

Notes of Hope

March/April 2008

a bi-monthly newsletter for Middle Tennessee Intergroup

Service!



The Roving Reporter Asks...

In what ways has giving service strengthened your program?

My sponsor encouraged me to get into service work very quickly. At first, she got me to agree to arrive at meetings early to help her straighten the chairs and get the meeting format, readings, "We Care" list and basket ready for the Chairperson. This gave us the opportunity to share one-on-one before meetings, since at first, I was uncomfortable talking to her on the phone, being by nature, shy and distrustful. She always nudged me into speaking up at meetings, usually by giving me "the eyeball," but sometimes employing "the elbow" when she was sure that I had some experience that I could share related to the topic. Sharing in meetings began to put an end to what seems to me to have been a lifetime of pretense and isolation. Because of our meeting guidelines about refraining from giving advice, feedback and crosstalk, I've learned that it is okay and safe for me to be me, and not who I think you want me to be. As I began to understand and experience the benefits of being open and honest, I began to hope and believe that the Program would work for me as it had for my sponsor and others before her.

As soon as I got abstinent and began working The Steps, my sponsor encouraged me and sometimes even had the audacity to volunteer my services to chair meetings and eventually to act as Secretary or Treasurer for a group. This made me feel "a part of" instead of "apart from" OA. When it looked like our group was going to have to disband due to lack of a key person, I volunteered to take the key. Often forgetful and unreliable before Program, I began to learn the importance of commitment and dedication. This added responsibility proved to be a true blessing as it forced me to "keep coming back" at tough times when I wanted to retreat back into what I perceived as the safety of my shell of isolation, felt overwhelmed with "life on life's terms," became filled with self-doubt, or simply thought I was just too tired to make a meeting. Besides, by now, I was sponsoring others, so my OA support group was so strong that living "one day at a time" in reality became a necessity and "spacing out" became an impossibility. Soon, what had once been fond memories of "running away," either literally or mentally, into my fantasy world seemed more like a nightmare than a distant dream.

Soon, I was elected to serve as Intergroup Representative for our group, and eventually, Intergroup Secretary and Treasurer. Always a loner, I learned how to work with others as we planned workshops, retreats and conventions. Assorted character defects such perfectionism, stubbornness, and always having to stay in control became glaringly obvious and I am gradually learning how to curb them, or at least, in some cases, to convert them into assets such as integrity and perseverance. It is reassuring to see that I am not alone, as I watch others doing the same! When I was fortunate enough to be elected as one of our Region 8 Representatives and eventually, as one of our WSO Delegates, I learned "love and tolerance is our code" on a whole new level, as I watched the "pros" and "cons" in the Fellowship hash out their differences at the mikes whenever an issue affecting OA as a whole came to light.

As a result of service work I've learned the benefits of balance. HALT has become a way of life for me, taking the time to plan and space my meals so I won't become too irritable and Hungry, and remembering to always ask myself, "How important is it really?" to avoid Angry outbursts or fits of frustration. Service work has taught me that I am only as Lonely in OA as I choose to be! Pacing myself socially, at home and at work so I won't get too Tired has become second nature since I was forced to recognize my tendencies toward staying busy and workaholic while doing service work in OA. Several years ago, finding myself exhausted, I was forced to resign from five of the six Intergroup committees I was in, during *one* monthly meeting! My sponsor, expressed amazement that I had spread myself so thin and her surprise at my "letting it all go so quickly and

abruptly", when her sponsor tapped *her* on the shoulder and said that maybe they should take a good, hard, honest look at their *own* full plates and stop picking at mine! After all, "We can't keep it, unless we give it away" applies to the growth opportunities we share with others by inviting and encouraging them to join us in doing service work in OA, as well as from sharing our personal experience, strength and hope at the group level. Service has greatly enhanced my personal recovery and sense of unity with others in the Fellowship. "Try it, you'll like it!"-- Nancy C., MTI Group Outreach Chair

Service has been my saving grace. Each time I make the commitment to do some form of service, my program becomes stronger. If I volunteer to be a meeting greeter, I arrive at meetings early instead of a few minutes late. If I volunteer to lead a meeting, I become more willing to read OA literature to prepare. If I volunteer to fill a group position (i.e., secretary), I make time to attend the business meetings and participate in decisions. If I volunteer to fill a position for an upcoming event, I make contact outside of meetings and my friendships in the fellowship increase dramatically.

I have to give my HP the credit each time a service opportunity is presented to which I am willing to respond. While it may seem easier to sit by the sidelines and let others make things happen, my HP nudges me and reminds that the OA program is a precious gift. It is only through the service of its members that OA will continue to give hope to the still suffering compulsive overeater. --Teresa

From the very beginning of coming into OA, I was taught that service is appreciated and important in recovery. My first sponsor spoke to me after a meeting I attended (this was in Lexington, KY) while I was putting up some literature into a small box. He said, "thanks so much for your service here." I stopped and looked at him and said, "Oh, this is nothing." He corrected me and explained that service, no matter how small of a gesture, is very important.

