



# Participation of Al-Anon Groups Which Meet Electronically (AFGWME) In the BC/Yukon Service Structure

THOUGHT FORCE REPORT 01-2022

Photo with members' permission:  
Summer Outdoor Al-Anon Meeting during the Pandemic, August 2021.

# Al-Anon Family Groups Which Meet Electronically (AFGWME)

## Thought Force Summary and Knowledge-based Decision-making (KBDM) Questions and Responses

### Part A - Summary of the Two Thought Force Charges

**Charge 1.** Does our Area wish to permit groups which meet electronically to participate in our Area service structure? **Recommendation is YES.**

**Charge 2.** If yes, what guidelines and boundaries might our Area need to define regarding service participation in our Districts and Assembly? What other changes to our service structure might be required?

- a. **Area service members must reside in the BC/Yukon Area.**
- b. **Group, District, and Area autonomy will prevail as to how they meet, who they want to accept, goals for growth, and so forth.**
- c. **Al-Anon Family Groups Which Meet Electronically (AFGWME) will follow the existing structure as is currently practiced in the BC/Yukon Area.**

### Part B –Thought Force Responses to Knowledge-based Decision-making Questions

1. **What do we know about our members' or prospective members' needs that are relevant to this discussion?**
  - We have a substantial number of Al-anon members meeting either locally, virtually, or both.
  - WSC has already accepted (Al-Anon Groups Which Meet Electronically (AFGWME) into the service structure, guided by the Service Manual and they are able to fit into an existing service structure.
  - Today's District meetings are held in-person, hybrid, or virtual; a changing reality during Pandemic restrictions currently still in place. This encourages attendance and so increased attendance at Assemblies will hopefully bring more groups into the Area.

- There are no physical barriers anymore to connect with Al-Anon members. Participating in meetings, working the program, and being of service on all levels of our local and worldwide service structure is possible anywhere, anytime.
- While still welcoming new members who join their virtual meetings, many existing local groups currently do not meet in a local venue due to Pandemic restrictions (see Outdoor Meeting cover photo).
- In fact, many Al-Anon members live and wish to participate in their local service structure as much as possible. Since their meetings were founded locally some time ago, these now-virtual members know each other from the past and, in many cases, they would like the service structure to 'stay the same'.
- These home groups in our Area that are local to a certain district feel that they should have a voice, vote in their District area, and want to continue to be part of that service structure. This assures harmony and allows our loving Higher Power to be represented in their Group Conscience.
- These new electronic groups may autonomously decide on their own goals for growth. Some wish to attract local members and participate in the local and Area service structure; others wish to attract worldwide members outside the geographical boundaries of our Area.

**a. How important is it to welcome (Al-Anon Groups Which Meet Electronically (AFGWME) and is it what our current members want?**

- Not all members are comfortable with the technology required to include Al-Anon Groups Which Meet Electronically (AFGWME) and they would like to return to local face-to-face meetings. They find "the human companionship and warmth cannot be totally replaced by electronic meetings; an important element to our recovery is to stop isolating ourselves" (WSO Guideline S6o).
- One BC/Yukon District Representative estimates the number of virtual meetings compared to those returning face-to-face could be 50/50.
- Virtual meetings have made a staggering impact on meeting members' needs. Some say, 'Zoom is a great way to do Al-anon'.

- If an Al-Anon Family Group Which Meets Electronically (AFGWME) and/or District does include local members, it is easier to for electronic members to reach out for literature and develop relationships with group members through opportunities to meet outside the scheduled group time.
- We'll learn about other cultures, uplifting our spiritual aims of diversity and tolerance.
- Since our primary purpose is to help families and friends of alcoholics (Tradition 5), allowing Al-Anon Family Groups Which Meet Electronically (AFGWME) into our service structure will help us fulfill this purpose to the greatest number.
- We would stay mindful not to be diverted from our spiritual aims or let our unity and/or participation suffer with the support of helpful tools and guidelines designed to work through inevitable setbacks.

