

Green Mountain Sharings

The Bi-Annual Newsletter of Vermont's Al-Anon Family Groups
Vermont's Al-Anon/Alateen Information Center
Fall 2013 Issue

Let's Grow in the Program Together!



Sponsorship

In this newsletter we will explore members' experience, strength and hope with Al-Anon's sponsorship program. Below are some Al-Anon definitions of sponsorship, organized by one of our members.

Jo S.

Sponsorship in Al-Anon

Sponsorship is a mutual and confidential sharing between two Al-Anon or Alateen members. A Sponsor is someone with whom a member can discuss personal problems or questions; someone who willingly shares the experience, strength, and hope of the Al-Anon/Alateen program. ([Sponsorship, What It's All About](#), P-31)

Al-Anon Personal Sponsors

After a period of time Al-Anon members will want to choose a personal Sponsor with whom they can identify. Members can encourage newcomers to find a Sponsor by sharing that Sponsors provide guidance; however Sponsors do not direct or give advice. The new member may have discussed problems with the contact before coming to meetings. This contact may or may not be asked to continue as a Sponsor; however, neither a contact nor a newly chosen Sponsor should be used as a substitute for a meeting. For more information on Sponsorship, read the pamphlet [Sponsorship, What It's All About](#) (P-31) and the bookmark [Sponsorship—Working Together to Recover](#) (M-78).

Service Sponsors

Service sponsorship is a special relationship where one member shares their service experience with another member. This type of sponsorship can be a one-time situation, such as an outgoing trusted servant supporting their replacement, or an ongoing relationship. Service sponsorship helps both the service Sponsor and the sponsee acquire new skills while being an example of personal growth through service. Al-Anon Family Groups worldwide benefit when members are enthusiastic about service. For more information about service sponsorship, read the pamphlet [Service Sponsorship—Working Smarter, Not Harder](#) (P-88).

Alateen Group Sponsors

An Alateen Group Sponsor is an Al-Anon member who is currently certified by their Area process as an Al-Anon Member Involved in Alateen Service (AMIAS) and has made a commitment to be of service to an Alateen meeting on a regular basis.

Alateen Personal Sponsors

Just as Al-Anon members sponsor each other, Alateens sponsor each other. Alateen Personal Sponsors are fellow teenagers who can discuss personal problems or questions with those they sponsor. Personal Sponsors willingly share the experience, strength, and hope of the Alateen program.

Finding the Strength to Find a Sponsor

I have been in the Al-Anon fellowship for about 3 years. My participation in the program has led me to a level of awareness and hope that astounds me. My own personal challenge with asking someone to be my sponsor has been frustrating and fascinating to me. It represents a bigger obstacle. Historically, my survival has been directly linked to trusting only myself and solving problems in isolation. Recently, my travels onto and along the path of Al-Anon have given me some hope that I can maybe strive for more than survival.

I am starting to suspect that with the right tools, I can live with genuine connections to other people and might be able to find a balance that still includes caring for other people but introduces the practice of caring for myself and possibly even trusting another serenity seeker to lend a hand to me. I am now seeking a balance that allows me some humility in order to see that I am no better or worse than anyone else and that the answer does not lie solely in me. I am more hopeful now that inviting someone other than me to glimpse at my truth, my flaws, and my challenges; does not guarantee immediate pain. For now, I am open to the idea that asking for help does not equal weakness. Asking for help might allow me to fully live in humanity instead of next to it.

Though I have not yet asked anyone to be my sponsor, I am warming up to the idea of it. Day by day, I am building strength to allow myself to let go a little - to reach out my hand without wincing. Thank goodness for the presence/presents of Al-Anon in my life.
Anonymous



District 1 does outreach. Staffing the table at a Wellness Event in Brattleboro.

And The Third Leg for Balance

I am speaking of the three legged stool so well known by old Vermonters. Al-Anon has its own three legged stool. The first leg - meetings & literature; second - prayer & meditation and the third, so necessary for balance, is a Sponsor.

I am preparing for a small dinner party. Before Al-Anon and my three legged stool I would be a total wreck worrying about whether or not it would be perfect. Of course it won't be perfect (I'm not God or even Martha Stewart for that matter) and for the first time in my life that is more than ok. My Sponsor has helped me through the first three very important steps. Thought we would never get any further and I have to admit I do sometimes, less and less, fall back to Step One. My Sponsor is the most honest person in my life. My Sponsor was not my first choice but as I have learned God has a wonderful sense of humor.