From that moment on, I have learned that I don't have to "be president" or "have tons of responsibility" in order to "really" be giving service. The truth is, sometimes I just help straighten up the chairs, or count the money, and that is service. How grateful I am that service can be so simple and easy and fulfilling. It truly is quality not quantity.--Melissa H.

Giving service strengthens my program because it causes me to get outside of myself and allows me to connect to the fellowship in a deeper way. Because my disease is so based on self-centeredness and self-will, anything that breaks through my wall of self has become an increasingly important, necessary, and precious part of my program. I am finding that doing service is playing a bigger and bigger part in my recovery as a result.

Related to my increased appreciation for service is a section in the Big Book that has recently gotten my attention. Page 84 gives us very specific directions for what to do when we find that selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, or fear has cropped back up in our lives. The Big Book tells us to do four things: ask our Higher Power to relieve the defect; talk to someone immediately about the situation; make amends if necessary, and finally, resolutely look to see how we can be of service to someone.

Recently, I had an experience where I was really agitated and feeling sorry for myself. I re-read page 84. But, I didn't have the willingness to do what it told me to do. (Hard to imagine, me not wanting to do what I am told. . .). While I was sitting there in my agitation, I remembered I needed to call my friend to see when we could play racquetball. I made the call and was shocked to find out that he had a serious life crisis going on. We talked for about an hour - about him, not me - and when I hung up I realized I wasn't agitated anymore. My experience, strength, and hope from this program tells me that making that phone call when I did was no coincidence. Even amidst my stubborn unwillingness to take the simple directions the Big Book gave me to alleviate my discomfort and anxiety, my Higher Power found a way to teach me that service (and that is what that phone call to my friend ended up being) is a humbling and awe-inspiring part of this spiritual experience that allows me to recover from compulsive overeating one day at a time. --- Becky M.

Someone once asked me which group is my home group. From that moment on I had a different attitude about my meetings I attended. I committed to regularly attending this meeting and became backup key person. At first I thought I was helping out--being of service but now I realize it's way more than that. When I don't want to go to a meeting—that's when I really need to be at that meeting.--Kathy B

"Service is love in work clothes" was printed on a sign. It caught my eye because I think it is a wonderful word picture. Service helps me stay connected to the OA community. I need that connection. I must be intentional and actively focused on service opportunities. One of the most basic, and the easiest, is to smile when people walk into an OA meeting. "We" is the first word of the first step. Service is focusing on the "we" and helps me strengthen my personal program. --Emily Mc

My sponsor once said to me that one of the problems with self-centeredness is not thinking *too much* of myself, but *too often* of myself. When my "problems" seem to pile up on me, one paradox of the spiritual life is that the best cure is to think of someone I can help. This is one of the tenth step suggestions on page 84 of the AA Big Book. Service is essential to the self-centered person, and I am helped as well; if only to help me out of the bondage to self. --Brian G.

For me, the most important service I can give is to be abstinent and be an example of what this program can do for someone. It was many years before I realized what a disservice I was doing myself, OA and those around me by talking the talk and not walking the walk... I had nothing a newcomer wanted or needed... I wasn't at a healthy weight or moving towards one... I am grateful to not be at that place today. Giving service keeps me abstinent. I can't keep what I don't give away. Being a sponsor is another service that is a huge boost to my program...it always amazes that I also need to hear just the things my sponsees need to hear from me. One thing my sponsor has told me a million times that frankly has saved my life...to pray for abstinence SO THAT I can be of service to others. Service for me is also fun and fellowship - working with fellow OAs outside of a meeting lets me get to know them on a deeper level and build more of a relationship with them. It's also important for me to remember that service work doesn't have to be chairing a committee or doing something grandiose it can simply be smiling at the newcomer, setting up chairs, telling someone you are glad they are at the meeting, etc. Service work can also stop my disease dead in its tracks...if I am in a funk and want to eat everything that doesn't eat me first ...there are lots of ways to not take that first bite but one way to do that is to call someone and ask how they are doing? Service work gets me out of myself and into the solution.—Angie B.



Readings on the topic of service can be found on the following pages of
Voices of Recovery: A daily reader: 34, 39, 90, 112, 227, 252, 284, 328, 348, 356, 358.

A note from the editor: *It has been my pleasure to give service as **Notes of Hope** editor for these two-plus years. Beginning with the next issue, Teresa T. will be taking on this service position. Thanks to all who have been so faithful in contributing to this newsletter. You've been a joy to work with. Pam B.*