

Excerpts on the Service System Project from *NAWS News*, 2008-2010

June 2008

SERVICE SYSTEM

This project will begin with developing a vision statement for all NA services. It will create options and frame discussions about improvements to our service structure in this cycle. This is a two-conference-cycle project.

The topic “Our Freedom, Our Responsibility” follows from the IDT “Our Service System.” One of the things we learned during this past cycle is that we are still struggling with the spirit of our service work—we continue to struggle with apathy and a lack of a sense of commitment and responsibility. Of course, “Our Freedom, Our Responsibility” was also the theme for the WSC and is the theme for the 2008–2010 conference cycle. We hope that this IDT will help us look more closely at our responsibilities and the freedoms we gain from them.

At the conference, the IDT session on “Our Freedom, Our Responsibility” focused on both the individual and fellowshipwide application of these principles. We began by breaking down the word “responsibility,” realizing that at its base it simply means “the ability to respond.” Individual members had an opportunity to share about their experiences in learning how to take personal responsibility and how that led to personal freedoms.

This became one of the most “hands-on” sessions, as some tables were asked to construct a model house, while others were given a prefabricated model. Participants were asked to consider the difference between attending (simply being present) and participating (being involved with others and co creating). Participating in our service allows us to build a better fellowship. The session’s activity seemed to emphasize that we value what we are responsible for creating. When we are responsible for creating the freedoms we have, we cherish them, and in doing so we strengthen them for ourselves and for those to whom we pass them.

November 2008

SERVICE SYSTEM

The Service System Workgroup has also met twice. This project is charged with developing a vision for all NA service efforts and framing recommendations for improvements to our service delivery.

Our biggest challenge is how to engage the fellowship in a meaningful discussion that might lead to a reframing of our service efforts and, ultimately, the creation of tools that will help us deliver services more effectively—either a revision or rewriting of *A Guide to Local Services* and/or the production of other tools. Our strategic plan explains that the project will “be rooted in an analysis of the success factors that work across our service structure, as well as allow for flexibility in meeting unique local needs.”

January 2009

We spent a full day in a facilitated discussion focused on our Service System project. We have heard throughout the years at workshops what is lacking: an attitude of giving back to a fellowship that saved our lives. This missing attitude manifests in disunity, lack of trusted servants, and declining financial resources and cooperation. The Service System project aims to help stem the tide of service disparities by working with our fellowship and the board.

SERVICE SYSTEM

We quickly realized this cycle that although we asked for your support in initiating this project, we had not done a very good job of communicating our expectations for both this project and the workgroup.

We spent the second day of our meeting backing up a bit and trying to better define the scope of what we expected with this project. We knew we had challenges that reached past simply the service structure, which is why we called this the Service System project. We discussed the components of a system—the structure, process, people, and resources; all focused toward a common vision. We are fortunate in NA; there is a commonly held understanding of why we do what we do. Whether we call it the primary purpose as expressed in our traditions (to carry the message to the addict who still suffers) or we describe it in more detail as in the NAWS Vision Statement, we all mean the same thing. We have been hearing through workshops and fellowship discussions for the past many years about our collective difficulties in keeping that focus and being effective in our service efforts. The repercussions of that collective inability are many, but we hear the same things repeated throughout the world. We were reminded about what we said in the 2008 *Conference Agenda Report* about this discussion topic in the fellowship:

Repeatedly over the course of these four years, we have heard that we need better communication, less duplication of efforts, more training, and more effective delegation, among many other responses. We need to find a way to make service more attractive, more accessible, and more supportive. Interestingly enough, these are all observations that were repeatedly made about world services in the 1980s and early 1990s. Many of you will remember that we ceased all but essential services to devote our attention to an inventory, and the results of that inventory led to a restructuring of world services, including the adoption of our vision statement in 1996 and the creation of the World Board in 1998. Almost immediately, we began to see improvements, and we continued to suggest smaller improvements to the structure (e.g., reducing the size of the board). While, of course, things aren't perfect in world services today, they are greatly improved on every front.

But while we made huge structural changes to world services, little has changed on the local level. We're not suggesting that local service bodies should cease all but essential services for a years-long inventory process, but we are thinking that we need to reexamine our service structure in a broad sense. Perhaps some of our chronic problems mentioned above can be alleviated through restructuring local services in some way.

After much discussion, we defined the overarching question for this project as “How can we build a system of service within NA that is driven by unity of purpose, and that allows for flexibility in meeting the diverse service needs and goals of our NA communities?” We know this project and the issue of WSC seating definitely overlap and that we were correct in asking for two conference cycles to discuss both of these issues. We agreed that a common vision is essential to guide all our service efforts, and the workgroup will be asked to refine the NAWS Vision Statement so that it speaks to all areas of NA service. Toward the end of the day, we began the process of deciding what our next steps are and who should undertake them. We will continue shaping this project and assigning responsibilities at our next meeting. We want to work in tandem with the workgroup to ensure a continual communication flow, a shared responsibility, and clearly defined parameters for the project.

