Service System Background

Our service system has been the focus of our fellowship Issue Discussions for the last ten years: from "How can we create a bridge that builds and maintains a connection to service for home group members?" in the 2000-2002 conference cycle, through "Infrastructure" (2004-2006) and "Our Service System" (2006-2008) to the topics of "Leadership" and "Communication" in the cycle we have just completed. The feedback we received from these discussion topics is echoed in the reports submitted by regional delegates to the WSC, emails and phone calls we receive at the WSO, and the discussions we have together at workshops, zonal meetings, conventions, and the WSC itself.

Again and again we hear about unfilled service positions, apathy, poor communication, and a negative atmosphere in our service meetings. More specific concerns include little or no training for trusted servants, the misuse or mismanagement of finances, ineffective services such as partially manned helplines . . . the list goes on and is sadly familiar to most of us. The Service System Project grew out of the need to find new solutions to these old problems.

NA World Services suffered from many systemic problems as it grew over the years and decades: duplication of services, poor communication, competition for resources, and an at-times hostile service atmosphere were some of the more glaring examples. By the early 1990s these problems were threatening to overwhelm our service efforts, a situation that led to the World Services inventory process. From 1993 to 1998 various committees worked to examine what we had, and to propose ideas for change. This led to the reformation of the Board of Trustees, the WSO Board of Directors, and the WSC committees into a single World Board; the creation of the World Pool and the Human Resource Panel; a unified budget for all world level services; and the writing of a NAWS Vision Statement. These structural changes have been followed by changes in the way we work together to deliver services. The strategic planning process, a project-based work cycle, and the use of consensus-based decision making at the conference are all examples of new processes that are more in harmony with the principles we all embrace as members of NA.

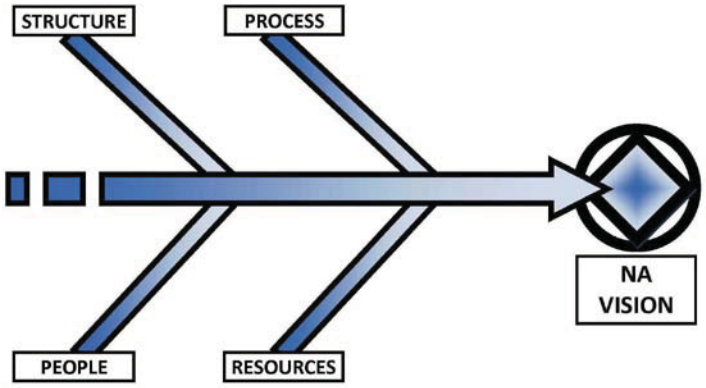
The rest of our service system, however, has never undergone such a thorough examination or radical overhaul. The structure and processes we have on a local level today (regions and areas) are almost identical to the ideas presented in *The NA Tree* in 1976. As we grow and NA spreads around the world, we repeatedly encounter problems that our rigid system fails to address. Time and again we apply the structure we have to an increasingly diverse set of conditions because it is the only option we think we have. The 2008 WSC approved the formation of the Service System Project to take a holistic look at NA service, and propose options for change.

The 2008-2010 Strategic Plan contained this approach:

> Develop a vision for all NA service efforts and begin to explore best practices and options for local service delivery. This 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. This will ultimately result in a rewrite of *A Guide to Local Services in NA*. We expect that the first cycle of this project will be focused on gathering options and presenting them for discussion in the fellowship.

Our first step in the project was to create *A Vision for NA Service,* unanimously approved by WSC 2010. Our hope is that this will serve as a guide and focal point for all our service efforts. This fundamental look at our ideas about service led us to focus on services from the ground floor up, rather than just propose changes to what we already had. We started by thinking about what needs the system has to fulfill in order to best support our groups in their primary purpose of carrying our message. Looking first

at what we have to do, and then how we can achieve it, led to our recommendations about structure that we presented at the 2010 WSC. Structure is one of four interdependent elements that form the essential parts of any successful system—structure, processes, people, and resources. Each of these elements plays a role in advancing us towards our vision.



Initially we have focused our efforts on the structural component of the system, but we have also inevitably had discussion around some of our key processes such as communication and leadership. This captures the reality that we have come to understand in this project. We know that we need a holistic approach; we must create a system rather than just a structure. No single element can solve all of our service provision shortcomings.

The key principles that underpin the structural models proposed for discussion at WSC 2010 are ideas that should guide all elements of a successful service system:

- Purpose-driven–each unit has a clearly defined purpose and set of responsibilities
- Group-focused–the system itself is refocused to offer more support to groups
- Defined by state, province, or national boundaries–this not only influences not only our structure, but also the type of services we deliver, encouraging us to focus on both underserved areas and on better interactions with professional agencies
- Flexibility–an essential element in a system that needs to function effectively in many different environments

We spent a great deal of time at the conference discussing the proposals. Input ranged from excitement to fear about the basic process of change, to specific concerns over the language used to describe elements of the structure and the need for more material to address our process issues.

The project was reaffirmed for another conference cycle by unanimous consent. The 2010-2012 Strategic Plan phrased it this way:

> **Issue*:* Service System Revitalization**
> OBJECTIVE 4: Transition from a service *structure* to a service *system* that is driven by unity in fulfilling our primary purpose and that is flexible in meeting the diverse service needs and goals of NA communities."

Where do we go from here? We believe our role now is to promote understanding and involvement in a fundamental and fearless examination of our service system and our opportunities for improvement. We look forward to engaging in this process with you.