Alcoholics Anonymous®
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Hello friends! I'm Carolyn and I am an alcoholic. I am currently serving as a Class B (Alcoholic) Trustee and an AAWS Director. I will be rotating soon and I am very grateful for this wonderful opportunity to reflect on my experience with self support.

I imagine if you have received this letter, you are already well informed about self support in A.A. My hope is that you will share this letter with some of your A.A. friends who may not be.

One old-timer told me "You are a member now, no one can take that away from you even if you drink, now act like a member, help clean up at every meeting you attend and put something in the basket no matter what." I wasn't staying sober, I didn't have much money, and I was holding onto the little bit of money I did have for things I thought were more important. I was avoiding the basket by going to the washroom when it was passed. After noticing this, the old-timer started giving me a little spare change from his pocket "for the basket." He told me, "A.A. is our home, it is up to us to take care of it." I was deeply ashamed for taking his money (he had none to spare), especially when I knew I had my own spare change. Because of his example, I started putting in what I could. We never discussed how much, or exactly how it was spent, he kept it simple "we do what we can so A. is here when we need it."

I was blessed to join a home group that lived our Twelve Traditions. We were a small group and our funds were kept in a purple Crown Royal bag (we did eventually get a back account). Great care was taken with the money; every penny was accounted for and reported on. At the business meeting we always heard about the services provided and funds needed by the levels of service (intergroup, district, area, General Service Board). I once suggested we spend for something we didn't strictly need and was promptly reminded that "it's not our money, it passes through the group on its way to support A.A. service entities and carry the message."

For my first few years I was close to bankruptcy. It took time to make my amends—I negotiated the best terms I could and repaid what I owed. My sponsor and my homegroup had a profound impact on me and I saw that money and spirituality really do mix! As I grew in A.A. my life grew and it was not long before I resumed a career where I was responsible for the financial performance of a large business operation.

As I result of doing service at the homegroup, intergroup, district, and area levels, I learned about the Twelve Traditions. In my employment and in my personal life I made spending decisions based on these new ideas where faith, sacrifice, responsibility, and prudence came together to guide the way. At work I took time to educate our team about our financial results. We were successful and I was promoted. Little did they know that the secret sauce was our Twelve Traditions brought into my (for-profit) workplace. A.A. principles work in the basket, in my home group, in my personal life, and in my professional life. I remain in awe of the power and simplicity of it all.

I served as delegate for Area 79 (British Columbia and Yukon). Area 79 is 1,431,250 square kilometres (552,609 sq miles) large. The size informs service needs in Area 79. I remember one Western Canada Regional event where there was a finance workshop on the "costs of travel." We all shared our experience and cost-saving ideas. The sharing continued and at one point shifted from how to reduce our spending to what the harmful impacts of these decisions might be. Through the sharing we heard many examples of where there was connection between participation and contributions. Ultimately, we agreed that the financial cost to keep the groups connected to the area and informed was better than the price to be paid if we fail to do so.

I have seen powerful examples of our Seventh Tradition in action. I remember a DCM from a remote district who was able to attend the area assembly due to an area travel subsidy, and afterward the district contributed the amount of the subsidy PLUS an additional contribution back to the area. Perhaps more important, that same DCM had a GSR and another member with her at the next assembly.

We have so much work yet to do. For example, we have materials in American Sign Language for deaf and hard of hearing members, but these are limited and there are ongoing requests for more items, including the A. Service Manual, which might foster more participation. There is a seemingly limitless need for translations, but there are not limitless funds. Then there are our operational needs. Bill spoke often and passionately about our "headquarters" and the need to support the core functioning of the office. There are no services without the operations and that means we have to pay the staff and routine bills that every service organization our size has to deal with.

Early on Bill W. noted "It was soon apparent that while alcoholics would spend lavishly on Twelfth Step cases, they had a terrific aversion to dropping money into a meeting-place hat for group purposes" (from *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions,* chapter on Tradition Seven). This remains just as true today as when it was written. It can be harder to see the direct impact on the alcoholic who still suffers of our contributions to the GSB and because of the scale of the services for an estimated 1.5 million members in the US and Canada. In 1951 Bill W. said "Our present array of services may look like big business to some. But when we think of the size and reach of A.A. today, that isn't true at all, In 1945, for example we had one paid worker to every 98 groups (from *A.A. Service Manual,*

Appendix A “A.A.’s Legacy of Service”). Based on our estimated number of groups in the US and Canada, it is now approximately one paid worker to every 748 groups. There is a staggering amount of services provided. You can learn more about that here SMF-176 Services Provided by GSO/AAWS.

At the time I came to A.A. I had given nothing and I received, literally, everything. I received this through the sacrifice of others. In time, I became self-supporting and was no longer a drain on A.A., or anyone else. But it took a little more time before I became a grateful contributor. Even this was still transactional; I was paying my share informed by the financial reports. Finally, there was a shift, and it became about the joy of giving and the spirit of sacrifice instead of what I can easily spare. I have seen countless examples that the sacrifices we each make have a profound and lasting impact on the lives of alcoholics (and beyond). I am inspired by the possibility of our service entities having more than the minimum funds required for them to survive. I believe that given the resources to do so, these entities can do more to carry our lifesaving message than I can even imagine. The amount of our contribution is secondary to the spiritual connection that joins us together in unity. As it is in A.A., the more I give the more I receive, and so the circle of sacrifice goes on (and on).

I will continue to try to inform newer members, the way others informed me. Simple things are important, like how at my homegroup we announce that “books are available at cost and pamphlets and Grapevines are available through your group contributions,” because nothing is free, someone made a sacrifice to put it on the table. I will continue to share what you taught me, that our Seventh Tradition is not a transaction, it is a sacrifice made in a spirit of gratitude, trust, and faith.

With gratitude love and service,

Carolyn W.