April 2009

We spent a full day in a facilitated discussion focused on our Service System project. The Service System Workgroup members and staff participated with us in this planning day which was a follow-up from our January meeting. This session was a brainstorming of ideals and ideas. Our service delivery structure has been functioning for years in a prescribed manner that may not be the best way to meet our collective needs or carry the message. To consider what needs to be accomplished to improve the service system as a whole—who do we need to reach and what vehicles may help provide the services—is a huge undertaking. Together, we laid the directional groundwork and refined the focus for this project. We

followed up with the Service System Workgroup for a half day on Saturday discussing issues related to regional seating.

SERVICE SYSTEM

One of the interesting “firsts” at our April meeting was a joint meeting with the Service System Workgroup. Most of the time, coordination between the board and workgroups of the board takes place through communication relayed by the board member(s) on the workgroup and NAWS staff. This past board meeting was the first time we ever met together with a workgroup and worked side-by-side to forge some of the foundations of a project.

The Service System Workgroup is charged with framing models for more effective service delivery, and the nature of that task is potentially so large and fundamental that we thought it best for us to meet together to discuss some of the basics. We are all in agreement that we can’t afford to limit our thinking this early on in terms of what a functional and effective service system might look like. The scale of change this project may end up proposing is potentially as broad sweeping on a local level as the changes in 1998 on a world level that brought about the restructuring of world services.

On Thursday we spent the day together talking about some of the fundamental “givens” of the service system—what needs must an effective service system satisfy, for instance. Friday the workgroup, independent of the board, continued that line of thinking, developing ideas about the functions and characteristics of a healthy service system and what variables it has to consider. This kind of groundwork will help us build a template to use when creating and evaluating potential models for service delivery. Saturday afternoon, we talked about WSC seating, a separate but related issue that may be affected by the work of the Service System project. Our discussions were primarily focused on the philosophical issues and underlying principles of regional representation at the WSC. We refrained from discussing the details of a new seating process. It would seem that once we are focused on the principles of the issue, a process would be most easily developed. One thing is clear: There are many facets to the issue, with no easy answers, and resolution will take the efforts of all of us. We encourage your input as we move forward in our discussions.

July 2009

We spent time reviewing the progress and direction of the Service System project; we offered suggestions for a global vision statement—one that both encompasses our entire service system and inspires. We continued our discussions on WSC seating and on the purpose of the conference, which will help us in our consideration of seating. We recognize that seating is a small part of a larger issue, namely, the purpose of the conference and what is to be accomplished during the WSC.

SERVICE SYSTEM

Following our joint meeting with the Service System Workgroup in April, where we agreed on the fundamental needs that an effective service system must meet, the workgroup continued to put together foundational pieces for the project. They have discussed, for instance, the many variables that must be considered when framing options for service delivery and the necessary roles that would need to be filled in an effective service system. In all of our discussions we are trying to follow the maxim that “form follows function,” so we are being very thorough in these first steps putting together these basic building blocks. In that spirit, one of the first tasks of the Service System Workgroup was to create a common vision for NA service efforts. After some discussion, we determined as a board that the best approach was to simply widen the focus of the existing NAWS Vision Statement to make it a Narcotics Anonymous Service System Vision. This proposed revision will be included in the CAR scheduled for release in November of this year.

As of this writing, the workgroup is putting together a “template” that lists all of the elements that must be included in a model of the service system. In addition to this we are looking at the ways in which both NA service bodies and external organizations are arranged so as to gather as many ideas as possible. We are still asking NA members to send us any innovative ideas that are working in their local services, so if you are doing something new to answer an old need, please let us know about it. Your experience may be invaluable in NA communities around the world. We will use all of this information at our next meeting to begin discussing alternative models for service delivery in NA. We have determined not to limit our thinking at this point, but instead are keeping our minds open to any ideas that seem effective. We look forward to sharing our thoughts at the conference and beyond.

WSC SEATING UPDATE

Our discussions on WSC seating continued from our last meeting, where we talked about the underlying philosophy and principles of regional representation at the conference. At our June meeting we touched on some of the larger, foundational elements: the purpose of the WSC; the decision-making process; how NAWS receives direction; training, development, learning, and sharing experience; the “magic” of attending the conference; and the impact on a local fellowship of WSC representation.

In the *NAWS News* following the April board meeting we wrote, “It would seem that once we are focused on the principles of the issue, a process would be most easily developed. One thing is clear: There are many facets to the issue, with no easy answers, and resolution will take the efforts of all of us.” Well, we were certainly feeling that sentiment at this meeting. The broad topics we covered in June began to outline our ideas about the “what” of the ideal WSC. Our hope is to discuss the purpose of the conference and how it satisfies the needs both of world services and of local NA communities. These discussions will in turn help us to tackle questions about the size and composition of the WSC, which may be more like the “how” of the issue. It proved to be quite a challenge to encompass an issue of this size in the short time we had available at this board meeting, however.

