

MOTION: That CNCA requests that a pamphlet entitled "Experience, Strength and Hope: AA for the Transgender Alcoholic" be produced. – presented by District 07

ARGUMENT IN FAVOR OF THE MOTION: X

This motion would direct our delegate to write a letter to AA World Services (AAWS) requesting consideration to produce a pamphlet that communicates the experience, strength and hope of transgender (trans) alcoholics.

The primary purpose of the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous is to carry the message of recovery to the alcoholic who still suffers. In order to better fulfill that purpose, the Conference has approved numerous pamphlets addressing the needs and barriers to recovery that speak directly to remote communities within our Fellowship: young people, native North Americans, black and African Americans, women, armed service workers, the older alcoholic, and gays and lesbians. But, there is no Conference-approved literature that specifically addresses the needs and barriers to recovery that the transgender alcoholic experiences.

As we heard from a presentation at a recent Area 06 business meeting, those needs and barriers include: confusion within the Fellowship concerning the nature and purpose of hormone replacement therapy for trans people; restricted access to gender-focused meetings; confusion arising from the informal AA tradition in which men sponsor men and women sponsor women; lack of access to gender-neutral facilities in AA meetings; the informal tradition of resisting "making big life choices in the first year of one's recovery;" the difficulties of disentangling trans life from alcoholic patterns of action in early sobriety; confusion concerning trans people's identities; gendered language in AA scripts that can be offensive.

The current gay and lesbian pamphlet does include stories of people who are transgender. However, a transgender person's sense of personal identity and gender does not correspond with their birth sex; while a gay or lesbian person's sense of attraction is to someone of the opposite sex. So, it makes sense that a new pamphlet, rather than a revision to the Gay and Lesbian pamphlet, would better serve this remote community. Further, it is imperative that a pamphlet be considered by the Conference, as our purpose is to accurately and consistently carry the AA message of recovery to everyone who wants it; and we know that this remote community is suffering acutely. Within the trans community, about 30 percent have a problem with substance abuse, compared to 9 percent of the general population.

If this motion passes, CNCA Area 06 would be taking a truly impactful step forward to spread the message of recovery among this remote community within our fellowship of alcoholics.

- Ashley J., Alternate DCMC, District 07

ARGUMENT AGAINST THE MOTION: While the intent of the motion – requesting a pamphlet for the transgender alcoholic – comes from a good place, the motion, as presented at the Pre-Conference Assembly of CNCA in April 2019 seems to be in conflict with some of our AA traditions.

Tradition 10 immediately comes to mind. "Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public controversy."

Not only does "confusion within the fellowship concerning hormonal replacement therapy" fall squarely in the realm of "outside issues," the creation of a transgender pamphlet could give the impression that AA has an opinion on what is unfortunately a very politicized issue. Society has yet to resolve some of the confusion about gender, and AA should not take a lead ahead of society. Possibly subjecting AA to a cauldron of debate surrounding politics, medicine and religion seems misguided and dangerous.

The proposed pamphlet could be in direct conflict with Tradition 4, concerning group autonomy. Some groups may only want cisgender men or cisgender women to participate – and this pamphlet could signal that what they are doing is “right” or “wrong” for AA. Every group is free to make any decision it wants, and our pamphlets should not tell them they are “wrong.” Tradition 3 states that “the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.” And our Responsibility Statement reminds us that “when anyone anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA to always be there and for that I am responsible.” This ensures that any alcoholic, in need of a meeting, should be welcome at any meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. Group anonymity states that the final voice in who is welcome to what meeting is dictated not by AA but by the group conscience.

In 2018, the pamphlet once geared primarily toward gay men and lesbians was renamed and updated to include stories of transgender AA members. There is currently representation in our literature for the transgender community. It seems too soon to be requesting new literature – and to ask groups to shoulder the cost of new literature – when we could simply update the new pamphlet.

Finally, same-gender sponsorship is not an AA tradition, but rather a suggestion made by members and is not printed anywhere in our basic text. Our Big Book reminds us that “we want to stay out of this controversy. We do not want to be the arbiter of anyone’s sex conduct.” Nor do we want AA to make decisions on still-politicized issues. Again, the intent of the motion is kind and welcoming. But Bill often reminds us that the good is often the enemy of the best.

- Nick M., GSR, District 14