nutshell, AA didn't really do anything for me that professionals probably wouldn't have been able to do in time, but it did do them quicker and at no monetary cost.

You can't deal with any problems when you are drinking and AA members are experts in helping you to do that. We know what it feels like to be drunk most of the time, we know what it feels like to lose things because of our drinking, and we know how to recover. We understand what a craving for alcohol feels like. We know how difficult it is in those first weeks without a drink, and we know how you can help yourself. We don't mind if you make 20 phone calls a day to us, just because you need to talk to someone. As a woman, I know what it's like to feel that shame, what it's like to be too drunk to get into the shower and become a derelict in your own home, what it's like to recover and wish you could go back twenty years, what it's like to come to terms with the damage you have done to your children. I know how it feels when your children don't want to bring their friends home because they don't know what state you're going to be in. I know what it's like to feel like life has passed you by. I know all about sitting drunk every night, playing sad records and reminiscing about what could and should have been. I know what it feels like to want to go back 20 years and fix everything.

AAs have first hand experience of alcoholics feel and things they have done. They can pass on a message of hope to those that are hopeless. Very difficult for a non-alcoholic professional to pass on this message in the early days.

AA also helped me with the concept that I had a part to play in the world, however small. As they say in the Desiderata, I recognised that I was a child of the universe and had a right to be here.

In the Big Book on page 63 there is a sentence which we call "The Third Step Prayer". It says: "God, I offer myself to Thee – to build with me and do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self..." Always had trouble with what God's will for me was and what I should be doing. A Catholic Nun member helped me with this. She simply said that "God's will for me was to be happy, as it was for everyone else in the world. Not a bad philosophy to keep in mind. AA certainly helps you in "trudging the road of happy destiny."

"When I went to other organisations they wanted me to tell them about me and then gave me advice – when I phoned AA the person on the phone told me about himself and the only advice was that I go to a meeting to get the message."

"Got me sober!!!"

"Engaged me as an equal. Not as separate – a community."

"Older sober members – loved me, fed, clothed, housed, employed me. & saw what I could recover to be through SPONSORSHIP."

"Reached back and put the hand of friendship out to help me out of the gutter."

"Gave me TIME – TIME – TIME"

"TRUST"

"12 Steps"

"Some spiritual tools available within a sponsor/sponsee relationship:

1. Flexibility
2. Tailored to meet each others spiritual needs moment to moment as need arises
3. Only a telephone call away
4. Participation in a unique trust relationship

5. Non-dependence in a relationship, forming a pattern for future healthy relationships
 6. Written tools – such as letters & continuing Step 4/10
 7. Anonymity – spiritual principle that governs – individuals embodying the AA Principle
 8. Humility – practised when asking for help
 9. Unconditional love “warts & all” care!”
- * *
 - * “AA moved me to identify with fellow sufferers
 - * It suggested an easy to understand solution & offered me help in putting it into practice
 - * AA didn’t ask for anything in return – only that I share what I had with other alcoholics.”

I needed help from another source, not self. Willpower & transferring to other addictions (work, success, prestige, money) didn’t work. The higher power – not prescribed – not necessarily religious – one I could adopt from my own understanding.

Support group. I could identify, share, learn HOW to live without alcohol, one day at a time, deal with trials & tribulations through working the program.

Fill a void. Regular meetings especially early on. Support & guidance from other members – I doubt if I would have stayed sober without it. Understanding came later, and growth in emotional sobriety.

Tradition of Service. Passing on the message helps me stay sober & enriches my life.

“I tried the doctors, councillors(*sic*), drug & alcohol programs, religion, everything I could think of, but none of them told me that I could not drink. I was a failure. AA took me on and told me that if I could go one day without at a time AA would show me a life I used to dream of.

- * I found I could relate to others in the meeting, nobody told me that I MUST NOT DRINK.
- * Just try and not to.
- * Get honest with my self.
- * Don’t try and save the world.
- * Do it one day at a time: I have the rest of life to do it.
- * Treat others how I would like them to treat me.

So today I do it one day at a time and live the life that I used to dream of. Thanks to AA. God bless. Keep it simple. My family is also grateful to AA.”