

# SPECIAL NEEDS AND THE HAND OF “A.A.”

## What can my home do?

The approach pertaining to your meeting relies on common sense. Try to put yourself in the shoes of regular and potential members. You do not need to be profoundly deaf, totally blind or in a wheel chair to need assistance.

Try sitting in a meeting with earplugs or a piece of gauze over your eyes. Try maneuvering through your meeting space with a walker. This should give you a new perspective on the situation.

Some groups have created a Disability/Special Needs Area. This area needs to have a clear uncluttered walkway from the entrance to the assigned area.

This is where the earplugs, gauze and wheelchair comes in. This is suggested even if your group does not utilize a Disability/Special Needs Area.

Sit in your meeting wearing the earplugs. Where is the best place for a Hearing Impaired person to sit?

Walk around your Meeting Area wearing the gauze over your eyes. You should be able to see but not see clearly. Are the chairs set up in a way that allows movement without unnecessary obstacles? Try the same action but remove the gauze and use the walker. Make sure there are no barriers to easy movement by the person with special needs.

After performing these exercises you should have a better idea where adjustments need to be made in your meeting space. As the Hand of “A.A.” we all need to make sure our meetings are welcoming to all of

our members and visitors. Nothing will sour the experience of a new member with a special needs challenge as a difficult time maneuvering a meeting.

Many of the new meeting spaces are Handicap Accessible if they were built after 1990. Much of the prior construction has been retrofitted where it was financially feasible.

Some A.A. clubhouses are older construction and have not been retrofitted because it is not financially feasible. Certain special needs, such as making a restroom more Handicap Accessible can be done inexpensively. Some of the items needed may be available at your local Goodwill Store.

In order for a meeting to be considered Handicap accessible the width of the door jams need to be 32 inches. There also needs to be ramps or elevators if the space utilizes stairs for individuals without Special Needs.

If your meeting is handicap accessible, make sure it is listed as such in the directory.

### OTHER SPECIAL NEEDS

Listed below are some other ways your group can be the Hand of "A.A."

#### **What if a parent has difficulty attending the meeting?**

Try providing childcare for members with young children. It is difficult, especially for single parents to make meetings when children are involved. If you are meeting in a church there may be a nursery already available. In other meeting spaces, there may be some additional space available.

Verify with your Meeting Space Contact that the use of the additional space is permitted. This needs to be done so your meeting space provider can evaluate whether any additional liability will be incurred by this request, or, whether any additional rent is required. Don't assume it is OK before getting permission.

After this is accomplished, you can ask for volunteers from your member base to provide the childcare. It is STRONGLY suggested that 2 members are utilized for each childcare session. This is in the best interest of all parties involved.

### **What if a member is a shut in?**

It is suggested that a volunteer base be created to bring meetings to members who are no longer capable of attending meetings.

### What if we want to bring a meeting to a member to their home?

Agree to a time and stick with it. Be aware you are going to someone's home.

Bring people the member will be comfortable with. This is usually fellow members he/she knows or members who have a known relationship to the meeting. Sponsors with sponsees would be fine.

A brand new (first day) member may be left to regular group meetings until someone knows his/her commitment to the program.

### What should we do when bringing meetings to a Nursing Home/Assisted Living Facility?

If a meeting is being brought to a specific resident of the facility, have the resident request the use of a meeting room. These are available for small functions requested by the resident or their family. Follow the same guidelines set up for a home visit, as this is the member's home.

If you wish to bring an open meeting available to all residents of the facility, you need to get clearance from the facilities administrator. Discuss what time and space works for the facility.

Make sure there is someone present to run the meeting. If your group is not consistent in manning the commitment, the opportunity to be the hand of AA will be lost. Be aware you are a guest in their facility. Set up a team to run the meeting and stick with it.

This is not a new meeting space for the general AA membership. And, outside members should be kept at a minimum. Outside member attendance should be discussed with the administrator prior to the first AA meeting. The facility is a business and if residents lodge extra complaints because of the meeting, the space will be lost.

#### What should we do when bringing a meeting to someone in the hospital?

Make sure the member wants visitors before bringing a meeting to him/her. It is insensitive to not be aware of the patients comfort level with visitors. Do not assume they want company. Keep numbers to a minimum.

Do not go if you are not feeling well. The patient does not need whatever you may be incubating. If any communicable disease protocols are required, make sure that they are followed. This is for you and the members' safety. Follow the same guidelines used in bringing a meeting to a member's home.

If you have any questions or comments regarding these guidelines, I can be reached at 770-714-2642.

Bill B. District 16

Special Needs Chair