A Report from your Area Inventory Steward – The Last Two Years

Two years ago, on November 4, 2018, SENY (Area 49) held its biennial Area Inventory. Perhaps you were in attendance; perhaps you were not; and perhaps (if this is your first go-round as a GSR) you were not even aware that Southeastern New York does such a thing. If so, never fear: you'll be able to attend this rotation's version on Saturday, November 14th – and since it will be conducted virtually, you won't have to leave the comfort of your own home!

Not only will you be able to attend; it is vital that your group's voice be heard through your attendance, since your group's most powerful link to the General Service structure is activated by the participation of its GSR. Go to www.aaseny.org and click on Events / Calendar for login and passcode information. While you're in the SENY website, also go to "Resources / SENY-specific" and look at the three (brief) Area Inventory pieces at the bottom of the list, if you haven't done so already.

The purpose of this report is to measure the progress, or lack thereof, regarding the Record and the Recurrent Themes that came up two years ago. I will focus on the three main recurrent themes, as put forth by our then-Chair / now-Delegate Jane E. I will strive for objectivity, as best I can. And, as mentioned at the end of my November 2020 Link article, I will view everything through "an over-arching, two-part question". So here we go.

1) <u>Communication</u>. Throughout this rotation SENY has done a great deal to make sure that we are reaching out effectively to all participating groups, districts and counties. We have endeavored to improve our digital outreach and to maintain the level of non-digital (printed / mailed) communication. The most obvious result of this is the SENY Committee's renaming of the Area Registrar to the Technology and Communications Officer this year, thereby distributing the overwhelming task load to a number of trusted servants. Please see the most current, online version of the SENY handbook for details of our TCO and our Technology Committee.

Another great challenge of communication for the Area is keeping up with changes of email addresses, especially in light of the fact that some Counties use Area-provided email addresses and naming conventions, while others use County email structures, and yet others use personal email addresses. While in line with Tradition 4, these practices can wreak havoc with effective communication: perhaps this is simply a matter of Acceptance, or "it is what it is". Finally, communication with AA Partners, for lack of a better term, such as the three Area YPAAs and various Intergroups, is heavily dependent on Liaison activity (the Alternate Delegate and Intergroup Liaison, respectively). Our link to Area 49's Hispanic District also relies a great deal on active, regular participation of the Alternate Delegate as a liaison.

Having said all that, perhaps the greatest communication challenge of all is to convince our AA members, especially those doing general service, to make a habit of checking our Area website (again, www.aaseny.org) on a regular basis, since communication is only effective when it is both sent and received. This last bit leads nicely into our next recurrent theme:

2) <u>The person new to service needs more support</u>. I love the AAWS Service Manual, as well as our Area 49 Handbook – I find there are answers to almost all of my questions regarding general service in those pages. That said, when I first became a GSR, my very first manual looked pretty much the same for several years as it did when I bought it: pristine, in mint condition and unused. I wanted expectations prioritized, and I didn't want to be overwhelmed. Additionally, I had the challenging experience of reporting back to a group that didn't want to hear my report.

So the number of comments about supporting those new to general service rang true for me: we (Officers and Committee Members) need not only make doing service attractive, we need to develop a concise message around what that service entails, as well as what the expectations are (overall time requirements, how to report back to the group, why attending Area Assemblies and the Delegate's Day of Sharing are critically important <u>for</u> the <u>groups</u>, etc.). We need to emphasize mission-critical passages of those same manuals, such as page 40 in the most recent SENY Handbook: the FAQ "What if my group isn't interested in General Service", or AAWS page S20: "Why do we need a Conference?", instead of "just read the book".

And, perhaps most of all, we need to have a dialogue between the Area and the Counties on how to create a *consistent message and action plan* for GSRs: goals, expectations, information pathways and the like. Might that be a great mission for the Ad Hoc Service Participation Committee of the new rotation, which is tasked in part "to share valuable experience, ask questions and spark new ideas", as well as "reinforce group and district participation"? Perhaps the next DCMCs and their Alternates will hold the key to a new, unified approach.

3) <u>Diversity, Accessibility and Inclusiveness</u>. Let's look at Accessibility first. As mentioned above, SENY has done its best to make access (both electronic and non-electronic) available to all trusted servants and AA members who want to take advantage of it. There will necessarily be an ongoing refinement of this process, especially in light of the implementation of the TCO / Tech Team, but we seem to be on the right path.

The pandemic of 2020 has both helped and strained this effort. Through virtual platforms, communication (for both recovery and service meetings, and via computers or smart phones) had made instant, effective communication – and thus, accessibility – available to the large majority of people. By the same token, it has hurt those who do not have electronic connection readily available. Additionally, doing effective 12th Step work with newcomers has taken some rethinking, as we all search for effective alternatives to the traditional face-to-face approach.

One expectation that a number of us had regarding accessibility has proved *not* to be true as the pandemic has continued on: a big increase in general service participation. Since the requirement of time and travel, especially through NYC, was eliminated when SENY went virtual, it was thought that many more GSRs (and others further below the groups) would be able to make more Assemblies and other major Area events. Attendance numbers have remained more or less constant, although some new attendees have been able to participate due to virtual access. Perhaps the next rotation, collectively, can consider this and ask what more can be done to make use of this unusual situation.

Finally, regarding Diversity and Inclusion: at our September 2019 SENY Assembly, a motion to change the language of an oft-used piece of Grapevine literature was brought before the Assembly, in the desire of delivering it for consideration at the 70th General Service Conference. The discussion that followed was not in the spirit of our A.A. Traditions, nor was it anywhere near the guidelines of the Warranties in Concept XII. At the next Assembly in November, distrust (re voting) was woven into the mix. Unity, trust, respect, and even love for one another were shaken. Four months later, the pandemic struck. It's a year later: have we recovered?

I will suggest that diversity without inclusiveness denies one of our most important underlying principles in Alcoholics Anonymous, that of Acceptance. Did we help or hurt participation in service on those days? Even more, did we help or hurt Tradition 3? It is my understanding that we talk and debate in A.A. so that we can become fully informed, so that our Fellowship can be the best it can possibly be – it is not meant to be a "zero sum" game. So, as far as our Area Inventory is concerned, perhaps ALL of us have some 11th Step contemplation to do.

Therefore, with all of the above information, and taking the pandemic of the last eight months into account, here are my observations in summary:

- **Communication:** moving forward, adapting, innovating at A.A. speed.
- **Support for new trusted servants:** refocus our efforts, get constant feedback.
- **Accessibility:** on the right track, much more to do, explore any and all options.
- **Diversity:** we have it, let's celebrate and honor it.
- **Inclusiveness:** we have a lot of work to do, and some healing to accomplish…

Yours in Service,

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Area 49, Panel 69