For six months I had been hearing, "If you don't have a Sponsor get one and if you do have a Sponsor use them." Attended my first Vermont Conference in 2012, about six months into my program, I heard a beautiful older woman speak about her experience, strength and hope. I took a deep breath and approached her after her sharing.

“Would you be my Sponsor?” She responded so kindly that she had sponsored a number of people and was taking a break. Because she was so gentle and lovely her response only wounded me a bit.

Courage takes me a while to accumulate and decided not to go off on my own but to ask an old timer at my home meeting if a recommendation could be made. I was given a name. She seemed perfect. Again I took a deep breath and approached her after a meeting.

“Would you be my Sponsor?” She went ashen and struggled to say she had never sponsored anyone and just couldn’t, no she really just couldn’t.

I continued to go to meetings and by now eight months had passed. I continued to hear, “If you don’t have a Sponsor get one (not having a lot of success in that) and if you have one use them.” I tried working the steps alone, I was learning a lot, I was praying but I began to feel I really was missing something.

So, on a whim, I went up to that old-timer and said, “I asked the person you recommended and she can’t do it. Would you be my sponsor?”

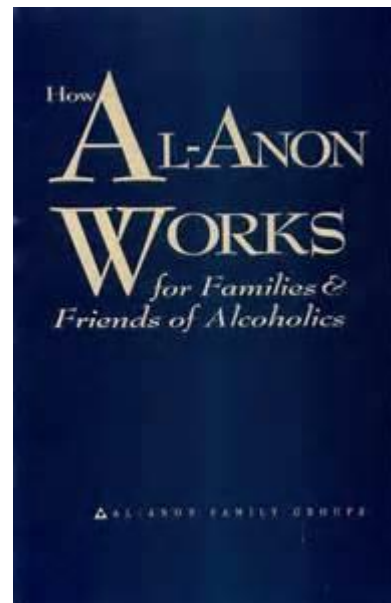
“It would be an honor.” That is what my Sponsor said. Of course, I didn’t believe it would be an honor at all but I would come to understand in working with me on my program my Sponsor was working another Twelfth Step.

My sponsor is not a therapist (I’ve had those, not that hard to find as their hours are billable). My sponsor is a trusted friend, a guide. My Sponsor has told me I was spiritually bankrupt, arrogant willful, and smug – I couldn’t believe someone would speak to me this way. But, I picked this Sponsor (or maybe God picked this person for me), and my Sponsor could easily recognize these traits in me because my Sponsor has them as well. I would show up, listen and try to make sense of what I

was being told. I was to learn that defects of character don’t all need to be eliminated; only the ones God chooses to relieve me of. I am learning to become aware, accept and act (another three legged stool).

My Sponsor has been a blessing in my life and in the life of my loved one struggling with the disease of alcoholism. Yes, understanding more about the disease has come about because of my Sponsor’s willingness to share.

I don’t always like my Sponsor but I have come to love my Sponsor in a very special way; the way my Sponsor already loves me. Thanks for letting me share. . . .
..Jackie A.



Ask CAL

On the drive home from a District Meeting, another member suggested an “Ask CAL” section for the newsletter. Members could submit questions and then the newsletter editor or others could research Conference Approved Literature (CAL) to find responses. Finding the responses was so much fun and so educational for me, that I leapt on the idea. Here’s our first Ask CAL.

Dear CAL: *My son has decided that he is ready to go to rehab, but currently there are no beds open. He is supposed to call the rehab every morning between 9 and 10 a.m. to see whether a bed has opened up. He is rarely awake at that time, so I've been calling and saying I am him. Am I enabling him or taking care of myself? Confused in Vermont....*

Dear Confused,
CAL has a lot to say to folks in your situation. "Can we really delude ourselves into believing that such stop-gaps will work?... We would do well to realize that the inevitable collapse may be far worse than if we had allowed him to face up to his own responsibilities and mistakes, free of our interference... If I take no part in protecting the alcoholic from the consequences of his drinking, and *allow* disaster to overtake him, then the responsibility for what happens is not mine..." (One Day At a Time, pg. 98)

