

How Districts Can Serve:

- *Create a Special Needs/Accessibility Committee*

- *Promote and Sponsor Accessible*

Meeting & Event Sites

- *Encourage Big Book Tape Study Meetings*

- *Provide interpreters and Special AA*

Materials when Possible (i.e. large

Print Books, Braille, Audio Tapes)

- *Educate Your District Members*

Through Workshops

- *Provide a Meeting Each Week with*

Child Care for Small Children

Communications Tips

1. When talking with a person with person speak directly to that person rather than through or to a companion or interpreter.
2. When meeting a person who is blind or has low vision always identify yourself and others who may be with you. When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.
3. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions.
4. Treat adults as adults. Address people by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to all others. (Never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.)
5. Leaning on or hanging on to a person's wheelchair is similar to leaning on hanging on to a person and is generally considered annoying. The chair is part of the personal body space of the person who uses it.
6. Listen attentively when you're talking with a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for the person to finish, rather than correcting or speaking for the person. If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod or shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond. The response will clue you in and guide your understanding.
7. When speaking with a person who uses a wheelchair or a person who uses crutches, place yourself at eye level in front of the person to facilitate the conversation.
8. To get the attention of a person who is deaf, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly. Not all people who are deaf can read lips. For those who do lip-read, be sensitive to their needs by placing yourself so that you face the light source and keep hands, cigarettes and food away from your mouth when speaking.
9. Relax. Don't be afraid to ask questions when you're unsure of what to do.

Special Needs/Accessibility Committees

Purpose:

To meet the special accessibility needs of the disabled fellowship of A.A.

Members of the Special Needs/Accessibility Committee:

- Committee members from each group
- District committee chairperson
- Area committee chairperson

Handling of an accessibility need:

When a need arises that an individual member cannot handle:

- Individual A.A. member contacts Central Service or a committee member (For example, to provide an interpreter for a meeting or workshop, or to provide tapes or other special resources or assistance to a member.)
- District or Area committee members contact and assist the disabled member or newcomer.

Whom We Serve:

- Physically disabled
- Deaf & hearing impaired
- Blind & visually impaired
- Learning or reading impaired
- Seniors and homebound
- Language barrier
- Single parents requiring childcare.

How We Serve:

- Provide interpreters for meetings and events.
- Provide Braille A.A. literature and programs for special events.
- Assist the physically disabled at events; provide rides in special cases.
- Encourage wheelchair-accessible meetings and events.
- Encourage Big Book tape study meetings in each district.
- Encourage groups to provide childcare.
- Update special-needs information on Where & When's.
- Bring meetings into the home, hospital, or long-term care facilities; encourage districts and groups to support regular meetings in special-needs facilities.
- Provide literature and hold workshops on special needs.
- Explore other special needs; work with GSO and other districts & areas.

HOW DISTRICTS CAN SERVE, EVEN IF THE SPECIAL NEEDS/ACCESSIBILITY CHAIRS ARE NOT FILLED: ELECT OR APPOINT A SPECIAL NEEDS/ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE LIAISON

****Once appointed, have the new Liaison visit the Area 38 SN/AC Webpage (<http://www.eamo.org/specialneeds.html>) and contact the SN/AC Chairperson by calling 314-644-1130, or emailing contact@eamo.org.**

JOB DESCRIPTION

An Accessibility/Special Needs Committee Liaison should be guided by the following principles:

"To carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers."

"There are no special A.A. members, only members with special needs."

Whom the Liaison will be serving:

- o A.A.s from minority groups: Deaf, Native Indian, Spanish, African American, Gay, and Lesbian;
- o A.A.s from a variety of cultures that have primary languages that are not English;
- o A.A.s who are deafened or hard of hearing (do not use American Sign Language);
- o A.A.s who are house or hospital bound;
- o A.A.s who are parents that are unable to find suitable child care to attend meetings;
- o A.A.s who do not have transportation;
- o A.A.s who are not able to drive themselves due to health conditions;
- o A.A.s who are house/hospital bound due to health conditions;
- o A.A.s that are unable to drive as a result of receiving a DUI;
- o A.A.s who live in nursing homes/foster care homes;
- o A.A.s who are blind or have low vision;
- o A.A.s who use wheel chairs/walker/canes;
- o A.A.s who have limited English speaking, reading and writing skills;
- o A.A.s who are with a dual diagnosis (i.e., mental illness and alcoholism);
- o A.A.s who have head injuries; and,
- o A.A.s whose speech is difficult to understand.

