



## **WORLD SERVICE BOARD OF TRUSTEES BULLETIN #18**

### **Special interest meetings**

*The following is a report delivered to the World Service Conference at its annual meeting in April 1989 by the WSC Ad Hoc Committee on Special Interest Meetings. Formed the previous year, the committee was chaired by the vice chairperson of the World Service Board of Trustees. However, please note that this report is offered for informational purposes only, and does not necessarily reflect the position of the WSB itself.*

*World Service Board of Trustees*

The WSC Ad Hoc Committee on Special Interest Meetings was formed by vote of the 1988 World Service Conference. It was moved by the RSR from Colorado and seconded by the RSR from New England "that the WSC chairperson appoint an ad hoc committee composed of RSRs, members of the WSB, and members of the WSC Policy Committee for the purpose of investigating the issue of special interest meetings in NA."

The intent of this motion, as stated in the WSC minutes, was "to help us as a fellowship come to grips with and perhaps [come to] a solution to the issue of special interest meetings. In addition this committee could provide some forum for the input of ideas around the issue."

The committee was composed of fourteen members: John Farrell, the vice chairperson of the World Service Board of Trustees, was appointed chairperson; and Debbie Churchwell, the RSR from Georgia, was appointed vice chairperson. Additional members were Becky Meyer (WSB member), Tim Banner (WSC Policy Committee member), Michael Jones (RSR, Connecticut), Janet Woolley (RSR, London, England), Mary Colangeli-Henning (RSR, Tri-State), Mitchell Soodak (RSR, Greater New York), Linda Cooley (RSR, Chesapeake-Potomac), Tony Dee (RSR, Southern California), Jay Venner (RSR, Florida) and Ed Shepard (RSR, Oregon/Southern Idaho). Other members were Bob Hunter (WSC vice chairperson), Stuart Tooredman (WSO Board of Directors vice chairperson), and Pauli Berri from Germany. Leigh Roberts provided support services from the World Service Office.

The committee met by conference call a number of times: on July 26, 1988; October 20, 1988; February 8, 1989; April 14, 1989; and April 21, 1989. It also met during the WSC workshop held

in Dallas, Texas, the weekend of November 11-13, 1988. In addition, the committee conducted an open forum for the receiving of input in Dallas on November 12.

## **PURPOSE OF THE COMMITTEE**

The committee spent a great deal of its initial meeting on July 26, 1988, discussing what it was the conference wanted the committee to accomplish. As a result of this discussion, the committee set the following goals:

1. To provide a definition of special interest meetings;
2. To investigate--that is, "to observe or study by close examination and systematic inquiry" (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*)--precisely what role special interest meetings play in the Narcotics Anonymous Fellowship;
3. To allow the fellowship opportunity to comment on this issue by means of conducting open forums; requesting input directly from groups and members via the *Newsline*, the *Fellowship Report*, and *The NA Way Magazine*; and by direct mailings to regions; and,
4. To provide a report which could be used by NA members as a basis for the discussion of the issue of special interest meetings.

## **DEFINITION OF SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS**

At the beginning of its deliberations the committee attempted to define what precisely a special interest meeting is and how that definition fits into existing NA guidelines on the subject. We were informed in this part of our task by both the *Temporary Working Guide to Our Service Structure* and the Basic Text.

The *Temporary Working Guide* told us that "an NA group is any meeting which meets regularly at a specified place and time, providing that it follows the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions" and that the "primary purpose of an NA group is to carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers by providing a setting for identification and a healthy atmosphere for recovery." (*Temporary Working Guide*, 1988 Edition, pages 1 & 2.)

The Basic Text further clarified our task in its discussion of Tradition Four by clearly stating that "a Narcotics Anonymous group is any group that meets regularly, at a specified place and time, for the purpose of recovery, provided that it follows the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous. There are two basic types of meetings; those open to the general public and those closed to the public (for addicts only). Meeting formats vary widely from group to group; some are participation meetings, some speakers, some are question and answer, and some focus on special problems discussion." (Basic Text, Fifth Edition, page 63.)

In some NA communities there are specialized groups consisting of men, women, gays, professionals, etc. These members host NA meetings where the focus is on recovery from drug addiction in Narcotics Anonymous.

## **TYPES OF SPECIAL INTEREST MEETING**

The Ad Hoc Committee on Special Interest Groups wrote to each RSC chairperson and RSR requesting information concerning special interest meetings in their regions. Of the fifty-eight NA regions, twenty-four responded to this request. The regions responding were Arizona, Buckeye, Southern California, Chesapeake/Potomac, Chicagoland, Colorado, Florida, Germany, Greater Illinois, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, London, Lone Star, Michigan, Mid-America, Mid-Atlantic, New Jersey, Show-Me, Sierra Sage, Upper Rocky Mountain, Utah, Volunteer, and Washington/N. Idaho. Here are the results of our survey:

1. Of the twenty-four regions responding, twenty indicated that special interest meetings are held in their regions.
2. The twenty regions have reported a total of 184 special interest meetings. Some regions, however, reported that not all areas responded to their request for information and that their data was therefore incomplete.
3. The regions reported a variety of types of special interest meetings. These types include: Men's, Women's, Gay and Lesbian, Young People/Youth meetings, one couples meeting, one Agnostic meeting, one Illness and Recovery meeting, and one "Pills" meeting. It was also reported to the committee from other sources that in some regions of Narcotics Anonymous there are also meetings for Vietnam Veterans, people with AIDS, people who are HIV positive, and various types of professionals.
4. Of the regions that reported how long special interest meetings have been in existence within their regions, a number of the regions indicated that meetings had been occurring for over five years, and one region reported a group soon to celebrate it's tenth anniversary.
5. Although the committee was informed that some areas have a policy of excluding special interest meetings from their meeting schedules, no region reported written area or regional policies on this subject.

## **FINAL OBSERVATIONS**

The Ad Hoc Committee on Special Interest Meetings understood from almost its beginning that resolving the issue of special interests in Narcotics Anonymous might be impossible, that the varying opinions on the subject seemed to be irreconcilable, and that we might not be able to offer a perspective that would be so fresh and profound that the entire membership of NA would immediately accept our conclusions. We did, however, feel that if we were able to make some objective observations on the subject--devoid of passion and emotionalism--we might be able to do some good. Here then are our conclusions:

Special Interest meetings have existed in Narcotics Anonymous for some time. There does not appear to be anything in the Twelve Traditions which inhibits groups from holding special interest meetings, provided that the group has no requirement for membership other than the desire to stop using. Special Interest meetings tend to survive and flourish in local NA

communities where there is a need and desire for such meetings and do not exist in NA communities where there is no need nor desire.

In Narcotics Anonymous, the World Service Conference does not have the authority to dictate policy to groups, and regional and area service committees do not have policy making authority over the decisions of their groups. The only authority present in the groups is a loving God expressed in a group's conscience.

The Ad Hoc Committee on Special Interest Meetings concluded that special interest meetings must be appropriate in some NA communities since they exist and flourish with little controversy in these communities. In NA communities where special interest meetings do not exist, and where the need for them is not apparent, there is no reason to create them. Groups, therefore, exercising their autonomy are best suited to decide whether there is any necessity to have special interest meetings.