"We don't realize that, by playing our part, we actually contribute to sustaining the disease of alcoholism. We may serve as the enabler, rescuing the alcoholic from unpleasant consequences of his or her own making." (How Alanon Works (pgs. 31-32)

"As long as I failed to detach—as long as I was always there trying to pick up the pieces,... I stood in the way of her self-esteem. I didn't give her the opportunity to do anything she might feel good about." (ibid, pg. 257)

"How do I know whether a particular action is enabling? While this is not always clear, I find it helpful to look carefully at my motives. Am I trying to interfere with the natural consequences of a loved one's choices? Am I trying to do for someone what they could do for themselves? Am I doing what I think is best for me? Do I resent what I am doing? If so, is it really a loving choice? Sometimes the most compassionate thing I can do is to let others take responsibility for their behavior." (Courage to Change, pg. 5)

GMS Editor: Jo S.

CAL welcomes questions. Please email them to the newsletter link at the website.



Showing & Growing Listening & Glistening

Becoming a member of Al-Anon Family Groups has been one of the best things I have ever done for myself. I say that with the knowledge that God gets the credit for everything that I do for myself & everyone that I touch spiritually.

I am aware that we are a spiritual, not a religious program and that sounds a bit on the negative side to me. This week, however, I heard a term I would like to share with you: "Spiritually independent". Now doesn't that center so much more on target!

My personal program of recovery became super enhanced and greatly deepened once I was graced with the opportunity to 'show' and share with my peers in detail, of HOW (honestly, Open-mindedly & Willingly) I read the steps - word by word, and identify with all that is therein contained. I go on to Traditions & Concepts with my most cherished sponsees, when each becomes ready.

The principles contained in the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions & Twelve Concepts, when applied to my daily living have offered to me a life previously unavailable; a life of being present & real; a life of authenticity.

Exercising my will rightly for the first time in my life takes a large amount of

constant vigilance. My feet take me to meetings; my actions, words & thinking are my responsibility. A good number of women have asked for me to sponsor them in this program & I am hugely grateful for each & every one. Each woman has brought my life to sparkle with new facets. I show how I've grown & they, in their own time, take on the methods adapted to their own needs & they return week after week with new awakenings, insights and awareness's so amazingly beautiful that it surpasses expression. These principles, which we learn together, are life generating. These principles are much more than our defects ever were. We, individuals who seek recovery are ultimately beautiful core beings and when the light shines out of us- each one glows with uniqueness unsurpassed. Sponsoring & being sponsored is my way of life. I have come to rely on this guidance to have a life filled with love, challenges, changes, growth, inspiration, admiration, caring - all around (for everyone & everything), connection, & completion.

We have grown well passed the original intent of our Founders. And we are making better the lives of those we meet as well as the lives we ourselves live. Now this is worth the showing, & the growing; worth the listening & the glistening. This is a valuable life.

Arlene H., Westminster, VT



GMS Editor: Jo S

LOVE *Let Others Voluntarily Evolve*

LETTER FROM THE COUNTRY

Dear Friends,

My road is currently impassable due to mud so I am sending what I wanted to share.

Remembering the paradox of service as humbling and elevating, I wrote my name down for the Speaker Meeting for March. I have had a sponsor now for almost two months and I felt sponsorship was a topic worth exploring together. Since December of 2009 when I entered these rooms in anguish, I've relied on you, on conference-approved literature and on life itself. While all the steps spring from fellowship and intimacy with a Higher Power, I was accustomed to studying alone, unchallenged, under-nurtured and a little ambivalent.

Why was it hard to ask? Because I felt overwhelmed and didn't want to be a burden. Because despite my sincerity I felt like an imposter and didn't know if I could ever believe in a benevolent Higher Power. I didn't get what "the work" was? What if we didn't click?

I bring this up because I wish I had asked sooner and had lived with the solace and sisterhood sooner and I hope if any of you are hanging back, that you will take the chance.

My sponsor and I turn out that have more in common than our complimentary ethnic backgrounds and the same cold home-remedy. Her years of living the program lend to me her solidity and offer the solidarity I lack. She perplexed me by asking what I noticed from the copyright page of Pathways to Recovery. I picked out the array of languages in which this same book was translated. Somewhere across the

planet anonymous friends are speaking these steps and climbing toward understanding now. The beverage may change one country to the next from metaxa to schnapps, but the “cause, control or cure” clause still holds true in any language.