Some job duties (opportunities to be of service):

- o Act as a communications link between the Area Committee and the Liaison's district by attending Area Assemblies;
- o Provide access to literature and be available to groups to speak about special needs;
- o Make alcoholics who have disabilities aware of their opportunity to recover in A.A.;
- o Make sure that AA's with special needs are aware of the special needs literature and other materials that is available;
- o Help make A.A. accessible to everyone who desires it; help alcoholics with special needs either to get to meetings or have meetings brought to them;
- o Establish and maintain subcommittees charged with addressing particular needs, such as a subcommittee to help an alcoholic get to a meeting or to bring a meeting to homebound;
- o Explore, develop, and encourage avenues of participation for all A.A. members and newcomers, regardless of their special need;
- o Make sure that all listings in directories in the Liaison's district identify whether they are wheelchair-accessible;
- o Compile and/or maintain a list of wheelchair-accessible meetings;
- o Encourage the use of wheelchair-accessible facilities for A.A. purposes;
- o Explore and develop avenues of participation for sober A.A. members who utilize crutches, walkers or wheelchairs;
- o Encourage the use of American Sign Language ("ASL") interpreters at open and closed A.A. meetings;
- o Make sure that all listings and directories should identify all meetings that are sign-language interpreted.
- o Compile and maintain a list of A.A. meetings using hearing/signing interpreters;
- o Compile and maintain a list of bilingual hearing/signing interpreters willing to sign at A.A. meetings and functions;
- o Explore, develop and encourage other means of participation for deaf sober A.A. members;
- o Make deaf alcoholics aware of their opportunity to recover in A.A.
- o Assemble Twelfth Step lists with codes to identify A.A. members who are available to give persons who are blind rides to meetings, as transportation is of utmost importance.
- o Set up a contact list of A.A.s who speak a language other than English. Have these names available for Twelfth Step calls and to sponsor those speaking another language.
- o Start A.A. groups in areas where specific languages are spoken;
- o Encourage A.A.s to visit nursing homes and give some A.A. tools for hope (i.e., offer to read A.A. material to seniors);
- o Start meetings/groups in nursing and retirement homes;
- o Set up a contact list of A.A.s to provide rides to meetings;
- o Provide Braille A.A. literature and programs for special events;
- o Encourage Big Book tape study meetings in the Liaison's district; and,
- o Encourage groups to provide childcare.

Is Your AA Meeting/Event Accessible?

Accessibility has two parts: (1) physical access to the meeting/event site; and, (2) communication access, i.e., access to the message of A.A.

(1) Physical Access to the Meeting/Event Site:

Note: Ideally, an accessible meeting/event site should provide the A.A. who uses a wheelchair with access to the meeting tables, as well as to the restrooms. However, not all meeting sites offer both features. Such A.A.s should have a way to tell just how accessible a given meeting site is prior to attending. Therefore, meeting directories should classify which accessible meetings also have accessible restrooms.

Qualities of an accessible meeting/event site*:

- It offers accessible parking;
- It has automatic doors or full-time greeters;
- Its doors feature easy to grasp hardware;
- Its doorways are at least 32 inches wide;
- It is on a ground floor (if not, consider stairs and elevator, below);
- There are handrails on all stairways necessary in navigation it;
- Any elevator call buttons are centered 42 inches above the floor;
- Its floors, if not carpeted, are slip-resistant;
- If carpeted, its carpeting has a pile of 1/2 inch thick or less; and,
- **Overall**, an A.A. who uses a wheelchair would be able to move into and around *the meeting place* without obstructions.

Qualities of an accessible restroom*:

- At least one stall must be accessible by wheelchair. This means specifically:
 - Sinks are 27 inches from floor to bottom of apron
 - Urinals are 19 inches from floor to lip
 - Mirrors are 40 inches from the floor
 - Towel rack/dispenser is 40 inches from the floor
 - Stalls with a 36 inch by 60 inch door that swings out
 - Stall entrance is 48 inches from the wall
 - Commodes with seats 20 inches from the floor; and,
 - Grab bars in the stall, 33 inches from the floor.
- Must also be on an accessible route from meeting place.
- **Overall**, an A.A. who uses a wheelchair would be able to maneuver *to and within* the restroom stalls, etc., without assistance.

*Compiled from Federal accessibility guidelines.