**b. How will it affect newcomers?**

- Electronic delivery is an easy way for newcomers to try out six recommended meetings without physically locating them.
- Some newcomers may find their first Al-Anon meeting on Zoom is less stressful than a face-to-face introduction to Al-Anon. Others prefer a face-to-face introduction to this important step in their recovery.
- WSO has developed a newcomer information page at [www.al-anon.org/welcome](http://www.al-anon.org/welcome) With both choices available, we provide more ways to attract new members and provide opportunities for recovery.
- Electronic meetings seem to be increasingly attractive to newcomers from all walks of life. Younger members are more comfortable with the electronic component of virtual meetings, aging newcomers with health, mobility, or driving issues may attend. Parents with childcare needs consider electronic Al-Anon meetings 'a life saver'.

**2. What do we know about the resources and our vision for the organization that is relevant to this discussion?**

**a. Vision**

- BC/Yukon is a strong and supportive Al-Anon fellowship of members who are seeking recovery in Service on all levels of our local and worldwide Service structure in Canada and the World.

- BC/Yukon committees and their elected Trusted Servants represent a knowledgeable resource which has the support of all they represent.

**b. Resources**

- BC/Yukon encourages participation and provides attendance options for all by holding in-person meetings with an electronic component for Area World Service Committee Meeting (AWSCM) and at Assembly for the next 3 years. There are no local barriers for participation.
- This way, we have a growing potential of Al-Anon members who are willing to serve in District and Area capacities and BC/Yukon needs dedicated members to fill these positions.
- Some individual Districts may not have the resources to hold hybrid or Zoom meetings requiring equipment and good quality WIFI .
- Regardless, there seem to be many groups proficiently holding electronic meetings with a personal computer and household WIFI. As such, groups are not paying rent and some Districts are able to carry the group's Zoom subscription on a District account, a big savings.

**3. What do we know about the current realities and evolving dynamics of the world and our fellowship that is relevant to this discussion? What the Pros and Cons of this change?**

**a. Current Realities**

- Alcoholism has no boundaries. It affects all races, ethnicities, religions and economic status. To reach a diversity of potential members, Al-Anon Family Groups Which Meet Electronically (AFGWME) can break down many of the barriers that prevent people from attending Al-Anon meetings.
- The potential of members who could benefit from Al-Anon Family Groups Which Meet Electronically (AFGWME) is great. They are the new reality which meets the local reality of the past. Both realities benefit from cooperating as they grow together.
- Embracing technology is an important element of the WSC theme from 2021: 'Moving Forward with Unity, Courage, and Perseverance'.
- The number of virtual meetings keeps growing and as in the Service Manual, any virtual meeting can apply to join a District.

**b. Pros of welcoming Al-Anon Family Groups Which Meet Electronically (AFGWME) into the BC/Yukon Area.**

- By welcoming Al-Anon Family Groups Which Meet Electronically (AFGWME) into the BC/Yukon Area, we demonstrate willingness to participate in the change of our current realities. In this way, we can attract and accommodate all existing and potential members.
- Giving Al-Anon Family Groups Which Meet Electronically (AFGWME) access to participation in our BC/Yukon Area service structure on the group level does not change or interfere with current local structures (WSO Guideline G39). In fact, one District says they would welcome them and look forward to more participation in service positions as well as the diversity they can offer.
- Al-Anon Family Groups Which Meet Electronically (AFGWME) Trusted Servants will have multiple options to organize, participate, and have an equal voice in the BC/Yukon service structure.
- Affordable communication options and fewer travel obligations are available for Trusted Servants now. Area may now be able to fill service positions easier and accommodations can be made to ensure electronic members can participate equally.
- Al-Anon Family Groups Which Meet Electronically (AFGWME) registered in a District or in their own Virtual District may finally attract some of the furthest remote communities to participate in our Al-Anon fellowship. BC/Yukon has tried hard to involve them in the past and now this may be a real possibility.
- If Al-Anon Family Groups Which Meet Electronically (AFGWME) petition to join a District in a 'Mixed District Model', it may become too full to manage with existing resources. District meetings could become very lengthy and service positions over-burdened. We need to establish some guidelines for outside or new groups wanting to join our Area and Districts so that adding these groups would enhance our service, not dilute it (big one!)
- Al-Anon Family Groups Which Meet Electronically (AFGWME) could be placed by Group Records into Districts or have options of the WSO or a BC/Yukon Virtual District. We need guidelines as to what criteria to use for accepting/redistributing electronic meetings in our Area structure.