I think of the deep democracy of Al-Anon and I can’t help pondering how our values play out in places where it is unsafe in public to speak from the heart. I add that to my gratitude list as I walk through my own steps.

My sponsor introduced me to the first other meeting I ever attended besides my home group. It was proof that the rising hope, like leavening bread, exists in every room where Al-Anon fellows gather. Why was this hard to believe?

“We came to believe a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity,” my sponsor quotes. A patient “comes to” after a coma or anesthesia. But I need to wake up and reorient over and over after the same operation. *My will be done* is not exactly working. Today is good practice for “Let Go and Let G-d.” A Higher Power has produced this Great Thaw. And that is a good thing.

I am grateful to my sponsor for offering her loving, wise perspective. I had imagined that having a sponsor would mean putting my shoulder to the wheel: the work of working. But she is a role model for lightening up and meeting simple needs with grace. Laughing over lunch, with chopsticks and tales of our city lives. I didn’t get that “Easy Does It” also means pause for pleasure. So thank you for all of your support. And here’s to the softening of icy spirits.

Verandah P., Guilford, VT



Too Many Acronyms!

Once upon a time there were two people who went to AFG. As they each grew in recovery they wanted to learn more about Al-Anon beyond their group. After some time in AFG, Josephine decided to become the GR, and Ben was the AGR for the Wednesday Listen and Learn AFG. The GR and the AGR talked to the DR about attending the District meeting to learn all about CMA, PO, AIS, AAPP, FC, and MO. It was all very interesting but a bit confusing so they all decided to attend the AWSC meeting to learn more. At the AWSC meeting they talked about the LDC that sold CTC and ODAT and other CAL. They discussed GS, and the Delegate’s trip to the WCS, and WSO. Since there was more information at the AWSC meeting they all decided to attend an RSS because it sounded like they would learn even more there about PSA’s, KBDM, RT’s and TAL’s and the CCT.

The GR and the AGR were able to return to their group to share all about their incredible journey and how it benefited their recovery. They explained what Al-Anon’s alphabet soup really means and the part each plays in our program of recovery.

Our acronyms are great but let us all remember to explain what they mean.

Barb S.

AAPP Area Alateen Process Person
 AFG Al-Anon Family Groups
 AIS Al-Anon Information Service
 AGR Alternate Group Representative
 AWSC Area World Service Committee
 CAL Conference Approved Literature
 CCT Conference Committee on Trustees
 CMA Current Mailing Address
 CTC Courage to Change
 DR District Representative
 FC Fellowship Communication
 GR Group Representative
 GS Group Services
 KBDM Knowledge Based Decision Making
 LDC Literature Distribution Center
 MO Membership Outreach
 ODAT One Day At A Time
 PO Public Outreach
 PSA Public Service Announcement
 RSS Regional Service Seminar
 RT Regional Trustee
 TAL Trustee At Large
 WSC World Service Conference
 WSO World Service Office



Al-Anon Sponsorship History **Lois W., 1967 Conference Digest**

...It would be very helpful if Al-Anon adopted many of the present day A.A. Sponsors' customs. To make sure that all newcomers are well received, the group appoints a special committee which not only greets all new arrivals but sees that they each have an appropriate, understanding sponsor, one who appeals to the new member.....

The initial Al-Anon contact is sometimes the one most suited to undertake the responsibility of sponsorship. This includes befriending the beginner, accompanying her to meetings, calling her during the week, and listening to her story, - perhaps over and over again, thus making oneself a sounding board against which the new member can pour out her pent up emotions. When the beginner has this outlet, she is not so apt to spill over at meetings, which, we all know, is undesirable. The Sponsor's example can also be of great help to the recent arrival who thus learns what to do and what not to do...

So when we try to sponsor newcomers, aiding them to live by the Al-Anon program, we are not only benefiting them but strengthening ourselves as well.

Next Green Mountain Sharings Topic

SPRING INTO ACTION

What actions do you take to find serenity?
 How do you work on your self?
 What "action steps" have given you strength and hope? How?

Please send submissions to the Al-Anon website, www.vermontalateen.org or give them to your GR or DR.

REMEMBER TO ASK CAL! Send your CAL questions to Jo S.