(2) Communication Access:

- Make AA literature available in large print and Braille.
- Provide visual as well as auditory info when possible, i.e. written material and audio tapes.
- Provide adequate lighting that does not interfere with ability to speech-read or see signing of interpreters.
- Avoid high noise levels and poor acoustics (encourage the use of microphones when possible).
- Provide interpreted meetings and special events when possible, i.e. banquets, one interpreted meeting per week. Consider a meeting based on the Big Book in ASL.

HINTS FOR HELPING A PERSON WITH A VISION DISABILITY

1. Talk to the person with a vision disability in a normal tone of voice. The fact that he cannot see is no indication that he cannot hear well.
2. Be natural when talking with a person with a vision disability. Think of him as a person who happens to have a vision disability.
3. Accept the normal things which a person with a vision disability might do, such as consulting his watch for correct time, dialing a telephone, or writing his name in longhand without calling attention to them.
4. When you offer assistance to a person with a vision disability, do so directly. Just ask, "May I be of help?" Speak in a normal, friendly tone.
5. In guiding the person with a vision disability, permit him to take your arm. Never grab the person's arm for he cannot anticipate your movements.
6. In walking with a person with a vision disability, proceed at a normal pace. Hesitate slightly before stepping up or down.
7. Be explicit in giving verbal directions to a person with a vision disability. Pointing is of no help. Use "right" and "left" according to the way he is facing, or use compass directions. Avoid all unnecessary touching and handling.
8. There is no need to avoid the word "so" when talking with a person with a vision disability.
9. When assisting a person with a vision disability to a chair, simply place his hand on the back or arm of the chair. This is enough to give him his location.
10. When leaving a person with a vision disability abruptly after conversing with him in a crowd or where there is a noise that may obstruct his hearing, quietly advise him that you are leaving so that he will not be embarrassed by talking when no-one-is listening.
11. Never leave a person with a vision disability in an open area. Instead, lead him to the side of a room or to a chair or some landmark from which he can obtain his direction.
12. Identify yourself to a person with a vision disability so he knows of your presence. Do not ask the person to guess who you are by your voice or touch.
13. When serving food to a person with a vision disability who is eating without a sighted companion, offer to read the menu including the price of each item. As you place each item on the table, call his attention to it. If he wants you to cut up his food, he will tell you.
14. Be sure to tell a person with a vision disability who the guests are so that he may know of their presence.
15. Don't fail to shake hands when meeting or leaving a person with a vision disability. A cordial handshake substitutes for a friendly smile.

St. Louis Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired
7954 Big Bend Boulevard
Webster Groves, MO, 63119
(314) 968-9000

COMMUNICATE WITH THE DEAF

(by all means!!!)

1. It is important to have the deaf person's attention before speaking. He may need a tap on the shoulder, a wave of the hand, or another signal that you wish to communicate.
2. Speak slowly and clearly, but do not exaggerate or over-emphasize. This distorts lip movements and makes speech reading more difficult.
3. Try to show facial and body expression when you speak. You don't have to be a pantomime expert to do this.
4. Not all deaf people can read lips, and even the best speech readers may miss many words. Therefore, if the deaf person does not reply or seems to be having difficulty in comprehending, rephrase the thought rather than repeat it exactly.
5. Look directly at the person while speaking. Even a slight turn of the head can obscure the deaf person's vision. Other distracting factors include beards and mustaches. Remember this.
6. Don't be embarrassed about communicating with paper and pencil. Getting the message across is more important than the medium used.
7. Establish eye contact. It helps convey the feeling of direct communication.
8. Don't restrict conversation to business matters. Deaf people have feelings and opinions. Humor, gossip, and small talk help everyone to relax.
9. If you are called on to read something while an interpreter is signing, please read slowly and clearly. Formal writing is more difficult to interpret quickly.
10. Never mimic people using sign language-not even in fun. American Sign Language is a real language, the third most commonly used language in the U.S.
11. Be aware of silent conversations. Often, hearing people interrupt an ongoing dialogue, not realizing what they are doing.
12. The most important advice for those who can hear is to remember that deaf people can speak. **Deafness is not muteness.** Listening is an important part of communication also.

Are closed meetings accessible to Deaf, deafened, and Hard of Hearing alcoholics who need professional sign language interpreters??