- Perhaps, if the BC/Yukon Area attracts enough Al-Anon Family Groups Which Meet Electronically (AFGWME) joining Districts, there could then be a vote to move forward 'organically' with the creation of a new BC/Yukon Virtual District having groups with Trusted Servants and a service structure in place.
- It was also noted, and all agreed, that if a group does not fit into a District somehow or decides to switch out of a District for some reason, a BC/Yukon Virtual District could be their 'harbour' to go to.
- In fact, there is the possibility that an established BC/Yukon Virtual Area District could eventually become larger than the BC Yukon Area itself.
- It was noted that creating a new BC/Yukon Virtual District creates a need for more service positions where some are still unfilled at this time.

**c. Cons**

- The process of integrating the old into the new current reality is complex and may be difficult to explain to Al-Anon members. It also requires a Task Force for new Policy and Procedure guidelines.
- Personal connections at in-person meetings and events feel stronger than at electronic meetings (WSO Guideline S6o). Also, in many cases there tends to be more organized fellowship opportunities and better accessibility to Conference Approved Literature.

**4. What are the ethical implications of our choices? In other words, will our decision be consistent with our spiritual principles?**

- a. If we decide to take action, will it be the 'right' thing to do?
  - By opening our Districts and our Area to AFGWMEs, we encourage and provide opportunities for members to grow the spiritual aims of diversity, participation, equality, and tolerance and we are leading this initiative by example (Tradition 11 and Concept 4).
  - Change can be a fearful experience. Could it be possible that groups would like to keep their service structure the same, as much as possible?
- b. Will our decision help us fulfill our primary purpose?
  - If we vote YES to allow Al-Anon Family Groups Which Meet Electronically (AFGWME) into our BC/Yukon service structure, no Al-Anon fellow will be left behind. We are fulfilling our primary purpose to help families and friends of alcoholics (Tradition 5).

- All options for participation will be available and members will be heard as equals on all levels of service. We are making the choices of today's world available to help and aid recovery in our fellowship.

#### **5. What do we wish we knew, but don't?**

- Numbers and demographics of existing groups may change. Will there be competition, resulting in a group being 'diverted by money, property, and or prestige?' (Tradition 6). Instead, can there be Unity?
- How can we create abundant thinking to create guidelines, such as Al-Anon Family Groups Which Meet Electronically (AFGWME) inventory tools for group health assessment, preventing dominance as an obstacle for success in Al-anon, when only a few members have the capacity to host a meeting, operate the screen, or share functions? There could be a problem when a member takes over and controls everything.
- Will members be able to trust their Higher Power and BC/Yukon Area leaders to support the policies and procedures of this mandate?
- Will hybrid Area, District, and Group meetings meet the needs of our fellowship and preserve the integrity of the spiritual nature of our program? Or will two 'classes' of Al-Anon members possibly be created?
- How do we create suggestions for adherence to our Traditions for groups that have not experienced the model of a 'live' service structure, meeting formats, and the understanding of appropriate use of Conference Approved Literature?
- How do we put tools in place that prevent technical challenges; that address safety concerns, anonymity issues, electronic crosstalk, distraction on other screens, newcomer issues, newcomer access to literature, literature purchasing, preventing online copying of Conference Approved Literature?
- We do not know how electronic members from outside the US, Canada, Bermuda, and Puerto Rico will participate in service. Also, we may need to be clear on the geographical boundaries of the members residing that are serving the group as GR or Alternate GR or any other service position that may extend beyond the group service structure.
- We still do not know yet what will happen with Covid 19.

With gratitude in Al-Anon Service: Kate S, Lothar S, Lynn B, Mavis H, Nancy M.