Seating is an issue that is closely linked to the work of the Service System project. The work of that project definitely overlaps with the issues related to seating, which in turn may be affected by the possibility of changes to our system. We will meet together with the Service System Workgroup again in January, and we hope at that time to be further along in our discussion. We are finding the question of seating to be more formidable than we had first hoped, but we remain committed to engaging delegates in structured discussions at the 2010 WSC.

November 2009

Service System

At their July meeting, the Service System Workgroup began to consider options for alternative system models, focusing first on the structural component. To guide this effort, the workgroup reviewed a list of the major challenges in our current system, identified from several years of discussion at workshops around the world, as well our own conversations as a board. Having created several possible structural ideas, the workgroup then means-tested these options to see how well they may perform to meet our service delivery needs. Means testing is a structured process of reviewing ideas and refining them; the workgroup will continue exploring possibilities and will consider options for further elements of the system in the upcoming months.

During our October board meeting, we devoted agenda time to familiarize ourselves with the workgroup’s ideas by undertaking a shortened version of the means-testing process. Following this process, we offered input to the workgroup for their upcoming meeting when the workgroup will begin to revise these structural elements.

We are planning another joint meeting with the workgroup in January to further develop the options we will be talking about with delegates at WSC 2010. We also spent some time exploring ideas for seating at the WSC, and will use our joint meeting with the workgroup to see if our ideas for the WSC and the service system work together. Ideally, the seating at the WSC and the service system ought to mesh; they are interdependent. When we were considering seating, we reviewed and explored the purpose of the World Service Conference – why we all come together biennially and what we hope to accomplish at the conference. Coupled with the purpose is a consideration of cost for this event. These costs have substantially increased since we have moved to full delegate funding, and one of the goals in considering seating is to ensure that the conference makes best use of fellowship funds. Additional information for discussion and deliberation will be forthcoming in the January *NAWS News* and the March *Conference Report*. In the meantime, we encourage you to read the essays in *The Conference Agenda Report* pertaining to the service system and NAWS resources; these will contain more information on both these topics.

At our October meeting, we also finalized the vision statement that we will be offering for approval through the *CAR* at the 2010 conference. To briefly recap, we refined the existing NAWS Vision Statement with an aim to speak to service in NA as a whole, rather than just the service efforts of NAWS. Our hope is that “A Vision for NA Service” will serve as a unifying ideal for all of us to strive toward and will guide us in all our efforts to further carry our message of recovery.

February 2010

“Our Vision, Our Future,” the theme for the 2010 WSC, will be the focus of WSC sessions and the 2010–2012 conference cycle. The service system and WSC seating sessions will showcase options for a more efficient, effective service delivery system and a focused, purposeful worldwide conference. We spent a half day walking through a facilitated discussion of the work of the service system workgroup, and a full day of discourse, deliberation, and consensus-based outcomes with the service system and WSC seating options, facilitated by Jim DeLizia.

Service System

Following our input at the October board meeting, the workgroup revised their ideas for the structural component of a service system. One of the main goals of our joint meeting in January was to combine the workgroup’s ideas about structure with our ideas about seating so that we could have a unified set of structural options to discuss at the conference. We reviewed the workgroup’s new ideas, and their beginning thoughts on the processes we use to deliver services. We also reviewed the structural ideas for seating options at the WSC, and discussed how these interfaced with the service system models. Together with the workgroup, we talked through ideas until we constructed two basic models of the structure, each of which has a series of options to make it more flexible and adaptable. In a general sense, we feel strongly that form should follow function, and want to find a way to ensure that communities have the ability to create a structure that works best for them.

All of our ideas throughout this process have been guided by four key principles. We feel the most effective service system will be:

- Purpose-driven: Each of the proposed service system units should answer a specific need or group of needs, and the responsibilities of each unit should be clearly defined and understood.
- Group-focused: Each model offers ideas for better aiding groups in their efforts to carry our message.
- Defined by geopolitical boundaries: Following established geopolitical boundaries for at least some of our service bodies would allow us to better interface with professional and legislative bodies, making it easier for professionals and the general public to find and communicate with us.

- Flexible: Each model offers ideas for extra service bodies to answer specific needs, but does not mandate their existence if they are not needed.

We know some of these ideas are a radical departure for many regions. We will be offering more complete information for review and discussion on both WSC seating and our service system in the *Conference Report*. It is important that we be able to talk together at the conference—delegates and the board—because these are big ideas. In order to make any useful changes to our service system and conference seating practices, we'll have to have extensive conversations throughout the upcoming cycle. The conference will be the beginning of that dialogue. We are looking forward to hearing from conference participants about whether we are on the right track with our ideas and how you think they might be practically implemented.