In order to build a list of closed meetings where deaf alcoholics and their interpreters can attend without having to seek special permission in advance, please do the following:

- 1) Request all groups in your district or area to take a group conscience to see if their group is willing to allow an interpreter for Deaf AA members to attend their closed meetings. Note: This does NOT mean that the group would be responsible to pay the interpreter.
- 2) Add one of the meeting codes below to the directory listing:
 - (SIW) non-AA certified sign language interpreter is welcome at this closed meeting for Deaf AA members
 - (CSI) closed to non-AA sign language interpreters for Deaf AA members.
 - (ASL) meeting conducted in American Sign Language
 - (SI) Sign Interpreted meeting
 - (ALD's) Assistive Listening Devices for the Hard of Hearing available
 - (RTC) Real-time captioning/CART available
- 3) Inform your Accessibility Committee Chair/DCM/webmaster/meeting schedule person of your vote. WHY? It is often very difficult for the Deaf alcoholic to attend a closed AA meeting. While a Deaf member may prefer to go to a closed meeting to better discuss their alcohol problem, the issue of whether the group will allow a non-AA professional interpreter to attend must be addressed. If a Deaf member "just shows up" with their interpreter at a closed meeting, to ask the group if they can attend, there are very awkward moments while the group takes a group conscience. In some cases there are objections to the interpreter being there, and even if the group conscience votes to have the Deaf member stay with their interpreter, the feeling is NOT at all one of welcome. If the group votes no, it's even worse! Once again, the Deaf alcoholic encounters a unique problem that most people in AA have never even thought of. A suggested solution for this particular problem is to inform the groups of this dilemma, and ask groups who hold closed meetings to take a group conscience on whether or not they will allow a non-AA professional interpreter at their meeting.

Special Needs/Accessibility Committee

This committee works to ensure that both AA's message and its meetings are accessible to alcoholics with special needs. *Specifically, this committee does (or has done):*

- **Group presentations:** on such special needs/accessibility issues as translators for the deaf and other related items.
- **Special Needs/Accessibility Committee presentations:** at the District level; especially for the districts lacking a committee chair.
- **Makes use of our District Special Needs/Accessibility Committee Liaisons:** these report to the Area Special Needs/Accessibility Committee and are available to serve the district in the absence of a District Special Needs/Accessibility Chairperson.
- **Contacts nursing homes in the districts:** we remind that anyone, or any district, wishing to visit nursing homes, should try to collaborate with the District or Area Public Information or Cooperation with the Professional Community committees. Nursing homes, in large part, are neglected by AA. These homes, historically, have not contacted AA; it has had to contact them. Untreated alcoholism thrives in this environment. Leaving information with the homes may be enough in some cases, in others, meetings will have to be brought in, or rides to meetings provided.
- **Assists deaf alcoholics by working with deaf institutions and locating translators:** via our district Special Needs/Accessibility Committee Chairs in their respective districts.
- **Helps to set up and support Spanish speaking meetings.**
- **Works toward correct/complete information in meeting directories:** changing the Where and When's "HF" system of designation to reflect availability of an accessible restroom. Recent publications of the Where & When reflect our hard work in updating the meeting database of Central Services with the new designations.
- **Provides and maintains the Special Needs/Accessibility Committee Lending Library:** this is located at the Central Services Office in St. Louis (see above). Materials from the G.S.O. catalog were ordered, so that the library offers everything G.S.O. has regarding accessibility. We are pushing districts and large groups to start their own lending libraries as well. The Committee is excited about the library, because it is available to those in need, and during normal business hours.

Special needs/accessibility needs: who has them?

- A.A.s from minority groups: Deaf, Native Indian, Spanish, African American, Gay, and Lesbian;
- A.A.s from a variety of cultures that have primary languages that are not English;
- A.A.s who are deafened or hard of hearing (do not use American Sign Language);
- A.A.s who are house or hospital bound;
- A.A.s who are parents that are unable to find suitable child care to attend meetings;
- A.A.s who do not have transportation;
- A.A.s who are not able to drive themselves due to health conditions;
- A.A.s who are house/hospital bound due to health conditions;
- A.A.s that are unable to drive as a result of receiving a DUI;
- A.A.s who live in nursing homes/foster care homes;
- A.A.s who are blind or have low vision;
- A.A.s who use wheel chairs/walker/canes;
- A.A.s who have limited English speaking, reading and writing skills;
- A.A.s who are with a dual diagnosis (i.e., mental illness and alcoholism);
- A.A.s who have head injuries; and,
- A.A.s whose speech is difficult to understand.